Mario Morpurgo

With the death of Mario Morpurgo on 29 May CERN lost one of its most individual and engaging characters. CERN's founding fathers, of whom Edoardo Amaldi was the prime example, are often cited but there is also a kind of brotherhood of the original builders amongst whom Mario Morpurgo occupied a special place. Morpurgo was not the person to aspire to a position of leadership or power, preferring to cultivate his own interests. Such individuals are rare and without them CERN would not be what it is, would have less value and less character.

Morpurgo came straight to CERN after his studies at Rome and immediately applied his intelligence to the design and construction of conventional magnets. He was quick to recognize that the future lay in strong-current superconductivity at a time when it was just beginning. Although cryogenics was for him a complete 'terra incognita' as it was for bubble chamber builders, he rapidly initiated himself into its mysteries using the facilities of the small laboratory founded and directed by Fritz Schmeissner and was soon able to design the large magnet for the Omega detector. He conceived the idea of extrapolating conventional magnet cooling technology to superconducting magnets, using a forced current of liquid helium under pressure. For this he needed a pump which he himself designed and got his team to build and which is still regarded as a model of its kind. After the inevitable teething problems, Omega was a complete success. Henceforth, Morpurgo was to be an authority in the field of superconducting magnets. He naturally became head of the Cryogenics Laboratory on Schmeissner's departure and contributed to the initial studies for the LHC.

All those who knew Mario Morpurgo found him both paradoxical and endearing. Though fundamentally a loner, he could run a team and earn its respect and affection. His range of knowledge and talents was impressive. In addition to his professional activities as an engineer, he could turn his hand to drawing and painting, in which he displayed considerable talent, and his connoisseurship in art was the admiration of his friends.

Although his caustic wit elicited wariness and even apprehension, he demonstrated unfailing loyalty to his friends. He also had a keen sense of justice and on several occasions intervened vigorously and effectively to combat injustices which had particularly shocked him.

Now he has left us and we will never again see that curious almost Chaplin-like figure of Mario at the far end of some corridor deep in his own thoughts.

May these few lines stand as a testament of friendship from those who knew him and of gratitude from the whole of CERN.

His former colleagues.