

# Edwin Hancock obituary

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My friend and neighbour Edwin Hancock, who has died of cancer aged 67, was a leading figure in computer science. At the height of his career, he was among the top five most productive computer scientists in the world and the author of more than 1,000 academic works. He also supervised some 50 PhD students. From 1991 Edwin worked at the University of York, first as a lecturer, and from 1998 as professor of computer science, specialising in the emerging field of computer vision and pattern recognition. While his work was highly technical, it also had practical applications. These ranged from understanding the impact of world economic events on financial data for the New York Stock Exchange, to research into Alzheimer's disease from MRI brain images. At the time of his death, Edwin was studying historic images held by the Scott Polar Research Institute, to estimate the loss of the polar ice mass. Born in Marlborough, Wiltshire, he was the only child of Edwin Hancock and Patricia Cooke, who were both in service. His parents divorced when he was nine and Edwin lived a peripatetic life as his mother's work as a live-in housekeeper meant they moved frequently, from one grand house to another. He never forgot those straitened times, and when the children of the families his mother worked for, who had been his playmates, went off to private schools such as Eton and Marlborough, Edwin went to Marlborough grammar school, leading him to become a lifelong advocate of state education. In 1977 he graduated in physics from the University of Durham, completing his PhD in 1981. He joined the Rutherford Appleton laboratory in Didcot, Oxfordshire, and worked at times on the particle collider at Stanford Linear Accelerator Centre (SLAC) in California. He held honorary and visiting posts in China, at Beihang University and Xiamen University. Edwin served on the editorial board of many journals and in 2017 became editor-in-chief of the Journal of Pattern Recognition. He received numerous honours and was elected a fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering in 2021. A polymath with an interest in history, architecture, art, food and travel, he displayed his cooking skills at parties at his art-filled home in York. He had no close family, but a wide circle of friends.