**Mark Jobling, Department of Genetics and Genome Biology (21.06.22)**

I’m Mark Jobling, I’m a Professor of Genetics in the Department of Genetics and Genome Biology, and I’m based in the Adrian Building.

In any interdisciplinary collaboration you need to learn each other’s language; in fact, the same word can mean different things in different disciplines, and you also need to be a bit humble about your own discipline – everyone has faith in their own discipline, of course, and there can be reluctance to accept challenges from others. There are different ways of looking at the world, and by bringing them together then you get something that’s more than the sum of its parts.

I’m a geneticist, and I’ve been interested in human evolution, and how genetics can tell us about the past, because DNA that we have is a message from our ancestors, in a way – it’s a text, it’s letters, and it passes down through time from ancestors and changes along the way. So we ought to be able to use it to reconstruct the past, but of course there are lots of other people who have tried to reconstruct the past using other sorts of data: so historical records; archaeological remains of human culture in the past; and palaeontologists use bones and skeletal remains; and then linguists use the relationships of human languages to try and understand the past. Particular individuals survive for reasons that we don’t understand, and so you’re looking at what’s left if you look at modern DNA populations, and that is not everything, and so it’s a selective - literally a selective record of what happened in the past. So you need to understand that data is not – you can’t just take it at face value, you have to think around it, and I think the interdisciplinarity helps you to do that.

Well, I would say the one [project] working with Lisa Smith in the Department of Criminology. So, I’ve worked with Lisa for a long time, but – Lisa secured funds to work on a project in partnership with groups in Kenya, so an NGO. The project’s ultimate aim was to devise methods to collect DNA evidence in cases of sexual violence, where often – most of the time, the DNA evidence isn’t collected at all, and also to develop methods that will allow that evidence to be preserved so it can be analysed and also keeps the chain of custody. So that involved working with NGOs who work with survivors of sexual violence, it involved going in – spending time in Nairobi and going into the largest slum in Nairobi and seeing what life was really like there, so without that interdisciplinary collaboration I would never have done that sort of thing, so that’s been really rewarding – it just changes your perspective a bit.

I go to Welford Road Cemetery actually, and the reason is that it’s a green space, it’s got plenty of wildlife, birdlife there, which is interesting, and you can wander around and pass by the names and the lives of the past population of Leicester.