


Podcast: 'God, what a mess!'—the accidental discovery of genetic fingerprinting

At 9.05 am on September 10, 1984, geneticist Alec Jeffreys developed an X-ray film that would change the world. Without intending to, he had invented genetic fingerprinting: a technique for generating a unique 'bar code' from any living thing.

Within a matter of months of [publishing their paper about the discovery in the journal Nature](#), Jeffreys and his team at the University of Leicester were inundated with requests for help. From paternity suits to immigration disputes and horrific crimes, genetic profiling soon became a mainstay of forensic science and the legal system.

<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/307-The-Story-of-Genetic-Fingerprinting-Genetics-Unzipped.mp3>

Alec Jeffreys. Photo by Jane Gitschier, PLOS Genetics
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On this episode of Genetics Unzipped, Kat Arney explores the accidental invention of DNA fingerprinting, and some of the cases that it helped to crack. We hear the story of Andrew—a 13-year-old boy at the center of a long-running immigration dispute, which was the first case to be solved using the technique. We also delve into True Crime territory to find out how DNA profiling helped to exonerate an innocent suspect and capture the true killer of two Leicestershire schoolgirls, Dawn Ashworth and Lynda Mann.

Full transcript, links and references available online at GeneticsUnzipped.com

Genetics Unzipped is the podcast from the UK [Genetics Society](#), presented by award-winning science communicator and biologist [Kat Arney](#) and produced by [First Create the Media](#). Follow Kat on Twitter [@Kat_Arney](#), Genetics Unzipped [@geneticsunzip](#), and the Genetics Society at [@GenSocUK](#)

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