

# CHRISTIE'S

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## THE 'SECRET OF LIFE' LETTER TO BE SOLD AT CHRISTIE'S ON APRIL 10

**Remarkable Letter from Francis Crick to His Son,  
Outlining the Revolutionary Discovery of the Structure and Function of DNA  
Estimate: \$1-2 million**



Francis Crick (right) with James D. Watson, co-discoverers of the structure and function of DNA, circa 1953

**New York** - On April 10, Christie's New York will offer a letter from Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of the structure and function of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), to his son, outlining the revolutionary discovery, dated 19 March 1953 (estimate: \$1-2 million). The 7 page handwritten letter expresses Crick's personal excitement of the recognition of the double helix structure of DNA. The letter was addressed to Francis's son, Michael Crick, who was twelve at the time and at a British boarding school and was instructed to *"Read this carefully so that you understand it. When you come home we will show you the model."*

### **Francis Harry Compton Crick (1916-2004)**

Francis Crick was born in Northampton, England in 1916, to a family which ran a successful shoemaking firm. Crick studied physics at University College in London, but his studies were interrupted by service in World War II. During the war he worked as a scientist for the British Admiralty, where he contributed important work in connection with magnetic and acoustic mines. Crick left the Admiralty in 1947 to study biological research at

the Strangeways Laboratory in Cambridge. In 1949, he transferred to the Cavendish Laboratory, headed by Nobel Laureate Sir Lawrence Bragg. He would join the new unit there established by the Medical Research Council (MRC) to study protein structure using X-rays alongside future Nobel laureates Max Perutz and John Kendrew. Crick was 33 years old and still a graduate student when the young American, James D. Watson arrived at the Cavendish. He and Crick believed the structure of DNA could be determined through a combination of data and theory, and model-building to see which structures made the most sense. Watson's carefully constructed models showing the base pairs were critical, while the data they worked with included crucial information from Franklin's X-ray research, which determined that DNA was helical among other characteristics. In 1962, Crick, Watson and Maurice Wilkins received the Nobel Prize in medicine for their work at the Cavendish Laboratory and at the University of Cambridge. In 1977, Crick became professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, where he did brain research. Most of his scientific papers are at The Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine in London.

### Excerpts from the letter

"Dear Michael,

*Jim Watson and I have probably made a most important discovery. We have built a model for the structure of de-oxy-ribose-nucleic-acid (read it carefully) called D.N.A. You may remember that the genes of the chromosomes – which carry the hereditary factors – are made up of protein and D.N.A. Our structure is very beautiful...*

*Now we believe that the D.N.A. is a code. That is, the order of the bases (the letters) makes one gene different from another gene (just as one page of print is different from another)...*

*In other words we think we have found the basic copying mechanism by which life comes from life. You can understand that we are very excited. Read this carefully so that you understand it. When you come home we will show you the model.*

*Lots of love, Daddy."*


14 Botolph Claydon  
Cambridge.  
14 March '53

My Dear Michael,

Jim Watson and I have probably made a most important discovery. We have built a model for the structure of de-oxy-ribose-nucleic-acid (read it carefully) called D.N.A. for short. You may remember that the genes of the chromosomes – which carry the hereditary factors – are made up of protein and D.N.A.

Our structure is very beautiful. D.N.A. can be thought of roughly as a very long chain with flat bits sticking out. The flat bits are called the "bases". The bonds in rather

like this



The model looks much nicer than this.

Now the exciting thing is that while there are 4 different bases, we find we can only pair ~~them~~ certain pairs of them together. The bases have names. They are Adenine, Guanine, Thymine & Cytosine. I will call them A, G, T and C. Now we find that the two pairs

In other words I we think we have found the basic copying mechanism by which life comes from life.

The beauty of our model is that the shape of it is such that only these pairs can go together, though they could pair up in other ways if they were floating about freely. You can understand that we are very excited. We have to have a letter A to T & C to G in a day or so.

~~Read~~ Read this carefully so that you understand it. When you come home we will show you the model.

Lots of love,  
Daddy

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*\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

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*Images available on request*

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