

# Valedictory

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Towards midnight on 27 June 1787, it was clear, serene and moonlit, Edward Gibbon, certainly the greatest historian of his own, and possibly of any other, era laid down his pen after having written the last lines of his masterpiece *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. He did this in the agreeable surroundings of the summer house in his garden at Lausanne overlooking the lake. He commented that his first emotion was the recovery of his freedom after so many years of unremitting labour but soon ‘a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken my everlasting leave’ of the ‘old and agreeable companion’ that his book had become to him over the years (Murray 1896: 333–334).

Similar feelings, although perhaps not so poetically expressed, will certainly be held by those retiring as Editor of *Polar Record*. This emotional attachment to the journal explains, perhaps, why there have been so few of them since its establishment in 1931. My predecessor, Dr Beau Riffenburgh, appended a table to his detailed history of the journal (Riffenburgh 2006) in which he showed that, including his tenure of office, the post had been held by only eight individuals and once by a committee. Counting my tenure from 2006 to 2016 this comes to only ten Editors in 85 years. This must be some sort of record for a learned journal.

Dr Riffenburgh also remarked that one of the advantages of retiring is that ‘one finally is able to say things that have long been on one’s mind’ and that is what I intend to do in this note.

Firstly, it is appropriate to comment on the evolution of the journal since I took it over. Then it was resolutely embedded in the ‘old style’ publishing strategy. All was in print, black and white, each issue, of which there were four in a year, had 96 pages, no more and no fewer, save under strictly regulated conditions and then only in multiples of 8, due to paper folding constraints, and one of the most exacting tasks undertaken by the Editor was fitting the available papers into this number. It simply never turned out to be as one would desire...for example 7 papers totalling the mystical 96 pages. One can guess the expedients to which it was necessary to resort in order to achieve this but they included fairly ruthless reductions in length of some papers, the reductions of font sizes in cases where long original documents were being quoted, and, in general, for reference lists. Fortunately in the year 2006, and in those immediately following, the submission rate of papers rapidly increased. The polar world became ‘larger’ at that time with more people working on its problems and during my tenure of office we have never been short of papers acceptable for publication.

Now, ten years on, what do we have? There are six issues per year, everything is on line from submission to final ‘printing’, there is lavish use of colour and constraints of space have simply vanished. The page total of the 2015 volume was 700 as opposed to the rigid 384 under the previous dispensation, almost twice as many. One can publish papers as they are approved and a fairly strict pecking order of them is maintained.

It should be stressed that even though each issue is on line there is absolutely nothing to prevent those readers who prefer to have hard copies from printing their own and this includes the cover that appears as it always has. In this context, one of the most hilarious memories I have concerning these changes arose from the complaint of a distinguished, very distinguished, Professor who enquired with some mild asperity, concerning how he was to read the ‘new’ *Polar Record* in the bath, as had been his practice for decades!

Of course the increase in size of the journal has imposed more constraints than hitherto. All contributions are still peer refereed and it is a measure of the coherence of the polar community at large that it has never been difficult to secure appropriate persons to undertake this necessary labour even though the number of papers has radically increased. The number of referees is approximately 70 per year and I express my gratitude to all of them. They are quite simply a kingpin around which the academic credibility of *Polar Record* revolves.

If this be true of the referees it is also the case with regard to the Editorial Advisers. The value of the availability of their expertise is impossible to exaggerate especially in the case of an interdisciplinary periodical which we, most definitely, are. It is interesting to compare membership lists for 2006 and 2016. Then all except three members were male and, except for two, all were Anglo-American. Now we have seven female members and representatives from France (although Patrick Arnaud has most unfortunately passed away very recently), India, Russia, Estonia, South Africa, Norway, Germany and two from Finland.

Mention of the latter country naturally leads to the point that the Editorship of *Polar Record* is now a team effort. We have as co-Editor Nikolas Sellheim, who is a German national, has just acquired an LLD degree, and who was recently a member of the University of Lapland in Finland. He is due to take up a post at the University of Kobe in Japan for 2017–2018. We also have a Reviews Editor, Hanna Lempinen, also from the University of Lapland. The services of this lady and gentleman have been invaluable in the last couple of years during which they have been heavily involved. From all of the above one might reasonably conclude that *Polar Record* is in a condition of robust health.

At this juncture it is appropriate to extend all our thanks to the officers of Cambridge University Press who have been involved with the journal over the last ten years. They have all been most helpful and understanding of the unique problems of our wide-ranging publication. A further word must go to the typesetters whose work largely goes unnoticed but which is, of course, vital.

At this point I must give my warmest thanks to two members of my family. The first is my dear wife, Olga, who has been very great support over the years and whose insightful view of problems has prevented me from erring more than I have, and whose linguistic skills have assisted the journal to broaden its

impact especially with regard to Russia and the Ukraine. The second is our pet rabbit, Thumper, who is happy to spend hours and hours sitting at my feet in my study and just being great company. One gets a lot of common sense from a rabbit!

On 1 January 2017, I shall become Editor Emeritus and Nikolas will take over from me as Editor. He is a first class scholar and one with broad interests. He will be the youngest holder of the office and the first non-Anglophone, although his knowledge of the English language would put many so-called native speakers to shame. His latest contribution to the journal is on the topic of 'heavy metal' music in the Arctic which is certainly a real novelty and may broaden the horizons of more readers than simply mine. Youth, of course, inevitably brings its changes but one can be sure that the high standards that *Polar Record* has maintained over the years will be maintained. He

and Hanna have my very best wishes for the future progress of the journal and the same, with my thanks, goes towards all the referees, authors and advisers with whom I have the pleasure of dealing in the past decade.

On 31 December 2016, as I put down my pen, or, more likely, close down my computer, I shall indeed be saying farewell to the 'old and agreeable companion' that *Polar Record* has become to me.

#### References

- Murray, J. (editor). 1896. *The autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*. London: J. Murray.
- Riffenburgh, B. 2006. To those who have made *Polar Record*. *Polar Record* 42(221): 97–99.