

Commentary

To those who have made *Polar Record*

Beau Riffenburgh

It is often an advantage of retiring that one finally is able to say things that have long been on one's mind and to acknowledge those who have contributed to one's career or profession. Better yet is retiring as an editor of a journal or magazine, because then those thoughts and the mention of significant individuals can be recorded on paper for posterity. Having just retired after some 14 years as editor of *Polar Record*, I am pleased to be in that position now, because there are many people — both before my tenure and during it — who deserve mention for their contributions to what this special and very visible aspect of the Scott Polar Research Institute has become and to how it will develop.

In writing this valedictory commentary, it is necessary to give some details of the history of *Polar Record*, but I refer those interested in further information to Bernard Stonehouse's eloquent treatment of the journal in 'Polar Record 200: a retrospective' (*Polar Record* 37 (200): 3–4; January 2001).

In 1930, four years after the founding of the Institute, the Committee of Management determined that a half-yearly bulletin should be produced to record the chief polar events of the preceding six months. This would allow details of the most recent polar endeavours — whether in exploration, scientific research, or exploitation of biological or physical resources — to be accessible to those unable to consult the scientific and expedition reports, correspondence, foreign literature, and other sources not normally available to the general public. *Polar Record* was, therefore, to be just that: a journal of record of what was occurring in the Arctic and Antarctic. The first editor was Professor Frank Debenham, the Institute's founding director.

The first issue of *Polar Record* — dated January 1931 — sold for one shilling; was 35 pages long; recorded information about Sir Douglas Mawson's British Australian New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition, Richard E. Byrd's first Antarctic expedition, and a variety of other ongoing explorations; and referred to the recent deaths of Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup, and Rear-Admiral Charles Roysd.

For 14 years Debenham compiled and edited *Polar Record*, which continued to be produced despite the Institute itself being closed to the public throughout the Second World War. The events of that period also strongly

affected the character of the journal, as they significantly decreased the recording of current activities in the polar regions. To fill this gap, there was a rise in the number and length of articles, particularly those detailing aspects of the history of exploration in the far north and south.

In 1945 Debenham went on leave and subsequently retired as director, ultimately being replaced in that position by Launcelot Fleming. The role of editor was taken on by an editorial committee comprising Fleming, Colin Bertram, Brian Roberts, and James Wordie. When Fleming left the Institute to become Bishop of Portsmouth, the other three members of the committee remained in charge of the journal, with the eventual addition of F.H.S. Kendon of Cambridge University Press. During this period an assistant editor, Douglas Blyth, was hired, and his fine work — including producing for January 1951 the first cover photo for the journal (of the expedition ship *Belgica*) — was recognised by his promotion to editor for the January 1953 issue, although he continued to work with the same editorial committee.

Blyth left to join the Foreign Service in 1955 — the same year that *Polar Record* began to be produced three times each year — and was succeeded by Max Forbes, who remained editor for 17 years, longer than any other individual, his tenure spanning numbers 50 to 100 of the journal. Forbes made *Polar Record* a more professional journal than it had previously been and helped to forge the alliance with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) after the International Geophysical Year, which saw *SCAR Bulletin* begin to appear in each issue of *Polar Record* beginning with number 61 in January 1959. During Forbes' editorship, key figures on the editorial committee continued to include Roberts and Wordie, as well as newcomers Gordon Robin, Terence Armstrong, Harry King, Charles Swithinbank, and Alan Cooke, the last of whom succeeded Forbes as editor in 1972.

Cooke, Christine Madden, and Kate Christie each had brief tenures as editor before Bernard Stonehouse took over for the January 1983 issue. He subsequently modernised the production of the journal (including editing in on a computer for the first time), changed it to a quarterly, increased the size to A4, and developed closer ties for it with Cambridge University Press, which began printing and distributing it with issue 148 in January 1988.

He also changed the four-decade-old editorial committee that closely oversaw the journal to a much larger group of editorial advisors, initially increasing the number to 16, allowing him a broad range of expertise upon which he could call for the benefit of the journal while at the same time gaining the editor greater freedom to improve the journal as he saw fit and to take it in new directions.

I joined Bernard Stonehouse in the *Polar Record* office in 1991 in order to prepare to succeed him the next year. My appointed task was to continue the transition he had already begun of making *Polar Record* a primary research journal and to continue to upgrade its scholarly reputation. This has been carried out in a variety of ways, including by more intensive and demanding peer-review processes and by developing special dedicated issues that have focused on highly topical and important research areas. In the past decade and a half, there have been many individuals who made major contributions in changing the focus of the journal and gaining it increased respect in the academic community. Many of the journal's policies were, of course, carry-overs from Stonehouse's regime — and I added new ones based on my years of previous experience in magazine and book publishing — but other innovations came from Karen McCullough, the editor of *Arctic*, who dismissed any notions of inter-journal competition and added immeasurably to my knowledge of how to run a modern scholarly journal, contributing dramatically to *Polar Record* in the process.

In recent years, a change of equal significance to that of *Polar Record*'s academic rise was that relating to its ownership. From the beginning of its existence more than seven decades ago, *Polar Record* has needed financial assistance, as, in fact, do many scholarly journals. When, about five years ago, the Institute lost some of its long-existing funding, *Polar Record* was perhaps hardest hit of all, and discussions were held about terminating the journal. Fortunately, Charles Swithinbank — one of the journal's longest and most devoted backers — understood that the respect and scholarly reputation gained for the Institute by the publication of *Polar Record* transcended simple issues of pounds and pence. Swithinbank was the key figure in obtaining a grant that allowed the journal's continuation long enough for me to arrange a transfer of its ownership to Cambridge University Press. Under this

new arrangement, *Polar Record* has remained the journal of the Scott Polar Research Institute, while at the same time guaranteeing its continued publication and long-term future. Looking back on this position, I think it is safe to say that without Swithinbank's intervention *Polar Record* would no longer exist.

Other individuals have also made most valuable contributions to the continued success of *Polar Record*. Ailsa Macqueen served as proofreader from the moment I took over the journal until the present, and an enormous debt is owed to her. Liz Cruwys served as assistant editor for a decade. And Peter Clarkson regularly produced the materials for *SCAR Bulletin*, which continued to appear in *Polar Record* through the January 2005 issue, when *SCAR Bulletin* became a primarily web-based production. In recent years, Julian Dowdeswell, the director of the Institute, has given it important support. Of unsurpassed value were two generally unrecognised heroes from Cambridge University Press: Gwenda Edwards, who was in charge of all editorial elements there (as she was for Bernard Stonehouse before me), and Mike Adams, the key figure in the printing of the journal for many years.

Like the editors before me, I have also been blessed by a number of extremely valuable editorial advisors. Although too many to list, several deserve special mention for their continuing efforts on behalf of the journal throughout the years of my editorship and extending back to that of Bernard Stonehouse. Most notable in this regard are David Walton, William Barr, Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith, Martin O. Jeffries, and Ian R. Stone.

The last of these made such numerous contributions that it seemed obvious that he was my natural successor as editor. Formerly at the University of Kent, but now living on the Isle of Man, Ian Stone is an outstanding polar scholar with a huge depth and breadth of knowledge. More than two decades ago, he earned a post-graduate degree in history at the Scott Polar Research Institute, and his publication record is, as all readers of *Polar Record* will be aware, phenomenal. His enthusiasm and energy have in a very brief period already had positive implications for the journal. I welcome him as the new editor of a very special journal and wish him the best in continuing to improve and enhance the reputation of *Polar Record*.

Editors of *Polar Record*

Editor	Dates of number of journal	Numbers	Issues edited
Frank Debenham	January 1931–January 1945	1–29	29
Editorial Committee	July 1945–July 1952	30–44	15
Douglas Blyth	January 1953–January 1955	45–49	5
Max Forbes	May 1955–January 1972	50–100	51
Alan Cooke	May 1972–January 1975	101–109	9
Christine Madden	May 1975–May 1979	110–122	13
Kate Christie	September 1979–September 1982	123–132	10
Bernard Stonehouse	January 1983–July 1992	133–166	34
Beau Riffenburgh	October 1992–January 2006	167–220	54
Ian R. Stone	April 2006–	221–	

Editorial committees of <i>Polar Record</i>	
<i>Journal numbers</i>	<i>Members of committee</i>
30–38	G.C.L. Bertram, W.L.S. Fleming, B.B. Roberts, J.M. Wordie
39–40	G.C.L. Bertram, B.B. Roberts, J.M. Wordie
41–55	G.C.L. Bertram, F.H.S. Kendon, B.B. Roberts, J.M. Wordie
56–59	B.B. Roberts, J.A. Steers, J.M. Wordie
60–70	B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin, J.M. Wordie
71–93	T.E. Armstrong, H.G.R. King, B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin
94–96	T.E. Armstrong, A.G.R. Cooke, H.G.R. King, B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin
97–100	T.E. Armstrong, A.G.R. Cooke, H.G.R. King, B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin, C.W.M. Swithinbank
101–102	T.E. Armstrong, H.G.R. King, B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin, C.W.M. Swithinbank
103–108	T.E. Armstrong, C.A. Holland, H.G.R. King, B.B. Roberts, G. de Q. Robin, C.W.M. Swithinbank
109–137	T.E. Armstrong, C.A. Holland, H.G.R. King, G. de Q. Robin, C.W.M. Swithinbank
138–140	T.E. Armstrong, D.J. Drewry, V. Galpin, C.A. Holland, H.G.R. King, C.W.M. Swithinbank
141–147	T.E. Armstrong, D.J. Drewry, V. Galpin, H.G.R. King, C.W.M. Swithinbank