

## EDITORIAL

With the publication of this 127th issue, *Polar Record* reaches its 50th year. The journal was the inspiration of the first Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Frank Debenham. He described his idea of publishing a half-yearly bulletin, attempting 'merely to record the chief polar events of the preceding six months', as 'a risky venture for a lean exchequer'. But *Polar Record* has grown in size and has clearly justified the optimism shown in launching it 50 years ago. From its principal preoccupation in the 1930s with recording events and progress in polar affairs, resulting in the main from geographical exploration, the journal has steadily altered, and its changes have to some degree reflected the changing relevance of the polar regions to world affairs. The era of series of small, privately financed expeditions, emanating in this country primarily from universities, gave way to government sponsored continuing undertakings based on long-term objectives. General 'exploration' was replaced in the 1950s by investigations of a discipline or of an area.

Even in 1931 Frank Debenham was conscious of the proliferation of written material for he wrote in that first editorial: 'To a world already somewhat overburdened with the publications of societies and institutions the advent of a new journal requires both explanation and justification'. Never has this been the case more than today. In the small, self-contained polar world of Debenham's era, *Polar Record* served a useful purpose and justified its existence by putting on record the main events of the time. Entire early issues of the journal consisted of little more than short summaries of the progress of expeditions in the field: a function served in more recent years by the 'Field Work' section of *Polar Record*. In the early days research was often hindered by lack of understanding of the practical aspects of working in polar regions, and reports on the problems experienced in the field were much valued. Today, it is no longer necessary or possible for a single journal to present a logistical record of all the hundreds of scientific field parties in any one season. In consequence of the declining value of routine summaries of expeditions it has become editorial policy to ask potential authors of field reports for more rounded notes of their achievements to appear instead in the 'Notes' section of the journal. The 'Field Work' section will in future become a less regular feature, to be replaced by articles and notes which tackle some of the main themes of polar research in general but which can no longer attempt to present a comprehensive overview of the polar world. In the years to come we hope that *Polar Record* will continue along its evolutionary path, keeping its readers aware of major contemporary developments in the polar and sub-polar regions and also serving as a useful work of historical reference.

To mark this anniversary issue Alfred Stephenson, an experienced polar man of the 1930s, has reviewed the period of British polar exploration when *Polar Record* was in its infancy, and has compared the 1930s' effort with that of the post-war period, just before the dawn of long-term research enterprises in the polar regions. During the 1930s 'Steve' was a surveyor on Gino Watkins' British Arctic Air Route Expedition of 1930–31 to Greenland, a member of the British Polar Year Expedition to Fort Rae, 1932–33, and in 1934 he joined John Rymill's British Graham Land Expedition. On his return to England in 1937 he was appointed to the faculty staff of Imperial College, London, where he remained until his retirement in 1971. His polar interest continued after the war, for he trained young surveyors of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and undertook ground control surveys in Labrador during the late 1940s.