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Editorial changes

Welcome to the first volume of the *Gazette's* second century. The cover is rather appropriate for an issue in which we ring the changes in the Editorial team. It gives me great pleasure to thank Nick MacKinnon for his work over the last five years. Nick provided me with a head start, in that he had already accepted some of the articles in this issue for publication. He decided to relinquish the editor's chair in order to concentrate on his role as House Master at Winchester College. In one way he has made the Editor's job more difficult. Douglas Quadling and Victor Bryant only had to decide once a year on the colour of the cover; since Nick's innovation in 1992 a cover picture is needed every issue.

In fact, Nick took on two major roles: as editor and as type-setter. Bill Richardson has taken on the latter task, and between us we hope to maintain the Gazette's traditional high standards. Bill is able to make use of documents on 3½" discs from a variety of machines, preferably saved in plain text format. Where disc copy is not available, he can scan clearly printed hard copy. The scanning process is rarely perfect however and the copy usually requires a good deal of "tidying up". It will be helpful if contributors can supply two copies of articles submitted, as this will enable me to send one copy to Bill.

There has also been a change of Reviews editor. Nick Lord has been an excellent co-ordinator of book reviews and the extended review section in this issue is a monument to his efforts. I offer him thanks, both for his work in the Review section and for the personal help and encouragement he has given me. I believe that he intends to maintain his prolific supply of Notes, so his name will continue to grace the pages of the *Gazette* for some time to come. The new Reviews Editors, Alun Green and Joe Kyle, took over in September. Alun will be the point of receipt of all books for review, but he will be assisted by Joe, particularly with more academic works. We are hoping to increase the number of extended expository reviews in which important fields of Mathematics are explained by expert reviewers. Readers who are willing and able to write such reviews should contact Joe at:

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The Problems section will continue to be edited by Graham Hoare and Tim Cross. In future we hope to include information about the British and International Mathematical Olympiads on a regular basis. Robin Wilson has decided to confine his Stamp Corner in future to the *Mathematical Intelligencer*. His has been a welcome feature in the last few volumes and I would like to thank him on behalf of Nick MacKinnon.

Editorial thoughts

When David Bain first wrote to me offering the *Gazette* editorship my feelings were somewhat mixed. On the one hand, I was pleased that the Association felt that I was worthy of the offer; on the other, I felt a blind panic. My wife knew I wanted want to say 'yes', as did my Head Teacher, Beth Smith, though both were concerned about the amount of work involved. I sought previous editors' advice: Victor Bryant, Douglas Quadling and Nick MacKinnon were all encouraging and helpful. I consulted the writings of T. A. A. Broadbent [1, 2] and W. J. Greenstreet [3], two of the longest serving editors, and read anything I could find that was vaguely relevant [4, 5]. Friends in the mathematical world were supportive, urging me to "be my own man". So, I said "Yes, thank you (?)"

G. H. Bryan, a past President, wrote in 1907 about what has proved to be a recurring problem [6] :

> " What then are the causes which deter the ordinary or the small mathematical master from joining our ranks? These causes might in most cases come under the following list:
>
> 1. He has never had the Association brought before his notice in such a way as to make him think of joining it.
> 2. He has not regarded membership of the Association as suitable for "the likes of him".
> 3. He has been frightened off by the somewhat forbidding appearance of certain papers published in the *Gazette*.
> 4. In the present heavily-taxed state of our country, the few extra shillings required for the annual subscription are an important consideration."

Times change and we would now recognise that many members are women. We would also have to substitute pounds for shillings, but the criticisms are still heard. In 1946, Broadbent offered a defence against Bryan's third point [1]:

> " Of criticisms of general policy that have been offered, perhaps the most frequent is that the average member does not find the whole of each issue readable and interesting coupled generally with the corollary that there tends to be too much high-brow material and too little discussion of points in the teaching of elementary mathematics. The first complaint is unreasonable: it is not to be expected that each one of 2000 readers can find the whole of every number to his taste – it is not even intended that he should. ... Our aim is, and can only be, to ensure that each member of the Association will find some proportion of each number to his taste, say one article in three, one Note in two, two reviews out of three.

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> The suggestion that there is too much high-brow material in the Gazette causes me more anxiety. But some of the blame, if there be any, lies on the shoulders of members themselves, since it is not unreasonable for an editor to confess his inability to publish those contributions which he never receives."

At the time of writing this item I have received some 200 articles and notes. I have rejected maybe three or four on the grounds that they are too elementary, but quite a few for being too advanced. This was Broadbent's experience also. In recent years the existence of the sister journal *Mathematics in School* has meant that the *Gazette* has had fewer articles about teaching younger pupils, though it continues to review lower secondary school books. The *Gazette's* target audience straddles school and university. It is not an 'Education' journal though it is concerned with Mathematics teaching. One of the main aims of the *Gazette*, implicit in Greenstreet's philosophy, was described by Broadbent in his 1954 Presidential Address [2].

> " But, it will be said, mathematics is so wide a field that the ordinary teacher cannot possibly hope to be acquainted with all the developments ... The teacher who, rightly observing that he cannot acquaint himself with all the advances of mathematics, draws the conclusion that he is thereby exempt from the need to acquaint himself with any of them, is using the same unsound argument [as] the man who says "If we cannot clear all slums, why clear any?" ... No doubt this demands a certain amount of time ... Too much, it is said, is being asked when it is maintained that we should devote a couple of hours a week to some genuinely mathematical topic. With this plea I have no sympathy – the busy person can always find time for more work. Time then, must be found. What topic should one choose? ... Any one of a thousand queries will do as a starting point; and to aid further reading, may I with no modesty at all recommend the guidance to be found in the review pages of the Gazette. ... A steady perusal of the review pages will bring a very wide field of knowledge before the reader's eyes and show him a multitude of possible pathways along which he may run, walk or dawdle as his fancy takes him. To my mind there is no better way of keeping in touch with the work of the hour."

I hope to include more expository articles and reviews, more articles that can be profitably be read by sixth-form and undergraduate students and more articles and notes by 'ordinary classroom teachers'. I would also *like* to include more articles and notes written by women. However, on the final point I would invoke the 'Broadbent defence': out of 200 contributions so far, just eight are recognisably by women (I have a problem knowing with some authors who prefer initials).

For any reader who is prompted by these comments to write for the first time to the *Gazette*, it is a good idea to start with a Note. Broadbent's 1946 advice still holds [1]:

> " The Notes should be mainly, though not exclusively, concerned with teaching points. Here it does not matter much about originality in the strict sense, a point which readers might do well to bear in mind. Someone sends a proof about some property of the conic, a proof which he has worked out and has found to go down well with his class. It is printed and what happens? Some reader, with that glow of conscious rectitude we all feel when exposing

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another's shortcomings, writes in this strain: "Where can your illiterate contributor have received his so-called education, that he does not know that this proof is to be found in Modern Geometry of the Conic, by Messrs. Blank and Blankdash, published in 1897 at the Press of the University of Bad Lands, Minn., and that I myself have used this proof in my teaching for the last 38 years." Seriously, it matters very little. If it is good, and it seems to be not widely known, then the Gazette is the place for it, though of course priority will be gladly acknowledged if possible."

If I receive an influx of contributions in response to this editorial, it will mean that I have to reject a greater proportion. While this is good for the *Gazette*, it can be hard for an author to have a perfectly respectable Note refused. My intention is to give authors a definite decision quickly and it is sometimes better to be rejected immediately than be told an article may be used in a future, unspecified issue.

The current issue is probably the biggest ever. It contains a long reviews section because a backlog has built up which I wish to clear. The greater number of articles and notes has forced a change to the Contents page, and readers will doubtless notice other small changes. The editorial team will be pleased to receive feedback – if there is something you particularly like or dislike, then do write and tell us. The carrier sheet for this *Gazette* has a short questionnaire on the reverse side to help us gather basic information about the readership. Please return it and any other responses to me:– Steve Abbott, Dept. MG, 259 London Road, Leicester, LE2 3BE (U.K.). I have also organized a feedback meeting at the forthcoming Brighton Conference.

References

1. T. A. A. Broadbent, "*The Mathematical Gazette*: Our history and aims" *Math. Gaz.* **30** (October 1946) pp. 186-194.
2. T. A. A. Broadbent, "Presidential Address, 1954. Printer's ink and the teacher" *Math. Gaz.* **38** (May 1954) pp. 81-89.
3. W. J. Greenstreet, "An appeal by the editor" *Math. Gaz.* **3** (No. 56) 1906; reprinted in *Math. Gaz.* **55** (March 1971) pp. 130-132.
4. Michael H. Price, *Mathematics for the multitude?* Mathematical Association (1994).
5. Paul R. Halmos, *I want to be a mathematician: an auto-mathography,* Springer-Verlag (1985).
6. G. H. Bryan, "The neglected British teacher: a plea for organisation in mathematics" *Math. Gaz.* **4** (No. 62) 1907; reprinted in *Math. Gaz.* **55** (March 1971) pp. 132-137.

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