Editorial

An editor departs

Roger Robinson joined Douglas Gairdner as co-editor of the Archives of Disease in Childhood in 1969. This month he has retired from office. During the 13 intervening years both the Archives and he have undergone much change. In 1969 the journal was published 6 times a year; now it appears 12 times and the number of papers submitted (together with the work they generate) has more than doubled. Similarly, the circulation has increased throughout the world.

Roger Robinson in 1981 surrounded at home by bound volumes of his journal.

While guiding the journal through this expansion Roger Robinson has had to contend with increasing commitments in his own professional life. When first appointed editor he was senior lecturer and consultant paediatrician at the Institute of Child Health at Hammersmith Hospital and was gaining international renown for his work in developmental neurology. Promotion to the foundation Chair of Paediatrics at Guy's Hospital Medical School brought its own increased work and Roger Robinson's qualities caused him to be sought after and engaged by many national organisations. Yet, despite these extensive pressures and a very long working day his prime commitment to the Archives has never been eroded or in doubt. He is a working example of the paradox that if you want a job done well you should give it to someone who is extremely busy (because that person is likely to have the organisational ability and drive to fulfil the task).

Anyone who has met Roger Robinson will have appreciated quickly his intelligence, his wide ranging medical knowledge, and his memory. Those who know him better will have admired his enquiring mind and his great ability to identify the nub of any question, whether it be the evaluation of a new idea, a business matter, a scientific problem, or a letter of complaint. They will have also heard him expressing himself cogently and persuasively for the benefit of paediatrics. These qualities may sound cool, intellectual, and overpowering particularly in someone who, at first meeting, seems rather diffident. But those who have worked closely with him whether it be in a clinical, research, educational, or administrative setting have been able to enjoy and admire the fuller man. The delight is that the confidence he has in his own capacities leaves him without the need for bravura of any sort and his understanding of the problems of others leaves him both a confident yet humble person. It takes time to discover some of his varied facets and the pleasure of being with him is the way in which they emerge with neither false modesty nor exaggeration but just as unsurprising matters of fact. (But then, for an ex-captain of the boat club who took Baliol to the Head of the River, I suppose nothing else could be really surprising again.)

Most editorial work is done at home, and despite the great value of editorial boards and referees, it is a lonely task. I looked forward to the regular meetings with my senior editor not just because of the relief of sharing problems and discussing ideas but because of the enjoyment of working with and getting to know a distinguished and delightful friend.

Valedictions can sound like obituaries. This one should be happy for all except me because Roger Robinson is in the middle of his professional career and his qualities will ensure that he continues to be used to the full for the benefit of paediatrics.
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