

EDITORIAL

25th Anniversary of the British Classification Society

“The Classification Society was founded on 17 April 1964 with the aim of promoting cooperation and interchange of views between those interested in the principles and practice of classification in a wide range of disciplines. The foundation of the Society arose out of a Symposium entitled *Classification: an Interdisciplinary Problem* organized by Aslib [Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux] in April 1962, at which it became clear that there are many aspects of classification common to such widely separated disciplines as biology, librarianship, information retrieval, soil science, anthropology, linguistics, and many others, and that opportunities for joint discussion of these aspects would be of value to all concerned.”

The above is the beginning of the Introduction to the first number of the *Classification Society Bulletin* (1965 ISSN 0578-4565). The Society was founded by a small group of people in varied disciplines, led by the late Dr. John S.L. Gilmour, Director of the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. John Gilmour was well-known for his writing on the logical basis of different forms of classification, e.g., a famous paper in *Nature* (1937, 139, 1040-1042, later reprinted in the *Bulletin*). Others who were active included E.R. (later Sir Edmund) Leach, the first Chairman, and the members of the first committee; W.S. Allen, B.W. Avery, A.J. Cain, R. Crawshay-Williams, J.E.L. Farradane, A.F. Parker-Rhodes, N.W. Pirie and L. Wilson. Gilmour became Secretary-Treasurer, and P.H.A. Sneath Editor of the *Bulletin*. In addition there were a number of very active members such as A.J. Boyce, D.J. Foskett, J. Heslop-Harrison, J.N.R. Jeffers, J. McNeill, R.M. Needham, K.I.B.S. Needham, J.H. Rayner, and A.J. Willmott. These spanned a very wide range of interests.

The Society held a regular series of meetings once or twice a year which took a special topic for their theme. These were commonly on a discipline such as linguistics or soils, but occasionally were directed to techniques such as information retrieval. Meetings were small but lively, and active participants included many of those mentioned and others such as B.C. Vickeyzy, R. Webster, J.L. Jolley, W.T. Williams, and A.J. Mayne.

In 1967 and 1968 there was a growth of interest in classification in North America, and a number of workers wished to start a branch on the other side of the Atlantic. In consequence the Society was reorganized to permit several branches and

a new constitution of December 1968 set up European and North American branches which were effectively autonomous with their own bylaws. It was agreed that the officers and committee members of the branches should constitute a council, with the President alternately the European and North American Chairman. About this time John Gilmour handed over the office of Secretary-Treasurer to A. John Willmott, who was Secretary-Treasurer till the late seventies, when S. Laflin-Barker became Secretary and P.F.M. Smartt became Treasurer. Peter Sneath continued to edit the *Bulletin*, which was distributed to North American members for a small charge. The first President was Robert R. Sokal.

The activities of the branches were thus largely independent, although the *Bulletin* carried reports of meetings of both branches. The *Bulletin* had always accepted short original papers and reviews from any part of the world, and these were a constant feature until the *Bulletin* ceased to be published in 1983, after which the new *Journal of Classification* was launched by the North American Branch, with active participation from the European Branch, and with Phipps Arabie as Editor.

For several years the two branches went their separate ways. The Americans had declared themselves members of the North American Classification Society, and it was not appropriate for the East-Atlantic rump to continue to use the general name of The Classification Society. Accordingly for a short while we named ourselves the United Kingdom Classification Society. Although this might accurately delimit the territorial area over which our writ holds, it was felt too cumbersome and we quickly changed to the British Classification Society — but we are happy to interpret British in a very wide sense. New regional classification societies were formed in various countries. Close links developed between these societies and the Psychometric Society and in 1985, at the Fourth European Meeting of the Psychometric Society and Classification Societies held at Queens' College, Cambridge in England, the International Federation of Classification Societies was formed. The precise date was 4 July which from hence-forward we suggest should be called Interdependence Day.

The membership of the British Classification Society continues to reflect a wide range of interests in applied problems of classification. Perhaps a smaller proportion of our membership than that of any other member of the Federation is primarily concerned with mathematical methodology. Accordingly our two annual meetings tend to be joint meetings with other societies. Recent examples of co-sponsors of joint meetings are: The Geological Society, The British Ecological Society, The Soil Society of England and Wales, The Systematics Association, and The Biometric Society. We are in good health and look forward to hosting the third meeting of the Federation to be held between 6 - 9 August 1991 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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