

Editorial 2017

The innovation of the Chief Scientific Editor producing the annual Editorial in partnership with one of the Assistant Editors has been one of my contributions during my term of office, but it seems right that I should take on the task on my own for Volume 50. The past year saw several significant events for me, as well as for the Journal. In January 2016, Brian Hawkins passed away. I had known him throughout most of my career, and he helped me publish my first journal paper in QJEG (as it was then) back in 1978. Later, Brian Hawkins became the Chief Editor (1988–1993). I first met him while on a field visit with my fellow MSc students from Imperial College to the then brand-new Bath University, where he described the cambering found during the construction of the approach road.

October 2016 was the 50th anniversary of the tragic landslide from a colliery waste tip down the hillside and into a school in the village of Aberfan in South Wales, a disaster that cost 144 lives, most of them schoolchildren at their studies. Britain, with its lengthy coastline in weak rocks and a legacy of both past glaciation and industrial activity, is home to many landslides, but never before or since leading to such a tragic loss of life. The news broke a month into my first year studies of Civil Engineering at Portsmouth College of Technology (later Polytechnic, now University), and it made me pay more attention to the courses in Engineering Geology and Soil Mechanics. The following academic year, an undergraduate course in Engineering Geology was started there. The students who started on that course were brave pioneers – I barely knew what Civil Engineering was when I chose my course, and Engineering Geology was initially beyond my ken. But it was not beyond the ken of the pioneer members of the Geological Society, who founded both the Engineering Group and this journal.

So it is appropriate, for me at least, that Portsmouth will host (in July 2017) a 3 day event commemorating, *inter alia*, 50 volumes of QJEGH and 50 years of the Portsmouth Engineering Geology course, with keynote speakers on the day dedicated to the Journal selected from those authoring the commemorative papers (<http://www.port.ac.uk/engineering-geology-50-conference/technical-programme/day-two/>). The first of these commemorative reviews has already appeared in Volume 49 and others will appear throughout the year.

The Aberfan disaster was so traumatic that the government set up a tribunal to investigate it, headed by Sir Harold Harding, whose autobiography, rescued from oblivion by his granddaughter and reviewed by me in Volume 49, covers his involvement. The event was commemorated with moving presentations at Burlington House and in Cardiff by Paul Maliphant and Helen Reeves. The scale of the human tragedy of that event should bring it home to all practitioners how important their work can sometimes be. On the scientific front, Professor A. W. Bishop's paper in QJEGH in 1973 (Bishop 1973; it was presented in the 1972 Regional Meeting held in Bristol) covers the researches carried out at the time, and is unlikely to be bettered unless a similarly tragic event happens. As it is, the lessons of Aberfan seem not have been learnt by the wider international community, and preventable mine waste failures continue to occur.

Any 50 year anniversary makes one reflect on that period past, but with the publication of the commemorative reviews, that reflection will come from a variety of voices in a way that does better justice than I can do, even if space was unlimited.

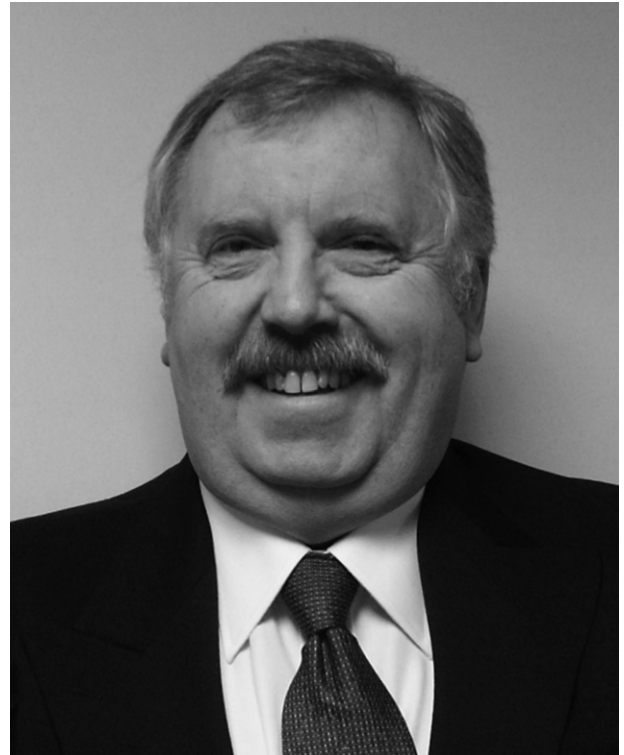


Fig. 1. Eddie Bromhead, the Chief Scientific Editor of QJEGH.

I expect to finish my term of office as Chief Scientific Editor at the end of 2017, and that makes this the last time I will write an Editorial. I will take this opportunity to thank those reviewers both on and off the Editorial Board for all their hard work, with a special mention of colleagues who served as Assistant Scientific Editors, not least because they make the work of the Chief so much easier. Of course, the whole work of the Journal starts and finishes with the Staff Editor, Helen Floyd-Walker, probably the most important person in its production. Editorial Board members, and other staff of the Geological Society Publishing House, all have their duties, and the appearance of a world-class journal four times a year is *prima facie* evidence that those duties are performed successfully and, in the case of Editorial Board members and reviewers who give their time for free, generously.

As a former academic staff member, I know the importance of publications as evidence of the relevance of one's research outputs, but as a practising geotechnical engineer, case records and theory form the background to all design, analysis and much of construction. I am therefore amazed to find some academics who simply won't do a review, in some cases citing instructions from their universities that it is not a recognized part of their workload. This strikes me as a behaviour that is selfish and ultimately counterproductive. Understandable, if the individual and their university do not value a publication research output, but incomprehensible if they do. Even for geologists and engineers in industry, reviewing counts as CPD (continuing professional

development) and helps fulfil professional obligations to disseminate knowledge.

It is probably impossible to work out how often the paper editions of QJEGH are read, but each time the online versions are accessed, we get a report. Then, we find that the 2 year census period for the citation index is quite nonsensical, as the profession at large finds value throughout the entire 49 volumes so far, and the Journal is not published simply for academia. Hopefully, the commemorative reviews will bring some of the material to the attention of even more readers: the first couple of these reviews appeared in the last issue of Volume 49 (Winter & Bromhead 2016) and the first of Volume 50 (Griffiths 2017).

2017 is the Year of Risk, with a web page featuring risk at http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/risk_17. I know that whenever I need some guidance on the subject, I reach for my copy of Lee & Jones' *Landslide Risk Assessment*, or should I say my copies, as I have both first and second editions close at hand in the shed at the end of my garden where I work. The second edition of this book was reviewed comprehensively in QJEGH by Richard Guthrie last year (Guthrie 2016), and has large parts generally applicable to geological risk other than landslides.

A new special interest group of the Geological Society on Contaminated Land is in process of formation, and QJEGH has already arranged a link to that group, just as we already have links to the Engineering and Hydrogeology Groups. Perhaps, then, it is fitting that I announce that my successor as CSE will be the distinguished hydrogeologist and specialist in contaminated land, Jane Dottridge. I must also congratulate this year's winner of the William Dearman Award, R. M. G. Harley for her contribution to the paper D. A. B. Hughes, G. R. T. Clarke, R. M. G. Harley (25), and S. L. Barbour, The impact of hydrogeology on the instability of a road cutting through a drumlin in Northern Ireland (part 1, 92–104) <https://doi.org/10.1144/qjegh2014-101>, although the judging this year was extremely close, and the two authors of R. E. Kristinof (31) and G. Marketos (33), Geotechnical characteristics of a high-porosity deep-sea clay sample retrieved from within a giant scour and its implications for local geological history (part 2, 154–169) <https://doi.org/10.1144/qjegh2015-078> would, in any other year, have walked away with a joint prize, as both authors would have

been eligible. QJEGH recognizes the importance of young authors' contributions to the journal through this prize, and actively seeks to encourage them to contribute.

On a personal note, I have a long and deep affection for QJEGH, because it published my first ever scientific journal paper, and in a long career in practice and academia, the most fundamental lesson I learned (and relearned repeatedly) has been that geotechnical engineering can only extremely rarely be done successfully while ignoring geology, and the most important aspect of geology for the geotechnical engineer is often the variability of the ground. It is therefore with a considerable degree of anticipation that I await Dr Jackie Skipper's 2017 Glossop Lecture on 'Variability: why the ground is "unexpected"'. We hope to publish two former Glossop Lectures during Volume 50: Mike Sweeney's authoritative account of pipeline engineering (Sweeney 2017), and Dave Norbury's masterly discussion of Standards, and why they are important.

Given that affection, I was extremely flattered to be invited to become the CSE, and I am sure that when the final year of my duties draws to a close, I shall feel a great sense of loss in giving it up, only assuaged by my complete confidence in the capabilities of my successor and the organization that will support her.

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