

G. K. Batchelor

Founding editor of the *Journal of Fluid Mechanics*

Although developments in fluid mechanics continue at a heady pace, and are reported in JFM at about 800 pages per month, things in the editorial management of JFM change only slowly. There is a continuity among the JFM Editorial Team and among the policies they espouse and implement that appears to be appreciated by the fluid mechanics community. A major change has, however, occurred from January 1999, in that George Batchelor has, after 43 years as Editor, stepped down from the day-to-day handling of papers and from the formulation of policies and practices, and allowed himself to be named on our masthead as Founding Editor. I say ‘allowed’ because George’s initial wish was not to be so named, feeling that this might be seen as an immodest and presumptuous title. But Founding Editor is exactly what George was and is. He launched JFM in May 1956, having persuaded Taylor & Francis to be the publisher and printer, and having enlisted the help of G. F. Carrier, W. C. Griffith and M. J. Lighthill as Associate Editors, and T. Brooke Benjamin and I. Proudman as Assistant Editors. Then, as now, all members of the JFM Editorial Team were to work autonomously in the handling of papers, with complete delegated authority and similar workloads, but all following similar procedures and with similar philosophies, and all under the watchful eye of G. K. B.

The tone and style of JFM were established immediately, as the most casual inspection of volume 1, part 1 will confirm, and were maintained through the first issues by the quality of contributions from the Editorial Team and their colleagues and collaborators until, after a very short while, the journal became self-sustaining, and peer recognition and pressure for the accolade of a JFM paper rapidly became strong. The credit for this, and for the central place which JFM now occupies in the work of thousands of readers around the world, is indisputably to be ascribed to G. K. B. and to his insistence not only on the highest standards of scientific work but on the highest standards of clarity and presentation in JFM papers. He wrote eloquently about his concerns on these matters in the JFM Editor’s Issue, vol. 106, 1981 (‘Preoccupations of a Journal Editor’, pp. 1–25). He also sought to persuade others – whether editors, referees or authors – of the importance of clear and attractive presentation of first-class work (clarity and attractiveness of presentation especially important in so broadly interdisciplinary a subject as fluid mechanics) through 43 years of detailed editorial handling of submitted papers. (I estimate that in this time he dealt with some 3500 papers, in perhaps 10 000 letters, with an acceptance ratio of between 0.40 and 0.45.) Not for G. K. B. the writing of editorial exhortations; his personal interactions with authors and referees were what defined the character of a JFM paper. As far as can be guaranteed, using reasonable processes of peer review by a worldwide expert community, JFM papers are found to be significant, accurate, reliable and informative at least a decade or more after their publication.

As many readers will know, G. K. B. achieved this not by looking for a majority among the referees and simply hiding behind that, but rather by presenting the author, on the basis of his own careful reading, with a coherent critique of a paper, with a consistent adjudication between the often-competing demands of referees,

and with firm and consistent recommendations for further work and more complete and convincing interpretations. He has been equally firm in persuading CUP (who purchased the JFM title in 1958 and two years later took over the printing as well) to provide the production quality necessary for the scientific message of JFM papers – whether presented in text, equations, figures or plates – to be appreciated in full measure, quantitative accuracy and confidence.

G. K. B.'s concerns over clarity of exposition are evidenced also by his own papers in JFM, by his celebrated textbook (still regularly reprinted), and by his trenchantly critical JFM book reviews (for example: 'This is slipshod writing and it is sheer irresponsibility to put it into print', vol. 2, p. 208). He also railed against the fragmentation of the subject brought about by the appearance of numerous specialized journals ('Journals galore', vol. 72, p. 589).

Future years will no doubt see some slow changes in the format and in the publication media of JFM (though equally probably the 'standard' archival print-on-paper article seems set to survive far ahead), but the JFM Editorial Team will be anxious to uphold the standards of quality in research and its reporting so firmly set by our Founding Editor George Batchelor – to whom, in the warmest affection and regard, we express the grateful indebtedness of the fluid mechanics community worldwide.

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