

# Transitions and Rebirth

**Bernard Carr**  
(outgoing chair)



My last editorial warned of the major changes that will be required in response to our serious financial problems. I tried to balance my remarks with optimism and I certainly did not want to give the impression that the SMN is in a state of irreversible decline,

just to stress that we need our members' support at this difficult time. Fortunately, most of the responses to my editorial were positive. I know that some people found my comparison with a mid-life (or even late-life) crisis rather dispiriting, so I should stress that the point of this analogy is that individuals usually survive such crises and end up stronger on account of them.

Since my editorial there have been further changes on the Board: Ioannis Syrigos stood down in July and Charla Devereux finished her employment in September. As highlighted in a recent editorial, Ioannis has spearheaded the exciting developments with our new website but he has been out of the UK for several years (first in Australia and currently in Ecuador) and now needs to focus his energies elsewhere. As Network Manager for the last 12 years, Charla has played a crucial role in running the SMN and a full tribute to her appears elsewhere in this issue. The Network is immensely indebted to both these people.

Another change is that I decided to stand down as chair and did so at the last Annual Gathering. It has been a tremendous privilege to chair the Network but I have held the position for five years and the time has come to hand over the reins. The reasons for this are partly personal. I have just retired and expect to spend a lot of time abroad in the next few years. But the main reason is that I felt it was in the best interests of the Network that I should stand down. All the recent changes on the Board – and the period of my chairmanship probably saw more of these than any previous five-year period – make it clear that the SMN is passing through an important phase transition. So we need a clean sweep and I should be part of that.

One might infer from these further resignations that the crisis has worsened. On the contrary, the last Annual Gathering ended with a mood of optimism. Instead of comparing our situation to a 'mid-life crisis', I now prefer to regard the SMN as going through a process of *rebirth*. This involves some disruption and discomfort but the process is also exiting and full of promise. As retiring chair, my role has primarily been to act as 'midwife' and I have every confidence that the new Board will nurture the 'baby' in the way that is required.

At this point, I would like to welcome my successor, Paul Filmore, who is sharing this editorial. As an expert in creativity and break-through problem-solving for individuals and organisations, nobody could be better qualified to take over the reins at this challenging time. Paul has been associated with the SMN for almost 40 years and a Trustee for 30 years, so he brings a unique long-term

perspective to the position. Indeed, he met the founders George Blaker and Peter Leggett when he was still an undergraduate and for many years ran, with his wife Catherine, the *Wider Horizons* course for students. Since SMN is an educational charity, it is also relevant that he heads an educational consultancy.

Another positive point from my perspective is that Paul is a scientist – a fellow physicist indeed – and this prompts me to make a further remark. One of the important roles of the SMN is to provide a bridge between science and spirituality. This is not a comfortable position – most scientists regard us as too mystical and most mystics regard us as too scientific – but that is inherent in being a bridge. When we were founded 42 years ago, the emphasis was very much on science but it is clear from the diminishing number of scientists among the Membership – and even on the Board – that this is less true today. In departing the Board, I would therefore like to stress my personal view that our science connection needs to be strengthened. Last June I spoke at a joint SMN/AHSSSE meeting in Oxford on the 'post-materialist manifesto', which was published in last summer's issue of the Review. There is no doubt that this is the start of an important movement to bolster the link between science and spirituality, so the SMN should be in the vanguard of that movement.

**Paul Filmore**  
(incoming chair)



My first couple of months have been a whirlwind of positive change. This started in July at the AGM when I was voted onto the Board and elected as chairman.

For me, the AGM weekend was a time of both sadness and celebration. In the photo you see Max Payne (and myself), who was an incredibly active member (as for example the Yorkshire group will testify) from the earliest of years, and then latterly also chairing the trustees. In June, Bernard, Janine, David and I, amongst a few other members, attended a family-organised 'Memories of Max' memorial, and it was with sadness that we remembered a dear friend, but also with joy we celebrated a life lived to the full. At the AGM, Peter led a time of reflection and celebration (augmented later in the 'entertainment' by Di), for us all.

Again at the AGM weekend it was with sadness but also deep gratitude that we thanked Charla for her 12 years as Office Manager and Bernard for his time as chairman of the Board. Words here in public do not do justice to the debt we owe them, so I will do this partly in private.

I also have to thank Ioannis (Board member) for transforming our website and our thinking to a modern state, fit to attract members and generate interest in the SMN. Ioannis (supported by Bernhard, Bruce, Paul and the web team) have given us a site with new articles every day, so please visit our site regularly ([www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org)), post replies, explore the archives, and tell (tweet) your friends! We now have new Board member Richard Irwin, with a wealth of relevant experience, taking over the development of the website. Thank you, and welcome, Richard.

Again with the theme of sadness and celebration, at the AGM weekend I resigned after 30+ years as a trustee, leaving my dedicated trustee friends, in order to become a member of the Board. The trustees have been very active helping to sort out the SMN's deficit, and so it is fitting that we welcome Adam Parkin back on to the trustees with his financial experience, to give us even greater capability. At the AGM weekend, Oonagh, supported by Janine, worked with members in a number of structured sessions, trying to tease out what we most celebrate in the SMN, and how we might change to incorporate the raft of great new ideas generated. I am sure there will be more on this either here or in the next issue. So, thank you trustees, from all of us.

As a Board, our immediate priority was to facilitate the move of the office, after years of it being hosted so kindly by Charla in her home. We have Martin and Peter to thank for suggesting Colet House in London ([www.studysociety.org](http://www.studysociety.org)), which has space for an office, excellent small and large meeting rooms that we can utilise, and even a library. Angela King has been employed to help with the transition and keep the office running. This she has done effectively and the office is now residing in Colet House. Again we thank many people, including Richard Irwin, for helping to get the telephone, Internet, and office IT systems functional and, I believe, even improved. Further developments in these areas are still in progress, and range from online booking to improved resource base access of, for example, our videos and audio materials.

The Board members all attended an extra board meeting during the 'Beyond the Brain' conference in August to review the changes and plan for the immediate future. I was immensely proud of the dedication of these members who have devoted part of their (and their partners') lives to support the SMN. This was also revealed by the quality of the 'Beyond the Brain' conference, in which many Board members had played a significant part. The feedback we received from attendees was excellent. This was in part due to the new format we were trialing at the conference, where attendees became more involved by having round table discussions after each speaker's contribution. I hope this success will inspire more members to come to our future events.

Finally, I wish to thank the membership, and the Board, in wholeheartedly welcoming me as I become chairman. As a Board we have an exciting few years ahead. It is my hope that my skills, initially training as a research physicist, becoming an academic, studying an MBA, and then for over a decade running, in tandem with academic life, my own educational consultancy, will serve me to steer the organisation in exemplifying epitomising the best of the Network ideals and aspirations.