



# Network Review – 100 not out

*David Lorimer*

**L**ooking back to Network Newsletter No. 50 of December 1992 one sees both continuity and change. Readers who were Members at that time will remember the newsletter as a small A5 publication with minimum formatting and no illustrations. Only in July 1993 with the help of Dr John Miller did it begin to evolve towards its present form, becoming A4 with a colour cover in April 1997. And only last year did we reach full colour.

The contents included an account by Kevin Ashbridge of the very important meeting of the Council and Trustees held that September in North Wales. It was there that we first formulated the Network Guidelines, which have appeared in the Review ever since. Donald Factor wrote a tribute to David Bohm, while Paul Devereux reported on a conference of the Society for Scientific Exploration and David St George wrote an article about the limits of clinical trials. Anne Baring offered a definition of spirituality, and among the books reviewed were Peter Fenwick on Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, Max Payne on *In Search of the Edge of Time* by John Gribbin, Geoffrey Cantor on John Hedley Brooke's classic *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, John Kerr on *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* and Brian Bates on Black Elk. Among the books I myself reviewed were *Belonging to the Universe* by Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast, *What is Life?* by Erwin Schrodinger, *The Way of the Physician* by Jacob Needleman, *Healing with Love* by Leonard Laskow, *A History of Gnosticism*, by Giovanni Filoramo and, topically, *Earth in the Balance* by Al Gore. We also informed members that we were going to hold our first continental Annual Gathering at La Bussiere Abbey near Dijon, which is now a five-star hotel – it was far from this at the time. We went in a coach via champagne cellars on the way and Vézelay on the way back.

George Blaker contributed a special editorial. He wrote about the strong affection he felt for many members and the sense of gratitude that they had seen fit to add their unique strengths, abilities and perceptions to the contribution that the Network can make

to the world as a whole, adding that he hoped that they would find fulfilment and deep friendships. The first Newsletter dated January 1974 consisting of four typed pages was distributed to the five founding members, soon to become 50. He saw the Network growing and becoming more international in the following 10 to 15 years, which he thought necessary to obtain more effective results in the public domain. He remarked that the broad central aims of the Network have remained the same from the start, but the problem is how to find the best words to express them. These included 'broadening the basis of scientific enquiry for the advancement of knowledge and the greater good; deepening understanding by fostering rational and intuitive enquiry in science, medicine and education; reinvigorating these fields by continuing rigorous scientific method we intuitive and spiritual insights.' George also referred to 'pursuing true to the limits of physical knowledge and to the frontiers of consciousness.' Readers will recognise these aims in our latest leaflet.

Peter Fenwick, then Chair of the Council, wrote that 'our understanding of brain function, based on new imaging techniques and the contribution that computers will make to our knowledge of neuronal nets and their properties, is leading us towards a total mechanistic explanation of man.' He added that the models built by science may well be deficient, as has been widely discussed in the last 15 years, especially since the foundation of the Journal of Consciousness Studies in 1994. The following year, we inaugurated our series of Beyond the Brain conferences in Cambridge as our contribution to the consciousness debate.

In the first Newsletter the immediate aim was to 'build up a, by progressive personal contact, private and informal list or 'Network' (note inverted commas) of qualified scientists, pure and applied, including in the latter category medical doctors who have adopted or are inclined towards a non-materialist interpretation of the universe and who have a sympathetic personal interest in studies of and research into parapsychological and spiritual matters

and in action that might usefully flow from these.'

The reason for beginning with scientists and doctors was that, in this materialistic age, people in general look to scientists directly or indirectly as a intellectual and spiritual leaders: 'they no longer accept the opinions of others about the nature of the Universe or what constitutes reality except where those opinions seem to be substantiated by the findings of scientific or medical research.' And although there is a growing body of interrelated facts entirely valid and coherent within its own terms, 'the limitations which the system imposes are seen to become ever more onerous', so that new discoveries unrelated to what is already known in a scientific way tend to be ignored. Hence the case for scientific research to be focused on 'those areas where true advances in basic understanding of the human situation can be made.' George added: 'it seems to us that studies of what is often called (but may not be) the 'paranormal', leading naturally into studies of a spiritual nature of man and the Universe, have a vital contribution to make to this process.'

35 years on, the debate between an exclusively materialistic and a wider, more spiritual worldview continues, as does the general neglect by scientists of parapsychology, and a simplistic understanding of spirituality. The Network has been and continues to be at the heart of this debate, bringing people together and promoting exploration and discussion of psychological, transpersonal and spiritual matters. Much research has been done, and many books published, but our impact on mainstream scientific thinking remains marginal, even if informed members of the public show much greater interest. The work and impulse of the Network remains essential, but I think we need to think more strategically about how to our message across in ways that raise the public profile of the issues with which we are concerned. The manifesto which follows is a step in this direction, and we welcome your responses and participation.