In this issue of Occupational Medicine

In February 1935, a meeting was held (in a public house!) where it was agreed to found the Association of Industrial Medical Officers. The first meeting was held on the 27th of September 1935; 2010 therefore marks the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Association of Industrial Medical Officers, which became the Society of Occupational Medicine in 1965. The Society plans to mark this special anniversary with a programme of excellence in scientific education and a variety of social events and as part of this Occupational Medicine has a special cover for the year and will be running a series of special articles.

As well as this important anniversary, 2010 also sees the 60th volume of Occupational Medicine. Initially published as the Transactions of the Association of Industrial Medical Officers, it first appeared in 1948, the year the National Health Service was born. To begin with it was little more than a newsletter and the first editor Dr L. G. Norman of the London Transport Executive acknowledged that. But it is interesting to note under a heading ‘Not too technical’ that ‘although formal papers appear in the technical journals, we feel that there are many instances where a useful paragraph could be written, concerning perhaps an individual medical case or example of industrial interest, perhaps not sufficient for a complete paper, but nevertheless of general interest’.

The first volume proper of the journal was published in 1951, following which the first papers resembling scientific research began to appear. The entire archive since 1948 is available online, free for subscribers to Occupational Medicine. It makes fascinating reading and is an invaluable resource. Making use of this resource, we have asked a number of eminent physicians to examine each decade for which the journal has appeared, relating this to health events of the time and articles and research published in the journal. In this issue, Tim Carter [1] examines the beginnings of the journal in the 1950s and Anthony Seaton [2] looks at the occupational medicine context in which the journal found itself. We will end volume 60 with Raymond Agius looking at what the novelties had to offer and by considering what Occupational Medicine might be publishing in 2070 and its context. Science fiction possibly but many of the things we take for granted now were science fiction in 1935. To help us plan the journal’s future, we now considered hearing loss, revised by the Health & Safety Executive in 2005, would fail to refer half those judged to have severe NIHL by assessing the actual audiogram. In a separate study of divers’ vestibular function, Goplen et al. [4] followed up 67 working divers over a 6-year period. While dizziness during diving was reported by almost two-thirds, they found no evidence of long-term vestibular effects and conclude that vestibular disorders in divers are probably related to singular events, like inner ear barotraumas or inner ear decompression illness rather than frequent diving.

Continuing the maritime theme, Coggon et al. [5] examined the occupational health needs of 210 fishermen in the south west of England. Twenty-seven per cent had been returned to shore at some time for emergency reasons although the vast majority were for injuries rather than illness. Likewise, more than a quarter had suffered injuries within the last 12 months and one in five of these had caused loss of > 3 days from work. Hand lacerations were found to be a particular problem as well as some of the novel methods used to treat the injury while at sea. On the other hand, they found very few medical conditions that would cause concern about fitness to go to sea. The authors conclude that routine medical screening is a lower priority than the prevention of injuries while at sea.

Finally in our series of maritime research, Roberts et al. [6] examined suicides among seafarers during 86 years of UK merchant shipping, a total of 11.9 million seafarer-years. Seafarer suicides have been of concern because of the easy access to a means (drowning), selection effects in people who go to sea, long-term separation from family, heavy alcohol consumption and psychoses. This study found that overall, the suicide rate was considerably higher than for the general population. However, the rate fell sharply in the last 40 years of the study period and has become more comparable with the expected population rates. The authors attribute this to a reduction in long inter-continental voyages and changes in seafarers’ lifestyles.

John Hobson
Honorary Editor

References


We are pleased to announce the winner of the prize draw for our recent readership survey was Dr Ted Smith from Cheshire. His prize was a copy of Well-being for Public Policy by Diener, Lucas, Schimack and Helliwell.