

## 2. *The Birth of the Journal*

### **The Birth of the Journal**

The conception and birth of the new *Journal* was a world-turned-upside-down in comparison with the time-honoured and traditional way in which new academic journals come into existence — at least in the Anglo-Saxon world. All the normal criteria were inverted.

Characteristically, a new academic journal was born (and often still is) from the determined efforts of a small group of like-minded enthusiasts — particularly enthusiasts frustrated by the present state of affairs which faced them. Existing journals did not acknowledge their own special interests sufficiently; established editors were out of touch with current trends of research; there was simply no existing journal which could provide the vehicle for new academic priorities. A new focus had to be created. Where such a journal existed in another country, this provided grounds for establishing an equivalent journal on behalf of predominantly national authors and a national readership, who could hope to get research relating to their their own country more easily published in a journal based in their own country, edited by their national colleagues.

This is the characteristic mode of evolution in academic advance: new specifications nucleate out from wider disciplines, seeking to establish a new agenda — new research methods, new methodologies, new fields of data, new themes born of a changing awareness of priorities. As new focuses of interest become identified they become embodied in new journals with new societies established to publish them.

The birth pangs of a new journal thus often involve minimal financial commitments as a journal begins at the grass-roots in a very small way, and subsequently pulls itself up by its own boot-straps, if successfully surviving infancy. It is usually a question of self-help. The initiating group bid for subscriptions, set at a minimum level to pay the most modest possible printing bills and postage costs. A cottage-industry of unpaid helpers cope with membership lists, proof-reading and associated chores. An honorary Treasurer handles the subscriptions. Minimum formalities are required and the initial subscribers may number just a few dozen — seldom a few hundred. But, setting out from this beginning, a conventional path lies ahead. A bank account is required in some non-personal name. A directing committee is needed. Accountability is necessary to the subscribers. A little further ahead lies a more formal constitution, with an executive/editorial committee or council elected, with the honorary officers, by the membership — for the setting up of a constitution normally signifies the transubstantiation of subscribers into members of the new society, with constitutional rights. Annual general meetings begin to receive reports from the editor of the journal, and agonise over the increase in subscriptions required to expand the size of the journal and improve its appearance. In effect, the society or association has come into existence primarily to finance and control the journal, which remains its main commitment, the primary call on its budget (the funding of the journal setting the parameters for subscription to the society) and its continuing *raison d'être*.

This sequence portrays an archetype, but an archetype with which most academic readers will be familiar. The Economic History Society came into existence in the UK in this way in 1926 to support the publication of the *Economic History Review*. The American Economic History Association followed a closely similar path for publishing the *Journal of Economic History*. More specialised academic interests within the broad field of economic and social history — such as the Agricultural History Society (publishing the *Agricultural History Review*) — followed in large numbers. Most local history societies and journals have a similar constitutionality. They follow the much earlier

nineteenth-century precedents, in Britain, of the county historical records and archaeological societies.

This is not the only model for the coming into existence of a journal, of course, and such a model is itself often compromised in its pure form — with initial subsidies or help from elsewhere. Journals, whether scientific or humanistic, are often published by existing institutes or university departments, with different funding arrangements and a correspondingly different constitutional basis. Increasingly, publishers are taking the initiative in establishing journals, taking the residual commercial risk in the same way as for the publication of books. Where such journals have academic standing there would normally be safeguards for the preservation of editorial autonomy with the existence of an editorial advisory board.

Setting out such particulars, with the constitutional linkages between subscribers/members, the funding and the editing of a journal conceived in this way, is to emphasise how different were the circumstances of birth of the *Journal of European Economic History*. It sprang, fully-armed like Jove, from the moment of its conception; with a distribution immediately as large as that of all comparable academic journals in the field; without financial exigencies; without a painful passage from being a struggling infant to a viable adult. And far from obscure private beginnings the *Journal of the European Economic History's* birth was celebrated in Rome under the arc-lights of national television companies, with leaders of the Italian business and financial community in attendance, and receiving wide coverage in the national press.

Why, it might be asked, was the new journal not considered for publication in French? At this time, French was the dominant language of the EEC and its commissions, and Italian membership of the new emerging European entity featured prominently in the publicity of the Bank and the rhetoric of the gala launch of the *Journal*. The oldest European connections of the Bank were with France, which had just been further strengthened by the alliance with Credit Lyonnais. The possibility was never, in fact, considered. The Bank's horizons were already global, and its network was now expanding

rapidly in extra-European regions of the world. Within Europe, too, the Bank's vision was always wider than the EEC — an inclusive, open-frontiered 'Europeanness'.

Proponents in the Bank saw the *Journal* as reflecting, with specific academic priorities, the international commitments, the world-wide standing, the horizons and the awareness which now and increasingly in the future would reflect the Bank's own priorities. From a widening base in Italy the Bank would do increasing business with the world. The *Journal* would also interpret European economic history to the wider world as well as to economic and social historians within Europe. Historical awareness would widen perceptions of present reality and future prospects. English was the world's *lingua franca* in academic as well as business dialogue; with most non-European nations having English as their second language, if not their first. And the *Journal* would join a long-established tradition of excellence in economic history in the English-speaking world.

The *Journal* itself was to be European in its widest sense, including Eastern European countries and Russia on equal terms with Western Europe. At the same time there was never any question that the Bank would sponsor an «International Journal of Economic History»: the base was to be the European historical experience interpreted for the world; with external European economic and social relationships explored (such as overseas trade or migration) as well as intra-European themes. Very occasionally the *Journal* was to publish a purely extra-European article, but its heartland was to be Europe. Authors and readers, however, were, from the beginning, world-wide, as a later section of this text documents.