

BRITISH SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

The British Science Association (formally known as the British Association for the Advancement of Science) is delighted to be associated with *The Annual Register* in its 250th year.

The Annual Register provides a unique record of the progress of science and many other topics over 250 years. The very great value of this record is its contemporary reporting by experts in the field, so that every breakthrough, invention and theory is seen in the light that prevailed at the time, rather than with hindsight. The birth in 1831 of the British Association for the Advancement of Science—"the most distinguished men of science from every part of the empire"—is recorded, as are very detailed reports of many of the subsequent meetings of an institution praised in *The Annual Register* for "the benefits to science from its efforts". Many great scientific advances are first reported at the meetings of the Association, the discovery of Neptune for example in the 1846 volume, while the 1871 *Annual Register* records how the publication of Darwin's *Descent of Man* resulted in sharp debate at the Oxford meeting. The Darwin family features even earlier, with Charles's grandfather Erasmus Darwin's publication of *Zoonomia* discussed in the 1794 edition.

Some of the very earliest scientific observations—Halley's Comet and the transit of Venus (AR 1758)—are there, all reported at first hand. There is a contemporary report of Marconi's first trans-Atlantic wireless communication (AR 1901). Because these are contemporary accounts, they make extremely interesting reading. It is amusing to read the discussion and debate, and indeed the delicate way in which *The Annual Register's* science writer so many years ago reported findings which today we take for granted. As an example, he tiptoes carefully around the quantum theory of atomic structure, not yet sure whether it will be accepted: "Professor Planck's hypothesis that energy is emitted in definite units or quanta, a view so contrary to preconceived ideas that it is not surprising that the veterans in physics reserved judgment on its merits." (AR 1913).

The Annual Register and its online version are a goldmine for students of the history of science; there is a feast of facts, ideas and personalities within its pages. We applaud the editors, the contributors and the publishers, who have ensured that this exceptional historical record has been maintained every year. We hope that the publication will continue to thrive well into the future. Our congratulations on your 250th birthday!

Roland Jackson
Chief Executive of the British Science Association