

EACR

40 Years on

Robert W Baldwin, EACR's second President (1973-1979) reflects on the Association's formative years and how founding principles and activities link with a successful future

The EACR was officially founded on January 9th 1968 in Amsterdam. This landmark decision was achieved following early discussions between several investigators with the objective of forming an association representing cancer researchers in Europe. Professor Otto Muhlbock in Amsterdam was a leader in the early deliberations and "recruited" several colleagues including Professor RW Baldwin who at this time was Chairman of the British Association of Cancer Research.

Memories of the formative times include meetings in Vienna, Austria and Cremona, Italy aimed at convincing the European cancer communities of the need for an association to foster collaboration in cancer studies. This was a difficult time since one view was that associations like the BACR and the American Association for Cancer Research provided forums for European cancer researchers. One of the early resolutions was aimed at advancing cancer research by stimulating contacts throughout Europe. This was to include both Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Plans were also drawn up to hold regular meetings in Western Europe and so began the EACR. One of my recollections of the early times was the effort to foster contacts with European countries including East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Visits to many of these countries were often difficult for political reasons, but despite this, our reception at many institutes visited was always cordial and this helped in fostering the EACR. I remember the 1985 meeting in Bratislava, when giving the Muhlbock Memorial Lecture, the feeling that by holding the EACR conference we were opening contacts with our East European colleagues.

A major task in the 1970s was to establish a core membership. This required much lobbying by the first two Presidents, Prof Otto Muhlbock (1970-1973) and Prof R W Baldwin (1973-1979). There were many problems in the early years in recruiting members. For example, members in Eastern Europe were unable to pay fees in Western currency and in Western Europe, both the BACR and the AACR were promoting their associations. But with time, the EACR gained in recognition of its European role and so during the 1970s we had a membership slowly rising to around 400. This was helped by the enthusiasm of the scientific committees during the early years particularly in planning "annual" conferences. Usually university facilities were used, since accommodation was not expensive. This encouraged junior scientists to attend and to join the EACR. This was not without its problems. I recall arriving at one University, which will not be named, to find my newly appointed and harassed Scientific Secretary, Mike Price, trying to organize towels and soap for delegates-on a Sunday! The reliability of the audiovisual facilities was also limited, but we did not complain!

Once the EACR had established a solid foundation and, importantly, a cash flow from membership dues, it became possible to establish a dedicated office. This was established in the Cancer Research Campaign Laboratories during my "voluntary" service as President (1973-1979). In turn I "recruited" Dr Mike Price, then a postdoctoral research Fellow in the CRC Laboratories, as Scientific Secretary, this position eventually receiving official approval by the committee. From these early days we recognized the importance of promoting European cancer research and so we established EACR Travel Fellowships. This proved to be a most successful initiative, now some 30 years old. The "EACR" office for most of the formative years was a corner of Mike Price's office in the CRC Laboratories. So EACR business was carried out alongside daily work for the CRC and Mike's research duties. There was no

dedicated secretarial assistance, but with the steady growth of work, we first recruited Paul Saunders part time jointly while acting as the Editorial assistant for the journal *Cancer Immunology*. Then as EACR continued to "mature", Paul moved to be fulltime EACR secretary. From this time, the association of Mike Price and Paul Saunders evolved into the EACR Secretariat. A great debt of thanks is due to Mike and Paul for all their efforts. It is also a great testament to Mike who died in 2000.

One can reflect with satisfaction on the support and goodwill generated during the formative years of the EACR. The early phase relied heavily on the individual researchers who served on the Scientific committees. They promoted the scientific structure of the association which continues today. They also promoted the association by starting EACR Travel Fellowships. Now there is a range of EACR awards and bursaries which support the younger members.

If one asks how successful has been the past 40 years, the growth in membership from the first few hundred to more than 7000 in 2007 is a measure of the success of the EACR. The Association is now recognized as a leading forum for European cancer research. In the early days meetings involved no more than two days, mostly with proffered papers and occasional guest speakers. One has only to look at the Advanced Programme for 2008 to appreciate the growth and importance of the EACR as a forum for contemporary cancer studies.



Robert W Baldwin (Centre) with Jim Embleton