

## Introduction to the special issue

In April 2000, the F.-A. Forel Institute at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, organized a symposium entitled 'From Geology to Environmental Risk Assessment in Lakes and Rivers', in honour of Dr Richard L. Thomas, who had formally retired from his part-time position as a professor in the Faculty of Sciences.

The title and content of the symposium reflects the evolution of Dr Thomas' scientific interests. He received his BSc. in 1959 and his PhD in 1966 from the University College of Wales, Swansea, which was at the time, one of the most prestigious geology schools in Britain. In 1969, an essential part of his doctoral thesis, 'Palaeontological and geochemical facies in the *Gastrioceras subrenatum* marine band and associated rocks from the North Crop of the South Wales Coal Field' was published in the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*.

Dr Thomas subsequently left his native Wales to settle in Canada, where he became a prominent figure in the research efforts carried out in the Limnogeology Section of the Canada Centre for Inland Waters, located in Burlington, Ontario. Working collaboratively with other creative researchers such as Bruce, Burns, Sly, Kemp, Williams and Frank, Dr Thomas greatly broadened our understanding of sedimentological processes in the Laurentian Great Lakes, illustrating the important role of sediments in the transport, distribution and biological availability of contaminants. His work on mercury in the sediments of the Great Lakes, for example, became a reference standard. As Senior Research Scientist, and then Director of the Great Lakes Biolimnology Laboratory at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters, he stimulated the institution's research activities. In the mid-1980s, he was involved in management activities as the Director of the Great Lakes Regional Office of the Canada-United States International Joint Commission. He later held senior positions as a professor in the Department of Geology, and Director of the Great Lakes Institute, at the University of Windsor. In 1992, he became the Director of the Waterloo Centre for Groundwater Research at the University of Waterloo.

Even with his busy professional life in Canada, Dr Thomas still managed to find the time and energy to escape each year to Switzerland to join his colleagues at the F.-A. Forel Institute, advising on and stimulating research carried out on Lake Geneva and its watershed. Invited by Professor Jean-Pierre Vernet as a Visiting Professor in 1982, Dr Thomas quickly developed stimulating research,

also attracting a group of young researchers seeking advice and encouragement in their scientific projects. His exceptional gift for raising scientific curiosity and investigative enthusiasm, and in a relaxed atmosphere, brought a lasting spirit of the most enjoyable teamwork to the Institute. He was subsequently appointed as a part-time professor, staying at the Institute two months each year, including supervision of numerous PhD and postdoctoral researchers. An excellent field work companion, and remarkable five o'clock tea drinker, Dr Thomas always was ready to continue scientific debates with his students in the local pub late into the night.

Now, in his busy retirement life back home in Wales—if not sailing the Great Lakes—he is still with us, helping to develop intensive collaboration on environmental problems in Eastern European Countries (NEAR network), organizing conferences and workshops, and co-writing research proposals. In organizing the symposium and preparing this collection of symposium papers for publication, the team at the F.-A. Forel Institute is expressing its sincere thanks to Rich Thomas.

The papers included in this issue deal with various aspects of lake, reservoir and river sediments as a vector for contaminant transport. Initially presented at the symposium in Geneva, they were recently updated and revised. Some of the papers are written by leading scientists in this field who, through their contributions, pay tribute to Rich Thomas' achievements. Other contributions in this issue are from former coworkers or students indebted to Dr Thomas for his guidance at the start of their scientific studies. The scope of the included papers obviously does not cover the whole area of sediment/contaminant interactions. It is, however, a representative sampling of the topics that have been at the centre of Richard's scientific interests. In fact, Dr Thomas himself has contributed to this volume with his thoughts on the complex relationships between society, politics and science. Having had the privilege of considering myself a close friend of this fine scientist and remarkable personality, I sincerely hope the readers will find the papers collected in this special issue both interesting and stimulating.

Janusz Dominik  
Professor,  
F.-A. Forel Institute, University of Geneva,  
Versoix, Switzerland