

The good old days

Editorial advisory panel

Peter Tompkins (chairman),
John Bating, Barry Botelho,
Matthew Edwards, Nigel Hayes,
Julian Leigh, Martin Lunnon,
David Paul, Andrew Smith,
Chris Sutton, Paul Sweeting

Editor

Timothy Bramham
Watson Wyatt, Watson House,
London Road, Reigate RH2 9PQ
T 01737-274229
F 01737-241496
e timothy.bramham
@watsonwyatt.com

Managing editor

John Harris
28 Burghley Road,
Bristol BS6 5BN
T 0117-924 5060
F 0117-924 0888
e johnharris@the-actuary.org.uk

Features editor

Wendy Crockford
112B Carshalton Road, Sutton,
Surrey SM1 4RL
T 020-8643 5205
e wendycrockford
@the-actuary.org.uk

Deputy features editor

Paula Jackson
PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
101 Barbirolli Square,
Lower Mosley Street,
Manchester M2 3PW
T 0161-247 4422
F 0161-247 4113
e paula.k.jackson@uk.pwc.com

News editor

Seamus Creedon
KPMG, 1 Canada Square,
London E14 5AG
T 020-7311 5075
F 020-7694 2340
e seamus.creedon@kpmg.co.uk

Company news

Laurence Kleerekoper
FIT Administration Limited,
Deben House, 1 Selsdon Way,
City Harbour, London E14 9GL
T 020-7515 6611
F 020-7712 0201
e kleerekoper@lineone.net

Puzzles editor

Rakhee Raja
55a Moss Road, Pinner,
Middlesex HA5 3AZ
T 020-8429 9415
e rakhee_raja@hotmail.com

Student page editor

Tristan Walker-Buckton
(see p44)

Production manager

Joanne Morley
Durwyn House, Long Marton,
Appleby, Cumbria CA16 6BN
T 01768-362361
F 01768-362262
e jomorley@the-actuary.org.uk

Editorial illustration

Satoshi Kambayashi

The Actuary online:

www.the-actuary.org.uk

Site administrator

e webmaster@the-actuary.org.uk



THE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED DEATH of my PC invites me to bring out my manual typewriter (an 18th birthday present from a doting grandparent hoping for a lifetime's memory) from the back of the top shelf. The deadline remains, even though the emails might just be delayed (hurrah!).

I am just old enough to recall as a first-year actuarial student a power failure in our office, which lasted some hours and provided a degree of fun. The old hands (and hands they had to be) searched similarly in the backs of cupboards for comptometers – mechanical calculation machines – with which they just managed to generate a couple of surrender values before the lights came back on.

Where would we all be without so much we take for granted? Ten years ago, before the proliferation of cell-phones, I regularly phoned in to see if my secretary had any messages, or to find out what had come in in the second post (remember that?). Now, all the Royal Mail (I think that's still its name) brings is magazines I don't want and conference flyers, at the moment mainly about tax simplification ideas or how to invest in self-invested personal pensions. Why is it that the authorities use phrases like 'simplification' to precede 200 pages of Finance Act or 700-page Revenue manuals, not to mention all the statutory instruments?

It seems that hardly a day goes by without a news item about the imminent collapse of civilisation when residential property can be bought by people through personal pensions. Indeed, there are days when the front page of

the paper could more honestly say 'no news happened yesterday' than 'tax loophole threatens UK housing market'. What is so wrong about people with savings investing in steady income-yielding investments occupied by younger people not yet able to put down roots of their own? It's what happens in France, Germany, the US, indeed almost everywhere. Residential property could be the ideal form of retirement asset for many of us. We understand it far better than we know the FTSE companies our with-profits or managed funds invest in.

Next year's tax changes seem likely once again to give a fillip to personal pensions at the expense of traditional employer provision. Again, three cheers for that. It strikes me that, quite apart from the open-ended cost or unwelcome jeopardy to government taxation, employer provision has suffered terribly from one size fits all. No longer are all (or even most) of your employees married with 2.1 kids and requiring two-thirds of their salary to live off in retirement. My private-sector paternal grandparents lived adequately off non-pension saving (and even had enough to buy me a typewriter), whereas my public-sector maternal ones lived no differently but survived for ages and so left truckloads of unspent pension moneys.

Individualisation of pension choice seems to be a perfectly natural endgame. But there are some collective goals I do retain – please get me back onto the web; I'm feeling homesick!

 PETER TOMPKINS