P. Jowitt
Honorary Editor

Editorial

Paul Jowitt

The lead paper in this issue of *Water and Maritime Engineering* is not some state-of-the-art exposition, nor is it the account of a landmark engineering achievement, the presentation of a novel and profound piece of analysis or experiment or the issue of some innovative piece of software. Instead it is an historical account of the history of engineering error. It is useful to reflect on these things. Engineers sometimes think they know their subject. Sometimes they don't. The consequences can range from the unfortunate to the catastrophic. The readers of this journal are encouraged to read Petroski's article (*Civil Engineering Systems*, 9, No. 3) on Galileo's analysis of the bending of beams—in which he developed a theory which was flawed

but which seemed to reflect observed behaviour. A case of the self-fulfilling prophecy—until ...

There are some lessons here, both for the student and the experienced professional: an understanding of the basics is essential, a misunderstanding is permissible, but perhaps most of all, an unquestioning acceptance of 'written (or intuitive) fact' is dangerous. Every now and again it is beneficial to look backwards. To repeat that well-worn phrase, 'If we don't look back at our failures, we are condemned to repeat them'. So, read this paper (and the others!) and enjoy and learn from it!