

Editorial

Half a Century of *Medical History*

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Medical History, the first British journal devoted to the subject, was begun in 1957 under the editorship of William J Bishop, who had been the Librarian of the then Wellcome Historical Medical Library until 1953. Published by William Dawson, its cover stated that it was the official organ of the Cambridge University History of Medicine Society, The Norwegian Society for the History of Medicine, The Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, and the Osler Club of London. When many smaller societies came together under the umbrella of the British Society of the History of Medicine, it became instead that society's official journal. Whether this designation involved more than the reporting of society meetings was never entirely clear, and its disappearance from the title page in 1974 provoked considerable controversy. While allowing Editors an enviable freedom of action, the absence of any direct link with membership in a society was always a source of financial worry, even with the generous support of the Wellcome Trust. The agreement that from 2006 *Medical History* would be the official journal of the European Association for the History of Medicine and Health will, it is hoped, allow the journal to flourish in the new world of electronic publishing. Indeed, from 2005 all issues of the journal, now fully the responsibility of the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL, are available online via PubMed Central.

The list of Editors and Assistant Editors suggests a remarkable degree of continuity. Noël Poynter, assisted by Sue Goldie until 1965, took over after Bishop's death in 1961, and when he retired as Director of the Wellcome Institute in 1973, he was succeeded by Edwin Clarke, who was determined to bring new standards of professionalism into the writing of medical history. In 1980 Bill Bynum and Vivian Nutton began the tradition of having two editors with varied interests and specialities. Anne Hardy took over from the latter in 2000, and Harold Cook from Bynum in 2002. But the hard work of running the day-to-day work of the journal falls upon the Assistant Editor. Jean Runciman served loyally from 1966 to 1987, and, when her successor, Christine Stevenson, left to become a university lecturer in History of Art in 1991, Caroline Tonson-Rye took over. All contributors, and readers, have reason to be grateful to them for their care and precision in correcting proofs, and for their friendly efficiency in dealing with all the hitches that can occur in the editorial process. The Editors also are aware of how much they owe to the management skills of their Assistants.

Obvious changes have been few. There have been four types of cover design, moving from orange and cream with a logo, to a plain orange, to cream with a logo, and now to cream with a varying image. These changes have overlapped with changes of printer. Originally with Jarrolds, *Medical History* was printed from 1966 until 1984 by a firm

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owned by the then Wellcome Foundation Ltd. It provided their staff with a pleasant relief from printing the labels on drug containers. They were succeeded by Derry's of Nottingham, and they in turn in 2000 by Latimer Trend. All of them have contributed to the journal's excellent typographical quality, and enabled Editors to boast that, despite strikes, machine problems, and the early change to computer type-setting (a change unnoticed by contributors and readers), a finished copy has always reached the office (and often readers) in its announced month. Publishing and distribution, for a long while maintained within the Wellcome on an idiosyncratic system that, rumour had it, derived from colonial administrative practice, was taken over in 1985 by PSP, a division of the BMJ Publishing Group.

If *Medical History*'s title has remained the same, its sub-title has undergone several variations that reflect both the fluctuating nomenclature of the Wellcome Library and wider developments in the subject. In 1974 the reference to the "bibliography of medicine" was quietly dropped, and in 2006 "related sciences" was replaced by "health", although, of course, submissions on both topics continue to be received and published. Most striking, and perhaps least noticed, has been the varied composition of the Editorial Board, which, in the early 1970s, could be described as "largely dormant and partly fictional" (or worse, for one of the names recommended to the Editors in reconstituting the Board in 1984 had died some time before, and another was long past any effective activity). The six members of the Board in 1968, for instance, were all distinguished (and mainly retired) medical men, including one peer and two knights, but, with the possible exception of Douglas Guthrie and Kenneth Keele, all are forgotten by today's historians. Peers and knights are now somewhat rarer among contributors and reviewers, although Sir William Paton, a Wellcome Trustee and a former Director of the Institute, served on the Board from 1984 to 1993. Retired medical men have been replaced by professional medical historians, female as well as male, drawn from around the world. The new link with EAHMH has brought in more European members, and enlarged the range of expertise of the Board, who now contribute much more actively to the journal.

Above all, the journal depends on its contributors for its successful survival. Thanks to them, *Medical History* has been able to expand in range and in size. Excluding the annual Supplement, first introduced in 1981, the journal now contains roughly 30 per cent more words than in 1966, and submissions and reviewers come from all over the world, not just from the British Isles. Today's themes and topics are very different from those in the first issue, but *Medical History* still retains its openness and accessibility to all those interested in the subject, whatever their background.

Producing the journal has been a pleasure for all involved, not least its Editors and Assistant Editors. Long may it continue to flourish.