



EDITORIAL

50 Years of the British Journal of Pharmacology

Although the British Pharmacological Society was founded in 1931, it was not until 1945 that the need for a *British Journal of Pharmacology and Chemotherapy* was identified. Until then a major vehicle for publication by British pharmacologists had been the *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics* published by the American Society, and from 1933 that society had invited 3 members of the British society to serve on its Editorial Board. In his Foreword to issue one of the new journal, Sir Henry Dale explained how the 'years of association and shared responsibility' arising from joint editorial control of *JPET* had served British pharmacology well, but the anticipated expansion in pharmacological research following the war now justified the founding of a new journal devoted to pharmacology.

The Editorial Board of 7 members was appointed in 1945, with J.H. Gaddum as Chairman and H.R. Ing as Secretary. The first issue appeared in March 1946 and contained six papers. Ing managed the Journal, including press editing, almost single-handed, for 9 years. These were the difficult post-war years, but he laid solid foundations of quality of content and appearance for the subsequent success of the Journal. Originally a quarterly publication, the growth of pharmacology has demanded an increase in frequency of publication from bi-monthly (1961) to monthly (1966), and now to twice-a-month (1995). By 1968 it was apparent that chemotherapy papers were being submitted elsewhere, so it was dropped from the title and from then on the Proceedings of meetings of the Society were published in the Journal.

At the time of the 40th Anniversary in March 1986 almost every statistic relating to the Journal had increased enormously compared with earlier years; in 1985, from 540 submissions, 319 papers were published by an editorial board of 46 members. The inexorable rise has continued over the past 10 years. We now have a submission rate of *circa* 1,500 papers *per annum* of which some 680 papers were published in 1995 by an editorial board of 88 editors. Despite this pressure on our editors, editorial office and publishers, the average time to publication from submission has improved from 7.7 months in 1986 to about 7.0 months in recent years.

Each year we analyse the country of origin of submitted papers, and the distribution seems to be remarkably constant over the years; about a third from UK laboratories, a third from the rest of Europe, and a third from the rest of the world. Of these submissions, the majority come from University departments (between 60% and 80% of submissions over the past decade).

During the 40th Anniversary, the then Chairman, James Mitchell, reported the high international standing of the Journal as judged by the SCI citation rankings for journals in the field. It is, of course, pleasing for everyone involved with

the Journal to note that 10 years later we have remained at the head of a list of journals devoted to the broad sweep of pharmacology.

In these days of increasing specialism and of the profusion of specialist journals, it is appropriate to ask why a journal devoted to pharmacology in general survives. It may be because, although most pharmacologists are keen to know what is going on in their own field of research, they are also curious to know what are the advancing fronts of pharmacology. There are specialties with specialist journals, but these change over the decades and often the boundaries are ill-defined and shifting. The general journal can encompass the overlap of boundaries, and new areas of specialism often emerge from series of papers published originally in non-specialist journals.

Despite its title, the Journal has evolved into an international forum for the worldwide dissemination of pharmacological papers; as the figures quoted above show, about two-thirds of our manuscripts come from outside the UK. Improvements in international communication have made it possible for us in recent times to appoint more editors working in laboratories outside the UK. We can now claim to have a truly international editorial board (one third have overseas addresses) and it is likely that this trend will continue. We ask a great deal of our editors (and their referees); they are working editors who expect actively to review 20 or more manuscripts each year for a period of 4 or more years. Following the highest standards set by Dr Ing and his fellow founders of the Journal, we have striven to pay rigorous attention to matters of detail, including guidelines for the nomenclature of drugs and receptors in which some members of the board have played a leading role.

In his survey of the Society's journals for the issue of *BJP* circulated at the time of the 1984 IUPHAR Congress in London, James Mitchell found it easy to list a number of papers which had first appeared in the British journal that would generally be acknowledged to have been landmarks in the development of pharmacology. We continue to believe that we publish papers that will be so judged with the passage of time.

The achievement of 50 years of publication of one of the world's leading biomedical science journals has depended on the dedication of generations of members of the editorial boards and staff of the editorial offices. For nearly 30 years the Society has been greatly favoured in having the Macmillan Press as its publisher for the Journal.

The British Pharmacological Society is proud to celebrate the first 50 years of publication of one of its two journals. To all who know that they have contributed to the success of the venture, I express our gratitude on behalf of the Society and pharmacologists everywhere.

A.T. Birmingham
Chairman of the Editorial Board