

Introduction

In the progress of any branch of science there are highlights of development and enlightenment, and signposts to future directions: these are usually recognised as single papers or series of papers in a scientific journal. The celebration of the first 50 years of publication of the British Journal of Pharmacology presented a golden opportunity to acknowledge some of the many such landmarks in the progress of pharmacology which have appeared in the Journal.

This book contains a selection of facsimile reprints to represent papers that would be widely acknowledged to be among the long list of papers published in the Journal which have proved to have been significant. By that, it is meant that they have subsequently been widely cited, started a new area of interest, were a significant technical (method) advance, or were, in some way, a foundation stone in a pharmacological edifice (not necessarily the first publication on the topic, that may have been in another journal, but nearly the first). The selection ends at 1986 as the last 10 years seem to be too recent to assess yet by these criteria.

The strict format of scientific publication usually conceals a more personal account of work; the passage of time allows the contribution to be seen in later years in the context of subsequent progress. So the opportunity also was taken to ask one of the original authors, or, where this was no longer possible, another appropriate pharmacolo-

gist, to write a Commentary to precede the facsimile of the paper. The commentators were invited to consider such aspects as the contemporary background to the stage of pharmacological knowledge at the time, how the idea for the work arose, the technical difficulties surmounted, the seeming impact (or perhaps lack of it) at the time, an assessment of the subsequent significance of the paper in terms of what it led to, and an assessment of how the development of the topic in later years relates to the paper.

When David Brown was elected to succeed me as chairman of the Editorial Board he readily agreed to help me with this enterprise and was immediately an enthusiastic supporter of the project. Together, we expanded and refined the list of papers and commentators. I am greatly indebted to David for his support and expertise. Of course, the list of papers included is selective; we have had to leave out many other important papers, but we believe that those we have chosen will meet with general agreement.

We thank Professor Tom Bolton for giving us access to his complete collection of the Journal (given to him by Professor Edith Bülbring) for the facsimile reproduction of the papers.

I record my thanks to colleagues on the Executive Committee of the Editorial Board who encouraged me to go ahead with the project, especially to Nigel McNeil-Smith of Stockton Press for his expertise on production matters.

*A.T. Birmingham
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