

## Producing the ‘Difficult Second Album’

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It is with pride and excitement that we present the second volume of *Topics in the History of Medicine*, the journal of the British Society for the History of Medicine (BSHM). After last year’s trailblazing inaugural edition, it was decided to continue the same successful approach of inviting papers from two of the areas highlighted during the most recent BSHM Congress.

The theme of ‘Pandemics’ clearly chimes with our own recent history in a way that we always hope will not be repeated too frequently in our future. Unsurprisingly, modern events brought especial interest in this area of medical history and inevitably parallels with pandemics past have been widely made. My own local village of Eyam in Derbyshire found itself in the spotlight, the occupants called upon to provide socially distanced ‘vox pops’ throughout the crisis and the Poet Laureate choosing a particularly emotive legend of the 1665-66 plague as the basis for his work *Lockdown*.<sup>1</sup> I reflected on this at the time in my blog post for the BSHM website.<sup>2</sup>

In choosing the second theme, though undoubtedly ‘Nursing’ or ‘Medical Technology’ would have provided a similarly rich selection of papers, ‘Medicine in the Workplace’ felt to be most reflective of the Congress’s host city of Sheffield with its industrial heritage, and thus was the pick of the editorial team.

It has been an honour and a pleasure to guest edit this volume. Being an editor is not always easy. In taking on the task, I was reminded of a cautionary tale from my own specialty. In the early years of the twentieth century, two medical knights, James Mackenzie (1853-1925) and Thomas Lewis (1881-1945), were working very productively together constructing the founding principles of the clinical study of heart disease through systematic observation, scholarly debate and critical appraisal of each other’s findings. They also launched the first journal in the world to focus on cardiovascular disease, *Heart*, of which Lewis was inaugural Editor-in-Chief.

A topic of debate at the time was the mechanism of action of digitalis, which was used then as now for control of atrial fibrillation, a condition Mackenzie himself had

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Armitage. The Official Website. <https://www.simonarmitage.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Parker WAE. Poems and Pandemics in the Plague Village. Available at <https://bshm.org.uk/poems-and-pandemics-in-the-plague-village/>

first described. When Mackenzie submitted a manuscript proposing that its mechanism of action was due to increased action of the vagus nerve, Lewis, who had believed the drug had a direct effect on cardiac conductive tissues, rejected the paper outright. Mackenzie, rather affronted, wrote back ‘... you might as well put upon the forefront of the journal “No articles will be accepted which are not in accordance with the (temporary) beliefs of the Editor” ’.<sup>3</sup> Their collaboration thence ended abruptly. Ironically, we now appreciate that both hypotheses were partially correct, with a mixed mechanism of action. Such adversarial scientific jousting has fortunately not been a prominent feature of the present volume’s preparation. Nevertheless, we have sought at all times to maintain academic integrity and all papers have undergone anonymised peer review before acceptance.

In compiling this volume, I must thank a number of people, without whom this would not have been possible. First, I am grateful to our submitting authors who have provided what I hope you will agree is a collection of superbly researched and well-written papers. Thanks too to our esteemed peer reviewers for their assistance, providing robust opinions but always remaining constructive. Finally, I am thankful to Christopher Gardner-Thorpe, Editor-in-Chief, and Edward Wawrzynczak, BSHM Journal Editor, for inviting me to be Guest Editor of this edition of the journal, and for providing wise counsel throughout the process of putting it together.

In the contemporary academic press, there are few opportunities to publish in an open-access peer-reviewed journal without charge. The fact this is being delivered by the BSHM represents the tireless and unfunded contribution of its volunteers and also highlights the role of the BSHM in propagating knowledge and stimulating study of the history of medicine in the wider community.

I sincerely hope this new volume of the journal is as well received as the first. This is just the ‘second album’ in what promises to be a long and prosperous catalogue. Please be assured that any articles ‘not in accordance with the temporary beliefs of the Editor’ remain most welcome.

## **Keywords**

Occupational medicine, medical publishing, pandemics

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<sup>3</sup> Moss AJ. Introductory Note on Sir James Mackenzie. *Annals of Noninvasive Electrocardiology*. 2005; 10(3): 387.

## **Biographical Details**

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