

## The early days of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland by Professor Laurence Garey

Recently David Moffatt responded to my appeal for information on possible archives of the Society, and kindly sent me a copy of the booklet entitled *The First Fifty Years of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland – A Retrospect* published in 1937 by Edward Barclay-Smith to mark the fiftieth jubilee of the founding of the Society in 1887. I found therein a wealth of precious information, much of it unknown to me, and thought that members might be interested in sharing some of it. I therefore offer a short précis of the book's content, which also included essays on the origins of the *Journal of Anatomy*, and on the Terminology Committee, that I also summarise.

You can find a photograph of Barclay-Smith on page 14 of the Spring 2006 copy of *Anastomosis*, in a group picture taken at the ASGBI meeting at Queen's, Belfast in 1931. His name is familiar to present-day Members through the Barclay-Smith Travelling Fund.

What we now affectionately call ASGBI was founded in 1887, a year after the Anatomische Gesellschaft and eleven years (oh shame!) after the Physiological Society. Barclay-Smith bemoans that fact too, remarking that for centuries anatomists had taught not only structure but function. He points out that William Sharpey who was appointed Professor of General Anatomy and Physiology at University College London in 1821 gave anatomical lectures and pursued no "physiology" at all, but transfigured dead anatomy into a living science for all that.

The Anatomical Society was conceived in early 1887 by Charles Barrett Lockwood, a surgeon at Bart's and their tame anatomist. He colluded with George M Humphry and Alexander Macalister during some weekend visits to Cambridge, and the result was a letter that he sent on 27 April 1887 from his home in Upper Berkeley Street to various potentially interested colleagues, inviting them to a meeting at the Medical Society of London (see the facsimile, Figure 1). More about that seminal meeting in a moment, but here Barclay-Smith throws in an important aside, to say that Lockwood must be remembered as the real founder of the Society, and that it "would be a graceful tribute to his memory to establish the custom of coupling his name with that of the Society when ever this toast is proposed at a dinner." What a good idea! President: action please: bring back the tradition.

Who was Lockwood? Born in 1856, he died in 1914 at only 58 years old. He was a surgeon, as I said earlier, and seems to have reflected this with a somewhat caustic wit, exemplified by his comment that one demonstration offered to the Society "showed less and smelt worse" than any specimen he had ever seen. Apart from the smell, one sometimes has a similar feeling now.

So, the first meeting was held on 6 May 1887, and I reproduce the attendance sheet (Figure 2). Someone had a messy pen, it seems. Interestingly, David Moffatt's covering letter to me when he sent me the booklet also has similar blots on it! How wonderful to receive a letter written in ink, in these days of e-mails! An honour indeed.

At this first meeting, Lockwood was elected Secretary and Humphry President, although the latter does not appear to have signed the register. Two resolutions proposed "That an Anatomical Society be founded, and that it be called the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland", and "That the scope and object of the Society be the Anatomy, Embryology and Histology of Man and of Animals in so far as they throw light upon the structure of Man".

Humphry was a founder of the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, about which more later. He was Professor of Anatomy at Cambridge from 1866. In 1883 he became first Professor of Surgery at Cambridge. He died in 1896.

Let us look at some of the names on the attendance list.

W Bruce Clark was another Bart's surgeon and anatomist.

William Anderson was an anatomy lecturer at St Thomas's, and also a Professor at the Royal Academy of Arts.

J Pickering Pick was a St George's surgeon and edited *Gray's Anatomy* for some years. He later became Inspector of Anatomy.

William H Bennet, also a surgeon at St George's, was in addition another Inspector of Anatomy.

## HISTORY MATTERS

James Black was an anatomist at the Westminster Hospital.

Arthur Thompson was an anatomist at Edinburgh, then Professor of Anatomy at Oxford from 1895 to 1933. He was an accomplished artist, being elected to a Professorship at the Royal College of Arts, and produced an acclaimed *Anatomy for Art Students*. He became President of ASGBI in 1906.

George H Makins was another St Thomas's anatomist, and surgeon too. He became Secretary of ASGBI in 1891, and President of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1918.

Alex Hill was another of those Cambridge anatomists, but also became Master of Downing, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, and finally Principal of Southampton.

George D Thane was student, Demonstrator and Professor successively at UCL, and President of ASGBI in 1895. He edited *Quain's Anatomy*, and became Chief Inspector under the Vivisection Act. He will enter the scene later in the section on nomenclature.

WJ Walsham was a Bart's surgeon and examiner for the Royal College of Surgeons.

Rickman J Godlee was a student at UCL, then went as Surgeon and Lecturer to Charing Cross, back to UCL, was President of the Royal College of Surgeons from 1911, and ASGBI councillor. Then he became a farmer!

John Hughlings Jackson was, as most of you will know, the name behind Jacksonian epilepsy. He was number one neurologist at the London Hospital. The question mark after his name on the attendance sheet presumably means that the Secretary could not read his name!

F Howard Marsh was an anatomist and surgeon at Bart's, then Professor of Surgery at Cambridge, and another Master of Downing. He was a hip specialist, being himself a sufferer.

E Blackett Owen was a surgeon at St Mary's, and Lecturer in Anatomy. He seems to be best known for an anatomy book that he published, but that did not sell! Maybe I underestimate him: tell me someone.

John Bland Sutton was surgeon and anatomist at the Middlesex Hospital, President of the Royal College of Surgeons and ASGBI councillor.

In his book, Barclay-Smith reports a second meeting of the nascent ASGBI, but cites the date as both June 1887, and "the following May", so I am not sure which is correct: probably the former I surmise. Whatever, this second meeting was used to fill the ranks of Officers and Councillors. I shall not list all those present, but some new, famous names appear.

William Turner, a new Councillor, later President, is said to have obtained his first job by having dinner with John Goodsir, Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh, and getting it right when asked to describe sartorius. Sounds plausible. Turner later was top anatomist at Edinburgh himself, Principal of the University of Edinburgh and President of the GMC, so that proves how useful it is to know about sartorius.

Then there was DJ Cunningham, whose dissection guide struck fear into my heart as a student. And John Cleland, and Johnson Symington (about whom more later), and a host of others that I shall skip over.

A third meeting, soon thereafter, fixed the subscription at ten shillings, decided to call members "Members" rather than "Fellows" (see my comment in Figure 2), and heard the very first communication, cited as Macalister on the "Brachialis Anticus Muscle". Cutting edge stuff.

The first "Annual" meeting was in November 1887, at UCL, while the first "Summer" meeting was in Cambridge in June 1888. This was also the first meeting in an anatomy department, and the first after which the participants dined together formally (at King's College). Grafton Elliot-Smith later proclaimed that "the dinner is by far the most important part of the Meeting". Although perhaps the subjective experience of some current Members, objective evidence that this is true will be presented toward the end of my essay, when dealing with nomenclature. The second Annual Meeting was at St Thomas's.

## HISTORY MATTERS

In February 1889, after less than two years of ASGBI, disaster struck. The Treasurer reported that Members' subscriptions were horribly overdue, so a "Mr Ridout" was appointed to collect the debts and keep 5% himself. Maybe I can volunteer for that job today. The only problem was that it did not work. A little more than two years later the Treasurer wrote to Mr Ridout to say that if the money was not forthcoming legal proceedings would be taken. Another year later the Committee of Management decided that the whole affair was futile, and let it drop. It is good that we never have this sort of problem today.

Each year brought some innovation or other. May 1890 saw the first Overseas Member, Professor JT Wilson from Sydney. The year after was marked by the institution of Honorary Members, although it was not until 1897 that Wilhelm Waldeyer, Wilhelm His and Le Boucq were actually elected. They attended the Dublin Summer Meeting that year, together with several other European colleagues. When His died in 1904, the President, Johnson Symington, pronounced a laudatory address to the May meeting.

A remarkable meeting must have been the one recorded in August 1892 in Edinburgh, which attracted 13 Members and guests. It lasted one day, or rather from 4.30 pm until dinner time, but there was no dinner.

The next seminal decision was in May 1894, when two ladies were admitted, Mrs Percy Flemming and Miss AF Piercy from the London School of Medicine for Women. We can note with pride that the Physiological Society only admitted women 22 years later.

Now a mystery: what happened to the two Peruvian mummies received from a Miss Beale in 1894?

In August 1905 the Summer Meeting was held in conjunction with the First International Congress of Anatomy in Geneva, and that tradition continued for a while thereafter, the next being in 1910 in Brussels.

1908 marked the start of a charming custom, that of Committee meetings in the rooms of the Conservator of the Royal College of Surgeons, with tea served, a tradition that Barclay-Smith records as still respected in 1937. When did it stop? In 1918 this hospitality was extended to the *Journal of Anatomy*, of which all issues were deposited at the College, free of charge. Are they still there?

The First World War disrupted the Society, but not completely. Some meetings were held, especially when really important issues were to be discussed. For instance, in 1914 it was proposed that the government be asked to supply osteology sets. (This makes me reflect that at this very moment today we are faced with paying the government a hefty sum just to be able to dissect.) But not until the Summer Meeting of 1918, with victory in the air, did the festivities start again in earnest, with a dinner in Merton College, Oxford, held under the shadow of food tickets.

For three days in April 1927 a joint meeting was held at UCL with the *Association des Anatomistes*, instead of the Summer Meeting. This was repeated in Bordeaux two years later, but it is noteworthy that very few members of ASGBI attended at Bordeaux, although around 100 "Continental" anatomists came to UCL.

In 1932 the wonderful news arrived that Miss N Symington had bequeathed the residue of her estate to the Society to found the "Johnson Symington Bequest for Anatomical Research".

In 1933 more good financial news arrived: the Charity Commissioners had granted us charitable status, so no more income tax would be payable. That year it was decided that five Overseas Councillors should be appointed.

Barclay-Smith recounts many more anecdotes in his book, and potted histories of early Members, that I have not been able to transmit, but I can easily access them for anyone who may have further questions. It might be possible to make copies of this document for anyone interested. Perhaps I should quote his last paragraph in full, as it seems very topical even today, as we stand on the brink of our 120th anniversary next year.

*With such a history of progress behind it, a steadily growing membership, a Journal which as far as attractiveness and illustration are concerned is now second to no other similar publication, an improving quality of the communications presented to its meetings and an increasing enthusiasm displayed by its members, the Society can look forward to the second (dixit Barclay-Smith, but let us substitute "next") fifty years with full assurance and confident hopefulness.*

## The Journal of Anatomy

### Barclay-Smith also recounts a short history of the Journal.

Between 1861 and 1865 comparative and other anatomical research tended to be published in Britain in the *Natural History Review*. After its closure in 1865, the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology* appeared. Who started it? Not clear, but according to Alexander Macalister it was William Turner, while Turner credited George Humphry. What really happened seems to be that at the meeting of the British Association in Nottingham in 1866 (Lopa, note that Nottingham was the trigger zone!) Humphry, Professor of Anatomy at Cambridge, but President of the Physiological Section of the meeting, met Turner, then assistant to Professor Goodsir in Edinburgh. Together they decided that an anatomical journal was needed, and consulted with Alfred Newton, Professor of Zoology in Cambridge, and Percival Wright, Lecturer in Zoology in Dublin, both editors of the defunct *Natural History Review*, and also John Willis Clark, Superintendent of the Museums of Zoology in Cambridge. They coined the name *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, and produced the first issue, with Humphry's Nottingham address on Physiology as the first article. The second issue carried Humphry's name as Editor, with Turner as Co-editor, and this lasted for 20 volumes. The physiologists split off to do their own thing in 1878. Humphry was succeeded by Turner, who edited volumes 21 to 31, then Macalister took charge of volumes 32 to 34, after which came DJ Cunningham for volumes 35 to 41, then Macalister returned up to volume 50, after which the Anatomical Society took over possession of the Journal.

The early editions were an eclectic mix of "natural historical" articles. Some idea can be had from these early titles:

*On domestic cats of ancient and modern times*

*The mechanism of perching in birds*

*The organic matter of human breath*

*The action of the horse*

*The preservation of minute animals in acetic acid*

The relationship between the Journal and the Society began with a letter in July 1887 from Turner, as Editor, to Humphry as President of the Society, suggesting that the Society publish their proceedings at the end of the Journal, with the Society paying the expenses and the Members getting a copy each. Sometimes the Society did not cover all the costs, and authors frequently had to pay for their own papers, some of which were actually printed in the main body of the Journal, if recommended by the Committee of Management.

An interesting venture was launched in May 1889. The Society appointed a Committee of "Collective Investigation", which meant that certain key projects would be undertaken by several schools and the results collated for publication. Two early projects were "The method of insertion of the pectoralis minor" and "The relationship between the external pterygoid muscle and the internal maxillary artery". No genome stuff here! At first there was much enthusiasm with around 20 groups participating, but by 1896 interest had waned to almost zero, and the Collective Investigation Committee was adjourned *sine die*.

In 1892 the Society suggested to the Editors that they produce an Index of the first 20 volumes of the Journal, which was done the following year.

At the Annual Meeting of the Society in November 1898, Frederick Gymer Parsons, the Secretary, proposed that Members should be able to subscribe to the Journal for 25 shillings a year, of which the Society would rake in 10 shillings. It happened that at the time Macalister was both Editor and President, and he approved the idea, although emphasising that it would cost the Society at least £300 per year. At the Committee of Management in January 1899, it was decided to circulate members, pointing out the excellent value for money, as the normal annual subscription was £1 10s 0d (ie 7s 6d per issue). (I delight in quoting these sums that may well be Chinese – no disrespect – to some of our present younger Members). However, response was poor, and the idea was dropped. A watered-down arrangement was proposed in 1905, such that the Society would pay £25 per annum to the Journal, and Members would get it for 15 shillings instead of the normal 21 shillings (the astute accountants among you will note that the market price of the Journal had gone down since 1898). This agreement went through, and was signed by Cunningham for the Editors and Symington for the Society.

## HISTORY MATTERS

A nasty incident occurred in 1908 when a paper read to the Society was published elsewhere by its author, and then appeared in the Journal. This prompted a new Rule of the Society that no paper given to a Meeting could be published elsewhere except with the permission of the Committee of Management. The next year, after Volume 44, and until 1926, the Proceedings were no longer inserted in the Journal.

In January 1911, Macalister wrote to the Society to say that as the Journal was making money, the Society need no longer pay the £25. That was a windfall for all, as the Society was "in a somewhat critical condition". This must be the first time that the journal bailed out the Society, although not the last. This was such good news that it is hardly surprising that the Society, at the Annual Meeting in December 1916, took over the Journal, which had therefore been going for 50 years independently, although rather incestuously. Macalister wrote to Editor John Earnest Frazer, saying: "I am now happy that the permanency of the Journal is secured and rendered independent of the lives of individual editors"!

The Society immediately changed the name to *Journal of Anatomy*, which simply formalised an already obvious fact: there was precious little physiology in the Journal by that time. An Editorial Committee of five was inaugurated, of whom four were elected and the other was the Treasurer. The first Committee was composed of Arthur Keith as Editor, with Grafton Elliot-Smith, James Peter Hill, Thomas H Bryce, and E Fawcett (Treasurer). The Journal would be given to members as part of the normal annual subscription, which was raised to 30 shillings.

The old Journal had been produced by Griffin's publishers and printed by Neil & Co, but in 1918 it was decided to change to Cambridge University Press from Volume 53 the next year.

The finances were highly labile at the time. In a mad moment of generosity the new committee raised the number of free reprints from 25 to 50, but a year later had to revert to 25! The minutes reveal intricate arguments about the market price of the journal (7s 6d, 8 shillings, or even 10 shillings). The meetings of the Editor with the Committee of Management must have been fun. Strapped for money, they decided to seek lucrative advertising material, and get authors to pay for proof corrections if thought to be excessive. By 1921 the price of the Journal was up to £2, four times more than the highest price considered two years earlier, and more than the 30 shillings subscription (so still good value to be a Member). But amazingly the Journal sold well, so much so that the 250 printed copies of the very first issue were sold out and had to be reprinted. Finances now took off in earnest, so much so that the sacrosanct reprints provided free to authors were again raised to 50 (an index of financial soundness if ever there was one).

As I explained above, the first Editorial Committee was appointed in 1916, but in 1926, ten years later, it emerged that it had never met! The Editor simply reported to the Committee of Management. The latter decided that this was not good enough, and that the Editorial Committee must do the work themselves.

And today the Journal progresses from strength to strength. Barclay-Smith, original author of this history of ASGBI, aspired in 1931 to the Treasurership of the Society and the Editorial Committee of the Journal, and would be proud of the continued success of both under the present management.

### Terminology

At a meeting in 1887 in Leipzig, the *Anatomische Gesellschaft* proposed a revision of anatomical nomenclature, which took place over the following six years, culminating with its adoption at a meeting in Basle. This became the "Basle Nomina Anatomica" (BNA). Several British anatomists were invited to participate, but they found the travel "difficult" and did not attend particularly assiduously. France refused to take part. However, the

BNA was fairly widely acclaimed, notably in the USA. A further revision took place between 1923 and 1935 in Jena, and was published in 1936.

## HISTORY MATTERS

At a meeting of ASGBI in February 1894, President DJ Cunningham nominated a Committee consisting of Arthur Thomson, Alexander Macalister, George Thane and Charles Sherrington to consider the German report. The importance given to this work can be judged by the generous award of £5 for their expenses. In fact this Anatomical Nomenclature Committee only claimed 14 shillings, and nothing further was heard of it.

We have to wait until June 1912 for further developments. The Physiological Society decided that physiological and anatomical nomenclature in the nervous system needed unifying. They invited the Anatomical Society to participate, and they actually appointed five people including Macalister, Elliot-Smith and Symington. But their findings were never published, except in a short report by the Physiological Society that the time was not ripe for such a task to be completed. As Barclay-Smith writes: "So that was that".

The next attempt to get things moving was soon thereafter, when the Annual Meeting of ASGBI in November 1912 discussed the BNA. However, they agreed to adjourn the matter until the next meeting, January 1913, when the adjournment was again moved, as they wished to consult the surgeons. Really, nomenclature did not seem to be flavour of the month, nor even of two decades.

However in March 1913, Macalister opened a discussion, which concluded that the BNA was "inevitable". Yet another Committee was appointed which, as we know all too well, was an effective way of burying a contentious subject. Indeed, in June they agreed not to proceed further until other views had been received, notably from delegates to the International Congress of Anatomy later that year. So, November 1913 marked the first meeting of the Committee, at which they reported views of American and Canadian anatomists. In the light of this, the Committee circulated all UK Heads of Anatomy, to see what they thought of the BNA.

The next Committee meeting was in March 1914, when the Americans replied by letter that they were not yet ready to respond. Here we go again! Of the UK anatomists circulated the year before, only two had replied. Outcome: "the Committee felt discouraged". So much so, that nothing more was heard of it.

In November 1917, things warmed up a little. Thane, one of those who had not been able to attend the Leipzig meetings on account of travelling difficulties, and who had been on the various ASGBI Nomenclature Committees, violently opposed the BNA, it being "adopted by the German Anatomical Society for its own use". Further, it "may be adapted to German usage" but was "entirely at variance with ours". Our "Society should retain its independence and self-respect". Almost a diplomatic incident. So what happened next? Of course, a new Committee. They reported in March 1918: they were against "departing from the use of the old nomenclature". However, they admitted that "some revision of certain terms ... might be undertaken with advantage". So how to proceed? You guessed it, form a Revision Committee. And so they met, all 12 of them. They decided to base their nomenclature on the 10th edition of *Quain's Anatomy* (edited by Thane himself). Some of their conclusions sound like delicate compromises. Latin was out, but if there was any it must be correct. Eponyms were out, but were OK when necessary. It was acceptable to have two names for the same structure, but it should be made clear which was preferable. At last the Revision Committee reported to the Society, but President A Robinson pointed out that there was a major problem: the Committee had never been given guidelines, so how could their findings be interpreted? The solution was novel: form a Sub-committee to consider how to co-ordinate the results of the Committee! Indeed, the results had been given as a series of considerations of specialities such as osteology, joints and muscles, angiology, CNS, PNS and special senses, and splanchnology. No evidence has been found that this worthy group ever met. However, Barclay-Smith considered that the Revision Committee "had made much further advance than any previous committee". The "results of its labours were decently interred in the box containing the records of the Society, and there they are now for all, who may so wish, to see". Are they still there? Maybe we should exhume them.

At the Summer Meeting in Manchester in June 1928 the whole business was resurrected. A proposal was heard that, although the BNA was in widespread use in English-speaking circles, in view of its unsatisfactory nature, a revision was needed. Cries of heresy! There ensued a "battle royal" between the "younger generation, untrammelled by tradition" and "the old diehards, possibly due to old age and decrepitude". The Committee of Management was asked to appoint a Committee (yawn), but never did so, as over the Annual Dinner that followed the Meeting, peace was made by all parties, and three upright gentlemen accepted the task of seeing what could be done.

This informal committee seems to have been the answer, with TB Johnston representing England, EB Jamieson Scotland, and Andrew Francis Dixon Ireland, for a year later they made preliminary suggestions for several of the sub-specialities. Their final report came in 1931, and the Society gave them its benediction by officialising the Committee, a potentially dangerous move, as we have seen.





*Anatomical Society Archive: Summer Meeting of the Society, June 1946*

In the Spring 2006 issue of *Anastomosis* I published the first of four archive group photographs of the Society's meetings. That one was the Summer Meeting in Belfast in 1931. This time we come a little more up-to-date, to Cardiff in June 1946, and some of the older timers will recognise a number of names, and maybe faces. I certainly see my own Professor of Anatomy, Wilfred Le Gros Clark, about whom I also contribute a short article in this edition. Then there is WJ Hamilton, my predecessor at Charing Cross (who was a mere boy in the 1931 picture!). Other Oxford colleagues are Geoffrey Harris and Paul Glees. But each of you will see his or her own kith or kin, or at least recognise some famous anatomical names.

I do not need to transcribe the names this time, as the photographer had kindly done it already.

**Laurence Garey**  
**Lausanne**  
**e-mail: [l.garey@freesurf.ch](mailto:l.garey@freesurf.ch)**