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History of the Biochemical Society

1911–1986



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Abbreviations

ACP, Advisory Committee for Publications; BCCB, British Co-ordinating Committee for Biotechnology; *BJ*, *Biochemical Journal*; BS, Biochemical Society; *BST*, *Biochemical Society Transactions*; C.U.P., Cambridge University Press; EFB, European Federation of Biotechnology; FEBS, Federation of European Biochemical Societies; ICSU, International Council of Scientific Unions; IUB, International Union of Biochemistry; IUPAC, International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry; MRC, Medical Research Council; PEC, PE(S)C, Professional and Educational (Sub-)Committee; RDS, Research Defence Society; UCL, University College London.

As the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Biochemical Society approached the Society Committee decided that one way to celebrate this event would be to commission a History of the Society. Publications covering the first 38 years, by R. H. A. Plimmer, and the first 500 meetings, by R. A. Morton, were already in existence; they were published in 1949 and 1969, respectively. However, the speed with which the Society has developed, commensurate with that of Biochemistry itself, made the idea of a new anniversary History an attractive one. Consequently when I was invited to undertake this assignment I accepted with pleasure. However, I did stipulate that I should write a history covering the entire existence of the Society and not just an updating of Morton's *History*. I took this view not because of any perceived inadequacies in his or Plimmer's volume — indeed my indebtedness to them will soon become very clear to the reader; but I felt that there might be some merit in a single author history by someone who has been intimately connected with the Society for over 40 years. It remains to be seen if this view was warranted and whether the feeling of challenge and excitement which has pervaded the Society since the Second World War emerges from the mass of archival data which a formal history must inevitably contain. In addition to providing information I have tried to suggest the nature of the personalities behind the biochemists who were responsible for the Society's development by including photographs, thumbnail biographies and anecdotes; some of the latter have been 'handed down' (but I hope they are not apocryphal) and some have come directly from the 'horses' mouths'. Inevitably, my own views have occasionally obtruded and I should make it clear that they are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society or, indeed, of any other member of the Society.

In order to give the financial problems faced by the Society's early officers more immediacy I have indicated in square brackets the present day equivalent of any sums of money quoted. The calculations have been based on official cost of living indices; thus the present day values are only approximations for there is no evidence that inflation in publishing and administration has been over the years the same as the average figure.

The response of colleagues and friends to my request for help and information was most valuable to me in coming to an integrated view of the development of the Society. To those for

whom I have been able to make only passing reference to their contributions, I have space here merely for a generalized 'thank you': appropriate acknowledgement is given in the text and their full replies are now lodged in the Society's Archives. A recent innovation has been to appoint a Society Archivist, who is currently Professor G. R. Barker. His efforts should make life much easier for a future historian of the Society.

Help in providing written information which I have drawn on at length was given by Professor H. R. V. Arnstein, Professor H. Bradford, Professor P. N. Campbell, Professor A. C. Chibnall, Dr R. M. C. Dawson, the late Professor K. S. Dodgson, Dr D. F. Elliott, Dr D. S. Jones, Professor J. Lucy, Dr P. T. Nowell, Dr A. G. Ogston, Professor C. Pogson, Dr H. J. Rogers, Dr G. A. Snow, Professor R. H. S. Thompson, Dr D. C. Watts and Professor W. J. Whelan. A number of these have also commented on my manuscript and many sections have been improved following their informed criticism. Mr A. Allan, Assistant Archivist, The University of Liverpool, kindly answered my many queries about Chapter 1.

The Society's professional staff, with the benign encouragement of Mr Glyn Jones (Executive Secretary), have given every possible assistance. In particular I must acknowledge the help of Mr Tony Evans (Editorial Manager), who saw the book through the press and prepared the Index; his advice based on many years' experience with the Society's publications was invaluable. It was an enormous help to be able to draw on the encyclopaedic knowledge of Doris Herriott (Meetings Secretary), particularly with regard to meetings and administrative matters. I am also most grateful to Vivienne Avery, who, before she left the Society's staff, gave enthusiastic help in the early stages of the project, and Dianne Stilwell who, on appointment to a new post of Research and Information Officer, immediately plunged into archival searches and spent a great deal of time organizing the photographs.

I wish particularly to pay tribute to the help given by the late Professor K. S. Dodgson (a member of the first honours class which I taught), who was one of the initiators of the idea of a History for the 75th Anniversary of the Society and who gave it his wholehearted support before he was struck down with his last illness. Sadly he was not to enjoy any of the Anniversary celebrations, the concept of which owed so much to his enthusiastic advocacy.

I hope that I have been able to show how and why the Biochemical Society has developed into one of the most successful and effective scientific societies in existence. It shows every sign of remaining so and I am confident that my successor writing on the Centenary of the Society will be reporting a similar situation.

T.W.G.
February 1987