

1 James Ritchie (1864–1923): The First General Secretary of the Society

Eric Sidebottom

INTRODUCTION

As a biographer of James Ritchie I was naturally keen to see for myself the minutes of the early meetings of the Society written, perhaps, in Ritchie's own hand. Accordingly I arranged to visit 'Head office' and was delighted to find that the 'appropriate archive boxes' had all been carefully laid out for me. But alas, on opening them, no old Minute books were to be found – only 'middle-aged' records. The disappearance of the early records, temporarily we hope, has caused some difficulties for the present officers of the Society, especially the Secretary, who has written:

'the minutes... oh what a saga. We have turned everything upside down, all the living officers, past and present have been contacted, and we have gone through the archives of the diseased ones (a singularly appropriate typo for a pathologist to make!)... the upshot... no sign of them. Moreover the Charity Commissioners now want sight of them.'

Fortunately James Ritchie's key role in founding the Society is set out clearly (although it should be noted, rather briefly) in Chapter 2 of this volume, the reprint of Henry Dible's history of The Pathological Society originally published in a supplement to the *Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology* in 1957. Unfortunately the details I had hoped to discover to embellish Dible's account will have to await the rediscovery of the old Minute books.

In summary I should like to quote from Robert Muir's obituary in the *BMJ* (Muir, 1923a):

'The unstinted way in which Ritchie devoted his powers to any work he undertook is strikingly illustrated by his services to The Pathological Society of GB & I. He was one of its secretaries from the foundation (in 1906, with AE Boycott), and when the *Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology* was adopted as its official organ (in 1907) he became assistant editor, and, on the death of Sir German Sims Woodhead, editor. The work which he did, both on the scientific and business sides, was invaluable; for along with his critical ability, always used with courtesy and tact, he had a special knowledge of the technical side of publishing, which was of great advantage. I am sure that all members of this society will acknowledge that to him the success and efficiency of both society and journal were largely due, and will always gratefully remember the debt they owe to him.'

As I have been unable to unearth much new information about Ritchie's role in The Pathological Society, this account will cover the whole of Ritchie's professional life (again about which there is surprisingly little documentary evidence).

RITCHIE'S BACKGROUND

James Ritchie was born in 1864 at Duns, Berwick, Scotland, the only son of an eminent clergyman of the United Presbyterian Church, a man of fine culture and great kindness, characteristics clearly passed on to his son. After attending Edinburgh High School Ritchie entered the arts classes at Edinburgh University in 1880 and graduated with an MA in 1884. He had the uncommon skill of a mastery of shorthand, which enabled him to take down lectures verbatim, a gift that he used not only for his own benefit but also as a service to friends. He went on to study medicine where, en route, he won many distinctions and graduated with honours in 1888. He was appointed as house surgeon to Professor John Chiene and elected as one of the Presidents of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, a much-coveted honour among young graduates. He then proceeded to study Public Health and graduated with a BSc in 1889. Soon after this, with Professor Chiene's blessing, he was invited to move to Oxford as assistant to Mr Horatio Symonds (who had himself trained in Edinburgh).

Obviously junior hospital posts in the 1890s were very different from today's 'house jobs' because it was reported that Ritchie had a considerable amount of leisure. He spent much of this time on bacteriological and pathological work and this work was submitted as an MD thesis entitled 'Some aspects of antiseptic action' to Edinburgh University in 1895. The thesis was awarded a gold medal. Ritchie was clearly fortunate in that the two most eminent medical professors in Oxford at the time of his arrival quickly got to know him and appreciate his talents. Sir Henry Acland, who had been Regius Professor of Medicine since 1857 and was in his late 70s, nevertheless encouraged his early research in bacteriology and provided him with laboratory space. He also invited him to give practical instruction in bacteriology; the first classes were held in 1894. John Burdon Sanderson, Professor of Physiology when Ritchie arrived but successor to Acland as Regius Professor in 1895, also encouraged him to offer formal pathology classes and campaigned in the University to appoint him to the newly created lectureship. At this time Burdon Sanderson was responsible for the hospital post-mortems and Ritchie assisted with these. The post-mortems were usually done at 2pm and they provided excellent teaching material. Boycott later, in an obituary (1923), wrote in the *Lancet* about the new teaching arrangements:

'regular classes started in 1896. Six or eight or ten men, mostly those who had taken a BA in physiology and were stopping up for a fifth year to do anatomy with Arthur Thomson used to meet Ritchie at four o'clock on three afternoons a week in the two small rooms in the University museum assigned for the use of the Regius Professor of Medicine, and received, till dinner-time, instruction in the theory and practice of pathology under the ideal conditions of intimate personal contact with a great teacher.....always ready to spend any amount of time helping lame (but generally enthusiastic) dogs over the fearful beginnings of practical bacteriology and post-mortems'.

RITCHIE'S APPOINTMENT AT OXFORD

The University technically made its first appointment in pathology from 1 January 1897, but because this was a backdated appointment the formal decision was actually made at a meeting of the Common University Fund (the precursor to the General Board) early in March. James Ritchie received the good news from the Secretary of the Fund, Mr Gamlen, on 5 March and responded immediately, accepting the new post (Ritchie, 1897) (Figs 1.1 and 1.2). Although Ritchie was the man appointed to this first University post in pathology, the background to the appointment was the work done by two Regius Professors of Medicine, Sir Henry Acland (1815–1900) (Fig. 1.3) and Sir John Burdon Sanderson (1828–1905) (Fig. 1.4). Both had longstanding interests in pathology and bacteriology. Acland had, from the mid 1800s, assembled collections of physiological and

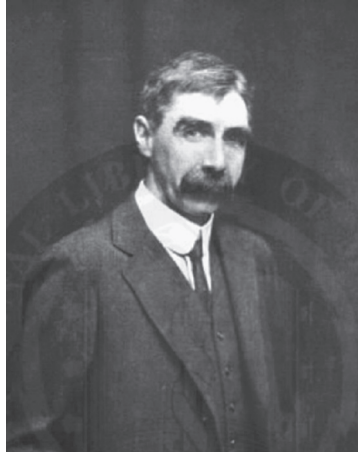
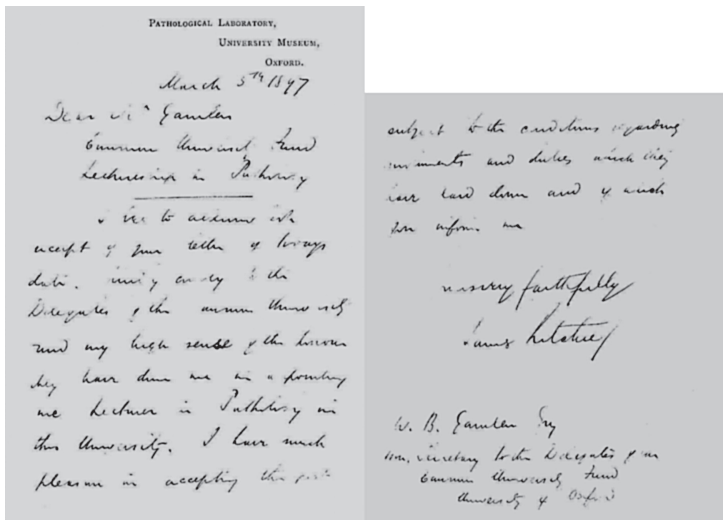


Figure 1.1 Photograph of Ritchie from the collection at the National Library of Medicine in the USA.

pathological specimens to illustrate normal development and the changes found in disease. These were exhibited in the University Museum of Natural History, which Acland himself had largely been responsible for persuading the University to build (Acland and Ruskin, 1859). He had also rigorously investigated the outbreaks of cholera in Oxford and its surroundings in 1854 and published his detailed findings (Acland, 1856). This led him to campaign for better water supplies and improved public health measures.



[Transcript: I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of today's date. Kindly convey to the Delegates of the Common University Fund my high sense of the honour they have done me in appointing me Lecturer in Pathology in this University. I have much pleasure in accepting the post subject to the conditions regarding emoluments and duties which they have laid down and of which you inform me.

Yours very faithfully
James Ritchie]

Figure 1.2 Ritchie's letter of acceptance of the University Lectureship.



Figure 1.3 The now famous photograph of Ruskin (left) and Acland taken in 1893 by Acland's daughter Angie. This was the last meeting of the lifelong friends; they both died in 1900.

Burdon Sanderson's reputation in pathology resulted primarily from his own pioneering experimental investigations of contagious diseases and infective processes. In 1865 he demonstrated the particulate nature of the infective agent in cattle plague (Burdon Sanderson, 1866) and in 1867 he confirmed Jean Villemin's experiments on the inoculability of tuberculosis in animals (Burdon Sanderson, 1867). Although he was generally considered one of the leading exponents in England of the germ theory of disease, there was an ambiguity in his views. Although he demonstrated that bacteria were invariably present in septicaemia and pyaemia, he avoided the conclusion that

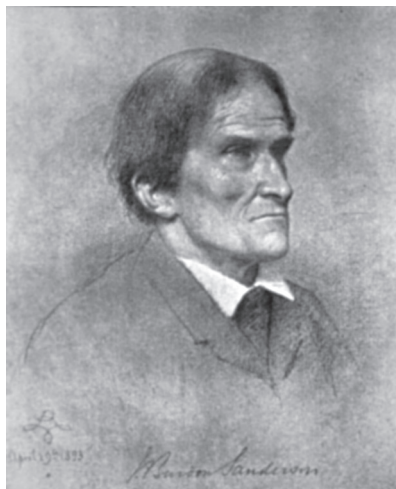


Figure 1.4 Sir John Burdon Sanderson.

the bacteria were directly causative; and as late as 1877 he held that 'there is but one case [splenic fever] in which the existence of a disease germ has been established'. His cautious attitude toward the germ theory resulted from the conflicting nature of the evidence then available, and from his own tendency toward theoretical scepticism (Burdon Sanderson, 1877). This caution obscures his position as one of the leading proponents of the germ theory. Burdon Sanderson, with Ritchie's assistance, gave the first systematic course of lectures in pathology and bacteriology in 1895/6.

Without the active support of these two eminent men Ritchie probably would have remained a little-known clinician. His story, which is not well known to present-day pathologists, reads superficially like a fairy tale. In his obituary of Ritchie, Robert Muir (1923b) wrote of:

'a character unusually lovable, a personality wonderfully proportioned and interesting, zest in all he had in hand, common sense and humour, and above all helpfulness to all and essential goodness – these were his in rare degree. He had a profound conviction that there is good and not evil at the heart of things but no trace of the facile optimism which sees only what it cares to see.'

When Ritchie arrived in Oxford in 1890 there was no formal instruction in pathology but when he left in 1907 there was not only a highly regarded teaching programme but also a fine new Pathology Institute.

LIFE AS A LECTURER

Ritchie's classes were popular; with an average of 10 students a year attending, the space in the museum soon became inadequate. Although the University was apparently reluctant to grant extra resources for the teaching of pathology, fate took a kind hand and a recent graduate, at first anonymous but soon revealed to be Dr Ewan Fraser, one of Ritchie's first students, offered £5000 towards a new pathology teaching laboratory provided that the University matched this money. At this time Ritchie was still engaged in general medical practice and in his memoirs Sir Arthur McNalty (1970), noted that on one occasion Ritchie, with his characteristic bushy black eyebrows and moustache, passing by on a bicycle wearing a bowler hat and a black morning coat with coat-tails flying, called out in a broad Scots accent 'McNalty, tell the class I shall be a wee thocht late, I am just off to a midwifery case'.

Ritchie almost certainly needed to do general practice to make enough money to have a reasonable standard of living for his family. His salary as a lecturer was £100 per year (supplemented by £50 towards the expenses of teaching). At this time an average general practitioner would earn about £500, a similar sum to a university professor. It is interesting to note therefore that in a document 'Memorandum as to pathology' written in 1901 to the Delegates of the Common University Fund, Frances Gotch, the Professor of Physiology, and Arthur Thompson, Professor of Anatomy, writing on behalf of the Regius Professor, who was indisposed at that time, made a plea to appoint Ritchie to a Professorship at a minimum salary of £500 (Gotch and Thompson, 1901). The document sets out eloquently the case for recognising the importance of pathology in Oxford and the virtue in confirming Ritchie as the appropriate person to lead the new department.

'Pathology has during the last 20 years developed in a manner unprecedented in the history of medical science and become a subject of national importance. In all the important universities in Europe and America there is at least one chair of Pathology and in every university in Great Britain except Oxford there is a professor in the subject.'

This document was considered by the Delegates of the Common University Fund at the same meeting on 7 March as a resolution from the Board of the Faculty of Medicine proposing that a Professor of Pathology should be appointed for 5 years at a salary of £500 to direct the new Pathology

Laboratory that was then approaching completion. However the Senior Proctor proposed, and the Vice-Chancellor seconded, an amendment that a Readership at a salary of £300 be created. The amendment was carried on a division and Oxford remained the only university medical school in the UK without a Professor of Pathology. It is also relevant to note that the Board of the Faculty of Medicine, at a meeting held on 9 March 1901, while admitting to being greatly indebted to the Delegates of the Common University Fund for constituting a Readership in Pathology at a salary of £300, felt that it could not agree to impose the restriction on private practice that had been proposed originally for the professorship until such time as the stipend accruing from the appointment reached a minimum of £500. The Board at the same time recommended that Ritchie should be appointed to the Readership.

THE NEW DEPARTMENT

The new Department of Pathology (Fig. 1.5) was built on a site adjacent to the museum and was formally opened on 12 October 1901 (incidentally, Virchow's 80th birthday; a congratulatory telegram was sent to him from the opening) by Sir William Church, President of the Royal College of Physicians. In Ritchie's obituary, Robert Muir (1923b) comments on the new building:

'It was carefully and ingeniously planned under Ritchie's direction and was a wonderful example of what could be got for money thoughtfully expended. Situated in quiet and beautiful surroundings and embowered in greenery, it was – I speak from experience (Muir spent a term working in the new department) – an ideal place for research work. Its freedom from dust was a feature that struck one who came from Glasgow.'

The building served pathology well until 1927 when the larger and grander Sir William Dunn School of Pathology was opened. It then passed to the University Department of Pharmacology, which occupied it until 1991, and thence to Chemistry.

After being appointed as University Reader in 1901 Ritchie was subsequently given the personal title of Professor in 1905 and appointed to a fellowship at New College. At this time it must have seemed externally as if 'everything in the garden was wonderful' for Ritchie; he had established pathology as a major subject in the medical curriculum and he had presided over the building of a much admired teaching and research institute. However a letter written by the Regius Professor, Burdon Sanderson, to the Vice-Chancellor on 22 October 1904 shows that this was not



Figure 1.5 The first University Department of Pathology opened in October 1901 (photograph 2001).

so and Ritchie was still 'hard-up' and looking for a more remunerative post elsewhere (Burdon Sanderson, 1904).

In a long letter, after setting out the aim of medical studies in the university,

'not to instruct students in the practice of their profession but rather by a thorough scientific training to render them capable of making the best use of the opportunities which the great hospital schools of the metropolis afford,'

the Regius went on to outline how Ritchie had set up a complete course of pathology

'under very unfavourable conditions in certain rooms in the museum temporarily fitted up as laboratories.'

It continues:

'However since the completion of the new pathological laboratory in Oct 1901 the progress of the department has been in the highest degree satisfactory. The Director has given his time and energies unsparingly to the work of perfecting the internal arrangements and resources of the laboratory. It is now, though by no means the largest, perhaps the best arranged Pathology Laboratory in the UK; in which respect it excited the admiration of the experts who had the opportunity of seeing it at the recent meeting of the BMA.'

The letter eventually comes to its main point:

'Dr Ritchie finds that the demands which are made on his time by his office are more than he can meet without serious injury to his health. The emoluments of the readership are so inadequate that he is obliged to depend for his income on professional practice. While on the one hand his laboratory work requires his whole time, on the other his professional obligations compel him to be at the disposal of the public. Having determined to make scientific investigation the main business of his life he finds it necessary, unless his income can be increased, to seek some appointment more remunerative than the one he now holds. And I have reason to believe that he has at the present moment the refusal of an academic post which although by no means lucrative, would be sufficient for his purpose.'

Burdon Sanderson concludes by saying that the resignation of Ritchie would be a serious calamity to the Oxford Medical School; no one comparable would be available to replace him. As a result of the Regius Professor of Medicine's plea the University granted Ritchie an additional £100 for 2 years. In June 1905 he was given the personal title of professor and in February, 1906 his Readership was renewed for a further 5 years. But clearly none of these enticements was sufficient to prevent Ritchie from 'returning home' when the firm offer came from Edinburgh.

RITCHIE'S DEPARTURE FROM OXFORD

Another scheme to try to retain Ritchie in Oxford had also been devised by Burdon Sanderson and his scientific colleagues. Burdon Sanderson had apparently decided as early as 1903 that he should retire from the Regius' chair but the only widely favoured candidate was Sir William Church, President of the Royal College of Physicians, and he was not remotely interested. Burdon Sanderson then conceived the idea that Ritchie should combine the roles of Professor of Pathology with that of the Regius (as Henry Harris was to do more than 70 years later). This suggestion however was bitterly opposed by the Oxford graduates medical establishment in London who met on 5 January 1904 and forcefully set out their opinions in *The Times*. They regarded the chair as essentially clinical rather than scientific and a link with the London medical establishment. They had the ear of the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, and he effectively blocked Ritchie's nomination.

It seems likely that Ritchie decided to leave Oxford when the University refused to appoint him to a full Professorship and his remuneration was accordingly less than he felt he deserved and indeed needed. He now had a family and lived, presumably in some style, at 28 Beaumont St. It was therefore not such a surprise to his Oxford colleagues when in 1907 Ritchie accepted the invitation to become the Director of the Laboratory of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh. Muir (1923a) wrote 'his departure from Oxford was of great regret to all who knew him. What he did during his stay was a wonderful achievement and the School of Pathology in Oxford will ever be his memorial.' Thomson (1923) wrote: 'In the interests of the School he worked with untiring energy, often sacrificing his own personal claims for the common good.'

Shortly before Ritchie's resignation a second Lecturer in Pathology had in fact been appointed. He was Ernest Ainley-Walker, who was to have a considerable, though low key, impact on the teaching of pathology in Oxford and indeed, as its first Dean in 1922, on the development of the whole medical school. After Ritchie's departure Ainley-Walker headed the Department until, later in the year, Georges Dreyer, a Dane, was appointed to the newly created Chair of Pathology. It is ironic that the creation of the Chair, which would probably have kept Ritchie in Oxford, was approved very shortly after his resignation.

As Superintendent of the laboratory of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh Ritchie again had more time to pursue research and most of his modest output of scientific publications is from this period, but his heart (and indeed his major talents) was in teaching, writing and administration and it appears that he drifted back to these areas. Boycott (1923), in his obituary of Ritchie in the *Lancet* wrote 'by what would now be called some sort of inhibition, he became almost incapable of carrying out any long laboratory investigation'.

The origin of the Chair of Bacteriology in Edinburgh is not without interest. Robert Irvine left a share in the company owning Christmas Island to the University, with instructions that a Chair of Bacteriology should be established when the funds were sufficient. The unexpected prosperity of the island (due to the export of phosphates – from guano) enabled this to be done in 1913 and Ritchie was the obvious choice for the Chair. This appointment brought him back into the mainstream of teaching and he quickly became more involved in the affairs of the Medical School. He continued to act as Superintendent of the College of Physicians Laboratory until 1920. He was also appointed as a manager of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, Chairman of its House Committee and a member of the University Court during this time.

WHY HAS RITCHIE BEEN FORGOTTEN?

Looking back to his fundamental importance in the introduction of pathology teaching in Oxford University, his impact in Edinburgh University and his undoubted talents as a teacher and inspiration to the young, I find it surprising that Ritchie's name is not more widely known and appreciated. As well as being a dedicated and stimulating teacher, Ritchie was a more than competent clinician. He was clearly not, however, highly regarded as a research scientist and his publication of research papers is sparse. (see Appendix at end of chapter). Charles Webster (1986) has described all the heads of the Oxford pre-clinical departments in the early 1900s (Gotch, Thompson, Gunn and Ritchie) as minor figures in a scientific context, but he also said that Ritchie was 'a figure of initiative, imagination and ability'. In his defence it should be said that Ritchie's contribution to the leading textbooks of his time was very substantial. The Manual of Bacteriology, written with Robert Muir and first published in 1897, ran to seven editions in his lifetime and continued to bear his name until an 11th edition in 1949. The Textbook of General Pathology, co-edited with Marcus Pembrey and published in 1913, also had a long and distinguished history since Geoffrey Hadfield (1954), in reviewing the first edition of Florey's textbook of general pathology, commented:

‘The last British treatise confined to general pathology and written by a panel of experts was published in 1913 under the editorship of M. S. Pembrey and James Ritchie. It was greatly treasured by a former generation of pathologists, but is now outmoded and out of print. It is therefore most gratifying to find, after a gap of 40 years, that Pembrey and Ritchie now have, in this product of the Oxford school, a modern equivalent and a worthy successor which preaches the same sound doctrine and is based upon the deep conviction that “the student must try to grasp what is known of the general principles underlying the pathological changes that he will be called upon to diagnose and treat.”’

It is gratifying to my efforts to promote Ritchie to find Florey described in *any* context as a ‘worthy successor to Ritchie’!

A cartoon (Fig. 1.6), reproduced from the menu of the 1896 Medical School Dinner, with the towering figures of Acland and Burdon Sanderson and the smaller caricatures of James Ritchie and Arthur Thompson, Professor of Anatomy, suggests that Ritchie was already a respected part of the teaching establishment even *before* he had been appointed to the Lecturership.

Perhaps Ritchie was just ‘too nice’ to push himself upwards. Although undoubtedly modest, what evidence we have does not sound as if he was a dull man. Arthur Thomson (1923) wrote: ‘In lighter vein his pawky Scottish humour just bubbled over. When on occasions in debate he took the floor at meetings of the Oxford Medical Club, his incisive criticism and brilliant repartee, often delivered in the broadest Doric, never failed to arouse the attention or stir the feelings of those who were privileged to hear him. Of Ritchie I never heard a man say an ill word – a tribute few can claim.’

Reynolds (1923), one of his Edinburgh students, wrote: ‘Although the name of Ritchie will go down in the history of Edinburgh University as a great scientist, worker and teacher, it is even



Sir Henry Acland
Prof. James Ritchie

Sir John Burdon-Sanderson

Menu: Oxford Medical Dinner, 1896, by C. W. Pilcher

Figure 1.6 This cartoon, reproduced from the menu of the 1896 Medical School Dinner, with the towering figures of Acland and Burdon Sanderson and the smaller caricatures of James Ritchie and Arthur Thompson, Professor of Anatomy, suggests that Ritchie was already a respected part of the teaching establishment even *before* he had been appointed to the Lecturership.

more for his personality....we will treasure his memory. The keen interest he had in each of his students made us feel that in him we had a personal friend who shared with us our joys and successes, our difficulties and sorrows. Nothing was too much trouble for him to do on our behalf. Although fully occupied by his professorial and other duties, he was never too busy to give us freely of his advice and help both as a man and a scientist. As with all truly great men, patience, simplicity and humility were outstanding features of his character.'

To complete the 'fairy tale' aspects of his life, James Ritchie married Lily Souttar from Aberdeen in 1898 and apparently had a very happy family life with his wife and three daughters who all survived him; or in the slightly ambiguous words of Robert Muir 'had a peculiarly happy family life that was for him a priceless possession'.

Less happy, however, was his relatively early death. Normally very fit and energetic he became unwell in the summer of 1922 and an exploratory laparotomy in October revealed an untreatable malignancy, probably carcinoma of the pancreas. He died in the following January, aged only 58.

Robert Muir's obituary (Muir, 1923b) ends with the fitting epitaph:

'he is of those who by their services have made men remember them. In truth he has deserved right well of his day and generation.'

RITCHIE'S MEMORY TO BE CELEBRATED IN A PATHOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEDAL

Just as I was finishing this manuscript the rumour leaked through to me that a proposal was afoot for the Society to create a 'Ritchie Medal' *to be given to a Member of the Society for distinguished services to the art and science of Pathology, to the promotion of the subject in the Medical and Scientific community and/or to the wider community* (this proposal was adopted by the Committee of The Pathological Society on 3 January 2006).

This is a fitting end to my campaign to publicise the talents and achievements of James Ritchie. He himself would surely have deserved the medal. I feel I can now lay down my pen!

APPENDIX: RITCHIE'S PUBLICATIONS

Books

- 1897 (with R. Muir) *Manual of Bacteriology* (ran to seven editions in Ritchie's lifetime).
- 1909 In Allbutt & Rolleston's *System of Medicine*, vol. 2. *General Pathology of Infection*.
- 1913 (with M.S. Pembrey) *Textbook of General Pathology*. Edward Arnold: London.

Papers

- 1896 *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, **42**. Short notes on two cases of opium poisoning.
- 1901 *J. Hyg.* **i**: 125. Artificial modifications of toxins, with special reference to immunity.
- 1902 *J. Hyg.* **ii**: 215, 251, 452. Review of current theories regarding immunity.
- 1909 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XIII**: 119. A case of pyaemia and meningitis associated with a pathogenic haplothrix bacillus. (with S. McDonald)
- 1910 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XIV**: 615. On meningitis with an influenza-like bacillus.
- 1911 *Q.J. Exp. Physiol.* **4**: 127. Suprarenal glands in diphtheritic toxæmia. (with A.N. Bruce)
- 1912 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XVI**: 147. On the relation between complement and the immune body, especially in relation to complement deviation. (with J.P. McGowan)
- 1912 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XVII**: 99. The effect of concentration of constituents on a haemolytic reaction. (with J.P. McGowan)

- 1912 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XVII**: 492. An enquiry into whether lipoids can act as antigens. (with J. Miller)
- 1915 *J. Pathol. Bacteriol.* **XX**: 159. Clinical and experimental observations on the pathology of trench foot. (with J. Lorrain Smith and J. Dawson)
- 1915 *Lancet* **ii**: 595. Clinical and experimental observations on the pathology of trench foot. (with J. Lorrain Smith and J. Dawson)

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Fame at last

It was the early 1960s, and I was attending one of my first Path Soc dinners, not long after publishing my first paper in the Journal. The formidable lady sitting opposite turned out to be Zaide Milner, who ran the Journal. After scrutinising the name tags of her neighbours, she turned to me and said 'Ah, you're Dr Scheuer'. Fame at last, I thought, clearly the result of my outstanding paper on haemochromatosis. But I realised that my fame rested elsewhere when she continued 'You're the man whose name we mis-spelt in the running head'.

Peter Scheuer*

A matter of culture

I was interested to learn that the Centenary Meeting is to be held at Manchester in 2006. Fifty years ago, I attended the 50th anniversary meeting, also in Manchester, and gave my first paper there, on experimental *Clostridium welchii* food poisoning, with my distinguished chief, Stephen Elek, as co-author. I was utterly terrified at this daunting prospect but, with the kindly support of our departmental Head, Professor Theo Crawford (and bolstered also by barbiturates and boiled sweets!) I was relieved to survive the ordeal intact. The acoustics of the lecture theatre were such that one had to bellow loudly to be heard at the back (no amplification in those days), but the hilarity of the capacity audience when I explained that bacterial cultures were added to an otherwise ordinary lunch taken by our volunteers in the St. George's

Hospital Medical School refectory had the effect of banishing my fears. Papers were never so trying for me ever again!

Frederick Dische

Is it significant?

One tiny vignette I still think of with pleasure after many years involved a sublimely indifferent presenter and Nick Wright:

Presenter: There was a difference of $x\%$ between the 2 data sets, but it wasn't statistically significant...

Nick Wright: So there wasn't a difference, then?

Presenter: There was a difference of $x\%$ between the 2 data sets, but it wasn't statistically significant...

Nick Wright: So there wasn't a difference!!

Presenter: There was a difference of $x\%$ between the 2 data sets, but it wasn't statistically significant...

Nick Wright: So there wasn't a difference!!!!!!!

Presenter: There was a difference of $x\%$ between the 2 data sets, but it wasn't statistically significant...

Chairman: Moving on...

Nick Wright: silly *%\$@ (sotto voce, mopping his brow...)

James Going

*Peter Scheuer sadly died after this book went to press