Archives of Disease in Childhood and the British Paediatric Association

This account of the founding and early years of the Journal by Alan Moncrieff was first published in ‘The British Paediatric Association 1928–1952’ by H C Cameron.

The Archives of Disease in Childhood first appeared in 1926, and was published by the British Medical Association, being the forerunner of many special journals. The question of the British Medical Association’s undertaking responsibility for publication of subsidiary journals devoted to special subjects (on the lines of the policy followed by the American Medical Association) had been under discussion in B.M.A. committees in 1925. According to an article in the British Medical Journal (1926: 1. 209), “some of the medical men whose work lies chiefly among children” had suggested the publication of a new journal and an approach had been made to the British Medical Association. Doubtless Sir Dawson Williams, then Editor of the British Medical Journal, gave his support, for he had been a paediatrician before becoming a full-time medical journalist. However, it is recorded that difficulties were encountered which “suddenly” and “unexpectedly” dissolved and that a Council Meeting in July 1925, the British Medical Association agreed to publish the new journal (referred to as a “Journal of Paediatrics”). It is not possible, unfortunately, at this stage, to be certain who were the “medical men” referred to above. The article mentioned says they had been meeting together. Sir Robert Hutchison remembers nothing about any such meetings and Donald Paterson has no clear idea of the events leading up to the launching of the Archives except that the only other Paediatric journal The British Journal of Children’s Diseases was getting worse! Presumably Hugh Thursfield and Reginald Miller must have had a lot to do with the affair, as they became the first editors. The first meeting of the editorial committee of the Archives took place in October 1925, with Dr. G. F. Still in the Chair. Others present were Thursfield, Cameron, Dingwall-Fordyce, Mr. H. A. T. Fairbank, Mr. Max Page and the editor of the British Medical Journal. Objections were raised to the use of “pediatrics” (American style!) in the title and after discussion the present one was adopted. According to the records Thursfield and Cameron had been the first choice as editors but Cameron was unable to accept and Reginald Miller was chosen. All this, of course, was going on before the British Paediatric Association had come into being.

It follows, therefore, that although the British Paediatric Association used the Archives to publish the proceedings of its Annual General Meeting from the outset, the first such report appearing in 1928 in the third volume, and later, during the years of the second World War to publish reports on various subjects, there was at this stage no official connexion between the Association and the journal. From time to time, the question of a special journal owned by the Association was discussed unofficially, there being a school of thought which held that a substantial income for the Association might thereby be obtained! Matters came to a head in September 1943, when the Executive Committee had before it a letter from a firm of printers, Messrs. Adlard and Son Ltd. offering to transfer all rights in the British Journal of Children’s Diseases to the British Paediatric Association. After considerable discussion it was decided not to accept this offer. In the course of the debate the question of an approach to the British Medical Association arose, and Alan Moncrieff, then one of the joint editors of the Archives was authorised to interview Dr. Hugh Clegg, deputy editor of the British Medical Journal on the question of the relations between the British Medical Association and the British Paediatric Association in reference to the Archives. Moncrieff reported to the next Executive Committee meeting that it looked as if the British Medical Association might consider recognition of the Archives as the official journal of the British Paediatric Association and accordingly the then President, Leonard Parsons, sent a letter to the Journal Committee of the British Medical Association asking that this should be effected. The Journal Committee apparently discussed the matter and then asked Moncrieff to come for further discussions with the Chairman of the Council of the British Medical Association, the acting Secretary, Dr. Charles Hill, the Chairman of the Journal Committee, the Editor of the British Medical Journal and the Deputy Editor, Dr. Hugh Clegg. The result of this was a rejection of the idea of making the Archives the official organ of the British Paediatric Association, together with an
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Archives and the British Paediatric Association, so that in effect the appointments were initiated by the British Paediatric Association and ratified by the British Medical Association. It was agreed that members of the editorial committee should serve for three years and that the President of the British Paediatric Association and the Editor of the British Medical Journal should be ex-officio members of this committee. The possibilities of a part-time payment to an editor was discussed. (Later the British Medical Association supplied the sub-editorial assistance for all its special journals as required.)

All this appears to have taken a surprising amount of time, meetings and correspondence. Parsons, Moncrieff and A. W. Franklin were appointed to serve on a joint committee with members of the Journal Committee of the British Medical Association, partly to discuss further the matters mentioned above, but also because the British Journal of Children’s Disease had now come into the story again. Dr. Clegg had approached Messrs. Adlard and Son Ltd. in December 1943, about the future of their journal. Eventually the Journal Committee offer to allow the appointment of editors, editorial committee and the general advisory board to be made by the British Paediatric Association, this fact to be noted on the cover and elsewhere. Another suggestion was that the appointments should be made jointly by the two Associations and this fact be suitably noted in appropriate places.

All this was reported by Moncrieff to an Executive Committee in November 1943, and eventually confirmed by a letter from Dr. Clegg to Parsons at the end of the year. At the first Executive Committee meeting in January 1944, Dr. Hugh Clegg and Dr. Charles Hill attended for further discussion. General matters concerning the relationship between the two Associations were debated but the subject is not relevant here. Regarding the Archives the second of the two foregoing alternatives was accepted. The British Paediatric Association was to nominate the editors, the editorial committee and the general advisory board, these nominations being subject to the approval of the British Medical Association.
and the Council of the British Medical Association agreed to purchase the rights of the *British Journal of Children's Diseases* "without prejudice to future publication and without conditions as to the printing thereof". This was duly reported to an Executive Committee in September 1944. The editorial committee of the *Archives* now duly nominated by the British Paediatric Association then met, and it was decided to add to the title of *Archives of Disease in Childhood* the words "incorporating the British Journal of Children's Diseases". The new wording regarding the appointment of editors and editorial committee was also approved and for the first issue of the next year, March 1945, the words "British Paediatric Association" appeared on the cover of the *Archives* for the first time. To this may be added a phrase in a letter from Dr. Clegg to Parsons regarding this point, namely that the name on the cover would "make it quite clear to the medical world generally that editorial policy and editorial direction are provided by your Association".

The Honorary Secretary, reporting these facts to the Annual General Meeting in 1945 stated that "your Association is officially associated for the first time with the management of this Journal".

No great change in the arrangements has since been made. The machinery for nomination and so forth worked smoothly when set in motion. If changes on the cover during the current year were to be avoided, however, someone had to remember in good time that nominations had to be made some six to nine months before the next year's volume appeared. Also, the period of three years was found in practice to be too short a time for membership of the Editorial Committee.

In 1954, with the agreement of all concerned, the annual meeting of the Editorial Committee, which used to be held in the summer, was changed to a time when its recommendations could go to the impending February meeting of the B.P.A. Executive Committee. Thence, after approval by the Annual Meeting of the B.P.A. the nominations are sent to the B.M.A. for their consideration, so that editorial changes are made in good time for the first number of the *Archives* for the ensuing year. In 1954 also, membership of the Editorial Committee was extended to five years.

Dr Douglas Gairdner, editor 1964–79, writes:

A possibly interesting commentary on the way things like appointing an editor used to go in the days when the BPA was smaller, more casual, and less professional is my recollection of a Council meeting in, I think, 1953. At the end of a long agenda came one more item—'Resignation of Dr Philip Evans from Editorship of *Archives*. The Chairman asked for suggestions for a replacement. None were immediately forthcoming, and there was quite a long silence. I looked round the table and saw Richard Dobbs, and mentioned his name as a possibility. He looked a little startled, but there was little hesitation from the others before he was unanimously appointed. Later, Ian Cathie expressed wry surprise that his co-Editor should have been appointed without any consultation with him (in fact, the two worked very harmoniously from 1954–1963). When Ian Cathie retired in 1963, Richard Dobbs invited me to join him, and this was endorsed by Council—a pattern that I presume has been maintained subsequently.