

# Foreword

As I write today my hospital celebrates its 150th anniversary. Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital was founded on 14 February 1852 by the visionary Dr Charles West who ignored his detractors, such as Florence Nightingale, and followed his belief gained from great experience that hospital care allied to research in children's diseases would reduce child mortality from above 50% by the age of 15 years. It is foolish to believe that we can progress in medicine without a knowledge of the past and those who believe that history is bunk ignore the simple fact that much of life is based upon experience. When putting together a series of articles on the history of haematology, initially published in BJH, this was the main *raison d'être*, along with the belief that the practice of medicine has become increasingly serious but should also be fun and interesting and even occasionally uplifting to the spirit. Sadly, in my view, many doctors believe that a reminder of the successes and failures of the past has no part to play in an understanding of the present; often the same people who ironically extol the politically correct virtues of 'treasuring' our mistakes. Apart from anything else, the struggles of our forebears should help to warn us against the

temptation to make change and 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. We do not serve our patients well if we are ignorant of the past and live simply in the arrogant belief that things are so much better now.

Lastly, the central problem of any survey of the history of haematology is usually the question of balance. Achieving a degree of balance among themes and topics that will be satisfactory to practising haematologists/physicians with an interest in blood diseases is essentially impossible. Our preference has been for themes of general interest rather than those of a purely scientific view into a field that has led the way in understanding the molecular basis of human disease.

Please read and enjoy the contributions from the distinguished authors who have produced this reprise on the exciting history of blood diseases.

*I. M. Hann*  
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*O. P. Smith*  
Dublin, 2002