

THE BIRTH OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF PAEDIATRIC SURGERY: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

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In his Newsletter of April 1983, the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons, Sëan Corkery announced the upcoming 1983 London Meeting of BAPS. In his unparalleled style of writing he concluded his letter as follows:

“Jan Molenaar has had another rush of blood to the brain. This time he feels the need to see if there are enough interested members of the Association to form a “History Club”. He would like all interested members to meet at lunchtime either on Thursday or Friday at the London Meeting, if you are interested please write to me so that we can know what size of room to book. At the moment we have reserved a telephone booth but if that is too spacious we can get something smaller! Appropriate signs will be posted at the Meeting — so watch out for them”.

The response to this encouraging announcement was a rewarding one: 45 members of BAPS coming from 26 different countries attended. On Friday, July 22, 1983, the International Paediatric



Fig. 1. Figure taken from book “*Prima Linea Anatomies*” (Vienna, 1775) by J. J. Plenck and made by the artist Johann Ernst Mansfeld.

Surgical History Club came into being. Membership was opened to everybody with an interest in the history of paediatric surgery and willing to contribute to the furtherance of this field. The aims of the club were defined as follows:

- to record for posterity how paediatric surgery came into being;
- to create a centralized bibliography concerning the development of paediatric surgery;
- to stimulate the writing of articles and the presentation of papers dealing with every single aspect of paediatric surgical history; and
- to accomplish our final aim: the publication of a comprehensive book on the history of paediatric surgery.

During a second probing session at lunchtime on Friday, July 27, 1984 at the next BAPS meeting in Liverpool, it was decided that our first scientific session would be held in conjunction with the upcoming 1986 BAPS meeting in Birmingham.

However earlier, in 1985 at the close of the Annual International Congress of the BAPS in Vienna, the hosts of BAPS, Dr Peter Wurnig and Mrs Wurnig, invited the President of BAPS and members of the History Club to attend a guided tour through the venerable Mautner Markhof Childrens's Hospital, founded in 1875. At that BAPS meeting it was decided, at the request of the History Club, that the History Club's biennial scientific meetings would be held on the Tuesday afternoon prior to the official start of the BAPS meeting on Wednesday. At the time, the membership totalled 115, with the largest contingent from the USA, followed by the UK and the remainder were spread out all over the world.

The Birmingham meeting in 1986 appeared to be a remarkable success. Subsequently, the membership rose to a total of 122 members spread over some 30 countries. Mr Peter Jones from Melbourne, who was in the audience, made the following account:

“One of the most enjoyable and memorable events held in conjunction with the BAPS Meeting in Birmingham in 1986 was the meeting of the International Society for the History of Paediatric Surgery (ISHPS) on the day before the Scientific Programme began. Under the Chairmanship of Professor Jan Molenaar, the meeting was attended by some 50 paediatric surgeons from various countries, all of whom had a particular interest in the historical, cultural and social aspects of the specialty of paediatric surgery. The programme was as varied as its audience, and covered such subjects as the depiction of children in European paintings and various other works of art, and a most interesting account of the life, family and work of Ram(m)stedt, and his lasting contribution, serendipitously devised, to the treatment of pyloric stenosis”.

The programme of this first meeting was as follows:

- 1) Why Paediatric Surgical History? J. C. Molenaar
- 2) The Contribution of Surgeons to Child Care through the Centuries. Mrs A. M. C. Ribbink-Goslinga
- 3) Dr Conrad Ramstedt, Paediatric Surgical Pioneer. G. Borgwardt

- 4) Children, Diseases and Doctors in Historical Pictures. P. J. Kuijjer
- 5) Paediatric Surgery in Birmingham and environs. P. Gornall

Mr Peter Jones continues: “Although it is perhaps invidious to select from among the excellent presentations, and the careful preparations demonstrated by every one of the speakers, Dr Görtz Borgwardt’s tenacious search for Ramstedt’s birthplace and the discovery of many of his relics, will be of particular interest and should, if feasible, be published in one of the paediatric surgical journals. Those who were unable to attend the meeting of the ISHPS will be delighted to know that Dr Borgwardt obtained a superb copy of the bust of Ramstedt sculpted by his obviously very talented daughter Tessa. The copy of the bust was later presented to the BAPS by Dr Borgwardt, to become one of the Society’s permanent memorabilia.

There can be no doubt that the ISPH should go from strength to strength, and win a place as an adjunct to all BAPS meetings. It is very fitting that we should be better informed of those who have contributed to the ethos, the ethics, the philosophy and the expertise of our specialty. All of us are in a very real sense pygmies, advancing on the shoulders of surgical giants of the past. The more we know of their lives, times and innovations, the better we are able to appreciate their contributions, and the foundations of the specialty of paediatric surgery.”

As an interesting note, Dr Borgwardt had serious difficulties in obtaining permission to leave his country, the DDR, and could do so only by special invitation of the History Club. Also in 1986, two interesting publications appeared:

- Vol. 20 of “*Progress in Pediatric Surgery*” was entirely devoted to “*Historical Aspects of Pediatric Surgery*” (Springer Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, 1986).
- “*Child Care through the Centuries*”. Papers given at the Tenth Congress of the British Society for the History of Medicine, Swansea, April 1984, including a paper of one of our members,

John D. Atwell from Southampton, UK, who lectured on “*The History of Paediatric Surgery*” (STS Publishing, Cardiff).

In 1988 the BAPS was meeting at an unusual date; the end of September. On the afternoon of Tuesday, 20 September 1988, the ISHPS had its second meeting under the watchful eye of Pallas Athene at the Astir Palace Hotel in Athens. One of the highlights of this meeting was the lecture by Professor Mark Ravitch from Pittsburgh on the anatomist Fredericus Ruysch of Amsterdam (1638–1731). Earlier that year the logo of our society was coined into a beautiful bronze medal, financed by the Foundation University Fund Rotterdam. At the close of the BAPS meeting, this medal was presented for the first time by the President of BAPS to Drs Çenk Büyükuñal and N. Sari from Istanbul, Turkey for their prize-winning presentation: *Sabuncuoğlu Şerafedding (XVth Century), an outstanding personality in the Turkish history of paediatric surgery*.

The History Club has proceeded from then on with scientific meetings every two years prior to and in conjunction with the international meetings of BAPS, in close collaboration with Miss Dorothy Grant, staff secretary of BAPS, who has always been of great help from the very beginning.

A very special meeting was held in Istanbul on Tuesday morning July 22, 1997, in the historical setting of the Topkapi Palace. It was here that chairmanship of the History Club changed hands. As the History Club newsletter of June 1997 puts it: “This newsletter, we’re afraid, is the last one to be sent from the Sophia Children’s Hospital in Rotterdam. As already alluded to earlier, Jan C. Molenaar has now retired from his office, and wishes to hand over the chairmanship of our society as well. Excellent candidates, in his view, would be Prof. Cenk Büyükuñal from Istanbul, and Mr Robert Carachi from Glasgow.”

In conclusion, a new tradition within the BAPS organization has been established. Not all the aims formulated at the start of the International Society for the History of Paediatric Surgery were accomplished, but the final aim, the publication of a comprehensive book on the history of paediatric surgery, has now been instigated.



Jan C. Molenaar and his wife



Alice M. C. Ribbink-Goslinga



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