



Presidential addresses of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene: 1907–2013

Simon I. Hay^{a,*} and Gerri M. McHugh^b

^aSpatial Ecology and Epidemiology Group, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS, UK;
^bRoyal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Northumberland House, 303–306 High Holborn, London WC1V 7JZ, UK

*Corresponding author: Tel: +44 1865 271243, +44 1865 281253; E-mail: simon.hay@zoo.ox.ac.uk

Received 25 March 2013; accepted 12 June 2013

Presidents have been required to give an inaugural address on commencing office at the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (RSTMH) since its foundation in 1907. All presidential addresses were identified, sourced and assembled into an annotated bibliography. The majority of presidential addresses have been published in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Unpublished and in some cases 'lost' contributions have now been sourced where possible and archived at the RSTMH. This unique, rich and rewarding archive provides a vista into the development of the RSTMH and the discipline of tropical medicine. The archive is freely available to all.

Keywords: Inaugural address, Tropical medicine, RSTMH, STMH

Introduction

The Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene was founded in 1907 by Sir James Cantlie and Dr George Carmichael Low and received permission to be designated a Royal Society in 1920.^{1–3} The current Royal Patron is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The 106-year history of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (RSTMH; 1907–2013) has seen 53 biennial presidential terms overseen by 51 presidents; two presidents having served two terms (Table 1).

The role and remit of the president has shifted at different stages of the Society's development. An independent external expert review of all governance structures, processes and roles was undertaken in 2010 on the recommendation of the recently appointed Chief Executive (Gerri M. McHugh). The role of President now focuses on the leadership of the Board of Trustees in developing a strategic vision and strategy for the Society, while ensuring the highest standards of governance, in partnership with the Chief Executive. On assuming office each president is required to give an inaugural address. These presidential addresses are traditionally given at the start of each presidential term, when the baton of office is passed from one president to the next.

A search for the entire back archive of these inaugural addresses was non-trivial and a proportion of the more recent ones have not been published. The main objectives of this review were to make accessible some of the rich history of the RSTMH by providing: (i) a complete annotated bibliography of all presidential addresses for reference; (ii) sourcing and archiving all unpublished addresses; and (iii) arranging for all published presidential addresses to be

made available on open access. This review is not intended to be a scholarly discourse on the origins of tropical medicine or on the history of the RSTMH; these have been lucidly documented elsewhere by past president Prof. Gordon C. Cook.^{4–6}

Materials and methods

All previous presidential addresses were searched on the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* website (<http://trstmh.oxfordjournals.org>). Those addresses that were not formally published were requested by direct communication with past presidents. Additional sources and archives were consulted to provide ancillary biographical information on past presidents.^{5–7} Each address was then read and short notes made on its contents and summarised in Table 1.

Results

There have been 51 presidents of which only one, Prof. Hazel M. Dockrell, has been female. Almost all (46/51) have been medically qualified. There has been one Noble Laureate, Sir Ronald Ross (1857–1932), who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1902; the first ever Briton to receive the prize.⁸ Almost a third (15/51) were also elected Fellows of the Royal Society. They enjoy a constellation of Royal and Military honours, too numerous to catalogue fully. As such, each presidential address gives an important window into the zeitgeist of tropical medicine at the time and the series together provides an insight into the evolution of the discipline of tropical medicine over the last century.

Table 1. Presidents, presidential terms and subjects of inaugural addresses at the (Royal) Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (R)STMH

President, name (lifespan) ^a	Term	Subject of address
1 Sir Patrick Manson FRS (1844–1922)	1907–1909	Survey of tropical medicine to 1907 ¹⁰
2 Sir Ronald Ross FRS (1857–1932)	1909–1911	History of infectious disease and sanitation ¹²
3 Sir William B. Leishman FRS (1865–1926)	1911–1913	The future of the STMH ¹³
4 Sir R. Havelock Charles (1858–1934)	1913–1915	'Neurasthenia' ¹⁴
5 Dr Fleming M. Sandwith (1853–1918)	1915–1917	Pellagra: a disease of inefficient nutrition ¹⁵
6 Sir David Bruce FRS (1855–1931)	1917–1919	Tetanus in wounded British soldiers (1914–1917) ¹⁶
7 Sir William J.R. Simpson (1855–1931)	1919–1921	Preventable diseases ¹⁷
8 Sir James Cantlie (1851–1926)	1921–1923	Life insurance in the tropics ¹⁸
9 Sir Percy W. Bassett-Smith (1861–1927)	1923–1925	Food supply in relation to disease in the tropics ¹⁹
10 Sir Andrew Balfour (1873–1931)	1925–1927	Pioneers of tropical medicine ²⁰
11 Prof. John W.W. Stephens FRS (1865–1946)	1927–1929	Functions of the spleen ²¹
12 Dr G. Carmichael Low (1872–1952)	1929–1933 ^b	Tropical medicine from 1894 to 1914 ²²
13 Sir Leonard Rogers FRS (1868–1962)	1933–1935	Forecasting cholera, smallpox and plague incidence ²³
14 Sir Arthur Bagshawe (1871–1950)	1935–1937	Disease in some small tropical islands ²⁴
15 Dr Sydney Price James FRS (1870–1946)	1937–1939	Post-war advances in malariology ²⁵
16 Sir S. Rickard Christophers FRS (1873–1978)	1939–1943 ^b	Malaria in wartime ²⁶
17 Sir H. Harold Scott (1874–1956)	1943–1945	Slave-trade and the spread of tropical disease ²⁷
18 Dr C. Morley Wenyon FRS (1878–1948)	1945–1947	Tropical medicine in war and peace ²⁸
19 Sir Philip Manson-Bahr (1881–1966)	1947–1949	Clinical practice of tropical medicine ²⁹
20 Prof. Henry E. Shortt FRS (1887–1987)	1949–1951	Tropical medicine as a career ³⁰
21 Sir Neil Hamilton Fairley FRS (1891–1966)	1951–1953	History, biology and reflection on schistosomiasis ³¹
22 Dr F. Norman White (1877–1964)	1953–1955	Personal retrospective of his career ³²
23 Prof. Rupert M. Gordon (1893–1961)	1955–1957	Filariasis host-parasite relationship ³³
24 Sir John S.K. Boyd FRS (1891–1981)	1957–1959	Personal experiences of dysentery ¹¹
25 Sir William MacArthur (1884–1964)	1959–1961	Pestilences of the past ³⁴
26 Sir George McRobert (1895–1976)	1961–1963	Transition from Empire to Commonwealth ³⁵
27 Dr Charles Wilcocks (1896–1977)	1963–1965	History of preventive, social and occupational medicine ³⁶
28 Prof. George MacDonald (1903–1967)	1965–1967	Scientific basis of tropical hygiene ³⁷
29 Prof. Percy C.C. Garnham (1901–1994)	1967–1969	Early researches into malaria ³⁸
30 Prof. Brian Maegraith (1907–1989)	1969–1971	The meaning of tropical medicine 'today' ³⁹
31 Sir Robert Drew (1907–1991)	1971–1973	Do we effect change with our rich tropical medicine heritage? ⁴⁰
32 Prof. Alan W. Woodruff (1916–1992)	1973–1975	The clinical unit in tropical medicine and epidemiology ⁴¹
33 Dr C.E. Gordon Smith (1924–1991)	1975–1977	An interdisciplinary approach to tropical medicine ⁴²
34 Dr Stanley G. Browne (1907–1986)	1977–1979	Balancing cost and goals in tropical medicine ⁴³
35 Dr Leonard G. Goodwin FRS (1915–2008)	1979–1981	Ensuring effective medicines for diseases of the tropics ⁴⁴
36 Dr Anthony J. Duggan (1920–2004)	1981–1983	The role of the physician in tropical countries ⁴⁵
37 Sir Ian A. McGregor FRS (1922–2007)	1983–1985	Malaria research ⁴⁶
38 Prof. Herbert M. Gilles (b. 1921)	1985–1987	Clinical epidemiology in the tropics ⁴⁷
39 Prof. Wallace Peters (b. 1924)	1987–1989	Cutaneous and visceral leishmaniasis in Arabia ⁴⁸
40 Prof. George S. Nelson (1923–2009)	1989–1991	Filariasis, trichinosis, hydatidiosis and schistosomiasis ⁴⁹
41 Dr Peter O. Williams (b. 1925)	1991–1993	The development of the tropical medicine discipline ⁵⁰

42	Prof. Gordon C. Cook (b. 1932)	1993–1995	Origin of tropical medicine and the (R)STMH ⁵¹
43	Major-General George O. Cowan (b. 1939)	1995–1997	The history of the typhus group of fevers ^c
44	Prof. David A. Warrell (b. 1939)	1997–1999	Our venomous and poisonous environment ^c
45	Prof. David J. Bradley (b. 1937)	1999–2001	The scientific basis of tropical and international health ^c
46	Prof. Harold Townson (b. 1942)	2001–2003	History and future of medical entomology ^c
47	Prof. Andrew Tomkins (b. 1943)	2003–2005	Nutritional interventions to reduce child mortality ^c
48	Sir Brian M. Greenwood FRS (b. 1938)	2005–2007	Prevention of childhood pneumonia in the tropics ^c
49	Prof. David H. Molyneux (b. 1943)	2007–2009	Neglected tropical diseases of the MDGs ⁵²
50	Prof. Hazel M. Dockrell (b. 1952)	2009–2011	Research networks in international health ⁹
51	Prof. Peter Winstanley (b. 1956)	2011–2013	Votiv C, sic CC: a 100 year retrospect and prospect of RSTMH ^c
52	Prof. Simon I. Hay ^d (b. 1971)	2013–2015	Mapping the future of tropical disease ⁵³

b.: born; FRS: Fellow of the Royal Society.

^aNames are listed with the highest known title achieved at the time of publication.

^bNote: two presidents have served two terms.

^cUnpublished.

^dPresident-elect at the time of writing and details not included in descriptive text summaries.

Of the 51 presidential addresses given, 44 have been formally published, 43 of these in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* (the exception was published in *International Health*⁹). The seven unpublished addresses have been sourced where possible and archived at the RSTMH. The chosen topics of the addresses are wide ranging with the historical development of the RSTMH and the subject of malaria getting most frequent attention (Table 1). We can do nothing more in this review than encourage the fellowship to indulge and perhaps relay a few highlights and thus quote our favourite opening, title and close in the discussion.

Discussion

Sir Patrick Manson (1844–1922), in the first ever address, sets a precedent that no following president has been brave enough to follow, at least in press: ‘I trust that it does not augur badly for the success of the Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene that its first President has to commence his Inaugural Address with an apology. Such, unfortunately, is the case. I intended to devote some time to preparation, but having been called on unexpectedly to take part in the recent International Conference on Sleeping Sickness, I have been so occupied that I have not been able to find adequate time or to give that care to preparation that the importance of this occasion demands. I apologise in advance, and trust you will be indulgent to my shortcomings’.¹⁰

The most intriguing title goes to Sir John S. K. Boyd (1891–1981) whose ‘Dysentery: some personal experiences and observations’ is a much more serious treatment than one might be given to expect from the title.¹¹

One of the earliest and most elegant summaries, goes to one of the most famous of all past RSTMH presidents, Sir Ronald Ross (1857–1932): ‘To sum up then: the past has given us much regarding the theory of our subject, let us hope that the future will give us more regarding its practice. Above all let us pray that our profession will shortly take, more determinedly than heretofore, its appointed place in the world as the army of humanity against disease’.¹² It is a message that should still resonate with the fellowship today.

Conclusion

The series of presidential addresses summarised provides a fascinating insight into the rich history of the RSTMH and its progress. Moreover, these presidential ‘Zonae torridae tutamen/guardians of the torrid zone’ provide a unique perspective on tropical medicine and its development over the last 106 years. We are delighted that this unique and rewarding archive is now more complete and freely available to all.

Authors’ contributions: SIH conceived and wrote the first draft of the manuscript; GMM provided information on the constitutional role of the president, helped source ancillary information on the biographic data on past presidents and arranged for open access categorisation of published addresses. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript. SIH and GMM are guarantors of the paper.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank Maria Devine and Kirsten Duda for checking references, finding biographic details on past presidents and proof

reading; and Oxford University Press for agreeing to make open access all past and future presidential addresses of the Society.

Funding: SIH is funded by a Senior Research Fellowship from the Wellcome Trust [grant no. 095066].

Competing interests: SIH is president-elect and GMM chief executive of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene.

Ethical approval: None required.

References

- 1 Low GC. The history of the foundation of the Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1928;22:197–202.
- 2 Cook GC. Foundation of the Society. *Twenty-Six Portland Place: the Early Years of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. London: Radcliffe Publishing Ltd; 2011, p. 5–24.
- 3 Cook GC. Early inter-war years (1919–20) – the Society becomes *Royal*. *Twenty-Six Portland Place: the Early Years of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. London: Radcliffe Publishing Ltd; 2011, p. 183–208.
- 4 Cook GC. From the Greenwich Hulks to old St Pancras: a History of Tropical Disease in London. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press; 1992.
- 5 Cook GC. *Tropical Medicine: an Illustrated History of the Pioneers*. London: Elsevier; 2007.
- 6 Cook GC. *Twenty-Six Portland Place: the Early Years of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. London: Radcliffe Publishing Ltd; 2011.
- 7 The Royal Society Library and Information Services. List of Fellows of the Royal Society, 1660–2007: a complete listing of all Fellows and Foreign Members since the foundation of the Society. London: The Royal Society; 2007.
- 8 Ross R. *Memoirs*. London: John Murray; 1923.
- 9 Dockrell HM. Presidential address: the role of research networks in tackling major challenges in international health. *Int Health* 2010;2:181–5.
- 10 Manson P. Inaugural address. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1907;1:1–12.
- 11 Boyd JSK. Presidential address. Dysentery: some personal experiences and observations. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1957;51:471–87.
- 12 Ross R. The future of tropical medicine. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1909;2:272–88.
- 13 Leishman WB. Proceedings of a meeting of the society on Friday, June 16th, 1911. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1911;4:213–23.
- 14 Charles RH. Neurasthenia, and its bearing on the decay of northern peoples in India. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1913;7:2–31.
- 15 Sandwith FM. Pellagra considered from the point of view of a disease of insufficient nutrition. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1915;9:1–15.
- 16 Bruce D. Tetanus: analysis of one thousand cases. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1917;11:1–53.
- 17 Simpson WJR. Some considerations regarding preventable diseases and their prevention. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1919;13:31–44.
- 18 Cantlie J. Life insurance in the tropics. Inaugural address. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1921;15:109–17.
- 19 Bassett-Smith PW. The relation of food to the causation of disease in the tropics. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1923;17:223–45.
- 20 Balfour A. Some British and American pioneers in tropical medicine and hygiene. Presidential address. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1925;19:189–230.
- 21 Stephens JWW. Presidential address. The functions of the spleen. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1927;21:161–86.
- 22 Low GC. Presidential address. A retrospect of tropical medicine from 1894 to 1914. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1929;23:213–32.
- 23 Rogers L. Presidential address. The methods and results of forecasting the incidence of cholera, smallpox and plague in India. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1933;27:217–38.
- 24 Bagshawe AG. Presidential address. Problems of health and disease of some small tropical islands. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1935;29:211–26.
- 25 James SP. Presidential address. Advances in knowledge of malaria since the war. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1937;31:263–80.
- 26 Christophers RS. Presidential address. Malaria in war. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1939;33:277–92.
- 27 Scott HH. Presidential address. The influence of the slave-trade in the spread of tropical disease. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1943;37:169–88.
- 28 Wenyon CM. Presidential address. Tropical medicine in war and peace. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1945;39:177–94.
- 29 Manson-Bahr P. Presidential address. The practice of tropical medicine in London. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1947;41:269–94.
- 30 Shortt HE. Presidential address. Tropical medicine as a career. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1949;43:239–54.
- 31 Fairley NH. Presidential address. Schistosomiasis and some of its problems. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1951;45:279–303.
- 32 Norman White F. Presidential address. Retrospect. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1953;47:441–50.
- 33 Gordon RM. Presidential address. The host-parasite relationship in filariasis. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1955;49:496–507.
- 34 MacArthur W. Presidential address. The medical identification of some pestilences of the past. I. The plague of Athens. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1959;53:423–39.
- 35 McRobert G. Presidential address. Empire into Commonwealth. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1961;55:485–96.
- 36 Wilcocks C. Presidential address. A historical trend in tropical medicine. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1963;57:395–408.
- 37 MacDonald G. Presidential address. On the scientific basis of tropical hygiene. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1965;59:611–20.
- 38 Garnham PCC. Presidential address. Reflections on Laveran, Marchiafava, Golgi, Koch and Danilewsky after sixty years. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1967;61:753–64.
- 39 Maegraith B. Presidential address. Tropical medicine today. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1969;63:689–707.
- 40 Drew R. Presidential address. Our rich tropical heritage. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1971;65:699–708.
- 41 Woodruff AW. Presidential address. The clinical unit in tropical medicine and epidemiology. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1973;67:755–69.
- 42 Smith CEG. Presidential address. Medicine in a developing tropical environment. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1976;70:1–9.
- 43 Browne SG. Presidential address. Tropical medicine—Facing today's dilemmas. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1978;72:1–5.
- 44 Goodwin LG. Presidential address. New drugs for old diseases. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1980;74:1–7.
- 45 Duggan AJ. Presidential address. Tropical medicine: a submerging art? *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1982;76:569–74.
- 46 McGregor I. Presidential address. Malaria—Recollections and observations. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1984;78:1–8.

- 47 Gilles H. Presidential address. Tropical clinical epidemiology—'A new name for an old art'. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1986;80:353–59.
- 48 Peters W. Presidential address. Manson House, 15 October 1987. "The little sister" — a tale of Arabia. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1988;82:179–84.
- 49 Nelson GS. Presidential address. Manson House, 19 October 1989. Microepidemiology, the key to the control of parasitic infections. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1990;84:3–13.
- 50 Williams PO. Presidential address. Manson House, 17 October 1991. Medicine for the tropics: past, present and future. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1992;86:115–20.
- 51 Cook GC. Presidential address. Manson House, London, 21 October 1993. Evolution: the art of survival. *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 1994;88:4–18.
- 52 Molyneux DH. Presidential address. Combating the "other diseases" of MDG 6: changing the paradigm to achieve equity and poverty reduction? *Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg* 2008;102:509–19.
- 53 Hay SI. Mapping the future of infectious diseases of the tropics. Presidential Address to the AGM of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. St John's College, Oxford, UK. 19 September 2013.