The First Meeting of the Anaesthetic Research Society

J. F. Nunn

After the Second World War, there was an unprecedented and progressive increase in the number of full-time research workers in anaesthesia in the United Kingdom. By the summer of 1958, many of them felt the need for a new forum which would allow detailed discussion and informed peer review of their current research. No existing organization seemed entirely appropriate for this purpose. The monthly meetings of the Section of Anaesthetics of the Royal Society of Medicine and the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Association of Anaesthetists had to be planned well ahead of time and neither was appropriate for detailed discussion of research methods. Several anaesthetic research workers had joined the Medical Research Society, the Physiological Society or the Pharmacological Society. These bodies listened attentively and courteously to papers on anaesthetic research and provided much valuable criticism. However, the meetings lacked the presence of the majority of research workers in our discipline and the discussion was the poorer in consequence.

With this background Dr J. P. Payne (then Senior Lecturer in the Royal Postgraduate Medical School), Dr R. P. Harbord (then Reader in the University of Leeds) and the present author (then Leverhulme Research Fellow in the Research Department of Anaesthetics of the Royal College of Surgeons of England) met informally in the first floor bar of the Nuffield College of the Royal College of Surgeons to discuss the problem. All three agreed that the academic wing of Anaesthesia had advanced to the stage when it was appropriate to establish a research forum similar in purpose and structure to the Medical Research Society, but to be concerned specifically with research in the field of anaesthesia.

Preliminary soundings met with a mixed reception. The younger generation of research workers were strongly supportive, but certain members of the anaesthetic establishment advised caution on the grounds that such a move might be divisive, separating the academics from the general body of anaesthetists. Nevertheless, the three protagonists were not to be dissuaded easily from their aims. The late Professor Woolmer, Head of the Research Department of Anaesthetics of the Royal College of Surgeons, was supportive and agreed to the first meeting being held in his department.

So on July 22, 1958 the three protagonists wrote to a group of research workers who, they thought, might be interested. Heads of Departments generally remained aloof at this stage. There is no record of those who were circularized, but best endeavours have reconstructed the probable list as follows:

Dr J. Clutton-Brock (Bristol)
Dr E. A. Cooper (Newcastle)
Dr A. Crampton-Smith (Oxford)
Dr J. W. Dundee (Belfast)
Dr H. G. Epstein (Oxford)
Dr I. C. Geddes (Liverpool)
Dr G. R. Graham (Royal College of Surgeons)
Dr D. W. Hill (Royal College of Surgeons)
Dr A. R. Hunter (Manchester)
Dr W. W. Mapleson (Cardiff)
Dr H. C. Newman (Royal College of Surgeons)
Dr J. Parkhouse (Oxford)
Dr J. D. Robertson (Edinburgh)
Dr W. N. Rollason (Aberdeen)
Dr B. R. Simpson (Oxford)
Dr M. Swerdlow (Manchester)
Dr M. K. Sykes (Royal Postgraduate Medical School)

The text of the letter was as follows:

22nd July 1958

Dear

Your name has been suggested as one who might be interested in occasional meetings of those engaged in anaesthetic research. You will appreciate that it has been difficult to draw up a list of names and we have for the time being restricted the list to those who are actively engaged in fundamental research, have recently published original work,
and might feel the need for a friendly critical appraisal of their work. We feel that, at least in the first instance, the proceedings should be quite unofficial and unpublished—thereby not restricting the ultimate publication of work.

It is suggested that there should be two or three meetings a year in different centres—the host department to be responsible for arranging the programme and for hospitality. The meetings might consist of demonstrations and presentation of current unpublished work. It is suggested that there should be six papers (lasting 15 minutes) followed by discussion. Following the practice of the Medical Research Society, the papers should not be read and should not exceed the allocated time.

It would be possible to hold the first meeting in the Research Department of Anaesthetics at the Royal College of Surgeons and the suggested date is 24th October, 1958.

May we ask you for your answers to the following three questions:

1. Would you be interested in attending such a meeting as we have suggested?
2. Would you be able to attend the October meeting?
3. Would you be able to present a demonstration or a paper in October? Titles would not be required until early October.

R. P. HARBORD
J. P. PAYNE
J. F. NUNN

Please reply to: Dr J. F. Nunn,
Research Department of Anaesthetics,
Royal College of Surgeons,
Lincoln's Inn Fields,
W.C.2.

It is believed that all 17 responded and, together with the three signatories of the letter, became the 20 founder members. To the best of our recollection, Professor Woolmer, while hosting the first meeting in his department, refrained from actually taking membership because of his professorial status. He believed, in common with others at his level, that it was for the younger research workers to make the running in the early stages. Nevertheless, it must be recorded that, without his support, there would have been the greatest difficulty in arranging the first meeting.

In the event, the first meeting was held in the Research Department of Anaesthetics at the Royal College of Surgeons of England on October 24, 1958. It was not recorded who was present, but it must have been decided to use the term “Anaesthetic Research Group”. The second meeting, held at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School on February 27, 1959, was announced as “Programme for Anaesthetic Research Group Meeting”. The name of the Group was not changed to “Anaesthetic Research Society” for many years. The third meeting was in Bristol on June 26, 1959 and both second and third meetings followed closely the format of the first.

It is remarkable that the overall pattern of the meetings has hardly changed over the ensuing 30 years, although the number of papers presented has increased progressively. Meetings are still held three times a year in various academic centres and the style of presentation and discussion has closely followed the pattern of the first meeting.

Administrative matters gradually intruded on the meetings. The first (unsigned and longhand) minutes of a business meeting were recorded for the Meeting of February 6, 1960 held at the Royal College of Surgeons. It was then agreed that Dr J. P. Payne and Dr J. F. Nunn should prepare a paper on the question of eligibility for membership. This is extant and dated March 1960. In later years, protracted and often agonizing dis-

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2.15 G. R. GRAHAM
The influence of hypothermia on the effects of experimental coronary occlusion.

2.45 M. SWERDLOW
The analgesic effectiveness of mixtures of pethidine and levallorphan.

3.15 J. D. ROBERTSON
Venous thrombosis following the administration of intravenous anaesthetics.

3.45 Tea

4.30 Demonstrations

5.00 H. C. NEWMAN
The effects of anaesthesia on the mechanical properties of the chest.

5.30 I. C. GEDDES
A comparison of the degradation products of Lignocaine and Carbocaine as determined by the use of C14.

6.00 M. K. SYKES
Rebreathing during artificial ventilation with the Magill attachment.

6.30 General discussion

7.00 Bar

7.45 Dinner

The general pattern of the meeting was modelled closely on the Medical Research Society and papers were not read from a manuscript. Discussion was spirited and criticism outspoken where indicated.

There is no record of any discussion which followed the meeting, but it must have been decided to use the term “Anaesthetic Research Group”. The second meeting, held at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School on February 27, 1959, was announced as “Programme for Anaesthetic Research Group Meeting”. The name of the Group was not changed to “Anaesthetic Research Society” for many years. The third meeting was in Bristol on June 26, 1959 and both second and third meetings followed closely the format of the first.

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cussions in general assembly and by working parties deliberated over the problems of membership, organization and publication of abstracts. About 1964, Heads of Departments became disbarred from direct involvement in the running of the Group.

However, this phase of the history of the Anaesthetic Research Group lies outside the scope of the present article which, on the 30th anniversary of the Anaesthetic Research Society, aims to record the circumstances which led to the holding of the first meeting. From this humble beginning we have seen the development of the Society, which has never faltered in its growth and the enthusiasm in which it is held by its devotees. It has provided an invaluable sounding board for research in our specialty and it has made no small contribution to the development of anaesthesia in this country. We would like to believe that it has made a significant contribution to the leading position of anaesthesia amongst medical subjects in which British researchers have published and been cited in the world literature [1].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCE