

## Personalities in Publishing: Bernard Donovan

Hazel K. Bell

The career of Bernard Donovan, BSc, PhD, DSc, CBIol, FIBiol, FRSM, comprises stm entier: at once the disciplines of science, technology and medicine, and STM - publishing in those fields. His accumulated various successes indicate the integrated interdependence of the four.

At school, during the war, he inclined both to science and journalism, but at the age of 16 began work at the Wellcome Laboratories of Tropical Medicine, assisting a chemist working on the development of anti-tuberculosis drugs; meanwhile attending college every evening, studying for University entrance qualification. After three years in the Royal Navy as a Radio Electrician, an ex-Serviceman's grant took him to Chelsea Polytechnic, then University College London, to acquire a BSc in physiology. A Medical Research Council Scholarship gave him entry to the Institute of Psychiatry, where he earned his PhD, which led to the award of a Beit Memorial Research Fellowship.

At the Institute his research was on the physiology of hormone function and reproduction, showing how the brain controls hormone secretion and the timing of puberty by chemical means: work, jointly with J J van der Werff ten Bosch, which earned them the Ciba Foundation Prize for Basic Research Relevant to the Problems of Ageing.

Donovan spent the rest of his academic life at the Institute of Psychiatry, from 1958-88, progressing from Lecturer to Professor of Neuroendocrinology. He also worked occasionally as a Visiting Professor and did research at the Universities of Leiden, Lund and California in San Francisco and Berkeley, and acted as external examiner in many others. He was awarded a DSc in 1967, became a Chartered Biologist and Fellow of the Institute of Biology in 1977. He acted as Academic Sub-Dean in the Institute of Psychiatry for ten years; and joined the editorial boards of several scientific journals. Scientific, publishing, and academic strands were proceeding in parallel: research, writing, teaching and administration all being integral parts of the process of the development of scientific knowledge - 'thus, of creation'.

Meanwhile, his earlier ambitions to write remained, and found scientific expression. To obtain grants and establish a reputation, researchers must publish; to merit research grants and prizes, research has to be written up for submission to prestigious journals and other outlets. The knowledge acquired by research has to be refined and set out clearly for presentation to others. A collection of material may have sufficient coherence to be the basis of a book, to transmit the collated, filtered information to students, to colleagues, and to future generations. Writing a text-book for students involves further refinement, and the simplification of complicated technical messages into language they can comprehend; generalizations must be so expressed that they hold broadly true, despite inevitable qualifications.

Donovan's first co-authored book, *Physiology of puberty*, appeared in 1965; his primer on *Mammalian neuroendocrinology*

(1970) was also issued in German and Spanish. He co-edited a three-volume treatise on *The pituitary gland* (1966), and worked with two American editors to produce two volumes of autobiographical essays by *Pioneers of neuroendocrinology*.

Donovan sees science as 'refined common sense', its practice consisting of observation and the testing of hypotheses: the acquisition of information. Once gained, the new knowledge needs to be assessed, collected together in an accessible fashion, disseminated and preserved. This a major function of learned societies, which act alongside the research institutions to ensure prompt and reliable publication of the results of research studies, and a place for the findings in abstracts and indexes: 'scientific work must get into the international bibliography', Donovan insists. To this end, publication is crucial to the scientist.

In the field of administration, Donovan further became a member of the Councils of the Society for Endocrinology, of the Journals of Reproduction and Fertility, of the International Brain Research Organization, of the International Society for Neuroendocrinology; the Committee of Management of the Institute of Psychiatry; the Commission on Endocrinology of the International Union of Physiological Sciences; the organizing bodies of three European Roundtables on Neuroendocrinology; the programme committees of some Acta Endocrinologica Congresses and an IUPS Symposium on Gonadal Steroids and Brain Function; and the Royal Society Information Committee. In education, in addition to the teaching, research and examination work recorded above, he served as Member of the Education Committee of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation, and Scientific Advisor to the WHO Centre for research and training in mental health. In the field of publishing, in addition to writing two more books, *Hormones and human behaviour* and *Humors, hormones and the mind*, and more than 200 research papers, Donovan served as Chairman of the Publications Committee of the International Society for Neuroendocrinology; a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Endocrinology*, *Neuroendocrinology* and *Neuroendocrinology Letters*; and, later, editor of the *Journal of Endocrinology*, 1974-80, and of *Biomedical Science* from 1988-91.

All these apparently collateral activities he sees not as diversions from his chosen path of science research, but natural extensions, as a necessary means of contributing to the health of the scientific information system.

Essential though publication is for scientific progress, journal publishing is not in the mainstream of commercial activity; scholars' demands for rapid distribution of their findings to a limited readership may conflict with the publishers' need for a proper financial return on investment. Scientific journals must survive, but to do so they must be viable. Publishing a paper represents a significant investment on the part of the publisher.

In 1972, as a means of promoting common interests, the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) was formed, in Donovan's words:

on the initiative of a small group of learned and professional society publishers who felt that their interests were not being properly served by the bodies concerned with commercial publishing. Impetus came from

the publishing directors of the British Medical Association, the Institute of Physics, the Institutions of Civil, Electrical, and Mechanical Engineers, the Pharmaceutical Society, and the Royal Society of Chemistry - bodies with substantial publishing divisions ... the vision of the innovators extended beyond the special interests of their parent bodies, for their aims were to assist in the transfer of expertise from the big organizations to the small, and to promote and improve communication and co-operation between learned and professional organizations of all sizes on matters concerned with publishing. ... The Association provides a forum for the large members to compare notes and to tackle problems of common concern ...<sup>1</sup>

Donovan, scientific researcher, teacher, administrator, writer and editor, naturally gravitated to such an organization, becoming its Vice-Chairman in 1979, Chairman in 1981, and Secretary from 1988-98. Through these years the challenges facing ALPSP and its members developed and increased, with the arrival of document delivery, electronic publishing and the Internet. ALPSP, its policies and activities, likewise evolved to face those challenges. Reviewing ALPSP's progress in its 21st year, Donovan wrote: 'Learned society and academic publishers are having to broaden their horizons to encompass changes in user practice ... It is argued that document delivery will supplant the journal ... and that the publishers of conventional journals are living on borrowed time'.<sup>2</sup>

He contributed many reports to ALPSP's journal, *Learned Publishing*, with several papers he had delivered at seminars also reported there. The titles of the major articles he has written for the journal indicate the chief concerns of scholarly publishing through those years: 'The clash that never was' (after an STM meeting on the likely effects of library networking and electronic document delivery on journal finances); 'Librarians and publishers: *not* working together' (after the 'Knowledge for Europe' conference in 1992); 'Librarians in search of an issue: task force zeroes in on profit pursuers' (after a US report on intellectual property rights); 'Learned societies and electronic publishing' (sponsored by the British Library Research and Innovation Centre); and 'The truth about peer review' (a presentation made at the ICSU Press Workshop on Electronic Publishing in Science). No writing for writing's sake in an ivory tower here: these are chronicles from the thick of the academic battle.

Donovan gives us an outline of the differences between learned society and commercial publishing:

Commercial publishers can react to untoward developments by cultivating alternative markets, reducing involvement in waning areas, and, if necessary, by withdrawal from a field. Learned societies, being subject-specific, do not have this flexibility although there are compensating factors, for they are essentially authoritative and expert information brokers able to draw upon the virtuosos of their discipline. The best societies provide quality-control mechanisms seldom matched by their commercial counterparts ... the evaluation or peer review process is

costly, and the revenue for its support can only be provided by sale of the product; membership subscriptions are no longer enough. ... What is the best means of providing their communities with the knowledge and information required by consumers?'<sup>2</sup>

During his ten years' active service as the chief executive of ALPSP Donovan added to his offices those of Director both of the Publishers Licensing Society and the Copyright Licensing Agency. Paying tribute to him on his retirement, the Chairman of ALPSP observed:

In many ways Bernard Donovan is the public face and voice of ALPSP. ... A scientist by training, he gathers facts, seeks opinions, and makes solid and well argued recommendations. ... The Association is the successful and well regarded organisation that it is today as a result of his diligence, creativity, organisational ability and professionalism.<sup>3</sup>

In his retirement Donovan contemplates further combining his initial interests in writing and in science by producing a biography of an outstanding 20th-century scientist, Lord Zuckerman. He will continue to serve on committees concerned with aspects of academic publishing. Always self-motivated, he cannot imagine a life devoted to a vegetative existence and the cultivation of grass, and is certain that new challenges will arise. Whatever appears, he aims to look to the future, while keeping a firm grasp upon the achievements of the past.

This is a career whose amalgamation of science, administration, education and publishing indicates the necessity for all of these to combine for the true advancement of scientific learning today - just as they do in the work of ALPSP, and, indeed, in the person of Bernard Donovan.

#### **References**

1. Donovan, Bernard T. ALPSP: who are we? *Learned Publishing* 3 (2) April 1990, 111-14
2. Donovan, Bernard T. A fresh start. *Learned Publishing* 6 (1) Jan. 1993, 4-5
3. Williams, Peter. Handing on the Standard. *Learned Publishing* 11 (3) July 1998, 166-7

- from *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* Vol. 30 No. 1