

Twenty years of scientific co-editing the Proceedings of the Royal Microscopical Society

Outgoing Scientific Editor Adrian Burden looks back on his long stretch holding the reins at **infocus**

Time has certainly flown over the last two decades. I remember well when Tim Watson and I first met in the RMS Office in Oxford to discuss taking over the job of editing the Proceedings of the Royal Microscopical Society from Peter Evennett. He himself had been a long-standing editor for 18 years, and we were both a little nervous to say the least. Peter had done such a good job of maintaining a high scientific standard and ensuring that there was an interesting variety of content in each issue. The Proceedings was, and still is, the main mechanism for the Society to connect regularly with its members, and so it was important that it remained appealing and valuable to its readers.



Back then, the format was an A4 magazine with a colour front and back cover and a generally greyscale (with occasional blue) innards. Our first edition (figure

1), marking the new millennium in March 2000 was Part 1 of Volume 35. It heralded a slightly revised format of more colour photomicrographs, and named sections relating to articles, news, letters, meetings, student articles, corporate articles and shorter method-based articles. Part of the strategy behind this approach was to indicate to readers the kind of content we sought in the hope that they would themselves contribute to one of the categories. After all, submitted copy is the lifeblood of a magazine or journal.

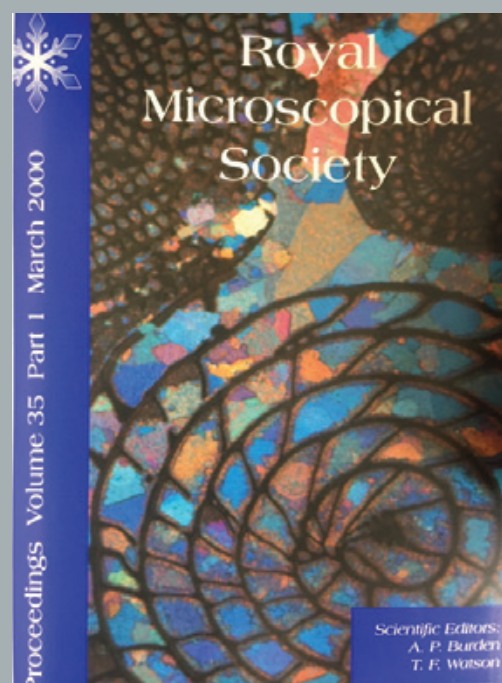


Figure 1 – Front cover of Vol 35, Part 1, March 2000

As we prepared the new-look Proceedings, people back then were concerned about the Millennium Bug – would everything around us break because digital clocks and computers would not advance correctly at midnight before the new year? In the end, the world did not stop and I think most, if not all, microscopes continued to function. The printing presses also worked and the new issue was delivered to members of the Society as planned.

Back in March 2000, we published articles on high resolution electron microscopy of carbon structures, because fullerenes and nanotubes were all the rage, and the Internet Electron Microscope, a new remote-controlled SEM for teaching and outreach. And this first issue was printed in time for the Micro 2000 conference in Hammersmith, London in April.

In the next issue, June 2000, we debuted our image-based articles, largely made up of colour photomicrographs rather than text. The inspiration for this was the National Geographic magazine, as I felt that the world of microscopy was at least as photogenic as the macroscopic natural world that this other publication captured so well. By the end of the first year, we even had gate-folded pages to really do justice to the photographs. And it was also the issue that we reported the UK SuperSTEM was to be funded and sited at Daresbury, the national facility that is now a cornerstone of the UK's microscopical infrastructure.

During April 2001, I was also elected to Chairman of the Materials Section, and we began to encourage all the sections to discuss the Proceedings with a view to soliciting articles from colleagues and contacts. This was because it was proving really difficult to fill the pages of the Proceedings with good quality articles, even though we always somehow managed to pull it off by the print deadline. Behind the scenes the pipeline was always precariously short!

Late December 2002, I moved to Singapore to work at the Institute of Materials Research & Engineering (IMRE). Even that long ago, believe it or not, email was sufficiently advanced to enable me to continue

in my role from afar, and low-cost telephony like Skype was to arrive very soon after.

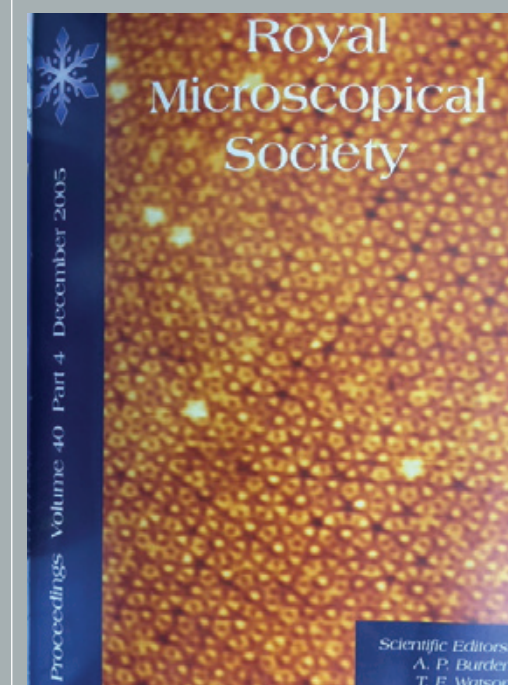


Figure 2 – Front cover of Vol 40, Part 4, December 2005

Remarkably, in December 2003, we managed to publish the first timeline, an idea that had been an on-going project behind the scenes for quite a while! The EM Section had worked hard to collate and draft a pictorial feature showing the development of electron microscopy from 1924 to 1992. At the time we hoped this would inspire the other sections to rise to the challenge and produce similar timelines for their own domain. In reality, this was not generally to be the case, although there is still an opportunity to do so!

Another interesting set of articles that ran during 2003 and 2004 was a seven-part series on the early years of electron microscope manufacturing in the UK taken from a transcript of a dinner meeting recollecting work at the company Metropolitan Vickers. It was back in 2003 that Reid Hoffman launched LinkedIn and 2004 that Mark Zuckerberg launched (The) Facebook and social networking began to grow.



Figure 3 – Front cover of *infocus* issue 1, March 2006

In December 2005, we printed the last A4 format of the Proceedings (figure 2), and in the Editorial I included a picture of my six year old son using his Great Grandmother's microscope in the garden during a visit from Singapore to the UK. He is now studying physics and chemistry at University, so that early introduction to STEM must have helped a little!

In March 2006, we revealed the new look *infocus* (figure 3) which appeared then much as it does today. The smaller format with a modern layout and full colour printing was now even more comparable to my vision of a "National Geographic" for microscopy. It was a credit to the team at the office, in particular then editor Laura Kingsbury and then Executive Director Rob Flavin that it looked so professional and fresh. I think it had a marked effect on retaining and recruiting members to the Society, because this was a magazine that would look equally at home on a coffee table as it would a desk or lab bench. Tim and I were both very pleased with the revamp and this spurred us on to seek new content and make best use of the all-colour glossy layout.

We continued to showcase stunning images and fill the issues with news, articles and insights. In September 2006 we even managed to publish the Immunocytochemistry Timeline as a folded-insert detailing developments in the field from 1930 to 2000. It was in 2007 that the first iPhone was released, and I remember Tim was, at the time, a keen Apple fan, and so was an early adopter of the iPhone and its apps.

In January 2008 I had moved from Singapore to Padua, Italy, and continued to contribute to the task of scientific editing from overseas. The magazine was in generally good shape with a full issue still coming off the presses each quarter. I recall we were always a little close to the wire with our article pipeline, but thankfully the articles we received were often of excellent quality and varied enough to enable us to balance the flow of topics each issue. We also had a few keen authors who would write multi-part articles. 2008 was also the year that Osamu Shimomura, Martin Chalfie and Roger Y. Tsien won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry "for the discovery and development of the green fluorescent protein, GFP", which of course has been used widely for the fluorescence imaging of biological samples.

By the time issue 18 came out in June 2009, I was back in the UK and so once again it was easy to participate in person at editorial meetings. The first 10 years of editing had flown by, and now everything was much more IT-oriented. Most authors submitted everything electronically, Tim and I reviewed and marked up pdfs of proofs, and we could share large files more easily with the recently launched Dropbox.

Keen to keep the sections engaged, and to ensure we had good coverage of all aspects of the broad topic of microscopy, we formed an Editorial Board in 2014. We had representatives from the different sections and invited them to our meetings where we would review progress, discuss new ideas and sift the pipeline of articles.

Another recent development was to give each major article a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to help with

citations which in turn would encourage researchers to publish their work in *infocus*.

Tim retired from post in July 2017, just after issue 46 came out ready for the Society's flagship event MMC 2017. We had had a lot of fun working on the publication together, sharing the responsibility and collaborating on new approaches. So, I was a little concerned about having to continue alone! But I was delighted that Vikas Trivedi was able to join as deputy, and indeed that he is able to continue in my position as I now step down.

In June 2018 we published a special gold issue 50 of *infocus* (figure 4), and even included a microscopic text challenge for the readers. And now we have reached issue 56 and I am pleased that we have probably the healthiest pipeline we've ever had as well as lots of ideas to keep the magazine fresh and informative.

Over the years, I've worked with a number of fantastic Executive Editors in the RMS Office. These were the people that did all the real work of collating,



Figure 4 – Front cover of *infocus* issue 50, June 2018



Figure 5 – Front cover of *infocus* issue 56, December 2019

typesetting, formatting, general proof-reading and finally pushing 'go' on the print run to enable each successive issue to arrive on your doormat in time. Back in 2000, it was Sue Betteridge, then in 2002 Ilaria Meliconi joined the team. In 2005 Lucy Haworth took over, and then Laura Kingsbury joined in 2005. Victoria Lee and later Jill Wilson also assisted, and Jill took over after Laura left. Lucy Saxton (now Ridler) took the reins in 2012, and William Dawkins did a spell in 2013-14, with Mel Readman helping in 2015 when Lucy was on maternity leave. In Dec 2018, Owen Morton became the capable and incumbent editor.

Karen (then Lonsdale, now Collins) and Allison Winton were also key to the publication; helping originally as Executive Editors and Advertising respectively before being promoted within the organisation (and still stepping in whenever there were gaps in the position)!