

# A Ruby (rubor!) Anniversary: the Scottish Skin Biology Club 1969–2009

R. C. McKenzie and D. McEwan Jenkinson\*

Tayside Institute for Health Studies, University of Abertay, Dundee, UK; and \*Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

doi:10.1111/j.1365-2230.2009.03491.x

## Summary

The 40th birthday of the Scottish Skin Biology Club (SSBC) was celebrated in Spring 2009. The SSBC, formerly The Skin Biology Club, has played a vital role in providing a forum and a means of networking for skin researchers in Scotland. This paper summarizes the history of the club.

## Origin

On 3 January 2009 the Scottish Skin Biology Club, formerly 'The Skin Biology Club' celebrated its 40th anniversary. The club originated from a telephone call in the late summer of 1968 to David McEwan Jenkinson from P. J. (Paddy) Hare, then recently appointed to the chair of Dermatology at the University of Edinburgh, seeking information on whether there was an informal Skin Club in Scotland similar to that in England and Wales. There was none, but the value of one was mutually recognized, and discussion ensued about forming such a club. Paddy and David (the latter working at that time in the Department of Physiology at the Hannah Research Institute, Ayr), identified a number of research groups working on comparative skin biology and veterinary science in Scotland and those working on underpinning dermatological science and research in the Scottish university departments of dermatology. These were invited to an exploratory meeting, which became the inaugural meeting of the club, held on 3 January 1969 in the Department of Dermatology of the University of Edinburgh at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh. Fifteen people attended and that

day formed the Skin Biology Club to foster interest in skin research and provide a discussion forum for all skin researchers in Scotland. Paddy was elected Chairman and David was elected Secretary/Treasurer.

## Original club structure and operational format

The meeting endorsed a format suggested by David. It was agreed that:

- Meetings would be as informal as possible and the Club should be small, with a limit of 50 members.
- The club would meet twice yearly at different centres in rotation. The host department would supply lecture-room facilities and take responsibility for arranging morning coffee, lunch and afternoon tea, the cost of which would be paid by attending members in the form of a meeting fee.
- Those present at the original meeting and those who had responded to the original circular as interested in joining (29 in total) would be considered Founder Members of the Club. Membership would be restricted to those working within the geographical boundaries of Scotland, to enable participants to travel easily to the 1-day meetings.
- A one-off life membership fee of 5 shillings (25p) was set per member to cover the cost of postage and incidental expenses.
- A business session would be held at each meeting.
- Each scientific session would be chaired by a club member and the discussion opened by another, a format designed to maximize member participation.

*Correspondence:* Dr Roddie C. McKenzie, Tayside Institute for Health Studies, University of Abertay, Kydd Building, Bell St, Dundee, Angus, Scotland DD1 1HG, UK

E-mail: roddiemck@hotmail.co.uk

Conflict of interest: none declared.

Accepted for publication 23 January 2009

## Developments in operational format

Surprisingly the concept of a one-off life membership fee has survived the test of time, although the fee has increased to £10 and average meeting costs have risen to £15 compared with 37.5p in May 1969; such is inflation! This continuity is in part due to the generosity of a number of host organizations who offered, and still offer, lecture-room facilities, and to sponsorship from commercial companies. The generosity of commercial sponsors still allows the club to invite internationally acclaimed speakers to address meetings. From the initial membership of 29 in 1969, the club has continued to grow (the original limit of 50 members was rescinded in 1972): 55 members in 1972, 67 in 1977, 102 in 1990, 134 in 1999, and in 2009, there are over 200 members. Club Business meetings have resulted in changes such as the introduction in November 1997 of e-mailing lists by Secretary Neil Gibbs; this was extended by Secretary Roddie McKenzie in 1999 to include a technical inquiry service. In November of that year, Chairman Malcolm Hodgins proposed changing the club name to 'The Scottish Skin Biology Club' to provide a distinct identity and prevent confusion with the Skin Club. This was ratified by the members in June 2000. Denys Wheatley suggested that the club should have a recognizable logo to be used on notices and official correspondence, and was given the task of producing such a logo; after debate, one was approved and adopted in November 2002 (Fig. 1). More recently, work has begun on a club website (<http://www.scottish-skin-biology-club.org>).

Although the operational structure has developed over the course of the 40 years, the club meetings have always been informal and convivial, which owes something to an average turnout being around 35–40 members and the provision of time for private discussion.



Figure 1 Logo of the Scottish Skin Biology Club®.

## Changes in meeting format

The early meetings were built around themes and topics, two at each meeting (morning and afternoon) with ample time for general discussion led by designated members, but from the 32nd meeting, the pattern changed to presentation of individual papers and by the 35th meeting in September 1985, had evolved into a presentational platform for work, particularly by younger investigators, at a state of preparation not necessarily ready for publication or delivery at larger formal meetings. Many a research paper benefited from the peer discussion that followed. A programme of 15-min papers with 10 min of discussion, was introduced at the 52nd meeting (April 1994), thereby providing the novice with experience in oral presentation in a friendly but critical environment and a test drive for a talk to be presented later at a national or international meeting. In this way, the club has eased many skin researchers onto the conference circuit, while also providing members with information 'hot off the bench'.

## Venues

The club has met at various venues throughout Scotland, and a measure of the diversity of interest in skin research is reflected by the fact that for the first 10 years (23 meetings) there was no repeat of venue. Venues have included dermatology departments; NHS sites; research institutes, private research centres and occasionally, more luxurious or exotic locales such as Glasgow Zoo, the Royal Scottish Museum, Kings of Kinloch Hotel (Meigle, Perthshire) and Ross Priory on the banks of Loch Lomond, complete with private golf course! By factoring in a generous lunch period, members were able to see at first hand the research facilities at some of the host departments.

Another factor contributing to the high conviviality and networking quotient was in the early days, enjoyment after the meeting of drinks and canapés, courtesy of the host organiser, and more recently pub sessions or meals out, which always command an enthusiastic following. Many research collaborations and at least one personal relationship have blossomed over post-meeting cocktails!

Travel to the spring meetings provides a welcome break away from the laboratory to blow off the winter cobwebs, and homeward journeys sometimes became memorable excursions through the magnificent scenery of the Grampians on the way back from Aberdeen. In contrast, the November meetings have occasionally required heroic and epic journeys because of early snow.

The Aberdeen contingent (in 1998) had to turn back 45 miles from Glasgow because of snowdrifts on the A9, and the Dundee party arrived an hour late (but in time for start of the talks) because of weather and road conditions.

However, the club is anything but parochial. Joint meetings have been held with The Skin Club, on the themes of Photoimmunology and Structural Biology; the former featured speakers from Bath, Leiden and Amsterdam, and the latter, which was part of the British Society for Investigative Dermatology millennium meeting in Edinburgh in 2000, featured speakers from all over the UK. Joint meetings were also held with the Scottish Aquatic Diseases Group (1973) and the European Society for Comparative Skin Biology (1979) and more recently, with the Scottish Dermatological Society (2008), promoting a 'cross-pollination' of clinical and scientific interests.

## Members

Some members who have attracted wider public attention include: Professor Sir Kenneth Calman; Professor John Hunter OBE (editor, *Davidson's Principles and Practise of Medicine*); Professor Irwin McLean FRSE (skin gene treatment) and Professor Rona Mackie (International authority on skin cancer).

Although this does not pretend to be an exhaustive list, in recent times regular contributions have come from groups led by the following investigators: Professor

Birgit Lane, Dundee (keratin biology); Professor Ron Roberts, Stirling (fish biology); Dr Hugh Elder, Glasgow, (equine sweating and anhidrosis); Professor James Ferguson, Dundee (phototherapy); Professor Mary Norval, Edinburgh (photoimmunology); Dr Malcolm Hodgins, Glasgow (connexins); Professor John Hunter, Edinburgh (inflammatory dermatoses); Professor Keith Thoday, Edinburgh (canine dermatoses); Dr Richard Weller Edinburgh (cutaneous nitric oxide) and Dr David Greenhalgh, Glasgow (mouse models of skin cancer).

The club, while structured to promote serious dermatological research, also considers that it can be a fun discipline. It continues to prosper under the guidance of the recently appointed new Chairman, Richard Weller, who took over from Irwin McLean in 2007 and new secretary Julie Woods, who took over from David Greenhalgh in 2008, thus maintaining the principle of a regular turnover of officers to invigorate the SSBC with new ideas. It continues to be the most prominent forum for the diverse range of cutaneous researchers in Scotland; from dogs to dogma, it is indeed a broad church. All skin researchers are welcome. Forty two members attended the 40th anniversary meeting in the Department of Dermatology, Dundee University on 28 May 2009 and most thereafter enjoyed a dinner in the Queen's Hotel, Dundee.

*Further details about the Scottish Skin Biology Club can be obtained from Dr Julie Woods, Photobiology Unit, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY (j.woods@dundee.ac.uk).*