

REVIEW

The European Society for Vascular Surgery and Journal Origins and Early Days

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Journals and Societies in the Early Days of Vascular Surgery

To appreciate the circumstances that led to the founding of the European Vascular Society and its Journal it is necessary to look back at the status of vascular surgery in the formative years of the 1960s and 70s.

At that time there were a number of national vascular societies already in existence or being established. They were increasingly flourishing worldwide. On an international basis there was the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery (ISCVS), the brainchild of Henry Haimovici of New York. It had the imaginative forum of a truly worldwide conference one year, alternating every other year with multiple meetings of 'Chapters' that were more continental in their geographic base, such as the European and North American Chapters. A complicating factor was that conceptually in the early 60s it had been reasonably assumed that vascular and cardiac surgery might develop together. So the ISCVS was structured to represent both disciplines.

As far as Journals were concerned, there was only one 'dedicated' vascular journal, the so-called 'Green Journal' (because of its cover)—The Journal of Cardiovascular Surgery. It was bimonthly and the official organ of the ISCVS described above. It was published in Milan and of course its contents divided between cardiac and vascular papers.

Apart from this there were the plethora of what might now be termed as 'General Surgical' journals mostly on the other side of the Atlantic. Many of these

had been established for years. Vascular papers were randomly and rather inconveniently spread throughout these without being particularly focused on any one. This included the British Journal of Surgery (BJS) in the UK.

The First Discussions on a New Vascular Journal

So it was against this background that discussions started in the UK being first formally raised at the Business meeting of the 1980 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Vascular Surgical Society of Great Britain and Ireland (VSSGBI). Indeed it is from the Minutes of these meetings that much of the initial story is taken. Thanks must be expressed to the VSSGBI for access to those papers and for their permission to record some of the events in this account.

The VSSGBI had itself been founded in 1966 and its early Presidents were mainly composed of the founding members. That year (1980) Frank Cockett of St Thomas' Hospital London was President. As is well known he had a special interest in venous disease and in particular subfascial ligation of incompetent ankle perforating veins. It was he himself who had made the first suggestion that the VSSGBI consider sponsoring or producing a new and dedicated vascular journal. Crisp and opinionated debate is recorded as having ensued in the Minutes of the meeting. The predominant view seems to have been that such a venture would face excessive competition and the VSSGBI would be too small to sustain a new Journal. Furthermore there were those that supported the ISCVS and its already established 'Green Journal' mentioned above. They felt that the VSSGBI should

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adopt a closer affiliation with that body. No firm decision was taken at that stage.

The subject was reviewed again at the AGM a year later and the link with the 'Green Journal' reinforced in particular by Sidney Rose, by then President Elect of the Society. He was a surgeon from Manchester and again with an interest in venous disease. He reported to the VSSGBI membership that he had negotiated some firm proposals for British representation on the Editorial Board of the 'Green Journal'. But there were some members who expressed reservations about the future of that Journal with its cardiac links. Furthermore, it has to be said that at that time the 'Green Journal' had an indifferent reputation for scientific content and delivery to subscribers. At this stage the BJS came into the picture and seemed keen to capture the home interests. It was announced by Crawford Jamieson, the Editor, that next year there would be the publication of a 'Vascular Supplement' to the main journal with a selection of some of the best papers presented at the VSSGBI meeting that year.

And so things remained for another year until the next AGM when Sidney Rose (1982), now President, reported that he had further negotiated with the 'Green Journal' and that he himself, David Charlesworth (Manchester) and Roger Greenhalgh (London) would be made members of the Editorial Board thus representing the VSSGBI. The BJS announced that the 'Vascular supplement' had been published successfully that year but had proved too expensive to produce on a regular long-term basis. It rather dropped out of the running. So the VSSGBI was faced either with staying with the 'Green Journal' with its now increased editorial representation, or considering a new venture.

A Milestone Year 1984

Not much then happened for two years until 1984, a milestone year. The Journal of Vascular Surgery was launched in the USA. Significantly it became the official Journal not only of the all-influential Society for Vascular Surgery but also the North American Chapter of the ISCVS. It had thus separated the 'Green Journal' from North American vascular activity and at a blow gathered under one roof the cream of the American vascular papers. It was an immediate and absolute success quickly moving from 6 to 12 volumes a year. As is now known it has gone from strength to strength.

An Approach to Start a New Vascular Journal

But it proved to be a critical year in the UK as well. The writer of this account had by then been appointed Honorary Secretary of the VSSGBI, which was to lead to long-term involvement in these events. Perhaps as a consequence of the successful developments in America, there were approaches independently to the VSSGBI by three different Publishers with firm and competing enquiries as to whether the Society would consider the launch of a UK based vascular journal. This was taken to the membership of the Society as a whole and vigorously debated once more at the 1984 AGM. After much discussion it was suggested that a working party be established to explore the options. There were strong feelings both for and against this and in true British democratic tradition the matter was put to the vote. The proposal to establish a Working Party was carried by 74 votes to 46.

The Core Group is Established

The Working Party was to consist of the author as Honorary Secretary of the VSSGBI(SGD), Roger Baird (RNB-Bristol), Peter Bell (PRB-Leicester) Roger Greenhalgh (RMG-London) and the current President of the VSSGBI. Vaughan Ruckley (CVR-Edinburgh) was co-opted soon after. And so these five members of the Working Party were to evolve into the Core Group of individuals who were to see through the events.

The Options for a New Journal

This group met immediately to consider the possibilities for a new journal. There seemed to be three;

- (i) A 'British Journal of Vascular Surgery'. This would have the advantage of independence from other ventures and a firm relationship with the VSSGBI. But would this be too parochial and limit the support to the UK with little interest or commitment from other countries?
- (ii) An 'Annals' of Vascular Surgery which could target a more worldwide audience. This would compete rather directly with the 'Green Journal', but if successful could engender a wide appeal although it was unlikely to draw much interest from the USA. Equally it would not necessarily have much 'home' support.
- (iii) An 'European Journal of Vascular Surgery'. This could be linked with a new European Society for Vascular Surgery. This seemed a good proposal

although some publishers subsequently advised that anything entitled 'European' was doomed to failure! None the less it was felt this could complement the Journal of Vascular Surgery in the USA representing the different emphasis, style and culture of vascular practice in Europe.

A Major Set Back

On balance the last of these options was favoured and debates were developing well when there was a major setback. Unknown, others were working along similar lines and were at a more advanced stage of planning. Even one of the possible preferred titles had been appropriated, 'Annals of Vascular Surgery'. A Flier with advice as to the imminent publication of this new Journal was suddenly widely circulated. It was led by Edouard Kieffer in Paris and Ramon Berguer in Detroit and was a French/American Venture. It seemed that it already had gained wide international support including the USA and indeed from within the UK itself. However, there were some important differences from the Groups preliminary proposals. There was no suggestion of a link with a new Society. It was a private venture with no intention to invest any future profits charitably into academic pursuit (which had been the Groups intention). It was to be published in English and French and possibly Spanish as well.

This was a significant development because if there were concerns about there being sufficient potential for one new journal what were the prospects for two? Furthermore, one could not but admire and applaud the Annals initiative, which was well conceived and organised. Furthermore, it was at a considerably more advanced stage of planning and had obviously every prospect of being deservedly successful.

Could a Compromise be Found?

Inevitably this all came back for debate at the next AGM (1985) of the VSSGBI at which the Working Party had been commissioned to report back. Again there was crisp debate but virtually unanimous support emerged from the Society's membership to sanction any UK initiative and for it to try to negotiate some compromise with the Annals team. At that stage, there was the overwhelming view that the development of two new journals was unrealistic and that every attempt should be made to work towards a combined effort.

A Critical Meeting at Schiphol Airport

By this time, the dilemmas that confronted the vascular world of these two competing ventures had become widely known and appreciated. To this effect the Dutch offered to arrange an urgent meeting between the two interested parties. This duly took place one cold foggy January (1986) day at the Golden Tulip Hotel at Schiphol Airport Amsterdam.

It is difficult to overstate the tension of that meeting. It was jointly organised and chaired by Bert Eikelboom and Stephan Skotnicki. Apart from the Core Group of five of the original Working Party, there was Martin Birnstingl (London), the by then President of the VSSGBI from the UK. The objectives of a new European venture were gaining increasing and widespread interest and support, particularly from Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. So the UK deputation was joined by Sven Eric Bergentz (Malmo), Henner Muller-Wiefel (Duisberg), Bernard Nachbur (Berne) and Wilhelm Sandmann (Dusseldorf) who had expressed enthusiasm for the venture. The central figures representing the Annals were Ramon Berguer and Edouard Kieffer, who were joined by among others Alain Branchereau (Marseille) and David Charlesworth (Manchester England).

Proceedings began with a buffet lunch that was taken by the two parties separately, who then sat down opposite one another along a long table. Initial discussions quickly became confrontational and some comments made that did little to develop common ground. In due course, however, a degree of harmony and purpose was established. There was agreement to work together towards a single shared journal and a draft was drawn up. This became known as the 'Agreement of Amsterdam'.

The Agreement of Amsterdam

The concept was of a single publication composed of two 'Sister' Journals published alternately. It would be known as 'The Annals of Vascular Surgery (European Vascular Journal)'. There would be one subscription base and it would initially be published in French and English. To start with the two Journals would have independent Editorial Boards but would work towards merging these within three years. Greenhalgh and Kieffer were asked to meet and lead on the development of these proposals.

The realistic feeling was that this was about as much as could have been expected at that stage. What chances for a meaningfully successful outcome were anticipated from these complex compromises? There

was no under-estimate of the likely difficulties or the size of the task ahead. Matters were made worse in the weeks immediately afterwards by acrimonious correspondence about how the actual meeting had been conducted and chaired. Prospects did not seem too propitious.

No Merger Proves Possible

And so it proved to be. Every effort unilaterally, particularly by RMG, was made to establish communications but cooperation seemed limited. Eventually in May 1986, Edouard Kieffer came over from Paris and met with the Core Group in London. He was friendly, gracious and charming and above all else honest. It was his view that unfortunately any joint venture was out of the question although he regretted that to be the case. The Annals was in effect already too far down the line in planning for there to be any changes. He was genuinely sorry.

On the 29th of May 1986 came confirmation of this when a letter from the Board of Directors of the Annals of Vascular Surgery was received, with key French, American and Spanish co-signatories. It stated that the conditions for any joint venture would be;

One subscription base, centred in Paris
Two issues per year only from our side with proportional revenue
Translation costs would have to be born by us unilaterally
A single title absorbing any development of a European Society
The English edition would move to the USA for publication within 3 years.

These proposals were, of course, unacceptable and were so far short of any possible compromise that further negotiations seemed pointless. Shortly after this RMG was in Baltimore USA for the Society for Vascular Surgery Annual Meeting. He had a number of discussions with interested parties from within the USA. He was pressurised to either back off completely or accept the conditions set out in the May letter.

Annals of Vascular Surgery is Published

In June the first issue of Annals of Vascular Surgery was published. And excellent it was. It included an invited Forward from Felix Eastcott (London), arguably the father of British vascular surgery. In this he imaginatively described the Annals as a 'Bridge' across the Atlantic in the most eloquent of terms.

Worse Still to Come

So at this stage the prospects for a new European Vascular Society and Journal seemed poor but worse was to follow. As if by fate the European Chapter of the ISCVS was to hold its meeting in the UK that year in the Metropole Hotel Brighton in July. One way or another several of the Core Group were independently involved. As Secretary of the VSSGBI, SGD was asked to arrange a satellite session with the two Societies. This was a panel of experts with a presentation of problem cases for discussion. It seemed to go down quite well. RMG was on the programme committee and RNB as National Representative was on the local Organising Committee.

The morning of the meeting proper there appeared in all the conference wallets a flyer advertising the proposed launch of a new European Vascular Society. It read as follows.

European society for vascular surgery

It is proposed to discuss the formation of a European Society for Vascular Surgery to meet annually for the presentation and discussion of papers on vascular topics. It is intended that membership should be open to vascular members of the European Society for Cardiovascular Surgeons and members of national societies and others of similar standing. Those interested are invited to meet in the Clarence Room of the Metropole Hotel on Friday 4th July at 6 pm.

It was 'signed' on behalf of the Core Group and a further 10 prominent European Vascular Surgeons who were known to have expressed enthusiasm for the new Society. This included those that had been at the meeting in Amsterdam. However, no one had any knowledge of having done so or the source of this invitation! Quite who put this in the wallets remains a mystery to this day. But it is not difficult to imagine the manner in which this initiative was greeted as a threat by the Executive of the European chapter of the ISCVS. The Clarence Room in which the intended meeting was to take place was locked on the orders of the ISCVS Executive and no one turned up. The Core Group were widely castigated. Someone suggested that it was an 'own goal' that had been scored! At least the proposals were now well and truly declared. Interestingly at the same meeting a similar initiative to form a European Cardiac Society was emerging.

The Core Group sat in the bar at the Hotel in Brighton and were conscious of being actively avoided. This was undoubtedly the lowest point and at the same time the moment when a decision had to be made. A dilemma had to be faced. Either action was required urgently and decisively, or of course the whole project could be abandoned. It was still 6 months until the next AGM of the VSSGIBI where some kind of mandate for further action could be sought. Certainly it would have been easier to have continued with a degree of such moral support rather than totally alone. But the provisional plans did not really affect the VSSGIBI. It was decided to press ahead independently as quickly as possible.

The European Journal of Vascular Surgery is Launched

An advertisement was placed and in due course prospective publishers interviewed. Grune and Stratton were selected who agreed to put up Editorial expenses and promotional costs and in return a 7-year contract was signed to allow time for the venture to become profitable and give them time to recoup their investment. When the point of profitability did arrive these would be shared equally between Publisher and the Journal with our share ploughed back into the projected new Society.

There were other major issues to be considered. It would be essential to retain ownership of the Journal 'Title'. There was resistance to this from the proposed Publisher and at one stage a clause was introduced into the draft Contract to the effect that the Title ownership would revert to the Publisher if the Society membership base did not meet certain targets within one year. These were clearly unrealistic and this was resisted strongly.

There were many legal implications to be considered. Firstly, there had to be a recognisable 'Body' to represent the venture. It would, for instance, be necessary to draw up and engage in a contract with the Publisher. Additionally the Core Group wished as much as possible to have individual protection from possible financial risk, such as litigation. In due course, Charitable Status would have to be sought in order to avoid taxation on future profits.

Expert advice was needed but the funds for this were non-existent! Fortunately there was an acquaintance, a solicitor, who had recently become a partner in Ashurst Morris and Crisp; a distinguished firm of London lawyers. He said he would help free of charge!

The European Society for Vascular Surgery Co. Ltd

The answer was to set up a Limited Company. An existing Company was purchased which had gone into receivership and its name and constitution changed, all for £200. So was born the European society for Vascular Surgery Co. Ltd. It was a company 'limited by guarantee'. This was quite an *avant garde* concept at that time though many UK medical societies now use this legal vehicle. Its features are that there is only a nominal share allocation and hence liability limited here to five £1 shares. The assets of the company are owned by its members and were to be administered by the five Core Group members as its Board of Directors with the same duties and responsibilities as with any Company.

The European Journal of Vascular Surgery

An Editorial Board was appointed from among those that had been so supportive throughout these endeavours:

Editor

P.R.F. Bell

Associate Editors

R.N. Baird, D. Bergqvist, B.C. Eikelboom

Editorial Board

R.M. Greenhalgh (Chairman)

A.A. Barros D'Sa, S.E. Bergentz, D. Bouchier Hayes, H.J. Buchardt Hanson, A.A. Calvelo, S.G. Darke (Hon. Secretary), J. Fernandes e Fernandes, H.O. Mhyre, B. Nachbur, A.N. Nicolaidis, C.V. Ruckley, W. Sandmann, V. Schlosser, S. Skotnicki, O. Wagner, W. Welch

Everyone involved was asked to submit a manuscript as soon as possible to get together enough copy for the launch edition.

All this was reported back to the membership of the VSSGIBI that November explaining that every effort had been made to reach a workable agreement with the Annals but the response had been delayed and the terms unacceptable. There was the intention to launch a new European Journal and Society next year and that preparations for the former were already advanced. This was met with support although there were those that still expressed scepticism and disapproval; principally the protagonists of the 'Green Journal'. So at this point the links with the VSSGIBI were closed and from then on action was as an independent agent.

In February 1987, the first Edition on the European Journal of Vascular Surgery was published. In the

short term at least half the job was done just six months after taking the decision.

A New Society Starting from Scratch

So what of the second part? How do you launch a brand new society starting from scratch? Efforts had been so focused on the Journal that there seemed to have been little time to give it serious thought. But one of our number (RMG) had it all worked out! There existed the perfect forum. The successful annual spring Charing Cross meeting was by then more than well established and attended. The comprehensive mailing list painstakingly built up over several years would be an ideal way of advertising the new Society's launch and soliciting papers for presentation. The inaugural meeting would be added onto the main Charing Cross event with its invited speakers. The Presidents of the European National Vascular Societies would be invited to attend. RMG would ask no lesser person than Dr Michael De Bakey to make a valedictory address. It transpired that the latter had been supportive and given helpful advice about the concept throughout.

The European Society for Vascular Surgery is Launched

So on the 7th and 8th of May 1987, the inaugural meeting of the European Society for Vascular Surgery took place at the Charing Cross Hospital London. The evening before Dr De Bakey gave his lecture 'Significant Vascular European Advances'. In this he commended the Presidential representatives of National Societies to support the formation of the new European Society. Professor Sven Eric Bergentz from Malmo who had been so supportive of the venture presided and the opening session was chaired by Mr Peter Dickinson President of the VSSGBI. The first paper was titled 'Who needs direct femoral artery pressures?' and was given by Peter Kitslaar from Maastricht.

At the end of the two days of scientific sessions, a business meeting was convened and the main objectives of the Society and Journal agreed. Hans Mhyre from Trondheim was the first elected President and Hero Van Urk from Rotterdam the Honorary Secretary. What a major contribution he was to make during those first critical seven years of the Society. SGD was appointed Honorary Treasurer. Peter Bell as Editor and Roger Greenhalgh as Chairman of the Editorial Board were elected to sit on the newly formed Society

Executive along with the officers mentioned above and the immediate past President and President elect. The subsequent contribution of PRFB and RMG towards establishing the scientific and financial base of the Journal and developing its relationship with Society was outstanding.

Over the ensuing months RMG was also to play the principal part in writing the draft Constitution. In this respect there were many sensitive and important aspects to consider such as the acceptability for charitable status, the qualifications for membership and its various categories and the means by which a democratic and geographically representative Council could be established. (For the first few years the council was very much a token affair mainly consisting of the Executive officers).

It was arranged that the next meeting would be in Rotterdam the September of the following year.

It was a beautiful spring day as we gathered outside the conference hall at the Charing Cross Hospital in the late afternoon. There was a corporate sense of excitement and a feeling of privilege that one had been party to a special and significant occasion. But there were no illusions; there was still much to do and potential pitfalls for the future.

The Early Days of the Society

Early and unqualified successes were needed to build on the initial progress. The meeting in Rotterdam was just that. Predictably the Dutch organised it all to perfection thus consolidating the status of the new society. The next year the meeting was in Malmo, which was again faultlessly and beautifully organised and lavishly staged. It was marred only by the extraordinary and freak accident to our Editor, Peter Bell, who was seriously injured when a car mounted the pavement and struck him while he was walking to the morning session.

Those that attended those early meetings will remember that they were relatively simple and focused compared with the current format. They consisted purely of two days of plenary sessions with best 30 papers given over 10 min all with 10 min of discussion. This worked quite well but there were times when the discussions faltered which could be difficult to handle if you were chairing the session. There was no doubt that language was a major sticking point unlike today when so many people speak such excellent English. Additionally, for the same reason, the discussions could become rather dominated by the British. At Council this dilemma was debated and in due course multiple simultaneous translation was

tried. It was very expensive and perhaps paradoxically inhibited the discussions even further. It was concluded that the Society had to persevere with just English as the international scientific language. This was the brave decision made by the non-native English speakers of Council, convenient for the British! But it proved to be correct.

Finances

So these first few years for both the Society and the Journal passed well from many points of view. But there were growing concerns about the relative lack of funds. A Secretarial infrastructure had been established in Rotterdam as a matter of some urgency to administer and process the increasing numbers of applications for membership. So where was the money to be found to finance all this? There were some profits from the early meetings but these were only modest. A joining fee amounting to £15 was to be levied from each new member. During the early part of the membership expansion this was significant. But this inevitably dwindled with time as the initial surge of new members eased off.

The major part of the annual subscription went towards paying for the Journal. Fortunately the Publishers invoiced for this at the year-end. This gave some cash flow liquidity during the year. But it was clear that finances were going to become critical during those early days unless other sources of income could be found.

To this effect Hero Van Urk negotiated with the Trade for 'Major Sponsors' who would contribute and in return would receive privileges and advertising. Their support was essential for survival. Initially most of this was invested into supporting the annual meetings in an effort to ensure their success. But there remained worries as to whether the finances could hold on until hopefully the Journal became profitable and there were improved returns from the AGM.

Charitable Status

There were other issues of an administrative nature. It was apparent that the organisation needed a base in some country where the accounts would be submitted and Tax paid when the Journal became profitable. Additionally, therefore, it was necessary to apply for Charitable status to enable tax to be recouped. The Limited Company and the Journal were already in the UK so this seemed the appropriate base.

Like most countries the charity laws and tax exemption in the UK are rather rigid and uncompromising. Any registered charity requires Trustees who have to accept accountability for activities. These responsibilities can be formidable and under exceptional circumstances even lead to personal monetary liability. Furthermore, there was a ruling at that time (since rescinded) that three fifths of the registered Trustees had to be resident within England or Wales (not even Scotland included!). This ruling, which was inviolable, led intermittently to a lot of misunderstanding in the years to come because the composition of the Trustees could not be made more representative of Europe as a whole. An already complex situation was compounded by the fact that although charitable status would apply to the Society this could not be granted to the Limited Company because of its trading activities. This same anomaly exists today.

A Financial Crisis

But this apart, how did the financial status progress? After Malmo came the meeting in Rome. The financial report to Council reflected growing concerns about the situation. As mentioned above income was limited and although the major sponsorship deal was bringing in quite large sums, this was all being directly invested into the annual meeting leaving none for the day-to-day running of the Society. The Journal though doing well was still a year or two off being net profitable. The Society was beyond doubt heading into debt. Rome again was superb but through nobody's fault the meetings had in some ways become progressively lavish and in this respect somewhat profligate. The Major Sponsors, on whose support there was so much dependence, felt this too. The Societies Executive got wind that they were dissatisfied with the way things were being run and that they were corporately considering pulling out of sponsorship. A meeting was hurriedly convened with them. It was admitted that there had been mistakes and they were advised that management of their vital input would change. Much less would go into the Annual meeting and more into running the Society. Each year there would be a meeting with them to account for the spending. It was probably the closest the whole venture came to being lost but fortunately just in time it was possible to turn things round. Within a year or two the Journal profit revenue started up and the AGM became progressively more profitable. Now the problem is more where to spend the money!

The Story Turns Full Circle

So how does this story end? The Annals of Vascular Surgery has gone on to become a highly successful and well regarded Journal thus confounding the original predictions that there would not be sufficient potential and capacity for both to prosper. It is also very important to emphasise that this record is not in any way intended to be triumphalist or self-congratulatory although inevitably it is recorded from one perspective. Nor is there any criticism to be levelled at those with whom these ventures were debated and shared. The account simply reflects the events that took place at a time when Vascular Surgery in Europe was in a state of rapid expansion. This was being led by many excellent surgeons from different countries and with differing but entirely legitimate objectives and

agendas and who conducted themselves honourably and with equal energy and vision.

For the European Society there was a continuing sadness that at the outset through circumstances beyond anybody's control, the situation had led inevitably to a degree of confrontation with friends in France, a country with such a unique and proud legacy for vascular surgery and its innovations. The second Secretary, Giorgio Biasi did so much to heal these wounds, culminating with the successful meeting of the Society in Paris in 1998 and the following year Alain Branchereau, who had been on the other side of the table in Amsterdam, became President at the meeting in Copenhagen. A *grand rapprochement* indeed and with France on board we were at last a truly European Vascular Society.

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