

Reflecting on the Institute's history

At this time of change, with the Institute proposing to leave Portland Place, it is worth reflecting on our history. I have been a British Institute of Radiology (BIR) member since 1981, when I was a trainee registrar at Hammersmith Hospital.

The BIR moved into Portland Place in 1982 and on 11 February of that year Her Majesty the Queen graciously visited us to open the house. We had moved to Portland Place from 32 Welbeck Street W1, which had been our home since 1922. Our time at Welbeck Street had been very happy and it was the centre of British radiology. As our past-President, Roger Berry, has said the Institute “was multidisciplinary at its core”. The BIR had only ever leased Welbeck Street for limited terms, and it might have appeared to lack a permanent home. The Institute had been saving to purchase the lease; however, the huge increase in property values in post-war

London had made this untenable. The Royal College of Radiologists had moved to Portland Place and so by moving next door the desire was to unite the medical and multidisciplinary.

The history of the Institute begins when the news of Röntgen’s discovery reached Britain on 6 January 1896. A meeting was held on the 18 March 1897 at the house of the Medical Defence Union to set-up a new society to study X-rays. It was decided that membership should “include all who are interested in the scientific study of the Röntgen Rays”, and this decision was to prove crucial to the ethos of the organisation. A second meeting took place on 2 April 1897 and an advertisement appeared in the *British Medical Journal* on 10 April. The first general meeting was held on the 3 June 1897 at the Medical Society of London in Chandos Street and the inaugural meeting was held on the 5 November 1897 in the old St Martin’s Town Hall with Silvanus Thompson as the first President. The X-Ray Society became the Röntgen Society and the Archives of Clinical Skiagraphy was adopted by the Society to become the Archives of the Roentgen Ray. This journal, started by Sidney Rowland in May 1896, continues today as the *British Journal of Radiology*.

For a long time, the Society met at 20 Hanover Square. In 1911, the Society moved to the Institution of Electrical Engineers’ offices and towards the end of the Great War moved again to the offices of the Royal Society of Arts. The period during and after the war was not an easy time for scientific societies and there was considerable financial stress; however, the Society kept up a full programme of Thursday evening meetings throughout the year.

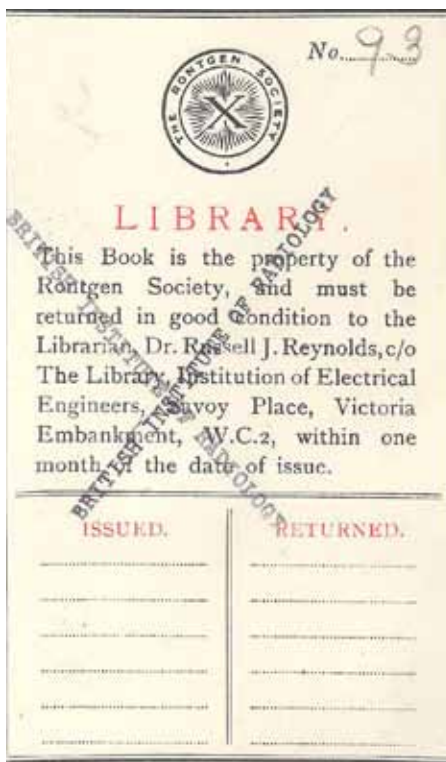
The concept of a radiological institute was first suggested in 1906 and revived again in 1917. The British Association for the Advancement of Radiology and Physiotherapy (BARP) was founded in 1917 and the Diploma in Medical Radi-



Logo of the Rontgen Society

ology and Electrotherapy (DMRE) was set-up at the University of Cambridge. The BARP formed an institute in 1924 with broad aims, including providing a meeting place for those interested in radiology, providing information of all kinds and having an international influence. Part of the reason for having a physical home was to house a reference library and a museum of radiographic films and lantern slides, and so the house in Welbeck Street was acquired. The modern Institute was created in 1927 as an amalgamation of the Röntgen Society and the British Institute of Radiology. Many had worked hard for a long time to enable this merger to come about.

From the very beginning, the three pillars of the Institute have been meetings, publications and a library. However, the nature of these pillars is now radically different from those of the last century for a variety of reasons. For the Institute to have a successful future, the nature of meetings, publications and library have to change. It may well be as an organisation we will now resemble more how we were in the early 20th century. The Institute has had many changes during its long history and we will continue to change to meet the contemporary needs of our members.



Book label No 93, from when we were based at the Institute of Electrical Engineers

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