

## How *TIBS* began – an IUB viewpoint

W. J. Whelan

Harland Wood, the General Secretary of the IUB from 1970–73, decided that the Union needed a concerted publication program. This began with *Biochemical Education* (1973) and continued with *TIBS* (1976), the *Journal of Applied Biochemistry* (1979), *Biochemistry International* (1980), and most recently, in cooperation with other ICSU Unions, *BioEssays* (1984). Wood had asked me in 1972 to begin to think about publications, beyond the already planned *Biochemical Education*, and in particular of a vehicle that would raise the visibility of the IUB in the biochemical community. With my natural inclination to become involved in publication activities (I had helped found the *European Journal of Biochemistry* and *FEBS Letters*), I was pleased with this assignment and continued it as a deliberate policy when I succeeded Wood as the IUB General Secretary in 1973. My Treasurer colleague was Bill Slater, also well experienced in the field of publications. He knew Elsevier. I knew North Holland. The two companies had merged shortly before. I discussed with him the idea of meeting Elsevier/North Holland to exchange ideas on new ventures. A meeting took place in Amsterdam in December 1973. Among the ideas that I introduced was one for a kind of *Nature*, specifically aimed at biochemists, with news, reviews and original communications. Elsevier told us of their idea for a magazine for biochemists, something after the style of a newspaper, not publishing original material, but otherwise sounding like the IUB proposal; so much so, that we agreed that together we would work on this new venture.

At first, things proceeded rather slowly. There seemed to be some opposition to the idea within the Elsevier organization, but the pace picked up when, at Elsevier, the project was taken over by Jack Franklin. One bit of history is a phone call from Franklin in 1974 concerning the name of the journal, which until then had been *Trends in Biochemistry*. Franklin pointed out that *TIBS* would be a better acronym than *TIB*, i.e.

*Trends in Biochemical Sciences*, but, he asked, did I think that inventing *TIBS* would worry the Federation of European Biochemical Societies – FEBS? I told him since it was I who had invented the name FEBS, against a certain amount of opposition, I did not see why FEBS should be bothered, and so *TIBS* was born.

The IUB and Elsevier signed the contract for *TIBS* at the FEBS meeting in Budapest in August 1974 and the process of identifying an editor-in-chief, who would then recruit an editorial board, began with my declining the suggestion from Elsevier that I should take on the job myself. I felt that it would take too much time from the amount of spare time that I could devote to IUB affairs (I was the General Secretary of the IUB). I happened also to be concerned about my health. About that time I was having problems finally diagnosed as arising from a car accident, but which on one visit to Amsterdam for *TIBS* led me to spend the night in a hospital where the physician struck terror into me by the diagnosis that I had just had my second heart attack. It later proved that I had not even had a first. Even so, my aim for the IUB was to spread the labour among as many people as possible, not try to take on everything myself.

Harland Wood was still a member of the IUB Council and he and I were members of an NIH Study Section and met each other regularly. In November 1974 we were able to recruit an editor-in-chief from the Study Section and sat back to let him organize the journal. By the following February the absence of any action was becoming alarming and the following month our appointee resigned.

With the news, a decision had to be taken on when to launch *TIBS* – on the originally planned date of January 1976 or one year later? I decided that if it was to be the former, I should, after all, become the editor-in-chief and, in a round of phone calls with the other IUB officers and Elsevier, this was arranged. The recruitment of the editorial board began. Wood signed up without hesitation as did Ralph Bradshaw, another Study Section member. The rationale for the selection of editors was a broad coverage of biochemistry with counterpart editors in

North America and Europe, plus the formidable help of Kunio Yagi in Japan and his colleague Osamu Hayaishi, the President of the IUB, in the background.

Elsevier on their part had recruited Joan Morgan, a biochemistry PhD as the 'in-house' staff editor. 'In-house' was literally so since she worked from her London home. Elsevier did not open its Cambridge offices for another three years so there was a triangular management from three countries: Whelan in the USA, Morgan in the UK, and the Netherlands headquarters.

Recruitment of the board was essentially complete by the time of the FEBS meeting in Paris in July 1975 and the first meeting was held there. Part of the planning revolved around what was called the 'zero issue', a miniature *TIBS* that would be mailed in the autumn of 1975 to potential subscribers, and containing typical articles.

A worried van Tongeren asked me to go to Amsterdam in August 1975 to review with the Elsevier staff what material was available for the first few issues. I agreed, but in taking off a week I had to risk that the NIH would accept the late submission of the renewal application of my major research grant which I was in the process of writing. (It was late, they did accept it, and it was funded.)

And so the first issue appeared. A copy now hangs on my office wall, signed by the editors and our Elsevier colleagues. It is a faded brown because of Elsevier's belief, in the beginning, that using newsprint rather than magazine-style paper would convey the intended 'newsy' image.

The countdown to January 1976 and the first 18 months thereafter were stressing. The promised first editorial did not arrive because the writer was ill. The supply of reviews was so scarce (by March 1976) that I sent the editors a telegram-style plea for help, in 1-cm high letters. The '50 Years Ago' column, which I had created, and was determined to see appear in each issue, was twice short of copy in 1976, necessitating my dropping everything and going over to the library to search the literature for 1926 for an appropriate topic to recall. My plea for help with this to Don Whitaker in Ottawa led to his proposing a procedure that still obtains, namely a one-year-at-a-time stint by a designated person who collects 12 articles.

And what of the reception of *TIBS*? It was my wont to tell biochemical societies what the IUB was doing. In mid-1975 I made such a report to one society's coun-

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cil, telling them about *TIBS*. The response of the Chairman was mild apoplexy. 'You (expletive deleted) Whelan are at it again. We don't want any more journals!' I learned the following day that after I had left, a council member assailed the Chairman in my defense. I sought out my protector and persuaded him both to become a *TIBS* editor and to be drafted to the IUB Council.

Another piece of negative feedback came from mid-Europe. A biochemist had read van Tongeren's statement on behalf of Elsevier in the first issue, which recalled the December 1973 dinner meeting where *TIBS* was conceived. My correspondent coupled his dislike at seeing a new journal with the claim that 'you [Whelan] would sell your soul for the price of a dinner'.

I value my time a little more than that. It was hard work because with such a new venture, many operational problems could not be anticipated. No-one worked harder than Joan Morgan, whose absence, in order to bear her second child, was taken in her stride early in 1977. It was a real blow early in 1978 when she resigned, departing in April. *TIBS* did not have a permanent replacement staff editor until Steve Prentis came along in August 1978.

Despite the setback with Joan, by mid-1978 we were in excellent shape for copy and I even had to ask the editors to slow down – we had a year's supply of reviews. The circulation of *TIBS* was a healthy 5000. The contents were widely quoted, and the acronym meant more to the average biochemist than did that of the IUB. It was over four years since I had become involved with *TIBS* and by now the IUB had two more new journals in the making. The time had come to find my successor.

John Tooze and I had become close colleagues as the Secretary and Chairman, respectively, of ICSU's Committee on Genetic Experimentation (COGENE). He had a proven flair for journalism and I realized that in accepting the invitation to put together the November 1978 issue of *TIBS* on recombinant DNA he had taken a liking to the journal. He assumed the editorship in January 1979.

Looking back, I have the greatest sense of satisfaction in having helped bring *TIBS* into being. Its 1985 circulation is in the mid-8000s. Right from the beginning, I had felt that we should not sit back until the 10 000 mark had been reached and that is still how I feel. A family of *TIBS*-like publications has

grown up. The easy style has been well received and has proved adaptable to change. *TIBS* arrived just as the explosion of new knowledge from genetic experimentation was beginning and has kept abreast of the wave.

It was a pleasure to renew my acquaintance with Bart van Tongeren with whom S. P. Datta and I had been involved in founding *FEBS Letters*. I made new friends at Elsevier in the persons of Otto ter Haar, Jack Franklin, Judith Taylor, Joan Morgan and Della Sar. It was a stroke of genius on the part of Elsevier to recruit A. B. Tulp as a cartoonist.

Harland Wood's original plan to give the IUB visibility through the printed word has succeeded nowhere better than with *TIBS*. His pivotal role in helping to create *TIBS* and in being willing to work for it as an editor must go on record, along with the names of the other editor colleagues who helped bring this new type of reporting into being. Mordecai Avron, Giorgio Bernardi, Ralph Bradshaw, Karel van Dam, Ray Gesteland, George Radda, Earl Stadtman and Kunio Yagi. Our thanks to them and to all the aforementioned Elsevier friends.

## Getting *TIBS* off the ground

Joan Morgan

At the FEBS meeting in Paris in July 1975 the editorial board and the publishers met to discuss the new journal that Elsevier had employed me to put together. We came away with the ingredients reasonably clear – the 'meat' of the journal would be short review articles, the remaining half news, features and book reviews. A copy deadline of 1 October was subsequently set for the first issue in January 1976.

The organization was expansive and global: the publishers represented by Jack Franklin (the director of the Biomedical Press) and his executive, Judith Taylor, in Amsterdam; the editor-in-chief, Bill Whelan, in Miami, with the Board spread over the world.

Also in the States were Earl Stadtman at NIH and Harland Wood in Cleveland, with Ralph Bradshaw in St Louis. In distant Japan, there was Kunio Yagi; at the Weizmann in Israel, Mordecai Avron; in Holland, Karel van Dam; in Paris, Giorgio Bernardi; and closest at hand to me, George Radda at Oxford.

In the background from the IUB were Bill Slater and Peter Campbell and in London I had another mentor – Walter Gratzer – recently retired as the molecular biology correspondent for *Nature*. From him came many ideas, such as the Discussion Forum and Emerging Techniques features, and contacts; his laboratory, mid-way between Covent Garden and the National Theatre, was a good spot to trap visitors. Friends at Mill Hill were generous too with their time.

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Karel van Dam had the great foresight to have working in his laboratory our first illustrator – Tulp, soon to be followed by the energetic biochemical cartoon factory of TAB (Tony Bramley), then in Pennsylvania. Keith Roberts at Norwich was a safer distance away in this splendidly international set up, and swift with a polished witty drawing.

Nicholas Wade agreed to give us a 'Letter from Washington'. The notion of a '50 Years Ago' piece was conceived and Bill Whelan began lining up the elder statesmen.

Now *TIBS* is established and, one imagines, the copy flows in; there are plenty of biochemical scribes eager to send in a crisp and sometimes opinionated résumé of their field and a luminary or two willing to gaze into the future. Then, the concept of a kind of professional magazine for working biochemists and others was a new one and contributors needed to be persuaded of its virtues. We trawled vigorously to realize our aim of presenting, in crystalline prose, all that was new and exciting in biochemistry.

The 'Review Status' sheets rolling out of Miami exposed the undelivered promises, the areas covered or yet to be aired, with the 'Chief' encouraging everyone to bring home their catch while the publishers nervously eyed the sales figures and my phone bills.

At that time Elsevier had no English office as it does now. I operated a cottage industry and worked from home. The edited copy went from me to Amster-