

The Rise and Role of Medical Journalism in Victorian Britain

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The Rise of Medical Journalism

19th Century periodical publication explosion

479 medical periodicals launched in 19th century Britain

Types of medical periodical*

- General – for whole medical profession
- Specialist – groups within medical profession (pharmacists, dentists, psychiatrists)
- Scientific – high proportion of non clinical material (microscopy, anatomy, bacteriology).
- Orthodox Health periodicals - disseminating health information to the reading public (e.g. Anti-Tobacco Journal)
- The Unorthodox Journal – homeopathy, hydropathy.

*W.F. Bynum and Janice C. Wilson, 'Periodical Knowledge: Medical Journals and their Editors in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter, Stephen Lock (eds.), *Medical Journals and Medical Knowledge: Historical Essays* (London, 1992).

The Role of Medical Journalism: Historiography

Few works

- Peter Bartrip, *Mirror of Medicine: A History of the British Medical Journal* (Oxford, 1990).
- W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter, Stephen Lock (eds.), *Medical Journals and Medical Knowledge: Historical Essays* (London, 1992).

Periodicals approached as passive sources

- D.J. Weatherall: Periodicals hold the “**potential** to be a viable historical document”, if they have “an independent voice”.
Mirror of Medicine, p. v.
- Michael Shepherd: “*the content as well as the titles of psychiatric journals may be viewed as **markers of developments** in theory and opinion as well as **providers of factual information** and I shall treat them as such*”. ‘Psychiatric Journals and the Evolution of Psychological Medicine’, in *Medical Journals and Medical Knowledge*.

The Role of Medical Journalism: Historiography

Jean and Irvine Loudon:

- medical journals “are almost the only source on **what really happened** in the period of medical reform”, with the *Transactions of the Associated Apothecaries* providing “the only comprehensive account of events preceding and immediately following the Apothecaries Act of 1815”

Historiography surrounding Science Journalism in the 19th Century

- Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (2007)
- W.H. Brock, *William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science* (2008).

Medical Journalism: an Active Presence

Questions

In what ways was medical journalism an active social force in Victorian Britain?

For what purposes – and with what effects – were medical periodicals published by editors and journalists?

For what purposes – and with what effects - were periodicals read by members of the medical profession and lay readers?

Areas:

- Campaigning: for/against the interests of the medical profession
- Medical education
- Shaping medical knowledge
- Advocating the medical fringe and the unorthodox
- Popularising medical knowledge for lay readerships
- Altering relationships between physicians and patients (readers).

Importance

- Expand upon the current historiography surrounding the medical press; build upon the view that periodicals are markers of change; place historiography on par with that surrounding scientific journalism
- Explore how periodical literature could be harnessed as an active social force in the Victorian era – by both journalists and readers
- Reflection upon how the impact of the internet as a new communications medium.