

## A tribute to Jack Franklin (1944-2022)

*“Jack’s contribution to STM publishing was immense, and his thoughtfulness and acumen are sorely missed.” Jeff Hillier (2023)*

Jack Franklin joined Elsevier in 1973, moving to the Netherlands with his wife Hilary, whom he had met at university. He had been part of the first intake of students at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in 1963 and went on to do his PhD there. After UEA he became Senior Lecturer in Medical Laboratory Sciences at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology before moving to Holland.[1]

The Elsevier that Jack joined was in a state of flux. He was initially recruited as a scientific acquisitions editor for biology and biochemistry for the newly formed Elsevier-North-Holland Biomedical Press (BMP) created by merging the biomedical book and journal activities of Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company and North-Holland Publishing Company[2] to which were later added the *Excerpta Medica International Congress Series* and several reference books and journals in development at Excerpta Medica. The portfolio included the flagship journals *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* (BBA), *Brain Research*, and *The European Journal of Pharmacology*. and the North-Holland monograph book series *Frontiers of Biology*. It also included the journal *Computer Programs [and Methods] in Biomedicine*, launched in 1970, which has grown ten-fold from 20 articles per year into a world-renowned outlet for biomedical informatics research[3]. Jack was quickly promoted to Chief Scientific Editor overseeing a team of scientific acquisition editors that he largely recruited himself, filling the void created by the departure of the biomedical editors from the original Elsevier and North-Holland departments. He became Managing Director in 1977.

Most of the new recruits were young PhD scientists with little or no publishing experience. Patrick Jackson joined the BMP in 1974 as its first and at that time only scientific editor; he recalls how Jack provided the necessary stimulus, dynamism and drive to activate a small and somewhat moribund publishing division into a stimulating and successful environment. Patrick writes: “Jack could be impatient for change, which some perceived as aggression or arrogance, but he had a great knack for establishing excellent relations with many of the company’s external editors and advisors, which would always counter any naysayers from within. I was not used to the cut and thrust of a commercial organization nor to the petty jealousies and office politics of a large company. Jack had a similar background as a university lecturer and well understood those challenges. In the beginning he acted as a mentor and protective shield against these incursions, which enabled me to survive and even thrive in the competitive world of science publishing.”

### Keeping up with Trends

Jack soon earned the respect of the company’s existing scientific contacts and established new connections. As BBA Editor-in-Chief and Treasurer of the International Union of Biochemistry (IUB) E.C. “Bill” Slater wrote in his history of BBA: “At the meeting on 20 February 1975 a new face was seen and a new face was heard – Dr Jack Franklin, who became a worthy successor to Dr [Jacques] Remarque.”[4]

Within the new organization the clash of cultures provided surprisingly fertile ground for new and interesting ideas. During Jack’s first months at Elsevier, a file landed on his desk containing a description of exploratory discussions with the IUB about establishing a news and reviews journal. This chimed with an idea within Elsevier about starting a science newspaper. Although the management was at first cautious, the idea caught on and evolved into the magazine *Trends in*

*Biochemical Sciences*, or “TIBS,” as it came to be known, a “journal with the look and feel of a newspaper” containing mini-reviews, news, opinion articles and even cartoons, printed on newsprint in the format of the British “opinion weekly” magazines of that time.

Jack put the TIBS team together along with his administrative assistant Judith Taylor, who had a background in business-to-business magazines, and who went on to become its Business Manager. Backed by the BMP’s joint Managing Directors Bart van Tongeren and Otto Ter Haar the TIBS team persuaded the production, sales and marketing departments to support the concept and come up with novel ways to speed up production (the magazine was printed on rotary presses to start with) and enable individuals around the world from Europe to North and South America to Japan to buy personal subscriptions in their own currency. Elsevier hired a Staff Editor, Joan Morgan, a journalist with a biochemistry PhD, to edit the news and opinion section. Della Sar and Eileen Leahy provided the marketing expertise. The rest is history. Despite some hiccups as the launch date drew closer, the first issue appeared in January 1976 and over 30,000 sample copies were sent around the world [5]. The circulation climbed over the next few years to peak at around 8,000 copies.

“That TIBS has succeeded, is because of the excellent team work between Elsevier publishing staff, led by Jack Franklin, and the IUB(MB) ... that laid the grounds for success, which, once it became evident, has continued to attract biochemists and molecular biologists of the highest caliber,” wrote founding Editor-in-Chief and IUB(MB) Secretary Bill Whelan 25 years later[6].

TIBS was quickly followed in 1978 by *Trends in Neuroscience* (TINS) developed by Patrick Jackson, and in 1979 by *Trends in Pharmacological Science* (TIPS) developed by Jeff Hillier who had joined the BMP acquisition team in October 1975. After several years the Trends magazines moved to a dedicated office in Cambridge, UK, headed up by Alexander (Sandy) Grimwade, former head of the BBA Secretariat.

As Jack and Sandy wrote 30 years later, “The creation of TIBS was such a remarkable project (we are sure that the modern-day successor of the Elsevier-North-Holland Biomedical Press would never entertain the idea of such a publication) that much of the history is burnt into the memories of those who made it happen. It is remarkable to realize now that TIBS was not only the first publication designed exclusively for professional biochemists, but was also the first of a whole new genre of publications – the ‘mini-review’ journal.”[7]

Sandy wrote that five years after the launch of TIBS, he found an old memo detailing the projected budget and income strategy for TIBS. “Not one of the detailed forecasts, such as printing expenditure, editorial expenditure and income from personal subscriptions, followed expectations but, overall, the project did adhere to the total forecast and TIBS had not only been born, it was alive and well.”[8]

Della Sar, who joined in 1975 and later went on to become Sales and Marketing Director at Nature, writes: “The story of *Trends in Biochemical Sciences* is now history, but its launch was one of the most exciting times in my career. When we launched the Review journals at Nature in 2000, I told them that if it were not for one Jack Franklin and his dogged determination to make TIBS work, the *Nature Reviews* would probably not exist.”

Decades after the launch of TIBS the Trends “magazines” were reborn as journals when they were put online and the personal subscriptions were abandoned along with the news and views sections.

The Trends portfolio consists now of more than 20 titles, 16 of which are now part of the Cell Press family.

The Trends magazines were not the only innovative format championed by Jack. He initiated a new family of “Letters” journals in several disciplines, following the earlier success of *FEBS Letters*, a short communications journal published on behalf of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS). Jack asked Patrick Jackson to develop and lead the launch of *Neuroscience Letters*, which first appeared in 1975 and became a leading voice for short communications in this field under the Editorship of Professor Manfred Zimmerman from Heidelberg. It was followed several years later by *Immunology Letters* on behalf of the European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) and *FEMS Microbiology Letters* on behalf of the Federation of European Microbiology Societies (FEMS). The idea of publishing short articles to communicate breakthrough findings rapidly became established, and major journals such as the *European Journal of Pharmacology* also started rapid communications sections. A quick perusal of Elsevier’s ScienceDirect platform today shows more than 40 “Letters” journals in the life sciences and other disciplines that were developed over the years.

Hoping to build on the company’s reputation as a publisher of books about scientific methods and techniques such as the already successful North-Holland *Practical Methods in Electron Microscopy* (ed. Glauert) and *Techniques in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*, Jack also investigated setting up a broader based project for publishing methods and protocols in the life sciences in a looseleaf format that could be kept in a ring binder and easily updated. Reviewers were skeptical about the format and the challenge of keeping the content together, and the idea was quietly dropped. However, a range of methods journals made their appearance such as *Journal of Immunological Methods* and *Journal of Virological Methods*.

In the 1970s Jack built a cutting edge team by recruiting a highly trained and scientifically qualified group of editors who were able to identify business and publishing opportunities ahead of competitors. Following the appointments of Patrick Jackson and Jeff Hillier, others included Hans van Hummel in 1975; John Jarvis and Gillian Ritchie who joined as scientific editors in 1977; and Graham Lees, Louis Ter Meer, Norman Paskin, and Sue Marsden. Some stayed and developed their careers at Elsevier, including Patrick Jackson who went on to become Chemistry Director and then Senior Vice President. Others moved on while staying in publishing such as John Jarvis, who rose to Managing Director and Senior Vice President at John Wiley & Son UK. Jeff Hillier succeeded Jack as Managing Director of the BMP, later moving to the USA where he founded TheScientificWorld, Simumetrix and Invisible Arts (the last two of which he is Chairman).

Jack also worked closely with Peter Brown, the London-based UK editorial representative for Elsevier-North-Holland. Peter established several biomedical journals in the fields of cancer, toxicology and nutrition [8]. They shared an enthusiasm for the emerging field of genomics. With Jack’s support Peter brought in a journal that was clearly before its time, the *Journal of Molecular Medicine*. Even the Chief Editor confessed he did not really understand what the title meant. Launched in 1975, by 1980 it was chronically behind schedule and was quietly closed down, although the title captured the imagination and it was later cloned by Springer, Academic Press and others as the field evolved.

Jack became Managing Director of the BMP in July 1977 after just four years, gradually – if slightly reluctantly - moving towards the more mundane aspects of management. In 1978 he encouraged Elsevier to acquire the Lancaster-based IRCS (International Research Communications System), which had been established by Mike Buckingham to publish short scientific papers of 700 words or less in under one month. Jack joined the board along with Otto Ter Haar (Chairman) and Leo Mulder.[1]. Unfortunately, the concept struggled to find a footing. Jack acknowledged that scientists thought there were already too many journals; he believed that short communications and synopses and mini-reviews were the way to address this and even advocated that the primary biochemistry journals should reduce the length of their papers by one page each. BBA for example might save 2000 pages a year. But as far as the IRCS experiment went, he admitted frustration. He wrote in 1979: “The problem seems to be convincing authors that a 700-word article will be accepted as meaningful. The proportionality between length in printed pages and scientific weight still seems to be believed by authors. Despite this problem, shorter papers may still provide the immediate answer.”[9]

During his time as MD at Elsevier, Jack was committed to expanding the journal program into new areas of research but being conservative about adding to the flood of new journals, he aimed to back intuition with sound research and judgment. Jean Levy recalls that in 1980 he asked her to review all journals publishing articles in immunology and to identify any emergent subdisciplines. The *Journal of Reproductive Immunology* was the result, still owned by Elsevier and now publishing its 159th volume.

Louis Ter Meer recalls: “The 1980s were a time of expansion and sometimes fierce competition among publishers, although not yet with scientific societies. In the many discussions headed by Jack we started to realize that things would need to change drastically although there was no clear strategy. We could not have foreseen then that the internet would be the medium through which a lot of his initial ideas would materialize. His open-mindedness, at least for me, acted as a guide in the years to come, and he must have been happy to see so much of these ideas take form in the digital era.”

### **The ASFRA years**

In the 1980s Jack left Elsevier to set up his own publishing and consulting company known as ASFRA. Biomedical journals were proliferating in the eighties and library budgets were not keeping pace, so Jack saw a system for reviewing both established and new titles as essential. Jean Levy worked with Jack on *SCIENCE SERIALS REVIEW: BIOMEDICINE* which was launched by ASFRA in 1985 and ran until the end of 1992. During that time they received and reviewed an astounding number of journals “with Jack’s wide understanding of the field being obvious in many of the Expert Evaluations,” notes Jean.

Jack continued his career as consultant to, among others, the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) and TheScientificWorld. In this latter role Jack used his extensive list of contacts to help build the first purely digital scientific journal with support from the National Library of Medicine (USA), British and French libraries. He also consulted for other scientific, technical, and medical (STM) publishers, including Wiley and IOS Press. John Jarvis recollects: “It was during this period that I appreciated more clearly Jack’s ability to identify trends before they were obvious and his unique understanding of bioinformatics, and to create new ideas for journals which by then were increasingly being sought after in digital formats.”

Ina Steenman worked with Jack at ASFRA from January 1990 until mid-1995, along with the ASFRA office manager Doreen Trampe, mainly as a typesetter for publications in the field of bioinformatics and affiliated topics and for a number of consultancy reports written by Jack and others. She remembers: “Working for Jack left a lasting impression on me. He brought his wealth of experience

and knowledge to various organizations in the biomedical and publishing sectors. One aspect that I greatly admired was his commitment to staying at the forefront of informatics trends. He encouraged continuous learning, and his ideas remained competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing world.”

Among the publications Ina remembers were a short orientation paper on “The Pharmaceutical Industry and Europe’s Information Society,” (1994); an overview of European Molecular Biology Network services and projects; *Action Front Newsletter* (Telematics for Healthcare Professionals); early issues of the journal *Disease Markers*; and EBIS - *European Biotechnology Information Service* (published by ASFRA on behalf of the European Communities).

She remembers Jack traveling all over Europe to attend meetings and symposia with other professionals in the field and with the relevant professionals within the European Union. “He trusted me and helped me wherever he could and I still benefit from what I learned from him, not only the digital skills, but also his persistence in reaching goals!”

Some of Jack’s reports survive in peer-reviewed journals, and his reports on peer review[10] and open access show a careful regard for balancing the interests of authors, publishers, and libraries. Although he saw open access as the way forward, he also recognized that someone would have to pay. “Like it or not, there are few things in our modern world that do not have a price tag. And there is always someone paying – even for a free product. Ironically, many things can be free while they are unsuccessful, and small and therefore cheap, but quite often successful free services grow to the point that they cost too much to be free! Therefore there is every chance that a totally successful OA-based scientific information service would eventually have to be charged for.”[11]

### **Biotechnology and bioinformatics**

By 1988 Jack had forged his way into the Commission of the European Communities, where his ability to see new avenues for communication in biomedicine led to his role as advisor to several EC departments, the opportunity to make new contacts, and the beginning of a long period of writing commissioned reports and reviews for the EC and others.

By this time ASFRA had repositioned itself as a bioinformatics consulting firm and Jack was increasingly recognized as an expert in bioinformatics at a European level. One of the earliest results was a study in 1988 entitled “The Role of Information Technology and Services in the Future Competitiveness of Europe’s Bioindustries,” (under a contract from the EC). This was followed by “Proceedings of Strategies in Bioinformatics: a European Perspective,” (a meeting held in Nijmegen in 1994 where Jack chaired several sessions, and a report, “Strategy for a European biotechnology information infrastructure” by a project team consisting of Jack together with representatives of AKZO, Elsevier, and the Confederation of European Chemical Industries (CEFIC) Biotechnology Working Party.

In 1992 ASFRA began publishing the *CEBC (China-EC Biotechnology Centre) Newsletter*, a quarterly report of research interaction between China and the EC Commission edited by Jean Levy. She and Jack worked together on this newsletter into 2000, swathe same year that the first international draft of the DNA sequence of the human genome and the establishment of China’s first human genome databank. One of ASFRA’s reports was a major Europe-wide project on bioinformation use and needs for the European Chemical Industry Federation (CEFIC) and a consortium of publishers in 2000.[12] According to an article in *Nature Biotechnology* the project’s primary aim was to develop a business plan to aid the European Community’s efforts at funding biotechnology information; it also aimed to provide market information for the participating organizations and to alert European companies to the dangers of a data drought.[13]

Jean Levy explains: “Jack had a singular understanding of the scope of biomedicine and the information and communication needs of both researchers and practitioners, and this understanding

is at the heart of the advice and benefits he brought to the field of bioinformatics.” This contribution was acknowledged when he was awarded a Visiting Professorship at Edinburgh University.

“Jack’s contribution to STM publishing was immense, and his thoughtfulness and acumen are sorely missed,” says Jeff Hillier.

John Jarvis writes: “Annoying and charming in equal measure, Jack was fascinating to work with and had an almost innate understanding of information and its communication. Although personal computers were quite prevalent by then, Jack was at his happiest and most productive with his large A4 pad and various pens. The ideas generated by his elaborate flowcharts were gems and many became new journals, newsletters and the precursors of today’s ubiquitous blogs. Many others in our industry have told me what an important contribution he made to their understanding of bioinformatics and more widely.”

### **Personal history**

Jack Franklin was born in Woking, Surrey in the UK on 27 December 1944 to Arthur and Gwendolyn Franklin. He had one sister, Gillian, and a brother Peter who died in 1953. The family moved to Aden, now the capital of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, when Jack was a child. From the age of 10 he went to Eltham College boarding school in South-East London. His parents stayed in Aden and after a few years moved to Ghana. Jack traveled there for the summer holidays and spent the shorter holidays in London with his grandmother Manga, as he called her, and with his aunt and uncle and guardians Ernie and Marjorie. Jack married Hilary (Gibson) in January 1969. Soon after moving to Holland they bought Bult 2 in Edam, a former cheese warehouse, and moved in after extensive renovations. They had two daughters, Emily Fleur and Laura Camilla. Jack had played guitar in a band called the Kimberidge Clay in England and continued to play guitar after moving to Holland, enjoying both hard and soft rock and folk music. He had eclectic tastes and in later years he added a dulcimer and a lute to his collection. He enjoyed sailing and teaching his colleagues to sail, encouraging some of them to take up sailing themselves. He continued to be a close friend and mentor to many of those he worked with during his early days at Elsevier. Jack died on 7 September 2022. He is greatly missed.

### **Acknowledgments**

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