

Introduction

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When the editorial board of the *British Journal for the History of Science* was considering ways to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the British Society for the History of Science, it was quickly decided that the occasion presented an ideal opportunity for publishing a collection of student essays. For few areas have changed so much over the last fifty years as the actual teaching of the history of science. When the Society began in 1947, the subject was offered in only three universities: Oxford, Cambridge and London. Now, in 1997, it is available in more than twenty-two institutions across the country and in many more worldwide. University teaching has become an essential part of our professional activities – essential and greatly valued. And the work of students today is of a calibre hardly anticipated fifty years ago. By publishing a selection of student papers during this Anniversary year, we aim to celebrate the strengths of our subject at the institutional level.

The essays printed here have all been written during the last two years, give or take a month or two, and derive variously from M.Sc. or M.Phil. dissertations, final-year undergraduate theses, or the very early stages of Ph.D. studies, and are by individuals based in several departments in Britain and Australia. Many excellent essays were submitted and the final choice has been made simply with a view to variety and range of subject matter. A second volume could just as easily have been compiled. Limitations on space have meant that the authors were obliged to curtail their arguments rather drastically; and they have submitted gracefully to strong editorial pressure at various points. In an exceptional move, it was further decided that we would omit book reviews in this special issue in order to allow a handful more papers to be published. As editor, I apologize to those authors and reviewers left waiting in the wings. This departure from tradition is unfortunate, although not without precedent. We return to normal in the next issue.

In the main, the intention has been to highlight bright ideas and novel approaches: much of the heart of our subject lies in the lively criticism and comment that fresh eyes can bring to established topics, and although readers will no doubt discern the various emphases of different departments, we felt that every essay chosen had a notably individual voice. The editorial board has found it particularly pleasing to provide a showcase for student endeavour.