

Friends of Millbank

January 2022 Newsletter

Celebrating the heritage, achievements and relevance of military medicine



Medicine and Surgery in Nelson's Navy (our forthcoming talk by Peter Brinsden, 28 January)

Dear Friend of Millbank

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a very Happy and Healthy New Year, and to thank all our speakers for this last year. 2021 has just come to an end, and 2022 has dawned; it has a pleasant ring to it. I hope that you have been well and will continue so this coming year, despite the omnipresent coronavirus pandemic, and the new Omicron variant. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you sincerely for your whole-hearted support throughout my second year as your Chairman, a time that has coincided exactly with this pandemic. January, named after the Roman god Janus, is a good time to reflect on the past and look to the future.

Looking forward - our Programme of Talks for 2022

The silver lining to the pandemic cloud. Our monthly Zoom talks, which commenced in October 2020, have proven extremely popular, enabling us to reach out to members in all four nations of the UK, as well as to a growing global audience. We shall therefore continue with virtual talks in future. We also aim to return to holding some talks at Millbank, and (an exciting new venture) to stream these online through Zoom for those who cannot attend in person. All being well, our first Millbank talk will be on Friday 8 April. Our Programme of Talks for 2022 is available on our website.

Our first (virtual) talk for 2022: '*Medicine and Surgery in Nelson's Navy*'

Our guest speaker on Friday 28 January is a fellow Friend of Millbank, namely Surgeon Commander Peter Brinsden RN (retd), one of our select band of Royal Navy members interested in military medical history (more are always welcome). He has volunteered to enlighten us on '*Medicine and Surgery in Nelson's Navy*'. This is a fitting subject with which to begin a year that commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War, success in which was so dependent on the Royal Navy's

ability to project power over many thousands of miles, alongside the Army, RAF, and Merchant Navy (and supported throughout by the Defence Medical Services). It may well be called upon likewise in future in this unstable world.

This Zoom talk, which starts at 1830hrs, is open to all: register via our website. It will be preceded by our Annual General Meeting at 1730hrs, for subscribing Friends of Millbank only (see below), so please ensure you have renewed your membership or enrolled by then, see Resources or Join Us on our website. The Zoom registration link on our website covers both the AGM and the talk. If you are only attending the talk, please log on from 1820hrs onwards.

Annual General Meeting, 28 January 2022

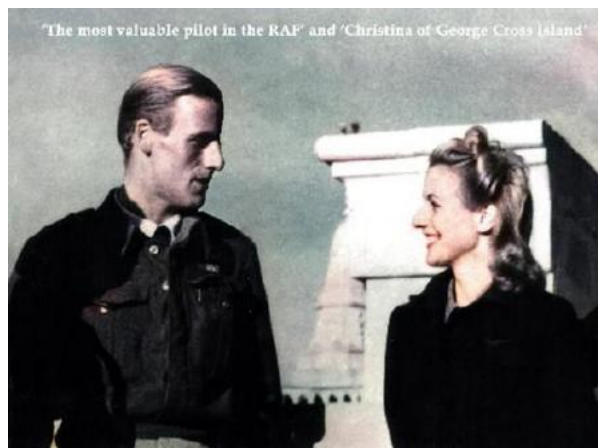
This year's AGM will be held online from 1730 – 1815hrs, followed by a short break before Peter Brinsden's talk at 1830hrs (in the same Zoom meeting on 28 January). Subscribing Friends of Millbank are encouraged to attend both events. Log in for the AGM from 1715hrs onwards. The Reports from last year's AGM (January 2021) are available for perusal in the Members Area of our website. The 2022 Agenda, and treasurer's and chairman's reports, will similarly be uploaded to the Members Area in advance of the AGM. Please send me any comments and items for 'Any Other Business', addressed to chairman@friendsofmillbank.org, by 21 January.

Anniversary talks in 2022

This is a year for anniversaries, starting with my wife Trisha and I celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary on 2 January! It's a special year.

Our Millbank talk on 13 May. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta, on 15 April 1942, at the height of Malta's epic two and a half years siege by the Axis powers. Hence the topic of our talk on 13 May, *'Two heroes of Malta's War'*, delivered in person at Millbank by Group Captain (retd) Paul McDonald RAF, author of *'Malta's Greater Siege & Adrian Warburton DSO* DFC** DFC (USA)'* and *'Ladies of Lascaris'*. For members' discounts, see: <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/discounts/>

The Island was only kept free, and saved from starvation, by the gallant efforts of the Royal and Merchant Navies, ably assisted by the Army and RAF. You can read more of this siege in the Malta section of our Members Area. Lest we forget...



Two heroes of Malta's War

Our Millbank talks on 1 July. We shall be commemorating the Falklands War through two talks (a double billing) on Friday 1 July, by veterans John Burgess and David Jackson, both Friends of Millbank, speaking on ***'The Falklands War 40th Anniversary - Personal reflections from Role 1 and Role 2'***. John Burgess was Regimental Medical Officer with 3 PARA, involved in the assault on Mount Longdon on 11-12 June 1982, while David Jackson commanded one of the two Field Surgical Teams ashore. Both have previously published their accounts in the Journal of the RAMC; John has also recorded an Oral History (soon to be uploaded to our Members Area), and David's personal account *'They shall grow not old'* is in our website's Glimpses of War section (see Resources).



3 PARA Regimental Aid Post, Falkland Islands (courtesy of John Burgess)

A preview of some of our other talks in 2022



25 February (Zoom): Recognition for nurses - A history of the Royal Red Cross award
Speaker: Simon Davies, with guest speakers from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada



25 March (Zoom): Our second Haywood Memorial Lecture:

Sir James McGrigor (1771-1858) Father of the British Army Medical Services

Speaker: Tom Scotland, author of 'Sir James McGrigor - The Adventurous Life of Wellington's Chief Medical Officer' and other military surgical history publications

Image courtesy of Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society



8 April (Our first talk back at Millbank):

From one pandemic to another - Spanish Flu in World War One, and COVID-19

Speaker: Jane Orr

Image courtesy of Jeanette Nathan

Combined BSHM – FOM Meeting, 30 September 2022

I am delighted to announce that we have been invited by the British Society for the History of Medicine to hold a combined meeting with them on 30 September.

Emily Mayhew, military medical historian and well known to many of us, will be delivering the BSHM's prestigious biennial Poynter Lecture.¹

Lt Gen (ret'd) Professor Martin Bricknell, Emeritus Surgeon General, will be speaking on behalf of Friends of Millbank, on 'Military Medical Dilemmas – ethics in decision making'

Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) Alastair Reid RAF, Emeritus Surgeon General, has kindly accepted to open the meeting.

The venue will be the RAF Club, courtesy of Group Captain (ret'd) Godwin Scerri RAF, sponsoring member and fellow Friend of Millbank. Further details will be circulated closer to the date.

For your information, Friends of Millbank has been affiliated with the British Society for the History of Medicine for the last two years. Subscribing Friends of Millbank are entitled to free membership of the BSHM, simply enrol [HERE](#) or via the BSHM link on our website to fully benefit from this.

Membership renewal for 2022

Our annual subscription of £20 covers 1 January to 31 December, so is due renewal now (see [Resources / Renew Membership](#) on our website). This entitles members to free attendance at all our talks (otherwise £5 donation per talk), and to access recordings of previous Zoom talks (through our Members Area), amongst other benefits. All Life Members and those Members who pay by Standing Order should already have received the new access codes for our Members Area for this year.

Looking back over 2020 - 2021: two momentous years

It's certainly been an unforgettable couple of years, largely thanks to a certain coronavirus, which is why I have invited Jane Orr to deliver her talk to us on 8 April, hopefully our first back at Millbank (pandemic permitting!), comparing the last pandemic (Spanish Flu) with COVID-19. Certainly topical.

It was exactly two years ago yesterday (on 31 December 2019) that China informed the World Health Organisation (WHO) of an outbreak of pneumonia of unknown aetiology in Wuhan. The rest is history still in the making. I recorded the early timeline to the first UK lockdown, on our COVID-19 section ([Resources / COVID-19](#), or <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/covid/>), as a salutary reminder of how quickly a pandemic can develop. What a lot has happened since and is still happening.

It was just five weeks ago (26 November 2021) that the WHO classified a new variant, B.1.1.529, as a Variant of Concern and named it Omicron. It was one day later (27 November) that the first two cases of this highly infective Omicron variant were detected in the UK.² Now COVID-19 cases are skyrocketing with almost 190,000 new UK cases recorded on 31 December,³ over 90% of them due

¹ [Poynter Lecture - British Society for the History of Medicine \(bshm.org.uk\)](http://bshm.org.uk)

² [First UK cases of Omicron variant identified - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

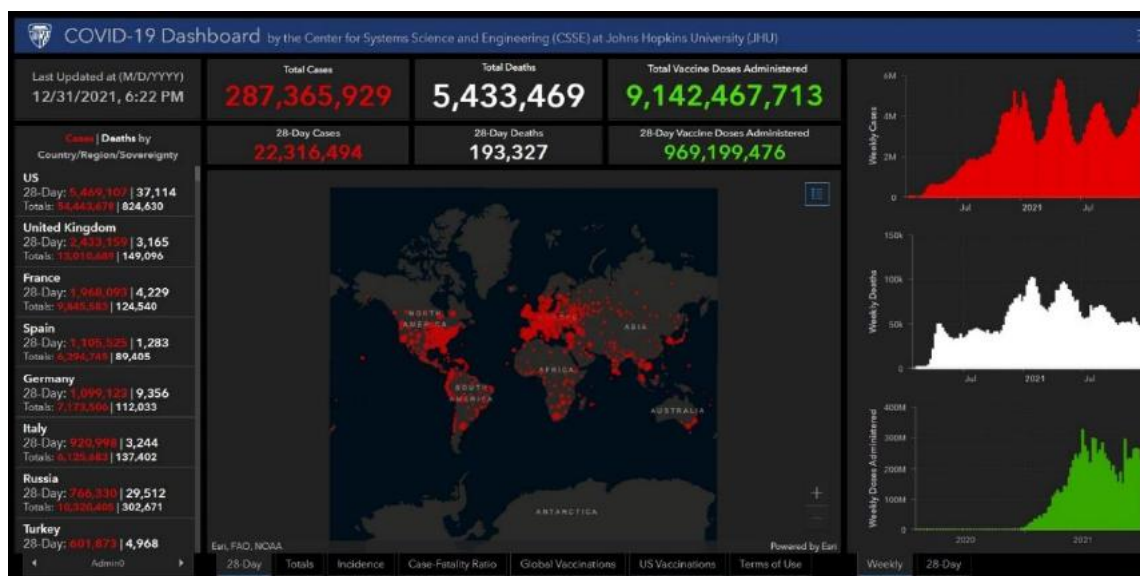
³ [UK Summary | Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](http://data.gov.uk)

to Omicron; the NHS is potentially at risk of being overwhelmed this month despite a massive booster campaign, and emergency field hospitals are being mobilised (again).

A previous newsletter of mine marked a milestone of 50 million COVID-19 cases and 1.25 million COVID-related deaths globally in the year since the first cases in Wuhan.⁴ Yesterday, 31 December 2021, two years into the pandemic, the recorded figures stood at 287 million cases and 5.4 million deaths globally. Many more will have gone unrecorded.

It was only one month ago (1 December 2021) that the first Omicron case was detected in the USA.⁵ The USA reached a landmark 500,000 COVID-19 cases in a day (mainly Omicron) this last week, and a total of 824,000 deaths by the end of 2021. The UK has now recorded over 13 million cases and 149,000 deaths since the pandemic began, though fortunately daily hospitalisations, and deaths (203 deaths recorded on 31 December 2021),⁶ are nowhere near those a year ago at the height of the second wave (964 deaths on 31 December 2020). This is thanks to the success of the UK's booster programme and apparently lesser severity of the Omicron variant. Most hospitalisations and deaths occur among the unvaccinated, a lesson to be heeded. Cases continue escalating worldwide – by a million a day on average over the last week of 2021 (7.3 million new cases in seven days).

A year ago, we sincerely hoped that the pandemic would be brought under control in 2021. Now we are learning to live with the virus as it evolves and becomes endemic: this is certainly not a time for complacency or to disregard proven 'Hands, Face, Space, and Air' precautions, as Omicron has reminded us sharply. New vaccines and booster programmes are certainly making an immense and very encouraging difference, albeit unequally around the world, and surely signpost the way out of this pandemic. I am sure I speak for all of us in thanking the scientists, health professionals and volunteers (including many in the DMS) who are enabling this and caring for those directly affected.

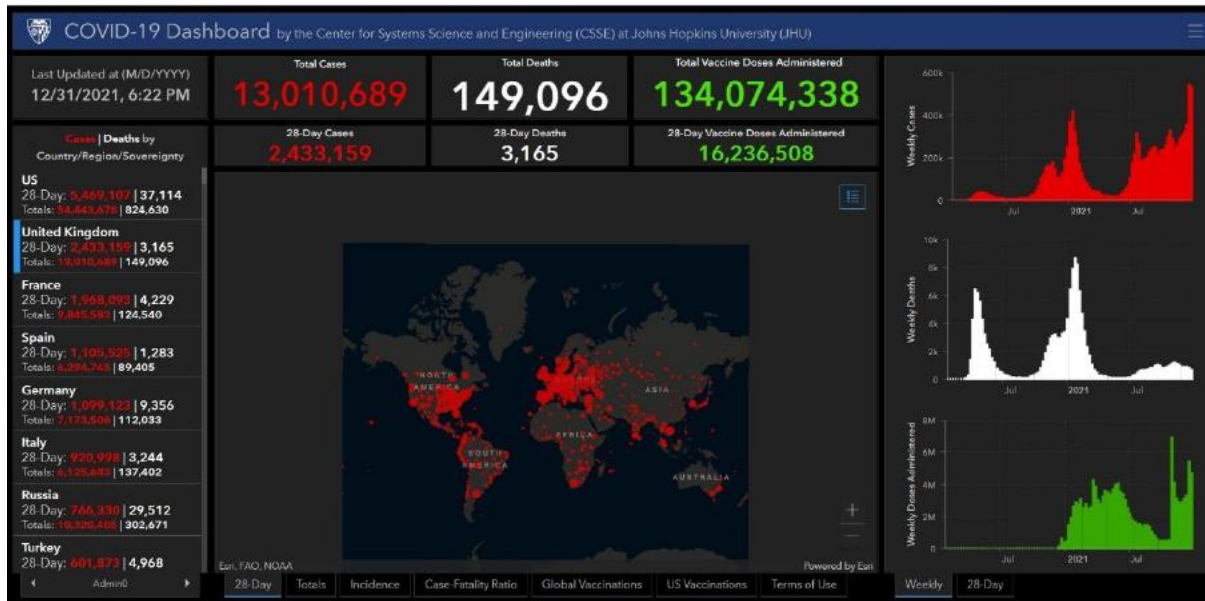


Screenshots 31 December 2021 from Johns Hopkins University dashboard (world above; UK below)
<https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/covid-19>

⁴ Chairman's Newsletter, 9 November 2020 [News_Nov_2020.pdf \(friendsofmillbank.org\)](#)

⁵ [First Confirmed Case of Omicron Variant Detected in the United States | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC](#)

⁶ [UK Summary | Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](#)



The way forward



Celebrating our website – and a vote of thanks

On a positive note, perhaps the most important thing that has happened to Friends of Millbank this last year has been the fortuitous appointment of our new volunteer webmaster, Lt Col Alex Saunders QARANC, a serving Reservist, in January 2021. Our previous webmaster had served us ably for the previous ten years, but her costs were becoming prohibitive. While I remain responsible for selecting content for our website, Alex has completely overhauled its design and layout, adding many extra pages and refinements, promptly and regularly updating them, and taking the website to new heights of excellence; you have seen the improvements for yourself. We owe a debt of gratitude to Alex, who has proven a real asset to Friends of Millbank, as well as a stalwart friend.

We shall continue enhancing the website, for your benefit and for the benefit of all those interested in celebrating the heritage, achievements, and ongoing relevance of military medicine. Watch this space www.friendsofmillbank.org ...

Invitations by other Societies

A key benefit of membership of Friends of Millbank is our interaction with different societies. The programmes for Talks by other Societies such as The Osler Club of London, to name but one, are advertised in our Members Area. We have also received some special invitations, see below:

British Society for the History of Medicine (BSHM) – Combined meeting

The invitation for our combined meeting on 30 September is outlined above.

George Cross Island Association (GCIA) – Visit to Malta

The GCIA is organising a visit to Malta between 14 – 28 April and their chairman has very kindly invited us to join them for all or part of this visit, their annual reunion in Malta. The visit starts with the annual Siege Bell ceremony which this year marks the 80th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta (15 April 1942). It ends with commemorations marking ANZAC Day and the loss of HMS *Urge* on 27 April 1942. HMS *Urge*, of the 10th Submarine Flotilla, struck a mine on leaving harbour, and her wreck has recently been discovered. I have attended GCIA annual reunions before and they are very well organised, including participation by the Armed Forces of Malta and local associations. Friends of Millbank are also welcome to join the GCIA directly, through being interested in the history of Malta in WW2, see their website [George Cross Island Association](http://www.georgecrossisland.org).

I shall be attending this reunion myself. Rather than organise a separate visit for Friends of Millbank, I have provisionally engaged an excellent local guide to accompany me and any involved Friends of Millbank on separate visits to sites relevant to military medical history, fitting into gaps in the GCIA programme. Anyone interested should email me directly, chairman@friendsofmillbank.org, as well as contacting the GCIA National Secretary, Pat Scott, info@georgecrossisland.org.uk, for more information. Further details will be provided through the Malta section on our Members Area.

British Modern Military History Society (BMMHS) – Glimpses of War (Falklands edition)

Having already published two volumes of ‘Glimpses of War’ in aid of the charity Blind Veterans UK, the BMMHS (www.bmmhs.org) is now compiling a third book in aid of this charity, to be published in May, of memories and stories of those who served in the Falklands.

The stories can be of any role, any of the services, civilians, Falkland Islanders, those based in UK or the families of those who served, and even from the Argentinian perspective. If you have a story to tell, whether a short anecdote or a longer piece (and please pass this message onto your friends, family and contacts), now is your chance: get in touch as soon as possible with the BMMHS chairman, Andy Cockeram, on andy.cockeram@bmmhs.org

Andy Cockeram has willingly agreed to my suggestion that any contributions by Friends of Millbank to this Falklands edition can also be published directly, subject to author’s permission, on the

Glimpses of War section on our website, see [gow \(friendsofmillbank.org\)](http://gow.friendsofmillbank.org). Please contact me directly if you wish to have your contribution uploaded to our website.

Crimean War Research Society – a Zoom talk on 10 January

Dr Mike Hinton, medical historian and a Friend of Millbank, will be delivering a free Zoom talk to the Crimean War Research Society on 10 January. He has kindly invited Friends of Millbank to attend his talk. To register, please email the chairman, Ian Binnie, on warwickfus@btinternet.com

‘Some medical fibs about the Crimean War: A mini-crusade against peddling misinformation!’



[Illustrated London News, 6 October 1855]

Fib: Utilized to demonstrate chaos at Scutari.

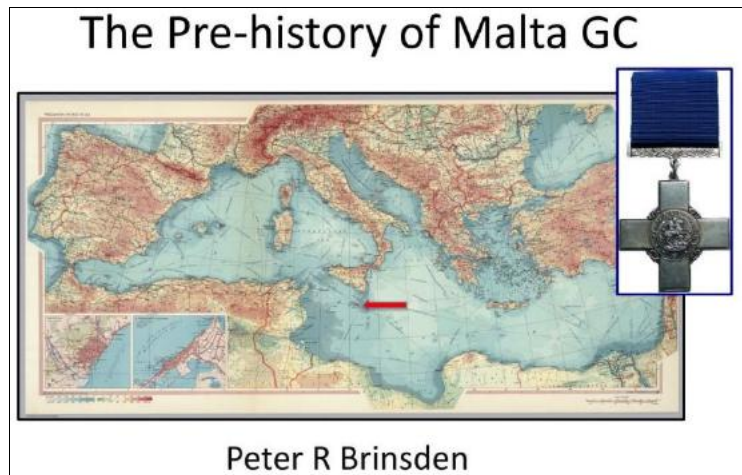
Fact: Dr Dugan treating Russians in a hospital in Sevastopol.

Many aspects of the Crimean War have been inaccurately portrayed in both academic works and popular culture, and this has resulted in false information being included in school curricula and classroom texts. Mike Hinton will give examples of this in an illustrated PowerPoint presentation, including references to the evacuation of the sick and wounded, medical developments, conditions at Scutari, and the legacy of the Royal Commission.

Friends of Valletta – Zoom talk on ‘The pre-history of Malta GC’

The next few Zoom talks by Friends of Valletta, all at 1900hrs, may be of particular interest to Friends of Millbank considering a visit to Malta. We have a standing invitation to their talks.

Surgeon Commander Peter Brinsden RN (retd), a Friend of Millbank, has been invited to deliver the first talk for Friends of Valletta this year, on **‘The prehistory of Malta GC’**, on Thursday 20 January at 1900hrs. The registration link is [Forthcoming Events - FRIENDS OF VALLETTA \(weebly.com\)](http://Forthcoming%20Events%20-%20FRIENDS%20OF%20VALLETTA%20(weebly.com)). Astute members will realise that Peter is also scheduled to give us a different talk a week later.



A Zoom talk on 20 January

Further talks by Friends of Valletta are: **'Malta Buses'**, by Richard Stedall on Tuesday, 15 February, and **'Malta Railway'**, by Paul Galea on Thursday 21 April.

On 13 June, there will be two live performances of the theatre performance **'Star of Strait Street'**, as part of the Chichester Festival. This play features Christine Ratcliffe and was inspired by Paul McDonald's book *'Ladies of Lascaris'*. Again, astute members will realise this author is Group Captain (ret'd) Paul McDonald RAF, who will be giving a talk to us, on *'Two heroes of Malta's War'*, at Millbank on 13 May.

Museum of Military Medicine – a talk on Nightingale Hospitals

I understand that the Museum is planning to hold a Zoom talk on this subject shortly, though details have not yet been uploaded to the website. Watch this space [News & Events – The Museum of Military Medicine](#).

.....

I hope this has whetted your appetite for what promises to be an exciting and special year.

I look forward to seeing you at our talks and events in 2022.

In Arduis Fidelis

David Vassallo

Col (ret'd) FRCSEd, DHMSA, MA (History of Warfare), L/RAMC
Chairman, Friends of Millbank
chairman@friendsofmillbank.org
Newsletter issued 1 January 2022