

Friends of Millbank

January 2021 Newsletter

Celebrating the heritage, achievements and relevance of military medicine



The Allied field hospital at Mont St Jean, Waterloo 1815 (courtesy of Michael Crumplin)

Dear Friend of Millbank

At the start of 2021, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well, to thank you for your support throughout my first year as your Chairman, and to wish you a Happy and Healthy New Year. As January is named after the Roman god Janus, whose two faces symbolise looking forward as well as backward, I thought I'd theme this newsletter accordingly.

Looking forward - Our first (virtual) lecture for 2021

Our guest speaker on Friday 29 January, 1830hrs, is Michael Crumplin, delivering a virtual lecture by Zoom on '*Losing Sight of the Glory – six centuries of combat surgery*'. Michael is a renowned military medical historian, author and speaker, amongst much else, whose particular interest is surgery in the Napoleonic wars. His principal purpose is to promote interest in the human cost of war.

Michael is no stranger to Friends of Millbank, having delivered a talk to us at the former Royal Army Medical College in February 2012, on '*A Surgical Artist at War - the paintings and sketches of Sir Charles Bell, 1809 – 1815*'. This was the subject of a marvellous book he co-authored with Peter Starling, curator at the time of the Army Medical Services Museum (now the Museum of Military Medicine), published in 2005 by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. In the words of the authors, Sir Charles Bell's paintings and case histories are 'a unique and poignant reminder of the tragedies of war'. Michael Crumplin's four other books are featured on the flyer for his coming talk, available on our homepage for you to download. I thoroughly recommend them all to you.

You should already have received an email announcement. The registration link on the Friends of Millbank homepage takes you directly to the Zoom booking site for this talk, and is much simpler than for our first virtual talks. Registration covers both the preceding AGM (commencing at 1730hrs) and the talk. If you wish to only attend Michael Crumplin's talk, please log on from 1815hrs onwards.

We are limited to 100 participants by our Zoom Pro subscription so please register now to ensure a place. 41 people have registered already, in just four days. Registration is open to all, and is free to students and subscribing members of Friends of Millbank. If you are not yet a subscribing member, please donate £5 by BACS to help cover expenses – or even better, enrol as a member. BACS details are on the attached membership form.

Annual General Meeting 2021

This year our AGM will be held virtually, from 1730 – 1800hrs on Friday 29 January, followed by a short break before Michael Crumplin's talk at 1830hrs (in the same Zoom meeting as above). You are welcome to attend either or both events. If you wish to attend the AGM, log on from 1715 hours onwards. The agenda is attached. The 2020 AGM minutes, and treasurer's and chairman's reports, will be circulated in advance of the meeting to full members. Please send any comments on these, and items for 'Any Other Business', to the Chairman, at info@friendsofmillbank.org, by 22 January.

Looking further forward – our programme for 2021

Our 2021 programme is appended to this newsletter and can also be downloaded from our website. We have a wealth of excellent speakers lined up to deliver talks to you. Exceptionally, to make up for the disruption to last year's programme, we shall have twelve talks this year, including the inaugural Haywood lecture in March that had to be postponed. All our talks will be held virtually until further notice, at least until September, until we are sure that the pandemic has abated sufficiently for it to be safe to return to actual talks at Millbank. Even then, we shall continue with a mixture of virtual and actual talks, to ensure we continue reaching out to all our members wherever you may be.

Membership fees for 2021

Our annual subscription, due renewal now, is only £20. This entitles members to free attendance at all our lectures (representing excellent value for the twelve this year), as well as free membership of the British Society for the History of Medicine (BSHM) as a member of an affiliated society. We had waived fees for our initial virtual talks in 2020, but can do so no longer, so please renew your subscription or enrol now.

Looking back to 2020: A momentous year

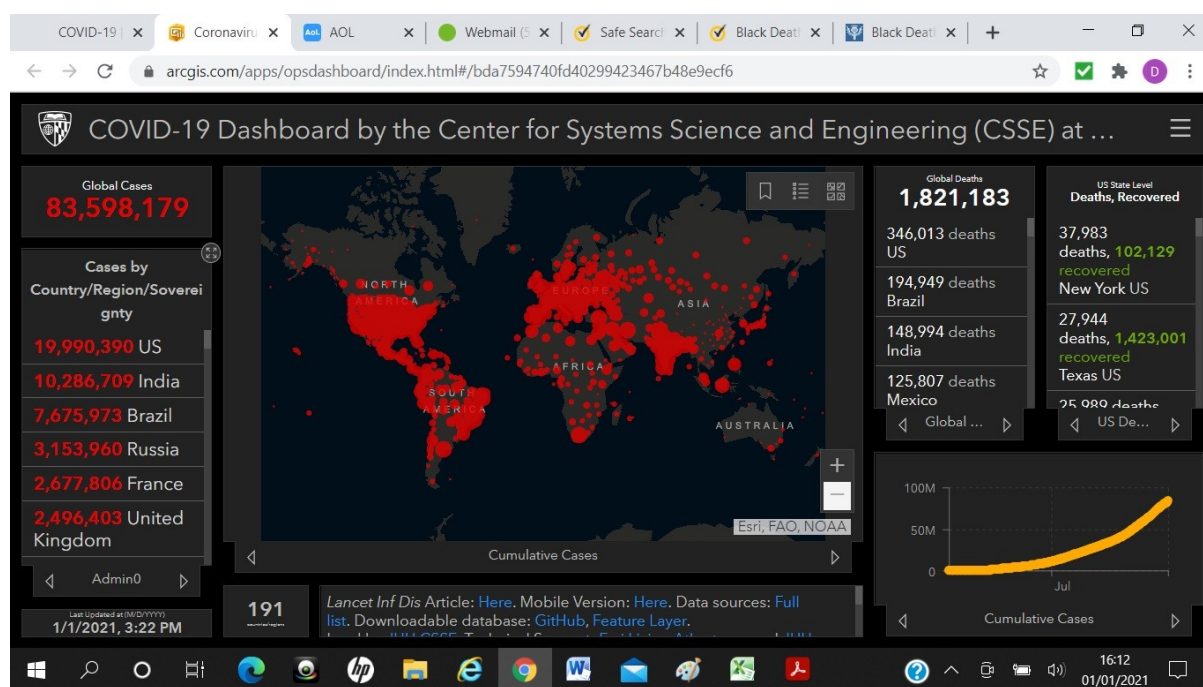
It's certainly been an unforgettable year, branded with a coronavirus pandemic that will go down in world history alongside the Spanish flu (1918 – 1921), Asiatic cholera and the like, even though deaths will hopefully be significantly lower than those by its end, and never rise to anything remotely like in the Black Death (1347 – 1351). And that's not considering other events this year such as Brexit and a certain US presidential election.

It was just a year ago (on 31 December 2019) that China informed the World Health Organisation of an outbreak of pneumonia of unknown aetiology in Wuhan. Cases spread so swiftly worldwide that barely one month later, 30 January, WHO declared a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern'. A lot has happened since, it's affected all of us, I hope you have coped well throughout.

My last newsletter, on 9 November, marked a milestone of 50 million global COVID-19 cases and 1.25 million confirmed COVID-related deaths in just 12 months since the first known cases in Wuhan.

On 1 January 2021, not even two months later, those figures stood at 83.6 million cases and 1.8 million deaths, with the USA reaching a landmark 20 million recorded cases and practically 350 thousand deaths. India has recorded over 10 million cases, six other countries have passed the two million mark, and another seven the million mark. The UK, after its first death on 8 March, had lost 73,622 people to COVID-19 by 1 January, and all of Europe is suffering a second wave. Daily deaths in the UK (964 on 31 December) are now greater than at the peak of the first wave (866 on 10 April). Cases continue escalating globally – currently by a million in two days (to 84.6 million on 3 January).

There is however good reason to hope that the pandemic will be brought under control in 2021, with vaccines being rolled out and people beginning to be vaccinated. The logistic challenges facing each nation, let alone those for a worldwide vaccination campaign, should not be underestimated.



Screenshot on 1 January from John Hopkins University dashboard, <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/covid-19>

Our 2020 programme

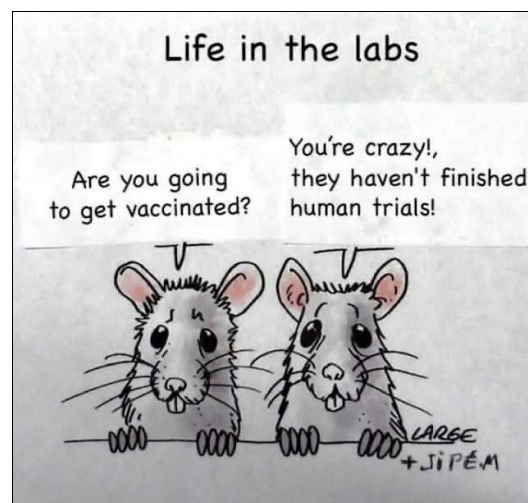
We enjoyed one actual talk at Millbank (27 February, by Heidi Doughty) before pandemic halted play, and three virtual talks – the George Blair Memorial Lecture on Friday 30 October by Richard Villar, followed by Alistair Macmillan on 27 November and Jessica Meyer on 18 December. The virtual Zoom format, new to us, proved very successful, attracting between 58 and 65 participants for each talk, including many who would not normally be able to attend Friday evening talks at Millbank. Heidi Doughty and Alistair Macmillan's presentations are now available on our website, and Jessica Meyer's will follow shortly. The content of Richard's talk is largely covered in his book 'Winged Scalpel', reviewed on our website.

Votes of thanks to Richard Villar and Alistair Macmillan

I have appended, with his kind permission, the votes of thanks by Lieutenant General Martin Bricknell to Richard Villar and Alistair Macmillan, as they highlight the most important aspects of their talks. The first one also contains a fascinating snippet of personal history, revealing how

Richard's example and his passion for teaching inspired a young medical student (and future Surgeon General) to join the Army.

Looking forward again (with a special cartoon for the Millbank lab rats)



One last look at 2020



And ending on a celebratory note



Our Life President and dear friend, Dr John Blair OBE, celebrated his 92nd birthday in style in Perth on 31 December 2020. Well known to many of us, John has been a keen and very generous supporter of Friends of Millbank from our very beginning, regularly travelling from Perth to attend our meetings at Millbank until as recently as 2019, and he remains as enthusiastic and engaged as ever. Happy birthday John from all of us! Thank you for your ongoing support and friendship. Here's wishing you a very happy year ahead. Ad multos annos.

To all Friends of Millbank

Stay safe, stay well. I look forward to seeing you at the AGM and Michael Crumplin's talk on 29 January, and at our events thereafter.

In Arduis Fidelis

David Vassallo

Col (retd) FRCSEd, MA, L/RAMC
Chairman, Friends of Millbank

(See 2021 programme and Votes of thanks below)

2021 Programme – Friends of Millbank

Website: www.friendsofmillbank.org

Our membership is £20 pa. All talks are free to students and subscribing members. Non-members are welcome, but are asked to consider a donation of £5 per talk or to enrol as a member. Membership forms with BACS details on request. All talks are virtual until further notice - prior registration required via our website.

Date 2021	Event	Comment
Friday 29 January	AGM, followed by our first talk of the year: <i>Losing Sight of the Glory – six centuries of combat surgery</i> Michael Crumplin	AGM 1730hrs Talk 1830hrs (via same link)
Thursday 25 February	<i>The Gulf War: Logistics and Medical Challenges</i> Brigadier (retd) Peter Sharpe	Note different day to usual
Friday 26 March	Inaugural Haywood Lecture <i>Rebuilding limbs, rebuilding lives</i> Lt Col Sarah Phillips	Haywood Lecture
Friday 8 April	<i>Farthest Fields – The Medical Services in Indo-Burma, 1939-44</i> Colonel (retd) S Jagdish	Anniversary of Battle for Kohima
Friday 23 April	<i>A view from on high – the Defence Medical Services today, and a glimpse over the horizon</i> Air Vice-Marshal Alastair Reid CB QHP, Surgeon General	
Friday 21 May	<i>Shipwreck, Sharks and Seasickness: Memories of the Royal Naval Medical Service in the Second World War</i> Dr Frances Houghton	
Friday 18 June	<i>Faithful in Adversity – the RAMC in the Second World War</i> John Broom	
Friday 23 July	<i>Blood, Metal and Dust – lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan</i> Brigadier (retd) Ben Barry	
Friday 24 September	<i>Civilian-military co-operation in time of crisis</i> Professor Martin Bricknell	
Friday 29 October	George Blair Memorial Lecture 2021 <i>On the Shoulders of Giants: Medical Officers in the Far East Conflict, 1941-45</i> Paul Watkins	George Blair Memorial Lecture
Friday 26 November	<i>Great losses of the Great War</i> Lt Col John Reynard	
Friday 17 December	<i>Golf, gunshots and surgical ramblings</i> David Jackson	Christmas special

Issued 28 December 2020 by the Chairman, Friends of Millbank info@friendsofmillbank.org

“Winged Scalpel - a Surgeon at the Frontline of Disaster”

Richard Villar

George Blair Memorial Lecture

Online talk, Friday 30 October 2020

Vote of thanks – Lt Gen (Retd) Martin Bricknell

Richard, thank you very much on behalf of all of the attendees to the first of these Zoom lectures for your excellent reminiscences of your career; both as a doctor serving in the army and also your subsequent experiences working as a surgeon in humanitarian crises. Whilst you will not remember, we first met in the 1980s when I was an enthusiastic third year medical student volunteering to assist when you were doing trauma lists at Southampton General Hospital during your time training as an orthopaedic surgeon. Your teaching influenced my decision to join the Army.

You gave us a vivid exposition of the realities of war and crisis surgery. However, alongside the clinical description, you also provided us some great insights about the living environment which you experienced during your deployments to these crises. You provided a great discussion of the link between clinical practice and the importance of understanding the wider health system in the care of patients that you treated. You also showed us your journey from your experiences serving with the Army, particularly with 22 SAS, and how that taught you personal skills that were applicable throughout the rest of your professional career.

You touched on the importance of teamwork, leadership, and also followership as a member of an emergency medical response team. This is directly relevant for those people who are still serving in the UK military medical services. You also introduced us to some of the realities of surgical decision-making and to the challenges that patients have in gaining access to healthcare particularly the realities of politics and money.

I am sure that your presentation was inspirational to those people who are starting their journey with the Army Medical Services and, for those people at a later stage in our careers, it was a nice reflection on the shared experiences that we all have. Thank you again from all of us in the audience.

I would particularly like to use this as an opportunity to thank our Chairman for his excellent organisation of the ‘Zoom environment’ to deliver the same education experience for Friends of Milbank, even if we are not able to have the same physical experience by being present in the lecture theatre that so many of us remember fondly.

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**A History of the AMS TA (including its pre- and post- guises)
Brigadier (Retd) Alastair Macmillan**

Online talk, Friday 27 November 2020

Vote of thanks – Lt Gen (Retd) Martin Bricknell

Alastair, thank you on behalf of all of the members of the Friends of Milbank who have joined us this evening.

History is the story of decisions by people and learning how and why those decisions were made. Firstly, your presentation has reinforced the importance of understanding history to explain current arrangements for the Army Medical Services and to learn from past experience to inform the future. You very cleverly pulled out the inter-relationships between the nation's health economy and its manpower, and how that supports the Armed Forces particularly for operations. This relationship is especially important as we consider both how the Territorial Army was created and its role in the current Army Medical Services. The way in which you've described both the strategic intent for the role of the Reserves in supporting the mobilisation of the nation's Armed Forces and how this applied to the military medical services was illuminating particularly when applied to individual case studies as you described in your presentation.

You also drew out the importance of seeing our military health services as a whole force, the connexion to our civilian health system through our reserves footprint, and its relationship to the wider military medical services. You highlighted during your presentation how the role of the AMS Reserves has been continually reinforced through operational experience. This was most particularly in World War One and World War Two, but also in recent times in support of military medical operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Ebola crisis of 2014, the response to major incidents in the UK, and most currently during the COVID pandemic.

Although the Army Medical Services reduced in size in 2010 as a part of the Army 2020 restructuring, the Future Reserves initiative that ran parallel reinforced the vitally important role of our AMS Reserves. The Reserve footprint is essential for recruiting both to the Reserve and Regular AMS. The Reserves has always been structurally bigger than the regular component of the Army Medical Services. So, on behalf of us all, thank you again for your excellent presentation, your description of the evolution of the role of the Army Medical Services Reserve and its contribution to enabling the whole of the Army Medical Services to meet the needs of the Army.

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