Editorial: A swan song

Molecular Plant Pathology did not spontaneously come into existence back in the year 2000; it grew from the embryo of Molecular Plant Pathology Online (MPPOL)—an innovative free-to-publish, open access, online-only journal launched by the British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP) in the late 1990s. Whilst MPPOL had some success as a journal, it was not financially viable. There is no such thing as free publishing or free open access. At some stage someone has to pay, there are always costs. Moreover despite lobbying, the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) refused to award an Impact Factor (IF) to a journal that was online-only. There had to be a 'paper' presence. How times have changed!

BSPP therefore decided, in conjunction with the publishers Wiley-Blackwell, to launch a brand new journal with both paper and online copy, based on the MPPOL concept. *Molecular Plant Pathology* (MPP) was born. A call for papers went out in 1999, with the first issues published in 2000.

In discussing the ethos and aims of MPP we wanted to capture the best research articles in the field of molecular plant pathology, as well as providing review articles of interest to researchers and educators alike. Our unique Pathogen Profile reviews are now highly regarded within the scientific community. For the Editorial Board we opted for an Editor in Chief, supported by Senior Editors in specialist areas, and a strong international Editorial Board. Both of these comprised of a mixture of 'old hands' and 'fresh faces'. We insisted that the Editorial Office be staffed at post-doctoral level, and we applied the online peer review process developed at MPPOL, thus enabling us to have rapid review and publication times from the outset. Visually, we wanted the journal to be eye catching and innovative. We have a highly distinctive front cover, with its trademark colours and typeface and use striking images to promote each issue. In terms of publicity our mantra of 'no mugs, pens, or mouse mats' has enabled conference delegates worldwide to enjoy the delights of aeroplanes, yo-yos and frisbees. Long may this continue.

However, it cannot be understated how difficult the early years were for MPP. We had an IF of 'zero' and had incurred huge financial costs as part of the launch and production. We had launched a new 'paper' journal into a publishing landscape undergoing seismic shifts in online usage, subscription methods and plummeting library budgets. Indeed many in the field said we would not survive (you know who you are). But there is a take home message here; IF is not everything. During this time MPP did publish excellent papers and did grow in terms of popularity and copy-flow. The overriding factors that won the day were the speed, quality and fairness of the peer review process, together with the outstanding production values of the final published articles. Over

the years our publishers Wiley-Blackwell have provided outstanding service at all levels. They have delivered a quality product, with astute financial management that has been to the benefit of all. I hope Wiley-Blackwell continue to support MPP in this way. Moreover, whilst it has become popular to move Editorial Offices in-house, I strongly support an independent Editorial Office for MPP. As such, it is an active partner in the development of new materials, systems and the journal as a whole. More importantly, it remains a perfect interface between publisher, society and editor. Finally, it gives a human face to the journal, maintaining our friendly and efficient approach that is noted for its 'non-corporate' nature.

Together BSPP and Wiley-Blackwell have worked closely to allow MPP to grow and serve the community. This has enabled the journal to remain free to publish with no page or handling charges, whilst keeping our subscriptions prices competitive for libraries and individuals alike. The journal also offers competitive prices for authors wishing to publish open access papers. At the same time Wiley-Blackwell have always been willing to make selected articles freely available to all.

The launch of MPP as a joint venture with Wiley-Blackwell was a big undertaking for BSPP. The society now rightly has a journal to be proud of, with a strong and increasing IF and a respectable income stream. We are known for our friendly but fair approach to reviewing. We are noted for speed and efficiency in handling all aspects of the publishing process. We strive to make the experience enjoyable for editors, authors and reviewers alike. Feedback from our Senior Editors and Editorial Board is that they have thoroughly enjoyed working on the journal and we have enjoyed working with them. The strength and international standing of the journal has always been based on the outstanding work of the Senior Editors, Editorial Board and the Editorial Office.

But we must not stand still. MPP must continue to innovate, lead, expand and grow. We must not be seen as 'just another journal', we must strive to be different and distinctive and to offer the best for authors and readers alike. The publishing world is changing rapidly and MPP must remain at the forefront of developments.

As I say farewell after thirteen years of service, I give my very best wishes to our new Editor in Chief, Marty Dickman. I know the journal is in excellent hands and I hope Marty enjoys and benefits from the experience as much I have.

It has been fun!

Gary

Prof Gary D. Foster

Outgoing Editor in Chief