

CELEBRATING 180 YEARS AND 120 VOLUMES OF *TRANSACTIONS*

By LUTZ MARTEN, Editor

In 2022 we celebrate two milestones in the history of the *Transactions of the Philological Society*. We are publishing our 120th volume and we look back over 180 years of history, starting with the first issue of Volume 1 of what was then the *Proceedings of the Philological Society*, which appeared in 1842.

The first Council meeting of the Philological Society took place on 25 November 1842, and the first issue of the *Proceedings* duly records the event, including a list of original members. At the meeting the assembled members also heard a paper by Robert Latham, a key founding figure of the Society and later in charge of curating the extensive ethnographic exhibition of the Crystal Palace. The paper, read over two meetings, presented a comprehensive, if unsurprisingly sketchy, survey of the languages of Papua New Guinea, Australia and Southeast Asian islands.

The following four issues then contain a range of papers, all read at the monthly meetings of the Society, addressing diverse topics –

A Letter from James Yates, Esq. to the Secretary, containing remarks on English Orthography, more particularly with reference to the spelling of the Passive Participle

Some Remarks on a Statue of Endymion, illustrative of a passage in Lucian, by James Yates

On certain Welsh Names of Places preserved in English Compounds, by Edwin Guest

On the Etymology of the word *Trap-rock*, by Hensleigh Wedgwood

A Notice of European Grammars and Lexicons of the Sanskrit language, by Horace Wilson

At the January 1843 meeting members of the Society also learned of letters received from the German comparative linguists Jacob Grimm and Franz Bopp, who expressed their interest in the new Society, and during the February meeting Rev. Richard Garnett presented to the assembled audience two recently published grammars of African languages – James Archbell's grammar of Setswana and R. Maxwell Macbrair's grammar of Mandinka.

These early, very active months of the Society provide a veritable micro-cosmos of its aims and main interests. It was founded to undertake the 'Philological Illustration of the Classical Writers of Greece and Rome' as well as to investigate 'the Structure, the Affinities, and the History of Languages' (see the excellent summary of the early history of the Society by Fiona Marshall, available on the Society's website). To these two aims may be added the study of the English language and dialects – and the Society's pivotal role in developing what is now known as the *Oxford English Dictionary* but which was originally labelled *The Society's English Dictionary* – as well as a special interest in non-European languages.

After an initial flurry of activities, the *Proceedings*, and from 1854, the *Transactions of the Philological Society* produced a steady flow of papers with regular volumes appearing up to the 1860s. However, things slowed down from the late 1850s onwards. For Volume 5 of the *Transactions*, the illustrious Secretary of the Society and editor of the *Transactions* from 1853 to 1910, Frederick Furnivall, had to resort to the ingenious editorial trick of publishing a selection of manuscripts in lieu of papers:

THE chief grievance of an Honorary Secretary is, that certain Members of his Society will not send him for press the Papers they have read at the Society's Meetings. Beg for them as he will, – by letter, word of mouth, through mutual friends, by special visits, – out of some Members no Papers can be got. What then is left for the unhappy Official, but to write Papers himself, or copy MSS. to fill the volume that his refractory friends have left vacant? The former branch of the alternative was out of my reach, so I grasped the latter, and the reader must not blame me if he thinks my basket of fruit a bad substitute for the second course of strong meat that he expected and ought to have had.

Volume 5, Issue 2 of the *Transactions* thus contains a selection of hitherto unprinted early English manuscripts from the British Museum.

Luckily, the drought passed, and over the years *Transactions* appeared more regularly, and with the expected academic content. Since 1933 *Transactions* have appeared annually, with the sole exception of 1976, when the volume was “unfortunately delayed” as noted by R. H. Robins, another illustrious Secretary of the Society (serving from 1961 to 1988 and subsequently as President of the Society).

A number of developments and innovations have taken place since the early years of the journal. The Society's membership and the readership of the *Transactions*, as well as the group of authors published in the journal, have much increased, and have become more diverse in terms of gender, academic age and institutional affiliation. The number of papers published have grown as well, and since the anniversary volume 100 in 2002, *Transactions* has been published in three issues per volume, one of which is often a special issue (as is illustrated by the set of papers in the present volume on ‘Digital methods for studying meaning in historical English’, edited by Susan Fitzmaurice and Seth Mehl). In 2000, the Society awarded its first biannual R. H. Robins Prize for the best student essay, and winning essays are typically published in the *Transactions*, as on occasion are the runners-up when the competition for the prize has been particularly close. Over the last few decades, the Society and *Transactions* have also joined the digital age, and more and more readers will access the *Transactions* electronically, rather than in print (indeed, all members of the Society have unrestricted access to all 120 electronic volumes of the *Transactions*), and may follow the Society's activities on Twitter and on our YouTube channel. Most recently we have begun to include non-English abstracts for papers published in the *Transactions* to acknowledge the world's linguistic diversity, and as a reminder of the imbalance represented by the dominant use of English as a language of science.

The *Transactions* are also finding themselves in a fast-paced and dynamic academic environment. Publishing models and readership expectations are changing in response to digitisation and to critical reflections on the role and accessibility of academic discourses. New forms of dissemination of research findings are developing, such as electronic datasets and digital archives. The field of linguistics has expanded considerably over the last decades,

with new subfields emerging and establishing their own distinct discourses and infrastructures.

Against this background, the aim and scope of the *Transactions* has been remarkably constant. Looking back at those first few months of the *Transactions*, the areas of enquiry addressed in the early issues, if not the specific questions and preoccupations, remain largely relevant for *Transactions* today – with the exception of more narrowly conceived Classics papers, for which other specialist journals became available in the late 19th century. The *Transactions* remain a broad-church home for innovative, engaging and, at times, controversial papers adopting an evidence-based approach to all areas of linguistics with a particular focus on the comparative and historical, and inclusive of the widest possible range of languages. We continue to welcome studies of all languages from the perspective of any of the various subdisciplines of descriptive and theoretical linguistics, and from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, with a particular emphasis on papers which address broader theoretical or methodological questions. This approach is well reflected in the papers included in the recent volumes of the *Transactions*.

If a long history is indicative of academic quality and relevance, this year's double anniversary of the *Transactions* can hopefully be seen as signalling the bright future of the journal and its continued contribution to the field of linguistics in the years to come.