Editorial

The publication of the November issue of the Journal coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Armistice which ended the hostilities of the First World War. Although not a themed issue, this anniversary provides an opportunity to publish a number of articles related to the conflict as well as the fourth of Henry Connor’s “Lest We Forget” series. These pieces summate, along with occasional publications in JMB over the past four years,1,2 to a small corpus of WW1-related material, sadly none from the German perspective. This material may be of interest not only to biographers but also to historians of the war.

In her very readable book History’s people. Personalities and the past, the Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan3 eloquently addresses the tension sometimes evident between biography and history:

... the relationship between historians and biographers is often an uneasy one, marked by mutual suspicions. Historians complain that biographers do not properly understand or short change the context while biographers feel that historians miss out the individuals who help to make history.

Speaking of Thomas Carlyle, she notes that, notwithstanding his work on “heroes”, he understood that:

... the secret of good biography – and indeed of much good history – is to understand that relationship between individuals and their societies. ... we must always locate people in their times and also remind ourselves that we cannot expect them to think things that hadn’t yet been discovered or articulated.

Escaping from, or resisting, our own subjectivity, be that in historical or biomedical contexts, remains a challenging task, indeed a necessity of which we may be totally unaware.

This editorial also provides an opportunity to inform potential contributors to the Journal that what might be termed our “occasional” sections are still operational, namely Medical Memorials, Who Made What?, Statues, and Medical Truants. Space in the Journal remains at a premium, the backlog to print publication for accepted papers remaining at more than a year, despite the expanded page count in volume 24 (2016), so brevity may be one of the factors to be taken into account when the editor is considering such pieces for publication.

References


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