striving to establish rheumatology units and to raise standards in clinical care and research. Advances in basic and clinical science needed wider recognition and discussion, and there were important unmet needs for education at all levels. Following a strongly positive referendum for unification and a draft constitution, BSR established a council and committees for education and clinical affairs as well as a Heberden Committee, with responsibility for organizing scientific meetings. Initially funded mainly from subscriptions, the society employed a single executive secretary working from a shared office belonging to the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council. An early goal was to establish two high-quality meetings each year, covering the spectrum of interests within rheumatology. About 500 people attended the first BSR meeting in Bristol and the first annual meeting at Kensington Town Hall in London. The latter included the first ever international cytokine symposium, and a subsequent workshop on IL-1. Promoting high-quality science was not, however, BSR’s only, or main remit. Development of postgraduate courses in basic and advanced clinical rheumatology were early achievements, and the BSR and ARC jointly developed an undergraduate curriculum in rheumatology. The society initiated some UK-US travelling fellowships with the ACR which led to productive transatlantic collaborations. Rheumatology training and career prospects were very uncertain in the 1980s and there were huge discrepancies in the provision of services across the country. Databases of consultants and trainees throughout the UK were developed, and BSR worked to establish an evidence-base for optimum numbers of specialists needed. Manpower, provision of services and career structure discussions were initiated with the Department of Health, Chief Medical Officers and the Royal College of Physicians. These were the origins an initial developments of a society which has grown and matured remarkably over the last 30 years.

**Disclosure statement:** The author has declared no conflicts of interest.

---

**THIRTY YEARS OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY FOR RHEUMATOLOGY**

**I24. BSR: ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES**

George Nuki

1University of Edinburgh Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, UK

Seamus Heaney wrote ‘If revolution is the kicking down of a rotten door, evolution is more like pushing the stone from the mouth of the tomb. There is an Easter energy about it, a sense of arrival rather than wreckage’.

So it was in 1984 when the British Society for Rheumatology (BSR) evolved from two rather different organizations. The Heberden Society was formed by physicians and scientists with an interest in rheumatic diseases and roots in departments of internal medicine, while the British Association of Rheumatology and Rehabilitation (BARR) had grown from departments of physical medicine. While the Heberden Society was the main forum for communicating advances in clinical and basic research, BARR had greater expertise in engaging with government and developing services. Although some had previously resisted amalgamation, the need for unity became overwhelming in the early1980s when rheumatology was struggling to raise its status as an emerging medical sub-specialty. Consultants from both societies were