

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

### Lessons from the Past

We wish to bring attention to two recent papers concerning the development of methods for the analysis of dairy products, milk and butter. These are relevant to today's chemists, since history has a habit of repeating itself, when the lessons from the past are forgotten, as illustrated in the recent horse meat event.

- (i) J. Steere-Williams, "A Conflict of Analysis: Analytical Chemistry and Milk Adulteration in Victorian Britain", *AMBIX*, **61**, 279-298, (2014)

The content includes the origins of the SPA and of the conflict of analysis, the defence of pure chemistry: James Bell and the Somerset House Laboratory, attempts at unifying analytical chemistry, and further examination of the Manchester Milk Case, summarised in the paper's abstract as follows:

*"This article centres on a particularly intense debate within British analytical chemistry in the late nineteenth century, between local public analysts and the government chemists of the Inland Revenue service. The two groups differed in both practical methodologies and in the interpretation of analytical findings. The most striking debates in this period were related to milk analysis, highlighted especially in Victorian courtrooms. It was in protracted court cases, such as the well-known Manchester Milk Case in 1883, that analytical chemistry was performed between local public analysts and the government chemists, who were often both used as expert witnesses. Victorian court rooms were thus important sites in the context of uneven professionalization of chemistry. This tension is used to highlight what Christopher Hamlin has called the defining feature of Victorian public health, namely conflicts of professional jurisdiction, which adds nuance to the histories of the struggle of professionalization and public credibility in analytical chemistry."*

- (ii) H. Deelstra, D. Thorburn Burns and M. J. Walker, "The Adulteration of Food, Lessons from the Past, with Reference to Butter, Margarine and Fraud", *Eur. Food Res. Technol.*, **239**, 725 - 744, (2014)

This paper includes the current international definitions of butter, margarine and derived products, the historical aspects are summarised in the abstract as follows:

*"The history of food adulteration and fraud and attempts at their control from the Middle Ages to date is traced for Belgium and for the UK with special reference to butter and margarine. The development of analytical procedures for the authentication of milk fat is outlined, from those based on the characterisation of*

*fatty acids derived from milk fat in the nineteenth century to chromatographic methods in the next century and the recent rapid spectroscopic approaches. The importance of adequate surveillance programmes to reduce the incidence of food fraud is stressed.”*

Yours sincerely,  
D Thorburn Burns and Michael J. Walker