The British Medical Journal has for many years run a Christmas special, in which doctors and researchers vie to publish content from the bizarre to the seasonal. This year, we are emulating our ‘big sister’ with the inaugural edition of a Winter Special to coincide with the astrological sign of Capricorn.

Our first theme is the history of the specialty, seen through the eyes of a young historian reading our journal for the first time. As you may know, our archive runs back to 1925 when we began as the British Journal of Venerology. Early editions advertised the names and addresses of venereal disease attendants, healthcare assistants of the distant past and displaced from their profession by the cessation of hostilities, now seeking new posts. We asked Huw du Boulay to explore representations of the great, stigmatised diseases of the past century in the journal, for the light this would shed on clinical worlds past. Huw has written an editorial and five fillers about the experience of reading our journal as a historical and professional outsider—we hope you will find it interesting, and that it will lead into our archive.

Our regular content begins with a report from Australia on the near-disappearance of genital warts in younger women within a clinical population accompanied by a podcast on the clinical and policy implications of this dramatic reduction. While clinical diagnoses are an important form of human papilloma virus surveillance, they sample a limited population, and Huw has written an editorial and five fillers about the experience of reading our journal as a historical and professional outsider—we hope you will find it interesting, and that it will lead into our archive.

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Finally, thanks to Jessica Stockdale for artwork on the front cover to mark our historical special issue.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

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3. Harte D, Mercery D, Jarman J, et al. Is the recall of men who have sex with men (MSM) diagnosed as having bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for re-screening a feasible and effective strategy? Sex Transm Infect 2011; 87:577–82.