

INTERNATIONAL UNION of the HISTORY and PHILOSOPHY of SCIENCE
Division of History of Science Scientific Instrument Commission

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NEWSLETTER
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CHANGE OF OFFICERS

On 1 January 1998, Dr. R.G.W. (Robert) Anderson and Prof. G.L'E. (Gerard) Turner stepped down as President and Secretary of the Scientific Instrument Commission. During the many years in which they held office, the Scientific Instrument Commission, with its annual international symposiums, newsletter and bibliography, has developed into one of the most active Commissions of the International Union. The instrument community has every reason to be grateful to both for their devotion to the instrumental cause.

Dr. J.A. (Jim) Bennett has been appointed the new President and he has asked Dr. P.R. (Peter) de Clercq to act as Secretary. Dr. P. (Paolo) Brenni has been invited to act as Vice-President, a novel function created to broaden the Commission's geographical horizon. The international triumvirate hopes to maintain the active programme of the Scientific Instrument Commission, and to respond imaginatively to growing interest and increasing activity in the discipline.

The SIC is grateful to the Museum Boerhaave for covering the costs of publication and mailing of this Newsletter and of the Fourteenth Bibliography.

MINUTES OF THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION

At La Maison de la Métallurgie et de l'Industrie de Liège, Liège 22 July 1997

In the chair

Dr R.G.W. Anderson

Present

61 Corresponding Members

1. **Apologies for absence received from**

Apologies received from: P. Galluzzi, A.D.C. Simpson, M. Miniati, J.P. Collins, R. & M. Webster

2. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The Minutes of the XV Plenary Session held in Ottawa, on 10 September 1996 had been circulated in Newsletter No. 18 and were accepted.

3. **Report of activities, 1996-1997**

The XV Symposium of the Scientific Instrument Commission was held in Ottawa 9-13 September 1996, hosted by the National Museum of Science and Technology. A Note on this Symposium was printed in Newsletter No. 18, which was distributed in April 1997. Through the co-operation of the Scientific Instrument Society, we are indebted for free distribution to their members.

The XVI Scientific Instrument Symposium (designated SU11), was held 20-22 July 1997 during the XX International Congress at Liège. The theme was: National Inventories of Historical Scientific Instruments.

Professor G.L'E. Turner and Dr D.J. Bryden prepared for the Commission *A Classified Bibliography on the History of Scientific Instruments*, which was published in May 1997. The Museum of the History of Science, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3AZ, is distributing this *Bibliography*, which is priced at £5, including surface postage.

4. **Reports on National Inventories and Listings of Instrument Makers**

It was announced that the Museum Boerhaave would publish in August 1997, Peter de Clercq, *The Leiden Cabinet of Physics: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Leiden: Museum Boerhaave Communication 271).

5. **Financial Matters**

The IUHPS made a grant of \$900 for the publication and mailing of the Newsletters No. 17 and No. 18, and Bibliography No. 13. The *Classified Bibliography* was published with a grant from the Renaissance Trust.

6. **Future Activities**

The Danish Academy for the Sciences and the Sorø Academy are to hold the XVII Scientific Instrument Symposium at Sorø, Denmark, between 20-25 July 1998. The local organizer will be Jan Tapdrup.

The meeting also noted the offer of Dr. J.A. Bennett, Keeper of the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, to hold the XVIII Symposium at Oxford in the middle of September 1999. This confirmed the announcement made at the Ottawa Symposium. Possible future locations were Sweden and Portugal.

7. **Any Other Business**

The President thanked all those who had contributed in any way to the present two-day Symposium, which had been organized by Dr Brenni, Professor Dorikens, and Professor Turner. Dr Anderson then announced that he would be retiring from the Presidency of the Commission at the end of 1997. Professor Turner would also retire in December, after serving 20 years as Secretary of the Commission. The President and Secretary received a standing ovation.

A NOTE ON THE LIÈGE SYMPOSIUM

In 1997 the Commission joined in the four-yearly meeting of the International Union by holding a Symposium within the XXth International Congress of the History of Science, held in Liège from 20 to 26 July. The Commission was allocated the appropriate accommodation of the Maison de la Métallurgie et de l'Industrie de Liège and heard papers extending over two days. The theme was 'National Inventories of Historic Scientific Instruments', but this was understood in a broad sense and became a critical review of different genres of documentation. There was a mood of introspection and assessment; it was an opportunity to take stock, to consider what the Commission and the wider world of instrument history had achieved in recent decades and to consider to what extent the current direction was appropriate for the future. This seemed a particularly suitable time for reassessment as new technologies offer fresh possibilities for information management.

Some papers addressed these challenges, while others reviewed the achievements and continuing value of conventional catalogues and inventories. There was no intention to publish the papers as a group, but the organisers have announced the publication of a set of Congress Proceedings in 25 projected volumes, and some of the speakers will be submitting their papers.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Sorø, Denmark: 20-25 July 1998

XVII Scientific Instrument Symposium

With a one-day trip to museums in Copenhagen and a post-conference tour to the Danish National Museum for the History of Science, the Steno Museum, in Aarhus.

There will be some 50 papers, including some invited lectures, and the main themes are 'Instruments and instrument makers in Scandinavia' and 'Cabinets of Physics and Chemistry'. Further information is available on <http://www.sic.iuhps.org> or from the Conference Office for the XVII International Scientific Instrument Symposium, Sorø Academy, Postbox 37, DK-4180 Sorø, Denmark. Phone: +45 5782 0135, Fax: +45 5782 0136, E-mail: ievhjan@dfi.aau.dk

Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia: September 1999

XVIII Scientific Instrument Symposium

The Plenary Session of the Commission held at Liège agreed that a meeting should be held in Oxford in 1999. However, there had been an earlier proposal that 1999 would be the occasion for the first visit to Russia, and an invitation to that effect was later received from the Institute of the History of Science and Technology of the Russian Academy of Science. It seemed appropriate to accept this welcome invitation and postpone the Oxford meeting to the year 2000. Plans are now underway to hold the 18th Symposium in Moscow and St Petersburg. At the initiative of Dr Vasily Borissov a National Organizing Committee has been formed under the Presidency of Academician Yuri Gulyaev, and the third week in September 1999 seems the likely period. Confirmation and further details will be announced as soon as possible.

Oxford, England: September 2000

The XIX Scientific Instrument Symposium is to be held at Oxford, probably in September 2000.

Mexico City, Mexico: summer 2001

The XX Scientific Instrument Symposium is to be held within the XXlth International Congress of the History of Science, which will take place in Mexico City in the summer of 2001.

WORKSHOPS AND SYMPOSIUMS HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION**Florence, Italy: 23-24 November 1998****Workshop**

With the generous support of the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza a workshop will be held under the auspices of the Scientific Instrument Commission in Florence, 23-24 November 1998.

The subject will be the Conservation and Restoration of Scientific Instruments: Issues of Principle and Practice. The details of the programme are being worked out in Florence, but the intention is to bring together people professionally active in the field, with several objectives:

to institute better co-operation between institutions, to encourage the formation of a pool of shared practical knowledge, to prepare some form of agreement regarding aims and good practice, and to secure and disseminate both general agreements and practical advice by publications. Details from the Vice-President.

Leiden, The Netherlands: 15-16 October 1999**Symposium**

The Museum Boerhaave will organize a symposium under the auspices of the Scientific Instrument Commission on 15-16 October 1999. Invited speakers will address the problem of authenticity and historic scientific instruments. Key words are: original, imitation, reproduction, reconstruction, copy, facsimile, restoration, forgery; see G. L'E. Turner 'Originals and imitations. A study of scientific instruments', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 8, nr. 3 (1983), 274-283.

The symposium is part of the Anton Mensing Scientific Instrument Project, a joint venture of the Museum Boerhaave, Leiden, the Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, the Utrecht University Museum and the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum, Chicago. It aims to trace, catalogue and research the instruments owned by Anton W.M. Mensing (1866-1936), director and owner of Frederik Muller & Co., auctioneers in Amsterdam. Ever since they were dispersed, there have been doubts on the authenticity of a section of the Mensing instruments; indeed, several have been proved to be forgeries.

Details from the Secretary.

SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION WEBSITE

The Commission has established its own website at <http://www.sic.uhps.org>

Thanks are due to Dana Freiburger, Jan Tapdrup and Giles Hudson at the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford.

The website has been useful in supplying information on the forthcoming Symposium, and has been enhanced by accounts and pictures of Sorø Academy and the Hauchs Physiske Cabinet in Sorø. In time, further features will be added, such as the Newsletter and Annual Bibliographies. The site will be worth watching for future developments.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE CLASSIFIED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Commission has issued a Supplement by A.V. Simcock to the *Classified Bibliography on the History of Scientific Instruments* by G.L'E. Turner and D.J. Bryden published in 1997. Copies of the Supplement can be obtained from the Museum of the History of Science, Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3AZ, U.K., on payment of £2 to cover production and postage costs. The *Classified Bibliography* itself is also available at £5, and copies of both Bibliography and Supplement will be on sale at the forthcoming Symposium in Sorø.

NEWS FROM MUSEUMS

The Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, will be closed from July 1998 for major building work and gallery refurbishment. The closure will probably last for about a year. The M.Sc. course will continue, but the only public visits will be virtual ones to the Museum's website:

www.mhs.ox.ac.uk

The History of Science Museum at Geneva has an exhibition 'Les instruments scientifiques du musée national Suisse', which shows some of the most precious instruments of the Swiss National Museum in Zürich. These include a Bürgi golden globe and a Gessner globe. Dates: 28 May to 2 November 1998.

The Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris, is scheduled to re-open in June 1999. To highlight the bi-centenary of the discovery of the voltaic cell, the museum will open a special exhibition in the Autumn of 1999 on the beginnings of new electricity, starring Coulomb, Galvani and Volta.

At Pavia, Italy, a symposium will be held on Volta in the Autumn of 1999. At that occasion, a reconstructed Volta's cabinet will be opened. At the same time, the collection of 'Volta's Temple' in Como will be brought back on display after restoration and reorganisation.

OBITUARY NOTE

Roderick Sheldon Webster (1915-1997)

Rod Webster, Curator Emeritus of the Adler's Planetarium collections of scientific instruments, passed away on 31 July 1997. He will be remembered as a faithful participant, together with his wife Madge who survives him, in SIC symposiums and other instrumental events. An obituary by Bruce Stephenson appeared in the *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society* No. 54 (1997)

The Commission's retiring and new officers in front of the Turners's house in Islip, Oxfordshire, on 2 December 1997. Left to right Jim Bennett, Paolo Brenni, Gerard Turner, Robert Anderson and Peter de Clercq.

Photograph by Helen Turner.