

INTERNATIONAL UNION of the HISTORY and PHILOSOPHY of SCIENCE

Division of History of Science

Scientific Instrument Commission

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NEWSLETTER

No: 20 – May 1999

CHANGES

The previous Newsletter, which appeared in June 1998, announced a complete change of officers of the Scientific Instrument Commission. After many years, Robert Anderson and Gerard Turner stepped down as Chairman and Secretary on 1 January 1998, handing the torch to a triumvirate, Jim Bennett, Paolo Brenni and Peter de Clercq. Unexpectedly, we once again have to announce a change in the group of officers.

Peter de Clercq will resign from the Museum Boerhaave and take up residence in London, where he will continue to act as Secretary. As it was considered important for the Commission to maintain close ties with the Museum Boerhaave, Marian Fournier, Assistant Director, was invited to join in a newly created position of treasurer. The Commission was gratified that she accepted and looks forward to a pleasant and fruitful cooperation.

MINUTES OF THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION

Held at Sorø, Denmark, on 24 July 1998

In the Chair

Dr J.A. Bennett

6. Future Activities

The Commission has accepted the offer of the Russian Academy of Sciences to organize the 18th Symposium in Moscow and St. Petersburg, 20-25 September 1999. The Chairman of the National Organizing Committee, Academician Prof Yu. Gulyaev, introduced the Vice-Chairman Dr V. Sitsev and the Secretary Dr V. Borisov, and commented on the proposed order of events. A first circular was distributed during the 17th Symposium and will be distributed by post to absent members. Respondents are to receive the second circular before the end of 1998.

The 19th Symposium is to be held in 2000 at Oxford, probably in September.

The 20th Symposium could be held within the XXIth International Congress of the History of Science, which will take place in Mexico City from 8-14 July 2001. However, Dr Bennett expressed concern about this location. Travel costs will be high, and the Commission is not aware of potential national organizers in Mexico, nor that there are museums and collections of sufficient specific interest. No decision was taken on the subject.

Dr G. Vlahakis of the National Hellenic Research Foundation at Athens read an invitation, also on behalf of Balkan colleagues, for a Scientific Instrument Symposium to be held in Athens in 2002. This invitation was gratefully accepted.

Increased activity can be effected by lending the Commission's support to workshops and symposiums which other bodies will organize under the auspices of the Scientific Instrument Commission. Two such events are presently being planned.

(1) Dr P. Brenni announced that a workshop on *Conservation and Restoration of Scientific Instruments: Issues of Principle* will be organized by the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza and is to be held in Florence, 14-15 December 1998.

(2) Dr P. de Clercq announced that a symposium on *Scientific instruments: fakes, forgeries, replicas, copies* will be organized by the Museum Boerhaave as part of the Anton Mensing Scientific Instrument Project and is to be held in Leiden, 15-16 October 1999.

7. Any other Business

The following resolution was proposed and carried unanimously:

The Scientific Instrument Commission recognises the international importance of the Hauch collection of scientific instruments at Sorø Academy.

The Commission congratulates the Sorø Academy Trust on the efforts it has made so far, most successfully, to conserve and display the collection.

The Commission urges the Trust to continue this work in a manner worthy of the collection's importance, ensuring its proper study and conservation.

Dr Bennett drew attention to the existence of a bulletin board for the scientific instrument community, which is operated from the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford and can be subscribed free via e-mail under *rete@maillist.ox.ac.uk*

Dr Bennett commented on the earthquake, which earlier in 1998 inflicted severe damage to the collection of historical scientific instruments at Urbino in Italy. He was authorized to send a formal expression of the regret of the Commission.

A NOTE ON THE SORØ MEETING

More than one hundred delegates took part in the XVII International Scientific Instrument Symposium, which was held in Denmark from 20 to 25 July 1998. The location was the idyllic Sorø Academy, some fifty miles west of Copenhagen, surrounded by a lake. The

Commission had the good fortune to have an ambitious and efficient Local Organizing Committee, chaired by Jan Tapdrup, with Jørgen From Andersen acting as General Secretary. Accommodation was offered in student housing on the grounds, which resulted in a 'summer course' atmosphere enjoyed thoroughly by most delegates.

Forty-two papers were read, partly in parallel sessions, and there were two special guest speakers. Owen Gingerich gave a pre-conference talk on Tycho Brahe, while John Heilbron admonished the gathered instrument historians to be more assertive about their field of research and delectation.

There was a full-day excursion to Copenhagen with visits to instruments at Rosenborg Castle, the Rundetårn, the Medicin Historisk Museum and National Museet. There was also a post-conference tour to Aarhus, with a visit to the Steno Museum.

The papers were grouped into three sessions: 'Instruments in Scandinavia'; 'Cabinets of Physics'; 'Other Subjects'. The second theme was inspired by the presence in a separate building on the grounds of Hauchs Physiske Cabinet, the collection of physical and chemical instruments built up between c. 1787 and c. 1820 by the Danish gentleman scientist Adam Wilhelm Hauch (1755-1838), and donated to Sorø Academy by the Danish king in 1827. As recorded in the Minutes of the Plenary Session, a Resolution was carried to urge the Sorø Academy Trust to continue its efforts to conserve and display this important collection.

In a special session, Jim Bennett and Giles Hudson, both of the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, explained and demonstrated the Online Register of Scientific Instruments, on which more information is given elsewhere in this Newsletter.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia: 20-25 September 1999 XVIII International Scientific Instrument Symposium

After the presentation and distribution of a First Circular during the XVIIth Scientific Instrument Symposium held in Denmark in July 1998, a Second Circular was sent out in January 1999. Copies of the Second Circular may be ordered from the Conference Office at:

XVIII International Scientific Instrument Symposium
Institute of the History of Science and Technology, RAS
Staropanski per., 1/5 Moscow, 103012, Russia
Telephone: (095) 921 8061
Fax: (095) 925 9911
E-mail: borisov@history.ihst.ru

The programme and registration details can also be found on the SIC Website at <http://www.sic.iuhps.org>

The Russian Academy of Sciences has chosen the year of the 275th anniversary of its foundation to invite instrument historians to participate in academic sessions and excursions to museums and institutions in Moscow, with an optional two-day excursion to St. Petersburg. The main theme of the symposium is **Historical relations between Russia and other countries in the field of scientific instruments**, but papers on other themes will also be welcomed. The closing date for papers and posters is 30 April, but this date may be flexible.

The conference will take place in Moscow at the Conference Hall of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Registration fee including three nights hotel accommodation in Moscow (19-22 September), meals, receptions and excursions in Moscow: \$ 500 if payment is made before 1 June, \$ 550 after 1 June. For students a special reduction fee applies of \$ 420.

Although the two-day excursion to St. Petersburg is optional, many delegates will consider this a vital part of the Symposium. The train to St. Petersburg leaves from Moscow on the evening of 22 September, allowing two full days for excursions on 23 and 24 September. Participants can return to Moscow by train, arriving there on Saturday 25 September, or

travel home directly from St. Petersburg. The cost for the excursion is \$275 including hotel accommodation, meals and excursions, plus a single train fare Moscow-St. Petersburg, or \$350 if a return train journey is required.

Payment can be made in US Dollars to Donau-Bank AG, Vienna. Beneficiary: Union of Scientific and Engineering Associations, Moscow. For details see the Second Circular. For the convenience of delegates, it has been decided to allow payment of equivalent sums in Pounds Sterling to the Scientific Instrument Commission, Oxford, or in Euros to the Scientific Instrument Commission, Leiden. Details about payment, and the equivalent sums, will be announced on the SIC Website.

Oxford, Great Britain: 4-8 September 2000

The XIX Scientific Instrument Symposium is to be held at Oxford, 4-8 September 2000, in Wadham College. This will include a visit to the Museum of the History of Science, which is presently undergoing major building work and gallery refurbishment. Details to follow.

2001

As it may prove difficult to organize the XX International Scientific Instrument Symposium within the XXI International Congress of the History of Science in Mexico City in the summer of 2001, alternatives are being considered.

Athens, Greece, 2002

The XXI International Scientific Instrument Symposium is scheduled to take place in Athens, at the invitation issued by Giorgi Vlahakis during the Sorø meeting.

WORKSHOPS AND SYMPOSIUMS HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION

Florence, Italy: 23-24 November 1998

Workshop on Conservation

This workshop was organized by the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza and the Opificio della Pietra Dura, both in Florence. It was very well attended and clearly touched the concerns of many people working with collections of scientific instruments. There were ten speakers from museums in Italy, Great Britain, Germany, France and The Netherlands, and there followed a discussion chaired by the Scientific Instrument Commission's President, Jim Bennett. Howard Dawes gives an impression of this meeting in the *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society* No. 60 (1999), p. 27. The report of the round table discussion will be added to the SIC Website. The full proceedings will be published by the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza. Further meetings, perhaps on twentieth-century instruments, are anticipated.

Leiden, The Netherlands: 15-16 October 1999

Scientific Instruments: Originals and Imitations. The Mensing Connection.

This 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.

The symposium will address the problem of authenticity and historic scientific instruments. The programme is printed on page 7. The registration fee is f 200,- (approximately \$95) and includes lunches and drinks and a copy of the proceedings, which will be edited by Peter de Clercq and published in the series of Museum Boerhaave Communications. For details and registration, contact the local organizer Agnes Rappard, Museum Boerhaave, Postbox 11280, 2301 EG Leiden, The Netherlands, tel. +31 (0)71 5214 224, extension

602, fax +31 (0)71 5120344.

VARIA

The On-line Register of Scientific Instruments

This is a scheme to improve access to information on historic instruments, which involves the adoption of a common system of numbering instruments in historical collections (ISIN-numbers) and the creation of a shared electronic database. To judge by the extensive interest in the proposal when the plan was explained to the Scientific Instrument Commission at the Sorø meeting in July 1998, there is considerable enthusiasm for this idea. It would provide an on-line database, accessible via the Internet, which would direct queries to the collections holding instruments matching the interests of the enquirer. The best way to see what is proposed is to visit the working prototype at <http://www.isin.org>. A manual is being prepared by Giles Hudson and Jim Bennett and will be available before the Moscow Symposium. The scheme will be launched this year.

Epact

The database of early mathematical instruments at the British Museum, the Museum Boerhaave, the Museo di Storia della Scienza and the Museum of the History of Science, a project supported by a grant from the European Commission, is now complete. It comprises an electronic catalogue rich in images and technical descriptions, with a variety of supporting tools. So far, it is available only in the collaborating museums, but a version on the World Wide Web is planned.

The Scientific Instrument Commission Website

The Commission's website at <http://www.sic.iuhps.org> went into its second year. Thanks are due to Dana Freiburger, who maintains the website. It is considered to amalgamate all SIC Bibliographies published so far on the Website, which would result in an instrument bibliography covering almost two decades. The site will continue to be worth watching for future developments.

Hellenic Archives of Scientific Instruments

In March 1999 the first Newsletter for the History of Science in South-eastern Europe was issued by the History of Science Programme of the Institute of Neohellenic Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation, 48, Va. Constantinou Av., Athens 116 35. It reports among others on the Hellenic Archives of Scientific Instruments, set up within the N.H.R.F to contribute to the preservation and study of scientific instruments located in Greece. For details see the Archives' website at <http://www.eie.gr/hasi>

Derek Howse (1919-1998)

Lieutenant Commander Derek Howse, MBE, Dsc, Royal Navy, FSA, FRIN, FRAS, died on 26 July 1998. Following a naval career, he joined the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in 1963, where he eventually became Keeper, and he remained active after his retirement in 1982. He was President of the Scientific Instrument Commission from 1977 to 1982. A productive writer on the history of astronomy and navigation, his books include *The Tompion Clocks at Greenwich and the Dead-Beat Escapement* (with B. Hutchinson, 1971), *Greenwich Observatory*, vol. 3: *The Buildings and Instruments* (1975), *Greenwich Time and the Discovery of Longitude* (1980, revised 1997) and *Nevil Maskelyne: The Seaman's Astronomer* (1989). An obituary appeared in the *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society* vol. 58 (1998), pages 2-3.

Aldert J. Klut (1928-1999)

Known to many of his English friends as 'Big Al', the Dutch engineer and instrument collector Aldert J. Klut died on 1 January 1999. Always keen to share his passion for precision instruments, he helped to initiate a Dutch National Inventory of historic scientific instruments, currently in preparation. An obituary appeared in the *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society* vol. 60 (1999), page 4.

Scientific Instruments: Originals and Imitations The Mensing Connection

A two-day symposium at the Museum Boerhaave, Leiden

Friday 15 October 1999

10.00-10.45 **Introductions**

P.R. de Clercq, London, United Kingdom

W.F.J. Mörzer Bruyns, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

10.45-11.30 **Paris, Amsterdam, London: the Collecting, Trade and Display of Early Scientific Instruments, 1830-1930**

A.J. Turner, Le Mesnil-le-Roi, France

11.30-12.00 Coffee

12.00-12.45 **Recognizing Imitation Instruments**

G.L'E. Turner, Oxford, United Kingdom

12.45-14.30 Lunch

14.30-15.15 **Why Make Fakes?**

O. Gingerich, Harvard Smithsonian, USA

15.15-16.00 **Twenty Years of Scientific Instruments at Auction**

J. Collins, London, United Kingdom

16.00-16.30 **Scientific and Technical Examination of Metal Objects**

P. Hallebeek, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Reception

Saturday 16 October 1999

10.00-10.45 **A Chapter in Silver Faking: the Feeterse Clan**

K.A. Citroen, Aerdenhout, The Netherlands

10.45-11.30 **Fakes among the Mensing Instruments**

J.C. Deiman, Utrecht, The Netherlands

11.30-12.00 Coffee

12.00-12.30 **The Tale of a Forger of Scientific Instruments**

written by S.A. Bedini, Washington D.C., USA, read by A.J. Turner

12.30-13.00 **Replicating Instruments: Some Practical Aspects**

M. Brunold, Abtwil, Switzerland

13.00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15.30 **Examination of imitation instruments**

15.30-17.00 **Final discussion**

Chair: R.G.W. Anderson, London, United Kingdom

Registration fee f 200 (ca. \$95) including lunches, drinks and, eventually, a copy of the proceedings. For a registration form with hotel information, contact the local organizer Agnes Rappard, Museum Boerhaave, Postbox 11280, 2301 EG Leiden, tel. +31 (0)71 5214 224, extension 602, fax +31 (0)71 5120344.

