

MINUTES OF THE 20th PLENARY SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMMISSION

Held at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm, on 19 October 2001

In the Chair Jim Bennett
Present some 50 Corresponding Members

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Robert Anderson, Vassily Borisov, Steven de Clercq, Dana Freiburger, Jean-François Gauvin, Julian Holland and Madge Webster. Silke Ackermann and Eftymios Nicolaïdis, who did attend the Symposium, had to leave before the plenary session.

2. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The Minutes of the 19th Plenary Session, held in Oxford on 7 September 2000, had been circulated in Newsletter no. 22 and were accepted.

3. **Report of Activities**

Newsletter no. 22 and the Seventeenth Bibliography of books, pamphlets, catalogues and articles on or connected with historical scientific instruments were published and distributed in May 2001, with the generous support of the Museum Boerhaave, Leiden. Both documents were added to the SIC Website, which was regularly updated through the efforts of Dana Freiburger.

It was agreed with Professor Paolo Galluzzi, director of the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza in Florence, that the Commission will have a distinct and identifiable section within an annual issue of *Nuncius*. The first SIC section will appear in the second issue of 2001. Guest edited by Anthony Turner, it will contain papers read at the 19th Scientific Instrument Symposium in the session *Archives of Instrument Dealers and Collectors*.

Anthony Turner stated that information would be added on the papers of the instrument historian Maximilian Bobinger (1895-1973), which were deposited at the city archives of Augsburg and to which attention had been drawn at the symposium's poster session by Inge Keil.

The 20th IUHPS Conference was held in Mexico from 8 to 14 July 2001. It had proved impossible to organize a Commission session during the Conference. The Commission was represented by Dana Freiburger, and the chairman read parts of his report. Dana voted for Beijing (versus Budapest) as location for the 21st IUHPS Conference to be held in August 2005; the vote was 37 to 29 (1 abstention) for Beijing. He also voted for the acceptance of a new commission: Commission on the History of Meteorology.

The chairman advocated that the Commission would have its annual symposium in 2005 as part of the IUHPS conference, and the meeting agreed that SIC should go to Beijing. Ronald Wittje, who had also attended the Conference, added his comments and concurred.

A workshop 'Making of the Spectroscope' was held in Munich, September 2001,

under the auspices of the Commission. The chairman had been among the 25 participants and reported that it had been well-focussed and successful. He expressed gratitude to the Deutsches Museum for its hospitality, to the Hans R. Jenemann Foundation for financial support, and to the organisers Charlotte Bigg and Klaus Staubermann.

It was felt that the papers read at the workshop would make a good SIC section in *Nuncius* in 2002, and Klaus Staubermann confirmed that he and Charlotte Bigg would be guest editors.

4. Financial matters

The treasurer reported on the health of the Commission's finances, with the balance currently 1,133 Euros. Payments were still to be made for the distribution of the Newsletter and Bibliography. On the other hand, a grant from the IUHPS of as yet unspecified size was forthcoming.

5. Publications

The proceedings of the 16th Scientific Instrument Symposium, held in Liège in July 1997, were to appear before the IUHPS Conference in Mexico, but this has not been achieved.

The proceedings of the 18th Scientific Instrument Symposium, held in Moscow in September 1999, have not yet been published because of lack of funding. It was agreed that the secretary would ask the editor, Vassily Borisov, what the prospects are. Should publication in the foreseeable future seem improbable, contributors could be given the option to publish elsewhere.

Bibliography and Newsletter:

In previous plenary sessions, the Commission announced that at some point it would stop printing and distributing these documents and restrict itself to offering them on the SIC website. Most members will by now have routine access to the internet, and others can arrange to gain access and make print-outs. This will reduce the financial and administrative burden for the Commission, and unlike the printed version, one can search the accumulated bibliographies electronically. Following discussion, it was agreed that the 18th Bibliography and the 23rd Newsletter, due in Spring 2002, will be the last to be printed and distributed to the members on the address list.

6. Future activities

The 21st Symposium will be held from Monday 9 to Saturday 14 September 2002 at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in Athens. This will include an optional excursion to Syros island from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening. On behalf of the local organizers, Eftymios Nicolaïdis had brought printed announcements. The secretary would supply him with the address list to send out first circulars.

It had been agreed that the 22nd Symposium would be held in 2003 at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, USA. On behalf of the local organizers, Willem Mörzer Bruyns announced that the dates will be Tuesday 23 to Saturday 27 September [but see below]. This will include excursions/sessions on Friday at Colonial Williamsburg, and on Saturday at the Smithsonian / National Museum of American History in Washington. At the latter institution, Steven Turner agreed to act as local organizer.

A first circular will be handed out at the Athens symposium. Willem Mörzer Bruyns announced that there would be no fixed symposium themes, but some extra attention to nautical instruments is to be expected. He announced that together with Inga Elmqvist he would organize a session on the iconography of instruments. Marvin Bolt reminded the meeting that these dates are inconvenient for US academics, but after discussion it was felt that there is no way of avoiding this inconvenience.

[Note: After the meeting, it was brought to the Commission's attention that in 2003, Rosh Hashanah starts at sundown on Friday Sept. 26 and ends at sundown on Sunday Sept. 28. To avoid a conflict of interests for some of us, it has been decided to postpone the meeting one week. The new dates for the Symposium are Tuesday 30 September to Saturday 4 October 2003].

Following the earlier proposal to have the 23th Symposium in September 2004 in Dresden, Germany, Peter Plassmeyer, Director of the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon, sketched the possible visits in and outside Dresden. He announced that a formal invitation was now on its way to the Commission, which the meeting agreed to accept.

As in the previous plenary meeting, Charles Mollan suggested to include a week-end, which would make it easier for some to participate; Anthony Turner concurred. [Returning from Stockholm, the Commission found the invitation from Dr Martin Roth, Generaldirektor Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, and Dr Plassmeyer. The secretary has written to thank and confirm.]

As discussed under item 3, the 24th Symposium will in principle be held as part of the 21st IUHPS Conference at Beijing in August 2005.

An invitation was received from the Algiers Observatory, who are willing to organize a symposium. Anthony Turner, who with Françoise Le Guet Tully is involved in studying and cataloguing astronomical observatories, confirmed that Algiers is very interested to host a meeting. This could either be a regular symposium, which would be in 2006 at the earliest, or -- sooner -- a specialist meeting under SIC auspices, which could focus on the Mediterranean area.. The chairman agreed that both options can be discussed with the Director of the Algiers Observatory.

The chairman observed that specialist meetings under SIC-auspices appear a successful formula, witness the well-focussed workshops held in Florence on restoration and in Munich on spectroscopes. He announced that as president of the British Society for the History of Science he has suggested to that Society to have a joint meeting with SIC on (provisional title) 'Do collections matter in instrument studies?'. The meeting could address the dichotomy between keepers and cataloguers of instrument collections on the one hand, and the potentially (but not actually) interested practitioners on the other hand. The meeting supported this initiative and gave the chairman mandate to plan this event, which is likely to take place in London in the first half of 2002, possibly at the Science Museum or the Royal Institution. [Note: since then, it has been decided to hold the meeting on 29-30 June 2002 in Oxford; see below under Forthcoming events].

Suzanne Débarbat announced that in Paris an exhibition is considered to mark the

transit of Venus in June 2004, and wondered whether this could be an occasion for a SIC initiative. The discussion showed that there is no lack of similar initiatives throughout the world, and it was suggested that a possible SIC involvement could be an internet site with a virtual exhibition. A working party, consisting of Sara Schechner, Stephen Johnston and Steven Turner as members, was formed to take this proposal further and to report to the Commission. Klaus Staubermann favoured a specialist meeting on instruments and expeditions, which, it was suggested, might be a session at the Dresden symposium later that year.

Christina Halldén urged the Commission to continue the discussion on conservation issues. It was decided that she and Klaus Staubermann would be in contact with Paolo Brenni to arrange a session on this subject, possibly at the Athens symposium. The papers could be the substance of a forthcoming SIC section in *Nuncius*. Mara Miniati suggested that it could even be a special issue in the series *Bibliotheca di Nuncius*.

7. Online Register of Scientific Instruments

The symposium folder contained information on this international database, which is developed and supported by the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford with SIC and can be visited at <http://www.isin.org>

The register currently contains records of over 6,000 objects from 15 institutions. Institutions with collections of any type or size are welcome to join the Online Register and add their instruments to the database. Enquiries are also welcome from private collectors.

Willem Mörzer Bruyns drew attention to thesaurus problems; for example, cross staff may be written in three different ways. The chairman stressed the need to 'browse creatively': the museum does not have the resources to police the register. It is up to the contributors themselves to weed out inconsistencies etcetera as a continuous programme of improvement.

8. News from members (developments, plans, problems)

Anthony Turner drew attention to a small exhibition from 20 November 2001 to February 2002 at the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris, "Time in the temples of ancient Egypt", centered upon a recently acquired statuette, formerly in the Time Museum, Rockford.

Sara Schechner told the meeting that at Harvard a new building will be erected for the collection of scientific instruments, intended to open late in 2003. Potential collection researchers were advised to contact her soon, as access to the collection will be very restricted during building works.

Suzanne Débarbat announced that in October 2002 an exhibition on Foucault will open at the Paris Observatory, accompanied by a book by William Tobin in French and English.

The chairman informed the meeting that the Carl Zeiss Jena Foundation has reduced its support for the Optisches Museum at Jena, and that our member Helga Beez was made redundant. On behalf of the Commission, he has written to the various authorities and to the regional press to express the concern of the scientific instrument community over these events. He did not receive any replies.

9. Any other business

The chairman announced that he will stand down as President at the next plenary

session at Athens in September 2002. This would take effect from 1 January 2003, by which time he will have served for five years. He felt that the Commission is now robust enough to have a frequent turn-over of Officers.

This announcement led to some discussion of the Commission's constitution, and several members voiced interest in broadening involvement with work of the Officers. The chairman undertook to discover what arrangements are made in other commissions and report back.

After this, the chairman closed the plenary session.

Forthcoming Events

21th Scientific Instrument Symposium, Athens, 9-14 September 2002

The Symposium will be held at the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF), in the centre of Athens. Address: 48, Vassileos Constantinou Avenue. The preliminary programme includes sessions and visits to the big Newall refractor at the Observatory of Penteli, the Archaeological Museum (where they have the famous Antikythera Mechanism) and the National Observatory of Athens (19th-century instruments). There will also be an optional excursion to the island Syros, with a visit to the Technology and Industry Museum, established in 1999. At the time of writing, two sessions were being organised by participants: Optics in the 19th century, and History of Science Museums and Dissemination of Scientific Culture. For details and update, visit the Symposium site <http://www.eie.gr/hasi> or contact the local organizers at gvlahakis@eie.gr

'Do collections matter to instrument studies?' Oxford, 29 and 30 June 2002

Joint meeting between the British Society for the History of Science (BSHS) and the Scientific Instrument Commission.

The meeting will address the gap between the increasing numbers of historians writing about instruments and the curators who actually care for our collections of instruments. The curators seem to be less aware of developments in instrument-focused work than one might expect and their lives have not been substantially affected by this major development in the history of science. On the other hand, the historians engage less than one might think with real objects and often fail to take account of what can be learnt from populations of instruments in collections. Contributions from both sides might discover common ground and forge new understandings.

Offers of papers and questions on the contents of the meeting can be addressed to the SIC President, Dr Jim Bennett, Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, e-mail: jim.bennett@mhs.ox.ac.uk. Registration information is available from the BSHS Executive Secretary, 31 High Street, Stanford in the Vale, Faringdon, Oxon SN7 8LH, e-mail: bshs@hidex.demon.co.uk

The Scientific Instrument Commission in retrospect

We conclude this Newsletter, the last SIC Newsletter to appear in print, with a short retrospect on the Commission's activities. The following is drawn from the Secretary's note 'The Scientific Instrument Commission and its Bibliographies',

Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society 71 (2001), page 38. That in its turn was partly based on a brochure *An Apparatus of Instruments: The Role of the Scientific Instrument Commission* (London, 1993; 22 pages; ISBN 0-9522077-02). Edited by R.G.W. Anderson and G.L'E. Turner, it was published by the Commission for distribution to delegates at the nineteenth IUHPS Congress in Zaragoza, Spain. The brochure gave the state of the art of instrument history and discussed the Commission's aims, accomplishments and challenges; it is now out of print.

The Scientific Instrument Commission (SIC) is a commission of the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science (IUHPS), Division of History of Science. It was established in 1977 at the fifteenth IUHPS International Congress at Edinburgh to stimulate historical studies on scientific instruments. SIC Presidents to date have been first the late Derek Howse, then Robert Anderson, and since 1997 Jim Bennett; SIC Secretaries have been Gerard L'E Turner until 1997, since then Peter de Clercq. The group of SIC Officers now also includes Paolo Brenni as Vice-President and Marian Fournier as Treasurer.

Symposiums have been held almost annually since 1981, as a rule coinciding every four years with the IUHPS International Congress:

1	1981	Bucharest	IUHPS XVI
2	1982	Greenwich	
3	1983	Munich	
4	1984	Amsterdam	
5	1985	Berkeley, California	IUHPS XVII
6	1986	Florence	
7	1987	Paris	
8	1988	London	
9	1989	Hamburg	IUHPS XVIII
		Note: only a plenary meeting was held	
10	1990	Cambridge, Mass.	
11	1991	Bologna	
12	1992	Edinburgh	
	1993	Zaragoza	IUHPS XIX
		Note: 'An Apparatus of Instruments' was distributed to IUHPS delegates	
13	1994	Leiden	
14	1995	Prague	
15	1996	Ottawa	
16	1997	Liège	IUHPS XX
17	1998	Sorø	
18	1999	Moscow	
19	2000	Oxford	
20	2001	Stockholm	

Academic papers and posters are the main substance at these symposiums, but visits to instrument collections in museums, universities and other institutions are an important and attractive ingredient.

From 1980 onward, the Commission has produced an annual SIC Newsletter, to which from 1983 onward was added an annual Bibliography of books, pamphlets,

catalogues and articles on or connected with historical scientific instruments. The total now stands at 23 Newsletters and 18 Bibliographies.

The first thirteen Bibliographies were combined into a single volume and published as G.L'E. Turner and D.J. Bryden, *A Classified Bibliography on the History of Scientific Instruments* (Oxford,1997). 119 pages. ISBN 0-9522077-1-0. It contains more than a thousand titles of works published between 1980 and 1995, classified under subject headings. The next year, this was followed by A.V. Simcock, *A Supplement to a Classified Bibliography on the History of Scientific Instruments* (Oxford, 1998) [40 pages], no ISBN. This volume contains references to a few hundred books and articles published between 1980 and 1995, mostly from the years 1990-1995. Both volumes were published by the SIC and distributed by the Museum of the History of Science, where they can still be ordered, for £5 and £2 respectively, including p&p. Write to: Museum of the History of Science, Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3AZ, United Kingdom.

The Newsletters and Bibliographies were printed and distributed to an increasing mailing list. The Scientific Instrument Commission has no formal or paid membership. It is an undefined and in principle unlimited group of individuals and institutions who share an interest in the history of instruments. To reach out to this audience, in 1998 the Commission has created its own website at <http://www.sic.iuhps.org>. It is maintained by Dana Freiburger in the U.S.A. and very much worth a visit. Among others, one can access all the SIC Bibliographies listed above, download them and search them in a way not possible with printed documents.

Although it will now no longer print and distribute them in the traditional manner, the Commission will continue compiling bibliographies and offer these on the SIC website at regular, not necessarily annual, intervals. As always, it invites members of the scientific instrument community to contribute recent titles, especially of publications that may easily escape the compiler's notice, such as descriptive catalogues, exhibition catalogues and papers published in less widely known journals. Suggested entries may be sent to the compiler at peter@declercq.homechoice.co.uk