

Meeting report 1996

The twenty-fifth meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was held at the University of Antwerp in May 1996 at the kind invitation of Dr Frans van Overveld. It was attended by 134 active participants and 17 accompanying persons, with representatives from 17 European countries as well as 6 non-European countries. On Thursday after a very early start (7.15), Dr van Overveld welcomed us with the legend of how Antwerpen got its name; an evil giant extracted a fee from all who wished to pass along the river. The valiant Bravo couldn't pay but he chopped off the Giant's hand threw it away - hence Antwerpen from to throw the hand. The Rector of the University Professor J Van Streenberge then welcomed us. The University of Antwerp also celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, although parts had been founded in the 19th century. Both the university and our society are still small enough so that everybody knows each other and works together. Our Secretary General, Professor Mannaioni, wished us all a happy 25th anniversary and complemented Frans on the beautiful silver lapel badges with our logo which we all received. Travelling from Florence to Antwerp, he passed no customs posts or passport controls, we are moving towards a united states of Europe. In our society the borders were always abolished during the meetings and we are bound by a common language English or in some cases broken English! He hoped that the younger members of the Society will celebrate our Golden anniversary.

The scientific sessions began with a look at the cardiovascular system and blood cells and we found that the modern cytokines are not as good as the mast cell at causing angiogenesis. After coffee, the first session on Histamine Receptors and Antihistamines was held. The GB West Memorial Lecture was given by Dr Michael A Kaliner, who recapped the role of allergy in asthma and focused on the rationale for novel asthma management strategies. The second session on Histamine Receptors came after coffee, followed by a session on Atopy. Here James Dear of University College London gave a talk based on his prize-winning 1995 GB West Memorial essay on the role of histamine in the nasal actions of bradykinin. For such a young scientist he gave a marvellous presentation and fielded the questions like an old timer! We returned to our hotels to get ready for the evening's entertainment. Our partners had visited a carpet weaving company and the Royal Carillon school in Mechelen. After an excellent Flemish lunch in castle Tivoli, they saw the astronomical clock in Lier and had tea on a boat. We were treated to a concert of harp and violin in the Rubens House, attended by one of the most reluctant concert-goers of the society who was later heard to say it was good! We then walked through

the picturesque old town, through winding alleyways and down into the cellar of the Pelgrom for a splendid meal accompanied by jugs of beer, wine or in a few cases cola. The candlelit tables made us think that we had gone back in time.

For the brave, Friday started with the fun activity at 7.00. Due to the poor weather cycling was cancelled but great fun was had in the hotel gym, though at least one potential participant did not get out of bed in time! The meeting opened with the Conference lecture given by Dr Guillermo Alvarez de Toledo who described the use of electrophysiological techniques to investigate the fine details of the exocytotic process in mast cells and other secretory cells. This talk was most impressive. Luckily the Society also impressed the speaker and on the final day he asked for details of how to join. Mast cells and basophils were an important theme in the conference and the rest of the morning was devoted to this topic. Appropriately, after lunch we visited the gastrointestinal tract and that well-known bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* was mentioned more than once. In the morning our partners had visited the Plantin-Moretus Museum, a wonderful late gothic house belonging to these world famous printers. Then as always off to the excursion - details of which Frans had kept hidden from everybody. We started with one of Belgium's best industries, no not chocolate making, but Janssen Pharmaceuticals. We learnt about the long road to successful drug development and then toured parts of the complex. Many of us were green with envy looking at the vast array of expensive equipment. Leaving Janssen, we found that we had also left Belgium and driven into the Netherlands. Arriving in Efteling, we walked through the park, with magnificent trees and weird but wonderful buildings, finally reaching the Dream Flight building where we were greeted by fairies and trolls. Oberon welcomed us to his kingdom and picked his special fairies for the night. One was called Early Morning, which in view of our early starts, made most of the delegates laugh. Poetry and dance made the place magical and the trolls managed to annoy some of us, nibbling at long hair and screaming, although they did stand still for photos! We rode around the fairy kingdom and down into the dark, damp world of the trolls. Greta fell and broke her glasses and was immediately surrounded by all the clinicians of the Society, who having realised that she was okay rapidly returned to their drinks! The food and drink were plentiful and excellent and afterwards we danced for what seemed to be half the night.

Despite the late return, the session on Cell Growth and Metabolism was very well attended and we were frightened by the dramatic effects that histamine antagonists have on foetal development. In

anaesthesia and surgery, a heated debate broke out about the best methods for histamine measurement. At the same time, there was a well-attended and successful discussion of the CNS posters and the afternoon continued this theme with the CNS oral communications. The final presentation was our anniversary lecture given by Börje Uvnäs who discussed milestones in histamine research; he has been working in the field since 1934. To recruit new team members, his group had a sailing boat and enjoyed many outings whilst talking about histamine. I have collected some of the interesting quotes: we wondered what hypertonic water does; how antigen contracts guinea-pigs; there were dose-demented effects; chairmen who didn't worry about running behind; men who were invited to become special fairies etc! In the evening, we went to the famous Antwerp Zoo, wandered round a superb tropical garden and were very well fed and watered. We sang our anthem and Anita's especially composed song to a nursery tune about an incy wincy spider. The poster prizes were as follows: third prize Lindström *et al* (Lund, Sweden), second prize Yokoyama *et al* (Sendai, Japan) and first Leurs *et al* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands). After a most enjoyable evening, many delegates gathered in the hotel bar or around the piano to listen to Romano, our famous entertainer from the Moscow meeting. Our thanks go to Frans, Karin, Greta and their team for organising the scientific and social side of the meeting so well. The next meeting will be held in Seville between 14-17 May, at the kind invitation of Dr López-Elorza.

M. Ennis

Department of Clinical Biochemistry, The Queen's University of Belfast, Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BJ, UK