

Meeting report 1998

The twenty-seventh meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was held in Lodz, Poland in May 1998 at the kind invitation of Professor Agnieszka Fogel. There were 107 active participants registered and 9 accompanying persons. The largest contingent came from our host country (27) with Germany (14) and the UK (12) having the next largest delegations. We started with an informal Get Together Party in the University Hotel. The food was beautifully presented as well as tasting great! Sir James Black seemed to be the most popular man at the event, every time I looked over he had a different pretty girl having her photo taken with him! Unfortunately, those of us on the National Secretaries Committee had to leave the reception early (21.30) and we stayed talking until the small hours! Poor Peterjan waited very patiently for his dad to take him home!

Although we were housed some distance from the conference centre in the Polish Mother's Memorial Hospital, the bus transfers worked very smoothly and those who couldn't get out of bed in time discovered that Polish taxis are safe, fast and cheap! Agnieszka's welcome address included slides from the first informal meeting in Lodz (1971). Several eminent histaminologists looked very comfortable in vests or bikinis, drinking wine and vodka by the waterside. Piero Mannaioni was sad that he was not one of the chosen few at the first meeting but this was his sixth visit to the country. He likened his friendship with Czeslaw Maslinski to that between Copernicus and his scholar Galileo (given their dates of birth this was a bit of poetic licence!). This was followed by a very special event, the presentation of honorary membership of the EHRS to Mrs Jean West, Professor Sir James Black and Professor Czeslaw Maslinski (see next article for details). Jean-Charles Schwartz (Paris) gave the first invited lecture entitled "Brain histamine and the H₃ receptor from function to therapy". This was an absolutely fascinating account which held us all spellbound. The central nervous system dominated the rest of the morning with a poster discussion session and free communications. The other poster discussion session included histamine diagnostic tests and diverse effects. In the afternoon we heard about histamine and blood cells as well as clinical studies. Our partners had a walking tour of central Lodz, visited the Poznanski Palace which contains the museum of the history of Lodz, had a superb lunch and then visited the famous Jewish Cemetery. In the evening, we were treated to a Polish Opera about a terrible haunted castle (Straszny dwor by Stanislaw Moniuszko). The opera fans were delighted by it and the rest of us found it a surprisingly enjoyable experience. Then on to an English Pub – the Rolling Stone – for Polish food, an interesting drink made of vodka and apple juice and of course wonderful beer!

Friday morning came all too soon but who could miss Professor Sir James Black's talk entitled "Adventures with histamine"? It was wonderful to hear the enthusiasm with which he talked about his work. Our morning continued the theme of histamine receptors as well as the role of histamine in the cardiovascular system and the gastrointestinal tract. After lunch, our excursion led us first to the beautiful Radziwill Palace at Nieborow. Many of us had difficulties putting the obligatory slippers over our shoes! But it was worth it. I remember the superb wood carvings, the tiles and the ovens

particularly. Sadly the rain made it difficult to appreciate the gardens. Then on to the skansen (open air museum) in Maurzyce where we took part in a traditional farmers wedding celebration performed by the regional dance group from the village of Urzecze. This was not just a quick show but lasted the whole evening! It seemed very real and I overheard one of the younger members talking as if he really believed it! We had traditional dancing, both displays and where everybody had to join in. The group really seemed to enjoy themselves and made a real effort to talk to us, even when we could only communicate with smiles and gestures.

Fred Pearce gave the Geoff West lecture entitled "Mast cell heterogeneity". However, he started by remembering not only Geoff but also his scientific fathers Charles Vernon and Wolfgang Schmutzler. In his preparation for this part of the talk, he suddenly realised that yours truly was his scientific sister. This came as a bit of a shock to both of us! We stayed chiefly with mast cells and histamine metabolism for the rest of the day. Our General Assembly seemed to finish in record time despite discussing issues such as re-election of society officials, future meetings, our finances, formal recognition of our society and how to bring more people into the society. We even set up 2 small working groups! During the day our partners visited the film museum, a park and the Herbst Palace, where the Institute of Biogenic Amines had previously been located. Our farewell dinner was held in the Hotel Centrum, with lots of different courses and drinks! Piero gave us 4 toasts: to vodka (for its role in the conception of the EHRS); to whiskey (in honour of Sir James Black); to crystal (in honour of Jean-Charles Schwartz) and finally to beer (which Fred Pearce is fond of). Eddy Neugebauer presented the poster prizes: the first prize went to Hegyesi *et al.* (Hungary), second prize to Anichtchik *et al.* (Finland) and third prize to Szeberényi *et al.* (Hungary). We had a special presentation of whiskey, crystal decanter and 2 glasses, a hand painted silk tie and some money given to Czeslaw Maslinski in honour of his 77th birthday (19th May) from all his friends in the EHRS. As usual we sang one of Anita's compositions to the tune of my bonny lies over the ocean. Then we danced the night away. I was told that some people who had to leave very early didn't make it to their beds! Our thanks go to Agnieszka and her team for organising the scientific and social side of the meeting so very well. The next meeting will be held in Lyon, France, 12-16 May 1999.

M Ennis

Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Institute of Clinical Science, The Queen's University of Belfast, Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BJ, U.K.