

Meeting report 1999

The XXVIIIth meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was held in Lyon, France in May 1999 at the kind invitation of Dr Philippe Belon. A total of 84 active participants registered. As usual we had representatives not only from European countries but also from Argentina, China, Canada, Japan and the USA. We started with an informal Get Together Party in the Hotel Lyon-Métropole. Poor Philippe was manfully dealing with all registrations and queries on his own. Very hard work, especially as people tried to pay with all manner of currencies. Role on the Euro!!

Although some delegates were staying in other hotels, the transfers to the Métropole went smoothly and we had a full house for the opening session on Thursday May 13th. We were warmly welcomed to the old city of Lyon and learnt a lot about its history especially under the Romans. The Geoff West Lecture was entitled "Clinical Significance of Mast Cell Heterogeneity" and was given by myself, which makes it very difficult to comment on how good it was! However, I did show many slides from previous histamine meetings. I ended my talk with a phrase from Geoff's book (A Handful of Luck): "If I had the chance of another life, I could ask no more than that it would develop as this one has been developing over the last 40 years." This is the mark of someone with a true love for their work and I hope that I will feel the same in 20 years. This year we had discussions at the posters, led by experts, so that all posters were carefully examined. The morning continued with poster and oral sessions on "Histamine biosynthesis, metabolism and role in cell growth" as well as a poster session on histamine containing cells. Lunch was excellent, indeed every meal at the hotel was first class; accompanied by good wines from the region and superb cheeses, although, some of the less well travelled delegates found the latter a bit different. For technical reasons, we broke with tradition and had our outing on Thursday afternoon. Our target was the Beaujolais region. The drive through the countryside was wonderful. It was especially interesting for me to see that the Pasteur Institute had a vineyard. I wish UK universities would think of doing something on the same lines – perhaps a distillery for Queen's University Belfast? We stopped in a wonderful medieval village "Le Bois d'Oinge" and walked up cobble stone roads/alleyways to the church, where we had a great view over the countryside. Having watched some local dances, we were able to learn more about the history of wine making and taste some products at the "Hameau du Vin" (wine hamlet) in Romanèche-Thorin du Boeuf. Several delegates left the gift shop bearing bottle shaped gifts! Our evening finished with a wonderful meal at the Chateau de Pizay, whose name was a source of merriment for the UK delegates!

Thursday morning came all too soon and we heard many talks about mast cells, basophils etc, as well as poster and oral sessions on histamine and homeostasis. Jean Sainte-Laudy (Paris) gave his conference lecture entitled "Modulation of allergen and anti-IgE induced human basophil activation by serial histamine dilutions". Jean described his findings from the past 20 years (see his paper later in this issue) clearly demonstrating effects of histamine on basophil degranulation with dilutions that contain no molecules of histamine. This resulted in a fierce debate at the end of his presentation but the results were certainly clear. Perhaps we do need to rewrite the accepted laws of physics and

chemistry? Our evening meal was in old Lyon. We drove up to Notre Dame de Fourvière, an imposing cathedral-like church on the hill above Lyon. From the ramparts we were able to see the two rivers and the different parts of Lyon clearly. Then down into old Lyon, for a walk through the medieval streets and the “Traboules” which are passageways linking different streets. Very useful for thieves or those who don’t want to be found! Our evening meal was in the very traditional Lyonnaise restaurant “Brasserie Georges”.

Our final day concentrated on the “Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacology of Histamine”. The General Assembly provided hot debate about changes to the Society. We elected a new General Secretary (to be known as President of the Society) “Madeleine Ennis” and a new Treasurer “Wolfgang Schmutzler”. We will be revising our statutes and trying to bring the society into the 21st century. Our final dinner included a moving speech by our retiring General Secretary Piero Mannioni and a vote of thanks from myself. He and Geoff West are very hard acts to follow and I only hope that I do them justice. The next meeting will be held in Rome, Italy, 17-21 May 2000.

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