
The Establishment of the *Journal Acta Chemica Scandinavica* in 1946

Bjørn Pedersen*

The *Scandinavian Peninsula* consists of Norway and Sweden, but the notion *Scandinavia* also includes Denmark. However, the journal *Acta Chemica Scandinavica* was open to contributions from the *Nordic countries*: Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden plus the self governed Faroe Islands (Denmark) and Åland (Finland). Original research from Nordic chemists, and foreign guest chemists reporting work carried out in a Nordic chemical laboratory, could be accepted written in English, French and German. *Acta Chemica Scandinavica*, in colloquial terms is called ACTA which is used in this paper, was founded in 1946 for reasons to be presented here.

Nordic chemistry journals

In the 19th century chemists normally published in national journals for the natural sciences. At the end of the century specialised journals in physics, geology, botany etc became more common. The first national chemistry journal to be published in one of the Nordic countries was the Swedish Chemistry Journal, *Svensk kemisk tidsskrift*, which was founded in 1889. An earlier attempt in Sweden, *Kemiska Notiser*, only lasted from 1887-9. Finland followed the Swedish example in 1893; Norway in 1904 and Denmark in 1920 (see the table below). These national journals were supported by the chemical societies in each country.

Before the Second World War (1939-45) the chemists in the Nordic countries mainly wrote their most significant scientific papers in German and published them in German journals as for example in *Annalen der Chemie* or *Zeitschrift für Analytische Chemie*. Each country also had their national chemistry journals for papers mainly written in the native language where, what were considered to be, less important papers were published. These journals also contained popular articles on the development of chemistry and articles discussing the industrial and

* Department of Chemistry, University of Oslo, Norway. bjornp@kjemi.uio.no

educational development in each country and in Europe. The name and a brief history of each journal, from the start to the present day, is given in the table below. These local chemistry journals still exist but the more ambitious, purely Nordic chemistry journals are no longer published. However they continued to be published much longer than the founding fathers of ACTA thought in 1946.

Table 1
The National Chemical Journals in the Nordic Countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>National chemistry journals</i>
Denmark	<i>Kemisk Maanedstidende</i> 1 (1920) continued as <i>Dansk kemi</i> from 43 (1962) - still published.
Finland	<i>Finska kemistsamfundets Meddelanden</i> 1 (1893) - 82 (1973) continued as <i>Kemia-Kemi</i> 1 (1974) - still published. <i>Suomen Kemistilehti</i> 1 (1928) – 46 (1973) succeeded by <i>Finnish chemical letters</i> 1 (1974) - 15 (1988) publication ceased.
Norway	<i>Tidsskrift for kemi og farmasi</i> 1 (1904) - 17 (1920) continued as <i>Tidsskrift for kjemi og bergvesen</i> 1 (1921) and from 1940 also included <i>metallurgi</i> - still published now called <i>Kjemi</i> .
Sweden	<i>Svensk Kemisk Tidskrift</i> 1 (1889) - still published now called <i>Kemivärlden-Biotek</i> med <i>Kemisk Tidskrift</i> . <i>Arkiv för Kemi, Mineralogi och Geologi</i> 1 (1903) - 26 (1949). <i>Arkiv för Kemi</i> 1 (1950) – 33 (1974) succeeded by <i>Chemica Scripta: an International Journal on Progress in Chemistry and Biochemistry</i> 1 (1971) – 18 (1989); publication ceased.

The Danish, Norwegian and Swedish languages are so similar that native speakers of one of them can easily understand the others. However, Finnish is completely different. Earlier, many Finns spoke Swedish, and the first chemistry journal in Finland was printed in Swedish. The industries in the Nordic countries are very different, so industry has not been a source of cooperation between the Nordic chemists.

Contact between the scientists in the Nordic countries took place through meetings (skandinaviske naturforsker møter) held successively in Copenhagen,

Christiania (Oslo) and Stockholm every 5 to 6 years from 1839 to 1936. The chemists arranged their own meetings from 1920. The next ones in 1923, 1926, 1932 and 1939 before the Second World War. The meetings created a network between the Nordic chemists especially at the Professorial level.

In 1919 the founder and editor of the Norwegian chemistry journal died, and after some discussion it was continued from 1921 as a journal for both for chemistry, the mining industry (bergverk) and later metallurgy. In the discussion of what to do in 1920 the Norwegian Chemical Society contacted the chemical societies in Denmark and Sweden with a proposal to found a Nordic chemistry journal to replace the national chemistry journals, but this proposal was rejected.

The editor of the chemistry part of the Norwegian journal, Peter A.R. Sollid (1869-1955), proposed at the 4th Nordic Chemists Meeting in Oslo in June 1932 (285 participants) a closer cooperation between the Nordic chemistry journals. He also proposed that the national chemical societies should prepare the establishment of a Nordic chemistry journal for discussion at the 5th Nordic Chemists Meeting.¹ The meeting was held in Copenhagen in July 1939 (360 participants). Sollid was not present; he had just retired as Head of Chemistry at the Technical College in Oslo. Nothing was reported about any discussion on the establishment of a Nordic chemistry journal in the published negotiations from the meeting, but it may have been discussed informally.²

After the war in 1945 many Nordic chemists turned away from German and Germany and wanted to write and publish their work in English, but the number of journals available without restrictions was limited. The next Nordic Chemists meeting was planned to be held in Lund in Sweden, but was delayed to 1947 because of lack of foreign currency for travelling after the war. But some chemists were impatient and wanted action before 1947.

In Norway Professor Nils A. Sørensen (1909-87) at the Technical University (NTH) in Trondheim, took an initiative in May 1945. In Denmark Professor Jens A. Christiansen (1888-1969), then president of the Danish Chemical Society, was working on a plan to establish *Acta Chemica Danica*. The result was that representatives from the Nordic chemical societies met in Copenhagen, March 20-21, 1946, and decided to establish a Nordic chemistry journal and name it *Acta Chemica Scandinavica*. The news was published soon afterwards in all the national chemistry journals.³

The Nobel laureate in chemistry of 1945, Professor Artturi Virtanen (1895-1973), summed it up:

Our hope and firm conviction is that this decision will promote chemical research in the Nordic countries and give the rest of the world a focused impression of the basic research in chemistry in Scandinavia.

The owners of ACTA, responsible for its finances, were the chemical societies in Denmark (Kemisk Forening and Selskabet for Analytisk Kemi), Finland, (Soumalaisten Kemistien Seura and Finska Kemistsamfundet), Norway (Norsk Kjemisk Selskap) and Sweden (Kemistsamfundet). The ownership was divided equally among the countries. However, the expenses were divided among the owners based on the relative number of pages published from each country.

The first number was published in January of 1947 and until 1974 ten issues were published in each volume. The editors from each country in this period are given in Table 2. Karl Myrbäck (1900-85), Professor of Biochemistry in Stockholm, was the editor-in-chief in the period from 1947 to 1973. The reputation of the journal grew with the years and the number of subscribers increased slowly, but the economy in the first thirty years was always frail, and at times the chemical societies needed external support to cover the publishing expenses.

Table 2

Editors of *Acta Chemica Scandinavica* from its foundation

Demark	1947-62	Jens Anton Christiansen
	1963-73	Carl Johan Ballhausen
Finland	1947-66	Artturi Ilmari Virtanen
	1967	Eero Tommila
	1968-73	Heikki Soumalainen
Norway	1947-56	Odd Hassel
	1957-65	Olav Foss
	1966-68	Alf Wickström
	1969-73	Olav Notevarp
Sweden	1947-73	Karl Myrbäck

In 1999 ACTA merged with the British chemistry journals Dalton and Perkin¹, published by the Royal Chemical Society in London. In the first five years, after 2000, *Incorporating Acta Chemica Scandinavica* was printed on the front cover of each journal.

The reasons for the merger, have been discussed by Harnung and Terjesen.⁴ This paper has concentrated on the establishment of the first and only Nordic che-

mistry journal intended for an international audience. It was built on a network of Scandinavian Professors of Chemistry, nourished by their meetings in the main cities of the Nordic countries: Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Helsinki, Oslo and Stockholm. The editors in the period when Myrbäck was editor-in-chief were all Professors of Chemistry. Their names are given in Table 2. The establishment of ACTA, and the running of the journal, was the most substantial cooperation between the chemists in the neighbouring Nordic countries in the last sixty years.

The content of ACTA has been digitalized and a beta-version is available on the Internet: <http://actachemscand.dk/>

References

- ¹ P. R. Sollid: *Short remarks about a Nordic chemistry journal (in Norwegian)*. Forhandlinger fra det 4^{de} Nordiske kjemikermøte Oslo 27. 30. June 1932 page 35-36. (Oslo: Brøgger, 1933)
 - ² Forhandlinger det 5^{de} Nordiske kemikermøde København 3.-7. July 1939. (København: Gads, 1940)
 - ³ O. Hassel and N.A. Sørensen: "Meddelelse til medlemmene av Norsk Kjemisk Selskap angående Acta Chemica Scandinavica." *Tidsskrift for kjemi, bergvesen og metallurgi* (1946) 137-8.
 - ⁴ Sven E. Harnung: "Acta Chemica Scandinavica." *Dansk kemi* **82** (2001) 44-46.
- Sven G. Terjesen: *Acta Chemica Scandinavica – ACTA. Norsk kjemisk selskap 1893 – 1993*. (Oslo: Tidsskriftforlaget Kjemi AS. 1993) 42-43.