

11th International Conference on History of Chemistry (11th ICHC), Trondheim 29 August-2 September, 2017

The 11th International Conference on History of Chemistry (11ICHC) of the Working Party on the History of Chemistry (EuCheMS) was held in Trondheim, Norway, during 29 August-2 September, 2017. The local host of the conference was the Department of Teacher Education, NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology, in collaboration with the Norwegian Chemical Society. The main sponsors were the NTNU, the Research Council of Norway, the Chemical Heritage Foundation, Sintef Materials and Chemistry, Ineos/Inovyn, the SHAC, and the division for history of chemistry of the Norwegian Chemical Society.

The 11th ICHC was attended by 111 participants, making it one of the highest attended conferences in the history of the ICHC. Participants came from Australia, Taiwan, Japan, China, Mexico, Canada, USA and most European countries. Historians and philosophers of science, professional chemists, current and prospective science teachers, came together to present and discuss ongoing research in the history of chemistry.

The programme consisted of three plenary lectures, 17 parallel sessions with 73 oral presentations, one film screening, and a concluding discussion panel, in addition to a social programme with excursions. In contrast to previous ICHC conferences there was no call for contributions on a specific theme. Instead, the three key note lectures were meant to inspire panel and individual submissions from a range of areas within the history of chemistry. Hasok Chang from the University of Cambridge spoke about “What history tells us about the nature of chemistry”, Maria Rentetzi from the National Technical University of Athens gave a lecture on “Living with radiation: What historians of chemistry have to do with science diplomacy and international organizations”, while Anders Lundgren from the University of Uppsala presented on “Science in chemical industry – what did it do?”.

The 17 parallel sessions covered the following topics: Chemists and the IUPAC: Taking responsibility and taking actions, Chemical innovation systems in the Third Reich, Elements and the structure of matter, Alchemy and early chemistry, Women in chemistry, Dyes and pigments in history, Recent chemistry: new methodological approaches, Toxic products: communicating toxicity, Toxic products: toxic risks, Science teaching: historical approaches, Chemistry teaching: new approaches, Boundary work: chemistry and economy, Relating chemistry: translating chemistry across linguistics, disciplinary, and physical boundaries, Biographical approaches, and Polymers and plastics. Finally, a round table titled “What future for the history of recent chemistry and molecular sciences? New challenges in the history of chemistry and the molecular sciences”, concluded the conference.

The social programme included demonstration of a 15th Century distillation furnace at the University Museum, excursion to Sverresborg Open Air Museum, an organ concert at the Nidaros Cathedral, conference dinner, a stroll along the Trondheim fjord, and a full-day excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Røros, a 17th century mining town.

The case studies and research discussed during the conference show the vitality of history of chemistry broadly construed and the existence of a vibrant community of scholars interested in the discipline. Of course, there is still room for new studies, opened to wider geographic and chronological frameworks, to enrich the area offering a richer view of the historical connections between chemistry and society. This is why we look forward to the next conference: the 12th ICHC that will take place in Maastricht, The Netherlands, 6-9 August 2019.



Group photo in Bymarka recreation ground, where the conference dinner took place. Photo credit: Mentz Indergaard, NTNU



Fredrik Kirkemo demonstrated a reconstructed 15th century distillation furnace at the NTNU University Museum. Photo credit: Mentz Indergaard, NTNU.