Working Party on the History of Chemistry

The Working Party on the History of Chemistry (WPHC) organises an international conference on the history of chemistry every other year. The 11th International Conference on History of Chemistry (I11CHC) of the Working Party on the History of Chemistry (EuCheMS) was held in Trondheim, Norway, 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 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, and 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 Penteti 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 organisations", while Anders Lundgren from the University of Uppsala presented on "Science in chemical industry – what did it do?".


The social programme included a demonstration of a 15th Century distillation furnace at the University Museum, and a full-day excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Røros, a 17th century mining town, amongst others.

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.

The Working Party on the History of Chemistry published a report on the teaching of the discipline in 2007 (on the webpage). By updating the 2007 report and preparing an overview on the history of chemistry in Europe, the WP wanted to evaluate the current situation and help to identify how best to support and reinforce local, national and international initiatives. The preliminary results have been discussed during the WPHC business meeting in I10CHC, and an interpretative presentation was published this year: "The Mapping of the Teaching of History of Chemistry in Europe", by Ignacio Suay-Mattallana and José Ramón Ber- tomeu Sánchez, J. Chem. Educ., 2017, 94 (2), pp 133-136 (access through the website).

The WPHC has started conversations with other Divisions and WP’s, as well as the UK group of historians of chemistry, the Historical Group of the RSC, to plan activities for Liverpool. The WPHC will propose a lecture on the heritage of chemistry, fitting with the European Year of Cultural Heritage, celebrated in 2018. A Symposium dedicated to the History of the Periodic Table is planned in St Petersburg, in the frame of the 150th anniversary of Mendeleev’s publication of his Periodic System.