

Chromatography Focus

Is Great Britain an Island Nation Separated from Europe in Separation Science?

Throughout its history the British Isles have both benefitted and suffered from its detachment from mainland Europe. Un-invaded for almost a thousand years and protected by at least 25 miles of water, these islands have felt secure but isolated from its neighbour's cultural practices and policies. Modern communications must have changed all that you might say, with cheap air travel, computer e-mailing, on-line language translators and the adoption of English for much of western scientific literature.



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The involvement and influence of British scientists in the world of the separation sciences has been noteworthy, with Nobel Prize winners such as Martin and Synge contributing to the foundations of chromatography and many leading names being closely associated with its development and applications.

However, I pose the question: are these past glories now history and is British science becoming dormant rather than dominant?

During this year's autumn conference season I was privileged to be invited to attend the 8th Balaton conference in Siofok, Hungary:

www.balaton.mett.hu

and to Euroanalysis 2009 in Innsbruck, Austria:

www.euroanalysis2009.at

My duties at Balaton were to help re-form the European Society for Separation Science (EuSSS)

www-c724.uibk.ac.at/theochem/euss

Steering Committee and ensure its elections and legal standing were established properly.

My role at Euroanalysis was to present the Chromatographic Society's Martin Gold medal to Professor Wolfgang Lindner (Figure 1). I have attended many European conferences on separation sciences in my career as a chromatographer at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), so you might wonder why I regard these two instances as special and unusual. A Hungarian former colleague had told me many times of the exceptional science being carried out in Hungarian universities and as part of my role at GSK I had liaised with many quality scientists from Europe including Croatians and Italians on multinational drug research teams.

Walking around the poster courts at Balaton and listening to the accomplished speakers gave me the distinct impression that some very fine science is being performed in central Europe. The picture at Euroanalysis was even more convincing that separations science in the wider analytical context is alive and well with significant contributions from European nations who some years ago would not have been represented at all.

However, my overriding impression was of a sad lack of British involvement.

Why are the British scientists not represented at these meetings?

Budgets for travel both in British industry and in academia are tight but not closed. Travel bursaries and grants to attend symposia are available from UK scientific societies, but in my experience they aren't being requested.

The Chromatographic Society, www.chromsoc.com, has for many years awarded travel bursaries and has recently been bequeathed funds to form the 'John Dolphin Fellowship' a source of funding specifically aimed at assisting British students to attend conferences and present their work.

www.chromsoc.com/page33912238.aspx

The recent fall in the value of Sterling against the Euro has made it more expensive for Brits to attend European events but this alone cannot explain the low attendance. I suspect that British scientists simply do not realise the excellent science that is currently being presented at the conferences.

At Euroanalysis the Pregl medal was presented to Professor Lottspeich (Figure 2), who gave an account of his passion for proteomics in a most intriguing plenary lecture.



Figure 1. Professor Wolfgang Lindner receiving his Martin award from Dr Chris Bevan

The opening ceremony at Euroanalysis featured a Tyrolean brass band fanfare to ensure that everyone remembered that we were in the glorious Austrian Alpine Tyrol. Innsbruck provides a scenic venue with many sightseeing and interesting haunts to discover. These afterhours' activities help to ensure everyone has a memorable conference.

The awards ceremony was followed by two plenary lectures from Lottspeich and Grasserbauer which in my opinion were amongst the most informative and professionally delivered I have ever heard. The wider analytical context of Euroanalysis showed chromatography set as an important technique augmenting and complementing spectroscopic techniques applied to solve some highly complex problems.

The social side of conferences can often act as a real incentive for people to attend and mix with scientists from other countries and cultures. Euroanalysis was held in the Innsbruck Congress Centre and the hospitality was superb. Good integration of the exhibitors and the poster presentations into the areas used for refreshments ensured good access for delegates of what was on show. The socio-science mix at these two conferences was excellent and I hope will provide a strong incentive for British scientists to attend, contribute and enhance their own knowledge and share their experiences with our European colleagues.

Science is fun and sharing it with like-minded people adds enormously to the joy, so please look at the EuSSS international calendar:

www-c724.uibk.ac.at/theochem/euss

And get travelling to Europe to represent good old Blighty!



Figure 2. Professor Lottspeich