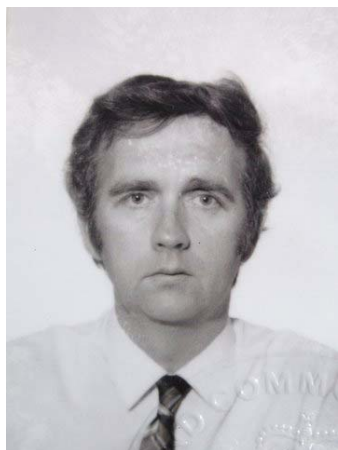


NMRDG Reminiscences 1973-78

Jim Feeney

National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill.



1976



2008

My period on the NMRDG Committee from 1973-78 (Treasurer (1974) and Chairman (1975-78)) happily coincided with several major and exciting developments in the NMR field. In 1973 we witnessed the breakthrough discovery of magnetic resonance imaging techniques (Lauterbur; Mansfield) which by 1978 had progressed to the stage of providing human whole-body scans. The same year (1973) saw NMR being used for the first time to study metabolites in body fluids and tissues (Hoult et al; Moon and Richards) and later to follow changes in muscle metabolism in human limbs. High field FT superconducting spectrometers (up to 360MHz) were already in common use in the period prior to 1978. As a consequence carbon-13 studies at natural abundance had become routine and biological applications of NMR had started to flourish. The possibility of 2D-NMR experiments had been suggested in 1971 (Jeener) and by the mid-1970s, the practical realizations of the multidimensional NMR approach (Ernst et al) began a revolution in the NMR world with its broad application across virtually every area. Other notable advances during this period were the development of the first fledgling cryogenic probes (Hoult and Richards) for improving sensitivity and the combined use of cross polarization/magic angle spinning techniques (Schaefer and Stejskal) in solid-state NMR. The International NMRDG Meetings (St.Andrews (1975 (Chairman Ed Randall)) and York (1978(Chairman Jim Feeney)) covered most of these

key areas. Looking back at the programmes for the NMRDG one-day meetings in these early days the lectures tended to concentrate on solution NMR studies no doubt catering for the interests of the majority of the members. This contrasts with the broad mixture of topics covered in the excellent meetings of the present day.

At the International Meeting in St Andrews (1975) we introduced the idea of Poster Sessions for the first time (in fact it might well have been the first Chemical Society meeting to have such sessions). This innovation allowed for a much wider direct participation of the attendees in this and subsequent meetings. The NMRDG International Meetings were always single session meetings with no parallel sessions and this formula was continued until very recently. I remember the great support we had in organizing these meetings from the Chemical Society staff, John Gibson and Gina Howlett, who had done it all so many times before. This allowed the organizing committee to concentrate on the scientific programme. I was always amazed that we could persuade top scientists from around the world to participate while only offering accommodation and ‘a *contribution* to their travel expenses’.

Our International meetings were always so much more than scientific events. They were large international social gatherings of old NMR friends. A particularly enjoyable aspect was the community singing session that always followed the banquet. This tradition started at the NMRDG International Guildford meeting in 1972 after the Elizabethan Banquet and continued at subsequent meetings for many years:



Community singing went on into the small hours at the Varian hospitality suite. . .

Prominent contributors to these sessions over the years were Edgar Anderson, Derek Mobbs, Irwin Jones, Duncan Farrant and yours truly, JF, with strong support from the Continental, Scandinavian and North American contingencies (for example the Volds).

I personally enjoyed these sessions very much and was always delighted when I saw Edgar Anderson's name on the list of participants. This guaranteed the success of our community singing. Edgar has a fine singing voice and unlike everybody else he knew all the words (and sang them in the right places). Occasionally, in addition to the singing, someone would recite a poem (Edgar providing a taste of Rabbin Burns in his beautiful Scottish accent and Ed Randall offering Shakespeare sonnets with the aplomb of Peter Hall). Invariably these sessions took place after the banquet in the hospitality suites kindly provided by the instrument manufacturers.

A special word of appreciation should go to the instrument manufacturers and their staff for their continued strong support of the NMRDG in many ways. They provided its first Secretary, Ernie Cummings, from Perkin Elmer and continued over the years to

contribute major service to the Committee (as Treasurers, Secretaries and Chairmen)
from members of Bruker, General Electric, JEOL, Oxford Instruments and Varian.