

David Neuhaus
2001 – 2003



2003

I seem to remember having had some degree of involvement with NMRDG throughout almost all of my career in NMR. I moved from organic chemistry into "full-time" NMR at the end of my PhD by joining Kurt Wüthrich's group in ETH Zürich for a year, and it was during that period that I attended my first NMRDG International Meeting (Edinburgh 1983). At that time the International Meeting was pretty much *the* NMR conference to go to, at least in Europe, and I remember meeting many of the "big names" while standing defending my poster. It made a big impression on me at the time, and my feeling of connection with NMRDG was strengthened further when during the following year I was invited (following a suggestion by Irwin Jones during conversation over tea at another meeting) to give my first public talk at the 1984 Christmas meeting. After those personal experiences, I always had a feeling of belonging to the NMRDG, and also that it was at the heart of NMR in this country. Getting to the meetings, especially the International Meetings, was something I looked forward to; the science was always the most important thing, of course, but there was a strong sense that these were social meetings also. As a result of my diligence in attending so many of them, I now have an almost complete collection of the Bruker mugs (anyone out there have a St. Andrews 1991 mug in good condition that they want to get rid of?). How sad is that?

During the 1999 International Meeting in Edinburgh, Jeremy Everett, who was then the incoming chairman, cornered me in the bar and set about persuading me that I should take over from him at the end of his term. In truth he didn't have

to try too hard, as I was very happy to take my turn at “driving” the organization that I had enjoyed being a member of for so long, and at the end of the Conference dinner at the 2001 Durham meeting I took over.

By far the biggest issue of my Chairmanship was the fate of the International Meeting itself. About half way through my term, in early 2002, we were approached by EENC and Ampere who had already taken a decision to join forces in order to try to create a new, annual, general NMR meeting for Europe, roughly along the lines of the American ENC. They invited us to join them in the process of setting up the framework for these new meetings, which were later named EUROMAR. We thus faced a choice, whether to try to keep the NMRDG International Meetings going, which would have meant doing so in competition with EUROMAR, or joining forces with them, which meant ending the series of International meetings in the UK as it merged with EUROMAR. I was very much aware that this needed to be a decision reached as much as possible by consensus, and so I contacted as many previous NMRDG Chairmen as possible. Some attended a meeting at RSC Thomas Graham House in October 2002, while many others contributed to the debate by email. In brief, as I remember it, the thinking that emerged went like this: It had been clear for a long time that as NMR matured one result was that conferences on sub-disciplines (e.g. NMR in structural biology, imaging, etc.) began to spring up and become popular in their own right. This in turn resulted in a gradual but steady decline in the attendance at general NMR conferences such as the International Meetings. We reasoned that while there was still sufficient market to sustain one high-quality general NMR meeting in Europe each year, there was insufficient for two or three in competition. Better, therefore, to join forces with the competition and try to help make the new meetings as attractive for the UK community as possible. This meant the big sacrifice of losing the guarantee of a UK location every second year, as the locations for EUROMAR would be decided by competitive bidding, but in compensation we would be on the inside of setting up the new series. The actual process of forming EUROMAR lasted well beyond the end of my Chairmanship of NMRDG, but together with my successor Duncan Farrant, I represented the NMRDG on the so-called 2+2+2 committee (formed by 2 representatives each from NMRDG, Ampere and EENC) until 2005, when this committee, rather unusually for a committee, voted itself out of existence, as the EUROMAR Board was created to take up running of the new series. At the same moment, the whole of EENC also voted itself out of existence - interesting times, as the Chinese are said to say. In 2006, the first EUROMAR conference was held in York, with Duncan as Chair; my hope is that this will have set the scene for further EUROMAR conferences in the UK in the future, provided of course that NMRDG bids for them.

Although the issue of EUROMAR rather dominated my period as Chairman, there was plenty else going on. In September 2002, we held a binational meeting with our French counterpart organization, the GERM. Quite apart from the great attraction of being held in Lyndon Emsley's old secondary school (since

converted to a conference centre by Southampton University), this was a most enjoyable meeting, showcasing some of the best of NMR in the two countries. Somewhat to our surprise, the French came over in substantial force, to the extent that they outnumbered the locals. The secret of organizing a good meeting is always to find a really good local organizer who does all the work. In this instance I could not have been luckier, as Jim Emsley did a really magnificent job, helped also by Malcolm Levitt and his group; Jim taught me by example how to run a meeting while (in his case, anyway) staying wonderfully calm.

Of course, the other big meeting of my period was the 2003 International Meeting in Cambridge. Given the developments with EUROMAR, we already knew at the time that it would almost certainly be the last of the International Meetings. Thus, although I enjoyed the Cambridge meeting very much indeed, I had severely mixed feelings since I was presiding over the last in a series that I felt very much affection for and was sad to see ending. On the organizational side, as before the choice of local organizer was key, and again I had little to do while my friend James Keeler worked flat out. It's quite remarkable that the friends I pick as local organizers still speak to me, when I come to think about it. In addition, others of my friends worked hard on the programme committee, ensuring that I had nothing to do about that either.

I am well aware that NMRDG faces many new challenges as a result of changes that happened "on my watch". I am very confident that NMRDG will remain a central feature in the life of the NMR community in the U.K., and I wish them every success for the future. Thank you to all who worked with me during my Chairmanship, on the NMRDG Committee, the various meeting committees, at the RSC, at BRSG, and most of all to the UK NMR community for sustaining, and providing the motive for, all of our activities at NMRDG.