

Ken Packer (1995-1997)



Whilst being involved with the NMRDG from its early days, it was quite late in my career that I had the pleasure of being its chairman. In part this was because I had been associated in the 1970s and the early 1980s with the BRSG (British Radiofrequency Spectroscopy Group). The BRSG was, and is still, largely, but not entirely, based around a membership drawn from Physics departments and physics-based commercial organisations. Indeed, it is now firmly part of the IOP, mirroring NMRDG's relationship with the RSC. In the late 1960s there were a number of young academics who were carrying out pulsed NMR research in the UK. Some of these were in physics departments and others in Chemistry departments. A subset of these got together to hold informal meetings in each others' laboratories. Those involved, if my memory serves me well, were Neville Boden (Leeds), Bill Derbyshire (Nottingham), Tom Halstead (York), John Strange (Kent) and me (UEA). We called ourselves the pnmrdg. The p stood for "pulsed" and the use of lower case was deliberate, emphasising the informal nature of our meetings. Somehow the BRSG became uncomfortable about our activities and we were tempted into the BRSG fold. I recall that Stan Clough of Nottingham was then secretary of the BRSG and he was quite persuasive! I eventually became secretary of the BRSG for at least three years and, in more recent times, had the honour to be Chairman, after I had served the same function for the NMRDG.

I had always taken the view that, as far as the spins were concerned, they didn't care whether we labelled what we did to them, and whether we used them in physics, chemistry, biochemistry etc. To that end, I tried on a

number of occasions to encourage links between the two groups. The one case where I achieved this, partially, was when the BRSG held a one day meeting on the last day of the NMRDG's International Meeting at York in July 1978.

By the time I became chairman of the NMRDG in 1995, NMR had moved a long way from those early days. The power of NMR to tackle numerous problems in all forms and states of matter, using the whole Periodic Table was well established and a plethora of fancy spin physics tricks had appeared supporting many of these studies. Some areas had grown so much that they could, justifiably, have a whole day meeting devoted to nothing else. As an example, the determination of solution structures of proteins became an art in itself and featured strongly in the late 1990s. One-day meetings often had a theme e.g. Inclusion and Molecular recognition; HPLC-NMR etc., whilst others offered mixed programmes. Medical NMR imaging had given birth to a completely separate conference circuit, virtually orthogonal to the worlds of NMRDG and BRSG.

The, by then biannual, NMRDG International Meeting, held at Exeter in my Chairmanship, had become the NMR shop window in the UK. It attracted leading speakers from many countries and the subject coverage was very wide. These meetings were distinguished by their timely nature, their collegiate good humour and for their memorable outings on the Wednesday afternoon which, after suitable refreshment, usually led to community signing of the highest quality (myself in the centre, with Derek Mobbs of Varian to my right and Irwin Jones of Bruker on my left)!

