

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the
XXXIX International Scientific Instrument Symposium
Online, 14-18 September 2020**
draft – subject to approval

Chaired by the Board

President: Rich Kremer

Secretary: Sofia Talas

Treasurer: Janet Laidla

The Scientific Instrument Commission was supposed to hold its thirty-ninth symposium from 14-18 September 2020 in London, hosted by the Science Museum and Royal Museums Greenwich. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, the symposium was held online, via zoom, thanks to the support of Alison Boyle (Science Museum), Louise Devoy (Royal Museums Greenwich) and their colleagues from both the Science Museum and Royal Museums Greenwich.

The SIC annual general meeting was held online on Wednesday 16 September. About 80 members attended.

1) Opening remarks and welcome

Rich Kremer welcomed the participants to the AGM and reminded the meeting that the SIC is an open organization with no formal membership. All persons actively participating in a SIC Symposium are by definition members and thus are entitled to attend and vote at the AGM.

2) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received by Peter Heering.

3) Review of Minutes from Last Meeting (2019) in Havana, Cuba

Sofia Talas recalled that the minutes of the plenary business meeting from the 38th Scientific Instrument Symposium, held in September 2019 in Havana, had been posted on the SIC website a few weeks before for circulation and review. She presented a correction received via email from Michael Korey about the election process. The correction was inserted in the new version of the minutes. She asked for other comments or corrections. Hearing none, the minutes were approved.

4) SIC Finances

Janet Laidla, presented her report on the Commission's finances from September 2019 to 11 September 2020.

She noted that the SIC receives its main income from the IUHPST/DHST and underlined that, in recent years, the DHST had set more restrictions in allocating the annual grant, such as restricting conference support only to travel grants for young scholars and capping the different types of expenses. Furthermore, this year, the grants to all DHST commissions were reduced by 10% to enable the DHST to meet its expenses in 2020-21. The SIC was thus allocated 2050 USD (2400 USD is the maximum amount), minus the 10% 1845 USD, so the SIC actually received 1691.11 EUR.

Janet pointed out that the grant has always been defined in USD by the DHST. During her first year as treasurer, the DHST transferred the grant in USD on Janet's bank account; the more recent grants were transferred in EUROS so that a double accounting is being tracked in our SIC financial records.

Short summary:

1.01.2020	4097.19 EUR	1770 USD
Income	1691.11 EUR	DHST grant
Expense	87.25 EUR	Server costs
Expense	365.83 EUR	Grant for the webmaster
Total expenses 10.09.2020	453.08 EUR	
10.09.2020	5335.22 EUR	1770 USD
Pending	Around 509 EUR	SIC 2020 meeting costs

The two external auditors, Louise Devoy and Tayce Phillipson, reported that they had read and approved Laidla's financial report.

5) SIC Publications

Giorgio Strano, Museo Galileo (Florence), general editor of *SIC: Scientific Instruments and Collections*, reported on the SIC series published by BRILL. He announced the publication in 2020 of the eighth volume of the series, entitled *The Astronomical Clock of Strasbourg Cathedral*, by Günther Oestmann.

Strano reported that another volume of the SIC BRILL series is on its way. Edited by Elisabeth Cavicchi and Peter Heering, the volume will focus on the theme of the applications and roles of historical science instruments in education in the 21st century or late 20th century. Strano also announced that the tenth volume of the series will deal with failures. It will be based on papers presented at the London SIC symposium as well as at previous SIC symposia and edited by Sara Schechner and Sofia Talas. Finally, Strano pointed out that, on the occasion of the ongoing SIC Symposium, BRILL is offering a discount of 25% or even 40% on some of its publications.

As for the editorial board of the SIC BRILL series, Giorgio announced that a new member soon will be added. As in previous occasions, the Board and the participants underlined the great amount of work necessary to edit these volumes and warmly thanked Strano and all the editors (Mara Miniati, Alison Morrison-Low, Sara J. Schechner) for their invaluable role, work and involvement.

6) Commission news

6.a Advocacy

As in previous AGMs, Kremer reminded the group that the SIC has been called upon, in the past years, to express its support for threatened collections or institutions, or to encourage new initiatives that would promote the field. He invited participants to present any such situations, recalling that in

early September 2020 the Board had posted a message, in this sense, to Rete mailing list.

During the previous AGM, In Havana, Pedro Raposo, Curator and Director of Collections at the Adler Planetarium, Chicago, had presented the situation of Yerkes Observatory, owned by the University of Chicago and closed from 2018. At the time, a local foundation, the Yerkes Future Foundation, was in negotiations with the University of Chicago, aiming to find a solution that would keep the Observatory open.

To support the preservation and promotion of Yerkes and its heritage, the SIC Board wrote a letter to the University of Chicago and the Yerkes Future Foundation, encouraging them to find a solution and underlining the significance of the Observatory. Expertise from the SIC members was also offered, as it might contribute to the conversations about the future of Yerkes.

Rich Kremer explained that he had recently learnt that the University of Chicago transferred ownership of the complete site to the Yerkes Future Foundation. Restoration works have been started, with an endowment of 20M dollars, and infrastructures for education activities are under construction. The Observatory building thus does not appear to be in immediate danger. However, the long-term ongoing project may not correspond to the views of the SIC community, as it seems mainly devoted to education, while the history of the site and its significance may be less actively supported. Kremer will encourage the Yerkes Future Foundation to make a commitment to the historical interpretation of Yerkes heritage.

No further cases of endangered collections were brought to the attention of the SIC AGM.

6.b SIC bibliography update

Rich Kremer recalled that, at last year AGM, in Havana, he had presented the activities launched to revive the SIC bibliography. After the Cuba AGM, he met Dalila Walle, librarian at Museum Boerhaave, who was at the time collecting new 2018 publications, trying to get access to all journals. Then Covid-19 partially stopped the activities, so that the 2019 bibliography was not completed with new entries.

As for the old entries, they have been converted in a new format to make them compatible with the History of Science Society's Isis Critical Bibliography. Kremer added that further news about development of the SIC Bibliography would be posted on RETE.

6.c Conferences sponsored by SIC

At the 2019 AGM in Havana, the SIC Board had announced that it had agreed to sponsor (without any financial component) the conference on teaching collections entitled "Objects of Understanding: Historical perspectives on material artefacts and practices in science education". Organised by Roland Wittje (IIT Madras) and Peter Heering (University of Flensburg), the conference was scheduled to be held from 29 June to 3 July 2020 in Flensburg, Germany. Due to Covid-19, the conference was postponed and it will be held from 19 to 23 July, 2021.

Roland Wittje indicated that the conference would present papers that were already submitted and accepted, but that a new call for papers would be announced as well (deadline for abstracts submission: 15 October 2020). He announced that a website would be prepared and the program would be put online. The final list of speakers will be available in November. Wittje asked the SIC to renew the sponsorship to the delayed conference and his request was accepted. He added that, if it were impossible to have a physical meeting in Flensburg, the conference would be cancelled.

6.d Use of social media

At the last AGM in Havana, it was agreed that Pedro Raposo and Taha Arslan would start an experiment to use Facebook and Twitter to engage the widest possible audience with the SIC's mission. Raposo reported on this experiment. He explained that accounts on Facebook and Twitter were created in November 2019. Taha and Pedro have been maintaining a rhythm of 2/3 posts per week in both platforms, with content distributed by three main areas: 1) SIC news, updates and

publications (but nothing that was not already shared through more traditional channels such as Rete and/or the SIC website); 2) “Instrument of the week”, a series of posts (with sources clearly identified) taken from publicly available databases relating to both well established and less known collections of scientific instruments; 3) Content shared from social media accounts of museums and scholarly institutions with regard to fellowships, symposia, exhibitions, new books, etc.

Raposo announced that, as of the date of this AGM, the SIC Facebook account had 173 followers from 32 countries. He pointed out that the response to the posts varied, with some types of posts (such as “Instrument of the Week”) getting a consistently good reaction. As regards Twitter, the SIC account had 230 followers. The limited number of characters per post on Twitter is quite challenging, but Pedro and Taha always seek to adapt the content to make it as engaging as possible.

All the participants in this AGM agreed that we should move from this first experimental phase into adding SIC’s social media accounts as a permanent feature of the Commission’s communication channels. Taha Arslan asked for volunteers, as he is himself quite busy and Pedro expects to become busier than usual as the SIC’s newly elected secretary. New volunteers could not only assist with improving, diversifying, and streamlining the selection and production of content, but also help expand SIC’s social media presence into Instagram, a platform that, Pedro noted, is particularly suited to the visually compelling material of the SIC worlds. A call was thus made for attendees particularly well versed in that platform to contact Pedro or Taha.

The SIC Board and participants at the London AGM warmly thanked Pedro and Taha for the terrific job they were carrying out.

6.e Young scholars’ gathering

As occurred at the last SIC Symposia, an informal get-together took place for emerging scholars attending the London Symposium. Of course, it was a virtual meeting, organized within the Symposium program by Janet Laidla and Ke Zhao (University of Electronic Science and Technology of China).

Ke Zhao reported that it was a nice and successful meeting with 35 emerging scholars, quite interdisciplinary. He underlined the importance of such meetings to help younger people better realize what the SIC community can offer them in experience, support, also personally, from all kind of fields. Hopefully, the next young scholars’ gathering will occur face-to-face in Prague.

6.f Election Board Report

David Pantalony (Canada Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa) recalled that an Election Committee had been formed, consisting of Marvin Bolt, Janet Laidla and himself. A few months later, Marvin Bolt was nominated as a candidate for the election of the new Board and he thus withdrew from the Election Board.

Pantalony explained that 75 SIC members participated to the election process, in July-August 2020, and he presented the newly elected new SIC Board:

Roland Wittje, IIT Madras, President

Pedro Raposo, Adler Planetarium, Chicago, Secretary

Louise Devoy, Royal Museums Greenwich, Treasurer

The members of the AGM approved and confirmed the elections. They warmly thanked all the candidates and congratulated the new Board, which will be in charge from the 2021 Prague IUHPST Congress, but will start shadowing the current Board from now on.

Pantalony also reported that discussions had started about how to improve the election process and he invited anyone with ideas on the topic to contact him. For the moment, discussions will go on between the current and the future SIC Board and, in Prague, a general discussion on possible new procedures will be opened at the SIC AGM.

7) News from members

- a. Paolo Brenni, CNR Florence, announced that the Astronomy Museum of Brera Observatory was currently being completely refurbished and will reopen in a few months.
- b. Sébastien Soubiran, University of Strasbourg, gave news about Strasbourg University's new planetarium and zoological museum. He said that the works for the planetarium had started two weeks before and, hopefully, the new building should be ready in 2022, while the zoological museum should be ready in 2023.
- c. Dominique Bernard, University of Rennes 1, recalled that at the 2018 SIC Symposium, in Leiden, he presented his book on the collection of scientific instruments of the University of Rennes 1. He announced that he had received a prize for this book from the French Académie des Sciences. He warmly thanked the SIC community for the support offered in these years. He also announced two new projects of books related to the University of Rennes' collections: one on zoology and botany, and a second on scientific instruments from 1900 to 1960.
- d. Rich Kremer recalled that Jim Bennett, in June 2020, had been awarded the Sarton Medal by the History of Science Society, the highest award offered by that body. The whole SIC assembly warmly congratulated Bennett, who kindly suggested that the medal was a reward for the whole scientific instrument community of scholars.

8) Future SIC symposia

a. Prague 2021

The 2021 SIC Symposium will be held in Prague, as part of the 26th International Congress of History of Science and Technology of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IUHPST).

Rich Kremer underlined that the call for papers was distributed early in 2020 and the accepted abstracts for the SIC symposia were already uploaded to the Congress website. Besides the traditional SIC Symposium, the SIC is also organising in Prague a special symposium on literature and scientific instruments, together with the Science and Literature Committee of the IUHPST, chaired by George Vlahakis. These abstracts also have been refereed, selected and posted to the Congress website.

As for the visits that will be proposed, Kremer reported that the SIC Board had been developing ties with the local technical museum and with other colleagues, in particular Alena Hadravová and Petr Hadrava, who will help the Board to set a program of visits to the astronomical sites of the city. The Mikulov Castle Museum, holding a rich collection of the former Mikulov Piarist School founded in 1631, could be an interesting field trip (200 km southeast of Prague, 50 km north of Vienna) to be organised by bus on Saturday, at the end of the conference. For a recently published catalog, see Z. Horský. *Historické vědecké přístroje v Mikulovských Sbírkách (Historical Scientific Instruments in the Mikulov Collections)*, Mikulov, 2011, or: <https://english.radio.cz/mikulov-museum-displays-historic-scientific-instruments-towns-380-year-old-8563930>.

b. 2022

As Rich Kremer recalled, the Board had received at the AGM in Havana an invitation from George Vlahakis (Hellenic Open University in Patras) and Efthymios Nicolaidis (National Hellenic Research Foundation) to hold the 2022 Symposium in Athens.

Vlahakis explained that this would be the second time the SIC would meet in Athens, after 20 years. The first Symposium was organized by the University of Athens and the National Hellenic Research Foundation. In these twenty years, new museums have opened, such as a museum on ancient Greek technology and the new display of Antikythera Mechanism in the National Archaeological Museum. There would also be the opportunity to see instruments of Big Science at the Institute for Nuclear Research in Athens, and in other institutions. Visits would also include the Astronomical Observatory and physics collections.

c. 2023 and beyond

Vienna - Rich Kremer reported his preliminary communications with Professor Anna Echterhölter at the University of Vienna, who expressed interest in learning more about the SIC, but worried about the lack of a broader community studying scientific instruments there; it seems difficult, currently, to find a hosting institution for a SIC Symposium in Vienna. Paolo Brenni underlined how valuable it would be to meet in Vienna, one of the most important places for scientific instruments between east and west.

Spain – Rich Kremer also wrote to several Spanish colleagues: several of them were interested but, here again, it seems difficult to find a strongly committed hosting institution. Silke Ackermann (University of Oxford) encouraged the future board to work on Spain, as a melting pot of traditions.

Padua – Sofia Talas said that Padua could be a possibility, as the Museum of the History of Physics should open its new display in March-April 2021.

Hans Hoijsmeijers (Rijksmuseum Boerhaave Museum) wondered about possible places outside Europe and Roland Wittje underlined that having meetings outside Europe, in Mexico or China for instance, was one of his goals, but that the SIC first needed to find partners in these countries and maybe to prepare the big SIC Symposia with previous smaller meetings in situ.

9) SurveyMonkey for London Symposium

Louise Devoy reported that the surveymonkey was an online questionnaire to evaluate the London Symposium. She encouraged participants to complete the questions, as they require a few minutes only and it could be extremely useful for future planning of physical/virtual symposia.

10) AOB

None

At the conclusion of the AGM, Michael Korey enthusiastically expressed his thank yous to Alison Boyle, Louise Devoy and to all their colleagues involved in the organisation of the Symposium. He expressed his special thanks to „Sam“, ie. Sameena Allie, from the Science Museum team, who was an invaluable support in the Zoom virtual meeting platform and had become known to participants as “the Voice of God” as she fixed our technical difficulties. All the organisers deserved at least a standing ovation, though a virtual one.

Rich Kremer enthusiastically seconded Korey’s speech and expressed the community’s profound gratitude to the local organizers of the 2020 SIC Symposium. Like Korey, he particularly thanked Alison Boyle and Louise Devoy, as well as their colleagues, for the perfect organization of this year’s symposium, which was the first virtual symposium ever organised by the SIC, with about 200 unique registrations for at least one day. All the participants to the AGM warmly agreed and thanked Alison, Louise and her colleagues.

Minutes compiled by

Sofia Talas, SIC Secretary, in collaboration with Rich Kremer, SIC President, and Janet Laidla, SIC Treasurer