

A Short History of the British Society of Audiology Short Papers Meeting On Experimental Studies of Hearing and Deafness

By Prof E F (Ted) Evans, organiser: 1976 - 2000.

These Annual meetings of the British Society of Audiology continue to draw together large numbers of researchers in the fields of auditory anatomy, molecular and cell biology, biochemistry, physiology, psychocoustics and clinical audiology. Their objectives have from the outset been: to maximise exposure to the different disciplines in experimental audiology; to minimise costs in order to encourage the participation of younger workers; to enhance good scientific communication; informality; and rapid publication of the abstracts.

How and why did they start? From sheer frustration! When I started research in the 1960s, there were only a handful of Hearing Research groups in the UK: primarily the ILO Group (Ade Pye, Ron Hinchcliffe *et al*); Roy Kay's psychoacoustic group at Oxford; and Ian Whitfield's Inter-disciplinary Neurocommunications Research Unit in Birmingham, of which I was the newly medically-qualified physiologist. It is no overstatement that the three main groups did not get on well together - there was an intense competitive spirit between them.

I then moved to the National Institutes of Health in the USA from 1965 to 1967 and experienced the meetings of the American Acoustical Society. These were interdisciplinary in that one could attend sessions on physiological, psychological and even musical acoustics in the same meeting. They were very friendly and interaction readily occurred across the disciplines, both within the sessions and equally importantly during the social times within the meetings.

Returning to the UK in 1967 to set up my own Group in the inter-disciplinary Department of Communication at Keele, it was a shock to return to the old UK scene. I remember giving my first paper at the British Society of Audiology - at a meeting held in Birdcage Walk - for it to be talked down rather dismissively by a senior member of the ILO group!

But how to create the interdisciplinary atmosphere that one had experienced in the USA? The obvious parallel organisation to the Acoustical Society of America in the UK was the Institute of Acoustics, of which I was a member. However, the high cost of membership and meeting registration militated against that route if we were to attract young research workers, especially those doing their PhDs. The BSA was the obvious choice, particularly after waging war with successive Treasurers to reduce the central meeting registration fees, particularly for PhD students, by doing the administration ourselves at Keele (more of this later).

The meeting started tentatively in 1976 with a half-day meeting at the University of Guildford and with invited speakers. Encouraged by the reception, we organised the first full day meeting at the University of Keele in 1978 with 15 oral papers. These were strictly timed, as is the case today. They are limited to 15 minutes with five minutes discussion, both regulated by the dreaded Keele Clock, assembled for the first meeting by my Keele colleague, Pat Wilson. The Keele meeting was so oversubscribed that at the next meeting in 1979 in the University of Cambridge, we extended it to one and a half days with a 11 posters as well as 15 oral papers, a dinner and overnight accommodation. By the 1990s, the meeting had grown to two full days of up to 99 posters and 18 oral papers with 130 attending. The meetings rotated through the Universities of Keele, Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Bristol, Sussex, ILO/UCL with forays to the universities of Essex, Hull and Southampton and in 2008,

York. Throughout, the meetings have been characterised by a willingness of all attendees to sit through and contribute to talks in other fields than their own, good humour, and encouragement especially to younger workers. As the meetings became more widely known, we have enjoyed participation from groups from abroad. This aspect has been built upon by the current organisers of the meetings in instituting a 'Ted Evans Lecture', a plenary invited lecture given by a distinguished researcher, generally from abroad.

The meeting continues into the 21st century still under the auspices of the University of Keele, and now under the able leadership of Dave Furness. Almost from the beginning, the meetings have been administered by our indefatigable secretary, Janet Norton, who has become the face of Keele to the many who have attended over the years. The meetings would never have been the same without Janet, and we owe her our enormous gratitude.

Our thanks also go to the local organisers who have to balance the requirements of participants with the limitations of their university bureaucracies! Nor should we forget the editors of the published abstracts, particularly over the years Brian Moore and Alan Palmer, and to successive editors of the *British Journal Of Audiology* and the *International Journal Of Audiology*.

Long may the meetings continue!

Ted Evans, 2001.