

The Royal Society of Chemistry - Belgium Section **Newsletter**
La Chimie au cœur de l'Europe
Chemie in het hart van Europa

No.11 – May 2009

www.rsc.org

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EDITORIAL

Reaching out to the wider community

Welcome to the latest issue of the RSC Belgium newsletter and my first since being elected as Chairman of the section at our AGM in January. I hope to be able to continue the excellent work that the section has initiated under my predecessor, Dr. Paul Gray, to bring the excitement and essential nature of chemistry to as wide an audience as possible.

Amazingly it is just over a year since the last section newsletter but the past year has been one of the most successful ever for RSC Belgium and, as you will see from the contents of this short publication, it was one in which we have reached out to new and bigger audiences than ever before.

In particular, I am immensely proud to see the work of the section extending into the wider community. The recent 'triumphant' demonstration lectures by Hal Sosabowski played to huge audiences including around one thousand francophone students from state schools in the Wavre area. Taken together with the entries to our 2008 'Biofuels' poster competition from students from the Flemish and French speaking communities, as well as those from our usual audience in the Anglophone and European schools around Brussels, I believe the section is entering a new phase in which our work to promote chemistry and support science education can achieve an even bigger impact right across Belgium.

The importance of chemistry and its contribution to meeting the challenges that society faces was emphasized during the recent visit of RSC President Prof David Garner to Belgium. Dave Garner is an old friend and colleague (we both research in the same field of inorganic biochemistry) and he clearly demonstrated what chemistry needs to do for society. He also laid out the strategic vision of the RSC in supporting chemistry across the world. The RSC 'Strategy on a Page' document is included with this newsletter and copies of the RSC Roadmap to fulfil the strategy are also available on the RSC website (members only). RSC Belgium will endeavour to play its full part.

I look forward to seeing you at an RSC event in the coming year.

Prof. Robert 'Bob' Crichton.

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An Even Bigger Bang!

In a hectic six performance schedule Dr Hal Sosabowski and his team from Brighton University played to a combined audience of well over 2200 people in shows from March 26-31. Hal's Bigger Bang shows followed his three show 'tour' in 2008 and again demonstrated the explosively fun side of chemistry receiving an extremely positive response from teachers, pupils and the general public.

As well as performing four shows to a mainly Anglophone schools audience at St. Johns International School in Waterloo, two sell-out shows were also delivered as part of the 'Printemps des Science' festival at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL). These shows included a significant first for RSC Belgium - a demonstration lecture to a huge francophone schools audience – as well as our annual public demonstration lecture to a mixed language audience. For both UCL shows an entertaining commentary in French was provided by Prof Istvan Marko.

Our thanks to all the schools who participated in making Hal's 2009 'tour' such a tremendous success. In particular the section would like to thank the ScienceInfuse team, Prof Marko and his colleagues at UCL, and Air Products for their support in terms of materials and expertise.

Belgium at TOTB final



For the third year in a row a team from Woluwe European School was crowned Belgium Top of the Bench (TOTB) champions following the closely fought 2008 'national' eliminator competition. The team went on to achieve a very respectable 16th out of 28 in the RSC final at Loughborough University, UK on 28 March this year. The final brings together the very best science students from schools across the UK and Ireland for tough but fun tests on theoretical and practical chemistry.

The Woluwe team (left to right Oliver Milton, Jennifer Cooper, Sara Cantisani and Fiona Tscherny) were presented with the Belgium TOTB Cup by RSC Belgium Chairman Prof Bob Crichton and Dr. Hal Sosabowski at Hal's March 26 show.

The 2009 Belgium TOTB Challenge will be organised in the second half of Autumn term and is open to all schools. For more details on TOTB rules and how to participate, please contact the section.

2008-09 Programme round-up

Sustainable energy has been a significant theme of our recent programme which included a fascinating talk on 29 May 2008 on the SusChem Smart Energy Home from Dr. Marian Mours of Cefic (the European Council for the Chemical Industry). He discussed the technologies required for energy conservation and generation, better health and personal care in future housing.

Our first event of the Autumn in 2008 was a highly enjoyable Saturday afternoon stroll around the Art Nouveau Houses in the Avenue Louise area of Brussels. Sarah Strange was our guide on 27 September and her knowledge combined with non-seasonal sunshine to give an excellent day out.

Considering recent events our decision to invite back Dr. Marc Vandenhoute of GlaxoSmithKline, Genval to update us on progress in medical research on viral diseases seems prescient! His talk on 23 October looked at recent achievements and current challenges in the prevention and treatment of viral disease including influenza – although I don't recall any mention of swine flu!

To conclude our 2008 programme we welcomed Prof Istvan Marko of Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) on 25 November to talk on his intriguing work on the catalytic activity of fruits and vegetables. Prof. Marko has produced some remarkable results by applying the natural enzymes found in legumes and fruits to stereo-chemical synthesis producing high-value chiral products that have potential pharmaceutical applications. This fascinating work combined with Istvan's naturally witty lecturing style provided an illuminating and thoroughly entertaining evening.

The sustainable energy theme was continued in 2009 with two lectures. The first was from Prof. Richard van den Sanden of Eindhoven University who talked about solar cells and photovoltaic technology on 27 January describing the different technologies and their future prospects. Our second lecture was a technical exposition on the potential for enzymes to provide hydrogen fuel with Prof. Fraser Armstrong of Oxford University on 3 March. He described his work in dynamic electrochemistry to elucidate structures and mechanisms within enzymes that may lead to exploitation of this natural chemistry to generate clean hydrogen fuel in the future.

On 28 April the section welcomed RSC President David Garner to Belgium to talk to us about 'Global challenges and chemical opportunities'. He outlined general RSC strategy and focused on the need for sustainable chemistry-based solutions to address the significant challenges facing humanity such as ensuring supply of sufficient energy, food and water and improving human health. Prof. Garner's lecture was well received and he was impressed with the level of participation and activity of the Belgium section. On the afternoon of 28 April Prof. Garner also presented a technical lecture on his research on inorganic biochemistry to students at UCL.

During 2008-09 the section has continued to support and work with other science and technology organisations in Belgium in particular the IMechE (Institute of Mechanical Engineers), SCI (Society of Chemical Industry) and IET (Institution of Engineering and Technology).

French Odyssey

Our 2008 summer weekend break took place on 20 – 22 June. Members and Friends visited the French town of Rouen and other historic and picturesque sites in upper Normandy. The highlight of the trip was undoubtedly the guided tour of Monet's beautiful house and gardens at Giverny on the Saturday afternoon, which benefited from fine weather and a knowledgeable guide. Excellent food and good company were enjoyed by all participants in the weekend.

This year's summer expedition will be to the Nord-Eifel region of Germany just over the Belgian border and near Aachen. We will be staying in a the pretty village of Stolberg and visiting an artisanal glassblower in Monshau as well as taking a guided tour of Aachen's ancient and historic cathedral. The trip takes place over the last weekend in May 2009.

Poster Competition – Food!

Following the success of the 2008 Biofuels poster competition, the section is turning to the theme for RSC's Chemistry Week 2009 for this year's topic: Food. The competition is open to school students across Belgium, can be delivered in English, Flemish, French or German and has three age ranges: 9-11, 12-14 and 14 years and over with prizes of €50, €25 and €10 available in each.

The competition is open now and the closing date is 21 December 2009. Full rules and other information on the topic have been recently circulated. For more information contact the section.

RSC Belgium Section upcoming events

Date	Event	Venue
22 September 2009	'Molecules of Murder' Dr John Emsley	To be confirmed
19 October 2009	'Hanging Hooke' Take the Space Theatre Group	St. Johns PAC Waterloo
10 November 2009	'The Science of Chocolate' Prof Koen Dewettinck, Ghent University	To be confirmed

RSC Belgium Committee & AGM 2009

The RSC Belgium Section's Annual General Meeting and Annual Dinner took place on Friday 6 February 2009 at Le Crabe Fantome restaurant in Watermael-Boitsfort. The formal AGM business was completed swiftly including reports on successful section activities from section secretary Tim Reynolds and on buoyant finances from Treasurer David Terrell. The 2009 Executive Committee was elected (see below) and retiring section chairman Paul Gray was thanked for his efforts over many years. Afterwards a very fine dinner was enjoyed by members, friends and their partners.

The membership of the RSC Belgium executive committee for 2009 is as follows:

Position	Person
Chair	Bob Crichton
Secretary	Tim Reynolds
Treasurer	David Terrell
Committee Member	Ian Carson*
Committee Member	Paul Gray
Committee Member	Richard Smalley
Committee Member	Rita Woodward
Committee Member	Laura Yonge
Co-opted Member	Pat Dickinson

*Ian Carson acts as the section's membership secretary.

Keeping in touch

For details of all section activities, and to subscribe (or contribute) to this newsletter by email, please contact section secretary Tim Reynolds on 02 640 32 26 or e mail:

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