

The Years Before the European Microwave Week

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Good afternoon. I would like to speak about the time before the creation of the European Microwave Week twenty years ago, in 1998, and describe the genesis of the European Microwave Conference which ran as a stand-alone event from 1969 to 1997.

The starting point for the first EuMC in London was the vision of Eric Ash, Harold Barlow and Peter Clarricoats to establish a forward looking and truly European event on a subject with significant potential for growth. The Organising Committee was a group of British engineers, who all went on to have successful and influential careers. This was augmented by a group of corresponding members from the major microwave groups across Europe. European microwave engineers were drawn into a dynamic network which co-operatively planned and organised what became an essential element of the engineering calendar.

A few words about those founding visionaries. Harold Barlow was the Pender Professor of Electrical Engineering at University College London. Eric Ash, also a professor at University College, later succeeded Barlow as Pender Professor, before becoming the Rector of Imperial College London. Barlow and Ash were co-chairs of the Conference. Their committee included Peter Clarricoats (who would chair EuMC in 1969), John Brown, Den Davies, Clive Foxell and Alec Gambling – between them five future Presidents of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, and not least, Sir Charles Kao, future Nobel Laureate. The list of Corresponding Members was equally luminous – including Bertil Agdur, Martti Tiuri and André Vander Vorst, each of whom would chair future EuMCs.

The first EuMC organised by the Institution of Electrical Engineers, the IEE, in London from 8-12 September 1969 proved to be a great success. A detailed account of the event was published in the *IEE News* which reported that there had been 174 papers presented and a total of 708 engineers attending, including 289 from outside the UK, of whom 248 were from

continental Europe. The article concluded with the words: "The continued existence of the European Microwave Conference seems assured, and its next resting place has been provisionally identified as Stockholm in September 1971."

The second event did take place in Stockholm and two years later the third was held in Brussels. The conference developed a very well-defined European character which was expressed in two ways: firstly as a peripatetic event that visited many European countries; secondly by creating a Management Committee of engineers from more than a dozen, different European countries. EuMC extended its own conception of Europe's boundaries ahead of political developments. Significantly a EuMC was held in Poland in 1980 and in Hungary in 1990. The conference both drew on the burgeoning European microwave fraternity and, in turn, helped to engender that fraternity.

In 1972 discussions were underway to put EuMC on a more permanent on-going basis. A meeting was held in London on 27 September 1972 between Eric Ash as past EuMC chair and Jean van Bladel as chair for 1973 to discuss enhanced publicity for the next conference and related issues. The meeting concluded that the series should henceforth become an annual event, that the IEE should provide a 'secretarial facility' and that a Management Committee should be created. At that stage Germany was favoured as the location for the fourth conference, but this was later changed to Montreux for the fourth and Hamburg for the fifth conferences.

On 16 March 1973 a meeting was held at Heathrow Airport between Eric Ash, Jean van Bladel, Fred Gardiol, representing EuMC, and Roger Marriott and Gordon Saville, the directors of Microwave Exhibitions and Publishers Limited, or MEPL. There was lengthy discussion about bringing EuMC together with MEPL's 'microwave international' exhibition. It was concluded pragmatically that "it might be possible in the short term for both activities to be held at the same place during the same periods". And this is what happened in Montreux in September 1974.

Meanwhile, the next milestone was the first meeting of the EuMC Management Committee, which took place in Brussels on 5 September 1973. A familiar structure was immediately established, with past and future EuMC chairs augmented by representatives of the microwave communities in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Yugoslavia. In September 1974 in Montreux the Constitution and Rules of Procedure were approved.

From the start the Objects of the Management Committee extended beyond the planning and organising of an annual European Microwave Conference. The intention was “to stimulate interest in, to spread knowledge of and to foster the development and application of microwave research and engineering”.

A decision was taken to appoint MEPL as the professional conference organiser, or PCO, for the EuMC conference series. This boosted the publicity for the event considerably. An Honorary Treasurer was appointed to manage the limited funds which the Management Committee began to accrue. It was immediately decided to use the funds to finance a Best Paper Prize. An Honorary Secretary was appointed to act as secretary to the meetings of the Committee, and this person was provided by the IEE. The Management Committee chairman and one third of the committee members changed each year. This rapid turnover meant that maintaining order was essential. The Honorary Treasurer and the Honorary Secretary provided essential elements of continuity and allowed the Management Committee to maintain its necessary independence from the PCO.

The progress of EuMC in the 1970s and 1980s meant that it visited the major European countries – France, Germany, Italy and the UK – and went to a great many other places across Europe. It was established that EuMC should return to previous locations, so London was again the host in 1979 and 1989, Paris in 1978 and 1985, Rome in 1976 and 1987. Events in Germany moved around the country – Hamburg in 1975, Nuremberg in 1983, Stuttgart in 1991.

But in the mid-1990s the series of conferences was seen to falter. Attendances fell and exhibitions shrank. The growth or decline of EuMC closely followed the health of the microwave engineering industry. In the early 1990s the industry stumbled and companies cut back in many areas, particularly defence-related subjects. The peripatetic nature of EuMC, which had been seen as both a defining feature and a strength, now became a weakness, because events held in countries with little or no indigenous microwave industry could not benefit from a boost in attendance from locally-based engineers.

This was the time to adapt and change, and I am pleased to say, this is what the Management Committee did. And that is a tale for others to explain.

Thank you!