

What's a girl like you doing in a place like this?

West Midlands Virology Symposium – 20 March 2007

The universities of Warwick and Birmingham, and the associated CRUK Institute for Cancer Studies, have a long tradition of virology, but – until now – relatively little formal contact. Your correspondents' move to the Midlands from Glasgow – where the annual workshop formed a focus for virological interactions north of the border – prompted the establishment of the West Midlands Virology Symposium. The inaugural meeting was held in the University of Birmingham's Barber Institute of Fine Arts, a stunning Art Deco gallery with a fine tiered music auditorium.

Over 110 registered for the meeting, lured by an eclectic mix of virology, bagels and the Barber's current exhibition of 'The Parrot in Art'. Opening presentations by Alan Rickinson and Andrew Easton provided an overview of virology in Birmingham and Warwick, respectively. Each gave a historical perspective, an introduction to the departmental/institutional structure and current research activities, and a brief overview of future goals and aspirations.

Coffee and pastries (in place of non-existent bagels) were separated from an excellent buffet lunch by a series of short presentations on diverse subjects. These included translational control in HIV (Emma Anderson, newly appointed in Warwick), EBV latency (Gemma Kelly), cell–cell transfer of HCV (Jennifer Timpe) and modulation of the innate immune response to KSHV (Cristina Aresté), together with talks on adenovirus (Andy Blackford) and reverse genetics of pneumoviruses (Roger Ling).

The purpose of the meeting was to encourage interaction between all participants. The organizers had therefore replaced the first of two afternoon sessions with 'Speed dating the Virology way'. Using a combination of coloured badges, three circulating subgroups, a clock and a tambourine (don't ask), a significant proportion of attendees met everyone else in the room in an exhausting whirl of introductions and thumbnail sketches of research interests. Only an alleged lack of familiarity with speed-dating prevented the organizers from achieving the goal of getting everyone to meet.

Refreshing tea and cakes were followed by further short presentations that demonstrated the excellent strength and breadth of virology in the West Midlands – topics included adenovirus persistence and vector construction (Sue Morris and David Onion), EBV modulation of interferon signalling (Khilan Shah), HPV replication (Ian Bell) and RNA structures in HCV (Andy Tuplin).

Further social interactions were enabled by a concluding wine reception and, for those with an interest in parrots, a tour of the art gallery.

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David Evans (e d.j.evans@warwick.ac.uk)

David Blackburn (e d.j.blackbourn@bham.ac.uk)

SGM/SfAM joint regional meeting grants

All Wales Microbiology Meeting 2007

Gregynog Hall – 19–21 March 2007

This year's meeting was attended by 62 scientists from all levels, undergraduates to senior academics, from Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea Universities, and the Institute for Grassland and Environmental Research. A broad range of very high quality talks on current research was presented for the main part by PhD students and postdocs, complemented by excellent presentations given by six visiting speakers. Perhaps the highlights of the latter were the two speakers invited from Newcastle, bracketing dinner on Tuesday evening: Rick Lewis with a superbly presented talk on structural studies of the stress response of *Bacillus subtilis*, and Tom Curtis with an entertaining and provoking exposition on theory and microbial ecology. As usual, the unique rural setting of Gregynog, complemented by fine spring weather, stimulated highly productive discussions on many areas of microbiology, ranging from rumen microbiology

to quorum sensing, and from viral biocides to planktonic protozoa.

Competition for the SGM/SfAM Microbiology Communication Prize was intense with a standard of presentation by the young microbiologists not seen before. The judges nominated talks from David Yanez-Ruiz (Aberystwyth) on rumen microbial ecology, Mark Malpass (Bangor) on chicken wing microbiology, and Elizabeth Steiner (Aberystwyth) on phosphorylation on Spo0A in clostridia for merit. The prize was awarded unanimously to Sandra Pierre (Aberystwyth) for her very clear and informative talk on proteomic analysis of the cacao fungal pathogen *Crinipellis perniciosa*.

A highly stimulating meeting finished on Wednesday lunch-time with all participants determined to return in 2008.

Paul Dyson (e p.j.dyson@swansea.ac.uk)