

Report by the Secretary-General 2010

The London Congress

Firstly, the 2008 Congress went extremely well, whether considering the excellence of the papers, the sparkle of the discussions, the glamour of the venue - the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre - the energetic Round Table on Climate Change, or – for those many who attended – a night to remember sailing down the illuminated Thames for dinner. On top of this there remains the permanent memento of the event, preprints, complete with CD, still available to buy from the IIC office.

The theme of the conference was *Conservation and Access*, demonstrating yet again IIC's skill at anticipating and stimulating debate on vital conservation issues. The range of the paper titles showed how IIC and its speakers lead the way on what are now hot topics: do we share the same temporal perception of “the future”? How long do we expect things to last? Should we privilege present generations over future ones? How much risk should we welcome, recognising the Catch 22 that “greater access to heritage brings greater social benefit, that greater access brings greater damage, and that greater damage reduces social benefit”. Everything will disappear eventually so what rate of damage is “acceptable” and to whom?

IIC Volunteering

Like many organisations, we thrive on voluntary effort. The congress alone brought out our best in the Organising Committee, the Technical Committee and the Editors of the preprints, to all of whom we express our gratitude.

But remember also all the other volunteers who give to IIC so unstintingly of their time. Think of the editors and editorial boards of *Studies in Conservation* and of *Reviews in Conservation*. Think also of our two new volunteers, Athanasios Velios and Eike Frederich, who have to our delight offered to apply their considerable skills in IT to the management and development of our website. Think also of the editor of *News in Conservation* – Lucy Wrapson – though on contract, dedicated I am sure far more of her time that she was paid for to preparing each colourful issue. We are sorry that her PhD studies – in which we wish her well - are now taking her from us in that important role.

Think also of our Council, many of them here today. They come from Finland, France, Germany, America, England, Scotland and Wales. Others who could not make it today but often join us by teleconference or in person are currently in Australia, Japan, Denmark and Switzerland. Every one of them is an IIC volunteer whose contributions to the work of IIC are of great value. IIC does not pay their expenses. It is a remarkable reflection of their dedication, and a tribute to IIC and their faith in its future that they should make such an effort.

Let me also pay tribute to my fellow officers, also of course volunteers, in their work for IIC: Sandra Smith, until October past our Treasurer – and Head of Conservation here at the Victoria & Albert Museum - who oversaw significant changes in the way we manage our finances; Joyce Townsend of Tate, our enthusiastic Director of Publications and long-time editor of IIC publications; and of course our President Jerry Podany of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, ever more vigorously finding new initiatives by which IIC can make an impact on world conservation and thereby

enhance the prestige of IIC. Now Jo Kirby Atkinson of the National Gallery - to the considerable benefit of IIC - has agreed to take over the role as Secretary-General as I retire from it. Velson Horie, formerly of Manchester Museum and more recently the British Library, has agreed to become our new Treasurer. I think you'll agree that IIC is enormously fortunate to have the services of such excellent people with so many other calls on their time.

IIC's influence

To make manifest IIC's international reach, we have begun to hold one meeting a year of Council outside London. Three years ago it was Vienna, last year it was Rome, where our good friends at ICCROM kindly made available their facilities and where we had a dynamic meeting with the officers of the IIC Italian Group. Such events do much to cement relations and to reinforce the sense of international community which IIC seeks to foster.

This last year saw the second round of scholarships from our friends at the Gabo Trust for conservators wishing to travel the world to view important conservation work in progress on sculpture.

Last year we made our views widely known on the closure of the Textile Conservation Centre through the pages of both *The Times* and *The Art Newspaper*, and we are very glad to maintain now a close working relationship with the latter. We were pleased too that the Art Newspaper took a robust line on the closure of the V&A's collaborative training programme with the RCA, a loss of serious consequence for UK's indeed the world's conservation skills.

So in this and other ways IIC continues to focus on its primary purpose: by informing, supporting and encouraging its members, it aims to ensure the safekeeping of the world's material cultural heritage and its continued enjoyment by present and future generations.

60 years on

Finally let me briefly reflect on the fact that on 27th April this year it will be 60 years to the day since IIC formally came into existence on the occasion of its incorporation. How things have changed! IIC was then almost the only show in town. ICOM (the International Council on Museums) was formed in 1946, but its Conservation Committee not until 1967. ICCROM, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome has just celebrated its fiftieth birthday. ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, was given birth by Unesco in 1964, at the same time as they launched the Venice Charter. So we see that IIC qualifies as the senior international organisation dedicated to conservation of the heritage, during which time it has continued to publish the leading conservation journals and to run the most dynamic range of conferences.

Since 1961 IIC has run a conference almost every two years on a theme of worldwide importance. That's 22 major events in countries round the world. Quite an achievement! The forthcoming one in Istanbul promises to be as successful as any, and in a part of the world which is new to us, where great things are starting to happen in conservation, and in a city with many obvious attractions for delegates.

New Directions

We conservators recognise not only our wider role in society but also the demands which conservation makes on the environment. This was the focus of the first of IIC's Round Tables "Dialogues for the New Century: discussions on the conservation of cultural heritage in a changing world" tackling heritage issues of concern in a rapidly changing world. Details of these events, can be found on the IIC website, including the transcript of the Tokyo event *Before the unthinkable... happens again*, exploring the protection of cultural heritage from earthquake damage. Watch out for two more round tables this year, one at the AIC Annual Meeting in Milwaukee ("The Plus/Minus Dilemma: The Way Forward in Environmental Guidelines") and the other to be held during the IIC Istanbul Congress.

Finally, I'd like to thank Executive Secretary Graham Voce and Membership Secretary Valerie Compton-Taylor for their continuing dedicated hard work in support of IIC. It has been a pleasure working with them and indeed with everyone in IIC.

David Leigh, Secretary-General