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Foreword

The Birmingham Symposium, forming the 21st in a distinguished series of meetings devoted to advances in high-performance liquid phase separations and related technologies, was held at the International Convention Centre, located in the newly developed city centre. Purpose built on a spacious shopping mall concept, the ICC was well suited for the wide range of activities programmed into HPLC '97 – from the small group Poster Discussion Sessions and Manufacturers' Seminars, through the Round-Table Debates, to the large hall for Plenary Lectures and the expansive Exhibition arena, with ample space for posters and the new Internet Café, set up with a special HPLC '97 Website for delegates. Just outside the ICC the canal-side bars and restaurants were just close enough to be reached, despite the best intentions of the British summer weather to keep everyone inside until the rain stopped.

Advances in separation science, covered in the 440 papers presented during the week, included major contributions in Analytical Biotechnology, in CE and MEKC, in the newly emerging area of Capillary Electrochromatography, and in the whole range of techniques hyphenated with spectroscopy, electrochemistry and high-performance on-line sample-preparation techniques, plus a galaxy of applications in every major user domain. An outstanding Plenary Session in honour of the lifetime achievements of Professor John Knox, FRS, focussed on the performance of novel continuous porous silica columns (Prof. Nobuo Tanaka), reversed-phase separations at high pH (Dr. Jack Kirkland) and advances in packings for electrochromatography (Prof. Klaus Unger). It was unfortunate that a planned contribution by Prof. Csaba Horváth could not be scheduled

due to last-minute indisposition of the speaker. Two podium sessions entitled 'The Next Generation' presented by scientists at the younger end of the age range made major contributions to HPLC '97, demonstrating the vigour and enthusiasm of workers newly entering the field.

As is now customary in international meetings, the Poster Presentations located in the Exhibition arena attracted enormous interest and featured some of the most exciting scientific developments – as evidenced by the keen competition for Poster Prizes awarded by an international Commission chaired by Prof. John Knox with scrupulous attention to fairness and scientific merit. The 'value-added' for poster presenters was enhanced by arranging opportunities for all those authors who wanted it, to make a short Oral Poster Discussion presentation in small parallel groups of thematically related topics. Although time was necessarily too short for any substantial discussion, this opportunity was highly valued by the authors, many of them presenting for the first time at the international level, and gave a refreshing diversity to the extended lunch-time activities scheduled each day.

The ICC will long be remembered for the extraordinarily convenient Exhibition arena, packed with Exhibitors shoulder to shoulder with the poster presenters – accommodating one of the largest European displays devoted to separation science. Thanks to the sterling efforts of Dr. Brian Clark, who as Deputy Chairman coordinated the Exhibition project, the Exhibitors made a major contribution in establishing the technical baseline of advanced developments in the range of separation sciences covered by the Symposium, and gave extra value with a series of mid-day Seminars, a concept which

was very well received by delegates who supported these sessions strongly throughout the week. Special thanks are due to Exhibitors, and also to the individual Sponsors, for supporting HPLC '97 at the ICC.

The Internet Café, with 15 high-grade PCs set up on the balcony overlooking the Exhibition arena, was also highly successful. It was equipped with its own Website, featuring tutorials for delegates presented during the day, with on-line help in searching the vast resources of the Internet to all who asked, and suitably lubricated with on-line coffee and tea. Although the Internet Café was technically demanding as regards the expertise of Café Hosts and the high-speed line and facilities required for rapid access to the Internet, the concept was an enormous attraction for the many delegates who kept the area busy throughout the Symposium. Thanks are due to Peter Myers and colleagues who set up this world-class operation at HPLC '97 and contributed their time and expertise.

Another group who regularly used the Internet Café were the 18 young people who joined the Kidscope and Youth Programme, an innovation in HPLC '97 for accompanying persons between the ages of 4 and 18. Their programme took advantage of the many attractions in and around the City of Birmingham, including the new Leisure Centre and also Seaworld next to ICC, Cadbury's famous Chocolate Factory (without Charlie on this occasion), a boat trip exploring the canal and a visit to the

dungeons of Warwick Castle nearby. The Kidscope programme owed its undoubted success to micro-planning, thanks to Misha Fell with help from her sons Andrew and Martin, and was much appreciated by parents and kids alike.

No meeting in Birmingham could be held without arranging a visit to nearby Stratford on Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace. Here the Social Programme featured a performance of his "Merry Wives of Windsor," a hilarious play beautifully performed and presented. Other social events included a Banquet with New Orleans style jazz music at Birmingham's Botanical Gardens and Conservatory, where delegates could enjoy the summer ambience of the beautiful gardens in the evening – and mercifully the English sun allowed itself to shine to illuminate a splendidly relaxed evening.

We should express our thanks to all those who contributed to the marvellously friendly atmosphere at HPLC '97. Thanks are also due to the Scientific and the Organising Committees for their hard-working contributions to an outstanding meeting in Birmingham, as we look forward to the 22nd HPLC Symposium in May 1998 in the safe hands of Prof. Dan Armstrong St. Louis, and to the 23rd Symposium in May–June 1999 in Granada, under the guidance of Prof. Emilio Gelpí.

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Tony Fell
Chairman, HPLC '97