

Conference Reports

1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR TECHNICAL
CERAMICS ('TECHKERAM'), WIESBADEN, FRG
16–18 NOVEMBER 1987

2ND EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON ENGINEERING CERAMICS,
LONDON, UK 23–24 NOVEMBER 1987

These two conferences following each other within one week had a number of common features, namely the subject matter, and that both were organised by commercial organisations. The first by Demat, Exposition Managing, Frankfurt, the second by IBC Technical Services Ltd, London.

Although the Wiesbaden Conference was designated an International Conference it was attended predominantly by Germans. All papers were presented by German authors in German but a simultaneous English translation was available for the relatively small number of non-German speaking participants. There were more than 500 registrations covering 20 nations.

Professor Kriegesmann of the Polytechnic (Fachhochschule) Höhr-Grenzhausen advised the organisers on the scientific programme of the Conference. He aimed at a comprehensive survey of the whole field and must be congratulated for having been able to get, for almost all subjects, the most competent speaker available in Germany. It was the stated aim of the Conference to form a link between the academic institutions, the manufacturers and users. This was to be achieved through plenary lectures, a workshop and the exhibition.

The plenary lectures, each lasting one hour inclusive of the discussion time, covered oxide and non-oxide ceramics and fibre and whisker composites, their production, properties and applications. The workshop contributions, dealing with more closely defined subjects, were of one-half hour duration and were interposed between the plenary lectures. Thus, apart from a short break at lunch time, lectures were going on continuously throughout the day, though in different rooms. One of the criticisms one might make is that the programme was too full for somebody with a wide interest in the subject. Coffee and tea breaks are an important feature of this type of conference as they allow time for personal contacts between the participants. An additional activity to be fitted into the available time was of course the viewing of the exhibition by 29 firms which covered manufacturers of technical ceramics (some of the most important ones were missing!), raw material suppliers and vendors of ancillary equipment used in the production and for testing.

The conference was held in the Rhein–Main Halle which provided good lecture and exhibition facilities. However, as a result of some building operations there was from time to time a most disturbing noise; it was as if a squadron of jet fighters was taking off from the roof. This was a serious inconvenience to lecturers and the audience. On registration, which could be for the whole period or selected days, for workshops only and/or exhibition only, all participants were given the full text of the lectures in German. They represent a valuable record of the state of the art. It is intended that an English version in book form should be published.

Overall it must be said that the aims of the 'techkeram' were achieved. The organisers intended to have another conference within the next two to three years. By all means let us have one but with tea and coffee breaks and without noises, please.

The problems of organising the programme of a second conference were obvious in the London meeting. Having had a fairly comprehensive coverage two years ago there were insufficient new developments to justify the same comprehensive approach. The organisers decided to have lectures on subjects not covered in the previous conference, e.g. coatings for thermal barriers and wear resistance, and non-destructive testing. A single lecture covered the most important developments that have taken place since 1985, a broad survey was given of the R & D programmes in Europe, the USA and Japan, and there were specific reviews of projects on ceramics in automotive applications in Germany and the UK.

With regard to the R & D activities sponsored by the EEC one was struck by that fact that the total expenditure by the EEC was only a very small fraction of the total amount spent by the Member States' governments and industries. The influence of the EEC activity is therefore small but is aimed at

the establishment of contacts between the workers of the Member States and to coordinate their research efforts. What needs to be achieved was brought out by the speaker who described the present attitude towards high technology ceramics in Japan; the Fine Ceramics Association in Japan has 163 industrial members. The review of different nations' government-sponsored activity has become a frequent subject at this type of conference. It is doubtful whether this is of great interest for most participants; it would be to government representatives but they are rarely present.

The London conference was attended by about 150 people, the majority coming from abroad. It was chaired throughout the full period by E. M. Briscoe. The authors were chosen on an international basis, mostly from Europe, but there were also speakers from the USA and Japan. The volume issued to the participants contained only the extended abstracts of the contributions.

Comparing the two meetings, considering the registration fees and relative hotel expenses, the Wiesbaden meeting was a far better buy for a German-speaking participant; those who don't had no choice. This was amply demonstrated by the attendance figures.

P. Popper