

Airborne spores – A personal perspective

M. E. Lacey

Rothamsted Research, Plant-Pathogen Interactions Division, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2JQ, UK e-mail: melacey@clara.co.uk

My first introduction to aerobiology was working with P H Gregory at Imperial College, London where I first learnt to draw spores, ran two Hirst traps during the summer and did experiments on splash dispersal. Moving to Rothamsted Research with P H Gregory I worked on finding the cause of Farmer's Lung Disease. I also painted pollen and spores for his book *The Microbiology of the Atmosphere*. Some part time work followed identifying and counting spores for my late husband, John Lacey, for his work on stored products and health hazards. Later at Rothamsted Research I worked with Alastair McCartney on splash and airborne dispersal of fungal spores from barley, oilseed rape and sunflowers. After retirement I painted some more airborne particles and wrote the text for a laboratory manual, '*The Air Spora – A manual for catching and identifying airborne biological particles*', with Jon West as co-author.

Swiss aerobiomemories

H.S. Varonier

LVPP, 1950 Sion, Switzerland

Some four decades ago, a young swiss pediatrician decided to acquire experience in allergology and clinical immunology. His application for a post doctoral fellowship in pediatric allergy was accepted by the Department of Pediatrics of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and University in Baltimore, starting March 1964. During this fellowship he received his first experiences in the world of airborne allergens and learned about all the available devices to collect airborne pollens, including Rotoslide, cascade impactors, flag samplers, Durham collectors and a brand new apparatus, the Hirst volumetric trap, just imported from England.

After his return to Switzerland, at the end of 1966, our freshly trained allergist was eager to conduct a year long pollen survey in Geneva, which was not yet done in Switzerland. He chose a very simple and uncostly device, the Durham gravity sampler. Pollen and mold spore counts could be performed in 1967 and 1968. The result was the creation of the first swiss made pollen and mold calendar, that has been published in a journal which no longer exists, the « Acta allergologica ».

During the same period, Dr Ruth Leuschner started her work in Basel and created slowly but surely a comprehensive aeropalynological network in Switzerland.

The late Dr Ferdinand Wortmann, in charge of the Allergy Clinic in Basel, supported the entire enterprise and in January 1983 became the first president and founder of the Swiss Working Team for Aerobiology. Thereafter, with the financial help of various sponsors, the team could carry out and publish yearly pollen counts. The financial burden of this nationwide system became problematic but received an almost unexpected solution: the Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology-MeteoSwiss was interested in this work and finally could take it over.

For some years, a so-called NAPOL-Committee, including members of the aerobiology team and MeteoSwiss officials acted as a scientific advisory panel.

In 1993 the Working Team changed name and thus gave birth to the Swiss Society of Aerobiology (SSA). The aims of the new society remained centered around the study of the impact of biological and anthropogenic particles on human health and the environment. The SSA has also drawn attention to indoor allergens and has published a brochure to help allergy sufferers fight house dust mites. The mode of dissemination of airborne mold spore became also part of the society's main research activities. Under the patronage of the SSA and since many years, one its past presidents, Dr Markus Gassner, has conducted very interesting and fruitful sero-epidemiological studies among school children and has obtained valuable information about the immunization status of these children and has helped pinpoint the impact of farm living conditions on the onset of allergic sensitizations.

The SSA has also set up several seminars and workshops, like the one held in 1996 in Neuchâtel and the present 8th congress of our international association.