

# IUMS Congresses

Janet Hurst

The 1999 Congresses of the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS) were held in Australia in August. The Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, located in the stunning setting of Darling Harbour, proved to be an excellent venue. The area has been extensively renovated in the past 10 years and the waterfront, with its cafés, shops, museums and ferries, not to mention the Casino and nearby Chinatown, offered tempting diversions from the conference programme, especially as the sun shone so brightly in what the Australians term 'winter'. Straying delegates were easily recognized by their bright yellow and blue conference rucksacks amongst the throngs of people of all ages and nationalities!

The XIth International Congress of Virology was on first, from 9–13 August; the IXth International Congress of Bacteriology and Applied Microbiology and IXth International Congress of Mycology ran during the second week (16–20 August), but many committee meetings and special workshops, including a timely one on 'Bioterrorism', were held in the interval between the congresses. For those requiring a break from the scientific activities, a range of tours and social events was available. A social programme had also been arranged for every weekday evening.

The Australian Society for Microbiology, who hosted the meetings and made ICBAM their own annual conference, were delightfully friendly and hospitable. No-one will forget the 'Australiana Nights' with their seemingly inexhaustible supplies of wine and Oz food specialities, and entertainment which included sing-songs (*Waltzing Matilda*, of course), whip-cracking demonstrations, sheep shearing and the unmissable opportunity of stroking a wombat. Hopefully none of

the delegates fell into the fountains of Darling Harbour staggering back to their hotels.

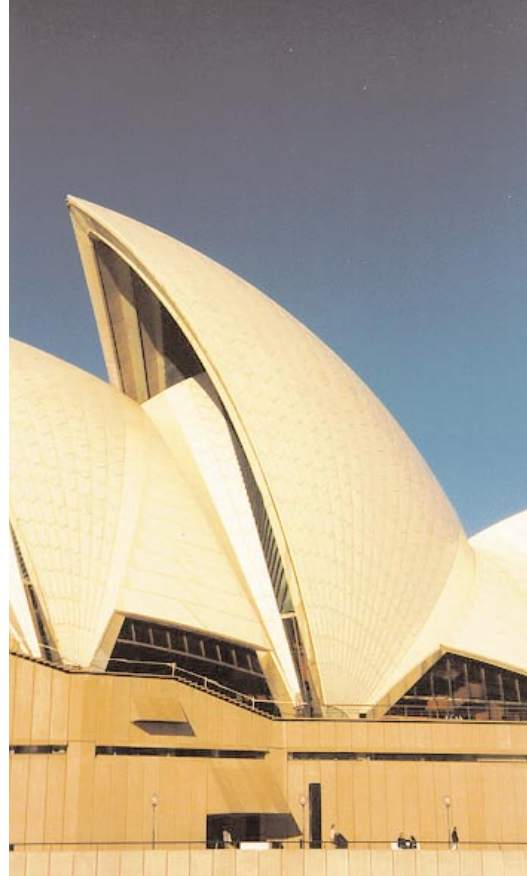
Every effort was made by the organizers to provide a memorable time for the delegates, both scientifically and socially. The congresses were run very efficiently and thanks are due to all concerned. Particular credit is due to John Mackenzie, who as overall chair for the scientific organizing committees, worked untiringly for many years to make the congresses a success.

## ● SGM input

The Society has been closely involved with these congresses from the very start 7 years ago. Successive SGM International Secretaries Tim Gray and Jeff Almond played pivotal roles in organizing the scientific programmes for ICBAM and ICV, respectively, and the events have been widely promoted through Society meetings and publications. The Society also provided significant sponsorship, both directly and by offering travel grants to delegates from the UK. SGM sponsored the closing plenary session of ICV and the opening plenary session of ICBAM.

## ● XIth International Congress of Virology

ICV opened with a spectacular ceremony on the Sunday evening. After national songs from the



Australian Youth Choir, Jeff Almond, chairman of the ICV Programme Committee as well as SGM International Secretary, welcomed delegates on behalf of the Virology Division of IUMS. He described the highlights of the first 100 years of the discipline and the important role it plays in the development of all biosciences. Many more speeches followed from virologists of international renown, culminating in an address by D.A. Henderson of CDC, on the theme 'An impending World Cup – man vs virus'. D.A.'s achievement in eradicating

ABOVE:  
Sydney Opera House.  
PHOTO AIDAN PARTE

LEFT:  
The Sydney Conference and  
Exhibition Centre and Sydney  
Harbour.  
PHOTO RON FRASER



## Congress facts

	ICV	ICBAM/ICM
<b>Participants</b>		
■ Total	2429	1378
■ Delegates	1407	781
■ Students	334	233
■ Speakers	379	140
■ Accompanying persons	202	79
■ Exhibitors	90	126
■ Top four delegations	USA 380, Japan 181, UK 170, Germany 105	Information not supplied
<b>Papers</b>		
■ Invited	51	Information not supplied
■ Offered oral	611	Information not supplied
■ Posters	1100	ICBAM 395, ICM 217

## SGM awards and fellowships

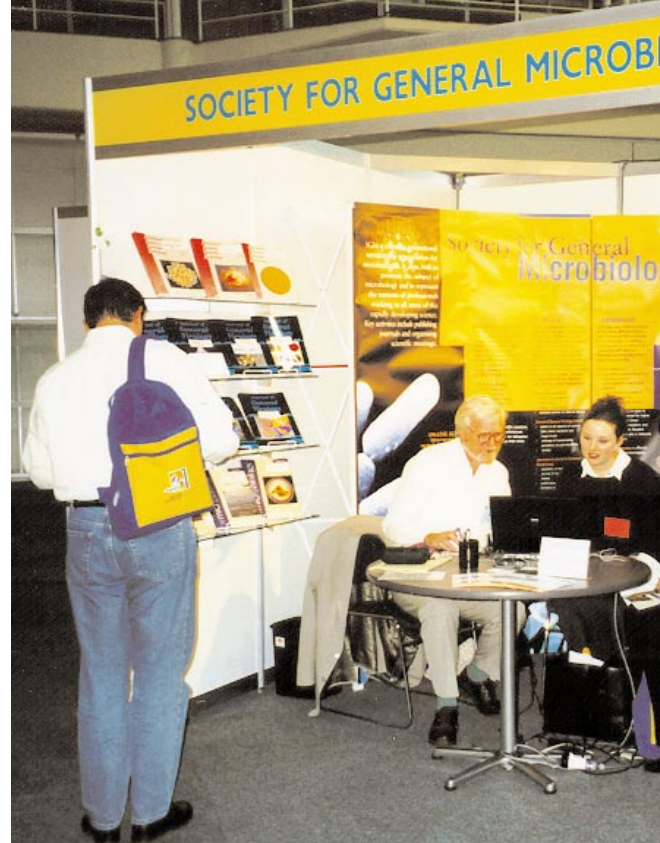
110 SGM International Congress Travel Grants were awarded to enable UK scientists (including postgraduate students) to go to Sydney. Council was also pleased to accede to a request from the Congress organizers for further sponsorship to permit the attendance of microbiologists from developing countries. A contribution of £23,500 was made which provided fellowships to the following people.

■ Professor Ahmed Yousief Gibril, Cairo, Egypt	■ Dr Gerardo Guillen, Havana, Cuba
■ Professor Krassimir Metodiev, Varna, Bulgaria	■ Mr Arnab Basu, Calcutta, India
■ Ms Olga Miatleva, Moscow, Russia	■ Dr Swarabjit Singh, c/o Pennsylvania, USA
■ Professor N. Parasakthi, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	■ Dr June Busingye, Kampala, Uganda
■ Dr N.P. Sunil-Chandra, Ragama, Sri Lanka	■ Dr J. Shanmugam, Trivandrum, India
■ Dr C. Chanyasanha, Bangkok, Thailand	■ Dr Shailesh Dewasthaly, Pune, India
■ Dr Oleg Zhirnov, Moscow, Russia	■ Professor M.J. Cardosa, Sarawak, Malaysia
■ Dr Irina Zubkova, Odessa, Ukraine	■ Dr T. Konakova, Moscow, Russia
■ Dr Irina Kolssova, Odessa, Ukraine	

A condition of their award was the fellows joined the Society; but as a gesture of goodwill to mark the start of the new millennium, the subscription for 2000 will be complimentary.

smallpox as Programme Director for the WHO, assisted by the venerable Australian virologist Frank Fenner, was then marked by the presentation of a citation to these two distinguished scientists. At the end of the ceremony the delegates all streamed to the exhibition hall where wine and cheese awaited them.

The sessions that followed over the next 5 days covered a wide range of current topics in virology. There were plenaries each morning and parallel work-



shops in the afternoons. Most of the great names in virology were present, including four Nobel laureates. The prestigious Stuart Mudd Lecture was delivered by Hilary Koprowski.

## ● IXth International Congress of Bacteriology and Applied Microbiology & IXth International Congress of Mycology

Once more the delegates were treated to an opening ceremony with entertainment from young Australians before the speeches. Dick Groot Obbink gave the welcome address followed by a number of presentations to distinguished microbiologists, including the Van Neil and Arima awards and annual awards of The Australian Society for Microbiology to its own members. Rita Colwell's keynote lecture 'Marine microbiology – the ocean frontier' held the audience spellbound, blending modern molecular science with the diversity of microbial life, particularly that found in deep-sea vents. Delegates then made their way to the exhibition hall for the welcome reception.

ICBAM and ICM followed a different pattern from ICV, with ICBAM plenaries each morning, symposia/workshops in the afternoon and ICM plenaries after lunch with their offered paper sessions in the morning. There was the same wide range of topics, including a symposium on *Helicobacter*, an organism which was first cultured in Australia. Sadly the congresses did not attract as many delegates as ICV, although there was a much larger trade show, and consequently there was not the same 'buzz'.





● **View from Stand 181**

In recognition of SGM's role as a significant sponsor, we were invited to take a stand in the trade exhibition for the whole duration of the congresses.

Thus it was that Ron Fraser and Janet Hurst from Marlborough House found themselves in Sydney for 2 weeks in August, setting up and manning the SGM stand. In the second week

they were ably assisted by Aidan Parte, Managing Editor of the *International Journal for Systematic Bacteriology*, who was there both to promote the journal and to attend an editorial board meeting. IJSB is a dynamic publication which is to be issued bi-monthly in 2000 under the new name *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology* (IJSEM).

On the stand we had a display of copies of recent SGM journals and symposium volumes and gave away back issues of *Microbiology Today*, membership literature, meetings information and a selection of educational resources. On-line demonstrations of the electronic versions of the journals and the Society website were available on a notebook computer. This also enabled us to keep in touch with SGM headquarters by e-mail.

The exhibition hall also housed the posters and was where the delegates took their tea and coffee. This ensured that there was a constant stream of people passing through the trade show. Our stand was well placed for obtaining refreshments at all times! The welcome receptions also took place in the hall.

The other exhibitors were a mixture of microbiological organizations (ASM, SfAM, the Australian Society, FEMS, etc.), laboratory suppliers, publishers and local companies promoting the tourist trade or products like opals. Some attracted attention by providing food – the hamburgers being barbecued by a certain well known pharmaceutical company will not be appearing at SGM meetings! However, the fruit juice on tap on another stand was more than welcome.



The main impressions were of great friendliness and goodwill. The delegates were a cosmopolitan crowd and it was interesting for us to meet people from so many other countries, especially from the Pacific Rim whom we do not usually encounter. A few very familiar faces from home included our President Howard Dalton, ex-Treasurer Allan Hamilton and quite big contingents from CAMR and UKNCC.

There was much interest in the SGM and its publications. Several delegates joined on the spot, others took away promotional literature. Our educational posters were very popular and should be decorating walls in laboratories and classrooms throughout the world as a result. We were pleased to chat to existing members, especially those from Australia, who do not normally attend our meetings. There were quite a lot of Australian undergraduate students present, with the usual problems of finding jobs and studentships. Advice was keenly sought on employment possibilities in London.

Overall it was excellent exposure for the SGM and our attendance was well worthwhile. The staff made some useful contacts. We look forward to the next IUMS Congresses in the Palais des Congres, Paris, 27 July–1 August 2002.

● **Janet Hurst, SGM Deputy Executive Secretary**

ABOVE:  
Sydney Harbour Bridge at sunset (top) and the Sydney Conference and Exhibition Centre (bottom).  
PHOTOS AIDAN PARTE

ABOVE (CENTRE PAGE):  
The SGM stand at the 1999 IUMS Congresses in Sydney.  
PHOTO JANET HURST

LOWER LEFT:  
A view of Sydney and Circular Quay from the harbour.  
PHOTO AIDAN PARTE

