

First International Baltic Congress of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care

RIGA
8-10 December 2005

A personal view –

Dr Keith D. Thomson

What a difference nine years has made in my experience of conferences in the Baltic States, no more projectors firing slides towards the ceiling at the wrong moment (Estonia 1996) or lecturers being locked inside a room with the only powerpoint projector in the country (Lithuania 1999)!

Now in 2005 there is double powerpoint projection and simultaneous translation in all three lecture theatres in an impressive venue, the Riga Conference Hall. This was apparently provided free for the occasion by the generosity of the city council.

The organisation of this meeting was impeccable and a tribute to the combined efforts of Professors Antonina Sondore, Indulis Vanags and their team. Tour operators 'Latvia Tours' provided a very professional service, the staff at the conference were always charming and helpful. There were about 1,000 delegates and many sponsors who contributed most of the staggering budget of 100,000 euros – a large amount for such a small country as Latvia.

My team of five UK anaesthetic Consultants (David Robins, Michael Scallan, Kevin Camden-Smith, John Barcroft and myself,) sadly reduced from seven due to illness and an important DFID meeting, were extremely well treated: accommodation was for four nights, at no

charge to us, in the 4 star Reval Latvia Hotel, conference opening ceremony, guided excursion round Old Riga (fig 1), excellent Gala dinner dance (fig 2) at the Latvian Society of Medicine, wonderful opera (Nabuko) complete with rendition of a 'Chorus of Hebrew Slaves' to warm the heart of avid Classic FM listeners like myself.

This last evening was made complete by being invited backstage by the theatre director to meet the cast. This was because during one of the three intervals he had noticed my Paul Harris Fellowship lapel badge. He had gained a similar award during 2005, the hundredth anniversary of Rotary.

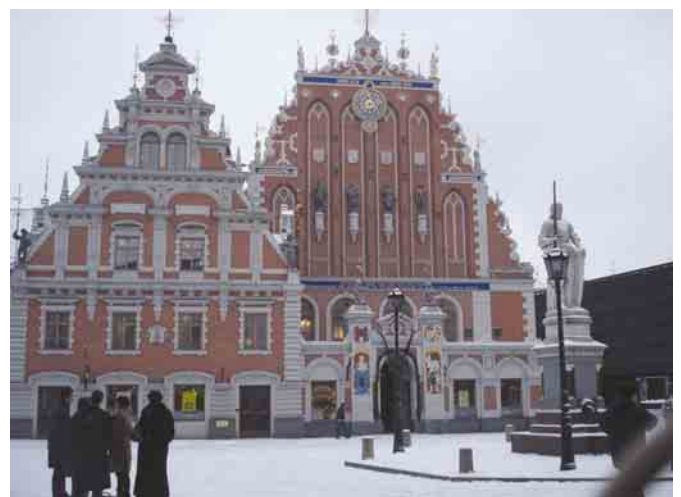
The Conference

The three days of presentation, 8-10th October, went very well. There was an international cast of speakers from UK, USA, Scandinavia, Germany, France and Hungary as well as from all three Baltic countries.

These included Peter Simpson (President RCA), Philippe Scherpereel (France) Jannicke Mellin-Olsen (Norway – Education Secretary WSFA) Joseph Holski (Germany), Youri Vater(USA) and Roger Eltringham (UK).

Their presence certainly added to the success and significance of this First Baltic International Conference.

Fig 1. Old Riga



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Fig 2.
Come dancing



On a personal note, this was my first presentation at an international meeting since undergoing major head and neck surgery 11 months' before. The Chair of my session was a good friend Sam Perov, Professor of Anesthesia in Detroit, USA, who not only informed the audience of my recent illness but also gave a plug for my charity work with Mercy Ships (www.mercyships.org).

My four skiing enthusiast friends (Belle Plagne veterans all – www.doctorsupdates.com) performed with panache and confidence which only a thorough knowledge of one's subject engenders.

Certainly those present at John Barcroft's remarkable presentation on 'Psychology of Errors' would not forget the invisible gorilla!

Conclusion

The whole visit was given a magical fairytale atmosphere by a three inch carpet of snow (fig 3) in the streets and bright Christmas lights on the fir trees. What a fantastic city Riga is, the friendliness of waitresses, hotel staff and individuals in the street is often sadly lacking in the UK. Although some of the older people still seemed rather unsmiling perhaps lacking the energy to grasp the capitalism rampant in the wake

of disbandment of the Soviet occupation of the Baltics in the early 1990s.

It was a personal pleasure that my four friends, Baltic tyros all, so enjoyed themselves that they will be happy to return to this part of Europe where the wine, hospitality and song everywhere set a standard to which other countries can only aspire.

**Date for the diary: "2nd Baltic International Conference of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care' Tallin, Estonia 26-28 October 2006
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Fig 3 . A room with a view

