

Review of the LBMA Assaying and Refining Conference

By Aelred Connelly, LBMA PR Officer



Introduction

The LBMA Assaying and Refining Conference was held at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington from 19 to 22 March 2017. This was the seventh event in the series, which has been held in London every two years since 2005.

Organising Committee

The LBMA is very pleased to acknowledge the work of the Working Party, which in addition to both Neil Harby, LBMA Chief Technical Officer, and Varsha Peiris, LBMA Good Delivery List Officer, comprises representatives of the referees group:

Argor Heraeus – Alessandro Ruffoni
Metalor – Jonathan Jodry
PAMP – Daniela Manara
Rand Refinery – Madeleine Theron
Tanaka – Hitoshi Kosai.

The LBMA would also like to extend its thanks to Mike Hinds of the Royal Canadian Mint, who also chairs the Reference Materials Steering Committee, as well as Stewart Murray, LBMA Good Delivery Consultant.

Attendance

The number of registered delegates in 2017, at 206, represented a new record attendance. This is more than double the attendance of the early events in the series. Although the delegate list continues to be dominated by representatives of Good Delivery refiners, the LBMA has opened up participation in recent years and it was notable that a much wider range of organisations was represented at this year's event. As well as refiners seeking accreditation and representatives of equipment manufacturers, it was gratifying to see a greater number of banks in attendance, not only central banks but also commercial banks. The LBMA is very keen that closer ties are established between banks and producers so that they have a better understanding of the key issues which are impacting on their business models.

Programme and Presentations

The Conference proceedings began on the Sunday afternoon with a Welcome Reception which provided an excellent opportunity for delegates to network in an informal, relaxed environment. The formal Conference sessions commenced, as in all previous events, with a welcome from the Chief Executive and an update on LBMA technical activities, as well as an excellent keynote speech from Professor Kim Esbensen. An abridged version of his speech is on page 3. The rest of the day was devoted to a range of assaying and analytical techniques, and for the first time, asset management. On the second day, the morning sessions featured a second keynote speaker, Susan La Niece from the British Museum, who delivered a presentation on 'Gold in the Ancient World', as well as sessions focused on reference materials, refining and assaying. The afternoon sessions focused on standards, along with a general session which included presentations on the 'Role of the Referees'. The Conference was rounded off in fine style by Neil Harby, who summarised the key takeaways from the conference proceedings.

All the PowerPoint presentations presented at the Conference are available for download from the LBMA website: www.lbma.org.uk.

Optional Events

On the morning of Wednesday, 22 March, three optional extras were offered. These included visits to the laboratories of the Inspectorate International in Witham and the London Assay Office, as well as a Workshop on Sampling, chaired by Kim Esbensen. The LBMA is most grateful to them for extending their hospitality to our delegates and, in the case of Kim Esbensen, for the huge amount of preparation that went into his workshop. It was most gratifying that the workshop and the visits to the Assay Office and Witham were so well attended and well received.

Networking

From the first event back in 2005, it has always been clear that participants find the networking opportunities at the LBMA Conferences to be particularly valuable. There is simply no other event that offers the chance for precious metals assayers and analysts to meet their peers from other companies and countries. The lunch and coffee breaks during the Conference, as well as the main dinner and optional tours on the Wednesday, all combined to provide excellent opportunities for delegates to network and share business cards and ideas. Taking into account the feedback from the last Conference, this year, drinks were organised at The Builder's Arms, a local hostelry, just a short walk from the Conference, which provided the perfect way for delegates and the Conference organisers to wind down after a hectic few days.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

The LBMA would also like to offer a word of thanks to the sponsors and exhibitors. The Conference dinner took place at the highly regarded restaurant, Quaglino's, in the heart of Mayfair. The food was particularly excellent as were the magicians who enthralled delegates with their amazing tricks. Special thanks should be extended to the LBMA's five referees who jointly sponsored the dinner. The exhibitors' stands from the following companies were located in the area used for the coffee breaks, and the LBMA would like to thank them for their support.

- Ametek – Spectro Analytical Instruments UK Ltd
- Fischer Instrumentation (GB) Ltd
- H.W. Pickardt ek
- IKOI
- Onsa Muchvherat

Feedback

As usual after an LBMA event, delegates were invited, via the Survey Monkey online questionnaire, to provide feedback on the Conference, including the structure of the programme, the quality of speakers, the venue and the networking opportunities. At the time of writing, we had received 58 replies (a significant improvement on the 38 replies for the last event) and the various detailed comments and suggestions will be reviewed by the Conference Committee (anonymously of course).

The feedback received so far can be summarised as follows:

- Nearly 60% of delegates rated the conference 'excellent' overall; the remainder considered it to have been 'good'.
- 79% and 77% of delegates thought that the sessions on Sampling Theory and Standards were either extremely or very important.
- 85% thought that the Informal Networking Reception was useful and 42% and 33% respectively thought that the networking opportunities could be improved by a later start in the morning and extending the conference to three days.
- Looking ahead to the next conference, more than a third of responses (38%) favoured a London location, whilst 21% preferred Edinburgh and 19% Berlin.

Next Event

The next Assaying and Refining Conference will take place in March 2019. In her closing remarks, the LBMA Chief Executive, Ruth Crowell, noted that UK locations other than London could be considered as long as they have good flight connections and facilities. The Conference Committee will shortly be meeting to discuss many aspects of the next conference. Suggestions from Alchemist readers are always welcome and should be addressed to: ruth.crowell@lbma.org.uk.