

Land of the Midnight Fun - FIG 2017



Self-appointed chair of the FIG FUN Commission, John Brock reports on the highlights of this year's working week where he found just the right hotel and that the sun never sets on Finnish lager!

After paying the registration for two deserving Finn students, Olga and Tommi, I found the perfect accommodation for an Aussie at the 4-star Hotel Katajanokka, a former prison where the staff had black & white striped uniforms with the phone number across the front, while breakfast was off tin plates and cups in the basement solitary confinement block. Just the place for a colonial Irish convict far from home!

Before Finland, I spent three nights in England studying the wall erected by Roman Emperor Hadrian from 122-136 to delineate the northernmost limit of the Empire. After researching this example of boundary demarcation my subsequent paper about this ancient edifice was chosen to be FIG Article of the Month for April 2017 (you can read it here: www.fig.net/resources/monthly_articles/2017/brock_april_2017.asp).

Next, I flew to Belgium to view the wonderful Wright-Draper Collection of survey instrumentation at Ghent University. Head of School Prof. Alain De Wulf kindly showed off his newest acquisitions. Next stop was GEO Business 2017 for two days of a brilliant show along with the customary fellowship accorded a long distance traveller by my English compatriots ably led by editor Stephen Booth, Fenian brother James Kavanagh and fellow GW columnist Malcolm Draper with whom dull moments are inconceivable.

Surveying History Symposium

Arriving early Saturday morning in Helsinki my first assignment was to chair the full day Surveying History Symposium. We were privileged to have FIG vice president Mikael Lilje meet us after procuring several books by one of his fellow Swedes, Anders Celsius (a surveyor who worked on the Struve Arc) and 500 Years of Nordic Mapping. Our chairman Jan De Graeve officially opened our event with an audience of twenty eminent and eager participants. Our first presenter was Director General of the Survey of Finland Arvo Kokkonen enlightening us about the history of surveying in Finland then Jan talked of the Struve Arc with its possible extensions to and across Africa, which have been thwarted by lack of funds in the poorer nations.

Monday saw the General Assembly (GA) where changes to the constitution and the venue for the 2021 Working Week were the main concerns. The final day saw a close vote chose Ghana over Poland for the 2021 Working Week. The Opening Ceremony was futuristic with 3D viewing and ending with a classic Sybelius recital with piano and cello.

Tractors and Naked What, Where?

The Commission 4/5/6 Dinner was held at the '50's décor Restaurant Zetor, which is the name of an old Czech tractor formerly used in Finland some examples of which stand within the premises. With a men's convenience lined with photos of naked women, it was the first time that I have seen a long line for this facility! Just before The Gala Dinner some of us took part in the Charity Run/Walk around the picturesque Lake. The lavish event took place around Finlandia Hall, a masterpiece of famed Finnish architect Alvar Aalto built in 1973.

My personal thanks to our superb hosts, the LOC led masterfully and cheerfully by Congress Director Pekka Halme, a man I proudly call my friend along with his great team of Finns including Paavo, Martti, Heli and Kiirsikka, who know how to put on an incredible show (Helsinki's 1990 FIG Congress is still mentioned as one of the best). Our unstoppable FIG Secretariat Louise and Claudia ably assisted by Maria and Wu, must be revered for such an amazing feat of organisation led by the Executive Committee of President Chrissy Potsiou, Prof. Rudolf Staiger and Dr Diane Dumashie.

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