

The International Molinological Society Symposium (TIMS)

Trip to Romania 2015, 6th to 14th June

David Plunkett

As a paid-up member of TIMS for over 20 years, I had regularly attended TIMS Symposiums around the world every four years. Sibiu in Romania was the chosen venue for 2015, based at the ASTRA Museum, an open air 'eco-park' in extensive woodland with lakes and running water including conference facilities.

As it was a former Iron Curtain country, I was looking forward to seeing part of this country, still emerging into the 21st century and grasping the Economic Community advantages but retaining its own currency.

After an early morning flight direct from Luton Airport by Wizz Air, to the little known city of Sibiu, I was with three other English members, arriving at our destination by a shared taxi in the early afternoon. I was booked into the modern timber framed and clad hostel (Vila Diana) while other members were largely at the adjacent Hotel Han Vestem, or the more distant Hilton Hotel about 1km away. Where-as my accommodation was rather basic, spartan but most economical, the adjacent hotel was a little more impressive and was where we shared breakfast each morning.

Some members had joined the Pre-Symposium trip to the north of Romania six days before and joined us during the afternoon.

After registration we had just a little time to settle in and get our bearings before a walk to the welcome dinner, at the 'Camara Boierului' restaurant, formed from a rebuilt great barn, adjacent to the Hilton Hotel.

It was good to meet many old friends from past Symposium and of course all the 15 members of the UK contingent, many with their wives, but I was the only one from Hampshire and without my wife Ros. The total number attending from 23 different countries was 107.

The modern conference hall was within the main administrative and conservation building a short walk away for me, which was very well equipped and comfortable, with the advantage of air conditioning

Firstly on Sunday morning, the official TIMS welcome by president, Willem van Bergen, to all the delegates and introductions from the Managers of the ASTRA Museum. There are nearly 400 buildings on this site with the great majority constructed of timber. Not only many forms of mills (water and wind) but agricultural stores, wagons, implements, to shepherds huts and sheep-folds. The daily maintenance is considerable and the labour force is high, as the site is open to the public all year round. Bearing in mind that the wages by general European levels is very low.

All day Sunday and Monday morning was devoted to the first of many molinological presentations by members from around the world, thankfully all in English. Monday afternoon included a three hour break to visit many of the displaced mills, both wind and water on this very large site from all over Romania. In a country with a very variable topography, from mountains to wide plains and forests, the temperature during our stay was surprisingly hot around Sibiu, at 30 to 33 degrees C. Further evening informal presentations usually continued

from 17.30 to 19.00 each day. Our lunches and evening meals were generally in one of the parks two restaurants (open to the public).

Tuesday, was a mixed day with the first two hours of presentation papers with one of the three papers given by Ton Meesters (NL), on his research of the 'Tidal Mills in the Low Countries'. My ideal subject of course. Followed by the departure of two coach loads of members on a guided walking tour of medieval central Sibiu. I considered the early town wall defences, towers and churches as their finest tourist points. A fine large central square or 'piata' was the hub for many locals and the milling tourists. Our lunch was in the central piata, at the "Am Ring" hotel restaurant, before a slow meander back to coaches and back to ASTRA, for more free time around more mills.

Wednesday required an early start from the Hilton Hotel by coaches, travelling to the east, visiting fortified churches at Valea Villor and Bieran, stopping for lunch at the Dracula Restaurant in Danes. Before more ancient churches and the medieval town of Sighisoara. Some are designated 'UNESCO World Heritage Sites which is assisting the conservation of these fragile structures

It was tough on ones legs at times, climbing up spiral staircases or long flights of steps. One flight was about 800 steps in total to reach the church door, but well worth it, even though it was lightly raining. Very rural landscapes and great distant views from defensive walls and church towers.

Thursday: A day of concerted members papers, including a presentation on 50 years of TIMS. Including one by Erik Stoop on, Anton Bruggeneate, who died in 1956 – a great European mills recorder, responsible of over 20,000 sites excluding those in the UK. Another interesting paper by Gabor Ozsvath, 'Palinka Mills in the Carpathian Basin' of Transylvania. These are mills associated with the distilling of plums into 'palinka'. No trip to Romania is complete until a sip of palinka has passed your lips. In the evening, I gave my short presentation on 'Intermediate Mills'. More of that for HMG members later. Kerr Canning from Canada was another member presenting his research on tidal mills in Nova Scotia.

Friday: Another day of formal paper presentations and evening informal papers, including one by John Boucher (UK) with 'Osmaston Manor- Early use of water power on an English country estate'. Following lunch, a few hours break to catch up any missed mills and other structures within the ASTRA park.

Saturday, our last day of formal presentations, taking the total to 30. The final paper by Mihkel Koppel (Estonia), on 'Windmills on Estonian Islands.' In the evening the usual raucous farewell dinner, held at the local Han Tulghes restaurant.

Sunday: Departure for many participants, where-as many awaited departure for the Post Symposium Tour to the mountainous region to the south (14th to 20th June). Joan and Peter Hill (Sussex) and myself, decided to catch a bus into Sibiu for some more sightseeing and a little shopping for folks back home. A rather busy and vibrant city centre, showing some affluence in the past few years. Due to only two direct flights to and from UK to Sibiu per week, I and the Hills had to wait until Tuesday to get home. That was no hardship, so I used the Monday to trek to the next town south via the abandoned old tram route to Rasinari, at the base of a range of hills about 9km away.

Many well-kept, old houses and dirt roads but with modern services being installed, like mains drainage, pavements and new concrete bridges which left parts of the town like a building site. Rather annoyingly I found no signs of a water mill by following the river up through the town. The bus ride back was only the equivalent of 20 pence, as was the price of a banana.

This report does not do justice to the great variety and scale of volunteer mill recording and research carried out by TIMS members around the world. One has to experience this first hand at a Symposium every four years, or simply join TIMS to learn more.



TIMS Members exploring one of the many mills on the site



One of the Boat Mills within the ASTRA Museum

