Monitoring AJT's attendance of meetings: a randomized decadal perspective

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Abstract: Personal involvement at meetings of various scales reflects the communication skills of scientists, and of leaders in particular. Illustrative samples are presented for two decades of Alan Thorpe's distinguished career.

1. Early roots for the monitoring exercise

The author (HV) was first introduced to Professor Alan J. THORPE (in short: AJT), the recently retired Director-General of the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), in mid-September 1986 on the staircase leading up to – what a telling coincidence ! – the lecture theatre of ECMWF. The reason was the common attendance of ECMWF's annual seminar, AJT seeking more knowledge about orographic processes while being a reader at the Meteorology Department of the nearby University of Reading and HV sniffing some ECMWF atmosphere after he had turned down a job offer from the Centre earlier in the year.

The autumn of the following year witnessed the "Great Storm" across southern England, followed by a sequence of Intense Observation Periods (IOP) during the Fronts'87 experiment, an exercise co-chaired by AJT. The passage of a nearly stalling cold front was tickled by a nighttime-25-to-26 October-series of radiosoundings launched by three men on Chesil beach near West Bexington at the Dorset coast, namely AJT with graduate student Azizan Samah and visitor HV. The years 1990, 1992 and 1993 experienced more working visits of HV's to the county of Berkshire and its meteorology minded institutions at the University, ECMWF, and the then adjacent MetOffice college in Shinfield Park.

AJT's extended stay as a guest scientist to DLR-IPA during the summer months (JJA) of 1991 kept some cross-Channel balance. It saw first drafts of the manuscript which eventually ended as Thorpe et al. (1993) and featured the first and only mention of the "Thorpean Alps" in the formal literature (p. 1578, formula 4), a rare combination of idealization with sharp personal observation most aptly paraphrased as: *"A novel feature is that the mountain elevation is made zero at a finite distance from the peak. … The consequence of this choice is that the slope of the mountains changes discontinuously at the surrounding plain in accord with the actual Alpine orography".* The mutual interest in the contemporary history of meteorology (covering the previous five to ten decades) was enhanced by discussions over the revised version of what was to become Thorpe (1993).

2. A randomized time-series composed of seven instants of time

The composite of group photos around AJT (Figure 1) sets off in June 1994 at the occasion the 75th anniversary of the short, but seminal paper by Jacob Bjerknes (1919), which was published on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. The unique reunion of younger and not so young anymore colleagues in Bergen, Norway, was master-minded by Melvyn Shapiro. Its publication as a book (Shapiro and Grønås, 1999) also contained two extended collections of older photos as well as of fine shots taken during the conference, including the grouping with AJT laughing at an eater (Fig. 1a).

March 1997 saw the first workshop of the specialist group "History of Meteorology" of the Deutsche Meteorologische Gesellschaft at the monastery in Andechs near Munich (Fig. 1b; Lüdecke and Volkert, 1997, p. 240). AJT appeared to be happy to meet with his long-term cooperation partner Melvyn Shapiro and colleagues working in continental Europe, to listen to presentations made under a decorated ceiling (Fig. 1c), and to tell his story of the history of PV-thinking (Thorpe & Volkert, 1997).

During the current millennium, AJT had followed a job trajectory via the Met Office's Hadley Centre; NCAS when still in plural mode; the driving seats of NERC and ECMWF, sequentially. After having reflected about V. Bjerknes's circulation theorem (Thorpe et al., 2003), he got involved with WMO and its Commission for Atmospheric Sciences (CAS) as a co-chair to set-up the first World Weather Open Science Conference (WWOSC) along with CAS-president Michel Béland. Figure 1d illustrates AJT's relaxed leadership even outside of his home institution. When WWOSC took place in the summer of 2014, AJT invested considerable efforts to preach to potential converts (Fig. 1e). The autumn of that year saw AJT assisting the closing-down of the decadal THORPEX-initiative within WMO (2004-2014)

Figure 1: ***Alan J. Thorpe*** *(AJT) in the company of colleagues including long-term cooperation partner* ***Melvyn A. Shapiro*** *(MAS) –* ***seven samples*** *from the period* ***1994-2015*** *ordered with time ascending:* ***a)*** *At a reception in Kong Haakon's Hall, Bergen (NO), 27 June* ***1994*** *[1: Hans Volkert, 2: Louis Uccellini, 3: Eero Holopainen];* ***b)*** *Speakers and organizers of History of Meteorology workshop (HMw), Andechs (DE), 3 March* ***1997*** *[1: Ulrich Schumann; 2: Huw C. Davies; 3: Cornelia Lüdecke; 4: Hans Volkert, 5:Joseph Egger, 6: Klaus-Peter Hoinka; 7: Reinhold Steinacker];* ***c)*** *Part of audience at HMw* ***1997*** *under a decorated ceiling [1: Reinhold Steinacker, 2: Christian Keil, 3: Ludwig Braun; 4: Stefan Emeis; 5: Rudolf Paulus; 6: Joachim Pelkowski; 7: Hans Fimpel];* ***d)*** *Planning WWOSC at WMO, 6th floor, Jura wing, Geneva (CH), 29 April* ***2014*** *[1: Michel Béland; 2: Gilbert Brunet];* ***e)*** *Lecturing at the World Weather Open Science Conference (WWOSC), Palais des Congrès, Montréal (CA), 17 Aug.* ***2014****;* ***f)*** *closing THORPEX in "salle Obasi", WMO, 17 Nov.* ***2014*** *[1: Deon Terblanche; on screen* ***f-2****: ~2002 in AJT's office in the meteorology building, University of Reading;* ***f-3****: listening at WWOSC, 18 Aug. 2014];* ***g)*** *open air lunch with IAMAS folks at IUGG assembly, Prague Convention Centre (CZ), 29 June* ***2015*** *[1: Laura Gallardo; 2: Matthew Lazarra; 3: Tom Lachlan-Cope; 4: Keith Alverson; 5: Guoxiong Wu; 6: Joyce Penner; 7: John Turner; 8: Sanjay Limnaye; 9: Richard Grotjahn; 10: Maria Kanakidou; 11: Jianping Li].*
Photo credits: Carlye Calvin (a); Arnold Tafferner (b, c); Hans Volkert (d, e, f, f-3, g; composition & annotation)

right at the epicentre of this inter-governmental organization, a club of national (hydro-) meteorological services, in three-fold appearance (once on stage, twice on the screen; Fig. 1f). At the end of June 2015, AJT also inspired the General Assembly of the non-governmental IUGG and its atmospheric grouping of experts, in a personal capacity, called IAMAS by sharing his vast personal expertise and infectious humour at an impromptu special assembly in the open summer air of Prague (Fig. 1g).

3. Concluding remarks

A quarter of a century ago, AJT assisted the author to formulate a transition-into-retirement-article for the director of his home institute (Volkert, 1991). Since then he has been continuing to be a source of inspiration for many. This account seeks to provide confirmation for this contention by giving hints to a few depictions and relevant texts. May such memorabilia preserve good memories for some at least.

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