

Histopathology For Trainees, Plzen, Czech Republic 31ST Jan- 3rd Feb 2008

(Editors note: Tricky business this editing. We got two excellent reports on the Plzen Course with nothing to choose between them. Too rich a diet for one issue of the acp News so I've used the intro and photos by Rachel Thomas and the diary from Alison Finall and Anurag Joshi. I hope this is OK guys.)

INTRODUCTION

In the middle of last year, the ACP advertised the opportunity for trainees to apply for a sponsored Histopathology course in Plzen – 'first come first served', with priority to ACP Trainee members. The course was described as an opportunity to be taught by some world experts on a large multiheader microscope in a beautiful European city, with all expenses paid, including the flights. Obviously, the pitch seemed too good to be true, but a small number of SpRs in our region eagerly faxed our applications off, and were delighted to be allocated places by return email. We swiftly booked our flights from the local airport to Prague (for which we were even more swiftly reimbursed), and a few months later we embarked on this much anticipated trip. In hindsight, the pitch was spot-on. Apparently the idea to organise the venture stemmed from the allocation of some money towards an educational opportunity to benefit ACP trainees. In this respect the course was unquestionably educational, with hours of stimulating histological teaching, but surprisingly supplemented by a refreshing insight into the working lives of pathologists abroad, and their unabashed hospitality and enthusiasm.

The course could be split into two hypothetical halves – the teaching aspect and the social aspect – though these two components were wonderfully blended into a very entertaining whole. The course was run by Professor Michal Michal, Director of the Biopsticka Laborator, a privately run laboratory in Plzen, and of the Department of Pathology, Charles University, Medical Faculty Hospital, Plzen. Together with four other members of his staff, we received six teaching sessions on a fantastic 28 header Olympus microscope within their private facilities. These sessions were timetabled to be roughly



Teaching on the multiheader with Prof Alena Skalova (6th from right)

3 hours long each, but buoyed by the natural enthusiasm of the speakers, all ran longer, a couple into intellectual marathons of endurance. Obviously being such fine specimens of youth and vitality, this should have been a distinct holiday compared to the hours spent looking at normal duodenums in dingy NHS facilities, but the liquid rehydration and sleep deprivation timetabled for the more social aspect of the course, was enough to challenge the most dedicated of trainees. Now read on ...

THE PLZEN DIARY:

Day One

Mishaps: 2 (prior to leaving)

Czech tumours seen: 0

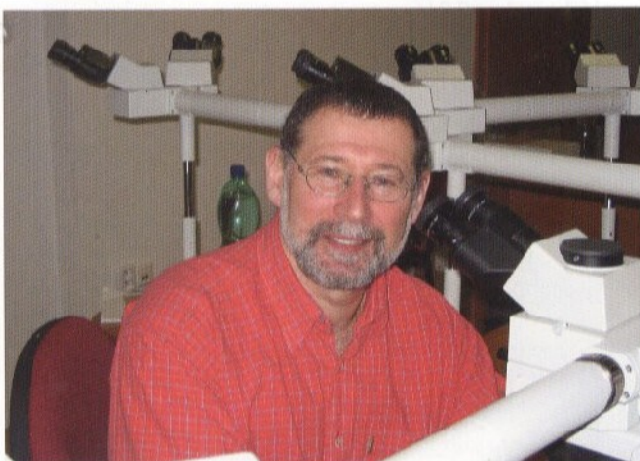
Pilsners consumed: 0

Hours of sleep: 9

Excited and frantic preparations for this trip started several weeks before we set off with visa applications and money changing. A word of caution to those of you from outside the EU: The Slovakian Embassy does not issue tourist visas for a visit to the Czech Republic. This gem of a fact was discovered at first hand by one of our intrepid delegates who found that both the country's embassies were situated within the same building. Thankfully the official in question was more bored with this error than offended, so no harm done. Nearer our departure time, it was discovered that the Czech Republic has not yet joined the Euro. As such, 300 Euros were up for grabs to the highest bidder from day 1 owing to a small defect in Czech research.

Perhaps more by luck than judgement, the remainder of the journey went smoothly and we were pleasantly whisked away from Prague's Ruzyně Airport by two lovely secretaries, Irena and Alena, from the hospital's pathology department in Plzen. An hour later we were deposited at Hotel Hazuka where the mystery of 22 participants in single accommodation but 15 rooms in the hotel was solved. People sharing were placed in a suite-like arrangement, sharing bathroom and kitchenette. The hotel was spotless and the friendly staff very helpful.

Later that evening we met some of the faculty staff for a welcome dinner at the town centre's El Cid restaurant, a



Dr Zolenek Kinkor at the multiheader

Spanish flavoured establishment. Michal Michal (so good they named him twice), Alena Skalova, Zdenek Kinkor and Dmitry Kazakov were all there to meet us and made for a very enjoyable introduction to Czech dining. A hearty and velvety rich beef goulash was served with fluffy bacon dumplings. Everyone's dietary requirement was catered for although the Czech concept of vegetarianism includes pork products.

We were impressed by the quality of Czech wine. The Czech chardonnay is light and clear with a short and lemony finish. What is not so impressive is the local spirit which came in his'n'hers forms. People apparently happily consume this stuff by the bottle on a daily basis in Plzen. Called 'Fernette' and distilled from an herbal base, it should have more accurately been called 'Floor-it'. The ladies' version was something like alcoholic Jif lemon cleaner and the other, 'Brut' for men. Both should be avoided at all costs unless short of fixative agents in the lab. Luckily, and as you might expect, the beer is of an entirely different standard, being fresh, crisp and tasty.

Day 2

Mishaps: 1, culinary

Czech tumours seen: 180

Pilsners: 22 (between us)

Hours slept: 6



Fresh, crisp and tasty

concepts that challenged tradition; with pathological evidence to back them up. The idea that all is not yet discovered is really inspiring and adds a 'zing' that can be easily lost when reduced

We were woken by sunshine pouring in through the windows of the hotel the following morning. We were very lucky, as clear blue skies with a frosty undertone made up the weather for the majority of our stay. Our first session covered papillary lesions of the breast, difficult at the best of times, and stretched us as far as complex ideas such as solid variant of papillary DCIS. The set up was a little intimate, around a desk of 22 multiheader extensions, but Dr Kinkor did very well at making papillary breast lesions easier to understand and his English was excellent; his only slip-up was using the word arousing instead of arising. Easily done. It became evident that we were in for a pathological treat. We were exposed to entirely plausible



"ACP" Restaurant, Plzen

to filling in proforma data sheets in diagnostic reporting.

Lunch was a bit of a disappointment. All 22 of us piled into an unsuspecting Mexican restaurant and despite the lone waiter doing his level best to feed us quickly, some of us had to wait a while for our chilli-free kidney beans-and-sauerkraut so we were late for the next session. However, our afternoon session was far from disappointing. Prof Skalova had a fabulous collection of cases and covered a breadth of topics from Warthins tumour with squamous metaplasia and branchial cysts, to cystic lesions within neck nodes and papillary adenocarcinoma of the sinonasal tract. She added in a few snippets of information about her pet golden retriever puppy (dog baby) and about writing the WHO book about head and neck tumours. She clearly has some very eminent friends in the world of pathology. Another superb speaker who was able to highlight the importance of global collaboration.

Day 3

Mishaps: 1, possibly linguistic

Czech tumours seen: (running total) 650

Pilsners: 30ish.

Hours slept: 6

We started the day with urology and discussed adenomatoid tumours and their H & E appearances with Dr Ondrej Hes. I had not before really noticed that stringy eosinophilic bridges are seen crossing the glandular like structures. We then entered the heady world of germ cell tumours and discovered the Talerman tumour and how the architecture of the tumour differs in male and female gonads. Ondrej believes that both the germ cell and the sex cord stromal components are malignant while many other experts believe only the latter is malignant.

That lunch time, a few of us ventured forth into the unknown; to discover that, just because a restaurant states outside that it sells pizza, one should not assume it will be on the menu, be it in Czech, English or German. We thought we had terminally offended the waiter by asking for a Coke when he glared at us and walked away from the table not to return.

Frantically we flipped through the Czech phrase book we were carrying and found that the words Coke/ Pepsi/ Coca-Cola were not listed but it was possible to ask him if we could 'move in together', or 'kiss me!': *Mohli bychom spolu žít?, libej me!* We abandoned the Coke plan and opted for *voda* (water) instead. Ordering lunch was made marginally easier when German language menus were discourteously tossed in our general direction and we ordered chips with a tomato and onion salad; gaining us yet more disapproving looks. A longing for the delights of Cardiff ensued when the well-built, spiky-haired ladies with yellow skin-tight leather trousers and faux-furs around their necks lit up their cigarettes. The smoking ban has yet to reach middle Europe and it's only when one is returned to those old smoky days that you realise how delightful it is not to have to eat in a smoky environment.

Back at the lab we had our first afternoon session with the lead pathologist at the private lab – Prof Michal Michal. It became apparent that he has an endless knowledge of the world literature and personal friendships with most of those at the forefront of pathological literature. Perhaps not a surprising thing for a man who is so charming, approachable and down-to-earth. He was passionate about morphology and classification, his specialist interests being wide ranging and his list of publications endless. He is a great collaborator and receives rare tumour material from all over the world. It is said

to Prague, one hour away. Prague is a beautiful city by night. We took in the main attractions on foot over three hours, including the Charles Bridge and Prague Castle where the first defenestrations (a form of execution whereby the victim is thrown from a high window – cause of death: **1a**. defenestration) took place. The first two men who were intended to be murdered in this way fell into a pile of dung and miraculously survived. At 'half-night' (that's midnight to the rest of us) we sat down to a wonderful meal that ended with 'Broch' – a traditional Czech Schnapps like spirit with a cinnamon aroma. Three people were asleep by the end of dinner (understandable at 3:30 am) but Prof Michal was still going strong. Apparently, he can go for two to three days without sleep and show no apparent ill effects. Perhaps that explains where he finds the time to produce so many original papers. Currently, he has more than 350 to his name, a statistic which merely adds to his bionic persona.

Day 4

Mishaps: near miss x 1 (sleeping)

Czech tumours seen: (total) 900

Pilsners: 91 and metered

Hours slept: 2

Barely awake, we staggered into the Bioptical laboratory.

Dr Dmitri Kazakov assured us he was aware of our sleep deprived state and of the big day ahead. Promising to be 'gentle' on us, he started with a large collection of sebaceous glandular lesions and their mimics. There were fascinating revelations regarding the embryologic origins of adnexal structures and how this translates to tumour development and classification. Dmitri was very friendly and spoke about some weird and wonderful neural lesions and mammary like lesions of the female genitourinary tract. We broke for lunch and discovered that the next session was starting at 4 pm – a little breather. A refreshing walk through a sunny and quiet Plzen that Sunday afternoon brought us to the central square where we indulged in traditional Czech honey cake in full view of the splendid cathedral of St. Bartholomew. Built in 1292 in impressive gothic style it has the highest church spire (100m) in the Czech Republic, a nation which boasts 500 churches, cathedrals and chapels within its capital alone. Having said that, only 4% of the population is practising Christian.

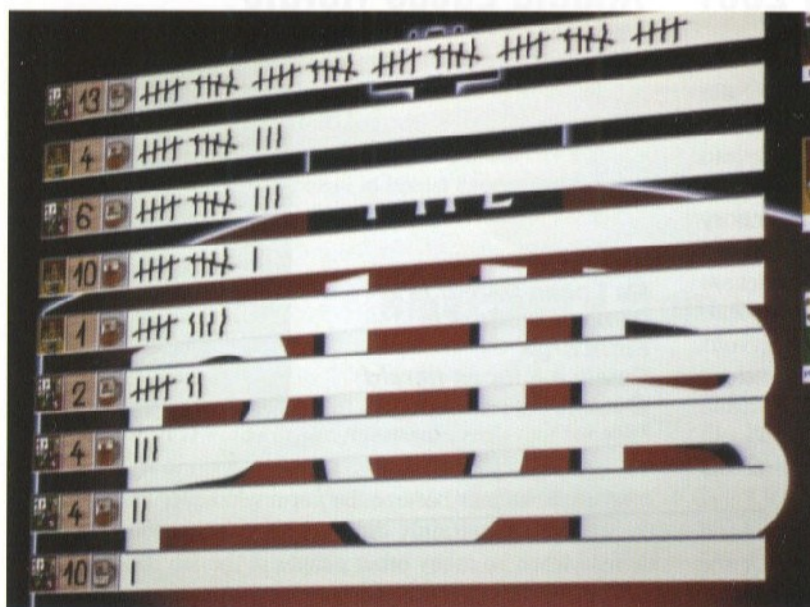
Plzen is home to the second largest synagogue in the world and has the oldest brewery. The Pilsner technique of brewing was brought to the city by a Bavarian man whose new ideas had not been well received in Germany. He found fans in Plzen where the inhabitants have been brewing since 1295. That afternoon we covered melanocytic lesions that amazed us all – especially the 'ball-in-mitts' appearance of benign deep penetrating naevi and their role in the development of cellular blue nevi. Many slides later we were convinced of the balls and the mitts (see below) and moved on to things neural and renal.



Prof Michal Michal leads the sightseeing on the night trip to Prague

that observation is the purest form of science and he certainly inspires in this area. Prof Michal is a master of descriptive terms, something of a great aide memoire to the more junior among us; for example the 'benign renal angiomyoadenomatous tumour' has tubular epithelium that resembles sharks teeth – though some of us could only see seahorses! This might have been a reflection of our reduced concentration after a marathon six hours session.

The night was young and we had a walking tour of Prague ahead of us followed by dinner at U Prince in Charles Square. Irena, our trusted secretary friend, drove us back along the E50



Top of the League Table: 81 pints!!!

A few group photos later, we set off at a semi-languid pace to our watering hole for the evening – the P.U.B. (Pilsen Unique Bar). The USP (unique selling point) of the P.U.B. was individual metered beer taps at numbered tables and a massive plasma screen display of the number of pints pulled at each table ranked against other tables from that site and nine other branches around the Czech Republic, all belonging to the chain. This clever concept originates from a medical

student and an economics student. They own the place – we have invited them to come to the shores of Old Blighty. We notched up a total of 92 pints, which sent us to the top 20 of their all time big totals; where we hope to stay for some time to come. The website www.thepub.cz bears our 'team' name 'The Mitts and Balls' as testament to our achievement that night.

postscript (Ed: Hangover?)

After three days in Plzen our brains buzzed with beautiful examples of unusual entities we don't have the pleasure of seeing every day. We all had a fabulous time and felt completely spoiled by the friendly, open-hearted hospitality and the opportunity to see rare tumours. On reflection, perhaps the less experienced among us were a bit out of their depth but it cannot hurt to venture out of ones comfort zone from time to time.

Thank you ACP!

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It's all a question of balance ...

Emyr Benbow sent this in just after we had got back from Durham

Once upon a time, in the Kingdom of Heaven, God went missing for six days.

Archangel Michael found him on the seventh day, resting. He enquired of God, "Where have you been?"

God pointed downwards through the clouds. "Look Michael, look what I've made."

Archangel Michael looked puzzled and asked, "What is it?"

"It's a planet," replied God, "and I've put life on it. I'm going to call it Earth and it's going to be a great place of balance."

"Balance?" inquired Michael, still confused.

God explained, pointing down to different parts of the Earth, "For example, North America will be a place of great opportunity and wealth, while South America is going to be poor; the Middle East over there will be a hot spot, and Russia will be a cold spot. Over there I've placed a continent of white people and over there is a continent of black people." God continued, pointing to the different countries.

"This one will be extremely hot and arid while this one will be very cold and covered in ice."

The Archangel, impressed by God's work, pointed to another area of land and asked "What's that?"

"Ah," said God. That's the North of England, the most glorious place on earth. There are beautiful people, seven Premiership football teams in the North West alone, and many impressive cities. It is the home of the world's finest artists, musicians, writers, thinkers, explorers and politicians. The people from the North of England are going to be modest, intelligent and humorous and they're going to be found travelling the world. They'll be extremely sociable, hardworking and high-achieving, and they will be known throughout the world as speakers of truth."

Michael gasped in wonder and admiration but then proclaimed, "What about balance God, you said there will be BALANCE!"

And God replied "Wait till you see the bunch of tossers I'm putting down South!"