

10 years of success stories with the EPS Historic Sites

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The Historic Site programme of the European Physical Society (EPS) dates back to 2011, having been established under my presidency ten years ago. The idea was to honor and commemorate with the Historic Site (HS) award places in Europe, or even outside geographical Europe, that are important for the development and the history of physics. Sites with national or European/international significance to physics and its history can be considered for this distinction, namely places (laboratories, buildings, institutions, universities, towns etc.) associated with an event, discovery, research or body of work, by one or more individuals, that made long lasting contributions to physics.

Nominations are open throughout the year from the EPS website and reviewed 2-3 times/year by the HS Committee. The EPS works with the nominators to obtain local authorisations for placing a plaque and in organising an official inauguration ceremony.

Through March 2021, over 90 proposals were received, almost all of them approved, and 55 EPS Historic Sites have been inaugurated until now in more than 20 different Countries.

The present EPS HS Committee includes Goran Djordjevic (Serbia), Ursel Fantz (Germany), Alain Fontaine (France), Jim Hough (UK) and myself. There are two observers, one for the American Physical Society (APS), whose similar Historic Sites programme inspired that of the EPS, and one from the EPS Young Minds (YM) Committee. The Chair of the Committee is Karl Grandin (Sweden), also Chair of the EPS History of Physics (HoP) Group.

For each EPS HS award ceremony so far, one could notice an improvement of mutual relations between the EPS and local national Member Societies, Associate Member Institutions and Authorities, an increase of EPS impact and visibility, and at the same time the enhancement of some “spirit of belonging” to the EPS. Moreover, the EPS Historic Sites initiative has raised the awareness that not only the artistic and natural heritages must be preserved for humankind but also the scientific one. This was the goal!

In Italy, 8 Historic Sites have been inaugurated since the start of the HS initiative:

1. The Goldfish Fountain of the Physics Institute of Panisperna Street - Fermi Centre, Rome, Italy, 20 April 2012
2. The Hill of Arcetri, Florence, Italy, 17 May 2013
3. The Villa Griffone in Pontecchio Marconi, Bologna, Italy, 26 May 2013
4. The AdA Storage Ring at the INFN Frascati National Laboratory, Frascati, Rome, Italy, 5 December 2013
5. The Mount Vesuvius Observatory, Hercolaneum, Naples, Italy, 23 May 2015
6. The "Piersanti Mattarella Tower of Thought", Erice, Italy, 21 August 2016
7. The Institute of Physics of the University, Palermo, Italy, 7 February 2019
8. The Academy of Sciences of the Institute, Bologna, Italy, 7 November 2019.

The next Italian Historic Site, already approved but unfortunately not yet inaugurated due to the COVID pandemic, is the “Institute of Complementary Physics” of the University of Milan. This was established by Aldo Pontremoli in 1924, then directed by Giovanni Polvani (SIF President from 1947 to 1961) who transformed it into the current “Institute of Physics”. In 1926 Pontremoli, together with Enrico Fermi, passed the first competition in Italy for a chair of theoretical physics. His lab in Milan was one of the best equipped in Italy for modern trends in physical research. He participated in the first scientific expedition to the Arctic led by Umberto Nobile on board the airship “Italia” in 1928. The expedition abruptly ended with a shipwreck and Pontremoli’s death. To honour its eminent founding father, today’s Physics Department has been named after Aldo Pontremoli. Hence the EPS HS recognition would further acknowledge the relevance of Aldo Pontremoli’s figure, as an eminent scientist and a courageous explorer.

Our strong wish was - and still is - to inaugurate this Historic Site on the occasion of the annual Congress of the Italian Physical Society (SIF) which was already foreseen to take place in Milan in September 2020. Alas, our 2020 Congress could only be held in telematic mode. We still don’t know if the pandemic conditions in September this year will allow the

Italian community to meet in person at the SIF Congress, as in the good old times, since in Italy we are not out of the storm yet. But we are confident that this inauguration will indeed be an historical and moreover auspicious event: the first Italian Historic Site after Corona!

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SIF Honorary President



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