

History of physics – all over Europe

✂ K. Grandin 📅 30-08-2023 🔗 <http://www.primapagina.sif.it/article/1738>

The establishment of the Historic Site distinction by the European Physical Society (EPS) in 2011 by Luisa Cifarelli, during her presidency of the EPS, has turned out to be an ongoing success. The more sites that are incorporated, the wider and richer the scientific heritage of physics in Europe stands.

At the time of this writing 71 Historic Sites (HS) have been inaugurated and three more are scheduled this autumn. These sites are located in 25 different countries with the addition of the 26th country (Serbia) in September. Recent country additions have been Finland, Israel, and Lithuania. The sites do not only cover Europe geographically, but also many fields of physics and many centuries. This way the historical canvas of physics as an important part of our common European cultural heritage is painted in many colours and many layers.

Nomination of a site is done online at the EPS website. To evaluate and eventually approve the nominations there is an EPS Historic Sites Committee. The present committee consists of Luisa Cifarelli (Italy), Goran Djordjevic (Serbia), Ursel Fantz (Germany), Alain Fontaine (France), Jim Hough (UK) and Karl Grandin (Sweden) as chair.

Important for the success of this initiative is the collaboration between the EPS and the respective national physical societies. Many nominations are made in connection with jubilees and local backgrounds, and the inaugurations of each site offer great public relations opportunities for local physics communities. All these aspects are important to the EPS as well, making the organisation visible in local contexts. At inaugurations a plaque is unveiled by representatives from the local initiative, local authorities and from the EPS most often the EPS President is present.

The EPS HS Committee evaluates nominations a few times per year. The committee may in a few instances take the initiative and encourage specific nominations, but normally the work of the committee is to evaluate nominations that are sent in by EPS members. So far there have been more than 100 nominations.



Inauguration of the 58th EPS Historic Site in Uppsala: Rasmus Nordin, descendant of the sixth generation to Anders Jonas Ångström reveals the memorial stone together with Petra Rudolf, Vice President of the European Physical Society. (Credits: Camilla Thulin)

Of the inaugurations I have had the pleasure to attend, I choose as an example, the inauguration of the Anders Jonas Ångström Physics Institute at Uppsala University in 2021. It celebrated Ångström's important contributions to spectroscopy in the 19th century. At the inauguration was a 99-year-old professor that told me that he had his office in the same building 70 years ago, thus making the point of all the layers of history that adds up to our present understanding of nature. And this became even more so apparent since a young descendant of Ångström attended the event. The young boy together with the then Vice President of the EPS, Petra Rudolf, unveiled the plaque, claiming he also wanted to study physics in the future!



Karl Grandin - Director of and Professor at the Center for History of Science at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm. His research has mainly dealt with history of modern physics. He is on the Scientific Advisory Board for the Niels Bohr Archive in Copenhagen, and he chairs the Historic Sites committee of the EPS. Since 2006 he is the editor of the Nobel Foundation yearbook.