

From The President and Senior Officers International Society for Eighteenth Century Studies (ISECS)

Dear colleague and fellow-member of ISECS,

As a member of a National Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, you are also, by affiliation, a member of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ISECS). Currently, ISECS is composed of 31 National Societies, which pay fees to ISECS ; and two Associate Societies, which do not pay fees and whose members do not participate in elections for the Executive Committee.

It is a pleasure to be in touch with you directly, to outline the aims and functions of ISECS, and to encourage our collective international contacts.

ISECS has two official languages, which are French and English.

1. HISTORY OF ISECS

The story of ISECS is linked with the story of Theodore Besterman (1904-76) who was a far-sighted scholar of eighteenth-century life. The son of a diamond merchant, Besterman claimed that he was largely self-educated in the British Museum Library.¹ In 1939-40, not the best of times, he published privately the first edition of his *World Bibliography of Bibliographies*, a work destined to become a classic, which is found on the reference shelves of every serious library worldwide.

Around 1950 Besterman began to study and publish the correspondence and works of Voltaire, a liberal spirit with whom Besterman identified. In 1929 the City of Geneva had acquired Les Délices, Voltaire's old residence (1754-60). It was progressively restored, became a museum and, in 1954, also a study centre. Besterman went to live there as its Director, taking with him his extensive library of all matters relating to Voltaire. As editor in 1955, he launched a new academic series of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, which now comprises over 600 volumes.

In July 1963, Besterman also inaugurated the "first international congress on the Enlightenment" which was held in Geneva and nearby Coppet. The Congress was bilingual (English and French) and brought together some 200 scholars working on the eighteenth century. It was remembered for its fruitful atmosphere and for the splendour of its organization.

Shortly after the Congress, the first National Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies were created: in 1964 the French Society (SFEDS); in 1969 the American (ASECS); and in 1971 both the British (BSECS) and Canadian (CSECS). In 1967, the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ISECS) was also established, its first president being Robert Shackleton. In 1971, Theodore Besterman moved to England and created the Voltaire Foundation, in partnership with the University of Oxford, which undertook the financial management of ISECS.

Following the first International Congress on the Enlightenment (ICE) at Geneva, an unbroken sequence of international gatherings has been held every four years. The next one, the 15th, will take place in Edinburgh in July 2019 on the theme of

¹ Source: Giles Barber, "Theodore Besterman", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2010).

“Enlightenment Identities”. It illustrates the success of this field over the last 55 years. It is a tribute not only to Besterman’s original vision but to the internationalism that is so particularly associated with the eighteenth century.

2. ISECS AIMS

Note : these are excerpted from the formal ISECS Statutes. The complete text is available on ISECS website: www.isecs.org.

2.1 The purpose of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies is to promote the growth, development and co-ordination of studies and research relating to the eighteenth century in all aspects of its cultural heritage (historical, philosophical, ideological, religious, linguistic, literary, scientific, artistic, juridical) in all countries, without exception. The Society is non-profit-making and non-political.

2.2 Its function in particular is to promote communication and the circulation of information between national societies for eighteenth-century studies.

2.3 Its aim is:

- i. to foster exchanges, contacts and meetings between eighteenth-century specialists of all countries;
- ii. to give moral support to cultural events (conferences, exhibitions, etc.) related to the eighteenth century, or commemorating its great figures and its accomplishments;
- iii. to promote the creation of national societies in countries where none are in existence.

3. ISECS ACTIVITIES

3.1 An **International Seminar for Early-Career Eighteenth-Century Scholars** is organised annually, at a different national venue. These events, which cater for 12-15 early-career scholars (after a process of open applications), are intellectually lively and productive – and help to foster international contacts between the next generation of eighteenth-century scholars. Seminars currently in the pipeline are:

2018 **Viterbo**. Theme: ‘Meanings of Silence’

2019 **Newcastle upon Tyne**. Theme : ‘Participation, Collaboration, Association’

2020 **Lausanne** or **Paris**. Theme : ‘Memory and Forgetfulness’ (subject to EC’s approval)

2021 **Ann Arbor**. Theme : ‘Credulity in the Age of Reason’ (subject to EC’s approval)

2022 **Graz**. Theme to be confirmed.

3.2 **International Congresses**. These are international events, meeting every four years in different national venues, attracting attendances of up to 1,000 scholars (sometimes more) from around the world. The immediate past Congress was held at Rotterdam in July 2015.

The next International Congress on the Enlightenment will be held in **Edinburgh** (UK - Scotland) from 14-19 July 2019, on the theme of ‘Enlightenment Identities’. It is being organised by the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS), in conjunction with the University of Edinburgh, ISECS, and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society (ECSSS).

These Congresses are open to all eighteenth-century specialists whether or not belonging to any scholarly society. We’ll hope to see you in Edinburgh in 2019!

3.3 Meetings of the ISECS Executive Committee, with associated Conferences.

The ISECS Executive Committee (details below) meets annually at a different national venue, where it organises a local Conference – open to all comers.

Meetings in the pipeline are:

2019 July, **Edinburgh**

2020, **Potsdam**

2021, **Rome**

2022, **Stockholm?** (to be confirmed)

3.4 Hosting the ISECS website, with an International Directory of Eighteenth-Century Scholars.

The website www.isecs.org, which is updated weekly, contains information about all activities relevant to eighteenth-century studies (publications, conferences, exhibitions etc), plus an electronic directory of the members of all National Societies. At present, the directory holds about 6,400 files.

The website seeks to facilitate communication between individual members and between National Societies; and welcomes suggestions as to how to promote such exchanges. Contact Communications Secretary Nelson Guilbert: admin@isecs.org.

3.5 Publications

i. The edited essays arising from each International Eighteenth-Century Early Career seminar are published by Honoré Champion (Paris), in its collection '*Etudes internationales sur le XVIIIe siècle*'. To date, 14 volumes have been published and 5 are in the publication pipeline – all showcasing the work of early career scholars.

ii. **IRECS** is the on-line journal of ISECS. It is published on the ISECS website, with a timetable responding to offers from contributors. The first issue was on the theme of 'Boundaries in the Eighteenth Century' (2011).

Other issues :

2016 : 'Justice and Revenge in the Eighteenth Century' (ed. Pascal Bastien)

2017 : 'Classicism and Enlightenment' (eds. Jean-Christophe Abramovici and Daniel Fulda)

2018 : 'Citizenship and Enlightenment' (ed. Conrad Brunstrom)

Proposals for future issues are very welcome, subject to the usual editorial process. Please communicate with **IRECS** editor, via Communications Secretary Nelson Guilbert: admin@isecs.org.

4. ISECS ORGANISATION

4.1 **Membership** falls into two categories:

- i. Personal Members, who include all paid-up members of the National Societies.
- ii. A smaller number of Corporate Members, consisting of paid-up libraries, associations or institutes concerned with eighteenth-century studies.

4.2 Constituent Societies:

i. Multinational and National Societies pursuing aims similar to those of ISECS are admitted as Constituent Societies at the ISECS General Assembly, provided that the EC is satisfied that, within the terms of their constitution, scholars in all fields of eighteenth-century studies may be admitted as members.

ii. The Constituent Societies pay an annual subscription to ISECS and furnish names and addresses of their respective members. Each Constituent Society also provides the means of contact between their members and ISECS.

4.3 Executive Committee: An EC is elected to conduct routine administrative business for ISECS. It meets annually, scheduling its meeting every fourth year to coincide with the ISECS Congress. The EC's membership comprises (1) 8 officers: the President, three Vice-Presidents (of whom one is known as the First Vice-President); the Secretary-General; the Assistant Secretary-General; the Treasurer; and the Assistant Treasurer; (2) 8 elected members, elected by ballot of all ISECS members; and (3) a number of representatives, chosen by the National Societies: each Constituent Society with fewer than 750 members is entitled to send one representative member to the Executive Committee; a Society with 750+ members may send two representatives; and one with 1,500+ members may send three. ISECS Officers serve for a minimum of four years; and may serve for a maximum of twelve.

Note: ISECS has a Technical Secretariat, composed of an Executive Secretary and a Communications Secretary, who are *ex officio* non-voting members of the EC. The Technical Secretariat is located at the Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, (email@voltaire.ox.ac.uk), which kindly provides its services free of charge.

5. ISECS BUDGET

5.1 Each National Society pays annually to ISECS a subscription of £1.50 per individual member; and £5 per institutional member.

5.2 The ISECS budget, which is audited annually and posted on the ISECS website, is used for the following main purposes:

- i. Annual payment for the webmaster and the hosting of the ISECS website.
- ii. Payment of subsidies of up to £3,800 to the relevant National Society, towards the costs of the annual ISECS International Seminar for Early Career Scholars.
- iii. Provision of bursaries on the occasion of the four-yearly ISECS congresses. At the most recent Congress, held in Rotterdam in 2015, ISECS contributed a subsidy of £20,000, which paid for 115 travel bursaries.

With all good wishes:

Lise Andries,
President of ISECS
and on behalf of all ISECS Senior Officers.