

WORKING GROUP ON SPECTROSCOPIC DATA ARCHIVES (*GROUPE DE TRAVAIL POUR LES ARCHIVES DE DONNEES SPECTROSCOPIQUES*)

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This WG, created in 1992, has a dual brief: to encourage the creation and dissemination of archives of spectroscopic data, and to work out a solution for safeguarding the information in (now historic) photographic spectra. During its 10-year existence the WG has witnessed substantial changes in attitudes towards aspects of archiving observations, from a deliberate indifference on the part of private observatories to the planning of mega-archives and the Virtual Observatory concept. By various individual efforts, through meetings and through published documents, members of the WG may have made what proved to be pivotal contributions during those critical years.

While spectroscopic archiving is now well provided for in a few modern instruments, in the majority of operating telescopes archiving continues to be insufficiently resourced, and the WG has a continuing duty to keep these issues to the fore. One of the most basic preliminary requirements for the creation of an archive is an on-line contents catalogue. To date, rather few observatories make their spectroscopic resources accessible in that way; a little more is being done in respect of direct plates (see “Skyarchive”, established by the Sky Surveys WG, Commission 9) and we are now pursuing ways and means for creating on-line catalogues.

The principal focus of the WG continues to be the safeguarding of information in historic photographic spectra, and the creation of a scanning laboratory (the “Spectroscopic Virtual Observatory”, SVO) for digitizing selected stellar spectrograms. The project was launched in Victoria (Canada), with media coverage, in September 2002. Efforts to raise the necessary funding to equip and operate the laboratory are continuing, and an important pilot project – examination of evidence of historic concentrations of telluric ozone – has now been funded. Members have also promoted the SVO concept through oral and poster papers at international meetings, and through an article in *Astronomy Magazine* (June 2001). The WG has also been instrumental in initiating projects concerned with digitizing direct plates, and particularly in stimulating scanning and archiving activities in Italy.

The passage of Resolution B3 (2000), which the WG initiated, was both timely and necessary in drawing attention to the physical plight of many of astronomy’s inherited observations, whose information could never be made fully accessible to research. In view of the burgeoning interest in the scientific potential of the Virtual Observatory, and considering the important contributions which historic observations can make uniquely to such a project, we look forward to growing interest in our efforts from that sector of the community.

Elizabeth Griffin
Chairperson of the Working Group