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Viggo Hartz
1934 - 2011



The relationships between Denmark and the UK have always been lopsided, in that most Danes are Anglophiles, whereas many people in this country are not even sure where Denmark is. This imbalance exists also between ATM and the Danish Mathematics Teachers Association; they are generally aware of what goes on in ATM, some of them read MT and a few have contributed articles; over the years many of them have attended our conferences; whereas only a select few of us have, mainly by invitation, been there.

Viggo Hartz, who died on 17 October 2011 after a long illness, did more than anyone to establish connections between the two associations. He first came to a conference in 1971, where he was fairly bewildered by the informality of the seminar groups and the ideas being discussed, and he went home thinking we were all crazy. But soon afterwards he was sufficiently reconciled to found the Danish association, and establish a journal.

He immediately began to organise summer courses, and from 1975 onwards several ATM members were invited to lecture, including Marion Walter, Ian Harris and Lyndon Baker. We found the basic structure of lectures and seminar groups similar to that of our conferences, but there were certain extras which gave them a very Danish flavour: a custom of beginning every plenary session with a traditional song, an orienteering session, a revue, much singing late into the night, and a final convivial dinner which was more like a Viking feast.

So, Viggo was the creator of and inspiration for the association itself. As the organiser of the course programmes he included inputs from other countries. As a main member of the journal's editorial committee, and for ten years its editor, he maintained a continuous quality of articles, which also included material from abroad.

His influence on mathematical education in Denmark was still wider than his work for the association. In the 1970s he gathered together a small group of like-minded mathematics teachers to produce a commercial scheme, *Matema*, comprising textbooks, workbooks and topic books, which was easily the most popular, and the best, scheme in Denmark. "Of course it's the best," he once told me; "we steal the best ideas from wherever we can!" His further influence, through the association, has been on the Danish government's decisions about mathematics teaching and testing, since in a small country it is evidently possible that a subject association can have access to the Ministry of Education, and to some extent they were able occasionally to rein in their government's desire to emulate some of the worst things that were happening here.

Viggo continued to attend most of the ATM conferences up to 2007, after which he unfortunately became too ill. At many of them he ran seminar groups, sometimes with

colleagues, and in 1990 he gave the closing lecture (reproduced in *MT* 133). He began that with typical humour, and a modest acknowledgement of his debt to us:

I have always felt it was preposterous of me to agree to give this talk. After the introduction I know it was downright foolish! One of the things I feared was your custom of giving lengthy introductions, which raise the expectations of the audience to a summit impossible to reach. It would have been much better, and fairer, just to have said, 'Here is this mathematics teacher from Denmark who some of you have seen around at many of the Easter courses in the last nineteen years. He is probably pretty nervous, and he'd better be, because all his ideas about teaching mathematics we taught him. Furthermore, whoever heard of such an idea as talking about mathematics and democracy? Above all he don't even speak the language – a bloody foreigner!'

His lecture included an account of an exchange with a group of pupils, which demonstrated a style of teaching that I used to see when I visited his classroom (and which many of us will be familiar with), in which he gave nothing away and allowed the pupils to work through the problem themselves. The lecture was entitled 'Mathematics and democracy, a real problem', and this was democracy in the classroom.

There are certainly many of us who have 'seen him around' at conferences, contributing to discussions in seminar groups, spending convivial evenings in the bar, taking advantage of the opportunity to drink Guinness or real ale, and entertaining everyone around. It was Viggo who first made me think that the Danish sense of humour was more English than ours was!

I owe him a personal debt, for introducing me to Danish culture, and for many years of close friendship. Others here who have known him will miss him too, and there are a large number of mathematics teachers and educators in Denmark who will be commemorating the life of a great Dane.

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