

568ml of science

There is a grand tradition, in biological sciences, of going to the pub to work. The most famous instance is probably the story of Crick and Watson in *The Eagle* but there are plenty of others. Stories of the discoveries and ideas that have flowed from pub conversations have long provided an excuse for a trip across the road and, in this building at least, the name of our local is particularly helpful to the practice: when someone puts a note on his door saying “At Doctors'”, only the capital letter gives away the nature of the 'medicine' likely to be involved.

Generally, when they go to the pub, scientists find a quiet corner to 'talk shop' and they take reasonable care not to disturb other customers and not to scribble too many equations on the beer mats. For one week a year, though, scientists in pubs become the very centre of attention and everyone else in that room of the pub turns up specifically to get their *Pint of Science*. The idea for this festival came from Praveen Paul and Michael Motskin of Imperial College, London. These two researchers had already been involved in outreach events that brought the public to science labs to hear about the forefront of medical research and, in 2013 they had the idea of reversing this and taking science to the people. And where better, in London, to meet people than in a pub? Thus Pint of Science was born – a place where people could turn up and hear two interesting linked talks and participate in an interesting, interactive activity between the talks. The idea was a success and quickly spread to many cities in at least a dozen countries.



I have just had my first experience of a *Pint of Science*, and I must say it was great fun! The bioengineer Wenmiao ('Will') Shu, with whom I have already been enjoying an interesting collaboration, and I were asked to present two talks at a session on building human tissues in an evening co-sponsored by NC3Rs. Will spoke about doing building tissues by 3D printing and I spoke about doing it using cells' own power of self-organization and, between the talks, the audience made 'human anatomies' out of an outlandish collection of objects scattered around on the tables. Some of these were highly ingenious in their rendering of anatomical details while others were more.... umm... abstract. The venue for all of this was very atmospheric: a deep, stone-faced cellar room in *The Canon's Gait* on Edinburgh's mediaeval Royal Mile. Strangely, the gloomy, almost gothic ambience seemed to

increase general merriment, and conversation flowed both about the science at the focus of the meeting and about science in general. The very skilled *Pint of Science* volunteers made sure that everything ran smoothly and, as they introduced the session, they told the audience of all of the other Pint of Science events happening in different pubs in different cities at the same time, giving a real sense of there being a virtual community

The one thing that was a surprise, to me, was that most people present at this particular event were either scientists or had been brought along by a scientist. The event worked brilliantly to connect people in different areas of research, and it worked really well as a kind of 'geekiness welcomed' party, but I am not sure how well it reached out to people who were really outside science as a whole. Does this matter? Probably not – other events do that very well, and it was nice to have one that was targeted at adults and at people who understand science in general and wanted to hear more about a specific part of it. Having experienced *Pint of Science* from the presenter's point of view, I will definitely make a point of turning up on the audience side of the mike next year. And I will continue to maintain that drinking a total of a pint of tea, small china cup by small china cup, is just as valid a way of respecting the 'pint' theme as would be the conventional glass of beer.

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Links:

Pint of Science - <https://pintofscience.com/>

NC3Rs – www.nc2rs.org.uk