

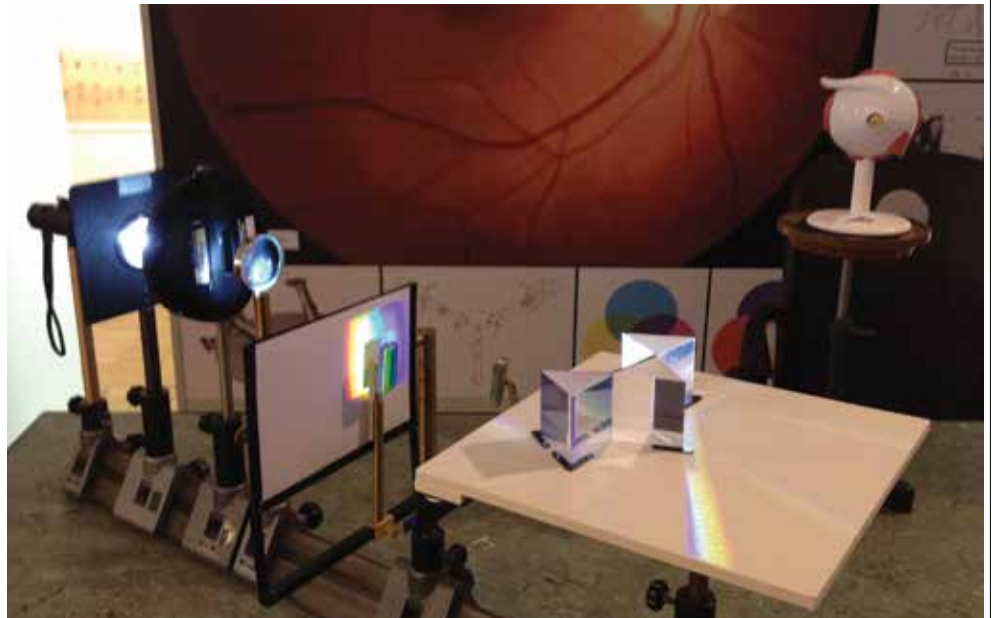
The AIO (Association for Independent Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians) Conference plan was to cruise leisurely along the Rhine and Danube, visiting four countries, enjoy the marvellous scenery together with the excellent company of our fellow professionals and visit noteworthy optical establishments en route.

The reality was somewhat different, we should have realised – the 13th Conference in 2013? It was bound to be an adventure. And adventure it was, coinciding with the worst flooding in parts of central Europe for 500 years. However, in the spirit of AIO and with the usual thorough preparation and organisation another great conference was enjoyed by 44 members of AIO and friends in early June. As a result of the weather, however, some planned professional events had to be cancelled or rescheduled and a few of the optional excursions offered by the cruise company were not possible. Logistically it was, sadly, just not possible to make the planned visits to the new flagship headquarters of Rodenstock in Munich or the manufacturing facility of Silhouette in Linz.

However, the Technical Museum in Speyer certainly filled one of the gaps before the first of the optical visits, to the Hermann von Helmholtz exhibition at the Adolph Wurth centre of History of Psychology at Wurzburg University. Charming **Professor Armin Stock** gave a fascinating tour of the exhibition, illustrated with several experiments, some of which we remembered from our student days. Helmholtz is of course a name very familiar to students of optics and it was

Taken at the flood

This year's AIO Conference was affected by the worst flooding in central Europe for 500 years, says **Pat Cameron Davies**



Splitting a light beam in the style of Hermann von Helmholtz

absorbing to see the actual apparatus and notebooks that he had used.

The alumni-register of Wurzburg University comprises eight Nobel Prize winners, including physicist Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, who received the first Nobel Prize in 1901 for his discovery of X-rays – we were treated to a private view of his laboratory, some of his early findings and his Nobel Prize certificate.

Regrettably, we had to leave our cruise boat and travel by road to hotels

that had been found to accommodate all the passengers. One was the venue for another optical extra when fellow AIO traveller, **Dr Richard Hull**, a rheumatology consultant at Queen Alexander and the Spire Hospitals in Portsmouth, spoke about art in medicine, an intriguing talk which highlighted medical conditions, common today, revealed by studying paintings from the past.

Our final destination of Vienna was eventually reached by the higher ground of the Austrian Tyrol, leaving the towns of Regensberg and Passau under the waters – no longer blue – of the Danube. The Schönbrunn Palace, the famous Viennese Riding School, numerous art galleries in stunningly beautiful buildings and a last night concert of waltz music all combined to make this a fantastic end to the trip.

AIO, once again proved to be a lively and fun group with whom to share optical and touristic experiences even in the face of adversity! Details of our next international conference, open to all independent practitioners and associates, will soon be posted on our website www.afio.co.uk ●

● **Pat Cameron Davies** is secretary and treasurer of the Association for Independent Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians



The river Main in flood at Miltenberg