

Ernst Homburg (1952-



Ernst Homburg was born on 2 August 1952 in Venlo, The Netherlands. He has been both curious and polymathic since childhood. He followed his science star at the Free University at Amsterdam and at the Municipal University of Amsterdam and obtained a Dutch Drs. Degree in 1978. His thesis was written in the Chemical Engineering area on the “Disproportionation of Propene.” But, he was captivated by the lectures of Professor Reijer Hooykaas on the History of Science, and eventually made this his life’s work. He received his Doctorate in History from the University of Nijmegen in 1993 with a dissertation on “ ‘Chemiker’ by Occupation: The Rise of the Industrial Chemist and Polytechnic Education in Germany (1790-1850).” His mentor and patron at Nijmegen was Professor Paul M.M. Klep. He entered the University of Nijmegen as a Research Fellow in the History of Science, but also paid his bills by working as a Professor of Chemistry and Society in the Chemistry Department. When Ernst speaks about the technical side of the History of Chemistry, he can draw on his extensive chemical experience. But, his current position as Professor of the History of Science and Technology is in the Department of History at the University of Maastricht. He holds a Chair instituted by the Stichting Historie der Techniek.

Ernst Homburg is one of the most prolific historians of the late 20th and early 21st century. In addition to scores of articles, he early established himself as an editor of large works. From 1989-2004 he was an editor of the massive 13 volume history of technology in the Netherlands. He is one of the editors of the New Dictionary of Scientific Biography. He has also published many books. Recent volumes include “Groeien door kunstmest: DSM Agro 1929-2004” (Hilversum, 2004), “De geschiedenis van de scheikunde in Nederland 3: De ontwikkeling van de chime van 1945 tot het begin van de Jaren tachtig” (Delft, 2004) and “Solvay: History of a Multinational Family Firm” (Cambridge, 2013).

But, the activity for which Ernst Homburg is most well-known is his collaboration and planning with other historians. He has planned dozens of conferences such as “Engineer or engineers?” (Paris, 2011), the 7th International Conference on the History of Chemistry (Hungary, 2009), and the XXIII International Conference on the History of Science (Budapest, 2009). His central role in the life of the history of chemistry community makes him a perfect choice for the HIST Award in the History of Chemistry.