



Hertfordshire Branch

Committee Report for 2013 - 2014

The Committee has pleasure in presenting this report on the Branch's activities.

The Committee delivered the 2013-14 programme of nine events focused on increasing attendances for branch events at our venues in Hemel Hempstead (Steria) and Hatfield (University of Hertfordshire-UH).

Branch Events

We kicked off our season in October at UH focusing on how the face of communication has changed over the past twenty five years with UH graduate, Martin Pistorius. The talk was titled "Enabling Communications Through Technology" and the speaker related his own experience of leveraging technology to regain the ability to communicate and in so doing create a life worth living.

At our November UH meeting Chris Shore, from ARM, shared with us how the company has grown by innovating in the competitive and internationalised market to be a global leader in its field with its microprocessors being used by Google, Samsung, Microsoft, Nokia, Raspberry Pi and Arduino. ARM has also been named as one of Britain's top employers.

UCL's Professor of Virtual Environments & Computer Graphics, Anthony Steed, spoke in our December meeting at Steria on The Future of Virtual Reality: Telepresence and Immersion by taking the idea from Star Trek, 'Beaming' as the process of using high-end virtual reality equipment, robotic platforms and scene reconstruction software (augmented reality) to virtually teleport a user to another destination while delivering the feeling of direct presence for all participants.

At our first meeting of 2014 at Steria, we went back in time to explore The Birth of Radar; its Influence on the Evolution of Electronics with Ian Goult. Ian spoke about how the very secret development of Radar during the Second World War took pre-war Radio and Telephone technology and spawned the basis of digital techniques such as the flip-flop, used by the million in early computer memories.

Our meeting in February at UH had to be cancelled at short notice due to the speaker falling ill, but the good news is that we have secured the services of now recovered Professor Aldrich of Warwick University to give his talk in February of the coming season. The title of the talk is "Future Spooks: Secret Intelligence in 2030" and is about the impact of changes in ICT upon the world of secret intelligence.

We broke new ground in March at UH with our first practical workshop, run by our Committee Member, Stephan Barnard, where each attendee was given (to keep) a micro-electronics kit which they built during the talk. We had 150 attend this workshop, a record for attendance at any of our meetings. We plan to build on this success in the coming season too with another hands-on workshop.

We welcomed back a former member of our Committee, Mike Barwise, to Steria in April to ask the question, "Inventing Ourselves to Oblivion?" in the context of Technology, Progress and the Quality of Life. Mike offered a relatively light-hearted analysis of this very serious issue, accompanied by some breath-taking examples.

The May meeting at UH made us all focus on the UK economy: An update from the Bank of England's Phil Eckersley. Phil focused on the latest quarterly report from the Bank with the



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detailed economic analysis and inflation projections which lead to interest rate decisions and an assessment of the prospects for UK inflation.

Our first visit of the season came in June, and we were very lucky to go out on a glorious sunny evening to Abbey Bowmen (Herts) archery club in St. Albans to find out about the fascinating sport of archery. Our thanks to former Secretary of our Committee Sarah Jacklin and to the Archery club for hosting this exciting evening.

September brings our AGM, and a guided tour of a world class highly secure green Data Centre at the Bio Park in Welwyn Garden City. The centre has State-of-the-art energy efficient cooling technology.

Attendance at our Events

Average attendance for the year, excluding the AGM, was 48 (2007 to 2013 averages 31, 29, 33, 24, 25, 29, 46). Analysing the figures we had an average of 28 (3 events: Member/non-Member split 24/4) at Hemel Hempstead and an average of 58 at Hatfield (4 events: Member/non-Member split 26/32). This is the second year that we have used the two venue approach, bigger events at UH in Hatfield and smaller gatherings at Steria in Hemel Hempstead. This approach also ensured the Branch link with academia (UH at Hatfield) and business (Steria at Hemel Hempstead) to maintain a healthy balance. It is acknowledged that some members prefer one location over the other and as such the Committee wants the Branch to be more accessible to the wider membership with a dual venue approach. The Branch is leveraging technology such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to better publicise the events and to provide recordings of some events on YouTube.

Adding Value beyond Branch Events

The Branch link with UH has not been limited to using the location for events. The Committee (Senior UH staff part of the Committee) has worked closely with the University in awarding two prizes to final year students for Innovation and Collaboration, each receiving a £100 prize and a one-year subscription to membership of the BCS.

Members of the Committee have gone further to support the BCS in general with contributions to the Best Practice forum and they also respond to requests from HQ for help and assistance.

In addition to our established web-site www.herts.bcs.org we have continued with our Facebook page for the branch www.facebook.com/BcsHertfordshireBranch. This has proved a valuable channel of communication with members and non-members for promoting our events, publicising video recordings of our events and getting members feedback on topics of discussion. Currently running at over 130 "likes", and growing, the Facebook page shows an interesting demographic of over 53% under 34s leading us to be encouraged that we are reaching a younger audience of members or potential members. Topics that have generated the greatest engagement have been Innovation (ARM) and Communication through Technology, these Facebook statistics are useful in guiding our choice of topics for future events. We have also created a YouTube account www.youtube.com/user/BCSHerts where we have placed a number of recordings from our Branch meetings. .



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Recording Thanks

We wish to record our gratitude to the speakers for their enthusiasm, to Steria and the University of Hertfordshire for their continuing sponsorship of events, to HQ for support and advice and to our members for supporting our events and providing valuable feedback.

The Coming Year- Programme 2014-15

The Committee has once again worked hard by consulting our members during the spring and summer months to develop our Programme 2014-15 for the Branch with eight Branch Events (using both Hemel Hempstead and Hatfield venues) and two Visits (including the AGM). The Committee hopes our members will enjoy participating and support us in building a stronger BCS Hertfordshire.

If anyone would like to join the Committee we would ask them to volunteer at the appropriate point in the AGM proceedings.