



Hertfordshire Branch

Committee Report for 2014 - 2015

The committee of the Hertfordshire Branch of the BCS (1,759 members; further details on Membership document) has pleasure in presenting this report on the Branch's activities for the 2014-15 season. The committee delivered a programme of nine events focused on increasing attendances for branch events at our venues in Hemel Hempstead (Sopra Steria) and Hatfield (University of Hertfordshire-UH).

Branch Events

We kicked off our season in October at UH with our first Ada Lovelace Commemorative Lecture to celebrate her life and achievements. Lady Lovelace was the daughter of Lord Byron and collaborator of Charles Babbage. She was a computing pioneer and is considered by many to be the first programmer. The lecture was followed by a talk by Dr Carol Buttle who focused on the technology of biometrics, its future direction and how its use will become widespread; affecting the general public. She then went on to discuss the security issues that need be resolved if the roll out of this technology is to be successful.

In November, also at our UH venue, Peter Alsop from Oracle Corporation talked about a hot topic, 'Big Data', explaining what it is really about. He started from the value of statistics and then showed how Big Data helps us achieve better results, and then gave an overview about the technology of Big Data and products on the market.

Dr. Mick Walters, University of Hertfordshire, gave us an insight of future predictions of the impact on our lives of new technologies with his December talk, 'What would life be like in 2045? A Not-So-Rosy View of the Future'. A wonderful world of plenty, robot servants and increased leisure for everyone to enjoy or would it be like previous revolutions indicate that many, if not a majority, of the population will be excluded from enjoying these benefits as they will simply not have the income to afford them.

At our first meeting of 2015 in January at Sopra Steria, Mark Laird, their Technical Architect and Lead Green Ambassador discussed as part of his talk 'Does the Cloud have a green lining?' the concept of how moving to the Cloud can help organisations become greener. He shared an overview of Cloud computing, the ideas that differentiate Cloud from virtualisation, the security challenges, making Cloud greener and the next generation of Cloud usage.

Future Spooks: Secret Intelligence in 2030, this talk by Professor Richard J Aldrich from the University of Warwick was postponed from the previous year and became our February event at UH with the impact of changes in ICT upon the world of secret intelligence where intelligence services have resolved to spend less time looking at states and their armed forces and more time looking at people and non-state actors through collecting routine digital data, in the hope that this will allow them to resolve crimes perpetrated in the past and, eventually, in the future.

Having broken new ground in March 2014 with our first practical workshop, we ran a second one at UH in March this year, once again with our Committee Members, Stephan Barnard supported by David Hubbard, where each attendee was given to keep a kit computer (containing electronic components such as light and temperature sensors, switches, LEDs, a prototyping breadboard as well as a micro-controller) which they built during the talk. We had 139 attend this workshop, the highest attendance for the year. We plan keep the hands-on workshop next year too.



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The Origin of British Computers with Alan Wray was our next event at Sopra Steria. Alan spoke about Britain's rich heritage in computer innovation and design, one that is easy to overlook in light of the dominant industry brands of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Alan reflected on the origin and development of computers until the 1960s. In particular he focused on Britain's early achievements in computer design with reflections on both the technologies and the key people who made Britain a world leader in the field.

In May, former committee member Geraint Williams gave a talk on Hacking the Internet of Things (IoT) at our Sopra Steria venue. Geraint described how devices are now interconnected by various media to each other locally and across the Internet, allowing them to exchange information or to interact with us. He later discussed the benefits and threats of IoT, and followed it with demonstrations.

Our first visit of the season came in June, when we visited Hertfordshire's award winning Tring Brewery. The tour lived up to its well-earned reputation for being informative, and members and guests relaxed with supper and the tasting a pint of the award winning ale.

September brings our AGM with a visit to the Mill Green Museum and Mill, a working eighteenth century water mill, which in addition to the mill contains three exhibition galleries showing a collection of art and local history.

Attendance at our Events

Average attendance for the year, excluding the AGM, was 56 (2007 to 2014 averages 31, 29, 33, 24, 25, 29, 46, 48). Analysing the figures we had an average of 21 (3 events: Member/non-Member split 15/6; a reduction from the previous year of 28) at Hemel Hempstead and an average of 71 at Hatfield (5 events: Member/non-Member split 30/41; an increase from previous year of 58). This is the third year that we have used the two venue approach, bigger events at UH in Hatfield and smaller gatherings at Sopra Steria in Hemel Hempstead. This approach also ensured the Branch link with academia (UH at Hatfield) and business (Sopra 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.

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. The Universities "RoboCup" team were recognised for their Collaborative achievements and success in the World Cup, and a final year student for her displays of exemplary initiative during her industrial placement. Each student received 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 continued contributions to the Best Practice forum and they also responded to requests from HQ, Branch members and local residents for help and guidance.

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



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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 169 “likes”, and growing, the Facebook page shows an interesting demographic of over 59% 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 RoboCup and Student Prizes, 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.

Recording Thanks

We wish to record our gratitude to the speakers for their enthusiasm, to Sopra 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 2015-16

The Committee has once again worked hard by consulting our members during the spring and summer months to develop our Programme 2015-16 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.