Letter from the Branch Chairman

Dear Colleague,

Please find enclosed your copy of the BCS Edinburgh Branch Programme Card for 2007-2008. My apologies for it being a bit later than normal this year – we have had some difficulties in finalising some of our events. Our Sidney Michaelson Memorial Lecture at the Edinburgh International Science Festival in March 2008 is not quite confirmed yet. Please check our web site for confirmation of this lecture.

To save printing cost (and a tree or two) we are only sending one copy of our programme card to each member this year. If you would like additional copies to pass on to friends and colleagues just let us know, or pick some up at a Branch meeting.

Our branch meetings offer an excellent opportunity for networking with other IS professionals. Please come along from 6:10 pm for coffee and a chat before the start of the talk at 6:30 pm. All our meetings are open to both BCS members and non members. Except where stated on our Programme Card, meetings are free of charge and no registration is required – just turn up and feel free to bring a colleague or two.

Our first meeting of the season is on Wednesday 10th October, when Dr. Colin Egan and Jason McGuiness of the University of Hertfordshire Department of Computer Science will be presenting Massively Parallel Architectures. A synopsis of this talk may be found on our web site.

New for this season is a visit to the new Air Traffic Control tower at Edinburgh Airport. Because they can take only a limited number of visitors we have set up a choice of two dates: in April and June 2008. Reserving a place will be essential for this visit and details of booking will be announced nearer the time.

As well as our programme of Wednesday evening talks, we will also be organising occasional Branch Professional Awareness courses this season. A big thank you to those members who, during the summer, sent in ideas for new Branch courses. We hope to launch one or two in the next month or so – again, please keep an eye on our Branch web site for announcements.

Finally, returning to the Branch Programme Card. This has been a mainstay of communication between the Edinburgh Branch and its members since the inauguration of the Branch over 40 years ago. Now that electronic communication is ubiquitous, we are questioning whether we should continue printing a every year. I would like your views on this. Do you appreciate the programme card we send you, or does it go straight into the bin? Would you be happy if we scrapped the printed programme card in future years and relied entirely on our web site and e-mail for communication with you. Do you have other ideas for improving communication between the Branch and its members?

With best regards,

Mike Hurst

Chairman, BCS Edinburgh Branch
chair.edinburgh@bcs.org

BCS-in-Scotland

A new initiative started last year is the setting up of a "BCS-in-Scotland" group. The group consists of the four Scottish Branches (Aberdeen & Inverness, Edinburgh, Glasgow & Ayr and Tayside), together with BCS Specialist Group chairs resident in Scotland and other prominent BCS individuals in Scotland. The purpose of this group is to improve the BCS presence and visibility in Scotland. In particular

…1. To represent the IT Profession in Scotland into the devolved organisations, such as the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, NHS Scotland, Education, etc.. At present the BCS has no direct channel into these devolved organisations.

2. To acts as a focal point for interests, issues, news and events of a national nature relating to Scotland.

3. To provide a forum for co-operation and co-ordination between the various BCS Branches and Special Interest Groups in Scotland.

Our top priority at the moment is to get the BCS to fund a part time person, preferably located in Scotland, to facilitate the above; especially item 1. (There is a limit to what volunteers can do). Progress at the moment is not as fast as we would wish. This is primarily due to a short term financial issue within the Society.

However the BCS-in-Scotland Group has sponsored the ScotlandIS Young Software Engineer award (2nd Prize) for the past couple of years. This has achieved some visibility for the BCS among IT leaders in Scotland. The most recent award was made at the ScotlandIS Gala Dinner at the Royal Museum on October 4th. Unfortunately this was after the copy date for this newsletter, so we can't tell you who won – you'll need to check our web site for news on this.

Student Prizes

Each year the BCS Edinburgh Branch awards a prize to a top student at each of the three universities in Edinburgh. This is a cheque for £150 plus free membership of the BCS. The winners this summer were:

University of Edinburgh
David Wark
Professional Issues course.

Heriot-Watt University
Adrian McMichael
Best Student, MEng in Software Engineering

Napier University
James Boag
BEng Hons Software Engineering

Do we have your correct e-mail address for BCS correspondence?

If you are a BCS member, please take a few moments to check the details BCS holds on you via the main BCS web site. (Go to www.bcs.org. Log in via the link at the top right, then click on Update Details).

If you are not a BCS member and wish to be kept informed about BCS Edinburgh Branch events then you may join our low volume, moderated e-mail list via our Branch web site. Go to www.edinburgh.bcs.org/mailinglist.htm.

Branch web site www.edinburgh.bcs.org

Donald Michie

Many members will have heard of the untimely death of Professor Donald Michie FBCS FRSE back on July 7th 2007. The was just a week after he gave what was probably his last public talk at the University of Edinburgh School of Informatics Computer History Reunion on June 28th.

During World War 2 he was recruited to Bletchley Park where he worked with Turing and his team in the development of automatic code breaking techniques.

Michie pioneered research into Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence at the University of Edinburgh in the 1960s and early 1970s. His major achievement during this time was Freddy – the world's first demonstration robot capable of using machine vision in the assembly of complex objects. There was a period in the wilderness after AI went out of fashion following the Lighthill report of 1973. However Michie returned to prominence in the 1980s with an interest in the new field of expert systems and the Expert-Ease software package, the founding of the Turing Institute in Glasgow and in 1994 the founding of the Human-Computer Learning Foundation charitable trust.

All those that new Professor Michie were shocked by his sudden death. Many might have disagreed with him in discussions on academic matters and scientific research, but all recognised his enthusiasm, energy and sense of humour.

Donald Michie's home page, with links to information on his life and work, is at http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~dm/

Volunteers wanted …

Do you have a bit of spare time you could devote to helping organise BCS Edinburgh Branch events? The number of Branch Committee members is currently down a bit compared to previous years and we are always keen to co-opt enthusiastic people with fresh ideas. If interested, please get in touch with Mike Hurst (chair.edinburgh@bcs.org) or any member of the Branch Committee.