

SUSSEX aBaCuS

The Newsletter from the
British Computer Society – Sussex Branch



Issue 20

October 2000

A Message from your new Chairman – *Rupert Harper* Chairman

I have served on the BCS Sussex Branch committee for some years and now you have seen fit to elect me as your Chairman. I hope that I will be able to serve the branch well.

I belong to an old school that strongly believes that professional institutions have a major role to play in professional life. They have been a significant force in the very development of our nation particularly in the area of technology.

However, the BCS is entering a crucial phase. I fear that, unless there are radical changes, the BCS will be dead in five or ten years time. There should be no criticism of our forebears; they have done nothing wrong. If I thought that, I would not be in the BCS.

What has happened is that the industry has changed beyond all recognition. The BCS must change to suit.

The major problem is one of recruitment. As a professional body our membership is only a few percent of what it should be when compared to other institutions. This is reflected in the low level of involvement in the Sussex Branch. There must be many tens of thousands of IT professionals living or working in Sussex and yet our branch has only around 800 members.

There is little that we in Sussex can do at a national level. But if we can breath some life into the Sussex Branch then we can show the way forward.

As a first step, we must do something to increase the involvement of those who already are members. There has been much talk of moving branches to the Internet but the reality is that the Internet is global and the idea of the Sussex Branch being web based is meaningless. Why join the Sussex Branch when you could gain just as many benefits joining another branch; you could

continued overleaf

even join another institution like the ACM.

The Internet is global and this is a good thing. Global membership of professional bodies is here now. I have just joined the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (an American organisation) who have an excellent Web presence and who are as accessible as an institution as one based in Swindon.

What we have to do is invent new ways of being a Branch. I feel that we should focus on ways of bringing people together at the personal level. This will allow us to achieve one of the most valuable benefits of membership of a professional institutions, networking.

This is a double benefit. Networking allows us to gain insights into professional knowledge outside of our own immediate experience. It also brings career benefits and, for contractors like myself, the opportunity to meet new clients.

We also need a new format for the branch meetings. The level of attendance at our recent meetings (2% to 4% of the membership) suggests that the Branch members are not finding our programme sufficiently attractive. We are required to run some sort of branch programme. I hope that next year we will be able to offer a programme based on two themes:

Firstly, a series of professionally run courses leading to a level of certification. We are still at the early planning stage so nothing is certain, but the IBM e-business certification course suggested by Alex Hunt was very much the sort thing I had in mind.

Secondly, more ordinary social events. Bodies such as the I.o.D. have regular Lunches and Dinners which form a large part of their activities.

All of this, I am afraid will cost money. We have in the past lobbied for an increase in the branch allocation and I intend to make this a central theme of my term as Chairman. We currently receive something of the order of 2% to 3% of your BCS subscriptions. This could be doubled or trebled with little loss of funds to head office.

I hope that we can rekindle the flame of the Sussex Branch. If anyone has any strong views or wishes to help they are welcome to contact me. Note that I am going to pay more attention to those offering to serve on the committee than those who don't :-).

Rupert Harper
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NEXT ISSUE of aBaCuS will be the end of January 2001. Any submissions should reach the editor by the end of December 2000. We would like to hear from anybody who wants to share their own computing experiences, technical, instructive, informal, or simply your views on a current issue.

Editor's Life – *Stephen Ticehurst, aBaCuS Editor*

I wonder if the Linux craze is dying down yet, is it safe to come out yet? The problem here is, I have been playing about with Linux for quite some time, I even experimented with Minix on the Atari ST. With all the latest focus, and possible hype, we have had lately over this operating system it is a bit embarrassing



to say that you use Linux, you like Linux, long live Linux. It makes you sound like yet another person who would like to join in with the fun, you don't quite know what it is all about, but lets add it to our portfolio until the hype moves on and we can take it out again.

So I use Linux as a server, as a desktop machine, I have done for some time now. "I do not use Microsoft Applications". I said it, a great weight off my mind, I feel I can carry on now without giving false impressions to anyone. Naturally, I cannot get around without using software such as WindowsNT and Word at work, an occupational hazard I suppose. But at home, my desktop machine is quite happy, and aBaCuS production is just as easy in StarOffice as it is in Word.

The whole idea of an operating system that is so flexible is the way to work. You can choose to run in command line mode if you do not need a GUI (why have a GUI on a server?). You can choose a number of window managers that can run a number of GUIs on top. One person's Linux machine will look totally different to another, but the heart of the system will be the same.

As I go through life I pick up a lot of old equipment that would be a pity to through away. I have had a number of old 386/486 machines laying around for some time, too slow for normal day use. But stick in two network cards, install Linux on the small disk and straight away you have a machine acting as an Internet gateway with enough power to fill a T1 line. Old technology being used today, at next to nothing cost, with an operation system that has had networking built in from day one.

Spring 2000 Programme Meeting Reports

8th May 2000

The Small Enterprise Guide to E-Business

Presented in association with the Institute of Management

An interesting afternoon attended by some 120 people from all over Sussex. Speakers were diverse, informative and helpful. An afternoon of interest that resulted in a large Q&A session. Such an event did have its hitches however, with Hove MP Ivor Caplin deciding not to attend at the last minute, along with Patricia Hewitt MP, a major blow losing two main speakers at such short notice. Special thanks here for the E-Business Committee that was made up from BCS Sussex and Institute of Management members, in particular Peter Taylor (Institute of Management) who managed to keep the event running in such troubled time and to turn a possible disaster into an informative day.

10th May 2000

Whither the Communications Revolution?

Presented by Dr. David Hartley, President of BCS

The development of communications was compared to our transport system. Once we had canals that allowed boats to move from city to city, taking days to get to the destination. Transport was a rare commodity and was certainly not wasted. Communications was, at one time, in a similar situation where we had wires along the side of a railway track that could carry messages from signal box to signal box. A message could take some time to reach its destination, and the technology at the time could certainly not be wasted on non important data.

Today, we have cars and a road system that allows us to travel where we want when ever we would like. It could be said that most cars on the roads carry only the driver, leaving space for three other people. Travel is now fast, but is also wasteful. Journeys of little importance take place all the time with the car nearly empty of people (just the driver). We have a resource, we like it, we do not mind if we waste it. And why not – we have the technology, why not use it for our convenience.

Communications was shown to be just the same. We now have the Internet, we have high speed access (or certainly other countries do), our communications networks can send large amounts of data any distance. We like to view web pages, even though during the time we read the pages, the communications link is present but nothing is going backwards or forwards, until we finish the page and load the next one. We have the bandwidth (once again, other countries may have more), we want convenience and we can have it.



Programme 2000Plus

Programme 2000Plus is a series of projects designed to implement the recommendations of the 1998 Membership Review Working Party. Over the next few years, this programme will open the membership of the BCS to all those actively involved or interested in the field of information systems. It will also aim to broaden the focus of the Society to include all the skills required to exploit Information Technology effectively for the benefit of individuals, organisations and the public at large.

2000Plus – National Survey

As part of the Programme 2000Plus, recently mentioned within the Computer Bulletin, the BCS is aiming to broaden the scope and appeal of membership. On a national level, the BCS is focussing its activities and services on the real needs of professionals today. In order to achieve this, they have setup a confidential questionnaire for members and non-members to fill out online. Further details can be found at <http://www.bcs.org.uk/survey/index.html>.

The aBaCuS archive is available via anonymous ftp @ [ftp.netmonitor.co.uk/pub/bcs/](ftp://ftp.netmonitor.co.uk/pub/bcs/). A web edition available from branch website. Members will receive an electronic copy of aBaCuS via email if a valid email address is given during subscription to BCS. Contact the editor if you wish to also receive a paper version.

BCS, Sussex Autumn/Winter Programme 2000

7.15pm for 7.30pm @ Engineering 1 Lecture Theatre
University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton

Free to members and non-members. Further details from the Meetings
Co-ordinator. Updates available from www.pavilion.co.uk/bcs

18th October 2000

Enterprise Java Beans

Mr David H Williams, EMEA High End Systems, IBM, UK

As a result of the World Wide Web revolution Java has become the must have” skill. However, the drive to reduce costs and delivery times has made reusability a commercial necessity. Find out how Java beans can help you achieve these goals.

The aim of re-useable code, simply take an object from the shelf and slot it into your own development, a target for any software development. This re-use has been designed for Java in the form of Java Beans, first announced back in 1997. Each Bean is totally independent, not tied into any operation system or development environment allowing flexibility in enterprise computing as Beans are easily shared.

21st February 2001

Computer and Telephony Integration

Mr. John Brown

Ever since the first modem, computing and telephony have had a symbiotic relationship. Soon, it will be hard to tell where one technology ends and the other begins. Find out how this is going to happen and how it will affect our lives.

14th March 2001

Quantum Computing for Beginners

Dr. Helen Prance, University of Sussex

The world of the uncertain looks like becoming a certainty. If quantum theory can be applied to computers then machines of unimaginable power become possible. Come and find out how this could be achieved.---

Digital computers known of two states, either on or off, true or false, 1 or 0. We can use the plates in a capacitor to represent this, a charged capacitor denotes bit value 1 and an uncharged capacitor denotes bit value 0. However, if we choose an atom as a physical bit then quantum mechanics tells us that apart from the two normal states of 0 or 1, the atom can be also prepared in a "coherent superposition" of the two states. In other words, the atom can be both 0 and 1. If this does not make much sense, and believe me people have been attempting to make me understand just what this is really about, then do not be scared away. Remember that this is for beginners!

25th April 2001

Virtual Private Networks and the Internet

Mr. Don McBeth, MBCS

The Internet offers organisations the opportunity to implement wide area networks at a minimal cost by using tunneling protocols. But how can you ensure adequate security and speed? When the Internet is slowing down due to extra traffic from graphics and video, what affect will WANs using the Internet for everyday business have?

23rd May 2001

The Future of the BCS (inc. Branch AGM)

BCS President

What can we expect from the BCS in the future and how will the society deliver it? In a world where everything must have an "e" before its name, will we see e-BCS, containing e-branches, which hold e-meetings.

BCS Sussex goes to Bletchley Park

17th March 2001

STATION X

A trip to the former "Station X", the home of Enigma that saw action during World War II as a top secret code-cracking centre. 50 years ago saw a significant part of research and development at the Station on Colossus, the first electronic computer, now rebuilt and working.

Includes a cryptology trail, following coded messages from interception to action. Working example of Enigma, replicas of Alan Turing's Bombe decyphering device and the world's first electronic computer.

Entrance fee five pounds (four pounds for children & concessions). An interesting day out for everyone, make it a family day out.

Tell Us

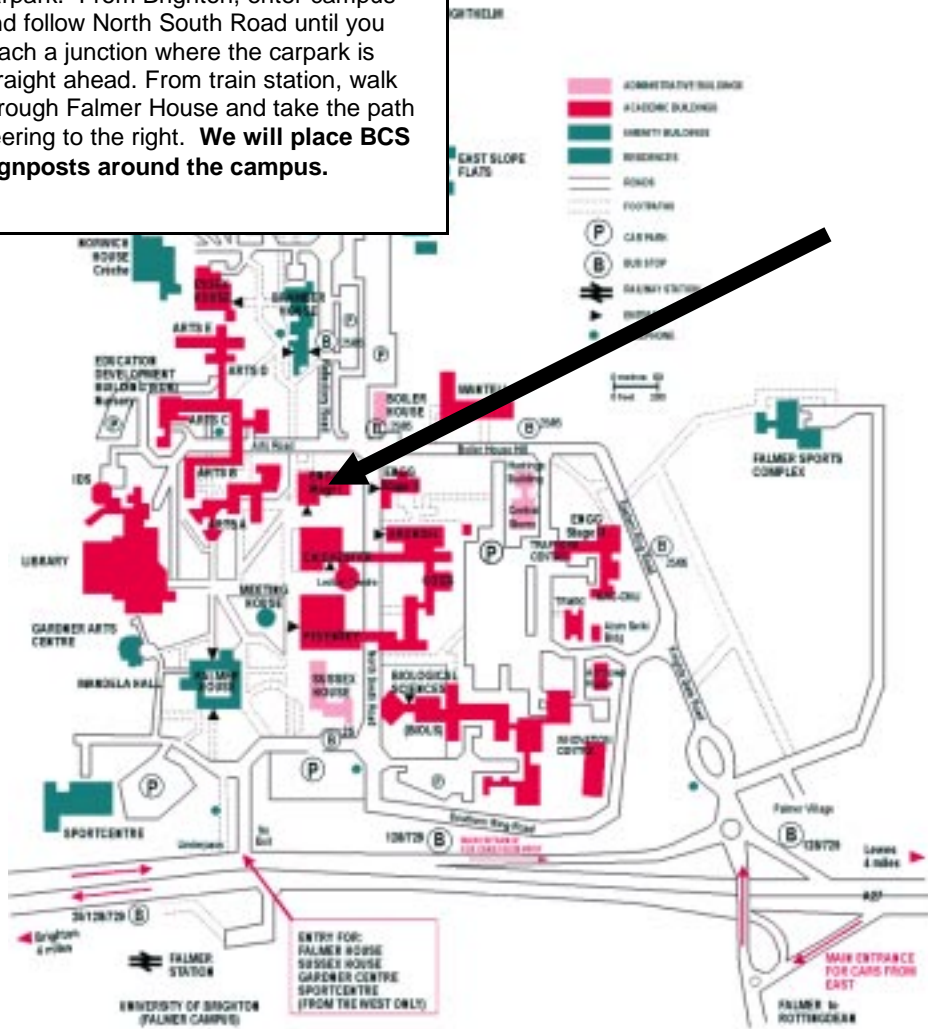
- would you like to join us for this daytrip?
- email the editor for further information.



Finding Engineering Lecture Theatre One:

Nearest carpark is the BoilerHouse carpark. From Brighton, enter campus and follow North South Road until you reach a junction where the carpark is straight ahead. From train station, walk through Falmer House and take the path veering to the right. **We will place BCS signposts around the campus.**

The University of Sussex



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