

annual conference review

Ergonomics in the Realm of Robin Hood

Nottingham is known traditionally as the location for the adventures of Robin Hood, but very different adventures were to be had at the Annual Conference of the Ergonomics Society which began interestingly, on All Fools Day, April 1st, 2008. Held at the Jubilee Campus of the University of Nottingham, the facilities were superb and added much to the enjoyment of what was a very informative meeting. The Donald Broadbent Lecture was given by Steve Tyler of the Royal National Institute for Blind People on reconsiderations of accessibility. Steve, who is blind himself, regaled his audience with various illustrative cases, often injecting humour into a most enlightening presentation. Following this Plenary, attendees could choose from one of five, purpose-directed tracks including a symposium on slips, trips, and falls. Parallel sessions inevitably lead to conflicts of interest and often leave one choosing between several appealing papers. Indeed, among the profile of early papers were talks on police enforcement ergonomics, an historical perspective

on Charles Babbage and the origins of ergonomics or the "facility of using", as well as an ergonomics paper on the running of ergonomics conferences. All intriguing stuff!

One of the highlights was the Society Lecture, given this year by John Wilson.

Always a dynamic and involving speaker, Wilson articulated his views on risk and his personal re-evaluation of his own stance toward resilience engineering. The latter is, of course, an interesting proposition and Wilson brought his own unique perspective to the current discourse. One personal highlight for me was the chance to attend Patrick Jordan's involving workshop on affective design. He brings the practical experience of the hands-on designer as well as the insightful eye of the theoretician to this new and important dimension of emotion-based response for ergonomics. His examples were apt, involving, and always informative. Many of the attendees from over 20 different countries around the world found themselves at the



Annual Dinner at Trent Bridge; Nottingham's 180 year old international cricket ground. This followed the previous evening's "Quiz Night" when alcohol, combined with physical and cognitive challenges, produced both the desired and expected results (and yes our team was certainly cheated out of rightful victory!).

One thread intrinsic to the whole meeting was the evolution of ergonomics toward larger social issues such as pollution, carbon emission, recycling, sustainability and other concerns canvassed under the umbrella of the environmental movement. Obviously more impactful in Europe than at present in the US, it is one outgrowth of the idea of social responsibility and the focus on global socio-technical systems. Emblematic of such concerns was Mark Young's paper on eco-friendly driving emphasising 'vehicle sympathy', interesting epithets underwritten by solid kinematic and kinetic measures.

A feature of the whole meeting was the strict adherence to time. With a relatively compact meeting location and with most rooms immediately adjacent to each other, it gave one confidence to 'session hop' secure in the knowledge that the desired paper would begin on time. The tight time scheduling was very much facilitated by a central loading of all talks so that awkward changes involving computer swap-overs was completely done away with. Thus overall this was a very well run, enjoyable, and informative meeting and much kudos must go to Sue Hull who, as facilitator-in-chief appeared to be everywhere and to solve each problem as it had the temerity to present itself. I strongly recommend this meeting to my American colleagues if their schedule and travel permits.

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