



## British & Irish Region Newsletter — October 2008



**Presidents' Corner:** left to right: John Gower, Geoff Freeman (IBS President 1986-7), Andrew Mead (IBS President 2008-9), Byron Morgan (IBS President 1996-7)

## Dublin impressions Sarah Geneletti

Thanks in no small measure to the hard work of the local organising committee and the programme committee, IBC Dublin was a resounding success. Attendance exceeded expectations with over 900 participants from all corners of the globe; there were myriads of presentations representing the full range of biometry today, and it's probably best not to try to estimate the number of pints of Guinness consumed! A constant buzz hung in the air as people rushed from one presentation to the other or stopped to discuss posters during the coffee breaks. New collaborations were forged and old friends and colleagues caught up with each other. Highlights included Andrew Mead's presidential address (see page 3), the organised outings on Wednesday, the lecture on Gosset's Student-t distribution given by Sir David Cox (probably the most popular talk, with the audience filling the aisles and spilling out of the theatre doors), and a particularly animated discussion following Peter Diggle's talk on Spatial Epidemiology.

BIR members found time meet to discuss themes for future conferences and meetings after hours (page 2), following up with the traditional trip to the pub! The BIR were also delighted to provide bursaries to 11 young biometricians: you can read their impressions on pages 2 & 3. A memorable conference dinner at the O'Reilly Hall provided a fitting conclusion.

## Channel Network Conference April 6-8, 2009

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The 2nd Channel Network Conference will take place in Het Pand, Belgium, 6-8 April 2009. Key themes include biological versus statistical interactions, mixture models and growth curves & multivariate survival analysis. Invited speakers include Sir David Cox (Oxford University), Anders Skroindal (Norwegian Institute of Public Health), Tyler VanderWeele (University

of Chicago), Mario Cortina Borja (University College London), Richard Silverwood (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), Stef van Buuren (TNO Quality of Life), Alioum Ahmadou (Universit Victor Segalen Bordeaux II), Robin Henderson (Newcastle University) & Hans van Houwelingen (LUMC). Full details on the conference website: <http://www.cvstat.ugent.be/>

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## President's corner



It was good to see so many BIR members at the IBC in Dublin, most of whom came to the BIR members meeting (see page 2). There was also a special IBS Council meeting to discuss broad issues. One key issue is that Council business is perceived as requiring too much rubber stamping, and that this may be the cause of the poor voting record of some Council members. Suggestions included reducing the number of votes, and reducing the maximum number of Council members from each region from 7 to 4. Also discussed was the possibility of direct election of the IBS President by the membership. In addition, recruitment into IBS is an ongoing concern. As many have online access to Biometrics and JABES via their employer, there appears little reason to join IBS (and receive a paper copy). Since online access is a must, and on-line access is cheaper than receiving a printed journal, ideally members should pay less for online-only access — which

should provide an incentive for switching from the paper journal. Further enhancing member benefits should help recruitment: options being considered include more online resources (job vacancy and discussion boards) & central dues collection by credit card (also for meeting registration). Otherwise the Society is doing well, with healthy finances and journals, particularly Biometrics. The 2010 IBC is in Florianapolis, Brazil, and I anticipate this will be just as great a success.

# British & Irish Region at IBC 2008

Sarah Geneletti



On the third day of the IBC about 30 BIR members met in a small lecture room in the UCD campus to discuss potential themes for future regional conferences and meetings. The region's president, David Balding, opened the discussion by asking members to introduce themselves. A large number of backgrounds were represented, ranging from industry through academia to the public sector. Themes suggested reflected this diversity and included *Training experts to give statistical court evidence*, *Cost Benefit Anal-*

*ysis* and *ID card Biometrics*. Joint meetings with the Royal Statistical Society and also with the Association of Applied Biologists were suggested as a way of increasing attendance.

A big thank you goes out to the BIR members who volunteered to man the BIR stand during the conference. Those who did found that it was an interesting experience and a good opportunity to engage people in conversation and encourage them to join the Society. It will come as no surprise that the most sought after item on the stand was the July newsletter! ■

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## IBC Impressions

Alexina Mason (a.mason05@imperial.ac.uk)

The IBC in Dublin is the first international conference that I have attended, and my overriding impression was that it was large. There were a large number of participants, a large number of sessions covering an impressive range of topics and large lecture theatres. Indeed, the large lecture theatre in which I gave my presentation grew immeasurably as I stood at the front, microphone in one hand and fancy laser pointer in the other, unnervingly fast-forwarding through my slides as I tried to point to an equation. It was undoubtedly the largest audience I have ever spoken to, and a highly memorable experience.

Apart from my obvious interest in the two sessions on missing data, the topic of my current research, there were plenty of other sessions that I enjoyed. One of the many good things about attending such a large, prestigious conference is the opportunity to go to talks on subjects about which you know little or nothing. As a PhD student it can be easy to lose sight of the breadth of statistical applications and techniques. I particularly liked Peter Diggle's dynamic space-time maps and even learnt about the difficulties of weighing sheep from Byron Morgan.

To mark the hundred years since the publication of William Sealy Gosset's seminal paper entitled 'The Probable Error of a Mean', the conference organisers had the smart idea of including a special session on Student's *t*. However they misjudged its appeal, placing it in a large, but not the largest theatre. Not only was every seat taken, but with the gangways and doorways packed as well, there wasn't even any standing room left by the start — pretty impressive given this was before 9am. Of course the room

size may have been deliberate to ensure that the rival sessions weren't completely empty! Having suspected that the Gosset centenary session would be popular, I arrived in time to secure a central seat and wasn't disappointed by the presentations which combined historical and statistical interest. Computers have changed just a little from Gosset's 'baby' Triumphator, but the principles of simulation have not. I was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to hear David Cox speak at the end of this session, which I found all the more impressive given that he presented without visual aids or notes.

As the conference wore on, it struck me how often an issue that I had considered in the context of my own missing data research, cropped up unexpectedly in a slightly different form in talks on other areas. Missing data is not only ubiquitous, but also has many different guises. I also realised that I wasn't the only cack-handed presenter, incapable of pressing the correct button on the remote and that I had managed to avoid other potential pitfalls. Thanking the chair to acknowledge their five minute warning card can be misinterpreted by the audience as the end of your talk and result in a round of spontaneous applause, although a good presenter turns this to their advantage and extracts a laugh.

Naturally the conference wasn't all about scientific presentations, there was also Guinness, meeting friends I'd not seen in years, more Guinness, being introduced to new people and yet more Guinness. Overall it was a great experience, and I am very grateful to the British and Irish region for their support. ■

## MORE FROM IBC DUBLIN

## IBC 2008 — a welcoming, encouraging environment

Joanna Davies (joanna.davies@worc.ox.ac.uk)



The online programme for IBC 2008 was very tempting. It made me want to attend and make my first presentation in Dublin. The appeal of being exposed to new work and different ideas was supplemented by the prospect of meeting other statisticians, including those whose papers

I have been reading. Perhaps I could even get feedback from others on my work.

Full of enthusiasm I immediately set about writing the abstract. That was all back in March, when July seemed far away. Time flew and there was some panic as the work in progress I submitted had to be completed. By the time I reached Dublin I was very nervous and daunted as a student, about to give my first talk to an international audience — an audience which might include people whose papers I had been reading.

I needn't have worried — the conference provided a welcoming, friendly, encouraging environment and was much less intimidating than I feared. I survived giving my talk, received useful feedback and settled back to take advantage of the rest of my time.

I particularly enjoyed browsing through the posters, which gave me a chance to chat informally, to broaden my outlook and to become interested in other areas of work. The hardest thing was deciding which sessions and talks to attend; my only criticism of the conference is that the structure of parallel sessions meant I had to miss some presentations but by the end of the conference, I had attended a wide range of sessions. I came away with deeper understanding and broader areas of interest.

I had made new contacts, and I left wanting to return to IBC another year and to my research, refreshed by new ideas. ■

## SUMMARY OF ANDREW MEAD'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT IBC DUBLIN, 2008

## Biometry and the IBS — Strength through Diversity

A. Mead (andrew.mead@warwick.ac.uk)



Diversity is defined (OED) as “the quality of being different or varied”. Diversity or variability is what brings biometricians together — without variability there would be no need for Biometry! And one strength of the IBS (and Biometry) is our diversity!

A historical perspective for the IBC starts to demonstrate this diversity — the IBC marks centenaries of the Gosset “t-test” publication and the papers developing the Hardy-Weinburg equilibrium, as well as the 60th anniversary of the British and Irish Region) and the 45th anniversary of the last IBC hosted by the British and Irish Region.

The IBS is strengthened by its geographical and cultural diversity, partially reflected by the locations of IBCs, but more by the different Regions, National Groups and Networks, the wide range of activities organised by different parts of the society between IBCs, and the representation of different parts of the society in the organisational structures of the society.

The conference programme reflects the scientific diversity, both methodological topics and application areas, covered by members of the society, another strength of the

society and our profession, with each geographical component of the society having a different scientific emphasis. The society includes both specialists and generalists, both experts and consultants, and both those focussed on new methodological developments and those focussed on solving real problems in different application areas. The diversity of our science and our profession can also be seen in the work of any individual biometrician — my own current work includes research on experimental design for microarrays, assessment of microarray data quality, application of non-linear regression approaches to model time course gene expression data, methods to assess the spatial aggregation of binary data, and assessment of the impact of land use change on biodiversity through landscape heterogeneity and habitat permeability.

In conclusion, we need to take the best advantage of the strength we have through our diversity, providing an expansion of opportunities for both individuals and groups, strengthening links between the component parts of the society, and using our diversity to strengthen links with other scientific societies, both statistical and biological. The challenge for individual members of the society is to take advantage of the opportunities for involvement in the society that the future will bring. ■

MEETING: TUES 7 OCTOBER, 1.30PM, ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY, LONDON

# Issues & Models for Competing Risks Studies

James Carpenter

This meeting on Tues 7 October, 1.30–5pm at the Royal Statistical Society, will focus on the issues that arise in the design and analysis of time-to-event studies when there are competing outcomes. Five speakers will review the theoretical and practical issues and illustrate alternative approaches with applications taken from clinical trials and observational studies.

## Programme

- 1.30–2.20pm, Per Kragh Andersen (Department of Biostatistics, University of Copenhagen)  
*Overview of issues arising in the presence of competing events*
- 2.20–3.00pm, Hein Putter (Department of Medical Statistics, Leiden University Medical Centre)  
*Competing risks, time-dependent effects, and vertical modeling*

## TEA/COFFEE BREAK

- 3.20–4.00pm, Abdel Babiker (HIV and Infectious

Group, MRC Clinical Trials Unit, London)

*An application of Cox proportional hazards models for competing risks to fertility and contraception studies*

- 4.00–4.40pm, Ronald Geskus (Department of Clinical Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Bioinformatics, Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam)  
*The Fine & Gray model for competing risks with left truncated data or time-dependent covariates*
- 4.40–5.20pm, Ruwanthi Kolamunnage-Dona (Centre for Medical Statistics and Health Evaluation, University of Liverpool)  
*Competing risks in anti-epileptic drug trials*

Full details and a registration form available from the regional web site. **THIS MEETING IS PROVING VERY POPULAR: IT'S TOO LATE TO SIGN UP FOR LUNCH NOW, BUT IT IS STILL POSSIBLE TO REGISTER IF YOU CONTACT BIANCA (BIANCA.DESTAVOLA@LSHTM.AC.UK) BEFORE MONDAY 6 OCTOBER.** ■

# Presidential Action

James Carpenter



Pictured is Andrew in action — loading my car with BIR materials at the end of a visit to Warwick in February (when I found out what I had really let myself in for). You can see that over the last 25 years or so we have acquired a lot of history!

The early history of the Society is in an archive housed

by the Royal Statistical Society, and it is now time to carefully go through more recent material, archiving that of enduring interest. The committee is keen to hear from anyone who would be interested in helping with this task: please email me in the first instance. A quick look through revealed some interesting correspondence (not least about the possibility of holding IBC in the UK, and the formation of PSI) so this promises to be an interesting task. ■

NOTICE OF AGM OF BRITISH AND IRISH REGION OF THE BIOMETRIC SOCIETY

# Committee Nominations

James Carpenter

This year's AGM will take place at 1.30pm on Wednesday 26th November, in the Rothschild Lecture Theatre, Saint Mary's Campus, Imperial College London. This will be immediately before the Presidential Address (see page 5).

Besides receiving annual reports from the Secretary, Membership Secretary and Treasurer, the main item of

business is the committee elections. The Secretary (James Carpenter) and Treasurer (Peter Rigsby) are both eligible for re-election and happy to continue in office. Suzanne Clark has indicated that she would like to stand down as membership secretary, and the committee are delighted to nominate Diana Cole (University of Kent).

In addition, Prof. Steve Guilmour and Dr. Angela

Wood come to the end of their 3 year terms this November. Thanks to them for their valuable contribution to the Society. The committee are pleased to nominate Dr Adele Marshall (Queens University, Belfast) and Prof. John Whitakker (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) for election at the AGM.

However, any two members of the Region are very wel-

come to make additional nominations. To be valid, such nominations shall (a) be in writing, (b) reach the Secretary (James Carpenter, Medical Statistics Unit, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT) at least four weeks before the date of the Annual Meeting (i.e. before Wednesday 29th October) and (c) have the consent of the person or persons nominated. ■

**MEETING: WED 26TH NOVEMBER, 1.30PM, ROTHSCHILD LECTURE THEATRE, ST MARY'S CAMPUS, IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON**

## Annual General Meeting and Presidential Address

James Carpenter

Please note the change of venue for the AGM and presidential address (now Rothschild Lecture Theatre, St Mary's Campus, Imperial College, London) which will form part of the November meeting of the Southern England Genetic Epidemiology Group (SEGENG).

Admission is free to all members of the Society, and in addition there will be a free sandwich lunch for members — see registration details at the end of this article.

### Programme

- 1:15–1.30pm Sandwich lunch for IBS-BIR members attending AGM  
(Rothschild meeting room, adjacent to Lecture Theatre)
- 1:30–1.50pm AGM of IBS-BIR
- 2:00–2.50pm IBS-BIR Presidential address: David Balding, Imperial College London  
*Kinship-based linear mixed models for population association*
- 2:50–3.30pm Chris Holmes (University of Oxford)  
*Analysing copy-number-variation from genome-wide SNP arrays, calling algorithms and tests of association*

- 3:30–4.00pm Tea/Coffee break
- 4:00–4.30pm Cathryn Lewis (King's College London)  
*Risk estimation: application to Crohn's disease*
- 4:30–5.10pm Antonis Antoniou (University of Cambridge)  
*Risk prediction models for familial breast cancer*
- 5:10–5.30pm David Clayton (University of Cambridge)  
*Discussion*
- 5.30pm Close

Admission is free but advance registration is required. Please e-mail Jane Okwesa (j.okwesa@imperial.ac.uk) giving your name, Institution/Company name (if any) and e-mail address. Please also state if you are a member of IBS-BIR wishing to come for lunch (lunch is free but we need numbers for catering purposes). *Closing date for registration: Friday 21st November.*

Directions to St Mary's medical school are at [www1.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/contacts/campuses/stmarys/](http://www1.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/contacts/campuses/stmarys/). Details of how to find the Rothschild LT within the building, will be e-mailed to participants. ■

## In Brief

### RSS Medical Section

James Carpenter has been nominated for the RSS Medical Section. This should provide opportunities for developing shared interests with the BIR.

### More help wanted

Thanks to Sarah Geneletti for helping me put together this newsletter. Sara and I are keen to for more volunteers to help: it's not a major commitment!

### Website Update

At their next meeting on the 14th October, the committee will be looking at exciting plans for re-vamping the website. More at the AGM!

### Send in your news, please

We want to keep members in touch — so please e-mail James with any news for the next issue.

Copy Deadline for next issue: Monday Dec 1st  
Production: James Carpenter & Sarah Geneletti