

# Edinburgh Mathematical Society

## President's Newsletter: October 2007

As my period of office as president comes to a close it is a time of reflection and also an opportunity to look forward to the future. Looking back to the past reminds me of great figures in the life of the Society including the three honorary fellows alive at the time of the centenary. Two of these, Professor Donald Coxeter and Professor W L Edge, have very much influenced my mathematical career; I say 'W L', as anything so familiar as 'William' or 'Bill' or 'Leonard' would seem to me, even now, out of place. The third member of that triumvirate, Professor Sir Michael Atiyah, is still very much part of the Scottish mathematical scene. As well as looking back one must also look forward. I am pleased to say that the Society hopes to celebrate its 125 years with a special meeting and dinner in February 2008. Plans for this are already well under way.

As part of the EMS@125 celebrations there will be an archive website. This archive will be available for EMS@125 and it is hoped that it will be demonstrated at the EMS@125 meeting. The website will contain digitised minutes of EMS meetings from the first meeting on 2nd February 1883 onwards. Other interesting documents from the first 125 years of the Society, including biographies of early members of the Society, will also be available. Looking at the archived material on the website will show how the membership of the Society has evolved over the years. For example, a membership list of the Society for 1929 is available. This membership list shows that many of the new members were coming from school addresses or private addresses. There were also many members from outwith Scotland. Many of the current issues being discussed within the Society were also being discussed at different times throughout its history. For example a question exercising many in the Society today, as in the past, is whether the impact of our Society could be increased both within the universities and also within the wider Scottish mathematical scene. A longer term project that has been motivated by creating this historical archive for the EMS@125 celebrations is research that is being undertaken in St Andrews into the Society's historical materials. The Society has not been able to give this wonderful collection the amount of attention it deserves, but the work being undertaken with the assistance of a St Andrews research student should organise and catalogue the material as well as leading to a more up to date commentary on the materials themselves.

There are several items to note in the last year. A mutually beneficial new contract between Cambridge University Press and the Edinburgh Mathematical Society has been signed. Additionally we have also signed a new contract with ICMS, the International Centre for Mathematical Sciences. On the positive side the contract with Cambridge University Press exposes the Society to less financial risk at a time when the journals world is changing rapidly. On the negative side there have been problems with members signing new direct debit mandates for the print only version of the Proceedings or for the print plus electronic version of the Proceedings. The EMS has also decided that all the Proceedings of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society should be digitised. This work is at present underway. Subject to a ten-year moving wall, the intention is that these digitised Proceedings will be freely accessible to all members of the mathematical community.

As regards meetings, we were extremely grateful to Professor Tony Carbery (Edinburgh) who, for the AGM in October, stood in at the very last moment for Professor Alain Connes who sadly had to cancel his visit to Edinburgh. A pleasant innovation at the after meeting dinners has been that, apart from the 'official party', anyone else may, at their own expense, join the dinner party. Quite a few members have taken advantage of this opportunity. It also looks as if, as I hoped last year, the tradition of the London Mathematical Society Hardy lecturer will be maintained and that Professor Shmuel Weinberger from Chicago will address the Society in June/July 2008. Another 'meetings matter' is that it is hoped to have a joint meeting with the London Mathematical Society in the not too distant future. Additionally both the Edinburgh Mathematical Society and the London Mathematical Society have agreed to be sponsors of the British-Nordic conference to be held in Oslo in July 2009. We now have nominations both on the Scientific Committee and on the Organising Committee.

The Edinburgh Mathematical Society (and The Operational Research Society (ORS)) has been accorded observer status on CMS (The Council for the Mathematical Sciences). This group, chaired by Sir David Wallace, is a grouping of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, the London Mathematical Society and the Royal Statistical Society. In its objectives the CMS states that it 'aims to provide an authoritative and objective body able to speak on the role of the mathematical sciences in UK higher education, research, business, industry and the public sector, and to engage with and respond to policy decisions that affect the mathematical sciences in these areas'. I attended two meetings of the CMS in February and May. It is anticipated that at the October/November meeting of CMS an offer of membership will be made to the EMS and ORS. Details are still awaited.

The EMS has responded to various educational initiatives. Among these it wrote to the Department of Education & Skills concerning the 'Reform of Higher Education Research Assessment Funding' and to the Scottish Executive on a consultation paper 'Science and Innovation Strategy for Scotland'. The Society is currently looking at ways of increasing and broadening the Society's expenditure on mathematical activity. Grants awarded by the Research Support Fund Committee and the Education Committee are much appreciated by recipients. Several new initiatives are being considered by these committees.

Despite the various activities described above, it should not be forgotten that the Proceedings of the EMS are a key part of the life of the Society both for the scientific worth of the papers and for the importance of the revenue generated by them which is used to support other areas of activity such as the Research Support Fund and the Education Committee. Thanks to Ran Levi (Aberdeen) the Convener and the other members of the Editorial Board. Problems of pressure of space and worries about the backlog are, I suppose, problems that we should be pleased to face.

Once again the St Andrews Fund has been used to support a very successful postgraduate conference at the Burn, Edzell. We are very grateful to Martin Bees and Christina Cobbold from Glasgow for running the meeting. As always the feedback from the meeting was very positive. The EMS is discussing with ICMS ways in which they would administer the Burn conference on behalf of the EMS while leaving academics to look after the scientific aspects of the meeting.

With the ease of electronic communication it is now possible to send 'news items' to members. At this stage a complete and regular newsletter is probably too elaborate but I would hope that circulating occasional items of interest to members might prove the next best thing.

Thanks are due to Tim Goodman (Dundee) the one retiring member of the General Committee. Sadly Francis Bell (Stirling) died in December. At that time he was on General Committee. A courteous and highly dedicated colleague, he will be remembered for his strong support for the EMS and in particular his willingness to serve on its committees. Thanks once again to the treasurer Martin Youngson for the care and concern with which he handles the finances of the EMS. Thanks also to the conveners both of the Research Support Fund committee and of the Education Committee and, in particular, special thanks to Penny Davies as her period as Convener of the Education Committee comes to an end. Thanks to all who have served on the many and varied committees. Final thanks must go to the two secretaries Tom Lenagan and Tony Gilbert. The telephone number of Tony, in particular, is deeply embedded in my brain!

I look forward to EMS@125 but hope that it is just a symbol of a vigorous and outward-looking Society. Finally I wish my successor Rob Archbold best wishes and satisfaction for his period of office.

Colin Campbell