

# BSHM President's report for 2014

## Aims

The aims of the Society are:

- to promote and encourage research into the history of mathematics and to disseminate the results of such research
- to promote and develop for the public benefit, awareness, knowledge, study and teaching of the history of mathematics
- to promote the use of the history of mathematics at all levels in mathematics education in order to enhance the teaching of mathematics for the public benefit.

## Meetings

2014 was an exciting and busy year for the BSHM, with no fewer than thirteen meetings and events. It was good to have held so many joint meetings with other organisations, and to have attracted fourteen speakers from abroad.

- 3 March: *Research in Progress* meeting at The Queen's College in Oxford, with the usual high quality of organisation and student presentations, including a talk by the 2013 winner of the BSHM Undergraduate essay prize; the keynote speaker was Jackie Stedall (University of Oxford) on her work on Thomas Harriot.
- 19 March: BSHM/IMA (East Midland Branch) joint meeting in Nottingham: lecture on Lord Kelvin by Raymond Flood.
- 4 April: *John Napier Anniversary Meeting*, held jointly with the Clerk Maxwell Institute in Edinburgh, to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Napier's invention of logarithms.
- 14–17 April: *BCME8: History of Mathematics* sessions at the BCME meeting in Nottingham.
- 13 May: BSHM/IMA (North-West Branch) joint meeting in Manchester: lecture on Leonhard Euler by Robin Wilson.
- 23–24 June: Weekend joint meeting on *Counting and Calculation*, with the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education, at Rewley House, Oxford.
- 25 June: *Famous Physicists and Mathematicians from Belfast*: a meeting held jointly with the Institute of Physics at Queen's University, Belfast
- 27 June: *Non-Western Mathematics*: a meeting held at the Mathematical Institute, Oxford University, with three speakers from North America (Kim Plofker, Joseph Dauben and Glen Van Brummelen) speaking on Chinese, Indian and Islamic mathematics and supported by the Clay Mathematics Institute.
- 6 September: *From Dürer to Sudoku: 500 Years of Recreational Mathematics*: a session given to a capacity audience at the British Science Festival in Birmingham.
- 11 October: *Open University Films Meeting 2*: a showing of five classic DVDs on the history of mathematics at the OU's West Midlands Regional Office in Birmingham.
- 31 October: *The History of Statistics*: three lectures to a capacity audience at Gresham College, London, including the annual joint BSHM–Gresham College lecture, given by Eileen Magnello on Karl Pearson's Gresham Lectures on Geometry (1890–1894).
- 21 November: *The History of Mathematics in 300 Stamps*: a public lecture by Robin Wilson at Oxford University's Mathematical Institute.
- 6 December: *BSHM Christmas Meeting* at the Birmingham and Midland Institute; this meeting contained a wide range of talks and was very successful. The keynote speaker was Lisa Jardine speaking on various recent women mathematicians.

## AGM

This year the AGM was held during the BSHM Christmas Meeting, on 6 December. The 2013 accounts were agreed and I gave a summary of the year's activities. There was some discussion of the continued delay in improving the BSHM's website; this will be an important issue for next year's council members to resolve.

*Elections to Council:* We are delighted to welcome **Philip Beeley** as President from 1 January 2015 and **Fenny Smith** as Council member. **Ken Lord** is to become Membership Secretary in addition to his role as Publicity Secretary. **Norman Biggs** has resigned the Vice-Presidency. Thanks were given to retiring Council members, **Noel-Ann Bradshaw** and **Peter Ransom**.

### **Jackie Stedall**

Jackie died on 27 September following at least two years of treatment for cancer. A much respected and loved figure, she made major contributions to the history of mathematics and to the BSHM. She received her PhD degree in May 2001 from the Open University under the supervision of John Fauvel, and taught for several years at The Queen's College, Oxford University. Her books include the sourcebook *Mathematics Emerging*, an edition and commentary of John Wallis's *Arithmetica Infinitorum*, a history of algebra from Cardano to Lagrange, and (with Eleanor Robson) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Mathematics*. On a more popular level, her *History of Mathematics: A Very Short Introduction* was awarded the BSHM's Neumann prize in 2013. Her research interests lay mainly in the 16th and 17th centuries, with particular interests in the work of John Wallis, John Pell and (especially) Thomas Harriot about which she spoke at the 2014 *Research in Progress* meeting. She served on the BSHM Council for several years and edited the *BSHM Newsletter*, eventually developing it as the *BSHM Bulletin* that has become so widely respected. She is greatly missed by us all.

### **Bulletin**

As usual, there were three excellent issues of the *Bulletin* in 2014. **Tony Mann** continued as Editor, with Snezana Lawrence and Benjamin Wardhaugh continuing as Associate Editors, and Jackie Stedall (former editor), June Barrow-Green, Serafina Cuomo, Howard Emmens and Raymond Flood as the editorial team.

### **Prizes**

There were several entries for the 2014 BSHM Undergraduate Essay prize. The winner was **Remus Stana** (University of Glasgow) on *Mathematics in Nazi Germany*.

### **Members' achievements**

Membership Secretary **Peter Ransom** completed a year as President of the Mathematical Association. Former BSHM President **Peter Neumann** is due to become MA President at Easter 2015. Two other former BSHM presidents have been reappointed to positions at Gresham College, London, giving lectures to the general public: **Raymond Flood** as Gresham Professor of Geometry and **Tony Mann** as Visiting Professor of Computing Mathematics. In addition, I have produced material for a website on *mathematical stamps* (with commentary) to be developed by the BSHM and the Portuguese Mathematical Society in the coming months.

### **Thanks**

Finally, I'd like to express my thanks to all the BSHM Council members for all their hard work over this past year, and in particular to mention two people who left Council at the end of 2014 after several years on Council:

**Noel-Ann Bradshaw**, who served as BSHM Treasurer for five years and Council member for seven years

**Peter Ransom**, who served as Membership Secretary for three years.

Robin Wilson