

History Activities Coordinator

Anthony Davies

Goals

Primary activity is directed towards recognition of technology achievements in Region 8 - of which History Milestones are a major part. These are also seen as a good publicity opportunity for IEEE, and a way to fulfill obligations towards students and young professionals, who need to understand past achievements in order to "invent and develop" the future. Secondary activity is encouraging preservation and availability of IEEE historical records (e.g. of Sections, Chapters, etc.).

Status and Past Contributions

- 1) The UK and Ireland Section has a large portfolio of History Milestone proposals in the pipeline, and no difficulty in finding additional ones. One of the difficulties is finding locations for the plaques, because often the best location for a plaque where the invention or achievement took place is no longer suitable because of organizations no longer existing and buildings having been demolished for re-development. One typical example of a Milestone which we hope is approaching the possibility of successful approval is the recognition of John Logie Baird's television inventions. He did relevant work in many places, most no longer exist. The TV transmitter site at Crystal Palace seemed very hopeful, and is also adjacent to the location of a laboratory where Baird worked, but then it turned out that automated operation of the transmitter has been established, so that it is unattended, and security considerations would have prevented public access. Now, there is high hope that the plaque, if approved, can be mounted in or on a building where Baird demonstrated television in January 1926. That building is now a coffee shop called Bar-Italia (not far from the former town residence of Ada, Countess of Lovelace (daughter of Lord Byron), considered as the world's first computer programmer, after whom the Ada programming language is named. A further problem is the care and monitoring of existing plaques: one to celebrate the landing point of the TAT-1 transatlantic cable, which made possible low-cost telephone conversations between North America and Britain, cannot now be located. It might have been stolen or may be in a derelict building with no access allowed.

		
<p>22 Frith Street, London</p>	<p>Coffee shop</p>	<p>St. James Square, London</p>

- 2) The IEEE CAS Society President has proposed a book on the history of the Society and of the major innovators in the field, and I have agreed to help as a co-editor. This is a large project with very many authors, the work to be done to a very short timescale. I have written a substantial amount of the Society history and origins, and also contributed to some other specific parts, such as 'In Memoriam' descriptions of some key people.
- 3) The November 2015 issue of the IEEE History Center Newsletter includes a report which I wrote entitled 'our technical history: things to see while travelling'. This describes historical plaques put up in the UK by various non-IEEE organizations. A more comprehensive paper based on similar material is due to be published in the IET History of Technology Newsletter later this year. Some examples are shown on the following page.
- 4) The UK and Ireland LMAG committee is primarily occupied in Milestone proposals and in plans for working with and mentoring students and young professionals. There is a link between such mentoring and technology history, since that is the area where LMAG members have interests and expertise. Getting new members of the LMAG committee is being given some emphasis.
- 5) The IET (former IEE) has made an expensive two and a half year refurbishment of its main building in Savoy Place, now re-opened, and as part of this, the IET Archives Department has improved premises and facilities, and attempts are made to work cooperatively with them. This is not always easy because of IET's 'rule-based' modes of operation, but

<p>Reminder of first British person in Space</p>	<p>First Cash Machine (replacement plaque: first was stolen)</p>	<p>Royal Aeronautical Society plaque at RAF Cosford</p>

at a personal level, the liaison is good, and they have excellent archival collections. Access by IEEE members seriously interested in such matters is welcomed.

- 6) I have had several invitations to attend and give presentations to Student Branch events, including an excellent inaugural meeting of a Student Branch of the IAS/PELS Societies in Glasgow. Strong financial support from the IAS Society made this a very effective event, and demonstrates clearly the value of good links being formed between Society and Regional sides - still unfortunately rather rare. My invited presentations are typically based around career advice and built upon what to the young listeners are more or less 'technology-history' related matters. Such material proves very popular. It is notable that the successful IEEE student branches are generally ones which have established strong encouragement from influential members of the faculty and have also shown themselves to be skilled at attracting finance from industrial sponsors for their activities. The branches are always 'at risk' as their leaders graduate and leave for employment in industry or elsewhere, and if there is no adequate leadership-succession plan.
- 7) A new milestone in Germany is due to be dedicated on 16th July 2016, and a date is awaited for a milestone dedication in Ukraine. Two proposals (one in Germany and one in Italy) are awaiting History Committee approval. One has been submitted from Sweden.

It will be apparent from the 'status' part of this report that there is no shortage of worthwhile things to be continued. It can be expected that some will successfully be brought to a good conclusion in future - some of which will need financial support and sponsorship to achieve a good outcome. If well organized, the benefits to IEEE in terms of publicity and recognition may be substantial. A good example is the Blumlein Stereo Inventions Milestone at Abbey Road, in the spring of 2015, which had substantial financial and organizational support from the Abbey Road senior management including free use of a studio which IEEE certainly would not have been wealthy enough to pay for. Although my report and activities have been primarily associated with the UK and Ireland Section, there have been worthwhile Milestone developments elsewhere in the Region, notably in Germany and Italy, and opportunities in Ukraine (unfortunately not helped by the turmoil and unresolved political situations).

Outlook

It would be helpful to recruit a few more volunteers from around Region 8 to assist with history activities, and particularly in those parts of the Region where there is a shortage of IEEE recognition for technology innovations which took place there. Generally these volunteers need to be both enthusiastic and sufficiently knowledgeable to move these ideas forward in collaboration with others, and need to be willing to spend time on these activities (and not just report twice per year to the R8 Committee while doing not much in between!)

Points of Concern

There are very many achievements and inventions in IEEE fields which have taken place within Region 8 territory. It is not difficult to identify many of these and to find well-informed persons who know of or can investigate the details. However, it is difficult to find 'champions' who will see proposals thorough the long stages from submission to final approval by IEEE and an actual unveiling ceremony. There is, of course, the also essential aspect of being sure that claims are valid, and that competing and sometimes concurrent claims are rigorously evaluated. Although not exactly connected with History Activities, the IEEE organizational changes being promoted by some at the top-levels of IEEE may put at risk the half century of acknowledged outstanding success of IEEE which has come about largely by devolving authority for decision making and action to the lowest levels (e.g. via Sections, Chapters, etc. and to new junior volunteers). Studies of history should help appreciation of the common failures of top-down managed systems.