

Contribution to Alan Bundy's Liber Amicorum

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I first met Alan in his office in the old South Bridge building in the autumn of 2002. Finishing a PhD in pure maths and looking around for something new to do, I contacted him by email after reading his webpage, and received a very friendly message suggesting that I come and see him. A few more visits, emails and grant proposals later, and in January 2003 I took up a postdoc position in the Dream group. Since the old building had just recently burnt down, the whole Informatics division was crammed into Appleton Tower, creating a slightly chaotic but very friendly atmosphere as we “hot-desked” in an open-plan lab. Fairly soon, our research group had been assigned its own corridor, and things settled down.

My time in the Dream group was immensely enjoyable and rewarding, both on a personal level and in terms of skills and experience gained. Alan can take credit for a huge amount of that: directly, in terms of his input to my work and job, and indirectly, in his running of the whole group. I was immediately struck by what an incredibly friendly atmosphere the Dream group has, both in working environment and social life. “Informal” seminars genuinely are informal, so that I (as an AI novice) felt completely relaxed about presenting and discussing my work. Moreover, this friendly atmosphere extends to social activities, with Dream meals hosted at everyone's houses in turn, from Alan and Josie to the most recent PhD recruit. Alan naturally puts everyone at their ease, is unfailingly supportive and encouraging, and unobtrusively makes the Dream group a stimulating and enjoyable place to do research. It was great to discover that work could be so much fun!

As it turned out, my time in the Dream group lasted only nine months, after which lack of funds combined with an opportunity to return to a Pure Mathematics environment led to my move to St Andrews. However, I feel that I have benefitted hugely from my time working with Alan at Edinburgh. I had a great time and acquired skills and experience which have definitely stood me in good stead ever since: for this, I would like to thank Alan warmly. Moreover, I'd like him to know that, at various times and places since leaving Edinburgh, when I've talked about this period in my career, I've had people from all over the world remark “Alan Bundy? I know him! Great guy!”