

BNA 17th National Meeting

Think of Harrogate, and many simply conjure a genteel old Victorian spa town just north of the Leeds with its hustle and bustle and bright city lights. Not so. For when a conference comes to town, the vibrancy and energy of this delightful place is truly palpable as the clubs, bars, bistros and coffee shops brim with chatter and banter, everyone clearly enjoying the legendary Yorkshire hospitality.

For the BNA, now hosting its national meeting biennially and for the third time in Harrogate, there was a sense of homely familiarity, suitably blended with the curiosity and enthusiasm of the many first-time punters. They

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were not to be disappointed. More than 800 delegates and exhibitors alike gathered to enjoy perhaps our best ever display of recent achievements in neuroscience in one of the most exciting programmes the BNA has ever assembled.

Seven plenary lectures explored topics as wide ranging as axonal regeneration after injury in the adult brain (Albert Aguayo, Montreal), a re-assessment of the role of tau protein in Alzheimer's disease (Michael Hutton, Florida), and the effects of genomic imprinting in brain evolution (Barry Keverne, Cambridge). Identifying genes that play specific functional roles in pain perception (Clifford Woolf, Boston) and the intricate regulation of GABA-A receptors at the molecular level (Trevor Smart, London) were also fascinatingly described. Finally, we learned what is 'what' in the auditory system, how spatial and object properties of sound are processed in the brain, (Tim Griffiths, Newcastle), and Monique Dubois-Dalq concluded the meeting with her bold account of oligodendrocyte generation. There was clearly 'something for everyone' in this dazzling array!

Supporting the plenaries each day were parallel symposia that also sampled the entire breadth of contemporary neuroscience research. Among the most popular were: The discussion on neural stem cells and their capacity to repair lesions in the nervous system; the effects of injury on the developing brain; the role of dopamine in the neurobiology of reward, and an up-to-date look at the mechanisms of memory formation, to name but a few! And with sessions examining the latest advances in our understanding of ageing and dementia, reviewing progress in clinical neuroscience or discussing neuronal rhythms, neuroinformatics and neuroimaging, the scene was clearly set to be as exciting and eclectic as ever!

Complimenting this scene were three symposia that considered the targeting and assembly of GABA, NMDA and excitatory receptors, organised collaboratively for the first time with The Biochemical Society. Such was the success and appeal of this venture that the BNA and The Biochemical Society will undoubtedly join forces again.

However, the BNA seriously acknowledges the importance of poster sessions for lively discussion and for the learning experience it affords our younger scientists, many of them presenting their work for the first time. So, about 450 of the submitted abstracts were presented as

posters in fifty themes that broadly ranged from molecular and cellular neurobiology to disorders of the nervous system and the neural basis of behaviour. The BNA also highly values the contribution of the exhibitors whose attractive displays this year enhanced the poster hall and served to inform us of the very latest in books, reagents and equipment to support our research. Needless to say, we are also extremely grateful for their financial support too that allows us to offer registration fees at a fraction of their real cost.

Finally, the BNA remains committed to providing at its national meeting a forum for two important issues: the

'Public Awareness of Science' and the 'Teaching of Neuroscience'. Addressing the latter workshop,

Michael Reiss (Director of Salter's Nuffield Applied Biology) and Anne Scott (Science Curriculum Development Unit, York) ignited a lively debate about the 'neuroscience' component of AS/A level Biology currently under consideration; addressing the former, Colin Blakemore, Nancy Rothwell and Lord Robert Winston entertained and, at the same time, informed and challenged us about important issues in the public perception and awareness of science, and about the blatant prejudice and appalling ignorance that exists too.

So, the BNA has certainly matured in recent years and must now be considered to host one of the premier neuroscience meetings in Europe in the years intervening the hugely successful FENS gatherings. Although primarily attended by UK-based neuroscientists, the 17th National Meeting this year had a truly international flavour with delegates from over ten different countries, and many of the speakers were also from overseas. Remarkably, the informality and congeniality of the old 'Brain Research Association' has been retained, despite the rapid growth in recent years of the re-vamped and re-launched BNA. The National Meeting is now at a significant crossroads, poised to thrive on its phenomenal and continuing success. So here's a date for your diary: 3-6 April, 2005, when we reconvene for the 18th BNA National Meeting to celebrate the very latest advances in our truly dynamic field!

*Dr Yvonne Allen
BNA Executive Secretary*

13-16 April, 2003,
Harrogate, UK

