

Trip report E.W.Dijkstra, England, 23 April 1981.

The occasion for this 24-hour visit to England was a meeting on Thursday evening of all people involved in the BP Venture Research Unit in celebration of the Unit's first anniversary. For Netty van Gasteren and me there were two reasons not to take the afternoon plane from Eindhoven to Gatwick. London's rush hour being what it is, we expected that we would be late for our appointment; furthermore we thought it a little bit much to make that whole trip for just a cocktail party and a dinner.

So we included a visit to the Computing Laboratory of the University of Kent, Canterbury, and took the early flight. Netty stayed with us in Nuemen the preceding night since we had to rise at 5:45 in order to catch it. (If we had known that, due to de-icing in Maastricht, the plane would be half an hour late, we would have stayed in our beds until 6:15 !)

Apart from the delay the NLM flight to Gatwick was OK. (It was Netty's first flight in an F27.) By British Rail we went to Victoria Station - 45 minutes, every quarter of an hour - , from where we took return tickets to Canterbury East, where we arrived at 11:00 (local time: 12:00 by Dutch standards). Dr. P.H. Welch from the Laboratory was at the station to collect us. After a cup of coffee in Dr. E.B. Spratt's office I gave a lecture - essentially on EWD776 - from 12:00 till 13:00. After an excellent lunch in one of the colleges

we left the campus and returned to London.

Having been given twice before - once at SDC in Santa Monica and once in Eindhoven for visiting Hungarian students - the talk went like clockwork; since it was the first day of term, my hosts were very uncertain about the size of the audience, but the (modest) lecture room was well-filled and about one fifth of my audience clearly enjoyed the lecture. The remaining four fifths looked puzzled when the first quantifier appeared on the blackboard. (In this respect the Hungarian students were better prepared!) When I complained during lunch, my hosts explained "Oh, but our students always look that way." We both found the place a bit depressing. At the University of Kent, the Computing Laboratory is part of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and computing is disjoint from mathematics. We sensed the traditional atmosphere of the Computing Centre; accordingly, staff and students seemed to suffer from underdeveloped power of abstraction. The campus was nice but - being built on the top of a hill - very windy.

When we arrived at Victoria Station at 16:06, the evening rush hour seemed to be already in full swing. After one confusion between Eastbound and Westbound - geography was never my strongest point - the Circle Line (yellow!) took us to Liverpool Street Station; from there it was a stone's throw to the

(not so) Great Eastern Hotel.

Leisurely we refreshed ourselves - initially the towels in my room were lacking! - and dressed ourselves for the BP party, which started at 18:30. We were two dozen people, half of them BP officials. After the cocktails we were served some sort of dinner, which ended with a round-table discussion. The last speaker, Professor Sir Hans Kornberg, FRS, distinguished himself by not mentioning money; as member of the Venture Research Advisory Council he discussed the selection criteria they had applied. I found it very instructive to observe the differences in attitude between the various council members. As was to be expected, many used "long range" where I would have used "medium range" and their expectations struck me as very concrete and explicit.

Shortly after dinner everybody left. In my room I found, packed in plastic, my "Continental Breakfast" which I happily ignored the next morning. But the wake-up service - at 5:30 - worked. Four hours later we were back in Eindhoven. As I had spent my wedding day in England, my wife and I had that evening a very nice dinner in Breughel.

Plataanstraat 5  
5671 AL NUENEN  
The Netherlands

27 April 1981  
prof. dr. Edsger W. Dijkstra  
Burroughs Research Fellow