In 2002, the ‘Regional Sections’ of the Biochemical Society were absorbed into the central organizing hub of the Society in an effort to increase our activities at the local level and to ensure that a fair range and spread of activities were supported. Many of our regional activities are undertaken by enthusiastic Society members who submit ideas to the Local Scientific Event panel via the website.

In the 2 years since their formation, the Local Scientific Event Grants have supported a huge range of novel and educational events across the UK and Ireland. This report aims to give you an idea of what some members have been up to on their doorsteps over the last year and hopefully inspire some more of you to take advantage of this scheme.

### The March Round 2003

**Neuroscience North-East 2003** — Paul Chazot (Sunderland, UK)
This 1-day conference was set up for PhD students and junior postdocs to both chair and deliver poster and oral presentations to peers on all aspects of neuroscience. It was open to all young neuroscientists based in universities in the North-East.

**The Magic of DNA: from Molecular Fingerprinting to Genetic Engineering** — Denis Murphy (Glamorgan, UK)
A full-day masterclass for local 5th and 6th formers was held at the University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd. Talks, lab visits, demonstrations and a debate on the pros and cons of genetic engineering made for an inspirational day for teachers and students alike.

**North of England Molecular Cell Biology Forum** — Elizabeth Smythe (Sheffield, UK)
This forum brought together molecular cell biologists from the Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester areas, working in the specific areas of membrane trafficking and molecular motors. Postdocs and graduate students gained valuable experience in communicating their research.

**Neurotox ’03** —
David Ray (Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham, UK)
An international research meeting for those interested in chemicals that are toxic to the nervous system was held at the University of Nottingham and was attended by around 300 delegates from the UK and overseas. The Biochemical Society grant provided several bursaries that enabled students to attend this event.

**Translation 2003** —
Michael Clemens (St George’s Hospital Medical School, UK)
‘Translation 2003’ was a 2-day workshop-style meeting held at the University of Surrey. It was part of an annual series of such meetings that provided a forum for researchers in the UK and other parts of Europe who work on the mechanism and regulation of protein synthesis to exchange information on their latest data.

**CHaOS Tour** —
Sarah Crisp (Cambridge, UK)
The CHaOS (Cambridge Hands-On Science) team provided fun hands-on science for children and the public with their extensive repertoire of experiments and enthusiastic student demonstrators. The 2003 tour exceeded all expectations, attracting around 1500 visitors over 2 weeks in the summer with venues in the North-West, Midlands and South-West of England.

You can see the CHaOS team in action at the Bioscience Kids event at the Glasgow Science Centre as part of the Bioscience 2004 annual meeting in July (see www.bioscience2004.org/bioscience_kids).

**Science Time Capsule** —
Karen Coyles (Ulster, UK)
Friday 6 June saw the formal unveiling of the Science Time Capsule that was subsequently buried on the site of the new Centre for Molecular Bioscience Building at the University of Ulster, Coleraine. Prizes were given by the Directors and Shauna Lowry (of Animal Hospital fame) to the winners of the schools competition for their suggestions of items that should be stored in the capsule. A lecture on the contribution science has made to our lives and ‘hands on’ science experiments were also part of the day.
and the seminar session was video recorded, digitized and put on the web. The resulting virtual school immunology module will now be used to benefit distance learners worldwide.

‘DNA and Me’ Art Exhibition — Diane Kelly (Aberystwyth, UK)
This exhibition centred on the theme ‘DNA and Me’ and was open to children of different age categories from across mid-Wales. Participants were encouraged to highlight the advances in DNA technology made since the advent of determining its structure using any medium. Winning entries were displayed at the University of Aberystwyth and the presentation evening was well attended.

The September Round 2003

Rowett Research Institute
90th Anniversary Celebration — Derry Mercer (Rowett Research Institute, Aberdeen, UK)
As part of the Institute’s celebrations, a series of open days were held in September 2003 to communicate, to a family audience, how nutrition can improve health and prevent disease. This event was extremely successful, with visitor numbers in the thousands, which included members of the general public, school parties of different ages and invited VIPs.

An interactive and educational display entitled ‘Where would we be without collagen?’ intended to convey the importance of collagen in the human body (in healing, aging, heart disease and cancer) was constructed with money from the grant. The exhibit will also be used in a range of other exhibitions, such as the Edinburgh Science Festival, Aberdeen’s Techfest (annual science festival) and Stratosphere (part of British Science week at the Aberdeen Maritime Museum). In addition, it is also intended to be used in schools to increase the interest of children of all ages in science.

Biology Challenge 2004 — Philomena Ewing (Truro College, UK)
This 2-day science programme for Cornish school and college students is due to take place in the summer of 2004. Students will get the opportunity to enter a giant inflatable human cell while learning about cell processes and DNA. A performance to illustrate the Epstein–Barr virus story is planned alongside workshops on bioethics and plant science. Teachers also stand to benefit from talks on new A-Level Biology courses and future science opportunities in Cornwall.

Molecular and Therapeutic Aspects of Parkinson’s Disease — Marcus Rattray (King’s College London, UK)
This mini-symposium on molecular and therapeutic aspects of Parkinson’s disease was held to provide a research-level review of the current status of investigations into the causes and prospective treatments of the disease. Final-year neuroscience undergraduates and postgraduate students of King’s College London attended this symposium, as well as delegates from the research community nationwide.

The programme of talks included topics such as a novel transgenic mouse model of Parkinson’s disease; pharmacotherapeutic approaches to the treatment of Parkinson’s disease; and stem cells and Parkinson’s disease.

Happycomplexans — Dominique Soldati-Favre (Imperial College, London, UK)
This 1-day symposium on Apicomp-lexa served as an informal platform for exchanges of expertise and ideas. The opportunities for networking helped to stimulate new interactions between scientists working on the cell biology and biochemistry of the apicomplexan parasites.

Ocular Research — Tara Moore (Ulster, UK)
Two guest lecturers (from Queen’s University Belfast and Birmingham Eye Hospital) presented their research and diagnostics last April at the University of Ulster, Coleraine. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students attended unpacking at Skegness

CHaOS on tour (Boris in the van)

CHaOS and liquid nitrogen at Cleethorpes

unpacking at Skegness

and unboxing at Skegness.

‘DNA and Me’ Art Exhibition — Diane Kelly (Aberystwyth, UK)
This exhibition centred on the theme ‘DNA and Me’ and was open to children of different age categories from across mid-Wales. Participants were encouraged to highlight the advances in DNA technology made since the advent of determining its structure using any medium. Winning entries were displayed at the University of Aberystwyth and the presentation evening was well attended.
Mad Scientists and Mutants — Avril Morrison (University of the West of England, UK)

This series of workshops is planned to give Girl Guides the opportunity to work with DNA and discuss the ethics of genetic testing. The grant will be used to buy kits that simulate a genetic screen for approximately 50–60 Guides.

The Guides will also be given the opportunity to discuss what they understand by the terms ‘human genetic disease’ and ‘gene cloning’ at the start and the end of the workshop, to see if the workshop has increased their understanding of these concepts.

History of Biochemistry in Cambridge in the Post-War Years — Tom Blundell (Cambridge, UK)

The post-war years were a very lively and productive time for biochemists in Cambridge, where Nobel Prize-winners Fred Sanger, Rodney Porter and Peter Mitchell conducted much of their innovative work. A number of the members of the Biochemistry Department at Cambridge in the 1940s and 1950s are still with us, and have interesting stories to tell of this time.

Earlier this year, both retired and active biochemists from Cambridge, elsewhere in the UK and the USA, met up for a 1-day discussion about this fascinating time in the field of biochemistry. Grant money was used for travel bursaries to allow younger biochemists to attend the event and make them aware of the origins and development of their discipline. We look forward to an article resulting from this event being published in a future edition of The Biochemist.

The Society would like to thank all those who have organized a Local Scientific Event to promote Biochemistry in their region. If you would like to apply for a grant of up to £500 to run an event in your area, please see www.biochemistry.org/education/newgrant.htm for more details and an online application form. The next deadline for applications is 11 September 2004.

Not another takeover?

I am sorry to be the one to break this news to Jane Thomson’s avid readership, but I’m afraid that’s the last you’ll be hearing from her for a while. So, please allow me to introduce myself: my name is Sheila Dargan and I will be replacing Jane as the Professional and Education Projects Manager at the Biochemical Society for the next 6 months, while she is away on maternity leave.

My scientific background is very different from Jane’s, a fact that will undoubtedly be reflected in articles I write for upcoming issues of The Biochemist. For those of you who are interested in my scientific history, here is a brief summary. My higher education began in 1995, when I was accepted on the Cell Biology Honours Programme at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. The delightful 3 years I spent at UEA as an undergraduate student inspired me to stay on and undertake a PhD in calcium signalling — using the patch-clamp technique to study single-channel activity of purified IP3 receptors reconstituted into giant liposomes — under the guidance of Professor Alan Dawson and Dr Edward Lea. My transition from PhD student to postdoctoral researcher was rather a rapid one! I submitted my thesis in November 2001, had my viva in December, then packed my bags and headed off to sunnier shores!

In January 2002, I joined the calcium imaging laboratory of Professor Ian Parker in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior at the University of California Irvine, where I have just completed 2 enjoyable years working as a postdoctoral researcher.

My recent decision to return to the UK and take up this post at the Biochemical Society was not intended to be a conscious effort to leave research, but rather as a career break and chance to try my hand at something new. I have a strong passion for science and education, and am thoroughly looking forward to the challenges that await me.