



Peter Watts
PhD Astronomy
**“Parameter Estimation and
the Statistics of Nonlinear
Cosmic Fields”, 2000**

Who is your current employer and what do they do?

Barrie and Hibbert (a Moody’s Analytics company from January 2012)

We are experts in financial stochastic modelling and provide risk management software and consultancy across the financial services.

What is your job title and what does the job entail?

Product Manager

I am responsible for innovating new products and services to offer our clients in the retail financial sector: asset managers, insurance companies, advisor networks and financial product distributors. My tasks include working closely with our sales team to understand and influence market requirements; translating these requirements into specifications for new products and product features; and, working with our software development, quant and economics teams, to research, build and test these new products.

How did you achieve your current position?

I initially stayed in academic research, taking postdoc positions in Nottingham and then Bonn, Germany. My research was in theoretical astrophysics. However I ultimately decided to leave academia in order to move back to Edinburgh and to pursue a career that offered a better chance of stability for myself and my family. I was drawn to the actuarial profession as it offered a challenging and reasonably technical opportunity with great future prospects.

I spent some considerable time and effort researching and applying for actuarial positions and eventually took a graduate position as a trainee actuary for a consultancy in Glasgow. I soon found that my experience during my PhD and beyond catapulted me forward in my new career: my quantitative skills and ability to think critically and work independently were highly prized by my employers. My technical background also helped enormously with the Actuarial exams.

After working as a pensions actuary for 2.5 years, I heard about Barrie and Hibbert and recognised that they would be an exciting place to work, being somewhat more technically oriented. I pursued a position in the company, eventually using a recruitment consultant to help. Eventually I obtained a position as a quantitative analyst in Barrie and Hibbert. After a relatively short time as a quant, my actuarial background allowed me to move into a consultant role which evolved gradually into product management. I’m fortunate to have a position in a company that, in many respects, has an academic vibe and certainly allows me to use and refine some of the soft skills I learnt during my time as a PhD student.

How do you feel you have used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your research degree in your career to date?

Given that my PhD was in Theoretical Astrophysics, I never use any of the specific academic knowledge that I accrued during my studies. Nevertheless, on a practical level the mathematical, research, writing, public speaking and programming skills that I picked up have been very useful. However the most important and useful feature of my PhD experience was that it taught me to think critically and creatively and to work independently. These have proved to be extremely valuable skills.

Other qualifications

MSci Physics, 1997, University of Nottingham