

Bits & Bytes

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No 40

Editorial

I think that I should first thank all those people who have contributed articles for this 40th edition and hope that others can find time to write something in the future, so that Bits & Bytes can continue.

Those of us who spend time to contribute and produce it would find it useful to know how many people read it. Is it worth the effort? Could you help me judge whether it's worth continuing to produce Bits & Bytes by sending an email to [Bitcount\(at\)outlook.com](mailto:Bitcount(at)outlook.com) with the Subject word "yes", without the quotes, if you would like me to continue. Optionally add some text to give us a clue to who you are. Your email address will not be passed on in any way.

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Email Grabbers

Crawlers grab email addresses so they can send you junk. They look initially for the '@' symbol and then do a bit more analysis before scavenging it. However if you don't want that to happen remove the '@' symbol eg vcelano (at) outlook dot com and then add: ***This format used to stop automatic scanners grabbing the email address.***

Fujitsu recognises ICT/ICL History

At last the present management gives some recognition to those people who worked for the organisation in the past, in all its different guises
<http://youtube/gFzSIcWP838>

Life before & after ICL

At the age of 16 I left Woodhouse Grammar School in N Finchley and started as an apprentice with Post Office Engineering as it was known in those bygone days, 2 years later and with the title of Technician 2A I was called up for National Service which I must admit was at the time a life changing experience, what with "Square Bashing" "fatigues, charges and worst of all Fire Picket duty. After 9 months training at Yatesbury I was informed by the Station Warrant Officer that my posting was to Brechin (RAF Edzell). His words were "you know where Brechin is Son- "Wales" so I thought I was going to Brecon but my travel warrant specifically said Montrose Scotland, not too much of a disappointment as it was a cushy

maintenance unit looking after Varsity Trainers and cocooned Lincoln bombers.

Once demobbed I decided to Leave the Civil Service and started work at GEC Applied Electronics Stanmore along with further education at Hendon Technical College, during which time I got married and then looked elsewhere for a job with more money, so in 1958 I commenced working at Elliott's as a commissioning engineer on the Elliott 803 which ultimately gave me the opportunity to install, maintain and repair 803's 503's and 903's both in the UK and abroad.

English Electric and Minerva Road figured in there somewhere, however I eventually found myself working for ICL in a nomadic customer service organization that moved me from Borehamwood to Harrow to Watford to Feltham to Stevenage Old Town, Ste04 and finally Els01/02. I did actually transfer out of Customer Service for about 6 months back to Ste04 but that was a mistake and I retired in 1991.

Retirement is OK as long as one has a job to go to and I scratched around working in admin for Courier Companies, like Concorde Couriers and A to Z,

Time marches on and in 2002 I saw an advert for a delivery driver with Saab, I worked for them for 10 years on a zero hour contract and was able to deliver luxury cars to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sterling, Inverness, all parts of the UK and on one occasion the South of France, all expenses were paid including return travel and overnight accommodation usually at a Premiere Inn. I think I would have worked for them for nothing because I enjoyed it so much.

Unfortunately in 2012 Saab went out of business, but I don't think their insurance would have kept me on anyway having reached the age of 79.

Here I am now in my 82nd year still playing Lawn Bowls and still doing some part time work at my Son and Daughters Business of Lettings and Property Management in Watford and St Albans.

Please don't look out for my name in the Obituaries just yet as I hope to continue on at least for a few more years. Best wishes to all those who knew me, even those who for one reason or another decided that they didn't like me!

Douglas Hall [douglashall \(at\) orange.net](mailto:douglashall(at)orange.net)

ICL Anecdotes

The Computer Conservation Society recently marked its 25th anniversary and, like a chump, I said I would be prepared to mark the occasion by collecting another handful of anecdotes, thinking that there must be many good stories in the background of many

of the Society's resurrection and reconstruction activities. Well they haven't come flooding in exactly, but I've landed another twelve excellent stories from ICL.

So this is a plea : If you can find room in the next Bits & Bytes (whenever that is) could you please include a para saying that I'm once again in the collection business, and will gratefully take anything I can get.

Hamish Carmichael jwscarmichael(at)gmail.com

Life in ICT/ICL

"What has ICL done for me?"

--apart from providing a very interesting way to earn a living,

I'm sure many if not all of us have been given opportunities to enlarge our life experience in some unexpected ways.

Early on in my career, initially with BTM as a London-based field engineer, I was enabled to discover that I had a definite taste for draught Guinness, when served in the best possible way.

This was in 1957/8, when there was a Guinness brewery at Park Royal, Acton. Remember the advertisement and posters of the Toucan with a glass in its beak, the Ostrich with one in its throat?

My boss at the time, at Victoria House, Southampton Row, was one Larry Daly, known as an Inspector. He was always ribbing me for being thin - (he was definitely not.)

When Guinness Park Royal bought a selection of machines, based around a 550 Calculator (might have been 542 Multiplier), Larry said "Dave, I want you to do all this installation, take your time about it, and put some weight on!"

He knew that visiting engineers were treated to a lunch in the Middle Management dining room (much class distinction existed), including a pint, maybe two, of draught Guinness drawn by the experts. This enjoyed very much. Despite serving in the RN for seven years, the deep, rich taste of draught Guinness had eluded me. At Portsmouth the offering was (to me) insipid Watneys. So, for four or five days (!?), I did the job and enjoyed the 'perks', but did not put any weight on.

There's a sequel; two or three weeks later, an agitated call from Park Royal's machine room supervisor "We are not satisfied, send an engineer at once!" Off I go, a bit anxious because I'm still quite green at customer relations. On arrival, "Oh, never mind the machine, it's probably our operator fault. Come and have a Guinness". This happened two or three times before I twigged - remember I was green. If the supervisor did not have a 'guest' for whom he could sign a Guinness chit, he did not get a free drink himself.

So he might call a typewriter mechanic, a Xerox engineer, or one of us. Kind of 'reverse Cry Wolf!'

Dave Clarke

WORDS AND MUSIC

No doubt formal, dry-as-dust records of ICL's history are held in archives somewhere, rarely if ever to see the light of day and there's a wealth of its history on-line at sites such as that of the Computer Conservation Society. When it comes to informal records, though, much has been written about the

"goings-on" within ICL and its predecessors both in "Bits and Bytes" and, of course, in Hamish Carmichael's publications. To both of those my own contributions have been minimal but I have read with interest and enjoyment those of other writers from areas of the company with which my working contact was small or non-existent.

What has always been missing (I'm open to correction on that) is the largely irreverent slant on events that has been captured by the lyricists among us. My introduction to the genre came soon after my arrival in Bridge House North at Putney in May 1965 - someone had written at least part of an opera which included (to the tune of the Volga Boatmen) the chorus of the PLAN slaves which went "LDX STOZ, LDX STOZ....." I never knew who the author was and should he or she or anyone who does know read this, please tell me.

My compositions didn't start until 1969 when Arthur Humphreys and other Directors decided that keeping us all in Putney was unnecessarily expensive and that Systems and Programming Organisation could be better and more cheaply accommodated in Berkshire. The stated intention was to make Bracknell the base but most of us (though not the upper echelon, of course) were first deployed to Reading. That's why the early lyrics, set to an obvious tune, started

"SAPO HQ's heading down here to work in Reading and things aren't what they used to be

But first as a prior treat they moved us to Friar Street; things aren't what they used to be.

It used to be fun, round the King's Head, drinking the odd few drams

But now it ain't done, somebody said, Bracknell is where we'll write our programs

As many will testify, for those of us who worked at Bridge House North or South in Putney the odd few drams were more likely to have been downed at The Eight Bells but although that scanned sensibly it didn't fit the rhyming pattern. The King's Head did have a full-size snooker table on which at lunchtimes Tim Wickes and I would let Alan Rousell beat us.

Then there was "Ballet Redingensian" to the tune of "Ballet Egyptienne" which dealt with plight of the software quality programmer removed from the comfort of his Putney office:

"I've been sent to Friar Street to validate COBOL, PLAN and lots lots more.

Very often you can see me working late - some afternoons till half past four

plus the arrival of a certain MLNF as our new boss:

"You could see Divisions shake and Departments start to quake

While their managers sat wondering what decisions he would make

As he galloped into Phoenix House all full of "Fire" and "Go" -

His name was Michael and he'd come to be the boss of SDO.

Now Michael had a rival, this bloke from up near Crewe

Who'd been a System Programmer on Project 52.

They said that he was crafty and would soon be boss instead

But Michael knew a thing or two and he kept three moves ahead."

Now, I bet that snippet about rivalry won't be documented anywhere in the formal archives and perhaps it doesn't truly reflect reality – but that's what it looked like on the shop floor at the time.

And so it went on down the years. My Programming Training unit was the last to leave Moor Hall in Cookham and we moved to Beaumont which was immortalised, to the tune of Oklahoma, thus:

"Beaumont College

Is a place you cannot reach by train,

Where you hear the beat of tramping feet

Looking for the swimming pool in vain."

Membership of the Majority Club came along and was commemorated by

"Thanks for the memory, of Bracknell in the rain

Of Kidsgrove on the train, a day trip to West Gorton – well I won't go there again ..." and

"Thanks for the memory, of MINIMOP and JEAN, of Carlton Drive canteen,

Of Peter Bonfield, Cecil Mead and all those in between"

before a final fling trying to gain funding from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for various software projects led to "There is nothing like a claim" which started

"We've got projects by the score, we've got managers galore,

We've got dozens of submissions and we'll soon have dozens more

We've got DTI officials who can shoot us down in flames

What ain't we got? We ain't got claims."

However, I know that my efforts to chronicle events were not the only ones as witness these extracts from an English Electric source which were written before the merger with ICT as it then was. It ran to sixteen verses of which these are the first and penultimate:

"We announced a new machine – System 4

It was nowhere to be seen – System 4

We had models made of wood

Which were very, very good

We would build one if we could – System 4"

"Oh! we've had it up to here of System 4

It's been dragging on for years, System 4

If we don't do more than shout

We will find without a doubt

I.C.T. will buy us out – and System 4"

And I find it hard to believe that the staff at Stevenage and West Gorton, to name just two, didn't include someone producing similar material. After all, it must have been a person or persons from a manufacturing environment who managed to subvert the system and infiltrate into the ICL telephone directory the magnificent entry.

McDonald A.D.A. Frm EI EIO

(In the unlikely event of anyone being interested a fuller version of any of the works listed may be obtained via e-mail from [ursidom\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:ursidom(at)btinternet.com))

David Brown

ICL in Eastern Europe

A latecomer to B&B, I think I've looked through all the back issues now, and I'm quite surprised to find very little mention of ICL's surprising history in Russia and Eastern Europe – the soviet empire – in the 1960's and -70's. That time was an odd one in my own career in fact, and only in recent years have I learned of the great work of the company and the industry in those times, and my own small part in it.

After spells at university in Birmingham and Manchester (economics and management science respectively, but I subverted the latter into 'computer programming') I fetched up in London at Friden, Blackfriars Road, helping to tame a rather difficult computer called a 360/20. I remember that the entire programming library followed your source program through the MFCM, on 2 or 3 trays of cards. MFCM? - multi-function card machine: inevitably we found a different name. It could read and punch on the same card path, and too often did both – you were left trying to distinguish input holes from output in your input-only cards (the register was very slightly different.)

Friden had been bought by Singer (of sewing machine fame), and the usual chaos ensued. I grew tired of that sort of thing, and spotted one day a small ad for computer programmers to work in Russia – Moscow. I thought myself well-suited, having read most of the James Bond books, and applied for the job. So I found myself in **very** lux offices in Euston, being interviews by Ralph Land and a woman, Pat McConnell I think. Looking back, I can't believe how naïve I was then: Frank was a legend in computing even at that time, while Pat worked in Moscow, seemingly as if it were Marylebone. I don't think I saw her again, though I heard she came to England, gave birth to a child and returned to Moscow all within six weeks.

I got the job. I can only explain that by the fact that ICL had a grand plan at that time to sell – I think – sixty System 4 computers to the Russians, and it was an 'all-hands' situation. 'Don't know Russian? - no problem', I was told – 'there's a language lab in the office – we'll teach you'. I found myself in a well-carpeted wonderland, where people routinely picked up phones and talked in foreign tongues, and secretaries browsed Pravda or Izvestia in their lunch breaks. A special version of the System 4 was designed – the 4-62: big enough to interest Russians, small enough to satisfy NATO restrictions. (In the end, I think only two copies were sold, and I became the last ICL project manager on those machines – but that's another story.)

But the business didn't come through: the language lab disappeared, and at some time the Russian Branch was merged with the Eastern European branch of the company (how demeaning, I thought!) I was banished to Hartree House to work on System 4 DBMS for a year – a rather boring job, but not without its moments. Having no computer of our own we scrounged time on other machines – sometimes at Minerva road (where I remember boiling kettles in the computer room to counter low humidity) and sometimes at the Agricultural Research Centre in Rothamstead, where we took the night shift. One evening I drove to ARC with Jack Beacom in a white van full of disk packs. We got there; found no-one else had arrived, and hung around waiting for someone with a key. We must have looked suspicious, because

soon afterwards a policeman arrived to check. The IRA were starting a bombing campaign around then, and Jack was very Irish – a Kerry man, I believe. Plod didn't exactly grab our collars, but we weren't going anywhere until some more respectable colleagues arrived with an explanation . . .

Afterwards I languished in Putney, BHN, hoping for work in Russia and attending to small matters. Business was slow. One evening I spotted a headline in someone's Evening Standard in the tube – 'Douglas-Home expels 90 Russian diplomats'. Would this affect our business? I wondered. Somewhat.

My salvation, strangely, was that DBMS. Database was becoming a fashionable item in 1971, and I got a couple of requests to go and explain our software – naturally, salesmen had been puffing and polishing it, and had cultivated some interest in those technology-starved lands. It has to be said that System 4 DBMS was an unlovely child, in fact I don't think it was ever used for real. But I duly went to Prague & other places, to 'explain'. To my horror these sessions turned out to be big lecture occasions, in large auditoria in the best hotels that Prague & Warsaw could manage. Audiences were institute directors, government officials, etc. and hospitality was lavish. I did my best, talking of parameters and card columns; but I think there was an utter mismatch. Looking back, I imagine they thought themselves just as inadequate – for not having a clue what I was talking about – as I thought myself for failing to excite any interest! And the drink smoothed things over . . .

Through these visits I eventually was invited to work in Czechoslovakia for a year, taking over Brian McCrow, who'd done a stint as System 4 account exec in the country. Time was short – you had to be out of the country by April 5 if you were to be eligible for a tax-free year. I bought myself a VW beetle (brand new, £600 tax-free for export.) I agreed to meet Brian at Vienna airport the next Monday morning – we'd drive together to Bratislava, for my first customer meeting. Then I went home to consult an atlas to find out where was Vienna!

This was early 1972. The cold war was in full swing. Czechoslovakia had been invaded and crushed by soviet tanks four years earlier. Czech intelligence was feared and respected by James Bond himself. Prague was regarded as the heart of darkness by most honest English people – even the name sounded sinister. My friends were horrified: everyone seemed to know an uncle who had gone there and never been heard of again . . . I was reassured by my colleagues who knew better. One, who had been around a bit, told me 'you're lucky; Prague's lovely – a bloody lot better than Moscow!'

I stayed three years in Czech that first time (I've lived here three times in all, and I expect I'll die here.) I won't go into details now about my experiences in those three years – maybe another time. Suffice to say that we – no more than ten people at that time – did some impressive work. Salesmen in their mid-20's sold huge (then!) computer systems at ministerial level after months or years of painful negotiation; engineers performed miracles to keep systems running (it was surprising how often the vital spare part was found in the boot of someone's car!) Software people would take operating systems apart, fix them and put them back together.

Roger Landau, the Prague manager, when threatened with lawsuits by a very displeased

customer in Bratislava, had a brilliant idea – he challenged the company to a football match. Someone procured the practice ground at the back of Sparta Prague's stadium; we were hard put to muster 11 men; they were giant Slovaks – all experienced in football. The score was a disaster for us, but they had mercy in the second half, and slackened the pace. The law suit was never mentioned again! I later did a lot of work at that site: they had some very clever people implementing critical path analysis on their 4-50 (quite advanced at that time, I think.) I could help in minor ways with the software, but more mundane tasks proved vital – arranging training, procuring manuals and suchlike.

We were very independent people – we had to be: in a year in Moscow I managed to get one phone call back to the company! Telex was a lifeline, but painfully slow. We travelled a lot – I had five customers, and it took six or seven hundred miles to drive round them all. Roads were diabolical, and in the winter one often found oneself driving behind a snowplough – or waiting for the next one. Shops and supplies were difficult, to say the least – one joke was 'milk? One lump or two?' Getting a spare part for a car usually meant going to Vienna or Germany (and cars needed lots of spares in those days!) Good friendships were made in those conditions, many lasting for life.

But the thing that impresses me most – and which I'm very proud of – is the way we got on with our Czech, Polish, Russian . . . colleagues. You only had to drive across the iron curtain in those days to realise that our countries were virtually at war. I well remember smoking cigarettes with my KGB minder (we all smoked in those days), in the corridor of a Moscow office – under posters showing helpful comrades dusting the radioactive debris from each other with birch twigs, while mushroom clouds blossomed in the background . . . But we got on well – engineers from different backgrounds but the same discipline; helping, questioning, explaining, sparking ideas off each other. The friendship and mutual respect carried over from work to social life – and (Russia apart) there was plenty of that. 'Drunk for a shilling, dead drunk for two shillings' was a real possibility.

ICL sold quite a lot of machines in the empire. Good machines too – in this century I've heard Czech people say that when their computers were breaking down, the ICL machines, old as they were, always worked. We brought many, many people to the UK for training. We worked with people in their countries, genuinely helped and informed them, and disproved some of the myths of evil capitalist enemies. We had some good times too! Oh, and imported quite a few spouses. When the old empire collapsed around 1990 I was very pleased: I'd always expected it to fail, but not in my lifetime. I firmly believe that we – ICL – played a minor but vital part in bringing Europe back together. Another reason to celebrate an extraordinary company – and extraordinary times.

Alan Jones alanjones(at)seznam.cz

BACS - A Brief Encounter

Dennis Gladwell Chairman of BACS and Finance Director of Midland Bank and I were stood waiting late one morning in the early 1970s for Geoff Cross to turn up. He was very late. We were at BACS splendid new centre in Edgware which had opened shortly

before in a former aircraft factory in De Havilland Road.

Nearby is Mollison Way named after Jim Mollison Scots aviator husband of Amy Johnson.

The occasion was a day I had set up for ICL colleagues from various parts of the company such as West Gorton, LDC Letchworth, Putney . . . who had contributed to the early 2900 project plus a number of managers. Some 50 people in all.

Most people in ICL seemed to have no idea that we had a large customer in the finance market and the day was a big eye opener. The Computer Hall was well over 200 feet long and 100 feet wide. Behind the scenes was a big technical support area plus an array of motor alternators and the air handling plant. Not one of the ICL visitors had seen such a place.

The format for the day was a tour of the premises in small groups escorted by a BACS director or manager followed by a buffet lunch.

All the guests had left on the tour when GC eventually turned up. He announced that he would not go on the tour since he had seen so many computer installations and he would just have a drink.

DG fixed him with his steely gaze and said "You will not get a drink until you have been on the tour like everyone else. I have got a manager standing by to escort you". With that he signaled to the manager. GC said "Oh alright" and trotted off obediently.

The tour took about an hour before the groups started returning and got stuck into the food and drink.

No sign of GC. Finally he came back with a smile from ear to ear and said "I have never seen anything like that". DG responded "Now you can have a drink!"

Norman Rees

8301 OMR

Reading the article in the last B&B reminds me of my brush with the 8301 OMR. We installed one in the Open University at Milton Keynes in order to mark the student assignments. They were known as C.M.A.'s (Computer marked assignments), and the instructions were to use an HB pencil and not to fold the document in the post, so we used to get ones that were filled out in biro and crumpled up. I think the students thought they might get better marks!! In fact we had an ironing board near the 8301 in order to flatten the documents. Anyway I digress.

One late Sunday evening when I was on TSB around midnight a call came in from the Open University saying that they thought their disc drives were going backwards!! Off I went in the car and found that their electricians had been working in their switch room and doing a lot of mains work. Sure enough, the discs were going backwards as were their line printers as the electricians had reversed 2 of the phases on their 3 phase supply. I couldn't do anything in the switch room so went under the floor and switched the phases on what I thought were all their 3 phase devices. When they were up and running I went off home and later that Monday morning had another call. They had switched on the 8301 and that had gone backwards and stripped all the teeth of the chains that took the documents around the machine. Luckily we only had a 3 pocket machine but it took me nearly a week to replace all the teeth on the chains, one link

at a time. I never forgot that the 8301 was 3 phase as well after that.

The following weekend the electricians corrected their wiring so we had to go back in and change all the mains connections on the disc drives printers and the 8301.

Malvin Drakley

Life after ICL

Might not have been what one was expecting

The parting of the ways came at the end of the year 2000. It came as a bit of a surprise and it had not been part of my game plan to retire at the age of 59 ½. Like greatness, some things just get thrust upon you and so after 40 years of working life, 39 of them with ICT/ICL, I was once again a free man.

Life with ICT/ICL had been somewhat nomadic starting off at Moor Hall in Cookham and proceeding somewhat circuitously to STE04 via Birmingham, Leeds, Park Lane in London, Eastbourne, Bristol, Chancery Lane in London, Brisbane, Adelaide, Wellington NZ, HAR01, REA09, SLH01, LON03, FEL01, BRA05, WSR02 and ELS01. There were also short term, diversionary forays into Eastern Europe and West Africa and secondments to various customer sites.

After 39 years it cost ICL quite a lot of money to get rid of me. I calculated that for the same money they could have got another 2 or 3 years work out of me and then put me out to pasture for virtually nothing. Perhaps they were worried about the damage that I might do in that time! When I finally departed I received the traditional send off letter; something along the lines of return the car to ICL Transport (or was it Dial?) and don't pinch the paper clips. It concluded with thanks for my 39 years of service in a sentence of 35 words written by someone from HR that I had known for less than 30 days. Such is life!

So, what next? Even after investing some of my pay off in an enhanced pension, take home pension was somewhat less than my previous take home pay and my state pension was not due to cut in for another 5 years. It was at about this point that my wife made a rather profound statement, namely "I don't do lunches". Taking this as a bit of a hint I set myself up as a self-employed sole trader and looked around for something to do. My first job was to project manage some building work at the cottage my mother had moved to recently. Needless to say this did not pay particularly well so I was obliged to cast my net a little wider.

Why not go back to ones core skills? However I was somewhat disappointed to find that there was very little demand for 1004, 1300 Assembler or even 1900 PLAN programmers so bookings were rather limited and I was spending rather a lot of time at home. This eventually prompted another profound statement from my wife, namely "Have you seen this advertisement?" The message was clear; I was needed out of the house.

The advertisement in question had been placed by the local 6th form college for examination invigilators for the summer season.....

Philip Sugden

Fun with I.T. once I retired

When I retired after my 43 years in the company, several things happened that I didn't expect.

Let me say first of all that I always worked on what was generally known as 'Large Systems' throughout most of my career. Starting with ICT, I switched to English Electric and was trained to support System4 via lengthy courses at ETS Letchworth and periods at Acton, Kidsgrove and Winsford. Like many of my work colleagues I never went near a PC other than using them in later years to send emails after dear old EXAC UK03 etc. popped its clogs in deference to the new guy on the block. It was almost a boast that I never touched that Microshaft stuff. Then I retired and it all changed.

Starting with family members who seemed to decide I needed more to do, odd jobs started to arrive in the shape of PC's that weren't well in some way. The reason they were deposited with me usually began 'you were in computers for a lifetime so you must be able to sort my PC problem in two minutes..' I gradually formed the impression that everyone in my family thought I sat and mended PC's all day at work for 43 years. So I began telling them about the 4/72's and 2980's that were 15ft long and 6ft tall and that was just the processor which is the same as that chip just under the fan in that laptop you just bought in for mending. However I stopped that tale when, instead of showing how clever I must have been to mend things with nearly a thousand printed circuit boards in, they started looking at me like I had lost my marbles. Often they just said, '15ft by 6ft, same job as the chip in this laptop? Yeh, right ! Hmmm.'

Over several months the PC's kept appearing and landing in my spare room. That room, formerly known as a bedroom is now apparently known as the 'computer room.' Gradually I got quite good at fixing whatever problem the little box of tricks had when it arrived. Amazing how many were just very slow and needed another gigabyte of memory. Ah.memory! I once began to tell my son a story like the above size story. It began 'do you know the 2980 SMAC of 1976 vintage had a large wardrobe that could only hold one sixtieth of the data that the little chip holds that I plugged into your laptop?' I got that funny look again so packed up all the stories like that. Hey, they were true weren't they or had I really lost my marbles? Anyway as I say I got quite good at sorting out the problems, all for free I might add as it was family.

Eventually I had them beat. PC's all working and the work input slowed to a trickle. That's when brother-in-law stepped in. 26 miles away from my house was a 'really nice guy and his wife. She is an ex-model. They really do need a bit of help with their PC problems.' The ex-model bit got my interest so off I went. Yes they were both very nice people in their 80's, ie an old model, which wasn't mentioned before. I sorted their problems and went. This started a new trend, moving from family repairs that had tapered off, to friends of the family and friends of their friends. So now its anyone in trouble with their PC, who are of an age that means they will have missed out on all this new-fangled stuff. If they fit that description I seem to get their PC to fix. I also cover the local old folks home so that's quite rewarding. Although I never charge anything other than for parts costs I do now have plenty of printer paper and bottles of wine for my efforts.

So my career started on big boxes and as the years have gone by I find myself working on smaller and smaller boxes. At this rate in a few more years I will be working on nothing! As Sir Clive Sinclair said about the internet "I never saw that coming."

Computers attract lots of criminals these days, so beware.

I know that many that read Bits & Bytes are computer literate, but in a big companies like ours there are also many, perhaps even the majority, who never used computers other than as a tool. So here are a few warning words for those who may not be aware of today's computer criminals.

In the 1970's those involved with computers were, I found, generally a straightforward bunch. Ok, some had funny Manchester type accents so my southern ears had to be accustomed to 'Tarra, must catch the Buzz' when it was home time after a day on the factory floor at MAN05 soldering extra wires on a 2970 in the hope it would run a test program. A criminal back then was somebody at MAN05 that connected a mains cable without waiting for 2 hours for the electrician to turn up. It was all highly unionised in MAN05 then, so tightening a mains plug if you weren't an electrician could precipitate strike action if caught.

Forty years later there are new lads around who are much naughtier than that. It goes like this. You are sitting at home when the phone rings.

"Hello, this is Microsoft. How are you today?" (Doesn't wait for reply)

"We have detected a problem with your computer and are ringing to assist you with the problem. Have you noticed your computer is slow sometimes?"

You answer "yes" as all PC's could be faster. Answering "No" wouldn't alter anything that the guy with a heavy foreign accent will say next anyway!

He then asks if your PC is switched on and directs you to do various things which inevitably leads to their website. To cut a long story short, these guys are trying to give your computer a virus that messes things up on your PC such that it won't function properly anymore. Once they have messed your PC up then the punch line comes.

"I dear oh dear, it's worse than we thought. It will cost £279 to fix that for you"

For those who don't suspect anything, they give them the money via VISA and suddenly...

Brrrrr, they've hung up never to be heard of again.

There are scores of such scams around and there is no real way of stopping these guys who are usually abroad. Forget TPS (Telephone Preference Service) etc., that won't stop them.

Now if you are like me and fancy just giving them maximum annoyance you can try the following.

1) Keep them chatting for ages

2) Take ages getting your PC switched on...its up a long flight of stairs and I am a pensioner you can say. They love that as advanced years=their target group. Stamp your feet a few times..it makes the imaginary stairs sound genuine and its good exercise.

3) Every time they ask you to press this key and that, take ages doing it, but don't actually do it. 'Where my glasses' are should always be in your stalling armoury.

4) When you have had enough fun, ask them how they found you. They will generally say "via your Windows licence." My favourite three replies are:

“But I haven’t got a licence, I only use pirate software”

or “I am not connected to the internet. Well you never asked me if I was!”

or “I run Linux not Windows”

Mostly they just hang up, but occasionally lots of very rude words are uttered by them, so you know you have done well and spoil their day. One woman really told me off for not pressing the correct key. “You didn’t do what I told you”, she shouted down the phone from Timbuktu! Pity she wasn’t within arm’s reach. Anyway, I do this so they waste time, their blood pressure goes up, and perhaps don’t have time left to catch any unsuspecting people that day. I managed 25mins recently whilst relaxing after lunch, but 10 mins. is about average.

Finally if you are busy and can’t spare time, then at the very least say “hang on a second, just getting my hearing aid” (always remember they focus on the elderly so mention a hearing aid). Then don’t hang up, just leave the phone for 10 minutes till it whistles. This procedure can work for bogus bank calls/insulation surveys/PPI scams, etc. etc. .

Retirement can be fun after all.

Vince Celano

Letters

PICTUREGOER

Recently, my wife said she’d like to visit an old friend of hers, who’d been dumped in a care home. I’ve seen enough of these “waiting rooms for death” but the address was Hitchin. Having been in “digs” there on a number of courses with the company, I was intrigued. The place hadn’t changed much, still possessing some charming old shops. Her address was in Bancroft, a street, which amazingly I remembered, considering it had been over forty years.

We had a cup of tea and as they droned on, I could see the old alms houses opposite in Bancroft. Something clicked and my train of thought ran: Bancroft—George Bancroft—character actor who was in “Stagecoach”—fine Western—we can’t make Westerns—we did try with “Shalako” that was so-so, but “Carry on Cowboy” was a hit (most of the “Carry On’s” were) the signals went red at this point for my train of thought.

One evening in 1969 Bob |Morley, a colleague on the course and I had gone to the local fleapit. I’d remembered particularly, as he’d persuaded me to walk out in the middle of “Carry on Screaming” a dire effort in the popular series, starring Harry H Corbett and Fenella Fielding.

I asked our friend if she recalled the local cinema. She replied that it had been pulled down in the eighties, but had I noticed her address was Regal Court? It seems we were on the site of the Regal Cinema. It was an odd feeling sitting just about where I’d sat forty years ago.

By the time we got home I felt whacked, having driven 100 miles! I used to do it daily at rush hour and buzz around Stevenage office all day, drive home at rush hour and go out in the evening, admittedly that was forty years ago!

I sunk into the chair thinking about Hitchin and this flashback, which might make a piece for “Bits & Bytes” My wife turned on the TV and uncannily they were showing “Carry on Screaming”. I now had a conclusion to an article!

I hadn’t thought of the Regal cinema or the “Carry on” movies for decades and now I had the chance to finally see the ending of the film! In deference to the late Bob Morley I switched it off. He’d have wanted it that way.

Dennis Goodwin

Reunions

Newcastle Friday Club

On the first Friday of each month Ex (and current) ICL/Fujitsu employees from the North East meet for a beer and bite at Wetherspoons Quayside Pub in Newcastle; we meet at 12:30, and any Ex ICL/Fujitsu people from the North East or who have had any contact with the North East are welcome.

Mike Green 0191 386 6787

ICL Central London

The next reunion will be on Wednesday 15 April 2015 at The Shakespeare’s Head, 64 Kingsway from 12 noon. The pub is on the eastern side of Kingsway just south of Holborn tube station.

Bill Williams 020 7607 9408

256meteorahlhorn(at)gmail.com

Stevenage & Letchworth Old Boys (renamed Punch Card Reunion)

The annual reunion will take place on Tuesday 6th October 2015 at Stevenage Labs STE04.

Please send £15 to Adrian Turner, 5, Nun’s Acre, Goring-on-Thames, RG8 9BE. Cheques should be made payable to **Punch Card Reunion** and accompanied by a SAE.

Payment can also be made via Internet Banking, ring me for the bank details.

Adrian Turner 01491 872012

MOD MOB

Retired and active staff from the London and MOD UK unit has met up for a number of years now, so we have now established ourselves as a sociable group of individuals. The date of the next meeting will be posted on Rod Brown’s B&B Repository website.

Anyone who is retired or active and wishes to meet up with individuals who worked anywhere on MOD contracts or in the group is welcome. Lots of people worked in CHOTS as well as in the main MOD team and all are welcome, security clearance not required, just bring a smile. Email to [modmob\(at\)shedlandz.co.uk](mailto:modmob(at)shedlandz.co.uk) for enquiries

Kidsgrove-Drawing-Office

The Annual reunion is held at the Bleeding Wolf, Scholar Green on the first Monday in December

[brian\(at\)morrismail.co.uk](mailto:brian(at)morrismail.co.uk)

Watford-Harrow- Feltham

Mike Ray 01895 230194

East Grinstead 81 Club

Gordon Franklin 01342 328479

East Midlands UB40s

Brian Skeldon 0115 9725119

ICL Double Majority Association

Giles Allen 07951 937124

ICL Midlands

Brian Trow 01785 257317

LEO Computers Society

John Andrews

[GlobalLeoSociety\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:GlobalLeoSociety(at)gmail.com)

Liverpool Engineers

We now meet about midday on the second Wednesday of every month at Weatherspoon's, Great Charlotte Street near Lime Street Station.

Bill Wood 0151 426 4025 (New Contact)

Surrey Engineers

Trevor Harding 01483 565144
trevor(at)harding14.plus.com

West Gorton Reunion

Eric W Watts 01457 875080

West Branch Engineers

Eric Reynolds has moved. No replacement notified.

West Kent Reunion

Ron Harding 01732 761076

ICL Old Buggas

Les Mowbray www.cuin.co.uk/oldbuggas/

ExICL Kidsgrove

Nick Edmonds 01270 585953
nick.edmonds(at)yahoo.co.uk

OBITUARIES

Nortel Fund

BRA01	David W	Mark	04/12/14	81
BRS06	Richard S	Hedges	05/02/15	89
	Walter E	Lamerton	08/01/15	84
CRE01	Betty C	Wright	11/10/14	86
Croydon	Mathew J	Bunyan	18/11/14	90
EDI04	Sidney G	McKenzie	17/03/15	89
FEL01	Stanley J	Pritchard	03/03/15	85
	Edward S	Smith	08/01/15	89
GLA01	Gavin B	Jack	23/10/14	85
HOC01	Dennis	Hall	07/02/15	88
HOM99	Leonie	Switzer	20/09/14	76
	Richard J	Tetley	18/12/14	84
	Donald	Webb	24/01/15	83
KID01	Jean C	Cross	15/10/14	80
	Jean	Heron	28/12/14	89
	Ian	McCluskie	17/01/15	85
	William I	Steventon	20/11/14	74
	Keith	Underdown	23/01/15	66
	David W	Worsdale	24/10/14	65
LET03	Clifford G	Bugden	02/10/14	81
LET04	Derrick J A	Coe	09/01/15	90
LET05	Henry G	Brett	27/09/14	86
	Gladys	Lambert	28/01/15	81
	Marion	Muncey	16/03/15	80
	George C	Owen	10/11/14	88
	Spencer H	Thomas	28/11/14	86
	John	White	24/12/14	93
LON03	David J	Peett	18/02/15	83
LON11	Leilh M	Boyer	19/02/15	69
	David F	Plummer	23/09/14	83
LON13	Jean V M	Mann	16/09/14	79
	J J	Woolger	16/12/14	92
LON30	Edward C	Coleman	16/02/15	84
LON31	Leslie A	Baxter	30/10/14	78
LON49	Michael W	White	21/02/15	70
MAN01	Kenneth	Driver	02/01/15	80
	Lewis	Winterbottom	04/01/15	86
MAN04	Allen	Horsfall	07/11/14	84
MAN05	Mohammed	Alam	14/10/14	84
	John B	James	06/03/15	94
	Joan	Thompson	06/02/15	86
MAN12	Ann M	Duddridge	14/11/14	68
	Donald	Fletcher	13/03/15	86
	Julia	Graham	14/10/14	83

NEW03	Donald	Mackenzie	07/02/15	82
	Robert G	Oakden	17/02/15	76
	Ronald	Rutherford	10/02/15	85
REA06	Rosemary	O'Connor	30/11/14	66
STE04	Terence	Capon	17/10/14	81
	Robert	Carpenter	07/02/15	77
	John W	Finney	02/12/14	82
	Dennis	Lawrence	28/01/15	92
STE08	Leslie W	Bidnell	01/02/15	88
STE14	Arthur D	Baxter	17/11/14	83
WAK01	Norman T	Thurman	26/12/14	76
No Known Location	Derek	Arkinstall	30/12/14	88
	Gwendolene	Barrie	26/02/15	78
	Arthur D	Baxter	17/11/14	83
	Arthur	Bayley	21/10/14	80
	Desmond G	Bingham	16/11/14	93
	Elizabeth T	Buntain	18/01/15	94
	James L K	Castor	31/12/14	90
	Richard T S	Chilton	04/11/14	83
	Doreen	Cooper	05/01/15	90
	Marion E	Croft	28/02/15	85
	Ronald W	Crutcher	12/10/14	95
	Ernest A	Door	14/11/14	84
	Brenda	Dunham	30/01/15	92
	John	Fennel	24/10/14	73
	Cyril A	Flint	18/02/15	93
	Charles W	Fox	09/02/15	95
	Gladys J D	Frost	19/12/14	95
	Hugh	Graham	07/01/15	79
	Richard J	Hacon	18/12/14	92
	Peter G	Hamdorff	28/12/14	86
	Hilda L	Handy	24/03/15	86
	John R C	Harper	10/11/14	83
	Nessie	Harrison	26/01/15	85
	Jeanne	Hobart	20/01/15	91
	R J	Kester	20/03/15	92
	Lawrence A	King	03/01/15	87
	Dorothy	Lawler	28/10/14	86
	Harry H	Macklen	06/10/14	94
	Laxmidas	Majithia	29/12/14	88
	Bruce A	Parkinson	08/10/14	90
	Dennis F E	Pidgeon	25/10/14	85
	Edward V	Riley	26/09/14	92
	Roy	Roberts	10/11/14	85
	Herbert S	Roberts	21/10/14	89
	Peter G	Saxon	17/02/15	66
	Douglas	Scott	14/12/14	89
	Selina	Smout	31/12/14	91
	James B	Stacey	15/01/15	93
	Raymond F	Stevenson	02/10/14	83
	Agnes	Taylor	05/01/15	89
	John E	Thompson	17/03/15	85
	Kenneth I	Turner	09/01/15	85

Bits & Bytes Archive

The Spring and Autumn editions of B&B will be available in the last week of March and September each year. Please make a note in your diaries to access the website on a regular basis.

www.bitsandbytes.shedlandz.co.uk

NEXT ISSUE

Copy for the Autumn 2015 issue must be submitted by 1 September 2015, but would be appreciated earlier.