## Editorial

The start of yet another year; where did the last one go? Time flies at an amazing speed when you no longer have the discipline of a working week, and the pill box requires to be refilled too quickly!

2017 was a milestone year for me as I reached four score years and after 22 years I decided that the Punch Card Reunion/SLOBS reunion that I had organised every October in the Stevenage Labs, had reached a point where it should be discontinued. Further kind words on this event can be found in this edition.

The world is changing and not in a positive way. Our village has been twinned with a town in Normandy since 1979 and will be hard pressed to continue with the exchanges until the 40th anniversary unless younger people in the community become involved. It is not only a British problem; the French and German committees say that they have difficulty in getting new people to visit their twin towns. Brexit will not help either!

You will notice in this edition that I am no longer able to get names of Nortel Pensioners who have departed this mortal coil. Another example of this changing world! Please let me know when ex colleagues die so that they can be remembered in the obituaries section of Rod Brown's website.

The Bombe replica which John Harper masterminded is being moved into the National Museum of Computing to be alongside Colossus. A Crowdfunding campaign which was launched mid-February and finished 13 March has raised £38k so far. They want £50k to set up the new location in TNMoC. If you haven't supported this very worthy project, please go to **http://www.tnmoc.org/support** and give some of your pension.

(I have just been to the doctor and the word "Support" now has a different meaning from when I was working for ICL!)

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### VAGUE MEMOIRS OF YET ANOTHER ENGINEER

I joined ICL in 1975, after working for 10 years as an electronics development engineer for Heenan & Froude in Worcester, who made dynamometers for testing the power output of engines of all sizes from lawnmowers up to huge marine engines and jets.

They made many other things including rolling roads for testing complete cars. While there, they sent me to work in the Zil truck factory in Moscow and, down at the British Embassy club for an English pint, I met Ron Aston and his wife Glen and their little daughter, who one day said to me, in all frankness, "I don't like you". Fair enough, there are days when I don't like me either.

Ron was out there on a 2-year tour, and as I was enjoying the life out there, I thought that if I joined ICL, maybe I could get out there for two years as well if I joined ICL but ICL had decided that the next person through the door would be trained as a 2980 engineer, and NATO had decided that ICL couldn't sell such a big computer to the Russians because it would give them too much computing power.

I was naive on three counts – one, that I would ever understand computers; two thinking that I would ever be good enough to get sent to Russia and three, that, even if I had got to Russia, I could further Anglo-Russian relations with a young Russian lady I had met there. I'd even taken a £1K salary drop from £3.5K p.a. at Worcester to £2.5K p.a. at ICL, thanks to my high hopes.

I was given the choice of Stevenage or Bracknell and I opted for Bracknell because I knew where it was. Stevenage was where they made Vincent motorbikes, I'd had two and both were rubbish, so Stevenage hadn't left a good taste in my mouth.

On my first day at Bracknell, I was told I should be at Letchworth on a one-week computer appreciation course, where, on arrival, I found I was in a class of one. Les Rabbit was my tutor and, during the week I asked him what it was like teaching just one person. "Come up here and find out" he said, so we swapped places and I had to explain computers to him. I remember an ICL car sticker on a window near the entrance. Someone had sliced it up with a razor blade and rearranged it so that the original "Think computers think ICL" now read "Thin kinky ICL computers".

Back at Bracknell, for six weeks I had to then study E003, a tape course, I think called "New Range Introduction", followed by a three-month 2980 course at West Gorton, staying at a real home-from-home 'hotel' in Whalley Range. I was accompanied though all this by Lyn Gore who re-joined the company the same day as I joined it. (Lyn now has a small farm at Kirk Michael in the Isle of Man and I visited him in April this year).

Back at Bracknell, we muddled through being 2980 engineers, Lyn becoming a shift manager while I drifted into DRS300's, DRS20's and DRS6000's before

being made redundant in 1993 after 18 years' service. It was a lovely opportunity to do something completely different, I never wanted to see another computer again.

Six months later, still enjoying my leisure, I was head hunted by CHOTS at Basingstoke to do hangaring (post-production reliability testing) of new DRS6000's from oop-north. Not really interested, but I thought that I'd do it for 6 months to get me through the winter. Seven years later, I got seconded to the CHOTS roll-out team installing PCs on RAF stations around the country, and Main Building and various other MOD sites near Trafalgar Square in London. I did one or two Army sites and a destroyer down at Plymouth, the destroyer being stripped and sold abroad four years later, but I don't think that was anything to do with me. My daughter is an officer in the Royal Navy and she sometimes spoke of the ICL / Fujitsu systems.........................but I still love her,

I also got involved with the PC roll-out in prisons, enjoying being able to clear a space at parties by saying I'd just done six-weeks in Brixton Prison. We met some quite nice people amongst the guests in there

I ended my ICL days working for CHOTS out of RAF Strike Command at High Wycombe.

I retired in 2006 at age 65. Started as a Customer Service Engineer, finished 31 years later as a Customer Service Engineer. Though I was made redundant after 18 years, I was given pay in lieu of notice during the 6 months until I re-joined ICL, this time at Basingstoke, so 31 years in the continuous pay of ICL / Fujitsu - . I feel that I was made redundant after 18 years so that they wouldn't have to do the 'majority' thing at 21 years.

Retired 11 years now, I certainly don't miss the work, but there are one or two colleagues who made work such a pleasure and so entertaining. I did have a nostalgic trip to the computing museum at Bletchley Park recently, lots of 'Hot Tango and Alabaster' kit there, but the excellent 'bubble and squeak' in the restaurant was of greater interest.
**Paul Burbidge**

## CATS' TALE

I was asked by my daughter to device a quiz to raise money for Pussycat Lodge, a cat charity. Trying to e-mail it to her for approval, Windows Outlook Express rejected it. I'm used to rejection of my writing, but usually they give a reason. I wondered if it was her address, so I sent it to myself, still no luck. The title of the piece was Pussy Cat Lodge Quiz. All I could assume was the Puritan American ethos that clumsily prefers "in back of" to "behind" it could be their debasing of the innocent word "pussy"

I altered the heading to "Pussycat" the message went, and American values were preserved. My son builds model aircraft and whilst searching for plans of a plane, he naively Googled "models" and was inundated with the most un-Puritan of pictures.

To ensure I wouldn't corrupt anybody else, I delivered the quiz to the organiser of the cat charity and was asked in for a coffee.

Her companions were a couple of elderly cats. On balance I'm a dog person, consequently, cats make a beeline for my lap, resisting any attempt to dislodge them by digging in with their claws. However, this one was acting strangely, it ignored me and stared fixedly at the wall. While my hostess was making the coffee, I tried to attract its attention by making a "Here Puss" kind of noise, with no effect. I shoved the stool it was seemingly glued to, in case it was a stuffed cat. It might well have been, as it didn't budge. Over the coffee, I tactfully asked if it was deaf and she explained it wasn't as simple as that, the cat has been diagnosed as suffering from depression! I nearly spilled my drink trying not to laugh, but she was serious, and it seems there are cat behaviourists who treat the condition, at a price!

I'd assumed a cat hasn't a sense of the past or the future and lives for the day. It has a roof over its head, a basket, and meals on demand and in return it has to occasionally condescend to play with its owner. What has it got to be depressed about? I guess it'd be a problem committing suicide, having nine lives. But as with humans, so with cats, the ability to cope with trouble varies enormously, the lucky ones handle it, but some don't. I prattled on in this vein and just as I was leaving, she threw me, by telling me her other cat has been diagnosed with dementia! I couldn't handle this, made my excuses and left. My frivolity was misplaced, and I hope I hadn't upset her. I was going to buy her a couple of those new-fangled knitted scarves for cats- only £14 each, until today's post revealed my annual state pension increase to be only £3.50 a week. Now I feel depressed.
**Dennis Goodwin**

## My First Day in Computing

My entry into the world of computing in 1960 was entirely unexpected and unplanned. The only thing that I knew computers at the time was that they were big, costly, arrived by lorry and that a computer delivery was sufficiently newsworthy for the TV cameras to turn up for the event.

My career game plan, in so far as I had one, was to complete my 'A' levels in Pure Maths, Applied Maths and Physics and then go on to university and study yet more maths. 3 less than sparkling 'A' levels meant a rapid switch to Plan B. What Plan B? Conscription had come to an end so the only option was to get a job, not something that I had given any thought to previously. A visit to the county youth employment officer only yielded a suggestion that I contact a number of 'blue chip' companies such as Rolls Royce, BP, etc. The list did include Elliott Automation. It was not a name that meant anything to me, but he had added in brackets "they pay well" so it seemed like a good place to start. I rang them up and explained that I was looking for a job; they, thinking that I was responding to one of their recent advertisement, invited me over for an interview.

I arrived at the appointed time and was duly shown round the ground floor demonstration centre of Elliott Automation at Elstree Way in Borehamwood. The centre was full of a bewildering array of very large, dull green cabinets, batteries of teleprinters and a variety of other bits and pieces some of which had flashing lights. I was to find out in due course that this ensemble was two NCR Elliott 405s and two Elliott 403s and, tucked away in a corner, an Elliott 802 and an Elliott 803. The story was that, as well as being a demonstration centre, they had started to run a computer bureau service and needed an operator to run the bureau work. I must have managed to conceal my sense of bewilderment because 2 or 3 days later I

received a job offer of computer operator with a pay rate of £9 10s 0d per week. As this was nearly double what I had been paid for a temporary holiday job it seemed a bit of a 'no brainer' so I promptly accepted the offer before they changed their mind. The only down side was that I now needed a motorbike to make the 18-mile journey to work each way which was not easy by public transport. Fortunately, even in those days, the Bank of Dad was able to help.

A couple of weeks later I turned up for the first day of my full time working career with very little idea of what lay in store. It started off with a very mundane briefing for all the new starters that week on matters like clocking in and clocking off, the dire penalties for being late; where to park your bicycle, motorcycle or car and the dire consequences of putting them in the wrong place and a raft of other administrative issues which may or may not have been relevant to me and my job. The location was a research lab and a factory as well as everything else so there were a wide variety of employee types and messages to be got across. After the briefing concluded I was collected by my new boss, a lady with striking red hair called Joyce. After a brief conference with Joyce and her boss, Reg, I was told that they thought that it would be a good idea if I sat in on a customer programming course that had started that morning. By that time the course was on morning coffee break, so I was infiltrated into the back row when the course resumed for its next session.

It was bewilderment time again. Programming, what was programming? Elliott 803 Autocode - I thought that I was going to be operating the 405s! If that was not enough the instructor, carrying on from where he had left off before the break, wrote up on the board a = a + b. I knew that my 'A' levels had been below par but I also 'knew' from 'O' level algebra that that equation could not be correct. Add confusion to bewilderment! I decided that, in the circumstances, it was probably best to keep a low profile and hope that things became clearer. They did, but only very slightly and it was a mighty relief to finally get through to the end of the day. I took the programming manual home with me that night to try and make sense of the day and to work out whether my new career was about to come to an abrupt halt.

Epilogue: I soldiered on, finished the course, became a bureau operator, became a programmer, left Elliott's and joined ICT, discovered the joys of punched cards (slotted and round), rediscovered computers, became a systems analyst and designer, became a project manager, worked in sales and sales support, etc., etc., worked in more ICT/ICL locations than I can now recall, but did include West Africa, Australia and New Zealand on my journey. I finally got found out and was put out to grass at the end of year 2000 having had more than 40 'interesting' years in computers / IT / ICT. One small irony was that my last journey to work covered a few miles of some of the same roads as my first despite having been round the world a couple of times in the meanwhile. I am still bewildered and confused by computers; this time it is with mobile phones, tablets, Facebook, Twitter, programmable central heating, et al., but I don't expect things to change. If I ever do finally catch up someone will only move the goalposts!

**Philip Sugden**

## 2982 Arithmetic

This story takes place in the mid-70s, which scarily is over 40 years ago, and sufficiently distant hopefully not to cause trouble. I was a junior engineer who had just moved onto regional support doing a mixture of software diagnosis and fault finding via VME dumps and error logs. The glamorous work around the central units was done by a group of high powered recruits recently recruited by ICL from our competitors. In those days of 2900 installations commissioning could take months and often involved very long CCTA acceptance testing, often having to be repeated due to the many faults that plagued us at that time. ("Mullard chips with that sir"..)

I recall a 2982 installation at a site in South Wales, no names but it used to produce a lot of statistical information, had been unusually troublesome due mainly to MT6 tape decks that regularly scrambled data and were generally awful. Let's just say if they were parachutes you certainly would not want to jump with one on your back. After many months of work and multiple attempts at the acceptance tests we finally got it through, handed over to the customer and went our various ways after a suitable celebration.

Around a year later the development labs in West Gorton discovered a fault in the Arithmetic Unit(AU) that apparently under 'certain' circumstances simply produced a wrong answer and then joyfully carried on. There then ensued a heated debate at the 'Elevated Engineer' level, a sort of 1970s moral maze, as to whether they should: a. Confess to the customer that some results, no one knew which or how many, over the last year were wrong or b. Just fix it at the next maintenance slot and whistle as you left the room.

I will let you to guess which option they took. I have often wondered which major infrastructure projects were planned, cancelled or built upside down as a result. It could explain a lot......

**Andy Stone**

## System 4 Machines

I joined the GPO data processing services (NDPS) in early 1972 as a computer operator at their Bristol data centre in Horfield. Telephone Billing and customer records were run on 3 x System 470s and a Leo 326. The 'glamour' of computer operations soon lost its attraction so in cahoots with an ICL engineer by the name of, let's say Mr X, I applied to join ICL and share the £100 bounty that ICL was offering new recruits. I was successful & duly started work on the other side of the fence at the Bristol data centre eagerly awaiting my share of the bounty. A complaint swiftly followed from the GPO that ICL had poached me and on this flimsy basis ICL withdrew the bounty. It should have been a warning for my future 37 year career with ICL of such things as promotion with longer job titles but little money, October revolutions twice a year and regular slogs from Bristol to West Gorton, but I ignored the warning.

In those days the machines were so unreliable that there were 3 shifts of engineers working 6 days a week, it was a pretty rare week when at last one of the machines was not completely dead. Frustrating for the customer, but great for an engineer who enjoyed working out what was causing the MMPE (Main Memory Parity Error), IOPE (Input Output Parity Error) & many more exotic fault conditions

that could appear on the very large ECP (Engineers Control Panel). Incidentally a very good way to get a full house on the ECP was to get an operator wearing a lot of nylon to touch the panel, instant Blackpool illuminations.

Practical jokes were not uncommon: a group of new joiners, including me, were asked to sort out an Annelex printer on the Leo that would not run. After many hours of scoping this and Avo'ing that, it was pointed out that the main drive motor was missing. It had been removed the day before.

System 4 used ECL logic, very quick for the time, but very power hungry. The 5v power supplies occupied a series of 6-foot cabinets populated with large column arrays of A101 power transistors on aluminium heat sinks with capacitors the size of buckets in the base. Allegedly if you were foolish enough to work on it with any rings on your fingers it was a very good way to amputate fingers. A common fault was a transistor going short circuit, which tripped the breakers and crashed off all the central units. The approved way to find the duff devices was to take out each one, they were about the size of pound coins, and Avo it for a short. The practical way of avoiding hours of tedious work was to get as many engineers as possible viewing the arrays and make and hold on the breaker. The trick was to detect the smoking transistor before it melted/vaporised and caused damage to the heat sinks. Once fixed you could then start fault finding on the central units as the power crashes had probably caused a couple of casualties amongst the ECL boards.

Later, as a regional support engineer I covered the SW and got to meet a great group of engineers struggling to keep the beasts running. Names such as Dave Travell, who kept a piece of 4x2 prominently marked 'Customer Relations', Roy and Jed in Exeter who had perpetual arguments as to whether round or square holes were better in punched cards, Jeff at SW Gas in Bath who had to maintain a vibrating computer - the main London to Bristol railway ran directly under it.

The SW gas machine was once the source of a question in parliament after an unfortunate OAP received a gas bill for many £1000s. After weeks of overtime rich diagnosis, it turned out that once every month or so a disc controller corrupted 2 bits in a byte thus circumventing the single bit parity. One does wonder how many people under or over paid before we found it.

Great fun System 4, but New Range, like an attractive girl across the dancefloor beckoned...

Oh yes, it later turned out that Mr X (remember him?) eventually became call out coordinator for the SW, in the process becoming the highest paid employee in the Region due to a brilliantly scheduled combination of Telephone Standby, Emergency Callout etc. It was apparently possible to claim more than 24 hours in a day. Now long-departed, he was a legend in his own lunchtime.
**Andy Stone**

## 1958-1992

Hello, my name is Derek Haslam, aged 82 and I live in Chorley Lancashire.

I have only recently come across this Web site and so am not up to date with what has been printed in the past.

A bit about myself. I started with Power Samas in 1958 and did the standard punched card, sorters courses quickly followed by the Electronic Multiplying Punch - a 400 valve computer which, after a long course I knew well.

I also got married just prior to this course and at the end of it - as my wife came from Hatfield in Hertfordshire and I came from Atherton in Lancashire - we tossed up where we should live.

The North won, and I was offered a job as an engineer at British Rail, Crewe. We visited the area and liked it but before we could move there I was asked if I would base myself in Manchester rather than Crewe and, so we bought a house in Blackrod near Bolton and I worked in and around Manchester for a couple of years.

A vacancy came up in Malaya for an EMP engineer and I was asked if I would go out there for a year - which we did and thoroughly enjoyed it. We were then asked if we would transfer to Ceylon and we stopped off there on the way home by boat but by this time Pat was pregnant and we didn't think it would be a good place to bring up a baby.

Back in Manchester again until I was asked if I would transfer to Preston where they were short of engineers. As I lived half way between the two centres it didn't matter to me, so I was transferred across. I must say I preferred it in Preston as I travelled around the countryside much more and it was a much nicer environment.

At this time, I was with Powers Samas who had one of the richest pension funds. Powers Samas was taken over by ICT and later by ICL and of course the pension aspect was moved across to these companies. I was retrained on the, I think, 1202 which was a 2000 valve computer, but I wasn't back on the field long before it became obsolete so was again retrained on the 1300 which I really liked and enjoyed working on.

Later I was again retrained on the 1900s and enjoyed that period but then I was asked to become first a team leader and then later, a supervisor.

Around this time the Preston office was closed, and we were transferred to Liverpool. I stayed in Liverpool until the Crosby officer was closed and we were again transferred back to Manchester.

Around this time ICL merged with Fujitsu and stayed that way I thought until I accepted voluntary redundancy in I think 1992.

I then started receiving my pension and was surprised to see it was coming from Northern Telecom and not ICL/ Fujitsu but as it kept coming I didn't query it.

The rest is history really. Northern Telecom went bust and into receiver's hands and it's been there for the last 8 years and still is. This means that whilst I still get a pension there have been no increments for the last 8years and, so it has become out of sync with current values. I queried with ICL why I was moved to Northern Telecom and apparently there'd joined up with them for a short spell and then left them but also left any pensioners who were not at that time still paying in to the pension scheme. As this was the year when I took redundancy I was left behind. ICL said I received a letter to ask if this was ok but I definitely did not and would never have left the ICL scheme voluntarily. As it's now way past the 5-year period when you can contest pension problems I can't do anything about it but I feel very bitter about the way

ICL have treated all who are in the same boat as myself after over thirty years loyal service.
**Derek Haslam**

## DM1/ ICL Series 39 Level 30

I was de-cluttering my loft when I found a curious small black box, with a model of a computer inside. I then remembered that I had been presented with the model of the DM1 (distributed mainframe) during the heyday of its development.

Rob Wilmott had been appointed Chief Executive of ICL and wanted a small office computer running the VME operating system, with the power of a mainframe but requiring no false floor, fan or air conditioning. It had to be capable of operating as a dual node system, use the fast fibre optic macrolan for disks and slower OSLAN for other peripherals.

A team was formed at ICL West Gorton. Brian Proctor was the architect. Derek Ashcroft led the processor team and Phil Broughton the I/O and store team. Andy Boswell was responsible for the system. Mike Eyre was initially the project manager but shortly after the start he handed that responsibility over to me.

Mainframe computers had previously always been housed in a steel frame, but we had to consider plastic. One very stressful day, the engineer responsible for the physical design, Sid Martin, breezed into my office to boast that he had designed 'the most complex structural foam moulding in Europe' - a challenge I felt we could do without!

To meet the exacting requirements that had been set for us, the recently available LSI technology would be necessary. Brian joined a small group to search the world for a suitable manufacturer. The Japanese Fujitsu 8000 cell CMOS (C8K) process was chosen.

I had been leading the 2966 development and was used to large computers with dozens of printed circuit boards. These often went through many modification levels before functioning properly. It came as a shock to me to learn that we would have to rely on an in-house Design Automation (CAD) system to help us get the design of the chips right first time.

The equivalent of seven 2966 computers were engaged round the clock, seven days a week, for over six months to help us complete the design. This was before the days of broadband, and magnetic tapes would be taken by courier and flown to Japan. Fujitsu would validate the design and deliver to us a prototype chip. Fifteen engineering meetings in Japan were necessary to sort out problems. ICL designed 42 C8K chips, and a typical system would require 60. To my relief, although a few changes were made subsequently, the processing node ran the VME operating system within 5% of expected performance without a single chip design iteration.

DM1 was launched as the ICL Series 39 Level 30 System in 1985.
**Colin Skelton**

## ICL Morale

I recall a meeting in the Southampton Region to gee up the low morale within the engineers at the time. We were asked to contribute something that we liked about ICL.

One of the D.P. engineers very close to retirement offered this …

I have 5 things I like about ICL: half past five Monday, half past five Tuesday, half past five Wednesday." I couldn't catch what the manager said as the laughter was too loud.
**Dave Bland**

## Piracy in the English Channel

Alan Gillman recalls that when he was told the company was moving into retail, by the acquisition of Singer, that he considered the Company lacked the skills as a mainframe servicing team to operate in this area. However front-line skills are very adaptable and when an issue was discovered with the Channel ferries onboard Bureau de Change computerised tills and more importantly the automated exchange rate display boards which they drove, some cunning solutions needed to be devised.

The issue was that if (by accident) the equipment failed, the exchange rate was what the teller in the bureau said it was, and not the computer recorded figure. It was therefore to the advantage of some devious tellers, to ensure the equipment did fail, and the number of incidents was growing uncontrollably.

At the same time the Ferry Company started to complain about the reliability but rejected the possibility that it was their staff. What was needed was a way of proving to the ferry company that repaired and working units were failing as soon as they were sent beyond the three-mile limit. Short of having a person standing over each teller a solution had to be found.

The final solution was to photograph each unit when it was returned to the ferry alongside the front of the daily paper for that very morning, when enough of these photographs had been collected they were presented to the ferry company and they were asked to verify our suspicions that the issue was not reliability, but possible piracy.

It did not take long before the robbery of "pieces of eight" stopped, in fact it was an overnight event and suddenly the reliability returned to normal.
**Bill Blake**

## Yet Another ICL Anthology

Just before Hamish Carmichael died, he asked me if I would finish the 3rd anthology ("yet another ICL anthology") in conjunction with his widow Kathy. He had amassed a sizable collection of stories but there was still some way to go. So, I am writing to as many people as I can to see if they have any further amusing or preferably, wicked, anecdotes. Spread the word as far as you can and send contributions to dik@leatherdale.net . It is unlikely that it will ever appear as a "proper" book, but it will end up on the Bits & Bytes website, next to its two predecessors
**Dik Leatherdale**

## Redundancy

The day ICL made me redundant is for ever etched in my memory. I knew my number was up when I saw the HR lady the previous day - we only ever saw her on such occasions. A pocket full of garlic the next day failed to keep her at bay. One by one we were called to the manager's office to be told good or bad news - bad in my case. Now this might have been a tricky interview at the best of times. But this was not the best of times. I'd never met this gentleman before although he'd been my two-up manager for 6 months

and had office 10 feet away. Apparently, he didn't consider it part of his job to meet the peasantry.

You'd have been proud of me. I resisted the temptation to enquire "and who would you be exactly?" though I did think I might. Instead I waited until he'd finished and said, "Well you won't want me to travel to Stevenage (from south-west London) every day on expenses for the next 90 days, then will you?" Once that was established I announced that I would relocate back to my theoretical home base in Bracknell. But by this time the posh office at Waterside Park (whence I'd come) had closed. Theoretically I'd been relocated to Reading and then back to another building in Bracknell while I'd been working in Stevenage. I made a couple of phone calls and left Stevenage for ever that afternoon.

Once safely ensconced in Bracknell I emailed HR enquiring why I'd never received my relocation allowance (two week's salary - not something to be sniffed at in the circumstances) when my base had been changed. I was informed that I wasn't entitled to relocation allowance unless the building was a long way from the town centre and there was no on-site catering. I knew this was nonsense but rather than arguing the toss I replied that the office was well over a mile away from the town centre and that the catering (such as it was) had been closed the previous month on the instruction of the local public health inspector (which was true).

So, it was that I got two week's money for moving offices while serving out my 90 days consultative period before being made redundant. Not sure if that was a unique achievement, but it must have been close.

Dik Leatherdale

## ICL Defence Systems

I joined ICL Defence Systems at Winnersh 1Oct87. I had been recruited by the late Brigadier Norman Green (Ret'd) from the Royal Australian Air Force. Iain Colquhoun had replaced Norman as Head of International Defence System (IDS) while I was in transit from Australia, but Dr Cliff Cundall Kindly held me supernumerary until a job became available in IDS.

I worked initially outside the secure area with the late Neil Horler and John Hughes, before joining IDS as Senior Consultant C3I. After about a year, I took leadership of the IDS Consultants Group, with the late Hamish Carmichael as our Police Consultant. I was thinking of Hamish this morning, and my wife found this site and the sad news of his passing. I can add nothing to the glowing recollections already on the site but am astonished that I didn't know that he played the guitar. Amongst many other gems, Hamish informed me of the long-established wisdom that there were Ford and Vauxhall backs. If your back hurt driving the Vauxhall, then changing to a Ford seat would see one right.

I worked for Iain Colquhoun for another year or so, before being recruited by Mike Dolan to take over from Colin Aldridge as Account Manager for the UKAIR programme being managed by DESC Ltd, the strange charity set up to facilitate the takeover of ICL by Fujitsu. Other salesmen working at DESC were Tim Parker, John Cousins and Brain Skinner. I provided Sales input the unsuccessful Pilot JOCS bid and worked closely with EDS Defence at Hook to provide a messaging solution for JOCS, the follow-on project.

When DESC was reabsorbed I worked for Jan Woolston at the Suttons Business Office with people like Mick Bell and then moved primarily to the Fujitsu Building at Viables Industrial Estate, Basingstoke, where I worked for Martin Beazley and then John Dunn. I took Voluntary Redundancy in 2000 and worked for Northrop Grumman Mission Systems Europe until I retired in 2007 and moved to Devon.

Wish that my memory could hold a candle to Hamish's, but it can't, c'est l'age vieulle. If anyone is at all interested, I may be able to remember a few anecdotes about those units and some of the people from Defence. Is Peter Janikounn still with us?

Kind regards,
**John Spurgeon**

## Smoke and Mirrors

In the days when ICL was headquartered in Putney, there were three buildings anybody crossing Putney Bridge couldn't really miss. On the South (Putney) side stood ICT/ ICL House formerly Hotpoint House and before that, the site of a bus garage operated by the London General Omnibus Company.

On the north (Fulham) side were Bridge House South and Bridge House North. Behind these two buildings was the lunchtime watering hole The Eight Bells, often referred to as Bridge House East. For it was here that gossip was exchanged, brains were stormed, and deals were done between ICL staffers who might not otherwise meet.

Many readers will be familiar with the story of the ICL 2903 launched in 1973. A dramatically cost-reduced version of the successful, but by then ageing ICL 1900 it was firmly aimed at entry-level computer users. The revenues from nearly 3,000 sales kept ICL afloat during the difficult period of transition from 1900 to "New Range" (a.k.a. ICL 2900). In 1975 the introduction of the 2904 allowed a growth path for 2903 users whose workload had expanded (as is often the case).

By the early 1980s the second generation of the 2900 range included the 2950. The 2950, like the 290x, was a microprogrammed computer which was capable of supporting, not only the 2900 order code, but also 1900 programs including those running on the 290x by using the DME-2 version of the microcode. In theory this gave 290x users a further growth path.

But theory isn't always reflected in practice as readers will be all too aware. The mid to late 1970s had been a painful experience for first generation 2900 users. In particular the VME operating system was, with some justice, considered complex and unreliable. By 1980, this had been triumphantly overcome but VME's early reputation clung to the whole 2900 range like a bad smell. So, it was that despite the evident need for more powerful 290x machines, sales of the 2950 running DME-2 were pretty dismal.

Enter at this point one Brian Cook, a consummate marketing man working in Bridge House South. It was Cook's inspiration to rebrand the 2950 running DME-2 as the 2905. It was, as it turned, out a notion of genius. No hardware or software development was required so the costs were zero as was the timescale. Just as important was the avoidance of internal

company politics which would certainly have delayed matters and might well have kicked the idea into touch altogether. It seems that Product Development Group were not even informed, much less consulted. Had they been, I have it on good authority that serious objections would have been raised. Extending the life of the 1900 order code was then against established company policy.

Not even the factory-fitted identification logos were changed — replacements were applied as part of the installation procedure.

Sales picked up immediately. 2905s, while not exactly flying off the shelves sold in respectable numbers to 290x users who might otherwise have been lost to ICL entirely and who had steadfastly refused to entertain the prospect of owning a 2950. And this at a time when ICL's fortunes were at a seriously low point.

The nomenclature of the 2900 range was (deliberately?) confusing. The low-numbered models (290x) were 1900 order code machines. Higher numbered systems ("proper" 2900s) were designed for the New Range order code, but the 2960 and all of the second-generation S-Series machines were capable of supporting either.

So, was this idea conjured out of the air in The Eight Bells one lunchtime? It seems likely that it was. That was Brian Cook's wont. Did he save the Company? That might be a bit of a stretch, but his cunning sleight of hand certainly contributed a great deal when it counted most.

Not long afterwards, a meeting involving ICL's then new chief executive Robb Wilmot was seriously delayed when somebody, assuming Bridge House South would be in the south side of the river in Putney, spent ages failing to find it Bridge House South was summarily renamed Bridge House.

In the 1990s ICL moved out of Putney and Fulham altogether. A heavily rebuilt ICL House is now luxury flats, Bridge House South, an hotel and Bridge House North houses a travel agent. Only Bridge House East remains, echoing to the sound of ghostly chatter and the gentle clink of lunchtime glasses.

**Dik Leatherdale**
**Thanks to the late Chris Cheetham, Steve Black, Rod Brown, Virgillio Pasquali and Brian Aldous.**

# Reunions

## The West Midlands ICL Pensioners
Meet for lunch, beer and a chin wag, bi-monthly on First Tuesday of the month, usually at The Square Peg, Corporation Street, Birmingham, B4 6PH from 12 noon. (Attendees are usually former Customer Services MF Engineers, POS, Key Edit, etc., from BIR03, BIR04 and 'guest visits' from NOT02).
All welcome!

## 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 **18 April 2018** 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.

## 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** 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**

## 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**

## Watford-Harrow- Feltham
**Mike Ray 01895 230194**

## East Grinstead 81 Club
**Gordon Franklin 01342 328479**

## East Midlands UB40s
**Brian Skeldon 0115 9725119**

## ICL Midlands
**Brian Trow 01785 257317**

## LEO Computers Society
**John Andrews**
**GlobalLeoSociety@gmail.com**

## 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**

## Punch Card Reunion/SLOBS
I'm sorry it is the end of the Reunions but as you say we are all getting older. I'm 92 next month!! I think I have attended all of them since. *(John was always the first person to apply for a ticket! Ed)*

I joined Powers in 1953 on £7-15 a week with alternate Saturday and no paid overtime which was quite frequent. I started in the South London area on

36/40 equipment but in 1960 I was selected to go to the to No.6 factory to work with the designers on the Samastronic which could run at 300 cards a minute as against conventional machines at 60/80 and it had unique method of printing by a stylus wire. Supporting and exhibitions took me to Australia, Germany, France then the Printhead to New York. I continued to support Samastronic for 7 years then moved to 1900s starting with 1909 then 1901A with the launch of 2903 I was again the main support and I finished on ME29 taking retirement in 1982.

Thanks for all you have done for the Reunions over the years and I hope Bits and Bytes continues under your leadership

Kind regards

**John Webb (Mr Samastronic)**

We all owe you an immense debt of gratitude for all you have done for us over – can it really be – 22 years? We have had interesting speakers, met old colleagues, exchanged many laughs, & for me at least, been ever surprised to recall what clever people I was lucky enough to have as colleagues.

That is without mentioning Bits & Bytes, which I hope can continue. I think one reason that stops more people writing is the fear that that the odd things we encountered was what we think most people encountered, & therefore not interesting.

(I was rather astonished that no one present at our last meeting had heard of B/MEEP, which caused us so much 'fun' at B.A.C.S.) Be that as it may, I hope you enjoy, like me, your ninth decade - & try not to think of it as 'decayed'!

My very best wishes.

**Varos Shahbazian.**

## Demise of PCR/SLOBS

Stevenage in the Eighties,
everyone and his mate is
aware redundancy stalks the land.
Yet in a couple of years
over a couple of beers
an annual reunion's planned.

Despite some whingeing and bitching
the ICL Sports club at Hitchin
provides a suitable venue.
We discuss our new wealth,
never think of ill-health
and enjoy all the talks on the menu.

After a while John Bennett,
said" We have to think of when it
is time to find a replacement"
"What about Adrian?" says Frank Tilley.
"Great" agrees John, "but will he
do it, he's not from the bargain basement!"

The reunion began to revive in 1995
when Frank Tilley and John Bennett agreed,
that a successor should be sought
and Adrian was thought
to be just the chap to succeed.

Twenty-two years on,
Adrian's still going strong,
but the turn-out has really diminished.
From eighty or more,

this year just a score
and the talk is "Are we finished?"

Adrian wants out,
the venue's in doubt,
no-one's keen, if truth be told.
There's nothing new to say,
many have passed away
and those left are looking old!

Travelling here is now a bind,
packing up on a high would be kind
of nice, let's call it a day.
Adrian's been a tower of strength,
I could go on at length,
"Well done!" and "Hip-Hip-Hooray!"

**Dennis Goodwin**

# OBITUARIES

## When you are gone

Recent deaths have highlighted a problem for people who want to write an obituary for an ex-colleague.

We have worked alongside somebody for many years but when the question is asked "where they were born, educated, joined the company?" we suddenly discover that we hardly knew anything about them and their family background. This is especially true for those who never married and have no close relatives. Can I suggest that we should each write a potted CV giving these basic details so that when we die the eulogy given in the church or crematorium and published on the Bits & Bytes website is factual.

You should also produce a list of friends and ex colleagues with their phone numbers and/or email addresses so that they can be informed of your death.

**Editor**

## Funeral Details

The Bits & Bytes website now publishes funeral arrangements and are published quickly to enable friends and colleagues to attend. Longer obituaries can be sent to the webmaster and will be published separately.

## Fujitsu Pensions Website

**https://fujitsu.pensiondetails.co.uk**
To access Bits & Bytes click on the link given on the very bottom of the home page.
**Direct telephone line to Pensions Department: 020 394 93492 (New number)**

## 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 2018 issue must be submitted by 1 September 2018 but would be appreciated earlier.