

ALL MICRO NEWS

(incorporating UKEUG Newsletter, EAEA Newsletter)
(Einstein Monthly and Alternative Micro News)

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(opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the publisher)

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HAPPY CHRISTMAS !!!

No, we haven't gone mad, wishing you all A Happy Christmas in July, even if it does seem that way at first glance. As some readers will have realised, the May / June issue was mailed out eleven weeks late, but Graham was too ashamed to admit the fact on the cover or in his editorial, hoping that you simply wouldn't notice! As a result we anticipate that this issue will be mailed out about six weeks late, and we hope to get the following issue out about a fortnight late, with normal service being resumed by Christmas.

However, this delay in publication does mean that this will be the last issue that goes out before the closing date for sea mail postings for delivery by Christmas to Australia, New Zealand, Tristan da Cunha, Burundi, the Solomon Islands and Peru. Admittedly there's no-one shown in the computer database as being an Einstein user in any of these places, but the computer program that runs the mailing list behaves just as though it was written by a team of Daleks (motto "Exterminate! Exterminate!"), and we wouldn't want any of you out there to think that we'd forgotten you.

If you are really on your toes today you'll have noticed that this issue (like the address panel on your envelope) has a change of format and also a change of publisher. You may even have noticed that you are once more a member of an Einstein User Group, after years of being in limbo and being no more than a subscriber to a flimsy little magazine. We were going to restore your membership of the UK Einstein User Group to you, but we know that Einstein users used to be spread further afield than the UK, and we wouldn't want anyone to feel they weren't welcome, so it's simply EINSTEIN USER GROUP that we've reinstated, as the basis for reviving the esprit de corps that used to make Einsteining such jolly fun, and the magazine so very useful

Still time to get there?

BUSINESS COMPUTING 93, at Earls Court, London, 21-24 September, £10 at the door. If we could have got the news out to you in time you could have phoned 0203-694177 for a free entry registration form if you qualified as a pukka business computer user. If this reaches you in time you may still be able to get in for free.

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 "A CHANGE IS AS GOOD AS A REST"  
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they say, and Graham certainly deserves one. He and Mike had taken over the Einstein user group and magazine from Chris and Keith long, long ago in the prehistory of computing, when Chris and Keith had been suffering from over-enthusiastic employers, a massive work overload that had turned Einsteining into a burden instead of a pleasure, and a monthly newsletter that was running three months late with no hope of ever catching up.

Running the magazine and user group was fun for a while, but in due course Mike's life took a change of direction that resulted in his giving up his major role in running the Einstein show, while Graham made the silly mistake of being far too good at his full-time job. As a result the same situation of work overload (and Einsteining becoming a burden instead of a pleasure) began to develop in Graham's life. Had lots of eager Einsteiners been tumbling over each other to get their knowledge and experience of Albert and super-Albert into print the situation might have been less of a problem, but in common with many other societies and clubs there are a small hard-core of active enthusiasts willing to pitch in and do something for themselves and their fellow members, and very many more who want to be a part of what's going on, but don't feel motivated to participate actively.

In this situation, with Mike and Graham no longer able to write the bulk of the magazine themselves, backed up by input from other members who felt they had something useful and worthwhile to contribute, the monthly magazine became erratic in publication, eventually settling down to bi-monthly publication, though this fact was not acknowledged officially until early this year.

In the meanwhile Graham had come to the conclusion that the heady days of Einstein enthusiasm by the masses were regrettably over, as there were only 800 members, and no real prospect of any increase in numbers or in people willing to write for the magazine, only a more likely slow decline to extinction. Expanding the coverage of the magazine to include other "golden oldies" machine users seemed to be the way forward, since several other user groups seemed very keen to pursue this course for mutual benefit.

This policy was adopted, but in hindsight proved to be totally disastrous, since changing the name of the magazine to accommodate other machine users made it totally invisible to "new" and lapsed Einstein owners, but didn't actually expand the membership or readership, since coverage of other machines existed in theory but not in fact. Another slight change of name and extending the coverage to include IBM-compatible machines didn't improve things at all, since a user group that only covered Einsteins no longer made sense and was sent into the Locoscript land of limbo, but this removed the last vestiges of non-B&H Einstein support from public awareness without doing anything at all to increase the membership base amongst other "golden oldies" users. Not surprisingly, All Micro News was a total non-starter when it came to competing for subscribers with mainstream 500-page "glossies" in the world of IBM-compatible publishing.

In the Spring of this year Graham realised that he was flogging a dead horse, and that with fewer and fewer people wanting to renew their

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subscriptions or write anything to put in the magazine each month, he was rapidly approaching the point of no return where the cost of having the minimum size magazine printed (and mailed out) which his printers were prepared to handle would exceed the subscription income per issue, and he would have no choice but to abandon the magazine as an Einstein magazine, and retire from the fray or start a new one.

Graham wasn't at all keen to do this, since he had promised in the October 1988 magazine that if he was ever to tire of the Einstein and running the user group he would ensure that another Einstein enthusiast took it on, just as the former organisers had done, but in the absence of some gullible fool willing to be lumbered in his place it just didn't seem possible to continue.

And if we hadn't stepped in, the last issue would not only have been a very late one, it would also have had to last you a very long time indeed, because it would have been the very last Einstein magazine you would ever have received from Ipswich. The crunch point of expenditure exceeding income (added to a deficit of reader contributions to print) has now finally arrived. The direct costs of printing and mailing out the magazine (without including indirect costs such as light, heat, rates, rent, insurance and wear-and-tear on equipment), would have exceeded the subscription revenue on this very issue at current rates of subscription renewal, and if we had not stepped in at the last minute Graham would have had no option but to declare the magazine insolvent and to return the balance of your subscription to you.

We accept that matters have reached crisis point, but our background and experience is different to Graham's, so we don't accept that the situation is necessarily hopeless. Much depends on you, the reader.

Our origins lie in the very earliest days of standard-gauge railway preservation over thirty years ago, and in struggling for decades as a band of dedicated volunteers without resources against hopeless odds -- including spending weekend after weekend patiently restoring derelict track, locomotives, rolling stock and signalling in living and working conditions that would make TV news headlines nowadays -- including BR. contractors moving in and actually starting to cut the track up for scrap -- including fighting British Railways Board and the Secretary of State for Transport through to the High Court for authority to operate the line. With such different origins our view of what is hopeless and what is merely rather difficult cannot be expected to be the same as that of Graham, in just the same way that steam enginemens who regarded it as just a normal part of their way of life to be sharing a cup of tea with the signalman at a lonely railway outpost in the middle of nowhere at four o'clock on Christmas morning can never really be living in the same world as modern-day workers who regard it as their God-given right to take a week or even a fortnight off with pay over Christmas as a matter of course.

We don't think the case is hopeless at all, or we wouldn't have taken it on. We do think that Tatung fully deserved to have the rug pulled out from under them by Amstrad for putting on the market a machine that -- in computing terms -- was much like trying to sell a jet passenger aircraft that had been designed so that it would appeal equally to a major world airline, and also to a child of three who just wanted to push it down the street and play at airplanes -- but that's a horse of a different flavour entirely!

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WHO ARE WE? WHO ARE YOU?

Our origins lie in the earliest days of standard-gauge railway preservation. We did eventually win our battle to preserve "our" railway, but through another body and not in the form we would have wished. Any organisation has to have a purpose, so we became involved in supporting other transport preservationists and in building up a museum and archive collection from small railways and tramways world-wide. This led, quite by accident on our part, to our becoming actively involved in preserving "steam printing" equipment, artefacts and archives when we encountered -- just as the scrap men were moving in for the kill, naturally !!! -- an almost-intact turn-of-the-century small-town printing works that had been the "tame printer" for a famous conglomerate of exactly the sort of small independent railways whose history we specialised in.

Having become involved in "steam printing" equipment, the question of typesetting methods naturally occupied our attention. Hand typesetting is not really practical other than on a very small scale, and although we had offers we weren't sure that it was practical for us to try to keep hot metal type-setting machines in good running order for only sporadic practical use. The possibility of using some combination of computers and offset litho technology for letterpress typesetting/ platemaking/blockmaking naturally invited exploration, and once we became actively involved we very quickly found that, quite contrary to our expectations, personal computing had packed just as much history, development and sheer fascination into a decade and a half as steam technology had into a century and a half, and we became firmly hooked.

Again, quite by accident, we responded to a letter in a mainstream computer magazine, enquiring what was the most environmentally-friendly way to recycle used computer magazines. Naturally, located in a rural development area and perpetually short of resources, we replied "Pass them on to someone else who can make good use of them. How about us, for instance?" Not content with that, we added that we'd also be glad of any redundant or obsolete hardware, software or manuals/documentation too.

Overnight we achieved three truckloads of what we're still not sure whether it qualifies as a computer scrapyard or an instant computer museum. Amazingly, quite a lot of it seems to be in good working order -- or would be if it were complete !!! One machine is of special interest, because it was donated by a very nice chap to whom we are very grateful, and whose membership number is 900. In good working order with mono monitor, 80-column card and software, a genuine Albert. Even better still, a month or two later he came up with a bumper bundle of User and user group magazines, and we found them so fascinating that we just had to have a full set and get on the subscription list.

With plenty of experience of running special-interest groups and oddball societies and their newsletters/magazines on budgets that made running things on shoe-strings seem like spendthrift extravagance, it didn't take us long to see what the problems were, so it's not surprising that Graham leaped at the chance of a way out of his dilemma. However, although we do have a couple of years experience of using IBM-compatible machines, using MsDos and writing batch files,

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we had never heard of an Einstein computer less than a year ago, and it's only a couple of weeks since we first set eyes on a 256, and we are nearly as much of an expert on them as you, Dear Reader, are on the practical aspects of mining gold on The Moon. We are very willing to give you the benefit of the skills and experience that we do have, painfully gained over more than thirty years of achieving the impossible, but without YOUR help and input, there's absolutely nothing we can do to turn the situation around and ensure that Einsteins and Super-Einsteins are earning their keep in the hands of enthusiastic owners well into the twenty-first century.

If you check the membership list you will see that we were allocated membership number 1623. We are perfectly willing to accept that anyone with a later membership number may know less than us about the Einstein computer and have less than us to offer other members by way of encouragement, support and shared knowledge and expertise, but we warn you that if WE are willing to shoulder the burden of the magazine and user group having almost less than nothing to offer in the way of practical experience, it's going to be very hard indeed to convince us that you are less well qualified to lend a hand to the wheel than we are !!!

However, that doesn't mean that we intend to bully and cajole you into doing anything you don't want to do, if for no better reason than that bullying and cajoling and making people feel guilty simply doesn't work. It's just counter-productive. What we find works far better is to find ways of motivating, encouraging and supporting people.

So who are we? We are Steam Computer Society, and we have taken over from Graham the responsibility of servicing your magazine subscription subsequent to All Micro News volume 2/1. Graham has correspondingly transferred to us the balance of unexpired subscription money that you have already prepaid for these issues, and we shall be producing the magazine from now on. However, the scope of Steam Computer Society is far too wide to provide the environment which is needed to revive Einstein user mutual support effectively, and indeed its main role is to encourage, support and promote small special-interest groups, which then function on a mutual self-help basis within a co-operative network of similar self-help special-interest groups.

So who are you? You are no longer just a subscriber to a scrappy little magazine about a discontinued computer. It makes no real sense at all to even try and publish such a magazine other than as the means of communication within an active and vigorous user group such as UKEUG once was, but which has been in a state of limbo for some time now. The difference between the two things can accurately be likened to taking part in a performance on stage of your local operatic and dramatic society, and merely reading about such things in your local paper.

What we, as Steam Computer Society have done, is to give you, as Einstein users, a reprieve from the death sentence on your user group and magazine that was due to be executed at first post tomorrow, in a plain brown envelope. It is up to you, as Einstein users, whether you execute that sentence or reverse it. We have no more knowledge or expertise on Einsteins and Xtal than you have, we can only encourage, support and assist you in deciding the destiny of YOUR user group and your publication.

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MEETING THE CRISIS -- Practical Self-help

The magazine has now reached the point, with the low renewal rate on subscriptions on the last two issues, that the cost of printing and mailing out the minimum size magazine (and the minimum size print run) that the printer will accept, exceeds the amount of subscription money that has to pay for that issue of the magazine. There are a number of steps that we as the new publishers of the magazine can take to alleviate and turn this situation around, and there are also a number of measures that you as AMN readers and Einstein users can take.

The first step, that we have already taken, is to dispense with the pretty cover and adopt the format long favoured by SMALL PRINTER, the monthly magazine of the British Printing Society, and many others. This reduces costs without materially reducing the content. The second step we have taken is to print this issue by photocopier. This is only marginally less frightfully expensive per copy than the first two hundred copies that the commercial printer demands as a minimum print run, but allows us to only print and pay for the exact number of copies that are actually needed, not the print run that the printer must have before it makes sense to him to even accept the job.

An urgent necessity is to get out of this impossible situation by substantially increasing the number of subscribers to the magazine, since the first 200 copies cost the earth to print, but once the printing plates are made and the machine is up and running, the run-on cost per hundred additional copies is peanuts by comparison. Effectively it is the cost of paper and ink times eight or ten, to pay for wages, insurance, rent, paper, ink and machine repayments. To keep on top the printer has to keep his machines going non-stop from starting time to finishing time, and with really expensive machines often round the clock. Each new job put on the machine means not only the cost of all the pre-press work before the printing plates can be put on the machine, it also means cleaning the machine down, re-inking with another ink, loading another type of paper, probably changing the fount solution that balances the printing ink so the ink only adheres to the image on the plate and not the blank areas; and all the tricky juggling act of getting the new plate printing smoothly, cleanly and in perfect register on the new paper stock, in balance with the new ink and fount solution. All this takes time and skill, and costs the printer heavily in lost production, for which the customer must pay at the start of his print run, be it twenty copies or twenty million.

In addition to these costs, collating, wire-stitching, folding and trimming are charged per thousand copies with no discount for smaller quantities. The result is that if we could get the circulation back up to only HALF what it was when the Einstein name disappeared off the cover, we could give you a 40-page magazine each time for less than it costs to give you 16 pages at present -- assuming of course that anyone out there can still find anything to write about Albert! If not, then by sharing the magazine with users of another machine, each user group could get 20 pages to fill with news, views, hints and tips about their favourite machine, when neither could afford the cost of producing a magazine on their own. It's that philosophy that allows the original 1979 Commodore PET to still get magazine space elsewhere. *****
The future for Albert will depend on many hands making light work, so we hope you will ALL become actively involved in running YOUR group.

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A further step that we can take is to increase the subscription rate, since this has remained unchanged for at least the last 55 issues of the magazine (since the time that Chris Giles and Keith Stokes took over the group and the newsletter from Robby Burns), during which time printing, mailing and costs of every other type have gone through the roof. There might be every justification for doing this if you were getting the 40-page magazine that we'd like to be able to give you each issue, but with the magazine in its present rather sorry state we don't think that we are justified in making more than a nominal increase. Even then we'll give you a get-out so that you don't actually have to pay the extra, and you can even pay LESS than now!

Therefore, we are immediately reinstating the 12-issue subscription option. Commencing 1st January 1994 there will be a nominal increase of the 6-issue rate to £10 to UK subscribers. The 12-issue rate will be £18, and a new 18-issue option will be available at £27. These will provide a discount for advance subscriptions, and protection against future subscription rate increases. (There will continue to be a £2.50 per 6 issues surcharge for non-UK subscribers, as at present).

Effectively you'll only pay the present rate if you pay for 12 or more issues, but we'll make you an even better offer. Join or renew BEFORE January and you'll only pay £9 for 6 issues, £16 for 12 issues, or £24 for 18 issues (plus £2.50 per 6 issues for non-UK subscribers). You can take advantage of this offer even if your subs aren't due yet, or even if you've only just renewed, because if you aren't due to pay yet, we'll simply extend your present subscription by the extra issues.

We'll give you YET ANOTHER WAY you can get your subscription extended, -- possibly for ever if you are as devious and cunning as we hope you'll prove to be!!! Half the pleasure of reading this or any other magazine is that the content is new to you, not something you read somewhere else yesterday. If nearly half the magazine consists of an article you've written yourself, it's really not fair to expect you to have to pay for the privilege of reading it. You ought to have a complimentary copy in appreciation of your kindness and consideration in sharing your knowledge and expertise with the rest of us. From now on, that's exactly what we're going to do. Any article of yours of two pages or more that we print, your copy of that issue will be gratis with our thanks, and we'll extend your subs by an issue in lieu.

There's a new/renewal form enclosed for you, or maybe you know someone else that wants to join? Better still, maybe you can photocopy some and spread them around where unsuspected users of Einsteins may lurk unseen? We suspect very few Einsteins actually get scrapped, and our chasing up newspaper and magazine adverts for Einstein items tends to indicate that there are large numbers of stranded 3rd- and 4th-generation Einsteiners out there who have working Einsteins but lack monitors, cables, manuals, software, Dos disks and/or any previous knowledge of computers, and who desperately need help, hand-holding, and contact with the magazine, a revived user group, and other users.

We'll do what we can to make contact with and help these stranded Einsteiners ourselves, but how about your helping them too, maybe with a "make contact" note in your local shop or supermarket display area, your parish magazine, family history journal or whatever your own personal interest area is, or maybe in your local paper. If giving us as a contact point, PLEASE DO ASK FOR A S.A.E. with their enquiry!

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BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

As well as overcoming your natural modesty and shyness and sending us lots of fascinating facts, interesting items, absorbing articles, chatty comments, exploratory explanations and pithy provocations to print about what goes on in Albert's innards, how you use your 256 to run a bakery, or whatever else we've all been dying to learn from you but you mistakenly thought would bore us stiff; and as well as saving yourself half a crown by renewing your subs even if it's not due yet, another very useful thing you can do that will be of practical help to your fellow Einsteiners and to us in serving them and you, is rooting out all your computing clutter that you haven't had any use for in the last twenty blue moons and never will, and passing it on to us so we can recycle it for you. Now a lot of people seem to have got the crazy notion that recycling is all about carting things from one side of the country to the other so they can be minced up small, melted down, and turned into something else.

NONSENSE !!! That's not recycling. That's SQUANDERBUGGING !!! Recycling is all about keeping on using whatever it is productively until it is completely worn out and can no longer be economically maintained in working order. THAT, we fervently hope, is what people with Einsteins are doing with them when they are forced to "upgrade" because poor little Albert can no longer cope with what they need a computer to do for them. Passing them on to a new proud owner who couldn't afford or justify their own computer otherwise.

We badly need lots of Einstein stuff to help us serve you better and to substantially reduce our ignorance about Albert & Friends. Back numbers of Einstein user group newsletters -- all user groups -- on disk or on paper, would be much appreciated, but then so would virtually anything else. If you have more than Postman Pat can handle in his van, please do check the delivery address with us first, because no-one else can ever find us, we are so obscurely hidden and accessed through other premises, with guard dogs, barbed wire and electric fences to keep out intruders. Anything that we can't use directly to serve you better we'll pass on to less fortunate Einstein users who have nothing but the machine they stand up in.

Most of all, what we want from you is to write in with suggestions about where we go from here, information about what you use your Einstein for, and what it is you need from the magazine and the user group. Also, of course what you can offer the magazine, and especially the user group. You can have absolutely anything you want from the user group, but you, the members, have to organise it and make it happen. It's hard at present, because there are not that many of you out there that are in contact, but the user group is the ideal way to organise anything, on the basis MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK.

For the magazine, we can't print what isn't there to print. What's been incredibly successful in other user group magazines is to give a page or two of the magazine to devotees of programs like WDPRO or Cracker, so they can have their own little mini-magazine. We know there are avid devotees of these and other programs out there, and we'd be delighted to give you space to share your knowledge and expertise with us in this way. If we can get the subscription numbers back up again so the printing cost per copy is once more under control, there'll be no problem at all in finding space for you. We

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also have some material for publication, passed to us on take-over, but we haven't a clue what's been published and what hasn't. Authors please contact us if you've sent something in and it hasn't appeared in print. Please also contact us if you had something published in the past, that other users would benefit from being reprinted in revised and/or updated form. We can't write everything ourselves, and most of you out there are far more knowledgeable and expert about Albert than we can hope to be for quite a long while yet.

EXTERMINATE !!! EXTERMINATE !!!

Remember the Daleks? That was their attitude to anything that wasn't another Dalek. We had intended to try our hand at a little minor desktop publishing, if only to make the front page look nicer, but the membership details are kept on computer database to simplify the task of printing the magazine address labels, and on taking over from Graham and comparing the manual records with the computer records we found overwhelming proof that the programs that run the membership database could only have been written by Daleks. There are in fact two quite different sets of programs to do the same job, of different vintages, but neither can be trusted to do the job without going round exterminating wildly if you are looking the other way at the time.

Consequently we've had to spend a solid fortnight since then teaching ourselves enough about how such programs should work to be able to scrap the existing ones completely, and write and debug new ones that do what they are told to do and nothing else. We've done our best to cross-check the records, but the paper records seem to have been randomly exterminated too, so we can't tell who the Daleks killed off.

We've also scrapped the crazy system where the computer performs obscure mathematical calculations on your computer record about how many magazines you are still due to every time the mailing list is printed, because it can't be trusted and we're pretty sure that it's responsible for exterminating large numbers of members by deleting them from the mailing list database, and thus, of course, making sure they never got a renewal notice. Since Graham doesn't seem to have ever chased up non-renewals, these dratted Daleks have got away with slaughtering members unchallenged on a horrendous scale!

We found that at some stage the Daleks had been giving this system a trial run by exterminating all your membership numbers and giving you a number one less than you'd had before. Seems a bit odd to us that none of you ever noticed, but perhaps not, since everyone in the group more than five years seems to have been liable to be given a completely different number several times anyway on a purely random basis for no very good reason, and up to four of you seem to have been sharing the same number at the same time anyway!

We've now put a stop to all this Dalek nonsense, and also to the Dalek trick of trying to make your magazine go astray in the post by printing a series of numbers to the right of the postcode to try and confuse the automatic postal sorting machines into sending your magazine to Timbuctoo. From now on your Einstein User Group membership number is shown on the line below your name, the magazines are numbered consecutively from Robby Burns' first UKEUG Newsletter -- this issue is No.65 -- and the issue number which you have paid up to

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(and should renew on or before) appears to the right of your membership number. If you have opted to be anonymous and don't want other members to know that you exist, then *** should appear on your label somewhere. In due course as renewals come in it will be transferred to appear in front of the postcode (this makes it easier to program you to be invisible), but that will take awhile to achieve.

In view of these problems with Daleks, PLEASE CHECK YOUR NAME/ADDRESS/ EXPIRY DETAILS CAREFULLY and advise us if they are in error. Also, if you happen to be in contact with other Einstein users who've lapsed, please check whether it was because they never got a renewal notice & thought we'd just folded our tent and faded away in the night. Or they may well have "upgraded" to another machine and passed their Einstein on, but not told the new owner how to make contact with us to take out a subscription. We want to keep every single Einstein in use that we can when the owner "upgrades" or otherwise ceases to be an Einstein, and this often depends on whether we can keep in touch with whoever has the machines. If YOU pass your machine on, PLEASE do tell us where it's gone, pass on any magazines and documentation with the machine, and tell the new owner that we'll transfer the balance of the existing subscription to the new owner if they write in and register the change of owner with us. NO CHARGE FOR DOING THIS -- we can't support Einstein owners if we don't know they exist!

SHARWARD SERVICES

At press time it was unsure whether Sharward Services would continue to support the Einstein now that they and Graham are no longer involved in producing the magazine, but we very much hope this service to Einstein users will continue, not least because it will take the revived user group quite some time to organise itself to provide an adequate replacement service. More news on this next issue, we hope.

EINSTEIN PUBLIC DOMAIN SOFTWARE LIBRARY

At press time the situation here was somewhat confused, since we understand that Jim is now running the PC library as an independent shareware library. We consider that the Einstein library content and user interface need substantially upgrading to enable it to be readily used by the complete novices who increasingly become handed-on Einstein users, but Jim is reluctant to invest time and effort at the present minimal level of Einstein interest. Update on this next issue.

NEXT MAGAZINE ISSUE

This was to have been the bumper, whopper too-thick-to-get-through-the-letterbox issue by Milton Finesilver mentioned in the last issue (with the pussy cat on the cover), but problems arose when it landed on Graham's desk a few days before we took over, and Graham hurriedly passed the buck to us. For reasons best known to himself Milton had decided to open this issue with an 18-page article on 13 different brands of computer printer, mainly concentrating on page-printers. Probably ideal for the sort of corporate computer buyer who reads the glossy 500-page PC magazines in order to be persuaded that 6-month-old 486-processor machines with 120 Megabyte hard disks and 20 Megabytes of RAM are old hat and ought to be scrapped straight away, but the relevance to most Einstein users' needs or budgets must surely be somewhat questionable.

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There was also a rather interesting article on the survival of 3-inch disks into the nineties, which most readers would have appreciated, and an article on what the people who marketed BBCBASIC(280) are doing in doctors' surgeries, that seemed to get a bit confused towards the end. There was rather a mishmash of various BASIC listings for you to tap in too, but it wasn't at all clear which machines these were from, to or via, as there was absolutely minimal documentation of them by REMs within the listings, and little or nothing by way of explanation.

At first we thought you would probably blow a fuse and cancel your subscription if we mailed this lot out to you without explanation, and anyway we couldn't afford to print 44 pages with the subscription money we had. In the end we arranged a clandestine meeting with Milton to discuss the matter in the dead of mid-afternoon in the faerie grotto of the down-side buffet at Ashford railway station, (which had been set fire to the previous week and resembled a Muslim-held town in Serbian Bosnia as a result of this and of the whole area being systematically ripped apart to build the new road system for the Ashford International railway station). The surreal effect was greatly enhanced by your editor wearing a bright yellow Wordstar baseball cap, while Milton sported a vivid pink AMN back number for recognition purposes, with the tricky negotiations to find some area of mutual agreement being conducted in furtive whispers just loud enough to be heard over the raucous din of an Alien Invaders machine at one end of the station buffet, aided and abetted by an unholy din of screeching and clanging and grinding noises from the new Channel Tunnel international trains on test immediately outside. The increasingly anxious and agitated expressions on Milton's face were eventually explained when it emerged that he has extremely sensitive ears, and is unusually allergic to even one of these noises being inflicted on him, let alone a whole cacophony of them in concert!

Having come to the conclusion that we could only get away with mailing out Milton's issue to you as a standard AMN one if we said "send it back clean and we'll credit you an issue if you really hate it", Milton opened the discussion on the basis of "Never mind the quality - Feel the Width!" by insisting that as it had twice as many pages as a normal AMN, we could afford to print it by charging you for it as though it were two issues, not one! Alternatively he'd print it and publish it himself, sell as many copies of it as anyone would buy, and if there happened to be any left over, we could have them to mail out to you, the people who'd already paid to subscribe to it. Isn't that nice of him? With a bit of luck you might have got four pages each out of his 44-page "special issue".

After about three hours of going round and round in circles, and trying to pin him down to something approaching reality, Milton admitted that he wanted to advertise and sell this special issue of All Micro News himself (whether it sold any copies or not) in order to get it on his CV and be able to get a job in journalism on the strength of it, but in return for calling it All Micro News, he'd order enough copies for us to be able to supply a copy to each of you as part of your subscription entitlement if we'd pay for these "extra" copies up-front at the run-on price that it would cost him to get them printed. We accepted this offer, as at long last it was a suggestion that made some sort of sense, and we agreed to phone Milton the next evening to find out how much the cheque needed to be made out for, and the name of the printer he wanted it made out to.

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Next evening we phoned Milton as arranged, but meanwhile he'd changed his mind. Now he says he's going to go it alone, get his issue printed himself, and sell it by adverts in the computer magazines. The September / October issue of All Micro News isn't going to be the September / October issue of All Micro News after all. Milton's going to change the name, call it something else, and sell your September issue of the magazine to other people instead. He says that if by some mischance there happen to be one or two copies left unsold he may still let us have his leftovers to share among you. Aren't you lucky? Would you like page four, or would you prefer page twelve?

Well, that's the September / October issue gone for a Burton! Anyone out there feel like writing something intelligent for the rest of us to read, so you don't have to suffer from another issue packed full of the sort of drivel we're likely to churn out?

A BRIGHT IDEA

We really don't like to admit it, as it might completely destroy the reputation we've built up over so many years, but we've just had one.

Is there, by any chance, anyone out there in a position to donate (or place on loan) a good working plain paper photocopier (A3 size would be lovely) and/or offset litho printing machine/platemaker and/or saddle stitcher (saddle stapler) and/or ink and/or paper. Magazine envelopes would be very useful too. Items like this would materially tip our finances in the right direction while we're taking steps to rebuild the economy of the magazine and the user group and ensuring that they return to a healthy state with a long future.

But please do check delivery arrangements with us before rushing off to Carter Patterson with 2 tons of Wharfedale stop-cylinder printing press under your arm, or anything else that's too big for Postman Pat to get into his little van. *****

If you don't like this issue of the magazine, and think the office cat could have done it better, who the heck do you think produced it? Are you volunteering to do the next one? *****

Anyone good on the hardware hacking or repair side? Albert/256 spares and repairs problems may be responsible for far too many good machines with minor faults being junked when they could have been repaired or used to keep others going. Do we have anyone with repair skills/talent /experience or just curiosity, or who could prepare simple DIY data sheets or articles or hints and tips, or something of the sort? *****

WE'RE LONELY -- PLEASE WRITE

Please do write in and tell us about yourselves and about your computing interests, your discoveries, your computing needs, and just what hardware, software, utilities and peripherals you have, whether Einstein or otherwise. If you'd like to write a one-off or regular piece for the magazine, we'll be happy to share some space with you.

INTRODUCING ANNE

Need a new computer ribbon? Try Anne, who runs RIBBONS & THINGS, and takes a delight in giving good service. Fax/phone: 0280 - 817217.

ALL MICRO NEWS

FAMILY HISTORY ON COMPUTER WITHOUT A FAMILY HISTORY PROGRAM

I feel very sorry for people who are persuaded into using database or family history programs for keeping their ancestors safe on a computer. Of course, if you are running a one-name society there just might be a credible argument for it, but I'm not convinced, even then.

All the specialised family history programs I've seen are based on a database engine of some sort, and you learn the hard way how vulnerable you are, trusting your ancestors to them, when the power goes down while your one and only database file is open, and every single one of your ancestors right back to Alfred The Grate is entombed forever, nevermore to be accessed, just as effectively as if all the parish registers, manorial records, muster rolls and census returns had been sent for salvage when Mr Hitler was looming across The Channel. In theory you backed it all up to a duplicate floppy disk just five minutes earlier, but it never works out like that, does it?

In my case my dear old Mum had spent the best part of seventy years ferreting out her ancestors when she invited me to bring my typewriter along and type the results up for her, and I wasn't about to take any risks with that many ancestors when I suggested putting it on computer.

Fortunately, while I was considering the best way of doing it, I read her copy of FAMILY TREE magazine, in which there was an article by a chap who'd used Locoscript on the PCW to draw up and print out his family tree. It looked a bit odd, but was perfectly readable, and it got me thinking.

Apart from original documentation or transcripts, traditional paper-based family history really involves three different types of record. The family tree records descent from an ancient ancestor, while the ancestor chart records ascent from you as far back as you can trace. If you are indulging in the pretty futile and pointless exercise of only tracing back your male ancestors in order to follow the family name, the two records will be pretty much one and the same. However, if you do this you really might just as well be collecting locomotive engine numbers instead, and anyway you'll finish up sooner or later wasting all your time and energy chasing red herrings, because at some time or another it will have been "Uncle Jack" and not "Dear Daddy", who fathered the child.

It's far more interesting and far more fruitful to follow your ancestor chart back along all its roots, filling in a family tree for each family it takes you back to as you encounter it and as information conveniently comes to hand. It's also far more likely that in doing so you'll encounter other enlightened people doing the same thing, or whose family members have already followed these patterns of research. This is where rewards really can result for you, because not only are most other family researchers extremely nice people to know, just like you are yourself, but frequently they will have pieces of information they've picked up on the way that either link your family and theirs and open up new shared vistas, or that are useless to them but invaluable to you.

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PRINTMEET, Folk Hall, New Earswick, York. 25 Sept, all welcome, free
SMALL PRINTERS' OPEN DAY: Yelverton, Devon, 02 October. 0844-212485
ALL MICRO SHOW:- 13 NOVEMBER, BINGLEY HALL, STAFFORD 0473-272002

ALL MICRO NEWS

You can draw up family trees and ancestor charts on paper, or in a somewhat bent and distorted shape if you use a word processor or text editor. If you have a mental capacity equal to that of Albert Einstein you might even be able to work out how to do it in 40-column WDPRO!!! Either way you can't do much with it on screen and will want a hard copy printout to work from.

There's not much real benefit from just train-spotting your ancestors, and whether it's with quill pen or wordprocessor the real joy of it comes when you take all the scattered bits of evidence and begin to build them up into individual personal records of each of these people whose flesh and blood are your flesh and blood, and of their brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren, of the places they lived and worked, of what sort of work they did and who they did it for.

If you'd like to know just what happened to Sarah Hartwell, who was born about 1820 and lived or worked in St. Albans in the 1840s, I can tell you, because she married my great-great grandfather James, who earned his living as a whitesmith. Ben Butterley was a sicklesmith and was probably born about 1730, but we don't know his wife's name or if either of them originally came from Eckington, where their son John married 20-years-young Mary Hardy on 19 January 1808.

It's ever so easy to build up a complete record, bit by bit, of every single person on your ancestor chart or family tree. By all means make full use of your computer, whether it's an Einstein or a Jupiter Ace or an IBM mainframe, BUT MAKE THE COMPUTER YOUR SERVANT, NOT YOUR MASTER!!! The computer is ideal for storing and editing data, but A4 sheets of printout are the ideal human interface. They -- or straight ASCII files on disk (or tape) if the format is compatible -- are the only way you can be ABSOLUTELY sure of interchanging data with others, (who may only just have upgraded to quill pen technology). I simply copied what my dear old Mum had already started to do -- a summary on a foolscap sheet for each person, of the information she'd collected about them over the past seventy years -- and set up a text file for each person. For simplicity and compatibility I identified each person (and their record file) with a code consisting of the first four letters of the surname plus the three significant numerals of the year of birth. If it's not known, use "x" instead until it is. The final letter or number is a check digit, in case two personal filename codes would otherwise be identical -- often the case with uncertain birthdates. This system of coding is simple, easily understood, and accommodates programs that insist on their own filename extensions.

The system is still evolving and can be tailored to your needs exactly, not like most family history programs, which are like Henry Ford's idea of car colour schemes: "You can have any colour you like so long as it's black!" After marriage, husband and wife record sheets tend to duplicate each other, and my system is now tending to evolve to show children and domestic events on the wife's sheet and work events on the husband's sheet, but events of equal significance to both are more likely to be entered on both sheets. All individuals with their own personal record set up are referenced both by name and by code, and children's records tend to be included with parents until and unless their own personal record is set up.

A sample personal record sheet is shown on the next page, but the beauty of the system is that you can do it just the way YOU want.

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ADAM8761

ADAMS, Walter James ("Jim")

record last updated August 4, 1993
Welwyn 1876 - Welwyn 1972

F = ADAM85X1 Walter ADAMS
M = CHAP8XX1 Amy, nee CHAPMAN
W1= "Lizzie" (Elizabeth), nee GIDDINGS
W2= Florence, nee xxxxxxx

1876 Apr 30 b. at "The Steamer", Inn at top of Welwyn Hill, Old Welwyn
1876 Jun 04 c.
1888 xxx xx age 12, went into the family business at Welwyn
1889 rode penny-farthing cycle with wooden rim & iron tyres
pre-1898 W1.Lizzie GIDDINGS, sister to bro.George's wife "Emmie"
1898 xxx xx dd. W1.Lizzie, age 22, and child, in childbirth
1898 xxx xx db. W1.Lizzie, with child, Welwyn Churchyard
1900 Jul xx W2.Florence xxxxxxx of xxxxx at Lemsford Church
190x xxx xx b. ADAM90X1 Leslie Walter @ Cromer Hyde (nr.Baldock?)
1914 xxx xx graduated from the penny-farthing & bought a motor car
WW1 served in Welwyn Fire Brigade
1920 xxx xx started in business with brother George as builders
1927 xxx xx built new office, Mill Lane, across road from original yard
WW2 head of Welwyn Rescue & Demolition Squad
1951 xxx xx dd. W2.Florence
1972 xxx xx dd. Walter

Served 25 years in Welwyn Fire Brigade; 15 years as Chief Officer

LETTERS PAGE

Dear Graham,

I wrote to you on disk on 5/10/92 with my entry for the AMN 1/9 Competition, plus index to AltMN & AMN. You published the index in AMN 1/10 and said 'John wins the prize', but I never got the prize or my disk back. I wrote again in May with a further program and index on disk, but I still haven't had my prize - or the disks back.

I'd like to hear from you that all's well with AMN & the Einstein Club. Was the last "AMN" Vol 1/12 (which I received in April,) or have I missed a copy?

John LUTHER, member 0083, August 1993.

@@@@ Whoops, Sorry John. You should have received AMN 2/1 a day or two after you wrote. No, all was far from well with AMN and the Einstein Club, but IF MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK things can only get better. Sorry about the disks. We are trying to sort out the material Graham handed over just as fast as we can, but things are still in a bit of a mess.

Dear Sir,

I recently bought a secondhand Einstein & I've been told you produce a user group mag. I have managed to get hold of some software & the BASIC manual, but I'm eager to learn more about the computer, how I can get hold of manuals, etc., & how to make the best use of what appears to be an excellent machine.

Please advise me the cost of subscriptions, how the user group operates, & how I can get copies of the mag (plus back numbers) so I can tap into the network of Einstein users & their vast collective expertise.

Des Guiry, Exeter, June '93

ALL MICRO NEWS

LETTERS, CONTINUED

***** WHOOPS! Sorry it's taken since June to reply, Des. I never thought when I suggested you contact Graham, that I'd finish up replying to you in his place, months later. Details herewith. *****

Dear AMN,

My 256 3" disk drive faded out slowly, & now fails to read any disks. Could it be an alignment problem? Who could fix it for me? Where can I get a replacement, or could I fit a standard TC01 drive?
Andrew Fay, member 0636.

***** Graham says the 256 uses a low-profile belt-driven disk drive, B&H have belts, but they are the wrong sort, and if you do find the right ones the speed setting is critical (more on this later). He says it IS possible to use a TC01 drive, but the casing needs surgery to fit the drive in it, and an adapter cable is needed.

There's probably a 256 owner out there who's had exactly this problem and solved it. Article and diagrams please !!!

Anyone know of good repairers for this or other Einstein kit?
>>>> Incidentally, we've heard that one or two of you have upgraded to 3.5" INTERNAL disk drive. Please tell the rest of us about this!

PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES

***** Fred the office cat says his paws are terrible sore after keying in the whole of this issue himself while we watched "The Good Life" on the telly. He says we'd better do something a bit sharpish about organising many paws to make light work, otherwise he'll have to harness up a team of white mice to produce the next issue, and they can only spell three words, two of which are "cheese"! So if you are looking for promotion, we are able to offer you some fantastic opportunities. We won't mention pay (there isn't any) but the job satisfaction is enormous and everyone else will think you are just great. Play your cards right and you'll even get your name in print!
***** If you know of any Einstein sources/repairers/user groups/clubs/magazines/newsletters, please let us know. We also need back numbers of newsletters/magazines of ALL Einstein user groups, living or dead.

>>>> BACK NUMBERS, see list in AMN 2/1. Also EINSTEIN USER, (4 issues per volume) 1/1 thru 2/2 and 2/4 thru 4/4 available. A few EAEA & UKEUG newsletters too. All at £1 each or £5 for 6 (including p+p)

>>>> TO S.A.E. OR NOT TO S.A.E.? Always a source of problems in ANY club or society whose officers admit to being able to read and write. Unless you provide SAE (or return address label plus postage) we'll normally assume you want any response included with the next routine mailing, or that you prefer to pay the postage on delivery to you, if the response is for your benefit. Obviously this doesn't apply if we're replying for the user group's benefit. Even here SAE/return postage is much appreciated.

>>>> CHECK THAT JUNK MAIL. We recycle everything, including envelopes, and you wouldn't want to bin the magazine before you'd read it !!

>>>> All mail and payments to: EINSTEIN USER GROUP, Ivy Cottage, <<<<<< Church Road, New Romney, Kent, England. TN28 8TY