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NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 60

April 1998



YES, THERE IS A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE!



This month sees a change to the intended programme. The meeting will start with an Extraordinary General Meeting. This is to discuss a proposed change to the club's constitution. Hopefully it will be very brief!

Then, the club is privileged to welcome Dave Smith known to many as Dave the Disc Doctor. Please come prepared to ask all of those questions you want clarified about discs, the problems you have experienced with them in the past and the meaning of those strange messages that drop into view sometimes and the best way of dealing with them.

If you are the proud owner of Amstrad's PcW 16, you might be interested to learn that Dixon's have now purchased the whole package from Amstrad and if you have any queries they have a help line. If you try to get help from Amstrad they will only give you the help line number for Dixons. 0870 9013000. I wanted to find out about compatibility of external printers and they were quite helpful. With the help of experts in the field of the PcW 16, the club is trying to put together a package for these users. It will comprise most, if not all, of the detail published about the machine since it's release. Be patient! From the comments I have heard, there is very little likelihood of there being any further software produced for this machine. You maybe interested to know my Canon BJ10 sx has been returned from their workshop after the repair I referred to a couple of issues ago and its fine. The service can be recommended, 10 working days is the normal time they expect to turn around your printer and it is returned with a test sheet produced on the repaired machine. (Canon's phone No. 0181 680919)

David Lalieu

Chairman's Chatterings

The next club night is in Committee Room 2 of the Basildon Centre on Thursday 2nd April at 7.30 pm and the talk is about using programs other than those from Creative Technology in the Network. It will primarily be a demonstration so there is no need to bring anything along for this evening unless, of course, there is a program you may wish to try. I will not guarantee we will solve all your problems but we'll have a go. However ensure that your discs are 3.5" or we will not be able to accommodate them.

On the subject of 3.5" discs, Peter Hathaway and I were preparing for last month's meeting on printers using a 9512 fitted with a 3.5" A: drive to replace the original 3". As I have said before, I would recommend anyone who wishes to keep their PCW going into the next century to get a 3.5" drive fitted before too long. However, Peter and I learned something new about 3.5" discs that day. Nothing to put you off using them but something of which you should be aware.

As I pulled a disc out of the drive the metal shutter had disappeared, obviously remaining behind inside the drive. There was no warning noise but no shutter either. We switched off the machine and, lifting the plastic flap gently, peered inside the drive. It was too dark to see a thing. With the 9512 fitted with a Rampak and a Keymouse, with cables to a printer switchbox and, of course, the mains, it was not practical to shake the shutter out of the drive whilst still in the machine (even if it would have come out). So the PCW was taken apart and the drive itself removed out into daylight. On tipping the drive forward gently the shutter came to the front and was gingerly pulled out with a pair of tweezers. So far, so good.

We re-assembled the PCW and started it up using a very ancient CP/M start-of-day, just in case. There was an almighty racket and the machine refused to start! This was why I had insisted on using an old start-up disc. There was nothing for it; the drive was extremely suspect and would not start. Peter phoned for a new drive which Pinboard supplied in 48 hours;

thank you Tony and Cora. Several days later I returned and installed the new drive which worked perfectly first time.

As we now had a drive which was unreliable Peter and I, both being engineers, said 'Let's see what's wrong with it!'. We unclipped the cover plate from the dead drive and there, sitting inside, was a small spring, 30mm or so long, bent at an angle of about 160 degrees with a small loop in the centre. If we could find out which pivot this had slipped off we could, perhaps, get it going again. As the drive was dead we had no qualms about taking it right down to the bones. We spent over two hours trying to find out where this spring came from! In the end we were just giving it up as a bad loss when Peter's wife walked in and commented that a spring as small of that probably fell out of the disc (not the drive).

Of course, she was right. When the metal shutter had become unclipped from the plastic disc-casing, the spring, which returns the shutter after use, had been free to fall out into the works. That's what was stopping the drive working. However, the spring was still in the disc housing from which the shutter had fallen a few days earlier! The spring had come from another 3.5" disc but its shutter had remained in place. In other words it was possible for the small spring which makes the shutter slide back to prevent the disc surface being exposed to slip out of place even though the shutter itself stayed trapped in the grooves. Peter went through all his discs looking for the one with a loose shutter without success.

Meanwhile, the replacement drive had not been a waste of money for when we re-assembled the old drive again and tried to boot the PCW from it (with an old start-up disc!) the disc would not go in properly and obviously one of the other parts of the mechanism, probably a spring, had been damaged when the drive failed; it was no longer reliable. I spoke to Ray from Pinboard about the possibility of having the drive overhauled. He suggested that the labour costs involved would be more than the price of a new drive. The most likely damage inside



South Essex PCW Club

NOTICE

to all Full Members

There will be an Extraordinary General Meeting
at 7.30 pm on Thursday 2nd April 1998
(at the beginning of the usual club meeting)
to consider a proposed change to the Constitution.

All fully paid-up Full Members of the Club
who are eligible to vote are urged to attend.
(Postal Members do not have voting rights)

The EGM will consider one item only and the
Club meeting will follow immediately afterwards.
Members arriving late will not be able to take part in the
discussion and will not be able to vote on the proposal.

Please ensure you arrive in good time on this evening

Mike Elliston, *Chairman*,
South Essex PCW Club

David Lalieu, *Secretary*
5th March 1998

would be that the loose shutter or spring had scratched or repositioned one or both of the read/write heads, rendering repair impractical.

The moral is to ensure that, when handling 3.5" discs, the shutter is firmly in place in the groove *and* that the spring inside makes the shutter slide back into place to protect the disc surface. Do not be tempted to squeeze the shutters on your 3.5" discs unnecessarily for it can have the reverse effect and open up the jaws so it becomes looser instead. Just handle

them carefully and put them in and out of the drive with the minimum effort necessary. It is perfectly ok to remove a loose shutter from a suspect disc as long as you ensure that the small spring in the leading edge of the disc has been removed also. In addition, never touch the exposed disc surface and keep the disc in a box or plastic envelope when not in use to prevent the egress of dust or grease.

Mike Elliston

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE SOUTH ESSEX PCW CLUB P.D. LIBRARY

For the past couple of years or so the emphasis has been on expanding the range of Clip Art in the library - very much at the continued request of Club Members. Of course it goes without saying that much of this welcome expansion is thanks to Members who have sent in a steady stream of contributions.

It is time, perhaps, to broaden the focus of our efforts. Whilst I am happy to add / find Clip Art to meet specific needs, I shall now put most of my efforts into developing and, when time permits, enhancing our Utilities and Applications software offerings.

Without further ado, I shall move straight on to tell you about databases - for which we now have a superb program suite available in our Library.

What is a database? The best way to think of a database is to use the analogy of a filing cabinet. It stores information in a similar way but the speed of access to a specific range of information is much faster - a computer disk also has the distinct advantage of being somewhat lighter to carry, than a filing cabinet. LocoFile, DBaseII, and MasterFile are all examples of commercial database programs with which you may be familiar.

An example of the effective use of a database would be for a video collection. I used a simple tape numbering system to establish a record of what TV programmes are recorded on which

tapes. An additional advantage is that if, say I wanted to find a space to record a half hour TV program, all I have to do is request a list of tape numbers where SPAREMINS (a variable set up at the outset) is equal or greater than 30. Almost instantly, a list of the videotape numbers which have the requisite 30 minutes of space available appears! Just imagine how long that task would take, hunting through a hundred or so tapes manually!

You could set up a database for names and addresses, shopping lists, a household inventory or cataloguing a stamp collection. The only limits are those set by your imagination!

We now have two of the fastest and most user friendly database applications available for the PCW right here for you, in our Library. "MasterBase" gives you 18, yes 18! sample databases to try out and get used to the concepts involved. "DeskPro" gives you free control of your (PCW dot matrix) printer and you get a disk utility, file utility, memo function and screen savers all included. These programs run in BASIC and come complete with comprehensive documentation for setting up and using.

If you would like either, or both these disks all you have to do is fill out the usual order form and ask for the MasterBase disk (Library Ref: - Disk 56), and/or the DeskPro disk (Library Ref: - Disk 57).

Nick Chaundy - March 1998

Wanted

Issue 2 8000 Plus Magazine
Swop or make available to club
members the following 8000/PCW
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49, 52-59 (inc.) 61, 63, 64, 65, 67,
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Contact Gary Jenkinson
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Standard machine, 3.0" 720k drive, black
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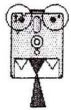
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Contact David Lalieu Secretary

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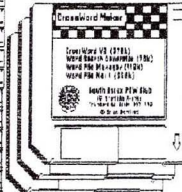
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