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NEWSLETTER

BRITISH AMSTRAD PCW CLUB

Issue No 62 June 1998

HEAR THIS! - HEAR THIS! IT'S CHANGED JUNE CLUB NIGHT NOW THURS. 11 th.

From the Secretary's Desk.

The general reaction to the clubs decision to change its name is positively one of approval. Many comments have been received but none are in disagreement. As many of our members are postal, we are now considering if associated groups would be a good idea. Let me attempt to explain the thinking behind this idea. The club's main attribute is its ability to tutor our members in the most effective use of PCW machines and the software available for these machines. I am sure you will, all agree this is best achieved in a face to face situation. I am also sure you will agree the early manuals for programmes are not very user friendly. It therefore follows, our club nights are probably the best way of learning about a particular subject.

If we had groups or members who were prepared to act in the same way as that promoted in the PCW Plus magazine reader helpline it would benefit many members. If you are able to help your fellow members and prepared to allow them to contact you either by telephone or in writing, please send me your details and we will prepare a help line directory. The details should include your name, town, the hours you prefer to be approached and your area of expertise. Remember our aim is to share knowledge.

The package to help our PcW 16 users is being prepared, Adrian Braddy of PCW Today magazine has started a "Save our Sixteen" campaign and is attempting to encourage software writers to take up the challenge and write additional programmes including a CP/M emulator and compiler.

F.S.D Continued

He says " The PcW 16 is increasingly becoming the odd one out in the PCW world. The vibes coming from long standing PCW users towards the new PcW machine are largely hostile because the machine will not run CP/M." He also suggests there will be 40,000 PcW 16 users before very long and these users will want new software; is this going to be a missed opportunity for programmers? If you want further details of his SOS campaign you can contact him at, PCW Today, 150, Oxford Road, Middlesbrough, Teeside, TS5 5EL and he will send you a pack.

David Lalieu.

Chairman's Chatterings

I was recently contacted by one of our longer standing members querying where he could obtain repairs to his PCW and who offered the best service. I asked what the problem was, the machine in question and the set-up. He had an original PCW 8256 to which a trader had added another 256k internally by fitting extra chips to the mother board. He had subsequently added an internal 3.5" B: drive to make it similar to a standard PCW 8512. Knowing that his 3" drive would not last forever he had fitted an external switchable A: 3.5 drive so that, whenever possible, the machine was started from the 3.5" A: rather than the 3" original drive; probably a good idea nowadays.

When MicroDesign 2 came out he was attracted to the idea of mixing graphics with text and when MicroDesign 3 was released he was sold immediately! This did, however, mean that the current 512k of memory was somewhat limited so he purchased a Creative Technology RamPort, 1.5 Mb to give the maximum memory available. He also invested in a KeyMouse, since this would make MicroDesign so much easier to run and, for good measure, a scanner to enable him to import his own scanned images as illustrations for the parish magazine and the ladies' knitting circle newsletter. Finally out came LocoScript 4 with the attraction of MicroDesign graphics in full colour so a colour inkjet printer was attached to the rear via the RamPort.

So what was the problem with the PCW? Did not everything work OK now that he had upgraded both hardware and software to the latest available? Why was he not satisfied? *The power board in the PCW 8256 (as it was in reality) had burned out.* Now I mustn't put an exclamation mark at the end of that last sentence because it's not really funny but he took great exception when I suggested that this was rather like towing a caravan *and* a trailer *and* a horse-box *and* someone else's car behind a Citroen 2CV!

The moral is to be aware of the power limitations of a bog-standard PCW, especially the earlier models which were designed to be single-drive machines. The disc drives probably take the greatest electrical load so think about having an external power supply provided if you fit another drive. If you are running such a machine. near to its limits, think in terms of removing any peripherals if you do not use them on a daily basis (*when the PCW is turned off!*). You do not need the scanner or the KeyMouse permanently attached for LocoScript if that is what you use most of the time.

If you have got a set-up rather like the above, think how you use it. In particular note that the memory is most likely to fail or give suspicious results when the disc drives are working, even more so when the printer comes into play, so get into the habit of

A Friendly Word of Advice from your PD Librarian

I have been receiving a number of requests for Public Domain software where the discs supplied by the member are High Density 3.5" discs which have been reformatted on a PCW to Double Density (720k). In several such cases the members have been experiencing data failure on these reformatted HD discs after a very short period of use. If you have encountered no such problem then you are indeed fortunate.

The reason I say this is because the magnetic material on a High Density disc (having two square holes and marked with the HD symbol) is thinner than that on a Double Density disc and the recorded signal is weaker than that on a DD disc. On a PC with an HD 1.44mB disc drive the drive distinguishes between an HD disc and a DD disc by the presence of the extra square hole and adjusts the signal strength accordingly; your PCW drives cannot do this. In addition a 3.5" DD disc drive as used on a PCW has a signal which is not only stronger but wider spread and with the thinner surface material used on HD discs this can cause corruption of data on adjacent tracks when used to write to HD discs.

Experience has shown that members using the, now cheaper, HD discs are having disc data failures much sooner than those using the standard 3.5" DD discs. Indeed, generally speaking, this has this has become such a significant problem with 3.5" discs that the committee has determined to make it Club policy only to supply copies of PD Library discs on standard DD discs (with one square hole only) which I can supply if required.

Needless to say, none of the above should detract from the wisdom of always making a back-up copy of any disc as soon as you receive it (or amend it).

Please ensure that *all* discs sent in for copying from Library discs are both formatted *and then verified* on the machine on which they are to be used.

Nick Chaundy April 1998

Extra Chatterings

Elsewhere you should find a note from our PD librarian about 3.5" discs. We have recently had a number of requests for Nick to copy 3" software from the master discs onto 3.5" discs for use on updated machines. If you have already tried yourself using Pip.Com, Diskit or something similar and got the message *Illegal copy* not only is it extremely unlikely that it will run in the new environment but it is breaking copyright law anyway. Please do not ask Nick to make copies of non-public domain software: to quote the notice about credit that used to appear over the grocer's counter: *Refusal may offend.*

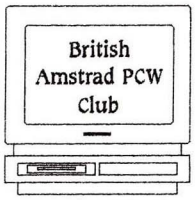
Mike Elliston

Extra F.S.D.

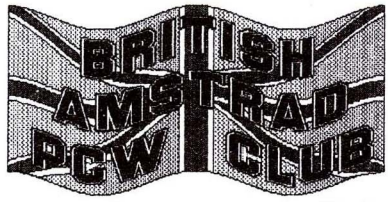
Please use your vote for the logo competition, it is your club and you should participate on an important item such as this. The prize for the winner is £15:00 worth of book tokens, I would think most manuals are now out of print, thank goodness. The results of the competition will be annouced in the next newsletter. Ken Rouse has vonunteered to act as the invigilator for the competition, Please return your slip to him in the enclosed envelope before the last day of June Well Done! Ken. It looks as though I might get the last word in on this occasion.

David Lalieu

No. 1



No. 2



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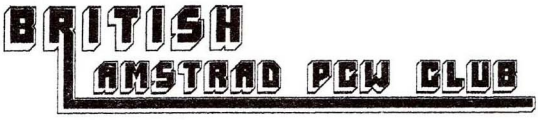

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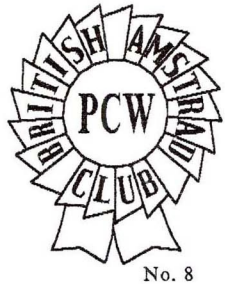

No. 8

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No. 11

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Address: .....

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No. 1		No. 2	
No. 3		No. 4	
No. 5		No. 6	
No. 7		No. 8	
No. 9		No.10	
No. 11			

Please tick ONE box only to record your vote.

C. C. Continued.

Finishing Edit and saving to disc first, *then* pressing P from the Disc Manager to print the file. This way you will, at least, have saved the file to disc before the printer adds to the load on the set-up. Remember also that early versions of LocoScript ran quite comfortably within the original upper limit of 512k. However if you have every LX font imaginable on your LocoScript 3 or 4 start-of-day disc/s you will start using areas of memory which previously had not come into use.

Both LocoScript Software and Cirtech supply a RamTest program. Use it immediately you have any suspicions about the running of your machine. And when the program comes up with a message like: *You have 1024k of memory. Do you wish to continue the test?* answer Yes and continue so that the full bank of memory is checked, not just simply counted.

Congratulations to Adrian Braddy and the team at *PCW Today* for the cover disc that comes with Issue No.9. Over 500k of 'free' software on a 3.5" disc (if you have paid the additional £5 per annum cover disc subscription). Seventeen Basic programs, most of which seem to be games; twenty-five MicroDesign Area files, all of animals; five . COM files which are games and six which are utilities; one new font, namely Old English 66, and a new MDS shades file, both for MicroDesign 3.

There is a limited introduction via PCWToday.COM and a LateNews.Doc text file. Without trying to appear too critical on this first edition there is a distinct lack of documentation for both the games and the utility programs. I'm not a games person but I suppose there is no harm in trying out a game from Basic; if all else fails you can at least reboot. However I am unhappy about trying out utilities without knowing the outcome.

For example DU53 simply gave me the options 1=Fix/unfix format, 2=Format, 3=Save Boot Sector, etc, (and happily EXIT). I decided not to experiment whether I was supposed to press the numeral 1 or the f1 key, especially as I noticed that it was talking about the *hard disc drives* on my machine. What *would* 'unfix format' have done there? DU53CON is probably equally valuable if you know what it does but no way do I *play* with such toys. DiscTool, equally dangerous on a hard disc machine *or in the hands of a tyro on a normal PCW*, left a frame and message on my screen, even after the use of CLS.

DIRR is more friendly but less useful than DIR [FULL] though it is half the size of DIR. COM. Serif.COM changes the screen characters to another font, not unlike those used in ForeWord and Rocket; Normal.Com switches back to the usual, more legible PCW screen font (thank Goodness). All in all, an excellent bundle of goodies for just over a quid and I heartily recommend those who are not on the mailing list to subscribe for the cover disc option before too long.

Two serious criticisms: Although the introductory message does state that copyright exists on some of the material on the disc I'd be very wary of issuing an MDA of Mickey Mouse without permission; Mr Disney's successors get quite hot under the collar about copyright on their images. The other was the positioning of the cover disc, admittedly in a natty protective box, in the *corner* of the cover (and thus the envelope). My envelope had gone through the franking machine just where the disc was stuck in place. (Murphy's Law never goes wrong!) The disc was slightly crushed to the extent that I had to manually re-seat the metal shutter before it would go into the drive properly. I would recommend that the disc box be stuck in the *middle* of the cover next time, thus missing the franking stamp.

Mike Elliston.

SMALL ADS.

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PCW Plus & 8000 Plus Magazines Index

A database that takes all of the hard work out of searching for that elusive article or tip in your magazine library, available in LocoFile. One or three files, LocoScript, ASCII,dBase II or Hardcopy. On 3½"discs @ £8:00. The hardcopy @ £10:00. Cheques payable to:- D.C. Lalieu.
10, Sheridan Avenue, Thundersley, Essex, SS7 1RD.

David Greenhough PCW Items for Sale

Flipper 3 (version 3.10) 3.5" disk
LocoScript 3 (8256/8512 version 3.06a) 3" disk
Printer support pack for Locoscript 3 3" disk
LocoFile (9512) 3" disk
LocoFont 24 (for LocoScript 2) 3" disk
LocoLink 2 (Sept 91) 3" PCW disk & 3.5"/5.25" PC disk
Maxam 2-Arnor assembler 3" disk
Stop Press 3" disk
Mix C compiler 3" disk
Moonstone's PCW Toolkit 3" disk
Cirtech SpeedPrint (print buffer) with 3" disk

Books

Program your PCW Ian Sinclair
The user's guide to Amstrad PCW 8256/8512- Don Thomasson
SID reference manual - Digital Research

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