

pcw Today

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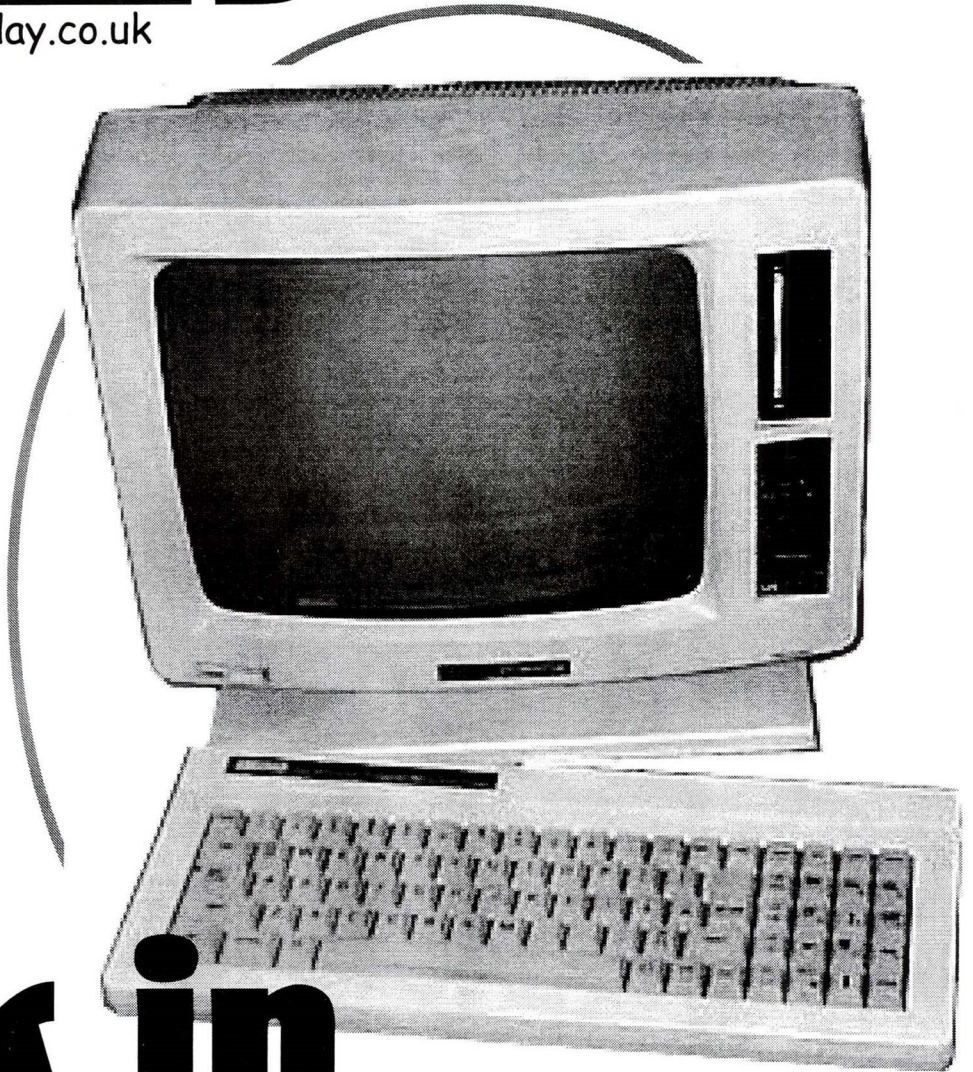
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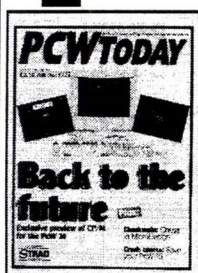
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PCW Today



ISSUE 12

- New 16 software boost
- Play chess in MicroDesign
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ISSUE 13

- Exclusive: Loco boss interview
- Complete guide to getting online
- Fix your PCW
- Logo tutorial
- Loco book review



ISSUE 14

- Review of new e-m@iler
- How to mend a dodgy drive
- New Loco spreadsheet
- Internet review

To order a back issue, simply send a cheque or postal order for the correct amount (payable to PCW Today) to the usual address. Back issues cost £2.50 each, or £7 for all three.



Happy Birthday

It's been a bit of a struggle at times, but it's still hard to believe we've been going for five years.

Back in the heady days of Spring 1996 the first edition of *PCW Today* hit the presses.

In actual fact it was called *MicroMotion* then, but we had changed the name by issue two.

Like every magazine we have had our ups and downs, but it is a rare feat for any publication to last half a decade and I am proud to say we are still here, along with most of our 1,000 readers who have stuck by us. Thank you for your continued support.

In November I'll be journeying to the centre of the earth. Well almost. I'm taking part on a two-week cycling trek across Ecuador to raise cash for Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Partly because of that and partly to celebrate *PCW Today's* birthday, we are producing a special charity edition of the magazine that will include all the best bits from our early years. I hope you all buy a copy and help a very worthy cause.

Adrian Braddy
Editor

first look

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Headlines

Vital records on 3" disks could be lost

Archaeologists worried about dependence on Amstrad PCWs

SCIENTISTS fear vital archaeological records could be lost as many are stored on old Amstrad disks.

While computer technology may have moved on, a lot of important data is still kept on reliable old three-inch disks.

And it has been revealed that programs like LocoScript and LocoFile are still being used to store key records.

But now archaeologists are afraid for the future as the disks and the computers they run on become rarer.

Studies in York have revealed that data stored on computers could disappear in little more than a decade.

The irony is that archaeological information held in magnetic format is decaying faster than it ever did in the ground," said William Kilbride of the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) at the University of York.

The ADS was asked to examine computer records of 180 Bronze Age excavations in North East London conducted between 1991 and 1996 by the Newham Museum Archaeological Service, which has now closed.

The Newham excavations yielded important information about London and the Thames during the Bronze Age, but that data was never published.

The records comprised more than 6,000 database, geophysical and CAD (Computer Aided Design) files held on 220 floppy disks.

When they came to examine them, the archivists found that five per cent of the older disks had become corrupted. The magnetic coating on the disks had simply

succumbed to the slow erosion of time.

Another problem they encountered was obsolete formats. In mainstream computer terms, 1991 is ancient history.

The formats of computer files change rapidly. A file created in state-of-the-art software one year becomes obsolete the next, as the software is updated.

Old disks are useless when the hardware is no longer available to read them," says archaeologist Keith Westcott.

"Finding a computer that will physically accept old-fashioned 5¼-inch or Amstrad-style three-inch floppy disks is not easy."

Paul Miller Collections Manager for the Archaeology Data Service said: "Hundreds of thousands of words were written about archaeology using Amstrad's PCW word processor, with its quirky operating system, green screen and strange 3" disks.

"As this machine's dominance was challenged by the growing availability of the PC, there were a large number of tools and services available to help authors copy their sparkling prose from the Amstrad PCW and into their favourite PC-based word processor.

"Now, though, the PCW has vanished almost without trace.

"The translation tools have largely disappeared and most of the commercial services have moved onto other things;



translation of PCW disks is no longer big business.

"Even University Computing Services across the United Kingdom, many of which kept the capability to read data from these machines, have increasingly been disposing of them in the past year or so as spare parts become more elusive and ageing components wear out.

"Many authors didn't bother to translate their data at the time - after all they were far too busy and there were plenty of people around who knew what to do, so they could always worry about it later.

"When the time comes to prepare second editions of books, or to try to publish ageing PhD theses, these authors are faced with the worrying realisation that there doesn't seem to be any easy means of translating their data any more."

Of course these claims are not actually true - numerous PCW-PC services exist, as does software to transfer the files across.

PCs make you mad - official

USERS of the reliable-old Amstrad PCW always knew it anyway, but a new survey proves you have to be mad to own a PC.

Despite years of programming and millions of sales, PCs still crash on a regular basis.

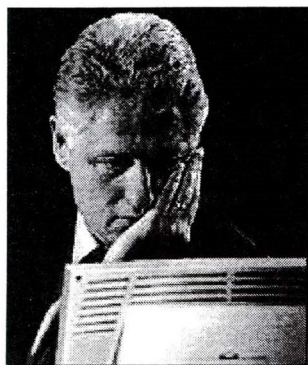
And now researchers say people in the UK are resorting to violence when their PCs break down.

A survey found that when faced with technical problems, most people shouted at colleagues, hit the PC or even threw parts of the computers.

People questioned said the most frustrating thing about using a PC was when they lost their work after the computer crashed or froze.

The problems seem to be widespread

with more than a quarter of those working with computers experience problems with their PC on a weekly basis.



Even the most powerful of people have problems with their PC!

The study by the National Opinion Poll and the software company Symantec, found that nearly half of all PC users had become angry at some time.

Almost a third of people had physically attacked a computer, 67 per cent experienced frustration, exasperation and anger and more than 70 per cent swore at their machines.

Technology rage is the latest rage to emerge in Britain and follows road rage, trolley rage and air rage.

Sadly surveyors failed to ask LocoScript users about their levels of stress. We reckon if they had, they would have found Amstrad users to be a far calmer bunch!

Farewell Doc!

ANOTHER chapter in the history of the PCW has come to an end, with the closure of a well-respected disk recovery service.

Dave's Disk Doctor Service began way back in July 1987, when Dave Smith began salvaging data from corrupted 3" PCW floppy disks.

By March 1989 donations had topped over £7,000, and at that point, for legal and tax reasons, the operations were taken over by Dave's Disk Doctor Service Ltd. A covenant for 100 per cent of Company profits was made to the Charities Aid Foundation.

This allowed UK corporation tax to be recovered and payments to be made to any registered charity. Since that time, the Company raised nearly £180,000, benefiting a wide range of charities.

Dave called it a day in January, due to a fall in demand for his services.

The remaining stocks of PCW goods are being sold off and the profit from these will go to a local charity.

See the advert elsewhere for details of this sale.

Alternative disk salvage and data conversion services are still provided by a number of companies (see directory).

Now Amstrad is fighting crime

AMSTRAD has just launched e-m@iler watch, a revolutionary new scheme which allows neighbourhood watch co-ordinators to communicate with the police by means of Amstrad e-m@iler communication centres installed within their homes.

The scheme went live in February, and initially involves hooking up 62 neighbourhood watch co-ordinators with the Lancashire Police, allowing them to communicate with one another via e-mail.

Amstrad has donated the initial Amstrad e-mailer phones, which will be installed in 62 homes across the Blackburn South division. The scheme is planned to roll out to over 500 neighbourhood watch co-ordinators across the Eastern Division by the end of May with the ultimate aim of taking the initiative nationwide.

The e-m@iler is a state of the art digital telephone answering machine that allows

the user to send and receive emails. It has been described as Amstrad's biggest product since the PCW.

Neighbourhood watch co-ordinators will receive regular intelligence briefings for the division. These briefings will highlight crime trends and hotspots, and provide neighbourhood watch schemes with the information to protect themselves and their community.

The network will also give the division the means to pass any other messages out to the public including appeals for witnesses, and specific crime prevention messages.

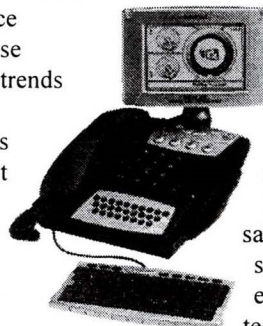
Police now have an easy and quick way to communicate with their communities and vice versa. In addition, area co-ordinators will be able to email specifically tailored information concerning their own area. The

e-m@iler watch scheme provides a secure two-way flow of information, and neighbourhood watch schemes will have

a more efficient method of communicating with the police, cutting out many of the telephone calls that have previously taken so much time and ensuring that important messages are not missed.

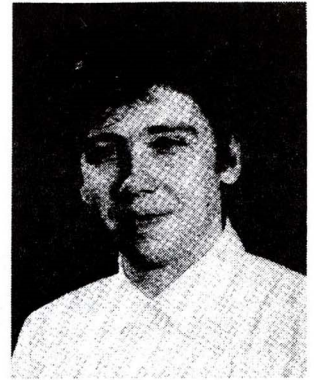
Home Secretary Jack Straw said: "The e-m@iler watch scheme provides a perfect example of how email technology can be used to improve the flow of information and intelligence in a bid to decrease crime."

Amstrad boss Sir Alan Sugar added, "Email provides the ideal method for neighbourhood watch co-ordinators to communicate simply and effectively with both the police and one another."



dave green

think green



Adrian Braddy chats to a former giant of the PCW scene

Throughout its 15-year history the PCW has been well served by magazines, but none has ever really matched the legendary *PCW Plus*.

This was one of Britain's first computer magazines and was only the second title to come out of the Future Publishing house in Bath – now one of the largest magazine groups in Europe.

PCW Plus editors were always talented, normally had a bizarre sense of humour, and each put their individual stamp on what soon became a well-respected publication.

Names like Sophie Lankenau and Martin Le Poidevin – apart from being hard to say – became legendary in the PCW world throughout the early nineties.

And perhaps the best of the latter-day editors at *Plus* was Dave Green, the second-last man to take charge of the magazine.

Dave Green left after a relatively short stint to become a radio technology pundit. He co-hosted a technology show on *BBC Five Live*, and now works for GLR in London.

PCW Today caught up with Dave for a spot of reminiscing about the good old days.

How did you start out at *PCW Plus*?

"I worked on *PCW Plus* three times - I sent in an article once when I was a student and the magazine was still called *8000 Plus* - and they printed it.

"Then I applied for the staff writer job during Sophie Lankenau and Martin Le Poidevin's

tenure at the magazine and did that for about a year.

"Then I moved to some of Future's other mags, then left the company and came back and edited the mag kind of part-time, with help from art editor/designers, often a production editor and of course the team of regular writers who would often provide ongoing series - Rob Ainsley on CP/M, Rod Patient on MicroDesign, Dave Langford on whatever happened to take his fancy."

You injected some humour into the magazine that made it different to many of the PC rags. Do you think you were a radically different computer magazine editor?

"I don't feel I was particularly unconventional in that respect - the *8000 Plus* that I remembered reading edited by Rob Ainsley and/or that other guy - Alec something? was always very

when I meet pcw owners I say 'oh I used to edit a magazine about them' and it's like we both collect vintage cars or something!

amusing and had the Fruit and Nut bars hidden on the cover and, yes, other jokes even funnier than that!

"On a more practical level, the mag had been going for 10 years, and no-one was too worried about it having to

establish its 'brand personality' any more.

"Also - the efforts of Creative Technology and such pioneers aside – there sometimes wasn't a huge amount of new stuff to say about the machine!

"So basically if we could liven the content up with a few jokes here and there - and no-one ever complained about them - it made it more fun for us and ideally for people reading it too!

"And you know how it is: you've got a funny story or a bit of a novel on your three inch disks somewhere and you think 'maybe I'll never finish this and no-one will ever see it,' but then you could sneak it into a LocoScript tutorial screenshot and people might wonder 'what the hell is this?'"

Why do you think *PCW Plus* lasted for so long – did Future Publishing just keep it going for old times sake? A circulation of 14,000 is hardly spectacular.

"Au contraire! For various reasons - it had a particularly dedicated readership, and it had been going a long time - *PCW Plus* had a substantial subscriber base, maybe as many as 50 per cent of its circulation.

"And magazine publishers love that because it means they don't have to split the cover price with the newsagent and the distributor - hence all the 'subscribe now' ads in, er, some publications - and also they're guaranteed sales.

"So that's probably the practical reason why *PCW Plus* lasted so long."



You are best known now as an expert on the Internet and hi-tech computing. Are you proud of your past work with the humble PCW?

"Oh I'm proud of my 8-bit heritage.

"Almost everyone I know in the internet and PC journalism business started off on the Sinclair ZX81 and Spectrum and BBC Micro and whatnot when they were teenagers, and these were machines that made the PCW look like the height of sophistication.

You had to load the software in off cassette tape, for heaven's sake!

"The PCW on the other hand was one of the first computers - like the Mac in the US - which you didn't have to be a computer nut to be able to do something useful with it.



"For my generation it's the computer your parents, or your vicar - or generally people who you maybe wouldn't expect to own a computer - would have.

"So whenever I meet someone like they say 'oh I have a computer, well I'm not sure if it is a computer, really, it's a PCW, do you know anything about them?' I say 'oh I used to edit a magazine about them' and it's like we both collect vintage cars or something!"

Do you think the PCW still has a place

in the modern world alongside super-fast PCs and Macs that dominate now?

"I'm a great believer in 'appropriate technology'. Often companies try and sell you stuff that you don't really need because, well, that's how they make their money isn't it?"

"It's particularly severe with PCs because there's always something new



if the pcw does exactly what you want of it, and you know it extremely well, you're not mad for sticking with it, you'd be mad not to!

round the corner - Windows 95/98/ME or whatever - telling you it's going to make your life easier - which is frankly rather less of a temptation with something that's already more than five or ten years out of date.

"In other words, if you're happy with your PCW, then I'm not going to stand in your way!"

Printers and monitors and word processing software have improved a lot in the meantime but that all comes at

a price - in learning new ways of doing things and getting new systems to work as well as money.

"So unless you were going to reap some fantastic benefits it might not be worth making the shift.

"Then again, you shouldn't be afraid just because it's something different; the experience you have on the PCW is an advantage when it comes to using other computers - because of similar concepts of files etc - so it should help rather than restrict you to just using one machine for ever.

"These same lessons apply across all kinds of computer systems - the big debate on the internet - itself a high-tech relic going back as far as the 1970s - is over the importance of simplicity, consistency and usability - a lot of which is obviously in the eye of the beholder.

"If the PCW does exactly what you want of it, and you know it extremely well, you're not mad for sticking with it, you'd be mad not to!"



Do you miss working with the Amstrad PCW?

"I had a great time on *PCW Plus* - which was the first real job I ever had - and everywhere else I've worked since has been different, yet never quite the same.

John Craggs

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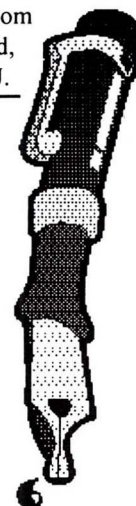
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www.web watch

Adrian Braddy reviews another selection of the top Amstrad PCW websites currently on-line

PCW King

www.pcwking.freemove.co.uk/

This is probably the most over-the-top Amstrad site on the web. Plenty of fancy animations, sounds, and flash graphics make this site look alive. Sadly they do mean the pages take rather a long time to load, and it is tricky to catch John King's contact address as it swings violently from side to side in a wondrous example of 3D graphics.

Appearance aside, this site is rich in information on both the PCW and CPC.

Features include an idiot's guide to the PcW 16 rescue disk, which takes you through the process of updating the 16's operating system with loads of helpful screenshots.

And there are loads of extremely helpful articles on all aspects of classic computing.

This site is a must-see.

Ron's Amstrad PCW Site

www.king27.freemove.co.uk/

This site is fast becoming the best PCW site on the net. It is regularly updated and includes reams of information on repairing and upgrading all models of PCW.

Ron recently gave the site a bit of a make-over and the new look is excellent, making the site one of the best-designed sites dedicated to the PCW.

Watch out for the articles on PCW software and hardware, which Ron adds to every now and then.

Judging by the number of hits PCW Today Online gets from Ron's site, it must be attracting a large amount of interest.

If you can get on-line, pay it a visit as soon as you can.

SD Microsystems

come.to/sdmicro

This is the home of Britain's biggest PCW firm, and operates alongside the LocoScript.com sister site reviewed last issue.

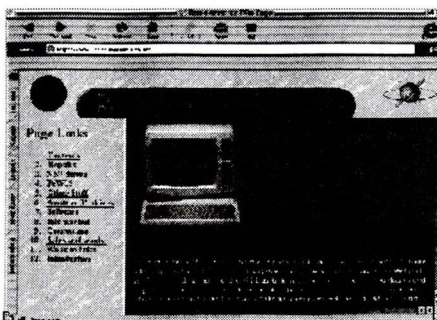
The site includes a list of the best-selling



John King's excellent but slow website



Cliff Lawson's unofficial Amstrad site



Ron King's top notch website

SD Micro products, and includes a regular news page and links.

Amstrad Unofficial

web.ukonline.co.uk/cliff.lawson/index.htm

We reviewed the official Amstrad.com site last issue, but in fact this unofficial site contains much more of interest to the PCW user.

It has been set up by Amstrad product designer Cliff Lawson, a great friend of this magazine, and is well worth a look.

There are sections on all models of PCW, including the PcW 16, and the site includes a series of basic guides on the most requested topics.

One of the best features is Any Questions, where users can quiz Cliff and he will try his best to answer. Many of the questions relate to the PCW and they make fascinating reading.

Ian MacDonald's PCW Site

www.caliban.org/PCW.html

Oh how the mighty fall. In the early years of the internet, when next to nobody could get on-line, there was only one real PCW website.

Ian Macdonald's web-presence was legendary and for years set the standard all other sites had to follow.

Sadly the website has not been updated in three years, and some of the information is completely out of date.

It is still worth a visit because no-one has yet replicated the number of direct links to software downloads.

Here you will find where you can download PCW classics like Head Over Heels – by far the best game ever written for the Amstrad.

pcw Today

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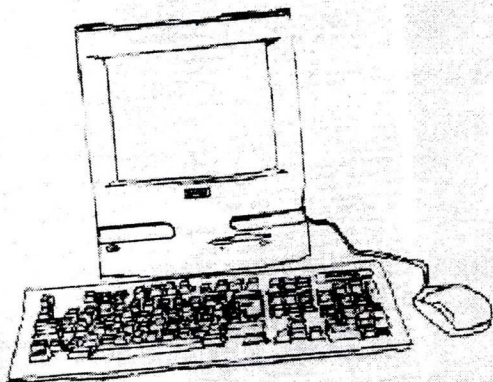
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- The first-ever edition of PCW Today - originally called MicroMotion -

MICROMOTION

Feature
Desktop Publishing
with LocoScript



The Sweet Sixteen
Is the new PoW 16 truly the best yet?

PCW Today is five years old and in recognition of this milestone we are putting together a very special anniversary edition of your favourite magazine.

This superb one-off publication will include a selection of all the best bits from the first five editions of PCW Today and MicroMotion, along with some great new features you will find no-where else.

What's more, all profits will go to Macmillan Cancer Relief, so you will be doing your bit for a worthy cause. The magazine costs just **£5.00** (inc p+p) and PCW Today will not take a single penny.

Send your cheques or postal orders (payable to Macmillan Cancer Relief) to PCW Today Charity Edition, 150 Oxford Road, Middlesbrough, Teesside, TS5 5EL.

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The money raised by the sales of this magazine will go towards the Ecuador Cycling Challenge 10-22 November 2001.

At least 66 per cent of this money will benefit Macmillan Cancer Relief, the balance being spent on costs.

100 per cent of any sum raised over £2,500 will benefit Macmillan Cancer Relief.

the matrix

PCW repairs specialist Ron King looks at the problems that can occur with your dot matrix printer

The dot-matrix printer of the PCW8256 and PCW8512 is designed to be absolutely compatible with those machines.

It cannot be used with other computers, because it is integrated with the machine and needs circuitry on the CPU board to function.

It is connected to the PCW by a 34-way data cable and a 24-volt supply for the motors and print head. The data cable also carries 5 volts for the circuit board.

Many other printers can be used with the PCW through a parallel interface connected to the expansion port, but they may have slight problems, such as being unable to print some obscure characters, or may have paper loading problems, or may be difficult to stop in emergency.

Despite its shortcomings in quality of printing, the 'built-in' dot matrix is very easy to use and is OK for most jobs.

The printer is quite rugged but like most pieces of equipment has its typical faults.

Print Heads

The PCW8256/8512 dot matrix printers can be divided into two broad groups, depending upon the type of print head fitted, although there are detail differences within the groups.

One type of print head plugs into the head carrier. It can be identified by the word HOT moulded into its top face. You can sometimes remove this head by gripping the side between thumb and forefinger and pulling straight up. If this doesn't work, look for the split-line on the side, about 12mm down from the top and insert a fine blade to start it.

The other type, usually distinguished by a silver label on its top face will not unplug but can be freed from the head carrier by removing the bright metal clip at its base. It is connected to the plastic cable, which conducts signals to the pins. This cable can be easily unplugged from the carrier but is difficult to replace, so don't remove it unless it's necessary.

Stuck Pins

Both types of head suffer from the same fault; if a pin does not operate there will be, in effect, a white line across the page (assuming that the paper is white, of course).

If a pin is stuck out, a continuous line will be drawn across the print.

In the latter case the pin may simply be stuck out by dried ink. Removing the head as discussed before, give the pin ends a good clean with a toothbrush and meths spirit, or better still WD40, as this also has lubricating properties.

Another reason for a pin sticking out is if the pin has become bent, maybe by using a cloth ribbon, which has been

inked too often and has become baggy. In this case there is little that can be done.

If a pin is not operating (stuck in) it could still be a case of ink gunge, but it may be that the tiny solenoid - which operates the pin - has broken.

This can be checked with a continuity meter. Both types of head have 11 connections. The centre, wide one, is 0 volts and common, and nine of the narrow tracks are 5 volt connections to the nine-pin solenoids; one is not connected.

With one probe on the wide centre track, check each of the narrow tracks for continuity. If nine of the ten check OK all solenoid windings are good. The plug-in type can be tested directly in this way but it is necessary to unplug the cable from the head carrier to check.

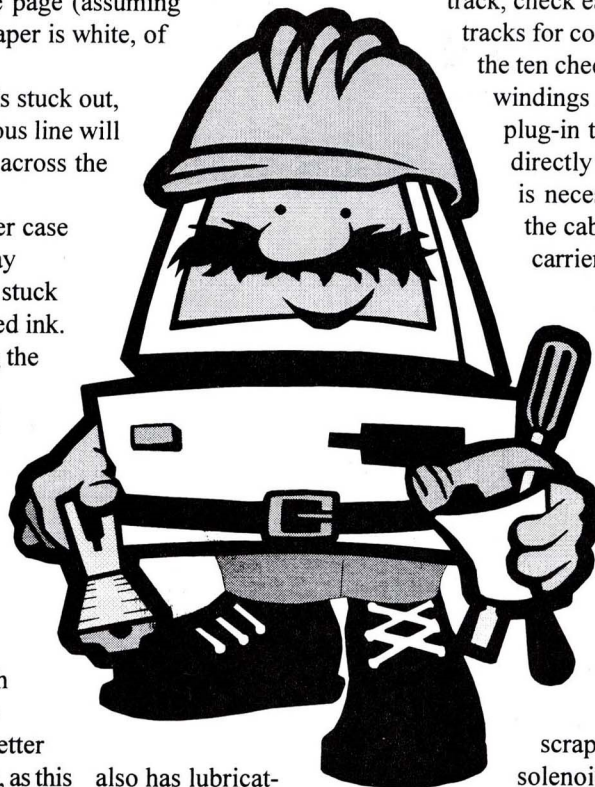
As I said, it is difficult to replace and it is often easier to remove the whole printer mechanism for easier access - not a big job.

A broken solenoid usually means that the head is

scrap unless a solenoid plate from a similar head with damaged

pins can be found.

In extreme cases, the head can be dismantled to try to straighten pins or



repair other damage, but should only be attempted in a spirit of adventure with a head that is otherwise not salvageable. Before starting, check that you have three hands and six fingers, at least, on each hand.

A pencil and paper, to make sketches as you go along is a necessity. A set of small screwdrivers is useful and a pair of tweezers is invaluable. Some heads are just held together with a spring clip, others by screws.

Try to keep the pins in position; if you take them out they can take a lot of time and patience to replace.

In each head there are several types of pins so if you do take them out be sure to place them in a pattern on a marked sheet of paper so that you know which pin goes where. If the pins flip out, as they have a nasty habit so to do, don't despair. Their correct positions can be worked out; it's where a degree in solving Chinese puzzles is useful.

So much for print heads and their problems, but there are other things that can go wrong

A message on the screen says that there is no printer, or the Save menu doesn't show one.

Switch off the machine, unplug the printer, then plug it back in again. Do this a few times. Sometimes a slight oxidation occurs around the pins which can prevent a good connection. If the plug is loose the two rows of pins can be prised apart a tiny amount to counteract this. If this fails there is probably a fault in the driver chip on the CPU board or in the PC board inside the printer.

If the printer fails to work check also that the 24-volt supply is OK. Substituting with another printer can also help to pinpoint the fault.

Paper doesn't feed properly or skews.

When paper is put into the printer and the bail bar pulled back, rollers at the

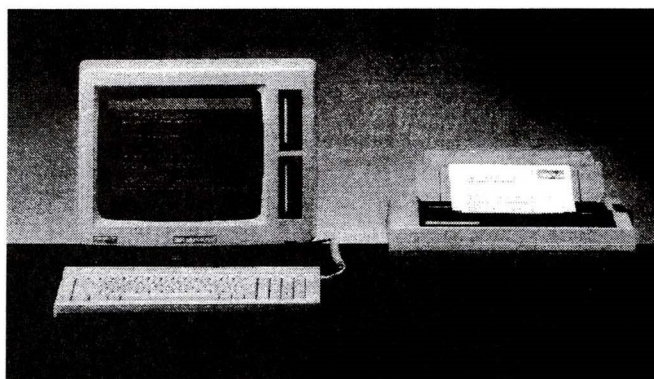
rear of the platen pinch the paper against the platen whilst the paper feeds in to the initial printing position (Top of form).

When the bail bar is released it holds the paper against the platen and the rear rollers release their grip.

The major force, which advances the paper, is the friction between paper and platen and this friction is drastically reduced by ink, which has dried on the platen.

The platen should be cleaned occasionally with methylated spirit and a clean cloth, cotton wool or kitchen paper.

Scrub the platen vigorously whilst turning it, until most of the dried ink



deposit is cleaned off. It will take quite a time and you'll never get it all off but keep going until there is only a little ink showing on the swab.

The bail bar helps by ensuring that the paper wraps around the platen. It is held against the platen by a spring at either side.

If the platen contacts the platen more firmly one side than the other suspect a missing spring.

These springs are very hard to see unless the whole mechanism is removed from the casing and viewed from underneath. If a spring is missing, a replacement can be made using piano wire purchased from a model-makers shop, using the remaining spring as a model.

At the front of the platen, where the ribbon runs, is a bright plate which also

guides the paper.

Sometimes this plate becomes displaced, particularly if continuous address labels have been wound backwards. It is just clipped in position and can be relocated fairly easily with the mechanism out of the casing.

Dismantling the printer

1) Pull off the handwheel 2) Prise off the bail bar operating wheel 3) Turn the printer upside down and remove 6 screws. 4) Turn the printer right way up and take off the top cover. 5) Remove the 4 screws, which hold the printer mechanism in place. 6) Lift the mechanism off the locating pegs and it can be removed entirely from the lower case together with the PC board.

Needless to say, all this must be done gently, taking particular care when removing the PC board and noting which way it goes into its slot and how the cables are routed.

Note that some of the cable connectors, notably the black ones, are very poor, and if you are getting electronic problems such as motors not

working, print head problems which are not covered by earlier notes or sensor problems, check these connectors.

With the innards removed, the casing can be washed in warm soapy water and the mechanism brushed clean using a small soft paintbrush.

If you need to dismantle further it easy to see how things come apart; for example, the platen can be taken out completely without much hassle, but be careful around the bail bar mechanism because the plastic connectors on the links are easily broken.

There are spaces for four small roller assemblies behind the platen, but if your printer has only three, don't worry.

I have seen many like this and they work OK. I expect Amstrad must have been short of these assemblies at one time, so fitted one less.

letters

a selection from our mailbag

have your say

Send your letters to: PCW Today, 150 Oxford Road, Middlesbrough, Teesside TS5 5EL. Or you can e-mail us at: letters@pcwtoday.co.uk



Abandoned software could be saved

Most software is not sold outright but is only licensed to the person that it is registered to, so that second-hand software should not be sold or even given away.

Not many people respect this I suspect, but copying software, unless it is in the public domain, for sale or for a friend is piracy.

However, I believe that software for classical computers, such as the PCW, should be viewed differently.. A glance through the pages of long-defunct PCW magazines reveals a mountain of software which has been lost or mislaid, usually because the publisher has ceased trading or has lost

interest in PCWs. This is a great shame and we should all endeavour to conserve what still remains. The problem is to know how.

I will have no truck with copying software which is still being sold new; we must keep faith with suppliers who are keeping faith with us, but what about software which seems to have no current owner? How should this be treated?

Some authors have put their software in the public domain whilst still retaining the copyright but most have simply walked away, so that if you copy such software for distribution you are technically breaking the law.

We should start now to compile lists of classical software with previous publishers if known and endeavour to identify and classify it. Present suppliers of software and their titles would thus be recognised and software which has been abandoned would be treated as public domain, taken up by suppliers who might also provide a manual and could thus be saved.

The ideal vehicle for this would be a magazine, but I am prepared to set the ball rolling on my web page. What do you think? Does anyone know about the legal implications?

Ron King,
Via PCW Today online forum

Kevin's PcW may not be dead after all!

On the letters page (Issue 13) there is a letter from a Kevin Boniface about how he "killed" his PcW16.

As far as I can tell, all that has happened is that the rogue CP/M program he ran on it has somehow inadvertently over-written the copy of the operating system in flash memory (hardly Amstrad's fault!).

He may be interested to know that if you try and switch the computer on while holding down the four [Task], [Shift], [Ctrl] and [Red] keys (the four in vertical alignment beneath the red key) and keep them held for about 10 seconds the "bootstrap" (that is in *protected* flash) should kick in and wipe the entire flash and invite him to insert his OS rescue disc to write a fresh copy of the operating system (but,

unfortunately, this unavoidably means that all files stored in flash are lost).

I think this should fix the problem that he has.

This is a very "dangerous" key combination (although I did mention it in the Q&A that comes with the machine), so use it only with absolute caution.

Cliff Lawson,
Amstrad

E-m@il back-hander?

I hope you got a good back-hander for flogging the e-m@iler. Why bother with PCW info & advice !!

Anon via e-mail

EDITOR'S NOTE: We got no money for what was a totally independent review.

Addressing the point

Just a note to thank you for publishing the very flattering review of my DTP disk by Mike Saunders in issue 14.

Unfortunately, in using "Print Screen" to generate a print-out of the "border" facility, he produced a faulty and misleading example of what is actually available – and he has apologised of the fact he didn't include contact details.

Should any readers still be interested, copies are still available from me at 28 Rectory Road, Southport, Merseyside, PR9 7PU – together with two additional "experimental" disks for producing multi-pattern notice board layouts – a total of three disks now at the original price of £8 including P&P.

Don Moody,
Southport

Printer problem

I have been out of the UK for some time and on my return before Christmas, Issue 14 of PCW Today was waiting for me.

I was interested in the Amstrad e-Mailer (which I am using) - it certainly lives up to your review!!

I have a query however which I hope you can assist with. The local stores are quite clueless and refer me back to Amstrad.

The query relates to the type of printer suitable for use with the e-mailer.

Amstrad Help Desk recommend the EPSON 640 or the HEWLETT-PACKARD 610C or 640C, using a parallel/centronics lead.

I have located a reasonably priced HP Deskjet 640C (B & W & Colour), but I am unable to ascertain if this printer will also be suitable for my PCW 8256.

My present dot matrix printer, which came with the PCW8256, still works perfectly and its versatility never ceases to amaze me.

Unfortunately it cannot be used for colour printing and the print is not as crisp as a modern inkjet printer. Whilst I will still use the dot matrix printer for everyday use I would like to be able to use a colour printer on

occasions and rather than buying a dedicated printer for each machine am seeking a single printer that I can use with either the e-mailer or PCW8256.

My PCW8256 has one 3inch Disk Drive, upgraded with memory chips to 512K RAM and is fitted with an add-on Microlink (Macclesfield) parallel/serial interface. I am using the LOCOSCRIPT 4 version 10.

If I purchase the HP Deskjet 640C - will it work with the E-Mailer & the PCW 8256 or will I need additional pieces of equipment? If the 640C is not at all suitable, can you suggest an alternative?

John S.G.Varney.

Via e-mail

EDITOR'S NOTE: We use two Hewlett Packard printers successfully with a PCW 8256. I would imagine the model you mention would work fine with both the e-mailer and the PCW. The LocoScript compatability chart lists models 670C and 690C as suitable. If you are still unsure ask the dealer whether the printer will work with a driver for a HP DeskJet 400 printer or a HP DeskJet560c printer as both are standard formats and are compatible with the PCW and e-mailer.

Can I turn my Apple into an Amstrad?

I have recently been given an Apple Mac to supplement my two PCW 8000s.

The software is nowhere near as user friendly as LocoScript. SD MicroSystems tell me they do not have a version of LocoScript that suits the Apple Mac.

I just wonder if out there among the teeming thousands of PCW Today readers there is someone who has been able to adapt LocoScript to the Apple Mac and can help me.

**Stan Mellor,
Berkshire**

EDITOR'S NOTE: You can buy Virtual PC, which will allow you to run DOS programs like LocoScript Professional. You can buy version three of this software from places like www.macwarehouse.co.uk for £88.11.

A far cheaper option is to get the famous Joyce emulator that will turn your Mac into a PCW, and will run the classic version of LocoScript.

The Mac version of this software can be downloaded for free at www.bannister.org/software/joyce.htm however I don't know how reliable this software is and you will need a fast Mac to get the best out of it.

Disaster strikes - but why?

Thank you for the latest issue of PCW Today which I have read avidly from cover to cover.

As is fellow pensioner HL Goodall (letters, issue 14), I am a beginner at operating the PcW 16 and what I know of this marvellous machine I have learned mostly by trial and error.

I found the handbook difficult to follow and I suspect it was written by a person with an in-depth knowledge of computers for people possessing in-depth knowledge of computers.

For example: I wanted to produce text in Swiss 12, 1,807 lines double spaced and word total 23,500. I used Folder One

of the Cabinet and I tackled the task in stages transferring text from the Cabinet to a floppy disk at the end of each stage.

The Cabinet content grew and then disaster struck. Folder One held well in excess of 18,000 words when I transferred to the floppy but then when I returned to the Cabinet up popped up a message, "there is an error". Two thousand words jettisoned! Gorn!! Nowhere to be found. Not on Cabinet nor floppy. To where, I have no idea. I was not pleased!!! I completed the document on Folder Two.

Neither the handbook, nor the FAQ section of the rescue disk, give a clue to

the cause of my disaster and I am mystified.

Perhaps, in a regular quarterly article on basics as suggested by HL Goodall, some kind person will explain what happened to my dematerialised text.

**Harry Hopper,
Livingston**

EDITOR'S NOTE: I'm afraid I have no answer to the mystery. The PcW 16 sometimes does strange things like that, particularly if you ask it to do too much too fast.

Some people call it eccentric, others use stronger language.

it is a computer!

PcW 16 expert **Mike Saunders** takes you stage by stage through the complexities of the CP/M emulator

With CP/M now available for the PcW 16, you can run many of the programs from the older PCWs on your computer. If you're new to CP/M, this guide will get you started.

What is CP/M?

CP/M is the operating system used on the older PCWs. Unlike the mouse, icon and menu environment we're familiar with on the PcW 16's Rosanne operating system, CP/M is text-based like MS-DOS. Commands are typed in at a prompt to start programs and work with files, and it can be a bit daunting at first.

So why use it?

It'd be nice if developers were queuing up to make '16 software, but the few remaining programmers working on Amstrad machines are more familiar with the old operating system. With CP/M available on the '16, developers only have to make slight changes to their programs (or even none) for them to run. If CP/M for the PcW 16 didn't exist, programmers would have to rewrite their programs from scratch. Also, there's loads of software already available for CP/M, so now there's more choice.

Where can I get CP/M?

The operating system can be downloaded from the website of its creator (John Elliott - www.seasip.demon.co.uk), or bought as a package from SD Micros.

Although the software is free, SD Micro charges for the disks, documentation and distribution.

If you're not technically-minded, I recommend getting it from the company as its packs come ready-to-run and with printed instructions.

You can also buy CP/M with Mallard BASIC if you want to write your own programs..

Getting started

CP/M for the PcW 16 is made up of two things: the loader and the startup disk. The

loader is the PcW 16 program that gets your '16 ready for CP/M, and the startup disk (sometimes called the system disk) contains the actual operating system files and commands.

Depending on how you acquired CP/M, setting it up varies. We'll take a look at each choice...

Downloaded from John Elliott's site - The 'CPM.TXT' text file that comes with CP/M explains how to expand the disk images. This means copying a file that contains a whole disk-full of information to a blank disk, making it fully usable. In the Zip file from John's site, you'll find 3 disk images. You'll need two blank floppy disks, including a double-density one. Two of the images are for the loader disk, i.e. the normal '16 disk that contains the program, and you can use pcw720.raw or pcw1440.raw to make that (depending on the size of the disk). The other, cpmdisc.raw, is for the CP/M startup disk.

As the text file says, use the RAWRITE program in MS-DOS to copy the image files to disk.

Bought from SD Microsystems -

With this option, you already have the loader disk and the startup disk prepared, so you're ready to start.

NOTE: ZPM3 is an upgrade to the CP/M supplied with John's Zip file. If you've downloaded CP/M, you'll need an older PCW model to upgrade. However, SD MicroSystems' packs include ZPM3 already prepared, so it's best to buy one these if you haven't got access to an older PCW. Many programs require ZPM3 to run.

First things first

If you have enough space, you can store the loader program in the Cabinet. You'll find it in FOLDER01 on the loader disk, and it's called 'CPM for the PCW16'. Just copy the file into one of your Cabinet folders in the normal way.

Now you're ready to run it. From the 'Tasks' menu, choose 'Run External Program' and find the 'CPM for the PCW16' program file. Click 'OK', and the program will start. Firstly, it will ask you to insert the CP/M system disk. Put your startup disk into the drive and click 'OK'. The program will now load the CP/M files from the disk, and the screen will go black with some white text appearing. You can ignore this - it's just describing what it's doing. After a few seconds you'll see 'A>', which is the command prompt. This means that CP/M has loaded and is waiting for you to do something.

Taking command

Pun intended! The most commonly used command in CP/M is dir. This is short for 'directory' and displays the files on the disk. Give it a go - just type dir and press enter. You'll see a list of all the files on the startup disk.

The most important of these files end with .COM, which are programs. For example, to run the program 'PALETTE.COM' you simply type in palette and press enter.

Getting back to the '16 Desktop is easy. Just put your startup disk in the drive and, at the prompt, type desk and press enter.

You'll have noticed that you can't look at your startup disk in the PcW 16 File Manager or in Windows. This is because it's in CP/M format, instead of the usual '16 format. You can import CP/M documents into the '16's word-processor, and this is useful for reading documentation that comes with many programs.

A large amount of CP/M software is available. There are sadly some programs that won't work with CP/M for the PcW 16, including ones which use graphics. However, there's plenty of stuff that will run without trouble - try Mallard BASIC if you fancy a bit of programming. See SD MicroSystems for a comprehensive range.

it's only words

Kathleen Thorpe looks at the history of language

Do you find the prospect of writing (or typing) certain words a little daunting?

Perhaps your spelling isn't as good as you would like it to be - even with the assistance of a spell checker such as LocoSpell. There are certain rules about spelling that need to be observed, such as "I before E, except after C, if the sound is EE". But it isn't always that simple, as there are exceptions to practically every rule.

'Etymology' (the study of the origin and derivation of words) can be a fascinating subject in its own right, but knowing a little about the history of words can help improve our spelling.

The English language is based on three Germanic dialects which descend from the Indo-Germanic or Aryan family of languages spoken since c.3,000BC by Nomads of the Great Lowland Plain of Europe. Now only fragments of Old Lithuanian contain what is left of this ancestral tongue.

Of the three Germanic dialects, the first was Jutish, brought into England in AD449 from Jutland. This was followed 40 years later by Saxon, introduced from Holstein, and Anglican, which came later from the area of Schleswig-Holstein. These three dialects were superimposed on the 1,000-year-old Celtic tongue, along with what Latin had survived in the towns from nearly 15 generations of Roman occupation (AD43-AD410).

The next major event in the history of the English language was the first of many Viking invasions, beginning in AD793 from Denmark and Norway. Both Norse and Danish left permanent influences on the Anglo-Frisian Old English, although Norse never survived as a separate tongue in England beyond the year 1035, the year that King Canute (who had reigned over England for 19 years) died.

For three centuries after the Norman Conquest of 1066 by William I, England lived under a trilingual system. The mother

tongue of all the first 13 kings and queens ranging from William I (1066-1087) until as late as Richard II (1377-99) was Norman.

English became the language of court proceedings during the reign of Edward III in October 1362, and the language for teaching in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge c.1380.

English did not form properly as a combination of Anglo-Saxon and Latin until the late 14th century, when William Langland (c.1332-1400) and Geoffrey Chaucer (?1340-1400) were the pioneers of a literary tradition, which culminated in William Shakespeare who died in 1616.

English is a 'living language' undergoing constant change, with new words being added, subtle differences in the meaning of words, and influences from other languages all affecting the way we spell words.

American spellings in particular can confuse the issue. Some word processor software was written for the American market, so therefore their spell checker's dictionaries would contain 'Americanisms', words such as 'theater', 'color' and 'center'.

This isn't a problem with the spell checkers available for the PCW, such as LocoSpell etc.

Here are a few words which have crept in from other languages.

KINDERGARTEN Nursery School, from the German meaning 'Children's Garden'.

GOSSAMER Fine cloth or cobweb, from the German for 'Goose Month' which amazingly is November.

CHAUFFEUR Driver, from the French for 'Stoker', reminiscent of the days of steam trains.

TOWN Half way between a village and a city, from Old High German for 'Fence', which enclosed an inhabited settlement.

Certain patterns reflect these influences from other languages. Classic Greek and Latin for example, may no longer be used in every day life, but they aren't as dead as

many people think. Their influence is all around us. 'Technology' not only derives from Greek as a word - it stems from 'skill' and 'logos' or word - but Greek influences are found in many related words. 'Tele' is Greek for 'far' and prefixes many words referring to modern technology. Television and telephone are two examples.

Some words that end with 'ise' can also be spelt 'ize'. It's often a matter of preference, but again the origin of the word determines which is the correct ending. Those which the Oxford dictionaries regard exclusively as 'ize' words, used to end in 'izo' in Classical Greek. 'Realize' is one, but 'advertise' isn't, and its correct spelling reflects this.

Plurals pose their own problems, the word 'leaf' can only become 'leaves' but 'dwarf' can be either 'dwarfs' or 'dwarves' depending on the context. Although 'donkey' becomes 'donkeys', 'spy' becomes 'spies'! The rule here is that if the letter before 'y' is a vowel, the plural is 'ys'. In all other cases it becomes 'ies'.

Then there are what we call 'False Friends', these are words that seem to belong together but in reality don't. Here are some common examples:

tee	tea	hare	hair
wait	weight	sort	sought

The list just goes on and on!

You might think that you'd never confuse the spellings of these words, but if you're typing quickly and your brain is already working out the words for the next line, it can be all too easy, and your spell checker wouldn't query the words used in the wrong context if they were spelt correctly and in its dictionary. 'Its' and 'it's', 'there', 'their' and 'they're' all come in this category.

If something belongs to 'it', leave out the apostrophe. Only use 'it's' as a short form of 'it is'. 'There' is a place, the opposite of 'here' and 'their' shows possession. Again a spell checker such as LocoSpell won't query these words as long as they are correctly spelt.



jim joyce

The classic computer columnist who doesn't pull any punches!

The Grimley curse

Another celebrity PCW user emerged from the woodwork in February. Actor and writer Nigel Planer – he's the grumpy one from The Grimleys – outed himself in the Sunday Times Doors supplement.

So what was his verdict on the PCW?

"I suppose one could argue that in an era of rush

rush rush, it was good for one's karma to spend a week scrolling through a document – rather like a five-day Test match in cricket – to make a little correction," Planer joked.

I can't make up my mind whether that was an insult or a compliment!

She's talking tosh

As a PCW user of 10 years standing I am used to taking a little bit of stick every now and then. Even when Amstrads were at their height, they were still often ridiculed.

But I was deeply offended to read in the Guardian the other day that Amstrads had been listed among the "top 101 things we don't miss".

Well-known so-called journalist Zoë Williams for some reason decided that Amstrads should be placed at number 70. She didn't specify what type of Amstrad

– the firm has made everything from TV sets to telephones in its time – but people usually mean PCW when they refer to the Amstrad.

Zoë described the Amstrad as "The only machine capable of giving you a headache in the four-minute window between starting up and breaking down."

I know she was talking in jest, but the statement is inaccurate, unfunny, and quite probably libellous.

Does anyone know of a more reliable computer than the Amstrad 8256? Okay, so the green screen might give you a headache, but if that bothers you upgrade to a 9000 series!

Perhaps the worst thing about Zoë's list was that she placed the Amstrad ahead of Polio, Rickets, and wait for it – the Millennium Dome.

Seeing double

Has anybody noticed the uncanny resemblance between Amstrad boss Sir Alan Sugar and a certain character from Beatrix Potter.

I always knew Sir Al had a reputation for being a bit prickly at times – but this gives a whole new meaning to the word!



Nigel Planer



Mrs Tiggywinkle

Prickly

A pretty nice bloke

Talking about the great Mr Sugar, I was on the Amstrad internet bulletin board the other day when his name came up.

It is rare for anything of interest ever to come out of the bulletin board – it's normally a load of techno-babble about the Amstrad CPC.

Anyway, on this occasion Amstrad design wizard Cliff Lawson happened to be on-line and he offered a rare glimpse into the world of his apparently much-misunderstood boss.

"On telly he comes across as abrasive and aggressive but I think that's just a public persona. In real life he's actually a pretty nice bloke and a devoted family man - his desk is covered in pictures of his grand children," said Cliff.

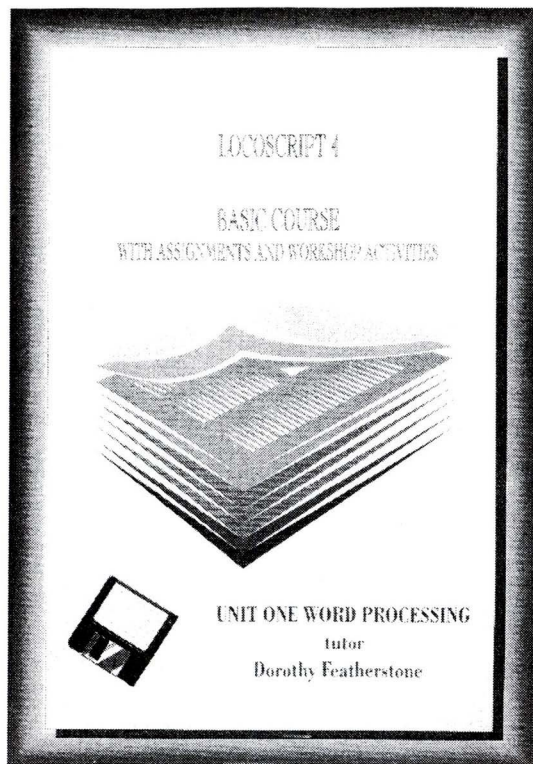
"He is quite shy and I think that's why he has the aggressive 'front' so that people can't get too close to him.

"At work he can be aggressive when he wants to be (like a deadline has been missed or we are spending three cents on a transistor we could have got for 2) but on the whole he's OK and over the last few years he has mellowed a LOT.

"He never used to take holidays but now takes quite a few in his villa in Florida or on his £12m yacht in the South of France.

"People often ask if we ever see him in the office. The actual question should really be - is there any day when you DON'T see him? (Apart from the recent holidays).

"Unlike the chairman of virtually every multi-national PLC, Alan is very "hands on" and often attends project meetings and is aware of every last detail of everything that everyone is working on - rather unnervingly!"



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The book lists the new features in upgrading from LocoScript 2 and 3 to version 4 and explains simply how to apply them.

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It includes help with tables, columns, page numbering, inserting frames, boxes and pictures. It contains interesting activities to pursue including repetitively numbering theatre tickets, creating exciting posters, illustrating poetry and displaying newsletters efficiently. It will refresh and enthuse the experienced PCW user and show new users what can be achieved with a simple Word Processor/Computer.

build a library

David Landers investigates how you can give your classic PCW extra storage space

We looked at file compression in the last issue. And, just as Squeeze had pioneered this concept on desktop computers, so Gary Novosielski's invention of 'libraries' was another CP/M breakthrough in file storage techniques.

The original Library Utility program (LU.COM) was written in 1982 - the impetus, again, coming from bulletin boards. Novosielski made three claims for his libraries: they kept related files together; saved disc space, and reduced directory entries.

We'll see how this was achieved, before assessing their benefits for today's PCW owner.

As you'll probably know, our CP/M Plus operating system has a rigid, predetermined disc directory structure based on User Areas.

LocoScript prefers to handle these as eight Groups plus eight Limbo Groups but a PCW's CP/M files can be split into sixteen separate compartments.

However... early versions of CP/M didn't feature User Areas, thereby forcing bulletin board operators to lump their files together in the same directory. This meant that filenames all had to be different: there couldn't be more than one 'READ.ME', for example.

It also created problems for subscribers wanting to download public domain software. A word processor, say, might also have a spell-check program, dictionaries and a user-guide - and these could be scattered across an extensive file list.

To get the whole package, each individual name had to be known, then the files downloaded one at a time.

In terms of user convenience, this has tremendous advantages over 'sequential' systems (like the Acorn DFS on BBC micros), which write each file as a single, contiguous entity and require a tedious disc-compaction process to remove dead files.

For CP/M's dynamic allocation to work, however, those chunks of data must all be the same size, and the space occupied by each file has to be rounded up to the next block boundary (with any surplus wasted).

So a file consisting of a single character doesn't consume one byte of disc space, but one block - and on a double-density floppy that means 2k (2048) bytes.

Clearly, CP/M's storage of small files is not space efficient. Within a library, though, member files are stored sequentially - allowing one file to start immediately after another finishes.

A library containing several small files takes up a fraction of the disc space that those same files would occupy individually because only the library file itself has to conform to the rounding-up rule. Additionally, there's nothing to prevent member files from being compressed (although, as we saw last time, compression only works to advantage on reasonably large files).

The final claim made for libraries is that they reduce directory entries. Again, this has relevance to disc storage - a floppy containing many small files will often run out of directory space before the disc is full.

But, with the directory list for its members stored internally, a library is a single file as far as its own directory entry is concerned.

LU.COM was an important program, and libraries transformed file storage on bulletin boards.

But it wasn't until Martin Murray wrote the faster, more user-friendly 'New Library Utility' (NULU), a couple of years later, that the wider CP/M community really took

Containment systems

LU.COM effectively split that single CP/M directory into subdivisions. The program creates 'superfiles', called libraries, which themselves contain other files (it's even possible to have libraries within libraries).

The operating system regards a library as a single file which happens to have an '.LBR' suffix. But LU is able to 'open' the library and extract member files for copying. So our hypothetical word processing package can now be presented as a single library file. Download that one file and you know you've got everything; run LU on your own computer and, like a conjuring trick, out pop the original files.

To appreciate the space saving aspect of libraries, we need to consider how CP/M's disc filing system (DFS) stores data. 'Dynamic allocation' allows chunks of a file to be put in different places on the disc - overwriting parts of old, deleted files if necessary.

You may be confused to find the terms 'library' or 'archive' used in a different context.

One of the CP/M utilities supplied with a PCW is named LIB.COM, but it's of interest only to programmers, and the library files associated with it have nothing whatsoever to do with Novosielski Libraries. 'Archiving', on the other hand, is sometimes mentioned with reference to file copying.

To distinguish between the two meanings of this word, just remember that 'archive' files are special conglomerate files (as made by ARK.COM); while 'archived' files are any files that have had their archive-attribute set (by PIP, etc.) to show that a back-up copy has been made. (So, yes... you can have an archived archive!)

the concept to heart. Significantly, by the time that MaxiSweep appeared, libraries were considered sufficiently popular for this invaluable file manager to include library-related functions.

Library staff

NULU and MaxiSweep allow PCW owners to exploit Novosielski Libraries without the need for anything more than a basic knowledge of CP/M. Both programs are easy to use - NULU is required for creating libraries (and adding extra members to existing libraries), but MaxiSweep is probably more convenient otherwise.

Holding associated files in a library is a house-keeping habit that saves both time and temper. For instance: all those confusingly named files relating to a little-used program - they won't get lost when stored together in a library. And there'll be a substantial saving on disc space if member files are compressed beforehand, making libraries ideal for holding related groups of squeezed/crunched text files (perhaps a writing project that's been temporarily put aside). MaxiSweep can open the library, display the compressed files and decompress them to a current work disc as desired.

Do be aware that a corrupted library may mean the loss of all of its members - so backups are especially vital. And, generally speaking, a library isn't suitable for storing files that are in constant use, because normal

CP/M programs can't get inside it.

Special utilities are available, though, the original being LRUN.COM - which can run a program from within a library.

Most others merely replicate a single LU/NULU function, performing that one task in less time than it takes for the larger program to load.

The usual syntax for a library-related utility is to follow the program name with the name of the library file, then the name of the member file.

For example, to use TLZH.COM to view an LZH-compressed text file called 'USEFUL.TYT', held as a member of INFO.LBR on A:, the command would be:

```
A>TLZH INFO USEFUL.TYT
```

...an '.LBR' suffix being assumed for the first filename.

'L' driver

The most remarkable library utility must be LD.COM - 'Library-Disk'. When LD is run, it installs a resident system extension (RSX), which lets a library be treated just as if it were an extra drive added to the computer. Imagine that a library file called TEST.LBR is held on a disc in drive B:. With LD.COM on a disc in A:, drive L: can be assigned to this library with the command:-

```
A>LD L:=B:TEST
```

...as before, the '.LBR' suffix needn't be typed.

From now on, until you switch off, or remove the RSX, your PCW has a drive L:

- quite a novelty! This 'virtual' drive can be used whenever the TEST.LBR disc is in drive B: (switch to and from the L> prompt in the usual way). Drive L: consists of the library's member files; these can now be treated more or less normally, as both CP/M itself and ordinary CP/M utilities have access to them.

On the PCW, care is needed with command line syntax when running programs or sub-files from drive L: - if the operating system finds it necessary to check the 'setdef' search path, it will decide that 'L:' isn't a valid drive after all! And a disc must be kept in A: at all times to avoid an "A: Drive not ready" message, as LD.COM triggers this drive whenever a command is issued. More importantly, if a library altered by LD is subsequently opened via NULU, a 'checksum' error will be reported.

However, this doesn't prevent access to member files, and it's easily rectified by getting NULU to remake the library.

Despite these minor irritations, Library-Disk provides a fascinating environment for library work. Special instructions, applying to its use on the PCW, have been added to the standard documentation that comes with the program. LD.COM has a companion program, called CREATE.COM, which allows new libraries to be created from scratch - but, again, NULU considers them to be flawed, unfortunately.

Try experimenting with the cover disc programs - a library extension could prove a genuinely valuable addition to your PCW.

Universal Archives

Novosielski Libraries are a CP/M speciality, whereas Archives originated in the world of DOS. Although very similar in concept, archives use a different directory structure and their constituent files are automatically compressed/decompressed.

Once established amongst PC users, archives spread to CP/M because bulletin boards often held files for both operating systems. So a need arose for CP/M subscribers to be able to unpack archives, and - once that had been accomplished - a CP/M archive creation program soon followed.

These programs are, respectively, UNARC.COM and ARK.COM. (The difference in spelling reflects the fact that DOS archives traditionally had an '.ARC' suffix, whereas CP/M ones use '.ARK' - it has no other significance.)

Archives are delightfully simple both to create and to unpack, and the automatic compression technique

achieves excellent results. This makes them ideal for long-term storage of obsolete/duplicate files - but, for more regular use, 'ARK' files lack the flexibility of libraries.

There's at least one 'ARK' file on the cover disc, along with UNARC.COM, which will unpack it via the command:-

```
A>UNARC filename d:
```

...where d: is the (optional) output drive - B: for example.

The most recent Self-Extracting Archives use a built-in program to unpack themselves automatically. They have a '.COM' suffix, and usually include 'SEA' in the filename (eg. PMARCSEA.COM).

To extract their contents, you just type the archive's filename followed by an (optional) output drive. The PMARC (PM-Archive) package provides facilities for creating them. Although it is a rather more complex procedure, the resultant archive is highly compressed and special PMARC utilities can manipulate it in much the same way as a library. The best of both worlds?

a backward step

PC user **John Markham** gave up his PCW some years ago but sincerely regrets it now. In this article, first printed on the Internet, he explains why it was a bad move

Are we really progressing, when a 10-year-old 8-bit Amstrad PCW still outperforms a PC?

Computers get faster, so the software gets bigger. Or is it the other way round? Still, the net result is just the same. And my reasonably up-to-date computer still takes almost as long to boot-up as the old 486/25.

Both of which cannot compete with the old Amstrad PCWs' boot-up time. OK, I know that I am talking about a word processor that has little more ability than the option of using different fonts.

But for the vast, VAST, majority of users, most never need or want the ability to produce a newspaper or magazine from their office desk. Most users of word processors only want to write letters.

But that's just one little niggle. The main point is: How do you fancy having 26 clipboards?

The PCW has a dedicated keyboard with single keys that were the equivalent of Ctrl+X, Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V.

To copy text, one would press the COPY key, highlight the required text, press the COPY key again, and then any letter key.

That text would then be stored under that letter. To paste: press the PASTE key, then the letter key.

It's that simple!

And of course, there are 26 letter keys - 26 clipboards. And they could be saved, so would always be available for future use.

I used to practically write whole documents with just a few keystrokes!

Not any more though - haven't we progressed? Just to pour salt on the wound, different sets of phrases could be saved in different directories. So whenever one was working on a document, the



phrases for that directory were available.

This was brilliant. In a directory for business letters, for example, phrases specific to those types of letters would be available, "For the attention of" and "Please find enclosed cheque".

Although there was a limit to the size of a phrase, it could still hold several hundred words.

The word processor that I use now does have a similar database function.

But what a pain it is to use.

Once a phrase has been defined, it cannot be overwritten. You have to go and edit the database, remove the entry, then go back and save the new one. I just can't be bothered to use the damn thing! If it could be done far simply, 15 years ago, why can't they do it now?

When I progressed from the PCW to a PC, I thought "what have I done?" If it wasn't for the fact that the PCW couldn't handle graphics at that time (LocoScript 4 hadn't come out then), I would have stayed with it. I could write letters far faster.

Also, as LocoScript was basically ASCII with modifiers inserted, a line of text could start off aligned left, then by adding a (+right) code, the remainder of the line(s) would align right. Try to achieve that on your PC!

There are several areas where the text formatting abilities (within the same line of text) of PC based word processors are poor in comparison with the old PCW.

Word processing software programmers have become so carried away with what they can achieve, dynamic linking, embedding, etc, etc, that they have lost sight of their main aim - the ability to type a letter quickly and format it as required.

So, all you clever software and hardware engineers, take a look at the work produced by the LocoScript programmers.

Take a leaf out of their book, and start thinking.

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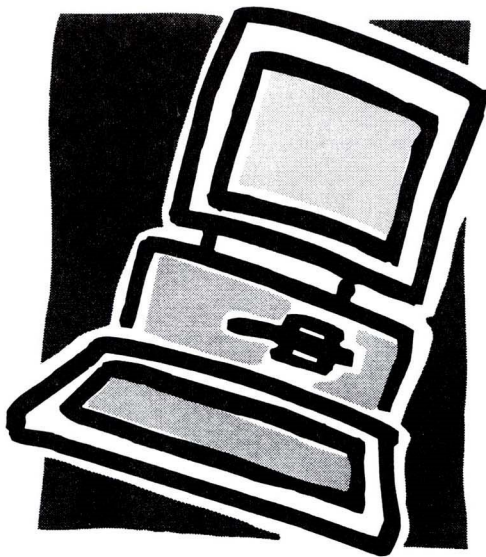
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back in fashion?

A new initiative believes 'obsolete' computers can beat the stranglehold of Windows - Adrian Braddy investigates

It is a little known fact that British businesses throw away more than £4million worth of computer hardware every day.

Technology moves so fast, computers soon become obsolete. What was state-of-the-art three years ago, will probably be unable to run today's computer software.

We now live in a wasteful culture where companies and even individuals think nothing of throwing out their year-old PCs and replacing them with the newer, more-flashy model.

Yet there was probably nothing wrong with the original systems.

In fact many people complain that their new computers are too difficult to understand, or they crash for no apparent reason

In one classic and true case, a large firm of solicitors part-exchanged their old Amstrads for a batch of the latest Pentium-powered monsters.

Within a month they returned the PCs and asked if they could have their old PCWs back because no-one could work the new machines.

People are convincing themselves they need the latest computer, when in fact what they have already suits their needs ideally.

Ninety per cent of PC users do nothing more than write letters with their PC. What a waste of technology and money. A £50 8256 would do the job just as well, and in half the time.

And as any eco-warrior will tell you, such a casual abuse of the world's resources, is not doing the environment any good.

Now the fight-back has begun in earnest. One man from the steel city of

Sheffield has decided enough is enough and he has launched the Redundant Technology Initiative, in a bid to fight giants like Microsoft chief Bill Gates.

Already similar movements have been started in Croatia, Amsterdam, Berlin and the United States on the back of the Sheffield scheme.

The project's Yorkshire headquarters show just how old technology can be utilised to do even the most complex of operations.

Along with old Amstrads, the warehouse-style HQ has hoards of ageing PCs, mobile phones, and video recorders lining the floors and walls.

It is like an Aladdin's cave of obsolete technology.

The initiative all started four years ago when Sheffield art student, James

*how come we need a
64 megabyte computer to
write a letter now when
we didn't before?*

Wallbank produced his first low-tech system for less than £100 after scouring the pages of *Exchange & Mart* for equipment.

Since then, RTI has grown into a major operation, headed by a group of 'green' artists who use so-called techno-waste to create masterpieces to highlight to the world the folly of throwing out perfectly good computers.

James Wallbank explained: "We are all about using art to raise people's awareness to the madness going on.

"Some 2,700 PCs a day are chucked into skips by British business - that's more than a million a year. Most of them

are smashed up and buried under the ground, causing horrendous environmental problems. This is sheer madness.

He added: "We said, let's try to gain the expertise and make it our business to use all that technology that's being thrown in the bin or left to clog up office storerooms."

Mr Wallbank believes ultimately he can defeat the stranglehold of Bill Gates and his Microsoft Windows monopoly.

RTI's revolutionary stance on obsolete technology is infectious. It has spread right across Europe and the US.

Mr Wallbank shows packed lecture theatres how he can make a 10-year-old machine do things you never thought possible.

He points out the "upgrade or replace" culture that has become commonplace in the Western world, saying it makes people lazy, and they lose the impetus to make the most of what they've already got.

"By constantly increasing the specification of new PCs, then equipping them with more resource-demanding software, the industry continues to sell 'entry level' systems for around £600.

"How come we need a 64 Mb Pentium to write a letter now when we didn't before? It's because people aren't familiar with technology that they get drawn into this never-ending cycle of upgrade or replace.

"We can run a whole global communications operation here, based on a machine deemed to be trash, so there is absolutely no need to throw out a perfectly good computer, just because the man at Dixons told you to."

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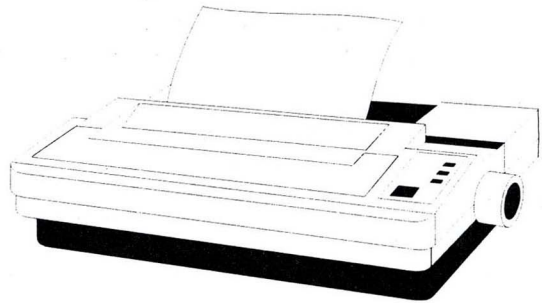
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I HAVE an Amstrad PCW 8256 (upgraded to 8512) for sale, c/w printer and the following: Locoscript I + II + III Locospell, Locofile, Laplink It has been a long time since it has been used and the drive was rather on the slow side the last time it was run. Buyer must collect from Midlands (Derby) andrewsmith108@hotmail.com

DAVE'S Disk Doctor Service Ltd ceased trading on 31st January 2001 after about 14 years during which it has raised about £180,000 for charity. A number of books and items of software are available for sale privately - the latest list is published on the web site <http://www.diskdoctor.co.uk> which will remain active for a year or more. The web site also lists a number of companies who provide alternative data transfer and retrieval services Alternatively, for a printed copy of the latest list send a SAE to Mrs S Smith, 41 Tutsham Way, Paddock Wood, Kent, TN12 6UA. Amongst the items currently for sale are: CPC6128 with 3" floppy drive, AMSTRAD PPC1512 twin floppy luggable + B/W monitor, PCW16, 8" floppy disk drive, New Japanese high quality 3" disks (MAXELL), Dust Covers for 8000 and 9000 machines, DIY Replacement drive band for 3" disk drive (incl instructions), DIY Replacement armature for 9512 printer (incl instructions). All proceeds from the sale of these and the other items will be passed to local charities as usual. Please call before sending any money to check availability.

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realities of life

LocoScript boss Steve Denson has a few home truths

I must admit that I am getting a little tired of reading critical comments in certain club newsletters and internet discussion groups about the "profiteering" tactics of commercial companies still involved in the Amstrad market.

There are some people who seem to suggest that the PCW has moved into the twilight zone of the hobbyist and that the remaining users of this minority machine should now get all their software and support for free. They complain that firms are overcharging for repairs and spares and that costs have risen recently.

The penny-pinching attitude, which appears in some articles, saddens me.

"Don't pay silly money for that repair - I can do it as a favour."

"Company X has put the price of product Y up by 50 pence."

"Why doesn't so and so put that program into the public domain?"

These are typical comments. Now I have nothing against colleagues helping each other out but to suggest that this is a strategy for the survival of the PCW in general is rot.

Illogically, these same people bemoan the fact that fewer companies still cater for the PCW. Well you can't have it both ways and in my experience there is a clear defining line between a company offering full-time professional support available at the point of demand and well-meaning part-time amateurs who are only too happy to help as long as it doesn't interfere with their regular round of golf or with taking the wife shopping.

I am all for computer clubs and generally feel they do a very good job of promoting their chosen machine but I also feel that some committee members suffer from a little pomposity. They look at their modest membership lists and conclude that they therefore represent

the market at large, which frankly they do not.

The type of people who join formal organisations differ from the general user who has no interest in the whys and wherefores of their computer. They simply use it for a specific purpose and in the case of the PCW this is largely still for word processing.

They need ribbons for their printer or a new start-of-day disc or a repair kit to get the thing working again. And they are prepared to pay a reasonable retail price in return for the rapid and efficient supply of such goods.

These customers understand the facts of commercial life and realise that a business has overheads to cover, staff to pay and need to make a profit to survive.

After all if a firm is not profitable then it is loss-making because the dividing line between the two is so thin, which is why so many former "cut price" companies disappeared.

Those who snipe at businesses don't understand this commercial concept.

They equate the price of a package with the basic contents inside. For them a piece of software is reduced to a disc and manual costing a few £££s to produce.

So why they ponder (although not too deeply), does the supplier charge up to £50 a time? They forget about the development costs of the program or how much a company has paid up-front for a duplication licence or the after-sales support which must be provided.

Furthermore a computer component looked at in isolation seems horribly expensive because it is actually a piece of plastic or metal.

The reality is that it is a precision part without which the machine won't function properly or at all. It also has to be manufactured with a production line being set up especially in some factory.

And, like it or not, the PCW does not enjoy the benefits of the economies of scale of the mass market PC.

And if we are talking numbers then I have to report that my company deals with more users by phone, post and email in an average week than even the largest of the Amstrad clubs can muster in total membership.

That is not meant to be a boast but is simply a fact, especially following the LocoScript takeover.

Even the mighty *PCW Today* reaches probably only two per cent of active users.

The vast majority of our customers greatly appreciate the small network of professional full-time businesses dedicated to their brand of computer years after the axing of PCW production by Amstrad PLC.

They lack the time or inclination to trawl around car boot sales or auctions looking for parts or software to keeping their machine running. They view a purchase for their Amstrad almost identically to that for any other of the consumer items they own; petrol for their car, a part for their cooker or the repair of their TV.

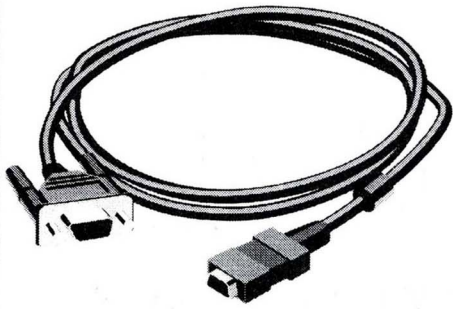
They may be spending £20 but a new PC might cost £1,000.

With *PCW Today* celebrating its fifth anniversary and the PCW itself its 15th I honestly feel that there is plenty of room both for volunteer organisations such as clubs as well as commercial companies who serve the market.

We do different jobs, which should also be complementary; we can provide new members for them and they can send customers to us.

Take a look around at what is left of the other 8-bit computer markets and you will see what I mean.

Most of them are no more than "I remember when..." talking shops these days.



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david langford



How sub editors love to wreak havoc with your copy

One nice thing about *PCW Today* is that our kindly editor doesn't muck around with what you write.

Usually I dread reading my own bits in magazines or newspapers, for fear of finding what atrocities the sub editor has wrought.

In fact the worst disaster that ever befell a Langford column was accidental. This was in *8000 Plus* for January 1991, when I wrote up the horrors of the literary life as a joke PCW text adventure game whose player typed commands at the > prompt. Like this: You are in an indescribably sordid hallway. Shabbily carpeted stairs lead up to your workroom.

> HELP

Kindly remember you are a freelance writer. That is: you're on your own, sunshine.

> GO NORTH

Stop kidding around. You have no idea which way is north.

At *8000 Plus* HQ it was an open secret that the magazine was designed on Macintosh computers. What I didn't know, and what the editors were too (let's be tactful) busy to notice, was that the Mac publishing software ignored lines starting with >.

So only one side of that dialogue with the computer game was printed, lending the column a certain surrealism which made people ask what I'd been smoking that month.

Then came the *Guardian*, which hired me to write batches of quickie SF reviews with just 70 words allowed for each book. That word count included title, author and full publishing details, so *Eon* by Greg Bear would get a less cramped review than something like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick, and I was grateful not to have to cover D.G. Compton's classic title *Hot Wireless Sets, Aspirin Tablets, The Sandpaper Sides of Used Matchboxes and Something That Might Have Been Castor Oil*.

Unfortunately, after I'd performed miracles of critical compression, the *Guardian* sub editors would then change everything around

to fit the text into too small a space. Once they evened up their print columns by cutting a review's final sentence of praise for a book I'd liked, and sticking it on to my 70 words about one I'd hated. Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers.

Fortunately I've so far avoided the *Times Literary Supplement*. A fellow SF critic found that after commissioning a review, the poxy *TLS* would not only edit it savagely but would then pay only (say) 70 per cent of the agreed fee, since they'd used only that percentage of a piece whose length had originally been specified with great precision. Shabby practice, indeed.

*the worst annoyance is
the editor who wishes
you'd written something
different and tries to insert
his ideas in place of yours*

Then there's *SFX* magazine, for which I've been writing a column in every issue since it began in 1995. Even with that much experience and a page all to myself, I still can't judge the length of my contribution accurately enough to be safe from editorial cuts. This is because *SFX* is addicted to a trick of layout called the drop-quote, whereby the designer picks a phrase from your article that seems particularly brilliant or idiotic, and puts this in huge type inside a flashy box to make the page look more exciting. (*There's an example above*)

Because you don't know how much space the drop-quote will take up, you can only guess at the needed word length.

Every now and then, a particularly oversized quote box forces the subs to cut some of the less important stuff on the page. So my text gets trimmed, with the big knives homing in accurately on vital explanations and punchlines of jokes.

Most of the above cock-ups happen because of the mechanics of design and

publishing, the never-ending tug-o'-war between text and presentation.

Dorothy Sayers nailed this one back in 1933 when she set a detective novel in an advertising office and revealed "that the great aim and object of the studio artist was to crowd the copy out of the advertisement and that, conversely, the copy-writer was a designing villain whose ambition was to cram the space with verbiage and leave no room for the sketch."

With electronic publishing, the same old battles are still fought on excitingly high-tech territory.

Well, you can be philosophical about all that. The worst annoyance comes when you meet an editor who wishes you'd written something different and tries to insert his ideas and opinions in place of yours. I had a nasty experience along these lines from *New Scientist* in the run-up to 2000...

It was a review feature based on futurology books. I made a point of digging out some less well-known differences between SF "predictions" and reality, avoiding hackneyed clichés like the idea of food pills. The sub editor crossed out what I'd written and inserted "food pills".

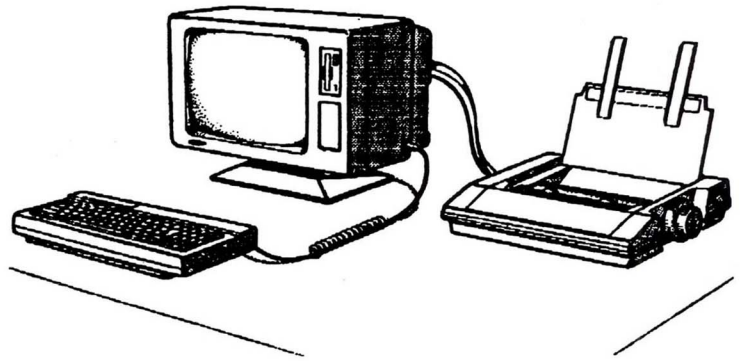
One of the books mentioned, and I quoted, an interesting bit about radical approaches to carbon dioxide sequestration - not planting trees in hope of soaking up greenhouse gases, but actually trapping and physically storing CO2 emissions. The sub editor crossed that out and inserted "planting trees".

I'd avoided quoting Arthur C. Clarke's far too familiar laws of futurology; the subeditor shoved them in, deftly deleting my own examples and conclusion to make room.

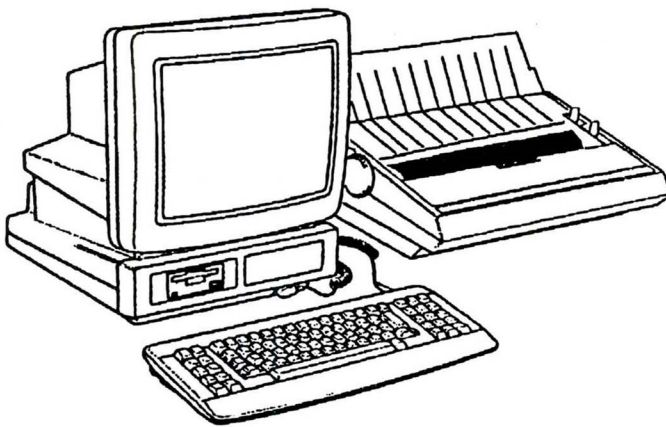
Oh, and - being an SF fan myself - I didn't include the usual journalistic sneer at science fiction. The sub editor ... but you're ahead of me, aren't you? Never again.

Oddly enough, the next SF article I sold was to the seriously upmarket science journal *Nature*. Unlike dumbed-down *New Scientist*, they didn't change a word. I hope there's a moral there.

Do you own a PCW?



Do you still use it?



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Full details of membership from the Secretary, Peter A Clark,
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