

# Bits & Bytes

No 37

## Editorial

This edition is rather different from the usual newsletter, in that it is giving readers an opportunity to see what I have been battling against over the past eighteen months.

*"I would not like my husband's name in Obits as people would know I'm living alone in a big house" LH.*

I have been ably supported by Alan Gillman, Hamish Carmichael, David Marwood and even Duncan Tait the CEO of Fujitsu UK. To no avail!

I would like to point out that over the past 18 years B&B has contained the names of ICL pensioners who have died and I have **NEVER** had anybody contact me because *"they were distressed"* at seeing their relatives name on the list. In fact the very reverse has occurred when somebody has died who wasn't in the ICL Pension Fund, the widows have asked me to include their husband's name in the list so that their ex-colleagues know that he has died!

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## Obituaries Saga

### David Marwood's Letter

Dear Mr. Sillitoe,

I am emailing you because you are chairman of the ICL Pension Fund trustees and I am an ICL pensioner.

I gather that your trustees have decided that Bits & Bytes should no longer include the names of ICL pensioners who have died. (known as "Obits").

I do not know the reason for this exclusion but it is an unhappy one - it means that pensioners are no longer told the names of former colleagues who have died.

Thus we are unable to send our condolences to the families of deceased colleagues and friends with whom we may well have worked closely over many years.

Please may this decision be rescinded and the names of pensioners who have died continue to be published in Bits & Bytes.

**David Marwood** ex-ICL Director and Company Sec.

### Reply from ICL Pension Fund Trustee

Dear Mr Marwood,

Thank you for your email to David Sillitoe, Chairman of the ICL Group Pension Plan Trustee. He

has asked me to respond to you in my capacity as Secretary to the Trustee.

As you know, the Trustee of the ICL Group Pension Plan decided to stop providing information about member deaths for inclusion in the Bits and Bytes newsletter. The Trustee took a number of factors into account when reaching the decision and gave a great deal of consideration to the feedback received from Adrian and from other Plan members.

However, overall the Trustee has decided that it is no longer comfortable providing information about member deaths because of the distress this may cause to the living relatives of those members. Some such relatives are also beneficiaries of benefits in the Plan, and accordingly the Trustee owes a duty to act in their interests. Also, there is no legal requirement to provide this information but there is a risk associated with providing it and the Trustee did not feel that it could justify continuing to provide this information when it was under no legal obligation to do so.

The Trustee understands that some members are unhappy with their decision to stop providing this information, but the Trustee considers that the decision has been made on the basis of fair and sensible reasons and I do not expect it to review the matter again in the near future.

I do hope you continue to enjoy reading the newsletter notwithstanding the recent changes.

Kindest regards,

**Lindsay Hawkins,**

Secretary to the Trustee of the ICL Group Pension Plan

### Hamish Carmichael's Letter

The Trustee of the ICL Pension Fund told you that they were no longer prepared to give you the names of those pensioners who had died since the last issue of Bits and Bytes was published.

I believe, first of all, that you ought to be thanked and commended for your strenuous efforts to get this sad decision reversed.

Let me then review and comment on the various stages in the argument :

'They' argued first that providing the information would be in breach of Data Protection rules. It took no time at all to prove that this was rubbish. A death is a matter of public record, and a dead person has no data protection rights whatsoever.

Then 'they' argued that publishing the names of dead pensioners in Bits and Bytes might cause distress to the relatives of the dead. It would be difficult to suggest anything more ludicrous : the relatives of the dead already know that the person has died, and such publication could not possibly cause

them further grief. In fact 'they' have got the position 100 % the wrong way round :

'They' fail to understand that withholding the information leaves the relatives open to receipt of calls and letters from friends who do not know of the death. That is bound to cause further real distress.

'They' also seem to fail to understand that withholding the information prevents friends from sending messages of sympathy, which have the potential to relieve distress.

'They' don't seem to understand that Bits and Bytes is a publication by pensioners for pensioners. We have the right to determine what it should or should not contain; they do not.

'They' also clearly do not understand, and this is really sad, that we worked for a company where long service was the norm, and where long-term colleagues became friends for life. Of course we want to know whenever such a friend dies.

The only explanation of 'their' decision that makes any sense is that providing the information was just too much trouble, and that by stopping it they might save a few pennies. But of course 'they' could never openly admit such a despicable reason. Instead 'they' have wriggled and squirmed in successive illogical attempts to excuse the inexcusable. And in the end all that they have achieved is that they have earned our derision, our scorn, and our bitterest contempt.

**Hamish Carmichael**

## Notification of leaving this mortal coil

The Trustee of the ICL Pension Fund think that publishing the names of dead pensioners "*may cause distress*" to bereaved relatives.

Can I ask that all pensioners who want their ex-colleagues to know "When I have shuffled off this mortal coil", (and whose relatives will **not** be distressed to see their name on the list), send an email to the ICL Pensions Department at [group.pensions@uk.fujitsu.com](mailto:group.pensions@uk.fujitsu.com) asking that the editor of Bits & Bytes be informed of their passing.

**Editor Bits & Bytes**

## OBITUARIES OBLITERATED

Of late, the first topic mentioned when I meet old colleagues, apart from congratulating me on yet another scintillating article, is the demise of the obituary column. They are more disgusted about the dumping of this link with old friends, than they are over the ongoing farce of the Nortel Pension debacle.

Does the Widow Soap really feel vulnerable by ICL Pensioners knowing that

"Joe Soap (89) who worked in Central London has departed this earth"?

Even the most cantankerous employee must have had at least one associate who'd come across his obit. and mentally doff his cap. It isn't being morbid that makes scanning the list fascinating, or smugness at outliving a non-smoking, non-drinking paragon. To me, it brings back memories, and memories are important at 86, of characters and incidents that made the job so satisfying. The fact that we still feel the urge to get together after a quarter of a century, must suggest we were more than just Staff Numbers on a pay roll. Didn't it cross the mind of somebody at the Pension Trustees meeting their position existed because of the efforts of those who have gone before?

I'm sure the Japanese side of Fujitsu show more respect for their ancestors!

**Dennis Goodwin**

## Life before ICT/ICL

### Mine safety

Upon leaving the RAF I joined the Mining Research Establishment at Isleworth in the Intrinsic Safety Department. Intrinsic Safety is a means of ensuring that apparatus used in a hazardous atmosphere is incapable of causing an explosion. I had been there only a day or two when I was told that my team was to go to Merthyr Vale, a mining village in South Wales, to conduct experiments. I was advised, rather ominously, not to take any clothes that I would want to use again. Unfortunately I missed my colleagues at Paddington, so made my own way to Merthyr Tydfil and thence by bus to the pit at Merthyr Vale. It was quite dark when I arrived, so entering the first lit building I came to I enquired if there was a hotel nearby. I was promptly shushed, as this was the Village Hall and the weekly tombola was taking place, something akin to a religious service it seemed. So I found my way to the pithead and enquired again. Politely hiding their mirth at my naiveté, they said there was no hotel for some miles but I was welcome to spend the night on the operating table of the little infirmary next door, provided of course, that I gave it up if it were needed. Since, like all airman, I had considerable experience of sleeping anywhere, I readily accepted. Unfortunately, in the early hours a poor chap arrived covered in coal dust and with a couple of his fingers now but loosely attached to him. He stoically smoked a cigarette with the other hand. I got up quickly and hoped he appreciated that I had kept the table warm for him.

In the morning my colleagues arrived and apologized that all they could find for me was a B & B at ten shillings a night, whereas they had got in at seven and six. I had an excellent breakfast overlooking the street and discovered later, when I went upstairs to my bedroom that I was now on the same level as the back garden. Quite hilly around there. I then strolled down to the local general store and asked if they kept any newspapers. 'We keep ALL the papers, boyo!' I was assured. So I asked for the Telegraph. The temperature seemed to drop about ten degrees and I discovered that ALL the papers meant The Daily Worker, The Daily Herald and The Daily Mirror. I should have realized that this part of the world had for many years returned a Communist MP to Parliament.

Arriving at the pithead I was duly kitted out with overalls, helmet and lamp and frisked for tobacco, matches and other combustibles. I then got into the steel cage and dropped like a stone for a thousand feet or so. The only things that all coal mines have in common is that they are dark and dangerous. Some are so wide you can run a railway, some so narrow the miner works on his side, some so hot the miners work naked and some so ventilated they are quite chilly. Some are very gassy, others less so, but you never know when a fall will release a pocket of firedamp. Firedamp is basically methane with a little hydrogen and is explosive in air between concentrations of about 5% & 15%. We had to inspect all the electric equipment used down the pit to ensure that, no

matter how it failed, it could never induce an explosion. Back at the lab, I had a Perspex chamber inside which were two platinum electrodes which rotated past each other and suddenly sprang apart. (When the electrodes wore, one would clip the ends, save the little pieces in a matchbox & sell them back to Johnson Matthey). The chamber was filled with an explosive mixture of methane and oxygen and various parts of the equipment circuitry were then connected to the electrodes. The result was often counter-intuitive. One would look in wonder as a big fat spark failed repeatedly to ignite the mixture whereas a tiny little spark might result in a big mauve bang. The real way was to connect a Tektronix C.R.O. to the electrodes and look at the voltage and current passing through the arc. This was, of course, transient, so it was better to photograph the screen so as to study the waveforms later. Later still Schlieren photography was used. Sometimes one got an instant explosion; sometimes it took scores of attempts: my record was just over a thousand. Cases in the upper hundreds one could put to one side as less as urgent and restrict their use. What could one do in the other cases? Well, we inserted inductance and capacitance as appropriate to quench sparks but the big breakthrough came with the invention of the Zener diode, which was a solid state device with a 'knee' in its voltage-current characteristics – i.e., it became non-ohmic. There were a number of companies in this field but their voltage and current limits were rather restricted. To have a little fun, one could phone them up and ask for a better performance and they were pretty dismissive for the most part. Then one had only to mention the words 'National Coal Board' suddenly to become flavour of the month. This was of course because in those days the N.C.B. employed hundreds of thousands of people and any contract was likely to be juicy. There was no circuit symbol for a Zener diode so I drew a Z with one side shaded-in & this became accepted, in our part of the woods at least. So slowly, as we worked through the equipment, the terrible explosions of the past became history (though of course they still happen abroad, especially in China).

The other way in which explosions could occur was by means of static electricity. Any combustible gas or finely divided material can explode if there is a build-up of charge through friction. This was always a threat in flour mills and cement works. The advent of machinery meant an increase in dust in the mines too. In fact it got everywhere: you couldn't lay down a piece of paper without its becoming covered in a fine layer (hence the advice about clothing). How the poor housewives got their washing clean and dry I never knew. Down the pit itself we kept levels down by water spray – not a method available in most other industries. One day we got a call for help from a big London hospital. New anaesthetics were being introduced to replace the old ether and chloroform: unfortunately they were highly inflammable (or as we're supposed to say nowadays, flammable) and a few patients had found flames going down their throats. Inspection of the equipment revealed no serious faults, but of course that was the time when everyone thought nylon was the height of luxury (remember saving up for one of those sticky white nylon shirts?) and many of the operating theatre staff were wearing it. Very high voltages can be induced by rubbing synthetics together, and that was proved to

be the case here. My offer to conduct further research on nurses' undies for free was refused (rather brusquely I thought) and all staff were ordered to wear cotton henceforth. Of course, since then, safer anaesthetics have been produced and few people wear pure synthetics anymore.

It has to be said that we were not always exactly welcomed by the miners; they felt we got in their way and stopped them from reaching their production targets. It was not unknown to find a pick put through your test apparatus. They had a point. For although tending to be left-wing in their politics, in their outlook the miners were conservative (with a small c). Clever men had told them they had to have steel pit props instead of their centuries-old Baltic pine. But Baltic pine groaned before it gave way whereas steel just collapsed. And again, I never did see a gas detector as sensitive and reliable as their canaries. Still it was pleasant to think that one might, in some small measure, have made the mines a safer place for those who had to toil in them. A couple of years ago, on holiday in Scotland, I met an old ex-miner. I mentioned that I, too, had worked for the N.C.B., but added that I didn't expect him to have heard of the Mining Research Establishment.

"Och, aye, I ken the Em Air Ee" he said. I was gratified; don't mention it – just doing my job.... "A richt bluddy pein in the erse you lot wair!

**Varos Shahbazian.**

## Life in ICT/ICL

### Eastern Gas Board, the Universal Document Reader and Déjà vu.

Varos Shahbazian's contribution to the Spring 2013 issue of B&B has jogged some memories of my own of Eastern Gas Board. I was put on to the account as post sales support after the order was taken for the 1904 system circa 1966. I had joined ICT in November 1961 as a trainee Technical Advisor, 'graduated' from Cookham in July 1962 and was then posted to Public Utilities sales area. By 1966 I might have reached the heady rank of Systems Advisor, I cannot remember exactly.

I was not involved in the sales campaign and I think that the order came as rather a surprise as by that time EGB was regarded as something of an IBM stronghold. I guess that it might have been a Powers or BTM site before it went to IBM but I do not know. The salesman was Bill Lumbers who was greatly assisted by Gwen Steel, the sales area's computer systems and programming expert. The initial configuration was for a 1904 with 32k words and included magnetic tapes (discs were not available at that stage), card reader, line printer and a couple of exotic peripherals. As Varos said, EGB seemed to have a bit of a taste for leading edge devices, sometimes so leading edge that you needed a cross between a telescope and a crystal ball to get a good view of them. EGB's two exotics were a multiplexor that was going to support an on-line system using teletypes or similar and a document reader known as the Universal Document Transport (UDT) fitted with an optical mark reader (OMR). I became heavily involved with the UDT at EGB which was to become a source of both pain and pleasure.

Why might customers/prospects be interested in a document reader or, put another way, what was the

sales pitch? There were 3 basic reasons why document reading might be an attractive proposition; it reduced the time taken to get data into the computer by cutting out the need to punch and verify the input, by avoiding the need to punch and verify it removed their associated costs for staff and machines and, given the right training, it improved the accuracy of the input data. It was all about beating the "input bottleneck". It obviously needed a sufficiently large volume of data to make the cost equation balance out. Eastern Gas had seen potential benefits in all 3 areas from their point of view. EGB's initial applications were for the input of gas meter readings, capture of payroll data and the processing of customer payments. It went on to have a number of other applications including the capture of data and keeping records of the conversion from town gas to North Sea gas of every domestic and business property in their area in the late 1960s.

The UDT could be regarded as the successor to the marked sense cards used on 80 column BTM/ICT punched cards although the technology was totally different. The UDT, in its first guise, was an optical mark reader able to read documents at up to 300dpm. The documents could vary in size from something as small as a cheque up to a foolscap sheet, although batches of documents could only be read one size at a time. The documents were fed from an input hopper, held on to a drum by suction, passed under a set of 24 read heads and then, under program control, put into one of 3 output stackers. Data was input by marking the appropriate box on the document with a line using an HB pencil. There could be up to 24 marking columns across the width of the document, spaced at 4 to the inch, any one of which could be used for the clock track, leaving the remaining 23 for data. The number of rows of boxes was determined by the clock track and could be up to 60 at 5 to the inch over 12 inches. This gave a theoretical maximum of 1,380 marking boxes on a maximum sized document. The practical maximum was somewhat less because of the need to print reference information and instructions on how to fill in the document.

I became closely involved with the design of the first EGB OMR documents; a meter reading sheet and two payroll input forms. This had to be done with some care because those filling in the documents had been doing things 'their' way for eternity, had probably never seen a computer in their lives and certainly were not going to change the habits of a lifetime just to enable the management save money. The meter reader's book was an iconic document containing a card for every supply with the name and address of the owner, a history of readings going back several years (useful when needing to estimate a reading) and supplementary notes like "beware of the dog", "owner deaf", etc. We were proposing to replace all this with a turnaround document holding just the name and address and the previous reading. To be fair to all, the EGB management did explain what they were proposing to do and organise proper training and the workforce did agree to 'give it a go' even though it was obviously doomed to failure from the outset. In fact, when the system did go live it went very well with only minor hitches, the meter readers got used to it very quickly and everyone was very pleased. Behind the scenes there was rather less sweetness and light!

Despite exhibiting the UDT at that year's Business Efficiency Exhibition, EGB's delivery was delayed. An

EXEC supporting the UDT was not available. Whatever had been cobbled together for the BEE was not going to be usable in a customer environment. Firm dates for a usable EXEC were not forthcoming. EGB had given notice to IBM to remove the 1401 in the expectation that the 1904 / UDR system would be in place by a certain date. EGB were not prepared to countenance the loss of face involved in extending the 1401 rental. That involved an excursion into using the 1900/1401 emulator and the rapid delivery of a 300cpm card punch. Face saved but at the expense of some customer irritation. What nobody knew was that we had had a lot of difficulty decoding the marks that the UDR had read. Each time the OMR detected a mark it put a bit in a word, up to 23 bits if all columns were marked. The bits were not appearing where expected. It eventually dawned on me that all the expected bits were there but were in the reverse of the expected order. I had managed to get things back to front. (I was told afterwards that engineer's bit '0' was at the opposite end of the word to programmers bit '0'). I have no idea whether that was true or not but it did appear to explain why we were where we were – in some trouble! The only way round the problem, without some tedious coding which would have slowed the system down, was to replug the small board at the back of the UDR. This directed the data from the 24 read heads to the appropriate bit positions in store. Bottle plugs were supplied on the assumption that that was what would be needed. Cross wiring, that I needed, had not been anticipated. By great good fortune the plugs needed were the same as those used on the 1004 and after a few sessions of 'beg, borrow and steal' I managed to assemble enough to cross wire the board. Heave sigh of relief and move on to the next challenge!

In the event the EGB UDR was the first customer delivery and once the system had bedded down they were more than happy to show off their new toy, particularly to other public utilities. At that time there was a certain amount of computer 'one upmanship' played between the 20+ gas and electricity boards. ICT was obviously more than anxious to capitalise on this success and sell more UDRs and to use it as a 1900 differentiator from IBM who, surprisingly, did not have a competitive product. After an initial surge of enthusiasm and a brief opportunity to be in the spotlight I began to find these reference visits a bit of a chore even with the free lunches that usually came with them. I was however more than happy to accept an invitation by ICT Eastern Europe to go to Budapest and Prague to talk about the UDR and its applications. This was 1967 when the Cold War had thawed to a slight extent but the Iron Curtain was still firmly in place. An interesting experience, reasonably relaxed once you were there but it did feel like you were entering and leaving a prison camp when you went through passport control.

Eventually I moved on from EGB but did not escape entirely from the UDR. In 1968 I went to Australia to work on the SGIO project in Brisbane, 1904A with VDUs and a Bryant Fixed Disc and subsequently in 1972, to Adelaide to become Systems Manager for South Australia. Here I came up against the UDR again. This time one had been sold as part of a small 1901 configuration to process medical benefits claims and benefits cheques. It was a small customer and all the programming had been undertaken by ICL, as it

then was. The decoding of the OMR documents was carried out by some general purpose routines that had been developed elsewhere in Australia. The program testing was being carried out on a 1903 bureau system and throughput speed achieved on the UDR was less than sparkling but thought to be 'good enough'. When the customer's configuration was commissioned the throughput was slightly better than paralytic, but not much. Result; a very unhappy customer and much consternation in the local ICL management circles. As a stopgap I offered to see if I could write some interim, bespoke decoding software until a 'proper' programmer became available to do a proper job. Where this person might come from was never entirely clear!

I had been on a very early PLAN programming course in about 1965 and by the end of the week had written a program to calculate the squares and cubes of the numbers from 1 to 10 and to output the results on the console typewriter – a red-hot commercial application if ever there was one! Seven or so years later I had not written another line of code. I did not even know how to call a subroutine – and still don't – someone else handled that task. As there was a lot of duplication of field types on the input document; date, amount, cost code, etc. I only had to write about 4 subroutines so I was able to spend a little bit of time ensuring that they were as efficient as reasonably possible. We tested the new code in secret on the bureau 1903 and were relieved to find that we were able to decode the documents correctly. Performance seemed to be better but not significantly. Once over the first hurdle we told the customer that we had some code to test but at this stage were only testing for accuracy of reading not speed. It was implied that this would come later from further code optimisation although none of us could see how. We did a test run on the customer's system with the customer breathing down our necks. The documents just sailed through at what looked like maximum speed. There must have been a bug in the program somewhere so that the UDR had just physically fed the documents through without reading or decoding anything. The expression on the customer's face certainly suggested that he had come to that conclusion. We waited for a few moments for the analysis and summary print to be generated fully expecting to see a page full of zeros. The print arrived in due course but with numbers instead of zeros and amazingly, all the right numbers. We could hardly believe our eyes and the customer certainly did not believe his. You could see that he suspected that we had fixed the demonstration to print the right answers even if the UDR had not read the information correctly – some customers are like that! He insisted on putting through one of the day's earlier production batches and timing the run. Again the documents went through quickly, nearly maximum rated speed, and the tabulation replicated the afternoon's output. I think that the customer's response to this was along the line of "pity that you could not get the program right the first time" nearly praise from a man whose vocabulary never seemed to include "thank you" or "well done" whatever the circumstances. With the UDR working at near maximum speed the customer's, and our, attention focussed on other issues. Just as well for I don't think that a suitable 'proper' programmer for the job of code optimisation was ever found – or ever likely to be found.

After that my ways and those of the UDR diverged. A very wide range of applications were developed for the UDR / OMR option and an OCR version was also developed and marketed. Overall it was quite a successful 1900 peripheral but probably not as successful as had been hoped originally. By the time that 2900 was announced much less expensive off-line devices were available on the market and the UDR was not carried forward. My ways brought me back to the UK and brief entanglement with an off-line OMR application in the mid 1970s but otherwise no further involvement with the technology until after I retired at the end of 2000. Looking around for something to do to make up the difference between 'take home' pay and 'take home' pension I became involved which running examinations for professional bodies and universities. Lo and behold I found that OMR marking sheets for multiple choice examination papers were going strong some 35 years after my first brush with the UDR. Initially when briefing candidates about filling in these documents I assumed that the technique was now so old that everyone knew all about it and, in any case, it was so simple that it was not necessary to explain it in any detail. WRONG and WRONG again – but that is another story.

**Philip Sugden**

## **BTM HEC / ICT 1200 Computer**

### **Part 2. Bedding in and Personal Recollections**

As I said in Part 1, (in B&B No36), from 1956 to 1960, over 100 HEC/1200s were delivered, making it commercially the most successful of the first generation of British computers.

I was to install or work on many of these, in the UK and abroad. The details of most have faded, but here are a few that still stand out in my memory.

I worked at Morgan Crucible in Battersea a few times and remember one particular problem. I had made a minor unofficial wiring mod at the back of the tabulator, for which I got a wrap on the wrist and a pat on the back, but it didn't solve the Lamson Paragon paper handling problem. Doc Keen spent a couple of weeks with me at Morgan's until it was fixed and the customer was happy.

One of the early machines was West Riding County Council in Wakefield. I enjoyed going there. It was only 6 miles from my parent's home and I still got full allowances. I helped Bill Holliday install it. Bill was ex-naval and had joined John Sherlock before me and had got himself onto a site engineer course. He got the Wakefield machine and settled with his family in Horbury, my home town.

I well remember British Rail Paddington and Bristol. On one occasion I was sent to Paddington late morning to find Margaret Lamb desperately trying and failing to get the payroll through. I had a quick look and said it would probably take time, possibly hours. So, off went Margaret with trays of cards to Bristol, which had an identical machine. I fixed Paddington early in the evening, only to get a call from Margaret to say that Bristol was down. She returned to Paddington with the cards, plus work from Bristol, while I travelled the opposite way to work until the wee hours fixing the Bristol machine.

Apart from helping to install and support the first exhibition in Paris, my first installation of a commercial 1201 abroad was for a bank in Hamburg. This was about 1958/59 and with John Hudson, possibly the first time I worked with him. The

building had one of those continuously moving lifts, the first I had ever seen, where you jumped on as a platform passed by and jumped off as it passed your destination floor. Now this was time in the UK when cities like Bristol, Coventry and parts of London were still badly scarred by bomb damage. Hamburg had been almost obliterated in 1944, but by 1958/59 the city had been completely rebuilt, brick by recovered brick. Not a sign of damage, except the dock area. That had been stripped, flattened and cleaned, with a single 30 to 40 foot cone in the middle, topped by a fantastic fish restaurant. It was in the British sector of Germany and English was widely spoken.

The Irish Sugar Company in Thurles, Tipperary, had ordered a 1201. The Irish service manager was Tom Daley, who kept an eye on us. The company had employed about 50 local people, almost all ladies, on short-term Hollerith accounting work, during the sugar beet harvest and processing periods. All were being replaced by the 1201, two programmers and Marion Killacky, an operator. Peter Watts helped us to install the machine for a few weeks, but John Hudson and I were to spend about eight out of the next eighteen months there. As usual, John made friends quickly, the most important one being one of the priests at the RC cathedral. He knew everyone and we met him everywhere. He introduced us to many local people and we had many invites to tea and parties and to social ceilidhs, where amazingly, John had a few dances. He really hammered his false leg on that first trip and broke the knee joint. The sugar company workshop did a temporary fix and John Sherlock picked up a spare from Roehampton and Tom Daley delivered it to Thurles three or four days later.

I remember helping site engineer Eddy Dawson to install GEC, in Smethwick just off the ring road to the north of Birmingham. I made a few visits to help fix faults. The site was close to a foundry and to the battery workshop. The smell was appalling, even to me having grown up in the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire. I was then in digs in Stevenage and I couldn't wait to get back to the green and pleasant countryside.

In 1959, John Sherlock put me back in the Stevenage factory to briefly work on and update myself to the 1202. It had a few changes, the most important being the quadrupling of the drum memory to 4096 words. My memory is a bit dim again, but three of these machines stand out.

The first was Pilkington Brothers Glass Works in St Helens, used for payroll, administration and production control. It was virtually a one street town, with the plant and the only (decent) hotel at one end. I was sent to help sort out an intermittent problem which was causing havoc with production runs. I was to spend 11 days there, mostly with my head inside the computer, until I was lucky enough to see a tiny flash from one of the register valves. Afterwards, I was put on a train in Liverpool and immediately I fell asleep, to be woken up by the guard at Euston.

The next 1202 was La Cite Vie in Strasbourg, which I installed with John Hudson. The site engineer was North Vietnamese and the salesman was South Vietnamese – very interesting. The area supervisor was John Mackenzie, who knew everyone, all the interesting places and all the French programmers.

I had been agitating John Sherlock for some time to move me on to something new, but he sent me to sort

out my last 1202 at the East African Railways in Nairobi. The site engineer had installed it with the help of local staff, but he had very little help and support after that. After six months of problems the customer manager Mr Bell said "Fix it or take it out" and I was sent there. The machine was inoperable; the covers were off; the air-conditioning was not adequate; there was no site Avo meter, oscilloscope, nor valve tester and totally inadequate spares. The site engineer Alan was in near breakdown and I had to have him sent back to the UK and have the spares and equipment sent out. I decided the machine needed re-commissioning and with the customer wanting a quick fix, I asked John Sherlock to send out John Hudson. I was to stay eight weeks and overlap with the new engineer and John stayed for five weeks. John concentrated on the tab, punch and Lampson Paragon attachment and I got on with the computer. We had the machine working in three weeks, but five days of this were over Easter. Mr Bell firmly said the office would be closed, so go and do something nice. Peter Mullet our local general manager had already given me a brand new Morris Oxford and said go to Mombasa, you will like it. And we did. Up at 4.00am, 300 miles of murrum (dirt) road, a stop half way at Hunters Lodge for breakfast. We experimented and found that a steady 50mph was the most comfortable speed and we arrived in Mombasa at 12.30. Two very young boys beautifully cleaned the car for 20 shillings (£1.00), a fortune to them, while we had a spot of lunch. We then picked out a beach hotel and ended up with a hotel full of Nairobi ex-pats, most of whom we knew, doing just what we were doing. It was fantastic trip and a fantastic break. Back in Nairobi, we completed the re-commissioning and got the programmers working.

The local service manager, Jim Irvin was no help technically, but looked after us socially and took us out on a few safaris. We were on the equator at 5500ft and yet 500ft up at 6000ft, the Country Club at Brackenhurst had log fires. One weekend John Hudson went fishing with a local engineer, so off I went on my own for two days via Nyeri, the Aberdares and Naivasha. What a wonderful country. I met my wife shortly after this trip and promised to take her one day – but it was to be 17 years before I could afford to take her there in 1978.

Eventually John Sherlock let me go to Stevenage, this time to do whatever I wanted on the 1300.

The 1200 days were the very early, heady days of computing and a fantastic start for a young 20 something. It is now a long, long time since then, but I still have happy memories of those times.

**Alan Wray. BTM, ICT, ICL.**

## Letters

I sent this to the Daily Mail and amazingly they actually published it and I got the "letter of the week" prize!

The information is regarding the State pension not the massive amount we are paying for Public Sector and Civil Servants pensions.

Letter sent was:

I am getting increasingly annoyed at the press reports implying we pensioners are a drain on the country.

Let's get some facts into the public domain, facts that can be proved by some diligent research from the Governments own publications.

1 – National Insurance contributions are (or are supposed to be) ring fenced for the following uses; state pension, widows pension and bereavement payments, incapacity benefit, unemployment benefit and support, maternity and guardians allowance, plus administrative costs.

2– In 2012 the total National Insurance contributions were £106 billion.

3 – In 2012 the expenditure was;  
State Pension (including Christmas bonus) £79.321 billion  
Widows Pension £0.571 billion  
Incapacity benefit £2.591 billion  
Unemployment benefit £3.463 billion  
Maternity allowances £0.373 billion  
Administration £4.693 billion  
Total payments £91.012 billion

Leaving a surplus of just under £15 billion making National insurance self sustaining year on year.

I know this means the state pension payments appear to be paid by those currently in employment, but if a person was on average salary from 1975 till retirement in 2011 they and their employer would have made National Insurance contributions of £98,363.88.

This is without any interest payment which would be there if it had been ring fenced.

According to the Department of Works and pensions the average State Pension for 2012/13 is £124 per week or £6,448 per year and with a UK male life expectancy of 79 years this equates to 14 years pension payment of £90,272.

Conclusion, you will not receive as much pension as you had actually paid for, so far from being a drain on the country you are actually contributing more than you ever paid in.

Dave Clark

## ICL lives on in Germany

I had two week's holiday in Germany and Holland in June. Back in 1964 Alan Wray and I installed an ICT 1500 (RCA301) system in the ICT office in Düsseldorf. I hadn't been back since and was interested to see what changes had happened in 49 years. The office was in Immerman Strasse and dominated by a Y shaped overpass. Unfortunately I arrived too late to see it, as it was removed in April this year to make way for a shopping mall, and I was completely disorientated!

As I drove into Düsseldorf from Essen I was amazed to see an ICL sign on the top of an office building. I know that Fujitsu dropped the ICL brand years ago. Maybe the sign should be given to the National Computing Museum at Bletchley Park.

Adrian Turner

## Reunions

### ICL Central London

The next reunion will be on Wednesday 16 October 2013 at **The Shakespeare's Head, 64 Kingsway** from 12 noon. The pub is on the eastern side of Kingsway just south of Holborn tube station.

Bill Williams 020 7607 9408  
256meteorahlhorn@gmail.com

**Stevenage & Letchworth Old Boys**  
(renamed Punch Card Reunion)

The annual reunion will take place on **Tuesday 1st October 2013** at Stevenage Labs STE04.

Please send £10 to Adrian Turner, 5, Nun's Acre, Goring-on-Thames, RG8 9BE. Cheques should be made payable to **Punch Card Reunion** and accompanied by a SAE.

Adrian Turner 01491 872012  
**Kidsgrove-Drawing-Office**

The Annual reunion is held at the Bleeding Wolf, Scholar Green on the first Monday in December  
brian@morrismail.co.uk

**Watford-Harrow- Feltham**

Mike Ray 01895 230194

**East Grinstead 81 Club**

Gordon Franklin 01342 328479

**East Midlands UB40s**

Brian Skeldon 0115 9725119

**ICL Double Majority Association**

Joseph Gardner 01438 362806

**ICL Midlands**

Brian Trow 01785 257317

**LEO Computers Society**

On **Sunday, April 6th, 2014** there will be a reunion to celebrate the setting up of LEO Computers Ltd 60 years ago. It will be held at the historic Middle Temple Hall, London EC4Y 9AT. Contact the Leo Society at [globalleosociety@gmail.com](mailto:globalleosociety@gmail.com) for more information.

John Andrews

[GlobalLeoSociety@gmail.com](mailto:GlobalLeoSociety@gmail.com)

**Liverpool Engineers**

We now meet about midday on the second Wednesday of every month at Wetherspoons, Great Charlotte Street near Lime Street Station.

George Lynn 01744 29984

**Surrey Engineers**

Trevor Harding 01483 565144

[trevor@harding14.plus.com](mailto:trevor@harding14.plus.com)

**West Gorton Reunion**

Eric W Watts 01457 875080

**West Branch Engineers**

Eric Reynolds 01452 712047

**West Kent Reunion**

Ron Harding 01732 761076

**ICL Old Buggas**

Les Mowbray [www.cuin.co.uk/oldbuggas/](http://www.cuin.co.uk/oldbuggas/)

**ExICL Kidsgrove**

Nick Edmonds 01270 585953

[nick.edmonds@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nick.edmonds@yahoo.co.uk)

**MOD MOB**

Retired and active staff from the London and MOD UK unit have met up for about two years now, so we have now established ourselves as a sociable group of individuals. The next meeting is on **Wednesday the 11th of December 2013 at the Moon on the Mall** hostelry about 12:00 hrs onwards.

Anyone who is retired or active and wishes to meet up with individuals who worked anywhere on MOD contracts or in the group is welcome. Lots of people worked in CHOTS as well as in the main MOD team and all are welcome, security clearance not required, just bring a smile. Email to [modmob@shedlandz.co.uk](mailto:modmob@shedlandz.co.uk) for enquiries

# OBITUARIES

## Nortel Fund

BRA01	Roger	Lee	23/06/13	69
BRA05	P W	Blott	29/04/13	83
BRS06	Roger B	Farmer	12/04/13	83
FEL01	H W A	Alcock	25/03/13	85
	Michael T	Hayes	16/07/13	84
	Steven R	Oultram	16/04/13	62
HOC01	A K	Howle	06/08/13	86
HOM99	T	Doyle	04/05/13	76
KID01	I	Booth	04/07/13	86
	Rose	Lomas	04/03/13	76
	Frederick	Evans	14/05/13	90
	Alexander	Patterson	24/04/13	88
	Edward	Smith	15/08/13	83
LET01	Edward W	Jones	24/04/13	92
LET03	P F	Chapman	09/04/13	83
LET04	John	Henderson	23/07/13	88
LET05	W	Dawson	15/03/13	83
	Raymond	Kitchener	25/06/13	82
	Brian W	Limbrick	07/05/13	81
	Anthony O	Osborne	14/03/13	85
LET06	Beryl	Fisher	25/03/13	87
	John R	Hurst	18/05/13	83
Lincoln	Dennis	Waddingham	03/04/13	85
LON11	John	McCarthy	04/07/13	94
LON13	Rita M	Sullivan	09/03/13	82
LON15	Jean R	Mole	31/08/13	83
LON31	C L	Bull	18/04/13	89
LON38	Richard	Whitfield	09/08/13	79
MAN01	Sydney	Petts	18/06/13	81
	Leslie E	Supple	14/03/13	89
MAN05	T	Bennett	03/04/13	95
	Francis J	Saunders	23/06/13	88
MAN12	Hazel Lou	Iago	27/05/13	82
	Henry A	Lightburn	19/07/13	86
MAN	John	Holland	07/08/13	84
REA06	James V	Burden	25/03/13	85
REA08	Ernest S	Ellis	11/07/13	76
	Vernon K	White	26/03/13	77
STE04	G L	Bentley	01/08/13	90
	Irene B	Graham	11/05/13	84
	Ralf R	Hurst	11/03/13	87
	Frances E	Lee	17/03/13	85
	Arthur	Pinder	06/06/13	84
STE08	Derrick	Allston	02/08/13	88
STE	Ronald F	Abrams	18/07/13	80
TAP01	Peter A	Greenhalgh	07/04/13	87
WSR01	Derek T	Fellowes	31/08/13	91
No	P J	Bailey	22/03/13	88
Known				
Location	John	Bennett	12/03/13	88
	E	Black	17/04/13	77
	N	Bottoms	01/07/13	94
	William E	Brookes	23/04/13	100
	T W	Burgess	01/05/13	75
	Claude H	Carter	30/03/13	101
	G G	Cass	04/05/13	82
	Lilian G	Court	27/04/13	92
	G M	Cuthbertson	20/06/13	93
	K T	Doyle	13/05/13	87
	B	Dudley	21/06/13	90
	Arthur D	Dwyer	08/06/13	88
	Katarzyna	Ejmsont	28/03/13	89
	B	Gibbs	12/08/13	72
	Mary E	Haynes	29/04/13	78
	Margaret R	Jones	19/03/13	92

Doris E	Langford	26/03/13	87
May M	Mitchell	28/04/13	82
Jerry L	Montgomery	11/07/13	73
John	Morrison	13/05/13	94
Edward R	Randell	06/06/13	89
Jacob E	Sachs	14/03/13	89
M V	Senior	31/03/13	85
Thomas A	Skilandis	13/07/13	83
Irene M	Sumner	15/08/13	85
James W	Teaton	25/03/13	84
E	Williams	10/05/13	93
Monica	Wood	28/05/13	89

## ICL Fund

*If you hear the words "Health and Safety" or "Data Protection" you can be pretty sure that some petty bureaucrat can't be bothered to do his (or more usually her) job.*

## THE MISSING NAMES

We enjoyed them, knew them, liked them;  
We were glad they were our friends;  
As we followed them in life  
We want to know about their ends.

Such loyalty was normal  
In the Company we knew.  
Now they say that they won't tell us.  
What's the Trustee coming to?

From the sympathetic outfit  
That we all were proud to know  
In so short a span of years  
How has the Trustee sunk so low?

**Hamish Carmichael**

BRA01

BRA05

BRS06

BTN01

EDI04

ELS01

EXE04

FEL01

GAT01

## Fujitsu Pensions Website

<https://fujitsu.pensiondetails.co.uk>

To access Bits & Bytes click on the link given on the very bottom of the home page. The Spring and Autumn editions of B&B will be available in the last week of March and September each year. Please make a note in your diaries to access the website on a regular basis. [www.bitsandbytes.shedlandz.co.uk](http://www.bitsandbytes.shedlandz.co.uk)

## NEXT ISSUE

Copy for the **Spring 2014** issue must be submitted by **1 February 2014**, but would be appreciated earlier.

Now that B&B is not printed and distributed to pensioners the number of stories and anecdotes has dried up. If you want B&B to continue YOU must contribute something!