

FROBNICATE

You won't believe it, but...

As I began to celebrate this issue's release, strange things began to happen with my bottle of wine, so I quickly grabbed my digital camera and...



**FROBNICATE
CELEBRATES
TEN YEARS!**

(gee, don't I feel old now!)

Contains sustained moderate geekery.



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[#24, 2005/04/16 04:25 CET]

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Credits:

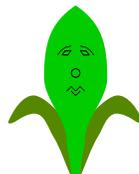
Designed, written, and created by Richard Murray.
"Attack of the killer pampas grass" written by Stephanie-Jane Murray.
"Hiding a satellite dish" written by Ewen Cathcart.

Images that are not my own have attribution, except:
The cute girl typing (p24) is from Votre Site Web built-in styles and images, converted from PNG format.

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The Frobnicate website - where you can also find the previous 23 issues...

<http://www.heyrick.co.uk/frobnicate/>



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Keep in touch!

heyrick -at- merseymail -dot- com

Editor's notes

Can you believe it!?!?!?

The first issue of *Frobnicate* was created *ten* years ago – in June 1995. Makes me feel old!

In this issue we have two serious and controversial subjects. The first is the issue of "Brits out" that has been happening in some parts of Brittany, though I reiterate not around here. That said, there are a few home truths that should not go unnoticed.

The second is one that concerns every single one of us. You are *all* computer users. You are either reading this on-screen, or you are reading a copy that somebody printed. The issue? Software patents. While we can't do much with, or for, the madness that calls itself America, we can stand up and do our best to ensure that can never happen in Europe.

Pages 25 and 26 are also going to be made available as a separate PDF document. You have my permission (and my blessing) to distribute these pages far and wide if there is any way that what I say will help people vote against software patents.

But, as always, there is a lighter side to *Frobnicate* – the hacker is back, I try to teach you to make web pages, *Frobnicate* publishes its first ever non-RISC OS review (and, frankly, a product in that state wouldn't cut it in the RISC OS market). Oh, and a whole heap of wanderings around my mind.

To round off this issue, Stephanie-Jane Murray (a.k.a mom) and Ewen have both written again for *Frobnicate*.



Were you a reader back in '95?

I know it is a horrible Americanism and a cliché, but what the hell . . . *enjoy!*

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Votre Site Web

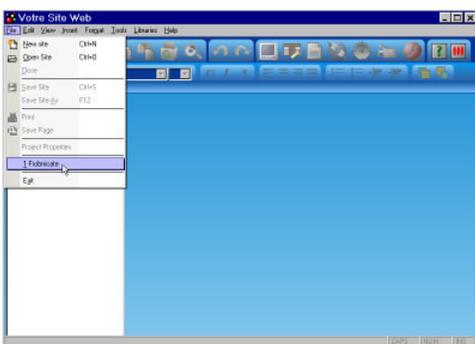
REVIEW

Within France, the company *Micro Application* is well-known for releasing inexpensive software solutions. I purchased *Votre Site Web*. While I don't have any problem with writing HTML and web sites, but I thought I'd try a package with 100's of designs to see about a little 'inspiration'. My main limitation is that while I have lots of ideas in my head, I am tragic at drawing. As a person that enjoys writing teleplays, you have no idea how depressing it is knowing that I can't adequately storyboard them!

Anyway – the software is cheap'n'cheerful. This is the 'light' version as it is a reduced version of a larger package (i.e. you have dozens of Flash thingies to insert, but you can't make your own Flash animations). I install it and it takes a good few minutes due to the *enormous* number of small files that it includes. It is interesting to note that *all* of the supplied images are PNG format. No GIFs in sight.



After a moment taken to initialise, the software opens with a shocking blue screen. I have seen this sort of thing before – it is software with “skins”



pretending to look like XP, as if it isn't bad enough that XP itself can look like this!

It looks plain weird in W98.

A wizard will appear, and making your first web site with this software is as easy as filling in a few details. Sit back while it assembles your site and then loads it. There are *loads* of styles to look at, and you can play with the colours (but not as much as I'd have liked). Certainly if your artistic ability is lacking, you'll have wet dreams due to the options.

You might have noticed that a lot is in English. This is because the software is a French conversion of an English-language product. I say “conversion” as the wizard, title, program identification, and (poor) instruction manual are in French. The rest is in English.

It is, in my opinion, a rather half-assed conversion as the help says “Pour les afficher, cliquez sur Bordures dans le menu Affichage.”. The menus are in ENGLISH. It is possible that the software installed a semi-English version because it noticed that my computer is set to English, but to be honest that's about as likely as me having won the lottery tonight!

This, *very sadly* is where the happiness grinds to a halt. Resolutely. Like driving a Mini into a cement mixer.

Wreckage litters the ground.

Think I'm exaggerating? Let me load up a suitably sombre Dylan song (with some Leonard Cohen in the playlist) and I'll continue...

Right. This software has a terrible propensity for crashing. It is lucky that it seems to save-to-disc regularly in the background. It seems the stupidest things (and many of them) cause it to roll over dead.

Why can't I set a default button size other than 125x28? It seems to have decided that its buttons will be this size and *that is that*. There are plenty of buttons to choose from, but only *two* exactly fit.

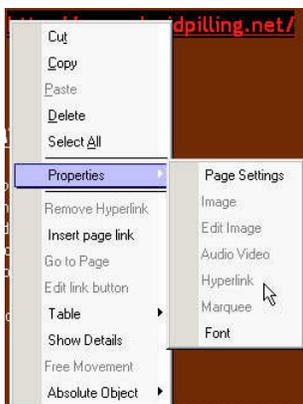
The built-in image manipulator has many capabilities, but cropping or resizing to fit and making the results look good... well that's just not one of its capabilities.

Shall we carry on? How about the HTML editor. The window doesn't appear to be resizable. And, oh my God, don't you *dare* try something stupid like changing all the © symbols to be © and the é to be é. Not only will it change them back to absolute characters, it'll get it's panties in a twist and promptly crash. If you're really lucky, upon a reload it'll notice the error and solve it by...

...wait for it...

...*deleting* the affected files. Holy ****!!! There's no option "Try to autofix, abort load, or delete files". Oh no, the sod will go ahead and nuke hours of work *just like that*.

You can set up hyperlinks in all sorts of interesting ways. Unlike *some* versions of *FrontPage*, this software doesn't try to "associate everything with C:\... unless you say otherwise". However should you later want to edit (or even check) the link, you'll have to learn HTML because the software



seems unable to recognise links that it has just created. A link is duly selected (I've tried all sorts of ways of selecting) and the mouse pointer finds the "hyperlink" option – which is greyed out!

If I add a new page, it'd be nice to have a new button for it. It doesn't seem to want to let you add more buttons. Trying to create a button for "return to index" (for what's the point of having a page's own button on itself?) caused a crash. I tried three different ways to do this, and it crashed three different times and ways (!). I did finally do it, but a trial changing the style of all of the buttons didn't touch the button I'd just created, so obviously it was treating it as just a picture with a link.

The new-look *Frobnicate* website was created using this software. It took a lot of subtle HTML editing to remove the *horrible* abuse of tables. The text panel of the main page was a frame inside a frame inside a frame seemingly ad finitum. While this isn't a terrible thing, it is rather unnecessary and the software should have been a little bit smarter here.

What *is* a terrible thing is the quality of the HTML generated. It is *appalling*. **It makes me want to vomit**. Think I'm being over the top? This is as-generated. Read it on the website and you'll be crying more than an eight-year-old schoolgirl who's just had her lunch money stolen. Seriously, the quality of the HTML is hard to describe without using so-called Anglo-Saxon words!

```
<TABLE cellSpacing=0 cellPadding=0 width=772 align=center background=images/m_bg.png border=0>
```

```
<TR>
<TD vAlign=top align=left>
<TABLE cellSpacing=10 cellPadding=0 width=772 align=center background="" border=0>
```

```
<TR>
<TD vAlign=top align=left>
<P align=center><FONT face="Trebuchet MS, Verdana" color=#ffffff size=2><STRONG>Welcome, </STRONG>to the home of <EM>Frobnicate</EM>
```

```
magazine. </FONT></P>
<P align=justify><FONT face="Trebuchet MS, Verdana" color=#ffffff size=2>Here you will be able to download <EM>all</EM>
```

```
issues in Ovation(Pro) format. The more recent issues are available in Adobe PDF format [...] able to view Ovation(Pro) documents; though note[...] for both RISC OS and Windows. </FONT></P>
<P align=justify>
<TABLE style="WIDTH: 752px; HEIGHT: 239px" width="752%" border=0 background="">
```

```
<TR>
<TD vAlign=top>
<P><FONT color=#ffffff><EM>Frobnicate</EM> [...] three things you don't often find...</FONT></P>
```

How many problems can you spot?

- Table background image. No quotes around it. I'd also like to see the alignment in quotes.
- The font colour is *not* quoted – and this is *very* wrong because the '#' character is used. SGMLS won't pass it. You might have got away with it if the colour had been named (i.e. "white"), but not as an RGB value.
- What's with the weird formatting? Any why all those pointless blank lines?

•The table tags give the width as pixels in the ‘style’ attribute. How, though, will this look on browsers that are not aware of the style and try to interpret the older method: you know... the one that reads:

```
width="752%"
```

How on earth did *that* turn into a percentage?

Actually, I do know how. I tried to set cellspacing and cellpadding to see what effect this would have to the displayed result, and while I could set them to a value, I couldn't set them back to zero. The software just ignored it. I had to resort to directly editing the HTML in the editor (with my fingers crossed too). Thus, if ‘%’ is the first option in the width part of the choices, it probably just assumed I meant ‘%’ rather than using the slightest bit of intelligence (or even raising a query over a percentage value > 100)!

If you are typing and you click a text effect the cursor disappears! You have to click in the text area to put the cursor back, and this sets the style options back to whatever they were before you applied the effect, thus it is necessary to learn ^B, ^I, and ^U... Also there doesn't appear to be a way to do things like superscript.

While I cannot turn my nose up at the price, a mere six euros; in my opinion this software is *not* complete. While I accept that all commercial software has bugs somewhere, this has too many critical and/or basic-interface-issue bugs. In fact, you wonder if the programmer(s?) actually use this software as you think “how did they miss *that*?”. This is what I would expect from a late Alpha or early Beta version. It isn't stable or bugfree enough to warrant a “commercial release” status.

As *Micro Application* have inserted their own information in the program info, so I don't know who to get in touch with, with regards to this review.

Verdict?

Votre Site Web Light; version 1.01.0174
(perhaps “Your web site ‘lite’” in English?)

Creativity	8/10	Plenty of options to try.
Ease of use	5/10	Some things just don't work right!
Stability	3/10	Poor, poor, poor.
Quality of output	1/10	Truly atrocious!
OVERALL	4/10	“Unrealised potential”

This could be a great little product. But it isn't, not yet.



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Between 2004/10/20 and 2005/04/01, *Frobnicate* issue **22** was downloaded **3506** times (with duplicate entries removed). The OvationPro version was downloaded 276 times (7%), the PDF version 3230 times (88%). The supplement made up the remaining 5%.

Between 2005/01/12 and 2005/04/01, *Frobnicate* issue **23** was downloaded **675** times (with duplicate entries removed). The OvationPro version was downloaded 175 times (25%), the PDF version 500 times (75%).

You could reach a potential 600 to 3000+ readers. Simply send an OvationPro document, RISC OS DrawFile, HTML document, etc. Adverts will be inserted to fill space on pages.
Please note: maximum content size is 32K unless pre-arranged.

Attack of the KILLER Pampas Grass!

by Stephanie-Jane Murray

Pampas grass is not something to be taken lightly. In fact, with those wickedly incised, strappy leaves often not to be taken at all. It probably looks nice as a specimen plant on its own. But here in deepest rural France we have two huge examples, somewhat overgrown, side by side along the edge of the driveway. One had already decided to throw itself across the tarmac with all the abandon of an inebriated prospector staking a claim. The other one was trying very hard to take over the entire Summer Garden. It had managed to trample over nettles and robust brambles, and completely flattened a barbed-wire fence. Pampas grass grows like a Triffid. It harbours lurking couleuvres (couleuvre: grass snake, smooth snake). It has great, feathery tassels that drop bits into your hair, down your back, and make you sneeze. When you try to cut it back a bit, it fights back! Our only resort was that one of the pampas grasses had to go.

Have you ever tried to cut down pampas grass? It defies logic and, more importantly, it defies most usual garden tools, too. We started by snipping away the long leaves with secateurs, and if we'd kept at it, we might have finished sometime in 2008; that is if it didn't manage to grow back faster than we cut it. The next bright idea was a large metal rake, maybe we could rake it apart? That was abandoned ten minutes later for a sickle, as well as a whetstone because the sickle needed sharpening every fifteen minutes or so. After 90 minutes the plant was about half gone. What was left was a hard, multi-branched stump something like sugar cane with a gazillion roots underneath. We were both a bit demented by then, determined to cut it all down, no matter what. Rick fetched the wood axe and began to chop with the same attention one pays to enormous, intrusive brambles. Another quarter hour and I brought out the Extremely Serious and Really Rather Heavy Pick-Axe – the one you use for breaking up hardcore and pack-ice.

We never did get it all out. It has defied everything in a Medusa-like way. We do have a flame-thrower, but even that probably wouldn't have worked since the

underground bits were not only damp, but seem to go on forever. Maybe Patrick, the chap next door, can hitch it to his nifty red John Deere and pull it out?

Meanwhile, there is a huge pile of the cut down and chopped up parts of the plant – about fifteen wheelbarrow loads of it. Ten or twelve foot high green and not-so-green straps with edges that bite. Where can we dispose of them? Will they rot down? Turn into green manure? Spring back to life? Go on forever? They certainly can not be discreetly added along the edges of the ploughed field. They are not in the least discreet. For now they are sitting, still defiant, in a very large pile in the summer garden.

And if we do ever manage to get this one totally removed, what's the betting that the other one will put on a huge growth spurt and fill up all that new, empty space? Didn't they teach you at school that nature abhors a vacuum?

On a totally different topic:

Best Books Read This Quarter

1. **Chronicles: Volume One**
Bob Dylan
Simon and Schuster

Don't bother to read this if all you are looking for is an explanation of the words to Dylan's songs. It isn't there. What is in this book is a fascinating and highly readable account of his early days in New York, the making of an album in New Orleans, and some personal asides to do with trying to keep his family together. Stardom apparently does not rest easy with him, and *Chronicles* is his chance to tell his side of the story. I liked him even more by the end of the book; what better recommendation can you give?

2. **Trace**
Patricia Cornwell
Little, Brown

The latest Scarpetta story. Benton is back, but away in Aspen while Kay is called back to the office she vacated five years ago in Richmond. Foul play at work, and she takes Marino along. Marino is acting more and more like Columbo. You will never, ever look at a baseball bat the same way after reading this.

How to make an HTML quilt

part 1

You can buy expensive and not-so-expensive books that will instruct you on how to make a website. This may be useful if you want fripperies, but the basics of HTML are really quite easy to learn. Your site won't sing and dance, but the content will be there. I've always believed that content is more important anyway – when you go to the cinema, do you go for the movie or just to watch the fancy introduction?

The first lesson, and I cannot state this enough, is that HTML is *not* a replacement for DeskTop Publishing. You are given certain “guarantees”, like “*heading type 1*” will be the same size or bigger than “*heading type 2*”, but beyond that *nothing* is promised. A site viewed on different browsers may look entirely different. Take a peek at the options in MSIE/Firefox/Oregano and you'll see that it is just a few mouse-clicks required to totally alter the text style used as the body font for *every* web page. Here we've switched to a sans-serif font. Using the font tag, you can instruct the browser as to what font to use, but don't be at all surprised if some browsers totally ignore/override this.

Lesson two.

There are two main components to HTML. The first is the “tag”. This is enclosed in angle brackets and it instructs the browser to do something. Often tags are given in pairs. For example to make a word italicised, you would do:

```
<i>budgies</i>
```

The ‘opening’ form of the tag carries any optional parameters. This means things like line widths, font size, and so on. The ‘closing’ form of the tag is simply the tag itself, alone, prefixed by a slash.

Some tags are unique in themselves. An example is
 which is used for ‘lineBreak’. There is no logic behind having a closing form, so </br> is invalid and therefore doesn't exist.

The second main component is the character entity. Things like pound (£), ampersand (&), and accented characters (écran, puî, umlaüt) should be given as entities because different computer systems may have different character sets. A very common example of this is the “sexed quotes” (the 66,99

type). Under RISC OS, the characters used are 148 and 149. Under Windows, 147 and 148. So if you put these characters directly into a web page, your text will look like:

```
"something quoted"
```

if seen on Windows when assuming RISC OS's character set, or more commonly, it will look like:

```
>something quoted"
```

on RISC OS, assuming the Windows character set.

Entities begin with ‘&’, contain some sort of code to identify the character, and end with ‘;’. The codes themselves are mnemonics so it shouldn't be hard to remember the common ones:

&	&	ampersand
"	"	quote
<	<	less than
>	>	greater than
©	©	copyright
£	£	pound

and so on. Note that in the case of &, < and >, you must *always* use the entities as these characters have special status within HTML markup.

Lesson three.

There are certain formalities that you must go through in the design of a web page. This is akin to having to start the car before you can drive it. You must say the content is HTML, give it a title, and tell the browser which parts are the ‘body’ of the document. This is performed using the following:

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Put your title here</title>
</head>
<body>

...your content goes here...

</body>
</html>
```

There is much more that can be done, but for now this'll do us fine.

Lesson four.

The bit where your content goes. Start writing. Anything, whatever you want your web page to be about.

You can either write it all out first and add markup later; or, as I prefer, do the markup as you are going.

If you require an entity (see the list on the previous page for a small example), write that instead of the character. For example “B&B” on-screen would look like “B&B” in the markup.

If you want something in *italics*, enclose it between `<i>` and `</i>`. **Bold** is `` and ``. Underline is `<u>` and `</u>`.

It is possible to ‘nest’ the text effects if, for example, you require ***bold italics***. Just remember to ‘undo’ the tags in the correct order, for example:

```
<b><i>bold and italic</i></b>
```

and *not*:

```
<b><i>bold and italic</b></i>
```

Italics were set last, so should be unset first. In practise this usually doesn’t matter, but that’s no excuse for not getting it right!

When you want a new line...

...like this, you need to add `
` to the end of the line. This is because HTML treats all “whitespace” (newlines, spaces, tabs, etc) as a single space.

If you want more space, a paragraph break, then use `<p>` instead of `
`.

Sometimes you might want a ‘bigger break’ between sections. You can trick many browsers into doing this by using the sequence “`<p> <p>`”. The ‘nbsp’ stands for Non-Breaking SPace.

Lesson five.

This is complicated and vital. Read it twice.

Pointing to other resources is something you will do quite often. There are two types of pointer.

The simplest is the off-site pointer. You would use this to refer to other websites.

For example in the *Frobnicate* website I refer to David Pilling’s site. I can simply reference this by giving the correct URL; but note that it must be complete!

David’s site is:

```
http://www.davidpilling.net/
```

You must include the ‘http://’ part.

The second type of pointer is the local pointer. This is the one you’ll be using the most. You’ll use it to refer to other documents, to images, and so on.

In a nutshell, things in the *same* directory are called using just their name. Things in a sub-directory are called with the directory name, a slash, and the filename. The slash is a Unix-style slash and *not* a DOS style backwards slash.

Things in a parent directory are referred to using two periods, a slash, and then the filename.

Things in a sub-directory of the parent? I’ll leave that for you to work out!

Imagine the following structure:

```
index.html          <- a file in the root directory
stuff.html          <- a file in the root directory
  digibox           <- this is a sub-directory
    index.html      <- a file in a sub-directory
    channels.html   <- a file in a sub-directory
  images            <- this is a sub-directory
    bbc1.jpeg       <- a file in a sub-directory
    bbc2.jpeg       <- a file in a sub-directory
    bbc3.jpeg       <- a file in a sub-directory
    bbc4.jpeg       <- a file in a sub-directory
```

There are two files (*index.html* and *stuff.html*) in the ‘root’ directory (rather akin to ‘\$’ on ADFS). When somebody types in our website’s address, they’ll see the root *index.html*. There are two sub-directories (*digibox* and *images*). Within each are files.

If the root *index.html* wants to display the *bbc1.jpeg* picture, it would refer to it as:

```
images/bbc1.jpeg
```

If the “*digibox*” *index.html* wants to display it...

```
../images/bbc1.jpeg
```

The ‘..’ means ‘back up a directory’.

The reason for the multiple *index.html* files is that this is the file that the server will send if you don’t say otherwise. *Some* servers look for alternate files, like *home.htm* – but this isn’t common these days.

The proper *Frobnicate* URL is:

```
http://www.heyrick.co.uk/frobnicate/index.html
```

but since the server will send us *index.html* automatically, we can omit asking for it.

Lesson six.

Linking to other documents (either locally or on another site), is quite simple. The tag used is “a”. It is given the parameter “href=” (Hyperlink REFerence) and then the URL.

Then comes whatever description you wish to show. Finally, an closes the hyperlink.

For example:

```
<a href="download.php?file=frob23.pdf">PDF file</a>
```

Notice that as the parameter to ‘href’ isn’t a number it is enclosed in quotes. You’ll see “[PDF file](#)” on-screen. Ignore the complexity of the filename given. We are just directing the user to a file called *download.php*, the rest sets up a variable because the file is actually a script that runs on the server. Etc.

Remember, again, if you are linking off-site, you must specify the *entire* and *correct* URL. If you were to write something like:

```
<a href="sky.com/">Go to Sky's website</a>
```

then the server will return a “404 Not Found” error, because the file:

```
sky.com/index.html
```



will not exist. Yes, without the *http://* prefix, the browser *will* assume that the link is local.

Lesson seven.

What is a website without some form of pictures? It is very true that a picture can explain things better than lots of words. Or maybe you just want a picture for illustration or as a logo?

Under RISC OS, images are predominantly in “sprite” format. Under Windows, there are an array of potential formats, the most common being BMP and TIFF.

On the internet, only three image types are widely supported:

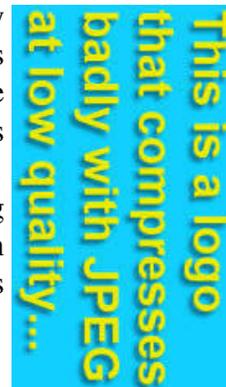
GIF - CompuServe’s Graphics Interchange Format. Some people say ‘jif’, some say ‘gif’. I’m with the latter on the principle that if it was to be said as ‘jif’ then it’d be spelled with a ‘j’! Either way, it is a proprietary format in that some company owns the rights to how it works. For this reason some people avoid it, and some (commercial) software has no support for it whatsoever. GIF images can be up to 65 thousand pixels by 65 thousand pixels. You can

interlace GIFs so a progressive visualisation is possible. This means a rough’n’ready version of the image appears quickly, and as more of the file is received, the image gets more and more defined. You can even hold multiple images in one GIF file, allowing animations. GIFs are lossless. A GIF viewed on-screen is just like the original picture. The bad point? GIFs are restricted to a 256 colour palette. Great for logos, pathetic for photographs.

JPEG - Joint Photographic Experts Group (really!). Everybody says ‘jay-peg’. This format is like TIFF in that it can contain all sorts of different ‘formats’. The two you will encounter are ‘baseline’ and ‘progressive’. Baseline JPEGs are the original and most compatible. The image is drawn line by line as you’d expect. Progressive JPEGs are an interlaced version so you can see a rough version that gets better and better as the image loads. JPEG is different because it is a ‘lossy’ format. What the end-user sees is *not* identical to the original image. However it does allow you to trade off quality for image size. A suggested default is 85% quality (baseline, no sub-sampling). *All* of the pictures in this issue of *Froblicate* are JPEG, quality ranging from 50% to 90% depending on the importance of the picture. JPEGs are available in greyscale (not terribly common), or colour. 16 million colours. There is no palette or anything as JPEGs exist in the YUV colourspace (like a TV broadcast, as opposed to the RGB used by your monitor).

PNG - Portable Network Graphics. This is the royalty-free answer to GIF, and it allows up to 16 million colours, multiple images, transparencies, etc. While it often compresses better than GIF, it is lossless so you don’t have the ability to trade size for quality.

In general things with lots of colours and shading (i.e. real-life pictures) compress very well using *JPEG*, and in many cases you can push the quality a way before it starts to become apparent. Things with areas of flat colour (logos, cartoons) will suffer from the aliasing effects of JPEG compression, as can be seen from the example picture. As for ‘low quality’, this was 75% so it was not set *that* low!



Under RISC OS, making JPEGs is easy with *!ChangeFSI*. For more formats, why not try Jon Kortink's *!Creator*?

Under Windows, there are many options. I like ULead's *PhotoImpact 5* because it'll let you preview the results of your options before you save the file which is *very* useful. There's no support whatsoever for GIF. Another usual alternative is *Paint Shop Pro* of which you'll find a demo on pretty much every cover-mount CD ever made!

So by this stage you'll have an image, let's say "nike.jpeg". Under RISC OS, this will usually appear as "nike/jpeg", you'll need to ensure that this is uploaded with the '.' inserted in place of the '/', though many RISC OS software packages will do this for you automatically. Now how do you describe, easily, a Nike advert in which a girl dances in an empty warehouse, as a challenge to a giant speaker? Well, this is where pictures come in!



Once you have inserted your picture into your web site, you need to know how to refer to it. If it is in the same place as your HTML document, just call it by name. If you placed it somewhere else, you'll need to tell the browser to traverse directories. If you're scratching your head and thinking "*Whuh?*" then it's back to lesson five for you! :-)

There are two final things that we need to consider. How *big* is the image? The one shown above is 211 pixels ('dots') across and 160 tall. You'll need to know this. If you are unsure, just drop it into your web browser and look for the "properties" (in Windows, often hidden in a context-sensitive menu).

The final thing that you will require is a description. It seems 'traditional' on RISC OS browsers to show the description before the image has loaded. MSIE takes a more logical approach and displays the description if you let the mouse pointer linger over the picture. Thus, it is not really sufficient these days to say something like "GIF logo, 4032 bytes". You want to *sell* the image, in a way.

Keep in mind also that useful image descriptions may be required by law in order to support internet

access for disabled people, in particular those not able to actually see the image. While this is only legally required in certain places and in certain conditions, a good description can encompass all of these requirements at once.

I feel, with the massive uptake of broadband, it is no longer necessary to define the type and filesize of an image. It is a bit of geekery that can be omitted.

So let's review what we have:

- Image filename
- Image dimensions
- A description

Now it is time to put it all together. An image is a tag unto itself (there is no 'closing' form). The tag is, understandably, `img`. Because of the information passed, it takes a lot of parameters.

```
src=      the filename
width=   the image width
height=  the image height
alt=     the description
```

Putting all of this together...

```

```

That's it!

Notice that the border setting is 0. I add this because I've seen a browser put borders around images on the assumption that if you didn't want them you'd say so. So we say so! Play with it, sometimes borders can be useful.

You can also create interesting effects by altering the width and height to be different to the source image, but *never ever use this method to make thumbnail-sized pictures*, if you want thumbnails then generate real thumbnails!

Lesson eight.

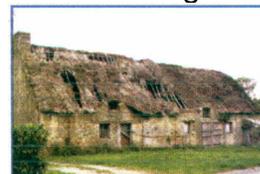
Here's a quickie to end with.

```
<div align="xxxxx">
    ...put text or image in here...
</div>
```

The alignment 'xxxxx' can be *left*, or *center* (note, American spelling), or *right*.

More next time...

Life in France



Herbignac

Proche St Molf - Ancienne chaumière en pierres à rénover, longueur de façade 22 m, de beaux volumes à exploiter, grand hangar sur un terrain de 1000 m², avec possibilité d'achat terrain supplémentaire. Réf.: 10451.

Prix : 114 490 € FAI

(*How much for a ruin?!?!?*)

Vivre à l'Ouest (immo. mag., dépt. 44)
N° 70 - 19 janvier 2005 - p12

I *like* France and I *like* the French people. But there is something that has been brewing for a while. This is a hard thing for me to have to write, but...

I think that the time has come to address the issue of *British go home*. There seems to be some sentiment in nearby places (though I have not experienced this personally) that us "Brits" (Rosbif?) are unwanted, undesired, and should basically sod off back to ol' Blighty, or wherever the hell we've come from.

In part I can understand why they feel this way. There's the whole issue with the house prices – I'll get onto that later – and then there is the issue of the sort of Brits that you wouldn't *want* to know. It is quite easy to spot Brits in the supermarkets. The French have a certain underlying "chic" to their attire. Even rebel schoolgirls and grannies with the weird blue-rinse-hair exude this "chic". Us Brits? We don't. The cashiers at the supermarket can tell us across the shop – they look for the jeans, trainers, and trolley full of cheap booze.

Then you get the sort that shout across the room, that have raucous snot-nosed children coughing all over everything in sight, that don't just buy a few bottles of alcohol but purchase entire packing boxes of it, and tend to swear a lot, loudly, for no good reason. You can look at them and you just *know* they have not left England because they see it isn't offering them a good life. You just *know* they are not really interested in settling in France. You just *know* they probably bought some cheapo wreck, plan to shove cardboard and filler in the holes in the walls, and flog it off for *many* times what they paid for it before 'sodding off' to Spain, where the alcohol is, apparently, even cheaper. And they say it's too cold for them in France.

Please do not tar us all with the same brush. I might be a Brit (actually Scottish by birth), but that doesn't make me an inherently bad person. I respect *France* as a country, and not just as a source of cheap booze and funny-smelling cheeses.

I have always spoken out against the narrow-minded prats that "hate" the French. Those that consider them *arrogant*, and refer to them as "*cheese-eating surrender monkeys*" (why? because they weren't willing to support an ill-conceived conflict based upon lies?).

I find comments passed as 'jokes' on *Late night with Conan O'Brien* to be offensive, petty, ill-educated, blindly patriotic and plain stupid. I even sent NBC an email of complaint which was, surprise surprise, ignored. If it were an anti-semitic jibe, what a storm there would be. Anti-French? Fair target, it seems. In fact, if you cannot receive (C)NBC, you need look no further than BBC's Radio Four (198LW) for your regular dose of anti-LaFrance. Shall I continue speaking against such bigotry, or shall I figure that if I, as a Brit, am going to get lumped in with the worst of my country, I shall just stop bothering and stop caring?

The house prices, in particular, are a sticking point. Well sorry to be so blunt but *get over it*. You know, we are looking to sell our place because it is very old, therefore the upkeep is getting too expensive. We're in the exact same situation. Where exactly do we go to next? Sure, our house has gone up in value – but so have all the others. It is bad for housing newbies, I understand that, but all of the rest of it is relative.

When mom bought this house, thirteen years ago, it was known that there was a price for the French and a price for the English. And the French were *more than happy* to sell to Brits, aided by con-merchants calling themselves overseas property agents.

Through naïvety, stupidity, or just general cluelessness, we Brits would pay 250,000FF for a wreck of a house that you'd be hard pushed to get a French person to buy for 30,000FF and that would be for the worth of the land.

We stupid *stupid* Brits bought all these ruins and crappy farmhouses with mad ideas of living in fermettes, keeping goats, and turning piggeries into gîtes. Oh yes, the entire country must have found this whole thing *really* funny. Along the way, though, we breathed life into villages that were on the point of dying (some local villages have a population that is more English than French). The entourage of kiddies that came helped keep the little community schools open.

And now, years later, there is a housing crisis. And property is so expensive that the new generation can't afford to begin. Can anybody blame us Brits for this? *Really?* What happened to the government official that is supposed to check the prices of houses put on the market?

Oh, wait, I forgot. It's okay to bump up the price because there'll be some clueless Brit willing to cough up.

Recently it was reported that the government (I don't know if this is Mr. Chirac or an 'opposition party') wants to set up a "*Brit tax*" to tax *us* if *we* should sell *our* houses. Now I fully agree with the sliding percentage scale of Capital Gains tax, and would even agree on applying it to *primary* residences, because property speculation is something that will only cause more harm than good. But to just tax us because we're British? That is outright discrimination.

In some places the mayors of the towns are actually blocking sales of property to Brits ... because, well, sellers still seem happy to sell to a Brit. We pay more. A 130,000 euro house (to a French person) can be flogged to a Brit for around 220,000 to 250,000 euros. Who do *you* think they'd *want* to sell to?

Yes, it seems the sellers are all too happy to be greedy *ici et maintenant* without much thought of where all this might end.

Well, guys, here we are. It's biting you in the ass.

How do you like it?

We (Brits) are *not* perfect, God knows that. But, more importantly, *we are not all the same*.

I, personally, think of a future where I can speak French well enough to be "gainfully employed". Paying taxes, and whatever the French equivalent of NI is. Like a normal person. And, perhaps one day, meeting a nice French girl and doing the family thing (but, to be honest, I see grey hairs and Zimmer frames before that!).

Brits have kept small villages and schools going through the period when many of the French turned their backs on the "paysage" and looked to the bright lights of the cities . . . so these little communities are still there fifteen-odd years later for them to whinge about and for them to have the cheek to tell us to "go home" because we saw opportunity where they saw nothing but a dumb old ruin, and currency signs going 'kerching!'.
Our own mayor?

He has given up pig farming. *He is now an estate agent.*

Before you complain about the "Brits", you might benefit from taking a damn good look at yourselves.

Hacker's Diary

2005/02/01

Weight: 65kg

Alcohol units: More than I'd admit to

Dear Diary,

Happy New Month. Oh yes, I'm a happy bunny. My computers have been coaxed back to life, but evidently the world has moved on in a *big* way.

My attempts at installing a bootleg copy of XP onto a 233MHz PC were not unsuccessful. I even have MSIE 6 on the machine. The only problem is I click on stuff and have time to make a cup of tea before anything appears to happen. I swiped a copy of PC World from WHS and was *astonished* to see the claimed clock speeds of these PCs. The last thing I knew the clock speeds were touching 1GHz on the high-end models and "quantum mechanics" was getting in the way. Well, it obviously wasn't that much of a hurdle as the things are just getting faster and faster.

'Average' graphics cards have more memory than my entire PC.

I downloaded the original of Grand Theft Auto. Being some 300Mb (!) it took forever (thank god I wasn't actually paying for this call!). Can you believe it? Before my accident I would have paid money for this game. Now, all this time later, it is just 'there' on a website. Check it out for yourself, it is at: <http://www.rockstargames.com/grandtheftauto>

My next challenge, and possibly beyond my skills of manipulation (for the moment, at least) is to get broadband. Practically everybody else in town has it, though I do worry about latency thanks to the large number of people using it for watching mindless television - what a waste of bandwidth...

Talking of mindless television, my Sky card hack is useless. In fact, my satellite receiver is useless. Sometime the whole kit'n'caboodle turned around and went digital. All I can get seems to be two American channels and a load of German stuff. And you haven't lived until you've seen German soft-

porn in the early hours. Forget faces. Forget boobs. Let's just look at lots of close-ups of bottoms, the larger and fabbier, the better. I'd be interested to know the statistics of death-by-dieting of young German girls, because if the apparent obsession for big bums is anything to go by; then perhaps this 'I'm fat' nonsense that has blighted America and the UK (to name but two countries) isn't even an issue over there.

Maybe I should marry a German chick? Walking around town the other day... The schoolgirls that seemed so cute now just look slutty. Their uniforms are unbelievable, I've seen less revealing swimming costumes; and perhaps it is poignant that all the news reports concern the anniversary of the concentration camps as too many of these girls look like survivors. For goodness sake, comfort-eating in moderation isn't a bad thing, why on earth do you look like *that*? And you do realise that too much make-up is off-putting? Mmm, evidently not.

And look! It is election time yet again, thus I expect to see somebody in the commons informing Tony that he is a pratt and has failed the country. And while he is at it, let's not leave Mr. Howard unscathed. No, I don't mean posters of him dressed as a pig - the entire *Labour* party should be forced to resign over such an utterly sick piece of religious persecution. No, here's something easier and non-religious. Dracula. I mean, doesn't Mr. Howard look like Christopher Lee? Once you've got that image in your head, it isn't a leap to imagine him dressed in a black robe and acting in a seriously camp manner (but, perhaps, not *quite* as camp as 'Interview with a vampire'). Actually, if he turned up on October 31st dressed as Dracula, he'd get my vote. Any politician who understands his own ridiculous points and lets rip once in a while is a good guy in my book. The closest Tony ever managed was a horribly posed 'jeans and guitar' photo-opportunity.

I downloaded the Blair's most recent Christmas Card. Cherie *almost* looks cute, in a sickening kind of way. Tone still looks like a twazook. And, well, it isn't exactly snow and pine trees is it?

Actually, maybe this month will be interesting after all?

Who knows...

:) Go figure! (:

a ramble around Rick's mind...

Picture the scene. It is touching on freezing temperatures outside. It is snowing lightly. The kitchen is around 5°C so you can be forgiven for not wanting to cook something. The perfect answer? Stop at McDonald's. Resto 975 (France). Hot food, a warm place to eat, and somebody else cooks. Best yet, there's nothing to wash up!

Well, that's the theory. Sadly the reality is lacking. For the burgers are very often served *lukewarm*. I have gotten into the habit of ordering chicken, because it has to be cooked thoroughly and, hence, arrives *hot*. I mean, the burger is how many millimetres thick? Slap in into a cold bap with lettuce and cheese and sauce and the heat'll vanish like a snowball in an oven.

So we order hot drinks. A coffee for me and a tea for mom. Oops, no. Not possible. With the meal you can have either a beer (eat-in only), a diminutive Evian, or a fizzy drink (Orangina, Coca, Sprite). A specific factor of these drinks is that they're *cold!*

This is, sadly, where I have to take issue with McDonald's. Again. What the hell logic is it, on a freezing snowy day, to refuse you a hot drink and instead offer you something that is normally served with ice cubes?

Or to take the logic a step further, with my meal I can have a beer. Unit price 2,20euro. Or I can have a still water. Unit price 2,20. Or a fizzy drink. Unit price 2,20. I might even be able to get an orange juice (never tried). I'd bet that'd appear on the ticket as costing 2,20.

A tea? 1,00. A coffee? 1,00. A hot choc? 1,00. For every large Coca you buy, I can get a hamburger *and* a coffee. It used to be that they'd tell the till that I was having a Coca, and they'd give a tea or coffee. We'd be charged 2,20 for a 1,00 drink, but perhaps this is better than a blunt refusal by some jobsworth. It has happened more than just the one time, so what is this? New management? New policy?

I know the French seem to classify a milkshake as a desert, and seeing what they think of "jelly", perhaps milkshakes are a little bit mind-blowing?

What's the excuse for tea and coffee then? Exactly how many French people regularly drink *coffee* with

their meal? In fact, refer to my McDonald's comments in the previous issue and notice what is with the meal... *coffee*. Why are McDonald's evidently deciding that a coffee is now not a suitable drink to accompany a meal *especially in the middle of *@#%ing winter!!!!?* If I contacted the head office of McDonald's, I'm sure their first comments will be "it is a franchise", but even with a franchise there are rules to play by. After all, McDonald's and the giant clown with the raised arm are "symbols". They carry certain expectation. If word got back to McDonald's HQ that in one restaurant the McGirls were roller-blading around *naked* to deliver your order, I'm sure they'd have something to say about it! I'm sure much of the adolescent male population would have something *else* to say about it... :-)

40cl of *icy cold* drink, a *lukewarm* burger, and *hot* chips (thank god *something* was hot) are not, apparently, designed to warm you up on a winter's day.

Why bother going back for *that*?

I have a new DVD player. An UPTEK DVD-555. You see, my old DVD (an LG 3000E) isn't capable of reading CD-Rs, it can't do MP3, it can't do VideoCD unless you tweak it... This new machine does MP3, it does VCD (SVCD???), I am confident it'll handle a DVD-R too. The best bit? There are several best bits... The first is the price – 27 euro. That's under twenty pounds!!! The second? It'll scan CD-Rs looking for something it can handle. It can not only play MP3, it'll also display JPEGs. And, I loved this, the player coped without a hiccup with region 2 discs and a region 1 disc! YES! The packaging says "region free", and it is nice to find a player with the sort of respect that the region coding system deserves (in other words, *none*). Oh sure, FACT and RIAA and the like will whine about how much money they're losing in piracy. Has it not occurred to them that we, the clued-up on-line consumers, are not *entirely* stupid? How can they justify region-coding a DVD? "Dark Summer" is "Dark Summer" and that's that. Oh, wait, the R2

(French) version comes without a bunch of stuff that I'm sure is present on the R1 release, out-takes, etc. In fact, it seems the only thing that this DVD player cannot cope with is DivX. Never mind, I'm happy with it. I plan to (soon) dump all my MP3s onto a CD-R so I can play them through the DVD and therefore don't need the laptop 'on' to listen to them.



I'd also appreciate it if anybody knows what the UPTTEK DVD-555 actually is. It is going to be a re-badged generic. Are there any 'hidden' menus? The on-screen display seems to revert to French so it'd be nice to tell it (once and for all) to stick to English. Also...because I'm nosy! :-)

I took a look at:

<http://www.ChristopheFantoni.com/>

but he does not (yet?) have any information on this model. I cannot open it up as one of the screws on the back is 'protected' by an extremely brittle label covering the screw. Nasty. Keeps people like me out. Looking in the side, the main IC is a ZORAN ZR36762PQC and the Xtal by it looks like 27MHz.

One of the better programmes on television recently has been the BBC production 'Sea of Souls'. Once you get over the title, what lies beneath is no X-Files rip-off. Spooky supernatural stuff is wound into conventional stories, and rational explanations are given. Did the weird stuff really happen, or was it a figment of the imagination?

Sadly, that is how I feel about the programme itself, it having a runtime of only three weeks (three double episodes shown across a weekend).

Isn't that the way? When you find something you think you can enjoy, it disappears... just like *My So-Called Life*, *Due South*, and *American Gothic*.

The BBC have made a screensaver that you can install, here you see it on my monitor. It is better than tedious flying stars... :-)



I'm sure by now that you *all* know how much I appreciate the local 'E.Leclerc', or should I refer to it by its advertised name: *EECLEC!*

They are closed one morning this week for inventory. I wonder if they'll find anything



else that they don't know the price of? (re. issue 23)

Now I'm sure you have used a cash machine before. It's a dumb computer with a small bunch of keys and a colour screen. The graphics just scream 16-colour VGA at you, and the thing is so *slow* in responding that you figure it is probably all those old 4.77/8MHz XTs being recycled. Certainly, doesn't the beeping sound like the wail of a sick AMIBIOS?

In the local bank a cash machine failed startup diagnostics. I don't know how much memory it had, but I can tell you it took about forty seconds to count it. The processor claimed to be clocked at 866MHz. It runs OS/2 Warp. It scrolls a lot of startup junk (imagine Linux booting) and then gets hung up trying to load or talk to something. Then the watchdog kicks in and the whole process starts all over again. I didn't bother to report it because it would have required me to report it in French (I'd rather let somebody else), and also they wouldn't have wanted to hear it from *me*. A cashpoint at the Mychett service station (UK) failed. It looked like a regular Windows error box on-screen complaining at IP something-or-other cannot resolve something. I don't remember now, it was back in 2001. So I called them up. They first denied any knowledge of anything. So I told them the IP address of their cashpoint. My God, I'd have had less commentary if I'd just robbed the damn bank! Thankfully I had not given my name (the man asked twice but it didn't strike me as an important question – knowing who I was wouldn't make their machine work!) so I told him if knowing the IP address was such a secret, it shouldn't be plastered across the screen. I then said that he'd better get it sorted before I turn up with a screwdriver and a packet sniffer. Then I hung up.

The machine worked the next day.

The very first time I saw the computer display in my UK bank, I didn't know about NT. I saw the 'Ctrl-Alt-Del to log on' prompt and thought 'Yeah, that figures'. It should be my Win98 logon message...

We move swiftly on. As I write this new paragraph, it is February 16th and the Kyoto treaty has come into effect... except for the Americans, who are the greatest polluters. While all sorts of countries (over 50 of them) are pushing through to make between 5% and 9% energy savings, President Bush (Jr.) denounced the US's planned -7% agreement back in 2001 and so far it seems talks with them have led nowhere. Bush is worried about American jobs, as if other countries (such as Japan?) don't have their own problems with meeting the target, huh? I guess money talks and you-know-what walks...

Sky News Active makes a few statistics. Every household in the UK creates about six tonnes of carbon dioxide every year, which is enough to fill six 10-metre diameter hot air balloons. Put like that, it doesn't seem like much. Only six?

They say energy efficient light bulbs use 75% less energy, which can save £7 per year on the electricity bill. Again, saving £7 over the course of a year is unlikely to be a major point – it is equivalent to a mere few days of Sky subscription!

Actually, I wonder about the £7 figure. So let's do a few sums. One *unit* of electricity is defined as the consumption of *one kilowatt* over the course of *one hour*. Thus, you can use a 2kW heater for half an hour, or a 100W light bulb for ten hours. We shall continue with 75W as our 'bulb' figure. We can run it for a little over 13 hours for one unit of electricity. Which is about 7 pence (tax included). In the winter it is typical to switch on lights at around 4pm, and on some days to keep them on all the time. In the summer, you often don't need to light up until 10pm or so. A compromise, a middle between the two, is 7pm. If we turn the light off at 12am; this gives us five hours of use per day. We'll knock off 21 days for holiday time and so on, thus allowing us to figure the bulb will be in use for *roughly* 1,720 hours *per year*. This would equate to a consumption of 129 units. At seven pence per unit, we are looking at something in the region of £10 to run *one* 75W light bulb for a year. This isn't bad really, though note that if you are the sort of person that has lights on in all the hallways and a porch light, and so on, this figure can easily become *hundreds*. My advice would be to look to fitting PIR sensors on a timer so lights come on as they are needed. Who needs to light an empty hallway? We shall turn now to the energy saving lights. The one I have here claims

15W to output the equivalent of a 112W lightbulb. It seems that these fluorescent energy saving bulbs come in 'bright' and 'really bright' varieties. Applying the maths, you can run this thing for nearly 67 hours per unit of electricity. Over the course of a year, we will arrive at a figure of 25.8 units; or £1.80. This is an actual saving of *eight* pounds. In reality, you will *still* pay your tenner a year for the light bulb because knowing that it is an efficient energy saving type, you'll be less inclined to bother to turn it off. I know somebody who leaves their energy efficient light on practically all day...

– why? – it's okay! – it's an energy efficient lamp!
Of course you'll need to work your own calculations as there are so many different electricity tariffs, providers, and so on.

While I think such lights are a good idea, you have to wonder about the cost to the environment of all these shops that remain brightly lit even when they are closed. I think a change here, in one shopping centre, could well equal an entire medium-sized town (such as Guildford) fitting energy saving bulbs in the houses!

Sky News Active then goes on to say that if every home fitted just two such bulbs, the energy saving would equal that consumed by the entirety of the street lighting in the UK, and the savings in CO² would fill the Royal Albert Hall nearly 3000 times (who on earth works out these things? and hands up if you can easily visualise the 'volume' of the Royal Albert Hall; never mind 3000 of them!).

The average house loses 40% of its heat due to lofts, walls, windows... Such loss is stated as being enough to heat three million homes. The advice, obviously, is better insulation. But further advice, from myself, is to turn the heat down. Right now it is 11°C in my room. That is a bit on the cold side. I would be happy at 16°C, but efficient heating is an issue. Anyway, when we visit local English people it is like going on holiday. Most will be happy for a slightly chilly bedroom ('chilly' ranging from 14°C to 18°C), but it is a different story in the living room. The cold ones tend to start at 20°C, and go up as far as 28°C or so. This is *not* necessary! Indeed, some people go around their house *in the middle of winter* wearing T-shirts. There is no shame in putting on a woolly jumper, it *is* winter. For the

relative luxury of being able to walk around dressed in summer clothes, they are paying *how much* to heat their homes?

Additionally, while I may sit here with a hot water bottle on my lap thinking it *could* be a bit warmer, I will state that my susceptibility to illness is a lot lower than *all* of theirs. Bugs like hot environments, and keeping your house too warm is the perfect place for flu and such to lay into you in a major way. This isn't to say that I'm immune – I suffered from The Dreaded Lurgy this winter as did most other people. I felt terrible for a couple of days and then got over it. Many of the English people living in these hot houses dropped off the radar for one or two weeks! One poor family kept giving each other the bug and were hit by illness for almost six weeks. So, in retrospect, perhaps a cold room isn't so bad after all...

By the way, they say turning the thermostat down a degree would save £30 a year. So try *three* degrees. You probably wouldn't notice that, but you'll walk away with around £90 to spend on something else...

They go on to say that if kettles were filled *enough* rather than to the top, the UK would save £1,000,000 *per week*! This is a disturbing thing that I have noticed. Why on earth does everybody fill the kettles up? Don't you realise that for two cups of tea you'd be waiting three, four, maybe more times as long just to get the water boiled? I put in enough to make a cup and then a refill (as I often have a refill), and even *that* I feel is too slow!

The overall CO² saving of this is not given, so let's pick a number ... 52 billion hot air balloons. :-)

Now a direct quote from *Sky News Active*:

:: Motorists could do away with unnecessary car journeys by shopping locally and where possible using public transport.

So here we finally reach the truth of why the Americans don't want to get involved with the Kyoto agreement. It might mean they can no longer visit one shop, and then *drive* to the parking lot of the shop next door...

Having said that, the last time I went on a train the prices were starting to get ridiculous; and the last time I went on a bus it smelled like an entire rugby team had used it as their ablution facility. Not to mention cars have reasonable heating, you don't need to wait forever, and you can go point-to-point

and not where the drop-off points are. There is certainly convenience in a car, but I think a good compromise needs to be reached; something sensible between public transport and "driving to the shop next door".

Perhaps a major area to target would be the ten-minute school run. The kids can *walk* to school, accompanied by a parent until they are old enough to be safe on their own. I walked, and the school was something like a mile away. It kept me reasonably fit.

And before I finish this thread of discussion, I must raise questions about the political side of Kyoto. While reducing pollution (and not just CO²) is a good thing, it seems some countries that "underpollute" will be allowed to pollute more. This, to me, seems wrong. Furthermore the idea of pollution quotas which can be traded with other countries also seems wrong.

A more logical approach, in my estimation, would be to work out what reduction of emissions can reasonably be expected on a country-by-country basis. Add a few percent to it to make a worthy challenge, and then each country should strive to meet their individual targets. Additionally, balancing should be included so if a country misses its target by 2% but has planted huge areas of forestry then this is taken into account.

And finally, whether America likes it or not, when the Kyoto agreement finishes and the results known, these results should be compared against America's efforts and America *fined* by the international community accordingly.

By the way, I am aware that Australia has also dropped out of the agreement; I just think America's output will overshadow anything Australia does or doesn't do.

In the *Sky News Active* service, you can sometimes choose to look at the "Sky Centre". Look at all those monitors displaying things like the OpenGL rotating cubes screensaver. So many of them have the flicker-effect so you know they are switched on. Perhaps *Sky* should set an example by installing the more efficient flat-panel displays, or *at the very least* by enabling the standby mode or some form of power saving. If each monitor is 100W, they must be drawing two kilowatt just to display to nobody!



The end could be nigh for the ‘golden m’, at least as far as I am concerned. They are still being obstreperous about how many milks they’ll give (and, again, I note that you get two sugars and *no* milk per cup of coffee unless you say otherwise). It has gotten to the stage where we actually *take our own milk* because trying ‘reason’ with them is a waste of effort. I’m sorry, but I’m learning French so I can get a job and (eventually) chat up a few girls; *not* to argue that a few extra milks won’t exactly bankrupt them.

The terrible irony? A standard burger (not a ‘promo’), large chips, and a coffee comes to *exactly* the same price as a McMeal. The only difference is the McMeal includes a fizzy drink unit-priced at twice the cost of a coffee. It is not to our benefit to order ‘parts’, it does not save anything, and it is clear that the cost of a McMeal is the cost of a McMeal. Fine. I can handle that. Just give me a damn coffee. With extra milks.



But no. They don’t want to see it that way. So here, on the right, you will see a picture of one of my most recent visits to their establishment. What’s missing? Well, as we had to order each bit in turn, we omitted the fries. Couldn’t be bothered to order them and, you know what? We don’t particularly miss them.

Us +2 euro, McDonald’s -2 euro (’cos you can’t tell me it costs *them* more than a few centimes for the chips).

This was the state of play until yesterday. The 15th of February. On leaving *that* e.leclerc with a paper and some pasta sauce, we stopped for a coffee at the little eatery place attached. It is a cross between a café and a bar. We both had ass-kicking coffee. So ass-kicking, in fact, that my cup took three entire sachets of sugar to make it drinkable. For the Francophiles among you, we ordered a ‘grand crème’. I don’t think I’d be alive after a French espresso!

Mom had another. And me? A very large and very *very* full glass of Rosé du Provence wine (one of my favourites, mmm!). It cost the same as a coffee, it was quite nicely potent :-), and there was *no* fuss. They were not put out that I wasn’t ordering a meal. I asked for a wine, I got a wine. A very nice wine (not that I’m a connoisseur!). Looking at the menu, the meal prices are perfectly reasonable. It is a little bit more expensive than McDonald’s, but you get *courses* and you get *actual* food on *actual* plates; as opposed to *things-in-a-bun-inside-a-cardboard-box*. It looks like the menu is flexible as well. The only question is what is considered ‘mealtime’? Is this ‘opening hours’ or just ‘lunch’ time? Well, perhaps by the time the next issue is out we’ll have been so I can let you know how it went. I have a suspicion, however, that the big m will be the caboose...

While I can sulk about not having received any valentines (is *anybody* out there interested? you have my email address...), I can say that Google made the effort to look nice on the day.

And here it is. Simple, yet tasteful. Effective.



Recherchez parmi plus d’un milliard d’images avec [Google Images](#).

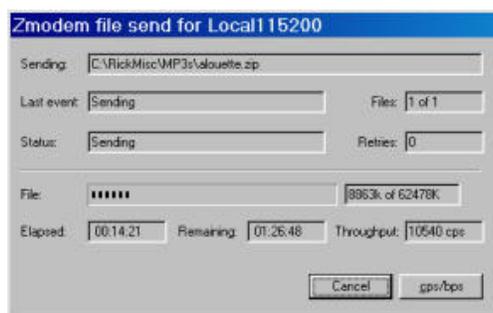
That’s the thing with Google, the displays (especially the entry) are simple, uncluttered, and absolutely minimal.

Unlike, for example, *IMDb* which is slow to load up even through an ISDN link.

Do you remember when we all used to think ‘AltaVista’ was *it* and ‘Yahoo’ was good for group-categorised stuff? Along came ‘Google’ and all the nerds-in-media said ‘ho! nobody needs another search engine!’, only Google offered comprehensive no-fuss searches with rather astonishing response times. The word, ‘Google’ has even entered everyday parlance, with people saying ‘Well, I just went and Googled...’. The word ‘Google’ lends itself to saying things like that. If you ‘just went and Yahoo’d’, people might think you’d lost your mind!

So I decide it might be time to backup stuff on the laptop. It has neither Ethernet nor a CD writer, so stuff is not backed up as often as I'd have liked. The way it is done right now is a null modem serial link. It is not terribly fast.

It would be nice, while I'm at it, to copy some of the various MP3s from harddisc to CD-R. Then, if I want to listen to some music I can do it through the DVD player and the Lo-Fi instead of off the laptop.



In this picture you can see me transferring *half* of the stuff recorded off of Alouette. It is only half because *HyperTerm* crashed trying to send the whole lot, so I brought the file size below 64Mb in case it was a silly signed integer type of thing. But no. It was not that at all.

The PC's serial port claims to operate at 460,800bps and – amazingly – the old dual serial port in the RiscPC connected, though it did require a little bit of tweaking to convince things that such a speed actually exists. Typing and spooling worked fine. *Zmodem* crashed *HyperTerm* (with no 'ack' from the RiscPC, it didn't get that far).

So I slow the ports down to 230,400bps. Now *HyperTerm* informs me that it cannot connect to COM1, at all.

So, finally, I drop back to 115,200bps to send this ~64Mb file, and it'll take me about two hours to do so – with a further tedious transfer for the *other* bunch of MP3s. Though, to be honest, I might decide to multisession the disc. I have better things to do, like load up GTA and cause mayhem. :-)

Anyway, the strange thing is that the serial port speed settings in *HyperTerm* appeared to do exactly *nothing*. To adjust the serial port speeds, I had to go into System Devices within Control Panel, call up the options for COM1, and adjust it there. Weird.

I guess next time I am on-line I'll have to track down a 'decent' freeware comms package. Preferably something that can batch-send files too. *HyperTerm*'s send window says 'File: 1 of 1' as you can see, but there is no method – that I have found – of sending multiple files in one go.

I have "Utilitaires Pro" (nov/déc 2004) issue, which comes with a double-sided DVD-ROM packed with loads of ways to clutter your harddisc. Sadly, though, there doesn't appear to be one single comms program among that lot. It's all internet and P2P these days.

This brings me on to Windows networking and *!PPPconn*. Getting a RISC OS machine to 'pretend' to be Internet, and a Windows machine to connect, is not *that* difficult. If you are interested, you will find concise details at:

<http://www.serial-networking.fsnet.co.uk/>

What is a problem, however, is getting the system to work at something a little more impressive than 9,600bps, or 19,200bps at a push. Has anybody achieved this reliably?

It appears that when you tell Windows to use a faster modem speed, it suddenly starts changing speeds all over the place – presumably some sort of 'probe' to see what the modem is capable of. Worse, there doesn't seem to be a 'lockbaud' option where you can tell Windows to "*talk to the modem at 115,200bps and bloody well stick to that*". The problem arises because modems are actually pretty smart. You can change serial speed and when you issue a new command, it'll have sync'd with the new serial setting. When you are talking to another computer, another serial port, this capability is missing. Thus, it is not easy to keep up with Windows as it messes with the serial port...

Windows98 does allow you to add "direct serial link between two computers" as a modem, but the internet dial-up settings do not give this as an option.

I almost had a VNC session running. I got fed up and killed it off before it had finished initialising. VNC over a 10baseT network makes any PC appear to work about the same sort of speed as the *original* Acorn 486 co-processor (the 33MHz one). Can you imagine it at a seriously slow serial speed? No, me neither. I gave up...

Well, that file has been in transit for 45 minutes as I've been typing this, checking out BBC*i*, making endless cups of tea... I'm afraid it'll be nappy-time for me soon as there's 57 minutes left (according to *HyperTerm*) so I'm just going to wander away and make yet more tea...

Now who invented the phrase "*piping hot*", and why does everything seem to insist on including this phrase in its cooking instructions? How pathetically poncey can you get?

You *know* it is bad when the phrase starts turning up on Lidl products...

Here we have the cooking instructions in French:

Placer le bocal ouvert au bain-marie ou chauffer directement la sauce dans une casserole.

In Italian:

Togliere il coperchio e scaldare a "bagnomaria" oppure versare il contenuto in una pentola e riscaldare.

In Spanish:

Destapar el tarro y calentar al baño maría durante unos minutos o bien calentar el contenido en una cacerola.

But in English...

*Open jar and place contents into saucepan. Heat up sauce stirring occasionally. Ensure product is **piping hot** before serving.*

What you might notice is that the instructions are different. The Europeans can be trusted to place the opened jar into a thing containing boiling water (amusingly also called a "bain-marie" in English, but you don't come across them very often).

The English, on the other hand, need to be told to put the sauce into a saucepan! And they need to be told to ensure that the sauce is "piping hot". So it isn't only poncey, it is geared to complete idiots.

But don't think it is the Germans having a joke at our expense (as Lidl is a German company). Oh no. You'll find the exact same patronising rubbish written on native products – cans of beans, chicken soup, microwave burgers, apple pies...

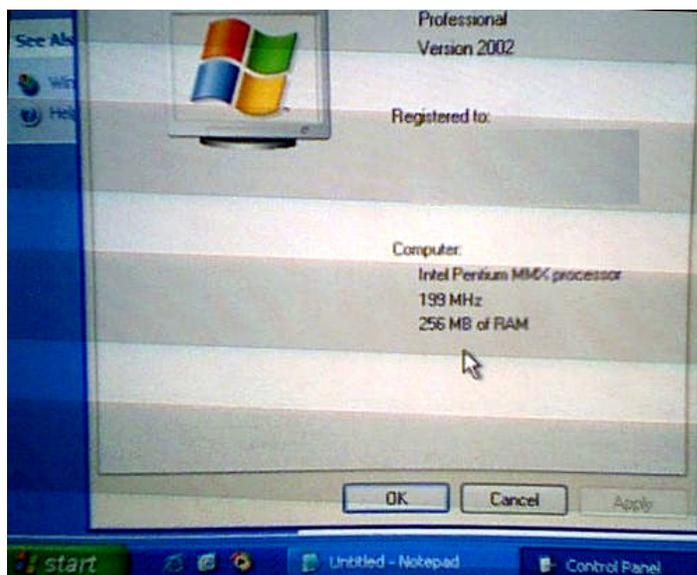
Check food is piping hot throughout before serving.

In England, hot food apparently "pipes".

Fweeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

(perhaps, in Scotland, it'd be "**wuuuuuuuur!**" :-)

I have, in the past, spoken with some friends about somebody I know who is running XP on a 200MHz machine. And, as any good hacker knows, you need to have the JPEGs to prove it...



The picture is wobbly because it was taken 'off screen' using a little digital camera. The on-board memory is quite generous considering, and the two 8Gb harddiscs (one totally unused) and 10/100 ethernet onboard might make this an ideal web server – it'd surely run Apache/PHP a treat.

But XP... on a 200MHz processor (though Windows claims 199MHz)... is an exercise in *pain*! Especially using the machine to dial-up *Wanadoo* and do stuff with MSIE and OE.

Though, in its favour, I know a laptop running a 1.3GHz processor that feels every bit as slow as this machine... go fi gure?

Well, I guess I should wrap this up for another issue. As I type this, it is 05:20 in the morning and quite a number of degrees below zero. I am 'up' through the night to run the water every half hour so the pump cuts in, the theory being that regular use of the pump will prevent ice forming inside it. You see, *all* of our water is pumped from two wells. No, we don't drink it, but we use it for the other things that water is used for. Because the pump is in an outbuilding, our insurers won't cover it (though we are, apparently, covered for ripping up the world if an underground water pipe breaks – go fi gure). This pump is big, meaty, powerful, and *expensive*. So here I am, typing this, hoping for warmer weather, and twiddling the tap every so often. Never mind...

Until next time, take care of yourselves...

Dude, where's my Archie?

part 1

One of the things missed on Windows is the sanity of RISC OS. For those with new computers, there are many options – *RedSquirrel*, *VirtualAcorn*...

But for those of us with older and less capable PCs, *Archie* is your friend. You'll find it at:

<http://www.geocities.com/chris-o/>

Here I am setting up *Archie* v0.9 on a 466MHz computer. I would imagine that anything too much slower (say, 233MHz or below) will struggle. You'll also need a reasonable amount of memory, at least 32Mb and preferably more.

Installing *Archie* is simple. The files are unpacked to a directory. Into this directory are placed the four 512Kb ROM images – ic24 to ic27. It may be possible to find RISC OS 3 on-line, however we'll just assume that you have a RISC OS 3 machine around. The ROMs are mapped in at &03800000 to &03AFFFFF. *Archie* requires the ROMs to be in four chunks, given the 'ic' prefix it presumably matches the ROMs on the motherboard. Actually, the RISC OS ROMs are byte-wide, and each of the four provides a byte within the word... but we won't split hairs over that. :-)

- Simple hex maths tells us that the locations are:
- ic24.rom &03800000 to &0387FFFF
 - ic25.rom &03880000 to &038FFFFF
 - ic26.rom &03900000 to &0397FFFF
 - ic27.rom &03980000 to &039FFFFF

Copy the four ROM files into the *Archie* directory. If you want to use the PCFS harddisc 'emulation', you will need to boot from a selected floppy disc image or you will need to patch PCFS into the ROM. Instructions are given in the help document.

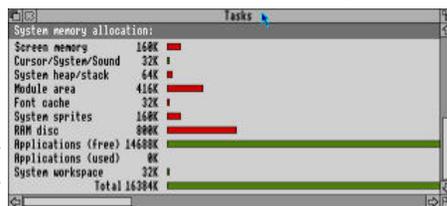
Double-click *Archie* to run. A Windowsy options screen will appear, but note that this is not Windows as we're running within the *dos4gw* environment. Click **OK** to fire up your virtual Archimedes!

Have you ever seen a RISC OS 3 machine with 16Mb of RAM fitted? Well... now you have thanks to an emulated quad MEMC. The sort of thing that I don't think is even viable in actual hardware!



Unless you like brain-toasting black lines, your first job should be to zip on over to the palette utility and select at least MODE 27.

It is amazing how advanced RISC OS was in some things as I still do not know how to get Windows(98) to

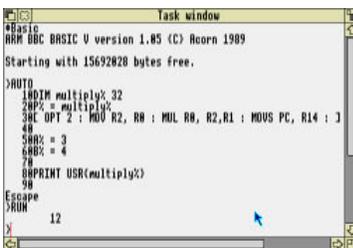


tell me the things shown in the TaskManager. Sure, Windows will tell me every single VxD and DLL present, but not 'how much memory does this use, and how much is in actual memory?'

Possibly, for me, though, the primary reason for wanting to run RISC OS is to allow me access to the ARM. It is logical, it is simple, it is nice. Far from the variable instruction sizes of the x86 and where the quickest way to zero a register is to 'XOR' it with itself... I can instead

do something like that shown on the right. It is a remarkably simple piece of code, but my inner moppet thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

This is quite unlike having to get your head around:

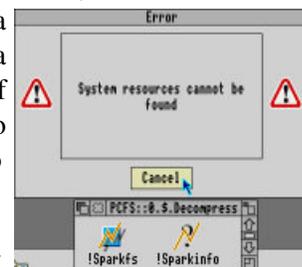


```

; if ( (today == 3) || (today == 23) ) strcpy(daytype, "rd");
L$24:
    cmp     ebx, 3
    je     L$25
    cmp     ebx, 17H
    jne    L$26
L$25:
    mov     edx, offset FLAT:L$61
    lea     eax, -4[ebp]
    call   near ptr FLAT:strcpy_
    
```

It isn't hard to follow, conceptually, but look at the registers and addressing! It lends itself to ugly code. Next to this, and especially in disassembly, ARM code reigns.

One of the quickest ways to get software into *Archie* is to make up a few *Dicottery* self-extracting archives. These go into *PCFS* and, once typed correctly, can be extracted with no more effort than just a simple double-click and then a drag. Unfortunately, lots of stuff requires system resources so next time we'll look at a way to get stuff installed onto *Archie*...



Until then, give it a try yourself. Email me with your thoughts and suggestions.

Making the PDF...

Recently I was contacted to ask how I make the *Frobnicate* PDF documents under RISC OS, and I thought this might make an interesting article.

I had originally resigned myself to creating the PDF versions under RISC OS as *CutePDF* (coupled with *Ghostscript 7.03*) made a complete hash of things; but as luck often is – I just tried PDFing this issue-in-progress and the only faults I could see were minor alignment quirks with the ‘ff’ and ‘fi’ ligatures! Maybe this issue will be created under Windows? It’ll be heaps faster, given that it happened in about thirty *seconds* (it’d take an ARM710 about eighteen *minutes*!).

The first thing you’ll need is Ghostscript. Version 7.03 (yes, the same as used here under Windows – go figure) is available from www.acornusers.org; unfortunately I don’t have the exact URL to hand, but Google found it for me in microseconds looking for ‘Ghostscript RISC OS’. The site is informative, so be sure to read it all.

If you don’t have long filenames support, you will need !raFS to put Ghostscript in. I will leave the installation procedure to the relevant documents...

Next, you will need *!ps2pdf* which you will find at <http://www.runtom.ndo.co.uk/> While it is possible to get Ghostscript to generate PDFs without *ps2pdf*, it is a lot of bother and command line stuff. The tool reduces this to mere draggy-droppy, like it should be.

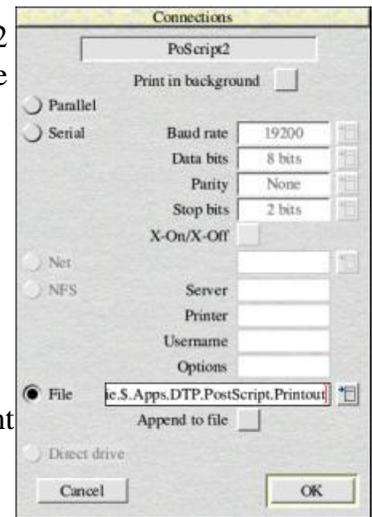
Finally, for the whole shebang to work, you’ll need to install a PostScript Level 2 printer driver. Wherever you obtained your copy of *!Printers*, perhaps an AcornUser CD-ROM?, you’ll find with it a large collection of printer definitions.

DO NOT FORGET that once you have installed the driver file, you must **SAVE** the *!Printers* settings (icon bar menu). If you don’t do this, it’ll not bother to remember that you have installed the printer. Stupid, but then I didn’t write it. :-)

The PostScript Level 2 printer driver should be set to PRINT TO FILE.

Call the file anything.
Call it Ishmael.
Call it Al.
It doesn’t matter.

Don’t “append” to existing file, that might confuse things.



Now you create your document as normal. If you require images, you *must* use JPEGs. This is because JPEGs can be inserted into level 2 PostScript. All other image formats are built from pixel-sized squares of colour. Yes, seriously. And I don’t think the driver is smart enough to convert sprites and suchlike to JPEG!

Now print, as normal, to the PostScript driver.



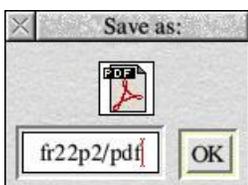
It’ll whizz by in no time at all as you’re outputting to disc (if only printing was always that fast, huh?).

That’s half the job done.

The next stage is to load up !ps2pdf and Ghostscript, if it isn't already loaded.

Because Ghostscript has been compiled and linked with UnixLib, it is a little bit eccentric with its memory handling. If your 'Next' memory slot rests at 512K or 640K as is usual, then Ghostscript will not work. You will need to change the 'Next' slot to something around 2Mb; if you plan to make lots of PDFs then you might like to force this to be a higher value always. Otherwise, open the Task Manager, grab the bar, and drag it to the right...

Find your PostScript file, the one you told the driver to print to, and drag it to !ps2pdf. The following will pop up:



In your case, it'll say only "/pdf" as a default suggestion.

Drag the PDF file con to somewhere convenient on your harddisc.

And wait. And wait. And wait.

This process does not multitask, and it is amazingly slow, an average conversion of Frobnicate takes in the order of half an hour (ARM710). But, on the plus side, it comes out correct!

In the screenshot below, you can see the original OvationPro document side by side with the PDF version (as viewed in !PDF). The small inset shows the exact same PDF document as viewed in Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0.

In essence, the only difficulty is in setting up the Ghostscript, but really that isn't too problematic. There are some limitations, for example non-standard fonts are sent as bitmaps (look at usage of the Sassoon font in earlier issues), while the Windows software uploads definitions. Provided you use Corpus, Homerton, and Trinity... things will be okay for you. Happy PDFing!

Rick, 2005/03/16

One thing that I noticed with my installation of *Ghostscript* for making PDFs is that it inserted *all* of my fonts as bitmaps. Everything looked horrible and the first version of *Frobnicate* issue 20 was around 36Mb in size (eek!).

I suspect this was a quirk specific to my system as I am using a UniCode version of FontManager; however in case anybody else experiences the same sort of thing, I'll explain how I fixed it.

Essentially, PostScript printers have a bunch of fonts built in – Courier, Helvetica, and Times (among others). Because of the close relationship with PostScript and aspects of RISC OS (the DrawFile format has been described as a ‘binary’ PostScript), we can be assured that our three primary fonts will easily map on to PostScript fonts.

When using the UniCode Font Manager, the primary fonts are given odd names such as:

RO_Trinity.Medium.Italic_ELatin1

which the PostScript system doesn't understand, hence font bitmaps will be in-lined, and your PDFs will look pretty poor...

But fear not! All we need to do, for *Ghostscript* is to inform it how the fonts map across.

Within *!GhostScr.bin* you will find the file *FontMap/GS*. Load it into *!Edit* and append the following to the bottom:

```
% Rick's RISC OS encodings

/RO_Corpus.Medium_ELatin1           /Courier           ;
/RO_Corpus.Medium.Oblique_ELatin1    /Courier-Oblique   ;
/RO_Corpus.Bold_ELatin1              /Courier-Bold      ;
/RO_Corpus.Bold.Oblique_ELatin1      /Courier-BoldOblique ;

/RO_Homerton.Medium_ELatin1          /Helvetica         ;
/RO_Homerton.Medium.Oblique_ELatin1  /Helvetica-Oblique ;
/RO_Homerton.Bold_ELatin1            /Helvetica-Bold    ;
/RO_Homerton.Bold.Oblique_ELatin1    /Helvetica-BoldOblique ;

/RO_Trinity.Medium_ELatin1           /Times-Roman       ;
/RO_Trinity.Medium.Italic_ELatin1    /Times-Italic      ;
/RO_Trinity.Bold_ELatin1             /Times-Bold        ;
/RO_Trinity.Bold.Italic_ELatin1      /Times-BoldItalic  ;
```

When you restart *Ghostscript*, it will perform font mapping according to this table and now all sanity will be restored.

Unfortunately this method cannot be used to include *Sassoon* and other fonts because all we are doing is aliasing our names to an existing font definition. Within *Ghostscript*, *Sassoon* doesn't exist so there is nothing to alias to...

Within *!ps2pdf* are a few options you might be interested in exploring. The compression options (“fate” etc) didn't seem to make any difference, and it appears the graphics are downsampled as standard. What may be of use is the compatibility level of the PDF file that is created.

Rick, 2005/03/16

You can *always* find the very latest issues of *Frobnicate* on our website!

Simply point your browser at...



<http://www.heyrick.co.uk/frobnicate/>

JUST SAY NO!

by Rick Murray

Be afraid...

Something *very* dangerous is lurking in Europe. Something known as a “software patent”.

Nothing special? Just more rubbish to write about in those licence “agreements”? Wrong, and wrong.

You see, software is already protected by *copyright*. So I can write a program (or, indeed, this document that you are reading) and automatically it is covered by a copyright – go Google if you’d like to know more on copyright laws (don’t read the licences, they pander to your fears, such as ‘it is a criminal offence to reverse-engineer this software’, while in general the law *does* permit this in very specific (and useful) circumstances).

A software patent is something very much worse. Very insidious. Very *very* dangerous.

Example 1

Let’s work on a simple idea. The program is going to be a star chart. It will display a grid with a bunch of stars plotted. You can ‘grab’ the screen and drag it around to look west, south, higher, lower...you get the idea. A little menu will be along the top of the screen, and the bottom will display status, time, and help messages. As our computer does not have a hardware cursor, we’ll make a cute little animated spinning earth with a pointer sticking out of the top. This will be placed on-screen using EOR plotting.

How many patents have I just trampled on? That is *your* homework, if you are interested.

I’ll give you a freebie – plotting the cursor on the screen using EOR. Yes, somebody *actually* owns the patent for this. A facet of boolean algebra that you can be thought of as a slow learner if you didn’t know by the time you were twelve years old. It is beautifully simple, yet very effective. You only need to remember *where* your pointer is. To draw it on-screen, just plot it. To remove it from screen, just plot it again. The EOR process just flips the bits. Do it once you have a pointer, do it twice, it is gone and you can place it elsewhere. *This is patented in the US.*

But surely patents protect?

The *big* businesses will try to convince you that software patents will protect valuable business and prevent theft. This is a *blatant lie*. From what I have been able to find out, the patent system applied to software is about as

unfair a legal process as it is possible to have. Patents are not automatic. You must apply for a patent, at 20,000 to 40,000 euros *each* (much of that being legal fees). This immediately means that people such as myself will never *ever* be able to patent an idea for anything.

Patents can be applied for, seemingly, anything. In America, IBM holds a patent on “*detection and prevention of running multiple instances of a program at once*” (US:05870543). This is suitably vague as to mean that probably most coders in a multitasking environment have trodden on this at one time or another.

Software patents do not protect innovation or good ideas, they exist to “protect” the big companies from having to worry about competition.

There’s more...

But the worst is yet to come.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO STEAL ANYTHING

One of the useful things about copyright is that you actually have to be a criminal to be prosecuted. You need to have stolen code, music, video... You need to have stolen *something*.

You do *not* need to steal a damn thing to be prosecuted for patent infringement.

So coders such as myself who sit, alone, in a bedroom writing programs for fun and education have a *lot* to fear. The fact that we have no connections to the outside world, no internet feed, and possibly were not even aware of the existence of the patent or the company that holds it... all are totally irrelevant.

Sure, we can fight back, and maybe the patent will be found to be groundless and it will go in our favour. We’ll just need half a million euros to get started with. The big companies (namely IBM who hold an astonishing number of software patents) can come up with this sort of cash.

Me? I doubt I’ll ever approach having a mere fraction of that sort of money.

Further reading, find out more:
<http://lfp.ai.mit.edu/>

Who gets the patent?

By the way, did I mention that the software patents are apparently given out on a first-come-first-served basis? You might have had the idea *first*, but if IBM registers the idea before you, they hold the patent and you do not. And, again, you could argue ... if you have the cash to back you up.

Example two

Let's work on another simple idea. We'll take the idea of software patents and apply it to white goods. Assume I own the patent to the concept of "moulded plugs". And I'm not a reasonable person. Nobody can supply a product with a moulded plug unless they pay me. And since some countries won't allow the product to be marketed *without* a plug fitted, the choice is to pay for normal plugs to be fitted, or pay me to allow moulded plugs to be used.

It gets better. There is no sense of "reasonable" necessary with my patent. I could charge the director of a company *one euro* because I think she's a "sex kitten" and very cute; yet turn around and ask the next company for half a million euros because... well, I don't need a reason. I can just do it.

Further reading, find out more:

<http://www.nosoftwarepatents.com/>

Example three

Why have companies not fought harder for their patents? Maybe they are waiting for the time when they can wave just one piece of paper in the air and all the competition will run.

Maybe they are waiting for a day when they can say "guys, we actually own the rights to ATMs and you are infringing on our patent".

Suddenly you might find two thirds of the cash machines that you rely on more and more cease working overnight and are physically removed days later, with mammoth lawsuits flying around. You think I'm joking? *Prove* to me such a scenario will never happen here.

There is only one way to stop such a mad idea, and that is to put a halt to the crazier idea of software patents in Europe.

Software patents will cause unemployment

It is a simple fact. If I was writing software in America, my choices are to either write and hope for the best, or to research each of the *one hundred thousand* software patents already in existence to see if my little *home-grown* algorithm will land me in trouble. Pretty soon I'll give up and stop coding as most of my time would be spent researching and not coding. Every tweak and alteration of my algorithm would require more research. And unless I patent my algorithm, I'd need to keep on checking through the life of the program. Oh, and since I don't have lots of money and the big companies do, there is actually nothing to stop the big companies from *stealing* my algorithm by patenting it and then squeezing me dry. Lawyers will make a lot of money. Small software companies will close rather than risk the heavy fines of infringing patents. Remember – not knowing is not an excuse...

And if a company closes, there will be unemployment.

The underlying motive

I believe the underlying motive is the big companies that made it in software are now worried about the massive and growing acceptance of "open source" products. They have always seen software under lock and key and "trade secret" as being secure and reliable, while only bored hackers released sources to shoddy cobbled-together things they wrote on a whim. The tables have spectacularly turned and the likes of *Linux* can wipe the floor with most closed-source operating systems. It is the American way – if you can't buy out then you litigate. The problem is that the open source movement have not stolen any code. It is all there for you to read if you feel so inclined. And, well, while the movement has several key figures (Mr. Stallman, Mr. Torvalds, etc), the actual work has been performed by *thousands*. Who do you even begin proceedings against?

The answer is beautifully simple. Get them on patent infringement. Get them for "stealing" an idea that probably wasn't yours to begin with – lest you forget, the patents are given out to who applies *first*, and believe-you-me, we *all* know who will be first in the queue if Europe is dumb enough to say "yes".

Further reading, find out more:

<http://www.freepatents.org/>

Slime tactics

In January of this year, the EU's Council of Agriculture and Fishery met to discuss a variety of items which were intended to be adopted as legislation without a vote. On the agenda... software patents. This is a very sly and slimy tactic that shows just how far the big software companies will go to push this twisted concept in Europe. They *know* they won't win on the merit of the idea presented on its own, so they'll try the back door approach. Any back door approach – including leaning heavily on Denmark.

Are you in favour of software patents?

You might like to consider the points I have raised, and especially the slime tactics, and ask yourself if you are believing in an idealistic concept hyped and spun to sound good, or in a lie that will cause a lot of damage.

These days we are all worried about terrorism from a variety of sources. To my mind, software patents are going to turn into a form of intellectual terrorism. Not now, probably not the days or weeks after the EU would pass such legislation, but when it *really* matters.

The winners and the losers

Software patents exist for *one* reason and one reason *only*:

To make the rich and powerful companies richer and more powerful.

You and me, us normal programmers? We lose.

Rick Murray, 2005/04/09

heyrick@merseymail dot com

<http://www.heyrick.co.uk/frobnicate/>

Hiding a satellite dish

by Ewen Cathcart

Ewen wishes me to print the usual disclaimers, though I rather expect you know the score by now... My comments are in italicised Homerton (like this).

In the previous issue I talked about installing a satellite dish indoors. I realise that this method will not be ideal for everyone. What we need is a solution that will allow an outdoor installation to take place without it falling foul of planning restrictions. We need to minimize the visual impact of the dish by hiding or disguising it. Alternatively, we can opt for a non-conventional antenna design.

In this issue I will be examining various techniques that can be used to hide or disguise a satellite dish. I will also be providing details about different types of antenna that are available. A number of companies offer dedicated solutions, some of which you might find of interest. However, there are also a few low-cost DIY alternatives that you might like to try.

The simplest method is to hide the dish behind the existing features of a building. This would include things like a balcony railing, a parapet, under the eaves of a roof, a "valley" between two roves, or a recess between chimney stacks. With the exception of a balcony, I have to say that a roof mounting isn't always ideal. It can make access to the dish very difficult, especially if the building is a high one. Besides, chimney stacks and roof parapets are not really designed to have large wind catchers attached to them! A roof install isn't something that I would personally recommend.

And "some famous person that fell off the roof (and died) while adjusting a satellite dish" seemed to be Sky's main excuse for not telling people who called their helpline where in the sky the dish should point...

There are other concerns with roof mounted dishes – a dish that is tucked into a recess had better be well anchored. Roof components are rather fragile when a lot of pressure is concentrated on a small area, such as the edge of a flying dish!

There is no reason why a dish cannot be installed in a garden (please refer to my first article on DIY installation of a satellite dish). One advantage of this is that the dish can be hidden away from the front of the property (often the part that matters the most). Then again you might find the front garden is the only suitable patch of land in terms of being able to receive a decent signal. It may be possible to camouflage the dish by surrounding it with plants. You can paint the metal an appropriate colour so that it will blend in with its surroundings (please remember to use non-metallic matt-finish paint).

DO NOT place any plants in front of the dish, as it will have an adverse effect on the signal being received. The best solution is to use a realistic looking fake plant. One such plant is called the "Dish Camo" (www.satellitedish.com). The company that sell it claims it will offer complete camouflage of the dish with virtually no loss of signal. It doesn't come cheap though. If you would like to try a less expensive solution, why not pop down to your local garden centre and pick up some plastic shrubbery (avoid type that has a wire framework). *I would suggest that a DIY method might be better than a 'potted plant'. You could make a layer of fake ivy. Avoid plants that would change noticeably during the year, such as leaf loss in winter...*

I've heard the suggestion that a dish might be attached to the trunk of a tree. Depends on the thickness of the trunk and whether the tree is mature or young (you might have to reposition the dish every so often to compensate for growth). Just make sure that there are no branches or leaves sticking out in front of the dish. *Please ensure the nails or screws that you attach to the tree do not poison it, it is no good to have a tree grow for fifteen years in order to be a reasonable dish holder, to then go and kill it by accident!*

Of course there is nothing to stop you sticking it on or against a garden shed. A black mesh dish shouldn't look too bad against a dark coloured shed.

You could mount your dish in a rockery. There is a dish cover made of plastic that is moulded in the shape of a large boulder! *Very "Space 1999" like!* The "Dish Rock" (www.dish-rock.com) is also handy for hiding unsightly sticking up features such as wellheads or pipes. Unfortunately, the price tag is somewhat excessive (\$200!). You could improvise by purchasing a thin/stiff sheet of plastic from your local DIY store, and then attempt to forge a rock shape out of it using a blowtorch, finishing off with a lick of textured paint to make it look authentic. It goes without saying that extreme care must be observed at all times, given that human flesh and melting plastic do not mix very well! A simpler solution would be to fashion a rock-like shape out of papier-mâché and then coat it in water-retarding textured paint. Please remember that your fake rock (whatever design) will need to be attached securely around the base. Metal tent pegs would be ideal for this purpose.



www.dish-rock.com (quality reduced for fit size)

Perhaps you don't have a garden. A wall mount may be your only option. You will have to think about ways to blend the dish against the background. If your wall has a uniform colour, it might be possible to paint your dish to match the wall (ideally with the same type of paint). Not a lot you can do about the side profile, although if you live in a terraced property it shouldn't be too much of a concern from out in the street. Just hang a bag of nuts from the LNB end of the boom arm and pretend it is a bird stand! *Or get a processor fan with big-ass heatsink and superglue it to the top side of the LNB. If anybody asks... no, it isn't a satellite dish, it is a radio-telescope!*

Some companies sell patterned dish covers that are designed to make your dish stand out from the crowd. However, there are also designs available that might help blend the dish into the wall. One such cover is called the "Satellite Skin" (www.satelliteskins.com).



Red Brick

www.satelliteskins.com

This is a rigid plastic concave disk that clips over the front of the dish. Unfortunately, the cover has to be matched exactly to the dimensions. Also, like everything else, it doesn't come cheap. You could of course improvise your own Satellite Skin. Take a digital photo of your wall. Print off some high-quality copies. Paste the sheets to your dish using some temporary adhesive; making sure that the pattern closely matches the surrounding wall. Fold the edges around the lip of the dish and trim off the excess paper. Now, give the sheets a good coat of resin (you can mix it with plastic powder to give it texture and reduce glossiness). Wait until it is dry, and then carefully peel away. Wipe the adhesive from the underside and give that a good coat of resin (smooth this time). The result should be a fairly stiff cover that can be placed over the dish as and when required. *I love this idea!*

If you live in a warmer climate (lucky you!) or are in a part of the world where the use of satellite equipment is banned (not so lucky you!) you might like to try an unusual design in the form of a prime focus dish built into a table umbrella (www.satelitedish.com). Again, this is likely to be quite expensive, plus there may be problems getting it through customs if your country disapproves of satellite viewing. Let us look at a DIY solution then!

Attach your own prime focus (or upside down offset) dish to the underside of a garden parasol (ideally, the framework will be non-metallic - you might be able to remove metal struts and replace them with plastic ones). I can imagine that an umbrella dish would not be appropriate for northerly latitudes, given the acute angle of lean that would have to be employed!

You might have an empty/unused outdoor swimming pool or pond or sunken garden. A dish could be placed in the recess and covered over with a tarpaulin. This method is commonly used in Iran (a big "*Salaam*" to all my Iranian readers!).

There is a type of see-through dish called a "Metronic Clear" (www.uk3w.com). The dish is made of a transparent plastic with a thin metal film to act as the reflector. Results can look quite good. The downside is that the dish is more flexible than the normal metallic type, and therefore prone to distortion in high winds. There is also a greater risk of it becoming damaged. These are quite expensive,

therefore you would need to decide if the aesthetics of the dish are worth the extra dosh.

Smaller dishes tend to be much easier to hide or disguise. If you can get away with using a small-sized dish at your location, then by all means please do. Small dishes (other than the mass-produced Sky Minidish) are usually more expensive than larger ones, and also a little harder to come by. As I write this, Lidl UK will shortly be offering the ‘Porty’ portable digital satellite receiver kit once again (www.lidl.co.uk). The kit comes with a 40CM plastic offset dish. Reasonable results have been achieved with this kit, even as far north as central Scotland.

Typically, the dish is a lot more expensive on its own; therefore the portable kit does represent a bargain.



The ‘Porty’ dish looks similar to the ‘original’ BSB Minidish. You might find some BSB Minidishes still knocking about at car boot sales in the UK. You can easily replace the original LNB with a modern one.

Another type of small dish is the 43CM Cassegrain (www.digicams-uk.com). This is a prime focus design, with an LNB in the shape of a central stalk. The unique thing about the Cassegrain is that it has the efficiency of a 60CM dish. People that use it (especially behind glass) have reported excellent results. A bit expensive, but well worth considering. Both ‘Multimo’ and ‘Arcon Sweety’ are of the Cassegrain type.

The ‘DigiGlobe’ (www.digicams-uk.com) is a Cassegrain built into a working outdoor lamp! You could have a go at making the lamp yourself, using a 12V high intensity light bulb (make sure that it doesn’t get too hot in case it affects the electronics of the LNB).



Then we have the flat-plate antenna design that resembles a BSB Squarial (www.satalogue.com). The antenna has the advantage of being completely flat and therefore a lot easier to hide or disguise. On

the downside, the efficiency is not so good. Also difficult to repair, given the LNB is fully integrated into the unit.

Old BSB Squarials can sometimes be picked up at boot sales. However, it is unlikely they will be of much use for anything (they were designed to pick up signals in the telecom band using circular polarization).

A French company has slightly modified the flat-plate antenna to create something that has the appearance of a sloping box. This is the ‘Cubsat’ (www.cubsat.com). The box design makes it ideal for use on the ground, on a balcony, or on top of a garage. Unfortunately, the design also lacks efficiency (I gather it comes with a built-in amp, although there is only so much you can do to boost signal levels). You could create your own ‘Cubsat’ using a large plastic container with a slope cut out of it (actually, it could be any shape - a cone, a pyramid, a cylinder, etc). I would use the Cassegrain type of dish in order to maximize efficiency.



Finally, we have a very unusual type of satellite antenna in the shape of a ‘pipe’ (it actually resembles a boom microphone!) called the ‘Satantenna’ (www.brymar.co.uk). I guess it is nothing more than an elongated flat plate. It can be installed in the same way as a terrestrial TV aerial (this is not a dish and therefore less likely to pose a risk in terms of being a wind catcher). The downside is that it is the least efficient type of satellite antenna. But you might find it ideal for your particular needs.



Well, I hope that I have provided some ideas for hiding or disguising your satellite dish. Until next time!

Ewen

*Thank you for that Ewen, very interesting stuff!
If you would like to send Ewen an email, you can contact him via Frobnicate.*

www.cubsat.com (edited to concentrate on unit)

www.lidl.de

www.uk3w.com

www.analoguesat.co.uk

Reminiscing (the '80s)

In writing this issue, I had two pages to fill, so what better to do than to write about some things that I remember. I'm a child of the eighties (I was born in 1973, a month too early – probably the only time I've been early for anything!).

I can remember Peter Davidson as *Doctor Who* the first time around. And that frizzy-haired guy. And the one with the big question marks on his clothes. I'll tell you what, though, I don't remember the original series being anything near as dark as the current ones; though I like the current series a lot (even if this Doctor is mildly annoying). I was very pleasantly surprised by Billie Piper's acting abilities, it is just a shame she constantly murders the English language!

Talking of surprised, I saw a bit of *Fireball XL-5* on one of these "way back when" TV programmes and it was in black and white! I could have sworn I saw it in colour! Was it ever in colour, or is my memory lying to me?

I look at children's television with despair. There don't seem to be any decent animated stuff on these days. I grew up with *Dogtanian and The Three Musketeers* and the equally watchable *The Mysterious Cities Of Gold*.

There was something else, something about the crew of a bright yellow and blue plane/spacecraft thing which had this whole complicated "closing up" routine that'd allow it to go underwater. I can't remember what that is called.

Still on animated series, who that watched TV in that era can ever forget *Ulysses 31*? That room with all the comatose people floating in the air was really creepy!

On the music front, my first day at boarding school (November 2nd 1985), I was subjected to a looped tape of Madonna's "*Like A Virgin*" because a certain 12-year-old (*not me!!!*) thought it was 'suggestive'.

That was the days when Madonna had mad hair, but it wasn't out of place because Cyndi Lauper's was madder still, and even Whitney Houston had a spot of the '80s in her. The weird thing, though, was that sometimes it wasn't easy to tell the males from the females!

Back in those days I'm afraid I liked *The Pet Shop Boys*, *The Cure*, *Erasure*... stuff like that.

My musical tastes have broadened slightly.

I like *Erasure* less – I think their best work was the *Wild!* album, and the one with "*Witch in the ditch*". I think those albums were more diversions and experiments than a direction as later work (such as *Stop*) went back to their original sort of style. Shame. Now my MP3 playlist includes *Cyndi Lauper*, *Bonnie Tyler*, *Spandau Ballet*, *Tears for Fears*...

...it is true: you can find some good songs these days (artists and groups such as *Norah Jones* and *KYO*), but music in general ain't like it was in the '80s. My local radio station in the UK (The Eagle, Guildford 96.4FM) did a big survey to find out what people most wanted, and they reached the conclusion that I've maintained for over a decade. No rap. Lots of '80s. And a month later I left the UK and The Eagle isn't available off SkyDigital...

Kids these days want games for their PS:2 and X-Box. We made do with *Jet Set Willy* on a Speccy, and the crap that appeared on-screen as the loader program used the screen memory as a dumping ground. Given that this stuff was loaded off of tape, we had plenty of time to watch!

The height of sophistication was Econet that linked together a bunch of BBC micros. Still, it was more than the average PC could do... ...wait a second. This was 1985ish. What the hell was a PC anyway?

Excuse me for geeking out – but was there any non-PC based upon the 8086/8088? Computer makers were happy to limit themselves to 64K with Z80s and 6502s, or design memory paging systems. More powerful machines went the 68000 route. Nobody, it seems, took the x86 seriously. I would

not have ever expected to sit here so many years later and write this with something that is a direct (but heavily mutated) descendant of this processor!

We all used BASIC. The language is much maligned, but I can guarantee that *every* thirty-something reading this has used BASIC, even if they have exorcised all memory of the experience. C, Lisp, Cobal, and Fortran systems existed for the home computers, but they were more toys than anything serious, a 32K tape-based computer is going to provide a painful C experience...

The more adventurous used assembler. One of my friends was a 6502 hacker in a big way, and had his own customised operating system inside a BBC micro (totally incompatible with anything Acorn), and he had this amazing flight simulator that drew a real-time view of a world... *in MODE 7!!!* You have no idea how much I wished I knew how to snarf a ROM dump of his operating system back then, I'd learn how to use his computer just to play that game!

Kids these days discuss the plot twists in *Harry Potter*. We had *The Goonies*. For an older audience there was *The Evil Dead*, and the very disturbing *Lamb*. One of my favourite films back then (and still now) is *D.A.R.Y.L.* Don't get me wrong, the film has loads of flaws, but I still like it all the same.

The '80s was the era of all those Michael J Fox films. The amusing *High School U.S.A.* which plays like an extended pilot of a series that never was. *Teen Wolf* which is maybe too Disney for it's own good.

Heathers was a quirky (but worthwhile) choice for Winona Ryder, who had previously been seen in *Beetlejuice*.

But what the '80s did best was rehash stale ideas in a new way. I don't think vampire lore has been the same since *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys* got away from the so-camp-it-is-ridiculous and turned them into leather-wearing 'cool' 'people' with a mean streak.

Pick a Corey. Feldman? Haim? From *Lucas* to... well, lots of things. There was more to the Brat Pack than just the Molly Ringwalds and the Emilio Estevezes, which neatly brings us to *The Breakfast Club* and the many creations of John Hughes.

Moving away from TV to current affairs. I can remember the near-constant action replays when the Shuttle blew up. No, not that one. The other one. *Challenger*. I can understand the Americans being wary and cautious, but I think that they either have to take the risks or get out of the game completely. It might sound heartless, but I am *into* astronomy and space travel and I respect it. What my thoughts and their thoughts don't change is the reality of hurtling through the sky at unimaginable speeds (the trail from the more recent disaster covered a huge swathe of America, that should give you an idea of how fast it was moving) while strapped to a something that is essentially a massive firework. Channels such as *Reality TV* show what it is like when a rocket malfunctions. It really tests our engineering abilities as rockets are not something you can test-drive before deploying them, and the conditions they must operate in range from appalling to disastrous (I'm surprised these delicate satellite payloads aren't shaken to pieces).

I actually find it difficult to remember much else of current affairs of '85-'90 because I was aware of the "me" culture inherent in the decade and it seemed at odds with what I thought should be right. I remember Maggie quitting and the fall of the Berlin Wall, but those are more recent.

What I can remember was that I would buy myself a train ticket just for the hell of going somewhere. One day I took a convoluted route around much of southern England just to go through a little town called "Bramley" (I adore Bramley apple pies!). I would not do such a thing today. For one thing the price would be prohibitive, it doesn't seem as if those Away Day (go practically anywhere) tickets exist these days. And since the privatisation of the railway, I'm afraid I don't trust them.

But, hey, let's not quit on a morbid note. My favourite moment of the '80s? Probably the first time I watched *My Stepmother Is An Alien* and fell in love with a certain actress, who you can see on the front cover of this issue.

There are many other amazing things that happened then: the computer literacy programme, Live Aid, mobile phones (that looked like bricks), CDs...

The Wrap Party

TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

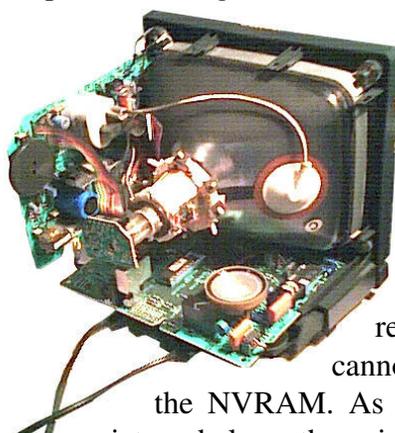


This, then, concludes another issue of *Frobnicate*. I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as we (myself, mom, and Ewen) enjoyed writing it!

Something I am playing with now is a Minitel2 terminal. Minitel is like a French version of Prestel. Not only is it technically superior, but it provided a host of good information right at the outset, which is why – even these days – you’ll see as many Minitel references as URLs. Some publicit  that arrived today gives a bunch of phone numbers, one of them says ‘3615 QUELLE’ in big letters, and ‘www.quelle.fr’ in smaller

letters. You must also realise that Minitel is essentially a pay-as-you-call videotext service operating at 1200/75 (!). To have such antiquated hardware still active today, and available in all decent post offices, is really quite an achievement. Unfortunately I have a grave problem with my Minitel:  `not do pass:`

The person who sold it didn’t tell me her password. I suspect she’d forgotten that it even *had* a password.



No problem, right? Just open it up and pop out the battery. That’ll do it...

...er, or not. I don’t have a chipset reference to hand, so I cannot identify which IC is the NVRAM. As you can see from the

picture below, there is an EPROM (64K?) and the main IC is an 80C32 microcontroller. The PDF I downloaded calls it a ROMless microcontroller, so there are obviously several



versions of the 80C32. As Philips made this unit, I hope the NVRAM uses IIC so I can hook it to the laptop parallel port and read it directly. The worst case? Having the NVRAM inside the microcontroller, or some weirdy like 8K of FlashROM...

Those that know me will be thinking ‘hang on, he doesn’t have a phone line!’ – true, but that didn’t stop me dialling something with a Bush box!

“Hello. My name is Rick and I have been clean for two and a half months.”

Am I talking about my alcohol consumption? Well, it does sound like a self-help group greeting doesn’t it? Actually, I’ve been clean of McDonalds for two and a half months. It takes a lot to annoy me, but they have. And over something so totally silly. Well, it is their loss. They might be a huge global corporation but they shouldn’t forget that us little people are actually their consumers. And, well, if you don’t mind I’ll patronise McDonald’s in the *other* sense of the word...

...and to that end, a little bit of free publicity for something that you may find an eye-opener if you like your food fast:

<http://www.mcspotlight.org/>

And while we are being reactionary, why not check out:

<http://www.michaelmoore.com/>

And, whatever you do, don’t look up ‘Veritas’ on-line. If that hit-counter goes up, twerp-features will think himself important.

Well, that’s the magazine written. Now all I’ve got to do is update the website. That oughta be interesting...

BEST WISHES!

Rick, 2005/05/16
04:25am CET