

My past and present interest in computers



by Andrew Renton

Dear Reader

This booklet

is a brief summary

of my interest in computers

and my utilisation of these

before and after my accident.

My accident

My accident happened on February 10th, 1994. A group of friends, including myself went for a seasonal break in the snow. We usually went to the Lake District, but decided Scotland was better this year. All of the other five had been Venture Scouts when I was a leader. On the day of the accident, 4 out of the 6 of us decided to go skiing at the facilities nearby. As me and Peter couldn't ski, we hiked from our house to where the others were skiing.



After we had lunch with the others, we made our way back, I slipped on a cliff and was rendered unconscious. My friend made me safe, and then went to get help. While he was away, I must have moved because I ended up sliding down the mountain, still unconscious, only stopping when my head rammed into a rock! Further information on this can be found on my website:

<http://home.btconnect.com/andrew.renton>

The (winding) road to recovery

Here is a list of all the medical and rehabilitation establishments that I have attended:

Fort William Hospital

Glasgow Hospital

Ipswich Hospital

The Lewin Centre, Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge

Papworth Hospital

McLean Wheelchair Centre

Papworth Trust, Ipswich

Headway, Colchester

Icanho, Stowmarket

Headway, Ipswich

Body Matters, Ipswich

My difficulties and solutions

My difficulties

My accident left me with two main issues, when it comes to technology.

The first is physical. I have very limited use of my right arm and leg. This is because when my head struck the rock, it damaged the part of my brain that controls the right side of my body.

The second is mental. Like so many people. I meet at Headway, I have trouble remembering things.

My solutions

When I first regained consciousness, I started going to the Occupational Therapy department in the hospital. Whilst there, I designed a gadget to hold one key down whilst I pressed another. Windows 95 has a feature called Sticky Keys which does the same thing but in software.

Touch typing is very difficult with only one hand. I use voice recognition rather than slaving away at the keyboard. It's not perfect, but it's better than I could do 'typing'. I'm using it to write this report.

As for memory, I keep all important data in my phone, which is also my Personal Organizer.

Use of computers at BT

I first joined BT as a clerical officer, aged 18, and we were using mainframe computers. My only real interaction with them was entering manpower figures.

When I moved to a different department, they made much more use of Personal Computers running at the time an operating system called CP/M.

My group delivered training in a number of computer related fields, as well as providing support. I used to lecture on the 'C' Language course and my specialist area was network.

Our division became involved in the rollout of a companywide e-mail project. At the first attempt, this was called COAST, (Common Office Automation System for Telecom).

BT Buildings I have worked in:

I have no picture of Princes Street, but if you know Ipswich, it's the building Princes Street between where John Grose used to be and Fisons.



Bibb Way, Handford Road,
Ipswich



BT Research Labs,
Martlesham Heath

We were then taken over by a gentleman from Martlesham, who was much more used to PCs and so we went that way. Originally, we chose NewWave, which was an object oriented system based on Windows. In the end, NewWave was ditched and normal Windows was the operating system of choice. This was back in the Windows 3.1 era.

History of the computers I have owned:

Since the ZX81 first sparked my imagination, I have always been keenly interested in computers.

When the ST came out, the choice of new 16-bit computers was either that or the Commodore Amiga. Because the ST appeared to suit me more, with my main interests not being in games.

Having said that, I upgraded to the 520 STE because it was more suited to game play.

After being at work for a number of years, I bought a Medion PC. This allowed me to bring work home with me and take stuff I had done at home into work.

The Dell system was really just an upgrade of the Medion, although it did have some new features like a DVD burner and a colour printer/scanner.

What influenced my choice?

I went for the Jupiter Ace mainly because it wasn't a Sinclair ZX81, like my friend had. FORTH was a new language to me and my friends so it took a bit of learning.

I got the Spectrum because it was more mainstream, and there was more software and peripherals available for it.

The ST had a rival, the Commodore Amiga, but that was only good for games.

I started buying PCs mainly because I used them at work.

My computers:

Sinclair ZX81

My first experience of the home computer. It belonged to my friend George, who it has to be said was a bit of a geek. I guess I was as well.



Jupiter Ace

My first computer, which had a Z80 processor and was programmed with the Forth programming language. Attachead is a RAM pack, which added 16K



ZX Spectrum

This was a more mainstream computer. It was faster than the Ace, had colour and sound (sort of) and was programmed with BASIC or machine code.



Atari 520ST

This was my first 16-bit computer. It ran the GEM operating system, which in its time was a rival to Windows.



Atari 520STE

I bought this as an upgrade to the previous 520ST. It had better graphics and sound, and it had joystick ports.



Medion PC (Windows 95)

I wrote programs on this using Borland Delphi and designed Web pages using Dreamweaver. I also played games.



Dell PC (Windows 7)

It had a DVD burner, a colour printer/scanner, voice recognition, a gamepad, synchronizes with my phone, a joystick, a webcam, speakers.



Asus EEE Pad Table

I tend to take this to bed with me. It's the easiest way to check my email and browse the web as I repose.

I just put it on charge when I get up.



Packard Bell

My current system running Windows 8. I have moved a lot of stuff from the Dell



Glossary (for the uninitiated!)

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| All the PCs | When I finally decided to get a PC, mainly for compatibility with work, I started off at the low end and gradually improved both hardware and software. |
| Atari 520ST & 520STE | My first 16 bit computer. The later STE was the same computer, in an advanced package. The reason I got the STE was that I had so much software for the ST, upgrading made more sense. |
| EAST | East Anglian Sailing Trust |
| Forth | A computer programming language, which needs less interpreting by the computer and is therefore faster. |
| GEM | When Windows first appeared, it had a number of rivals. GEM was one of them, bearing more of a resemblance to the Apple Macintosh. |
| Spectrum | Had colour and sound. More mainstream, you could buy hardware and software on the high street. |
| Venture Scouts | The stage in the Scout Movement after Scouts, for 16-20 year olds of either sex. |
| ZX81 | The first home computer I encountered. Very limited in comparison with today's computers. |

I don't think I'm a geek. What do you think?! 😊

What I'm up to nowadays:

Although they tried to reinstate me, BT were forced to medically retire me at 28, mainly due to my poor memory.

I have taken up designing Websites, including one for East Anglian Sailing Trust and Headway Ipswich.

Here is my weekly programme:

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| MONDAY Morning: Headway Afternoon: Go somewhere with Dad Evening: Watch TV or PC | THURSDAY Headway all day. Evening: Monthly visit to Bramford History Group when on |
| TUESDAY Morning: Usually shopping with Mum Afternoon: Watch TV or PC Evening: Watch TV or PC | FRIDAY Morning: Gym Afternoon: Watch TV or PC Evening: Watch TV or PC |
| WEDNESDAY Morning: Go round my Mates 4 T & chat Afternoon: Watch TV or PC Evening: Sailing with EAST | SATURDAY Morning: Go up town with ad Afternoon: Whatever Evening: Whatever |
| SUNDAY Morning: Perform weekly computer administration tasks Afternoon: Watch a film(s) Evening: Watch TV or PC | |

