

FROBNICATE

With an estimated 2200 readers!



The Rennes métro; annoyed at McDo; Win98 troubles; using a dish inside; life before email; and loads more!

Hissing Sprinch

Winter 2005 Issue 23 €0



123

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Credits:

Designed, written, and created by Richard Murray.

"Using a satellite dish indoors" written by Ewen Cathcart.

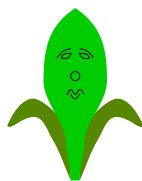
"Bringing it all back home", almost..." written by my mother. :-)

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The Frobnicate website - where you can also find the previous 22 issues...

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



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Keep in touch!

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Editor's notes

I was pleasantly shocked (amazed, actually) at how many people actually read *Frobnicate*. A good number of you discovered the previous issue before its “official” release notification. People from Germany, the Netherlands, California... and places that I have no idea where the domain name represents!

It does, though, make it a tad depressing that I receive such a *small* amount of feedback from y'all. The PDF version was downloaded over *two thousand* times, the OvationPro version more than two *hundred* times... And the replies to my surveys and questions? Knock off another zero, and even that is more!

Come on people – this is intended as something we can **all** share and enjoy. Do you want to hear my skewed political views *again*? If not – **write something more interesting!** It doesn't have to be nerdy at all. The person in California... What is the place like? I have visions of *The Red Hot Chili Peppers* and movie stars, but I suspect I'm stuck in an era of Burt Reynolds movies and Valley Girls...

You can talk about practically anything!

Anyway, I have yet to write some software to count up things like downloads/domain, and PDF/OvnPro downloads, etc. Potentially *two and a half thousand* readers! Okaaaaay...say something sensible. Erm... :-)

I have gotten into MP3 in a big way. I don't mean the download scene (rather hard, what with only getting internet at the local library!), but I've discovered that I can store a large number of songs in a small amount of space. So I am MP3ing various CDs direct to harddisc. Set up WinAmp's playlist and no more do I have to mess with swapping CDs. I can cut out the songs I don't like, and randomise the lot for a change. What better to freak out parents than to nestle a Dylan track between two Amy Lee (Evanescence) numbers?

Even better, I can (hopefully in the Spring) get a cheap MP3 CD walkman so when I mow the grass (or whatever) I can drop in a CD full of MP3s and listen to all my favourite songs without the hassles of CD swapping (which, when you're in the middle of a field, is marginally *more* hassle than dropping another disc in the caddie). I just find it nice that it sounds (to my ears) mostly the same yet only takes 4-5Mb for 128kbps and 7-8Mb for 192kbps per song. Some stuff is 192kbps as an experiment. Sounds the same as 128kbps to me!

This issue almost wasn't to be. The first article “If it ain't broke...” explains why. Looking back on it now, as this machine works (touch wood!), it is almost comic. Or maybe Comic Sans? Okay, that was scraping the very bottom of the joke barrel.

In this issue there is no code, so you can give your brain a rest. It is the start of the new year, and this condition should, rightly, last until around May at which time it can become *summer*. This means we don't have to do any actual work, or thinking, until Autumn – and by then we'll have an excuse for then too. :-)

In this issue we'll hear from *Ewen* on using a satellite dish indoors (yes, really); and my own mother concludes the Winter 2005 issue. In amongst those gems, plenty of witterings from me!

With the exception of mom's article (which was written on an Acorn A4) and Ewen's article (which was written off-site), this entire issue was *created* using the Windows version of OvationPro. The PDF creation rests in the RISC OS realm as Ghostscript 7.04 and CutePDF Writer misposition the characters and muck up the ligatures.

Well, that's it for the editor's notes.
Enjoy *Frobnicate* issue 23!

Note the new email address. The old one still works, but this one is more direct, quicker...

If it ain't broke...

This little story will no doubt be found highly amusing by Windows certified (emphasis on the "certified") nerds, and may even strike a chord with the rest of us. Either way, it should be taken as a warning...

This Acer Travelmate 514TXV (with Windows98 SE) didn't start off life as mine. And, through time it has had a variety of software installed and removed – some of this by myself. I don't know exactly what the previous owner had, I remember wading through the system registry removing all traces of Gator.Com software. A nice little utility to check, on-line, that your computer's date and time were bang on. Sadly, though, it was slightly more insidious, including an uninstaller that appeared to simply remove the start menu icons. The `gator` service was still loaded at startup.

So there I am, looking with *RegEdit*, thinking what an utter load of crap is inside the registry. I need a tool to scan through for garbage and remove it. While I'm there, can anybody tell me what DLLs in `Windows\System` are *actually* necessary? I don't mean a crappy "scan the registry and see if its usage count is zero", I mean scan *every* application on the harddisc and map what calls what. After all, UninstallShield often pops up messages like "BoingZebedee may be a shared resource, sure you wanna kill it?" and you scratch your head and think "How the hell do I know?"

If the system is going to dump garbage into `Windows\System`, can't *something* maintain a list that you can look at? I mean, if that DLL is only supposed to be used by Mookie v2 which you deleted weeks ago, then it is safe to remove it. On the other hand, if VisualBasic still wants it, it'd be best to leave it in peace for upsetting VB incurs karmic disarray and giddy feelings.

It is staggering how much crap accumulates within Windows. DLLs, VxDs, OCXs, and some stuff that seems simply to exist for the sake of filling up the Explorer view in really big screen resolutions!

So I find a program called *RegVac*. Version 2 I *think*. So I let it get on with an automated clean.

Fine. Cool.
I reboot.

That is when the problems begin. The system detects

"ACM Battery" (I *think* the initials were 'ACM'). It nicely installs the drivers, which are all present in `Windows\Options\CABs`. Thank you Windows98. Now why the hell are you broken? In fact, you are so broken I can't even Ctrl-Alt-Del. The whole shebang has taken a nosedive into oblivion, rather like Las Ketchup's career once everybody got sick of the ketchup song.

So I reboot.

This time into Safe Mode. Well, it is safe mode right? So I can install/deinstall the hardware 'safely' right?

Balls.

Various drivers aren't loaded. Safe mode allows you to do various tweaks to resolve conflicts and crap, but don't ask it to install a new bit of hardware. It doesn't want to know. So in a bit of reverse psychology I disable the power management.

Win98 boots, correctly. I look through the help for troubleshooting and it looks as if the recommended method is to "run SETUP to correct this problem". Fine. I'll do that. Only, Setup seems to insist on totally re-installing Windows.

Like, whatever.

I installed Windows on top of Windows, so it'll hook into my existing registry so I don't need to re-install everything.

I know that this is a Microsoft product so sooner or later it'll want a registration key. Some stupid bit of paper I lost ages ago. Now Microsoft can't accuse me of using a pirate copy since it is right here on a CD that says "Recovery CD Travelmate 510 series" in big letters. Luckily they aren't entirely smart so the key will be found at:

```
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\ProductKey
```

I very nearly published the key here just to annoy Microsoft; retribution for the hassle they're causing me.

Because this story, it ain't over.

Hell no! We've barely begun.

Two *hours* pass. Sure enough, it asks for the key. M3WBP etc etc.

And Windows98 boots. With my Alyson Hannigan backdrop and the various startup services (*WinAmp*, *QuickRes*, and a bunch of other crap).

But, problem! No mouse.

So over I go to System devices. There's a problem. Running SETUP will fix the problem. It says so, right there on the window. You have NO idea how I'm having to bite my tongue from sliding into obscenities as *another* two hours pass. The first thing the Windows installer says as the actual install gets underway is "Relax as Windows installs on this machine". Somebody, somewhere, is laughing at me.

By the way, Dr. Watson was totally useless. It installs itself on the system tray and wants you to click it to invoke it. And, you know what? I've not yet found a keypress that gets you to tab around the items in the system tray. Is it even possible?

Well. This is a good start. Windows98 detects "IRQ <something> for PCI steering". What the hell? Even worse, it detects several of them. And a composite power supply, in addition to the *three* that it already thinks I have. Somewhere along the way it also re-installed a new system timer and PC speaker, which are in a state of conflict with the ones already installed. I look in the settings and **both** things are using identical settings, are you telling me Windows is too bloody stupid to notice *that*?

Troubleshooter says, quote:

"If the device appears twice, but you have only one such device installed, remove all occurrences of the device and then reinstall it."

So I remove all of this conflicting stuff. Windows doesn't want to find it when scanning for hardware, it seems that it is only interested in "non-PCI" devices.

So I reboot. It'll find it that way. Maybe it'll even find the mouse...

It does. It re-installs it all. Incorrectly.

Never mind, it seems to work. But...

...*still* no mouse. I know Windows is traditionally good in a mouseless state (unlike RISC OS), but it is rather difficult to even pretend to be productive without the friendly pointer. This isn't Windows 3.11 y'know!

I reboot again. Has it *finally* sorted itself out?

Well, actually, no. There is some problem with VMouse.VxD. It exists. Probably missing from the registry, Windows seems to depend more on what the registry says than any attempt at actually looking at the referenced device. But that isn't the best bit. ZVSwitch.VxD is upset too. Some bad VxD call in it. Most likely to the VMouse.VxD that it didn't want to load not a few seconds ago.

DO NOT TOUCH THE TOUCHPAD! If even so much as a cat's whisker comes into contact with the touchpad, it is instant reboot time. No blue screen, no "I'm scared and want to wet myself – abort, retry, ignore" message from Windows... No, the screen goes black and the next thing I see is the Acer startup logo. *Total annihilation!*

Screw this.

I rename C:\Windows as C:\OldWin.

I try to run Windows setup. It doesn't want to know. So I make \Options\Cabs as a directory. It still doesn't want to know. I copy WIN.COM from the old Windows to the new directory. Now it installs (go figure). This time it takes *three* hours to install. Maybe I need a defrag by now? God knows my mind does!

But, problem. It misdetects several key items of hardware. The sound stuff, for example. No problem, I set up the right drivers. But, why is this Windows trying to be smart? I mean, Windows 95 asked me to confirm that it correctly detected the hardware. This one just goes ahead and does it. Again, *incorrectly*.

Reboot.

YES! It works!

Now the bad news. EVERYTHING has to be reinstalled. Actually, Word runs – it just whinges that the registry settings are corrupt. Actually, Word, you don't *have* any registry settings. Just shut up and load before I take a pump-action to your ass...

Can't play DVDs.

You'd have expected, since this thing had *Mediamatics DVD Express* installed, that you might find this on the recovery CD? Noooo. That is too much like logical. So I search the old registry (I exported it as a REG file before giving up on the old Windows) for Mediamatics and DVD express. I copy a few DLLs and import a few registry options. DVD express first complains that the region is incorrect (it isn't – I watched this DVD just three days previous) and then it says no drive or disc can be found. I drop in American Pie 2. Maybe that yucky Interactool will work? No. It says the Mediamatics driver is the registered driver, but that there is no registered driver. What?

I then try WinDVD Platinum. It tells me it cannot install on a non-French computer. A moment in control panel's Regional Settings fixes that. But then it tells me I need DirectX 9 (I have 8.0a) and some other stuff like a newer Windows installer. Sod that, it's too much like bother.

I find "VLC 0.7.2" by VideoLAN. It is small, it is powerful (LOADS of options!), and it is free. Some DVDs seem to cause it to crash in certain places, but I notice that there's a newer version on the VideoLAN website. I'll get it someday (it is 6Mb).

VLC appears to "not care" about DVD directives like "don't fast forward through the copyright blurb" and

“don’t allow the language to change”. It’ll do it anyway. On one hand I’m really happy that I can watch DVDs but on the other hand I’m getting used to it crashing for no apparent reason, or failing to show me a picture. In fact, it appears to have read my monitor type and set itself up as 1024x768. The fact that I always use 800x600 (less noise on mom’s LW radio) seems to have escaped it’s notice, however the configuration options allowed me to change size. This things has good keyboard control and so many features it is scary. If it was a tad more stable then I would recommend it for a simple and definitive DVD/MPEG player. [*update: Try “Media Player Classic”, it rocks*]

I suppose you think the story is over now? Nope!

The machine enters standby or hibernate, but freezes coming out of it. I install the power management tool that I finally discovered on the recovery CD after lots of looking! It is totally useless. The tool does not log to disc, so if the fault is between restart and getting something visible on-screen, you might as well not bother.

Using *MSConfig* I switch to diagnostic “Selective startup” and don’t load anything. Progressively I add more and more things to the startup sequence.

I have narrowed it down to three points of failure, any (or all) of which prevent Windows from restarting:

1. IRMon. I don’t know what, it used to work.
Don’t use IrDA anyway...
2. LEXSUPMAN. A Lexmark utility to, I think, prod the printer at standby and restart. Works fine without it.

And, you will NOT believe this...

3. PMTSHOOT

Yes! Microsoft’s own power management troubleshooter crashes the system on return from a standby situation. I know it says it takes longer and runs slower due to PMTshoot, but I gave the damn thing FIVE entire minutes to do whatever it does. It’ll boot from fresh, but it won’t restart.

I’m still running my Windows in the Selective startup as I have not gotten around to locating where Windows decides what to load at startup in order to erase the things I don’t want it to do.

Not only is Windows98 now running, but:

Dr. Watson found nothing obviously unusual.

If I had a hundred euros in disposable cash, I’d buy an external CD burner and ghost the entire harddrive to CDs because I don’t fancy going through this crap again.

Several days pass.

Mostly everything else needs to be reinstalled. Visual Basic 5 needs to be coaxed into knowing that I really *am* licenced to use COMDLG32 in my project. Little hair-raisers like that. And, I need to patch the VBP file directly as those CLSID thingies are, now, all different so it can’t even find those OCX files. Like I said, it asks Windows instead of looking in a logical place.

Well, I got what I wanted. My `Windows\System` folder is nearly 100Mb (!) smaller. The system registry files are 1.4Mb smaller. The system starts up faster too.

But... Why does Windows insist on scanning for new hardware? Can’t this be switched off? I mean, how often does anybody *add* stuff to their machine? Why is SETUP incapable of fixing the problems it is supposed to fix? I liked the Windows 3.1 SETUP that’d ask you what monitor/mouse/keyboard (etc) you had installed. And, finally, I think *PMTShoot* is “indicative of the entire situation”, a diagnostic utility that makes things worse. Stupid crap! Yes. I’m pissed at Microsoft. Oh yes, they’ll ensure that I enter the licence key at EVERY re-install, but will they confirm with me that the mouse settings are correct? Will it fix a damaged registry?

Oh no. No way. It ain’t *that* smart.

What gets me most is this was caused by an attempt to tidy out the mammoth amounts of cruft that Windows accumulates.

So the moral of the story: Let all the silage pile up inside Windows. If it ain’t actually broke, ***leave it the hell alone!***

You might be thinking that a concluding sentence like that would imply that this whole sorry tale is now over. No, there’s more... I installed OpenWatcom. I don’t like the way a lot of stuff insists on putting itself into the root directory, so I decided to place it in `C:\Program Files\watcom`. Fine. It needs a bunch of environment variables, so I reboot as requested (can’t Windows do this sort of thing on the fly?).

Upon loading the ESSOLO driver, MSGSRV32 crashes. It is one of those crashes where you can choose “Ignore” or “Cancel” depending upon your mood because without MSGSRV32, Windows will progress no further. You can pop up the Ctrl-Alt-Del window but there are no tasks to kill. You click Shutdown and it does nothing. I suspect this is, in RISC OS terms, akin to yanking SharedCLib out from under RISC OS. Well, maybe not as RISC OS will start and run the desktop without it, but you get the point. MSGSRV32 is a pretty important bit.

I’ll skip the frustration and the many glasses of wine it took to reach a mental state capable of handing this problem and I’ll ask you if you know what the problem was. I’ll give you a clue, Windows safe booted okay, and

reverting to a known 'good' version of the registry did bugger all to fix the problem.
Give up?

Here it is. The OpenWatcom installer altered the DOS PATH variable. So now it was:

PATH=C:\Program Files\watcom\bin;blahblah;%PATH%

It didn't actually say 'blahblah', it's just that there was a bunch of other things that, really, are totally irrelevant.

To fix the problem, I amended that to:

PATH=C:\Progra~1\watcom\bin;blahblah;%PATH%

The fault was that DOS only saw as far as "C:\Program" and assumed everything else was a parameter of some sort. Actually, no, the fault was the Watcom installer – knowing that it may be used in a situation with long file names in use and knowing that it will need to alter the DOS PATH variable – failing to write a DOS-friendly path. This path was first used by the ESSSOLO driver and, well, things fell apart. And it could be argued that DOS is also faulty for a partial implementation of long filename support.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some hard decisions to make...

Shall I drink myself unconscious?

Shall I repeatedly slam my head in the shed door?

Shall I stab myself to death with a meat knife?

Pour petrol out of the mower's tank and over me and grin as I light a match?

Perhaps I can fire up the mower, wrap a coathanger around the dead man's handle and go lie on the ground in front of it?

Maybe I should hotwire mom's car and go to Paris and drive like the French?

Actually it is winter now. I should drive à la method française up Col d'Obésque. At least when I go sliding into a forty-thousand foot plunge, it'll be a hell of a view!

Decisions decisions, but all options are surely less traumatic than what I've just been through here! :-)

And yes, I can hear Ewen now ... "he's been watching *The Horror Channel again!*" True, Ewen, true. All of you with a Digibox pointed to 28.2°E, turn to channel 330 in time to catch "Asylum Night". It is a perfect movie!

Endnote: Well well well... Just looked in System devices and I have only *one* composite power source, and *no* ACM battery. I do have a bunch of ACPI things, including an ACPI battery. As for this PCI steering weirdness, none of that – anywhere!

Kinda makes me want to rip out this Celeron and whack in an ARM to I can exist in the niceness that is RISC OS...

The Froblicate Quiz

In the last issue I presented you with a picture and asked you to name the person.



This one stumped you, though I'm not surprised!

This is *Viktoria Krantz*, a Swedish performer. You'll find more about her on her website:

<http://www.viktoriakrantz.com>



Here she is performing live alongside the Russian *Irina Slutskaya* (who improvised her skating for this song).

This picture is from the 2003 Ice Dance Gala performance; held in Malmö, Sweden.

Who is this issue's happy person?

You'll find her mentioned somewhere on my



website, with a different picture of course!

Answers to:

heyrick -at-
merseymail
-dot- com

Concerning spam

From BBCi 2004/12/07:

Anti-spam screensaver scrapped

A continuous campaign to bump up the bandwidth bills of spammers by flooding their sites with data has been dropped.

Lycos Europe's Make Love, Not Spam campaign begun in late November but its tactics proved controversial.

Lycos has shut down the campaign saying it had been started to stimulate debate about anti-spam measures and had now achieved this aim.

The anti-spammer screensaver came under fire for encouraging vigilante activity and skirting the edge of the law.

When I read things like this I can't help but wonder if the people that bring such actions "under fire" are so insulated from on-line reality that they don't even know what real spam looks like! Need I remind you of the person that sent, to a large company, a copy of a malicious email that one of the company's machines had sent. The company mail server quarantined and deleted the message because it contained obscenities. Well, where was the filter when the mail was on the way out!

[you might ask why the sender didn't edit the message – that would be bad sysadmin practice, you should send an EXACT copy of the message, not a mutilated one]

It's the same sort of deal with spam. Anybody that thinks we are complaining about email adverts from *Reader's Digest* and *Argos* need a serious reality check. Over the past few months I have deleted spam telling me in no uncertain terms why every Muslim on the planet should die (and latterly Sikhs). I have been offered my very own Asian girl for around \$17,000 (USD) and the youngest age I can pick is under ten years old. The reason I'm vague is because I am used to click'n'kill to remove spam. Anyway, the crowning achievement must go to the spam that provided a link directly to a PDF document that claims to teach me how to rape a woman more effectively and as a bonus it'll teach me how to beat a woman so that it'll hurt like hell while, generally, not being so visible. Of course, all of this is perfectly legal, right? To take action against it... Well, that would be skirting the edge of the law. Oh, okay. That makes sense...

So let's put it to you another way. Can anybody give one single reason why we shouldn't make life as difficult as possible for pro-spam providers? After all, who has recently received a spam that was welcome?

I sure as hell wouldn't want people openly offered documents on how to be a more effective rapist. In fact, there is no single freedom-of-speech it-is-in-the-constitution excuse that would permit a person to go on television and present such a thing. Why do some people defend this excrement just because it flows through a different media channel? Before you argue that closing them down is against their 'rights' and their 'freedoms', consider the massive majority who want to exist within perfectly boring 'normal' lives, and do so in safety. The world is bad enough without *this*.

Ignore the wolly-minded liberals. It is up to *us*. Yes, *us*, to attack spam distribution points as hard as we can. Governments will always fail to 'police' the Internet because they exist within boundaries and it doesn't. Therefore it is up to us to make the Internet a spam-unfriendly environment *before* the governments react in the only way that is truly open to them, before they decide to restrict what comes into their countries, and thus destroying the freedoms implicit within the concept of the Internet.

And if this is a vigilante action, **so be it**. It beats doing nothing while the situation gets worse and worse and worse. If for no other reason than I'm sick of looking at this filth, and I'm sure most of you are too.

Love letters

With the continual problems of the British Post Office and the growing sense of ‘people aren’t bothering to write to each other any more’, I think it has come time to stand up and defend email.

Or, to put it another way, to explain why so many people are leaving *Royal Mail* (and the like) behind.

Clifford Stoll writes in his book “*Silicon Snake Oil*” something along the lines of ‘if a letter is lost in the post, it gets looked into, but a lost email is ignored’.

I think maybe Clifford is stuck a few decades back where every Mountie got his man and the postal service bent over backwards to deliver mail, even incorrectly addressed items. In the eighties, I correctly received letters with addresses that even I couldn’t figure out. They tried.

This was the year that was – 2004. The year when *Royal Mail* tried to shake itself up, yet despite this renewed enthusiasm, they apparently managed to fail every single one of their targets. Loyal employees find themselves out of a job because, well... do we blame the foreigners who work for less? Do we blame the management (not just those at the top but the thousands ‘in charge’) for doing such a pathetic job? Do we blame the government for selling it off in the first place?

2001. My bank account was hit for around £75 in charges. Why? My pay never turned up. I had a heap of outgoing to dispatch the day after my pay went in. It should have worked perfectly. Like clockwork. Only my time-sheets never turned up at the office so pay was held up. Upon contacting the post office, we (my mother and I) were initially told that the letter was incorrectly addressed. I pointed out that it was addressed *exactly* as described on their website. I saw it go through her mind, but she didn’t have the gall to suggest the web site was wrong. Instead she said that if we want to be sure that a letter arrives, then we should either send it by registered delivery or we should deliver it ourselves. As a consolation prize we got a book of stamps. So there you have it. I lost a healthy chunk of my pay in bank charges and all the post office could do was say “too bad” and give us some stamps. The letter had gone to Northern Ireland, for some reason best known to Royal Mail...

2002. I paid £8 for an A3010. I wasn’t interested in the

computer, I have plenty of Acorns. I was interested in the mezzanine pre-ARM250 inside it. I’d like one of those. The person selling it said it was only going to cost me £8 so I might as well have the whole machine. Fair enough. *ParcelForce* got it as far as Aldershot. Then, following a long series of phone calls and visits, somebody told me that a subcontractor does the actual delivery. In the *TWO* miles between where I lived and the sorting office, it vanished. They knew they were onto a good thing as I was leaving for France in two days. I continued checking up on it for a few months after, and people promised to amend my ‘file’ with new information that never actually happened (like, I had a mobile phone, three times I gave them the number...). What do they care? The final straw was that Autumn when I was told, in no uncertain terms, that my reference number was not recognised, go away. Apparently *ParcelForce* had split away from *Royal Mail* and later got sucked back into them. I don’t know, I don’t care, it just seemed like somebody had stolen my parcel and everybody couldn’t care less if they tried. A couple of ‘apology’ form letters is what I have.

Now, *I*, as the recipient, cannot go further. I need to contact the person that sent the computer and get him to chase things up his end. They don’t want to hear from me any more, it is up to the sender now. And, frankly, for an £8 loss, I don’t plan to involve him in this crap. It isn’t his fault, it is their fault. Maybe it is some stupid legal thing, or maybe it is just a fob off as I’d been making noise and he hadn’t. I just know I cannot trust them any more.

Last winter a friend sent me a ‘random wave antenna’ to help with my shortwave reception. It never arrived. I think he has his doubts about the French postal service, and I have my doubts about the English. Exactly who pinched it we’ll never know. Maybe it was Customs who X-rayed it and decided a spool of wire looked like a Weapon Of Mass Destruction, and so they blew it up? Who knows?

This summer mom posted a registered letter to an English company. Might have been some sort of insurance, I don’t remember. It was important. Weeks later we asked *La Poste* to look into it. Three months passed and they sent us a cheque. Apparently registered things carry a certain amount of insurance. They traced the letter to England, and as to what happened next, France will never know. England didn’t bother to reply.

You cannot beat the warm fuzziness you receive from an actual letter from a pen friend, especially a girl who you feel you'd get on well with if it wasn't for the hundreds/thousands of miles between you. Email doesn't offer that.

What email *does* offer is no pretence. We *all* know that hundreds of emails get "dropped on the floor" every day. Quite why it happens is anybody's guess, usually some stupid misconfiguration in some mindless bit of software that probably shouldn't even be in use anymore, it is so old... We *know* that email is anally retarded, that if you send a message to "Microsoft.Co" then it'll bounce because it isn't smart enough to figure that you *really* meant "Microsoft.Com".

But despite this, we have many attributes. Firstly, emails can be lovingly crafted or just bashed out. Then you click a few buttons and it is on its way. You don't have to walk it to a post box. It arrives in a matter of minutes, my quickest email turnaround has been *four* minutes. All emails are kept on your computer so if one gets lost, you just pull it out of the "Sent" box and resend it. You can do this until it arrives, if you feel so inclined. You don't pay. Okay, you pay about 0,06 cents for three minutes on-line to connect, do mail transfer, and disconnect. And the best bit? Sending two, or even ten, emails still only costs 0,06 cents because the actual sending is quick. You pay for minutes on-line, not per message. Of course, those with unmetered broadband don't even need to worry about this little triviality!

And you can rest assured that if your message is discarded then it is usually due to some sort of technical fault. It may be a form of incompetence, but it isn't sheer laziness. The mail sack wasn't tossed into a wheelie bin because the post person just couldn't be bothered. Or your mail wasn't stuffed in a sewer drainway because the post person doesn't like your colour, your nationality, or your beliefs (or even your operating system!).

And, again, if you know the message didn't arrive, you can always resent it. Without photocopying or scanning handwritten letters, *you* try remembering exactly what you wrote! You can just fire off another copy. Quick, simple, any decent package will let you do this in about five mouse-clicks.

Sadly I don't think I'm preaching anything new. I still have faith in *La Poste*, who are always friendly and helpful – though I must admit that our new post office clerk can't work out what to do to a letter with a 0,90 stamp on it to make the postage 0,90 (because the computer tells her to print out a ticket for 0,90!). She'll get there in time. She'll wake up one day and learn to tell the computer to go stuff itself; it wants 0,90 and the letter has 0,90 on it so it's okay...

Also, letters to France and within the EEC cost the same 0,50 like they're supposed to (going up to 0,53 soon).

What is England charging now? Two different rates, for a start. Yes it *is* true that Guildford is closer to London than Tallinn, but that's not the point of an EEC-wide postal agreement. Otherwise we might as well go back to that bizarre system *British Telecom* (in the GPO days) ran where calls were charged according to miles of copper used, and everybody had a little orange book of 'incantations' designed to connect to local towns without going through the costly STD route.

Well, give it a while, maybe letters from London to Edinburgh *will* be charged differently to London to Guildford!

But...

No. I have no faith whatsoever in *Royal Mail*, *Consignia*, or whatever name they give themselves next (if, even, *they* can be bothered any more).

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the crux of the matter. You don't expect a pristine service from email. But you know it may work or it may not. And if it doesn't, it isn't the end of the world. You just try again.

And that is why I will defend email (except, maybe, for love letters!). Those who prefer the written word (like my mother...) should consider my message here. I'm not against proper written letters, I'm against entrusting them to various postal services. Fix that and the rest may fall back into place, if it isn't too late...

OvHTML – now for **WINDOWS!!!**

Yes, you read that right!

You can now download an early version of my HTML import utility to use with *OvationPro* for **Windows** (32bit - Win95 onwards)

It offers the same facilities as the RISC OS version *except* (for now): config, export, image handling...

<http://www.heyrick.co.uk/software/ovhtml.html>

Life in France

Herewith another slice of life in France. The French are very technically advanced, but in a totally understated way. For example, their phone cards were 'smart' way back when the first that the British knew of such things was their Sky subscription card. Most post offices *still* have a Minitel and many products carry the infamous Minitel references, like "3511 FROB" or some-such. Where is Prestel now? How many of you reading have ever used Prestel? How many know what I'm talking about (without looking it up on Google)?

And, the rail network. While the British were worried (perhaps justifiably?) about removing signalmen and automating the crossings, the French had done it that way for years. For sure, their network had suffered that same as the UK. It appears a semi-local *Chateaubriant* to *Nantes* line will be reopened in around 2008. The current method is something terminally stupid like *Chateaubriant* to *Rennes* to *St. Breuc* to *St. Nazaire* to *Nantes*. That may not be quite correct, but any decent road map will show the railways that exist.

Yes, sorry, this is another in those anorackish rail-related articles. For this is the Rennes métro. Built recently, like 1999 or thereabouts, the métro does something that most underground links don't do. It can climb.

The métro is a wobbling line from the south of *Rennes* to the north-west. Starting at *La Poterie* (pictured), it winds its way through the old town and ends up by a university. To be honest I'm surprised it doesn't



veer off eastwards to *Cesson-Sévigné*, but then *Rennes* isn't that big – places like *Southampton* are bigger... So, we start off high. The car park is underneath the southern terminal. The line carries on south awhile beyond here, maybe half a mile. Plans for the future?



So the little train pulls up to the station and the protective doors slide open. There are doors on the station (to stop you ambling around the electric rails) and on the train (to stop you sticking your head out, etc). Here I am sitting in the front of the train. And, as you can see from the picture on the next column, when I said the front, I meant the front...

For the *Rennes* métro is totally automatic. This is looking out the front window at an oncoming; is the girl in that train asleep?! It is perhaps most impressive when you realise that this service picks up speed quickly. In between stations you're probably doing about 40 or 50 (mph) and you slow sharply yet smoothly to stop *exactly* with the doors on both the train and the station aligned perfectly. In peak times, the trains come through about one every three minutes.



Now I can understand the directions board mounted in the wall just beyond each station. If something were to go wrong, you only need to run like hell for half a kilometre to reach *Triangle*, or if you're smart you'll notice *Italie* is right behind you.



But what I can't quite get over, in this highly automated service that runs at least as effectively as the Swiss rail system, are the red lights mounted in the tunnel roof at each station. Why are they there? Is this some sort of weird "passenger confidence" ploy? An instruction that we should only commence panic if the train should pass a red light? I mean – no driver, who needs the traffic light?!? Notice also that the tunnel is extremely well lit. The view is pretty boring, but you get a feeling of safety here. This isn't a bleak tunnel with who-knows-what ahead, like the London Underground. They want you to see your little circular world, and feel happy within it. Travel is 1,10 for an hour, or about 3,00 for a day. Anywhere, as often as you like in your allocated time.

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I must finish by pointing out the TGV, or *Très Grande Vitesse* as it should be known. Unlike the Intercity, this is electric so it is practically *SILENT!* Wow. And I finally got it on tape. :-)



Rick, 2005/01/03

Using a satellite dish indoors

by Ewen Cathcart

Standard disclaimer, you perform any/all of this at your own risk. E & OE.

-Ed.

In the previous issue of *Frobnicate*, I told you about a variety of methods that could be used to install a satellite dish outdoors on a temporary or semi-permanent basis. Unfortunately, an outdoor install isn't always convenient, not least of all if you don't happen to have a spare plot of land to stick the thing in! Perhaps you would prefer to have a permanent install, but are unable to do so because you happen to live in a conservation area. Or your landlord will not permit the installation of a dish on his property. Or you live in an apartment block that doesn't have a communal system. { *Or your mother doesn't fancy you climbing around the roof armed with a cordless drill!* -Ed }

Alternatives to multi-channel viewing, such as that provided by cable TV or DTT might not be available. In many cases the only solution to this dilemma is to install a satellite dish within your living area. Most professional satellite TV installers (including SKY in the UK and Dish Network/DirecTV in the States) will not even entertain the idea of an indoor install. Therefore, it will have to be another DIY jobbie!

I was curious to find out how a satellite dish would perform inside my house. I also wanted to demonstrate how a fully operational indoor set-up could be achieved, simply and easily.

When we talk about an indoor installation what we really mean is using a satellite dish behind a glass window. Contrary to popular belief, satellite signals in the microwave part of the radio spectrum are quite capable of penetrating glass. The window must be south facing (roughly in the direction of your required satellite) and have a clear and unobstructed view of the sky.

In my house there are a couple of windows that can be used for satellite reception. The window in the bathroom faces the correct way to receive transmissions from Astra 1, Astra 2/Eurobird, and Hotbird, while the one in the living room can be used to pick up satellites on the western edge of the Clarke Belt, the strongest of those being Hispasat.



You might be unlucky to find that you do not have a suitably positioned window. If this is the case, and you happen to live in a house, it just might be possible to receive signals through an attic skylight! I have also heard of people being able to receive signals through plastic roof tiles. Any other type of roofing material will present too much of a barrier to the signals.

Some attenuation of the signal as it travels through glass has to be expected. The amount of attenuation depends on a number of factors, including – size of window, thickness of pane, number of panes, number of frames, material used for each frame, and amount of metal contained in the glass (for insulation purposes). If you are using an attic skylight then your only real concern is the size of the window. You might want to think about replacing the glass with clear plastic, such as Plexiglas. This type of material will pose somewhat less of a challenge to microwave signals.

The window in the bathroom is slightly bigger than my 80cm dish. It is divided into 2 panes (the frames being made of wood) and is double-glazed. As far as I can tell the glass does not contain any metal. The window in the living room is almost $\frac{1}{3}$ as much in size, with everything else being the same. The metallic content of window glass does appear to be a significant factor. After all, the small amount of metal contained in the glass of a microwave oven door is enough to hold back +500 watts of flesh-zapping energy! { *Only 500W? :-)* -Ed. }



The angle at which the signal arrives in relation to the horizontal plane of your window is also very crucial. In an ideal situation, the satellite would be located directly in front of the window so that it appears 90 degrees to the pane. Any angle greater or less than this will result in further attenuation due to a narrowing of the aperture that the dish will effectively 'see'. The bathroom window is almost directly in front of Astra 2/Eurobird at 28.2°E. Satellites at 19.2°E and 13°E are somewhat affected by this narrowing of the viewing area.

Ewen Cathcart



The angle of elevation is also important. The severity of the angle in relation to the vertical plane of the window will depend upon your latitude, as well as the area of the Clarke Belt where your desired satellite is located.

In this picture, Ewen has fixed up a digital receiver directly to the dish (in the bathroom) and to a television. You can see it receiving Sky News. The entire set-up is visible.

Angle of elevation also needs to be taken into account when sitting the dish. Ideally, the dish should be positioned directly in front of the window. You can move the dish further back, but please remember that you will also need to lower it so that it can continue to be illuminated by the signal. In my case, having the dish propped up on a slippery toilet cistern wasn't such a great idea! Moving the dish further back from the window allowed me to rest it on the floor (actually, on top of some towels!) against a radiator. The dish is located underneath the window, facing the toilet bowl!

Dish size is very important. Ideally, you should go for the largest size possible (or what your budget will allow) to compensate for the loss of signal. Obviously there is no point in using a dish that is larger than the area of the window! In my case I am using an 80cm solid offset type. At my northerly latitude anything smaller would be less than useless.

Anything covering the inside of your window might have a detrimental effect on the signal. It could be that blinds will have to be raised or curtains remain open during the period of viewing. It is up to you to decide whether this will pose too much of an inconvenience. You might be able to get away with the use of net curtains. The window in my bathroom has net curtains, although the decrease in signal strength is negligible. I would normally have them pulled to one side anyway. Condensation on the window is also likely to have an effect; hence why I tend not to use the dish after someone has had a bath!

Techniques for finding the satellite indoors are exactly the same as for an outdoor install (please refer to *Frobnicate* issue 22 for details on how to locate a satellite using a signal meter). However, greater emphasis must be placed on getting the dish "spot on" in order to compensate for the loss of signal. We want to get every little bit of signal that we can, even if it means spending slightly longer on the fine-tuning part.

For satellite reception in the bathroom I will normally take my equipment into the hallway just outside the bathroom door. The equipment that I use consists of an analogue or digital receiver, a signal meter (needle type), and a portable colour TV. This set-up allows me to accurately adjust the dish using the signal meter powered from the nearby receiver. At the same time I can watch the picture on the TV and (in the case of digital) observe the on-screen signal/quality indicator bar. Once the tuning has been achieved to my satisfaction, the equipment is removed and a longer length of cable attached to the LNB so that viewing can continue in another room.

I am sure you are curious to find out what reception is actually like inside my house! Okay then, here goes...

Ewen Cathcart



Digital reception of Astra 2/Eurobird is on the whole quite good if the weather outside is dry. Using the Comag SL55 receiver, I have found signal and quality levels to be above 50% on most transponders. This is generally considered satisfactory

for viewing in dry conditions. All channels can be received without picture break-up. Moderate rainfall reduces the signal and quality levels to around 45% and some degradation will be noticeable on a few channels. Have not tried it out during heavy rainfall, but I would imagine that most channels would be affected in some way.

I found digital reception of Astra 1 to be less robust. Signal and quality levels in dry conditions are mostly between 45% and 50%. One or two channels suffer break-up, but most can be received with little or no corruption. Moderate rainfall produces signal and quality levels of around 40%, and about half the available channels suffer from the effects of degradation. Again, I have not tried viewing this satellite during heavy rainfall, but I suspect that all channels would be affected, with some being completely lost.

Oddly, I think Astra 1 is stronger than Astra 2. Perhaps the satellite footprint is weaker over Scotland? I'd also be interested to know the symbol rate of the channel Ewen was watching, as it seemed to me that 22000 is slightly more tolerant than 27500, but – obviously, I have not put this to any formal test! -Ed.

You can forget about digital reception of Hotbird! Signal and quality levels are generally below 40%.

I also tried receiving digital channels using a Grundig Digibox. I found the Digibox tuner to be less sensitive when compared to the Comag. And obviously less convenient when used away from the 28.2°E position.

Refer to <http://www.heyrick.co.uk/ricksworld/digibox/> if you are interested in using a Digibox to receive non-Sky.

Analogue reception was tested using a SR 1902 VC receiver. Astra 1 channels tend to have a few sparklies on them in dry conditions. Slight variation in picture quality from transponder to transponder. Mild rainfall produces more sparklies, but most channels are still considered to be ‘viewable’. Analogue channels on Hotbird have lots of sparklies, with one or two channels being almost submerged in noise. A few channels are just about ‘viewable’ during dry conditions. Rainfall obliterates most of the weaker channels.

I am only able to obtain analogue reception from Hispasat with the dish in the living room. Reception on one of the film channels is almost free of sparklies during dry weather.

Other channels appear to be Syster-scrambled, therefore it is difficult to gauge from the video what the quality is actually like. I suspect the signal strength possibly matches that of Astra 1. Have not tried viewing this satellite when it is raining, therefore I am not sure what the drop-off effect would be like.



Ewen Cathcart

Please bear in mind that I am located in northern Scotland, therefore I am likely to have weaker reception on most satellites than would be the case further south. For example, the recommended outdoor dish size up here for analogue reception of Astra 1 and Hotbird is 80cm. For Hispasat, we are looking at an even bigger size of dish. Please also note that the set-up in the bathroom is far from ideal, with a small amount of signal being blocked off by the toilet bowl! So, all things considering, I don't think I am doing too badly!

Some thought must be given to the mounting of the dish. You might be lucky to get away with a small-sized dish (minidish), in which case you could position it fairly close to the window, possibly attached to an improvised bracket of some sort. One dish that has been popular in the past for indoor reception is called the Arcon Sweety. This dish measures only 43cm in diameter, but due to its ‘cassegain’ design it has an effective performance of 60cm. Another similar type of dish is called the Multimo (pictured on the right).



www.satcure.co.uk

A larger dish is more than likely to be required in order to provide you with stable reception. Unfortunately, they tend to be a bit more obtrusive. You could use a ‘transparent’ dish, such as that manufactured by Metronic (a clear plastic design with a thin film of metal to act as the reflector). It could be placed quite close to the window and it will still allow a certain amount of light to pass through. Nosey neighbours might think you have acquired a ‘cool’ new lampshade!



www.satcure.co.uk

{ Or maybe you are spying on them? -Ed. }

A temporary install might be a better solution. For example, the dish in my living room was simply plonked on a chair and moved close to the window! Some people have been known to use swivel chairs. One guy removed the seat from his swivel chair and attached the dish to the base! How about sticking one on a camera tripod? Or follow the suggestion from the previous article and use an old tyre? And, if you want to go for the ‘chav’ look, you could always use a shopping trolley! There are 101 possibilities to explore.

The inconvenience of a temporary install is that you have to search for the satellite each time you want to use the dish. { And, of course, you worry when the Shipping Forecast says ‘Gale force 8’ or the like... -Ed. } But I guess after a while the sat finding would become second nature. Sort of like having to tweak an indoor TV aerial, but with a bit more hassle!

I can vouch for that. I needed to adjust my dish. It was supposed to be pointing towards 28.2°E. It ended up nicely tuned into 19.2°E – it is as if I'm programmed to find the older satellites! -Ed.

One advantage of using a dish indoors is that it will not be affected by the outdoor elements. No risk of it being blown over and dented, or end up on (or in) a neighbour's greenhouse. It will also last a lot longer.

Ewen Cathcart

I am intrigued and would be interested in giving this a try. Unfortunately the south-facing aspect of my window looks directly into pine trees. I figure there's only so much I'd be able to get away with – window yes, pine trees possibly not.

I wish to thank Ewen for another interesting and informative article. If anybody tries Ewen's suggestions of indoor reception, please could they email me? Let me know how you get on. I can forward messages to Ewen.

I look forward to Ewen's next instalment. Until then...

Programming on the Other Side

I program in BASIC, ARM assembler, and C. I have rejected C++ as not being anything I can't do in vanilla C. Okay, some C++isms are really klutzy in vanilla C, but why would I want to do them in the first place?

I was given a laptop with a non-functioning display panel. Hooked into a normal CRT, it works fine. Running Windows 98 in 64Mb RAM on a 466MHz Celeron, it is capable of being used for actual work. My Pentium75 (at 90MHz) running Windows 95 in 16Mb RAM was... well, the words "toy" and "joke" come to mind.

One of my main RISC OS applications was *VideoList*. I had sort-of arranged with a software company to sell the software purely at cost-price. I don't make anything from it and they don't make anything from it (allegedly...), the price simply covers making up the package and postage. Yes, I actually agreed to those terms. I know you won't get rich on the RISC OS market.

It took a while to get my CD burner running again after a brownout or surge or something cooked my SCSI card. I used the time to add to *VideoList* and to rewrite bits of it that I wasn't entirely happy with. So I posted off a package containing a CD-ROM.

No reply.

I waited a while and then sent an email.

No reply.

I sent another email.

No reply.

I sent a written letter.

Guess. Go on...

I will not name the company, but I find it very depressing that these people couldn't even be bothered to talk to me. Maybe they simply didn't like *VideoList*? Maybe they decided that the at-cost idea was no longer viable? I could have handled *any* reason if they'd sent me a letter (email?) and said *something*.

But no.

I heard nothing.

On a whim (or perhaps a moment of madness), I bought VisualBasic 5; and never being one for "Hello World!" rubbish, my first program was "Verbe". It conjugates French verbs and will test you on this. Seeing as I wrote it, it probably conjugates incorrectly. Never mind, it is rules based and flexible so when I get to grip with verbs (like, what's a "verb" anyway?), I can fix any problems easily.

My next program I wanted to mean something, and to stretch my understanding of Visual Basic 5. So I looked to *VideoList*.

After two glasses of wine I decided that it will not be merely *VideoList*. It will be *VideoList 2*. It will be like *VideoList*, but it'll contain all the things that I wanted to add to *VideoList*. All the new stuff that never went into the original *VideoList* spec (*VideoList* actually predates DVDs, imagine that!). Other things, like an ass-kicking filter system.

I understand *VideoList* had some shortcomings, so I want to put in all of those wish-list things into *VideoList 2*.

And I am writing it for Windows machines.

Let's face it. *VideoList 2* will be able to export as *VideoList* (original type) files, but the chance of *VideoList 2* appearing in a RISC OS version is less than remotely slim. Actually, I think I can say that unless I win the lottery and pay somebody to do it for purely altruistic reasons, there's no way in hell I'm going to devote that sort of time and effort for so little in return.

But don't blame this PC. Don't blame Visual Basic. Neither of these are the problem. The problem is the RISC OS market. I had agreed to let *VideoList* go at no income for myself. I said I'd provide upkeep and bugfixes as was reasonable, again at at no income to myself. And still it sits here on my harddisc.

I had, in the summer of 2004, drawn a line through *VideoList*. I will offer it one final time on those same terms to any reputable RISC OS company that is reading this. If somebody is interested, then RISC OS will see *VideoList*. If not...

VideoList 2 is developing. Not quickly as I don't have the ability to code fourteen hours a day any more, and I am writing quite a lot too (such as this that you are reading now). But it is coming along. The editor is mostly complete. I had this smart idea of making "scripts" for the import and export. I am currently regretting this a lot as it is a real pain in the ass, but when it is complete it'll reap benefits in that importing from or exporting to *any* other product will simply be a matter of writing a suitable script. But, for now, I curse and swear as the script handler is a forbidden morass of tellytubby goo splashed all over my harddisc.

Like, **don't** think it is all rosy under Windows. There are some really cool things Windows can do, such as file renaming and directory creation while saving, but these things are only really necessary because the filing system presentation is pretty terrible. Most of the on-screen 'fonts' are drawn in pixel-wide text so they can't be anti-aliased. The text that is "smoothed" looks blurry. Don't even mention drag'n'drop, it doesn't work in any way even approaching logical. The entire concept of the system registry is a disaster. All the applications dumping settings in this one file, and if that file goes tits up, how much stuff will break?

Sadly, the API is about as broken as the GUI aspect.

Here's a challenge... In how many applications can you find two different sets of radio selections? You'll be hard pushed to find two sets in the one window because Windows has this totally bizarre thing whereby in order to separate them from each other (so selecting one option doesn't unselect related options), you must embed them within 'frames'.

I'll give you a hint. Load up *HyperTerminal* and do the name/icon stuff it asks for. Open the File menu. Choose Properties. Choose the Settings tab. Up the top are two unrelated sets of radio options within frames. You'll notice **nothing** else is in frames, except within the Print and Page setup windows, but I think these are standard Windows dialogues. It is not a very consistent metaphor as some things have grouping frames, some things don't. And to **have** to put radio options into frames to stop them interacting... That is just bizarre. The RISC OS ESG method was so much better!

I do wonder, however, how many things are reworded in less legible ways in an attempt to avoid having to put things in frames. This restriction doesn't apply to ticky boxes as they are autonomous, so dump the radio options and use ticky boxes; comprehension suffers...

It gets better.

Visual Basic 5 cannot do bit shifting.

In fact, I think it was around the year 2001 when Visual Basic gained the ability to bit shift.

I spent ages reading on-line help and three different (printed) books. I couldn't believe that this advanced programming system couldn't do:

```
value = value >> 3
```

I just couldn't believe it, until I found, on the Internet, how to do the above...

```
value = value / 2 / 2 / 2
```

If I wasn't in the library at the time, I probably would have said something quite rude out loud.

You could simplify this to be...

```
value = value / 8
```

I really really hope that Visual Basic is clever enough to spot this and use SHL and SHR instructions instead of division and multiplication, which are long and tedious, but... let's just say I'd be surprised.

When you get the BSOD saying that the system is waiting for the Close Dialog(ue) to be displayed, I do **not** want to press Return and stare at a blank screen, and I do **not** want to Ctrl-Alt-Del to restart, thank you very much. People often slag off RISC OS's co-operative multitasking for allowing an errant task to bring down the system. Well, I don't see a difference here, frankly. If the Close Dialog(ue) doesn't appear in, say, twenty seconds then why not give me the ability to tell the application to 'bugger off!'.

At this stage I don't care if the memory used is not released. Hell, as far as I care Windows could simply delink it from the active task list and force a screen redraw. Anything has to be better than knowing you're gonna have to kick the thing.

And the problem with a laptop is that when you finally lose your rag, you can throw the machine that much further... :-)

Visual Basic, all that aside, is a delight to use. You must **never** go at it with the expectation that it is BASIC. It isn't. It is like calling JavaScript a kind of C code. Sure, it looks sorta similar, but it isn't anything like any BASIC I've used. And it has a whole pile of interacting quirks designed to ensure that you can't even try things that would have made sense in BASIC.

But *VideoList 2* is now quite usable within its own confines.

How does Windows work, internally? I don't have a clue.

How does the mouse click get dispatched? I don't have a clue.

You don't need to know these things when you program in VB.

You design a "form" (a window) and you put icons in the form.

You double-click the icons and insert code for events. For

example a "Cancel" button. Double-click on it and VB will create a function for you:

```
Private Sub cancel_Click()
```

```
End Sub
```

and in this subroutine you insert:

```
Me.Hide
```

That's it.

Click "Cancel" and the form will be removed from display (but not unloaded, this removes it from memory which is something you won't be used to from RISC OS).

Most of the standard API functions are handled by the runtime system. Double-clicking on the title bar to maximise/restore. That sort of thing. In fact, you can call standard APIs for those load/save things along with the printer setup and loads of other things. You don't have to code any of that yourself.

The price you pay for this is, potentially, several megabytes of DLLs. However most systems will already have these, and most other programs written the same way will use them. Your program isn't any different, and year by year the spec of a standard PC gets more and more ridiculous, so loading a bunch of DLLs is less and less of an issue than it was in the early days.

Do you know what depresses me? The VB programming interface is what the *Toolbox* **should** have been. You can set up all sorts of stuff with the Toolbox, but you must do a lot of the coding yourself, still. It is like one day somebody decided to replace the Templates files with resource files built around the new Toolbox, but they stopped before getting 'round to implementing a good programming environment.

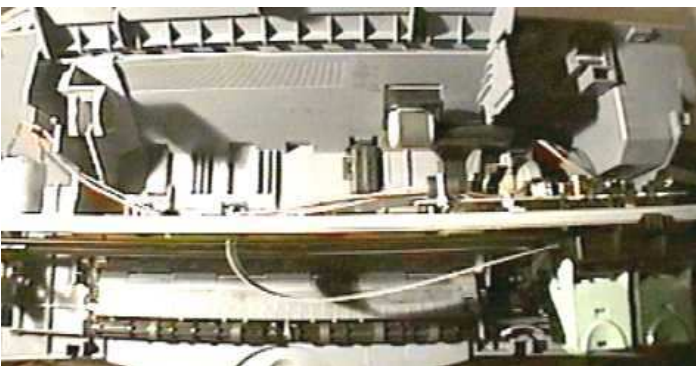
RISC OS, traditionally, has never has a point'n'click programming environment because, well I guess us RISC OS programmers are a smarter bunch as large numbers of us are not afraid of coding up something in assembler for that extra little speed tweak. But you cannot deny the power of Visual Basic. I have no clue whatsoever how the Windows subsystems work, internally. The polling and event handling mechanisms. How DLLs load and talk to each other. I have no idea about any of that. I don't need to know any of it to write software in Visual Basic. The other way around, I'd have to find a copy of the PRMs and figure out how things work. You might be able to use DeskLib or OSLib without knowing how the Wimp mechanisms work, but I suspect a lot would be gibberish to you. Visual Basic, for all its faults, actually manages to abstract the platform from the programming language. Hell, I bet these days you can get Visual Basic compilers to make up WinCE code to run on PDAs and mobile phones, and it'll look just like a miniaturised VB application, written in Windows like normal. The fact that the processor and such is different is probably not a major hurdle.

The Lexmark z23

With this laptop, I inherited a Lexmark z23 inkjet printer. It connects using the USB port. It supports two ink cartridges (with built-in print head), a black and tri-colour.

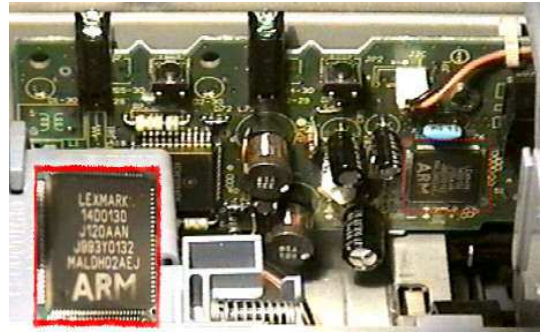
I have heard some unkind things said about Lexmark, it representing the lower end of the printer market. However it has been my experience that the colour reproduction *onto plain paper* is excellent. Some printers tended to make things look “cartoonish”, like the original Technicolor™ movies. In fact, pretty much the only problem I have encountered (and, hence, why I am colour-printing on the Epson Stylus 640 Color) is the lack of refills. It is quite difficult to find original Lexmark cartridges, and all-but-impossible to find clone cartridges. I have used a black-ink refill and print in monochrome on this printer. Why? It is simple and it is fast. Additionally, it is quiet. The Hewlett-Packard and the Epson are quiet machines compared to the old dot-matrix printers, but they clatter and clank when feeding paper.

Internally the Lexmark is a remarkably simple device. Perhaps this is why some people seem to feel the need to slate it. Gone are the days when a printer motherboard was as big as the paper. In the picture below you can see inside the z23, looking down from above. The circuitry is centre-right. Below it lies the print mechanism. And some cogs'n'things for the paper transport. What else, exactly, do you need?



The logical progression from here is to look at the motherboard. From the picture (next column), you will see that it is sparsely populated. Integration and

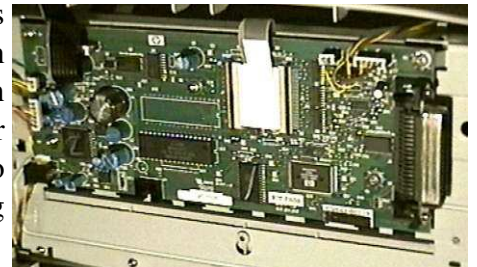
miniaturisation have done a lot. No more do we need a CPU, RAM chips, EPROM/FlashROM, drivers, and a host of other things. Instead we have two ICs. I suspect one is a memory chip and the other is an integrated CPU/firmware/driver/etc/etc.



Given that “ARM” is a copyrighted trademark and that people can’t just write “ARM” on their ICs when they feel like it, I suspect that this marking identifies this IC as being a special part built for Lexmark by ARM Ltd. Perhaps it is a kind of ARM7500 style device with some built-in ROM. And, instead of VIDC capabilities, they included a host of I/O options sufficient for driving a print-system. But, that is just a guess.

It is interesting to note that *most* modern printers of this sort do not have the motherboard in a shielded enclosure. A good example are the Hewlett-Packard DeskJet range. The 420 and 540 both have the motherboards hiding behind clip-on plastic covers.. A friend has confirmed that his HP is similar. How do these models pass EMC testing? They *really* affect mom’s radio. The Lexmark is better in this respect. Unshielded, but interferes much less.

On the right is the back of an HP DJ420 with the clip-on cover off. It is older, so has more going on inside.



:) Go figure! (:

a ramble around Rick's mind...

So there I was, some months back, sitting at a large table at the house of good friends John and Irene Williams (take a look at <http://www.picindex.info/>) and I got out my CD player to introduce him to some new music. I'm sure he'd agree that my taste is 'eclectic'! He saw something written on my CD player and he pointed it out, as I intend to right now.



Here is my CD player, playing *Evanescence's* first album. It has been around, long life in the services, minidisks in every port, you get the idea. :-)

Who in their right mind would consider a "1bit DAC" to be a selling point!?! Is this supposed to impress those who don't actually know what a DAC is?

Well I know what a DAC is and I know what it is there for, so I will raise another question. How can a 1bit DAC be a DAC?

For those who don't know, it means "digital to analogue converter". The music on the CD is in digital form. It is pretty much the same as a 44,100kHz 16bit stereo WAV. A bunch of numbers that equate to 'levels' of audio. The role of the DAC is to output an *analogue* (or "wibbly") signal that reflects this *digital* (or "steppy") input. It is supposed to enhance listening pleasure, reduce headaches over prolonged listening, etc etc. The jury is out, still, as "what sounds better" is a highly subjective thing.

So the DAC 'reads' a set of digital values and outputs an analogue value that matches. Well, people, can somebody explain the purpose of a 1bit DAC? It can, as its name would imply, hold one bit worth of information at any given time. The input to the DAC is either present or absent. In response, the DAC responds by creating a result that is either present or absent, based upon the *one bit* of input.

Therefore, *surely*, the output from a 1bit DAC would be the exact same digital signal that you put into it in the first place?

Come on, tell me I'm stupid and obviously wrong...!?!?



Here I am in a supermarket car-park observing all the typos that I missed *before* a previous issue's release. Mom, meanwhile, does boring stuff like, you know, shopping. Which lettuce is better than all the other lettuces. As far as I'm concerned, they're green and yucky. The only thing lettuce is good for is a bit of "colour" on a burger.

Which is why, as you can see in the picture, I am turning into a podgy old fart. I just turned 31 yesterday, I have grey hairs already, but I can't say I really feel much 'older' than I felt when I was, like, twelve!

Still, I've never been one to obsess over my weight, I only plan to do *that* if I get a life-support machine strapped to me.

Not that I think my 62kg will turn into seriously obese... ever. I don't eat to excess, I just eat what I enjoy and don't care if I've taken a week's dose of salt in a single day, nor do I care if the calorie count of the meal I just ate is higher than the car's milage. I certainly don't eat to schedule – some days I'll eat a big greasy mess and, later, two plates of pasta (I always cook up two platefuls, I seriously like my pasta). Because maybe the following day I won't feel like making anything so I won't bother to eat.

The shop is an "Intermarché", by the way. Their slogan is "The Musketeers of distribution".

I almost expect to see *Dogtanian* come flying out of the doors atop a shopping trolley. By the way, to pre-empt any emails, I *did* mean *Dogtanian* and not *Dartanian*, okay? It was a cartoon series in the late '80s.

Still, it has *got* to be better than the supermarket that calls itself *Mutant*. Seriously. Visions of all the cheesy horror flicks come to mind, like "Attack of the Killer Crab Men", or perhaps, "Attack of the Killer Crab Pate"?

Over two weeks have passed since I wrote the previous page (on 2004/12/17). It is the first day of 2005. And the electricians in most of the house are not working. We have no running water (electric pump) and no flush toilet (electric grinder-upper), no lights in all but two rooms. Why?

Well, you've got me. This is *old* wiring and as such it only has four fuses. A neutral fuse (bloody dangerous) and one on each of the three phases. The only other device is a 650mA trip-switch. And, at random intervals, it tripped. It could be switched back on, but then it'd trip out again twenty minutes later. We thought we'd narrowed it down to the pump so I switched it off and all was fine...

...for three hours. I have physically removed all of the older wiring and am running the two (newer) bedrooms. It's enough for a kettle and, of course, the laptop. But it could be better. Still, at least it hasn't been *that* cold yet.

My theory is an earth leakage fault. It can't be a direct short as it did come back on, and I've been out and wobbled the one strung cable in case it was wind degradation. The thing is, for some reason almost every room has a three-phase outlet. Because of this, three-phase is routed all around and the single-phase things have been added ad-hoc. It is a nightmare! So we are currently waiting on an electrician to do diagnostics, hopefully with better equipment than I have.

The reason why I think it is dangerous to have a fuse on the three phase neutral is because I thought I'd remove it to kill all the circuits. A lot less hassle than poking around under the main trip switch. Well three phase doesn't work like that, does it now? Suddenly the lights in the living room and kitchen became *really* bright. I'll leave "why" as an exercise for you, dear reader.

Anyway, a fault on a phase should blow the phase fuse. Having a fuse on neutral seems to me like a weak link. Should it blow, or fail for any other reason (like, perhaps, because it is older than I am?) then most of the nice 230V outlets will suddenly become not-so-nice 400V outlets. Stuff won't react nicely to that! It's a weak link.

Modern French houses have switchboards. I don't mean like the ten-in-a-row used in many English houses, I mean they have upwards of thirty or forty switches in their fusebox. Some of these are doubled up, like one may be a regular breaker and another a 30mA breaker, but it must surely be better? I could look at a flipped breaker and think "A-ha! A fault in Area 51, better look at it". Currently I look at the tripped breaker and think "A-ha! A fault... erm... somewhere."

Yeah.

That helps.

This Christmas saw quite an interesting line-up of movies. If your taste in movies is like mine, keep an eye on *The Horror Channel* (#330 on a Digibox) for a movie called "*Asylum Night*". It is great. And, even better, it is both new and British!

"*Shrek*" gave us a weird green guy and possibly one of the most memorable/beautiful renditions of a Leonard Cohen song that I've ever heard.

It was nice to finally see "*Harry Potter*". The story itself was the usual good vs bad morals mix, nothing too unusual there. It was nice (refreshing) to see special effects used to enhance the movie rather than make the movie. Loved the chess game!

There isn't much to say about "*Armageddon*" really. Gung ho from the opening credits to the end credits. Possibly the best bit of the movie is the Russian bloke's way of fixing things.

I think "*Mrs. Caldicot's Cabbage War*" came a bit too close to reality. For those of you reading for the first time (hiya!), I was an Agency Care Assistant three years back when I lived in England. We used to be called "auxiliary nurses", if that's a help. Looking after old people. So this movie didn't nearly dig deep enough, but I can think of a few who could be a Mrs. Caldicot had they not lost hope.

Talking of lost hope, we slide straight into "*AI*". Did the Schindler movie break Steven Spielberg? *A.I.* was an extremely depressing movie. If you've never seen it, the most enjoyable moment is the "I love you mommy!" as mommy gets the robotic boy to imprint. But then things change. Sometimes not logically, like how come eating spinach splatters green gunk all over the circuitry but he can have his mouth open in a pool without shorting out? Or the ending. The ending was very very weird. But, tragically, the ending was not a solution. Nor a resolution. Nor, dare we pray, a tying up of loose ends etc etc. No, the ending was, in its way, a final summing up of all the previous upsets with the über-tragedy. It is certainly an interesting and attention-holding film, but do *not* expect to walk away a happy bunny. I don't think I've seen such a sad/upsetting movie since "*Lamb*".

Thank God, therefore, for "*Don't Say A Word*". The film starts with a selection of tragedies and it ends nicely.

One last thing: if you are a fan of horror movies, try to catch "*Kolobos*" on *The Horror Channel*. Bunch of freeloaders wanted for a "Big Brother" type of deal, with video and stuff. The twist here is a bizarre (some say nonsensical) ending. I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on what the ending of this movie means...

Now it is time to take on the McDonald's corporation. I guess it is a possessive 's'? I dunno.

Anyway. The date is 8th January 2005. The time, 14:56 according to the till receipt. The place? Châteaubriant (Loire-Atlantique, France). The receipt says 'Resto 975'.

I got a 'Maxi BestOf Royal Deluxe'. That's the French way to say a McDeluxe – go large.



As you can see from the picture, there was a burger and a large-size chips. And a coffee.

My complaint? What the hell is up with the chips? This is *exactly* as it was given to me. I haven't eaten a single chip, and I've taken this picture (and written this) because, frankly, I find this an insult.

Why does it happen? They scoop fries using a plastic thing that funnels the fries into the carton. Now if you squeeze the carton slightly while filling... you end up with what is above. By volume, weight, and any other measure you care to name, I would bet that the amount pictured is *less* than a properly-filled medium size carton.

You will notice that there are two milks beside the coffee. This, apparently, is your 'allocation'. I happen to like four milks in my coffee. Am I being greedy? Well let's consider two facts. Firstly you often don't get any milk at all unless you ask, so I can't imagine my four will send the company into receivership. The second reason? If you get the coffee (tea, hot chocolate...) with your meal instead of a cold drink, most of the time it is put through the till as a Coca-cola. The quoted unit price of a big Coca is 2,20. The list price of a hot drink? 1,00.

Who to blame? Well I'm short-sighted so don't ask me to read the McServeuse's name tag. The till receipt says 'Delphine C', but I have been served by a bloke apparently called 'Sophie'. Either that or they don't log in and out according to who they are.

We move from McDonald's and travel about half a mile north to my favourite (!) place, the E.Leclerc supermarket. Same town. I have mentioned, previously, their paranoid theories regarding backpacks and such. This Christmas mom and I visited to look for a advent candle. There was one. Actually there were two. No price. No ticket on the shelf. I tried the scanner and it didn't want to know. So I took it to the information desk. The girl there tried to pass it through the till, which objected. So she walked me to the shelf. I might have been English but how stupid do I look? She tried the scanner, and seemed surprised at the response. I asked her if perhaps it was 'gratuit'? But, well, I don't think this person had any sense of humour. Or maybe they appreciate Christmas shoppers about as much as I do! Anyway, she gave the article to her superior. She (the superior) tried the bar code in a computer. By now I was figuring that the code just wasn't going to work. Actually, it looked as if the computer blue-screened on her. So at this she informed me 'No', and she sent the other girl to retrieve the other candle. So I made my own with a normal candle and a board marker. But, really, how do they manage to have a product with no price, no ticket, no recognised bar code, yet it is out on the shelf? I just find it a shame that I hadn't taken it to the till – imagine the chaos that it could have caused!

This time of year is when the French produce something called a 'frangipane'. It is a kind of pie, like an apple pie, but flat and covered. Inside is a marzipan paste. Now marzipan, in my experience, is like 'Marmite' (or 'Vegemite' if you're Aussie). You'll either be thinking 'mmm', or 'ewww'. If you ever buy one, don't tuck in with great enthusiasm. It is traditional to hide a little ceramic figurine inside. I got... a Tellytubby. (argh!) Just be warned, okay? Your teeth wouldn't like it.

Does anybody know what on earth a 'Clemenville' is? I like... I don't recall if it is a tangerine or a satsuma. It is the little orange thing with a thick skin that just sort-of falls off. Very sweet. Clementines have skin more like an orange that you need to, sometimes, prise off. Enter something new in the supermarkets. The 'Clemenville'. Is this a French name for something that exists or has somebody bred a new mini-orange?

Recently there was a mouse in my bedroom. It didn't overly bother me (some people freak about now), but the weirdest thing is that the scratching on a cardboard box is one of the few things to wake me from a deep sleep. It succeeded where alarm clocks fail! So mom got me a mouse trap. A cute little creation that actually includes a lump of 'fake' cheese. It didn't work.

What else didn't work were our cats. I tried the three younger ones (individually) and the result? One explored. One freaked because the room had changed. The third? Just sat and purred. Like, *so not helpful!*

So we got a regular mouse trap (called *Lucifer!*) and mom introduced me to a "secret recipe".

Peanut butter.

I said "what about cheese? chocolate? cake?". Mom was adamant that peanut butter would do the job. So, highly sceptically, I placed a dollop of peanut butter on the trap, and left the trap on the floor of my room...

...the mouse was dead less than four hours later.

Lucifer had done the job brutally. The mouse's head was caved in; frankly, at least it would have been quick.



So – mom's secret mouse bait. Peanut butter.

Have you noticed how much things are being dumbed down? If you go into *SkyActive*, you'll see the URL quoted as: sky.com/news

What's so wrong with "www.sky.com/news/"?

Shall I mention a cleaning product being advertised on English TV? A product called "Bang"?

But perhaps the most depressing example of dumbing down are the news reports of the recent tsunami in Asia. It isn't a "tsunami" any more. It is now a "big wave". Over a hundred and fifty thousand killed by a "big wave". It doesn't really do any justice to what happened, does it?

Simple question for you. How do you spot a committed geek?

Answer? One who sees op-codes in licence plates and things. For example:



Okay, it is a 6502 op-code. I've seen a sweet girl on BBC's news, surname "ORR". "BIC" is a type of pen. Pigs live in a "STY". Oops, 6502 again. I think it'll be much harder to find "STMFD" somewhere!

Then again, how easy do you think it'd be to find a bright red British phone box in a town in north-western France? Not in a private collection, but just plonked in the middle of town.

Difficult?

Actually. No.

If you find *Nantes* on a map, head south-east until you get to a place called *Clisson*. If you move about five miles north you'll come to a place called *Vallet*. Boards on entry to the town proclaim it as *The home of Muscadet* (mmm, nice...). And right there, in the town, is a red phone box. It is, perhaps, ironic that there's such a thing in a little *French* town. How many still exist in the UK?



I'll end this time with a tricky little question for you. Look at the picture below. I don't want to know who it is (I have no idea)... all I want you to tell me is what she is doing. A sort of "what happens next?"



PS: No, it is not Cameron Diaz (I think!).

Rick, 2004/12/17 - 2005/01/08

ADVERTISE IN FROBNICATE!

It is *free*, and entirely at my discretion. :-)

Between 2004/10/20 and 2005/01/05, *Frobnicate* issue 22 was downloaded **2227** times (with duplicate entries removed).

The OvationPro version was downloaded 201 times, the PDF version 2026 times.

You could reach a potential 2000+ readers. Simply send a RISC OS DrawFile (preferred), OvationPro document, HTML document, etc. Adverts will be inserted to fill space on pages. Please note: maximum content size is 16K unless pre-arranged.

The spArchive

You kids today.

With your broadband and your 24/7's. You want free email. You moan if it takes too long to download a bootleg DivX of your favourite TV series.

You have *no* idea how good you have it.

Me, old fart moi, lived in an era when there was no internet. When dial-up access was *the* way. Yup. Every SysOp was the master of his BBS. When calling London from Camberley would incur national rate charges. None of this penny-a-minute rubbish, or unmetered. Companies such as Microsoft simply couldn't exist. If they placed a download of XP SP2 on their BBS (no websites, remember), people would laugh and say 'how the hell am I supposed to download *that*?'. Oh, and you were on a roll if your computer had 4Mb RAM and a harddisc with < 100Mb storage. So, I guess, XP wouldn't have ever been possible. Oh no. *We made do with GEM.*

The picture speaks for itself.



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RS, Jul-Oct '88

The attribution? RS catalogue, July-October 1988.

The price? If you cannot read it, know that *you* could own this classy 2400bps capable modem for *only* £795!

Recently I asked a friend if his printer cartridge included the print head, or if it was just an ink tank. He wasn't sure, and these days (thanks to protectionism more than anything else) it isn't reliable to look for 'contact pads' to tell them apart.

Looking from the *bottom*, on the left is a Hewlett-Packard cartridge for the older colour DeskJet (i.e. 540, etc) range. You can clearly see the print area (lower middle). On your cartridge it'll be a gold or copper coloured square, probably with ink smudged around it. This is the best type of setup as if you mess things up with a bad refill, a new cartridge will get your printer 100% perfect again. It is costlier though. Many modern cartridges are easily capable of 1200 dots per inch, often with variable-sized dots.



On the right, an ink-only refill for an Epson Stylus Color 640 (and compatible). These cartridges are often cheaper if they are clone parts, but since the print head is fixed inside the printer, a bad refill can be a veritable disaster. You can see the ink drain holes.

Why do I mention refills and clones? It's because very often the two different types cost the *same* when you buy original parts. One is tech'd up, one is just a tank full of ink. Yet, with excuses, the manufacturers will justify the prices, which are often in the region of 40 or 50 euros *just for the colour cartridge.*

You can, actually, buy a *new* cheapy colour printer (about 69 euros) and chuck it when it runs out of ink. Just go purchase a new one! As amazing and stupid as it sounds, it'd actually be cheaper than most *original part* refills. Let's hear them justify *that!!!*

“Bringing it all back home”, nearly...

by Stephanie-Jane Murray

Spare a thought for us almost-OAPs who still live in fear of technology. If we own a computer, it stares at us with terminal loathing, daring us to conquer the simplest command. It emanates intense dislike, ruthlessness, capriciousness and an incomprehension as to why humans over the age of 50 have an inherited gene that prohibits them from ever truly understanding modern mechanical devices. We can't programme our video / DVD recorders (but our 4 year old nephew can), set our digital linked-to-the-atomic-clock-at-Rugby alarms, make sense of the instructions for using the cappuccino/latté/espresso coffeemaker with the metal thingie that makes 3,000 bars pressure in the froth (!), can't send either MMS or text messages, – and we mostly live with a secret, terrible fear that merely pushing the “on” button on the monitor will more or less instantly cause it and/or us to blow up, regardless of what “Computers for Dummies” says.

If you think exclusion from the bright, new world of advanced technological equipment is difficult, think how it feels to not only be a charter member of technophobes anonymous, but also to be the mother of *Frobnicate*'s author. How many millions of times has he been heard, head in hand (or head banging against the wall) to say, ‘MOTHER! It is so easy that a three year old can do it!! Why can't you?’

Perhaps because I'm a good few years past being three?

Yet...yet there is something to be said for us Luddites. Back in the Dark Ages of my youth, we were taught practical things like writing, good table manners, and how to occupy time in that vast void without televisions, videos, computers, mobile telephones, Walkmen, et al. Can you imagine *that*? It was even before the Beatles, before McDonald's, before alcopops. What a world, eh?

I find the computer keyboard frustrating. I was trained in touch-typing; why it was called *touch* typing is mystifying – all keyboards were manual, great metal things you had to hit (“stroke” was the correct term, but “hit” was how you did it). We learned our ASDFG home position off by heart, to use the space bar with the thumb and the Caps Lock with the left little finger. Who on earth designed the computer keyboard to have the very important Ctrl key exactly where I am used to finding the

Caps Lock? Rick can tell you of amazing little-known commands I have inadvertently discovered while typing e-mails to my friend Sarah who emigrated to New Zealand. I've deleted, magnified, found autodate (even though it told me it was January 1, 2004 on the 29th of October), shifted, totally hidden, altered typeface – you name it. It always results in a stunned look on my face, and a yelp for help ("It's too big for the screen / so tiny it can't be read / gone / gone *forever...*"). While I can appreciate the rapidity of e-mail, it still seems very impersonal, as well as creepy – what's exactly going on, out there in hyperspace? Where do lost e-mails go? Does anyone print out their e-mails and tie them up with a satin bow? A virtual satin bow? Will their teenage children ever find them all hidden under the shoebox in Mom's closet one rainy day, and spend an absorbing and hilarious afternoon reading them?

Is it considered good manners to send a text message of sympathy to your friend, on the death of their parent? Does "srry4U" carry quite the same depth of feeling as a handwritten note? Would the young folk of today, so skilled in text abbreviations, even know how to write a letter of condolence? It disturbs me that all the small social manners are disappearing as rapidly as suburban post offices. Where are life's experiences to be found if everyone is banking on the Net, grocery shopping at a massive and impersonal out-of-town complex, and learning social mores off a DVD which could be anything from "Driving Miss Daisy" to "Kill Bill II"?

Okay, I am nearly an OAP and I still haven't mastered A-Drive on my neolithic 486. But there are so many compensations for this apparent ineptitude with machinery. I grew up in the 60's when we still believed that the world could be a good place. I wouldn't trade that for any of your cutting-edge technology. How many of you can type 84 wpm on a manual typewriter (how many of you have ever *seen* a manual typewriter)? How many of you went to Woodstock? Have you ever had an eight minute conversation with Bob Dylan about the sad-eyed lady of the lowlands (who is his wife)? Walked the Appalachian Trail to watch the sun rise over Mt. Marshal, elevation 3,360 feet? Those were good days. We all understood about survival: don't aggravate them, smile, be quiet, and never *ever* tell them the truth.

Oh, and in case you are wondering: no, I didn't vote for Nixon. But I still believe in Dylan.

This is me, walking in the Atlantic ocean on the 28th of December. It is a beautiful, rocky part of the Brittany coastline and it was surprisingly warm.

