

IAPetus



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The Year 1999 Problem

Scanning through some of the Year 2000 documents on the Web, my attention was grabbed by a phrase to the effect that

"during the eighties it was not unusual for programmers to use 9/9/99 in the date field to signify the last record"

Hmmm. Now there was something that did strike a familiar note (unlike most of the more 'traditional' year 2000 issues which passed me by... I never worked on a main-frame). Sure we used 9/9/99 or something similar to flag a whole range of things. When you're dealing with a variable number of records in a fixed length buffer or string array it is often much easier, more efficient, and safer to flag the last record (a null record) rather than maintain a counter. And where better than the date field? It's generally the only field where the full range of legitimate values are known at the onset of the project, often being computer generated PLUS it isn't likely to get totalised or averaged by mistake (at least not unless

the mistake is a whopping big one!).

Of course, the practice died out as the years progressed (at least it should have) and I certainly shan't lose any sleep over it since I'm fairly certain none of the code I worked on in those days is currently in use. Others, particularly those in the financial or retail sectors, may not be so lucky, particularly as the big institutions seem to cultivate legacy code and often run systems way beyond their expected (and intended) lifetime.</

So, another year, another IAPetus..... reading the papers, it seems that very slowly people have at last noticed that the 'Millennium' approaches and that they will need to do something about making sure that their computers will be able to cope with years beginning 20.. instead of 19..! Good analysts and programmers like you have no doubt made sure all your programs are perfectly adequate already, so now have time to help everybody else. Good luck!

A new home has now been found for the IAP website. The address is "http://www.iap.org.uk" - you don't need that annoying iapdg on the

end any more! Moves are afoot to be able to provide services such as 'life-time' email addresses for members. You become fred.bloggs@iap.org.uk and your email is sent to whichever address you specify; you can change your email address and just ask for your email to be sent to the new one. Watch this space for more details once this service is set up.

In the meantime, you can link your personal or business website to the IAP one, and read general information on the IAP. All Council members are accessible by email, as is the Institution office and IAPetus.

We also now have a mailing list,

for general discussion and chatter via email. This has been set up by **Graham Foster**. To join the happy throng, send an email to "List-Server@INCA.CLARA.NET" with "SUBSCRIBE IAP" in the body of the message. To send a message to the mail list ensure that it is addressed to IAP@inca.clara.net. I hope to see you there. So far, there is a debate ongoing as to the need, and suitable format, for language-based discussion/self-help groups. Many thanks to Graham for this initiative. Enough from me.....

Megan C. Robertson

The Director General writes

Older members of the Institution may remember the time when we had a Graduate grade and a Licentiate grade, both squashed into the gap between Associate Member and Member. Therefore it may seem bizarre that the Council should have decided to re-introduce Graduates at this time. Perhaps I can explain the thinking behind the move.

The first thing to appreciate is that, at 250 points on the IAP scale, the new Graduate grade comes *below* Associate Member in the pecking order. Furthermore it will *only* be available to students who have gained all 250 points from an IAP-approved course of formal study and examination in analysis and programming.

The new grade is meant to encourage students to gain a proper mastery of the basics of analysis and programming from the outset, so that they are properly equipped to start jobs in the industry, and have a firm foundation on which to build more sophisticated skills.

At 250 points Graduates are some way below the level of Associate Member (350 points). They are expected to fill this gap by rounding out their experience in the realities of professional employment, and at least beginning to develop the all-round capability that marks the true professional. Graduates who obtain suitable employment should make Associate Member within two years. Some of them may be able to cut this down even further by taking the

projected IAP Business course.

Older members are probably not aware of the extent to which the IAP's admission standards have been tightened in recent months. This is partly to prepare us for a Royal Charter, but more immediately because the Council are determined this Institution shall become synonymous with the very highest professional quality standards. No matter what the opposition may do - we're going to be the best. IAP members will be recognised as the absolute cream of the profession. OK, we may not be there quite yet, but that is our declared aim.

One not so helpful effect of this

Council Elections 1998

Well - it's come to that time of year again - and we've had all the nominations in from those standing for election or re-election to Council which has resulted in the following nine people standing for seven places (five for three years, one for two years, and one for one year). Their manifestos are printed elsewhere in this issue of *Iapetus*.

A voting card should also be included - please fill it in and return it to us!

Cecilia Flavell, Edwin Keen, Selva Naidu and Megan Robertson retire by rotation, and Nick Swain resigned his seat earlier this year.

Paul Lynham and David Morgan were co-opted onto Council during the last year, and under the standing orders Council operates by, offer themselves for re-election at the first election after their co-option.

As in previous years, voting will be by single transferable vote for seven separate places. The first five persons elected will get the three year places, the next person will get the two year place, and the seventh will get the one year place.

As is common practice, the runners-up will be considered should any casual vacancies occur on Council prior to the next election.

an indication of this approach. In order to do this, the IAP needs to have clear standards for entry and to assist members in the maintaining of a CPD record. It is in this area that I have tried to make a contribution over the last three years and, if re-elected, would continue to do so.

Edwin Keen FIAP

Paul Lynham MSc FIAP

For the past fifteen years, I have lectured in Information Technology, both part and full time. Ten years ago I set up a company to produce commercial bespoke systems for varied clients and have produced applications for use in agriculture, medicine and education. Since then I have also become a director of another company producing educational software, one product being the leader in its field.

I hold a Masters in Computing, but my proudest moment was when I was elected as a Fellow of the Institution of Analysts and Programmers. I have a lot of enthusiasm for the IAP and hope to bring a range of skills that have been learned the hard way. I have experience at board level, including sitting on the board of Governors of Pencoed College, chairman of the College's IT Committee and being a co-opted Member of the Council of the IAP since last June.

IT is becoming deeply woven into everything we use. Analysts and programmers are the people who are relied upon to get these things right. If elected to the Council, my aims would include promoting the Institution, enhancing and developing further

Did You Receive a Tax Return Last Year?

If you did, you will receive another one in a few weeks. As you are no doubt aware, the Inland Revenue has already raised £100 million from fines for late submission of last year's returns. Interest and surcharges on late or incorrect payments will significantly add to this sum over the next 6-9 months.

If you want to avoid paying fines and penalties, you should make a note of this year's deadlines:-

September 30 - If you want the Inland Revenue to calculate the amount of tax you need to pay, you must complete your tax return and all necessary schedules and send them back to the Revenue by this date. They will guarantee to let you know how much you need to pay, in time for you to make the payment by the 31 January 1999.

January 31 1999 - If you have chosen to calculate your own tax liability, this is the latest date for submission of your tax return. It is also the last date for payment of any tax due for the 1997/98 tax year.

If you had any difficulties completing your return last year, you may wish to take professional advice this year. There are a number of organisations completing returns for a fixed fee (check to make sure they are not charging for each additional schedule).

One company offering a service is

We are particularly pleased to welcome the following members who have been admitted as Fellows of the Institution since *IAPetus* was last published:

Peter Birley

In 1981, following a number of short periods as a programmer in industry, Peter Birley moved into the insurance sector, since when he has become one of the country's leading experts in this highly specialised area of IT. Peter first joined the Institute of London Underwriters, becoming their Head of Computer Operations in 1986. Not long after he obtained a directorship with Alexander Howden Group Management Services, and became IT Director to the whole of the Howden International insurance broking group in 1989. In 1993 he left Howdens to become Head of IT for London Market Claims Services. Since 1996 he has been a consultant.

Andrew Hardie BSc(Hons)

Leaving university in 1974 Andrew Hardie joined a small electronic automation company, becoming their only programmer. By 1985 he had become Research Director, responsible for all their hardware and software development, but continued to do all the programming for a variety of industrial, military and government projects. Then in 1990 events conspired to precipitate a drastic change of career direction. Andrew became a consultant to the Government, since when he has undertaken work for a wide variety

of Departments and similar bodies

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the article entitled "The Professionals" in issue 24 of *IAPetus* and will agree that there are a lot of "cowboy solutions" being sold, in fact my company has been in the fortunate position (although may be no so fortunate for the client) to pick up and sort out the mess on several "cowboy" installations. However in all cases they have been the result of a salesman "boxshifting" a solution without really caring if it was right for the client and the client blindly believing every thing told without really evaluating the solution or taking up references from similar previous projects.

I do however take umbrage at the fact that the writer of the article assumes that only a graduate has adequate qualifications to call himself an IT Professional. I have worked within the IT industry for the last 10-15 years and progressed along the same path as a majority of older technologists, starting as an operator moving up through programmer, analyst and project management until I started my own company several years ago.

In my experience it is more often than not the so-called consultants employed by companies who are fresh out of university, all be it with relevant degrees and quite often post graduate qualifications, who are responsible for the grossest mis-selling of solutions. Although these people may be well versed in IT theory, they do not have the faintest idea of how to apply this to a business based solution.

If our industry is to clean up its name we do indeed need to tighten