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Editorial

Welcome to the Winter issue of Reporter. This issue contains a review of the 1999 International Conference held in Edinburgh. It is of course always a pleasure to be in Edinburgh. This was an extremely good Conference. As well as the usual selection of User papers and training, the focus was on the impending release of SIR2000, with the developers of the product giving us a detailed look at its many new features, including Visual PQL and ODBC amongst others. Well, we shall soon each be able to judge for ourselves, since the release is being shipped even as my fingers dance across this very keyboard.

Momentous event though it is, there are other things going on too, and the User Group is organising a Conference in June 2000, more details of which are in this issue of Reporter, greater detail flowing as the Conference nears. In addition, there is another International Conference being arranged. And of course, being such a forward-looking bunch of people, we are already thinking ahead to releases of SIR beyond SIR2000.

Well, I hope that all users will be delighted with the new release. There are of course users out there still on version 3 or even 2. Though backwards-compatibility will always be something we are all keen on, it is the interests of all of us to upgrade to the new release as soon as we can. So, happy implementation!

Finally, compliments of the season to all our readers. May you all enjoy the new millennium as much as you did the last...

Michael Staley

Why not visit SIR's web site at www.sir.com.au?

Note from the Chair

The international June conference in Edinburgh was very well attended with delegates from 8 countries. I believe that it was enjoyed by everyone who attended, if you know different please let me know. See the report elsewhere in this issue if you were not there or were enjoying yourselves too much. If you missed out then you have another opportunity at the next international conference to be held somewhere in the world - yet to be decided. Let Mo Reardon know your preferred location.

SIR2000 is looking good, I find more goodies tucked away every time I use it. The latest I have spotted is import from ODBC source that will even create the schema for you and load the data. All you have to do is point SIR2000 at the ODBC source tell it the case id variable or value and the sort id variables and away it goes.

I have also been trying out sirweb.cgi both on a PC and on Unix - it works like a dream; never has cgi writing been so easy (for a PQL user that is). In fact you only need one cgi for all your web forms and that is sirweb.cgi which you pass the name of a procedure or file containing the pql (in a text field on your form) and away it goes. There are some easy to use functions to cope with the funny things the web server does to your data just give the function the name of your form field and back comes the value the user typed. Great!!

Tony Reardon has been over to give some training in the new features, unfortunately it was full up by the time I tried to join, so I do not know how it went. Obviously there are other potential users out there.

Dave Doulton

Events

The next UK SIR Conference is scheduled for **Friday 23rd June 2000** in Colchester. We have selected a hotel in the heart of Colchester which is just 45 minutes by train from Liverpool Street.

The conference will be the usual mix of training sessions and user papers. I'd love to hear from any user who might be able to present a paper or training session, and from any user who has particular ideas for the training sessions which they would like to see.

Fran Williams
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SIR2000

Free trial of SIR2000 plus 10% discount for purchases during the year 2000!

Enclosed with this newsletter is SIR2000 for Windows 95/98 NT, Linux (Intel), SUN Solaris and OpenVMS (Alpha). IBM AIX 4.3 is available on request and we plan conversion of HP UX and Silicon Graphics as soon as we arrange access to computers to do the ports. If there are any other versions you would like, please let us know. The code is now very portable so all we usually need is sufficient demand and access to the computer type and operating system.

The free trial runs to the end of April 2000 and we are pleased to offer more than 10% discount to anyone taking out new licenses during the year.

After you have installed SIR2000 your computers, please pass the CD on to anyone you think may be able to use it. If they then purchase SIR2000, they will not only qualify for the discounted price but we will credit your next annual renewal with an amount equal to the discount they receive. If you require extra copies to pass on, please just ask me. We could end up paying you to use SIR2000, as we will credit you for each resulting purchase!

Full documentation in MSWORD97 is included on the CD. A Quick Reference Guide and a What's New in SIR2000 booklet are currently being produced. For copies of the CD, documentation or if I can assist in any way please email me at mo@sir.com.au

HAPPY NEW MILLENNIUM

Mo Reardon.

International Conference June 1999

Summer in Edinburgh! I had previously attended the one-day Conferences in November, when the city is dank though still beautiful. Thus, Edinburgh in summer was a revelation to me, the finest location for a Conference one could have wished for. Arriving at the Apex International Hotel at noon, I registered for the Conference and received my bag of goodies. The best of these was a shoulder-bag, with an amazing number of pockets and pouches, and emblazoned with the SIR 2000 logo. This is the most useful thing I have ever received at a Conference. On the debit side, as a Committee member, I was presented with a white cotton t-shirt, much too big (all males in Australia seem built for XL size clothes), embroidered with a lurid design which announced to the world that I was a member of the "SUG Committee". It seemed that, in the fashion of a leper, I was expected to wear this throughout the Conference. Never one to shirk my duty, even though it meant being a fashion victim, I complied.

The Conference opened after lunch, with an Introduction from Mo Reardon on what we could expect from the Conference, and how it was to be built around the forthcoming and much-anticipated release of SIR2000, as well as considering what might lie beyond. She then introduced the first paper, from Nick Gawrit of SIR Americas, on "SIR: Past, Present & in the new Millennium". This was a progress review of the development of SIR from its earliest days to the present, emphasising the consolidation of features which he had found particularly useful in his own progress development, illustrating with examples drawn from his own applications.

Next, we had a paper from Leif Spange Mortensen, of Uni-C, Denmark, on "Using SIR as the basis for web-based statistical databases". This was an imaginative application, and us older



Janet Dyson and Mo Reardon

hands were gratified to see that SIR 3.2 was used as the engine. Doubtless, when SIR 2000 has been released and explored, it will be used instead. Not that this was the only use of 3.2 that we would see; rather like being at the 1970 Isle of Wight pop festival when the Who brought on the old war-horse "Tommy". The fact is, of course, that 3.2, especially in its 2.6 revision, has a marvellous resilience that will be the benchmark for all future releases of SIR. This was followed by a short presentation, again from Nick Gawrit, on "SIR data entry from Scanned Forms". This introduced 'Teleforms', a scanning system which reads forms, validates the data, and stores the clean data to a SIR database. No fuss, no mess.

After tea and biscuits, we had a presentation from Andrew Burnham entitled "The Impact of SIR on Clinical Care". This was an overview of an application for building up an incident history of patient care and treatment at his local authority. This was followed by a presentation by Adrian Birch, of Essex University, "Using Perl to access the SIR API". Perl is a language used as an interface between different file formats and software packages, and is fast, flexible, and powerful. Clearly not too dissimilar to the "pearl of great price" mentioned by Othello in his final soliloquy. Adrian showed us how Perl could be used as a code generator for PQL or SQL on the basis of supplied parameters.

David Baxter and Tony Reardon of SIR Pty. fronted the final session of the day - one of those much loved "SIRgery" (geddit?) sessions, whereby users are invited to proffer problems and solicit solutions - a cybernetic equivalent of Gardners' Question Time, methinks. Sometimes these sessions generate only embarrassed silence, dozens of brains groping for something to ask; sometimes, on the other hand, the first, hesitant



David Baxter, Nick Gawrit and Nina Bullen

question, coaxed from a shy audience, then unleashes a flood of questions. This session turned out to be lively, a mixture of specific development problems and considerations of future development strategy.

Dinner was preceded by a Reception hosted by SIR Pty which turned out to be a great success. We were all modest imbibers of the amber fluid. After dinner, many of us went on the Ghost Tour of Edinburgh, led in a most entertaining and informative way by a young woman who was clearly an actress earning some pin money. It was a great chance to see and explore more of this lovely city, and we all had a wonderful time.

The next day's events started with a presentation by Tony Reardon on "SIR2000", which covered all the new features in the forthcoming release. Topics covered included a brief overview of Visual PQL and ODBC (these were covered in more depth in subsequent sessions); the use of multiple databases, and referencing more than one database in PQL; the spreadsheet interface; and the use of the new Graph module. This was an absorbing session. A lot of work has gone into this impending release, and it looked very impressive indeed. This session was followed by three other, deeper sessions on Visual PQL, for which Tony was joined by David Baxter. The first of these was an introduction to all Commands and Functions, and covered the concepts of message processing and VisualPQL, then going through all its syntax and functions. The next session was "Building a menu, building a dialog", followed by "Using the Dialog Designer and Dialog Commander". Though these sessions lasted all morning, they were fascinating and informative, and instruction was imparted well.

After lunch the Conference split into two streams, with Tom Shriver and Kathy Brooks offering Introductory and Advanced Training respectively. Your reviewer was at the Advanced modules, which was very informative and enjoyable, Kathy passing along advice and demonstration of specific techniques and solutions to problems which other people would find useful. Kathy is



Randy Banks and Kathy Brooks

extremely good at these Training sessions; she has the knack of imparting information at just the right pace and level. This was followed by a session from David Baxter and Tony Reardon on "Tailoring the SIR Environment". Version 4 and onwards of SIR uses an initialisation file to store various system settings, such as font and window size. Interestingly, there are also new PQL functions which are able to access this file. This was followed by a session on Y2K considerations, of great interest to everybody.



Dave Doulton

There are some functions in 3.2 which, depending on how they are used, might be a source of problems, but which can be worked around. However, no major problems are foreseen.

After a tea break, we next had a paper from Dave Doulton, the Chairman of the User Group Committee. This was a presentation on how the SIR Application Programming Interface is used at Southampton University to control user access to computer systems, to manage user accounts, log the processing time used, and control database access and locking mechanisms. This was followed by a presentation by Tony Reardon on the provision of Open DataBase Connectivity (ODBC) in the forthcoming SIR2000 release. This is something of a standard provision across a growing number of packages, and its inclusion in SIR is something which has been eagerly awaited. After explaining something of how this had been achieved in SIR2000, Tony then went on to demonstrate it in operation, exchanging data with Excel, to mighty applause from the audience. This session passed gracefully into the last session of the day, "Beyond SIR2000", where future possibilities were discussed. One development was of interacting with the internet, which Tony demonstrated, giving us a glimpse of SIR2000i. Following the close of this day's sessions, the UK attendees moved to "another place" for the Annual General Meeting of the SIR UK User Group. It was an occasion of appropriate solemnity and hallowed tradition, as one would expect.

This being the last evening of the Conference, we had the Conference Dinner and fancy-dress disco to look forward to. Dinner was preceded by another Reception generously hosted by SIR Pty. The Dinner was excellent, with of course both pre- and post-prandials. Various people then retired to the privacy of their rooms and emerged attired in fancy dress, the theme being "Witches and Warlocks", though the odd Vampire did gatecrash proceedings. Was that young man cowering in the corner, being admonished for his lack of fancy-dress, really Michael Staley, he who had spent years petitioning for just this fancy-dress theme? Indeed, he it was. Well, the evening was a great success, enjoyed by the weird and the normal alike.



Fran Williams and Karen Brannen

Friday morning's proceedings started at 10 o'clock, in deference to the sensibilities of revellers, with a talk by John Lemon on "Unscrambling Awkward Data with PQL Functions". From time to time we might be given a mass of data - particularly if it is old - the format of which is either uncertain or a moveable feast. John demonstrated how he can utilise the richness of various PQL functions to meet such challenges. This was followed by another presentation from Nick Gawrit on Heartbase, "SIR is Good for the Heart". Heartbase is a package developed and marketed by SIR Americas, and Nick showed us how it was used in a patient-centred environment for managing treatment of cardiac disease. He also discussed future developments of the package. The final presentation before Tea/Coffee break was from Michael Staley, entitled "Cyril: An SPSS-SIR Interface". Michael explained how there had been a need on one of his surveys to take data from SPSS into SIR. He had met that need by generating a SIR schema from the SPSS data dictionary, writing out the data as fixed ascii, firing up (a technical term, this) the SIR database from the generated schema, and loading in the ascii data. A Clipper program, called somewhat

predictably SPSS2SIR, simply edited the SPSS data dictionary. Michael demonstrated this in operation with, it must be said, touching enthusiasm; no fuss, no mess. Cyril, for those whose curiosity is rampant, is short for Cybernetic Relational Interface Liaison. Honestly... you couldn't make it up, could you?

After the break we had another presentation from SIR Americas connected with Heartbase, this time on the new Reports Module which allows the production of reports in Microsoft Access from a SIR version 4 database. It does this via OLE Automation, and the output is used in Microsoft Word mail merges. The next presentation was from Karen Brannen and Colin Smart, both of Edinburgh University, called "SIR and DDI: can you teach an old dog new tricks?". This was a paper about the Data Documentation Initiative, which involves developing a meta-language which can facilitate the effective transfer of data and meta-data across different packages. Whilst the transfer of data between systems is becoming well catered for, transfer of meta-data can still be problematic. SIR can be used here, since one of its particular strengths is the retention of meta-data.

The Conference was drawn towards its conclusion by a presentation by Mo Reardon, of SIR Pty, which dwelt on SIR Conferences past and present - including, of course, incriminating photographic evidence (some of the bodies weren't buried too well). This was actually a competition, the winner of which would receive a free place at the next International Conference. All he or she had to do was guess the location and people featured in a series of snapshots. Most of these were fairly easily; some, though, were surprisingly obscure. Many a groan, and a few gnashings of teeth, accompanied the stretching of grey matter almost (and beyond, in some cases) to breaking-point. Then we had the closing speech and the presentation of gifts to the speakers, as well as some more goodies for all from SIR Pty. Afterwards, some dallied over lunch whilst others dashed for plane, boat, or train.

This was an extremely useful and enjoyable Conference - the best that your reviewer has attended in all his years on this benighted planet, actually. SIR2000, around which it was largely based, looks very good, and impressed us all - "lookin' good, like a young man should", as the Bard has it. Thanks to SIR Pty for developing such a good release, and to the UK User Group for organising such a good Conference.

Michael Staley

SIR 3.2 Users

If you are still using SIR version 3.2 or earlier versions, please be aware that the TODAY function no longer works correctly. It still assumes that the century is 1900 and will not recognise 29th February 2000 as a valid date. So, if you have not already done so, you need to replace all references to TODAY(0).

In DBMS replace TODAY(0) with:

```
JULN(NUMBR(SBST(SGLOBAL("DATE"),1,2)),NUMBR(SBST(SGLOBAL("DATE"),4,2)),1900+(NUMBR(SBST(SGLOBAL("DATE"),7,2))<20)*100+NUMBR(SBST(SGLOBAL("DATE"),7,2))))
```

In FORMS replace TODAY(0) with a computed variable called TODAY, calculated as follows:

```
menu MAINMENU -
initial compute TODAY =
  JULN(NUMBR(DATEC(TODAY(0),'MM')),
  NUMBR(DATEC(TODAY(0),'DD')),
  1900+(NUMBR(DATEC(TODAY(0),'YY'))<20)*100+
  NUMBR(DATEC(TODAY(0),'YY')))
if (exists(TODAY) eq 0) TODAY
  =JULN(02,29,2000)
```

Thanks to David Baxter at SIR for these workarounds – full details are on the SIR website at www.sir.com.au.

Kathy Brooks

Anagrams

An Anagram, as you know, is a word or phrase made by transposing or rearranging the letters of another word or phrase. The following are exceptionally clever. Someone out there is deadly at Scrabble and should probably work for the government!

Dormitory	Dirty Room
Evangelist	Evil's Agent
Desperation	A Rope Ends It
The Morse Code	Here Come Dots
Slot Machines	Cash Lost in 'em
Animosity	Is No Amity
Mother-in-law	Woman Hitler
Snooze Alarms	Alas! No More Z's
Alec Guinness	Genuine Class
Semolina	Is No Meal
The Public Art Galleries	Large Picture Halls, I Bet
A Decimal Point	I'm a Dot in Place
The Earthquakes	That Queer Shake
Eleven plus two	Twelve plus one

Contradiction
Princess Diana

Accord not in it
Ascend in Paris

This one's truly amazing: *"To be or not to be: that is the question, whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."* And the Anagram *"In one of the Bard's best-thought-of tragedies, our insistent hero, Hamlet, queries on two fronts about how life turns rotten."*

"That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Neil Armstrong. The Anagram: *"Thin man ran; makes a large stride, left planet, pins flag on moon! On to Mars!"*

And finally...the following phrase: *President Clinton Of The USA* can be rearranged (with no letters left over, and using each letter only once) into: *To Copulate He Finds Interns!* Coincidence? You be the judge...

Dave Doulton

Frequently Asked Questions

When unloading a version 3.2 database and reloading in SIR2000, SIR generates an automatic date var range with upper limit 31dec99 when date vars are YY.

If you had a YYYY map then the range would have been: 15 OCT 1582 thru 31 DEC 2199 which was the internal range of dates in 3.2.

The range is stored in your 3.2 database but not written to schema because there were no other valid dates. In 2000 we've increased the upper date limit (Y3K OK) - we don't know that this is a 3.2 unload, the date range is less than the max so we have to write the explicit range in your date map.

You should EXPORT / IMPORT your 3.2 databases to avoid this.

David Baxter

In SIR2000 I cannot get DBMS to work concurrently with FORMS on the same database. It looks like it works OK but the retrieval fails to attach the database concurrently.

Make sure that both forms and dbms have exactly the same mst= and p=parameters. Eg if your DBMS shortcut is:

```
C:\sir2000\sir.exe
  mst='oldst'/db=qschool/pw=q/p='h:\exams\qu
  eries\'
```

then your FORMS shortcut must specify the database prefix in exactly the same way with identical drive letters.

Tony Reardon

Are there any new facilities for controlling master in SIR2000?

SET MASTER, CLEAR MASTER, COPY DIFFERENCE FILE, SHUTDOWN MASTER are all DBMS commands (not PQL).

SET MASTER name

Sets the use of Master. If a name is not specified, sets the Master to be the previously used Master.

CLEAR MASTER turns the use of Master off.

SHUTDOWN MASTER [NOLOGONS] [password]

If the session is connected to Master, requests that Master to shutdown. The keyword NOLOGONS specifies that the Master should not accept any more client logons and should warn existing clients that the shutdown is in progress. Master only completes the shutdown when there are no clients connected. If the Master was started with a password(pwd=xxx on execution statement), then specify the password on this command.

COPY DIFFERENCE FILE

If the session is connected to Master, requests that all databases connected at that time through that Master are written to disk so that updates are available for other processes.

(You can do a copy manually through interrupting master directly - then type COPY)

There are **3 new system functions** and 3 other new functions (all PQL functions) that work with Master:

n = SYSTEM(38	1- Master On
n = SYSTEM(68	Number of Master Clients
n = SYSTEM(69	Number of Master Databases

n = DELMCLID (id,pwd)	Deletes master client
s = GETMCADD (id)	Gets client tcp/ip address
n = GETMCLID (n)	Gets nth client id

Tony Reardon

In SIR2000 DOS commands seem to be ignored using ESCAPE, but other 'programs' run ok in ESCAPE.

Eg

escape 'edt xxx'	works OK
escape 'copy xxx lpt1' in 3.2)	does nothing (OK
escape 'dir' in 3.2)	does nothing (OK

ESCAPE executes an operating system command - in SIR3.2 the operating system was DOS and in SIR2000 it's Windows so direct dos commands will not work.

There is a windows command for executing dos commands (you may have to specify full path for command) e.g.

```
escape 'c:\command.com /c dir'
```

There are a few options which are useful - the /c terminates the window after the command runs (/k keeps it) - use command/? at DOS prompt for full details.

There are tricks you can do to hide the 'dos' window - make a shortcut to command.exe and change short cut properties to run minimised; then run the shortcut instead.

David Baxter

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