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Editorial

After many years as Editor of SIR Reporter, Mick Staley has succumbed to the pressures of work and decided to scale down his commitments to the User Group. But all is not lost – his inimitable style can still be found inside this issue and we hope that Mick's Corner will become a regular feature of Reporter.

This issue is primarily devoted to the imminent SIR Conference in June in Colchester on **23rd June**. Following the huge success of the training sessions last year, we are very pleased to combine this conference with more training by Tony Reardon of SIR Australia on **21st and 22nd June**. The whole package including training, user conference, two nights accommodation and meals is available at a cost of £440, but if you book and pay before 22nd May a 10% discount will apply. See inside for more details of this conference and rates for day delegates etc.

You can book online at http://www.soton.ac.uk/~_sir/confbook.html or complete the booking form enclosed.

Hope to see you there!

Kathy Brooks

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

Note from the Chair

Well we are well in to the year 2000 and I hope you are all using SIR2000 or on your way to converting to it. It seems to me to be an excellent step forward from earlier versions with more and more of my wish list being implemented.

June sees the next user group conference which is a one day conference with some extra days of SIR2000 training. Come and hear from the creator how to use the new features. Tony Reardon will be giving the training so we should all learn a lot. It will also give you the chance to ask for your wish list of items for the next version which is now on the drawing boards. I hope to see as many of you as possible at the conference or the training. If you want to see SIR2000's `sirweb.cgi` in action the call up http://www.soton.ac.uk/~_sir/confbook.html.

The User Group committee is always on the look out for new members. This does not involve a lot of work - just attending committee meetings every couple of months or so and helping to contribute to Reporter and organising the conferences. If you have the skills necessary then please contact me or any other committee member.

Dave Doulton

Events

UK Training and Conference	21 st -23 rd June 2000 Colchester
International Conference	17 th -20 th April 2001, Sydney Australia

UK Training and User Conference 21st-23rd June 2000

The SIR UK User Group is pleased to announce a very special package consisting of 1.5 days of training in SIR2000 plus a one day conference of users experiences of SIR with plenty of tips and tricks as to how to get the best out of your favourite database management system.

The training will be given by Tony Reardon and will be held at the University of Essex in one of its well-equipped computer laboratories. Tony is the Technical Director of SIR Pty and is responsible for the development of SIR2000, so if he can't answer your questions on SIR then nobody can! The training will be similar to the very successful course Tony ran in London last autumn. It will concentrate on the new features of SIR2000 – Visual PQL, internet interface, multiple databases etc and there will be plenty of opportunity to try out these new techniques for yourself and raise any questions or problems you have with SIR2000 with Tony.

The Conference and accommodation will be at the Quality Hotel, Colchester. This attractive location was formerly the Mill Hotel, so called as it is actually a converted flour mill. There will be papers on SIR, both old and new. Amongst others, Chris Cowell of ORCI will be talking about an exciting new study for the Employment Service of DfEE, Dave Doulton will be demonstrating how he has implemented Web data access to a SIR database, Kathy Brooks will talk about that perennial problem of the fuzzy matching of data and John Lemon will discuss how he has used SIR to allocate medical students to courses. Having already shown us the delights of SIR2000 Tony Reardon will be outlining SIR Pty's plans for the future development of SIR. There will, of course, be a social side to the proceedings, including the 'not to be missed' SIR Conference Dinner, an historical tour of Colchester, Britain's oldest recorded town and a surprise, Mystery Event

The hotel can provide rooms at a reasonable rate for any delegate who wishes to spend the weekend exploring Colchester and 'Constable Country'

Fran Williams

Timetable

Wednesday 21st June

10.00-13.00	Registration	
13.00	Lunch	
14.00-18.00	Training	Tony Reardon
19.00	Dinner and mystery event	

Thursday 22nd June

09.00	Training	Tony Reardon
13.00	Lunch	
14.00-18.00	Training	Tony Reardon
19.00	Conference dinner and tour of Colchester	

Friday 23rd June

10.00	Coffee and registration	
10.30	Welcome	Dave Doulton
10.40	Course allocation with SIR	John Lemon, University of Aberdeen
11.10	Employment Service Evaluation Database	Chris Cowell, ORC International
11.40	Fuzzy Matching	Kathy Brooks, Forvus
12.10	Annual General Meeting	
12.30	Lunch	
14.00	Implementing web data access using sirweb.cgi	Dave Doulton
14:30	Beyond SIR 2000	Tony Reardon
16:30	Tea and close	

Full abstracts are given below.

Fees (no VAT payable)

Full Residential £440.00 (Training plus conference)	Includes: accommodation, all meals from Wednesday lunch till Friday lunch, training, conference and all social events.
Day Only £330.00 (Training plus conference)	As above, excluding accommodation and breakfast
Conference Only £80.00	Conference and lunch on Friday

Book and pay by May 22nd for a 10% discount on the above prices!

Due to the practical nature of the training, numbers will be strictly limited and allocated on a first come, first served basis. So book today and don't miss out on the best training / conference deal of the year!

Fill in the enclosed booking form or register on-line at

http://www.soton.ac.uk/~_sir/confbook.html

Training

Come to Tony's training session to find out how to:

- Build graphical menus
- Build user dialogs
- Build a web interface directly in VisualPQL
- Use the web interface to distribute output to users
- Take advantage of the 100+ new functions in SIR2000
- Link applications using ODBC and the new SIR SQL Server
- Create html cross tabulations
- Use the new graphics module
- Use the new spreadsheet facility

You will receive an excellent set of handouts and lots of hands-on practice with the ultimate SIR guru, Tony, to answer all your questions.

Book now as places for the training are limited.

Abstracts

Course allocation with SIR

Medical students at Aberdeen have a number of 'specialty' attachments during their course. There are a limited number of places on each attachment and each student has to rank their choice in order of preference. The task is to allocate places in the order of the students' preferences on a 'first come first served' basis where vacancies exist. This used to be carried out by hand and attempts were made to solve the problem using other tools. Using SIR the task has been simplified and made flexible.

John Lemon
University of Aberdeen

Employment Service Evaluation Database

The ES Evaluation Database project involves the storage and manipulation of potentially 250 million records that contain details of Clients, Opportunities and Employers throughout England.

On a monthly basis ORC receive DLT tapes containing up to 80Gb of data. Tapes are read on Linux and transferred to Windows NT for the initial pre-processing stage of converting to fixed column format. Whilst in this format the data is again processed via a series of tools in which files are sorted and then compared with the previous months tape.

ORC hold ES data in 6 regional SIR databases. These databases are case structured on ORCID (an ORC generated unique client identifier), however before we can input the data into the appropriate database we must firstly add the Case (ORCID) to each record. The Case (ORCID) is held in a separate "CLIENT INDEX" SIR database. This database holds details for all clients (8.75 million) throughout England. Employer & Vacancy data is processed in a similar fashion.

A suite of programs has been developed to look-up the ORCID from the MASTER CLIENT INDEX that make use of SIR HOST. These programs are launched from screens developed using the new Visual PQL functionality of SIR 2000.

Chris Cowell
ORC International

Fuzzy Matching

Forvus has recently undertaken a project to link together records from a wide variety of data sources using fuzzy matching techniques. Kathy will talk about the techniques and facilities used to store the data and the subroutines used to perform the fuzzy matching. Standard SIR facilities, such as the soundex subroutine included in the system profile, were supplemented by some specially written subroutines to mirror facilities found in some other packages.

Kathy Brooks
Forvus

Implementing web data access using sirweb.cgi

This paper will show how to set up web access to your SIR database - using the company database and others as examples. It will use Microsoft's Personal Web Server which is distributed with

Windows 98 but is equally relevant to other servers. It will use sirweb.cgi supplied as part of SIR2000 to access the SIR database.

Dave Doulton
University of Southampton

Beyond SIR 2000

Development work is already underway on new and exciting features for the next release of SIR2000. Current development plans include:

1. New Spreadsheet control. This is a new control integrated with the gui which allows VisualPQL interaction with a row/column style display. It will be machine independent (i.e. available on Unix). This will then be used through the main menus to provide a number of better ways to define, update and review data.

2. Integrate Forms style capabilities into VisualPQL. This extends VisualPQL with new forms style commands and provides a simple way for users to create Forms style dialogs and program logic in VisualPQL. A conversion tool will also be provided to assist in migrating from current forms.

3. Create Forms painter. Allow users to visually layout fields and relate to database fields and so generate new forms pql programs.

4. New features in report and tabulate to extend the use of html with support for variable fonts, colors, sizes, etc.

5. Various Internal changes to remove limitations, etc.

This session will discuss these features, demonstrate the available new features and offer an opportunity to influence development plans - a not to be missed session.

Tony Reardon
SIR Pty

International News

SIR2000 has proved a big success, with both new & existing users. Around the world, new customers have been attracted from as far away as Greenland.

Here are some of the comments we have received:

“Edinburgh conference was most informative and the new developments very impressive.”

“I’m glad to be able to convince the University that SIR is the in thing.”

“It was a really great conference - there was a real buzz and I’m really excited about the new SIR releases.”

“SIR2000 looks very good. I consider it to be a very attractive upgrade of version 4.0 “

“I am looking forward to many years of working with your superior product.”

“We have enjoyed looking at SIR2000 and are very impressed”

“SIR2000 will work for us.”

We have also enjoyed the increased contact with customers as a result of consolidating our support services in Sydney. Please don’t hesitate to contact us at support@sir.com.au if we can assist in any way. It really is very beneficial for the developers to get direct feedback and input from users. Thank you to everyone who has been in contact with us and for the nice comments like *“First, I must say how impressed I am with the speed with which you folks respond to queries. The nameless minions at Microsoft could take a lesson from SIR Pty!”*

Thank you everyone and don’t forget to tell us what you want us to include in SIR2001!

Mo Reardon

International Conference & SIR2001 Training Sydney, Australia April 2001

Tuesday April 17th –Friday 20th April 2001

CALL FOR PAPERS PLEASE

The next international conference and training workshop will be held in Sydney immediately after Easter in April 2001. Why not use the Easter break and come for a couple of weeks?

The conference costs are US\$800, EURO 800 or £485 and include:

- 3 nights Tuesday to Friday accommodation – twin share
- All meals from Tuesday dinner to Friday breakfast inclusive
- Entertainment including Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb or boat trip
- All conference materials and sessions
- All training materials and sessions
- A 50% discount on any new SIR licences purchased by your organisation from October 2000 to December 2001

Winners of the competition in Edinburgh in 1999 will of course be able to use their prizes for this conference and SIR2001 training.

Please email mo@sir.com.au to register interest, submit a paper or request more information.

Mo Reardon

News on SIR Development

First, we have been busy working on the SIR2000 release, doing revisions as and when anyone finds problems; users should check the web site for current status if they are about to start trials or implementations. Of course if they have a live system that doesn't hit any of the problems then fine.

Next we have been working on the next release - working title SIR2000 version 2 but this could

change into something else, suggestions welcomed - perhaps SIR2001 (a space odyssey). I will be talking about this and demonstrating where we are up to at the conference and it is obviously a work in progress. There are four major new features so far:

a) A new 'grid' control.

The spreadsheet in SIR2000 is a third party Active-X control, which has a number of disadvantages: it only works on Windows and we have to pass ALL of the data to it before you see anything which means it can be slow to start and has capacity limits. Our new grid control replaces the spreadsheet, runs on all platforms, is very fast and works in a totally different way such that there is no limitation on the size of database or tabfile.

b) PQL Forms

This is a major extension to VisualPQL to allow the definition and execution of forms style dialogues. The syntax is copied from old style forms wherever possible but it is all actually PQL and you can use the new commands plus all standard PQL commands, subroutines, etc. What you see is actually a gui dialog.

This is all you need to write to create a dialog which operates in the same way the old forms does i.e. lets you retrieve a record, go [next | previous | first | last], update the record, etc.

```
| Sample simple
  program
FORM UPDATE
CALL SCREEN review
RECORD review
FIELD id
FIELD position
FIELD revdate
FIELD rating
FIELD newsal
FIELD idsuper
END RECORD
END FORM
```

c) Secondary Indexes on database records.

This allows you to define secondary indexes on a database record in exactly the same way as you can on tabfiles and the system creates them and maintains them. You can then use these to retrieve data as necessary. If you want to know how it works from the user perspective, just look at what you can do with tabfiles and that is what you can do with database records. Internally these will all be held on a new database file .sr6 which also means that we preserve compatibility.

d) A dialog/form interactive painter.

This allows you to place elements of your required dialog/form where you want to see them, select and drag them, etc. and relate them to specific database/tabfile variables as appropriate.

Tony Reardon

Mick's Corner

"How about doing a Mick's Corner feature in Reporter?" said the Bearded One. The Young Handsome One to whom the remark was addressed sniffed disdainfully, flicking imaginary specks of dust from his expensive and exquisitely-cut suit. "Dunno about that, man", he thought. But the idea drifted out of sight into the depths of consciousness, there to germinate and subsequently flower forth in the Spring. Thus from battered acorns are mighty oaks reared, as the actress said to the bishop.

I have often thought that perhaps we focus too narrowly in Reporter on purely SIR issues. Business software is only a small bubble in the big world of cybernetics in which it floats, and context is often worthy of contemplation. So "Mick's Corner" will take a look at some of these wider considerations, beginning in the next issue. Perhaps the most intriguing of all these considerations is the brain / computer equation that some excitable souls, clearly regarding themselves as little more than machines, are still apt to make.

Oh, and "Mick's Corner" won't be all weighty stuff. Expect the odd knitting pattern, gardening tip, or delicious recipe from time to time. Until the next time, then, this is your old friend Mick Staley saying "Ta ta for now".

Michael Staley.

Beatles Songs for IT

This collection was contributed by Dave Doulton.

"Yesterday"

Yesterday,
All those backups seemed a waste of pay.
Now my database has gone away.
Oh I believe in yesterday.

Suddenly,
There's not half the files there used to be,
And there's a deadline hanging over me
The system crashed so suddenly.
I pushed something wrong
What it was I could not say.
Now all my data's gone
and I long for yesterday-ay-ay-ay.

Yesterday,
The need for back-ups seemed so far away.
I knew my data was all here to stay,
Now I believe in yesterday.

"Let it Be"

When I find my code in tons of trouble,
Friends and colleagues come to me,
Speaking words of wisdom:
Write in C.
As the deadline fast approaches,
And bugs are all that I can see,
Somewhere, someone whispers:

Write in C.
Write in C, Write in C,
Write in C, oh, Write in C.
LOGO's dead and buried,
Write in C.

I used to write a lot of FORTRAN,
For science it worked flawlessly.
Try using it for graphics!
Write in C.
If you've just spent nearly 30 hours,
Debugging some assembly,
Soon you will be glad to
Write in C.

Write in C, Write in C,
Write in C, yeah, Write in C.
BASIC's not the answer.
Write in C.

Write in C, Write in C
Write in C, oh, Write in C.
Pascal won't quite cut it.
Write in C.

"Imagine"

Imagine there's no Windows,
It's easy if you try.
No fatal errors or new bugs
To kill your hard drives.
Imagine Mr. Bill Gates
Leaving us in peace!
Imagine never ending hard disks,
It isn't hard to do.
Nothing to del or wipe off
And no floppy too
Imagine Mr. Bill Gates
Sharing all his money.
You may say I'm a hacker,
But I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
And your games will fit in RAM
Imagine 1-Giga RAM
I wonder if you can.
No need for left-shifts or setups
And no booting again and again.
Imagine all the systems
Working all life-time!
You may say I'm a hacker,
But I'm not the only one.
Maybe someday I'll be a cracker
And then I'll make Windows run.

Frequently Asked Questions

A bit thin on the ground this time, so please email contributions to the editor!

Compiled executables

When you create a compiled executable it inherits various system settings one of these being the page size so make sure you have this set to the value you want when you compile as you will not be able to change it when you come to execute.

Did you know?

You can set the write security of a variable to a value lower than the read security. This means that when connected with the lower value for read and write you would be able to change the value in the variable but not be able to read what it is before or after the change. I have not yet discovered a use for this feature however.

Dave Doulton

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