

Contents

- Editorial
- Note from the Chair
- Events
- June 1997
- November 1997
- Version 4 progress
- A New SIR User at the BBC
- Report from 1996 Edinburgh Conference
- SIR 1997 International Conference in Sydney
- Profile of David Baxter
- The Plan
- SIR and the Internet
- Forvus News
- Tips and Tricks
- Committee Members
- Forvus Training

Editorial

Welcome to the Spring 1997 issue of Reporter. After having mentioned the imminence of the Windows version of SIR for a while now, it is heartening to report a solid advance. A demonstration was given at the recent International User conference in Australia this January, when an advanced Alpha version was presented. Although I was not at that Conference, I have seen the demonstration model; it looks good. Formal beta testing will start soon, with the full release planned for later this year. A full review of the International User Conference appears later in this issue. There is also a report of progress on the Windows version from the developers in Australia.

Now that the Windows version is here (almost), our thoughts turn to the post-Windows world. There are certain features in packages which are increasingly expected today, an important one being easy access of data across packages. This is something which will not be in the initial release of 4.0, but which will follow shortly thereafter. Doubtless once we all get used to using SIR in Windows, new expectations will be generated.

Although the use of Windows becomes ever more widespread, it is important to remember that many users will keep using the DOS and mainframe versions for some time to come, and their needs are also important. Reporter will continue to cater for the users of SIR on whatever platform they are running the software, with as rich a mixture of reviews, feature articles, and tips and tricks as ever. This newsletter is produced for the benefit of you, the user of SIR, whatever the size, shape or form of the machine on which you are running the product.

Michael Staley

Note from the Chair

Welcome to 1997 the year of Version 4. Having just returned from the International Conference in Australia (see report elsewhere in this issue) I have been convinced that the package is in good hands and that version 4 will be with us this year, hopefully in June.

As your new chair I would like to put forward what I believe is our mission in the era of version 4 namely:-

To promote the use of the SIR package through various means, including

- giving assistance to existing users in using the package through conferences and Reporter and Mailbase.
- giving assistance to SIR Pty Ltd by reporting bugs.
- giving assistance to FORVUS in gaining new customers by acting as reference sites.
- doing anything we can to raise the profile of SIR within the industry.
- representing user interests to SIR Pty by requesting new features and requirements for future versions.

We have been achieving these aims in recent years, by holding successful conferences and producing reporter regularly. Mailbase is available to all with email access, but has been lightly used as yet. We have been instrumental in pressing for a client server version, using ODBC and other means, which seems likely to be with us about 6 months after version 4. At the Australia conference a meeting looked into various enhancements for the next version and I hope that during the year we shall be requesting your views on what you would like to see in the package.

I would like to see individual users write to their favourite magazine asking why SIR never gets a mention despite the high profile applications in which it is used. Maybe the launch of Version 4 with its Windows interface would be a suitable time for this action, resulting in the product being reviewed for all to see.

Dave Doulton

Events

April 16

**Data Warehousing, Mining,
Refining and Recycling
London**

**Details from Diana Elder,
Tel and fax: 01494 793033
email asc@essex.ac.uk**

June 26

**SIR Users Conference
Clapham, London**

September 30

ASC Conference, London

November 12

**SIR Users Conference
Edinburgh**

Users Conference June 26, 1997 London

Book now for the Users Conference in London in June - booking form enclosed.

By June we expect that SIR 4.0 will have been in Beta testing for some time and that the full release will be imminent. We are very honoured to welcome **John Francis** from ONS as the keynote speaker. John has worked with SIR for many years, and will set the scene for a full day of tips and tricks, training and user papers.

The training sessions will concentrate on WDL and other aspects of SIR version 4.0.

We are finalising the programme at present, and would love to hear from any users who could offer a presentation of 15 to 30 minutes which might be of interest to other SIR users. Contact Kathy Brooks at Forvus (contact details are inside back cover) if you are thinking of offering a paper.

Users Conference November 12, Edinburgh

So far this event is just a date for your diary. But we would love to hear from you if you could offer a paper. Please contact Kathy Brooks at Forvus if you might be able to offer a paper.

Version 4 Progress

Those of you who were unlucky enough not to have attended the SIR Users Conference and those that cannot remember anything that happened there will be curious as to what is happening with the next release of SIR, Version 4.0 for Windows.

Dates

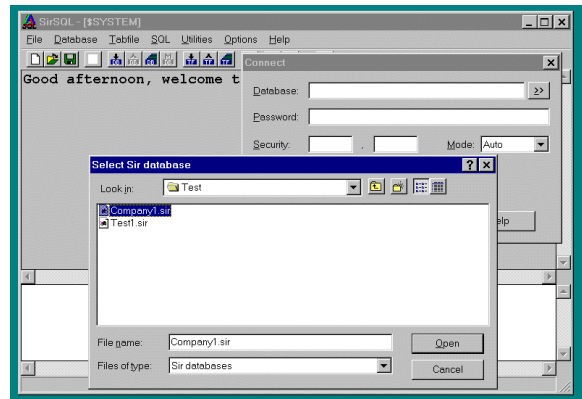
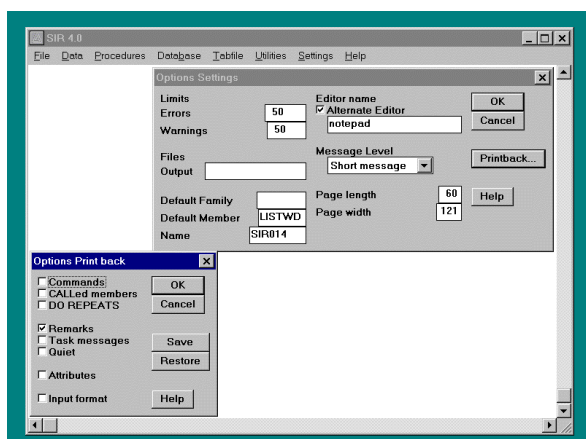
We are currently on target to produce a Windows Beta Version (with the graphic user interface) in March 1997 and, if all goes well, a full commercial release in June. There was a demonstration version of SIR 4.0 given to delegates at the conference which was not the beta version but more of a working "illustration" of some of the new features which will be available.

What's new?

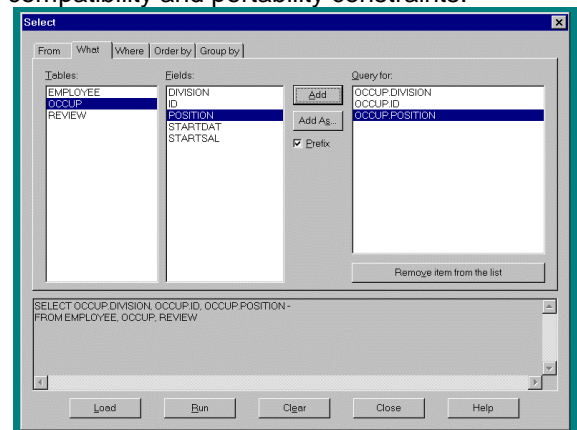
As you know, SIR is broken into several modules: DBMS SQL FORMS HOST TDC HELP and MASTER. In version 4.0 we have made fundamental changes to all these modules. Most of the code is now generic which may not seem like a great improvement to the end user, but it does mean that the individual platform releases will be much quicker and less prone to machine specific bugs (they'll now be generic bugs so everyone can enjoy them).

DBMS and SQL have graphical user interfaces (GUI) and the DBMS one is tailorable and any tailorings are portable to other SIR platforms. SIR's new Windows Definition Language (WDL) is a major new feature. Its purpose is to build a windows based input/output device for DBMS. The device was originally called the Windows Display Layer (WDL). The actual language is quite terse and devised by a c programmer. Eventually it will be more of a windows definition portable file rather than a language.

The **SQL** GUI takes full advantage of the native operating system - It has toolbar buttons, multipage dialogue boxes and many other nifty



widgets. R&D have really enjoyed themselves with this. As SQL is a stand-alone system which is not used for application development (it can be used as part of an application) they have had no compatibility and portability constraints.



FORMS will run under windows and will look graphically as it always has. We intend to replace FORMS with automatically generatable & tailorable WDL scripts, but we will continue to maintain the FORMS system.

HELP is still maintained at SIR on a tabfile but we've written procedures to generate Windows Help and HTML files from it (Microsoft intends to base its next Help system on HTML). We intend to incorporate Help and the other documentation into a single on-line reference system.

In Version 4, the **TDC** has gone. Keymapping is required if you use the SIR editor or the old SIR full screen interface but this is much simpler, interactive and may not be necessary.

David Baxter

A New SIR User at the BBC

Lisa Zaninetti has recently joined the BBC and is working on the SIR television audience databases with Toni Moulin and Dave Greatorex.

Being a new user to SIR, you highly experienced readers will have to bear with me while, I, as a virgin user describe my venture into SIR for the first time (to boldly go where ...erm...quite a few people have gone before actually).

So, having been initiated by Janet and Tracy of Forvus I went into the mire. The first thing I found strange about my venture was the language used; there was the CASE structure concept, as opposed to the familiar table/key concept (although there is still the SIR keyfield). Also, having only encountered the relational databases where tables held the data before and not record types, now in SIR, data was in record types and the tables in the database were tabfiles. I am still learning more about the data structure and putting the concept into context with BBC audience data.

Some of my whinges (small though they may be) as a new developer are:

Why is there no menu option for 'Copy' for taking a copy of a member into a development family? This would be very useful and quicker than using the copy and paste facility.

It may seem simple but another thing which confused me was that the compile menu option is called 'Run' and the run option is 'Run'. You will be pleased to know that Toni and Dave have now put me right as to what is going on!!

The look and feel of the interface to a new user is quite easy to navigate and certainly the menu options are preferable to a single command line which I believe was the case (no pun intended) once upon a time. As is everybody's want, a GUI interface would be preferable, but I have gathered that this is something which is in the pipeline.

The PQL language seems an efficient language to use, with many functions from which to choose, and the use of Tabulate and Report makes writing out the data an easy task. I have been browsing the Web SIR pages for tips and tricks and trying to learn more about how PQL can be used.

Overall my impressions are good but I am still getting to grips with the coding side of things. My first work on SIR has been to add more options for specifying the parameters for analyses which select the Top 'N' programmes from our Programme Database, so Toni and Dave have been gentle with me so far!

Lisa Zaninetti

email: lisa.zaninetti@bbc.co.uk

Report from 1996 Edinburgh Conference

The 1996 conference was held on 13th November at the Pfizer Conference Room, Lister Postgraduate Institute. The Keynote Address was given by Joanne Lamb, on the subject of "Statistical Metadata - A Role for SIR?", and was an interesting look at where SIR should be in the year 2000. This was followed by a talk from Kathy Brooks on "Database Design and its Pitfalls", and then a demonstration by Dave Doulton, "SIRfing the Net", on what was available for SIR users on the Internet.

After lunch we had a Forvus Update from Steve Flack. There followed a talk by John Lemon on "2000+ and SIR", which explored the oft-mooted problem of two-digit year expressions causing grief come the turn of the century. The next talk was given by Peter Ritchie and Patrick Brown on "RICE from Prime to PC"; this was about the benefits and pitfalls of moving a system from a mainframe. Finally, we heard from Randy Banks on "Benchmarking SIR", where he explored both the need for benchmarking and the results from such an exercise.

All papers were interesting, and the Conference was a great success and enjoyed by all present. Thanks and congratulations go to Peter Ritchie and Karen Brannen for organising it so well.

Mick Staley

SIR 1997 International Conference Sydney

Sun, Surfing and SIR in Sydney

Well, sort of ...

While temperatures were certainly warmer than the 2 degrees we left at Heathrow on the night of January 9, the sun was singularly absent for a great deal of our stay in Oz. "Weather' s not like it use to be", was the verdict of one venerable nautical type, which served to reduce the envy factor and cure homesickness at the same time.

And, as far as the surfing goes, I can definitely say that there sure is a lot of the stuff around. As, however, prerequisites for its undertaking include (a) a body honed to a high level of shape and fitness through intensive physical exertion, and;

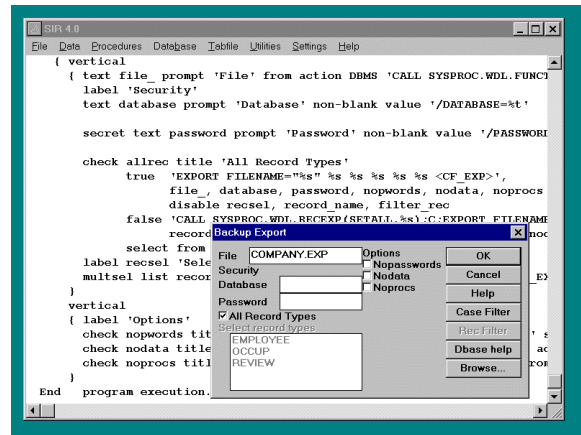
(b) a rubber fetish, I decided to add surfing to my already long list of vicarious sporting experiences.

SIR, though, without a doubt was alive, kicking and the focus of attention for some twenty-five users from around the world. The UK made a good showing with four long-term users and members of the UK User Group committee - Kathy Brooks, Dave Doulton, Toni Moulin and yours truly - providing a paper each; Kathy, additionally, provided four very well received training sessions. (See the end of this for a list of the formal presentations and training sessions) More generally, SIR Pty Ltd - its MD, Mo Reardon, in particular - put together a programme which mixed formal meetings, presentations and training with informal gatherings of all sorts and topped the lot off with a well thought out social programme. The end result was a most enjoyable, instructive and - even - uplifting two weeks.

Unexpectedly - and quite rightly, too - SIR 4.0 was the centre of attention, and I'm very pleased to say that there is a lot of positive news to report. Since last October, Tony Reardon, SIR's Technical Director, has been getting back to his roots as a programmer - and even has the long hair to prove it! Having lost his R&D manager, Tony's taken personal responsibility for development of the core SIR code and management of the rest. With the Conference providing a suitable deadline, Tony *et al* worked flat out to produce what we all had (and you all have) been waiting for: a version of 4.0 with a working GUI interface.

As has previously been reported, PQL functionality has changed very little. There are a few extra commands, mainly designed to bring ICE-only operations into PQL, though I think I now have a personal guarantee from Tony that 4.0 will include the ability to generate a WRITE command that does not output an end of line character. (To be exact: the end of line character will be user-definable, with NULL as a legitimate value) Although I (most definitely) will find these enhancements greatly to my advantage, most of the work on the core SIR code has been to clear up the small number of bugs in 3.2 and, more generally, to enable it to be more efficiently maintained.

The GUI interface, however, is completely new and is based around SIR's Windows Definition Language (WDL, pronounced: "WiDdLe" by those in the know). Although there are still some features to be designed, and some which remain to be implemented, the version of WDL we saw was relatively complete.



More particularly, WDL has been designed as a platform-, GUI- and, ultimately, package-independent means of specifying a user interface. PQL programmers will find it a bit disconcerting at first as it is object-oriented, rather than procedural, has a 'C' feel about it (WDL is case sensitive and uses many 'C' syntactical conventions) and is conceptually closer to HTML than to PQL's current screen handling mechanisms (the programmer uses WDL to specify *what* s/he wants done; *how* it appears on screen depends on the windowing system being used).

Unfortunately, time and space do not permit more than this brief, and hopefully tantalising, glimpse of what is shortly to come - Tony promised that a beta version will be released in March with a full, commercial Windows 3.X and Windows 95 release by June; Unix (X/Motif) and VMS releases should appear shortly thereafter. (see also the announcement on SIR's WWW pages: <http://www.sir.com.au/sirnews.html>).

Although SIR 4.0 dominated the Conference, it did not do so to the exclusion of all else. SIR Pty Ltd, for example, didn't get to be one of Australia's largest exporters without knowing how to organise a social programme. Amongst its many memorable moments I must mention a night of stand-up comedy (so good that even I can remember some - two, actually - of the jokes), music by one of the best bands I've ever heard (*Run Silent*, whose recent album, *Bring Back the Days*, is to be highly recommended) and (through no fault of SIR's) a small eternity suffering one of the worst bands I've ever endured (on whom the only comment to be fairly passed is: don't give up the day job). But, if it was not all work and no play, the work of the Conference certainly looked beyond SIR 4.0 to the future. While I can't go into this fully, two aspects deserve to be specifically noted.

First, Major Lester's presentation on the new release of SPSS (7.5) and SIR's interface to it was, to me anyway, more instructive for what it implied and the context in which it was given than for what it actually said. On the one hand, the

requirements of the presentation meant that something had to be done very quickly to enable Major - a SIR innocent - to actually export data from SIR in real time. That this requirement was met illustrated to me the real power of WDL - for it was WDL wot done it. On the other, and more significant, hand the very presence of an SPSS VP, along with other indicators, suggest to me that the potential synergies between the two products could very well, and not before time, finally be exploited.

Secondly, and perhaps most significantly of all, was the question of Open Database Connectivity (ODBC), the Microsoft-driven standard for generic database access. Now developed to version 3.0, SIR users have been clamouring for ODBC for quite a while now and two user presentations (Ahmad Iqbal and my own) focused on the need for SIR to support it.

Talk about pushing at an open door !

Not only did SIR accept the need to support ODBC, Tony Reardon was even prepared to the most dangerous thing a software developer can ever do, i.e., give a date by which a functional product would be delivered. (The end of this year, as you asked) To this end, *inter alia*, an ODBC Special Interest Committee (SIC) was officially convened with Nick Gawrit of SIR America in the chair and a brief to act as informal consultants during the development phase.

As can be imagined, condensing two weeks into a limited amount of space is rather difficult, but I hope with the above I've given you both a flavour and the important highlights of them. It remains only to say how wonderful it was to see old friends and make some new ones, and to help celebrate SIR's 20th birthday. Thank you very much to everyone at SIR Pty Ltd without whose efforts the Conference would not have happened; and to Mo and Tony: congratulations on your 25th wedding anniversary. Many happy returns on all counts.

Training Sessions:

David Baxter	SIR Pty Ltd, Australia	Windows Definition Language (3 parts)
Kathy Brooks	SIR UK Ltd, UK	SIR Systems Management, Percentages with Tabulate, Disaster Recovery, SIR Database Design and its Pitfalls

User Presentations :

Those marked with * have abstracts and, in some cases, full papers published on SIR's WWW site, <http://www.sir.com.au/user97.html>

Tony Reardon	SIR Pty Ltd, Australia*	Keynote Speech, SIR TODAY
Abdullah Al-Kurnas	King Faisal Hospital, Saudi	Detecting Records entered with an

	Arabia*	erroneous Case-ID Value
Major Lester	SPSS	Interfacing SIR to SPSS 7.0
Toni Moulin	BBC, UK*	Exploring the Television Experience
Dr Robert Zobel	Volkswagen AG, Germany*	SIR - Application in the Volkswagen Accident Database
Randy Banks	University of Essex, UK*	ODBC - A Necessary Option for SIR
David Baxter	SIR Pty Ltd, Australia*	SIR QA Testing
Kathy Brooks	SIR UK Ltd, UK*	Computer Aided Management of Metadata
Geert Schou	Danish Cancer Society, Denmark*	Confidential Handling of Sensitive Data
Dave Doulton	University of Southampton, UK*	SIR Use on the Internet
Niels H Veldhuijzen Ahmad Iqbal	CITO, Netherlands* IQBAL Germany*	The Use of Globals in PQL SIR - A Component of the Six Sigma Program

Randy Banks

Profile David Baxter

At some time, you may find yourself in the unfortunate situation of having to deal with SIR Australia and its Manager of Support Services - David Baxter. Who is he? What does he know? and why doesn't he use smilies in his emailings?

Me & family

I was born in Australia, a small town in the Riverina (South New South Wales - like A Riviere for cows) called Deniliquin. I lived in UK-Wales, for 4 years (1965 - 1969) but I was very young then. I met my wife, Marge, when studying Mathematics and Computing at Bathurst in NSW, she was studying journalism. We have a daughter called Clare who is nearly three and another due in the second half of March (which I will announce to the sir-users list and SIR WWW page).

When not at work

As with most SIR users I guess, I like funny things which are supposed to be serious - an example appeared in this morning's paper: *Six sharks and 12,000 litres of seawater gushed out of a glass tank when it cracked open at the Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour yesterday...(further down) Witnesses said a man in a wheelchair was among those who got wet....*

I enjoy playing with little Clare; for the last year & a half I only worked four days a week and Clare and I had a special day when we would do something together. Now Marge is on leave and I am back to five days ho hum. Otherwise I'm brewing beer (Ale) from grain & hops and drinking it, renovating the house or making toys.

Riding

I travel to work by push bike, the ten kilometre route takes me around the harbour and over the Harbour Bridge - which you may have seen pictures of - and two other lesser known ones. If you have a good atlas you can see where I live: Leichhardt and where I work: Milsons Point.

SIR

I started using SIR in 1986 at the Traffic Accident Research Unit where I was a data analyst working on the New South Wales Traffic Accident Database. (Heather Goldsmith worked there too - she was on the interview panel that hired me). I became database manager in 1988. In 1990 my wife Marge got a job/transfer to a newspaper in Toronto, Canada so I quit traffic and found a job at Mount Sinai hospital (Toronto) (which is opposite the Toronto *Hospital for Sick Children* - Check with Randy Banks - that's its real name!). I was Database Manager there too.

SIR Pty Ltd

On April Fool's Day, 1992 I started at SIR and was given the task of testing and writing automated testing procedures for the impending SIR 3.2. And now I'm Support Services.

David Baxter

The Plan

In the beginning was the Plan.

And then came the Assumptions.

And the Assumptions were without form.

And the Plan was without substance.

And darkness was upon the face of the Workers.

And they spoke among themselves, saying, "It is a crock of shit, and it stinks."

And the Workers went unto their Supervisors and said, "It is a pail of dung, and we can't live with the smell."

And the Supervisors went unto their Managers, saying, "It is a container of excrement, and it is very strong, such that none may abide by it."

And the Managers went unto their Directors, saying, "It is a vessel of fertiliser, and none may abide its strength."

And the Directors spoke among themselves, saying to one another, "It contains that which aids plant growth, and it is very strong."

And the Directors went to the Vice Presidents, saying unto them, "It promotes growth, and it is very powerful."

And the Vice Presidents went to the President, saying unto him, "This new plan will actively promote the growth and vigour of the company with very powerful effects."

And the President looked upon the Plan and saw that it was good.

And the Plan became Policy.

And this is how shit happens.

Anon

Contributed by James Torler

SIR and the Internet

SIR OZ can be found at URL <http://www.sir.com.au>, and Forvus can be found at <http://www.forvus.co.uk>. Any SIR user may join the sir-users list by sending an email to mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk which contains the line:

**subscribe sir-users firstname
lastname**

You will get an automatically generated message telling you that you have been accepted and then you can contact users around the world. To mail the whole list simply address your email to

sir-users@mailbase.ac.uk.

The list has been very quiet, with little flurries of activity when someone posts a question. So please join if you can and keep in touch.

Kathy Brooks

Forvus News

You normally find things going a little quiet work-wise over December and January, but this time round at Chateau Forvus the opposite has been true. All of the consultants have been rushed off their feet trying to fit in additional work (you want it when??) in between multiple bouts of 'flu. As well as the continuing work on School Performance tables (see the last Reporter, and

the one before that, and the one before that...), a number of new projects have come up. These have been particularly welcome, because apart from the obvious advantage of keeping us in beer and fags it has allowed our consultants to exercise recently gained skills in new areas. Here are a few of the projects recently undertaken.

The Welsh Housing Survey - 'Never say Dai'

Forvus has joined a small consortium to carry out the Welsh Housing Survey. The survey will involve an initial 36,000 interviews with householders, and eventually 16,000 property surveys. The companies in the consortium each bring their own area of expertise to the project, and our part is to design and develop the survey management system.

Tracy Kirk has been busy writing this in Access for Windows95. The system has to merge data from 3 different sources and produce management reports on the progress of the survey. It has got nice, user friendly screens which can be easily navigated by non-IT users. As the project progresses, Tracy will be extending the system to take account of additional requirements.

Court Again

Over the past year Forvus has been carrying out various SAS based projects for one particular section of the Court Service. So satisfied with the work that we have been carrying out that the client recommended us to another part of the Court Service, and we have now been contracted to undertake work for them as well.

This will entail Bernie Enlander converting back data from their current archaic system and storing it in SAS so that it can be easily reformatted in Excel as required. The new system will have a user friendly front end to allow Court Service staff to input and manipulate new data themselves.

Burning Issues at the Home Office

Steve Howard has been busy at the Home Office working on 1995 Primary Fire data. Primary fires include house and car fires as opposed to secondary fires such as grass and refuse fires. Steve is converting the data (which up to now has been kept in a system unique to the Home Office) into SAS datasets. Once the data has passed a whole series of validation rules programmed by Steve, he will carry out the analysis and production of tables for the H.O.'s "1995 Statistical Bulletin on Fire Statistics". Steve is also carrying out adhoc queries in SAS on 1993 and 1994 Fire data.

On the subject of Fire Statistics, Philip Truscott is finishing off work on a QuickTAB Easy Graphical User Interface for use by Fire Brigades. We will then put this on a CD ROM along with 5 quarter's

data and send it to all the Brigades. Users will then be able to formulate adhoc queries on the data, either at a local level or nationally.

Dasa Way You Should Do It

DASA (Defence Analytical Services Agency), the agency responsible for providing IT support to the Ministry of Defence, has contracted Forvus to carry out a Scoping Study relating to management information. While not wishing to go into any great detail ('cos we don't want to get done under the Official Secrets Act or some such), I can say it has got Bernie, Kathy Brooks and myself out of the office visiting various military establishments to gather information for the study.

Steve Flack
stevef@forvus.demon.co.uk

Frequently Asked Questions

My database is corrupt and I don't have a recent backup.

Don't despair (yet). Even with non-correctable errors, you may be able to get back some or all of your database. Phone Bernie Enlander at Forvus for advice.

My retrieval has become very slow.

Have you been adding lots of data or changing record schemas? If you add lots of data, the data block loading can get unbalanced. If you do schema changes on-the-fly then every time you read a record, SIR has to transform it to conform with the new definition which can be slow. Either way, it would be a good idea to unload and reload the database. If you will not be adding new data for a while, why not reload with a loading factor of 1? This will halve the size of the database and thereby speed up retrieval time. You will need to have a lower loading factor again if you plan to add new data.

My dictionary has value labels defined, but the vallab function does not retrieve them.

Value labels will only be defined for a variable in the local data buffer (summary record) if you retrieve the variable using 'get vars', and 'get vars' is the first reference to that variable. Eg

```
process rec OCCUP
. get vars POSITION
end rec
compute POSLAB = vallab(POSITION)
```

will have value labels (and var label, missing values and other schema info) all defined, but

```
set POSITION (0)
process rec OCCUP
. get var POSITION
end rec
compute POSLAB = vallab(POSITION)
```

will not have value labels etc defined for POSITION. This is because the 'set' command is the first reference to POSITION and it creates a default real*4 variable in the local data buffer (with no other schema attributes). So the 'get vars' only gets the value.

Of course you can define attributes for any variable created in the retrieval eg

```
integer*1 POSITION
var labels POSITION Position level
value labels POSITION (1) Clerk (2)
...
missing values POSITION (blank)
set POSITION (0) ...
```

The only schema attributes you cannot reproduce on a computed variable are those of 'cat vars' and 'scaled vars'.

My retrieval ran OK last week and I haven't changed it but it crashes now.

In most cases, some apparently minor change has been made. Failing that, the database may be corrupt - run Verify File. Just possibly, the schema may be corrupt; backup the database and then export and import it.

What will SIR do with my date variables in the year 2000?

If all your date maps have 4 digit years, eg 'ddmmyyy' then you won't have a problem, but if you have 2 digit years you should think now about changing to 4 digits. A map like 'ddmmy' assumes the current century when data is loaded, so the date 311299 is read as 31 Dec 1999 now, but in the year 2000 it will be read as 31 Dec 2099. Whatever map you use, the date is stored as the number of days since 15 October 1582, so the century is stored in all dates, and you can change the default map without amending any data. Why not modify your schemas and programs to use a 4 digit year now!

I never use SQL+, what benefits does it have?

Feb 18, 1997 SEL * FROM \$VAR

	RECNAME	VARNAME	LABEL	TYPE	LENGTH
-					
2	CIR	ID	Identification Number	INTEGER	
27	EMPLOYEE	NAME	Name	STRING	
1	EMPLOYEE	GENDER	Gender	INTEGER	
1	EMPLOYEE	MARSTAT	Marital status	INTEGER	
13	EMPLOYEE	SSN	Social security number	STRING	
4	EMPLOYEE	BIRTHDAY	Date of birth	DATE	
1	EMPLOYEE	EDUC	Education level	INTEGER	
1	EMPLOYEE	NDEPENDS	Number of dependents	INTEGER	
1	EMPLOYEE	CURRPOS	Current position level	INTEGER	
2	EMPLOYEE	SALARY	Current monthly salary	INTEGER	
4	EMPLOYEE	CURRDATE	Current salary date	DATE	
1	OCCUP	POSITION	Position Level	INTEGER	
4	OCCUP	STARTDAT	Starting date this level	DATE	
2	OCCUP	STARTSAL	Starting salary this level	INTEGER	
1	OCCUP	DIVISION	Division	INTEGER	
1	REVIEW	POSITION	Position this evaluation	INTEGER	
4	REVIEW	REVDATE	Evaluation date	DATE	
1	REVIEW	RATING	Evaluation index	INTEGER	
2	REVIEW	NEWSAL	Monthly salary	INTEGER	
2	REVIEW	IDSUPER	Supervisor ID	INTEGER	

If you are happy with PQL, stick with it. But SQL is very useful for people who can't write PQL or who only use it occasionally. SQL also is very nice for looking at database schemas. If you are sick of the List Schema output try this in SQL:

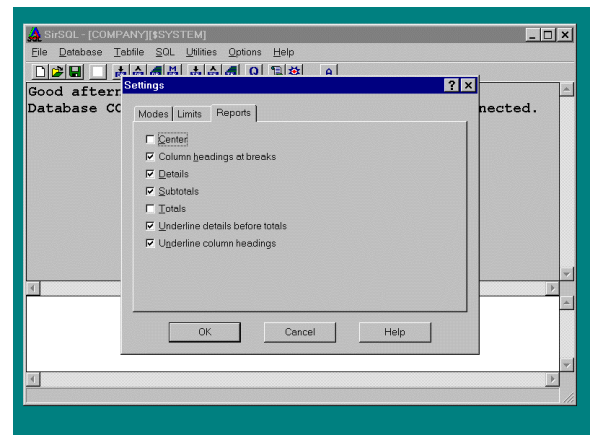
```
connect database company
select * from $var
```

The output, after excluding some less interesting columns is shown above.

When I read in a blank, it always sets it to zero. Why?

By default blank is read as zero. The only way to alter that is to define blank as a missing value. In a record schema you could try

```
modify schema 1
missing values VAR1 (blank)
```



In a PQL program or retrieval you need to pre-declare the variables eg:

```
integer VAR1 ....  
missing values VAR1 to ... (blank)  
...  
read (input_file) VAR1 (I3) ...
```

will distinguish blank from zero in VAR1.

The screen below shows the SQL settings window in version 4.

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