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Editorial

This year is a noteworthy one for SIR users, with the beta testing of SIR 4.0 for Windows already under way, and the commercial release set for Summer. The UK User Group Committee have taken a close interest in the progress of SIR for Windows ever since the start of development, and we feel something akin to parental pride as the youngster emerges, blinking, into the sparkling Spring sunlight. It is never easy adapting older packages to Windows, and we would like to send our heartiest congratulations to SIR Australia on their achievement.

There is a one-day Conference this year on 26th June at Forvus, and full details of the programme, price, and how to book are given elsewhere in this issue. The theme is Version 4, and one of the training sessions is devoted to demonstrating the new version as well as considering transition from version 3 to 4. There is also a training session on the use of Windows Design Language, which is the user interface with the package.

Needless to say there is much more material at this one-day Conference which is not related to the new version, but is of great interest to all SIR users no matter what platform or version they are using. There is the customary mix of deliberations on the future directions of SIR, the more practical Tips and Tricks sessions, and User papers. The scene is set for a great Conference, the price is very reasonable, and the charismatic presence of your Committee members is thrown in at no extra cost! There will be the usual post-Conference shindig for us all to relax and socialise with other users. What more could anybody ask?

My fellow Committee members and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Michael Staley

Note from the Chair

We are approaching the UK SIR conference season, with the London conference on June the 26th and the Edinburgh one on 12th November, which will include the AGM. I expect these conferences to be especially well attended, as

there will be a lot of new ground to cover. This is because SIR version 4 is nearly with us. The beta version, which was due by the end of March, has arrived with beta-testers. When I emailed David Baxter to find out progress at the start of April I was informed that it would still be distributed by the end of March - the 37th!

The new version has a new interface and some long awaited new features. You can now start SIR without a database, so you can now use PQL for any little programming task without having to create a dummy database. It is hoped that by the full version you will be able to switch databases from within the package. There is also a new progress bar function that will allow you to monitor progress.

The new interface is totally tailorable as it is just a text file containing WDL statements, so if you do not like the menu organisation you can change it. You can also add or remove menu entries very easily.

If you want to find out more come to the conference, it will be worth the £40.

Dave Doulton

Events

June 26	SIR Users Conference Clapham, London
September 30	ASC Conference, London
November 12	SIR Users Conference Edinburgh
April 20-22, 1998	International Conference in Florida

Users Conference June 26, 1997 London

Book now! The programme is given below, and abstracts for all presentations are given elsewhere in this issue of Reporter. If you can't make the June date, come to the Edinburgh conference on 12th November - the full programme will be in the next issue.

10.00	Coffee and Registration,	
10.30	Welcome	Dave Doulton, Chair
10.40	SIR: from ICE to Mice	John Francis, ONS
11.10	Training 1 SIR 4.0 transition and	Kathy Brooks,

	demonstration	Forvus
11.45	Examining the changing employment status of parents with the Labour Force Survey using SIR	Charlie Owen, Institute of Education
12.15	Report from International Conference in Sydney	Randy Banks, Essex University
12.30	Forvus news	Steve Flack, Forvus
12.45	Lunch	
13:45	Tips and Tricks on macros for controlling and monitoring retrievals	Janet Dyson, Forvus
14.05	The Use of Globals in PQL	Niels Veldhuijzen, CITO
14.35	Gimme 5! The new user and the new channel	Lisa Zaninetti, BBC
14.55	Tea/coffee	
15.15	A Generic Solution To Converting SPSS System Files To SIR Tabfiles	Adrian Birch, Essex University
15.45	Training 2 - WDL	Dave Doulton
16.30	Panel	
16.50	Review/summary of presentations and panel, actions to take	Randy Banks
17:00	Finish and wine and cheese	

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 4.0 Beta is out!

After a very busy few months, SIR 4.0 Beta was released to beta testers, as promised in March - albeit the 37th.

Relatively few SPRs (we don't call them bugs) have flooded in - which we hope is a sign of how well it's going. Those which have come in mostly apply to new features such as connecting to a database after starting dbms, and browsing for files. We have actually received two positive comments!

The weeks leading up to the beta release were fairly busy here:

Marge Overs, David Baxter & Clare had a baby boy: Patrick Robert Overs who was born in water at 8:09am on Saturday 15 March '97, weighed 3.685kg and was 50cm long. It was a natural birth at the King George V Birth Centre in Sydney. We had the whole place to ourselves - which was a change from Clare when there were five babies being born (one in the corridor) and only one midwife. The labour was relatively short but intense. Marge & Patrick came home on the Monday (St Patrick's Day by coincidence); everyone is well and please by their changing weight.

I took a week off work to be with the family before the grandmothers came to stay. This was the week Tony did not take into account when announcing the beta dates!

David Baxter



Clare and Patrick

Abstracts for June

SIR: from ICE to Mice

SIR has changed radically from the days when we called the editor ICE. Will SIR 4.0 bring SIR into the windows age, or is it just a gimmick that will put a greater distance between the programmer and the program? I have used SIR for more than twelve years and windows for more than five, and I will explain my experiences with testing the beta version of SIR 4.0 and go on to ask questions about SIR's future.

John Francis
ONS

Examining the Changing Employment Status of Parents with the Labour Force Survey using SIR

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a regular household survey conducted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). About 60,000 households are interviewed each quarter. Although the main focus is on the labour force, data is collected on all members of the household. SIR preserves the hierarchical structure of the data: people within families and families within households. This makes it relatively straightforward to conduct analyses at different levels: individual, family and household.

This paper shows how SIR was used to analyse data from the LFS for the years 1984 to 1994, to examine the changing employment status of parents. The results show growing inequalities between families, with a growth in the percentages of families where both parents are employed full-time and families where there is no employed parent. Recent retrospective changes to the structure of the LFS SIR files, however, make this kind of analysis more difficult.

Charlie Owen

*Thomas Coram Research Unit
Institute of Education, University of London*

A Generic Solution to Converting SPSS System Files to SIR Tabfiles

This paper intends to explain how a generic SPSS system files to SIR tabfile converter was written using Perl as a code generator. This code generator was run on a Sun workstation running SunOS 4.3 for testing purposes. Both SPSS (Release 4.0 for Sun 4) and SIR (version 2.2) run on the same workstations. This represents the limits to testing the converter which is called `sps2sirtbf`. However providing Perl, SPSS and SIR are all run on the same machine, `sps2sirtbf` should work with little if any modification.

The converter has several limitations. Firstly var and values labels are not carried across. It is hoped that this can be easily remedied in future. Secondly, the converter only allows for one level of indexing on the SIR tabfile. Any other indexes must be added later.

In producing `sps2sirtbf` several existing tools were used. These will be explained when they occur. All the tools were written using Perl 4.0.1.8

(patch 36). If this converter proves of use to other parties it will be deposited at the SIR archive.

Adrian Birch

*ESRC Research Centre
University of Essex*

Tips and Tricks on Macros for Controlling and Monitoring Retrievals

This talk will demonstrate various ways of controlling and monitoring retrievals, focusing on PQL functions, full-screen programming and edit buffers. The aim of this is to provide a versatile user-friendly interface that non SIR-users can handle.

Janet Dyson

Forvus

The Use of Globals in PQL

Although global variables are well documented in the manuals, their versatility is not recognised by many SIR users (at least in The Netherlands). In this paper, a brief introduction to global variables will be given, along with some indications of the way they are used by me. The use of globals has its idiosyncrasies as well, however these will be touched upon. The main theme of the paper is that global variables, especially in conjunction with CIF-blocks, make it possible to tune a general suite of programs to the details of a specific database, and that globals are great fun!

Niels H Veldhuijzen

NSIR; CITO Netherlands

Gimme 5! the New User and the New Channel

As a new user, trained in January of this year on the SIR DBMS, my first main work was involvement in preparation for the arrival of Channel 5 data. So this paper covers my perspective of SIR as a new user and in relation to our Channel 5 changes. With the devolution of the Broadcasting Research Services as we once were, under our new name of Audience Data Services, and as part of the BBCs Policy and Planning, this was to be one of our first major tasks. In addition this opportunity was taken to make any other changes to programs as needed.

Examples of changes included:

- Database schemas

- Retrievals - PQL
- Report formats - Quick Report and Full Report
- Posting of SIR reports on the Web

Lisa Zaninetti
BBC

Training 1 SIR 4.0 Transition

This session will demonstrate the new SIR version 4.0 beta software and give training in the new facilities and options. Advice will be given on moving existing databases and applications to version 4.0.

Kathy Brooks
Forvus

Training 2 WDL

The WDL training will show you how to create a WDL script to produce menus and dialogs to enable you to run programs and view your data. There will also be indications as to how to use the dialogs to edit your data as well.

Dave Doulton
University of Southampton

1998 International Conference

To celebrate our 21st birthday, SIR is holding the next User Group meeting in Orlando Florida. Following the successful User meeting in January in Australia, with attendees from Denmark, Germany, Holland, Saudi Arabia, UK, USA, and of course, Australia, SIR is inviting users to the USA for the 1998 conference. To make the conference even more worthwhile, training has been integrated in the meeting.

At the 97 conference it was suggested that as many users have special SIR skills or applications that they would be willing to give training sessions about, these sessions could be very useful for the 98 conference. On many occasions, users have given papers which outlined techniques or applications which the attendees would have liked to learn about. If you have a topic which you would like to deliver as a

training session or workshop in Orlando in 98, or you have any topics you would like to see given by other people please let me know. If you are willing to give a training session and yours is chosen for inclusion, the US\$350 conference fee may be waived.

Provisional Program User Conference 98

Venue:	Ramada Resort Maingate Orlando
Conference Cost	US\$350 Per Person
Hotel Cost	US\$65.50 (Inc Tax) Per Room Per Night

Sunday 19th April

17.00 - 19:00	Registration
19:00	Cocktail Welcome Party

Monday 20th April

09:30	Welcome & Keynote speech
10:30	User papers
12:30	Lunch
14.00 - 17:00	SIR/ODBC Training Workshop
19:30	Dinner & Show

Tuesday 21st April

09:30	User papers
12:30	Lunch
14:00 - 17:00	User Training/Workshops

Wednesday 22nd April

09:00	User Training/Workshops
12:30	Lunch
14:00 - 17:00	User papers
19:30	Conference dinner

The conference fee includes all conference materials and all meals shown above plus breakfast. The Ramada Inn features 2 swimming pools, a sauna, gym, fitness centre and 2 lighted tennis courts. It is a 2 storey property with 391 first class rooms with TV's, videos, phones. There are 2 double beds in each room and the price includes accommodation for up to 4 people in the room, so bring the family for a trip to Disneyworld.

If you are interested in attending, offering a paper, or giving a training session please register your interest with Robyn Jackson at SIR.

Robyn Jackson

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Forvus News

It's Good to Talk

Let's be a bit different this time round and start off with a good whinge. Now then, although here at Chez Forvus we are all brilliant consultants *par excellence* and do the best we can to help clients, old ladies, small children and dumb animals wherever possible, the one thing that we are not is psychic! I can confirm this 'cos I've checked the payroll and we do not employ anyone named Mystic Meg or Doris Stokes.

So when our clients, be they SIR user or no, move offices it would be greatly appreciated if they would be kind enough to drop us a line, pick up the phone, Email us, fax us, chuck a note tied to a brick through the window, just to let us know. I mean, look at the disadvantages of not doing any of these - you don't get a Chrissie card from us, you miss out on all the freebies we send out on a weekly (oh all right, perhaps not weekly) basis, and most important you miss out on your upgrades and your newsletter.

What's brought this on all of a sudden? Well, the occasional client/SIR user trolling off and not telling us is par for the course and we accept it. But when not one, but two *whole* flaming organisations do it, and **not one** of its employees tells us, I do rather think this is taking the mickey a bit. I won't name names and embarrass anyone, suffice to say that I hope that the moves to Drummond Gate and Stag Place went well. And Mike, if you *can* let me have that phone list that you promised me 2 months ago.....

Right, that's me done. Normal service will now be resumed.

Two In, One Out

Given the number of consultancy contracts we have recently been awarded, Forvus decided to recruit another person to help out. We have placed the ads and are currently sifting through the replies. We have also recruited a second consultant to help with the development of QuickTAB. This became necessary when Philip Truscott decided to emigrate to America. **Mark Carter** has joined us from Glasgow Caledonian University and will work with Kwok Hung on QuickTAB development and consultancy.

Busy, Busy, Busy

Doesn't time fly? It seems only February that I was writing the last Forvus News. We are still very busy here carrying out the contracts that I mentioned in the last Reporter, and about to start a few more. We are particularly pleased that the Department for Education and Employment have

shown excellent judgement again in awarding the Schools Performance Tables contract to us for the next three years. You can look forward to yet more articles on this particular subject in the future!!

Recovering from Disaster

What would we do if we came to work one morning to find Forvus House burned to the ground? Oddly enough, the answer isn't "go home and put your feet up in front of the telly". We have been giving serious thought to this problem, and as a result have implemented a disaster recovery plan which will get us back on line within 24 hours. In the event of an emergency, the whole company would decamp to a site in Wapping, where pre-installed hardware and communications would allow us to resume business with the minimum of delay. One thing we needed to do was to draw up a contingency plan, specifying who does what in the event of us having to implement a move. It is amazing exactly what *does* need to be done in these circumstances, and it is not until you sit down and really think about it do you realise the scale of the problem. Suffice to say, in the event of us moving out to Wapping, you will still be able to contact us on our usual numbers, and of course we will let you know where we are (see "It's good to talk" above).

Steve Flack

stevef@forvus.demon.co.uk

Quotes

The Editor and publishers of this newsletter take no responsibility for the accuracy of these quotations - but think you might enjoy them!

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers"

Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM, 1943.

"Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons"

Popular Mechanics, forecasting the relentless march of science, 1949.

"I have travelled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year."

The editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall, 1957.

"But what... is it good for?"

Engineer at the Advanced Computing Systems Division of IBM, 1968, commenting on the microchip.

"There is no reason why anyone would want a computer in their home."

Ken Olsen, President, Chairman, and founder of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977.

James Torler

Frequently Asked Questions

I want to set summary variables to missing but SIR thinks I am updating the record

If you have

```
process rec OCCUP
. get vars POSITION STARSTAL
. set POSITION STARTSAL (missing)
end rec
```

You will get a message that you are trying to update the record variables. This is because the compiler will always look for any variable first in the CIR, then in the current record, and finally in the summary record. So if the same name occurs in the current record and the summary record SIR will access the variable in the current record.

If you really need to force SIR to use the summary variable, you can fool it like this:

```
process rec OCCUP
. integer VAR1
. get vars POSITION STARTSAL
. integer VAR2
. set VAR1 to VAR2 (missing)
end rec
```

because the first and last variables in the list are summary variables only, and SIR then interprets the whole list as being summary variables. This will only work if these are the first references to VAR1, VAR2, POSITION and STARTSAL.

Why does SIR truncate my string variables at 20 characters?

SIR has a default string length of 20 characters, so if you just use for example

```
compute POSLAB = vallab(POSITION)
```

then any labels over 20 characters will be chopped off in their prime. If you want say 40 characters you need to pre-declare POSLAB like this:

```
string*40 POSLAB
compute POSLAB = vallab(POSITION)
```

I want to prompt a user for a variable name and then get the value of that variable. Can I do that?

Yes, there are special functions NGET, SGET, NPUT and SPUT which can get the values of variables named during execution. They are a bit fiddly to use but something like this should work for numeric variables

```
retrieval
read 'Type in caseid and varname'
  XID(i*) VARNAME (a*)
case is XID
. process rec EMPLOYEE
. compute VALUE = nget(VARNAME)
. write 'Case `XID` has `
  VARNAME ` = ` VALUE
. end rec
end case
end retrieval
```

For a more general program which could handle string variables too, you would need to use a function like VARTYPE to check the variable type and then use SGET or NGET as appropriate.

Kathy Brooks

SIR UK User Group Committee Members

1996/97

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