

OtherSides 2002



Photo courtesy of Graham Rule

As reported in last month's *BITS*, the Other Sides 2002 exhibition of the arts, crafts and activities of Information Services Group staff was opened on 1st November and runs until 13th December.

Helen Talbot (EUCS) and Anne Donnelly (Library)—aka *Brave Harps*—provided a musical accompaniment to the opening of the exhibition, which can be seen in the Exhibition Hall on the ground floor of the Main Library, George Square.

Putting the University Online—the Virtual University

I have recently been engaged with James Cornford on a two-year research project entitled *Space, Place and the Virtual University* to investigate the way in which UK universities are attempting to build new technologies into higher education.

In recent years there has been a phenomenal interest in the growth of what some are calling 'digital', 'online', or 'virtual' universities. You will already know the vision: a decrease in importance of the campus, as students 'login' from a distance to access 'courseware', new media technologies replacing traditional lectures, courses being delivered and assessed over the Internet. The assumption often appears to be that institutions can move straightforwardly toward this vision.

Yet our recent research suggests that the universities which we have studied have found the introduction of new technologies, alongside their more traditional methods of providing teaching and learning, extremely difficult and that the actual model of Virtual University which we have seen emerging bears little relationship to the vision. What we have found is that the Virtual University works in theory but not in practice.

A summary of our findings can be found in an article published in the e-journal *Ariadne*, issue 24: see <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue24/virtual-universities/>

The details of a forthcoming book on the issues raised, *Putting the University Online*, can be found at <http://www.openup.co.uk/>

Neil Pollock (Management School)

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Christmas Vacation Services

The University closes for the Christmas vacation at 5PM on Friday 20th Dec, and reopens at 9AM on Friday 3rd Jan 2003.

All University buildings will be closed throughout this period; in particular the open access computing labs will be closed. Central computing services such as **holyrood** and **EdLAN** will continue without systems staff cover for the whole closure period, but there will be operator dayshift cover on 23rd, 24th, 27th, 30th and 31st Dec.

There will be no telephone operator service during this period, nor any postal or internal mail deliveries. EUCS Receptions, User Support and the Resource Centres will also be closed.

David Muxworthy (EUCS)

Novel waverley

The intermediate compute service **waverley** now uses new hardware and software. The old SparcServer 1000s and their 60Mhz processors have been replaced by a single SunBlade 1000 system with two 750MHz processors. This represents a considerable increase in processing power.

The service continues to operate as a 'farm', with users logging onto a single front-end system, which gives access to powerful back-end systems via load-sharing software. The front-end system is in fact the original waverley server (from pre-farm days) called **waverley-p4**, or simply **waverley**. The two back-end systems are an Ultra 1 (with two 296MHz processors) and the SunBlade 1000 system described above.

The three systems will run the newer Solaris 8 Operating System. Instead of the previous load-sharing system, LSF, load-sharing will be handled by Sun Grid Engine (SGE). To help ease the user transition to the new software, the EUCS Unix Team has provided some scripts to emulate LSF functionality. Details of these scripts and of SGE are available at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/unix/docs/sge/>

LSF continues to be available, as a skeleton service only, until the end of December 2002 on **waverley-p1.ed.ac.uk**. (Note that the name **waverley** no longer refers to this system.) All users should move their compute jobs over to SGE before the New Year deadline.

Andy Garman (EUCS)

Unix—a Reliable Operating System

Many business critical services in the University run on Unix based systems. These systems are usually rebooted only to perform upgrades and for maintenance of the machine room environment. It is therefore instructive to see what happens when these systems are just patched for essential security fixes and otherwise left to look after themselves.

The EUCS Unix team recently rebooted one of their servers which had been up for two years, two months and 14 days (805 days).

Keith Farvis (EUCS)

Scanning Mail for Viruses and Junk

EUCS has recently completed upgrading the main University mail relays to scan all messages passing through them using anti-virus technology from Sophos. In the first few days of operation, we trapped an average of 273 mail-borne viruses per day.

Junk mail is still increasing. We have recently been stopping an average of more than 28,000 junk messages per day. In addition to what we already do to control the flow of junk (June 2002 *BITS*, page 2), we will next be deploying new software which tags email with an indication of how likely it is to be junk; this can then be used by mail programs for filtering, under the control of users. We also intend to make available ongoing statistics on virus and 'spam' trapping.

Scott Larnach (EUCS)

Student Mail Service Disk Quotas

As an early Christmas present, the Student Mail Service disk quota allocation for non-research students is being increased from 24MB to 40MB. Research student disk quotas are pegged to the staff quota of 100MB—they will remain the same.

Graeme Wood (EUCS)

Internet Storm Centre

The Internet, a huge and ever expanding conglomeration of computers and subnetworks, is constantly under attack by hackers trying to detect weak spots and exploit them to cause havoc. To get a picture of the current scene, and what is being done to protect the Internet, have a look at the Web site of the Internet Storm Centre <http://isc.incidents.org/> and click on the About button. The description there is fairly technical but does illustrate what is going on. It also demonstrates the importance of implementing security updates to networked machines as soon as they are released.

Editor

E-Learning support for staff at KB

The University provides staff with a number of off-the-shelf and bespoke services to assist them in using technology in their teaching and learning. This includes advice on using software dedicated to teaching and learning, such as the virtual learning environment WebCT and the automated question and test system Perception.

To improve support for learning technology developments on The King's Buildings campus, a member of staff from MALTS (Media and Learning Technology Service) will be in the Graphics and Multimedia Resource Centre, half a day a week, for five weeks starting on the afternoon of February 26th. This pilot 'consultancy' service allows staff to make an appointment to discuss ideas and techniques for using learning technology in their teaching. More details will be available in the next issue of BITS and from the News section of the MALTS Web site at <http://www.malts.ed.ac.uk/>

For further information or an appointment at KB contact Wilma Alexander: email w.alexander@ed.ac.uk or telephone 516543.

*John Blair-Fish (EUCS)
Wilma Alexander (MALTS)*

Document Distribution

Have you ever needed to send out a single document, electronically, to a large number of people? What is the best way of doing this—can you ensure that your recipients can read what you send them, and can you achieve what you are trying to do without putting undue load on the University's computing resources?

The C&ITC Desktop Consistency Working Group has considered this issue, and has produced a set of recommendations: please see <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/ucsinfo/cttees/citc/work/desktopwg/docdistrec.htm>

Here is a summary of their advice: use plain ASCII text where the content is purely textual and formatting is not critical. If the document is lengthy and the format of the content important then convert the file into PDF; otherwise convert to HTML, put it on the Web and give the URL in a short mail message to your intended recipients. Always consider who will be reading the document at the other end. By sticking to non-proprietary file formats you will reach more people without antagonising them!

There are many examples of bad practice: an 800Kbyte newsletter was recently sent as an email attachment to about 1,000 staff, which placed a tremendous strain on the University Mail service.

The Working Group is keen to encourage staff and students to comply with its recommendations.

Gillian Kirkwood (EUCS)

BCS Presentation on Voice Synthesis

Paul Taylor of Rhetorical Systems will give a presentation on voice synthesis at 6:30PM on Wednesday 11th December at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 36 York Place, EH1 3HU. See <http://www.rhetorical.com/> for further details.

All are welcome, whether or not members of the BCS. Christmas refreshments will be served from 6:15PM.

David Muxworthy (EUCS)

eDiarying—an Update

An article in last month's *BITs* described the development of the University electronic diarying project. Since then the C&IT Committee has met and requested that EUCS give higher priority to the task of offering a basic Web-based eDiarying service to those parts of the University not already using the service under the auspices of MIS. Consequently our project plans have been accelerated and we expect to start to offer the service by the end of January 2003.

Please note that, by the nature of the service, it is only useful if complete staff groupings make use of it, so the service will be offered at the school (or major unit within a school) level and not "on demand" to individuals or small groups of individuals. Those who have already expressed urgency in receiving such a service will be approached in January, and Colleges will then be asked to prioritise their schools for the roll out of the service.

Details of the project will be posted shortly on the Web, at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/projects/ediary/>

Scott Currie (EUCS)

New Horizons (concluded)

The September and October issues of BITs contained extracts from a long article illustrating how the University Library, supported by Computing Services, is taking a lead in developing technological solutions to providing access to research collections. Here is the final part of the article. It was contributed by the University Librarian, Ian Mowat, who died in a hill-walking accident in September.

Charting the Nation: Early Maps of Scotland, 1550-1740

Award: £206,307 (with additional support from SCRAN and the National Library of Scotland). Leaders—Professor Charles Withers and Dr Andrew Grout.

Web site: <http://www.chartingthenation.lib.ed.ac.uk/>

The launch of the *Charting the Nation* Web site makes thousands of high-quality images of the early maps of Scotland and associated printed and manuscript texts available through the Web for the first time. Managed from the Library and the Department of Geography, the project has been a major collaborative venture, involving a consortium of nine other higher education and national institutions within the United Kingdom. Many other UK and European institutions and private owners have contributed images.

This new Web site, powered by Luna Imaging's sophisticated Insight™ image server, brings all these related materials together in an innovative and accessible way, and will allow us to manage, access and use the collection over the Web for both research and teaching. Images have been catalogued to either MARC21/AACR2 or ISAD(G) standards, depending on the nature of the materials and the requirement of the holding institution.

The Walter Scott Digital Archive

Web site: <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/>

This project, an initiative arising from the University Library itself, aims to create the world's leading Web site on Sir Walter Scott by opening up the eclectic collection of Scott materials gathered by James E. Corson, librarian, scholar, and Scottophile, now in Edinburgh University Library. Corson devoted much of his life to amassing a huge collection of materials by and about Scott, a collection quite unique in both its breadth and depth. The collection can be divided into five categories: printed books, manuscripts, press cuttings, visual materials (prints, drawings and paintings), and realia.



The collection includes printed material, including a presentation copy from Scott to Anna Seward of *The Chase* (1796), Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe's copy of the first edition of *Waverley* (1814), the Duke of Wellington's copy of *St Ronan's Well* (1824), and an early proof of *The Lady of the Lake*. Also included are a large number of musical scores, playbills, and theatre programmes. Perhaps the most interesting part of the whole collection is the section devoted to illustrative material. This term covers a multitude of visual formats, mostly unbound, and consisting of works of art on paper, but also including 25 oil paintings, by artists such as David Roberts, Robert Scott Lauder, and Sir William Allan. The realia in the collection is where Corson's own obsession with Scott took hold in its most terrifying form: with the EUL collection hosting not only bedpans, but toy soldiers, shortbread tins, tea towels, and other examples of material culture associated with Scott. The material is undoubtedly of serious interest to the researcher interested not only in Scott, but also in material culture and national identity.

The collection was sold by Corson (a former Deputy Librarian) to the University under an agreement in 1978, and it was transferred to the University Library in Edinburgh in 1989. After his death, Corson's widow generously bequeathed a sizeable estate to the University to maintain and develop the collection. The revenue from this bequest has been used to create the website.

Ian Mowat

Procurement News

eProcurement—Progress Report

As described in the July 2002 issue of *BITs*, the University's draft eProcurement strategy proposes that by the year 2005 we should have 80% of departments carrying out 80% of their procurement electronically, with at least 50% of all invoices issued electronically.

I am pleased to report that the strategy has been passed by the Management Information Committee, and noted by the Central Management Group. We are about to start a pilot of sourcing tools for quotations, e.g. for scientific equipment, we are at the planning stage of a pilot for laboratory consumables, and we are evaluating pilot arrangements for stationery and office supplies. We will shortly update our Web page <http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/>

Karen Bowman (Procurement)

National Apple Agreement

Edinburgh University has officially joined the 'National Apple Agreement'. The contract offers significant discounts. Our Apple Web pages can be found at http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/computer/ordering/apple_macs.htm

Details of the National Apple Agreement can be found at <http://apple.procureweb.ac.uk/>

Fujitsu Hard Disk Problem

Further to the item in last month's *BITs*, I would emphasise that if you think a recently purchased RM or Viglen PC might be affected, please look at the Procurement Web pages—specifically at <http://www.procure.ed.ac.uk/computer/ordering/new.htm> Don't put this off: if you have a PC with one of the faulty hard disks, it *will* fail sooner or later!

George Reid (Procurement)

Disability Office

Please note that the Disability Office Computing Support email address is: Disability.Computing.Support@ed.ac.uk

Managed Desktop Project —Progress Report

The EUCS Desktop Services Team can now deliver a Windows XP desktop in a managed way for Departmental Computing Officers to test, using an image build and the technology for adapting it to the specific requirements of the target platform.

A workshop was held in November for Departmental Computing Officers to familiarise them with the delivery mechanism. Further workshops are planned: these are seen as a crucial mechanism for obtaining feedback from technically-aware staff in Colleges and Schools.

The Managed Desktop Project area on EUCSinfo can be found at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/projects/mdt/>
Graham Newton (EUCS)

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Contributions to *BITs* are welcomed.

Copy deadline for January *BITs*:

Monday 9th December

