



Words of warning

Is there anybody there? Messages from beyond, an unhelpful ABC, and rides with the unknown driver all conspire to confuse a curious Tim Nott.

I've used Word for Windows since version one, and a noticeable change is the steady increase in the file size over the years; not only of the program but of its documents, too. When I upgraded from version 2.0 to 6.0, the Hands On Windows column upgraded itself from 17Kb to 24Kb, although the number of words remained the same.

Although versions six and seven ostensibly have the same file format, the latter adds a further 2Kb to the file. Curious to know what, exactly, added value was in those extra kilobytes, I opened a Word 7 file in Notepad. As expected, there was a load of binary header information, followed by the text itself, followed by more gobbledygook, followed by some more text on the subject of modem initialisation strings, which I didn't remember writing and which certainly wasn't visible when loaded into Word.

Perhaps, I thought, I'd been messing around with "hidden" text or something. Or perhaps I'd had a crash and the file had somehow got corrupted. But opening a few more files in Notepad revealed more "mes-

sages from beyond", most of which (but not all) I was able to track down to my offline mail reader. Curiouser and curiouser: was there something seriously wrong with my hard disk? Scandisk didn't seem to think so.

All became clear when Microsoft announced the "Service Pack 1", a minor update to Windows 95. This is mainly concerned with network and printing (and indeed, networked printing) issues, so I hadn't got round to downloading the

1.25Mb file. However, the readme file contains the following little gem.

"The Windows 95 OLE 32 update addresses file-management behaviour in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft PowerPoint® for Windows 95. Because of the way these applications use OLE for file storage, files created by these applications might contain extraneous data from previously deleted files. This data is not visible while you use the applications. However, when such a document file is viewed by using Windows Notepad (for example), it might be possible to see pieces of information from the previously deleted files."

In case you didn't know, when you delete a file from disk by using the DOS delete command or emptying the recycle bin, you don't actually delete the data at that time. Instead, you mark that area of the disk as unoccupied so subsequent data can overwrite the "deleted" file. What these Microsoft applications are doing is grabbing a section of disk space without cleaning the previous data from it, which may then be preserved in the new file. Obviously, files you regularly delete (in my case, email and conference messages) stand a good chance of turning up again.

The Readme continues: "This could

Get a Liff

In last September's column (written when Windows 95 was still in beta) I shared with you the secret of how to customise the "Tips of the Day". To recap: run Regedit (having first backed up your System.dat and User.dat) and go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\CurrentVersion\Windows\Explorer\Tips. Alternatively (or if for some reason it's elsewhere), run Edit/Find... on "Tips" and keep hitting F3 until you see a list of the tips in the right-hand pane. Double-click on the number next to each message and you'll get a dialogue box where you can edit the "Value data" — in this case the tip.

Reader Peter Bryant has taken this not just a step but a whole new dimension further. He has created a .REG file containing entries from Douglas Adams and John Lloyd's book, *The Meaning of Liff*. For those of you who never visit bookshops or other people's lavatories, this is a list of strange-sounding but real place-names with implausible definitions. Example:

"Stoke Poges (n) — The tapping movements of an index finger on glass made by a person futilely attempting to communicate with either a tropical fish or a post office clerk."

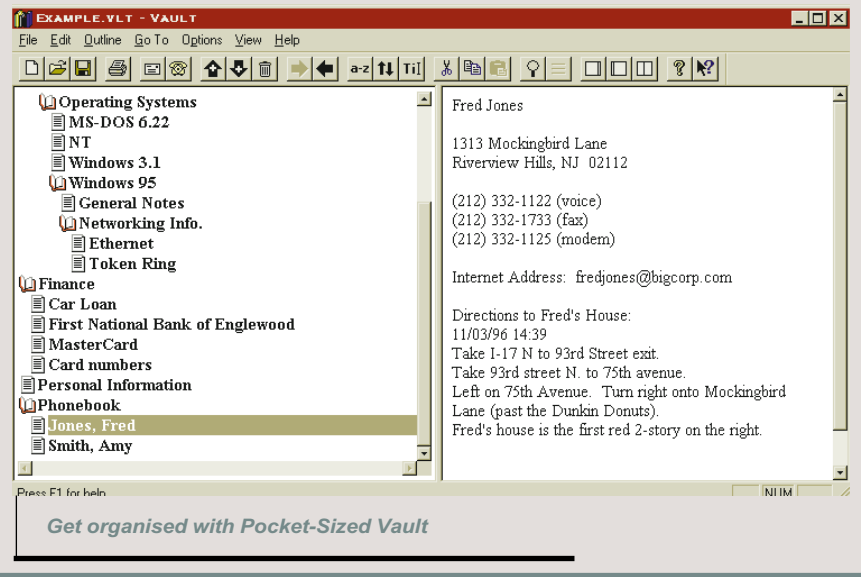
Though I would dearly love to share this with you in its entirety, there are a few small problems. Firstly, Peter's .REG file runs to 80Kb — when I double-clicked on it to add it to the Registry (yes, damn right I backed up first!) Windows complained it was unable to import the file. In fact, it had imported most of it but there is, according to my usual reliable sources, a 64Kb limit to a registry key. Secondly, the "tip of the day" selection mechanism seems to be capable of handling only 53 entries; the rest get ignored. Thirdly, there is the rather awkward but interesting concept of copyright. Nevertheless, many marks for effort, Peter. ● Perhaps other readers would like to share their own favourite tips of the day? I'll include the funniest printable ones in a future column.



Is that a Vault in your pocket or are you just organised to see me?

Despite not being able to include "Liff" (see adjacent panel, "Get a Liff") on this month's cover-mounted CD-ROM, I'm not going to leave you empty-handed. If you've ever used a decent word processor, you'll know what an outliner is. If you haven't, it's a device to help you order your thoughts into a hierarchy of headings, sub-headings and body text. You can then expand or collapse a branch, or the whole outline, rather like an Explorer tree.

Pocket-Sized Software has produced Vault, a Windows 95 (and NT) outliner. There are two panes, with the outline "tree" on the left and the text for the highlighted item on the right. If a branch of the tree has sub-headings, then it appears as a book — bottom levels appear as a sheet. It has all sorts of clever touches for adding and rearranging items, and has a hook into the Windows phone dialler. The sample file doesn't really do it justice as there all sorts of things you could do here to create to-do lists, address books and so on. The real attraction is that you can mix and match all kinds of information. It doesn't, alas, support OLE so you can't include spreadsheet tables or pictures, but apart from that is an excellent little application. It's shareware, registration is \$15 from Pocket-Sized Software in the US (see our contacts panel, page 268). I don't have an email, FTP or Web address but it's on this month's CD-ROM as Vlt32.zip.



pose information security or privacy concerns if you distribute electronic versions of files created using these applications." They aren't kidding. Have you just had second thoughts and deleted that angry resignation letter you wrote, but never sent, to your boss, calling him/her every name under the sun? It could survive and turn up in the most unexpected places, such as your Excel departmental budget projections. Likewise, your deleted (or so you thought) list of dodgy Web sites, the novel you've been writing in the firm's time and any other dark secrets you might be harbouring. Or, if you're emailing files as binary attachments, you could be freely distributing your company's deepest secrets.

At the time of writing, the Service Pack was available free from Microsoft's Web site (www.microsoft.com/windows) but by the time you read this it should be available on disk from Microsoft UK. This doesn't happen under Windows NT but can happen under 3.1 — you need to

contact Microsoft to get the "c" releases of Word 6.0, Excel 5.0 or PowerPoint 4.0 if you don't already have them.

Capital offence

Long filenames — don't you just love them? My particular *bête noire* is the way Word 7 defaults to giving a file the name of the first line in the template. So, every month, I start this column anew from a template that begins "Hands on Windows 95 column for PCW".

I type in the month, and save. It doesn't make any difference whether I add the month at the beginning or the end of the line, the document name is kindly filled in for me with the plain, undated "Hands on Windows 95 column for PCW". I've also found that long filenames have another practical limitation: if you name a file "Letter to Aunt Edith dated April 1996 thanking her for the very nice socks.DOC", you need a lot of screen real estate to see the title in list or details view — though it's rather clever the way in



Cunning curves and clever tricks

● Returning to those “Tips of the Day” for a moment (see “Get a Liff”), if you unticked the “Show this Welcome Screen next time you start Windows” in a moment of exasperation, and now have a nostalgic urge to see those tips again, you can get at them from the Help command on the start menu: double-click on the “Tips & Tricks” book icon, then “Tips of the Day”, then “Viewing the Welcome screen”. A new “Windows Help” window opens: on this, is a button marked “Click to open the Welcome screen” — which it does.

● In the March issue column, I mentioned that you can no longer perform the equivalent of the old “mystery INI file” trick with the registry. With Windows 3.1, any mysterious .INI file cluttering up your Windows directory could be moved to a safe place off the path and if nothing complained, or it wasn’t recreated, then it probably belonged to an application that was no longer installed and thus could be safely deleted.

If you read last June’s *Hands On Windows* column, the name Jason Ozin may ring a bell. He is the creator of that essential Windows 3.1 utility Inst-All, which records changes made to the Windows and System directories, and WIN and System.ini, when you install software.

This time, he points out that I’m wrong. Faced with a mysterious branch in the registry, “you can use the ‘Export Registry File...’ option on the ‘Registry’ Menu of RegEdit and then select ‘Selected Branch’. By default, this will save the selected branch (prior to you deleting it) as an REG extension which can be double clicked to add it once again to the registry at a later stage.”

● If you somehow managed to avoid March ’96 and last September’s columns you might not be aware that the “Send To” folder is one of the most useful folders on your machine, as any shortcuts in there will be added to the right-mouse “Send To” sub-menu. Hence you can send any file to another folder or application regardless of its extension or association.

If your JPEG files are registered to a heavyweight slow-loading image processor, then you can bypass this by sending them to something like Paintshop instead of the default “Open”. Or you can send any file to Notepad, and so on. The only problem is that it’s a bit of a hassle to set up — you have to open the ‘Send To’ folder, then the folder containing the application, and drag a shortcut from the latter to the former. Richard Ansell came out with an idea so brilliantly

obvious that I didn’t understand it at first, which is why it has been lying unreported on my desk for several months.

From Explorer, right-drag the “Send To” folder on to the desktop and “Create shortcut here”. Then, right-drag it back into the “Send To” folder and chose “Move”. Rename it “This menu”. Subsequently, any program file on which you right-click and send to “This menu” will have a permanent shortcut added to the menu.

One drawback is: don’t try this with folders. It will copy or move the entire folder and its contents, so it’s probably best used as a temporary measure to set up “Send To” shortcuts.

● Here’s a tip for those trying to sort out modem problems. Windows 3.1 Terminal was just that: you could run the program and start typing command strings straight to the modem — ATZ, for example, to reset it, and ATDT 1234 to tone-dial 1234. With the new Windows Hyperterminal, this seems impossible as it asks you for a name and phone number before it will let you start. In fact, it isn’t. The trick is to choose an icon and give the session a name, just to play along, then when the “Phone Number” dialogue appears go straight to the bottom box — “Connect using”. Click on the arrow and select “Direct to COM 2” (or whichever port your modem resides at). You can then type away in Hayes-speak and converse directly with your modem.



which other icons get out of the way in large or small icon view.

Another annoyance is the way folders are capitalised, or not. You can create a folder called “abc”, “Abc” or even “ABc”, but not, it would appear, “ABC”. It seems this is because it isn’t a long filename as far as Explorer is concerned. “ABCDEFGHIJ”, however, will display in all-capitals as it’s over the eight-character limit. Curiously, if you do try to create or rename a folder “ABC”, the “long” filename will appear as you intended from the DOS “DIR” command, even though it’s short. If you see what I mean.

If at first you don’t succeed... give up

This month, I had the joyful task of re-installing Windows 95. One day, Windows suddenly decided that from that moment on, it no longer liked my PCI-bus Opti hard disk controller and would be running the File

System in “MSDOS compatibility mode”, which is the long way of saying “slow”: so slow, in fact, that it couldn’t read the “Microsoft Sound” off the hard disk at start-up without pausing for breath in the middle.

So I rounded up the usual suspects. Virus? Mr McAfee, he said “No”. Moreover, booting back to Windows 3.1, whose 32-bit file access tends to fall sick at the slightest suggestion of a boot-sector sniffle, showed this was in excellent health. The Windows 95 Control Panel/System/Device Manager pinned the blame squarely on my startup files. There was an “unknown driver” in Config.sys or Autoexec.bat lousing things up.

This was rather mystifying news, as I didn’t have a Config.sys or an Autoexec.bat. Rebooting with saved and known-to-be-good versions of the Registry and System.ini didn’t help. Neither did making a Boot log and replacing the files shown to “fail” in Bootlog.txt. Nor did

attempting to remove the defective controller from the Device Manager: Windows would lock solid. After scandisking, defragging and various other rituals I gave up and reinstalled Windows (and all my applications) from scratch. I’m pleased to say that the file system is back to its full 32-bit glory, and clearing the accumulated dross of the last few months means not only do I have acres of hard disk space, but Windows now goes like a train once more. I’m still mystified as to what happened, however, and why it should take a complete re-installation to repair it.

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