

16 Moreton Avenue, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2ET

8 December 2014

Dr John Davis
Orchard View
Tye Lane
FLOWTON
Suffolk IP8 4LD

Dear John,

Catherine and I were so sorry to hear what you are going through at the moment and we wanted to send you our good wishes for a speedy remission.

As you will know, not being a society member any more, I do not receive copies of the Newsletter but an 'outlying' BSS member from the NE contacted me over the weekend to read me Frank's appeal for anyone having experience of MS Publisher to get in touch.

As you know I have had a fair experience with MS Publisher over the years – though not of course as much as you must have by now! It goes without saying that I will do what I can to help draft any articles that you may care to send me for laying out. I presume that you operate to a standard template, font, colour scheme etc and I presume too that you have a standard PDF format and resolution in which completed articles are stored for later inclusion onto DVD. If you can send me details, I can easily set up things here. Thereafter if you are able to email the text and images of a few articles each quarter I should be able to help. I cannot say that I can commit to processing all articles of each edition nor that I can do this on anything other than an emergency basis, but if you indicate what's needed I shall certainly do my best. Currently I only possess, in my own name, MSP 2007, (having deleted the BSS-provided MSP 2010 when I resigned) however I doubt that will be too limiting.

As far as getting others to volunteer is concerned, I was dismayed to hear that the message in the Newsletter seemingly made absolutely no mention of society help with software provision or even help with local professional training courses.

I trust that if they are really serious to assist you, then the council will indeed take steps to make use of the Microsoft charity purchase system to make up to date Microsoft Publisher software – and perhaps even hardware and/or local training by any of the many companies that now exist all over the UK. After all, this is just one of the reasons why, years ago, BSS standardised upon Microsoft products as a part of the Society's *Disaster Recovery Policy* that I helped to design. All this was after that debacle where individuals were choosing to use whatever software and hardware they liked. You will recall that we also took steps to offer training in Microsoft software to any who were interested and I for one recall that I did a little to introduce Microsoft Publisher and Powerpoint to a few including the 'outlying' member who contacted me. I must still have their names somewhere.

I trust we are not going to see those on the present Council who might have little or no experience in Microsoft products trying to suggest a change of publishing software. For those like me who come from the IT industry, the lack of clear and sensible standardisation is anathema. Yet, as anyone who has supervised and managed generations of novice programmers will testify, it is a common – and incidentally very revealing - reaction of the inexperienced when asked to make a change to an existing

program to declare that it would be easier to start again. That is of course, not an indicator of competence.

Microsoft software as a whole is readily available, consistent between its packages, advantageously available to charities, widely understood, readily supported by training organisations local to every UK BSS member, available to the public as well as to business and it is the one software suite that BSS Members are most likely to know and be able to obtain relatively cheaply product by product. As we saw before, choosing other packages, isolates the Society when any sort of crisis occurs.

I am not sure if I heard correctly on the phone but I thought that the Newsletter suggested that a committee might now take over publication of the Bulletin with ideas of peer review. Clearly those suggesting this can have little memory of Charles Aked's efforts at so-called peer review in a similar venture. How the wheel comes round! BSS is not a scientific entity where careers depend on the numbers of valid publications. It is one where those with something to say on the matter of dialling can be encouraged to contribute – whether that contribution be scientific, mathematical, artistic, etymological or poetic .

Of course any obvious errors need to be removed and a level of consistency imposed but, as Charles quickly discovered, any refusal causes offence, and the subsequent inter-member grapevine quickly leads to a dearth of submitted papers.

If I may say so, you have managed to maintain that delicate balance in a quite exemplary way. It really does need one person to have the final say – and that should be one of the Specialists. A committee of six (or whatever is being suggested) would be a mistake for that. As Margaret once told me, it is the case that a paper which gets published containing some contentious or erroneous elements can actually promote further articles in a publication like the Bulletin. I would most certainly counsel caution about the sort of formalisation of article selection that appears now to be suggested.

Whatever is decided it should be something that permits your approach to be replicated as far as may be possible with a spread load and preferably with the opportunity for you be involved as much as you may be able.

Catherine and I send you our very best wishes and I stand ready to help you in any way I can. Just say the word. Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick

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