

## Cairngorm Club Newsletters

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The October 2013 Club Newsletter posed a question "How are we doing?" and invited comment on whether the format of the Newsletter could be improved. This had me realising just how much the Club Newsletter, and more especially the means of producing and distributing it, had changed during the 25 years when I was responsible for it as Club Secretary (1972 to 1997), with this possibly scarcely known outside the Shirreffs household. So, for any historical interest that it may have, this is what I remember now.

When I took over from Eric Johnston in 1972, the Newsletter, then two issues a year, was professionally printed. The secretary had to assemble clean typed copy, take it to the printers (no disks, no e-mails, not even faxes in those days) and then await a proof for checking before the printing was done. The secretary also had to organise addressed envelopes and take them to the printers, who then added the printed material and dealt with the posting. Eric, I think, relied on handwriting the addresses on the envelopes, but I invented a primitive form of labelling based on a typed master list.

In 1972 the only way (at least for me) to assemble clean copy for the printers was to type it with a manual typewriter – and to retype it if it had to be changed. I did my own typing for quite a time, but later (perhaps when electric typewriters came on the scene) I managed to enlist help at the office. Later still, electric typewriters evolved into word processors, with which one had the luxury of savings one's work for sprucing up or adding to later, and taking a fair copy when it was all ready. This brought the added benefit that the material which recurred from year to year could be regenerated with just a little editing, no wholesale blitz of fresh typing.

Somewhere along the line, possibly in the early 1980s, I acquired a BBC B computer, with all of 32KB of memory, but this was still no help with generating Newsletter material, as my printed output was limited to a dot matrix printer. Later though, after moving on to one of the successors of the BBC B, I had a desktop publishing facility at my disposal, and an enhanced printer, and I could generate presentable printed output, with occasional boxes or even images,

that could be copied rather than printed. Before this we had in fact switched to professional photocopying, when our longstanding printers had closed down and the firm which took over did not last long.

The addressing of envelopes followed a different course of evolution. Quite early on I managed to get a mailing version of the members' list typed in a three-column format on foolscap paper. For a mailing I would take a copy of this list (with the original preserved intact), guillotine the copy sheets into three columns, and then cut these by scissors or guillotine to give "labels" which were laboriously sellotaped onto the envelopes. As members were added or deleted or changed address, the superseded entries in my master list were struck out and the new ones added at the end – until such time as the list became too unwieldy and time could be found to retype it. The advent of office word processors might have helped simplify this form of list-keeping, but in fact that was where my BBC B or its successor came into its own. Having learned how to do programming in BBC Basic I devised a program with which, even within the severe memory constraints of the machine, I could record all of my membership info (including extras such as membership type, years of admission and past or current committee service) and print (at first with the old dot matrix printer and continuous stationery and then with something better) simple lists with as much or as little information as I wanted, and, most importantly in relation to Newsletters, name and address labels. I was in fact rather proud of my little program, which underwent constant enhancement in conjunction with me generating a counterpart for domestic purposes, and in many ways went beyond anything that I can achieve now with standard packages such as Word or Excel.

During all this time, there was little if any conscious thought of reviewing the content or presentation of the Newsletter. The main thing was to produce it, covering what it had to cover, in a way that was within the resources available, and to get it out when it was needed. The resources and production methods have changed enormously since I was doing the Newsletter and I am sure that they will continue to change in years to come, but aside from that there seems to be no cause to change for change's sake.