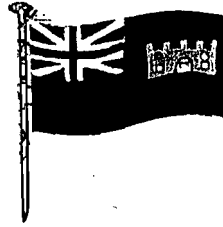


Customs & Excise History Network

Newsletter No. 20



Spring/Summer 2006

Computers now control or have an influence over all aspects of twenty-first century life, no more so than in the offices of HM Revenue & Customs, where every desk has a computer and e-mail constantly demands our immediate attention. I therefore thought it appropriate to include this article sent in by Dave Dobbin, who has served as a programmer and in various mainframe support areas within the Department since July 1971.

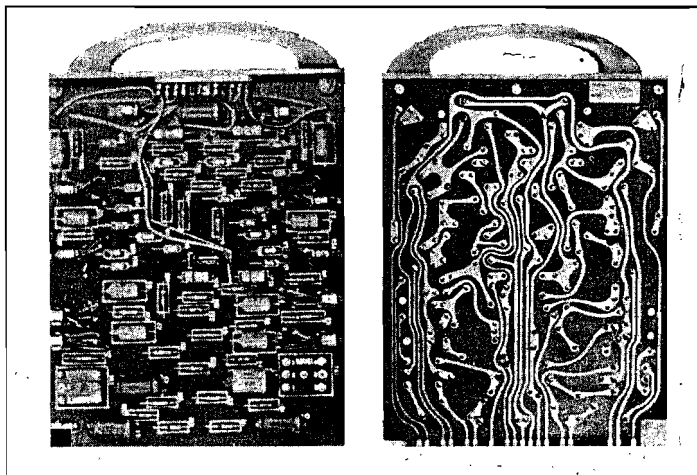
A Brief History of Customs Computing

BC (Before Computers)

By the 1920s, the Statistical Office (SO) of HM Customs and Excise needed a way of processing large amounts of data quickly. Since 1696, records of Imports and Exports were recorded manually in ledgers and this system remained, more or less, unchanged. The increasing trade and the need to analyse the figures in different ways was causing serious delays.

As long ago as 1910 HM Customs and Excise were thinking of automating the collection of trade statistics when a Mr Reade and his Principal visited the offices of the Hollerith Company, and also the Census Office who had experimented with punched cards in 1901.

Reade suggested that the SO should experiment with punched card equipment, starting with the Annual Statement of Trade, and see if it could be used for the Monthly Account and finally daily registration. This was accepted as a good idea, but nothing further was done because of changes that were due to take place in the way some of the figures were going to be calculated.



Whether or not the prospect, and the occurrence, of the First World War also had an influence, we don't know, but it was not until October 1921 that the first experiment started, following a Treasury inspection of the SO in 1920.

Initially the experiment was planned for six months, but some of the staff were reported to be indulging in deliberate wrecking of the experiment and some of the decision makers were reluctant to

admit it was a success. After nine months, the British Tabulating Machine Co Ltd wrote to the Controller of the Stationery Office expressing concern about the length of the 'experiment'.

This led to pressure on the Department from the Treasury and eventually the decision was taken to extend the use of machines to other areas of the SO but it was not until 22 April

1927 that the 'experiment' ended. By then, British Exports had been the first figures to be tabulated in 1922, followed by Returns of Imports in 1924, and Re-exports and Coal in 1925.

The hand punches and verifiers in use in Customs were initially manual ones and it wasn't until 1930 that electric hand punches were brought into use. It was also noted that some of the women found it hard to adjust to the newer devices, which required a more delicate touch, and were causing damage by continuing to press the keys as if they were still manual machines.

By 1963, it was realised that the SO tabulators were not coping with the workload and another solution had to be found. By this time computers had become available and the far-sighted J Lyons and Co, who ran a national chain of tea bars and Corner Houses, had pioneered their use in business.

A brief guide to the first business computer

J Lyons & Co (or 'Joe Lyons' as they were usually known) had seen the potential for business computers and had approached all the organisations that made them in order to buy one. They were sent away empty-handed as the computer manufacturers thought that computers would only be of use to the scientific and military community - they couldn't see any market for business computing.

Not to be deterred, Lyons decided to build their own stored-programme computer. They managed to attract and bring together electronics experts, mainly from Post Office Telephones (the fore-runner of British Telecom), and built the first system designed for running business systems. They named it LEO (standing for Lyons Electronic Offices), the company they formed in 1948 to make and sell business computers. LEO 1 did sterling service for many years running Lyons' accounting systems and also calculating recipes for the many cakes that the company produced.

Once the potential for business computers had been recognised, other organisations began to find uses. Post Office Telephones were early users and so were the Ford Motor Company at Dagenham. There were two further major developments to the LEO computer, producing the LEO 2 and LEO 3 ranges of computers. This is where Customs enters the picture once again..... **To be continued**

Old Departmental Instructions #1 - Official Vehicles (1953)

17. *Maintenance of vehicles by the General Post Office.* - The General Post Office, through their regional transport organisation, have undertaken the maintenance of departmental vehicles. This includes the supply of petrol, oil and spare parts, inspection, repair and overhaul as necessary and, where available, cleaning and lubrication, but the Coast Preventive Man cleans and lubricates his official motor cycle [Ed. Either a Matchless 350cc. or BSA 250 cc. at this time].

(e) Cleaning of motor cycles - A Coast Preventive Man is responsible for cleaning his departmental motor cycle and for this purpose he may be authorised to obtain the following items of cleaning gear from the G.P.O. garage or workshop at which his motor cycle is normally serviced:-

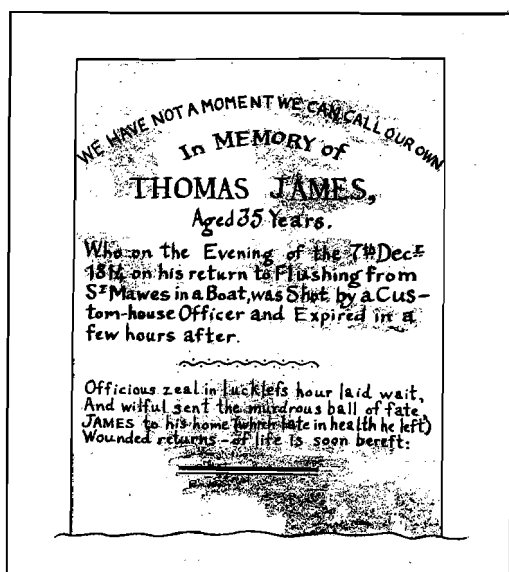
Paraffin and cotton rags (not cotton waste) may be supplied in small quantities as required,

upon production by the Coast Preventive Man of the Petrol Authorisation form carried with each motor cycle. One engine cleaning brush (size 2) and one spoke cleaning brush (size 5) for each motor cycle, will also be supplied on production of a written request signed by a senior official (e.g. Chief Preventive Officer or Waterguard Superintendent) and a receipt given if required. All items of cleaning gear, with date of receipt, should be recorded in the vehicle log book.

Particular attention is drawn to the fact that in no circumstances is petrol to be used for washing and cleaning purposes and that paraffin must not be used for cleaning paintwork.

For the men's "comfort" whilst driving, the machines were supplied with windscreens and leg-shields, but individuals could ask for these to be removed, the C.P.O. then having to report to the Board where said items were to be stored when not in use. It seems everyone had to report everything to the Board in those days!

Grave Smuggling Tales # 4 - Thomas James



An account of the circumstances surrounding James's death appeared in the Royal Cornwall Gazette on December 10 1814. Note the way that the stonemason has carved the word "Customs", with the line reading, "Shot by a cus..!"

" The following may be relied upon as an authentic account of the late melancholy catastrophe near Falmouth. About nine o'clock in the evening of Wednesday last, as Mr. Thomas James, Mr. Richard Kempe, and the son of the latter, were returning to Flushing in a small boat from St. Mawes, where they had been spending the day. They were pursued by another boat with four men, which they had seen setting off

from the shore, although unconscious of their object. The pursuers hailed them, but before they had time to reply, a musket or blunderbuss was discharged into their boat, and the other was instantly alongside. Mr. Kempe, son, asked what they meant by firing without giving them time to answer their hail, when one of the persons in the large boat stood up and said, "My name is Painter: I am a custom-house officer, and had a right to bring you to." They proceeded to search their boat, in which however, they found some pilchards. The custom-house officers then rowed off. During the above conversation and search, James remained sitting up in the boat, without feeling himself wounded, but soon after he said to Kempe that he feared the cartridge (for they had no idea of a shot having been fired) had injured him, and he fell, in a state of insensibility, in the boat. On examination, it was found that a ball had entered his left side, below the ribs, and gone out in an oblique direction, at the back. Kempe called to the persons who had just left him, and told them they had wounded a man, but they paid no attention to him, although they must have heard him, the distance between them being very little. James was conveyed to his home, where he languished about 12 hours in great agony, when he expired. He was an

honest and industrious man, much respected, and has left a disconsolate widow to lament his loss. An inquest was held on the body this day (Friday) before Thomas Clutterbuck, Esq, Coroner, when the jury, after a long and patient

investigation, returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person unknown. Two of the party, named Carne and Odgers, are in custody; Painter and another have escaped, but strict search is making after them."

News from the Museum

Exciting and dynamic developments are taking place at the Museum.

The scheme design for the new gallery has been presented to National Museums Liverpool and HM Revenue and Customs. A couple of images from the scheme design can be seen inserted in this Newsletter giving us a glimpse of what it may look like. The gallery will be rooted in the present and supported by the past, arranged in a thematic way. It will cover a cross section of the work carried out by the new department and is being designed by *At Large*.

The new gallery with its new name will be in a new place - the basement of the Merseyside Maritime Museum.

Key dates:

History gallery closes	19th June 2006
Contemporary gallery closes	October 2007
New gallery (with its new name) is planned to open	Spring 2008

'Enforcement, Enforcement, Enforcement'

This is the title of a book produced by a former Senior Investigation Officer, Roy Brisley. The book relates the history of large-scale smuggling and other frauds, from the 1275 Wool Act to date, and the development of the investigative body in HMC&E to combat criminal activities, from the latter part of the 19th Century to its break up this year. It provides a wealth of information about the Riding Officers and their work, the Special Duty Staff, Special Service Staff, Special Inquiry Service, Investigation Branch, Investigation Division, NIS and Law Enforcement. Investigations of particular interest and their outcomes have been included, as have thumbnail histories of commodities that have been the subjects of major fraud. The book provides a record of the steady growth and achievements of an exceptional organisation that earned worldwide respect and admiration. It comprises 180 text pages, including 60 illustrations. Described by former Chief Investigation Officer Richard Lawrence as "a rattling good read", copies are now available directly from Roy at £10. For the time being, at least, he will despatch copies free of packing and postage charges. **Orders, with cheques made out to R S Brisley should be sent to 12 Devonshire Avenue, Sutton, Surrey, SM2 5JL.**

You can obtain a complete set of back numbers, in a thermal binding cover, by sending an A4 SAE plus £3.90 to **John Pink, 6 Anns Court, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey, KT6 4BE**

If you would like to be on the mailing list, please drop a line to: **Karen Bradbury, Curator, HM Customs & Excise National Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool, L3 4AQ**

Please send any items for the newsletter to: Mark Bullen HM Revenue & Customs, 2 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EJ (Tel: 0117 372 2146) or e-mail Mark at: **mark.bullen@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk**