

Chapter 07

1963 to 1973

English Electric Computing Services Ltd. and its successors.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 6, I had this rather wild notion that I could make a career in the computer industry, but could not persuade ICI to transfer me to their IBM section. As I had worked as a clerk for 10 years, I hardly had the background to convince any employer that I was the whizzkid they had been looking for. My academic record was not outstanding although I had passed the Higher School Certificate at Ordinary level in Maths, Physics and Geography. My ICI salary was now £1194, maximum £1310, a good remuneration for those days.

Then fate took a hand. In the Liverpool Evening News I noticed an advertisement by the English Electric Company inviting prospective programmers to informal interviews at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool at 7pm that evening. Without further ado I drove to Liverpool only to find 70 other hopefuls crammed into an hotel room. Mr Bannister, the EE personnel manager, announced that they could not possibly interview everyone but if those present would enter their details on a sheet of paper they would see as many as possible. The others would be contacted later. One person was invited in for interview, and when he re-appeared I shot across the room and was through the door before anyone else could move. Thus I got my interview, the first of five.

The problem was that I was aged 38 and they had never recruited a trainee of that age before. They tried to convince me that, as a family man, I was taking a great risk moving from a safe, well-paid job. However, I scored well in the IBM tests and emphasised that my commercial experience would be of great value when writing accounting and payroll programs. What probably clinched it was that I wrote to The Sunday Times for an appraisal of the merger currently proceeding between English Electric Computing Services Ltd. and J Lyons. I presented their favourable reply in my third interview with John Bannister and he was so surprised that someone had the temerity to question the soundness of EE that I think he gave me the job. So on the 9th August 1963 I accepted the post of commercial programmer at a salary of £1250 per annum.

ICI tried to keep me to the three months notice in my contract of employment, but eventually agreed that I could leave on the 30th September, 1963. I lost my pension rights, receiving instead a lump sum of £300 after paying off our housing loan. This I invested in a short term life insurance policy which would have given my family a living wage if I died within two years. As another precaution I fitted a seat belt to the drivers seat of our A35. The round trip to Kidsgrove was 70 miles and so the risk of an accident had increased. Having taken these steps I started work as a programmer in the Commercial and Systems Department at Kidsgrove on the 1st October, 1963.

The next programming course did not start for 8 weeks, so I was given a programming manual, told to do the exercises and shout if I needed help.

The computer we used was called the KDP10, later upgraded to the KDF 8, and cost £500,000 to build. It was a copy of the American RCA500, and had 96k of transistor memory, tape drives and offline chain printers. There were no hard disc drives so all data had to be processed sequentially. Its power was roughly equivalent to a personal computer of 1985 vintage.

Across the road, the Deuce Mk.IIA valve machine was still working. A friend of mine who programmed it alleges that one of the engineers used to test the thousands of valves by tapping them with a metal rod. He claimed that he could identify a failing unit by the tone it emitted.

Our manager was Norman Dowell, an ex-university boffin who was largely ignored. There were eight commercial programmers and I joined Geoff Evans and Phil Jones to form the payroll team. They had previously worked for British Rail on an Elliot 803 which was programmed by inserting copper rivets into insulated cards. Geoff Evans and I later bought adjacent semi-detached houses at Nos 10 and 12 Rothesay Aenue, Newcastle, price £3500, mortgage £17 per month. He was the one with the telephone, so all late night call-outs went to him until we got a shared line. I suffered from severe haemorrhoids at this time and used to ease the pain during the night by leaning against the computer console. It was a massive affair, with hundreds of flashing lights and buttons. One them had the letters SORE on it and many years later, when the computer was scrapped, Geoff Evans rescued the button and sent it to me as reminder of those nights we spent together.

We programmed in Octal (0 to 7) each number representing a group of four binary digits. The days of mnemonic systems and COBOL were yet to come. The operating system required only 300 characters and we were allowed to change it to suit our requirements. Input was by paper tape or cards and we were allowed one testing run per night. This was a great incentive to check your coding very, very thoroughly.

Well before the official programming course was due to start, Phil Jones, our team leader, had decided that we were going to start writing the first multifile payroll to be launched in the UK, possibly in the world. We didn't bother to tell Mr Dowell, and he never asked what we were doing. We named the program MULTIPAY. I was responsible for the paper tape and card input program and within six months we had not only written a complete payroll program but also gone out into the potteries and sold the system to several companies. Aynsleys Ltd. were first, and the only comment we got from our boss the morning after the first computer run was "Why was the payroll delivered half an hour late. They've been on the phone complaining?". After being up for most of the night tending our baby we were a little deflated. Shortly after this, Mr Dowell returned to the academic world and we obtained a more commercially minded manager.

We had estimated that the maximum number of payrolls that we could complete in one computer run would be 10, (i.e. digits 0 to 9). However the program was so successful that within a short time we had to increase the files to 36 by using alpha/numeric digits. It wasn't long before we were processing two files on a Tuesday night and one on a Wednesday night. We also developed a monthly payroll which was equally successful.

(I recently found the folder containing the original payroll program that I wrote in 1963 and it now resides in the National Computer Archives at Manchester University.)

In parallel with this work we also wrote other commercial programs. We became a major Share Registration bureau, spent a fortune on a Quantity Surveying package which collapsed under its own complexity, provided computing services for TV when a General Election took place and wrote many invoice analysis and general commercial and accounting programs for major companies

In 1967 I installed 25 payroll systems single handed. At that time I reported to Wally Somerfield, the Operations Manager. At my annual salary review he awarded an increase of £38 per year and commented that it was plenty for “pampered programmers”. We were more highly paid than his operators and he believed that all we achieved with complex programs he could do with punched card tabulators/sorters. I asked to see the Managing Director, who promptly awarded me an additional £60 per annum.

We must have been very dedicated in those early days. We frequently worked through the night and at weekends. Our service contract meant just that. We were there to serve the company and received no overtime pay. Small meal allowances were given and 6d per mile paid for car use outside normal working hours.

When English Electric and the General Electric Companies joined together in 1969 I was put in charge of the merger and converted 31 share registers into 11 new ones using three different computers and a staff of two programmers. I worked 7 days a week for 13 weeks and received an annual rise of £150 for my efforts. I was grateful that I was allowed two days off for Christmas.

Mergers resulted in several changes of name from 1963 to 1973.

English Electric Computing Services
English Electric Leo
English Electric Leo Marconi (+ Elliott Computers later)
International Computing Services Ltd (a merger with the ICT bureau)
BARIC (When Barclays Bank took a 40 % share of the company)

Within ten years the bureau had expanded from one small office at Kidsgrove to a company employing over a 1000 staff in Kidsgrove, Manchester, Glasgow , London, Birmingham, Bristol, Belfast and Dublin.

A major problem was the accumulation of thirteen types of incompatible computers and their associated programs. However the business gradually became rationalised, old computers were retired, and by the time I left in 1973 it was reasonably profitable. But no-one at the time realised what an impact the Personal Computer was going to have on the bureau business.

I progressed slowly through the ranks.

October	1963	Started as a commercial programmer.	£1275
April	1967	Section Head, Job Installation group. (Responsible for the installation of all commercial programs)	£1850
April	1968	Chief, Job Installation, including responsibility for running Share Registration Dept.	£1925
February	1969	Title now Chief (Production) Installation	£2075
May	1969	Appointed Product Planner responsible for high level development of commercial programs. (I now had a car parking space on the management car park, so was I beginning to make my mark?).	
October	1970	Appointed Senior Product Planner	£2756
April	1971	Warned of move to London in 1972 (Cancelled May 1972)	£3094
October	1972	Salary increase.	£3252
April	1973	Product Planning department closed down. Offered job as Chief of Applications, Systems, in the Payroll Product department. This was a lower grade so I refused it.	
May	1973	Contacted friends in Barclays Bank and was eventually offered post as assistant project controller on the Barclaycard project.	
June	1973	Letter of resignation. Left Baric 31st July	

I could not have coped with the stresses of the computer world without the tolerance of Winn. Long hours, late nights and early morning call outs sometimes made me tired and grumpy even though I enjoyed the challenges that computing had brought to my life. In addition Win had to shoulder most of the burden of bringing up two children, one still suffering from frequent asthma attacks, and then later the trauma of the teenage years. We say trauma, but in reality our offspring were no different from any other teenagers. They

adopted the standards of the swinging sixties and have survived to face the same problems in their marriages and families. They have given us six grandchildren who are all healthy, intelligent and a source of great pride to us.

Win was not well for several years, suffering from blackouts and other problems, but eventually a hysterectomy helped to restore normality. Shortly after we moved to Newcastle under Lyme Winn became an Avon lady. She enjoyed meeting people but the income did not justify the long hours involved. Later she joined me at Baric, working in the records department, and travelling to work in her Austin A30, acquired from a friend for £30. This car was later replaced by an Austin A35 Countryman.

The later years at Baric were overshadowed by a tragic family split, which was not resolved until 1985. Sad though it was, it seems to have made family bonds even stronger than they might have been.

Lyn did not shine at the Orme Girls School. However, In spite of her asthma, she was a very determined girl, and in her teens found jobs in the summer holidays. One summer she worked in the share registration department at Baric and earned enough to go on a Mediterranean School cruise. After A levels she secured a place at Crewe Training College, passed her diploma, and proved to be a very able Junior School teacher. She married Richard Smolenski in 1972 and when the family arrived a few years later she devoted herself to being a housewife, not only in England but in South Africa and Denmark following her husband's career. She has now returned to teaching (1990) and runs adult classes in patchwork and quilting in Alsager.

Barry attended Newcastle High School. His academic achievements were variable, but he liked Maths and Physics and excelled at Engineering Design. His A level results did not qualify him for a place at University, but he studied for a further year at the Newcastle College for Further Education and his greatly improved A Levels got him a place at Salford University. He commented at the time that the College treated him like an adult, the High School did not. He not only got a degree in Mechanical Engineering (1977) but made quite a reputation for himself as a parachutist, achieving high places in the British National Championships.

In 1971 we celebrated our Silver Wedding Anniversary with family and friends at the Post House Hotel, Clayton. This was followed by a five

day holiday at Arenal, the Majorcan Blackpool. The cost for five days was £25 including flight and full board, but of course it **was** in November. However the sun shone, there were but a few showers and we enjoyed the company of another couple spending their first holiday away from their family.

In 1973 I was on the move again. As mentioned earlier I had a dispute with BARIC over my terms of service. As a founder member of the company I refused to be down graded and so looked elsewhere. Barclays Bank had moved their Management Services Department to Radbroke Hall, near Knutsford in 1972, and I approached my contacts in the payroll department. The personnel department were very slow in replying to my application and I eventually discovered that my papers had been lost. Not a very auspicious start. However, I had the usual interviews, gradually being passed up the chain of command until I was summoned to London for an interview with two General Managers. When I arrived at Euston station I decided to add the final touch to my appearance. I went into Steiner's hairdressing salon and had the most expensive haircut available. I not only looked good, I smelt good **and I got the job**. I was now aged 48.