

Issue 225

SUMMER 2024

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP



HOT KEY

JULY 2024

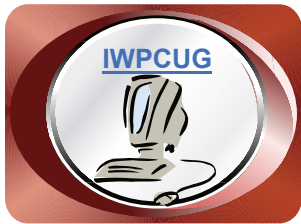


Attendees at the BBQ held on 3rd July, hosted by David Groom

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The Isle of Wight Personal Computer User Group

We welcome anyone who has an interest in computers and related technology and what you can do with them.

We are a group which seeks to exchange ideas and new information.

Membership is £12 per annum

Our meetings are normally held on the first Wednesday of each month from 7.00 to 9.00 pm. Until further notice these will be held online via Zoom.

Visitors are always welcome.

If you would like to know more about us, you are most welcome to come along to one of our meetings, or you can contact one of our Committee Members listed on page 3.

The Club web site address is www.iwpcug.org

We also have an e-group discussion area on

Groups.io: <https://groups.io/g/iwpcug>

Details of how to join are on page 12.



FUTURE MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
3 July	Summer BBQ	
7 August	No meeting	
4 September	TBA	Jonathan Burt

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman : David Groom

Secretary : **position unfilled**

Treasurer : Mike Hoar

Membership and Database Secretary : Roger Skidmore

Committee Member : Steve Sutters

Committee Member: Sven Alleblas

Committee Member : Susanne Bone

Treasury Supervisor : Phil Rogers

Note

**Contact details removed prior to
publishing on the internet**

Suggestions for new events, topics or speakers for talks are always welcome.

Please contact Steve Sutters, or any committee member, with your ideas. If necessary we may be able to find a speaker for your subject.

Chairmans Report

Firstly thank you to everyone who came along to the club BBQ at the start of July. Particular thanks go to Peter who came across from Eastleigh especially for the event. Although the weather wasn't as good as it could have been it certainly was better than what we've experienced on many of the evenings since! Having had to cancel the BBQ's in the previous two years it was nice to be able to go ahead this year.

Apologies for a few small gaps on the pages of this issue, although I have at least managed to produce a summer issue of HotKey which is more than I did last year.

A reminder that we are not holding a meeting in August, so we will next meet online in September when Jonathan Burt will be giving us a talk. Although we have no current speakers for the remainder of the year hopefully we can find someone to talk about something.

David Groom

Affinity Software Free Trial

I've written in past editions of HotKey about Affinity software, their photo editor, vector graphics design software, and the publisher software (which I use to produce HotKey). I have recently had my attention drawn to the fact that Affinity are currently offering a six month free trail of their software, see <https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/trial/> .

David Groom

That Itch Again - part 2

- sequel to Part 1 which appeared in April 2024 HotKey.

Well, moderately-fast experimental PC now assembled. Apart from wanting to get constructive, I also wanted to see how cross-compatible software builds could be across hardware platforms. It was instructive to find that a basic Linux Mint installation designed to suit Ukrainian refugees, set up on one PC, would work in almost any other refurbished laptop, regardless of hardware configuration.

So my hobby-build was Intel/Radeon rather than my office PC which is AMD/Nvidia. But it took very little fiddling with graphic drivers to find perfect compatibility (using a cloned backup drive). All well, so far. You're not supposed to be able to do this but it seems to work - probably a tribute to versatile operating system design and the convergence of graphic cards on to just two main families.

I used an Asus Prime B760M-A W-Fi micro-ATX motherboard with Crucial 8Gb x 2 DDR5 RAM and Asus (Radeon AMD) RX 6400 Phoenix graphics with 4Gb RAM. (Micro-ATX format is all the home user needs these days).

And a CiT Classic Micro Mid-Tower Case - Black with added Corsair 620W PSU. Note that a slim mATX case will not take a full height tower cooler. And an essential part of messing around is a dual front-loading hard disc caddy – see image.

Because many recycled laptops are elderly and support the old MBR file system my new system had to be legacy-friendly. In modern BIOS terms this means offering "CSM" mode and this mode is not supported with CPU integrated graphics. The CPU was therefore an Intel Core i5 13400F and the "F" means it does not have integrated graphics. "13" means 13th generation. An additional "K" suffix would mean more over-clocking tweaks are possible.

This is a pale shadow of Jonathan Burt's system which had an i9 FK processor with a much more powerful graphics card and much more RAM.



Things I like about the new PC: The case, which is modest and optimally functional; the upgraded modular 620W Corsair power supply which just powerful enough and conveniently part modular (the 400W PSU supplied was replaced). I regard the front-loading twin SSD caddy as vital - I just wish they did one for NVMe hard drives in M.2 format. I very much like the motherboard and its associated BIOS control panel which even I can partly understand. Obviously the CSM/Legacy capability. And this board also has legacy parallel and serial headers to remind me of the good old days of parallel printers and serial mice.

I like that I used threaded metal stand-off spacer nuts to hold the motherboard rather than those awful plastic clips that you can't undo - better for removing the board if needed.

I like the graphics card, although it occupies two slots - well any card worth its salt takes up more room, but the Wi-Fi terminals no longer require a slot and nor does the sound output. I was struggling to think of something to put in the remaining two slots to keep the legacy cables at bay. And I like that the supplied Intel cooler fan was very quiet – if a little tricky to fit.

Things I don't like – very little. So far I don't totally understand the optional boot screen (F8) when the same boot drive appears twice. Hm... might be a product of the CSM setting. Probably lists the same drive with GPT or MBR format. Still reading the product manual – something Asus is very good with. I think I would stick with Asus another time.

It's two years since I built my current office AMD PC and things have certainly moved on. Even over the period we were refurbishing laptops for Ukrainians the MBR file system seems to have died out and yielded to GPT. To a dabbler like yours truly, this has been a confusing experience, but we have to go on learning.

Roger Skidmore

VueScan Software (an update)

I last wrote about VueScan Software in April 2022, but I just wanted to explore a few things I did not touch on in that article, or that have been added in more recent versions of the software. VueScan is a program for scanning with flatbed and film scanners, and has particularly good support for older scanners which may not now be supported by the scanner manufacturer. It is regularly updated and now supports over 7,400 scanners.

VueScan has built-in Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for English, Spanish, German, French and Italian, with the option of downloading further 39 language files which contain data about the character set used in each of these languages, and the OCR results will be better if you use them. As I test I decided to scan the cover page of an old edition of HotHey, see image to the side. I thought this might be a challenging test due to the different content on the page, and the fact that the main text was in quite a small font. The output file containing the text created by VueScan contained none of the text items above the image, it contained the text of the contents box, but struggled with the first line of that box. The caption under the photo was captured accurately, and as for the bulk of the text in the two columns below the image the OCR file was 100% accurate. I was most impressed.



A new feature added in 2023 is automatic hole punch removal. A checkbox in the VueScan input dialog box allows you to activate this feature. Apparently the software uses machine learning to recognise a hole punch in a scanned document and then uses inpainting techniques to intelligently fill in the gaps. I tried this scanning a white paper page with black text, and the hole made by a hole punch was indeed removed from the final scanned image. However on a colour page, not only did this feature not work, it actually added an extra small white square into the scanner document.

David Groom

5G Broadband to Replace Landline

In the April 2021 edition of HotKey I wrote an article entitled “Mobile Broadband”, though the article would perhaps have been better titled “4G Broadband” as it wasn't really anything to do with being “mobile”.

Fast forward 3 years and I have very recently taken the steps to replace my landline broadband with 5G Broadband. The catalyst for the switch was receiving a bill from EE (my current broadband and phone provider) for £45 for a months broadband, phone number, and unlimited calls. I also had slow broadband speed, and seemed unable to convince EE there was a problem.

So I searched for a new broadband providers, but being in the process of moving house I did not want to enter in any long term contracts. A quick search on a price comparison web site showed the only monthly deal was from Three using 5G (please note that subsequent searches have provided other options, and I also have now noted that Voipfone do a landline based monthly broadband). I knew Three had a good signal in Bembridge as a friend uses iD Mobile, which is a virtual provider using the Three network.

Looking at unlimited data plans on a rolling one month contract I found iDMobile for £18, Smarty (also based on the Three network) do a similar plan for £20. The Three plan with unlimited data was for £28 per month, but included a 5G router. In my April 2021 article I wrote “If you have a number of devices which need to connect to the internet, and you want mobile broadband to be a long term solution then the best option would be to go for a dedicated mobile broadband router”. 5G routers are expensive to buy, and if 5G broadband doesn't prove a satisfactory solution for me I didn't want another piece of redundant equipment laying around, so it seemed best (at least in the short term) to go with the contact from Three.

I placed my order, and a day later the router and SIM arrived. I put the SIM in the router, and powered it up. The power light came on but nothing else, I thought that maybe I was not in a good location in the house, so I moved the router to a different room, and all lights lit up. However I now believe that the initial reason for the lights not coming on was that it was taking time for the new SIM to be registered on the network, as putting the router back in the first room now gives no problems.

I connected my laptop wirelessly to the router and ran a speedtest, the results were 49.62Mbps download, and 38.36Mbps upload. Compare that to my fixed line broadband from EE of 14.36Mbps download, and 0.88Mbps (on a good day I might get 1.4Mbps upload speeds).

The router supplied was a ZTE MC888, see photos on the back cover. On the back is a socket to plug the power adapter into, two RJ 45 sockets to connect ethernet cables into, an unused phone socket, and a button to press to set up a wireless connection using WPS. Sadly there were no sockets to connect external 5G antennas (Three apparently have in the past supplied a router by Zytel which does have these sockets). External antennas can be directional and coupled with being outside the house would tend to give a stronger signal. Some management of the router is carried out through a web interface, but oddly some functions are only accessible by connecting to the router using an app on a mobile phone.

As I started writing this article it was day 3 of evaluating the 5G connection, the image to the right is a screen shot of the results produced by speedtest app on my mobile phone connecting to the 5G router. As you can see I was getting consistently good results.



The next step was to connect the router to my network using an ethernet cable connected between one of the ports on the back of the new router and a network switch, and then to disconnect my landline broadband from the router. This all went OK, though I currently need to keep the old broadband router in the network (albeit with its modem function disabled), as I need the additional ports on the back of it to connect all my devices to the network.

So that deals with the broadband, but what about the phone number and call package which I currently get from EE? In March 2021 I gave a talk about VoIP telephony. VoIP (Voice Over IP) is the transmission of voice over an internet connection. With the addition of a SIP trunk a VoIP phone can connect to the regular phone network to have calls between the VoIP phone and a mobile or traditional landline based phone. One of the VoIP/SIP providers I looked at in March 2021 was Voipfone. They are currently doing a plan with one UK number, and 100 minutes of calls to a UK landline or mobile number for £5 (plus VAT) per month. I can transfer my existing landline number to Voipfone for free, a process which takes 7-14 days, and will result in the automatic cancellation of my broadband service with EE. I'm going to wait a little longer to evaluate the 5G router connection before taking this step, look out for an article in the next edition of HotKey.

David Groom

TeamUp

If you visit the Shiant Isles (www.shiantisles.net) your stay in their basic bothy will be recorded on a calendar program called "TeamUp" (www.teamup.com).

TeamUp is free for home use and presents like Google Calendar. It will import and export calendar files in standard ICS format or CSV. It can present data in various ways but I find Table mode the most useful - depends what you want, of course. In the u3a we looked at using it for presenting the various group activities but in the end went for a simple hand generated Word table. Nonetheless it would have been useful as the free version supports up to 8 contributing editors and 12 calendar overlays.

This would be ideal for a small club with lots of events supported and edited by a number of contributors who are happy and confident to collaborate in maintaining an online calendar.

Roger Skidmore

Three Programs for Linux

1 Hypnotix is an "IPTV" program which allows you to watch international TV, at least on Linux Mint with which it is bundled. Not had any luck installing it on anything else. Excellent for CNN news program. (It seems there are alternatives for non-Mint users.)

2 Boomaga is a print output manager similar to Windows' "FinePrint". Nowadays, of course, many printers come with their own print managers. Boomaga can print multiple pages on a single page and best of all can print A5 booklets on (preferably) duplex printers.

3 Better Bird – not content with Mozilla's "Thunderbird", someone has written the Better Bird email client. This addresses numerous issues with Thunderbird and has also encouraged improvements in the original. Featured in the June issue of Linux Format.

Roger Skidmore

Plus Email Addressing

I recently gave a talk on email, one thing I did not cover was “a plus address” the reason being I had never actually come across this until this week, even though it has been around for some time.

A “normal” email address takes the form of **dmgroom@iwpcug.org**, where there is a user or account name (in this case “dmgroom”) then the “@” symbol, followed by the domain name” (in this case “iwpcug.org”). A plus email address takes the form of **dmgroom+bbq@iwpcug.org**, note the “+bbq” (known as a tag) after the user name. In order to use plus email address the original email address has to be valid, the +tag value that you add after the username is arbitrary, although regular character restrictions for SMTP email addresses apply (for example, no spaces).

So why might you want to use a plus email address?

One reason might be to allow for better filtering of incoming messages. Using the example above I could set up a mail filtering rule so that any email sent to the address **dmgroom+bbq@iwpcug.org** automatically gets moved to a separate folder in my mail client. Interestingly the host I use for my vectis-webdesign.com emails automatically creates a new folder (named the same as the tag) and routes plus addressed emails into that folder (though I do have the option in the email section of my hosting account to turn off this automatic creation of folders). I can’t see a similar feature on the host which hosts the iwpcug.org domain.

A second reason for using a plus email address is that it might help to avoid spam. If you want to give out your email address to a new organisation, and you are worried about receiving spam from them in the future then use a plus email address. If you start to receive spam from them then either block mail sent to that plus email address, or create a mail rule to automatically delete mail addressed to that plus address. However it should be noted that a dedicated spammer may simply get round this by recognising all plus email addresses, and removing the plus tag and then send the spam emails to your original mailbox.

If you want to use a plus address I would recommend testing it first to see how it works with your particular email host and email software.

David Groom

Disaster Recover and Backups

I hope that we all don't need a reminder about the importance of having some form of back up for our documents and software, and some of us may have an uninterruptible power supply ("UPS") to power out computers, NAS drives and other hardware.

It is important, however, to not only have these things in place, but to test regularly to see that they are working as expected.

For instance how many of us have ever tried to recover something from the backups we do? I'm not sure I ever have, but it is important that I should try as my computer is becoming increasing old, and I can't rely on it working forever!

I was prompted to consider this subject because a few days ago we had a one second power cut while I was sitting at my computer. Despite everything being connected to the UPS the computer immediately went off. It appears my UPS is not functioning properly, most likely the batteries which are supposed to supply power in the event of a mains power failure have themselves failed. The batteries are a lead acid battery type, and don't have an indefinite life. I can't remember when, or even if, I have ever changed them. Luckily replacement batteries are still available, and the £50 cost of replacements will be less than the cost of a new UPS.

David Groom

Joining the Email Discussion Group

Send an email to: iwpcug+subscribe@groups.io, you will receive a confirmation email, follow the instructions in that email, and then wait for your approval request to be approved by one of the moderators.

All members are encouraged to join this group (it's free and private to club members) so you can keep in touch with events and join in with the discussions.

You can also keep in touch by regularly visiting www.iwpcug.org

Password Woes

My mother and I both have Gmail email accounts and I frequently access mine from her computer. One day whilst logging in to my account I accidentally changed her logging in procedure. Not sure what I did (and sure wish I hadn't) because Google became suspicious and wanted to send a security code to my mobile phone (as I used my phone for her email recovery). Trouble was I got one of the numbers wrong and the number Google showed was40 but it should have ended in50 (for my actual phone number). It was no good google sending a security code to the number they had as I could never receive it!

She has had the account for years so it would have been a big problem losing it and having to start a new email account. A week later on my next visit, I realized there was a simple solution. One of the recovery options offered was to type in my mobile number without Google sending a security code to it or to actually use it. Fortunately the only digit I had got wrong was the second to last one (which Google showed) so with that alteration I typed my mobile number and immediately the security question was answered correctly. Google then allowed me to log in if the correct email address and password was entered. Unfortunately after typing these in Google then gave an error message of wrong email address or password. She has always had the same email address so she must have made a mistake with the password, and it turned out that she had written 2 different passwords in 2 notebooks and had entered the earlier (redundant) password. She then tried the other one and her emails appeared and account was recovered. Phew!

Clear lessons are one should be very careful with security questions to avoid typos, passwords kept in one place and old ones deleted!

David Grooms advice was to not store passwords on a memory stick without encryption in case the memory stick was lost. While on the subject of memory sticks I would like to tell the sorry tale from a mate of mine who stored important data on 2 identical memory sticks (bought at the same time so probably from the same batch). 2 were bought for redundancy but they both failed at the same time so all the data was lost. Lesson from this tale is to use different USB sticks for redundancy.

Stephen Sutters

Printers for the Computability Project

Firstly - the “Computability” project has largely morphed into “Laptops for Ukrainians” and now, via IW Community Action, it has really further morphed into “Ukrainian and Resettlements” project. Or not just Ukrainians.

We do receive printers from time to time, and while it seems nobody wants printers anymore, they do provide a bit of a challenge, not only to make work but also very often to simply repair because they don’t work.

The first thought when someone offers a printer is “Oh, no!” because so often they are passed on as something too good to take to the tip but of no use because they have dried up and been stored for several years.

We tend to say “OK provided they work” but it makes little difference because people always say it worked when last used (two years ago, etc.) Undaunted we arrive with another printer, or more recently two more.

We now have three printers in stock, awaiting deployment. Bearing in mind that our clients typically live in small rented rooms and have no money for consumables like paper and ink, demand is low. Those who can afford a printer, probably already have one.

We have a Brother MFC-J1420DW. The “DW” means both duplex (two sided) and wireless, so really rather tempting. MFC implies multi-function copier (and therefore scanner) even more tempting. A nice printer. Only the ink was all dried out, so should we take a punt and buy a set on the off-chance it will work? Well, yes we did; and it did. Straight away with Windows but after a considerable challenge with Linux. Had to download an installation script and run it through the “Terminal” – the black DOS-like programming box in Linux. But success brings its own rewards and it became a desirable printer. Especially after the kind donor then found a further set of unopened ink cartridges.

More recently we received a Samsung ML-1865W (meaning Mono-Laser with Wireless). Neat and compact with fresh toner cylinder. Works straight with Windows but not listed on Linux CUPS list, but did work with next model number up. (CUPS - The Common UNIX Printing System, or CUPS, is the most widely-used way to manage printing and print services in Ubuntu. This freely-available printing system has become the standard for printing in most Linux distributions, and uses the standard Internet Printing Protocol

(IPP) to handle network printing.) Another success. Probably best for the next applicant because of its small size.

And then the most challenging of all, an HP PhotoSmart C4380, which allegedly does everything (except duplex). Nowhere could the drivers be found on the HP website – YouTube videos of how to... but no actual drivers. (Interestingly, if required, all the stuff for the Samsung was actually listed on the HP website – some takeover or skulduggery there...) So the PhotoSmart now does work (with two new very basic recycled cartridges) but only for Linux - but that process was completely automatic for both printer and scanner functions.



It's been an adventure but no trips up to Currys recycling department. The three printers are starting to take up more than their fair share of space so I would happily donate the Linux-only PhotoSmart to any club member, deserving or undeserving, just to reclaim some space.

Happy recycling.

Roger Skidmore



The ZTE 5G router supplied by Three, see page 8.

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