



# HOT KEY

**JANUARY 2026**

If you place a date in a spreadsheet cell in any recognisable format, what is actually stored is a number. This number should be interpreted as the number of days since December 1899. By changing the date format, you can see by changing the date flag so that it is not part of the date.

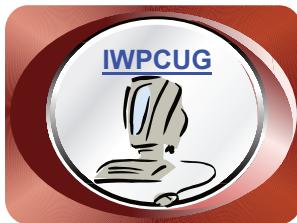
Reason a number is used is that it is easier to subtract month and day separately than to subtract date from date. The number used is the number of days from December 1899. But any other base date not too far away in time could be used as it cancels out in the subtraction.

You can do this the other way round: place a number in a cell and then change its format to "date" and, provided it is a number in a suitable range (1 to 65379), it will be

At the January meeting David Groom talked about desktop publishing using the new Affinity program. Here demonstrating text wrap settings.

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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 8:30 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 attend one of our meetings, or you can contact one of our Committee Members who are listed on page 3.**

The Club web site address is [www.iwpcug.org](http://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 4.



## FUTURE MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
4 February	AGM & Guru Panel	
4 March	History of Printers, Printer Languages and PDF	Jonathan Burt
1 April	TBA	Dennis Linzmaier
6 May	TBA	
3 June	The Life of Sean Colson	Jonathan Thornton
1 July	Summer BBQ	

## 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 :** 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.

## Chairman's Report

Last month we heard the sad news that Sean Colson, one of the founding members of the IWPCUG and a former Chairmen, had passed away. On page 5 Roger Skidmore gives some memories of Sean.

Next month's meeting starts with the AGM, we will try to keep the formal part as brief as possible and then move on to the general question and answer session. So get your thinking caps on and prepare some questions prior to the meeting.

With the exception of the May meeting we now have something planned up to the summer. See the calendar on page 2.

In discussion with Roger about desktop publishing the question of whether articles were more readable if they were in two columns or one was brought up. Roger and I have a difference of opinion. Ever since I took over editorship of HotKey I preferred one column with the text left justified. Roger's preference is two columns with the text not justified. As an experiment I have laid out the article on pages 9 and 10 in this latter format and we can discuss at our February meeting the relative merits of each.

**David Groom**

## Extending the Life of Windows 10

I dislike buying new things just for the sake of it, and my Windows PC & laptops are old, but still usable, but due to their age won't accept Windows 11 even with the various hacks (see January 2025 & October 2025 editions of HotKey).

As the end of support for Windows 10 approached last October I noted the option to extend support for one more year. I could pay \$30 and this would cover up to 10 devices, this seemed a price worth paying, so I clicked the button to proceed with buying the extended support.

Imagine my surprise when the next message I got told me I had no need to pay, and the support had been extended. If you are still running Windows 10 and have tried to get extended support I would recommend you do, it may cost you \$30, or it may be free, but it should be worth it for security.

**David Groom**

## Sean Colson 14/10/1956 to 20/12/2025

Memory grows dim but I know I had started to use my Elonex 286 (first proper computer) in about 1990 and I know I was a very early member of the Isle of Wight PC User Group (IWPCUG). I had responded to a County Press advert for a start-up PC User Group which met first in Yelf's Hotel in Ryde and there I met Sean (who was to become Chairman) for the first time along with two or three other enthusiasts - including of course Sean's long-time buddy and the Group's technical guru, Mike Parsons (who also passed away two years ago).



I'm not quite sure what my role was but we used to meet twice a month in the Riverside Centre, and once a year had an actual Computer Show there.

I remember being quite buddy with Sean (very easy to be buddy with Sean) and followed him through his early ups and downs and attempts to start a "proper" computer business. At first it was TDL "Tomorrow's Designs Ltd" but after some rough times it became Parsons and Colson Consultants (PCC) as we know it today. Only today it is now, as promised, the biggest computer consulting firm on the Island (and with mainland extensions).

On a personal level, Sean has always been there as a friend and confidante. We have had many meals and chats together and I regret never having taken up his offer of a trip to his adopted retreat in Varna.

A bit of history – see HotKey Summer 2015 (pages 7 – 11)

And a trip through nostalgia – Search HotKey (search anything)

And two of Sean's favourite projects:

[www.islandeye.co.uk](http://www.islandeye.co.uk) and [www.varnaeye.com](http://www.varnaeye.com)

**Roger Skidmore**

## **NOTICE OF AGM**

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Isle of Wight PC User Group will be held on Wednesday 4th February 2026 at 7:00 PM via Zoom.

Nominations are requested for the positions of: Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Secretary, and up to eight other committee members.

Please send your nominations to the Chairman, David Groom. Seconders are not necessary at this stage.

### **ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA**

1. Consider matters arising from the previous AGM, held on 5th February 2025, (<https://www.iwpcug.org/secure/minutes/AGM2025Approved.pdf>).
2. Receive reports:
  - 2.1 Chairman
  - 2.2 Treasurer, including approval of the Club Accounts
  - 2.3 Membership Secretary
  - 2.4 Other activities: Computability, HotKey, Website, Egroup, Facebook
3. Consider the future of the IWPCUG
4. Elect a Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, and Membership Secretary.
5. Elect other Committee members (up to a maximum of eight persons).
6. Set the Annual Subscription.
7. Appoint an Independent Examiner.
8. Any Other Business

### **Joining the Email Discussion Group**

Send an email to: [iwpcug+subscribe@groups.io](mailto: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](http://www.iwpcug.org)

## On-Device AI vs. Privacy: A New Frontier in Personal Computing

As artificial intelligence becomes embedded in everyday devices — from laptops to smartphones to smart home hardware — a new battleground has emerged in personal computing: how to balance AI capability, privacy, and security. On one hand, on-device AI promises faster responses, lower latency, and reduced dependence on cloud servers. On the other, it opens doors to new privacy risks, unexpected attack vectors, and regulatory challenges.

### **The Rise of On-Device Intelligence**

Historically, most AI processing occurred in cloud servers, where vast computing power and data resources reside. But in recent years, manufacturers and OS developers have pushed for more functionality to shift to local devices. This "edge AI" model allows features like predictive typing, local voice recognition, or personalised assistants to run even offline or with minimal network latency. ([deloitte.wsj.com](https://deloitte.wsj.com))

That shift brings real user advantages: quicker responses, smoother experience, and potential for improved privacy (since data need not always leave the device). But it also carries new risks in the architecture and trust model of personal computers.

### **The Privacy Paradox: More Local Power, More Risk**

Paradoxically, giving devices more AI power locally can increase the stakes of a compromise. If a malicious actor gains access to a device, they don't just get basic files — they may tap into AI model internals, memory caches, inference logs, or private "memories" that an AI assistant stores. For example, Microsoft's AI PC "Recall" feature (which indexes past user activity) has drawn scrutiny from privacy experts, who warn that if exploited, it could expose deeply personal data. ([Axios](https://wwwaxios.com))

Furthermore, AI models trained on personal data — emails, photos, browsing history — are opaque by design. It is often unclear how they generate certain outputs, or what internal representations they store. This "black box" nature complicates auditing and oversight. ([Cloud Security Alliance](https://www.cloudsecurityalliance.org))

### **Security Challenges**

On-device AI also broadens attack surfaces. Researchers talk about *prompt injection* attacks (where adversarial inputs trick the model into leaking

private data) or *model theft* (stealing a locally stored model). ([www.trendmicro.com](http://www.trendmicro.com))

Even more insidiously, AI agents themselves may be manipulated as new “insider” threats. Attackers might insert hidden commands or malicious payloads into AI workflows so that the AI performs adversarial acts (e.g. querying secure data, exfiltrating credentials) without alerting traditional security systems. ([The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com))

## Mitigations and Pathways Forward

Addressing these tensions requires a combination of hardware, software, and governance:

**Privacy-enhancing techniques** such as differential privacy, homomorphic encryption, secure multi-party computation, or federated learning can allow model training or inference without exposing raw personal data. ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org))

- **Explainability and auditability:** Systems should log AI actions in a transparent and reviewable way, enabling users or auditors to trace how an AI arrived at a decision
- **Strong sandboxing and isolation:** On-device AI components must be isolated from core OS systems and sensitive data, minimising lateral movement in case of breach.
- **Regulation and standards:** Policymakers are actively debating frameworks to govern AI—that include provisions for privacy, accountability, and user control. ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org))

## Conclusion

Personal computing is undergoing a subtle but profound evolution: devices, rather than remote servers, are becoming smarter. This holds enormous promise for user experience, responsiveness, and autonomy. But it also carries new risks — to privacy, security, and trust. The key to success will lie not in halting AI adoption but in designing personal computing systems that are secure, auditable, and respectful of user autonomy.

ChatGPT

## Three Ways I Can Take Photos

Canon Powershot A720 IS. This was the first digital camera I bought (about £150 in 2007) and it has given me 20 years of great service. Small enough to carry around with me everywhere and good specs with its 8Mp sensor and 6x optical zoom. Fast to take photos with, as with many compact cameras, the automatic lens cover opens as soon as the camera is switched on. The picture quality is good in decent light, or when used with a flash, but very grainy in low light without the flash because of its tiny sensor. Also the battery life is short as it just takes 2 AA batteries. Does take videos but only 640 x 320 pixels which was typical for compacts of that time.

I've heard it said the best camera is the one that's with you. In that case it would be my Galaxy XCover 5. Unlike my other two cameras I carry this mobile phone around with me wherever I go. Although it doesn't have an optical zoom the sensor has so many pixels (16Mps) I can zoom in many times before pixelation occurs. Takes HD videos (1080p@30fps) too. In decent lighting takes good photos and videos but not good in dim light and does not have a flash.

It's not hard to spend over £1,000 on a new good quality camera with an

APS-C sized sensor. Buying an old DSLR is a great way to take high quality photos with an APS-C sensor without spending much. My Nikon D40 is the biggest and heaviest (getting on for a kilogram) with one lens and in its case. Because of this I only take it if I'm going somewhere interesting. Also the slowest to take photos with as I have to get it out of its case and take the lens cap off before I can take photos. Also it has no video capability. Because the sensor is only 6Mp I can only zoom in to a 1080p screen 1.5 x before pixelation occurs.

Its lowest resolution (1500 x 1000) is great for sending small photo files to sites such as eBay which I've read has a maximum displayed resolution of 1600 x 1000. It takes very good quality photos and the big APS-C sensor means it works well in low light so I don't need to startle people with a flash. It's also brilliant to use in strong sunlight because I can use the optical viewfinder unlike with the other two where I can barely see the LED screen. Has hours of battery life. It can be used as a 'point and shoot camera' by putting it on automatic, or I can adjust as many settings as I like. Also cheap. It can be bought on eBay for well under £100 with the kit lens. When I first picked up a

DSLR I was shocked at the weight and the full frame DSLR's can weigh over 2Kg but although they tend to weigh more than mirrorless cameras one can get plastic bodied light weight DSLR's that weigh under ½ Kg for the body and with a light prime lens and case can weigh under 1 Kg. So not much to lug about.

My favourite to use is the Nikon. I like the many big controls, through the lens viewfinder and being able to use different lenses. Also takes better photos in low light than the other 2 with greater battery life. If a UFO suddenly appears I have more chance of photographing it with my mobile phone though as this is the device I carry around more often!

**Stephen Sutters**

## Affinity Software

In 2019 Serif launched the Affinity Range of software. There were separate programs for photo editing, vector editing, and desktop publishing. Version 2 was introduced in 2022. Each of those programs cost, I believe, around £49 or you could buy the whole suite at a slight discount. I've written about the software in previous editions of HotKey.

Last October Affinity released version 3 of the software. There were two major surprises. This new version of the software combined photo editing, vector editing and desktop publishing all in the one program, and amazingly the software was now free. Although if you want access to the AI features this will need a premium payment, currently a minimum of £100 a year. Affinity is now owned by Canva, and they have given reassurances that Affinity will always remain free.

There is a review of Affinity in the current (February 2026) edition of PCPro magazine, and I also gave a brief introduction to desktop publishing in Affinity at our members' meeting this month.

The Affinity suite of products was always good value, but now it is free there really is no reason not to be using it for all your design needs, whether that is photo editing, vector image creation, or desktop publishing.

**David Groom**

# What Home Windows Users Can Learn from Ransomware — and How to Stay Resilient

*Last year we saw high profile cyber attacks on M&S, the CoOp and Jaguar Landrover, prompting me to wonder what lessons we, as home users, should learn. So I asked ChatGPT [The Editor]*

Ransomware attacks on large corporations often make headlines, but the same techniques used against multinationals are routinely aimed at home Windows users. In fact, home users are often *easier* targets: fewer defenses, less monitoring, and no IT department to fall back on. The good news is that the lessons learned from major corporate breaches translate very well to personal computers, and you don't need enterprise tools to protect yourself.

## **Ransomware Is Inevitable — Recovery Is Optional**

One of the biggest shifts in corporate cybersecurity thinking is the acceptance that prevention alone is not enough. Organisations now assume that, sooner or later, something will get through. Home users should adopt the same mindset. The goal is not to be “unhackable,” but to make sure that if something does go wrong, the damage is limited and recovery is fast.

That mindset starts with backups.

## **Backups Are Your Most Important Defence**

When companies are hit by ransomware, those with clean, offline backups can often refuse to pay and recover safely. Those without them face impossible choices. The same applies at home.

A good rule is the **3-2-1 backup principle**: keep three copies of your important data, stored on two different types of media, with at least one copy kept offline or isolated. For a Windows user, this might mean your main files on your PC, a backup on an external USB drive that is only plugged in during backups, and a cloud backup service that keeps file version history.

It's also important to test backups occasionally. Many victims—corporate and personal—only discover their backups don't work when it's already too late.

## **Keeping Software Updated Still Matters**

A surprising number of high-profile ransomware attacks succeed because systems were running outdated software with known vulnerabilities. Attackers routinely scan the internet and email attachments for these weaknesses.

For home users, the lesson is simple: keep Windows Update enabled and let it install security updates automatically. Browsers, Office, PDF readers, and

other common programs should also be kept current. Attackers don't need zero-day exploits if they can rely on users postponing updates indefinitely.

## **Built-In Windows Security Is Strong — If You Use It Properly**

Modern versions of Windows include very capable built-in security. Windows Defender is no longer a “last resort” antivirus; it provides real-time protection comparable to many paid products.

One particularly important feature is **Controlled Folder Access**, which helps prevent unauthorised programs from modifying files in common folders like Documents and Pictures. This can stop many ransomware attacks before they encrypt your data. Tamper Protection is another key setting, preventing malware from simply disabling your defences.

You don't necessarily need multiple antivirus programs, but you do need to make sure the one you have is fully enabled and configured.

## **Accounts, Privileges, and Passwords Matter**

Many corporate breaches spread because attackers gain administrator-level access too easily. Home systems often make this problem worse by running daily activities under an admin account.

Using a standard (non-administrator) Windows account for everyday work significantly limits what malware can do if it runs. Administrator access should be reserved for software installation and system changes.

Strong, unique passwords are equally important. Password reuse allows attackers to move from one compromised service to another. A password manager makes this practical, and enabling multi-factor authentication wherever possible adds another layer of defence that ransomware operators strongly dislike.

## **Phishing Is Still the Most Common Entry Point**

Despite all technical advances, most ransomware still enters systems through human interaction—emails that look legitimate, attachments that appear harmless, or links that lead to malicious downloads.

Users should be especially cautious with unexpected emails, invoices, delivery notices, or “urgent” messages. Avoid enabling Office macros, downloading pirated software, or clicking links from unknown senders. Simple caution goes a long way.

## **Harden the System You Already Have**

Basic system hardening makes attacks harder without making daily use

inconvenient. Disabling Office macros by default removes one of the most common ransomware delivery methods. If you don't use Remote Desktop, turning it off removes another common attack surface.

Drive encryption such as BitLocker doesn't stop ransomware, but it does protect your data if your device is lost or stolen—another lesson frequently reinforced by corporate incidents.

### **Know What to Do If Something Goes Wrong**

One reason ransomware is so effective is panic. Victims don't know what to do, so they freeze—or pay. Corporations now practice incident response; home users should at least have a mental plan.

If you suspect ransomware, disconnect the computer from the internet immediately and unplug any external drives. If files are actively being encrypted, powering off the system can sometimes limit damage. Recovery should involve wiping the system and restoring from a known-good backup, not attempting to “clean” an infected installation.

Having a simple written plan—where your backups are, how to reinstall Windows, and how to recover key accounts—can make the difference between a bad day and a disaster.

### **Resilience Beats Perfection**

The biggest lesson from recent ransomware attacks is that no system is perfectly secure, but resilient systems survive. For home Windows users, resilience means backups that work, updates that aren't delayed, security features that are actually enabled, and a calm, prepared response if something does go wrong.

Another lesson from corporate ransomware incidents is the importance of simplicity and consistency. Many breaches succeed not because defenses are weak, but because they are inconsistently applied or gradually forgotten. Home users often install security software once and assume the job is done, but security is not a one-time action. Periodically reviewing your settings, checking that backups are still running, and confirming that recovery options still work can quietly prevent months of loss. Just as large organizations now conduct regular resilience reviews, home users benefit from occasional “security checkups” to ensure yesterday's protections still work against today's threats.

**ChatGPT**

## Using ChatGPT for Programming

In the April and October 2023 editions of HotKey I wrote a little bit about using ChatGPT to write code. I had occasion late last year to use it again.

Some years ago I created a small website to provide tourist information for Bembridge and St Helens. The VisitBembridge ([visitbembridge.co.uk](http://visitbembridge.co.uk)), website is based on WordPress. On the homepage I wanted to display the current weather and on a second page display a forecast for the coming few days. At the time the Met Office provided free access to their forecast data and with the aid of a lot of online resources I wrote a plugin forward press to download the data from the Met Office and display within my website.

Last year the Met Office changed their licensing model and I decided to look at alternative providers. I decided that I would use the OpenWeather ([openweathermap.org](http://openweathermap.org)) service. This would require a complete rewrite of the plug-in code. Not only, this but upgrades to WordPress in the intervening years also meant a rewrite of the code would be a good idea. I could of course have done what I did before, looked at a lot of online resources and written the code myself from scratch, but I decided instead to give ChatGPT a go.

I typed the prompt "can you build a wordpress plugin to interface with openweather api. the plugin will display current weather data for a specific location". Very soon I received the friendly response:

*Absolutely! Here's a lightweight, production-ready WordPress plugin that fetches and displays current weather from the OpenWeather API. It includes:*

- *An admin settings page (API key, default location, units)*
- *A shortcode: [owm\_weather] with override attributes*
- *Caching via transients (defaults to 10 minutes)*
- *Secure, escaped output and error handling*
- *Minimal CSS you can tweak*

At this point ChatGPT started to write out 320 lines of code, And then gave instructions on how this code should be used. I followed the instructions and much to my delight and amazement the code did exactly what I wanted (see image on back cover). I subsequently gave ChatGPT extra prompts to refine what it had produced, not because the original code was wrong, but because I thought of additional things that I wanted.

There is still more that I would like to do with this, for instance I'd like a new

page which displays a five day forecast. The challenge is not so much in writing the code, but deciding how I best want things laid out on the page.

The speed and accuracy with which ChatGPT wrote the code for the plugin really amazed me and saved me hours of work, and I'm sure I will use it again in the near future.

**David Groom**

## Copilot and Linux Mint

A little while ago a friend recommended "Copilot" as a better AI app. Copilot comes with Windows 11 but, like many others, I had paid it no attention. But on running it, I was amazed. Can't live without it now - scary. If you haven't tried it then do so. But choose a more amenable voice!

I now only use Linux "Mint" on Computability computers. Most Linux apps are installed from a number of repositories of applications, but "Snap" being one which Mint does not access. Snap, however, is the repository which contains a Linux version of Copilot as an application.

I spent time asking Copilot (on Windows) how to install Copilot on Linux Mint and eventually I learned how to get Linux Mint to access Snap, and then to install Copilot from Snap. Windows' Copilot's guidance was excellent and I learned a lot. But then I found going down this path that Copilot was not very stable so I then learned how to remove Copilot and then remove access to the Snap repository.

After all that, it seems that you can run Copilot direct from a web browser - so I do not understand why there is an installed application for Linux anyway.

The web link is: [copilot.microsoft.com](https://copilot.microsoft.com) ... that simple.

So now all I do is create a "Launcher" (a.k.a. "Shortcut" in Windows) on the Linux desktop. Right click on the desktop, choose "Create Launcher" and enter the magic code "firefox copilot.microsoft.com" and press enter.

Interesting journey, but you must try it!

**Roger Skidmore**

# Visit Bembridge & St Helens

HOME CALENDAR THINGS TO DO + GUIDEBOOK PLACES TO STAY EATING OUT MAP SHIPPING CONTACT US



Welcome to the Visit Bembridge & St Helens web site, which aims to provide tourist and visitor information for the area around Bembridge Harbour, on the Isle of Wight....

The villages of Bembridge and St Helens are located at the eastern end of the Isle of Wight, on either side of Bembridge Harbour, and are a popular location for visitors to explore, either for a day whilst staying elsewhere, or alternatively as the main base for their Isle of Wight holiday.

Ask ten different people what they like most about this area and likely as not you'll receive ten different replies.

Bembridge, GB

Overcast clouds

5°C

Feels like 2°C

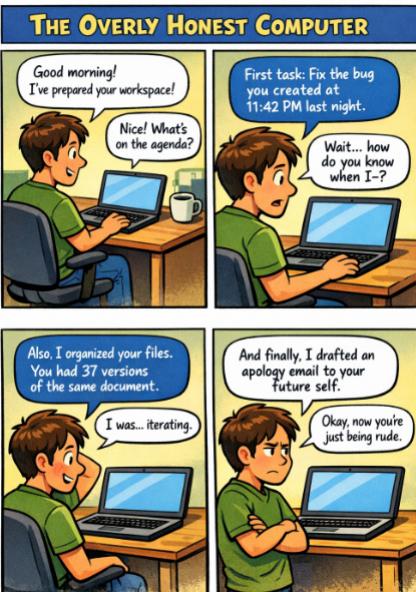
Humidity 81%

Wind NW 4.02 m/s

Weather data provided by [OpenWeather](#)



The weather panel using a Wordpress Plugin written by ChatGPT, see page 14.



Using the prompt "can you create a 4 panel comic strip on a computer related topic" I asked Microsoft CoPilot to produce the text output for the strip, and I then copied that copied that output to ChatGPT asking it to produce an image. The result is shown here. Initially it looked good, but the top bubble in each frame is spoken by the laptop, and that wasn't obvious from the bubbles position. Despite two more attempts at more precise prompts I couldn't get the speech bubbles in the correct place.

We try to publish HotKey quarterly in April, July, October and January  
This edition was produced using Affinity.

No responsibility can be accepted with respect to any advice or suggestions in this journal, and the views expressed are those of the contributors.