

The news you were all hoping to hear



On Thursday 8 September the conference centre at the Welding Institute, Abington, was packed with Acorn employees who had been bussed to this secret location to hear the company's half-year results. After an initial welcome from Steve White and a showing of the latest Acorn promotional video ('Are they trying to hypnotise us?'), Harvey Coleman stood up to address the first staff meeting since he became MD.

Confidential material

He started by warning staff of the dangers of talking about the highly confidential details of their work, since careless talk could lose Acorn its commercial advantage, and explained that much of what he was going to say on this sunny afternoon was for the ears of Acorn employees only, and was not to be repeated outside the company.

Focus our efforts

He then announced with considerable pleasure that the operating profit in the six months to 30 June 1988 was £1,047m and the company seemed well on the road to recovery after the ups and downs of the previous year. This turnaround had been achieved by hard work from all the staff, by good sales of the mainstream products, and by careful and unceasing cost control. "But", he continued, "there is a tremendous amount still to be done and the company's activities must be strongly focussed to maintain this positive momentum."

You'll be seeing more of me

Harvey apologised for spending so little time with his staff during the past six months. However, he had had many demands on his time: as MD he was the chief ambassador and salesman for the company, and when a company was emerging from unsettled times the directors had to go into huddles more often than in settled times. "Now that things are on the right track you should see more of me - I hope you'll like it."

The mission statement

The mission of Acorn is to *design and market high technology products profitably focussed on the workstation market particularly in education and normally sold and supported through third parties.*

A discussion of the mission statement and the proposed strategy for achieving the company's aims was followed by a demonstration of the capabilities of the new RISC OS operating system and of the musical versatility of the Archimedes computer.

Cambridge phenomena

When Harvey returned to the microphone he described the theme of the Autumn advertising campaign, ('What other micro has the power to do both?'); explained the organisational changes that had been introduced since the new year ('change is normal, change is necessary'); and talked about the effect the Cambridge Phenomenon is having on staff recruitment.

Rewards for hard work

Before the audience moved into the next room to fall gasping on the drinks and wolf down platefuls of food, Harvey again thanked his staff for their efforts over the last six months. And since these good results had been achieved by tremendous hard work from the staff, who had sacrificed their free time in the company's interests, he announced, to murmurs of appreciation, that he was rewarding their commitment with a well-earned salary increase.

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An end to the workstation famine in Egypt

Early in August Harvey Coleman and David Tee accompanied the Rt Hon Kenneth Baker to Cairo to 'give' three Archimedes 440s to the Egyptian Minister of Education and to two universities.

"Our main reason for the trip", Harvey explains, "was to grasp an opportunity for business. There is no supply of workstations in the Egyptian market, so this high-profile donation of Archimedes 440s to the Ministry and to the Universities of Cairo and Alexandria gives us a good opportunity to make our mark. And since Egypt supplies teachers to the whole of the Arabic world, successful sales in Egypt should act as a springboard into the rest of the Middle East."

David Tee's job was to make sure that Acorn's contributions to the presentations all ran smoothly. Here he tells his side of the story.

"The first show was in the Ministry of Education, after Kenneth Baker had opened the new Education Computing Centre (all part of the pilot project with 620 Master Compacts described in the

August issue of the Newsletter). This was the first time Baker had seen an Archimedes computer in action and I think he was impressed. The British Ambassador to Egypt liked the rotating molecule, and especially the 'absolutely marvellous 3-D effect'.

"The next day we made our presentation to the University of Cairo. 'For reasons of security' we were not told when the British party would arrive, and had plenty of time to test out the system. This time we put on a slightly different show but the British Ambassador still thought the rotating molecule was an 'absolutely marvellous 3-D effect, really jolly good'.

"The last presentation was in Alexandria. I went up the evening before to get the machine ready for the 9 o'clock (approximate time, for reasons of security) presentation. Due to an unfortunate bit of oversleeping I arrived at the same time as the red carpet. The British Ambassador didn't arrive at all – a pity since I'd left the rotating molecule in the demo specially for him."



New names, new faces

We welcome the following people who have joined Acorn since the last issue of the Newsletter:

Name	Department	Job title
Coral McLachlan	Purchasing	Purchasing Assistant
Linda Storr	Sales	Sales Office Operations Manager
Jeremy Newman	Product Marketing	Workstation Product Manager
Rosie Rush	AR&D	Secretary
Tracey Northrop	Sales	Secretary to UK Sales Manager
Ashley Oliver	Projects and Planning	Senior Project Manager
Rachel Warren	Product Marketing	Secretary
Kim Darnell	Customer Services	Customer Support Assistant
Helen Baldwin	Sales	Secretary

We really have enjoyed ourselves (and learned a lot)



For the past six months Kristin Willoughby (on the right of the picture) and Fiona Roberts have been working for Acorn as part of their B TEC HND courses in Business Studies and Finance.

Kristin, now finishing her second year, spent her first placement with Marshalls of Cambridge (Engineering), in the finance department. She quickly decided to specialise in marketing, and for her next stint was taken on by Michael Page to help out in corporate communications.

"I've had a really good job here, doing lots of things besides administration and secretarial work, and have had a thorough practical introduction to corporate communications. Acorn doesn't use students as a cheap form of temporary labour, unlike some firms.

"I started by arranging photo sessions to build up a library of staff portraits. I had to phone all the members of the company, without knowing who they were. I even phoned Roger Cranville who sits right next to me. Since those early days I've been involved in lots of things, from day-to-day liaison with Hi-Tech, the PR company, to organising the sponsorship and hospitality tents at the Cambridge Festival. I've never been afraid of talking, but I've improved my communication skills just through spending my time asking people to do things.

"I was told at the interview that I might have to travel, and I will be going down to the Personal Computer Show in my last week here. My greatest achievement has been tidying Michael's office and setting up a foolproof filing system – even Michael can follow it. Michael is a very nice person, even when he pulls my spelling to pieces."

Fiona came to Acorn because they offered her the most money (in stark contrast to a leading firm of accountants who offered

£50 a week and demanded that she gave up her Saturday job) and has not regretted her decision.

"I've been working for Richard Butterworth, helping to set up and test a computer system that keeps track of fixed assets and assesses their depreciation. I've also done some bought ledger and sales ledger work which gave me a broader knowledge of accounts. The most useful thing has been finding out how a company works, though I've been assured that this one is not typical.

"Before I came here I hated phoning people blind, but now I'm used to it. I've had to approach everyone in the firm to make proper lists of the company's equipment, and sometimes I've had to interrupt the same people again and again. Once, when I was trying to sort out the paperwork on some oscilloscopes, I phoned Vic Gibling four days in a row but he didn't mind, all he said was, 'It's worse than being married'.

"I've been most struck by the low average age and how hard people work (and by the large M&S orders some people consume when they are on a diet). You can tell I've enjoyed it here – I decided to stay for a few extra weeks before the beginning of term, even though I could make more money teaching."



Learning the Principles of Business and Organisation is 'hard work' but 'enjoyable'

In a secluded Victorian house in the country, complete with bar and a luxurious swimming pool, eight Acorn employees were intent on running their three small businesses. The competing robot-producing companies were managed by a terrible trio (Simon Woodward, Kechil Kirkham and Michael Page), a dependable duo (Lorne Byatt and Caroline Lane) and the winning wonders (Janet Henson-Webb, Roger Broadie and Ian Sewell). All eight were attending a residential training course on Principles of Business and Organisation designed to improve and extend their performance as managers.

Regenerated by an early morning swim and primed by a morning's seminar on one aspect of business practice, the teams battled through the afternoon, evening and night to capture the orders, produce the goods, keep the cash flowing and prepare strategies to ensure their future profitability and dominance of the market. They had to cram a whole year's trading into

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Cricket captain quits in 'work before games' controversy

Close on the heels of the lack of success experienced by the Acorn Computers Cricket team at the start of the season, a serious controversy split the team, causing a corresponding drop in morale.

Some reports had attributed the lack of form to team members having indulged in frantic working sessions before the game. It had even been reported that the captain, Alastair France, had held 'a meeting' in his office just two hours prior to the commencement of an important fixture.

France, 25, initially denied the allegations. Later, pressed by questioning journalists, he broke down and confessed. He blamed the pressure of the job of cricket captain, and said that he needed relief from this pressure. "Working provided the easy way out", he revealed.

He agreed that some players stood up to the pressures of selection particularly well. Mark Evans and Roger Cranville had produced excellent performances, and the selection of Peter Dawson as wicket keeper proved particularly successful – especially considering that he had not played cricket at this level for some years. "It doesn't excuse my own lack of success with the bat", he said, "although I have been quite pleased with my bowling."

After the publicity surrounding these allegations, the selectors wasted little time in dropping France for the month that followed. His place as captain was promptly taken by Mike Evans, and his position on

the board of selectors ably filled by Tim Beeby.

In an exclusive interview, granted to this paper before he left the country in disgrace, France expressed his wish to return to the team and regain the captaincy. "But first I must establish the selectors' faith in my ability to hold down a place on the merits of my cricket", he said.

Under the new regime Acorn's cricketing fortunes showed a dramatic turn around. Just three games later they achieved a decisive victory against their old footballing foe Hunters Fen FC. Bowling out the opposition for a crushing 22 runs, the ACC team seized their chance and hit the bewildered Fen bowlers all round the wicket. Lengthy celebrations followed this historic success, with the euphoria lasting well into their next match against age-old rivals, the CU Computing Laboratory. But even their good form could not help them conquer these towering opponents, and the valiant Acorn cricketers lost by just nine runs.

This season's Wizard with the Willow award goes to John Thackray, Acorn's highest scoring batsman. Special mentions, too, for Jim Fallon, Richard King and Mark Evans, whose good, tidy bowling and remarkable consistency for wicket taking did much to contribute to Acorn's successes. And Peter Dawson's performance as wicket keeper continued at a standard that league cricketers would be proud of.



Our picture shows the Acorn Computers Cricket team early in the season, after a narrow defeat by Cambridge Instruments. From left to right, standing: John Thackray, Bruce Trotter, Richard King, Mark Evans,

Alastair France (capt.), Neil Gardner; seated: Tim Beeby, Roger Cranville, Jim Fallon, Bill Thompson, Peter Dawson (WK).



each session, and thoroughly deserved a liberally poured nightcap before sleeping the sleep of the totally exhausted.

The company directors soon found that outside events, conveyed to their boardrooms as news bulletins, could wreck even the best laid plans. One team, indignant that the course organisers should have a monopoly on news generation, decided to help their cause by awarding themselves the King's Award for Industry, and even honouring their MD with a knighthood. Alas, awards for industry do not guarantee a company's success, and this innovative though eccentric company had the worst balance sheet of the lot at the end of the game.

Harvey Coleman, who came to hear the company directors present their results on the last day, addressed Sir Simon by his full title and listened politely to his justifications for the company's poor performance.

All eight participants returned to the office fired with enthusiasm to use their new-found knowledge, to work pro-actively and anticipate events, to categorize, prioritize and delegate. How are they doing now?

Thank you letter

The following letter was received from a pupil at Bishop Wilton C.E. Primary School, York, to thank Acorn for donating £50 towards the cost of their new BBC Master.

"Thank you ever so much for the fifty pounds you gave us. It was very kind of you. We are putting the money towards a new computer that will go in the wall. And we are knocking down the end of the classroom and putting it further along. Yours sincerely,
Davina Brightman"

Three treasured tortoises (not) for Sale

Roger Sale thought he would never achieve his childhood dream of owning a tortoise. "I always wanted a tortoise as a child but my parents' garden was not enclosed enough. But by the time I had married and settled down with a garden of my own it was illegal to import tortoises into the country."

In spite of this unpromising state of affairs, Roger now has three tortoises to care for. He weighs them regularly to make sure they are putting on enough weight, feeds them their favourite delicacies and watches over them during the worrying winter months of their hibernation.

Tumbaly was the first to join the household, acquired when Roger spotted a 'Tortoise For Sale' ad in the local paper.

News for the world: from our news releases

Winners at Cowes predicted by Archimedes program

An Archimedes computer installed in the Royal Yacht Squadron club house was used to estimate the race timings for over 700 boats competing in the Cowes Regatta. The information was presented in graphical form to the race officers at the finishing line and used to calculate the expected time of arrival of the leading boats in each race.

Archimedes computers networked in Italian school

The Istituto Technico Statale Commerciale 'Vincenzo Comi', a technical school for accounts in Teramo, has just installed Archimedes computers with an Econet network and a 20 Mb Filestore. The system will be used to teach programming and network to 14-18 year olds. Acorn's distributor in Italy, Milan-based G. Ricordi and Co is one of the world's major classical music and opera publishers.

Two Acorns make an Oak

G A Cook, who lives in the Algarve, Portugal, has two BBC Bs re-boxed by Oak Computers which, because of his disability, are necessary for communication and environment control. One of the Oaks, with a two-switch input and suitable software, is connected to a further BBC B (or a Master 128) via a special interface. This enables him to control the second computer fully through the Oak. The second pair of computers (Oak and BBC B or Master) is a backup system in case the first needs repair.

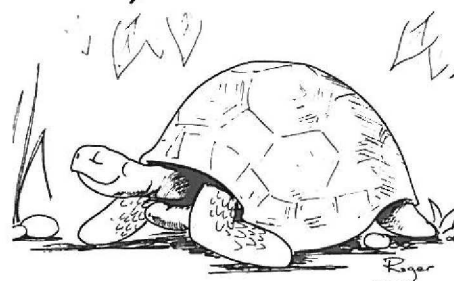
Spot the ball competition



Fabulous prize to be won!

Mark a cross where you think the ball should be. Send your completed entry to Chris Seaman in Personnel. The winner will be announced in the next Acorn Newsletter. Only one entry per person.

(This competition is, unfortunately, not open to members of the football team, their employees or members of their families and those involved in producing Acorn Newsletter.)



little chap. His shell is rather rough and cracked, but he has a very pretty face."

The tortoises are fed on a varied diet with plenty of their favourite foods - thawed frozen peas (Birds' Eye are preferred to any other brand), cucumber, plums and pansy flowers.