Keynotes

Collaborative technologies

Volume 33, Number 1

From the Editor

Welcome to the first Keynotes of the new academic year. As ever, Computing Service staff have been busy throughout the summer, and I hope you will find much evidence of this in this issue.

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A number of new web tools and utilities have been put into place; turn to page 2 to read about Google Mini, to page 3 to learn about timetable delivery via the web, and online financial journaling, and to page 7 to find out about accessing personal images on the web.

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The Computing Service Innovation Fund allows us to indulge in a little blue-sky thinking; one project which is being carried out under its auspices looks into the potential of collaborative technologies - read more on page 6.

Joanne Casey

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**Back copies of Keynotes can be found at:
www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/keynotes/**

Keynotes

Opening hours
Brian Souter

The Computing Service Information Desk will now stay open until 5.15 pm on a Friday following the introduction of the new standard working week. The new opening hours are 9 am to 5.15 pm, Monday to Friday. We plan to monitor user demand and review these arrangements next year.

Staff and Postgraduate training courses
Susanne Hodges

This term, as well as providing standard Office application training and Dreamweaver courses, we hope to run a new lunchtime lecture on using templates in Word. The lecture format proved very popular last term, when over fifty people attended a lecture on using styles in Word. More short courses and lectures will run throughout the year.

Where there is demand, we may add new courses during the year; Departmental Computing Officers will be informed via the DCO mailing list of any courses not on the printed schedule. They will also be advertised via YorkExtra and on our website at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/training/timetable.htm**

Power saving
Andrew Smith

During the Autumn term we will trial the automatic shutdown of classroom PCs overnight and during the weekend. All classroom PCs will shutdown at 22.00 if there is no user logged in. At 07:30 the PCs will restart in order to receive security and software updates.

During the day, classroom PC screens will shutdown after periods of inactivity. They can be re-activated by moving the mouse.

Notices detailing the changes will be displayed in classrooms. For more information on energy conservation throughout the University, please see: **www.york.ac.uk/energyconservation/**

PC room maintenance
Brian Souter

The programme of PC replacement, safety testing, maintenance and cleaning all went according to schedule over the summer. In total, 84 PCs were replaced in rooms A/EW/107, L/117, W/036, W/218 and the RBL Reading Room. The new PCs have Pentium 4 3.00 GHz processors, 512MB memory, 17" LCD display screens, CD writers and accessible USB ports.

Sun training courses
Andrew Smith

We now have access to 59 of Sun's web training courses. These include Solaris training, StarOffice, and other IT management courses (project planning, budget control, managing staff, etc). The courses are available to everyone in the University, both staff and students.

In order to access the courses, potential users need to register; for more information please see: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/advice/sun.html**

Staff news
Mike Jinks

We welcome Adrian Young as the Applications Software Deployment Team Leader in the Support Services Group. Adrian is a Computing Systems graduate and has been working at HBOS in Halifax in a variety of technical roles. Most recently he has been the Technical Team Leader involved in developing and supporting software deployments to over 80,000 systems. Adrian thus brings experience of large scale software deployments in a critical enviroment to our work here.

Adrian Young   *Max Spicer*

We're also pleased to welcome Max Spicer who is joining the Web Services Group as part of the University's Web Redevelopment Project coordinated by the Web Office. Max's role will focus on the procurement and subsequent systems administration of an institutional Content Management System. Max is a York graduate, who was previously working as a web developer and systems administrator for Central Science Laboratory.

We wish them both well in their new roles.

Mail quotas increased
Mike Brudenell

Towards the end of the Summer Vacation storage quotas on the Central Mail Service (YorkMail) were increased for the second time this year. The standard allocations for accounts are now as follows:

Account owner	Old quota	New quota
Staff	50 Mbytes	100 Mbytes
Research Graduates	50 Mbytes	100 Mbytes
Taught Graduates	20 Mbytes	30 Mbytes
Undergraduates	20 Mbytes	30 Mbytes

We anticipate that this will be the last across the board quota increase possible with the hardware currently running YorkMail. Options are now being investigated with a view to renewing the hardware next Summer.

Any members of Staff or Research Graduates who have exceptional needs and experience problems working within even these increased quotas should contact the Information Desk staff for assistance.

Keep your inbox small

It is possible that the new, larger quotas will stress the input/output capacity of the mail servers' disks. You can help reduce this problem, and so help keep the mail system fast and responsive for everyone…

Your inbox is a very special folder, kept open all the time you are working with your mail program. Please help us all by treating it like an "In Tray" on an office desk:

- Keep only your most recent e-mails and the ones you are actively working on in your inbox.

- Delete messages you no longer need.

- Move e-mail you still need to keep for reference into other mail folders, creating these to organise your filed messages as necessary. (Like moving items out of your desk's In Tray to your office's filing cabinet: they are to hand when you need them, but aren't clogging up the In Tray.)

- Consider removing attachments from messages you wish to keep - the article **Storing emails without attachments** on this page explains how you can do this in Outlook.

Keeping your inbox small - with as few messages as possible - will make it faster to open and work with. It will also reduce disk activity on the mail servers, keeping them responsive for everyone.

Storing emails without attachments
Susanne Hodges

Although mailbox quota has been significantly increased, it can be used much more efficiently if you save attached files to a different location, then detach the file from the email. This is easily done in Outlook.

Open the email, right click on the attachment and choose **Save As..**. Save the attachment in your chosen location. If you have a message with multiple attachments, open the message, then select **File | Save Attachments**. A dialogue will open listing the attached files. By default all of the attached files will be highlighted. To save them all, click **OK**. To save some files and not others, deselect the files by clicking in a blank area of the dialogue, then press down the **Ctrl** key whilst clicking on the files you wish to save. Click **OK**.

Once saved, right click on the attachment and select **Remove** to delete the attachment. When you close the message, you will be asked if you wish to save any changes. Choose **Yes**.

Finally, choose **Edit | Purge Deleted Messages** to remove any attachments from the mail server.

Google Mini – the University's new search engine
Fergus McGlynn

In August, the Computing Service and the Web Office rolled out a new search engine for the University. **Google Mini** is an appliance comprised of Google hardware and software. It provides much of the functionality as the well known Google search engine; in addition, we are able to configure what the Google Mini indexes, and how often.

Google Mini replaces the two search engines that we were previously running – the free **Google University Search** tool, and **Ht://dig**. Staff at the university felt that Google University Search offered good quality results, however the free service only guaranteed monthly indexing of our websites. In contrast, the Ht://dig service indexed nightly, but the search results were not perceived to be as good as Google's. The Google Mini gives us the benefit of nightly indexing along with good quality search results, and removes the confusion of having two search engines.

Google Mini is currently indexing around 60,000 pages from Yorkweb plus a number of affiliated departmental websites. The types of document being indexed include plain text, html, PDF, Microsoft Word and Powerpoint.

You can use the search engine from the university home page: **www.york.ac.uk**. If you have any queries about the Google Mini, please contact the Web Office (**web-office@york.ac.uk**).

Timetable delivery via the web
Jenny Smailes

The Teaching Timetable for 2006/7 is the first timetable to be made accessible to staff via the web. Timetables have been made available initially in three formats:

- department
- module
- member of staff
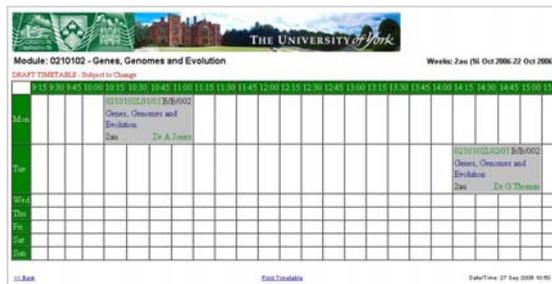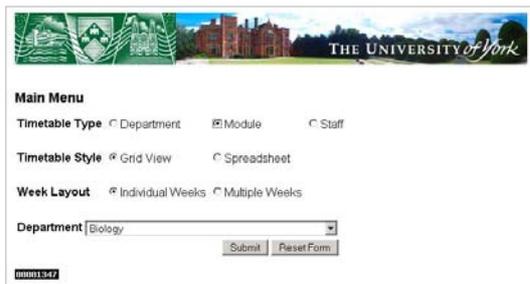
Students will also be able to access the web application once the 2006/7 timetable has been finalised towards the end of September.

The timetables are delivered using the Scientia Web Server which has been purchased from the supplier of the University's timetabling software. Previously timetables were supplied to departments via spreadsheets which very quickly became out of date. Now timetables are created dynamically and provide an up to the minute reflection of the timetable.

Timetables are available using Computing Service user names and passwords. The system is accessible from Interactive Yorkweb page under the Teaching heading: **www.york.ac.uk/np/staffonly/interactive.htm**

Online financial journaling
Michelle McCarthy

A new system has been introduced to enable journal entries to be completed via a web interface, submitted for approval, before they are automatically uploaded into the Finance system (Agresso). The system can be found on Interactive YorkWeb under Finance.
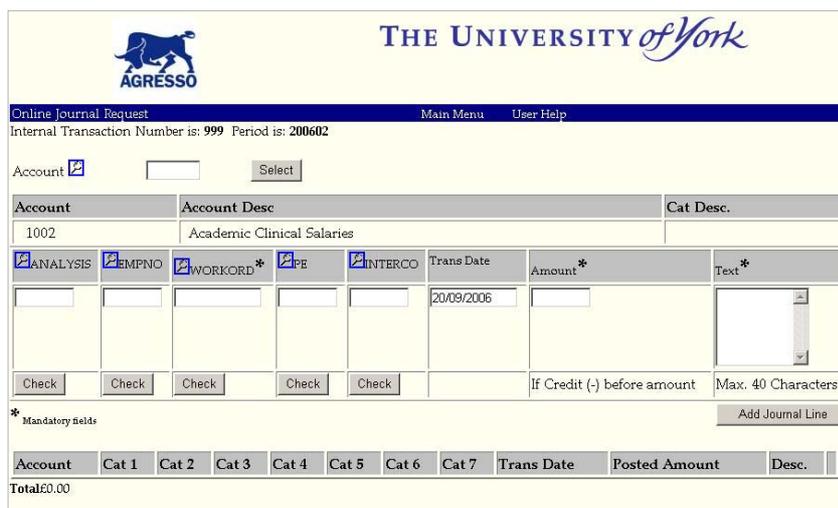
Target staff should already have access to the system but additional requests can be made using the YIMS Registration system (which can be accessed on Interactive York Web under General Help).

Using templates in Word
Susanne Hodges

Every Word document is based on a *template* which determines the basic structure for each document that you create. Templates contain document settings such as fonts, margins, page orientation, menus, page layout, special formatting, styles, macros, autotext and boilerplate text. Templates in Word help to achieve consistency in layout and format without having to start from scratch every time.

If you create a new document by clicking the **New Blank Document** button on the Standard toolbar, the blank document you see will be based on Word's **Normal** template. The Normal template has a default font setting of Times New Roman, 12pt. The left and right margins are set at 3.17 cm and the top and bottom margins set at 2.54 cm. There are set AutoText entries, styles and other features associated with the Normal template. As with any other template, the Normal template can be customised.

If you create a document using the **New…** command on the **File** menu, the complete list of templates is available when you click on the **General Templates** link in the **New from Template** section of the **New Document** task pane. These exist to help you create a variety of materials such as memos, newsletters, business cards and CVs, and you can tailor them to your own needs or create new ones that are suitable for your work. Some are described as wizards – these contain coded routines to help you construct a document.
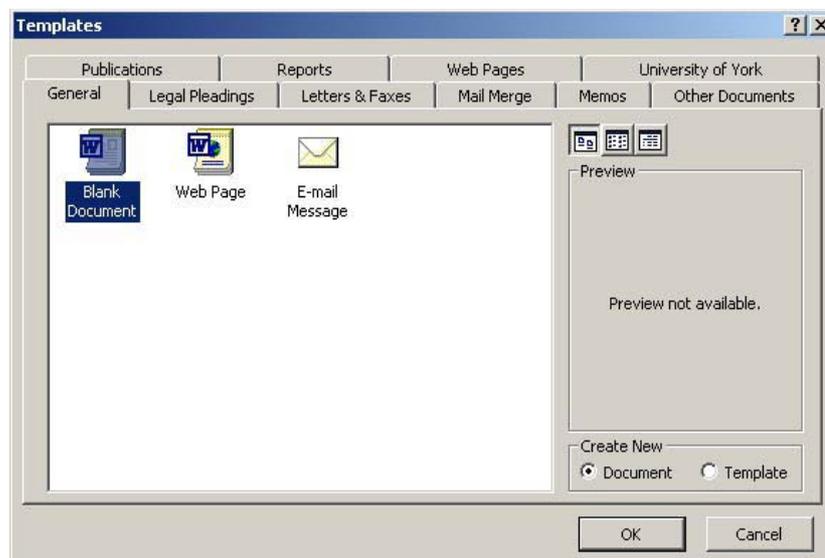
A template has the following features:

•	It has the extension **.dot** rather than **.doc**.
•	When you create a document based on a template other than the Normal template the title bar shows **Document <no>** as well as the template filename.
•	An existing template can be modified and re-saved as a new template for future use.
•	An existing document can be opened and saved as a new template for future use.

Templates can be restricted to your machine, or they can be placed in a shared area so that many people can create documents with a consistent style.

Templates are automatically saved in **My Documents | Applications | Microsoft | Templates** and, should you wish to make any further changes to your template, you will need to open it from this area. Alternatively, if you have very recently created a template, it should be accessible from the file list under **Open a document** in the **New document** task pane.

Interested in learning more? Come to the **Using Templates in Word** lecture on Monday 30 October 12.30 - 13.15 in Physics Block P/L005.

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Notice of software withdrawals
Peter Halls

The following software applications will cease to be available during next summer, 2007. Alternatives are already available for each of these and it is believed that few users are still working with these products. Those who are need to plan to have migrated to an appropriate alternative by August 2007.

Interbase database management system: the alternatives are Access, MySQL and Oracle.

ArcView 3: it is expected that this package will not be available in the license renewal due in spring 2008; the alternatives are ArcGIS and Geomatica. Users of Avenue scripts should note that this language is specific to ArcView 3 and that such scripts will have to be rewritten for any replacement package.

Microsoft Visual Studio 6: this product is now obsolete and is replaced by the current release of Visual Studio .Net.

Borland compilers – c++, Delpi, etc: these products ceased to be supported by the vendor several years ago and are incompatible with current standard libraries for Windows. The alternatives are Microsoft Visual Studio and the GNU compilers, gcc, etc., available with CYGWIN. Unfortunately, there is no direct replacement for Delphi, which was specific to Borland, but a suitable alternative may be Java.

Mathematica
David Surtees

The Computing Service is pleased to announce that it has purchased fifty concurrent licences of the mathematics package Mathematica, as a result of departmental input into the software wish list (**www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/ wishlist.yrk/wishlist.htm**). Versions are available for 32 bit and 64 bit Windows operating systems, Mac OS X, and some versions of Linux. It is being deployed to supported PCs and is available for unsupported machines via the Information Desk. The new agreement also allows for 50 "home use" licences for members of staff of the University.

More details on Mathematica can be found at Wolfram Research's website: **www.wolfram.com/**

Access to teaching software from study bedrooms
Andrew Smith

From the start of the Autumn term students will be able to access a selection of teaching applications from their study bedrooms. These applications will be delivered by the Sun Secure Global suite which provides a web portal to the applications. The service is a trial and only a small number of applications will be initially available, but it is hoped to provide more over the coming year.

Please see: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/net/ ssgd/** for information on how to access the service.

New software
Adrian Young

Over the summer, a number of new packages have been deployed. In addition to Mathematica (see article on this page), these new packages include:

- Geomatica 10
- DevC++
- TeXnicCenter

Maple and Matlab have also been upgraded, to versions 10 and R2006a respectively.

To install these packages on a supported PC select **Start | Settings | Control Panel** and double click on **Run Advertised Programs**. Select **What's New** from the drop-down list to find recently deployed software.

Site licensed software
Joanne Casey

We have recently become aware that some users have purchased their own licences for various items of software, unaware that the University already holds a site licence for the package they need to use.

Before you buy any software, please check whether or not there is already a site licence available. A full list of centrally provided software can be accessed from: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/**, or you can contact the Computing Service by emailing **infodesk@york.ac.uk**..

Keynotes

Collaborative Technologies Project
Joanne Casey and Verity Hartley

Background

The Computing Service is currently running a project aimed at investigating the potential of collaborative technologies. Recently, we have seen increased user demand for tools which support collaborative working, and we are aware that other Universities offer these facilities to their staff and students. The imminent provision of a central php service meant that the potential to host such services would be available.

To address this issue a project has been established under the auspices of the Computing Service Innovation Fund to provide a safe environment to try out these technologies, and to investigate the possibility of providing a service. The project team is currently considering three main tools, all of which are open source and viewed as being amongst the market leaders:

- Discussion boards using phpBB
- Wikis using MediaWiki
- Blogs using WordPress

Pilot phase

Initial testing of the three technologies was carried out in the Computing Service. At the same time, departments were contacted via the Departmental Computing Officers' list and asked to express an interest in piloting the technologies.

During the initial Computing Service testing, it was agreed that the next stage of the pilot would focus on Discussion Boards and Wikis. It was recognised that running a Blog service, even in a pilot phase, is a huge undertaking, and that effective testing necessarily requires a sizeable user base. We are continuing to test a Blog service within the Computing Service, and plan to pilot it more widely at a later date.

In the Autumn term, Wikis and Discussion Boards are being made available to the departments involved in the pilot. The tools will be used as a 'sandbox' to allow users to try them out, discover their potential uses and their possible shortcomings. It is envisaged that this stage of the pilot will give us a better idea of the effectiveness of the packages currently being tested, of the potential workload involved both within the Computing Service and within Departments, and of the gradient of the learning curve.

At present, we intend to extend the pilot phase in January 2007 with a wider release of the tools. Please get in touch if you are interested in trialling either a Wiki or a Discussion Board within your Department.

Definitions

Collaborative technologies: tools which enable collaborative working, sharing of resources, remote working, often encompassing a more informal, immediate use of computing. The term covers tools including blogs, Wikis, discussion boards, instant messaging, news feeds and internet relay chat. See: **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_tools**

Wikis: shared, editable documents. Examples include:
- **www.wikipedia.org**
- **www.memoryarchive.org/**
- **www.wikinfo.org/**

Discussion boards: also known as forums, talk boards, message boards etc – can be support tools, social tools, confined to certain user groups or wholly public. See:
- **www.bbc.co.uk/messageboards/**
- **www.adobe.com/cfusion/webforums/forum/**

Blogs: online journals, with the facility to comment, subscribe and 'trackback' (see who has linked to a blog). A blog can be produced by a single author, or by a group of authors. For examples, see:
- **blogs.warwick.ac.uk**
- **blogs.guardian.co.uk/**
- **www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/**

ETS Review Project
Joanne Casey

A team within the Computing Service has been investigating the possibility of replacing the current Enquiry Tracking System with a commercial service desk product.

The Enquiry Tracking System is a 'home-grown' facility, originally developed by Mike Clark who recently emigrated to Canada. Pressures on the time of developers within the Computing Service means that the system doesn't have the extent of functionality we had originally hoped for, and it is not currently feasible for the system's functionality to be extended in-house.

With this in mind, we have looked at the market for service desk systems, investigated what other universities are using, and drawn up a requirements document: for this we have invited input both from within the Computing Service and from other key users of ETS - for example the Library, Finance Department and the Web Office, who all use ETS to manage enquiries they receive.

It became evident early on that the market for commercial service desk systems has grown immensely since we last looked at it. Consequently, these systems now offer an enhanced range of features including for example:

•   extended enquiry management capabilities - creating parent/child tasks, automation of routine tasks, quick resolution of repetitive queries

•   facility for the service desk system to be linked with SLAs (Service Level Agreements), allowing us to identfiy targets to be met and to keep better track of performance in resolving enquiries,

•   gathering of management information and statistics

•   change management capabilities

After initial demonstrations from a number of companies, the Project Team selected a shortlist, and tender documents were drawn up with the help of the Materials Management Office. Following the tender process, the shortlist was refined further and followed by supplier demonstrations to larger groups of people, trials of demonstration versions within the Computing Service, and technical presentations to enable us to investigate the detail of the systems.

The selection process is ongoing, and we will keep you informed of its progress.

Personal images on the web
John Byrne

A new system called Personal Images on the Web has been developed by the Computing Service in a project involving representatives from several departments. At its core are a repository of images and a set of rules which govern access to the images. The repository currently holds student images. Upload facilities allow images to be added or updated - this will enable departments to add staff images if they wish, or allow students (where authorised by their department) to update their own image.

A simple web-based search tool will allow the selection of useful groupings of images - eg staff in Biology, 3rd year students in Chemistry, research students in Philosophy. What a user will see when they carry out a search is determined by access control; anyone who has an image stored in the repository can control who is allowed to see their image. Various options are currently available - eg all staff in my department, all students in the University. A restricted group of privileged users, authorized by the Registrar, will be able to view subsets of images (regardless of the access settings) in order to carry out key tasks, eg identification in case of an emergency. By default, all members of staff are be able to view the images of all students within their department.

All access requires authentication with a personal Computing Service username and password, and anyone who uses the system is required to accept the terms of a **Conditions of Use** document. Public access is not allowed.

Further details can be found at **www.york.ac.uk/systems/mugshots/documentation/**. Please contact the Computing Service Information desk if you have any queries.

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Contacting the Computing Service

Computing Service	Telephone:	(01904) 433800
University of York	Direct dial:	(01904) 43 followed by ext no.
Heslington	Fax:	(01904) 433740
YORK YO10 5DD	Email:	*username*@york.ac.uk

www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/

Information Desk

The Information Desk is your first point of contact with the Computing Service
Telephone: ext 3838
Email: *infodesk*
Open from 09.00 to 17.15 Monday to Friday (*may be closed for training Wednesdays 14.00-15.00*), for problem solving, advice and information, fault reporting, network connections, file restoration, course bookings and user registration.

Computing Service Staff

Director:	Mike Jinks	3801	*kmj1*
Departmental Secretary:	Lorraine Moor	3801	*lsm1*
Head of Infrastructure:	Robert Demaine	3808	*rld1*
Head of Information Systems:	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	*kmh8*
Head of Support Services:	David Surtees	3803	*dps4*
Information Officer:	Joanne Casey	3805	*jmc8*

Kashif Amin	3817	*ka14*		Anthony Leonard	4350	*apbl500*
Gavin Atkinson	3738	*ga9*		Michelle McCarthy	2627	*mm533*
Amanda Bacon	3802	*agb12*		Fergus McGlynn	3822	*fam6*
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Sue Bolton	2102	*sjb28*		John Mason	3813	*jrm13*
David Broom	3229	*dlb10*		Darren Miller	3815	*dm26*
Mike Brudenell	3811	*pmb1*		Eleanor Morrison	3742	*emm502*
John Byrne	3812	*jcb1*		Darren Munday	3821	*dam6*
Arthur Clune	3129	*ajc22*		Nicola Normandale	4695	*ncn1*
Steve Downes	3741	*sd21*		Heather Payne	3800	*hp501*
Al Edgar	4348	*aee500*		Aimee Phillips	3897	*amp11*
Ken Finch	4452	*kf1*		Tamsyn Quormby	4346	*tq1*
Rob Fletcher	3816	*rpf1*		Sam Scott	3817	*svs2*
Iain Ford	3894	*igf500*		Dan Shelton	4349	*ds23*
Kevin Gardner	3739	*pkg4*		Jenny Smailes	4455	*jj5*
Chris Gowland	3823	*cg1*		Philip Smailes	3833	*pjrs1*
Dan Granville	3819	*dsg2*		Andrew Smith	3809	*abs4*
Kelvin Hai	4689	*kh525*		Brian Souter	3814	*bs1*
Sarah Hall	3827	*seh11*		Max Spicer	3745	*mjs510*
Peter Halls	3806	*pjh1*		Richard Stoddart	3825	*rjs502*
Verity Hartley	3595	*vh505*		Carl Stovell	4699	*cjs505*
John Hawes	4347	*jeh11*		Ben Thompson	3230	*bt4*
Susanne Hodges	3839	*sh32*		Pete Turnbull	3804	*pnt1*
Geoff Houlton	2100	*gph2*		Sam Vines	3749	*sccv1*
John Hutchinson	3898	*jh57*		Adrian Young	3820	*ary500*
John Isles	4454	*jdi500*				

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