Select and Collect

Simon Burrows makes a selection from the best of current Public Domain

ublic Domain Software is widely available for the Archimedes, and it can be difficult to identify useful or interesting items from the hundreds of discs' worth available from PD libraries and bulletin boards. The large amount of PD software in circulation (despite the comparatively small user base) reflects the quality of BBC Basic and the RISC OS Wimp interface, which makes the Archimedes pleasant and relatively easy to program.

This occasional series hopes to introduce some of the best PD software, so that the task of choosing worthwhile items is not so much of a lucky dip. A few PD programs are not worth even the cost of postage, whilst it would be justifiable to go out of your way to get hold of others. Remember that software may only be distributed if explicit permission is given in the accompanying files, and then any attached conditions must be followed.

DRAWPLUS

Many programs build on the facilities already provided by Acorn, the most notable of these being *DrawPlus*, written by Jonathan Marten. This invaluable application, written in C, provides a complete replacement for Acorn's Draw, and boasts many extra features of use to anyone who ever needs to produce or manipulate Draw files. The features are really too numerous to cover in detail. For example, it allows complex pictures to be built up layer by layer, and each can be made invisible or locked so that they cannot be accidentally altered whilst the rest are completed. Libraries of graphics, symbols and other clipart can be created, and Draw files can be extracted from these as

required, providing an excellent means to preview the different Draw files which you may have available.

DAILY

The simplest programs are often the most useful - an example of this is *Daily*, by Joe Abley. This module displays a small digital clock in the top right corner of the

The DrawPlus library feature

screen, in the style of Channel Four's Breakfast TV clock. It is very unobtrusive and attractive to look at, using system font characters adhered to the backdrop, and comes complete with the small bar which moves underneath the digits every fifteen seconds. The worst feature is that it can remind you how many hours have been spent on the computer, although on reflection this may be a good thing!

Some PD software is so good that it seems wrong that the author gains no financial reward for it. Take for example RiscBBS, by Carl Declerck of BASS, a group from Belgium who have produced

many excellent applications. It allows any user with a modem to run a substantial bulletin board system, although actually it is fun to play with even without a modem! It sits on the icon bar allowing the machine to multi-task, and yet supports numerous BBS facilities, including Fidonet-compatible Electronic Mail, conferences, uploading and downloading of software, real-time games and so on. Several layers of privileged access are available, even allowing the command line to be accessed remotely. Incidentally, RiscBBS is so good that Acorn have adopted it as the basis for their on-line support system.

Creating Crosswords

TEMPLATE EDITORS

There are several utilities available to assist help authors produce templates. Acorn's *FormEd*, which is not Public Domain can be used to create template files, which greatly simplifies the creation of windows in the RISC OS Desktop. Several enhanced versions have been produced by other people, so it is worth checking exactly which one you have. An equivalent program to deal with menus has been written by David Andrews, simply called *Menus*. This contains a module which greatly simplifies the creation and handling of menu structures, a great boon since this can be one of the most time-consuming parts of writing a program to work in the Desktop.

MAIL-MERGE

Computer Concepts are not well known for producing PD software, but they have released their *Impulse II* system (not to be confused with Impression II!) into the Public Domain. This module, complete with documentation and example programs which demonstrate mail-merging with Impression II, allows Wimp tasks to communicate in ways which were not possible before, and is the basis for hotlinking between many commercial and PD programs.

INTERFACE

If you want your Desktop applications to look impressive, take a look at the *Interface* module written by Simon Huntingdon, which comes complete with full documentation on disc. This makes it easy to produce 3D effects similar to those used in Impression II, and is widely used in PD applications since so many people prefer the appearance to that laid down by Acorn.

ADVANCED GRAPH PLOTTER

The interface module is put to good use in *AGP* by Ben Harris. AGP stands for Advanced Graph Plotter, and would be of particular use in the classroom. It enables a variety of graphs to be plotted in a Desktop window, including more than one at a time, and these can be saved as Draw files for use in other packages. Like many PD programs, AGP makes good use of Acorn's interactive help facility, so if you have any difficulty using it, load the Help application off your RISC OS Applications disc.

SHAREWARE

A proportion of so-called PD software is actually *Shareware*; this means that if you find the software useful, you should send off a registration fee to the author. Paying is not optional, but is dependent on people being honest. Doing so usually means that the author will send you some free upgrades, perhaps enhanced versions and even printed manuals. Authors are also more likely to implement extra features for you if you are registered (provided they would be of interest to other people). In general, Shareware can be obtained in exactly the same way as PD software.

TRANSLATOR

For people with an interest in graphics, John Kortink from the Netherlands has produced a whole host of useful Shareware programs. The most useful of these is *Translatr*, which allows graphics images from other computers to be converted into sprite files for use on the Archimedes. It copes with a large number of different image formats, and even makes it possible to buy discs of graphics images from PD libraries for other computers (providing that you have the means to read their disc formats). John is particularly keen that people should register as required, and upgraded versions are only available to registered users. Furthermore, users can send examples of other image formats to John, and he will happily update Translatr to handle them. This is a classic example of a program which is constantly being improved, and it is well worth upgrading if your version is earlier than about v6.80.

RAY-TRACING

Another popular form of image manipulation is ray-tracing, and Pete Goodwin has recently released his Archimedes version of *PVray*. This comprehensive package, which would take up several discs if not compressed, provides many of the features which you would normally expect to pay a lot of money for. As with most ray tracers, *PVray* takes a long time to produce the final images, but it is worth the wait, and stunning pictures can be produced, especially from the numerous examples included. PVray is also available for use on other computers, and the files are interchangeable. A powerful screen designer called *Model* is available for use with PVray, making the complete package even more flexible. Several ray-tracers are available at minimal cost, but I would recommend that you consider this latest offering.

MEMPHIS

Brian Brunswick writes many useful applications, one of which is *Memphis*. Quite simply, this provides a replacement for the RAM filing system which automatically resizes itself according to the length of the files to be stored in it. The MemFS filing system allocates no more space than needed, so it is no longer necessary to store files somewhere else whilst trying to alter the size of the RAM disc.

LABEL

The RISC OS Outline Font manager is great for most types of printing, but the majority of users still use dot-matrix printers. When using labels, outline font printing is unnecessarily slow and the print quality may not be as good as the printer's internal fonts. Various utilities are available to facilitate such printing - one of the most versatile is called *Label* by Jonathan Marten of DrawPlus fame. It caters for all sizes and configurations of labels, and can send control codes to the printer to select from

any print styles available.

ADDRESS

If you wish to print address labels, then *Address* by Alex Hopkins may well suit your needs. This Shareware program allows names, addresses and other details to be entered, searched and stored, and has the capability to print out chosen details from selected (or all) records onto a variety of labels. The latest versions are fully RISC OS compatible, and are ideal for storing and printing addresses.

HANGMAN

A number of PD programs can be of particular benefit in the classroom, and in this category I would include *Hangman*, by Brian Trott. This plays a great game of Hangman, and uses excellent ray-traced graphics. The best part is if the player actually fails to guess the word in time, in which case the unfortunate person actually swings on the end of the rope, complete with ray-traced reflections! The dictionary of words can be altered, so it is simple to adapt it to use words from a foreign language.

CROSSWORDS

For all crossword fanatics (and magazine editors), *DrawCross* by Liam Corner is well worth trying out. This program takes a text file, with # symbols representing black squares, and converts it into a corresponding Draw file containing the crossword puzzle. This makes it simple to create attractive and

are only visible after much scrolling. The integral calculation uses the specified maximum and minimum x values as the limits - it would have been useful to draw a graph and then specify separately the limits

Figure 3. Plot of

for calculating an integral.

Three dimensional plots are specified similarly with a choice of function plotting (grid lines) which gives the best indication of the surface (see figure 3) or contour plotting.

The other menu options allow any graph to be saved as a Draw file or to be printed using RISC OS printer drivers.

Functionplotter is supplied on a single disc with a plain 36 page manual. The features are just about adequately described, but there are no examples here or on the disc.

In conclusion I have to say that this product currently lacks both sophistication and flexibility. Compared with what is available from PD libraries or elsewhere (see the Cartesian graph plotter on this month's magazine disc for example), Functionplotter regrettably is limited in what it has to offer.

professional looking crosswords for use in desktop publishing.

IN CONCLUSION

A large proportion of PD software is written outside of the UK, and often it rates amongst the best - offerings from Germany and the Netherlands are common, but have you seen the software written in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, France, Japan, Italy, Iceland or even Russia? Some recent items have appeared from students at the Moscow State University, and are very good, especially considering that the authors cannot afford to buy books, magazines or software, not even discs of PD programs.

All of the items mentioned here are available from any good PD library (including the RISC User PD Software Library - see below) - the quality of a PD library can only be judged from experience or personal recommendations. It is a good idea to compare the catalogues from several different sources (including the RISC User PD library) and choose whichever library appears to offer good value combined with quick service. If you want a particular item, check what other items each library includes on the same disc, and choose whichever one contains the most attractive-sounding extra software.

This article has only covered a few items of good PD software, and we intend to look at many more in the future. If you find a piece of software particularly useful or interesting, please do write in, giving the name and author of the program in question, and saying what you like about it.

All the PD software referred to by Simon Burrows is available a a special collection within the RISC User PD Software Library, at just £1.60 per disc inclusive of VAT and p&p - for *more details see our PD page opposite.*

Other sources of PD software are:

The Data Stream, 32 Holinwell Avenue, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 1JZ.

Arch Angel PD Library, P.O.Box 41, Exeter, Devon EX4 3EN.

The DataFile, 22 Duxford Drive, Aldergrove, Co. Antrim BT29 4BG.