The **Explorer** quest

Not quite your Ranulph Fiennes, but none the less intrepid for all that, Tim Nott leads you to the answer to an FAQ about Explorer and hacks his way through other little-known aspects of this utility.

The Lord, it is said, moves in mysterious ways. Equally mysterious are those of Windows 95 folders and Explorer.

Let's start with an FAQ — a Frequently Asked Question. How do I persuade Explorer to start without expanding a drive? By default, it starts with the left hand pane showing a tree structure, with Desktop at the top, then My Computer, Network Neighbourhood, Recycle Bin and Brief-case on the next level.

My Computer (or whatever you've renamed it) branches to each logical drive on your PC, as well as entries for Control Panel, Printers and possible other folders, such as Dial-up networking. However, it's the drives we're interested in.

Say you have a PC with floppy disk on A:, a hard disk split into two partitions C: and D:, and a CD-ROM on E:. Explorer will, by default, expand the first level of folders in C: and show all its contents in the right hand pane. If you've got more than a score or so of folders in the root of C:, this means you have to collapse the branch (click on the minus sign to the left of the drive icon) or scroll down to see D: or E:. All of which is rather a pain in the pane, so to speak.

Fortunately, Explorer has a variety of startup switches which enable it to perform in different ways. You'll find this information in a file called Tips.txt which should be in your main Windows 95 folder. Failing that, it's also in the Windows Resource Kit Helpfile on the CD-ROM, situated at Admin\Reskit\Helpfile\Win95rk.hlp. The command line parameters are:

```
EXPLORER [/n] [/e][,/root,object][[,/
select],subobject]
```

If you find the explanation that follows totally baffling, then you are not alone. However, after much trial and error with the final beta I did manage to get it to open, unexpanded. Then, when the release version arrived, I lost the magic formula and it reverted to its old ways. So a big thank you to Eric Chapman who posted the following hint on CIX:

Right-click on the Start button, then Open. Double-click on Programs in the folder that appears. In the next folder you should find a shortcut icon (it has a little arrow at the corner) for Explorer. Right-click on this and choose Properties. Click on the Shortcut tab in the property sheet, and change the entry in the Target box to:

```
C:\WINDOWS\EXPLORER.EXE /n,/e,/
select,C:\
```

Make sure you get all the commas and slashes right. You can, if you want, put a different drive letter before the final back-slash. Explorer will then open with no drive expanded, and C: (or the letter you've specified) highlighted.

Screen horror

Explorer is actually responsible for far more than the tree/contents window that appears when you click on its icon. It's the Windows "shell" and, like 3.1's Program Manager, is running all the time. Try clos-ing any Explorer windows and press Ctrl+Alt+Delete. This will summon the Close Program dialogue box. You'll see a list of all programs running — including those that work behind the scenes and don't appear on the taskbar. Select Explorer and click on the End Task button, and the Shut Down Windows dialogue appears. Similarly, try running Explorer from the Run command without the /e

switch — youll see a normal, single-paned folder window open.

You can also Explore from an open folder by right clicking on a sub-folder and choosing Explore. A quicker way is to shift-double-click on a folder. But there is a rather tedious trap here: if you're not care-ful this will open an Explorer for every folder up to the one on which you double-click. Once the process has started there seems no way of aborting it — you just watch in horror as the screen fills up with Explorers, and then close them all individ-ually when it has finished.

What happens is that when you open a folder, the first item is semi-selected. It isn't highlighted, but there's a dotted box around it. Shift-clicking on another item selects everything in between, and if these are all folders, then they will all get Explored. Logically, it should take three clicks to do this, but logic keeps a low pro-file in Windows 95. The way to avoid it happening is to select the folder you want to explore with a single, unshifted click, then shift-double-click.

Windows allows you the option of opening new folders as separate windows, or replacing the contents of the existing one. You set this behaviour from the View/Options menu. Whichever option you choose, you'll probably find occasions when you'd rather it did the opposite. For example, in "same window" mode you might find yourself wanting two folders open so you can drag files between them. Or in "multiple windows" mode you might want to open a deeply-nested folder with-out cluttering up the screen with all its ancestors. However, if you hold down the Control key as you open a folder, the

behaviour reverses on a one-off basis. You doubtless know that pressing the Backspace key opens (or switches back to) the parent folder, but Ctrl+Backspace doesn't appear to work — you have to Ctrl+click on the "Up one level" button instead. And don't forget that holding the Shift key down when you close a folder closes all its ancestors.

Christmas reprise

This time last year, the *Hands On* editor, Gordon Laing, suggested that we each produce a Christmas wish-list. Gordon has since moved to the other end of the magazine, but I'm pleased to say that our current squadron leader, Eleanor Turton-Hill, is upholding tradition, although management cutbacks mean we're down to five wishes against last year's ten.

Before I send this year's list (see the panel page 289) fluttering up the chimney, it's interesting to see how many of last year's dreams came true.

Wishes one and two concerned the price of RAM. We all need more of it, and

Mystery of the month

This month's mystery is one that had me completely stumped at first: reader Martyn Goodman wanted to know how it is possible to modify something that doesn't yet exist.
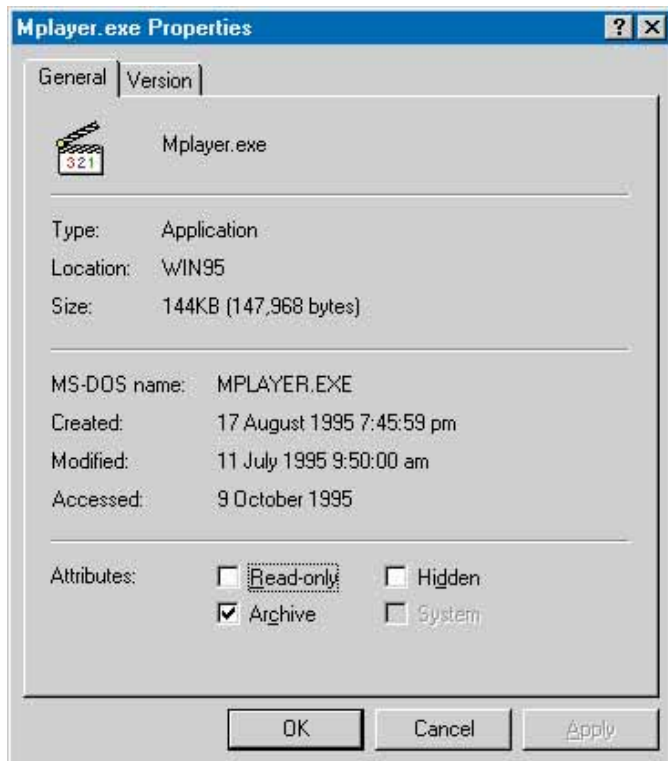
This is not a philosophical paradox, on the lines of "travelling back in time to before you were born and killing your parents", but refers to the information given in some file property sheets. Sure enough, when I looked, I found that I had a load of files that were created on 17th August 1995, but which had been modified more than five weeks earlier. The confusion stems from what is meant by "creation date".

Windows 95 keeps track of three dates per file: the date at which the file was created on your hard disk; the date it was last accessed (the last time you ran a program file or read a data file without necessarily changing it); and the date it was last changed.

Windows 3.1 only showed the last of these, and this is also the date that appears in a folder with Details turned on. Since most of us don't modify program files, then this is usually the date-stamp given to the file by its original creators and was previously known, quite reasonably, as the "creation date". This is often a useful aid to identification: the time for Windows 95 files is shown as 9:50 a.m; and Windows 3.11 as 3:11 a.m. However, the Created field in the property sheet refers to the date the file was created locally, on your hard disk.

Mystery solved, I hope.

A blow to Creationists — can Windows really time travel?

my fervent desire was that someone would put out the fire in the resin factory, or at least come up with some plausible explanation for why it continues to be so expensive compared with processors and hard disks.

A quick look at the prices in corresponding issues of *PCW* shows that hard disk prices have once again tumbled dramatically — a 1Gb drive can be had for under £250, which works out at 25p a megabyte. Practically everything else is cheaper, too: motherboards, processors, peripherals and software. RAM, on the other hand has dropped only slightly in price; it's still about one hundred times the

price-per-meg of hard disk space. Five years ago the ratio was around ten to one. Keep trying, Santa.

Wish three was for a decent Windows text editor. At the time, I reported that I'd already opened this one, in the shape of Windows 95 beta WordPad, which had all sorts of improvements over Write such as: drag and drop editing, a toolbar, and the ability to read and save RTF and Word 6 documents. To my acute embarrassment, I actually wrote I think I'm in love. Not any more. For a start, the release version shows a distinct downturn in speed; it's only about 25 percent faster than Word 7 to load a big document. Write does it

almost instantly.Furthermore, Write had headers, footers, decimal tabs and full-justified margins. WordPad doesn't.

And if you're thinking of taking a Word 6 or 7 document home for the weekend, and editing it in WordPad, you'll notice that you've lost the greater part of the formatting. Sorry, Santa, but the wheels have fallen off this one.

Wish four was my periodic howl for a keyboard whose layout was based on something a little more ergonomic than the 1872 Scholes Typewriter. Dream on, Tim.

Wish five was for the Windows 95 programmers to move the Close button away from the Maximise and Minimise ones.
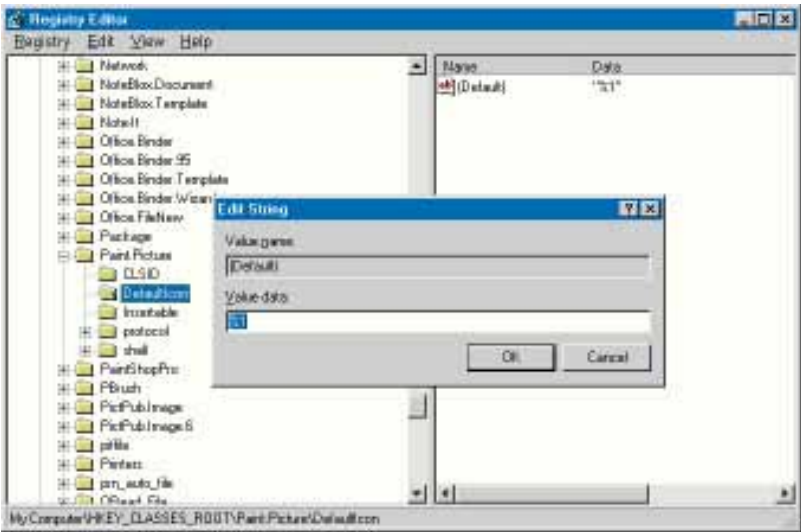
Bits & PCs

Good news and bad news for Microsoft Office users.
● The good news, which I discovered purely by trial and error, is that Windows Paint will use the graphic import filters supplied with Office. It tries to keep this secret, as they don't appear in the list of file types, but I've managed to load .GIF, .TIF and .JPG files. This is strictly a one-way exercise because you can't save in these formats, but I'm none the less impressed.
● The bad news, which I'm glad to say I didn't find by trial and error, is that if you enter 1.40737488355328 into a cell in Excel… well, try it and see. Weird, is it not?
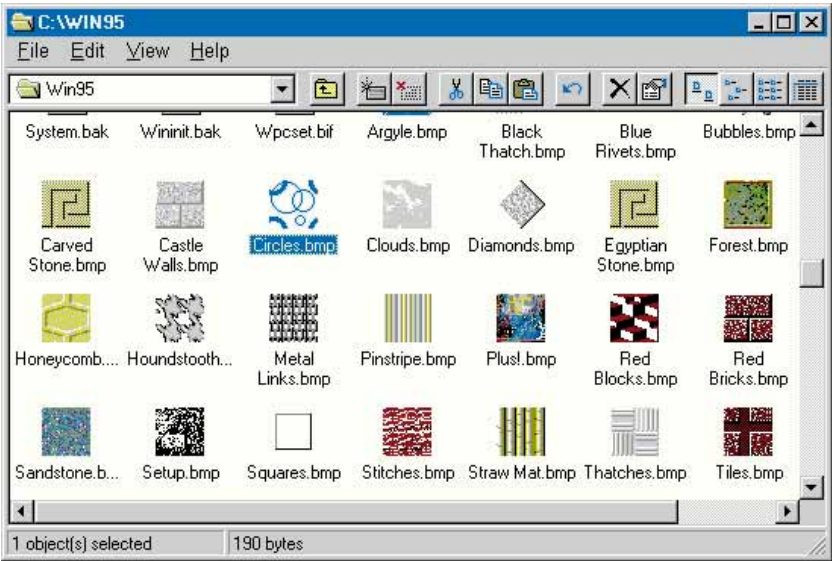
Pretty silly
● Here's a fairly useless, but rather clever, trick that involves editing the registry; so you may want to make back-ups of USER.DAT and SYSTEM.DAT first.

Run REGEDIT, and click on the plus sign next to HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT. Scroll down until you see Paint Picture and click on its plus sign. Click on the folder that says DefaultIcon, then switch to the right-hand pane and double click on Default in the Name column. A dialogue box opens, letting you edit the contents of the entry in the Data column. This should contain the location of the icon — normally "C:\Progra~1\Access~1\MSPAINT.EXE,1". Pausing only to wonder why the registry can't handle long folder names, change this

Left
Editing the registry entry for Paint Picture icons…

Below
…and the result

to "%1". Don't type the quotes — the editor will add its own double quotes. Close REGEDIT (it saves automatically). You

should then find that all .BMP files appear in folders, not with the default Paint icon, but as miniatures of themselves.

Christmas wishes

Dear Santa,
Please ask Microsoft to place a few windows in its Chinese walls. Then the developers of Office could see what the Windows 95 mob was up to. I like the way the accessories such as NotePad, WordPad and Paint show the file first, then the application on the title bar or the task bar. This is the document-centric approach, and it's a great improvement — after all, you can tell the application from the icon picture. So why on earth didn't someone tell the Office team about this? To add insult to injury, it's not just "Word" or "Excel", followed by the data file that appears on the taskbar buttons, but "Microsoft Word..." Hence, after a busy hour or two you end up with several buttons all saying "Mic..."

And while the Office crew is making its products Windows 95-compatible, how about a bit of feedback the other way? Why not make the Windows 95 accessories Office-compatible so we can add Paint files to an Office Binder, for instance?

And can you remind Microsoft about MDI — the multiple document interface? Opening separate folders, or Explorer sessions, is a tedious way to move files about compared with the old multi-paned File Manager.

And getting back to Binder again — why is there no way of tiling documents there? When I looked at the beta version of Windows Quickview, I distinctly remember having seen viewers for JPEG and GIF files. So why aren't they there any more? Can we have them back please?

Please give me the patience and understanding to get to grips with the way in which Windows 95 saves settings, or not, as the case may be. You may remember we used to be able to do this with the File and Program Managers. I realise this is going to take a long time, but I would like to pass this information on to the readers of my column. Can we please start with "How do I stop Windows re-opening all the folders I was using when I last shut down?"

They didn't, and now I've grown used to it I'm very glad they didn't and I retract that one completely.

Alas, the Whoops button (for cancelling the loading of a program one has launched by accident) didn't happen either, but my next wish did. It was for a create directory button in File/Save dialogues. Santa really went overboard on this one, as I can now rename, copy, move and delete files, Quickview them, send them to another application and generally do all the things possible in a normal folder, without leaving the Open/Save as… dialogue.

Wish seven was for a way of password protecting — particularly from six-year-olds — applications and directories on a standalone PC. Pausing only to update that to *seven*-year-olds, I can report that Windows 95 is better at this but still not good enough. I will cover this in greater detail in a later issue.

Wish eight was a subscription to Which Internet Book magazine. It was meant as a joke, but I am now informed that such a thing exists.

I'm still waiting for wish nine, the UK version of Encarta, and since no-one fulfilled wish ten — a bottle of Bushmill's Black Label — I bought my own.

Grovel
In the November issue, I explained how to change the startup screen, and wrote Make a back up of LOGO.SYS, which you'll find in the root directory of your boot drive. My apologies go to all those who have been trying to find a non-existent file, and thanks to the readers who emailed me, pointing out the error.

Mark Lovell got there first, stating correctly that this file isn't installed by Windows, but by the Plus! pack. The default startup screen is built in, but any 256 colour .BMP file, 320 pixels wide by 400 high, saved as LOGO.SYS in the root directory, will override it. ◾

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