Liveryman Ernest Morriss

M y own memories cover the years from the 1950's, the birth of the general application of computers - in a commercial environment - through the time when information technology came into being, to the present day when everything IT-orientated is now arguably taken for granted.

At the end of my National (Military) Service, in September 1954, I joined the British Tabulating Machine Company (BTM) as a (trainee) Technical Serviceman. After nearly a year's training in the company's punched card equipment, I was transferred to the City of London branch, where I assisted customers in the use of the equipment for accounting and administrative processes. BTM was then developing its commercial computer, the HEC4, which led to the 1201 computer, and later the 202 when the drum storage was enhanced. In 1957 I was sent on a course to learn how to program the computer and then took part in advising several organisations which had signed up for one of these machines. A year later I was appointed by one of their customers, CT Bowring & Co (Insurance) Ltd. (CTB), to lead a team preparing for the introduction of a 1201. One was duly delivered in 1960 at which time I became the data processing manager, although my main role seemed to be debugging programs! Whilst successful at the time, this range of machines was supplanted by more powerful ones, the Company replacing the 1202 by the Honeywell 400 in March 1965, which was chosen mainly because of its superior magnetic tape facilities, without which we would have struggled. I remained with the Company until the end of 1966 when I joined Cooper Brothers & Co (CB & Co), the management consultancy arm of its chartered accountancy practice, which had extended its services into giving advice on computer systems.

In the late 1960's and even in the 1970's the lack of program design and implementation services at the established management consultancies became a partial disadvantage. They were faced with the expanding nature of software houses and the apparent preference by computer managers for the wider range of assistance (rather than just advice) which was provided. It was this competition which led CB & Co to join COSBA (the Computer Services and Bureaux Association), and in the early 1970's, now as a director of CB & Co, I became involved with COSBA on behalf of the Company. This organisation had been established to act in the interests of bureaux and then more widely of service companies. The Software Houses Association (SHA) had a similar remit, the two organisations merging to become the Computer Services Association (CSA) in 1975, when I was appointed Secretary, and in the following year I became its third president, following our Founder Master Barney Gibbons and past WCIT Liveryman Bryan Mills. In 1957 the British Computer Society (BCS) had been formed to be representative of everyone actively engaged in computing, be it in academia, business, research, or the manufacture and operation of machines. The BCS was influential in the formation of WCIT, which also covers a broad spectrum of the profession. Several former BCS Presidents became Masters of WCIT. These included, for example, Past Master Alan Rousell from the manufacturing industry; Past Master David Mann from the software side of IT; and Past Master Sir Brian Jenkins, IT applications to accountancy.