

Paint a computer competition for children

Recently the Young Observer section of the *Observer* colour magazine, in association with Honeywell, organized a Paint a Computer competition for children. The winner, 14-year-old Nicholas Wingfield, of Gravesend, designed the computerized family doctor illustrated.

The complete Honeywell report on the event is reproduced *in toto* as a little light relief.

"This computer turns dead people into useful things like dogs, flowers and bubble gum." Michael Green, aged 7, of Brighton, Sussex.

"Our computer shrinks animals. This would be useful if the world had no more room for crops. The crops would grow where the large animals used to be." Gillian Williams, aged 10, of Rhiwbina, Cardiff.

"This machine is made to count how many measles spots there are in the British Isles at a given time. It should help doctors know where to go." John McPherson, aged 10, of Bishop's Stortford, Herts.

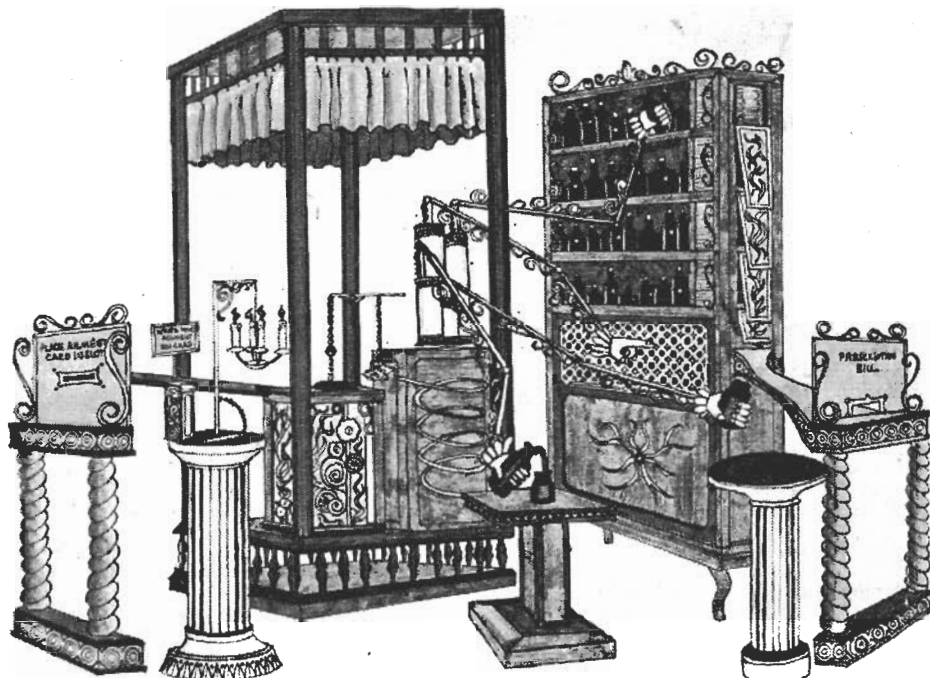
"For testing people and testing their blood and finding out if they smoke, eat eggs, bacon, potato and if they run. It measures a person's height." Shona McKinnon, aged 6, of Bearsden, Glasgow.

"One day a computer made a boy and out he came." James Cheseldene, aged 5, of Leeds.

Five gems from among many. There were the predictable UFO detectors, space stations, homework computers ("satchel size"), time machines, weather or football forecasters, kitchen computers. There were conveyor belts, cogs, brains, buttons, steam, tubes, wire, plugs and pipes.

But there were also the extraordinary flights of imagination that no computer could ever have predicted. Like the blackberry counting computer; or the one that is used to wipe your nose and switch on television; or that tells you what to do when you are in the WC when the WC is locked; or that makes red, green, black, brown, orange and purple toothpaste; or that blows out candles ("for the man who has everything"); or that finds out how many bees are in the area by hearing the buzzing and converting it into numbers; or that translates animal language into human language; or that makes apples into tennis balls; or that puts answers into your head before you ask the questions.

It was the everyday chores of life, however, that came in for the most attention — mostly those faced by Mum dashing madly about in the morning getting breakfast and doing housework. Washing dishes and making tea; cleaning shoes; taking the dog for a walk; doing the gardening; getting up in time to get to school by way of the Bakerloo line; minding the baby; cooking; letter writing; and, of course, homework. Division seems to cause problems to many a 10-year-old; and one at least applied a computer to "working out the best excuse



Computerized family doctor depicted by 14-year-old Nicholas Wingfield in the Paint a Computer competition organized by the 'Observer' and Honeywell.

if you did not do your homework".

Some of the serious issues of the day were also covered. There were several machines designed to clear the atmosphere of pollution, and others for deciding strikes. Master C. C. Wheeldon, aged 15, of Plymouth, reckoned to have solved the unemployment problem at a stroke with his computer "as it will take at least 300 people to build it". On the other hand, Duncan Chapman, aged 8, of Hoylake, Cheshire, produced a computer to control "the machines in a factory, so only two men are needed". And there was many an entry aimed at crime in the person of the burglar who came in for some pretty gruesome punishment. There is a sadistic streak lying crust deep in many a young mind!

There was one "primeminister" computer — "he'll listen, sip tea, tax things and generally flap about all day" — sent in by Robert Jones, aged 14, of Redditch, Worcs; and one "Mrs. Thatcher computer" entered by Frances Williams, aged 14, of Helston, Cornwall, which had its free school meals dispensers labelled "out of order".

Other teacher-prompted suggestions were also in evidence — the computer for working out school timetables did not, somehow, ring true as the idea of a 9-year-old.

Then, finally, there was some evidence of real computer appreciation. "The computer I have illustrated will give you the answer to any of the subjects I have stated provided the machine is fed properly" was one phrase that struck a chord in the heart of the man from Honeywell.

As did the use of a toilet-roll for print-out ("perforated for easy tear off"); and the provision of a "steam boiler in case of power cuts" that Hugh West, aged 9, of

Didcot, Berks, made for his computer for house and garden work.

And when it came to acronyms, the computer industry had nothing to teach some of the entrants. Honours here were equally divided between two 12-year-olds, Timothy Wilcox, of Oadby, Leics., and M. Everest Phillips, of Mill Hill, London. Timothy coined P.E.S.T. for Pocket Embassy Spy Tracker Mk 1 for embassy officials to detect the presence of spies; and young Phillips, S.C.R.A.P.S., for School Cook's Ration Allocation Programming System.

Almost to a child, all assumed that the computer was infallible. Occasionally, however, there was a hint that the machine could falter — like the "computer that predicts the football pools absolutely correctly . . . (usually)". Or — and this must be the last word — 11-year-old Tessa Howe's, of Forest Row, Sussex, wind forecasting computer: "to work the computer, you pull back the lever and the incorrect wind forecast will fall slowly into the bucket".

PEAL a clanger?

Engineers' demands for personal services were the subject of a joint examination by the Council of Engineering Institutions and the Engineers' Guild Ltd. The formation of the Professional Engineers Association Ltd, PEAL (see *Wireless World* September 1970 p.428) was proposed but the response from members of constituent institutions was below the target set for a viable organization and PEAL was, therefore, still-born.