Editorial comments

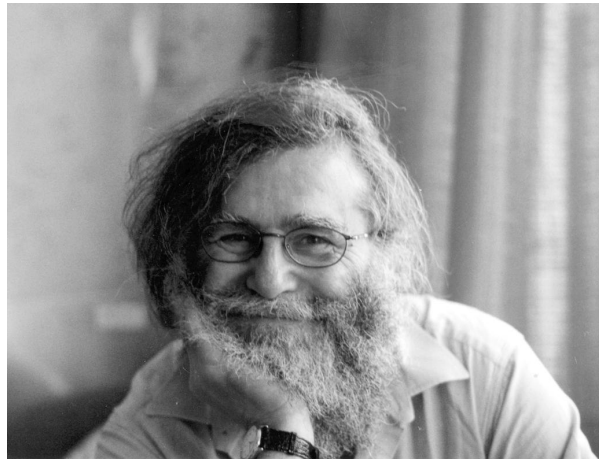Barbara Beeton

Robin Fairbairns, 1947–2022

Robin left us on 25 February 2022, after a long period of ill health. An interview by Dave Walden in February 2005[1] tells how he came to the TeX world, even before he joined the Computer Laboratory of the University of Cambridge, bringing (LA)TeX with him.

At Cambridge, Robin was in charge of many activities related to TeX. Early on, he was an avid TeX user, and actively answered questions on `texhax` and `comp.text.tex`. When the University of Aston determined that they were no longer able to host the UKTeX Archive, Robin rescued it and brought it to Cambridge, where it became one of the original nodes of CTAN. (In turn, this freed Sebastian Rahtz to put together the first versions of TeX Live.[2]) Robin is listed as (co-)author and/or maintainer of a rather large number of packages on CTAN,[3] among them `capt-of`, `covington` (linguistic support), `endnotes`, `footmisc`, `moreverb`, `rotating`, and `setspace`, to mention some that I've seen still in use recently.

Always helpful, and a good explainer, Robin (with others) selected the 100 most interesting questions asked on various Internet fora and created the UK-TUG FAQ, which they published in *Baskerville* (*The Annals of the UK TeX Users' Group*) in December 1994 (vol. 4, no. 6).[4] The online version moved to Cambridge in 1999, joining CTAN, with Robin as editor. With the maintenance of CTAN centralized under DANTE, the Cambridge site became a mirror, and after Robin's retirement at the end of December 2014 the FAQ found a new home.[5] However, much of the content still owes its existence and clarity to Robin.

Robin attended the first meeting of the British user group, UK-TUG, and was persuaded to serve on the committee; he also served as chairman, and was the formal publisher of *Baskerville*. He was active in TUG as well, serving on the board in 1996–1997. He attended several TUG annual meetings, and was editor of the proceedings for two of them: 1995 (St. Petersburg, Florida) and 2000 (Wadham College, Oxford, UK). The *TUGboat* production team was formed during the editing of the 1995 proceedings, with Robin as a founding member; he

remained a member through 2019. Also a *TUGboat* author,[6] Robin introduced the "New (LATeX 2_ε) *TUGboat* Macros",[7] a tutorial for the package he helped to develop, based on his experience with the 1995 proceedings.

Last, but far from least, Robin was a member of the LATeX3 Project. The memorial on their site includes this recognition:[8]

> Robin was a tireless member of the community who helped many people for many years with his kind, friendly, and patient approach. He clearly looked to improve the TeX ecosystem and worked hard to leave it in a better place after his time was up. He certainly succeeded in that.

I couldn't agree more, and will miss him greatly.

R.I.P. Brent Longborough

Brent Longborough, an active participant since its inception in TeX.Stackexchange and other (LA)TeX-related pursuits, left us peacefully on 6 December 2021, surrounded by his family. Brent characterized himself as an "old-ish IT geezer, young at heart".

Born in Exeter, in Devon, England, he moved with his family to a number of different UK towns and cities, prefiguring his later peripatetic life. He attended Oxford University, concentrating in chemistry, but decided early that this was not for him, and switched to IT, which became his permanent direction.

In 1980, he moved to Rio de Janeiro, working for a British airline. There he mastered the Portuguese language, met his wife, Celia Navarro, and acquired a family.

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[1] `tug.org/interviews/fairbairns.html`
[2] `tug.org/TUGboat/tb18-2/tb55tlguide2.pdf`
[3] `ctan.org/author/fairbairns`
[4] `mirrors.ctan.org/usergrps/uktug/baskervi/bask4_6.pdf`
[5] `texfaq.org`
[6] `tug.org/TUGboat/Contents/listauthor.html#Fairbairns,Robin`
[7] `tug.org/TUGboat/tb17-3/tb52guid.pdf`
[8] `latex-project.org/news/2022/03/16/robin-fairbairns/`

For many years, Brent was employed by IBM, still in Brazil. After leaving IBM, he worked for a Turkish airline, moving with his family to Turkey, becoming conversant in Turkish as well. When he became involved with TeX, he participated in the development of `arara`, including the translation of `arara` into Turkish.

Brent continued moving around the world, living at various times in Mexico, Colombia and India, returning to the UK after retirement, where he settled with his family in Wales. Languages were well represented in Brent's skill set, and included French and Spanish (as well as innumerable programming languages), and finally, Welsh. After his return to the UK in 2002, Brent served (in 2013) as a member of the UK-TUG committee.

Brent's contributions to CTAN were related to the use of `git`, and the package `tagging`, which supported the creation of a source document from which multiple distinct outputs could be generated.

A representative example of his contributions to Stackexchange discussions is his response to the question "Why is LaTeX so complicated?", which can be seen at `https://tex.stackexchange.com/a/222505`.

A memorial to Brent was held via Zoom on 23 January 2022, led by his son, Gus Navarro, and attended by many of his friends. Conducted alternately in Portuguese and English, his message honored his father's care and attention through an eventful life. Remembrances by friends reinforced the memory of these qualities.

Thanks to Paulo Cereda for sharing notes from the Zoom memorial and providing other helpful information.

TUG 2022 — Online again

Owing to the ongoing uncertainty concerning the ability to travel and meet with no restrictions based on COVID-19 status, it has been decided to, once again, conduct the conference online. This will take place from 22–24 July 2022. For details so far visit the conference web page at `tug.org/tug2022`.

As always, participation is encouraged, both through submission of papers and volunteering to assist with the organization. Instructions for submitting a presentation are on the web page. If you wish to volunteer, send a message to `tug2022@tug.org`.

HTML versions of TeX-related documents

Two significant developments have occurred to support (visual) access to TeX-related material on the web: an HTML version of the PGF/TikZ manual, and HTML output from articles on the arXiv.

The manual was provided by Dominik Peters at `https://tikz.dev`, as announced in January on the `tex.stackexchange` forum.[9] It's searchable, and sections are provided as links identified with ¶. (The graphic of the opening page in the posting is very attractive.)

The second development is the availability of math articles on the arXiv via `ar5iv.org` as "responsive HTML5 web pages" (the "5" is an indication of the HTML version). Translation from the source is accomplished using LaTeXML.[10] More details of the project can be found on the arXiv blog.[11] We would be pleased to learn your reactions to the output of this project.

The W3C MathML Working Group is working on the problem of audio and tactile accessibility for visually impaired readers. This is even more complicated than conversion to HTML for sighted readers. At an appropriate time, we hope to learn about the problems they've encountered and how those were overcome.

Movable metal type

Earlier this year, Boris Veytsman sent to me and several others interested in the printing arts a link to the scans of a beautiful copy of a Gutenberg bible, resident in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.[12] Leafing through the pages, I observed that not only was some of the text printed in two colors (black with select passages in red), but ornate initials and delicate marginal decorations were also present. While admiring this handiwork, a followup message arrived from one of the other recipients, admiring the printing workmanship that had produced these marvelous decorations.

Stop! Given the mechanical requirements of printing with movable type, it wasn't possible that the decorations could be produced on the press. They must be added by hand after the print run. Since I would have expected the individual making these comments to know the process, but clearly that was not the case, it seemed appropriate to present a brief introduction. Here I will be very brief, but with the intention of creating something closer to a "how to" manual at a later time.

Movable type, from Gutenberg's time (mid-15th century) through the middle of the 19th century, consisted of individually cast metal letters that were

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[9] `tex.stackexchange.com/a/630330`
[10] `math.nist.gov/~BMiller/LaTeXML`
[11] `blog.arxiv.org/2022/02/21/arxiv-articles-as-responsive-web-pages/`
[12] `orbis.library.yale.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=3391099`, `collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2020598`

composed into text by hand. In order to keep them in their proper locations, it was necessary to place them on a flat solid surface and constrain them by locking them into a frame, or chase, so that they wouldn't fall apart into "pi", forcing the compositor to start all over, after picking up the little pieces and sorting them into a recognizable order.

Watch this brief video, showing how an 83-year-old Japanese printer carefully selects her type, arranges it, locks it up on the press, and prints a business card.[13] Then contemplate how much more effort went into the printing of the Gutenberg bible.

Calling all users of the UK TEX FAQ

This is not new news, but may not be known generally, and it can come as a surprise when links pointing to the FAQ come up broken.

The UK TEX FAQ was created under the auspices of UK-TUG. Full publication first occurred in *Baskerville* **4**:6, December 1994, as *The New TEX FAQ: Your 100 Questions Answered*.[14] At that time, the home for the FAQ had moved from the online `comp.text.tex` newsgroup to Cambridge University, where it came under the tender care of Robin Fairbairns. When Robin retired, the FAQ was cut loose, but the established url maintained independently, and linked to the new location. This has become too expensive, and the academic ID has been terminated. This leaves a large number of links throughout the Internet without a recognizable target. An effort is being made to update links in online forums or on static pages where this is possible. Of course, it is impossible in such places as mail archives, but since the FAQ itself is still alive (if a bit inactive) anyone knowing of a reference that can be fixed is encouraged to fix it.

Here is the formula. The former syntax of the url was this:
`http://www.tex.ac.uk/cgi-bin/`
                      `texfaq2html?label-⟨topic⟩`
This should now be
`https://texfaq.org/FAQ-⟨topic⟩`
Please use the new form when referring to the FAQ, and if you encounter the old url, please correct it if you can, or ask someone who can.

⋄ Barbara Beeton
  https://tug.org/TUGboat

Robin Fairbairns and UK TUG

Jonathan Fine

Dear Members

I'm saddened to hear that Robin Fairbairns has died. I knew that for some time he had health problems. His family, friends and colleagues have my condolences. I write with a mixture of sadness, regrets and gratitude.

About 30 years ago I learnt of his role in the TeX community, and was delighted that he and I lived close to each other in Cambridge. I learnt a lot from him, particularly working together in person on the TeX FAQ, which had recently become the responsibility of the UK TeX Users Group.

In 1994 Chris Rowley as chair of UK TUG reported [Baskerville 5.1, p35]

> The notable innovation in 1994 has been the regular appearance of Baskerville. Under the editorship of Sebastian Rahtz, and with Robin Fairbairns and Jonathan Fine as publisher and distributor, issues of our newsletter now reach members approximately every two months.
>
> It contains an interesting variety of TeX-related articles in addition to notices of meetings and subscription forms. In my opinion, Baskerville is the best in content and, by a wide margin, in timeliness of all the journals and newsletters produced by TeX user groups.
>
> Thanks to Sebastian, Robin and Jonathan, and also to all those who have written items for Baskerville.

With the tragic early death of Sebastian in 2016, and Robin this year, of the four persons named in that news story only myself and Chris Rowley are still alive.

⋄ Jonathan Fine
  Milton Keynes
  UK
  jfine2358 (at) gmail.com
  https://jfine2358.github.io/

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[13] `youtube.com/watch?v=UqDU6UO1328`
[14] `http://uk.tug.org/wp-installed-content/uploads/2008/12/46.pdf`