QUANTA HELPLINE   Dilwyn Jones

Members wishing to submit helpline requests via email can use the email address helpline@quanta.org.uk or if you prefer to use traditional post, please send the helpline request to me via the address printed inside the front cover of the newsletter.

Obviously, we cannot guarantee to answer every query we receive, but we will do our best! Where we have been unable to answer the queries, we may print the help request as an open request in the newsletter to ask if any of the readers can come up with a solution. And, of course, if readers feel that they have a better solution than we came up with, or would like to correct any errors we make, please write to us!

Q. What's the difference between SuperBASIC and SBASIC? And S*BASIC? What's that!
A. First there was SuperBASIC (the version of QL BASIC on the original QL) and then there was SBASIC when the SMSQ operating system came along. Basically (!) , SBASIC can do everything which the original SuperBASIC could plus a whole lot more. SBASIC has many new commands and functions, and SBASIC also has facilities to access different screen sizes, the GD2 high colour systems so you can use the new colours from BASIC.

SuperBASIC is the term for the BASIC on a QDOS system, while SBASIC is the name for the version of BASIC on an SMSQ or SMSQ/E system (the /E in SMSQ/E meaning it's the version of SMSQ with the Extended Environment, pointer interface etc, built in.

At some point, some clever person coined the wildcard 'S*BASIC' (the '*' being the wildcard allowing the new term to cover both versions of BASIC for programs which would work on either system).

Q. I'd like to convert some Word .doc files to files I can use on a QL. How do I go about that?
A. There is no direct way of achieving this, no Word to Quill conversion program was ever written for the QL as far as I know. The closest to it is a program called CATDOC, ported to the QL by Jonathan Hudson. It was originally a Unix program, written by Victor Wagner. Download it from Jonathan's QDOS website at http://www.daria.co.uk/qdos/

Catdoc can apparently convert Word documents up to the Word 97 versions. If you have documents created in later versions, you may have to try to use the Word facility to save documents in older versions. Catdoc outputs as plain text.

You can of course tell Word to save its documents a plain text. This will lose the layout information, but at least the text itself can be transferred to the QL.

Another way to extract text not just from Word, but also many other files such as PDF files, is to use the Generic Text Printer Driver in Windows. In simple terms, when you print from a program using this printer driver, only the plain text gets through. You'll have to reformat it on a QL to fix margins etc (and possibly convert to the QL character set, depending on whether the text includes any characters such as accented characters which are different between QL programs and Windows programs.

To install the Generic Text Printer Driver in Windows, follow these instructions. This is for the version of Windows used on my PC, Windows XP Pro, it might vary between Windows versions.

From the START menu in Windows, select Printers And Faxes. Double click on Add Printer icon, or goto File menu and click on Add Printer. The Add Printer wizard appears. Click on Next, then select Local Printer. Click Next again, it will spend a while searching for Plug & Play printers, tell you it didn't find any, then you an tell it what type of printer port to use. LPT1 should do for the purposes of this installation. Click on Next again, now you get a screen asking you to select the manufacturer and model of the printer. In the left hand window, scroll down to GENERIC. In the right hand window, select the Generic / Text Only printer model. Follow the prompts for the rest of the installation. Remember NOT to select it as default printer or it will take the place of your normal printer, after all, you'll only want to use it occasionally.

Every time you need to use this driver you'll need to select it as a temporary printer driver – most programs can set this from the File, Print menu, where it shows the name of the default printer and there'll be an option alongside this to select another of the installed drivers.

When you print, it will ask for the name of a file to save the text to – enter a name suitable for transferrign to a QL.

Q. I am trying to unzip a large zip file on the QL, but it keeps stopping when I get to one particular filename and I can't unzip the rest. How can I get at the other files?
A. This is usually down to filename length limits on a QL. Filenames must be 36 characters or less, but this includes any directory name, but not the drive name. The limit is 41 characters if you include the drive name. Where some people come unstuck is forgetting that the length limit includes the directory name. Trying to unzip the Lynx text browser for the QL is a classic example of this. Where the archived file includes stored path names, some care is necessary not to unzip such programs to too long a directory name. If you get the problem mentioned by the questioner above, it might be possible to try unzipping to either a temporary very short directory name on a hard disk (e.g. WIN1_A_) or to the 'root' of a drive such as FLP1_ and try to copy an drename files later to remain within the length limits.

The 36 character limit on filenames comes about because each file has a 64 byte header. Within that 64 byte header, only 36 of the bytes are allocated for the filename, so it is fixed and cannot be extended within the current filing system. Sadly for us, the directory names are considered as part of the filename in this respect.

If you are running into a similar problem with trying to copy files from a Windows hard disk to a QL emulator, you need to bear in mind that the Windows directory name and filename, though separate and not limited by the same length constraints, is considered by the QL emulator filing system to also have the 36 character directory an dfilename lengths. There are two ways of working around this:

1. Use as short a directory name in Windows as possible. If this is not practical, e.g. the file is held in the My Documents or similar long path name, create a temporary dircetory such as C:\QL\ where you can copy files into temporarily ready for transfer, and delete them once the transfer is complete.
2. If using QPC2, where you have the DOS device available, you can work around the 36 character length constraints a little by including as much of the Windows path name as possible into the DOS drive definition. For example, if the files having long filenames are also in a long directory name such as

C:\VeryLongDirectoryName\ you can assign a long path to the DOS drive and that part of the path name is not as subject to the 36 character length limit.

DOS_DRIVE 8,'C:\VeryLongDirectoryName\'

So, within drive DOS8_ now you can still have pretty long filenames without worrying too much about the name length limit!

Q. I have just started using QPC2 and am a bit confused by the range of display sizes. Which is the best size to use?
A. The simplest answer is that you should use what's best for your needs. Monitor sizes and resolutions vary greatly and it's hard to recommend a display size without knowing what type of monitor you have, what your graphics card supports, and what you need to do with your QL emulator. My personal preference (I have quite a large widescreen monitor) is to set a QPC2 height which is a multiple of 256 pixels high and multiple of 512 pixels wide. As most QL programs, especially older ones, tend to be designed for a 512x256 display size, it means you can stack them one above the other as long as they allow themselves to be moved around the display. Where you have old programs stuck in the top left 512x256 corner of the screen, they tend to obscure the BASIC windows, which can be irritating. Fortunately, the SBASIC designers thought of that, and with the new version of the WMON and WTV commands to reset the windows, you can specify where they should be reset to. The new version of WTV and WMON allow an origin to be specified. So, WMON 4,0,256 would try to set mode 4, 256 pixels down the screen, under the "fixed" programs. You can leave out the screen mode number, so WMON ,0,256 for example is quite acceptable. In fact, you may want to add this to your BOOT program if you want the BASIC windows set clear of older programs overlapping in the top left of the display. I prefer to use the 'windowed' rather than the 'full screen' version of the QPC displays, as it leaves me room to switch between QL and PC programs more easily.

Q. I have several programs which won't run on QPC2. Any suggestions for getting them to run?
A. In short, compatibility problems arise when the software writers assume something about a QL setup. This short list covers the majority of issues:

1. QL screen is "always" 512x256 pixels in size.
2. QL screen is "always" at address 131072 (decimal).
3. QL screen is always mode 4 or mode 8 layout.
4. QL system variables are always at address 163840 or just after the screen.
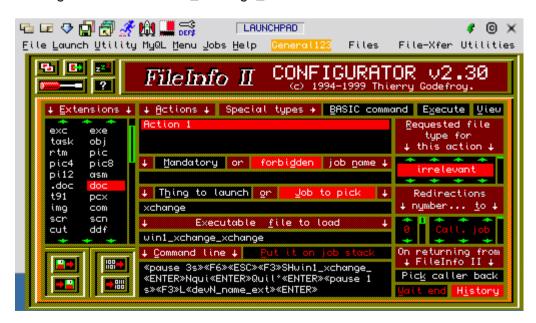5. Some programs look for a specific routine at a known address in the QL ROM.

By and large, many of the issues can be summarised as programs which PEEK and POKE into "fixed" addresses which are not fixed any more.

By and large, QPC2 can accommodate most fo these problems, allowing a surprising degree of compatibility if you know how to "persuade" it. Actually, Marcel Kilgus was aware of these issues when he wrote QPC and went to great lengths to provide ways of working around the limitations of older problems. I'll go into this in more detail in the graphics articles, but basically:

1. Set QPC2 to start in 512x256 QL colours mode. This forces a QL style memory layout of screen and system variables. Don't try to use the DISP_SIZE 512,256 command to force this, it won't reorganise the memory layout in the same way.

2. Use the QPC_QLSCREMU command (see page 8 of QPC manual, though this may vary between manual versions). This sets up the emulation of an original QL screen and invisibly translates writes to the "old" screen between that emulated screen and the real QPC screen. This might help when you want to run an old game or something which writes direct to the QL display, but probably won't help much with programs which acess the system variables, in which case try suggestion 1 above. QPC_QLSCREMU takes a single parameter with 4 options on the parameter value to set how it handles the "old" screen mode. The interesting feature is that even if you are runnign QPC in high colour modes, it is still able to handle programs writing to a mode 4 or mode 8 screen, as the emulation arranges to convert the colours for you!
   a. QPC_QLSCREMU -1: REMark automatic mode
   b. QPC_QLSCREMU 0 : REMark disabled, screen conversion off
   c. QPC_QLSCREMU 4 : REMark force to mode 4
   d. QPC_QLSCREMU 8 : REMark force to mode 8
3. If it's a BASIC program which fails because of PEEKs or POKEs in the system variables, find those PEEKs and POKEs and work out how far into the system variables it's looking. Usually you can work this out by subtracting 163840 from the address where the "assumption" was made, and then changing it to something like this, which works out an offset into the system variables along with something which does the calculation for you, using either the direct and indirect reference version of POKE and PEEK (see SMSQ/E manual page 19, "Peeking and Poking in the System Variables", e.g. PEEK(163886) could be replaced with PEEK(!!163886-163840) or even, using VER$(-2) to find the system variables: PEEK(VER$(-2)+46). All a bit clumsy and messy, but sometimes a comparatively minor change like this can be all that's needed to make the difference between running and not running. And it'll make you look like an expert when you show off your fix to others! (Why work hard when Tony Tebby and Marcel Kilgus make it easier!)

Q. I am using FileInfo II and would like to set it up so that a Quill DOC file is loaded into Xchange rather than the original Quill. Is this possible?
A. Yes. Start the FileInfo configurator (Fi2Config_obj) and load your current settings. The screen dump below shows the settings required – this assumes that Xchange is stored on Win1_Xchange_.

In case you can't read the vital bit, the command line at the bottom, it should be:

<<pause 3s>><<F6>><<ESC>><<F3>>Shwin1_xchange_<<ENTER>>Nqui
<<ENTER>>Quil°<<ENTER>><<pause 1s>><<F3>>L<<devN_name_ext>>
<<ENTER>>

This long-winded statement loads win1_xchange_xchange (set in the box above the command line), waits a coupel of seconds for it to load (you can change the delay depending on the loading speed of your system), then "presses" F6 to force it back to the initial screne if already running, "presses" Esc to get out of that, "presses" F3, then S for Set command, then H for HELP device which is then set to win1_xchange_, then ENTER to get back to commands menu. Then "press" n (for New) then "qui" for Quill, ENTER, a short pause to allow Quill to start, then in Quill, "press" F3 and L (for load) and the full filename passed and finally ENTER to complete the loading process.