

NOTHING'S NEW IN COMPUTING, SAYS FORMER SERVICE BUREAU BOSS

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The conclusion that Bryan Mills, former boss of CMG, draws after nearly 50 years in computing is that "there ain't nothing new." The next time anyone in the IT industry gets excited about ASP, or outsourcing, or facilities management, for example, they should, he suggests, ask themselves, "Have we been here before?" For in his view these are just new ways of describing the services offered by computer service bureaux of old: more sophisticated, perhaps, but essentially the same.

Mills was looking ahead to a seminar later this month celebrating 50 years of computer payroll and organised by the Computer Conservation Society at London's Science Museum for 26 February. It will be his task, as final speaker, to set the payroll story into context and bring it up to date and, as founder and executive chairman of CMG, one of the largest computer services operations in Europe and now part of LogicaCMG, he has a fund of stories to draw on.

His very first payroll customer was Pinewood Studios when, in 1958, he installed a system running on Burroughs electro-mechanical accounting machines. His latest is still current as he is presently overseeing a project to install a new payroll system for ServiceTec, the £25 million turnover, 400 people international IT service company he now chairs: ironically, this will run on an in-house PC and replace a bureau system operated by Centre File.

"The question I'm now being asked is should we really be in-sourcing," he quips, but answers by explaining that it makes sense for the new payroll system to be integrated with an existing HR system called Snowdrop from Evergreen with which ServiceTec is "very content."

The seminar at the Science Museum, sponsored by LogicaCMG, will mark the 50th anniversary of when, in February 1954, the world's first computer payroll system went "live" for Lyons Bakeries on the legendary LEO I computer.

At the outset, LEO handled the payroll for 1670 people, which rose gradually thereafter to the limit of 10,000 that was set until a second machine should be available. Now payroll is, as Bryan Mills says, "an everybody-has-to-do-it" computer application: one that's taken for granted, but remains both time and people critical and one of the mainstays of the computer services business.

The seminar will take place in the Director's Suite at the Science Museum and begin at 2.30pm. Admission will be free and open to all.