

QLis30 PROBLEMS

Something that has almost become a QL tradition is in danger in 2014.

The practice has been for major events to be held once in the five years both in the UK and on the continent to celebrate the QL's birthday. In 2004 the 20 year celebration held in Eindhoven was probably the most significant QL event in the last decade. A year later Quanta organised a 21 year celebration in Portsmouth.

5 years ago Quanta organised the QLis25 event in Coventry and a continental event was held in Lucerne.

To understand the problems that have arisen over the 30 year celebration we have to look at the history of the shows.

QL2004 in Eindhoven cost under £1,000. QLis21 in Portsmouth cost Quanta over £3,000.

QL2004 was a one day show held free of charge in a school where QL-ers were either staff or former staff. None of the three organisers, who lived in 3 different lands, claimed any expenses. Instead the show was organised by email with just 2 face to face meetings held on the Dutch QL user (Sin_QL_Air) group's meeting days.

In contrast QLis21 was a two day event held in a hotel with four main organisers. Part of the high cost was to pay Quanta committee expenses.

Similarly the QLis25 event cost Quanta £2,714 although this sum includes £418 for a special silver jubilee issue of the Quanta Magazine and a contribution to the costs of the Lucerne show. The actual QLis25 show itself probably cost Quanta about £2,000.

Quanta's finances are rapidly deteriorating and they can no longer afford a prestige show on the lines of QLis21 and QLis25. Quanta has made a financial loss in 8 of the last 10 years and on average that loss amounts to £700 per year. In practice Quanta financed the two shows by drawing on its reserves, but these have fallen from £15,933 in 2004 to £7,899 in 2012. To add to Quanta's woes it raised its subscription in 2012 for the first time since the mid 1980s and this has resulted in a loss of membership from 175 in December 2011 to 104 in April 2013. This represents a fall in basic membership income of £1,332 per year with the result that, on the last published membership figures, Quanta's basic subscription income will be under £1,600 per year. Compare that with the cost of printing the Quanta Magazine in 2012 of £1,281.

Following the 2013 AGM the chairman of Quanta announced in the April/May Quanta Magazine:

"The Committee also started to discuss the AGM for 2014, when we hope to provide an interesting weekend, starring all Sinclair computers, to celebrate QL is 30. We have a couple of potential venues in mind that we are looking into."

In fact the proposal was that Rich Mellor would organise a, largely self financing, general Sinclair event with special facilities for Quanta and Quanta members. He came up with a two day event, preferably held late in the year, hosted by the Cambridge Computer Museum. Quanta turned down this proposal explaining in the June/July Quanta Magazine:

"Unfortunately with the numbers that came to 'QL is 25' in the Midlands (well above average) and the falling numbers at the Annual General Meetings since, it is not considered that the costs of such an event can be justified. Rich Mellor has visited the Cambridge site and confirmed that there is parking available, but it would require

overnight accommodation for the majority of the Committee and mileage expenses as well."

What appears to have happened is that Rich Mellor said he would require 2 people from Quanta to help with the event, costing Quanta about £500, but Quanta is insisting on all committee members having their expenses paid costing up to £1,750.

In the December 2013/January 2014 Quanta Magazine the chairman writes:

"QL is 30 is not forgotten or abandoned, but it will not be held in April. I am aware that a number of venues have been suggested, including Cambridge, by various people on the QL-Users list. So far, other than Rich Mellor, no one has approached QUANTA with anything other than vague ideas. QUANTA is prepared to support one or more events with our presence, displays and an A & E desk, but we do not feel that we can organise such an event at a location far away from our Committee members."

This does raise the question of how Quanta could afford this if they could not afford Cambridge. In effect Quanta appears to be saying that a QLis30 event must be held in or near Manchester.

It is looking increasingly likely that a UK QLis30 can only take place if Quanta is totally excluded from the equation. In this way the cost of the event can be significantly reduced as there will no committee expenses. Continental events are organised by individuals who have to keep their costs low. For example the organiser of an event in Italy held it the company for which he worked with the only expenses being travel and lunch. In practice it should be possible to organise a QLis30 event for little more than the cost of the venue.

If the costs are kept small a small attendance can be justified. It is the people attending and what they get up to at the event that is important. In particular can something come out of the event for the benefit of the whole QL community?

So far, apart from Rich Mellor's plan there have been only two serious proposals for a QLis30 event, a UK one in Edinburgh and a continental one, probably in Paris.