

The Whittle Story

A Live Book

What's in a name?

By Ruth Whittle, June 20, 2018

When Jeff left Monash University in the 1970s and set up a computer consultancy, we called it “Whittle Programming” to denote Jeff’s computer skills.

Some years later, we told one of our adult sons that this would continue to be the name of our new mining software development company, and his reaction was: “Yer don’t call a company after a person.”

Well, we did anyway.

Since then Jeff has said many times: “It is not a pretty name, but it’s dead easy to remember.”

How it came to be used as a verb in the mining community is not clear. We did not invent or use the term “whittling” in our press articles. I suspect it was rather like the building of the pyramids.

Creative editors invented headlines such as: “Whittling your way to success”. Miners themselves used the word as shorthand for having used the software on the design of their pits, because our company and software were generally referred to as “Whittle”.

Fortuitously, it also encompasses the obverse image of the ancient English word with Nordic origins meaning “to make or shape by paring or shaving”, which is a fair description of what our software does to a pit.

The term became so widely used that, at one stage, I prepared a submission to have the word included in the Macquarie Dictionary. This was never submitted, however, because we risked making it a generic term of the “hoover” kind.

To read Ruth's bio please scroll to the next page..



Ruth Whittle BA

Ruth has an honours degree in French from the University of London.

Her first job was as Executive Officer in the Ministry of Supply in London, then in administration at AERE, Harwell (Atomic Energy Research Establishment).

After marrying Jeff in 1954, she devoted herself full-time to raising their six children, five sons and a daughter.

The family moved from England to Melbourne, Australia, in 1961.

When Jeff and Ruth established Whittle Programming in 1984, she successfully undertook the marketing of the software.

Since her retirement in 2000, Ruth has maintained a keen interest in the continuing development of the Whittle software.

She is currently working on compiling a history of the Whittle software by means of a Live Book.

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