The Whittle Story
A Live Book

Working with Whittle Programming
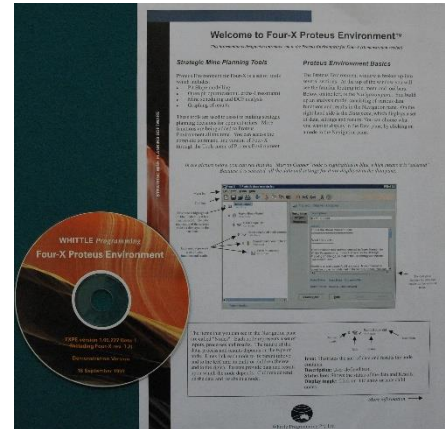
By Geoff Hall, December 2018

Working for Jeff Whittle and Whittle Programming was interesting /exciting/challenging because we were allowed (expected!) to get it right. Near enough was not good enough. And it wasn't just programming, it was the whole software development process from design through to testing and support.

I remember the vigorous 'active debates' when each of us reckoned we had the right idea of how to proceed. These would often develop from an informal 2-way discussion into one that might involve the majority of the development team. We liked to think that our final solution was always better for this.

I first started working for Jeff when he was working from home. An overriding memory I have is of the delicious smell of a slow-cooking meal wafting up the stairs to the former bedrooms, attempting to disrupt my concentration from the task at hand.

Back in the early days of backup software you couldn't have any files open for the backup to work successfully. This was the genesis of the tradition that at 5 o'clock on Friday, everyone had to down tools for the backup to commence. In order to encourage this activity (we always wanted to finish what we were working on!) we gathered for a glass of wine (or other favoured beverage) and discussion. Those discussions were usually wide ranging … and may have occasionally included work!

Developing the GUI ("Proteus Environment") was an exciting time. We involved user-interface experts (one from CSIRO and another from a private consulting company whose name escapes me now). It introduced a new language into the team (Java – the result of another 'active debate') and a totally new procedure for using the Whittle software. A big plus for us was that the script or 'log' file method that could be used for the hands-off running of the Fortran engines could be used without modification by the GUI. It was also a plus for those customers who were already using the engines in batch processes who did not have to make any changes when the new environment was introduced.

My final role at Whittle Programming (at Gemcom) was to implement the Prober-B software from Whittle Consulting within the Gemcom Whittle environment. During this process I once again worked with Jeff in one of the upstairs bedrooms. So, I had come full circle!

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

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Geoff Hall M.App.Sci, MACS (Snr)

My first involvement with Whittle Programming was as a backup to Jeff. I held a backup copy of the software offsite and would have been able to produce a software release if required.

After a couple of years this turned into a full-time contract and then employment until I retired (by which time Whittle Programming was a wholly owned subsidiary of Gemcom Software (now Geovia)). The first two years under Gemcom's ownership required living in Vancouver (Canada) for two years!

In my time at Whittle Programming, my roles were many: starting as System Programmer to Jeff's application development, producing the company's first web site, developing a release procedure (before the days of automatic build software), product leader for Opti-Cut, and manager of the Whittle team in Gemcom days, during which time we reached the heady number of eight developers and testers.

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