EMAS: the first and last user - Joanne Lamb (née Officer)
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I joined the Computer Science department as a postgraduate student in the late 1960s. As I sought for a topic for my PhD, it was suggested that I might be interested in writing an interactive language to run under EMAP (the Edinburgh Multi-Access Project).

This was a project set up jointly between the department and English Electric (soon to merge with ICT to become ICL), to implement a multi-access system on their new 4-75 machine.

Accordingly, I started on my research, though somewhat slowed down by the fact that I was simulating an interactive environment by sending batch jobs down the line to Newcastle. In view of this difficulty, I was invited to try my luck as the first user as soon as possible.

The system was not very robust at that time, and I have a vivid recollection of sitting in a rather dingy room in 10 Buccleuch Place, pounding an old-fashioned teletype (upper case only) and logging off every few minutes, as there was no other way of protecting your files if the system should crash (which it frequently did).

Computer Science must have moved to JCMB about that time because my next recollection is of bussing up to KB every night for almost a year. The system was in much better shape and a general service was offered - at lunch time and in the evenings. The tools I was using then, IMP and EDIT, are still in use today - just. Eventually I handed my thesis in at Christmas 1972. In January 1973 EMAS went live with a full-scale service!

After working in England, I returned to Edinburgh in 1976. EMAS was much as I remembered it, and I had come to appreciate its user friendliness after struggling with JCL and other horrors. Over the years, both EMAS and IMP were improved, with new concepts being added as techniques advanced. One of my first jobs on returning here was to write a questionnaire design package which is still in use.

Twenty-one years after I became the first user of EMAS, I am likely to be one of its last: we have a questionnaire to design by the end of June. The questionnaire design program is now about the only use we make of EMAS, however, as most of the packages we use are more easily implemented on a commercial operating system such as VMS or Unix.

I will always remember EMAS with affection. I think that in the early days we did not appreciate in Edinburgh just how lucky we were.

Times change, however, and we are now in the world of micros, Windows, and colour graphics. Soon we will be grappling with high-speed networks and fileservers. Life in computing is never dull!