A tribute to Ken Stoner

28th April 1935 - 14th August 2006

Chair: BCS ITCH Network

From an early age Ken was interested in aircraft & other engineered products, building model gliders and selling them in the school playground. He worked at Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) in Farnborough and ultimately became a Chartered Engineer. Always working on the practical and useful, he traveled the world as a Consultant Engineer but still found time for exciting family holidays and to build "The Oakley Rocket", a spectacular aerial runway device, for his children's School Fete.

At the age of 52, while Chief Engineer of a drilling rig manufacturer, Ken developed Motor Neurone Disease and quickly lost his ability to walk and speak. Although he used a wheelchair and a speech synthesizer, he was determined to live life to the full. Ken enjoyed applying his knowledge and skills to help other disabled people to sail and ice-skate working as a REMAP engineer and to serving as Vice Chair of the British Computer Society's Disability Group.

Many people with MND die within two years of diagnosis; however Ken was one of the exceptions. He gave a presentation at a conference in 1992 and remarked, "it's keeping occupied that's important; to keep the boredom and negative thoughts away. I consider the fact that my illness has not worsened has been, in part, to my computer; the synthesiser has avoided a lot of frustration and stress, the computer enabling far more interesting work to be achieved and so avoiding anger and depression". Ken's

philosophical way of looking at life and the opportunities it held, albeit with major restrictions, was soon to be put to significant use.

Ken's experiences of setting up his own computer system with the help of friends and family members led him to propose setting up a network of volunteers to help other disabled people. It was his drive and determination that ensured that Information Technology Can Help (ITCH) has grown since its small beginnings in 1994 into the national network we have today.

The ITCH Network now covers the entire UK. ITCH Network currently has around 300 volunteers. In the past four years alone, ITCH Network volunteers have made more than 4000 visits to disabled clients, solving many hardware and software problems, and helping them gain confidence in using a computer.

In an age where technology can frequently receive a bad press, Ken was a testimony to all that is good about its development. He would even make use of its benefits down the pub, "my laptop synthesizer guarantees that I never forget a punch-line!", he would say. Despite his condition Ken worked tirelessly, with a positive outlook, a cheeky grin and a wicked sense of humour seeming to draw strength from his determination to develop ITCH and repeatedly prove wrong every prognosis for his survival!

Jeff, Tom and Paul, members of BCS Disability Group and ITCH Network Committees.

ITCH Client HelpLine:	0800 269545 (Minicom)
Client contact by Email:	enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk
Volunteers Contact:	info@itcanhelp.org.uk
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The ITCH Network (www.itcanhelp.org.uk) is part of the British Computer Society (www.bcs.org) and works in partnership with AbilityNet (www.abilitynet.org.uk) REMAP is a national voluntary network of engineers that provide one-off technical aids to disabled people (www.remap.org.uk)