

INFORMATION PIONEERS: EPISODE FOUR

CLIVE SINCLAIR

RED KINGDOM

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ARCHIVE / SHOT FOOTAGE:

A BBC MICRO-style winking cursor fills the screen. Characters clatter out: 10 PRINT "The future has arrived!" 20 GOTO 10. A pause. Suddenly every line of the screen carries the legend:

The Future has arrived!

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

Sounds crazy - but in 1953 there were only about 100 computers in the whole world. By the late 70s that number had gone up quite a bit - but the majority of machines were still the size of a bus, with hundreds of valves and great reels of magnetic tape... and you usually had to be a 'computer scientist' with a white coat - and probably safety specs and a clipboard - to work out how to run them.

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

To most people computers back then were still mysterious bleeping, Big Brother contraptions used for academic work and industry. If you were a fanatic you could build your own machine from a kit. And there were some home computers out there - but they cost an arm and a leg.

Computing was basically either very difficult or very expensive. Usually both. Not that it mattered. Because in 1977, the President of a major American computer company told us: "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home".

So there.

Then along comes a self-made man called Clive who had a different idea. Clive Sinclair couldn't stop inventing things. A working man's boffin, he'd already scored a hit with the first slim-line pocket calculator. Sinclair was one of those guys who liked to give the public what they wanted -- even if they didn't know they wanted it yet!

And what he thought the public wanted
now

...was a computer in their own home.

That meant making it affordable. So,
in '79, with some clever design and
marketing, and using the TVs and
cassette players people already had to
cut costs, Sinclair and his team
created a computer for use in the
home. All for £99.95. Bargain. And it
was called:

The ZX80!

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

Weighing in at 12 ounces, with 1
kilobyte of memory, a monochrome
display and no sound, the ZX80 wasn't
going to give Einstein a run for his
money.

It was temperamental, had a tricky
keyboard, a screen flicker and the
official advice was to hold the 16k
memory extension on with Blu-tac. Some
people even used frozen milk cartons
to keep the thing from overheating...

But this little beauty proved a point!
20,000 were sold into a market that
nine months earlier hadn't even
existed. And when the ZX80's much
improved - and even cheaper -
successor, the ZX81, was launched,
demand for home computers went through
the roof.

The market was suddenly red hot. Soon,
in 1982, Sinclair brought out the ZX
Spectrum, now with 48K. With millions
sold it would become hands-down the
most successful British computer ever
made.

This was a new dawn. And now that dawn
had sound. And 8 colours.

Back in the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

Now Sinclair's original ambition was
to create computers for people who
wanted a tool to learn about
programming on. To develop knowledge.

(MORE)

SHOOTING SCRIPT Page 3.
ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

And this did happen. The ZXs were quite simple little things, so you could really get your hands dirty with them, and do a bit of D.I.Y programming.

But most people - that would definitely be me! - wanted to play games. Good job then, because soon there were hundreds of them.

ARCHIVE footage illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

Lots of these games were put together by professionals but many, many more were created by a great army of Bedroom Coders, all making their own adventures and selling them through the mail.

It was probably not like any other moment before, because these teenagers found they were able to get involved in the creation of a brand new industry - and they could do it without ever leaving their bedrooms.

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

Some of these teenagers, cutting their teeth on Sinclair's machines during these years, became experts. And they're why the UK became a global force in the software and gaming industry.

All those mind-blowing games we play now... all that started with a Sinclair user in their pyjamas.

ANIMATION illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

But things weren't going to stop moving fast. By 1984 there were more and more companies fighting for the computer market. And an American firm called I.B.M had launched something they were calling a 'Personal Computer'.

Sinclair would lose the ultimate battle for the market to bigger U.S companies - but he'd won the argument.

In just a few years he'd helped to take computers out of the hands of academics and businesses and given them to us.

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

And whether he planned to or not, he'd also given a gift -- Blu-tac, milk cartoons, 'Jet Set Willy' and all -- to a generation of people and their keyboards. Because Clive Sinclair, and other pioneers in the early 80s, brought us into a new age.

An age where -- with no degree, no white coat, no safety specs -- the next breakthrough in the number one industry of our time could be made... by you.

END