Arthur C Clarke, the late science fiction writer, once observed that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'.

He was far enough ahead of his time to describe the system of orbiting communication satellites, but was unable to patent the idea because the technology to build it didn't exist at the time - and anyway the patent would have expired by the time technology caught up.

Now we take the global reach of communications for granted. The telegraph was a great improvement over its earlier alternatives, but still required a physical wire for transmission.

Specialist operators could send streams of dots and dashes of Morse code at high speed. They would be astounded by the ease with which a child can now send emails, text and pictures in full colour, instantly. To anywhere. With a pocket telephone that takes the picture in the first place.

The companies who make all this possible have enormous power and vast resources.

George Orwell warned about the possible effects of such a concentration of power in his novel "1984". "Big Brother" on TV watches the participants continuously and gives them tasks. Orwell's original "Big Brother" told society what to think.

Today people can download Apps [applications] to extend the scope of their mobile telephones. They can download a book for their portable electronic book-readers.

Recently they have been amazed to discover that the big companies can remove them remotely. It was done without warning or consultation, but with a refund of any original payment.

Some people are screaming 'Big Brother' at such high handedness. The firms argue that the facility is there to protect against harmful software from spreading uncontrollably. Indeed that was the reason given for deleting one item that was constructed deliberately to sneak harmful software past the security checks (which it did) in order to show up a flaw in security.

The debate will continue. How much freedom can we afford to give up? What is the right balance? Total freedom is seemingly the demand, but that will never be possible and would be dangerous if it were.

For example, a judge has noted that the freedom of speech does not extend to shouting "Fire !" in a crowded theatre.

Technology in many spheres is changing faster than social behaviour can adjust to cope with it. The adjustments will take time and be heavily debated. Who will be the final arbiter – the people, the politicians or the commercial interests?

Ironically, one book that has been withdrawn from e-readers is George Orwell's "1984".

The club will be on a break until the second Tuesday in September when we will reboot for the coming academic year – BUT:

As part of the Penarth Festival the club will be holding an Open Evening on Tuesday 13th July at 7.45pm at the Lesser Hall, All Saints Church. Visitors will be able to chat with members; learn about the club and look at some computers demonstrated by members. For more information ring Howard on 029 20708439.

In Brief

Computer Club

As part of the Penarth Festival the club will be holding an Open Evening on Tuesday 13th July at 7.45pm at the Lesser Hall, All Saints Church. Chat with members; learn about the club; look at some computers. For more information ring Howard on 029 20708439