As well as talks on how to live with your computer, we are introducing more frequent free-ranging Brains-Trust meetings to consider questions of immediate interest.

Beginners have questions about basic matters and these are deal with straightforwardly. Indeed, our first few talks deal with many of them before they are asked. As people get more 'into' the things they want to do, they naturally encounter situations that require answers to rather more complex questions. This is where we hope to provide some help. (Note the word 'hope'.)

No guarantee is given other than we will try. This is because the club is composed not of highly trained computer experts, but of people who are interested in using computers and who have quietly gathered a certain amount of 'know-how' that they are happy to share with others.

The reliability of computer hardware and software has improved enormously over time and they do things now that we could only dream about a few years ago.  This is sometimes offset by the sheer complexity and range of their capabilities that, in combination, fail to cope with the frailties of the people who try to use them. That generates the questions.

Machines (not just computers) are famed for being able to choose the most awkward moments to play up. The intense frustration increases if no solution is forthcoming.

What is the best approach? Well, obviously, it is better to avoid the problem in the first place – and some can be prevented by keeping your Operating System, Applications and hardware drivers up to date. This can be quite simple and partly automated.

When asking a question, it is important to provide as much relevant information as you can about the problem. Such as:

- Computer Make and model.
- Operating system & version.
- Make and model of any hardware involved E.g. Printer.
- Application name and version.
- Exactly note any error message. (Cut & Paste it.)
- A note of the last thing(s) you did.
- What anti-virus software are you using and IS IT UP TO DATE?
- Have you just installed any new software?
- Has anyone else been using your computer, who and why?

Not everything will be both relevant and available, but as you are stuck, you might not know what is.  Even with lots of information the answer might not be clear-cut.

Sometimes the best reply will be advice to try X or Y or to check for A or B.

You will, of course, have tried the classic first option: close everything down; including the power; wait half a minute and then start all over again. Many problems vanish at the reboot.

Reading the manual is usually the last resort!

Our next meeting is on Tuesday 25th September 2012. Doors open at 7.30 pm for an 8.00 pm start. You get your new computer home. What do you do after you take it out of the box?

For more programme information visit our website at www.penarthcomputerclub.co.uk