



THE STORY BEHIND...

■ The Twins have been busy in lockdown updating their website – I thought it was a good time to ask them all about it.

Chris Wilkins: Hello again chaps, I guess this time we're having to do this a little more remotely, all working from our individual homes in lockdown. How are you coping?

Philip Oliver: We're absolutely fine Chris – thank you.

Andrew Oliver: We both live in the countryside and we no longer have the worries of people at work to manage, and we have families at home. In fact we both have in-laws living with us and both have two kids at home. We both take dogs for daily walks, in fact, you might say we were like twins!

CW: Ah, very good. So what have you been up to, like I don't know?

PO: Well we've found a lot more time on our hands than usual, and so in the first few weeks of lockdown we cleared down some backlogged tasks around the house, on the computer things like tidying up directories etc. and we got



chatting, whilst trying out all the video chat systems, about sorting out our old Oliver Twins website.

AO: Yes, Philip wants me to try and keep it alive, but really it has been hanging on by its fingertips for a while now.

CW: Why's that?

AO: Well it was written, hardcoded, in HTML back in the Blitz days, around 2008 by one of the media team at Blitz Games Studios when they had some spare time.

PO: At the time, we thought it was pretty good, but didn't want them to spend too much

Above: The rather dated looking original website developed in 1987.

work time on it, as there's nothing commercial about it.

AO: Then Blitz went into voluntary liquidation, meaning none of the hardware belonged to us, and all the staff were let go. We had to recover the files from the server, along with the Blitz Games website and find a new place to host them. That became our new company Radiant Worlds.

PO: Then one of the IT guys at Radiant World hacked the HTML to add a Radiant Worlds

logo in and update the footer date.

AO: Then we sold Radiant Worlds to Rebellion and all the files had to be shifted again. Thankfully they survived, and were hacked again to change the Radiant Worlds logo to a Game Dragons logo and the date updated again.

CW: So really it's not had any proper updates for over 10 years?

PO: That's right. From time to time, we looked at it saying, it's ok, but it looks dated and what there is, is quite limited. We have so much stuff we'd like to add.

AO: So we've always talked about updating it, but we didn't really want anyone else to do it because we wanted to be able to easily make updates ourselves. We also knew we'd have to start it from scratch — so that's a big hurdle, as there was already quite a lot of content there. If you are going to make something new, it has to be much better than what it replaces or it's not worth doing.

CW: Yes, making websites is a lot of work. So what made you do it and how did you go about it?

PO: When setting up Game Dragons, we wanted a website and asked around to find the best way to do this, and who could do it.

AO: I'd made the Made in Creative UK website (www.MadeinCreative.com) a few years ago, but there were lots of issues with that. It was created in the offline version of Wordpress. We were told how much the



Above: A design of a page of the cleaner look new site.

browser-based GUI editors had really advanced since then. We checked out the two market leaders, Wix & Square Space, both impressive, powerful and easy to use. We decided Wix was our favourite and working with one of the original media guys from Blitz, Chris Williams (now living in Japan), we came up with a clean and professional look for that website. Since that initial set up a year ago, I've been able to easily maintain it.

CW: How did you go about the design of the site?

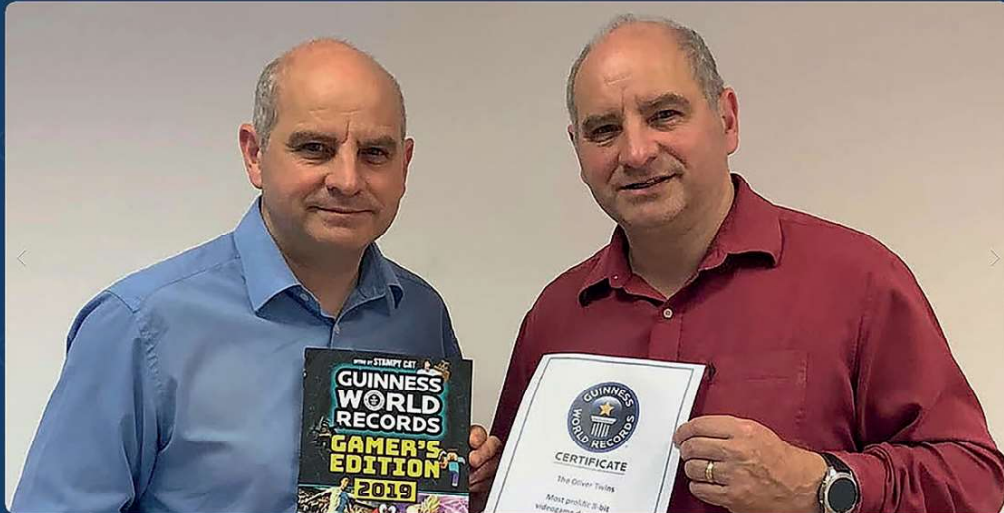
PO: We knew we wanted an index of the games, with a

page for each game, showing what the game was and the press about it. We also wanted a section for background story as to who we are and why we write the games we wrote. Although we decided to do a very brief overview since it's covered in the book so well — which you kindly let us put on the site! I'm sure your readers will appreciate that. Although obviously it's not nearly as good as owning a physical copy!

AO: We knew we needed a news section, something we make good use of on Game

Welcome to our new website to preserve and showcase our old games.

We have been lucky enough to be making games most of our lives and this is our digital scrapbook.



Dragons, then we found we had a lot of material that didn't fit any of these pages. There were general articles and adverts that covered many games, and there was a lot of additional Dizzy material, things like some fantastic Dizzy fan art.

CW: I notice the website looks great on Mobiles too.

AO: Most of the credit must go to Wix, you build the site to look great on a full-screen browser window and then it has an option to see what it would look like on a

mobile. It then does most of the work to rescale, and move around to work sensibly, but allows you to over-ride a few items. It reminds me of the old days, writing a game on the Amstrad and then recompiling for the Spectrum to see what changes are required.

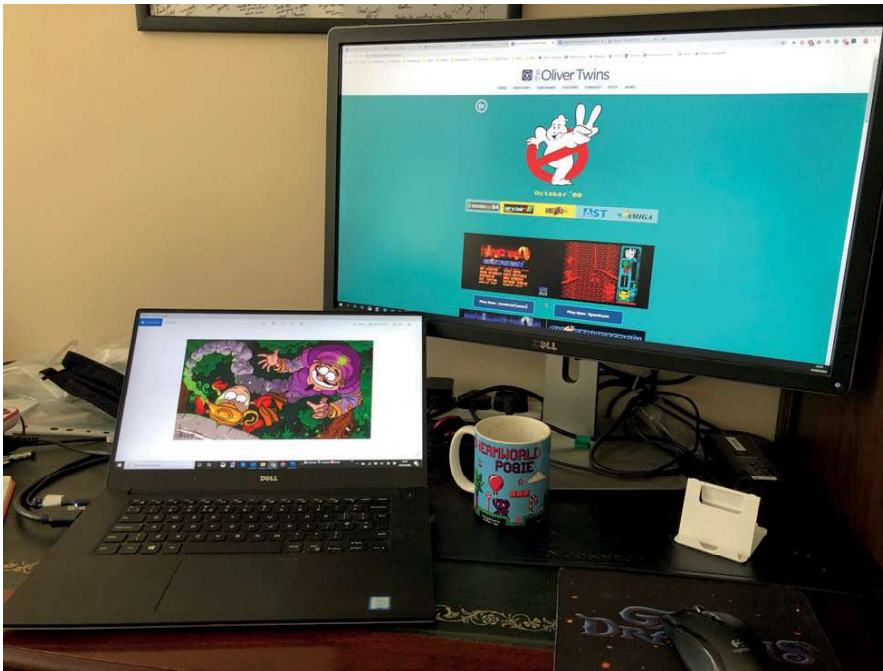
For example, sadly the games aren't playable on mobile, not because they don't run, they actually do, but there are no keys on mobile devices to be able to start the games and get them off the title screen. So I was able to change the buttons on the mobile

Above: The guys looking proud on their new website.

version to say 'Playable on PC browser'.

CW: You mentioned there's nothing commercial about it, so why do you do it?

PO: We do this because it's good to preserve some history and give people access to it. We know people are interested in this, as we are often asked to do interviews about these games, but we want to ensure that what we say is accurate, interesting and hopefully, we try to be educational and



Above: Philip proudly showing the site on PC and Laptop — check out the Pogie mug.

inspirational too, especially when the audience is the next generation of game developers.

CW: So when did you first decide to have a website?

AO: It all goes back to around 2000, when we were doing the first retro games interviews and people were asking us about games we'd written 10-15 years earlier. We found it pretty hard to remember key facts, like the order the games were written in, what formats they were on. For some time, we thought we wrote Killapepe on the BBC Micro, when in fact it was the Amstrad.

PO: We knew we'd kept everything in boxes in my loft, so we decided to go and dig through all the boxes to create a MS Word document of all the facts.

AO: Around the same time, having had difficulty securing Blitz.com (our preferred domain for our studio) we

realised that once a domain has been taken, it's difficult if not impossible to get it later. So I decided to buy several domains — one of those being www.OliverTwins.com. The problem was there was no website at the destination. So I decided to publish the Word document to that site, really as a holding page. Word had a feature to simply publish as HTML.

CW: So looking at the site I see you've been doing lots of stuff recently including some videos about making the games, I was aware of some, but not all of them.

PO: Yes, the 'Lets Play' videos started when UKie (tradebody organisation for the games industry) asked, back in February '15, if we'd do a charity event where we'd play and talk about Dizzy. It was unrehearsed and pretty much the first time we'd played Dizzy since making it, 29 years earlier. It was well received and got over 5,000 views on YouTube.

AO: So we thought we

should do some better versions, giving more behind the scenes info about the games, and not so much playing them. Let's be honest, we're not the best players, even of our own games. We'd often said, most people who bought our games played them more than we ever did. Our time was spent developing them with only a small playtest at the end.

PO: Whilst they'd been on our YouTube channel, the new website has been a great place to present them where people would expect to find them.

CW: I've watched most of them, I think, I particularly like Cavey where you pull out disks and graph paper to say how you made your first arcade-style game. You should make some more.

PO: I'm pleased you like them. It's fun doing them, going through all the old stuff that's stored in the loft.

AO: But it's a lot of work and we never like to ask anyone else to do it. So after we've done the filming, I get the job of cutting it all together to keep it tight and interesting. I can tell you that the GhostBusters 2 was a real challenge due to YouTube rules! We'll probably make a few more of these, but they require both of us being in the same place which, given lockdown, isn't going to happen anytime soon.

CW: Check out the new www.olivertwins.com where you can not only read the background to all the games, you can play all the original versions in a browser.