Monitor. 1. A high quality visual display unit. 2. Software providing the fundamental set of commands needed to operate a computer system.

Mouse. A hand-operated device, connected electronically to the computer, that can be rolled across the surface of a desktop, causing a corresponding arrow or cursor to move on the screen.

N

Network. A system of communication channels connecting various units, such as computers, and that allows them to exchange data.

Noise. Random fluctuations in an electrical system, which distort or corrupt signals. Noise can be deliberately generated by some computers for use as sound effects, such as explosions, in games.

Non-numeric computation. Computing by the manipulation of symbols rather than numbers only. This is useful for areas such as *Expert systems* where facts and knowledge are being manipulated as opposed to just words and numbers.

Number system. Any system for representing numeric values and quantities.

Numeric keypad. A section of the keyboard in which the number keys are grouped together as on a calculator, to facilitate entry of numeric data.

O

OCR. Optical Character Recognition. A means of reading printed or written characters with an optical scanning device and suitably coding them so that they can be input automatically to a computer.

Operating system. The software that controls and supervises all the internal operations of a computer.

Output. Data and information leaving the computer; for example, the results of a program to be displayed on the screen, sent to a printer, stored, or sent to some other device.

Overwrite. To write data to a part of the memory where information is already stored, thereby replacing the original contents.

P

Paddle. A rigid, hand-held controller with a 'trigger' button, mainly for use with games (see *Joystick*).

Parallel interface. A data transmission device in which each bit in a byte has its own wire, allowing them to be transmitted simultaneously. (See *Serial interface.*)

Pascal. A high-level programming language that encourages *Structured programming*.

PEEK. The function in BASIC that is used to examine the contents of a specific memory location.

Peripheral. An accessory that, once connected, will increase the capabilities of a computer.

Piracy. The unauthorised copying of software (and hardware) for financial gain.

Pixel. Contraction of **picture cell**. The smallest pattern of dots on the display screen that can be accessed individually by a graphics programmer, hence it is the building block of images.

Plotter. A computer-controlled device that moves one pen or more across a sheet of paper to draw pictures or 'write' characters.

POKE. The statement in BASIC that is used to place a value in a specific memory location.

Port. A socket through which signals bearing data can enter or leave a computer; the visible part of an *Interface*.

Portability. 1. Relating to computers that are small and light enough to be carried easily and used at different locations, often using batteries as a source of power. 2. Property of software that can be run on more than one kind of computer.

Printed circuit board. A sheet of plastic with metallic connectors formed in strips on it that link together the electronic components.

Printer. A device for printing out text, results and program listings under the control of a computer. Some printers can also produce graphs and diagrams.

Program. A sequence of instructions written in a computer language that,
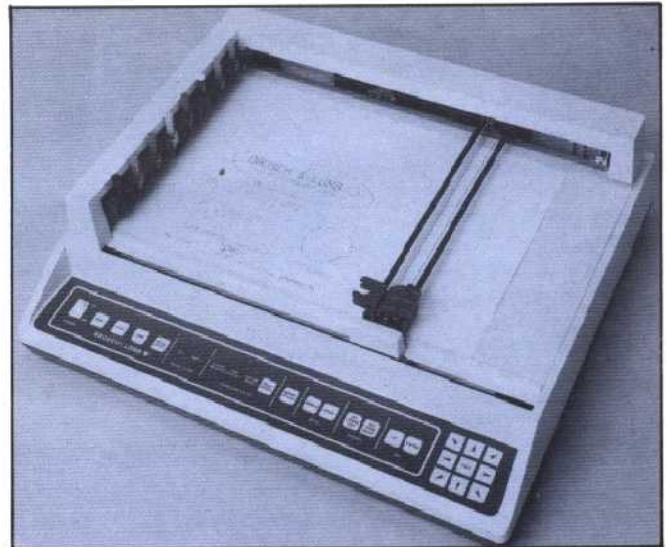
The computer-controlled plotter 'draws' graphic images.

when executed, causes the computer to perform a required task.

Program development. The analysis of an intended computer application and the program writing and editing that results.

Programming language. A set of special command words and rules designed to describe to a computer how it should carry out a computation.

Prolog. A programming language that describes what a computer should do rather than how it should do it.

PROM. Programmable Read-Only Memory. A chip that is programmable with the use of a special device, and then becomes a read-only chip, or *ROM*.

Prompt. A visible indication from a computer that it requires a response from the operator.

PSU. Power Supply Unit. A device that converts the household electricity supply into the form needed by a computer.

Q

QWERTY keyboard. A computer keyboard with its keys arranged in the same way as those of a standard typewriter keyboard. The name derives from the sequence of the first six letters of the top row of alphabetical characters.

R

Radix. See *Base*.

RAM. Random Access Memory. Memory in which stored information can be altered by the user. Its contents can be examined, or read, and also overwritten — that is, replaced by other information. This type of memory is known more accurately as read-write memory. The amount of RAM available determines how much memory the programmer can use to store programs and data. Dynamic RAM needs to be refreshed every few milliseconds to retain its contents. When the computer is switched off, the contents are lost. Static RAM retains its information.

Random number. A number generated in such a way that its value cannot be predicted. Random numbers are used in games, simulation and mathematical operations.

Raster. The patterns of horizontal rows in which *pixels* are displayed on a screen.

Real-time operation. The mode of operating a computer where it controls some activity — for example, an industrial process — as it happens.

Recursion. A series of repeated routines within a program in which the result of each repetition depends on the outcome of the previous one. The routine recalls itself until the task is completed.

Refresh. 1. To recreate the display on a screen as new pictures arrive. 2. To renew the information in *RAM*, without changing it, by passing an electric current.

Register. A special memory location (often within the micro-