BEETLEMANIA

Bug-Byte is a software company that has grown in step with the UK home computer industry. It began as a manufacturer of games for the Sinclair ZX80 and has developed into one of the leading suppliers of games for the more popular machines. Its hits have included Manic Miner and Twin Kingdom Valley.

Bug-Byte was founded in the spring of 1980 when Tony Baden and Tony Milner, two chemistry students at University College, Oxford, began writing programs for their newly acquired ZX80. Realising there was little software for the machine, they decided to market their games, bought 40 blank cassettes, and advertised a five-game

Tony Milner   **Tony Baden**

package in a computer magazine. Orders began to arrive at the rate of 15 a week, and the partners re-invested their profits in more advertisements and writing other ZX80 programs. Later that year the Acorn Atom was launched and Bug-Byte expanded its range to meet the demand for software for the new machine.

In early 1981, the ZX81 appeared and demand for ZX80 games quickly fell, so Baden and Milner turned their attention to writing ZX81 software. They graduated from Oxford in June 1981, and Bug-Byte then moved to Tony Baden's home town of Liverpool. The company now became a full-time operation and within a short time program sales had doubled.

By Christmas 1981, the competition in the software games market had become fiercer. To maintain sales, Bug-Byte employed an advertising agency to handle marketing and started to produce full-colour cassette inserts and advertisements, at the same time using a professional tape duplicating company to ensure high-quality cassettes.

This new approach to the presentation of its products, coupled with the introduction of a

nationwide dealer network, had a marked effect on sales and the company employed further staff. As more home computers were launched, Bug-Byte employed freelance programmers to meet the increased demand. Many of these later left to form rival software houses such as Quicksilva and Software Projects. The company pays its programmers at a fixed rate per cassette, and claims that an author whose game reaches the top twenty best-sellers can earn between £10,000 and £40,000 in the first year.

By the end of 1982, Bug-Byte's dealer network comprised over 200 independent outlets, in addition to the major chain stores, and the company's mail order operation was phased out. Tape supplies were proving to be a major headache, as duplicating companies were unable

Bug-Byte's Headquarters, Liverpool

to meet the demand from software houses building up stocks for the Christmas sales boom, so Bug-Byte set up its own duplicating company, Spool. June 1983 saw the company move to larger premises in Canning Place, Liverpool; these had been designed to Bug-Byte's specification and were completed at a cost of £50,000.

Bug-Byte's major successes have included the graphic adventure game Twin Kingdom Valley (for the BBC and Commodore 64), and Manic Miner, which runs on the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. The author of Manic Miner, Matthew Smith, has recently left the company to form Software Projects, taking the game's copyright with him.

Bug-Byte's expansion has continued unabated, and the company's software is now sold in most West European countries as well as in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. A recent deal with CBS UK, which handles Bug-Byte's European marketing, may result in the company entering the lucrative American market. John Phillips, Bug-Byte marketing manager, claims that 'using the CBS connection as a model, we hope to make the operation truly global'.