

# Transition from LEO to LOLA's IBM

*In March 1972, as recalled in 2021 by Ray Smith*

As part of the deal with IBM they supplied an emulator to translate LEO machine code to IBM 360 code, but we were responsible for converting our data files from LEO to IBM.

This was accomplished with our friends at the Post Office. I remember taking a test tape to their site at Charles House in West Kensington for them to convert, which they did successfully. They were taken aback that the file only took a few seconds to convert because they were expecting a large, specimen data file, but I had created a test tape containing a few blocks only containing every valid LEO character.

There was one incident, though. The Domestic Rates files for the four boroughs not only wanted translating but every record needed a new reference. My memory is slightly hazy here. I believe a new field name, 'new ref', was added to every Rates record and over time this was populated by data submission. This new reference needed a new suffix to be appended to it (possibly just a check digit). This was a reasonably complex algorithm. I had written a program to do this calculation and to overwrite the old reference. This was probably to be the last program to run on the LEO before decommissioning. However, shortly before D-day, there was a change of mind as to how this should be calculated. I duly changed my program and tested it.

Come conversion day, all our main data files were successfully translated and brought to the LOLA Enfield site.

I remember distinctly coming to the LOLA site the next morning, whistling along a corridor, whereupon I came across a very glum looking Harry Pearman and Jim Cleall-Harding. They had been examining the Rates printout details and the original algorithm had been used rather than the new one. I had specified the old version of the re-referencing program by mistake!

We sat in silence for a few minutes. It would not be possible to construct the proper reference from wrong one. Harry and Jim thought we would have to fire up the LEO again and go through the whole process again – a logistical nightmare with upset boroughs unable to work.

However, as luck would have it, or divine inspiration, I had taken it upon myself to store the original old reference in the now redundant 'new ref' field (that is, swap them over) on the new main files. This enabled us to recalculate the proper new reference and update the main files on the IBM at the cost of about ten boxes of stationery for reprints. Phew!

Apart from that sticky moment, the whole move from the LEO machine in Hackney to the IBM machine at Enfield went very smoothly indeed. Unless anyone knows differently?

Ray Smith

Ray started with LBJCC in 1966 as an operator and in 1968 with LBMSU as a programmer, He then transferred to LOLA as a Principal Programmer. He left LOLA in 1978.

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*This version is slightly amended by Alan Cooper*