

Phil Whitehouse: Hello. This week marks the three year anniversary of TiddlyWiki being published to the web, and I'm joined here today by the original creator of TiddlyWiki, Jeremy Ruston, and we're also here with Saq Imtiaz, who is a frequent contributor to the TiddlyWiki project. Hello guys.

Saq Imtiaz and Jeremy Ruston: Hello Phil!

Phil: So in a minute, I'll hand over to Saq to chat with Jeremy about the history of TiddlyWiki, but while this interview is taking place, I'll be online taking additional questions from the global TiddlyWiki community in the IRC chat room. I'll pick the best questions to ask at the end. And with that, it's over to you, Saq.

Saq: Thank you, Phil. So Jeremy, TiddlyWiki. What is it all about?

Jeremy: That's the million dollar question, and one that I've struggled to answer succinctly in all of these three years, and to be honest, the clearest way I've found to define it is for people who already know what a Wiki is. Then it's straight forward; you can talk about how the user interface lets you see multiple pages at once and how it doesn't need a server. But to people who don't know anything about Wiki's, I describe it as a notebook, as an outboard brain, as a place that you can put the stuff that matters to you and then do things with it.

Saq: Right. So you mention a bit about differences as compared to other Wiki's. Perhaps you'd like to elaborate a little about that.

Jeremy: Sure. Well, so, one of the motivations for TiddlyWiki was that observing the way that particularly sophisticated users use Wiki's, is that you'll see them often opening multiple pages and multiple tabs in their browser so they can flip between pages easily, and particularly so that they can have two pages at once in edit mode. And when you're doing kind of refractoring of moving stuff from page to page it's quite powerful to be able to do that compared to jumping around in a single window. And so I was interested in ways of making.. 'cause I think that's a productive way to use Wiki's, so I was interested in how I could create a user interface that would kind of promote or push that way of working. And that drove the idea of a Wiki where the individual entries, instead of being pages, are more akin to paragraphs. And in fact, in the very first instantiation of TiddlyWiki, I was thinking that what we now call a tiddler would be a paragraph, so that we conflate the two things.

Saq: So TiddlyWiki, that's a bit of an interesting name. What are the origins of that?

Jeremy: <laughs> Right, so it's a ludicrous name, and in many respects it was, um, a crazy decision, but then, I guess I've ended up with a name that's — hopefully — warm-hearted, and maybe funny, which is probably better than it being something completely dry. But the real problem with it is that in the UK a 'tiddler' just means something small. So you talk about a tiddler as, like, a tiny fish that isn't worth keeping and you throw it back. But it turns out the word doesn't really exist in other cultures. And so, um, I think that particularly people from the US struggle with perhaps it could have an, uh,

inappropriate meaning. But <puts hands up> it doesn't have an inappropriate meaning. <smiles>

Saq: So, when you started working on TiddlyWiki you must've had some sort of goal in mind. What were you trying to achieve?

Jeremy: Yes, well, it's part of a lot of work I've done over the years in Wiki's. I've been interested in Wiki's for seven or eight years, and worked with them professionally – all the organisations I've worked with for the last eight years have used Wiki's. So there's a range of things that are.. a range of topics that I've been interested in for a while with Wiki's. The particular thing that prompted me then was that I wanted to participate in the blogosphere, which kind of technically meaning having a website that I could write on and an RSS feed that people could subscribe to, but I recognise some of my weaknesses as a writer, and one of them is that blogs, to me, well .. it encourages you to write in a kind of long passages of text, and kinda what you end up with is a stream of consciousness. And I wanted to find a way to write in the same way, to try and write every day, just have the same discipline as a blogger, but instead of creating a stream of consciousness, to kind of knit together a coherent manifesto of my beliefs. So I was hoping that by dripping in a little bit of content every day, what I'd end up with was something that would be much more useful and consumable than a stream of consciousness. But of course, <laughs> when I actually created TiddlyWiki, I never quite got around to using it in the way that I intended.

Saq: So to provide some context, perhaps, what else were you working on at the time?

Jeremy: So back then, my second 'dot com' had just failed, about four months before, I think. Four or five months before. So I'd been doing some consultancy work for various people I'd worked with in the past in London. Just kinda little bits of work. And in fact, what I hoped I was going to be able to do was somehow come up with some fantastic commercial idea and build a business. And at first, I was kinda disappointed that TiddlyWiki seemed like it wasn't going to be that idea, because interesting though it was, it's a real struggle to apply conventional Web 2.0 funding models to something like TiddlyWiki. It's really inimicable to the normal 'gate-keeper, charging people for premium usage and stuff'. So, did that answer your question?

Saq: Yes, I think it does.

Jeremy: I think I might have drifted. <smiles> Sorry, Saq.

Saq: That's okay. <smiles> So, um, TiddlyWiki, it's got what's sometimes described as a bit of an exotic storage medium. Y'know, all the tiddlers are saved in one file. Perhaps you'd like to talk us through the inspiration behind that.

Jeremy: So, when I first did TiddlyWiki, one of the ways I thought we'd deliver it would be as a.. <pauses> ..you'd write text, using normal HTML, and then drop it into TiddlyWiki.js as a kinda unobtrusive javascript that would kinda TiddlyWikify your existing content. So to begin with, that allowed me to focus on the UI part of the problem and not think about storage. And at that point, probably if I'd been familiar

with a particular server-side architecture then I would have probably handled the saving problem by writing a conventional server-side. But at the time, there was no decent web-based server tool that I was particularly familiar with, but I was getting really into javascript and loving it, so I kinda set myself the self-imposed constraints of 'right, let's just not have a server at all'. And that was also 'cause the webspaces I had at the time was only static, it was given to me by a friend's computer in the attic, <looks into the camera> thank you Steph! And, um, so at the time it would have been a nightmare to have gotten anything dynamic up and running.

So, sorry to be drifting, the very first version of TiddlyWiki kinda skipped the saving problem entirely. It would let you edit stuff, and when you pressed 'save', it would pop up a window saying 'oops, we can't save this in any useful way, copy it out of this text box and copy it into a text editor somewhere else'. That was a real cop-out, obviously, and it meant that the very first version of TiddlyWiki was a fascinating experiment but it was hard to see how it could be made useful. The first reaction from the internet community when I released it was very, very positive. People were saying, 'gosh, this is a mind-blowing UI', 'this is the future of Wiki's' and all that great stuff. But every single person also said, 'it'll be great when they fix saving'. And so I was sitting at home, being amazingly grateful for all this kind of recognition, but also being really frustrated because I was trying to say to people, 'of course, it'll never be able to save; it's impossible for a HTML file to save changes onto your local harddrive, don't be ridiculous'.

And for two months, maybe, I was getting really frustrated that so many people would say that, and then, rather as is the way of these things, because of the pressure, eventually I started thinking, 'well actually, maybe you can' and discovered.. well, the internet is a fantastic resource for finding out about web development, and so there are a lot of clues out there if you know where to look, and within two days of each other, I think, I found a path in ActiveX, in Internet Explorer, which is to use a built in ActiveX controller as file system access, and a separate path in Firefox, which is to use the XUL components that give you a file API. So it was an immense surprise to discover that it was possible.

Saq: So when did TiddlyWiki go from just another experiment on your desktop to you realizing you had something special on your hands?

Jeremy: Gosh, that's interesting. Well, in a way, I knew it was special from the beginning, because the reaction from lots of people that I trusted and respected was amazingly positive. And although people go gaga on the internet for stuff all the time, I was really flattered that the things that they identified as being cool about TiddlyWiki were the things that I thought were cool as well. Um.. sorry, what was the original question, just to make sure I don't drift too far?

Saq: The original question was just, when did you realise you had something different ..?

Jeremy: <interrupts> ..so literally the 20th of September, 2004. The experience of putting TiddlyWiki on the net to say 'this very first version was scarcely practical'. But I

think I put it up on the Monday, and then had like 23 hits the following day, which was my mum and my sister kinda thing, and then the day after that we had a couple hundred hits because I'd gone and spoken about it at a conference here in London, and then on the Friday it was picked up by kotke.org, Jason Kotke's fairly well-read blog, and it just exploded. The nature of the feedback gave me lots of comfort that it was a cool and interesting thing, but just didn't give me much comfort that I'd discovered.. <laughs> what I was really looking for, which was to start a conventional business that could make money.

Saq: So TiddlyWiki's an open-source project, which means that the source code has been available to everyone and on top of that you used a BSD license, which in layman's terms means, well, anyone can do whatever they want with it. What was the reasoning behind that decision?

Jeremy: Well, before TiddlyWiki, I didn't have any particular experience or even opinions about open-source. I mean, neutral to positive opinions about open-source. And like many people, when I came up with TiddlyWiki, I was explicitly thinking about commercial applications, and so my instinct was to try and find way to keep my options open by closing some of it off. There's no question that I would have put it out under a closed source license were it not for the fact that TiddlyWiki is exposed source anyway, and the fact that it's entirely on the client means that anybody can do a 'ViewSource' and read the entire code. So that meant that I could've tried to protect it and could've tried to keep it proprietary, but the cat's already out of the bag. So at first I published it under Creative Commons license, which was probably an inconsistent thing to do, but I just thought that that's what the internet kids do, so I'll do that. Then I got a certain amount of feedback from people, saying I should use a proper software license. But the thing that became clear was that having accidentally started an open-source project, the most important thing with open-source is adoption. An open-source project isn't really alive unless it's got adoption. And so I found that by making it a BSD license, that minimizes the chances that people who first approach TiddlyWiki are going to get switched off by the licensing terms. For instance, people who approach TiddlyWiki may figure that it has grey applications in education, which is a common reaction of people, and for some people, in exploring those applications, they quite understandably don't want to write off the idea of commercially exploiting those ideas up-front, but certain open-source licenses would require you to, up-front, before you even start using TiddlyWiki, agree to the restricted license about non-commercial applications.

So in fact, while nobody's made a big, mainstream commercial play with TiddlyWiki, it has been integrated into four or five completely commercial propriety products, and probably more that I don't even know about.

Saq: One of the interesting things about TiddlyWiki is that there's a populism prosperous community that's sprung up around it. Perhaps you'd like to tell us a bit about when that started happening, and perhaps what led to it.

Jeremy: Well again, because I knew nothing about open-source when I started, I didn't realise the importance of a community, and I didn't realise what a community brings to open-source projects. So to begin with, I just published my email address as part of

TiddlyWiki, so for about six months, the 'community' was me dealing with an increasing number of emails from people wanting to talk about TiddlyWiki. And that's cool; I was really loving the fact that what people were saying was generally very positive and I got a lot of people interested in it.

So then in about June 2005, maybe a little before that, I just couldn't cope with emails anymore. So I opened up two Google groups, pretty much so that I wouldn't feel this volume of pressure to answer all these emails. And what then happened was that both of those groups grew to .. I don't know how many hundreds of members there are now, but a pretty substantial community. And the thing that it left me free with, really, was that for a long time the coding of TiddlyWiki was a solo project, and I think that to do all the other things that needed to be done, like support and so on, was really tricky when I was doing all the coding myself. But very quickly it became clear to me that the community was a way of sort of sharing some of that work. I got a glimmer, really early on, of how the community could sort of help itself in a way. The benefit to me is that I share the work, and the benefit to the community is that they could get much better support from each other than they could from one man.

Saq: So you mentioned having less to do, so I imagine in the beginning there must have been a lot of late nights. How did the missus react to being told that the reason you were up at 5 in the morning still was because you were working on something called TiddlyWiki?

Jeremy: Yes, well early on I wouldn't necessarily tell people it was called TiddlyWiki, because yes, that joke did stop being funny quite soon afterwards. <laughs> But although I was spending a lot of time on it, I always spend a lot of time on computers, so I didn't really realise that it was taking over my life until it already had, kind of thing. And then it was too late. <laughs>

Saq: With it being so demanding on your time and everything, did you ever come close to abandoning the project?

Jeremy: I never felt like abandoning it in the sense of abandoning the technology of TiddlyWiki, but there were definitely times when I might've had to take a job, and I'm naturally a fairly optimistic and reckless man so I managed to kinda ignore the financial pressures for a long time, and I had some help. But yeah, there were lots of times when I might've had to take a programming job or something just to keep up on the mortgage.

Saq: You mentioned having some help to keep things going; would you like to tell us a bit about that?

Jeremy: One of the most decisive contributions to TiddlyWiki is a man called Greg Wolf at Ricoh Innovations, which is Ricoh's research division in Silicon Valley. And Greg called me out of the blue in November, 2005, so TiddlyWiki was about a year old, and by that time, GTDTiddlyWiki was quite well established, and there was a pretty strong community. And Greg emailed me out of the blue and said, 'we're loving TiddlyWiki at

Ricoh, we're using it in a couple projects, would you consider accepting money for what you're doing?' And I fell off my chair with amazement.

And at first, I didn't really understand their motivations, but it turns out that Greg's a man who has a very deep understanding of community projects, and this comes partly from the social entrepreneurship which is quite well established in California. He saw echoes in the nature of TiddlyWiki of the kinds of structures he feels are effective ways of solving certain kinds of social problems. He'd made an association that hadn't really been explicit to me, realized that TiddlyWiki's independence was a key part of that – the fact that TiddlyWiki wasn't part of, y'know, Yahoo's product strategy or something, and I mean no disrespect to Yahoo, it just would've made it less appropriate for those kinds of projects. So what Greg managed to do was to pay me just enough money to make a huge difference. I mean, I essentially had no money coming in, and was living off that, and he managed to get some money in to me, but also he helped me work on the community as a whole, to find ways not just to help Jeremy stay alive so I didn't have to go and get a job, but also helping to foster the community and providing some of the resources that we needed. So for instance, TiddlyWiki.org, the servers and everything, and the management of those servers, that was all an initiative started by Greg.

The work with Greg culminated in the creation of UnaMesa, which is the non-profit foundation we set up to own the TiddlyWiki IPR.

Saq: Alright, perhaps you'd like to tell us about some of the big break-throughs you've had. I mean, you mentioned saving as one of them and implementing the saving features in TiddlyWiki; what else do you think is worth mentioning in that same breath?

Jeremy: The UI. And something that I think has turned out to be really cool about TiddlyWiki is that everything is a Tiddler. So I see this with a lot of products.. I think a good strong product has a small number of new concepts that you have to learn, that are very simple, and that allow themselves to be recombined in lots of ways. The strongest products, those concepts that you have to learn are sometimes embarrassingly simple, much simpler than you think. So Twitter would be a great example to me of something that, from the perspective of us lot, building IT stuff, it's got such a small set of features, that it seems like it's .. I heard a lot of IT people making this point before Twitter got popular, that it's too trivial. And similarly, the data model in TiddlyWiki – the idea that having a name and a chunk of text, referred to as a Tiddler, which is like the simplest possible structure that you can think of, but by rigorously applying that, and making everything in the TiddlyWiki universe a Tiddler, you get this fantastic commonality, that once you know how to edit the main menu, you know how to edit the side bar, and you apply that simple concept to all over the place to achieve a number of things.

So at that level, I hope and I'm sort of proud that TiddlyWiki's kinda coherent and tasteful. Those kind of very soft adjectives. Then in the kind of techy stuff, yeah, there's cool stuff we do with stylesheets and templates that I've not seen done elsewhere. The saving stuff is neat, and yeah, the formatters and the Wikifier are obviously a neat piece of work because that makes pluggable in a pretty efficient way, something that's pretty intricate and normally rather tightly coupled.

Saq: And the formatters and Wikifier are the part of the TiddlyWiki core that determine how the TiddlyWiki text is processed and presented.

Jeremy: Right. They implement the TiddlyWiki format text, so all the kind of conventions about camel case meaning a link and so on come out of the formatters. And they're pluggable so that we can plug in a media Wiki formatter, for instance, or a share point Wiki formatters to make it display Wiki text that came from somewhere else.

Saq: So as the creator of TiddlyWiki, a lot of us are very curious as to how you use it yourself.

Jeremy: Yeah, so, I largely use it to demonstrate TiddlyWiki to people. <laughs> The main work I do with TiddlyWiki is updating TiddlyWiki.com, and so it's a kind of self-serving, recursive thing. Occasionally I set it up for one-off things, but I don't use it in a long-term way, I'm afraid. Isn't this awful but <holds up notebook> I'm a pencil-and-paper man. Sorry. <grins>

Saq: So were you ever tempted to turn TiddlyWiki into a proprietary product?

Jeremy: Yes, very tempted. Early on, it's the dream that we all share; you come up with some fantastic idea because we're all technologists and we all like inventing things, you go to VC's and they say 'yes, that's a great idea!' and they give you the money and you start your business. And I started to say this earlier; it became clear very early on that TiddlyWiki is completely the wrong shape for conventional VC's so there's no obvious choke point. And in fact, these are the very advanced uses of TiddlyWiki, that it's impossible for me to count the number of users of TiddlyWiki. I don't even know when people have downloaded it, because from the point of view of my server, there's no difference between downloading TiddlyWiki and just viewing it in a browser. So it's a completely uncountable number, and yet the first question a VC would ask is 'how many users have you got?' And so I'd explain why I couldn't know that, and they would immediately start trying to explore technical ways that you could force that – making TiddlyWiki phone home and stuff. And the more you talk about it, the more you realise that that would actually deflect any .. well, I mean, a lot of users of TiddlyWiki would be repelled by such a feature.

So I spent a lot of time in pubs talking to people, the entrepreneurs who do that kind of thing, trying to figure out a path. I eventually concluded that it wasn't going to work, and started to think in my head of TiddlyWiki as a kind of free loss leader for something else that I would need to do. There was a time in the middle of TiddlyWiki when I was looking around for something else, using TiddlyWiki as a stepping stone to something else. And again, I was too close to it, and didn't realise that TiddlyWiki was the point. And now I realise that one of the fantastic things about TiddlyWiki is that people can use it freely, knowing that its commercial entanglements are completely open because of the IPR and UnaMesa, but its nature means that you can never have the rug pulled out from under you. So when we use GMail, or any online service, we're completely at the mercy of the people operating that service. And that's fine, most of the time, but there are situations and there are people for whom that matters. You can pretty quickly

see that that's the case with TiddlyWiki, because I can give you a TiddlyWiki on a USB stick. You know where it is, you know who else can see it, so it's sort of transparent, whereas a lot of online services are around assembling a virtual desktop in the sky or something, where you have no control over the underlying infrastructure.

Saq: With such a large community, and perhaps a passionate one, was there ever a sense of loyalty – that you didn't *want* to turn TiddlyWiki into a proprietary product.

Jeremy: Yes. I got very positive feedback early on, but as soon as the community came into existence, I mean, you can immediately see that I can't claim ownership or control or anything like that of the community, and it's a glorious thing to have grown up around me. So I would treat it as – and I think this is someone else's metaphor – but a flock of useful birds on your lawn. You're lucky to have them on your lawn, but you know that if you made a loud noise, you know that you might scare them away, and then someone else might move in next door with better grass. And so I feel that I want to do everything I can to get the most out of the community. I mean, even that sounds the wrong way around, but fundamentally, to recognise that the community is a spontaneous thing that happened independently of me. I have a role in the community, but I see it as an independent thing.

Saq: So one of the recent changes is that your own company Osmosoft was acquired by BT. I'm sure there are TiddlyWiki community members out there that are asking, 'Jeremy, why did you sell out?' So what do you have to say to them? <smiles>

Jeremy: Well, BT is an amazing marriage to TiddlyWiki. It doesn't feel like having sold out; although it's nice to be able to pay the tax bill without going to prison. Um, well, as I said, early on, there were stages when I thought I might just have to go and get a job and be doing TiddlyWiki as a night job. As TiddlyWiki got more popular, it got interest, and I started to make the sorts of connections that may have made it possible to get an interesting job, but a characteristic of a lot of the options I looked at was that they were treating TiddlyWiki as part of my credentials for taking the job, but the expectation was that I'd stop caring about TiddlyWiki and start caring about something else. And BT was the only offer available to me that put TiddlyWiki front and centre, in two very interesting senses; that TiddlyWiki is a microcosm of the sort of open-source projects that BT wants to be able to understand, and so by being a little bit closer to it, it's easier for BT to learn from it. But it also turns out that TiddlyWiki itself, due to some of its technical properties, is a great solution to certain problems within BT. So we're able, amazingly, to continue developing and extending TiddlyWiki with the community outside of BT as well. Both serving the interests of BT and serving the interests of the community.

Saq: So you've gone from basically working on TiddlyWiki yourself and relying on volunteers from the community, to having a wealth of resources at your disposal. How has that affected the way you're approaching development?

Jeremy: Oh, it's awesome. Well, for a start, I've spent 20 years running dev teams, so I find that a little frustrating, working on my own. And in one way it was great, because I'd spent the past 7 years doing far too much management and not enough coding, so

for someone like me, it was really cool that front and centre of my life was writing code every day.. sorry, remind me of the original question so I don't get too far astray..

Saq: Oh, just how is it changing the way you're approaching development?

Jeremy: Oh, so for me it's a very familiar situation to be in, to have a group of people to work with. Running a team, what you strive to do is to share a vision in the team so that you as a group, you kind of care about what you're doing. The best teams, in any environment, are the ones that care. And the fantastic thing about TiddlyWiki is that because there are already so many people that care about it, the people within Osmosoft who have joined BT, they've been very quickly able to share in the excitement around TiddlyWiki and it's given me the ability to delegate. I'm only just beginning to reap the benefits of that, in terms of being able to get more of the things done that I'd like to get done, and freeing myself up a bit more for the stuff that, there's lots of things that as one man, I struggle to do or should do. <laughs>

Saq: With BT being such a large corporation, how are you finding that transition to the different working environment? Are they treating you okay?

Jeremy: Yes! BT is a phenomenal company, it scarcely recognizes it itself. But BT's corporate culture is .. I think, after three months of being with them, is one of the most spectacular things. At BT, for a variety of reasons, the company instinctively uses quite emotional language to describe what it does. We judge the outcomes of events not merely financially, but also in terms of how it makes people feel, and the good that we're doing in the world. That kind of culture, compared to, well, the last big corporation I worked for was in an investment bank, which had a noticeably different culture. But BT now is a successful company, and this culture is so deeply embedded in it, that for me it's been at once a kind of familiar environment, because it's friendly and nice, but exhilarating, because the capabilities we've got here to do stuff are phenomenal. BT has got so many people in the UK and around the world, and so many resources, and many of those resources are exactly the things that we need to make an immense difference in parts of the open-source community. There's some fantastic potential.

Saq: So you mention your new team at BT-Osmosoft. What's your general impression of the team you've put together?

Jeremy: I'm delighted with the team. Basically, we've hired two people from outside - Phil Whitehouse and Phil Hawksworth, both of whom I've worked with in the past and knew exactly what I wanted them to do. And Phil is doing an amazing job in what we call a 'Community Advocate', to try to build a bridge between the interests of BT and the interests of the community. He's the kind of sensitive man that is doing an amazing job at that.

Saq: From my own experiences in the last few days, I would definitely agree with that.

Jeremy: And he organized all the drinking sessions too.

Saq: Of course, always a big bonus.

Jeremy: And Phil Hawksworth, who has done some amazing work with theming TiddlyWiki. I mean, he's got an eye for design that I admire tremendously. And the rest of the people in the team are actually already people from BT. Many of them are involved in interesting Web 2.0 projects, and what they did when I arrived was, because there was a certain amount of discussion about my arrival, I was lucky enough that people kind of came bounding up to me saying, 'can I get involved?' And so I had the fascinating, fantastic job of trying to figure out the best set of people to put together here. And now we've got six people who were existing BT staff, and all are now at a pretty decent level of familiarity with TiddlyWiki, and have become a part of the community. And in the last two weeks, we're starting to see our ability to produce stuff gearing up. It's tremendous excitement.

Saq: Right. Well Jeremy, it's time for the moment of truth. You've got a young, dynamic team on your hands, so except for yourself, of course, who else is the weak link?
<grins>

Jeremy: Oh, gosh. That's an interesting one. The weak link is obviously me. I mean, running an open-source project, you have to be transparent. You can't hide behind a layer of marketing or communications or something. I've learnt that my kind of limitations or weaknesses are abundantly clear, I think, and they're the classic ones that developers have: Jeremy's not too good at documentation, for instance. The community has, in a very natural way, compensated for some of the things I've done badly. But really interestingly, there are some things I think of myself as doing really badly, and nobody's compensated, and actually, end-user documentation would be the case in point. If I was running a company, I'd probably have invested money in the end-user documentation.

Saq: One of the other things I thought might be quite interesting for the community to hear about is the role of Martin Budden in the Osmosoft team, because from what I hear, he has a bit of a different role to play.

Jeremy: Yes, indeed. So Martin, I think he first got involved in TiddlyWiki a year and a half ago or something, and at the time, he was the chief architect at Symbian, the mobile phone software manufacturers. And as it happened, he was working just around the corner from where I was living. As he started contributing more and more, I'd met him a couple times for beers and so on. For a number of reasons, he was ready to move on from Symbian, so when BT came up to me, I was really interested to find ways to, y'know, get more of Martin into TiddlyWiki. And the obvious way to do that was to explore hiring him to come work for BT. BT's a great company to work for, in the ways I said, but also it's the bread and butter – it's a nice, secure employer, and for many of us in the industry, it's a reasonable company for us to work for.

But one of the things I was worried about through the acquisition was that TiddlyWiki might start to feel too much like a BT thing. Like it's sponsored by BT. And in fact, people expected it to have 'sponsored by BT' on it, which we resisted doing. I was probably oversensitive to it, but that's the best way to be. One of the things I was

worried about was that the core code of TiddlyWiki is mostly either written by me, or very tightly gatekept by me, which is a very common characteristic in open-source projects, but it's Jeremy that's moving to BT. It's me that now has BT in my name. So I wanted to provide a balance for that, to show that on the one hand, we want the continuity of Jeremy still having a hand in the core, but we want some feet in the core that have nothing to do with BT. So I came up with this idea of having Martin work for UnaMesa, the non-profit foundation within TiddlyWiki, but still sit in my room as part of the extended team. So that means we treat Martin as a member of the community, like you, in fact, but just happens to be one we're providing office space for and so on. So he and I get the advantages of him being a member of the team, and he's there for the discussions that are going on, and can help the other guys in the team and so forth, but he also can be a stubborn character, in the best possible way, and he can stick his feet in the ground and say 'no, that's not the right thing'.

Saq: So in other words, you can count on Martin to keep you honest?

Jeremy: Yeees. I mean, hopefully, you can count on me to keep you honest, but Martin, yeah, provides a check and a balance. And of course, his background in software is phenomenal and BT is lucky to have him in any capacity. And I should say that BT is contributing money to pay Martin, via UnaMesa.

Saq: So the acquisition of Osmosoft by BT, what does that mean for TiddlyWiki?

Jeremy: Well, hopefully, it secures TiddlyWiki's future. I mean, in a way, TiddlyWiki's future has always been secure. One of the marvelous things about it is that if you create a TiddlyWiki now, you can be reasonably confident it will still work in 30 years time. I'm assuming we can get a Windows Vista emulator for whatever funky computer we're using in the future. And obviously, that's not true with Flickr. It would probably be rash to assume your photos will be safe on Flickr for 20 years. So in a sense, TiddlyWiki always had some independence and stability. But BT means that Jeremy is more secure. I'm not being chased by the tax man. There were times when TiddlyWiki was going on when I was being chased quite hard. <laughs>

Saq: And how does it change the community's role?

Jeremy: Well I hope not at all. What I'd really like, is to get to the point where there are other entities the size of BT interested in it, so we can see BT as just one of the people happy to publicly contribute to TiddlyWiki because of the benefit that they get from it. One of the characteristics of BT, as I said earlier on, is that it's an immense company with lots of resources, and some of those resources, we're going to be trying to put at the disposal of the community. An example of that would be eye-tracking hardware is commonly used in mainstream web development business as an input to the user experience or UI. But those are expensive pieces of kit, and therefore it would be a rare open-source project that had a decent level of access to them. It's not something we're set up to do right now, but I hope to be able to do this, and gain access to those machines, and share it with open-source projects, very freely, just as long as they share what they've learned from it. So for instance, if we had 20 popular open-source projects that suddenly had the benefit of being able to use one of these

devices, and shared that so that other open-source projects could see not only the benefit of using the hardware, but that these guys are Osmosoft who might be able to help provide it. So we want to do a certain amount of stuff like that, in areas where BT is reasonably well set up, we'll hardly notice the pain of providing resources but making a difference in the community that would be hard to do without that extra resource.

Saq: Right, well, you have a bit of a different perspective on TiddlyWiki, having created it, having been there from the beginning, so what do you envision for the future of TiddlyWiki?

Jeremy: That's an interesting question. In a funny way, I think that TiddlyWiki's future is really TiddlyWiki as a platform. So that means that the TiddlyWiki code itself, I hope, is going to continue to slow up, to become a more and more stable platform. In the very early days of TiddlyWiki, all the innovation was in the core. So, y'know, 'woo, we've added tagging!' and 'woo, we've added this new innovation!' and now already it's abundantly clear that the innovation is at the edges of TiddlyWiki, in the plugins. And so the ecosystem around TiddlyWiki, we need to get exactly the right balance, and it's an ongoing process to get it right, where we keep the core up to date and keep it fresh, but keep it stable enough so that it feels like you're on an island and not on a raft if you're working with TiddlyWiki.

That's a great metaphor for it. <laughs>

Saq: It really is! Um, so TiddlyWiki. It seems to have a life of it's own now. It's kind of self-sustaining. What does it feel like to have to relinquish control, to an extent, over something that you've created?

Jeremy: Oh, absolutely glorious, because I'm relinquishing control over it to people who, y'know, my admiration for all the people in the community who've helped means that .. well, it's the difference between standing in a bus shelter on your own and being at a party with people you like. I'm often struck by the fact that people like you, who've made really decisive, long-term contributions to TiddlyWiki, and sacrificed lots of time – and I can see from the times of day that people reply, that you and other people are spending *a lot* of time on TiddlyWiki – and it's always a bit, well, at least I get the benefit of 'Jeremy Ruston created TiddlyWiki', so I get really obvious kickback in terms of respect or something. And it's really striking that the people in the community don't have that. I mean, within the community, for sure, we do. But when I see people giving so much, so selflessly, it actually means that there's very little I can claim ownership of anymore. I'm proud to have originated the thing, but the reason we're sat here now, and what makes TiddlyWiki so special today is completely out of the zone of the clever things I did right at the beginning.

Phil: Okay, that's fabulous, that's actually the last question.

Jeremy: Phew!

Phil: We've actually had a lot of action on the IRC channel while you've been talking, and we've been lucky enough to be joined by the Baird brothers, Simon and Daniel, who

are over in Townsville, Australia, and Daniel has asked, 'what is your vision for the evolution of the human interface to TiddlyWiki?' And Phil Hawksworth has chimed in and asked, 'as it develops, to include more functionality, will it become less useable and accessible to new users as a result?'

Jeremy: Gosh, well, those questions will have separate answers. So Daniel's question was?

Phil: 'What is your vision for the evolution of the human interface to TiddlyWiki?'

Jeremy: Wow. So, um, it's really.. it's a great question that you ask that. One of the things that I .. by having a team at Osmosoft, by having a large group of people, it allows us to take more risks. So with eight people, you can start to spend two weeks of somebody's time on something that has a higher risk/higher potential sort of thing. So working on the user interface elements of TiddlyWiki, as in researching and exploring fundamental advances in the UI is one of the things I hope to do. And that work is driven by two really obvious things; basically, devices. So if you put TiddlyWiki on other devices, like an iPhone, that immediately invites you to explore other possibilities of the UI. So we've been looking at the iPhone, so that's us thinking of touchphone interfaces for TiddlyWiki, and we've also been looking at one of the most popular multi-touch controller platforms. Well, okay, we've been looking at the Nintendo Wii, which it turns out, has some very interesting characteristics. It runs an Opera browser, and from within javascript within the browser, you can read the position and orientation of all four controllers. We're interested in the idea of creating an experimental gestural interface to TiddlyWiki using those controllers. That's not because we think we can go out and sell it, obviously, it's because the opportunity cost of an experiment like that is really low, and because it teaches us masses about the different ways of using TiddlyWiki, different ways of approaching the user interface.

Phil: Lots of people have been mentioning the iPhone in the chat channel. There is an interest in a lightweight version of TiddlyWiki that needs to be created to run on that. When do you think that might be available?

Jeremy: That's one of the things I'm bad at doing – answering questions that begin with 'when'.

Phil: <laughs>

Jeremy: Soon. I've been working with Martin on that. It's a goal for TiddlyWiki anyway, to strip some of the bloat, if I'm allowed to call it that, and find ways to make some of the core functionality optional, essentially. And that'll allow us to make it faster on the iPhone and other devices that benefit from that.

But didn't I forget Simon and Daniel's question? Or Phil Hawksworth's question?

Phil: Phil asked, 'is there a risk that as it develops, to include more functionality, could it become less useable and accessible to new users?'

Jeremy: I really hope not. One of the things that I've jealously guarded is that the TiddlyWiki UI is actually almost unchanged from the first material version. So I haven't added lots of new buttons to the sidebar on the right. I've tried to keep the UI editions.. what's the word, so, like there's the backstage areas, which is a new UI thing but it's deliberately.. you don't need to see it if you're an end user, so it's intended not to complicate the first user experience. And similarly, we've resisted a bunch of features that would have started creeping into extension of the UI, and we need to try and continue doing that. The other thing that I'm interested in is the idea of vertical editions of TiddlyWiki, targeted at particular uses, e.g. the GTD edition of TiddlyWiki. Using that model of different editions suggests the idea of editions that are especially adapted for people who may not have used a Wiki before, or who have various levels of expertise. So I think what I'm trying to say is that the open-source community is very good at providing a plurality of solutions for a space like that, so we ought to be able to make TiddlyWiki eminently consumable by my mum, and still keep the techy geeky appeal that makes it appeal to people that aren't my mum.

Phil: Okay. Another popular member of the community, Shilcke, is online and he's asked, 'is TiddlyWiki qualified to become a universal tool in the educational sector?' In particular, he's seen the blog posts from John Lister about the One Laptop Per Child laptop.

Jeremy: Yeah, wouldn't it be glorious. I mean, one of the great things about questions like this is that the answer has nothing to do with me, in that TiddlyWiki is out there, there's a lot of people interested in TiddlyWiki, there's a lot of people interested in education, and I think there's a lot of people interested in pursuing that dream. For me, I think it's a wonderful educational tool, again because of its decentralization. Many of the most dehumanizing aspects of many of the institutions we're involved with stem from that centralization. Education at its best is a student-centric process and TiddlyWiki, to me, by doing it with tools that are themselves personal it makes it more likely that the student themselves can tailor it to their own educational needs rather than having to consume a kind of .. the old broadcast model of education. I remember the idea in the 70's of the open university was broadcasting the same material out to a wide population of people. Using TiddlyWiki, I think you can imagine it performing a more interactive educational approach.

Phil: Okay, another question from Daniel Baird; 'what is the weirdest or most interesting use of TiddlyWiki that you've ever seen?'

Jeremy: Ha. Gosh. I wish I could remember enough of them. So there's somebody who's got a complete concordance of all Mark Bolan's lyrics on it, which I just think is glorious, so when I was a 14 year old Led Zeppelin fan, that's probably what I would have done with TiddlyWiki, is put all Led Zeppelin's lyrics in them and done a whole, y'know, cross reference, collateral thingie. Um, funniest or weirdest.. gosh.

Phil: Weirdest or most interesting.

Jeremy: Oh, there's been plenty of interesting ones. I mean, there are people, and I'm trying to think of decent examples, um, yes. There are people using TiddlyWiki for all kinds of strange and interesting stuff. We might have to cut this answer, sorry.

Phil: Okay, and the final question from Daniel; 'which is better: pirates or ninjas? One answer is right. The other will get you keelhailed and shot with a cannon.'

Jeremy: <laughs> Pirates!

Phil: That's the right answer!

Jeremy: <laughs> Ah, thank goodness! Thank you, Daniel. <grins>

Phil: Okay, I think that's all we've got time for, so thank you very much, gentlemen. It's been fascinating listening to you. And thank you very much for watching! And if you're ever in London and you're a fan of TiddlyWiki, we'd love to meet you, please get in touch. All the best, and bye for now!