What was the 'future' electronic development that Leon Bagrit wasn't able to foresee?

Predicting the future is notoriously difficult.

Who could have imagined, in the mid-1970s, for example, that by the end of the 20th century, computers would be as common in people's homes as TV sets?

In the 1970s, computers were common enough, but only in big business, government departments, and large organizations.

These were the so-called mainframe machines.

Mainframe computers were very large indeed, often occupying whole air-conditioned rooms, employing full-time technicians, and running on specially-written software.

Though these large machines still exist, many of their functions have been taken over by small, powerful personal computers, commonly known as PCs.

In 1975, a primitive machine called the Altair, was launched in the USA.

It can properly be described as the first “home computer' and it pointed the way to the future.

This was followed, at the end of the 1970s, by a machine called an Apple.

In the early 1980s, the computer giant, IBM, produced the world's first Personal Computer.

This ran on an 'operating system' called DOS, produced by a then-small company named Microsoft.

The IBM Personal Computer was widely copied.

From those humble beginnings, we have seen the development of the user-friendly home computers and multimedia machines which are in common use today.

Considering how recent these developments are, it is even mére remarkable that as long ago as the 1960s, an Englishman, Leon Bagrit, was able to predict some of the uses of computers which we know today.

Bagrit dismissed the idea that computers would learn to 'think' for themselves and would 'rule the world', which people liked to believe in those days.

Bagrit foresaw a time when computers would be small enough to hold in the hand, when they would be capable of providing information about traffic jams and suggesting alternative routes, when they would be used in hospitals to help doctors to diagnose illnesses, when they would relieve office workers and accountants of dull, repetitive clerical work.

All these computer uses have become commonplace.

Of course, Leon Bagrit could not possibly have foreseen the development of the Internet, the worldwide system that enables us to communicate instantly with anyone in any part of the world by using computers linked to telephone networks.

Nor could he have foreseen how we could use the Internet to obtain information on every known subject, so we can read it on a screen in our homes and even print it as well if we want to.

Computers have become smaller and smaller, more and more powerful, and cheaper and cheaper.

This is what makes Leon Bagrit's predictions particularly remarkable.

If he, or someone like him, were alive today, he might be able to tell us what to expect in the next fifty years.

According to Bagrit, computers would be small enough to hold in the hand, and they would be able to provide information about traffic jams and suggest alternative routes.

They would be used to help doctors diagnose illnesses, and in business, would relieve office workers of dull, repetitive work.

However, he failed to predict the use of the Internet as a vehicle of communication or a source of information.

But as predicted, computers have become smaller, more powerful, and cheaper.

Predicting what computers will be like in 20 years' time or what they will be able to do is a guessing game.

If Leon Bagrit could not predict everything, what chance do I have?

However, because prediction is just a calculated guess, I will try!

The development of the computer since the 1960s has been very fast.

From large mainframe computers which filled whole rooms to small laptop computers which you can carry in a shoulder bag or a large handbag, it has taken only forty years.

Computers are already smaller, more powerful, and cheaper than they have ever been.

So what might happen in the next twenty years?

Let's speculate.

In twenty years' time, it's possible that many people will be doing their everyday shopping by computer.

The 'virtual reality' shop will be available through your TV set.

You will be able to 'walk through' your supermarket on screen, click or tick what you want, and then order, and it will be delivered.

In education, most students could be using computer notebooks, which make notes for them as they listen to a lecture or watch a demonstration experiment.

In the world of travel, aircraft already have computer systems that will control the autopilot.

In twenty years' time, computers could actually pilot aircraft with no need for a real, live human pilot at all.

Computers already help doctors diagnose diseases and other health problems, and help in the control of body systems during operations.

What else might they do in the future?

They might actually control certain kinds of surgery ( brain surgery, for example) where the human hand cannot always keep still enough, and power computer-operated limbs.

So there are some ideas.

But who knows what might really happen?

No one.

No one can see into the future.

We shall just have to wait and see.

In the mid-1970s, computers were in widespread use.

The importance of the Altair was that it put computing power within the reach of ordinary people.

Leon Bagrit foresaw that before long, computers in commerce would take over many repetitive tasks.

Leon Bagrit's most important insight into the future development of computers was in terms of their size, power, and cost.

It is notoriously difficult to predict the future.

Who could have imagined that there would be as many computers as TV sets?

People in those days liked to believe in computers taking over and ruling the world.

What makes Bagrit's predictions so remarkable is their accuracy.

Bagrit refuted the idea that computers would rule the world.

Bagrit foresaw that computers would become sufficiently small to hold in the hand.

All these computer uses have become relatively normal.

The Internet enables us to get in touch instantly with anyone in any part of the world.