Fire Call Win

Fire Call Win is a simple chat tool that allows two users, typically developers, to communicate person-to-person using encrypted transfer via Dropbox shared files and folders. Files can be transferred and exchanged, chat and data swapped on almost real-time basis. The basic Dropbox service is free, this program is free and FOSS. In addition to chat, Emojis and other files can be shared too.

Fig. 01 FireCall for Windows Main User Interface

Developed in VB6, it is a 32bit program (all hail 32bits!) that allows chat to take place between both Windows and Mac OS/X users using DropBox as the interchange medium. In addition to the VB6 version there is also a version that uses javascript on Mac OS/X. They use the same methodology to successfully communicate with each other on multiple o/s. The javascript version works on Windows as well so you are spolit for choice as to which you can use! This help file describes the Windows version only.

Minimum configuration: From Windows XP to current Windows versions. Any version of Windows 32/64bit from XP upward that have the VB6 runtime. All versions of Windows have the VB6 runtime pre-installed so FCW works on any Windows PC. Tested on Windows XP, Win 7 and 10. Should also be tested on Win11 shortly.

Program Configuration.

When the program first runs it needs to have some configuration options filled in. Fire Call Win will prompt you to set the location for the input and output files and the location of the exchange folder. The preferences screen will automatically run to allow you to set these.

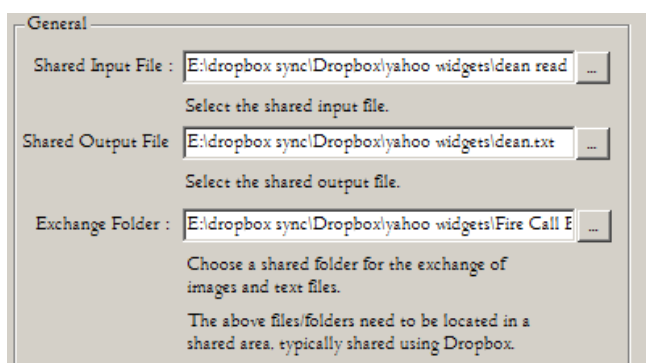**Fig. 02 The Preferences General Tab in full.**

Fig. 03 A Portion of the Preferences General Tab, Input and Output File Fields Highlighted

Enter the location of the input and output files you will be using to communicate with your partner in the fields above.

Suggested names : *inputFile.txt* and *outputFile.txt*.

These should be created and located in your dropbox folder. The dropbox folder is the location where all your dropbox files are synched. The two files required are simple text files. Create them yourself manually in the dropbox folder. You do need some basic familiarity with sharing files using dropbox, how to share files and folders and how to create files in a shared area. If you have that knowledge then proceed, if not, then go and watch a youtube tutorial!

The following is a brief resume of what you need to do:

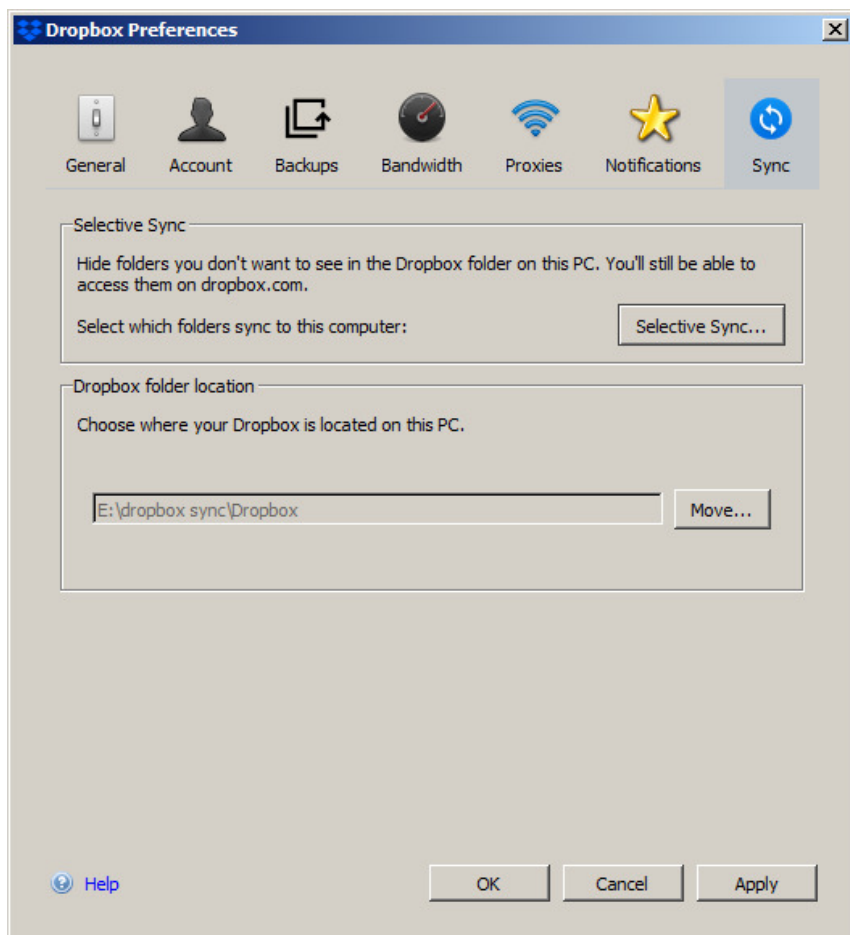If you open the program interface of DropBox and select Preferences, you will see this screen.

Fig. 04 The Dropbox Synch. Location

Dropbox makes a copy of all your shared folders and locates this in the folder specified above. <u>This is where you will place your files</u>.

Explanation:

Fire Call Win has two shared files, one is the <u>input</u> file from which you will receive updates from your partner. The other is the <u>output</u> file where your own updates will be written and sent to your partner. The location where you store these files must be shared within Dropbox so you can both see them. Visit dropbox for more detailed instructions on how to share a folder with another user. Basically the method is this: Open dropbox using its web interface (you must have an account and be logged in) and look for the "shared" menu option. At that point there will be a button to create a shared folder, you simply specify the name and who you want to share it with. That person clearly must have a dropbox account too. Once the Dropbox sharing is resolved Fire Call Win will be able to use it as the communications medium to your partner. Next, you must create two files and share them with your partner and once done you need to enter their location into Fire Call Win. That's it! More simple in reality than it sounds.

The third essential setting is the exchange folder. This is the location that Fire Call Win will use to store files that are shared between two chat partners. This folder must be created, shared in Dropbox and then entered into Fire Call Win's configuration. This will enable drag and drop and thus allow the sharing of files between you.
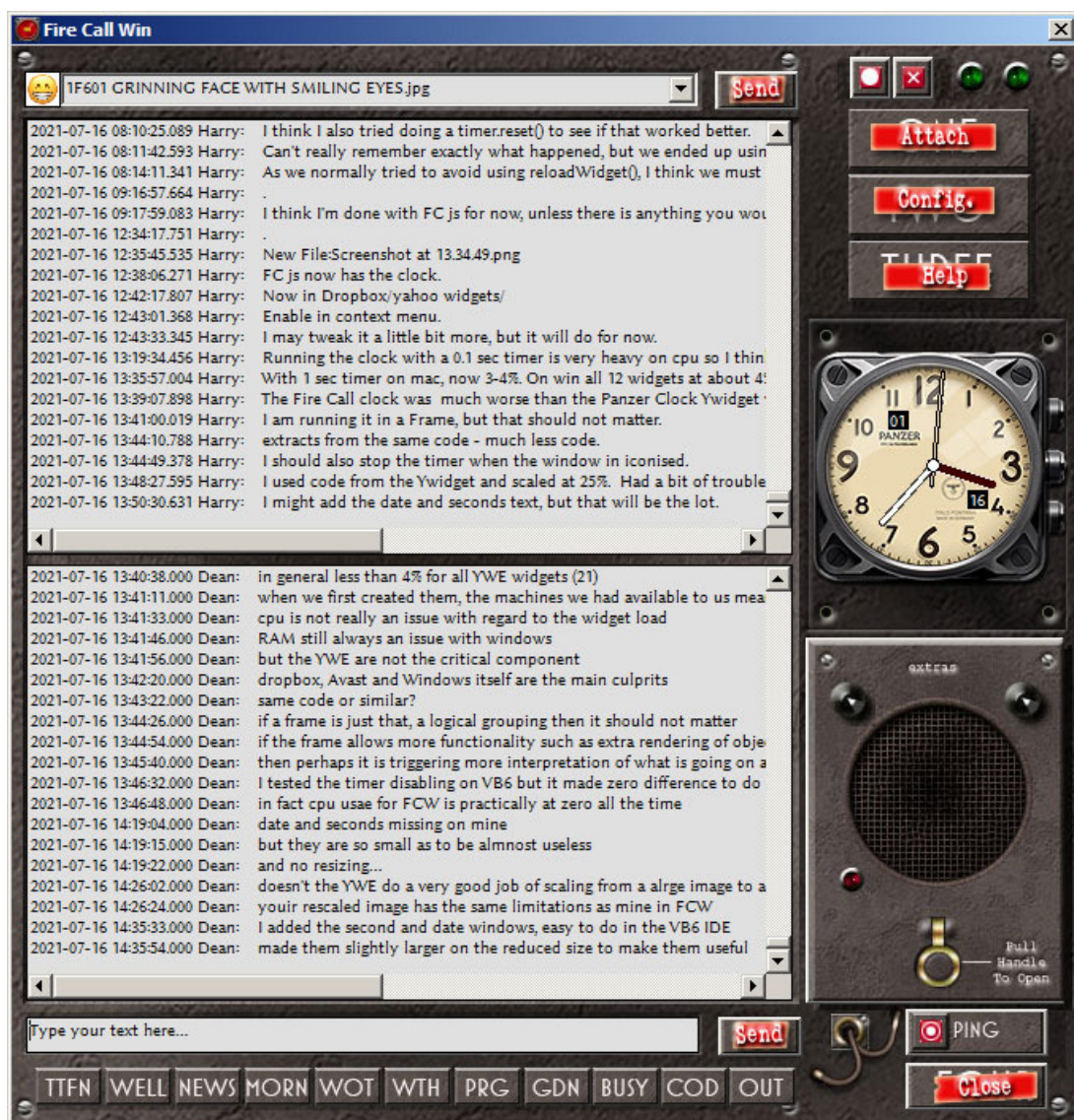
Fig. 05 FireCall for Windows Main User Interface

Program Operation

When the basic configuration tasks are done, FCW will start and show a screen similar to the one above but with no chat text in the two chat windows. The chat boxes are empty as you have not yet started to chat. If you hover your mouse over any component a tooltip will pop up briefly stating what the component does.

Upper Chat Window

The top chat contains your chat partner's texts and messages. This is known as the *input* box displaying the contents of the shared *input* file.
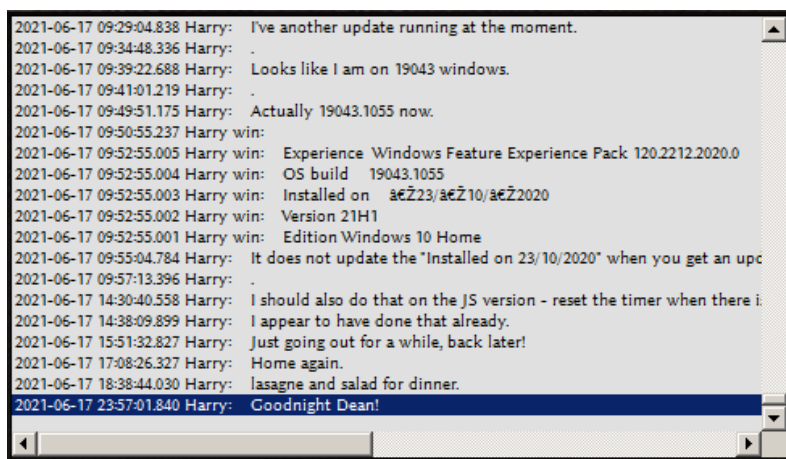

Fig. 06 Example Partner's Chat Window.

Lower Chat Window

The bottom chat contains your own texts and messages. This is the *output* box displaying the contents of the shared *output* file. Beneath your chat box is the text box where you type your messages, pressing the SEND button to dispatch the text.
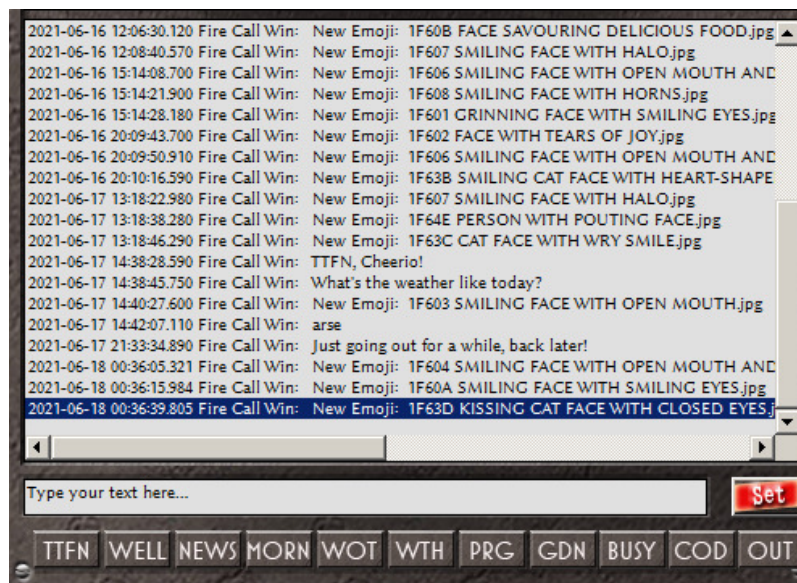

Fig. 07 Your chat window showing chat and user-defined buttons.

Chat Window Right Clicking

If you right click on either of the chat windows you will be presented with a pop up window that is dedicated to the chat box.
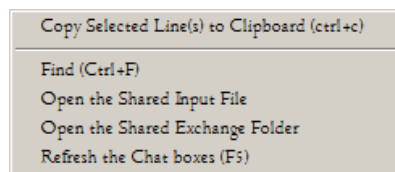

Fig. 08 The Right Click Menu as shown on the Chat Windows.

Copy Selected Line(s) to Clipboard

This will allow you to copy any selected lines within the chosen chat box. You can then paste that text into any other application.

Find (Ctrl+F)

This option allows you to search for specific text within the selected chat box. The Ctrl+F key is designated to initiate a search at any time. First of all click upon the chat box that you want to select as the source. Then press Ctrl+F and a dialog box will appear where you can type in your search string. Press F3 for subsequent searches for the same string.

Open shared input or output files

The option to open shared input or output files will open the files specified in the default application, this will probably be notepad on most systems.

Open shared exchange folder

The option to open the shared exchange folder will open the File Explorer at your specified location.

Refresh the chat boxes

The option to refresh the chat boxes will cause the program to repoll for fresh data immediately and the two windows to refresh.

Pre-Defined Text Buttons

Beneath the text box are some buttons allowing preset messages to be dispatched. Each will send a random selection, initially from three sets of message texts, each with roughly the same meaning. You can add your own custom texts in the preferences 'Texts' tab.
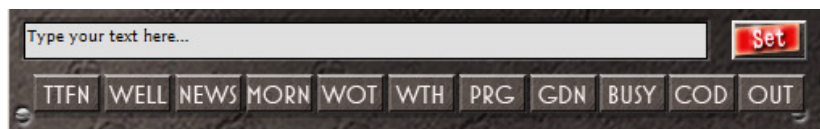
Fig. 09 Text Box and Pre-Defined Text Buttons

Emoji selection

At the top of the input box is the Emoji selection Drop Down. Select an Emoji and press SEND. This will send the emoji to your chat partner and open the Emoji panel, bottom right so that you can see your current Emoji state.
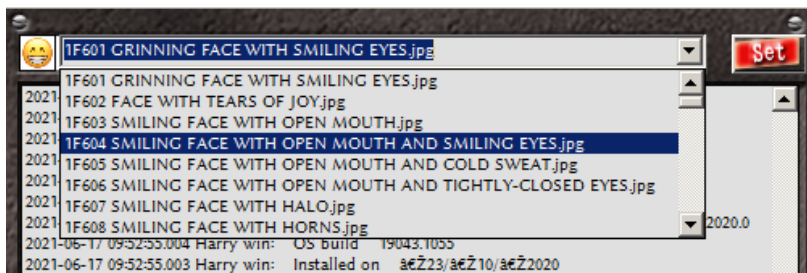

Fig. 10 Emoji Selection Drop Down

Polling and Data Update Lamps

Two lamps exist at the top of the window, they have two states, OFF and LIT . When the right lamp is lit continuously it means that you have an update from your chat partner in chat. The left hand lamp will regularly glow for 5 seconds to indicate that the tool is successfully polling the shared data area. It does this according to an interval set in the preferences. If Fire Call Win ever fails to obtain the data from the shared location an error message will pop up telling you of the problem.

Fig. 11 Polling and Data Update Lamps

The polling lamp also has another function, you may double-click on it to refresh both chat windows, this will also initiate a poll of the input file.

The Attach Button

This allows you to select a single file to send to your chat partner. This will open a file selection box. Select a file, press OK and it will be sent. It will be copied to the FCW exchange folder. The chat partner will receive a notification.

Fig. 12 The Attach Button

In addition to attaching a file via this button you can also Drag and Drop files onto either chat window and your chat partner will receive a notification of the event. The files you drag to the chat window will be copied to the FCW exchange folder. Dropbox will then automatically synch the file so that it is available to your chat partner. The speed of the synchronisation is dependant upon the size of the file you are attaching and the speed of your internet/dropbox settings. It does not matter which window you drag to, the drag will be considered a share to your remote partner. You may only drag single files or a single folder but please understand that dragging an entire folder may have unexpected results due to time taken and space utilisation. Note: Dropbox has a limit on space utilisation so don't drag and drop a large folder.

Help Button

This button will display the help file you are reading now. It will open the browser you have specified as your default browser.

Fig. 13 Help Button

Close Button

This button will close the utility and all associated windows.

Fig. 14 Close Button

It has the same functionality as clicking the 'x' button, top right.

Fig. 15 Close Button

Config Button

Fig. 16 Config Button

The config button opens the Preferences Utility where you can change the program settings. Note that when the preferences window is open the polling timer and any other timers that perform normal operations are temporarily stopped.

Fig. 17 The Preferences Panel Showing General Tab.

Note: the program will stop automatically polling for new data whilst the preferences window is open. Close it and automatic polling will restart.

The use of the input, output and exchange fields. was covered earlier in the explanation section.

Refresh interval

The refresh interval is the polling time. Setting this to just a few seconds will make the chat feel much more real-time. Extending it just slows down the discussion, which may be preferable when you are busy or if you are not bothered about chat turnaround.

Backup Location

FCW takes a backup copy each time it restarts, it makes a backup of the local copy of your output text file and stores that backup in the backup folder which is typically located here:

```
C:\program files(x86)\FireCallWin\backup.
```

If you click the Backup Location button, a file explorer window will open at that folder and you will see all the backup files listed. Each file has a numerical suffix of .1, .2, .3 &c appended to the filename. This indicates a version which is incremented each time a backup occurs. The higher numbered versions are the most recent. Look after these files, these are your backups and you may need to

restore one of them if you ever encounter a data corruption of some sort. Also, be aware that the number of files in this folder can grow quite quickly and so you may need to trim the older version files from time to time.
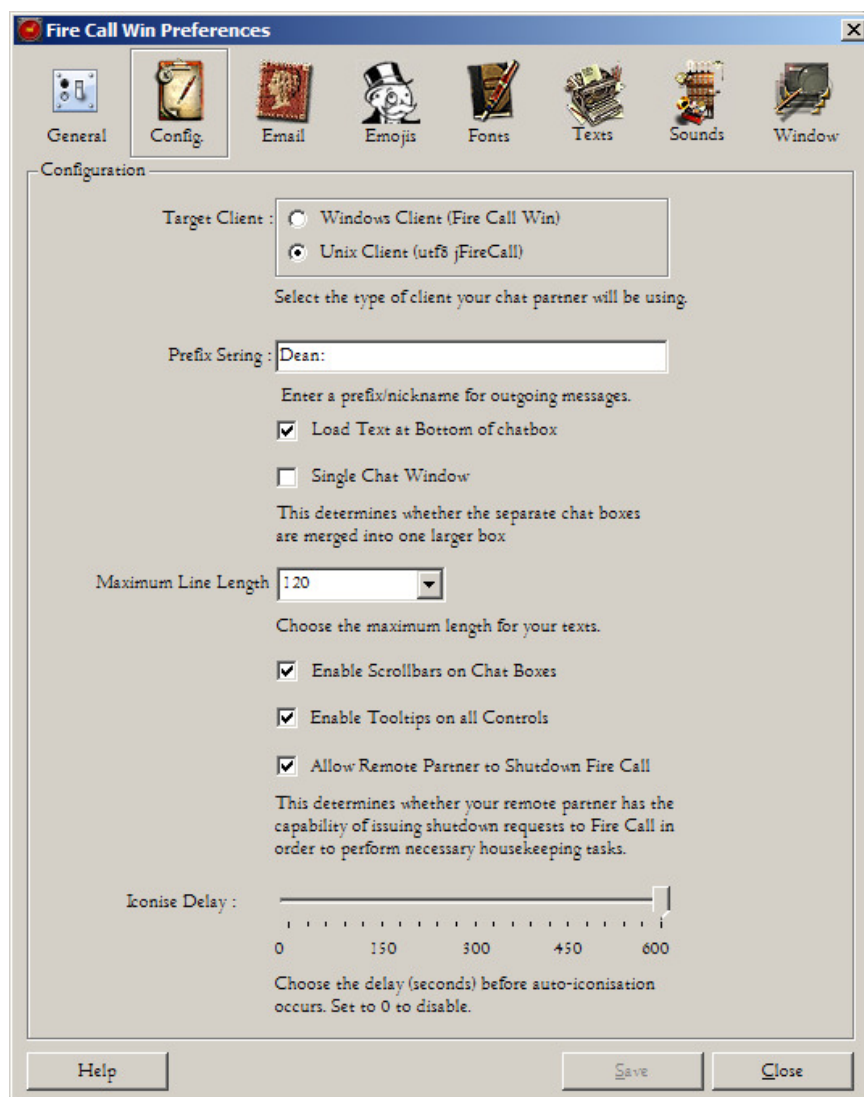

Fig. 18 The Preferences Panel Showing the Configuration Tab.

Target Client

The target client is an option that you may not need to change unless you are communicating with the javascript version of the FireCall app that runs on Mac OS X. That version requires UTF8 support to display and handle unicode characters. If you are a Windows user communicating with FireCall for Windows you do not need to select the UTF8 option. However, the code we use to handle UTF8 files may be faster for reading and writing the input/output data files, so by all means try it out.

Prefix String

The prefix is a string that will precede all your text messages.

Load at Bottom

The Load at Bottom checkbox determines whether the chat texts are top or bottom-loaded.

Single Chat Window

The Single Chat Window will merge the chatboxes to just a single box, this will converge functionality with the Yahoo widget version of Fire Call that has a single chat window by default. The text from both windows is merged, sorted and displayed as one.
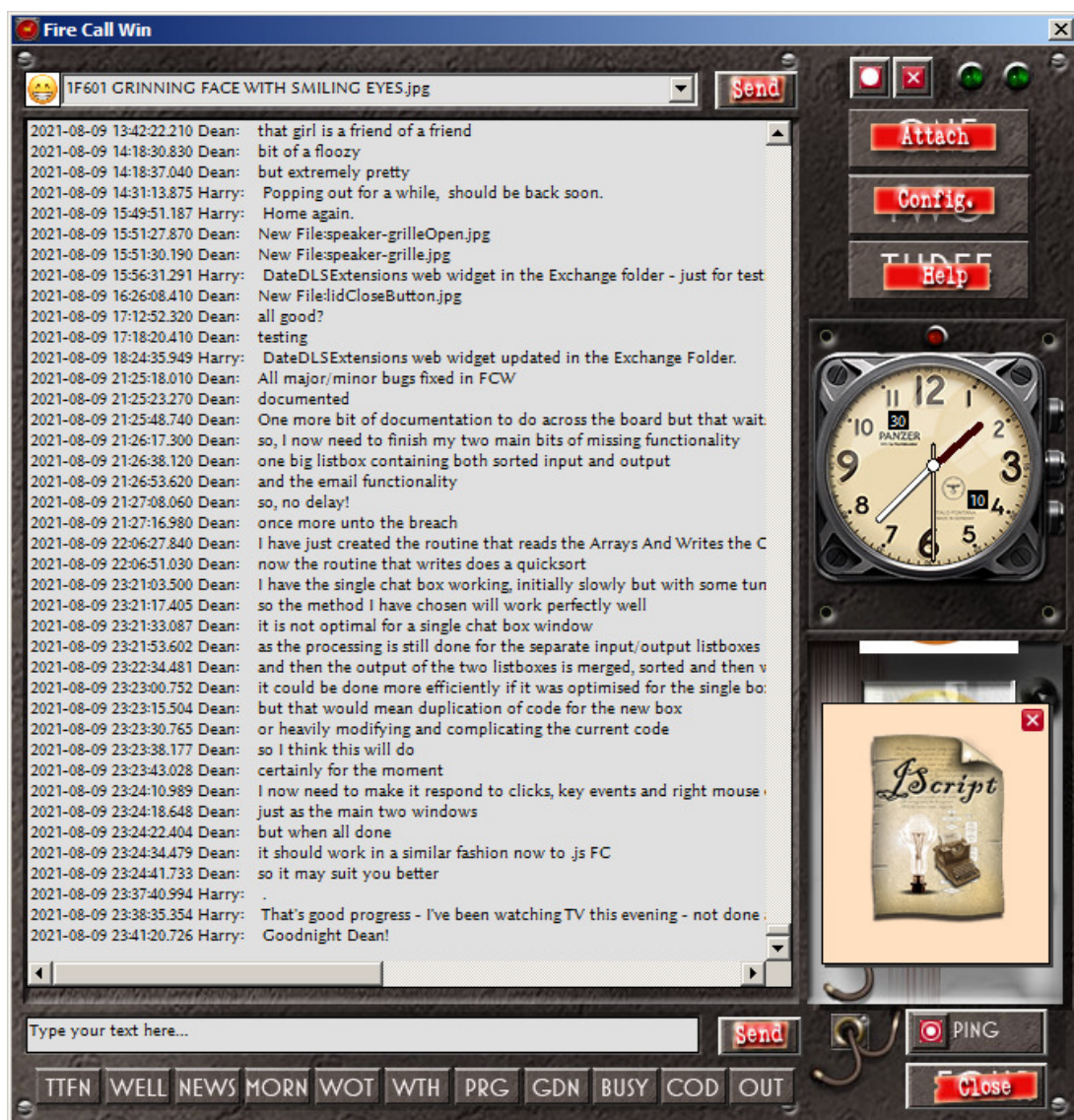
Fig. 19 The Preferences Panel Showing the Single Chat Window Option.

Maximum line length

The Maximum line length option will cause any lines you type in to be cropped when the line length reaches the set limit. The line will then be split into two or more lines. The line length option only affects lines currently being typed in, not older lines already contained within the chat.

Note that you can resize the FCW window horizontally so that your longest messages will be readable without too much scrolling.

Enable scrollbars

Enable scrollbars option will enable or disable the vertical and horizontal scrollbars in all chat windows. Scrolling is then achieved by use of the keyboard up and down keys.

Enable Tooltips

Enable Tooltips will enable or disable the tooltips on the main application window.

Iconise delay

Iconise delay - this controls the delay after which the application will be iconised or minimised to the desktop. This is not a Windows minimise but an program iconise. After iconisation the program will look exactly like the following icon. You can place the icon wherever you want on the desktop and it will remember the location even after shutdown and restart. The reason for this type of iconisation is to minimise desktop space utilisation and to allow the program to alert you to any incoming text.

Fig. 20 The Program Iconised

The icon image will pulsate when a incoming message has arrived. Double clicking on this icon will cause the main program to re-appear. The data change lamp will be lit . To clear this click on the lamp or the text input area, this tells the program that you have acknowledged your receipt of new text.

Allow Remote Partner to Shutdown this app

This determines whether your remote partner has the capability of issuing shutdown requests to your copy of Fire Call prior to him performing administration or housekeeping tasks such as reducing the size of the text files used to store the chat text. If these tasks are carried out whilst FCW is running it could cause the app some problems. Having the ability to indicate the need for a shutdown to your partner is a useful tool.
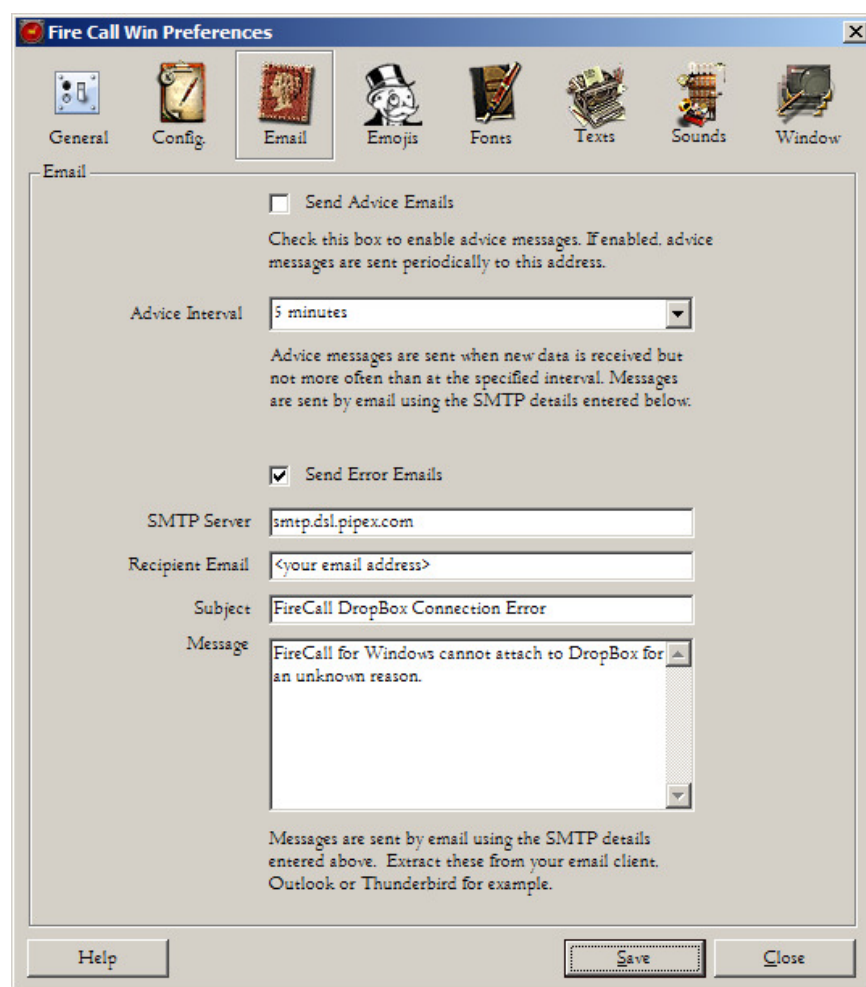

Fig. 21 The Preferences Panel Showing the Email Tab.

The configuration options on this page are not currently functioning. When this functionality is enabled it will expect the user to enter details of his email settings so that the program can email a recipient if there is an error.
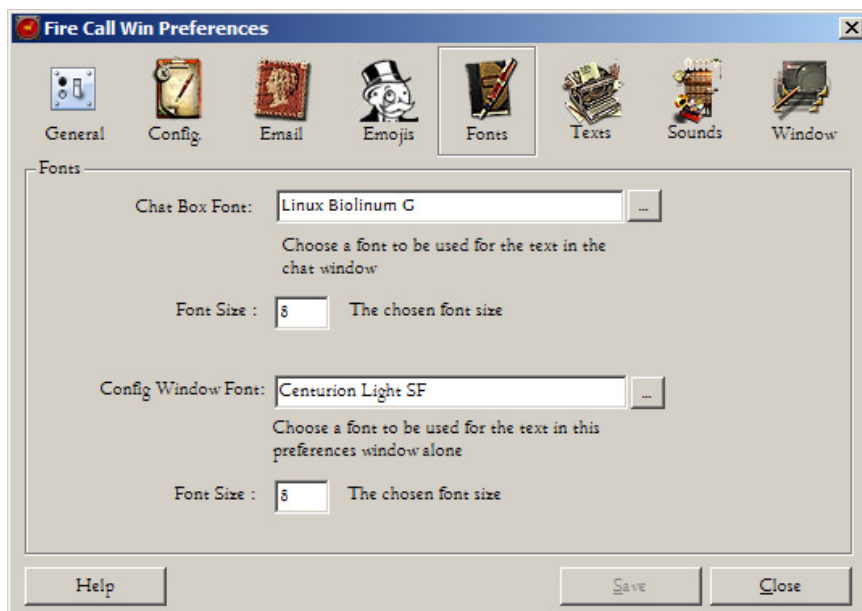
Fig. 22 The Preferences Panel Showing the Fonts Tab.

Chat Box Font

The main window font only affects the chat box text. I use Linux Biolinium as the text font for the chat as it is concise, easy to read and looks the part with regard to the rest of the program. The Linux Biolinium font is contained in the fire call program folder so that you can install it at any time.

Config Window font

This allows you to change the font of the preferences window. I always use Centurion Light SF on the majority of my apps as I feel it returns a slightly more classy look than the windows default. All my applications allow customisation of the font, giving your apps a unique look and feel using your chosen settings. The Centurion Light SF font is contained in the fire call program folder so that you can install it at any time.
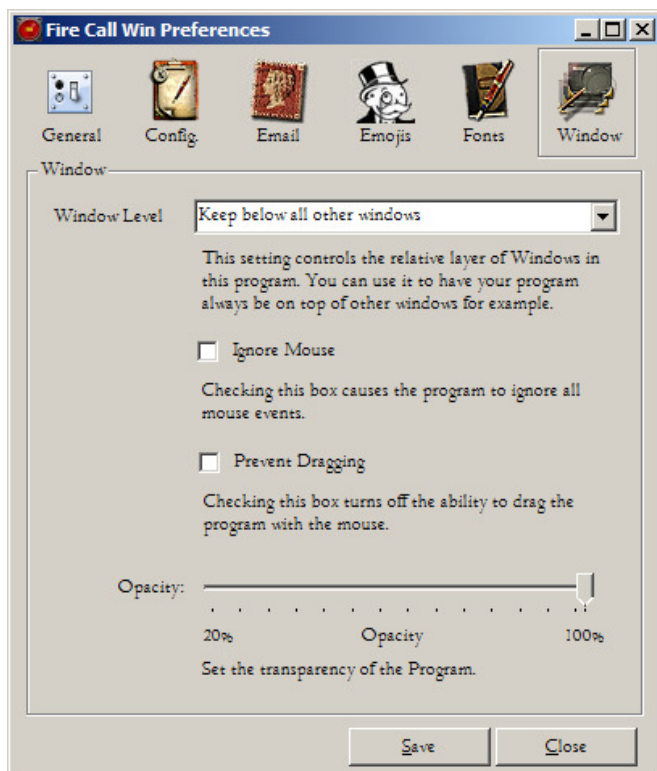

Fig. 23 The Preferences Panel Showing the Window Tab.

Window Level

The Window Level is the position of your program window in the z axis. Setting it to keep below all other windows means that it will

drop to the bottom and stay there. Windows will always bring any window that is in focus to the top but the program will also be trying to keep itself at the bottom, so that whilst you are working on the window it will tend to jump forward and back again. If you choose this option do realise its limitations. It is here as more of an experiment as to how to implement a feature, one carried over from the Yahoo Widget (javascript) version of this program

Ignore Mouse

This option is currently disabled in this program.

Prevent Dragging

This option is currently disabled in this program.

Opacity

The opacity of the program is rather a strange characteristic to change in a Windows program, however Fire Call Win is a copy of a Yahoo Widget of the same name. All widgets have similar window tab options including the capability to change the opacity. It allows your program to sit at the back of your desktop with an opacity that ensures it presence does not interfere with any other programs. Whether that is useful to you or anyone is a moot point but as this tool aims to replicate the YWE version functionality it has been reproduced here.

Fig. 24 The Preferences Panel Showing the Texts Tab.

The texts tab allows you to change or add to the pre-defined text buttons that appear at the bottom of the program. Enter your custom text in the text field at the top and click the "+" button below on the pre-defined button of your choice. Your test will be added to the drop down list for that button. Click save afterwards to save your changes. FCW will store up to 10 of your custom texts for each pre-defined button. When you press one of the pre-defined buttons on the main program window, one of the texts will be selected at random.

The "-" button next to the "+" button will delete the currently selected text.

Fig. 25 The Preferences Panel Showing the Sounds Tab.

Alarm Sound

The alarm dropdown will display any .WAV files the program finds in the sounds folder. You can add you own. Press the small "sounds location" button below and a file explorer window will open at the correct folder, the folder labelled SOUNDS in the RESOURCES folder. If you copy your WAV file into this location the utility will find them after a program restart.

The small button marked with a green arrow will allow to hear any additional sounds that you have added prior to selection. The small button marked with a red cross will mute any sounds you are currently testing.

Enable Sounds for the Animations

There are various animations that have an associated sound when they operate. You can disable these entirely here

Enable loud volume

There are various animations that have an associated sound when they operate. You can reduce the volume of those sounds so they have much less of an impact.

Save button

The Save button on the preferences utility causes all the changes you have just made to be saved to a configuration file and the new values are passed to the program to change the way it operates.

Close button

The Close button on the preferences utility closes the preference windows but does NOT cause all your recent changes to be abandoned. It is not a cancel button.

-oOo-

Leaving the preferences behind we return back to the main program.

Fire Call Button.

Fig. 26 The Fire Call Button.

This big red button, if kept pressed for 5 seconds will buzz your chat partner to get his attention. You will also hear the buzzer sound at your end to confirm the operation.

The Buzzer Lamp

Fig. 27 The Buzzer Lamp Bright

Just above the Fire Call button is the buzzer lamp. If your chat chat partner has buzzed you during your absence meaning that you did not hear the buzz, the buzz light will stay lit.

Fig. 28 The Buzzer Lamp Dull

A click on the buzz lamp will extinguish the lamp to its dull state.

Clock Activator Screw

Pressing the top left screw on the Fire Call button will cause the button to flip to the real-time clock display as shown below.

Fig. 29 The Clock Activator Screw.

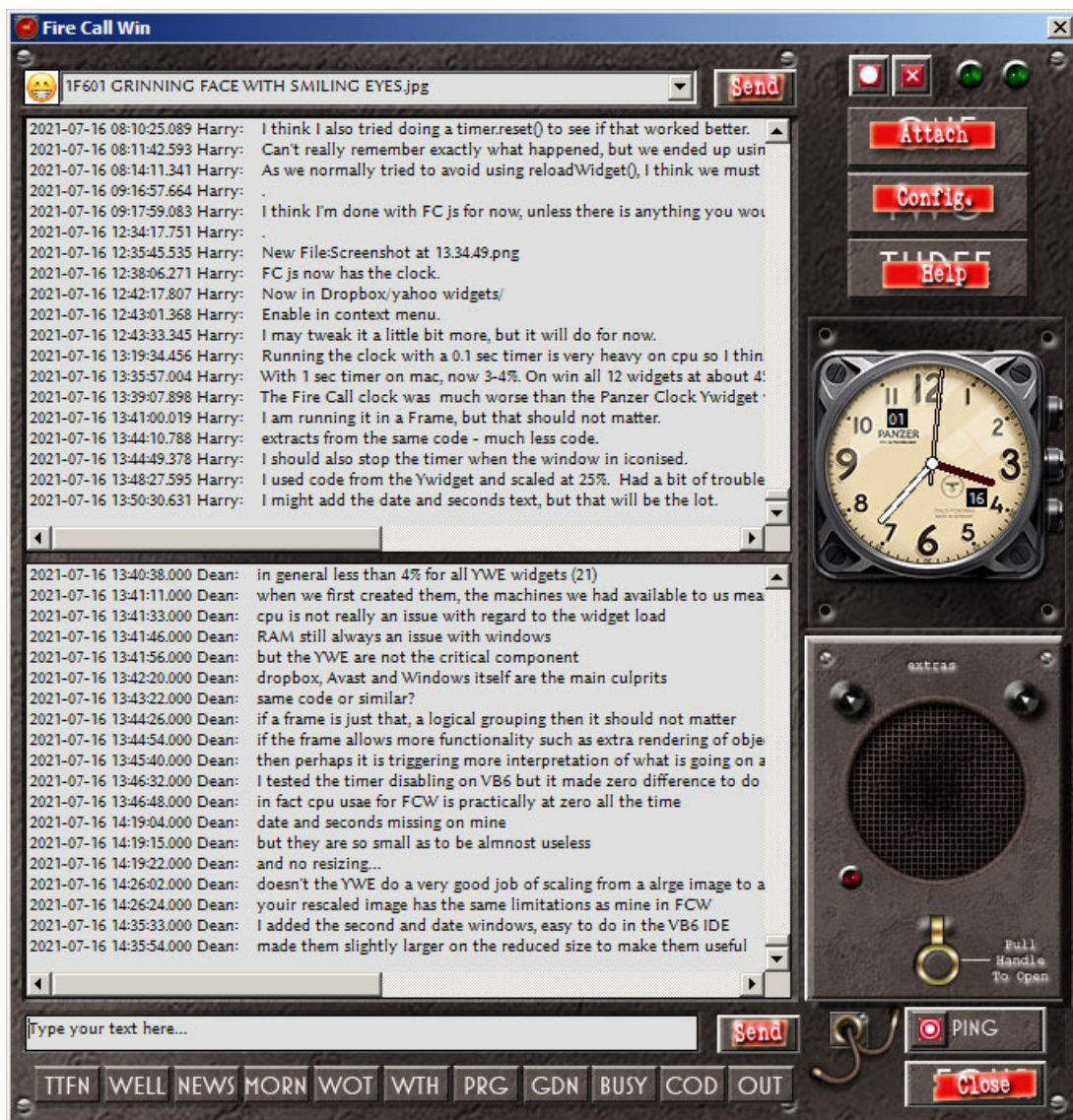 A further press on the screw will revert back to the fire call button, ready to buzz!

Fig. 30 The Real-Time Clock.

The Real-Time Clock.

A right click on the Real-Time Clock displays a right click menu where you can select the method of displaying the clock. The GDI+ method does not yet function as it has not been implemented.
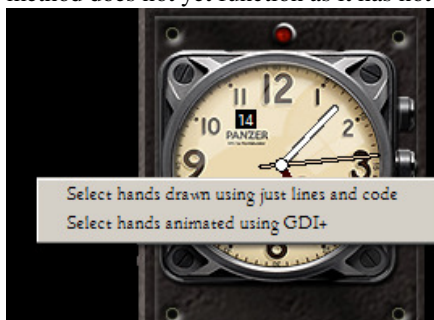

Fig. 31 The Real-Time Clock showing right click menu

Fig. 32 The Iconise Button

This button replaces the standard Window's minimise button but instead causes the program to fade to nothing. The program window then fades away and is replaced by an icon that sits on the desktop. You can place that icon anywhere you like on the desktop and it will remember its position when the program is next restarted.

Fig. 33 The Program's Iconised state

In order to give you warning of new incoming messages, this icon will pulsate when a new text is incoming. Double-click on the icon to maximise the program.

The Close Button

It has the same functionality as clicking the close button, bottom right.

Fig. 34 The Close Button

The Ping Button

Causes a 'ping' to be sent to the other user. This will elicit a ping response from your chat partner's client app as long as it is running.

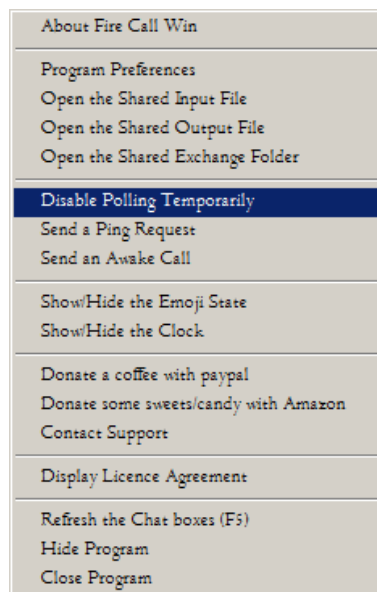**Fig. 35 The Ping Button**

The Right Click Menu.

Fig. 36 The Right Click Menu.

The right click menu has a few options that are also available through buttons on the main program. They are here for convenience. Certain items are unique to the menu. The menu appears when you right click on any part of the program except for the chatboxes and the clock. The two chat boxes will show a different right click menu as well as the clock, described earlier. The preferences window also has a right click menu that is a subset of the one above.

About Fire Call Win

The "About Fire Call Win" option displays program information and the current version number.

Open shared input or output files

The option to open shared input or output files will open the files specified in the default application, this will probably be notepad on most systems.

Open shared exchange folder

The option to open the shared exchange folder will open the File Explorer at your specified location.

Disable Polling Temporarily

The option to disable polling is there so that you can mute your chat partner's messages until you wish to re-enable polling again.

Send a Ping Request

Causes a 'ping' to be sent to the other user.

Send an Awake Request

Causes an awake to be sent to the other user's application, that should elicit an awake response shortly after.

Show/Hide the Emoji State

Causes the Emoji control panel lid to be removed and the control panel to reappear.

Show/Hide the Clock

This is a toggle that switches between the clock and the big red shiny buzzer button.

Donate a coffee with Paypal

We love a coffee. Opens a browser window to make a donation to us via Paypal.

Donate some sweets via Amazon

We love sweets, especailly licquorice. Opens a browser window to allow you to make a gift via Amazon wish list.

Contact Support

This will open a link to somewhere that you can ask for support. Not yet determined where....

Display Licence Agreement

The "Display Licence Agreement" is an important option that you do need to review, this is the licence by which you use this software.

Refresh the chat boxes

The option to refresh the chat boxes will cause the program to repoll for fresh data immediately and the two windows to refresh.

Hide Program

Iconises the program to the stamp icon.

Close Program

Closes the application completely.

The Emoji Panel Cover

Fig. 37 The Speaker Panel & Emoji Panel Cover

The speaker cover has two buttons, one to record speech and the other to halt any current recording. The small red lamp on the speaker panel will change to green when recording a message for your chat partner. The maximum length is 65 seconds. Be aware that if you utilise this facility a lot you will fill up your dropbox allocation rather quickly! Best to be brief with your messages and be infrequent...

Click on pull catch to remove the cover and display the Emoji Panel below.

Fig. 39 The Emoji Control Panel

The Emoji Control Panel shows your current emoji state on the television screen and your chat partner's emoji state is available via print-out. When your chat partner's Emoji status is changed it will display his Emoji through the use of a print out animation. Clicking on the strip of paper (just appearing at the top of the Emoji Window) will allow you to see your chat partner's current Emoji state. A small animation will run when the paper is first clicked upon. Another click on the displayed print out will shred it.

The left and right hand button allow you to select other emojis for viewing on the telly screen. As you select each Emoji, the Emoji drop-down at the top of the program will change as well.

Clicking on the speaker grille will toggle the sounds for the whole application, changing them from loud to quiet and back again as required.

The final control in the emoji panel is the button top right that will close any displayed image.

Displaying your partner's attached images.

When your chat partner sends you an image or other attachment, it will appear in a picture box in the emoji control panel. If the file is a known image then it will display the image itself. If it is a 'known' image format but Windows cannot easily display it then an appropriate icon will appear in its stead. The program will attempt to display the following image types - ".jpg,.jpeg,.bmp,.ico,.png,.tif,.tiff,.gif,.cur,.wmf,.emf".
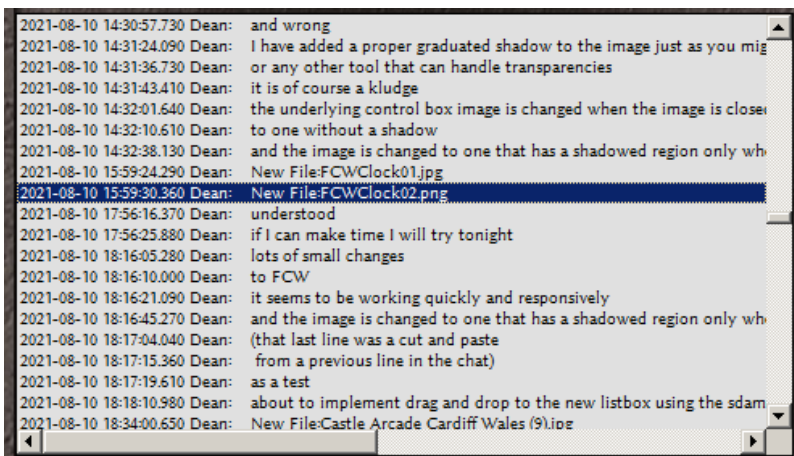

Fig. 40 Example chat partner's Chat Window Selecting a PNG file.

Fig. 41 Example picture box displaying an attached PNG file.

Those attachments that it cannot display due to limitations in the program or in the o/s itself, are what we refer to as valid but unknown image types. For example: ".pict,.icns,.svg,.NEF,.CR2,.ORF,.RW2,.ARW,.DNG,.wps,.AI,.PDF,.PSD,.RAW,.INDD" will each have an icon displayed that indicates this status but nothing more.

Fig. 42 Unknown Image Type Encountered Icon

The same will occur for attachments that are valid and known, in this case a file type icon will be displayed. eg. if you have been sent an attachment then it will have an appropriate icon displayed that indicates the file type using the file suffix.
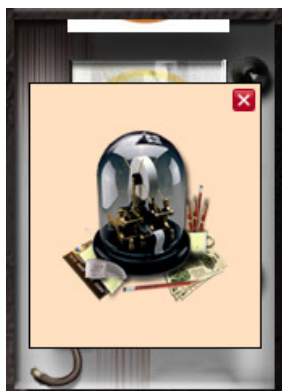

Fig. 43 Example Attachment of a program file of type EXE

The program has a bundle of appropriate but not exhaustive file types. The program will select one of each using the file suffix.
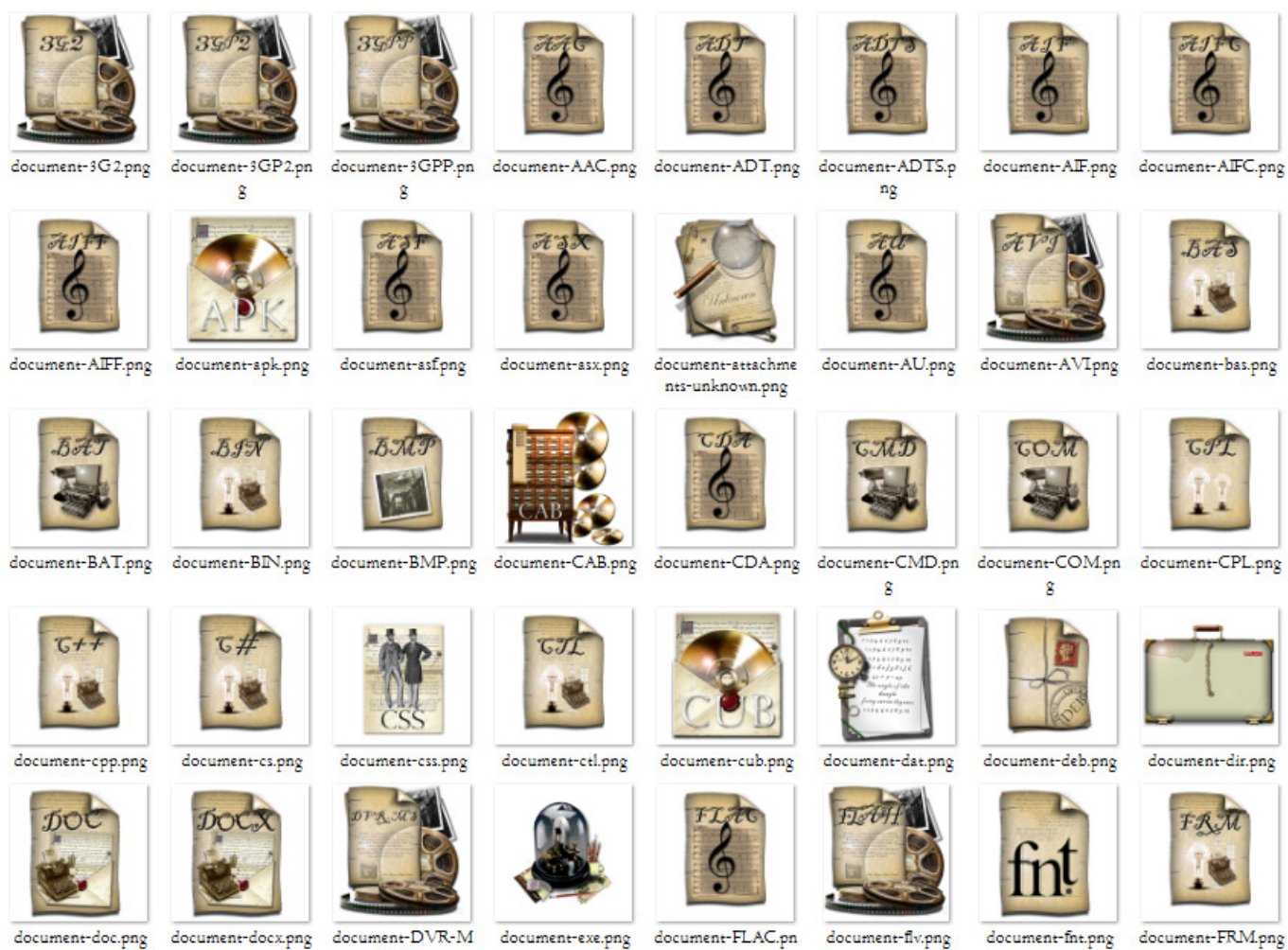
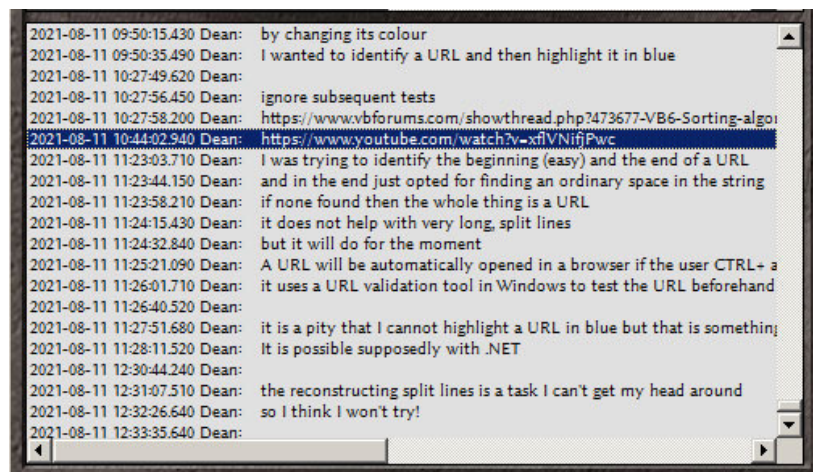**Fig. 44 Examples of Other Attachment Icons**

A double click on the icon picture box will open the attachment using the default application. In the above case Windows will open the attached EXE file and run it, so take care! If an audio file is selected Windows media player will open and play the WAV file. What happens is down to your Windows configuration and the default application types. If the file type is completely unknown then the following icon will be displayed in its stead.

Fig.45 Unknown Attachment Encountered Icon

If an attachment has expired, ie. the shared image has been deleted from shared area then a click upon an old image reference in the chat window will fail. It will now fail to show an image or attachment type as the file has disappeared as far as the program is concerned. In this case the following image icon will be shown.

Fig. 46 File Not Found Image

URLs

Fig. 47 Selecting and Opening a URL

When your chat partner sends you a valid URL then you can open that using a double-click on the link itself. It will open automatically in the default browser.
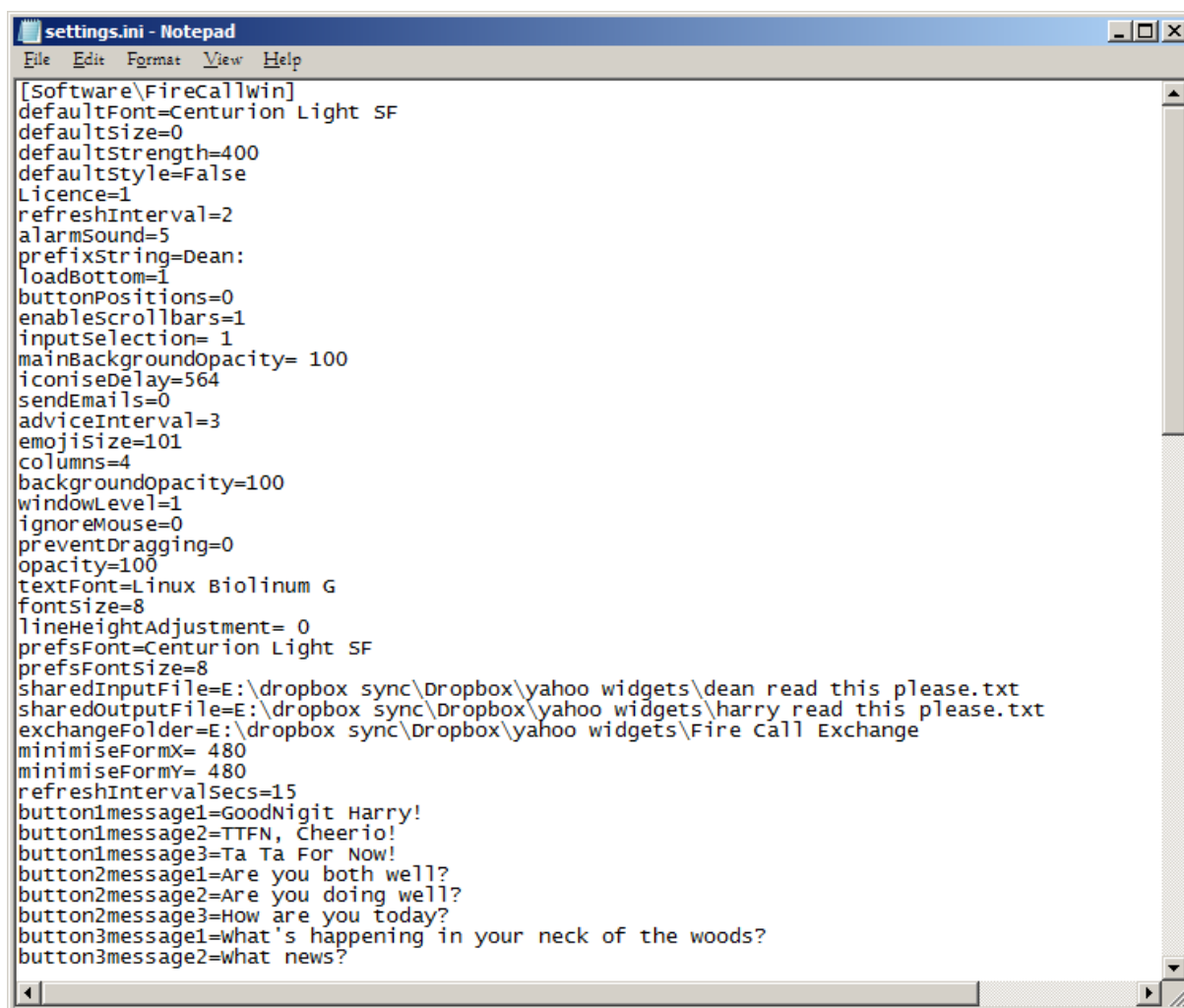
Settings:

All the above configuration options are stored in one place, within a settings.ini file in this location typically:

`C:\users\<username>\appdata\roaming\firecallwin\`

eg. `C:\users\beededea\appdata\roaming\firecallwin\settings.ini`

The settings file is a text file and it is not recommended to edit it by yourself in notepad or similar, if you have to then it might be wise to take a copy before doing so.

```
settings.ini - Notepad
File  Edit  Format  View  Help

[Software\FireCallWin]
defaultFont=Centurion Light SF
defaultSize=0
defaultStrength=400
defaultStyle=False
Licence=1
refreshInterval=2
alarmSound=5
prefixString=Dean:
loadBottom=1
buttonPositions=0
enableScrollbars=1
inputSelection= 1
mainBackgroundOpacity= 100
iconiseDelay=564
sendEmails=0
adviceInterval=3
emojiSize=101
columns=4
backgroundOpacity=100
windowLevel=1
ignoreMouse=0
preventDragging=0
opacity=100
textFont=Linux Biolinum G
fontSize=8
lineHeightAdjustment= 0
prefsFont=Centurion Light SF
prefsFontSize=8
sharedInputFile=E:\dropbox sync\Dropbox\yahoo widgets\dean read this please.txt
sharedOutputFile=E:\dropbox sync\Dropbox\yahoo widgets\harry read this please.txt
exchangeFolder=E:\dropbox sync\Dropbox\yahoo widgets\Fire Call Exchange
minimiseFormX= 480
minimiseFormY= 480
refreshIntervalSecs=15
button1message1=GoodNigit Harry!
button1message2=TTFN, Cheerio!
button1message3=Ta Ta For Now!
button2message1=Are you both well?
button2message2=Are you doing well?
button2message3=How are you today?
button3message1=What's happening in your neck of the woods?
button3message2=What news?
```

Fig. 48 The Settings.ini File opened in Notepad.

Technology:

The utility was created using VB6 and GDI+, VB6 was Microsoft's once vaunted flagship language. It was built upon Windows 7, Microsoft's last good desktop operating system, I used VB6 to prove it can be done and to reacquaint myself with the technology. The utility will be migrated to VB.NET so there will be a version that is both future-proof and 64bit.

VB6 Version Credits:

The utility was created using VB6, Microsoft's once vaunted flagship language. Microsoft created a superb tool but abandoned it much too early in my opinion. I also used MZ-TOOLS 3.0, CodeHelp Core IDE Extender Framework 2.2 & Rubberduck 2.4.1.

This program was built with the assistance of various snippets or chunks of FOSS code. VB6 has been around for so long that the codebase is immense. You can always find snippets to do this or that and it makes your development tasks immeasurably easier.

- Shuja Ali (codeguru.com) for his settings.ini code.
- Registry reading code from ALLAPI.COM.
- Rxbagain on codeguru for his Open File common dialog code without a dependent OCX
- si_the_geek for his special folder code
- Aaron Young for his code for registering a keypress system wide
- La Volpe for the code to allow VB6 to read non-native image types
- Krool for his slider OCX
- Chris Fannin, code for copying a folder
- Austin Hickl function GetDateInUniversalFormat
- Ellis Dee quicksort function
- KayJay IsGoodURL function
- Jcis resizing an image
- Qvb6 date from epoch

Finally, credit to Harry Whitfield, Emeritus Professor of Computing, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, for helping me with ideas, testing and being a sounding board for my ideas. I would have done none of this without him as he is my programming Yoda and my inspiration to do better. Harry coded the original Fire Call program in javascript using an idea we came up with together. We worked further to create the Yahoo Widget version that also still exists today - that became an inspiration for the VB6 version you are using

now.

Donations:

Bonkers people like myself create these tools and we do it for nothing, for free, gratis. However, it makes my day when someone sends a gift, a treat or a present and it inspires me to do more. In all the time that I have created all these tools (thirty or more tools) I have received no more than a dozen or so gifts but when someone has done so I feel like I have just inherited a new friend. All I ask is that if you use this tool and continue to do so, consider sending me something small once every few years. I have a penchant for licorice and cheap SSDs, the former is cheap and brings a smile to my face, the latter has me running round the room in circles.

END

Fig. 49 Fire Call for Windows shown on my desktop.