

is recorded in spiral tracks or concentric circles, also by a laser light beam. Because the Hi-Lite card is held firmly in the drive, it is designed to withstand greater shock and vibration than a spinning disc. ORC engineers think this will open the market to greater military and industrial uses.

Information is stored through a pulsar beam. Words, pictures, or sounds are converted to a digital data stream and written – or etched – onto the card in a series of micron-sized pits, or spots. They can then be read back with the use of a less-powerful laser that scans down the data track. The laser light strikes either a pit or an unexposed space and is reflected back through the optical system as either a “1” bit (a pit) or a “0” bit (a space). This binary code is trans-

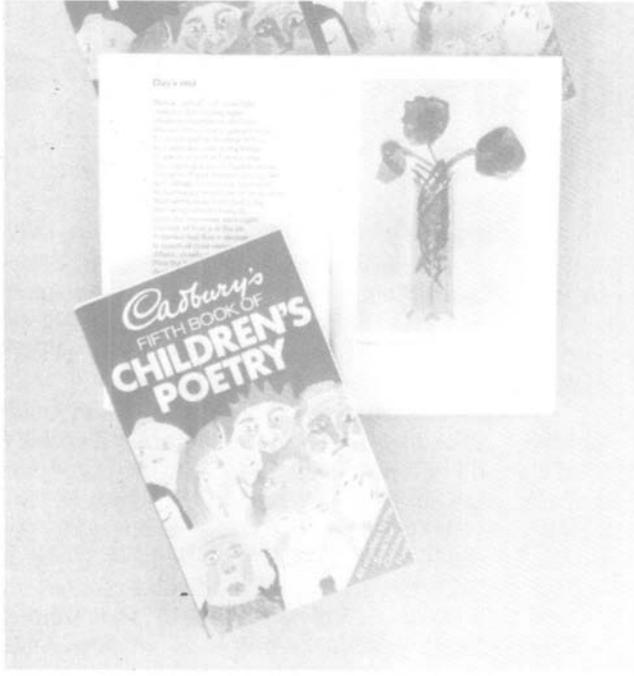
lated and reads out as pictures, music, or text’ (*Christian Science Monitor*, 19–25 Oct 87).

The medical industry could use the card as a personal health record that is regularly updated, including everything from dental x-rays to prescriptions. Clinics could in this way evolve new card-index systems out of their traditional records, as could insurance companies and government bodies holding detailed information about large numbers of people. The brainchild of American inventor James Russell, the laser card has a 200-megabyte storage capacity. That is, one card can hold the whole *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, with all its pictures. Markham’s report in the *Monitor* was entitled, ‘By 1995, an encyclopedia could fit in your wallet’.



The on-going primacy of the printed word Some prophets of technology have for years been predicting the death of books. With the coming of a paperless society, they insist, the kind of digital achievements described in ‘The

encyclocard in your pocket’ will reign supreme. Chauvinists of print can, however, take heart. The above array of publishers’ stands at the 1987 Frankfurt Book Fair suggests that the traditional printed word is still secure.



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