



TNMOC Newsletter

Issue 13 December 2009

www.tnmoc.org

Highlights of our year

It's been quite a year for TNMOC following the funding boost from PGP Corporation and IBM at the end of last year. We still need lots more funding of course, but their contributions show how much we can do when we have the resources.

Visits of the year included a father of British computing, **Sir Maurice Wilkes**, the multi-talented **Stephen Fry**, the technically savvy **Duke of Kent**, musician **Imogen Heap**, actress and singer **Myleene Klaas** and many more – in fact our visits from the general public soared.

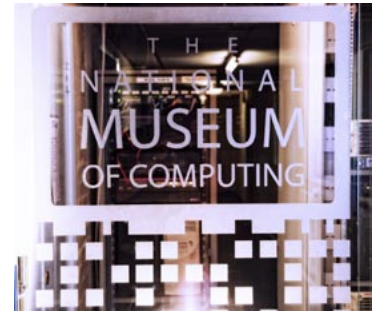
Projects this year have included the start of the restoration of the **Harwell/WITCH** computer, the re-assembly of **IRIS** the recently decommissioned air traffic control technology, and the seemingly never-ending task of trying to make the **Elliott 803** and the **ICL2966** mainframes behave.

New galleries have opened and lots more new areas of the museum have been opened to the public: the latest opening is the **Technology of the Internet** gallery and early this year the **PC gallery** and a **slide rule display** were unveiled. And then there is the new shop and coffee area!

In amongst all that we even had Colossus, Elliott and others making their way onto iTunes thanks to a musical concert by Pixelh8. The latest news is that the resulting album *Obsolete?* has been ranked 80th best album of the year. <http://tiny.cc/tnmocobs>

Kevin Murrell

TNMOC Trustee and Director



Internet technology gallery – or how the British invented the Internet



December saw the opening of The Technology of the Internet gallery, sponsored by NPL and attended by three key members of Donald Davies' team who developed Packet Switching, a key building block of internet infrastructure.

BBC Online turned up and spent most of the day interviewing and filming for an online special they plan in February. They were very excited about two re-discoveries of British contributions to the early days of the internet: a pre-html html and a pre-Google google. Expect to see some special coverage early in the New Year. Meantime, you can keep watch on TNMOC in the media here: <http://tiny.cc/tnmocmedia>

Harwell / WITCH update

Work on the Harwell / WITCH computer is led by Tony Frazer and we are hopeful that a documentary may be made about the challenge to restore the world's oldest original computer. Pilot filming is due to start soon and an American company has hopes of making a programme for global TV distributor.

Meantime, more of the history of the machine is emerging. Its three designers have been in contact with TNMOC and past users are making themselves known amongst the visitors who come to see the restoration in action. We'll tell you about the link with a spy another time.

Shares in the restoration are still available and lots of publicity is in prospect for 2010. <http://tiny.cc/tnmocspowitch>



Tony Frazer starts the restoration of the Harwell / WITCH computer – in full view of museum visitors.

The world's first purpose built computer centre, home to **The National Museum of Computing**

Media Relations: Stephen Fleming of Palam Communications 01635 299116 sfleming@palam.co.uk

Lin Jones, Volunteer Operations Manager

There can't be many museum volunteers who can say they have used many of the artifacts on display. But in a 40 year career with computers, Lin Jones, Operations Manager at TNMOC, has made her living from working with lots of them.

Lin has been at the Museum for just over one year now, but her impact has been enormous. She fondly remembers her first tasks: "when I first arrived, the Museum was full of men who didn't prioritise tidiness or hygiene, so I took great joy in organising the admin office and sorting out the kitchen! And now, despite my fascination in computers, the newly opened public coffee area and shop is my favourite part of the Museum!"

Describing herself as an autodidact, Lin's career has been an extraordinary journey through our digital heritage. On arriving at the Foreign Office in 1969, she was just in time to see the Elliott 803 depart and the Elliott 503 arrive. Her first program was written in Algol for the 503 to work out the day of the week for any given day.

Then, in a series of postings with her husband across the globe, Lin become involved in the newly emerging world of optical mark reading and data logging, worked remotely from Budapest in the early 1990s, trained Berlin embassy staff in computing in the late 90s, and – a sign of our times – dealt with "delinquent loans" for the ill-fated US Fannie Mae mortgage company in the early 2000s.

At the Museum, Lin's organisation skills have proved priceless, but she has also become an accomplished media spokesperson much praised by journalists. As ever, if she needs to know, she will find out and her favourite role at the Museum is talking to other volunteers and researching the machines on show.

Fortunately, Lin is at the Museum nearly every day it is open, so it will be well worth seeking her out on your next visit – if she isn't busy organising the next event or talking to the media, that is.



Lin Jones

A computing great comes to visit

A few weeks ago, TNMOC was delighted to host a visit from 96 year old Sir Maurice Wilkes, a father of computing who amongst other achievements helped develop the EDSAC, the first practical stored computer program, co-authored the first book on computer programming, and led the way in micro-programming.

A hardware man to the core, Sir Maurice nonetheless loved to see so many working applications at TNMOC.

Jack Schofield of The Guardian interviewed him and produced a fascinating article. Read it here: <http://tiny.cc/tnmocwilkes>



A preview of 2010

There's lots in the pipeline for 2010. A few items we can flag up early are:

Computing for schools. Thanks to donations from the Drapers Foundation and Black Marble, six BBC micros (amongst other computers) are set to beep back into action to enable students to learn basics of computer programming. New courses are being piloted and will start soon.

Corporate away-days. TNMOC is now a venue for stimulating away-days for company staff. Even a torch-lit visit by HP Labs personnel during a day-long power cut on Bletchley Park proved a hit!

New galleries are on the drawing board awaiting sponsors and funds to make them happen. A Debits and Credits display is set to provide a fascinating history of how money has gone from metal and paper to plastic and virtual. The changing role of the technology in the workplace will be featured in a series of four offices at four periods in the past century.

All donations welcome <http://tiny.cc/tnmocdonate> **Please pass this newsletter to friends.**