TNMOC – real progress

It's been a hectic summer with the Vintage Computer Festival being a major highlight (report below). We've also started regular guided tours on Tuesday and some other afternoons (sign up on arrival at Bletchley Park) run by our invaluable volunteers and with the help of funding from our first Foundation Sponsor, Insightsoftware.com.

Week by week, the Museum is looking smarter with a highlight being the marvellous new **coffee shop**. Further improvements are expected throughout the Museum soon and then the focus will switch back to specific displays.

Top of the list is the **Tunny Room**. The Tunny rebuild (pictured right) is almost complete and we have plans to transform its "workshop" display status into a real visitor attraction. Essentially Tunny was the reason that Colossus was built -- Colossus found the pin wheel settings of encrypted messages so that Tunny could decipher them. We are seeking funds to create a fitting display for this hugely significant exhibit which together with Colossus shortened the war by many months, thereby saving tens of thousands of lives.

Tunny rebuild nearing completion

In the Autumn we will also launch the first of our major educational initiatives: **the BBC Micro workstations**. Pilots have shown that schools are finding it an extremely valuable resource to teach programming, a skill that British industry is discovering to be increasingly rare.

Kevin Murrell
TNMOC Trustee and Director

Vintage Computer Festival success

With more than 2000 visitors, Britain's first Vintage Computer Festival was a remarkable success. Nicknamed a 'geekend' and coinciding with Father's Day, the event had the feel of a real festival. Since then, the volunteer organisers at TNMOC have been dodging questions about the possibility of another one.

Stars of the show included Chris Serle, presenter of the 1980's BBC Computer Programme, who opened the event, co-designer of the ARM chip Sophie Wilson who gave a riveting talk on the evolution of computers, and Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys of OMD who gave a sparkling set in the intimate setting of The Mansion.

The media loved the event too and you can see plenty of detailed and interesting reports here: **http://tiny. cc/tnmocvcfnews** Interest from mainstream media was high with people like young Naomi (pictured above) explaining to Radio 4's BH programme why she likes computers and how neat it is to play a short game on a vintage computer before going to sleep.

Fortunately some news didn't leak out: like the power outages (probably caused by a vintage machine's dodgy PSU) that continued right up until opening time, and an OMG moment with OMD when their concert was close to cancellation because of a buzzing mixing desk that was replaced with just 15 minutes to spare by a vintage mixing desk that just happened to be lurking in the back of a volunteer's car. But to the general public, all appeared seamlessly efficient ...

Sheridan Williams, rocket scientist to tour guide

Living just six miles from Bletchley Park, a visit to the Park three years ago encouraged Sheridan Williams to become a TNMOC volunteer and today he leads the highly successful hour-long Insight Tours of the Museum on Tuesdays.

Sheridan has had a long and varied career starting as a rocket scientist, a senior lecturer in maths, statistics and computing and then running several successful computing-related companies during the boom years of British computing in the 1980s. He was also a founding contributor to Britain's first micro computer magazine, Personal Computer World.

Sheridan Williams,
rocket scientist, astronomer and TNMOC tour guide.

Today, astronomy and computing occupy much of Sheridan's time and he gets a buzz showing people around TNMOC. "On the tours, I enjoy seeing the delight on peoples' faces when they see a machine they once used but haven't encountered for decades. I can often refresh their memories on how the machines worked, but it's some of the questions from children that can be tricky: Where's the screen for the WITCH (1950s) computer? Why didn't they invent core memory earlier? That takes a bit of explaining!" Even for a rocket scientist.

Sheridan's work as a rocket scientist has given him a particular interest in TNMOC's Analogue Room where a PACE TR-48 analogue computer resides. It was with this machine in the late 1960s that he modelled the flight path of rockets (the analogue computer gave results far faster than its digital counterparts). Says Sheridan, "It's an eye-opener for many visitors and I'd like to write a new application for it and maybe even a course".

The Insight Tours sponsored by Insightsoftware.com and run by volunteers currently start at 2.30pm on Tuesdays and some other days. They fill up quickly, so sign up when you arrive at Bletchley Park or at Colossus on the main Park tour. The tours are free but a minimum £5 donation is welcomed.

Latest, Up and Coming

August: The BBC Micro comeback in teaching – at TNMOC. BBC News Online video: **http://tiny.cc/tnmocbbcb**
(Following the report, TNMOC had a flurry of offers of equipment and accessories.)

9 September 2010: the first appearance of TNMOC on the Radio 4 *In Business* programme. Presenter Peter Day had a fine time at the Museum discussing the British computing industry and how computers were taken up by industry. See **http://tiny.cc/tnmocib**

Coming very soon: internet access to be available for visitors throughout Block H.

Coming very soon: promotional video of TNMOC.

October: Special "under the bonnet" access to TNMOC only for TNMOC members – you can become a TNMOC member here: **http://tiny.cc/tnmocmember**
Comments from new TNMOC members:
"Most of my life I have worled with computers - this is a small thank you for an enjoyable career."
"A vital part of the national heritage! I've worked with computers since 1971 and am delighted to be able to support the museum."

6 November 2010 ACCU Conference at Bletchley Park with Bruce Schneier, Whitfield Diffie, Andy Clark and David Kahn. Proceeds are to shared by Bletchley Park Trust and TNMOC. **http://tiny.cc/tnmoc6nov**

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