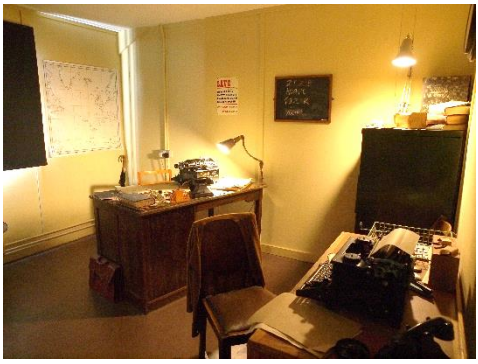
Bletchley Park Tech Trip



Saturday 30th April 2022 saw the inaugural SCSC Tech Trip, which was to Bletchley Park, once the top-secret home of the World War Two Codebreakers. Fourteen attended including SCSC members and their families. Dewi Daniels provides a report of the event.

I last visited Bletchley Park about 20 years ago. The site has seen a lot of restoration work carried out since then. The last time I visited, many of the buildings were dilapidated and very few of them were open to the public. This time round, it was great to see the site rejuvenated and the ground and buildings well-maintained.

I arrived early, so I was able to enjoy a delicious bacon bap in the Bletchley Park Coffee Shop before I met the others at 1130. The first hour was free to wander around the site. It's quite a large site and very pleasant to stroll around on a sunny day. There are many interesting places to visit, including Alan Turing's office in Hut 8, which is where they broke the German naval ciphers.



At 1230, we had an hour-long guided tour of the site. Our excellent guide said that his link to Bletchley Park was that he had worked for "a branch of the Foreign Office". We learned about the history of the site from its purchase by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, head of MI6, in 1938 to its closure in 1946, including an explanation as to how the hut system worked.



We then had an hour for lunch in one of the cafes at Bletchley Park, after which we moved to the National Museum of Computing.

Although the National Museum of Computing is in Block H on the wider Bletchley Park site, it is outside the gates of the Bletchley Park Museum. Whereas the Bletchley Park Museum seems very well-funded and commercially aware, with an excellent gift shop and several places to eat, the National Museum of Computing seems to be run by enthusiasts, with lots of interesting kit packed into a small space.

We'd booked a 2-hour guided tour, which turned into 3 hours. I think the guide appreciated our clear interest and the many questions that we asked. We saw many amazing exhibits, such as a replica Bombe and Colossus. The original Bombes were built to break the Enigma code.



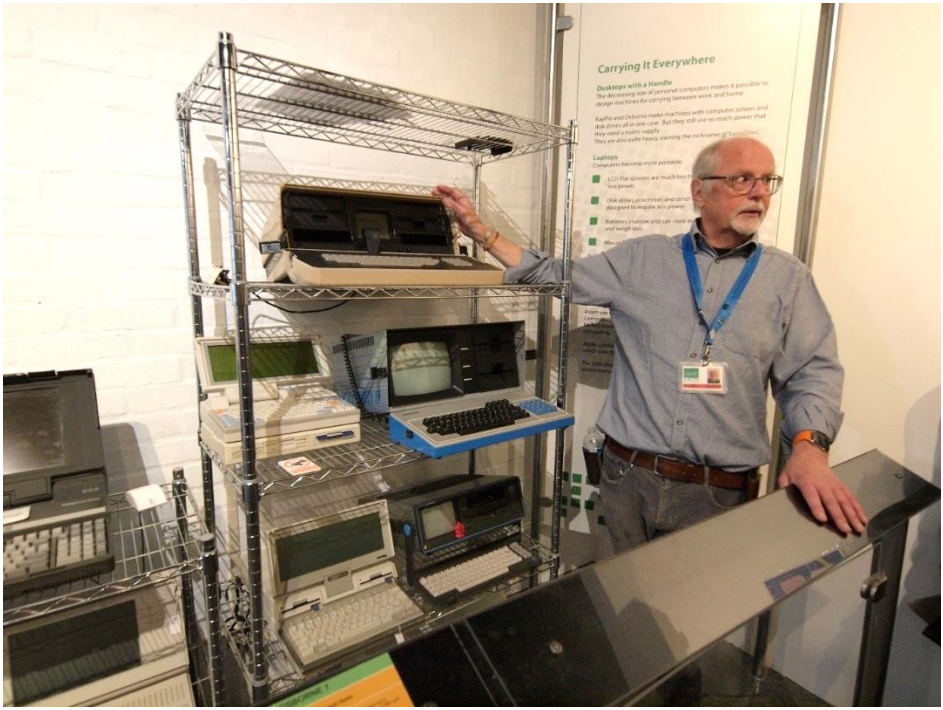
Colossus was the world's first programmable electronic digital computer, built to break the Lorenz code that was used by the German High Command. The replica Bombe and Colossus took an incredible amount of effort to build. The replica Bombe took 13 years, the replica Colossus took 15 years.



We were also shown the Harwell Dekatron, which is the World's oldest working digital computer. It's a strange device. It's decimal rather than binary and is very slow (about 5 seconds to carry out a multiplication), but apparently very reliable.



We were also shown a replica of the EDSAC, which was the second electronic digital stored-program computer (the first was the Manchester Mark 1), several mainframes including an ICL 2966, many early personal computers, several early laptops and personal organisers. I found the National Museum of Computing surprisingly interesting. I was astonished at how many of the computers are still in working order.



It's a shame that these two fine museums don't cooperate more closely. Bletchley Park is well-funded, the ground and buildings are well-maintained, but most of the buildings are empty. On the other hand, the National Museum of Computing next door is full of interesting computers, most of them in working order, but is very short of space.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable day out. I look forward to the next SCSC Tech Trip!

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The next SCSC Tech Trip will be to the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Shropshire on 1st October 2022 and includes a guided tour.



This is a museum dedicated to the history of aviation and the Royal Air Force in particular. There are thrilling displays of aircraft including the world's oldest Spitfire as well as other attractions such as iconic cars, models and tanks.

The Tech Trips are open to all – family and friends are more than welcome!