



Above from the left: Tony Malins, Peter Davies (on keyboard), Martin Neville (elbows on table), and James de Raeve (at the back)

A World First for Teddies!

Incredible though it may seem, forty years have passed since St Edward's School took delivery of the first computer in the world specially designed for schools. This pioneering venture caught the imagination of all age groups and provided a strong motivation for boys considering a career in the fledgling computer industry.

A prototype was delivered in September 1966 and ran almost continuously until Christmas. Manufactured by IBM, the school's computer would be regarded as a joke by today's sophisticates but back then it was a miracle. Using a TV Screen as a monitor and a domestic tape recorder as a back-up store (both of these were world firsts), the computer had a touch keyboard and boasted a magnetic core memory of just 4,000 bytes.

Designed initially to demonstrate how computers worked, St. Edward's boys soon programmed the machine to perform complex routines, solving problems which astounded visiting IBM engineers from Winchester whose invention pioneered many new electronic techniques but which had not been exposed to applications in the real world of schools.

Based on the success of the initial trial, IBM manufactured ten Schools' Computers which were to be deployed in schools and colleges across the south of England. Experiences with the prototype in Oxford helped to inform the training and preparation of teachers in the wider trial programme and caused great interest across the country and at conferences overseas. Had the machine been put on the market it would have cost the equivalent of a teacher's salary for a year.

Unfortunately IBM had to close down its research prematurely because of anti-trust problems unrelated to its schools project. This was a great disappointment to all concerned but the stimulus led to several of the pioneers at St Edward's to choose computer studies at university and move on to successful careers in the industry. One of the finished products ran for ten years at Teddies before dying and being superseded by micro-processor based machines.

Now that most young people have at least one computer, not to mention mobile phones, i-Pods and digital cameras, it seems strange that in such recent history no school had any computers. But St. Edward's had the first – and designed for the purpose!

David Tinsley (MCR 1959 to 1970)

Below: IBM Experimental Schools' Computer



Music

Belshazzar's Feast - 13th May:

On Sunday, 13th May, on a massive outdoor stage in South Park, Oxfordshire's 1,000th birthday was celebrated in real style. The Festival Concert was a large-scale collaborative venture which was designed to draw together threads of the county's rich musical life. St Edward's was at the heart of the organisation of the concert, which involved over 700 performers ranging from the age of 8 to 80.

Belshazzar's Feast (Walton) provided the dramatic finish to the concert. Under the baton of Jamie Burton, who drew some magnificent playing from the Oxford University Orchestra the dramatic story of Belshazzar's downfall unfolded.

Roderick Williams (baritone) painted a vivid picture of Babylon at the glittering height of its commercial powers, before the writing on the wall presaged Belshazzar's violent death, ending his hedonistic and godless reign. In the meantime the Festival Chorus, made up of the St Edward's Singers and members of the Chapel and Chamber Choirs, were exhorted by the conductor to express the devastation of those living in exile 'by the waters of Babylon.'

The waters themselves were not hard to imagine in the afternoon rehearsal as the heavens opened. But just as mourning gave way to ultimate triumphant rejoicing in the Old Testament story, so the afternoon rain was replaced with miraculous evening sunshine. Although many had been driven away, the atmosphere among the intrepid audience of 2,000 was extraordinary as the depth of talent and the warmth of the collaboration between the county's musicians was revealed.

The whole occasion, with the spectacular stage playing its full part, lifted the spirit and gave real cause for celebration.



Concerto Concert - 29th April:

The 2006-07 Upper Sixth was a vintage year for musicians and there was a wealth of talent to choose from to perform concertos. Emma Searle opened the concert with a sensitive and warm-toned rendition of Mozart's Oboe Concerto in C. Emma joined St Edward's in the sixth form and her oboe-playing developed extremely well over the two years. Gabriel Mynheer's trumpet-playing has always reached the highest standards in a wide variety of styles: his jazz playing has set many a foot tapping and his "Last Post" has brought tears to the eyes of old soldiers but in the concerto concert he played the demanding trumpet concerto by the Baroque composer Neruda with fine style. David Oppenheimer has been a stalwart of the Big Band and Saxophone ensemble and he chose Eric Coates' 'Saxo Rhapsody' for his concerto debut. The 'allegro' section was particularly demanding and David, together with the orchestra surmounted the difficulties with ease. Perhaps the most technically tricky item in the programme was Poulenc's concerto in D minor for two pianos. The challenging piano parts

were taken by Andrew MacFarlane and Michael Robson-Kiernan who covered themselves in glory with a splendid performance. The concert closed with a most accomplished performance of Guilman's 'Morceau Symphonique' for trombone and orchestra given by Edward Stephenson. It was easy to see why Edward had passed his Trinity Diploma examination with Distinction in the previous term, winning the letters ATCL after his name. We will be sad to see such a talented group of instrumentalists leave the school but happy in the memory of many amazing performances.

Gaudy Concert - 29th June:

In recent years the Gaudy Concert has taken place just before half-term in the summer term. This year we decided to re-unite the Gaudy Concert with the end-of-term Gaudy prize-giving in order to give a greater celebratory feel to the end of term and to attract a wider audience. This was a risky strategy as the Vth form and Upper Sixth would be away on study leave while the Shells were either in Snowdonia or France. However, with some careful planning and special minibus services to North Wales, the various ensembles gathered for some final rehearsals for the final concert of the year.

Stephen Dunstone's Harp Ensemble opened the concert with some of his own compositions. It is particularly pleasing to see this new ensemble flourishing at St Edward's. The Concert Band was in fine form, giving a powerful performance of the music from 'Gladiator' and encouraging audience participation in 'At a Dixieland Jazz Funeral'. Another recently formed group - the Percussion Ensemble - gave a tremendously exciting performance of 'Lime Juice' by Arthur Lipner, featuring some virtuosic marimba playing by Felix Higginbottom.

The School Choir offered a showcase for three talented singers who will be leaving: Danni Green gave a beautifully controlled performance of 'The Blue Bird' and Edmund Irwin-Singer and Andrew MacFarlane (both of whom have won Choral Scholarships to Trinity College, Cambridge) shared solos in Vaughan Williams' 'The Turtle Dove'. The Chamber Orchestra provided stylish accompaniment for Gabriel Mynheer and Edward Stephenson's solos (trumpet and baritone respectively) in 'Grosser Herr' - an extract from Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio'.

The main part of the concert ended with a party piece for Michael Robson-Kiernan and the orchestra. Michael played Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' with great skill and conviction and he thoroughly deserved the tumultuous applause. The audience was then led to The North Wall Arts Centre by pipers Cameron MacRitchie and Digby Ogston where the African Drumming Ensemble was waiting with master drummer Keith Fairbairn. Fortunately, the weather was fine and the rest of the concert was given outside the North Wall while the audience took refreshments. The Saxophone Ensemble was led for the last time by Caroline Lauder who sadly moves on next year. They performed with their usual panache and were followed by The Big Band who usually conclude many of our concerts in fine style. However, on this occasion, the final slot was taken by the Modern Jazz Ensemble as all the players in that group - Gabriel Mynheer (trumpet), Edward Stephenson (trombone), Nigel Munoz (piano), Edmund Irwin-Singer (bass) and Alec Creed (drums) - will be leaving. The audience refused to let them stop and they displayed their usual virtuosity. They will be back for a swansong on Thursday 27th September at 8.30 pm in the North Wall - don't miss them.

Moving the date of this concert to the end of term proved to be an inspired idea as there was a huge audience and a real sense of end-of-term fun and celebration.

Neville Creed