

This was the first ever project undertaken by Hursley Storage Development. IBM had developed a system for the CIA, code name Walnut, which used photographic chips stored in cells to provide mass storage and retrieval of microfilm data. IBM followed this up with Cypress, including the IBM 1350 system with improved film technology, and the 1360 to expand the same technology to computer data. The idea of Zenith was to hugely increase the storage capacity by using magnetic technology instead of film.

The 'chips' would be stored in plastic cartridges as displayed, which would be stored in trays in a carousel and loaded for reading and writing. The chips themselves would be fetched out of the carousel into the read / write mechanism. The fourth photo below shows the 1360 system, Zenith would have looked very similar but without the film developing part at the far end.

The last photo shows the prototype chip reader, developed by John Heath, with solenoid below the cartridge to provide the initial push. Above was a vacuum system to suck the chip up into the head assembly.

The project was abandoned after 12 to 18 months with the advent of better magnetic storage devices.