

## Sixty years of world's first modern computer

Do you know that Saturday is the 60th birthday of the world's first modern computer? Manchester Baby, a computer that could store a programme, was built in Britain's University of Manchester June 21, 1948.

It was the first machine - invented by Frederick Williams and Tom Kilburn - that had all the components now regarded as the characteristics of a basic computer. Most importantly, it was the first computer that could store not only data but also a short user programme in electronic memory and process it at electronic speed.

According to the written records of that day preserved in the university, the Baby's co- inventor Kilburn said of his product: 'The most exciting time was when the machine worked. Nothing could ever compare with that.'

The University of Manchester launched a year-long celebration Friday to mark the occasion with a promise to use computer technology to help understand the human brain.

The Baby had a random access memory of 32 words and a computer speed of around 1.2 milliseconds per instruction. In comparison, the world's fastest supercomputer, IBM's BlueGene/L can do 360 trillion operations per second.

The university's resident professor of computer engineering Steve Furber who delivered the Kilburn Lecture, 2008 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary, said computers will now have to be used to scale the ultimate goal: unravelling the brain.

'Biological systems demonstrate many of the properties we aspire to incorporate into our engineered technology. So perhaps that suggests a possible source of ideas that we could seek to incorporate into future novel computation systems,' he said.

Psychologists at the University of Manchester have teamed up with colleagues in the School of Computer Science to develop a speech and language model using a computer system that will be up to 1,000 times more powerful than a standard PC.

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