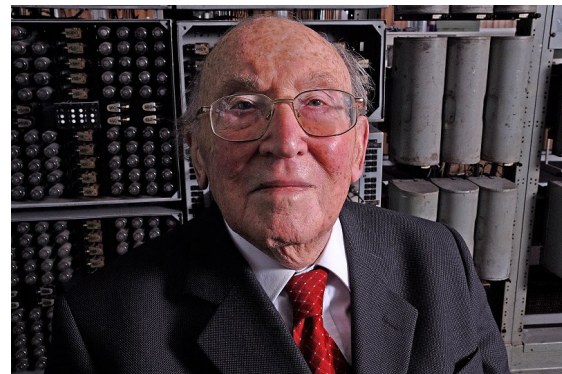


Sir Maurice Wilkes, a distinguished computer scientist, and the founding father and first President of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, passed away on 29 November 2010, aged 97.

Sir Maurice enjoyed a distinguished career and is widely acknowledged as an acclaimed computer scientist credited with a number of major developments in computing covering hardware, software and communications.



He was born in modest circumstances in Dudley, Staffordshire on June 26th 1913. He attended the local grammar school and won a scholarship to St John's College, Cambridge in 1931 to study mathematical physics. He studied with Alan Turing and took a quiet satisfaction that he and Turing graduated with the same class of degree. After graduation he worked at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge on the propagation of radio waves gaining a PhD in 1938. During World War 2 he worked on radar and returned to Cambridge at the end of the war where he was appointed head of the Mathematical (later Computing) Laboratory.

His first contribution was the leadership of the Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator (EDSAC) project which resulted in the construction of the world's first usable stored-program computer. It was switched on in May 1949. From the outset Sir Maurice aimed to provide a service to academics from other disciplines. This insight is reflected in its origins in the Mathematical Laboratory and that, in common with some other early computers, it was named as a "Calculator".

The EDSAC design was made available to Lyons, who ran numerous high cafes and a major retail food business, to enable them to design and build the Lyons Electronic Office (LEO), which was the world's first business computer.

The emphasis on providing a university computer service led to an interest in programming. The book "The Preparation of Programs for an Electronic Digital Computer" written with two colleagues and published in 1951 was the first book on the subject.

In 1951, Sir Maurice was responsible for the development of microprogramming a system which later became adopted widely in the industry including IBM. The successor computer, EDSAC2, was the first to use a micro-programmed control unit.

Many other important developments followed in the ensuing years, including his first paper on cache memories and a book on time-sharing. Another notable innovation was the application of digital switching to communications with the development of the Cambridge Ring. While successfully installed in a number of centres, the industry ultimately chose to adopt the Ethernet as its standard.

In 1957 Sir Maurice was invited to become the first President of the British Computer Society serving for three years. He remained active in the society in numerous ways until the end of his life. He was a keen supporter of the BCS Computer Conservation Society, the world's largest group devoted to the history of computing with a strong track record of restoring historic computers to working condition. Sir Maurice

observed when it was founded that he thought it was a good idea but would run out of things to talk about after two years. Twenty years later he admitted to being surprised and delighted by how much computer history there had proved to be!

It was in his capacity as BCS President that he took part in the planning meeting for IFIP's first World Computer Congress although by the time it took place in 1960 he had handed over the Presidency and his successor attended the Congress. Those present at the Golden Jubilee World Congress in 2010 in Brisbane will have seen the video message he recorded welcoming delegates to the event. That video made in June 2010 was his final public interview.

Sir Maurice was a Distinguished Fellow of the British Computer Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering. He was a Foreign Associate of both the US National Academy of Sciences and the US National Academy of Engineering.

Sir Maurice was awarded many accolades including the Turing Award (1967), the Faraday Medal from the Institution of Electrical Engineers in London (1981), the Kyoto Prize for Advanced Technology (1992) and the IEEE Computer Society 60th Anniversary award for seminal contributions to the discipline of computing (2007). He was knighted in 2000.

*) The picture shows Sir Maurice Wilkes with the WITCH computer at the National Museum of Computing, Bletchley Park, November 11th, 2009.