Oct. 14th

Surface-Barrier Transistor

Oct. 14, 1953

William E. Bradley of Philco Corp presented a paper on surface-barrier transistors at the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE). Compared to earlier approaches (e.g. John Bardeen and Walter Brattain's point-contact transistor [Dec 16]), this technology offered higher speeds and was easy to produce in quantity.

Subsequently, surface-barrier transistors were employed in the TX-0 [Nov 20], and the NSA signed a contract with Philco in 1955 to build a transistorized computer based around them. This SOLO project was later repurposed as the Philco Transac S-1000, and its upgraded version, the S-2000, released on [March 23] 1958, became the first commercially available transistorized computer.

BCS

Oct. 14, 1957

The British Computer Society (BCS) was formed from the merger of the London Computer Group (LCG) with several other local associations, and Maurice Wilkes [June 26] became its first president. The BCS quickly grew to become the largest professional body for computing in the UK, and has operated under a Royal Charter since 1984.

The highest grade of membership is "Distinguished Fellow", which has been granted to just 32 people, starting with Edsger W. Dijkstra [May 11] and Christopher Strachey [Nov 16] in 1971, and the most recent appointee being Eben Upton [Feb 12] in 2019.

The membership currently includes three Sir's, a Lord, and a Baroness.

Atari VCS / 2600

Oct. 14, 1977

Atari [June 27] released their Video Computer System (VCS), later known as the Atari 2600. It took two years to become popular, but was the bestselling gift of Christmas 1979.

A "wood veneer" version of the Atari 2600. Photo by Evan-Amos.

Part of its success was due to the quality of its custom chip, the TIA [next entry]; another factor was its use of interchangeable game cartridges, and its library grew be the largest for any console of the time. Classic titles included Adventure, Asteroids [Nov 13], Combat, and Space Invaders [June 5]. Of course, there were a few stinkers as well, such as "E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial" [Aug 18].

Atari TIA

Oct. 14, 1977

The Television Interface Adaptor (TIA) was the custom chip at the heart of the Atari 2600 game console [previous entry]. The TIA generated visuals, sound effects, and even read the input controllers; it was developed by a team led by Jay Miner [May 31].

The TIA's registers could only hold enough data for a single display line, so creating a full-screen image required the clever updating of registers on the fly, a process known as "racing the beam" (i.e. the screen's electron beam).

The TIA design subsequently evolved into the ANTIC and CTIA/GTIA chips for the Atari 400/800 [Nov 00], and Miner would also use a similar design for the Amiga series [July 23]. ANTIC generated graphics (text and bitmaps) while CTIA/GTIA provided color and overlay objects (i.e. game sprites).

The CTIA and GTIA acronyms officially stood for "Color Television Interface Adaptor" and "Graphic Television Interface Adaptor", but various publications claimed that the "C" in "CTIA" actually meant Colleen and/or Candy and the "G" in "GTIA" was George. The reasoning behind these startling revelations was that the Atari 400's codename had been Candy, and the 800 was called Colleen. Also, one of the designers of the GTIA was George McLeod.

C++ Programming

Oct. 14, 1985

"The C++ Programming Language," textbook was written by the language's creator Bjarne Stroustrup [Dec 30], and its publication today coincided with the release of the first commercial implementation of that fine language. Until the release of the ISO standard in Sept. 1998, the book served as the de facto definition for C++.

To those who whine about how hard C++ is to understand, Stroustrup has remarked: "It wasn' t meant to be learned in two hours." He's also said, "In C++ it's harder to shoot yourself in the foot, but when you do, you blow off your whole leg."

ZMODEM

Oct. 14, 1988

Chuck Forsberg released the ZMODEM file transfer protocol for modems, a faster and more crash resistant version of his YMODEM protocol, which had

been the successor to Ward Christensen's XMODEM protocol.

Many observers waited eagerly for the successor to ZMODEM, wondering what it would be called. Forsberg later collected a number of improvements into ZMODEM-90, and the developers of BBS Synchronet came up with a X/Y/ZMODEM implementation named SEXYZ.

Gunning for Consoles

Oct. 14, 1992

Konami released 'The Justifier" light gun for the Genesis [Oct 29], SNES [Nov 21], and later the PlayStation [Dec 3]. It looked not unlike a Colt revolver, although dressed in child-friendly colors.

It was originally intended for use with the home version of Konami's "Lethal Enforcers" game, and modeled after the gun attached to the arcade version. Unsurprisingly, its realistic appearance, and the game's violence inflicted upon photorealistic bad guys, generated some controversy [Sept 16].

Bright blue and pink versions of the Justifier were available for the SNES and Genesis, while a redesigned green edition was aimed at the PlayStation.

AT&T's Hobbit

Oct. 14, 1992

AT&T Microelectronics unveiled its Hobbit processor (more formally known as the ATT92010). The Hobbit was based on the company's CRISP (C-language Reduced Instruction Set Processor) design, which had grown out of Bell Labs' C Machine from the late 1980's.

The plan was for Apple to use the Hobbit to drive the Newton [May 29], but according to Larry Tesler [April 24]: "The Hobbit was rife with bugs, ill-suited for our purposes, and overpriced."

Apple switched to Advanced RISC Machines in 1990 (in a deal organized by Tesler), with an accompanying $2.5 million investment in the company [Sept 8]. This turned out to be a great deal because when Apple sold their stake at the end of the 1990s, they netted $800 million.

Aside from Apple, Be Inc. [Oct 00] also tried using Hobbit processors in its BeBox PC, and later switched to the Power PC 603.

The Hobbit died in 1994 (at two years of age), which was sad because J. R. R. Tolkien had noted that their average life expectancy was 100. Indeed, the best known Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, was 131 when he boarded the ship docked at the Grey Havens.

KDE

Oct. 14, 1996

In a post to a Linux newsgroup, Matthias Ettrich formed a new project called KDE (the K Desktop Environment) as a response to what he considered the dismal state of UNIX desktops.

Konqi the KDE Mascot by Tyson Tan. CC BY-SA 4.0.

In particular, he was less than happy with CDE [Aug 6] (Common Desktop Environment), an X11-based environment developed by HP, IBM, and Sun through the X/Open consortium.

When KDE version 1 was released in 1998, some users were unhappy that it relied on the Qt widget toolkit, which employed a proprietary software license at the time. Naturally, this led to the founding of the another desktop initiative, the GNOME project [March 3], which used the GTK+ toolkit.

The "K" in KDE use to stand for "Kool", although that seems to have been dropped in recent years in favor of "Community".

The current mascot for KDE is "Konqi Konqueror", a green dragon, who replaced "Kandalf the wizard". Kandalf was Kancelled owing to Kopyright issues: namely his similarity to Tolkien 's Gandalf.

First Patch Tuesday

Oct. 14, 2003

Microsoft conducted its first "Patch Tuesday" (aka Update Tuesday) when it released security patches for several products. It quickly became a semi-regular event (held on the second, and perhaps fourth, Tuesday of every month).

The Microsoft Security Response Center (MSRC) spearheaded the idea of a predictable schedule for patch releases, shifting from a "ship when ready" model. They tasked Craig Gehre, then a Security Release Manager, with developing the operational guidelines and overseeing the implementation of Patch Tuesday.

This led to the coining of "Exploit Wednesday" since many hacking tricks tended to appear shortly after the release of the patches that revealed the security problems those tricks utilized.

iFart Released

Oct. 14, 2008

iFart Mobile was an Apple iOS [Jan 9] application distributed through the App Store [July 10] which consisted of a red button on a brown background. When

the button was pressed a random flatulence sound was played, selected from a list including “Burrito Maximo,” “Bombardier,” and “Bubbler.” Former weather man, Joel Comm, wrote the program.

iFart Mobile became one of the most popular iPhone apps, reaching number one spot on the application chart by Christmas. It was estimated that Comm was making almost $10,000 daily.

But controversy erupted in Jan. 2009 when Air-O-Matic, Inc., creators of “Pull My Finger,” claimed that Infomedia (the company that had released iFart) had infringed its trademark.

Wi-Fi Direct

Oct. 14, 2009

The Wi-Fi Alliance published the specification for Wi-Fi Direct (formerly known as Wi-Fi Peer-to-Peer) that allows devices to communicate directly without connecting to a network hotspot. The technology was designed as an alternative to Bluetooth [May 20].

Google announced support for Wi-Fi Direct in Android [Nov 5] in Oct. 2011, and the Xbox One [Nov 22] and several TV set brands also adopted it. However, iPhone [Jan 9] devices use a proprietary protocol to implement its AirDrop capability.
