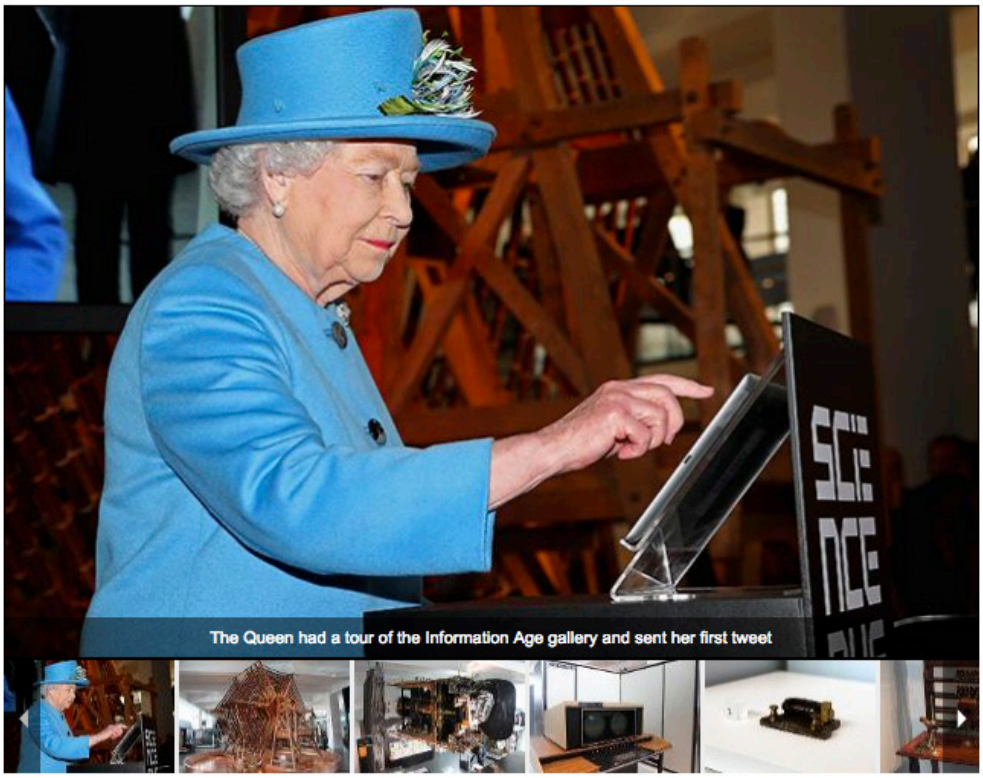
Queen opens Information Age exhibition at Science Museum

24 October 2014 By Edd Gent



The Queen had a tour of the Information Age gallery and sent her first tweet

The Queen has officially opened a new exhibition celebrating the history of information and communication technologies, where she also sent her first royal tweet.

The £15.6m gallery features more than 800 objects and explores how breakthroughs in six key communication networks – the telegraph, the telephone, radio and television broadcasting, satellite communications, computer networks and mobile communications – have transformed the world over the past 200 years.

The 6m-high copper and wood aerial tuning inductor from Rugby Radio Station – once the most powerful radio transmitter in the world and donated to the Science Museum by BT – dominates the centre of the exhibition, which also includes state-of-the-art interactive displays to tell the personal stories of those whose lives were changed by each new wave of technology.

Following a tour of the gallery the Queen sent a tweet via the official @BritishMonarchy Twitter account, which read: "It is a pleasure to open the Information Age exhibition today at the @ScienceMuseum and I hope people will enjoy visiting. Elizabeth R."

Visitors will be treated to a series of collaborations with leading artists and thinkers, including Olivier award-winning video and projection designer Finn Ross, artist Matthew Robins, broadcaster Bonnie Greer and computer scientist Sir Tim Berners-Lee.

Gent, Edd. “Queen opens Information Age exhibition at Science Museum.” *E&T*. N.p., 24 October 2014. Web. 12 Mar. 2015. (english)
http://eandt.theiet.org/news/2014/oct/information-age.cfm

The Science Museum has also commissioned BAFTA-winning artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer to create a unique digital art work called Fiducial Voice Beacons, a dynamic light and sound installation that visitors can interact with.

"Information Age tells the story of the last 200 years of information technology and focuses on how people's lives have been transformed by those devices and networks," said Jessica Bradford, Information Age content manager.

"We wanted to challenge the idea that innovation only happens with men working in closeted labs and show that it's down to teams of people and collaborations, and most importantly that users change technology by using it."

Artifacts on display range from some of the latest mobile and satellite technology back to the infrastructure that supported the very first telephone and radio networks. According to Bradford the museum was keen to avoid underselling the impact of the older innovations such as the very earliest Trans-Atlantic telegraph cables.

"That for us is a key moment where everything changed and the world shrunk for the first time," she said. "We think we are living through a moment of completely unprecedented change but the difference between sending a letter to America and it taking ten days and sending a telegraph and it taking minutes is really much more profound than anything we have experienced."

In particular the gallery is designed to highlight the role of the engineers and computer scientists behind the technology we use every day. One exhibit features a digital display where Sir Tim Berners-Lee and comedian Josie Long explain the nuts and bolts behind the World Wide Web and what happens when people click on links on a webpage.

"I think as information becomes increasingly invisible and intangible we do forget the enormous infrastructure that is supporting it," said Bradford. "Tim Berners-Lee said the question he is asked the most is what actually happens when you click on a link. It's something we all do every day and very few ever think about what is going on in the background."

Among the items on display are a number of artifacts bequeathed to the museum by the IET including a manual 50-line switchboard made by Jones Bros around 1879, which, according to the museum's curator of communications and electricity supply John Liffen, is likely to be one of the oldest switchboards still in existence.

The IET's collection, which was built up when the IEE decided to have a museum at Savoy Place in the 1920s, includes equipment used by Guglielmo Marconi in the very earliest experiments with radio transmission that was donated to the IET by the Marconi company.

Included in this collection is a carbon-mercury-iron semiconductor based on the designs of Indian scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, which, according to Liffen, is effectively the first ever transistor.

"It is one of only two known and both may have been used in Marconi's first Trans-Atlantic radio transmission so that's a very precious device," said Liffen.

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