



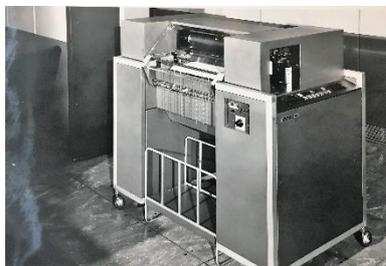
Gilbert Rooms

Today, the Gilbert Rooms are configured as two general purpose meeting and teaching rooms, but this disguises the historic importance of the building which dates from the early 1960s. It was constructed to house the University of Salford's very first computer, an English Electric KDF9. Bought by the University in 1964, the KDF9 remained operational until 1975 when it was replaced by an ICL 1904 and the computing service moved to the new, but now demolished, Bridgewater Building on the other side of the River Irwell.

English Electric's KDF9 was one of the most successful products of the early UK computer industry. It was designed and used for mathematical and scientific processing and 30 systems were sold, the last of which was decommissioned in 1980.

Salford's KDF9 had 32k of 48-bit words of core memory, 6 tape drives, and ran under the Egdon 3 operating system. It had a 1M word disc drive, which was physically huge, being about 5ft high, 8ft wide, and 4ft deep. A small group of enthusiastic University staff were developing their own programs in Algol 60 which were written on coding sheets. The Data Preparation Service, which consisted of a battery of operatives, then typed the users' programs and data onto punched cards or rolls of paper tape. A PDP8 computer was used a front-end to take jobs input from paper tape or Hollerith cards. It also had paper tape and card punches to output onto these media, and a line printer. Unfortunately, a fire in 1975 destroyed the PDP8 which meant that the University then had to operate a van shuttle service to send jobs between Salford and Liverpool University's KDF9.

In 1966 Salford's KDF9 was involved in a pioneering experiment in computer networking when it was linked to another KDF9 at the National Computing Centre on Oxford Road in Manchester, about 1.5 miles away. They were connected using a coaxial line provided by the GPO and two prototype 2.4kByte modems supplied by STC.



Who was Gilbert?

The Gilbert Rooms are named after two prominent people. William Gilbert (1544-1603) who was a physician and scientist known for pioneering work on magnetism which he published as "De Magnete" and John Gilbert (1724-1795), land agent and engineer to the Duke of Bridgewater during the construction of the Bridgewater Canal.