Celebrating Alan Turing’s 100th Birthday

Turing 100 Manchester Conference, 22-25 June 2012

By Andrew Duncan

If he had lived long enough to see it, this weekend would have been Alan Turing’s 100th birthday. Alan has been attributed with the invention of the modern-day digital computer, which of course is also behind the internet, mobile phones and so many devices we all use every day – so his influence has been enormous; yet he is still relatively unheard of. Why is this?

For me, a gay man with an interest in artificial intelligence (AI) and computers, Alan has been a lifelong inspiration. So it was a delight to be able to attend this weekend’s conference in Manchester to celebrate his life and genius achievements in fields as diverse as mathematics, cryptography, computation, AI and biological morphogenesis. He is certainly well known and enormously respected by people today in all these specialist fields of study.

Alan was born on 23 June 1912 and quickly showed himself to be ‘different’ in his interests compared to most other children. His mother famously sketched him looking at daisies growing, during a school game of hockey! Whilst at Cambridge he found in that environment, perhaps for the only time in his life, warmth and acceptance of his homosexuality, in the otherwise hostile Britain of 1930. He studied mathematics, and by age 22, had been made Fellow of the Royal Society of Mathematics. The 1930’s saw him write the paper defining the Universal Turing Machine – the predecessor of the digital computer, then at the start of WWII move to Bletchley Park, where he worked on cracking Nazi Germany’s Enigma Codes. His success helped to shorten the war and arguably saved hundreds of thousands of lives.
After the war he worked at first at NPL in Middlesex and then in Manchester University on developing early computers. Certainly, he suffered a setback when his NPL boss described his 1948 paper on Intelligent Machines as a “schoolboy’s effort” and it was never published. Its genius is now well recognised, but perhaps too late for history yet to have put this injustice right? American researchers, such as Johnny von Neumann, also central to early computer development, were probably far better self-promoters than Turing, who was a master of British understatement!

After he moved to Manchester, he is known to have had a number of sexual relationships with young men and, unfortunately for Turing, in 1952 one of them stole £10 from him. Alan had always been impeccably honest (perhaps also a reason why he did not always get on with some of his co-workers?) so he felt obliged to report the theft to the police. This was disastrous and he finished up being prosecuted for gross-indecency. Barbaric though it may seem today, he chose chemical castration in preference to prison. Despite all this, he remained in good humour and even joked with a friend that the treatment was making him grow breasts.

For a year after this treatment, he continued to work productively and also seemed happy; facts which make the circumstances of his death all the more mysterious. On 7 June 1954, just before his 42nd birthday, he was found dead in his bed, with a half-eaten apple on his bedside table. There was a strong smell of cyanide. Theories about his death abound; the official verdict is that he committed suicide, perhaps following the events of the previous 2 years; his mother maintained until her death that it was an accident (Alan was often known to conduct chemical experiments!); others have even contended that he was assassinated by the secret services of one country or another. Being homosexual was perceived as being a national security risk, since it was said to provide an opportunity for blackmail; so, after conviction, lost his security clearance. Turing certainly understood a great deal about message encryption used by the secret services and also made frequent trips abroad, including at least one to Norway, where he had heard men-only dances were being held. Perhaps we will never know the truth about how he died.

In 2009, the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, offered a full apology for the way that the authorities had treated Turing in 1952. Earlier in the noughties, Manchester City Council erected the pictured statue in honour of Turing in Sackville Gardens, right next to the Canal Street Gay Village. So it was a wonderful and emotional moment for me, whilst at the Turing Conference to visit and give Alan a big hug on his 100th birthday!

Perhaps with all the attention he is receiving during his centenary year, history will begin to do justice to this gay 20th century genius?

For those who would like to do/know more...

Petition: Depict Alan Turing on new £10 note: [http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31659](http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31659)
Further reading: Turing conference Manchester: [http://www.turing100.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.turing100.manchester.ac.uk/)

Turing 100 conference San Francisco: [http://turing100.acm.org](http://turing100.acm.org)

2012 the Alan Turing Year: [http://www.mathcomp.leeds.ac.uk/turing2012/](http://www.mathcomp.leeds.ac.uk/turing2012/)

The Alan Turing Homepage: [http://www.turing.org.uk/turing/](http://www.turing.org.uk/turing/)

Andrew Hodges' biography of Turing: [http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0099116413](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0099116413)

Videos: [http://youtu.be/gyusnGbBSHE](http://youtu.be/gyusnGbBSHE) and [http://youtu.be/5LHFzNMgWzw](http://youtu.be/5LHFzNMgWzw)

Parts 1 & 2 of a 50-minute BBC documentary on Turing the man and his work.

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**Rainbow Cafe**

The next Rainbow Cafe Tuesday Film Night will be on Tuesday 3rd July, showing 'I love you Philip Morris'; a comedy starring Jim Carrey. Everyone welcome and there will be popcorn provided.

The next music jam up/sing along at Saturday cafe will be Saturday 21st July with Kate. Feel free to bring instruments.

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**Daniel Land and the Modern Painters**

Danny was one of Intercom’s first ever volunteers, back in 1999 when he was just out of College, and he has been a supporter ever since. His band, Daniel Land and The Modern Painters, released their second album in May. Read an interview with him here: [http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2012/05/28/interview-daniel-land-and-the-modern-painters/](http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2012/05/28/interview-daniel-land-and-the-modern-painters/). Way to go, Danny!

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**Rainbow Families South West**

Rainbow Families South West is growing. They have lots of families from Exeter, Ottery St Mary, Newton Abbot, Plymouth, Totnes, Dorchester and enquiries from lesbian couples who are moving to Devon. Sarah-Jane and Jeannette have secured a room at Exeter University (pending board approval; however, the head of campus services said he agreed) so that will potentially be good as the group grows and when it’s bad weather. They also have camping trips lined up for the summer, meets at Bigbury Beach and some are interested in going to other Prides events like Brighton. Thanks for your continued support.
Youth Spaces Survey

Youth Chances wants to know what life is like for young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and for those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity (LGBTQ). By sharing your experiences you will help them to build the evidence to make recommendations to change the way young people are supported.

The survey will include questions on a range of topics including gender identity, sexual orientation, local community and youth services, crime, housing, education, employment, physical health, mental health and sexual health.

The questions they do ask about you are not intended to identify you individually. These questions will allow them to analyse the responses of different groups of young people, for example are the experiences of young people in London different to young people living in the north-west? The questions will also let us check that the responses they collect are representative of the English population, for example do they have the right proportion of young people from different social classes?

When you finish the survey you can enter a prize draw to win £500!

Fill out the survey here: https://www.snapsurveys.com/swh/surveylogin.asp?k=133758699403

LGBT Understandings and Experiences of 'Community'

This new research project aims to explore LGBT understandings and experiences of 'community', and impact on LGBT health, well-being and 'quality of life'.

The terms 'LGBT community' and 'LGBT communities' are often used, but how much do we know about how these terms are understood – and how people experience this 'community' or these 'communities'?

This study aims to address these questions via the following activities:

1. A review of the literature to bring together research related to this area from a wide range of subject disciplines
2. Consultation with LGBT participants and stakeholders through a number of workshops and an interactive website
3. Final project report summarising study outcomes
4. Project website to share literature review sources and other study information
5. Final project event to share study outcomes

The project will run until late 2012 and is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the 'Connected Communities' programme of work.

Please see the project website for further detail: http://www.lgbtcommunityresearch.co.uk

You can also access the survey separately at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LGBTopinion

If you have any questions or for more information please contact: Eleanor Formby (Principal Investigator), Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, Sheffield Hallam University. Email: e.formby@shu.ac.uk
Devon Police Consultation Group

The first Dorset Police Consultation Group was held on the 15th June and it proved to be a great success. It was wonderful to get such a positive response from everybody that attended and to get such a broad group of people together to talk about crime and safety related issues that affect our LGBT community. The main topic of conversation for this meeting was the impact the Olympics may have on the pan-Dorset area. This topic covered a wide range of concerns, including the potential for phobic/racist/religion-based chanting from people watching on public screens and how this will be dealt with, and asking if the Olympic staffing team do or do not have the diversity and awareness training needed to support the many aspects of society which may require their support. The group also discussed community safety and possible unexpected/hostile/prejudiced responses to the relatively inclusive environment in Dorset by visitors who come from countries which are less accustomed to more positive social environments in respect of LGB and/or Trans people. All of these concerns were gratefully received and acknowledged by the police representative, and there will be much to feedback on by the time of the next meeting. It is clear that the Consultation Group has the potential to be a productive and effective forum for exploring all manner of issues relating to homophobic and transphobic crime, and we look forward to the next meeting and being part of this group as it develops.

Intercom Buddy Service

Andy runs Intercom’s Grassroots Help and Advocacy service. He writes:

“We are always looking for new ways to be of assistance to clients. We are going to start a buddy/befriending service on a client by client basis to see if we can ease some of the isolation felt by clients. Here is one example where buddying/befriending would be especially welcome:

One of our service-users, Tom, has cerebral palsy and lives in a residential unit in Northern Devon. He came out to staff over 2 yrs ago. He now attends the Rainbow Cafe in Exeter once a month. Tom would very much like to meet other Gay Men and Lesbians but due to the inaccessibility of venues and his disability he is finding this very difficult.

If you feel you could be of assistance either to Tom or to other possible clients, please contact us: ring Andy or Lizzie on 01392 678744, or e-mail Andy@intercomtrust.org.uk

All befrienders/buddies will receive thorough training in advance around Intercom’s clear and detailed supportive/protective policies and protocols.”

Dorset-based Olympics legacy exhibition project challenges homophobia

Alan Mercel-Sanca writes:

A broad coalition of active support ranging from NHS trusts, local councils, Bournemouth and Poole College Art and Design Department, Bournemouth university academics and Students Union, Equality South West, Dorset’s Space Youth Project, Intercom Trust, Bournemouth University LGBT Society, and Silver Moments LGB&T Group, AFC Bournemouth, have been brought together around an anti-homophobia Olympics legacy exhibition project.
Initiated by Alan Mercel-Sanca, chairperson of a multicultural learning voluntary organisation (www.oes.com) over nine months ago, the project comprises a set of thematic pdf's and related exhibition panels that tackle issues such as stereotyping and other sources of LGB&T discrimination, and targets a range of audiences, especially schools and public sector organisations such as the NHS.

Final year graphic design students at the Bournemouth and Poole College worked on creating the exhibitions panels, with the outcome of not only some iconic art being produced but the very rare phenomenon of a predominantly non LGB&T group of students having their understanding of discrimination issues transformed into dynamically inclusive perspectives. For project lead, Alan Mercel-Sanca, the latter has been perhaps the most rewarding of all outcomes for the project:

“The original vision that inspired me to initiate the project was to see non-LGB&T members of the youth/young adult age group provided in a dispassionate and object way with factual details about what it is like to experience homophobic bullying and discrimination, and to, in this way have the chance to shed any inherited anti-gay stereotype and homophobic and transphobic thinking and prejudices.

Through their involvement in the graphic design project and on careful study of the background context article material I provided concerning the issues involved, the whole group took up the challenge of seeing the world afresh and celebrating respect for individuality and inclusivity. In so doing, they wholeheartedly took the side of the bullied and discriminated against, and demonstrated that the society of the UK in the second decade of the 21st century has from the perspective of youth, no place for homophobia or toleration of indifference towards LGB&T discrimination.”

Representatives of supporting organisations will attend a private launch event to be held at Bournemouth Library on Tuesday 7th August. VIP’s attending include amongst others, Mr Michail Sanidas (NHS South of England Equality and Human Rights Manager West), an Intercom Trust officer, Father John Hyde (Silver Moments LGB&T Group), an officer of Dorset Race Equality Council, and equality officers from local councils. In addition, two key groups will be attending as VIP’s: officers and members of Space Youth Project (who worked closely with Alan on aspects of the project), and; Bournemouth and Poole College teachers/lecturers, who lead the college's graphic design related project, and some of the college’s final year graphic design students and their parents.

The more long-term aims of the project have been to encourage discussion with non-LGB&T audiences, LGB&T communities discrimination and bullying issues and remedies, and related inclusivity needs in the workplace(s), sports, educational and broader social contexts. The projects information resources and graphic design images will be available online from the end of July at www.ahs-exhibition2012.co.uk In the meantime, to learn more project lead Alan Mercel-Sanca can be contacted on oces.contact@gmail.com
Our August Newsletter will go out at the end of July.

Local Groups, if you want us to promote your events, let us know in good time! The final deadline is 20th July.

If you want to be sure your event reaches the Newsletter team, send it to news@intercomtrust.org.uk

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Love to all!
Zach, Michael, and the team

up ‘t Kreek tttheatre

up ‘t Kreek tttheatre is a new theatre company based in Cornwall. Their work explores issues concerning sex and gender identity, ethnicity and violence, political corruption and religious taboos. Their mission is to play against the stereotypes of society in an effort to change people perceptions of the world around them. Their new and upcoming show is entitled 'The Haunted Rite of Madness'.

up ‘t Kreek tttheatre are always looking for new styles, new ways of working and constantly on the lookout for artists, creative and/or otherwise. If you feel you have something to offer and would like to work with them in any way, shape or form, they would like to hear from you. Just send them your CV, a little bit about yourself and why you'd like to get involved.

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