In the first week of March of this year the school's Mathematics department took a stride forward into the Electronic Age with the arrival of its first computer.

The machine, a COMMODORE CBM 3032, popularly referred to as the 'Pet', was the gift of Mr G. M. Bye. He had suggested the purchase some months earlier, leaving the choice of the machine to the department, so there ensued a period of much fact-finding enquiry, and the visiting of exhibitions and trade-shows, to decide on the best model for teaching purposes. Though perhaps not as sophisticated or versatile as some of its rivals, the model chosen had the virtues of being compact, easily transportable as a single unit, easy to use, and, most importantly, robust — a very vital quality in a piece of school 'apparatus'!

At the time of its delivery few of us in the department had had much experience of using computers. I myself had met various ones on one-day courses, which I attended some years ago, but that faded knowledge needed some brushing-up, a fortnight or so of 'machine familiarization' became the first priority. During free time at school, and at home in the evenings, I began to grapple with the techniques of programming, a task not made any easier by the frequency with which errors cropped up in the instruction manual. But despite these hazards, the fascination of computer operating began to burgeon, and the 'Pet' proved a happy machine to use.

By May a newly created room, on the top floor of the East Down building, had been adopted as the home for this new electronic star, and it became available for use by classes and individual groups of boys. Some of the latter rapidly began to display a surprising command of programming, sometimes as a result of experience with computers elsewhere. Others, eager to become conversant with the skills of the space-age, began from scratch — with the aid of a few sheets of brief guide notes which had been written out. Within weeks programming had proliferated to such an extent that everything from moving sine-curves to computerized games of skill began to appear. By the time the Open Day came around, and with the additional appearance of a Nascom I machine owned, built and operated by Graham Blair, the Computer Room had taken on an impressively professional appearance.

The computer is now an accepted part of the school's facilities, and will pave the way to the introduction of computer studies as part of the school curriculum in due course. Meanwhile all the indications are that it will prove a popular and exciting feature.

P.S.