



OggCamp 12

The OggCamp free culture event returned to Liverpool this year, so **Neil Bothwick** risked the M62 to investigate.

OggCamp: “A Free Culture Unconference” returned to Liverpool for its 2012 date. This was the fourth running of the event, which was created in response to the demise of the Lug Radio Live show in 2009, and the second time it has been held in Liverpool. One of the objectives of OggCamp is to “get together as many interesting people who were doing good things with open hardware and software to exchange ideas”. The venue was different this time, with OggCamp moving in to the Art & Design Academy of Liverpool John Moores University.

The event was jointly, and efficiently, organised by two of the UK’s leading podcast teams, Linux Outlaws and Ubuntu UK Podcast, with between 300 and 400 people attending on each of the two days. There was a decent-sized auditorium, three lecture rooms of varying size, other areas for exhibition tables and the Hardware Jam. The exhibition area had representatives of various Linux User Groups and Free Software Groups, as well as a couple of commercial organisations – SUSE and O’Reilly. The latter were doing brisk trade, I succumbed to their wares myself, and were also promoting their discount scheme for user groups. Interested LUG masters should

contact them. The speakers in the main auditorium, for the only talks that were scheduled in advance, included Simon Phipps, from the Open Source Initiative and the Open Rights Group, speaking about the Communication Data Bill; Pete Lomas, from the Raspberry Pi Foundation; and Stephen Fry.

Yes, it was the real Stephen Fry, although he was not there in person, citing “an appalling attack of indifference” as the reason. He had recorded a video, in which he answered questions put by the organisers on everything

also well attended. Pete Lomas, one of the hardware gurus behind the Pi, explained some of the decisions leading to the final hardware design and the compromises involved in keeping within the price target, as well as talking about the future.

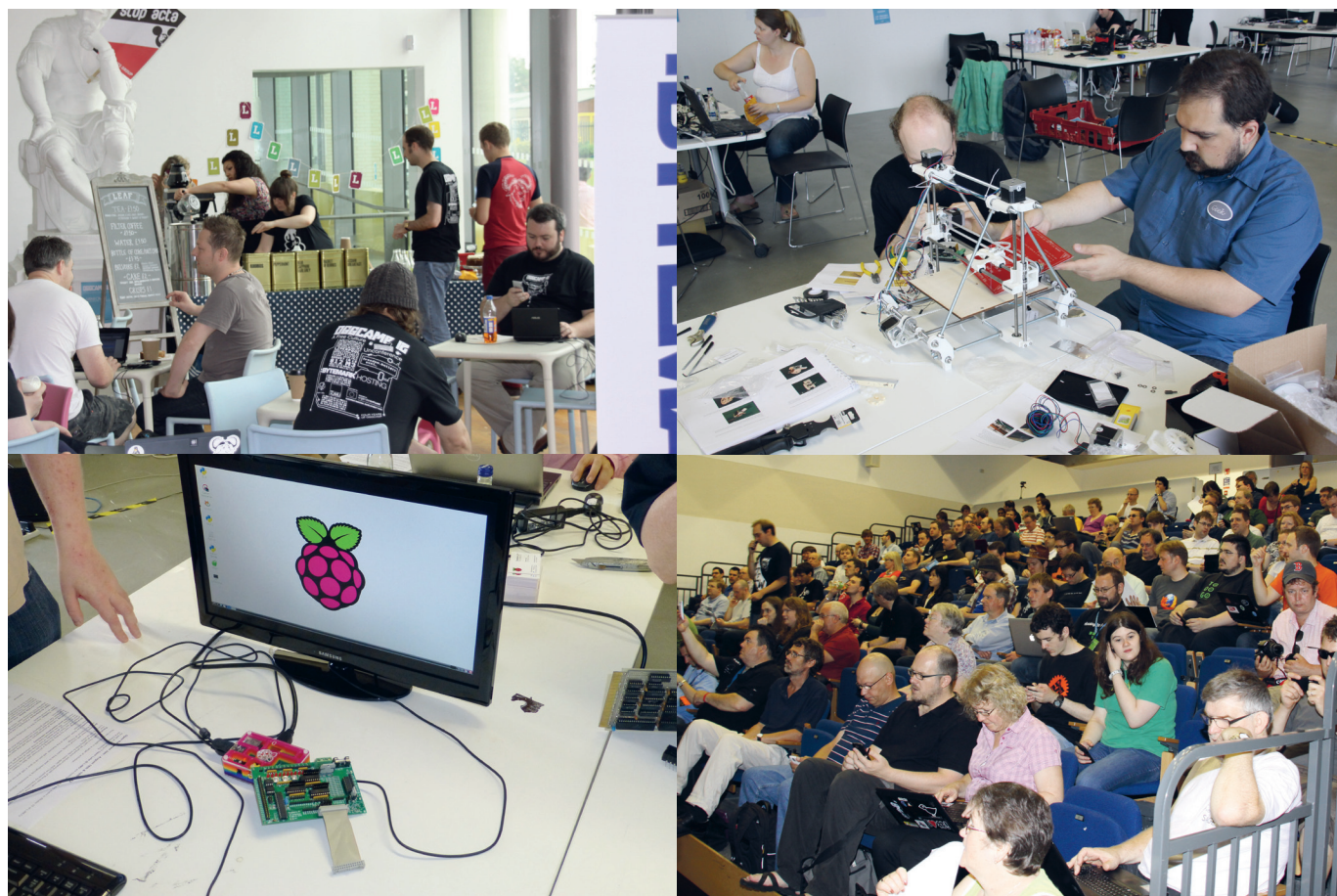
The scheduled talks were only a small part of the event – the unconference aspect meant that anyone could propose a talk, and if it got enough votes they got a slot. A couple of years ago this was done with pieces of paper on a noticeboard, but this year the *Campfire*

Manager software written specifically for OggCamp, but now used by other BarCamp-type events, was operational. The full list of events and proposals was available as a web page, and visitors voted to attend talks, which were then allocated rooms

appropriate to the number of attendees. This worked well, as there was good wireless connectivity throughout the venue – a positive thing, as it seemed half of the attendees were carrying Nexus 7 tablets. This resulted in some hard decisions for attendees when interesting topics inevitably clashed – there’s a need for a version of *MythTV* for real life. Not all of the talks were on serious or technical matters; the presentation on error messages over the years,

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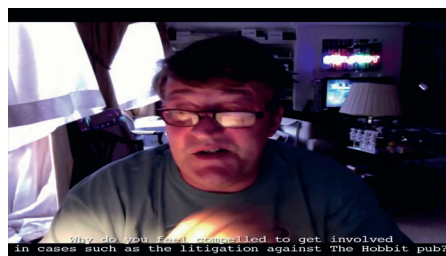
from how he got started in computers to his thoughts on Apple’s walled garden, which were not entirely sympathetic, and open standards, which were. This was clearly recorded at home on a webcam, not something done as part of his ‘day job’ but in his own time. His responses were witty, well informed and well received. The video was shown in the large auditorium, but you still had to be there early to get a seat. The Raspberry Pi presentation was, unsurprisingly,



› (Clockwise from top left) You can't have an event like this without somewhere to sit down for a chat and top up your caffeine levels; a 3D printer takes shape, with many of the parts printed on an identical printer – the machines are reproducing; it was no surprise to see the Raspberry Pi in evidence, here is one with the Gertboard breakout board; the auditorium filled up early for the Stephen Fry and Raspberry Pi presentations.

including some generated live on stage, provided a great deal of amusement.

The Open Hardware Jam was a separate room full of Arduinos, Raspberry Pis, various other hardware configurations and the smell of soldering. The Raspberry Pi was selling like, well, hot pies, but all the other exhibitors were getting their fair share of interest – from the perennial appearance of Bubblino to the Nanode, an Arduino-based board with wireless connectivity making it suitable for remote monitoring and control. This was not just about



› Stephen Fry's video interview was interesting and well received.

seeing what hardware hackers were doing, visitors were encouraged to join in and try making something for themselves. This was particularly apparent where a RepRap 3D printer was being built using parts printed on another RepRap, with anyone passing having the chance to add to the project.

Saturday's weather was kind to the planned Geeknic, an attempt to introduce geeks to the outdoors, if only for their lunch break. However, with free pizza on offer there would have been plenty there anyway. There was also the traditional talk about MQTT, this time given by Andy Piper as a last-minute stand-in for a speaker who was unable to get there on time. MQTT is an open communication protocol from IBM that only had proprietary software until a presentation on it in "the house that twitters" at the first OggCamp. As a result, work started on an open source implementation within hours, and Mosquitto reached its 1.0 milestone release just before OggCamp 2012. This particular story, while not the only example, highlights the usefulness of these events in bringing together people with overlapping interests, who wouldn't otherwise meet.

The final event on the main stage was a raffle, with the usual selection of goodies on offer and the main prize being a Nexus 7. The winner of this generously gave it straight back to be auctioned off, raising significantly more than the retail price, which should help next year's event get off to a good start.

Towards the end of the event, I managed to get Dan Lynch, one of the organisers, to sit down for long enough to share some of his thoughts on the event. Despite some hiccups, he was pleased with how the weekend had gone, and really happy with the new venue, but what came across most, not only from Dan, was how much all those involved in OggCamp enjoyed seeing the event come to life. Dan said: "One of the nicest things about running OggCamp is seeing other people having a good time, learning stuff and teaching stuff," and there was plenty of that in evidence. When I asked about the possibility of an event next year, he sighed wearily (it had been a long weekend for the organisers), but there is little doubt planning for it will soon start.

If you are now wishing you had attended OggCamp, the website will have links to videos, photos and presentation slides from the event. There is also plenty of material on Flickr, Google+ and any other social networking site you care to log in to. **LXF**

Links

- OggCamp** <http://oggcamp.org>
- Linux Outlaws** <http://sixgun.org/linuxoutlaws>
- Ubuntu UK Podcast** <http://podcast.ubuntu-uk.org>
- Campfire Manager** <https://github.com/CampFireManager/cfm2>
- List of talks** <http://talks.oggcamp.org>