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This article examines the claim, often made by historians from the U.K., that the British "Colossus" machine, built to decrypt intercepted German communications during the Second World War, was the world's first electronic digital computer. The authors challenge that claim, and in doing so provide a well-researched analysis of exactly what the Colossus was and what it did. While arguing that the Colossus was not in fact the first computer, the authors show that it was a well-engineered example of sophisticated electronics technology, which in a very short time advanced the state of the art of electronics engineering. The Colossus, they argue, was as remarkable as any of the other machines that historians have touted as the "first" computer. While analyzing the Colossus, the authors give a general and well-reasoned critique of the tendency for historians—both popular and scholarly—to identify "firsts" in the history of technology. For computer historians, they argue that such a tendency illuminates not only assumptions about what are the critical technical qualities that define a "computer," but also the social and political environment of the 1940s and 1950s, when the first electronic digital computers emerged.