

Museum Profile

Who We Are

The Centre for Computing History (CCH) was formed in 2007 and is a pioneering educational charity that opened at its current site in Cambridge in August 2013. The Centre's own history can be traced back to the 1980s when the unassuming collection began to form. CCH was established as a charity to tell the story of the Information Age through exploring the historical, social and cultural impact of developments in personal computing. It maintains a long-term collection of objects to tell this story and utilises them through education, events, and research programmes. The Centre for Computing History is a fully accredited museum.

Why We Exist

The growth and innovation of the computing revolution has been fast and furious. Having created a global society whereby our thinking, means of communication and the way we organise our lives have been irreversibly transformed, it is now impossible to envision a world without computers or the internet. However, there is now a generation growing up who know very little about how this has all come to pass. The Centre for Computing History tells this story.

Videogames form a large part of our collection and an important part of computing history, both technically and culturally. They are also an excellent way of showcasing the capabilities of the machines we display, as well as providing interactivity. As such, they are an essential focus for the museum and we are home to a vast collection of computers and game consoles and a fast growing collection of over 12,000 videogames (as of Feb 2020).



(Some of) What We Do

Exhibition

The Centre for Computing History is a highly regarded visitor attraction based in Cambridge, UK. The exhibition is a nostalgic tour of the computing technology of the past 60 years, from the huge computers that filled entire rooms, to the latest immersive technology of virtual reality. The exhibition features home computers, video games, portable computers, supercomputers, mobile technology, communications and more. The 80s Classroom plays host to our workshops and self led programming guides where parents and children and learn the basics of coding together.

The exhibition is uniquely hands-on, and visitors to the museum are actively encouraged to use and experience the machines on display. The hugely interactive nature of the museum is one of the reasons the museum is considered the #1 museum in Cambridge as voted by users of Tripadvisor.

Education

CCH delivers inspirational learning opportunities to a wide range of audiences – from pre-schoolers to the over-70s – so people can become confident and creative users of information and digital technology. We offer a range of education services onsite including programming, electronics and discussion workshops. We offer interactive formal learning using 1980s BBC Micros, Raspberry Pis and many other technologies for both the general public and students of all Key Stages through to University. We also offer a huge range of informal learning opportunities through our dynamic displays, museum trails, and events.

We also deliver training sessions to teachers to provide them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to teach computing to their students in an engaging way.

The Collection

The fast-paced nature of the computing industry along with its tendency to discard irrelevant technology as soon as it becomes outdated means that the heritage around its origins and subsequent developments is at risk of being lost. CCH aims to preserve this fundamental part of our cultural heritage and ensure that it is valued, celebrated and secured for posterity.

CCH has an internationally significant collection of vintage computers, game consoles, games and software, memorabilia, artefacts, documentation and more – in total about 38,000 items. The core collection consists of 1,400 computers, including game consoles, and over 15,500 software titles, 12,000 of which are video games. The rest of the collection is made up of peripherals, documents, photographs, ephemera, interviews and other related items.

The Centre for Computing History is a fully accredited museum and the procedures and processes dictated by accreditation and the fundamental Spectrum standards are applied to our collection to ensure best practice.

Our entire collection is available to browse online via our website.

Videogame preservation

The museum has a strong focus on videogames and their cultural and historical impact. We hold a unique collection of videogames dating back to the 1970s. This collection includes original boxes, manuals and associated ephemera. It also includes original source code, development documentation, marketing, interviews and hardware from some of the pioneers of the videogame industry and the consumers of the games.

We apply a nationally agreed standard of best practice to our collection and use it to engage with researchers, students and the general public both at CCH and online.

We also undertake the digital preservation of these games as technical and cultural objects. We believe that future generations will want to know how and why games were created and played and how they were marketed and sold as well as having access to their code. To understand the complete story, they will need the code, the media, the artwork, the packaging, the hardware for their creation and use, and an insight into the creators, the consumers, and the world in which they lived.

Read more here:

<http://www.computinghistory.org.uk/pages/56680/videogame-preservation/>

Time, Space & Funding

The amount of time that goes into preserving and cataloguing items to museums accreditation standards should not be underestimated. Once the items have been cleaned and catalogued, they are stored in appropriate conditions. With over 12,000 physical videogames and 1,400 computers and game consoles, the amount of space required to store these is significant. Then there is the 16,000 hardware manuals, books, magazines, documentation, photos and the numerous peripherals, interfaces and so on. Many of these objects require different kinds of storage methods and specialist knowledge, which require the time of our dedicated staff with the vital support of our volunteers.

Whilst we are immensely grateful for the donations of items that we receive, very few people may consider the fact that everything we add to the collection adds an ongoing financial responsibility to the museum both in terms of time and space, and the Centre for Computing History receives no government funding.

Unlike the museum exhibition space which is sustained financially by means of visitor admission fees and school visits, the storage areas can not be monetised in the same way and as such are maintained at pure cost to the museum.

As such the museum is always open to the offer of financial support from the very industries whose history we preserve.

