

National Centre for Computing History

Minutes of Meeting Held on 26th March 2007
at Pure Energy Multimedia, Rookwood Way, Haverhill

Present:

Jason Fitzpatrick (Pure Energy), Elaine Collins (Gold PR), Lisa McGerty (Printwise/Town Centre Management Group), Charmaine Symonds (Gold PR), John Senior, Nick Keeble (Haverhill Town Council/Arts Centre), Alan Baxter (St Eds. BC), Peter Robson (Peter Robson Architects Ltd), Joel Snape

Apologies:

Tom Harrison (Adams Harrison Solicitors/Haverhill Enterprise), Howard Lay (Samuel Ward Arts & Technology College)

Minutes recorded by:

Lisa McGerty

This meeting was convened in order to take forward ideas for establishing the National Centre for Computing History in Haverhill, Suffolk. Attendees had expressed an interest in the Centre.

Summary of Discussion

- Everyone was introduced to each other.
- A presentation was shown about a computing history museum that exists in California, USA. Nothing of this sort currently exists in the UK or in Europe. The most similar entity is at Bletchley Park but the focus there is on the Second World War.
- The premise was put forward that a Centre in the UK, here in Haverhill, would be possible, relevant and timely. All present agreed with this.
- Such a Centre could be established in Haverhill based (initially) on Jason's private collection of computing history artefacts. It could have a museum area with interactive displays, an archive of associated materials such as books, posters etc, a restoration lab, a lecture hall for speakers/presentations/awards, a visible storage area, etc. It would focus on the personal, rather than on the technology itself, by telling the stories of the people involved. It would therefore explore the cultural, aesthetic, ergonomic and design changes, as well as the technological ones that have taken place over the last 30 years. It would

correspond with current trends through reflecting an interest in oral history as well as technology.

- The Centre could also be a meeting place, have an internet café, hold LAN parties and computer fairs, and offer data conversion and other services to businesses and individuals. It could also have educational and research functions.
- This model does not imply that the Centre would start small and grow; rather we should aim high from the start.
- The centre in the US is funded by business, offering various levels of sponsorship to companies. This model would be an option here but it was agreed that there might be some discord between the Centre having a business angle as well as an educational one. It was suggested that education is a better 'hook' and fits with the current national momentum in the museums sector, which is focused on education. Businesses, charities and local and other authorities may be more able to secure funding for the Centre if it is of educational benefit.
- A particular strength of this Centre, as opposed to a traditional museum, is that it would engage in contemporary collecting, i.e. the Centre would continue to acquire artefacts and narratives to tell the computing story as it continues to emerge. This would be relatively unusual and would ensure its continued relevance and growth. However, the public would need to understand exactly what it is the Centre would be presenting to them - this needs to be very clear - otherwise the project risks failure. The key is in presenting layers of information; the function of any museum is to store and present.
- Other strengths/opportunities are local government identification of Haverhill as an area lacking any significant cultural/heritage offer, Haverhill's proximity to Bletchley, to other major museums such as Duxford and to Stansted airport. There might also be the possibility of partnership with UCS through the possible location of a learning centre in Haverhill. Links/affiliations with these and other centres may be advantageous.

Actions

- All present agreed that the initial key issues are funding, premises and securing/protecting the idea for Haverhill. The first step should be protecting the name - The National Centre for Computing History. This could be done by registering a limited company straight away to stop someone else from doing this. Pure Energy could

be used as the contact address for the Centre for the time being. **Jason will look into this.** The Centre already has a web presence at www.computinghistory.org.uk, which Jason will maintain.

- Secondly, a Committee should be set up to take things forward. Expressions of interest in being on the Committee are invited - **contact Jason after the meeting.**
- Regarding funding, little can be done until the Centre exists in some form. However, as soon as it does exist, companies (local, national and international) could be asked for their support for the project. This need not be monetary support at this stage but could simply be an expression of support that could be used to give the Centre credence. A series of press releases (local and in the computing press) could be issued about the Centre, asking for support and inviting people to contribute their stories and memories in order to get the National Centre off the ground. With luck, regional and national press might also pick up the story. Contributions of artefacts could also be invited, although the Committee should agree an Acquisitions Policy prior to this to avoid having to dispose of unwanted equipment donated by all and sundry. These activities would serve to put a marker down for the Centre, stating that it exists here in Haverhill and that is well supported and has credibility. **Elaine to draft press releases.**
- As for premises, much of the collection is currently stored in an unused Gurteen building. There might be the possibility of this becoming the Centre's premises in the short term, simply providing somewhere where interested parties could visit by appointment. This to be investigated in due course. Also in due course an exhibition of the collection could be held in another centre, e.g. the Haverhill Arts Centre or Moyses Hall; this would be a good way of raising the profile of the project. Longer term, premises would need to be found; these would need to be fairly large, have provision for coach access, public access, car parking etc. The various merits of a town centre location or an industrial location were discussed but no decisions can be made at this early stage. In the meantime, **Jason will contact the local planning department to source their list of currently available land/premises.**

Date of next meeting: TBC

An interim meeting may be held for Tom Harrison and Howard Lay who could not make today's meeting - TBC