

Wednesday 9 March 2011

cambridge-news.co.uk

Published: 08/03/2011 09:45 - Updated: 08/03/2011 09:47

Computing heritage in new city museum



Two high-profile Cambridge tech businesses are spearheading the foundation of a new world-class Cambridge Computing History Museum.

Red Gate Software and ARM have both donated substantial funding for the project.

The Centre for Computing History was started in Haverhill in 2006 to explore the impact and tell the story of the Information Age. The plan is to relocate the museum to Cambridge, in the city where so much of this story has unfolded.

The search is on for a building to house this internationally significant collection of vintage computers, artefacts, memorabilia, and associated documents.

With over 12,000 items, including historic machines like the Altair 8800 – the first home computer – the Sinclair Spectrum, Commodore 64 and the Acorn Atom, space is an issue. The museum needs around 10,000 sq ft of rented accommodation, within walking distance of the city centre, to showcase the collection and provide storage.

The plan is to create a permanent, purpose-built museum.

ARM is providing temporary storage for the collection, a fraction of which is displayed at a temporary site in Haverhill.

Cambridge is the natural home for the Centre for Computing History in the UK. Charles Babbage, widely regarded as the father of computing, read Mathematics at Trinity College.

The city also generated Acorn Computers, developer of the BBC Micro, and Sinclair Research, creator of the famous ZX81 and ZX Spectrum computers.

Jason Fitzpatrick, chairman of the museum trustees, said: "The centre stands poised at a definitive moment. There are still hurdles to overcome, much to do and more money to raise but relocating this museum is fast becoming a reality.

"Organisations have a unique opportunity to make an enduring contribution to computing history and play a key role in shaping the museum's future."

Neil Davidson, joint CEO of Red Gate said: "I, and many people at Red Gate, have an enormous personal debt to the UK computer industry of the 1980s. We cut our teeth on BBC Micros and Sinclair Spectrums: they made us who we are."

Entrepreneur and co-founder of Acorn Computers, Dr Hermann Hauser, has also been taking a keen interest in the project and said: "It would be wonderful if a computer museum was opened in Cambridge to celebrate the many historic milestones Cambridge University and local companies have contributed to."

Mr Fitzpatrick, who acted as a technical adviser as well as appearing in the BBC's Micro Men TV film, said: "The fast-paced nature of the computing industry, along with the tendency to discard irrelevant technology as it becomes outdated, creates the risk that a sense of its origins will be lost.

"The centre's aim is to preserve this fundamental part of our history and keep it alive.

"The story of the Information Age is inspirational. It is still waiting to be told in this country.

"Cambridge played an integral role in that story. If we can turn our vision into reality, the Centre for Computing History will be another gift from Cambridge to the whole world."