

Making the History of Computing Relevant

Science Museum, London, 17th – 18th June 2013

IFIP WG9.7 in conjunction with the Science Museum and Computer Conservation Society

- Sponsored by Google -

Displaying and examining the remains of old mainframe and mini-computers is of considerable interest to those who were involved in building or using them. For others, displays or descriptions of this technology are of little relevance or are difficult to engage with. Many people have a modest appreciation of how electronic digital computing has developed over the last 70 years but they understand (or care) little about details of the configurations of these machines or how they differ from modern computers. How can we turn our histories into a form that people today can understand and appreciate?

The aim of this conference is to discuss what needs to be done to make the history of computing relevant and interesting to the general public today. It is to discuss how we can display the *meaning* of computing. Would shifting the emphasis from the technology itself to how it was used make a difference? What about stories about the designers, builders and users of these computers? Would the use of replicas, re-builds or simulations make this history more interesting? What lessons does this history tell us about the possible future of the digital revolution? The conference aims to consider some of these issues.

If we want to play a positive role in creating a future that will benefit the whole community, we need to understand where that future comes from: what the lessons of history tell us. Understanding the implications of the technological revolution should not be just the province of the technically literate.

It is hoped that the conference will be of interest to academic historians of computing, museum curators involved in displaying the history of computing, members of IFIP Working Group 9.7 (History of Computing), members of the British Computer Conservation Society, and others with a concern to make this history more relevant to people of today.

Possible topics for discussion include (but are not restricted to):

- Relating details of the uses of early (or more recent) computers, their social impact, and what difference they made to business, industry, military, education, government and people's lives
- Sharing stories about the inventors, builders and users of these computers: their lives and their motivations
- Using simulations, replicas and oral histories to illustrate the history of computing and to appeal to a range of audiences
- How distinct national perspectives embody different histories of computing and communities of practice
- Displays of computing history as representing narrative or technical histories of computing
- How museums around the world are handling the issue of better presenting the history of computing as well as conserving it
- The importance of education in making history of computing relevant

A vital part of the conference will also be discussions, so if you do not feel like writing a paper your contribution will still be very welcome. It is our intention to publish presentations and papers after the conference in the form of a book by Springer.

Conference participants will be able to see the Museum's Turing Exhibition and a demonstration of Babbage's Difference Engine. Optional pre/post conference activities (16th and 19th June) will include excursions to Bletchley Park and the stores of the Science Museum.

Expressions of interest in participation and presenting a paper are requested by 15th March 2013

Papers must be submitted *no later than* 15th April 2013

Expressions of Interest and Draft Papers should be sent to Arthur Tatnall (Arthur.Tatnall@vu.edu.au)