Guide to the Adam Osborne collection

Finding aid prepared by Jack Doran and Sara Chabino Lott
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November 2018
Title: Adam Osborne collection
Identifier/Call Number: X7926.2017
Contributing Institution: Computer History Museum
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 10.0 Linear feet, 8 record cartons
Date (bulk): Bulk, 1975-1991
Date (inclusive): 1943-1991
Abstract: The Adam Osborne collection consists of material related to Osborne’s role as writer and publisher of software and technical books and manuals, primarily between 1975 and 1991. There are copies of these texts in English as well as Japanese, Italian, Spanish, German, and Norwegian. There are also two cartons of slides and photographs, mostly with content related to Osborne’s personal and leisure activities. Also included are college papers on chemical engineering and books and software from Osborne’s library.
Language of Materials: Collection is primarily in English, with some material in Japanese, and a small amount of materials in German, Italian, Spanish, and Norwegian.
creator: Osborne, Adam, 1939-2003
Processing Information
Collection processed by Jack Doran, November, 2018.
Access Restrictions
The collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of Item], [Date], Adam Osborne collection, Lot X7926.2017, Box [#], Computer History Museum.
Immediate Source of Acquisition
Biographical/Historical Note
Adam Osborne was born on March 6, 1939 in Bangkok, Thailand to Lucia Osborne, a homemaker, and Arthur Osborne, a devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi whose spiritual writings helped to popularize Eastern religion in the West. Having spent much of his childhood in South India, Osborne moved to England where he attended the Leamington College for Boys before entering Birmingham University where he earned a degree in chemical engineering in 1961. After moving to the United States, he completed his doctorate at the University of Delaware in 1968 before taking a job as a chemical engineer at Shell Oil in Northern California.
A computer hobbyist in his spare time, Osborne founded Osborne and Associates, which specialized in publishing easy-to-read computing books and manuals. During this period, he was a regular attendee of the Homebrew Computer Club meetings, and by the time he sold his publishing company to McGraw-Hill in 1979, he had become a known figure among computer enthusiast circles through his strongly opinionated columns, first in Interface Age and later in InfoWorld.
Osborne had been advocating for the need of a portable computer before he approached hardware designer Lee Felsenstein with his ideas in 1979. They unveiled the Osborne 1 at the West Coast Computer Faire in April, 1981. It immediately became one of the industry’s best selling personal computers, and was the world’s first commercially successful portable computer, but it wasn’t without its competition. After a number of missteps in management and marketing that resulted in unsold inventory and mounting financial losses, the Osborne Computer Corporation declared bankruptcy in September, 1983. After recounting the initial success and eventual failure of OCC in his bestselling book, Hypergrowth: The Rise and Fall of Osborne Computer Corporation, Osborne made one last attempt at regaining OCC’s footing in the computer market with the Osborne Vixen, but it fell short of its competitors and OCC was unable to recover.
Next, Osborne founded Paperback Software International Ltd., a company specializing in inexpensive software. Though some reviews indicated that PS’s products were superior to those of their competitors, Lotus Software sued for copyright infringement in 1987, and eventually won the case in 1990, effectively putting an end to Paperback Software.
His health declining, Osborne moved to India to live with his sister in 1992, and he passed away on March 18, 2003 at the age of 64.

**Scope and Content of the Collection**

The Adam Osborne collection consists of personal and professional materials ranging from circa 1943 to 1991. The bulk of the professional material is made up of records from Osborne's book and software publishing companies. There are also a small number of photographs related to the Osborne 1 and snapshots of Osborne speaking at conferences. The remaining photographs and slides consist of snapshots taken during trips, outings, and vacations Osborne took with friends and family. The personal papers make up the smallest portion of the collection, and consist primarily of Osborne’s college activities, including his post-graduate dissertations and related correspondence, and his undergraduate report cards. There is also a collection of poems Osborne wrote during this period, including two journals in which he was published. The remaining series, “Non-Osborne software” and “Non-Osborne print materials,” are comprised of publications from entities that Osborne was unaffiliated with.

Aside from those mentioned above, there are no business records included in this collection, nor papers or notes that indicate Osborne’s thinking during the years when he was writing his “From the Fountainhead” column in the years leading up to the founding of OCC. Also absent are manuscripts or drafts of his books. They are believed to be lost. Rather, these are materials that were stored at Osborne’s first wife’s house when his health began to decline.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into 5 series:

Series 1, Personal papers, circa 1959-1979, bulk 1959-1968
Series 2, Osborne publishing records, 1976-1988

**Separated Material**

Hardware was separated from the main collection. To view catalog records for separated material search the CHM catalog at [http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/search/](http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/search/).

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Adam Osborne and Associates
Osborne 1 (Computer)
Paperback Software International
Portable computers

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**Personal papers, Series 1, Bulk, 1959-1968 circa 1959-1979**

**Series Scope and Content**

This series contains material from Osborne’s college years at both Birmingham University and the University of Delaware, including both his Masters and PhD dissertations from the latter. There are also fragments of his papers as well as requests sent from various colleagues within the chemical engineering field asking for copies of his postgraduate work. He wrote poetry during this period as well, and this is represented in a small collection of his unpublished poems as well as two separate journals that include one of his poems in print. There is a small amount of correspondence titled Family affairs, which mainly deals with his father’s health late in the elder Osborne’s life. Finally, there is a certificate for membership in the New York Academy of Sciences that Osborne received in 1979.

102783426 College papers 1958; 1963-1967
102783427 Poems ca. 1959-1965
102783428 Family affairs 1968-1969
102783502 New York academy of sciences membership 1979-03
102757778 Illustration of Adam Osborne 1982
102757778 There is only one Adam Osborne 1982-11-17
Osborne publishing records, Series 2, 1976-1988

Series Scope and Content

This series is made up of publications from Osborne’s various book and software publishing companies, including Adam Osborne and Associates, Osborne Books, Osborne/McGraw-Hill, and Paperback Software International. Also included are copies of Osborne’s memoir, Hypergrowth: The Rise and Fall of Osborne Computer Corporation and loose software disks. Though most of the titles in this series are in English, there is a fair amount of translated texts, mostly in Japanese, but also Spanish, German, Italian, and Norwegian.

102783429 6502 programmieren in assembler [6502 assembly language programming] 1981
102783430 6800 programmieren in assembler [6800 assembly language programming] 1978
102783431 6800 programming for logic design 1977
102783433 68000 assembly language programming 1981
102783432 6809 assembly language programming 1981
102783461 70 programmes basic [Some basic programs] 1980
102783435 8080 programming for logic design 1976
102783434 8080 programming for logic design 1976
102783436 8080A/8085 programmieren in assembler [8080A/8085 assembly language programming] 1978
102783437 8089 I/O processor handbook 1978
102783438 CBASIC user guide 1981
102783466 Executive filer 1985
102783442 Explosieve groei : opkomst en ondergang van een werelderoemd hi-tech bedrijf [Hypergrowth: the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation] 1985
102783439 General ledger 1979
102783441 Hypergrowth : the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation 1985
102783443 Hypergrowth : the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation 1988
102783440 Hypergrowth : the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation 1984
102783462 Im strudel der miroeletronik [Running wild : the next industrial revolution] 1980
102783451 Innføring i mikrodatamaskiner [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts] 1978
102783452 Introduccion a las microcomputadoras y microprocesadores, tomo 1 : principios basicos [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts] 1979
102783450 Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts 1980
102783449 Introduction to Microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts 1976
102783445 Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts 1976
102783446 Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts 1980
102783454 Introduction to microprocessors, An, vol. 3 : some real support devices 1978
102783453 Introduction to microprocessors, An, vol. 2 : some real microprocessors 1978
102783455 Microprocessors for measurement 1981
102783479 My ABC's 1986
102783465 Number works 1985
102783456 Osborne 1 : user's reference guide ca. 1981
102783458 Osborne 16-bit microprocessor handbook 1981
102783457 Osborne 4 and 8-bit microprocessor handbook 1981
102783459 PET/CBM personal computer guide 1980

Series Scope and Content

This series consists primarily of snapshots and slides from photos taken at weddings, vacations, outings, and trips. Most of these photos have been kept in their original developer envelopes, and are arranged chronologically, but there are also two scrapbook volumes that contain some of the same photos. There is also a portrait of Osborne and his mother taken some time in his early childhood, as well as some snapshots of Osborne with friends taken in 1969. Professional activities are minimally represented in this series, but there are professional photos of the Osborne 1, some snapshots of Osborne speaking at various conferences, and a previously framed photo of Osborne with Steve Jobs taken sometime in the late 70’s or early 80’s.


Series Scope and Content

This series consists of manuals, periodicals, and books found among Osborne’s personal effects. Like those materials in Series 4, “Non-Osborne Software,” none of the titles has any direct affiliation with Osborne’s companies, but most are of a technical nature concerned with software or microprocessors. Also included is a book on Hinduism written by Osborne’s father, Arthur.
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>102783497</td>
<td>Microsoft Windows user's guide</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>102783498</td>
<td>Object-oriented programming in C++</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<td>Okidata IBM-compatible Microline 182</td>
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