



Guide to the Adam Osborne collection

Creator: Adam Osborne

Dates: 1943-1991, bulk 1975-1991

Extent: 10 linear feet, 8 record cartons

Collection number: X7926.2017

Catalog number: 102738362

Collection processed by: Jack Doran, November, 2018

Finding aid prepared by: Jack Doran and Sara Chabino Lott, November, 2018

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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.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

The Computer History Museum (CHM) can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Copyright restrictions may apply and users are responsible for satisfying any claims of the copyright holder. Requests for copying and permission to publish, quote, or reproduce any portion of the Computer History Museum's collection must be obtained jointly from both the copyright holder (if applicable) and the Computer History Museum as owner of the material.

Languages

Collection is primarily in English, with some material in Japanese, and a small amount of materials in German, Italian, Spanish, and Norwegian.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of Item], [Date], Adam Osborne collection, Lot X7926.2017, Box [#], Folder [#], Catalog [#], Computer History Museum.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Alexandra Geddes, 2016.

Repository

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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

Series 3, Photographic materials, circa 1943-1990, bulk 1981-1990

Series 4, Non-Osborne software, 1978-1991

Series 5, Non-Osborne print materials, 1977-1991

Indexing Terms

Adam Osborne and Associates

Osborne, Adam

Osborne 1 (Computer)
Paperback Software International
Portable computers

Separated Material

Hardware was separated from the main collection. To view catalog records for the separated material, search CHM's online catalog at <http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/search>.

Collection Contents

Series 1, Personal papers, circa 1959-1979, bulk 1959-1968

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.

Series 2, Osborne publishing records, 1976-1988

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.

Series 3, Photographic materials, circa 1943-1990, bulk 1981-1990

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 4, Non-Osborne software, 1978-1991

This series is made up of packaged software and manuals published by companies unaffiliated with Osborne's publishing projects. They were found among the personal effects kept at Osborne's first wife's house at the time of his death.

Series 5, Non-Osborne print material, 1977-1991

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.

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder List			
Personal papers			
Box 1	102783426	College papers	1958; 1963-1967
Box 1	102783427	Poems	ca. 1959-1965
Box 1	102783428	Family affairs	1968-1969
Box 1	102783502	New York academy of sciences membership	1979-03
Box Flat File 5	102757788	Illustration of Adam Osborne	1982
Box Framed	102757787	There is only one Adam Osborne	1982-11-17
Osborne publishing records			
Box 3	102783429	6502 programmieren in assembler [6502 assembly language programming]	1981
Box 3	102783430	6800 programmieren in assembler [6800 assembly language programming]	1978
Box 3	102783431	6800 programming for logic design	1977
Box 3	102783433	68000 assembly language programming	1981
Box 3	102783432	6809 assembly language programming	1981
Box 3	102783461	70 programmes basic [Some basic programs]	1980
Box 1	102783435	8080 programming for logic design	1976
Box 1	102783434	8080 programming for logic design	1976
Box 3	102783436	8080A/8085 programmieren in assembler [8080A/8085 assembly language programming]	1978
Box 1	102783437	8089 I/O processor handbook	1978
Box 1	102783438	CBASIC user guide	1981

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
		Osborne publishing records	
Box 1	102783447	Einführung in die mikrocomputer-technik [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts]	1978
Box 4	102783466	Executive filer	1985
Box 1	102783442	Explosieve groei : opkomst en ondergang van een wereldberoemd hi-tech bedrijf [Hypergrowth: the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation]	1985
Box 3	102783439	General ledger	1979
Box 1	102783441	Hypergrowth : the rise and Fall of Osborne Computer Corporation	1985
Box 1	102783443	Hypergrowth : the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation	1988
Box 1	102783440	Hypergrowth : the rise and fall of Osborne Computer Corporation	1984
Box 2	102783462	Im strudel der miroeletronik [Running wild : the next industrial revolution]	1980
Box 2	102783451	Innføring i mikrodatamaskiner [An introduction to micromputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts]	1978
Box 2	102783452	Introduccion a las microcomputadoras y microprocesadores, tomo 1 : principios basicos [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts]	1979
Box 1	102783450	Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts	1980
Box 1	102783445	Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts	1976
Box 1	102783446	Introduction to microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts	1980
Box 1	102783449	Introduction to Microcomputers, An, vol. 1 : basic concepts	1976

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
	Osborne publishing records		
Box 2	102783454	Introduction to microprocessors, An, vol. 3 : some real support devices	1978
Box 2	102783453	Introduction to microprocessors, An, vol. 2 : some real microprocessors	1978
Box 1	102783448	Introduzione al microcomputer, vol. 1, il libro dei concetti fondamentali [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 1 : basic concepts]	1980
Box 3	102783455	Microprocessors for measurement	1981
Box 1	102783444	Mikrocomputer-grundwissen : eine allgemeinverständliche einföhrung in die mikrocomputer-technik [An introduction to microcomputers, vol. 0 : the beginner's book]	1978
Box 4	102783479	My ABC's	1986
Box 4	102783465	Number works	1985
Box 3	102783456	Osborne 1 : user's reference guide	ca. 1981
Box 2	102783458	Osborne 16-bit microprocessor handbook	1981
Box 2	102783457	Osborne 4 and 8-bit microprocessor handbook	1981
Box 2	102783459	PET/CBM personal computer guide	1980
Box 3	102783460	Practical basic programs	1980
Box 2	102783464	Running wild : the next industrial revolution	1980
Box 2	102783463	Uten stying? : mikroprosessoren i arbeidsliv og samfunn [Running wild : the next industrial revolution]	1980
Box 3	102783467	Value of micropower, The	1974
Box 4	102783480	Various software	ca. 1985-1987

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Osborne publishing records			
Box 3	102783468	VP-expert	1989
Box 4	102783469	VP-info	1986
Box 4	102783474	VP-planner	1986
Box 4	102783473	VP-planner	1987
Box 3	102783472	VP-planner	1987
Box 4	102783475	VP-planner guidebook	1987
Box 4	102783476	VP-planner plus	1987
Box 4	102783477	Z80 assembly language programming	1979
Box 4	102783478	Z8000 assembly language programming	1980
Photographic material			
Box 5; 6	102783481	Photographic materials	ca. 1943-1990; bulk 1981-1990
Non-Osborne software			
Box 7	102783483	Disc operating system	1985
Box 7	102783484	First mouse	1991
Box 7	102783485	Guide to operations	1982
Box 7	102783486	Info-XL	1988
Box 4	102783482	Microsoft DOS version 3.2 user's guide reference manual	1986
Box 7	102783488	NeuroShell	1991
Box 7	102783489	PC Tools Deluxe	1989
Box 7	102783490	Power Desk	1988
Box 7	102783491	Various software programs	ca. 1978-1990
Box 7	102783487	WordStar professional	1987

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
		Non-Osborne print materials	
Box 8	102783492	AT bus design	1990
Box 8	102783493	Image-In-Color installation quick start tutorial	ca. 1986
Box 8	102783494	Interface age magazine	1977-09
Box 8	102783495	Mad around the world	1979
Box 8	102783496	Micro computers and my business	1981
Box 8	102783497	Microsoft Windows user's guide	1990
Box 8	102783498	Object-oriented programming in C++	1991
Box 8	102783499	Okidata IBM-compatible Microline 182	1986
Box 8	102783500	Ramana arunachala	1980
Box 8	102783501	Value line investment survey, The	1990