Ferranti Ltd.

The Ferranti company was founded in 1882 by Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti, an inventor born in Liverpool. Ferranti soon achieved substantial success in the fields of electrical generation and supply, transformers and electricity meters. This was followed by work on electrical measuring instruments and, in due course, wireless technology.

By the end of the 1930s, Ferranti was larger than Elliott Brothers (London) Ltd. Furthermore, Ferranti was able to build on its radio and radar activity during the Second World War to become a leading UK electronics player.

The Ferranti company was based in Lancashire, with most of its factories within the Manchester area. It was therefore not surprising that, in 1948, when the government was looking for a company to produce a re-engineered production version of a pioneering digital computer produced at Manchester University, Ferranti was given the contract. This led to the Ferranti Mark I which, when it was delivered in February 1951, was the world's first production computer to have been installed at a users' site.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Ferranti Ltd. continued to build computers, initially aimed at the scientific and engineering sectors of the market. At the smaller machine sector of this market, Ferranti produced computers for the control of surface-to-air missiles and, in due course, for industrial process control. For the most-demanding large machine sector of the scientific market, Ferranti produced the Atlas computer. When Atlas came into full operation at the end of 1962 it was reckoned to be the most powerful in the world – a position from which, inevitably, it was soon displaced by more powerful American computers.

In terms of end-user support, a notable innovation by Ferranti was the establishment in 1955 in London of probably the UK's first Computing Centre to be based on stored-program machines. (L J Comrie had set up the world's first for-profit computing service in London in the 1930s, but based on electro-mechanical calculators). At Ferranti's Computing Centre a Pegasus was made available (from 1956) for demonstrations, programming courses, bureau services, systems development and documentation. Ferranti was at the forefront of UK companies at that time in the provision of help for end-user applications.

Ferranti remained a leading British computer manufacturer until 1963, when its mainstream computing sections were taken over by International Computers & Tabulators (ICT). Ferranti continued to manufacture smaller computers for industrial process control and for real-time military applications until the company finally lost its separate identity in 1987.

The Ferranti computers featured on the *Our Computer Heritage* site are:

Group	Computers	Dates first working	Relative size	Initial target applications
F1	Mark I	1951	Large	General
	Mark I*	1953	Large	General
F2	Mercury	1957	Large	General
F3	Pegasus	1956	Small	General
	Perseus	1959	Large	Commercial data processing
	Sirius	1963	Small	General

F4	Orion 1 & 2	1963	Large	Commercial data processing
F5	Atlas 1 & 2	1962	Large	General
F6	Poseidon	1964	Medium	Defence (naval)
	Hermes	1964	Medium	Defence (naval)
	Apollo	1961	Medium	Air traffic control
	Argus	1958	Small	Defence (missile control)

Within the *Our Computer Heritage* time-frame of 1950 – 1965, the only Ferranti computer not specifically mentioned is the F1600 – initially designed for real-time naval applications.

For further reading, see: *Ferranti: a History. Building a family business, 1882 – 1975.* J F Wilson. Carnegie Publishing Ltd., Lancaster, 2001. ISBN: 1-85936-080-7. Volume 2: *from family firm to multinational company, 1975 - 1987*, published in 2007 by Crucible Books, Lancaster. ISBN: 978-1-905472-01-7.