



April 2011

**Tadley and District History Society
(TADS) - www.tadshistory.com**

**Next meeting - Wednesday 20th April 2011
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

**‘A History of Hampshire Maps’
By Gill Arnot
*Hampshire Record Office***

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.50)

Membership Matters. There are a small number of people who have not rejoined. If you get your Newsletter delivered and still want it, please contact the Treasurer.

We are missing the addresses and emails of some new members. If you see this and have not had a personal copy of the Newsletter, please give your details to a member of the committee.

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
e-mail: richard@iilexind.plus.com or Carol Stevens (0118) 9701578*

www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 18th May 2011:

‘The Duke of Wellington’s House at Stratfield Saye’

by Brigadier Michael Aris, CBE, DL

Last meeting 16th March:

‘Computers and Tea - Lyons Electronic Office’

By Quintin Gee

Computers of one sort or another are all around us in mobile phones; cars; kitchen appliances; TVs; etc. As well as the more visible PCs and laptops and life today would be very different without them. Tea is also very familiar, but computers and J. Lyons & Co Ltd of the tea shops is a seemingly very odd combination. Quintin told us an amazing tale of a tea company leading the world in computing.

The Lyons Company grew from a tobacconist/cigar manufacturers called Montague Gluckstein started in 1886 which opened the first Joe Lyons tea shop in Piccadilly in 1894. This was followed by the famous London Trocadero restaurant in 1898. By 1903 there were 80 tea shops and they were also blending and selling tea. By the 1920s the business had become a large conglomerate and it was becoming an accounting nightmare, because of the range of products and overnight ordering requiring the delivery of products the next day. In 1939 they had 1500 clerks struggling to control it all. After the Second World War the Board decided that the answer was a COMPUTER. Unfortunately the electronic programmable computer had barely been invented and was not intended for business use. So it might have to be DIY job! In 1947 the Board carried out an investigation in the USA at Harvard University and were told there was just as much knowledge at Cambridge and Manchester Universities. (There had been a working computer at Bletchley Park, but that was still a secret).

In a very bold decision the Lyons Board did decide to build their own business computer - the first in the world - and in 1949 started recruiting electrical engineers, electronic engineers having not been invented. In less than 2 years Lyons Electronic Office (LEO) based on the Cambridge University EDSAC computer was built and installed at Cadby Hall, Lyons’ Hammersmith HQ. On 5th September 1951 a bakery control programme was successfully run.

On Christmas Eve 1953 the first payroll program was run, doing the calculation for an employee in 1.5 seconds compared with 8 minutes by an experienced clerk. The computer, now known as LEO I, continued to work for 14 years until 1975. It was the size of a house and based on telephone exchange racks full of thermionic valves. Data storage was done using mercury delay tubes. The heat output must have been awesome and probably accounted for most of its 25 kW power consumption.

LEO Computers Limited was formed as a separate company in 1954 and went on to build 11 LEO II computers, with 9 sold to other big companies (1957 - 1961) and Leo III - 64 machines built until 1974, including one sold to Russia and through barter it was paid for in Polish eggs! Hopefully the eggs were still usable by the time Lyons got them.

The LEO Company had numerous 'firsts' in computing but by 1962 it was in financial trouble. The sale price of the computers was not related to the manufacturing price and competition from other companies was getting fierce. The result was a merger with Ferranti who in turn became part of ICT and then ICL who today trade as Fujitsu.

The Joe Lyons business also declined due to an excess of borrowings and the effects of the 1974 recession. (Sounds familiar). It was bought by Allied Breweries in 1978.

Thank you Quintin for relating an extraordinary tale of how a British company best known for its tea shops and cakes built the world's first business computer, and had a profound effect on the design of computers, even today.

Richard Brown

History in the Making

Tadley 26th March - **The Falcon Inn** was demolished.



Tadley 31st March - **Des Helyar** of Des Helyar Motorcycles on Pamber Heath Road died at the age of 71.

What's on? Events which may be of interest

Hampshire Record Office

For information see www3.hants.gov.uk/whatson-hro or ring 01962846154

Milestones Museum

The museum is running Children's Easter Bunny Trails during the weeks before Easter and also doing presentations on A Romany Wedding and a 1940's Wedding on different dates. Tel. 01256 477766 for details or see: www3.hants.gov.uk/milestones/whatson

Willis Museum

2nd April to 23rd April a special exhibition in the Community Gallery, 'Stories of Basingstoke – the People who gave us our Heritage' Free Admission

The museum is also running an ever changing series special exhibitions.

Friends of the Willis Museum *(7.30pm at the museum)*

21st April - 'Basingstoke Canal - the last 6 miles' by Roger Cansdale

Basingstoke Archaeological & History Society *(7.30 at Church Cottage)*

12th May - 'Edward Jenner and the Smallpox Virus' by Dr Tim Mason, University of Portsmouth.

A New Local History Book

The Basingstoke Riots - Massagainians v. the Salvation Army 1880-1883 by Bob Clarke has been published by Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society. It is available from Waterstones.

***TADS annual membership is £12 per person.
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