

Fact from fiction . . .

Peter Bird joined J Lyons and Company in 1964 shortly after Lyons took delivery of their first LEO III computer and when the pioneering phases of the LEO Project were fading. The United Kingdom computer industry at that time was reassessing its strategies but it was a time when Lyons were still bold enough to experiment with new ideas; among these the Autolector and Xeronic printer. Peter Bird was responsible for the operational department of these devices and later became operations manager for all computers and other off-line equipment installed at Cadby Hall.

In 1981 he became systems development manager of Lyons and a director of Lyons Computer Services Limited, a post he currently holds.¹ When he joined Lyons in 1964 he had already completed a successful career as a Merchant Navy Officer and was not fully aware of the work which had led to the famous LEO Computer for which he became responsible. This early work had become no more than folk history, and the subject of a wide variety of anecdotes in which it was difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

After 20 years with the company he decided to set about writing the history of the LEO Computer since so much that he had seen and read about was in many ways inaccurate and misleading. His research led him to consider the nature of Lyons in the immediate post war years, but it soon became clear that the answers lay further back in time. It was only by studying the history of the company—how it started and how it developed—that it would be possible to understand the path which led to the LEO project and the part it played in the information technology industry. He discovered that the historical evidence was fragmentary and few documents had been systematically preserved. However, after three years' research and contact with

¹ Note: Now retired

many of the early people involved in the saga (150 in all), the task is complete. He has called his work 'LEO—Pride of Lyons' and is now seeking a publisher for his manuscript.²

In this article he mentions Thomas Thompson, Oliver Standingford and John Simmons—names of businessmen who were very much associated with the Institute's development in the 50s and 60s.

² The Book was published 1994 under the title **LEO: The First Business Computer**, Hasler Publishing Limited