

# Leatherhead & District Local History Society

Potted Histories No 42

## Ronson UK, Randalls Rd, Leatherhead



For many years Ronson was one of the largest employers in Leatherhead, and at their peak employed between 2000-3000 including outworkers. Ronsons, founded in America by Lewis Aronson I in 1898, originally made church ornaments. In 1918 it began manufacturing cigarette lighters, and the rights to sell and service the lighters in the UK were acquired. The agency, with premises in London's

Caledonian Road was heavily bombed in the Second World War. As a result, Ronsons moved to Leatherhead and bought Dorincourt in Oaklawn Road where their war work was making among other things, bomb fuses. These were manufactured on government-subsidised machines which after the war were modified to make lighters.

Five million lighters were produced before Dorincourt was sold in 1953 to Queen Elizabeth's Training College and Ronsons moved to its custom-built factory in Randalls Road. Here the firm diversified and were also very successful in the developing of butane and battery lighters. However the Japanese, Ronsons' best customers, produced their own lighters, not only inexpensive to buy but incorporating a competitive piezzo mechanism. The order to market these lighters came to all Ronson subsidiaries from the US parent corporation who had long been in difficulties. These intensified worldwide especially in the service field.

Despite attempts by Ronson UK to solve the corporation's financial problems only resulted in the liquidation of Ronson UK and in 1981, the sale and subsequent demolition of the Leatherhead factory. A display of Ronson products can be seen in the Leatherhead Museum.

*Goff Powell - with acknowledgement to Edwina Vardey - History of Leatherhead - A Town at the Crossroads - L&DLHS 1988*

*For a more comprehensive history on Ronson UK, I suggest you read Peter Tarplee's Past Industries of Ashted, Leatherhead & Bookham, available from The Museum, Barton's Bookshop Leatherhead and Bumbles Ashted.*

**For information regarding Membership, Lectures and Museum opening hours**

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