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OBE FOR FRANK LAND, COMPUTER
PIONEER AND EDUCATIONALIST

Frank Land, a leading member of the small team that developed the world's first business computer, a wholly British achievement, and who then went on to become the UK's first professor of information systems and have an outstanding career in university education, has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List published today. The award is for services to the information systems industry.

At the age of 90, Land, born Landsberger in Berlin, who came to England as a young boy fleeing Nazi Germany, expressed his delight at receiving the award which he sees as "a sign of recognition of the LEO contribution to information systems."

LEO, standing for Lyons Electronic Office, is now recognised the world over as the first ever business computer when, in November 1951 it began live operations processing data for J Lyons & Company, the catering company best known for its teashops and the "nippies" who served in them. It was an outrageous decision – eccentric in a peculiarly British way – that Lyons took to build its own computer and have it operating on business applications ahead of American giants such as Sperry Univac and IBM.

Lyons went further and had the gall to set up a company to start selling its machines to others and it was Frank Land who, starting as a trainee programmer, took a leading role in the company's sales and systems consultancy team. He did the job for 15 years and then took his LEO experience in another direction into academic research and education when he joined the LSE in 1967 to establish the UK's first university programme in information systems.

Frank Land's contribution to the information systems revolution stands out for its combination of practical, hands-on involvement in the early development of business computing and his later career as a leading researcher and educationalist in the disciplines of systems analysis and software development. Recognised both at home and internationally for his work in this field, he has inspired a whole generation of PhD students.

Among his many international awards, he has received the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) outstanding service award, IFIP being the organisation that links some 50 national and international societies working in information and communications technologies. He is also a fellow of the Association for Information Systems, receiving their LEO Award for outstanding life-time service to the understanding of information systems. The AIS is the leading professional organisation dealing with the research, teaching, practice and study of information systems worldwide.

He was also recently awarded a life-time fellowship of the British Computer Society.

Though formally retired since 1991, he has remained active as an emeritus professor of the LSE providing support to young researchers embarking on a career in computing. In addition, he chairs a history sub-committee of the LEO Computers Society (www.leo-computers.org.uk), now a charity, and is busy compiling an archive of historical material on LEO computers called LEOpedia. LEOpedia is a critical component of the LEO Heritage project being carried out in partnership with the Centre for Computing History, Cambridge and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Land also manages the Society's oral history project.

Frank Land now lives with his wife Ailsa, herself a professor emerita of the LSE, in Totnes, Devon. They have three children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

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Professor Frank Land, OBE, pictured with Dame Stephanie ("Steve") Shirley in November 2016 on the occasion of a plaque unveiling ceremony featuring LEO (Lyons Electronic Office) close to the site of Cadby Hall, the Lyons company HQ where the machine was developed and where it ran the world's first operational business data processing.