

## **The Story of Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries by Chris Turland**

In May, Chris Turland came to speak to us about the fascinating story of the large manufacturing firm of Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries which was founded in Ipswich in 1789. Robert Ransome (1753-1830) came to Ipswich from Norwich where he had been making iron roofing panels. His cast iron foundry, Orwell Works, was situated in the centre of Ipswich in Old Foundry Road where he developed a business making agricultural tools. It was his patents for tempered cast iron plough shares, chilled cast iron and interchangeable plough parts that provided the foundations for this large and complex firm's success. Ransomes was a major player when Ipswich was an innovative manufacturing town of national and international repute. In 1812 it became Ransomes and Son and in 1818 Ransomes and Sons as a second son joined the firm. During the agricultural depression, Ransomes expanded into other areas, such as building the new iron Stoke Bridge in Ipswich and a gasometer. In 1830 Robert Ransome died and his grandson joined the firm – now called J.R. and A. Ransome. In 1832 they started manufacturing a grass cutting machine. Production rapidly expanded. A catalogue of 1844 shows 70 different types of plough attachments for different ploughs and cultivators to suit every soil type and requirement. By 1881 it had become Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries. Over the next 20 years, they produced over 1500 grass cutting machines along with horse rakes, rollers, steam engines and threshing machines. The company sold agricultural equipment all over the world including Russia, USA, South America and India. At the same time, they also began manufacturing railway parts. The railway side of the business was taken over by an offshoot company- Ransomes and Rapier. During World War 1, Ransomes produced munitions and even aeroplanes. Post war manufacturing concentrated more on lawn mowers, including a gang of 8 mowers in a row for golf courses. Following the innovative electric trolley bus design, in 1926 they produced the first electric lawnmower followed by elevating platforms, cranes. Churchill tanks, fork lift trucks and combines. Examples of some of these can be seen in the Ipswich Transport

Museum. In 1946 a gradual move began from Orwell Works in the centre of Ipswich to Nacton Road on the outskirts of town. By the 1980's work focused almost exclusively on lawn mowers and turf care.

A lively discussion followed between the many ex- employees present who enjoyed remembering their working days!