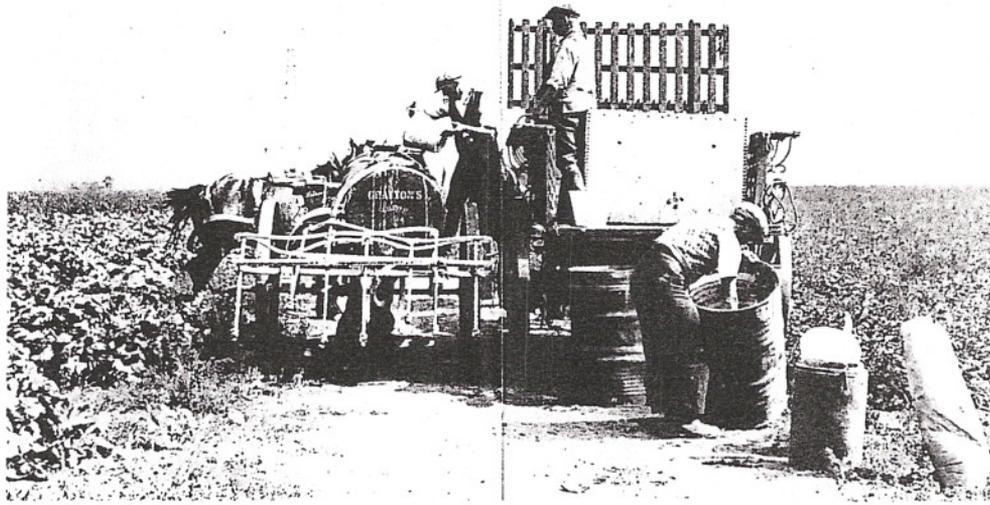


108



108 1933 Rainham. Spraying potatoes for S. Gunary and Sons. The early sprayer was pulled by a horse!

leading reputation for milking machines. Acrow acquired Simplex and changed the name to Bentall Simplex. They introduced innovative industrial bulk storage, slurry conservation and horticultural equipment. Bentall Simplex elevators and conveyers were matched with their seed cleaning machines, an advisory service, and the circular grain bins which Simplex had been developing. The Simplex idea had been for free-standing storage bins. The old name was retained and they became known as 'Goldhanger' bins. The 18th century plough had become a modern grain silo.

William de Vigier, decided that the future, which had once looked rosy, was saturated. The Heybridge factory was closed. The large building was used partly as an Intervention Store after the 1984 harvest and it later became occupied as offices. In 1998 the electronics giant Industrial Control Service occupied many of the sites that had seen the rise of Edward Bentall's dream. His name lived on. The new industrial units were known as the Bentall's Centre. A hospice was established and the school opposite, which had been endowed by the Bentall family in the 19th century became a Training and Enterprise Centre.

Earls Colne and Great Yeldham

Reuben Hunt was employing 300 men at Earls Colne in 1900. It was the days of paternalistic Victorian industrialists who, following the lead of the aristocracy, provided 'everything from the cradle to the grave'. The factory dominated the village which had suffered from the decline of the cloth industry and later straw plaiting. As Hunts grew there was a ready-made labour force. He built over 100 terraced houses from a foundation in 1825.

Hunts were famous for their cast iron rolls. They also manufactured pulleys and sharpening for industry and, like Bentalls, they relied upon the export market. British

engineering products had a world wide reputation at this time, but "Hunt was in the middle ranking of a league of firms based in the Eastern Counties that came to dominate the agricultural engineering industry during the nineteenth century".[4]

The association with Ransomes was cemented when, due to changing demands of their product range, a lack of innovative ideas and an inability to continue without a considerable injection of new capital, Ransomes took over Hunts. They continued to produce heavy iron castings for their rolls and a range of other less well known products. In 1988 the business was closed and the village of Earls Colne was bereft of its patrician founding factory.

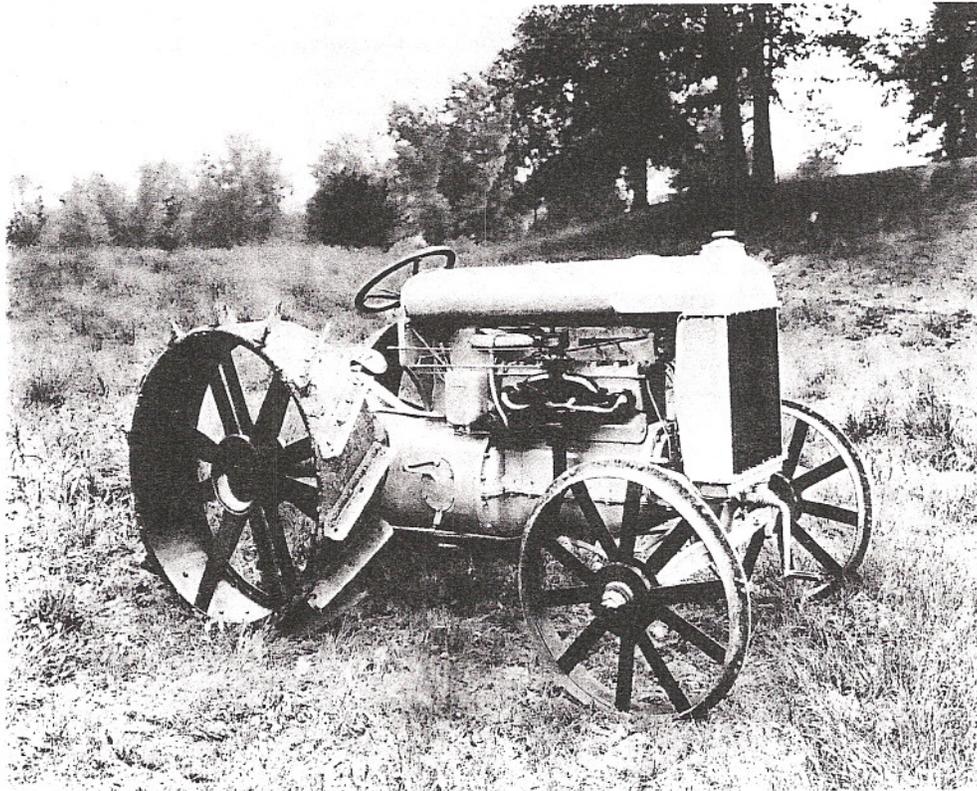
NWA9
NFB

Whitlocks at Great Yeldham emanated from Walter Whitlock, Poole Farm, who was also a forage merchant. He was a successful farmer with land in eight Essex villages and when he retired in 1919 he had over 1,000a.

The forage business was a successful one and there were over 70 workers employed in 1914. It was through this diversified, but ancillary trade that Whitlock became interested in machinery. When he discovered that spare parts were difficult to obtain he sent one son to an engineer in Scotland and another to Hunt's at Earls Colne. It was these two sons, Thomas and Herbert, who started the agricultural engineering business.

They became agents for some of the most prominent machinery manufacturers, did

109 1920s/30s. Fordson tractors were the most common on Essex farms.



ESSEX FARMING 1900-2000

repairs, and supplied spare parts "in what was then described as an isolated part of the country".[5] In 1924 Whitlock Bros. had developed a carpentry division with the emphasis upon pig feeders, poultry houses, shepherds' huts and a range of similar equipment. In 1953 they continued to make wooden cattle cribs, calf mangers and hay racks.

WCB
L1187

They diversified into the Whitlock Dinkum Digger and were the first UK company to make a tractor-mounted excavator loader. Whitlocks' diggers were ahead of their times and the integrated pivotal Dumpers were the forerunner of the Volvo and others which were used extensively for earth moving. Under Carleton Whitlock, chairman from 1941, the company flourished but after his death in 1966 the dominance of the Whitlock family had gone. Their designs had not been developed and they lacked the capital to expand in the way in which Joe Bamford (JCB) had expanded from making iron hay-rakes and other farm machinery at Uttoxeter.

The company became part of the London & Midland Industrials Group in 1967. They were absorbed into the Powell Duffryn Group in 1972 and integrated with Hy-Mac, the producers of cranes and earth moving equipment.

The prominent Yeldham site, almost opposite the 1,000 year old 'Yeldham Oak' was occupied as a depot for an aggregates and machinery company, part of it became used as an International Tractor and Combine branch but the name disappeared from the village.

Darby's in Trouble

In 1900 the Darby Walking Digger had a national reputation. Thomas Darby of Pleshey Lodge had invented his digger in 1877. "As the sheds clanged to the sound of the hammer on rivet, the revolutionary shape of the first walking broadsider took shape".[6] In 1900 the rotating forks replaced discs and it became known as the 'Revolving Screw Action Digger' and the operation was moved to Stilemans Works, Wickford. Times were hard. Darby's son Sidney, recalled in 1947 "Round about 1907 it was very hard work trying to sell farm machinery owing to price cutting by dealers and the extended credit required by farmers and I have known new American Horse Rakes difficult to sell at five guineas; Mowers at ten guineas and Binders as low as £24".[7] He described his father's efforts in difficult circumstances. He grew linseed at Pleshey Lodge and fed it to his horses. They became too fat, although they had glossy coats. The straw of the linseed was soaked in ditches and Darby made a machine for scrutching it. "We obtained good results with very nice bales of fibre but foreign competition beat us and we had to give up".[7] Darby overcame the problems of flexible power drive but Paxman Colchester works produced a competitive digger which proved to be more popular. An engine was produced known as the Darby Maskell. J.W. Maskell of Tillingham had invented the 'Maskell Motor Cultivator'. It was a combined motorised cultivator which was powered by a four cylinder 25hp engine. Primarily designed for orchard and market garden work it cost £400 in 1919 but by this time was being made at Stamford Lincolnshire.

One of the last Darby diggers to be constructed was viewed by King George V at the Royal Show at Bristol in 1913. "Darby and his sons were never to achieve the success which they so richly deserved. In the end Darby, through the Pedestrian Digger Co. and the Syndicate lost in excess of £100,000, an enormous sum even now".[8]

Sydney Darby took over the Stileman's works and became a machinery agent