

## FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS

by Daphne Bampton

There is an aura of timelessness about Ashbury—a downland village on the edge of the ancient Ridgeway—and it is not easy to associate such a spot with industry. Yet it has been the home of William Bunce (Engineers) Ltd. since 1896, when William John Bunce purchased the village blacksmith's business for £15.10.0d.

In 1896 William Bunce was young and enterprising and, like many of his contemporaries, remarkably energetic. He began business on a "shoe-string" and happily cycled on a penny-farthing bicycle from his home in Aldbourne to Ashbury—a journey of 15 miles. This was, in fact, the only form of transport that he could afford when he began in business and for some white afterwards.

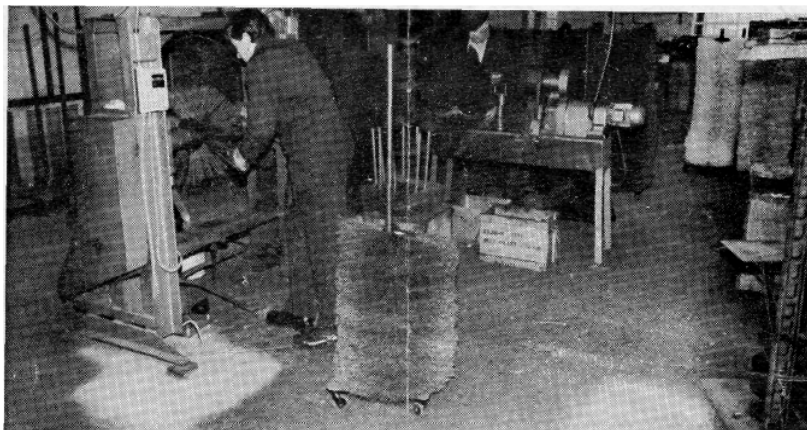
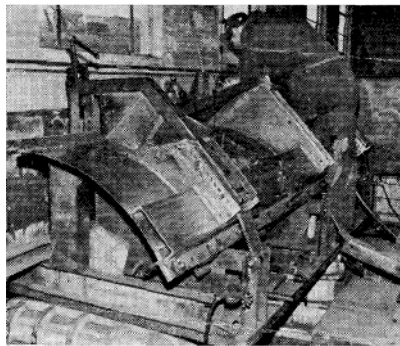
Shoeing horses was not a very profitable occupation in 1896, and Bunce records for the period show that horses were shod for 2/8d. per set of shoes; this limited sum being, in some instances, only earned after William Bunce had travelled several miles to shoe working farm horses before they left their stables at 7 o'clock in the morning. For this type of job he would leave home between 4.00 and 5.00 a.m. and walk to the farm, since he could not carry the shoes and tools required on his penny-farthing bicycle.

Fortunately, it was not too long before he had extended his activities to include repairs to farm machinery and could afford to buy a pony and trap.

William Bunce's little business made a big jump forward when he invented 2- 3- and 4-horse whipple trees followed by the Berkshire Patent Fertiliser Distributor. He was well established by 1926 when he brought his children, (Albert Bunce, and the Misses Bunce) into the business on terms that specified that any profits made by the firm would be shared equally between William Bunce and his children, while any losses would be borne by the founder alone.

This was 50 years ago yet William brought his two daughters into the business on equal terms with his son, and when he designed and patented the Ashbury Gritting Machine in 1927 it was his daughter Doris who drove a lorry all over the country launching and demonstrating the machine. The annals of the Company refer to an occasion when Miss Doris Bunce and her father went to Surrey to demonstrate the Gritting Machine to the County Council. Competitors were present, but as there were no other women the Ashbury Machine was demonstrated first. And it is on record that in answer to a question about the abilities of his Gritting Machine Mr. Bunce replied, "Sir, I am no preacher, the proof of the pudding is in the eating", and to his daughter, "so drive on my dear". Which she did to good effect since the Bunce Machine was ordered by the County Council.

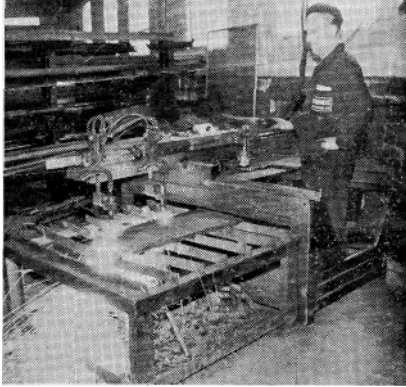
1929 saw the introduction of the Bunce patented snow plough which incorporated a special tripping edge designed to spring back when obstacles such as man holes were encountered. But the efficiency of the equipment could not be proved until 29th February, 1931 when there was, for the first time, a fall of snow sufficient to carry out tests.



Making steel-wire brushes for road sweepers—being much longer wearing.

*William Bunce's Company grew during the 1930's, but the greatest progress came during the Second World War when an order for 666 snow ploughs was received from the Ministry in 1941; and before this fantastic order was completed the number of snow ploughs increased to 1,320. Of these two were supplied to every aerodrome in Great Britain and to Air Force bases overseas, some going as far as Iceland.*

*Mr. William Bunce remained actively involved in the operation of his busi-*



*Cutting metal sections with oxy-acetylene profile cutter.*

*ness until 1949 when he retired, because of ill health, at the age of 78. He had enjoyed building the Company and since 1926 had worked in harmony with his children who, in turn carried on running the firm. The Misses Bunce retired in 1961 and Albert Bunce was head of the firm until his death in 1966.*

*Today the Company is run by the founder's grandson, David Bunce, who now leads a firm that is geared to present day trading, and has contracts all over the world. For example, in 1975 12 snow ploughs were exported to Annam in the Jordan and further orders have been received from Jordan. Orders have also come from Saudi Arabia following a sales visit by David Bunce, and at the time of writing the Company is producing 40 sweepers for Nigeria. Other interesting export orders include a tractor-mounted sweeper to the Bali Beach Hotel in Indonesia; road sweepers to Saudi Arabia and snow ploughs to the Dubai Defence Force which were used for moving sand.*

*This is a family business that has survived three generations, and it is not the only grandfather, father and son relationship within the firm. Several men work there today, whose fathers were employed before them and whose sons have joined the Company in recent years.*

*Arc-welding snow plough blade on jig.*