

Our distributor's premises at Brenchley, Kent.

OUR MOTOR SCYTHE DISTRIBUTORS

I. W. M. GODFREY AND PARTNERS

I MUST admit that when your Editor asked me to write something of Godfrey's activities for *Allen's Activities*, my first feelings of horror were fairly quickly overcome by a certain degree of pleasure, and even pride, at having been asked and at the kind manner of the invitation.

As time has passed with one or two gentle inquiries and reminders that he was still waiting, the pleasure has, I am afraid, slightly evaporated. My problem has not been lightened by the fact that I wrote on this subject a year or two ago, and it may prove difficult to avoid undue repetition.

In several respects my task is easy. The association of this firm and the Allen Scythe has been continuous and close since within a few weeks of the birth of both. They, the scythe and the firm, were born almost simultaneously, shared their teething troubles together and will, in a few years' time, both come of age.

I can certainly say that if it were not for the Allen scythe this firm would not now be in existence. Since the converse cannot be claimed in any way, it will be plain that the scythe is the senior partner in the association. I sincerely trust that this close connection will continue for many years to come and that we will reach maturity and old age together.

The firm began in November 1933, I having married the previous month and being in need of a respectable job. We started at the National Fruit Show in Bristol, by selling a number of power spraying machines manufactured in Northern Ireland, at scattered addresses throughout the chief fruit-growing areas of the country.

The firm consisted of one fully employed fruit grower and myself. We were both full of enthusiasm and, as regards myself, wholly ignorant of all business methods.

I had up till then, had a rather varied career as cowman, tractor driver, assistant to the manager of a salmon fishery and had finally peddled a box tricycle about London delivering vegetables.

None of this had added much to my abilities to run a business and I don't think it had ever entered our heads that it is impossible to sell machinery without an adequate service organization behind you.

We turned a small boxroom in my flat in Tombridge into an office, borrowed a typewriter, wondered what we should do next, and really just sat and waited for someone to notice us. Looking back at it I am completely amazed at our temerity and cannot conceive how we ever thought it could develop into a living concern.

I can only be grateful now that we knew so little. If we had been less ignorant it is impossible to believe we would ever have dared to start at all.

I well remember a friend ordering a galvanized tank from us in the first week or two. I ordered it hopefully from a large wholesaler from whom I was greatly surprised when they asked for cash in advance.

I may say that we had not yet received any commission on our sales of fruit sprayers and had not even opened a banking account. In my ignorance I protested and got a clear, but firm, reply, with extracts from a trade association report on us.

However, we paid up, completed the deal and received our very first payment. In most cases people were amazingly patient and helpful to us, and I have many happy memories of kindnesses and assistance.

The firm had not existed more than a month or two when an advertisement, probably the first ever, of the Allen Scythe appeared in *The Fruit Grower*. It was one-third of a page, and complete with picture. We were greatly impressed, even excited, by it. However little we really appreciated its eventual importance to us, we did realise that here was something entirely new. It is difficult now to think of a time when there were not such things as motor scythes, but that was then the case as far as England was concerned.

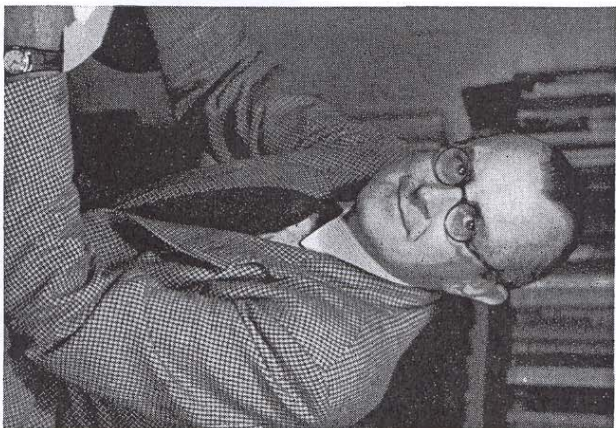
The Allen Scythe was in effect, even if not in strict truth, an invention, and inventions in the real sense are rarities. We immediately saw immense possibilities in the machine for fruit farming and, to us at that date, fruit farming was the only sort of farming that mattered.

I rapidly organised a visit to Oxford and was shown a machine, perhaps the first that was ever built. I regret I cannot vividly recall the impression it made on me, but that is not surprising after 18 years.

I do, however, remember clearly that I and the firm were rightly summed up as being of no importance whatsoever. No territory was available for us and, as far as Allen's were concerned, the incident was firmly, but politely, closed.

This was, perhaps, one of the very few occasions when Allen's and ourselves have disagreed entirely. I returned home and we reconsidered the matter.

My partner was anxious to have a scythe for his farm and we were certain there was an immense market in fruit farming. Not being a stock line, already handled by all the long established firms, we also felt that there must be another line of approach open somewhere.



Sir William Godfrey, Bt., who writes the first story in this series.

We bought a scythe for my partner's personal use through the nearest agent, now on our retail dealers, and used it for demonstrations whenever we could get any. As a result we sold three of four machines that first season.

This may not seem a lot now, but an machinery agent will appreciate the effort needed to sell the first half dozen of any new line, lacking any existing users to refer to for recommendations, etc. It proved enough to arouse Allen's interest and they gave us a small territory of our own which was all and more than we really hoped for.

A matter of considerable importance to us was our lack of any other agencies. To a large firm even an Allen Scythe is just one more line. To us it was almost everything. Our only other agency was a spraying machinery. Our territory for that covered the whole of England and a such, was quite irrational and absurd.

It was not long before we had to employ a traveller. My partner was already overworked on his own farm and I was fully occupied as everything from office boy to general manager, as well as accountant, excuse department, store keeper and workshop staff.

A recent examination of our petty cash book for 1935 showed that during that summer we drew approximately £5 every other week, which paid for all outgoings such as postages and included a traveller's wage too. Our capital then, and for some years, consisted of a bank overdraft limited to £1,000. It will be obvious that neither partner drew any salary, or even many expenses, during these early years. On the other hand, we were being paid a high rate in experience and knowledge.

We had also, I think, avoided inheritance any bad habits that would have been learned had we served our time in other firms before starting up on our own. As a firm, we have