

AGRICULTURAL & GENERAL ENGINEERS LIMITED

BY MIKE J. BURROWS

Floated on 4th June 1919, with a nominal capital of £100, this brainchild of Thomas Aveling and Archibald W. Maconchie was one of those ideas which no matter how good they seem in theory can be extremely difficult to put into practice.

The objects of the Company were fairly simple. To bring all the products of fourteen companies engaged in the agricultural engineering industry under the auspices of a single marketing force. Thereby obtaining raw materials at a viable price and marketing the end products at the best price possible.

Establishing a Head Office at Central House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2., it was not long before problems arose. Victor Garrett, as head of the buying department, had the unenviable task of persuading the Board of Directors to revert back to individual buying. This was agreed and took place from July 1920. The sales, however, remained centralised under the control of Frank Garratt, with branch offices opening up in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India & Chile.

A new Head Office - Aldwych House - built on a site leased from the London County Council was opened in 1923. To administer this a new company, Aldwych House Estates Limited, was added to the Group.

The companies making up this formidable force were:

1. AVELING & PORTER Rochester, Kent.  
Established in 1850 by Thomas Aveling and Richard T. Porter. Registered 16th July Converted into a private company in 1920. At this time a London office was to be found at 729 Cannon Street, London EC4. The name was changed on 13th February 1934 to Aveling- Barford Limited, and converted into a private company on 29th June 1937. Eventually became a subsidiary through British Leyland Motor Corporation Limited of British Leyland Limited.
2. JAMES & FREDERICK HOWARD LIMITED. Britannia Works, Bedford.  
This Company established in 1813 and registered in December 1916.
3. E. H. BENTALL COMPANY LIMITED, Heybridge Works , Maldon,  
Essex.  
Began in 1812 by William Bentall. Registered as an unlimited company in January 1875. Re-registered as a limited company in November 1909. Later became part of the Acrow Group.
4. BLACKSTONE & COMPANY LIMITED. Rutland Works, Ryhall Road,  
Stamford, Lincolnshire.  
Established in 1837 by T.W. Ashby & Company it had various name changes, Ashby, Jeffrey & Luke; G.E. Jeffrey; Jeffrey & Blackstone. Incorporated as a private liability company in 1888. Had a London office at 81, Cannon Street, London, E.C.4 by at least 1920. Believed later to be part of the Hawker Siddeley Group.

5. BARFORD & PERKINS LIMITED. Queen Street Ironworks, Peterborough.  
Established in 1840 and eventually registered in December 1911.  
Acquired by Aveling & Porter in 1932. Became subsidiary of British  
Leyland.
6. CLARKE'S CRANK & FORGE COMPANY LIMITED. Coultham Street,  
Lincoln.  
Established in 1859. Rebuilt and restructured in 1909 by  
Louis W. Smith. Incorporated as a limited company in the same year.
7. L. R. KNAPP & COMPANY LIMITED. Thames Valley-Iron Works,  
Clanfield, Oxon.  
Established in 1745.
8. E. R. & F. TURNER LIMITED. St. Peter's & Greyfriars Works,  
Ipswich, Suffolk.  
Established in 1837 by Henry Bond, Walton Turner and George  
Hurwood. Registered June 1897. London Office : 82 Mark Lane,  
London, E.C.3.
9. BULL MOTORS LIMITED.  
Began in Stowmarket by Napier Prentice in 1898 as East Anglian  
Engineering Company Limited. Registered in 1902. Name  
changed to A.G.E. Electric Motors Limited, 17th August 1920.  
Registered as Bull Motors Limited on 23rd November 1922. In  
voluntary liquidation, 25th August 1933. Transferred to E. R.  
& F. Turner Limited.. Acquired by A.O. Smith Corporation of  
America in November 1969.
10. CHARLES BURRELL & SONS LIMITED. St. Nicholas Works, Thetford,  
Norfolk.  
Established in 1770. Registered as a limited liability  
company in July 1884. In voluntary liquidation 29th December 1932.
11. BURRELL'S HIRING COMPANY LIMITED. Thetford, Norfolk.  
Established in 1887. Registered ten years later. By 29th  
December 1932 was in voluntary liquidation.
12. DAVEY, PAXMADT & COMPANY LIMITED. Standard Ironworks,  
Colchester, Essex.  
Established in 1865 and incorporated in April 1898.
13. PETER BROTHERHOOD LIMITED. Peterborough.  
Established in 1867 by Kitto & Brotherhood in London.  
Converted into a private limited liability company by 1907.  
In 1937 changed to a public company.
14. RICHARD GARRET & SONS LIMITED. Leiston Works, Leiston,  
Suffolk.  
Began in 1778 and was registered in April 1897.  
  
With all this might and knowhow under one huge umbrella one  
would have thought everything was set fair. However, the  
Agricultural & General Engineers Limited just was not meant to

Succeed as a conglomerate.

One of the first firms to fold was the Thetford company of Charles Burrell, makers of the famous steam engines so admired and revered by today,s enthusiasts and preservationists. By 1930 anything that was of use had been moved to Garretts of\_Leiston. A few road locomotives were completed at Leiston but this only had the effect of putting off the inevitable. In February 1932 the A & G E was in the Receivers hands. Garretts closed on 15th February and then partially opened on the 25th. By April the Liquidator appeared on the scene.

Salvation appeared in the form of Sir Sam Fay of Great Central Railway fame, and on 20th July 1932, Beyer, Peacock & Company Limited of Gorton took over, the Company changing its name to Richard Garrett Engineering Works Limited. The original company was removed from the register in 1936.

Some of the members used perfins:

451.3	A&P	10,14,11	4½mm (I)	No. 1
190	EH/B/&Co	10,12/13/12,8,6	4½mm (IIIa)	No. 3
584	B&P/P	14,14,10/10	5½mm (III)	No. 5
197.2	R.G.	13,10	5½mm	No. 14

Another is known with Bedford postmarks but has not yet been positively identified:

282	J&FH	7,14,8,11	4mm (IIIa)	No. 2
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A letter I sent to the Managing Director of Richard Garrett arrived at a very opportune moment and the reply is worth quoting from,

".... one of our retired financial Directors was in the office ... He worked with the Company from the time he was a boy and personally used the perforating machine... The procedure was that the stamps purchased from the Post Office were guarded jealously 'until they had been perforated, under supervision, and then they were issued to the Mailing Department. The machine is no longer around but as far as can be remembered stamped two stamps at a time.... The press was in use in the early 1900's and we believe was used up until 1936/7... No records were kept standard procedure to perforate everything"

Of the stamps that I have seen with the R.G, perfin all were cancelled with the D16 duplex for Leiston. The issues being Q.V. 1d lilac and the low values of K.E.V11.

Acknowledgement: Thanks are due to Mr. M.W. Hilton, Managing Director of Richard Garrett Engineering Limited.