

Chapter 1 The Ferrabees at Thrupp.

The earliest records show that there was a cloth mill on this site in 1381, when John Hokkevale, a tucker was living at Lippiat. The property was known at that time as Huckfields/Huckvales Court.

By 1770, the property had passed to a Joseph Wathern, who was described as one of the most considerable clothiers in the county at the time of his death in 1786. His widow, Anne, owned the property in 1792 which now included a house, 3 or 4 fulling mills, and a gig mill, known locally as Wathern's or Thrupp Mill.

The first reference to Ferrabee in connection with the Thrupp Mill is in 1793, when it was leased to Edward Ferrabee (Veraby). An indenture of 1826 refers to John Ferrabee, the son of Edward, as a machine maker. This suggests the he was making items for the woollen industry, probably mostly of wood, as was customary at that date. The iron foundry was in operation here by 1828, as a cast nameplate bearing that date still survives, although it's present whereabouts is unknown. The name Phoenix Iron Works came into use at the same time. By now, the entire mill premises were leased to the Ferrabees.

In 1830, the works started to produce the Budding lawn mower. (see appendix 1). John Ferrabee had a well established sales network for his agricultural implements and cloth machinery, but realised that he needed greater range. In 1832 Ransomes of Ipswich were granted a licence to produce and retail the Budding mower. Initially, Ransomes were acting as wholesaler from their Bury St. Edmunds showroom, but in 1837 they started to produce the machines under licence. The range was extended with the introduction of 16inch and 22

inch cut machines, and by 1840, over a thousand had been sold.

The Phoenix Iron Works appears to have prospered, as in 1843, John Ferrabee purchased the whole of the property from the Wathern family for £4000.

When the Uley Iron works closed in 1846, the patterns and designs were taken over by John Ferrabee who continued to produce the “Uley” range of agricultural machinery. In addition, some of Richard Clyburn’s designs also appeared, produced by Ferrabee.

Ferrabee’s display at the Royal Agricultural show at Northampton in 1847 included several of the “Uley” implements, as well as the Budding mower, and adjustable spanner.

Further improvement were made to the mowers by 1852, and two more sizes were added, a 30 inch and a 36 inch. By now, over 4000 machines had been sold. In their advertisements in 1852, they stated that only mowers with the name Budding were guaranteed, a suggestion of competition from a new source. Actually, the Patent office had allowed the patenting of improvements in design, and this opened up the field to others.

John was joined in the business by his sons, James and Henry, trading as John Ferrabee and Sons, until his retirement in 1852, when the name changed to James and Henry Ferrabee. In 1851, the census data shows that 90 men were employed at the works. The partnership between James and Henry was dissolved amicably, and James became the sole proprietor.

James Ferrabee continued the production of the Budding mower, and exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1862. For financial reasons, however, the Ferrabees discontinued

operation at the Phoenix works in 1863, and the works were leased to George Wailes & Company, of Euston Road, London for 11 years. Little is known of this firm, except that a brother of the owner, John Wailes was appointed works manager at the Phoenix Iron works, but was dismissed for erratic timekeeping. The family of George Wailes resided at the Phoenix House, but due to constant complaints about the water supply, they finally sold the lease on October 22nd 1872.