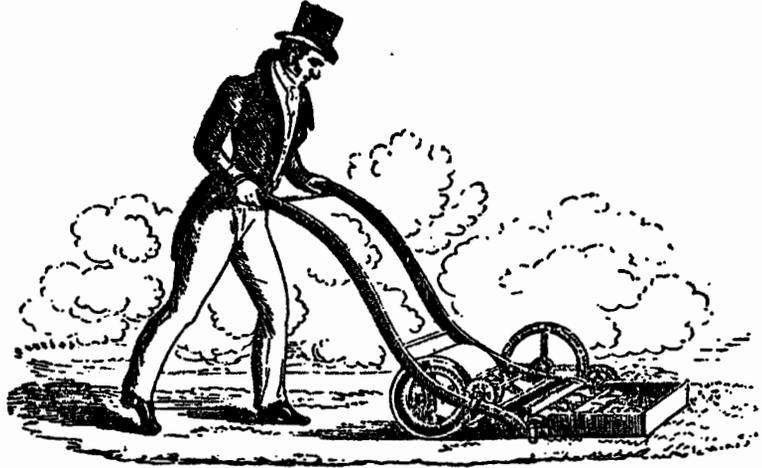


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PLAQUE COMMEMORATING THE FIRST LAWNMOWER

G. S. ANNIS



Edwin Beard Budding was a mechanic working for John Ferrabee at the Phoenix Foundry, Thrupp, around 1830. Budding developed the helical cutter used in cloth napping machines and applied it to grass cutting. It is said that trials of the prototype mower were carried out on the lawn of Phoenix House and at night, to preserve the secrecy of the invention.

In 1830 Budding surrendered his rights to the invention to Ferrabee who manufactured the mower for some while after 1831. It isn't known how many mowers were made at Phoenix Iron Works, perhaps demand exceeded capacity, for Ferrabee ultimately licenced Ransome's of Ipswich to use the design, so Ransome's may be considered the oldest commercial manufacturers of lawn mowers in the world.

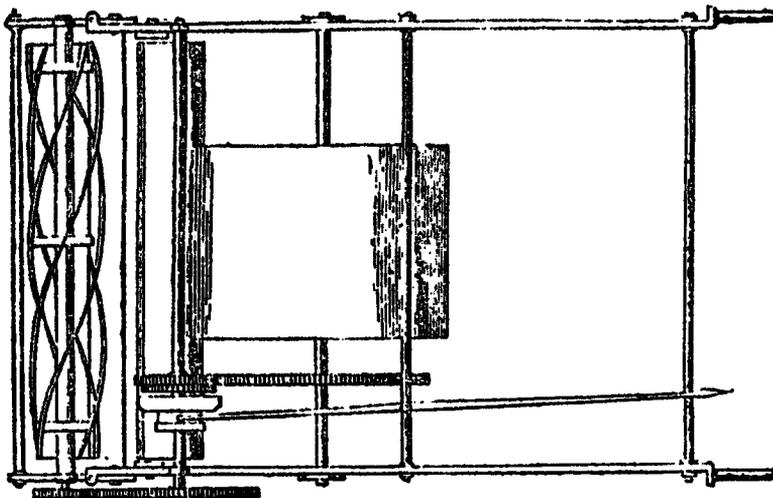
Budding died in 1846 aged 51, not a rich man. His descendents have worked for George Waller & Son Ltd who started business at Phoenix Iron Works in 1866 and the last member of the family to be employed there retired in 1964.

On 20 October a plaque commemorating Budding's invention and the connection with John Ferrabee was unveiled at the Phoenix Iron Works by our President, Mr David Vecey. It quotes the patent which says 'Country gentlemen may find in using my machine themselves an amusing useful and healthy exercise.'

The Society is indebted to Mr Goodfellow, Managing Director of Waller's, for his interest and generosity in supporting this venture. His Company mounted an exhibition illustrating their business over the years and the mower itself was on show. The ceremony was well attended by representatives of the Society, Company staff and the Chairman of the Stroud UDC and RDC, and, followed by cocktails, presented a very pleasant occasion.

George Wallers are transferring their business to Chesterfield and the premises at Thrupp are to be leased to R.A.Lister & Co for whom Edwin Budding went to work after he left Phoenix. The old foundry is to be demolished and a new works entrance will be made on its site. We have agreed with the new owner, Mr John Vick, that this will make the most appropriate final site for the plaque and it will be transferred there from its present position on the Waller office block in about 18 months time.

Reference to Budding and the Ferrabees is made in The Waller Story produced by the Company in 1972 to mark their centenary. The unveiling was reported, with photographs, in the Citizen on 22 October and Stroud News and Journal on 25 October. Other plaques erected by the GSIA are at Benson's Tool Works, commemorating Brimscombe Port, headquarters of the Thames and Severn Canal Co. 1785 - 1933; The Hop Pole, Gloucester Road, Cheltenham, the site of the terminus of the Gloucester-Cheltenham Railway, a horse tramway for the transport of freight, and at the Newent by-pass, site of the Gloucester-Hereford Railway which replaced the Gloucester-Herefordshire Canal.



Illustrations of Budding's mowing machine from the Gardener's Magazine 1832.