

## From THE STEAM PLOUGH TIMES March 1987

### A story of wartime airfield tree pulling By the late Harry Maxey

At the end of Autumn 1940 I took Albert Goodall's set of steam cultivators into his yard at Welton, nr. Lincoln, after a wet spell and they were then going to be stored away for the winter.

I had been in charge of the set that summer and although I was only 29 years old, there were not many men of that age who had charge of a steam plough set. My other driver a most likeable man, Sid Marwood of Wickenby, nr. Lincoln, did not want the responsibility. Although 16 years older than I, Sid was a true steam man and we never had a wrong word. Albert Goodall offered me a job driving a threshing set, but I turned it down as I lived at Skellingthorpe which was 12 miles away from Welton. It meant a cycle ride of 25 miles each day so I turned it down and got a job at a local gravel pit operating a steam dredger in the middle of a large lake. After a few weeks of this I got a summons from the then Labour Exchange to report to a place and time of their choosing!

I was registered as a steam engine driver and I was to take charge of a set of ploughing engines which were commandeered by the Air Ministry and we were to pull down some trees at Ingham Airfield, which were preventing aircraft from successfully landing.

Yes, you've guessed – the engines commandeered were Goodall's and I was in charge again! Goodall's were to supply oil, grease, waste for cleaning shackles, chains, etc. and do any necessary repairs. I collected the engines, with living van and water cart, over a period of two days with the help of an ex-roller driver who was not given to the idea that hard work killed horses! We had the services of a sawyer from the timber firm of Holmes of Wragby in charge of felling and it was very hard work - cutting round the roots and it was all axe and crosscut saw. We had no chain driven or power saws then. When ready the tree would be pulled down by the engine with the aid of snatch-block and chains.

We made steady progress and gradually the engines got further apart. In the first half of January 1941 they were almost a mile apart. One engine was at the side of the A15 Lincoln-Brigg road and the other was near to the Windmill Inn on the B1398 cliff road. I cycled between the engines daily and soon work was brought to a standstill by the severe frosts that were occurring, plus the blackout regulations. It was very difficult to steam the engines during the period as the fires were banked down at 3.30 to 4 p.m. and the tops were not removed until 8 a.m. or after and sometimes the fire had gone out. There were several complaints as the blackout restrictions were violated several times - this forced the Ministry to call a halt to the job...

I took one engine and living van back to Welton and next day the second engine and water cart. So ended an experience few men have seen and I'm sure there are not many men who have steamed a pair of engines a mile apart and used them at the same time.

For the benefit of those interested the engines were 1913 FOWLER BB1, 14 hp. (2 speed ploughing gear) and were named HERO and HEROINE. Heroine was No. 13776 and reg. no. was BP 6123. Hero was No. 13777 and reg. no. BP 6121. They were two very good engines and had been carefully worked and looked after but sad to say they are now derelict and almost beyond repair. Albert Goodall sold the set to Nicholson Bros, farmers of Faldingworth, near Market Rasen in 1941 and Nicholsons only did two fields with them and I was the last recognised driver of them. Nicholson Bros, have now, like me, been caught by Father Time and when I last saw Jack Nicholson and spoke to him on the subject of Hero and Heroine he like his brothers was not bothered. They have another set\* in their yard and this set has been robbed right and left and are derelict too.

So ends another chapter in the life of a steam plougher, to wit -  
Harry Maxey.

20.11.86

\* These are BBls Nos. 15416 (BE7517) and 15417 "BLACK PRINCE" (BE7516), completed May 1919.

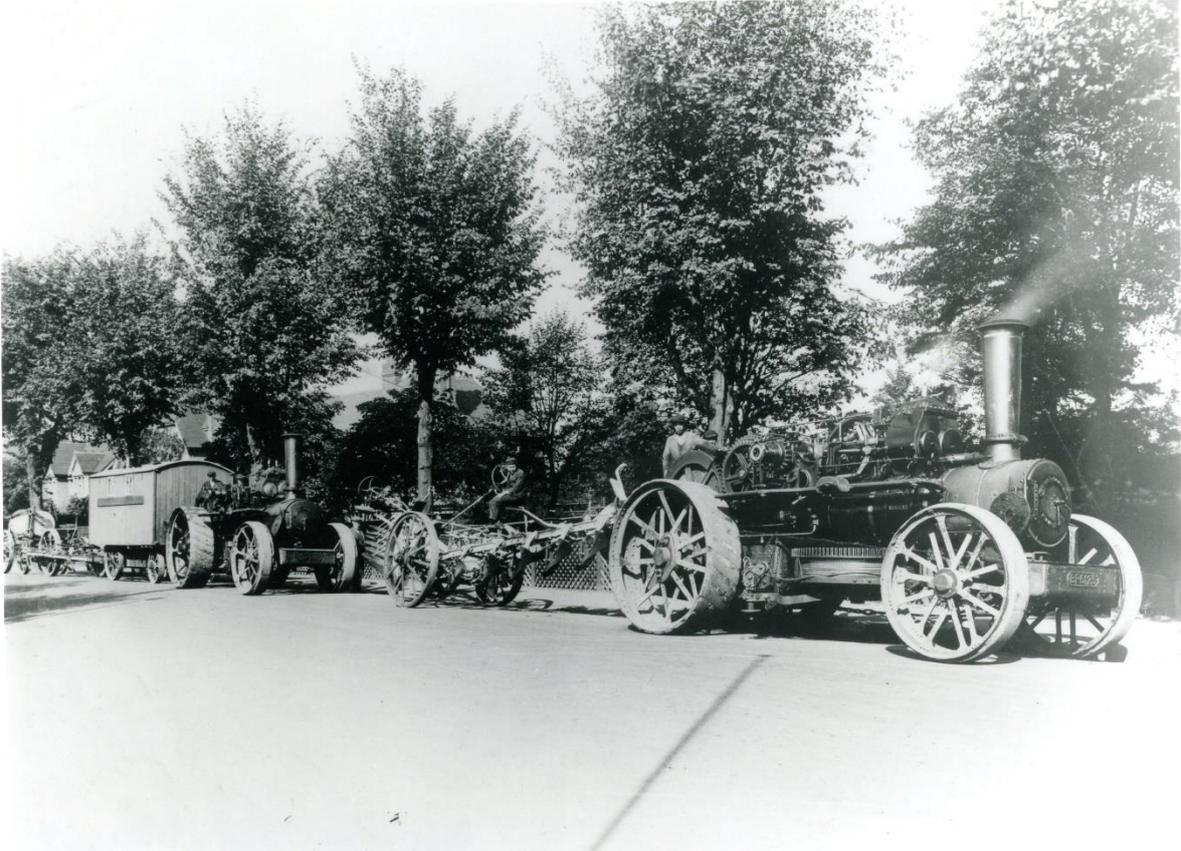
Note

Engines 13776 and 13777 survive as recorded operational in Lincolnshire. Contrary to the account above they are 14hp BBs (originally delivered to John Sparkes in July 1913). BB1s 15416 and 15417 are now recorded as operational in Scotland.

Harry Maxey, one of the old-time steam men contributed many reminiscences of his life and times with the old steam plough gangs in earlier STEAM PLOUGH TIMES. He died in February 1992.

JB

31.03.21



From SPC archives

Fowler BB 13776 "Heroine" and Fowler BB 13777 "Hero" with plough, living van and cultivator in tow