

CARVER

SEVEN GENERATIONS
OF SUCCESS

NIGEL WATSON



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OF SUCCESS

Carver Group Ltd and Engineering Innovation

NIGEL WATSON

ST MATTHEW'S PRESS

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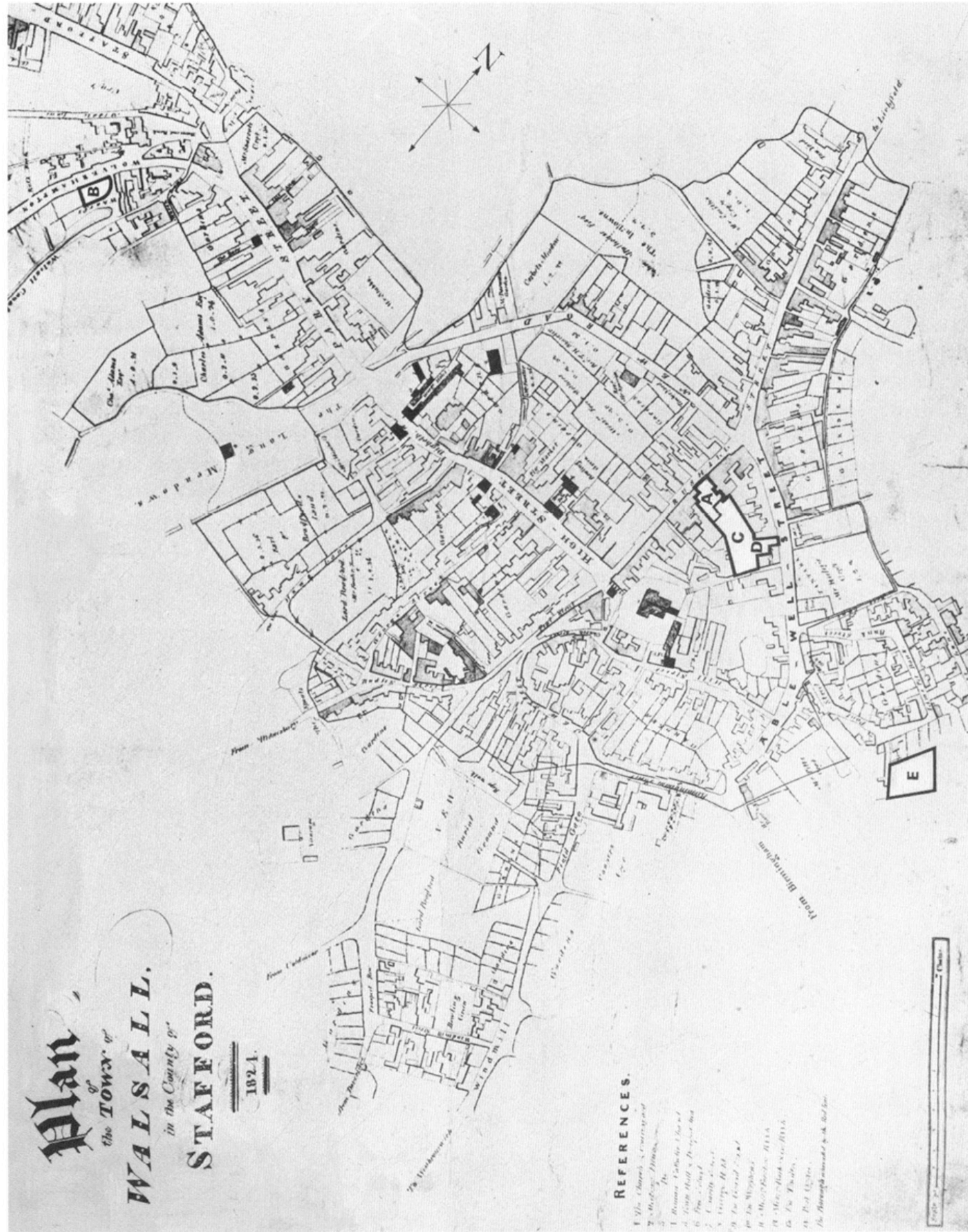
Author's Acknowledgements

THIS SHORT HISTORY OF THE CARVER GROUP covers more than two centuries, a remarkable achievement in itself. More interestingly, it demonstrates how the business has survived and flourished by adapting to the social and economic changes which have taken place, particularly during the last hundred years or so. Today, with the vital addition of professional management, the Carver Group remains a successful family owned business.

I would like to thank in particular David Carver for all his enthusiasm for this project and all the invaluable help which he gave me. At Carver's Aldridge head office I was also grateful for the kind assistance shown to me by Jane Turner and Marlene Smith. Tim Carver not only provided me with a considerable amount of material relating to the development of the business but, along with his mother, Nancy, he was kind enough to talk to me about his late father and the family's

involvement. David Carver also gave up his time to talk to me about the business as did Doug Morrison, Peter Hall and Beryl Thorpe, to all of whom I am very grateful. Part of the research for the text and the illustrations was conducted at the Walsall Local History Centre whose staff were always informative and helpful. I would wish especially to thank Ruth Vyse. A number of the illustrations have been reproduced by kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre. Any remaining errors inevitably remain the responsibility of the author.

NIGEL WATSON
SUMMER 2002



Superimposed on this plan of Walsall from 1824 are the locations of the Carver business: (A) is the Rushall Street workshop which was expanded gradually from 1824 until 1887 to include the properties marked (C) and (D) fronting Ablewell Street. The premises at Park Street Wharf are marked (B) while Eldon Street is labelled (E).

Foreword

By David Carver

Chairman of Carver PLC

CARVER PLC TODAY thrives on the basis of looking forward, planning for the future and adapting to changing circumstances. The essence of this survival technique was probably much the same for the six generations of my forebears except that today we like to think that change is more rapid than it was in the past.

This may be too simplistic an observation. Technical and commercial changes have tended to be rapid throughout history — the change from gas lighting to electricity (which was repeated in the caravan industry in my working lifetime), the change from the horse to the internal combustion engine — which was well before my lifetime! What has changed is that the period of stability between changes has become ever shorter.

The history of Carver has been governed by these changes. Some have been handled more successfully than others, but we are still here — 225 years on from our foundation and coping with the biggest change to date, that of globalisation of trade. We are still in manufacturing at a time when that sector has shrunk from being responsible for more than 70% of local employment and wealth creation to less than half that

figure in a period of 15 years. By choosing to remain in manufacturing we are not heading for extinction like the dinosaurs but flourishing by striving towards world class performance in terms of production and management and by being of sufficient significance in our markets to be influential.

This book looks at the personalities and forces that have brought the company from its small beginnings to the substantial business it is today. Carver PLC is one of a very select group of firms in an historical sense in that it has remained within one family throughout seven generations. What is interesting to me, and I hope to you, is the different ways in which each generation has influenced the business throughout that time. My uncle, Jos Carver, commissioned a history 25 years ago for our 200th anniversary. It has to be said that 225 years is less notable in numeric terms but, since the last 25 years have seen more changes than occurred in the last 125, I felt it worthwhile putting another peg in the ground at the beginning of this new millennium by which future generations might measure their effects on the business in years to come.

SUMMER 2002

Whipmakers of Walsall — 1776–1880

THE LINKS BETWEEN the Carver family and the town of Walsall stretch back over more than two centuries and the business which Joseph Carver established in the town in the 1770s continues to flourish under the ownership of his descendants. But to achieve this remarkable record, the firm, like the town, has changed out of all recognition. As the industry from which the firm profited for more than a century fell into decline so the family moved into other spheres, gradually building up a reputation for innovation and ingenuity which has stood the firm in good

stead as it enters a further phase of expansion and development in the 21st century.

When Joseph Carver first set up his business in Walsall in the 1770s, it was a thriving market town with a population of some eight thousand people. The town grew steadily and by the end of the century one commentator could remark that it 'surely deserves to be better known ... its situation is particularly striking, on a bold eminence from the summit of which rises its fine old Gothic Church and lofty spire, the streets and houses gradually descending on every side'. A large



This view of Walsall from about 1830 would have changed little from the late eighteenth century. The parish church rises above the tightly clustered buildings around it, among which was the Carver workshop in Rushall Street.



This group of loriners worked for the firm of Smith, Bayliss & Nettlefold during the 1930s but it is evident that little had changed in the trade for many years. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

part of the town's prosperity stemmed from the light metal goods made in the town. Locks had been made in Walsall since the sixteenth century and for many years the town was renowned for making buckles for shoes until fashions changed with the advent of laces. In the late eighteenth century came the development alongside the buckle trade of saddlers' ironmongery, known as lorinery, making spurs, stirrups, bits, snaffles and curbs. In 1770 there were ten saddlers' ironmongers and eighty-four buckle makers in the town. By the 1790s another boost had been given to Walsall's prosperity when the town was finally linked to the network of canals in the Midlands which made it cheaper to transport local coal, ironstone, limestone and lime. The Napoleonic Wars stimulated the saddlers' ironmongery trade which expanded to meet rising demand from the military. This brought twenty years of prosperity and encouraged the development of the town's infant saddlery trade which grew up alongside saddlers' ironmongery.

One of the earliest known members of the saddlery trade was John Carver. His father Joseph is known to have bought a house and warehouse off Rushall Street

in Walsall in 1776 which eventually became known as Carver's Yard. Thirteen years later, it is Joseph's son, John, who is described as a whip thong maker in a contract of employment dated 24 July 1789 when he engaged another whip thong maker called John Smith. An experienced man, Smith was also expected to give instruction in the art of whip making to John Carver's young apprentice, John Brockhurst. The Carver business was already well-established at a time when whip making was only just developing as a separate branch of the leather trade in the town. Thomas Penrose was making whips in Walsall in 1770 but there were still only four whip makers listed in the town by 1818.

John Carver died in 1813 and his business was carried on by his son Joseph. It became traditional within the family to name Carver sons as John or Joseph. By 1821 Joseph was a man of sufficient substance and respect to give £40 towards the rebuilding costs of St Matthew's parish church which brought him his own pew in the gallery 'for the use of himself and Family so long as they shall continue inhabitants of the parish'. This second Joseph Carver was not content with concentrating on the whip making

to and with the said Joseph Smith that he the said John Carver his Executor or Administrators shall and will weekly and at the end of every week during the said Term let and truly pay or cause to be paid unto the said Joseph Smith for the work and Labour to be by him done and performed as aforesaid the same and usual Rates Rates and Summe of Money which shall in this like and some Cases be usually and generally paid and given by the said John Carver to his other Executors and Assigns for the time being or in the same Terms and for the same Sort of Work And Also that he the said John Carver his Executor and Administrators shall and will at his and their own Costs and Charges find and Provide Constant Work and Employ And also shall keep them that are and shall be of all sorts for the said Joseph Smith during the said Term of Seven Years In Testimony whereof they the said Joseph Smith and John Carver have hereunto set and put their Hands and Seals the Day and Year first before written

John Carver
John Smith
John Carver

Received of and from the said John Carver the Sum of Ten Pounds and four Shillings being the full Consideration Money with in mentioned to be paid by him to me the undersigned Hand
Joseph F. Smith
John Wilson

Witness
John Wilson

Articles of Agreement
 Twenty fourth Day of July last the said John Carver and Eighty nine by and between Joseph Smith of the Borough of Walsall in the County of Stafford Whip Thong Maker of the one Part and John Carver of the same Place Whip Thong Maker of the other Part Joseph Smith in Consideration of the Rates and Prices for Work in and by these Presents agreed to be paid to him by the said John Carver as hereinafter is mentioned Doth hereby for himself his Executors and Assigns to and with the said John Carver his Executors and Administrators That he the said Joseph Smith shall and will from the Day of the Date hereof for and during and unto the full end and Term of Seven Years from henceforth notwithstanding and fully to be Content and Satisfied with and Faithfully and to the utmost of his Skill in Addition to Work and Labour for and truly to do the said John Carver his Executors or Administrators as hereinafter is said and therein contained in the last Terms and Conditions of Whips Thong Making in all the various Branches which are now used and in every Working Day during the said Term shall and will work in the Service and Pursuits of the said John Carver his Executors and Administrators in his other Workshops or in such other Place or Places as he or they shall direct or appoint And Also shall and will make complete and finish all such goods which he the said Joseph Smith shall be employed about or

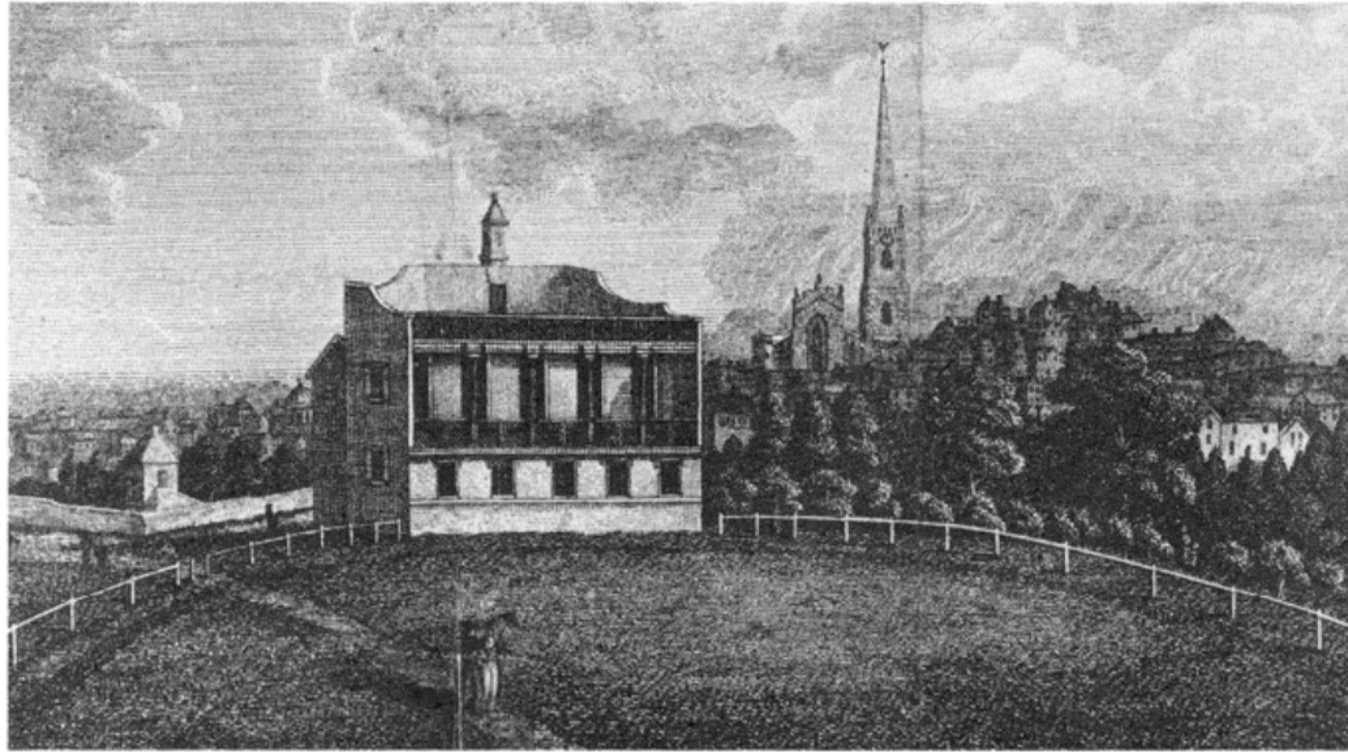
to and with the said Joseph Smith that he the said John Carver his Executor or Administrators shall and will weekly and at the end of every week during the said Term let and truly pay or cause to be paid unto the said Joseph Smith for the work and Labour to be by him done and performed as aforesaid the same and usual Rates Rates and Summe of Money which shall in this like and some Cases be usually and generally paid and given by the said John Carver to his other Executors and Assigns for the time being or in the same Terms and for the same Sort of Work And Also that he the said John Carver his Executor and Administrators shall and will at his and their own Costs and Charges find and Provide Constant Work and Employ And also shall keep them that are and shall be of all sorts for the said Joseph Smith during the said Term of Seven Years In Testimony whereof they the said Joseph Smith and John Carver have hereunto set and put their Hands and Seals the Day and Year first before written

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Joseph F. Smith
John Wilson

Witness
John Wilson

These articles of agreement from 1789 are the oldest surviving document in the Carver archive and provide clear evidence that the family were already well-established as makers of whip thongs.



This elegant Georgian grandstand belonged to Walsall racecourse, seen here in 1809, and was just one of the more frivolous reminders of the prevalence of the horse in people's lives.

business. He took premises at Park Street Wharf by the canal where he opened a coal yard, delivering to many local customers. As was the custom in those days, accounts were often settled late and in kind rather than in cash. The local commissioners, who were responsible for the rates in the town, set off their coal account in 1825 against Joseph's rates bill. Mr Yates, a grocer, settled his account in October 1826 with goods worth £2 17s 1d which was a lot of groceries in those days. Today it would probably be worth around £180. William Taylor, a local builder, paid his bill with building work. Many customers bought saddlery as well as coal from Joseph Carver who during the 1820s was described as a saddler rather than a whip thong manufacturer. Mr Glover during the summer of 1827 added to his coal bill the following saddlery items - one 'Plow Lash' at 5d, a 'new Cart Bridle' at 10s 6d, a 'new Collor and housing' at £1 1s 6d, a 'new Cart Belly-board' at 8s, a 'new head Collor with Leather R[e]i[n]' at 7s 6d, a 'new Nose Bag' at 6d and 'Straps & Buckles to Cart Sheett' at 4s. Joseph Carver seems to have been quite an entrepreneur. Alongside the saddlery business and the coal business he also carried out a lot of carting and haulage during the 1820s and 1830s for local timber merchants, builders, stone masons and quarriers, transporting timber, lime, bricks, slate and sand to the canal side at Park Street. He also seems to

have moved for a time into the timber business, buying and felling trees on local estates and even preparing timber as pit props, planking and boarding for sale to the local collieries.

The horse remained the supreme means of providing motive power on land for commercial, personal and agricultural use although many farmers still used oxen to pull their ploughs. This began to change with the development of the railways. As railway lines gradually reached the more remote parts of the United Kingdom they put paid not only to long distance stage coaches but also to many of the short haul carriers. When the Grand Junction Railway reached Walsall in 1836, the town was already one of the four main centres of the British saddlery trade. Walsall and Birmingham together accounted by far for a larger share of the trade than did the two other centres, London and Glasgow. Over the next twenty years Walsall assumed the leading position in the trade as saddlers moved away from Birmingham which turned its attention to other industries. While Walsall's population expanded, growth was not on the same scale as in neighbouring areas like Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry. In Walsall a population of some 12,000 in 1821 reached nearly 27,000 thirty years later. The town continued to be prosperous and was acknowledged as Staffordshire's second

manufacturing town. New streets were laid out and fine new private houses and public buildings were erected.

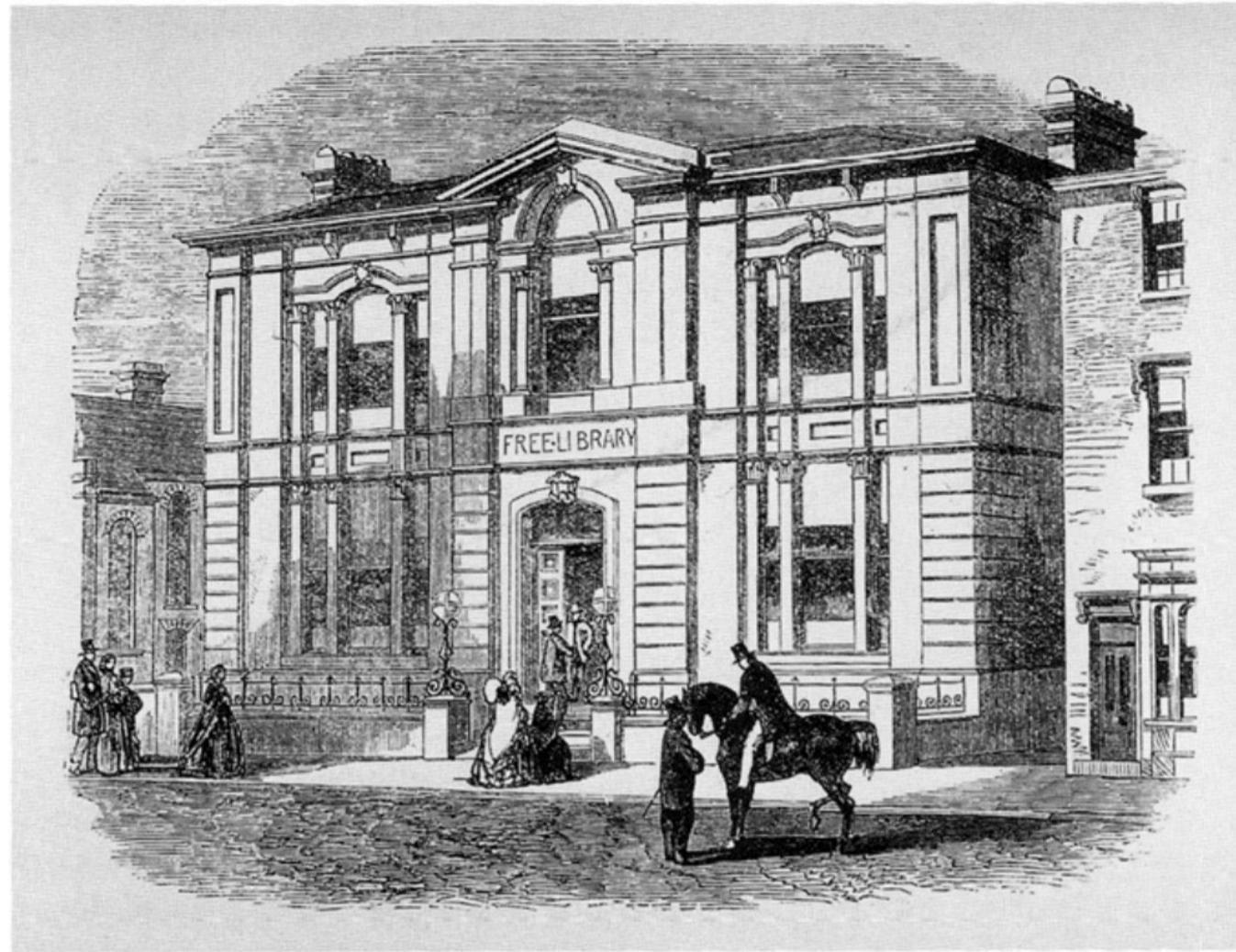
By the middle of the century the shifting nature of the home trade had led Walsall's saddlery manufacturers to start making more expensive luxury items and also to promote exports rather than concentrate upon the domestic market. Joseph Carver was winding down his coal merchant's business and had given up carting and haulage entirely. He had also decided to concentrate entirely upon whips rather than saddlery in general. Joseph was getting older — he was sixty in 1850 — and his two sons from his third marriage were still very young, Joseph being born in 1845 and Francis in 1847. Even before their birth, he had probably decided to cut back the extent of his business activities before they became too much for him. Instead of doing a lot of things pretty well he opted for doing one thing very well indeed.

An old sales day book from the 1850s shows that Joseph's whips were made in three weights, light, middle and heavy. He made military whips and hunting whips, whips for drovers and for stockmen.

There were silk lashes and jockey's lashes, plough lashes and twisted lashes and, as an indication that the horse and the ox were not the only animals which needed to be controlled by the whip, 'knotted dog floggers'. He rarely sold direct to the public, preferring to deal with wholesalers and retailers. Many customers were local and repeated mention of their names shows that Joseph Carver built up a loyal following. He also developed a steady business with the high-class London trade. The ledger refers, for example, to Mr Martin of 64, Burlington Arcade, to Eldred & Company of Cripplegate, to Mr Stokey of Little Moorfield (who took fifty military whips) and, in August 1857 as well as on subsequent occasions, to 'Messrs Swaine & Adeney, 185, Piccadilly, London', suppliers then as now of saddlery and harness to royalty and aristocracy. In the early 1860s Joseph Carver took premises in Ablewell Street in Walsall which backed onto Rushall Street where the property was retained until the 1880s. Joseph lived to be ninety-six, a remarkable age for the time, and his longevity enabled him to see his eldest son, the third Joseph, carry on the business. Joseph junior would probably



Walsall High Street in the mid-nineteenth century provides more serious evidence, in the presence of the coach and horses and the horse and cart, of how essential the horse was for ordinary daily life.



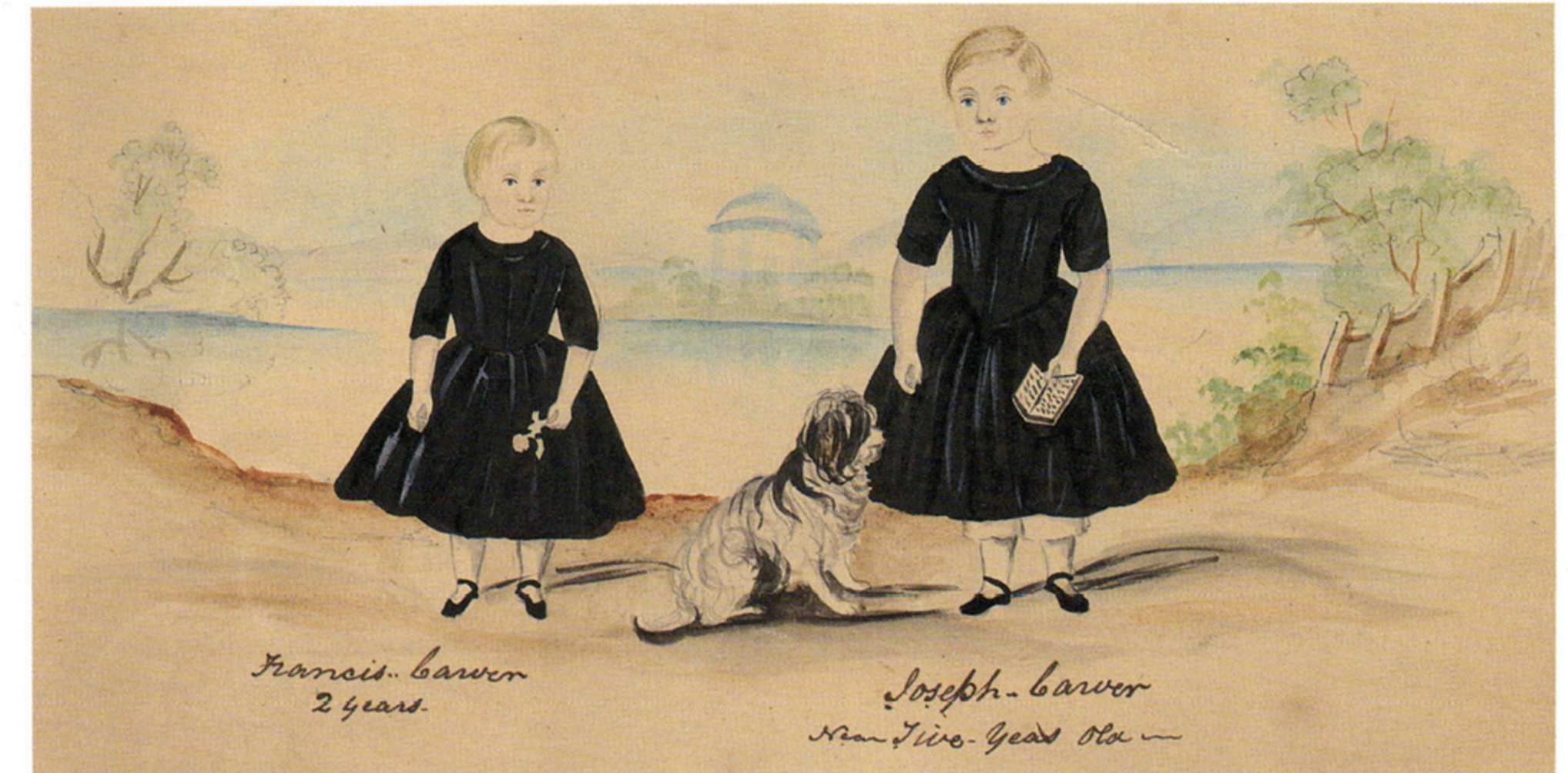
The Free Library in Goodall Street was one of the fine public buildings erected in Walsall during its period of Victorian prosperity. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

have entered the firm upon leaving school but would hardly have had the maturity or experience to take over the business until he had reached twenty in 1865. By then his father would have been in his mid-seventies.

What is absent from the ledger is any indication that the firm had started sending any of its goods overseas although Carver whips will almost certainly have been used by the British army in the Crimea during the mid-1850s, yet another of the nineteenth century wars which gave a periodic boost to the saddlery trade. The specific demands of the War Office encouraged a move towards some standardisation of products as well as greater concentration within the trade as several manufacturers expanded by acquiring rivals in the rush to increase output to meet demand. Like many manufacturers in other industries, the saddlers, whip makers and harness makers found that the colonies of the British Empire, most of them relatively undeveloped, provided almost a

captive market, particularly as competition on the Continent increased during the 1870s. During the 1860s, for example, about a third of the saddlery goods made in Walsall were sent to just two destinations, Australia and New Zealand. From the 1870s South Africa proved to be an attractive market, especially at a time when trade at home was depressed. British saddlery also found its way into the expanding South American and Russian markets.

Important though it was to the town, Walsall's saddlery trade, despite its pre-eminence, could not be considered a major industry. It employed about eleven hundred people in the 1860s and this number remained much the same in the 1900s. The difference by then was that the number of employers had shrunk from 250 to fifty as the trade had consolidated. Nevertheless it was a trade in which young Joseph Carver was a rising star and one from which he earned a prosperous living.



A charming family water-colour from about 1850 showing Francis Carver on the left, aged two years, and Joseph Carver on the right, aged five years, dressed in children's clothing typical of the time. (By kind permission of Mrs Nancy Carver.)



The horse still features in this 1875 photograph of Townend Bank, close to Park Street Wharf. Although the railways were now a faster, more popular way of travelling, the horse and cart was still used for hauling goods short distances. (Note also the inscription on the gable end for a dealer in hay, straw and cut chaff for horses.) But by now the whip makers and saddlers were starting to turn their attention to overseas business.

2

Whipper of the World — 1880-1914

BY THE LATE 1870s the Carvers were a well-established and respected Walsall family. Joseph Carver, still in his early thirties, was held in high enough regard to be appointed one of the first two churchwardens of St George's Church, built in 1875 for a parish established in 1878 in recognition of the town's growing population. (The church was demolished in 1964.) Joseph's surviving bank books suggest that the business had become extremely profitable. In 1876, for example, Joseph's annual income was more than £1,600, which placed him comfortably among the country's highest earners of the time.

Joseph's prosperity came from the export trade. As a young man, he possessed the energy his father had lost

to capitalise upon the opportunities overseas of which many in the trade were already taking advantage. The *Guide to Walsall*, published in 1889, may have been partisan in its sentiments but was justifiably proud that as far as saddlery, harness making and leather goods were concerned, 'for quality of material and excellency of workmanship, Walsall in these branches of industry is unsurpassed and holds its own against the world'. The firm of Joseph Carver was probably one of the largest makers of whips in the world by this time. This was in the context of a British saddlery and harness industry whose entire export business was worth between five and six hundred thousand pounds for all products in the late 1880s, with Walsall manufacturers accounting for about half of this. As far as whip

makers were concerned, there were about 150 in England, Scotland and Wales together with some fifty whip thong manufacturers and thirty makers of whip mounts. More than sixty of the whip makers were based in London while in Walsall Joseph Carver was one of only three, the others being Goddard's in Adams Street and Leech Brothers in Station Street. In 1887 Joseph Carver was a giant in his field,



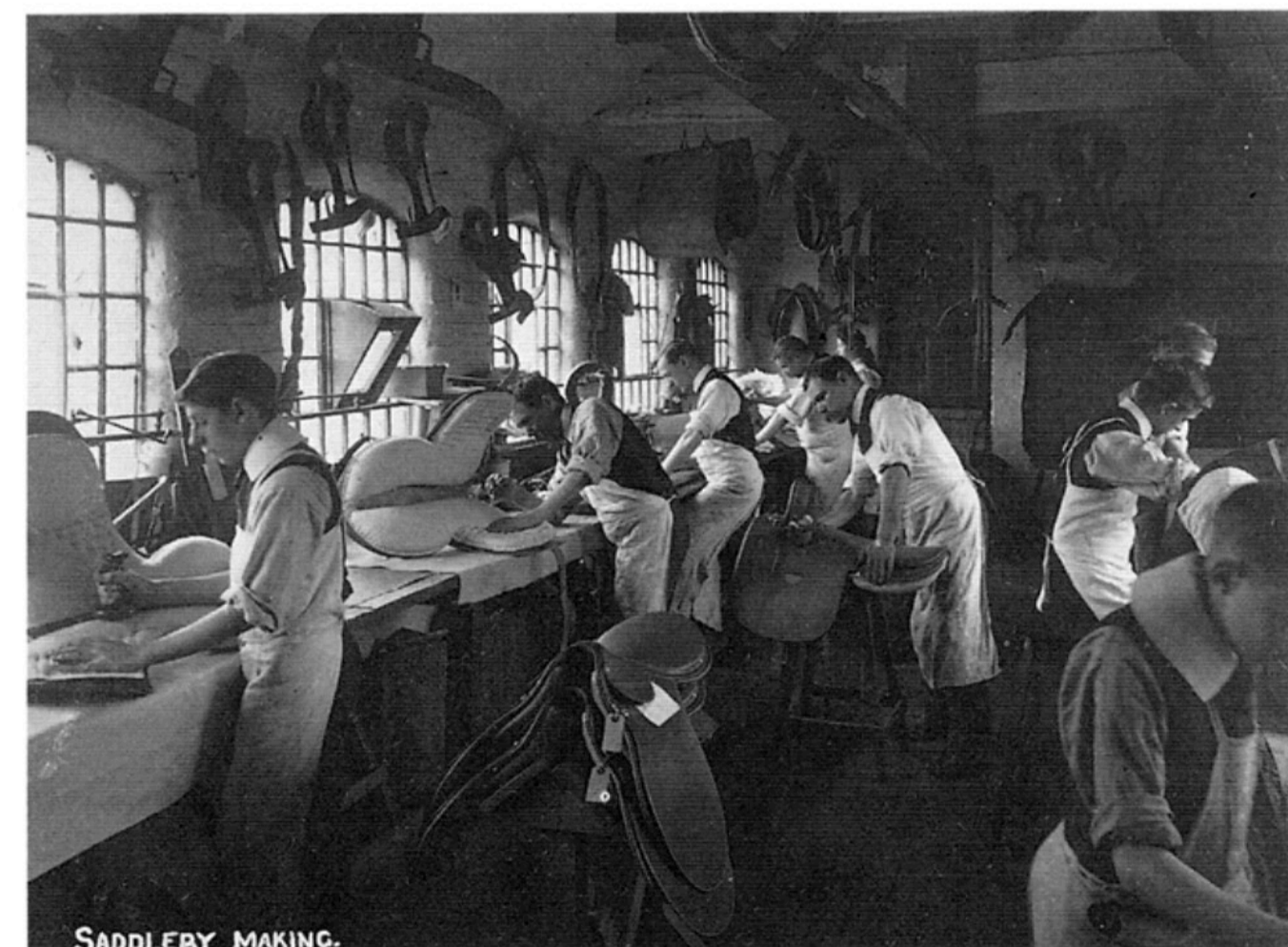
St George's Church in Persehouse Street, Walsall, where Joseph Carver was one of the first churchwardens. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

employing sixty-five people in an industry where most manufacturing units were small because of an emphasis upon skills and quality and the variety of goods produced. In that year the firm had moved into new premises on five floors in Eldon Street, grandly named the Eldon Street Steam Whip & Girth Works. The number of storeys was reduced by two as the result of a serious fire in the summer of 1892. Spotted at lunchtime, the blaze could not be brought under control in time because of a lack of water pressure. Many historical records were lost and the fire caused more than £5,000 of damage but this was offset after the debris had been sifted by the recovery of £2,000 of gold and silver that was used to decorate the whips.

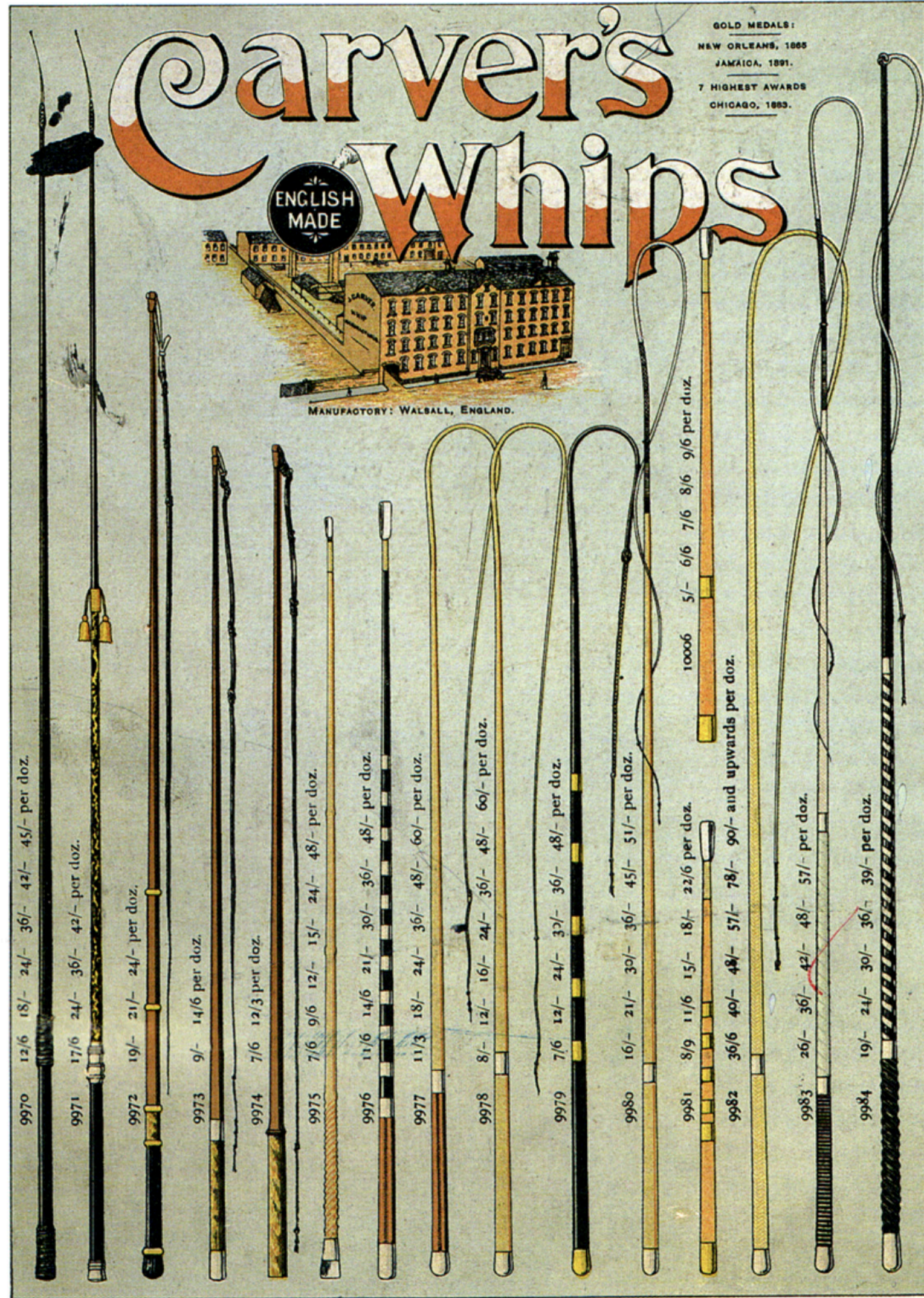
Perhaps Joseph Carver's greatest strength was his considerable flair for marketing which displayed itself to great effect in the catalogues issued by the firm from the 1880s onwards. He emphasised cost and quality, prompt service, fashionable designs and innovatory production techniques employed on the latest plant and machinery with highly skilled workers in modern premises — 'Having put down the most perfect machinery for their manufacture, I am able to defy competition, both in price and quality'. He liked snappy phrases. He was 'Not to be beaten' in the quality of goods and service he provided his



Workers at the firm of A A Stubbs in Lime Street in Walsall stuffing horse collars with straw c1900. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)



Saddlery making in progress in a Walsall workshop in the early years of the twentieth century. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)



Showing only a small sample of the wide range of whips made by Joseph Carver in the late nineteenth century, this illustration also shows the Eldon Street Steam Whip & Girth Works. The right-hand section was in fact never built while the top two storeys were destroyed by fire within five years of being completed.

customers as the 'Whipper of the World'. One page in a catalogue from 1891 proclaimed

Don't
Scratch your head and
Worry Your Brains
Because
If You Cannot Make
And don't know where to obtain
A Special Article
That a customer may require
Write To
CARVER
He Will Do It And You'll Be Pleased.

And that was the thing — he was not trying to persuade the ultimate customer to buy his products but the wholesalers and retailers. If he could impress them not only with the quality of his goods and the efficiency of his service but also with the image which he built up around them, then perhaps they might sell with equal effect to their own customers. As he noted of another product, 'You can recommend them at first; they will recommend themselves afterwards'.

He knew too that the best marketing in the world would be insufficient unless his products measured up to the often extravagant claims he made for them. So Joseph Carver's whips were widely exhibited at the great international trade exhibitions which were all the rage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He won his first gold medal at the New Orleans Exhibition of 1885 and followed this up with further medals at Jamaica in 1891 and at the Chicago World Fair in 1893. The case he despatched to Chicago was described by the local press as 'magnificent'. Twenty feet long, ten feet high and four feet deep, lined with scarlet, it contained seven hundred whips in a wide variety of finishes including gold and silver, mother of pearl, ivory and rhinoceros horn. Joseph accompanied his exhibit to Chicago and was presented upon his return with a brass-bound writing companion case by his loyal workforce. The firm made such an impact in the United States that in December 1896 the American 'Whip King', Ira D Miller, came to



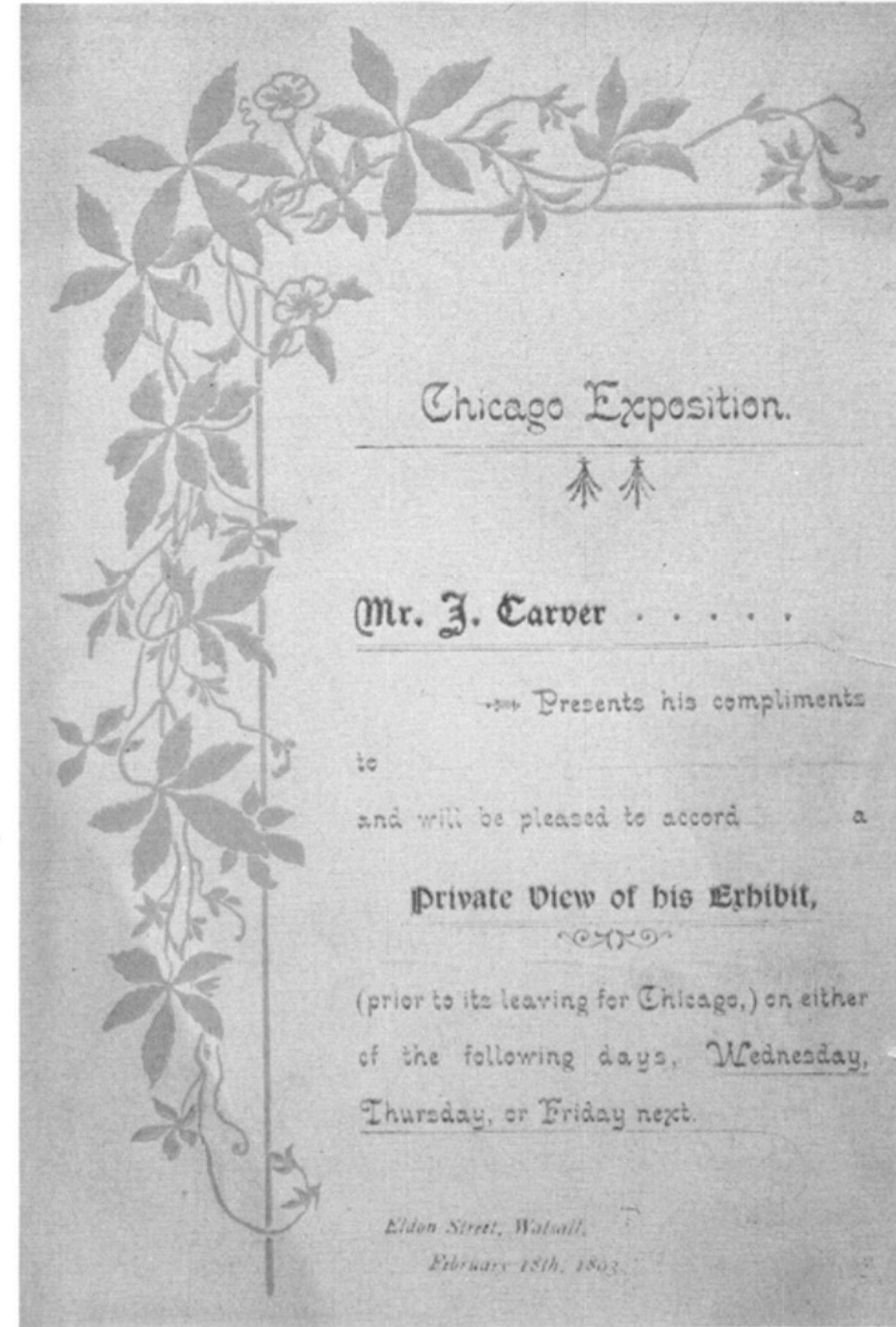
Gold medals won by Joseph Carver at the 1891 Jamaica exhibition and the 1893 Chicago exhibition.



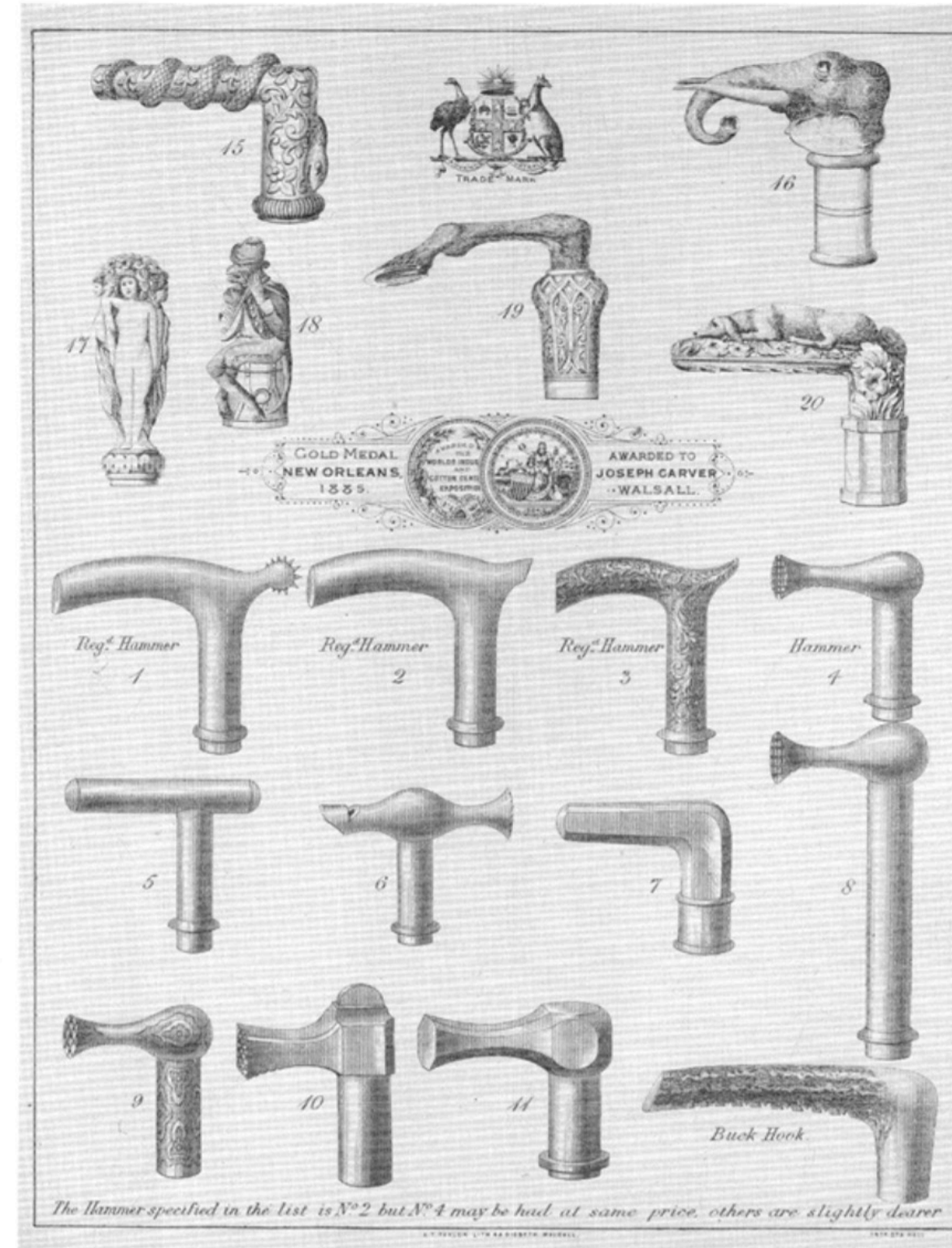
This is the remarkable exhibit which was transported from Walsall across the Atlantic ocean to Chicago in the United States for the exhibition of 1893. It impressed the judges sufficiently to win yet another gold medal for Joseph Carver.



Bottom left: On his return in triumph from Chicago, his loyal employees presented him with this writing case which remains in the family to this day.

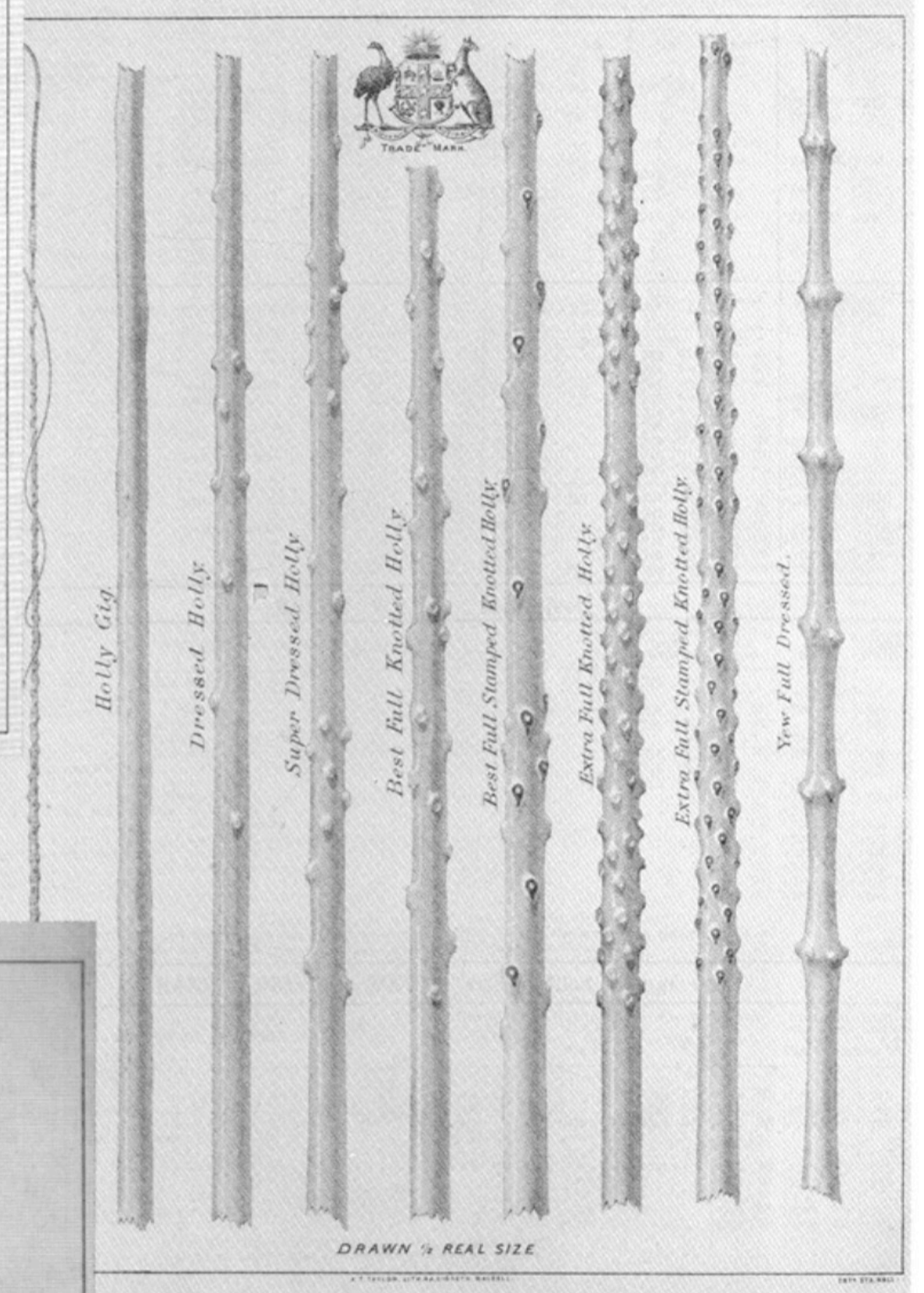


Above: Joseph Carver's pride in his Chicago exhibit and in the evident skill of his workforce encouraged him to issue this select invitation to a private viewing in February 1893.

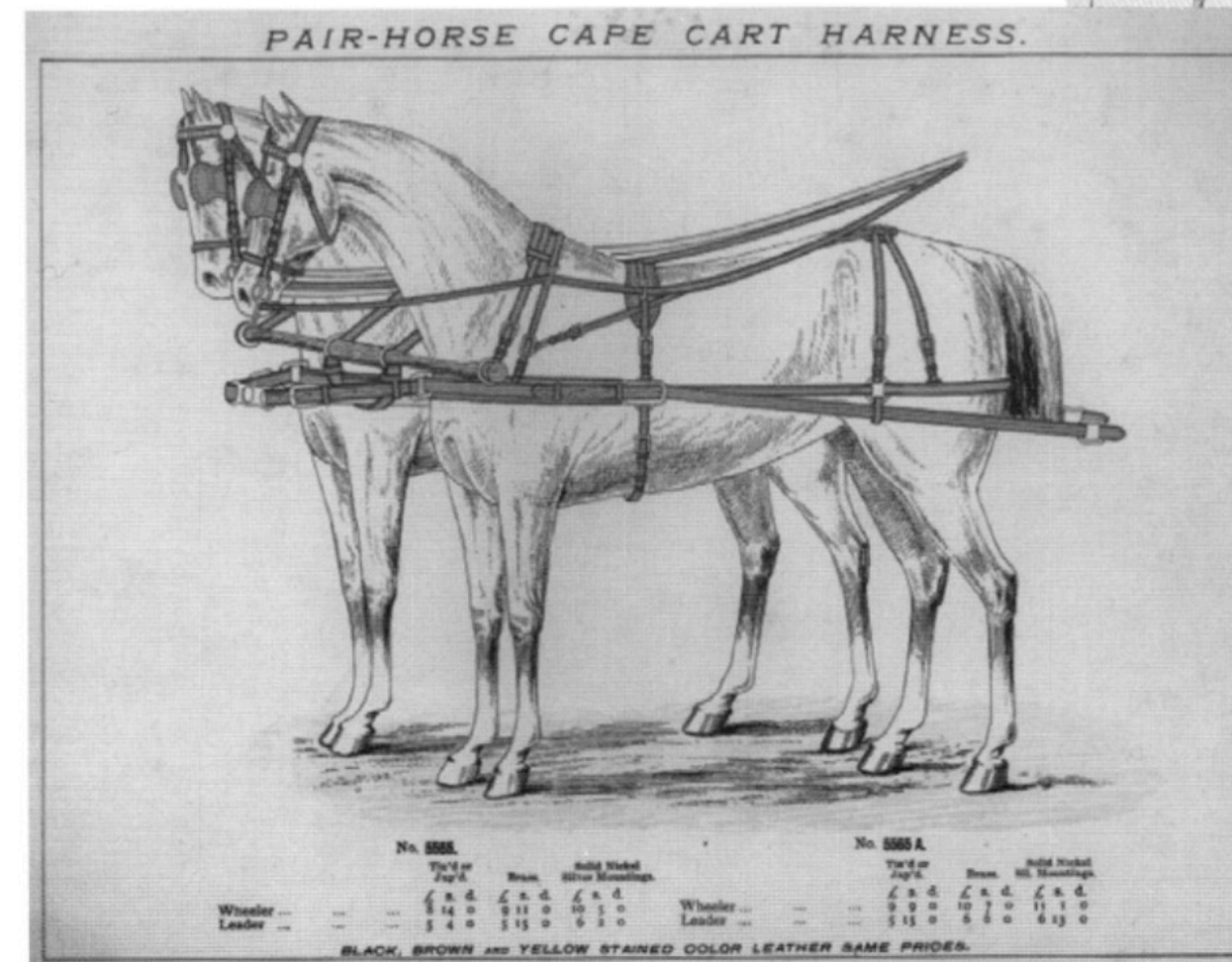


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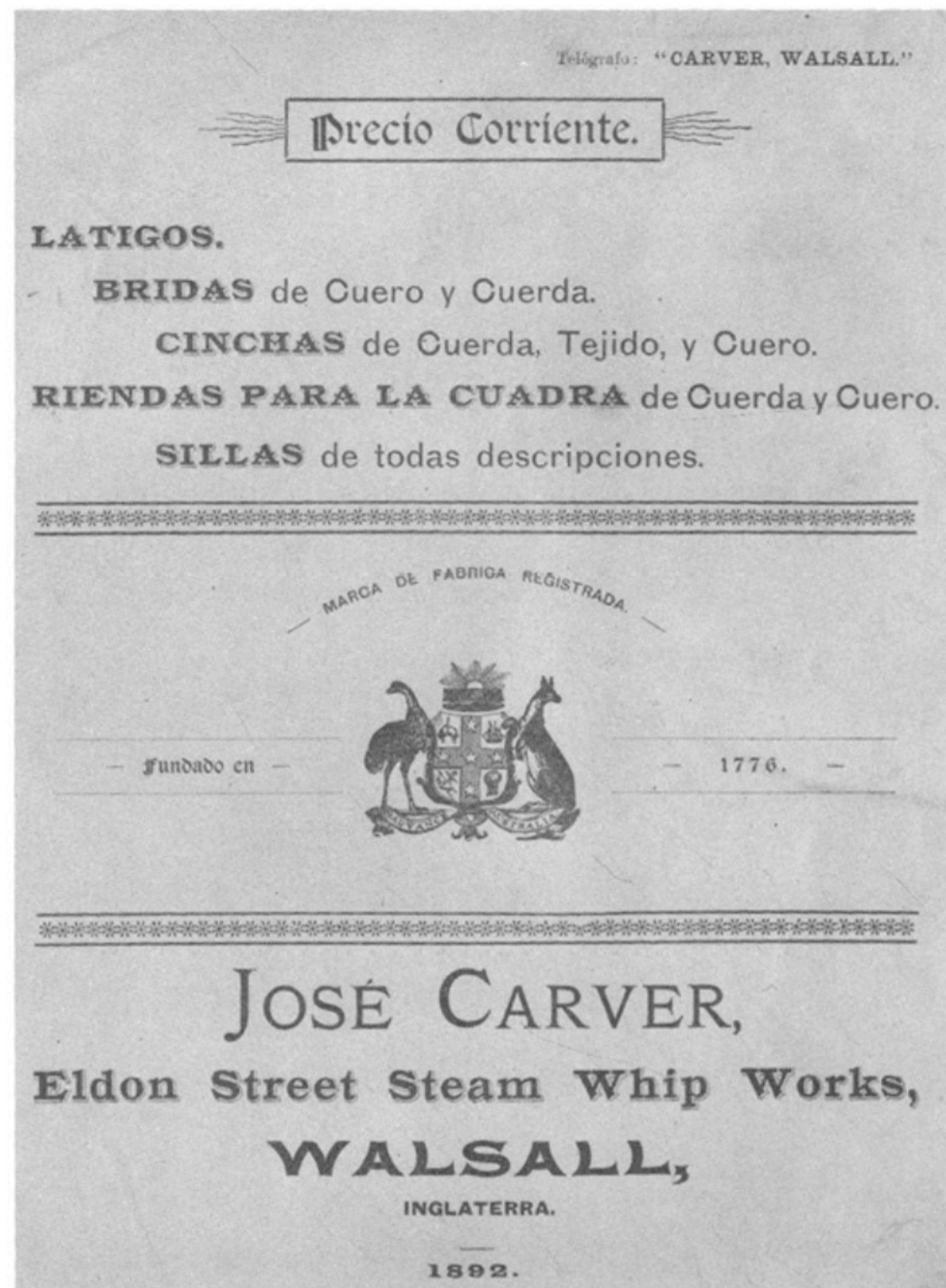
Two contrasting extracts from Carver's 1887 catalogue. The first (1) shows figure heads which Carver added to the whips made in Eldon Street and which were nearly always made in neighbouring Birmingham. The second (2) illustrates a more fundamental range of products, the stick driving whips made from holly and yew and adopted by cart, gig and cab drivers.



(2)



An elegant depiction of a pair-horse Cape cart harness as shown in Carver's 1887 catalogue.

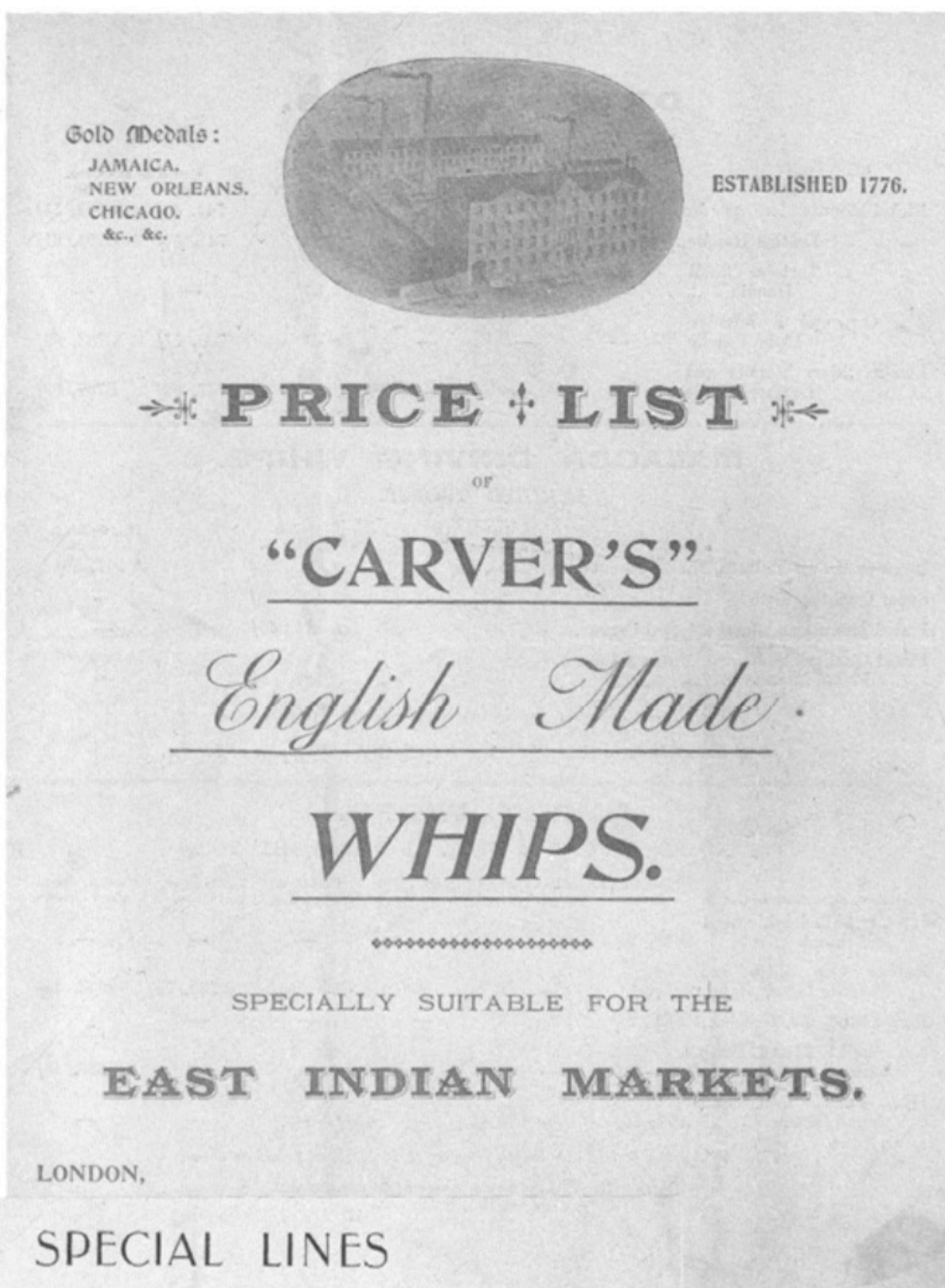


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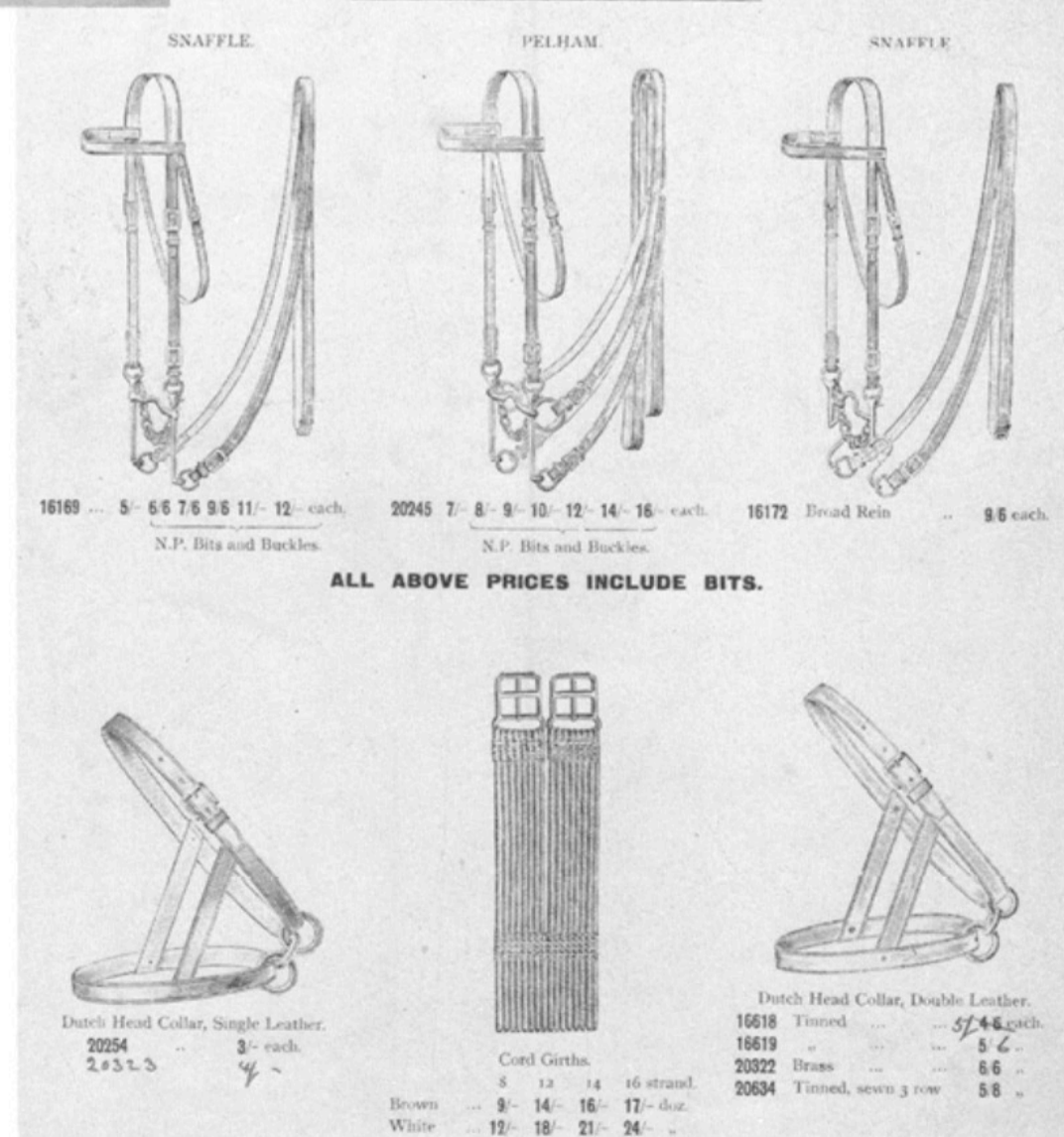
The extent of Carver's overseas business is shown in these three examples of his catalogues: (1) the first from 1892 for José Carver has been translated into Spanish for the South American market — Carver has adopted the Australian coat of arms as his unusual trade mark, perhaps because Cook discovered the continent in the same decade that the Carver business began (for a time, as a long-time freemason, Joseph Carver also added the masonic symbol to his catalogues); (2) the second from 1896 is aimed at the East Indies; while (3) the third from 1903 was for the lucrative South African market.

(3)

(2)



SPECIAL LINES FOR SOUTH AFRICA.



visit the 'Whipper of the World' in Walsall. This was viewed locally as a considerable honour and the great man stayed with the Carver family. Young Mary Carver, aged twelve, remembered seeing Miller come down one morning having forgotten his wig — 'Grandma made some tactful comment, whereupon he stroked his bald head and retired upstairs to recover his false hair'.

Carver's range of products was immense. In 1884, owing to the rising cost of whalebone, a staple material for making whips, Joseph introduced his newly invented fine tempered steel-lined whip after more than two years perfecting it. This proved an instant success, selling in its second year four times as many as had been sold on its launch. Another of his whips was 'The Only Unbreakable Driving Whip', dressed in holly, thorn, yew, palm 'or any other pattern'. This was typical of the Carver range in that it was a standard item available in a variety of finishes. With regard to his ladies' riding whips, he noted that the handle could be made to match their riding habits since 'it is now quite the fashion for the habit and whip to match'. The catalogues boasted jockey whips, cane driving whips, ladies' riding whips, waggon whips, buggy whips, braided driving whips, stick driving whips, dog whips, dealers' whips; Malacca cane cart crops, stock crops, Perpignan wood crops, French top gigs; dog thongs, white whip thongs, green hide thongs, kangaroo thongs, twisted Scotch thongs; dog leads, saddle girths, cord girths, twisted lashes, cord heads and reins, driving and riding reins, pillar reins, halter heads and reins; and fly nets.

Carver's goods were sold overseas through a network of agents such as J W Nelles & Brother in Montreal, Jewell Davis & Co of Sydney and W Leslie Daniels in Johannesburg. Since many overseas companies also handled their exports through London-based agents, Joseph also had a small office in the capital at 3, Billiter Buildings in the City. Australia and South Africa were the two largest export markets for British saddlery and harnesses, followed by South America. Joseph produced separate editions of each catalogue for different markets. There was one in French, another in Spanish (for South America) and a third in both English and Dutch (for South Africa). It was not only the language which differed, the products and even their names varied according to their ultimate destination. French top driving whips were known as 'Empress of India' whips in a catalogue for the East Indies market but as 'Sjambok' whips in the South African version.

Perhaps the remarkable thing about Joseph Carver's success is that it was achieved at a time when the outlook for the industry was clouding over. From the 1880s onwards native firms began to emerge in many export markets, tariffs were a deterrent to trade in the United States and other countries and supply was outstripping demand. There was also a severe drought in Australia which was responsible for a sharp drop in exports. At home agriculture with its million or so

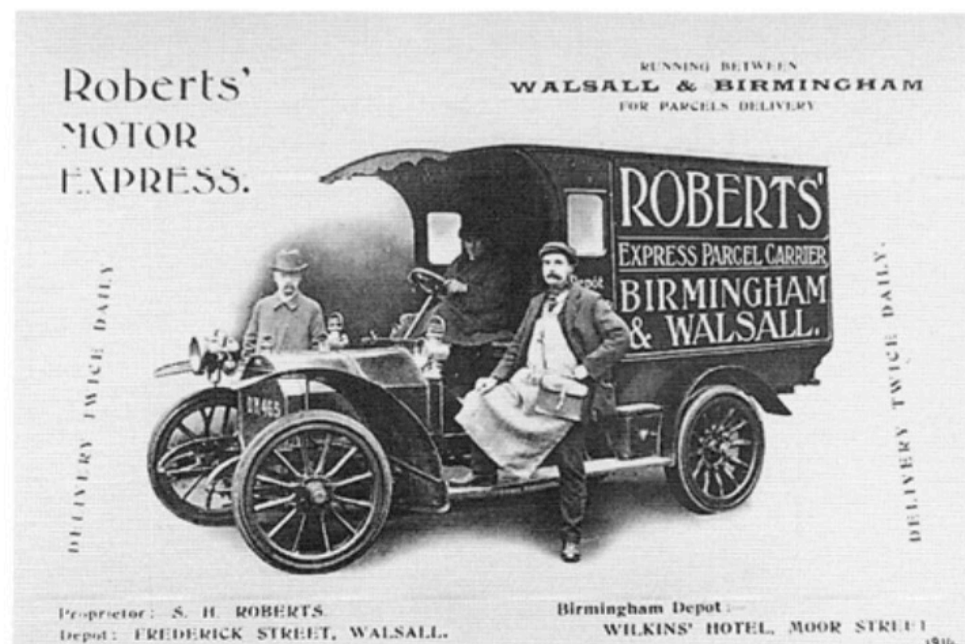


Walsall high street in 1900 remains relatively unchanged from fifty years before.



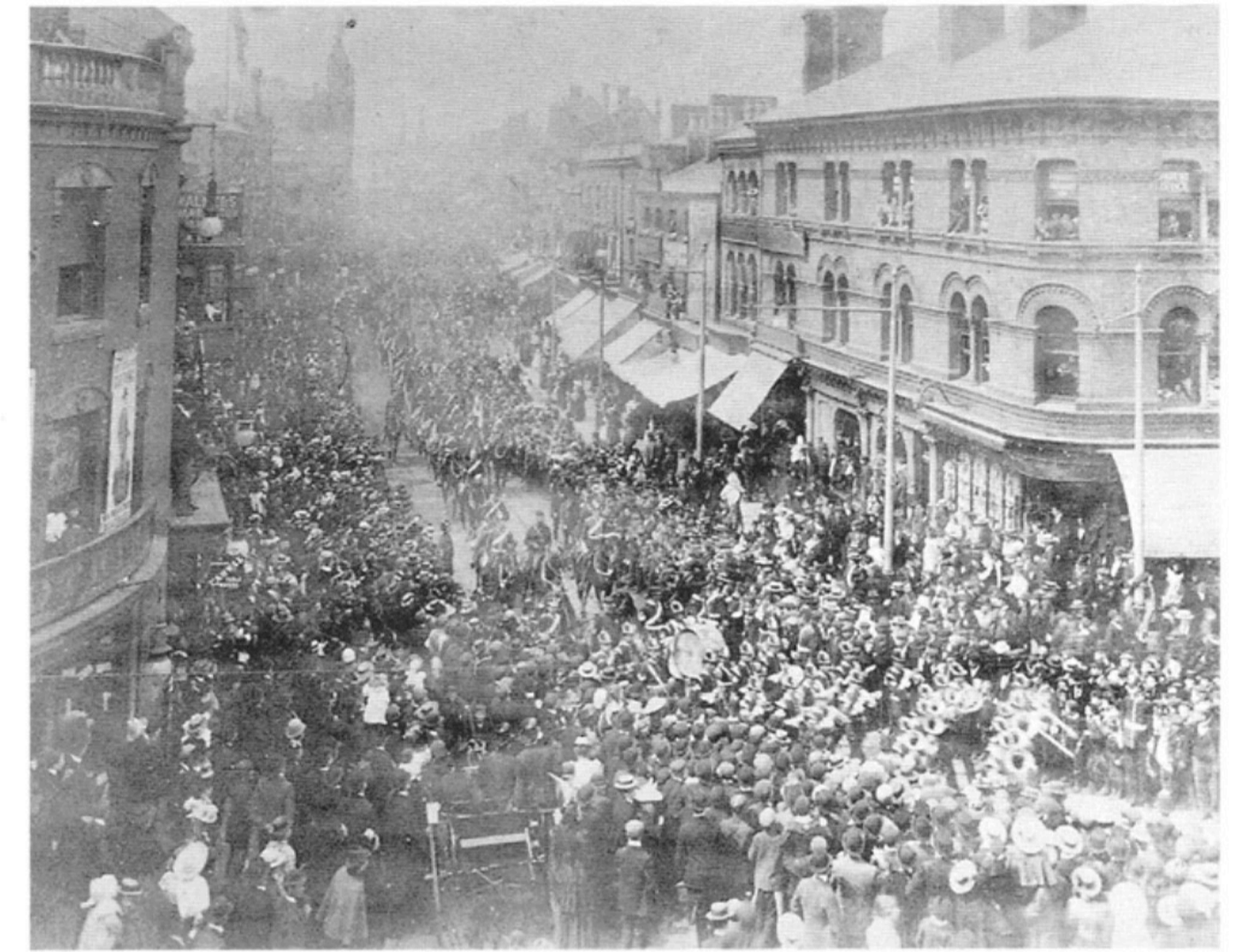
For this story the interest of the photograph lies not in the building (the brewery at Pleck) but in the number of bicycles. Faster than foot and cheaper than a horse, the bicycle became hugely popular during the 1890s, even, to the horror of some, being taken up by ladies! (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

This 1913 photograph emphasises how horse-drawn passenger vehicles had long since given way to motor vehicles. These buses, operated by the London & North-West Railway Company, were based with their staff at the Brownhills bus garage. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)



The horse-drawn carts and vans were also being replaced by the motor-van as this 1911 advertisement illustrates. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

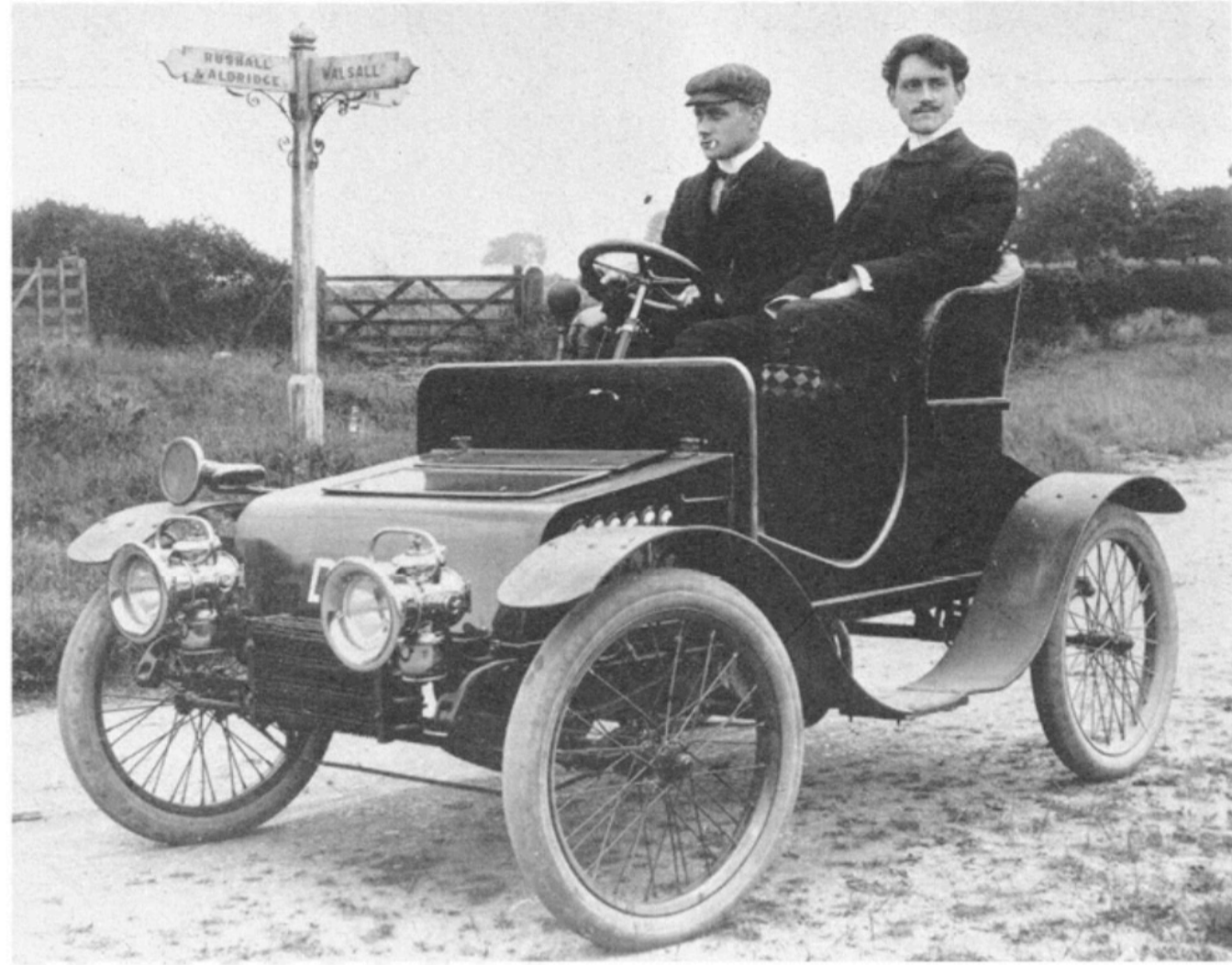
horses was suffering from a prolonged depression. By the mid-1880s the trade was past its peak. Joseph Carver's success was impressive but ephemeral. The development of a popular form of the bicycle with the advent of the pneumatic tyre in the late 1880s also affected the saddlery trade (by 1895 Birmingham was surrounded by 161 bicycle factories) while the invention of the internal combustion engine in the early 1880s was a sign of worse things to come. Twenty years later the trade journal *Saddlery & Harness* remarked that motor cars were 'fast becoming a crying evil to every horse owner and cannot but be a source of injury to the harness making industry in the near future'. Even then it might have appeared to some that this was a premature prediction. The use of the horse in commerce and agriculture remained strong and the Boer War had been a fillip for the trade. Joseph Carver, who won his fair share of War Office contracts, perhaps failed to see that his business had left its glory days behind but he was keen enough to improve efficiency at the Eldon Street works and installed labour saving machinery from the 1890s onwards in areas such as cotton braiding, whip tapering, splitting and grooving. He certainly never lacked confidence. In April 1901 he took on a new member of staff, Mr Stephens, and was prepared to guarantee a fifty-two hour working week for the next five years. He wrote to Stephens that 'I want to pay the same as my competitors and no more because I am going in for the big trade ... I think we shall get on well together and you may depend on this, that I never forget to recognise and compensate any man who helps to make my business a success'.



In 1902 the troops returned from the Boer War which had given fresh stimulus to the saddlery industry. In the middle of the picture, behind the band, process the mounted soldiers perhaps carrying Carver whips. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)

Two years later the industry was suffering from a widespread depression which drove out of business many smaller manufacturers who, like Joseph Carver, had also installed costly new machinery, as well as forcing closure upon those who had been tempted to set up business by the Boer War boom. Things remained gloomy for the trade until 1914 and many of those left decided to withdraw from saddlery and employ their skills instead in producing light and fancy leather goods. Joseph Carver's confidence, on the other hand, was almost undiminished since he found that the firm with its new plant was able to sweep up the orders previously handled by rivals who had now gone out of business. A hint of regret comes from a surviving letter written in 1908 in an attempt to win back an old customer in Australia — 'it seems that since I have not had an agent in the Colony, my name and manufactures have been forgotten by you'. But on

the whole he was doing well even from a declining market and saw little need to move into new fields, particularly as he was now approaching sixty years of age. He might have received the encouragement to do so if any of his three sons, Joseph, born in 1867, David, born in 1875, or Ernest, born in 1879, had been in the firm but none of them were particularly interested in the whip making business. Joseph settled in Australia, initially acting as an agent for his father, but this relationship fell apart when Joseph senior refused to accept an order on the terms negotiated by his son. Joseph left Australia for Canada where a branch of the family still exists. Ernest trained as an architect, designing, for example, one of the pavilions in Walsall's Arboretum. He too emigrated to Canada, settling in British Columbia, perhaps attracted through correspondence with his eldest brother about the opportunities which were available there. David, known to his family and friends as Dav, had also been expected to



Dav Carver, on the left, is the driver with his brother Ernest as passenger in Dav's pioneering 500cc motor car.



Joseph Carver was still travelling on business overseas shortly before the First World War. Here he is, seated third from the left, with his wife standing on the extreme left with the family of one of his South American agents at the Buenos Aires Centenary Industrial Exposition of 1910.

WHIPS FOR ALL MARKETS.

WHITE DROP THONGS			1	1½	1¾ yards.
4 Plait, Light	2/6	3/6	4/9 doz.		
4 .. Mid. or Heavy	3/6	4/2	5/3 ..		
6 .. Light	3/6	4/2	5/3 ..		
6 .. Mid. or Heavy	4/9	5/8	7/6 ..		
8 .. Light or Heavy	6/6	8/-	9/6 ..		

QUILLED GIG THONGS.
Tapered Steel Lined, Won't Rust or Break.
 6 Plait, 11/- 8 Plait, 15/-
Ditto Whalebone Lined.
 4 Plait, 7/6 6 Plait, 10/- 8 Plait, 15/6

Tandem. Four-Horse. Hansom.
 30/- 36/- 25/-

9970 12/6 18/- 24/- 36/- 42/- 45/- per doz.
 9971 17/6 24/- 36/- 42/- per doz.
 9972 17/- per doz. 4½ ft.
 9973 8/- 9/- 14/6 per doz. 4 ft. Steel Lined Super, 16/- per doz., 4½ ft.
 9974 6/- 7/6 12/3 per doz. 4 ft.
 9975 Steel Lined with Thong, 8/- 10/- 12/- 15/- 20/- per doz. any color
 9976 11/6 14/6 21/- 30/- 36/- 48/- per doz.
 9977 9/6 11/3 18/- 24/- 36/- 48/- 60/- per doz.
 9978 7/6 8/- 12/- 16/- 24/- 36/- 48/- 60/- per doz.
 9979 7/6 12/- 24/- 30/- 36/- 48/- per doz.
 9980 Steel Lined Gig Whip 12/- 15/- 25/- 36/- per doz.
 9981 8/9 11/6 15/- 18/- 22/6 per doz.
 9982 38/6 40/- 48/- 57/- 78/- 90/- and upwards per doz. Raw Hide.
 10007 10/- 15/- 25/- 30/- per doz. Malacca Gig.
 9984 20/- 25/- 40/- 48/- 72/- per doz. Very Light to handle in use.
 10 ft. Reaper Whip.

There is no lack of confidence in this extensive display of Whips For All Markets dating from 1912 but the boom days of Joseph Carver's whip making business were by now long gone.

travel abroad on behalf of the business. His father wanted him to develop Carver's sales in central and South America from a base in Mexico. In preparation for this, he was sent to learn Spanish in Spain, residing with the family of a Spanish engineer. He had always been mechanically minded and this break from his father and the whip making business made him realise that what he really wanted to do was to become an engineer himself.

As it turned out this was probably a wise move but it cannot have gone down well at home. The story is that Joseph challenged his son to prove that he had the capacity to take up engineering and that the result was the first motor car to be built in Walsall. The reality was less dramatic. Dav was apprenticed to an engineering firm in Stafford and built the car towards the end of his apprenticeship, using a treadle lathe to produce the parts in a shed at home and paying for leg-work done by friends in cider. The 500 cc car was completed in 1902 and was advanced for its time in having a mechanically operated inlet valve. The engine was later used for a boat called the *Endeavour* which Dav Carver built in 1910. After serving his time as an apprentice, Dav then rented a workshop from his father who happily employed him to produce more

labour-saving plant for the Eldon Street whip factory. One of the machines he built was in service until the factory stopped making whips in 1957. For many years the engineering business consisted entirely of Dav Carver and another workman with turnover peaking in the years before 1914 at £1,231 in 1911. He had an ingenious and inventive mind and devised a number of patented special purpose machines, such as dressing and fettling machines for malleable ironfounders, although he nearly always sold the patents. His inventiveness — he also invented the retaining stay for gramophone lids — was allied to a well developed sense of mischief. He challenged a local ironmaster who fancied himself as something of a golfer to a one shot driving competition, declaring that he would out-drive the ironmaster with a niblick. The ironmaster duly drove off, sending his ball into the distance down the fairway. Seconds later he saw Dav Carver's golf ball scorching past his own ball — to fire the ball Dav had devised a mortar which fitted inside his golf bag and was detonated by a single stroke from his niblick! Dav also constructed a mechanical model of a golfer which amused his fellow members by caricaturing several of them. The model still survives in working order.

3

Hard Times — 1914-1940

THE FIRST WORLD WAR once again raised the hopes of the country's remaining whip makers, thanks to the fact that the British army still made extensive use of horses both in the cavalry and for transport. Joseph Carver felt optimistic enough to turn his firm into a limited liability company as Joseph Carver Ltd, turning out whips, saddlery and harnesses for the army although orders fell away after 1915 as horses gave way to mechanisation. Instead the company, no doubt with Dav Carver's advice and active participation, turned over many of its machines to making shell fuse carriers for the armed services to a design patented by Dav. This design was sufficiently highly thought of to feature in the centenary edition of *Machinery* magazine. The company was so successful that its production techniques were copied in other munition factories and at its peak Carver employed around a hundred workers operating around the clock on three shifts. But as soon as the war ended contracts were cancelled with immediate effect and without compensation, leaving the company with tons of raw materials and part-finished and finished components.

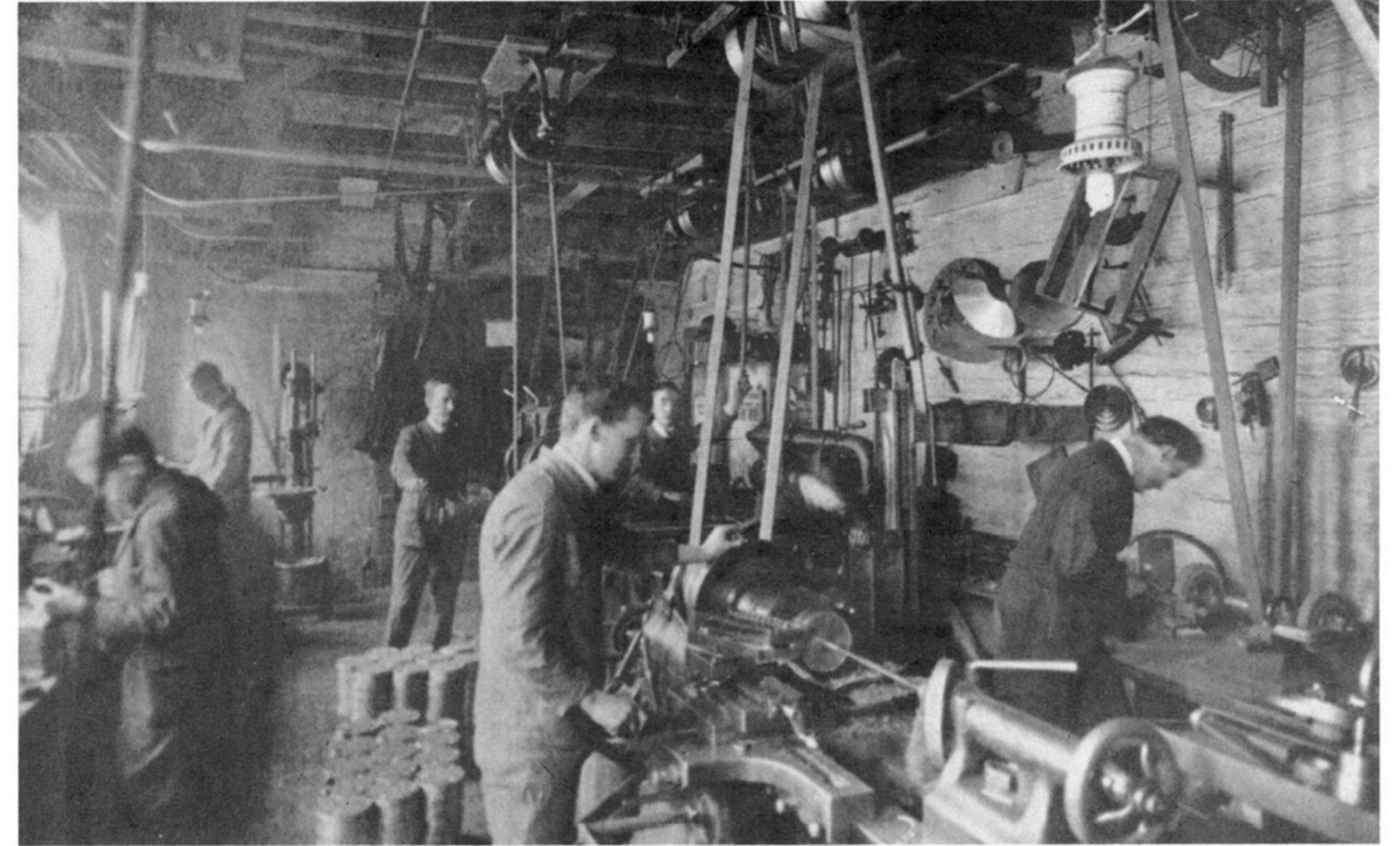
The carnage on the Western Front must have seemed unreal to most of the citizens of Walsall, now a town of nearly 100,000 inhabitants, yet a German Zeppelin made its way there to drop bombs in late January 1916, killing four people. When the bells of the parish church and the hooters of local factories greeted the Armistice on 11 November 1918, they sounded yet another reprieve for Joseph Carver Ltd which welcomed with enthusiasm the pent-up demand for its goods which peace now released. But this reprieve was even more short-lived than all the others. The internal combustion engine was now well-established, tractors and motor bicycles, motor cars and motor lorries were increasingly prevalent, and the company could no longer survive on what little business was left over. This was especially true as the British economy entered the roller-coaster inter-war

The penultimate fillip to the saddlery trade was given by the First World War. Here the troops of the 5th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment assemble in the centre of Walsall before departing for France on 11 August 1914. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)





These are examples of the whips made by Joseph Carver Ltd during the twentieth century but they no longer formed the bulk of the business which had to look elsewhere for products to make a profit.



Above: Dav Carver was behind the company's successful performance in assisting the munitions industry during the First World War. These men at Eldon Street are turning noses for shells. Many of these machines were still being used in the 1950s.

Right: Munitions work went on elsewhere in Walsall. This is the workshop of Walsall Munitions Ltd where more women than men were employed. Shell cases are clearly evident. (By kind permission of Walsall Local History Centre.)



period. Although all three whip makers in Walsall from the 1880s survived until the Second World War, their trade was a shadow of its former self. Even so the last whip maker in Walsall, Edward Goddard Ltd in Farringdon Street, survived until the late 1990s.

Joseph Carver finally retired from the firm in 1920 at the age of seventy-five and died four years later. In his heyday he had been a man of dynamism and energy whose success had been based on the way he had allied good quality products with marketing panache. This was a lesson which later generations would apply with equal success; they would also learn from Joseph's failure to adapt to changing business trends. At Joseph Carver Ltd, Charles Williams took over as production manager, remaining in post until well into the 1950s, while Joseph's son-in-law, Charles Brazier, acted as managing director until 1942. One of Joseph's daughters, Martha, also continued working in the business until she finally retired in 1960 at the age of eighty-nine. Most of the 1920s was spent searching for alternative products for the company to augment the much reduced sales of whips. In the early 1920s the company produced a variety of locks as well as shelf brackets, hasps and staples. There was a long tradition of lock manufacturing in Walsall but it was a short-lived experiment for Joseph Carver Ltd. Around the same time the firm began making plumbers' force cups and tried to capitalise on the growing popularity of golf by producing golf clubs under the brand name of 'Torpedo'. It was a difficult time for the business whose sales stood still between the early 1920s and the late 1930s. For much of this time the company hovered around the break-even mark, turning in small losses or small profits.

It was in 1926 that the company at last alighted on the two items which would remain in production for the next fifty years. The manufacture of drain clearing rods and chimney sweep sets utilised the existing machinery at Eldon Street and many of the same materials, particularly Rattan cane. A brochure from the late 1930s shows that the range had been extended to include drain testing plugs, hand brushes and plungers. The goods were sold with some success in Great Britain and Ireland through commission sales-

men and the company had also been able to appoint agents in South Africa and South America. But the élan and enthusiasm which had characterised the company in its heyday, particularly in the way in which it had marketed its goods, was conspicuously absent.

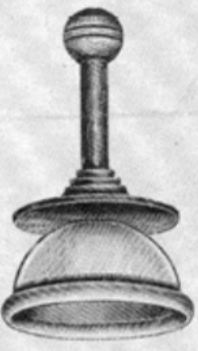
Dav Carver's company, known as Carver & Company, was a small scale affair but he preferred to apply his inventive mind to devising one-off solutions for his customers rather than the repetitive volume work with which Joseph Carver Ltd was involved. Turnover in 1914 was £905, reaching £1,509 in 1917 but more than doubling during the last year of the war and the boom year of 1919. The collapse when it came was dramatic. Sales fell from an average of nearly £3,900 (the equivalent today of about £84,000) in 1918 and 1919 to just over £1,900 (the equivalent of £34,000) in 1920.

The engineering business made little headway during the 1920s and 1930s. Walsall had an established engineering industry specialising particularly in the manufacture of welded and then seamless steel tubes. But the inter-war years cut a swathe through the ranks of Britain's engineering firms and Walsall was as badly affected as anywhere else. Unemployment in the town reached twenty per cent as early as 1922 but in the depths of the Great Depression in 1932 reached thirty per cent, a figure which seems utterly unbelievable today. The average level of unemployment in Walsall during the 1930s was sixteen per cent. The state of the economy was so poor that there was little opportunity for Dav Carver to exercise much flair and imagination in his own engineering business. The firm struggled. Apart from 1921 (even then the firm made a net loss), sales never approached anything near the figure recorded in 1911. By the end of 1939 sales for the year were only £713; they had been as low as £457 in 1931. Between 1921 and 1936, for which figures are available, only twice did the firm make a net profit - £18 in 1930 and £5 in 1936. The firm's capital had shrunk to a mere £90 in 1931 and Dav Carver had to inject £265 of his own savings into the business in the following year but further poor results consumed almost two-thirds of this by the end of 1936. To keep

**SPECIAL LINES IN
PLUMBERS'
FORCE CUPS**

INVALUABLE FOR CLEARING PIPES OF SINKS,
BATHS, LAVATORY BASINS, ETC.

Best Quality Drab Rubbers
Extra Long Superior Wood
Handles
Japanned Plates



BETTER THAN MANY
EQUAL TO ANY

	Height Overall	Diameter of Rubber	Price
Small Size	6 1/2 in.	3 in.	7/9 doz. Net
Medium Size	13 1/2 in.	4 in.	11/9 "
Large Size	25 in.	5 1/2 in.	24/- "

EXTRA RUBBERS	Small	Medium	Large
	4/6	7/6	14/6 Doz. Net.

CARRIAGE PAID { England and Wales £5 Lots.
Scotland and Ireland £7 10s. 0d.

DELIVERY FROM STOCK

JOSEPH CARVER LTD., WALSALL
ESTABLISHED 1776

(1)

**LOCKS ARE REDUCED!!!
NOW IS THE TIME TO BUY**

OUR "SUPREME" RIM LOCK,

6in. STEEL CASE, DOUBLE HAND, DOUBLE BRASS BUSHED, FITTED WITH STRONG SOLID BRASS BOLTS, SASH WARDS.

Complete with No. 100 Drilled thro' Furniture Screws and Pins. **54/- doz.**

Complete with No. 200 Milled Edge Drilled thro' Furniture Screws and Pins. **57/- doz.**

THE "SUPREME"
If Required Unbushed 4/- dozen less.

**FOR SECURITY AT A LOW PRICE
OUR "PREMIER" STILL LEADS.**

NOW MADE WITH FANCY BITTED KEYS AND SIX DIFFERS IN 1 DOZEN.

Complete with No. 100 Furniture, Screws and Pins **48/- Per Doz.**

Complete with No. 200 Furniture Screws and Pins **51/- Per Doz.**

SAME PRICE.

GOOD HEAVY LINE WITH IRON BOLTS, SASH WARDS

6in. complete with No. 100 Drilled thro' Furniture Screws & Pins **55/- doz.**

No. 88 Unbushed **55/- doz.**

No. 99 Bushed, **61/- Doz.**

For a cheap bold line our No. 49 6in. Square Steel Case, Iron Bolts, Unbushed Sash Ward Key. **47/6 Doz. complete**




ALL RIM LOCKS NEATLY BOXED.

PROMPT DELIVERY.
CARRIAGE PAID to Port in Quantities.


ORDERS THROUGH BRITISH SHIPPERS ONLY.

(2)


"TORPEDO" BRAND GOLF CLUBS.
HANDFORGED POLISHED IRONS. SELECTED HICKORY SHAFTS. RUBBER GRIPS.



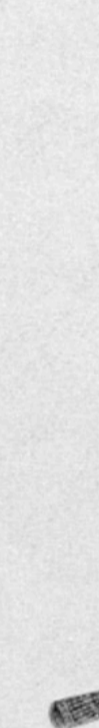
K86



K80



K87



K82

		Approx. Weight of head in ozs.	Price per doz.
K79	Ordinary Iron, scored face,	9 1/2	138/-
K80	Round Back Iron, scored face,	8 1/2	138/-
K81	Gem Putter,	8 1/2	150/-
K82	Wry Neck Putter,	9 1/2	138/-
K83	Upright Putter,	9	138/-
K84	Jigger,	7 1/2	138/-
K85	Cleek, (Driving),	8	138/-
K86	Deep Face Mashie,	9 1/2	138/-
K87	Niblick, Plain Face,	12	150/-
K88	Mashie Niblick, Plain Face,	8 1/2	150/-

Customers' Special Mark on 6 Doz. Lots Free of Charge.
Each Club marked with Reference No. on Head.

(3)

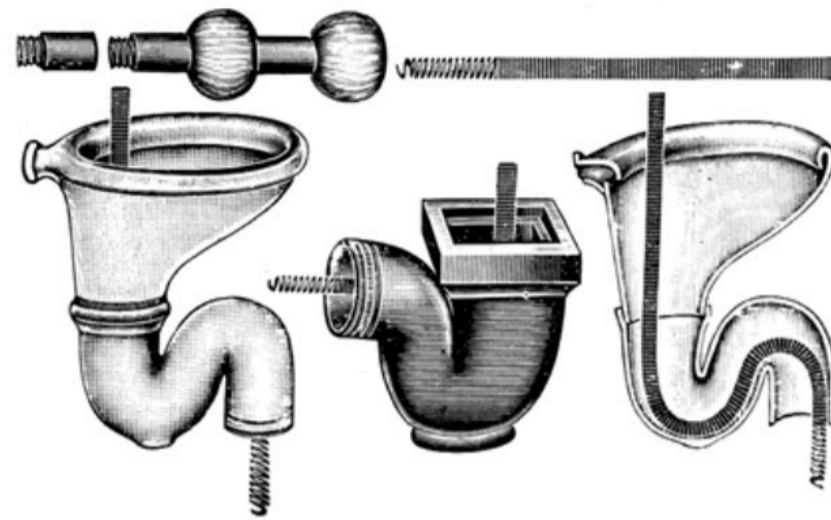
Plumbers' force cups (1), 'Torpedo' golf clubs (2) and locks (3) were all products to which the company turned as the mass market for whips finally collapsed after the First World War. Of these, only plumbers' force cups remained a staple product for any length of time.

THE FERRET DRAIN CLEANER

Made of Finest Japanned Closely Coiled Steel Wire, Extremely Flexible, complete with Wood Handle, Brass Adaptor Joint for connecting to Cane Rods, and Key.

each.
 6ft. Set, in two 3ft. Lengths, 1in. dia. 14/-
 6ft. Ditto, ditto, 3/4in. dia. ... 10 6
 1in. dia. 3/4in.
 Extra 3ft. Lengths ... 5/6 each 3/-

Invaluable to Plumbers, Builders, Sanitary Authorities, Etc.



No. A73

HOUSEHOLD COMBINATION SET

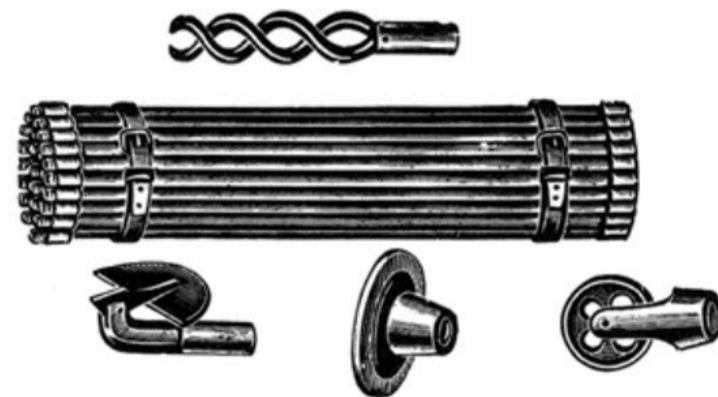
A5—Made of Good Quality Natural Cane Rods, in 3ft. lengths, complete with 16in. Real Bahia Bass Brush, Japanned Flue Rake, Hand Brush, 4in. Jointed Scraper, 4in. Rubber Plunger, Double-Worm Screw, Brass Clearing Wheel and Pair Leather Straps.

30ft.	40ft.	50ft.
29/-	34/-	42/- Set



No. A5

A43—Made of Best Selected Full Medium Size Red or Natural Canes, in 3ft. lengths, complete with Forged Double-Worm Screw, 4in. Jointed Scraper, 4in. Rubber Plunger in Brass Cup and Cap, Brass Clearing Wheel and pair Straps



No. A43

		30ft.	40ft.	50ft.	60ft.	70ft.	80ft.	90ft.	100ft.	
Universal	...	27/-	33/-	41/-	49/-	56/6	63/-	70/6	78/-	Set
Ideal	...	38/-	47/-	59/6	70/6	83/-	93/-	104/-	114/-	„
Ferret or Trigger	...	48/-	59/6	74/6	86/-	104/-	117/-	130/-	146/-	„

the business going, he and his assistant had to take small scale and mundane work, such as repairs to a sawbench for Joseph Carver Ltd, overhauling a punching machine for E O Robathan, or repairing a radial drill for Cross & Cross Ltd. Customers were mainly small local businesses but there were also names such as Buck & Hickman, Dowding & Mills, Platt Brothers, Rubery Owen and Perkins. The most often recurring names were those of W H Arthur, the Burleigh Foundry and Walsall Corporation.

It was Joseph Carver Ltd, with its unexciting range of drain rods and chimney sweep rods and brushes as well as whips, which was performing quite nicely by the late 1930s, recording sales and net profits which would in today's values be in the region of £250,000 and £19,000 respectively. The company's strength was that it was cash positive. Not only did it have money in the bank, it also had approximately £50,000 in today's

values invested in overseas dominions stock, railways stock, retail and property company shares. On the other hand, little if any money was being invested either in the Eldon Street property or in plant and machinery.

When war was declared in September 1939, Joseph Carver Ltd was pressed into national service once more. The state of Britain's preparations for war might be gauged from the fact that the first orders received by the company were for making shell fuse carriers to exactly the same specifications as it had done twenty-five years earlier. Dav Carver carried on with small scale machining work and engineering repairs for his regular customers. But the long hard years of struggle during the 1920s and 1930s seem to have worn him out. He was taken seriously ill in February 1940, his sixty-fifth year, and never returned to work, dying two years later.

Eventually Joseph Carver Ltd concentrated on manufacturing drain cleansing and chimney sweeping appliances and the company sold these products with success for some fifty years. The items seen here are all taken from a catalogue issued by the company in the late 1930s.

4

Inspirational Engineering — 1940-1963

DAV CARVER HAD TWO SURVIVING SONS, John, born in 1920, and Joseph, known as Jos, born in 1924. He always encouraged them to look for experience beyond the family business so when he was taken ill in early 1940 John, who had inherited his father's talent for engineering ingenuity, was designing air-frames for Stirling bombers at Rubery Owen and could not be released. His younger brother, Jos, had decided to stay on at college but the college ran out of coal that winter, confining Jos at home, as a result of which he found himself taking over from his father in his small engineering business. He joined the firm when he was still fifteen at the end of February 1940, earning 10s 6d a week. One critical figure in the business during this period was Dav Carver's widow, Helen, a shrewd and determined woman who did much to hold together both businesses until her sons were older.

For most of the war Carver & Company employed three or four people, twice the pre-war payroll and a sign of how much the firm's services were in demand. Sales at last exceeded those of thirty years earlier as the firm made tube brushes, trigger pins, plugs and spanners as well as carrying out machining work and the usual repairs and replacements. At Joseph Carver Ltd, sights for STEN guns were made alongside the shell fuse carriers. After the death of Charles Brazier in 1942, the post of managing director was filled for the next twenty years by another of the late Joseph Carver's sons-in-law, Fred Hall. The company's sales rose steadily throughout the war, more than doubling by 1945 to reach what would in today's values be around £420,000 a year.

It was after the war that the balance between the two Carver businesses began to change although only

slowly. Joseph Carver Ltd continued to make cane brush sets for sweeping chimneys and rods for clearing pipes. A few whips were still made by three skilled and long-serving employees, William Musgrove, Frank Owen and William Smith. Sales peaked at nearly £27,000 in 1948 but declined slowly thereafter. Investments reached almost £8,600 in 1950, including British Transport stock, government bonds and loans, and shares in a variety of businesses, including British American Tobacco, Ansells Brewery and Associated Electrical Industries.

The engineering business made gradual progress. The austere economic conditions of the late 1940s and early 1950s made it difficult for firms to acquire badly needed new machinery. Carver & Company needed modern plant more than most, having had very little investment at all since before the First World War. The firm's small size also meant that at Eldon Street there were just three belt-driven lathes, one shaper, one drill and a selection of hand tools. Early post-war projects included the mechanisation of the production of wooden golf tees for the firm of W H Arthur and work on experimental shell moulding machines based on studies made in Germany by reparations assessors. But the ambitions of the firm clearly changed with the arrival at the works of John Carver at the end of November 1947. As a local newspaper later expressed it, the firm 'concentrated on building special-purpose machines to exploit an impressive design talent'. A selection of orders for products designed and developed by the firm from the late 1940s shows how true this was — a complete rotary feeder for the International Furnace Equipment Company in 1948 (with two similar orders in early 1949); a toggle closing unit and press for Alfred Stanley & Sons in early 1949;

experimental and tooling work for Whittaker's throughout 1949; and for International Furnace once more 'emergency services in connection with Prototype plant at Woolwich Arsenal' which included 'technical advice, supervision of site work, liaison with Arsenal officials and maintenance of mutual goodwill'. When Peter Hall joined the firm in September 1949, earning £1 15s a week, the workforce had grown to ten people. By 1950 Carver & Company's sales had risen to nearly £5,400, having more than trebled since the end of the war.

This was the year when John and Jos Carver were pictured in the *Birmingham Mail* with the motor car they themselves had built out of frustration at the inordinately long waiting lists for new cars which occurred during the period of Britain's post-war austerity. The newspaper described John as technical manager and Jos as works manager although in reality their roles within what was still a small business encompassed many more responsibilities. The car was initially nicknamed 'The Chariot' but later re-named 'The Bomb' by which it was best known. It was, noted the newspaper, 'a fast, powerful tourer, resplendent in shining paint, and has amazing road-holding quality and rapid acceleration to a speed around 100 mph'. It had taken more than a thousand hours to build and, other than the chassis, engine and gear-box, most of the parts were hand-made, several being adapted from aircraft components. Two days after being completed, the car successfully rose to the challenge of taking the two brothers on a thousand mile tour. It was still in use in the late 1950s for hill climbing and for towing boats for the 3rd Walsall sea scouts with which movement Jos Carver was involved throughout his life, eventually becoming county commissioner.

At Eldon Street Carver & Company's growing activities led it to take over more and more space as the business of Joseph Carver Ltd shrank. On 24 June 1952 the firm became a limited company as Carver & Company (Engineers) Ltd with Mrs Helen Carver as the first chairman and the two brothers as directors. Beryl Thorpe joined Carver & Company in 1954 and remained with Carver until her retirement in 1995. She found premises on three floors, with machinery, stores and offices. The covered yard at the rear contained a welding bay and a small canteen. Charles Williams was still managing Joseph Carver Ltd with a lady called Monica Hales. Jos and John Carver insisted on being called by their first names. Beryl worked mainly with Jos Carver in the office. She found him easy to work with. Although 'he could go off like a bottle of pop', his temper quickly subsided and he was not a man to bear a grudge. Peter Hall remembered that all the floors were reached by very steep wooden stairs with rope hand rails. An elementary voice tube system

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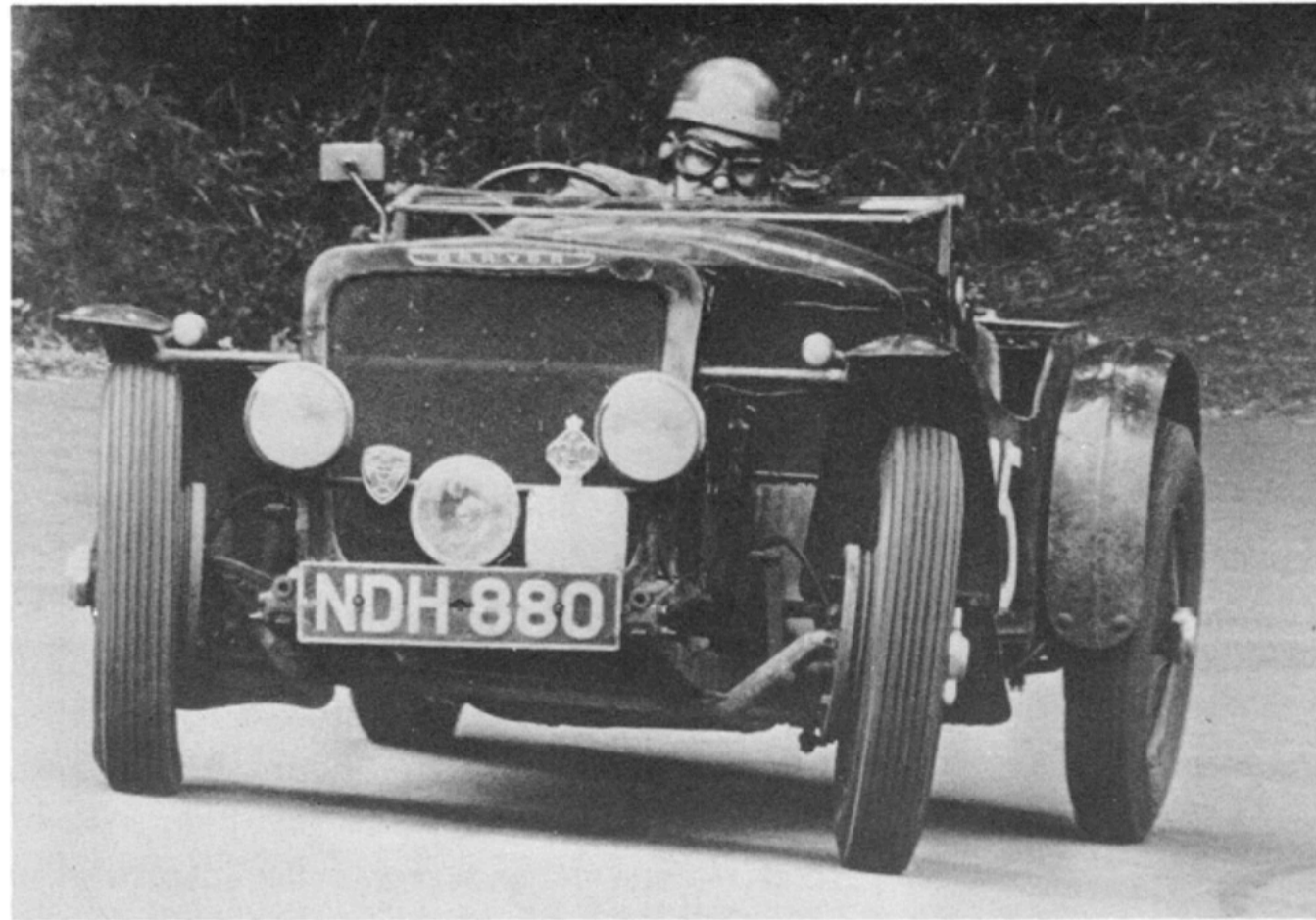
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In the early 1950s Carver & Co (Engineers) Ltd was beginning to establish a reputation as a local engineering business.

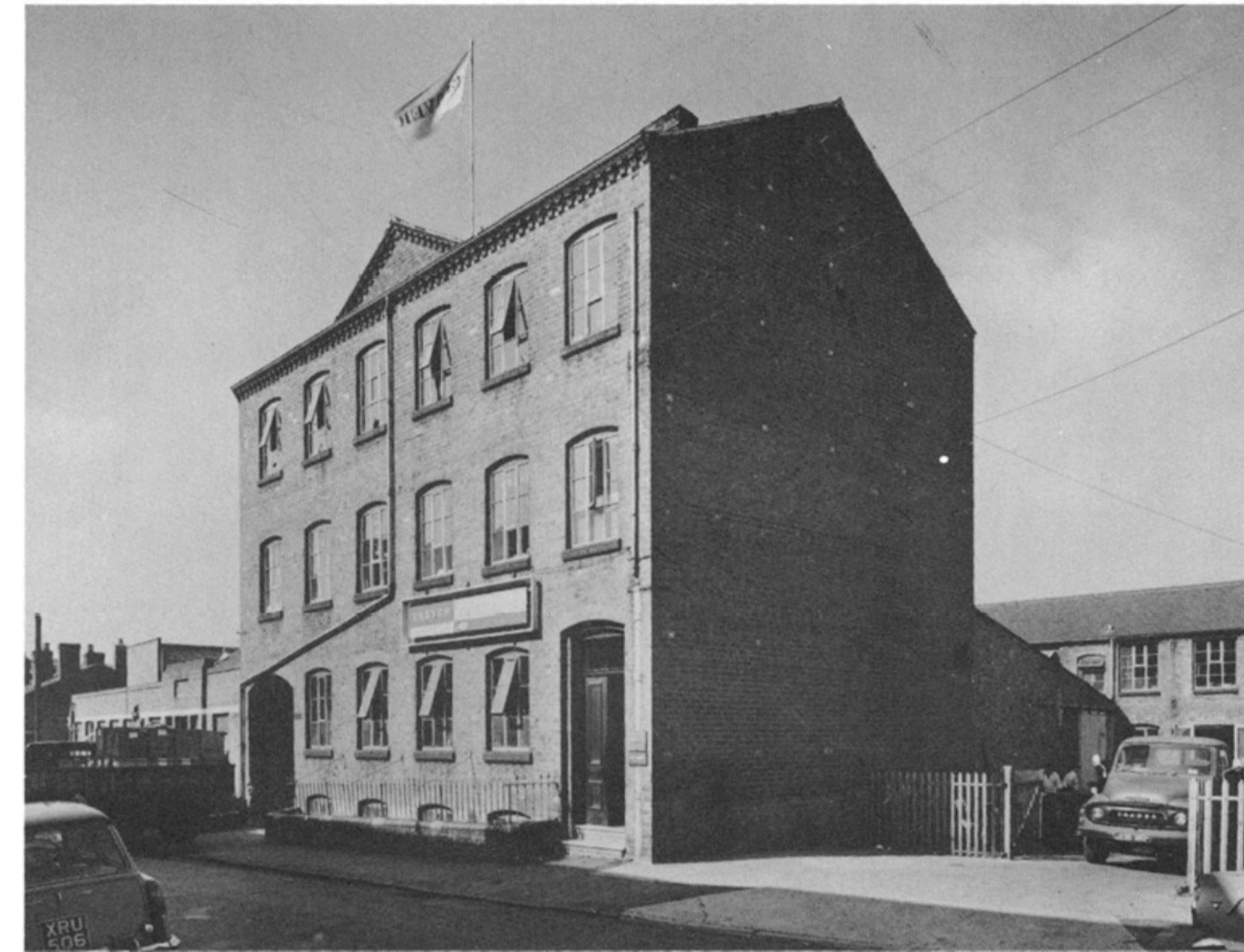


'The Bomb' is shown here with Jos Carver at the wheel competing in the Prescott hill climb

connected each floor — one trick was to alert the ground floor from the one of the upper floors only to pour water down the tube upon the unsuspecting recipient. The last of the whip makers still worked on the top floor while the braiding department was on the floor below where Dav Carver's original machines plaited the braid for drovers' whips.

Joseph Carver Ltd was still making whips, drain rods and chimney sweep kits as well as carrying out machining work. The leaflet for the 'Sweepkleen' chimney sweeping outfit provided advice on the reverse on how to apply soot to the garden, for example, as a light dressing on carrots to drive away flies, on beetroot to improve colour or as a feed on lawns mixed with peat, sharp sand and bonemeal. These products were sold by agents throughout the United Kingdom as well as in South Africa and South America. Whip making came to an end in 1958 after the death of the last of the company's long-serving whip makers, concluding a tradition which had lasted nearly two centuries. The remaining plant and machinery was sold to Edward Goddard Ltd in Walsall where Dav's whip making machines were still operating in 1998.

Until the late 1950s Carver & Company continued to develop one-off machines and was also doing a lot of work with the local motor industry. This enabled the company to achieve a turnover of nearly £14,500 (the equivalent today of £219,000) in 1956 although trading profits were still small. A major breakthrough came in 1957 thanks to John Carver's ever fertile and inventive mind. He had built for his young son, David, a scooter which had broken. John had taken it to Eldon Street to weld it together. He could not find a decent G-clamp anywhere in the works since they were all either bent or had been splattered by hot metal during welding. So John chalked out directly onto steel plate, flame-cut and welded an alternative clamp where the tightening screw was shielded from weld splatter. It consisted of a J-shaped frame with a cranked jaw sliding over it that could locate into one of a series of holes and be tightened by a fine pitch screw acting against the rear of the J-shaped frame. He thought nothing more about it, leaving it lying around in the works over the weekend. Picked up and used by Carver's workmen, it was so effective that they asked John Carver to turn out some more for them. Two



Eldon Street in the late 1950s.

SPECIALITIES IN CROPS AND WHIPS FOR HUNTING, RIDING, RACING, POLO, ETC.



THE BUSINESS OF JOSEPH CARVER LIMITED was established in the year 1776, and descendants of the Founder still continue to take an active interest in the management.

The Firm has always enjoyed a wide reputation for quality consistent with price, and for sheer value for money their manufactures are unequalled.

New patterns are continually being created, and enquiries and orders will be appreciated and carefully attended to.



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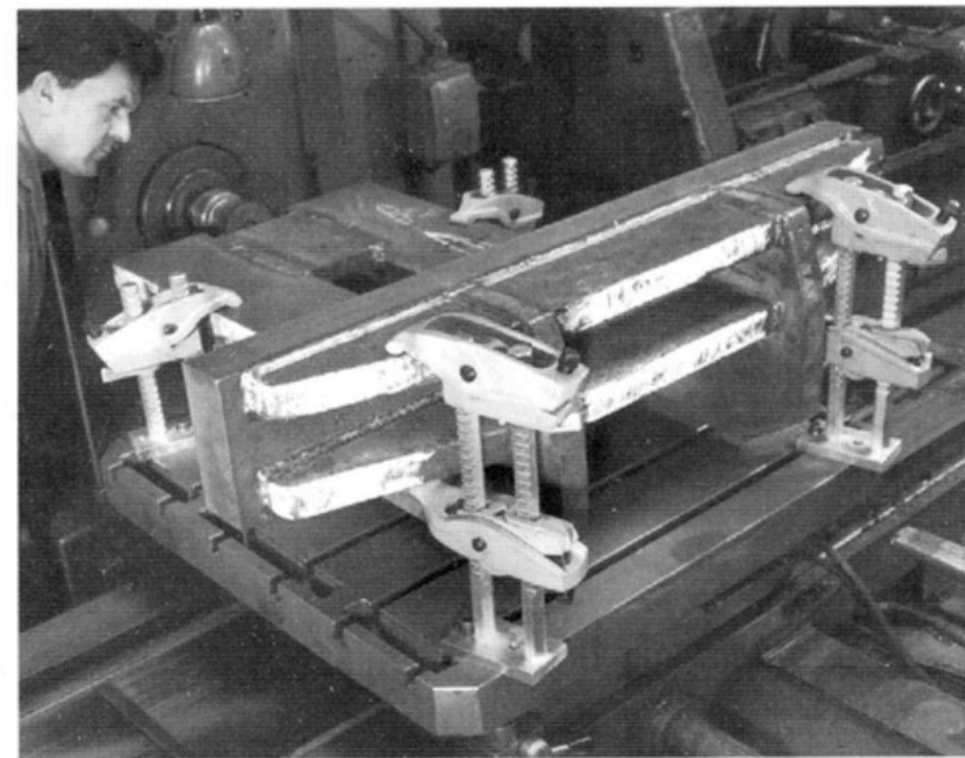
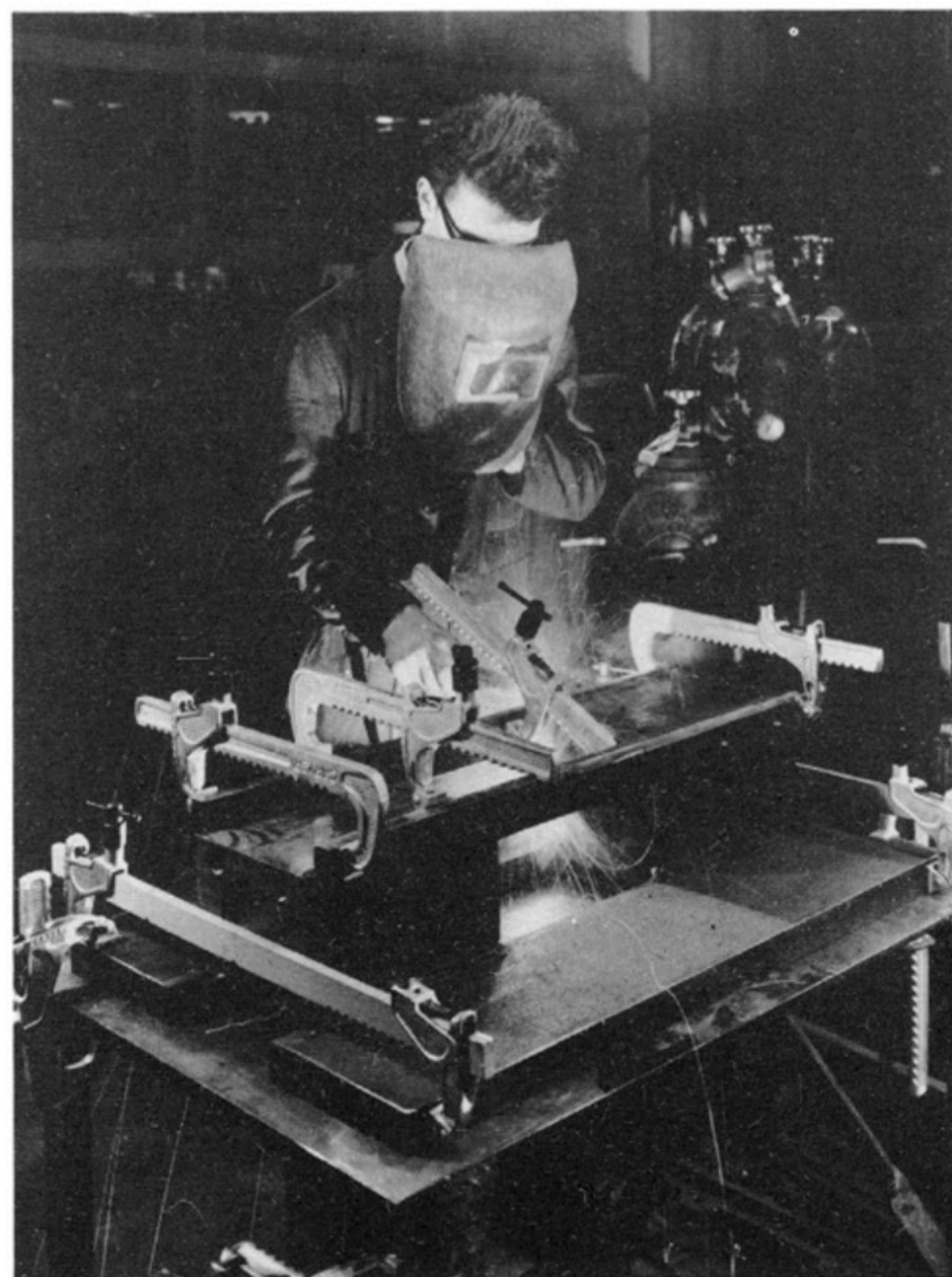
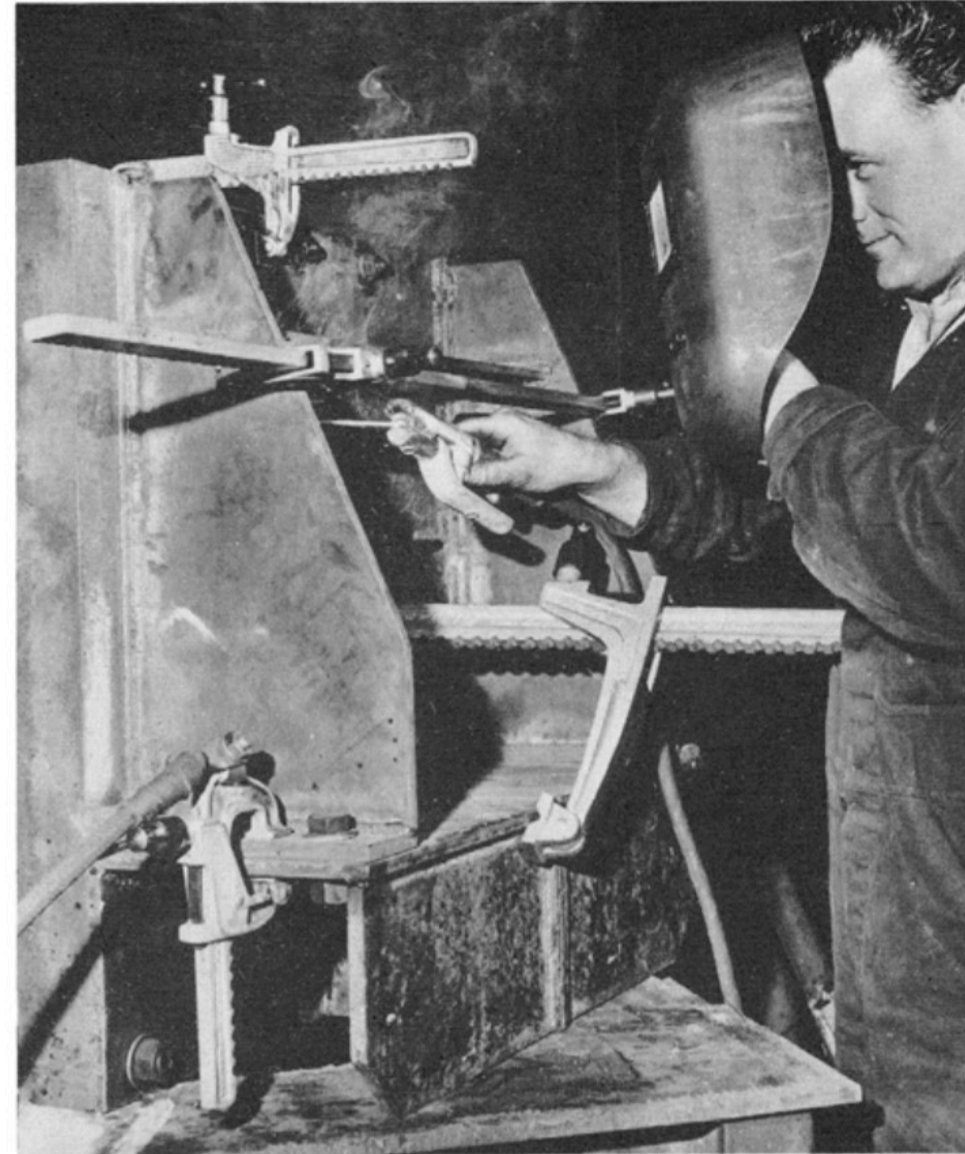
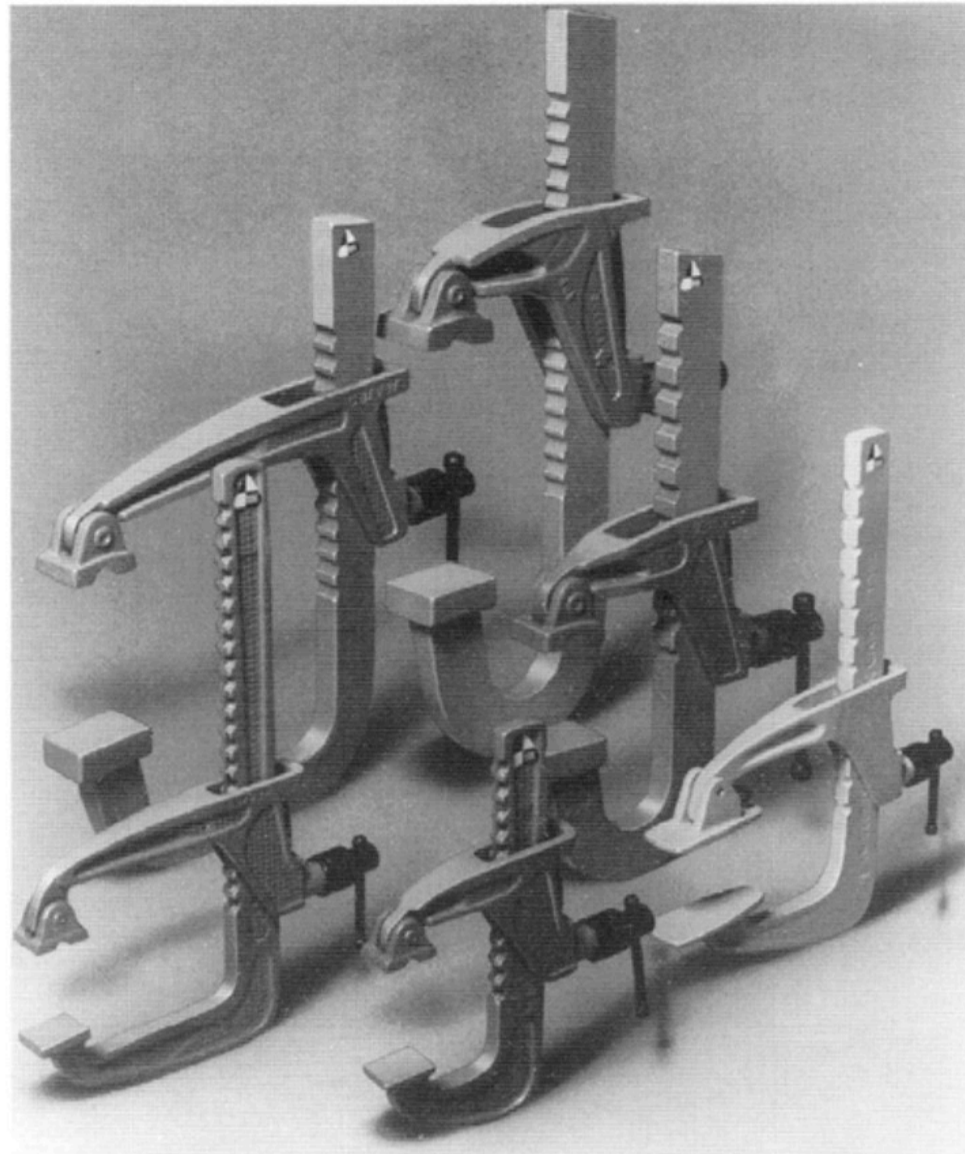
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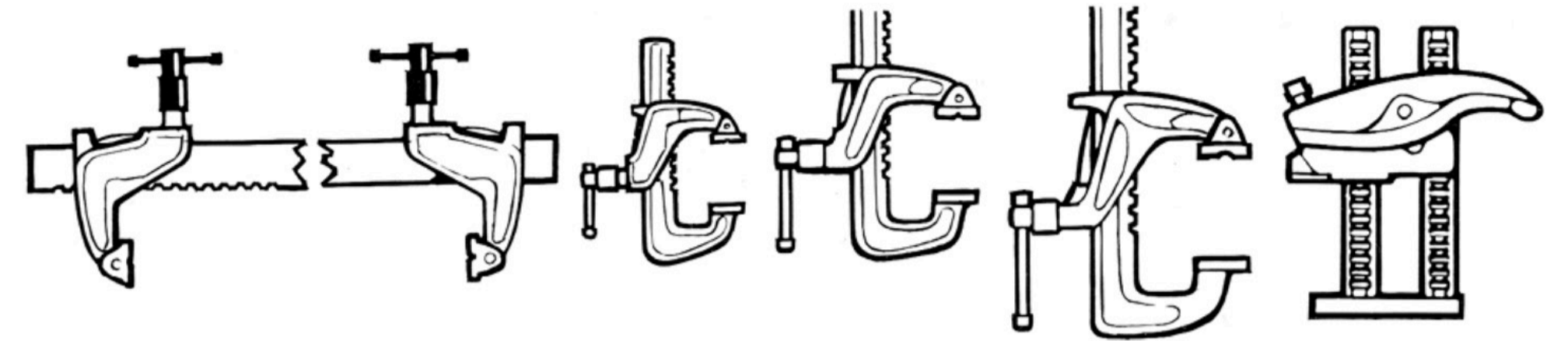
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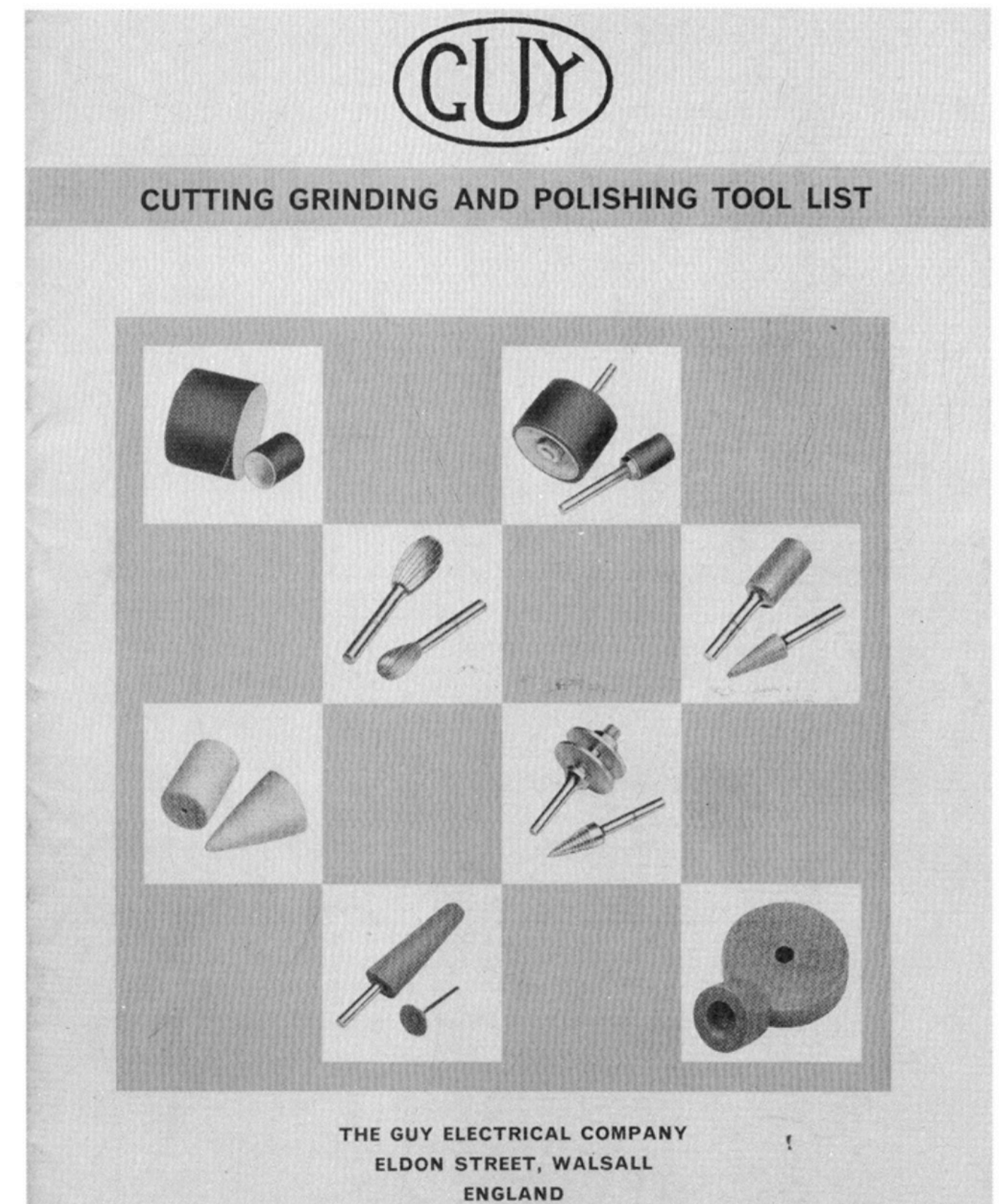
This simple leaflet, one of the last produced for Carver's whips, is a far cry from the crammed catalogues of the late nineteenth century.



The Carver range of clamps are still being sold worldwide nearly fifty years after the first rack clamp was produced by John Carver. The illustrations of the clamps in use were all taken for marketing purposes in Carver's own workshops.



This line drawing demonstrates the elegant simplicity of the design of the Carver clamps which has never been bettered since it was first produced.



The cover of the brochure issued by the Guy Electrical Company under Carver's ownership from the late 1950s.

ALUMINIUM FURNITURE TUBES
To be bent fast eight or more bends at once. Excellent repeat accuracy.

CYCLIC GAS PLANT NEEDS AUTO CONTROLLER
Fail Proof Programme, cut labour, remove explosion risk.

ULTRASONICALLY CLEANED COMPONENTS
Need drying. Warmed cleaned air and forced circulation.

HERE'S HOW

BIAS MOP MANUFACTURE SPEED UP
Cut time 60 per cent.
Better Balance—Cut Cloth Waste.

DELICATE SECTIONS NEED THROUGH POLISH
Labour Cost down 90 per cent.

LOST WAX CASTINGS
Fast New process. Needs Crash heating of investments. Bonus 85 per cent. wax recovery and smokeless exhaust.

STEEL VEE PULLEY TRUING
Rotary Planishing gives true run and increased belt life.

By the early 1960s Carver & Company was becoming known for its specialist engineering expertise, encapsulated in the slogan 'Carver Solves Problems'. 'Here's How' provided several examples of the machines devised for customers in response to specific problems.

years later the clamp was launched onto the British market and made an immediate impact. Known as the 'Rack Clamp', it had been re-designed for production, the holes in the J-shaped frame being replaced by a series of teeth and a fulcrum pin in the moving arm. Among early customers were Buck & Hickman and Rolls-Royce in Derby. An early leaflet which introduced 'the amazing Carver rack clamp' claimed that it represented 'the greatest advance in clamping since the invention of the "G" clamp'. Within two years of being launched, the clamp was achieving sales of £19,000 a year and the company's total turnover had surged to almost £46,000. A small contribution

towards this total came from Guy Electrical, which made flexible shaft grinding and polishing machines, rotary burrs and other small tools, whose business Carver had purchased in 1959. The impact of the Carver clamp can be gauged from the increase in clamp sales from £19,000 in 1961 to £33,000 in 1962. Carver & Company increased its total sales to £77,000 while importantly trading profits had reached the much healthier position of £18,000. A single product had transformed the company's fortunes.

Carver Clamps & Trumatic Heaters — 1963-1988

THE TWO COMPANIES, Joseph Carver Ltd and Carver & Company (Engineers) Ltd, although they had shared the same premises, had two sets of different shareholders. This was not a satisfactory situation, particularly now that Carver & Company, under John and Jos Carver, had far outstripped Joseph Carver. It was Jos Carver who decided that the best thing to do would be for his mother, his brother and himself as shareholders of Carver & Company to make an offer for Joseph Carver Ltd. An offer of £2 a share was made and accepted by Joseph Carver Ltd in March 1963, valuing the business at £16,412. Joseph Carver continued to trade for some years and drain rods and chimney sweeping kits were still being made in the late 1970s albeit from polypropylene rather than cane.

The main aim of the two brothers was to capitalise upon the success of the Carver clamp. John and Jos Carver were very different in character. John loved finding solutions to engineering problems. Teeming with new ideas, he pursued those which

were deemed worthy of taking further (and several that perhaps were not) with a zealous perfectionism which ensured the quality of their design and development. Any suggestions he offered for subsequent improvements were invariably found to be right. With a compendious knowledge, he was a quiet but strong willed man. The strength with which he expressed his views was a characteristic he shared with his younger, more extrovert brother, Jos, the only problem being that they often took different lines on the same issues. Jos's practical experience enabled him to spot faulty workmanship at a glance as he walked through the works while his flair for salesmanship and marketing reflected his more exuberant personality. On the other hand, as the business grew, he found it

The Carver stand at the 1963 International Factory Equipment Exhibition at Earls Court, showing the old, the chimney sweep kits and drain plugs, on one side; and the new, the Carver clamps, on the other.





John Carver's inventive mind was never still and this letter to his brother, Jos, who was travelling in the United States, shows his facility for design, both in words and pictures, in this instance for a variant of the Carver clamp

very difficult to delegate any of the many responsibilities which he had exercised for so long. This held back the managerial development of the business and often made life difficult for other managers.

The brothers certainly had their differences which created undeniable tension at times although this was rarely destructive. Peter Hall came to play a mediating role between them and in March 1972 was given a ten per cent stake in the company. The brothers had decided that the possibility that this stake could be used against either of them would force them to reach agreement with each other and this seems to have worked. But eventually John Carver decided that he could concentrate on his design and development work only if he was at a distance from the factory and

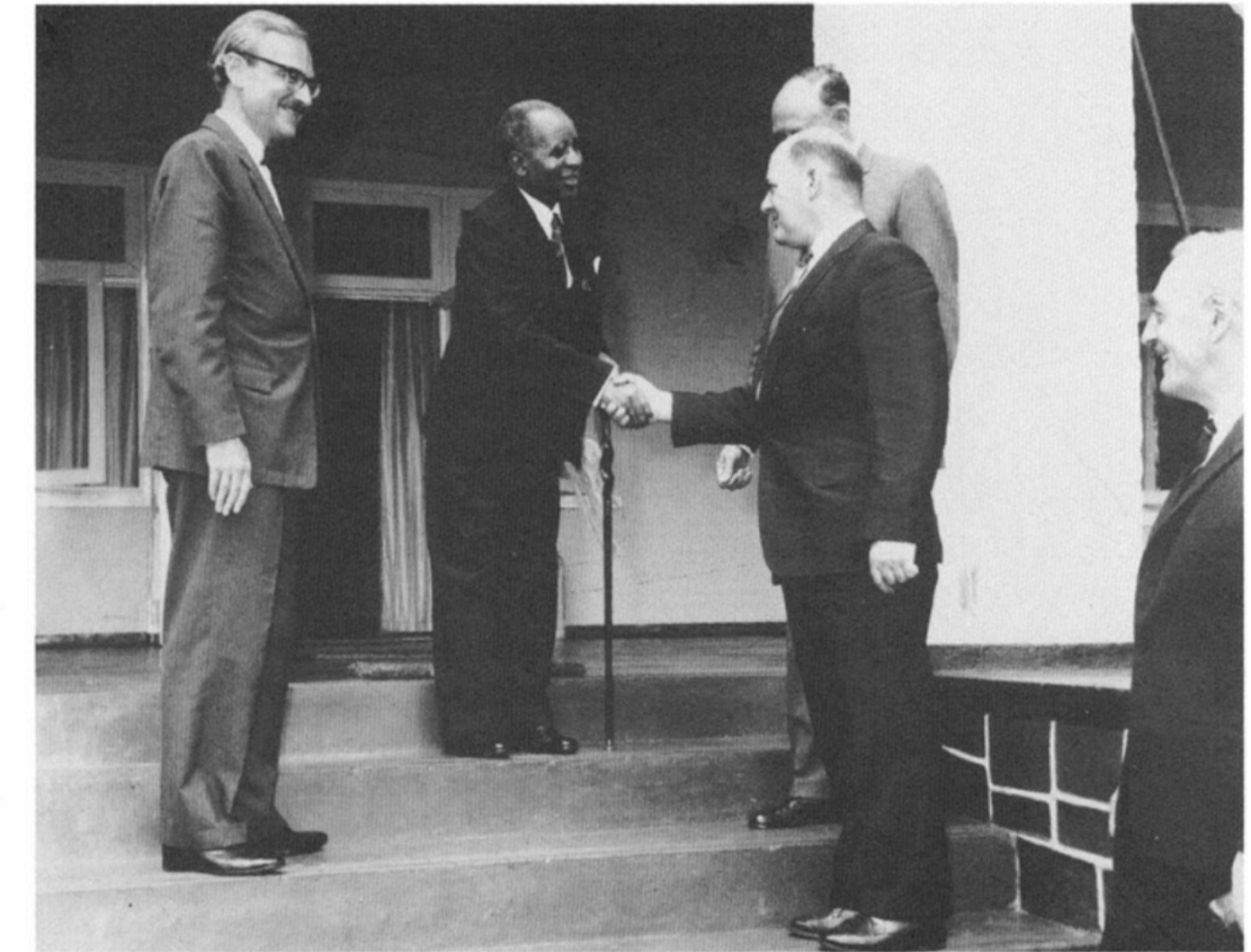
in 1977 he moved away from Walsall to Longhope in Gloucestershire. This revised arrangement allowed the brothers to continue to work together in a partnership which ultimately lasted for more than forty years and transformed the family business. They kept in regular contact when either was away from Walsall on business and most importantly were agreed on the fundamental point that the bulk of trading profits should be always be reinvested in the company.

The success of the original Carver clamp led to the introduction of several other models, including a tee-slot clamp which held materials on machine tool tables. In late 1963 a visiting American saw the rack clamp and placed an order. This prompted Jos Carver to travel to the United States, sailing from Southampton to New York on 24 October 1963 aboard the *Queen Mary*. As he said later, 'I packed my bags, got a full range of samples, and went off determined not to come back without an order'. During the month he spent in the United States and Canada he visited New York, Pittsburgh, Hamilton, Detroit, Cleveland, New Orleans, Jacksonville and Montreal. A network of dealers and agents was appointed and he had discussions with British consular officials on the possibility of establishing a US-based subsidiary to handle sales of the clamps. In the following year, 1964, agents were also appointed in the countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) plus France and Italy. Then came licensing agreements for the manufacture of the clamp in South Africa and New Zealand. Jos made a second visit to North America in 1965, appointing new agents in Toronto and increasing the number of agents on the east coast of the USA. By January 1966 Carver had won orders worth \$100,000 for clamps from the USA and Canada which meant shipments leaving Walsall for North America every fortnight for a year. This led to one of the company's US agents, Frank Dewhirst, a British expatriate, being appointed to manage Carver Inc which was formed at Jacksonville in Florida in February 1966. Jos was in the USA once more at the time and his correspondence reveals the busy schedule he kept, making up to fourteen calls a day on potential customers. The detailed but chatty letters he wrote to

his brother also enclosed details of any new machines or other products of interest he had seen during his travels. By 1967 annual sales of clamps in the USA alone had reached \$200,000 and the company was exporting sixty per cent of all the clamps it could make. Clamps accounted for sales of £122,000 out of Carver's total turnover of £210,000. In the same year Jos Carver set up a distribution network covering the USA, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the West Indies and had travelled as a member of a trade mission from Birmingham to Malawi where he took the time to try and establish new contacts not only in Malawi but also in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rhodesia and South Africa.

The remarkable growth of Carver — the business had expanded nearly ten fold in ten years — made new premises imperative. At the beginning of 1967 Joseph Carver Ltd and Carver & Company moved to a

new £75,000 purpose-built factory on a two acre site at Coppice Side in Brownhills. The Eldon Street property was sold to Frank Charlton Ltd, a saw making firm. The mortgage was provided by ICFC (now known as 3i). Brownhills was at that time a borough in its own right although it has since been



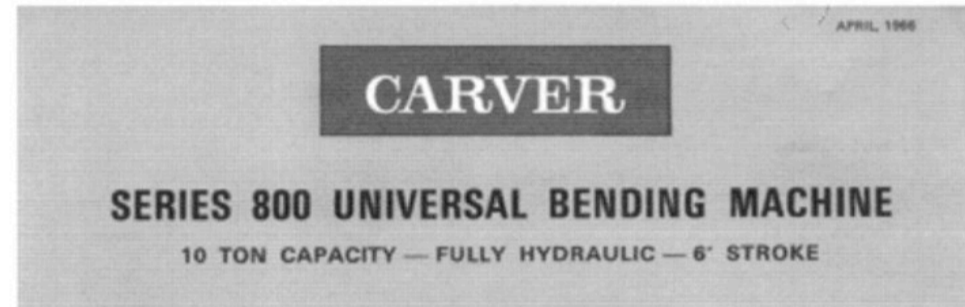
Top right: Jos Carver travelled extensively overseas during the 1960s on behalf of the business but he is seen here, shaking hands with President Hastings Banda, as the deputy leader of the Birmingham trade mission which visited Malawi in 1967. (By kind permission of Mrs Nancy Carver.)

Bottom right: This is a rare photograph of Carver employees from the 1960s showing (back row, left to right) Stan Thorpe, Ron Haycock, Derek Gibson, Ray Poole, Vince Horton and Trevor Jones; (front row, left to right) Arnold Baxter, Brian Parkes, Tom Whitehouse, Cyril Wrighton and Colin Scrimshaw. Notice the clamps on proud display!





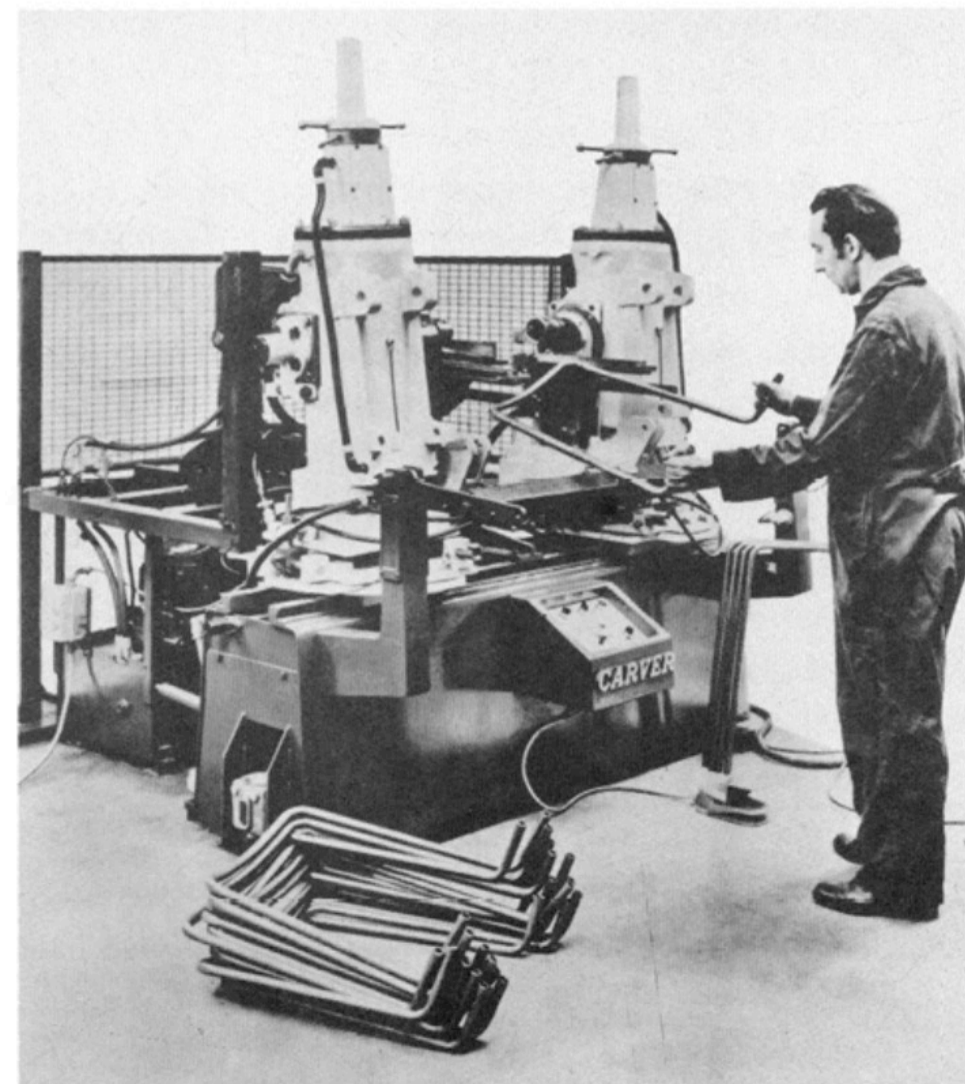
The Coppice Side premises in Brownhills to which Carver moved in 1967.



(1)

Three examples of the Carver range of tube-bending machines — (1) the 800 (seen with Stan Thorpe), (2) the 802 twin head (seen with Ron Haycock), and (3) the 900.

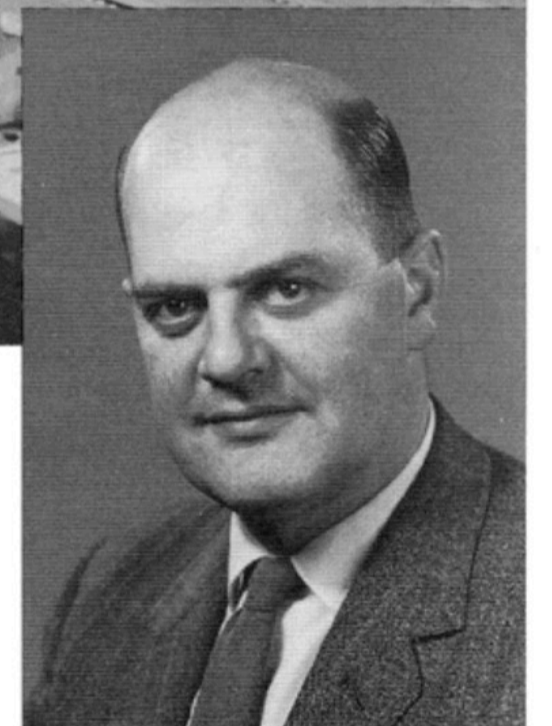
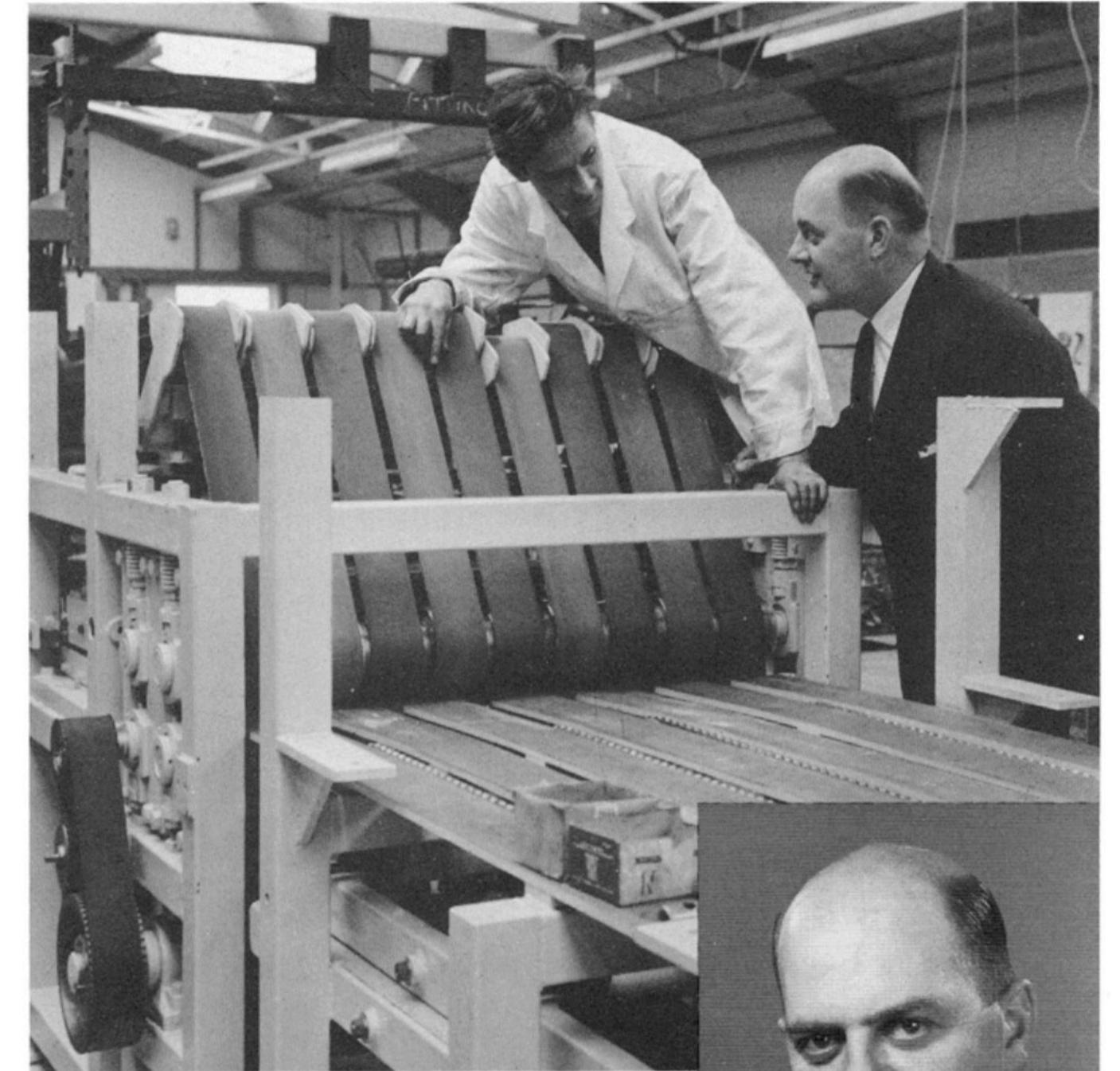
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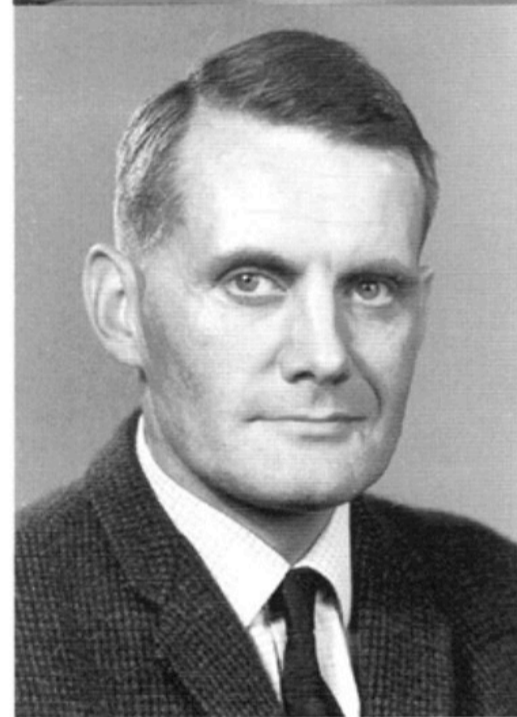
absorbed within Walsall. It was only with reluctance that the firm left Walsall but after two years the Corporation had failed to find Carver a suitable site within the borough. Not only was the Coppice Side property fifty per cent larger than Eldon Street with the capacity for being extended from 15,000 to 45,000 square feet, it was built on one level with strong floors, better lighting, an infinitely superior layout, and an improved canteen. The factory was designed by John Carver who built a scale model of the premises. The architect, Hickton, Madeley & Partners, who handled the project said that they had never before been given such complete and detailed plans by a client. All except one of Carver's Eldon Street workforce moved to Coppice Side, a sure sign at a time of almost full employment that Carver was a good place at which to work. In fact the pay and conditions at Carver & Company were in advance of nationally negotiated agreements and included the removal of demarcation and restrictive practices to increase labour flexibility and mobility. In 1969 John Carver told the firm's works council, which had been formed in 1964, that 'the long established close liaison between management and employees has produced advanced conditions up to eight years earlier than would have been likely had the company and its employees been members of their respective organisations'. The workforce had their own football team, darts team, swimming group and photography group as well as regular social evenings.

By the late 1960s the Carver brothers were exporting not only clamps but also drain rods and, more importantly, the latest Carver machine to go into



Jos Carver (inset) — seen in the Coppice Side factory discussing the copper starter plate looping machine with Peter Hall.

production. This was a tube-bending machine which had been developed in the first place in 1962 for the production of aluminium garden furniture at the Walsall firm of John Hawley & Company. Three years later, thanks to John Carver, the company had made a twin head high speed tube bender which could produce the ten bends in a car seat frame in ten seconds. From this, under the supervision of Geoff Langley, the company's chief designer who was appointed to the Carver board in 1966 with Peter



John Carver (inset) — seen with slide rule in hand discussing design issues with Geoff Langley at Coppice Side.

Hall, came a range of benders for flat strip, bar and wire. Unlike the clamps, the tube bending machines were much more costly items at £4,000 each (the equivalent today of £45,000) and very capital intensive to produce. By 1967 the firm had successfully won orders for fifty-three machines, including an order for several machines for export to a firm in the United States. The order was plagued with problems attributable, noted John Carver, to poor engineering which resulted in late delivery of unserviceable equipment and considerable delay before Carver received payment.

At the same time the company had embarked upon another significant item of capital expenditure. Carver

had won an order for what was the largest single machine ever built by the company. This was a copper starter plate looping machine for a local copper refinery, involving a highly automated transfer process for preparing copper sheets for electrolytic deposition. The order had been won while the company was still at Eldon Street so the move to Coppice Side came just at the right time since the machine required the full length of one of the new factory bays for final assembly.

These two events were the catalyst in 1969 for perhaps the most serious financial crisis to afflict the business during more than two centuries. The delayed payments from the American firm coincided not only with the need to spend significant sums upon the development of the copper looping machine but also with pressure from Carver's bank to reduce the company's overdraft which had more than doubled during 1969-70 from £24,000 to £52,000. Until the American customer solved the immediate crisis by agreeing to release money before the machines had been successfully commissioned, the board had been looking for a buyer for the firm. The danger signs had been flashing for a while. The company's overall net current assets position seemed sound but too large a proportion was accounted for by work in progress and increasing stocks of unsold tube-bending machines. Rapid expansion meant that the company was under-capitalised.

John Carver knew that one lesson to be learnt from the American episode was never to sacrifice quality for speed. But there were also other related problems which had to be dealt with before the firm's cash-flow problems were overcome. The decision to export tube-bending machines to the United States had diverted management resources at Carver Inc from continuing

to drive forward clamp sales. This was exacerbated by the fact that such machinery was out of the field of expertise of Frank Dewhurst and his team. On top of this came the realisation that Jacksonville was too far away from the company's most important customers. As a result of all these factors, the decision was taken to wind up Carver Inc which was accomplished by 1971. This brought to an end an exciting period in Carver's history when ultimately the company failed to make the most of the initial success of the Carver clamp in the United States, firstly by attempting to expand too rapidly (a growth rate of twenty-five per cent per annum was not sustainable) and secondly by not developing an export organisation effective enough to promote the company's other products.

Partly because of the recognition that Carver & Company could not afford to develop the volume production of a range of tube-bending machines and partly to raise cash this business was sold off also in 1971. Geoff Langley left Carver at the same time to continue his involvement with production of the tube-bending machines. More distressingly, a number of employees had to be made redundant as part of an essential cost reduction exercise. Peter Hall found this particularly difficult since among a small workforce most of them were also friends. The directors could not afford to pay themselves their full salaries so for a period the balance they were owed over and above the sums they had withdrawn to live on was placed in a loan account with the company. A prominent businessman, Bill Pamment, was brought in to nurse the company

back to health and he in turn introduced Carver to a chartered accountant in practice in Wolverhampton. This was Mike Groom who would become president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 2002. Over many years he not only provided valuable advice to the company but also proved very successful at encouraging the two brothers to work effectively together. Much needed capital was injected by ICFC who took a twenty per cent equity stake in the company.

The cash-flow crisis which took two years to resolve also placed the company's newest venture under some initial doubt. Jos Carver was a keen caravanner but had never been able to find an inexpensive and reliable space heater for his caravan on the British market. At a machinery exhibition in Oslo towards the end of the 1960s he spotted in a caravan in the car park an intriguing heater which had its flue beneath the floor of the caravan. The heater was made by a firm called Philipp Kreis in Munich and sold under the Truma brand name. Jos ordered one on his return to England and installed it in his own caravan where it was noticed by many of his friends who also placed orders through Jos for further heaters. Jos believed that the Truma heater had a lot of potential in the British



The Carver stand at the 1972 Caravan Exhibition at Earls Court portrays yet another stage in the evolution of the business, displaying the recently adopted Carver Truma range of heaters, lights and other accessories

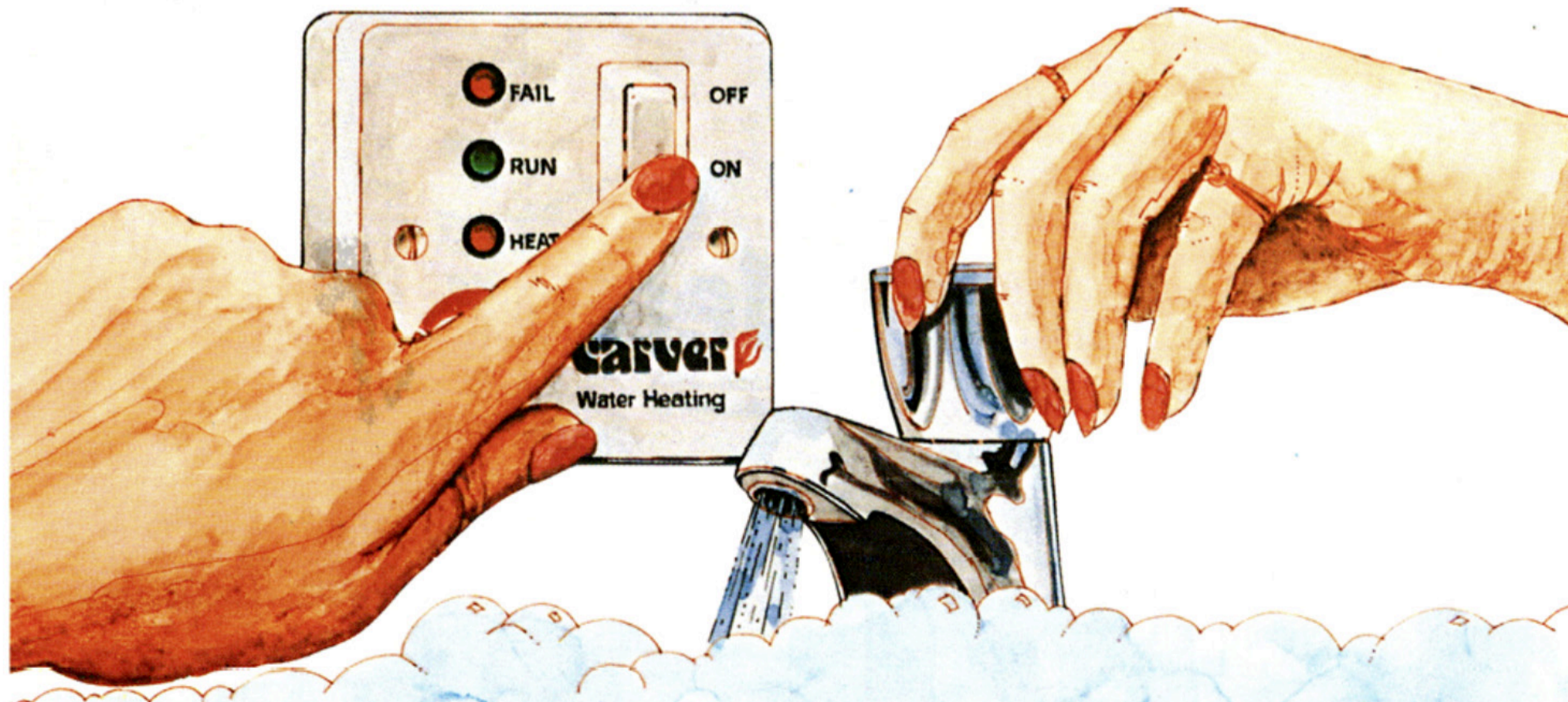


caravan market. This ultimately proved to be the case although it was not an overnight success and UK caravan manufacturers were initially much more interested in the novel Truma gas light. But heaters began to be offered as optional extras and eventually were fitted into several more expensive models as standard equipment. Jos saw the sense in Carver seeking to assemble the heaters from parts supplied by Kreis rather than acting as an importer of completed heaters. On 29 June 1970 Carver signed an exclusive licence with Kreis for the assembly of Truma heaters in the UK. The agreement noted that while Carver must purchase heat exchangers, burners and ignitors from

Left: The Carver Truma caravan heater revived the company's fortunes during the 1970s and was a great success in the caravan industry, providing caravanners with safe interior gas heating.

Below: Another advance in comfort for the caravanner and another innovative success for the company was the Carver Cascade water heater which gave a constant supply of instant hot water.

Bring the luxury of **CASCADE** hot water heating into your caravan



Kreis, other parts could be made by Carver. The agreement also permitted the export from Britain of any heaters fitted to caravans but otherwise only with the consent of Kreis. It was touch and go for a while as to whether Carver could afford to pay for the first consignment of parts sent from Germany.

The Carver Trumatic, as the heaters were known in Britain, were responsible for the company's renewed growth during the 1970s as they became ubiquitous throughout the UK caravan industry. The Trumatic eventually became a completely Carver designed and manufactured product, differing in significant respects from the original model. Alongside this, sales of the Carver clamp provided a valuable and stable source of income and revenue was still being generated until the end of the decade from drain clearing rods and chimney sweeping kits. A further boost to the company was given by the Cascade caravan automatic water heater which was launched in 1979. The inspiration for this came from Jos Carver in the early 1970s. The water heater was designed by John Carver although six years elapsed before development was completed and the product was introduced. Described as 'the caravanner's dream of a hot water system' and as 'a major step forward for caravanners', the Cascade proved very popular. In response to demand in the UK, a second completely revised version, Cascade 2, easier to make and simpler to install, was

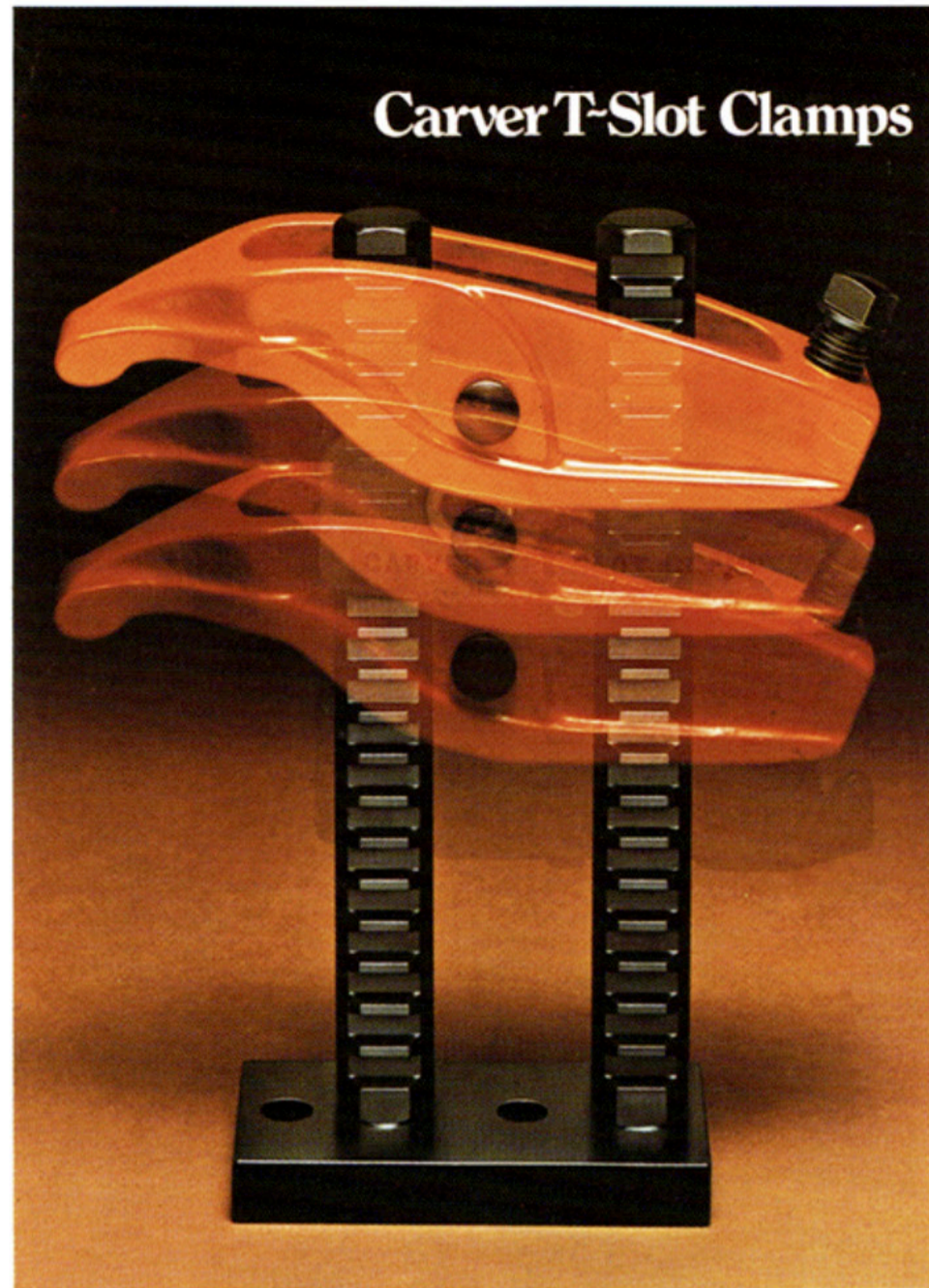
produced. It was hoped that the success of this revised version in the UK would lead to its adoption in the continental market by Philipp Kreis, but since Kreis chose to develop their own water heater, sales of the



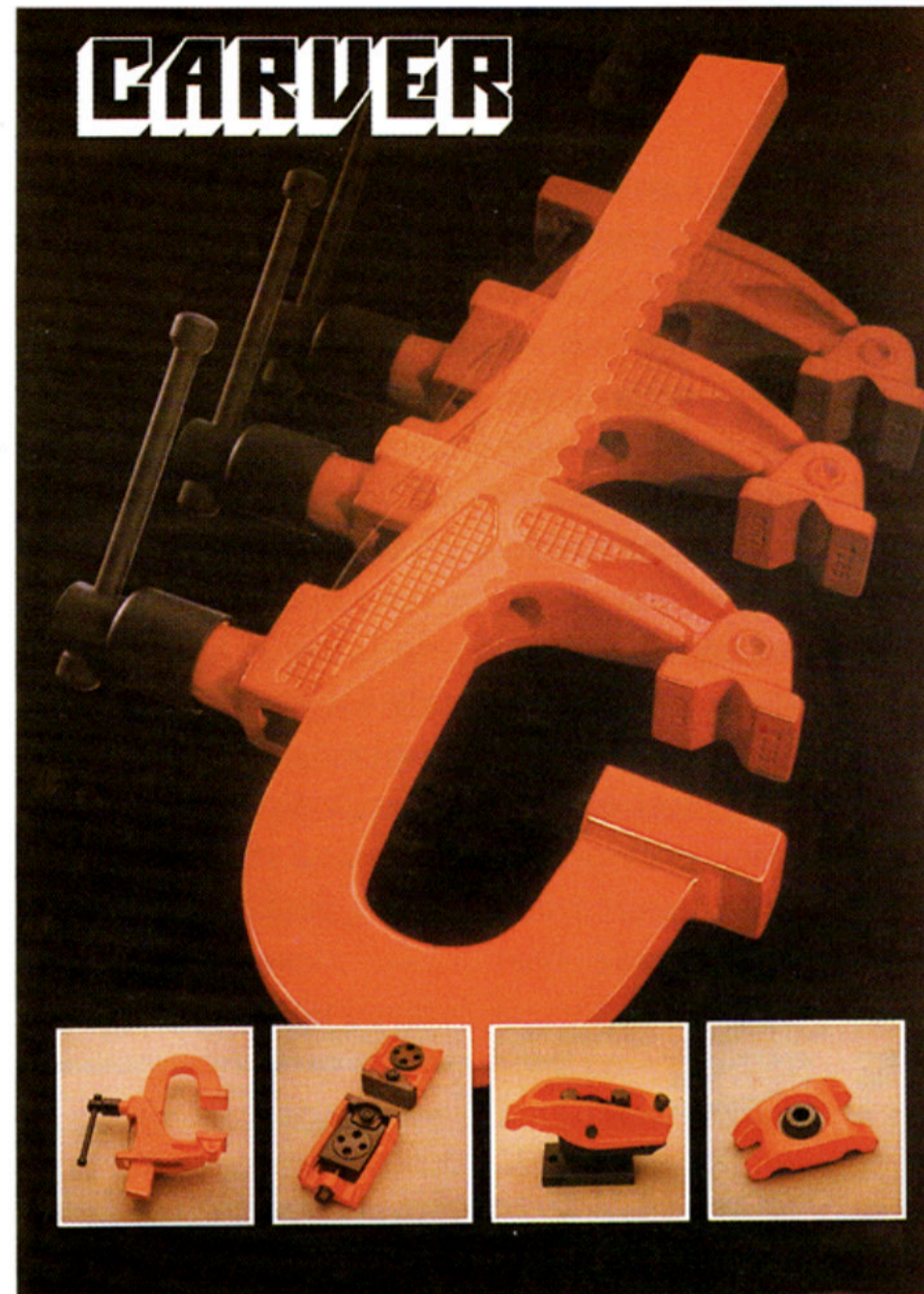
David Carver joined the company in 1969 and became managing director in 1979.



Princess Margaret with Jos Carver and, on the left, Lee Lee-Davy, chairman of the National Caravan Council, at the Carver stand at Earls Court in 1982.



Carver T-Slot Clamps



The success of the Carver caravan heaters and accessories should not overshadow the continuing contribution to the company from its range of clamps for which there was always a demand.



Carver rack clamps

Cascade were confined largely to the UK and, in a handful of cases, to some Commonwealth countries.

Progress was not necessarily smooth but lessons learned from the events of the late 1960s combined with advice in particular from Mike Groom enabled Carver & Company to achieve a real increase in turnover of more than two and a half times between 1970 and 1980. By then the company was achieving a rate of return on sales of more than five per cent and employed more than a hundred people. Guy Electrical, which had been the first agent for Bosch electrical power tools in the UK, was sold off in 1979 since Carver preferred to concentrate scarce capital upon the development of the company's mainstream activities. The time had come to expand the Brownhills

factory and the company added to its own resources by taking up a further loan from ICFC to construct new offices and an extra production bay which were completed at the end of 1979.

In August 1979 Jos Carver stepped down as managing director of the company after suffering a heart attack. In his place came his nephew David, John Carver's eldest son. Just married and working as a buyer for a sign manufacturing firm in Bristol, he had joined the family business only reluctantly in October 1969 after being invited

to take up a vacancy in buying. At the age of thirty-three David Carver felt himself somewhat unprepared to take over from his uncle and, although he was given support from a number of capable senior managers as well as from Mike Groom, the situation was not made any easier by his uncle's subsequent recovery, return to work and re-assertion of his authority.

Realising that conflict was pointless and counter-productive, David Carver instead turned his attention to building up a strong multi-disciplined senior management team that would become the core of the business during the 1990s. A conscious move away from the hands-on management of Jos and John Carver, it was also essential to galvanise the growth of the business. David's strategy was influenced by his involvement with the Walsall Chamber of Commerce & Industry where he became a Council member in 1986 and president in 1990. At the Chamber, his main interest lay in training and education and he was heavily involved in the creation of the Walsall Training & Enterprise Council in 1990. He was not only a founding member of the TEC board but was chairman for five years until the TECs were replaced by Learning & Skills Councils in 2001. The lessons he learned from his involvement with other businesses both locally and nationally bore fruit in Carver's expansion during the 1990s.



In 1980 the Carver stand at the Birmingham NEC Caravan, Boat and Leisure Show, displays a complete range of caravan accessories.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were not easy years for British manufacturing which suffered many casualties during the most severe recession since the 1930s. In 1981 Carver made a loss of £260,000 and was compelled to make a substantial reduction in operating costs to return to profit in the following year. Another significant event in the same year was the sale of the business of Joseph Carver Ltd to Bailey Brothers Ltd in Birmingham, bringing to an end after two centuries the whip making, drain and chimney rod business. Economic difficulties were partly responsible for a vain attempt to market a domestic heating system to national house builders at a time when house building too was in the doldrums; and for a lack of progress in a cooperative venture between Carver and Peter Everard Ltd of Stroud which produced Zig caravan battery chargers. But slow growth during the first half of the 1980s was made up by expansion at a rate of more than ten per cent a year during the second half as there was a resurgence of demand for the company's main products, the Carver clamps, the Carver Trumatic caravan heaters and the Cascade water heaters.

6

The Carver Group — 1988 Onwards

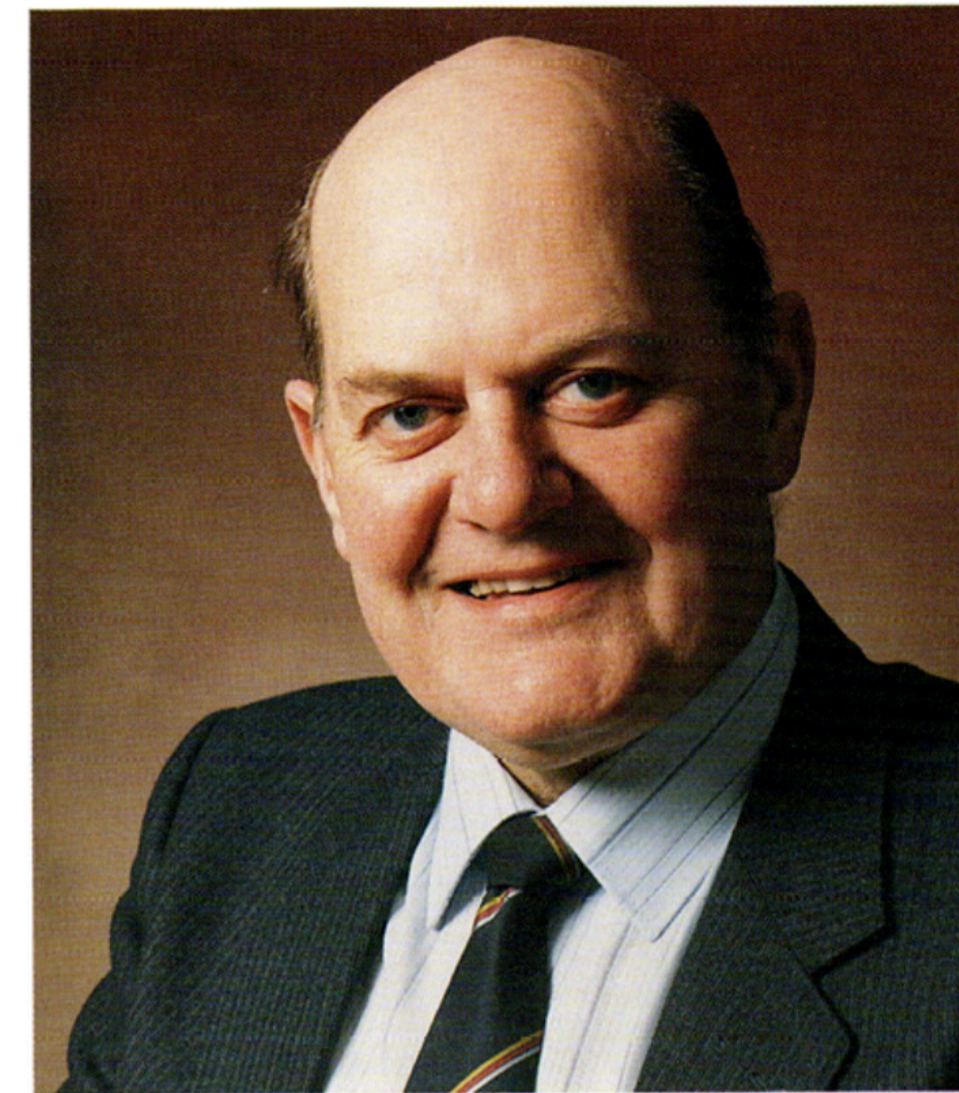
CARVER HAD FIRST CONSIDERED the idea of expanding by acquisition in the late 1970s but the directors decided that this would have placed too much strain upon existing management to be feasible. During the company's subsequent organic growth, Carver had fostered the development of its middle management and this, together with improved trading conditions and renewed ambition, made it possible for the company to look at the idea once more in the late 1980s. On 30 June 1988 Carver acquired a local Walsall firm called Metal Casements Ltd which fabricated steel and aluminium windows as sub-contractors to the construction industry. It was felt that Metal Casements would be an appropriate acquisition given Carver's engineering experience. Certainly Carver's managers were able to make improvements to Metal Casement's administration and manufacturing processes but Metal Casement's contractual arrangements with the construction industry were completely alien to Carver. A warranty claim against the company compounded trading losses and Carver disposed of the business as a going concern less than three years later on 8 May 1991. The episode taught Carver an expensive but valuable lesson.

In February 1990 Jos Carver completed fifty years of service with the business. Sadly he had been in ill-health for some time and died only four months later. But, along with John Carver, David Carver and Peter Hall, he had already realised as a result of the experience with Metal Casements that Carver needed additional management expertise to fulfil its ambitions for further growth. It was also apparent that the business which in 1990 had sales of more than £12 million and trading profits of nearly £300,000 was becoming too complex to be managed by a board

comprised entirely of shareholders. In 1991 it was agreed to adopt a two-tier board: a non-executive board which included shareholders and an executive board responsible for the day to day management of the business. David Carver stated that 'by amalgamating the best qualities of a family business with expert professional management, we expect to produce a dynamic and progressive firm'. Mike Groom became Carver's first non-executive director and in the spring of 1992 John Carver handed over the chairmanship to his son David. It was also at this time that David followed Jos by becoming involved with the caravan industry trade association, the National Caravan Council. Jos would have taken pride to see David



Robinson Willey is a major name in the UK gas appliances industry — the slogan on the company's current exhibition stand, displaying a wide number of Robinson Willey's gas fires, reads 'The hottest name in gas'.



Jos Carver (1924-1990).

become the NCC chairman from 1998 to 2000. Early in 1991 the company had made a significant appointment in recruiting Doug Morrison, who had been managing director of Electrolux Domestic Appliances in Luton, as commercial director and he became responsible shortly after his arrival for identifying possible future acquisition targets.

The first of these was the long-established Liverpool-based gas fire manufacturer, Robinson Willey, which Carver bought from Hanson plc on 30 June 1992 for nearly £2.5 million. It was the second largest manufacturer in the market, then dominated by sales to British Gas showrooms, and had plenty of room for improvement. Doug Morrison was sent for a period as managing director to Robinson Willey where the culture of the company was turned around under a new management team which led to improvements in working practices, industrial relations, production and ultimately profitability.

Carver's strategy was to build up a business based on Carver & Company, Robinson Willey and another major acquisition. There had been some discussion about the future of the Carver clamp business but this remained a stable source of income. The caravan heater business was operating in a stagnant market but nevertheless this too produced a reasonably predictable income stream. Doubling Carver's turnover, the purchase of Robinson Willey improved the business's cashflow and helped to secure Carver's next major acquisition. It also prompted the formation of Carver PLC on 1 February 1994 as the holding company for what became known as the Carver Group under David

Enter the Carver comfort zone

To obtain maximum enjoyment from caravanning, home comforts are essential. You need efficient heating, hot water, fresh tasting drinking water. Carver specialise in supplying these products for caravans, with an emphasis on efficiency and safety.

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You'll really feel at home all the year round with Carver Central Heating. The system directs warmth to every part of the caravan from the floor upwards, including behind the seating and up the windows.

HEAT WHEN YOU NEED IT

On a cool evening Carver Heaters give instant heat. Well proven for over 20 years, they are standard equipment in most caravans.

HOT WATER ON TAP

When the washing up needs doing, or you fancy a shower, a Carver Cascade will deliver up to 2 gallons of hot water as soon as you turn on the tap.

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The Carver Crystal not only pumps water from your barrel to the tap, but also filters out any unpleasant tastes or smells - giving you a nice cup of tea anywhere.



For full details of all Carver products ask your local caravan dealer for our catalogue or write to the address below.

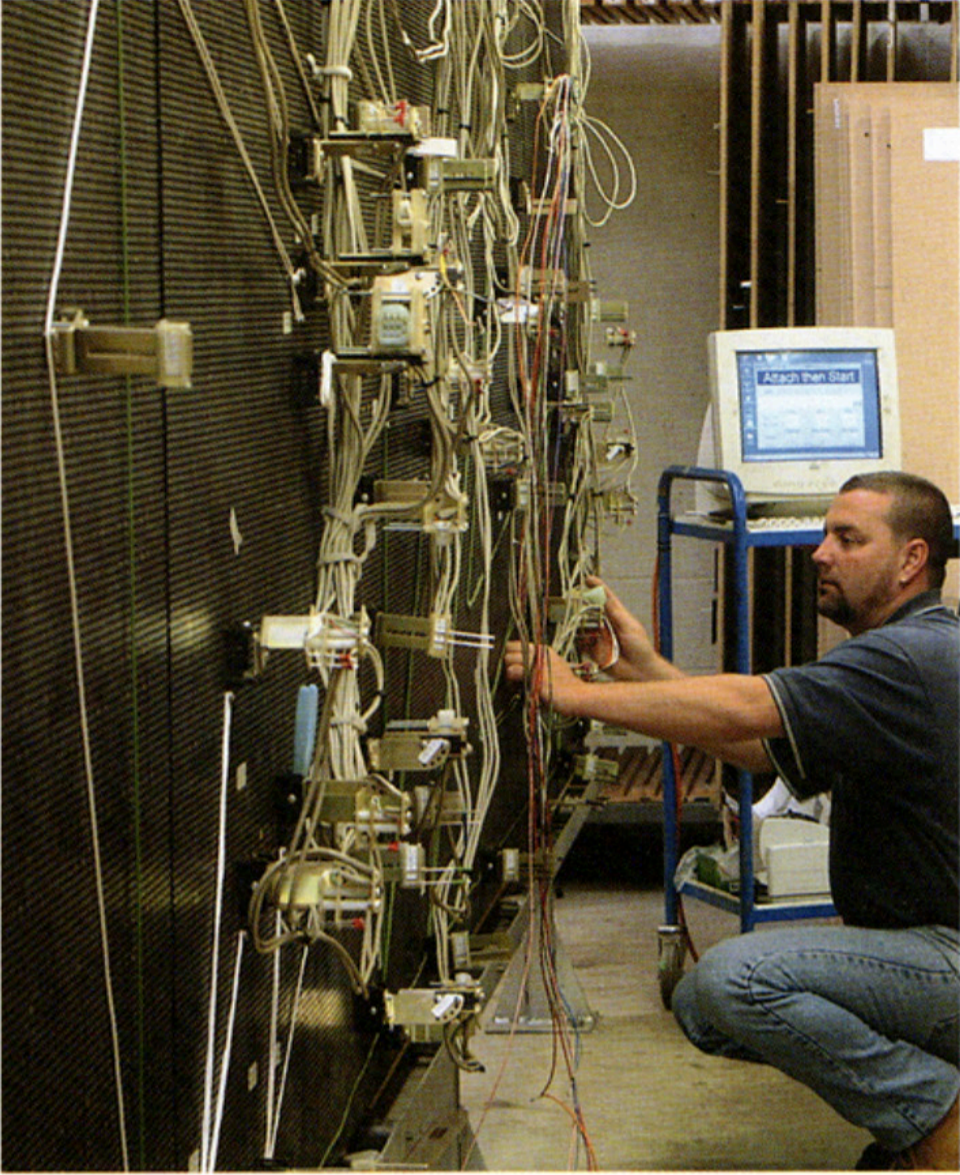
CARVER

CARVER & CO. (ENGINEERS) LTD
COFFICE SIDE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
BROWNHILLS WALSALL ENGLAND W58 7ES
TEL: 0543 452122 FAX: 0543 360760

In the early 1990s Carver was still the name associated with caravanning comfort through its range of heating, hot water and filtered drinking water systems.



(1)

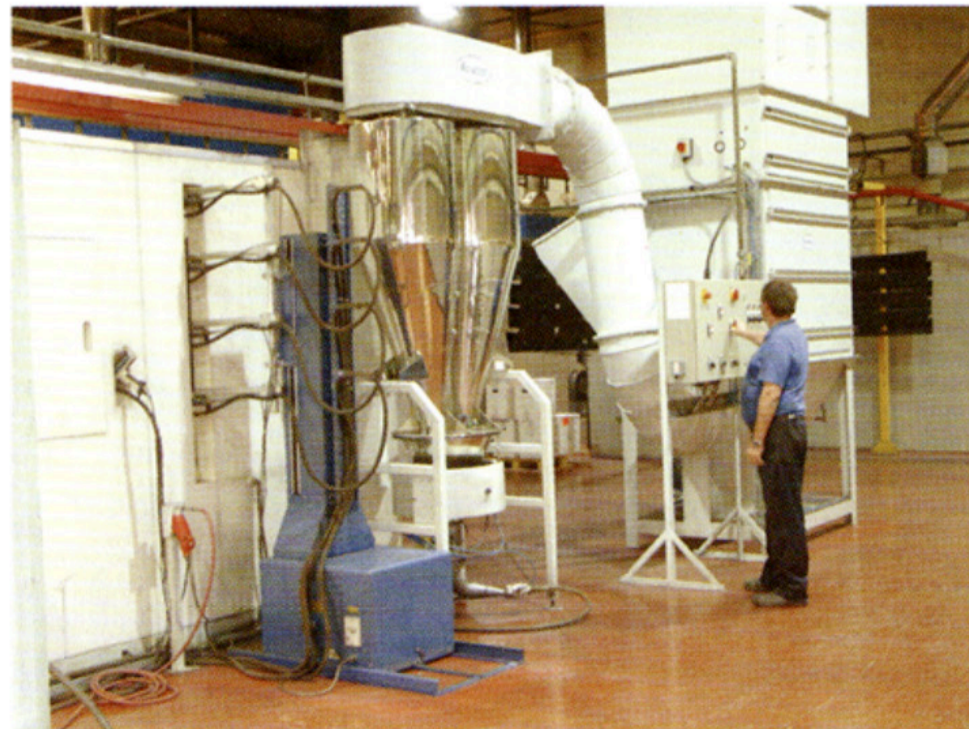


Wiring harness assembly in progress at Zig Electronics.



(2)

Carver as chairman and Doug Morrison as chief executive. In the meantime the board took the opportunity to strengthen its position in the caravan market by acquiring Zig Electronics with which Carver had first had contact ten years previously. Zig was well-known in the industry for making caravan battery chargers and electronic control panels. It was a growing company which required additional capital but whose founder, Mark Francis, wished to retire. Carver took over Zig on 30 March 1994, retained Mike Francis, Mark's son, and moved Zig into larger premises, still near Stroud. Five months later, on 26 August, Carver completed its third acquisition in less than three years when Widney Leisure Ltd became part of the Group. Based in Redditch, Widney was the



(3)

At Robinson Willey investment has created modern plant and assembly lines — shown here are a gas fire assembly line (1), modern computer numerically controlled machinery (2) and the modern paint plant (3).



John Carver (1920-2000).

development of new customers and diversification into new product areas, including air filtration and quartz radiant heating.

In November 1997 John Carver celebrated fifty years with the business at a celebratory dinner held appropriately at the Design Museum in London. Forty years after he had designed the first rack clamp, the original design was still so good that improvements to the range had been relatively minor. His influence upon the business was still apparent. Like his late brother, John too was a keen caravanner but as he got older he found current caravan movers, used to move unhitched and stationary caravans, simply too much effort to use. Here was another problem he set himself to solve. After a couple of years spent developing a suitable design, he produced a prototype caravan mover in the spring of 1996. Typically the prototype was so good that the first production model was not

leading UK manufacturer of gas fires for caravan holiday homes. It was an efficient and profitable business with excellent potential under the capable and confident direction of its existing management, John Rogers and Martin Ward, but it was seeking additional investment for further expansion. Two small complementary businesses were acquired in 1995. The Imperial Electric Company, which made electric fires, and GrateGlow Ltd, a maker of living flame effect gas fires, were both retained as separate brands, Imperial being developed as a high volume manufacturer of electric fires for the wholesale and retail trade while GrateGlow's operations were absorbed within Robinson Willey. A decision taken at this time to reduce the dependence of Robinson Willey upon British Gas was justified in 1999 when British Gas closed all their showrooms with just two months' notice. While this caused some disruption to Robinson Willey, the impact was much reduced thanks to the



The Group Board: Doug Morrison, David Carver and David Jones.

very much different with the exception that it possessed electronic rather than mechanical controls. It departed completely from other caravan movers in that the drive, controlled through a small hand-held unit, worked through the caravan wheels themselves, resulting in greater traction, greater mobility and much easier operation. Two years later, in February 1998 the caravan mover won the caravan industry's Innovation of the Year award presented at the Caravan, Boat & Leisure Show at the National Exhibition Centre. It was sold not only in the UK but also on the continent through an exclusive arrangement with Philipp Kreis of Munich and became, in David Carver's words, 'a phenomenal success'. A twin axle version was launched in 2002. John Carver died at the age of eighty in April 2000.



The Carver name continues to be linked with innovation — this leaflet is for the Group's very successful caravan mover.

In 1998 purpose-built premises were erected at Stoke Prior near Bromsgrove for Widney Leisure and Imperial Electric. Over the next two years the premises were expanded to accommodate both Zig Electronics and Carver & Company as they relocated to Stoke Prior. Carver & Company had been trying to develop the European sales of the Cascade water heater, including the formation of a German distribution company. This led to Philipp Kreis making an extremely good offer for the purchase of the Carver business, excepting the caravan mover and clamps, together with the Brownhills premises. The sale was completed for more than £13 million in September 1999. Sadly the Brownhills factory continued in production under Kreis for less than a year. The sale enabled the Group to buy back from 3i in September 2000 the twenty per cent stake in the business acquired thirty years before. The sale proceeds also enabled the

Group to fund the expansion of the Stoke Prior site and to acquire premises in Aldridge for a new Group head office which was opened in early 2001. The caravan market in the UK had shown little signs of growth so the proceeds from the sale of the touring caravan heater business helped Carver to move into areas with greater potential.

In searching for areas of further investment, the Carver Group executive board, consisting of David Carver, Doug Morrison and the Group's finance director, David Jones, decided that the Group's existing skills and expertise could be applied with success to the heating and ventilation industry which occupied a profitable niche market with further potential. The founder and principal shareholder of a firm called Thermoscreens, Keith Lauder, was wishing to retire from business. Based in Eastleigh, Thermoscreens made air curtains, widely used in factories and



(1) Carver's Bromsgrove premises, the home of Carver Clamps, Carver Caravan Mover, Widney, Imperial Fires and Zig Electronics; (2) the Dutch offices of Biddle; and (3) the Eastleigh factory of Thermoscreens.



The administrative headquarters of the Carver Group in Aldridge. (Photograph by Andy Carver.)

shops, had established itself as the leading firm in its field in both Britain and France, and exported over seventy per cent of its output to more than fifty countries. Distribution in France was carried out by the company's other major shareholder, Claude Bloch, whom Carver wished to retain. Thermoscreens was acquired in the summer of 1999 and Mike Francis from Zig was appointed managing director at the beginning of 2000, demonstrating the importance for the future of the Group of retaining high calibre management from previous acquisitions. A complementary business, Biddle plc, became part of the Group in October 2001. Biddle, a firm operating in the same field as Thermoscreens, possessed factories in Nuneaton in Warwickshire and in Kootsterille in Friesland in the Netherlands, sales offices in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and Canada, and an installation company specialising in the ventilation of supermarket stores. Forty-five years old, the business had been developed by Tony Biddle who had taken over from his father. Initially reluctant to sell, he was ultimately persuaded that Carver possessed not only the capital and expertise to maximise the potential of Biddle's plants but also a sympathetic culture

and ethos. Tony Biddle and his Dutch colleague, Mark van Rooij, accepted preference shares in Carver PLC as part of the terms of the sale which valued Biddle at more than £14 million, both men joining the Carver board as non-executive directors.

The Carver Group in 2002 employs some 400 people, has an annual turnover of nearly £40 million, and remains consistently profitable. Thirty per cent of turnover is exported and half comes from air curtains with Thermoscreens and Biddle accounting for a substantial share of the European market. With a minimal head office, the Group demonstrates a confidence in the management of individual subsidiaries by allowing them considerable freedom and flexibility within agreed guidelines subject to regular reporting to the Group chief executive. One of the major strengths of the Group in recent years has been the way it has encouraged the development of managers throughout the Group, notably those who have come from outside, and the contribution of senior management within a family-controlled business is now being recognised by the implementation of a share participation scheme. The family shareholders have also consistently shown their faith in the executive directors, there are excellent communications between the non-executive family directors and senior executives and the family have been united in their support of the Group's strategy to develop the business.

More than two centuries after Joseph Carver first began the business in Walsall, Carver PLC remains family-controlled, a member of the family, David Carver, still chairs the business and it continues to be based in Walsall. This is a remarkable achievement, especially given the recent and successful expansion of the Group. It is also extremely rare since most family

businesses are short-lived. There are many reasons why the Carver Group has survived and flourished. Over several generations members of the family have either displayed talents of their own which have enabled the business to move on or possessed the shrewdness to bring in others to complement their own abilities to the same end. Entrepreneurial instincts, panache for sales and marketing, flair for innovative engineering — all these have played their part. So too has chance: Dav Carver's preference for engineering over whipmaking laid down the foundations for the modern business which was also lucky to survive the cash-flow crisis of the late 1960s. Jos Carver's initiative in buying out the shareholders of Joseph Carver Ltd was a shrewd move which helped to concentrate the family shareholding in relatively few hands. Jos and his brother John were able to work together by recognising their differences and so prevent the family feuds which so often lead to the dismantling of family firms. They too were agreed that the progress of the business depended upon the constant reinvestment of the bulk of the business's profits rather than paying out substantial dividends to shareholders, a policy which still continues. More recently the family have recognised the importance of professional management for the development of the business in which Doug Morrison and David Jones play a particularly prominent part today and which has allowed the Group with such success to move out of mature markets and into markets with greater potential for growth. Perhaps most of all every succeeding generation of the Carver family has always maintained a belief in the future of the business, providing a stability and continuity which must be the envy of many other businesses.

Afterword

ANOTHER 20 YEARS HAVE PASSED since the history of the Carver family business in Walsall was published. With a continuing demand for copies, we have decided to take advantage of the electronic age and publish an 'e' version to include this brief update.

In 2002, the Group recorded a profit before tax of £560,000 on a turnover of just over £38m and employed over 400 people. The sale of Robinson Willey to its management in 2006 reduced that number to around 250. The money raised by the sale went towards paying the final instalment for Biddle plc which had been acquired in 2001. We also started to move all the Group's UK production to the factory at Nuneaton. In December 2011 we dropped what some might say was the hubristic title of PLC and reverted to being a private limited company as Carver Group Limited.

A further significant change came when Doug Morrison retired as CEO in March 2012 and Aidan Killeen was appointed as his successor. Doug had been CEO for most of his 21 years with the company and today still continues to provide invaluable advice to the Group as a non-executive director. Aidan brings many new skills to the business and has now steered us through three further acquisitions.

The first, in 2016, was Applied Comfort Products Inc, based in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada, a manufacturing company with a range of packaged terminal air conditioners. ACP, as it is known, holds all our Canadian interests, acting as a distributor in Canada and the USA for Biddle and Thermoscreens as well as for its own products.

The second acquisition was Cooltherm Ltd in 2018. This UK-based business designs, supplies,

installs and maintains specialist air conditioning systems in commercial premises. Based in the South of England and Wales, the business is expanding with the aim of covering the entire country.

Let's pause to see where the Group was by the end of 2019. During the previous 20 years, the company had consolidated its position with air curtains and air conditioning and turnover had risen to £58.4m with £1.6m profit before tax and £5.7m EBITDA (earnings before interest, depreciation and amortisation).

By this time, Brexit had taken place, and the Covid-19 pandemic was imminent. The Group was well placed to withstand Brexit, with production facilities and markets in both UK and the Netherlands. However, like everyone else, we had not expected a pandemic, which did affect the business, temporarily knocking us off our growth curve. But good management limited the adverse impact and our performance in 2021 was once again on a par with 2019. By 2022, the company was employing 271 people, and there was another all-time record performance, with turnover reaching £59.3m, profit before tax £5.5m and EBITDA £8.7m.

Returning, then, to the third acquisition under Aidan's management, completed on 26 May 2023, just in time for this publication. Powrmatic Limited is a long established manufacturer of industrial heating and ventilating equipment based in Ilminster, Somerset. This is a substantial move for the Group, with Powrmatic adding turnover in excess of £21m. It comes with a very good profit record and exciting future prospects.

This latest acquisition gives the Group an annualised turnover above £81m and EBITDA of more than £12m with a workforce of almost 400 people.

From Left to Right: Chris Carver, Non-Executive Director; David Carver, Non-Executive President; Aidan Killeen, Group Chief Executive; Doug Morrison, Non-Executive Director; Tim Carver, Non-Executive Chairman; Jonathan Moore, Group Finance Director.
Photo © Andy Carver

Inevitably there have been family changes: my mother, Jill Carver, died aged 90 in April 2013, followed by the death of Peter Hall in October the same year, while Nancy Carver, mother of my cousin Tim, died at the age of 89 in May 2016. As previously noted, the Halls are not strictly family but we have always held them in the same high regard. On a happier note, my youngest son Chris, who studied mechanical engineering with finance and is a qualified chartered mechanical engineer, was appointed a non-executive director in January 2018. While he still has his own interests elsewhere, he brings new insights to the Group – who knows where they might lead in future?

Our Group Finance Director, Stuart Fyfe, left us in 2021 and his successor, Jonathan Moore, joined us in March 2022.

On 1 January 2023, my younger cousin Tim Carver took over from me as non-executive chairman. I remain on the board with the honorary title of non-executive president for as long as I can continue to contribute but the Group is in great shape, with excellent prospects, and I shall take enormous pleasure and pride in watching it continue to fulfil its ambitions.

When my fourth cousin once removed, Henry Carver, the owner and managing director of builders merchant Carvers (Wolverhampton) Ltd, which is not part of Carver Group Ltd, recently commissioned research into the family, this produced additional information and material to help us correct some of the assumptions made about our early history. The family has now been traced back to Richard Carver, b c.1625, and his details and those of his descendants are given in brief here:



Richard Carver: b c.1625, d c.1685, in Mancetter, Warwickshire.

Married Anne, c.1645, in Mancetter.

Nine children, eighth of which was:

Joseph Carver: b1663, d1725, in Mancetter.

Married Ellen Hawkinson, 1687, in Mancetter.

Seven children, third of which was:

Joseph Carver: b1691, d1739, in Mancetter.

Married Mary Hill, 1717, in Mancetter.

Nine children, ninth of which was:

Joseph Carver*: b1735 in Mancetter, d1797 in Sutton Coldfield. He dealt in property and was landlord of the Red Lion in Sutton Coldfield's High Street. It is probable that Joseph purchased the site in Rushall Street in Walsall in 1776, later known as Carver's Yard. (**This is the first Joseph in the previously published family tree (p54).*.)

Married Mary Carver (with one daughter by previous marriage), 1763, in Sutton Coldfield.

Four additional children, first of which was:

John Carver: b1763 in Sutton Coldfield, d1813 in Walsall. It is John Carver who truly established the manufacturing business, setting up the whip making business after his apprenticeship to whip thong maker Thomas Penrose in Walsall. He was in business on his own account by 1789, by which date he was employing John Smith (*see page 3*). It was his son Joseph, b1790, who continued the business.

DAVID CARVER
SUMMER 2023

The Red Lion Inn, High Street, Sutton Coldfield, c.1850. The photograph was taken by William Morris Grundy, whose caravan is said to be that in the picture and from which he did his processing. From the Norman G. Evans' Collection, by kind permission of Marian Baxter.



A Carver Chronology

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|-----------|---|----------|---|
| 1770 | Cook discovers Australia | 1936 | Edward VIII abdicates | July 2002 | Turnover £38.1m; profit before tax £0.56m | Oct 2015 | Carver Clamps, Widney and Zig production is moved from Bromsgrove to the factory at Nuneaton |
| 1776 | Joseph Carver begins in business | 1939 | Second World War declared | Jan 2003 | Caravan Mover patent granted | May 2016 | Nancy Carver dies |
| | American War of Independence begins | 1940 | Jos Carver enters the business | Dec 2003 | Caravan Mover sold to Truma for £4.7m | Nov 2016 | Acquisition of Applied Comfort Products Inc. in Ontario, Canada, manufacturer of Packaged Terminal Air Conditioners |
| 1788 | <i>Times</i> newspaper founded | 1942 | Death of Dav Carver | Aug 2006 | Robinson Willey Limited site in Liverpool sold for housing for £3.8m | Jan 2018 | Chris Carver, youngest son of chairman David Carver, is appointed non-executive director. From the eighth generation of the family, Chris is a chartered engineer working full time with another company but brings expert skills to the business |
| 1789 | John Carver employs John Smith | 1945 | Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima | Oct 2006 | Robinson Willey Limited company sold to the management in an MBO | Aug 2018 | Cooltherm Limited acquired (UK based design, supply, installation and maintenance of commercial air conditioning equipment) |
| | French Revolution begins | 1947 | John Carver joins the business | Jan 2007 | Thermoscreens Limited production is moved from Eastleigh to the factory at Nuneaton | Dec 2019 | Turnover £58.4m; profit before tax £1.61m |
| 1805 | Battle of Trafalgar | 1949 | Peter Hall joins the business | Aug 2007 | Arthur Forrest replaces Mark van Rooij as Tony Biddle's non-executive appointee, shortly after which Tony Biddle resigned, leaving Arthur Forrest on the board to protect his interests | Jan 2020 | Covid-19 pandemic emerges – impact will last for the next three years |
| 1813 | Death of John Carver | 1952 | Death of George VI | Jun 2011 | Purchased the freehold of Head Office at 15 Northgate Aldridge from Walsall Council | Feb 2020 | Brexit – UK leaves the European Union |
| 1815 | Battle of Waterloo | | Carver & Co (Engineers) Ltd formed | Dec 2011 | Carver PLC changes name to Carver Group Limited | Dec 2020 | Turnover £48.8m; profit before tax £0.75m |
| 1821 | Joseph Carver makes donation to rebuilding of St Matthew's Church, Walsall | 1956 | Clean Air Act passed to eliminate smog | Mar 2012 | Aidan Killeen appointed Group CEO in succession to Doug Morrison who becomes a non-executive director | Mar 2022 | Jonathan Moore replaces Stuart Fyfe as Group finance director |
| 1825 | Stockton to Darlington railway opens | 1957 | Carver clamp invented | Apr 2013 | Jill (A.M.) Carver dies | Sep 2022 | Death of Queen Elizabeth II and accession of King Charles III |
| 1837 | Queen Victoria ascends the throne | 1958 | Joseph Carver Ltd makes its last whip | Oct 2013 | Final payment for Biddle made. Biddle appointee, Arthur Forrest, steps down from the board | Dec 2022 | Turnover £59.3m; profit before tax £5.5m |
| 1851 | Great Exhibition held | 1961 | Berlin Wall built | Oct 2013 | Peter Hall dies | Dec 2022 | David Carver relinquishes his non-executive chairmanship in favour of his younger cousin, Tim Carver, and becomes non-executive president |
| 1869 | Suez Canal completed | 1963 | President Kennedy assassinated | July 2014 | Group financial year-end moved to 31 December with a 17 month extended transitional trading period | May 2023 | Powrmatic Ltd, Ilminster, Somerset, acquired |
| 1876 | Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone | 1966 | Carver Inc established in Florida | Feb 2015 | Stuart Fyfe replaces David Jones as Group finance director | | |
| 1878 | Joseph Carver becomes churchwarden at St George's in Walsall | 1967 | Carver moves from Eldon Street to Coppice Side | | | | |
| 1885 | Joseph Carver wins gold medal at New Orleans exhibition | 1969 | David Carver joins company | | | | |
| | Invention of the internal combustion engine | 1970 | Carver signs licence with Kreis | | | | |
| 1887 | Earliest surviving issue of Joseph Carver's catalogue | 1971 | Decimalisation | | | | |
| | Joseph Carver moves to new premises in Eldon Street | 1973 | Britain joins the EEC | | | | |
| | Queen Victoria celebrates her Golden Jubilee | 1979 | Cascade water heater launched | | | | |
| 1888 | Pneumatic tyre invented | | David Carver appointed managing director | | | | |
| 1891 | Joseph Carver wins gold medal at Jamaica exhibition | 1982 | Falklands War | | | | |
| 1893 | Joseph Carver wins gold medal at Chicago exhibition | 1989 | Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe | | | | |
| 1896 | Ira D Miller visits Joseph Carver in Walsall | 1990 | Death of Jos Carver | | | | |
| 1899 | Boer War begins | 1991 | Doug Morrison joins Carver | | | | |
| 1902 | Dav Carver completes his 500cc motor-car | 1992 | Robinson Willey acquired | | | | |
| 1903 | Flight of the first aeroplane | 1994 | Carver PLC formed | | | | |
| 1908 | First Model T Ford sold | | Zig Electronics acquired | | | | |
| 1914 | First World War is declared | | Widney Leisure acquired | | | | |
| 1917 | Russian Revolution | 1996 | Carver caravan mover prototype | | | | |
| 1920 | Joseph Carver retires | 1998 | Premises erected at Stoke Prior, near Bromsgrove | | | | |
| 1926 | General Strike | 1999 | Caravan heater business sold | | | | |
| 1929 | Wall Street Crash leads to Great Depression | | Thermoscreens acquired | | | | |
| 1933 | Hitler elected German Chancellor | 2000 | Death of John Carver | | | | |
| | | 2001 | Aldridge head office opened | | | | |
| | | | Biddle plc acquired | | | | |

Carver Family Tree

