

Founded 1908

Jubilee Souvenir

# THE L.B.G. STORY

A Chronicle of the growth from humble beginnings of a Society for the collective marketing of produce and the provision of the needs of growers in Vale Of Evesham villages famous for their fruit and vegetables

By

C.A. Binyon, J.P., O.B.E.

Edited by John H. Bird

Originally published in July 1958 by  
Littleton & Badsey Growers Ltd., Badsey, Near Evesham, Worcestershire

*This digitised version was created from the original booklet by Alan Bunting whose father, S. F. E. Bunting, joined L.B.G. in 1926 as book-keeper and later became Company Accountant for the period covered by this history.*

## INTRODUCTION – By John H Bird

# L.B.G. AND ITS LEADER

THIS is the story of an enterprise by the few in the interests of the many. For years the market gardening community, beset by problems and always faced with uncertainty, plodded on in near-poverty but showing little ambition about trying to improve conditions in their own industry.

Although producers of essential foods they were never sure of a fair return for their goods and toil. Yet when in 1908 the L.B.G. Society was formed with the object of working out a system to ensure better reward for their labours, and with some measure of security, there was scepticism and an unwillingness to join in the new enterprise. Co-operation commanded no confidence, perhaps because their doubts exceeded their hopes. And the really good growers had got their markets and were fairly well satisfied.

Half a dozen thinking men (including Mr. R. R. Smith who moved the historic resolution founding the Society) pioneered for collective effort. They realised, however, that co-operation alone, while bringing about better service and business terms, would not solve all their problems. That would take years with an industry whose workers had always ploughed a lone furrow. It *did* take years to solve even a few of them; some, they say, are insoluble.

At several stages in its career the L.B.G. Society was almost defeated; once or twice it was about to be folded up in despair, but the spirit of the few prevailed. A return to individuality would have meant back to hand-to-mouth methods and hope for the best. The few kept bravely on. Growers had always laboured in the dark. They were strong-minded optimists who, having worked through all the daylight hours, could sleep well at night not knowing whether they would get a fair price for their produce, or even at times if they would receive anything at all.

The Society, similarly, had to take chances in trying to bring about salvation without experience to guide them and without credit, capital or government grant to help them. The enterprise could easily have failed. It did not fail because its leaders were men of determination and stamina; men who themselves were striving to get a decent living from the land.

When the L.B.G. Society of growers was established 50 years ago its leader was one of them, though to them he must have appeared as a delicate young man of the cloisters who had taken to the spade and seed drill for the sake of healthy outdoor life. He was Mr. Charles Arthur Binyon, bachelor, vicar's son, brother of the poet, Laurence Binyon, and he came as a young man to live at Badsey.

Mr. C. A. Binyon, who had studied early attempts at co-operation among growers elsewhere, was ready and earnest; and in return he served the Society as book-keeper, treasurer, manager, plan-drawer, sign writer, contract negotiator, chairman and, chiefly, as president. He encouraged and inspired; he gave freely of his time and talents without reward; he enjoyed the confidence of his colleagues and he never lost faith.

This story of L.B.G. is called forth from Mr. Binyon's recollections, his experiences (he has always been in closest touch with its direction and management) and from his numerous diaries and notebooks, all written with a fine regard for detail and in the neatest of handwriting.

Home of the L.B.G. is, and always has been, in the hamlet of Blackminster, about three miles from Evesham - where the old Great Western Railway (Oxford - Worcester line) borders the parishes of Littleton and Badsey. Though the names of those two villages are incorporated in the Society's title, there was no intention of restricting membership to growers there. Blackminster was a central point for several villages and the Society's name was partly suggested by the name of the railway station serving them.

It was on the edge of the railway goods yard that, in September 1908, the Society set up its first premises - a small wooden shed for office with an adjoining storeroom on a foundation of old railway sleepers.

The Avon valley in the neighbourhood of Evesham embraces some 100 villages where practically the only industry is market gardening; and most of them have growers in membership of the L.B.G.

Today the L.B.G., long since an established success, is reaping the reward of having built diligently on foundations of its own construction. In its ranks are a fair percentage of the gardeners who may be regarded as successors to those monks of old who, finding the soil in the neighbourhood of Evesham's quondam Abbey so rich and rewarding, were really the originators of this intensive form of agriculture.

## CHAPTER I

# HOW IT BEGAN : 1908 - 1909

The Change Over from Farming  
Small Acreages and the Evesham Custom  
Growers Lacked Marketing System  
They Loathed Letter Writing  
First Move Towards Co-operation  
I Meet Mr. Asquith  
Tom Bubb calls in C.A.B.  
A Start Made with Ten Stalwarts  
“Everything for the Grower”  
Not Enough Money to Make Mistakes!  
Cash and Credit Hard to Come By  
“Close Down!” They Said

WHEN I first came to Badsey in 1899 the change over from farming to market gardening was almost complete. \*

The land was now occupied almost entirely by small-holders with from three to ten acres. The older men were farm labourers in their younger days, earning about 15s. per week. When the farming industry became depressed and it was difficult to find tenants, landowners let out acreages in small lots at increased rents, but they observed the Evesham Custom [see page 7] which ensured to the tenant not only security of tenure but also recompense for improvements. As a result a very high standard of cultivation was reached.

Market garden produce was marketed in three ways: (1) sending by rail to commission men in Birmingham, Manchester and other large towns; (2) sending the produce to Evesham Smithfield Market where it was sold by auction; (3) by selling to a local dealer.

Each gardener purchased his own requisites and marketed his own produce as best he could. Fertilisers were mainly bought from Evesham merchants who gave generous credit terms. There was no organised collective effort for either buying or selling; but I found a very friendly spirit among the gardeners. If a grower was incapacitated by accident or illness his neighbours would club together and give him a day's work; and they *did* work! I have known as many as thirty turn up and it can be imagined what a help that was.

Some gardeners still grew a patch of wheat, a custom which they carried over from farming; and as it was not possible for an individual to hire a threshing machine these men agreed to take their wheat to a central spot and share the cost of a hired machine. The corn was ground at Aldington Mill and many villagers still baked their own bread. Combined operations also applied to ploughing with the cost shared in proportion to the acreage. Much of the land was heavy and required four horses. Horses and tools, too, were freely loaned among growers.

For marketing, commission agents supplied empties - wicker hampers known locally as pots - to be used only for produce sent to *them*. After deducting sums for carriage, commission and any other charges, the commission agents sent cheques weekly to growers in payment for their fruit and vegetables. In times of glut the unfortunate grower was occasionally faced with a debit note for expenses over the amount realised by his produce.

*\* An illustration of the fact that corn growing was merely lingering towards its end in this district came my way when I met an old man who had filled his waistcoat pockets full of seed wheat. He planted them out with a dibber on his allotment, putting a single seed carefully into each hole. It took him all morning. I was pleased that this last crop yielded an excellent harvest for him.*

There was, of course, no telephone, little if any correspondence, rail transport only, and often the grower never met his salesman. Some city salesmen, however, made annual visits to grower clients, meeting them at work on their land and giving them useful hints as to packing and marketing requirements. But the whole system was very haphazard and a great deal was left to chance. Selling to dealers locally was, in some respects, attended with less risk, but it was important to choose a dealer who would look after the grower when produce was plentiful and not just take it when it was scarce and in good demand. We had a very good dealer in Badsey, Mr. William Pethard, who had a stand in Birmingham market. He was a great help to the village growers. He used to take consignments regularly and, being in close touch with Birmingham Market, he could advise growers when to send in produce.

Evesham Smithfield Market had the advantage that the grower could actually see his own produce sold by auction. It was attended by many dealers and trade distributors from the Midlands. Prices fluctuated greatly. They were generally best, of course, when produce was in short supply and worst in times of glut.

Much dissatisfaction was caused among growers by the railway companies' charges. Delays in delivering goods were frequent and occasionally goods were lost. I recall an occasion when one truck full of asparagus caught fire en route and the unfortunate growers not only had no compensation for their losses but were actually charged for railway carriage.

Prices at the turn of the century were very low. Egg plums (the local name for Pershore) which were grown in large quantities, often made only one farthing a pound and did not pay for picking. A feeling spread among growers that there was a great need for combining in order to get fair play, to put their case before the Government, and to press claims on the railway company. Although there had been no organised attempt to co-operate in the district there was undoubtedly a very strong sense among the small growers that something was lacking. They felt at the mercy of all who handled their produce and had no means of making their grievances known or any method of redress.

Railway charges were high and the complexity of the rates system presented great difficulty to men who had left school at 12 or 13 years of age. Making claims for produce spoiled by undue delay in transit or not even delivered was, to them, a formidable task. They would rather dig a chain of heavy land than write a letter. Then too, disputes with salesmen would occur, calling perhaps for lengthy correspondence. Most of these small growers really wanted to devote their whole time to cultivation of their holdings and not have to worry about writing letters when they got home after a hard day's work in the open air.

The untimely death of William Pethard deprived these men of a very useful outlet and helped to bring home to them the weakness of their position. No wonder then that when a definite proposal to start a society was made it was received "as rain on parched ground," to quote the words of Mr. R. R. Smith, one of the originators of the L.B.G. Society. The matter was first publicly discussed at a meeting held at South Littleton on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September 1908, with the object of seeing what could be done to obtain more land for small-holdings.

Three months before I had been a member of a deputation who met the Prime Minister to put forward the need for small-holdings. Mr. Lionel Horne was my colleague and in the House of Commons we were ushered to a door bearing the words "Prime Minister." The interior reminded me of my schoolroom at St. Paul's. Mr. Asquith was seated at the desk. An M.P. introduced us and we all sat very quiet, like pupils called before a stern boss. While the M.P. was speaking my neighbour nodded towards the Premier and whispered to me, "He's not taking a bit of notice." Mr. Asquith certainly seemed quite absorbed in some document on his desk. But suddenly, as our leader was making some statement about tenure, Mr. Asquith rapped out, "Why do you say that?" and without waiting for an answer he proceeded to quote figures which entirely refuted the argument.

The schoolmaster was for all the world correcting a head scholar who had blundered in construing. We were informed that all our points were receiving his attention.

After the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture (Earl Carrington, later Lord Lincolnshire) had made sympathetic speeches, promising help, the delegates dispersed but I managed to have a word with

the Minister of Agriculture about railway rates. When I offered to supply facts he said. “We have pigeon-holes full of them.”

We did not offer facts alone when another Minister of Agriculture visited the Vale of Evesham. Inspecting some of our small-holdings, I introduced him to our most pestilent weed - *Allium Vineale*-locally called “Crow Onions.” He had never heard of them. We pulled a few from the soil and asked him to smell the obnoxious nuisance.

To return to my story: At the Littleton meeting in 1908 the chair was occupied by Mr. C. A. W. Saxton, a member of the Midland Sectional Board of the Co-operative Union and a very influential member of the Worcester Co-operative Society. He was accompanied by Mr. Duncan Bailey, of the Co-operative Union, and Mr. W. M. Tad, of the Agricultural Organisation Society. The meeting was well attended and the speakers urged growers to co-operate. It was suggested that they should apply for the whole of a farm and dispose of the produce collectively.

When questions were invited Mr. G. E. Field asked if good markets could be guaranteed. At present markets seemed glutted. The answer given was “Yes, by proper organisation, as you will then know where produce is wanted.” Topping a package of inferior produce with good stuff was common and very harmful. When it was suggested that inspectors should be appointed with power to fine any grower caught at this practice, a voice from the audience called out, “We should *all* be fined here!” The packing of produce at this time left much to be desired.

The answer to the question about markets was typical of well-meaning people who had very little practical experience. I well remember that on another occasion we were told that we should scientifically regulate our crops. We retorted that we would do this if someone would first regulate the weather. I suppose that this was an instance of the inability of the urban mind to understand the problems of the countryside. Apparently it had not occurred to the gentleman who put forward the “scientific regulation of crops” proposal that yield was entirely dependent on the weather. And although the suggestion that gluts could be modified by organisation had some truth it has by no means solved the problem.

Moment for decision came when Mr. R. R. Smith asked, “Why not start now?” The proposal was seconded by another local gardener, Mr. Thomas Bubb, who suggested that surrounding villages should join in so as to form a strong Society. The motion was carried unanimously and the following were appointed to form the committee: Messrs. R. R. Smith, T. Bubb, M. Harrison (South Littleton), Messrs. G. E. Field, L. E. Horne, F. Perkins (Badsey), Messrs. W. Jones, R. Grove (Bretforton) with Mr. B. Wheeler of North Littleton. The committee were given power to add to their number. At this time I was a member of the Board of Guardians at Evesham and Mr. T. Bubb was the representative of South Littleton. He used to sit next to me and at the next meeting he gave me a pressing invitation to join the committee. I agreed to do this and we held the first meeting in the small room over the Bidford Co-operative Society's shop at South Littleton. At this meeting I was elected chairman and so began my long association with the Society.

Our first discussions were occupied largely with legal questions bearing on the formation of Co-operative Societies under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. We were recommended to get into touch with the Agricultural Organisation Society, whom we found most helpful, giving us much valuable advice as to procedure in the registration of the Society, the compilation of rules and many other matters.

One of the most debatable rules was that relating to the allocation of profits and we adopted the model rules of the Agricultural Organisation Society which provided that, after paying 5 per cent interest on the Share Capital, at least half the balance should be placed to the Reserve Fund until this fund equalled the Share Capital and afterwards such proportion as the Annual Meeting should decide. Of the remaining balance not less than 5 per cent to be paid to the workers employed by the Society as a bonus proportionate to their wages; the remainder as a bonus to members proportionate to their dealings with the Society.

As a matter of fact, we could put nothing to the Reserve Fund until eight years had gone by and no bonus to members until 24 years had passed, by which time drastic revision of rules became necessary.

Shares were to be of the value of one pound and could not be withdrawn except by committee consent, which would only be given for special reasons, such as a Member leaving the district. But shares could be transferred. At first we decided that only 5 shillings should be paid on each share on allocation, but it soon appeared that our capital was quite inadequate and that it was necessary for shares to be paid in full on joining the Society. Objects and powers of the Society, as laid down by the rules, were very wide, though as it turned out later they were not wide enough. In the prospectus the objects of the Society were defined as “the co-operative marketing of members' produce and the supply to members of manures, seeds, implements, etc.” As to the first object: “By combining the members' consignments it will be possible to reach many markets inaccessible to individual growers and to secure lower railway rates.” The supply of requisites would be advantageous to members because by purchasing in large quantities and securing the minimum railway rates the Society would be able to supply first-class articles at moderate prices.

The provisional committee, being composed of market gardeners, was well aware that the satisfactory marketing of produce would prove to be extremely difficult. In the first place all the growers had existing outlets for their produce. Each had his own favourite commission agent in London, Manchester, Birmingham, or some other town, or else he sold his produce to a dealer or sent it to the local market at Evesham to be sold by auction. In many cases this connection was long established, a cordial relationship had been formed, and the grower would be unwilling to make a change. On the other hand there was a very real danger that indifferent or poor packers who had been unable to obtain what they considered satisfactory prices would be the most attracted by any new facilities for marketing his produce. These problems were left to be solved by the committee of management to be appointed by the first general meeting of members.

Early encouragement came from the Co-operative Wholesale Society, who gave us an order for Brussels sprouts and sent empties. The produce was despatched and prices were left to the C.W.S., whose return was described as comparing favourably with local prices. Other orders followed, quite small at first, but the connection thus formed before the Society was actually in being has never been broken and at the time of writing the turnover with the C.W.S. amounts to many thousand pounds worth of fruit and vegetables yearly.

To make the proposed Society and its objects known throughout the district, meetings were held in each village and a delegate from the Agricultural Organisation Society (Mr. Tod) gave explanatory talks to growers. In accord with our decision that whenever it could be arranged a local grower should preside, Mr. Alfred Butler took the chair at Aldington where the first meeting was held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1908, and I explained our objects. At the Badsey meeting I presided and Mr. G. E. Field gave an account of the work of the provisional committee. A question as to what commission the Society was proposing to charge on sales of produce was asked. In reply, I said that the provisional committee had so far charged 5 per cent, but that it would depend largely upon the amount of business done. It might prove insufficient. Meetings were also held at Bretforton and Offenham.

The interest shown at these meetings seemed to justify the formation of a Society and accordingly Littleton and Badsey Growers' Society was duly registered on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1908.

We now began to enrol members. Mr. C. H. Knight of Bretforton was the first. Each member received a number on enrolment, which was entered on his share certificate and was also his number in the Society's books. By the first of February 1909, some 35 members had joined the Society but the paid-up capital only amounted to £11 10s. A week later we had 65 members and the capital had grown to £24 15s. We were then looking forward to our first General Annual Meeting. This was held at South Littleton on February 8<sup>th</sup> when the first business was the election of the President. Mr. Thomas Bubb's proposal that I should accept the position was carried and it was understood from the first that the President should be Chairman of the Management Committee, taking an active part in the Society's business, and not be a mere figurehead. Messrs. Lionel E. Horne (Badsey) and E. A. Thorne (Wickhamford) were appointed auditors, as at that time it was not compulsory to have a professional auditor. Each village was to be represented on a committee of sixteen. The bulk of those elected were market gardeners in a small way, excellent cultivators of the land but with no experience in the management of a Society.

In my outline of the present position I warned members that we had a great deal of hard work before us and many difficulties to surmount. It was therefore necessary that they should give the committee all the help possible. I drew attention to the fact that the capital was quite inadequate for, although we had one hundred members, only a few had taken more than one £1 share and very few had paid in full, many having paid only five shillings. It became absolutely necessary that we should increase the capital. So far the number of members represented a very small proportion of the growers in the area; collectively they cultivated only about three hundred acres.

At that moment we had no office or premises and the provisional committee came to the conclusion that we should endeavour to obtain a site near Littleton and Badsey railway station. Staff would be needed and a manager must be appointed.

I mentioned the orders from the Co-operative Wholesale Society and said the C.W.S. ought to be in a position to deal with most of our members' produce. My strong plea was supported by Mr. R. R. Smith, who urged members to be loyal in their dealings and always to remember it was their own Society and not just a new agency run by a committee. Mr. W. W. Blake asked whether the Society would be prepared to sell feeding stuffs as well as fertilisers to which I replied, "Yes, and anything else you may want."

So ended our first meeting. On looking back one cannot but feel that the outlook was most discouraging. Only a very small number of the growers in the area had joined - most of them seemed to be waiting to see what success attended our efforts. The amount of capital paid up was totally inadequate and was insufficient to buy the empties required for the produce, still less for the purchase of stocks of fertilisers and requisites. We dared not offer a good salary to obtain a capable manager and none of us had any experience in managing a concern of this sort. But our enthusiasm was not damped and we threw ourselves into our task, determined that if it were possible we should make a success of the venture.

In the next few years we had the utmost difficulty to keep going. On several occasions we nearly came to grief, but we finally won through and by our trials and difficulties gained experience and confidence. Indeed it is possible that if we had been given financial help to any great extent when we first started, the result might have been disastrous through our want of business knowledge and experience. As it was, we were almost entirely dependent upon our grower members for financial support for the first few years, and although this was not sufficient to bring much success, it did make us cautious and prevented us from making heavy losses. We had to live as it were from hand-to-mouth, being in no position to offer security, we could only obtain credit to a very limited extent. Still, we never lost hope and although sometimes urged to close down we plodded along, for we were convinced that such a Society would be of very real service to the grower when firmly established.

#### *THE EVESHAM CUSTOM*

*As its name indicates the Evesham Custom is unique to the Vale of Evesham in its origin. This system of land tenure arose out of the vital needs of growers in and around Evesham. Under the Custom (restricted to market gardens) valuation of tenant-right takes into account the potential value of intense cultivation, unexhausted manures in the soil, all growing plants and trees and tenant's improvements. Thus, because he is almost as secure as a freeholder, the tenant can safely develop his holding. He also has the right to introduce a new tenant to the landlord at any time. I am indebted to Mr. Charles H. Gardiner for this summary of the Evesham Custom.*

## CHAPTER II

# GROWING PAINS : 1909 - 1910

Our First Office  
And Our First Pay-out to Growers  
Bricks Without Clay?  
Pig Keeping was Dying Out  
Marketing Problems  
Asparagus Gave Us a Start  
Should We Take the Lot?  
A Rule Soon Revoked

WHEN the newly appointed committee set about starting the Society on its first complete year they made changes in management. Mr. George Field (part-time secretary at 10 shillings a week) agreed to give more time with payment increased to 30 shillings, and we accepted an offer of help from Mr. Albert Wyles, a retired businessman, who had considerable experience of accounts.

Mr. Wyles was keen, capable and progressive and he did not relish the handicap of insufficient capital. Whenever he became despondent about the future of the Society he used to express himself in quaint phrases: "The children of Israel were told to make bricks without straw - you are trying to make them without clay!" Again, twitting us on our lack of funds, he would say, "You are trying to fly without feathers."

In taking over the books Mr. Wyles gave us a reminder that he was a local preacher when he said, "The Good Book says no man can serve two masters, and you are asking me to serve 200." But he kept the accounts with great accuracy and gave us much good advice.

Mr. Field also found his position very trying. He could never get any time free from interruptions. Growers would come to him at all hours at his house very early in the morning and late at night. If he went to a football match he would be buttonholed and given orders for goods or asked about markets. One cannot wonder that resignations were tendered.

The committee at their first meeting appointed two sub committees. One was to arrange about the purchase of feeding stuffs, the other for purchase of fertilisers. The first was found to be a difficult business owing to rapid fluctuations in prices and the problem of vermin proof storage. We obtained our supplies from Aldington Mill on a commission basis, but they gradually dwindled, for the demand became less as fewer pigs were kept, and we finally dropped this line altogether.

Fertilisers have always occupied a very important place in our activities. The Society has always tried to give good value and to stock only those articles which tested satisfactorily on a unit value basis. Compound fertilisers and proprietary brands did not find much favour with us. At first all purchases were actually made by the committee which met frequently and it also fixed the margins and selling prices. The arrangement was far from satisfactory as there was a tendency to fix the selling price too low with insufficient margin being left for overheads. Moreover, it was not always possible to take advantage of special offers which required immediate acceptance.

The want of capital added to our worries. As we were obliged to ask for credit we could not buy to advantage. Direct importers and manufacturers would only sell for prompt payment. As a London firm in a large way of business told me, "We are merchants, not bankers. If you require credit you must arrange for your bankers to advance money." Naturally the bank could not be expected to make advances to an untried and inexperienced body of men with no great financial resource, in the absence of security. We had therefore to get supplies from local merchants and the small commission they allowed was not sufficient to cover our expenses. It was in fact some years before we could buy direct from importers and merchants. We did, however, obtain an agency for fertilisers from Manchester Corporation, through the generosity of Mr. W. H. Churchill, but this did not involve large quantities. Other fertilisers were at first

bought from Evesham merchants. The chief substances sold were soot (used in large quantities on the heavy clay), bone meal, super phosphate, Peruvian guano, nitrate of soda and a small quantity of basic slag. Sulphate of ammonia was not yet in common use. Nitrate of soda was used extensively, but on heavy land it had a very bad effect on soil condition. Peruvian guano was a very favourable fertiliser. Of course as time went on this list was extended greatly.

The supply of other requisites was considered and it was decided to have a price list printed and distributed. Raffia, string, packing paper, tomato canes and small flower pots were the chief articles. A bale of raffia was bought.

At a meeting in March 1909 to consider the urgent question of office accommodation, it was decided to take a room in a small house (occupied by Mr. Edwin Bell) on the Bretforton Road, Badsey, at a rental of three shillings a week. Account books were purchased. An account was opened at Lloyds Bank and the share capital paid in. The total so far was only £24 15s. After an unsuccessful effort to obtain a loan of £100 from a Co-operative Society, we called for another 5s. per share from members. At the end of June it appeared that the balance at the bank was sufficient to pay all outstanding liabilities and that the capital was balanced by the amount due from debtors. New members continued to join, but only in small numbers.

It was generally recognised that a small warehouse was necessary. We secured a lease for 21 years at a rental of £2 of about one and a half chains of land adjoining the sidings at Littleton and Badsey station, but it was not until April of the next year (1910) that we were able to accept a tender for the erection of a wooden warehouse with office for the sum of £47 18s. As soon as this was built we evacuated the room at Badsey.

How best to market members' produce was our next big problem. As at the outset we were unable to buy empties, it was necessary to approach commission agents in various towns who supplied empties, chiefly wicker pot hampers, half pots and bags. The pot hamper, which holds a definite weight of each kind of produce, was the standard container in the Evesham district. To give a few instances, a pot of peas or beans contained 40 lb., spinach or parsley 20 lb., Brussels sprouts 40 lb., plums 72 lb. Bags of roots were standardised at half-hundred weights.

When commission men were approached in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Nottingham, Swansea, Newport, Edinburgh and Glasgow we encountered fresh difficulties. Produce to each market had of course to be sent in empties belonging to the agent in that town. These were distributed among our members. But it often happened that the particular crop to be marketed by a member was not in demand in the market whose empties he had on hand. It was impossible, as we had no telephone, to obtain information in time to prevent the produce being packed and in consequence the resulting price was often poor. Obviously we could not expect to build up a satisfactory connection on this basis. We had hoped to receive good support from the large Co-operative Societies in the towns, but although we had been led to believe they would take large quantities of fruit and vegetables from us we could get no response at all. This was a great disappointment to us. In spite of all endeavours four years went by before we received any order from such a society.

It is true that the Co-operative Wholesale Society gave us each year orders for Brussels sprouts, but these orders were not, during the first years, of large size. As to asparagus, I found there was no market to touch Covent Garden and Messrs. T. J. Poupert, who took some of our first produce, has received regular consignments every year since.

The first pay-out to our growers took place on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup> 1909. The total, which covered all produce sent the previous week, amounted to £79 2s. 7d. The following Tuesday the amount increased to £131 8s. 6d. and by June 15<sup>th</sup> the sum paid to our members was over £174. Most of this was for asparagus and on June 12<sup>th</sup> we were proud to receive from Pouperts a cheque for over £100 for the week's consignments. By the 1950s a four-figure cheque for a week's sales of asparagus was quite commonplace.

Asparagus at that time was done up in bundles containing six small bundles of 20 sticks of buds, and they are locally called “hundreds” although they contained 120 buds. There had always been some difficulty in standardising the quality until the operation of the National Mark scheme many years later. Growers had very different ideas as to what constituted special quality. One man's “special” was often no better than his neighbour's “ordinary.” We consulted salesmen as to the best methods of packing the bundles in baskets, known as flats, which were supplied by the commission agent. The commission the society charged on asparagus was 2 per cent and 5 per cent on other produce. Anyone who was not a member was charged double commission.

It was now necessary to make an important decision.

Should it be a condition of membership that a grower must send *all* his produce to the Society? We decided against this, partly because we realised that if we insisted on this we should get very few members. Growers who had good outlets would be reluctant to surrender them, and very little confidence was placed in the Society's ability to market *all* the produce of the various members. I always took the line that if we were efficient we should attract members' produce, and that if we were not efficient or likely to become so; the sooner we closed down the better. But if the grower was not bound to send all his produce, it was necessary to give the manager power to refuse produce from any member who was not sending regularly.

At first the committee decided that if any produce did not realise sufficient to pay expenses, any loss should be borne by the Society. This was soon proved to be a mistaken policy for the result was that, during a glut, produce was sent to us in heavy consignments, as was produce of poor quality, for growers knew they could not lose and might possibly gain. Needless to say, no business could be built up on these lines. Consignees who found their heaviest supplies were of poor quality, or that produce was in poor demand, naturally objected. This rule was very soon revoked.

### *Pioneers – The L.B.G. Committee in 1911*



*Back row: H.J. Cave, C.A. Binyon, R.R. Smith, C.H. Knight, R. Aldington,  
George Stanley, S. Harris*

*Seated: J.E. Knight, T. Bubb, F. Bubb, W. Cooke*

## CHAPTER III

# BRAVE DAYS : 1910 - 1913

Early Struggles  
First Year - Lost Money  
Black Sheep and Honest Packing  
Marketing Problems  
An Anxious Winter  
Reorganisation and Retrenchment  
Self-Sacrifice Essential  
Condemned Without Fair Trial  
A Profit at Last - 31 Shillings!  
Chairman as Book-keeper  
A Birmingham Market Scheme Fails  
Slow Progress But We Carry On  
Then War Came

WHEN the first year's work was reviewed at the annual general meeting held at Badsey Old School on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1910, there were only forty-two members present. As this was less than half the members, we were disappointed. Absence from meetings may mean, however, that members are fairly well satisfied. although in the difficult days of the first few years we should have been glad of all the encouragement we could get, especially at this critical time when the very existence of the Society was at stake.

Accounts showing a loss of £20 meant a serious depletion of our very inadequate capital. The turnover of rather more than £4,000 was considered satisfactory because produce prices were at a very low ebb at this time. Sales to members amounted to £519, chiefly for fertilisers. The paid-up capital had scarcely increased at all. The general opinion of members seemed to be that for the first year the committee had done as well as could be expected. The President and the two auditors were re-elected.

The newly appointed committee (all but three had been re-elected) confirmed the appointment of Mr. Collins as manager at 35 shillings a week. Mr. G. E. Field agreed to act as secretary for the first three months. Mr. Wyles was paid 30 shillings a week for keeping the books.

At our invitation, Messrs. T. J. Poupart, of Covent Garden, sent a representative to meet the committee and a very useful discussion on the marketing of asparagus took place. This became an annual event and was extended to include visits to members on their land.

We needed encouragement, for business kept decreasing and it became almost impossible to make both ends meet. The most difficult problem was the marketing of members' fruit and vegetables. It was essential to ensure that the growers of the best produce should be paid the best prices. At first sight, the best guide would appear to be the actual price the Society received but we soon found this was not so as nearly all our consignments were to commission salesmen in various towns and prices fluctuated not only from day to day but also from town to town. A late delivery by the railway company might have a disastrous effect and many other factors quite beyond our control often adversely affected prices.

It should be remembered that we were dealing with produce from many small growers with no common standard. The only sure guide was inspection before despatch and with our small staff it was impossible to do this effectively. All we could do was to allot to each member a number which had to be borne on every package he sent. Salesmen were told of this and informed that in the event of complaint this number must be quoted. But this was not always done and so we had growers who complained that their produce made less than their neighbour's, although they asserted that theirs was far better. We had no means at first of testing the truth of these assertions, but we knew we had some black sheep and that we could not rely on every package being honestly packed and of good weight. In these circumstances it was not surprising that our turnover dwindled.

As the Society gained experience new means of dealing with this problem were discovered, but the fact remains that the sale of very perishable fruit and vegetables is one of the most difficult operations to perform satisfactorily and even now we have not reached a thoroughly sound method in spite of all the time and thought given to it. Occasionally we called together one or two of the committee and examined a consignment and so found out the bad packers.

There was so much anxiety about the state of the Society that a general meeting of members was called on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1910, in order to decide on our future course. A small sub-committee appointed to investigate did not report until June 1911, when the situation seemed so serious that the question of closing down was first discussed.

Four reasons were given against closing. First, it would be unjust to those members who had ventured their money in taking more than one share. Second was the very bad effect it would have on future attempts to revive co-operative enterprise among the gardeners. Third, it would mean summary collection of debts, which would cause great prejudice and hardship. Fourth, our warehouse at the station had only just been completed.

In order that the Society should continue it was necessary to make a brave effort under somewhat different management. The resignation of the newly appointed manager was accepted solely on the ground that we could not afford to pay him, for he had served us faithfully and well. These were our troubles: lack of capital, disloyal members, irregularity of supplies, lack of touch between management and members and poor packing by some growers.

Measures recommended included that members should be divided into three classes: (1) all who marketed their produce through the Society, these to be charged only 5 per cent commission, (2) those who regularly sent a proportion of their produce - these to be charged 7 per cent and (3) those growers who sent at uncertain and irregular intervals - these to be charged at least 10 per cent and the manager given power to refuse their produce if necessary in times of glut.

We stressed the importance of frequent examination of members' produce in order that good packers might have justice and poor packers be brought to book. Every endeavour should be made to ensure that our salesmen had regular supplies. Because the funds of our Society did not permit of much paid work, a good deal would have to be done voluntarily by the management committee. The help required amounted to self-sacrifice.

I have given this report in detail because it does show clearly the nature of problems which had to be solved and the spirit with which they were faced. The report was signed by Messrs. L. E. Horne, A. E. Thorne, R. R. Smith and myself. Although it was adopted, the proposals as to classification of members proved impracticable because it was impossible to discover what members were marketing the whole of their produce; also it would introduce complexities into the accounts. But the power to refuse consignments was retained and has proved of great value.

Need for retrenchment was made more urgent by the fact that at the annual meeting in February 1911 I had the unpleasant task of announcing a loss of over £64 on the year. I had been warned there would be a proposal that the Society should be wound up as not being likely to be of any real use to growers. Having found that the member intending to bring this proposal forward had done no business at all with the Society, I told the meeting we would welcome criticism provided that the questioner had given the Society a fair trial. This had the desired effect. Closing down was never mentioned.

Implementing the report, Mr. Wyles was appointed secretary and Mr. Fred Bubb was asked to assist in the management on five afternoons a week for ten shillings per week with the proviso that any further time required would be rewarded at sixpence per hour. Mr. Bubb agreed. This was the spirit we needed.

It was this policy of retrenchment which enabled the Society to pay its way and in the following year we made a small profit - £1 11s. But we had not turned the corner for business had dwindled sadly, the membership had not increased and paid-up capital was still inadequate.

“Kill the wretched thing!” Mr. Wyles urged once more.

Still we determined to carry on in a small way with a skeleton staff while gaining experience. Mr. Wyles soon retired and Mr. Bubb was made secretary with an increased salary. I was appointed book-keeper with payment at one shilling per hour. Being aware of my keen desire to keep the Society going, the committee trusted me entirely. It seemed only right in the circumstances that I should retire from the chairmanship but they refused to agree to this. However, when the annual meeting came round I succeeded in retiring from the presidency and Robert Aldington took my place.

At this meeting in April 1913, we were able to show another small profit - £4 4s. 9d. and we had gained much experience. The turnover began to increase slowly.

East Anglian Farmers took some of our produce (we continued to supply them for many years) and, following my visit to Birmingham, we began supplying the Co-operative Wholesale Society, mainly to Manchester.

At about this time another venture closed down. Nine societies had combined to have a stand in Birmingham Wholesale Market - Coventry Perseverance, East Worcestershire Small Holdings and Allotment Society, West Midland Farmers, North Bromsgrove Market Gardeners, Worcestershire New Co-operative Industrial Society, Ten Acres and Storchley Society, Herefordshire Farmers Association and our Society. Each of these societies was represented by a director with Mr. A. Eades of the Birmingham Industrial Co-operative Society as chairman. I was appointed to be our Society's representative. But here again we had the old story, starting with insufficient capital, failure on the part of growers to support the scheme, and difficulties of remote control. The concern closed down after a brief struggle, fortunately not involving the shareholders in any great loss.

A plan to find a further outlet for produce at Bristol and Cardiff bore little fruit despite great effort but, in 1913, the Derby Co-operative Provident Society ordered a consignment of mixed fruit and vegetables and paid us what they considered a fair price. The result was quite satisfactory and we received a cheque for £21 19s. 11d. in due course. Regular orders followed and ever since we have sent them produce and enjoyed an annual interchange of visits. This was the sort of business we had always hoped for and indeed expected. One of our greatest disappointments was the failure on the part of the large Co-operative Societies to give us the slightest support or even encouragement. So it was most heartening to make the Derby connection, and I cannot exaggerate its effect. It was some time before any other large Society followed suit.

Meanwhile the financial situation did not improve and it was found necessary for members of the committee to give a personal guarantee to the bank in order to obtain an overdraft. The bank manager was not very happy about this because, as he truly said, none of us were men of substance. It also had a drawback from the point of view of the Society as by our rules anyone signing such a guarantee could not be removed from the committee, so that elections at the annual meeting were almost a farce. However, it enabled us to keep going. The turnover showed a slight increase, and we took on an agency for seeds. A new cheap fertiliser - malt dust - was stocked and proved quite useful for digging in. We had a good deal of trouble with soot (which at the time was in great demand) owing to its bad condition, but we managed to obtain an excellent parcel of Peruvian guano, which helped our sales and increased our reputation.

The year 1913 again showed a very small profit - £2 13s. 11d. Share capital increased by only £2 during the year but the turnover both in payments to growers and in sales to them improved although still below that of our first year's working.

We now invested in larger quantities of empties, chiefly pots and half-pots.

Mr. Bubb took advantage of a day trip to Scarborough in order to see our salesman there. The fare was 6s. This was in July 1914, a few days before the outbreak of war.

## CHAPTER IV

# WAR-TIME TONIC : 1914 - 1918

War - and a New Crop  
Herbs for the Nation's Medicines  
Disused Hop Kilns Adapted  
Belladonna Brings a Big Bonus  
A Reserve Fund at Last  
Getting Expert - Then The War Ended  
Strength to Meet Depression

THE market grower, like the farmer, may assert that it is left to times of war to bring prosperity to agriculture. Such is his experience. Only when the nation is locked in mortal combat is serious attention paid by the public to food production at home and full recognition given to the importance of those who work on the land.

Apart from the stimulus given to the industry in general, the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 immediately created an opportunity for starting something new - the production of crops to contribute to the nation's medicine sources, depleted by war-restricted imports.

It came about in this way. A relative of the Vicar of Badsey was in the habit of coming to our village every Easter and he always liked to have one afternoon with me. He chatted with growers on their land and, being very conversant with medical herbs, he suggested that we should take up their cultivation. There was uncertainty about prices and I realised that the risk of failure would be great. A few days after the outbreak of war, Mr. Bowden, the gentleman in question, wrote to me naming a dealer in crude drugs who would be prepared to take the whole crop at a fair market price. He offered to supply seeds and cultural instructions. I saw that this was just the kind of work our Society could undertake but there was a certain amount of hesitation before our growers would commit themselves to new, untried crops. In April 1915, Mr. Bowden sent us 72 lb. of belladonna seed, 44 lb. of henbane, 22 lb. of stramonium, 3 lb. of dandelion and 1 lb. of digitalis.

Our soil proved totally unsuitable for digitalis and very little stramonium was grown. Belladonna needed a lot of nursing and when we had at last achieved results we found slugs and other pests loved these poisonous young plants, while drought proved fatal. Some of the cultural directions proved to be quite erroneous. but close observation and skill on the part of growers soon revealed how to overcome these difficulties and by midsummer we had one and a half acres of good belladonna plants set out at one yard square. As none of the land was fenced it was very necessary to take precautions against poisoning. Children were carefully instructed not to touch the plants and although belladonna was grown in the open fields for five years we had no case of poisoning. Sometimes those who worked among the plants or in the drying shed found the pupils of their eyes much dilated, but the trouble soon passed.

First preparation for drying the leaves and young shoots was the erection of a small wooden shed while the plants were getting established. As we were still very short of capital we had to start the business on a shoestring. The shed, built in August 1915, had a very short life, being burned down on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Fortunately we were able to hire a substantial building - a disused coach-house at Badsey\* and this we fitted with two large tortoise stoves. The flues were carried through the shed beneath the trays.

Although the quantity of leaves produced during the first year was not large, we had done well enough to show that more accommodation would be needed. We hired three disused hop-kilns from Mr. Alfred Butler at Aldington at a rent of £13 a year and later on we used old kilns at Harvington. Hops as a local crop had by now disappeared from the district.

*\* It was in this old coach-house (belonging to Mr. Henry Hall) on the Willersey Road that the first motor plough was made. Inventor was Mr. Albert Wyles, Junior, son of L.B.G.'s one-time secretary.*

The first cut from eight acres of belladonna was made early in June and the leaves and tender shoots were sent to the drying shed or kilns to be dried immediately, otherwise fermentation would set in. Stems were bundled and dried separately. Another cut was made in the autumn.

The crop from five acres of blessed thistle was dried in mid August in the open or in a barn without any heat. I grew about one acre of blessed thistle on land that is now Badsey Recreation Ground.

Six acres had been set aside for henbane (the annual variety) and the seed behaved in a most extraordinary way. Some came up well and quickly, some did not germinate at all during the first year and some, after lying dormant for several years, came up in full row although the ground had been dug in the meantime.

The price received for dandelions caused growers to drop it as a crop. Sage, being a crop-already grown in the district, presented no difficulties and, not being perishable, was much easier to dry. Rubbing the sage was the worst job and through want of a machine we were unable to market a really satisfactory article.

Up-to-date apparatus was badly needed so Mr. Fred Bubb and I set off to the Teme Valley to inspect a kiln with a large fan driven by an engine. Having taken a load of sage with us we were prepared to conduct our own experiments which meant staying the night and we took it in turn to wake up and stoke the fire.

At about midnight the owner very kindly came along with some whisky to help us keep out the cold. When we refused the drink he probably thought either that we were of the spartan kind or not particularly thirsty. But what would a couple of teetotallers want with whisky? Our test was thorough and we were convinced that large fans would solve our problem of drying herbs speedily.

Invited by Mr. George Cadbury to Bournville, I learned a good deal there about drying methods from inspection of his plant. Another outcome was that Mr. Cadbury offered to invest £100 in our Society and it was decided £10 should be in shares and the remainder on loan. A half-acre site near Littleton and Badsey station was purchased for £50 and then our difficulties began again.

With strict wartime control of materials it was by no means a simple matter to obtain a building certificate from the Ministry of Munitions. We applied for galvanised iron but were told we should use wood. Making application to Timber Control for wood we were told to use metal. We persevered, received the certificate in March 1917 which left us little time to get the plant installed for summer drying-and we chose galvanised iron for the building.

In search of the right type of apparatus, I had studied many catalogues and made frequent journeys to London. I drew the plans and visited Birkenhead to settle details of the drying shed with the manufacturers. Apparatus for the drying plant consisted of a Sirocco fan and heaters (bought for £172), a vertical engine and a second-hand loco-type boiler, the steam from which furnished the heat. Cold air was driven by the fan through five steam-filled radiators and it then entered a duct beneath the cabinets containing the green herbs.

All this cost a good deal of money and ways and means had to be found of meeting the bill. Accordingly it was decided that loans from members should be invited, such loans to bear interest at 6 per cent and to be repaid in three equal instalments, one-third each year. This financed our new venture. It also ensured, in effect, the building up of a reserve fund. The post-war slump which followed showed we had taken a wise precaution. We were able to weather the storm which would have engulfed our Society.

A special Herbs Committee was appointed, consisting of Messrs. Alfred Woodall (who gave prizes for the best crop of belladonna), J. E. Knight, H. Hall and W. Cooke who, with others, did much voluntary work at the drying shed, especially at night. Being unable to get good steam coal, the boiler tubes often became blocked and in view of our lack of experience with either engine or boiler, it was remarkable that we had no accident. By the middle of June 1916, we were able to start drying. Even before working at full

capacity we managed to dry over two tons of green herbs a week with the new equipment, apart from the amount produced at Aldington kilns.

As can be imagined all this was not achieved without a great deal of trouble. Being wartime, all sorts of permissions had to be obtained from various Government departments which seemed to be past masters in the art of causing delay. Pieces of machinery would be lost in transit and unexpected obstacles turned up. During the year we dried more than 130 tons of green herbs which realised well over £6,000. To help keep the factory running night and day several members gave their services and all the regular staff pulled their weight.

At the end of 1917 we were able to pay our belladonna growers over £2,900 as a bonus. In the following year we had to restrict the crop which would have increased beyond our capacity for drying. In the hope of dealing with larger quantities of belladonna we considered the making of an extract by crushing the leaves. Many years before this had been done at North Littleton. We found the apparatus was still in existence and purchased it. But before we got the scheme going the war ended and the demand for herbs collapsed.

The price paid to growers for the third year's crop of belladonna averaged about £300 per acre. Enough was left from the profits to pay back most of the loan, which meant that the beginnings of a reserve fund were at last possible.

As I have indicated, this business of herb drying was quite a performance - rehearsals and experiments all went together in this new production and the behaviour of some of the seeds was on a par with that of temperamental actresses. It was a pity that the whole enterprise came to an end, as we had learned how to dry herbs in a really efficient way when we had to close down.

However, we had no reason to regret having embarked on the scheme, as it resulted in a substantial contribution to the stability of our Society. Without it we might have found it impossible to surmount the difficulties of the post-war depression.

## CHAPTER V

# GROWERS GET MORE : 1915 - 1919

Where Was the Co-op Spirit?  
Souvenir of a Tomato Trip Food for the Army  
£3,792 for Growers - A Record  
War-Time Produce Prices  
We Buy a Horse  
Cadbury's Build Drying Factory  
Profits from Herb Growing  
House of Commons Conference  
Miles of Middlemen!  
A World Scheme Crashes  
But L.B.G. Marches On

I HAD always been convinced that the larger co-operative societies in cities and towns could, as buyers of our fruit and vegetables, provide a solid foundation for our business. For us it would have meant a big and permanent outlet and they would have been availing themselves of a reliable service of well graded supplies.

Hopes ran high when, soon after the First World War began, the Agricultural Organisation Society suggested that we should at once take steps to supply the industrial co-ops. As I have already stated, this had been our aim from the start but response had been poor. Indeed the only trade so far secured was with the C.W.S. and the Derby and Bolton societies. Despite all our efforts the list of such societies grew very slowly and I was surprised to find so many co-op green fruit managers who were not in the least co-operative minded. We made fresh approaches with renewed zest but with little in the way of increased trade.

Meanwhile our Society was making progress in its general trading and when produce was plentiful and prices poor new ideas were introduced. For example, when the trade for outdoor tomatoes was at a very low ebb we tried to get the co-operative societies at Chipping Norton, Oxford and Swindon to take some off our hands.

Again little success resulted so we began retailing ourselves and I recall Mr. Frank Jelfs (later, and still, our travelling buyer) hawking supplies of lovely red tomatoes in the Tewkesbury district, 25 miles away. Mr. Jelfs had almost sold out when a wheel came off the dray. He completed his journey home on horseback. Back at the L.B.G. he had quite a story to tell but preferred not to sit down for the telling of it! It is true that our tomatoes that day made better than market prices but direct retail, we discovered, is a business that must be regular to be successful and we could not see our way to develop it.

By increasing our stocks of empties - we bought 100 pot hampers from a local maker and laid in a good stock of chip baskets and crates - we became less dependent on commission agents. This freedom also enabled us to procure better business terms.

Our members' technical needs were not forgotten. Lectures were given in the villages on such subjects as the best use of fertilisers and pruning demonstrations were provided. Mr. R. C. Gaut, the Worcestershire county organiser, was most helpful in this direction.

At the annual meeting in April 1915, Mr. Robert Aldington was again re-elected president and we appointed Mr. A. J. Peek of Pershore as our auditor in compliance with the new law. At this time I was keeping the books and was also herbs manager and I cannot speak too highly of Mr. Peek's advice and assistance.

Gift supplies of fruit and vegetables were sent periodically for wounded soldiers at Rubery.

October brought us good news - a report which stated that there was an increase in business in every department.

Lack of transport was still a handicap and at last we decided to buy a horse and dray for £47 10s enabling us to deliver goods when collecting produce. Soon the horse was found unequal to the work and we replaced it with a stronger one. Both Mr. Jesse Sutton and Mr. Fred Bubb had a hand in the buying of our horses. Mr. Bubb chanced to meet a man taking a horse to the knacker's yard for £1. He bought it for £2 and rode it to the L.B.G. shed. The second horse was named Jesse after Mr. Sutton.

Although accounts for the year ending April 1916 showed a loss on feeding stuffs, all other departments had paid their way. Turnover had increased and there was a profit of £33 12s. 3d. on the year's working. Payments to growers at £3,792 was an increase of over £1,500 on the previous year. Sales to growers were £822. Both figures were a record but still the share capital was too small to finance the business. We had to fall back on loans. After paying interest on paid-up share capital we divided the remaining £25 18s. equally between the reserve fund and a bonus to employees in proportion to their wages for the year.

As delegate to a conference of agriculturists at Worcester, I heard Lord Selbourne speak gravely of another year of war. We were urged to grow as much food as possible and the needs of the Army Canteen Board were made known to us. Prices agreed (free on rail at our station) were: carrots £4 2s., parsnips £3 17s., savoy's £2 12s., onions £10 9s., all per ton; Brussels sprouts 3s. 8d. per pot of 40 lb., cauliflowers 1s. 2d. per dozen, vegetable marrows £3 16s. per ton, outdoor tomatoes 2¼d. per lb. Fair business resulted.

Rejecting a proposal for a separate but affiliated Society to take over the herb business, we decided in 1917 to have separate committees for dealing with produce, herbs and requisites. I was made manager of the herbs department with a bonus of 1½ per cent on turnover and £15 per annum for general oversight of the Society's business. Mr. Bubb was made manager of the Society at £2 per week plus 1½ per cent commission on turnover over £4,000 per annum, excluding herbs.

A substantial profit - £132 on the year - was reported at the annual meeting in April 1917, and this we appropriated as follows: 5 per cent on paid-up share capital; bonus to employees at 5 per cent on their wages, leaving a balance of £119 15s. 8d. which was placed to the reserve fund.

As the most striking feature of the season had been the remarkable growth of the medicinal herbs venture, our next move was the erection of modern drying plant. Messrs. L. E. Horne, H. Hall and H. J. Cave, who drew up the report, spoke generously of my services and announced that the turnover of £6,700 was an increase of £1,500. We had a balance of £200 in the bank.

To succeed Mr. R. Aldington who, owing to his many public duties, was unable to continue as President, we chose Mr. Lionel E. Horne. Mr. Woodall's prizes for the best crops of medicinal herbs were won by Mr. W. R. Wilkins and Mr. J. Sutton

Recollected items of interest are: We made a charge of two shillings an hour for hire of a lad with horse and skim. We sold nine pairs of rejected Army boots for £1 per pair. German prisoners of war from Badsey Manor did useful work on the land. We did a fair business supplying Egg plums to Cadbury Brothers.

Vegetable drying was the next move. Mr. George Cadbury wrote to me saying that the Board of Agriculture had urged them to put down vegetable drying factories and his firm had decided Badsey would be a good centre. They bought a site near our premises beside the railway.

It was gratifying to find that the reputation of the L.B.G. Society was such that the Board of Agriculture had stipulated to Cadburys that on no account must they do anything to injure the Littleton and Badsey Growers. Mr. Cadbury, who readily gave that assurance, said, "My hope is that we shall be of mutual benefit to each other." We supplied the factory with some of the vegetables required but, with the end of the war, its activities were soon ended.

Owing to the growth of the Society's business the offices of Manager and Secretary were divided. Mr. Bubb continued as manager and Mr. Douglas MacDonald was appointed secretary at the annual meeting in April 1918.

Twenty-six members were present to hear it stated that the Society now had 144 members and the turnover had reached £16,700 - more than double last year's figure. Great progress had been made in all departments. More than 130 tons of green medicinal herbs had been dried. A profit of £1,439 12s. 9d. enabled us to place £1,340 to reserve. Growers' payments amounted to £7,986 and £3,997 for herbs.

Yet another attempt to set up a great organisation to supply the needs of agriculture was made in 1919. In the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons we met as representatives of various societies and we were told that what the greatest industry in the world lacked was one big organisation. A delegate from Natal said we in England should have strong Parliamentary representation. A Canadian said that in Alberta there were thousands of miles of prairie between farmers and their markets and he was puzzled to find that in our compact little country we had marketing problems. Instead of prairie we had thousands of middlemen!

The Agricultural Wholesale Society, which each society was invited to join by taking up shares, did not survive many years, mainly through lack of capital and partly because of co-op competition. We lost our share money - £62 10s.

At home we asked L.B.G. members to increase their shares and, by the end of the year, the share capital was £477. In addition we had over £600 in loans.

And one day a bell rang loud and clear. A small but important detail - we had the telephone installed - a big boon at the height of the season.

## CHAPTER VI

# WE ARE SEVEN : 1919 - 1931

Meeting Post-War Depression  
Finding a Way with Fertilisers  
Sam Brookes Gets Busy  
Reconstruction and More Retrenchment  
Overdraft Always With Us  
Seven Sign As Guarantors  
Profit After Many Lean Years  
We Buy a Factory  
Fruit Canning Enterprise  
Came a Frost!  
We Quit Canning  
Proud of My Staff

EAGER to strengthen the Society and anticipating depression in the post-war period, we set up in 1919 a Committee of Reconstruction, comprising Messrs. W. G. Geden, W. Jones, J. J. Pethard, R. R. Smith and Alfred Woodall, Douglas Macdonald and myself. We reviewed salaries, did some stocktaking and looked for ways and means of improving marketing methods and our trade in general.

Because we were having difficulty in obtaining fertilisers, the Food Production Department refused to make our Society an approved agent. I made a trip to London which resulted in acceptance of an order for about 100 tons. On a subsequent visit to Newport (Mon.), Messrs. Morris and Griffin agreed to make up a special combined fertiliser to be supplied in bags bearing the L.B.G. name. I ordered 50 tons.

All these were moves to bring about gradual improvement in our organisation but we found, in 1920, that retrenchment was necessary. Mr. F. Bubb resigned the secretaryship after ten years' good service and we took the bold step of appointing a manager-secretary. He was Mr. Samuel Ladyman Brookes, a Londoner, very capable and experienced, who inaugurated a more detailed system of book-keeping. A very energetic person, Mr. Brookes lived on the spot in a converted railway carriage taken from the nearby siding and set up on the doorstep of our wooden office.

The appointment of a manager-secretary was indeed a venturesome move, for the first business was to mortgage our property to Lloyds Bank so as to have an overdraft. Amongst other things, Mr. Brookes ordered a typewriter and duplicating machine; earlier secretaries had written all their letters by hand. Having persuaded us to spend about £2,000 on transport and stocks of empties he dashed away northwards (leaving the directors to discover how to pay for them!) to call on salesmen in Hull, Sheffield, Leeds, Scarborough, Harrogate and Bradford.

All this and other things kept the directors thinking hard as we had, for some time, been desirous of undertaking the canning of fruit. Here, we felt, was the real answer to the glut problem in seasons when fruit had to rot on or under the trees because it would not pay for the picking.

Meanwhile our office had been given a new look, with more staff and modern equipment. The new empties began to arrive; 1,000 Dutch hampers (known locally as pots), 2,000 cotton bags, 1,000 sprout nets and, amid great excitement, a motor lorry. Secondhand and somewhat worn, with solid tyres and (we found) troublesome chain drive, the lorry cost us £460 plus a little more for having L.B.G. etc., handsomely blazoned on cab and sides.

We decided that growers would have to pay spot cash when buying fertilisers.

At the annual meeting, I was given back my old position of President, the committee was reduced in number to ten (half to be appointed for one year and the other five for five years) and we were told that the year's trading was very disappointing. Of 70 members sending their produce to us only 20 were

entirely dependable. Loss on the year was £900. Our new manager became despondent. "Let me resign," he said; but we persuaded him to carry on to see what our latest efforts would yield.

Drought spoiled the 1921 summer and our turnover dwindled further. The manager (whom we paid on a commission and profits percentage basis) suggested closing down for a time. Such counsel of despair was stoutly opposed and we met the situation by reducing the staff and decreasing salaries and expenses.

The manager evolved a scheme by which the Society was merely a forwarding agent and supplied its own empties to growers who were at liberty to select any commission agent on a list which we supplied. Salesmen sent the returns direct to growers, deducting expenses, carriage and an agreed packing fee, which was refunded to the Society. This system is still used by a few growers sending to Manchester and Liverpool.

We raised a useful £125 by selling the boiler used in the herb drying and invested £100 in a new marketing society at Coventry which started operations in June 1923. Our manager was glad to revert to a fixed salary.

A suggestion in 1922 by Mr. J. T. Coates, of Pinvin, that we should start an auction market was rejected as our site was not suitable, but we began renting a coal wharf from the G.W.R.

Money was still very short, as in 1921 we had lost over £900. The bank insisted on joint-and-several guarantees being given for £1,000. Seven of us still had sufficient confidence in the future of the Society. We signed; J. E. Knight, R. Aldington, J. Hall, junr., Walter Jones, Jesse Sutton, R. R. Smith and myself.

We found ourselves making profits again in 1923 - £7 on the year's working. The worn out Bessemer lorry was sold for scrap in the following year and replaced with a Ford one ton truck - new!

A sliding scale of discount terms for members was evolved providing for the discount of 5 per cent being decreased month by month by twopence in the £ until five months. After that the full price was charged. The scale is much the same today. In order to keep a firm hand on finances a special committee was formed and this ultimately became the Executive Committee. As a result of our 1924 trading there was a profit of £536 on a turnover of £21,000. We were able to pay interest on share capital and place £430 to reserve.

The vegetable drying factory built by Messrs. Cadbury in 1915 was offered to us at £7,000. Cadburys allowed two thirds to remain on mortgage so that we had to find only £2,333. Still this was a great strain on our resources but our faith found some reward in 1925 when we made a profit of £1,135. For the first time we were able to pay a bonus to members on their transactions and we put £650 to reserve.

To meet the transport problems during the General Strike of 1926 we bought a new Ford lorry and hired motors for long distance journeys.

Although great efforts to obtain more share capital brought in a sum short of our needs we decided to embark on fruit canning as the plum crop was very heavy. Our Canning Committee bought 100 gross of cans, three tons of sugar and were given much good advice by Campden Research Station, who loaned us a sealing machine.

In August we started canning. Early success was sweet. At the Imperial Fruit Show our canned plums were awarded gold and silver medals.\* We canned five varieties of plums and a few gross of blackberries - in all 300 gross. And then our manager found he had not enough fresh fruit for one of our general contracts. He was able to fulfil the order only at a heavy loss because prices had risen.

*\* But when we tried for more gold medals in the following year, the gooseberries let us down - they did not take kindly to their cans*

A bonus of £10 was given to the principal members of our staff who now included a newly appointed book-keeper, Mr. S. F. E. Bunting, who did excellent work in remodelling the accounts and getting better equipment.

At about this time the Derby Co-operative Society took up 200 shares and also loaned us £100.

Important canning development followed a proposal by Mr. Angus Watson, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to join us in a separate canning society. Vale of Evesham Fruit Cannery was formed, the capital being provided equally by Mr. Watson and ourselves and our premises were used. L.B.G. members welcomed the project in which we had the sole right of supply, and Angus Watson and Co. the sole selling rights. Our capital was doubled but, despite this, we still did not have sufficient cash to finance the new venture. The bank looked very askance at canning and refused to consider shares in the new Society as good security. Angus Watson and Co. gave a temporary guarantee for £5,000 and we were then allowed an overdraft limit of £6,250.

So 1927 had proved an eventful year. Our Society made a profit of £1,130 on a turnover of £32,158 and after paying interest we put £700 to reserve and paid a bonus of three pence in the £ on members' purchases. Fifty-one more growers had become members. I was paid a bonus of £100.

Such a frost! - actual and metaphorical - occurred on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1928, just when the Society's prospects were set fair. I travelled to Newcastle to tell Mr. Angus Watson that plum and other fruits had suffered badly. He agreed to an adjustment of quantities for canning and to treat this year as an experiment.

Fruit purchased included 125 tons of Pershore Egg plums at £31 per ton. A good deal of new canning machinery was installed and, to help us, Mr. Cadbury persuaded the Fircroft Trustees to loan us £810 and his firm also helped in various ways. Although during the season we packed 20,000 cans of soft fruits, at the end of the year we owed our growers £2,000 for fruit and the can makers £3,000. Our overdraft was £1,000 and another call for capital brought in several hundred pounds.

A new company, British Cannery Ltd., was formed in 1928 to take over the Canning Society. Capital of £15,000 was provided by Angus Watson and Co. in cash; £6,000 in buildings and machinery by the L.B.G. Society, and Mr. George Cadbury contributed £3,000 by reduction of mortgage. Mr. Alfred Woodall and I were appointed as directors representing the L.B.G.

The outcome was not happy - we eventually found the cannery buying much of its fruit elsewhere while L.B.G. were supplying fruit to other canneries, and in selling out our shares in 1929 we lost a considerable sum - about £1,500.

Concentrating on our own Society, we erected two Dutch barns (now our machinery stores), and started making wicker pot hampers. A small executive committee was appointed.

A loss of £239 on the year 1929 and some dissatisfaction about management affairs led to Mr. Brookes being asked to accept a lower salary. He refused and left us in 1930.

When inviting me to become manager the executive begged me not to give up my public work which included the chairmanship of Evesham Rural District Council, my duties as a magistrate and much County Council work.

I found a solution which well rewarded us, the placing of more responsibility on senior members of the staff - Messrs. Victor Smith, Stanley F. E. Bunting, Harry Hatcher and Frank T Jelfs - all of whom are still with us. Given as free a hand as possible they proved most capable and conscientious.

In particular, Mr. Bunting's work was most valuable when the Society's financial structure was strengthened and we carried out ruthless stocktaking with disposal of old goods.

Mr. Aldington succeeded me to the presidency again.

## CHAPTER VII

# TRADE EXPANSION : 1932 - 1957

New Premises and More Progress  
Canning Factory Purchase  
New Asparagus Pack  
We Branch Out  
Mechanisation - By Chance?  
When Science Came In  
£250,000 Sales Record  
War Again - Gloom and Boom  
An Arctic Winter  
Pathway to Prosperity  
New Societies and L.B.G. Pattern  
The World Comes to See Us

IMPORTANT development plans in 1936 received a check when, having bought a derelict orchard for a railway siding and warehouse site, the G.W.R. Company's terms for a siding were so prohibitive that we abandoned the project and brought the orchard back into cultivation.

This in no way lessened our determination to improve our establishment however and when the Cannery Company, having closed down its factory, decided to sell we bought the premises for £5,000. With loans totalling £4,000 from members the outlay caused us no great embarrassment. No more rents to pay for hire of premises, we told ourselves, and I recalled an occasion some years before when a man agreed to take-a rent of £1 per day for two weeks use of his premises by the Society. Later he sent an account for double the agreed amount and, when we protested, declared that he was charging for day and night! Threatening to put the matter in the hands of his solicitors, I said that was the best thing he could do. We paid the agreed sum and heard no more about it.

Acquisition of adequate headquarters not only paved the way for success but had a beneficial effect psychologically on committee, staff and members. Having adapted the new premises (situated across the road from our office) we began new activities. Plant for mixing fertilisers was installed at a cost of £100 (and later extended) so that growers could have just the balanced ingredients they desired and we began to make the crates and boxes now superseding the old wicker pot hampers.

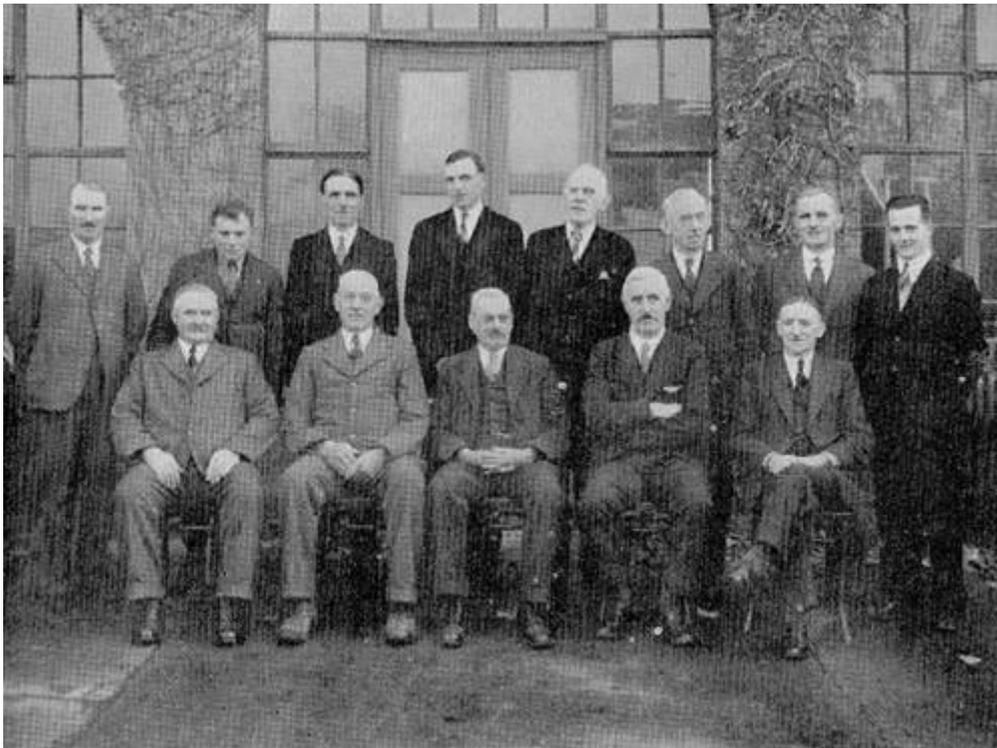
Changing methods of packing produce for market saw the introduction of half-bushel and bushel boxes for fruit, flowers, onions, beetroot, etc., punnets and chip baskets for soft fruits and crates for cabbages, cauliflowers, leeks and roots. Coir nets were acquired for sage and parsley, cotton liners and paper woven bags for peas and beans, tomato boats (Canary) for salad onions. Heavy expenditure is involved yearly in providing an adequate supply of produce containers.

There was a change also in the asparagus pack and here I must tell you something about this luxury vegetable for which our villages are famous. Earlier in the present century it was given individual prominence with the formation of Badsey Asparagus Show. Our Society supported it. Scope of the show was extended following the formation in 1925 of the Vale of Evesham Asparagus Growers' Association (non-trading) and more attention was paid to culture, packing and marketing. Assistance in regard to seed trials, pest and disease control was given by Worcestershire County Council and Long Ashton Research Station.

The granting to L.B.G. by the Ministry of Agriculture of £100 towards the establishment of a grading and packing scheme for asparagus under the National Mark Scheme resulted in a change of pack - a distinct change for the better. After inspecting American and French bundling machines we devised a simple model of our own for tying small round bundles containing (in the medium size) 25 to 30 sticks. Hitherto asparagus was tied with split willow twigs in bundles of 120 sticks and although bundles of this size were uneconomic (they invariably had to be broken open for customers convenience) traditional practice died

hard. For the new grading scheme wrappers were designed for three grades of asparagus and special crates were obtained. About 40 growers with a total of 75 acres of asparagus participated in our scheme. They sent us their asparagus in loose quantities and we employed girls to tie the sticks in the attractive new circular bundles.

Unfortunately the extra expense of sorting, grading and tying swallowed up the extra price received and growers strongly objected to paying for this work, hitherto done voluntarily by their wives and daughters. Our grading and tying scheme ended for that reason, but the new pack continued and the enterprise proved worth while for that alone.



*The L.B.G. General Committee 1937 – 1938*

*Front row: R.R. Smith, R. Aldington, C.A. Binyon, M.G. Hepburn, J.E. Knight  
Back row: W.H. Walford, E.P. Churchill, H.E. Bayliss, John Hall, B.R. Swift,  
Geo. Cassidy, Adam Howley, L.V.W. Smith*

Branches of the Society were set up and it was the first of these in 1938 which led to further expansion of our activities. Pershore Co-operative Society, which dealt only with produce, told us they had no intention of supplying growers' requisites so in Broad Street of that Avonside town we bought a shop and dwelling house with land. It so happened that the man we appointed to take charge of our new Pershore branch (Mr. C. Surman) held the agency for a light motor tractor of an ideal type for market gardeners. In taking over the agency (after compensating Mr. Surman) we entered the machinery business in time for the general trend for mechanisation of agriculture.

The need for a repair and spare-parts service led naturally to the eventual establishment of a machine shop, with equipment including welding apparatus, at our headquarters at Blackminster.

Our aim had always been to supply anything that the grower needed in his business and with better premises and facilities we were able to expand our range of sundry goods. Spraying machines, powders and liquid insecticides were stocked (to advise on plant diseases and pest control we engaged a technical officer), a small laboratory was provided for soil testing and we began a considerable trade in greenhouses and Dutch lights.

Wartime restrictions really restricted, but although we blacked out our premises to befog enemy raiders by night, we met with a good deal of frustration. The first war-time winter was the most severe for many years (the land could not be worked until the end of February and the Avon froze over) but there was a brighter side - trade improved in scope and value. As an example, our contracts for asparagus broke all records.

As there was very little demand for home-grown medicinal herbs (which had proved a useful new crop during the first world war) we let our old drying shed to the Cotswold Preserving Company. Part of our premises was used by Flemings, a firm producing articles for the Royal Air Force, and a basement served as a sugar store.

During the second world war the Society's services were of the utmost importance, both to members and in the general war effort. We were a natural collecting agency for the Ministry of Food, the National Vegetable Marketing Company, and to help with the tomato distribution scheme, the pre-emption scheme for fruit for the diversion of produce to processors. In addition our Society undertook the organising of all local commercial transport in readiness for petrol rationing.

Growth in membership and trade was evidence of increasing confidence in the Society and, fortunately, acquisition of the former cannery premises enabled us to cope with the great business expansion. The handling of 1,000 tons of plums in 1942 was a pointer to the bulk of produce to come. More than 1,250 tons of ware onions sold in the following year represented half the crop growth in the whole of Worcestershire. About 57,000 chip baskets each containing 12 pounds of tomatoes were also marketed and 4,500 tons of fertilisers were sold.

In 1945 we sold our one remaining horse and began servicing our own motor transport. The 1,000th member was enrolled in 1947 and in the following year we bought property in Pershore, where our thriving branch was further developed.

There is a tinge of regret when we recall 1951 for in that year our hopes of purchasing Smithfield Market at Evesham were disappointed and we were outbid by another society. But progress continued in other ways and a scheme for giving preferential treatment in marketing plums for members whose loyalty and trade deserved such treatment was successfully launched.

The establishment in 1944 of a drying and rubbing plant to deal with culinary herbs enabled us to overcome a long-standing problem and the installation of apple grading machinery soon began to prove its worth.

Our total sales in 1943 had exceeded £250,000 when we took over Welford-on-Avon Growers (a small society in a nearby village) and enlarged our premises at Pershore for the provision of shop, showroom and fertiliser store.

It has been said that the first war saved us; the second sent us on the highway of prosperity. During the war period 1939 - 1945 our share capital trebled, exceeding £20,000; payments to growers increased from about £50,000 (the figure for 1940) to more than £200,000 (in 1945) and turnover approached £400,000. The membership figure rose to nearly 1,000.

The horizon became brighter than ever. From now on we were able to make big strides and our services were in demand in other directions too.

It was true that my own time was fully occupied in coping with the spate of war-time regulations, receiving evacuated children, dealing with food distribution, coal prices, fire watching, etc. yet I was made chairman of the Horticultural Committee of the new Agricultural Co-operative Association. This meant numerous meetings and interviews, advising the promoters of other societies starting in various parts of England.

We in the Vale of Evesham still had vivid memories of pioneering work with its struggles, yet our advice was not always taken, though I will not speculate whether that was, or was not, the reason why several

new societies had to close down. At times some of the promoters seemed quite devoid of the co-operative spirit. Others had the right ideas with the necessary tenacity and now seem well on the road to success. To be in a position to give more help, we exchanged a few shares with some of the new societies, enabling us to attend each other's meetings. This co-operation among co-operators was carried a stage further, socially, when in 1950 representatives of about 15 horticultural organisations in the Midlands, East Anglia and the South accepted our invitation to an L.B.G. "at home." Visitors from all parts of the world now come to L.B.G., many of them directed to us by the British Council, others by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Foreign Office, their recognition adding to our pride in the Society built up by the growers themselves.

Finding that numerous journeys to London were tiring for me - I had passed my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday - I vacated the chair of the A.C.A.'s Horticultural Committee (in favour of Mr. E. P. Churchill) but, following a serious operation at Westminster Hospital, I made a good recovery and my colleagues insisted on my continuing as L.B.G. President.

When I retired from the presidency in 1956, the Society persuaded me to continue my services on the executive and in an advisory capacity to the management. Mr. E. P. Churchill was elected President but to our sad consternation he died a few days later. Mr. Ernest Hartley was chosen to succeed him with Mr. John Hall as vice-president - both of them practical men with land.



*L.B.G. General Committee 1956-57*

*Front Row: F.R. Jelfs, H.C. Setten, C.A. Binyon, E. Hartley, J. Hall, R.R. Smith, R. Cresswell, T.F. Jelfs  
Back Row: H.E. Bayliss, F.G. Bailey, L.V.W. Smith, J.H. Jones, J. Harrison, T.W. Archer, A.H. Walford,  
W.T. Bearcroft, R.H. Rowland, R.G. Churchill, G.A. Brookes, H.D. Archer*

## CHAPTER VIII

# 1958 - PRIDE AND PROSPECTS

L.B.G. Jubilee Year  
Trade Tops the Half-Million  
A “Growing” Service  
Prepackaging Next?  
Quality Produce Plea  
Marketing Problems Still  
Signposts to Success  
The Way Ahead

AND so from retrospect to prospect. For some of us it has been almost a lifetime of working and waiting; and both have been rewarded. L.B.G. has in the last 20 years gone from strength to strength. On 14<sup>th</sup> December 1958, the Society will have been operating for fifty years. With an annual turnover now exceeding half a million pounds sterling it surely represents the largest business in its field in the Vale of Evesham.

Today the Society stands with all its services available for an even larger number of market gardeners and small-holders when they are ready to join us and take advantage of its many facilities. In addition to those services, which range from advice and information to growers, marketing of their produce and supplying their seeds, tools, fertilisers, there are trading developments to consider.

Prepackaging of produce in order to provide distributors with quantities more convenient and inviting for consumers may soon become the subject of experiment. Some think that prepackaging means a rosy future. Who can say? It is likely, however, to become part of the trade pattern just as are canning and quick freeze, but it will have to prove itself as being for the good of the producer as well as the customer before any revolutionary change can be made by L.B.G.

With all its projects the Society learned to walk gently at first. If they were economically sound and worth while they grew and were developed. Only one venture can now be seen to have been allowed to depart from this policy. Fruit canning began in a small way but was promising and profitable. Had it been permitted to develop from its own strength a very different story might have been told.

There may be repercussions from European Free Trade, which may force such organisations as ours to adopt measures to counter adverse effects on our trade. That remains to be seen.

If, however, growers wish to introduce something within their own control let me commend the plea of our manager Mr. Victor Smith who asks: “Is not this the time to recognise the value of doing our own job better than it has ever been done before - cultivation, planting, growing, gathering, grading - and being mighty proud to pack and present our produce really well? Growers can do that in voluntary co-operation and leave marketing to the Society which has proved its worth in good times and in bad.”

Marketing methods present recurring problems. Various ideas have been put forward from time to time and I recall no fewer than three Commissions set up in the hope of dethorning this very prickly obstruction to progress.

The time may come when such societies as ours, built upon voluntary co-operation, have to face the challenge of Government sponsored organisations; but uncertainty of yield and difficulties of crop and acreage control would apply no less to them. National Mark schemes are perfectly valid but attempts at standardisation present many snags as far as vegetables are concerned.

In looking back as I write these final lines of the L.B.G. story, I am reminded that of the pioneers who served on the original committee only Mr. R. R. Smith is still with us in that capacity and I know that he will agree with me when I say that we have confidence that our Executive, under the leadership of our

young President Mr. Ernest Hartley, will direct the organisation capably on proved lines and will tackle future proposals sensibly and imaginatively.

In the long struggle for success, among the most progressive moves made - and which may be regarded as the main turning points in the Society's career - were the acquisition of premises permitting trade expansion and the promotion in 1934 of Mr. Victor Smith to succeed me as general manager. Son of a pioneer member, Mr. Smith had literally grown up with the Society. He and other young men to whom we gave opportunity and responsibility all justified the confidence placed in them.

What of the future then? The prospect is bright. L.B.G. has solid assets in funds and buildings, in goodwill and in practical experience. The Society is now in that happy position of being able to take the opportunities essential to success which scope was denied to us for many years through lack of funds and confidence in our future stability.

In compiling this Jubilee chronicle I have been encouraged by the hope that it may prove not merely of local interest and a reminder of the faith and tenacity necessary in any pioneering work, but that it will also give some guidance and inspiration to others putting their shoulders to the wheel for the good of the many. To all who live by the land I commend the spirit of co-operation and the pattern of L.B.G.



*Part of the fleet of motor vehicles outside L.B.G. headquarters at Blackminster*

## “LITTLE BUT GOOD”

To say today that L.B.G. is Little But Good (to quote an early epithet still remembered) is to state a half-truth. L.B.G. is Large But Good.

The Society has about 1,400 members, two district branches, a Staff of 65, a fleet of about 25 motor vehicles, wide produce-marketing services and departments for technical advice, herb drying, machinery repairs and the supply of fertilizers, machinery, implements, greenhouses, feeding stuffs, coal etc.

L.B.G. sends fruit and vegetables to many of the large cities and towns in the United Kingdom and the trading turnover figure for 1957 was £560,000.



*The President, Mr. Ernest Hartley (left), with Mr. L.V.W. Smith (manager) & Mr. C.A. Binyon (former manager & president), photographed in 1958*



*Accountant Mr. S.F.E. Bunting points out ledger items to (left to right) Messrs. Frank Jelfs (fieldsman-advisor), W. Cole (produce salesman) and H. Hatcher (transport manager)*

## L.B.G. FROM THE BEGINNING

- 1906 The change-over from farming: local men talk among themselves on how to get more land for small-holdings.
- 1907 Messrs. C A Binyon & Lionel Horne in deputation who met prime Minister, Mr. Asquith
- 1908 Formation of Littleton and Badsey Growers. Registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act. About 100 market gardeners joined the Society in the first year. Turnover £4,000. Loss of £20 on first year.
- 1909 Mr. C. A. Binyon elected L.B.G. president. £4,000 worth of produce marketed.
- 1910 L.B.G. Office and Warehouse erected at Blackminster, L.B.G. ordered its first truck of coal.
- 1912 A profit (£1 11s. on the year) made for the first time.
- 1913 A profit of £4 4s. 9d. on the year.
- 1914 World War I. L.B.G. members grow medicinal herbs to help 1918 war effort.
- 1915 L.B.G. bought its first transport - a horse and dray. Vegetable drying factory built (near L.B.G. premises) by Cadbury Brothers.
- 1917 Payments to growers exceeded £10,000 for first time.
- 1918 Telephone installed at L.B.G. Office.
- 1919 L.B.G. reports turnover of £16,700.
- 1920 Mr. S. L. Brookes appointed manager.
- 1921 L.B.G. bought first motor lorry.
- 1925 Vale of Evesham Asparagus Growers' Association formed with L.B.G. support.
- 1926 L.B.G. start fruit canning - gold and silver medals won at Imperial Fruit Show.
- 1927 Vale of Evesham Fruit Cannery formed.
- 1928 British Fruit Cannery Ltd. formed. Payments to growers exceeded £25,000 for the first time.
- 1929 L.B.G. cease participation in fruit canning.
- 1930 Manager, S. L. Brookes, resigned; Mr. C. A. Binyon took over. Asparagus Pool introduced.
- 1931 National Mark Asparagus Pack by L.B.G.
- 1934 Mr. L. V. W. Smith appointed L.B.G. manager.
- 1936 L.B.G. purchase fruit canning factory premises from British Cannery Ltd. for £5,000.
- 1938 Branch office and store opened at Pershore.
- 1939 - 1945 World War II.
- 1940 Arctic winter; Avon frozen; crops suffered; prices high.
- 1941 Payments to growers for produce exceeded £100,000 last year. Tractor repairs service started.
- 1942 Over 1,000 tons of plums marketed by L.B.G.
- 1943 L.B.G. take over Welford-on-Avon Growers' Society. About 4,500 tons of fertilizers sold. Over 1,250 tons of onions and 300 tons of tomatoes marketed.
- 1944 L.B.G. bonus to members on 1943 trading reached 1s. 5½d. in the £ ("If only we had been able to retain some of this as additional share capital!" sighed the management). Sage drying plant installed. Pershore branch premises enlarged.
- 1945 Machine shop established at L.B.G. headquarters.
- 1947 1,000<sup>th</sup> member enrolled.
- 1948 Plum trade in the doldrums. Glut. About 150 tons pulped to help absorb the crop, later sold at heavy loss.
- 1949 L.B.G. Founder members Messrs. C. A. Binyon, R. R. Smith and Walter Jones complete 40 years continuous service on committee.
- 1950 Mr. C. A. Binyon awarded O.B.E.
- 1954 Staff superannuation scheme started.
- 1956 Mr. E. Hartley elected L.B.G. president. Mr. Binyon made life member of both general and executive committees.
- 1957 A year of disquiet. Petrol rationing because of Suez Canal crisis. Crops poor (particularly asparagus and cauliflower). Trade shockingly bad. Wet summer.
- 1958 L.B.G. celebrates its Jubilee with a horticultural show for members on August 1st.

## PROGRESS CHART

Year	Membership	Paid up Share Capital	Payments to Growers	Sales to Growers
		£	£	£
1908	35			
1909	100	113	3,625	659
1910		134	3,507	519
1911		144	2,784	463
1912		144	1,228	385
1913		146	2,471	445
1918		477	15,519	1,756
1919		556	6,909	3,236
1920		621	12,305	3,993
1921		664	5,071	3,672
1922	224	686	7,886	3,768
1923	228	690	8,368	3,556
1924		696	12,151	5,887
1925		755	18,408	8,275
1926		2,444	17,096	10,164
1927	340	5,282	26,543	9,124
1928		5,836	30,700	10,588
1933		5,922	18,390	11,105
1938		5,568	31,059	18,918
1939		5,635	28,162	25,973
1940	431	5,805	48,659	33,229
1941		6,004	111,402	59,401
1942	584	11,014	142,658	86,970
1943	668	14,312	202,336	102,673
1944	802	16,363	220,961	121,384
1945		18,734	189,962	125,754
1946	935	20,665	218,297	128,599
1947	1,070	22,302	199,198	151,260
1948		24,037	223,072	155,217
1949		24,670	201,322	143,433
1950		24,885	189,301	145,716
1951	1,200	25,705	212,467	162,419
1952		27,625	201,448	180,835
1953		28,456	186,711	201,365
1954		29,137	231,449	209,120
1955		31,595	219,996	252,504
1956		32,147	232,479	270,087
1957		33,148	218,345	264,706
1958	1,400			

*Originally published in booklet form in July 1958 by  
Littleton & Badsey Growers Ltd., Badsey, Near Evesham, Worcestershire*