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Opening of Acrow's Coronation Works at Saffron Walden

by The Rt. Hon. R. A. BUTLER, C.H., P.C., M.P.
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons
on JUNE 22nd, 1956.

A little over fifteen months have passed since on March 18th, 1955, the Rt. Hon. R. A. Butler, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, laid the Foundation Stone of the Acrow Coronation Works (which ceremony was fully reported in our issue of April 15th, 1955) in the presence of a distinguished company including the Managing Director and Chairman of the company, Mr. W. A. de Vigier, — a compatriot of ours, — the Swiss Minister, and Madame Daeniker, members of the Board, the Mayor of Saffron Walden, etc., etc.

These works — so called because they were first planned in the Coronation Year of H.M. the Queen — were opened on Friday, June 22nd, 1956, as is right and proper, by the man, who fifteen months ago laid the foundation stone.

On that occasion, the Chairman of the company, Mr. de Vigier, remarked that he was particularly anxious that the foundation stone should be laid by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because he considered him more than any other man responsible for the commercial and industrial prosperity enjoyed by this country. A further fact, which prompted him to entrust Mr. Butler with the ceremony was, because of his close connections with Saffron Walden, which constituency he has represented in Parliament for over 25 years.

By courtesy of the Management, I was privileged — together with a number of colleagues of the English and Swiss Press — to witness this impressive ceremony, having also been present when the foundation stone was laid.

No better day could have been chosen for the opening of the doors of these fine works situated on a plateau overlooking the picturesque and old town of Saffron Walden, and surrounded by acres and acres of meadows and woods.

After days of indifferent weather, the sun was brightly shining when, in a fleet of cars, we started from the Headquarters of the Company, at 8, South Wharf, London, W.2 on our 40 miles journey, which was interrupted at Epping where the Company offered to the representatives of the Press a sumptuous luncheon.

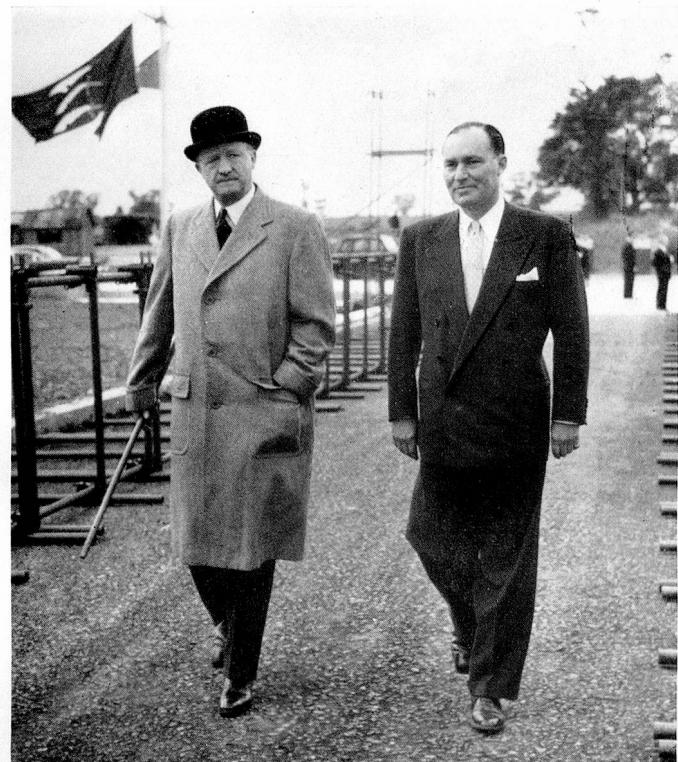
Almost on the stroke of 3 o'clock, we arrived in front of the new works which presented an impressive view. On a high mast the Union Jack, accompanied by the Swiss and Essex County flags fluttered in a keen breeze. The presence of the Swiss emblem was, no doubt, meant as a compliment to the Chairman of Acrow's who hails from our country, and also as a mark of respect to the Swiss Minister who was present.

Opposite the front doors of the works a temporary pavilion was erected where the official *invités*, numbering about a hundred, took their seats awaiting

the arrival of the principal guests. They were shown to their seats by a bevy of very attractive looking young ladies. In an adjoining pavilion the band of the Welsh Guards, by permission of Colonel D. G. Davies-Scourfield, M.C., and conducted by Major F. L. Statham supplied the musical programme. Outside the pavilion, a large number of workmen with their families were assembled to watch the coming proceedings.

First arrivals were the Directors of Acrow (Engineers) Limited, Messrs A. V. Bauscher, A. A. Hobbs, Brigadier S. K. Thorburn, O.B.E., M. C., E. G. Crook, accompanied by their Ladies, these were closely followed by Madame W. A. de Vigier, the charming wife of the Chairman, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Drayton, Sir Peter Bednal, Lord and Lady Braybrooke, the Mayor and Mayoress of Saffron Walden, and the clergy.

When all were seated, the Right Hon. Mr. R. A. Butler, C. H., P.C., M.P., Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, accompanied by Mr. W. A. de Vigier, Chairman of the Company, arrived amidst cheers of the assembled company, and were followed shortly after, by the Swiss Minister, and Madame Daeniker.



ARRIVAL OF THE RT. HON. R. BUTLER,
ACCOMPANIED BY MR. A. W. de VIGIER.

The band then intoned the National Anthem, after which Mr. R. W. Gourdie, O.B.E., the Company's Secretary, ascended to the rostrum to welcome the guests.

"This ceremony", he said, "marks yet another milestone passed in the history of this young and vigorous Company, and it is an occasion in which we all may take some pride. I say "we all", because represented here this afternoon are our shareholders, suppliers and customers, our work people and staff, our professional advisers and the good people of Saffron Walden, and all of these people have helped in some way or another, and at some time or another to raise this Company to the position which it finds itself to-day".

Referring to the shareholders the speaker said that the Company could no longer be called a small one, but that in spite of growing bigger and bigger it still very much remained a family in the sense that all its employees are treated as human beings and individuals and not merely as numbers on a payroll. "I would like the shareholders to feel" he continued, "that they too are important members of this happy and winning team, and that the name of Acrow will come to mean more to you than simply a place where part of your money is invested".

After welcoming the Press, Mr. Gourdie, introduced as the next speaker, Alderman Ellis Rooke, M.B.E., J.P. Mayor of the town of Saffron Walden, who referred in his address to the importance which this event has for the town of Saffron Walden, and the benefit thereof enjoyed by the Borough by the

opening of a second factory, wishing the Board success in their new venture. In conclusion, His Worship emphasized the happy relations which had always existed between the Company and his Council.

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur A. Daeniker, was then introduced by the Secretary, inviting him to say a few words. The Minister, who received a cordial reception said:

"My wife and I are delighted to assist at to-day's formal opening of the "Coronation Works". Only in the Spring of last year, we attended the laying of the foundation stone. I congratulate the Board of Directors and all concerned on the rapid completion of these works and offer my sincere good wishes for a bright and prosperous future of this enterprise.

Acrow's is a happy blend of Swiss and British initiative, skill and engineering talent. Its success, reaching far beyond the boundaries of this country, and indeed of Europe, only shows what a sound and hopeful combination this can be. It is, more-over an indication of the close and friendly understanding which dominates the relations between our two countries.

This Spring we celebrated in Geneva and in London the first centenary of the coming into force of the Treaty of Friendship, Establishment and Commerce between Switzerland and Great Britain. This treaty is the basis of our relationship; it is a very liberal treaty, embodying in its text the lofty ideals which inspire our peoples; it has been and still is the foundation for a happy mutual expansion of our trade. Such beneficial relations existed, of course, many



THE SWISS MINISTER GIVING HIS ADDRESS.



ENTERING THE WORKS.

Left to Right: **The Swiss Minister, Mr. R. A. Butler, Mr. A. W. de Vigier.**

centuries before the signing of the treaty and were a consequence of the political and cultural contacts from the time of Henry VIII. The first recorded Anglo-Swiss business transaction occurred in 1536, when British theological students in Switzerland opened a commercial side-line. They bought a special kind of wood in Glaris and in Zurich and — making it into long bows — exported them to England. I must leave it to somebody else to trace the connection between long bows and Acrow scaffolding or describe the many lanes which our trade and interwoven financial interests have been following since this first recorded deal. They will but prove that there is still scope for expanding commercial relations even between highly developed industrial countries. Such ties are the safest guarantee for the continuance of the good will and close friendship which so happily exist between our nations.

In conclusion I wish to thank Monsieur de Vigier and the other members of the Board of Directors that they made it possible for me as the official representative of the Swiss Government to be present at this Ceremony and to wish them every success. With the 'Coronation Works' behind them, good luck is bound to follow!"

The Minister's speech was warmly applauded.

Once again Mr. Gourdie came before the microphone, this time to introduce to the audience the

Chairman, and Managing-Director of Acrow's, Mr. W. A. de Vigier.

In his introductory remarks he said: "To-day I have spoken of some of those members of this happy Acrow team, but no team was ever good without a captain. Our captain is second to none. With Mr. Bauscher and another he formed this Company in 1936, and the story of those twenty years is a veritable romance of industry. His ability has been widely acknowledged both at home and abroad, and only a few weeks ago he was made a Knight of the Swedish Order of the North Star, an honour which has given all Acrow employees much pleasure and pride. Success has not spoiled him, he still maintains his natural charm and employees can approach him as easily as they could twenty years ago. He keeps his finger on the pulse of every section of the business but in his enlightened way still gives his executives the utmost freedom of action, he thus does not stifle initiative but encourages it".

Amidst vociferous applause, Mr. W. A. de Vigier mounted to the rostrum, and when calm was restored, said:

"It is only one year and three months since Mr. Butler laid the Foundation Stone for these buildings on what was then a barren field. Today you have in front of you a factory and an administration block of over 130,000 sq.ft. of covered floor area. The factory is already in production.

Believe me when I say that in order to complete the Works by today we had to stage a photo-finish almost worthy of Ascot Week, and I would therefore ask you to accept this as a warning that when visiting the Works you will encounter wet paint everywhere.

The next stage of development which we are planning is to build on this area, between the Works and the town, a housing estate as well as a sports ground for our Staff and Workers.

To ensure that the machinery and equipment installed in the Works will be the most modern of their kind, our Works Manager, Mr. Clark, our Works Director at Harefield, Mr. Crook, and myself, last November visited over thirty factories in the United States, and we are satisfied that if we receive the same co-operation from our work-people as we have done in the past, we should be able to produce in these new Works Acrow equipment at prices enabling us to compete everywhere in the world, and especially in the hardest market of all, the dollar countries.

The fact that we have built a third Works in Great Britain and invested so much for the future is proof of the confidence the Board has in your Company's ability to forge ahead. At present over 60% of our Company's total output is exported, and provided we are able to stabilise costs in this country, I see no reason why this percentage should not be maintained or even improved upon, particularly with the many new products which we will shortly put on the market.

Last year I travelled of 80,000 miles, visiting Acrow Companies and distributors overseas, and surveying the last few remaining unexplored markets to give our Company an entire world coverage.

I found everywhere eagerness to buy British goods provided they could be obtained at the right price and provided that British firms were prepared to adapt their products to the needs of local markets. This we at Acrow are always prepared to do, as we do realise



Left to Right: Madame de Vigier, Mr. R. A. Butler, The Swiss Minister.

the importance of giving customers the goods they want wherever they may be.

I have said before, and I say again that to help the nation in its exports an International Trade Fair on at least the scale of the Hanover Fair should be established in London. Such a Trade Fair would not only serve as a shop window for British goods, but, what is much more important, would enable British manufacturers, workers and students to see foreign exhibits of a high standard of quality and finish and appreciate what people abroad expect and can obtain. Such a yearly International Trade Fair which must be the largest of its kind in the world is, in my opinion, an essential to win the battle for exports".

Mr. de Vigier then expressed thanks to all those who were connected in one way or another with the new building, presenting some of the workmen, who with their own hands built the factory, with various momentos.

He concluded his address with the following words: "To the younger generation I hope Coronation Works will be an inspiration, and a reminder in the years to come that on the energy and initiative of the individuals rests the welfare of one's country.

Finally, let us all at Acrow's dedicate ourselves to the task of ensuring that this new monument to Acrow's enterprise makes a worthy contribution to the nation's prosperity and to Saffron Walden in particular".

Spontaneous, and long applause greeted the words of the Chairman of the Company.

Further speakers were Mr. John A. Clerk, Works Manager, and Mr. A. V. Baucher, co-founder of the Company, and a member of the Board.



AWAITING THE OPENING.

The opening ceremony was then performed by Mr. Butler, who was loudly cheered on walking to the speaker's desk. In his address the Lord Privy Seal recalled the foundation stone laying, which he had conducted fifteen months ago, and remarked on the relatively short period which had elapsed since then and the opening of the works. "That is a tribute", he said, "to the drive and energy of Mr. de Vigier".

Mr. Butler mentioned that the new works were situated in an agricultural area, and that he wanted to encourage agriculture and industry to get together. "Produce more food at home, and send more goods abroad, and we shall be a happy and prosperous nation", he said.

The speaker related that Acrow's had been in operation for twenty years, whilst he himself had been a member of Parliament for 27 years. "They are a mere child to me" he remarked, "I welcome this new "baby", and recommend it to your attention, and hope our friends in Saffron Walden will nourish it". (Applause.)

Mr. Butler then, amidst much cheering and firing of guns, operated an electrical switch which cut a white tape stretched across the main entrance portals.

The guests, and members of the public were then shown round the factory which in its new attire presented a most imposing sight. Members of the staff explained to the visitors the manifold articles which would be manufactured at the Coronation Works, from scaffolding to making steel office furniture, etc.

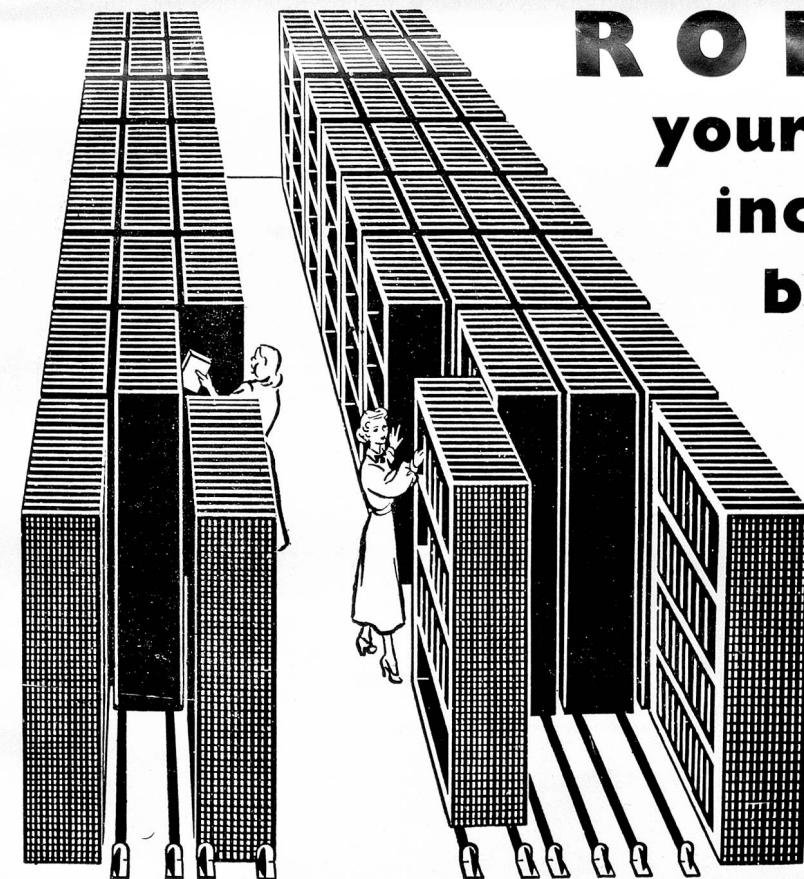
After a thorough inspection of the works, including the large canteen, which contains the latest improvements providing comfort for the workmen and staff; the guests adjourned to a large marquee where tea was served, followed by a most generous *apéritif*. Mr. de Vigier, ably assisted by his charming wife, acted as perfect hosts. In the evening dancing and a fire-work display took place.

During the last few years in which I have on many occasions, been privileged to witness functions of one kind or another, of the Acrow Company, I have always been most favourably struck by the cordial and intimate relations which exist between Management and Staff. There is indeed, as the Chairman rightly said in his address, a "family spirit" prevalent, which is a healthy sign, especially in a time in which so much unrest and misunderstanding exists between some employers and employees.

The Acrow (Engineers) Ltd., is a British Public concern, and perhaps does not strictly come in our sphere of activities, but in view of the fact that the Founder, Chairman, and Managing-Director is a compatriot of ours, we feel well justified to acquaint our Colony with its progress and its achievements.

We are proud indeed that one of our countrymen has by his intelligence, driving spirit, wide vision, and sheer hard work achieved so much in a relatively short span of time, which does not only honour him, but also our homeland.

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