The Smyth Suffolk drill

Seed for grain crops was broadcast by hand until 1731 when the first horse-drawn seed drills made by Jethro Tull came into use and some grain crops were sown in rows. Instead of needing a lot of hand labour to kill weeds it was now possible to do this job with a horse hoe. James Cooke made a similar drill with Suffolk-type coulters in 1782 and James Smyth made his first Smyth cup feed drills at Peasenhall in Suffolk, in the early 1800s. The horse-drawn Smyth drill was attached to a wheeled fore carriage and pulled by two or three horses. The drill was steered by the horseman who walked alongside the drill and, a second man, walking behind the drill kept an eye on the feed mechanisms and put the coulters in and out of work at the headland. The Smyth catalogue for 1913 listed 5 models of 'Semi-Nonpareil' corn drills ranging from a 12-row model for £34 15s. to a 16-row drill priced at £39.

This Smyth 'Non-Pareil' 14-row corn drill cost about £200 when delivered to a Suffolk farm in the late 1950s, is set up for drilling 5-rows of field beans using 2 seed discs and twin seed tubes at 20in row spacings. The drill was last used in 1972.

The seed hopper, with an adjusting handle to keep it horizontal, consisted of an upper grain box and the lower part contained a wheel-driven reversible seed barrel with a seeding disc for each row. Small cups around the edge of the discs picked up seed and carried it to an outlet where it fell from the cups into telescopic tubes connected to the Suffolk coulters. The drill was supplied with two seed barrels with two cup sizes on each barrel making the Smyth drill suitable for all types of seed from clover to field beans.

When tractor-drawn drills appeared on the scene, a worker was still needed to walk behind the drill until someone thought of providing a riding platform. It was all change in 1962 when the hopper was turned round enabling the tractor driver to watch the feed mechanism. The Peasenhall factory closed in 1967 and production continued for a short while at Johnson's Engineering at March.

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