

## SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE – WILLIAM BENTALL 1779 – 1846

### The Goldhanger Plough

William Bentall did not invent the plough, in fact for thousands of years people had attempted to cut grooves in the earth so that they could plant seeds that would grow into food crops. The early ploughs were nothing more than a branch of a tree roughly chopped into shape and at first it would have been a man, his wife and children who would have pushed and dragged the plough to till the field; much later oxen and horses were used to pull the plough. Wooden ploughs like the diagram below might have been reinforced with stone or iron at the point of contact with the ground to improve the groove and wear resistance. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century William Bentall had learned how to cast iron because he decided to use cast iron to make a Plough Share that is the cutting blade that turns the soil in modern ploughs. He



designed and made the share with the help of a blacksmith who used William's drawings to make a Mould (A hollow space shaped to accept molten metal). Having poured the white hot molten iron into the mould and after allowing it to cool, the mould was broken to release the cast-iron share. This metal share was cleaned and had holes

drilled to bolt it to a wooden frame to produce a plough like the one in the photograph below. With the completed plough and a horse William started ploughing his farm fields in Goldhanger near Maldon with remarkable results; the ground was not only cut but turned over in neat furrows and neighbouring farmers were astonished by the huge improvement the plough made. They all wanted a Goldhanger Plough and after some time the demand was so great that after trying to produce ploughs on his farm he decided to give up farming and build a factory on ground he bought near the newly opened Chelmer & Blackwater canal in Heybridge. This allowed him to have iron and wood delivered by canal and with the success of the Goldhanger Plough soon he was producing all kinds of agricultural machines. The Goldhanger Plough can be seen to be one of the first true modern ploughs from which others were developed. When greater power than the horse was later available in the form of a tractor it was possible to increase the number of shares so as to plough four or more furrows at a time. This made the faithful horse redundant but made agriculture more efficient to produce more cereal and vegetable crops for a larger and fast growing population. The Bentall Company became a thriving business, well known worldwide.

