

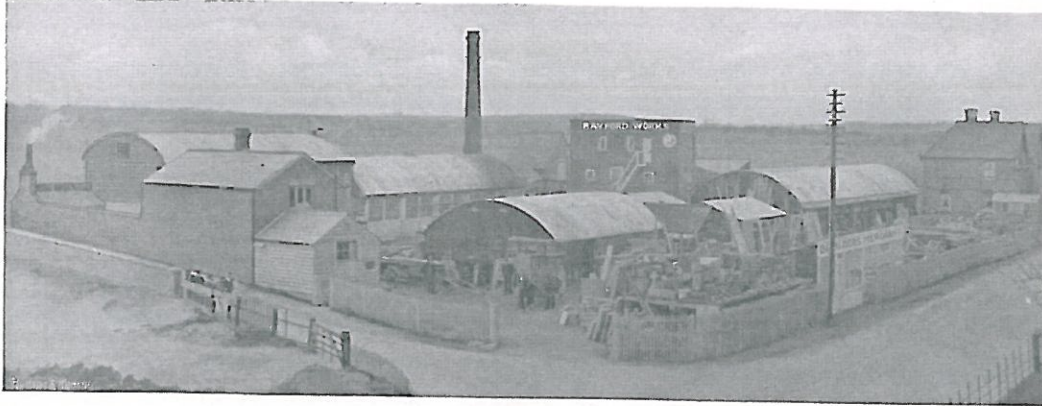
CONTRACTING AND ENGINEERING.

Sittingbourne has a good many surprises in the way of large businesses for the inquiring visitor, and amongst them he will find those conducted by Mr. Laurance Seager, at London Road.

We say *those* because there are two quite distinct businesses in operation, one devoted to building and contracting, carried on in Mr. Seager's own name, and one to engineering and the manufacture of brickmakers' appliances worked under the style of J. T. Bower & Co., but both belong to the same proprietor.

The building business is the oldest, and was started in an ordinary way over 100 years ago, having remained in the same family's hands the whole time. In 1884 it came into Mr. Laurance Seager's possession, and he has very much extended the scope of its operations, and, indeed, quite transformed it from an ordinary building and contracting concern into one of the largest enterprises in the county.

It is only necessary to mention some of the contracts carried out to shew this, amongst them being large and various contracts in Sheerness and Chatham Dockyards for the Admiralty, also for the War Departments and General Post Office; the new Grammar School for Girls at Rochester; Technical Institute at New Brompton, and several large shops; the Co-operative Society's premises and the Workmen's Club and Institute at Chatham; the Municipal Buildings at Margate, the Masonic Temple, Covered Seats on the Cliffs, residential and hotel work also in the same town; Sir William Clayton's mansion at Marden Park, Caterham, Surrey; the Dolphin Hotel, Herne Bay; a large house on the North Foreland, and also the Jubilee Clock Tower and Covered Shelter at Broadstairs, from Mr. Seager's own design; the St. Lawrence Steam Laundry at Canterbury, including all



L. SEAGER'S WORKS, LONDON ROAD.

kingdom. Both works are conveniently near each other, and for our purpose we may treat them as one. They border the London Road and stand on some two acres of land, and more suitable or better equipped for their purpose they could not be. There are spacious offices, two on the ground floor and above them the ordinary office, and the place is lit throughout by electric light, the plant for which, with the exception of the dynamo, was made in the works; and here, too, we saw the Acetylene gas in operation, Mr. Seager being local agent for it. Water is obtained from a well and reservoir on the premises, from which both the works and adjoining property is supplied.

The saw-mill, driven by a 16 h.p. engine, is on the ground level and contains a large frame saw, taking logs 3ft. square and making 20 cuts at once, a circular saw, a four-cutter, a machine for making flooring and match-boards, mouldings,

&c., a tenoning machine, a universal woodworker, capable of most ingenious adaptations, a vertical spindle for circular cutting, a planing and thicknessing machine for panels, and other labour-saving plant. Upstairs is the turnery, with a fine set of lathes; here newels, rails, and other turned articles are

made, either for the business requirements or for the trade, for which a large business in joinery is done. In their turn we visit the carpenters' shop, painters' and plumbers' shop, smithy and wheelwrights' department, monumental and general masons' yard and shops, where a lot of work in marble mantels, marble shop and bar fittings, and cemetery work is going forward, look in at the stores, where every conceivable article used in the trade is kept ready to hand, and then on to the engineering works.

These are also thoroughly well fitted, a special department being set apart for making brick-moulds and bed-plates, for which there is a large demand from America and Australia, as well as from British brick-makers. Here, too, are made slurry-pumps and other machinery used in brickmaking, while the number of brickfield barrows (specially balanced), sieves, screens, and other articles constantly turned out is legion.

A noticeable feature is the large store of engineers' patterns kept, and to these have been added those recently held by the late Mr. Eddington, of Chelmsford, so that duplicate parts of most of the machinery made by him can be supplied.

A large amount of work in all the shops was going forward at the time of our visit, and both in staff and general resources the business is equal to any demand likely to be made upon it.

The works are connected with the National Telephone Company.

BARGE BUILDING.

Notwithstanding other facilities nowadays for the transport of heavy and bulky materials, the barge still reigns supreme on the Thames and the adjoining coasts, and remains the most characteristic feature of the great London waterway. The reason is not far to seek, for whether a barge takes advantage of wind and tide or forms an item in the "tail" of a river tug, the cost of transit is merely nominal in comparison with the usual charges by road or rail. A barge, too, is very *handy* and can go anywhere, provided there is enough water to give it a spare inch or two of draught. Sittingbourne is a great centre of barge traffic, in connexion with the local brick, cement and general carrying trades, and here, too, the craft of barge building is prominently represented.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Alfred White, one of the best-known of Thames barge builders, we had the privilege of inspecting his Sittingbourne barge building yard at Crown Quay, and of watching the *modus operandi* of barge construction. The material used is British oak, and in this case the supply comes chiefly from Sussex, in the rough log. Then, after seasoning, it passes into the steam saw-mills, which form an important portion of this establishment, and which are equipped with a powerful plant of circular and frame saws for converting the timber to any required scantling. A hand saw-pit of the old style is also busy alongside, and has a special value in this industry, where some queer cuts have occasionally to be made. The construction of the barges themselves is ship building pure and simple, and is little less laborious than it was in the days of the Vikings, or later, when the Great Peter of Muscovy worked hard and drank deep at Deptford. Bar accidents, an oak-built barge is a long-lived craft, not by any means dear at first, and a little gold mine afterwards. This reminds us that Mr. White, who builds 16 barges a year at Sittingbourne, is the owner of a flotilla of 20 barges of various types, plying for hire chiefly in and out of the Thames. He is also a timber merchant for the trade, and is very favourably known for the low prices he can always quote.

We may note that Mr. White has a big yard of the same description at Old Orchard, Blackwall, where a big building and repairing trade is done. He has built up the whole business by his own exertions, having started single-handed at Blackwall 25 years ago, afterwards opening a wharf at Greenwich and then at Sittingbourne. Since the start, he has built over 600 barges, most of which, as far as known, are as sound as the day they left the slips.



STEAM JOINERY DEPARTMENT.

the fittings, machinery and plant; large Board Schools at Stone and Darent; extensive additions to Gravesend Hospital, also the Infectious Hospital at Faversham; Green's Hotel, Sheerness; the Masonic Temple and the extension of the Waterworks (including a reservoir holding 300,000 gallons) at Sittingbourne, together with many large private residences, business premises, farm-house and estate work, and hotel work at Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Faversham and the surrounding neighbourhood. Shop fitting in high-class style is also carried out, the contracts in this line including the International Tea Companies and The World's Tea Companies shops through Kent.

In church work too, which is a special feature, Mr. Seager has restored Rodmersham Church and built the Vicarage, restored Upchurch and Halstow Churches, building a Vicarage at the latter place, and also Marden Church, near Maidstone; built Teynham Vicarage, Ebenezer Chapel, Chatham, and Sittingbourne Mission Church. At the present time nine houses are in course of completion at Sheerness, so we need say no more to prove that the business is really a very extensive one.

This equally applies to the engineering and brickmakers' appliance manufacturing branches, the firm's productions in these lines being in use all over the