

simple woollen machinery, as his father had done before him. Henry Platt was only in a very small way of business and there must have been some hard times in those grim years following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1821 he decided to leave his home in Saddleworth for Oldham, one of the rising cotton manufacturing towns of Lancashire, and there set up in business as a maker of machines for cotton. Henry Platt chose the right moment for settling in Oldham and starting the manufacture of cotton machinery. A great expansion was shortly to take place in the Lancashire cotton industry and a demand for textile machinery was to grow as one mill after another was built. Henry Platt started on a very humble scale. He arrived in Oldham comparatively unknown and with practically no resources. He had a wife and several small children to maintain. The first order that he received for a machine is said to have come from a young cotton spinner who at the time had not even a mill of his own. His name was Samuel Radcliffe. These two young men in Oldham in 1821, Henry Platt and Samuel Radcliffe, must have been men of great force of character. When they met and made their first business deal in 1821, they were nothing but poor, obscure artisans. Yet, within a comparatively short time they were both to establish businesses which were to rank amongst the greatest in the Lancashire cotton industry. But in 1821, no one who knew them could have foreseen the commercial success and prosperity that awaited the two young men nor that 21 years later Henry Platt's second son, John, then aged four, would marry Sam Radcliffe's daughter, Alice.

Having made and sold his first carding machine, Henry Platt moved to a place at Ferney Bank, Oldham. Here he was able to employ five or six men to help him with the work of making machines. An old photograph of the house at Ferney Bank has been preserved. Platt's workshop, it seems, was on the top floor, whilst he and his family lived on the first and second floors. One can imagine how cramped they all were. Henry Platt had four sons and five daughters and one can imagine, too, how his boys from a tender age were practically brought up in their father's workshop and taught to help with the work of machine making. It was a hard life. The sanitary conditions in the rapidly expanding industrial town of Oldham in the 1820s must have been appalling. Only the fittest could survive and the health of those who survived was impaired. Henry Platt's youngest son died when still a boy. The eldest son, Joseph, died of consumption at the age of 30. And both Henry Platt himself and his son John were to be cut off in the prime of life. As we shall see presently, John Platt's comparatively early death was to have important repercussions in Llanfairfechan. But in the 1820s Llanfairfechan had never heard of the Platts and Henry Platt and his family, struggling to make their business a success amidst the grime and dirt of Oldham, most assuredly had never heard of Llanfairfechan.

In 1822 Henry Platt met and entered into partnership with one of Oldham's most remarkable self-made men, Elijah Hibbert. They moved the workshop from Ferney Bank to rooms at Mount Pleasant in Oldham. One would imagine from these names, Ferney Bank and Mount Pleasant, the most sylvan and idyllic surroundings. But these names belonged to the period before the late eighteenth century when Oldham was a small, rustic village. There were no ferns or pleasant mounts in Oldham in the second decade of the nineteenth century. They had given way to gaunt cotton mills, coal mines, and slag heaps and rows upon rows of workers' houses. "Where there's muck, there's brass" is a well-known Lancashire saying and if there was plenty of muck in Oldham there was also plenty of brass there for the determined business man and manufacturer. Henry Platt and Elijah Hibbert were making money. But it meant very hard work. It was a harsh, highly competitive world in which no quarter was given or expected. The manufacturer who turned out shoddy products and neglected his business could not and did not survive. Henry Platt and his partner by dint of hard work and honest workmanship gradually earned amongst the mill-owners a good name as makers of textile machinery. Orders came to them from all parts of Lancashire. They had acquired an old cotton mill, Hartford Mill, in Oldham, in which they had installed their workshops. Around this old mill, their workshops and iron foundries steadily grew and expanded. By 1837, they were employing 400 men. In that year Henry Platt's two elder sons, Joseph and John, were admitted into partnership and the firm's name was changed to Hibbert, Platt & Sons. In 1842 John Platt, then aged 25, married Alice Radcliffe of Lowerhouse Mills, Oldham, the daughter of his father's old friend, Sam Radcliffe. Both families had prospered greatly since the days when John and Alice were children and Henry Platt had sold his first carding machine to Alice's father.

In the same year, 1842, Henry Platt died at the age of 50, just before the business which he had founded was to enter into a new period of far greater prosperity and expansion than he had known. In 1843 an Order in Council abolished the restrictions on the export of machinery to foreign countries. A new vast foreign market was thrown open to the go-ahead manufacturer; and Elijah Hibbert and his two young partners, Joseph and John Platt, were quick to take advantage of the opportunity. Soon textile machinery from their works at Oldham was being exported to all parts of the world. The old workshops and iron foundry at Hartford Works were not large enough to cope with this access of business. New workshops were built on a vast scale, the Hartford New Works, as they were called. The drawings which have been preserved with the Platt papers of both the Hartford Old Works and the Hartford New Works, together with their subsidiary collieries, show impressively enough how extensive and elaborate the organization of the business, begun at Ferney Bank on such a humble scale some twenty-five years or