

IV Onward – Platt Brothers & Company

During the eight years between the death of Elijah Hibbert and the firm assuming the name Platt Brothers & Company progress was maintained at a phenomenal rate. The number of men employed rose from 900 to 2450, of which 750 were stationed at Hartford Works, Greenacres moor, and 1700 were stationed at Hartford New Works, Werneth. (The figures exclude boys). So expansive was the works at Werneth becoming, visitors, particularly from overseas, were astounded by what they beheld. The Company was now the largest employer in Oldham and the largest maker of cotton machinery in Lancashire and hence in the world. In attaining this status it had surpassed Dobson & Barlow, at Bolton, for so long the front runner in the business. From 1854 progress continued unabated so that by 1857 the Company was able to offer the cotton manufacturing industry every type of machine it required for both spinning and weaving operations, an ability never to be matched by any competitor. Already, the dynamic leadership of John Platt was manifest, a leadership which was to become legendary.

John Platt had inherited the native Saddleworth ingenuity. He was the natural main spring for the Company's continued exploration of the cotton spinning processes from the findings of which the techniques devised enabled the superiority of the Company's product machines to be maintained. Patents were granted to him, often in co-ownership with members of his staff. At no time were John Platt's innovative powers better demonstrated than during the cotton famine occasioned by the American Civil War. The spinning machinery in use in Lancashire had been prepared to process American fibre (staple) length cottons, but he adapted the machinery to process Indian and the other shorter fibre length cottons and averted for Oldham some of the distress the cotton manufacturing towns had had to endure. But that was not all, he developed machinery for the production of woollen and worsted textiles and so added to the Company's range of products a line of machinery his forebears had originally set-out to make in a modest way. Platt Brothers & Company was now well on its way to becoming the undisputed, most substantial and comprehensive textile machinery maker the world has, so far, seen. John Platt

travelled widely, not only as the Company's premier salesman, but with an eye open for opportunities to exploit the local scenes and, in turn, of course, to bolster the fortunes of the Company. The cotton ginning machine marked a significant example of such a policy when it was introduced into the Company's line of products. The cotton ginning machine (Gin) is not used in the mill but on the cotton fields leading, in some instances, to it being classified as an agricultural machine. This machine separates the cotton fibres from the pod (boll) on which they grow, the pod having been hand picked from the plant. The machine in the "saw" form was invented in the USA in 1793, by Whitney and, later, Macarthy invented the "roller" form which did not damage the cottons with the longer (staple) fibres. Platt Brothers & Company was to make both forms; for manufacture they were allocated to the original works at Greenacres moor. Very quickly John Platt's powers of invention were applied to the Gin for in the early eighteen-sixties he was filing applications for patents concerning the machine.

The combination of the enlarged range of products and the ever escalating volume in which they were being sold caused the workforce to rise, by 1872, to a total of 7 000. A growing number of the machines sold were replacements for the earlier, comparatively, primitive and less productive versions and the manufacture of power looms was approaching 300 machines per week, the greater part of which was destined for markets overseas. A loom fitter and his apprentice were required to build three looms every two days; it used to be said that all a loom fitter needed was a lead hammer and a stout pair of clogs. Yet the sheer increase in the size of the workforce was not the only measure taken to meet the fortunate demands the Company had placed upon it. The Company maintained its policy of concentrating, within its own hands, the manufacture of the component parts it needed for its machines, which were now vast in number and variety and made from an assortment of raw materials. So, in order to minimise the time taken to produce the parts, more and more machine tools and refined production methods were introduced. Again, to achieve this end, some of the machine tools were designed and manufactured by the Company on its premises. Tool Rooms, millwrights and general maintenance departments had become permanent establishments within the Company. So intense had the policy of self-sufficiency become every nut, bolt and screw was made on the premises and, even, the taps and dies by which they were machined. (Although the screw threads were of Whitworth form the specification was the Company's own and the items were identified by a numbering system peculiar to the Company: Platt's No. 1, Platt's No. 2, Platt's No. 3 etc). The nuts,