

destroyed and the library was closed for its protection. However, soon after the troubles were over the Company re-opened both facilities, the library then to contain in the order of 5 000 volumes.

It has been said that the Platt machinery was the true basis of Oldham's industrial supremacy. By 1871 Oldham, alone, had more spindles in operation than any one country in the world had in total, save only the USA. Although the Company had experienced, from its outset, competition from other textile machinery makers based in Manchester and some of the other Lancashire cotton towns it had had from 1845 a not insignificant competitor situated directly in Oldham; this was the firm of Asa Lees. The Asa Lees business, housed in premises named Soho Works, was located at Grenacres moor, on the opposite side of Huddersfield Road to Platt Brothers' original Hartford Works, and had grown from the roller and spindle making business which Asa's father, Samuel Lees, had founded in 1816. Both firms had prospered, to the general good of Oldham, although Asa Lees had never equalled nor ever was to equal the scale and scope of Platt Brothers; the Asa Lees' workforce, at its greatest, only reached a quarter of that of Platt Brothers. From 1871 the sustained demand for textile machinery in Oldham saw Platt Brothers supply slightly more than three times the amount of machinery supplied by Asa Lees and in the markets elsewhere at home and overseas the amount supplied by Platt Brothers was at an even higher ratio as Asa Lees, a cautious man always, preferred to limit his commitments especially to the export trade. Though not as comprehensive as Platt Brothers, Asa Lees was a sound concern in the manufacture of those textile machines it elected to make and in the markets where it chose to operate.

Pursuant to the Companies Act of 1862 Platt Brothers became, in 1868, a limited liability company. In time, the head office was transferred to Werneth, the name of the works there dropping the word "new" to become Hartford Works with the original works, at Grenacres moor, being renamed East Works. But the vernacular, as it always does, had long found the succinct nomenclature, it had opted for "t'new end" and "th'owd shop".

V *The Platt Brothers: John & James*

John was a name regularly bestowed by the Platt family on its sons, but this John Platt was, to the people of Oldham and, in due course, Llanfairfechan "The John Platt": industrial magnate, civic leader and public benefactor in Oldham, the town's mayor and Member of Parliament and Justice of the Peace for and Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire, country squire and benefactor in Llanfairfechan, Justice of the Peace for Caernarfonshire, Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff of that country. He was the one member of the family to tread all the stages of the Platt metamorphosis. Albeit, he was only four years old when taken by his parents from Saddleworth to live in Oldham, but his first experiences must have been of Dobcross, his birthplace, and of the wider Saddleworth surroundings and traditions his forebears had known for generations. Moreover, there is record that John Platt returned to Saddleworth for some part of his formal education. It was to the boarding school run by Ralph Broadbent, assisted by his brother Charles (an accomplished mathematician), in a house, "Springhill", on Hey Flake Lane above Delph Heights. There is mention that James Platt also attended this school. James Platt was a native of Oldham. He, too, applied many of his energies to serving his fellow townspeople. He was a member of the Borough Council, was associated with many social and cultural projects in the community and, even, preceded John as Member of Parliament for the Borough before a grievous fatal accident brought his works to an end. All this devotion to public service the brothers undertook, in parallel, with the stupendous fears they achieved in directing and developing the great company which bore their name and of which they were the virtually exclusive owners.

In entering public life the Platt brothers contrasted with Henry Platt, their father, who seemed to have left that realm to Elijah Hibbert. There is, even, record of John and James' older brother, Joseph, speaking at one of the meetings called to support the petition for Oldham to be granted the status of Parliamentary Borough. By the time John Platt became involved in public affairs Oldham had been granted its two Members of Parliament and the burning issue then before the town, in 1848, was the question of a Charter of Incorporation.