XVII *The Sad End*

In 1976 Stone-Platt Industries Limited returned a pre-tax profit slightly in excess of £15.5 million pounds, a figure which marked the peak of a steady growth in profits over each of the previous eight years, in parallel with which dividends had increased in every year since 1969. To the outside world, the fortunes of Stone-Platt appeared sound and even when the pre-tax profit dropped to just short of £14.5 million in 1977, to which a hardening in the exchange rate for the pound sterling had contributed, there seemed no reason to question the statement, contained in the Company's Annual Report for that year, that the Company foresaw continuing growth in the years ahead through its aim to be the world leader in each of its mainstream lines. But to people knowledgeable in the affairs of Platt Saco Lowell Limited the statement had a hollow ring. To these people it was already evident that Platt Saco Lowell Limited, the subsidiary company to which Stone-Platt had entrusted the responsibility to lead the Textile Machinery Division and thus maintain its long renown as the world's leading maker of textile machinery, had lost the basis to hold the renown and, worse still, was fast approaching the position from which it would never be able to recover it.

From 1978 the sale of Stone-Platt's mainstream conventional textile machinery fell into serious decline. Granted a world wide recession in the demand for textile machinery had enveloped all the makers but Stone-Platt was, progressively, securing less and less of the business which was available, most disastrously in the, albeit dwindling, Lancashire and other UK home markets. The alarming reason was that an ever growing proportion of the product machinery for which Platt Saco Lowell Limited was responsible was no longer of its traditional high quality because the work to maintain that quality had lost impetus when a preference had been given for the development resources to be devoted to the pursuit of novel machines for exploiting new technologies. Stone-Platt was in the lamentable position that its Blowroom machinery was outclassed beyond recall and was reduced to the state, when called to supply such machinery, of having to merchant the products of another maker. Belated attempts started to be made to upgrade certain of the other cotton spinning machines but the exercise proved forlorn because

the competitors' machines were ever improving and the leeway was not properly being made up. The cotton Card was a particular case in point. Platt Saco Lowell Corporation had ceased making Blowroom and carding machines quite some time before it was acquired by Stone-Platt so no help had come from that quarter with better models for those two types of machinery. Furthermore, the attempts to make up the leeway on the superior machines from the competitors were not helped by the fact that no clear cut allocation of the Stone-Platt range of textile machines had been made to Platt Saco Lowell Limited and Platt Saco Lowell Corporation, as had been done, in earlier times, amongst the TMM Operating Companies, so that in those instances where certain of the machines were still being made in duplicate the necessary dual development work dissipated the resources and retarded progress all round, particularly when, in turn, both Platt Saco Lowell Limited and Platt Saco Lowell Corporation were charged with designing a new Ringframe. The cotton Comber had provided a peculiar contribution to the loss of business because although the model made by Platt Saco Lowell Corporation was satisfactory in terms of the combing performance it was of the double type (in effect two machines placed back to back on a common support framing), a configuration which found favour with only a limited number of customers, whereas the more popular single type, made by Platt Saco Lowell Limited, did not match the combing performance of the machines available from the best competitors. Added to these shortcomings, the machinery made by Platt Saco Lowell Corporation was still according to the Imperial (inch based) system of measurement and was, on this account, encountering gathering resistance from markets outside the USA, despite being traded profitably within the USA. It will be remembered, it had been recognised, in 1969, for the machinery to be successful in world wide markets it had to be made in metric measure. Apart from the 'ST' machine (which remained on offer), the woollen and worsted machinery, which was entirely a Platt Saco Lowell Limited responsibility, had been so drastically eclipsed that it led to the decision to abandon the manufacture of all the other machines for these fields of textile processing and the consequent closure of Burlington Shed at Keighley. The Axminster carpet loom was axed from the range of product machines made at Hartford Works and enquiries to supply such were turned away.

Concurrent with the falling sales of the mainstream conventional machinery the lack of prospects for the machinery intended to exploit the new technologies was being revealed. Several projects had to be written-off on the grounds of either technical infeasibility or inadequacy. These projects included a machine for imparting to cotton yarns a treatment aimed at cheapening the cost of producing a mercerised