

Stothert's Foundry, Southgate Street, Bath

Southgate/Horse Street

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The proposed redevelopment of the Southgate area of Bath has led to a renewed interest in the ancient property boundaries along the east side of Southgate Street which existed before the area was levelled for the present shopping precinct in the 1970s. Various studies of the district have been undertaken by Bath Archaeological Trust and others. This renewed interest suggested to us that, as part of the topographical project called the Survey of Old Bath, a closer examination of early deeds, rate books and other documentary material might provide more information about the original site of the iron foundry established by George Stothert and first heard about in the early nineteenth century. The growth of the business from these beginnings into the later internationally famous crane-making firm of Stothert and Pitt is already well described in Hugh Torrens' comprehensive history of the firm, but it is now possible to enlarge on the original site of the iron foundry in a way which has not been done before, and

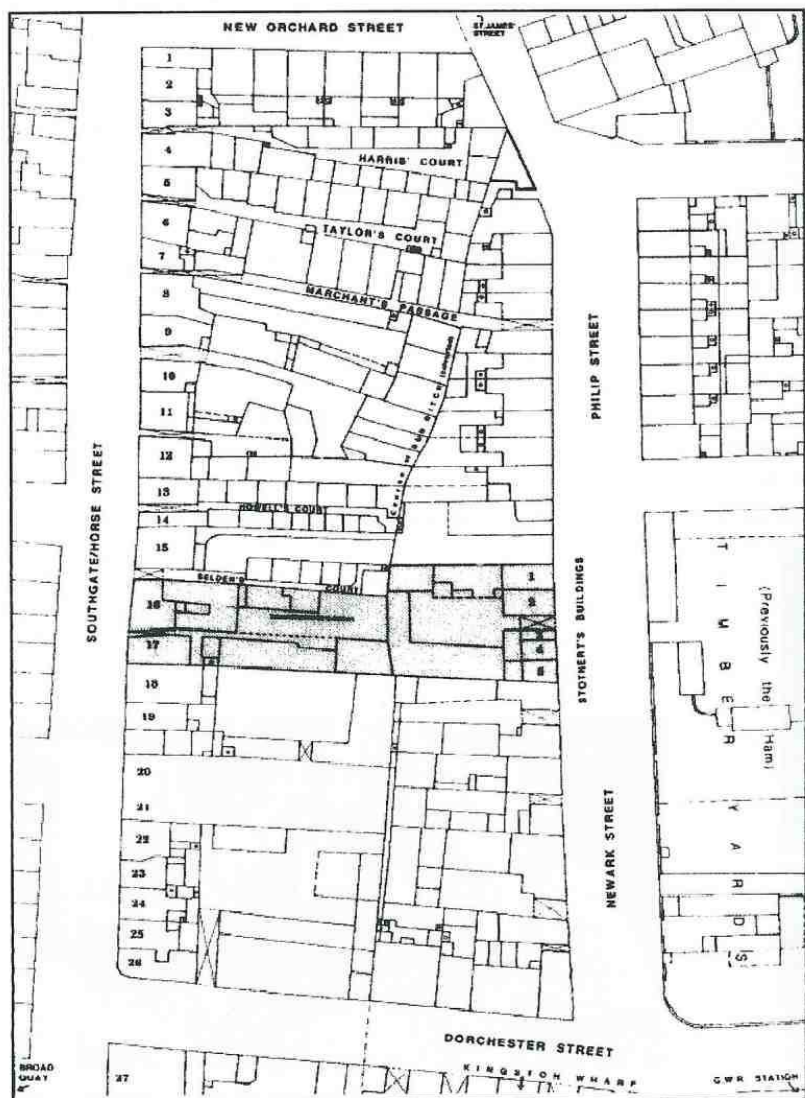
When George Stothert first moved to Bath towards the end of the eighteenth century, the layout of the suburb of Southgate Street still remained much as it was in mediæval times, consisting of a row of tenements lining the road which crossed the meadows between the South Gate of the city and St Lawrence's Bridge over the River Avon. Behind them on the east side a stream from the hot springs known as Bum Ditch ('bottom ditch') could still be seen flowing along the bottom of the tenement courts and gardens about 50 yards behind the street frontage. This served as a common sewer. Beyond the ditch to the east lay the Ham, shortly to become the property of Charles Medows, later Lord Newark, a large meadow containing market gardens which once belonged to Bath monastery.

Southgate Street had always been an area of trade and industry, but by the eighteenth century these had grown to service the needs of the influx of fashionable visitors to the spa. Provision was also made for the transport arrangements of travellers arriving in the city and hence

the street was generally known as Horse Street (the name Southgate Street being restored in the early decades of the nineteenth century). It was a busy and somewhat downmarket thoroughfare, made even busier by the opening of the Avon Navigation in 1727 and the building of a riverside wharf ('Broad Quay') at the south-western end of the street. Many of the old thatched buildings that lined the street were burned down in 1726, but these were quickly replaced, the gardens at the rear becoming filled with small back-to-back tenements around the narrow courtyards which housed numerous artisans and workshops. Although the street was fronted by inns and shops, considerable industrial activity was being carried on at the rear, including the work of ironmongers.

Stothert's Ironmongery

The earliest mention of George Stothert as a young man in Bath comes in Richard Chippendall's reminiscences of his own arrival in Bath in 1779, when Stothert was working as a superintendent. at about the age of 23, over the smiths, braziers, tinmen, planemakers, &c. employed by the ironmonger John Harris. In 1766 the rate books show that John Harris was occupying what came to be number 16 Horse Street (street numbering was not introduced into the Horse Street rates accounts until 1811, with the numbers not always exactly as they were later). In 1769 a lease was taken out for no 16 under the name of Thomas Harris, his father. In 1774 John Harris also took out a lease for a property later



The Southgate Street area, taken from Cotterell's map of 1852, showing Stothert's property (shaded) in Southgate Street and Newark Street.

even to supply a plan of Stothert's yard.

known as nos 13-14 Horse Street. He had already acquired the site, once the Ring family's, and had recently pulled down the buildings at the rear of the premises and replaced them with ten tenements (somewhat squalid houses, later known as Howell's Court) which were presumably provided for his workmen.

From 1784 onward it is George Stothert who is rated for no 16, and it was evidently he who was now running the business there, possibly, it is thought, as a result of the retirement of John Harris on the death of his wife early that year. Retirement might also explain why Harris is described two years later as 'gentleman' during a renegotiation of the lease of nos 13-14. It is possible that Stothert came to take over this part of the business also, being mentioned as the occupier of the site in an 1803 deed relating to a neighbouring property. As planes were supplied from this address after this date, he may have continued to use the site as late as 1816, when it came under new ownership. After the death of John Harris in about 1803, other members of the Harris family did not continue in the ironmongery business, although they retained an interest for many years in no 4 (where the buildings at the rear later became known as Harris' Court in place of nos 13-14) at the top of Horse Street.

In the meantime Stothert was rapidly expanding the ironmongery business in his own right, perhaps on the basis of a temporary partnership between 1794 and 1801, no 16 being then rated jointly between Stothert and a Mr. Richardson. Between 1797 and 1800 he was also being rated for a property in the High Street and, from 1798, for a warehouse at 15 Northgate Street immediately advertised in his offer to the Bath Armed Association of military equipment against the threat of invasion by the French. More significantly in 1799 he now took a lease on no 17 Horse Street, followed in 1803 by another for no 16, having purchased the remainder from John Harris before his death. Directory listings and a 1795 letterhead show that Stothert was also supplying planes and materials from no 21 Horse Street for a while, although there is no supporting evidence from deeds or rate books. Whether this was a temporary outlet it is not possible to say, but many of the sites associated with George Stothert appear to be of this nature. It is also likely that much of the work, such as the wooden components of the planes, would have been subcontracted - perhaps to the previous occupants of no 17, who are all identified as carpenters.

Further expansion took place in 1810 when he was also rated for a yard in Philip Street, a shop in Back Street (evidently with access to the wharf at Broad Quay), and a 'wharf' in St James' Street. The latter 'wharf', being in the centre of the town, was presumably an office where business was done for the new wharfs being set up along the lock flight of the Kennet and Avon Canal - newly opened in the Dolemeads on the other side of the river. More importantly perhaps, was the yard associated with Philip Street. Philip Street had only recently been laid out a short way into the north-west corner of the Ham, and it appears that other plots further down on the west

side of the meadow were also being leased out to the neighbouring businesses in Horse Street (such as the brewery belonging to Stothert's neighbour, Opie Smith) as an extension of their premises. After 1811 the 'wharf' is also listed with Philip Street and appears to have been relocated closer to the yard.

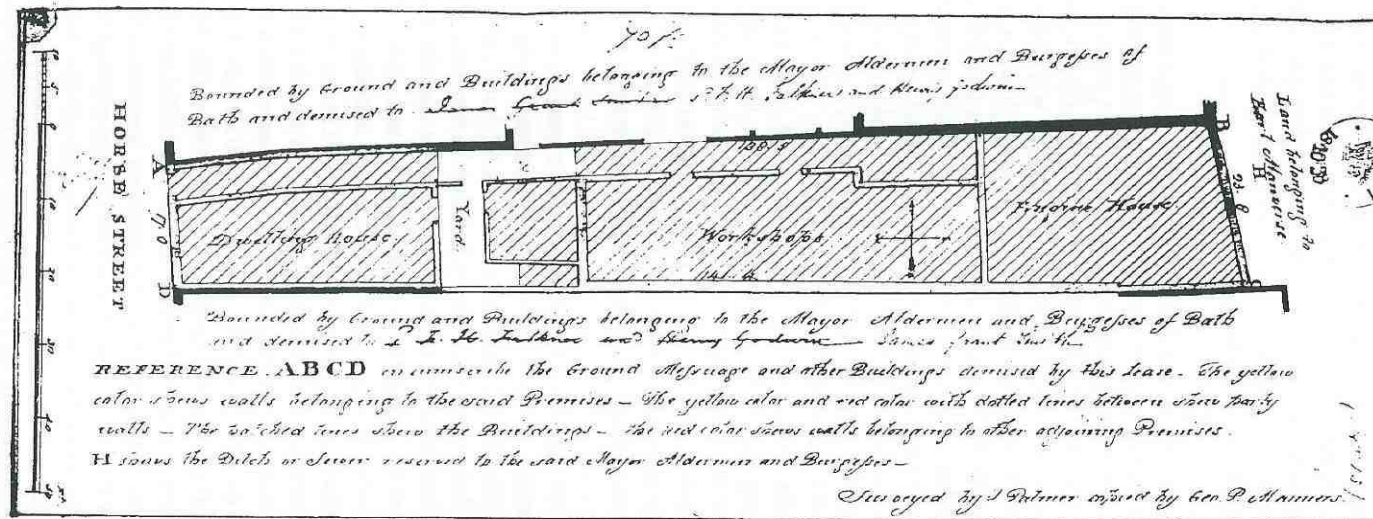
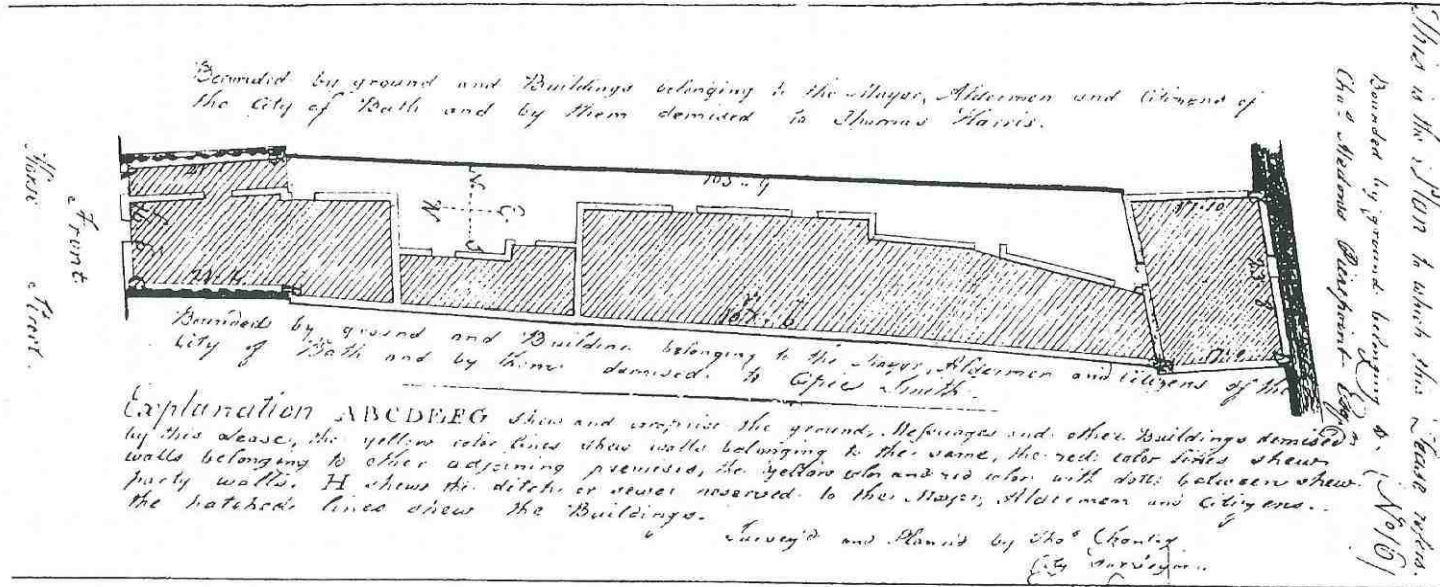
It is not known where George Stothert lived with his family until 1800 when he is listed in the directories as residing at the Northgate premises. This he expanded after 1811, being rated for several houses in Street's Court to the rear. From 1813 onward there is also a rating of the occupants of 'Stothert's Court'. This appears to have been a group of four small tenements built at the rear of no 16 Horse Street, against no 17, to house some of Stothert's workmen.

Stothert's Foundry

The next development of the business occurred in 1815 with the announcement in the *Bath Chronicle* that an iron foundry had been established at no 17 Horse Street (confirmed in the rate books), which was in future to be managed separately by Stothert's son, George junior, who subsequently pays the rate for the yard at the rear. In the seventeenth century no 17 was a smithy, and the plan included with Stothert's 1799 deed suggests that the layout had not changed since then. There was an arched entry from the street into an open passage leading along a row of narrow buildings which presumably once served as stables. At the end of the passage, adjoining Bum Ditch, was a larger building which would have been the site of the original smith's shop. Later deed plans show that the Stotherts had converted the 'stables' to workshops and rebuilt the 'smithy' to house a steam engine.

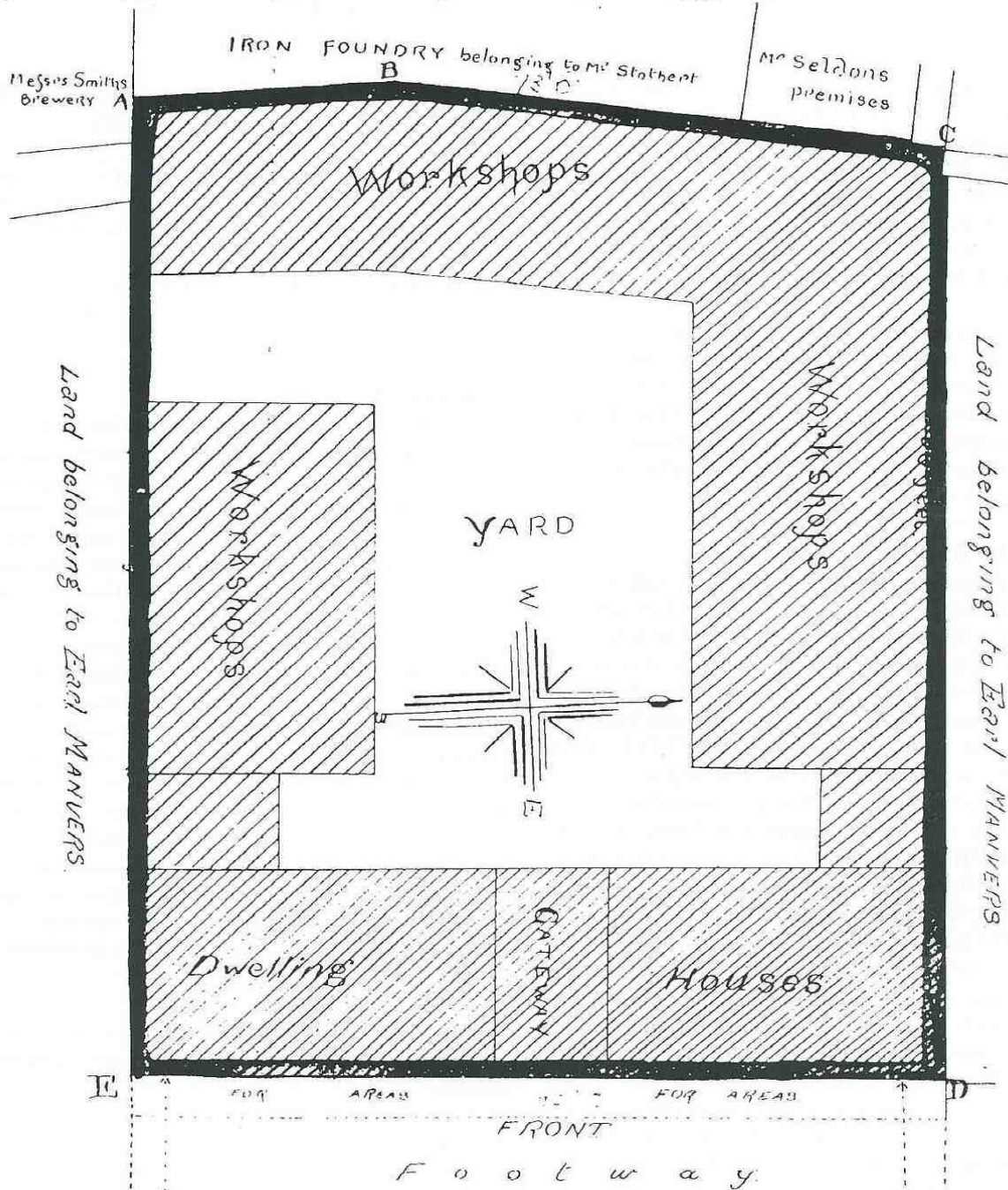
On the death of George Stothert snr in 1818, the properties in Northgate Street were bequeathed to George's other sons, John and William, where they were to continue with the ironmongery business. However, the foundry, which now included the properties in Southgate Street together with the yard and wharf at the rear, remained with George Stothert jnr. The foundry was still expanding and required further space, as indicated in the rate book of 1818/1819, which mentions, by two of the dwellings in Stotherts Court, '*Taken down and now form's the Site of the New Part of the Iron Foundry*', the engine house and workshops of no 17 apparently being extended northward into the premises of no 16.

Eventually, in 1821, George jnr took out a formal 99-year lease from Lord Newark (now Earl Manvers) of the adjoining yard in the Ham. The plan relating to this deed shows that the Stotherts had already built workshops around the perimeter of the yard (elsewhere called 'a smith's shop and four several sheds'), connecting up on the west side with the foundry at the rear of nos 16 and 17 Horse Street. The yard, 73ft in width and 90ft in length, was closed off on the east side with a row of five workmen's dwelling houses (with two washhouses attached), facing onto the meadow. These houses were, for some reason, only two storeys high, and a yearly rent of

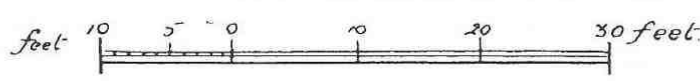


Sequence of deed plans for number 17 Southgate Street showing the old smithy in 1799 (left) and its subsequent conversion into a foundry (right). Note the disappearance of Bum Ditch (culverted) at the east end of the property.

The Plan referred to:-



Reference. The red colour and letters A B C D E to A circumscribe the Plot of ground conveyed by this Indenture
 The HATCHED lines show the dwellinghouses workshops and other Buildings erected on the said ground



The 1821 deed plan of Stothert's Buildings and workshop yard on the east side of the iron foundry

7s was paid on the property for 'opening four lights towards ground in the Ham'. Located centrally between the houses was an arched cart entry into the yard from a road or trackway which led down from Philip Street, a feature which ensured that the front of the foundry now faced east.

The row of dwellings appears in the rate books as nos 1-5 Stothert's Buildings, although the access road itself was also referred to as Lower Philip Street. As other buildings came to be built along the road, the name of Newark Street was adopted some time about 1829, and from thereon the business was always known as the Newark Foundry. Stothert's Buildings eventually became known as 6 - 10 Newark Street, the old numbers persisting until the removal of the firm in the 1850s.

The rate books suggest that the Philip Street 'wharf' was not still part of the Stothert interest (later rate books show that they acquired a wharf by the Kennet & Avon (K&A) canal at Dolemeads), being described from 1815 onwards as 'Canal Office' rated to John Thomas (builder of the K&A canal and owner of Prior Park), listed alter Stothert's Buildings.

The move from Southgate

Under the management of George jnr's half-brother Henry, who was taken on as a partner in 1823 and took over the firm in 1827 (when George retired on account of his health), the scale of operations being undertaken by the foundry was considerable. By the mid 1850s space must have been a great problem. The construction and installation of steam engines was already being carried out by 1827 (a separate works was also begun in 1836-7 at St Philip's in Bristol for the manufacture of locomotives), and the first cranes were being produced by 1850. The Ham however was rapidly becoming a built-up area containing numerous timber yards and warehouses, although transport facilities had been improved by the establishment of the Kingston Wharf on the Avon at the bottom of Newark Street in the late 1820s, and the construction next to it of Bath Spa Station by the Great Western Railway Company some ten years later. Whether temporary use was made of the surrounding yards by the foundry is not known, but in 1857 a new foundry was built, also known as the Newark Foundry, on a much larger site a half mile out of town between the Lower Bristol Road and the river. By this time the firm had passed to Henry's son John Lum Stothert (in partnership with Robert Pitt) and now becomes known as 'Stothert and Pitt'. With the Northgate business already sold the year before, contact between the firm and its original sites was soon broken.

Of the original sites, no 16 Horse Street remained with the family in trust for Elizabeth, wife of George Stothert snr. After her death in 1855 it passed to other members of her family, the Aspreys, who did not give it up until 1911 when it was purchased by the Bath Electric Theatre Company for one of the city's first cinemas known as the 'Picturedrome'. Similarly, no 17 also remained with the

executors of George Stothert snr, but in 1850 it was acquired by Richard Bathe, a wine & spirit merchant of Bath (probably an acquaintance of Francis Henry Falkner, executor and in-law of the Stotherts - also a wine merchant), who converted at least part of the premises into a wine vaults before the Stotherts' removal. The two properties were again brought together in 1916 when a large portion of no 17 was acquired by the Picturedrome for enlargement of the cinema which later became known as the Regal and finally, in 1943, the Odeon.

As to the foundry yard behind Stothert's Buildings, the directories show that it was already being used as a builder's yard when the Manvers estate in the Ham was sold in 1874. It came to be occupied by sundry other businesses, some of the more noteworthy being a cabinet works in the 1870s, a wheelchair factory in the 1880s, and from thereon until the first world war, a bicycle factory.

Conclusion

One of the most interesting aspects of this study was the role of the Southgate Street as an industrial suburb of Bath - the context in which the Stothert enterprise was able to flourish. The presence of influential promoters of industrial development, such as John Thomas and John Billingsley, and the involvement of several Bath banking families suggests that the various activities being carried on behind the Southgate Street frontage were not insignificant. Particularly interesting is the connection between the brewers of Bath (who figure prominently in Southgate Street as well as Northgate Street) and the introduction of steam power into the city in the early nineteenth century, in which such firms as the Stotherts were involved. Dr Torrens has already pointed out the importance of the wide connections between the Stotherts and other influential engineers and industrialists of the day, and it would appear that the Southgate area had its own part to play in these developments. Further investigation of these early industrial sites and their place in the web of business connections would therefore be worthwhile.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to City of Bath Record Office for access to corporation deeds and Manvers papers, with permission to publish extracts.

Sources

References are provided in the text. Further information is available in:
 Torrens, H., *The Evolution of a Family Firm: Stothert & Pitt of Bath* (Bath, 1978).
 Chapman, M., *An Historical Guide to the Ham and Southgate Area of Bath* (Bath, 1997) (See review in this *Journal*).

Material on the Stothert's Southgate site and on their family connections is included in an exhibition hosted by the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre, June - October 1998.