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JAMES WATT'S COPYING-PRESS

Correspondence

The following is a selection of letters concerning the development of the copying-press and the beginning of the copying company, James Watt & Co..

James Watt to Joseph Black. 24 Jul. 1778 [MS 3219/4/127/6]

Watt announces he has discovered a method of copying letters instantaneously.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 3 Mar. 1779. [MS 3219/4/125/4]

This is probably the earliest surviving example of a press-copy made by Watt's method. There are other early examples under the same reference.

Gilbert Hamilton to James Watt. 9 May 1779. [MS 3219/4/18/16]

Hamilton compliments Watt on the ingeniousness of his new method of copying letters.

Matthew Boulton to James Watt. 25 Jun 1779. [MS 3147/3/322]

Summarised: 'Concerning Chelsea engine. Also Lord Dartmouth. Mentions Watt's new scheme for copying letters'.

Matthew Boulton to James Watt. 3 July 1779. [MS 3147/3/3/23]

Summarised: 'Concerning Watt's headaches. Concerning engine trial. Rude and foolishness of the Bank people concerning Watt's copying scheme'.

Matthew Boulton to James Watt, 4 Oct. 1779. [Ms 3147/3/3/32]

Summarised: 'Watt's arrival in Cornwall. Smeaton speaks well of Chelsea engine. Letters from Wilkinson. Complaints to be of Ned Bull. Thinks he can make a good thing for Watt of the copying business. All the world won't pay-time they did'.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 2 Dec. 1779. [MS 3219/4/127/13]

Watt has petitioned for a patent for his copying-press, and has taken Matthew Boulton and James Keir as partners. He describes how the business will work.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 1 Mar. 1780. [MS 3219/4/127/14]

The proposals for the copying-press scheme will soon be published, and some presses are under construction. The price of a press has been raised to 6 guineas.

James McGrigor to James Watt. 15 May 1780. [MS 3219/4/18/22]

McGrigor has sent some pressing-paper for the copying press. He asks for a copying machine, so that he may show it to others.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 17 May 1780. [MS 3219/4/127/60]

Watt sends thirty printed proposals for Black to distribute to friends, and bookseller. He describes the proposed arrangements for delivering the machines, and the sizes available.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 9 Jul. 1780. [MS 3219/4/127/18]

Watt discusses problems concerning copying-inks. Watt's petition for a patent has been read before the committee.

Gilbert Hamilton to James Watt. 24 Aug 1780. [MS 3219/4/18/23]

Hamilton orders four copying-machines, as production is now in hand.

Gilbert Hamilton (Glasgow) to James Watt. 22 Oct. 1780 [MS 3219/4/18/17]

Hamilton requires some copying-paper. He explains his method of keeping his copy-letters, and wonders whether the press-copies will survive.

James Watt to Joseph Black. 25 Oct. 1780. [MS 3219/4/127/20]

Watt discusses further problems with the regard to the copying-ink, and describes how it is made. He gives an account of the state of their business.

Matthew Boulton to James Watt, 1780. [MS 3147/3/4]

[These letters are mainly from Boulton in London, and many of them mention his attempts to promote and sell the copying machine.]

James Keir to James watt. 12 Nov. 1781. [MS 3219/4/90/1]

Keir gives a detailed account of the state of the copying-press business.

James Keir to James Watt. 5 Jan. 1782. [MS 3219/4/90/2]

Keir gives an account of the progress of the copying-press sales, & c.

Letters from the following persons to James Watt Jr. also refer to the copying-press. All the references shown should be prefixed by MS 3219/6/2 followed by the first letter of the person's last name.

George Lee. 1790-1800.

T. Pearson. 1795.

Antonio Piatti. 1795-1796.

Joseph Levi. 1796.

Miss de Luc. 1796.

James Anderson. 1796-1797.

James Miller. 1797.

Peter Ewart. 1797-1798.

William Foreman. 1809.

William Bell. 1814.

John Robinson Jr. 1803.

James Grillier. 1804.

Records of James Watt & Co.

Records of James Watt & Co., the firm that manufactured the copying-presses between 1780 and 1840, may be found in the Boulton & Watt Collection.

Ledger. 1820-1834. [MS 3147/17/2]
Ledger. 1840-1841. [MS 3147/17/3]
Sales ledger. 1803-1804. [MS 3147/17/1]
Journal. 1824-1834. [MS 3147/17/4]
Letter book. 1780. [MS 3147/19/1]
Letter book. 1813-1819. [MS 3147/19/2]
Letter book. 1819-1826. [MS 3147/19/3]
Partnership indenture. 1780. [MS 3147/18/2]
Price list. [MS 3147/4/233 or MS 3147/9/25 or MS 3147/9/29]
Printed directions for using the copying-press. 1778-1846. [MS 3147/20/2-11]

Records of Boulton, Watt, & Co. (Copying Department)

In October 1840 manufacturer of the copying-press was taken over by the Copying Department of Boulton, Watt & Co., and subsequently references to the manufacture of copying-presses appear in the records of that company-for instance, in the engine day books. [MS 3147/1/41] There is a Copying Department ledger, beginning in October 1840. [MS 3147/17/13]

Copying-Press Records in the Boulton & Watt engine records.

General incoming correspondences 1775-1785 [MS 3147/3/370] , 1785-1795 [MS 3147/3/385] & 1795-1798 [MS 3147/3/413] contains lots of enquiries, orders etc. for copying presses. Letters from James Watt Jr. to James Watt in 1794 [MS 3147] discuss the development of the portable press. The 'Soho Day Book', 1802-1825 [MS 3147/1/43] includes the copying Co's account with Boulton, Watt & Co.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

These are available in the City Archives. Please order the pamphlets using the references shown.

Dr. Jim Andrew, 'The Society of engineering drawings and documents', *Transactions of the Newcomen Society*, May 1980. [Pamphlets, B & W/A/4]

H.W Dickinson. *James Watt, craftsman & engineer*. (1936)

H.W. Dickinson. *Matthew Boulton*. (1937)

Dr. Richard Hills. 'James Watt and his copying machine', *Studies in British Paper History*, Vol. 1 (1996), pp. 81-88. [Pamphlets, B&W/H/9]

Barbara Rhodes and D. McKie. *Partners in Science: James Watt & Joseph Black*. (1970)

This book contains transcripts of the correspondence between these two men which is referred to in the source list above,

J. Tann. *The Selected Papers of Boulton & Watt Vol.1 The Engine partnership, 1775-1825*. (1981)

This book contains transcripts of documents from the Boulton & Watt archives, some of which mention the copying press.