

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY
Series One: The Boulton and Watt Archive and the Matthew Boulton Papers
from Birmingham Central Library
Part 12: Boulton & Watt Correspondence and Papers (MS 3147/3/1-79)

DETAILED LISTING

REEL 198

MS 3147/3/1-79: Principals' and Partners' Correspondence

Typescript listings from Black Binder for MS 3147/3/1-79

MS 3147/3/1-22: Correspondence from Matthew Boulton, 1777-1799

Letters from Matthew Boulton to James Watt. Henry Hazleton summarised almost all of these letters in the 1890s, and his summaries have been transcribed.

3/1 Letters to James Watt, 1777 (18 items)

1. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (at Mr. Taylor's, Bedworth). 6 Jan. 1777.
2. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Newhall) to James Watt (at Mr. Taylor's, Bedworth Colliery). "Thursday Teatime" [30 Jan. 1777?]. *Docketed as 1 Feb., which was a Saturday.*
3. Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (Bedworth). "Tuesday Evening" [— Mar. 1777].
4. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 17 Apr. 1777. *Summarised "Boulton sorry to hear of Bedworth misfortunes. Hopes all is well at Bloomfield. Visits Mr. Wilbie's engine. Has visited Shadwell and made experiments. Concerning the dexterity in measuring out the coals. Vere's house dissolves at Xmas."*
5. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 1 May 1777. *Not dated – date taken from the docket. Summarised "Boulton with Sir Charles Whitworth. Concerning the Richmond engine. Required another engine for Chelsea Water Works and not being yet accustomed to estimates please send all the hints etc. you can to enable me to face the committee. Watt proposes glass in the nozzles to permit the seeing of the valves at work."*
6. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). "Saturday Night" [3 May 1777]. *Summarised "Boulton with Mr. Gilbert MP in expectation of meeting gentleman from Russia. Concerning Mr. Wilkinson and his foundry, and if he is not honest Boulton will sell his clothes but what he will erect a foundry. About Perrier. Visits Chelsea engine and gives particulars of its working."*
7. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 7 May 1777. *Summarised "Concerning the Chelsea Water Works engine. Requires estimate for Richmond Water Works pump. Meets Shadwell committee tomorrow."*
8. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 8 May 1777. *Docketed "Bow Engine experiment."*
9. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 12 May 1777. *Docketed "Calculation Chelsea engine."*

10. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 16 May 1777.
Docketed "Simcocks and Chelsea coals."
Summarised "Boulton before the Chelsea committee, who use strong language between themselves. Gives calculations of coal burnt, and other remarks, and proposes putting the cylinder inside the boiler. Also other propositions. In company of a person who has many strange views."
11. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 22 May 1777.
Summarised "Visits the Shadwell committee. Visits the Chelsea committee. To attend Richmond. Thinks Wilkinson not sound, to cast a cylinder for an unknown firm. Concerning Miss Mynd's health."
12. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 26 May 1777.
13. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (care of Thomas Wilson, Chacewater). 18 Aug. 1777.
14. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt [Cornwall]. 30 Aug. 1777.
15. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt [Cornwall]. 4 Sep. 1777.
Docketed "The Proprietors of Tingtang Mine."
16. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (care of Thomas Wilson, Chacewater). 6 Sep. 1777. *On the same sheet:*
Transcript of bill from Jukes Coulson & Co. for piston rods, 1 May 1777.
17. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Chacewater). 13 Sep. 1777.
18. Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (—). "Wednesday night" [— 1777].
This letter was probably written in October 1777; indeed Watt appears to have docketed it "Oc", although this is not entirely clear. Dickinson & Jenkins date the letter after Watt's return from Cornwall, which took place in late September or early October. The contents of the letter place both Boulton and Watt in Birmingham – given that Boulton departed for London early in November, October would appear to be the likeliest month.
Docketed "Concerning the performance of the Soho engine."

3/2 Letters to James Watt, 1778 (18 items)

1. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (at Salmon's, Hassall). 3 Feb. 1778.
Summarised "Piece work v. day work. Smeaton's enquiry for condenser for an atmospheric engine."
2. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 27 Apr. 1778.
Summarised "Henderson and Bedworth engine. Wants drawings from Watt. Watt's lodgings."
3. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (—). 1 Jul. 1778. 2 sheets.
Boulton completed this letter on 2 Jul.
Summarised "Boulton in want of money and malice exhibited thereby in Birmingham. Concerning the application of scoop wheels or Archimedes' screw."
4. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Redruth). 3 Jul. 1778.
Boulton completed this letter on 4 Jul.
Summarised "Erectors to note defects in a book. Concerning business with Cornish bankers. Drainage of Holland and gold medals. Richmond engine. Keir. Wants about £5000 to assist in difficulties."
5. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Redruth). 9 Jul. 1778.
Summarised "Shadwell Water Works. With Smeaton. Requires money to meet bills. Richmond Water Works not satisfactory. Thinks there is too much friction by having small pipes."

- 6.** Letter. Boulton & Fothergill (Birmingham) to James Watt (Redruth). 11 Jul. 1778.
On the same sheet:
Letter. John Hall (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 10 Jul. 1778.
Docketed as Mr. Walker. The letter signed "Boulton & Fothergill" is in Zaccheus Walker's hand, and concerns a fire in the engine house at Soho.
- 7.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (—). 11 Jul. 1778.
Summarised "Received money. Bankers want it. Boulton in low spirits. Richmond engine in bad form. Concerning leads in cylinders, for the pistons."
- 8.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 25 Jul. 1778.
Summarised "Concerning malice exhibited in Birmingham. Concerning fire at Soho, burning of the engine house. Value of damage sustained. Engines for the Prussian commissioners. Richmond engine. Hornblower's company."
- 9.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 29 Jul. 1778.
Docketed as 28 July. Summarised "Concerning money affairs. Richmond supplied with water entirely by Boulton & Watt. Slowness of erectors."
- 10.** Letter. Boulton & Fothergill (Birmingham) to James Watt (Redruth). 15 Aug. 1778.
In Zaccheus Walker's hand.
- 11.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 22 Aug. 1778.
Summarised "Concerning money matters. Engines visited and found in very bad state. William Murdock wants to erect a Scotch engine, now a good engineer."
- 12.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 27 Aug. 1778.
On the same sheet: Transcript of letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to J. D. H. van Liender [Rotterdam]. 27 Aug. 1778.
Summarised "Copy of letter concerning the drainage of Holland. Bouge's double cylinder engine. William Murdock's abilities. Spanish engines. Designs of pistons. Elliptical compass."
- 13.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 1 Sep. 1778.
Summarised "Murdock not to erect the Scotch engine. University men to keep engines in order. Murdock at Bedworth. Copper education pipe better than iron."
- 14.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Redruth). 12 Sep. 1778. 2 sheets.
Summarised "Concerning pistons. Bedworth engine water. Richmond engine. Shadwell engine."
- 15.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 26 Sep. 1778.
Summarised "Discovers the fault at Shadwell. Richmond won't pay. Hawkesbury won't pay."
- 16.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (—). 17 Dec. 1778.
Summarised "Matthew Wasbrough good brazier. William Murdock as pattern maker. Engines going well."
- 17.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 26 Dec. 1778.
Re-directed to James Watt at Soho.
Summarised "Chelsea engine. Shadwell engine. Richmond engine. Speaks well of William Murdock. Concerning Messieurs Perier and Jary."
- 18.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Redruth). 30 Dec. 1778.
On the same sheet: Letter. James Keir [Soho] to James Watt (Redruth). 30 Dec. 1778.
Re-directed to James Watt at Soho. The sheet is very badly damaged, and part of Boulton's letter has been torn away.
Summarised "James Keir's letter concerning James Watt's son James. Concerning Cornish engines. Glass barometers better than iron."

3/3 Letters to James Watt, 1779 (36 items)

1. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 19 Jan. 1779 [?].
This letter was not dated by Boulton. It was docketed by Watt as 6 Jan., but the postmark appears to read 19 Jan. Docketed "About Mr. Perier and about Bedworth engine."
2. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 20 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Cautions Watt against foreigners who have come over to steal his ideas. Concerning trouble in getting documents signed. Boulton hurt by a coach. Thinks it necessary to inform Wilkinson of the Baron's visit for information."
3. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 22 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Complains of delay in getting documents. Trusts Watt will not think ill of him. Will try to get a neutral ship to sail to Nantes. Wants Murdock to go to Watt. Business with Perrier – should not let him slip through our fingers."
4. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (—). 23 Jan. 1779.
Sent with the letter below. Summarised "Proposals to Perrier and directors."
5. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 23 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning documents. Concerning his accident. Gives account of his health."
6. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 26 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Proposals to Monsieur Jary concerning the cost of engines for France and difficulties in sending them. Watt's headaches. Engine for Russia. Fothergill says we want honours from Russia before supplying."
7. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Soho). 27 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning business with Perrier."
8. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 29 Jan. 1779.
9. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 30 Jan. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning the business with Perrier."
10. Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (—). 2 Feb. 1779.
11. Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (Birmingham). 13 Feb. 1779.
Not dated – date taken from the postmark. Docketed as 14 Feb. Summarised "Concerning several engines."
12. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Hawkesbury Colliery) to James Watt (Newhall, Birmingham). 5 Mar. 1779.
Summarised "Plug valves used on atmospheric engine ought to be patented. Concerning the Hawkesbury Colliery engine."
13. Letter. Matthew Boulton ("Encamped in Hawkesbury Field") to James Watt (Soho). 6 Mar. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning the excellent working of the Hawkesbury atmospheric engine."
14. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Bedworth) to James Watt (Newhall). 7 Mar. 1779.
Summarised "Trial of the old engines at Bedworth."
15. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Hawkesbury Field) to James Watt (Soho). 11 Mar. 1779.
Summarised "Trials of the atmospheric and steam engines at Hawkesbury Colliery."
16. Letter. Matthew Boulton (Hawkesbury Field) to James Watt (Birmingham). 12 Mar. 1779.
Summarised "Variance of the water lifted by the atmospheric and steam engines. Suspects the old engine people are tricking."

- 17.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 23 Apr. 1779.
Summarised "Visit to Shadwell and Chelsea engines. Chain breaks. Concerning keels. Business with Lord D. (Lord Dartmouth I presume)."
- 18.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Amsterdam) to James Watt (Birmingham). 30 Apr. 1779.
Summarised "Boulton at Amsterdam. Concerning Mrs. Watt's air (daughter's birth). Boulton's scheme for varying lifts."
- 19.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 8 May 1779.
Summarised "Boulton's voyage from Holland. Mrs. Watt's daughter's birth. Signing of documents."
- 20.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to Anne Boulton (Soho). 10 May 1779.
Not dated – date taken from the postmark. This paragraph to Watt formed the postscript of a letter from Boulton to his wife; the outside of the letter is directed to "Mrs. Boulton, Soho". This part of the letter was torn away, and passed to Watt. Mrs. Boulton presumably retained the other half. Docketed "Mr. Boulton 11 May 1779. The breaking of Chelsea chain." Summarised "Accident at Chelsea Water Works – the breaking of chains."
- 21.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 15 May 1779.
Summarised "Concerning the accident at Chelsea and Boulton's scheme and sketch [within the text] for repairing the cracked cylinder."
- 22.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 25 Jun. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning Chelsea engine. Also Lord Dartmouth. Mentions Watt's new scheme for copying letters."
- 23.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 3 Jul. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning Watt's headaches. Concerning Chelsea engine trial. Rude and foolishness of the Bank people concerning Watt's copying scheme."
- 24.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (Birmingham). "Tuesday Midnight" 6 Jul. 1779. *Sumarised "Chelsea Water Works engine trial."*
- 25.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 8 Jul. 1779.
Summarised "Good bargain with the Hawkesbury people. Concerning the removal of engines. Concerning passports. Erector nearly pressed. Signing of Penryndee Mine documents."
- 26.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (Birmingham). 15 Jul. 1779.
Not dated – date taken from the postmark. On the same sheet are extensive calculations of the performance of the "Chelsea Old Engine". Docketed "Mr. Boulton's account of Chelsea experiments." Summarised "Calculation of the trial of Chelsea Water Works engine. Concerning Smeaton's trials of Watt's engine. Boulton gives points for ideas in improving the engines."
- 27.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 21 Jul. 1779.
Summarised "Money prospects brighter. Mr. Watt ought to be relieved of part of business. Chelsea Water Works. Boulton's daughter's illness. Hornblower to go home. Smeaton's publications not kindly intended."
- 28.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Southampton) to James Watt (Birmingham). 28 Jul. 1779.
2 sheets. *Docketed "About payments to Low Vere & Co."*
- 29.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (—) to James Watt (Birmingham). circa 29 Jul. 1779.
Summarised "Concerning the Shadwell Water Works engine and the air vessel. Also Chelsea Water Works. Mentions the East India Company."

- 30.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (London) to James Watt (Birmingham). 12 Aug. 1779. Summarised *“Donnington Wood engine, and Hornblower’s grievances and his expensive ways. Proposes sending him back to Birmingham. Boulton proposes to cut the steam off at 2/3 of stroke. Bad behaviour of Hornblower. Boulton wants a good picture from Soho for a present.”*
- 31.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (Birmingham). 17 Aug. 1779. Summarised *“Boulton thinks Hornblower should not be turned adrift. Suggests sending him to Ketley and Penryndee. Mentions the French and Spanish fleet in the Channel – hopes Hardy will beat them.”*
- 32.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (at Thomas Wilson’s, Chacewater). 4 Oct. 1779. 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.”*
- 33.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (—). 18 Oct. 1779. 2 sheets. Summarised *“Cleared up Vere’s business. Keir wants to patent his naval metal. Shadwell engine. Sealing of Hawkesbury deed and mocking of engine. Concerning the copying scheme. Wasbrough not to be pushed. A recipe for drunkenness better than for swearing.”*
- 34.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (—). 21 Oct. 1779. Summarised *“Boulton angry – will not be bullied out of money. Trusts it will not upset Watt. to have charge of his business and he will then soon be at Cornwall.”*
- 35.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (at Thomas Wilson’s, Chacewater). 23 Oct. 1779. Summarised *“Watt not to shield Dudley. Hints on piston rods. Copper plate prints of engines. Jary wants engines for France. Boulton going to London.”*
- 36.** Letter. Matthew Boulton (Soho) to James Watt (at Thomas Wilson’s, Chacewater). 6 Nov. 1779. Summarised *“Boulton and family ill. Watt in trouble with the Cornish mine proprietors. London Bridge Water Works and fire engine burned down.”*