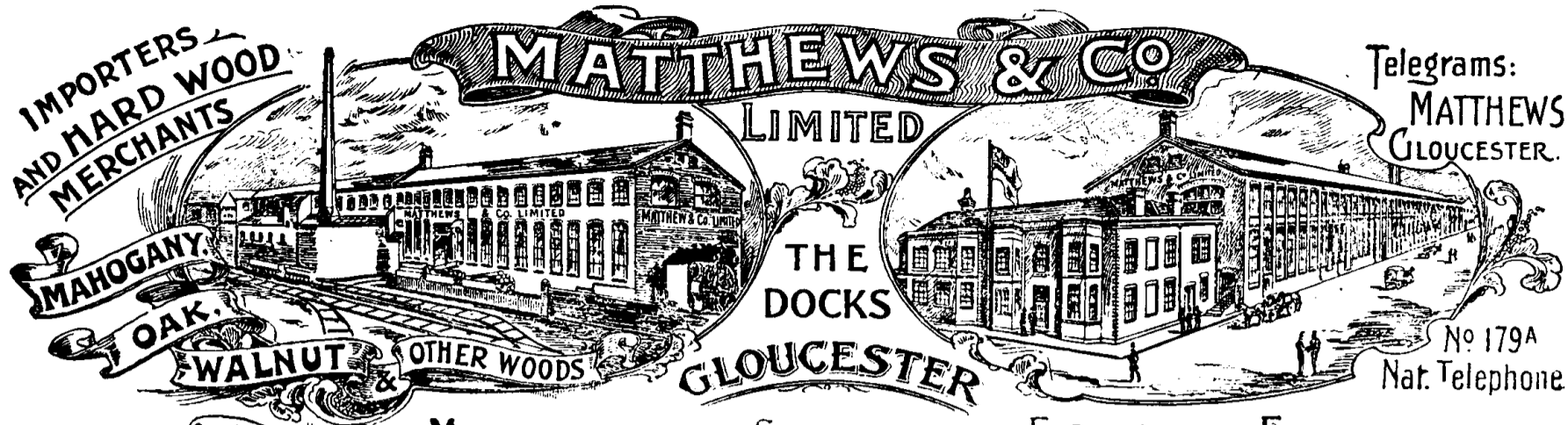
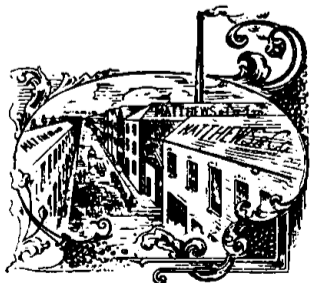
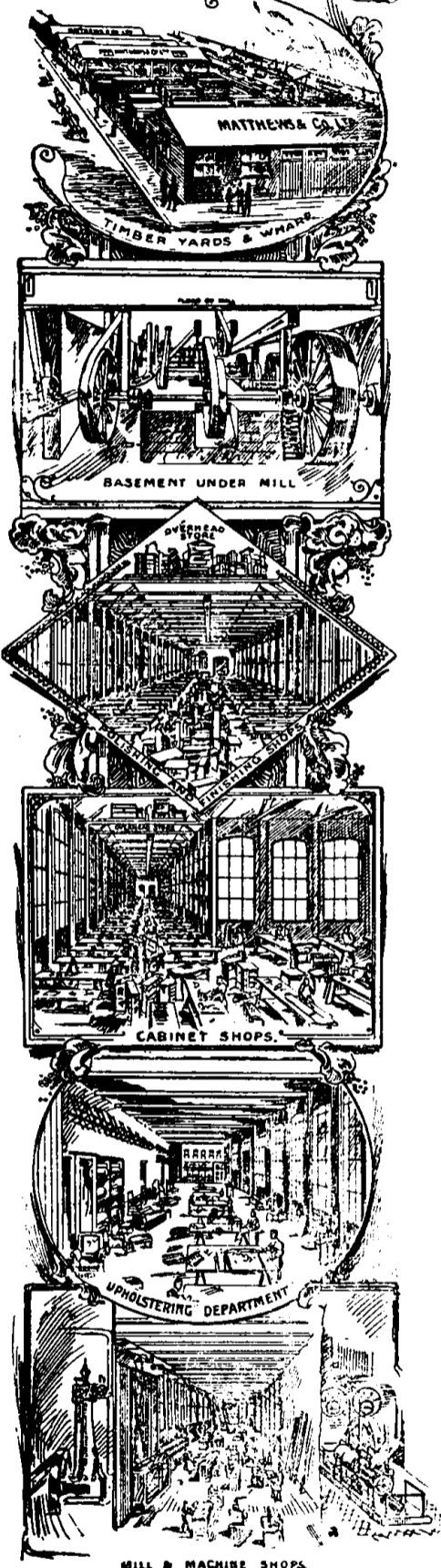




Furniture Specialities.



MANUFACTURERS OF SPECIALITIES IN FURNITURE & FITTINGS.



Of all the industries of Gloucestershire none are more interesting than those of Messrs. Matthews and Company, Limited, the Docks, Gloucester, their vast works, fitted with highly perfected machinery and ingenious appliances, affording a splendid example of modern science and invention. This great industry is doubly interesting as having grown up in the short space of four decades, and as largely representing the labours of one man. To those who wish to believe, and who do believe, that British enterprise and resourcefulness are still equal to any in the world, a brief description of the Company's works will therefore be of particular interest. It is but just to add, however, that the following description is necessarily inadequate, as nothing more than a rough outline can be given in the limited space allowed us here.

In 1863 Mr. J. A. Matthews, the founder of the industry and the present Chairman and Governing Director of the Company, purchased a small furniture business at the corner of Southgate and Parliament-streets, the present site of one of the Company's palatial warehouses. He had previously served an apprenticeship in Gloucester, his native city, subsequently spending some years in London, acquiring that practical knowledge and technical skill which have been an important factor in his success. The premises first occupied were wholly insignificant as compared with the present area, and were not, indeed, as large as the offices alone are now.

Being of a decidedly inventive turn of mind, as well as unusually progressive along purely business lines, Mr. Matthews invented and patented a number of furniture specialities which quickly became popular throughout the country as well as in this immediate district. The demand for these specialities necessitated almost constant enlargements to the premises and additions to the staff of workpeople, until it was found that the original site afforded no more room for expansion, and new premises were sought. Fortunately for Gloucester, the Company found admirable available property in the city, thus retaining here what has become an industry of incalculable benefit to our artisans and labouring classes. This property was formerly owned and occupied by Messrs. Price, Walker, and Company, and comprised a solid tract of several acres, with excellent wharfage, private railway siding, two private streets penetrating the property, and several substantial buildings. All the buildings except the offices, however, were pulled down and extensive specially designed structures erected in their stead. At the present time a still further extension, making the fourth in five years, is being planned, and the already enormous capacity of the works will soon be doubled. Thus from a small local business has been evolved in forty years one of the largest and most completely equipped wholesale factories in Great Britain, and to-day there is scarcely a single town in the United Kingdom having a population of 12,000 or over, which has not an account with the Company.

From the accompanying engravings, which were kindly loaned us by Messrs. Matthews and Company, Limited, the reader may gain some idea of the number and size of the various departments. It should be understood, however, that these engravings afford mere glimpses throughout the works, the great size of which can only be fully appreciated by one who has been privileged to inspect them.

In making a tour of the works, a journey which cannot be accomplished under several hours, one usually begins at the wharf and timber yards, a bird's-eye view of which is included among the illustrations shown on this page. These timber yards cover an acre of ground, all of which is under roof, the substantial sheds being so constructed as to afford complete shelter, while permitting the light and air to reach every corner. In

these enormous sheds every foot of space has been utilized, stacks of almost every kind of timber being piled to the roof. The various kinds of hard and soft woods are so stacked and recorded that at any moment the Company can tell almost to a foot the quantity in stock. Each separate importation is marked with the date of its receipt and every piece is seasoned for years before being used. This care in the treatment of the material is one of the secrets of the invariable excellence of the Company's manufactures. It may be proper to add in this connection that in preparing for a recent order for London the Company made an importation of the best foreign oak aggregating 1,000,000 feet, probably the largest single importation ever made by an English furniture manufacturer.

From the yards one goes to the mill, whither the rough timber is conveyed on special trucks, and where it passes through a number of machines, each of which performs a separate operation with almost incredible speed and absolute precision. In being reduced to its final form, each piece of timber is first sawn with a cross-cut saw, whence it passes to the edging tools, then to the dimension saws, and thence in turn to the jointing machines, surface planers, thicknessing machines, mortising, boring, turning, and carving machines, and finally to the sand-papering and finishing machines. From the latter it is placed on the special factory trucks and conveyed in a capacious lift to the second floor, where it passes through the hands of the cabinet makers, upholsterers, and polishers, when it is again lowered in a second lift to the packing room to be made ready for shipment. Every finished article, from the smallest "tea companion" to the largest bank desk, or a fitment for a Council Chamber, passes through scores of hands before reaching its final stage, and in the process of manufacture no part of the work passes over the same ground twice—a striking evidence of the careful system prevailing in all departments.

It should be stated in passing, that before a single piece of furniture of any kind is specially manufactured it is first roughly sketched out by the heads of the Company, and sent by them to the drawing office, where the details are perfected. The finished design is then handed over to the specimen makers, whose work is closely criticised, further improvements being made when possible. When every detail is as nearly perfect as the most careful thought can make it, an order of 100 is produced complete, as making a single order for the trade would not enable the Company to put it on the market at the right price. If the pattern succeeds an order for 1,000, instead of 100, is given to the head foreman, many thousands frequently being made in the course of a single season.

The mechanical equipment employed by Messrs. Matthews and Company, Limited, represents the very highest stage of modern invention. Whenever a machine is invented which performs its work more effectively, more quickly, or more economically than the old one, it soon finds its way to this factory. In the mill, to which reference has been made, are fifty machines, all of which are of the latest and most approved pattern. Another notable feature of the mechanical equipment is the excellent arrangement for removing the dust and chips as fast as they are made. Attached to each machine is a large suction pipe forming part of a complete "cyclone" system which conveys all the refuse from the mill to the boiler house, where it is used as fuel. Still another and very commendable feature is the system



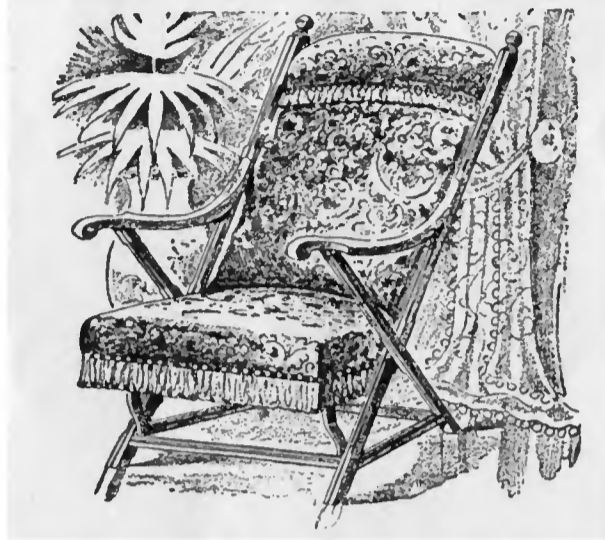
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of heating and ventilation, by which every particle of air in each department is renewed every twenty minutes. By means of this system, which was installed by the Sturtevant Heating and Ventilating Company, the entire buildings are warmed to a temperature of from 65° to 70° in winter, and in the hottest day in summer the temperature is lowered 12°.

Without attempting to enumerate all the points of excellence everywhere observable, there are several which should be referred to in a word. The great size, lofty ceilings, each 16 feet in height, and admirable lighting of all the departments impress even the most unobservant visitor. The cabinet-making and polishing shops, which are z shaped, are 40 feet wide, 16 feet high, and 600 feet long, being the largest single department of any furniture factory in the Kingdom, and affording conditions for health and comfort which work-people seldom enjoy. The entire plant is lighted with electricity generated on the premises; sliding iron doors isolate the various departments; fire buckets and hydrants are placed

“Times,” not only for the excellence of the work, but also for the rapidity with which it was turned out. As an evidence of the great capacity of the factory it may be stated that the finished book-cases were for several months dispatched at the rate of 100 a day, and this while several other scarcely less important contracts were in full swing.



One of Matthews & Co.'s Specialties.

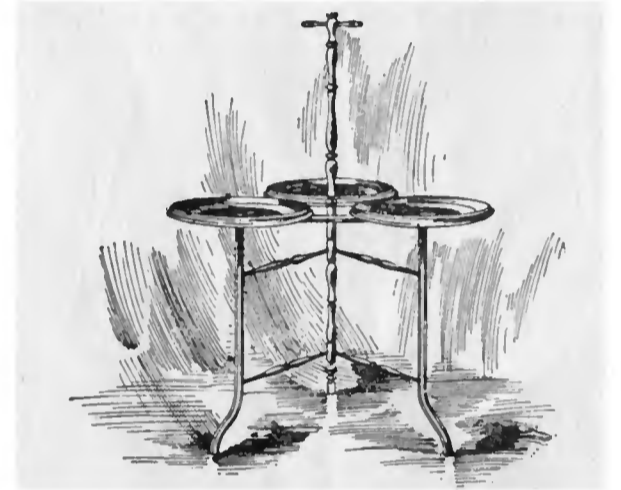
It is interesting to know that from the date of its establishment, the business has never been suspended a day; on the contrary, orders are always plentiful, and have shown an uninterrupted increase, the factory during the past year, in spite of the prevalent “dull trade,” working time and a quarter and time and a half. The handsome illustrated catalogue published by the Company gives an idea of the great variety of work manufactured by them, consisting of not fewer than 250 separate specialities in furniture and fittings. Of these, 150 are their own patents, many of which have gained a popularity unprecedented in the annals of furniture manufacturing. We would make special mention of a new simple Patent File and Filing Cabinet in Solid Fumed Oak which the Firm are just about to put on the Market. It is certainly the simplest and best of all the new filing inventions we have yet seen.

The enormous output of the factory has necessitated the maintenance of several warehouses for the reception and display of the finished work. Of these the largest is that at the corner of Southgate and Parliament-streets, where the business originated. This warehouse, a fine five-storey structure having a frontage of 300 feet in Parliament-street, contains fifty separate rooms, many of them over 100 feet in length, and with the exception of

industry would have been a sufficient tax upon his energy, he has found time to take an active and prominent part in public affairs, for we find he was for about 20 years a Member of the City Council, and filled in the office of Councillor and Alderman; was High Sheriff in 1890, and Mayor and Chief Magistrate in 1892 to 1894, President of the Gloucester Incorporated Chamber of Commerce in 1899 and 1900, President of the Gloucester Charity Trustees, and he is one of the Executive Council of the Institute of Directors in London.

In the industrial life of the city we find him a Director of the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company, Limited, also Director and Deputy-Chairman of the Iron and Hardware Company, Limited, and other important concerns. Without disparaging others it is certainly accurate to say that no other one man in Gloucestershire has done more to promote the industrial prosperity of the county and to keep it on a high plane.

Mr. Albert Matthews, the Managing Director of the Works, devotes himself to the supervision of the designing and actual manufactur-



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ing processes. He was practically born and brought up in the works, having himself served a thorough apprenticeship in the various branches.

Mr. Morgan Matthews, the Deputy-Chairman, is Managing Director of the Warehouses, having offices in Southgate and Parliament-streets; and, curiously enough, was born on the premises which he now controls. Mr. George A. Matthews, one of the Directors and Secretary of the Company, attends to the Counting House—a post which is particularly important by reason of the extent of the Company's business and the vast number of accounts they have.

In concluding this article we should again apologise for its inadequacy. Those who are connected with the furniture trade would do well to visit the Company's works and see for themselves the many evidences of progressive-



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ness which limited space, as well as limited ability, has precluded us from mentioning here. We are sure they will receive every courtesy and attention and will find their visit both interesting and profitable.

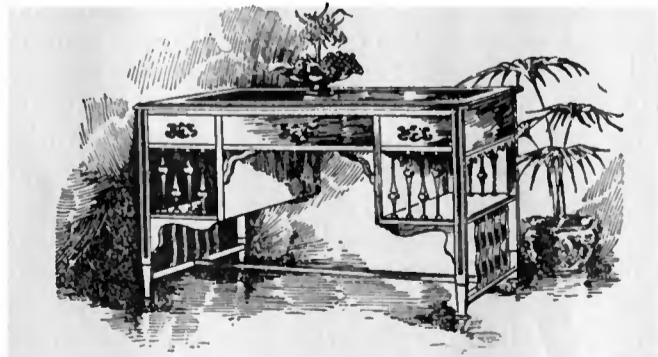


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at convenient intervals; capacious lifts connect the floors; and a miniature telephone exchange places the director of the works into instant touch with the heads of every department.

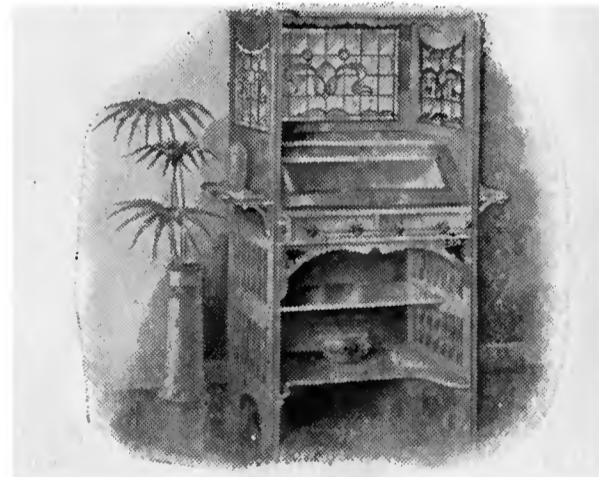
But what most impresses the visitor is the enormous scale on which the manufactures are produced. In making a *single* article Messrs. Matthews and Company, Limited, claim no particular advantage, except in time, over the old-fashioned cabinet-maker who performs every operation by hand, and who devotes from a day to a week to his task. It is only by making preparations to produce many thousands at a time that they have been able to place their manufactures in almost every town of importance in the Kingdom and abroad.

Although everything is made in quantities such as but few manufacturers can attempt, there is no slighting of the work in any stage. No flaw in material or workmanship is veneered over and passed on with the remark, “That will do, it is good enough.” Nothing is considered good enough until it is perfect. This invariable characteristic, which is maintained only by ceaseless vigilance, has given the Company's productions the highest reputation in the trade and is constantly securing them important contracts. Every one remembers



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the book cases recently so largely advertised in connection with the sale of the Encyclopædia Britannica by the London “Times,” though perhaps but few are aware that those cases were manufactured by Messrs. Matthews and Company, Limited. In the execution of the order they received the highest praise from the



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one house in London, is the largest furniture warehouse in Great Britain. At the present time the adjoining property in Southgate-street, recently purchased by the Company, is being remodeled and made a part of the warehouse, thus materially increasing its capacity. Another warehouse is maintained at the corner of Westgate-street and St. John's-lane, and another in London.

As already stated, Mr. J. A. Matthews, J.P., the founder of the business, is the Chairman and Governing Director, and has been so from the formation of the Company. Although it would seem that the building up of so large an