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by N. M. Herbert
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Stroud Tradesmen in an Age of Enterprise, 1770–1832

By NICHOLAS HERBERT

The quickening tempo of English industrial and commercial life in the late 18th century began the break-up of the traditional, ordered pattern of provincial market towns. In the case of Gloucestershire some towns, particularly those on the Cotswold hills, were bypassed by the new developments: with their industries lost or in decline and their marketing function eroded by out-of-market dealing, it was often only the servicing of road transport that gave them a few years of bustle before the onset of the railway age. For other towns the modernization of old industries or the introduction of new ones, together with improved communications, brought a period of expansion. The central Gloucestershire town of Stroud was one of those which embraced the new age of the Industrial Revolution. Local enterprise, building on the advantages of its geographical position, made it pre-eminent in its region, outstripping the neighbouring small towns of Painswick and Minchinhampton.

In the valleys around Stroud the main development of the age was the reorganization of the dominant clothmaking industry by the introduction of machinery, the building of factory mills, and the application of steam power. That reorganization depended on the provision of the necessary infrastructure, a process that got under way in 1779. In that year Stroud acquired two of the features identified by historians as crucial to growth at the period, a canal and a bank. In the following year a new turnpike road, running down the Woodchester and Nailsworth valley, was built in the area, forerunner of a network that in the early years of the next century placed Stroud town firmly at the centre of local communications. Among those promoting improvements, as canal promoters, turnpike trustees, subscribers to coaching ventures, and property developers, it was naturally the Stroud region's industrial aristocracy, the millowning clothiers, that took the lead. The clothiers were supported, however, by others—tradesmen, shopkeepers, and professional men—and this article will identify and examine the role of such people in the period from 1770 to the early 1830s.

The canal completed in 1779 was the Stroudwater canal, running from the river Severn at Framilode up to Wallbridge, adjoining Stroud town.¹ In 1789 a continuation, the Thames and Severn canal, was opened from Stroud to the river Thames at Lechlade.² The Stroudwater was very much a locally-based enterprise built mainly by local effort and capital, while the Thames and Severn, having potential as a national artery of trade, was promoted by a more widely-based group. The canals enabled Stroud and its region to tap the trade of the river Severn without the heavy cost of road carriage.

The chief aim of the men who built the two canals was, like most canal promoters, to secure a cheap supply of coal, and coal was overwhelmingly the cargo carried. For the first 30 years it came mainly from the Staffordshire and Shropshire pits which in the late 18th century supplied much of north Gloucestershire by means of the Severn, but in the second decade of the 19th century after new harbours were opened at Lydney and Bullo Pill on the Forest of Dean shore of the Severn estuary the Forest coalfield became the main source of supply. Coal was delivered to the cloth mills which stood at intervals along the canals' route, a service which became

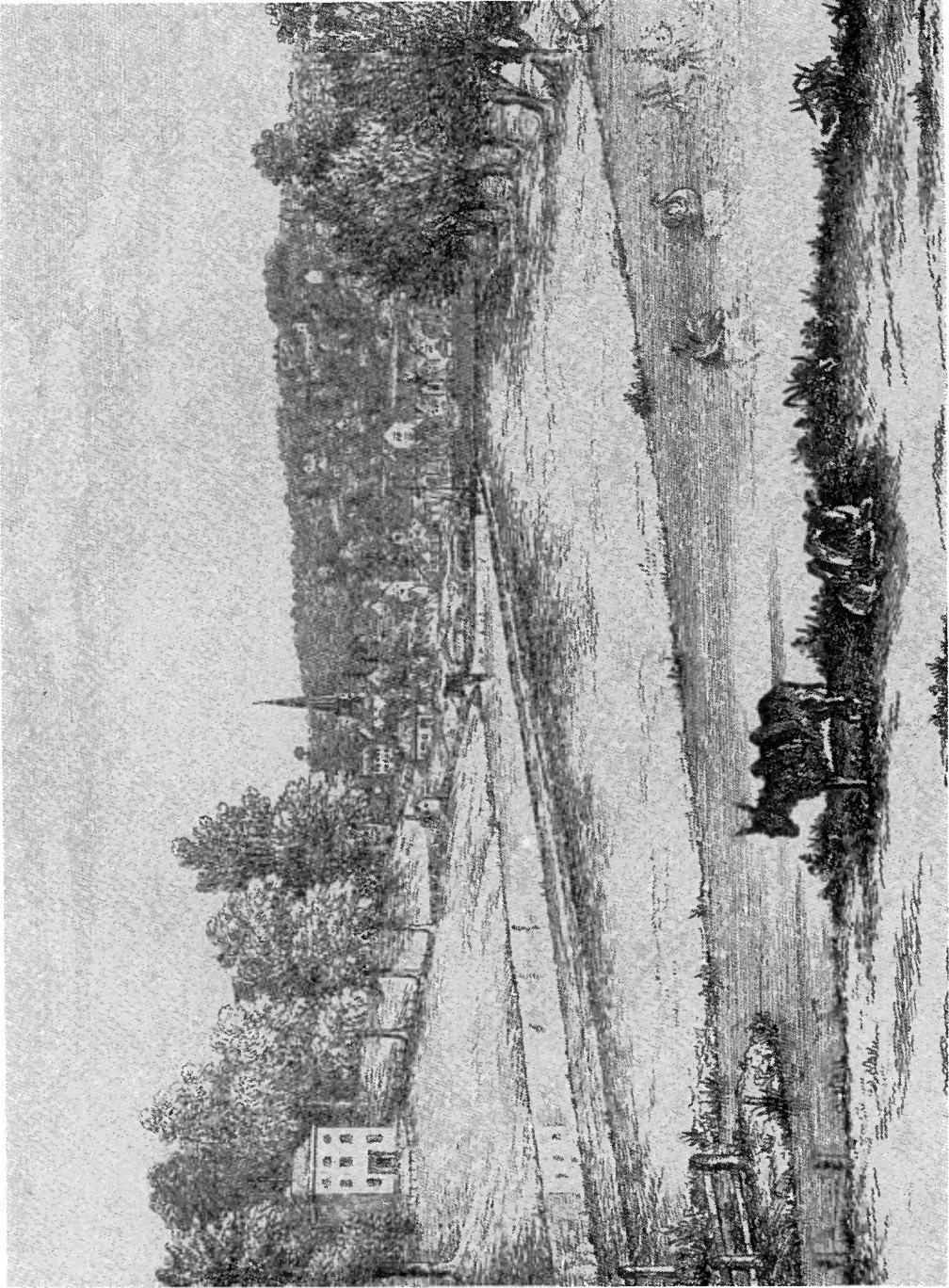


Fig. 1. Stroud from the south-west, 1795, showing terminus of Stroudwater canal at Wallbridge with (at left) Farhill, the Grazebrooks' house (detail of plate by Samuel Lysons, intended for his *Gloucestershire Antiquities*).

even more relevant with the introduction of steam engines to the mills. Coal from Tenby, in Pembrokeshire, a variety found most suitable for use in the malting industry, was a smaller though regular cargo. Other staples of the Severn trade brought up the canals in the late Georgian period were roadstone from quarries on the Wye and Bristol Avon, salt from Droitwich, bar iron, timber, and paving stone from the Forest of Dean, copper from Swansea, and slate from north Wales. The opening of a connexion by water with Bristol gave Stroud's shopkeepers easier access to supplies of imported goods, such as wine and sugar, and a number of Bristol merchants and bankers were among investors in the Stroudwater canal. A regular connexion was also established with the lesser regional centre of Gloucester, and towards the end of the period imported grain, brought from Gloucester docks, became a significant item of cargo.³ Access to both Bristol and Gloucester was much improved by the completion of the Gloucester and Berkeley ship canal in 1827, forming a junction with the Stroudwater at Whitminster.

The position of Stroud was further enhanced by new turnpike roads, including a new Cheltenham-Bath road built through the town in 1800 and a new London road built along the Chalford valley towards Cirencester in 1814.⁴ Such projects required not only funding, in the form of loans raised on the security of the tolls, but sometimes also aggressive promotion in the face of opposition from rival interest groups.⁵ The canals and the new roads were complementary: the canals eased the transport of road-building materials but provided too slow a mode of transport to challenge the roads for the freight of lighter goods. It was carriers' wagons that took away the locally-produced cloth. The carrying trade by road to London and to Bristol and Gloucester flourished at the period, and one of the most successful Gloucestershire firms, Tanner and Baylis, had its origin in Rodborough, adjoining Stroud, before extending its field of operations throughout the north of the county.⁶ Coaching was another enterprise in which Stroud men invested cash and effort. In 1807 local tradesmen recruited over 200 subscribers in the cloth-making area in an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to compete with an established Cirencester operator in running a London service.⁷ Later, inhabitants of the area lobbied the Post Office for a direct London mailcoach service through the town, and that was secured in 1827. In recognition of what was then a powerful filip to a provincial town's sense of its own importance, the first coach of the new service was greeted by the ringing of the Stroud church bells.⁸

The canals and new roads were among stimulants to the growth of Stroud. The expansion of the town uphill towards the east, which had been a feature of the early 18th century, showed signs of resuming soon after 1800 when new cottages were built in the entrance to the Bisley road beyond Nounsells Cross. Most new building was, however, in the area below the old High Street, near to the new turnpike roads and the canal wharves: the building of a group of artisans' cottages named Bath Place and larger houses on the new London road began c. 1820 (for the town and new development at the period, see Fig. 2). Outside the town, substantial detached houses were built by clothiers above and adjoining their mills along the river Frome and by clothiers, attorneys, and other businessmen in the Beeches Green area to the west of the town.⁹

The families most prominent at the period¹⁰ were involved both in the Stroudwater canal and in the Stroud bank, which was founded in January 1779 a few months before the opening of the canal. The bank, vital for financing the new enterprises of the period, was to some extent a continuation of a traditional feature of the region's economy, the supply of credit by leading shopkeepers and wholesale dealers to the clothiers, particularly in the form of mortgages on their fulling mills. Four men established the Stroud bank, putting in a total capital of £10,000.¹¹ Two of the partners, Joseph Wathen of Thrupp Mill and James Winchcombe of Ham Mill, were successful clothiers, and a third partner, James Dallaway, was from another of the leading clothier families; but the partnership also represented the strength of the Stroud shopkeepers, for Winchcombe was himself the son of a mercer, and the fourth partner, Winchcombe's

brother-in-law John Hollings, was a mercer. All the partners were closely concerned with the Stroudwater project. Wathen, Winchcombe, and Hollings were among a group of nine 'undertakers' who in 1774 were empowered by the shareholders to see the canal through to completion, and James Dallaway's brother, William Dallaway (d. 1776) of Brimscombe Mill, had been chairman of the undertakers and the project's leading advocate.¹²

Of the leading business families of the Stroud area represented in the bank and canal enterprises the Winchcombes¹³ proved the most durable, for their progress took them into the ranks of the county gentry. James Winchcombe, father of the banker and canal undertaker, was the son of a mercer of Frampton on Severn, and had himself traded at Stroud as a mercer. His business prospered, enabling him to acquire much property in the town and, in 1743, to buy Ham Mill, one of the principal fulling mills adjoining the town. He was able to provide his two sons with £500 each to set them up in business, and the younger James Winchcombe manufactured cloth at Ham Mill while his brother Nathaniel traded as a mercer in the family's home village of Frampton. The elder James, who died in 1761, left £1,000 each to his three daughters which aided them to find husbands within a few years: Elizabeth Winchcombe married John Hollings and her two sisters married into the Colbornes, a family established in Stroud as clothiers and shopkeepers since the late 17th century. The younger James Winchcombe, who built himself a substantial house at Bownhams, in Rodborough, and also became owner of the Stratford Park estate, in Paganhill, brought good security and a solid business reputation to the banking venture of 1779. He died the year after its establishment, leaving his mill and lands to his nephew Nathaniel Winchcombe, son of the Frampton mercer.

The Winchcombes' success reflected not only business acumen but also a reputation for personal integrity. It is noticeable how often James the elder and James the younger were called upon to act as trustees for private individuals and for charitable institutions in the area. The younger Nathaniel followed in that tradition, becoming closely involved in local educational and philanthropic projects.¹⁴ The family also had a generous share of luck in what might be termed the marriage and inheritance stakes. Stratford Park came to the younger James in 1778 under the will of an unmarried cousin, and when the younger Nathaniel joined the county gentry as the owner of the fine mansion Frampton Court and its estate in 1801 it was a rich, unforeseen dividend of his father's marriage back in 1756. At Frampton, where his father and great-grandfather had driven their trade, Nathaniel settled down as a Gloucestershire squire, changing his name to Clifford, that of the historic owners.

When the younger James Winchcombe died in 1780 the Stroud bank and Stroudwater canal seemed satisfactory investments, but success was not guaranteed. The dominant clothmaking industry was subject to periodic depressions from which the whole region and all its businesses suffered. The year 1784 was marked by one of the most serious slumps, caused by a fall in the trade of the East India Company which many local manufacturers supplied.¹⁵ When another of the partners in the bank, James Dallaway, made his will in April 1786, it was in the knowledge that his 'small remaining fortune (was) greatly reduced if not in danger of a total wreck from unforeseen impending bad debts', and he could promise his son, James, a clergyman and antiquary, only a meagre legacy of £20, reminding him of the large sums spent on his education.¹⁶ The bank survived, however, under the direction of Dallaway's fellow manager John Hollings who, after the death of Joseph Wathen in 1786 and Dallaway in 1787, took into partnership another resourceful local businessman, Benjamin Grazebrook.

John Hollings¹⁷ was the son of a Hereford butcher and had started in business at Stroud in 1763 as an outsider; his marriage to Elizabeth Winchcombe the following year brought him a place among the leading Stroud families as well as some useful capital. He was evidently the prime mover in the establishment of the Stroud bank, which traded as Hollings, Dallaway &

Co. For him it may have been a development of an unofficial banking business carried on over the counter of his mercer's shop in High Street. In his later years Hollings was a prosperous and powerful figure in the town, occupying the smartest house in High Street.¹⁸ He was appointed a county J.P. before 1797 and he became captain of the Stroud Volunteers formed in the Napoleonic Wars. His rapid rise and his abrasive personality attracted the spite of local wits, and he figured largely in a collection of satirical pieces on Stroud events and personalities published in 1817 under the title *The Chronicles and the Lamentations of Gotham*. Hollings was ridiculed there as a parvenu tradesman posturing in the role of a county gentleman and for his alleged arrogance towards his volunteer troop. A speech Hollings made at a presentation of colours to local troops made no bones of the fact that the volunteers were formed as much to meet the threat of radicalism at home as Bonapartism abroad¹⁹ and perhaps his finest hour came in the summer of 1800 when he led his corps against rioters who had seized a bargeload of wheat on the canal at Chalford.²⁰ John Hollings died in 1805, leaving no one to inherit his position in the town: his heir was a niece, who married an attorney and went to live in Herefordshire.²¹

Central to the linked enterprises of bank and canal was the Grazebrook family.²² Benjamin Grazebrook was an innovative and versatile businessman of a type well suited to ventures into the uncharted territory of the Industrial Revolution. He first made his mark as a plumber, providing Stroud town with a piped water supply in 1769, and he seems to have traded at times as a carrier by road, a maltster, and an innkeeper. It was in the Stroudwater canal project, however, that he really found his role. Michael Handford has identified him as the prime mover in the final stages of the canal's construction, ready to act in whatever capacity was required—clerk, surveyor, barge operator, buyer of building materials, and, finally, resident engineer. His urgent application to the canal's completion was not motivated solely by his financial investment in it: he intended to become the principal carrier of coal to Stroud and by the start of 1778 had acquired five Severn trows for that purpose. After completion of the project he established a fortnightly general carrying service with his trows to Gloucester and to Bristol. Grazebrook was also involved, as an investor and a surveyor, in the Thames and Severn project of the 1780s, and after that canal's opening his trows connected at Brimscombe Port with the boats of Thames bargeowners. By 1787 he had acquired the capital and business reputation to become a partner in the Stroud bank, and after John Hollings retired c. 1798 he devoted his final years to managing the bank.

Two younger sons of Benjamin Grazebrook, Benjamin and Thomas, continued his extensive canal carrying business in the first decade of the 19th century, and Thomas was in business as a merchant at the canalside hamlet of Dudbridge until 1815. In the Stroud bank the elder Benjamin was joined by his first son Joseph, who had long been a partner of his activities. In the 1770s as a young man in his early 20s Joseph had acted as clerk to the Stroudwater project. After his father's death in 1810 he was senior partner in the bank, guiding it through the financial crises of 1815 and 1825 in which many other provincial banks foundered.

As Stroud town began to expand Joseph Grazebrook ventured into property development. The earliest significant new building of the period was a terrace of smart town houses put up between 1801 and c. 1810 at Rowcroft alongside the new Bath road; four of the houses were built by Joseph and one became the headquarters of the bank. The style of the Rowcroft terrace is reminiscent of some of the houses of the great leisure resort to which the new turnpike led and Grazebrook and his fellow developers apparently hoped that Stroud had a future as a residential town for the wealthier classes. His next venture was made on the firmer supposition of an increased artisan class. Before 1813 he built the Brick Row, 30 cottages in a terrace on the north-west part of the town (see Fig. 2); those found tenants among such people as millworkers, carpenters, and tailors.²³ Joseph Grazebrook lived until 1843, a respected and influential member

of the community, occupying the house called Farhill that his father had built near the Stroudwater canal basin at Wallbridge (see Fig. 1).

Another successful Stroud enterprise in which Joseph Grazebrook had a stake was the Stroud brewery, which was established on a new site at Rowcroft, close to the canals, in 1793. The enterprise had been started by Peter Leversage,²⁴ a substantial farmer and maltster, at Middle Lypiatt in the east part of Stroud parish. Leversage was another supporter of the Stroudwater project, being appointed clerk to the commissioners in 1774,²⁵ and no doubt he saw the canal's potential for supplying barley, hops, and malting coal. The year 1793 when the brewery moved to its new Rowcroft site must have appeared particularly favourable, for two other canals begun then, the Gloucester and Berkeley and the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, would soon—if they had been completed as planned—have improved carriage from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire hopfields. The value of the investment of Leversage, Grazebrook, and a third partner, an attorney Henry Burgh, in the Stroud brewery grew steadily. Burgh sold his one-third share of the business to the other two for £702 in 1797 and Grazebrook sold his half share to Joseph Watts for £4,225 in 1806. Leversage was an eminent figure in the trade, acting as chairman of a meeting of Gloucestershire maltsters in 1802, the year before his death. By the time his family relinquished its interest in 1826 the Stroud brewery had become established, under Joseph Watts's shrewd guidance, as one of the leading breweries of the county.

Another prominent supporter of the Stroudwater canal from the ranks of local tradesmen and shopkeepers was Richard Aldridge,²⁶ who was actively involved in the scheme from the 1750s and was one of the 'undertakers' of 1774. He and his brother John, sons of a Stroud maltster, traded as tallow chandlers in the town, and Richard was engaged in more general dealing, being sometimes styled a mercer (a description which in country towns designated dealers in a wide range of goods). He inherited considerable property from his father and probably got a handsome marriage portion with his first wife, who was Elizabeth Webb, from one of the long-established clothier families of the region. He became a wealthy man by Stroud standards, leaving among his children at his death in 1776 a total of £6,300, as well as property.

Aldridge's designated successor in trade at Stroud, a younger son, died a few months after him, and it was his eldest son, another Richard, who succeeded to his canal and other interests. Richard, the son, had established himself at Bristol as a merchant by 1774 when he became a partner in the Harford family's bank there,²⁷ and he remained in Bristol after his retirement from that bank in 1794. He kept, however, close links with Stroud and its area. He supported, for example, the Nailsworth valley turnpike scheme, taking up £300-worth of the bonds issued by the trustees to finance the construction of the road between 1780 and 1782. He retained the family property in the town and was apparently a developer on a modest scale, for at his death in 1815 he owned a row of new-built houses called Aldridge's Buildings, standing just above the Cross. By his will his property and stock, amounting to several thousand pounds in value, was disposed of mainly in legacies to family and friends in the town; he nominated five of its leading inhabitants to act as pall bearers at his funeral at Stroud parish church.²⁸ Aldridge sold most of his father's shares in the Stroudwater canal to his partners, the Harfords, in 1780 and 1781, and he acted as agent for other Bristol businessmen who later acquired shares in the canal.²⁹ He was no doubt instrumental generally in forging links of investment and credit between Bristol and the tradesmen and clothiers of his native region.

Another banker whose role one would like to know more of was William Knight, who was one of the Stroudwater 'undertakers' in 1774.³⁰ He was then aged over 70 and had been a banker in London before retiring to Stroud, where he lived until 1786 in a house called Gannicox (later Lower Gannicox), on the Paganhill side of the parish, inherited from an uncle. It was almost certainly Knight who rebuilt Gannicox on modern and quite sophisticated lines, giving it a brick

front facing down to the canal and an ornamental coachhouse and stable block in matching style.³¹ Although Knight's involvement in the Stroudwater project may have resulted initially from the fact that he had land on its projected route, his London connexions possibly gave him an important role in securing finance and in pushing forward the necessary legislation.

In addition to the prominent figures so far described, Stroud's economy at the period had a strong foundation of middling shopkeepers and tradesmen, including mercers, grocers, curriers, and maltsters. Few were as wealthy and enterprising as John Hollings or Benjamin Grazebrook, but several were ready to back the schemes of their more adventurous colleagues. They invested in the canal, supported roadbuilding projects, found some of the credit to enable millowners to modernize their plant in the new age of the factory system, and made ventures in property. The wills of Stroud's non-clothier tradesmen indicate the modest wealth accumulating in the town in the last quarter of the 18th century (as some guide to the figures mentioned below, in about 1810 an annual income of £70 would keep a family man in reasonable comfort, while a decent town house in a terrace, such as Rowcroft, would be worth around £400).

Jasper Winnett, a grocer, who in the years before his death in 1786 was busily amassing house property in the town, was in a position to leave three daughters £300 each.³² Ezekiel King (d. 1779), tallow chandler and grocer, left £550 between two daughters and had bought considerable house property.³³ Samuel Spencer (d. 1790), another grocer, left £600 each to his wife and daughter.³⁴ The mercer Daniel Bloxsome, who was established in business in Stroud by 1782 when he married a daughter of John Aldridge, the tallow chandler, left £2,000 stock to his wife and daughters in 1808. Bloxsome is recalled in one of the neat little pen portraits in Paul Fisher's *Notes and Recollections of Stroud* 'standing on the steps of his doorway with an air of self-satisfaction, attired in a many-curled powdered wig, dresscoat and vest, knee breeches and buckles, speckled stockings on his short thin legs, and square-toed shoes with large shining buckles'. His premises, situated at the Cross at the top of High Street, included a malthouse,³⁵ and so presumably he was also a maltster. Edward Willis, the son of a prosperous saddler, went into business as a maltster and had a personal estate valued at over £1,000 at his death in 1785. His wife Elizabeth,³⁶ was an Arundell from a branch of a leading clothier family which lived at the Castle, one of the best houses in the town. Elizabeth's sister Sarah Arundell married another successful tradesman, Charles Freebury a baker, who used the Stroudwater canal to ship in regular cargoes of salt for his bakehouse and perhaps also to retail. About 1789 Freebury bought the Castle from his wife's relatives and, with larger premises including wool-lofts at his disposal, he gave up the bakery and went into clothmaking. At his death in 1795 he left a personal estate valued at c. £5,000.³⁷ Also in business on a significant scale was Richard White, wine and brandy merchant; he embarked on property development at the start of the new century, offering plots of land at the upper end of the town on building leases in 1806.³⁸

The regular connexion with Bristol by canal and river, as well as by wagon on the improving road system, gave Stroud's shopkeepers an important trading advantage, and some, such as two grocers who both set up in the town in 1790,³⁹ were wholesalers supplying shopkeepers in surrounding villages. A draper William Bell had shops in both Bristol and Stroud before 1806 when he gave up the Stroud end of his business, putting £3,000 worth of stock up for auction.⁴⁰

In 1774 a number of the middling tradesmen of the town joined Grazebrook, Aldridge, and Hollings and the leading Stroud clothiers (with some dyers and woolstaplers) as investors in the Stroudwater canal.⁴¹ They included the baker Charles Freebury, Benjamin Fisher, a currier in Stroud since 1763,⁴² and William Turner, landlord of the George inn, then the town's main coaching inn and social centre. For Turner, who was probably responsible for building the new assembly and music room that the George had acquired by 1775, the advantages of an expansion of trade in the town were self-evident. His support was in any case immediately politic, for the

Stroudwater ‘undertakers’ held their meetings and dined under his roof.⁴³ Other Stroud investors in the canal included another baker, a maltster, a tailor, and two of the town’s medical men. The investments of such middle-ranking tradesmen were fairly small but represented a large stake in terms of their total assets: the maltster James Croome, who ventured £300, and the baker George Sumner, who ventured £100, had personal estates valued at *c.* £600 and under £300 respectively in 1786.⁴⁴

During the first part of the 19th century many of the town’s businesses continued in the old nexus of families. Charles Kendrick, a son-in-law of Jasper Winnett and nephew of Charles Freebury, succeeded to the latter’s bakery business. Kendrick’s son, Charles Freebury Kendrick, became one of the property developers in the town’s expansion in the second and third decades of the century, capitalizing on his ownership of land known as Kendrick’s Orchard, strategically situated between High Street and the new London turnpike road.⁴⁵ Among developers on the south side of the London road was a son-in-law of Thomas Grazebrook, the surgeon Edward Humpage.⁴⁶ At the same period leading shopkeepers included another son-in-law of Jasper Winnett, trading as a grocer and cheese factor, and a son of Edward Willis, trading as a mercer.⁴⁷ The currier Benjamin Fisher had become patriarch of a whole clan of tradesmen. Two of his many sons went to larger towns for apprenticeships, probably a traditional route for younger sons of Stroud tradesmen, but in the town’s expanding economy three other sons were able to set up in Stroud itself in the grocery, leather, and malting trades, and two others entered the professional classes as attorneys.⁴⁸ A more eminent name reappeared in the Stroud business community in 1808 when Joseph James Dallaway, a son of William Dallaway of Brimscombe, returned from London to trade as a silversmith at Rowcroft.⁴⁹

In the expanding climate of the early years of the 19th century a second bank was started in 1809. The partners were William Sandilands Wilson, who had been a bookseller and printer in the town since 1801,⁵⁰ Thomas Mills, who was presumably from a local tradesman family of that name (though not to be confused with a namesake who was a draper at the same period⁵¹), and Richard Martin, Mills’s father-in-law. Their business was wound up during the financial crisis of 1825,⁵² leaving Joseph Grazebrook’s Stroud bank alone in the field. Also begun in the town was a second brewery, though on a much smaller scale than the Stroud brewery of Leverage and Watts: John Sims, who had traded as a mercer from the 1790s, branched out *c.* 1818 into brewing and dealing in hops.⁵³

By 1821 the High Street was lined for almost its whole length with shops. The leading establishments were clustered in the central area of the street⁵⁴ near the small market place called the Shambles: based there were John Sims, his brother-in-law John Mills, founder of a successful grocery business,⁵⁵ the druggist and grocer James Withey, who became owner of Gannicox house before 1824,⁵⁶ the draper Thomas Mills, the banker William Wilson, and John Brisley, proprietor of a long-established stationery and printing business. Many of the houses of High Street were rebuilt at the period, and alterations to the street were made under the town’s Improvement Act acquired in 1825.⁵⁷

At the same time other business areas were forming on the new roads further down the hill. When in 1816 Thomas Wall, landlord of the George, in High Street opposite the Shambles, moved his establishment to the King’s Arms in King Street at the junction of the new Bath and London roads, it was in recognition of a shift in the town’s centre of gravity. Re-christened the Royal George, his new establishment soon became the leading posting and coaching inn of the town.⁵⁸

The canals remained central to the continuance of old businesses and the encouragement of new ones. The successors of Benjamin Grazebrook—wharfingers, canal carriers, and coal merchants, based at the canalside hamlets of Stroud parish—included Richard Miller of Brimscombe

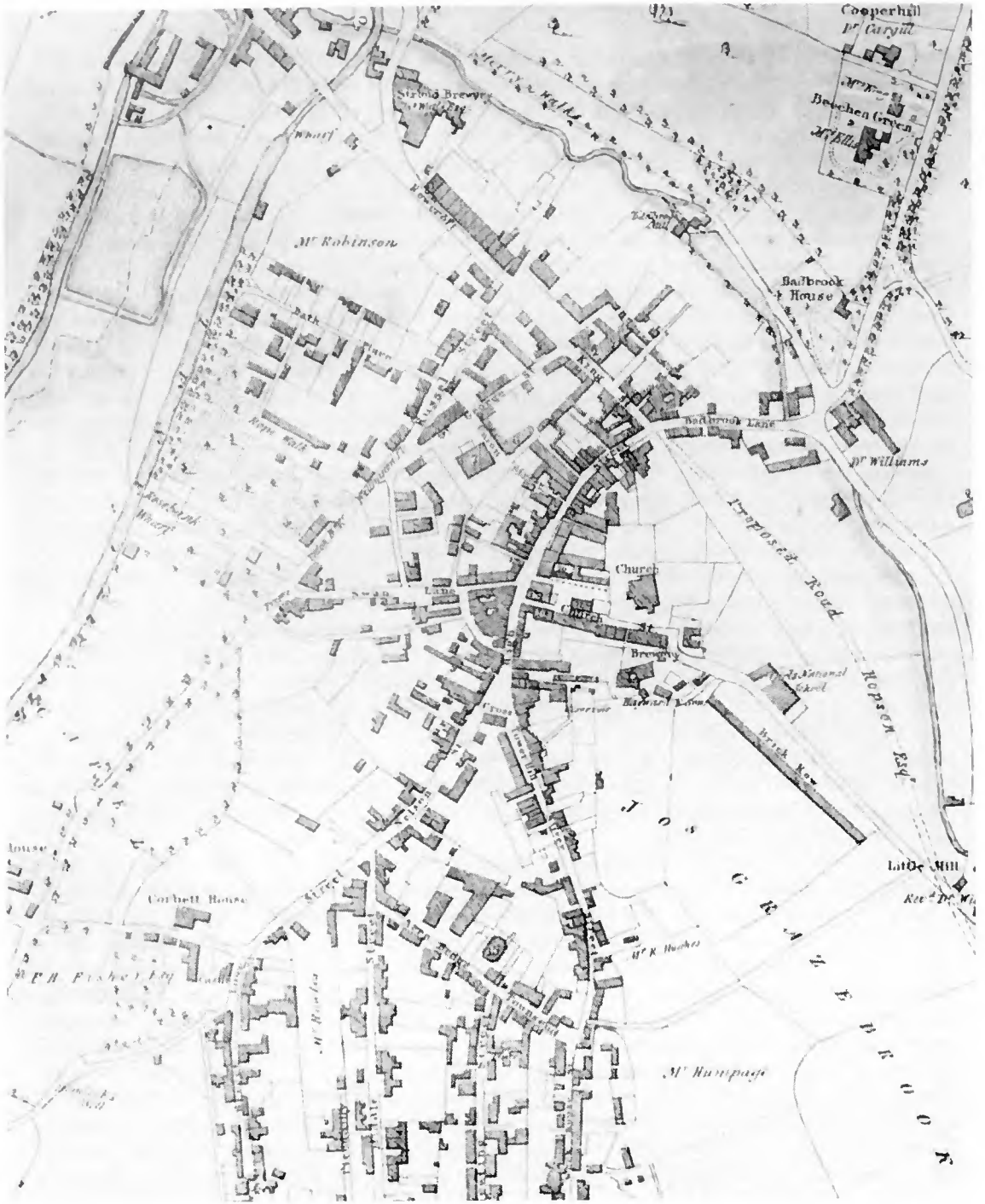


Fig. 2. Detail from John Wood's map of Stroud, 1835 (west is at top of page), showing recent development around the London road between the curving course of High Street and (on left) the Thames and Severn canal.

Port, who in his career almost equalled Grazebrook in versatility. At first employed as a clerk by the Thames and Severn company, he made himself one of the principal carriers and wharfingers on the two canals, ran London stagecoaches, and started his own bank at Brimscombe before failing financially in 1822.⁵⁹ In the late 1820s John George, who also built canal craft and ran a wholesale grocery business, became the principal carrier at Brimscombe Port,⁶⁰ obtaining the lion's share in the then dominant Forest of Dean coal trade. He was among several canal carriers running regular services to Bristol at that period. Another was John Biddle, miller and corn merchant at Stratford Mill; he also used the canals to bring in corn from Gloucester docks, where he built one of the first of the large corn storehouses.⁶¹

This survey of the men who promoted and sustained Stroud's rise cannot omit the attorneys, those professional oilers of the wheels of commerce. In the average small town the need for magistrates' clerks, manorial stewards, and land agents, together with legal work of a more incidental nature, provided business for two or three attorneys; but in early 19th-century Stroud legal work for the canal companies and the turnpike trusts,⁶² conveyancing for building developments, and the channelling of finance from private investors to new enterprises encouraged an expansion of the legal fraternity. The numbers of attorneys listed in a trade directory of 1822–3 provide one rough index of the state of Gloucestershire towns at the end of the period: Gloucester and Cheltenham then had 22 and 17 respectively, while Stroud with 8 listed was on a par with the county's two ancient second-rank towns, Cirencester (with 9) and Tewkesbury (8), and way ahead of towns such as Tetbury (3) and Newent (2).⁶³

The principal attorney in the late 18th century was John Colborne, whose florid signature on wills and other documents becomes familiar to students of Stroud's history at the period. A member of a local tradesmen family—his father was an apothecary and his grandfather a mercer—Colborne entered the legal profession before 1760 as partner to an uncle John Heart. He married one of the Winchcombe girls in 1764. Colborne's partner, and after his death in 1792 head of the firm, was Henry Burgh. In 1799 Burgh was in a position to buy Stanley Park, a substantial house at Selsley near Stroud and, retiring from his practice soon afterwards, he became an active and much respected magistrate, engaging Bow Street runners to hunt down local gangs of wool stealers. Burgh's successor John Saunders,⁶⁴ amateur pig-breeder and writer on agriculture,⁶⁵ was a less formidable figure, but by his day the old-established legal firm was only one of several in the town.

Charles Newman was in business as an attorney in Stroud by 1796 and moved into John Holling's old house on High Street in 1805. Newman was joined in partnership by Henry Clarke,⁶⁶ a son-in-law of Benjamin Grazebrook, who came to Stroud from Minchinhampton in 1808.⁶⁷ The same move from Minchinhampton down the hill to the new centre of opportunity was made by the attorney George Wathen in 1799. In 1800 he too joined the circle of leading entrepreneurial families by marrying a daughter of the brewer Peter Leversage; the connexion perhaps resulted from his being himself the son of a maltster. Wathen was involved particularly in poor-law work for local parishes⁶⁸ and probably became something of a specialist in the inter-parish litigation over settlement cases which was a lucrative part of an attorney's business in the dying years of the old poor-law system. Also in practice, from 1801, was Paul Hawkins Fisher, one of the sons of the currier Benjamin Fisher, and he later took into partnership his younger brother, Samuel. Paul Fisher became even more firmly entrenched in the town 'aristocracy' by his marriage to a granddaughter of John Colborne in 1824.⁶⁹ Others in practice in the town were, from 1813, Richard Wyatt and, from 1819, Peter Hawker, a scion of one of the leading clothier families of the region.⁷⁰

Inevitably, Stroud's attorneys were closely involved in its new enterprises. Colborne was at the centre of the Stroudwater canal scheme, acting as treasurer in the crucial completion years

of the late 1770s,⁷¹ Burgh was one of the partners in the Stroud brewery in 1793,⁷² and Wathen was partner to Joseph Grazebrook in the bank from about 1813 to 1826.⁷³ Richard Parker, another of the town's attorneys, doubled as landlord of its chief coaching inn after he married Mary Pearce, the owner of the Royal George, in 1821.⁷⁴

Appropriately, it was an attorney from one of the leading tradesmen families who became the chronicler of the town's transformation. Paul Fisher's reminiscences, in *Notes and Recollections of Stroud* compiled in the 1860s when he was over 80, form a bridge between the unsophisticated world of the small 18th-century town and the days of its Victorian civic respectability. They illuminate the period in which it rose to a high place among Gloucestershire towns. The population of Stroud parish increased from c. 4,540 in 1784 to 5,422 in 1801⁷⁵ and to 8,607 in 1831. In 1831 it remained well behind Gloucester (11,933), which had grown for some of the same reasons as Stroud, and Cheltenham (22,942), which had grown even faster but for very different reasons. Stroud had, however, outstripped or was challenging (the substantial outlying villages in its parish make the comparison difficult) the three towns that in the late 18th century were above it in the Gloucestershire hierarchy, Tetbury (2,939 people in 1831), Cirencester (5,420), and Tewkesbury (5,780).⁷⁶ The period may be said to have culminated in the year 1832 when by making it the centre of a new parliamentary constituency covering the 13 surrounding parishes Stroud's dominance of its region was acknowledged.

The Victorian age brought the railway to Stroud, new industries to its region, new suburbs to its outskirts, and new public buildings to its centre. It was in an earlier age, however, that the old Cotswold valley town was (in Paul Fisher's phrase) 'raised up ... from her slumber'⁷⁷ with Grazebrooks, Winchcombes, Wathens, Colbornes, Aldridges, and many humbler figures, attendant upon that awakening.

Notes

1. For the building of the Stroudwater Canal, M. Handford, *The Stroudwater Canal* (Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1979).
2. For the Thames and Severn Canal, H. Household, *The Thames and Severn Canal* (David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1969).
3. The Stroudwater Canal tonnage books for the period provide a full record of the cargoes carried: Gloucestershire Record Office (Glos. R.O.), D 1180/4/1-12.
4. *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester (V.C.H. Glos.)* 11, 102.
5. As in the case of the new London road and a new Stroud to Gloucester road of 1818: P.H. Fisher, *Notes and Recollections of Stroud* (2nd edn. 1891), 152; *Gloucester Journal*, 29 Nov. 1813; Gloucester Library, Gloucestershire Collection JF 9.126.
6. N. Herbert, *Road Travel and Transport in Glos.* (County Library Series, 1985), 79-84.
7. *Ibid.* 62-8; Fisher, *Stroud*, 109-11.
8. Post Office Archives (Freeling Ho., London), Freeling Papers, vol. 24, p. 405; *Glouc. Jnl.* 11 Aug., 1 Sept. 1827.
9. Fisher, *Stroud*, 138-59; *V.C.H. Glos.* 11, 63-4, 105-7, 109-10.
10. The principal sources for the genealogy of the families discussed in this article are the Stroud parish registers in Glos. R.O., P 320/IN 1/4-9; inscriptions recorded in R. Bigland, *Collections Relative to the County of Gloucester* 3, no. cclvii; and the history of Stroud in *V.C.H. Glos.* 11.
11. Glos. R.O., D 149/T 940.
12. Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 119-34.
13. For the Winchcombes, Glos. R.O., D 149/F 24-37, T 353, T 931, T 1080, T 1185; Public Record Office (P.R.O.), PROB 11/876 (P.C.C. 224 St. Eloi); *ibid.* 1074 (P.C.C. 53 Webster); *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 145; 11, 118, 124 (where, however, the two James Winchcombes are not correctly distinguished).
14. Cf. *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 111, 185.

15. J. de L. Mann, *The Cloth Industry in W. of England* (O.U.P. 1971), 56–7.
16. P.R.O., PROB 11/1179 (P.C.C. 248 Macham).
17. For Hollings, Glos. R.O., D 149/F 29; *Glouc. Jnl.* 7 Feb. 1763; 11 Jan. 1779; 20 Feb. 1797; Fisher, *Stroud*, 79–82.
18. The house was that on the corner of High Street and Lansdown later named Bank House (but after a different bank).
19. *The Chronicles and the Lamentations of Gotham* (Stroud, 1817), 33–40, 43–9. It is difficult to resist (if historically frivolous) imagining Hollings—in his dual role as bank manager and captain of a ‘Home Guard’ unit—as resembling in character ‘Captain Mainwaring’ of BBC Television’s 1960s/70s series *Dad’s Army*.
20. *Glouc. Jnl.* 7 July 1800.
21. *Ibid.* 21 Oct. 1805.
22. For the Grazebrosks, P.R.O., PROB 11/1508 (P.C.C. 78 Collingwood); *Glouc. Jnl.* 6 Sept. 1779; 13 Dec. 1784; 30 Sept. 1805; 3 July 1809; 28 Aug. 1815; Glos. R.O., D 1180/4/1–2; Fisher, *Stroud*, 30, 133; Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 131, 177, 183, 189, 205, 279–80, 297–300, 303, 307–8; Household, *Thames and Severn Canal*, 32, 42.
23. Fisher, *Stroud*, 138, 142; Glos. R.O., P 230/IN 1/9, entries in 1813, 1816, 1819, 1822.
24. For the brewery and the Leversage family, Glos. R.O., D 1815, Hallewell fam., abs of title to Stroud brewery; G.D.R. wills (in Glos. R.O.) 1796/92; P.R.O., PROB 11/1396 (P.C.C. 641 Marriott); *ibid.* 1457 (P.C.C. 211 Lushing); *Glouc. Jnl.* 16 May 1796; 7 July 1800; 31 May 1802; 23 Feb. 1807. Four Peter Leversages, father and son, successively held Middle Lypiatt but have not been clearly distinguished in earlier accounts: they were (i) Peter (d. 1796), also of Cherington, (ii) Peter (d. 1803), the brewer, (iii) Peter (d. 1807), and (iv) Peter (fl. 1826, 1840).
25. Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 115.
26. For the Aldridges, G.D.R. wills 1776/130–2; 1790/133; Glos. R.O., D 1265, Playne fam., Nailsworth deeds 1656–1836; *Glouc. Jnl.* 19 Aug. 1776.
27. C.H. Cave, *Hist. of Banking in Bristol* (Bristol, 1899), 93.
28. P.R.O., PROB 11/1578 (P.C.C. 116 Wynne); *Glouc. Jnl.* 8, 15 July 1816; Glos. R.O., D 1911/1, pp. 5, 29, 51, 71.
29. Glos. R.O., D 1180/3/1, pp. 63–7, 85–7, 91–2, 95–6.
30. *Ibid.* pp. 70, 121; Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 132 (where he is incorrectly identified with a Painswick clothier of the same name).
31. Glos. R.O., D 1347, deeds of Gannicox House 1811–16; D 1842/T 2, will of Hen. Bond. The stable block (photograph by N.H. in 1978) has been demolished.
32. G.D.R. wills 1787/64.
33. *Ibid.* 1779/79.
34. P.R.O., PROB 11/1200 (P.C.C. 42 Bever).
35. *Ibid.* PROB 11/1498 (P.C.C. 428 Loveday); G.D.R. wills 1790/133; Fisher, *Stroud*, 49. (Fisher’s record of an inscription to the Bloxsoles, p. 322, has a misreading of John Aldridge’s forename).
36. G.D.R. wills 1788/14; cf. *ibid.* 1784/154.
37. Glos. R.O., D 1842/T 2; D 1180/4/1; Fisher, *Stroud*, 11.
38. *Glouc. Jnl.* 1 Sept. 1806.
39. *Ibid.* 25 Oct., 29 Nov. 1790.
40. *Ibid.* 9 June 1806; *Matthews’s Complete Bristol Dir.* (1803), 17.
41. For the canal shareholders, Glos. R.O., D 1180/3/1.
42. N. Herbert, ‘Introduction’ to Fisher, *Stroud* (reprint by Alan Sutton, 1975), p. vi.
43. *Glouc. Jnl.* 15 May 1769; 16 Mar. 1772; 20 Feb. 1775; Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 114–15, 119, 133, 142.
44. G.D.R. wills 1786/102; 1787/61.
45. Glos. R.O., D 1842/T 2; Fisher, *Stroud*, 37, 154, 158.
46. *Glouc. Jnl.* 9 Feb. 1801; Glos. R.O., D 127/796–894; cf. map 1835, in *ibid.* D 1180/10/40.
47. Glos. R.O., D 1815, Hallewell fam., abs. of title to Stroud brewery; D 1842/T 2; Gell and Bradshaw, *Glos. Dir.* (1820), 199.

48. Glos. R.O., D 44A/31, 36-7; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 63-4.
49. *Glouc. Jnl.* 9 May, 13 June 1808; Fisher, *Stroud*, 213.
50. *Glouc. Jnl.* 7 Dec. 1801; Glos. R.O., P 272A/OV 3/4/1; Gell and Bradshaw, *Glos. Dir.*, 200, 204.
51. Stroud Improvement Act, 6 Geo. IV, c. 6 (Local and Personal).
52. Fisher, *Stroud*, 142.
53. *Glouc. Jnl.* 28 Apr. 1794; Glos. R.O., D 914/11; P 320A/VE 1/7; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 63.
54. For the shopkeepers in High Street, Glos. R.O., P 320A/VE 1/2 (nos. 147-79); VE 1/3 (nos. 9-28); Fisher, *Stroud*, 37-79; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 63-4.
55. Fisher, *Stroud*, 77; *Glouc. Jnl.* 18 June 1792; 30 Sept. 1799; G.D.R. wills 1827/202.
56. Glos. R.O., Q/RUm 93; Stroud and Cainscross Roads Act, 6 Geo. IV, c. 23 (Local and Personal).
57. Fisher, *Stroud*, 75-8.
58. *Glouc. Jnl.* 2 Dec. 1816; cf. Fisher (*Stroud*, 35, 121), who mis-remembered the date of the move.
59. Household, *Thames and Severn Canal*, 120; Fisher, *Stroud*, 111.
60. Household, *Thames and Severn Canal*, 121-2; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1830), 390-1.
61. Glos. R.O., D 1180/4/10-12; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1830), 391; H. Conway-Jones, *Gloucester Docks* (County Library Series, 1984), 32, 165.
62. e.g. *Glouc. Jnl.* 24 June 1805; 19 May 1806.
63. *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 47-66.
64. Fisher, *Stroud*, 90; *Glouc. Jnl.* 15 July 1760; 25 May 1818; 30 Aug. 1819; *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 248.
65. Fisher, *Stroud*, 75-6; *Glouc. Jnl.* 23 Mar. 1807; 8 Aug. 1808.
66. *Glouc. Jnl.* 26 Dec. 1796; 8 July 1805; 15 May 1809.
67. *Ibid.* 1 July 1805; 21 Apr. 1806; 2 May 1808.
68. *Ibid.* 21 Oct. 1799; 6 Jan. 1800; 20 Oct. 1806; 9 Mar. 1807; P.R.O., PROB 11/1396 (P.C.C. 641 Marriott); for his poor-law work, e.g. Glos. R.O., P 181/VE 2/2; P 272A/VE 2/3.
69. *Glouc. Jnl.* 25 May, 26 Oct. 1801; Herbert, 'Intro.' to Fisher, *Stroud*, p. viii.
70. *Glouc. Jnl.* 22 Feb. 1813; 8 Mar. 1819; *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 63.
71. Handford, *Stroudwater Canal*, 144, 150, 205.
72. Glos. R.O., D 1815, Hallewell fam., abs, of title to Stroud brewery.
73. *Ibid.* D 914/12.
74. *Pigot's Dir. Glos.* (1822-3), 63; Fisher, *Stroud*, 121.
75. Glos. R.O., P 320/IN 1/6, p. 136; *Census*, 1801.
76. *Census*, 1831.
77. *Stroud Journal*, 4 Feb. 1860 (Fisher's 'Reminiscences', no. 1).