

EDWARD SNELL'S DIARY: A JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER IN BATH IN THE 1840s

John Cattell

Edward Snell (1820-1880) is a relatively obscure figure who is best known in this country for his two watercolour views of the new locomotive works and railway village in Swindon in 1849.¹ But he was so much more – engine erector, civil engineer, surveyor, draughtsman, inventor, artist, traveller and adventurer. His greatest contribution to posterity, perhaps, was as a diarist and chronicler of the social scene in England and subsequently in Australia. He wrote two diaries, both profusely illustrated by charming pen and ink sketches, the first covering the period 1842-49 in England, the second covering his adventures in Australia between 1849-58 and his return to England.² The period 1842-49 in this country was a time of great industrial expansion fuelled by the growth of the railways and accompanied by fluctuating economic conditions. It was also an age of immense social upheaval and reform characterised by migration from the country to the towns, by a drive for self-improvement among the working classes, particularly the educated artisan class of which Snell was a member, and mass emigration. His English diary provides a very personal and colourful insight into these and other aspects of life at the time, and as such is of very considerable historical interest.

Snell had a special affinity with Bath. The diary was intended as a record of his working and social life following the completion of a seven-year apprenticeship at the Newark Foundry of his relative, the prominent Bath engineer, Henry Asprey Stothert. The first part of the diary covers in considerable detail his life and adventures in the city between 16th March and 20th May 1842 prior to moving to Bristol and later to Swindon to take up employment as a fitter in the new railway works. Throughout the 1840s many of his days off were spent on return trips to Bath to visit his foundry friends and relatives, and it is clear that he regarded Bath as his second home after his native North Devon.

He was born in Barnstaple on the 27th November 1820 the grandson of William Snell, a serge manufacturer of Crediton, and the son of Edward Snell, a silversmith, jeweller, watch and clockmaker with premises in High Street, Barnstaple.³ The latter married Elizabeth Stothert, the daughter of Abel Stothert, a cutler of Shaftesbury, at St Peter's Church, Barnstaple on 24th June 1820.⁴ The couple had four children, Edward, the eldest, and three daughters, Rose Emily (known as Emily), Emma and Elizabeth (known as Lizzie). Edward Snell senior died at the age of 33 in 1827, probably of typhus fever, when his

son was aged only six. The sale of the business, the High Street shop and the family's house above it realised £1500 which was left in trust for his wife and family.⁵ This appears to have placed Elizabeth and her four children in some immediate financial difficulty and they moved to smaller premises in Newport on the southern outskirts of Barnstaple.

The first page of the English diary gives a brief account of the young Edward's early upbringing, his education at the local schools and in particular his love of the sea: 'I always had a strong inclination for the sea, which inclination was always thwarted and crossed by my over anxious mother; in consequence I began to be, and have remained up to the present time what a seaman would designate, "a land lubber"'. He was to retain a strong interest in the sea throughout his life, visiting coastal areas as well as the shipping at Bristol and London docks and elsewhere whenever possible. He described himself as a 'Mammy's Darling', and as the eldest child and only son his future career and fortunes were closely linked to those of the whole family. With this in mind his mother used her family connections to secure for her son an apprenticeship with the Stotherts in Bath. Elizabeth Snell's father was the brother of George Stothert who established the Stothert ironmongery business in Bath in around 1785.⁶ She was thus first cousin to George Stothert's son George junior (1786-1858) who set up a foundry in Horse Street in 1815.⁷ This was run as a separate business from his father's No. 11 Northgate Street ironmongery establishment, and would later come to form an engineering firm of national and international importance.

The premises at Nos. 16 and 17 Horse Street, later renamed Southgate Street, were acquired by George senior from 1799 as part of his ironmongery business and subsequently extended through to the rear (east) with buildings fronting Philip Street, renamed Newark Street from around 1829.⁸ By 1821 the main entrance to the engineering complex, then under the management of George junior, was from Philip Street and with the change of street name the works became known as the Newark Foundry. George junior retired in 1827 and the foundry was taken over by his younger half-brother and partner Henry Stothert under whose management the business expanded further.⁹ Two other sons of George Stothert senior, John and William continued their father's Northgate Street ironmongery firm.

George Stothert junior took a close interest in the fortunes of Edward Snell, being his friend and patron and using his influence to obtain employment for his young cousin throughout the period covered by the English diary. It was probably he who facilitated Snell's apprenticeship, perhaps reckoning, rightly as it turned out, that a training of this kind would stand him in good stead at a time of rapid advancements in the fields of civil and mechanical engineering.

He began his apprenticeship at the age of 14 on 16th March 1835, the date recorded on his indenture of apprenticeship (fig.1). His move to Bath was the first time he had left Devon and was a traumatic experience, arriving in an unfamiliar city, away from his family and school friends and removed from his hitherto largely rural existence. His initial unease is apparent from the following passage at the beginning of the diary: 'At length on the 11th of January 1835, I left my dear native town & came up to Bath to be apprenticed, and I think the first 6 months of my apprenticeship the most miserable I ever spent'.

He was apprenticed as an engineer and millwright, and the agreement entered into between Edward, his mother and Henry Stothert appears by today's standards to be very draconian, but was probably fairly typical by the standards of the time. Snell was required to serve his master faithfully, obey his every command, and not waste his goods or lend them to anyone unlawfully. He was not to 'commit fornication nor contract Matrimony'. He was also forbidden to 'play at card or dice tables or any other unlawful games', to 'buy nor sell', to 'haunt taverns or playhouses' or to absent himself day or night without his master's permission. It is perhaps little wonder that, after a brief account of his childhood, the first entry in the diary, dated 16th March 1842, reads 'Hurrah! Emancipated at last ...'. On the following evening he celebrated his new status at the *Engineer's Arms* public house with a group of his 'shopmates' and 'our most respected foreman Old Bluebottle', the nickname given to the Foundry's managing engineer George Rayno who in 1844, with Robert Pitt, became co-partner with Henry Stothert in the engineering business.¹⁰

There is relatively little information in the diary on the work undertaken during the seven years of his apprenticeship except that he was confined to the pattern shop for the first five years and spent much of the remainder of the time in the millwrights and fitting shops. The pattern shop was almost certainly located above the foundry building at the rear of the Horse Street premises on the site of the old smithy, while the millwrights and fitting shops were possibly accommodated in the newer part of the complex entered via the main entrance on Newark Street.¹¹ Snell also records making two apprentice models: 'during my apprenticeship I made two small High Pressure Steam Engines, one a beam, and the other an oscillating Engine, the stroke of the former being 2 inches & that of the latter 1 inch'.

Although following his 'emancipation' Snell concentrated on recording his social activities, presumably regarding much of his work and the foundry as too humdrum to be worth describing in any detail, it is still possible to get a good impression of the kind of tasks he undertook. On 9th April 1842 he was 'At work in Bathwick Tunnel fixing a cast-iron cistern up to my neck in mud and dirt'.¹² Later that month he mentions repairing a sugar mill for

Francis Asprey, a tea dealer and grocer of No. 17 Southgate Street and a relative of Snell and the Stotherts by marriage.¹³ 'The sugar mill I repaired had about a pound of sugar sticking between the cracks and it was astonishing to see the voracity with which it was devoured by some of our foundry chaps' (fig.2).



Fig.2 Snell's sketch of Newark Foundry workers eating sugar left in the cracks of a sugar mill he had repaired. He wrote: 'I refrain from mentioning names but ... the generality of the foundry gents are not at all squeamish about sucking a dirty finger or two poor Devils!'.

Two days later he was busy fixing a chimney to the boiler of a steam dredging machine. This may have been one of the steam dredgers designed by Brunel in the 1830s to drag the mud from Cumberland Basin in Bristol.¹⁴ This task took him two days including a half hour spent in the boiler of the 'mud boat' reading Cobbett's *History of the Protestant Reformation* in protest at Henry Stothert's decision to reduce his wages (see below). Shortly afterwards he was told to hold himself ready to go to Newbury to fix an old mud engine in a new boat, although in the end he was not asked to perform this task. On 5th May he mentioned repairing a pump to go to Batheaston and then being sent to '... Watson's Corn Mill in the Lower Bristol road to repair the engine'.¹⁵ He sketched the engine (fig.3) and described it as 'A regular rickety old puffer with a leakage in every joint, and the boiler in such a state that in the course of the night the leakages almost empty it'. Two days later he was still at the mill trying 'to get the engine started before night' and endeavouring to fill the boiler by dipping buckets into the river from an open window. On 12th May he was busy drawing 'steam apparatus' for the new City Gaol at Twerton East opened in 1843. He also produced drawings for a Mr Daniels of Twerton, possibly Joseph Clissild Daniell, the inventor and improver of machinery who worked for Charles Wilkins the owner of the two large woollen mills at Twerton.¹⁶ He also drew some 'manure machinery' for Barrett

who was employed at the 'Twerton Factory', perhaps one of the woollen mills or a separate engineering business.¹⁷ Snell obtained Rayno's permission to copy drawings of a marine engine illustrated in 'Tredgold on the Steam engine and Steam Navigation', which he described as 'a capital work' and one which he 'should like to have'.¹⁸

Taken together these jobs amount to a wide and fascinating range of engineering work under-

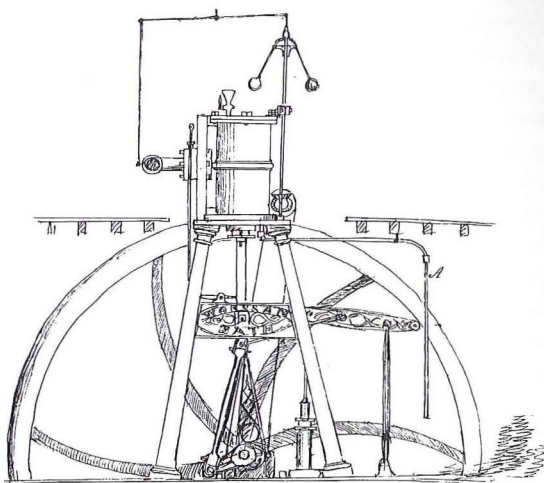


Fig.3 The old engine Snell repaired at Watson's Corn Mill off the Lower Bristol Road.

taken by a local foundry. Much of it was concentrated in and around Bath but occasionally, as the Newbury job shows, it involved working further afield.¹⁹ It was also hard physical work often carried out in difficult conditions. Snell commented that his '... fist which was once as delicate as a lady's is now as rough as the paw of a bear with fingers as stiff as pokers and fit to handle nothing but a 16in pipe' and 'we do get most horribly black to be sure and I think it would not be a bad spec. to send some of our old clothes to the Monmouth St mendicity society to be boiled into soup for the poor'.

On average he worked six days per week and eight hours per day not including meal breaks, recording in the diary the total number of days worked per week and any additional hours. Sometimes he worked for less than the six days and occasionally a few hours more. On 17th April he refers to a notice put up in the foundry stating that the men had to be at work by 6.05am or lose a quarter day's wages. Also those working outside the foundry were now required to work two and a half hours per quarter day, in other words a ten-hour day, instead of the usual eight hours. The notice also stated that they could continue to work two-hour quarters, in which case the daily lodging allowance when working away would be reduced from one shilling to 6d. Snell thought 'this a great encroachment on the men and as soon as I can afford it I shall bid old Bluebottle goodbye and let him tyrannize over the rest'.²⁰

Snell's indenture stipulated that he be paid three shillings a week in the first year of his apprenticeship rising to 13 shillings in the seventh year.

However it seems that he was being paid over 20 shillings per week by the time he had completed his apprenticeship, as on 18th April he was informed by Henry Stothert's clerk that he was being overpaid and that his wages were to be reduced to 20 shillings. Snell was most indignant at this 'rather queer intelligence' and began making preparations to leave the foundry while trying to think of ways of making extra money: 'Think I shall take one or two of my pictures & endeavour to sell them at the shops, any scheme to get money. Money! The want of which is the root of all evil – had I but £5 in my pocket how soon would I bid farewell to old Bluebottle and the whole lot of ragamuffins at Newark Foundry'. His inability to save was probably made worse by the relatively high cost of procuring lodgings in relation to his wages.²¹ Being of a fiercely independent character with a strong sense of natural justice he was determined not to let the matter rest, writing a fairly stiff letter of complaint to Henry Stothert:

Sir – As I have seldom a chance of seeing you I take the liberty of remonstrating by letter against the excessively low wages which you have thought fit to give me and as I cannot discover wherein I am so greatly inferior to the rest of the men I see no reason why such an immense distinction should be made between our respective wages. That I am of some use in Drawing I have sufficient proof by being sent for so often by Mr Daniels of Twerton, and though I dislike praising myself yet do I not find but that I can do my share in the other branches of the business and in the whole course of my Apprenticeship I do not remember ever to have had a job given me which I was unable to accomplish. But setting self commendation aside it is at best but a spiritless and unmanly thing for a person to underwork his fellows and for my part I consider the practice highly reprehensible inasmuch as it is calculated to bring down the price of labour and thus involve hundreds of persons in misery and destitution, so I shall leave the matter to your generosity especially as I think it high time I should begin to do something for my Mother who stands in great need of my assistance ...

The letter was bound to have annoyed Stothert who made no move to increase Snell's pay presumably reasoning that at a time of general economic malaise he would fare no better elsewhere. Snell seemed to recognise he had little option but to accept the cut: 'I feel quite ashamed of working for less than the rest but what can I do. Its all very fine for a fellow to throw himself out of employment but starvation wont altogether suit my constitution so I suppose I must put up with it till Mr Henry Stothert returns from Wales ...'.²²

His dissatisfaction with a pound a week prompted him to contemplate emigrating: 'Begin to think by Jove that I must bid Adieu to Old England for a

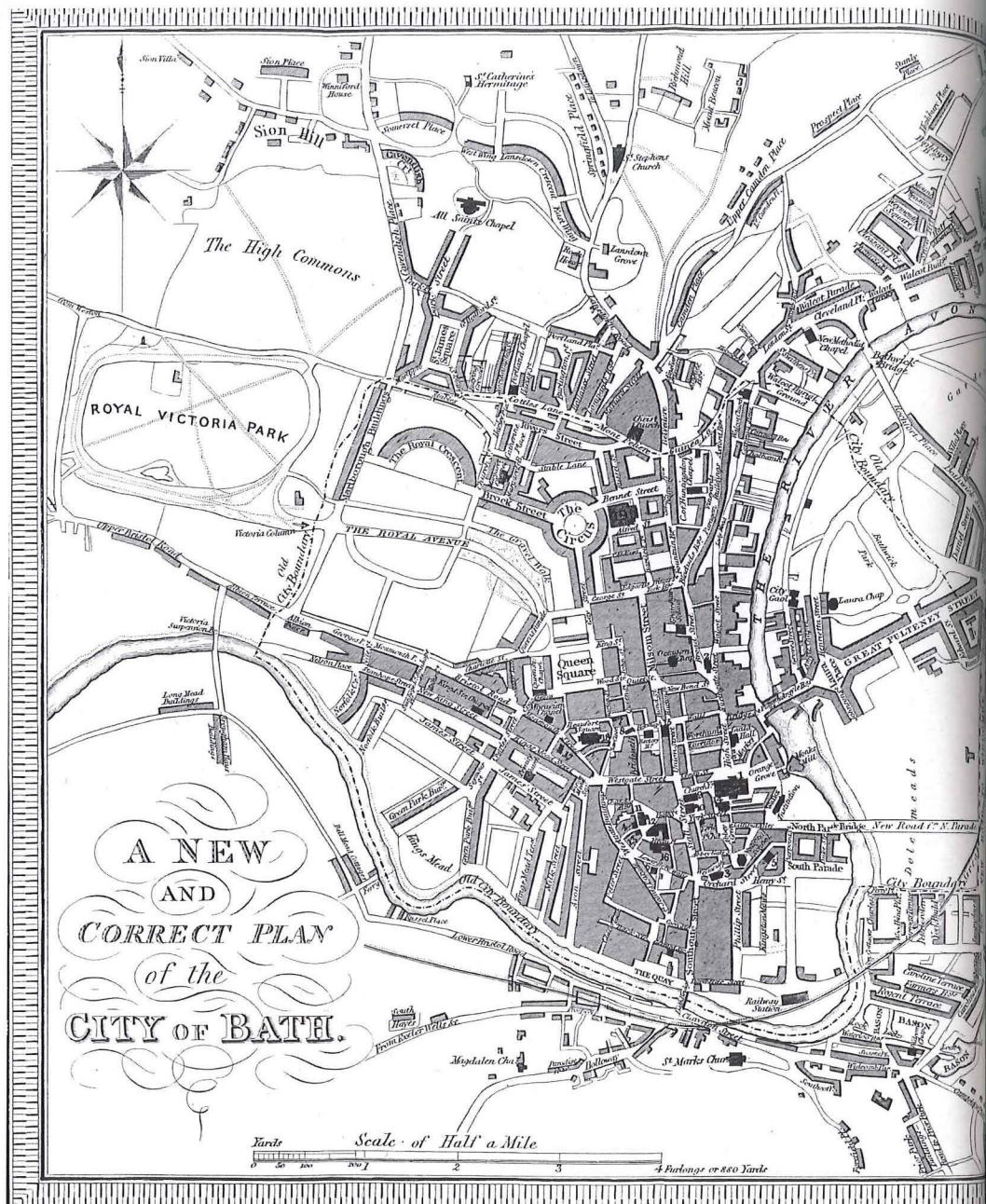
short time and emigrate to the United States or New Zealand unless I can get a berth in some Steam ship, and Mother must console herself for my absence in the best manner she can'. However concern for his mother's feelings seems to have been the main reason for not pursuing the idea of emigration at that time: 'should have no objection to go to America myself but I know my mother would make a bother about it so I suppose I must stay at home'.



Fig.4 No. 2 Great Stanhope Street, Snell's lodgings in the late 1830s-early 1842.
(photograph by James O. Davies)

In early April, in an attempt to increase his savings, he decided to leave his lodgings at No. 2 Great Stanhope Street and move to cheaper accommodation at No. 12 Brougham Hayes Buildings, Twerton, south of the river. No. 2 Great Stanhope Street was Snell's second lodgings. He moved there in the late 1830s from No. 7 Paragon Buildings where he had stayed with John Lambert.²³ No. 2 is an ashlar, three-storey and mansard terraced house of the late eighteenth century (fig.4). In the early 1840s it was occupied by Mrs Sarah Thornthwaite, a 40-year-old lodging housekeeper of independent means who lived there with her four sons and daughter Susan. All were present on census day in 1841, along with three lodgers: Miss Hanna[h] Brooke, of independent means; John Harris, aged 20, ironmonger; and Edward Snell, listed as an apprentice coach maker. Three of Mrs Thornthwaite's children, Miss Brooke and Snell were evidently having some fun with the enumerator, all giving their ages as just 14 or 15 although they were all older. Snell claimed to be 15 when in fact he was 21.

No. 12 Brougham Hayes formed part of a terrace of much smaller two-storey, single-bay houses, probably of early nineteenth-century date, on the southwestern outskirts of the city (fig.5 overleaf).²⁴ The terrace was later cut in two by the creation of Lorne Road. No. 12 was run by Mrs Mary Coopey, whom Snell described as '... a quiet, clean and tidy woman & withal a most excellent cook'. In 1841 she was aged 55 and of independent means. The house probably had two rooms on each floor, accommodating as well as Mrs Coopey, a lodger called Hall whom Snell described 'as being twice in America'; and a chum from Newark Foundry called Zenas Hall who shared a room with Snell. Noting that 'I think on the whole I am not too badly quartered', Snell produced a sketch plan of his room, carefully annotating each item of furniture as well



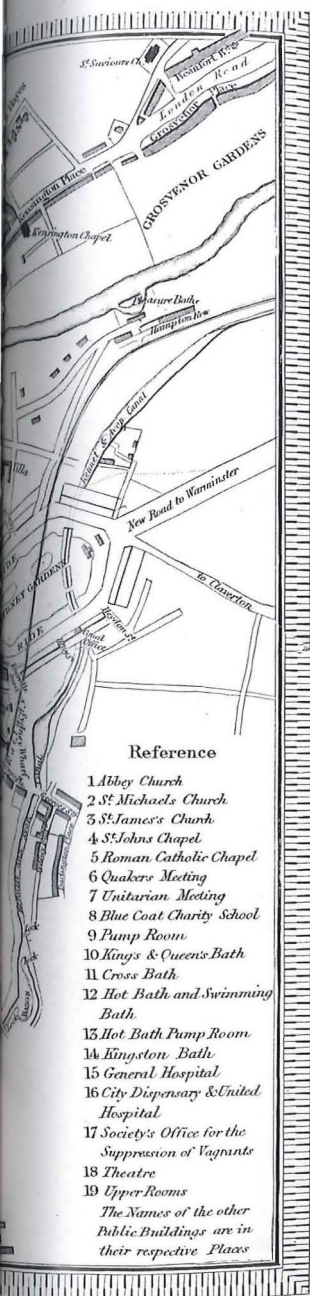


Fig.5 A map of Bath in the 1840s, from Samuel Gibbs, *Illustrated Bath Visitant or New Guide to Bath* (Samuel Gibbs, Bath, n.d, c.1847?). Brougham Hayes Buildings where Snell lodged in early 1842 is the block immediately above the word 'new' in the map title.

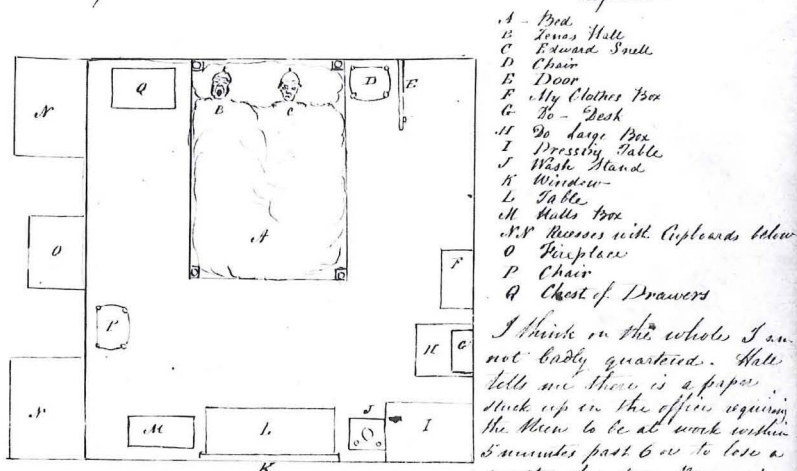
as the two occupants of the bed (fig.6 overleaf). This must be one of very few such illustrations of the interior of a lodging room of the period. A great observer of his fellow man he devoted considerable time to describing the antics of Zenas Hall.²⁵ His entry for 14th April reads:

Staid at home all evening reading. Zenas Hall came in slightly fuddled and began to show symptoms of a scrimmage – but the effervescence of his spirits soon passed off and he sat down quietly playing his flute till bedtime ... [When] Zenas ... staggered into the room this evening ... the first indication of his not being 'compis mentis' was communicated to me in the shape of a punch on the head. Owing however to the difficulty he experienced in preserving his centre of gravity the said 'punch' was no more than a love tap and did not in the least ruffle my truly amiable temper.

Following a similar display from Hall, Snell '... began to think him rather an ardent devotee of Bacchus or to speak more correctly though less classically of John Barleycorn.' Snell drank relatively infrequently although on one occasion he described an incident involving a glass of whisky:

Miss B[rooke] desired me to brew myself a glass of whiskey and water and as I was not aware of the strength of the 'cratur' I mixed a jolly good tumbler of half and half swallowed it and soon found myself unable to preserve my centre of gravity and as great as a lord in my estimation. Can't very distinctly remember all the little absurdities I was guilty of. I had a notion of trying to walk in a straight line from one lamp post to another but I have a strong suspicion that I did not succeed. I have likewise a faint recollection of making love to Mrs Coopey, attempting to preach a sermon, then spouting Richard the 3rd, singing a Psalm & then toddling up stairs to bed with a great many injunctions from Mrs Coopey to be sure & take care of the candle and not set any thing on fire.

morning - Said in Bed till 7. By the by I may as well now make
of a sketch of our Bedroom



ask for us to work 12 for a quarter instead of 2 hours as heretofore, or if
we they can work 2 hours & have the usual allowance of 1 shilling a day.

Fig.6 Snell's sketch of his room at No. 12 Brougham Hayes Buildings.

The diary is peppered with amusing anecdotes and sketches illustrating his life as a lodger. He seems to have got on well with his room mate Zenas Hall despite the occasional minor falling out. One such incident involved an argument over whether or not to open a window:

sleep with the window open our Hall won
I took up my quarters on the outside of



22nd
allied to see Miss Ellis & found she was out,

Fig.7 Snell (foreground) being advised to 'shut his head' by his co-lodger Zenas Hall.

Went home to bed - found it plaguey hot & wanted to sleep with the window open but Hall wouldn't consent to it so I took up my quarters on the outside of the bed and kept Hall awake by chattering till he got so savage I thought it dangerous to persist so in compliance with his advice I 'shut my head and went to sleep' (fig.7).

Snell records staying in bed until twenty minutes to six, '... which is as long as we possibly can with safety. Great and manifold are the grumblings too before we do turn out ...'. Their route to the foundry was probably via Dredge's suspension bridge (Victoria Bridge) (fig.8) and along the Upper Bristol Road to Monmouth Street, Westgate Street, Stall Street and Orchard Street.

His diet seems to have included staple items such as bread, butter and cheese together with copious quantities of pork: 'Zenas is pecking away at a ham bone most voraciously but I can't find much fault with him for I have eaten so much pork lately that I am getting quite bristly in the face'. He makes no mention of vegetables except for enjoying some 'brocoli' with bacon, suggesting the former was something of a novelty.

Snell spent much of his spare time socialising with work mates and friends he had made at his various lodgings in Bath. He also went to the theatre and visited the hot baths.²⁶ One of his closest friends was John Gully, a fellow apprentice at the Newark Foundry in the 1830s.²⁷ His father, Philip Gully, ran an ironmongery business at No. 11 New Bond Street and was probably a friend of the Stothert family.²⁸ John Gully worked at the Bath Savings Bank, Trim Street, from the late 1830s until 1846 when he went into partnership with his father. Gully and Snell shared a great interest in art, Gully being a painter of considerable ability who emigrated to New Zealand in late 1851 and became one of that country's most important landscape painters. Snell was a regular visitor at the Gullys' house at No. 12 Argyle Street and relished 'overhauling' John's latest works. The latter gave Snell a lesson in crayon drawing on Christmas Day 1844.

His social activities also included frequent visits to the houses of the Stotherts and their relatives the Bartrums and the Aspreys. He was evidently a favourite of the Stothert women who, judging by various references in the diary, seemed to take their young relation under their wing. Snell's kinship with the Stotherts placed him in a privileged position, allowing him access



Fig.8 Victoria Bridge, an improved type of suspension bridge designed by James Dredge c.1837, to provide a crossing between the Upper and Lower Bristol Roads. (photograph James O. Davies)

to social circles closed off to many of his fellow foundry workers, who, despite being highly skilled artisans, were essentially working class. The Stotherts were by the early 1840s prominent members of Bath's middle class. This increasingly influential section of society was dominated by successful manufacturers, reflecting the growing industrialisation of Bath at that time.²⁹ A liberal and Nonconformist, Henry Stothert supported the election of the Radical candidate John Arthur Roebuck to Parliament in 1832 and shared his enthusiasm for reform and greater freedom for Dissenters.³⁰ The increasing influence of Stothert and others like him resulted from success in business evident, in the former's case, by the expansion of the Newark Foundry and the establishment of the large Avonside Ironworks in Bristol in 1837. Other members of the Stothert family were influential in business and social circles. They lived in comfortable circumstances, often on the then outskirts of the city. George Stothert junior, a retired bachelor with a second house in London, resided at No. 2 Richmond Hill with his unmarried sister Ann whom Snell referred to in the diary as Miss Stothert. This house, which has a three-bay ashlar façade, forms part of a terrace of three-storey houses dating from 1790-1800. The houses are set well back from the street and have splendid prospects out over the city below. Henry Stothert and his family lived at No. 4 Priory Place, Lyncombe, while his brother William, who had retired from the family ironmongery business in around 1837 and who by 1842 was listed as among the gentry, resided nearby at Southcot House, Lyncombe.³¹ The ironmonger, John Stothert, was a city councillor and resided at No. 23 Bathwick Hill, while another brother, Richard, was a solicitor.³²

Throughout the 1840s Snell made return visits to Bath as often as he could. Initially he obtained accommodation with Mrs Coopey at his old lodgings but later stayed either at No. 2 Richmond Hill or at Belmont, Hay Hill, the residence of George Stothert senior's second wife Elizabeth Stothert, née Asprey (c1765-1855), stepmother of George junior and mother of Henry. Belmont is a three-storey plus mansard house with a bowed single-storey entrance section fronting the narrow pedestrian passage making up Hay Hill. Snell spent the Christmas of 1844, 1845 and 1846 with the Stotherts in Bath. His diary entry for Boxing Day 1844 gives a good impression of the fashionable and cultivated lifestyle enjoyed by the family:

We met at Mr HS [Snell's shorthand for Henry Stothert] the same company we saw the night before with the addition of Mr Laufiere & Mr & Mrs William Stothert & family. Spent the evening gloriously – every delicacy of the Season – beautiful girls, music, dancing, etc. Obligated to leave them at 12 tho. Went into the Full Moon with Mr Laufiere & Mr Pitt & had a glass of brandy & water & cigar.

Snell possessed a keen and often impish sense of humour devoting considerable space in the diary to recounting and sketching the various practical jokes perpetrated by his fellow foundry workers, some of these accounts giving useful insights into his working conditions:

This morning old Bluebottle came up into the pattern shop grumbling about our shutting the door and trigged it open himself, but had barely reached the bottom of the ladder before it was shut again, by that fountain of all mischief Bill Glass.³³ This contempt of his authority acted upon old Bluebottle's excitable temper to such a degree that he was constrained to blow off steam, which he immediately did in the shape of a volley of oaths and imprecations quite dismal & heartrending to listen to, but we excused it as we thought without a vent of some kind he must inevitably have burst his boiler. When the tempest of his wrath had in some degree subsided, he mildly swore by God he'd have the door off the hinges, which was accordingly done by old Sam Hook, so that the pattern shop is now most admirably ventilated, though unfortunately instead of pure air of heaven, 'wot poets call zephyr breeze' the Sulphuric vapour from the furnace finds it way into the shop, and by half suffocating the unfortunate inmates gives them a slight foretaste of what they may expect in the next world, when consigned to the tender mercies of the gentleman whose name should never be mentioned in the hearing of 'Ears polite'.

On another occasion a group of noisy ragamuffins playing a game of pitch and toss just outside the foundry walls had a bucket of clay wash thrown over them by one of the workers. This

'... covered them completely & served the vagabonds right' (fig.9). In the tricks he

he played on his friends Snell occasionally went too far. One incident

involved Silas Lambert who was presumably the son of

his first landlord and later became a Baptist

preacher. About a year earlier he had fallen

desperately in love with Snell's sister Emily when

she had visited Bath, although she had not

the slightest interest in Lambert's advances. Snell,

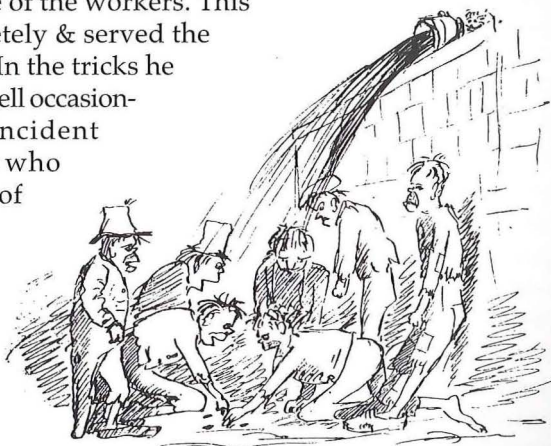


Fig.9 Ragamuffins outside the Newark Foundry wall being doused with a bucket of clay wash by a foundry worker.

however, seeing the potential for a practical joke, told Lambert that his sister was interested in him. Lambert then wrote to Emily via Snell to express his feelings for her to which Snell forged a rather unsympathetic reply. He then persuaded Lambert not to give up and write again. The next letter forged by Snell was a much warmer one, encouraging Lambert to begin a correspondence lasting three months, the latter blissfully unaware that all the replies were written by Snell. Eventually things got so serious that Snell concocted a letter from an imaginary rival in the hope of discouraging Lambert. This failed and when Lambert started talking about visiting Mrs Snell in Barnstaple to request Emily's hand in marriage Snell was obliged to tell him the truth. As a result Silas became sick and refused to speak to Snell for six months before shaking hands and making up. Snell's recounting of the tale suggests that he was ashamed of the whole episode and the act of describing it in detail in the diary seems to have served as a form of absolution.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the high proportion of females to males in Bath at that time,³⁴ Snell enjoyed the company of a number of young women. Most appear to have lodged at Mrs Thornthwaite's in Great Stanhope Street. He seems to have struck up a friendship there with a Miss Ellis, on one occasion inviting her and a Miss Baker to his new lodgings to take tea. On 22nd April he recorded calling '... to see Miss Ellis & found she was out. This is probably the last time I shall ever see her as she leaves Bath for Glamorganshire tomorrow & will not return till the winter, & before that time I shall, I expect, have quitted Bath for London'. Two days later he wrote:

In the afternoon took a walk with a Miss [Susan] Thornthwaite to Sham Castle where she left me to flirt with a tailor and 2 counterjumpers and if I had any regard for her I should have taken offence at it. As it was it made me look rather silly and I'll warrant I don't walk her out again for some time to come ... After Chaple [*sic*] took a walk with Miss Ellis and after I left her took another with Henrietta.

It is not known who Henrietta was, although she was evidently quite a close friend judging by his frequent use of her first name. Immediately prior to leaving Bath for Bristol he described having a 'parting interview with Henrietta too and left her like Niobe all tears but at length comforted her with a promise of seeing her again. NB she's deceived though'. At times he seems to behave remarkably freely with his female friends and acquaintances, although it is difficult to judge the extent to which this was out of the ordinary without knowing the precise circumstances surrounding these relationships or the backgrounds of the women in question. That he was not exactly shy in his dealings with the opposite sex is evident from an encounter with a young woman on the platform of Bath Station:

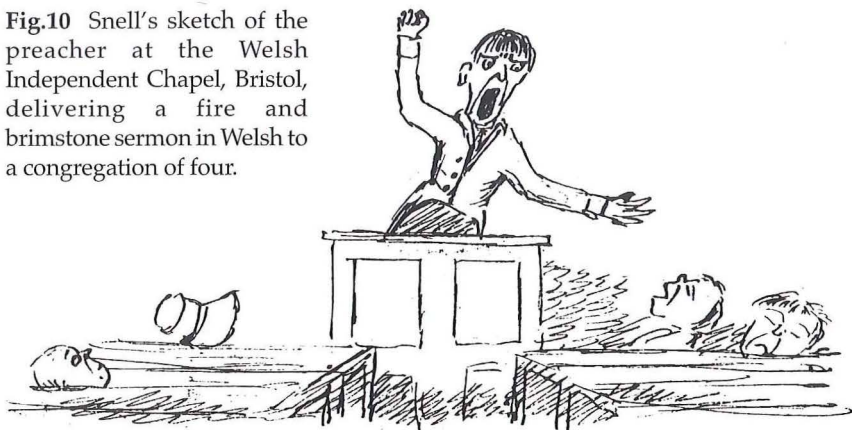
While there observed a nice looking girl waiting as well as myself so got into conversation with her but was soon interrupted by the arrival of the engine puff, puff, puffing away. Laid hold of her hand took her across the rails to the opposite platform, handed her in and took very good care to sit on the next seat to her. All Right – off she goes – cutting along like a sky rocket. In going through the tunnels the engine fellow set the confounded screeching whistle a going which so terrified my fair companion that I was obliged to put my arm around her waist to comfort her and being in total darkness thought there could be no harm in giving her a kiss or two but the tunnel was so confoundedly long at Brislington that by Jove I could hardly make a hundred last all the way through.

He met the 'railway maiden' twice more by chance, but did not see her again.

His life at that time was very much that of a young bachelor determined to enjoy himself to the full, which, in Bath, he was able to do. Snell's attitude to marriage reflected the popular Malthusian belief that settling down was unwise without first having accrued sufficient financial resources: 'Marriage ... is a deuced expensive thing and wont suit me yet these 10 years unless some pretty young lady with a handsome fortune would be kind enough to fall in love with me and then I should have no objection to do the Hymeneal instant'. He would later find life in Swindon very different with its initial lack of recreational and cultural facilities and the almost complete absence of unattached female company. His unhappiness with his single state would in 1847 be expressed in a poem 'The Bachelor's Complaint' written in the album of a friend, Miss Sarah King.³⁵ He eventually married Charlotte Elizabeth Bayley in Geelong, Victoria, on 23rd June 1853 and the couple had nine children, all but the first, Emily Charlotte, surviving to adulthood.³⁶

Snell's attitude to religion was somewhat ambiguous. His parents were Nonconformists and although he was baptised in St Peter's Parish Church in Barnstaple his sisters were all christened at Cross Street Chapel.³⁷ While in Bath he attended a number of chapels including the Methodist Chapel on King Street (rebuilt 1847 by architect James Wilson), the Walcot Methodist Chapel, and the Argyle Chapel of the Independent Congregationalists. He seems not to have been a regular at any one chapel and on occasions was content to attend both Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. He disliked the prevalent evangelical style of preaching and at times found the delivery of fire and brimstone sermons highly amusing (fig. 10 overleaf). Nevertheless his faith was sufficiently strong to engender feelings of guilt when he was unable to attend Chapel: 'this is sad sinful work though – here I am on Sunday morning writing in this journal instead of being at Chaple. Must positively turn over a new leaf & attend more regularly'.

Fig.10 Snell's sketch of the preacher at the Welsh Independent Chapel, Bristol, delivering a fire and brimstone sermon in Welsh to a congregation of four.



However in common with many other Dissenters, including the Stotherts, Snell was very much a free-thinker and liberal, and as such was open to new ideas. At the Avonside Ironworks in Bristol he was to meet Edward Prowse (1824-62), whom Snell called 'one of the respectables'. Prowse introduced Snell to the writings of Thomas Paine and almost succeeded in converting him to deism, prompting something of a crisis of faith. In the early 1870s Snell would gain local notoriety for his conversion to spiritualism, a movement which had spread from America in the 1850s and gained popularity among the middle class and well-educated members of the working class.³⁸

During his time in Bath Snell made a number of local excursions, including a two-day Whitsuntide trip to Bristol and a one-day river journey from Bath to Bristol and back. Prior to setting out on the former, Snell wrote: 'While dressing heard two fellows in the street talking very hard about starvation so has 'em in to breakfast with me and seeing one of them minus a shirt gave him one of mine'. He took the train to Bristol where he was met by an old school friend John or 'Jack' Gillard and the two embarked on a rapid tour of the city's churches. After dinner they took a walk around St Vincent's Rocks, Snell commenting that 'the weather was intensely hot and brought out the Bristolians in their finest toggerly like butterflies'. The next morning he got up early and walked to Cook's Folly where he pulled out his telescope and obtained views of Denny [Island] and the Monmouthshire Hills. He sketched the view towards Bristol including the abutments of the incomplete Clifton Suspension Bridge, as well as the view in the other direction toward the Bristol Channel. After breakfast he went down to Cumberland Basin to see the shipping, catching a glimpse of the 'Mammoth', the 'large Iron steamer building by Acraman' that was later to be named the *Great Britain*.³⁹ He talked his way onto an old steam

packet, the *Nora Creina*, and also got on board the *Queen* and the *Hero*, observing 'I am certain I learnt more of Marine engineering from inspecting those two or three steamers than I should from reading Tredgold in a month'.

In the afternoon he visited Bristol Zoo, noting 'The collection of animals is not very extensive, but they are all kept in capital order'. He also had a ride on an elephant: 'The Elephant was brought out into the lawn and I had a ride on his back which was as rough as a hedge and his walk was nearly as fast as I can run' (fig.11).

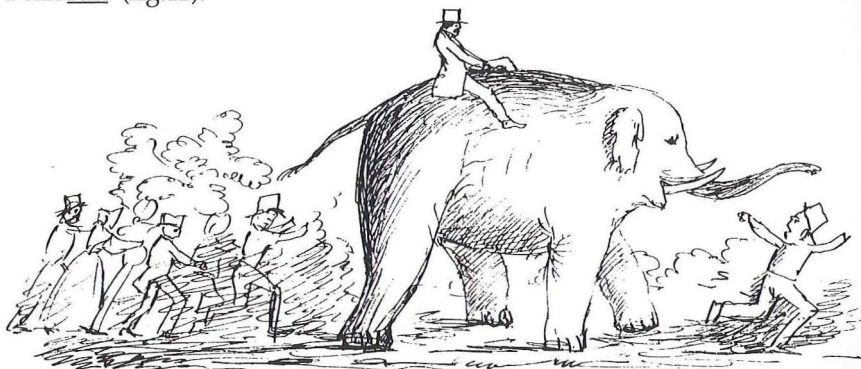


Fig.11 Snell riding an elephant at Bristol Zoo

The next day back in Bath he got up at six and went with two foundry mates Bill and Fred Glass to a boathouse near Bathampton to fetch a rowing boat. They rowed down to Pulteney Bridge and after lifting the boat over the weir proceeded to Dredge's suspension bridge (see fig.8) where they stopped for breakfast at Snell's lodgings. Back on the river they passed through the various locks arriving at the outskirts of Bristol by about 2.00pm (fig.12).⁴⁰

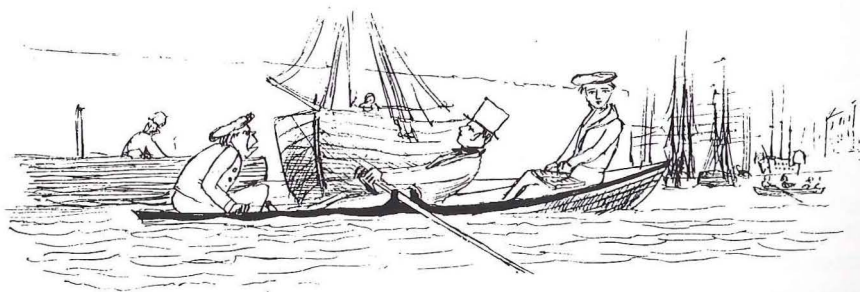


Fig.12 Fred and Bill Glass with Edward Snell (at the oars) among the shipping in Bristol while on a 'pull' from Bath to Bristol, Whitsun 1842.

Reaching a point near Temple Meads Snell recorded that:

Every thing now was subject of wonder & astonishment to Fred Glass [who had never been to Bristol]; the height of the chimneys, the hum of machinery, and the glimpses we got of Engines at work & wheels in motion through the windows of the various factories were constantly subjects of remark, but when we got into the thick of it he was surprised indeed. We had a narrow escape of getting crushed through passing a bridge at the same time as a large Iron barge but luckily escaped without accident. This bit of a job gave Bill Glass the horrors again and he became as nervous as a Toad under a harrow...

On the way back they got into trouble for avoiding the toll at Hanham locks, the irate lockkeeper chasing them for six miles before eventually giving up and treating them '... to a tolerable sample of Bristol abuse'. They got back to Bath at midnight, Snell reckoning he had rowed '... 45 miles ... [and that he was] cold, wet and almost fatigued to death'.

On 18th May 1842 he received a message from Henry Stothert telling him to get himself to Bristol ready for work at the Avonside Ironworks on the following Monday. Snell duly set off on the back of a waggon, noting: 'This was my first removal from Bath and I may say MY FIRST STEP IN LIFE'. The Avonside Ironworks was established in 1837 by Henry Stothert on Avon Street in the industrial area of the city, St Philip's.⁴¹ This heavy engineering works specialised in the production of stationary and marine engines as well as locomotives such as those supplied to the Great Western Railway between 1841-2.⁴² Snell hoped to procure a position as a draughtsman but was instead put to work in the erecting shop. After the more relaxed and friendly atmosphere at Newark Foundry he took an immediate dislike to the gruff manner of the managing engineer Edward Slaughter, who became a partner in the firm in 1840, and particularly to what he viewed as his tyrannical management style, which included a severe system of rules, regulations and fines. He wrote: 'By Jove Rayno was right when he told me I should find a difference when I went into another shop and I should never have believed had I not seen it that in *'Happy England'* tyranny was carried to so great an extent'. Leaving after just three weeks in protest at the regime and low wages (20 shillings per week) he returned home to North Devon where he stayed until February 1843. He was unemployed during this period except for a short spell as a 'quill driver' (clerk) at a bank in Barnstaple. His rapid departure from the Avonside Ironworks resulted in a 'blowing up' from both Henry and George Stothert. However the latter used his influence with Daniel Gooch, the Locomotive Superintendent of the Great Western Railway, to obtain a position for Snell at the Swindon Works on 28th February 1843. Apart from a

four-month stint at Penn's marine engineering works in Greenwich in 1844 Snell remained with the GWR at Swindon until 18th May 1849, by which time he had become deputy works manager in charge of several hundred men and with responsibility for a major new building campaign. When the GWR sought to cut his pay during the post railway mania crash of 1848-9 he left and decided to emigrate. Having settled on the United States he changed his mind at the last minute and instead sailed with his friend Prowse for Australia.

His adventures on the voyage out and his life in Australia and on the Victorian gold diggings are vividly recounted in the published Australian diary (see note 2) the original manuscript of which is now rightly regarded as one of the treasures of the State Library of Victoria. Snell was subsequently appointed Surveyor for the Melbourne-Geelong Railway and built a large railway works at the Geelong terminus. Although he was to make his fortune from this appointment, enough in fact not to have to work for the rest of his life, the post exposed his shortcomings as an engineer.⁴³ Under something of a cloud he sailed with his family for England in 1858, where he settled in Saltash and died there in 1880 aged 59.

Snell's English diary offers fresh insights into the true nature of life for many of Bath's inhabitants in the 1840s. His account of a busy working life is strikingly at odds with the usual descriptions of genteel Bath society, and reflects the changing nature of the city at that time. It puts flesh on the bones of the histories of the period in a way that amounts to a veritable goldmine for the social historian. Above all it is the personal and highly entertaining story of an articulate young artisan eager to make his way in the world. That it is told with wry humour and illustrated by such amusing sketches, at times approaching caricature, only adds to its appeal.

Notes

- 1 The more detailed of the two paintings forms part of the collection of Swindon Museum, Bath Road, Old Town, Swindon. The other version is a slightly later copy held by STEAM: The Museum of The Great Western Railway, Kemble Drive, Swindon. For an account of the origins of the two paintings see John Cattell and Keith Falconer, *Swindon: The Legacy of a Railway Town* (HMSO, 1995; revised ed, English Heritage, Swindon, 2000).
- 2 The 1842-49 diary (the English diary) is in the possession of Snell's great granddaughter and is being edited for publication by the author of this article. The diary is 253 pages long and is 8" x 8" square with cloth boards. The 1849-59 diary (the Australian diary) was lavishly published by Angus & Robertson in 1988 with an excellent introduction. Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell: The illustrated diary of an artist, engineer and adventurer in the Australian Colonies 1849 to 1859*, edited and introduced by Tom Griffiths with assistance from Alan Platt (Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1988). The diary was purchased in 1935 by the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, from a book dealer in Exeter (information from file in Bath Reference Library, accession no. D802236, class B620.0092).

- 3 Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures ...*, pp. 408-9 includes a family tree with details of Snell's ancestors.
- 4 North Devon Record Office (NDRO), Barnstaple Parish Registers.
- 5 NDRO, Index of Barnstaple wills, ref. S 986.
- 6 Hugh Torrens, *The Evolution of a Family Firm: Stothert and Pitt of Bath* (Stothert & Pitt Ltd, Bath, 1978), p.2. See the detailed account of the origins of the Stothert ironmongery and engineering businesses.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.23.
- 8 For a description and plans of the Newark Foundry see Mike Chapman and Elizabeth Holland, 'Stothert's Foundry, Southgate Street, Bath', *BIAS Journal*, 30 (1998), pp.34-38.
- 9 Torrens, *op.cit.*, p.26.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.32. Following Rayno's retirement in 1855 the firm Stothert, Rayno and Pitt became Stothert & Pitt, the name by which the firm is still known. Pitt and Snell were fellow apprentices at the Newark Foundry in the late 1830s-early 1840s.
- 11 Chapman and Holland, *op.cit.*, pp.35-36.
- 12 It is not clear whether this refers to the GWR tunnel at Bathwick or the Kennet & Avon Canal tunnel west of Sydney Gardens.
- 13 *Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography* (Pigot & Co., London and Manchester, 1842).
- 14 L. T. C. Rolt, *Isambard Kingdom Brunel* (Penguin edn, Harmondsworth, 1974), pp.95-96.
- 15 There is no mention of a mill of this name in trade directories although a William Watson, baker and flour dealer, is listed in the *Bath Directory* (Silverstone, Bath, 1841). One elevation of the mill adjoined the river.
- 16 K. H. Rogers, *Wiltshire and Somerset Woollen Mills* (Edington, Wilts., 1976), p.171. See also Nicholas von Behr, 'The Cloth Industry of Twerton from the 1780s to the 1820s', *Bath History*, Vol. VI (Millstream Books, Bath, 1996), pp.88-107.
- 17 The Barrett mentioned by Snell may have been James Barrett, Old Crown Inn and Millwright, Twerton, *Hunt & Co.'s Directory and Court Guide for the Cities of Bath, Bristol & Wells* (1848).
- 18 Thomas Tredgold, *The Steam Engine, its invention and progressive improvement. An investigation of its principles and its application to Navigation, Manufactures and Railways* (revised and enlarged edn with a section on Steam Naval Architecture, edited by W. S. B. Woolhouse, 2 vols., John Weale, 1838).
- 19 The Newbury job may have been for the Kennet & Avon Canal Company, the Stothert's having connections with the canal from the late eighteenth century, Torrens, *op.cit.*, p.11 ff.
- 20 Despite this comment about Rayno the two men enjoyed a cordial relationship. On return trips to Bath Snell often called at the foundry to talk to Rayno and the two travelled to Swindon together on Snell's first day at the GWR Works.
- 21 Snell makes no mention of the cost of his accommodation in Bath but for a week's lodgings at 21 Langton Street in Bristol in May 1842 he paid 13 shillings.
- 22 For more information on Stothert's business interests in Wales see Torrens, *op.cit.*, pp.31-32.
- 23 *The Bath Directory* (Silverstone, Bath, 1837).
- 24 This terrace survives largely intact although its street elevation is much altered.
- 25 Snell was also fascinated by his fellow lodgers in the Swindon railway village and made a number of amusing sketches of them in his diary.

- 26 Henry Stothert was responsible for a number of engineering works at the Hot Baths in the 1830s, for an account of which see Torrens, *op.cit.*, pp.30-31.
- 27 For more on Gully see J. S. Gully, *New Zealand's Romantic Landscape: paintings by John Gully* (Wellington, New Zealand, 1984).
- 28 Philip Gully was staying at the house of William Stothert, the retired ironmonger and brother of Henry, at the time of the 1841 census.
- 29 See Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele University Press, Keele, 1996), pp.87-114.
- 30 R. S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History or a Valley of Pleasure, yet a Sink of Iniquity* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Boston and Henley, 1981), p.347.
- 31 Torrens, *op.cit.*, p.26; *Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography* (Pigot & Co., London and Manchester, 1842).
- 32 Davis and Bonsall, *op.cit.*, p.128.
- 33 William and Frederick Glass are listed as engineers and millwrights, 36 Thomas Street in Hunt & Co.'s *Directory and Court Guide for the Cities of Bath, Bristol & Wells* (1848). The brothers accompanied Snell on a boat trip down the Avon to Bristol and back.
- 34 Davis and Bonsall, *op.cit.*, p.69.
- 35 This album, which has only recently come to light, includes a number of poems by Snell and his sisters. Private collection.
- 36 Marriage certificate in family papers; Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures ...*, pp.408-9.
- 37 NDRO, Barnstaple Parish Registers, Baptisms, 1813-1979; Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures ...*, p.xi.
- 38 Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures ...*, p.xii; S. F. Cooper and P. Atterbury, 'Religion and Doubt', in John M. MacKenzie ed., *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain* (V & A Publications, 2001), p.142.
- 39 Snell's reference on 16th May 1842 to the *Great Britain* being built by Acraman's is perplexing, since according to Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol* (Arrowsmith, Bristol, 1909), p.76, the Great Western Steamship directors built the *Great Britain* in their 'own yard at Wapping [Bristol] because "no existing" ship-builders in the port would tender for the construction of an iron ship nearly three times the capacity of the *Great Western*'. In fact the directors had to provide a yard for this purpose at a cost of £52,000. Snell's attribution is therefore erroneous or refers to some works (the fitting of the engine perhaps?) by Acraman's as sub-contractors. The ship was launched on 19th July 1843, Snell obtaining time off work to attend the event.
- 40 For the history of the Avon Navigation see Brenda J. Buchanan, 'The Avon Navigation and the Inland Port of Bath', *Bath History*, Vol. VI (Millstream Books, Bath, 1996), pp.63-87.
- 41 For an account of the Avonside Ironworks see John Cattell, 'Avonside Ironworks, Bristol', *BIAS Journal*, 30 (1998), pp.13-24.
- 42 In 1842 Stothert & Slaughter supplied 'fixed engines' for the new locomotive works at Swindon, Cattell and Falconer, *op.cit.*, p.27. See also Torrens, *op.cit.*, p.39.
- 43 Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures ...*, pp.xx-xxi.

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