

the steam engine. He invented and used the first steam-driven tilt hammer about 1787. In 1801 he heated the blast for his furnace in a cylinder, thus anticipating Neilson's patent for hot blast in 1828. Curiously enough, he used only a leather "goose neck" connection with the tuyeres, and, as this soon charred, he abandoned the hot blast, without having tried a metal connection. He made cast-iron cannon and took out what is probably the earliest patent for rifling guns.

Wilkinson did more in his time than any other man to lay the foundations of the modern iron trade. Amongst his early followers and successors after his death in 1806, having their own mines, furnaces and ironworks, were:

Samuel Haden Blackwell, of Russells Hall, near Dudley,
and Crookhay, Wednesbury.

The Bagnalls of Wednesbury.

The Lloyds-Fosters of Wednesbury.

The Thornycrofts of Wolverhampton and Bilston.

The Barkers of Chillington Works, Wolverhampton.

The Wards of Priestfields.

The Sparrows of Bilston.

The New British Iron Co. of Cradley.

John Bradley & Co. of Stourbridge and elsewhere.

The Earl of Dudley, Round Oak.

N. Hingley & Sons of Netherton.

William Hatton of Bilston established one of the earliest rolling-mills, at Kidderminster, for tinsplate and sheet iron, and one on the River Stour. These grew in number, and at one time, before the trade went to South Wales, there were several in operation. Mr. George Hatton, his son, is prominent to-day in the Staffordshire world. In 1788 there were nine coal- and coke-fired furnaces in the district, with a total weekly output of 135 tons.