



**BANK OF ENGLAND**

# News release

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29 May 2009

## **Boulton and Watt: the New Faces on £50 Banknotes**

The renowned 18th century business partnership of entrepreneur Matthew Boulton and engineer James Watt provides the historical figures to be portrayed on the Bank of England's redesigned £50 banknotes. Bank of England Governor, Mervyn King, made the announcement this evening when he opened a new exhibition at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery: 'Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the world desires'.

Commenting on the choice, the Governor said, "Just as the Bank of England plays an essential role in the economy as the United Kingdom's central bank, so too did Boulton and Watt's steam engines and their many other innovations as essential factors in the nation's Industrial Revolution. So many of the advantages society now enjoys are due in large part to the vital role of engineering and the brilliance and foresight of people such as Boulton and Watt whose development and refinement of steam engines gave an incredible boost to the efficiency of industry."

"The unique and rare opportunity that the Bank has through its banknotes to acknowledge and promote awareness of our nation's heritage of artistic, social and scientific endeavour is an honour for us. The Bank's choice of Boulton and Watt, a reminder of the invaluable contribution from engineering and the entrepreneurial spirit to the advancement of society, I think, well reflects this."

The Boulton and Watt £50 banknote, to be launched in around eighteen months time, will be the second note in the Series F 'family' which began with the introduction of the Adam Smith £20 note in 2007. Therefore its overall appearance will be similar. But for the first time two portraits will appear together on the reverse of the note, those of Boulton and Watt, along with the image of a steam engine and the Soho (Birmingham) Manufactory. As with the Adam Smith £20 banknote however, continuity is provided with the current portrait of Her Majesty The Queen, which was first used in 1990 and which will be retained on the front of the note. Further details of the design and the range of security features to be included on the new note will be revealed when the new note is launched, within a full promotion and awareness campaign.

Andrew Bailey, the Bank's Executive Director – Banking Services and Chief Cashier, whose signature appears on Bank of England banknotes, also attended the Birmingham exhibition opening. Commenting on the plans for the new £50 banknote, he said, "Not only am I delighted with the proposed design for the

banknote but I am pleased too that the Bank has the opportunity again to introduce advances in anti-counterfeiting measures which have come on stream.”

As new-design banknotes are introduced so the notes they replace are withdrawn - although they can always be exchanged at the Bank of England for their face value. The Boulton and Watt £50 banknote will therefore circulate in tandem with the current £50 banknote first introduced in 1994. This earlier note, which features Sir John Houblon, the first Governor of the Bank of England, will be gradually withdrawn from circulation with the final date for its status as legal tender to be announced in due course.

### **Notes to Editors**

1. An image of the concept design for the reverse of the new note, for media use only, and restricted to illustration of this story only, is available on the Bank's website.

<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/MediaCentre/ssl/login.aspx>

NB Publication of the image is also EMBARGOED to 19:00 hrs BST.

You will need to contact the Bank's Press Office on 020 7601 4411 to obtain login details. After 6pm your call will be forwarded to the Press Officer on duty.

2. The design includes separate portraits of Boulton and Watt, developed from images held by the Bank of England (Bank of England copyright). The image of the Soho Manufactory, where Boulton produced small metalware and which became the first steam-powered mint and another, of the Whitbread steam engine designed by Boulton and Watt and installed by Samuel Whitbread in his London brewery, are worked from images owned by Birmingham City Council. Permission to use these two images was kindly given by the Council. Acknowledgement of the copyright and permission would be appreciated.

3. Background details on Matthew Boulton and James Watt follow at the end of this release.

4. The news release, including the full text of the Governor's opening remarks, will be available after 19:00 hours on the website.

5. The Executive Director – Banking Services and Chief Cashier, Andrew Bailey, has some time available in Birmingham for interviews and photography at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Please contact the Bank's Press Office on 020 7601 4411 to arrange.

6. The Boulton and Watt £50 is the second in Series F with the Adam Smith £20 the first (2007). The Houblon Series E was introduced in 1994. The only previous £50 banknote design was the Wren banknote, introduced in 1981 and withdrawn from circulation in 1996. Prior to this there was a white £50 in issue between 1725 and 1943.

7. At the end of December 2008 there were some 171 million (170,846,025) £50 banknotes in circulation (6.7% of total notes by volume, 18.8% by value); over the whole of 2008 the average figures were 157 million (156,987,390) £50 notes (6.7% of total notes by volume, 18.9% by value).

8. More information on Bank of England banknotes can be found on the [banknote](#) pages.

## **Boulton and Watt – a brief background**

### ***Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) Industrialist and Entrepreneur***

Matthew Boulton was a leading innovating entrepreneur of the Industrial Revolution whose commercial success contributed greatly to the emergence of Birmingham as a thriving industrial centre with an international reputation.

On leaving school he worked in his father's factory which he inherited in 1759. The factory operated in the 'toy' trade of Birmingham, making buckles for shoes and knee-breeches and in 1760, being by then regarded as one of the most eminent and astute Birmingham manufacturers, he represented the buckle makers of Birmingham, Warwick and Wolverhampton before a House of Commons committee. In order to expand his business he had a new factory called the 'Soho Manufactory' built on Handsworth Heath. It became the focus of his activities and a showpiece.

Although concerned at various times with the manufacture of buckles, buttons, silverware in Sheffield plate (a sheet of silver fused to one of copper) and ormolu (gilded brass) ornaments, he was particularly enthused by and was later to become renowned in two fields of activity: the development, production and sale of steam engines and the minting of coins.

In 1775 Boulton went into partnership with James Watt (1736-1819) whose improvements to steam engine design had led to greater efficiency and cheaper running costs. Initially the market for their engines was in the mines of Cornwall but Boulton, spotting the potential in the cotton spinning industry, encouraged Watt to develop an engine suitable for that purpose. By 1800 Boulton was selling far more of this type of engine than the earlier design and the market had become worldwide.

In order to augment the supply of coin provided by the Royal Mint, Boulton established the Soho Mint, and it was there, using steam-driven machinery, that coinage of the highest quality was produced. High definition and high relief together with a truly consistent appearance was now possible using the power of steam.

His lively intellectual curiosity - he was a prominent member of the Lunar Society - had led him to examine the relationship between science and industry and to focus on the organisation of production. The partnership with Watt was not simply that of entrepreneur and inventor: Boulton made many suggestions for improving Watt's engines and his enterprises made a huge contribution to the progress of the Industrial Revolution.

### ***James Watt (1736-1819) Engineer and Scientist***

James Watt was the great improver, not the inventor, of the steam engine. While repairing a Newcomen steam engine he was struck by the considerable steam wastage inherent in its design and realised that it could be made more efficient by condensing the spent steam in a separate chamber thereby allowing the

cylinder to remain hot. Furthermore, less fuel would be needed to generate the steam. Progress in its development was slow until he entered into partnership with Matthew Boulton in 1775.

Watt was also involved in several civil engineering projects, the most significant of which was a survey and estimate in 1773 for a canal between Fort William and Inverness. The canal was constructed in the early 19th century and named the Caledonian Canal.

He joined the Lunar Society of Birmingham (to which Matthew Boulton also belonged) which had fourteen members, several of whom were destined to become Fellows of the Royal Society. The principle behind such literary and philosophical societies was that self-improvement could be achieved through conversation. In Watt's case he was, of course, interested in the measurement of heat, the theory of latent heat and the expansive properties of steam.

The great market for steam engines was the textile industry and Boulton urged Watt to develop an engine suitable for this purpose, which he did in 1774 although it was not patented until 1781.

Watt continued inventing until the end of his life, particularly focusing his energies on innovations that would allow the power from the engines to be harnessed more effectively. He introduced the term 'horsepower' and the metric unit of power is named after him.

Remarks at the Opening of "Matthew Boulton: selling what all the world desires" by Mervyn King  
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive/Documents/historicpubs/news/2009/governorremarks090529.pdf>