The Industrial Revolution

in Great Britain

**Part Two**



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Work, Health, Housing and Working People in the City of Manchester

#### THE WORKING PEOPLE OF MANCHESTER

Despite the growing wealth due to trade and commerce, prosperity lay in the hands of very few of Manchester's residents.

The working people, who actually produced the wealth, lived, worked and died in conditions of the most desperate poverty and degradation.

Innumerable reports and surveys were carried out during the 19th century, and they all told much the same story: poor wages, impossibly long working hours, dangerous and unsanitary working conditions, even more unsanitary dwellings, little or no health provisions, high infant mortality and a short life expectancy.

A map of Manchester showing age of death figures in the mid-nineteenth century revealed that life expectancy was directly related to wealth.

Put simply, the poor died younger and the rich lived longer. At that time, Ancoats [Manchester’s poorest neighborhood] was the death black spot of Manchester.

Records show that by 1830 there were over 560 cotton mills in Lancashire, employing more than 110,000 workers, of which 35,000 were children - some as young as six years of age.

Wages for children were about 2s.3d. (two shillings and three pence) per week (about 20 cents), but adults were paid about 10 times more.

Hence, it made economic sense to employ as many children and as few adults as possible, and this is exactly what happened. Youngest children were employed to crawl beneath machinery (while still in operation) to gather up loose cotton - they were known as "scavengers" and many died by getting caught up in machinery.

Those that survived to adulthood had permanent stoops or were crippled from the prolonged crouching that the job entailed.

The typical working day was 14 hours long, but many were much longer, as, without regulation, unscrupulous mill owners could demand any terms they liked.

##### MANCHESTER - VICTORIAN ATTITUDES

Any attention that the plight of working people drew from a wider middle class public was generally disparaging and attitudes tended to be *laisser faire*.

The poor were regarded as an underclass, whose degradation was largely their own fault; frequently it was stated that God wished them to be poor; they were a semi-class of probable criminal tendencies.

Victorians distinguished between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor. Widows, orphans, old people and those whose sickness rendered them incapable of work were regarded as deserving and could receive help through the system of Poor Houses, degrading though these were.

The other poor or unemployed were regarded as undeserving and, without any social support system in place, were left entirely to their own devices.

Acquired wealth, on the other hand, was commonly seen as a visible sign of virtue: the poor were bad, the rich were good - it was a natural order. Another popular concept was that if one worked hard, this would be rewarded by an increase in wealth.

##### POPULATION GROWTH IN MANCHESTER

Manchester saw exponential population growth during the early 19th century - while London's population doubled, Manchester's trebled! Here are figures for population growth in Manchester, based on local period censuses:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1717:** | c10,000 |   | **1821:** | 126,066 |
| **1758:** | c17,000 |   | **1831:** | 182,016 |
| **1773:** | 22,481 |   | **1841:** | 235,507 |
| **1801:** | 75,281 |   | **1851:** | 303,382 |
| **1811:** | 89,068 |   | **1971:** | 351,189 |

##### WORKERS' HOUSING IN MANCHESTER

By and large the workers lived near and around their workplace, and the wealthy lived a few miles outside the city in their garden suburbs. Houses were "jerry" built, without control or regulation of any kind. Builders, usually the employer, would build so as to cram as many houses as possible into the space available.

There was no water or services, and no attempt to provide privacy of any kind. People worked in shifts and shared beds. Ten or twelve people could share the one bedroom, and up to 100 houses shared the one "privy [toilet]" - usually a deep hole dug in the corner of a yard, or a "midden" - a trash heap against a wall.

Houses were damp - there were no damp-proof courses, and no double brick walls. Rain leeched through walls, and even in dry summers, damp rose up the walls. The only relief from damp was the building of cellars to contain it. However, these cellars inevitably became dwellings for subtenants.

Manchester and Salford's cellar dwellings were the root of most health problems, and became a national disgrace. "The Builder" magazine of 1864 illustrated the worst dwellings, and many celebrated figures emerged to urge for improvement of the lot of working people.

John Kay published *"The Moral and Physical Conditions of the working Classes"* in 1832, [Engels](http://www.manchester2002-uk.com/celebs/politicians3.html) wrote his well-known *"The Condition of the Working Class in England"* in 1844 based on the plight of the Manchester underclass, and in 1842 Edwin Chadwick published his *"Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population"*. 'Official' paupership figures for the "Township of Manchester" were the highest in Britain - higher even than in London's east end.

**LABOR & WAGES**

Average wages in 19th century Manchester were well below subsistence level. A report by Fred Scott for the Manchester Statistical Society in 1889 found that over 40% of working men interviewed in Salford were "irregularly employed", and that 61% could be defined as "very poor" with a weekly income of less than 4 shillings (20p) per week.

The main problem was casual labor. Payments from the Manchester & Salford District Provident Society's Poverty Fund in the winter of 1878-79 revealed that the vast majority of qualifying applicants were casual and seasonal workers - among them were warehousemen, builder's laborers, general laborers, storemen and transport men - most of these were of Irish descent. In the days before any welfare provision, there was no sick pay - if you couldn't work, you weren't paid.
Many people worked up to 14 hours a day for 7 days a week; a few "benevolent" employers allowed a 6 day week with compulsory church attendance on the seventh.

## MANCHESTER'S IMMIGRANT POPULATION

Immigrants also formed a large proportion of the poor. By 1851, Irish immigrants comprised around 15% of the city's poor. Half of the people registered in the New Bridge Street Workhouse in the 180s and 1890s were Irish Catholics. Most lived in Ancoats, (40% Irish according to the 1900 census), probably the poorest and most deprived area of the city. A small area of Chorlton on Medlock was also known as "Little Italy" on account of the large numbers of immigrant Italians who lived there in a sort of ghetto situation. They formed the largest section of the vast casual labour force, which put to hard long hours when trade was good, were first to be laid off in leaner times. They formed the largest part of the Smithfield Market labour force, comprised the majority of the city's street sellers and hawkers, dominated the building trade and figured largely in domestic service (females in particular).

#### DISEASE & HEALTH ISSUES IN VICTORIAN MANCHESTER

Manchester had become a very unhealthy place to live in. Coal burning domestic fires and innumerable factory chimneys meant that the city was overhung with a permanent pall of smoke, drenched with acid rain, and suffered plagues of respiratory diseases (bronchitis, influenza, pneumonia, asthma, as well as other industrial dust-related diseases).

Life expectancy of a working man in Salford in the 1870s could be as little as 17 years. While the opening of some hospitals after 1850 and the application of public health measures saw a fast decline in infectious diseases such as small pox, scarlet fever and other communicable diseases, there were still many endemic diseases which plagued working people.

In sewage disposal, the city had little or no policy until the late 19th century. Ashpits and communal cesspits were common, and they overflowed in rainy periods, and had to be emptied and carted away. This was, however, rarely done. There were frequent official accounts of "midden" overflowing into the cellars in which a large number of workers lived, with no attempt made to relieve the problem.

Even by 1907 only about one-third of the city's privvies were water closets (bathrooms). Such water closets as there were before the 1870s simply ran directly into the Irwell, from which most people obtained their drinking water. Cholera was a common summer visitor to the city. The Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association was formed in 1852 to promote public health and sanitary reform. They had a vigorous programme which included distributing thousands of tracts (though few poor people could read), and delivering hundreds of public lectures. They also created isolation hospitals for the worst diseases. Despite all this the city's health failed to improve.

But it was the airborne diseases which accounted for the greatest mortality figures. Pulmonary Tuberculosis killed most people in Manchester.

The highest death risk areas of the city were all inner city zones, occupied by the working poor. It was not until the 1850s that relatively clean drinking water came into the city from the completion of Longendale reservoir, (though ordinary people had to queue at street standpipes to obtain it), and that Thirlmere in the Lake District was added to the system in the 1890s. These measures had a significant impact in improving the health of the city's residents. Cholera and typhoid were virtually wiped out at a stroke.

Things were no better in the working mills of Lancashire. "Mill Fever", aching head, limbs and nausea was common. Workers usually developed tuberculosis, bronchitis and asthma due to cotton lint and dust which hung in the air - there were, of course, no health or safety precautions or safeguards in place.

#### INFANT MORTALITY IN VICTORIAN MANCHESTER

The main killer of children was diarrhoea. Despite greatly improved water supplies, the main threat still came from backyard middens, insect borne germs, inadequate washing facilities, poor food hygiene, and from a very poor diet. Manchester's slow rate of conversion to water closets and sewage disposal were at the root of its extraordinarily high infant death figures. Many middens and privvies were still in use well into the early 1900s.

**HEALTH REFORMS**

Not until later in the century did significant health reforms improve the lot and the longevity of working people. New sewers and sewage treatment plants and the appointment of Manchester's first Medical Officer of Health in 1868, who closed down virtually all of the city's cellar dwellings, made great improvements to the health and well-being of ordinary people. The creation of public bath houses and

**primary documents for a debate on child labor**

**during the British Industrial Revolution**

**Scavengers**

The youngest children in the textile factories were usually employed as scavengers and piecers. Scavengers had to pick up the loose cotton from under the machinery. This was extremely dangerous as the children were expected to carry out the task while the machine was still working. [David Rowland](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRrowland.htm), worked as a scavenger in [Manchester](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ITmanchester.htm): "The scavenger has to take the brush and sweep under the wheels, and to be under the direction of the spinners and the piecers generally. I frequently had to be under the wheels, and in consequence of the perpetual motion of the machinery, I was liable to accidents constantly. I was very frequently obliged to lie flat, to avoid being run over or caught."

**Food in the Factory**

Factory owners were responsible for providing their pauper apprentices with food. [Sarah Carpenter](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRcarpenter.htm) was a child worker at [Cressbrook Mill](http://www.peakdistrictinformation.com/towns/cressbrook.php): "Our common food was oatcake. It was thick and coarse. This oatcake was put into cans. Boiled milk and water was poured into it. This was our breakfast and supper. Our dinner was potato pie with boiled bacon it, a bit here and a bit there, so thick with fat we could scarce eat it, though we were hungry enough to eat anything. Tea we never saw, nor butter. We had cheese and brown bread once a year. We were only allowed three meals a day though we got up at five in the morning and worked till nine at night."

**Punishment**

Children were also punished for arriving late for work and for talking to the other children. [Joseph Hebergram](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRhebergam.htm) pointed out: "if we were five minutes too late, the overlooker would take a strap, and beat us till we were black and blue." [Sarah Carpenter](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRcarpenter.htm) was beaten on a regular basis: "There was an overlooker called William Hughes... He came up to me and asked me what my drawing frame was stopped for. I said I did not know because it was not me who had stopped it. A little boy that was on the other side had stopped it, but he was too frightened to say it was him. Hughes starting beating me with a stick, and when he had done I told him I would let my mother know. He then went out and fetched the master in to me. The master started beating me with a stick over the head till it was full of lumps and bled. My head was so bad that I could not sleep for a long time, and I never been a sound sleeper since."

**Deformities**

Dr. Samuel Smith was one of those who gave evidence to Sadler's committee in Parliament: "Up to twelve or thirteen years of age, the bones are so soft that they will bend in any direction. The foot is formed of an arch of bones of a wedge-like shape. These arches have to sustain the whole weight of the body. I am now frequently in the habit of seeing cases in which this arch has given way. Long continued standing has also a very injurious effect upon the ankles. But the principle effects which I have seen produced in this way have been upon the knees. By long continued standing the knees become so weak that they turn inwards, producing that deformity which is called knock-knees and I have sometimes seen it so striking, that the individual has actually lost twelve inches of his height by it."

One on the major complaints made by factory reformers concerned the state of the buildings that they children were forced to work in. Dr. Ward, who visited textile factories in [Manchester](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ITmanchester.htm) in 1819 wrote: "I have had frequent opportunities of seeing people coming out from the factories and occasionally attending as patients. Last summer I visited three cotton factories with Dr. Clough of Preston and Mr. Barker of Manchester and we could not remain ten minutes in the factory without gasping for breath. How it is possible for those who are doomed to remain there twelve or fifteen hours to endure it? If we take into account the heated temperature of the air, and the contamination of the air, it is a matter of astonishment to my mind, how the work people can bear the confinement for so great a length of time."

**Pollution**

Most young workers complained of feeling sick during their first few weeks of working in a factory. [Robert Blincoe](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRblincoe.htm) said he felt that the dust and flue was suffocating him. This initial reaction to factory pollution became known as mill fever. Symptoms included sickness and headaches. Frank Forrest, a child worker in [Dundee](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ITdundee.htm), reported: "About a week after I became a mill boy, I was seized with a strong, heavy sickness, that few escape on first becoming factory workers. The cause of the sickness, which is known by the name of "mill fever", is the contaminated atmosphere produced by so many breathing in a confined space, together with the heat and exhalations of grease and oil and the gas needed to light the establishment."

Sir Anthony Carlile, a doctor at Westminster Hospital visited some textile mills in 1832. He later gave evidence to the House of Commons on the dangers that factory pollution was causing for the young people working in factories: "labour is undergone in an atmosphere heated to a temperature of 70 to 80 and upwards". He pointed out that going from a "very hot room into damp cold air will inevitably produce inflammations of the lungs".

**Accidents**

Unguarded machinery was a major problem for children working in factories. One hospital reported that every year it treated nearly a thousand people for wounds and mutilations caused by machines in factories.

[Michael Ward](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRward.htm), a doctor working in [Manchester](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ITmanchester.htm) told a parliamentary committee in 1819: "When I was a surgeon in the infirmary, accidents were very often admitted to the infirmary, through the children's hands and arms having being caught in the machinery; in many instances the muscles, and the skin is stripped down to the bone, and in some instances a finger or two might be lost. Last summer I visited Lever Street School. The number of children at that time in the school, who were employed in factories, was 106. The number of children who had received injuries from the machinery amounted to very nearly one half. There were forty-seven injured in this way." [John Allett](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRallett.htm) reported: "I have known more accidents at the beginning of the day than at the later part. I was an eye-witness of one. A child was working wool, that is, to prepare the wool for the machine; but the strap caught him, as he was hardly awake, and it carried him into the machinery; and we found one limb in one place, one in another, and he was cut to bits; his whole body went in, and was mangled." In 1842 a German visitor noted that he had seen so many people in the streets of [Manchester](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ITmanchester.htm) without arms and legs that it was like "living in the midst of the army just returned from a campaign."