

MANCHESTER IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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THE following “delightful if somewhat ungrammatical” description of Manchester, as it has been called, is given at the base of an engraving entitled *The South-West Prospect of Manchester in the County Palatine of Lancaster*, published by S. and N. Buck in 1728 :

Manchester is neither Borough nor Corporation, but a spacious, rich and populous Inland Town in the Hundred of Salford and South East part of Lancashire. Situate upon a Rocky Cliff, at the confluence of the Rivers Irk and Irwell, [?which] add much pleasure to its healthfull soil, which is most part Gravelly. It is a Mannour with Courts Leet and Baron ; which at the decease of the present Lady Dowager Bland will devolve to Sir Oswald Mosley, Barrrt. Tis governed by two Constables, annually chosen in the Court Leet at Michlms : Tis famous for the Woollen, Linnen and Cotton Manufactories, whereby it's immensely enriched and many 100 poor Families employed from several Counties. This Town is adorned with many noted buildings . . . and with handsom broad Streets both New and Old ; And a large Bridge over the River Irwell which joyneth Salford, a populous, Beautiful Town, giving name to the Hundred, and seemeth as a Suburb thereto. The Exchange now building by Sir Oswald and the River Irwell falling into the Mersey, communicateth with Liverpool which (by their expence and labour) hath gained a considerable progress and is soon expected to be made navigable.¹

What was the size of the urban community known as Manchester in the latter half of the eighteenth century? As the late A. P. Wadsworth remarked : “the early estimates of the population of Manchester are remarkable for nothing more than their variety.”² Our difficulties are increased by confusion

¹ Quoted by J. Lee in *Maps and Plans of Manchester and Salford, 1650 to 1843* (1957), pp. 10-11.

² A. P. Wadsworth and J. de L. Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1780* (1931), pp. 509-11, Appendix A : “The Growth of Manchester” ; Dr. J. Aikin, *A Description of the Country from thirty to forty miles round Manchester* (1795) pp. 155-7 ; P. Mantoux, *The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century* (1928), pp. 365-6.

between the *ecclesiastical parish* of Manchester, which covered sixty square miles, and the *civil township* of Manchester which had a much smaller area. In addition, a distinction was sometimes made by eighteenth-century writers between the *township* of Manchester and the *town* of Manchester, i.e. the built-up area inside the township. Another frequent source of confusion is a reluctance to quote separate figures for Manchester and Salford. For example, in 1773 Dr. Percival quoted an estimate of 1717 which gave the population in that year as 8,000, but he was uncertain whether Salford was included or not. Certain returns made to the Bishop of Chester about 1717 suggest that Manchester had a population of 10,000 and Salford one of 2,500. In the latter half of the eighteenth century more trustworthy figures are available. In 1758 an enumeration of the population of Manchester took place as the result of a dispute about the manorial corn-mill rights and the figure of 17,101 was obtained for the township. The population had therefore roughly doubled in the previous fifty years. According to Percival, the rate of increase became more rapid after 1765 and in 1773-4 a further "enumeration of the houses and inhabitants of the town and parish of Manchester" was taken "by a person employed for the purpose, and at the joint expence of a few gentlemen in the town". The manuscript volumes of this return are now preserved in Chetham's Library and John Whitaker expressed his belief in a note written in one of them that this enumeration was "sufficiently accurate for every literary or political use". The township of Manchester by then contained 24,386 persons in 5,678 families. In the period of recovery after the commercial crisis of 1771-2 "the town extended on every side, and such was the influx of inhabitants, that though a great number of houses were built, they were occupied even before they were finished".¹ Manchester's rising prosperity had not therefore been seriously checked by the War of American Independence. Nevertheless, the war and its aftermath did aggravate certain social problems. Dr. Henry remarked on the increased incidence of fever during

¹ Dr. Thomas Henry, "Observations on the Bills of Mortality for the towns of Manchester and Salford", *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, iii (1795), 160.

1783-5 as compared with 1780-2, and considered that it was probably due to

. . . the crowded and uncleanly manner, in which the poorer people have been lodged, owing to the want of houses to accommodate them : for, though, many have been erected, yet several causes have contributed to restrain the spirit of building. During the war, the high price of timber was a considerable obstacle ; and since the peace, the frosts, which were, for two years together, very intense, and continued until the spring was far advanced, have prevented the making of bricks, and together with the tax, greatly enhanced their price.¹

By Christmas 1788 the population of Manchester township had further increased to 42,821.² Less than thirteen years later, when the first nation-wide census was taken (1801), there had been another spectacular rise to 70,409. It was little wonder that on his visit to Manchester in 1784 Monsieur de Givry, member of a group of French visitors engaged in industrial espionage, could write that Manchester was a " large and superb town . . . which has been built almost entirely in the past 20 to 25 years ".³

We can distinguish three main direct causes of this spectacular rise. First of all there was immigration into Manchester. This influx consisted mainly of persons in the prime of life, with their young families. Most of them came from the districts immediately surrounding the town, attracted by the jobs on offer in one of the growing points of the British economy. But there was also an appreciable volume of long-distance immigration, particularly from Scotland and Ireland. The number of Scottish names in the Manchester and Salford directories increases rapidly after the 1770s⁴ and many of the doctors and surgeons attached to the Infirmary were Scots.⁵

Secondly, there was a natural increase, the surplus of births over deaths. Although the death rate was high by modern

¹ Henry, *op. cit.* iii, 161-2.

² Aikin, *op. cit.* p. 157. See also W. Brockbank, *Portrait of a Hospital, 1752-1948* (1952), p. 213, Appendix III : " Population of Manchester ".

³ *Archives Nationales*, Paris, T 591 : 4 et 5.

⁴ J. T. Crofton, " The Scots and Manchester after the '45," *Trans. Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, xxvi, 1908 (1909), pp. 65-95 ; W. H. Chaloner, " John Galloway (1804-1894) . . . ", *ibid.* lxiv (1954), 93-4.

⁵ E. M. Brockbank, *Sketches of the Lives and Work of the Honorary Medical Staff of the Manchester Infirmary . . . 1752 to 1830* (1904), *passim*.

standards, so was the birth rate, and there seems little evidence that the death rate was rising between 1750 and 1800. Towards the end of the eighteenth century a substantial excess of births over deaths appears to have occurred every year. For the three years 1765, 1766 and 1767 the Manchester and Salford bills of mortality (for what they are worth) show an annual average of 900 baptisms and 811 burials, whereas for the three years 1783, 1784 and 1785 the corresponding figures are 1,838 and 1,468.¹ The figures for 1791 are 2,960 births and 2,286 deaths.²

Thirdly, as the eighteenth century wore on, increasing supplies of food were available. This had not always been the case. 1756, 1757 and 1758, for example, were years of high food prices and food riots in Manchester, the price of oatmeal, the staple diet of the population, reaching a peak of 39s. 6d. per load of 240 lb. early in 1757, compared with less than 20s. a load in 1753. There were food riots in the town in 1762.³ The miseries of these years, however, do not seem to be paralleled again, in spite of the vastly increased population, until 1812 brought the notorious Shudehill potato riot.⁴ The reasons can be sought in improved communications, which enabled food to be brought into the Manchester markets from an ever-widening area, and secondly the introduction of new foods, of which the most

¹ Henry, *op. cit.* pp. 163-4. Henry gives the triennial figures for the whole period 1765-85. The baptisms for 1786 and 1787 were 2,219 and 2,256 respectively and the burials 1,282 and 1,761 respectively (*ibid.* p. 173). The bills of mortality for the *township* of Manchester from 1580 to 1832 are printed in E. Baines, *The history of the County Palatine and Duchy of Lancaster* (edn. of 1868 by J. Harland), i. 346-8. The last year in which they show an excess of burials over baptisms is 1766. Baines stated in 1836 that they had been "extracted from the registers of the Collegiate Church to the year 1821; and subsequent to that time from those registers and the register of the Rusholme Road Cemetery combined". He went on: "There are also funerals at other churches and chapels in the town, fluctuating from 500 to 1,000 a year" (*op. cit.* p. 348, n. 2). For criticisms of these and the Parish Register Abstract figures for Manchester see Barbara Hammond, "Urban death-rates in the early nineteenth century" (*Economic History*, no. 3, Supplement to the *Economic Journal*, January 1928, pp. 419-28 and esp. pp. 424-6).

² Aikin, *op. cit.* p. 157.

³ Wadsworth and Mann, *op. cit.* pp. 355-78.

⁴ J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer, 1760-1832* (1920), pp. 287-9.

useful was the potato. But the potato was not alone—it was merely the most spectacular addition to the diet. Dr. John Aikin wrote in 1795 :

The supply of provision to this populous town and neighbourhood is a circumstance well deserving of notice. Formerly, oatmeal, which was the staple article of diet of the labouring class in Lancashire, was brought from Stockport ; . . . Since that time, the demand for corn and flour has been increasing to a vast amount, and new sources of supply have been opened from distant parts by the navigations, so that monopoly or scarcity cannot be apprehended, though the price of these articles must always be high in a district which produces so little and consumes so much.

Early cabbages, and cucumbers for pickling, are furnished by gardeners about Warrington ; early potatoes, carrots, peas, and beans, from the sandy land on and about Bowden downs. Potatoes, now a most important auxiliary to bread in the diet of all classes, are brought from various parts, especially from about Runcorn and Frodsham, by the duke of Bridgewater's canal. Apples, which form a considerable and valuable article of the diet even of the poor in Manchester, used in pies or puddings, are imported from the distance of the cyder counties by means of the communicating canals, and in such quantities, that upwards of 3000*l.* in a year has been paid for their freight alone. The articles of milk and butter, which used to be supplied by the dairy-farmers in the vicinity, at moderate rates, are now, from the increase of population, become as dear as in the metropolis, and are furnished in a similar manner ; viz. the milk, by means of milk houses in the town, which contract for it by the great, and retail it out ; and the butter from considerable distances, as well as salt butter from Ireland and other places. Of butcher's meat, veal and pork are mostly brought by country butchers and farmers ; mutton and beef are slaughtered by the town butchers, the animals being generally driven from a distance, except the milch cows of the neighbourhood, which are fattened when old. The supply of meat and poultry is sufficiently plentiful on market days ; but on other days it is scarcely possible to procure beef from the butchers ; nor is poultry to be had at any price, there being no such trade as a poulterer in the whole town. Wild fowl of various kinds are brought to market in the season.

With fish, Manchester is better provided than might be expected from its inland situation. The greatest quantity of sea-fish comes from the Yorkshire coast, consisting of large cod, lobsters, and turbots, of which last, many are sent even to Liverpool, on an overflow of the market. Soles, chiefly of a small size, come from the Lancashire coast. Salmon are brought in plenty from the rivers Mersey and Ribble, principally the latter. The rivers in the neighbourhood abound in trout, and in what is called *brood*, which are young salmon from one to two years old, and not easily distinguished from trout, which they closely resemble in shape, but are more delicate to the taste. Salmon trout is also plentiful, and likewise fine eels. The Irwell at Manchester and for some distance below is, however, destitute of fish, the water being poisoned by liquor flowing in from the dye-houses. Many ponds and old marl-pits in the neighbourhood are well stored with carp and tench, and pike and other fresh water fish are often brought to market. The poor have a welcome addition to their usual fare, in

the herrings from the Isle of Man, which in the season are brought in large quantities, and are sold at a cheap rate.¹

The movement of foodstuffs into Manchester on this scale could not be effected without major changes in local transport facilities. Lancashire in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was notorious for its bad roads, supplemented by the famous paved causeways of stones raised above the level of the fields, which were just wide enough for horses but too narrow for wheeled traffic.

Improvement began, however, as far as the Manchester area was concerned, in the early eighteenth century. In 1738 a local historian wrote that there were causeways "everywhere about Manchester . . . of a common breadth and kept in good repair by the extraordinary care of the proper officers".² It is significant that the first road in Lancashire to be placed under the administration of a turnpike trust was the stretch from Manchester to Stockport. This road formed part of the Manchester to Buxton trust set up by Act of Parliament in 1725. In 1732 the Manchester-Ashton-under-Lyne-Mottram road was turnpiked, and this was followed three years later by the Manchester-Oldham-Austerlands road. For most of the second half of the eighteenth century there was great activity in road improvement in south-east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire. But roads formed only a part of the transport facilities of the area. We have seen that S. and N. Buck remarked in 1728 on the work then in progress with a view to rendering the Rivers Mersey and Irwell navigable up to Hunt's Bank under an Act of Parliament passed in 1721. The men who directed and financed this task included members of the chief trading families of this area—John Lees of Clarksfield, Oldham, Joseph Byrom, a wealthy mercer, James Lightbowne, a woollen draper, and also

¹ *Op. cit.* pp. 203-5. Further details concerning the supply of potatoes to Manchester are given by R. N. Salaman, "The oxnoble potato . . .", *Trans. Lancs. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, lvi (1954), 66-82. For the growth of the wholesale trade in foodstuffs in the nineteenth century see H. B. Wilkinson, *Old Hanging Ditch: its trades, its traders and its renaissance* (1910) *passim*, and J. T. Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester fifty years ago* (1881), *passim*.

² Quoted in G. H. Tupling, "The turnpike trusts of Lancashire", *Mem. and Proc. Manchester Lit. and Phil. Soc.*, xciv (1952-3), p. 2.

the "chief linen drapers" of Manchester.¹ Although the two rivers were rendered navigable as far as Manchester by the early 1730s, the project yielded no profit to its proprietors for many years.² Then in 1737 seven landowners and merchants from Manchester and the neighbourhood obtained a second Act empowering them to deepen and render navigable Worsley brook, down to its junction with the Irwell. Some, if not all, of this second set of "undertakers" seem to have been connected with the Mersey and Irwell river navigation. But the scheme did not materialize and a plan put forward by a group of Manchester men for a canal from Manchester to Leigh and Wigan in 1753-4, i.e. five years before the Duke of Bridgewater's project, also came to nothing.³

The story of the third Duke of Bridgewater's canal enterprise, which brought his Worsley coal to Castlefield in the heart of Manchester by 1764,⁴ has frequently been told. By reducing the price of coal, it certainly made Manchester a more comfortable place to live in. But more important was the extension of the Duke's canal across north Cheshire to Runcorn on the Mersey, opened throughout in 1776. Not only did this extension make it possible to send north Cheshire potatoes into Manchester, but it also provided a means of sending raw cotton from the West Indies, and later from the Southern States of the U.S.A., into south-east Lancashire via Liverpool. We must not, however, exaggerate Manchester's dependence on coal supplies from the Worsley pits. The Bradford colliery in East Manchester was sunk in the 1760s, and Dr. Aikin had this to say about the sources from which Manchester drew its supplies in the early 1790s :

The supply of coals to Manchester is chiefly derived from the pits about Oldham, Ashton, Dukinfield, Hyde, Newton, Denton, etc. . . . The supply from the

¹ T. S. Willan, *River Navigation in England, 1600-1750* (1936), pp. 30, 37-8, 59-61.

² H. Clegg, "The third Duke of Bridgewater's canal works in Manchester", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.* lxxv (1955), 92.

³ V. I. Tomlinson, "Salford activities connected with the Bridgewater Canal", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.* lxxvi (1956), 53-5.

⁴ Clegg, *op. cit.* pp. 94-5. The canal was not, as is often stated, opened throughout to Manchester in 1761.

duke of Bridgewater's pits at Worsley is less considerable, though a very useful addition for the poor.¹

The industries of Manchester, and the fortunes of the merchants and wholesale manufacturers who directed them have only received fragmentary treatment at the hands of economic historians. It is true that we have that classic work *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1780* (1931) by the late A. P. Wadsworth and Miss Julia de Lacy Mann, and Professor Redford's *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade, 1794-1858* (1934). But it is curious that in a recent article on "The Merchants in England in the Eighteenth Century"² by Mr. Walter E. Minchinton, the Manchester merchants are nowhere mentioned, although it was mainly through their efforts and those of their agents that the official value of British exports of cotton goods was pushed up from practically nothing in 1751 (£45,986) to £200,000 by 1764, and to nearly £5½ million by 1800, a figure almost equal to that for woollen and worsted cloth, linens, ribbons and mixed cloths of linen and cotton.³ These men financed the spinners and weavers of south-east Lancashire by supplying them with raw materials and yarns. They also saw to the bleaching, dyeing and finally the printing of the goods they had made. Their activities tended to diminish the other local wholesale markets such as that of Bolton.⁴ But this was not the whole range of Manchester's industries. Silk throwing and silk weaving flourished in the late eighteenth century and so did the manufacture of hats.

Then from the 1770s came the boom in cotton associated

¹ Op. cit. p. 205.

² *The Entrepreneur: papers presented at the Annual Conference of the Economic History Society . . . 1957, 1957* (Research Centre in Entrepreneurial History, Harvard).

³ E. Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*, (1835), p. 215; Charles Wilson, "The entrepreneur in the Industrial Revolution in Britain", *History*, xlii, no. 145 (June 1957), p. 108. Little has been published on the history of Manchester banking since L. H. Grindon's *Manchester Banks and Bankers* (1877), but mention should be made of T. S. Ashton's article on "The Bill of Exchange and Private Banks in Lancashire, 1790-1830", *Econ. Hist. Rev.* xv (1945), 25-35.

⁴ Aikin, op. cit. p. 158; [James Ogden,] *A Description of Manchester* (1783), p. 46.

with the great inventions and the beginnings of the factory system. The first cotton factory in Manchester appears to have been that built in the early 1780s by the famous Sir Richard Arkwright, in partnership with Messrs. Simpson and Whittenbury. It stood on Shudehill and was noteworthy because the warp-spinning frame was driven by water power supplemented by a single-acting pumping engine of the Newcomen type. This replenished the water wheel's reservoir by pumping back into it the water which had passed over the wheel. Some of the wholesale buyers who supplied goods both to home and overseas markets followed the example of Arkwright and began to invest profits made from merchanting in mechanized cotton spinning. Such a man was Peter Drinkwater (? 1742-1801) who in the 1770s was a wholesale fustian manufacturer, living in Spring Gardens, with a warehouse in King Street, and an extensive trade overseas. In the 1780s Drinkwater began to transmute some of the capital he had accumulated as a textile middleman into industrial capital. Some time in the 1780s he purchased or set up a water-driven cotton spinning mill at Northwich in Cheshire for the production of warps and in 1789 began to build his second factory, a four-storied building which lay just off Piccadilly between Auburn Street and Upton Street. This was powered by a Boulton and Watt rotary steam engine—the first in Manchester—which was used in the carding of cotton and the preparation of rovings. He also installed some 144-spindle mules worked by hand, and appointed good managers. From 1792 to 1794 or 1795 the famous Robert Owen managed Drinkwater's two mills and after Owen came Robert Humphreys, who applied steam-power to Drinkwater's mules according to Kelly's method of 1790.¹ By 1800 there were dozens of cotton spinning mills in the Manchester area and an unsuccessful attempt had even been made by the Grimshaw brothers in 1791 to try out, in a factory at Knott Mill, Deansgate, 500 of the clumsy power looms, invented by the Rev. Edmund Cartwright. But the mill was burnt down in 1792 and not rebuilt. The Manchester

¹ W. H. Chaloner, "Robert Owen, Peter Drinkwater and the early factory system in Manchester, 1788-1800", *BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY*, xxxvii (1954-5), 82-94.

handloom weavers continued to enjoy general prosperity during the period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.¹

The mechanization of cotton spinning created a demand for textile machinery making and engineering industries. In the 1790s a number of Manchester firms arose to satisfy this demand. The most important of them was undoubtedly the partnership of James Bateman and William Sherratt, although their steam-engine factory was actually in Salford. Here they manufactured not only "large cast wheels for the cotton machines" and old-fashioned Newcomen engines, but also pirated Boulton and Watt's patent rotary steam engine.² At Knott Mill, Alexander Brodie (1732-1811), London financier, Shropshire ironmaster and armaments manufacturer, set up a foundry and steam engine works about 1790 in partnership with two men named McNiven and Ormrod.³ Apart from these two large firms there were many smaller concerns by 1800.

Auxiliary trades expanded in sympathy. Aikin wrote in 1795 :

The making of paper at mills in the vicinity has been brought to great perfection, and now includes all kinds, from the strongest parcelling paper to the finest writing sorts, and that on which banker's bills are printed.⁴ . . . The tin-plate workers have found additional employment in furnishing many articles for spinning machines ; as have also the braziers in casting wheels for the motion-work of the rollers used in them ; and the clock-makers in cutting them. Harness

¹ There had been an attempt by a Mr. Gartside about 1758 to drive swivel-loom by water power at Garratt Hall (Aikin, op. cit. pp. 175-6 ; Wadsworth and Mann, op. cit. pp. 301-2).

² Aikin, op. cit. pp. 176-7 ; T. S. Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution* (1924), pp. 80-1, 102 ; F. S. Stancliffe, *John Shaw's, 1738-1938* (1938), pp. 69-70 (Wm. Sherratt), pp. 87-8 (James Bateman). Some details about the Griffin Iron Foundry, Swan Street, Manchester, set up in the 1780s as a branch of a Derbyshire firm, are given in P. Robinson's *The Smiths of Chesterfield : a history of the Griffin Foundry, Brampton, 1775-1833* (Chesterfield, 1957), p. 43. The early history of engineering in Manchester has recently been discussed in detail by A. E. Musson and Eric Robinson "The Early Growth of Steam Power", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., xi (April, 1959), 418-39).

³ Chaloner, "John Galloway . . .", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, lxiv (1954), 103-4. According to Galloway, Brodie was the "maker of a new stove for ships, and had a large connection, especially with Government".

⁴ Aikin, op. cit. p. 176. This is a reference to the brown-paper mill of Smith and Inglis at Throstle Nest, Agecroft (D. C. Coleman, *The British Paper Industry, 1495-1860* (1958), p. 197 ; Chaloner, op. cit. p. 96).

makers have been much employed in making bands for carding engines . . . whereby the consumption of strong curried leather has been much increased.¹

The spectacular growth of the cotton industry naturally aroused much interest in France and Germany and from the late 1770s there was a trickle of foreign visitors to the town. The French geologist Faujas de St. Fond remarked during a visit to Manchester in 1784 that he could get no admission to the cotton factories because of the previous activities of visiting Frenchmen who had been engaged in spying out industrial secrets. And in 1792 another Frenchman, F. C. L. Albert, received and served a sentence of four years' imprisonment in Lancaster Castle for trying to secure specimens of cotton machinery and endeavouring to induce Manchester operatives to emigrate to France.² Gradually, however, the interest of foreigners in Manchester took on a different form. They came to stay as merchants and manufacturers. It is no accident that John Scholes's manuscript register of foreign merchants in Manchester begins in 1784,³ and as early as 1799 a German, Carl Friedrich Brandt, was nominated as boroughreeve of the town.⁴ Perhaps the most eminent of these "new Mancunians" of the 1790s was Nathan Meyer Rothschild, the German-Jewish financier (1777-1836), although he did not stay for many years.⁵ Aikin summed up the situation as follows :

Within the last twenty or thirty years the vast increase of foreign trade has caused many of the Manchester manufacturers to travel abroad, and agents or partners to be fixed for a considerable time on the Continent, as well as foreigners to reside at Manchester. And the town has now in every respect assumed the style and manners of one of the commercial capitals of Europe.⁶

In contrast with this exuberant economic advance, local government in the township of Manchester made only modest progress in the eighteenth century. Up to 1765 Manchester's

¹ Aikin, *op. cit.* p. 178.

² The evidence concerning Albert's activities is conveniently summarized in W. O. Henderson, *Britain and Industrial Europe, 1750-1870* (1954), pp. 46-7.

³ John Scholes, "Manchester Foreign Merchants, 1784-1870" (MS., Manchester Central Reference Library).

⁴ *The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester* (ed. J. P. Earwaker), ix (1889), 261.

⁵ *D.N.B.* vol. xlix.

⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 184.

local government status, as Defoe remarked in a hackneyed phrase, was indeed that of a village—it was governed by the Court Leet of the lord of the manor. Every year the Court Leet chose unpaid officers who were to see to the performance of the various municipal services such as they were understood at the time—the boroughreeve (a kind of mayor, but with little executive power), the day police, the market lookers or inspectors, the scavengers, etc. As the Court Leet met only twice a year long periods sometimes elapsed before offenders were summoned before it. Yet the eighteenth-century alternative to this system was to have an oligarchical municipal corporation which might try to control and warp the town's economic development in its own narrow interest, and would take just as limited a view as the Court Leet did of its sanitary functions. Aikin summed up eighteenth-century majority opinion when he remarked: "With respect to *government*, it remains an open town, destitute (probably to its advantage) of a corporation, and unrepresented in Parliament."¹

But in 1765 would-be local reformers secured the passage of the Manchester and Salford Police Act, which set up a body of Cleansing and Lighting Commissioners empowered to provide, among other things, a more adequate fire brigade. Such local acts were the normal eighteenth-century method of securing better urban sanitation.² If the influential inhabitants named in the act had only used their statutory powers more vigorously they could have largely superseded the Court Leet, but they did not, and things went on much as before. Then in 1776 the first Manchester Improvement Act was obtained for widening and improving, in particular, Old Mill Gate and St. Mary's Gate, and also opening a new street between the Exchange and St. Ann's Square. The Act named the commissioners empowered to carry out the improvements and anyone who subscribed £20 to the good work could join their number. Having accomplished the purpose for which they were set up, the Improvement Commissioners naturally rested from their labours. In the

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 191.

² B. Keith Lucas, "Some influences affecting the development of sanitary legislation in England", *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd ser., vi, No. 3 (April 1954), 290-6.

1780s there was much discontent with the Court Leet, which had in many of its functions become "sluggish and inactive", and the setting up of the Manchester and Salford Police Commissioners by yet another Act of Parliament in 1792 was the first substantial step towards a recognizably modern system of local government. Some of the clauses of the 1765 Act were re-enacted word-for-word in the measure of 1792,¹ but for the first few years the new Police Commissioners did little to justify their existence. They had the power to light and cleanse the streets and to maintain a police force during the hours of darkness, but none of these things had been done adequately by the winter of 1798-9. John Cross described the situation in 1799 as follows :

. . . during many wet and dark winter months, the streets have remained uncleaned and without lights ; for some time no watchmen or patrols were appointed . . . and none could pass through the streets in safety. Escaping personal violence, they were still in imminent personal danger, from the numerous unguarded cellars, pits and various obstructions that every where interrupted their passage . . . the streets are still crowded with annoyances . . . not a street has been widened or laid open.²

From 1799 onwards a new spirit of enterprise animated the Police Commissioners and, by the time they were superseded by the new Manchester Borough Council in the early 1840s, they had so extended their powers and functions as to become one of the most progressive local governing bodies in Great Britain.

It has recently been suggested by two eminent medical men "that specific medical measures introduced during the eighteenth century are unlikely to have contributed substantially to a reduction in the death-rate".³ An examination of the work of the doctors associated with what is now the Manchester Royal Infirmary in the first fifty years of its existence suggests that this judgement may well be based on an inadequate appraisal of the histories of particular hospitals. What is now known as the Manchester Royal Infirmary was established in 1752 by a

¹ A. Redford, assisted by I. S. Russell, *History of Local Government in Manchester*, i (1939), 100-1, 157-8, 192-3, 200-1.

² Redford and Russell, *op. cit.* pp. 206-7.

³ T. McKeown and R. G. Brown, "Medical Evidence related to English population changes in the eighteenth century", *Population Studies*, ix, no. 2 (November 1955), 119.

committee of philanthropists and medical men who opened a small hospital at No. 10, Garden Street, off Withy Grove. Within three years a permanent hospital had been built on land called the Daub Hole Field, purchased from Sir Oswald Mosley (now Piccadilly Gardens). The rural situation of the new hospital, which started off with fifty beds, is made clear from the fact that in 1762 Marsden Kenyon was given leave to make a gate at the West end of the Infirmary Garden into his field.¹ On the new site the number of persons treated both as in-patients and out-patients increased rapidly. From the first, the governing committee (Weekly Board of Trustees) of the Infirmary laid what was, for eighteenth-century society, unusual stress on cleanliness: "Nurses were expected to clean their wards by seven in the morning in the winter and by eight in the summer."² The new building had contained some baths when originally opened in 1755, but in June 1779 the Trustees decided to erect "a complete set of cold, warm and vapour baths" which, it was thought, would be of great utility to the hospital and of "great public convenience to the inhabitants of Manchester". The scheme aroused such enthusiasm that the original plans were at once enlarged, and two years later, in the annual report for June 1781, the Trustees observed with pleasure that "the profits have greatly exceeded their expectations, whilst the public [of Manchester] at a very modest expense may have the use of one of the most complete and elegant sets of baths in the whole kingdom".³

Progress could be very patchy, however. When John Howard, the prison reformer, inspected the Infirmary in 1788, he made certain criticisms, as a result of which the floors of all wards were washed more frequently with soap and warm water, the walls whitewashed, and the doors and other woodwork coated with turpentine varnish annually. The legs and arms of every patient had henceforth to be washed with soap and water

¹ F. S. Stancliffe, "The birthplace of the Manchester Royal Infirmary", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, vol. lxi for 1949 (1951), 35-42; W. Brockbank, *Portrait of a Hospital, 1752-1948* (1952), p. 18.

² Brockbank, *op. cit.* p. 10.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 18, 26-7.

immediately on admission. This was to "be often repeated unless ordered to the contrary".¹

The Infirmary naturally did not admit those suffering from contagious diseases as in-patients, but in 1781 the hospital authorities started a most interesting and successful scheme for treating, in their own homes, patients suffering from infectious diseases such as smallpox and measles, provided they lived within the towns of Manchester and Salford. In 1784 the Trustees accepted a proposal by the hospital's doctors and surgeons to inoculate poor persons for the smallpox and to attend them, if necessary, at their homes while they were in quarantine. By 1786 the number of home patients treated annually had reached a thousand,² and in the January of that year Dr. Thomas Henry noted that within the previous quarter of a century the mortality from smallpox in Manchester and Salford had sensibly diminished. He went on :

Perhaps there is no disease the medical treatment of which has been more improved than that of the small-pox ; and, the improvements, suiting the dispositions and convenience of the lower class of people, have been more frequently adopted than might otherwise have been expected.³

Inefficient midwifery caused many deaths in the eighteenth century and midwives, like nurses, were notorious for dissolute character and drunken habits. During the eighteenth century, however, members of the medical profession took an increasing interest in gynaecology.⁴ An important local manifestation of this movement occurred in Manchester in May 1790, when three members of the Infirmary's surgical staff and one physician, of whom the most famous was Charles White, met at the Bridgewater Arms, alongside the present Victoria Station, to discuss a scheme for delivering poor married women in their homes. Later they rented a private house in Salford for use as a maternity home. This was the ancestor of the present St. Mary's Hospital.

Dr. Thomas Percival, writing in 1773, twenty years after the foundation of the Infirmary, stated :

¹ Brockbank, *op. cit.* p. 31.

² *Ibid.* p. 28.

³ Henry, *op. cit.* iii, 167-8.

⁴ M. C. Buer, *Health, Wealth and Population* . . . (1926), pp. 139-48.

It is pleasing to observe, that, notwithstanding the enlargement of Manchester, there has been a sensible improvement in the healthiness and longevity of its inhabitants ; for the proportion of deaths is now considerably less than in 1757. But this is chiefly to be ascribed, as Dr. Price has justly observed, to the large accession of new settlers from the country. For as these usually come in the prime of life, they must raise the proportion of *inhabitants* to the *deaths*, and also of *births* and *weddings* to the *burials*, higher than they would otherwise be. However, exclusive of this consideration, there is good reason to believe that Manchester is more healthy now than formerly. The new streets are wide and spacious, the poor have larger and more commodious dwellings, and the increase of trade affords them better clothing and diet than they before enjoyed. I may add too, that the late improvements in medicine have been highly favourable to the preservation of life. The cool regimen in fevers, and in the small-pox ; the free admission of air ; attention to cleanliness ; and the general use of antiseptic remedies and diet, have certainly mitigated the violence, and lessened the mortality of some of the most dangerous and malignant distempers to which mankind are incident. The ulcerous sore throat, which prevailed here in the year 1770, is the only epidemic which has appeared in Manchester, with any fatal degree of violence, for many years. Miliary fevers, which were formerly frequent in this town and neighbourhood, now rarely occur ; and if I may judge from my own experience, the natural small-pox (for inoculation is not much practised here) carries off a smaller proportion of those who are attacked by it, than is commonly supposed. Puerperal diseases also decrease every year amongst us, by the judicious method of treating women in child-bed : and as nature is now more consulted in the management of infants, it is reasonable to suppose that this must be favourable to their health and preservation.¹

The Manchester doctors of this period also pioneered the cod-liver oil treatment for rickets. It is often assumed that because rickets (a softening of the legbones due to vitamin D deficiency) was called "the English disease" (*die englische Krankheit*), and because it appears to have been most prevalent in the early nineteenth century, that this malady originated in the new factory districts. But rickets was well-known in many parts of England in the seventeenth century and it is noteworthy that rickets was first successfully treated by the administration of cod-liver oil at Manchester Infirmary in the early 1770s. By the early 1780s between fifty and sixty gallons were prescribed annually.²

The very rapid rise in Manchester's population in the

¹ *The Works . . . of Thomas Percival, M.D.* (4 vols., 1807), iv, 5-7.

² Sir J. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food* (1957), pp. 149-60, 271-6 ; *The Works . . . of Thomas Percival, M.D.*, iv, edn. of 1807, 354-62.

1780s and 1790s appears to have resulted in increased local anxiety concerning contagious diseases. For example, typhus or 'putrid' fever, a louse-borne disease, had been a dangerous scourge throughout the eighteenth century. It was known by a variety of names, such as ship-fever, barrack fever and gaol fever, which indicates the frequency with which it broke out among persons massed together in close proximity. As might be expected, in the 1780s and 1790s, when the new cotton factories were being built and improvised in large numbers, frequent references are found to outbreaks of typhus in such establishments.¹ The best-known of these was the outbreak which began in Ashton-under-Lyne in 1795, but it had been preceded by an epidemic in Manchester in 1794. The Ashton outbreak spread rapidly to the Manchester area and on 7 January 1796 the Manchester Board of Health, including Dr. Thomas Percival and Dr. John Ferriar, was set up. Its promoters had great hopes that the Board's recommendations would be taken up and enforced by the Police Commissioners or by the magistrates in quarter session. Dr. Ferriar, for example, repeated his pioneer suggestion, made originally in 1791, that the common lodging houses in Manchester, notorious focal points of disease, should be licenced and supervised by the magistrates. The Board set up a temporary isolation hospital, the House of Recovery, in 1796, and by 1804 was able to erect a permanent hospital for infectious diseases, capable of holding a hundred patients. Yet in spite of their good intentions, the promoters of the Board never succeeded in "playing a considerable part in improving the sanitation of Manchester".² That was to be the task of the reformers of the nineteenth century.

Did Manchester's intellectual life between 1750 and 1800 match its economic growth? Unfortunately it is practically impossible to compare these two spheres of existence. Writing of conditions in the early nineteenth century Mr. Donald Read

¹ Anon, "The putrid fever at Robert Peel's Radcliffe Mill", *Notes and Queries*, cciii (Jan. 1958), 26-35; broadsheet in Chetham's Library reporting meeting of Manchester committee "for the relief of the sick poor afflicted with the epidemic fever", 12 December 1794.

² E. P. Hennock, "Urban sanitary reform a century before Chadwick?", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. x, No. 1 (August 1957), 113-16.

has repeated the generally received opinion that "the intellectual life of Manchester was left in the hands of a very few. In things of the mind and spirit the town was very backward."¹ The question arises: backward compared with what? The purpose of the following pages is to suggest that Manchester's intellectual development in this period, all things considered, compared favourably with other provincial centres such as Leeds and Leicester. Let us examine more closely a few of the outward manifestations of Manchester's intellectual life in the eighteenth century.

Although the history of the newspaper in Manchester goes back to at least 1719,² when Roger Adams of Chester started his *Manchester News-Letter* (later the *Weekly Journal*) these early publications generally led obscure and chequered lives, with frequent changes of title,³ until the foundation of Joseph Harrop's *Manchester Mercury* on 3 March 1752. But it is important to remember that when Harrop (1727-1804), a young man of twenty-five, brought out the first number of the *Mercury* there were already two rival publications, *Whitworth's Manchester Magazine*, which had been in existence under various names since 1730, and the resurrected *Weekly Journal* (later known as the *Manchester Journal*), the first number of which was issued by Orion Adams in the January of 1752. The *Journal* does not

¹ *Peterloo* (1958), p. 3. Mr. L. S. Marshall, *The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester, 1780-1820* (Syracuse, 1946) must be used with caution. Even if it were admitted that Manchester may have been culturally under-developed in 1800, extenuating circumstances might be pleaded—the rapid growth of the new industrial community and the defective education of some, but not all, of the new men who were rising to the top.

² D. Read, "Manchester News-Letter, a discovery at Oxford", *Manchester Guardian* (31 August 1956). See also *Manchester Review*, viii (Winter, 1957-8), 124.

³ G. A. Cranfield, *A handlist of English Provincial Newspapers and Periodicals, 1700-1760*, Cambridge Bibliographical Society, monograph no. 2 (1952), pp. 12-14; R. C. Jarvis, "The Rebellion of 1745 . . .", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, xlvi (1941-2), 124-8; xlvii (1943-4), 47-50; G. R. Axon, "Roger and Orion Adams, printers", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, xxxix (1921), pp. 108-24; *Collectanea relating to Manchester and its Neighbourhood . . .*, ii, ed. J. Harland (Chetham Soc., lxxii, (1868), 102-20; *Manchester Mercury* 24 January 1804 (obituary of Harrop); F. Leary, "History of the Manchester Periodical Press" (MS., c. 1897, Manchester Reference Library).

seem to have lasted the year out, yet when Whitworth's newspaper (by then called *Manchester Advertiser*) came to an unprofitable end with issue no. 3414 on 25 March 1760,¹ Joseph Harrop's *Mercury* held the field alone for a short time only. In June 1762 the first number of the *Manchester Chronicle or Anderton's Universal Advertiser* appeared, and although it seems to have been short-lived, nevertheless John Prescott was confident enough to start Prescott's *Manchester Journal* less than ten years later, on 23 March 1771. This lasted until at least 1774.² By 1800 three weekly newspapers of respectable solidity were in circulation; the *Mercury*, Wheeler's *Manchester Chronicle*, founded in 1781, and Cowdroy's *Manchester Gazette*, established in 1795.³ As in the general population and the business world, so it was with the newspapers: many were born but few lived long.

Closely allied to the rise of the newspaper was the growth of the postal service, through which an increasing number of newspapers were circulated. Until 1793 the establishment of the Manchester post office remained absurdly small. At the beginning of that year all postal services in Manchester were performed by an old woman, Mrs. Sarah Willatt, who held the office of postmaster, assisted by her daughter and a solitary letter carrier. The Manchester Post Office was the most profitable in the kingdom, producing £15,000 a year. Then, in April 1793, the old post-mistress was pensioned off on £120 a year. James Harrop, the son of the printer of the *Mercury*, was appointed in her stead and allowed a staff of four clerks and six letter carriers. A local penny post came into operation in July 1793 and functioned over an ever-increasing area around the town until the introduction of the general penny post in 1840.⁴

¹ Harland, *op. cit.* p. 106. A second *Manchester Journal* appeared between 1754 and 1756 (Cranfield, *op. cit.* p. 14).

² Harland, *op. cit.* p. 109. Harland complained: "Nothing is more difficult to trace than the deaths of newspapers."

³ *Ibid.* pp. 110-14.

⁴ C. Roeder, "Beginnings of the Manchester Post-Office", *Trans. Lancs. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, xxii, pp. 28-34, 39-42; K. Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 32, 99; Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office* (1948), p. 215. It is quite wrong to imagine that there was no penny post until 1840. There were dozens of local penny posts in operation before Rowland Hill's reform.

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, founded early in 1781, of which Benjamin Franklin was an honorary member, arose quite naturally out of informal meetings for discussion held at Dr. Thomas Percival's house on the corner of King Street and Cross Street. One of the first joint secretaries of the Society was Dr. Thomas ("Magnesia") Henry (1734-1816), visiting apothecary to the Infirmary and a successful manufacturing chemist.¹ In addition to furthering scientific education in the Manchester area, he lectured and published works on chemistry, dyeing and calico printing. Other honorary members of the Society included Dr. Erasmus Darwin, Dr. Joseph Priestley, the French chemist Lavoisier (some of whose works Henry translated) and the Italian Volta. Another of the founder members was Dr. Thomas Barnes, who later became principal of the Manchester Academy on its formation in 1785-6. The subjects discussed were extremely varied—social improvement, political economy, many aspects of the cotton and woollen trades, metaphysics and medicine. In 1793 Robert Owen, the "father of British socialism", became a member, followed in 1794 by John Dalton, the propounder of the atomic theory.²

In the early 1790s public opinion in Manchester became seriously divided on the subject of political reform and the French Revolution. The controversies of these years have recently been discussed by Miss Pauline Handforth and Mrs. F. Knight, with particular reference to the career of the Radical Thomas Walker and the pro-French newspaper, the *Manchester Herald* (1792-3).³ The split even had echoes in the Literary and Philosophical Society's proceedings in 1791, when Samuel Jackson, a noted sympathizer with what was happening in France, moved a resolution expressing the Society's sympathy with Dr. Priestley on the losses he had sustained from the sacking

¹ A. and N. Clow, *The Chemical Revolution* (1952), p. 189.

² W. H. Brindley, "The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society", *Journal of the Royal Institute of Chemistry* (February 1955), pp. 62-9; E. M. Fraser, "Robert Owen in Manchester, 1788-1800", *Mem. and Proc., Manchester Lit. and Phil. Soc.*, lxxxii (1937-8), 35-40.

³ Pauline Handforth, "Manchester Radical politics, 1789-1794", *Trans. Lanc. and Ches. Antiq. Soc.* lxxvi (1956), 87-106; F. Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker* (1957).

of his house by the Birmingham mob on 14 July. The resolution was not carried, but in the following year, 1792, the reformers—headed by Joseph Priestley, jun., the doctor's son, and Thomas Cooper, the Radical who later became a prosperous lawyer and slave-owner in the U.S.A.—showed their independence by forming the Manchester Reading Society or the “Jacobin Library”, as it was nicknamed.¹

There were also many flourishing schools, both secular and Sunday,² in Manchester by 1800, and the town was frequently visited by itinerant lecturers, mainly on scientific subjects. In addition the Manchester College of Arts and Sciences had been established in 1783, although it did not fulfil the hopes of its founders.³ The stirrings and controversies of the 1780s and the 1790s indicate that Manchester had crossed the threshold of intellectual maturity.

¹ W. E. A. Axon, *Handbook of the Public Libraries of Manchester and Salford* (1877), pp. 61-2.

² For the Sunday schools, see A. P. Wadsworth, “The first Manchester Sunday Schools”, *BULL. JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY*, xxxiii (1950-1), 299-326.

³ H. McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: its history and influence* (Chetham Soc., cvii (N.S., 1943), 123-4. My colleagues, Messrs. A. E. Musson and Eric Robinson, intend in the near future to publish a study of educational growth in Manchester during this period.