

HOUSING FACTORY WORKERS: Ancoats in the Early Nineteenth Century

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What happened to the housing stock in Manchester, more particularly in a rapidly growing factory district such as Ancoats, during the Napoleonic Wars and in the period of post-war depression and recovery? Economic historians such as Jeffrey Williamson have argued that the demands of the Wars sucked in savings from the British people like a vacuum cleaner, 'crowding-out potential investment resources, particularly for residential housing.' Further, if there were constraints placed on the growth of the housing stock in the context of a rapidly rising factory population, we would expect rents to rise, the urban cost of living would increase, 'and the nominal cost of wages facing city firms would rise also.' Did this pattern emerge for Manchester, and more specifically for Ancoats, the very centre of the factory system of 'Cottonopolis'?

Manchester Housing Stock 1801-1831

Figures for the township of Manchester's housing stock have been provided by Vigier⁴ for 1801, 1821, and 1831, along with population data for the town. For a more rigorous test of the Williamson hypothesis, with particular emphasis on Ancoats, we have computed additional housing figures for 1807 and for the end of the Wars in 1815. In Manchester all private properties were assessed for the poor rate⁵ and thus it is possible to collate the housing stock from the rate books. Further, for rating purposes the town was sub-divided into 14 separate districts, or zones, and this allows for a more detailed examination of more concentrated factory districts such as Ancoats. Quite clearly it would be in Ancoats that the pressure on the housing stock was likely to be most acute.

The data in Table 1 shows the pattern of housing and demographic change in Manchester between 1801 and 1831. On a first reading the data does not appear to confirm Williamson's hypothesis. Rather, Manchester appears to meet its physical housing needs both during the war years and in the decade or so after Waterloo. For example, if the

Table 1: Manchester Population and Housing Stock 1801-1831

YEAR	1801	1807	1815	1821	1831
Population ^a	70,409	75,839	90,881	108,016	142,026
Housing ^b	10,109	11,646	13,406	16,653	22,445
Ratio Persons /house	6.96	6.51	6.78	6.49	6.33
Average Rateable Value of house	N/A	£8.29	£10.79	N/A	N/A

Sources: F. Vigier, *Change and Apathy: Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (1970), p. 139; Manchester Central Library, Poor Rate Assessment Books for the Township of Manchester, 1807 (M9/40/2/71), 1815 (M9/40/2/78).

[Notes: a Population is for the township of Manchester incorporating the 14 rating districts. The figures for 1815 and 1817 have been calculated from the intervening census data assuming a steady annual average growth rate.

b Housing includes houses, cellars and rooms, where the latter two received a separate rate assessment.]

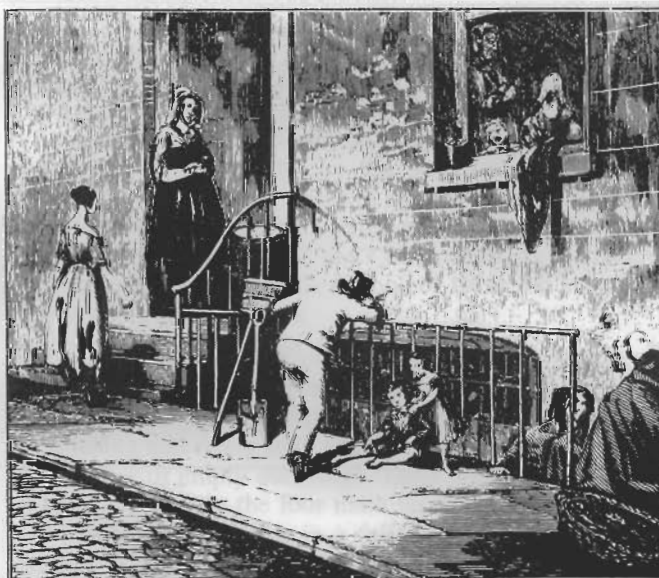
1801 ratio of persons to houses was merely to be maintained by 1815 it would have required an addition of 2,491 houses; the actual increase was 3,297 or 12.1 per cent in excess of the number required. The result, of course, was a fall in the ratio of persons per house. For the period 1815-1831 the required increase of houses to merely maintain the 1815 ratio was 7,544 but the actual increase was 9,039 producing an excess of 19.8 per cent. Although clearly the rate of increase in the housing stock accelerates after 1815, there is no direct evidence to support Williamson's hypothesis of crowding-out during the war years. The private sector under the pressure of market forces provided the physical resources to meet the needs of a growing population, but this tells us little about the qualitative changes in the housing provision.

In Manchester, there was no attempt made by the main instruments of local government, the Court Leet and Police Commissioners, to regulate private developers. ⁶ Referring to the first two decades of the nineteenth century Vigier observes that:

working men and their families were being crowded into every available cellar and room, partly because of the disparity between the wages they were able to bring home and the rents charged by speculators, and partly because of the necessity to live close to the factories in the absence of public transport.⁷

In Ancoats speculative building followed the practice of subdividing property into long blocks, about 250 feet in length and between 60 to 90 feet in width. To provide additional access to the interior of these narrow blocks the developer would construct a complex maze of courts and alleys and 'the row of houses was built back to back so that as many as four houses could be constructed within the width of the block'.⁸ Accompanying this highly 'economic' use of space, the practice of providing cellars for domestic habitation proved an attractive proposition to property developers.

Table 2 shows the increase in houses and inhabited cellars in



Manchester street showing the exterior of a cellar.

Table 2: Houses and Inhabited Cellars in the Major Streets of Ancoats 1815-1825

Street	1815		1825	
	Number of houses	Number of cellars	Number of houses	Number of cellars
Oldham Rd	196	39	242	88
Great Ancoats St	128	9	142	13
Henry St	118	0	127	26
George Leigh St	102	4	129	20
Total	554	52	640	147

Source: Rate books 1815 and 1825 calculated for District 1, Ancoats.

the four largest streets in Ancoats in 1815 and 1825 calculated from the rate books. In 1815 these four streets represented 27.75 per cent of the total housing stock of Ancoats and between 1815 and 1825 the proportion of separately rated cellars and rooms to houses rose from 4.7 per cent to 12.8 per cent. The total number of houses rose by 17.6 per cent while the total number of cellars increased by 182 per cent.

The pressure of rapidly rising population coupled with unregulated private enterprise produced, in the post war years, a change in the composition of the housing stock and this in turn was accompanied by an increase in sub-standard accommodation often with the minimum of facilities. Thus in the early 1830s a Manchester Board of Health survey showed that 55.4 per cent of houses in Ancoats were without private plumbing, 15.1 per cent were in need of major repair, and 56.1 per cent of all streets in the district were unscavenged containing heaps of refuse and stagnant pools.⁹ The housing stock in the decade or so after Waterloo grew more than sufficiently to accommodate the rapidly expanding population of Ancoats, but there are good grounds for supposing that in terms of the composition of that stock it deteriorated and included an increasing proportion of jerry built houses and low rental cellars and rooms. If such problems existed free from the exigencies of war it necessitates a closer examination of the data for the war years and Williamson's notion of crowding-out.

Ancoats Housing Stock 1807-1815

While the housing stock did increase significantly between 1801 and 1815 and provided the growing population with a roof over its head, over the shorter period 1807-15 there is strong evidence to show that the stock failed to keep pace with the demand for housing. As Table 1 shows the persons per house ratio rose in the eight years leading up to Waterloo. An extra 2,311 houses were required by 1815 if the ratio of 1807 was to be maintained. The actual increase was 1,760, a shortfall of 23.8 per cent. It is highly probably that the



The interior of a Manchester cellar.

effects of this shortfall would be felt in places like Ancoats with its high concentration of factories. To examine this issue in more depth, Table 3 shows the breakdown of the housing stock and rateable value (RV) for each of the 14 districts of Manchester between 1807 and 1815.

What is clear from the table is that the growth in the number of houses is significantly lower than the increase in the RV.

Table 3: Manchester Housing Stock by District 1807-1815

YEAR	1807		1815		1807-1815	
	No of Houses	RV £	No of Houses	RV £	% Increase Houses	% Increase RV
1 Ancoats*	2,157	10,548	2,499	19,580	15.9	85.6
2 St Michaels	1,246	9,339	1,579	12,752	26.7	36.5
3 Collegiate Church	1,324	11,162	1,416	13,721	6.9	22.9
4 St Clements*	1,533	11,433	1,771	17,492	15.5	53.0
5 St Pauls	976	9,398	929	10,640	-4.8	13.2
6 Exchange	131	1,232	197	4,548	50.4	69.0
7 Mynshul*	862	6,869	1,128	12,785	30.9	86.1
8 St James	343	5,992	381	8,537	11.1	42.3
9 St Anns	456	8,682	441	10,321	-3.2	18.9
10 Oxford St	60	970	73	1,502	21.6	54.8
11 St Peters*	1,227	10,098	1,473	15,377	16.7	52.2
12 St Marys	290	2,515	377	4,221	30.0	67.8
13 Old Quay	525	4,108	571	6,150	8.8	49.7
14 St Johns	516	4,509	571	7,004	10.7	55.3

Sources: Manchester Rate Books 1807 and 1815

[Notes: * indicates the major factory districts of Manchester.

a. The 14 rating districts were divided by Commissioners under the Police Act, 11 July 1792. See Manchester Central Library (M9/30/1/1).]

Table 4: Rateable Value and Rent Schedule Houses and Cellars in Ancoats 1825

RV £	Rent per week new pence
3.50	13.3
4.00	15.0
4.50	16.25
5.00	18.75

Source: Manchester Rate Book 1825

This is particularly true of the factory districts (districts 1,4,7,11). If we exclude district 6, the central warehouse area of Manchester,¹⁰ with an exceptionally low housing stock, the two zones with the largest increase in RV are Ancoats and Mynshul, and there are also sizeable increase in St Clements and St Peters. These districts together accounted for 52.1 per cent of Manchester's housing stock in 1815, and Ancoats alone accounted for 18.6 per cent. Why was there such a substantial increase in housing RV? It cannot simply be explained by an inflation in the valuation. The housing stock for Ancoats rose by 15.9 per cent between 1807 and 1815 compared to the average for Manchester as a whole of 15.1 per cent. Yet the RV of Ancoats' housing stock rose by 85.6 per cent, twice the rate of the city wide increase of 46.3 per cent. Table 3 also shows a number of districts displaying similar or higher rates of housing growth than Ancoats but recording low increases in RV.

We would argue that the rise in RV in Ancoats was a demonstration effect of the growing population pressure on the housing stock towards the end of the Wars. This pressure manifested itself in Ancoats by rising house valuations and rising rents. The valuation of property assets, including

Table 5: Empty Houses in the Four Main Factory Districts 1807 and 1815

YEAR	1807		1815	
	District	No Empty	% of Total	No Empty
1 Ancoats	95	4.4	36	1.4
4 St Clements	53	3.5	18	1.4
7 Mynshul	41	4.7	14	1.8
11 St Peters	24	2.0	27	1.8
Total	213	3.7	96	1.4

Source: Manchester Rate Books 1807 and 1815

private dwellings, was based on the rental earnings of the property.¹¹ Unfortunately the rate books before 1825 did not provide data for rentals but as Table 4 shows there was a clear linkage between RVs and rent in Ancoats in 1825. The importance of this linkage takes on added significance when it is recalled that Williamson argued that one of the consequences of pressure on the housing stock, through crowding-out, would be a rise in rents and indirectly urban labour costs. In Ancoats RVs rose rapidly from an average of £4.93 per house in 1807 to £7.84 in 1815, an increase of 59.9 per cent, and given the method of valuation must have meant rising rents.

The effects of crowding-out are reinforced by looking at another indicator of housing utilisation, the proportion of empty houses. We would expect that the increasing demand for housing and rising RVs and rents would lead to a fall in the number of empty dwellings. Table 5 shows the number of empty houses in the four main factory districts for 1807 and 1815. Overall there is a fall of 55.4 per cent in the number of houses recorded in the rate books as empty and the fall is sharpest in Ancoats at 62.1 per cent. There is little

Table 6: Weekly Wages of Fine Spinner Operatives in the Town of Manchester 1810 and 1815

Date	Weekly Wage (new pence)
1810	212.5
1815	160.0

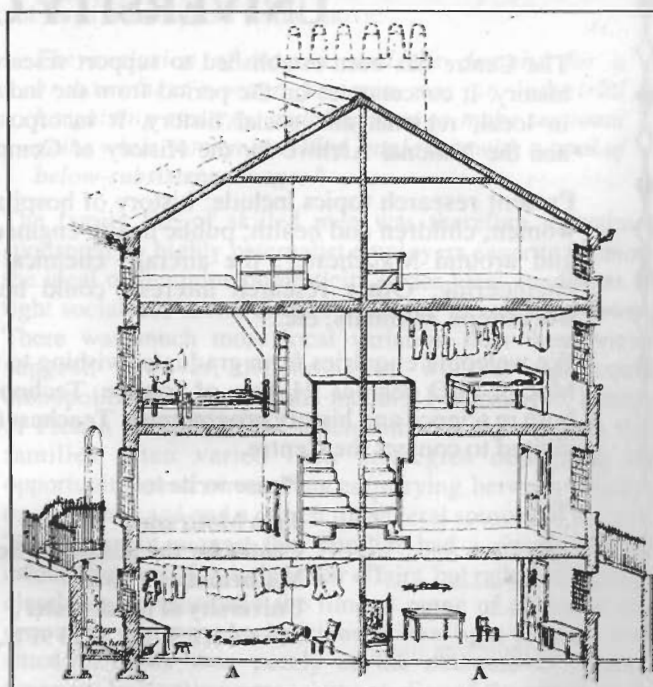
Source: Rate Book 1815

doubt that considerable pressure was being exerted on the housing stock at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and this was especially manifest in the factory districts. The workers of Ancoats in 1815 were being crowded into a highly utilised housing stock and would have felt the extra pain of rising rents. But did they compensate for rising housing costs by earning higher money wages and thus as suggested by Williamson raise the cost of labour to Ancoats' factories?

Table 7: Cotton Spinning Firms in Ancoats 1815

Firm	RV(£)	Firm	RV(£)
E. Robinson	59	Smith & Townley	147
Alex Smith	118	Walker Bros	64
H Parker	20	B & W Sandford	114
Gallimore & Johnson	85	Holt & Firth	65
Smith & Welsh	41	C Luke	25
W Mitchell (Holt Town)	519	Gray & Kirby	244
John Kennedy	449	J Pollard	478
Halliday	89	McConnel & Kennedy	933
G & A Murray	924	A Curruthers	41

We do have wage data for Manchester between 1810 and 1815 from Baines¹² and Table 6 shows the trend in weekly wages for fine spinners. The data shows a general decrease in wages across the various cotton trades. More importantly the figures for fine spinning firms are very suggestive. The data in Table 7 shows the number of factory spinning firms and their RV in Ancoats in 1815, and amongst them are the large firms of McConnel and Kennedy and A. & G. Murray.¹³ These two firms alone accounted for 19.5 per cent of Manchester's factory labour force¹⁴ and 42 per cent of Ancoats.



Section of back to back houses.

Both these firms were fine spinners and the 24 per cent decrease in fine spinners wages shown in Table 6 suggests that workers in Ancoats were not able to compensate for the rise in housing costs. That is, the rise in urban costs were not absorbed by factory masters such as McConnel and Kennedy

and the Murrays¹⁵ but by the factory workers of the Ancoats district. If any former factory workers did return from the Napoleonic Wars they would not find in Oldham Road, Henry Street, George Leigh Street, or Great Ancoats Street, homes fit for heroes.

NOTES

1. J.G. Williamson, 'Debating the Industrial Revolution', *Explorations in Economic History*, 24 (1987), pp273-5, 285.
2. *Ibid.*, p.287.
3. The township consisted of 14 rating districts and for a description of these districts see R. Lloyd-Jones & M.J. Lewis, *Manchester and the Age of the Factory* (1988), Appendix 2.
4. F. Vigier, *Change and Apathy: Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (1970), p.139.
5. For a discussion of the use of rate books for urban reconstruction see R.Lloyd-Jones & M.J. Lewis, 'A Database for Historical Reconstruction: Manchester in the Industrial Revolution', in *History and Computing III* (1990).
6. See A. Redford et al, *The History of Local Government in Manchester*, vol. 1 (1939); Vigier, *Change and Apathy*, pp.150-55; Lloyd-Jones & Lewis, *Manchester*, pp.135-7.
7. Vigier, *Change and Apathy*, p.132.
8. *Ibid.*, p.137.
9. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.141.
10. For a detailed discussion of the Manchester warehouse system see Lloyd-Jones & Lewis, *Manchester*, Chs 3 & 4.
11. The rate in Manchester was set by the Police Commissioners who empowered district assessors, under the administration of the Church Wardens and Overseers, to collect the poor rate and assess property. Redford, *Local Government*, p.26.
12. E. Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain* (2nd edition, 1966), p.438.
13. Other notable fine spinning firms in Manchester were B & W Sandford, J. Pollard, W. Mitchell, and Gray and Kirby of the Ancoats Twist Co.
14. R. Lloyd-Jones & A. A. Le Roux, 'The Size of Firms in the Cotton Industry: Manchester 1815-1841', *Economic History Review*, 33 (1980), pp.75-6.
15. Factory owners who owned houses of course benefited directly from rising rents. The 1815 rate book did not record house owners but for 1825 factory masters such as James McConnel, Joseph Clarke, Alex Smith, Galloway, and McNiven owned houses which they rented out in Ancoats.

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