

# FAMILY SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN MID-VICTORIAN ANCOATS

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To judge from many nineteenth-century accounts, stable family life was not one of the features that distinguished the people of Ancoats. As the correspondent of *The Times* reported, as he explored the area the week after Peterloo:

*It has been created by the success of the cotton trade, and swarms with inhabitants, who share all its vicissitudes. It is occupied chiefly by spinners, weavers, and Irish of the lowest description, and may be called the St. Giles's of Manchester. Indeed, no part of the metropolis presents scenes of more squalid wretchedness, or of more repulsive depravity, its natural concomitant, than this<sup>1</sup>*

This intemperate language of moral condemnation was, of course, frequently used in descriptions of the area, notably by J. P. Kay in the 1830s, suggesting a link between pauperism, vice, criminality and public health. "Sensuality has no record", Kay remarked, and "the bonds of domestic sympathy are too generally relaxed" as family duties were neglected. More sympathetically, Frederick Engels pointed to the material factors militating against family life:

*In a word, we must confess that in the working-men's dwellings of Manchester, no cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible; that in such dwellings only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home.<sup>2</sup>*

Fifty years later, a nostalgic retrospective remembered the anarchic squalor of old:

*Women and men, real men and women, on Sundays had regular 'up and down' pitch battles, women with breasts bare and petticoats turned up; cock fights and dog fights were held here as lately as 1866.*

Yet by the 1890s, it was said (rather sadly, perhaps) "You hardly ever see a street fight". Apparently, by this time Ancoats had settled down to decorous respectability. If a true picture, this comparative security — whether achieved through some natural process of settling down or through external pressure upon the district — was an achievement against considerable odds.<sup>3</sup>

## The Family in the Nineteenth Century

Whether this image of nineteenth-century Ancoats family life — of initial chaos followed by orderly respectability — is correct forms the focus of this article. At the outset it has to be admitted that the sources available rarely allow us the kind of vivid, personal accounts that such a study requires. The bulk of the data is derived from the census forms of the oldest district of Ancoats which provide a kind of decennial snapshot of households and their members. Much of the most interesting information, particularly on the degree of mutual support and the availability of family aid nearby, is simply missing from a source like this. Much of the data to which twentieth-century sociologists are accustomed and, for example, are so often found in individual memoirs of working-class life on the way families and communities cooperated, are therefore absent.

In other respects, however, the study of census material from 1851 to 1871 matches the emphasis in the current debates among historians and sociologists on critical changes in working-class families. Earlier historians had concentrated on the industrial revolution as the key watershed in family history. Today, the dimensions of its impact are drawn more cautiously, as the 'revolution' is seen more as a process than an event, the culmination of a longer series of developments beginning early in the eighteenth century that created the 'proletarian' family. Features such as earlier marriage, uncontrolled fertility, fragile partnerships and geographic mobility of families after 1750 had their origins in the decline of the cottage economy. After 1850, it is widely agreed, working-class families developed contrasting elements of control and stability.<sup>4</sup>

Two features of this second phase were widespread. Firstly, the nineteenth-century household (a useful concept in that it focuses attention on the co-resident group) showed a marked increase in the extent to which relatives other than parents and their children resided together. In Preston more than a fifth of households were extended in this way, mostly to include brothers and sisters of the parents. Thus one of the features of mid-twentieth century sociological surveys, the 'extended family', had already developed by 1851.<sup>5</sup>

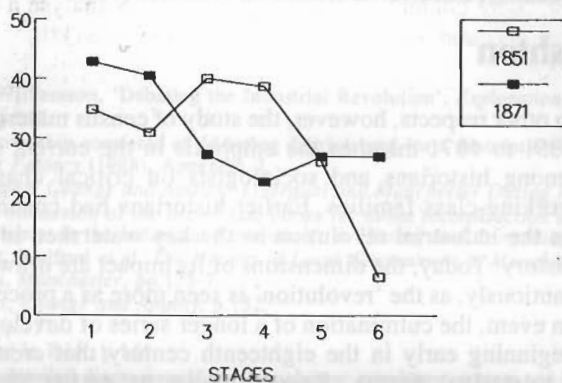
The second widely recognized characteristic of the family as it developed over the nineteenth century was a family economy increasingly dominated by men's monopoly of work and income, with women's financial contribution becoming less important after the early years of marriage. Most historians interpret this as the outcome of the struggle of men to become secure breadwinners through winning concessions from employers such as the prevention of women working on equal terms, a struggle won with considerable assistance from middle-class reformers. Employers, too may not have been averse to the move:

*The exclusion of women, and the demand for a breadwinners's wage for men was an industrial bargaining strategy, enabling men to make sectional gains while women provided employers with a pool of below-subsistence wages.<sup>6</sup>*

The family life of skilled men was therefore sometimes sponsored by highly paternalist employers eager to promote the ideal of feminine domesticity under local conditions of tight social and moral control available in company towns. There was much more local variation than these views suggest, however, depending on whether men could monopolize decent work and income. For example, a study of French families in the nineteenth century suggests that families often varied their strategies depending on opportunities and circumstances, varying between reliance on a single wage and a search for several sources of income. This does not suggest that families had a simple rational calculative way of ordering their affairs, but rather recognized clearly and realistically the limited range of choice at any one time. They made decisions in the light of their own situation rather than purely as the outcome of external pressure. In Britain, comparative studies of the variations in gender patterns of work and family life, in the context of the

## WORKING WIVES

### % IN EACH STAGE OF FAMILY CYCLE

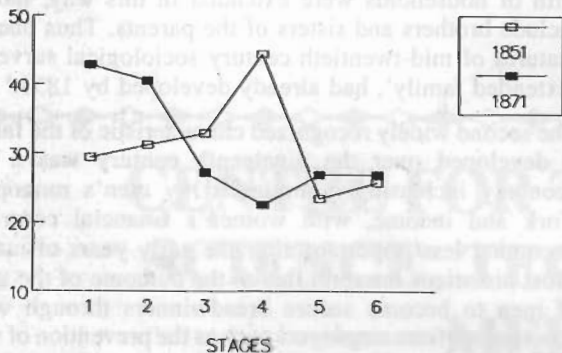


[Note: the stages of the family cycle, borrowed from M. Anderson, 1971, are

1. Couples with the wife under 45, no children at home;
2. wife under 45, one child at home;
3. more than one child at home, none at work;
4. more than one child at home, up to half at work;
5. more than one child at home, more than half at work;
6. wife over 45, no child at home, or only one over 21.]

## TAKING IN LODGERS

### % IN EACH STAGE OF FAMILY CYCLE



development of particular industries, have provided a broader picture. The available evidence here, too, suggest great variation depending on local economic and social circumstances and the ways that families and individuals adapted to them.<sup>7</sup>

Historians and sociologists have therefore learnt to be sceptical of standardized and simplified models of family life, whether constructed by the ideologues of the past or positivist statisticians of today. There is simply too much variation in the ways people reacted to their difficulties and opportunities.<sup>8</sup> These debates have particular relevance to the problem of understanding the way in which families survived the vagaries of life in Ancoats in the mid-nineteenth century. No single study can encompass the whole district, however, so the area surveyed through a sample of one quarter of the households was the oldest part, on the corner of Oldham Road and Great Ancoats Street, extending to Union and Bengal Streets. This was the area familiar to *The Times* correspondent after Peterloo, and to later commentators, containing the worst and oldest housing — the first to be demolished at the end of the nineteenth century. Ancoats, of course, extended much further, to beyond the Ashton Canal, and was gradually filling up through the first half of the century, until it contained 55,983 people in 1861, its peak

population. Thereafter, there was a sense of decline and change as its population fell (to 45,982 in 1891), although not as rapidly as the city-centre districts such as Market Street or Deansgate.

As will emerge from what follows, a focus on a small part of such an area (containing perhaps 8,500 people in 1851) reveals such a variety of family life, and so many changes in the subsequent twenty years, that it is impossible for families to be summed up easily in one image. Consequently, there will be no discussion here of *the Ancoats family*, only of varieties in the modes of family organization. We need to place family life within the context of the economic uncertainties and shifting housing market of this inner-city area which posed such severe difficulties for people.<sup>9</sup>

## Families and Children

The first question to ask, perhaps naively, is whether people lived in families at all. Yet to modern eyes, the families of Ancoats of 1851 or 1871 might seem very similar to today's. There was a high proportion of couples on their own in the area, with a bare majority of two-parent families, and, increasingly by the 1870s, many one-parent families. Looking at it from the point of view of the children, one in six of those aged 21 or less were in one-parent families in 1851, and by 1871, one in five. This compares with about one in seven today. A tenth of young people in the district lived in lodgings of various kinds with no visible kin (see below) but this fell a little over the period. Equally significant, about a fifth of young people (nearly all teenagers) were described as 'servants', often resident in the business premises such as shops where they worked. With around 70 per cent of children and young people, therefore, living with relatives in family groups which, together with married couples, made up the vast majority of households in the district, Ancoats does not show many signs of that 'depravity' which commentators continually deplored throughout the century:

*There will be little female virtue where, in the very nature of things, there can be little delicacy or decent reserve. In town and in the country, in low lodging-houses and in squalid clusters of agricultural cottages, the evil is the same. The sexes, at all times and at all hours, are huddled together, simply from want of room and accommodation to bestow them separately; and thus follow the inevitable results of brutalized men and shameless women.*

But Kay found few lodging houses in Ancoats, as did this survey, and life was lived mostly within the confines of the family.<sup>10</sup>

Poverty, overcrowding and high mortality did, nevertheless, have their effects on family life. For example, one-parent families today attract attention because of the break-up of marriages and other other forms of partnership. In the past, though, the majority of single parents were widows or widowers, to be expected since the life expectancy was so low in areas like central Manchester — about 40 on average if you survived childhood, not much more than 50 if you reached 21. But at least a sixth of single parents in 1851 were either single or married women — the latter apparently deserted by their husbands. This is not untypical of data on the English poor ever since the Norwich survey of 1570. The problem may have been greater than the census forms suggest, if only because 'widow' might be a tactful but generous description in some cases.<sup>11</sup>

Another feature of these families, which might be generally interpreted as the result of poverty and overcrowding, was

the high proportion of extended households. As in Preston, a large proportion of couples with children had other relatives in the household — a fifth in 1851, falling to a sixth in 1871. This decline is large enough to be significant, and will be discussed below: it is important to stress here that families in Ancoats relied on each other and shared accommodation. Significantly, the number of one-parent families in extended units was even higher, nearly 30 per cent. The largest group of relatives in both these types of household, nearly half, were brothers and sisters of the parents, sometimes with their own children. One-parent families, however, often lived in three-generation households, suggesting that grandparents were also a vital resource for those trying to bring up children on their own.

This is part of the expected pattern for family life in England, now well-established by historical demographers, of the steady rise in extended families since the end of the eighteenth century, though it was probably already higher in urban areas before 1800. One probable cause seems to have been the increasing need for support and the desire to share burdens (of childcare as much as the costs of housing), both as a response to periodic crises and to the permanent pressures of the city economy. In other families all the adults shared the same occupation and may therefore have been together for that reason. For example, in 1851 one household at 132, Gun Street consisted of Thomas and Harriet Lowe, both 62, and Thomas's younger brother and sister, all of whom were silk warpers. The daughter of the house, however, was a 26-year-old dressmaker.<sup>12</sup>

The slight decline by 1871 in the proportion of extended families in the district suggests a possible connection with the slow downward trend in overcrowding experienced in the city after the mid-century. As mentioned earlier, the population of the inner-city districts peaked in 1861 and fell thereafter, but in the area surveyed, the oldest block of Ancoats, the decline was particularly steep, from approximately 8,500 to 7,000 between 1851 and 1871. The occupancy rates (people per numbered house) also peaked at 6.1 people per house in 1861 in the city as a whole. In the New Cross survey, occupancy rates were 6.75 in 1851, falling to 5.67 in 1871. It is probable that since houses here were larger, often having four stories, they were prone to overcrowding. But the downward trend was the same as elsewhere in the city, albeit from a higher starting point. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, housing in this district may have been more readily available at more reasonable rents, and perhaps related families had less need to live together. By this time, the houses were mostly 50 years old or more, and in poor condition, yet mostly apparently still serviceable.<sup>13</sup>

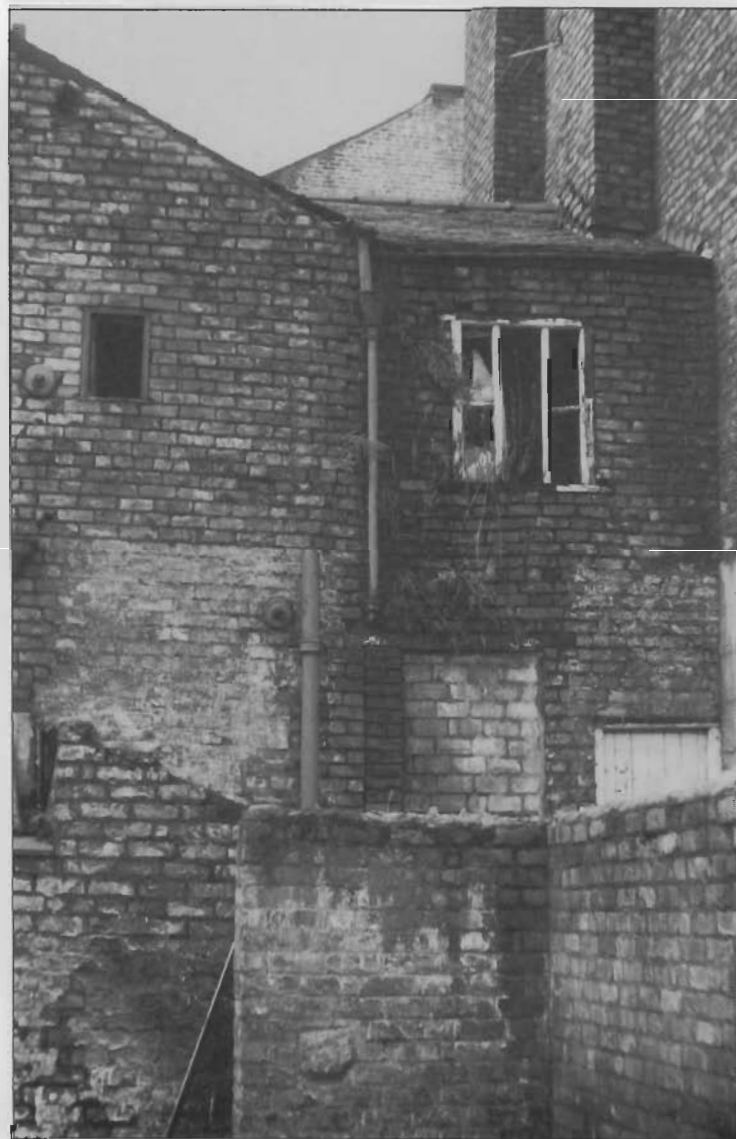
This concentration on the household, however, may be misleading, since there were often separate units in the same subdivided house who nevertheless shared the same economic basis. This was particularly notable among the domestic artisans who probably worked together under the same roof, pooling their skills. For example, at 3, Cornwall Street in 1871 were two couples, each with one young child, who were both fustian cutters. The same pattern of cooperation may have been true of neighbours in different houses, but it is precisely these vital interconnections that are invisible in census surveys.

### **Gender, Work and Family Survival**

The physical dominance of the area by the great mills perhaps deceived contemporary observers, for Ancoats was not predominantly a community of factory workers, at least

as regards the adult men. This raises the difficulty of relating work opportunities to strategies of family survival, for in cities such as Manchester, as today, opportunities for work differed markedly according to age, gender and nationality (or, more contentiously, race, if we are to analyse a district that was about 45 per cent Irish-born in 1851).<sup>14</sup>

The 1841 Census for the Lancashire towns suggests that adult men in Manchester were already experiencing very different economic chances compared with women — only 26.6 per cent of them were in any kind of textile work (including tailoring, dyeing and bleaching and all unspecified weavers), compared with 42.6 per cent of adult women, and only a little over half of these were in factories. This was a feature of Manchester for the rest of the century, confirmation of the argument by economic historians that other industries and particularly other sectors such as warehousing and distribution, mattered more in a regional centre compared with smaller, more industrially specialized towns. However, it should be noted that for younger people (under 20 years old), especially young women, the jobs were largely in textiles (58.6 per cent of women under 20, 43.6 per cent of men), and in factories (more than 70 per cent of both). Nonetheless, the Manchester economy in general was less dependent on the textile sector at mid-century than most other Lancashire towns, and this was a striking feature of the inner-city area of Ancoats. In 1851, local people were rather more involved in textile work than the average for the city,



*Back of Sherratt Street.*



*Cottages in Gun Street, c1810.*

but for adult men there was still a large sector of handcraft work which set them apart from their children of either gender, and from adult women as a whole. While 30.3 per cent of all men worked in textiles of some kind or another, only 4 in 10 of them had factory jobs. There were still some handloom and 'cotton weavers', fustian-cutters and other domestic workers in the district. The majority of local women in the textile sector, by contrast, worked in the factories (probably those nearby in the district).<sup>15</sup>

The contrasting fortunes of gender and generation are clear in one family who lived at The Passage, Gun Street:

*Patrick Marsden, head, 48, Handloom weaver*

*Margaret, his wife, 44 "ditto's wife"*

*Margaret, d., 22, powerloom weaver*

*Jane, d., 19, powerloom weaver*

*Thomas, s., 16, handloom weaver.*

As the plaintive song, *The Weaver and the Factory Maid* put it, "Where are the girls? I'll tell you plain. The girls have gone to weave by steam". The 'weaver' of the story, of course, was male, as were all the 'cotton weavers' listed in the 1851 census of Ancoats, suggesting that many handworkers survived hidden under this generic description.<sup>16</sup>

In such an economy dependence on men's income-earning capabilities was not a practicable proposition for many families: the income would have been both too low and too infrequent. By 1871 only one in five adult men worked in any kind of textiles: the majority of the rest were working in the various artisan trades, retail and warehousing, transport and building — all the semi-casual, workshop and outdoor jobs of a large Victorian city. The artisans made everything from stays to umbrellas, shovels and bonnets, pins and matches. Not surprisingly, only one elderly (59-year-old) Irishman was in handloom-weaving by this time, but significantly his two teenage children were in cotton mills. There was little skilled and highly-rewarded work done by the men of Ancoats. Presumably the skilled workers in local mills lived further out in the newest suburban housing: it was not just the rich or middle class who evacuated the city centre for the "healthy zones of new growth", leaving the poorest near the places of casual work in the old slums.<sup>17</sup>

### Immigrants

The problems facing men were worse if they were recent immigrants: while Ancoats was not classed by Werly as one of his Manchester Irish ghettos, it is striking that nearly half the men in 1851 were born in Ireland, and many had probably migrated when their families were already completed, their children already half grown-up. Their chances of factory work were slim — fewer than one in twenty were in the textile factories, but they dominated the construction industry, making up 84 per cent of Ancoats labourers in 1851. They were also scattered through many artisan trades such as shoemaking, but notably less involved in the shops and other retail work. Recent studies of the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain have provided a necessary corrective to the common image of the poor unskilled Irish immigrants, for taken as a whole the community displayed a diversity both in occupational background before migration and in their subsequent achievements. But in the oldest district of Ancoats this diversity, dependent on substantial opportunities for success being available, was not possible for people of any background. The Irish were described as the 'poor whites' of nineteenth-century Lancashire, and this status was shared by many adult men in Ancoats outside the factories.<sup>18</sup>

This evidence confirms the recent economic analysis of Manchester as possessing a "casual labour market which, as a proportion of the total male labour force, was more akin to those of ports like Liverpool and Hull than other inland cities like Birmingham or Leeds". Given the seasonal character of both construction, artisan and retail work, it is not surprising that Fred Scott found a fifth of Ancoats heads of households 'irregularly employed' in the 1880s. The situation continued at the end of the century, as Ancoats, so near the Smithfield Market, was characterized as possessing "an army of street traders and hawkers eking out an insecure living"<sup>19</sup>

### Work of Women and Children

Families therefore frequently depended on more than one worker to bring in income, and more than just textile work, to survive. For men, who had the greatest difficulty in finding unskilled, semi-skilled work, often seasonal and badly paid, income from the rest of the family was essential. One obvious strategy was to find work for the children as soon as possible. The 1851 census, in providing data on the work of children in Manchester, demonstrates that the age at which half were at work, at 12 for boys and 13 for girls, was lower in Ancoats than elsewhere in the city. However, in contrast to the situation facing teenagers, many of the very

young had difficulty finding any, let alone regular work, for in 1866 Bremner found, in a famous survey that provoked national discussion of the necessity of compulsory schooling, that half the children living with parents in Manchester and Salford were neither in work nor school. This is confirmed to some extent by the 1871 sample from Ancoats, which reveals more than half the children under 13 years of age were described as neither in work nor 'scholars' (although these modes of description are hardly completely reliable).<sup>20</sup>

One of the key methods of economic survival for families was for married women to work. Some clearly worked with their husbands and children in the family trade. This was clearest in occupations such as boot- or shoemaking, where the wives were often described as 'boot closer' or 'shoebinder', reflecting their role as assistants to their husbands. But in areas such as fustian cutting and hat finishing, too, where men and women were more likely to share the same description, married couples obviously formed a team together in the same trade.<sup>21</sup>

Since most opportunities for women lay outside the home, however, the question arises as to how they combined family responsibilities with this kind of work. In 1851, it is clear from the evidence of families in different 'stages' of development that married women's recorded work actually increased as the family grew, peaking in the stages of the family cycle before the children in their turn found work. At this time nearly 40 per cent of married women had a recorded occupation that brought in income. This is almost certainly an underestimate of the extent of women's income-earning activities, as Sally Alexander's work on London suggests, so the degree to which women worked while their children were small may have been much greater. At the start of their married life, as a young couple alone or with not more than one child, only about a third of the married women worked, and at the end of the cycle, after most of the children were employed, it fell to less than a fifth. It was in between these phases, when the children were most numerous and most dependent, that mothers sought to work. As Rowntree put it in 1901, "it should be noted that women are in poverty during the greater part of the period that they are bearing children".<sup>22</sup>

This pattern is the precise opposite of the present-day 'interrupted career pattern' of women who take some years away from paid employment to have children, and return when they are in school or reasonably independent. It is a sure reflection of the uncertainties of the husbands' employment and level of income at this time, and of the desperation of families where children were costly despite their high mortality. Yet by 1871, among Ancoats families, something approximating the modern pattern appears to have developed. While the overall average of married women working was much the same (a little over 31 per cent), the work was concentrated at the beginning and end of the family cycle. In the middle, when the children were mostly dependent, the proportion fell to one in four, rising only a little as the children gained work themselves. This suggests a more reliable family economy, or at least one in which the domesticated ideal of a wife's life had become economically viable. Certainly the forces of middle-class public opinion were against the pattern of work that had prevailed earlier, and the change by the 1870s may be due to such semi-official pressure. Few nineteenth-century observers conceded the right of women to work when it was economically necessary, or challenged the conventional assumption that the children of such women were inevitably neglected: the Factory Inspector Cooke Taylor was almost alone in making such a sympathetic argument in the 1860s.<sup>23</sup>

The change in women's work patterns in Ancoats outlined here should not be exaggerated — mothers with very young children were still more likely to work than not throughout the period. Nevertheless the overall proportion of married mothers working at all fell, and this, taken with the decrease in the middle of the family cycle, suggests that by 1871 mothers tended to 'return' to the home as the family grew. This fits in with much evidence, particularly from oral testimony as late as the 1920s, that "women were much more likely to be employed during the early years of child-bearing . . . than in subsequent years".<sup>24</sup> It may be, to reiterate Alexander's point, that women had become more adept at hiding from official eyes the true sources of their income if they continued to work while their children were small, thus avoiding official censure.

Certainly one notable feature of adult women's work by 1871 was the gradual reduction of their dependence on textiles and their diversification into the retail, artisan and casual labour trades, making and selling cigars, boots and shoes, handkerchiefs, or sweets and cheap confectionery. This may have made accurate recording of their paid work less likely. On the other hand, in the language they used to describe themselves, Ancoats wives indicated a growing domesticity. They were distinctly more likely to call themselves 'housekeeper' (not 'housewife') by the 1871 census compared with twenty years earlier. Perhaps unpaid domestic labour — 'homemaking' had become a more prestigious status to declare on official forms by that time. Certainly the labels used by 1871 seem to reflect a view of women as appendages of men. It is hard to believe that a 'cabinetmaker's wife', 'woodturner's wife' or 'market porter's wife' would be a partner in the family trade as still occurred in shoemaking and fustian cutting, though this may be reading too much into the scanty evidence.<sup>25</sup>

### Housing and Survival

If no additional income could be found from outside employment, the housing market offered some opportunities for families to save or make money. Couples could go into cheap lodgings rather than try for a house, or part of one, of their own. Equally, if they had the space, they could offer lodgings to others for a little cash. Both these strategies were essential to Ancoats people, whose flexible use of housing resulted in a situation where tenants moved so frequently that they are almost impossible to track in the annual rate books.<sup>26</sup> The provision of lodgings was a common characteristic of many poor areas, aiding the process of immigration by the young and, perhaps, allowing local families to reduce overcrowding as the children left home to live nearby. Certainly lodgers were an essential part of the economy of the poor, about a tenth of Ancoats couples taking them in throughout the period. In addition, there were in all Victorian cities 'professional' managers of lodging houses for whom this was a primary business; none featured in this survey, which specifically excluded business premises, though, as mentioned earlier, they were not numerous.

In Ancoats, lodgers were just as likely to be male as female, and a majority were under 25-years-old, and Irish-born. In 1871 they were rather fewer overall, perhaps due to definitional changes in the census concerning lodgers and 'boarders', and more likely to be male and British-born. Despite the general decline in immigration (some 36 per cent of the total population had been born abroad in 1871), there remained a viable market for lodgers right up to the end of the century.<sup>27</sup> Some lodgers were co-workers in domestic trades. For example, in 1851 George Green and his wife,

living at 140, Henry Street with their five young children, also had five adult male 'lodgers', all of them, like George, bootmakers. These were not 'servants', as young shop assistants were often described, but more likely fellow workers in the household business.

As well as single lodgers, there was a pattern of couples going into lodgings, most typically before the children were born — a quarter in 1851, more than 45 per cent by 1871, providing themselves with cheap housing at the time of their maximum joint earnings. Thereafter, they would try to find a place of their own, despite the greater expense. Throughout the period, couples took in lodgers to help with this cost: in 1851 this was most commonly when their children were too young to work. As this coincided with the timing of the peak in wives' working, the two may have been connected: the lodgers, many of them young, may have helped with the children. But with more than a third of couples in this stage of their lives taking in lodgers in the 1851 sample, the suggestion must be that lodgers, despite the overcrowding their presence must have produced, were essential to the middle period of the family cycle when the economic resources were thinnest and the children's needs greatest. By 1871, things may have eased, for little more than a fifth of couples in their middle stage took in lodgers, scarcely more than in the subsequent phase when their children were earning. As with the parallel development of a more modern work career pattern for wives, this may indicate that a relaxation of the severest pressures on families had occurred by the 1870s.<sup>28</sup>

### One-Parent Families

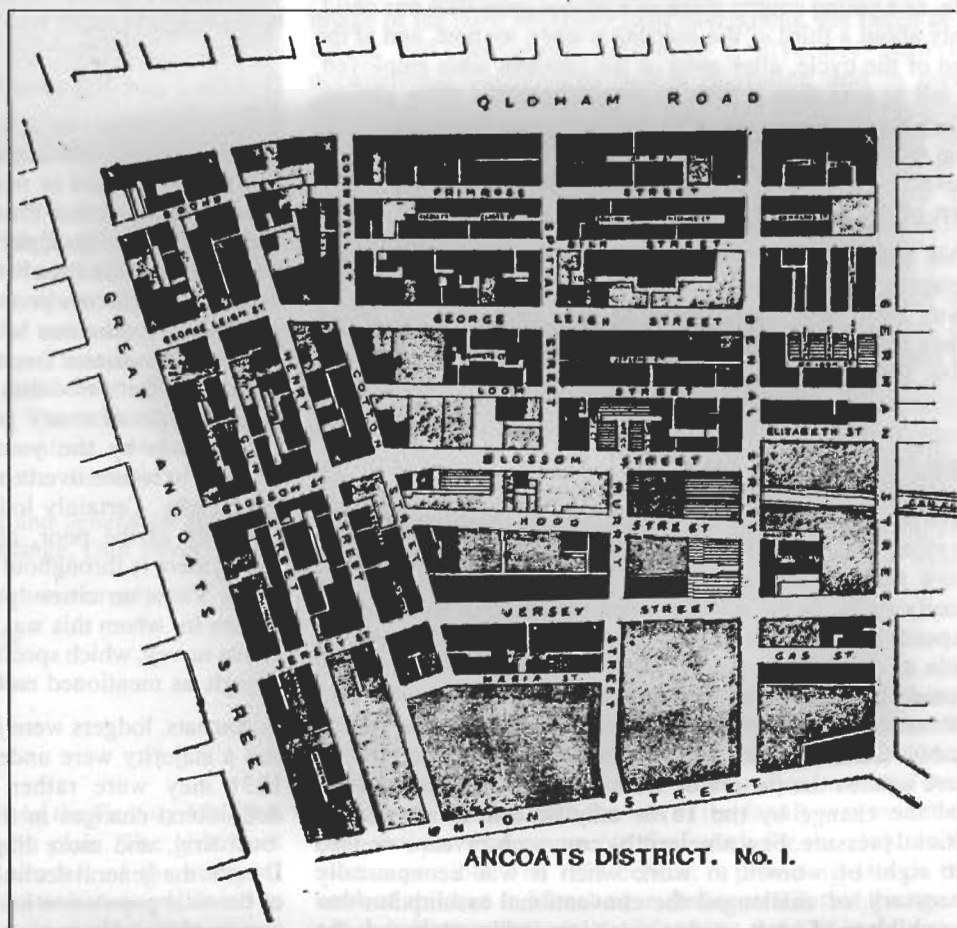
The casualties of the system, as today, were undoubtedly those parents left on their own with dependent children. These families were far less likely to be able to set up their own household, and in 1851 nearly two-thirds were in lodgings, though this had fallen to slightly less than half in 1871. This reflected their poverty, as did the limited range of low-paid occupations available, most striking among female single parents in particular. These women were disproportionately dependent on washing and charring or working in shops and minor artisan trades. A second group of one-parent families contained much older children, adult and in work, and, as mentioned earlier, more likely to be in three-generation households. With these, it seems that co-residence provided both a more secure economic life for the increasingly elderly parents and a means of caring for the grandchildren while the middle generation were at work. These families were more likely to possess their own households, and consequently supplemented their incomes by taking in many lodgers. Nevertheless, widows

were in particular difficulty, especially if elderly and unable to work, despite the aid from co-resident relatives: their earnings in the 1860s were reported to be as low as five shillings a week.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

The features of family life among the poor of Ancoats are, therefore, fairly clear from this evidence. Faced with an uncertain inner-city economy, high death rates and the problems of immigrant adaptation, families relied on a series of flexible strategies for their survival. Their use of housing, both taking in lodgers or becoming lodgers themselves, frequent changes of address, and drawing together of larger groups of kin under the same roof, all signify a family system in which households could change from year to year, or even month to month, depending on circumstances. Couples sought to maximize earnings of all members of the family, including married women, and single parents used their own parents or siblings for support. Everyone attempted to find work for the children as soon as possible, though this became less successful later in the century. Above all, families relied on each other — especially during the worst emergencies. As Anderson has shown, the close ties between relatives were demonstrated through family visits during times of crisis such as the 1832 cholera epidemic.<sup>30</sup> Yet this mutual reliance was part of the flexible resilience of the Manchester population and the way they organized their family life.

Throughout this analysis, concepts such as 'strategy' and 'organization' have been used with regard to Ancoats families. These do not reflect a situation of rational calculation and freely-made choices. On the contrary, many families and



The much-investigated No. 1 District. A map of 1887 showing areas 'where consumption is bred in Manchester and Salford'.



George Leigh Street, the 1890s rebuilding.

individuals had no choices at all given their scarce sources of income and burdens of children. Yet the reputation of local people for having a talent for survival is reflected in these findings. One local politician, surveying the life of the city's poor in the 1880s was surprised by the absence of hereditary pauperism — “the children of paupers do in the large majority of cases become self-supporting”, and noted that, for young people at least, finding work through which to achieve this was not difficult. His surprise was patronising, of course, for above all, the city economy was well suited to the young and single; for those with children to support, or whose physical health was declining with age and infirmity, it offered harsher prospects. Only intermittently did Ancoats families manage to establish their economic security, but it was easily shattered. Yet local people thought at the end of the century that the worst was past. Charles Rowley, talking of Booth's studies of the poor in London, remarked that “in reading his books I could fancy that he was analysing huge chunks of population that I have known from childhood”. In his view, Ancoats had by then grown out of that level of degradation.<sup>31</sup>

Such judgements were made in many cities at the end of the Victorian period, as ‘rookeries’ were discovered to have become ‘communities’. Such a shift in language, perhaps used to indicate the development of decorous respectability, is deceptive. Most of these areas continued to be poor, notoriously hostile to the police, and the focus of disproportionate official interest.<sup>32</sup> Ancoats was no exception. Surveys of the poverty and ill-health of its people continued to be published until after the Second World War. As T.R.Marr reported in 1904:

*Very few skilled workers were found in the district, and a large proportion of those found were out of work. The investigators noted that they were often old men, occasionally they were invalids, and in a few cases there was evidence that they were intemperate. In a good many instances the head of the household was a widow earning money by charring or washing.*

While the area remained heavily built up, however, there was relatively little overcrowding (judged by an official measure of more than two people to a room). Later surveys of poverty between the wars indicated that unemployment was a severe factor then, leaving two-thirds of households in varied degrees of poverty. The evidence “illustrates the survival of immense poverty in central districts even in the more prosperous late 1930s”. Casual work remained widespread. In the view of the police, Ancoats, like other inner-city areas, was a centre of illicit gambling, as had been alleged a century earlier. The notion of *improvement*, therefore, or any idea of stabilisation of family life, must remain relative to a desperately poor past rather than to the more prosperous and comfortable situation of the suburban areas of Manchester. Ancoats was always poor and never managed to catch up with middle-class districts. But such poverty was not static, for the family life within it changed significantly in the mid-Victorian period. It would therefore be an error to believe that, for the perpetually poor, everything always stayed the same. There was sufficient variety as well as uncertainty to produce both a diverse and changing family life as different strategies were adopted and developed in Ancoats.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 *The Times*, 24 August 1819.
- 2 J.P.Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, originally 1832, reprinted E.J.Morten (Didsbury 1969), pp.62, 64. F.Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England. From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*, Introduction by Eric Hobsbawm (London, 1969), p.96.
- 3 *An Historical Account of that Part of Manchester Called New Cross*, MCL Archives, (1871?, Manchester); Charles Rowley, *Fifty Years of Ancoats: Loss and Gain* (1899), read before the Toynbee Debating Society, p.194
- 4 J.E.Goldthorpe, *Family Life in Western Societies: A Historical Sociology of Family Relationships in Britain and North America* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.35-9; David Levine, *Reproducing Families: The Political Economy of English Population History* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.96, 104, 160ff.
- 5 Richard Wall, 'Regional and Temporal Variations in the Structure of the British Household Since 1851', in T.Barker and M.Drake, *Population and Society in Britain, 1850-1980* (Batsford, 1982), pp.92-93; M.Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971).
- 6 Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain, c.1850-1914* (London, 1981), p.39, and chapter by E. Roberts, 'Working Wives and Their Families', in T.Barker and M.Drake, *Population and Society in Britain, 1850-1980* (Batsford, 1982), pp.142-3.
- 7 John Holley, 'The Two Family Economies in Industrialism: Factory Workers in Victorian Scotland', *J.Fam.Hist.*, 6 (1981), pp.56-69; Louise A. Tilly, 'Demographic History Faces the Family: Europe Since 1500', *Trends in History*, 3 (1985), p.59; and see H.Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work. A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge, 1989).
- 8 M.Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914* (1980), pp.80-3; Charles Tilly, 'Family History, Social History, and Social Change', *J.Fam.Hist.*, 12 (1987), pp.319-330.
- 9 To judge from the published census figures, Ancoats was an inner-city area with space for rapid growth, from 11,039 in 1801 to 31,600 in 1831 to 53,737 in 1851, but shared the decline after 1861 with Deansgate and Market Street and other central areas: only St. George's grew.
- 10 Angus Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849* (originally 1849, reprinted Helmshore Local History Society, 1972), p.5; P.Rushton, Housing Conditions and the Family Economy in the Victorian Slum: a Study of a Manchester District, 1790-1871 Univ. Manchester, Ph.D. thesis (1977), pp.290-2. Kay, *Moral and Physical Condition*, p.33.
- 11 For death rates, see L.Playfair, *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Large Towns in Lancashire (to the Health of Towns Commission* (pamphlet, 1845), and Rushton, thesis p.222. J.F.Pound, *The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570* (1971), Norfolk Record Society, Vol. XL. Widows — Rushton, thesis, pp.306-7
- 12 Richard Wall, 'Regional and Temporal Variations in English Household Structure from 1650', in John Hobcraft and Philip Rees, eds., *Regional Demographic Development* (1977), pp.94, 103-7; Rushton, thesis pp.311-3. M.Anderson, *Family Structure*, Ch. 10.
- 13 Rushton, thesis, pp.36, 45; H.Baker 'On the Growth of the Commercial Centre of Manchester, Movement of Population, and Pressure of Habitation — Census Decennial, 1861-1871', *Trans. Manchester Stats.Soc.* (1871-2), and 'On the Growth of the Manchester Population, Extension of the Commercial Centre of the City, and the Provision for Habitation, Census Period 1871-1881', *Trans. Manchester Stats. Soc.* (1881-2). The Officer of Health, *Annual Report* (1884) provided a detailed map of the district showing that the bulk of residential property had been built by 1830.
- 14 Rushton, thesis pp.174-5, p.208, n.45. See Sheridan Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780-1900', in Colin Holmes, ed., *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London, 1978), p.85, and M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Problems of Integration', in R.Swift and S.Gilley, eds., *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London, 1985), pp.20-1, for the debate over nation and race.
- 15 Alan J.Kidd, 'Introduction: The Middle Class in Nineteenth-Century Manchester', in A.J.Kidd and K.W.Roberts, eds., *City, Class and Culture. Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), p.21; Rushton, thesis p.198-200.
- 16 Rushton, thesis p.160; R.Palmer, *A Touch on the Times — Songs of Social Change, 1770-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.133.
- 17 Rushton, thesis pp.161, 202. Baker, *Manchester Stats. Soc.*, 1871-2, pp.68-9.
- 18 Rushton, thesis, pp.208, n.45, pp.174-5; R.L.Greenall, 'Popular Conservatism in Salford, 1868-1886', *Northern History*, 9 (1974), p.132; J.M.Werly, 'The Irish in Manchester', *Irish Hist.Stud.*, 18 no. 71 (1973), 345-358; Steve Fielding, 'Irish Politics in Manchester, 1890-1914', *Int.Rev.Soc.Hist.*, 33 (1988), pp.264-5, notes the importance of service industries such as the nearby Smithfield Market, in an area that contained 40 per cent of Manchester's Catholics in 1900. See also Colin Pooley, 'Segregation or Integration? The Residential Experience of the Irish in Mid-Victorian Britain', and Graham Davis, 'Little Irelands', in R.Swift and S.Gilley, eds., *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (1989).
- 19 Alan J.Kidd, "'Outcast Manchester': Voluntary Charity, Poor Relief and the Casual Poor', in A.J.Kidd and K.W.Roberts, eds., *City, Class and Culture. Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), p.52; F.Scott, 'The Condition and Occupations of the People of Manchester and Salford', *Trans. Manchester Stats. Soc.* (1888-9), p.101, Fielding, 'Irish Politics', p.265.
- 20 Rushton, thesis, pp.248-50, figures pp.250 and 252; *Select Committee on Manchester and Salford Education, 1852-3*, P.P.1852 XI, Appendix II; J.A.Bremner, 'Education of the Manual Labour Class', *Trans. Nat. Ass. for the Promotion of Social Science* (1866), p.311.
- 21 See Thomas and Mary Brown, in 1851, at 179 Henry St., he a shoemaker, she a bootclosser.
- 22 Sally Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London: a Study of the Years 1820-50', in J.Mitchell and A.Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth 1976); Rushton, thesis pp.296-7; see also Edward Higgs, 'Women, Occupation and Work in Nineteenth-Century Censuses', *Hist.Workshop J.*, 23 (1987) 63-4; B.S.Rowntree, extract from *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, in Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England, 1866-1913. Selections from the Social Explorers* (London, 1976), p.193.
- 23 Rushton, thesis, p.219; see L.Davidoff and C.Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987); W.Cooke Taylor, 'The Employment of Married Women in Manufacture', *Trans. Nat. Assoc. for the Promotion of Social Science* (1866), p.605.
- 24 57.5 per cent of mothers with children less than 5 in 1851, 55.1 per cent in 1871; but the overall proportion of married mothers working fell from 34.5 per cent to 28.5 per cent, to below the average for all married women in the area. Elizabeth Roberts, 'Working Wives and Their Families', in T.Barker and M.Drake, *Population and Society in Britain, 1850-1980* (Batsford, 1982), p.143; Rushton, thesis, pp.296-7.
- 25 Rushton thesis, pp.181-2, 304; see P.Rushton, 'Anomalies as Evidence in Nineteenth-Century Censuses', *The Local Historian*, 13 No.8 (1979), for further interesting oddities in these census forms.
- 26 As an indication of rising tenant turnover, it was found that only 10.8 per cent of tenants were left in 1861 after 5 years, an 89 per cent turnover, up from 75 per cent in the 1820s and 1830s — Rushton, thesis pp.99-100.
- 27 J.Emerson, 'The Lodging Market in a Victorian City: Exeter', *Southern History*, 9 (1987), pp.103-113; Rushton, thesis, pp.296-8 — in 1851, 139, 64 per cent of them Irish, in 1871 115, 35.6 per cent Irish.
- 28 Rushton, thesis p.321: note that the proportion of couples using *none* of the 'strategies' listed here — neither being, nor taking in, lodgers, nor the wife working, rose from 41.4 per cent in 1851 to 52.9 per cent in 1871, graph 2.
- 29 Rushton, thesis pp.306-10, n.21 p.324; Manchester and Salford Education Aid Society, *Annual Report*, 1865-6.
- 30 M.Anderson, *Family Structure*, p.64.
- 31 Alexander MacDougall, *Inquiry into the Causes of Pauperism in the Township of Manchester* (1884), p.8, and *Further Inquiries into the Causes of Pauperism in the Township of Manchester* (1885), p.6 — he was Chairman of the General Purposes Committee of the Manchester Board of Guardians. Charles Rowley, *Fifty Years of Ancoats* . . . (1899), p.4.
- 32 Jennifer Davis, 'From "Rookeries" to "Communities": Race, Poverty and Policing in London, 1850-1985', *History Workshop Journal*, 27 (1989), pp.66-85.
- 33 T.R.Marr, *Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1904), for the Citizens' Association for the Improvement of Unwholesome Dwellings and Surroundings of the People, pp.54, 56; Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty. Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992), p.23-4, and Chapter 6; William Beaver Neale, *Juvenile Delinquency in Manchester: Its Causes and History, Its Consequences, and some suggestions concerning its cure* (Manchester, 1840), pp.8-9, 16.