

IRISH IN THE EAST CHESHIRE SILK INDUSTRY 1851–1861

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The first two generations of labour historians – notably, the Hammonds and the Webbs, the Coles, Henry Pelling, Eric Hobsbawm and Edward Thompson – established the chronology and bibliography of labour history. Above all, they got its importance recognised, though the task is far from complete. The third generation of social historians have focussed largely upon the demands which the Industrial Revolution made on the skilled worker in such studies as Richard Price's *Masters, Unions and Men*, a study of the building trade (1980), and Charles Moore's *Skill And The English Working Class, 1870–1914* (1981). Another legacy of the Hammond era has been the development of interest in small geographical areas, such as John Foster's study of Oldham, South Shields and Northampton in *Class Struggle And The Industrial Revolution* (1974) and Michael Anderson's study of Preston, *Family Structure In Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (1971). With this regional interest has come a considerable number of papers and articles on occupational changes in many trades and localities which had been out of the reach of the pioneer social historians at the beginning of the century.¹ With the change in emphasis came a change in methodology. In 1951 the first really useful Census, for the year 1851, became available to historians. This contained material concerning individual occupations, family size, place of birth and marital status. By comparing the materials found in subsequent censuses, 1861 and 1871, it is possible to identify subtle shifts in occupational structure in small areas and thereby test the theories of trade union growth, educational development and population growth. Few historians, however, have examined the effects of the

most important migration into English towns in the mid-nineteenth century, the Irish. This is either because assumptions about the Irish 'colonies' have been so keenly held by scholars eager to trace class consciousness before the 1880's, or that a satisfactory explanation of occupational mobility for English settlements after 1840 can be had without reference to the immigrants who took the poorest jobs, kept them for a short time and who had moved on before the next census could locate them in the same district ten years later. It is with recent studies such as Jacqueline Roberts' book, *Working Class Housing In Nineteenth Century Manchester*, and Lynn Hollen Lees' study, *Exiles of Erin*, that the importance of the Irish worker has been recognised. While Lees traces occupational patterns of the Irish in London, Roberts is able to focus on one street of some fifty houses, identify movements in and out of the Street through censuses, rate books, rent books and directories to establish a social history for a small corner of a major city. The call for small-scale research is clear. The materials and methodology are at hand. The questions about migrants and the English labour market have yet to be answered satisfactorily.

The silk industry of East Cheshire was reputed to be an area of strong union solidarity, even as early as 1833.² Furthermore, the propensity of the industry to take children at a much younger age than the cotton factories of Lancashire is well documented. John Wright, Steward in Brinsley and Shatwell's Silk Mill reported that this very early start for children, often at five or six years of age, produced an alarming number of cripples later in life. In one small area of the town there were sixty three cripples. He reported, 'the degradation of the workpeople baffles all description: frequently, have two of my sisters been obliged to be assisted to the factory and home again until by and by they could no longer, being totally crippled in their legs'.³ The parents of the town quite probably evaded the law concerning child labour by giving false ages.⁴ How far this affected the enumeration of the census forms is hard to say. Some parents would be unwilling to admit to a civil servant that their child was under age to work in a factory, but this might be misjudging the parents.⁵ On the other hand, without extremely tedious work tracing the birth certificates for all children in Macclesfield in 1851 there are only the census forms to go by. In fact, the census for Macclesfield appears extremely reliable, in that there are no double entries, few

errors and seemingly very careful counting marks made by the enumerator. In any case, many children were employed domestically and therefore not under the Factory Commissioners' jurisdiction. Families in Macclesfield in the middle of the last century came from all over England, and from unspecified localities for the most part in Ireland.

Perhaps the most interesting feature concerning the East Cheshire Silk Industry is the fact that it experienced an influx of already skilled Irish labour. Other districts such as Liverpool, Birmingham and London found Irish workers unskilled for any job. Many were willing to take anything to keep them from starving. *The Report On The State of The Irish Poor in Great Britain* (1836), which is one of the most impressive essays in sociology among the Blue Books of the 1830s came to this conclusion:

The Irish emigration into Britain is an example of a less civilised population spreading themselves, as a kind of substratum, beneath a more civilised community; and, without excelling in any branch of industry, obtaining possession of the lowest departments of manual labour.⁶

The effect of the decline of the Irish textile industry in the early years of the nineteenth century was to send to Great Britain a swarm of handloom weavers. The Irish handloom weavers comprised a considerable proportion of the burden of pauperism in Manchester at the end of the Napoleonic wars, and their numbers throughout the manufacturing districts increased during the following twenty years. From Dublin there was a considerable movement of silk weavers into Macclesfield and Congleton. After 1826 the movement was stimulated by public subscriptions. Similar financial encouragement of migration occurred also at Cork and Limerick.⁷ Such a situation seemed to flourish in the silk towns until 1840, when high tariffs abroad made English silks too expensive to compete and the industry began to decline. In Congleton there had been 28 silk mills in 1819, but by 1882 there were 12. Weavers were regularly without work for six months at a time.⁸ They, among other workers, were least likely to change occupations. *The Report On The Silk Trade* in 1832 recorded the fear of one weaver in Macclesfield, 'our hands would be in that state (if we became labourers) that we should not be able to handle silk'.⁹

Contemporary accounts over the causes for the decline of weaving were contradictory. In 1835 Andrew Ure in his

Philosophy of Manufacture suggested that the strong trades unionism in the town caused restrictions on labour and led to the weavers pricing themselves out of the market.¹⁰ This view is supported by the minutes of the Trades Council reported in the *Macclesfield Courier and Herald* throughout the 1850s. Throughout the 1840s the weavers had shown considerable solidarity in combining to demand higher wages. This led to the wages agreement of 1849 after weeks of strike in which the minimum rates for piece work were established throughout the silk districts.¹¹ The manufacturers' representatives on the Trades Council constantly remarked how the industry could scarcely afford such wage settlements at a time when silk was not commanding the same price abroad as it was ten years earlier.¹² Another account of the stagnation in the Cheshire silk industry came from the first-hand experience of A.B. Reach in 1849, whose peregrinations throughout the textile districts for the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper were reported.

'What is the cause of the stagnation of the trade in Macclesfield?' Well, I heard say that they were caused by over production. More goods were being made nor people wanted. Then the master couldn't sell what they had on emptie shelves, and of course, they didn't want for more, so the looms stood idle. It was a necessity.¹³

One feature which affected the silk weavers in the towns of Congleton and Macclesfield was the introduction in 1833 of the Jacquard loom. It made possible the intricate weaving of pictures and patterns and made the 'fashion' trade accessible to those previously semi-skilled weavers who had taken in only the coarsest silks.¹⁴ Reach indicates that the specialist work previously done in the towns was now being carried out by 'the weavers living in the remote country districts'.¹⁵ It is clear to see that the technological innovations in the silk mills were a mixed blessing. While the demand for special patterns and pictures in silk was high, the silk operatives were contented. Reach reported that at the height of trade a silk weaver on a Jacquard loom could earn 35s. a week, a labourer in the silk mills 20s. a week and a female throwster up to 9s. a week. On the other hand, the weaver was employed only when trade was good. Often hands were laid off for months at a time, and so the 35s. a week on average turned out at 10s. to 11s. a week throughout the year.¹⁷ Moreover, it seems that the silk trades were those most prone to debilitation in the old. It has already been seen how early child employment for long hours

caused dreadful injuries. As the weaver grew older he became less able to manipulate the threads. The time it took him to weave a pound of silk became longer and longer. Old age was to be resented in the silk towns of the nineteenth century. The problems of old age entered the folk tradition of the district in such songs as 'The Macclesfield Silk Weaver's Death'.

F'r e'en wayvers are woven in life's mystic loom
Are worn till thi threadbare, then meet the common doom
Fa nowt that is woven keeps a' of a piece
Yea, a thing's like Jacob, i' course o' time, cease.¹⁸

By far the highest number of families applying for relief at Macclesfield Workhouse in the 1850s were weavers, despite the fact a relief fund, initially established to support a striking weaver at a minimum of 5s. a week had been extended to help superannuated weavers in the 1850s. It seems that there was some disagreement over whether domestic handloom weavers, who comprised those weavers in the outlying districts round Congleton, and the Irish weavers from Dublin, should receive such assistance.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the silk operatives of Macclesfield and Congleton in the 1860's sent considerable funds to their Lancashire counterparts to relieve the effects of the depression in trade caused by the Lancashire Cotton Famine.²⁰ Whatever the causes of the decline in the silk trade, its effects were very obvious. Macclesfield, in particular experienced a considerable decline in population from 40,000 to 36,000 between 1851 and 1861. Applications for outdoor relief were increased from 115 to 257 over the same period. Looms stood idle, factories closed and hard times ensued.²¹

The status of the Irish in the towns of Congleton and Macclesfield during these times of fluctuating trade can be guessed at with the reports in the local press about Irish workers, Catholic practices and the absorption of the Irish into the community.²² Throughout the region there had been an uneasy peace between the English and Irish workers. While the skilled English artisan did not like to feel competition from the Irish immigrant, in times of distress the Irish were often blamed for lowering wages, bringing diseases, and in one case, for committing more murders than the English!²³ When the Royal Proclamation of June 1892 restricted Catholic processions in the streets, a series of Irish disturbances broke out in the Stockport and

Macclesfield districts.²⁴ From the newspaper report of the time it is obvious that the riots were the result of prolonged antagonism between the English and Irish workers over competition for jobs,

The population of Edward and John Street, and that dense district became mixed up in the feud for it ought not to be disguised that for a considerable period the Irish have entered so seriously into competition for cheap labour in the silk and cotton mills that the English have begun to view them with the strongest feelings of jealousy – if not of disapprobation.²⁵

How long such feelings existed is difficult to estimate with such scant newspaper coverage after the issue. However, in Macclesfield, the Irish weavers met regularly after 1852 in order to maintain their economic and cultural independence.²⁶ It would be fascinating to know the exact details which gave rise to this statement

Resolution of the Irish Weavers in Macclesfield

We consider it imperative for the weavers in Dublin to adopt their most likely means of restoring the whole silk branches there, as such restoration is at the present time most urgently required and that there is no possible chance of restoring such branches by adopting unreservedly the Customs and usages of the trade as practised in England. . .²⁷

The Dublin weavers blamed the invidious practises of the English manufacturers for the decline in the Irish silk industry. It seems that considerable pressure was put upon the Dublin weavers at home to accept lower wages in order to preserve the industry there. It was met with little enthusiasm in Ireland. The Dublin weavers, if they had not emigrated to England, remained an increasingly impoverished group, unable to change occupations and unwilling to take lower wages.²⁸ The Dublin weavers in Macclesfield had a slightly different occupational pattern from the rest of the Irish. Most were domestic weavers who took 'outwork' from the larger mills, and so did not have the same contact with the factory system, apprenticeships or the trade council in the town. Table 1 illustrates the different jobs the Irish had in Macclesfield.

Dublin Irish families generally did not, in 1851, have workers in industries outside silk. There are no tailors, no agents, none of the occupations which other Irish workers were adopting as they migrated into the town. Furthermore, because the place of birth of Irish families was not recorded with the precision it was in the earlier Census, it is

TABLE 1. *Occupations of Irish heads of houses in Macclesfield from the Census enumerator's returns of 1851 and 1861*

<i>Occupations</i>	<i>Dublin Irish in 1851</i>	<i>Non-Dublin Irish in 1851</i>	<i>Irish in 1861 (locality not stated in Census)</i>
Weaver	27	39	49
Labourer		20	26
Agric. Labourer		11	46
Tailor		8	10
vagrant/widow/ Housekeeper		7	27
Silk winder	2	6	7
Piecer	1	5	3
Dyer	2	4	4
Charwoman		2	3
Cordwainer/Shoemaker		3	5
Railway Labourer	1	2	(undesig- nated)
Painter		2	1
Baker		1	—
Cap maker		1	—
Coal dealer		1	—
Cotton Winder		1	—
Grocer		1	1
Hawker		1	9
Musician		1	1
Nailmaker		1	—
Trunk Maker		1	1
Wood Turner		1	1
Sugar Boiler		1	1
Spinner	1 (doubler)	1	—
Silk operative		1	4
Servant		1	3
sempstress			2
shopkeeper			2
Knitter			1
Nurse			1
Ostler			1
Rag and Bone Dealer			1
Reed maker			1
Shirt Maker			1
Trimmer			1

impossible to illustrate how much recourse the Dublin weavers had to occupations such as agricultural labourer, and lodging-house keepers which were the growth occupations of the Irish after 1851. The place of birth of Irish families were recorded in the following way. In most census districts where there were Irish families residing in 1851

there were Dublin-born Irish recorded. This would suggest that the enumerators were consistent about recording Irish who came from the capital. But, if there had been only one or two census districts in which Dublin-born Irish were recorded then the census would have conflicted with the evidence of newspapers that there were upwards of 30 Dublin weavers' households in the town in 1850, suggesting that the enumeration was inconsistent and therefore unreliable.²⁹ The 1861 Census, however, appears inconsistent.³⁰ If Table 1 represents an accurate picture of occupations open to Dublin-born Irish, then it is plain to see that the vicissitudes in the silk industry would most keenly be felt by them. Hence, the reason for the Dulin weavers' meetings throughout the 1850's. Further patterns emerge when one examines the 'scholar' registration figures for the Irish community, the occupations of their children and the speed with which they were absorbed into the communities.

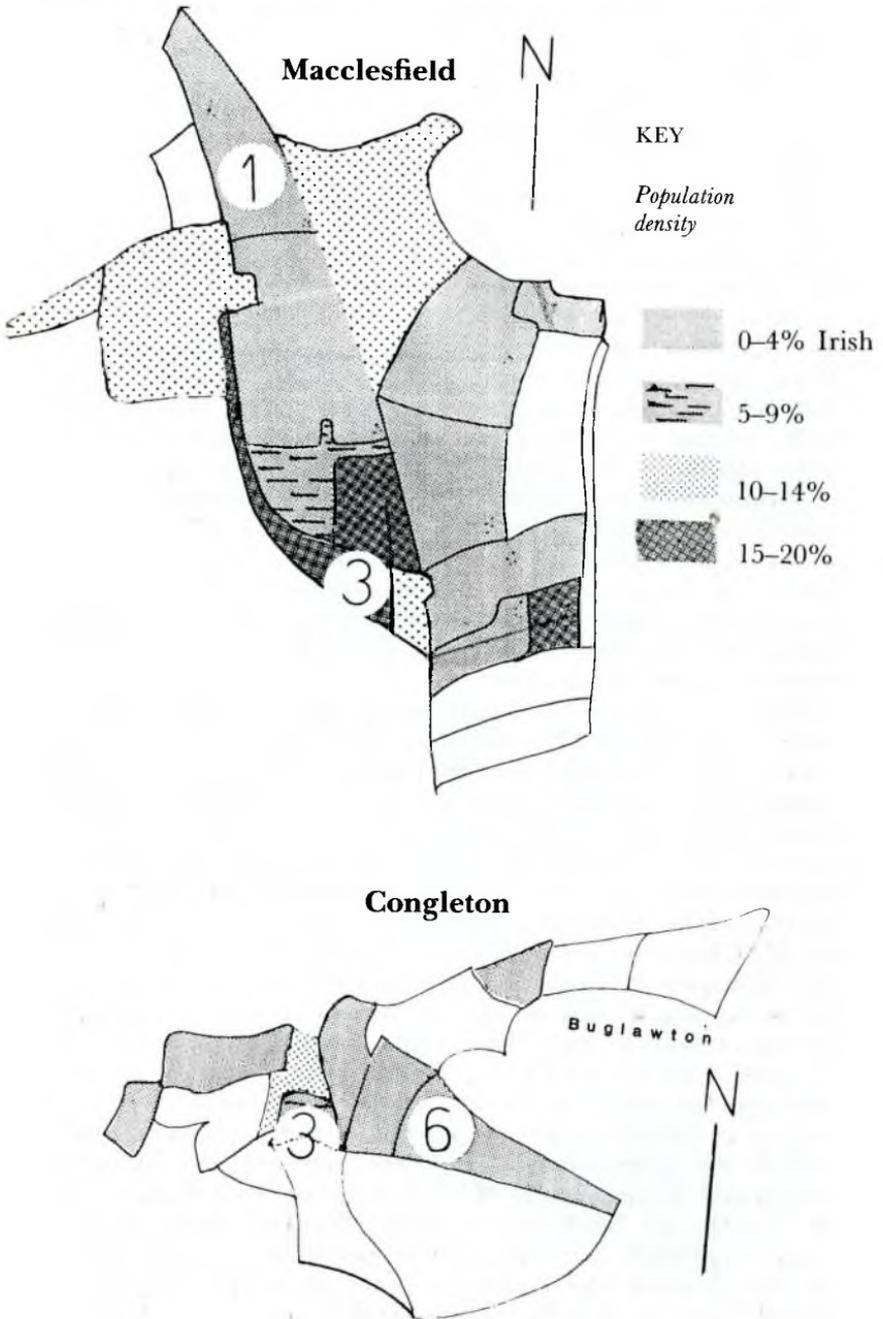
The size of the Irish communities in Congleton and Macclesfield is crucial if one is to examine such processes of absorption and occupational mobility. Table 1 indicates the jobs of Irish-born heads of houses, but does not give details of complete occupations by all Irish families, or families with one Irish servant, an Irish wife or relative. In Lowe's study of the Irish in nineteenth-century Lancashire, he has indicated that the Irish community might be up to half as large again than the number of Irish-born heads of households.³¹ In Congleton there were 65 Irish families, three of which came from Dublin and were each concerned with the ribbon weaving trade.

TABLE 2 *The size of the Irish community in Congleton, 1851.*

People who were Irish-born	253
English-born living with Irish families	53
English-born with Irish servants, lodgers	12
size of Irish community	318

The Irish community in Congleton was 26% larger than those Irish-born. In Macclesfield the figure is slightly larger, 32% higher than Irish-born in 1851 and 46% in 1861. The reason for the higher proportion of non-Irish in the Irish community is owing to the larger number of shopkeepers who were willing to employ an Irish female servant, and the several lodging-houses kept by English-born heads of households who took in Irish lodgers.³²

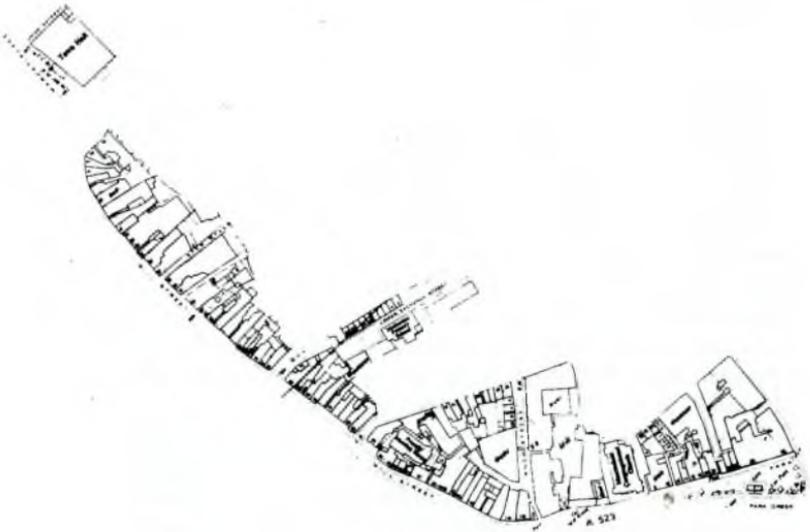
FIG. 1 *Irish Families in Macclesfield and in Congleton in 1851*



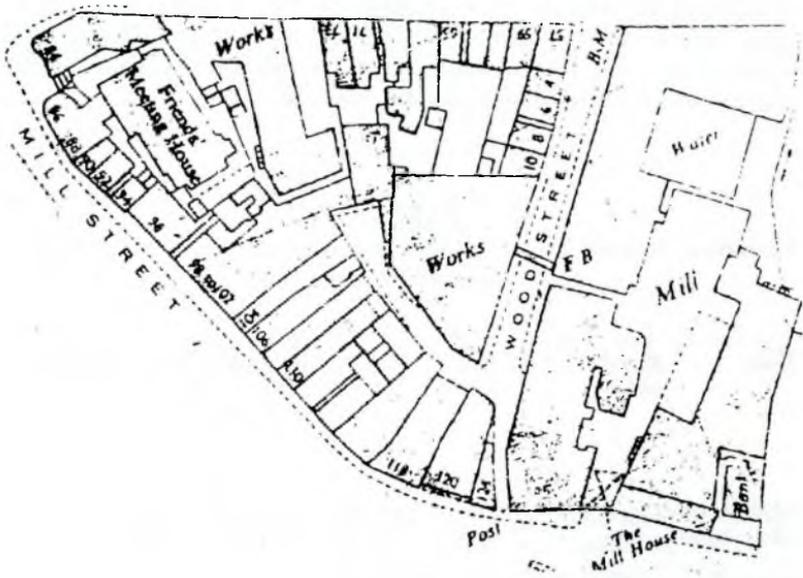
The size of the English population in the Irish community, the number of Irish and English marriages and rateable value of property where the Irish community lived can indicate the speed with which the Irish were absorbed into the community. This is important if trends of occupational development are to be thrown into relief, to know whether the absence of the Irish in certain occupational groups indicates a monopoly held by locally-born workers and a unwillingness to admit Irish men, or merely an indifference on the part of the Irish to those occupations.³³ In several studies already carried out on occupational mobility the geographical location of the Irish communities has played a significant role. As urban development took place, particularly after the 1855 Working Man's Housing Act, which made it easier for working men's houses to be built, certain enclaves grew up in towns and cities which were inhabited by particular occupational groups.³⁴ The most famous is the classic slum of the Victorian city, or the middle-class developments on the fringes of the industrial zones in such cities as Manchester and Liverpool. The silk towns of East Cheshire too experienced these 'spatial' changes in which location of factories, density of population, rateable value of property and a host of other factors must be taken into account.

Figure 1 shows the population density of Irish-born families in 1851 in Macclesfield and Congleton. In the three areas most inhabited by the Irish in Macclesfield, the immigrants made up between 15% and 20% of the population. In districts to the north and south of the town there were no Irish families at all. In Congleton, the Irish district was located in the centre of the town, with large areas to the south and the district of Buglawton with scarcely any Irish at all. Closer analysis of the census districts indicate that the Irish population was not evenly distributed throughout the area, but tended to live in smaller areas, or 'colonies'. Recent research into nineteenth century Merseyside by Richard Lawton and C.G. Pooley has indicated a methodology for small scale analysis from census data.³⁵ A variety of influences on an enumeration district, which may include the proportion of Irish, the percentage of 'scholars' designated in the census, the subtleties of the rateable value of streets and likelihood of Irish families living next to English, provide a 'grid' for comparison between districts.³⁶ In Macclesfield, the lowest rates in the town were paid in Wood Street, a notorious slum locality since the 1830s.³⁷ It

MAP 1 Census District 3 Macclesfield



MAP 2 Contrasting home environments in Macclesfield Census District 3



paid the lowest amount to the poor rate, and made the highest claims for relief. Furthermore, in 1851 it had more Irish living in it than any other street in the town. Wood Street was part of census district 3, a district made up largely of shopkeepers and tradesmen on the main thoroughfare of the town.³⁸ The Wood Street area was reached through a small alleyway between the main Mill Street with its shops and the grim district of Pickford street with its silk works (see maps 1 and 2). In Congleton, the greatest proportion of Irish were to be found in census district 3, mostly in Water Street with 11 Irish families. In Macclesfield, Wood Street had been the home of large numbers of Agricultural labourers, mostly lodgers. In Congleton, there were as many silk operatives as labourers in district 3. It appears that the Irish weavers separated themselves geographically from the Irish agricultural labourers. This was either because weavers were able to afford slightly higher rated property than the newly arrived itinerant Irish in the town, who inhabited the lodging houses in Wood Street or because there was a strong hierarchy of labour existing as much among the Irish as among their English counterparts.³⁹ Table 3 sets out the 'grid' analysis of district 3 in Macclesfield and district 3 in Congleton. The problem of rate-book analysis for such purposes as the comparison of districts can only be acknowledged. The figures here represent aggregates of the rateable value, except where such wide ranges of rates paid, as in Congleton's Canal Street, merit complete inclusion in the 'grid'.⁴⁰

TABLE 3.

Variations between streets in Macclesfield census district 3, 1851, by selected variables.

<i>Street</i>	<i>Rateable value</i>	<i>Irish families</i>	<i>Irish working</i>	<i>Irish children</i>	<i>Irish children</i>	<i>English working*</i>
				<i>scholars at work</i>		
						0; sk; se; La
Mill St. (pop. = 275)	£2	2	trimmer weaver	2 1	0	1 15 31 1 1
Wood St (pop=178)	£1.10	4	silk op. ag lab.	8 30	0	2 1 14 18

Street	Rateable value	Irish families	Irish working	Irish children scholars at work	English working*
Park Green (pop=87)	£1.10 even £2. odd	16	weaver silk op. ag lab.	9 10 19	2 7 70 11 1
Exchange St	£3	—	tailor silk op.	2 0 1	1 3 3 8 0
Market P1 (pop = 98)	£4	—	0	0	9 9 13 13 0

Variations between streets in Congleton census district 3, 1851, by selected variables.

Canal St. pop.=280	96-126=£5 even=£2 shops=£6	5	labourer housekpr hawker nailmaker	1 1 1 1	0	4 2	8 6 4
Cole Hill pop.=128	£3	3	labourer housekpr hawker nailmaker	4 2 3 0	0	0 3	9 19 10
Water St. pop=142	£2	11	labourer silk op houskpr hawker	7 7 3 3	4	2 0	2 27 16
Moody Terrace pop.=93	£3	1	labourer silk op dressmakr housekpr	1 1 1 1	0	1 8	12 25 9

*The abbreviations for English workers: o = overseer; sk = skilled; se = semi-skilled; la = labouring.

The *English working* figure simply represents the occupations of the heads of houses, but is useful in order to facilitate a 'social index score' for an area. This is a numerical score arrived at by allocating skilled, semi-skilled

and labouring families a numerical value and then dividing the product by the number of families in the street. The methodology was established in such research as Dixon's study of nineteenth century Preston and Frank Cass's 'Census and Social Structure'.⁴¹ The social index score for Wood Street in Macclesfield in 1851 would be established as follows;

TABLE 4 *The social index score for Wood St., Macclesfield, 1851*

<i>type of work</i>	<i>socio-economic group</i>	<i>numerical value</i>	<i>number of households</i>
overseer	SEG 1	6	0
professional managerial/ manufacturer	SEG 11	5	0
overseer/ manager	SEG 111a	4	0
skilled worker	SEG 111b	3	1
semi-skilled	SEG IV	2	22
unskilled	SEG V	1	48

By multiplying the household scores by the values attributed to them, then dividing by the number of households, a simple number is obtained which can be used for purposes of comparison.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Social index score} &= \frac{(1 \times 3) + (22 \times 2) + (48 \times 1)}{\text{Number of households} = 71} \\
 &= \frac{95}{71} \\
 &= \underline{1.33}
 \end{aligned}$$

A score of 4 and over indicates that an area consists mainly of households from SEG 1 (professional), SEG 11 (managerial) and SEG 111a (overseer); it would be a middle class district. Social index scores of below 3 mean progressively working-class districts. Hence, Wood Street, with a score of 1.33 was a heavily working class location. Water Street in Congleton gives a similarly working-class figure of 1.5. If

one group of Irish lived in an area of English workers with a high social index score then, on contemporary evidence, it is unlikely that the Irish were of a lower socio-economic group. As a first-hand account, *The Irish in Manchester, by one of them* (1860), suggested: 'Find an Irishman among an exclusively English district and 10 to 1 he's prosperous'. Wood street, Macclesfield, since it was a 'colony' within an area with a much higher social index score from English tradesmen and shopkeepers, was the exception to the above rule.

Wood Street appears to have been the first stop, so to speak, for the newly arrived Irish who could only obtain work on the farms nearby. Skilled weavers were generally absent in the district, and it would appear that these workers on first arriving in the town would lodge with families which were heavily engaged in weaving already. The majority of Dublin weavers lived in district 10 with 16% Irish in the skilled and semi-skilled occupations, and in district 12 with 3% Irish, all skilled workers in the silk industry. In districts with low numbers of Dublin weavers, there were Irish engaged in trades outside the silk mills. Most districts had Irish tailors, nailmakers and cordwainers, and this might be the first indication that the non-Dublin Irish had access to semi-skilled jobs outside the mills because they were not culturally bound to the economic system at home as the Dublin weavers were.⁴² Table 5 is an attempt to condense the findings of Table 1, in order to illustrate the mobility achieved by the Irish population between 1851 and 1861. Although statistical data such as that on Table 5 blurs the subtleties obtained by 'grid' analysis, it does reveal an overall trend amongst the Irish towards semi- and unskilled occupational groups. This is most likely owing to the slump in the silk trade in the early 1860's, and the migration into the town of textile workers from the Lancashire cotton famine. Much evidence suggests that workers, especially the semi-skilled operatives in one textile such as cotton or wool, would attempt to 'transfer trade' to another textile in hard times.⁴³ The most skilled in their trade would be the least likely to abandon it and the least likely to be able to 'transfer skills'. Hence, the trend of impoverished weavers and an influx of semi-skilled operatives in the town.

TABLE 5 *Occupations of Irish heads-of-household in Macclesfield from the 1851 and 1861 Census returns, by socio-economic groupings.*

<i>socio-economic group</i>	<i>N= 74</i>	<i>N= 195</i>
	<i>% Irish heads in 1851</i>	<i>% Irish heads in 1861</i>
SEG I (professional)	0	0
SEG II (managerial)	0	0
SEG IIIa (overseer/shopkeeper)	3	2
SEG IIIb (skilled worker)	20	10
SEG IV (semi-skilled)	62	56
SEG V (unskilled/labouring)	14	32

A most convenient comparison for district 3 in Macclesfield is district 1 which lay to the north of the Market Place, but on the main thoroughfare. The social index score is 2.5 1851 (social index for the Irish = 2.0). Here, there were more Irish servants to English households, and more Englishmen with Irish wives, a significant factor when assessing the absorption of one group into the community. Furthermore, it appears that the children of Irish workers in district 1 were equally likely to gain employment in the silk trade as the children of Dublin Irish in districts 10 and 12, and the children of agricultural labourers in district 3. The greatest contrasts come in the occupations of Irish children whose parents were not employed in the silk mills. These occur in most enumeration districts throughout the town. The children of the nailmaker retained their fathers' occupation in 1851, as did the bakers' children, the milksellers', the mat-makers' and the shoemakers'. A simple index of occupational mobility can be established in Table 6.

TABLE 6 *Mobility of Irish first-born sons in Macclesfield, 1851*

	<i>father's S.E.G.</i>	<i>first-born son's S.E.G.</i>	<i>Number moving</i>
up	IIIb	IIIa	2
	IV	IIIb	2
	V	IV	7
down	IIIb	IV	3
	IV	V	1
no change			54

TABLE 7 *Mobility of Irish first-born sons in Congleton, 1851*

	<i>father's S.E.G.</i>	<i>first born son's SEG</i>	<i>number moving</i>
up	IV V	IIIb IV	0 4
down	IIIb	V	1
no change			16

In both Congleton and Macclesfield there were several families with no sons, and families with sons but a widowed mother and no father's occupation which have not been included in Tables 6 and 7. Perhaps the most significant factors for the investigation of Irish absorption into the community are the predominance of Irish and English marriages on the one hand, and the likelihood of Irish families living next to English. The techniques were well used by John Foster in his *Class Struggle And The Industrial Revolution* when examining the emergence of working-class consciousness among the labouring population in industrial towns.⁴¹

TABLE 8 *The incidence of English and Irish intermarriage in Macclesfield in 1851 and 1861 from the census returns.*

<i>Incidence.</i>	<i>1851</i>	<i>1861</i>
Irishmen with Irish wives	64%	68%
Irish men with English wives outside Macclesfield	20%	14%
Irish men with Macclesfield-born wives	14%	7%
English men with Irish wives	2%	11%

NB The figures for English men with Irish wives is counted as part of the whole number of mixed marriages, i.e. 2% in 1851 of all mixed marriages, and not 2% of English marriages.

The trend in Table 8 is a subtle one, but clear enough. Irish men in 1861 were as likely as in 1851 to have married an Irish woman, but less likely to have married a locally-born woman. On the other hand, English men in 1861 had found Irish wives more readily. What these figures appear to illustrate is that Irish men were not absorbed into the community through kinship bonds, but were accepted into the locality provided they did not represent a threat to the labour market. This could partially explain why most Dublin Irish, with, incidentally, exclusively Dublin wives in

Macclesfield, lived in two or three districts. Cultural identity and economic security must have been strong cohesive factors in a foreign land. Irish families with access to jobs outside the silk mills seem to have been those most likely to have had a mixed marriage.

TABLE 9 *Proximity of English and Irish families in Macclesfield and Congleton in high and low density Irish communities, 1851.*

<i>proximity</i>	<i>Macclesfield</i> <i>census districts</i>		<i>Congleton</i> <i>census districts</i>	
	1 (low density; 2% Irish)	3 (high density; 16% Irish)	6 (low density; 2% Irish)	3 (high density; 9% Irish)
Irish with 2 English neighbours	45%	16%	52%	5%
Irish with 1 English neighbour	37%	28%	46%	70%
Irish with 2 Irish neighbours	18%	59%	2%	25%

Foster's second method for examining absorption of groups into a locality, was by examining the geographical proximity of Irish to English families.⁴⁵ Recent research by Marsden into Bootle in the last century has shown how families in differing socio-economic groups reacted to agencies such as education, the church, and even to beerhouses and inns.⁴⁶ For the purpose of this research, two factors most vulnerable to population change have been examined; geographical proximity of English and Irish and the access which the Irish had to educational provision. Both factors are readily isolated from the census returns, and Table 9 shows how districts with the higher proportion of Irish and which tended to engender isolated Irish 'colonies' were the least likely to produce English and Irish proximity. In Congleton, where the Irish represented a much smaller proportion of the total work force, the proximity figures of English and Irish neighbours appear much higher than in Macclesfield. In areas of low Irish populations, much higher English-Irish proximity figures are produced, especially in Congleton district 6. Here, the Irish were mostly labourers of one kind and another, living in cheaply rated property. Most interesting is the fact that English labourers had not differentiated themselves geographically in Congleton from the Irish, as they had in Macclesfield. Furthermore, it appears that Irish weavers in both Macclesfield and Con-

gleton had a greater chance of having English neighbours in the low density districts (1 in Macclesfield and 6 in Congleton) than in the high density districts. If this is the case throughout the textile districts, then groups were not divided so much over occupational opportunities. Perhaps what emerges is that both Irish and English skilled workers were united against economic threats. The Irish labourers in Macclesfield's Wood Street were as isolated from the English and Irish weavers as their English counterparts. Hence, generalised statements by historians such as E.J. Hobsbawm about the Irish settlements do not entirely hold good in the silk industry; '[The Irish] wages were lower than anyone else's, they lived in the worst slums, and the English and Scots despised them as semi-barbarians. . . .'⁴⁷ Although the wages problem is an extremely difficult one and beyond the scale of this paper, it is evident that the Irish did not, in general, live in the worst slums if they were skilled or semi-skilled. The proximity of many of them to English workers in similar occupations suggests that they were not 'despised' unless they were unskilled, recently arrived in the towns or likely to gain employment as an agricultural labourer. Whether the Irish were any more barbaric than the English is difficult to estimate.

However, we can illustrate the recourse that Irish parents had to education in the last century. The censuses after 1851 indicate whether children attended school or not, and by comparing the 'scholar' percentages for different groups in the community, some measure of the importance of education can be established.⁴⁸ Much pioneering work has been done using similar techniques for London before the Elementary Education Act of 1870, by David Rubenstein. Most interesting are the conclusions he draws about the significance of education for upwardly mobile groups in communities.⁴⁹ While Roach can suggest that examinations became a prerequisite for upward mobility in certain emergent occupations such as clerk and secretary, the importance of elementary schooling for the skilled and semi-skilled groups is by no means clear.⁵⁰ Again, simplistic notions about education and the industrial revolution proliferate and hinder a complete understanding of the relationship between community and industry before the 1870 Education Act.⁵¹ Roderick and Stephens in 'Scientific and Technical Education In Nineteenth-Century England' explain, 'After 1851 . . . increasing attention was given to education . . . the interdependence of education and indus-

try and the economic implications of educational policies, loomed large.⁵² G.D.H. Cole in the 1920's looked blandly on the development of education. 'Between 1851 and 1861 State grants for education in England and Wales rose from £150,000 to £813,000 . . . the improvement of educational standards was more than maintained',⁵³ and expressed the classic view, that as the industrial revolution progressed, so did the growth of elementary education. Recent studies have questioned this simple reciprocal relationship. Webb in 1950 looked at subtle changes in literacy rates for large areas of the population and focussed the historian's attention on small areas, using such materials as the availability of newspapers, Mechanics Institutes and reading rooms.⁵⁴ W. Marsden has suggested that the districts most in need of educational provision were those most militated against by government legislation.⁵⁵ After 1861 schools had to pass an examination in order to obtain a grant. Often the schools with the most itinerant population, the least motivated parents and the hardest areas to enlighten were unable to earn the grant so desperately needed to maintain the teacher and his resources. W.B. Stephens has shown how educational provision was dependent on many factors during the industrial revolution, not least those made by the changing demands upon the workforce of the textile industry.⁵⁶

In Macclesfield in 1818, a survey shows that there was 1 full-time day school and there were 3 Sunday schools.⁵⁷ By 1851 there were 9 schools with an average of 615 children in attendance. At the same time, there were small 'Dame' schools which remain unregistered for the most part except for the few which existed at the times of the censuses, and there had been for many years a 'Useful Knowledge Society' in the town. It was mostly for adults, and the attendance figures show that the majority of members were from skilled trades outside the silk mills.⁵⁸ No information exists as to whether the Irish were attracted to the Society. Catholic schools were built in Macclesfield in 1853 but not in Congleton until well after the 1870 Education Act. Closer analysis of grants earned by schools reveal subtle differences in 'earning capacity'. Across the industrial belt of South Lancashire and East Cheshire the differences between towns suggest a flourishing educational enterprise in Macclesfield and Warrington, but a desperate one in St. Helens and Wigan.

TABLE 10 *Government spending on six industrial towns per head of population, 1833-1861.*⁵⁹

St. Helens 7d	Warrington 15.8d	Widnes 10.6d	Wigan 8.3d	Macclesfield 14.5d	Congleton 11.2d
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To suggest that every person in Macclesfield or Congleton had enjoyed 14.5d or 11.2d worth of government grant for education by 1861 would, of course, be misleading; the Catholic community in Macclesfield received little or nothing until after 1853, and likewise not until after 1870 in Congleton. Little research has been carried out concerning the Irish and elementary education before 1870. What little there has been suggests that Catholic schools struggled in industrial areas to survive, and were often at odds with the government legislation over management clauses and the control of schools. Added to this, the populations of Irish communities were unstable and schools found themselves unable to guarantee a high attendance figure, thereby losing part of their capitation grant.⁶⁰ From the administration's point of view, the analysis was a simple one; the lowest and least willing of the working classes to be educated were least deserving, and so gained least. A closer analysis of the government spending in the industrial towns of Table 10 would reveal these areas 'least deserving', and one suspects they would be those same areas which, ironically, needed most resources.⁶¹

From a parental point of view, education was a commodity to be bought like anything else. There was no compulsion to attend schools, and there was a freedom on the part of parents to sponsor any school from which they were not denominationally restricted.⁶² The 'scholars' designated on the census returns indicate which occupational groups were sponsoring education. Unfortunately, the census does not allocate the actual school the child attended, but nevertheless, an impression of the value of education to different groups within the community can be established. In Macclesfield, 54% of children were registered as 'scholars' in 1851 between the ages of 3-15. The national figure at the time was between 38 and 44%, and Congleton's 41% seems much more in keeping with a town where educational provision had scarcely been a major administrative concern.⁶³

TABLE 11 *Designation of Irish children in Macclesfield and Congleton from the 1851 census*
(age ranges = 3-15)

	<i>Macclesfield</i>	<i>Congleton</i>
Irish children designated as 'scholars'	23%	19%
Irish children in work	28%	36%
Irish children undesignated	49%	45%

There were far fewer Irish children likely to attend school in the silk factories than English children. The high 'undesignated' figure for both districts perhaps indicates that there was a great deal of domestic work for the children to do at home, and which was not deemed worthy of recording on census night. Hence, the 'children at work' figure is likely to represent children involved in factory work. The Parliamentary Enquiry into the State of the Irish Poor mentions that Irish children found work easily in the silk mills.⁶⁴ Furthermore, perhaps the comparatively low percentage of Irish children attending school is astonishingly high when one considers that there was no government aided Catholic school until two years later. The figure shows, moreover, that there were many agencies operating in the town which engendered elementary schooling of some kind. Such institutions have been well documented in some parts of England in which industrialists were more beneficent towards their workforces and bestowed some means of schooling on them.⁶⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine educational enterprise in Cheshire before 1870, except to identify the predilection of the Irish towards it in the silk towns.

TABLE 12 *'Scholar' designation for Irish children (aged 3-15) in Congleton and Macclesfield, 1851.*

<i>Age ranges</i>	<i>Macclesfield</i>		<i>Congleton</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
3-6	9 scholars 20 children	6 scholars 24 children	5 scholars 11 children	3 scholars 8 children
7-10	20 scholars 45 children	7 scholars 32 children	5 scholars 13 children	5 scholars 16 children
11-15	9 scholars 32 children	1 scholar 37 children	1 scholar 24 children	0 scholars 23 children

Once past the age of six, as children grew older, so they became less likely to attend school. These figures are borne out in almost all the Government reports of the day.⁶⁶ In the Irish community the most likely children to experience schooling were the boys between the ages of 7–10. The majority of children in these groups came from weaving families. In Congleton, all Irish weavers' children were registered as 'scholar' under the age of 10. The same does not apply for Macclesfield, since in the Irish community the weaver's children were as likely to go to school as a tailor's or a housekeeper's. The children of labourers are almost entirely absent from 'scholar' figures. The reasons are obvious; the Irish labourer, more often than not employed on casual work, would not be able to afford the luxury of school pence for his children. One suspects that the 'scholar' rates for most occupational groups are seasonal; they bought education when times were good, and withdrew their children and sent them to work when times were hard. Perhaps most interestingly, Table 12 shows how schooling was scarcely a sought after commodity in the Irish community. Domestic weaving did not demand literacy and numeracy any more than agricultural labouring, which explains the high proportion of weavers with children at school in Congleton. It would be interesting to investigate the opportunities for literacy in the weaving industry by examining signatures and crosses on marriage registers. Unfortunately this is out of the realm of the present survey.⁶⁷ What can be identified, however, are the jobs which were open to children. (See Table 13)

The majority of children were piecers in the silk industry. The absence of designated occupations under the age of 8 indicates that domestic weaving was in operation and many children would be employed at home. It is interesting to note that the number of children employed increases after the age of 10, the age when few Irish children went to school (see Table 12). Furthermore, there were very few families, either Irish or English which did not have some contact with the silk industry. Almost every house in 1851 and 1861 had some representative in silk. Perhaps the skills of weaving and throwstering were only to be learned after painstaking work as a piecer or silk hand. A local report from 1849 indicates how a throwster had to serve an unofficial apprenticeship for 7 years before he was allowed to pay the weaver £5–£10 to learn the skill.⁶⁸ How far this was the case in the late 1850's when the industry was in decline is hard to

say. It appears that some Irish families, with no member in the silk mills, found it easier to become established as shoemakers and tailors. Whether this merely signifies the re-emergence of skill that the immigrant brought over with them from Ireland years before, it is hard to say. If this is the case, then the Irish weavers, with a pride in their skill and a desire to encourage their children in the trade, were ensuring their later poverty by this early contact with the silk industry.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to take from the study is that the Irish influx was a force to be reckoned with by the English communities. By enlisting the support of the Irish weavers, the English were able to make their case for higher wages much more forcibly in 1849 and 1855.⁶⁹ The Irish families appear, for the most part, to have been absorbed gradually into the local communities, except in localities where they threatened to swamp the labour market or live in squalor. Perhaps the skilled Irish weaver who had lived along side his English counterpart suffered more from the influx of Irish vagrants and agricultural workers than one might think. If the peace was an uneasy one, the skilled weaver would be the first to leave for the mills of Manchester.⁷⁰ The Irish, then, do not represent a dynamic force for social change, nor do they establish new pathways of social mobility. What does seem to emerge, however, is that for the most part, the Irish were conscious of their skill in a foreign land and used that skill to exert what industrial pressure they could. Furthermore, by mid-century, they were taking advantage of whatever agencies were open to them, even if it meant choosing early experience in the silk mills as opposed to elementary education. It is not insignificant, that the grant earning capacity for the Catholic school in Macclesfield was the highest in the town in 1871.⁷¹

NOTES

- 1 Dyos, H.J. 'The Slums of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 11, No. 1. (1967), pp. 5-40. Crompton, F., *Occupational Mobility and Elementary Education in nineteenth century Northamptonshire*. (History of Education Society Occasional Publications, No. 4). Sanderson, M., 'Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England', *Past and Present* No. 56 (1975).

- 2 Ure, Andrew. *The Philosophy of Manufacture* (1835).
- 3 PP. *Factory Commission; Children's Employment, 1833-4*, Vol. 4, p. 26.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 5 Hobsbawm, E.J., *Industry And Empire* (1968), pp. 294-312.
- 6 PP. *Report of the state of the Irish poor in Britain, 1836*, pp. vii-ix; xxx-xxxi; PP. *3rd Report of the Irish Poor Enquiry Commission, 1837*, p. 24.
- 7 PP. *Report on the handloom weavers, Ireland, 1840*, p. 611.
- 8 Warner, F., *The Silk Industry* (1905), pp. 148-150.
- 9 PP. *Report on the silk trade, 1832*, pp. 608; 704-5.
- 10 Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufacture*, pp. 284-298.
- 11 *Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, June 9 1849, p.5 col. 2.
- 12 *Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, Dec. 11 1850, p. 2 col. 2. Six silk operatives were elected to the Board of trade and six non-silk workers.
- 13 Reach, A.B., *Manchester And The Textile Districts in 1849*, ed. Aspin C. (and reprinted by Helmshore Local History Society, 1972), p. 96.
- 14 *Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, Sept. 28 1850 p. 2 col. 3, 'A chapter in the history of silk weaving'.
- 15 Reach, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 89-97.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 18 Waters, S., *Macclesfield Silk Weaver's Death* (1905).
- 19 Macclesfield Workhouse admissions register is to be located in Cheshire County Record Office at LGM 1/12: LGM 1/4. *Macclesfield Courier*, June 9 1849, p. 5 col. 2.
- 20 Money from Macclesfield silk weavers was sent to the Crimean War Fund in the 1850's and to the families in Lancashire during the depression of the Lancashire Cotton famine (references throughout the *Macclesfield Courier*, 1855, 1863-4).
- 21 Macclesfield Workhouse admissions register.
- 22 Reports on the Irish in Macclesfield and Congleton; *Stockport Advertiser*, June 2 1852; *Macclesfield Courier*, Dec. 21 1851, p. 7 col. 1; May 19 1866, p. 3; June 2nd 1866, p. 2 col. 3.
- 23 *Annual Register*, 1852; *Stockport Advertiser* throughout June 1852. *Macclesfield Courier*, Dec. 21 1851, p. 7 col. 3.
- 24 *British Almanac Companion, 1853-4*, p. 264.
- 25 *Stockport Advertiser*, June 25 1852; May 2 1851 p. 3 col. 24.
- 26 *Macclesfield Courier*, Oct. 20 1849, p. 8 col. 3; August 30 1851, p. 5; September 8 1855 p. 2 col. 1; May 17 1856 p. 7 col. 3.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Warner, *The Silk Industry*, p. 147.
- 29 PP. *Children's Employment Commission, Vol. 4, 1833-4*, pp. 26-28. PP. *Poor Enquiry of Ireland, 1836*, pp. xxxi-p. 86.
- 30 Lawton, R., *The Census and Social Structure* (1975), pp. 83-112.
- 31 Lowe, J., 'The Irish In Lancashire, 1846-1871'. (Dublin University unpublished MA thesis, 1973).
- 32 An interesting comparison of absorption into the community can be obtained when one looks at the figures for a town like Widnes, which had experienced the industrial revolution after 1850 with the Chemical industry, and where strict occupational divisions were slow to emerge. Widnes Irish community = 40% higher in 1851 than the number of Irish-born. In 1861 it was 70% higher.
- 33 Williams, F.J. The development of Elementary education in Widnes, 1840-1880. Sheffield, University unpublished MA thesis, 1983.
- 34 Marsden, W.E., 'Education and Social Geography in nineteenth

- century towns and cities', in *Urban Education and Social Geography*, ed. Wrigley, E.A. (1972).
- 35 Pooley, C.G. and Lawton, R., 'Methodological Problems in the Statistical Analysis of small area data'. (Social Geography of nineteenth-century Merseyside Project working paper No 2. 1973).
- 36 Foster, John, *Class Struggle And The Industrial Revolution* (1974), p. 126.
- 37 *Report of the Commissioners of Boundary Changes. Macclesfield district, 1833 and 1837.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, survey for the East district.
- 39 For further material on this, see Hollen Lees, Lynn, *Exiles of Erin*, Chapter 4, pp. 88-122.
- 40 Macclesfield Rate Books are to be found in Cheshire County Record Office at LBM 2261/40/1; and Congleton at LBC 31/1.
- 41 Dixon, P., 'The Development of Education in nineteenth century Preston' (Liverpool unpublished M.Ed. thesis, 1975). The S.E.G. ratings are essentially a condensation of the groups identified by the Registrar General in 1911, and used by writers such as Lawton in *The Census and Social Structure* for most nineteenth-century assessments.
- 42 *Macclesfield Courier*, October 20 1849, p. 8 col. 3. See footnote 29. above.
- 43 A considerable interest has recently grown up concerning the uses of skills in and out of the textile industry. In Rochdale, for instance, a worker who experienced both cotton and woollen mills, early in the century, explained that the most skilled workers were tied to their trade for life. It seems it was the semi-skilled 'piecers' who could transfer from one textile to another. (Mr Lingard, recorded in Rochdale, January, 1985) Contemporary accounts would bear this out for the nineteenth century. See *The British Almanac for 1845-6*, pp. 37-94.
- 44 Foster, *Class Struggle And The Industrial Revolution*, pp. 73-120.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 126; a), b), c).
- 46 Marsden, W.E., 'Historical Geography And The History Of Education', *History Of Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1977).
- 47 Hobsbawm, *Industry And Empire*, p. 312.
- 48 Katz M. 'Who Went To School?', *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (1972).
- 49 Rubenstein, D., *School Attendance In London, 1870-1902* (University of Hull Monograph, 1969), pp. 1-15.
- 50 Roach, J.P., *Examinations .In Nineteenth-Century England* (1974), pp. 201-2.
- 51 Murphy, A., *The Education Act of 1870.*
- 52 Roderick, G.N. and Stephens, M.D., 'Scientific and Technical Education in 19th Century England'. p 10.
- 53 Cole, G.D.H., *A Short History Of British Working Class Movements, 1789-1947* p. 150.
- 54 Webb, R.K., 'Working Class Readers in Victorian England', *English Historical Review*, 1950. Vol. 56, pp. 333-351.
- 55 Marsden, W.E., 'Social Environment, School Attendance and Educational Achievement in a Merseyside Town, 1870-1902', in *Socialisation and Popular Education in the nineteenth century*, ed. McCann, W.P., (1977), pp. 76-18.
- 56 Stephens, W.B., *Regional Variations in Education during the Industrial Revolution* (The British Journal of Education and Administration, Monograph 1, 1972), p. 7.
- 57 PP. *Report of the Select Committee into the Education of the Poor, 1818*, Cheshire table p. 88.

- 58 *Macclesfield Courier*, November 19 1870, p. 7 col. 5. Of the 85 adult members of the society, 18 were carpenters, by far the largest proportion of any one group. There were 5 weavers and 6 'operatives' and 7 designers.
- 59 *Committee of Council for Education Annual Reports, 1858-59*, p. xliii.
- 60 Kitching, John, 'Catholic Poor Schools, 1802-1845', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 1 no. 2, June 1969; Vol. 2, no. 1, Dec. 1969.
- 61 Briggs, Asa, *Victorian People* (1965) pp. 240-271.
- 62 The Trust Deeds of the schools in most cases demanded that the Catechism be taught if it were 'Nationally funded'. Headmasters in the poorest districts would take Catholic children but not demand they learnt the C. of E. Catechism. This enlightened move on the headmasters' parts, brought them into conflict with their authorities. See National Society Letter Files for St. Mary's National School, Widnes.
- 63 *1851 Education Census*. PP. 1852, pp. xccx, cxxxii.
- 64 *PP. Report On The State Of The Irish Poor in Britain*: p. xxxiii.
- 65 *British Almanac, 1861* - On The Metal Trades of the Midlands. Also E.P. Thompson, *The Making Of The English Working Class (1968)*, pp. 297-346.
- 66 *1851 Education Census*, PP 1852, pp. xc; cxxxii.
- 67 Permission was not granted for the researcher to consult the marriage returns in Macclesfield Registry Office.
- 68 *Macclesfield Courier*, December 1 1849, p. 2 cols 3-5.
- 69 *Macclesfield Courier*, June 14 1851, p. 5 col 2; August 30th 1851, p. 5; September 6th 1851, p. 5 cols 2-4; September 8th 1855, p. 2 col 1. Also Jackson J.A. 'Nineteenth Century Toilers - Occupations of the Irish Immigrant since 1800', in *The Irish In Britain*, ed., Jackson J.A. (1965), pp. 72-90.
- 70 Redford, A., *Labour Migration in England 1800-1850* (1926), p. 153.
- 71 *Committee of Council for Education Annual Reports, 1871*, p. 239. An interesting discrepancy is shown between Church of England schools which earned 138d per head in 1871 and the R.C. school which could earn 142d.