LOCAL history—as we have recently been reminded—is of value not only in itself, but in its relevance to regional and national history. But it can only be appreciated fully in the regional and national context: while seeking to extend our knowledge of local history, we must not neglect the study of regions and their place in the national picture. Already a vast amount has been learnt from the great mass of documentary and statistical material available for the study of the industrial revolution in Britain. But much remains to be done, not least in the study of the distinctive industrial regions of Britain during the nineteenth century, which will call for analysis of both national and local records of particular industries and communities.

For any study of Britain in the nineteenth century, whether on a local, regional or national scale, the decennial censuses of population from 1801 are of fundamental importance. At first little more than enumerations of population and households, though these are given in very valuable areal detail, these censuses increase in scope, especially from 1841. Moreover, they are closely associated with the systematic recording of demographic data after the Civil Registration Acts of 1837, which made compulsory the recording of marriages, births and deaths, and led to valuable information on causes of mortality being obtained. In addition, each census, especially from 1841, provides a unique decennial stocktaking of the economic and social structure of the population, gathering information on occupation, housing, birthplace and marriage, to mention only some of the data. The censuses thus form a body of material of unique value which nevertheless has been neglected at both

(1) H. P. R. Finberg, *The Local Historian and his Theme* (1952).
Figure 14. POPULATION TRENDS, 1801-1961

Based on the census of Great Britain, 1801-1851, and the censuses of England and Wales, 1861-1961. The figures of total change are plotted on a logarithmic scale and show relative as well as absolute trends.
the national and regional level. There are few studies and fewer maps tracing the underlying demographic reasons for changes in population distribution in the nineteenth century, particularly those caused by the country-wide movements of labour which largely fed the phenomenally growing urban and industrial regions of Victorian England and which led to the associated depopulation of the countryside; there are no maps at the national level, and few at the regional, showing the changes in the structure and occupations of the people and the relationship of such changes to changing economic and social conditions. This is symptomatic of the failure to think regionally about such problems, though regional studies are of value, not only in themselves, but because of the light that they shed on a period which has greatly influenced our environment and given rise to many of the problems with which we are now faced.

II

This paper is concerned with some of the demographic trends underlying population changes in Lancashire and Cheshire as a whole since the early nineteenth century. With the adoption in 1851 of the framework of registration districts for census as well as for registration purposes, Lancashire and Cheshire became one of the basic census regions—the North Western—and remains today one of the Standard Regions of the country for statistical purposes. From an early date this region was caught up in the dramatic economic and population changes caused by the industrial revolution. There was a rapid transformation of what, in the early eighteenth century, had been, for the most part, a remote, under-developed and mainly rural area. By 1801 the development of industry and coal mining had raised population densities in many parts of the region to among the highest in the country. Gonner has shown the relatively rapid rate of growth of population, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century. His estimates show that whereas there was a 9% increase in England and Wales between 1700 and 1750, population in Lancashire increased by 83% and in Cheshire by 23%; even more striking are the increases of 134% and 51% respectively, as compared with 41% for England and Wales, from 1750 to the first census of 1801.

In 1801 the manufacturing districts of east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire and the growing port of Liverpool were among the greatest concentrations of population in the kingdom.

Figure 15.

POPULATION DENSITY, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1801

Based on the census of Great Britain, 1801. This and the following maps (Figures 16-19) show population density by civil parishes.
(Fig. 15). But over the region as a whole areas of higher density were restricted in extent and towns were still relatively small; although much of the countryside was industrialised, the powerful agglomerating forces of the steam-powered factory and of the railway were not yet fully operative. Nevertheless the textile-spinning area of south-east Lancashire and adjacent parts of Cheshire, centring on Manchester, had already a large concentration of people. To a lesser degree these higher densities extended across the flanks of Rossendale and into adjoining areas of north-east Cheshire; the cotton textile region of north-west England had already taken shape. Outside this region there were considerable tracts of thinly-populated country; it should be recalled that at this time much land was still waste, notably in the mosslands and moorlands of Lancashire. Moreover the coastal areas, compared with what they became later, were thinly populated, apart from those in the vicinity of Liverpool, Lancaster and Preston. The small towns of the Cheshire salt area gave rise to small nuclei of higher density but no regional concentrations of population.

By 1851, after half a century of unprecedented growth, the region had consolidated its position as one of the principal cradles of industrial development of the early industrial revolution and contained around Manchester the major concentration of population in the British Isles outside London. By this date the textile region in particular had a mature economy which was already nearing its zenith. Indeed, in terms of population growth since 1801, despite the generally rapid rates of increase over much of the region, areas of early industrialisation in the north-west were not always within the most rapidly-growing areas of population. But a relatively high level of growth had been sustained and, as compared with the increase of 102% for England and Wales, the population of the north-west had increased by 185% (see also Fig. 14).

The most marked changes in distribution and density had taken place in east Lancashire in general, and south-east Lancashire in particular. Even as early as 1795 Aitkin had been able to speak of the area thirty to forty miles around Manchester as one of the greatest and most varied industrial regions of his day, the focus of an incipient conurbation. By mid-century J. T. Danson could point to the Manchester district—as he termed it—as having one million people more closely spaced than anywhere in Europe except for London.
Figure 16.
POPULATION DENSITY, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1851
Based on the census of Great Britain, 1851.
and Paris, a dubious claim to fame but a striking result of a century of intensive industrial and commercial growth (Fig. 16). A conurbation, the central areas of which were already losing population to its suburbs, had begun to exist at the centre of the region. In north-east Lancashire the weaving towns had expanded and were beginning to join together. Parallel developments, though affecting a smaller area, were taking place on Merseyside as the dock system spread along the Liverpool shore and across the river in Birkenhead and Wallasey industrial and residential development proceeded. Moreover, with the growth of the heavy chemicals industry in the middle Mersey area from the late 1840s, a new industrial region was also being established here. The provision of the materials required by this industry, notably imported soda and local salt, was leading also to the growth of a discontinuous industrial region centred on the salt area of mid-Cheshire. The considerable increase in coal-mining, to provide both steam power for the industrial areas already mentioned and for domestic use, had led to early exploitation of the Lancashire coalfield, particularly, since 1801, in the south-western sector of the field, around Wigan.

Moreover, the rapid expansion of urban markets within the region had led to rapid growth in agricultural production, which benefited both the dairy farming of Cheshire and, particularly, the arable farming of south-west Lancashire. The latter involved a major reclamation of mossland, much of which in 1801 was still waste but which by 1849 could be described by Garnett as “the distinctive farming of lowland Lancashire”. Thus, although many of the more remote farming areas, particularly in the uplands, were losing population to the towns, rural growth, quite apart from that occasioned by industrial developments, was more pronounced than in many parts of Britain. However, as Danson and Welton pointed out in their monumental survey of population distribution in Lancashire and Cheshire between 1801 and 1851, the mainly rural areas in the south and north of the region showed a population growth of only 91% as against a 301% increase in the mainly industrial eastern and western regions. Moreover, these

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION 1881
PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE

5000 and over
2500 - 4999
1000 - 2499
500 - 999
250 - 499
100 - 249
0 - 99

Figure 17.
POPULATION DENSITY, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1881
Based on the census of England and Wales, 1881.
areas display quite different demographic, as well as economic, trends.

By 1881 most of the major areas of high population density in the region were well-established (Fig. 17). Conurban growth was pronounced in south-east Lancashire and on Merseyside, and in a more discontinuous fashion towns were beginning to coalesce along the northern and western flanks of Rossendale; already the nuclear areas of mid-nineteenth century urbanism were pushing out suburbs into the surrounding countryside. There were also a number of new but significant developments, one of these being the expansion of "new towns" of mid-nineteenth-century origins. Some of these, such as Crewe and Fleetwood, were direct products of the railway age; others, like Barrow, St. Helens and Widnes, were products of new industrial processes and locations in the second phase of the industrial revolution; yet others, like Southport and, in particular, Blackpool, were the creation of the railway age and provided popular resorts for the inhabitants of increasingly congested industrial towns.

One important contrast with the changes noted between 1801 and 1851 remains to be drawn. Almost all rural townships within the region were losing people and often suffering a decline in population density. This was symptomatic of a trend which was country-wide. The contrast is suggested in the fall of population in the two quite different rural registration districts of Garstang and Macclesfield and, were we able to separate Barrow from Ulverston registration district and Lunesdale from Lancaster registration district, would undoubtedly appear in these also. Moreover, despite the general increase in population in the region since 1851 (Fig. 20), many of the older towns and industrial areas, especially in the textile districts, were growing much more slowly than in the early nineteenth century.

Thus while the population-density map of the region in 1911 (Fig. 18) confirms the high densities of 1851, the major increases since 1881 were in west Lancashire and north-west Cheshire, and in the Manchester conurbation (Fig. 20); here, however, much of the growth was due to redistribution of population which left the older, more crowded parts in the Lancashire section of the conurbation for the residential suburbs to the south of Liverpool and Manchester. It is also important to realise that the rate of growth of many parts of east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire had slowed down, or even stopped, particularly since the 1880s. Population was stagnating in many areas, this reflecting in some measure a
Figure 18.
POPULATION DENSITY, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1911
Based on the census of England and Wales, 1911.
Figure 19.
POPULATION DENSITY, LANCASHIRE AND Cheshire, 1951
Based on the census of England and Wales, 1951.
Figure 20.
TOTAL POPULATION CHANGES, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1851-1951
Based upon the censuses of England and Wales, 1861-1951. Total population changes in registration districts and, for 1931-1951, in local authority areas, are shown as percentages.
slackening in the rate of growth of the economy of many of the textile towns; in turn this was due to fundamental changes in the structure of the British economy and the position of staple industries in the markets of the world.\(^9\) The cotton textile industry continued to be very important in Lancashire and Cheshire but in the national labour force and in the export trade cotton did not occupy the same position of absolute dominance as in the early and mid nineteenth century.

In the present century these trends have continued unabated in the textile towns of east Lancashire (Fig. 19). Losses by migration were severe in the inter-war years (Fig. 22) and continued into the post-war period. Similar losses have also been experienced in the older centres of towns and especially of the Merseyside and south-east Lancashire conurbations, but these have been due partly, though not entirely, to movement of population into adjacent "rural" districts, this giving rise to a complementary gain by migration in north Cheshire and west Lancashire.\(^{10}\) Equally notable has been the gain in the Fylde by overspill from Preston and the growth of the residential population in the resort belt between Lytham and Fleetwood. Much of this suburban growth has been in townships within relatively easy access of city factories and offices, and has given rise to large and often complex daily movements of people between residence and workplace, which have permitted the growth of such dormitories for Liverpool as Huyton, Maghull, Hoylake and Heswall, or for Manchester as Alderley Edge, Altrincham and Sale. Thus the true trends in rural areas have often been cloaked by urban sprawl. Nevertheless, in many of the farming areas of the north-west population has either decreased or increased but slowly, and this points to continuing loss by migration.

Some of the largest gains since the first World War have been bound up with development of new industries in new locations. Thus in the Trafford Park-Ship Canal belt to the west of Manchester there has been a considerable increase, as there has been along the East Lancashire road in the vicinity of Liverpool.

III

The changes in distribution of population already outlined are the results of complex variations in rates of natural growth


and in the balance of migration. There are but three factors to consider: births and deaths, the balance of which gives natural change, and net migration, which reflects the whole complex of movements in and out of individual areas. These factors underlie all population changes, reflecting in part economic and social factors, while doing much to determine the structure of population; but they have been very inadequately studied. For periods before the decennial censuses made possible (from 1801) the organised collection of demographic data and, more particularly, before the registration of births, deaths and marriages was made compulsory (in 1837) it is difficult to obtain much systematic statistical information on such matters though parish registers may give samples of varying reliability on which to base estimates of fertility and mortality.\(^{(1)}\)

The rest of this paper is concerned with the analysis of natural changes in population and of migration in the north-west after the middle of the nineteenth century. Figure 20 shows percentage changes in population totals for selected periods from 1851 to 1951. These have been shown in relation to changes in population distribution and only the main points need to be restated here. Whereas between 1851 and 1861 most of south Lancashire and north Cheshire had rates of increase above the average for the country as a whole, by the end of the century such rapid increases were confined to a belt around and between Manchester and Merseyside. Many of the textile towns were stagnating in terms of population totals by the turn of the century, and between 1931 and 1951 there was a decrease almost throughout the cotton belt.

Conversely, the rural areas around the two conurbations and in such regions as the Fylde, which were growing slowly in the mid-nineteenth century, have been progressively involved in suburban expansion, especially since the first World War, this giving rise to above-average increases in the period 1931-51. On the other hand, the purely rural farming areas of east Cheshire and north Lancashire have suffered prolonged and persistent stagnation or decline, this being offset only in areas adjacent to such towns as Barrow, Lancaster and Macclesfield.

Taken purely on their face value, figures of total population change can be very misleading. Areas of high and low natural increase will present very different problems in themselves and in relation to identical patterns of total population change. The national picture in the nineteenth century is one of natural increase slightly above total increase with a small average net

\(^{(1)}\) See, for example, W. G. Howson, “Plague, Poverty and Population in Part of North-west England, 1580-1720”, in TRANSACTIONS, Vol. CXII, p. 29.
Figure 21.
NATURAL CHANGES IN POPULATION IN LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1851-1951
The maps show the changes arising from the differences between births and deaths in selected decades and are on the same bases as those shown in Figure 20.
loss by migration. Birth-rates remained high until the 1880s, when they fell, perhaps because of changing economic conditions, certainly because of changing social attitudes. Thus, with generally decreasing death-rates throughout the period, especially after the mid-nineteenth century, and improvements in health and sanitation, notably in the towns, there was an increase in rates of natural growth to about the 1880s, checked thereafter by the decreasing birth-rate.

In the mid-nineteenth century the rates of natural increase in the north-west tended, on the whole, to be high (Fig. 21). Apart from the rural areas (e.g. east and west Cheshire and north Lancashire) and in the centres of cities, where there were high death rates and relatively low birth rates, increases were above the 12.6% rate for England and Wales. High birth rates were responsible for this in the industrial areas, for here death rates were also high, sometimes very high, though those in the weaving areas of north Rossendale tended to be lower than those in south and south-east Lancashire. Some rural areas maintained a natural increase above the national rate by reason of a much lower death rate, although this was partly offset by lower birth rates, the latter no doubt due in some measure to loss of population, chiefly in the young and middle age-groups, to the towns. These tendencies persisted during the period 1881-91 although the regional emphasis changed with the slackening rates of natural increase in south-east Lancashire, chiefly owing to a fall in birth rate. For Merseyside, and the Wigan and mid-Mersey areas, however, birth rates and hence levels of natural growth remained relatively high.

In the period 1901-11, however, rates of natural increase over most of the region had slackened considerably and, with the exception of Barrow, only a belt of country in south-west Lancashire and mid-Cheshire (both strongly Roman Catholic areas with high birth rates) had figures which were above the 12.4% rate for the country as a whole. This tendency has persisted to the present day, as can be seen by comparing the 1931-51 increases with the average natural increase of 8.2% over that period for England and Wales. Indeed parts of the region (especially north-east Lancashire) had more deaths than births, a sign of loss of young people by migration and of the presence of an ageing population.

The progressive decline of rates of natural increase relative to the average rates in England and Wales is very interesting, and is closely tied to socio-economic changes in the region. It was chiefly due to the more rapid fall in the birth rate than in the death rate and this, together with local fluctuations, is
Figure 22.
MIGRATION CHANGES IN POPULATION, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1851-1951
The maps show net migration in selected decades and are comparable with Figures 20 and 21.
worthy of fuller analysis in relation to the local factors in operation.

If the figures of natural change derived from the registration statistics are compared with total changes in an area, we can calculate the amount of gain or loss of population, on balance, by migration (Fig. 22). This is a significant indicator of economic trends over a period. In the mid-nineteenth century a considerable number of registration districts in the north-west were growing rapidly in population and gaining by migration, most notably on Merseyside, in the Manchester area and in the textile districts of east Lancashire. But people were leaving the northern, mainly rural, districts of Lancashire and much of Cheshire. This trend continued and was strongly-marked except around a few rapidly growing towns in a decade mainly of industrial depression in the 1880s. Indeed at that time many of the areas attracting population by migration were those suburban to Liverpool and Manchester. This is a position very similar to that which prevails at the present time with the one major exception that almost throughout Cheshire not only is population growing because of natural change, but migration gains are being experienced. This latter is due in part to suburban growth around the two great conurbations, but it is due also to important shifts in the economic balance within the north-west and the considerable growth of industry on the southern margins of the conurbations, in and around Chester, in the mid-Cheshire towns and along the Manchester Ship Canal. East Lancashire, on the other hand, shows in its loss of population the effects of decline in the cotton industry, only partly off-set in some areas by economic diversification. Indeed it would be true to say that it is only in those areas with a diversified and flexible industry that sustained inward migration has been possible. Conversely, in the nineteenth century in particular, notably during the railway age, rural depopulation and migration from the countryside was as marked here in the north-west as in Britain as a whole.

IV

It is possible to pick out a number of distinctive regions within Lancashire and Cheshire in the nineteenth century and to summarise the demographic trends in operation in registration districts within these regions. In the Manchester area the rapid growth of Manchester and Salford, fed by a high level of migration in the early nineteenth century, was replaced by outward movement and, eventually, loss of population (Fig. 23(a)).
Figure 23(a).
(See page 211).
Figure 23(b).  
(See page 211).
Figure 23(c).
(See page 211).
Figure 23(d).
(See page 211).
Figure 23(e).

(See below).

Figures 23(a - e).

POPULATION CHANGES IN SELECTED REGISTRATION DISTRICTS OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE, 1801-1911
Based on the census of Great Britain, 1851, and the censuses of England and Wales, 1861-1911. The percentage total change (solid line) is compared, from 1841-1851, with the percentage natural change (pecked line); the resultant net migration is stippled when there is a balance of population movement into the area and shaded when the balance of movement is outward.
The graph for Chorlton is complementary and shows the first stages of suburban growth and decay. Much of the migration gain in Stockport in the nineteenth century may similarly be regarded as due to that town being suburban to Manchester. Very similar tendencies are to be noted on Merseyside (Fig. 23(b)), but the remarkable fact that there was an excess of deaths over births in the Liverpool registration district in certain decades after the mid-nineteenth century should be noted.

In the cotton spinning area of south-east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire (Fig. 23(c)), despite the relatively high rates of population growth over much of the period from 1801 to 1911, there were generally modest rates of natural increase relative to those in England and Wales; and by the end of the nineteenth century, at any rate, many parts of the region suffered loss by migration. In contrast the cotton weaving areas (Fig. 23(d)) had higher rates of natural increase except for Preston; but here again, except for Burnley registration district, they were losing by migration at the end of the period.

Finally a group of mainly agricultural districts (Fig. 23(e)) shows clearly the population trends typical of most rural areas of nineteenth-century England. In the early nineteenth century rates of growth were relatively high, especially where, as in Macclesfield, these were encouraged by industry; but by the middle of the century growth had slackened and was generally below the relatively slow rate of slackened. Thereafter loss by migration, sometimes accompanied by a decrease in actual numbers, was persistent.

It should be understood that net migration of population is a simplified resultant of a very complex series of patterns of inward and outward movement which cannot be fully analysed from census sources. A considerable, but unknown, part of such movements involved the redistribution of population between different parts of the north-west. It is certain that much of the rural loss in the region is to be set against movement to the towns; similarly, as town centres decay population movement gives rise to successive cycles of suburban growth. Nevertheless long-term trends affecting the demographic and economic position of Lancashire and Cheshire in the country as a whole may be traced in the birth-place tables of the censuses of population from 1841. Summarised in their simplest form, these indicate that Lancashire was, on balance, gaining by migration from most of Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, a particularly heavy immigration having come from Ireland in the late 1840s. But progressively in the next century, while
considerable movement into the county continued, it was exceeded by loss of population, especially to the south-eastern and southern regions of England but also to more traditional suppliers of labour such as the East Midlands counties.

Similar trends were at work in Cheshire, though here one of the major features has been the reversal of Cheshire’s mid-nineteenth-century role as primarily a supplier of people to Lancashire, so that by the early twentieth century, and much more so today, the county is gaining from Lancashire, to a large extent by overspill from the towns and industrial areas north of the Mersey.

In this brief review of population trends in the north-west many demographic problems (notably the variations in birth and death rates responsible for widely-differing rates of natural change even within individual towns) have not received the close analysis which they merit in relation to the local conditions. Problems of population mobility cannot be fully analysed apart from studies of the changing economic structure of the region and its place in the national economy as a whole. Moreover, while resulting from the economic and social characteristics of different parts of the region, demographic trends themselves give rise to further contrasts in population structure; some of these are of considerable importance to the social historian and throw light on many regional characteristics and problems, not only of the past but of the present. The local historian as well as the geographer might well investigate these matters, for they are not only intimately related to many aspects of local history, but help to shed light on neglected problems of British social and economic history. There is still much to be done, as there was when J. T. Danson pointed out a little over a century ago that “the study of man, and his various modes of living . . . have only of late attracted scientific investigation and have, as yet, but few practical observers. Yet it is not possible to doubt that . . . patience and industry . . . would secure an ample return if bestowed upon the studies to which we have . . . drawn the attention of the Historic Society.”

(12) J. T. Danson and T. A. Welton, op. cit., XII, p. 35.