

THE INDUSTRIES OF THE CITY OF BATH IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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When the Rev. Richard Warner wrote his history of Bath at the end of the eighteenth century, he said, "Bath has little trade, and no manufactures, the higher classes of people and their dependents constitute the chief part of the population; and the number of the lower classes [is] small."¹ Since then this assertion, uncritically accepted, has passed into academic as well as popular folklore. We are told that match-making was the chief activity engaging the attentions of the citizens of Bath in the eighteenth century; and we are led to infer, for the early nineteenth century, that, between the City's gentry and its beggars, there was a classless gulf resulting from the absence of a resident proletariat.

Yet a superficial consideration of the nature of the services provided by the City suggests that Warner's statement is unlikely to be accurate. In the early nineteenth century, Bath was still the resort of the wealthy bent on the pursuit of pleasure. With the level of economic and technological development then achieved, the needs of this rich clientele could have been met only through the constant exertions of large numbers of tradesmen, independent craftsmen, artisans, servants and labourers. Thus it would seem safe to conclude that large numbers of all five classes lived in or about the City. The validity of this conclusion is supported by the kind of evidence contained in the City's numerous Directories and in the Census returns for 1831.

This Census shows that out of a total population of over 50,000, 21,000 were males, of whom 8,556 were over the age of twenty. Of these only 1,196 were classified as "Capitalists, Bankers and other Educated Men." The other 7,360 were mostly artisans, master craftsmen, shop assistants, retailers in business on their own account, and non-agricultural labourers engaged in a variety of unskilled employments.

Indeed the extent to which Bath provided opportunities for skilled specialists in a wide range of consumer industries is shown by a comparison of the proportion of men over twenty, who were engaged in specific trades in Bath, with the proportion similarly occupied in the County of Somerset. Bath was the home of one twelfth of the total number of men in the County but it contained

¹ Rev. R. Warner, *History of Bath* (1801 edition), p. 344; *Bath Guide* (1812), p. 114.

half the county total of painters, one third of its total of pastrycooks, two fifths of its total of coachmakers and so on. The extent to which there was an even greater concentration of craftsmen within the City itself is shown by the figures for the parish of St. James, situated in the lower town in the bend of the river. St. James was the home of 12% of the male population of the six parishes, but it contained 28% of the City's tailors, 24% of its boot- and shoemakers and 19% of its carpenters.

Only in the more residential parishes of Bathwick and Walcot, north of Queen Square and west of Margaret's Hill, and in the parish of St. Michael's, were the proportions employed in trade and industry very much smaller than the figure for the City as a whole. However there was one other parish, Lyncombe and Widcombe, in which the pattern of industrial employment varied significantly from that in the other parishes. Here some 565 males were listed as being employed in the manufacture of fine woollen cloth. If this figure is reliable it shows that, in all Somerset, this part of Bath was second only to Frome in numbers of males employed in woollen cloth manufacture, and more important than Twerton, where 284 males were employed in the industry — except that Twerton was a factory area giving employment to several hundred children and many women even at the beginning of the century.

The Census returns for 1851 were more accurate and detailed. They show, in comparison with 1831, and the growth of population, a relative decrease in the numbers employed in building, shoemaking, tailoring, and domestic service. However this was offset slightly by absolute increases for cabinet-making, coach-making, printing, the metal trades and engineering. Over one third of all men were employed in the nine trades already listed; one sixth in a variety of other crafts and in retail trade; and a further one sixth were engaged in unskilled employment. The remaining third consisted of army and navy personnel, the police, government officials, merchants, accountants, agriculturalists, scientists, writers, artists and teachers.

In addition this Census shows that about one third of the women were employed in domestic service (7,306); one tenth were employed in the tailoring and millinery trades (2,012); and nearly 450 were engaged as shoemakers or "Shoemakers' Wives".

Consequently it is apparent that Bath was a City with many people employed in trade and in manufacture, that the higher classes

of people and their dependants were a minority of the population, and that the numbers of the lower classes were considerable. Since this is so, the livelihood and the condition of life of the lower classes — largely obscured from the eyes of contemporary novelists, historians, and other observers of the Bath scene — merit a fuller examination than they have yet received. It is the purpose of the remainder of this paper to explore one aspect of that life and to use the available evidence in an attempt to describe the size and organization of industry in the City for the period 1800 to 1850.

The artisans who figure so largely in the Census returns are difficult to distinguish from the small masters for whom they worked. This is so particularly in some branches of retailing, and in the building trades in which the unit of production was generally small. In tailoring and shoemaking the size of the unit was larger, and the employer is easier to distinguish from his employees.

In the building trades masters of very small concerns drew little distinction between themselves and their journeymen. Like Richard Lamacroft, master carpenter, they paid themselves little more than their men. Lamacroft paid himself 4/- a day, and worked alongside his only journeyman whom he paid 3/6 a day. Journeymen in many trades were readily accepted into the master's family, then into partnership, and finally into sole ownership of the firm after the master's death or retirement. In this way, between 1814 and 1819, at least nine small concerns were inherited by ex-foremen, assistants and near relations employed in the firm, and two others were carried on by widows who either employed, "proper assistants" or "newly engaged a competent foreman". Indeed a competent assistant with the right employer in the right circumstances, having made a wise choice of wife, could on occasion make a fortune. In 1814, when William Kemp, banker, dealer and chapman, sold all but his banking business, just before his bank went bankrupt, the buyer, Thomas Flower, paid £9,000 in eighteen promissory notes of £500, each payable one week after the last. But Flower, 33 years old, had been Kemp's apprentice and assistant for twenty-two years, and was married to his wife's sister!

In many cases the amount of capital required to establish a business was small enough to enable many people to venture into independence with relatively little initial outlay. A clear-starcher required £47, a baker and pastrycook £50, a grocer £184 and a

blind-maker £50. For those whose capital needs were even smaller there was the "Bath Society for the Suppression of Common Vagrants and Impostors, the Relief of Occasional Distress and the Encouragement of the Industrious Poor"—generally known as the Monmouth Street Society. This Society, founded in 1805, set out to discourage vagrancy and begging by requiring its subscribers to give tickets instead of money to anybody soliciting alms. The bearer of a ticket could then apply to the office of the Society where voluntary helpers would conduct an investigation to determine the real extent of need. A beadle was also appointed with powers to apprehend and bring persistent vagrants before the magistrates. Since the objects of the Society were not exclusively or indeed wholly repressive, and included that of encouraging the industrious poor, it set itself three tasks beyond that already outlined. First, it rewarded the deserving among the aged poor with small weekly pensions. Secondly, it set out to instruct the young in useful work, and thirdly, it assisted the temporarily unemployed in finding employment and in achieving economic independence.

To instruct the young it established a knitting school for girls and through its Work Committee subsidized a number of tradesmen if they would set the poor to work. A hatter proposed to set girls to work in one of the most unpleasant domestic trades — plucking fur for hats; two instructors taught the making of patten ties to children eight to twelve years of age; and a linen draper received £20 to start a scheme of button-making.

The Society was more successful in its policy of making small loans to men and women to enable them to purchase tools or a small stock of goods to establish themselves in trade or employment. In 1835 the average amount of 260 loans was a little more than three guineas for awards such as: (1) To arrears of rent, owing to illness, bad debts etc. £5. Security G.H., housekeeper and shopkeeper. (2) To C.D. to furnish a shop with small grocery £4. Security M.M. Esq. In this way £12,000 was lent between 1805 and 1835 with the result that several thousand men and women were set up in small businesses and given a measure of economic independence.

This wide range of enterprises, controlled by numerous independent petty producers, made for great social mobility within and between the lower and middle classes. For many this movement was downwards. Failure through illness, theft, fire or accident, as well as

bad trade, reduced many a small man to poverty. "My father", wrote John Manley, "when I was about one year old, took me and my mother to London (from Dale Wood near Honiton), where he lived about two years, making himself proficient in his business. He was a cabinet-maker. From London he went to the City of Bath and there set up his business. He appeared to succeed finally in a flourishing business for some 13 years, when under pressure of the great bank panic of 1829 he was compelled to make an assignment in favour of his creditors. He gave everything up — among the rest some ten thousand dollars of my mother's property. He struggled on against wind and tide till 1831, when he emigrated with my mother and seven children to the United States."² Smaller concerns were affected more rapidly. Widow Hiscocks was prevented by stomach ulcers from plying her business as a mantua-maker for a period of seven months. She lost her trade and her capital. Thomas Lear, an unemployable baker, and his wife were unable to carry on their business as launderers because they lacked the few shillings necessary to redeem their calendering machine. A butcher lost his shop because he was robbed of £48. Bad trade and rheumatism ruined a trunk-maker after twenty years in business, and the lack of the price of a horse ruined a coal-haulier and his family when his own horse died.

Some of these men and women were, of course, so affected as to become chargeable to the parish. In the first twenty years of the century at least 139 persons and families were removed from St. James parish to places as far afield as Essex and London. More significantly the list included two masons, two shoemakers, two sawyers, a plasterer, a printer, a baker and a maker of artificial flowers — a wide enough spread of trades to suggest that no craftsman was safe from the threat of failure or unemployment in Bath, "Whither persons from various places come to try their fortunes in trade and frequently failing become chargeable."³

Others were more successful and their businesses flourished to the extent that their owners became men of substance whose views and influence carried weight. Kemp valued his grocery business at £9,000 in 1814 and had gone into banking. George Cox started as

² "Brief Life of John Manley" (Quarto sheet copy in the writer's possession — original belonging to Mrs. J. B. Cardwell of Texas).

³ Report of a Committee appointed to examine into and control the Receipts and Expenditure of the Parish of Walcot in 1817. (In Bath Public Library).

an apprentice, working sixteen hours a day, and until 2 or 3 o'clock on Sundays, in a hat factory in 1804. Forty years later he was a successful master hatter, with his own hatting and undertaking business in Stall Street, and a leading Baptist with an independent line in politics. Joseph Pearson was another. He was an enterprising draper, a Methodist with a taste for Sunday Schools and Adult Education, and, if he can be believed, a man so well known and influential that he could disperse an angry mob, at the time of the Bristol Riots, merely by looking at them. Caleb Hornby, too, was a draper whose business in Union Street prospered from its foundation in 1829, to be bought, forty-one years later, by James Colmer who turned it into a limited company with a capital of £100,000 in 1889.

Walker of Westgate Street was a leech, cork and bottle dealer with an extensive market throughout the neighbouring counties. In one year, 1828, he purchased 75,000 leeches at a cost of £221 13s. 0d. Most he imported from London but his other materials — boxes, bottles, jars, etc., he bought from Dudley, Cardiff, Bristol, Stourbridge and Bradford-on-Avon as well as from London. Most of his suppliers gave him credit, either directly or by bills of exchange, which were accepted at a discount by local banks. For example in 1828 he began the year by owing £48 14s. 6d. to his main London suppliers of leeches — Messrs. Pain and Cullen of Cannon Street. In the course of the year he paid a total of £200 in weekly instalments, and at the end of the year owed £71 8s. 6d. The wholesale price of leeches varied from £2 5s. 0d. to £6 0s. 0d. per 1,000. Retail prices were about 50% higher. Walker prospered. He probably sold out to Edwin Hancock some time during 1841. By 1858 Hancock described himself as a surgeon mechanist, took a full page advertisement in the Directory and a private residence at Elm Place.

Perhaps the most interesting example of economic expansion, during these years, is the conversion of George Stothert's ironmongery into Henry Stothert's ironfoundry. In 1802 George Stothert, the senior partner in the firm of Stothert & Son, was already a man of property and one of the biggest creditors of Bamford and Co., a firm of woollen manufacturers at Twerton. Stothert's firm dealt in ironmongery, and, among other things, was the local agency for a portable family brewing machine. In 1815 the father and son partnership was dissolved and George Stothert Junior set up as an iron-founder at 17, Horse Street. By 1827 he had installed steam-driven

machinery. The Newark foundry was in operation by 1834 and George's son Henry was sole agent for Finlayson's harrow, a tool that contributed its share to the general improvement of agriculture. In 1836 Henry unsuccessfully tendered for the Victoria Bridge and in the next year ventured to buy land in Bristol to establish a railway locomotive factory. At this factory, in 1840, Messrs. Stothert built 'The Arrow' for the Great Western Railway, the first of its kind built in the West of England. Henry Stothert, like Cox and Pearson, was active in the Radical interest and was able to combine business with politics to the advantage of business. In 1835 he manufactured and installed an elaborate illumination of 720 gas jets at Todd's Ride when seven hundred Radicals met and heard their leaders, Hume, Roebuck and Napier.

Success in one business often produced a surplus which became available for investment in bigger, speculative concerns. The firmest evidence for this is the agreement made between William and John Townsend and Richard Hewlett, and eighty-one others for the joint financing of the Grosvenor Hotel and Pleasure Gardens at a cost of £10,500 in 1794. (This sum was additional to at least £6,384 already invested by a previous partnership which was dissolved on the bankruptcy of John Eveleigh, the architect for the undertaking.) Hewlett, a builder, and the two Townsends, who were silversmiths, agreed to advance £1,750 each in £50 shares. Two widows each advanced £200, eight other subscribers agreed to take four shares each, and the other seventy-one partners agreed to invest £50 each. Sixty-four of the investors were from Bath. The list of their trades and occupations reads like the pages of a directory. There were brewers, apothecaries, carpenters, coal merchants, music-sellers, peruke-makers, brush-makers. Altogether there were twenty-seven trades and callings represented by men who had accumulated sufficient capital and who were enterprising enough to risk £50 in a very uncertain undertaking. Few, however, gained much from their enterprise on this occasion for, in 1812, twenty-seven shareholders were pressing for a public auction of the premises on the grounds that the bankruptcy of Townsend and Hewlett had "rendered the further prosecution of the undertaking hopeless and abortive — the little property that now remains on the said premises [being] in a ruinous and dilapidated state of decay."⁴

4 Articles of Agreement, 14 Aug. 1794, 3 Nov. 1812. (In the writer's possession).

Joint stock undertakings were always risky. The subscribers who agreed to invest some £15,000 in the Batheaston Coal Mining Company between 1804 and 1808 must have lost everything, for the site and the pithead gear were sold when it was realised that production was impossible. Investors in the Bath and Bristol Railroad, floated in 1824 with a capital of £100,000, many of whom had bought their £25 shares at a premium of £5 to £6 gained nothing. The company was dissolved in 1826. The £25,000 invested in the Gas Light and Coke Company in 1817 was put to better purpose and the company prospered. Similarly the £300,000 capital of the Monmouthshire Iron and Coal Co., most of which was raised in the Bath region in 1836, proved a profitable investment.

Most of the businesses in Bath could be established with little capital, some skill and a few men. Consequently these large joint stock concerns were not typical. Nevertheless, between the two extremes, there were a number of industries in which the size of the individual enterprise was larger than the one or two man concern encountered in the building, retail and general service industries. In the clothing, shoemaking and metal industries journeymen and apprentices tended to work in workshops or small factories using power. These workshops generally had their own retail outlets. Each firm employed from twenty to thirty indoor workers and offered irregular outdoor employment to many others.

In 1804 George Cox, the master hatter, started work in a factory employing upwards of twenty men. About the same time Joseph Pearson, the Methodist draper, arranged with the authorities to run the workhouse of the united Parishes of St. James and St. Peter and St. Paul, as a factory to manufacture worsted for stocking-making, "to give employment in the house, to all who were able to work; and a machine for making worsted was provided, and all the children in the house, and those in the neighbourhood, who were receiving parish pay, were taught to knit, one half of the day; . . . when they could knit well, I bought stockings for my shop, and gave the wholesale price for them."⁵ It is true that no adults were employed and that the place was a workhouse; but the example serves to show the connection between retailing and production, and that the idea of workshop production was not alien to this branch of the clothing industry. Some years later, in 1829, the fact that Mr. Moore of

⁵ Henry Fish, *Memoirs of Joseph Pearson*.

Bond Street, another hatter, employed 130 men at his factory at Oldland Common, supports the view that factory or workshop organization was usual in this branch of the clothing trade.

The evidence for the concentration of ownership in tailoring is indirect. In 1813 the journeymen tailors negotiated successfully for double wages during the general mourning. They did so with nine master tailors and publicly announced their agreement. It would be difficult to argue that these nine were the only employers in the tailoring trade, although it is reasonable to suppose that they constituted a majority of influential masters sufficient to warrant such a confident public statement by the journeymen. If these nine master tailors were a majority of the master tailors of Bath, then it is likely that they employed a majority of the 350 journeymen in the trade. Because of this, and because of the establishment of a Piece Work House of Call in 1813, it seems probable that some kind of workshop organization existed for the trade, which was supplemented by the employment of numerous outdoor workers employed on piece rates.

Much the same can be said for the millinery and dressmaking trades. In 1817 Mesdames Smith and Jones had a shop in New Bond Street which they supplied with merchandise, consisting of hand-done embroidery and needlework, from their own establishment at 1, Ainslie's Belvedere, a large house with extensive outbuildings. Smith and Jones claimed to employ 150 females in the undertaking. The proportion of these who were outworkers is not clear, but, since their employees included "the friendless, the infirm, the unfortunate; and many who having seen better days turn to a source of pecuniary emolument those talents, once cultivated as an elegant accomplishment",⁶ it may well be supposed that a high proportion were outworkers.

Nevertheless evidence given by a number of Bath milliners before the Children's Employment Commission in 1841 shows that a workshop organization, in which making was mixed with shop service, was common. One milliner employed five outdoor assistants to ten indoor workers, and another said that, out of a sixteen- or eighteen-hour day the assistants, "have no fixed time for walking; and in the busy time there is no time for that at all. They have no holidays on Saturdays, but they have a month or sometimes six weeks in July or

⁶ *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, 5 Nov. 1817.

October — the younger persons answer the bell in turn and so get a little exercise.”⁷ A letter written to the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* in 1825, and not denied, gives support to the argument for a workshop organization and affords a fleeting glimpse of the conditions under which some 2,600 girls and women worked.

“During our most fashionable seasons of the year, when plays, balls, masquerades, and riots, are the order of the day, it is by no means unusual for delicate females to be following an unhealthy sedentary employment to the destruction of their sight and constitution, for 16 and even 18 hours out of the 24; and this is not in solitary or occasional instances, but day by day and week by week during the greater part of the season.”

“Imagine, Sir, a number of unprotected females from the humbler walks of life (I allude to the outdoor assistants) leaving their employment at 11 and 12 o’clock at night, and sometimes at 1 and 2 in the morning, to return to the abodes of their parents or to their lodgings . . . and calculate upon the chances of temptation thrown in their way by the licentious of our sex.”

“The inmates, to my certain knowledge, are doomed during the dreary time of winter, and even extending in many instances to mid-summer, to drag a life of servitude far more oppressive than the Indian Slaves, by being compelled to work 20 hours a day from Sunday night 12 o’clock until Saturday 12; and that too without intermission for months; and their employers, not considering they have reaped a sufficient harvest from their labours during these unwarrantable hours, go further, and modestly and feelingly require their services, ‘a little on the Sabbath’.”

“In this city, I should consider the first rate houses employ, on salary and apprentices, 200 females, inmates; and I have no hesitation in stating that three fourths of that number are so impaired in health, that the foundation of disease is laid, and a premature grave the inevitable end.”⁸

In shoemaking the firmest evidence of numbers employed comes from two sources. First, in a report on the employment scheme sponsored by the Monmouth Street Society in 1817, it was noted that one master shoemaker had employed sixty men in coarse work.

⁷ *Bath and Ch. Gaz.*, 31 May 1842 (quoting from the Children’s Employment Commission).

⁸ *Bath and Ch. Gaz.*, 11 Oct. 1815.

Then, in 1824, Messrs. Phipps of Margaret's Buildings offered regular employment for "thirty men in the Plain Heel and Turn Round line and ten good Binders", none of whom were to be in the Union. But indirect evidence for a workshop organization exists in the determined activity of the journeymen in combinations and strikes, both very difficult to organize even in prosperous times, in the absence of some nucleus of indoor workers. In the strike of 1804 the Union reported successful negotiations for a rise with six masters and encouraged the emigration of as many journeymen as possible. They struck again in 1805, 1808, 1813 and 1824. Their particularly 'black' employer was J. Cooper of the Shoe Manufactory who insisted on employing "a large number of Apprentices, contrary to the law and to the great injury of the mechanic." The shoemakers appeared a militant and well organized group of workers employed by, and negotiating with, relatively few employers.

Workshops and factories existed in a variety of other trades at different times throughout the period and provided work for small numbers of artisans, labourers, women and children. Brough and Deverall of the Quay were steam engine manufacturers in 1802. There was a flax factory in 1819, two soap factories in the 1830's, a steam-operated cut glass factory in Westgate Buildings from 1828, and from 1812 a brass foundry that expanded to employ, "upwards of twenty good and able workmen, — Brasscutters and finishers, Braziers, Tinmen and Bellhangers" by 1837. From 1813 there was the expanding concern of George Stothert already described, and at least one other sizeable foundry on the Wells Road, big enough to cast the metal work for the Victoria Bridge, in 1836. Then there was the Morford Street pin factory, established in 1814 under the auspices of the Walcot Overseers. Here employment was given to ninety children, aged between 6 and 14 years, with an additional twenty employed at the Poor House in heading pins. Two years after the factory had been established the Overseers ordered, "That all poor children of the age of seven years and upwards (not otherwise employed to the satisfaction of the Parish Officers) but capable of working at pin making, shall be employed in the said factory, and that all parish pay received by children or parents having children, or such part thereof as the Parish Officers shall deem proper, shall be suspended until compliance with the resolution."⁹ The factory

⁹ *Bath and Ch. Gaz.*, 11 Dec. 1816.

remained in being until 1819 or 1820 but, because of a dispute with the proprietor, it was not then in use as part of the parish scheme of relief, which sought to attract a manufacturer in silk, cotton, wool or iron by offering the labour of one hundred children free of all wages for a period of one year and the labour of fifty children every year thereafter.

Building and demolition provided employment for gangs of labourers and, undoubtedly, the £15,000 invested in the Batheaston Coal Mining Company, the £25,000 invested in the Gas Light and Coke Company, the construction of roads and the commencement of operations on the G.W.R. after 1836, created local demands for unskilled labour. Actual employment for some hundred labourers was provided during the winter of 1830/31 by the Walcot Surveyors; and the development of Victoria Park gave work to two hundred labourers at a cost in wages of £2,614. But at no time, except from 1839 to 1841, was there any regularly expanding demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Except for the sub-contracting, piece work system, employed on the railway, it is only possible to guess at the way it was organized.

This scatter of evidence suggests several generalizations about the economy and industries of Bath in the early nineteenth century. Firstly, it was a City where the growth of numerous trades, and retail outlets was stimulated by continued lavish expenditure on consumer goods of all kinds. Secondly, many of the businesses required relatively little initial capital; consequently there were many very small independent concerns operating in a highly mobile society — some succeeding, some failing in a classical economist's paradise. Thirdly, there was a group of trades in which a small factory or workshop organization existed with unidentifiable numbers of outworkers assisting the indoor workers. Fourthly, in all types of firm and in all trades there was a close connection between production and retailing. The general conclusion is that, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century, Bath provided a localized market for a rich variety of products, and is a good example of a pre-factory economy operating within the sort of framework postulated by classical economic theory.

This article is based on Chapters 1 and 2 of a dissertation, "Economic Conditions and Working Class Movements in the City of Bath, 1800 to 1850", submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts of the University of Bristol. Much of the evidence

is derived from the files of *The Bath Chronicle*, *The Bath Journal*, *The Bath Herald* and *The Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*. In this article references have been given for direct quotations only. The reader interested in exploring the original sources for himself can find detailed references in the dissertation.