

THE POPULATION OF MANCHESTER FROM cAD79 TO 1801

P Arrowsmith

The following is an attempt to trace the population trends of Manchester from the Roman occupation until the turn of the 19th century. It must be pointed out at the outset that such a study is hampered by the general inadequacy of the available evidence. The earliest enumeration to have any claim to precision occurs as late as 1758. For the two centuries before that date we must make the best of a sequence of figures which give or allow only an approximation of the total population. Prior to the 16th century, documentary evidence in any form is infrequent, and provides only the barest of outlines.

In the case of Roman Manchester our present state of knowledge owes much to recent excavation (Jones 1974; Walker 1985). The first fort, established by Agricola about AD 79 at the confluence of the Medlock and Irwell, covered 1.6 ha (3.9 acres) and probably housed a cohort of around 500 auxiliary infantrymen. During the first half of the second century the fort was dismantled and subsequently rebuilt to cover an area of 2 ha (4.9 acres). The garrison may now have been a mixed unit of infantry and cavalry, again totalling about 500. This enlarged fort, reconstructed in stone around AD 200, continued to be occupied until the Roman withdrawal from Britain in the early 5th century.

Outside the area of the fort, chance finds made in the 19th century and recent excavations have produced evidence of a substantial vicus, or civil settlement. In the late 1st and 2nd centuries the inhabitants of the vicus were mainly engaged in metalworking, carried out on such a scale as to suggest that Manchester served as an industrial centre for the forts of the West Pennines. During the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries the vicus underwent a period of gradual transformation into a settlement of a more domestic and commercial nature. During this period the number of vicani probably far exceeded that of the garrison. The second half of the 3rd century however saw a decline in the civilian population, and by AD 300 the vicus to the north of the fort had been largely abandoned.

For half a millennium following the final withdrawal of the Roman garrison the evidence for settlement within Manchester is slight. Four features excavated immediately outside the north gate of the fort may be the remains of grubenhauser or Saxon sunken huts of the sub-Roman period (Walker 1985). A Saxon urn probably of late 6th century date is known from Red Bank, near Victoria Station (Morris 1983, 7). Each of these might represent no more than casual settlement, and the same may be true of a hoard of sceatta of the 8th century, discovered in Tonman Street, off Deansgate in 1821 (Morris 1983, 12-13).

In the early 10th century however, Manchester once more became a place of some importance. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in 919 Edward the Elder "went with the army to Thelwall and ordered the burh to be built, occupied and manned; and while he stayed there he ordered another army, also from the people of Mercia, to occupy Manchester in Northumbria, and repair and man it" (Whitelock 1961, 7). The Burghal Hidage, a document of Edward's reign listing burhs in the south of England, prescribed that 4 men should man each pole (5.5 yds) of their defences, and this principle was probably also applied to the burhs of Mercia (Hunter-Blair 1977, 293-4). Unfortunately the use of the Hidage to estimate the size of the garrison at Manchester is hindered by an uncertainty as to the location of the burh. Edward's directive has suggested to some that his army of Mercians refurbished the defences of the Roman fort (Tait 1904; Jones 1974, 170). The name Aldport, applied to the area at the southern end of Deansgate, is suggestive; though the name may have been prompted by the remains of the Roman vicus rather than by the presence of a late Saxon settlement at this location (Roeder 1899, 126-7). Furthermore, excavation of the fort's northern defences has failed to produce evidence of the putative 10th century repairs (Walker 1985). An alternative is to place Edward's burh on the rocky spur overlooking the confluence of the Irwell and Irk, and to see the feature known as Hanging Ditch as forming part of its landward defences (Morris 1983, 45-7).

The primary function of the Manchester burh was unquestionably military, serving to protect the northern frontier of Edward's kingdom against Viking incursions from the Wirral and Northumbria (Morris 1983, 15). That the fortification of the burh was also the prelude to the establishment of a town at Manchester is, on the other hand, open to question. The Domesday Survey passes over Manchester in a single sentence, noting that under Edward the Confessor the Churches of St Mary and St Michael held there one carucate of land, free from every due except geld (Morgan 1972, R5). The Church of St Michael was probably at Ashton-under-Lyne, and that of St Mary at Manchester itself: the forerunner of the 15th century Collegiate Church (Tait 1904, 6-7). That the late Saxon church at Manchester did not stand in isolation is likely enough. Possibly Manchester formed the centre of one of the twenty-one *berewicks* contained within Salford Hundred (Tupling 1962, 115). The entire population of that Hundred, which covered about 350 square miles, has been estimated to be a little over 3000 in 1086 (Farrer 1898, 34); though an even lower figure of around 90 families has been put forward (Harland 1861, 31). However the decline in the value of the Hundred from £37 4s to £12 suggests that prior to the Conquest the population had been much higher (Thomson 1967, 29).

Following the Conquest Salford Hundred was given to Roger of Poitou, who retained the demesne manor of Salford but granted other lands to five knights: the largest of these fiefs, held by Nigel, probably being centred on Manchester (Tait 1904, 9-10). Under William Rufus, Manchester passed to Albert de Grelley, who controlled an extensive Barony including lands not only in Salford Hundred but also in the Hundreds of Leyland and West Derby (Tait 1904, 11-15). At some date prior to 1184, a modest castle was erected at Manchester, probably close to the church and on the site of what is now Chetham's School of Music (Morris 1983, 36-7). By 1282 the castle had evidently gone out of use, to be replaced by a manor house (Morris 1983, 39). It is in 1282 that we also have the first evidence of a developing town, in the form of *burgage* rents amounting to £7 3s 2d. Since each *burgage* was assessed at a rent of 1s, this total implies the existence of approximately 143 such properties (Harland 1861, 144-5; Morris 1983, 38). On the assumption that one family held each *burgage* plot we may suppose a population of at least 600. The precise date of the creation of a class of *burgesses* at Manchester is uncertain. Salford was granted its charter around 1230 and although Manchester itself did not receive a charter until 1301, the privileges and obligations contained within it were already well-established (Redford 1939, 15-16). The right to hold an annual fair, the first to be established in Salford Hundred, was given in 1222 and confirmed in 1227: a year before the granting of a similar right to Salford (Tupling 1933, 351). Possibly, then, the two boroughs were roughly contemporary in origin.

In the first half of the 14th century, evidence of a growth in population is provided by the creation on Long Millgate of new plots, held directly from the lord rather than by normal *burgage* tenure (Morris 1983, 39). This process of growth however was checked with the arrival of the Black Death in 1348. Though we may only guess at the number of

fatalities caused within the town, an indication of the effect within the parish is provided by the consecration in 1352 of the chapel yard at Didsbury for the burial of the dead (Hollingworth 1839, 36; Frangopulo 1962, 23). How long it took to make good the losses of the plague is uncertain, though the preamble to the royal licence of 1421 granting the foundation of a college of clergy describes the parish as not only very extensive (it covered an area of about 60 square miles) but also very populous (Hibbert-Ware 1848, 129). A rental of 1473 shows that the *burgage* rents then amounted to £8 0s 6d, implying an addition of 12½ *burgages* since 1282. The rental includes half and quarter divisions, together with fractions rented in odd numbers of pence. Several of these property divisions appear to be recent creations, indicating a growth in population at this period (Morris 1983, 39-40).

In the 16th century the size of the town's population caught the attention of contemporary commentators. The Act of Parliament of 1541 removing the recently-granted right of sanctuary noted that "the towne of Manchestre is and hath of long tyme been a towne well inhabited" (Reilly 1861, 98). John Leland, who visited Manchester in about 1540, described it as "the fairest, best-buildid, quikkest and most populus tounne of all Lancastreshire" (Lowe 1972, 1). An indication of the increase in the number of its inhabitants during the 16th century is given by the total *burgage* rent of £11 5s 9d in 1599, suggesting an addition of 65 new *burgages* since 1473 (Morris 1983, 40).

An estimate of 1520, the earliest known, numbered the population of the parish at over 7000. This figure is almost certainly too high, as are also the estimates of 10,000 and 20,000 given in the Collegiate Church charters of 1578 and 1635 (Wadsworth and Mann 1931, 509). Far more credence may be given to the total of about 3300, including 1800 in the township, postulated by Willan for the year 1563; this was based on the number of households enumerated in an episcopal return to the Privy Council (Willan 1980, 38-9). In February 1642, all householders and men of eighteen or over within the township were called upon to sign the Protestation: expressing their willingness to maintain the Anglican Church and to protect the king's person, the freedom of parliament, and the rights and liberties of the subject. The record of their response lists about 1200 names, including one woman, and suggests a total population within the township of over 3000 (Palatine Notebook 1881; Willan 1980, 39). At the time of the Hearth Tax of 1664, there were 820 households in the township, implying a population of over 3600 (Blackwood 1978, 8).

It would appear therefore that the population of the township of Manchester approximately doubled in the century between 1563 and 1664. To put this growth within its proper perspective however, it must be borne in mind that on three occasions during this period the population was considerably reduced as a result of outbreaks of the plague (Redford 1939, 123-7). The first of these epidemics was in 1565 when, according to the 17th century chronicler Hollingworth, "there was a sore outbreak in Manchester and about it, of which very many died" (Hollingworth 1839, 82). A fresh

outbreak occurred in 1605 when "the Lord visited the town, as forty years before and forty years after, with a sore pestilence, there died about one thousand persons" (Hollingworth 1839, 106). The effect of the epidemic of the summer of 1645 may be judged by the 1212 burials recorded in the parish register of that year, as compared with an annual average of 273 in the 1630's (Wadsworth and Mann 1931, 509).

In an essay of 1773, Thomas Percival cites an estimate of 1717 which numbered the population at 8000, though Percival expresses uncertainty as to whether Salford was included within this figure (Percival 1789, 1). However from about 1717 we also have the returns made to the Bishop of Chester, which give the population of the parish as 3201 families: 2003 of these being in the township of Manchester, 503 in Salford, and the remaining 695, probably an underestimate, in the outlying nine chapelries (Wadsworth and Mann 1931, 509-10). The figure given for Manchester implies a total population of about 9000: more than double the number suggested for the year 1664.

Both Defoe and Stukeley visited the town in 1724 or thereabouts and passed comment on the number of its inhabitants, though their estimates vary considerably. Defoe argues vigorously for numbering the inhabitants of Manchester and Salford at 50,000, but his case hangs upon the misplaced acceptance of the figure of 20,000 for the population of the parish in 1635 (Defoe 1724-6, 261-2). Stukeley on the other hand gives the more conservative, and more plausible, estimate for the township of about 2400 families (Reilly 1861, 231). In 1758 an enumeration prompted by a dispute over manorial corn-mill rights revealed that "besides Soldiers, and Travelers and Strangers", the population of the township numbered 17,101, having doubled in the previous 40 years (Wadsworth and Mann 1931, 510).

In 1773-4 a more complete attempt at a census was organised by a private group under John Whitaker (Mantoux 1929, 358; Chaloner 1959-60, 41). The total population of the parish was then found to be 42,937 and that of the township of Manchester 24,386: of whom all but 1905 lived within the built-up and densely-populated area of the town itself (Percival 1789, 2-3, 38; Aiken 1795, 156-7). The township, then, had increased by a third in the preceding fifteen years: a rate of growth commensurate with the steady expansion of the first half of the 18th century (Vigier 1970, 94-5).

Between 1773-4 and 1801 however, the rate of growth underwent a dramatic process of acceleration. An enumeration undertaken at Christmas 1788 placed the population of the township at 42,821 (Aiken 1795, 157; Ashton 1816, 24). By the time of the first national census in 1801, that figure had increased to 70,409 (Census Reports 1801, 173). In the last 25 years or so of the 18th century the population of Manchester had nearly trebled: a hitherto unparalleled rate of increase. Unfortunately, a detailed examination of the causes of this growth - the increasing industrialization of the surrounding countryside from the 1770's onwards, and of the town of Manchester itself from the 1790's (Vigier 1970, 88-96) - must lie outside the scope of this paper.

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