

WORKERS' HOUSING IN MANCHESTER

By and large the workers lived near and around their workplace, and the wealthy lived a few miles outside the city in their garden suburbs. Houses were "jerry" built, without control or regulation of any kind. Builders, usually the employer, would build so as to cram as many houses as possible into the space available.

There was no water or services, and no attempt to provide privacy of any kind. People worked in shifts and shared beds. Ten or twelve people could share the one bedroom, and up to 100 houses shared the one "privvy" - usually a deep hole dug in the corner of a yard, or a "midden" - a heap against a wall.

Houses were damp - there were no damp-proof courses, and no double brick walls. Rain leached through walls, and even in dry summers, damp rose up the walls. The only relief from damp was the building of cellars to contain it. However, these cellars inevitably became dwellings for subtenants.

Manchester and Salford's cellar dwellings were the root of most health problems, and became a national disgrace. "The Builder" magazine of 1864 illustrated the worst dwellings, and many celebrated figures emerged to urge for improvement of the lot of working people.

John Kay published *"The Moral and Physical Conditions of the working Classes"* in 1832, Engels wrote his well-known *"The Condition of the Working Class in England"* in 1844 based on the plight of the Manchester underclass, and in 1842 Edwin Chadwick published his *"Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population"*. 'Official' paupership figures for the "Township of Manchester" were the highest in Britain - higher even than in London's east end.

LABOUR & WAGES

Average wages in 19th century Manchester were well below subsistence level. A report by Fred Scott for the Manchester Statistical Society in 1889 found that over 40% of working men interviewed in Salford were "irregularly employed", and that 61% could be defined as "very poor" with a weekly income of less than 4 shillings (20p) per week. The main problem was casual labour. Payments from the Manchester & Salford District Provident Society's Poverty Fund in the winter of 1878-79 revealed that the vast majority of qualifying applicants were casual and seasonal workers - among them were warehousemen, builder's labourers, general labourers, storemen and transport men - most of these were of Irish descent. In the days before any welfare provision, there was no sick pay - if you couldn't work, you weren't paid.

Many people worked up to 14 hours a day for 7 days a week; a few "benevolent" employers allowed a 6 day week with compulsory church attendance on the seventh.

MANCHESTER'S IMMIGRANT POPULATION

Immigrants also formed a large proportion of the poor. By 1851, Irish immigrants comprised around 15% of the city's poor. Half of the people registered in the New Bridge Street Workhouse in the 180s and 1890s were Irish Catholics. Most lived in Ancoats, (40% Irish according to the 1900 census), probably the poorest and most deprived area of the city. A small area of Chorlton on Medlock was also known as "Little Italy" on account of the large numbers of immigrant Italians who lived there in a sort of ghetto situation. They formed the largest section of the vast casual labour force, which put to hard long hours when trade was good, were first to be laid off in leaner times. They formed the largest part of the Smithfield Market labour force, comprised the majority of the city's street sellers and hawkers, dominated the building trade and figured largely in domestic service (females in particular).

Tratto da: <http://www.manchester2002-uk.com/history/victorian/Victorian1.html>