The very worst sites of filth and darkness.’ Exploring the evolving Industrial community of Angel Meadow

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HELP FOR POVERTY: HISTORY AND BELIEFS
The growth of populations in the developing urban communities of England caused major difficulties for the way the nation had traditionally provided support for the poor. England had a long history of organised support for the impoverished. Prior to King Henry VIII dissolving the monasteries (between 1536 and 1539), such assistance had been provided by the Church. Once these institutions ceased to function, a gap existed in provision, until the First Poor Law introduced by Queen Elizabeth I in 1601. This organised a levy on all residents in the parish, called the ‘poor rate’. The money was controlled by parishes, and provided support to destitute residents in the local community. It was the first national state-organised system of support for the poor and operated until the onset of industrialisation.

This emergence of extensive urban areas resulting in consequent population movements meant established provisions often existed in the wrong location. These huge increases in population had resulted in a disjunction between need and provision, with many rural parishes now seeing a reduction in population and demand for provision. By contrast, in the newly emerging urban areas the parishes saw a massive increase in population, with consequential demand supported by a very low level of inherent financial resource. This need for change prompted a debate about provision for the poor that was to have significant implications for millions of people. The new arrangements, from 1834, saw amalgamation of poor rate parishes into Unions, where economies of scale could be developed through the new ‘workhouse’ system.

An important basis of the contemporary debate was fuelled by beliefs about differences between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. A widely held view was that the poor could be neatly classified into two distinct groups. One were those viewed as unfortunate in their poverty, through causes such as accident, illness, or old age following a long period of work. A second were those who had the opportunity to rise above poverty but made a conscious choice not to do so – those who made a lifestyle choice of being poor. These groups were characterised by the terminology of the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor – the deserving poor being those who had no choice in their condition whilst the undeserving were feckless, making life-style choices and choosing not to work, but to live off the state. Allied to this was a widely held belief that poverty could be contagious – spread from individuals, and especially from parents to children. This belief was used to justify the separation of families in the newly established workhouses – splitting husbands and wives, and especially parents from children. This dichotomy of the deserving and undeserving poor, and belief in the contagion of poverty, became major components of political belief that shaped social policy of the day.

Whilst the physical conditions people lived in were bad, there were attempts through charitable organisations to impact on the lives of the poor. Workhouses were places where the poor were offered accommodation and employment. Workhouse inmates lived in harsh conditions, doing hard work, but had advantages such as the provision of free medical care and education for children, neither of which was available to the poor in England living outside workhouses in those days. [Ed.]
Visitors to Manchester were observing something unique for the time, the birth of industrialisation on a scale never before contemplated – the start of the world’s first industrial city.

Operating until the 1970s, the Ragged School Movement[^3] was to become a major feature in the lives of many of the poor. These charitable schools provided free education for the most impoverished children, which included basic literacy, numeracy and Christian morality. Between 1844 and 1881, it is estimated that some 300,000 children attended such schools across the country. They often became important centres for some of the most disadvantaged communities – and Angel Meadow was no exception. Many of the children who attended were the sons and daughters of parents who were regarded as the undeserving poor – parents who had ‘failed’ their children by being poor. This was the same driving philosophy that led to the splitting up of families in workhouses. In order to maintain their existence many such schools were to depend on extensive support from local industrialists, alongside other charitable bequests.

**SHOCK CITY**

It was industrialisation that caused one discrete district of a small town to develop into a major conurbation of 2.5 million people. The onset of industrialisation was a huge international phenomenon, with people journeying from all over the world to witness this new spectacle of the modern world, this embryonic urban location. Visitors to Manchester were observing something unique for the time, the birth of industrialisation on a scale never before contemplated – the start of the world’s first industrial city. In *Victorian Cities*,[^4] Asa Briggs titles his chapter about the city as ‘Manchester, symbol of a new age’. This new metropolis was exciting and different, making the city a major tourist attraction as people came from across the world to see this new phenomenon.

Prior to industrialisation, Manchester was a small town on the banks of the River Irwell. It had no significant claim to fame, having been founded by the Romans and developed into a small medieval settlement. Its population growth due to industrialisation is staggering:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1642</td>
<td>c3200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1788</td>
<td>42,821</td>
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<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>126,066</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>235,597</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>303,382</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>347,495</td>
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Similar huge growth in population was experienced across the many industrialising cities of the world, as people migrated from rural to these newly emerging urban communities. This mass influx of people was to cause serious problems for the new cities. The demand for housing often meant existing properties were subdivided to provide space for the increasing number of families. Older abandoned dwellings were brought back into use. Many places were converted to use for human occupation – not least the notorious cellar dwellings. Speculative builders bought up land and crammed as many houses as possible onto sites. Little consideration was initially given to health or hygiene. The implications of industrialisation for the landscape were consequently widespread and extensive.

**THE EARLY YEARS OF ANGEL MEADOW**

For many years, the area we now know as Angel Meadow, the location of this study, were open fields, the nearest communities being the city centre and Collyhurst. In between was a pleasant, verdant, arable land. Collyhurst was the nearest village we find a reference for as early as 1322 in the ‘Extent of the Manor of Mamecestre’, when Sir Roger de Pilkington rents 80 acres for a shilling an acre.

The first reference to a major link with Manchester comes in the Manchester Court Leet[^5] records of October 3rd, 1594, when in return for enclos-

[^3]: Ragged schools were organisations that offered free education and other resources to poor (“raggedly clothed”) children in low-income areas. [Ed.]
[^5]: In England, a yearly or half-yearly court of record that the lords of certain manors held. [Ed.]
ing part of Collyhurst Common the people of Manchester:

when any infection of the plague shall happen in Manchester, should have the right and liberty to erect and build cabins, for the relief and harbouring of infected persons, upon six acres of Collyhurst aforesaid next to Manchester, and to bury the dead there.\(^6\)

It is apparent that by 1638 the cabins are still there, since Court Leet records show a larger community with more demands on the structures of law and order. Collyhurst has a specific officer in the person of Mr. Peter Walker as bye-law man,\(^7\) with seven others appointed as ‘officers to distribute rent charges from Collyhurst’.\(^8\)

By the early 19th century street names that exist today can be identified, the community is well established and the incorporation of the area into Manchester is complete with more people using the thoroughfares. In 1805 Mr. Jennings is charged with allowing an open sewer from his house in Ashley Lane to overflow. The judgement mentions it as a ‘common nuisance to all persons passing in and along the Lane’,\(^9\) inferring a well-used thoroughfare. The district has been transformed since Sir Roger de Pilkington rented his 80 acres and is now a thriving and populous community. And Mr. Jennings and his sewer? He was sentenced to a 40 pounds fine if the situation hadn’t been rectified at the next sitting of the court. As there is no further mention of him in Manchester Court Leet records, October 10th, 1787.

The district was to develop into a classic inner-city industrialised community. The River Irk runs through the area and was to become heavily polluted with effluent from the factories and mills that sprouted up in abundance. A massive population increase meant facilities were developed by the fledgling city to support the ever burgeoning community. There were inadequate resources physically, politically and socially, to provide the mechanisms that were required to cope with such an extensive incursion. These higher population densities produced a unique situation demanding innovative methods to deal with fresh problems. New institutions were developed, and many were located in the Angel Meadow community. The local area saw the first Manchester Workhouse. It was the initial location of the Manchester and Salford Juvenile Reformatory. Saint George’s Chapel, the Manchester Industrial School, public houses, philanthropic buildings, a large number of ragged schools and a host of pawn brokers alongside industry and housing made for a heady mix in what was one of the world’s first industrialised communities. Certainly living in the area was not a pleasant experience. As Angus Reach was to observe after his visit in 1849:

The lowest, most filthy, most unhealthy and most wicked locality in Manchester is called Angel Meadow. It is full of cellars, and inhabited by prostitutes, their bullies, thieves, cadgers, vagrants, tramps.\(^10\)

Outside the workhouses, industry and residential living developed side by side, with houses and industrial property sharing the same street. Most industry was powered by steam that necessitated the burning of vast volumes of coal, the same materials the tens of thousands of new homes were heated with. This coal produced large volumes of thick, dark smoke, from both residential and industrial premises. This, mixed with the naturally damp atmosphere of the town, produced a toxic mix of smog, causing serious respiratory problems for the new population that had been so used to rural living. In addition, disease was rife due to the unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. In three months of 1862, Angel Meadow saw 68 cases of smallpox and 142 patients were admitted to the Workhouse hospital with 80 to the infirmary. This was in addition to regular outbreaks of diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and typhus.

Not surprisingly, there were elements of society who believed such conditions should be challenged. Middle-class reformers toured this and similar areas, determined to record the conditions they found, resolute in providing evidence of the poverty and privations they found. Figure 1 shows an extract from just such a report, one of many recording the physical deprivation that existed in these communities. In 1832 the Medical Officer of Health for the City, James Kay-Shuttleworth, said:

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\(^6\) Manchester Court Leet records, 1594, n.d.
\(^7\) Officer that executed local laws. [Ed.]
\(^8\) Manchester Court Leet records, October 10th, 1787.
\(^9\) Manchester Court Leet records, October 26th, 1805.
the houses, in such situations, are unclean, ill-provided with furniture; an air of discomfort, if not squalid and loathsome wretchedness pervades them; they are often dilapidated, badly drained, damp.11

Things had improved little twenty years later, when in 1853 the Manchester and Salford Statistical Society reported that ‘it is a melancholy fact that in this town about half the children die before the age of five years; of the other half but few live to old age’.12

By the late 19th century, housing in the area was a mix of speculative terrace developments with large earlier family housing, alongside the adaptation of existing earlier vernacular properties. An early excavation by Wessex Archaeology examined the housing on Angel Street. Originally these had been houses for artisans, but with the explosion of the population an increase in housing density became inevitable. These early properties were subdivided, so doubling both the population and the rental income for the absent landlords. The report describes the demand for these altered houses as:

the increasing need for individual homes for families as demonstrated in trench four where what was once a two room dwelling was divided into two single room dwellings by the insertion of a corridor.13

This area also contained a large number of a further type of housing that emerged significantly across all major towns and cities, that of the lodging or boarding house. It is beyond the scope of this paper to dwell at any length on these, but consideration of the fact that Angel Street alone had fifteen properties described in Trade Registers as ‘Common Lodging Houses’ is indicative of the scale. Some of these premises had extensive multiple occupation, with occasionally up to ninety residents, being an indicator of the magnitude of this sector of housing. Again a large number (although not all) of the owners were absentee landlords.

Recent excavations of the area undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North, funded by the Co-operative Group in preparation for their new national headquarters, have given us a greater insight into the lives of local people. The investigations excavated a total of 75 differing properties in diverse parts of the Angel Meadow community. Many of the buildings in the area were shown to have single-skin internal walls (Fig. 2), something not uncommon at this time. The whole area also provided evidence of the process of sanitary development across time, and the difficulties that were experienced in its implementation. An interesting aside is that one part of the area (the southern cellars along Angel Street) provides evidence from the Manchester Blitz in the Second World War on December 22nd and 23rd 1940, which is rare since bombed properties were almost universally cleared immediately.

Much of the housing was of a very poor quality, with multiple-occupation a frequent occurrence, but the area developed in distinct stages. The earliest properties were robust artisan properties

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which were subsequently subdivided to provide further tenancies. Later developments were the speculative housing so well-known and extensively reported on. Whilst this speculative housing consisted of the vast majority of the properties, it was not the only housing in the area. A further form was the earlier large house, some of which were, as the economic fortunes of the area changed, redeveloped into the lodging houses referred to elsewhere in this text. Others of these properties were redeveloped into industrial-based structures or mixed premises, commonly with living accommodation on the upper stories and industrial activity in the basement. Many of these structures display evidence of original cotton loom workshops in the attic, with photographs of the properties clearly illustrating the typical gallery windows of the domestic loom shop so common across industrialised Lancashire.

There was also extensive demolition of earlier property to be replaced with industrial capacity. So in the area of Crown Street, houses were demolished to be replaced by a cabinet factory. In addition to specific industrial developments, there was also piecemeal adaptation of existing estates to develop small-scale industrial activity. For example, some cellars were converted for use as meat storage through the removal of internal walls and the provision of further ventilation. Further evidence from the excavations shows the remains of the ends of carpet rolls discovered in a basement (Fig. 3). The use of cellars for industrial work was therefore widely developed in the area, further illustrating how industry, commerce and domestic accommodation were integrated. Such theories are further supported by early cartographic evidence demonstrating phased evolution of the area into a mixed living and industrial community.

The report also has a significant finding concerning the longevity of the housing in the area. Accepted beliefs were that the housing was constructed of a poor quality, with a relatively short lifetime due to poor construction technique. Whilst the excavation did discover some variation in the quality of build, much of this could be explained by the use of apprentices on those areas of construction not on public display. This is not uncommon in many properties, including modern ones. The report by Oxford Archaeology North goes further and questions the validity of
accepted beliefs that speculative builders were responsible for low quality construction as a means of minimising construction costs and therefore maximising profits. They explicitly make clear that the excavation has shown that earlier structures, built for yeoman or middle-class workers, are in many respects as poorly constructed, albeit generally to a larger size. Whilst there is undoubtedly some truth in the accusation, it does also appear that many of the construction techniques could be argued as following the local vernacular tradition.  

Such assertions are new and provide a valuable new interpretation on the housing stock in a local context.

Contemporary views on the area are perhaps best illustrated by an edition of *The Spy*, a magazine published in Manchester at this time. In 1893, they sent a reporter down to the community, who described ‘the dreary wastes of Angel Meadow. Down Angel Street with its pestiferous lodging houses; with its bawds and bullies, its thieves and beggars’. They went on to describe a resident who had ‘a weariness and despair in her look, and recklessness and defiance in her manner’. The reporter was clearly moved by what they saw, and made clear where they felt some of the blame lay, arguing ‘but the poor live here and die here while our city fathers sleep’. Their personal despair was also evident, as they conclude ‘I came away from this place sick at heart, ashamed of myself and all mankind’.

**CHARTER STREET RAGGED SCHOOL AND WORKING GIRLS’ HOME**

One of the most important ragged schools in Angel Meadow was Charter Street. It was supported by the great and the good of Manchester – the Crossley family (of Crossley Motors) and the Broadhurst family (of Tootal, Broadhurst and Lee), to name but two of the major business benefactors. As well as providing financial support for the maintenance of the building, they also provided practical support for families. The school started with a dispute at another school and 16 teachers moved to the new site, with Tony Johnson JP as the prime mover. For several years the school operated alongside others in the area that provided extensive and diverse support to the local community. The school provided a basic education to large numbers of local children.

Johnson had always wanted to establish a home for working girls so there were later extensions to the building to enable this to happen. In addition, the buildings became the home of the Manchester Medical Mission – in 30 years of existence they were to treat some 200,000 people. Although the medical mission ceased its operations at Charter Street around 1913, there are contemporary echoes of it every Christmas when the centre still houses a specialist clinic staffed by medical volunteers for Manchester’s homeless. This activity was traditionally closely associated with the Manchester Royal Infirmary and drew many of its volunteers from among the students at Manchester University.

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Throughout its history, Charter Street was at the very centre of the community, providing education, and at times food, clothing, shelter and medical services to local people – young and old, male and female. Clogs (Fig. 4) were issued by Charter Street Ragged School to local children during the winter, being collected back in summer. Many children worked barefoot in the many surrounding mills – it made movement on the highly polished floors easier. They often carried this out into the streets (many of which were nothing more than unmade tracks), and in the summer months were to be found regularly barefoot outside. Many of the local middle classes felt this demonstrated a dire need to ensure that local children were at least well shod. To this end, children were loaned the clogs for the duration of the winter months.

The clogs are stout and being well made of leather and wood with rivets attached to the soles and heels, would provide strong, durable footwear for the raw winter months. These were substantial items of footwear and a significant investment by the school in the children of the locality. Therefore, they were prized possessions, raising a reasonable sum at the pawn shop. To exclude this possibility, the school would stamp them with the legend ‘not to be pawned’. This was seen as a wise precaution against the vicissitudes of certain parents and their propensity to pawn items of value. It speaks volumes for the perception the institution had of local parents. Similarly, every item in the school was marked with their name, including the milk jug (Fig. 5), so discouraging theft and ensuring that any stolen property could be immediately identified.

The school was integral to the community over many years. Not only did it provide education for local youngsters when no state provision existed, it also hosted Christmas parties and other important community celebrations. There were regular adult religious classes. In the Second World War,
when many local houses were damaged by bombing, the school became a refuge providing a roof for local bombed out families. It organised a day out in the summer as the only holiday local children received. It was a centre for social activities of all the community, as well as for holding political meetings. It provided evening classes for adults and evening recreational activities for the whole community. It was a centre for medical support, being closely associated with the Manchester Royal Infirmary and supported by students from the fledgling Manchester University medical school. As late as the 1980s, it was providing a drop-in medical care centre, with the aid of volunteer medical students and staff from Manchester University, for homeless people on the city streets.

But such provision, of itself, was not regarded as enough; there were still unmet demands in the densely packed community. For several years, concern had been expressed about the future possibilities of young girls who managed to get jobs, in the process moving from the undeserving to the deserving poor. Many, although now in full time and permanent employment, still lived with families, and the old debates about poverty and its contagion resurfaced. Such beliefs were instrumental in demonstrating the clear need for residential provision. This eventually came to fruition with the Working Girls’ Home. Separated by the width of a door, the working girls’ home and the ragged school could not have been more different.

The role of women in the area was a constant concern for the local vicar, with Angel Meadow being often regarded as the centre of the city’s vice trade. He documented the extent of prostitution in 1896/7:

The class of fallen girls and women is very large and aggressive. Of the 42 streets of the parish, only 18 can be said to be free from this class, and many of these 18 even are doubtful. The following figures will give some idea of the state of the two principal streets. Angel Street, with 54 houses, has only 8 quite free. Charter Street, with 79 houses, has only 21 quite free. Further, there are 15 lodging houses which are practically quite given up to this class of women, and a large number lodge in the mixed lodging houses with the men who live on their earnings.16

This would have fed directly into the prevailing beliefs of the underserving, and ungodly, poor. It would have generated extensive concern and debate about the possibilities of addressing the issues, and could clearly have been a factor in the development of the home for working girls at Charter Street.

These views are to be found clearly represented in the physical construction of the two buildings. The stairs of the ragged school are plain cement with a single basic iron handrail (Fig. 6) – the girls’ home stairs were wood with ornate painted hand rails and carpeted (Fig. 7). The floors of the school are basic, plain and unadorned, whilst those of the girls’ home were carpeted. School walls were plain painted brick, whilst in the home they have been further treated by being plastered and subsequently wallpapered. Windows in the home were accessible and contained decorative coloured glass, whilst in the ragged schools windows were high, plain and purely functional. But perhaps the greatest and, in many ways, most significant contrast is to be found in the entrances, which not only impacted on those within the buildings, but significantly presented a public persona, an image to the outside world. The external doors to the school were plain and undecorated wood, fitted into standard surrounds. However, the surround to the entrance of the girls’ home is elaborately decorated with carved stone containing the name of the school, and the doors are substantial decoratively carved wood (Fig. 8). Once the doors were opened, the entrance to the ragged school gave directly onto the plain austere stairs, whilst the girls’ home opened onto a small entrance hall containing a complex decorative mosaic (Fig. 9). It is with both the decorative and functional elements of the buildings where significant differences between the two institutions are clearly apparent. In an area of outside toilets, ash pits and common lodging houses, the facilities provided in the girls’ home were regarded as the height of luxury. There was nothing austere about this physical environment. It was light and airy, well decorated and the finishings to the furniture and fittings were the most modern available.

Clearly the girls’ home was much more ornate and had received a significantly greater financial investment than the ragged school. This difference in internal decoration emphasised the traditional dichotomy of the deserving and un-
deserving poor. The political and social ideas of the time were built into the very architecture and fabric of the building, that fabric providing a visual permanent display of these differences within the community. Being the largest local building (apart from the church), it would have dwarfed all other institutions. The physical presence of such a structure was a daily and repetitive reminder to the whole population of the benefits of aspiration. As an instrument of social manipulation, it made a daily impact on the local community. It said to this most poor of populations that there was the opportunity to ‘better’ yourself, to become a model citizen.

The building was also a symbol of the opportunity the new industrialised societies offered. Not only did it represent the opportunities for individual advancement, it also displayed the advantages inherent in a successful life gained through conformity. Acting in a compliant and accepting manner – gaining the basic education on offer, respecting the Christian ideals emphasised in the school, taking an active part in the community – could lead to progression to the girls’ home and admission through the ornate carved doorway.

THEN AND NOW
Certainly the ragged school/girls’ home fortunes ebbed and flowed reflecting microeconomic factors within the area. At times of severe and desperate poverty, the Charter Street Ragged School was an essential and substantial part of the community. As the fortunes of the area changed, so did involvement with and support for the school. The school, however, became adept at evolving its activities to remain a focus of local attention – whilst simultaneously remaining true to its founding charter and core beliefs. As changing economic fortunes depopulated the area, so the school began to expand its activities to encompass a broader geographical spread of influence, becoming a larger player in citywide activities rather than solely serving the immediate locality. Indeed it was still a significant and important provider for elements of the poor population in the city up to the late 1970s.

This whole area developed and changed due to the impact of the industrialisation process that influenced the small town of Manchester. The transformation of what had to then been a relatively unimportant community on the banks
of the River Irwell into the major metropolis of Greater Manchester is a classic case study of the changes stimulated by the Industrial Revolution. Yet these changes were not solely with respect to the physical development of the industrial substructure of the area. This paper has sought to explore the impact that industrialisation had on the social and personal lives of the people who were attracted to this newly developing neighbourhood. In doing so, it has investigated the mechanisms that developed, and the functions they served. It is important to recognise that these developing institutions sought not only to impact on key problems in the area, but also reflected the political and social beliefs of the time. It is clear, then, that the manner in which these beliefs influenced the social lives of local people, through the institutions they generated, is key to understanding the impact of industrialisation on these newly emerging communities. Without this, our interpretation of these new societies is rendered meaningless and incomplete.

In conclusion, the examples cited illustrate clearly the influence industrialisation had on the lives of so many ordinary people. They demonstrate the impact of beliefs from that period, and the very tangible repercussions policy-making had on real lives. The evidence speaks as eloquently today as it did then to the issues of poverty, status and social division. The archaeological testimony can be effectively used to understand the implications of contemporary policies. Where poverty, austerity and privation exists today in communities, and debates about the deserving and undeserving poor are surfacing, the lessons from Angel Meadow become as relevant now as they were in the 19th century. In short, these historic structures are as important now as then, because they are able to articulate with contemporary debates. The archaeology of industry, and industrialisation, is as relevant today as it was when these buildings were first constructed.