First published in 2020 by the Bodleian Library
Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BG
www.bodleianshop.co.uk

ISBN: 978 1 85124 517 8

Text © Bernard Nurse, 2020

All images © Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2020

Bernard Nurse has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this Work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the Bodleian Library, except for the purpose of research or private study, or criticism or review.

Cover design by Dot Little at the Bodleian Library
Designed and typeset by Caroline and Roger Hillier, The Old Chapel Graphic Design, www.theoldchapelivinghoe.com, in Caslon Classico
Printed and bound by xxxxx, xxxxx on xxx paper

British Library Catalogue in Publishing Data
A CIP record of this publication is available from the British Library

Contents

7 Acknowledgements

9 Introduction

15 I. North of England

47 II. East of England

71 III. South-East

97 IV. South-West

129 V. Midlands

151 VI. Scotland

175 VII. Wales

197 VIII. Touring the country in eighteenth-century England

207 Appendix I: Richard Gough's tours through Britain 1756–71

208 Appendix II: Letters and journals of Richard Gough

216 Bibliography

222 Index

Introduction

British country towns in the eighteenth century

In Tudor times only London would have been regarded as a major city by foreign visitors. By the late eighteenth century, many British towns were admired for their appearance of prosperity, their manufacturing, shops, cultural life and well-maintained streets. In the previous hundred years, provincial towns in Britain had grown in size and importance. Ports such as Glasgow and Liverpool greatly expanded and industrial centres like Birmingham and Manchester flourished. Market towns developed as commercial centres or developed specialities, such as leisure facilities in Bath, horse-racing in Newmarket or naval services in Portsmouth. The expansion of towns took place in a period when the country's population increased by about 50 per cent, England adding about another 2.5 million inhabitants, Scotland another 600,000 and the mostly rural Wales about 200,000. Greater London, with almost twice the population of Wales, had in excess of one million inhabitants by 1801, when it was possibly the largest city in the world.

With the notable exception of London, a regional shift began to take place as towns in the Midlands and North of England grew faster than those in East Anglia and the South-East. Development occurred sooner in the port towns, particularly those on the west coast, driven by the growth of international trade as Britain's empire expanded, but also in those on the east coast. Manufacturing towns developed later as the process of industrialization took hold.

Several factors have been identified as creating the conditions for Britain to initiate the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. Abundant mineral resources, especially coal, provided fuel to replace depleting stocks of wood and metals to manufacture machinery. Newcomen and Watt developed steam power to make engines that could drive machines and pump water from mines to prevent flooding. A workforce of skilled engineers, such as could be found in the Midlands, was able to provide the precision needed to improve efficiency. In this period, the process of industrialization was mostly small in scale and workshop or domestically based rather than characterized by the sort of large factories constructed in the nineteenth century.

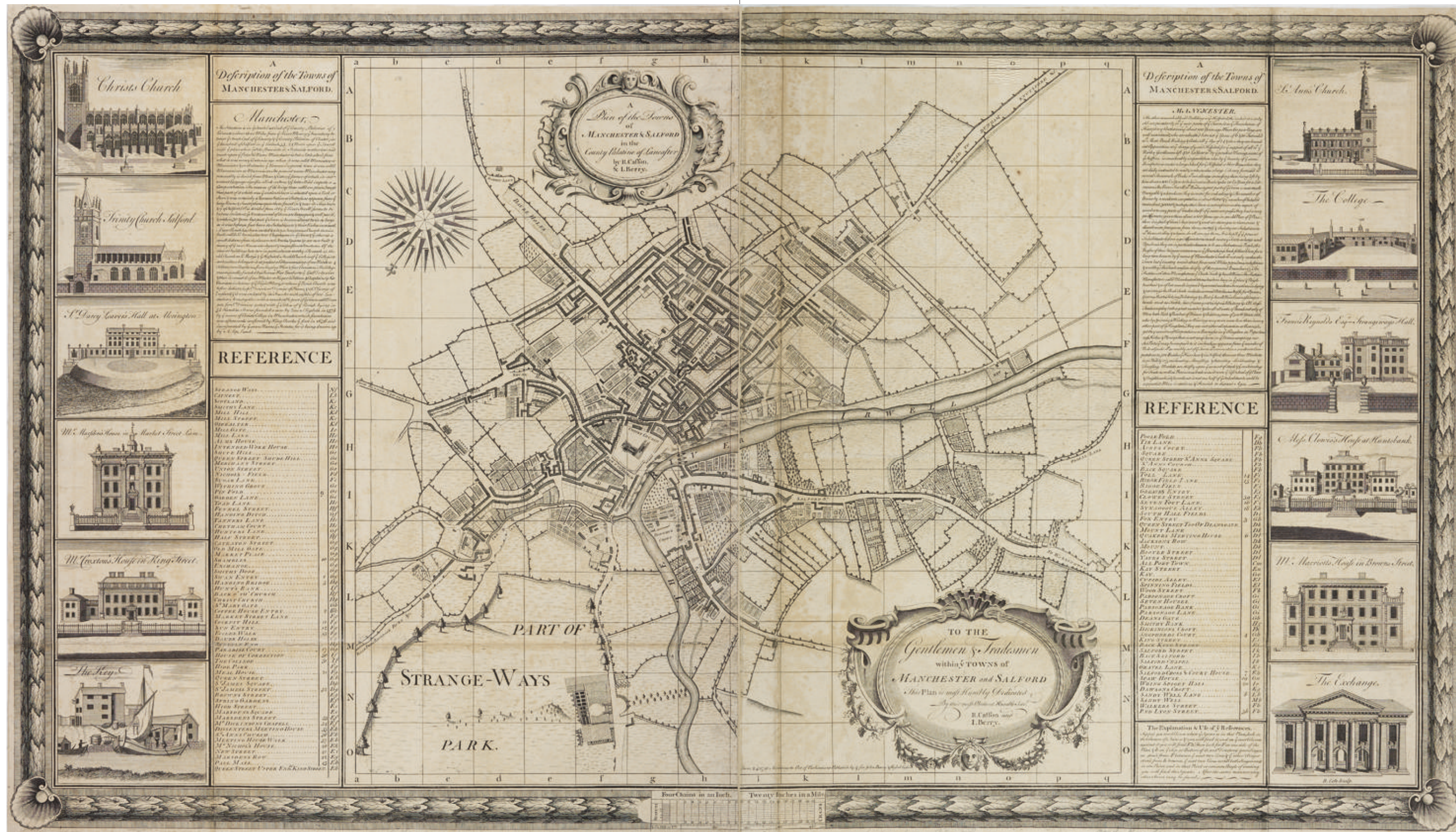
I.
North of England

The North of England stretches from the Scottish border to Cheshire and Yorkshire. Before the middle of the seventeenth century, growth was mostly in the rural areas where agriculture had been assisted by the enclosure of common fields and manufacture was essentially domestic. The older centres such as Durham and Beverley were generally in decline and only York and Newcastle are estimated to have had more than 10,000 inhabitants; in Newcastle seventeenth-century evidence of plague and considerable poverty has been found. Change was slow in many parts, hampered by the upland countryside and poor communications. In other areas urban development gathered pace towards the end of the eighteenth century, fuelled by the industrial revolution; and the foundations were laid for more spectacular growth in succeeding years.

In particular Liverpool and Manchester became the largest provincial towns in England by 1801. Liverpool benefited from trade with the British colonies in North America and one of the main imports, cotton, came to be extensively processed in factories around Manchester. Improvements to navigation along the rivers Mersey and Irwell improved transport by water. Dramatic but short-lived growth took place on the coast north of Liverpool in Cumbria. In Whitehaven, the earliest of the new towns was founded by the enterprising Lowther family, the powerful principal landowners.

Cloth-making towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire did not develop as quickly as towns in Lancashire. Leeds was one exception, where the population grew rapidly, as it did in Sheffield, which specialized in cutlery and tool-making. On the coast, seaports responded to the expanding North Sea economy and the demand for abundant and accessible coal, especially from the important London market. Mining allowed towns in County Durham to expand; whaling and fishing industries flourished; the coal trade and shipbuilding developed around Tyneside.

Those towns in areas without significant industries, such as much of East Yorkshire, remained stable or declined. From being one of the largest provincial towns in England in 1700, by the end of the century York was little more than half the size of Newcastle. The corporation and craft guilds restricted new enterprises and poverty was widespread. Just as York lost trade to Hull, another former regional centre, Chester on the river Dee lost out to Liverpool as the most important port in the north-west. The continuous silting of the river made navigation by ocean-going vessels difficult compared to that on the Mersey, where there were good harbour facilities at Liverpool.
Walton, 2000, pp. 111–31.



10a. Plan of Manchester and Salford by Russel Casson and John Berry, engraved by Benjamin Cole, 1741. Gough Maps Lancashire 4.

smoke arising on the outskirts and the overcrowded Sandgate area beyond the bridge. Estimates suggest the population of the built-up area in the 1770s was around 30–40,000 after a period of steady growth, but still small compared to the Victorian period. Beilby's plan (fig. 13) shows little increase in the extent of the town from earlier maps, but great contrasts within it. The wealthier inhabitants moved to new fashionable streets in the upper parts, while the poorer crowded in narrow Quayside alleys especially to the east. Towards the end of the century, street improvements, good shops and a vibrant cultural life could be found, and even Gough noticed the fine Exchange and the walks near St John's Church. However his observations on poverty and overcrowding were echoed by other commentators and borne out by the high death rate within some parishes of the town, whose population was only sustained by high levels of migration.

Gough visited Newcastle in 1763 and did not stay to explore the historic remains. He described what he saw in his travel journals:

> The town is join'd to Gateshead … by a bridge of 7 arches as large as those of London Bridge, and supporting a street of houses as it did, but so narrow as scarce to admit single carriages and foot passengers, besides being crowded up with two or three old gates. Along the north side of the Tine [Tyne] is a long Key [Quay] which when the old town wall (which is very thick but low) is removed (as it will be as soon as the Corporation have found a use for the stones) will be very spacious. It is faced with freestone & is much longer than that at Bristol. Near the Bridge foot is a handsome Exchange built of stone, and opening to the Key: and near this is the Market from whence you ascend up a very steep hill, by a narrow street, with a row of short flat stones in the middle just wide enough for a horse, and without any separation for the walkers, which in a town so crowded with Inhabitants as this, is inconvenient and dangerous … near it [St John's Church] are walks around a square belonging to the Barracks and Guardhouse, where the genteel part of the Inhabitants resort. Pilgrim Street running nearly parallel to the High Street is spacious and tolerably well built … Great part of the town wall with its towers remains on the north east side. The Castle is now converted into a Goal [Gaol]. The town is irregularly built on a very steep hill, the streets for the most part narrow, the houses are built of stone and brick and a great number of timber; but all so discoloured by the smoke of the Coal, Iron and Salt works that it is difficult to say what they are made of; and all these works require so many hands and particularly children of both sexes, that one would think the Inhabitants of the whole County were assembled in Newcastle; add to this the closeness of the houses, the number of families crowded into each of the poorer sort, and the Nastiness arising from this circumstance and the Dirtiness of their Employments, and the town may be pronounced to bear all the marks of dirty Opulence: the inns are indifferent, their trade being confined within themselves and arising from their own Townspeople, and a great want of Order and Cleanliness. Strangers must not expect extraordinary Accommodations here, nor indeed was I enough pleased with the place to discover either the Curiosities or the Beauties of it.

MS. Top. Gen. e.22 fols 239–243.

The three illustrations were published in John Brand's *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne*, London, 1789. J. Bailey is probably the Northumberland draughtsman and land agent, John Bailey (1750–1819). James Fittler (1758?–1835) lived in London and was marine engraver to George III. Ralph Beilby (1744–1817) was the Newcastle engraver who trained the wood engraver and artist Thomas Bewick; Beilby's plan appears to be based on that of Charles Hutton, published in 1772. His brother William (1740–1819) was a noted glass engraver who used classical ruins in some of his designs; the two collaborated on the view of the bridge.

Bendall, 1997, B019; Butler, 2012; CBTM, 19362; G., W., [William Garret], 1818; Purdue, 2013, pp. 272–84; Horsley, 1971; Worms, 2011, pp. 64–5 (Ralph Beilby), 236–7 (Fittler).

Scarborough

In the seventeenth century, the discovery of mineral waters running from one of the cliffs, and publicity about their supposed medicinal qualities, encouraged many visitors, especially from Yorkshire, to the spa which briefly rivalled Bath. When sea bathing became popular in the eighteenth century, Scarborough developed into a fashionable seaside resort. The prospect by the Buck brothers (fig. 14) shows the spa in the left foreground, and provides one of the earliest images of 'bathing houses' (no. 3) designed to take swimmers (often without clothes) into the sea. By 1798, the town had a population of about 6,000, with a busy fishing port, a prosperous shipbuilding industry and attractions for visitors.

Figure 15 is from *History of Scarborough* (York, 1798) by Thomas Hinderwell (1744–1825), the Scarborough philanthropist and antiquary. His was the first detailed history of the town.

CBTM, 19380; Hyde, 1994, pl. 70.

Sunderland

Completed in 1796, the single-span iron Wearmouth Bridge (fig. 16) was built at a location on the river that presented several problems to engineers at the time. The bridge had to be high enough and wide enough so that large boats did not have to lower their masts when passing underneath. The final design was patented by local MP and chief financier for the project Rowland Burdon and the engineer Thomas Wilson.

At the time of construction, it was the longest single-span bridge in the world, covering 72 metres. Despite needing frequent repairs, the bridge remained in use until it was replaced in 1929. By 1796, Sunderland was already a thriving port, second only to Newcastle for the export of coal and with a booming shipbuilding industry, but the bridge greatly increased its development. Previously, access across the mouth of the river between the two ancient settlements of Bishopwearmouth and Monkwearmouth absorbed into Sunderland had only been possible by ferry; and the nearest bridge was at Chester-le-Street, eight miles upstream.

James, 2015, pp. 193–249; Worms, 2011, p. 544 (Raffield).

Whitehaven

Whitehaven's growth from a small village in the early seventeenth century to a major port in the eighteenth was due to exploitation of the local coal fields by members of the Lowther family, the landowners. From the 1680s, they created Britain's first post-medieval planned town, laid out on a grid pattern much of which still survives. Whitehaven soon became the most important port on the west coast for the shipping of coal, mostly to Ireland, and briefly developed an important trade in tobacco with the American colonies. However, when this plan (fig. 17) was surveyed in 1772, Whitehaven had passed its peak of prosperity as it was overtaken by other towns with a more extensive industrial hinterland, better transport links and a larger share of the transatlantic trade.

John Draper (fl.1747–d.1776) was a teacher of mathematics in Whitehaven and the author of two books on mathematics and navigation. According to the printed inscription, Draper was responsible for the survey, which he dedicated to Sir James Lowther, the 5th Baronet. John Ainslie (1745–1828) was a surveyor, cartographer and

III.
South-East

For our purposes the South-East region consists of the home counties of Kent and Surrey outside the Greater London area and the surrounding counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Sussex. In the eighteenth century, towns here were generally more prosperous than those elsewhere, as they are in the present day. The relatively high income per head helped retailing, services and the professions. The South-East had more shops than other parts of England – Oxford's covered market, for example, opened in 1774 with forty butchers' shops. Members of the university and their servants swelled that city's population, as did the staff and pupils in the small town of Eton.

By the end of the century, London and Beijing were the two largest cities in the world, with populations exceeding one million. London's influence was mostly felt within fifteen miles of the centre, but the impact of its relentless growth extended much further. More roads than in the rest of the country were improved by turnpike trusts, speeding up transport of goods and passengers. London's dominance meant that large regional centres like Norwich and Exeter could not develop in the South-East, but towns with specialist services grew. Seaside resorts such as Brighton, Margate and Ramsgate and spas such as at Tunbridge Wells rose to serve Londoners with money and leisure time. River communications were good and used for bulk transport of food supplies. The land was fertile and favourable to growing crops. Reading on the Thames became a centre for the collection of wheat and barley, processing them into flour and malt to send to the capital. By 1800, silk-weaving had almost disappeared in Canterbury, where once it had employed many skilled workers. However, the surrounding area of Kent flourished by concentrating on hop-growing to meet the growing demand for beer. Other natural resources included woodlands, which in the Chilterns were exploited for furniture-making; the previously significant iron-smelting industry, centred on the Weald of Sussex and Kent, had largely declined by 1800.

Sheltered ports on the south coast provided good links with the Continent, but were also vulnerable to attack from Holland in the seventeenth century and France during several wars in the eighteenth. Naval bases at Portsmouth and Chatham expanded with large numbers of shipyard workers and military barracks. By 1800, Portsmouth was the largest town in the region with about 33,000 inhabitants.

Chalklin, 2000, pp. 49–66.