

BURY IN THE COTTON FAMINE 1861-64

CHARITY IN BURY DURING THE COTTON FAMINE



The Cotton Famine Relief Committee by Arthur Hughes and Albert Goodwin, Manchester Town Hall, painted from a photograph about 1869, from ArtUk under Creative Commons licence

Mass unemployment hit suddenly across Lancashire in 1861. The existing Poor Law could barely help a fraction of those affected. Most people in unaffected areas did not find out about of the impact of the crisis for some months but when news finally spread, charitable donations began to flood in.

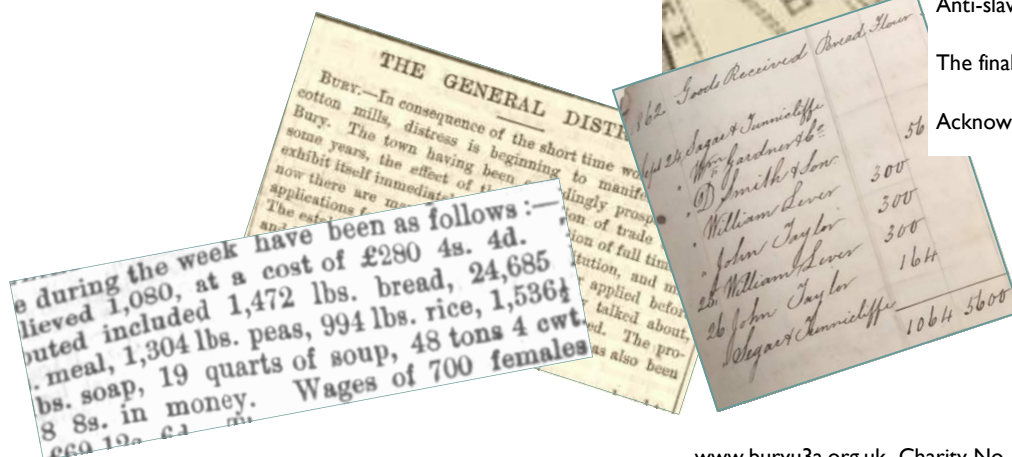
This booklet forms one in a series exploring the effect of the Cotton Famine of 1861-64 on the area around Bury. The research was done by a group of members of Bury U3A.

We were responding to a wider active learning initiative that started in 2018, with the umbrella title 'Cottonopolis'.



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Why was charity needed in Bury in 1861?

See 'Work and Poverty', a separate booklet in this series, for more detailed information on the poor law and wage levels

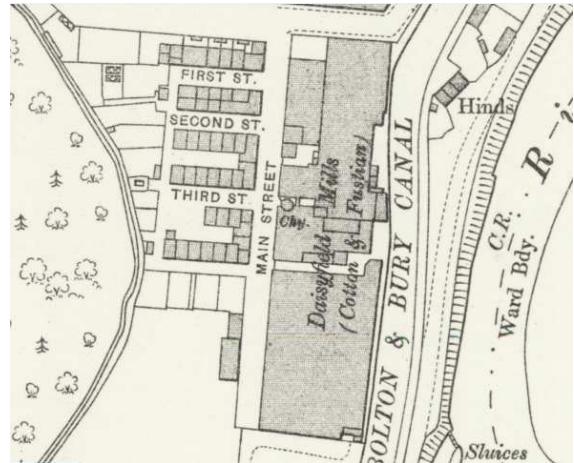
Laissez-Faire economics

'Laissez-Faire' means 'let go'. It describes the economic system of Victorian Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, which was based on minimum government intervention and very low taxation.

Low taxation meant schemes needing large amounts of public funding were very hard to achieve. One of such scheme was providing help for the unemployed during trade depressions.

Society as a whole valued and respected charitable giving. Every district had a network of concerned religious groups, political activists and well-meaning 'lady visitors' who gave direct help to those in need.

The newspaper clipping opposite shows one of the regular grand events held in Bury to raise money for charity.



Above: Daisyfield Mill, Bury, with workers housing adjacent. Built by the Hutchinson family before 1846

Trade depressions and business set-backs

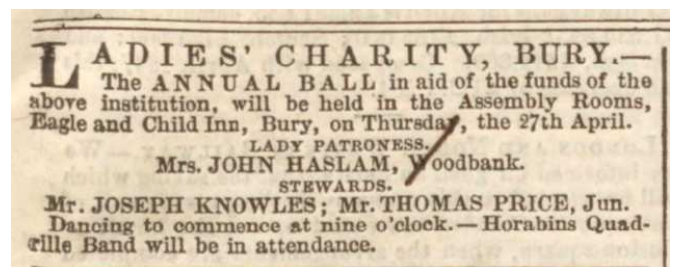
If business slowed down, mills would reduce hours or close down completely. Usually this was for a few weeks at a time, but from time to time mills went out of business completely.

When closures occurred, workers fell back on savings or on their familiar local networks of credit, such as pawn shops and corner-shop 'tick'. When normal work resumed, debts could be paid off.

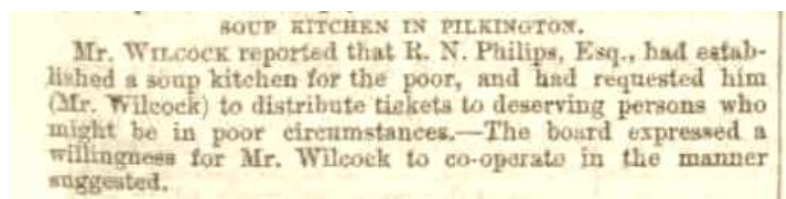
The poor rate was insufficient to cope with mass unemployment

The number of people across Bury's townships getting poor relief each week in the depth of winter was usually about 2500.

The Cotton Famine led to unemployment on an unprecedented scale. By December 1862 there were 11,400 applicants for poor relief in Bury Poor Law Union.



Manchester Courier 1848



Bury Times January 1862

Soup kitchen provided by industrialist RN Philips to supplement the poor relief efforts

Bury Times, January 25th 1862

Elton Township

A philanthropic mill owner paying his workers 'unemployment benefit' and expecting losses of £1000 over six more weeks

An alleged instance of death by starvation

And a failure by the better-off gentry of Elton to give any public charity to aid the unemployed

This would be seen as shameful by society at large.

ELTON.—Many factory operatives in Elton are reduced to the verge of starvation by the prevalence of short time and the general want of employment. In some instances much has been done by active benevolence to ameliorate the condition of the suffering people. The cotton mill of Messrs. Hutchinson, of Woodhill, is only working at present five hours during the week, but the proprietors pay the work-people for two days per week, and it is stated that they will not have to refund the money when work becomes plentiful. An intimation has been given that this arrangement will continue during the period of six weeks, and it is supposed that the loss which will thus have been sustained by the firm will be equal to £1,000. It is commonly reported that a fatal case of starvation has occurred.

There has not been any public subscription to meet the distress which prevails in this township.

HEYWOOD.—The distress in Heywood is now keenly felt many of the cotton mills are working short time, and some are entirely closed. The applications for relief have increased so much of late, that the relieving officer applied for assistance at the last meeting of the board of guardians, alleging that there were more cases than he had time to attend to. At the mill of Messrs. Kershaw a soup kitchen has been opened, and each of the hands usually employed (the factory being now stopped) is supplied daily with soup and half a pound of bread. Many families are in a deplorable condition.

Heywood Township

Relieving officer overwhelmed by cases

Soup and bread distributed by mill owner to his laid-off workers

In Bury

The formerly prosperous town is now feeling the pinch

Worse was to come—by the year's end a record 11,400 applicants for poor relief came forward.

Find out more overleaf about how charity, not the Poor Law Union, saved the unemployed workers of Bury.

THE GENERAL DISTRESS.

BURY.—In consequence of the short time working in the cotton mills, distress is beginning to manifest itself in Bury. The town having been exceedingly prosperous for some years, the effect of the depression of trade did not exhibit itself immediately after the cessation of full time, but now there are many fresh cases of destitution, and many applications for relief by persons who never applied before. The establishment of a soup kitchen is now talked about, and it is probable that one will shortly be opened. The propriety of opening a school for the unemployed has also been taken into consideration.

Timeline: charity and employment schemes reach Bury

December 1861

By the winter of 1861 record numbers of people across the Lancashire were applying for Poor Law Relief. The numbers getting poor relief in Bury were the same as usual, despite there being large numbers out of work. The poor law Guardians in Bury could see the crisis mounting round them but could only provide limited help.

Slow communications kept the outside world in the dark about the crisis in Lancashire. Moreover everyone affected believed it would soon be over. Then Prince Albert died in December 1861, occupying Parliamentary business and national newspapers' attention for weeks.

April 1862

News of the crisis spread to the affluent middle classes across the country after articles by Rochdale writer Edwin Waugh were circulated in newspapers.

A whole series of charitable donations came from churches, individuals, companies, trade unions and overseas colonies. In Lancashire alone, £400,000 had been raised by December 1862, with another £40,000 coming from overseas (*source, speech of Lord Derby*).

May 1862

On 16th May 1862 the Lord Mayor of London dedicated the regular charity drive, known as the 'Mansion House Fund', to relieving the poverty among the Lancashire textile workers. This was the equivalent of the media-led charity appeals we see in the present day.

Wealthy subscribers enabled £1,500 aid to be sent to Lancashire in its first month alone. The Mansion House Fund Committee also began coordinating clothing collections in London, using a warehouse at Bridewell (Soho) to store and sort donations.

At government level, a special Poor Law Inspector, Harry Farnall was sent to work in Lancashire. He travelled round the county making notes and advising local Poor Law boards, reporting his findings back to Charles Pelham Villiers, the leader of the president of the Poor Law Board.

Harry Farnall recommended that unemployed

textile workers in Lancashire should not be penalised for getting help from charities as well as getting poor law relief. He also realised the funds held by the Poor Law Unions were hopelessly inadequate to cope with the crisis.

June 1862

The unemployed did not suffer as badly in warmer weather. There was generally a dip in applicants for poor relief at this time. Casual work must have been available, and less fuel needed to warm homes.

Two more regional charities were established in June 1862, the Manchester Central Relief Fund, led by the mayors of affected towns, and the Cotton Districts Relief Fund. These two bodies merged to make one Central Relief Committee.

December 1862

This period marked the peak of Bury Union's unemployment crisis, with over 11,400 people receiving aid in the worst week of December. By this time, the local Relief Committees were in full swing.

Newspapers from this month show that local landowner Lord Derby was leading a movement urging a change in the law so more help could reach Lancashire.

Derby supported amending the Public Works Act to allow the government to offer cheap loans to town authorities in areas suffering unemployment. These loans, at low interest, would pay for approved local work such as road-building or sewer-digging. By using part of the loans to pay unemployed men as labourers, the strain on local poor law unions' finances would be relieved.

This was a controversial proposal because it involved the government in trying to solve unemployment, and this was not in keeping with Laissez-Faire economics.

Local taxation and public order

Lord Derby's proposal was welcomed by the leading politicians of Lancashire, many of whom were also mill owners. It was affordable and practical solution, it kept down the poor rates, and by giving men work and pay it reduced the probability of rioting and lawlessness.

1862-65: the work of Bury relief committees

Bury Archives collections

Local archives in Bury and Heywood hold collections of accounts books and minute books used by local church charities and by the General Relief Fund Committee.

Heywood was then in Bury Parish, but later became part of Rochdale's local government. Consequently at some point in the past, the archive seems to have been divided up. One of our members has tracked down important archives in Heywood and Rochdale. The whole body of information deserves longer and better scrutiny than we have been able to give, but some conclusions are possible.

Firstly, it's clear that in Bury two relief agencies continued to operate at the same time, but whether they coordinated their work isn't immediately clear. The two agencies were the Bury General Relief Fund, and the Castlecroft Congregationalist Church.

The following observations come from the Bury archives collection.

Field Notebooks

There are a number of notebooks used by the Congregationalist volunteer visitors. These record on-the-spot assessments of individuals' circumstances such as health, marital status, family size and sources of income, if any.

It appears that the Congregationalists prioritised members of their own congregation, but this point needs further research to clarify. There do not seem to be equivalent field records surviving from the General Relief Fund.

The field notebooks begin in the winter of 1862-63, with fewer applicants being recorded in spring and summer, finally closing in June 1864. A sample notebook held around 100 names for the autumn-winter of 1862 and 180 for the winter-spring of 1863.

The books are in many different formats, from slim bound volumes to cheap copy-books ('exercise books'), and they may not be a complete record. Several seem to have been used either before or after 1864 for different purposes.

The notes made by the anonymous visitors were clearly written on the go, in spidery pen and ink on often dog-eared paper. These notebooks would

Winter 1862-63, Castlecroft Visitor field notes:

'S. Entwisle' a man with a large family out of work now 18 months but are now to put to work in part'

'Eliza Diggle' a bad case only one girl in the family with work'

benefit from digitisation to enable access by wider numbers of researchers. The family names alone are of great value to family historians.

Minute books

The minute books of the Castlecroft Congregationalist Church and those of the General Relief Fund differ in some respects.

The Castlecroft minute books are handwritten in notebooks, whereas those of the General Relief Fund comprise a written notebook copy and a bound printed version. We lacked time in this project to read through both versions and it's possible changes were made between notes and final edition.

Castlecroft Congregational Church Minutes

The Castlecroft minutes record donations from fellow worshippers across the country. The record of donations ends in March 1863.

Donations to Castlecroft Congregational Church Relief Fund

- The Reverend J Fleming £10 'for relieving the scholars'
- Mr Roaf of Wigan, £10
- The Rev J Graham of Craven Chapel, London, £5 'for clothing'
- In November 1862, 8 boxes of clothing were received from other chapels
- December 1862: £40 from the 'General Committee for the relief of Distressed Congregationalists', plus a further £35 and £5 in early 1863

The General Relief Fund Minutes

The General Relief Fund was established to handle the aid provided after May 1862 by the Mansion House Fund. Newspaper accounts from the Bury Times describe their committee being made up of 'all the gentlemen of the town'.

They seem to start around September 1862, meeting at first in the Athenaeum in the centre of the town, and a final account is provided in 1865.

These minute books contain at times very detailed accounts of decisions and plans, including appointing subcommittees, the process for acquiring premises for storage, whether relief should be given in cash or by ticket (today we would call these vouchers), and protocols for how and where applicants could come to ask for help:

- November 1862: Schools for children less than 14 years to be run from 'the Australia Fund', to take place at various church premises and at Wellington Mill in Elton
- The Soup Committee reported on Heywood soup kitchen; the Friends soup kitchen provided by 'Bales Street Manchester' (location of a large Quaker soup kitchen); the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway soup kitchen was allowed to sell soup to the public for one penny per quart, 'with the General relief Committee covering any losses made'
- December 1862: local committees established for Elton, Central Bury, St. Paul's and St John's
- Applicants for relief could register their names at either the Poor Law Overseers office, Bury Bridge, or at 'the Relief Stores' on Silver Street. They would then be 'visited' (home circumstances assessed) and 'ticketed' (given vouchers)
- The sewing school committee would serve Bury and Elton, and is referred to at a certain point in the minutes as 'the Gigg Committee' (Gigg is outside Bury on the Manchester road, mostly known for the football ground at Gigg Lane)

Bury General Relief Committee departed from Inspector Harry Farnall's advice by ruling that there should be 'no doubling up' with Poor Relief by the applicants they helped.

Soup being provided at Bail Street, Manchester, by Society of Friends. Attribution unknown

FUND FOR THE RELIEF OF DISTRESS IN THE MANUFACTURING DISTRICTS.	
Monthly Return from the Bury Relief Committee, being of the Township of Bury & Elton Union of Bury	
25th APRIL 1863.	
1—No. of Operatives in Full Work in the District for which Committee acts	414
2—No. working Four or Five Days	214
3—No. working Three Days	214
4—No. working Two Days	417
5—No. entirely Out of Work	19,854
Total	21,117
6—Estimated Loss of Wages	2,117
7—No. of Persons relieved by Committee, who are also in receipt of relief from Guardians	244
8—No. of Persons relieved by Committee only	2,441
Total	2,685
9—Amount to which the Committee make the Average Income per head, including Relief and Earnings	about 10.5
No. of Persons employed by Committee	
10—Men—School	186

Ravages of time Above: Bury Relief Committee's monthly returns. The top sheet starts in April 1863. Below: Bury Times November 1862, online version of only surviving copy.

Townships.	State of Factories, &c.					State of Operatives.		
	Total number of factories, works, &c.	No. with full complement of hands.	No. with only part hands employed.	No. on short time.	No. stopped altogether.	No. of hands usually employed.	No. working full time.	No. working short time.
Bury	59	23	7	20	9	9110	2213	40
Elton	31	12	4	8	7	3876	1536	7
Radcliffe & Pilktn.	69	7	12	40	10	8386	1719	8
Heap	63	18	4	24	17	9366	2839	2
Tottington - lower and higher-end.	73	26	9	20	18	9059	2972	2
Total	295	86	36	112	61	39797	11279	13088
Nov. 27, 1862	295	54	34	140	66	39797	6623	16846

Glossop and Hadfield, £1,800; Bury and Elton, £600; Whitefield and Unsworth, £75; Tottington, £75; Bacup, £200; Withnell, £80; Bolton, £80; Wigan, £100.

Above: an extra grant to the townships from the Manchester Central Relief Committee, January 1864. Bury, Elton and Tottington lay in Bury Union



The Store Books

Aid was distributed in the form of food, clothing, and fuel.

The General Relief Committee acquired 'Pilkington's warehouse' on Silver Street as their store and headquarters.

The Store books are mainly accounts of provisions bought using Mansion House Funds, but they also record occasional donations in kind.

Another unexpected factor discovered through these Store Books is the importance of sacks. Close records seem to be kept of empty sacks being returned, or cases where the sacks were donated to the cause. In our pre-packed age we have forgotten these daily essentials of 19th century life.

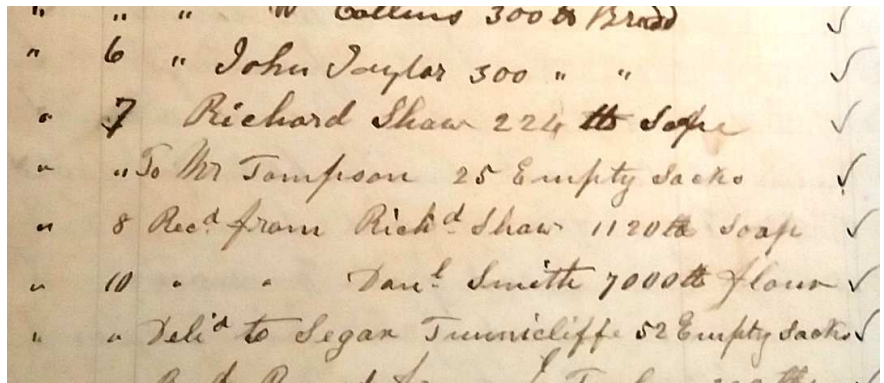
One entry from 1862 records '213 tickets delivered for bread, flour, meal, peas, rice, bacon'.

The records imply that each ticket applied to specific items, such as flour or clogs, and that an applicant would go away with several tickets according to their assessed needs.

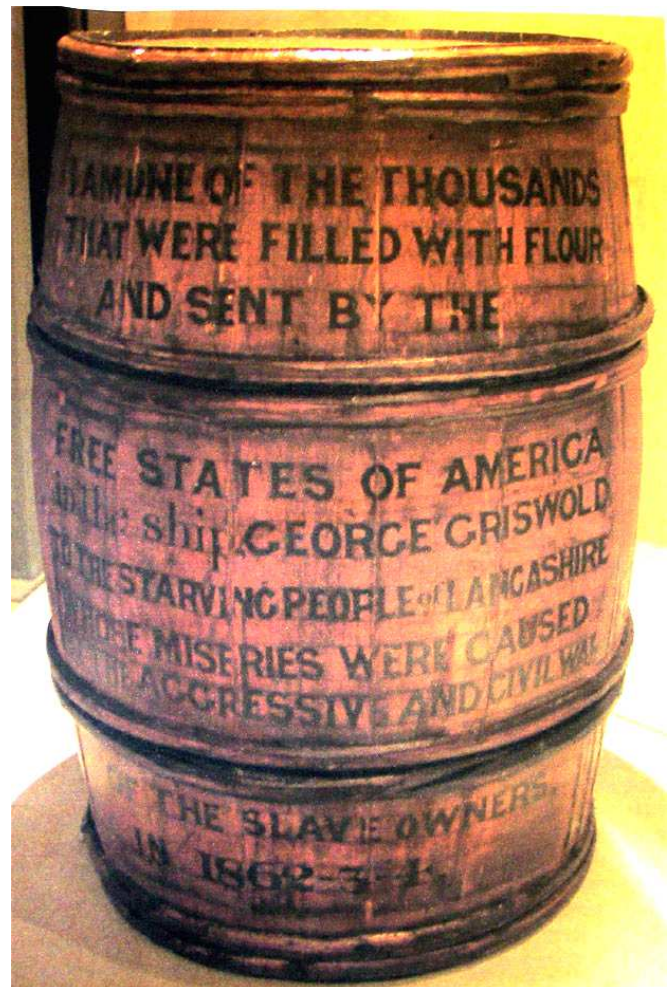
These tickets would be brought to the stores and redeemed for the items listed. None of the tickets issued appear to have survived to the present day.

Direct aid provided in this way caused an outcry among local retailers, explained below.

The warehouse in Silver Street is recorded as 'to be given up' on October 4th 1865.



Store Book detail November 6th to 10th 1862 showing quantities of goods acquired by the Bury General Relief Fund



Above: on 9 February 1863, the American relief ship 'George Griswold' docked at Liverpool, carrying boxes of bacon and bread, bags of rice and corn, and 15,000 barrels of flour. This barrel is in the collections of Rochdale Museum

1862 Goods Received Bread Flour	
Sept 24 Segar & Tunncliffe	
Wm Gardner & Co	
D Smith & Son	5600
William Lever	300
John Taylor	300
25 William Lever	300
26 John Taylor	164
Segar & Tunncliffe	
	1064 5600

Store book entries showing 1064 loaves and 5600 pounds of flour received over two days in September 1862

One week's aid, December 1862

standing medical treatment the ... proved fatal.

BURY RELIEF COMMITTEE.—The operations of this committee during the week have been as follows:—No. of families relieved 1,080, at a cost of £280 4s. 4d. The articles distributed included 1,472 lbs. bread, 24,685 lbs. flour, 4,006 lbs. meal, 1,304 lbs. peas, 994 lbs. rice, 1,536½ lbs. bacon, 1,126 lbs. soap, 19 quarts of soup, 48 tons 4 cwt. of coals, and £18 8s. in money. Wages of 700 females in sewing school £69 12s. 6d. The sum of £185, received from the Mansion House Committee for Christmas dinners, has been awarded (at the rate of 8d. per head) to each person on the books. The following articles of clothing, &c., have also been given:—blankets 869, bedticks 80, quilts 103, sheets 530, flannel shirts 750, cotton shirts 644, cotton petticoats 178, flannel ditto 453, linsey ditto 404, chemises 634, stockings 674 pairs, clogs 482 pairs.

PATENTS ...

Bury Times, last week of December 1862. The originals of the newspaper have extremely tiny print.

Most of the items mentioned have been listed below.

1,472 loaves of bread
 24,600 pounds of flour
 4000 pounds of corn meal (Indian meal)
 1300 pounds of peas
 994 pounds of rice
 1536 pounds of bacon
 1126 pounds of soap
 19 quarts of soup
 48 tons and 4 hundred-weight of coal
 £18 8 shillings in cash
 £69 12 shillings wages for 700 females at sewing school
 869 blankets
 80 bedticks (a stuffed sack-like bag / makeshift mattress)
 103 quilts
 530 sheets
 750 flannel shirts
 644 cotton shirts
 1035 petticoats (undershirts)
 634 chemises
 674 pairs stockings
 482 pairs clogs
 700 'Females' in sewing schools also paid wages
 Plus a special Christmas payment of 8 pence to each person

1080 families were helped in this single week.

The figures from Bury Poor Law Union show that at this time over 11,400 people were 'on the books' of the Bury Poor Law Union. That is, they had applied for help and been granted it.

And yet just under 1100 families got help in this one week. What can this tell us about how aid was distributed?

Here are some options to help explain the figures:

- 1080 families, not people. Families must surely mean three or more people. Large families could have been prioritised that week.
- Relief may have been given to households in 2-4 week doles ie not to every household, every week. As most of the aid is in dry goods or clothing, this seems likely.

The list contains very basic clothing and bedding

The existing linen and bedding owned by those getting help may have simply worn out.

Extreme hardship may also have led people to pawn anything not 'on view' to raise cash. Women could pawn petticoats (undershirts) and their all-purpose chemise, (a cross between nightdress and blouse), but needed to keep their outer skirts.

No potatoes issued

Potatoes were not considered nutritious by those advising the relief charities (*DJ Oddy 1983*).

The shopkeepers protest

Our study group had wondered what the effect of the Cotton Famine was on local businesses. An answer of sorts can be found in article printed in the Bury Times on 6th December 1862.

A meeting of 'the shopkeepers of Bury' records widespread concern among local retailers, combined with an awareness of how little sway they had over 'the gentlemen of the town' who ran the General Relief Fund.

They agreed that the trade downturn had affected all of them, but were annoyed that the General Relief Fund were buying provisions in bulk outside the town, and distributing them directly to people from their own warehouse on Silver Street.

They wanted this replaced 'wholly or in part' by giving the applicants for relief tickets (vouchers) that could be spent in their usual local shops. The shopkeepers were clearly well aware of the amount of financial aid that was now coming into the area, and were put out that they seemed to have been written out of the solution.

Moreover, clog-makers were aggrieved that the Stores Committee were issuing applicants with tickets for new clogs that could only be redeemed at certain shops. This meant quite literally walking past the doors of shops they normally dealt with.

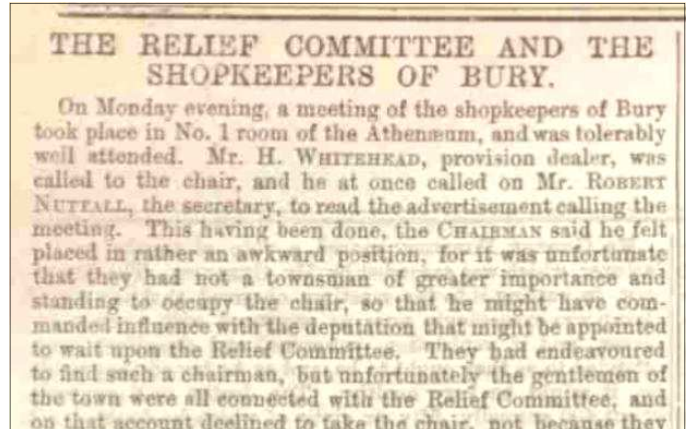
One solution proposed in this meeting was for the relief tickets not to recommend specific shops, but for recipients to use them as they saw fit in local shops, where 'no shopkeeper would take advantage of them'.

Moreover, the shopkeepers argued that going the General Relief Fund stores meant a long walk, carrying heavy provisions back home, which was not the case when people shopped locally.

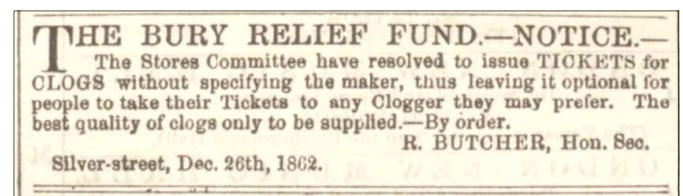
It looks like the General Relief Committee took the retailers points on board, at least to some extent. A brief article in the Bury Times for December 1862 says that applicants could use tickets issued for clogs at any maker, fulfilling one request made by the shopkeepers of Bury.

In February 1863 the General Relief Fund minutes record a decision that successful applicants could choose to have one shilling instead of one ticket, enabling more local shopkeepers to benefit from the aid programme.

This move to allow grants of money may also have



Bury Times 6th December 1862



Bury Relief Fund, December 1862

Clogs can be made at any clogger's



Clogs were staple footwear of working people across Britain. They comprised a wooden sole and an enclosed leather upper.

been made so that unemployed workers could redeem their beloved possessions from pawn shops.

Accounts from across Lancashire at this time refer to the passionate desire among the unemployed textile workers to get their clothing and household goods back from the pawnbrokers.

The Sewing Schools

Teaching female unemployed cotton operatives to sew was identified as a useful skill that would outlast the crisis. Many writers had long commented on the lack of 'domestic arts' among the women mill-workers.

Parallel sewing schools seem to have existed, at least for a time, at Castlecroft Congregational Church and at locations supported by the General Relief Fund.

The Castlecroft minute books record that a sewing school was set up in November 1862. On November 5th it was resolved 'that the ladies be empowered to spend £3 in material for clothing and that they see to the best mode of its being made'.

Sadly the 'ladies' are not named and aside from names of class members in the attendance register, we cannot find out who was involved in organising lessons, or what they taught.

The class register still exists for the Castlecroft school, but only references in the minute books and a final account appear to survive from the General Relief Fund. Some 800 names appear in the Congregationalists registers.

October 1862: General Relief Fund Recommendations for the Sewing School

- There should be one joint workroom instead of denominational ones
- The term 'workroom' was to be used rather than 'school'
- The workroom would start as an experiment in space at the Silver Street warehouse,
- No girl under fourteen years may attend
- Wages would be paid at the rate of 8 pence per day, attending for 3.5 hours maximum
- This payment was to be rated as employment (and so made recipients ineligible for Poor Law Relief)
- The General Relief fund would pay for material and receive all work done
- One sixth of the time attending could be spent repairing own clothes using General Relief Fund materials



Above: Castlecroft Congregational Church, site of one Bury's Sewing Class during the Cotton Famine Photo courtesy of Bury Archives



The location of Castlecroft Congregational Church is well known, but the main warehouse is referred to as both on Silver Street and on Bank Street.

The Castlecroft sewing school registers reflect the General Relief Fund's recommended structure of attendance over three days. The wage levels fall in line with the recommended 8 pence a day. Some however are paid an extra 6 pence over a week – maybe as 'pupil monitors'?

It seems unlikely that the Congregationalists could have afforded to fund the wages of 800 girls and women over some 14 months without additional help. More detailed scrutiny of the sewing class registers compared with the Congregationalist Church finances is needed to ascertain this fact.

No examples of work done by the sewing schools have survived in the Bury area, but the group



Panel made for textile hanging by group member Jean Prince, using personal research and the Castlecroft Church photo (opposite) as reference

members who held a study session at Gawthorpe Hall, Padiham, were able to view contemporary examples of hand sewing.

These represent the kind of skills that would have been taught in the sewing classes.



Narrow hemming, ruffles, buttons and buttonholes, decorative stitching, typical of sewing skills taught in the 1860s. Photo by Susan Browning

		Mond	Tues	Wedr	Thur:	Frid:	Saturday
ann	duckworth	x		x		x	2s
mary a	barcroft	x		x		x	2s
Nancy	Orrell	x		x		x	2s
jane	smith	x		x		x	2s
ann	holt	x		x		x	2s
Mary	Riley	x		x		x	2s
syvia	wild	x		x		x	2s
eliza	diggle	x		x		x	2s
martha	hargreaves	x		x		x	2s 6d
jane	whittaker	x		x		x	2s
mary	whittaker	x		x		x	2s

Sample from transcript of Castlecroft sewing school attendance register and wages book

our clerks, overlookers, and others. We would keep accounts of our expenditure, and always have our books open to the inspection of the guardians or any person they might appoint.

By this means we think we should relieve your board of considerable trouble and anxiety, and possibly also of some expense.

The terms upon which we could undertake the above duties form the most difficult part of the subject, but the practical gentlemen of your board will be the most likely persons to solve this apparent difficulty. I may be permitted to say merely as a suggestion, that if you will undertake to bear two-thirds of the expense of providing food, we will find the other one-third of the expense, and find the room, the cooking and cooking apparatus, the teachers, and materials without any charge to you.

I shall be glad to afford any information you may require, if you will please write before Wednesday next.—Sir, I am, your obedient servant, for T. B. Crompton, J. C. RIVETT.

After the reading of the letter, in reply to a question from

The proposal from Mr Joseph Rivett of Prestolee Mills, reported in the Bury Times 29th November 1862

The Prestolee Mills Incident, November 1862

In 1862 Prestolee was a small industrial village surrounded by open countryside. It was technically part of Bury Union, being an outlying part of Pilkington township.

A local inventor and industrialist, T B Crompton, had built up a large business in Prestolee from the 1820s onwards, based on paper-making and cotton-spinning. The cotton mill alone had 800 operatives. He was known locally as a benefactor to the community, building schools and good-quality workers' houses.

Prestolee had been a self-contained community with little need to use Poor Law Relief arrangements.

However the paper mill burned down, uninsured, and this was followed by the death of TB Crompton in 1858. By 1862 the Prestolee Spinning Mill was owned by Joseph Rivett, originally from Stockport.

In November 1862 Joseph Rivett's solicitor contacted Bury Poor Law Guardians with a proposal.

Anticipating that they would soon have to close the spinning mill completely, Mr Rivett would convert parts of the building into a canteen and school.

Mr Rivett's staff would manage the relief programme in Prestolee and Bury would be saved administrative and running expenses.

All that was needed to do this was for Bury Poor Law Guardians to pay two-thirds of Prestolee Mill's costs. Mr Rivett would pay for the rest.

Representatives of the two sides met and discussed how this arrangement might work, and after 'mature deliberation', Bury Poor Law Guardians rejected Mr Rivett's proposal outright.

The Bury Times of 6th December 1862 reported both the decision and Bury Guardians outrage at the preposterous cheek of a firm 'represented as one of the richest in Lancashire...to stand with breeches pockets buttoned up' while asking a district that could ill afford it for so much funding.



Balloon shows location of Prestolee in relation to Bolton and Bury. It is about 5 miles from Bury and 3 miles from Bolton.

The Public Works Act 1863

Lord Derby's campaign to amend the Public Works Act succeeded in 1863. The new Act encouraged town authorities to prioritise schemes of 'utility, profit and ornament'.

Public feeling approved of the idea that these schemes would make local improvements and also remove unemployed textile operatives from the poor relief system.

Lord Derby sold several plots of land to the town to enable projects to go ahead.

Paving and sewers in Bury

A group of Improvement Commissioners had existed in Bury since 1846. They had not been able to make much progress as they did not have enough funding.

In 1864 Bury's Improvement Commissioners were granted their government loan. The repayments were to be made by local ratepayers being charged an extra 3 pence in every pound. A householder with property worth £100 would pay less than £2 a year local tax for poor rates and improvements. Most rate payers held property worth far less than £100.

In February 1864, Bury Improvement Commissioners put out a tender for the supply of 800,000 bricks, to create new mains sewers.

They also began the process of buying land offered by Lord Derby to create a new cemetery.

By August 1864 street improvement, water supply and sewer-digging works were under way in the centre of Bury.

The labourers were paid according to the size of

their families, and figures quoted range between 6 shillings to 11 shillings a week.

The Manchester Central Relief Committee provided each man with a 'suit of clothing' for each man employed, and paid an additional allowance to those in hardship, for their first six weeks of training.

This is a sad reflection on the abject poverty of the unemployed. By 1864 unemployed textile operatives would have long since pawned any sturdy outdoor clothes they had once possessed. Then like now, starting paid work after being unemployed for months or years comes with hidden expenses such as needing new work clothes.

Bury Cemetery

Reports of the Improvement Commissioners committee meetings in the Bury Times of 1864 show that the idea of a new cemetery as a Public Work project was not universally supported.

The objection was that a perfectly good new cemetery had been built and that this would fulfil the town's needs for at least a generation. Interestingly, local experts have not so far been able to identify where this 'new' cemetery was.

Despite doubts expressed, the Improvement Commissioners took the decision to go ahead with a second new cemetery, on the grounds that the government loan was a deal that would never be repeated, and the work would take 70 unemployed men off the Poor Relief books.

Designed by architect James Farrar, the work was finally completed in 1869.

promptly adopted. He thought that their grant of a suit of clothing to each workman engaged on the public works, and the allowance of relief from their funds in certain cases during the first six weeks of the workmen's training, were the wisest measures which could have been taken, and eminently calculated to facilitate the operation of the act.

Above: suits of clothing for labourers provided by the Central Relief Committee, from Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, 19th January 1864

Right: present-day view of Bury Cemetery, by Shirley Ingham



Final accounts from the General Relief Fund, 1865

The Bury Archives collection includes a page from an accountant book recording the closing balance of the work done in the Bury area. The sums paid out were:

Sewing school workroom	£1517 0s 6d
Christmas dinners	£ 175 18s 4d
Day schools	£ 591
Overall relief Fund 1862-65	£23,548 2s 3d

(including local subscriptions of £10,000)

Sources

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