

GEH1077 CA4

Work, Women and the Cottonopolis

Teng Hau Wei
A0217200B

Room 1: Work and the Cottonopolis

A: Flemish Weavers in Manchester AD1363



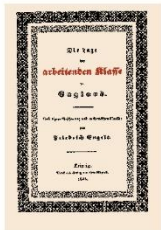
B: Cotton Weaving Machine



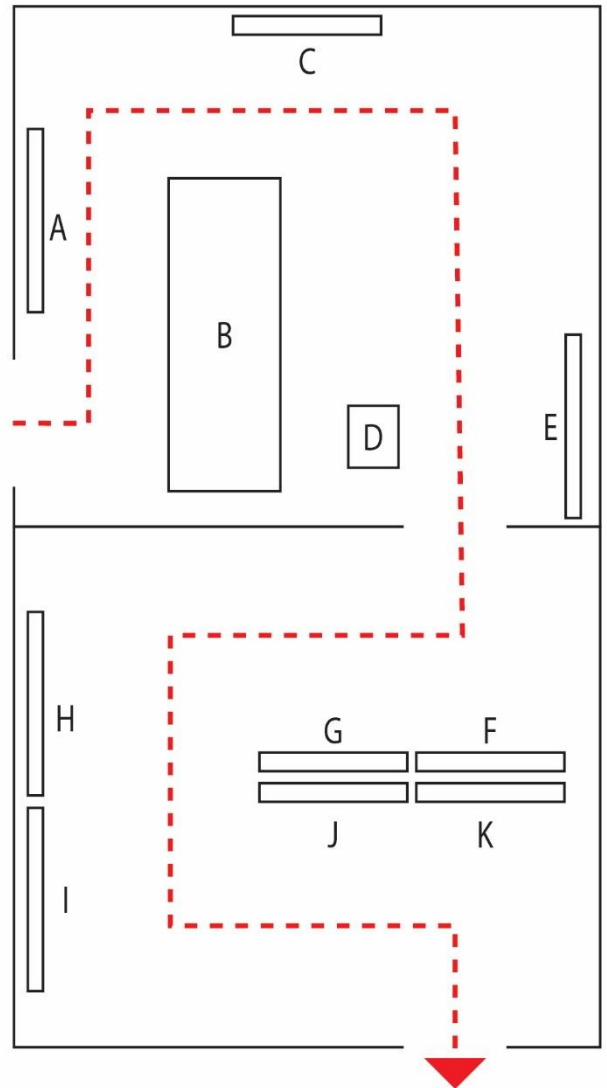
C: Heatmap of Cotton Mills



D: The Condition of the Working Class in England



E: Coming Home from the Mill



Room 2: Women and the Cottonopolis

See Appendix for enlarged view.

F: Infographic

Occupational Category	Rate (thousands/1,000 males)		Percent female
	1961	1981	
Public Administration	84	3	4.5
Armed Forces	12	0	0.0
Business	162	101	28.9
Domestic Services	193	119	35.5
Commercial	91	0	0.0
Transportation & Communications	42	12	1.9
Agriculture	1708	229	11.4
Fishing	26	1	2.7
Mining	283	11	2.8
Marine Industries	338	36	4.3
Building & Construction	496	1	0.2
Wood & Furniture	112	8	5.2
Books, Games, Toys, Games	79	15	16.7
Chemicals	42	4	8.7
Leather & Shoes	15	5	8.3
Food & Drink	42	36	20.0
Health	681	635	50.0
Education	419	491	56.6
Travel, Drive, Lodging	248	12	13.2
Other	445	75	14.4
Total Occupied	6545	2812	30.2
Total Unemployed	7080	5294	33.5

G: Photograph



H: The Dinner Hour



I: Work



J: Photograph



K: Photograph



Exhibition: Work, Women and the Cottonopolis

This museum exhibit is divided into two rooms, the first room is themed around work and the second room is themed around women.

The first room is curated to assert that:

- 1) Manchester *rose to its industrial prominence* as the Cottonopolis due to the *introduction of capitalist production to labour, and*
- 2) *in its process, urban labour was dehumanised.*

The first painting (Item A: Flemish Weavers in Manchester AD1363¹), informs the visitor of Manchester's suburban beginnings. A sign explains pre-industrial Manchester's specialisation in cotton production. It also explains that pre-industrial weavers were artisanal and dignified with royal patronage. Thus, Item A is like a "snapshot" of dignified work and the Manchester suburbia before industrialisation.

The exhibit follows with a replica of a 1800s weaving machine (Item B) and a map² (Item C) showing locations of cotton mills centralised along canals in 1800s Manchester. Accompanying signs explain the high-productivity effects of industrial capital (in machinery and mills) on cotton production work, where industrial capital enabled the division of labour into repetitive tasks.

¹ Ford Maddox Brown, Flemish Weavers in Manchester AD1363. (Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery, 1888)

² Dierke International Atlas, "Manchester (England) – Early industries around 1850 - Dierke International Atlas." (n.d.)

An excerpt from Engel's book (Item D: The Condition of the Working Class in England³) is shown. It described capital's centralising tendency which similarly caused worker populations to centralise into cities. Human workers thus became like 'a piece of capital'.

Item B to D describes the "science" behind the changing nature of work and the city. The items support the first assertion by explaining how industrial capital in the form of machinery and factories introduced to cotton labour for productivity gains allowed the *Cottonopolis to urbanise into prominence*. The items also support the second assertion as they show how workers become *less like humans and more like capital* as they perform repetitive tasks in machines centralised in cities.

As items B to D explain the "science" of *industrialisation on dehumanising work and urbanising the city*, the manifestation of this "science" is shown in a painting of industrial Manchester's cityscape (Item E: Coming home from the mill⁴). Faceless and ubiquitous workers commuted amidst a factory-lined background. This contrasts with the "snapshot" (Item A) of 1300s suburban Manchester and its artisanal workers.

Through the first room, the visitor appreciates the interplay of capital and work in the history of Manchester.

A subset of the industrial labour force of the cottonopolis, Women in Manchester will be examined in the second room.

³ Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England. (1845)

⁴ Laurence Stephen Lowry, Coming Home from the Mill (Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery, 1928)

The second room is curated to assert that:

- 1) *women were highly significant in Manchester's cotton industry boom,*
- 2) *the Victorian "heroic worker" narrative is male-centric, and*
- 3) *gender inequalities existed.*

Shown in an infographic (Item F), the 1800s women representation rates were 49% and 54% for the textile and clothing industry respectively⁵. However, women were severely under-represented in all other industries except for domestic work.

Women representation in Manchester's cotton industry is seen expressed in a photograph⁶ (Item G) and a painting (Item H: *The Dinner Hour*⁷). Both of the items portrayed women cotton workers. They support the first assertion that women were *significantly represented and instrumental* in driving Manchester into industrial prominence.

Despite so, Victorian morality entrenched gender roles in labour, and such work (i.e. weaving, domestic) was possibly considered a women's job⁸. The industrial period saw continued gender inequality due to Victorian morality.

This is further exposed with a significant 1860s painting (Item I: *Work*⁹) of the London *Great Stink* crisis which recognised and dignified the Victorian worker as heroes. The heroes were exclusively males and women were exclusively portrayed as being idle in the crisis.

⁵ B.R. Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962)

⁶ Greenville Collins et al., *Hard at work: mill workers in Rochdale*, (Lancashire, 1911)

⁷ Eyre Crowe, *The Dinner Hour*, Wigan, (Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery, 1874)

⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Half Way to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*, (1980), 107

⁹ Ford Maddox Brown, *Work*, (Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery, 1863)

By displaying Item I, the city of London is juxtaposed with the cottonopolis Manchester where women had a *greater significance* in the labour force.

Concluding the exposition on Victorian moral narratives and recognition of women workers, post-Victorian photos are displayed to comment on the progress of gender equality.

Item J is a post-Victorian 1940s photo where Queen Elizabeth (during then a princess) visits a Manchester female cotton worker¹⁰. The post-industrial female cotton worker is given recognition from royalty. This is also a nod to Item A, the painting of the early history of the 1300s Manchester where royalty gave patronage to pre-industrial textile artisans.

Item K, a 1968 photograph¹¹ of women textile workers striking for equal wages in London, concludes the exhibit.

These two photos show the events post-Victorian era which marked new struggles for gender equality. This encourages the visitor to reflect on the 1800s history of Manchester women and anticipate the post-1800s developments to gender equality.

In summary, the visitors of the museum will firstly understand how the industrialisation of the Cottonopolis is caused by capitalist production and they will appreciate its effect on changing the nature of labour.

Having understood that, the visitors move on to the second room, which emphasises the role of women and gender inequality in this chapter of industrial history. There is also a temporal flow as visitors move on from the first room to the second room which dwell into the later periods of industrial history.

¹⁰ Manchester Evening News, The Way We Were: Cotton industry, (Manchester, 2013)

¹¹ Sheila Cohen, Sewing machinists' strike at Ford was not about equal pay, (2018)

Inspiration and Reflection:

Urban historians regard industrialisation as a precursor to the urbanisation of modern cities¹².

The rise of Manchester was the first milestone city in the history of industrialisation and urbanisation¹³. This period was also known for its multifaceted ramifications on the working class¹⁴. Thus, my exhibit dissects Manchester to examine industrialisation's impact on labour.

A noteworthy historical event was the migration of rural populations into cities for industrial jobs. Masses often migrated from small towns and the countryside, and this led to issues of the city becoming physically and morally unhealthy¹⁵. My exhibit covered how Manchester urbanised due to the agglomeration of worker populations, focusing on the morally unhealthy nature of work that was *dehumanised*.

Another historical event was how industrial productivity was achieved through capital inflow, machinery, and division of labour. Clark wrote that the British Empire's colonial activities financed capital, where wealth gained overseas were channelled into British cities for capital investments¹⁶. My exhibit did not cover on colonial financing, but it covered on machinery and factories as *capital which was introduced to labour in Manchester*.

Lees described these events as the cities exerting centripetal force¹⁷, sucking up the hinterlands' populations and colonial finance for capital. Manchester did not rise to prominence by itself, it had to rely on labour and capital from elsewhere.

¹² Greg Clark, *Global Cities: A Short History*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 63

¹³ Joel Kotkin, *The City: A Global History*, (New York: Modern Library), 120

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pg 122-123

¹⁵ Andrew Lees, *The City : A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 63

¹⁶ Greg Clark, *Global Cities: A Short History*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 64

¹⁷ Andrew Lees, *The City : A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 8

To expose industrial era philosophy of estranged labour¹⁸, I focused on exhibiting the *dehumanising* effects on labour where industrial workers were alienated from the products of their labour. Before industrialisation, Manchester's artisanal weavers made the product wholly and the product belonged to them. During industrialisation, the division of labour had the weavers perform repetitive mundane tasks on machines, and the finished product belonged to the capital owner. It was such that workers became like *capital* and lost the sense of belonging to their craft, thus becoming *dehumanised*.

Secondly, my exhibit examines the history of women and Manchester. Where male workers faced the ills of industrialisation on work, women workers faced an additional layer of gender inequality.

The artworks from the documentary The Victorians¹⁹ impressed me. While not mentioned by the documentary as it focused on celebrating Victorian "progress", I noticed that there were dimensions of gender involved.

Manchester artworks represented female subjects more than other cities. Manchester women were portrayed as workers not too unequal from men. For instance, "The Dinner Hour, Wigan" by Eyre Crowe positively represented women workers. Conversely, the "Work" painting by Ford Maddox Brown represented London women negatively as being idle. With these paintings, I asserted that women were accorded a greater significance in Manchester than in other cities.

¹⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (New York: Prometheus Books, 1987), 28

¹⁹ Jeremy Paxman, The Victorians (London: BBC, 2009)

Historically, Victorian morality had a “separate spheres” concept where women were prescribed domestic roles while men were prescribed public roles²⁰. This was manifested in the artworks. Victorian women also received lower wages than men²¹.

Yet, if textile work was considered part of the women’s “sphere”, then the purportedly egalitarian Manchester was merely a manifestation of patriarchal Victorian morality. Notwithstanding, Manchester women still played a significant role in the industrial revolution.

To conclude my exhibition, post-Victorian photos are displayed for a closure of the chapter of history of Manchester women. The Post-war period (1940s) marked new developments towards gender equality²², such as women striking for equal wages. The future seemed more hopeful.

²⁰ Amanda Vickery, *Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 384

²¹ Anne Digby et al., *New Directions in Economic and Social History Volume II* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 33

²² Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Half Way to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*, (1980), 107

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Appendix

A: Flemish Weavers in Manchester AD1363

1888 Mural by Ford Maddox Brown (1821 – 1893)



B: Coming Home from the Mill

1928 Oil Painting by Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887–1976)



C: Heatmap of Textile Factories in Manchester 1850s

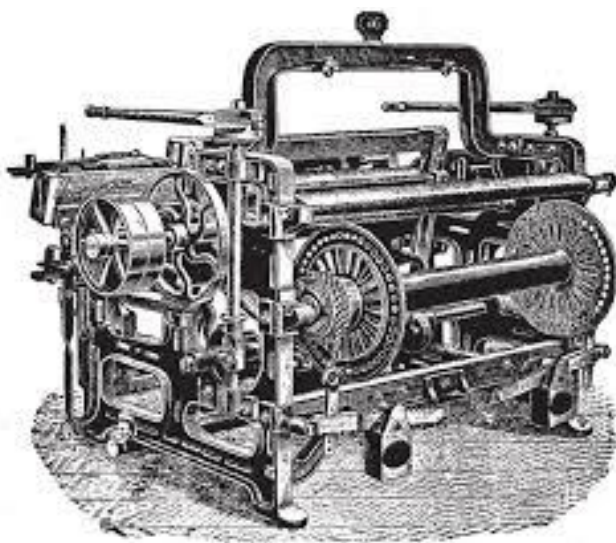
n.d. Map by Dierke International Atlas

This map shows the agglomeration of textile factories represented by dots.



D: Cotton Weaving Machine

2021 Replica



The Condition of the Working Class in England

1845 Book by Frediech Engels

“The centralising tendency of manufacture does not, however, stop here. Population becomes centralised just as capital does; and, very naturally, since the human being, the worker, is regarded in manufacture simply as a piece of capital for the use of which the manufacturer pays interest under the name of wages”

F: Gender Distribution in Occupations

1851 Census

Occupational Category	Males (thousands)	Females (thousands)	Percent Female
Public Administration	64	3	4.5
Armed Forces	63	0	0.0
Professions	162	103	38.9
Domestic Services	193	1135	85.5
Commercial	91	0	0.0
Transportation & Communications	433	13	2.9
Agriculture	1788	229	11.4
Fishing	36	1	2.7
Mining	383	11	2.8
Metal Manufactures	536	36	6.3
Building & Construction	496	1	0.2
Wood & Furniture	152	8	5.0
Bricks, Cement, Pottery, Glass	75	15	16.7
Chemicals	42	4	8.7
Leather & Skins	55	5	8.3
Paper & Printing	62	16	20.5
Textiles	661	635	49.0
Clothing	418	491	54.0
Food, Drink, Lodging	348	53	13.2
Other	445	75	14.4
Total Occupied	6545	2832	30.2
Total Unoccupied	1060	5294	83.3

Source: B.R. Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962, p. 60.

G: Photograph of Women Weavers

1911 Photograph



H: The Dinner Hour, Wigan

1874 Oil on Canvas by Eyre Crowe (1824–1910)



I: Work

1863 Oil on Canvas by Ford Madox Brown (1821 – 1893)



J: Photograph of Queen Elizabeth Visiting Cotton Mills in Rochdale

1948 Photograph



K: Ford Sewing Machinist striking for equal wages

1968 Photograph

