

The Survival of the Macclesfield Silk Industry 1825-1865

Stephen Barnes

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## Abstract

This study enquires into how the Macclesfield silk industry survived after an Act of Parliament in 1824 removed the prohibition on wrought silk imports. Silk was a luxury item and high demand elasticity had always made the industry vulnerable to depression but due to the lower cost of living in other silk manufacturing countries, the price of foreign silks was lower. The impact of the change became evident in 1825 when demand for home produced silk began to decline and many silk manufacturing businesses in England failed. As Macclesfield was a major silk producing centre making a wide range of goods, it suffered more than other silk industry locations and the lack of alternative employment caused severe distress amongst the working population. The challenge increased in 1829 when the duty on foreign thrown silk was reduced. More businesses failed but the silk industry in Macclesfield survived while elsewhere in England, it suffered terminal decline.

This is an original study of how a local industry survived the negative effects of government legislation. After assessing the impact of the customs changes and the complexities of the industry, the study identifies the ways in which the challenge of foreign competition was met by the Macclesfield manufacturers between 1825 and 1865 and argues that survival was achieved through the deployment of a range of strategies. It both questions and supports theories in the historiography of poverty and industrialisation. Through analysis of primary sources, including newspaper reports and parliamentary papers, it identifies the challenges the manufacturers faced and the strategies which enabled the industry to survive. The study concludes that the Macclesfield silk manufacturers ensured the industry's survival through strategies which caused distress to the workforce and that the most successful strategies were those which caused most distress. It also concludes that the root cause of the distress was government policy implemented without regard to its impact on local industry.

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### Personal Statement

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at the Open University or at any other university or institution.

Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

### Acknowledgement

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation examines the way in which a local industry responded to challenges arising from government legislation. It addresses the question of how the silk industry in Macclesfield survived following an Act of Parliament in 1824 which removed the prohibition on manufactured silk imports. In so doing, it provides new insights into the relationship between local industry and government in the nineteenth century. To answer the research question, an understanding of the legislation's impact is necessary. It is also necessary to identify the complexities of silk manufacturing which the legislation exacerbated and the extent of the distress suffered by the working population following exposure to foreign competition. All the issues arising from the complexities of the industry and the distress of the workforce had to be managed and this study will argue that in order to survive, the manufacturers used a unique set of survival strategies across a forty year period from 1825. Each firm was, of course, focused on its own survival. There was no overall industry survival plan but some collaboration did exist and most firms adopted a similar approach to survival. This approach might be viewed as 'tactical' rather than 'strategic' but the tactics were applied consistently over a long time scale and will therefore be referred to as 'survival strategies' in this study.

Silk manufacturing in Macclesfield, a town and borough in east Cheshire, had been established as a cottage industry making silk buttons in the seventeenth century and by the early nineteenth century, a silk industry producing a wide range of goods and employing more than ten thousand people had developed.<sup>1</sup> The exploitation of overseas markets was a

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<sup>1</sup> C. Stella Davies, ed., *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp.122-133.

feature of that development but when legislation removed the prohibition on wrought silk imports in 1824, international trade began to feature in the industry's decline.<sup>2</sup>

The customs changes were to become effective in 1826 but demand fell in 1825 in anticipation of price reductions the following year.<sup>3</sup> Industrial development in Macclesfield had created a high level of dependency on the silk trade and the lack of alternative employment caused significant distress during depressions. Ainscough describes Macclesfield as a town dominated by silk manufacturing and adds that otherwise, there were 'only a couple' of cotton mills and a small number of other manufacturing concerns.<sup>4</sup> Silk was a luxury item and high demand elasticity meant the industry was vulnerable to periodic depressions but the customs changes presented much greater challenges. In 1825 and 1826, business failures in Macclesfield resulted in high levels of unemployment and significant wage reductions for those still employed, casting doubt on the ability of its dominant industry to survive. Further business failures were suffered in 1829 following a reduction in the duty on imported thrown silk. Throwing was the process which produced the thread and Macclesfield was a large silk throwing centre.

The impact of foreign competition, the complexities of the industry and the distress this caused will be identified in Chapter 2 along with the differences between Macclesfield and other silk producing areas. The extent of the business failures in Macclesfield and across the English silk industry as a whole will also be determined through analysis of bankruptcies and partnership dissolutions reported in contemporary newspapers. The analysis conducted for Chapter 2 demonstrates that the Macclesfield silk manufacturers needed strategies for survival and in Chapter 3, the strategies they devised and deployed are identified through the examination of a range of newspaper reports and parliamentary papers. Due to the volatility

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<sup>2</sup> Davies, p.123; PP. 1832 (678) 6-18, *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 February, 1826.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Ainscough, 'Macclesfield Elites, 1832-1918', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2003), p.76.

of the industry and the need to continually adjust the prices paid for weaving, the relationship between the manufacturers and their weavers was a key aspect of the struggle for survival. Volatility, conflict and its resolution will therefore be the focus of Chapter 4 which will also consider the impact of the emigration of silk workers from Macclesfield in the later years of the period.

The Parliamentary papers utilised for this study include Select Committee and other enquiry reports, Poor Law Commission and Board reports and other reports relevant to the silk trade. Of particular significance is the report of the Select Committee on the Silk Trade in 1832 which reveals, through witness testimony, insights into the complexities of the silk industry and the negative impacts of the customs changes on Macclesfield. The report of the Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioner for Macclesfield, published in 1839, provides new perspectives on the relationship between the manufacturers and the weavers and indicates the ways in which outside influences impacted on that relationship. The report of the Poor Law Commissioners on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions in 1841, which was printed in 1846, reveals the influence of the silk manufacturers on the distribution of poor relief and the use of out-relief to subsidise wages. As regards the fixing of prices for weaving, the report of the Select Committee on Masters and Operatives in 1856 provides valuable insights.<sup>5</sup> Hansard is used for parliamentary debates relating to the silk industry. Reference is also made to the conflicting arguments presented in contemporary publications regarding the impact of the customs changes on the silk industry. In addition to information on business failures, press reports also provide evidence of social unrest, industrial disputes and other conflicts. The volatility of the industry and the consequential distress suffered by those it employed was also covered by the press. Opinions of Macclesfield and the silk

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<sup>5</sup> PP. 1832 (678) *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*; PP. 1839 (490) *Reports of the Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioners*; PP. 1846 (661) *Reports received by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions*; PP. 1856 (343) *Select Committee on Masters and Operatives*.

industry in general were sometimes expressed in line with the political stance of the publication and these are viewed in the light of possible bias. Overall, the primary sources enable assessment of the impact of the customs changes and identification of the survival strategies pursued by the manufacturers. They also reveal the fluctuating fortunes of the Macclesfield silk industry.

The secondary sources relevant to this dissertation include Pat Hudson's study of industrialisation. Hudson argues that investment in industry and its location was influenced by factors including the power of local elites and 'the strength of entrenched customs or traditions.'<sup>6</sup> Both influences were evident in Macclesfield as confirmed by other historians. The tradition of silk manufacturing is evident from the work of Davies and Ainscough's study of Macclesfield's elites reveals, for example, that of the 31 individuals who held the office of mayor between 1832 and 1865, 19 were directly involved in the silk trade.<sup>7</sup> Macclesfield can also be viewed in relation to Nicholas Edsall's study of the anti poor law movement. Edsall argues that the more varied a town was economically, the more likely it was to escape distress but Macclesfield remained heavily dependent on silk manufacturing and never developed other substantive employment opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Other relevant secondary sources include S.R.H. Jones on the transition from home working to factory production which is relevant to the relationship between the Macclesfield manufacturers and the weavers and Sarah Griffiths regarding the Macclesfield Useful Knowledge Society, an educational establishment which did much to support the industry through training and which was, in turn, supported by the silk manufacturers. The work of Lynn Hollen Lees on the provision of poor relief and poor law reform is also relevant to the study which will show that distress amongst the working population of Macclesfield was continually evident during the forty

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<sup>6</sup> Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p.111.

<sup>7</sup> Ainscough, p.333.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas C. Edsall, *The anti-Poor Law movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), p.199.

year period from 1825. Margrave's study of the emigration of silk workers from Britain to America covers the relocation of Macclesfield silk weavers and operatives to Patterson, New Jersey where silk manufacturing had been established. This assists consideration of whether emigration contributed to the survival of Macclesfield's silk industry by absorbing part of its surplus labour force.<sup>9</sup> Local studies in addition to the comprehensive history of the town provided by Davies, include Keith Austin on social unrest in Macclesfield and George Longden's overview of events in Macclesfield across the period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S.R.H. Jones, 'Technology, Transaction Costs, and the Transition to Factory Production in the British Silk Industry, 1700-1870', *The Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1) (1987), 71-96; Sarah Griffiths, 'The Supporters of the Macclesfield Society for Acquiring Useful Knowledge', *Northern History*, 48 (2) (2011), 295-314; Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Richard Dobson Margrave, 'The Emigration of Silk Workers from England to the United States of America in the Nineteenth Century with Special Reference to Coventry, Macclesfield, Paterson, New Jersey, and South Manchester, Connecticut', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Keith Austin, *Troubled Times: Macclesfield 1790-1870* (Leek: Churnet Valley Books, 2001); George Longden, *Life and Labour in Victorian Macclesfield* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1986).

## Chapter 2: Competition, Complexity and Distress

The legislation passed in 1824 which exposed the silk industry to foreign competition presented a significant threat to the survival of silk manufacturing in Macclesfield. This chapter will determine the extent of that threat. It will reveal the complexities which the competition compounded, the distress caused to the working population and the differences between Macclesfield and other silk manufacturing areas. In order to make comparisons with Macclesfield, it will also identify the business failures in the industry across the whole of England during 1825 and 1826.

The impact of the fall in demand for home produced silk towards the end of 1825 was reported in the press early the following year. In January, *Berrows Worcester Journal* focused on the situation in Macclesfield and reported that firms were ‘discharging their workpeople and withdrawing their capital from the trade.’ In March, *The Chester Courant* reported on business failures in Macclesfield and the distress caused by the decline in its silk industry.<sup>1</sup> The impact of the customs changes on the silk industry in general and Macclesfield in particular also prompted debate amongst those with an interest in the trade. Richard Badnall, a former silk merchant, published his views on the subject and argued in favour of free trade, expressing the belief that the changes would be beneficial to the industry. The current distress, he claimed, had been the result of over investment. His arguments were countered by Macclesfield silk weaver John Prout who claimed that the lower cost base of the foreign manufacturers made it impossible for the home industry to compete without protection from foreign imports. He accused Badnall of arguing on the basis of theory rather than from a practical understanding of the industry.<sup>2</sup> Prout also criticised those who

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<sup>1</sup> *Berrows Worcester Journal*, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1826; ‘Distress at Macclesfield’, *Chester Courant*, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Badnall, *A View of the Silk Trade* (London: John Miller, 1828); John Prout, *A Practical View of the Silk Trade* (Macclesfield: J. Swinnerton, 1829).

supported the government's trade measures and claimed that 'their conclusions have been formed before the subject has well been brought before them.' He also claimed that facts were distorted to support preconceived opinions.<sup>3</sup>

The need to resolve the different views on the state of the silk trade and assess its condition was evident but parliament failed to act until 1832 when, during the sitting of the House of Commons on 1<sup>st</sup> March, Lord Grosvenor, MP for Chester, proposed the establishment of a Committee of Inquiry into 'the distressed condition of the silk manufacturers of the country.'<sup>4</sup> The motion was agreed to and the testimonies of those appearing before the committee reveal much about the situation in Macclesfield and confirm the need for action in order to ensure the survival of its silk industry.

Grosvenor was in the chair when the Committee called its first witness, James Deacon Hume the Joint Secretary to the Board of Trade. Hume confirmed that he had drawn up the Bill for the 1824 Act of Parliament which replaced the prohibition of imported silk products with an average protective duty of 30%. He went on to explain the adjustments that were made in 1829 and it is clear from Hume's evidence that the calculation of the duty was a complex process. It was lower on the type of goods most likely to be smuggled and customs officers were also given the discretion to calculate duty based on value rather than weight for certain types of goods.<sup>5</sup>

Witnesses from Macclesfield included John Brocklehurst and John Prout and their evidence provides insights into the impact of foreign competition, the complexities of the silk trade and the distress suffered by the working population of the town and borough.<sup>6</sup> Brocklehurst explained to the committee that his business was involved in manufacturing the raw silk through all its processes. These were the throwing process, the dyeing of the thread

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<sup>3</sup> Prout, p.v.

<sup>4</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 10, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1832, cols. 992-1040.

<sup>5</sup> PP. 1832 (678) 5-18, *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*.

<sup>6</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, pp.775-804.

and 'weaving into goods.' He stated that he had been a silk manufacturer for 24 years and that silk throwing had been a growing business before the customs changes. The workers had received reasonable wages but were now reduced to poverty. The numbers employed in the throwing mills had fallen from 10,229 in 1824 to 3,622 at the beginning of 1832 and average earnings had fallen by 75%. This was during a period when consumption of silk goods in the country had increased by at least 30 or 40 per cent but Brocklehurst argued that the increased demand was being satisfied by the cheaper imports and reported that in Macclesfield only 41 of the 71 throwing mills were in operation.<sup>7</sup> This implies that lower priced foreign goods had forced the home manufacturers to reduce their own sales prices with wages reduced as a consequence. Prout also provided evidence in relation to wage reductions. He advised the committee that he had worked in the silk trade for 34 years and prior to the years 1824 and 1825, there had been a great deal of improvement in silk manufacturing but since the customs changes there had been no improvements. Before the duty changes came into operation, he had weaved fancy goods, for which he received £1. 16s. & 3d. for every 16 ounces of silk but now, for the cheaper goods he received 6s. for every 20 ounces. The difference in his earnings due to production shifting away from the more expensive goods was, therefore, substantial although a larger quantity of cheaper goods may have been produced. Other information on wages was also provided by Prout to the committee. Based on this, table 1 shows the reduction in all the prices for weaving between 1825 and 1832. These changes would have applied to every weaver but many would have been forced entirely out of employment as, in addition to wage reductions, Prout informed the committee that the estimated number of looms had fallen from 5,325 in 1825 to 3,500 in 1832. Calculated on the basis of 1 loom per weaver, this implies a reduction in weavers active in the industry of 34%. This reduction is less than the 65% reduction in throwing mill operatives reported by

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<sup>7</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.779.

Brocklehurst but the lower duty on foreign thrown silk implies that more imported thread was being weaved. Indeed, Brocklehurst testified that following the duty changes, the Italians had begun to throw more silk for export and as a consequence of using more raw silk, the price of raws had risen making the cost of home thrown silk higher than imported thrown silk.<sup>8</sup>

Table 1: Prices For Weaving 1825 and 1832

Source: PP. 1832 (678) 810 *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*.

	1825	1832	Reduction
Bandannas	3s 6d per cut	2s 3d per cut	35%
Plain Sarsnets	9p per yard	4d per yard	56%
Gros de Naples	1s 1d per yard	6d per yard	54%
Black Bars	9s per doz	6s 3d per doz	31%
8 Shaft Figures	8s per doz	4s per doz	50%
100 ditto	13s 6d per doz	7s per doz	48%
Mountures, &c.	24s per doz	9s per doz	63%

To assess the reduction in spending power between 1825 and 1832, the impact of inflation needs to be considered. As table 2 shows, overall inflation rates varied significantly between 1825 and 1832. Average prices increased in 1825 but subsequent deflation had corrected the impact by 1832 and market reports in the press indicate that throughout the period, the price of a standard sized loaf varied little. The price in January 1825 was 11d and in 1832 at the time of the enquiry it was 10d with little variation in between.<sup>9</sup> It can, therefore, be concluded that neither overall inflation rates nor bread prices undermine the use of earnings as an indicator of distress between 1825 and 1832. The data provided by both Brocklehurst and Prout reveal the decline of both silk throwing and weaving. They also demonstrate the threat to the industry's survival should the decline continue.

<sup>8</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, pp.789-90.

<sup>9</sup> 'Price of Bread', *Sunday Times*, 9 January, 1825; 'Price of Bread', *Morning Post*, 31 July, 1832.

Table 2: Annual Inflation Rates 1824-1832

Source: Historical UK inflation rates and calculator <<http://inflation.iamkate.com/>>

[Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

Year	Inflation Rate
1825	17.4%
1826	-5.5%
1827	-6.5%
1828	-2.9%
1829	-1.0%
1830	-3.6%
1831	9.9%
1832	-7.4%

As regards the condition of the weavers, Prout claimed they had been forced to pawn most of their clothing and many of their children were ‘obliged to go barefoot.’<sup>10</sup> He expressed the belief that the solution to the problem was protection from foreign imports and referred to the effect of distress on the peaceable disposition of the people and the fact that soldiers were keeping the peace.<sup>11</sup>

Both Brocklehurst and Prout were disparaging about the decisions of government. Brocklehurst laid the blame for the issues he revealed on the late William Huskisson, former President of the Board of Trade. Huskisson had expressed the belief that the distress in the silk trade was due to ‘over-trading, over-building and wild speculations’ but Brocklehurst denied this, asserting that the true cause was the foreign competition.<sup>12</sup> In turn, Prout stated that the expectations of those involved in silk manufacturing had been raised by Mr. Robinson who had expressed confidence in the prosperity and stability of the trade. This suggests that investments had been made on the basis of unreliable information from

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<sup>10</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.811.

<sup>11</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.814.

<sup>12</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.779.

government. The 'Mr Robinson' to whom Prout referred had been Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time of the customs changes.<sup>13</sup>

The complexities of the silk industry and the challenges they presented were revealed by Brocklehurst who explained that 50,000 lbs of Italian silk was needed for every 100,000 lbs of Bengal and China silk they used and from this both the importance of Italian raw silk and the complexities of the manufacturing process are evident. Brocklehurst also stressed the importance of obtaining adequate supplies in a raw state as sudden demands abroad would reduce the supply, increase the price and force them to suspend their consumption of Bengal and China silk. This shows that the manufacturing process required a mixture of raw silks imported from different countries but the duty changes had reduced the supply from Italy to the detriment of the home manufacturers. The Italians were retaining more raw silk for throwing at home as they were now able to export manufactured silk goods to Britain. As a consequence, production of the most profitable finer articles had stopped in Macclesfield. When asked about making greater use of Indian silk, Brocklehurst introduced more complexity, informing the Committee that Indian silk was of inferior quality to French or Italian silk and unsuitable for the finer products. In response to the suggestion that the silk trade required competition from foreign goods to stimulate improvement, Brocklehurst claimed that goods could be produced in this country that were unequalled by any manufacturer in the world. His opinion was that growth arose from profits rather than foreign competition.

Technological developments in relation to silk manufacture were also a complex issue which gave rise to the need for a strategic response. Regarding the applicability of the power loom to the weaving of broad silk, Brocklehurst referred again to Huskisson who had

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<sup>13</sup> P.J. Jupp, 'Robinson, Frederick John, first Viscount Goderich and first Earl of Ripon (1782-1859)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2009.

predicted the successful application of power looms but Brocklehurst insisted that, ‘he knew nothing about the matter’.<sup>14</sup> The power loom was, in Brocklehurst’s view, useful in weaving narrow goods and crape but not for weaving broader goods as power was wasted because of the need for handling and trimming the silk. He added that when any imperfection in the pattern arose the power loom continued and wasted material. Use of the power loom for silk weaving was therefore tied to decisions about the type of goods produced and this, in turn was impacted by factors affecting the availability of a combination of raw silks which could only be supplied from overseas. The extent of investment in power looms therefore had to be part of an overall production strategy.

Brocklehurst also confirmed that the impact of the customs changes had begun to be felt in 1825 by stating that, ‘in the latter end of 1825, knowing that the time was approaching, our customers said we will sell off to the last yard, to be prepared for the foreign goods which are in bond.’<sup>15</sup> This is also confirmed by advertisements in the press offering silk goods for sale at much reduced prices.<sup>16</sup> It also shows that prices of imported goods must have been significantly lower than home market prices prior to the customs changes. Brocklehurst claimed that the customs legislation was ‘ill-judged and based on very imperfect information’ and added that the subsequent change in 1829 ‘aggravated the evil.’ He claimed that the Board of Trade was still too inclined to be influenced by people who didn’t understand manufacturing. Like Prout, he believed the only remedy was extended protection and that the cost of subsistence should have been reduced prior to any customs changes in order to place the home manufacturers on a more equal footing with foreign rivals as the cost of living in England was twice as high as overseas due to the corn laws. He concluded by saying that

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<sup>14</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.796.

<sup>15</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.778.

<sup>16</sup> *The Examiner*, 20th November, 1825; *Morning Post*, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1825; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1825.

those in the trade were anxious for the Committee to report as this would inspire their confidence.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of the customs changes on the silk industry is evident from the number of business failures in 1825 and 1826 compared to those in 1824. Table 3 shows bankruptcies and partnership dissolutions by location in those two years. The research methodology utilised Gale Primary Sources to search British Library newspapers for reports of bankruptcies and partnership dissolutions in the English silk industry for the years in question. All newspapers reported these in the same way by recording the name of the business or individual followed by the place of business and the nature of the business. The exception to this was London where the place of business was indicated by the name of the street or road on which it was located. Bankruptcies and partnership dissolutions were always reported together and in order to ensure complete coverage, searches were made using the key words “Bankrupts” and “silk” for the years in question. Duplicates were eliminated as well as reports of dividend payments, creditors meetings and reports unrelated to business failure. The information had originated in the *London Gazette* but no reliable method could be found for searching this. The raw data summarised in Table 3 is contained in Appendix 1 which also includes the sources. Numerous locations suffered only a single business failure and these are not shown for 1825 and 1826. All business types connected to the silk industry are included in the Table 3 data which, in addition to manufacturers, throwsters and dyers, included mercers, brokers, dealers and warehousemen. The results of this research show that Macclesfield suffered significant business failures but the impact in other areas, with the exception of London, was less severe. As Spitalfields was a discrete area of London in which silk manufacturing was known to be concentrated, this was separated from the rest of London. Whilst failures across London were greater than in Macclesfield, these included 10

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<sup>17</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.804.

mercenary, 5 warehousemen, and 2 brokers which means as regards manufacturing concerns, Macclesfield suffered more failures. The same methodology was used for 1824 and the outcome is summarised in Table 4 with raw data and sources in Appendix 2.

Table 3: Silk Industry Business Failures by Location 1825-1826  
(Areas with more than a single business failure)

Location	Bankruptcies	Partnership Dissolutions	Total
London (Excluding Spitalfields)	20	19	39
Macclesfield	14	12	26
Manchester	2	11	13
Spitalfields	4	7	11
Congleton	5	2	7
Coventry	1	4	5
Derby	2	2	4
Norwich	0	2	2
Braintree	0	2	2
Totals	48	61	109

Table 4: Silk Industry Business Failures by Location 1824

Location	Bankruptcies	Partnership Dissolutions	Total
London (Excluding Spitalfields)	4	7	11
Spitalfields	2	0	2
Manchester	0	2	2
Leek	0	1	1
Macclesfield	0	1	1
Worcester	1	0	1
Totals	7	11	18

As table 4 shows, there were no bankruptcies in Macclesfield in 1824 and only one partnership was dissolved. The only area with significant business failures was London and these were much lower than those suffered in 1825 and 1826. This analysis therefore supports the argument that the removal of the prohibition on manufactured silk imports was the cause of the increase in failures in the following two years. The total number of failures in

Macclesfield does not, however, appear to have been as high as Brocklehurst claimed and it is also likely that some partnership dissolutions had not been due to business failure. On the other hand, it is possible that some of those involved in the trade had managed to exit while still solvent. It should also be noted that members of dissolved partnerships could become bankrupts at a later date. However, despite these issues, the data is a reliable indication of the impact of the customs changes and highlights the difference between 1824 and 1825-6.

Despite Brocklehurst's claims regarding the lack of over-trading, some speculation would have been encouraged as a result of the optimism expressed by those in government as referred to by Prout. Indeed, Brocklehurst testified that in Macclesfield, 12 new mills had been built between 1824 and 1826, a time when potential investors would have been aware of the impending customs changes.<sup>18</sup> However, there is evidence which suggests that the new mills were never operational. In September 1827, *The Standard* reproduced a report from the *Manchester Guardian* which included the following claim:

“It is, no doubt, true that buildings erected in Macclesfield for the silk business are now lying idle; and the reason is, that at a period when credit was cheap, a number of men of small capital availed themselves of that circumstance, and erected mills which they had no capital to work; and which, in fact, were never likely to be wanted, if they could be worked.”<sup>19</sup>

If true, this supports the argument that no one became unemployed as a result of speculation and the distress reported in the press was due to the failure of established businesses following the customs changes rather than to over investment as the government had claimed.

Unlike all other silk industry locations with the exception of London, Macclesfield suffered both distress and significant business failures in 1825 and 1826 but whereas Coventry, for example, suffered some distress due to wage reductions, its silk industry experienced only 1 bankruptcy. Sir Frank Warner's study of the origins and development of

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<sup>18</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.779.

<sup>19</sup> *Manchester Guardian* quoted in, *The Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1827.

the UK silk industry reveals that it was widely dispersed across England but whilst Macclesfield produced a wide range of silk goods, other areas in England were more specialised.<sup>20</sup> Brocklehurst's testimony, confirms that, unlike other locations, it covered all aspects of the production process from throwing and dyeing to weaving and this increased the risk of failure when demand declined. The silk industry in Coventry was less complex. It specialised in the manufacture of silk ribbons and the testimony of Coventry manufacturer William Brunskill before the Select Committee in 1832 reveals that the lower quality products they produced could be sold more cheaply than the Italian imports.<sup>21</sup>

From the evidence of Brocklehurst and Prout the impact of the customs changes on the Macclesfield silk industry is evident. Foreign competition, the complexities of silk manufacturing and distress amongst the Macclesfield workforce had created the need for action but despite Brocklehurst's plea, the Parliamentary Select Committee, after hearing evidence from a total of 79 witnesses, made no recommendations for change.<sup>22</sup> The silk industry in Macclesfield was left to ensure its own survival. Strategies to achieve this were necessary and these will be identified in the following chapter.

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<sup>20</sup> Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Dranes, 1921).

<sup>21</sup> *Report From Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.26.

<sup>22</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.3.

## Chapter 3: The Macclesfield Strategies

Having revealed the impact of foreign competition on Macclesfield, this chapter identifies the strategies the manufacturers adopted to address the challenges they faced. Due to the wide range of goods produced in Macclesfield and its status as a major silk throwing centre, all the complexities of the industry were evident and Macclesfield's dependency on a shrinking industry and the distress this caused to the working population added to the challenges and emphasised the need for survival strategies.

In July 1827, after the impact of the customs changes had become evident, *The Morning Post* reproduced a report from the *Macclesfield Courier* which criticised William Huskisson, President of the Board of Trade, for removing the prohibition on wrought silk imports. The report went on to provide the following advice:

“The question of what is to be done must soon be agitated; and we presume that the silk masters, who have hitherto been too little in the habit of acting in combination where their interests are concerned must learn to value and use the influence which their wealth and information afford them for political purposes.”<sup>1</sup>

The Macclesfield silk manufacturers were, however, aware that government would not be influenced by their wealth and knowledge. Appeals and petitions had already been brushed aside. On 17th November 1825, *Berrows Worcester Journal*, had referred to the rejection of a plea made by the silk manufacturers and throwsters of Macclesfield to the Board of Trade for the restoration of protection from foreign competition. Referring to the silk industry in general, the newspaper report went on to state, ‘The silk manufacturers will now, we hope,

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<sup>1</sup> *Macclesfield Courier* quoted in ‘The Silk Trade’; *Morning Post*, 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1827.

endeavour to prepare themselves to meet the competition which they will not be able to shut out.’<sup>2</sup>

Despite their inability to influence government, the advice of the *Macclesfield Courier* may have encouraged the manufacturers to collaborate in order to further their business interests and evidence given before the 1832 Select Committee suggests there was collaboration between the Macclesfield manufacturers. Competition between them would have limited the potential for a mutually devised survival strategy but Manchester silk manufacturer Vernon Royal speaking of Macclesfield, testified that, ‘there is a society of masters there, and they have a secretary, and they meet to tell of their experience, and the circumstances of their trade, and so on.’<sup>3</sup> If such a society did exist in Macclesfield it is unlikely to have been placed on record and there is no evidence that a Society of Masters, formal or otherwise, existed when Royal gave his evidence. Ainscough identified an elite group of Macclesfield silk manufacturers but makes no mention of a ‘Society of Masters’. Any group of manufacturers seeking a common approach to the protection of their interests would have operated confidentially and this type of collaboration was evident in Macclesfield in relation to the administration of poor relief. John Brocklehurst when asked by the Select Committee about the consequences of lack of profitability and the prospects of unemployment stated, ‘I consider the present basis of our throwing to be the poor rate,’ inferring that the rates were used to subsidise wages.<sup>4</sup> This would have enabled those involved in the trade to reduce working hours and wages during recessions and retain the pool of labour for when demand increased and there is evidence that this practice continued long after the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. Witnesses from Macclesfield provided details of how wages were subsidised in evidence given before a

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<sup>2</sup> *Berrows Worcester Journal*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1825.

<sup>3</sup> PP. 1832 (678) 157, *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*.

<sup>4</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.781.

Parliamentary enquiry in 1841 into the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions, the report of which was printed in 1846.<sup>5</sup> When giving evidence, John May, the acting clerk to the Macclesfield Board of Guardians, testified that there were seven Macclesfield Guardians five of whom were silk manufacturers and they operated apart from the union as a whole, granting relief in a separate meeting and following the practice of subsidising the wages of the silk trade operatives. He added that, ‘The Relieving Officer goes to the silk mills where the applicants work and refers to the pay books. He reports to the board what their wages are; on that report, relief is granted.’<sup>6</sup> William Shalwell, the Relieving Officer also referred to the manufacturers keeping operatives employed part time rather than dismissing them and making up their wages from the rates until they were required to return to full time working. The Assistant Overseer, John Wilson, when he gave evidence said of those in receipt of the wage subsidy, ‘it is necessary to keep them out of the rates to maintain the requisite number of extra hands, to meet the extra demand to which I have alluded.’<sup>7</sup> Despite its non-compliance with poor law legislation, it is clear from this that the practice referred to in 1832 by John Brocklehurst was still evident in 1841 and that the silk manufacturers collaborated in order to maintain it. Steven King argues that by the early 1840s, the Poor Law Commission had reached the point where they could set about the task of curtailing outdoor relief but Edsall claims that in manufacturing areas which were suffering economic distress such as Macclesfield and Bolton, the Commissioners were reluctant to take action to bring Poor Law Guardians into line. Edsall says that in these locations, the Commissioners did not even pursue a policy of gradual reform and their reluctance to intervene might explain why the witnesses from Macclesfield made no attempt to conceal their practises during the enquiry.

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<sup>5</sup> PP. 1846 (661) *Reports received by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions.*

<sup>6</sup> *Reports received by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions*, p38.

<sup>7</sup> *Reports received by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions*, p.35.

However, whilst Edsall argues that in northern textile districts, poor relief was administered in a chaotic fashion, the management of poor relief in Macclesfield appears to have been highly efficient in terms of the benefit it provided to the silk industry.<sup>8</sup> According to Lees, by 1847, outdoor relief prohibitory orders had been issued to most poor law unions but there is no record of a prohibitory order being issued to the Macclesfield Union prior to June 1856 when the Poor Law Board made the payment of out-relief illegal in Macclesfield unless the recipients were 'set to work by the Guardians'.<sup>9</sup> Wage subsidies and outdoor relief payments to operatives wholly out of work were therefore evident in Macclesfield prior to 1832 when Brocklehurst gave his evidence. They are likely to have continued at least until the middle of 1856 and from the evidence of May, Shalwell and Wilson, it is clear that this practice was a key element of the Macclesfield silk industry's survival strategy during that period.

The wage subsidies aided the industry's survival as profits could be maintained and cash reserves created by reducing wages but following the prohibitory order of 1856, an additional strategy was needed. The level of profits which could be generated by the larger firms was indicated by the daughter of John Brocklehurst, Emma Dent, who claimed that her father had incurred losses of £70,000 by keeping his mills open during a recession in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Inflation rates suggest this loss would equate to nearly £9 million today.<sup>11</sup> Cash reserves provided scope to scale down operations or shut down entirely during depressions until demand improved. Shutting down the mills and factories was therefore feasible, as shown during the severe recession of 1857-8. This could not have been the one during which J. and T. Brocklehurst kept their mills open as in a report submitted to

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<sup>8</sup> Steven King, *Poverty and welfare in Victorian England: A regional perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.228; Nicholas C. Edsall, *The anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), pp.197-198; Edsall, p.213.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.200-201; Cheshire County Records Office, LUB101/19, Orders of the Poor Law Board to the Guardians of the poor of the Macclesfield Union, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1856.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Bray, *The Lady of Sudeley* (Stroud: the History Press, 2010), p.13.

<sup>11</sup> The Bank of England <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>> [Accessed 24th August 2020]

the Poor Law Board in that year, John May referred to the workers being unprepared for a complete shutdown. The manufacturers drew on their reserves and their workers had to rely on soup kitchens or begging for food.<sup>12</sup> Unlike 1841, May was also keen to demonstrate compliance with the Poor Law, describing the distribution of soup and bread as both undesirable and objectionable.<sup>13</sup> With no scope for subsidising wages, the industry had survived by shutting down.

A formal collaborative process was established to set prices for weaving through the establishment of a Silk Trade Board in 1849. Ainscough describes this as a board of conciliation between manufacturers and weavers with an independent chairman, established to resolve a strike but a report in the *Northern Star* claimed that at a meeting of manufacturers called in March 1852 to elect their representatives to the board, only seven attended and a motion was passed to discontinue it.<sup>14</sup> If this is factually correct, it appears that a lack of enthusiasm for a formal price setting mechanism existed amongst the manufacturers, implying that it operated to the weaver's advantage. A reference in the report to some manufacturers violating the rules suggests that competition between them limited co-operation. The animosity between the weavers and the manufacturers had also been heightened by the manufacturers practise of sending work to other areas in order to obtain lower prices. This was, according to Austin, an ongoing practice dating back to the 1830s and earlier.<sup>15</sup> From reports in the press, it is clear that this strategy continued during the brief existence of the Silk Trade Board. In December 1850, the *Manchester Times*, reporting on Macclesfield, stated that, 'The men cry out against the masters for sending the work out of town while hundreds in the town are walking about in idleness.'<sup>16</sup> Due to the volatility of the

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<sup>12</sup> 'Alderley Edge and the Macclesfield Weavers', *Manchester Guardian* 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1857, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> PP. 1857 (2402) 43-46, *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Ainscough, 'Macclesfield Elites, 1832-1918', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2003), p.196; 'Macclesfield', *Northern Star*, 12 June, 1852, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Austin, *Troubled Times: Macclesfield 1790-1870* (Leek: Churnet Valley Books, 2001), p.117.

<sup>16</sup> 'Macclesfield', *Manchester Times*, 11 December, 1850.

silk trade, especially after 1825, the resetting of prices for weaving was an ongoing issue resulting in continual conflict which had to be resolved in order for the industry to survive and this will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Manufacturing strategies were also important in ensuring the survival of the industry. According to S. R. H. Jones, Macclesfield was the only location where a significant proportion of the weaving was carried out by journeymen in the factories with 234 looms out of a total of 1,240 being factory-based in 1818.<sup>17</sup> The decision to bring looms in house was, according to Jones, the result of a dispute with weavers in 1815 over a 25% reduction in piece rates and Jones claims that as well as a tactic to undermine the position of local weavers in wage negotiations it was a change in organizational structure for the purpose of cutting wage costs through the use of child labour. Jones refers to the movement of looms into factories as a restructuring of the trade which the weavers were powerless to prevent but if so, the change was very limited and after the customs changes, the system of ‘putting out’, combined with the wage subsidy, allowed the manufacturers to vary the work they gave out in line with fluctuations in demand whilst retaining their in-house weavers. The retention of outworking was, therefore, essential and from a report in the *Daily Telegraph* in February 1863, it is clear that weaving was still being carried out by ‘undertakers’ who worked for a price agreed with the manufacturers. They worked at home and employed family members and their own journeymen.<sup>18</sup> As Jones argues, the movement of looms into factories was about more than just the exploitation of cheap labour. It was also a warning to the undertakers of what might happen if they were difficult. Indeed, this type of tactic was not uncommon. During his examination before the 1832 Select Committee, Ambrose Moore, a Spitalfields silk Manufacturer was asked about an advertisement placed by a Macclesfield silk manufacturer

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<sup>17</sup> S.R.H. Jones, ‘Technology, Transaction Costs, and the Transition to Factory Production in the British Silk Industry, 1700-1870’, *The Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1) (1987), p.74.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1863.

in 1825 for 5,000 hands. Moore was aware that this had been referred to in Parliament by Mr Huskisson who claimed it was ‘a specimen of their folly’ but Moore claimed it had been a ploy used during a strike to induce a return to work. No one had been employed as a result and this appears to have been widely known within the silk industry.<sup>19</sup> As for the use of child labour, Jones says that half pay apprentices could turn out acceptable plain or figured goods, for half the outdoor list price. Determining the extent of child labour in the Macclesfield silk industry is difficult as manufacturers breached the rules and often failed to complete time books. Macclesfield silk throwster George Kent Pearson appeared before the magistrates in 1836 and admitted breaching the Factory Act but claimed that everyone was ‘equally delinquent’ including ‘the member of parliament.’ This will have been a reference to either John Brocklehurst or fellow silk manufacturer John Ryle, both of whom had been elected to parliament following the enfranchisement of Macclesfield in 1832.<sup>20</sup>

The flexibility provided by combining ‘in-house’ weaving at low rates with the ‘putting out’ system allowed the manufacturers to survive market fluctuations following the customs changes and it is evident that this combination persisted in Macclesfield into the 1860s. Jones says that following exposure to foreign competition, the smaller throwing and manufacturing firms either failed or had to change their product mix and manufacturing methods to survive.<sup>21</sup> The data on business failures in 1825 and 1826 demonstrates that many were indeed eliminated and John Prout testified in 1832 that following the customs changes production had shifted away from the light and valuable articles.<sup>22</sup> The ability to adjust production methods and ensure the availability of labour when required was essential to

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<sup>19</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.746; Keith Austin, *Troubled Times: Macclesfield 1790-1870* (Leek: Churnet Valley Books, 2001), p.31; *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 14, 23 February 1826, Cols. 733-809.

<sup>20</sup> *Manchester Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1836.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, p.81.

<sup>22</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.809.

survival and combining in-house weaving with the use of undertakers was a strategy which supported that need.

In addition to their involvement in the silk industry, both John Brocklehurst and John Ryle were bankers and the ability to control the supply of capital was advantageous to them both especially after the exposure to foreign competition. Ainscough reveals that the Brocklehursts had taken over the bank of Critchley and Turner in 1816 and points to close connections with local firms, an example being Whistons of Langley, dyers who treated Brocklehurst products.<sup>23</sup> Providing finance to firms which in turn provided services to the silk manufacturers indicates that banking, as well as generating profits, also provided opportunities to exercise control over businesses linked to their own interests. The strategy of combining manufacturing and banking was not devised as a result of collaboration but it was certainly a strategy adopted by the town's most prominent silk manufacturers.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1835 a public meeting was called in Macclesfield Town Hall to discuss 'the expediency of forming a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge amongst the operatives connected with the town and trade of Macclesfield.'<sup>24</sup> Longden cites the prominent role of silk manufacturer John Brocklehurst in its formation, stressing that he was principally concerned with the benefit to the silk industry.<sup>25</sup> Brocklehurst was certainly aware of the competitive advantage education could provide, especially in relation to design. In his evidence to the 1832 Select Committee, he had referred to paying £800 for designs, a significant cost which could be reduced by training his own designers.<sup>26</sup> The secondary literature makes it clear that the Useful Knowledge Society was more than an educational establishment for the silk industry. Davies, for example, refers to a 'Female Class' which

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<sup>23</sup> Ainscough, pp. 34-35.

<sup>24</sup> British Library Historical Collections, *A Walk Through the Public Institutions of Macclesfield: Being a series of articles reprinted from the Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, (Macclesfield: Clay, Brown and Claye, 1888), p.59.

<sup>25</sup> George Longden, *Life and Labour in Victorian Macclesfield* (Manchester: Neil Richardson), p.19.

<sup>26</sup> *Report From Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.797.

provided instruction in the three R's as well as sewing and knitting and Longden refers to the organisation of annual excursions to places of interest such as Ilam Hall in Ashbourne, Derbyshire.<sup>27</sup> The society was, however, heavily focused on the silk trade and there is a general consensus within the historiography regarding both Brocklehurst's leading role in its foundation and its emphasis on silk manufacturing. Austin refers to Adam Rushton, a weaver who earned 5s a week teaching at the society. He says that Rushton had been one of its first students, learning to weave silk on the Jacquard loom. Griffiths emphasises the correlation between the society and the needs of the silk industry and claims that this was strengthened by the establishment of the School of Art and Science in 1851 which Brocklehurst saw as a means of improving the standard of Macclesfield's silk products.<sup>28</sup> Industrial education was not, however, unique to Macclesfield. Mechanics Institutes existed at the time in many industrial towns. The London Mechanics Institute had been established in 1823. Its membership covered numerous different trades but in Macclesfield industrial education was an element of an overall strategic approach to ensuring the survival of its staple trade. An institute had also been founded in Spitalfields in March 1825, ten years before the Macclesfield UKS but this appears to have been unpopular with silk operatives due to its emphasis on political economy and the use of power looms.<sup>29</sup> It was also referred to in 1851 by a Spitalfields silk dealer who stated, as reported in an article in *Household Words*, that the mechanics institutions they had tried had 'not come to much.'<sup>30</sup> In Macclesfield, however, the support of the manufacturers as subscribers to the society indicates its importance to the survival of the industry.

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<sup>27</sup> C. Stella Davies, (ed.), *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p.226; Longden, p.20.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Jane Griffiths, 'The charitable work of the Macclesfield silk manufacturers, 1750-1900', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Chester, 2008), p.122.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Hudson Flexner, 'The London Mechanics Institution: Social and Cultural Foundations 1823-1830', (unpublished PhD Thesis, UCL, 2014), p.109; Flexner, pp.210-211.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Dickens, (ed.), 'Spitalfields', *Household Words*, 3 (54) (1851), 27.

In view of the significant impact of government policy on the wellbeing of the silk industry, the possibility of influencing future policy would have been of interest to the manufacturers and despite the failure of their appeal in 1825 for the restoration of protection, both John Brocklehurst and John Ryle sought and won seats in Parliament in December 1832.<sup>31</sup> Ryle lost his seat in 1837 having achieved nothing to benefit the industry and Hansard records that Brocklehurst spoke only 18 times in his 36 years as an MP. He may, however, have had opportunities to exercise informal influence but his attitude to his role as an MP was made clear in January 1850 when a dinner was held at the Town Hall assembly room in Macclesfield in honour of the borough's members of parliament. Following a toast to 'The Health of the Borough Members', Brocklehurst rose to respond and after referring to the dependency of the borough on the silk trade, he is reported to have said, 'I am, as your representative, deeply responsible for your interest and confidence. I have attended the House of Commons whenever anything sufficiently important drew me there; at other times, I have preferred going to bed.'<sup>32</sup> Brocklehurst's lack of interest in a political career is evident from his remarks and this is further demonstrated by his infrequent contributions to parliamentary debate which are listed in the table below. This shows that Brocklehurst certainly limited his speeches and interventions in Parliament to sessions involving matters of particular interest. With the possible exception of the first, they all concern either the silk industry, trade in general, finance, the poor laws and social order. These were all matters of interest to Macclesfield's silk manufacturers and Brocklehurst's reference at the dinner to the borough's dependency on the silk trade suggests that he considered everyone in Macclesfield to be interested in its welfare.

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<sup>31</sup> 'General Election', *Bristol Mercury*, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1832.

<sup>32</sup> 'Dinner to the members for Macclesfield', *The Daily News*, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1850.

Table 5

John Brocklehurst MP – List of Parliamentary Speeches and Interventions 1832-1860Source: *Hansard*, Series 3, Volumes 16-156, 7 March 1833 to 2 March 1860

Date	Hansard Reference (Series 3)	Debate/Issue
7/3/1833	Volume 16 cols. 368-69	Reduction of public salaries.
13/3/1833	Volume 16 col. 574	Suppression of disturbances (Ireland).
25/3/1834	Volume 22 cols. 637-640	South Sea Company
25/3/1834	Volume 22 cols. 640-642	South Sea Company
19/6/1834	Volume 24 col. 589	Proposal to protect the ribband trade.
11/12/1837	Volume 39 cols. 962-63	Poor-Laws. Riots at Bradford.
2/2/1841	Volume 56 col. 220	Proposal to equalise the duty on Rum.
7/6/1842	Volume 63 cols. 1368-69	Customs Act. The Tariff.
10/6/1842	Volume 63 col. 1458	Customs Act. The Tariff.
10/6/1842	Volume 63 col. 1459	Customs Act. The Tariff.
31/3/1843	Volume 68 col. 285	Custom-House Frauds
25/3/1844	Volume 73 cols. 1524-25	Hours of Labour in Factories
18/7/1844	Volume 76 col. 1057	Poor-Laws
19/3/1845	Volume 78 cols. 1206-07	Proposal to remove duty thrown silk.
16/3/1846	Volume 84 col. 1079	Customs and Corn Importation Report
16/3/1846	Volume 84 cols. 1080-81	Customs and Corn Importation Report
27/5/1853	Volume 127 col. 748	Income Tax Bill
2/3/1860	Volume 156 col. 2198	Customs Acts – Report

The benefits of Brocklehurst's status as a member of parliament are difficult to determine but he would not have continually sought re-election if there was nothing to be gained from retaining his seat. His service on parliamentary committees was also focused on matters of interest to the silk industry. His membership of Select Committees included the Hand-Loom Weavers Committee in 1834 and Art and Manufactures in 1835, a committee which was 'appointed to inquire into the best means of extending a knowledge of the arts, and of the principles of design among the people (especially the manufacturing population) of the country'.<sup>33</sup> He was also a member of the Select Committee on the Act for the Regulation of Mills and Factories in 1840.<sup>34</sup> The impact of activities behind the scenes cannot be

<sup>33</sup> PP. 1834 (556) *Select Committee on Hand-Loom Weavers' Petitions*; PP. 1835 (598) *Select Committee on Art and Manufactures*.

<sup>34</sup> PP 1840 (203) *Select Committee on the Act for the Regulation of Mills and Factories*.

determined but the political economists in parliament would have been aware that someone in their midst was a defender of the silk industry. Macclesfield's interests were certainly Brocklehurst's main priority. On the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1834, he objected to the proposal that protection be provided to the ribband trade on the grounds that he had 'been in communication very lately with the Macclesfield manufacturers, and their opinion was, that the House could not serve them better than by leaving the matter entirely alone.'<sup>35</sup> This supports the argument that Brocklehurst represented the views of the Macclesfield manufacturers on matters relevant to them and in this instance was willing to go against his own principle that protection should be given to all trades. It also shows that informal collaboration for political purposes did exist amongst the Macclesfield manufacturers and that, although unrecorded, representation of Macclesfield was also likely to have been conducted by Brocklehurst other than on the floor of the House of Commons. Irrespective of the amount of influence he could exert in Parliament, awareness of the political mood and of planned legislative changes would have been beneficial with regard to business planning and Brocklehurst's status as a member of parliament also enhanced his standing in the community and helped him to claim a leadership role in Macclesfield's silk industry. Brocklehurst's final speech in the House of Commons was on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1860, little more than a month after the signing of the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty with France which removed the duty on imported French silk whilst retaining the 30% duty on silks imported into France.<sup>36</sup> He was speaking on behalf of the silk manufacturers when he asserted that home manufactured silks should be admitted to France on the same terms as French silks were admitted to England but must have realised that he was fighting a losing battle. He retained his seat until 1868 but never spoke again on the floor of the House.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 24, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1834, col. 589.

<sup>36</sup> Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Dranes, 1921), p.78.

<sup>37</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 156, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1860, col. 2198.

The Macclesfield silk manufacturers co-operated with each other when there was a strategic approach from which they could all benefit such as retaining a combination of factory production and out-working and the use of poor rates to subsidise wages. The Useful Knowledge Society was also mutually beneficial but the manufacturers were competitors and those who saw a benefit in acting unilaterally would do so, especially the large, more dominant firms. High demand elasticity was an ongoing challenge but when the customs changes impacted on the industry from 1825 it became the victim of what appears to have been an experimental trade policy based on hitherto untested theories. John Brocklehurst stated in Parliament during the debate on tariffs on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1842 that it was, ‘a bad thing to recognize the principles of free-trade with respect to the manufacture of silk alone before they were generally introduced.’<sup>38</sup> However, the unbreakable conviction of politicians who supported the customs policy prevented any backtracking as they refused to accept that the distress in Macclesfield was due to the removal of the prohibition on wrought silk imports and persisted with the claim that it was due to over speculation. During the same debate, William Gladstone, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, referred to ‘the years of such extraordinary speculation’ and cited the advert for 5,000 hands as an example.<sup>39</sup> The explanation for this had fallen on deaf ears and the stance of those who supported the customs changes had already been bolstered by the *Morning Chronicle* which evoked utilitarian principles in expressing support for the measures. Referring to the parties interested in the silk trade, the paper had claimed that ‘there is one large class generally left out of the estimate, viz. the public – i.e. the buyers and the consumers.’<sup>40</sup> Given the intractable position of the politicians and the argument that the interests of the buyers and consumers outweigh those of the manufacturers and the people they employ, the prospect of any change of policy

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<sup>38</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 63, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1842, cols. 1456-57.

<sup>39</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 63, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1842, col. 1458.

<sup>40</sup> ‘The Silk Trade’, *Morning Chronicle*, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1828.

was at best slight. No pleas had succeeded in securing a change of policy and yet, despite the obdurate stance of the government, the extent of distress caused by the downturn and the shrinking of the industry as revealed in the evidence given to the Select Committee, the Macclesfield silk industry survived due to the strategies, scrupulous or otherwise, deployed by the manufacturers.

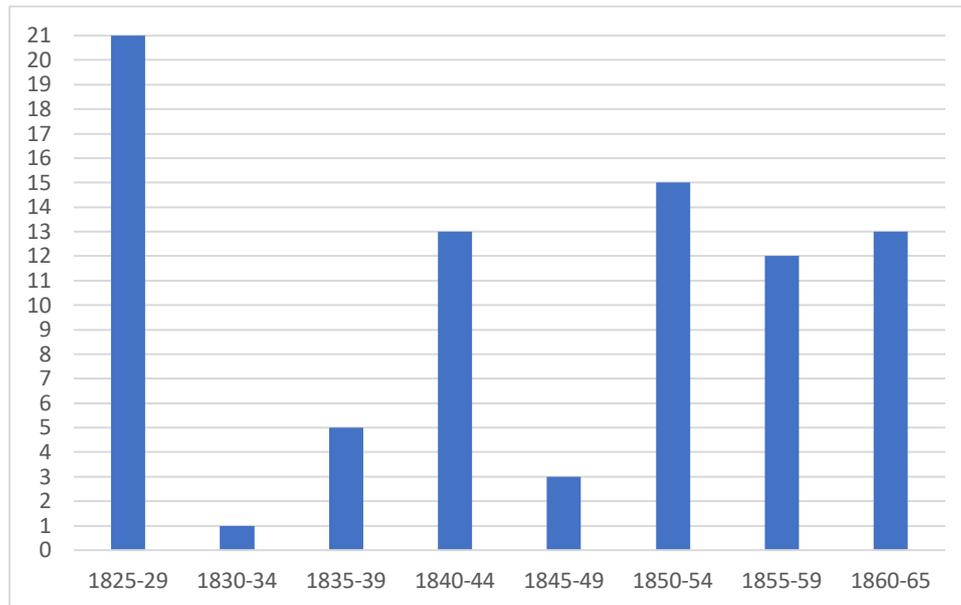
## Chapter 4: Volatility, Conflict and Resolution

Due to the volatility of the silk industry which was especially evident in Macclesfield, the manufacturers had to continually adjust the prices paid for weaving in order to survive and the conflict this created had to be resolved. This chapter examines the extent of the volatility which gave rise to the need for price adjustments and the way the conflict with the weavers was managed. It shows that volatility made conflict inevitable and that whilst this was addressed and reduced by the manufacturers through the use of power to exercise control, compromise was also evident on both sides. The part played by emigration in resolving conflict and aiding the survival of the industry will also be considered.

The threat posed to the silk industry in Macclesfield by foreign competition is evident from the fourteen bankruptcies reported in 1825-6. but there were none in 1827 and only two in 1828. A further five followed in 1829 after the reduction of the duty on foreign thrown silk and by 1832, the industry had shrunk to a significant extent as the testimonies of John Brocklehurst and John Prout before the Select Committee in that year revealed. The volatile nature of Macclesfield's silk industry is indicated by the trend in bankruptcies as shown in Figure 1 with raw data in appendices 1 and 3. The methodology used to identify bankruptcies specific to Macclesfield was to search British Library Newspapers as before but using the keywords 'Bankrupts', 'Macclesfield' and 'silk'. Partnership dissolutions are not included as bankruptcies alone provide a reasonable indication of the industry's peaks and troughs despite a possible lag between business failures and bankruptcy announcements. The Limited

Liability Act of 1855 is unlikely to have had any significant impact as limited companies did not begin to appear in Macclesfield until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Macclesfield Silk Industry Bankruptcies  
in each 5 year period from 1825 to 1865



The shifting fortunes of the silk industry in Macclesfield are also evident from reports in the press. Positive views of the situation in Macclesfield and the state of the silk industry in general were evident in the early months of 1827 but later that month the *Macclesfield Courier* reported on distress in Spitalfields and Macclesfield.<sup>2</sup> In August *Berrows Worcester Journal* pointed to improvement in the Macclesfield silk industry but in the following month,

<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. Bainbridge and M. Todd Henderson, *History of limited liability* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2016), pp. 29-31; Steven Ainscough, 'Macclesfield Elites, 1832-1918', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2003), p.392.

<sup>2</sup> *Macclesfield Courier*, quoted in *Berrows Worcester Journal*, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1827; *Macclesfield Courier*, quoted in *The Standard* 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1827.

the *Macclesfield Herald* referred to the ‘ruin which is inevitably approaching’.<sup>3</sup> However, despite this prophesy of doom, only two bankruptcies were reported in 1828.

In May 1829, the *Morning Chronicle* claimed that the Macclesfield manufacturers believed the depression in the town’s silk industry had been ‘aggravated, and the silk trade in general greatly injured by one house – the firm of Messrs. Brocklehurst.’ It goes on to assert that the Brocklehursts had reduced wages by between five and ten percent under the prices paid by the other manufacturers and in order to compete, other firms had been forced to make similar reductions.<sup>4</sup> If the accuracy of the report can be relied upon it shows that price fixing was not, at that time, a collaborative strategy but was used by individual manufacturers seeking to establish competitive advantage over rival firms but volatility was continually evident as was the need for adjustment to the prices paid for weaving. The weavers were, however, aware of the need for price adjustments. As John Prout wrote in 1829, ‘our manufacturers are compelled to reduce the price of labour or be driven entirely from the market.’<sup>5</sup>

The total of 21 bankruptcies between 1825 and 1829 contrasts with just 6 in the whole of the following decade. This leads to the conclusion that by the 1830s, the silk industry in Macclesfield had shrunk to a level at which it could be sustained but despite the limited number of bankruptcies in the 1830s, the industry was far from stable and the relationship between manufacturers and weavers was often strained. In 1831, labour relations became entwined with political reform following the establishment of the Macclesfield Political Union. This was one of many such unions formed across the country to support the reform of parliament.<sup>6</sup> Despite the official purpose of the Political Union, Austin reveals that, in

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<sup>3</sup> *Berrows Worcester Journal*, 9th August, 1827, p.1; *Macclesfield Herald*, quoted in *The Standard*, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1827.

<sup>4</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 4th May, 1829.

<sup>5</sup> John Prout, *A Practical View of the Silk Trade* (Macclesfield: J. Swinnerton, 1829), p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy D. LoPatin, ‘Ritual, Symbolism, and Radical Rhetoric: Political Unions and Political Identity in the Age of Parliamentary Reform’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 3 (1) (1998), pp.1-29.

Macclesfield, it became aligned with the Association for the Protection of Labour formed by John Doherty, the Manchester cotton spinners' union secretary. At the forefront of the Political Union in Macclesfield was John West, a young weaver described by Austin as a charismatic speaker. In March 1832, West submitted a letter in the Union's name to the *Poor Man's Guardian* accusing J. and T. Brocklehurst of acting unjustly towards its weavers.<sup>7</sup> The letter described John Brocklehurst as a tyrant and claimed that his weavers were forced to accept unfavourable terms as set out in a letter which had supposedly been issued to them. However, the defence to West's accusation came from the weavers rather than the firm.<sup>8</sup> Brocklehurst had claimed that the terms set out in the letter, which was reproduced in the newspaper report, were for weavers elsewhere in the country who took work from Macclesfield. It stated that there would be no price fixed for the work until the over-looker had determined its worth and payment would be based on 'the state of trade and the quality of the work.' It reads like terms for sub-contractors who could choose whether or not to accept them and if it had been issued to the Macclesfield undertakers, this would have been a matter of fact rather than one of speculation. In view of the antagonism caused by the practice of sending work out of town, an aggressive response to Brocklehurst's explanation from his weavers might have been expected rather than the impassioned defence he received which referred to West's allegations as 'an abominable misrepresentation.'<sup>9</sup> It seems unlikely that Brocklehurst would have been supported by his weavers without an arrangement which was beneficial to them and this implies that compromise was sometimes evident when it came to setting prices. Indeed, there was evidence of successful negotiation at J. & T. Brocklehurst later in the same year when, with the agreement of the firm's weavers, wages were reduced by 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d per yard in order to 'undersell' a competitor but when other firms followed suit with

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Austin, *Troubled Times: Macclesfield 1790-1870* (Leek: Churnet Valley Books, 2001), p.67; 'Unjust and Tyrannical Employers', *Poor Man's Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1832.

<sup>8</sup> 'Messrs J. and T. Brocklehurst - Macclesfield', *Poor Man's Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1832.

<sup>9</sup> *Poor Man's Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1832.

price reductions a strike forced Brocklehurst's weavers to turn out as well.<sup>10</sup> It is clear from this that relationships between manufacturers and weavers were not consistent across all firms and the volatile nature of the industry meant conflict and the need for resolution were permanent features.

The plight of hand-loom weavers in all parts of the country and in all industries including silk was brought to the attention of parliament on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1834 when Bolton MP Colonel Robert Torrens presented petitions seeking the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the distress of handloom weavers. A lengthy debate followed but the petitions were merely 'laid on the table'.<sup>11</sup> A further request for a Committee of enquiry was made on 15<sup>th</sup> May that year. The debate which followed was adjourned until 11<sup>th</sup> June when the motion to establish a Committee was passed.<sup>12</sup> After taking evidence, the Committee reported that the distress of the hand-loom weavers had not been exaggerated but expressed no opinion on what might be done to relieve it. The evidence was laid before Parliament and in March 1835, a second Committee was formed and reported in July. The report included the idea of establishing a system of minimum wages for hand-loom weavers but this was rejected by Parliament.<sup>13</sup> Nothing had so far been achieved for the benefit of the hand-loom weavers but in July 1837 a Commission was established.<sup>14</sup> Assistant Commissioners were appointed and allocated to specific locations both in the UK and Europe to gather evidence but it was not until October 1838 that Solomon Keyser, Assistant Commissioner for West Riding, Macclesfield and Germany arrived in Macclesfield and his report provides insights into the relationship between the manufacturers and the weavers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Southampton Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1832.

<sup>11</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 21, 5 March 1834, cols. 1144-1145.

<sup>12</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 24, 11 June 1834, cols.364-382.

<sup>13</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 29, 28 July 1835, cols.1152-1183.

<sup>14</sup> *Hansard*, Series 3, Volume 38, 4 July 1837, cols.1790-1797.

<sup>15</sup> PP. 1839 (490) 475-480, *Reports of the Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioners*.

Keyser estimated that there were about 4,000 hand looms operating at the time in Macclesfield with very few cotton weavers and no linen weaving. He made reference to price lists which were generally adhered to but when giving evidence, John Prout claimed that the masters had taken advantage of the dependent state of the weavers, implying that prices had been imposed rather than agreed. Keyser also reported complaints from weavers about deductions made when work was delivered late. Claims were made that ‘late money’ was ‘enforced with partiality’ which implies that the manufacturers used rules to control those weavers they found to be difficult. Keyser also noted that the weavers’ opinions of their employers were ‘much influenced by some leading men amongst their fellow-workmen.’ He also revealed that there had been problems in securing the attendance of the weavers to give evidence as they preferred to ‘spend a day in listening to the speeches of Messrs. F. O’Connor, Stephens, &c., promising to redress all their grievances.’ As Keyser’s arrival in Macclesfield had coincided with a visit to the town by Chartist leader and *Northern Star* editor, Feargus O’Connor it is hardly surprising that Keyser was unable to compete for the attention of the weavers.<sup>16</sup> Keyser also referred to the weavers families and the fact that their children, rather than being an incumbrance were a benefit as they could earn nearly enough to pay for their maintenance. Mutual enthusiasm for child labour meant the weavers may have been inclined to condone breaches of legislation which restricted the working hours of their children. This would have given them some bargaining power but despite the earning capacity of their children, Keyser reported that the weavers did not expect to be able to generate savings. He went on to say that to improve their lot, the only option was to seek more profitable employment but, with few exceptions, this could only be achieved by the Macclesfield weavers through either re-location to other areas or emigration, an option which

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<sup>16</sup> Austin, p.101; P.J. Jupp, ‘O’Connor, Feargus Edward’, (1796?-1855)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

many would subsequently choose. Keyser also stated that the private conversations with weavers were ‘the best calculated to elicit the truth.’ He expressed the belief that in the public meetings the weavers contradicted the statements they made privately and presented their situation as being worse due to ‘the presence of some delegate or constituted authority.’ He also claimed that in public examinations several witnesses made exactly the same speeches, ‘in order to have them publicly reported.’ This implies that the weavers were well prepared to present a united front in conflicts with the manufacturers and this solidarity combined with the vulnerability of manufacturers operating in a volatile market must have created scope for compromise and resolution of conflict. Despite his extensive enquiries, Keyser failed to identify any solutions, stating that this should be left to others better qualified but there was no support from Government. Ongoing conflict between manufacturers and weavers was inevitable but dependency and bargaining power on both sides provided scope for resolution.

The partiality noted by Keyser regarding the deduction of late money appears to have been a tactic more widely used by the manufacturers to keep the weavers in line as it was also evident in relation to out-relief payments made to unemployed weavers. This was the practice revealed during the 1841 enquiry which also exposed the influence of manufacturers in the granting of poor relief. Testimony had been given at the same enquiry by John Morton, superintendent of the stone quarry where inmates of the workhouses were sent and Morton revealed that he had 10 weavers working there.<sup>17</sup> This is likely to have been a small proportion of the weavers out of work at that time and based on the testimony of May and Wilson, most would have been receiving out-relief and this is likely to have included both in-house weavers and undertakers but some must have been selected for less favourable treatment, a warning perhaps that concessions had to be earned through conformity. Effective

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<sup>17</sup> PP. 1846 (661) 40, *Reports received by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1841, on the state of the Macclesfield and Bolton Unions.*

trade union representation would have assisted the weavers in establishing a more balanced relationship but whilst Davies claims there was considerable trade union activity in Macclesfield in the nineteenth century, she adds that most of the records had been destroyed. She also refers to hand-loom weavers agreeing the prices they would accept and to weavers committees but other than the short-lived Macclesfield Board of Trade, there is no record of any formal bargaining process. Davies quotes from a booklet entitled ‘Rules and Orders to be observed by the Silk Weavers of Macclesfield’ which was addressed to ‘Brother Tradesmen’. After referring to the need to form a union, it set out rules for both journeymen and undertakers.<sup>18</sup> However, the apparent lack of formal negotiation suggests that in most cases, prices were imposed rather than agreed.

The volatility of the silk industry continued in the 1840s. There were 13 bankruptcies in Macclesfield in the first half of the decade but just three in the five years from 1845 to 1849. A trade depression in the earlier years of the decade resulted in wage reductions and in August 1842, a wave of strikes broke out in many industrial locations. Multiple reasons, including the issue of wages, have been cited for what Longden referred to as a ‘general strike’ while ‘strike wave’ is the term used by Dean who cites causes including agitation by Chartists and Anti Corn Law League supporters.<sup>19</sup> As reported in the press, groups referred to as ‘mobs’ were successful in forcing turnouts in different industries across many areas including Macclesfield, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, and locations further afield.<sup>20</sup> Many of the strikers would have supported the objectives of the Chartists and the ACLL as would some employers but the apparent ease with which the turn-outs were achieved suggests that increasing their wages was the primary objective of the strikers. Silk

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<sup>18</sup> C. Stella Davies, (ed.), *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961) pp.189-190.

<sup>19</sup> James Dean, ‘Ten Days of Tumult: The Mass Strike of 1842 in the West Riding of Yorkshire’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 90 (1), (2018), 128-157, p.128.

<sup>20</sup> ‘The Anti-Corn-Law League Riots’, *Southampton Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1842; ‘Disturbances in the Manufacturing Districts’, *Morning Post*, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1842.

manufacturing in Macclesfield could only survive by keeping the weavers employed and earning reasonable wages and whilst the protests might be seen as a threat to the industry, pressure on the employers from any source could also be regarded as beneficial to the weavers. Support for parliamentary reform in Macclesfield is likely to have included some manufacturers as, following the 1847 election, Chartist supporter and radical liberal, John Williams was elected as the borough's second MP.<sup>21</sup> This also suggests that some manufacturers who supported parliamentary reform shared a common bond with their weavers, inclining them to compromise but compromise could also be used as a control tactic as the weavers would be unaware of the scope the manufacturers had for making concessions.

The volatile nature of the silk trade in Macclesfield was particularly evident in 1850. In January, trade was reported to be improving and factories previously empty were tenanted and being fitted out but this optimism was balanced by the news of a shortage of China raw silk leading to predictions of decline.<sup>22</sup> By June some manufacturers had stopped production due to the depressed state of the market and whilst in August the throwing mills were busy due to high demand, the weavers were out of employment and the dyers were 'slack of work.'<sup>23</sup> In October, the *Manchester Examiner and Times* reported that there was insufficient work for the weavers of Macclesfield and manufacturers needed to 'keep production within the narrowest limits'.<sup>24</sup> The 6 bankruptcies in 1850 suggest that the speculation apparent in January may not have been a risk worth taking. On the 14<sup>th</sup> October, however, the *Morning Chronicle* reported an expectation of increased demand stimulated by the Great Exhibition planned for the following year but stated that the manufacturers were very cautious due to different opinions as to what the prevailing colours and styles might be.<sup>25</sup> This highlights the

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<sup>21</sup> Austin, p.111.

<sup>22</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1850.

<sup>23</sup> *Morning Post*, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1850; *Liverpool Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1850.

<sup>24</sup> *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1850.

<sup>25</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1850.

risk of predicting changes in fashion and the 8 bankruptcies reported in 1851-52 indicate that the Great Exhibition held in 1851 had encouraged more unwise speculation.

Another cause of the 'stop start' nature of the business was the seasonality of the trade. In October 1850, the *Morning Post* reported that most manufacturers were stopping production as far as possible to prepare for the spring trade and in December, the *Manchester Examiner and Times* also referred to the spring trade and the length of time it took for looms to be prepared to weave fancy goods. This had resulted in many operatives being unemployed until after Christmas.<sup>26</sup> The variability of work for the weavers suggests that for some, permanent employment was impossible and decisions in relation to the provision of work would have provided the manufacturers with another opportunity to exercise control through the partiality that was also evident in relation to 'late money' and poor relief.

The volatility in 1850 continued in 1851 with trade reported to be dull in February. The throwing trade was described as 'very depressed' in April and prices for weaving were being reduced significantly by the local board.<sup>27</sup> In June, the *Manchester Examiner and Times* claimed that half the Macclesfield weavers were out of employment and despite reports of improved demand for silk goods in July, the optimism regarding the impact of the Great Exhibition does not appear to have been justified.<sup>28</sup> Later in July, the *Morning Chronicle* reported that the Macclesfield Board of Trade, 'works well in the prevention of strikes and the equalisation of prices amongst the principle manufacturers' but reference to the practice of sending work to other areas suggests that the Macclesfield manufacturers agreed to prices they had no intention of paying except to those weavers they chose to favour.<sup>29</sup>

The abolition of the Macclesfield Board of Trade in 1852 removed the only formal negotiating mechanism between manufacturers and weavers but in 1856, a Select Committee

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<sup>26</sup> *Morning Post*, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1850; *The Manchester Examiner and Times*, 11th December, 1850.

<sup>27</sup> *Morning Post*, 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1851; *Macclesfield Courier*, quoted in *Morning Post*, 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1851.

<sup>28</sup> *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1851; *Morning Chronicle*, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1851.

<sup>29</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1851.

was appointed ‘to inquire into the ‘Expediency of establishing Equitable Tribunals for the amicable adjustment of differences between masters and operatives.’ It reported on 8<sup>th</sup> July that year having found that a considerable number of witnesses were in favour of establishing Boards of Arbitration between Masters and Workmen.<sup>30</sup> There were, however, differences of opinion as to how Boards should be constituted and the extent of their jurisdiction. The report referred to the existing arbitration law which allowed for disputes to be settled either summarily by a Justice of the Peace or by referees appointed by a Justice of the Peace. However, the Committee believed that this process was inoperative due to objections which included, in manufacturing districts, reluctance to have cases decided by Magistrates as they were ‘generally manufacturers, or else in some way connected with manufacturers.’ This objection would certainly have been evident in Macclesfield where John Brocklehurst, along with others connected to the silk trade, was a Justice of the Peace.<sup>31</sup> Whilst it is unlikely that Brocklehurst would have presided over such matters, the suspicion of influence behind the scenes would certainly have been sufficient for the arbitration process to be unworkable in Macclesfield. The proposals in the report included the establishment of Courts of Conciliation similar to those already existing in France but the committee also recognised the impossibility of giving these or any other tribunals the power to forcibly regulate wages.

Whilst the enquiry was of little value to Macclesfield, the evidence given to the Committee by Thomas Winters does reveal more about the abolished local Board of Trade. Winters was the Corresponding Secretary of the ‘National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Industry’ and when asked about price lists agreed between masters and workmen he stated, ‘the largest list that I know of anywhere as agreed to between master and workmen is contained in this book.’<sup>32</sup> The book he presented to the Committee contained ‘the

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<sup>30</sup> PP. 1856 (343) 3-4, *Select Committee on Masters and Operatives*.

<sup>31</sup> *Times*, 25th August, 1870, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> *Select Committee on Masters and Operatives*, p.21.

rules and regulations, and the list of prices fixed upon to be paid for weaving in the silk trade at Macclesfield.’ Whether this was the book referred to by Davies cannot be confirmed but Winters described it as a ‘very comprehensive one indeed’ adding that it was signed by the manufacturers and workmen. Winters went on to state that the prices had been agreed in 1849 by the Macclesfield Board of Trade which he described as being composed of twelve manufacturers and twelve operatives. He claimed that all disputes were settled amicably and during the board’s existence, there were no strikes but after three years, the board was discontinued due to Messrs Brocklehurst ‘refusing to be any longer bound by these rules.’ If Winters’ information is reliable, the citing of Messrs Brocklehurst as the firm responsible for the abolition of the Board emphasises both the firm’s dominance and its determination to retain control. The Brocklehursts preferred negotiation to be unburdened by rules they had not set themselves.

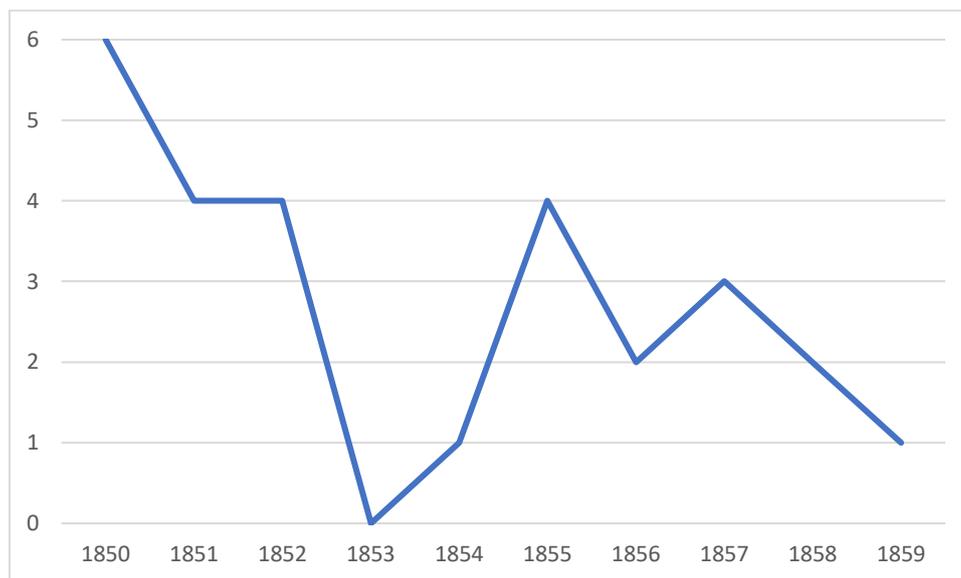
During the severe depression in 1857-8 referred to in Chapter 2, the employers shut down production and drew on their reserves, a strategy which ensured the survival of most firms. Of the 27 bankruptcies in the 1850s, only 5 occurred in the whole of 1857 and 1858 with just 1 in 1859 as indicated in Figure 2 which shows the trend in bankruptcies for the whole of the 1850s. Raw data is provided in Appendix 2. While most silk firms survived the 1857-8 depression, the impact fell heavily on the journeymen and undertakers.<sup>33</sup> The lack of alternative employment in Macclesfield made the depression particularly severe and no one could escape the impact. The observation of Solomon Keyser in 1838 proved accurate as most of the weavers and other employees had no savings and had to depend on poor relief, and charity and their plight did nothing to enhance the relationship between masters and weavers which was so important for the long term survival of silk manufacturing in Macclesfield. The presence in Macclesfield of the Poor Law Inspector for the district, Mr

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<sup>33</sup> PP. 1857 (2402) 43-46, *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*.

Doyle, prevented any bending of the rules in relation to relief but a delegation of weavers was allowed into a meeting of the Guardians in December 1857, attended by Doyle, to agree the work they would do in return for relief.<sup>34</sup> The distress of those thrown out of employment during the depression should not be underestimated but despite the need to comply with poor law legislation, expenditure on out-relief did increase by nearly a third from £6,058 in 1857 to £8,017 in 1858 and the employers could at least claim that as much had been done as possible within the law to alleviate the suffering.<sup>35</sup>

Figure 2: Macclesfield Silk Industry Bankruptcies 1850-1859



The recovery of the Macclesfield silk industry from the 1857-8 recession is proof of its ability to survive under the most extreme circumstances but Longden, after describing the impact of the depression, claims that by the winter of 1862 there had been a significant decline in the number of weavers working and a reduction of wages to 6s a week.<sup>36</sup> For

<sup>34</sup> *Macclesfield Courier*, quoted in, *Leigh Chronicle*, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1857.

<sup>35</sup> *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*, p.108; PP. 1858 (2500) 90, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*.

<sup>36</sup> George Longden, *Life and Labour in Victorian Macclesfield* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1986), p.25.

Macclesfield's unemployed at this time, the choice was between the offerings of the legally compliant Poor Law Guardians or acceptance of charity. The Cobden-Chevalier Treaty with France in 1860 had removed the last remaining protection against foreign silk imports and the future for the industry looked bleak.<sup>37</sup> Due to this, relocation had become an option which more Macclesfield weavers were taking up. Margrave points to the correlation between industrial decline and emigration and argues that labour disputes and the depression in the 1850s had prompted out-migration from Macclesfield prior to the treaty of 1860. Nearby Manchester was a favoured location but emigration to the colonies of Australia and New Zealand was also an option.<sup>38</sup> The reports of the Poor Law Board show that between 1851 and 1861, the population of the Macclesfield Union declined from 63,332 to 61,543.<sup>39</sup> However, the population reduction of 1,789 was less than 3% and does not indicate a mass exodus but enthusiasm for emigration was certainly evident especially after 1860. As Margrave argues, the treaty with France was based on national rather than local considerations and whilst free trade impacted negatively on the silk industry, it helped the overall domestic economy to achieve significant growth.<sup>40</sup> Despite this, Macclesfield remained dependent on the declining silk industry and in May 1863, its ratepayers petitioned the Mayor to convene a public meeting to consider how unemployed weavers might 'emigrate to some place where there is better demand for labour.'<sup>41</sup> An emigration committee was formed and became the Macclesfield Silk Weavers' Emigration Society. A limited number of free passages to America were provided for onwards travel to Canada but most emigrants chose to settle in Paterson, New Jersey where a silk industry was already

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<sup>37</sup> Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Dranes, 1921), pp.78-90.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Dobson Margrave, 'The Emigration of Silk Workers from England to the United States of America in the Nineteenth Century with Special Reference to Coventry, Macclesfield, Paterson, New Jersey, and South Manchester, Connecticut', (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1981), p.79.

<sup>39</sup> PP. 1861 (2820) 281, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*; PP. 1863 (3197) 297, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*.

<sup>40</sup> Margrave, p.84.

<sup>41</sup> Margrave, pp.91-92.

established.<sup>42</sup> The exact numbers of weavers emigrating from Macclesfield and choosing Paterson cannot be determined but Davies claims that by 1900, there were 3,000 former residents of Macclesfield in Paterson.<sup>43</sup> This does not suggest that by the mid 1860s, the industry had been deprived of weavers it needed in order to survive. Davies also claims it was at this time that John Brocklehurst kept his mills open and suffered the loss of £70,000 referred to in chapter 3.<sup>44</sup> However, unless a significant upturn in the industry's fortunes was expected, there was nothing to gain from reducing the number of departures. They benefited both the industry and the town by removing excess labour and reducing the level of conflict and the pressure on the rate payers. But whether or not Brocklehurst's decision was a genuine act of charity, the silk industry in Macclesfield did survive. Writing in 1921, Sir Frank Warner, having detailed the eradication of the silk trade in locations such as Spitalfields and Coventry goes on to state that the town of Macclesfield had, 'the best claim to be regarded as the present headquarters of the British silk industry.'<sup>45</sup> The strategies employed by the Macclesfield manufacturers, unscrupulous or otherwise, had allowed the industry to survive for much longer than elsewhere despite the continual conflict and poverty it created amongst its workforce.

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<sup>42</sup> Margrave, p.96.

<sup>43</sup> Davies, p.140.

<sup>44</sup> Davies, p.136.

<sup>45</sup> Warner, p.127.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has shown how the silk industry in Macclesfield survived following the legislation in 1824 which removed the prohibition on manufactured silk imports. Because it was involved in all aspects of the production process, all the complexities of silk manufacturing had to be managed as well as the relationship with the weavers and operatives. Foreign competition added to those challenges but the impact was less significant in other locations such as Coventry where the silk industry was more specialised and hence, less complex.

Due to the establishment in Macclesfield of a tradition of silk manufacturing and the influence of the predominantly silk manufacturing elite, the town and borough persisted almost exclusively with silk production throughout the period covered by this dissertation and beyond. In terms of its economic dimensions, Macclesfield can be seen to have progressed through the first three stages of development identified by Rostow.<sup>1</sup> Beginning as a traditional society with a ceiling on the level of attainable income per head, the cottage industry allowed the ceiling to be broken and take-off was generated through the exploitation of expanding world markets. Rostow argues that the 'maturity' stage was reached when an economy achieved the capacity to move beyond the industries which generated the take-off. This was evident in other regions which developed new industries but Macclesfield maintained a high level of dependency on an industry producing luxury goods with high demand elasticity and continual peaks and troughs of activity. This study therefore supports Hudson's argument in relation to the influence of elite power and tradition but also shows that they were important in securing the industry's survival.<sup>2</sup> Macclesfield had become

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<sup>1</sup> W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.4-10.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p.111.

dependent on an industry so volatile that unscrupulous strategies were necessary to sustain it and this was a course the elite of Macclesfield were well placed to follow. The volatility of the industry increased after the customs changes and this created conflicts as operatives and weavers continually suffered loss of work which caused significant distress and social disruption. Few of those working in the industry could rely on continuity of employment but the strategies devised and deployed by the manufacturers to address the challenges they faced created more distress. Shutting down the mills and factories and drawing on reserves proved to be highly effective during the 1857-8 depression. Despite its severity and the distress it caused to the workforce, very few businesses failed and the lack of alternative employment ensured that the pool of labour was still available when production resumed. The relationship with the weavers was also managed through the exercise of partiality in relation to 'late money' as identified by Solomon Keyser during the enquiry of 1838. Reducing the prices for weaving, often without the agreement of the weavers was a strategy which cut production costs in order to compete with rivals and maintain profit margins. It also caused considerable hardship to the weavers and on occasions when agreements were made with them, the manufacturers would send work to other areas in order to avoid paying the higher prices to which they had agreed. The use of the poor rates to subsidise wages when demand was low allowed the employers to reduce working hours and retain the hands they needed when demand improved but the wage subsidy could also be used as a control tactic as it could be denied to those out of favour and this can be seen as another example of partiality. The combination of in-house weaving and 'putting-out' also ensured that labour was available when demand increased but it too could be used for the purpose of control as the provision of work to undertakers could also be exercised with partiality.

The situation in Macclesfield gave rise to appeals and petitions to government but these were rejected out of hand with government ministers claiming that distress in Macclesfield

was the result of speculative investment. However, the research conducted for this study suggests that whilst new mills had been built by speculative investors, they were never fully operational and wage reductions, unemployment and distress were suffered by those employed in established businesses as a consequence of government legislation. Lees refers to the influence of newspapers such as the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the *Northern Star* which blamed poverty on middle-class capitalists and unjust political representation. This appears to fit the situation in Macclesfield as poverty was created by the manufacturers as they sought to maintain profitability but Lees claims that poverty was caused, 'at the level of the entire society, not the individual.'<sup>3</sup> This study supports both theories. The strategies deployed by the middle-class manufacturers were, to a large extent, a response to the actions of government and whilst it must be concluded that the most successful strategies were the ones which caused most suffering to the workforce, government trade policy implemented without due consideration of the impact on local industry was the root cause. This was a policy which could be construed as interventionist as the government claimed it would stimulate improvement in the silk industry but this was refuted by Brocklehurst in his testimony before the 1832 Select Committee and it is much more likely that replacing prohibition with tariffs averaging 30% was a policy introduced to raise revenue.

Despite the conflicts, the complexities and the negative impact of government policy, the silk industry in Macclesfield survived throughout the period covered by this dissertation and beyond, albeit on a reduced scale. The dominant firm of J. and T. Brocklehurst was at the forefront of the issues this study has examined and, as Warner reveals, the firm survived into the twentieth century long after the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty with France in 1860 and the

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.158-159.

disappearance of silk manufacturing from Spitalfields and other areas. The firm remained in family ownership until 1911 when it became a limited company under new management.<sup>4</sup>

The struggles of the working population of Macclesfield have been extensively documented and discussed by local historians but the question of how silk manufacturing survived in Macclesfield for longer than in other areas has attracted little detailed attention. Poor law studies also make no specific reference to the wage subsidy revealed by May, Wilson and Shalwell in 1841. Their surprisingly frank revelations suggest that similar subsidies existed in other industrial locations and their seemingly efficient management of out-relief in support of the silk industry contrasts with Edsall's description of poor law administration in northern textile districts as 'chaotic'.<sup>5</sup> There is also scope for researching other issues associated with the silk industry. This would include, for example, investigation of John Brocklehurst's claim that the government had used the silk industry for a trade reform experiment. Indeed, further detailed studies of the relationship between government and local industries in the nineteenth century would add to the understanding of industrial development.

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<sup>4</sup> Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Dranes, 1921), p.135.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas C. Edsall, *The anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), p.213.

## Appendix 1

English Silk Industry Bankruptcies and Partnership Dissolutions Reported in the Press  
in 1825 and 1826

London (Excluding Spitalfields) 1825

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
17/01/25	Times	J.P. Makeham & W.H. Hayward	Silk Manufacturer	Partnership Dissolution
20/02/25	Sunday Times	W.W. Smith	Silk Mercer	Bankruptcy
10/3/25	Berrows Worcester Journal	Thomas Wren	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
14/04/25	Caledonian Mercury	H.T. Robinson	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
21/04/25	Caledonian Mercury	C. Smith	Silk Mercer	Bankruptcy
05/06/25	The Age	Hora, Nail and Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
19/06/25	The Age	J. Wright and J. Ragg	Silk Mercers	Partnership Dissolution
17/07/25	The Age	Forsyth & Bigs	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution
01/10/25	Caledonian Mercury	J. Kincaid	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
02/10/25	Sunday Times	J. Cork & J. Blagg	Silk Mercers	Partnership Dissolution
17/10/25	John Bull	Holman and Dunnett	Silk Warehousemen	Partnership Dissolution
29/10/25	Derby Mercury	W.S.W.H. Baker	Silk Hat Maker	Bankruptcy
07/11/25	John Bull	W. & J. Blincow	Silk Warehousemen	Partnership Dissolution
10/12/25	Caledonian Mercury	J. Daniel	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
22/12/25	Caledonian Mercury	H. Ochsenbein	Silk Mercer	Bankruptcy
29/12/25	Caledonian Mercury	G. Garsh	Silk Mercer	Bankruptcy
31/12/25	Caledonian Mercury	R. Camplin	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy

London (Excluding Spitalfields) 1826

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
04/01/26	Morning Chronicle	T. Wilkinson & J. Mulcaster	Silk Warehousemen	Partnership Dissolved
23/01/26	Morning Post	W. Dickinson	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
26/01/26	Caledonian Mercury	G. Mills	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
28/01/26	Lancaster Gazette	S. Morrey	Silk Mercer	Bankruptcy
18/02/26	Morning Post	W. Hayden & W. Ash	Silk Mercers	Partnership Dissolved
02/03/26	Caledonian Mercury	H. Warland	Silk Warehouseman	Bankruptcy
26/03/26	Bell's Life in London	H. Congreve & R. Hill	Silk and Ribbon Manufacturers	Bankruptcy
15/04/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	Robert Leeming & Thomas Tatlock	Silk Brokers	Bankruptcy
14/05/26	Sunday Times	J. S. Sweeting & J. J. Bygrave	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
15/05/25	John Bull	Ewer & Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
26/05/26	Liverpool Mercury	J. Cattell	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
19/06/26	John Bull	Goodall & Co	Silk Manufacturer	Partnership Dissolved
26/06/26	Bristol Mercury	H. Rodwell	Silk Broker	Bankruptcy
05/07/26	Morning Post	Douglas & Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
28/07/26	Liverpool Mercury	W. Rogers	Silk Warehouseman	Bankruptcy
26/08/26	Morning Chronicle	A. Leigh & William Sherwood	Silk Mercers	Partnership Dissolved
16/09/26	Morning Post	W. Thompson & Son	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
30/10/26	John Bull	Sansum & Davies	Silk Mercers	Partnership Dissolved
09/11/26	Caledonian Mercury	J. Wray	Silk and Bombazine Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
18/11/26	Morning Chronicle	James Dawson & Charles Comber	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
20/12/26	Morning Post	J. Evitts & J. Taylor	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
30/12/26	Morning Post	J. Bamford & E. Varnish	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved

Macclesfield 1825

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
12/01/25	Morning Post	J. Habgood jnr and T. Parker	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
28/05/25	Lancaster Gazette	J. Ridgway	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
10/07/25	The Age	J. Braddock and J. Jackson	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
11/07/25	Morning Chronicle	Frank Fletcher and Charles Fletcher	Silk Throwsters and Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
11/09/25	The Sunday Times	H. Yates and I. Smith	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
30/10/25	The Sunday Times	J. Cooper and T. Johnson	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
04/12/25	Bell's Life in London	J. Braddock	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
04/12/25	The Age	T. Keats and G. Taylor	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
10/12/25	Caledonian Mercury	J. Rowbotham	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
22/12/25	Berrows Worcester Journal	Samuel Bratt	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
28/12/25	Morning Post	J. Jackson and F. Jackson	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved

Macclesfield 1826

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
01/01/26	Bell's Life in London	J. Habgood Jnr	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
28/02/26	Morning Post	J. Preston and G. Mayson	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
18/03/26	Lancaster Gazette	Thomas Clay	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy
22/03/26	Derby Mercury	S. Higginbotham	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
15/04/26	Caledonian Mercury	W. Bailey	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy
16/04/26	Bell's Life in London	J. Wadsworth	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
26/04/26	Morning Post	J. Firth and F. Sadler	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
01/05/26	Morning Post	G.F. Barker and G.K. Pearson	Silk Manufacturers	Bankruptcy
06/05/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	Thomas Parker	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
06/05/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	John Harden and Peter Higginbotham	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
19/05/26	Liverpool Mercury	J. Forster and Co	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy
03/06/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	H. Barlow	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
29/07/26	Times	P. Bailly, R. Malkin, T. Henshaw & T. Huntsworth	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
23/09/26	Morning Post	T. Hall and E. Hall	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
04/10/26	Morning Post	T. Bullock and J Hooley	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved

Manchester 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
01/01/25	Lancaster Gazette	J. Collier and W. Wood	Silk Ribbon Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
01/01/25	Lancaster Gazette	W.J. ?, P. Fletcher and C. Fletcher	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
11/05/25	Morning Post	T. Crewdson & Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
10/07/25	Bell's Life in London	H. Thomas	Silk Mercer and Draper	Bankruptcy
25/10/25	Morning Post	C. Rickards and J. Walmsley	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
08/01/26	Sunday Times	J. Holland and R. Groves	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
04/03/26	Lancaster Gazette	J. Oaks and R. Aubrey	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
11/03/26	Lancaster Gazette	B. Benton and C. Yates	Silk Merchants	Partnership Dissolved
01/04/26	Lancaster Gazette	Millington and Smith	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
16/04/26	Bell's Life in London	J. Hewson and J. Stuart	Silk Manufacturers	Bankruptcy
27/09/26	Morning Post	J. Pratt and T. Smith	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
30/09/26	Lancaster Gazette	Swindells and Barge	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
31/12/26	Sunday Times	H. Farington and T. Cash	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved

Spitalfields 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
25/04/25	John Bull	Dale and Ballard	Silk Machine Makers	Partnership Dissolved
27/04/25	Morning Post	E. Turner & R. Camplin	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
12/09/25	Morning Post	C. Guillotte and D. Morel	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
18/09/25	The Age	I. Martin and D. Martin	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
21/11/25	Morning Post	J.J. Jaques and J. Racine	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
26/12/25	John Bull	Martin & Tourell	Silk Weavers	Partnership Dissolved
22/01/26	The Age	A.C. Mann	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
04/03/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	James Gammon	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
28/06/26	Derby Mercury	J. Brownell	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
29/07/26	Times	J.D. and D.E. Bagg	Silk & Satin Dressers	Partnership Dissolved
05/08/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	J. Baptist Galiegue	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy

Congleton 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
23/02/26	Morning Post	J. Hall and T. Vawdrey	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
19/05/26	Liverpool Mercury	P. Gent	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy
28/06/26	Morning Post	S. Jackson	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
08/07/26	Royal Cornwall Gazette	William Thomas Power and Samuel Jackson	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
19/08/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	James Johnson	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy
04/09/26	John Bull	Hall and Johnson	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved
09/12/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	George Bullock	Silk Throwster	Bankruptcy

Coventry 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
21/02/25	John Bull	Caldicott and Russell	Silk Dyers	Partnership Dissolved
13/04/25	Morning Post	E. Bamford and J. Overton	Silk Dyers	Partnership Dissolved
24/07/25	The Sunday Times	J.W. Caldicott and J.B. Vuldy	Silk Dyers	Partnership Dissolved
30/07/25	Jackson's Oxford Journal	Thomas Paine	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
18/10/26	Morning Post	T. Dalton & Co	Silk Dyers	Partnership Dissolved

Derby 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
10/01/26	Morning Post	S. Mills & Co	Silk Shawl Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
28/01/26	Jackson's Oxford Journal	William Goodale	Silk Throwster and Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
08/03/26	Derby Mercury	G. Milner	Silk Manufacturer	Bankruptcy
13/04/26	Morning Post	T. Hill & Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved

Norwich 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
07/07/25	Morning Post	J. Saunders and J. Bushell	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
25/09/25	Sunday Times	A & E Pye	Silk Fillers	Partnership Dissolved

Braintree 1825-6

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
22/12/25	Morning Post	J. Appleby and T. Huitson	Silk Ribbon Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolved
25/05/26	Morning Post	R. Smith and S. Morse	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolved

Appendix 2English Silk Industry Bankruptcies and Partnership Dissolutions Reported in the Press in 1824London

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
12/1/1824	Morning Post	W.W. Smith	Silk Merchant	Partnership Dissolution
14/1/1824	Morning Chronicle	E. Fellows and W.J. Brown	Silk-Men	Partnership Dissolution
2/2/1824	Morning Chronicle	James Bill	Silk Manufacturer	Partnership Dissolution
19/5/1824	Morning Chronicle	Joseph Barker	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt
28/6/1824	Morning Chronicle	Samuel London Field	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt
8/7/1824	Berrows Worcester Journal	William Moody	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt
10/11/1824	Morning Chronicle	Patrick Campbell and Edward Andrews	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution
10/11/1824	Morning Post	Adams & Co	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution
24/11/1824	Morning Post	B. Charlesworth & J.C. Crampin	Silk Warehousemen	Partnership Dissolution
1/12/1824	Morning Chronicle	Charles Fennell Thompson	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt
1/12/1824	Morning Post	J & H Smart	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution

Spitalfields

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
1/1/1824	Berrows Worcester Journal	James Durant	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt
26/1/1824	The Examiner	T. Montgomery	Silk Manufacturer	Bankrupt

Manchester

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
22/12/1824	Morning Post	J. Collier & W. Wood	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution
22/12/1824	Morning Post	W. J. Edensor & Co.	Silk Throwsters	Partnership Dissolution

Leek

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
28/4/1824	Morning Post	T. Sutton & Co.	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution

Macclesfield

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
14/7/1824	Morning Post	F. Sadler & J. Dewhurst	Silk Manufacturers	Partnership Dissolution

Worcester

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Individual or Business	Nature of Business	Case Type
15/3/1824	Morning Post	J. Preen Jnr	Silk Mercer	Bankrupt

## Appendix 3

Macclesfield Silk Industry Bankruptcies Reported in the Press - 1828 to 1865

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Bankrupt	Nature of Business
21/06/1828	Morning Post	John Broadhurst	Silk Manufacturer
03/08/1828	The Examiner	J. Moore	Silk Manufacturer
28/01/1829	Morning Chronicle	Henry Yates	Silk Throwster
31/01/1829	Morning Chronicle	Jonathan Higginbotham	Silk Manufacturer
04/03/1829	Morning Chronicle	Thomas Hall	Silk Manufacturer
01/04/1829	Morning Post	Moses Armfield	Silk Manufacturer
06/06/1829	Morning Post	William Bayley	Silk Manufacturer
11/1/1832	Morning Post	James Wigan	Silk Manufacturer
31/1/1835	Morning Post	William Jackson	Silk Manufacturer
26/10/1836	Morning Post	S. Cheetham & T. Wadsworth	Silk Throwsters
20/4/1837	Bradford Observer	George Kent Pearson	Silk Throwster
17/7/1839	Morning Post	C. Jackson	Silk Throwster
4/12/1839	Morning Post	William and John Taylor	Silk Manufacturers
25/1/1840	Morning Post	Samuel Johnson	Silk Throwster
22/4/1840	Morning Post	James Brooke	Silk Manufacturer
27/5/1840	Morning Post	Samuel Bradley Booth	Silk Manufacturer
8/4/1841	Morning Post	Richard & John Burgess	Silk Throwsters
29/7/1841	Bradford Observer	William & John Newton	Silk Throwsters
13/5/1842	Essex Standard	J. Tilston	Silk Manufacturer

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Bankrupt	Nature of Business
22/10/1842	York Herald	Thomas Allen	Silk Manufacturer
13/3/1844	Morning Post	William Pott	Silk Throwster
13/7/1844	Manchester Times	John Crowder & John Green jnr	Trimming Manufacturer
13/7/1844	Southampton Herald	H. Whittaker	Silk Throwster
7/8/1844	Morning Post	J. Bloor	Trimming Manufacturer
21/9/1844	Morning Post	John Ball & William Ball	Trimming Manufacturer
5/10/1844	The Examiner	J. Metcalf	Trimming Manufacturer
22/3/1845	The Examiner	J.L. Machu	Trimming Manufacturer
19/4/1848	Morning Chronicle	Adam Marsland	Silk Manufacturer
22/11/1848	Morning Post	Mathew Warren	Silk Dyer
13/2/1850	The Standard	William Pownall	Silk Manufacturer
12/6/1850	The Standard	Jonas Harrop	Silk Dyer
24/7/1850	Morning Chronicle	Ralph Nuttall	Silk Manufacturer
21/8/1850	The Standard	William Goodwin	Silk Manufacturer
6/11/1850	Manchester Times	Abraham Hooley	Silk Manufacturer
9/11/1850	Huddersfield Chronicle	John Rowbotham	Silk Manufacturer
16/7/1851	Morning Post	Samuel Joule and John Joule	Silk Manufacturers
25/10/1851	Huddersfield Chronicle	John Power	Silk Manufacturer
25/10/1851	Morning Post	John Howard	Silk Manufacturer
01/11/1851	Morning Post	Joseph Day and Thomas Day	Silk Manufacturers
14/2/1852	Huddersfield Chronicle	Mathew Warren	Silk Dyer

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Bankrupt	Nature of Business
10/3/1852	Manchester Times	William Frost	Silk Throwster
31/3/1852	Manchester Times	Robert Johnston	Silk Manufacturer
3/4/1852	Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph	William Higginbotham	Silk Manufacturer
9/6/1854	The Standard	Samuel Walton	Silk Manufacturer
3/1/1855	Daily News	Thomas Wadsworth	Silk Dealer
28/2/1855	Morning Post	James Johnson	Silk Dyer
20/4/1855	The Standard	Thomas Holder	Silk Throwster
12/5/1855	Morning Post	Charles Condron	Silk Manufacturer
23/3/1856	Berrows Worcester Journal	John Prout	Silk Manufacturer
25/10/1856	Southampton Herald	John Bourne and Thomas Rowson	Silk Manufacturers
8/10/1857	Nottinghamshire Guardian	S. Bayley and T Russell	Silk Dyers
9/12/1857	Essex Standard	Joseph Dunkerley	Silk Manufacturer
26/12/1857	Huddersfield Chronicle	James and Charles Howard	Silk Manufacturers
23/1/1858	York Herald	James Norton	Silk Dyer
2/6/1858	Blackburn Standard	W and T Bullock	Silkmen
11/6/1859	Berrows Worcester Journal	Thomas Heaps	Silk Throwster
28/11/1860	Southampton Herald	Peter Sherratt	Silk Manufacturer
22/6/1861	The Examiner	D. Brown and W. Brown	Silk Manufacturers
18/10/1862	Morning Post	James Johnson	Silk Dyer
10/12/1862	Morning Post	Samuel Smith	Silk Manufacturer
22/4/1863	Leeds Mercury	W. Harman	Silk Manufacturer

Date of Report	Paper Name	Name of Bankrupt	Nature of Business
12/9/1863	Birmingham Daily Post	J. Cooper	Silk Manufacturer
24/10/1863	Huddersfield Chronicle	S. Brown	Silk Agent
27/1/1864	Sheffield Independent	D. Hooton	Silk Manufacturer
25/2/1864	Liverpool Mercury	James Nightingale	Silk Manufacturer
23/4/1864	Huddersfield Chronicle	J. Ridgway	Silk Manufacturer
3/4/1865	Liverpool Mercury	John Allcock	Silk Throwster
2/11/1865	Liverpool Mercury	Henry Orme	Silk Twister

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