The Impact of the Cotton Famine on the Lace Industry in Nottingham: Economy, Poverty and Global Connections 1861-1865

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The Impact of the Cotton Famine on the Lace Industry in Nottingham:

Economy, Poverty and Global Connections

1861-1865

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MA Library and Information Studies (Loughborough University)

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of the cotton famine on Nottingham from 1861 to 1865, comparing it to the level of economic crisis and destitution in Lancashire cotton towns. The focus is on the lace industry showing Nottingham’s place in the global network of the cotton trade and uncovering the responses to humanitarian issues such as war slavery and poverty. There is very little existing research on the connection between lace, cotton, slavery and the American Civil War. The effects of cotton shortages on towns outside Lancashire that were reliant on the thread produced by the cotton mills has also been overlooked. Nottingham’s staple industries of lace and hosiery both used cotton as their main raw material and had become over dependent on a single source of supply produced by the enslaved. Newspaper reports on the state of trade, company accounts and records of bankruptcy reveal the economic performance of the lace industry over the years of the American Civil War. This shows that, although seriously affected, there were periods when orders and employment recovered slightly. There were also other important factors affecting the economic performance of the industry such as: alternative export markets, innovation, fashion and business cycles. Levels of poverty were not as high in Nottingham as in Manchester but a significant increase in recipients of outdoor relief shows unemployment increased, with a disproportionate impact on the able bodied and on women over the period. Charity, relief funds and self-help options were a necessity to alleviate distress and an emergent official support net for the poor is in evidence. Support for anti-slavery in Nottingham is apparent but the connection between the enslaved production of the raw material and lace manufacturing is hard to establish. Although there was awareness of the need to find new sources of cotton, it is more an economic imperative than an ethical argument; only isolated examples were found of support for free labour cotton, or its use to make lace in Nottingham.
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**Abbreviations**

BFASS  British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society

NA    Nottinghamshire Archives

NDE   Nottingham Daily Express

NG    Nottinghamshire Guardian

NJGA  Nottingham Journal and General Advertiser

UoN Mss  University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections
Glossary

**Bobbinet or bobbin net:** lace made by a machine invented by John Heathcoat in Loughborough in 1809. Flat round bobbins were used in carriages to pass through and round vertical threads.

**Fancy Lace:** a sector of the lace trade producing machine made lace with intricate designs.

**Jacquard:** a system of cards punched with holes invented for the weaving loom by J M Jacquard in France about 1800. Applied to lace machines for applying pattern.

**Lace Runner:** the job of adding a pattern to lace net, by hand embroidery, usually performed by women.

**Leaver’s machine:** is an adaptation of Heathcoat’s machine by John Levers (the ‘a’ was added to aid pronunciation in France) in Nottingham in 1813. The original machine-made net but it was discovered that the Jacquard technique for applying pattern could be added to it.

**Plain net:** Plain hexagonal mesh with no pattern.

**Pusher machine:** a variation of Heathcoat’s machine, created by Samuel Clark and James Mart in 1812. It takes its name from the rods which pushed the carriages through the machine.

**Scolloper or Scalopper:** the job of cutting loose threads from the finished lace.

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Personal Statement

I declare that this dissertation is my own 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.

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1. Introduction

The American Civil War was an event with global repercussions and its effect on the cotton manufacturing districts of Lancashire has been well documented. Beckert sees the outbreak of war as a struggle, ‘over global capitalism’s dependence on slave labor across the world’ and questions whether the existing industrial order would be able to adapt.¹ Lace manufacturing was central to the industrial development of Nottingham in the nineteenth century but few histories of the industry mention the problems of supply of the main raw material, cotton, during the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, or its links to slavery. The lace industry was unique in its structure and development, with Nottingham at the centre of the finishing and merchant functions. It was an industry linked by its main raw material and export markets to national and international events. This research will compare the economic impact on Nottingham and Lancashire, investigate resulting levels of poverty and evaluate the political and humanitarian responses to the crisis.

The use of cotton in the lace industry tied Nottingham to the global network of production and trade, outlined in the work of Beckert and Riello.² The American Civil War highlighted the problem of overdependence on one country for supply and export but there is debate about how far the impact was felt beyond the Lancashire cotton towns. Most of the research on the cotton famine relates to Lancashire and covers the hardship experienced by cotton workers, the problems

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of the existing system of poor relief, allegiances to either the Confederacy or Union and the fear of unrest. Blackett’s research on the impact of the American Civil War describes textile areas outside Lancashire, including Nottingham, as ‘devastated’.\textsuperscript{3} Church describes the hundreds unemployed in lace and hosiery in the early 1860s but as just one of several commercial crises in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{4} Support for emancipation of slaves and the free grown produce movement are further elements closely tied to the diplomatic and economic issues of the war. Marx sees the influence of the cotton workers as securing Britain’s neutrality but Blackett and Ellison both show a much less uniform pattern of support for either side in the war.\textsuperscript{5} Olusoga describes Britain as seeing itself, ‘in a position of global moral leadership’ following abolition; three decades later, the importance of the cotton industry to the economy meant Britain was ‘economically speaking, up to her neck in Southern cotton slavery’.\textsuperscript{6} The attitudes of Nottingham people, tied to these international issues and events, has so far received little attention.

The area of study is the town of Nottingham or the ‘county of the town of Nottingham’ which consisted of three parishes: St Mary’s, St Nicholas and St Peter.\textsuperscript{7} St Mary’s is the largest of the three parishes containing nearly four fifths of the population.

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Nottinghamshire: History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County and of the Town and the County of the Town of Nottingham} (Sheffield, Francis White and Co., 1864) pp.108-109.
This area, shown in Map 1, was chosen because of the concentration of lace warehouses, workshops and factories in the town and because it corresponds with the area used in Census reports and with the Nottingham Poor Law Union. Although this excludes lace industries in the industrial villages outside the town boundary, it enables more accurate comparison of data. Further qualitative information has been

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included where the exact location is unknown or if it provides a useful example but is outside the town boundary. The time period chosen, 1861 to 1865, coincides with the years of the American Civil War but evidence from outside this period is included where it illustrates a trend or provides a comparison.

A range of primary sources have been used to build a picture of the economic and social impact of the cotton famine. Census reports on occupations of 1851, 1861 and 1871 indicate the numbers employed in the lace industry and how this changed over time. Trade Directories provide listings of businesses involved in lace to establish trends. Records from the Nottingham Poor Law Union allow comparisons of those receiving relief in Nottingham and in Lancashire, also showing lace industry employees admitted to the workhouse. Local newspapers provide statistics from the Nottingham Board of Guardians’ meetings and reports of the economic conditions in the town. These are used to quantify the impact on the local economy and resulting levels of poverty. Detailed accounts from a local lace manufacturer, James Fisher and Sons, provide evidence of profit and loss during this period. Editorials in the local press give an indication of attitudes towards the Civil War, support for emancipation, the search for new sources of supply and unrest in the town. The use of local newspapers has been limited to two titles, the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* and the *Nottingham Daily Express* both of which are available online for the years of study. Other titles were unavailable due the temporary closure of Nottingham Central Library. Although providing invaluable statistics and reports, the political outlook of the paper is likely to affect the representation of opinions. The *NG* started as a
protectionist paper aimed at the country gentry, remaining Tory in outlook, in contrast to the Liberal, nonconformist stance of the *NDE*.\(^9\)

Chapter Two describes the development of the lace industry and the existing factors contributing to economic vulnerability. Chapter Three provides an analysis of economic trends, bankruptcies, occupations and a lace manufacturer’s profit and loss, developing a clearer picture of the extent of the depression and its causes. Chapter Four examines the levels of suffering and poverty through the existing system of poor relief, charities and self-help, to allow comparisons with Lancashire towns and with previous trade depressions in Nottingham. Chapter Five examines attitudes towards free-grown cotton, antislavery campaigns and support for the Confederacy, to determine how this was related to the economic priorities of the town.

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2. The Economic Development of the Lace Industry in Nottingham

To understand what was happening to the lace industry during the 1860s when there was a shortage of cotton during the American Civil War, it is necessary to explore the position of the industry in Nottingham, its dependence on specific yarns, innovations in machinery, changing fashions and industrial structure. The industry at this time combined many different processes carried out by businesses of differing size, in a variety of locations and using a range of machinery. Nottingham Lace refers to machine made lace which originally used adapted stocking frames to make net from about 1760.1 Nottingham was a centre for the hosiery industry so the two industries developed side by side, their initial growth also being partly dependent on the location of cotton spinning mills in the late eighteenth century.2 In 1861, 2634 males and 6066 females listed their occupation as lace manufacture in Nottingham; equivalent to twelve per cent of those occupied.3 Only hosiery in male occupations and housewives in female occupations equal or exceed these figures, illustrating the high dependency on the lace industry, often for entire families.

Location and structure

Nottingham Lace originally referred to machine-made net produced on a stocking frame where the pattern was added by hand. Factories and workshops were located in several regions but Nottingham was the centre for processing through the Lace

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Market.4 William Felkin lists 660 bobbin net machines in Devon, 500 in Derbyshire and 700 in Nottingham in 1865 and stresses how ‘the entire production continues to be finished and sold in Nottingham’.5 The lace manufacturers were concentrated in the Lace Market area of the town, buying the brown net from lace makers then finishing and marketing the end product. This involved sending unfinished lace to a specialist dye works then undertaking finishing processes in warehouses or through outworking. The finishing process mainly employed women to inspect, mend, clip and scallop by hand.6 ‘The fragmented nature of the Nottingham lace trade, in which many individual companies contributed to the finished product, ‘mirrors the way in which many individual threads are interlinked in the lace itself.’7 Baxter sees the complex network of different processes both within the factory and beyond to the finished product as a collaborative process with companies in competition but also dependent upon the quality of work produced at each stage of the process.8

Innovation and entrepreneurship

With Nottingham at the centre of manufacturing, finishing, marketing and machine building, the importance of accumulated local knowledge was evident in the innovations that had taken place in the industry since Heathcote’s invention of the bobbin net machine in 1808.9 Church emphasizes that, although based in Loughborough, Heathcote made no further contributions to innovation after he left

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4 Mason, p.1.
8 Baxter, p.42.
9 Church, p.60.
the area for Devon and William Nunn, a large manufacturer, went out of business following a move to the Isle of Wight where local ideas were no longer accessible.\textsuperscript{10} The exception to this is the flow of lace makers from Britain to Calais from around 1823, escaping competition and lowering wages, yet maintaining links to technical advances from a distance.\textsuperscript{11} Protecting new ideas and adaptations to machines was important to a business’s competitiveness but slowed the wider adoption of new techniques. This is shown by the application of the jacquard, a system that allowed patterns to be added to lace. Simon Draper held patents for its application to lace machines in 1834 but before licenses could be granted for other manufacturers three large companies bought the rights and prevented purchase of licenses until 1844.\textsuperscript{12}

Personal prosperity did not necessarily come from innovation. Felkin describes the experience of John Woodhouse Bagley, ‘one of the most singularly gifted mechanical minds’ who made many beneficial improvements to the bobbin net machine but failed to fully profit from them because he lacked the resources to challenge patent infringements.\textsuperscript{13} In 1856 Bagley wrote an account of his experience ending with the comment, ‘Many are enjoying wealth from my labours, I am in difficulty to know how to pay my way’.\textsuperscript{14} James Fisher employed William Crofts as principle mechanic and funded patents for improvements to machines making spotted net costing up to £5000. This considerable investment meant Fisher had a

\textsuperscript{10} Church, p.62.
\textsuperscript{11} Fabrice Bensimon, ‘The Emigration of British Lacemakers to Continental Europe (1816-1860s)’, Continuity and Change, 34.1 (2019) 15-41, (pp.21,36).
\textsuperscript{12} Mason, Nottinghamp Lace p.35.
\textsuperscript{14} Felkin, A History p.375.
virtual monopoly on any lace product with a spot in its design.\textsuperscript{15} Crofts was another example of an innovator with great mechanical skill who did not receive a just monetary reward in Felkin’s view.\textsuperscript{16} Mcleod’s research shows the difference between the experiences of artisan innovator John Levers who produced his bobbin net machine for sale and John Heathcoat a user innovator employing his own equipment in his factories.\textsuperscript{17} Levers remained in poverty despite his name being synonymous with one of the most employed machines in the industry while Heathcoat was earning up to £10,000 a year from licenses before his patent expired in 1823.\textsuperscript{18} An early interventionist proposal in 1835 was to set up a Mechanical Board which would try to mitigate the problems of expensive litigation and protect inventors from the expense and uncertainty of the patent laws.\textsuperscript{19} Before 1860 there was no single, standardized machinery for lace making but piecemeal adaptation and improvement to machines of different types producing different varieties of lace. Although certain innovations stand out, the development of the industry was gradual and incremental with continual adaptations. From 1860 onwards, with the use of steam power and the jacquard becoming more common, most of the machine innovations were financed by specialist machine building companies.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Felkin, ‘The Lace and Hosiery Trades of Nottingham’ p.324.
\textsuperscript{16} Felkin, A History, p.330.
\textsuperscript{18} Mason, Nottingham Lace p.37.
\textsuperscript{19} ‘Mechanical Board’, NJGA, 3 July 1835, p.2.
\textsuperscript{20} Mason, Nottingham Lace p.52.
The factory system

The adaptation of machines to make lace is common to other textile industries during the industrial revolution but the application of power and the factory system was very different. The variety of machines that existed and the industry’s initial relationship to the stocking frame meant the application of steam power progressed slowly in comparison to cotton spinning. This did not necessarily hamper the development of the industry because innovations meant wider and faster machines were developed that increased production.\textsuperscript{21} Church estimates that the value of output increased from £1.9 million in 1831 to £5.1 million in 1862. The use of steam power required the development of lace machines using rotary motion which was applied to a warp frame as early as 1791 but the variety of different machines involved in twist net production meant steam power was only in general use by the mid-1850s.\textsuperscript{22} The manually operated machines in workshops gradually reduced in number as machine holders moved to factories where steam power could be rented. Most twist lace was produced outside factories in 1851 but by 1861 the estimate was that only 90 hand operated machines were still in use.\textsuperscript{23} The number of large factories increased from around 30 in 1836 to 130 by 1865 but the industry remained based on small independent makers within larger premises.\textsuperscript{24}

Machines could be purchased by instalments which meant people with limited capital could set up as small independent lace makers often with the factory premises included in the rent. This could bring prosperity, but some did not have the business

\textsuperscript{21} Church, p.82.
\textsuperscript{22} Mason, Nottingham Lace p.34.
\textsuperscript{23} Mason, Nottingham Lace p.96.
\textsuperscript{24} Church, pp.84–85.
skills or reserves to survive a recession. Machine makers paying rent direct to factory owners would be left with unused equipment if the lace makers defaulted. Firth saw the structure of the industry with many smaller manufacturers being a disadvantage during a depression. Small businesses today are seen as adding to growth in the economy but in the 1893 the view was very different, ‘it is a well-established fact that the presence of the small manufacturer is undesirable in almost every industry’. Felkin provides several examples of an opposing view with entrepreneurship enabling social mobility in the industry. William Gregory a former collier and farm labourer mastered the skills to adapt a machine to make three twist net, becoming a wealthy manufacturer and employer. Samuel and Jonathan Burton were originally framework knitters who built a large factory in Carrington for making plain net, generating enough profit to buy land, increase the number of machines and set up a new factory in Sherwood. Felkin attributes the success to sound judgement and administrative ability which he feels could have wider benefits through employer and employee co-operation.

Export markets

The lace industry was heavily dependent on its export markets so external factors affecting overseas trade made it particularly vulnerable, with added issues of seasonal demand which increased employment and production in spring and autumn for the main markets in Europe and America. The diversity and variety of

27 Felkin, A History pp.379-381.
28 Church, p.13.
production had not helped the lace industry during the economic downturn of 1837, caused by the collapse of cotton prices in America and the lowering of interest rates by the Bank of England. This illustrates how the integration of the economies of America and Britain, especially through cotton and capital, had an impact on Nottingham well before the American Civil War and subsequent cotton famine.\(^{29}\)

Felkin describes how the lace industry suffered with more than half the machines out of operation, businesses closed and relief funds established for those in hardship.\(^{30}\)

The important export market for lace also meant tariffs were crucial to economic success. Negotiating preferential export and import duties, especially with France, was a subject that preoccupied the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce when it was first established in 1860.\(^{31}\)

**Fashion**

Changes in fashion were a major influence on the prosperity of the industry especially due to the increased concentration of Levers lace production in Nottingham.\(^{32}\) Firth saw Nottingham as having an almost complete monopoly on the lace trade in the 1860s with a steady level of constant demand which was not in itself sufficient for prosperity.\(^{33}\) Firth described the cyclical nature of the industry with three years of increased demand followed by gradual decline as lace moved in and out of fashion every ten years. These economic troughs had an unsteadying influence on the town; the introduction of new industries such as bicycles and

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\(^{31}\) ‘Establishment of a Chamber of Commerce in Nottingham’, *NG* 19 April 1860, p.3.

\(^{32}\) Mason, *Nottingham Lace* pp.91-92.

\(^{33}\) Firth, pp.709-710.
tobacco with a more constant demand was economically beneficial. The popularity of a pattern would also determine whether a specific machine would be in constant use or idle meaning income could be very insecure. ³⁴ Changes in fashion had contributed to the decline in the hosiery industry as trousers for men became more popular. It also brought obsolescence to machinery such as the pusher machine as demand for single items of lace declined. ³⁵ Mason sees changing fashions as an important influence, affecting different companies and districts unequally due to specialization in production. ³⁶ Altering machine settings for changes in demand would be costly and slow as new parts and patterns were required, the investment not always producing returns before fashions changed again.

Cotton

The other important component crucial to the operation and prosperity of the industry was the thread used to make lace. This was predominantly cotton though silk was important and wool was occasionally used for shawls. ³⁷ The qualities of the thread were vital to the design, pattern and machinery employed; the availability and the price paid for high quality cotton would have an impact on profits. Long staple cotton was considered the best for lace making, most of which was imported from Egypt, Sudan and the United States. By the early nineteenth century ‘Sea Island’ cotton from the southern area of the United States became the most popular. Although there were cotton mills in the region, along the River Leen and River Derwent it was

³⁴ Firth, pp.712–13.
³⁵ Church, p.27; Mason Nottingham Lace, p.25.
³⁶ Mason, Nottingham Lace pp.4–5.
³⁷ Mason, Nottingham Lace pp.42–43.
lower prices of cotton from Lancashire mills that allowed the expansion of markets for lace as a more affordable item\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Summary}

The overall impression of the development of the industry is one of vulnerability to trade cycles and to changing fashions with few options for diversification. There was some attempt at regulation and intervention through co-operation amongst makers and manufacturers to promote innovation. The numerous smaller producers, specializing in different types of lace, made the industry more resilient but equally more vulnerable to change and economic crises if they lacked the resources or technology to adapt. The focus of the industry on Nottingham meant smaller producers could make use of the wider infrastructure and Church sees this concentration and competition as generating “a climate conducive to technical progress”.\textsuperscript{39} Cuthbert sees the industry as vulnerable due to its unique structure, the influence of fashion and the dominance of small scale businesses.\textsuperscript{40} Reliance on an industry that employed such a high proportion of the population, was dependent on specific overseas export markets and imported most of its major raw material from a country using enslaved labour, seems particularly unstable.

\textsuperscript{38} Church, p.60.
\textsuperscript{39} Church, p.xiii.
\textsuperscript{40} Norman H. Cuthbert, \textit{The Lace Maker’s Society: A Study of Trade Unionism in the British Lace Industry} (n.k.: The Amalgamated Society of Operative Lace Makers and Auxiliary Workers, 1960), p.66.
3. The Economic Impact of the Cotton Famine on Nottingham

The economies of Britain and the United States were intricately linked and the cotton industry, seen as a driver of the industrial revolution, was dependent on imports from the United States. Repercussions of the blockade on exports from the Confederate States were felt in the areas that specialised in cotton production as supplies dwindled by Autumn 1862.¹ There are opposing views that do not see the American Civil War as responsible for the depression, finding the preceding period of overproduction the underlying cause.² The impact on commerce in Lancashire was complex, with some manufacturers and agents profiting from high prices and speculators gaining from blockade running. Investment in new mills and machinery continued despite many running at a loss or on short time. Over 300 cotton mills went out of business between 1861 and 1868: employment decreased by 50,000.³ Industries like lace manufacturing using the product of the cotton spinners, but located outside Lancashire, also experienced a trade depression. This chapter will explore the impact on Nottingham’s economy, focussing on the lace industry using census records, economic reports in the local press, bankruptcy records, trade directories and the archives of a local lace company.

Imports from the United States

The dependence on cotton imports from the United States is shown in Figure 1. In 1860 when imports from the United States were at their highest for the period shown,

imports from other source countries combined formed only twenty three percent of the total. By 1862 when imports from the United States were at their lowest, the other source countries supplied ninety five percent of raw cotton. Figure 2 shows how total imports had fallen by nearly two million bales over these two years because new sources of supply could not meet previous demand.

Figure 1 Source of cotton imports 1855-1870

Figure 2 Total imports of raw cotton 1855-1870

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4 Watts p.6.
5 Watts, p.6.
Silk was also used in the lace industry, but cotton predominated after 1805 with the availability of long staple cotton from the United States and the innovations of Samuel Cartledge providing fine doubled thread. This created increased demand for a cheaper product which had previously been a luxury item. In 1860 the supply from the United States exceeded estimates so manufacturers had unlimited cotton at cheaper prices; by 1861 the total supply held at Liverpool provided for only fifteen weeks of production. Underpinning this was the contradiction of dependence on a low-priced product of the slavery system by a country that had abolished slavery in its own territories decades previously. Speculation on these stocks meant that some United States’ cotton was still available for sale by February 1862 but by November only Surat cotton from India was available, an inferior product which was rapidly increasing in price. The high price of cotton could ruin lacemakers because buyers might delay purchasing until prices of lace fell. Lace manufacturers were often selling at a loss when cotton prices increased suddenly, making it difficult to replenish stocks. A report in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* compares the local situation with Manchester during the cotton famine expressing the opinion that Nottingham manufacturers were prepared to keep running at a loss while Manchester mills closed.

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7 ‘State of Trade’, *NG*, 22 March 1860, p.5.  
8 ‘State of Trade’, *NG*, 7 February 1862, p.5; 7 November 1862, p.5.  
9 Mason, p. 42; ‘State of Trade’ *NG* 17 March 1865, p.5; 10 April 1863, p.5.  
10 ‘State of Trade’, *NG*, 26 September 1862, p.5.
Unemployment

It is difficult to ascertain levels of unemployment during the mid-nineteenth century because records available provide an incomplete picture. The Board of Trade statistics for employment for this period do not provide information at a local level or include the textile sector. This data was calculated retrospectively from Trade Unions’ returns and shows the national picture of declining employment and export value from 1860 to 1862 and the subsequent troughs that re-occur every eight to ten years but no further detail by region or sector.\(^{11}\) It is difficult to determine change over time and the precise impact of the cotton famine on employment from Census records because occupational title is recorded rather than economic activity.\(^{12}\) This is an imperfect measure as it does not take account of multiple occupations, short time, casual work, or unemployment. Changes over time are difficult to interpret and the ten-year gap does not help to show the effects of the cotton famine in mid-decade. Higgs illustrates the difficulties of interpretation in relation to domestic servants: they might be wrongly classified by the enumerator, entered incorrectly by the clerk tabulating the data, or misinterpreted by the household.\(^{13}\) This is likely to apply to the lace industry as well, because work was often undertaken in the home, men regularly had several occupations and ancillary industries were recorded under broad headings such as engineering. Women were particularly significant in Nottingham’s economy in both lace and hosiery trades but the census figures underestimate the numbers involved, especially for married women where lace

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\(^{11}\) *British and Foreign Trade and Industry (Second Series)*, Cmd.2337 LXXXIV.1 1905 p.80 (see Appendix 3); George R Boyer and Timothy J Hatton, ‘New Estimates of British Unemployment, 1870-1913’, *Journal of Economic History*, 63.2 (2002), 643-675 (pp.643-644)


mending often supplemented household work, as it could only record a single occupation defined as regular employment. Figure 3 shows how occupations recorded in the lace industry increased over this period, indicating a growing industry but only revealing a snapshot without showing the fluctuations in employment in intervening periods. The higher number of women recorded might partly be explained by the concentration of warehousing businesses in the town. Workshops and factories, more likely to employ men, were developing in the industrial villages outside the town. Felkin estimated 100,000 women employed in the lace industry in Nottingham in 1865 and 135,000 employed in total, a much higher figure than the Census because it includes ancillary trades. However, Felkin thought there was

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16 Felkin, p.397-398 (See Appendix 2).
little change over the cotton famine period. In his view, 1865 levels of employment and machinery were similar to 1862.

Newspapers reported ‘deep distress’ in August 1860, well before the cotton famine, with 1,600 men unemployed in the lace and hosiery trades and ‘a large number of females thrown out of work on account of the greatly depressed state of trade’.17 In evidence to the Board of Guardians there was an estimated 700 fancy lace hands out of work in Nottingham.18 By March 1861 there are further reports of 7053 operatives wholly out of work in Manchester but no comparable figure for Nottingham only the comment that, ‘Very many of our lace and stocking hands are totally unemployed and it is an undeniable fact that several of our warehouses are closed’.19 Unemployment was particularly high again in the winter of 1862 to 1863, ‘Both our staple trades are suffering…..there are hundreds and I might almost say thousands of our artizans nearly unemployed’.20 Soup kitchens were set up in December 1862 to help those, ‘temporarily deprived of their means of subsistence by the decadence of trade’.21 The report emphasised that the distress was not on the same level as two years previously, because the winter was not as severe. The winter of 1864 again brought more unemployment and distress to both lace and hosiery trades with some businesses at a standstill.22 An article reprinted from Sporting Life is an unlikely source of analysis of the effect of the cotton famine, ‘Nottingham has passed through an ordeal of no trifling character. The cotton famine, supposed to be peculiar to Lancashire and Cheshire, has found its way to

17 ‘Distress in Nottingham’ NG, 23 August 1860, p.4.
18 ‘Board of Guardians’ NG, 23 August 1860, p.3.
19 ‘State of Trade’, NG, 21 March 1862, p.5
20 ‘Nottingham Town Council’, NG, 5 December 1862, p.10.
Nottinghamshire’. The continued demand for lace, although slight, was seen as the reason for lower level of poverty compared to the cotton districts, ‘it is only by dipping into the lower strata that the effect of the cotton famine on Nottingham is to be traced at all’.

**Economic crisis**

At the start of the American Civil War in April 1861 the lace trade was only just recovering from the depression of 1857. This economic crisis caused business failures and unemployment in lace and hosiery industries, leading to a demonstration of 8,000 unemployed workers. Comments on the crisis during the cotton famine imply this was another cycle of depression in the industry and not necessarily more severe. Church briefly discusses the adverse effects on trade and industrial expansion caused by disruption to the supply of the raw material, fluctuations in cotton prices and restrictions of exports to a major market. Felkin dismissed the ‘so called’ Lancashire famine as causing far less distress than that suffered by the hosiery trades from 1810 to 1845. He acknowledged that trade improved after the end of the war with an ‘exceptional’ increase in exports of lace. Blackett argues that the cotton famine, ‘devastated, if not to the same degree, the lives of textile workers in other parts of the country’. Nottingham is mentioned, but the degree of suffering is linked to levels of unrest: according to Blackett the town was not

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23 ‘Nottingham from a Metropolitan point of view’, NDE, 10 March 1863, p.4.
25 Church, p.155.
26 Felkin, pp.458,552.
considered an area of conflict. Hanlon’s research into the effects of the American Civil War on the economies of cotton producing towns concludes that other centres of the textile industry, including Nottingham, were not, ‘negatively affected by the cotton shortage’.\(^{28}\) This may be because Nottingham is grouped with other textile towns based on wool, linen and silk rather than cotton when there is substantial evidence that both hosiery and lace industries in Nottingham predominantly used cotton.\(^{29}\)

![Figure 4 State of Trade reports for the lace industry 1860-1865](image)

Local newspapers provide further insight into the performance of the economy in Nottingham. The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* printed a regular report, State of Trade, which provides qualitative information on orders, buyers and events affecting the performance of the lace industry.\(^{30}\) Bias in reporting and editorial control mean this source cannot be completely reliable. The distinction between silk and cotton lace products is not always clear, though silk lace was affected by the disruption to trade

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\(^{30}\) ‘State of Trade’, *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 1860-1865.
as well. The reports describe times of depression, high prices for cotton, low stock and minimal orders. These are presented in Figure 4 by combining the most prevalent economic status of each weekly report into a quarterly position and including key comments on factors affecting trade and its consequences. In summarising each quarter, weekly and monthly variations will not be visible and could give an inaccurate picture. This shows there were bankruptcies, industrial unrest and a depressed industry before the civil war starts. The weather is also an important factor in 1860, when a cold spring delayed the normal seasonal demand and prevented buyers from visiting. However, shortages of cotton by late 1861 meant using alternative sources, sometimes of inferior quality and at higher prices, causing manufacturers to operate at a loss. This led to unemployment and short time working in the first quarter of 1862 but by May there was evidence of companies re-hiring. There was also an improvement in the home market by the summer of 1862 with orders increasing and employment rising but this had declined again by the winter months. By 1863 the situation was very different with some improvement to trade mainly through exports to Germany, but with cautious buying and periods of stoppages. The more favourable period continued until early 1864 as the influence of the war in America reduces and orders from New York were resumed. High tariffs and the price of gold adversely affected trade with America and by November 1864 business declined again with business failures and fluctuations in the cotton market.

The reports illustrate the importance of factors other than cotton shortages affecting trade: seasonal fluctuations in demand, disrupted export markets, unrest on the continent during the Italian Civil War, the Polish uprising and war in Denmark. They show that there was not a continuous period of depression for the duration of the war but seasonal fluctuations. William Felkin, a lace manufacturer in Beeston provides
additional information on the local economy in personal letters to his youngest son Henry. In 1863 he hopes for renewal in the home trade and feels there is, ‘no healthy relation between price, cost and selling prices’, ‘it is well that you are quite away from life here’.31 In 1864 he writes, ‘business in this town is in perfect stagnation, indeed what may be called a fearful panic’, ‘a piece would sell at any price beyond raw material’.32

Bankruptcies

The incidence of bankruptcy and insolvency is another measure of economic downturn, although there are few statistics available nationally or locally to make comparisons or determine trends.33 There is also some debate about how far economic performance can be correlated with business failure especially if there is a time lag where companies suffer most towards the end of a recession.34 To analyse how the cotton famine affected bankruptcy, data was gathered from court reports in the local press over a five year period. This method is limited as it is possible not all cases were reported; it excludes private arrangements outside the courts and companies that cease trading. Identifying lace companies is more difficult: where the main business was not listed, if individuals had more than one trade or if the occupation is ancillary to the lace trade. The bankruptcy process often involved several court appearances making it more difficult to avoid double counting. Some reports include the amount owed to creditors, providing a measure of business size

32 Felkin Family Letters, 5 October 1864.
34 Lester, p.158.
and indebtedness, but details of employee numbers or the reasons for failure are not always reported. There was also a change to bankruptcy law in 1861 where the previous distinction between traders and non-traders was removed, the insolvency and bankruptcy courts combined and all occupations were subject to bankruptcy law. Figure 5 shows bankruptcies and insolvencies grouped together for 1860 and 1861, comparing numbers from the lace industry with other trades for each year. This shows a definite peak in 1862 for all categories but the highest numbers for the lace industry in 1860 and 1862. Lace industry failures do not exceed twenty per cent of total bankruptcies in any year shown.

Figure 5 Nottingham bankruptcies and insolvencies 1860 to 1865

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lace bankrupt/insolv.</th>
<th>Other bankrupt/insolv.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>75</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
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<td>110</td>
<td>127</td>
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<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Nottingham bankruptcies and insolvencies 1860 to 1865

35 Lester, pp.242–43.
Church found the crisis of 1857 led to the failure of 57 lace businesses by 1860 but during three years of the cotton famine, 1861 to 1863, there was slightly lower number of 44 bankruptcies.37

There is also evidence from news reports that economic conditions were not always to blame for business failure. James Smith, a lace manufacturer from New Lenton, attributes heavy losses in 1861 to the depression in trade but reckless spending and financial imprudence are seen by the court as important factors in the case of Fitch and Carr.38 Bankruptcies in all sectors peak in 1862 and decrease for the remaining years of the American Civil War, quite a different pattern from that found by Hanlon in the cotton manufacturing districts. 39 Hanlon’s research shows peaks in business failures in all sectors followed the spikes in cotton industry failures. This was linked to cotton prices falling, usually within a one-month time lag. However, lace industry failures do not reveal the resulting unemployment levels or the companies that continued trading with reduced working hours. The impact on the many traders in consumer goods, such as bakers, shoemakers, butchers, grocers, drapers and victuallers are also important to consider when the town’s staple industry was in depression.

Trade Directories

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37 Church, p.231.
38 ‘Nottingham Court of Bankruptcy’, NG, 18 April 1861, p.8; ‘Birmingham District Court of Bankruptcy’ NG, 15 January 1864, p.4.
Trade Directories provide further information about industries in Nottingham and changes over time, but they cannot be relied upon for accuracy and do not give an idea of business size or employment. Church compares Wright’s Directory for 1862 and 1871 and finds a decrease in the number of lace merchant manufacturers but an increase in lace producers, machinists, frame smiths, and bobbin and carriage makers. The drawback of using directories with a complex industry lies in interpreting the different categories used and questioning the consistency with which they are applied, this is added to the issues of accuracy in collection and recording of information. Mason discusses some of the problems of identifying numbers of people occupied in the lace industry due to the overlap in the many processes involved. The distinction between manufacturer and maker or machine holder, discussed in Chapter Two, is not always clear; the term manufacturer might be used more frequently because it was more prestigious. Although looking at years outside this study, Mason finds 274 lace manufacturers listed in 1869 but through cross checking concludes 140 is the maximum possible number. Entries might be duplicated if people with more than one role in the industry were listed under different classified headings, the classification might change in subsequent issues and a business might have outlets in several areas of the town. This makes it more difficult to be accurate in analysing changes over time. Joseph Webster of Pelham Street is one example of a business listed as lace agent and as lace merchant in 1858. Wrights Nottingham and Suburban Directory used in Figure 6 does have similar trade categories in different editions but includes different areas within Nottingham in each

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40 Church, p.235.
41 Mason, p.140.
43 Wright’s Nottingham and Suburban Directory 1858 (Nottingham: C. N. Wright Jun., 1858), p.235.
edition so businesses in Radford, Lenton, Sneinton and Carrington were added to the 1858 and 1862 listings for Nottingham to make comparable areas. Other auxiliary industries like dyers and machine builders are difficult to include as they were not necessarily working exclusively for the lace industry. Without further research, directories as a source can only provide a broad indication of the performance of the lace industry.

![Lace industry listings in Wright's Directory](image)

**Figure 6** Lace industry listings in Wright's Directory 1858, 1862, 1866

Figure 6 shows a slight increase in the number of manufacturers between 1858 and 1866 but makers and machine holders decrease by nearly half between 1858 and 1862. This could be because of economic conditions forcing the smaller units out of

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business or it could mean consolidation of smaller units into larger businesses. This fits with Felkin’s observations in 1867 of the disappearance of the smaller businesses and the many agents they employed, often lacking the required business skills, ‘the trade seems to be approaching a further important concentration in the ownership and employment of machines’.

*Fisher and Company*

Fisher and Company were a large manufacturer founded by James Fisher in New Radford in 1823 which survived until 1910 when it was taken over by William Hurst and Sons. It is the only known local lace manufacturer with accounts and stock books surviving from the 1860s. James Fisher senior was admired by Felkin for his administrative skills and his profitable partnerships with skilled mechanics, John Levers and William Crofts. He was ‘the personification of method in carrying out sound principles of business determinately to their appropriate end’. In the 1840s Fisher was active in pursuing infringements to patents, implying he had the financial resources required. This ‘hostile interference’ may have provided the foundations for his eldest son James to buy out his brothers’ shares in 1859. Stock books for the company show profit and loss during the cotton famine years and provide records of the value of machinery, equipment, thread and net, although there are some gaps for the years 1868 to 1870. Figure 7 shows 1861 was the year with the heaviest loss of £4581 though in the two following years loss is under £1000. Without knowing the company’s turnover or financial reserves, it is difficult to evaluate the impact this loss

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45 Felkin, p.552  
46 Mason, p.243; Felkin, p.322.  
47 Felkin, p.329.  
48 Felkin p.239; *Records of Fisher and Company - Admin History*  
<https://mss-cat.nottingham.ac.uk/Calmview/MS977/> [accessed 08 July 2021].  
49 UoN Mss MS 977/1/1/85, MS 977/1/1/88 James Fisher Radford Works, Stock Books 1859-1865, pp.31,59; *Papers of James Fisher and Company, Stock Books* Fi S4/1 p.27,58; Fi S5 p.27,79.
might have. The lace machinery is a high value asset which remains stable over the period. Stocks of brown net stayed fairly level until 1863, when possible decreased orders and declining thread stocks meant production was reducing by 1863. The State of Trade reports in Figure 4, describe the decline in orders and fluctuations in cotton prices throughout this period which were possibly causing the decline in stocks and profits for this company. Fisher and Co. were an example of a company running at a loss during this period, finally breaking even in 1871 but unfortunately there are no known records of sales, wages, or employees to provide a more complete picture.

![Fisher and Co: Stock value profit and loss](image)

Figure 7 Fisher and Co accounts 1860 to 1865

**Summary**

Each of the sources on their own cannot provide an accurate picture of the economic situation. Apart from the Census which seems to show increasing numbers with occupations in lace, the State of Trade reports, the records of bankruptcies and the

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50 James Fisher Radford Works
records of Fisher and Company all point towards a significant downturn in trade. It is arguable that this was a continuation of the depression of 1857 and that it was not of the dimension or as long lasting as the cotton famine in Lancashire. However, the shortages of cotton led to fluctuations in prices, new sources of supply were often expensive and important export markets were disrupted, all of which caused trade in lace to suffer from lowered demand and less profitability. Other factors were also involved, especially unrest on the continent, affecting the lace trade’s other important markets. Unemployment is reported on in the newspapers but often resulting from a mass meeting, march or demonstration, there is unfortunately little evidence from the lace workers themselves.
4. Levels of Poverty and Support for the Distressed

There seems no doubt of the extent of deprivation in Lancashire with a seventy per cent increase in applications for poor relief in January 1862 compared with the same period in the previous year. Over 250,000 people were receiving relief by December 1862, costing nearly £14,000 a week.¹ The Poor Law was not designed to cope with large numbers of unemployed skilled workers. Adaptations were introduced through the *Union Relief Acts 1862-63* and the *Public Works Acts 1863-64* for the cotton manufacturing districts but private charity was the only option for many.² The poverty and distress accompanying the cotton famine is traditionally seen as restricted to the cotton manufacturing districts of Lancashire but areas like Nottingham with employment dependent on industries using cotton were also severely affected as shown in the previous chapter. Nottingham’s mayor, Richard Birkin, thought the crisis in Nottingham was less severe because workers had experienced previous depressions and were more prepared through savings and provident institutions.³

This chapter begins by comparing the extent of poverty in Nottingham with the cotton districts of Lancashire to establish that Nottingham also suffered during the cotton famine if not as severely. Workhouse admission records reveal the impact on lace workers and show how this disproportionally affected women. The need for private charity and self-help options in Nottingham, an important means of additional support in the cotton manufacturing districts, will also be evaluated.

Evidence of the level of support for the poor is limited because private charity was not recorded to the same extent as the relief dispensed by the Nottingham Poor Law Act 1834.

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³ ‘The Distress in Lancashire’, *NG*, 5 December 1862, p.10.
Union. The records that survive for the Union are also incomplete and provide no
details of outdoor relief. The national statistics of poor relief provide a yearly average
not reflective of seasonal changes, the duration of relief, or the number of repeat
applications.⁴ The Poor Law Board Annual Reports are also limited by providing
statistics at a county level only. The stigma associated with accepting support and
the criteria for eligibility also mean that records underestimate the extent of poverty.
Unemployed workers would economise first using credit, sick clubs, friendly
societies, or pawnbrokers before relying on poor relief or soup kitchens. ‘Some,
indeed, as we can testify, will starve for days before they can stoop to become
burdens on the parochial funds; and the best and most usually prosperous among
them are always the last to apply’.⁵ Kiesling highlights how the persistence of
distress in the cotton districts led to institutional change, through relief committees
set up by local residents and acceptance of increased centralisation through the
national relief committees.⁶ This was also evident in Nottingham where the local
relief committee and self-help provisions were essential to supplement an
inadequate poor relief system. Charitable donations to the Cotton Famine Relief
Fund were seen as part of an unwritten contract with the poor to keep them from the
demoralising Poor Laws but requiring compliance to avoid civil unrest.⁷ Nottingham
did not benefit from the central Relief Fund but it may have been driven by similar
motives to establish its own relief committee in 1863.

5–19 (p.17).
⁵ The Economist, 26 April 1862 quoted in L. Lynne Kiesling, ‘Collective Action and Assisting the Poor: The
Political Economy of Income Assistance During the Lancashire Cotton Famine’, The Journal of Economic History,
⁶ Kiesling, pp.381–82.
⁷ P. Shapely, ‘Urban Charity, Class Relations and Social Cohesion: Charitable Responses to the Cotton Famine’,
Levels of poor relief in Nottingham and Lancashire

Despite providing only partial evidence, statistics available for poor relief during this period provide a measure of distress, allowing comparisons between different areas. Figure 8 shows statistics collected for the cotton districts up to 1862 which include Nottingham and Sheffield. The Return of the Number of Paupers looks at weekly percentage change in the number of paupers across the years 1857 to 1862 and includes the Nottingham Union rather than an aggregate for the County. These figures have been used to take the number of paupers in the first week of the third month of each quarter and to calculate this as a percentage of the total population in 1861. Although this is only available for the earliest years of the crisis it does show that Nottingham had seven percent of its population claiming poor relief in 1858 before the start of the American Civil War. This fell to four percent later the same

![Number of paupers as a percentage of 1861 population](image)

Figure 8 Number of paupers as a percentage of 1851 population

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8 Poor relief (Lancashire, &c.) Return of the number of paupers (exclusive of lunatic paupers in asylums and vagrants) in receipt of relief in each week of the fourteen months ending with December, 1862 HC 502, pp.34-39.

9 Poor relief (Lancashire, &c.); George R Boyer, 'The Evolution of Unemployment Relief in Great Britain', The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 34.3 (2004), 393–433 (p.405); 'Nottingham Board of Guardians’ NG 12 September 1862 p.5; 28 November 1862, p.5.
year but increased again to eight percent by March 1862. Manchester and Oldham had a lower percentage than Nottingham and Sheffield for the first year of the war but this increased significantly from June 1862. Manchester rose to nearly twenty percent and Oldham to nearly fifteen percent.\textsuperscript{10} The rate in Nottingham remained at a much lower level, closer to six percent. It is not clear why the towns outside Lancashire were included in this report as they do not appear in subsequent editions. It may have been to make comparisons, as the \textit{14th Annual Report of the Poor Law Board} mentions Nottingham and Sheffield as areas with staple trades affected by the harsh winter of 1860 to 1861.\textsuperscript{11} The numbers of people engaged in cotton manufacture in 1851 are only provided for the Lancashire towns, illustrating the concentration of the industry in that area. Ashton under Lyne has seventeen percent of its workers aged over twenty engaged in the cotton industry: this compared with Nottingham’s twelve percent in lace, hosiery and cotton combined.\textsuperscript{12} Figure 9 shows a different pattern when looking at the amount spent on poor relief in two Lancashire towns and Nottingham. The \textit{Comparative Statement of Amount Expended on In-Maintenance and Out-Relief} includes data for individual Unions but this is limited to expenditure on relief rather than numbers of paupers.\textsuperscript{13} The larger amounts spent on outdoor relief in nearly every year show how the system was not following its original aims of restricting relief to the workhouse or reducing costs. Some urban Poor Law Unions re-interpreted the regulations as a tacit agreement with the unemployed worker.\textsuperscript{14} Boyer also sees the continuance of outdoor relief in urban areas as a

\textsuperscript{10} Boyer, (p. 405).
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Fourteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board}, 1862, Cmd.3037 XXIV.1 pp.14-16.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Poor relief (Lancashire, &c.)}, pp.2, 3, 36; Appendix 1, 5.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Comparative Statement of Amount expended for In-maintenance and Out-relief Poor rates and pauperism. Return (C. I.) In-maintenance and out-door relief}, 1860, HC 383C LVIII, pp.46,48; 1861, HC 324C LIII, pp.46,48; 1862, HC 307C, XLVIII, pp. 46,48; 1863, HC 431C, LI, pp.44,46; 1864, HC 507C LI, pp.44,46; 1865, HC 442C XLVIII pp.44,46; 1866, HC 422C LXII pp.27,28.
\textsuperscript{14} Boyer, p.395.
means of unemployment insurance for manufacturers who could pass some of the costs of maintaining their laid off workforce to local ratepayers.\textsuperscript{15} There is a significant contrast between the large amounts spent in Manchester between 1862 and 1864 and the expenditure in Nottingham and Oldham. This indicates that levels of distress were not consistent within Lancashire and that Nottingham was only slightly lower than Oldham. Allowing for differences in population of the towns Manchester remained significantly higher in 1863 at around nine shillings per head, while Oldham and Nottingham were closer to three shillings per head. This does not provide a complete picture as expenditure would be limited by the amount the poor rates could be increased in each area, the level of defaulting on poor rate payments during an economic downturn and the availability of other charitable provision.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{The Nottingham Poor Law Union}

In Nottingham, the principle of providing outdoor relief had been established since the depression of 1839.\textsuperscript{17} In 1852, the Poor Law Board gave guardians in ‘more populous areas’ the discretion to give outdoor relief to any class of pauper.\textsuperscript{18} However, in 1861 the Nottingham Guardians emphasised that relief outside the workhouse was intended for, ‘exceptional cases of unusual depression’, stressing that it was a temporary solution which needed to comply with regulations.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Boyer, \textit{The Evolution of Unemployment Relief}, p 398.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board}, 1853, Cmd.1625 L.1 pp.21-22.
\textsuperscript{19} ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’, \textit{NG}, 18 July 1861, p.3.
Figure 9 Expenditure on Poor Relief 1860 to 1865, Nottingham, Manchester, Oldham

Comparative Statement 1860-1866, Table 4.
The neighbouring Basford Union interpreted the regulations differently and would not provide outdoor relief unless the workhouse was full. Provision of relief had been under considerable pressure before the outbreak of the American Civil War. Edwin Patchitt, outgoing Chair of the Board of Guardians for Nottingham Union in April 1861, described the difficult preceding year, with an increase of 33,000 receiving outdoor relief and 2045 receiving indoor relief in just one quarter. Patchitt defended the Guardian’s expenditure against criticism over extravagance with public funds, arguing that the workhouse had insufficient capacity and there was a need to take each case on its own merit. The financial difficulties of the Board also resulted in the Guardians borrowing money to enable relief to continue, in their view preventing possible unrest.

Poor relief in Nottingham, shown in Figure 10, uses statistics taken from newspaper reports of the meetings of the Nottingham Union Board of Guardians, providing numbers receiving relief and costs of outdoor relief. This shows a high proportion of outdoor relief, in most months exceeding 3500 people. There is no further information on outdoor pauper categories but this does indicate that unemployment was high. The period with the highest numbers receiving relief is from April to August 1861, before the effects of the blockade had come into effect. The new workhouse, which opened in 1842, was not often at its full capacity of 1150, although it had housed as many as 1,600 inmates in 1848. Only in December 1861 and April 1862 are the number of inmates above 900.

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21 ‘Dearth and Duty’, NG, 1 May 1863 p.5.
22 ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’, NG, 11 April 1861, p.5.
24 Beckett, p.221.
There was a slight increase in overall numbers from mid-1862 which fell gradually by the end of 1865. There is a strange anomaly in April 1862 when numbers decrease but expenditure increases. The second and third quarters of 1862 showed improving trade and increased employment according to the State of Trade reports referred to in Figure 4, but this is not reflected in the increasing numbers receiving outdoor relief in 1862. The Guardians were more hopeful about the industrial prospects of the town by November 1864: there were signs that closed factories were taking on workers and the numbers receiving outdoor relief was 311 fewer than the year before.26

Records of workhouse admissions for St Mary’s parish provide details of occupation, status and gender of those admitted.27 Unfortunately there are some gaps where

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26 ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’, NDE, 23 November 1864, p.4
records have not survived, making comparisons of half years difficult due to seasonal variations. The high number of able-bodied workhouse admissions compared to the not able-bodied, shown in Figure 11, is at odds with MacKinnon’s work on aggregated data for England and Wales. MacKinnon’s research finds only 0.6 percent of all paupers were able bodied men receiving indoor relief in 1865 and estimates that at least half of these were sick or disabled.\(^{28}\) It is difficult to compare this directly for just one parish in Nottingham and for admissions rather than inmates, but for St Mary’s parish alone, able bodied men admitted to the workhouse from October 1860 to March 1861 formed two percent of all paupers.\(^{29}\) This could be explained by the fact that there were very few married couples admitted, so these were single temporarily unemployed men. The same might explain the large proportion of able-bodied women in both periods in Figure 11. These could be single

![Figure 11 Workhouse admission numbers by category 1860 to 1861 and 1863 to 1864\(^{30}\)](image-url)

\(^{28}\) MacKinnon, p.7.

\(^{29}\) ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’ NDE 1860 to 1865; Indoor Relief Lists 1860-1861; Appendix 2.

\(^{30}\) Indoor Relief Lists St Mary’s Parish Oct 1860 to Mar 1861, Oct 1863 to Mar 1864; ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’ 22 August 1860, 5 Dec 1860, 11 April 1861, 21 August 1863, 18 December 1863, 15 April 1864.
women from the lace workforce, but research shows women often outnumbered men in receipt of relief.  

Women might be widowed, pregnant, or abandoned by their husbands and would often bring their children, resulting in the high numbers of children under sixteen.

Figure 12 Workhouse admission numbers by occupation 1863/64

Included in the lace worker category in Figure 12 are job titles that were mainly carried out by women, often in the home, such as lace mender, lace runner and scoolloper. These activities amount to more than half of the total ninety-five admissions with lace as an occupation; the lower paid, lower skilled occupations were more financially vulnerable. Single women might also be more vulnerable without the family support networks they might normally rely on and without the benefits of Union membership. There is some evidence of women joining the

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32 *Indoor Relief Lists 1863-1864*.
33 Olwen Purdue, ‘Surviving the Industrial City: The Female Poor and the Workhouse in Late Nineteenth-Century Belfast’, *Urban History*, 44.1 (2017), 69–90 (p.72).
Levers Lace Trade Society from 1852 because auxiliary workers were needed for effective industrial action.\textsuperscript{34} Most of the women outworkers involved in finishing work were unlikely to have Union protection or receive benefits. Low skilled labourers are the highest occupational category but the two staple industries of Nottingham, framework knitting and lace are only slightly lower. If the occupation seamer, which Felkin mentions in statistics for the hosiery trade, is added to framework knitters the admissions for this occupation are the highest.\textsuperscript{35}

Although the poor relief data does not show the highest levels of distress for the years of the cotton famine it does reveal that unemployment was at a high level and that outdoor relief was vital throughout the period. These figures will also vastly underestimate the true extent of poverty. Despite this the evidence shows: the effect on women in lower skilled jobs, the avoidance of the workhouse by married couples and disproportionate impact on lace workers.

\textit{The Relief Committee and charitable support}

Newspapers report unemployed workers in lace and hosiery requesting relief early in 1860 and there are further reports of delegations and public meetings in 1863 and 1864 at the height of the cotton famine, but the levels of distress are hard to quantify from this descriptive information.\textsuperscript{36} In 1863 approaches for a relief subscription in Nottingham in aid of Lancashire towns was rejected by the Mayor because of the,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{36} ‘Relief to the Unemployed Artizans’, \textit{NDE} 24 August 1860, p.2.
\end{flushright}
‘considerable amount of distress in our own neighbourhood’.37 Mayor Richard Birkin goes on to describe the thousands of artisans unemployed in the lace and hosiery industries, the fifteen percent of the population in receipt of relief in St Mary’s parish and the large numbers not applying for support but in severe poverty. The level of poor rates is also mentioned: in Nottingham four shillings in the pound and in Radford five shillings. This is not as high as the rates in Lancashire but there is some criticism that in many parishes in Lancashire land values had increased but the rates had not. The situation had not improved by April 1863 when a ‘large mass’ demonstrated in the Market Place with the message, ‘Willing to work but not to starve’. 38 The report sympathises with the demonstrators, acknowledging their peaceful conduct and their desperate circumstances but stressing the need for a relief committee to help the one in thirteen of the population of Nottingham in receipt of relief. In December 1864 a further demonstration, described as ‘largely attended’ sent a deputation to the police courts to ask magistrates for food. The mayor addressed the deputation, sympathising with their position and reinforcing outdoor relief as an option for workers reluctant to break up their families by entering the workhouse. 39

The need for support outside the provisions of the Board of Guardians is in evidence by the existence of soup kitchens providing low cost or free access to hot food. There were at least four soup kitchens to help the destitute during the hard winter of 1861. One was provided by the Stoney Street Baptist Church and later in 1865 one was set up by a private individual at his own expense.40 The Mayor felt more soup

37 ‘The Distress in Lancashire’ NG, 5 December 1862, p.10.
38 ‘The Unemployed of Nottingham’, NG 24 April 1863, p.5.
40 NDE 12 Jan 1861, 23 April 1861, 21 Jan 1865
kitchens were needed in December 1862. The newspaper report drew attention to those in need but not in receipt of relief, described as ‘the quiet poor’, requiring house to house visits to seek them out.41 Charitable suggestions are made in the NDE that seem at odds with the Victorian ideas behind the system of poor relief. The suggestion was that support provided for the Lancashire cotton workers should be available to local people in need, outside times of crisis, through collections of clothing and provision of warm rooms for the poor.42 The second point covered by the NDE questioned the adequacy of the current system and the inability of the Guardians to estimate and act upon the true extent of poverty beyond those receiving indoor or outdoor relief.43

The Baptist Church and its members were important providers of additional support in Nottingham, through organising relief committees, benevolent societies, savings banks and provident societies.44 James Lewitt, a Baptist minister, also wanted to draw attention to the 6,300 people receiving relief in February 1862 but estimated a much larger total of 12,000 destitute residents.45 The Nottingham Relief Committee resolved in February 1861 to reassure its donors that funds were being spent on those in most need by undertaking an investigation into the ‘actual conditions of distress’46 This involved a ‘Visiting organization for the whole town’ which would ensure funds were distributed only to the needy and this would be a, ‘business like

41 NDE 24 December 1862
42 NDE 9 Jan 1864
43 NDE 29 November 1864
45 NDE 13 February 1862
46 ‘Nottingham Relief Committee’ NDE 13 February 1861 p.1.
and trustworthy method’ of providing charity.\textsuperscript{47} The Committee ran the soup kitchen in Beck Lane which was opening every day due to ‘the great amount of distress now existing in this town’.\textsuperscript{48} The kitchen gave out 600 gallons of soup at a cost of £20 a day. Townspeople donated or could buy a dozen tickets for one shilling to give out to the needy.

The existence of the Relief Committee and the work of many local churches for their congregations is evidence of the extent of poverty, unacknowledged by the official poor relief system. There was an undercurrent of feeling, especially in the more Radical \textit{NDE}, that the system was inadequate and not providing for the basic human need for warmth, shelter, clothing and food. Despite this, providing a business-like approach to charity which would give only to the needy and avoid fraud also emerges as a priority.

\textit{Savings and Provident Societies}

Nottingham already had its own Savings Bank, established in 1818, which was seen as a way for working people to be more independent and to plan for periods of unemployment. In November 1860 the Savings Bank had 4502 depositors with a balance below one pound; by November 1864 there were 4637 depositors with a balance under one pound.\textsuperscript{49} Unfortunately, it is not known if depositors were from Nottingham, how many were lace workers or how helpful their savings were as an alternative to poor relief. Data compiled from the \textit{Registrar of Friendly Societies Annual Report} shown in Table 1 illustrates that although there were a similar number

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47}‘Nottingham Relief Committee’
\item \textsuperscript{48}‘Public Soup Kitchen’ NDE 13 February 1861 p.1
\item \textsuperscript{49}‘Yearly Statement of the Nottingham Savings Bank’, \textit{NDE}, 26 January 1861 p.4, 28 January 1865 p.4.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of societies in Nottingham in 1862 and 1864, the membership and funds decreased substantially. This may be because of the economic depression where funds were depleted and the unemployed withdrew membership when they could no longer afford the subscription. There is some debate about who could afford savings and friendly society subscriptions and how significant this source of support was during the cotton famine compared to poor relief. Smith’s study of alternative sources of relief in Nottingham from 1800 to 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nottingham Friendly Societies</th>
<th>1862</th>
<th>1864</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societies</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds</td>
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<td>£7,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>10325</td>
<td>5236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Nottingham Friendly Societies

demonstrated that endowed societies were most important for those in extreme poverty but they distributed £2,272 annually compared to £11,000 spent on poor relief in 1861. Boyer and Kiesling study the importance of alternative sources of assistance during the cotton famine. Kiesling argues that poor relief would only be sought when informal sources were depleted. Boyer argues that informal sources were much less important than poor relief as they were only available to the higher paid cotton workers. In Nottingham it is possible that lace workers may have been

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more likely to make use of personal savings and friendly societies and framework knitters were more dependent on poor relief due to the differences in earnings. Chapman describes the contrasting living conditions of lace hands and framework knitters due to the lower incomes of the latter in a largely domestic industry.53 Church refers to Felkin’s survey of household budgets in 1844, showing that framework knitters were unlikely to have any surplus income to use as insurance, but the more highly skilled lace worker benefited from a higher wage so was less vulnerable to destitution.54

Summary

Nottingham was not subject to the same levels of poverty as parts of Lancashire and did not receive external donations or contributions from the national relief fund. The inadequacies of the poor relief system were ameliorated by charities, the Relief Committee and self-help options. Only the records of workhouse admissions provide a clear distinction between poverty amongst lace workers and other trades in the town. It is likely that the lower paid hosiery workers were more vulnerable. There is also an indication of an underlying higher level of unemployment in Nottingham outside the cotton famine period when compared to Manchester and Oldham. Suffering may have been lessened by the worker’s experience of previous crises but it was also related to the proportion of people in low skilled, low paid jobs. Trade Union membership was one form of protection but was mainly available to the higher

paid, male skilled workers\textsuperscript{55}. There was an obvious awareness of the suffering of the unemployed amongst the leading townspeople with some understanding of the stigma of poverty and the reluctance to enter the workhouse. Charities, relief agencies and organisations set up to engender self-help were essential to support but provision of relief was at times connected to the prevention of unrest, to be explored further in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{55} Cuthbert, p.32.
5. Humanitarian Responses and Global Connections

The traditional view of the role played by the British working class in the events of the American Civil War relies on Marx’s theory of ‘pressure from without’. \(^1\) Marx felt that even without a vote the working class had an influence on parliament and would be used by the upper classes to provide pressure in favour of legislation or policies. In the case of the American Civil War, Marx found that this theory could not be applied. The working classes had resisted the will of the aristocracy, despite their suffering, to support the cause of the Union and prevent British intervention in recognising the Confederacy. Later research has revealed a more complex picture where substantial support for the South existed amongst working people in Lancashire and that support for either side was not necessarily aligned with class.\(^2\)

This chapter will explore how these ideas apply to Nottingham, the extent of support for either side in the war and how this relates to support for anti-slavery. The effect of the economic repercussions on public order will also be examined. Newspapers are used as the main primary source providing, ‘a guide and a mirror’ to public opinion but limited by inherent editorial bias and lack of representation.\(^3\) Olusoga describes the men and women workers of Lancashire who supported the Union as understanding their connection with the slaves who had loaded cotton onto ships in the Southern ports but it is hard to find evidence of working people’s views other than their attendance and implied support at public meetings.\(^4\)

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Unrest

Unrest in England, even revolution was one of the expected outcomes of the blockade that Confederate leaders hoped would force the British government to intervene. However, one of the features of the cotton famine in Lancashire was the relatively low incidence of unrest and the general view that the millworkers bore their hardship with dignity and maturity. There was a real fear of violence and pleas for the unemployed to avoid unrest. This was also the case in Nottingham where the disruption that accompanied Chartism at a time of depression in the 1840s was not a distant memory. The Mayor Richard Birkin talked of the manufacturers and operatives of Nottingham who have, ‘suffered very seriously by the unhappy difference in America……the workpeople have endured their privations without manifesting those angry feelings which formerly accompanied distress’.8

One threat of violence came from protests against an unfair poor relief system. A ticket system, introduce in lieu of cash, brought riots and destruction to Stalybridge in 1863. In Nottingham the predominantly peaceful deputations of men demanding more bread, marches through the town and mass meetings are the only evidence of discontent. Church describes the hardship between 1857 and 1865 as, ‘unaccompanied by even a suspicion of public disorder’ Industrial unrest was also not a prominent feature of this period in Nottingham. Trade Unions representing the skilled lace workers in three separate branches of the industry, Curtain, Levers and

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5 Foner, p.4.
6 ‘BBC Radio 4 - In Our Time, The Lancashire Cotton Famine’ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05tly3f> [accessed 12 October 2020].
7 Blackett, p.205.
8 ‘Nottingham Lace at the Exhibition’, NG, 7 November 1862, p.3.
9 ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’, NG, 28 November 1862, p.5; ‘The Unemployed of Nottingham’, NG 24 April 1863, p.5; ‘Meeting of the unemployed poor’, NG, 24 April 1863, supplement.
Plain Net, were established in the 1850s. Their aims were to increase wages and establish funds to support members through periods of hardship. Resolving disputes through arbitration and negotiation took priority over strike action, which may explain the low levels of unrest in Nottingham during the cotton famine. This approach failed in the depression of 1860 when employers attempted to reduce wages and refused arbitration. The sympathy of one local newspaper towards the resulting lockout and accompanying unrest was firmly with the employers, as those responsible for the town’s prosperity, rather than the, ‘oppressive and hostile combination’. Industrial relations were helped by the existence of a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation for the hosiery trade set up in 1860 where employers and workers had equal status in bargaining. This influenced the Lace Maker’s Society to offer arbitration during the 1860 lockout, but there was no formal arbitration board for the lace industry until 1869. The unrest that was visible in the town during this period was more often related to elections, particularly the parliamentary election of 1865, where windows were smashed, the election platform burned and fifty people injured.

It remains unclear why there was not more protest connected with the distress either in Lancashire or Nottingham. It is inevitably tied to complex issues of support for emancipation, a preference for neutrality, the protection of savings or Union benefits for some and the prospects of improvements in trade. The dilemmas involved made it difficult for the working class to have a clear demand for government action. The attitude of workers during this period is often seen as vital in the extension of the

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12 ‘State of Trade’, *NG*, 15 November 1860, p.5.
13 Church, p. 270, p.296.
15 Blackett, pp.172–73.
franchise; although there was a clear link for some between the freedom of slaves and electoral reform at home, this alone cannot account for the lack of unrest.  

*Connections with the enslaved and support for the South*

Although some support for the Southern States did result from the blockade it did not materialise in an uprising. There were additional reasons for siding with the Confederacy which Blackett outlines in research on support for Southern Clubs. This was often linked to the aristocracy, large employers, business interests, supporters of free trade, or people with family ties. Support for the Union was more common in urban areas and with Radicals and Dissenters. However, there was no overwhelming support for the Union that might have been expected from a country perceived as an anti-slavery nation. Many of the Southern Independence Associations were supported by millworkers in Lancashire, not just out of self interest in protecting their employment, but also because they supported the idea of independence and free trade. Liverpool was better known as a centre for Confederate support and blockade running because merchants were offended by the flouting of free trade principles. Pelzer writes, ‘Such acts seemed to be at least as great an affront to traditional morality as did the institution of slavery to the nineteenth century commercial mind’. Public meetings in Ashton Under Lyne and Oldham in 1862 and 1863, demonstrated the support of thousands of people for an end to the blockade and recognition of the Confederacy. The opposite was true in

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16 Blackett, p.243.
18 Olusoga, p.359.
20 Olusoga, p.361.
Rochdale where there were strong anti-slavery societies before the American Civil War and firm support for the Union, perhaps influenced by John Bright MP whose family owned mills in the town.\textsuperscript{21} After initial scepticism and concerns about retaliation, support for the Union increased, especially following the Proclamation of Emancipation in September 1862. Resolutions condemning slavery were passed at more than fifty meetings across the country in the first quarter of 1863.\textsuperscript{22}

Nottingham’s anti-slavery society originated in the late eighteenth century, but after the Emancipation Act in 1833, its presence is less visible and there is no evidence of its existence in the local press or the \textit{Anti-Slavery Reporter} after 1840. There is still evidence of support for the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) from local people, including Samuel Fox, former secretary of the local society, who continued to give donations up to 1864.\textsuperscript{23} As a Quaker, Fox would have been strongly pacifist and despite condemning slavery would be opposed to the war.\textsuperscript{24} Samuel Morley, MP, Nonconformist and local hosiery manufacturer also detested slavery but refused to back the BFASS when he felt their approach was too partisan.\textsuperscript{25} Local sharebroker, Joseph Sturge Gilpin, was involved in the Freedmen’s Aid Association, an important charity providing aid to freed slaves that pacifists could support.\textsuperscript{26} Unfortunately there are few surviving records of nonconformist church meetings that cover discussions of anti-slavery during this period; the influence and concerns of Quakers in Nottingham has not been uncovered.

\textsuperscript{22} Pelzer, p.49; Longmate, p.267.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘Donations and Subscriptions’, \textit{The Anti-Slavery Reporter}, 1 June 1865, p.145
\textsuperscript{26} ‘The Freedmen of America’ NG, 14 April 1865, p.3.
In the early stages of the war a resolution was passed at a lecture given by the abolitionist Dr Daniel Cheever, in Nottingham, that the British Government should not recognise the Confederacy.27 The editorial in the NDE, covering the meeting, showed regret that a representative of the Union was questioning Britain’s anti-slavery credentials.28 The article stresses that there was not, ‘an atom of sympathy for the Secessionists’ and ‘we do not fear that such a necessity for recognition will arise’. Although making clear the lack of support for the Confederacy, it does shed light on attitudes to the Union, ‘why should we be asked to sacrifice what the Americans themselves have long refused to sacrifice, though the duty lay far nearer them?’. In October 1862 a NG editorial responded to Gladstone’s speech predicting that the South would achieve secession, ‘we rejoice that the pronouncement has come at last’.29 Recognition of the Confederacy was seen here as beneficial in bringing peace, allowing the cotton trade to resume, ending the suffering of Lancashire operatives and allowing commerce to flourish.

It is estimated that 10000 English men fought in the American Civil War, the majority for the Union.30 Some were already soldiers in the British Army in Canada, some had already emigrated and volunteered. It is not clear how many were from Nottingham because town of birth is not consistently recorded in attestation papers. The only example found of a soldier’s letter home published in the newspapers, was from two Nottingham brothers both fighting for the Confederacy, who outline the cruelties of

27 ‘The American Crisis’ NDE 5 June 1861, p.2.
29 ‘The American Difficulty’, NG, 10 October 1862, p.5.
the Union army. A further letter from a local family who emigrated to the North for work are fearful for their sons facing the draft for a war they see as hypocritical.

The lecture by abolitionist George Thompson in April 1863 provides some evidence of support for the Union in Nottingham where a resolution denouncing the South was carried unanimously. Civic leaders were also in favour of providing support for the Freedmen’s Aid Association, partly because, ‘during the Irish Famine and the Lancashire distress America contributed liberally’. The reticence in advocating wholesale support for the Union resides in attitudes towards the Northern States. An editorial in the NG describes the appeal to help freed slaves as, ‘a whine of hypocritical beggary’. The opinions given were that: the Proclamation was insincere and a way of gaining sympathy for the cause, many people in the North benefited financially from the war, there was an underlying policy to appropriate Canada and because the North was seen as retaining a hatred of Britain.

Reinstating cotton supply and ethical consumerism

In 1861 The Economist clearly stated the reasons behind America’s dominance as a cotton exporter: no other region could compete with the quality and low prices resulting from the use of slave labour. As the crisis of secession unfolded it became obvious that although other sources of supply had been investigated it

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32 ‘Letter from America’ NDE 13 October 1864 p.3
33 ‘The Slavery Question and the War in the United States’ NDE, 1 April 1863, p.4.
34 ‘The Freedmen of America’, NG, 14 April 1865, p.3.
35 ‘Sympathy for Slaves’, NG, 14 April 1865 p.9.
would have been risky to invest in infrastructure for what was seen at the time as a temporary interruption. This became more urgent as the American Civil War progressed; The Cotton Supply Association supported Manchester manufacturers in moving equipment and cotton seed to India where production increased by fifty percent.37 Despite the economic and political motivations, some manufacturers and consumers were influenced by a more ethical argument to avoid slave grown products.

The World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 supported the aim to establish India as a source of free grown cotton.38 The Secretary and Chair of the Nottingham Anti-Slavery Society, Samuel Fox and William Wilson, attended the Convention and there is some evidence of later support for free labour produce in the town. Long before the war, the free labour movement were obtaining free grown cotton from Tennessee and a Nottingham hosiery company, Cox, Horner and Hogg, were making stockings from Barbados cotton.39 The Nottingham Chamber of Commerce gave support to the African Aid Society in developing free labour cotton in West Africa. The Chair, William Vickers, a lace manufacturer states, ‘One of the most effectual means of suppression of the slave trade was the introduction of free labour in the production of cotton’40 In a speech to the Royal Institution, Thomas Bazley MP, a cotton manufacturer, provides samples of products produced from cotton grown in India: this includes lace made in Nottingham from cotton spun in his own mills in Manchester.41 Unfortunately, there is little additional evidence of local companies

39 ‘The Free Labour Movement’ The Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1 May 1849, p.77
40 ‘Nottingham Chamber of Commerce’ NG, 17 January 1861, p.3.
41 ‘A Plea for Cotton and Industry’ NDE 5 June 1862, p.3.
using more ethical sources of fibre without a more in-depth investigation of supply chains. The Ladies Free Grown Cotton Movement produced a list of approved manufacturers and retailers but there are no suppliers included from Nottingham.\(^{42}\) The archives of Fisher and Co, lace manufacturer, include details of payments to local cotton doublers and agents but it is unclear where these companies obtained yarn supplies.\(^{43}\) Research on the Derwent Valley Mills of the Strutt family in an earlier period up to 1830 shows they supplied leading hosiers and lace manufacturers in Nottingham but despite their Nonconformist, anti-slavery views, their supply of cotton came mainly from countries using slave labour.\(^{44}\) The \(NG\) aligned the suffering of Nottingham people with the operatives of Lancashire, ‘as the staple material of Lancashire manufactures is also the staple of the great bulk of Nottingham fabrics’\(^{45}\) The article then separated local manufacturers from the issues of cotton supply, ‘It is to be wished that a wiser system of ethics will influence the political economists of Manchester and Liverpool in the time to come’.\(^{46}\) The mixed ethical messages are also shown in an \(NDE\) editorial just before the start of the war where the idea of cooperating with the Confederate States because of a need for cotton is rejected because , ‘we have proved pretty plainly our devotion to freedom’ but, ‘We depend on them for cotton,… because they have hitherto supplied us and no emergency has occurred sufficiently great.. to procure it elsewhere’.\(^{47}\) Watt describes the lack of interest in orders for free

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\(^{45}\) ‘Dearth and Duty’ \(NG\), 1 May 1863, p.5; ‘State of Trade’ \(NG\), 11 July 1862, p.5.  
\(^{46}\) ‘Dearth and Duty’  
\(^{47}\) ‘The Nottingham Daily Express’ \(NDE\), 17 January 1861, p.2
labour calico in Manchester, at a slightly higher price, ‘trade is profit…. the pursuit of cheapness for profit supersedes every other motive in trade’.48

Kelly’s research has investigated the dilemma of how the flow of capital could be reconciled with the Britain’s perceived distance from slavery; ‘The majority of British subjects saw American slavery as lying outside both their personal moral geographies and that of the government’. 49 Kelly concludes that Britain saw itself as insulated by its place at the top of a hierarchy of civilisation, allowing ideas around the rational, economic needs of trade to be reconciled with the slavery system.

Summary

The public support for anti-slavery and the complex picture of changing views on recognition of the Confederacy is not surprising given he predominance of self-made, dissenting Radical Liberals on the town corporation, many of whom were lace manufacturers. 50 However, it is difficult to distinguish the economic need to find new sources of supply from the humanitarian view of using free labour. Although there are examples of free labour cotton being used there is little evidence of manufacturer’s desire to boycott cotton produced by the enslaved. This could be because they were reliant on agents and cotton doublers to supply yarn and so were one step removed from their raw material. It could be that the price of cotton was the overriding factor in determining the source of supply or perhaps it was seen as America’s duty to end the slavery system and therefore beyond their control.

50 Church, pp.181-182.
6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the economic impact of the cotton famine on Nottingham, the degree of ensuing poverty and attitudes towards the ethical issues highlighted by the American Civil War. The lace industry was based on a unique and complex structure which was vulnerable to: trade cycles, a lack of diversification, disruptions to raw material supply, disturbances in export markets and even the weather. The American Civil War disrupted the supply of cotton and a major export market but the levels of poverty experienced in Nottingham were not as severe as parts of Lancashire. It is difficult to determine the full extent of distress because the official records are likely to be an underestimate and reliance on qualitative sources conveys an impression which could be inaccurate. A further limitation is that the lace industry is often not referred to specifically, especially in newspaper reports. The patterns shown by the economic measures used, reveal a definite downturn in trade but this starts before the full effects of the cotton famine take hold. There are also seasonal variations from 1861 to 1865 where trade improved slightly but the winters of 1863 and 1864 were particularly depressed. This fits with theories suggesting that the cotton famine was not caused by the American Civil War but by overproduction in the preceding years but it is also explained by the much higher dependence on employment in the cotton mills of Lancashire.\(^{51}\) Newspapers have provided evidence of the awareness of the distress in the town from leading townspeople and their desire to alleviate suffering. The Liberal, non-conformist nature of the civic

leadership may have influenced the more lenient approach to poor relief, the
availability of self-help options and the services of the Relief Committee. However,
responses were at times linked to a fear of unrest which did not materialise. There
was definite support for anti-slavery in Nottingham but less evidence of
manufacturers seeking out free grown cotton until supplies from the American South
were no longer available.

After the end of the American Civil War the lace industry hit another economic crisis
in 1866 but prospered with the rest of the town in the boom years of 1869-72.⁵²
During this period the town’s industrial structure became more diversified with the
development of coal mining, railways and three additional important industries:
Players, Raleigh and Boots. The bicycle industry had a direct link to the engineering
companies that had originally built lace machines.⁵³ The industry remained unstable
until the early twentieth century in Church’s view. This was mainly due to its
structure, with increasing numbers of independent lace makers who hired machines,
leading to higher risks of overproduction.⁵⁴

Further research into the origins of cotton used by local firms would help to clarify the
extent of enslaved materials used by the industry. A research project at Nottingham
Trent University is examining the links between lace, cotton and slavery from a
global perspective. This incorporates the use of mass spectrometry on samples from
the Lace Archive to establish the origins of the thread and the processes used.⁵⁵

⁵² Roy A. Church, Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900 (London:
⁵³ Church, p.247.
⁵⁴ Church, p.306.
⁵⁵ ‘Lace: Global Material Encounters’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IOyTbMvnKQ> [accessed 07
August 2021]
Further research into the lace industry’s financial connections to slavery through banking, investment and inheritance would also help to shed light on a different aspect of global links. There is also potential for further exploration of the impact of the depression on lace workers by following individual workhouse inmates through the Census records and by looking more closely at lace industry bankruptcies and their causes.
Appendices

Appendix 1 Occupations of males and females in Nottingham, 1841 to 1871

Appendix 2 Felkin’s estimates of employment in the lace industry

Appendix 3 Index number of employment in the United Kingdom

Appendix 4 Statistics of poor relief in Nottingham 1857 to 1865

Appendix 5 Comparison of Industry Concentration: Lancashire Towns and Nottingham
Appendix 1 Occupations of males and females in Nottingham, 1841 to 1871

### Occupations of males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1841</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
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<td>1851</td>
<td>1861</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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### Occupations of females

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<td>1%</td>
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<td>Domestic servant</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortmaker/ seamstress</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosier manufacture</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glover</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washerwoman/laundry keeper</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentlemans/ independent</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alms paupers pensioners beggar</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total age</td>
<td>40288</td>
<td>43442</td>
<td>47285</td>
<td>47285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Appendix 2 Felkin’s estimates of employment in the lace industry.²

Appendix 3 Index number of employment in the United Kingdom.³

³ *British and Foreign Trade and Industry (Second Series)*, Second series of memoranda, statistical tables, and charts prepared in the Board of Trade with reference to various matters bearing on British and foreign trade and industrial conditions. 1905 Cmd.2337 LXXXIV.1, p.80.
Appendix 4 Poor relief statistics 1857 to 1865

4.1 Number of paupers, Nottingham, Sheffield, Oldham and Manchester, 1857 to 1862 and as percentage of 1861 population.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dec 1857</th>
<th>Mar 1858</th>
<th>Mar 1858</th>
<th>Jun 1858</th>
<th>Jun 1858</th>
<th>Sep 1858</th>
<th>Sep 1858</th>
<th>Dec 1858</th>
<th>Dec 1860</th>
<th>Dec 1860</th>
<th>Mar 1861</th>
<th>Mar 1861</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5335</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3286</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2923</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3930</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5917</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10842</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7523</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6453</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5039</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2562</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2201</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1668</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16037</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8754</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7278</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5374</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6147</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jun 1861</th>
<th>Jun 1861</th>
<th>Sep 1861</th>
<th>Sep 1861</th>
<th>Dec 1861</th>
<th>Dec 1861</th>
<th>Dec 1861</th>
<th>Mar 1862</th>
<th>Mar 1862</th>
<th>Jun 1862</th>
<th>Jun 1862</th>
<th>Sept 1862</th>
<th>Nov 1862</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>5816</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5367</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5334</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6078</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4979</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>7680</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8197</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8393</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8306</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6550</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2976</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3022</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>6181</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5927</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8406</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12127</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13122</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Poor relief (Lancashire, &c.) Return of the number of paupers (exclusive of lunatic paupers in asylums and vagrants) in receipt of relief in each week of the fourteen months ending with December, 1862 HC 502, pp34-39; George R Boyer, ‘The Evolution of Unemployment Relief in Great Britain’, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 34.3 (2004), 393–433 (p.405); ‘Nottingham Board of Guardians’, NG, 12 September 1862, p.5; 28 November 1862 p.5.
### 4.2 Expenditure on poor relief, Nottingham Manchester, Oldham 1860-1866.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nottingham</th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Oldham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-maintenance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>2368</td>
<td>7452</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>3431</td>
<td>8896</td>
<td>2038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>3280</td>
<td>10176</td>
<td>4446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>3060</td>
<td>39175</td>
<td>2318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>2745</td>
<td>14443</td>
<td>5909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>3070</td>
<td>9595</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>3843</td>
<td>10574</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outdoor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>4663</td>
<td>6164</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>7603</td>
<td>6424</td>
<td>3854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>7505</td>
<td>21712</td>
<td>4446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>7215</td>
<td>48648</td>
<td>2318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>5901</td>
<td>23804</td>
<td>5909</td>
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<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>5219</td>
<td>10865</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>5499</td>
<td>8530</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>£ per head 1861 pop.</strong></td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<td>1863</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

2 Comparative Statement of Amount expended for In-maintenance and Out-relief Poor rates and pauperism. Return (C. I.) In-maintenance and out-door relief, 1860, HC 383C LVIII, pp.46,48; 1861, HC 324C LIII, pp.46,48; 1862, HC 307C XLVIII, pp. 46,48; 1863, HC 431C LI, pp.44,46; 1864, HC 507C LI, pp.44,46; 1865, HC 442C XLVIII, pp.44,46; 1866, HC 422C LXII, pp.27,28.
4.3 Numbers in receipt of indoor and outdoor relief Nottingham Union.\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>22 Aug 1860</th>
<th>05 Dec 1860</th>
<th>11 Apr 1861</th>
<th>21 Aug 1861</th>
<th>11 Dec 1861</th>
<th>02 Apr 1862</th>
<th>20 Aug 1862</th>
<th>13 Dec 1862</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workhouse inmates</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor relief</td>
<td>2558</td>
<td>3144</td>
<td>5165</td>
<td>4837</td>
<td>4371</td>
<td>3143</td>
<td>3830</td>
<td>4253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor relief cost</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3080</td>
<td>3855</td>
<td>5969</td>
<td>5594</td>
<td>5345</td>
<td>4080</td>
<td>4474</td>
<td>5105</td>
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</table>

av 1860/61       4301.33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workhouse inmates</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor relief</td>
<td>4336</td>
<td>3966</td>
<td>3995</td>
<td>4200</td>
<td>3432</td>
<td>3884</td>
<td>3538</td>
<td>2668</td>
<td>2651</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor relief cost</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5073</td>
<td>4628</td>
<td>4735</td>
<td>4920</td>
<td>4019</td>
<td>4698</td>
<td>4243</td>
<td>3329</td>
<td>3436</td>
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</table>

av 1863/4       4761.00

4.4 Workhouse admission numbers by category.⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Oct 1860-Mar 61</th>
<th>% of all paupers*</th>
<th>Oct 1863-Mar 64</th>
<th>% of all paupers*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able bodied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child u16</td>
<td>489</td>
<td></td>
<td>191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married M+F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able bodied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child u16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunatics</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1563</td>
<td></td>
<td>1010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of paupers*</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td></td>
<td>4751</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Average admissions as % of average total paupers 22 Aug, 5 Dec 1860, 11 Apr 1861, 21 Aug, 18 Dec 1863 15 Apr 1864 Appendix 2.2

Appendix 5 Comparison of industry concentration: Lancashire towns and Nottingham

1 Poor relief (Lancashire, &c.) Return of the number of paupers (exclusive of lunatic paupers in asylums and vagrants) in receipt of relief in each week of the fourteen months ending with December, 1862, HC 502, pp. 1, 3, 36. The population figures in this source do not match the total population figures from the Census, (113,272) in the absence of explanation, it is closest to total population with occupations for Nottingham (74,693)
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SO/PU/O/2/3/3/1 Indoor Relief Lists Oct 1863 - Mar 1864

SO/PU/O/2/3/3/2 Indoor Relief Lists Oct 1864- Mar 1866
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Fourteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1862, Cmd.3037


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**Broadcasts**