

December 15, 1815
Alston, England

I, Charlotte Parker, have lived all sixteen years of my life in the small, rural town of Alston in northern England. Each day, I make the trek from my family's small two room house to the London Lead Company mine by foot, along with my brother, Jack. The land around Alston is thriving with mining and the mines provide most of the towns' people with employment. However, I cannot take the long days in the mine. I work for only one shilling a day, which then is given to my mother and father. I spend six days a week in the mine, twelve hours a day. The only day that I have off is Sunday, the day in which my mother, father, brother and I attend St. Augustine's Church in town. On my way to work each day, I travel through the open moorland in which sheep graze and cottages are scattered far apart from each other. Much of the land around Alston is considered to be moorland. Moorland is open grassland. When in town, I walk along the streets and pass the several storefronts. It has recently been known that Alston is now considered to be the highest market town in England at an elevation of 1,000 feet. I find this puzzling considering the land is predominately flat grassland. My father works in the cottage industry system. He produces various hand crafted goods with the use of materials supplied by a wealthy merchant in the industrious town of Manchester. Mother's job is to simply manage the house, as most women of rural communities are to do after having a family. As the year comes to a conclusion, 1815 has meant the end of two large scale wars. The Napoleonic Wars, as well as the War of 1812 ended within this year. Many Brits are still very bitter over their loss to the Americans, but I was too young to even understand or care about the war.

Charlotte Parker

July 23, 1818
Alston, England

As the summer has moved on, more and more people from Alston are leaving for the larger towns and cities, many moving to Manchester. I have never been to the city of Manchester, nor have any of the families moving there. The distance is over a hundred miles one way and can take three days by carriage. Upon going into town, all you hear people talking about is the great opportunities for prosperity in the city. The great lead mines surrounding Alston are slowly closing down, but I still have my daily duty of working long days underground, taking the lead from the miners to be processed above ground. The work is as wretched as it always has been. However, it really is the only option for women in Alston. Since the mine's opening, every child growing up can expect to start working in the mines around age five. Although it is the way of life, I still find it harmful and unjust to make such young children work such long hours in harsh conditions. However, Parliament has not placed any regulations on it. In Fact, there really has not even been talk of doing so, it only frustrates the workers, not the wealthy merchants and capitalists that Parliament would actually listen to. It is simply the way of life or English children. At age nineteen, I am becoming more a woman than a child, but I still live at home; for no single woman, even on a paid wage certainly cannot afford to support herself alone. It is hard to believe that I am not too far from the common age for marrying. My parents married at the age of eighteen, but today, the age is getting higher as more and more women enter the industrial workforce. I still have a good six or seven years before I will more than likely get married.

Charlotte Parker

September 23, 1819
Alston, England

Last week, I received a letter from my Aunt Josephine. Josephine, along with her husband Stanley were one of the many from Alston that migrated to the great town of Manchester. She informed me of sad news. Stanley was injured last month in the Peterloo Massacre. She said that the fighting broke out in St. Peter's Field on August 16th. It happened when calgary charged at a crowd of thousands of angry civilians. The civilians had gathered there to protest and display their want for Parliamentary reform. Stanley had been a member of the Manchester Patriotic Union, lead by Henry Hunt. The protesters were outraged after large scale famine and unemployment after the instituting of the Corn Laws and the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Thankfully, Stanley was not one of the fifteen people killed. He did suffer a wound, but it could have been much worse. Now, the Six Acts are currently awaiting passage by Parliament. The Acts have been drawn up to outlaw any kind of radical group meeting. This is ridiculous, it is just another way that Parliament is trying to crush the opportunities for poor, rural citizens that demand change. Parliament should be protecting the rights of all citizens, not imposing rules and laws to prevent them from having rights. Hopefully the Acts are not passed. If they are passed, even newspapers will be limited as to what they can say. I did read in the paper that the Whigs are intensely oppose to the passage of these acts. All that aside, I send my thoughts and prayers to Josephine and Stanley and wish for the best recovery for him. He must begin to improve condition because the factory he works in does not give time off for unhealthy employees.

Charlotte Parker

March 12, 1822
Alston, England

Today, my father made the entire family sit down. He had said that he had something very serious to discuss with us, which made me nervous. My father never does such things. However, I thought I knew what he was going to say. It was what most families had already communicated about and decided to do. The truth was, Alston was rapidly becoming limited in opportunities in comparison to Manchester. The population in Alston was still high, near 6,000, but Manchester was just so full of jobs in the emerging textile industry. Although we would have to give up our rural home, the wages that could be earned were far greater than those in the small town of Alston. With new industry, my father no longer had extensive work in the cottage industry business. He found that less merchants were looking to small rural worker like him for work when they could produce goods cheaper in urban environments. My father, mother, brother and I talked over the prospect of moving and working as a family unit in a factory. We decided it was the smartest decision to make. From that moment on, we spent every second planning our new life to the best of our ability. There a lot of uncertainties though. We will not know who will hire us until we arrive. We hope to work at one of the large textile mills. I do not want to leave the open moorland of Cumbria behind. I will miss the open grassland, small town, the beautiful River South Tyne. However, moving to Manchester will be adventurous and it will be a step closer to my independent adult life. Perhaps I will meet a man and have a child in the coming years. I do not know what the great urban life that everybody speaks of will be like, but I will have to wait and see. In the meantime, I must prepare. We will leave this summer.

Charlotte Parker

August 17, 1823
Manchester, England

I have spent the last year in Manchester. I am trying to look at all the great opportunities that this town will bring, but looking around, all I see is brick mills and factories. It is nothing like our old home. I miss the quaint streets and grassland near Alston. I miss the clear river. All of this makes the lead mine not look so awful. The crowded town has a dull feel and is full of unhappy people, constantly struggling to make the demands of wealthy factory owners and capitalists. Our family was hired by the McConnel & Kennedy Mills. McConnel & Kennedy is one of the largest factory complexes in the town of Manchester. We moved into a poor house with many other families and mill workers. Each day, we make the five minute walk to the mill on Redhill Street. We work in the newly constructed Sedgewick Mill with nearly 1500 other workers, primarily women and children. We work 69 hours a week and make only 11 shillings. The mill is only a few years old and is very large. It is comprised of eight stories and takes up six street blocks. Here we produce cotton textile. There is also a hissing machine unlike anything that I had ever seen in Alston. It is called a Watt steam engine. It is in the tunnel and powers everything in the mill. The monstrous machine has a 24 feet tall flywheel and operates at 54 horsepower. We were told that it is revolutionary technology and is very expensive. It scares me, as do the many other machines within the mill. The working conditions are awful and the hours are even longer than the mine I worked at in Alston from a young age.

Charlotte Parker

May 3, 1830
Manchester, England

Today, marks my thirtieth birthday, and since the last time I wrote, great change has occurred in my life. I met a man in the Sedgewick Mill I have been working in for many years. He came to Manchester when he was 13. He moved along with his parents to join the early textile industry when it was first developing in the town. He operated a Spinning Jenny on the same wing of the factory that I work on. Although factory owners attempt to stop relationships from occurring, but James and I fell in love regardless. We knew each other for about a year before we decided to get married. Without a ceremony, we received permission to wed. He brought a sense of happiness in this dull, monotonous world of Manchester. We moved into a large tenement building. We share the old building with five other families and there is a total of twenty people living with us. It is crowded, but it is also all we can afford with our small wages from the mill. With such long work hours, we really do not even spend much time in the building. Tenements and poor houses are simply a way of life in the urban center of Manchester. We are now expecting a baby. I am so excited, but I am also aware of the great risk that I will ensue from childbirth. It is very common for women to die in the process and it is also likely for babies to contract illness and not live past infancy. The birth of our child will also mean that I will no longer be able to work my long hours at the mill. I must stay home with the baby, and then shortly after, I will look for another job. Many lower class women are obtaining jobs as servants for the wealthy, and this looks as though it will be my best opportunity for work. We will not be able to afford the cost of living a food with only James' salary.

Charlotte Thomas

June 21, 1841
Manchester, England

Ten years ago, James and I gave birth to our first child. We had a daughter, Abigail. Luckily, she was born in good health and is still living today. She recently began to work at a textile mill in Manchester. I hate to see her leaving for long work days, but it is the only option for children today; it is simply what is expected. Between then and now, I have given birth to three other children. After Abigail, I gave birth to a baby boy, Henry, but within only four days of birth he passed away from serious complications. After the death of Henry, I had another boy, Walter. Walter has also survived to this day as a healthy boy of seven years old. Walter is not yet allowed to work, for The Factory Act of 1833 banned factory work for children under the age of nine. I was very lucky to have survived three childbirths, as it is something that is uncommon for many women. I remained healthy whilst many women die in the process or die from infection afterward.

My mother and father moved to nearby Liverpool, for my father to partake in the large shipping businesses. Liverpool has turned into a large port city and directly supplies Manchester. The latest mode of transportation between the two cities is the Manchester Liverpool Railroad. The first steam engine ran on the track nearly eleven years ago, but today the train is much more sophisticated than it was originally. My mother, Felicity recently traveled to visit us and see her grandchildren. She took the train that traveled at a steady 17 miles per hour and covered 35 miles worth of railed track. It is amazing how people are beginning to travel from long distances in only a very short amount of time. It is very, very different from when I was younger. Another amazing method of transportation surrounding Manchester is the Bridgewater Canal. Transportation is greatly changing. It is quite amazing, but the speeds that these new transportation methods are attaining are unsafe. No humans have traveled this fast before, and when they do now, they must assume many risks.

Charlotte Thomas

September 19, 1853
Manchester, England

For quite some time now, a quote has been going around to describe the conditions in Manchester. The statement was made by a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville. Of course many were taken back by his blunt statement, saying that he was simply criticising Manchester because France does not have a city like it, nor are they anywhere near where England is in regard to industry. "From this foul drain, the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilize the world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and here civilized man is turned back almost into a savage." Whether the statement is harsh or not, I do find much truth in it. It does not take much to observe these things about the place in which I have spent all of my adult life. The River Irk is as black as coal and has a terrible smell protruding from it. Every body of water within the city and suburbs is used for the disposal of waste. Most of the city is covered in filth, yet, as de Tocqueville stated, it continues to be one of the largest industry towns in the world. The widespread use of steam power and the rising presence of burning various fuels for power has left the sky tainted black and always looking hazy. Every square foot of the urban area is covered in warehouses, factories, and mills. Few trees remain, and even signs of the city of crept outward into the countryside as railroads are becoming more universal and members of the wealthy upper class are beginning to leave the filth of the city behind and have built lavish homes in the peaceful countryside I used to live in. The land that was once where prosperity was. Once where the heart of industry was located with the use of cottage industry and putting out system. Now the heart of industry is centered in filth, but what do the factory owners that benefit only from money care? They don't is the answer. They have the money to escape the poor conditions and they are the ones to receive the benefits for their children.

Charlotte Thomas

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February 24, 1860
Manchester, England

James, Walter, and I recently moved out of the tenement building in which we called home for many years. We moved into a row house near the mill that James works 14 hour days in. Walter is nearly an adult and is working with his father. Abbey already moved out with her husband, Charles that she married last summer. She works as a weaver in a textile factory. That really is the only opportunity for the people of Manchester. The once agriculture based society completely took a turn. You either work in the factories and mills, or if you are a woman, especially a mother, you may have the chance to work as a servant for a wealthy family. That is what I have done since ~~giving~~ birth to my children. Everyday I leave the rowhouse at six in the morning and walk for a half an hour to a large, grand house on the outskirts of the city. It is a villa in the Victoria Park suburb. Only the wealthy can afford to live there. I find that I am often treated poorly and the wage I earn is low, but I must say that is a wonderful opportunity to leave the uncleanliness of the city behind for a day. There has been rapid population growth within the ~~past~~ twenty years that has left everywhere crowded and unpleasant. Cholera has broken out due to contaminated drinking water, and even though there was the development of a vaccine years ago, smallpox has once again left its mark on many. With little money, many people have become famished and are more susceptible to disease, such as Tuberculosis and Typhoid. I sure do hope that everyone in the family are able to resist all the harms and dangers that are causing such outbreaks in disease.

Culture?

Charlotte Thomas

October 7, 1870

As I am beginning to grow old, I have begun to realize just how much change and development that I have witnessed in my lifetime. Now, the filthy, overcrowded city I wrote of in the past is beginning to transform into a city of more character and cleanliness. I witnessed the town of Manchester become an incorporated city. I saw factories and crowded tenements be built upon the sides of every street. I beared witness to trees being cut down, land taken, and the once blue waterways fade into black. Once a rural village girl with no concept of transportation aside from walking and carriage, I came to know railroads and canals. Steam engines were like a new breed of life, for every where man now works is powered by the beasts. Although I have never been a woman of wealth, I have always been a very lucky woman. I survived infancy and childhood, giving birth, and I have been able to see my family develop into adults. Manchester is now becoming a better place. The atmosphere is cleaning up. Appropriate housing for workers is now being constructed. Waste is being handled properly and drinking water is no longer as contaminated. Working classes were provided with greater opportunities as more regulations were placed within the workplace. With shorter work days, leisure sports have become popular among the working classes. A few public parks have opened within the city to compensate for the many years of no open land. Just sitting in the small parks at least brings back some memories from my childhood in the moorland of Alston. The Manchester Baths and Laundry Company opened a few years ago as a place to provide workers with the ability to wash their clothing and to promote sanitation. A few new hospitals have also opened, but healthcare is still relatively sparse. I am proud of the recent

transformation that our city has made. I have seen so much great change over the years, I cannot imagine what Manchester will be like even in the near future.