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A Social History of the Scottish Handloom Weavers, 1790 - 1850

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Summary of Thesis

Like any other work of social history, this study must begin by examining the economic background. In outlining the main economic factors affecting this important workforce in the Scottish Industrial Revolution period, it is not only necessary to quantify the numbers who, over time, depended upon the hand loom for a living, but also to relate these aggregate figures to the types of fabric worked, the industrial hierarchy of the industry, and the sex structure of its followers. Other questions to be asked in this context relate to the geographical location and, where relevant, the nationality of the weaving community. Moreover, since the websters were affected by long term movements in economic prosperity and by cyclical fluctuations, some attempt must be made to delineate these exogenous influences, and to explain the causal factors operating in each case.

Once the economic background has been established, an assessment of the movement over time of the more measurable facets of weavers' living standards is attempted. Trends in aggregate family incomes are examined in relation to the movement of food and other prices to establish the course of real wages. Such an exercise reveals clearly that there was a trend increase in poverty among the Scottish handloom weavers. The incidence of poverty

is examined critically, making particular use of concepts formulated by the social analysts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is followed by an assessment of the effectiveness of various relief mechanisms in alleviating such destitution and, in addition, several aspects of weavers' everyday lives - working conditions, housing and health are briefly explored.

But the quantifiable side of living standards apart, certain qualitative elements in the overall culture of the Scottish weaving community need to be analysed. These include educational, religious, and intellectual activities, leisure-time pursuits, the incidence of crime and vice among the weavers, as well as their performance according to the prevailing contemporary concept of morality. Again, as in the case of more measurable criteria, changes in these cultural aspects over time are emphasised.

Since over the period 1790-1850 weavers were subjected to increasing social and economic pressures, their response to such harrassment is interesting. Basically, this took two forms. They attempted to protect their trade by forming trade unions, and they supported the main political movements of the period. In addition to examining in detail their contribution in these directions, it is, finally, worthwhile noting whether there was any degree of overlap between the two responses.

Chapter I

Economic Background

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Whether one accepts the sectoral or the broad-based interpretation of the causes of the Scottish Industrial Revolution, there can be little doubt that in the vital 'take-off' phase textiles played a significant, perhaps even a key, role. Certainly if Sir John Sinclair can be believed, Scottish textiles employed nine-tenths of the occupied industrial labour force in the 1820s, though precisely the range of occupations which were included in this category is not known. More revealing is the same author's assertion that the iron industry, which he noted next in importance to textiles, occupied only one-half, one-sixth and one-twelfth of the numbers employed in woollens, linens and cottons respectively.[1] As an employer of labour, therefore, the Scottish textile industry was of major importance in the growth process; in addition, it clearly overshadowed any other 'manufacturing' industry.

Cheap labour and local skills had attracted the silk gauze manufacture to Paisley in 1759 and soon Paisley products competed effectively with those of Spitalfields and French silks, in the fashionable markets of Europe. By 1784, a total of 10,000 were employed, half of whom were weavers, in the silk gauze line. This figure had shown no diminution by 1789, although the numbers engaged in weaving lawns, cambrics and thread gauzes had increased from 2,400 to 2,800 in the same quinquenium.[2] With the ascendency of cotton, however,

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1. J. Sinclair, _Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland_, London, (1826), p. 321

2. A. Brown, _History of Glasgow and Paisley, Greenock and Port Glasgow comprehending the Ecclesiastical and Civil History of these Places_, Glasgow, (1795), p. 245
   R. Brown, _The History of Paisley from the Roman Period down to 1884_, Paisley, (1886), pp. 96-97.

the Scottish silk industry declined in the 1790s, for even if there is a paucity of statistical evidence as to the numbers employed in this period many sources refer to the fall-off in the silk trade.[3] That this depression was a prolonged one may be gauged from the fact that in 1824 it was hoped that the removal of the duty on raw silk might lead to the revival of that trade.[4] Of 51,060 looms enumerated by J.C. Symons in 1839, 7,860 wove 'fancy muslins, silk gauzes etc', most of which were concentrated in Glasgow and its neighbourhood, or in Paisley and rural Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.[5] As Dr Harding in his report on the East of Scotland, where he estimated there were 33,500 handloom weavers, found no silk weavers in his district it would seem that the proportion of silk looms to total loom strength in Scotland in 1839 was slightly below ten per cent although this figure excludes an indeterminate proportion of 7,750 weavers in the South of Scotland who wrought 'shawls, zebras etc.'[6] Many of these shawls were made wholly or partially of silk. And if it is impossible to ascertain the precise number employed as silk weavers it is safe to assume that as late as 1840 it was still a sizeable element of the South of Scotland workforce.

The traditional industry of woollen weaving had been one of the

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3. J. and K. Parlane, Historical Notes on Paisley and its Neighbourhood, Paisley, (1881), p. 71
W. Metcalfe, The History of Paisley 600-1908, Paisley, (1909), p. 460

4. Glasgow Herald, 27 Feb., 1824

5. Hand Loom Weavers, Reports from Assistant Commissioners, Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-6.

6. The proportion of silk looms to total loom strength was less than 7,860 from 86,560.
Hand Loom Weavers, Reports from Assistant Commissioners, Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 187-191

oldest economic activities of the west of Scotland but at an early stage of the Scottish Industrial Revolution it was eclipsed first by flax spinning and weaving, and later by cotton.[7] Elsewhere in Scotland, however, the industry grew. At Galashiels for example the number of employees rose from ten in 1775 to thirty-five in 1825, whilst the number of looms in regular use increased from about thirty to 175. In approximately the same period, from 1774 to 1825, annual raw wool consumption in the town increased from 17,000 lbs. to 500,000 lbs and the value of its output of woven goods is estimated to have advanced from £5,500 in 1790 to £58,000 in 1825.[8] More important, the spread of the woollen industry from Galashiels to Jedburgh and Hawick as well as to rural villages in the Borders meant that over time employment increased. For example, estimates for the numbers of looms in these areas - though these were not devoted exclusively to woollen weaving - for 1828 and 1838 stand at 630 and 782 respectively.[9] In addition, perhaps another 2,500 woollen looms existed in 1838, mainly concentrated in the Stirling and Aberdeen areas.[10] But the changes in the woollen industry were not merely confined to physical expansion and a shift in location, for the Industrial Revolution period also witnessed important technological and organisational developments in the weaving sector of the trade. These developments comprised the successful adaptation of the flying shuttle

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7. T. Cunnison and J.B.S. Gilfillan, (Ed), The Third Statistical Account of Scotland, Glasgow, Glasgow (1958), p. 246
   G. Thomson, Airdrie, A Brief Historical Sketch for the Ter-Jubilee of the Burgh 1971, Airdrie, (1971), p. 6

8. C. Gulvin, The Tweedmakers, A History of the Scottish Fancy Woollen Industry 1600-1914, Newton Abbot, (1973), p. 40

9. Assistant Commissioners Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 4

10. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 187

TABLE 1A

Extent and Distribution of Scottish Woollen Trade, 1776

Town		No. of Looms or Description of Industry
Edinburgh	...	20,000 stones of wool used for stocking knitting and carpet weaving.
Leith	...	20,000 stones of wool bought annually.
Dalkeith	...	700 stones annually used - employed 200 people.
Musselburgh	...	Over 1,000 stones of wool used annually.
Haddington	...	800 people in woollen trade, annual value of which was £5,000.
Dunbar, Linton, Tranent, Linlithgow, Perth & Inverness		Woollen cloth, carpets and stockings.
Alloa	...	150 looms.
Fyfeshire	...	Good deal of woollen cloth for local consumption.
Peterhead	...	2 woollen factories, producing £110 per week.
Ellon	...	Produced stockings to value of £100 per week.
Aberdeen	...	240 looms chiefly in woollen fabrics.
Montrose	...	One woollen factory employing 70 hands.
Stirling	...	160 looms, 38 stocking frames, 17 carpet frames.
Glasgow	...	One woollen factory mainly in carpets.
Kilmarnock	...	146 looms, all woollen, 26 of which were carpets.
Ayr	...	100 looms, and 15 stocking frames, all wool.
Dumfries and Sanquhar		Considerable trade in stocking weaving.
Moffat	...	50 looms in serges, shalloons, blankets, etc.
Galashiels	...	30 looms.
Melrose	...	140 looms, all in woollens.
Hawick	...	65 looms in linen and woollens, mainly the latter.
Jedburgh	...	56 looms all employed in jobbing.
Kelso	...	40 looms in blankets and flannels.
Peebles	...	40 looms in coarse woollens.
Selkirk	...	A few looms but concentrated on spinning.
Other Areas	...	Weavers found in most Scottish villages doing customer work.

SOURCE: D. Bremner, The Industries of Scotland, Their Rise Progress and Present Condition, Edinburgh, (1869), pp. 152-154

and the 'factoryisation' of much of the Scottish woollen hand-weaving trade.[11] Considerable productivity gains accompanied such changes.

For various reasons a considerable flax-spinning and weaving industry developed in Scotland during the eighteenth century. Fragmentary evidence clearly demonstrates the importance of this industry in local economies. For example in 1778 there were 4,000 linen looms in Glasgow and its environs; there were another 1,360 looms in the trade at Paisley and 2,000 at Dundee; in 1788 there were 900 looms at Dunfermline; while in 1795 there were 1,500 looms in Perth and linen was still the 'staple manufacture' of that town.[12] Local figures can also be used to demonstrate the increasing importance of the industry over time. The number of linen weavers in Glasgow increased from 3,200 in 1767 to 4,000 in 1778; while estimates for Dunfermline and its surroundings for 1749, 1788 and 1792 stand at 400, 900 and 1,200 respectively.[13] But the first available global figures are as late as 1790, when it was estimated that in addition to 181,252 spinners there were also 47,530 linen weavers in Scotland.[14] More and

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11. Ibid., p. 4; p. 187.
In 1789 the Weavers' Incorporation of Galashiels wrote to a Dr Douglas requesting his assistance in applying to the Board of Trustees for Manufactures for a sum of £50 with which they could purchase a common stock of steel reeds. The flying shuttle, introduced to Galashiels in May 1788, quickly damaged the existing stock of wooden reeds, though the weavers of Galashiels nevertheless acknowledged its technical superiority.
R. Hall, The History of Galashiels, Galashiels, (1895), pp. 286-288.

12. H. Hamilton, The Industrial Revolution in Scotland, London, (1966), p. 101
A. Mercer, The History of Dunfermline from the Earliest Records down to the Present Time, Dunfermline, (1828), p. 165
T.H. Marshall, The History of Perth from the Earliest Period to the Present Time, Perth, (1849), p. 483

13. Report from the Select Committee on the Linen Trade in Great Britain and Ireland, P.P., 1773, III, p. 102.
Hamilton, op. cit., p. 101
E. Henderson, The Annals of Dunfermline and Vicinity from the Earliest Authentic Period to the Present Time, A.D. 1069-1878, Glasgow, (1879), p. 640

14. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 101

more of these workers were becoming full time weavers.[15]

Like the Scottish woollen and silk industries, however, linen was eclipsed by cotton. This takeover of a great deal of its productive factors helped to determine the geographical location of the Scottish linen industry in the nineteenth century, with its concentration upon the east coast of Scotland.[16] Though some linen weaving survived in the west until 1839, at Paisley, Port Glasgow and Greenock, the actual numbers employed at weaving the fabric in these districts by that date was minimal, and of these some wove linen mixed with other fabrics. In summary it is safe to assume that the number of linen weavers in Scotland in 1838 closely approximated to Dr Harding's estimate of 26,000.[17] This, of course, represents a sharp decline in numbers since 1790, but this must be balanced against the eastward migration of the industry, the fact that its labour force in the west was quickly (and at least in the early period, painlessly) absorbed into the expanding cotton trade, and, more important still, the realisation that in the east of Scotland the linen industry was a

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15. Ibid., pp. 100-101.

16. The distribution of the Scottish linen industry in 1822, measured in terms of annual production of finished cloth, was as follows:

Forfar		22,629,533	yards
Fife		7,923,388	"
Aberdeen		2,500,403	"
Perth		1,605,321	"
Kincardineshire		632,896	"
Cromarty		297,754	"
Inverness		318,465	"
	TOTAL	35,907,760	yards

Hamilton, op. cit., p. 109

17. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 188
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 35

growth sector during the Industrial Revolution. In 1838 there were 3,000 looms at Dunfermline and its immediate neighbourhood, almost all of which did 'harness work'. These were in fact almost the only harness linen looms in Scotland, producing damask table cloths, table covers and napkins. In some of the other large towns - in Dundee, Arbroath, Aberdeen, Montrose and Kirkcaldy - 4,000 looms wraught at 'heavy work' such as sail-cloth, broad sheetings, floor cloth and some descriptions of bagging. But by far the largest number of linen looms in 1838 were in 'ordinary or light work,' producing dowlas, common sheetings and Osnaburghs; Dr Harding estimated that in 1838 this sector of the linen trade employed 17,000 in summer and 22,000 or 23,000 during the winter.[18] Though possibly somewhat atypical in relation to the other branches of the Scottish linen trade, available figures for the number of looms in Dunfermline and its vicinity do illustrate both the growth rate of the industry and its significance to the local economy.[19]

But by far the most spectacular advances of the Industrial Revolution took place in the cotton industry, which rapidly assumed - in

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18. Assistant Commissioner's Reports from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, pp. 188-190.

19. No. of Looms in Dunfermline and its Neighbourhood

Date	Looms within the Parish	Looms outside the Parish	Total
1749	about 400	-	400
1788	-	-	900
1792	820	about 380	1,200
1813	930	70	1,000
1818	1,500	150	1,650
1822	-	-	1,800
1831	2,670	450	3,120
1836 (July)	2,794	723	3,517
1837 (August)	2,983	717	3,700

Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 640

Scotland more so than in England - a dominant position in relation to other textile fabrics.[20] From an estimated total number of 300,000 employed in the whole of the British cotton industry in 1785 the industry grew to employ another 75,000 by 1791.[21] In relation to Scotland alone there is no scarcity of either statistical or more subjective evidence about the development of the cotton industry. The first cotton spinning mill in Scotland was established at Penicuik in 1779 and in the following year a similar establishment was set up in Rothesay. From nineteen in 1787 the total number of Scottish cotton mills increased to 134 in 1834 almost all of which were within a twenty-five mile radius from Glasgow.[22] A good indication of the rapid growth of the west of Scotland cotton industry at this critical phase of the Industrial Revolution can be obtained from figures for raw wool imports to the Clyde in the late eighteenth century. From an annual import of 0.15 million lbs from 1770-1774 the figure rises to 2.0 million lbs in 1789, 2.8 million lbs in 1798, 3.2 million lbs in 1799, 4.8 million lbs in 1800 and 7.5 million lbs in 1801 when the series unfortunately ends.[23] Expansion undoubtedly continued after 1800 and assuming that the average weight of cotton bags had not radically altered from the 200 lbs of 1800 it is fairly safe to calculate the weight of raw cotton imported into the Clyde in 1810 and

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20. T.C. Tindall, the Glasgow Hand Loom Weavers 1833-1845, B.A. Dissertation, Economic History Department, University of Strath-Clyde, (1967), p. 16

21. Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencier, 4 April, 1791

22. T.S.A., Glasgow, p. 103

23. T.C. Smout, A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830, London, (1969), p. 250
Glasgow Herald, 4 May, 1801

and 1811 respectively at 10,673,600 lbs and 8,549,800 lbs.[24] Total annual consumption of raw cotton at these two dates almost certainly exceeded these figures by a considerable margin since, increasingly after 1800, a large amount of fine cotton yarn was sent to the weavers of Glasgow and Paisley by the great Lancashire spinning firms.[25]

There is also ample testimony as to the speed with which cotton superseded the other textile industries of Scotland. For example, the Old Statistical Account refers to the rapid predominance of this new fabric at places as far apart as Melrose, Blairatholl, Kirkmichael in Ayrshire and the Barony parish of Glasgow.[26] In 1786 the weaving of cotton fabrics began to supplant that of native linens in Airdrie; towards the close of the eighteenth century the traditional staple trade of Perth, linen, came to be entirely superseded by cotton and by 1810 only a few linen weavers remained in the area all of whom were engaged in diaper work; in 1790 the manufacture of silk was almost totally given up at Paisley, being replaced mainly by muslin manufacture which by 1818, when it employed 6,750 weavers, was

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24. Imports of Cotton to the Clyde

Description	1810 Bags etc.	1811 Bags etc.
America	21,828	19,868
Brazil	1,827	3,170
Demerara	10,225	5,136
West Indies	14,445	10,581
	48,323	38,755
Coastwise	5,040	3,994
TOTAL IMPORTS	53,368 bags	42,749 bags

Glasgow Herald, 10 Jan. 1812

25. Smout, op. cit., p. 250

26. W.H. Marwick, The Cotton Industry and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland, Scottish Historical Review, Vol. XXI, (1923) pp. 210-211.

considered to be the greatest 'manufacturing employment' known in the town.[27] By 1814 it was reckoned that a total of 151,300 found work in some branch or other of the Scottish cotton industry.[28] The rapid increase in the weaving side of the industry may be demonstrated from one contemporary account which quotes 50,000 operatives employed throughout Scotland in 1803, a figure which represents a six-fold increase on the number of weavers in 1792.[29] It seems fair therefore to assume that most of the new recruits to the trade were engaged in cotton weaving. A recent estimate puts the number of hand-loom weavers in the west of Scotland, the principal cotton area, at 35,000 in 1810; while James Cleland in 1819 enumerated a total of 32,000 looms employed by Glasgow manufacturers alone. Later, in 1831, he listed 31,990 hand looms which again were engaged only by Glasgow manufacturers. Most of these looms would have been devoted to the production of cotton fabrics, for by 1838 just over half of the 84,560 working hand looms in Scotland were engaged in the cotton trade.[30]

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27. Thomson, Airdrie Brief Historical Sketch, op. cit., p. 6.
Marshall, op. cit., p. 484 Parlane, op. cit., p. 71.
W.H.K. Turner, The Textile Industry of Perth and District, Transactions and Papers of the Institute of British Geographers, (1957), p. 126.
G. Crawford and G. Robertson, A General Description of the Shire of Renfrew including an account of the Noble and Ancient Families, Paisley, (1818), p. 335

28. View of the Present State of the Cotton Manufacture in Scotland from Sir John Sinclair's General Report of Scotland, 5 vols., 1814, Scots Magazine, LXXVI, (1814), p. 905

29. Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114) VIII, p. 95.

30. A. Slaven, The Development of the West of Scotland, 1750-1960, London, (1975), p. 103
J. Cleland, The Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow, Glasgow, (1820), pp. 237-239
J. Cleland, An Account of the Former and Present State of Glasgow comprehending its Commercial Manufacturing and Ecclesiastical Concerns, Glasgow, (1837), p. 35.

The geographical location of the Scottish cotton industry with its concentration upon Glasgow and the west of Scotland, was well summed up by Leonard Horner, one of the Factory Commissioners, when he reported in July 1834 -

> ... that in Scotland there are 134 cotton mills; that with the exception of some large establishments at Aberdeen, and one at Stanley, near Perth, the cotton manufacture is almost entirely confined to Glasgow and the country immediately adjoining to a distance of about 25 miles radius, and all these cotton mills, including even the great house at Stanley, are connected with Glasgow houses or in the Glasgow trade. In Lanarkshire, in which Glasgow is situated, there are 74 cotton factories; in Renfrewshire 41; Dumbartonshire 4; Buteshire 2; Ayrshire 1; Perthshire 1. In these six counties there are 123 cotton mills, nearly 100 of which belong to Glasgow. 31

Several factors contributed to this geographical concentration of the industry. In the first place the west of Scotland was admirably suited for the industry because of its damp climate, while the physical situation of the River Clyde gave the region a locational advantage with regard to the supply of raw materials. Certainly a contemporary observer in 1777 remarked that any kinds of goods made from cotton - 'fustians, thicksets, dimities, ginghams, with the numerous varieties of goods made by the industrious and ingenious inhabitants of Manchester' - could be manufactured 'to a good purpose' in Glasgow.[32] Moreover, in the Clyde valley the older textile industries had produced

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B. Gaskin, The Decline of the Hand Loom Weaving Industry in Scotland during the years 1815-1845, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, (1955), p. 8.

31. The Statistical Account of Lanarkshire by the Ministers of the Respective Parishes, Edinburgh, (1841), p. 148.
J. Cleland, Former and Present State of Glasgow, 1837, op. cit., p. 34.

32. J. Gibson, The History of Glasgow from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time, Glasgow, (1777), p. 249.

both entrepreneurial expertise and skilled labour which helped to achieve a smooth transition to the new raw material. For example the linen industry had provided good experience for small manufacturers and had established business links with Lancashire while it was fairly easy for highly skilled weavers, accustomed to producing the finest lawns and cambrics, to transfer to using cotton yarn and making muslins.[33] Presumably spinners also benefited from skills acquired in working silk, wool and flax. Finally, in the west of Scotland, considerable capital had been accumulated, initially by the great tobacco merchants before 1776, and this had been further developed by investment in the linen industry. Recent research has demonstrated that the extent of merchant involvement in the linen industry of west-central Scotland was significant in the development of the trade.[34]

It is important to realise, however, that concepts such as 'Industrial Revolution' and 'take off' are terms which historians use to depict vast historical processes and, as such, they are generalisations which simplify rather than clarify. Like other historical generalisations these concepts stress some aspects of an historical era but they totally ignore other important aspects of the same period. As in eighteenth century Europe, there were many aspects of life which were 'unenlightened' so in late eighteenth and early nineteenth Scotland there were many spheres of economic and social

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33. Smout, _op_. _cit_., p. 249
Hamilton, _op_. _cit_., p. 118

34. _T.S.A., Glasgow_, p. 103
T.M. Devine, _The Tobacco Lords. A Study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities C.1740-90_, Edinburgh, (1975), pp. 38-40

life which were in no way 'revolutionary'; working life remained for many in Scotland as it had been for centuries. This does not, of course, deny that change and great economic strides were achieved in these years. A new source of raw materials was successfully exploited, new overseas markets were developed and there was great technological innovation in the Scottish cotton industry. At the same time stimulating, and being stimulated by, other Scottish industries - for example iron, coal, agriculture, and transport - the overall advances employed a much larger labour force and sustained a considerably increased population.[35] Yet much of the traditional way of life remained unchanged, and Sir John Clapham's famous comment that 'no single British industry had passed through a complete technical revolution before 1830' is a telling one, particularly as far as the Scottish cotton industry, with its greater reliance on finer fabrics, is concerned.[36]

Nevertheless, even bearing this qualification in mind, the advances made in the Scottish economy by that date still remain impressive. The role played by textiles, especially by cottons, in this development has already been demonstrated. But the major technological and organisational changes were accomplished in spinning and ancillary processes of the industry, for the weaving sector had experienced no revolutionary changes in the early stages of Scottish economic growth.[37]

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35. Smout, op. cit., pp. 223-240.

36. J.H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, the Early Railway Age 1820-1850, Cambridge, (1967), p. 143

Hamilton, op. cit., p. 143

37. Clapham claimed that by the eve of the 'Railway Age' hand spinning was extinct. Clapham, op. cit., p. 179

For a variety of reasons, though its progress was more rapid than elsewhere, the power loom was only slowly adopted in Scotland, even in the cotton trade. By 1813 there were a total of 1,500 power looms in Scotland housed in fifteen different establishments; in 1820 there were 2,000, a figure which had risen to 10,000 in 1829, chiefly employed on calicoes and fustians and located mainly in or near Glasgow. By 1845 there were approximately 22,300 Scottish power looms, seventy-nine per cent of which worked for Glasgow firms. But its adoption in Scotland was fitful, partly because of its unsuitability for fine weaving. As late as 1833 Kirkman Finlay claimed that the hand loom weaver could work a great many things which it would not be in the interests of any power loom manufacturer to make, especially all the finest goods.[38] Clearly, therefore, in the early critical stages of Scottish economic growth a vital industrial function was performed by the increasing numbers of handloom weavers. Even as late as 1831 Glasgow, the centre of the cotton trade, controlled only 15,127 steam looms in comparison to 32,000 hand looms. Of the latter total 18,537 were located in the city and suburbs, with another 13,463 in outlying towns and villages.[39] But this merely represents the general trend since mechanisation was only very slowly introduced to

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38. S.D. Chapman, The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution, London and Basingstoke, (1972), p. 25.
N.J. Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution, An Application of Theory to the Lancashire Cotton Industry 1770-1846, London, (1967), p. 148.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X p. 150, qq 1959-1963
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (341), XIII, p. 55, q 378.
Weavers Journal, 31 Oct. 1835.
Rise, Progress, Present State and Prospects of the Cotton Manufacture, The Edinburgh Review, XCI, June 1827, p. 17.

39. J.E. Handley, The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845, Cork, (1945), p. 112.

the other textile fabrics in Scotland.[40]

The economic significance of the handloom weavers in the emerging industrial economy was not confined solely to their vital industrial role. Leaving aside for the moment their social function, it seems clear that their numbers were such as to affect, not just local economics, but the whole of the Scottish national economy. Some indication of their importance in the overall economy may be obtained from the various estimates of the numbers of hand-weavers in Scotland at different dates. From approximately 8,340 in 1792, their numbers had grown to 50,000 or more weavers in 1803. Thereafter the total was alleged to have fallen to 45,000 in 1834, although by 1838 it was thought that there were no fewer than 84,560 weavers in Scotland.[41]

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40. The first woollen power looms were installed at Hawick in 1830 and by 1850 there were 247 in the industry. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 103.
In the linen sector power looms were first introduced in Kirkcaldy in 1821 and by Maberly in his Aberdeen venture in 1824: by 1834 there were still no power looms in Dundee, nor were there any at Dunfermline by 1836.
W.H. Marwick, Scotland in Modern Times, An Outline of Economic and Social Development since the Union of 1707, London, (1964) p. 36.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 241, qq 3298-3299.
Henderson, op. cit., p. 639.
By 1835, according to Baines, power loom weaving had not yet affected the fancy trade though this was considered to be an inevitable development. E. Baines, History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain, London, (1835), p. 499.
James Orr stated in 1834 that the silk gauze trade was as yet quite unaffected by power loom competition, while a few years previously Cleophas Ratcliff, a ribbon manufacturer at Coventry, had spoken of the impossibility of applying mechanised weaving to the manufacturing of silk.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 67 qq 922-925.
Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

41. C.M. Burns, Industrial Labour and Radical Movements in Scotland in the 1790s, M.Sc. thesis, University of Strathclyde, (1971) p.5.
Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the

These figures, the validity of which will be discussed later, represent a sizeable proportion of total Scottish population being relatively more important in the early period, particularly in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth centuries. Moreover this period roughly corresponds with the so-called 'Golden Age' of handloom weaving when both the money and real incomes of the weavers were high in comparison to most other occupational groups and, equally important, in relation to their own later experience. Placing this fact alongside the known data for weavers' consumption patterns in this period it is reasonable to conclude that in the critical phase of economic growth the purchasing power of the Scottish handloom weavers acted as a substantial stimulant.[42]

A more crucial role was played by the weavers in local economies, particularly in large west of Scotland towns like Glasgow and Paisley. But the trade also helped the growth of other large Scottish towns like Dundee, Dunfermline, Forfar, Aberdeen and Perth, as well as stimulating rural or semi-urban economies such as those of Neilston, Fenwick, Biggar, Cumnock and Airdrie (and these are only a small sample of such weaving centres).[43] In fact in all areas in which weaving

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Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556) X, p.58, qq 820-821.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 518, p.p. 187-191

42. T. Johnston, The History of the Working Classes in Scotland, Glasgow, (1920), p. 314.
Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug., 1832.

43. D. Pride, A History of the Parish of Neilston, Paisley, (1910), p. 58.
Fenwick Weavers' Society, Record Book 1761-1873, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 4702(1).
N.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 366.
J. Strawhorn, The New History of Cumnock, Glasgow, (1966), p. 52.
J.D. Knox, The Handloom Weavers in the Industrial Revolution Geography of Airdrie, Scotland, a Research Paper presented in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of B.A., University of Toronto, (1967), pp. 1-3.

was the chief occupation the economic impact of the weavers was profound. Even after a period of declining money wages and reduced real wages it was claimed that the slump in the weaving trade in the early 1840s had a depressing effect upon other trades at Mauchline and Pollokshaws, while in 1843 Alexander Campbell, Esq., Sheriff Substitute of the County of Lanark, told the Select Committee on the Distress in Paisley, that the depression of the previous year, which had led to grave economic and social distress in the town, had spread from the weavers to all other classes of workers. According to Campbell winders, enterers, dyers, implement makers - in fact all those engaged in 'accessary work' - were thrown idle, while other witnesses claimed that the distress among the weavers affected the commercial sector to such an extent that even pawnbrokers were complaining.[44]

But perhaps even the handloom weavers' industrial role deserves a critical reappraisal of the position normally ascribed to it by historians of the 'Industrial Revolution'. Impatient with anything that smacks of failure, and motivated by a desire to relate the story of successful mechanisation of spinning and weaving, they have obscured the fact that some valuable technological and organisational progress was made by the hand-weaving industry at a key stage of Scottish economic progress. At Dunfermline alone, from 1799 to 1819 no less than four weavers were commended and rewarded for important adaptations to weaving machinery; the years after 1789 witnessed the successful adoption of the flying shuttle to the Scottish woollen industry; later in the nineteenth century several weavers - James Mills and James

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44. Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan., 1842.
Select Committee on Distress In Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), VII, p. 89, q. 732.

Morrison, both of Paisley, and Andrew Arbuckle of Cambuslang - were instrumental in effecting important improvements to the weaving of fancy goods.[45] Such evidence refutes James Orr's claim that no improvements in the productivity of hand weaving machinery had been accomplished from 1800 to 1833.[46] Moreover, this was accompanied by the widespread adaptation to a new fabric in the west of Scotland, by a shift in the geographical location of the older fabrics and by the emergence and growth of handloom factories within the industry. Finally during this period weaving was increasingly becoming a full-time occupation.[47]

ii

In the middle of the eighteenth century the structure of handloom weaving in Scotland was entirely domestic: whether weaving for manufacturers on the 'putting out' system or doing 'customer-work' weavers worked either in their own homes or in loom sheds immediately adjoining them. In Scotland as elsewhere an increasing majority of workers from the mid-eighteenth century belonged to the former category, working on their own looms material obtained from manufacturers or their agents, who paid the weavers when webs were satisfactorily completed.[48]

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45. Incorporation of Dunfermline Weavers Minutes 1793-1835, 5 Nov. 1799; 3 Feb. 1803; 15 Oct. 1819. Carnegie Library, Dunfermline.
Hall, op. cit., pp. 286-288.
Glasgow Herald, 24 Apr. 1838; 5 Sept. 1845.

46. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 668, q. 11198.

47. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 97.

48. D. Bythell, The Hand Loom Weavers, A Study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution, Cambridge, (1969), p. 35.

This system, however, was considered inefficient by some as schedules and work specifications could not be enforced; nor could there be any effective curb on weft embezzlement. Such considerations helped to produce some structural adaptation in the industry.[49] Hand loom 'shops' or factories evolved in Scotland, each housing a varying number of hand looms. For example, in the east of Scotland all carpet weaving, and all the heavy linen weaving of Dunfermline, were performed in factories. In addition, there were two hand loom factories at Leith producing sail-cloth in 1838; over 1,000 weavers in Aberdeen were located in factories; a quarter of Arbroath's 2,000 looms were factory-based as were five-sixths of Montrose's 500 to 600 hand looms. Moreover most of the woollen weavers in the Border region were to be found in manufactories, while the increasing number of dandy looms employed after 1840 also tended to be in factories.[50] But even in the east of Scotland factory looms were in the minority by 1838, while in the west domestic weaving was still very much the norm by that date. In the area examined by Symons a mere 3,505 out of a total of 52,164 looms were in factories.[51] Clearly the typical Scottish weaver of 1840 was still the domestic out-worker who, on completing a piece of work, took his finished web to a manufacturer, or agent, who supplied him with a new web and payment for the one he had just woven.

Customer weavers were the modern counterpart of the household weavers of mediaeval times 'working up the consumer's prepared material

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49. Smelser, op. cit., p. 130.

50. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195) XLII, p. 558, p. 701, pp. 210-213.
Smelser, op. cit., p. 142.

51. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

to the customer's order'. In this form they still existed as late as 1831 in the Highlands of Scotland, when it was recorded that there was one customer weaver for every 279 persons in Inverness-shire. In the same year it was claimed that there was one customer weaver for 100 people in Berwickshire, although this latter figure almost certainly includes some who worked for master weavers in Glasgow and Edinburgh.[52] Customer work was identified at Selkirk in 1816 and apparently still persisted there in 1838.[53] In the east of Scotland Dr Harding referred to, but did not include in his enumerations, 'a class of weaver only to be found in the remote rural districts, who procure their own materials, and weave coarse linens and woollens, either to the order of their neighbours, or for sale by themselves, known as "customer-weavers".'[54] As late as 1858 six customer weavers remained at Fenwick, although by 1873 only one remained, the celebrated Matthew Fowlds who died in 1907.[55] It is doubtful, however, whether the remnants of 'customer weaving' in the nineteenth century would have qualified for the title had Clapham's strict definition been rigidly applied to them. It is clear, for instance, that many of these alleged customer weavers were at a half-way stage between the strict definitions of that category and the putting-out system by procuring

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52. Clapham, _op_. _cit_., pp. 159-160.

53. T. Craig Brown, _The History of Selkirkshire, or Chronicles of Ettrick Forest_, Edinburgh, (1866), p. 179.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, _P.P._, 1839, (195) XLII, p. 42.

54. _Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland_, _P.P._, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 186-187.

55. H. Hutchison, Fenwick and its Parish, _Scottish Field_, Vol. XCIX, (1972), p. 19.
Fenwick Weavers' Society, Record Book 1761-1873.

their own raw materials and marketing their finished cloth, independently of agents or manufacturers. But whether they were customer weavers or market weavers their numbers were small in relation to the whole workforce. Moreover, it is certain that after 1800 the growth of capitalism tended to reduce the vast majority of weavers to the position of mere wage earners working for employers.[56]

Just as varied forms of industrial organisation coexisted in handloom weaving so there could be found at any time in Scotland different stages of evolution of hand weaving into a full-time occupation. Already the trend to full time weaving in linen has been referred to, but enough evidence remains to indicate that in some areas full-time status had not been achieved by 1820.[57] For example, part time weaving was the norm in East Mains, Lanarkshire, in the years after 1850, while at Strathaven part time weavers survived until the surprisingly late date of 1872.[58] Again, at Carstairs in 1841 the weavers were as often 'found handling implements of manual labour in the field as on the loom board', the former occupation being found both more pleasant and more remunerative than the latter, while in the autumn of that year handloom weavers at Paisley were engaged in harvest work.[59] When John Duncan became a country weaver at Drumlithie in 1824 weavers not only worked on local farms in the autumn but actually migrated south for the season to work on the larger

56. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 100

57. Ibid., p. 97.

58. G. Thomson (Ed.), The Third Statistical Account of the County of Lanark, Glasgow, (1960), p. 454, p. 607.

59. N.S.A. Lanarkshire, pp. 559-560.
Glasgow Herald, 27 Sept. 1841.

agricultural units there.[60] Obviously part time weaving had not completely disappeared by mid-nineteenth century, but there are good reasons for assuming that it was far from typical and undertaken in the main when weavers suffered seasonal, cyclical, and even sectoral depression in their primary economic activity.

In the first place increasing urbanisation in the west of Scotland made it impossible for many handloom weavers to participate in agricultural work. Secondly the above evidence for 1841 coincides with a period of extreme depression in the trade when weavers were compelled to seek alternative employment. Thirdly, handloom weavers, it was claimed by many contemporaries, were not suited for arduous outside work.[61] Fourthly, many weavers had been recruited to the trade at a time of relatively high wages which had induced many of them to relinquish their links with, and sometimes close proximity to, other sources of part time employment.[62] Weavers then were seldom more than weavers if webs were available and this was particularly the case in the fancy trade where it was expensive to keep relatively dear

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60. W. Jolly, The Life of John Duncan, Scottish Weaver and Botanist with Sketches of his Friends and Notices of the Times, London, (1883), pp. 67-69.

61. The 'farmer-weavers' of Paisley in 1841 had, prior to doing harvest work, been on the unemployed list and had to revert to the relief fund as soon as harvest work was completed. Glasgow Herald, 27 Sept., 1841.
Although country weavers did not decline in numbers, it was in towns that the real multiplication of numbers occurred with the industrial revolution. Smout, op. cit., p. 421.
Many writers referred to the inability of hand weavers to perform any heavy outside work. Perhaps this was also applicable to reaping, stacking and other tasks performed at harvest time.
Scottish Patriot, 25 April 1840.
Glasgow Saturday Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer, 9 July 1842.

62. M. McCarthy, A Social Geography of Paisley, Glasgow, (1969), p. 67.

equipment idle and where the level of skill required was such as to demand constant practice.[63] Symons in 1838 found that the great bulk of the regular weavers in his area of Scotland subsisted entirely by the loom and engaged in no other pursuits, except at Largs 'where the weavers derive considerably higher earnings in summer from fishing and boat-letting than from the looms, and where the looms are generally unemployed except in winter.'[64] In the east of Scotland at least three-fourths of the weavers were engaged 'exclusively' in weaving, the subsidiary activities of the other quarter being field labour, herring and whale fishing, and masons' work, though rural and semi-rural weavers, or their families, assisted in getting in the harvest.[65]

The last category which must be examined are the itinerant weavers, variously labelled 'migratory' or 'tramping' weavers, at least two-thirds of whom are said to have been Irish, and who were described as the'most dissolute and immoral' class of weavers in Scotland. They took looms from masters as journeymen and not infrequently decamped, carrying off with them the unfinished webs.[66] Reference to their existence however is scarce. They seem to have been at their most prolific in rural Ayrshire although at Lanark the practice of house sub-letting by weaving agents was defended in 1836 on the grounds that it reduced the weavers' migratory predilections.[67] However, their

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63. G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, The Common People 1746-1938, London, (1938), p. 63.

64. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 5.

65. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, p. 186.

66. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 45.

67. The Statistical Account of Ayrshire by the Ministers of the Respective Parishes, Edinburgh, (1845), pp. 884-885.

overall numbers must have been small as few contemporary sources refer to them. Certainly, none remained in Airdrie in 1841.[68]

This examination of the workforce, however deals with only one aspect of industrial organisation. Also important in this context was the capitalist side of the trade. The control of handloom weaving by yarn merchants had been well established in the eighteenth century in the linen industry and this was carried over into cotton.[69] Typically those who described themselves as 'manufacturers' were really yarn merchants and were the employers of the vast majority of Scottish handloom weavers. With capital invested in raw materials, warehouse and stock, these manufacturers were the capitalists of the putting out system. The scale of their capital and operation varied considerably with the larger ones working through agents in outlying areas.[70] The importance of Glasgow in this kind of organisational structure was that it formed a nucleus of industrial activity from whence agents put out work to places as distant from one another as Perthshire to the north east and to coastal towns in Ayrshire, like Irvine and Maybole to the west.[71] In 1835, Mr Hutchison, a manufacturer in Glasgow, claimed that he employed from 1,500 to 2,000 looms in Glasgow and its environs as well as 600 looms in Belfast weaving muslins.[72] Moreover in 1840 a number of Glasgow firms were

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68. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 38.
69. Slaven, op. cit., p. 94.
70. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 138.
71. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, X, p. 219, q. 2931.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 36-37.
72. Royal Commission on the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xxviii.

alleged to employ 'hundreds of Irish weavers in the neighbourhood of Lisburn', producing delicate muslins and cambrics.[73] This form of organisation probably survived as long as domestic handloom weaving itself did; it can be shown, for example, that as late as 1840 there were at least 304 firms in Glasgow under the heading 'manufacturer'.[74]

The scale of the typical manufacturer's enterprise is impossible to ascertain but it seems likely that only a very few of the largest concerns would have employed the number of looms for which Hutchison supplied work. One remaining set of records, for Messrs Pettigrew and Dickie, 'weavers' of Glasgow, reveals that the total capital stock of the partnership at 1st September 1814 stood at £4,133 18s 4d.[75] Though labelled 'weavers' their records show that they were clearly 'manufacturers' engaged in putting out work to agents or weavers. At Dundee the manufacturers were 'as a rule a very respectable class of men [and] from these God-fearing employers many of the best families in Dundee have sprung.'[76] Moreover, a number of witnesses to the 1834 and 1835 Hand Loom Weavers Select Committees made reference to the respectability of the larger houses in the trade.[77] It would be wrong, however, to draw any general conclusions from such isolated data. As early as 1808 complaints were voiced that the recent expansion in the

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73. G.M. Mitchell, The English and Scottish Cotton Industries; a Study in Interrelations, Scottish Historical Review, Vol. XXXIV, (1925), p. 109.

74. Post Office, Glasgow, Directory; 1840.

75. Records of Messrs Pettigrew and Dickie, Weavers of Glasgow, Glasgow City Archives, T.D242-3.

76. E. Gouldie, The Dundee Textile Industry 1790-1885 from the Papers of Peter Carmichael and Arthur Stone, Edinburgh, (1969) p. 21.

77. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556) X, p. 23, qq 521-523; p. 45, q 696; p. 63, q 872.

cotton trade had been accompanied by a tendency for men without capital to set themselves up as small 'manufacturers' or 'corks'.[78] Again, witnesses who testified before the major enquiries into the trade in the 1830s argued that great injuries were done to the trade by these small capitalists.[79] Among other things cut-throat competition between Scottish manufacturers was indicative of the considerable numbers of productive units in the industry.[80] Some indication of the extent of small corks in the Scottish handloom weaving industry may be obtained from the fact that, including the 304 manufacturers in Glasgow, there were 900 - 1,000 firms with which one of the Glasgow weavers' union had to negotiate in an attempt to secure uniform prices in 1835.[81] Like the larger manufacturers the small corks sold their, often inferior, produce to individuals with foreign establishments, particularly those dealing with continental markets, while an indeterminate proportion of their goods was consumed in the home market, being purchased from the corks by houses normally supplying the home trade.[82]

Two-thirds of the handloom weavers in Scotland in 1838 lived in rural areas and it would be expected, therefore, that in such districts where there were no local manufacturers or corks, agents would be responsible for giving out webs, and for collecting finished cloth,

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78. Select Committee on Petitions of Several Cotton Manufacturers and Journeymen Cotton Weavers, P.P., 1808, (177), 11, p. 99.

79. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 44, q 692; p. 155, q 2052.

80. Ibid.

81. Weavers' Journal, 31 Dec. 1835.

82. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 2.

as well as for paying the weavers.[83] But the functions performed by country agents in fact were so similar to those of the corks that one suspects that in much of the contemporary records the terms 'agent' and 'cork' are used synonymously, thereby destroying the possibility of enumerating either category with any degree of accuracy. What is clear however is that, despite this ambiguity many agents - in the sense of working for manufacturers on a commission basis per amount of cloth completed - existed. Pettigrew and Dickie, for instance, made allowances for 'amount of agency' in calculating the costs of the various processes required to finish their cloths and in 1812 were paying agents who distributed webs at Douglas at a rate varying from eight per cent to twelve per cent of the cost of weaving the webs.[84] William Aitken, a harness manufacturer in Glasgow, told the 1834 Select Committee that manufacturers who sent out work to the country were subject to additional expenditure for paying 'a little for an agent' but where work was sent directly to a weaver the latter always paid for the carriage. In addition he admitted that in the table of prices drawn up recently in the harness trade it had been agreed to deduct five per cent off country weavers to pay commission to agents.[85] Again, as late as 1841 there were six weaving agents in Airdrie, a town which was allegedly free of small corks altogether.[86] Indeed the degree to which weaving agents _per se_ had proliferated not just in rural areas but in substantial towns remote from the Paisley-

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83. _Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1841, (296), X, p. 2.

84. Records of Messrs Pettigrew and Dickie, T.D.242.4-242.5.

85. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1834, (556), X, p. 169, qq 2209-2210.

86. J.D. Knox, _op. cit._, p. 37.

Glasgow nucleus of the industry is made abundantly clear by the howls of execration which greeted them not only in the somewhat tendentious weavers' press, or in the radical press, but even in the more moderate Glasgow Herald, of the 1830s.[87]

Thus the Scottish handloom weaver, even as late as 1840, generally lived in a rural or semi-urban community and worked for one of the big manufacturers of Paisley or Glasgow dealing with a large employer through an agent, or alternatively worked for a small, probably local, cork. When webs were completed they were returned or collected and he was remunerated, payment being made by the piece. The organisational aspects of the industry, in fact, were in a number of ways similar to those obtaining in the Harris Tweed industry as found at present in the Island of Lewis. Here, some 630 so-called hand-weavers - they actually operate 'Hattersley' foot-treadle looms - receive warp and weft from putters-out, who own the spinning mills of Stornoway, the chief town, and the mill at Shawbost, to the west of the island. Though delivery is made by the spinning mills directly to the weavers' homes, hence obviating the need for agents, the parallels between the two industrial systems are real enough. The foot-treadle weavers of Lewis own their own looms and operate them in sheds adjoining their own homes; there are no strictly laid down working-hours and thus weaving is often combined with crofting, although the former is generally the primary economic activity; when tweeds are completed and collected, payment is made, again on a piece-

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87. Weavers' Journal, 31 Dec. 1835; 1 Aug. 1836; 1 Sept. 1838; 1 Feb. 1837; 1 March 1837.
Reformers' Gazette, 14 July 1832; 1 Sept. 1832; 13 Oct. 1832.
Glasgow Herald, 12 April 1830

work basis.[88] It seems, therefore, that the present day industry has sufficient factors in common with handloom weaving in the nineteenth century as to call for at least some modification of Bythell's assertion that 'domestic weaving has no modern counterpart.'[89]

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Any attempt to estimate the number of weavers in Scotland at any point in time, before the parliamentary enquiries of the 1830s, is bedevilled by the lack, and unreliability, of available data. Though the total number of hand looms in 1838 can be fairly precisely ascertained it would be erroneous to equate that number with the total number of weavers in the immediately preceding or succeeding years, except perhaps in times of full employment, for during periods of slack trade only a proportion of the looms would have been operational.[90] Bearing this qualification in mind, however, and working from the fragmentary evidence available, a tolerably accurate calculation of the number of weavers in Scotland, over time, may be arrived at.

Major available data for the numbers of Scottish handloom weavers are contained in Table 1B, from which several conclusions may be drawn. First of all, the figure for the 1780s seems to be broadly

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88. F. Thomson, Harris Tweed, the Story of a Hebridean Industry, Newton Abbot, (1969), pp. 140-149.
Although in fairly recent years there has been a sharp contraction in the number of Harris Tweed weavers in Lewis, there were still 630 looms working in the island in August 1975. Stornoway Gazette, 2 Aug. 1975.

89. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 58.

90. Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

TABLE 1B

Estimated Size of Labour Force over Time

Date	Number	Description	Source
1780s	about 20,000	weavers in west of Scotland	(i)
1790	47,560	linen weavers in Scotland	(ii)
1803	50,000	weavers working for Glasgow/Paisley houses	(iii)
1810	35,000	weavers in west of Scotland	(iv)
1819	32,000	looms working for Glasgow houses	(v)
1828	48,000	looms in the south of Scotland	(vi)
1831	31,990	looms working for Glasgow houses	(vii)
1834	45-50,000	weavers working for Glasgow houses/ or weavers in the whole of Scotland	(viii)
1838	84,560	looms in the whole of Scotland	(ix)
1846	200-225,000	weavers in the whole of Britain	(x)
1860	19,000	weavers in Scotland, mainly in fancy trade	(xi)
1872	10,000	weavers in Scotland, mainly west central	(xii)

Sources

(i) Slaven, op. cit., p. 103

(ii) Hamilton, op. cit., p. 101.

(iii) Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

(iv) Slaven, op. cit., p. 103.

(v) Cleland, Rise and Progress of Glasgow (1820), op. cit., pp. 237-239.

(vi) Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

(vii) Cleland, Former and Present State of Glasgow (1837) op. cit., p. 35.

(viii) Although there was a reasonable consensus among witnesses in 1834 that the 'total number' of weavers lay somewhere between 45,000 and 50,000 there seems to have been confusion as to whether these figures represented all weavers in Scotland, or merely those working for Glasgow houses.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (556), X, p. 58, q 580; p. 149, qq 1936-1937; p. 161, qq 2109-2110.

(ix) Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 1-3.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 187-191.

(x) Clapham, op. cit., p. 72.

(xi) Slaven, op. cit., p. 105.

(xii) Johnston, op. cit., p. 314.
T.S.A. Glasgow, p. 243.

acceptable for the west of Scotland, considering that in 1776 there were 2,500 weavers in Paisley and its immediate neighbourhood alone. But this estimate does not of course include figures for the remainder of Scotland, in some parts of which linen and woollen weaving had become important industries. It is for instance certain that a considerable proportion of the 47,566 linen weavers of 1790 must have wrought linen in 1780. Taking local data into consideration it seems reasonable to conclude that at least another 15,000 weavers in other districts should be added to Slaven's c.20,000 for the west, and that a total of about 35,000 Scottish handloom weavers is more applicable to the middle years of the decade.[91] Probably something in the region of just over 25,000 is a better estimate for the first year of that decade.

Though at first sight on the high side, the 47,560 estimate for Scottish linen weavers in 1790 is the only available figure and it just predates the really rapid advances of cotton in the 1790s. Yet, to obtain national figures, some allowance must be made for the growing number of cotton weavers in the 1780s, as well as for other weavers who worked silk and wool.[92] It has already been noted that there were at least 5,000 in the former category in 1789. Moreover, of 2,067 looms enumerated for the Scottish woollen-trade in 1776 only 250 were located in the west of Scotland and most had not been displaced by 1790 through transfer to cotton. Finally, the

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91. G. Crawford and W. Semple, The History of the Shire of Renfrew, Paisley, (1782), p. 324.
Hamilton, op. cit., p. 101. Henderson, op. cit., p. 528.
Marshall, op. cit., p. 483. Hall, op. cit., p. 287.

92. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 101.

above estimate excluded sizeable woollen manufactures at Elgin, Peterhead and in Fifeshire where the number of looms had not been quantified.[93] Undoubtedly some extension of cotton weaving had occurred by 1790, as in 1793 a total of thirty-nine cotton spinning concerns had been established in Scotland.[94] Underlying this point, from 1785 to 1791 the numbers employed in the British cotton industry had increased by twenty-five per cent, while the numbers engaged in weaving 'lawns, cambrics and thread gauze' at Paisley in 1789 was 2,800, an increase of 400 since 1785.[95] Again, the making of striped and spotted muslins had commenced at Kilbarchan as early as 1782.[96] Reports from other areas indicate that cotton weaving had made some sizeable advances by 1790, especially in coarser lines like calicoes and fustians.[97] Nevertheless the number of cotton weavers in 1790 must have been fairly small for the main centre of the industry was controlled by Paisley and Glasgow houses; between them by 1792 they employed approximately 8,250 weavers of whom a great many would be the remnants of the 5,000 silk weavers of Paisley in 1789.[98] Moreover, there is almost certainly a degree of overlap between the statistic

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93. D. Bremner, The Industries of Scotland, their Rise, Progress and Present Condition, Edinburgh (1869), pp. 152-155.

94. Slaven, op. cit., p. 93.

95. Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 4 April 1791.
A. Brown, op. cit., p. 247.
R. Brown, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

96. C.H. Rock, The Weaver's Cottage, Kilbarchan, Edinburgh, (1974).

97. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 120
Strawhorn, op. cit., p. 52.
Parlane, op. cit., p. 70.
M.M. Edwards, The Growth of the British Cotton Trade 1780-1815, Manchester, (1967), p. 38.

98. Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

for linen weavers in 1790 and the existing, if obscure, number of cotton weavers, as in the period before satisfactory cotton yarn was obtained following the widespread adoption of Crompton's Mule, invented in 1785, some Scottish master weavers used cotton for weft while retaining linen for warp. Furthermore, the really rapid extension of cotton, especially muslin, weaving occurred in the 1790s, while what is known of the Scottish hand weaving trade at a later period argues that the estimated figure for linen weaving is too high. It is therefore likely that the total number of weavers in Scotland in 1790 was no higher than the linen estimate and probably lower, possibly in the region of 45,000 weavers.[99]

Contemporaries were impressed by the advances made in the hand loom weaving trade in the 1790s. Indeed one of them in 1803 considered that Glasgow and Paisley houses alone employed 50,000 weavers, being an increase of about 42,500 on his own estimate for 1792.[100] A sizeable proportion of this last figure of course was not composed of recruits to weaving but consisted of websters who had transferred from silk or linen to cotton. The eclipse of the former in the last decade of the eighteenth century was almost complete while the latter industry is generally thought of as having been displaced in the west by cotton by this time.[101] But even if all the linen weavers of the west - from the 1790 figure - transferred to cotton by 1803, there

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99. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 119

100. Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

101. Parlane, op. cit., p. 71.
Hamilton, op. cit., p. 105.
Smout, op. cit., p. 251.

would still have been about 39,000 linen weavers as well as 50,000 cotton weavers, and 2,500 woollen weavers, giving a total of 91,500 handloom weavers for Scotland. But what we know of figures for the industry at later periods indicates clearly that this figure is far too high and clearly the estimates both for 1803 and 1790 need to be somewhat deflated. Reducing the estimate for linen weavers by 10,000 approximately, as was done to obtain the 1790 figure, and the 1803 estimate by 15,000, in accordance with figures available for the west of Scotland in 1810, and, furthermore, allowing for an overlap of some 8,250 weavers who might have transferred from linen to cotton weaving, a figure in the region of 58,000 handloom weavers can be accepted as the Scottish total in 1803. Of these 35,000, or approximately sixty per cent, worked for Glasgow and Paisley houses.

Assuming that the broad geographical distribution of the Scottish textiles industry had been established by 1810 some backward projection of figures available from the official enquiries into handloom weaving may be useful. Making the further assumptions, that Dr Cleland's enumeration for 1831 is correct, that there had been little change in total numbers in the 1828-1831 triennium, and that the increases in numbers in Dr Harding's area in the 1828/1838 decade were proportionally similar to those in the south of Scotland, the conclusion emerges that two-thirds of the looms in the south of Scotland, or forty-three per cent of the national total, worked for Glasgow manufacturers. (This seems to be broadly in agreement with the percentages obtained for Glasgow and Paisley houses in 1803.) Using these percentages as multipliers in relation to Slaven's 1810 estimate of 35,000 in the west of Scotland, a figure of approximately 66,000 is produced, allowing for the fact that there were some 5,000 weavers in

areas other than the west of Scotland who worked for Glasgow houses.[102] 66,000 handloom weavers in Scotland in 1810 seems to be the best available estimate.

If it was again assumed that the proportion of weavers working for Glasgow houses remained constant after 1810, at forty-three per cent, then using Dr Cleland's 1819 figure as a basis for calculation it seems that by 1820 the number of handloom weavers in Scotland must have risen to approximately 74,500, representing an 8,500 increase on the figure of a decade previously. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the expansion in the labour force from 1810 to 1820 was of greater magnitude than this suggests; and therefore either the forty-three per cent 'constant' is questionable or that Dr Cleland's estimate is too low. The latter was probably the chief cause of distortion, since the proportion controlled by Glasgow houses probably increased during this decade. Two factors indicate that there were a number of hand looms controlled by Glasgow houses which Dr Cleland failed to enumerate. Firstly, in the post-Napoleonic war period handloom weaving absorbed a great many demobilised soldiers and sailors. Secondly, in the year after 1815 a great many complaints about Irish immigration and overstocking were voiced.[103] Bearing these considerations in mind it is probably necessary to add some 3,500 weavers to the above figure. The resultant estimate is that there were 78,000 handloom weavers in Scotland in 1820.

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102. Assistant Commissioner's Report from the East of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, p. 191.

103. N.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 22
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 12, q 165; p. 14, q 185; p. 15, qq 190-193.

It would appear that the number of handloom weavers in Scotland remained fairly constant in the 1820s, if Glasgow figures reflected national trends. This would also be partly attributable to the real gains made by the power loom in the mid 1820s.[104] Thus the figure for 1830 would not differ markedly from that of 1820. Later there was to be, however, some confusion as to what is represented by the 1834 figures; but judging from Symon's findings for 1838 they seem to be rough guesses - often 'off the cuff' with witnesses clearly not prepared for the questions - of the numbers employed by Glasgow (and presumably Paisley) houses.[105] Yet they seem to mirror Symon's finding for an increase in the number of Scottish handloom weavers in the 1830s, leaving the national figure in the middle of the decade at something between 78,000 and 83,500. Not surprisingly, the best data for the number of hand weavers in Scotland exist for the latter part of this decade and come from the findings of the Royal Commission, when the two Assistant Commissioners, Mr Symons and Dr Harding, enumerated the number of hand looms in the whole of Scotland in 1838 at 84,560.

After 1840 it is clear that numbers declined fairly rapidly, even if at different rates according to fabric and intricacy of work. The long and intense depression which began in 1838 proved critical for handloom weaving: by 1846 there remained only 60,000 handloom weavers in cotton production in Britain compared with 200,000 to

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104. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 141.
Smelser, op. cit., p. 147.

105. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 58, q 580; p. 149, qq 1936-1937; p. 161, qq q109-2110.

225,000 in the previous decade.[106] Since in 1834 the proportion of hand looms in Scotland was approximately twenty-five per cent to twenty-seven per cent of the British total, there must have been at least 15,000 to 16,000 cotton weavers in Scotland in 1850, although one historian of the Lancashire cotton industry asserts that by the 1840s handloom weavers had become a 'rare species' in that area. Relating these observations to the fact that there is a surprising lack of comment on the demise of such a formidable class of workers in the contemporary press; that in 1842 hand weavers were still considered to play substantial roles in many sizeable local economies; and that as late as 1845 there were 923,2736 and 531 weavers unemployed at Kilbarchan, Paisley and Airdale respectively; it seems probable that the Scottish numbers may have been somewhat higher.[107] Moreover, Scotland's greater concentration on the fancy trade, which was late in succumbing to mechanisation, would indicate a more protracted rate of disappearance and displacement. An acceptable figure for 1850 would thus approximate to 20,000 cotton weavers. A reasonable estimate for hand-weavers on all woven fabrics in Scotland in 1850 would therefore be in the region of 25,000.

Yet the post-1840 contraction in numbers was real enough and by 1860 only 10,000 handloom weavers remained in Scotland, the great power loom boom of the 1850s having absorbed or displaced nearly all who worked coarse fabrics. Those remaining in the trade were mainly

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106. Clapham, op. cit., p. 72.
A.J. Taylor, Concentration and Specialisation in the Lancashire Cotton Industry 1825-50, Economic History Review, Vol I, (1948), p. 117.

107. Glasgow Saturday Post, 2 May 1840; 29 April 1843; 18 July 1846; 8 Jan 1848; 22 Jan. 1848; 5 Feb. 1848.
Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1848.
Supplement to Glasgow Argus 1842.

in the fine and fancy sections and their numbers had not fallen noticeably by 1872, by which date most of the surviving handloom weavers worked at fine muslins and curtain materials in the Irvine valley, or shawls and fancy fabrics in Paisley.[108] After 1872, however, their numbers diminished rapidly, having in the Irvine valley fallen by more than half by 1877. No intricacy of pattern or fineness of fabric could curb the encroachments of the power loom and by 1900 the few surviving handloom weavers in Scotland had become historical curiosities.

In the pre-Parliamentary enquiry stage, in fact up until 1838, no national figures for Scotland were available (though Symons also received estimates for 1828 for the south of Scotland). Up until 1828 therefore estimates are based largely on informed guesswork. Unfortunately, local studies have little to offer - even though there is a wealth of information on local figures at certain times - for it appears that if the number of weavers increased in some areas, they declined in others. For example from 1828 to 1838 the number in Airdrie fell from 1,700 to 1,550 while in the same ten years the number of weavers in Kilbarchan rose from 670 to 1850. During the same decade the fall in number of hand looms in Glasgow, Partick, Govan and Strathbungo was partially offset by an increase in weaving in burghs and villages around Glasgow.[109] To project national trends from local data, therefore, would involve too many pitfalls. Rather it is more satisfactory - as has been attempted - to use the

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108. Slaven, op. cit., p. 104.

109. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

available conjectures in corroboration with the reliable figures of the Royal Commission to delineate the broad national trend. On this basis the following 'rule of thumb' table for the number of handloom weavers in Scotland in the century from 1780-1880 has been composed (Table 1C).

TABLE 1C

Approximate Numbers of Handloom Weavers in Scotland, 1780-1880

Date	Approx. No.	Date	Approx. No.
1780	25,000	1840	84,560
1790	45,000	1850	25,000
1800	58,000	1860	10,000
1810	66,000	1870	10,000
1820	78,000	1880	4,000
1830	78,000		

iv

Similarly the best available statistics for the geographical location of the Scottish handloom weaving labour force emerge from the Royal Commission's findings and again relate to 1838. Clearly there had been some changes of concentration over time as the labour force increased in numbers. The rapid growth of the linen industry in the east of Scotland readily provides one such example underlined by the extant statistical material for Dunfermline.[110] But as Symons showed in his report, the increase in numbers in the preceding decade was not solely confined to the east of Scotland. Moreover the weaving of fancy goods like shawls and zebras was not introduced to the west of Scotland until some date between 1802 and 1806, after which this

110. Henderson, op. cit., p. 640.

sector experienced rapid growth.[111] Finally, most of the cries against the overstocking of the trade emanated from the west of Scotland weavers and not from the east.[112] These factors seem to argue therefore that the location pattern of the Scottish handloom weaving trade, as publicised by the Assistant Commissioners in 1838, had been established fairly early in the nineteenth century, probably about 1810.

From the findings of Mr Symons and Dr Harding (see Tables 2A and 2B) it can be deduced that approximately sixty-two per cent of all the looms in Scotland were found in the south. When figures for the four principal weaving counties are examined, the conclusion which emerges is that just over half of the hand looms in Scotland were located in the shires of Lanark - including the city of Glasgow - Ayr, Renfrew and Dunbarton. Viewed in another light these counties housed about ninety per cent of the hand looms of the south of Scotland, by far the greater proportion of which were engaged in cotton manufacture. The rest of the looms in Symons' area were found in Dumfriesshire and in scattered villages, most of which again worked cotton either for Glasgow or Carlisle houses, while, of course, there remained the 966 woollen weavers of the Borders.[113] In the east of Scotland cotton weaving was confined principally to Perthshire with a little at Kinross, Aberdeen and Auchtermuchty. Though attempts at breaking down the looms in Dr Harding's area, by industrial organisation and fabric worked, are incomplete because of the fragmentary nature of the avail-

111. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 6.

112. N.S.A., Lanarkshire, p. 22. Glasgow Herald, 9 Aug. 1819.

113. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

TABLE 2: Geographical Distribution of Scottish Hand Looms in 1838

A

South of Scotland

County	Factory	Harness	Plain	Total
Glasgow and environs	1,580	1,870	7,635	11,085
Ayrshire	660	3,311	9,055	13,026
Lanarkshire	-	843	9,310	10,153
Renfrewshire	472	5,466	3,263	9,201
Dunbartonshire	-	14	2,699	2,713
Dumfriesshire	36	6	1,499	1,505
Borders	429	-	537	966
Other Areas in South	328	50	1,392	1,770
	3,505	11,560	37,099	52,164

B

East of Scotland

Town	Factory	Harness	Plain	Cotton	Linen	Wool	Total
Dunfermline		2,947	-				2,947
Perth		834	523	1,335			1,335
Dundee					4/5,000		4/5,000
Kirkcaldy	245		2,470				2,775
Aberdeen	1,100		330	130	1,000	300	1,460
Arbroath	500		1,500				2,000
Kirriemuir					2,000		2,000
Forfar			2,830				2,830
Brechin					870		870
Montrose	4/500		100				5/600
Auchterarder			500	500			500
Newburgh					600		600
Kinross		50	350	350		50	400
Cupar and Ceres					1,167		1,167
Auchtermuchty				50/100	900	8	1,000
Other Areas in East		8,000					8,000
TOTAL							33,474

SOURCES

Gaskin, *op. cit.*, p. 12

Assistant Commissioners Report from the South of Scotland, *P.P.*, (1839), (195), XLII pp. 2-4.

Assistant Commissioners Report from the East of Scotland, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 185-192; pp. 204-208.

able evidence, it is nevertheless safe to conclude that linen was the predominant fabric woven in the east of Scotland. Here, hand weaving was an important economic activity in all the major towns and their hinterlands, as well as in scattered villages in the east where some 8,000 hand looms must have existed.[114]

To ascertain what percentage of Scottish looms were based in the larger towns and cities some arbitrary criterion of size must be used to define such regions. Accepting 8,000 as the population of an urban community then 20,807 hand looms in the south of Scotland would be included in this category.[115] This, however, would be somewhat more than the actual numbers found in the urban areas, for some of Symon's enumerations for towns included rural and semi-rural communities in the immediate vicinities of the towns. For example, the number of looms given for Glasgow in 1838 included all those within the Parliamentary boundaries, while those for Hamilton were not just restricted to the town itself but encompassed all the weavers in 'Hamilton etc.' Nor is there any doubt that for other major towns like Paisley and Kilmarnock, weavers in the suburbs, which were more rural than urban in character, would have been included. From this discussion it is thus reasonable to conclude that only about one-third of the handloom weavers of the south of Scotland lived in urban communities.

Unhappily the Assistant Commissioner for the east of Scotland did

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114. This figure of 8,000 hand looms represents the discrepancy between numbers given in Dr Harding's Report and in the Appendices to his Report. Presumably these were looms in scattered villages. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 185-192; pp. 204-214.

115. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

not provide such a detailed breakdown; yet enough inferences may be drawn from the sketchy evidence available to suggest that the pattern in the east broadly mirrored that in the south of Scotland. Firstly there were 8,000 hand looms which were not located in any of the major weaving centres as listed above. Secondly the principal manufacture of the east was 'ordinary or light (linen) work' such as dowlas, common sheetings and osnaburgs; this was almost universally carried on as outdoor work, thus not precluding it from being rural based. Moreover the labour force in this linen sector oscillated considerably between 17,000 in summer to 22,000 or 23,000 in winter. This was only possible through the existence of alternative agricultural work in summer and autumn, which indicates that the workforce must have been based in rural or semi-rural communities. Finally some of the weaving centres of the east of Scotland for which details were given in the Appendix to Dr Harding's report (Table 2B) were themselves only of a semi-urban character. Certainly some had populations of less than 8,000 and hence would not have qualified for our definition of 'urban community' as applied to the south of Scotland.[116]

The numerical superiority of the rural handloom weavers of Scotland over his urban-based counterpart is, therefore, fairly conclusively demonstrated and it is safe to advance the opinion that two-thirds of all handloom weavers in Scotland still lived in rural villages or on the outskirts of towns in 1838. In addition any backward projection of this proportion to the beginning of our period would almost certainly reveal an even greater concentration of rural weavers

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116. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 187-188; pp. 206-214.

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as it was claimed that most of the subsequent increases in the numbers of weavers took place in the towns.[117] Furthermore if we adhere to our reasonable, if arbitrary, criterion for an urban community there would have been noticeably fewer of these in 1790 than in 1838.[118]

Against this broad pattern of settlement it is necessary to discuss one further aspect of the geographical location of weavers in Scotland. Where they were located in urban or semi-urban areas even domestic handloom weavers tended to be concentrated in certain areas of these towns. In Airdrie, for instance, 'weaving neighbourhoods' could be identified where the proportion of the labour force who worked the shuttle was almost three times as high as the percentage for the town as a whole.[119] Similarly although in Paisley 'there was no common centre of manufactures', weaving being such a prevalent economic activity in the town, each district of the town specialised in the production of its own particular fabric.[120] Nor were the 9,350 weavers of Glasgow and its Parliamentary bounds spread evenly over the whole of that area; instead they were concentrated in 'weaving centres' like Calton, and Mile-End and Camlachie.[121] Finally even some rural townships, like Kilbarchan and Strathaven, had come

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117. Smout, op. cit., p. 451.
Jolly, op. cit., p. 67.

118. For example, Scottish towns with populations of 10,000 and over held only 17 per cent of the country's population in 1801, compared with 32 per cent in 1841.
D.F. MacDonald, Scotland's Shifting Population 1770-1850, Glasgow, (1937), p. 86.

119. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 35.

120. D. Gilmour, Reminiscences of the Pen-Folk by One who Knew Them, Paisley, (1871), p. 11.

121. Tindall, op. cit., p. 35.

to specialise in particular fabrics.[122] Clearly depressions, whether sectoral, cyclical or seasonal, would have drastic effects upon living standards in such districts.

v

At no point during our period was the Scottish hand weaving labour force a homogeneous occupational group. The most obvious source of variety among the work force was the nature of the actual fabric worked. But in the period from 1790 to 1850 there was a considerable shift in the proportion in each fabric, the dominant proportion of linen weavers pre-1790 rapidly giving way to an increasing number of cotton weavers whose numerical hegemony, established before 1815, remained until the middle of the nineteenth century. It is reasonable to assume from data already discussed that by about 1790 linen controlled some seventy-two per cent of Scottish hand looms with the cotton, silk and woollen sectors accounting for approximately eleven per cent, eleven per cent and six per cent respectively of the aggregate total. But by 1826, when Sir John Sinclair was writing, considerable intersectoral shifts had taken place, with the respective proportions of linen, cotton and woollen hand looms standing at thirty per cent, sixty per cent and ten per cent. Indeed, by this date the numbers employed in silk manufacture had presumably dwindled to a total so low as to exclude them effectively from all consideration.[123] This

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122. Papers of Daniel Houston 1888-1970. Private Collection in the hands of Mr John Rodgers, Kilbarchan.

123. Though figures quoted are the total number employed in the various Scottish textile fabrics this would have been approximately reflected in the proportions weaving each fabric, as processes

pattern was broadly sustained until 1840, though with slight percentage changes, the main distorting factor being the evolution of a silk gauze and shawl trade centred mainly in Paisley; by 1838 some ten per cent of all Scottish hand looms were working on silk fabrics. The Scottish Assistant Commissioners have left further information for that year from which fairly accurate estimates for the relative importance of loom strength in each industry may tentatively be arrived at. In rough terms fifty-three per cent, thirty per cent and seven per cent of Scottish hand looms at that date were employed on cotton, linen and woollen fabrics respectively.[124]

The heterogeneity of the labour force was not simply confined to the range of fabrics woven, for another significant source of diversity among the Scottish handloom weavers was the amount of skill required to weave a particular type of web. For example, considerable skill and training, as well as extra help and equipment, was necessary for shawl weaving, while, on the contrary, little skill and the barest modicum of instruction was needed to make plain cotton goods like calicoes, pullicates and ginghams. As various areas in Scotland tended to become centres for the weaving of particular types of goods there were at times noticeable differences between localities as to the types of weaver who worked there. For example, Glasgow concentrated on plain muslins while Paisley weavers produced shawls, zebras and fancy muslins. A further factor which produced

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involved in all textile manufactures were similar, and by this date advances made by the power loom were limited.
Sir J. Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

124. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland*, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 699-706; pp. 204-214.

even greater diversity among the Scottish handloom weavers was the amount of strength which was required to produce a particular cloth and, as this generally depended upon the coarseness of the yarn and the breadth of the cloth, many of them wrought woollens and linens rather than cottons and silks.[125] But since the amount of skill or strength - or more importantly a combination of both - were claimed to be the principal determinant of weavers' wages it is worthwhile to attempt to gauge what proportion of the Scottish handloom weaving labour force could be placed in either (or in both) categories.[126]

Such is the scarcity of evidence about the proportion of fancy weavers to the total number of weavers in Scotland in the early part of our period that it is impossible even to hazard a guess at their overall strength. It is not in fact until the major Parliamentary enquiries of the 1830s that the first estimates are available. If we accept the number of harness looms as a barometer of the extent of the fancy trade in Scotland we conclude that by 1834 about a quarter of the total were in the fancy trade.[127] This group contained narrow silks and ribbons and also some silk gauzes made with light yarn; linen napkins, narrow damasks and cambrics; also fine muslins - chiefly book-muslins. Furthermore, this proportion still obtained in the later findings of Symons and may well have been a reflection of this position in the east of Scotland also. In the absence of more comprehensive evidence, it is safe to conclude that something

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125. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 14.

126. Ibid.

127. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 59, q. 821.

between one-quarter and one-fifth of Scottish handloom weavers in 1838 were engaged in the fancy trade.

The pre-eminence which the cotton industry quickly assumed within the Scottish textiles group ensured that by 1838 only a small proportion of Scottish weavers qualified for membership of the category which required considerable physical prowess, since by that date, the power loom had monopolised all cotton weaving which required strength alone.[128] Not surprisingly, there were scarcely any in silk either since, except for plain narrow silks, considerable skill rather than strength was needed to weave this fabric. Only two basic groups fell in fact into this category. They were, on the one hand, weavers of woollen blankets, coarse broadcloths, shepherd's plaids and carpets with simple patterns, and, on the other, producers of linen sail cloths and broad linens of every description.[129] Although precise and complete information is again lacking, it is clear that even the most generous estimate would place the number of Scottish handloom weavers in 1838 who required strength but no skill, at a maximum figure of 6,500, or approximately 7.5 per cent of the total.[130]

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128. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII. Note to be appended to Mr Symon's Report, P.P., 1840, (220), XXIV, pp. 616-617.

129. Ibid.

130. Assuming the following weavers to be in this category:-

170 carpet weavers in Glasgow
130 " " " Kilmarnock
580 sail cloth and coarse linen weavers at Port Glasgow, Leith and Musselburgh
475 woollen weavers in the Borders
1,215 woollen weavers in the east of Scotland
4,000 heavy linen weavers in the east of Scotland

6,583

Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p.6; p. 22; p. 36; pp. 39-42; p. 44.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 187-192.

But the best paid fabrics were those requiring a combination of both strength and skill and this category was composed of a wide diversity of goods including silk broad shawls, silk damasks and wide-figured webs, broad velvets, woollen broad carpets known as 'combres', some broad tartans and fine broadcloths, and some fancy trouser pieces. Finally in linens, fine damask table-cloths and wide figured webs and in cottons a few of the wide shawls also conformed to this criterion. To quantify, however, all these groups from the available data is a task quite beyond the competence of the historian, since there was rarely any distinctions made over time between different types of weavers. In fact, only in the case of the 3,000 harness linen workers of Dunfermline can any definite conclusion be advanced, although it is certain that some of the carpet weavers of Kilmarnock, Glasgow and Lasswade, and a section of the woollen weavers of the Borders and east of Scotland - as well as a proportion of the fancy weavers of the west of Scotland - must have fulfilled the characteristics of this category. Their numbers however still remain obscure and most of them have already been included in our definition of fancy work. Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that by 1838 only a minority of the Scottish handloom weavers worked fabrics requiring either strength or skill, singly or combined, although these were the main determinants of high wage levels. A clear majority of about sixty-five per cent of the hand weavers in Scotland must therefore have fallen into the low-paid category.[131]

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131. This approximation is arrived at by adding 6,500 - i.e. those weavers requiring strength alone - to twenty-five per cent of 84,560 which was the maximum number of skilled weavers in Scotland. Clearly all the remainder were in low paid fabrics.

vi

Not all the handloom weavers were adult males. Symons estimated that for the south of Scotland the proportion of looms to families in 1838 was nine to five.[132] Thus four looms in every nine were worked either by subsidiary family members - i.e. women and children - or by journeymen who either hired looms from, or were employed by, master weavers. Although there are numerous references to the high proportion of women and children employed in the Scottish hand loom weaving trade, authoritative estimates do not exist. Nonetheless, a rough approximation of the strength of 'soft labour' in the industry can be arrived at. For example, at both Glasgow and Airdrie approximately twenty per cent of handloom weavers were journeymen.[133] If these centres mirrored the general experience of the south of Scotland where four-ninths of the labour force were not adult male heads of families, then it is clear that at both Glasgow and Airdrie some quarter of the hand looms were operated by women and children in the late 1830s. Other, less measurable, evidence, however, suggests that the proportion of 'soft' labour to the total workforce was even higher than twenty-five per cent. For instance, Scotland's concentration upon cotton would indicate that a high proportion of the labour force were women and children, as cotton elsewhere had become soft labour dominated.[134] It is also very likely that the proportion of female and

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132. Smelser, op. cit., p. 139.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 4.

133. Assistant Commissioner's Report from the South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 11; p. 21
J.D. Knox, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

134. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 60.

child labour increased over time when with falling living standards, all available family members were put to work. Indeed, the frequency of complaints about the number of very young children in the trade lends support to a conclusion that the percentage of 'soft' labourers in the south of Scotland hand weaving trade was sizeably higher than this figure. Perhaps a third of all weavers in Symons' area were women or children. Moreover, there is no great reason for doubting that this proportion would have approximately mirrored the pattern elsewhere in Scotland, particularly since the majority of master weavers in the east weaving light linen fabrics, had four to six looms. A sizeable proportion, without any doubt, would have been used by women and children.[135]

The industrial hierarchy within the labour force was not wholly determined by traditional demarcation lines of master, journeyman and apprentice. Such was the variety of industrial organisation in hand loom weaving that these divisions were sometimes irrelevant. Where they existed, however, they were acknowledged. Journeymen, for example, comprised twenty per cent of the labour forces of Glasgow (1838) and Airdrie (1841), while thirty-three per cent of the weavers of Dunfermline (1838) came into this category.[136] At Eaglesham, however, where the domestic system was more closely linked with the weaver's family the proportion of journeymen was as low as eight per cent in 1838.[137] Over time it was claimed that there was an increase in

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135. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 189.

136. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 11.
J.D. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 643.

137. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 5.

the proportion of journeymen as the real cost of looms and other necessary equipment increased. Moreover, new weaving devices, especially the Jacquard loom, increased the need for journeymen, and thus accounts for the high proportion of journeymen found among the weavers of Paisley, the centre of the fancy trade.[138] Yet in 1838 it is likely that the overall proportion of journeymen to total weavers in Scotland was nearer to eight per cent than it was to thirty-three per cent because for every urban-based weaver there were still two in areas like Eaglesham which still retained their domestic forms of production. The trend increase in journeymen was from a very low base. Although many of the early Scottish websters were formally designated 'journeymen' they were journeymen in name only and actually worked as free and independent craftsmen.

Those who trained as formal apprentices however experienced the reverse of the trend increase of the journeymen's share of the trade. Much to the chagrin of the Scottish weavers the cost of apprentices' indentures at a time of declining wages was such as to be a disincentive to forming a binding legal contract between apprentice and master. Thus the former often left the latter's service as soon as the rudiments of the trade had been absorbed and set up as independent weavers, while a vast number of others entered the trade, often through family connections, without any formal instruction. Before our period, judging from the regulations laid down by weavers' incorporations, apprenticeship had been the norm for all who learnt the trade. It was during the years 1790-1810, with rapid increases in numbers of weavers,

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138. W.H. Marwick, Economic Development in Victorian Scotland, (1936) pp. 89-90.
D. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers of Other Days, Edinburgh, (1898), Chapters 1 and 2.

that the practice seems to have declined.[139] Certainly by 1812 the prohibitive cost of indentures was bitterly complained of and this complaint was repeated continuously in subsequent years by weavers' spokesmen. Indeed there is fragmentary evidence which points to the extent to which the practice had dwindled by 1838: in that year only forty-four out of 2,947 looms were kept going by bound apprentices at Dunfermline, while at Eaglesham apprentices worked only twenty of the 380 looms in the village.[140] Moreover, in areas where plain fabrics, especially cottons, were woven, apprenticeship had become largely ir-

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139. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, pp. 216-217, qq 2904-2919; p. 231, qq 3304-3315; p. 276, qq 3714-3716.

Enrolment of Apprentices to Glasgow Incorporation of Weavers 1717-1817 (ie Nos Apprenticed to Weaver Members).

Date	Charitable	Non-Charitable	Total	Date	Charitable	Non-Charitable	Total
1790	8	7	15	1806	3	1	4
1791	?	?	18	1807	2	3	5
1792	2	17	19	1808	4	2	6
1793	1	12	13	1809	2	4	6
1794	7	7	14	1810	3	4	7
1795	9	7	16	1811	2	1	3
1796	7	5	12	1812	2	-	2
1797	1	2	3	1813	4	1	5
1798	2	4	6	1814	5	3	8
1799	10	8	18	1815	2	-	2
1800	8	-	8	1816	-	2	2
1801	3	1	4	1817	1	2	3
1802	3	8	11	1818	1	1	2
1803	3	1	4	1819	-	0	0
1804	8	4	12	1820	-	1	1
1805	7	1	8				

Incorporation of Weavers' Enrolment Book 1717-1817. Glasgow City Archives, TTH 5-9.

140. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 180, q 2383; p. 181, qq 2467-2468; pp. 216-217, qq 2913-2917.
Henderson, op. cit., p. 643.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 5.

relevant as fairly young children could learn the trade after a short period of training.[141] Even in fancy weaving areas like Renfrewshire and Ayrshire there were only 869 children apprenticed to a total of 10,825 weavers in 1834, while the number of apprentices in Paisley in 1839 was estimated at 900, of whom, it was claimed, only three were indentured.[142]

Within the Scottish hand loom weaving industry, however, all these occupational divisions were often of less significance than other factors which imposed an altogether different hierarchy upon the industry in terms of the twin criteria of wages and job status. These other determinants of industrial hierarchy were the type of fabric worked and the intricacy of weaving certain webs. As has already been noted, cloth requiring strength or dexterity, or particularly a combination of both, brought weavers the best remuneration and the plainest fabrics realised the smallest rewards. Not surprisingly job status was also largely determined by these factors with the best paid work being the most eagerly sought after by those who believed that they could perform it competently. Thus cotton weavers in Border regions attempted to transfer to the more lucrative woollen trade while our period witnessed a drift in the west of Scotland, which was accentuated by power loom encroachments, from plain to fancy fabrics.[143]

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141. Glasgow Herald, 19 Sept. 1817; 3 Dec. 1832; 26 Oct. 1835.

142. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 217, q. 2919.
Weavers' Journal, 2 Jan. 1837.

143. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 56.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), p. 103, q. 1352.

But the degree of dexterity required to weave a particular fabric, was only one pointer to where an individual stood in terms of the weavers' social scale. Other broad indirect indicators in this direction were age and sex, for plain goods not requiring a great deal of strength were generally woven by women and children and by men who had passed the peak of their physical strength. Conversely well paid work which required power (with or without skill) tended to be the work of men in the prime of life. Similarly, children and females were largely debarred from working fancy fabrics as this sector required considerable training, while the finer fabrics demanded a sharpness of eyesight which elderly men would probably lack.[144]

The aristocracy of the Scottish hand loom weaving force consisted therefore of adult males in the prime of life who practised considerable craftsmanship or vigour in performing their work, these being much more important determinants of wages and status than the traditional divisions of working groups. For example a journeyman weaver at Galashiels or Dunfermline earned considerably more than a master cotton weaver in Glasgow, and a Paisley journeyman weaving shawls was paid sizeably more than a master weaver at Airdrie, who wrought pullicates or ginghams.[145] But this aristocracy was not massive in numbers and at least sixty-five per cent of Scottish hand looms belonged to the lower paid category being operated by a multifarious group of websters of both sexes and varying widely in ages. Perhaps it is

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144. Note to be Appended to Mr Symon's Report, P.P., 1840, (220), XXIV, pp. 615-617.
A.M. Stewart, The History and Romance of the Paisley Shawl with a foreword on the Kashmir Shawls, Glasgow, (1946), p. 108.

145. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 13-15; p. 42.

significant that it was among this sector of low paid workers that traditional occupational divisions, particularly apprenticeship, had broken down.

vii

The blatant discrepancy between the rate of growth of the Scottish hand loom weaving force (Table 1B) and estimates for the rate of increase of total Scottish population (approximately 1.1 per cent per annum) suggests that the historian must look further than the procreation of the indigenous weaving force for the origins of the newcomers to the trade. If weavers reproduced at the national average rate of eleven per cent per decade then it is clear that in any ten year period, before 1820, only a fraction of the increase was attributable to natural increase among the workforce.[146] Contemporary sources in fact point to three areas from which the newcomers in the trade may have been recruited. A proportion possibly originated from the Highlands of Scotland, some may have been agricultural workers in the Scottish Central Lowlands who were displaced by the agrarian revolution, while a further fraction of the recruits might have consisted of pre-famine immigrants from Ireland.

There is some evidence to show that at least some of those who migrated from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to the Central Lowland regions took up the shuttle for a livelihood. For instance in the early part of our period David Dale employed 800 weavers at New Lanark of whom a great proportion consisted of Highlanders. Indeed,

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146. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 5.
Table 1C.

the ministers of the north of Scotland were implored by west of Scotland cotton spinners to recommend to their parishioners to settle in Paisley, Glasgow and Greenock instead of emigrating to foreign climes.[147] Moreover each year a host of some 2,500 Highland shearers came south for seasonal work; and it is possible that some of these were lured to the hand loom by prospects of high wages.[148] Yet available data on the Highland influx, if admittedly for a later period, suggest that at least as far as Glasgow was concerned, such immigration by 1851 was responsible for only 6.4 per cent of the 259,167 of the population of Glasgow who were born in Scotland, and that those born in the crofting counties formed only five per cent of the total population of Glasgow.[149] This evidence implies that the Highland contribution to the increased numbers of weavers must have been relatively small. Additional evidence adds weight to this view. Thus although only 5,581 or just under ten per cent, out of a total population of 5,730 families at Paisley in 1821 came from Highland areas, this percentage included an obscure number who came from Bute. Finally the same source asserted that Highlanders were 'a pastoral, a fishing, or an agricultural people' who were 'not suited to work in factories or to weaving.'[150]

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147. Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 30 July 1792.

148. Glasgow Herald, 20 Aug. 1824.

149. T.S.A. Glasgow, pp. 808-810.

150. Inhabitants of Paisley Born in the Crofting Counties 1821

Argyle and Bute	428	families
Inverness	91	"
Ross	22	"
Caithness	13	"
Sutherland	4	"
TOTAL	558	"
Population of Paisley	5730	families.

Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. xxix.

There is no scarcity of evidence about Irish immigration to Scotland during our period; nor is there any doubt that many of the immigrants took up hand loom weaving, if indeed they had not been linen weavers in Ireland previously. Yet there are no global figures as to the proportion of Scottish handloom weavers at any point in time who were of Irish extraction. The only method of ascertaining the numerical strength of the proportion is largely based upon generalising from the fragmentary, local data available. Needless to say such a procedure has many inherent pitfalls.

Irish immigration to Scotland did not start with the Great Famine of the 1840s. In fact as early as the late eighteenth century the flow of Irish to Scotland was not inconsiderable. Nor was this early immigration of an exclusively seasonal character. From 1773, for example, Irish linen weavers were coming to Scotland to take up the weaving trade with the decline of the Irish linen industry.[151] In the 1790s the south west coast of Scotland had many Irish including political refugees. In 1797 there were 500 immigrants per month landing in Scottish ports and certainly in March of that year these Irish immigrants 'gathered together in villages as weavers'.[152] The flow of immigrants, once established, quickly became a feature of Scottish social life; it was claimed that in 1799 there was 'a prodigious influx of Irish coming from Ireland ... and ever since that time they have continued to flow in constantly'. By 1834 the numbers of

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151. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the sudden increase in the population of Fife.
Handley, op. cit., p. 133.

152. Burns, op. cit., p. 205.
Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. v.

Irish in Scotland were such that 'in all the manufacturing districts the Scottish character may be said to be considerably changed.'[153] Though no quantitative assessment of the proportion of Irish handloom weavers for the early period can be made from such fragmentary evidence it is nevertheless safe to conclude that many Irish immigrants were becoming handloom weavers during the industry's phase of rapid expansion.

It is not in fact until about 1820 that some estimate of Irish involvement can be made. In the depression of 1819, of 324 handloom weavers employed at relief work on Glasgow Green no fewer than 101, or 31.2 per cent of the total, were natives of Ireland, perhaps indicating that some thirty per cent of the Glasgow weaving population were born in Ireland.[154] On the other hand, two years later a census of population in another of Scotland's major weaving centres - Paisley - revealed that only 603 families out of a total of 5,730 (i.e. 10.5 per cent of all families in Paisley) were of Irish extraction.[155] This paradox can only be resolved in terms of the different fabrics woven at the above centres, for Paisley's speciality was the production of fine muslins and silk cloths which was retained by native Scots, while the weaving of ordinary materials such as coarse grade cotton goods was concentrated upon the Glasgow region.[156] Not only was the Irish immigrant by 1820 flocking to Scottish textile centres, but already

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153. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 267, q. 3623.

154. Glasgow Herald, 20 Aug. 1819.

155. Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXIV; p. xxix.

156. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 12.

in Scotland, as elsewhere, he was demonstrating his propensity to take up the weaving of low-paid cotton fabrics.[157] As Glasgow was, moreover, the centre of the plain weaving trade, and as the Irish were probably least able to withstand slumps, it seems reasonable to assert that by about 1820 less than a quarter of all weavers in Scotland were natives of Ireland.

The influx of the Irish continued unabated after 1820, with many of these newcomers on arrival taking up the hand weaving trade. In 1826, it was thought that there were 40,000 Irish in Glasgow, most of whom were weavers, while in 1833 George Allen told the _Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping_ that at least a third of the weavers of Glasgow were Irish, though their wages did not compete with those of the Scottish weavers.[158] That the proportion of Irish weavers in Glasgow had been increasing since 1820 seems certain from statistics relating to the work of the Glasgow Relief Committee in 1837. Of 2,884 weavers aided by this body 1,103, or 38.2 per cent were born in Ireland - representing an increase of seven per cent on the proportion similarly relieved in 1819 - while 26.6 per cent of the 1,000 relieved at the soup kitchens were also born in Ireland.[159] Yet another estimate in this decade ascribed even greater numerical strength to the Irish among the websters. A few years previously

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157. J.H. Treble, The Place of the Irish Catholics in the Social Life of the North of England, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leeds, (1968), p. 22.

158. _Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom_, _P.P._, 1826, (404), IV, p. 201, q.2200
Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, _P.P._, 1833, (690), VI, p. 697, q. 11720.

159. Baird, _op. cit._, pp. 168-170.

Hugh Cogan, a Glasgow cotton manufacturer, who employed 800 looms in caorse grade work, reckoned that half of his weaving force was Irish.[160]

Some adjustment of these estimates, especially the last, for Glasgow seems necessary to establish the national average as that city was the major centre for coarse grade cotton weaving. Having said that, it must be borne in mind that the Irish were an important factor in other weaving centres; for their settlement pattern coincided fairly closely with Scotland's principal weaving areas, and the Irish immigrant's predilection for hand loom weaving can be firmly established.[161] Furthermore, as has been demonstrated, some sixty-five per cent of all hand looms in Scotland in 1838 were in low grade work, and this was the sector of the trade to which the immigrant Irish were above all attracted. Reinforcing this point, the Irish immigrants proliferated beyond the west central cotton weaving areas, to weaving towns - for example Dundee and Aberdeen - on the east coast of Scotland where they formed sizeable portions of the weaving communities.[162] Even at fancy weaving centres like Paisley where the proportion of Irish weavers was admittedly low, not a few of the draw-boys employed by the harness weavers were natives of Ireland.[163] Overall, therefore, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that by 1838 some thirty per cent of Scottish handloom weavers were born in Ireland. If second generation Irish are included, the percentage would undoubtedly be higher. With declining wages after 1840 the

160. Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. 109.

161. Ibid., p. 581.

162. Handley, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

163. Ibid., pp. 98-99; p. 103.

Irish were of even greater importance as fewer Scots than Irish were putting their children to the hand loom.[164]

A subtle simultaneous trend, which only a few observant commentators found worthy of mention, accompanied Highland migration and Irish immigration to the principal weaving areas of Scotland. This was the transition from agriculture to industrial pursuits, as indicated by a drift from rural hamlets to urban centres. Since opportunities for agricultural employment did not increase in proportion to the growth of population in Scottish farming districts at a time of rapid progress in the hand loom weaving trade, it is logical to conclude that some proportion of the Scottish handloom weavers were recruited from rural-born workers, especially as the hand loom, unlike factory work, did not necessitate great institutional changes.

At first sight, however, certain types of social statistical details indicate that west of Scotland towns received markedly less of an increase from rural Lowland Scotland than they obtained from Ireland. For example during the 1819 slump only ninety-six out of the 329 weavers working on Glasgow Green - ie just under thirty per cent - were born in 'other parts of Scotland' which was slightly lower than the 31.2 per cent formed by the Irish contingent.[165] Again, in 1837, of weavers given work by the Glasgow Relief Committee only 558, or 20.4 per cent of the total of 2,884, came from 'other parts' of Scotland, which is only a little more than half the Irish percentage, while 31.2 per cent of relief recipients at the same committee's soup kitchens - though not all of these were weavers - were from other Scottish areas.[166]

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164. *Ibid*., p. 117.
165. *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Aug. 1819.
166. Baird, *op*. *cit*., pp. 168-170.

The above percentages must, moreover, be deflated as they include possible Highland migrants, if the proportion of migrants from Lowland agrarian areas is to be ascertained. However, the sector of hand loom weaving which absorbed the indigenous population tended to be less depressed than the low paid fabrics which attracted the Irish immigrants, while the economic habits of the Scot were so noticeably different from those of his Irish counterpart, to leave the latter less able to cope during periods of slump.[167] If the overall population of Glasgow in 1851 is looked at, out of a total of 329,097 the number born in Scotland, excluding Highlanders and native Glaswegians,was 97,611 or about 24.5 per cent of the total. This was twice as high as the 59,801 figure for the Irish-born.[168] If pauper statistics are taken for an area with a low concentration of plain weaving - Paisley - the number on the Poors' Rate in 1840 is significantly different from those of Glasgow in 1819 or 1831: here, out of 616 on the list, 223 were born in 'other parts of Scotland' though this again included the Highland area. This can be contrasted with 136 Irish, the respective percentages for other parts of Scotland and Ireland being 36.2 per cent and twenty-two per cent.[169]

It can also be shown that Lowland Scots were an even more significant factor in weaving areas during the earlier, crucial phase of economic development. For example in Paisley in 1821 the proportion of Scottish families, excluding all those born in Renfrewshire and in

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167. Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. xxxv; p. 157.

168. T.S.A. Glasgow, pp. 807-809.

169. Royal Commission on the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws in Scotland, P.P., 1844, (557), XX; p. 579; q. 10554.

the Highlands, was 1,709, or just under thirty per cent, of a population of 5,730 families. This was almost three times as much as the Irish fraction of the population.[170] Again, if the residence pattern of destitute Glasgow weavers in 1819 is examined it can be shown that as many as 40.6 per cent of all the Scottish weavers who received relief had lived in Glasgow for an average period of 18⅝ years. On the other hand, the average period of residence in Glasgow for forty-eight per cent of all Irish weavers who received relief was 12½ years. For both nationalities these percentages represent the fraction of the group who had been resident longest in the city.[171] Bearing these figures in mind, it seems that the average Scottish-born weaver in Glasgow had in the pre-1820 period been at the trade longer than his Irish counterpart. Moreover, even as early as 1810 low wages in cotton weaving were ascribed to agricultural improvements which 'rendered fewer hands necessary in that department' and a glutting of the handloom weaving labour market from that source.[172] In other words, the displaced in rural areas - some of whom already knew the art of weaving - quickly made their way into the manufacturing towns.[173] Finally, the administration of the Scottish Poor Law, unlike its English counterpart, in no way impeded the influx of labour from rural to urban areas. Reflecting this view that the law stimulated mobility it was asserted in 1836 that the population of Glasgow could be

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170. Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. xxix.

171. Glasgow Herald, 20 Aug. 1819.

172. Select Committee on Journeymen Weavers' Petitions, P.P., 1810-11, (232), II, p. 394.

173. Fenwick Weavers' Society Record Book, 16 Feb. 1769; 9 Aug. 1770; 19 Nov. 1771.

divided into five parts 'of which the native inhabitants would be one fifth, the Lowlanders two fifth, the Highlanders one fifth, and the Irish one fifth. There are few persons you meet with in Glasgow who can say that their fathers were born in that town'.[174] In accounting for the origins of the Scottish hand loom weaving labour force, therefore, the economic historian must look beyond the natural increase in the weaving population, Highland migration and Irish immigration, to a considerable influx from the rural areas of the Scottish Lowlands. Indeed in the industry's phase of rapid expansion the source was probably as important as the flow of immigrants from Ireland.

viii

> There was (in the annals) of our trade an era when the frugal and industrious weaver could, on the fruits of his labour, enjoy an honourable rank in society; when a competent portion of the necessaries of life made his fireside cheerful, and the periodical returns of a rent day were seldom attended with feelings of painful solicitude; when to give our little ones a modest share of education, to enjoy the sacred institutions of religion, and to become the proprietors of a small library replete with the elements of useful knowledge were within the boundary of reach. That was the golden age of our industry. 175

Writing in 1828 William Radcliffe also described the allegedly halcyon days of the hand loom weaving trade in glowing terms with the weavers enjoying high wages which arose from the differential rates

174. Appendix G., State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xxviii.

175. Weavers' Journal, 31 Oct. 1835.

of innovation in spinning and weaving.[176] In his view the 'Golden Age' was an era of neat dwellings and small gardens for the weavers; all the family had a good set of clothes, the father a watch and his wife a fancy dress; each weaver's household had handsome furniture and beautiful crockery; and every Sunday the churches were crowded to excess.

Radcliffe's portrayal of the comfortable state of the handloom weavers during the industry's phase of rapid expansion was echoed by others. Indeed, a considerable amount of quantitative data on weavers' wages in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, supported by qualitative observations on the lives of the Scottish handloom weavers indicate that the concept of a 'Golden Age' has some validity. According to Gilmour, 'both weavers and their boy-helps must have had comparatively easy lives' at Paisley before 1818.[177] At Kilbarchan it was claimed that in 1782 360 looms could each earn £65 per annum.[178] Even J.C. Symons, who made a detailed study of handloom weavers in Scotland and abroad commented upon the 'desirability' of the trade in Scotland in the generation prior to the parliamentary enquiries.[179] In addition a number of contemporaries bore witness to the comfortable state of the hand loom weaving trade at the turn of the century.[180] Later economic historians continued

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176. W. Radcliffe, Origin of the New System of Manufacture, Stockport, (1828), p. 67.

177. D. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 12.

178. R.D. Mackenzie, Kilbarchan, a Parish History, Paisley (1902) p. 175.

179. J.C. Symons, Arts and Artisans at Home and Abroad with Sketches of the Progress of Foreign Manufactures, Edinburgh, (1839), p. 231.

180. Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832.
Glasgow Free Press, 4 March 1835.
Chartist Circular, 25 April 1840.
Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in

this traditional interpretation. Hamilton, for instance, claimed that in the last fifteen years of the eighteenth century there was an 'extraordinary demand for weavers who became the aristocrats of labour and whose wages rose to treble and quadruple that of any other trade', while Johnston described the evidence supporting the existence of the 'Golden Age' as 'overwhelming'.[181] Moreover it was claimed that the era was one of great social mobility for Scottish handloom weavers - by 1834 at least forty weavers had risen to positions of wealth and influence, and of these two, Monteith and Dalgleish, had become Provosts of Glasgow.[182]

Yet not all contemporary reports of Scottish hand loom weaving in the late eighteenth century and early years of the nineteenth were in quite such glowing terms, and wages' data certainly show that this picture was by no means generally applicable to all parts of Scotland. At Dunfermline, for example, a good weaver with his cord drawer could make £30 per year in 1780.[183] In 1810 Thomas Smith, delegate of the Glasgow trades told a Select Committee that average wages for all classes of weavers working for Glasgow manufacturers, on the wages regulations negotiated between masters and men nineteen years

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the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114) VIII, p. 97.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII; p. 24; p. 39.

181. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
'... as late as 1797 the weaver could make as much as 25/- a week and that at a time when 7/6d bought a stone of flour, 20 lbs of oatmeal, one stone of malt, one joint of butcher's meat, one lb of cross butter (18 ozs to the lb) and left 4½d over'
Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

182. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

183. Mercer, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

previously would not have amounted to more than 12/- per week. He went on to assert that in 1792 the best weavers could earn 18/- weekly, but this could not be sustained over the whole year.[184] Remuneration in linen weaving was considerably less attractive, for in 1787 William Crighton wrought linen in Perth at an average rate of 15/4d per fortnight.[185] Clearly estimates for weavers' wage rates in the 'Golden Age' are so much at variance with the traditional interpretation of weavers' rates of remuneration in that period as to require at least some explanation.

One of the principal reasons for this confusion was the emergence of a 'bewildering variety of contrasts' in weavers' wages and living standards. Already at the turn of the century the hand loom weaving trade displayed a variety of type and intricacy as regards fabrics woven.[186] As we have seen, there were considerable contrasts in the degree of strength and/or skill required to weave a certain web. High estimates of weavers' wages in the period therefore arose from selecting data regarding relatively higher wages in the fancy trade in such localities as Paisley and Kilbarchan and, conversely ignoring comparatively lower wage rates elsewhere in Scotland. Nor is it difficult to find the motivation behind this point. Partly, many writers viewed nostalgically a past era in hand loom weaving when the trade had been considerably more prosperous than it was by the 1830s. Partly also the weavers' spokesmen saw the Radcliffe hypothesis as excellent

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184. Select Committee on Journeymen Weavers' Petitions, P.P., 1810-11, (232), II, pp. 4-5.

185. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 695, q. 11679.

186. Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

support for their case in the 1830s. By exaggerating the prosperity of the 'Golden Age' the weavers could magnify the fall in their living standards and thus strengthen their pleas for legislative aid.

Obviously then, high wages were not universal in the 'Golden Age'. Again, recent research has shown fairly conclusively that the era in question witnessed five serious recessions in the Scottish cotton industry; 1787, 1792/93, 1797, 1799/1800 and 1803.[187] Such instability must have taken some of the lustre away from these years, especially since the increasing army of cotton weavers were the worst affected by the war. Since the cotton industry depended on overseas areas entirely for raw material supplies and partly for markets, its fortunes could change rapidly in war time. Moreover, if weekly wages in book muslin weaving reflected general wage rates in the trade and oatmeal was the staple diet of the weavers then a considerable trend fall in real wages, irrespective of cyclical fluctuations, occurred from 1790 to 1807 as shown in Table 3. Overall, it is likely that the era of prosperity was short-lived; elsewhere decline had set in by 1807 and by 1815 the 'Golden Age' was a fast-fading memory.[188]

But expressions like the 'Golden Age' do not in any case imply precision of dating; in fact they are so vague as to make them difficult to disprove. At best, the term stresses only one aspect of the era, which when examined critically, must have been the experience of very few. When by the mid-nineteenth century it was accepted doctrine that the industry had once experienced great prosperity in the 1790s

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187. Burns, op. cit., pp. 76-79.

188. F. Collier, The Family Economy of the Working Classes in the Cotton Industry, 1784-1833, Manchester, (1964), p. 6.
Treble, op. cit., p. 23.

TABLE 3

Real Income Trend in Book Muslin Weaving 1790-1807

Year	Book Muslin Weekly Wages	Oatmeal, Retail Price per Peck	Year	Book Muslin Weekly Wages	Oatmeal, Retail Price per Peck
1790	100	100	1799	63	144
1791	100	99	1800	63	257
1792	100	95	1801	63	182
1793	100	108	1802	55	104
1794	126	106	1803	63	116
1795	78	116	1804	56	119
1796	78	121	1805	78	127
1797	70	87	1806	78	131
1798	63	97	1807	56	147

SOURCE: Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

and early 1800s it could be argued that such a doctrine was fed by a psychological rejection of the prevailing distressed state of the trade. Like others, the Scottish handloom weavers then looked back to an idyllic and idealised view of the past.[189]

There is no ambiguity among either contemporaries or later historians that decline had set in by the end of the Napoleonic Wars though there is some reluctance to define precisely what was meant by 'decline'. For example there is the obvious paradox in the Scottish hand loom weaving industry after 1815 of falling money and real wages while the actual number of weavers increased. The actual rate at which weavers' money wages fell varied considerably according to fabric but the extent of the fall, for most fabrics, can be readily demonstrated (Tables 3 A, B and C). Indeed, the evidence for this trend is so plentiful that only three examples are given here, one for book-

189. J.T. Ward, The Literary Weavers. *Journal of the Bradford Textile Society*, (1969), p. 18.

TABLE 3A: PRICES of Weaving BOOK-MUSLINS.

--		12^{00}		Weekly Wages.	14^{00}		Weekly Wages.
March:		4/4	6/4		4/4	6/4	
1797	-	7 7/8	11 3/4	12/2	12	18	-
1798	-	7	10 1/2	13/3	10 7/8	16 1/4	-
1799	-	7 7/8	11 3/4	13/5	12 1/8	18 1/8	-
1800	-	7	10 1/2	13/1	11	16	15/2
1801	-	6 1/4	9 3/8	12/9	9 3/4	14 5/8	13/9
1802	-	7	10 1/4	13/6	11	16 1/2	15/2
1803	-	7	10 1/4	14/1	11 1/4	17	15/2
1804	-	6 1/4	9	13/2	10	15	13/5
1805	-	7 3/4	11	15/4	13	19	21/9
1806	-	8 3/4	11	17/8	14	19	21/6
1807	-	7	9 1/4	15/6	11 1/2	16 1/2	19/8
1808	-	5 1/2	7 3/4	13/2	9 1/2	13	15/9
1809	-	5	7 1/4	11/9	8 1/2	11 3/4	14/11
1810	-	6 1/4	8 1/2	14/9	10 1/4	13 3/4	16/3
1811	-	4 3/4	6 3/4	12/5	7 3/4	10 1/2	13/6
1812	-	5 1/4	7 1/2	13/2	8 1/2	11 1/2	15/7
1813	-	6	8 1/4	15/2	9 3/4	13	17/8
1814	-	7 1/4	10	17/4	11 1/2	15	20/1
1815	-	6	8 1/2	14/1	9 3/4	13	18/9
1816	-	4 3/4	6 3/4	-	7 1/2	10 1/4	11/9
1819	-	3 1/4	5	-	5 1/4	7 1/2	9/2 3/4

--		12^{00}		Weekly Wages	14^{00}.		Weekly Wages.
October:		4/4	6/4		4/4	6/4	
1797	-	7 7/8	11 3/4	12/2	12	18	-
1798	-	7	10 1/2	11/3	10 7/8	16 1/4	-
1799	-	8 1/3	11 3/4	13/10	12 5/8	18 1/8	-
1800	-	7	9 3/8	13/7	11	14 5/8	13/5
1801	-	6 1/4	9 3/8	12/9	9 3/4	14 5/8	13/9
1802	-	7	10 1/4	14/8	11 1/4	17	14/1
1803	-	6 1/4	9	13/2	10	15	13/5
1804	-	6 3/4	9 3/4	14/6	11 1/4	17	14/11
1805	-	8 3/4	12	18/1	14	20	21/8
1806	-	7 3/4	10 1/4	17/	12 3/4	17 3/4	21/1
1807	-	7	9 1/4	15/6	11 1/2	16 1/2	19/8
1808	-	5	7 1/4	11/9	8 1/2	11 3/4	14/11
1809	-	5 3/4	8	13/3	9 3/4	13 1/4	16/
1810	-	6	8 1/4	14/1	9 3/4	13	15/5
1811	-	4 1/4	6	11/1	7	9 1/2	13/
1812	-	5 1/4	7 1/2	13/2	8 1/2	11 1/2	15/7
1813	-	6	8 1/4	15/2	9 3/4	13	17/8
1814	-	6	8 1/2	14/4	9 3/4	13	19/8
1815	-	5 1/4	7 1/2	-	8 1/2	11 1/2	13/7
1816	-	3 1/4	4 1/2	-	5 1/4	7	9/1 1/2

General average of 369 webs of all descriptions of light work.

Taken from the books of Mr. James Perston, Glasgow.

Source:

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 157

TABLE 3B

Description of various Fabrics of Muslin manufactured in Kilbarchan: the price per Ell paid for Weaving, and the Year it was paid.

DESCRIPTION	Reed.	Breadth.	PER ELL IN 1824.		1825.		1826.	1827.	1828.	1829.	1830.	1831.	1832.	1833.	1834.
			s.	d.	s.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.	d.
Seeded Shawls- -	1,400	7/4	1	-½	1	-¼	- -	- -	8	7½	-	-	-	-	-
Seeded Shawls- -	1,200	7/4	-	-	-	11½	10	- -	- -	- -	- -	7¼	7	7	7
Seeded Shawls- -	1,400	5/4	-	8½	-	9	- -	6	7¼	5¼	4½	-	-	-	-
Seeded Shawls- -	1,200	5/4	-	-	-	7½	5½	- -	- -	4½	4½	4½	4½	-	-
Moss Seeds - -	1,300	5/4	-	3¾	-	3¾	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moss Seeds - -	1,200	5/4	-	3½	-	-	- -	- -	- 2½	2	2	2	- -	2	-
Colonnade Seeded Stripes	1,400	5/4	-	6	-	6¼	5½	4	4⅜	3½	3¼	3¼	3¼	3¼	-
Coloured Bord Shawls	1,200	5/4	-	-	-	-	- -	- -	- -	3	3	3	-	-	-
Jaconet (Coarse)	1,300	5/4	-	3¼	-	3½	2½	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jaconet (ditto)	1,200	5/4		-	-	-	- -	2	2¼	1⅞	1½	2	2	-	-

The above I believe is a correct statement of facts.

Kilbarchan)
23 June 1834)

(signed) Archd Crawford, Manufacturer.
D.W.W. Grahame, J.P.

SOURCE:

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 193, q. 2550.

TABLE 3C

TABLE, showing the increasing lengths of the Webs, and the gradual Reduction of the Weavers' Wages, from 1809 to 1833.

NAMES of the WEBS	Length in Yards.				Breadth in Inches				Porters in the Reed per Yard, showing the Thickness of the Fabric.				Wages per Web, including all Expenses.				Expenses of Winding, Loom Rent, Light, &c., paid by the Weaver out of his Wages.				Wages per Web in 1833, if paid according to the Length at the Prices of 1809, deducting Expenses.	Present Wages for each Web, with the additional Lengths, after deducting Weavers' Expenses.	Amount of reduction of Wages on each Web since 1809.
	In 1809.	In 1818.	In 1824.	In 1833.	In 1809.	In 1818.	In 1824.	In 1833.	In 1809.	In 1818.	In 1824.	In 1833.	In 1809.	In 1818.	In 1824.	In 1833.	In 1809.	In 1818.	In 1824.	In 1833.			
													s.d.	s.d.	s.d	s.d.	s.d.	s.d	s.d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
Hessian Sheeting	102	116	118	139	40	40	40	40	16	18	18	18	16 -	9 -	11 -	8 -	1 6	2 -	2 3	2 1	19 9	5 11	13 10
Ditto	102	116	118	139	40	40	40	40	15	15	15	15	15 -	8 -	10 -	7 -	1 6	1 9	2 -	1 10	18 4	5 2	13 2
Common Sheeting	126	126	126	136	35	35	35	35	22	24	21	22	20 -	9 -	12 -	8 -	2 3	2 1	2 2	2 1	19 9	5 11	13 2
Dandy ditto	- -	96	96	108	--	36	36	36	--	24	21	21	- -	7 6	10 -	7 -	- -	2 1	2 2	2 2	6 1	5 4	--
4-feet Sacking	72	72	92	105	28	28	28	28	14	14	14	14	14 -	10 -	10 -	7 -	1 -	1 -	1 -	1 -	19 -	6 -	13 -
Osnaburgs	146	146	146	158	25	25	25	25	24	24	24	24	20 -	8 -	11 -	7 6	2 3	2 1	2 2	2 2	19 1	5 4	14 5
Canvass	40	- -	40	42	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7 -	- -	4 3	4 -	- 8	- -	- 6	- 6	6 7	3 6	3 -
Cotton Bagging	63	- -	- -	67	39	--	--	42	10	--	--	10	10 -	- -	- -	4 3	1 -	- -	- -	- 9	10 3	3 6	7 -

SOURCE: Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 237, q. 3244.

muslin weaving in Glasgow, one for the fancy trade of Kilbarchan and one for plain linen weaving at Dundee.[190] Reinforcing this adverse trend all available data indicate that the fall in money wages far outstripped the trend price fall for food and other necessities. By the 1830s living standards had declined sharply while a decade later real wages had sunk so low that many weavers lived at a level little short of actual starvation.[191]

But the wage fall for most weavers notwithstanding, the trade still continued to recruit labour. Thus in 1824, there was a noticeable demand for more weavers in the neighbourhood of Glasgow and Paisley.[192] Ten years later the number of weavers in the Lanark area was said to be increasing even in the face of extreme destitution.[193] Again during several trade revivals reference was made to the abundance of work available, albeit at very low prices.[194] In 1837 one Glasgow newspaper found it 'totally inexplicable' that handloom weavers could continue to be so numerous 'not only in the face of their present disadvantages but in the prospect of prices being still further reduced

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190. Baines, op. cit., p. 488.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 156, q. 2058.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 13-16.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 203-211.

191. Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.
Glasgow Saturday Post, 12 Feb. 1848.

192. Glasgow Free Press, 7 Sept. 1824.

193. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 195, qq 2583-2586.

194. Glasgow Courier, 10 Aug. 1826.
Glasgow Herald, 10 Feb. 1845.

by the progressive improvement of machinery'.[195] Elsewhere a similar pattern emerged. A short-term fall in wages in the relatively prosperous Border tweed trade was also accompanied by an increased number of weavers, while in other districts it was reported that after 1815 labour continued to enter a doomed craft.[196] It remains for the historians to explain the emergence of this pattern.

The ease of entering the hand loom weaving trade was obviously a crucial factor, for the industry required little capital or skill, particularly in the plain sectors which attracted most newcomers. Moreover the hand loom still offered some positive attraction for entrants since, unlike factory work, domestic weaving retained a degree of independence; nor was there any breakdown of family unity with its feared effects upon morality. At the same time social mobility within the trade was possible, some plain weavers being able to move into the better - if more irregularly-paid fancy fabrics, while other weavers actually aspired to small cork status.[197] In addition, although slumps were all too frequent occurrences, recoveries were equally certain and for some time considerable optimism prevailed of an impending sectoral recovery in the trade.[198] Such hopes, however, were never realised. Nonetheless, the flow of recruits to the loom continued unabated until 1840. Nor was there corresponding mobility out of the weaving trade, since websters found difficulty in transferring to

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195. Ibid., 10 July 1837.

196. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 167.
Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 138.

197. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 103, qq 1351-1352; p. 214, q. 2881.
Glasgow Evening Post, 19 July 1834.

198. Weavers' Journal, 1 Dec. 1835.

other occupations, where combinations increasingly restricted entry.[199] The outcome of all these factors was a glutted labour market.

It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that the real wages of the Glasgow handloom weavers fell from 1810 to 1831.[200] Meanwhile, if Glasgow retail prices are accepted as broadly applicable to Kilbarchan then a fall in real wages was also experienced in the fancy trade there.[201] Again, in another fabric altogether - linen - Dundee handloom weavers must have experienced a marked fall in real incomes from 1819 to 1838, as falling wages outstripped the decline in the price of oatmeal and of wheaten bread, the two staple items of the weavers' diets.[202] In general terms weavers' money wages were even more depressed in the 1840s and it is almost certain that the decline in real incomes continued after the middle of the century.[203]

This fall in real wages experienced by many handloom weavers was all the harder to bear since, by the 1830s, they were, even in times of full employment, at the very base of working class society.[204] To the obvious economic difficulty of the weavers must therefore be added the psychological problem of the erosion of their occupational status;

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199. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 199, qq. 2645-2648.
Final Report of Royal Commissions on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 120

200. T.R. Gourvish, The Cost of Living in Glasgow in the Early Nineteenth Century, Economic History Review, XXV, (1972), p. 75.

201. Ibid.

202. Tables 3C and 4B.

203. Johnston, op. cit., p. 317.
Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.

204. Gourvish, op. cit., pp. 74-76.

TABLE 4A

Real Wage Data for Various Glasgow Occupational Groups, 1810-31

(1815/16 = 100)

Year	Bricklayer Money Wages	Bricklayer Real Wages Index 1	Building Labourer Money Wages	Building Labourer Real Wages Index 2	Handloom Weaver Money Wages	Handloom Weaver Real Wages Index 2
1810	100.0	97.2	100.0	99.1	134.5	132.5
1811	100.0	100.2	100.0	98.2	103.4	101.0
1812	100.0	92.4	100.0	88.3	117.2	102.9
1813	100.0	86.8	100.0	85.0	134.5	113.8
1814	100.0	92.8	100.0	94.2	134.5	126.0
1815	100.0	101.1	100.0	101.8	134.5	136.0
1816	100.0	98.9	100.0	98.2	65.5	64.0
1817	100.0	91.3	100.0	90.5	65.5	58.9
1818	100.0	98.0	81.8	79.7	91.4	88.5
1819	94.1	106.1	68.2	78.5	56.9	65.1
1822	103.4	121.9	75.0	91.9	56.9	69.3
1831	88.2	116.8	81.8	107.2	75.9	98.9

The above estimates are all based on Glasgow Retail Prices. Index 1 is based on the dietary pattern of the urban working classes with high incomes, and Index 2 is taken from nearer subsistence diet of the lower working classes.

SOURCE:-
Gourvish, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-76.

TABLE 4B

Movement of Wages and Food Prices at Dundee

Year	Wages for Weaving Hessian Sheeting		Average Quarterly Price of Oatmeal		Quarterly Average for Quartern Loaf	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1810	14					
1811	11					
1812	10					
1813	8					
1814	12					
1815	13					
1816	7					
1817	6					
1818	8					
1819	7		1	3½		10½
1820	7			-		-
1821	9		1	1		8¼
1822	9		1			8
1823	9		1	0¾		7½
1824	10	6	1	3¾		8¾
1825	11	6	1	3		9¼
1826	5		1	5		8¾
1827	5	6	1	4		8¼
1828	7	6	1	1½		8¼
1829	7	6	1	2¼		9¾
1830	6		1	9		9
1831	6	6	1	11¼		9¼
1832	6		1	1½		8½
1833	6	6		11¾		7¼
1834	6		1	0¼		6¾
1835			1	4¼		5¾
1836			1	9¼		6¾
1837			2	2½		7½
1838			1	11		8

SOURCES:

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 227, q. 3082.

Assistant Commissioners Reports from the East of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, p. 206.

inside a generation the Scottish hand loom weaving trade was transformed from one of more or less craft status, to being the sewer of unemployed labour.[205] Inevitably symptoms of social, 'moral' and cultural decline appeared in many aspects of their lives which had been lacking in an earlier and more prosperous era.[206] In addition, the frequent cyclical fluctuations tended to reduce the handloom weavers more than any other sector of the proletariat to dependency on the Poor Law or temporary relief committees.

Until 1840 there was no decline in the Scottish hand loom weaving trade in terms of a diminution in the number of weavers employed. But for the vast majority of Scottish handloom weavers there was the real protracted economic decline of receiving less reward for an increasing amount of work at a time when other working groups were making gains in real terms. As will be seen later, the growing poverty of the weavers had marked repercussions on all aspects of their lives. After 1840, however, the number of weavers diminished rapidly, the increasingly successful adaptation of the power loom forcing the survivors into the most intricate fabrics. Even then there was no recovery in wage rates and cheapness of labour alone temporarily halted further investment in power loom technology. Until their eventual demise the Scottish handloom weavers were in socio-economic terms at the very bottom of the working classes.[207]

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205. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 120.

206. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 44; p. 48.

207. The Operative Cotton Weavers, as early as 1824, considered themselves to be 'in a state of nature, without landmark and without law. They are equally the prey of every ambitious and avaricious adventurer. In such a state did the Europeans find the original inhabitants of North America and drove them, piece by

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Superimposed upon the downward sectoral trend in the living standards of the Scottish weavers were fluctuations in levels of prosperity which were determined by cyclical influences. Like all other manufacturing industries hand loom weaving was affected by the general movement of the emerging industrial economy from booms to slumps in the now familiar pattern normally described as the inventory trade cycle.[208] Moreover, the products of the Scottish hand loom were so varied in quality and price that elasticity of demand differed considerably from cloth to cloth. Not surprisingly, therefore, weavers in each sector of the trade were affected to differing degrees by trade cycle movements. In addition, one important sector of the Scottish trade - the production of fancy fabrics - was affected by varying levels of demand according to season. Nonetheless, even if the time of year affected overall levels of prosperity or immiseration in this line of work, this pattern must still be related to the contours of trade cycle movements and the downward sectoral trend.[209]

Two criteria may legitimately be used to trace the movement of the trade cycle in the weaving trade. The first, and less reliable, of the two is wage rates, for at the onset of recessions small manu-

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piece, into the very bosom of the desolate wilderness. The fate of the Cotton Weavers in this country has been somewhat analagous'. Glasgow Free Press, 14 Sept. 1824.

208. A.D. Gayer, W.W. Rostow and A.J. Schwartz, The Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy 1790-1850, an Historical, Statistical and Theoretical Study of Britain's Economic Development, Oxford, (1953), Vol. I, pp. 1-342.

209. Glasgow Herald, 7 April 1820; 31 July 1826; 9 Nov. 1827; 10 July 1843; 13 July 1849; 19 Nov. 1849.

factures often precipitated a chain of reductions which forced other employers to follow suit, so that overall wage cuts were experienced in slumps; conversely, with recovery and the return of confidence, competition for labour led to wage advances which, not surprisingly, reached their peak coincident with the crest of the boom. The second parameter for measuring the movement of the cycle is the level of employment, or conversely of unemployment, for, unlike the sectoral decline pre-1840, cyclical fluctuations in the trade were characterised by varying levels of employment. Typically cyclical peaks were periods of full employment and slumps witnessed high unemployment, while intervening downswings and recoveries saw employment levels varying between these two extremes. Supplementing two approaches with the more subjective evidence of contemporary commentators, who were familiar with the weaving trade, a tolerably accurate chronology of cyclical fluctuations may be constructed.

Brief reference has already been made to cyclical slumps in the earlier, more prosperous, phase of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade. The years following the American War of Independence saw a quinquennium of gradually increasing prosperity in the west of Scotland running roughly from 1782 to 1787. At the latter date, however, a slight, but significant setback was experienced caused by over speculation and overproduction in cotton, coupled with large scale importation of cheap Indian muslins by the East India Company. Though less hard hit than their English counterparts the ensuing attack on their living standards provoked the Scottish handloom weavers to stage the first big strike in the trade but, despite a two months' stoppage, the Glasgow weavers were unable to prevent a reduction in their wage rates. Recovery, however, was rapid and by 1790, with increasing exports,

cotton was again booming. This revival was in turn short-lived. A check to expansion was experienced in 1792, largely caused by the difficult international situation and the near certainty of Britain entering the war. By 1793 considerable depression prevailed. The bankruptcy of the Deanston and Ballindalloch mills owned by the Buchanan brothers was only the most notable of failures among Glasgow firms, which culminated in thousands of weavers being either unemployed, or unpaid for work performed. The gravity of this situation was inevitably aggravated by temporary wage cuts in most fabrics.[210]

Like the severe slump of 1793, the 1793-96 upswing was primarily the result of developments in the increasingly important export sector, above all in the cotton industry. Fortuitously, the opening up of the American market in 1793 compensated for the loss of European openings thus inducing the prosperity of this triennium. Once more, however, recovery was checked by the war with France, for the coming together of a number of adverse factors, including the national panic caused by the French landing at Fishguard in 1797, led to the suspension of cash payments and disrupted the whole economy. The upshot was a drop of cotton and linen production in Scotland with a concomitant decline in levels of employment.[211] The ensuing upswing was of short duration, for the upsurge from June 1798 lasted little more than one year, the exceptionally bad harvests of 1799 and 1800 strongly dis-

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210. Burns, op. cit., pp. 76-79.
Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 8 July 1793.

211. 'The disruption of normal trading patterns, the necessity of sending large sums of money abroad as subsidies to the allies, the flight from Britain of privately held gold chasing the best advantages in abnormal price fluctuations and the inevitable demands in periods of panic to convert paper into gold'. A combination of the factors in 1797 forced parliament to suspend specie payment.
R.K. Webb, Modern England from the Eighteenth Century to the Present, London, (1969), p. 145.

couraging business confidence. By October of 1800 the destitution among the working classes of Glasgow, Paisley, Anderston and Calton led to food riots, while at Glasgow a soup kitchen was established, financed by a subscription raised for the poor.[212] The geographical origins of these riots strongly suggests weaver participation. The situation was saved in 1801 with the Peace of Amiens and consequent re-opening of European markets. The comparative prosperity which followed, and particularly the profits made in 1802, stimulated factory building and the large scale adoption of new techniques.[213]

Again, however, the prosperity was shattered by the resumption of the war in May 1803. Many Scottish manufacturers were caught unawares with embarrassingly large stocks when hostilities were resumed. But this situation was further exacerbated by German producers who, using yarn exported from Britain and the cheap labour of the Rhineland, undercut British goods. The problems of the handloom weavers, especially those in cottons, were aggravated even further by increasing instability from 1804 to 1808 which was not helped by the Berlin or Milan decrees. Moreover, during this period, the hand loom weaving side of the cotton industry suffered more than other branches both because of the lack of effective combinations of workmen and because the trade had evolved a sizeable number of small cork manufacturers who were more than willing to undercut to clear their stocks. Such practices persuaded the Central Committee of Operative Weavers in Scotland to petition parliament for minimum wage rates.[214]

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212. Burns, op. cit., pp. 28-39.
Glasgow Herald, 21 Oct. 1800; 24 Oct. 1800.

213. Burns, op. cit. p31.
Glasgow Herald, 18 Feb. 1803.

214. Burns, op. cit. p31. Glasgow Herald, 2 Dec. 1808.
Select Committee on Journeymen Cotton Weavers in England, and

Some degree of recovery was achieved by late 1809 but as early as 1811 wages had again dropped considerably and in 1812 renewed demands for minimum wages led to a three-week strike of - allegedly - 40,000 Scottish handloom weavers. Defending the weavers in the Court of Session the lawyer, Francis Jeffrey, compared the general average of plain and fancy weavers - 13/9½ clear wages per week - with other trades' wage rates. These other occupations, claimed Jeffrey - among them masons, wrights, day labourers and shoemakers - produced returns for both masters and servants of from 16/- to 24/- weekly, while the general average for all other groups was almost 5/- higher than weavers' average rates. Evidence from other sources lends some degree of support to these contentions. Early in 1812 for instance the operative weavers of Glasgow had complained bitterly of the recent cuts in wage rates, especially as they coincided with increases in the cost of necessities. On the 26th of February, Lord Douglas and Clydesdale wrote to an R. Ryder warning the government that considerable alarm prevailed in the County of Lanark in consequence of the distressed situation of the weavers, while towards the close of that year John Joseph Dillon, a barrister, informed Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, that the general state of the trade was worse than was commonly supposed.[215]

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also on Petitions of Cotton Manufacturers and Operative Cotton Weavers in Scotland, P.P., 1809, (111), III, p. 31.

215. Glasgow Herald, 9 Nov. 1812.
Glasgow Chronicle, 25 Jan. 1812.
Douglas and Clydesdale to R. Ryder, 26 Feb 1812, Scottish Record Office, R.H 2/4, p. 194.
John Joseph Dillon to Lord Sidmouth, 18 Dec. 1812, quoted in A. Aspinall, The Early English Trade Unions, Documents from the Home Office Papers in the Public Record Office, London, (1949), pp. 412-413.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 183, q. 2438.

The last two full years of hostilities against Napoleonic France, 1813-14, saw a return of boom conditions to the hand weaving trade. As demand for a time was powerful enough to outstrip even the increased raw material costs, profit margins were healthy and some elements of these gains accrued to the weavers during a period of relative scarcity of labour. In other words weavers' wages were greatly increased without an immediate glutting of the labour force, as the cotton boom preceded the demobilisations and dismissals which accompanied the peace.[216] The fluctuating prosperity of the weaving trade in these years can be illustrated by reference to data relating to the annual wages of James Smith, a Paisley weaver. In 1810 Smith's earnings were £40 7 5d while in 1813 this total soared to £50 11 0d. The following two years, 1814 and 1815, saw his annual income at £59 15 0d and £56 13 4d respectively. But by 1816 the cycle had run its full course with Smith earning £40 1 7½d, or just less than his remuneration for 1812.[217]

Ample testimony exists as to the distressed state of the weaving trade in 1816, for like other war-induced booms, this one also was of short duration and the ensuing trough was aggravated by a considerable influx of hands to the trade. This slump was typically characterised by marked wage falls and increased unemployment levels. For example at Perth in January 1816 pullicates were woven at the rate of 3¼d per ell, but by March the rate had fallen to 1¾d and this decreased even further to 1¼d per ell in November of the same year. This

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216. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., pp. 102-103.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 183, q. 2433.

217. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 467.

last figure was the lowest rate ever recorded in that town.[218] Similar wage falls were experienced elsewhere though the real trough in wages, at Glasgow for example, did not occur in all areas as early as it did in Perth.[219] Data on unemployment in 1816 are equally plentiful. Lack of work for handloom weavers at Strathaven and nearby Avondale led to a plea for a subscription to help the unemployed; in Glasgow the distress of the period was compounded by the high incidence of fever prevailing, while at Paisley the season was said to be one 'of uncommon distress and peril'; at Hamilton it was hoped that the weavers, who had been too proud to accept alms in 1811, would be given preference at local relief works.[220] Though average wages for most Glasgow cotton fabrics as well as Smith's wages at Paisley - and the amounts he earned annually suggest that he was employed in skilled lines - underwent some improvement in 1818, this revival was of an ephemeral nature for severe depression again hit the hand loom weaving industry in 1819.[221]

As in England the year which witnessed the 'Peterloo Incident' saw chronic distress among the Scottish handloom weavers. On 4th September 2,000 Glasgow weavers and others considered the propriety of petitioning the kirk session, the local authorities, the Court of Session and the supreme magistrates to put into active and immediate operation the poor laws of Scotland, while a fortnight later a subscription for the unemployed operative weavers was opened at Irvine. Two

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218. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 204.

219. Baines, op. cit., p. 488.

220. Glasgow Chronicle, 8 Aug. 1816.
Glasgow Herald, 1 July 1816; 6 Sept. 1816; 15 Nov. 1816; 10 Oct. 1817.

221. Metcalfe, op. cit. p.467. Baines, op. cit. p.488.

TABLE 5A

Annual Earnings of James Smith, a Paisley (Fancy) Weaver
1806 - 1838

Year	Annual Earnings	Year	Annual Earnings	Year	Annual Earnings
1806	£34 14 7	1817	£41 4 8	1828	£33 11 3
1807	41 17 6	1818	58 1 10	1829	31 15 0
1808	31 6 2	1819	47 3 3½	1830	40 7 4
1809	44 6 10	1820	40 19 0	1831	31 16 4
1810	70 8 8	1821	49 8 6	1832	31 16 6
1811	54 6 0½	1822	56 18 1½	1833	29 7 6
1812	40 7 5	1823	50 16 1	1834	29 14 3
1813	50 11 0	1824	45 8 5	1835	37 17 0
1814	59 15 0	1825	44 15 2	1836	40 6 6
1815	56 13 4	1826	11 7 2	1837	30 1 6
1816	40 1 7½	1827	37 17 6	1838	33 5 2

SOURCE:

Metcalfe, *op. cit.*, p. 467

TABLE 5B

Daily Wages of Glasgow Cotton Weavers,
1810 - 1819 (and in 1831)

Fabrics Woven	1810	1811	1812	1813	1814	1815	1816	1817	1818	1819	1831
4-4th Cambrics, 1,300	2/7½	1/3	1/6	2/6	2/6	2/6	1/9	0/10½	1/3	0/9	1/-
6-4th Book Muslin, 1,400	2/7	1/8	1/11½	2/3½	2/11	2/6½	1/8	1/2½	1/8	1/2½	1/4
4-4th Jaconets, 1,200	1/-	1/-	1/6¼	1/7½	2/0½	1/8¾	0/10¾	0/9½	1/-	0/8¼	0/11
4-4th Pullicates, 1,300	2/-	1/-	1/8	2/2	2/4	1/8	1/1	1/-	1/-	0/10	1/1
4-4th checks, 1,000	1/7½	1/3	1/5	1/7½	1/7½	1/7½	0/9½	0/9½	1/1¾	0/8¼	0/11
5-4th, do.	2/4½	1/10	2/0½	2/3	2/3	2/3	1/2½	1/2½	1/7½	1/-	1/2
11-8th Ginghams, 1,300	1/11	1/3	1/7½	2/0¼	2/2	1/11	0/11	0/11½	1/1	0/10	1/-

SOURCE: Baines, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

months earlier about 150 Dumfries weavers struck work complaining that their employers, the manufacturers of Carlisle, took advantage of them both to reduce regular prices and in employing Dumfries weavers at rates lower than those current in that town. Again a contemporary, discussing the topic of taxation, claimed that many of the poor weavers could scarcely earn, with hard labour, twelve or fourteen pounds per annum in 1819. Distress in Paisley in that year sparked off the political meeting on Meikleriggs Muir and the subsequent riots in the town, while in Airdrie many of the weavers were in danger of being expelled from the Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society because they were in arrears of subscription payments. On 9th August 1819 James Crawford of Glasgow, handloom weaver and veteran of the French Wars, wrote to Lord Sidmouth begging him for monetary aid as he was driven to despair, 'trade being so dull and having a wife and one child to support'.[222] Further information of the extent of the distress in the summer of 1819 is provided by the figures for Gorbals where in August 167 looms out of 645, or almost twenty-six per cent of the total, were idle. To this statistic must be added well over one hundred draw-boys; in all the total thrown idle amounted to 'little short of 300 persons.'[223] Compounding the social distress, the recession was on this occasion protracted and there can be little doubt that the so-called 'Scottish

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222. Dumfries and Galloway Courier, 7 Sept. 1819.
Glasgow Courier, 15 June 1819.
The Reformer, 1 Dec. 1819. Glasgow Herald, 13 Sept. 1819.
Scotsman, 7 Aug. 1819.
Airdrie Weavers Friendly Society Minute Books, Airdrie Burgh Library.
Crawford's optimism was sparked off by the fact that he had heard of the Home Secretary's 'condescending good nature, piety and exemplary virtues.'
Scottish Record Office, R.h 2-4/125, 9 Aug. 1819.

223. Glasgow Chronicle, 14 Aug. 1819.

Insurrection' of 1820 received considerable impetus from a prolonged period of unemployment combined with very low rates of remuneration in the weaving trade.[224]

It was for instance as late as April 1820 before the 'long languishing' trade of Paisley recovered, and although in that month most of the weavers of Glasgow and Paisley were returning to their looms it was nevertheless agreed in May of that year at a meeting of merchants, manufacturers and traders in Paisley to petition parliament 'in consequence of the unprecedented pressure on every branch of mercantile industry'. In early 1820 the Edinburgh magistrates relieved the distress of the unemployed operative weavers by granting them employment which added to the improvements of the capital. In that city it was to be April 1820 beforethe unemployed silk weavers went back to their looms.[224(A)]

From the painful and prolonged trough of 1819-20 the Scottish economy made a slow but gradual recovery culminating in the boom of 1825, during which the Scottish cotton industry experienced its only post-Napoleonic War period of sustained buoyancy. Not only did this upswing bring full employment to most Scottish handloom weavers; it also led to a rapid extension of industrial capacity, especially in the number of power-looms which increased throughout the 1820s from 2,000 to 10,000 thus leading, according to some contemporaries, to at least some excess capacity.[225] For the duration of the boom the benefits of full employment were accompanied by wage advances. At

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224. P.B. Ellis and S. Mac A' Ghobhainn, The Scottish Insurrection of 1820, London, (1970), p.19.

225. R.H. Campbell, Scotland since 1707, the Rise of an Industrial Society, Oxford, (1971), p. 108.

224(A). Glasgow Herald, 7 April 1820; 19 May 1820 Scotsman, 29 April 1820.

Perth, for example, the weaving of so called cotton bagging and sacking - which really was a linen fabric - was paid at the rates of 5/-, 5/6d and 6/6d per piece in January, April and July of 1825 respectively, while the entry pattern of weavers to the Strathaven Weavers' Friendly Society indicates that real incomes during the boom were sufficiently high to allow an untypically large number of weavers to afford to pay the entry subscriptions.[226] Yet the amplitude of the boom over-reached the requirements of legitimate demand and it was characterised by considerable speculation which caused financial chaos when the downturn eventually occurred. Even as early as May of 1825 manufacturers and merchants at Paisley were afraid to keep large stocks in case of a reaction to the 'unprecedented advance upon Silk, Worsted and Cotton', while at Manchester it was claimed in June that cotton had advanced by at least fifty per cent beyond the price which could be justified on a fair consideration of the actual state of demand and supply.[227] When the crash came it, not surprisingly, had traumatic repercussions in the cotton industry and inflicted considerable economic and social distress in the sector of the cotton labour force which was least capable of defending itself.

Unprecedented panic in the cotton trade came sooner than was expected in the summer of 1825 - though in parts of Scotland weavers'

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226. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Sootland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 205.
In 1823 only four weavers joined the Strathaven Weavers' Friendly Society, but in 1824-25 this figure was increased to fifteen while in the ensuing difficult year of 1826 there were no new entries to the Society.
Regulations etc. of the Strathaven Weavers' Friendly Society, Scottish Record Office (West Register House), FS /16/204.

227. Glasgow Herald, 6 May 1825; 24 June 1825.

wages - including rates at Perth and Paisley - remained steady or advanced until the autumn. Indeed, it was not until late 1825 and early 1826 that complaints of distress on a large scale among Scottish handloom weavers were voiced.[228] Industry in Paisley, in January of the new year, was feeling severe setbacks as a result of the 'recent feverish state' of the London money market, while early in February 'thousands of weavers' were being discharged and were suffering severe distress from want of employment.[229] Cotton weavers, however, were not the only ones to suffer for howls of execration at unfair French competition in silk production emanated from both Macclesfield and Paisley, while Irish competition - again through very low wage levels - in linen production was debated.[230] Available evidence testifies as to both the extent of unemployment in 1826 and to the severe cuts in rates of remuneration for more fortunate weavers who obtained webs. At Glasgow in early April, for example, 3,000 weavers in the City and the Barony parish were idle while of those employed, 4,000 were so badly paid that they were unable to earn 8d per day and the majority could not obtain 1/- daily after sixteen hours work.[231] By May, chronic distress had hit Paisley where the number destitute of employment in the town and its immediate vicinity amounted to 12,899 to which another 1,000 could be added if the surrounding parishes of Eastwood, Neilston, Kilbarchan, Houston, Loch-

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228. Ibid., 1 July 1825; 3 Oct. 1825; 5 Dec. 1825.
229. Ibid., 16 Jan. 1826; 3 Feb. 1826.
230. Ibid., 5 Dec. 1825; 18 Jan 1826; 16 Jan. 1826.
231. Ibid., 31 March 1826.
Scots Times, 1 April 1826.

winnoch and Renfrew were added; this represented almost twenty per cent of the population as enumerated in the census of 1821.[232] Reference to Table 5A suggests that James Smith was among the Paisley unfortunates who were thrown idle. In addition by August, about 300 weavers around Hamilton, or just over twenty per cent of the labour force in that district, had no webs.[233] Despite the very inclement economic climate in the Scottish hand weaving trade, however, the Scottish weaver in the summer of 1826 did not follow his Lancashire counterpart on a desperate campaign against technological progress; contemporaries in Scotland were in fact impressed by the weavers' exemplary and unprecedented (in periods of distress) good behaviour, and only at Kilmarnock was there some mobbing and rioting instilled by a fear of a scarcity of meal.[234]

After 1826, when the inventory trade cycle had run its full course, events were to show that there were to be two minor cycles and a time-lag of six years before the economy could again begin to sustain another major cycle. From the trough of 1826 there was considerable revival in the following year which culminated in a minor boom in 1828. Unfortunately, however, full confidence took time to recover from the previous crash, and a bad harvest in 1828 checked expansion. 1829 was a year of low economic activity. Some of the searing distress which

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232. Glasgow Herald, 29 May 1826.

233. In 1828 the total number of hand looms in Hamilton and district were enumerated at 1,450.
Glasgow Chronicle, 27 June 1826.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 2.

234. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., pp. 196-198.
Glasgow Herald, 21 Aug. 1826.

had characterised 1826 now returned to the Scottish handloom weavers. On April 3rd 1829 an estimated 20,000 from Glasgow and surrounding weaving areas met on Glasgow Green to discuss their 'present destitute and pitiable condition'. Three weeks later about one-third of the 1,200 to 1,300 harness, plain shawl and muslin weavers of Kilmarnock were without work, in addition to another 300 idle carpet weavers. By July only a very unconsiderable number of hands obtained work in harness plaid weaving at Ayr.[235] Once again distress meant not simply unemployment but also wage cuts. A meeting of weavers' delegates from districts round Glasgow in April resolved not to accept any work below the prices paid in October of the previous year, indicating that wage rates were under pressure, while attempts were made to coerce weavers into obeying this resolution by burning, with vitriol, webs accepted at lower rates.[236] Nonetheless the competition of too many hands for work coupled with the ineffectiveness of their combinations led to considerable cuts in wage rates. It was claimed, for example, that a 16^{00} broad lawn was paid in 1826 (presumably before the crash) at 11¾d per ell; by December 1828 this had fallen to 6⅛d which was considered a starvation price. By March 1829 this rate had been reduced even further to the unsparingly low level of 3¾d per ell.[237] Indeed the weavers themselves claimed that they were starving 'without a morsel to appease their hunger'; in March, for example, one individual with a wife and four children was ready to swear that during the last three months his family had subsisted on less common provision

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235. Glasgow Herald, 3 Apr. 1829; 20 Apr. 1829; 14 July 1829.

236. Ibid., 29 May 1829.
Glasgow Chronicle, 17 April 1829.

237. Ibid., 27 March 1829.

than was essential to support them for one month.[238]

An upswing in the following year was again checked by a bad harvest and by autumn of 1831 the condition of the Paisley weavers was said to be 'rather desponding', though it was hoped that the prospects of the manufactures of that town were brightening.[239] Such hopes, however, were dashed as by November the weavers of Perth and Paisley were petitioning their respective towns for relief, while the bankruptcy at Dundee of Messrs Stalker and Company, who weekly disbursed work to the amount of £250, further increased the difficulties of the weavers in that town.[240] Though the degree of distress, judged by the numbers unemployed at Paisley, was on a lesser scale than that of two years previously this recession was still marked by wage cuts. Furthermore, it was of a protracted nature affecting the fancy trade with particular severity; in June 1832 there were still about 1,000 Paisley weavers without work of any kind, while in the following month almost half the weavers of Kilbarchan had no webs, and relief for 'the sufferers' was being actively sought.[241] Clearly the political agitation of this era, as well as renewed attempts by the Scottish weavers to prevent further reductions by establishing tables of prices, received part of their impetus from prolonged economic and social distress. The Scottish weavers continued to complain bitterly in late 1832 and the first half of 1833. Even with a trade revival and

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238. Scots Times, 21 May 1829.
Scotsman, 8 March 1829.

239. Glasgow Herald, 1 Aug. 1831.

240. Glasgow Evening Post, 5 Nov. 1831; 26 Nov. 1831.

241. Ibid., 12 Nov. 1831; 14 July 1832.
Glasgow Free Press, 5 Sept. 1832.
Scottish Guardian, 22 June 1832; 17 Aug. 1832.

more demand for weavers, wages continued to be very depressed.[242]

Aided by reasonable harvests, from 1832 to 1835, and by the gradual development of a genuine railway boom, a slow recovery in the British economy was experienced after 1832. And although obscured by the rapid development in the other Scottish basic industries - iron, in particular but also coal - the Scottish textiles industry increased its production sizeably during these years. Once the over-capacity created in the previous major boom of 1825 was taken up, there took place a rapid extension of the Scottish cotton industry. For instance, it is reasonable to argue that most of the approximately 3,000 increase in hand looms in the south of Scotland, which occurred from 1828 to 1838, took place in the mid-1830s.[243] The upswing was, moreover, marked by attempts both at local and national levels by weavers to improve or stabilise their wage rates. The success achieved in this field in some localities indicates that demand for weavers in Scotland was in a healthy state.[244] All such advances, however, have to be related to the lower rates of the first few years of the decade; from a sectoral perspective weavers' wages certainly did not recover

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242. Glasgow Evening Post, 13 Oct. 1832; 23 March 1833; 17 Aug. 1833; 24 Aug. 1833.
Glasgow Argus, 6 May 1833.
Glasgow Herald, 26 April 1833.

243. Certainly the slack in the hand loom weaving trade in the early 1830s had been taken up by the middle of the decade. It can, of course, be argued that some of the increased number of weavers in the younger age group, were those displaced from cotton mills as a result of recent legislation.

244. Glasgow Evening Post, 13 Oct. 1832; 8 Dec 1832; 19 Jan. 1833; 9 Feb. 1833; 23 March 1833; 17 Aug. 1833; 24 Aug. 1833; 19 July 1834; 29 Nov. 1834; 13 June 1835.
Glasgow Free Press, 30 Jan. 1833; 9 March 1833; 30 Nov. 1833.
Glasgow Herald, 25 July 1834; 29 Aug. 1834.

to the rates acquired in the boom of 1825.[245]

The downswing of the cycle began in 1837 when by March 450 weavers in Paisley were unemployed. During the following month the destitution among the Scottish weavers had spread: not only was the centre of the fancy trade affected but so also were the handloom weavers in areas so far apart as Ayr and Dundee.[246] In Table 6 an attempt has been made to assess the extent to which the labour force was affected by unavailability of employment in a wide variety of areas, whose sole common link is that they have been documented in the surviving evidence. The percentage, and of course the raw figure, for Paisley is certainly lower than it should be for in June there were 1,965 unemployed workers in that town and in the following month 2,048 were given relief work. Given the importance of weaving in the local economy it is safe to conclude that a considerable number of the above were handloom weavers.[247] In addition, the familiar pressure on wage rates was exerted, while the severity of the trough was sufficient to render combinations among the Scottish weavers ineffective, and tables of prices negotiated and agreed during the gradual upswing were for the most part discarded.[248]

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245. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, pp. 14-16.
Appendix to Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 203-210.
Glasgow Herald, 17 April 1848; 13 July 1849.

246. Ibid., 24 March 1837; 14 April 1837.

247. Ibid., 12 June 1837.
Glasgow Argus, 27 July 1837; 10 Aug. 1837.

248. Early in the recession a reduction of 15 per cent took place in the principal fabrics of Perth.
Glasgow Evening Post, 22 April 1837.
The Paisley Weavers' Association, before asking for aid from relief bodies, deployed its own funds for that purpose.
Glasgow Argus, 6 April 1837.

TABLE 6

Extent of Destitution among the Scottish Handloom Weavers in 1837

Area	Column A Number Unemployed	Date	Column B Total No. of Weavers in Area	% Unemployed
Hamilton	463	22 April	1,276	36.3
Lanark	261	22 April	605	43.1
Paisley	600	22 March	5,599	10
Kilmarnock	358	17 April	1,892	18.9
Dunfermline	1,000+	25 Sept.	2,947	33.8
Crieff	-	-	-	50+
Girvan	543	14 April	1,800	31.1
Airdrie	400	21 April	1,700	23.5

SOURCES:

Column (A):

Glasgow Evening Post, and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer, 8 Apr 1837; 22 April 1837.

The Constitutional, 22 March 1837

Glasgow Herald, 24 March 1837

Glasgow Argus, 17 Apr. 1837; 25 Sept. 1837

Scotsman, 29 Apr. 1837

Glasgow Herald, 14 Apr 1837; 21 Apr. 1837.

Column (B):

Assistant Commissioners Report from the South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 2-4.

Assistant Commissioners Report, from the East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 210.

Fortunately for the Scottish handloom weavers the duration of the slump - unlike earlier ones in the decade - was not proportional to its severity. By July there was some optimism that recovery was impending; by mid-autumn, the worst of the depression in the various fabrics in the trade was over.[249] In the first half of 1838, when the Assistant Commissioners commenced their enquiry into the trade, a revival was well under way. But during the upswing business confidence was again chastened by the shockingly poor harvest of 1838 - the worst since 1816 - and only a minor boom was achieved in 1839 after which the economy receded towards the very deep trough of 1842. During the gradual but inexorable downswing from 1839 to 1842 the experience of the Scottish handloom weavers to a large extent mirrored that of the economy generally. In 1840 the main complaint of unemployment emanated from Perth and Paisley and was almost certainly confined to seasonal dullness in the fancy trade, although grievances at the low levels of wages paid to Scottish handloom weavers were universal in the trade.[250] But the distress which visited the trade in the following year was not to be restricted to the fancy trade although its impact was more severely felt in that sector than in other sectors of the craft. Dundee, Forfar and Dunfermline, for example, were badly hit as was the Glasgow area, where most of the remnants of the plain cotton

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249. Glasgow Herald, 15 Aug. 1837; 18 Aug. 1837; 28 Aug. 1837; 15 Sept. 1837; 18 Sept. 1837; 25 Sept. 1837; 13 Oct. 1837.
Scottish Guardian, 5 Oct. 1837.

250. The poor harvests of the early years of the 1840s, which were largely responsible for giving the decade its 'hungry' characteristic, certainly did nothing to improve either domestic demand or business confidence.
Scottish Patriot, 25 Apr. 1840.
Scots Times, 22 Apr. 1840; 27 May 1840.
Chartist Circular, 26 Oct. 1839; 19 Dec. 1840.
Scottish Patriot, 28 May 1840.
Glasgow Herald, 30 Mar. 1840; 29 June 1840.

weavers could still be found.[251] Nevertheless, by the last quarter of 1841 the gloom which had prevailed on the east coast of Scotland, and this included not only linen weavers but also the cotton weavers of Perth, had begun to lift, though there was no noticeable revival in the commercial prospects of Glasgow or Paisley.[252] Indeed in the new year the seasonal revival in the fancy trade was so faint that there was no discernible reduction in the number of weavers unemployed in Renfrewshire.[253]

By all accounts the year 1842 was a black one for the Scottish handloom weavers. Yet because of the heterogeneous nature of the trade experience still differed from sector to sector. The greatest destitution occurred in Paisley and its dependent fancy weaving environs caused by the poor demand for its products. This situation, however, was aggravated by the bankruptcy of the Paisley municipal authority, in itself a partial consequence of the failure of the fancy trade on which the local economy was over-concentrated.[254] Moreover, the distress in Paisley and its vicinity continued throughout the entire year. For example on the 4th of April 13,262 people were listed as unemployed while the figures for 9th May and 6th June 1842 were 11,843 and 10,417 respectively. By 6th January 1843 this total had again risen to 11,885.[255] Nevertheless the economic difficulties of the times extended

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251. Glasgow Herald, 3 Sept. 1841; 12 Nov. 1841; 19 Nov. 1841.

252. Glasgow Herald, 20 Sept. 1841; 12 Nov. 1841; 19 Nov. 1841; 17 Dec. 1841; 27 Dec. 1841.
Glasgow Chronicle, 27 Aug. 1841; 6 Oct. 1841; 3 Dec. 1841.

253. Glasgow Herald, 27 Dec. 1841; 10 Jan. 1842; 24 Jan. 1842; 21 Feb. 1842; 28 Mar. 1842.

254. Select Committee on the Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843 (115), VII, p. 83, q. 913.

255. Glasgow Herald, 4 April 1842; 9 May 1842; 6 June 1842; 6 Jan. 1843.

much more widely than the fancy sector for a great many handloom weavers in other areas of Scotland had no webs to work in January 1842. From all such districts bitter complaints were made about the unprecedently low levels of hand weavers' wages.[256] Viewed against this background it was scarcely surprising that the year witnessed considerable unrest among the weaving labour force. The unemployed weavers of Dundee and Forfar, for example, resolved to organise themselves into a General Union which would approach the landlords and farmers of their localities with demands for comfortable food and clothing, while at Dunfermline proposals by large shops to cut weavers' wages led to open rioting. In the west the situation was only slightly better with a hunger march by the unemployed of Glasgow and a strike of dandy-loom weavers at Mile End, producing 'riotous' behaviour.[257]

From the depths of the 1842 depression, however, the handloom weaving trade began in 1843, at different rates for different fabrics, to share in the recovery of the global economy.[258] But the weavers' share in this revival was, according to the twin criteria of employment and remuneration, relatively modest. In the first place it is clear that during this phase of gradual, then rapid, expansion of the Scottish economy many of the Scottish handloom weavers were absorbed in other

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256. Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.
Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.

257. Glasgow Herald, 12 Aug. 1842; 15 Aug. 1842; 29 Aug. 1842; 19 Sept. 1842; 2 Sept. 1842; 19 May 1842; 8 July 1842.
Glasgow Chronicle, 15 Aug. 1842; 20 Jan. 1843.

258. Glasgow Herald, 23 Jan. 1843; 30 Jan. 1843; 13 Feb. 1843; 17 Feb. 1843; 20 Feb. 1843; 13 Mar. 1843; 17 Mar 1843; 20 Mar. 1843; 3 Apr 1843; 14 Apr. 1843; 17 Apr. 1843; 1 May 1843; 5 May 1843; 10 July 1843; 14 July 1843; 31 July 1843; 18 Aug.1843; 22 Sept. 1843; 24 Sept. 1843; 6 Nov. 1843.

expanding economic activities. Secondly, although weavers' wages advanced during the upswing this was not in relation to rates achieved during the previous major boom of 1836. Rather such gains as were recorded were relative to the unprecedentedly low levels of 1842, leaving the sectoral trend, once again, as one of marked decline.[259]

When this boom finally cracked the weavers once again suffered to a disproportionate degree, while even during the long but uneven upswing of 1845 to 1847 this diminishing workforce had not enjoyed constant relative prosperity. In each of these years some areas were affected by seasonal unemployment and depression partly as a consequence of the increasing reliance of the Scottish industry upon fancy fabrics.[260] If these seasonal set-backs, however, were local, the cyclical depression beginning in 1847 was not; it affected almost all hand loom weaving areas in Scotland and was not merely confined to cotton and silk fabrics, but also extended to linens. Furthermore, it was by no means an ephemeral crisis. Thus although signs of revival were apparent to contemporaries at Paisley by July 1848, it was December of that year before a significant reduction had taken place among Kilmarnock's unemployed weavers.[261] At the depth of the trough the

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259. Glasgow Herald, 24 Feb. 1845; 4 Aug. 1845; 22 Sept. 1845; 6 July 1846; 14 Sept. 1846; 23 Nov. 1846; 30 Nov. 1846; 11 May 1847; 14 May 1847.
Glasgow Chronicle, 7 July 1843.

260. Glasgow Herald, 6 Jan. 1845; 10 Feb. 1845; 24 Feb. 1845; 12 May 1845; 23 June 1845; 4 Aug. 1845; 6 July 1846; 3 Aug. 1846; 14 Sept. 1846; 21 Sept. 1846; 23 Nov. 1846; 14 Dec. 1846; 4 Jan. 1847; 18 Jan. 1847.

261 Ibid., 8 Mar. 1847; 22 Mar. 1847; 29 Mar. 1847; 12 Apr. 1847; 30 Apr. 1847; 11 May 1847; 14 May 1847; 18 June 1847; 28 June 1847; 30 Aug. 1847; 6 Aug. 1847; 8 Oct. 1847; 8 Nov. 1847; 12 Nov. 1847; 20 Nov. 1847; 26 Nov. 1847; 13 Dec. 1847; 24 Jan. 1848; 4 Feb. 1848; 14 Feb. 1848; 21 Feb. 1848; 6 Mar 1848; 13 Mar. 1848; 3 April 1848;

experience of some Ayrshire weavers illustrates the difficulties facing these workers: in Saltcoats and Stevenston, for example, the trade was so depressed in April - usually the height of the busy season - that gross wages of fully employed weavers were as low as 5s to 7s per week. At Saltcoats the extent of underemployment was such that none of the 300 to 400 weavers was permanently employed, while at Stevenston only half of the 200 to 300 secured any work.[262] The situation of the Dunfermline damask weavers was no happier with 500 of them destitute of work and suffering great privations in February of 1848.[263]

All the available evidence seems to indicate that the last two years of our period saw, with minor seasonal fluctuations, some revival of activity among the remnants of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade. Certainly the employment situation improved and some wage advances were achieved by the remaining fancy weavers.[264] Some indication of the modest degree of recovery engendered by this upswing can be illustrated by the figures for the number of hand weavers who opened deposit accounts at the National Society Savings Bank of Glasgow in 1847, 1848 and 1849. The respective figures for these years -- seventy, sixty-six and ninety-two -- indicate fairly clearly the return of some small measure of prosperity to the trade.[265] After 1850

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10 Apr. 1848; 17 Apr. 1848; 5 May 1848; 8 May 1848; 9 June 1848; 17 July 1848; 17 July 1848; 7 Aug. 1848; 18 Aug. 1848; 28 Aug. 1848; 2 Oct. 1848; 16 Oct. 1848; 27 Nov. 1848; 18 Dec. 1848. Glasgow Saturday Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer, 19 July 1847; 28 Aug. 1847; 8 Jan. 1848; 22 Jan. 1848.

262. Glasgow Herald, 17 Apr. 1848. 263. Glasgow Herald, 14 Feb.1848.

264. By 1848, mechanical weaving had taken over almost all work in plain fabrics in cotton and, elsewhere in the trade, the power loom was making rapid encroachments.

265. Glasgow Herald, 28 Dec. 1849.

both the woollen trade and the remaining fancy sectors of the other fabrics in Scotland, which were still manufactured on hand looms, continued to be affected by considerable vicissitudes.[266] But an analysis of these later trends lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Varying gradations of skill among the labour force superimposed upon a range of different fabrics meant that the Scottish handloom weavers were a multifarious workforce. Largely because of this heterogeneity the prices paid for their products also displayed sizeable variety and the fortunes of their producers diverged to a marked degree. If the differing experience of each fabric is examined, it seems, from the comments of interested contemporaries, that cottons were the worst affected by cyclical fluctuations. Nor in a sense was this surprising, given the cotton industry's disproportionately greater reliance upon distant markets and raw material supplies.[267] After cotton the silk weaving trade was the fabric most subject to cyclical forces, if the experience of the Spitalfields weavers was representative of their Scottish counterparts, although it should be remembered that the silk weaving trade of Scotland was mainly concerned with intricate fabrics.[268] On the other hand, Scottish linens, it was claimed, were more independent of movements in the economy generally, though it has been shown already that, in the 1840s, the Scottish linen weavers were badly affected during the depressions of

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266. Gulvin, _op. cit._, pp. 94-95; pp. 167-171.

267. Clapham, _op. cit._, p. 555.

268. _Report of Dr Hay to the Poor Law Commissioners on the subject of Distress in Spitalfields; and of the Report of Mr Gulson to the Poor Law Commissioners on the subject of Distress in Nottingham_, _P.P._, 1837, (376), LI, pp. 191-192.

of that decade.[269] Nor were the Scottish woollen weavers exempt from the vicissitudes of the trade cycle, even if the extent to which they suffered was on a small scale in relation to other fabrics. Considerable hardship, for example, struck Galashiels in 1829, while the severity of the depression of the late 1840s was such as to reduce the weekly wages of one firm's handloom weavers from 18s in 1846 to 10/4d in 1849.[270]

As a general rule the most intricate fabrics were most subject to sharp fluctuations in their levels of activity. Those who worked the finest webs suffered not just from the greater frequency of depressions but also because the visitations of stagnation in the fancy trade tended to be of greater duration than they were elsewhere. Demands for such relative luxuries was so elastic that the fancy weavers - for example in Paisley - were adversely affected in the incipient downswing phase, while they were the last to be re-employed during periods of recovery. But the lateness of revival was also partly due to the fact that fancy weavers found difficulty in procuring, not merely webs, but the more expensive tools necessary to execute intricate work. Their existing equipment was sometimes sold or pawned during bad times while changes in prevailing fashions frequently required quite new and expensive adaptations to the loom. This applied not just to cottons and silks but also to fancy linens and woollen

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269. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841 (296), X, p. 17.
Glasgow Herald, 14 April 1837; 25 Dec. 1839; 2 Jan. 1843; 5 May 1843; 14 Feb. 1848.

270 Gulvin, op. cit., p. 167.
A.A. Nawrocka, A History and Industrial Archaeology of the Galashiels Woollen Mills, B.A. Dissertation, University of Strathclyde, (1970), p. 10.

weavers.[271]

On the other hand, weavers on the plainer fabrics, although affected severely by adverse cyclical movements, tended to endure unemployment for a less lengthy period than those in the fancy trade. Two adverse factors ensured that unemployment and wage falls in the plain branch were proportionately greater than the downturn in demand for their products. First of all depressions resulted in greater competition for work as skilled weavers tended to accept any kind of work when intricate webs were unavailable.[272] Moreover, although evidence on the point is scarce, it is possible that during depression periods those thrown out of work generally may have taken up plain weaving. Secondly, during cyclical depressions employers utilized as much as possible any capital investment which had been made in the industry. Thus power looms (usually heavily invested in during the recent upswing) competed fiercely for the available work, while capacity in hand loom factories was also used to the maximum, leaving the domestic handloom weavers, particularly those who lived at areas distant from the main centres of distribution, at a serious disadvantage.[273]

But the fancy trade was also bedevilled by the fact that demand varied according to season. Thus spring and autumn tended to be the busy times for the weavers of intricate fabrics, especially shawl weavers, while the intervening summer and winter months saw greater

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271. Glasgow Herald, 20 March 1843.

272. Ibid., 9 Nov. 1827.
Glasgow Chronicle, 4 Feb. 1826.

273. T.S.A., Glasgow, p. 106.
Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 28.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 201, q. 2681.

slackness in the trade.[274] But seasonal fluctuations were not confined solely to the fancy fabrics of Paisley and the west of Scotland - the demand pattern for weavers in linens and in woollen fabrics also varied, if to lesser degrees, according to the time of year.[275] In addition, as already observed, seasonal slackness in the fancy trade had indirect repercussions upon the weavers of plain goods as fancy weavers, where possible, took up work on less intricate webs thus exacerbating the labour problem in an already overstocked industry.[276] Moreover, the fortunes of the fancy trade were subject to the whims of fashion to such an extent that involvement in that sector of weaving was a dangerous speculation. Thus on more than one occasion Paisley products, for example, fell far short of expected sales levels with dire consequences for the handloom weavers of the town.[277] Furthermore, the more intricate sector of the weaving trade had to adapt constantly to changes in demand occasioned by the caprices of the luxury market; even though manufacturers and weavers successfully kept the fancy trade in a state of flux there was no guarantee that fashion-markets would always accept their products.[278]

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274. Glasgow Herald, 7 April 1821; 31 July 1826; 9 Nov. 1827; 10 July 1843; 6 Jan. 1845; 19 Nov. 1839.

275. At Inverurie, in Aberdeenshire, winter was the dull season for customer weaving work. For example, William Thom had been idle in January 1841 for two weeks, and trade was expected to remain dull for several months.
W. Thom, Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand Loom Weaver, London, (1847), p. 39.
Glasgow Herald, 14 July 1843.
Transcript of Brown's Diary, Library of the Scottish College of Textiles, Galashiels, 29 Sept. 1828.

276. Glasgow Chronicle, 4 Feb. 1826.
Glasgow Herald, 9 Nov. 1827.

277. Ibid., 20 Sept. 1819; 27 Sept. 1841; 21 Feb. 1842.

278. Ibid., 3 Aug. 1840.
Scots Times, 21 Jan. 1834.

Leaving aside, however, fairly predictable seasonal fluctuations and less predictable switches in fashion, but making allowances for the impact of chance factors in particular localities or fabrics, the fact still remains that the pattern of cyclical movement within the weaving trade during our period was generally in keeping with the movements of the national economy. If anything, slumps tended to be more frequent in the hand weaving trade than they were elsewhere and they were also of longer duration. In addition, contemporaries were sure that slumps affected the hand loom weaving trade to a greater degree than any other Scottish industry.[279] All the evidence testifies to the severity and widespread nature of the cyclical depressions in the trade. But it is also clear that poor trade union organisation among the Scottish handloom weavers could not slow down the pace of wage cuts at times of recession.

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Cyclical movements apart, the long-term movements in the trade require some explanation. These can briefly be divided into three separate phases. The first of these was the early period of relatively high wages and considerable expansion in the labour force. This era began about 1790 though when it terminated is less easily ascertained. But since the Scottish weavers' strike of 1812 is usually taken as an important turning point in the trade, it can reasonably be accepted as the terminal point of the first phase. The second stage,

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279. Treble, Irish in North of England, op. cit., p. 26.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 272, q. 3679.
Glasgow Herald, 10 Oct. 1817.
Reformers' Gazette, 28 July, 1838.

running from 1812 to about 1840, witnessed falling wages and living standards but sizeable increases in the labour force. This phase is normally, if vaguely, depicted as the 'decline' of the industry. The third distinctive era was the post-1840 period which witnessed a large industrial decline among the weavers as well as further falls in the wages of those who remained at the hand loom. Because this phase was, however, more closely allied to the eventual displacement and disappearance of the Scottish handloom weavers it will be examined in relation to these problems, in the next section of this work.

Any explanation of the rapid growth of the Scottish textiles industry in the years during which cotton achieved its supremacy must look partly to the demand pattern. There, the historian can point to a home market which exhibited buoyancy because of steadily increasing population almost certainly accompanied by marginally improved *per capita* incomes, as well as an increasing demand for British goods in foreign quarters. As the phase of expansion in the cotton industry witnessed fairly marked price falls for cotton goods their industrial production was stimulated even further. Moreover, differential rates of mechanical innovation on the spinning and weaving sides of the industry left the former more capital, and the latter more labour intensive. Thus the coexistence of a healthy state of demand and a steady, but not too rapid, influx of weavers, at a time when mechanical weaving was only beginning to compete for work, left rates of remuneration in the Scottish hand loom trade at reasonably attractive levels. For example, it was claimed in 1834 that the demand for all the products of the hand loom had been good, 'even for old articles', during the Napoleonic Wars, while in 1810 it was argued that for a twenty mile radius round Perth 'such was the demand, [for weavers], not a herd

boy could be found in the country; all flew to the loom.'[280]

The attractions of the weaving trade during this early period were real enough. First of all, unlike factory work, domestic weaving implied no major organisational or institutional change for weavers' families; the hand loom did not mean the tyranny of factory hours or discipline; nor did the domestic system challenge family unity, the break-up of which weavers and others feared to the extent of displaying considerable reluctance to enter factories.[281] Secondly, entry to the trade required little capital, looms and other necessary tools being relatively cheap in an era of fairly high wages - for example, the cost of the most expensive hand loom at the turn of the century was £6.[282] Thirdly, there were few restrictions upon entry to the trade, for although extensive apprenticeship regulations existed throughout Scotland, the scattered nature of the industry made them impossible to enforce, particularly as the old weavers' incorporations declined.[283] Fourthly, the trade was easy to learn, especially in the plainer fabrics, where it was claimed that it was becoming easier to take up with technological improvements in spinning improving yarn. Moreover, it is clear that some of the newcomers to the trade

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280. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 17, qq. 222-223.
W.H.K. Turner, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

281. A. Wilson, The Chartist Movement in Scotland, Manchester, (1970) p. 3.
Chapman, op. cit., p. 53. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 117.

282. Glasgow Herald, 10 Oct. 1817.
Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 44.
Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 696, q. 11697.

283. Select Committee on Petitions of Journeymen Cotton Weavers in England and Scotland, P.P., 1810-11, (232), II, p. 7; p. 10.

were already acquainted with the requisite basic skills.[284] It is however unlikely that any of these 'pull factors' were singly, or even collectively, as significant in inducing men and women to become websters as was the crucial attraction of relatively high financial rewards.

Though not generally applicable throughout the whole of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade, the money and real wages of the Scottish weavers during the so-called 'Golden Age' of the trade were high relative to those of other Scottish workers, and very high compared to their own later experience. For instance, in the case of Wylie v. Sword at the Court of Session in 1785 an example was recorded of a weaver who expected a rate of 1/6d per yard for weaving book muslin eight quarters broad. And although his employer, broadly supported by other manufacturers including Henry Monteith, thought this rate too high, a price in excess of 1/- per yard was nonetheless generally considered reasonable.[285] Some of the evidence regarding the economic position of weavers in this early period must of course be treated with care since it is often tainted with nostalgia. Nonetheless the Statistical Account does tend to corroborate this view of early prosperity in the trade. The minister at Coupar Angus, a linen weaving centre, claimed that in 1793 half the houses in the parish possessed a watch,

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284. As early as 1799 improvements had been made in spinning yarn, and in weaving implements, such as the introduction of the flying shuttle. This would enable inexperienced youths to do as much work as very good workers could perform a few years earlier. This opened the way to a great influx of hands.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 54.
Appendix G. State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV; p. v.

285. Burns, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

an eight-day clock and a tea kettle; the minister in the Abbey Church at Paisley said that an industrious weaver could make from 20/- to 30/- per week, while a moderately industrious and careful journeyman could live with his family in a manner well above that of very decent farmers in the surrounding countryside.[286] In a later era, of course, there was a plethora of examples demonstrating the superior money and real wages of these early weavers.[287] Obviously then, the promise of prosperity lured many to the hand loom in the 'Golden Age'. Financial inducement, moreover, was not restricted to adult males but at a time of rapid expansion, especially in the cotton trade, was also open to subsidiary family members. In addition it was possible for weavers, possessed of industry and enterprise, to set themselves up as small manufacturers in the trade.[288] Finally, it is clear that the hope of financial improvement attracted more to the hand loom than to many other trades because in the former the other 'pull' factors co-existed with high levels of remuneration.[289]

But 'push' factors also played a significant role in the creation of the labour force during the 'Golden Age'. Most important among these 'push' factors in the early stages of the industry was the fact that employment outlets in the Scottish farming counties failed

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286. Smout, op. cit., p. 422.

287. Glasgow Herald, 10 Oct. 1817.
H.W. Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution, Glasgow, (1912), p. 63.
Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII, p. 95.

288. A.B. Richmond, Narrative of the Condition of the Manufacturing Population and proceedings of Government which led to the State Trials in Scotland, 1820, London, (1824), p. 6.

289. Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832.

to keep pace with population increases in these areas, as a consequence of improvements in the productivity of agricultural labour during the Agrarian Revolution. In this era these Lowland Scots formed the principal source of labour in filling the gap between the demand for weavers and their supply from within the weaving areas. Secondly, in both Ireland and the Scottish Highlands there were declining economic and social opportunities as the populations of these regions were either sustained or increased.[290] The third and final 'push' factor inducing men, women and children to become handloom weavers during the industry's age of rapid expansion was the unsuitability of alternative employment opportunities. Most of the newcomers, especially migrants, to the weaving trade regarded the new factories with disfavour.[291]

The second phase in the sectoral pattern of the Scottish hand weavers' history is that, arbitrarily dated here from 1812 to 1840, which exhibited the paradox of steadily falling wages with a simultaneous considerable increase in the number of people taking up the trade. This antithesis was of great interest to contemporary commentators who put forward a host of different explanations to account for it. On the whole, however, their theories lack conviction since they do not differentiate clearly between the causes of the industrial, and the social, problems which faced the weavers.[292] Here, priority will be

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290. Smout, op. cit., p. 246.
C. Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9, London, (1962), pp. 23-24.
R.B. McDowell, (Ed.), Social Life in Ireland, 1800-45, Dublin, (1957), p. 85.

291. Wilson, op. cit., p. 3. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 117.

292. Before the Royal Commission's findings were published the Scottish handloom weavers had no way of ascertaining exactly what the trend in labour force size was. Although the Select Committees of

given to explaining the problems facing the industry rather than its dependents during the thirty year period. These factors which affected the lives of the workforce and their families, but which had minimum impact on the industry, will be dealt with more fully in Chapters 2 and 3.

An overview of the economics of the industry during the three decades in question highlights distinctive trends. Firstly, there was a clear fall in profit margins especially from 1820 to 1850.[293] Secondly there was no decline, commensurate with the trend fall in weavers' wages, in the remuneration received by other work groups - e.g. spinners and power loom weavers - within the industry. Two factors were mainly responsible for this development. In an era of squeezed margins the weakest work group through their inability to combine effectively experienced, and were forced to yield to, the greatest pressure upon wage rates. But in addition, at boom periods employers invested considerably in mechanical weaving machinery. When, therefore, profit margins came under pressure such machinery was always fully utilized. Only after all capacity was used up would any surplus work be sent to handloom weavers.[294]

Yet the part played by the power looms should not be overemphasised in Scotland with its greater stress upon fancy work, and where the

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the mid-1830s looked at Weavers' problems in detail, there is no evidence of any attempt at relating movements in labour force size to the trend fall in wage rates, in an empirical way.

293. Smelser, op. cit., p. 141.

294. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 141.
Cleland, Former and Present State of Glasgow 1837, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

handloom weavers in the main did not revert to machine breaking with the same relish as their counterparts in the south did.[295] Investment in weaving technology in Scotland was gradual and certainly post-dates the most spectacular cuts in handloom weavers' wages. Indeed in the late 1820s there were only some 20,000 to 30,000 cotton looms in the whole of Britain, despite the fact that Horrocks of Preston and Radcliffe of Mellor had perfected the steam loom by 1806-07, from which date successful commercial use could be made of it. Moreover, by 1830 mechanical weaving in other fabrics - linen, worsted, silk, woollen - was still very much at the experimental stage.[296] Yet the wages of the Scottish handloom weavers had experienced a sharp down-turn before 1820 and this was true even in sectors experiencing no direct power loom competition.[297] Although, theoretically, the advances in mechanised weaving may have forced some plain cotton weavers to transfer to more intricate weaving lines, yet the high degree of geographical specialisation within the Scottish hand loom weaving industry suggests that, in reality, such a transition could only have been achieved by very few. Even in the 1830s and 1840s when the power loom began to play some part in depressing hand weavers' wages, by competing at low rates for the available quantity of work, its role was small in relation to other factors. Before 1830 the part played by mechanical weaving in hand weavers' wage contractions was minimal. Indeed it can be argued that low handloom weavers' wages, determined primarily by other factors, in fact slowed down the rate of encroachment of the power

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295. Treble, Irish in North of England, op. cit., pp. 192-194.

296. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 139.
Clapham, op. cit., p. 71; p. 179.

297. Baines, op. cit., pp. 498-500.

loom, by removing possible advantages from investment in mechanical weaving plant. Certainly the greatest advances in power looms were made during boom periods, such as 1824 and 1852 when handloom weavers' wages were relatively high. Conversely, there was little investment in mechanised weaving during slump periods when handloom weavers' pay rates were low.

Some contemporaries ascribed some of the weavers' difficulties to foreign competition, though later historians have rightly played down this explanation. Throughout our period textiles formed an important part of British exports, a striking expansion in the volume of cotton exports having taken place from 1815 to 1845. Looked at in another light the relative importance of textiles in British exports, by value, remained constant almost up till the middle of the century. Throughout the period all cotton goods accounted for about forty-six per cent of exports and all other textiles comprised twenty-two to twenty-three per cent of exports from the United Kingdom. (These figures included substantial yarn exports.) It has been estimated that about half of all the cotton manufactures of Great Britain were destined for overseas markets, and it is reasonable to assert that Scotland's export performance was reflected in this trend. Though global statistics for linen exports are unavailable it is certain that a sizeable proportion of the industry's output was sent overseas. Certainly about half of the fancy linen products of Dunfermline were produced for the American market, while the relatively small amounts of woollen and silk exports add to the argument that most of the twenty-two to twenty-three per cent of British exports, composed of 'other textiles' were in fact linen products.[298]

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298. Gaskin, op. cit., pp. 45-53.

These textile exports were subject to various kinds of pressures. The types of foreign competition generally complained of fall into two categories, one of which affected all Scottish textiles, and another which was specific to certain fabrics. Firstly, it was argued that they suffered from competition from overseas weavers who were sometimes protected by tariffs, and who worked on a part-time basis at very cheap rates.[299] Certainly the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed rapid developments in the native weaving industries of European countries, the United States and other overseas regions. Equally clearly, such developments reduced to some extent the potential sales of British woven goods of all fabrics abroad.[300] But the second form of competition - the struggle for export markets in 'neutral' countries between Britain and her rivals - did not affect all fabrics. None of this type of competition affected cottons, on which most Scottish weavers were employed while Britain's role as the world's predominant exporter of woollens also remained unchallenged. But Germany and Russia exported an increasing amount of linens while France remained the world's leading exporter of silk goods.[301] It is reasonable therefore to assume that foreign competition of this nature affected considerably less than half of the Scottish handloom weaving labour force . Moreover, it is important to realize that only a proportion of silk and linen loom products were sent abroad and that the

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299. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, pp. 60-61.

300. Hand Loom Weavers Reports from Assistant Commissioners, Report from France, Switzerland, Belgium and Austria, P.P., 1839, p. 612; p. 614; p. 620; p. 629; p. 631; p. 645. 1840, XXIII, pp. 349-350.

301. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 48.

weavers of these fabrics were themselves confident of their superiority vis-a-vis their overseas counterparts.[302]

Foreign competition as it affected the Scottish handloom weaving trade should perhaps best be seen as a long term variable influencing the fortunes of the industry throughout our period. From this viewpoint it becomes clear that lack of foreign rivals and the starvation of raw material supplies - especially cotton - which afflicted the European continent during the French wars led to over-stimulation of the British industry. With the cessation of hostilities the British trade had still to sustain a high volume of exports; in the main, this was achieved.[303] In general terms it might be concluded that if not a major contributor to the sectoral fall in wages, however, dependence upon foreign markets, at a time of increasing self-sufficiency in all fabrics and growing competition in some, probably did not add to the stability of the trade. Above all this was a partial cause of the ubiquitous fluctuations, with dire social consequences, which affected the fancy sector of the trade.

Related to the question of foreign competition and a constant complaint of contemporaries, was the high level of yarn exports in all fabrics from Britain. It was generally argued that twist was imported by Britain's rivals, thus stimulating their weaving industries to the detriment of the long term prosperity of the British weavers. It is true that a great deal of yarn was sent abroad but this was a reflection of this country's superior spinning technology. Moreover,

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302. Glasgow Argus, 14 July 1834.

303. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 113.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 132, qq. 1751-1755.

it has already been shown that foreign competition played but an insignificant part in the weavers' decline. In addition, had the legislature given way to the clamour for a curb on yarn exports from this country then considerable displacements would have occurred in the spinning industry which undoubtedly would have further exacerbated the labour problem in the hand loom weaving trade. Finally, it is significant that intelligent contemporaries ascribed the woes of the weavers not so much to competition between British and foreign producers, but to internal factors; home competition was the main cause of the distress.[304]

In all the markets for the produce of the hand loom, whether at home or overseas, there was fierce competition between British manufacturers to sell their cloth. In examining this competition commentators often referred to rivalry between Glasgow and Bolton, the west of Scotland and Lancashire, and Scotland and England.[305] Basic to this question was the fact that in Great Britain as a whole there were too many small cork manufacturers. Being possessed of little capital any downturn in prices was immediately passed on to the weavers by these petty capitalists. Certainly the witnesses from Scotland who gave evidence to the Select Committees on Hand Loom Weavers in the 1830s (and these included employers as well as weavers) gave unanimous testimony as to the existence of increased competition between manufacturers. For example in 1834 Thomas Davidson, a Glasgow manufacturer,

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304. Select Committee on Petitions of Cotton Manufacturers and Journeymen Cotton Weavers, P.P., 1868, (177), II, p. 18.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 41, q. 672-674; p. 44, q. 692; p. 47, q. 707; p. 94, qq. 1256-1257; p. 148, q. 1926.

305. Marwick, op. cit., p. 217.
Select Committee on Petitions of Cotton Manufacturers and Journeymen Cotton Weavers, P.P., 1808, (177), II, p. 18.

asserted that -

> Since 1815 when I began to manufacture on my own account, prices have had a continual tendency to fall; there have been temporary reactions but the uniform tendency has been downwards. This appears to me to arise in a very considerable degree from over-production, itself the effect, I would say, of the intense competition among the manufacturers themselves, which competition I would consider has been in a very considerable degree at the expense of the operative, arising from the irresponsible power which each manufacturer is invested of buying labour as cheap as he supposes he can obtain it, or rather of creating a price for labour himself, which any considerable manufacturer I think has been able to do. 306

This level of competition also was the driving force behind petitions for boards of trade which the websters themselves wanted in order to avoid frequent wage cuts and which respectable employers supported in the hope of offsetting those frequent (and they claimed unnecessary and arbitrary) reductions, with their reverberating effects, initiated by smaller manufacturers.[307]

The severity of competition in home markets had repercussions on the producers as underselling forced manufacturers to cut weavers' wages in order to remain in business. These practices seem to have been common in all fabrics of the trade.[308] It was frequently argued

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306. Although cheaper prices were partly the product of falling unit costs the value of the finished cloth fell largely through fierce competition among manufacturers to sell their cloth.
    Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 135, q. 1798.

307. The evidence taken by the Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers in 1835 is principally concerned with discussing the possible effectiveness of proposed trade boards in the industry.
    Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (341), XIII.

308. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 190, qq. 2502-2503; p. 120, q. 2946; p. 228, qq. 2907-2908.
    Glasgow Herald, 12 Sept. 1823.

in Scotland that reductions took place when market prices did not merit, or necessitate, such cuts.[309] It was claimed, for example, that small manufacturers or corks, who were much more prevalent in Scotland than elsewhere, sparked off wage cuts which others had to follow, not because of changes in demand level, but through caprice or avarice. In other words, small corks undersold their larger and more respectable rivals thus forcing the latter to bring down their prices. Corks and dishonest country agents also were at times guilty of cutting weavers' wages when there was no corresponding cut in prices paid for cloth.[310] In addition, it was argued that a great many corks in Scotland exerted a permanent and depressing influence upon market prices since they possessed an unfair advantage over their more respectable counterparts by making use of stolen or 'bowl' weft or yarn. Yarn embezzlement was a constant feature throughout our period and at times reached such dimensions that decent manufacturers formed protecting societies which sometimes offered rewards in an attempt to erase such mischief.[311]

Early over-stimulation of the trade, however, led not simply to a large number of capitalists but also to an overstocking of the labour

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309. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 184, q. 2443; p. 194, qq. 2558-2559; p. 264, qq. 3603-3604.

310. Ibid.

311. Burns, op. cit., p. 64.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (341), XIII, p. 88, qq. 1013-1014; p. 95, qq. 1183-1185.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 67-69; pp. 86-94.
Glasgow Herald, 13 Feb. 1818; 13 Sept. 1824; 6 Feb. 1837; 5 April 1841; 27 Oct. 1845.
Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 20 July 1790.
Weavers' Journal, 1 Feb. 1837.

force. On this interpretation the decline of the weavers was largely a product of the industry's previous success, as workers continued to flock to the loom at a time when even the most cursory glance shows that wages were falling rapidly. This other form of competition - for work itself - was the most important factor contributing to the declining wage rates in the post-war period.

The general background to the problem of an overstocked labour market has already been examined. Both 'push' and 'pull' factors were responsible for the influx of labour to the hand loom weaving trade in the pre-1812 era. But after 1815 recruits continued to flock to the loom despite the fact that it is clear that a sectoral fall in wages had set in by that date. Without the guidance of hindsight, however, men, women and children were influenced to take up hand loom weaving by continuing hopes of earning high wages. Indeed, such hopes were not totally without foundation since in one of two limited sectors of the trade websters, at times of peak demand, could still realize substantial weekly wages. Moreover, after 1815 it was even easier than formerly for weavers to establish themselves as independent craftsmen since by now all attempts to control the absconding of apprentice weavers, prior to the completion of their contracts, were totally abandoned.[312]

But having once entered the hand loom weaving trade, escape was very difficult to achieve. Hence the labour problem in the decades after Waterloo became progressively more intractable. One factor contributing to this end was the reluctance of weavers to leave the trade. In theory at least the hand weaver enjoyed a degree of in-

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312. Glasgow Herald, 3 Dec. 1832.
Baird, op. cit., p. 171.

dependence and freedom from strict factory hours and discipline although not too much emphasis should be placed on this point since the harshness of some of the early factory masters could have been no more cruel than the constraints to which the weaver was subject during his long period of decline. Probably of greater importance was the attitude of weavers, especially older men, to the new factories. Already it has been stated that through ignorance of factory life and conditions older weavers were possibly afraid of their effects upon family unity and morality. Moreover and reinforcing their lack of mobility, the weaving trade, especially in intricate fabrics, had fairly recently carried craft status which probably was slower in being erased than the fall in wages suggests.[313] In addition, it is clear that as the decline in wages continued weavers found it increasingly necessary to utilize all members of the family in an attempt to forestall falling living standards. As most of their children took up the hand loom, this was an added disincentive for heads of families to seek work elsewhere.[314]

But even these weavers who wanted to change their occupations found transfer very difficult indeed. First of all, alternative employment was not always available at suitable locations for expanding industries - for example, spinning mills and power loom factories - tended to be found in areas with low concentrations of hand weavers, or _vice versa_.[315] It is true of course that this was not the case in

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313. _Glasgow Herald_, 26 Nov. 1849.

314. _Ibid._, 3 Dec. 1832.
Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832

315. Bythell, _Hand Loom Weavers_, _op_. _cit_., pp. 91-92.

large towns like Glasgow, Dundee and Paisley, but two-thirds of the handloom weavers in Scotland lived in rural areas in the 1830s. Secondly, even in these towns the existence of local factories did not guarantee a source of alternative employment for weavers and their families; labour demand in these mills tended not to be for adult males. Often they excluded weavers, or even their children, altogether.[316] Thirdly, the trade was so vulnerable to entrance by the displaced elsewhere that it contained a form of disguised unemployment. On any long-term analysis it is clear that the problem of overstocking would remain until the economy took up this slack. Significantly this was not achieved even in the phase of rapid expansion of the Scottish heavy industries in the 1830s, and it required the railway boom of the 1840s before substantial reduction in the labour force took place. But by that time the Scottish handloom weavers were fighting a losing battle against the rapidly advancing power loom.

Overstocking, however, did not induce decline solely by producing greater competition for available work with a concomitant reduction in wages. It also meant low wages and overproduction. The dynamics of this process can be simply but effectively outlined. The rivalry of too many hands for work led to a lowering of wages particularly at times of bad trade when weavers' combinations usually were forced to capitulate. But in reaction to this fall in remuneration weavers attempted to sustain living standards by increasing their output either through lengthening their working hours, or by initiating other family members to the loom. In either case the increased amount of cloth

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316. Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, pp. 106-108; qq. 1943-1956.

produced exacerbated the problem at market level causing further wage falls and helping to elongate periods of slump. Clearly, overstocking was disastrous for the Scottish hand loom weaving trade not only because of its obvious and immediate depressing effect upon wage rates, but because it tended to perpetuate that process.[317]

Having examined the principal causes of decline in weavers' wages and living standards from 1812 to 1840, the task remains of briefly considering other factors which exacerbated their plight. Some of these factors formed the subject of bitter complaints from the weavers themselves. But since they comprised a motley of largely unrelated grievances an attempt will be made here to reduce them to some form of order by dividing them into two groups. Firstly, there were troubles which the weavers ascribed mainly to the nature of the trade itself. The second category was composed of difficulties which, the Scottish handloom weavers argued, stemmed from government policy.

Prominent among the first of these headings were criticisms of the consignment system. Basically the Scottish handloom weavers were disgruntled at export methods which had been introduced after 1816, and more particularly post-1826, of consigning goods to overseas agents upon advances given by these agents, instead of selling their goods directly to merchants as had been the previous practice. Inevitably with this system, manufacturers had little say in the selling prices of their

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317. Again, the clamour for boards of trade in the 1830s was partly motivated by a desire to cut down on over-production, necessitated by low rates of remuneration. Trade boards, it was argued, would equalise prices and cut down on frequent wage cuts by capricious or greedy manufacturers. This would obviate the problem of over-production which bedevilled the trade.

Glasgow Herald, 10 April 1829; 19 Oct. 1832.

exports. When selling prices fell far short of expectations they were forced to cut their losses quickly and the weavers, because of their weak industrial position, were again the principal victims.[318] In addition, criticism was levelled by some weavers against the evils of the agency system. Country agents, it was claimed 'cozen the poor operative of his prosperity and grow fat upon the ruin of their fellow creatures'.[319] These 'hucksters' not only reduced weaving rates at Kilsyth by an alleged twenty-five per cent but elsewhere they were guilty of operating truck systems in commodities and housing as well as taking part in the illegal trade in 'bowl' weft. More particularly, weavers blamed them for undercutting and for attempting to break at least one weavers' union.[320] The third factor to which the weavers drew attention was the lack of educational opportunities for their children partly because they could not afford to pay the necessary fees and partly because their offspring were put to the loom at an early age. Although this was a source of great sadness to weavers, and contemporaries thought it added to the intractable problem of overstocking, it was less a cause of decline than a symptom of that process.[321]

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318. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 51, qq. 746-747; p. 100, q. 1317; p. 130, qq. 1720-1725; p.137, qq. 1820-1822; p. 163, qq. 2138-2139; pp. 163-164, qq. 2144-2145.

319. Loyal Reformers' Gazette, 28 April, 1832.

320. Ibid., 26 May 1832; 2 June 1832.
Reformers' Gazette, 7 July 1832; 14 July 1832; 1 Sept. 1832; 13 Oct. 1832; 10 Nov. 1832.
Weavers' Journal, 31 Dec. 1835; 1 June 1836; 1 July 1836; 1 Sept. 1836; 1 Nov. 1836; 1 Dec. 1836; 1 Feb. 1837; 1 Mar. 1837; 1 Apr. 1837.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 201, qq. 2678-2681; p. 234, qq. 3192-3193.

321. Assistant Commissioners Report from the South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 48-49.

As well as feeling aggrieved at some features of their trade the Scottish websters were bitter critics of government policy. Although both the unreformed and reformed parliaments investigated the conditions of the handloom weavers no positive ameliorative action was forthcoming.[322] Repeated demands by the weavers for parliamentary aid were time and again met by an attitude of almost total indifference.[323] The increasing dominance of laiser-faire ideas debarred the legislature from doing anything to ease the weavers' plight, although elsewhere it had been suspended to protect a sector which was politically and strategically more important than the hand weavers. Moreover, as a group the weavers could exert no great political influence even in the reformed parliament for very few of the Scottish websters had the vote after 1832, their economic position by that date having fallen below the requisite level.[324] The almost total absence of political rights, however, did not stop the Scottish websters from developing attitudes of bitter resentment, which were often directed at the government's fiscal policy.[325] Indirect taxation, which affected all low income groups adversely, was regularly criticised.[326] But in

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322. P.P., 1802/3 (114) VIII. P.P., 1805 (105) III p. 127.
P.P., 1808 (177 II. P.P., 1809 (111) III.
P.P., 1816/12 (232) II. P.P., 1818 (398) IX.
P.P., 1834 (556) X. P.P., 1835 XIII
P.P., 1839 (195) XLII. P.P. 1841 (29) X.

323. Select Committee on Petitions of Journeymen Cotton Weavers in England and Scotland, P.P., 1810-11, (232), II, p. 39.
B. Inglis, Poverty and the Industrial Revolution, London (1971), p. 175; p. 218; pp. 292-293; pp. 349-352; p. 361; p. 367.

324. Weavers' Journal, 1 Feb. 1837.

325. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, p. 72, q. 986.
Glasgow Free Press, 4 March 1835.

326. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 77, p. 80.

particular the weavers resented the imposition of the Corn Laws which impinged upon their living standards.[327] Scathing attacks upon these laws however produced little response until almost mid-century, from the legislature.

Much more serious for the weavers was the government's refusal to do anything to alleviate the serious industrial problems of the industry, particularly the question of overstocking. Despite lengthy and expensive investigations which contained detailed analyses of the weavers' problems the petitions of the weavers were rejected on '*laisser faire*' grounds.[328] This philosophy forbade interference with the free operation of market forces in the 1830s in the shape of boards of trade as it had more than twenty years previously forbidden the establishment of minimum wages. Nor surprisingly, the weavers' hopes of taxes on power looms were to be frustrated by the same maxim.[329] An even more damning criticism of the governments of the time, however, is that even their own recommended remedies for the ills of the trade - emigration and education - were given insufficient and ineffective aid from the legislature.[330] Allowing that the weavers' position was

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327. *Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers*, *P.P.*, 1834, (556), X, p. 20, q. 280-283; p. 72, q. 985; p. 80, q. 1072; p. 131, q. 1736; p. 146, qq. 1904-1908.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, p. 80.
Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, *P.P.*, 1841, (296), X, p. 51.
Glasgow Argus, 17 July 1837.

328. Inglis, *op. cit.*
H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, Bungay, Suffolk, (1963), p. 19.

329. *Glasgow Chronicle*, 2 July 1812; 4 July 1812.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, *P.P.*, 1834, (556), X, p. 101, q. 1329.

330. *Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers*, *P.P.*, 1841, (296), X, pp. 119-124.

vulnerable industrially, there was nevertheless a total failure on the part of government to intervene in the trade, though the legislature had aided other sectors of the economy who were of greater political and strategic importance.[331]

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After 1841 no official statistics or commentaries are available about the numbers or condition of the Scottish handloom weavers. Yet from the scattered data available a picture of the post-1840 displacement and disappearance of the weavers may be constructed. Briefly, by 1850 the labour force had contracted rapidly to almost a quarter of its size a decade previously. In the succeeding decade this process continued, albeit at a less speedy rate. Thereafter, the weaving force dwindled only slowly during the 1860s, the number of weavers in 1870 having not noticeably fallen since 1860. However, the 1870s themselves witnessed a further contraction, until there were a mere 4,000 handloom weavers left in 1880. After that date the industry gradually faded out and was almost extinct by the turn of the century.[332]

The majority of the remnants of the trade tended to be clustered in certain areas and engaged upon particular fabrics. For example, there were until the 1870s considerable concentrations of weavers working shawls and other fancy fabrics in the Paisley area, and fine muslins and cotton materials in the Irvine valley.[333] Henry Ballantyne and Sons still hired handloom weavers in Galashiels in 1868; while in

331. Glasgow Argus, 17 July 1837.

332. Table 1C.

333. Slaven, op. cit., p. 104.

1871 there were still 348 cotton weavers at Perth (a figure which contracted in the next decade to seventy-nine). In addition statistics available for membership of hand weavers' friendly societies after 1850 clearly demonstrate the survival of hand loom weaving on the east coast of Scotland; while pockets of weavers continued to exist in rural or semi-rural communities in the west of Scotland.[334]

As the trade therefore displayed, even in this late stage, a bewildering variety of contrasts some revision of the traditional picture of the sexual composition and living standards of those who wrought at the hand loom in the post-1840 era is necessary. Briefly, the normal interpretation of the industry in this phase emphasises that it had become the realm, almost exclusively, of female labour and that wages in the trade had fallen to levels which alone could not possibly have afforded subsistence to families.[335] In at least one respect, however, this picture needs to be modified, for female domination of the craft certainly did not apply throughout the textile industry. There is, for example, no reference to women members in surviving weavers' friendly societies. Again, the major concentration of the Scottish trade by this time was in the fancy sector which in an earlier era had been the domain of male websters.[336] Moreover, some of the newly

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334. T.S.A. Glasgow, p. 243.
Gulvin, op. cit., p. 169. Turner, op. cit., p. 127.
Regulations and Correspondence etc., with Miscellaneous Papers of Weavers' Friendly Societies, Scottish Record Office (West Register House), FS1, 11/4; FS1 2/20; FS1, 2/51; FS1, 12/17; FS1, 12/18; FS1, 12/22; FS1, 12/26; FS1, 12/32; FS1, 14/1; FS1, 14/15; FS1, 16/174; FS1, 16/40; FS1, 16/198; FS1, 16/204; FS1, 17/74; FS1, 21/49; FS1, 25/2; FS1, 26/22.
Bremner, op. cit., p. 166.

335. Johnston, op. cit., p. 317.

336. Glasgow Herald, 17 Jan. 1834.
Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 336, q. 5653.

introduced fabrics in this late period - for example the 'Venetians' started in Kilmarnock about 1870 - were so heavy that agents were unwilling to give work to any but the 'strong, young and hard-working'. It is thus inherently unlikely that many women would have been engaged in weaving this type of fabric.[337] In most cases pockets of weavers tended to be found in areas where alternative employments were few, suggesting that adult males formed the main group of weavers in such locations.[338] While, then, it is possible that a greater proportion of soft labour worked in the trade than had been the case at any previous date, it is unlikely that they composed the majority in the trade. The most acceptable theory is that subsidiary family members supplemented family income by working at the hand looms, but, in these families, the principal breadwinner still tended to be an adult male.

On the other hand, with minor modifications the traditional interpretation of weavers' wages in the post-1840 period is more firmly based. But again the heterogeneity of the trade must be stressed as wages still varied greatly according to the fabric worked. Traditionally, the historian has tended to cite the wages of the worst paid weavers as being the typical experience of the workforce at this time.[339] There were, nevertheless, some significant exceptions. As late as 1866-68, for instance, woollen weavers in the Borders were earning slightly in excess of £1 per week.[340] Again, in the mid-

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337. Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.
338. Regulations and Correspondence etc. of Weavers Friendly Societies, FS1, 11 - FS1, 26.
Bremner, op. cit., p. 166.
339. Ibid.
340. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 169.

1850s weavers of fancy fabrics in Ayrshire sustained wages of 16/- to 20/- per week in a period of prosperity which endured for more than two years, while similar weekly rates were achieved in 1869-70.[341] Nevertheless, during most of the period of the hand weavers' demise wages were low generally. Even in fancy fabrics in the 1870s wages ranged from 10/- to 12/- weekly while in less intricate weaving rates could sink as low as 6/- to 7/- per week.[342] When these wage data are related to the view that weaving tended to be an economic activity engaged in by more than one member of the family the obvious conclusion is that living standards must have been more depressed than some writers have acknowledged.

It is against this background that three fundamental questions have to be asked by the historian in relation to the post-1840 experience of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade. The first demands some explanation for the rapid fall-off in numbers in the 1840s and the still sharp, if slightly slower, contraction of the 1850s, these reductions being in marked contrast to the labour market expansion of the pre-1840 era. The second problem requires some account to be made for the dogged persistence with which some weavers clung to the hand loom for a decade after 1860, given that individual earnings and family living standards were very low and that by now it was clear that the craft was doomed.[343] Thirdly and lastly, the historian must put forward some explanation for the demise of the Scottish hand weavers after 1870, and their almost total disappearance by 1900.

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341. Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.

342. Ibid.

343. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 222.
T.S.A. Glasgow, p. 243.

The stagnation and difficulties encountered by the Scottish cotton industry, after the 1830s - increased competition from Lancashire and from foreign producers - gives some indication of the problems facing the labour force, though it does not explain the dynamics of decline.[344] Of more immediate relevance, the gradual triumph of the power loom was a vital factor in reducing the number of weavers after 1840. During two major recessions in the 1840s hand weavers were only employed when all capacity in mechanised weaving was fully absorbed. Furthermore after the power loom investment boom of the early 1850s, that instrument of production competed with the hand loom in all except the very finest fabrics.[345] Any explanation of the contraction of the labour force which emphasises the role of emigration must, however, be rejected; though handloom weavers had ranked high in the membership of emigration societies and comprised a high proportion of those who sought better fortunes overseas,[346] the total outflow from Scotland in the period 1840 to 1860 was insignificant in relation to the 70,000 or so weavers who abandoned the trade in this period.[346(A)] Though difficult to establish it is likely that a much more fundamental cause of this diminution of numbers was natural wastage. The Assistant Commissioner who had inquired into the trade about 1840 decisively differentiated between the 'morality' of the younger and older handloom weavers indicating that two distinct categories could be identified. Without pushing conjecture too far it

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344. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 148.

345. Slaven, op. cit., p. 105.

346. Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, P.P., 1826-27, (88), V, p. 1.

346(A). Glasgow Herald, 30 May 1842; 15 Aug. 1842. Glasgow Chronicle, 1 Feb. 1843.

may be suggested that some measurable part of the labour force contraction by 1860 was produced by the death of a portion of elderly craftsmen.[347]

Clearly, however, the most important factor in enabling individuals to escape from the doomed trade in this period was the availability of alternative employment, since the sectoral decline of the industry contrasted with the long-term growth of the Scottish economy. The continuing growth and further development of the Scottish economy post-1840 opened up opportunities for handloom weavers and their children in many different economic spheres. Some Paisley weavers it was claimed, obtained employment as agricultural labourers during the 'High Farming' era, though this would almost certainly have been on a seasonal basis.[348] More permanent employment was obtained by weavers in the vicinity of Aberdeen who moved into that city to work in the expanding shipbuilding industry.[349] Elsewhere important lines of escape were into coalmines, iron works and especially railway construction during the boom of the mid-1840s.[350] The only local study available of this trend - for Airdrie - suggests that ex-operative weavers were absorbed generally in the local expanding economies with their more differentiated occupational patterns. Some even became small retailers like grocers, drapers or spirit dealers, while others attempted to adopt to skilled trades such as tailoring, hatmaking or joinery.[351] But whatever form of alternative employment was opted for

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347. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 95.

348. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 262.

349. S.D. McCalman, Chartism in Aberdeen, Scottish Labour History Society Journal, (1970), p. 6.

350. Smout, op. cit., p. 430.

351. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 49.

there is no doubt that weavers wanted to leave the trade. It was claimed, for example, that even in the early 1840s Paisley handloom weavers would have accepted any other work which was available.[352] To reinforce this point it can be shown from a study of the geographical distribution of remaining weavers that, wherever other outlets existed, Scottish handloom weavers were only too happy to accept them. Thus in areas where it was possible to engage in other trades, such as Glasgow, Rutherglen and Airdrie, the hand weaving industry soon disappeared.[353] Conversely, in areas with restricted economic opportunities the post-1840 demise of the handloom weavers tended to be more prolonged.[354] For instance, the trade lingered in small villages, like Kilmaurs or Strathaven, where other industries had, as yet, made little headway; such areas, in addition, tended to be at substantial distances from the centres in which growing industries were located.[355]

But geographical location was only one of the factors accounting for the surprising survival of a fairly constant number of handloom weavers in Scotland between 1860 and 1870. A second, and more important, consideration was that most of the remaining work, with some

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352. Glasgow Herald, 27 Dec. 1841.

353. By 1862 the largest employers of hand looms in Glasgow were Laird and Thomsons at Mile End who engaged 300 handloom weavers in their factory.
Campbell, op. cit., p. 187.
T.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 247. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 49.

354. T.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 406; p. 454.
Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.
Regulations and Correspondence etc. of Weavers' Friendly Societies, FS1, 11/4 - FS1, 26/22.

355. Strawhorn, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
D. McNaught, Kilmaurs Parish and Burgh, Paisley, (1912), p. 269.

significant exceptions, was concentrated in fabrics to which mechanised weaving had not as yet been adapted.[356] Although some time previously men with an intimate knowledge of the weaving industry asserted that power weaving could successfully be utilized for any fabric or any degree of complexity of pattern, the principal remnants of the trade - the very intricate fabrics of Paisley and the Irvine valley - still escaped its encroachments.[357] One of the principal reasons for the non-mechanisation of weaving in these sectors was that hand looms could perform the work cheaply and without risk to the entrepreneur. A third factor accounting for the substantial numbers of handloom weavers in the 1860s is the age structure of the labour force. There is some evidence to support the argument that those who persisted at the hand loom in the 1860s did so because they were of an age which made either geographical or occupational mobility difficult, or even impossible.[358]

The disappearance of the trade after 1870 cannot then be explained in general terms. It is essential to examine the eclipse of the individual sectors of the industry's remnants. The woollen weavers of the Borders, for example, were gradually ousted by the power loom.[359] Between 1870 and 1880 Paisley shawls went out of fashion; this time the whims of luxury demand displaced a workforce to which they had so often in the past, brought disaster.[360] In addition, re-

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356. Slaven, op. cit., p. 105.

357. Glasgow Herald, 24 April, 1838.
Rise, Progress, Present State and Prospects of the British Cotton Manufacture, The Edinburgh Review, XCI, (1827), p. 17.

358. Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.

359. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 103.

360. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 149.

curring depressions and long-term decline in the Scottish cotton industry undoubtedly influenced some weavers to leave the trade.[361] Meanwhile in the Irvine valley a strike had led to the introduction of 'Nottingham' lace looms by Alexander Morton and Company at Darvel in 1875. Soon after, all the hand looms in that territory were superseded by power weaving, although some of the contraction must again have been due to natural wastage.[362]

There are, nevertheless, some factors common to the experience of disappearance of all sectors of the labour force post-1870. One of these is the availability of local alternative employment; for example, weavers at Galston were taking jobs in the pits in 1877.[363] Secondly, there is some evidence of movement out of weaving areas in this period. There was, for instance, an outflow of younger men from the Irvine valley in the 1870s.[364] But neither of these factors contributed significantly to the ultimate demise of the Scottish handloom weavers, since only young men would have been capable of occupational or geographical mobility. Some of the extant evidence certainly points to the fact that the remnants of the trade in Ayrshire in 1870 were elderly weavers.[365] Furthermore, a convincing argument can be

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361. According to Hamilton, Ibid., the financial crisis of 1857 was the turning point for the cotton industry, while the American Civil War of the next decade also had devastating effects upon the industry.

362. Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.
W.H. Morton, Alexander Morton 1844-1923, Kilmarnock (1960), pp. 23-25; pp. 28-29.

363. In the villages surrounding Paisley ... 'The hand loom weaver of the rural district died out, and other industries provided more remunerative employment for his children.'
A. McLean (Ed.), Local Industries of Glasgow and the West of Scotland, Glasgow, (1901), p. 139.

364. Kilmarnock Standard, 30 June 1877.

365. Ibid.

constructed indicating that this age pattern obtained throughout the remnants of the industry in Scotland. If the reasonable assumption that there were very few weavers recruited after 1840 is accepted then it follows that the remnants of the trade in the 1870s must have been the survivors of the younger category of weavers of 1838.[366] As by the 1870s most of these workers would have been advanced in years it is logical to conclude that age structure was a key factor in the eventual demise of the Scottish handloom weavers.

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366. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 95.

Chapter 2

Standards of Living

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Any attempt by the social historian to compile a table of money wages for the Scottish handloom weavers during the period covered by this thesis is hampered not so much by a paucity of data as by a lack of certainty as to what available wage series actually represent. As was shown in the previous chapter, the industry was characterised by variety rather than similarity in relation to fabrics worked and industrial structure. It is not therefore surprising that wage rates within the Scottish hand loom weaving trade displayed considerable variation. Several factors must thus be taken into consideration when examining weavers' wages and earnings.

Firstly, rates of remuneration had a direct relationship with the degree of strength and/or skill exercised by the weaver. Secondly, wages varied with different forms of industrial organisation within the trade; for example, weekly wage rates of factory handloom weavers tended to be noticeably in excess of those of their less fortunate, domestic counterparts.[1] Thirdly, the weekly rewards of the handloom weavers demonstrated sizeable variations according to geographical location: rural weavers' weekly wages tended to be measureably less than those of their urban brethren.[2] Fourthly, it was

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1. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 8.

2. Wage Rates at Glasgow and Irvine

Lawn paid an ell	Irvine	Glasgow	Lawn paid an ell	Irvine	Glasgow
13½ 11-8th	5d	5⅞d	16	6½d	7½d
14	5½d	6d	16 11-8th	9d	10¼d
15 4-4th	5½	6d	17	11¼d	12¼d
15½	6d	6¾d	17½ 4-4th	9d	10¾d

Glasgow Chronicle, 9 Sept. 1824: Burns, op. cit., p. 230.

claimed that differential wage rates were paid by different manufacturing houses, the larger, more respectable, firms generally being more generous than their small cork competitors.[3] Fifthly, it is difficult to ascertain whether available wage data refer to full-time or part-time work at any time in our period. This problem is made more complex by the fact that even during periods of brisk trade fancy weaving was subject to seasonal dullness. Finally, the available evidence proves conclusively that, throughout this sixty-year period, all Scottish handloom weavers were paid by the piece, thus rendering the task of computing weekly wage rates, or assessing the reliability of available data, even more difficult. But the methodological problems are further compounded by the fact that weaving was paid, not according to standard measurements of length, but in ells. One of the grievances of handloom weavers, particularly on the east coast of Scotland, was that manufacturers arbitrarily changed the length of these ells.[4]

However, even when an individual weaver's gross weekly earnings

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3. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 54, qq 781-782.

4. Cannot a man call a master before a magistrate and compel him to pay him according to the length? - There was a case of that kind tried in Dundee lately. A weaver went to Mr Ferguson and got a Hessian sheeting to weave, and Mr Ferguson said the length was 104 ells, or 100 ells; the individual measured the web with the ell of 45 and found it to contain 117½ ells; he went to Mr Ferguson and asked remuneration for this additional length, and it was denied; and the case was brought before a court of justice, and the justice after hearing the evidence found that it was the practice in Dundee that when webs were given out to weavers to be woven, they were to be paid according to the description and name of the fabric and not according to the length of it --------- and when he endeavoured to ascertain what was meant by an ell, the justice said it had no definite meaning at all.

   Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 247, qq 3372-3380.

at the loom have been established, sizeable deductions from these wages have to be taken into account before any valid assertions can be made about his, or her, money income. These deductions cover such items as loom rent for factory weavers and all journeymen whether in factories or on the domestic system, and the cost of looms and other necessary tools, like shuttles or heddles, for domestic weavers. Allowances also have to be made for other essential materials, like starch for sizing webs, and for fuel and lighting which the independent weaver had to provide. Moreover, weavers' wages were further depressed by payments for pirn winding, agency fees in rural areas and occasionally by fines imposed by employers for poorly executed work.[5]

Partly offsetting such deductions, however, were wages which the weaver might earn from some form of supplementary work, for example agricultural labour. The prevalence - indeed, the possibility - of this practice has however first to be established before the individual weaver's overall weekly income can be ascertained. But of much greater importance was the contribution made to total family income by subordinate members of the weaver's family. In the same way as weekly budgets normally covered whole families rather than individuals, the earnings of the weaver's wife and/or children, if any, must be considered before any assessments of living standards can be made.

When examining, or compiling, wage series over time the historian's difficulties are further exacerbated by yet other factors. For the first decade under review no official statistics are available. Evidence for these 'Golden Age' years is thus sketchy and incomplete,

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5. Thom, _op. cit._, p. 11
Weavers' Journal, 1 March 1837.

or distorted by hindsight. There is, however, no scarcity of wage series in the Parliamentary Papers, particularly in those specific enquiries into the hand loom weaving trade in the 1830s. Nevertheless, such series must be treated carefully as they may represent special pleading by weaver witnesses who, allegedly, exaggerated wage rates in the early years of the period in order to magnify the scale of their own decline.[6] Again, like the first decade of our period, the 1840s was devoid of official enquiries. Indeed, no comprehensive wage series is available for the industry after 1840 and even G.H. Wood, who constructed a table of average weekly earnings for the 1840s and 1850s had to admit that his figures were conjectural.[7] The final factor which must be considered in relation to long runs of weavers' wages is the trade's particular susceptibility to cyclical fluctuations. When dealing with handloom weavers' rates of pay over time it is necessary, therefore, to differentiate between sectoral trends in rates of remuneration, and rates which are exceptionally high or low because of temporary, cyclical influences upon the trade.

Finally, a crude average wage for all Scottish handloom weavers at any point in time cannot be accepted as a meaningful criterion for measuring living standards since it would merely represent a mean for widely contrasting levels of remuneration. Even if such an average could be constructed it would tend to obscure sizeable differences in the experience of the workforce. To obtain a more accurate picture of the Scottish handloom weavers' level of prosperity it is better to

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6. Bythell, The Hand Loom Weavers in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution : some Problems, Economic History Review, Vol. XVII, (1964), p. 347.

7. G.D. Wood, History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, London, (1910), pp. 127-128.

examine specific examples of weekly money wages at different levels of the remuneration spectrum, stressing those which were most typical of the Scottish trade.

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Though less useful than weekly wages for determining total family incomes and living standards, an examination of piece rate series nevertheless provides some insight into the fundamental economic difficulties which faced the Scottish handloom weavers. The following tables indicate clearly that, over time, the rates of pay for most fabrics fell drastically. Under such conditions it would be expected that the fall in piece rates would considerably exceed the decline in prices paid for weaving per week, since the Scottish websters undoubtedly increased their working hours greatly, in a desperate attempt to offset falling money wages and deteriorating standards of living.[8] This lengthening of the working day had grave social consequences for the weavers and their families as more and more time was spent at the loom and, consequently, less devoted to other pursuits. (Some of the repercussions of this tendency will be examined later.)[9] Nonetheless, the surviving data, which cover both the piece rates and weekly wages, do not testify to anything like the expected difference between these two. The rate of decline in the piece rate for book-muslins, from 1797 to 1819 is only slightly greater than the percentage fall in

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8. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
   Glasgow Herald, 3 Dec., 1832.
   Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, *P.P.*, 1834, (556), X, p. 154, q 2018-2019; p. 161, q 2105.

9. Chapter 2, vii.

TABLE 6A

Movement in Piece Rates - in pence per Yard - 1790/1808

	Book Muslin 12^{00} Wide	Jaconet 12^{00} Wide	Checks 10^{00} Wide	Striped Gingham 12^{00} Wide	Pullicate 16^{00} Wide
1790	15	8			
1791	15	8			
1792	15	8	6¼		
1793	15	8¼	5½ - 5¾		
1794	19	6½	5¾		
1795	11⅝	8	6 - 6¼		
1796	11⅝	8¼	6¼		
1797	10½	7½	6¼		
1798	9⅜	7½	6		
1799	9⅜	7½	6 - 6¼		
1800	9⅜	7½	6¼ - 6½		
1801	9⅜	7½	6½		
1802	8¼	6	6 - 6½		
1803	9⅜	6	5¾		
1804	8½	5¼	5¾		
1805	11⅝	8¼	5¾	8	15
1806	12	8¼	6	8	12
1807	8½	6¼	5¾ - 6¼	6½	11
1808	7¾	5½	6	5	

SOURCE: Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 34

TABLE 6B: Movement in Piece Rates for Various Woven Fabrics, 1797-1838

	Pullicates 16^{00} 6/4th	Book Muslin 12^{00} 4/4th	Striped Gingham 12^{00} 6/4th	*Cotton Bagging per piece		Pullicates 16^{00} 6/4th	Book Muslin 12^{00} 6/4th	Striped Gingham 12^{oo} 6/4th	*Cotton Bagging per piece
1797		7⅞d			1818	7½d		4½d	
1798		7 d			1819	8 d		3 d	4/3d
1799		7⅞d			1820	5 d	3⅜d	3¼d	4/3d
1800		7 d			1821	6 d	3⅜d	3¼d	3/-
1801		6¼d			1822	6 d	3⅜d	3¼d	5/6d
1802		7 d			1823	6 d	2⅞d	3 d	5/-
1803		7 d			1824	6 d	2⅞d	3¼d	5/-
1804		6¼d			1825	5 d	3¾d	3½d	5/-
1805		7¾d	8 d		1826	4½d	2⅞d	3 d	5/6d
1806	15 d	8¾d	8 d		1827	5 d	2⅛d	3 d	4/-
1807	12 d	7 d	6½d		1828	3½d	2⅜d	4 d	4/6d
1808	11 d	5½d	5 d		1829	3¾d	2⅛d	3 d	4/-
1809	10 d	5 d	7 d		1830	3 d	2 d	3 d	4/-
1810	12½d	6¼d	8 d		1831	3 d	2 d	3¼d	4/-
1811	9 d	4¾d	5 d		1832	3 d	2 d	2¾d	4/6d
1812	12 d	5¼d	6 d		1833	3 d	2 d	2¾d	4/6d
1813	11½d	6 d	6½d		1834	3½d	2⅛d	3 d	5/6d
1814	12½d	7¼d	8 d		1835	3⅛d			5/3d
1815	12d	6 d	6½d		1836	3⅞d			6/-
1816	6 d	4¾d	4¾d		1837	3⅜d			5/-
1817	6 d		3½d		1838	3½d			4/-

* Cotton Bagging was a linen fabric

SOURCES:

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 156, q. 2058; p. 157, q. 2065.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 14.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 205.

book muslin weavers' weekly pay over the same period, while in the pullicate sector weekly payments seem to rise and fall directly in proportion to the movements of the piece rate in the years between 1795 and 1838.[10] But since the references to lengthened working hours are too ubiquitous to be ignored, some explanation of this paradox must be attempted.[11]

One possible explanation for this trend can be related to employment opportunity, for the theory that weavers increased their working hours as pay rates fell presupposes that there was no scarcity of work. Thus, at times of slack trade one would expect that average weekly wages would move in very close proportion to the rise and fall of the piece rate. On the other hand it could be argued that when work was plentiful the rate of growth of weekly wages would outstrip gains in piece rates as websters again worked longer hours. This argument, however, is basically not applicable to weavers' weekly income in the case of pullicates, since they gained or lost proportionally as the piece rate rose and fell. A second possibility is that the actual sizes of the pieces were increased arbitrarily by manufacturers so that the actual piece rate fell much more rapidly than available figures first suggest. Certainly such malpractice was common among linen manufacturers on the east coast of

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10. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 157, q. 2065.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 14.

11. Campbell, op. cit., p. 187. Burns, op. cit., p. 38.
Inglis, op. cit., p. 170.
Anonymous, The Weaver's Saturday, a Political Poem inscribed to J.C. Symons, Esq. Glasgow (1838), p. 7.
D. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers of Other Days, Edinburgh, (1869), p. 14.
N.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 22. Glasgow Herald, 3 Dec. 1832.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 154, qq. 2018-2019; p. 161, q. 2105.

Scotland. But the relative absence of complaints from the vocal weavers of the west of Scotland would indicate that arbitrary web lengthening rarely occurred in that area. It is therefore not an adequate total explanation for the commensurate movement over time of piece rates and weekly wages. A third possible explanation, however, is more plausible: as money incomes fell at a much faster rate than prices there was clearly a sharp downturn in the real wages of the handloom weavers, as will be demonstrated later.[12] The protracted fall in living standards had such adverse effects on weavers' physical and mental health, especially in the poorly paid fabrics that there were no productivity advances. Indeed the reverse was probably true; with rapidly declining living standards there were falls in the weavers' productivity. The weakened capacities of some of the websters meant that they were able to produce less than previously in the same period of time. Moreover, diminishing returns necessitated the recruitment of women and young children into the trade. The productivity records of these soft labourers were less than those of their adult male co-websters.[13]

Yet the fall over time of money wages was the experience of all Scottish weavers irrespective of fabric worked, as is shown by the trends in gross weekly wages in Table 7A. The information contained in this table together with more scattered data on wage rates at certain points in time shows clearly that ignoring cyclical aberrations, the total weekly prices for weaving in Scotland did diminish on sectoral trend, though both the rates of decline and the absolute values

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12. Chapter 2, iv.

13. N.S.A., Lanarkshire, p. 414.
Glasgow Herald, 24 Dec. 1824; 3 Dec. 1832
Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832.

TABLE 7A

Gross Weekly Wages of Scottish Handloom Weavers

	Cottons				Linens			Fancy Trade	Wool-lens
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1790									
1791									
1792									
1793									
1794									8.9
1795									8.9
1796									
1797									
1798									
1799									
1800									
1801									
1802									
1803									
1804									
1805									
1806	1.14.0	17.8							
1807	1. 7.3	15.6							
1808	1. 4.6	13.2							
1809	1. 2.9	11.9							
1810	1. 8.3	14.9	8.11	10. 6½	16. 0				
1811	19.6	12.5	6.10½	6.10½	13. 0				
1812	1. 7.3	13.2	7.10½	8.11	12.0				
1813	1. 6.3	15.2	8.11	11. 1¼	10. 0				
1814	1. 8.3	17.4	8.11	11.11	14. 0		1. 3. 6	1. 3. 0	
1815	1. 7.3	14.1	8.11	10. 6½	15. 0		9. 0	1. 1. 9	
1816	13.9		4. 4½	5. 0½	9. 0			15. 5	
1817	13.9		4. 4½	5. 3½	8. 0			15. 9	
1818	17.3		6. 1	5.11½	10. 0			22. 4	
1819	18.3		3. 9½	4. 7	9. 0			16. 3	
1820	11.6		5. 0½	5. 6	9. 0		13. 0	15. 9	
1821	13.9				11. 0		19. 0		
1822	13.9				11. 0			1. 1.10	
1823	13.9				11. 0			19. 7	
1824	13.9				12. 6			17. 5½	
1825	11.6				13. 6		13. 0	17. 3	
1826	9.9				7. 0	10. 9		4. 5	
1827	11.6				7. 6	10. 6		14. 6½	
1828	8.1				9. 6	10. 6		12.10½	
1829	7.6				9. 6	10. 2		12. 2½	12. 0
1830	7.0				8. 0	9. 6	8. 0	15. 6	16. 6
1831	7.0				8. 6	9.10		12. 3	16. 6
1832	7.0				8. 0	9.10		12. 3	16. 6
1833	7.0				8. 6	9. 6		11. 2½	15. 0
1834	8.1				8. 0	9. 3	8. 0	11. 6	15. 0
1835	8.1					9. 3		14. 6½	15. 0
1836	8.11					10. 5½		15. 6	14. 6
1837	7.9					9. 9		11. 6½	14. 6
1838	8.3					9. 4		12. 9	14. 6

Continued/

TABLE 7A (Continued)

	Cottons				Linens			Fancy Trade	Woollens
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1839 - 1845									
1846									14. 6
1847									14. 6
1848									14. 6
1849									12. 0
1850									12. 0

Sources and Footnotes:-

1. Rate weekly for weaving a 16^{00} 6/5 pullicate. The sum of 1/6d is added to weekly net wages to give gross weekly rates. Table was submitted by John Ker, Manufacturer, Glasgow, Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 14.
2. Weekly wages for weaving book-muslins, calculated as an average from 369 webs. Table submitted by James Patterson, Glasgow, Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 157, q. 2065.
3. Rates paid for 4-4th 13^{00} checks at Glasgow. J. Cleland, Statistical Tables relative to the City of Glasgow with other matters connected therewith, Glasgow, (1823), p. 132.
4. Rates paid for 11-8th, 13^{00} ginghams at Glasgow, Cleland, op. cit.
5. Gross weekly wage rates for weaving Hessian sheeting at Dundee, Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 227, q. 3082.
6. Weekly rates for dowlas weaving at Aberdeen. Since average deductions in other linen areas amounted to 2/- per week, net wages here have been adjusted by that figure. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 208.
7. Rates paid for linen weaving in Forfarshire. Quoted in Hamilton, op. cit., p. 114.
8. These figures for gross weekly income are obtained by dividing James Smith's annual earnings over time by 52, Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 467.
9. Average weekly gross earnings of Hand Loom Weavers in the Borders, 1793-1850, from Gulvin, op. cit., p. 167.

of gross wages at any point in time differed between fabrics, and even varied between different categories of woven goods within the one fabric. In cottons, for example, there were sizeable differences between gross weekly wages on pullicates, book-muslins, checks and ginghams throughout the period under review. The rates at which the weekly wages of those who wrought these various cotton fabrics declined was also subject to fundamental differences.

Though the Scottish hand loom weaving industry could be divided into the four major textile groups - cotton, linen, woollen and silk - such a wealth of complexity was exhibited in some of these groups as to preclude the historian from making a detailed examination of each. In attempting to assess weavers' living standards it is, nevertheless, useful to investigate in some detail the behaviour over time of the wage series of the main groupings of websters in Scotland.

Taking cottons first, the fall in gross weekly wages can be demonstrated fairly easily. In the pullicate lines it is clear that wartime levels of income were never again achieved in the post-Waterloo period. Indeed a drastic cut in average wages accompanied the coming of peace, and in many of the post-1815 years those who wrought pullicates in Glasgow were receiving little more than half the earnings they obtained during the war. Leaving aside cyclical movements, pullicate weavers' weekly incomes deteriorated even further in the 1830s, by which time their earnings were slightly less than one-third of their average receipts during the Napoleonic Wars (if 1811 is excluded). The succeeding decade witnessed continued decline in their wages, as mechanical weaving ousted the hand loom from plain cotton fabrics and depressed the wage rates of the survivors.[14] As ginghams and plain

14. Glasgow Herald, 4 Aug. 1845; 26 Nov. 1849.

TABLE 7B: Net Wages in Chief Branches of Hand Loom Weaving, 1810-38

	Glasgow Ginghams & Pullicates		Carlisle Ginghams etc		Glasgow Plain Muslins		Glasgow Fancy Muslins and Silk Gauzes		Paisley Shawls		Zebras and Dresses		Woollen, Stuffs, Plaids, etc		Carpets	
Period	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class	1st Class	2nd Class
1810-16	17/-	24/6			13/6	17/2	10/6	20/-	23/-	26/6	9/1½	15/-			12/-	
1816-20	10/-	13/5			9/-	14/6	10/3	18/-	17/6	24/-	10/5	15/-				
1821	9/6	12/2			9/-	14/5	10/3	18/-	13/10	24/6	8/7	12/6				
1822	9/6	12/2			8/9	13/11	10/3	16/6	13/6	24/6	6/3	11/-				
1823	9/6	12/2			8/3	12/5	10/3	15/9	12/6	24/6	6/11	11/-				
1824	9/6	12/2			8/6	12/10	10/-	14/-	12/-	24/-	7/4	11/6				
1825	7/6	10/-			9/-	15/-	8/6	13/-	13/-	25/6	8/10	12/8				
1826	6/6	8/2			7/2	9/5	9/-	12/6	9/6	16/9	4/9	7/-				
1827	7/6	10/-			6/9	8/11	8/6	11/3	9/6	16/9	7/7	10/6				
1828	6/6	8/5			7/-	9/2	8/6	11/3	9/-	12/6	5/6	8/6				
1829	6/6	8/-			6/3	7/11	8/6	11/3	8/9	11/6	5/8	8/9				
1830	6/-	7/6	7/-	8/1	5/3	6/5	7/9	10/6	9/6	12/6	6/3	8/-	15/-	18/-		
1831	6/-	7/6	6/4	7/6	5/6	6/5	7/9	10/6	10/6	13/6	6/9	8/-	15/-	18/-		
1832	5/9	7/-	6/4	7/6	4/2	6/9	7/6	10/6	9/9	12/2	5/6	8/-	15/-	18/-		
1833	5/3	6/6	6/4	7/4	4/8	6/6	7/6	10/6	10/2	13/6	7/8	8/6	14/-	17/-		
1834	6/6	7/3	7/9	9/6	5/2	8/1	7/4	10/6	9/8	15/6	6/10	8/-	13/-	15/-		
1835	6/8	7/9	6/3	8/9	5/9	8/2	7/4	10/9	10/8	15/6	7/2	9/-	12/-	14/-		
1836	5/9	7/6	5/6	7/5	6/6	8/10	7/-	10/6	12/-	15/2	7/6	8/-	12/-	16/9		
1837	4/3	6/6	4/3	6/2	4/6	7/9	5/-	9/6	8/4	13/2	8/-	8/8	11/-	16/9		
1838	4/6	7/-	4/6	7/6	4/6	7/6	6/-	9/6	6/6	13/2	6/3	7/6	11/-	16/9		18/-

SOURCE: Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 15.

muslins were subjected to basically the same pressures as pullicates the wages of websters on these fabrics, over the period, shared the experience of pullicate weaving rates. Nevertheless, to assess precisely what the weekly receipts of this group was in the 1840s is a formidable task because of the paucity of data and the frequency of severe cyclical slumps in that hungry decade. Clearly, however, those who persisted in the plain cotton sector had to accept lower weekly incomes than more skilled weavers, who during the trade revival of 1849 earned gross wages of 7/- to 9/- per week.[15] If the wage differentials of 1838 could be applied to 1849 some 1/6 to 2/- weekly would have to be subtracted from these statistics to obtain the incomes of plain cotton weavers at the later date.[16] Moreover, the usual weekly deductions would diminish these rates further still. Finally, it should be remembered that figures contained in Table 7A relate to Glasgow and that in rural areas weavers' wages were noticeably lower.[17]

Weekly rates in fancy cotton weaving displayed sharp contrasts according to the degree of intricacy involved in working any particular fabric. It is, nevertheless, almost certain that James Paterson's wage series relating to poorly paid fancy cottons - that is book muslins - represents the lower end of the wage spectrum in the fancy trade. In fact these websters were receiving less per week than John Ker's plain cotton weavers.[18] Nevertheless, Paterson's

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15. 'He /the hand loom weaver/ earns at present in these two towns /Stevenston and Saltcoats/ from the fabrics there working, from 7/- to 9/-.' Glasgow Herald, 13 July, 1849.

16. Tables 7A and 7B.

17. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 105, q. 1382.

18. Table 7A.

series gives useful information on the average weekly wages of what had been a rapidly advancing sector of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade during the 'Golden Age'. Others in the fancy category, who wrought fancy muslins or Paisley shawls were, of course, considerably better paid. For example, those who wove the finest Paisley shawls enjoyed average net weekly wages of 26/6d in the period 1810-16, a rate of remuneration which suffered no noticeable diminution until after 1825. Although the rewards for shawl weaving fell markedly thereafter, they were still in 1838, and indeed at the end of our period, considerably greater than wages in less intricate lines.[19] The proportion of Scottish weavers who enjoyed such relative prosperity, however, was small. Indeed, even within the fancy cotton category, the lower paid weaver was, in Scotland, a much more typical phenomenon than his better paid co-worker in more skilled lines.[20] The typical experience in this category therefore was that war time wages held for a decade longer than those of plain cotton weavers. But with the cyclical downturn of 1826 rates for weaving fancy cottons fell, and never again recovered to pre-1825 levels. After this climacteric the weekly wages of this important category in the Scottish weaving trade diminished gradually until at the end of our period fancy cotton weavers could only take home from 5/- to 7/- per week.[21]

Unfortunately, data on linen weavers' wages are not as readily available as those for cotton workers' rates. Though Dr Harding in his report on the east of Scotland included several wage series, these

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19. Table 7B.

20. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 6.

21. Glasgow Herald, 13 July, 1849.

tended to be for piece rates which are less meaningful for an area where there was no established standard ell.[22] Yet from the sketchy evidence available several conclusions regarding wage rates for flax weaving may be drawn. Certainly in the 1790s the diminishing numbers who wrought linen fabrics in Scotland were less well paid for their labours than the rapidly increasing army of cotton weavers. At Dunfermline, for example, the annual earnings of the town's weavers in the Golden Age were said to be £30 per annum, and this sum included a necessary deduction for cord drawing.[23] The Dunfermline level of wages seems to have been reflected in other Scottish linen weaving centres in the 1790s.[24] On the other hand, it is fairly clear that over time linen weavers' wages generally did not decline with the same rapidity as did those of cotton weavers. Both Mr Symons and Dr Harding submitted conclusive evidence in support of this thesis in 1838. For instance, the net wages of Dunfermline weavers in that year was 8/6 per week; those who worked sail cloth, broad sheeting and floor cloth at places like Dundee, Arbroath and Kirkcaldy had clear weekly wages of at least 8/6, and sometimes as much as 18/-, while at the

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22. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556) p. 247, qq 3372-3380.
23. Mercer, op. cit., p. 165.
24. Burns, op. cit., p. 230.

Linen Weavers' Gross Weekly Wages

Year	Place	Weekly Wage	Type of Fabric
1791	Leslie	7/- - 10/-	Plain
1791	Forfar	7/6 - 10/-	Osnaburghs
1792	Arbroath	7/- - 10/-	Osnaburghs, sailcloths, brown linen
1792	Auchtermuchty	9/- - 17/-	Wide brown silesias
1792	Dunnotar	8/6	Osnaburghs, sheeting, checks, sail-cloths
1792	Kirriemuir	9/6	Osnaburghs, scrims, birdy
1794	Kirkcaldy	8/- - 12/-	Coarse

same time the net wages of linen weavers in Port Glasgow, Greenock and Leith ranged from 10/- to 16/- per week.[25] It should be noted, however, that one of the reasons for assuming that linen rates declined only minimally in our period is the low rate paid to weavers of that fabric in the last decade of the eighteenth century. In addition, cuts in piece rates in this fabric were often hidden by arbitrary web lengthening. Finally, it is important to stress how representative the greater wage rates were of the linen trade generally. Bearing this last qualification in mind it can be shown that the proportion of linen weavers enjoying the relatively comfortable rates quoted by the two Assistant Commissioners represented only a minority who worked that fabric.[26] More than two-thirds of the Scottish linen weavers were employed on 'ordinary or light work' which, by 1838, paid only 5/6d to 7/6d per week. In 1841, for example, the 'knights of the shuttle', or domestic linen weavers, of Fife were receiving 5/8d per week, a rate which had not altered substantially by 1856 when weavers in Freuchie (in Fife) were paid 1/- per day, though they were also provided with a free dinner.[27]

The few extant statistics relating to weekly wage rates for woollen weaving in the early years of our period refer to 1793 and 1794 when weavers in the Borders received 8/- to 9/6d and 7/6d to 10/- respectively.[28] Precisely what the movements of woollen weavers'

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25. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 35, pp. 43-44.
    Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 187-188.

26. Ibid.

27. P.K. Livingstone, Flax and Linen in Fife through the Centuries, Kirkcaldy, (1952), p. 11.

28. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 167.

wages were for the remainder of the war-time period, or indeed in the pre-1829 era, is not known. The absence of complaints about distress from the woollen sector, however, suggests that wages were not as hard pressed in this fabric as they were in cottons for example. This view is supported by the fact that in the depressed year of 1829, when chronic distress affected the town of Galashiels, weavers in the Borders, nevertheless, averaged gross wages of 12/- weekly.[29] Subsequently, woollen weavers' weekly rates were sizeably higher than those of websters on any other fabrics; they neither experienced the same rate of decline nor the very low absolute prices which other less fortunate workers in the trade were to receive. Nevertheless, the trade was affected, especially in the 1840s, by cyclical depressions and in 1849 average wages at Ballantyne's loom shops in Galashiels fell to 10/4d per week.[30] Furthermore, one of the highest paid sectors of the woollen trade - carpet weaving - was bedevilled by recurring periods of unemployment for the weavers. Complaints of distress in carpet weaving often, for example, emanated from the town of Kilmarnock.[31] Finally, in the east of Scotland there were 2,500 woollen weavers but only those on soft tartans and shawls entered the best paid category. They were not numerous.[32]

Though there is no scarcity of evidence about the existence of a silk trade in Scotland, centred principally upon Paisley, in the pre-

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29. Transcript of Brown's Diary, 30 March 1829; 18 April 1829; 27 April 1829; 12 June 1829; 8 Aug. 1829. Library of the Scottish College of Textiles, Galashiels.

30. Gulvin, op. cit., p. 167.

31. Glasgow Herald, 20 April 1829; 4 Jan. 1847. Glasgow Saturday Post, 22 Jan. 1848.

32. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 185.

1790 era, none of the commentators of the industry has left any data relating to wage rates. There is no need to consider silk weaving rates during the French wars since in this period very few people in Scotland worked at silk fabrics. In the post-war era, however, and this trend continued until the end of our period, wages for weaving silk goods, mainly gauzes or shawls, experienced a steady decline over time.[33] Even then rates of payment for silk weaving remained markedly higher than those in all other fabrics except woollens and one would assume that silk weavers would have been among the relatively prosperous handloom workers in Scotland. Overall, however, they were of little numerical significance, for it was not until the Paisley shawl trade expanded in the 1830s that they became a sizeable workforce.[34] Moreover, of all the Scottish handloom weavers they were the most vulnerable not only to frequent cyclical depressions but also to regularly recurring seasonal dulnesses.

Tables 7A and 7B clearly demonstrate the gradual diminution over time of rates of pay for all handloom weavers in Scotland. After 1838 more fragmentary data show that this decline continued unabated until the end of our period. These two tables refer to two different rates, for the former deals with gross wages and the latter with net wage rates. The difference between them at any point in time con-

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33. See Table 7B.
In both categories here labelled under the headings 'Glasgow Fancy Muslins and Silk Gauzes' and 'Paisley Shawls' those who wrought silks would have probably been included in the '2nd Class', or better paid weavers.

34. 'Life was much simpler for our forefathers of 1810, the period which marks the beginning of the harness shawl era, as we came to know it'. Shawl weaving, however, developed only gradually.
A.M. Stewart, The History and Romance of the Paisley Shawl, with a foreword on the Kashmir Shawls, Glasgow, (1946), p. 14.

sisted of all those deductions which were made from gross wages. The precise amount deducted varied according to fabric and industrial structure, and also changed over time. Reductions for instance made from factory weavers' earnings were higher than those to which domestic weavers were subjected. For example, woollen weavers in the Borders paid greater deductions weekly than did domestic cotton weavers. Again, where harness work was involved the weavers' expenses were considerably increased, irrespective of fabric, as drawboys had to be hired and expensive mountings had sometimes to be acquired.[35] But there were some items of expenditure which all the Scottish hand weavers had to pay. For example, looms had to be bought or hired, while in some cases loom sheds also had to be purchased or rented. Occasionally too, small sums were expended upon repairs to looms or the purchase of shuttles. In addition, various necessities had to be purchased; these included, as well as fuel and lighting, payments for starch or tallow for greasing webs. Moreover, it is fairly clear that at least some of the Scottish weavers had to pay for their own pirn-winders since there are no references in extant manufacturers' books of allowances being made for this by manufacturers or their agents.[36] It is likely, however, that this task was often performed by other members of the particular weaver's family. Finally, fines were sometimes imposed upon the weavers for poor work, or for industrial indiscipline in hand loom weaving factories.[37]

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35. Assistant Commissioner's Report from the South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 33.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 185.

36. Daybook of Jas Whyte, Jnr; Paisley Museum. Records of Pettigrew and Dickie, Glasgow City Archives.

37. Thom, op. cit., p. 246. Weavers' Journal, 1 March, 1837. Reformers' Gazette, 13 Oct. 1832.

Over the sixty year period in question, however, the amounts deducted from weavers' wages increased markedly as a proportion of weekly incomes. In 1812, for example, when the weekly wages of plain weavers were 14/- gross and those of fancy weavers were £1, the respective expenses paid by these two groups were 2/- and 4/5d.[38] In other words, in the earlier part of our period plain weavers lost one-seventh, and fancy weavers had to pay less than a quarter, of their gross weekly earnings. By 1838, weavers in Lanark who earned gross weekly wages of 7/- were subject to the following deductions: starching 2d, light and coal 2d, carriage 2½d, loom rent 10d. This amounted to a total sum of 1/4½d, although this figure makes no allowance for pirn-winding.[39] In the same year the average weekly expenses subtracted from linen weavers' wages was 1/9d, a figure which included 1/1d for winding.[40] Although good hands in linen weaving were in 1838 receiving gross wages of 7/6d weekly many were in less favourable circumstances, earning only 5/6d approximately per week. Clearly by this date deductions for those two fabrics considerably exceeded one-quarter of their gross weekly earnings. Indeed, the fact that weekly expenses did not fall proportionally with weekly wage rates can be further substantiated by evidence presented by Messrs J. and J. Robertson of Paisley to J.C. Symons in 1838. A table of gross weekly wages for the first class of Paisley shawls was compiled from which a constant deduction of 6/6d weekly

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38. Printed Letter, 24 Oct. 1812, David Ross, Trial Presentations, Justiciary Office, Edinburgh.

39. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 541.

40. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 188.

had to be subtracted, for the whole period, 1810-1838, to obtain net wage rates.[41] Two other factors reinforce this point. Firstly as working hours increased so did each weaver's expenditure on fuel and light. Secondly, over time, the practice of fining websters for poorly executed work became more common.[42]

Not all weavers' families, however, depended solely upon the net earnings of adult male weavers' looms, although the latter was normally the principal bread-winner in the home. Firstly, the weekly earnings from his loom could be supplemented from other sources. Weaving, for instance, could be a dual pursuit with other occupations, principally agriculture. Yet, it is clear that weaving as a dual occupation was a rapidly dwindling pursuit over time. Thus, although the weavers of Paisley occasionally took up agricultural labour, this was usually because work in their main economic activity was unavailable through cyclical slumps, or seasonal dullness.[43] Elsewhere, too, as has been noted, hand loom weaving was increasingly becoming a full-time occupation. The gains to total family incomes from part-time occupations were therefore such rare phenomena, and in absolute terms were so small, that no adjustment of aggregate sums is required.

In theory at least the adult male weaver could earn money from several other sources. He could charge fees for training apprentices; he could hire looms to journeymen; and he could

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41. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 33.

42. Weavers' Journal, 1 March 1837.
Reformers Gazette, 1 Sept. 1832, 13 Oct. 1832.

43. T.S.A. Glasgow, p. 454; p. 607.
N.S.A. Lanarkshire, pp. 559-560.
Glasgow Herald, 27 Sept. 1841.

obtain rent payments from resident journeymen. In practice, however, the proportion of Scottish master weavers who enjoyed these benefits was small, and decreasing over time. Apprenticeship, as we have seen, was a dwindling practice, while the proportion of journeymen never formed a large part of the labour force in Scotland.[44] Income from these sources, therefore, had no sizeable impact upon living standards.

The standard of life, however, could be affected by 'in kind' contributions which, if not adding to total family income, at least reduced expenditure. At Airdrie, for example, weavers grew their own vegetables in their kail-yards,[45] while evidence from other areas indicates that Airdrie was not the sole locality where weavers enjoyed such benefits.[46] Nonetheless, it is unlikely that 'in kind' supplements were by any means general among the weaving community. Furthermore with the protracted decline in wage rates, and the concommitant lengthening of the working day, even those weavers who owned or rented yards or plots had great difficulty in finding time to exploit them fully.

The second possible source of ancillary income could come from the earnings of weavers' wives. There were three main employment outlets for the weaver's spouse. She could be engaged at tambouring (or embroidery), at pirnwinding or, like her husband, she too

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44. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 180, q. 2383; p. 187, qq. 2467-2468; pp. 216-217, qq. 2913-2917.

45. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 21.

46. T.S.A. Glasgow, p. 454, p. 607.
N.S.A. Lanarkshire, pp. 559-560.
Glasgow Herald, 27 Sept. 1821.

could work a hand loom. In 1838, for example, tambouring earned the women of Strathaven from 6d to 10d per day.[47] Compared with this the 1/- to 1/6d which weavers' wives could earn weekly at pirn winding was a small sum.[48] Moreover there is good reason to believe that many weavers' wives wound pirns principally for their husbands: thus, although offsetting the cost of hiring someone else to perform this service, there was often no monetary gain to total family income from pirn winding.[49] In any case, employment opportunities in pirn winding were limited, as these pirns were only wound when webs were ready to be woven. In theory weavers' wives could earn as much as the adult male weaver himself at the loom, but in practice their wives tended to be employed upon plain, coarse grade and low paid work.[50] Moreover, in each of these three activities women's working hours necessarily had to be flexible as time had to be taken

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47. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1838, (195), XLII, p. 28.

48. For example, at Annan in Dumfriesshire women winding pirns earned about 1/6d and 2/- for winding. This seems to have been higher than in other areas of Scotland; for instance, in the same year (1838) linen weavers on the east coast paid only 1/1d for winding pirns.
Ibid.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1838, (195), XLII, p. 188.

49. This was certainly the case on the east coast of Scotland. As far as the west was concerned the evidence is more conflicting as witnesses to the Parliamentary enquiries seemed to infer that this payment was made by manufacturers. Yet in the extant manufacturers' daybooks no allowance is made for winding, as is indicated above. Possibly of some significance here is the fact that in the Harris Tweed trade pirn winding is the responsibility of the weaver who makes his own arrangement and pays for this task.
Ibid.
Daybook of Jas. Whyte, Jnr.
Records of Pettigrew and Dickie.

50. Final Report of Royal Commissioners on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 45.

off work for domestic chores. Furthermore, the pressures of such tasks as cooking and looking after children must have precluded many urban weavers' wives from working at relatively highly paid jobs in spinning and power loom factories, though the geographical location of the Scottish hand loom weaving trade, with two-thirds of its workforce in rural areas, strongly suggests that few weavers' families enjoyed additions to family income from this source.[51] The contribution of the weaver's spouse to total family income varied according to the life cycle of the family. For example, during pregnancy and early motherhood her earnings fell considerably or disappeared altogether. It is clear therefore that with the trend increase in family sizes over the 1790-1850 period, the effective contributions of weavers' wives to aggregate incomes declined, since proportionally greater periods of their potential working lives were spent on maternal duties.[52] Finally, the employment opportunities open to adult females were in some instances intimately related to the weaving trade. Therefore, in the many cyclical depressions which affected that trade some proportion of this source of supplementary income was lost to the weavers' families.

The third possible way of supplementing the family incomes was through the contribution made by the earnings of children of varying ages who had not yet married, and who still resided in their parents' homes. One important outlet, for girls mainly, was in spinning and power loom factories. For example, in 1838 'clever girls of 15 to

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51. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 80, q. 1081.

52. Baird, op. cit., p. 171.
Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832.

20' could make 8/- weekly, while those of a younger age could earn 4/- to 5/- per week, in the cotton spinning department of power loom factories in Glasgow.[53] In the same year Houldsworth's new cotton factory in Airdrie gave employment to weavers' children at an average rate of 6/9d per week.[54] In areas like Paisley and Dunfermline where harness work was performed weavers' children were employed as draw-boys at weekly rates varying from 2/- to 4/6d.[55] But the principal employment outlet for weavers' children, especially males, must certainly have been at their fathers' trade, judging from the many contemporaries who remarked upon the early age at which children were put to the loom, and bearing in mind the complaints of weavers regarding the difficulty of apprenticing their children to other trades, or getting them into the cotton mills.[56]

Various influences, however, reduced the effective contribution of children's earnings to weavers' total family incomes. Although, over the period, the expansion of the economy increased employment opportunities for children as well as others, several factors operated to deflate children's wages. For example, the 1833 Factory Act effectively reduced employment opportunities for young children and cut the working hours of young persons under eighteen years of age.[57]

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53. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 11.

54. Ibid., p. 29.

55. Weavers' Journal, 2 May 1836.

56. Glasgow Herald, 10 Oct. 1817; 26 Oct. 1835. Scottish Guardian, 17 Oct. 1832.

57. Though previous legislation had some effect in improving conditions in cotton factories in Scotland, in contrast to the experience in flax mills where the earlier Acts had not been applicable, yet the 1833 Factory Act provided for full time paid government inspectors to enforce the new law. Smout, op. cit., p. 389. J.T. Ward, The Factory System,

Total family incomes must, consequently, have been reduced, at least in the short term. Again, in the harness section of the weaving trade, the gradual adoption of the Jacquard loom obviated the need for draw-boys.[58] Indeed the value of a draw-boy's earnings to a weaver's family is open to some doubt since harness weavers themselves had to pay draw-boys. Furthermore, this sector of the trade was subject to frequent fluctuations and during slump periods draw-boys as well as their parents suffered unemployment and loss of earnings. However, as a high proportion of Scottish weavers in 1834 still lived in rural areas few of them could put their children to factory or harness work in any case.[59] Like their mothers, the children who took up weaving usually worked upon plain, low paid work, the value of their earnings to total family incomes depending mainly upon their ages and physical prowess. Again, however, it must be stressed that their weekly contribution to family income must have declined over time in relation to the fall in the piece-rate in the lowest paid fabric.

But before any final assessment can be made as to the effectiveness of supplementary wages in inflating total family incomes it is necessary to ascertain what proportion of weavers families enjoyed these incomes. Though precise quantification of subsidiary contributions is too formidable a task to be attempted here the

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Vol. 2, The Factory System and Society, Newton Abbot, (1970), pp. 161-164.

58. A. Barlow, The History and Principles of Weaving by Hand and by Power, London, (1878), p. 134.

59. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 80, q. 1081.

main reservations regarding supplementary incomes for each category have already been listed. But perhaps the most telling opinion in this respect is that of J.C. Symons who considered that the view that weavers generally enjoyed supplementary pay was an exaggerated one. He argued, for example, that the opportunities open to weavers' children were relatively restricted. Although other tradesmen could set their children to the hand loom, few websters' sons were allowed to take up alternative trades.[60] Certainly evidence of earnings from sources other than the wages earned at the loom by adult male weavers cannot possibly reverse the trend of decline in net earnings. Indeed, to arrive at aggregate family income it is clear that at any point weavers' wages should only be adjusted minimally on average to allow for supplementary earnings.

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Money wages, however, comprise only one side of the economic equation. To establish how weavers' real wages moved over the period 1790 to 1850 it is also necessary to examine the general trend in commodity prices. But it is not sufficient merely to delineate the general movement of such prices since the relative importance of individual items in each family's expenditure pattern could change over time. For instance, the proportion of the weekly budget expended on food alone could vary quite considerably, while the level of expenditure upon individual food items could also fluctuate sharply

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60. Although instances had been recorded of weavers' children earning as much as 8/- per week, these were exceptions. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 54.

as a result of changes in weavers' dietary patterns.

Though detailed breakdowns of weavers' budgets are not available for the early, relatively prosperous, era of the industry it does seem fairly clear from contemporary and later comments that at least some of the Scottish weavers were able to expend some proportion of their weekly budget on items other than the basic essentials required for survival. These relative luxuries included school fees, seat rents in church, contributions to friendly societies or similar institutions and possibly small sums paid to local book clubs.[61] In addition, it seems that weavers in the 'Golden Age' could afford to purchase and consume quantities of alcoholic liquor.[62] With the decline in money wages such relative luxuries soon became nothing but memories to many of the Scottish weavers' families. Possibly as early as 1810, and certainly by 1815, most of the handloom weavers of Glasgow confined their weekly expenditure to items of immediate need. It has, for example, been estimated that in the period 1810 to 1831, seventy-one per cent of the Glasgow weavers' weekly expenditure was spent on food purchase while the remaining twenty-nine per cent was expended on other necessities such as rent, coal, candles and soap.[63] Similarly at Dundee weavers spent, in 1834, 78.7 per cent and 21.3 per cent respectively of their total weekly income on food and the other necessities listed above.[64] Again in the Calton district of Glasgow in 1830, where net weekly

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61. Radcliffe, op. cit., p. 67.
Weavers' Journal, 31 Oct. 1835.

62. Johnston, op. cit., p. 314.

63. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 71.

64. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 238, q. 3249.

wages and total family incomes were lower than at Dundee, 2/- weekly was spent on rent and fuel alone which, from a total weekly outlay of 5/8d represented thirty-five per cent of family expenditure.[65] Clearly then the amounts spent on some of these necessities were less elastic than the amount available for buying food, although it of course remained by far the most important item in weavers' weekly budgets, probably accounting for something in the region of seventy per cent of total family expenditure.

Although some of the judgements regarding weavers' dietary patterns in the 'Golden Age' are almost certainly over-optimistic, or distorted, there remain good reasons for supporting the argument that their diets changed for the worse as money wages fell. First of all, those who passed comment on declining dietary standards were familiar with the trade and its workforce. Secondly, many found the change over time in weavers' diets worthy of comment since it was in obvious contrast to the trend dietary improvement over the period for many other sectors of the working classes.[66] Probably the most revealing feature of the weavers' experience was that meat consumption declined considerably as a feature of their eating pattern, and by 1810 it had disappeared altogether from the weekly diets of many weavers. From that date onwards most Scottish websters and their families lived on subsistence budgets satisfying four basic requirements: cheapness, palatability, purchasing in small quantities, and credit facilities.[67]

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65. Glasgow Examiner, 6 March 1847.

66. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 314, qq. 5280-5281; p. 715, qq. 11997-11998.

67. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 70.

The basic items of food consumption in such a diet were potatoes, oatmeal, buttermilk, salt and salted fish. The surviving evidence points to an increased dependence upon potatoes among the poorer classes in Scotland in the nineteenth century. For instance, the Town's Hospital in Glasgow decided in 1816 to introduce more potatoes into the diets of its inmates and three years later the payment of out-door relief in meal was discontinued. The increasingly high proportion of Irish-born and second generation Irish among the Scottish weaving force would certainly suggest that handloom weavers and their families conformed to this dietary change. Nonetheless, oatmeal still remained more important in their diet than either bread or potatoes despite the relative cheapness of bread and the difficulties involved in preparing oatmeal. In the years 1810 to 1831 cereal foods were still the predominant feature in weavers' diets, accounting for something in the region of forty-two percent of total expenditure. Milk, particularly in the form of buttermilk, was also popular, while, instead of meat, herring or salt ling were consumed. The quantities of tea, sugar, butter and salt purchased were invariably small.[68] Table 8A shows the relative unimportance of all these items in Glasgow weavers' diets in 1815-16, and it can be reasonably assumed that no major shifts of emphasis had taken place by 1831.

Thereafter, there seems to have been little change in this broad pattern for Glasgow weavers. A Glasgow weaver's budget for 1834, for example, reveals that the major food items were still being purchased in roughly the same proportions as in the 1810-31 period.[69]

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68. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
69. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 146, q. 1912.

TABLE 8A

Expenditure Pattern of Glasgow Handloom Weaver 1815/16

Item	Quantity purchased Weekly	Price 1815/16 (d.)
Oatmeal	12 lb (Dutch)	27.00
Potatoes	40 lb	12.50
Bread, household	4½ lbs	8.25
Buttermilk	6 quarts	3.00
Salt Herrings	2 lbs	7.50
Salt Ling Fish	2 lbs	6.00
Irish butter	½ lb (Tron)	8.19
Salt	½ lb	1.25
Tea	½ oz	2.50
Sugar	½ lb	5.25
Candles	½ lb	5.50
Soap, brown	½ lb	4.50
Coal	1.2 cwt	8.70
Rent	per week	13.85
Total Expenditure		113.99

Source: Gourvish, op. cit., p. 79

Nor is the continuation of the pattern in any way surprising since many weavers' expenditure was essentially restricted to absolute necessities. As early as 1815-16, for example, no margin was left for spending on luxuries such as whisky and tobacco, except at the expense of normal food requirements.[70] More serious for the weavers and their dependents was the fact that they could no longer afford to pay church rents, costs of education, friendly society contributions or book club levies.[71] Indeed, as wages underwent further contraction weavers found great difficulty, even in years of good trade, in providing even these basic necessities. Against this sombre background, it was to be expected that in the last two

70. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 71.

71. Chapter 3.

decades of our period, the budgets of many weavers made no allowance for the purchase of clothes and shoes.[72]

Before the price trends of the major items in these accounts are examined, it remains for the historian to ascertain what proportion of the Scottish labour force lived on subsistence budgets. In the twenty-two years before 1812 it is likely that few of these websters were reduced to this level, except of course in the frequent years of bad trade, or during the adverse phases in the life cycle of the weaver's family. Certainly there is sufficient evidence to indicate that meat was a regular feature of their diets and that money was spent on more than basic needs.[73] But in the years after 1812, the consumption patterns of many weavers were reduced, though at different rates over time, to subsistence budget levels. The most obvious exception to this trend was the section of the labour-force engaged in woollen weaving, above all in the Border district.[74] Also failing to conform with the general decline in dietary patterns were the linen weavers of the east of Scotland, some of whom at least still in 1834 enjoyed animal meat in their weekly fare.[75] At most, however, a mere third of east coast linen weavers came into this category. Certainly by 1838 linen websters in such areas as Cupar, Brechin and Kinross very rarely tasted butcher's meat.[76] Moreover, even in the case, quoted in Table 8B, of the relatively well-paid Dundee weaver, no allowance is made for anything except basic

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72. Tables 8B and 8C. 73. Johnston, _op. cit._, p. 314.

74. _Assistant Commissioners Report from South of Scotland, P.P._, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 41-42.

75. Table 8B.

76. _Assistant Commissioners Report from East of Scotland, P.P._, 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 211-212.

TABLE 8B

Weekly Maintenance of a Weaver's Family at Dundee, 1834

Item	Quantity Purchased	Cost
Oatmeal	3 pecks	3s 3d
Milk	--	1s 2d
Tea	2 ozs	9d
Sugar	1½ lbs	9d
Soap	½ lb	3d
Wheaten Bread	1 loaf	7d
Potatoes	--	7½d
Beef	3 lbs	1s 3d
Light	--	1½d
Salt	--	1d
House Rent	--	1s 2d
Coal	--	9d
TOTAL		10s 9d

SOURCE: Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, p. 238, q. 3249.

TABLE 8C

Weekly Expenditure of a Glasgow Weaver, 1834

Item	Quantity Purchased	Cost
Oatmeal	1½ pecks	1s 4½d
Potatoes	1½ pecks	7½d
Buttermilk	3 pints	3d
Herrings	2 lbs	3d
Salt	1 lb	½d
Soap	½ lb	3½d
Cheese	½ lb	4d
Sugar	½ lb	3½d
Tea	½ oz	2½d
Train Oil	1 quart	9d
Starch Dressing etc	--	6d
Rent of Loom stead	--	6d
Fuel	--	6d
House Rent	--	1s 0d
Church Seat	--	½d
TOTAL		7s 0½d

SOURCE: Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, p. 146, q. 1912.

necessities, although the diet itself is relatively varied. These exceptions apart, however, the only other main group within the workforce who may have been expected to enjoy budgets above subsistence levels were the skilled weavers of the west of Scotland, found mainly in Paisley and its vicinity.[77] Nevertheless, in discussing the feeding habits of Paisley weavers in 1834, James Orr was not at all convinced that there was much difference between harness and plain weavers. Furthermore, he was in no doubt that many Paisley weavers' families only ate meat once a month. The usual bill of fare was oatmeal and pease, with 'salt herrings to the potatoes' being in general use. Nor did Orr perceive any difference in outward appearance between plain weavers and others and he believed the respective indoor comforts would have been on the same footing.[78] In the last analysis, therefore, it is clear that the vast majority of Scottish weavers were forced to exist on a subsistence budget. If one has to hazard a guess for quantification purposes it is likely that in the last two decades covered by this thesis at least three-quarters of all Scottish weavers and their families should be included in this category.[79]

iv

Any attempt at tracing the movement of commodity prices, particularly food prices, from 1790 to 1850, is confounded by the lack of

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77. Tables 7A and 7B
78. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (556), X, p. 67, qq 909-913.
79. Chapter I, vi.

uniformity of price for many of the principal articles of consumption between the various regions of Scotland. The average July price of a quarter of wheat in Aberdeenshire in 1803, for example, was 54/6d which was 10/- dearer per quarter than wheat sold in Roxburghshire, while in the same month the average prices of a quarter of barley were 20/1d, 29/3d and 36/6d in the counties of Fife, Lanark and Inverness respectively.[80] Nonetheless bearing these regional variations in mind, and noting that for the same month in 1803 the average price of oatmeal per boll was relatively standard throughout Scotland, it is still possible to construct a table of the movement in price over time of the main component in weavers' diets. Though at a cursory glance the data in Table 9A seem to argue that the average price of oatmeal in Scotland showed no noteworthy decline from 1790 to 1838, this has to be qualified by the fact that the Edinburgh prices with which the series begins were lower than Glasgow oatmeal prices, especially during periods of shortage.[81] But even if the data for the early period were weighted to allow for this qualification the overall series would still not demonstrate a marked price decline in the main dietary item of the handloom weavers by 1838. Hereafter data are less readily available and are clouded by cyclical influences upon meal prices. For example, in November 1843 oatmeal cost only 7d to 8d per peck at Fenwick, while in the spring of 1847 the price per peck in Glasgow was 1/7d.[82]

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80. Glasgow Herald and Advertizer, 5 Sept. 1803.
81. Burns, op. cit., p. 48.
82. T.D. Taylor (Ed.), The Annals of Fenwick by James Taylor, 1814-1855, Collections of the Ayrshire Archeological and Natural History Society, (1970), p. 34.
    Glasgow Herald, 12 July 1847.

Evidence regarding the movements of bread prices over the period 1790 to 1850 is somewhat scarce, and must be treated with a great deal of caution. The main figures extant are contained in Table 9B. Unfortunately, one of the principal sources employed here does not differentiate between wheaten and household bread when quoting the assize prices of bread at Glasgow and Perth from 1787 to 1805,[83] although an examination of contemporary newspapers strongly suggest that wheaten prices are being quoted in Glasgow.[84] Accepting the validity of this last point it becomes clear that, apart from exceptional years like 1795-96 and 1800-01, the price of wheaten bread at Glasgow and Perth in the last decade of the eighteenth century was only moderately higher than the cost of the same commodity at Dundee in the 1830s, although clearly in an intervening decade, 1810-1820, prices were in most years considerably higher than in the 1790s. It must be pointed out, however, that wheaten bread was a rare item in weavers' diets. When they did eat bread the Scottish websters, almost exclusively, had to opt for the cheaper, household variety.[85] Yet an examination of wheaten bread prices over the period is not an altogether useless exercise. Although these prices in absolute terms mean very little when related to the experience of the Scottish handloom weavers at any particular period, yet their movement over time seems to reflect fairly accurately the trend changes in the cost of household bread.[86] Proceeding from such an

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83. Burns, op. cit., pp. 46-47

84. Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 28 Feb. 1800; 11 Sept. 1800; 6 Oct. 1800; 28 Nov. 1800.

85. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 71.

86. Statistics available for the average prices for wheaten and household bread in Glasgow for 1810-1819 seem to indicate that the prices of wheaten and household bread moved in step during

TABLE 9A: Average Quarterly Price of Oatmeal, 1790-1838 (per peck)

Year	1st Quarter s	1st Quarter d	2nd Quarter s	2nd Quarter d	3rd Quarter s	3rd Quarter d	4th Quarter s	4th Quarter d	Town
1790	1	0	1	0½	1	1½	1	1½	Edinburgh
1791	1	1	1	1	1	0¾	1	0	"
1792	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0¾	"
1793	1	1	1	3	1	2¾	1	1	"
1794	1	1¾	1	2	1	1½	1	1	"
1795	1	1	1	2¼	1	4	1	4½	"
1796	1	6¼	1	5¼	1	2	1	1	"
1797		11½		10¼		11¼		11¾	"
1798		11¼	1	1¼	1	1	1	0½	"
1799	1	0¼	1	5	1	8½	2	0¾	"
1800	2	9	3	4¼	2	7	2	7¼	"
1801	2	8¼	2	3¾	1	8	1	2	"
1802	1	1¾	1	0¾	1	1¼	1	1¾	"
1803	1	1	1	2	1	3¾	1	4¾	"
1804	1	2	1	3	1	4¼	1	3¾	"
1805	1	3¼	1	4	1	6	1	4¼	"
1806	1	3	1	4¾	1	6	1	6	"
1807	1	5	1	6	1	8	1	9	"
1810	1	8	1	8	1	8	1	8	Glasgow
1811	1	8	1	8	1	8	1	8	"
1812	1	9	1	9	1	9	1	9	"
1813	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	"
1814	1	8	-		-		1	6	Paisley
1815	1	4	-		-		1	3	"

Year	1st Quarter s	1st Quarter d	2nd Quarter s	2nd Quarter d	3rd Quarter s	3rd Quarter d	4th Quarter s	4th Quarter d	Town
1816	1	2	-		-		1	8	Paisley
1817	2	2	-		-		1	11	"
1818	2	0	-		-		1	8	"
1819	1	3	-		-		1	4	"
1820	1	4	-		-		1	3	"
1821	1	2	-		-		1	3	"
1822	1	2	-		-		1	0	"
1823	1	0	-		-		1	3	"
1824	1	6	-		-		1	2	"
1825	1	3	-		-		1	4	"
1826	1	3	-		-		1	2	"
1827	1	7	-		-		1	2	"
1828	1	1	-		-		1	2	"
1829	1	4	-		-		1	3	"
1830	1	2	-		-		1	5	"
1831	1	6	-		-		1	2	"
1832	1	1	-		-		1	0	"
1833	1	0	-		-			11½	"
1834	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	Dundee
1835	1	7	1	7	1	3	1	0	"
1836	1	1	1	10	2	0	2	2	"
1837	2	4	2	4	2	4	1	10	"
1838	1	10	2	0	2	0	-		"

SOURCES:

Burns, op. cit., p. 93: Cleland, Statistical Tables, (1823) op. cit., p. 133:
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 93, q. 1241:
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 206.

TABLE 9B: Average Price of Bread in Scottish Towns (Quartern Loaf)

Year	Glasgow s	Glasgow d	Perth s	Perth d	Dundee s	Dundee d	Type of Bread
1787				7¼			Assize Prices?
1788		8		7¾			"
1789		8⅜		9			"
1790		9¼		7¾			"
1791		8¼		7½			"
1792		8⅛		7¼			"
1793		8¾		8¼			"
1794		9¼		8½			"
1795	1	3¼		11½			"
1796	1	1½	1	0⅛			"
1797		9¾		8½			"
1798		9¼		8½			"
1799	1	0		11¾			"
1800	1	6¼	1	3¼			"
1801			1	1¼			"
1802				10¾			"
1803				9¼			"
1804				10¼			"
1805			1	0¾			"
1810	1	3¾					Wheaten
	0	10½					Household
1811	1	1¾					Wheaten
		9¼					Household
1812	1	4					Wheaten
		11					Household
1813	1	5					Wheaten
	1	0½					Household
1814	1	0					Wheaten
		9					Household

Year	Glasgow s	Glasgow d	Perth s	Perth d	Dundee s	Dundee d	Type of Bread
1815		10½					Wheaten
		7½					Household
1816	1	2					Wheaten
		9					Household
1817	1	4½					Wheaten
		11¾					Household
1818	1	2					Wheaten
		10					Household
1819		11¾					Wheaten
		8¾					Household
1820							Wheaten
1821						8½	"
1822						8¼	"
1823						7½	"
1824						8¾	"
1825						9¼	"
1826						8¾	"
1827						8¼	"
1828						8¼	"
1829						9¾	"
1830						9	"
1831						9¼	"
1832						8½	"
1833						7¼	"
1834						6¾	"
1835						5¾	"
1836						6¾	"
1837						7½	"
1838						8	"

SOURCES: Burns, _op. cit._, pp. 46-47: Cleland, _Statistical Tables_ (1823) _op. cit._, p. 133: _Assistant Commissioners Report from East of Scotland_, _P.P._, 1839, (195), XLII, p. 206

assumption it becomes clear that for most of the 1830s the average price of the quartern loaf of brown (or household) bread was only slightly less than what it had cost their forefathers in the 1790s.[87] Finally, assuming there were no marked falls in household bread prices in the 1840s it seems reasonable to conclude that the trend decline in bread prices, as they affected Scottish handloom weavers, was only slightly greater than the fall in oatmeal prices, from 1790 to 1850.

From the early eighteenth century, potatoes were being increasingly cultivated and consumed in Scotland south of the Forth and Clyde.[88] By the last decade of that century potatoes, which were relatively steady in price compared with oatmeal, at around 6d to 9d per peck compensated to some extent for high oatmeal prices.[89] Moreover, potatoes were becoming a more important item in weavers' diets, especially in rural areas.[90] There are no readily available series, however, relating to potato prices over the period 1790-1850 and in their absence the available data must be used with care. The only short run of figures extant are for the decade 1810-1819 when the average price of unwashed potatoes in Glasgow was 1/1½d per peck, which is a significantly higher average than the prices cited above for the 1790s.[91] Clearly then in the years which witnessed the

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86. that decade, with household or brown bread costing between seventy per cent and eighty per cent of wheaten bread price at any time.
Cleland, Statistical Tables (1823), op. cit., p. 133.

87. Table 9B.

88. R.N. Salaman, The History and Social Influence of the Potato, Cambridge, (1949), Chapter 21.

89. Burns, op. cit., p. 50. 90. Ibid., p. 44.

91. Cleland, Statistical Tables, (1823), op. cit., p. 133.

most dramatic fall in weavers' pay rates there was no corresponding drop in the price of this item. Post-1820, however, potato prices seem to have fallen considerably. By 1834, they were sold at Glasgow at 5d per peck,[92] although this fall was possibly a reflection of the good harvests of 1833 and 1834, whose influence on oatmeal and bread prices can easily be demonstrated, rather than an indication of a dramatic downturn in the trend price of potatoes over time.[93] In 1838 the average price of potatoes on the east coast of Scotland ranged from 4d to 6d per imperial stone of 14 lb.[94] When this fact is considered in relation to the Glasgow peck which weighed 40 lbs it becomes apparent that potato prices, on the east coast of Scotland at least, cost around 1/- per peck which is much higher than the 1834 Glasgow figure and fairly close to average potato prices at Glasgow in the 1810-19 decade.[95] Obviously, therefore, for the greater proportion of our period there is no clear cut or irreversible trend fall in this increasingly important item in the diets of the Scottish handloom weavers.

Detailed series of prices for non-staple commodities consumed by the weavers are even scarcer than those for the principal items discussed above. Nevertheless, some use can be made of the available data in assessing trend changes in weavers' living standards,

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92. Table 8C

93. Tables 9A and 9B.

94. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 198.

95. If east coast prices for 1838 are expressed according to the 40 lb criterion for the Glasgow peck, then the prices of potatoes on the east coast of Scotland in that year were between 11½d and 1/5d per peck. Expressed as an annual average this would be 1/2¾ per peck.

particularly as some of the evidence spans the years which witnessed the sharpest falls in their wage rates. From such evidence, embodied in Table 9C, it is clear that in the crucial decade, 1810-19 no falls were recorded in the prices of a number of necessities. The main exception to this trend was salt herring, which experienced a twenty-five per cent price fall from 1810 to 1819, and tea, while in the cases of brown sugar and black tea, the only items for which this broken series is complete, average prices in the post-war period seem to have been slightly lower than in the pre-1815 era. Even so, for tea the difference is very small; for the item was selling in 1834 at the same price at which it sold in 1810. After 1819, the most significant drop in price was for salt herrings, although salt prices generally also experienced a sharp contraction. But to obtain an overall picture of the price shift over time for the more incidental commodities consumed by the weavers it is better to quote a contemporary estimate. In 1833 James Orr thought that the items of common consumption, excepting bread and oatmeal, at Paisley were ten per cent lower in price than they had been during the war years.[96] But to relate this observation to the standard of living question, it has to be remembered that for all fabrics wages fell at a much more rapid rate than these prices. Furthermore, it also seems likely that any further drop in these commodity prices in the decade after 1833 was more than outweighed by corresponding wage falls since by 1842 it was claimed that the Scottish handloom weavers were constantly on the verge of destitution.[97]

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96. Select Committee on Manufactures, Shipping and Commerce, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 669, q. 11225.

97. Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Scotland (presented to both Houses of Parliament), P.P., 1842 p. 173, p. 277.

TABLE 9C

Average Prices of Minor Items in Weavers' Diets, 1810-34

Year	Butter Milk per pint		Salt Herring per lb		Salt Ling per lb		Salt per lb		Black Tea per oz		Brown Sugar per lb		Town
	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	
1810	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	9	Glasgow
1811	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	8	"
1812	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5½	0	9	"
1813	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5	1	0	"
1814	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5½	0	10	"
1815	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	11	"
1816	0	1	0	3½	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	10	"
1817	0	1	0	3½	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	9	"
1818	0	1	0	3	0	3	0	2½	0	5	0	8	"
1819	0	1	0	3	0	3	0	2½	0	4	0	7	"
1826									0	5	0	8	Paisley
1827									0	5	0	8	"
1828									0	4¾	0	8	"
1829									0	4¾	0	8	"
1830									0	4¾	0.6 - 0.8		"
1831											0.6 - 0.8		"
1832									0	4½	0.6 - 0.8		"
1833									0	4¼	0.6 - 0.8		"
1834									0	4¼	0.6 - 0.8		"
1834	0	1	0	1½			0	0½	0	4½	0	6	Dundee
1834	0	1	0	1½			0	0½	0	5	0	7	Glasgow

SOURCES:

Cleland <u>Statistical Tables</u> (1823) <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 133

<u>Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1834, (556), X, p. 92, q. 1241.

After food the next greatest weekly cost to handloom weavers was rent. Though in the earlier, more prosperous era of the industry weavers actually owned their own houses, most by the 1830s rented their accommodation. In this respect the Airdrie weavers who in the 1830s still owned their homes and kailyards, were certainly an exception.[98] Some of the existing data on rents indicate that there was a noticeable decrease in amount laid out. For example in 1833 George Allen paid £5 for his year's rent in Glasgow, whereas in 1818 he had paid £7 for the same house.[99] His experience was corroborated in 1834 by James Orr who asserted that the lowering of rents had been of great advantage to the weavers.[100] In the same year, 1834, however, William Buchanan was firmly of the conviction that the fall in house rents was not proportionally as great as the fall in weavers' wage rates.[101] Other extant evidence on rent payment seems to vindicate Buchanan's claim. Although in the first and last years of the second decade of the nineteenth century the weekly rent for two-apartment houses in Glasgow was 1/11d and 1/9d respectively, it is unlikely that many weavers enjoyed the luxury of two-apartment houses.[102] One historian has convincingly argued that in the period 1810 to 1819 average weekly rents for Glasgow weavers would have been about 1/-.[103] Furthermore, evidence is available to show

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98. J.D. Knox, _op. cit._, p. 34.

99. _Select Committee on Manufactures, Shipping and Commerce_, _P.P._, 1833, (690), VI, p. 698, q. 11732.

100. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1834, (556), X, p. 94, q. 1253.

101. _Ibid._, p. 152, q. 1999.

102. Cleland, _Statistical Tables_ (1823), _op. cit._, p. 133.

103. Gourvish, _op. cit._, pp. 70-71.

conclusively that in money terms rentals paid by websters remained static until mid-century. Thus the weavers of Perth, Dundee[104] and Glasgow[105] all rented accommodation for 1/- per week. Later, in 1842, landlords at Pollokshaws were demanding approximately the same weekly sum in rentals from the websters of that locality.[106] Since rentals were static in money terms as wages fell, they clearly became a proportionally greater item in expenditure over the period.

But sketchy data apart, other indirect indicators also point to this trend increase, while they also show that the websters were subjected in this field to adverse pressures. Firstly, by the middle of the nineteenth century weavers had to pay rents at shorter intervals than had previously been the case. Landlords were now demanding fortnightly payments whereas at an earlier period they had been happy with monthly or half-yearly payments.[107] Secondly, over time the actual accommodation rented by handloom weavers deteriorated. Thus, even where rent falls were experienced by weavers this was sometimes because the lesser payments were for inferior homes. Thirdly, the practice of renting tied houses increased in the 1830s and 1840s. One of the reasons for this was that landlords could only be guaranteed rent payments if they were the first charge on weekly wages.[108] Fourthly, over time considerable evidence exists to show that more and more weavers were falling into arrears. In some cases non-

104. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 227, q. 3065; p. 238, q. 3249.

105. Ibid., p. 146, q.1912.

106. Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.

107. J. Miller, The Factors Contributing to the Decline of Hand Loom Weaving in the West of Scotland, B.A. Dissertation, Economic History Department, University of Strathclyde, (1971), p. 9.

108. Weavers' Journal, 1 Sept. 1836; 1 Nov. 1836.

payment among the weavers would mean that landlords were forced to accept lower rents or have unleased property on their hands.[109]

But whatever the trend in the cost to the weavers of renting accommodation, there is no doubt that there was no diminution over time in the amount of local taxes which the weavers were required to pay. With regional variations these rates included police dues, water rent, road money or statute labour dues, as well as poor rates. The best data available for the annual cost to the weavers of these items reveals that police dues stood at 5/-, road money 3/-, and poor rates 3/-, with an indeterminate sum for water rates.[110] These figures, which are for Paisley in 1834, suggest that the annual cost of local taxation was almost certainly in excess of 13/-. Although expressed as a weekly sum this was as low as 3d per week it was a significant extra cost when related to subsistence level budgets. Two further factors exacerbated the problem of local taxation for the Scottish handloom weavers and their families in the last two decades covered by this thesis. Firstly, they were not collected in small sums weekly or even monthly but annually. Thus weavers' families were expected at certain times of the year to pay out substantial portions of their meagre weekly incomes on local taxes. Secondly, by all accounts they were rigidly exacted.[111] It is not surprising,

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109. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 259, q. 3529.
Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.
Glasgow Courier, 9 May 1826.
Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), VII, p. 68, q. 722.

110. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 85, q. 1150.
Johnston, op. cit., p. 315.

111. Ibid., p. 83, q. 803.

therefore, that many weavers in the 1830s and 1840s found it difficult to pay these rates and this, in turn, led to protests or resistance against such levies. For instance, in 1849, a deputation of handloom weavers from Camlachie and Parkhead petitioned the Municipal Police Board of Glasgow, praying to be relieved of the payment of police and statute labour dues.[112] Fifteen years earlier, in 1834, it was claimed that at Calton the doors belonging to all the weavers in a particular street were bolted as soon as local rate collectors appeared there.[113] In Calton as elsewhere many were in arrears of payment of local taxes. Unfortunately, however, for the weaving population local authorities were less flexible in collecting rates arrears than landlords in accepting lower rents. In Glasgow in 1834, for example, it was not uncommon for goods to be impounded from the weavers for non-payment of rates, while at Paisley in 1843 the prison assessment (police rate) was so vigilantly collected that there were instances of shirts and petticoats being pawned to raise means for paying that levy.[114]

The remaining commodities which were essential, if small, weekly drains upon the weaver's purse were soap, coal and candles. Of these three, coal probably accounted for as much weekly as soap and candles together. From an average of 8½d per 1.2 cwt in 1810-12, (this was thought to be the weekly coal consumption of a weaver's family from 1810-1819) coal prices in Glasgow fell to 6½d for the same quantity

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112. Glasgow Herald, 18 May 1849
113. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), p. 53, q. 769.
114. Ibid., p. 57, q. 803; qq. 808-812.
Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), VII, p. 68, q. 726.

in 1819, and were to contract even further to 5½d or 5¾d by 1834.[115] Thereafter data on coal prices are unreliable as falling weekly expenditure on fuel reflects the consumption of less coal as much as a contraction in fuel costs. Assuming that each Glasgow weaver's family used half a pound of brown soap weekly, this quantity in 1810 cost 5d, a price which had fallen to 4½d in 1819.[116] The downward trend in soap prices probably continued unabated since at Paisley in 1826 the soft soap used by weavers' families retailed at 2½d per half pound.[117] Seven years later Paisley soap prices stood at 1½d per half pound.[118] After this date it would be expected that soap prices would continue in a downwards direction for in June 1833 duty on soap was reduced considerably.[119] Nevertheless, regional price variations remained, for in other major weaving areas in 1834 the cost of their weekly soap ration to weavers was considerably higher than that of their Paisley counterparts in 1833. At Dundee, for instance, soap still cost 3d per half pound while in Glasgow the same quantity was priced at 3½d.[120] Handloom weavers also purchased an average of half a pound of candles weekly, an item which during the Napoleonic War years cost from 5d to 7d.[121] By 1820 there was no significant diminution in the amount spent on lighting weavers' homes, but from 1830 to 1833 candles had fallen fairly rapidly in

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115. Cleland, <u>Statistical Tables</u>, (1823), <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 133.
Gourvish, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 79.
<u>Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1834, (556), X, p. 162, qq. 2117-2118.

116. Gourvish, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 79.

117. <u>Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1834, (556), X, p. 92, q. 1241.

118. <u>Ibid</u>.

119. <u>Ibid</u>.

120. <u>Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1834, (556), X, p. 238, q. 3249; p. 146, q. 1912.

121. <u>Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1833, (690), VII, p. 669, q. 11229.

price to 3¼d or 3½d.[122] Clearly over time fuel, lighting and cleanliness cost weavers' families sizeably less. In total the price of these items probably fell by thirty per cent to forty per cent from the 1790s to the mid-1830s. Yet this must be viewed against their relative unimportance in total weekly expenditure, and of course against the fact that in the same period most weavers' wages had fallen to a proportionately greater extent than these items.[123]

Several witnesses to parliamentary enquiries in the 1830s testified to the fact that most weavers' incomes by that date were expended totally on items of everyday need. By very definition, therefore, little was left for occasional purchases of other necessities. Thus, William Buchanan, in 1834, claimed that shoes and clothing could only be purchased at the expense of other basic items.[124] Hugh Mackenzie told the same enquiry that a great many weavers had no clothes apart from their working suits, and that weavers were very frequently clothed in rags.[125] Mackenzie was equally convinced that they were unable to buy new furniture. Weavers' homes were invariably poorly furnished.[126] Moreover, this was no new situation; for it has been convincingly demonstrated that the Scottish handloom weavers' economic position had fallen to this level of deprivation considerably earlier than 1834.[127] From 1815 onwards when

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122. Ibid. 123. Tables 8A, 8B, 8C, 9C.

124. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 147, qq. 1914-1915.

125. Ibid., p. 54, qq. 775-777.

126. Ibid., p. 41, q. 667.

127. Cleland, Statistical Tables (1823) op. cit., p. 133. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 79.

really sharp wage cuts were experienced, most weavers' expenditure was exclusively devoted to matters of immediate need.

Equally important in the context of this discussion it must be borne in mind that the meagre incomes of the Scottish handloom weavers were adversely affected by several other factors which meant that their purchasing power was lower than crude incomes/price data would suggest. One of the principal depressing influences was the pawnshop. Although there were some irregular unlicensed operators in Scotland in the late eighteenth century, it was not until 1813 that the first regular pawnbroker, John Graham, was in business in Glasgow. By 1820 there were six licensed pawnshops in that city.[128] By far the most important clients at the Glasgow shops in 1820 were the 'industrious poor', a category which undoubtedly would have included weavers. They pawned 'luxuries' such as bibles, umbrellas, watches and Waterloo medals, but mostly they pledged necessities such as clothes, bed linen and blankets.[129] In the decade which followed furniture and kitchen utensils were also handed over albeit not to the same scale as clothing. For example, in one Glasgow pawnshop investigated in 1836 it was found that bed and body clothes were nine times more numerous than all other articles put together.[130] Evidence from other sources demonstrates that this trend was mirrored

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128. P. Holt, Scottish Pawnshops 1792-1820 - A Note on a Neglected Index of the Condition of the Working Class, <u>Scottish Labour History Journal</u>, (1974), p. 31.

129. <u>Ibid</u>.

130. J.H.F. Brotherston, Observations on the Early Public Health Movement in Scotland, <u>London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Memoir</u> ', (1952), p. 54.

elsewhere.[131] Exactly where websters obtained the items pawned is somewhat obscure since they could no longer afford to purchase furniture or clothing. The most convincing explanations are that such items were inherited or had been in the weavers' homes for years as relics of a more prosperous era. This view is supported by the fact that most of the articles pledged were old. In any case, there is little doubt that over time the Scottish handloom weavers were making increasing use of pawnbroking facilities. At Paisley in 1833, for instance, and at Maybole in 1838 it was common practice for weavers to pawn their clothes at the beginning of the week and redeem them at the end, while at Glasgow in 1829 many weavers' houses were divest of furniture which had gone to the brokers.[132] But apart from the distressing effects of the privations suffered through having their best suits perpetually in pawn, the Scottish websters' purchasing power was substantially reduced through interest paid for redeeming articles. At Paisley, for example, the authorised interest rate charged by licensed brokers in 1843 was twenty per cent on sums under £2.2/- or fifteen per cent on higher sums.[133] The weavers would almost certainly have paid the higher rate.

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131. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, pp. 715-716; qq. 12001-12002.
Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843 (115), VII, p. vii, q. 560, q. 575.
Glasgow Evening Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer, 15 March 1832.

132. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 37-38.
Scotsman, 8 March 1829.

133. Report from the Royal Commission for inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws in Scotland, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, pp. 323-324.

Yet licensed brokers were very much in a minority in Scotland. In Glasgow in 1844 there were thirty licensed brokers but 'upwards' of 200 small unlicensed operators.[134] Indeed the increasing number of these 'wee pawns' over time, and particularly in the 1840s, is itself an indication that the working classes were making greater use of their services. It can reasonably be argued that the hand-loom weavers would have made greater use of these wee pawns than other more fortunate sections of the proletariat, and certainly their higher concentration in weaving centres like Calton, Anderston and Gorbals lends support to this contention.[135] Moreover, some of the practices of these less respectable brokers added greatly to the difficulties of their customers. Firstly, they were not in the habit of keeping books and thus there was no guarantee that articles pledged could be redeemed.[136] Indeed it was claimed that small brokers sold off articles irrespective of ownership.[137] Secondly, they were used by petty criminals for resetting purposes and among embezzled items accepted were bobbins of weft.[138] The temptation for some weavers to pawn their working material must have been great. Thirdly, interest rates charged by 'wee pawns' were completely unrestricted. Often these were as high as 1d per shilling per week which expressed as an annual rate represents the enormous interest rate of 433 per cent.[139] Moreover, local authorities had no control over

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134. _Ibid_. By 1850, however, it was alleged that there were as many as 800 of these 'wee pawns' in Glasgow. _Glasgow Saturday Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer_, 26 Jan. 1850.

135. In Calton there were about 137 small brokers while the figures for Anderston and Gorbals were forty-seven and sixty, respectively. _Ibid_.

136. _Ibid_., 2 Feb. 1850. 137. _Ibid_., 26 Jan. 1850. 138. _Ibid_.

139. _Supplement to Glasgow Argus_, 17 Jan. 1842. _Glasgow Saturday Post_ etc., 16 Feb. 1850.

the activities of small brokers until the Police Act of 1846, and even then their malpractices were not quickly or effectively curbed.[140] Obviously, therefore, the habit of pawning, especially with small brokers, had a considerable deflationary effect upon purchasing power. Sadly for the weavers this influence of the pawnshop increased over time as their wages continued to fall.

A second deleterious factor was the role played in the weavers' lives by credit. It is probable that weavers began to make extensive use of credit facilities in the post-1815 period. In support of this view it can be shown that the websters of rural Renfrewshire were heavily dependent upon credit by the mid-1820s.[141] A decade and a half later there can be little doubt that the practice of obtaining regular loans had become well established among a majority of the Scottish weaving population; by the mid-1830s it was claimed that weavers at Glasgow, Paisley, Dundee and Forfar were regularly in debt.[142] Money was often owed for doctors' fees, rent arrears or advances obtained from employers or their agents, although such is the paucity of evidence that it is impossible to ascertain what, if any, interest was charged upon these debts.[143] There were, however, two other sources of credit to which weavers increasingly resorted over time, and whose social effects upon weavers' families were more serious. The first of these were regular weekly advances from grocers. In 1836 at Kilmarnock, for example, as soon as wages

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140. Glasgow Saturday Post, etc., 2 Feb. 1850.

141. Glasgow Chronicle, 4 Feb. 1826.

142. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 177, q. 2331; p. 61, q. 858; p. 238, q. 3253; p. 259, q. 3538.

143. Ibid.

were obtained, weavers had first to pay their score at the shop from which they obtained their provisions, while at Paisley in 1835 weavers shopped where 'forehand money' was available.[144] Secondly, particularly in the 1840s, there was an increasing number of loan societies and credit clubs, both 'institutions for sucking the blood of the poor'.[145] Although there is again a scarcity of data on interest rates charged by grocers and credit societies, the fact that social commentators classified them along with pawnshops as social evils, indicates that they cost their debtors dearly.[146]

A third factor which depressed the Scottish weaver's real wages was the operation of the truck system. Despite legislation from 1830 onwards this system was not effectively brought to an end until long after the period under examination.[147] Basically 'truck' meant that employees had to purchase the necessities of life from a shop owned and controlled by their employers. Often these commodities were handed over in lieu of wages, and always they were sold at grossly inflated prices.[148] Although in 1830 Kirkman Findlay claimed that he had never heard of the truck system operating in Glasgow, Symons in 1838 discovered that some of the small corks of that city kept stores where weavers 'must buy what they want, often at a high rate.'[149] Furthermore, evidence from other areas in the west

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144. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xiii.
Weavers' Journal, 31 Dec. 1835.

145. W.E. Logan, The Moral Statistics of Glasgow in 1863, Glasgow, (1864), pp. 44-46.

146. Ibid.

147. Glasgow Chronicle, 8 Dec. 1830

148. Scots Times, 21 Dec. 1830.

149. Ibid.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1838, (195), XLII, p. 22.

of Scotland indicates that the truck system was fairly widespread in the region. For instance, at Maybole in 1829 weavers had to buy essential commodities from agents at prices laid down by the latter.[150] In 1832 at Kilsyth the practice was so common that the town's weavers seldom or ever handled 'the current coin of his own country, excepting at Whitsunday and Martinmas perhaps a little money may be advanced to lull the infuriated laird'.[151] In the same year, weaving agents at Ayr kept change-houses and grocers' shops, at which weavers had to accept most of their wages in goods as a condition of employment.[152] Some insight into the effect of trucking on the real wages of affected weavers may be gained from the fact that at Kilsyth the hucksters sold goods at prices twenty-five per cent above those paid in Glasgow for superior goods.[153] As elsewhere, the difference between market price and that paid in the truck shop was immense.[154] In addition, there is some fragmentary evidence to show that a system of house-trucking also operated in the west of Scotland. Under this latter system, inflated rents were deducted at source from weekly wages.[155]

The fourth influence which reduced the living standards of weavers below the level suggested by wage-price trends was the fact that the commodities which they bought were not quite of the quality which

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150. Handley, Irish in Scotland, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
151. Loyal Reformers' Gazette, 26 May 1832.
152. Reformers' Gazette, 14 July 1832.
153. Loyal Reformers' Gazette, 26 May 1832.
154. Scots Times, 21 Dec. 1830.
155. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1838, (195), XLII, p. 22.

they were supposed to be. The adulteration of food was not an uncommon practice in Scotland in the early nineteenth century. At Kilmarnock in 1817, for example, it was alleged that most dealers were deceiving the labouring population by selling meal of a very low quality at the current price for the best grades,[156] while the deceptions of the weaving hucksters of Kilsyth in this respect have already been referred to.[157] Occasionally instances of adding substances to food or drink were revealed. For instance, it was claimed that much of the ground coffee sold in Glasgow in 1832 contained about half its weight 'of some other vegetable production'.[158] Again in 1840, it was thought that beer which had not been adulterated was a rare commodity.[159] Though neither of these beverages ranked highly in weavers' diets the facts, nevertheless, illustrate the widespread nature of adulteration of working-class food and drink. Nor was this evil easily eradicated. In 1848 it was believed that 'the wicked and fraudulent adulteration of provisions has been going on in Glasgow as bad as it ever was,' although the hope was entertained that the practice would soon be brought to an end by the officers of Police under Captain Miller.[160]

The fifth and final factor which depressed weavers' real wages was the tendency over time for the purchasing habits of the Scottish

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156. Ayrshire Miscellany, 22 Aug. 1817.

157. Loyal Reformers' Gazette, 26 May 1832.

158. Radical Reformers Gazette, 24 Nov. 1832.

159. 'Grains of paradise, cocculus, indicus, nux vomica, henbane, broom tops, copperas, tobacco, sulphuric acid, are used in adulterating beer.'
Chartist Circular, 15 Aug. 1840.

160. Scotch Reformers Gazette, 8 July 1848.

handloom weavers, or their wives, to change. In the late eighteenth century it was quite common for handloom weavers in Glasgow to lay in as much meal, potatoes, cheese and butter at harvest time as would provide them with food until springtime. Meat was also salted for winter at Martinmas and coal was bought in large quantities.[161] Elsewhere in Scotland similar patterns of purchasing were followed in the 'Golden Age', although it is unlikely that many had organised themselves into victualling societies as the Fenwick Weavers Friendly Society had done. Here, bulk buying reduced the cost of staple foods and cut out middlemen's margins, so that weavers could buy these goods at lower prices.[162] But with falling wages a marked change occurred in this pattern. By 1834 Forfar weavers were obliged to buy food from day to day, and could never purchase more than a week's provisions at a time.[163] In 1842 a report from Bakers', Butchers' and provision shops at Cumnock claimed that purchases were made in small quantities, such as half-penny worths of sugar and tea.[164] In the same year at Pollokshaws supplies were procured for a single day's consumption, or even for a single meal.[165] Clearly, the overall effect of the trend change in the purchasing habits of the Scottish handloom weavers was to reduce already low real wages even further.

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161. Bythell, _Hand Loom Weavers_, _op_. _cit_., p. 94. Johnston, _op_. _cit_., p. 314.

162. Fenwick Weavers M.S., 9 Nov. 1769; 20 Feb. 1788; 1 Nov.1793.

163. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P_., 1834, (556), X, p. 259, q. 3541.

164. _Supplement to Glasgow Argus_, 17 Jan. 1842.

165. _Ibid_.

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The evidence thus far examined indicates that, although the price of necessities fell in the period 1790 to 1850, the contraction was not proportional to the downturn in the wage rates paid to most Scottish handloom weavers, with the possible exceptions of woollen weavers and those who wrought the very finest fabrics. Some of the major available data on wages and prices can be tabulated so that the fall in weavers' real incomes over time can be fairly precisely assessed (Tables 10A, B). These results indicate clearly that from 1816 to 1831 the real wages of Glasgow weavers contracted by approximately thirty per cent. Moreover, this contraction was subsequent to a previous cut back from 1790 to 1810 in the real wages of book muslin weavers, who formed an important sector of the Glasgow industry.[166] Post-1820 the real wages of cotton weavers contracted even further, apparently by another thirty-eight per cent by 1838.[167] Yet it is almost certain that if local prices were used instead of the general index of wholesale prices, then the fall in real wages would be greater still by 1838.[168] Qualitative as well as quantitative contemporary data also testify to a marked fall in real wages over the period 1790 to 1850. For example, in 1834 Hugh Mackenzie was certain that the diet and style of living of the Scottish weavers were extremely poor compared with what they had formerly been.[169] Two years later Sir John Maxwell stated that whereas in 1797 weavers earned 26/- or 27/- per week which

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166. Table 3.

167. Tables 7A and 7B.

168. Gourvish, op. cit., p. 65.

169. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 54, q. 770.

TABLE 10A

Real Wages for Glasgow Handloom Weaver, 1810-31

(1815-16 = 100)

Year	Money Wages per Week	Retail Prices in Glasgow	Real Wages (Glasgow Prices)
1810	134.5	100.9	132.5
1811	103.4	101.8	101.0
1812	117.2	113.2	102.9
1813	134.5	117.5	113.8
1814	134.5	106.1	126.0
1815	134.5	98.2	136.0
1816	65.5	101.8	64.0
1817	65.5	110.5	58.9
1818	91.4	102.6	88.5
1819	56.9	86.8	65.1
1822	56.9	81.6	69.3
1831	75.9	76.3	98.9

SOURCE:-

Gourvish, *op. cit.*, p. 72, p. 75.

TABLE 10B

Real Wages of Cotton Handloom Weavers, 1821-38

Year	Index of Wages of Cotton Weavers	Index of Wholesale Prices	Index of Real Wages
1821	100	100	100
1825	93	110	85
1830	62	86	72
1835	68	85	80
1838	55	89	62

SOURCE:-

Gaskin, *op. cit.*, p. 115

enabled them to purchase 281 lbs of flour, as well as the other necessities of life, by 1835 their wages were so reduced that they could only afford 81 lbs of flour, after other necessities had been purchased.[170] In addition, although the trend fall in linen weavers' real wages was small in relation to that in cottons, the real wages of the greater proportion who wove the former fabric in Scotland were by 1838, only slightly higher than those of their counterparts in cotton fabrics.[171]

Apart altogether from the sectoral trend in weavers' real incomes there can be little doubt that during the frequent slump periods which bedevilled the major sector of the industry money wages fell drastically, often accompanied by sizeable increases in the cost of necessities. Cyclical depressions, whose chronology have already been examined were characterised in the weaving trade by contracting piece rates and unemployment.[172] Indeed, there is no doubt that during slump periods, if left entirely to their own devices, starvation was a real possibility for affected websters and their families. Several factors increased this possibility. Firstly, when work was not available credit was withdrawn from the weavers. Nor could they resort to the pawnshop since with the deepening of the slump there was nothing - and this included necessary weaving equipment - left to pawn. Secondly, at periods of slack trade work was not available for other family members. Thus, total family incomes were reduced to a greater extent than simply the cut-

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170. Weavers' Journal, 30 Jan. 1836.

171. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 228, q. 3083; p. 471, qq. 5974-5976.

172. Chapter 1, ix.

back in the breadwinner's wage rate suggests. Thirdly, weavers and their dependents were more likely to be affected by epidemics during years of depression, thus reducing earning potential even further.[173] Finally, it is clear that during periods of slack trade food, the principal item of expenditure, tended to increase in price. Thus as weavers' total family incomes fell the amount required to feed them rose considerably.[174] (The means of avoiding starvation in such periods will be examined later.)

There are limitations, however, as to the usefulness of real income trends as a tool for the measurement of relative prosperity or poverty. In this more sensitive area it is therefore essential to supplement real income data by using two different approaches to the question. Firstly, the frequent, if qualitative, comments of interested contemporary observers give some insight into the pattern of weavers' living standards over time. Secondly, the techniques employed by the social analysts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be used to evaluate the extent of poverty prevailing among the Scottish handloom weavers.

Several witnesses called before the Parliamentary enquiries of the 1830s testified to the increasing misery of the weaving population of Scotland. Already it has been noted that by that date the incomes of many were so meagre as not to allow for expenditure on incidental necessities such as shoes, clothing and furniture, let alone any but the smallest weekly contributions to institutions like

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173. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 54.

174. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 463.
Treble, Irish in North of England, op. cit., p. 98.

friendly societies. But the evidence suggests that the privations suffered by the weavers and their families were much more serious than the lack of occasional essentials and relative luxuries would imply. In 1833, for example, Henry Houldsworth could only describe the position of the hand weavers generally as 'desperate' while in the same year the sufferings of the Paisley harness weavers were compared to those of the persecuted American Indians.[175] In the following year the Glasgow handloom weavers were alleged to have been in a state approaching starvation.[176] In 1836 reference was made to the 'severe, undeserved and protracted sufferings and privations' of the handloom weavers of Bridgeton.[177] Many examples of equally grinding poverty were also to be cited by the Assistant Commissioners in 1838 from widely scattered parts of Scotland.[178] By the early 1840s the condition of the Scottish weavers and their families had deteriorated even further. At Lanark, weavers who in 1842 had any children at all lived in 'misery and privation', while the Glasgow weavers 'constantly on the verge of destitution' readily identified with the poor element of that city.[179] Five years

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175. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 318,q. 5345.
Glasgow Evening Post, 23 March 1833

176. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 202, q. 2681

177. Glasgow Free Press, 18 March 1835

178. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1838, (195), XLII, p. 11; pp. 18-19; p. 24; p. 28
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P. 1838, (195), XLII, p. 188; p. 191

179. Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Scotland, directed to be made by the Poor Law Commissioners, July 1842, p. 240, p. 173

later, despite recovery from a cyclical downturn and brisk demand for tartan weavers, full-time work in that sector of the weaving trade did not afford sufficient remuneration, without supplementary earnings, for men in the prime of life.[180]

There is no doubt, therefore, that the last two decades covered by this thesis witnessed an increasing incidence of poverty and destitution, irrespective of cyclical fluctuations. However, precisely when the wages of the labour force had contracted relative to price falls to the point at which weavers suffered from poverty is not easy to ascertain. As early as 1812 the weavers of Glasgow and its neighbourhood complained of 'grievous sufferings and privations.'[181] Although it can be argued that the difficulties experienced in that year were largely the product of cyclical influences, yet it is likely that a few years after 1812, and particularly after the sharp wage cuts of 1815, some of the Scottish weavers' families began to experience poverty, even in years of reasonable trade. As far as periods of dull trade are concerned, there is little doubt that in every major slump from 1790 to 1850, including the frequent troughs of the 'Golden Age' period, some of the Scottish weavers were temporarily living in poverty or destitution.[182]

But contemporary judgements on poverty always contain a subjective element which means that the social historian must use them with care. More scientific means of defining poverty and thus enabling the historian to assess its extent were pioneered in the late nine-

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180. Glasgow Saturday Post, 28 Aug. 1847.

181. Glasgow Chronicle, 25 Jan. 1812.

182. Chapter I, ix.

teenth and early twentieth centuries by Charles Booth and Seehohm Rowntree, respectively. Briefly, Booth postulated the concept of a poverty line for a moderate-sized family. All families of that description whose incomes were below the income level stipulated by Booth, lived in poverty.[183] Shortly afterwards, Rowntree employed scientific evidence to determine exactly what the financial needs of the average-sized family were. From statistical data obtained from dieticians Rowntree ascertained the food requirements of each family member. Adding to the total cost of food a basic level of expenditure for rent, clothes and fuel, he was able to calculate the minimum weekly sum which enabled families to live in a state of physical efficiency. All moderately sized families whose aggregate incomes fell below this level were in a state of primary poverty.[184]

Primary poverty was primarily a function of income level. In other words the wages of all who came into this category could not guarantee them physical efficiency even if all their income was spent on necessities.[185] Rowntree, however, went on to define another category of poverty - secondary poverty - where wages were normally sufficient for physical efficiency, had some portion of income not been spent in an unscientific way. In this context unscientific expenditure meant some part of total family income had been disbursed on items other than the basic essentials, food, accommodation, fuel and clothes. Nonetheless, although these non-essentials could

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183. C. Booth, Labour and Life of the People, Vol. I, East London, London (1889), p. 131.

184. B. Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty A Study in Town Life, (2nd Edition, 1902), p. 86

185. Ibid.

include reckless spending on such things as excessive credit or alcoholic drink, they could also consist of useful payments made for such relative 'luxuries' as newspapers or contributions to friendly soccieties.[186] Since much of nineteenth century thinking was tainted with the prevailing notion that poverty was mainly the product of the misappropriation of income, through moral failure, Rowntree's differentiation between primary and secondary poverty is invaluable to the social historian in assessing the extent to which the difficulties of the Scottish handloom weavers and their families can be ascribed to low incomes and, conversely, how much of their poverty arose from the unscientific disbursement of total family incomes.

The most comprehensive evidence on the minimum requirements of Scottish handloom weavers again refers to 1834, when it was argued that for bare maintenance a weaver's family at Dundee, consisting of a man, wife and three children, needed 10/9d per week.[187] At Perth, a weaver, his wife and two children required 9/3d weekly, while at Glasgow in the same year the 'average' weaver's family needed a minimum of 7/0½d per week, differences in dietary patterns accounting for the discrepancy in minimum income needs between these two towns.[188] Assuming that these figures are reasonably accurate then a great many of the Scottish weavers' families by that date must have lived below the poverty line. For example, the Perth estimate made no allowance for rent, clothing, fuel or soap. Again, although the figure quoted for the Dundee family included a sum for rent payment,

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186. Ibid., pp. 86-87

187. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834 (556), X, p. 238, q. 3249.

188. Ibid., pp. 224-225, qq. 3016-3018; p. 146, q. 1912

most Dundee weavers by that date were seriously in arrears with their rents. Furthermore, there was no allowance made for clothing or shoes. In addition, James Buik who calculated the requirement level of the Dundee family quoted above, admitted that weavers' families who lived even at that minimum level of subsistence were already in debt.[189] No sum for shoes or clothing was included in the Glasgow estimate either.[190] But apart from the absence of these basic necessities, the dietary patterns of the weavers indicate that they lived below the poverty line in 1834. Only at Dundee, for instance, did the weavers enjoy the comparative luxury of wheaten bread. Elsewhere in fact no allowance was made for bread, weavers' families relying instead on oatmeal for their staple diet. Moreover, it seems that Glasgow weavers' families enjoyed no animal meat in their diets at all. Instead of meat they consumed a small quantity of herrings. And although both the Perth and Dundee estimates include 3½lbs and 3 lbs of beef respectively other evidence from these areas suggests that meat consumption was not common among weavers' families.[191] Certainly there had been an all round decline in the consumption of that commodity over time.[192] The pattern of expenditure

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189. Ibid., p. 238, qq. 3252-3253

190. Ibid., p. 147, q. 1914

191. James McEwan reported in 1834 that in Perth 'there are plenty of weavers who do not taste animal food in a month; they just have potatoes and a little milk; but I am saying barely what a man would absolutely need.' Ibid., p. 225, q. 3030.

Also in 1834, James Buik claimed that Dundee weavers, except the very best paid sector, who enjoyed the luxury of a diet with meat, were bankrupt. Ibid., p. 238, qq. 3252-3253.

192. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 329, q. 5519.

of the Scottish handloom weavers in 1834 points therefore increasingly to the conclusion that many lived in a state of primary poverty.

Data for weavers' wages in 1834 add considerable weight to this argument. Assuming that supplementary family incomes only marginally inflated the net wages of the handloom weavers, even on the harsh definitions of minimum subsistence levels laid down by contemporaries, the weekly incomes of a large portion of the Scottish weavers and their families were inadequate for physical efficiency. All who wrought plain cotton fabrics, for example, must be included in this category of primary poverty, as also must the weavers of some linen fabrics such as hessian sheeting and dowlas.[193] Indeed, wage rates indicate that few of the Scottish weavers, except those on woollens and fancy fabrics, would have been substantially removed from the primary poverty category in 1834. Finally, those weavers whose incomes were only slightly higher than subsistence levels for average families, of course, plunged below the poverty line if they had a large number of children. From this evidence it is reasonable to suggest that something in the region of half the Scottish hand weavers and their dependents lived in a state of primary poverty in 1834.

As it was determined primarily by total family income levels, the weavers who experienced primary poverty could do little to improve their condition. On the other hand secondary poverty was a state induced, not by low family incomes but, by imprudent budgeting. In this context it is clear that by far the most prominent

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193. Tables 7A and 7B.

of the items on which weavers improvidently disbursed their incomes was drink. There is little evidence that the Scottish handloom weavers indulged in gambling to any noticeable extent, while tobacco seems to have been but a minor element in weavers' weekly outlay.[194] Moreover, improvident spending was often accompanied by improvident habits. Some references were made by contemporaries to the poor managerial abilities of Irish house-wives, who by 1833 formed a substantial portion of all weavers' wives in Scotland.[195] That the weavers and their wives relied too heavily upon available credit facilities, which effectively reduced the purchasing power of their incomes, has already been demonstrated.[196] But when contemporaries alluded to moral failure as a causal factor of the weavers' distress, their overall propensity was to point to wasteful expenditure on alcoholic beverages.[197] The historian's task is, therefore, to ascertain to what extent poverty among those Scottish hand weavers, whose incomes would normally be above the poverty line, was self-induced, because of their liking for drink.

The weight of extant evidence points to an increasing consumption of alcohol by the Scottish handloom weavers over time, despite the simultaneous downward trend in total family incomes. In Glasgow, for example, it was claimed that the weavers took to ardent

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194. Considering the fact that many in the first half of the nineteenth century highlighted reckless expenditure as being the major cause of reducing working class families to destitution, there is a surprising lack of comments about either gambling or smoking among the weavers. They must therefore have been very minor 'vices', probably indulged in mainly in relation to drink.

195. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xiii.

196. Chapter 2, iv.

197. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, pp. 323-324.

spirits because excessive hours of toil deprived them of their 'rational amusement with their families'.[198] It can, however, be demonstrated that high consumption of alcohol among the Scottish weavers was not confined to those who lived below the poverty line, but that it was also an all too common practice, in 1834, of weavers who would otherwise not have experienced poverty. It was alleged, for example, in prominent centres of the better paid, fancy cotton trade such as Paisley, Kilbarchan and rural Ayrshire that the weavers there in the 1830s drank considerably more than they had consumed in an early, more prosperous era.[199] Although they had never been known for their abstemiousness, it seemed from contemporary comments that what had been an occasional occurrence in the 'Golden Age' had become 'a regular craving' by 1834.[200] The tendency to over-indulge in 'ardent spirits' was also reported to be on the increase by the 1830s among the better paid of the linen weavers on the east coast of Scotland. Here the rural out-workers, who were low paid, were generally of sober and industrious habits but in towns like Dundee, Arbroath, Aberdeen, Montrose and Kirkcaldy more and more weavers succumbed to whisky as a stimulant.[201] At Dundee, for instance, many weavers earning 15/- a week were in the habit of pawning clothes to obtain spirits.[202] Excessive drinking therefore was a phenomenon not

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198. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 111.

199. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 89, qq. 1204-1210
Weavers' Journal, 31 Dec. 1835

200. Aspinall, op. cit., p. 18
Blair, Paisley Shawl, op. cit., p. 21

201. Assistant Commissioners Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 187

202. Ibid., p. 187

associated solely with the low paid weavers who experienced primary poverty. For as one influential contemporary pointed out, high wages only led to an increased expenditure on drink.[203]

There is no doubt that weavers who chose this escape route had ample scope to exercise their predilections. In Glasgow in 1838 there was one spirit shop for every ten houses throughout the city, while in the same year the annual per capita consumption of spirits in Scotland was twenty-three pints; the respective figures for England and Ireland in 1838 were 7 $^{1}/9$th pints and thirteen pints per head.[204] Moreover, many weavers were so physically dissipated by poor nutritional standards that, it was alleged, they were inebriated by small quantities.[205] In addition, unlike most of Scotland's working classes, handloom weavers were not answerable to factory discipline. Since they could stop work, in theory at least, whenever they wished there was no necessity to adjust their drinking habits to rigid work schedules. Henry Houldsworth claimed in 1833 that spinners had to curb their drinking habits or they would be dismissed.[206] It can of course be argued that sheer necessity compelled weavers under the poverty line to work regular long hours in the same way as the factory bell imposed discipline upon industrial

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203. In 1826 Archibald Alison, Sheriff Depute of Lanarkshire, claimed that with improved wages the situation of labourers became even more destitute and the condition of their families more indigent, because all surplus wages were spent on drink.
First Report of Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 115, q. 1971.

204. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 52.

205. Symons, op. cit., p. 150

206. Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 314, q. 5279.

workers. But weavers whose potential earnings would put them above the poverty line were not regimented to regular habits of work to the same extent. Moreover, since better paid weavers tended to be subject to more frequent periods without work than the poverty-stricken co-workers, they were clearly in a better position to practise their improvident habits. Small savings which might have been accumulated during short periods of brisk trade, in addition to borrowed money, would tend to be spent in this socially harmful fashion.

It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that in 1834 many Scottish handloom weavers and their families were plunged into poverty, not because of the low levels of their wages, but through misappriation of that income. Though impossible to quantify with any degree of precision the total number of weavers' families who experienced poverty in the mid-1830s was considerably higher than the fifty per cent, approximately, who were in the primary poverty category. When the evidence for drinking habits is related to excessive reliance upon credit, and to the fact that wages in the fancy trade fluctuated to the point at which the best of managerial abilities on the part of the weavers' wives was severely taxed, it is not too unreasonable to assert that in 1834 another twenty per cent of Scottish weavers' families lived in secondary poverty, through the unscientific disbursement of income.[207]

Assessing the incidence of, and ascribing causes to, poverty in 1834 is a relatively easy task. In the previous and subsequent eras

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207. It is possible that by the 1830s the better paid weavers were the principal recipients of credit. Certainly by 1834 advances were no longer being given to the poorer weavers.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 60, q. 858.

the problem is much more formidable largely because of the paucity of evidence. In looking at these timespans it is perhaps more revealing to examine years of reasonable trade, since at the onset of cyclical depressions whole sectors of the handloom weavers and their families were undoubtedly submerged into primary poverty. This was the case even in the 'Golden Age' of the industry although apart from slumps it is very unlikely that many weavers experienced poverty in the period 1790-1810.[208] The absence of complaints from a relatively vocal sector of the working classes strongly indicates that most Scottish weavers and their families lived, for most of the time, above the poverty line during these two decades.

Recent research has ascertained fairly precisely what the expenditure pattern of handloom weavers in Glasgow was in the period 1810-1831. As in 1834 weavers' diets made no allowance for meat consumption and only for a small amount of the cheaper household bread.[209] And although it can be argued that such a dietary pattern, relying heavily upon oatmeal and potatoes, was determined primarily by consumer choice, it is more accurate to regard it as being imposed upon the weavers and their families by necessity. Firstly, in the decades previous to this period meat had been a regular item on the weavers' tables.[210] Secondly, in comparison to purchasing bread, the preparation of oatmeal was a time-consuming process.[211] Thirdly, available evidence on Glasgow weavers' wages in these years shows clearly that

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208. Chapter 1, iv

209. Gourvish, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., pp. 70-71

210. <u>Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland</u>, <u>P.P</u>., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 18.

211. Gourvish, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 70

they had little alternative but to accept the cheapest food available.[212] Even making no allowance for non-necessities the weekly financial requirements of Glasgow weavers' families were, especially after 1815, in excess of their wages.[213] Assuming that interregional food price differentials were not too great, and that low-paid weavers elsewhere in Scotland were forced to adopt similar dietary patterns to their Glasgow counterparts, then the evidence suggests that the families of all plain cotton and linen weavers after 1815 could only be spared from primary poverty by subsidiary family incomes. The fact that such income supplements were neither universal nor substantial has already been indicated.[214] Bearing these considerations in mind, a reasonable estimate of the number of weavers' families who experienced primary poverty after the sharp wage cuts in 1815 stands at something between a quarter and a third of the total.

The sharp contraction in wages, relative to prices from 1815 to 1834 meant that over time more and more weavers' families would have been included in the primary poverty category. But, simultaneously, the number of weavers' families who experienced poverty through adopting careless expenditure patterns increased over the period. This latter point can be fairly easily demonstrated. Firstly, with wage contractions, weavers' families depended to a greater extent than formerly upon credit facilities, and particularly on the pawn-

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212. Tables TA and 7B

213. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 146, q. 1912.

214. Chapter 2, ii.

shop. Secondly, there was an increasing proportion of Irishmen in the trade, and the managerial abilities of Irish wives were notoriously inadequate.[215] Thirdly, the two decades which followed the coming of peace in 1815 witnessed, according to many contemporary commentators, deteriorating habits of sobriety among the Scottish handloom weavers, which was not simply confined to the low-paid sections of the labour force.[216]

By the 1840s however the concepts of secondary poverty, as defined by Rowntree, was less applicable to Scottish handloom weavers and their dependents than it had been in 1834. The reason for this development was that, by the last decade covered by this thesis, almost all who depended for subsistence on the hand loom alone experienced primary poverty. The effect of a further decline in real incomes was that weavers and their families in the 1840s could only afford the barest modicum necessary for survival. In periods of slack trade those who depended on the hand loom certainly could not afford sufficient nourishment to keep them above starvation level. But deprivation was now also being experienced even in years of good trade. For example, at both Dundee and Paisley weavers' clothes had generally been reduced to rags by the 1840s, while in each of these

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215. Appendix G, State of Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xiii.

216. The available evidence seems to indicate that the 'moral' deterioration affecting weavers and their families accompanied the fall in living standards. Witnesses called before the parliamentary enquiries into the hand weaving trade in the 1830s were certainly under the impression that improvident habits had increased since the end of the French wars.

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 61, q. 861; p. 89, q.1207; p. 193, q.2544; p. 195, q.2568; p.228, q.3087; p.260, q.3549.

towns it was asserted that the inadequate footwear of weavers and their dependents, once worn out, could not be replaced. Again, in 1844, it was considered that the very minimum on which a weaver's family could live at Kilmarnock was 5/- to 6/-, a figure which exceeded the wage rate of many weavers still in the trade.[217] Underlying this point, some of those who commented on the appearance of weavers and their families in this decade referred to their emaciated condition. In addition, by the 1840s even contemporaries whose tendency was to analyse poverty in terms of moral failure admitted that the handloom weavers did not follow this broad pattern, since their destitution stemmed largely from inadequate wages.[218]

Equally important it seems that some of the practices of unscientific expenditure had lapsed by this time. For instance, weavers could not use pawnshops as many had nothing left to pawn, while there is evidence to show that, even before the 1840s, hand weavers and their wives were denied credit facilities on the grounds that they were bad risks.[219] Finally, the fact that there are very few

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217. Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.
Royal Commission on Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 711.

218. Ibid.
At Perth in 1844 the number of weavers 'who depreciate their own condition and neglect that of their families by an over-addiction to Scotland's skaith' was small. Instead, 'sobriety, frugality and decency of deportment' distinguished the working population of that town.
D. Peacock, Perth, Its Annals and Its Archives, Perth (1844), p. 513.
Logan, op. cit., p. 25

219. Paisley manufacturers in the 1840s preferred to send work to Ayrshire and rural areas of Renfrewshire than to Paisley weavers who needed implements and some advance payments. Paisley weavers were so notoriously improvident that they could not be trusted.
Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 633, q.114112.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 60, q.858.

references to intemperance among the Scottish weavers in the 1840s, would indicate that fewer families came to poverty through improvident habits. This above argument does not, of course, mean that there was no misappropriation of income in this decade. Rather it suggests that where available money was carelessly disbursed the destitution of affected families was seriously exacerbated. These families, however, were in poverty principally through inadequate incomes.

But it is certain that the number of weavers and their dependents who were under the poverty line at any point in time was appreciably smaller than the total number of families who experienced poverty at some stage in their lives. Each family unit, it can be argued, lived through phases of poverty and relative prosperity according to the ages of dependent members. According to this poverty-prosperity-poverty cycle, which again was outlined by Rowntree, children were born into poverty, a state in which they remained until they could start work and make contributions to total family incomes. Then, as long as they themselves remained unmarried their supplements to family incomes helped to raise themselves and their parents above the poverty line. When sons and daughters married, however, the loss of supplementary incomes meant that their parents relapsed into a state of poverty from which they could never recover. For a brief period after being married the combined incomes of husband and wife allowed them to enjoy a fleeting moment of comparative prosperity which terminated when they started raising a family. At that stage pregnancy and child rearing prevented weavers' wives from making effective contributions to total family incomes. Thus the family fell below the poverty line where they remained until their own offspring could

contribute to the family's common stock.[220] The historian must ascertain the extent to which this dynamic model of poverty is applicable to the case of the Scottish weavers and their dependents.

At the beginning it can be accepted that increasingly over time weavers' children in Scotland were born into a state of poverty. In the next phase of the cycle, however, it is difficult to ascertain how effective their contributions were in raising the family above the poverty line. They were certainly put to work at an early age, but this in no way guaranteed that family incomes were pooled. Indeed accusations of immorality and improvidence were levelled at younger weavers thus suggesting that income pooling may not everywhere have been the accepted norm.[221] Simultaneously weavers' wives could make contributions to aggregate family income. Although, as we have seen, adjustments to aggregate family incomes from supplementary earnings of this kind were, in the main, minimal, nonetheless some ascribed a significant role to these additions. According to Symons in 1838, weavers' children were a great asset to the family, particularly if employed at the loom.[222] Two years previously a contemporary, wondering how a weaver in Hamilton could support his family, could only conclude that he was spurred on by 'the hope of better days when his offspring will provide their mite to the family's common stock'.[223] By 1847 it was claimed that the only handloom weavers living in comfort were those whose children were grown

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220. Rowntree, _op. cit._, pp. 136-7.

221. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1834, (556), X, p. 41, q. 671; p. 81, q.859.

222. _Final Report of Royal Commissioners on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1841, (296), X, p. 45.

223. _Weavers' Journal_, 1 April 1836.

up and were in some occupational pursuit other than weaving.[224] Clearly, therefore, supplementary family incomes could either elevate some weavers' families above the poverty line or, alternatively, raise their living standards even if they were still in poverty. But this conclusion emerges from an examination of only incomes and ignores what is, at the same time, happening to the costs which weavers' families incurred. When it is remembered that as weavers' children advanced in years to the age at which they contributed effectively to total incomes they needed greater quantities of food and other essentials, then this phase of relative prosperity loses some of its lustre.

Although the offspring of weavers were, undoubtedly, set to the loom while they were still of tender years, this practice did not ensure that the parents enjoyed a longer than normal phase of income pooling, since it was counterbalanced by the propensity of the websters' children for early marriage.[225] Moreover, this propensity almost certainly extended phases of poverty both for parents and children. Firstly, parents were denied the benefits of income supplements at a fairly early period in their life cycle, and thus they plunged, long before the onset of old age, into a poverty from which they could not escape. Secondly, early marriage abruptly concluded the phase of relative prosperity which weavers' children had enjoyed in their parent's homes. For, since little financial preparation had often been made for marriage, the onset of pregnancy submerged all into poverty again. Indeed, it is possible that by marrying

224. Glasgow Examiner, 27 March 1847.

225. Final Report of Royal Commissioners on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 45.

early weavers' wives tended to have more children. Certainly a trend increase in the size of weavers' families was noted in the years leading up to 1838.[226]

The Scottish handloom weavers' lives, therefore, conformed broadly to Rowntree's concept of the poverty-prosperity-poverty cycle. The only significant divergence from the model suggests that the Scottish weavers and their families enjoyed prosperous phases to a lesser extent and for shorter duration than other sectors of the working classes. Conversely the websters and their dependents had to endure longer periods of deprivation. Furthermore, assessed from the viewpoint of a dynamic concept of poverty there was yet another way in which the handloom weavers suffered to an inordinate degree. For the poverty-prosperity-poverty cycle must also be related to the contours of cyclical economic fluctuations. When this exercise is carried out it is clear that some families who ought, according to the stage they had reached in the family cycle, to have been enjoying relative prosperity were plunged into poverty during the downswing of the trade cycles.

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One of the sources to which poverty-stricken handloom weavers and their families may have looked for alleviating their miserable condition was the Scottish Poor Law. For most of the 1790 to 1850 period poor relief in Scotland was organised on traditional lines; for it was only in the last five years of the timespan covered in this thesis that the amended Scottish Poor Law was in operation.

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226. Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832

Under the old Scottish Poor Law parishes in Scotland were divided into three types, burghal, rural, and a mixture of these two. In burghal parishes such as Glasgow and Paisley, the duty of providing funds and administering relief was imposed upon the magistrates of the burgh, though the ordinary management of the poor was generally devolved on a committee of managers. Nevertheless, only the burgh magistrates could apportion and levy the rates.[227] In rural parishes poor relief was administered and assessments imposed by a body composed of the kirk session and the heritors. At half yearly meetings this body assessed the parish according to the financial requirements necessary for supporting the poor. Where parishes were partly burghal and partly rural the administrative body consisted of the heritors and kirk session acting together with the burgh magistrates.[228]

It has been claimed that one of the principal features of this system was that, among all concerned with its operation, there was a distaste for assessments. The main reliance for provision of funds, it is argued, was on voluntary contributions from the public, principally in the form of church collections. Poor rates only became a compulsory levy when it was considered that voluntary contributions would fall short of the amount deemed necessary to support the poor. In support of this line of argument it has been asserted that even when deficiencies occurred, the heritors were so anxious to avoid the establishment of assessment that they sometimes made good the deficits themselves, in proportion to their valued rents.[229]

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227. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. iv.

228. Ibid.

229. Ibid., p. 25

Certainly the Scottish clergy under the influence of Thomas Chalmers, a vehement opponent of assessment, argued that assessment increased pauperism, since there was no reluctance among the poor to apply for relief in the assessed parishes, whereas in parishes relying on voluntary contributions, there were numerous instances 'of a most amiable and scrupulous delicacy in avoiding applications for parish relief'.[230] Despite this hostility, it is nonetheless clear that the practice of assessment increased over time especially in urban areas.[231] From 1818 to 1845, for example, the total number of assessed parishes in Scotland grew from 145 to 230.[232] On the other hand, however, although the practice was increasing, assessment by 1845 still only affected a minority of Scottish parishes. At that date there were another 640 depending entirely upon voluntary contributions to fund their poor relief operations.[233] Where this last situation obtained there was perhaps inevitably a tendency among authorities to employ financial stringency in the administration of relief.[234]

One partial consequence of this parsimony was that very poorly paid weavers could expect no aid from the Scottish Poor Law. Apart from periods of cyclical unemployment, one of the major problems facing weavers and their dependents was that they had to endure pro-

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230. Report of the Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on an Inquiry into the Management of the Poor, P.P., 1818, (358), V, p. 32.

231. R. Mitchison, The Making of the Old Scottish Poor Law, Past and Present, No. 63, (1974), pp. 58-59.
R.A. Cage, Debate: The Making of the Old Scottish Poor Law, Past and Present, No. 69, (1975), pp. 1160117.

232. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 68

233. Ibid. 234. Ibid.

tracted periods of deprivation when they clearly subsisted at levels below what informed contemporary opinion defined as a poverty line. In England, weavers whose total family incomes were below estimated subsistence levels sometimes received supplements from the poor rates. On the other hand all evidence seems to indicate that the Scottish websters and their families were less fortunate.[235] Except at times of exceptional distress there was no provision for the able-bodied poor in Scotland.

On the other hand, there were two distinct categories who were entitled to regular relief in Scotland before 1845. The first of these was the sick poor, 'cruiked folk, sick folk, impotent folk, and weak folk,' who on account of infirmity were incapable of working and earning a sufficient maintenance for themselves. The second group who were granted some form of relief were the elderly, described in terms of the Act of 1579 as 'aged, pure, impotent and decayed persons'.[236] In Scotland as a whole allowances were granted to the aged and infirm only after an assessment had been made of the 'character and known habits of the pauper'. Once they had been investigated by the kirk session the quantum and kind of allowance given to applicants would be decided.[237] In all cases, however, except instances of 'total and absolute destitution', the amount of aliment provided by the parish was inadequate.[238] Tradit-

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235. Bythell, English Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit. pp. 236-237.

236. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. iv.

237. Report of the Select Committee of Church of Scotland on the Poor, P.P., 1818, (358), V, p. 33

238. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), X, p. xiv.

ionally even the aged and sick poor were expected to procure a part of their sustenance either through their own efforts, from the assistance of relatives or the belevolence of their neighbours.[239] Not only, then, were allowances granted to the poor on the regular roll at such urban centres as Paisley, Kilmarnock and Gorbals parsimonious; throughout Scotland as a whole the provision made for the poor was considered to be insufficient in 1844.[240] Thus, for most of the 1790 to 1850 period, handloom weavers who were incapacitated through infirmity or old age lived at the very barest of subsistence levels. This applied whether they were relieved in their own homes or in one of the increasing numbers of poors' hospitals in the major urban centres.[241] Moreover, problems facing incapacitated websters undoubtedly increased over time. Since after 1815 most of the Scottish weavers had ceased to contribute to provident institutions, such as savings banks and friendly societies, they were increasingly compelled to resort to the Poor Law for relief during periods of prolonged illness, or in old age. Other misfortunates, moreover, were in the same category as the incapacitated; for in addition to the elderly and the sickly, widows and orphans were given barely enough to live on, even in rural parishes.[242]

Over and above the provision, albeit inadequate, made to the 'ordinary' poor, who were on the regular roll, the old Scottish Poor

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239. Report by a Select Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on the Management of the Poor, P.P., 1839, (177), XX, p. 8.

240. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 645, p. 795, p. 436, p. xiv.

241. Ibid., p. viii.

242. Smout, op. cit., p. 376

Law also gave assistance to the 'occasional' poor. What this tended to mean was that temporary aid was granted at the discretion of the kirk session during periods of chronic, short-term deprivation.[243] At Paisley, for example, although the larger proportion of the town's hospital distribution was to regular outdoor pensioners in 1844 there was also a great number obtaining short-term aid to combat temporary distress, while 'a considerable portion' of the outlay of the kirk session was to 'occasional' recipients of relief.[244] During such temporary periods of incapacity, often due to short-term illness, weavers and their families were entitled to some form of aid from the Poor Law. Medical relief normally took the form of establishing dispensaries or appointing doctors.[245] However, all available evidence indicates that such aid was piece-meal and only of short-term duration.

After extensive investigation it was concluded in 1844 that there was scarcely any provision made for medical relief out of the poor funds in Scotland, except at Glasgow and Greenock where medical men were appointed and paid by the managers of the poor.[246] But even where doctors were appointed to look after the most destitute cases, as at Gorbals, the practice was soon discontinued.[247] Clearly, therefore, weavers and their families obtained little by way of medical relief during periods of short-term illness from the unreformed Poor Law. Instead, such provision seems to have been

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243. Select Committee of General Assembly on the Poor, P.P., 1839, (177), XX, p. 7.

244. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 561, q.10315.

245. Ibid., p. xiii. 246. Ibid.

247. Ibid., p. 436.

left systematically to private charity.[248] Furthermore, and exacerbating their problems at such times no financial aid was available to those in temporary distress without a thorough investigation of the character of the applicants.[249] Only when all savings were exhausted, and no contributions from relatives or charities forthcoming, were weavers granted a pittance from poor funds. Not surprisingly, chronic deprivation during temporary illnesses had the effect of extending the duration of sickness. Visitations of fever and contagious diseases hit weaving centres with particular severity.[250]

Although the old Scottish Poor law did little to alleviate the chronic distress of the websters and their dependents during their lives, it did make provision to reduce the cost of dying; for one of the 'extraordinary' payments made under the unreformed system was for the funeral expenses of the poor.[251] The financial requirements for the burial of the totally destitute were defrayed out of the poor funds, though there was a general understanding that the kirk session or other managers of the poor were entitled to any effects which deceased paupers possessed.[252] Nevertheless, the surviving evidence clearly suggests that the Scottish handloom weavers, even in a period of unmitigated poverty, did all within their powers to avert, for themselves and their families, the stigma of the pauper's funeral. Hence, all but the destitute among the labour force still

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248. Ibid., xiii.

249. Select Committee of General Assembly on the Poor, P.P., 1839, 1839, (177), XX, p. 7.

250. Tindall, op. cit., p. 57.

251. Royal Commission on Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. xiii.

252. Ibid., p. xiv

continued to make minute contributions to funeral societies.[253] Indeed, long after they had ceased to belong to friendly societies and savings banks, important sections of the labour force continued to maintain their membership of the local burial club. Increasing poverty, however, was to mean that, over time, an increasing number of totally destitute websters were buried by the parish.[254]

The third incidental charge upon the poor fund before 1845 - the expense incurred in moving paupers back to their parish of settlement - certainly did nothing to alleviate weavers' sufferings. Each year considerable sums were spent on sending home English and Irish paupers as well as paupers belonging to other Scottish parishes in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other large towns and parishes.[255] However exactly what proportion of those removed in this way were handloom weavers and their dependents is impossible to ascertain. Certainly a fair proportion of the 208 who were struck off the relief list in Paisley in 1843 would have been weavers and their dependents.[256] They consisted of Irish men, women and children whose period of residence in that town was less than ten years. Nonetheless, as far as the destitute who were removed were concerned, this process did nothing to relieve their destitution. From being

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253. Minute Book of the Incorporation of Weavers of Calton and Blackfauld, Glasgow City Archives, T-TH5-3.
Minute Books of the Freemen Weavers of Calton 1786-1872, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

254. Ibid.

255. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. xiv.

256. Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843 (115), VII, p. 38, q.306.

paupers in one parish they became paupers in other Scottish parishes, or in Ireland, although there was no Irish Poor Law before 1838.[357]

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that neither the 'occasional' nor the 'ordinary' poor among the weaving population of Scotland could hope for any effective alleviation of their distressed state from the old Scottish Poor Law. Because of its antiquated character it became an obvious scapegoat for many contemporary problems, and a prolonged agitation for Poor Law reform culminated in the passing of the Act of 1845.[258] Since the amended Poor Law operated for only five years before 1850, and the numbers dependent upon the hand loom were dwindling rapidly by 1845, a detailed examination of all its features falls outwith the scope of this thesis. It should be pointed out, however, that in one important aspect - that is the policy adopted towards the able-bodied poor - there was no significant change since the pre-1845 era. The new Scottish Poor Law granted no more aid to either the 'ordinary' or the 'occasional' poor than its predecessor had done.[259]

Throughout the whole of the 1790-1850 period the Scottish handloom weavers and those who depended upon them were plagued by frequent bouts of unemployment.[260] During the frequent cyclical slumps many able-bodied weavers were totally destitute, while they could not look to the unreformed Scottish Poor Law for relief, since it made no provision for aiding the able-bodied poor. At such times

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357. C. Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9*, London, (1965), p. 25.

358. Brotherston, *op. cit.*, p. 69

359. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

360. Chapter I, ix.

starvation itself was only averted by the voluntary intervention of some local authorities, charitable societies and interested individuals, acting singly, or concertedly as *ad hoc* relief committees. The historian's task is to assess the extent to which these committees succeeded in alleviating the distress of weavers and their families during periods of unemployment.

Little direct evidence survives regarding the relief of the distressed in the five recessions which were experienced during the 'Golden Age', although during these decades the greater proportion of handloom weavers may have survived each crisis with the aid of payments from provident institutions, or on savings previously accumulated.[261] Yet it remains possible that even in these years of comparative prosperity the agencies of self-help did not give sufficient aid to distressed weavers. If the slump of 1801 was in any way typical of practice in the Golden Age, the 'famine and scarcity' which were menacing the lives of the poor - a category which in that year would certainly have included many handloom weavers - were only alleviated in Glasgow by an extensive system of soup kitchens. The effectiveness of these establishments, financed by public subscription and under the direction of the Lord Provost and Magistrates,[262] can only be guessed at; but it is worth noting that one writer was certain that they would 'defeat as much as possible the machinations of two such formidable contemporaries'[263]

During the first two visitations of serious unemployment in the

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261. *Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers*, *P.P.*, 1834, (556), X, p. 84, qq. 1129-1130; p. 96, q. 1291.

262. *Glasgow Advertizer*, 12 Jan. 1801.

263. *Ibid*.

hand weaving trade after 1815 soup kitchens were reverted to as a means of offsetting famine. For instance, a soup kitchen was set up at Calton in 1816 for the distressed weavers of Calton and Bridgton.[264] Again in 1819, kitchens were opened at Gorbals, in the Barony parish, and in the city of Glasgow. These depressions, however, witnessed the advent of a new departure for relieving poverty resulting from cyclical influences. Relief work was now being provided for the unemployed. In Glasgow in 1816 and early 1817 a total of 146 unemployed weavers were given work at 'levelling, turfing and building walks'.[265] At the same time it was proposed that unemployment among the operative weavers of Perth could be relieved by setting them the task of cultivating nearby wasteland.[266] Simultaneously 324 Glasgow weavers were engaged on improvement works on Glasgow Green,[267] while the destitute websters of Hamilton and Paisley were, respectively, employed on improving roads and cultivating moss ground.[268]

In contrast to the earlier period some assessment can be made of the effectiveness of these relief measures. It has already been argued that the maximum aid soup kitchens could provide was barely above starvation level. Moreover, in the years immediately after 1815 the stigma attached to this form of relief was such that

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264. Glasgow Chronicle, 3 Aug. 1816.

265. Ibid., 14 Aug. 1819.
Glasgow Herald, 13 Aug. 1819.

266. J. Cleland, Reports Respecting the Improvements in the Green of Glasgow, Glasgow, (1828), p. 3.
P. Baxter, Perth, its Weavers and Weaving, and the Weaver Incorporation of Perth, Perth, (1936), p. 214.

267. Glasgow Herald, 13 Aug. 1819.

268. Ibid., 2 Aug. 1819; 20 Aug. 1819.

some of the distressed weavers would not revert to them. At Calton in 1816, for instance, the opening of a soup kitchen was so unpopular that it provoked a riot which had to be put down by the military.[269] Again the quantity of soup allowed to Glasgow weavers in 1819 was certainly inadequate to sustain their families in a state of physical efficiency. For example, a weaver, his wife and two children were allowed six quarts of soup weekly, and for this a payment of 1/- had to be made. But not only was the amount of nourishment insufficient; many weavers were unable to meet even this meagre payment.[270]

However, available evidence suggests that those aided by the alternative system of relief works fared little better than their co-sufferers at the soup kitchens. As a means of alleviating distress, make-work programmes had serious drawbacks. Firstly, they were unsuitable for handloom weavers, many of whom were unable to perform outside work or tasks requiring much physical effort. Only adults in the prime of life could legitimately expect to participate in these schemes. Secondly, rates of pay at relief work were clearly inadequate to sustain physical efficiency. Those, for instance, employed on Glasgow Green in 1819 received 7/6d per week, if they had as many as three dependents. This sum fell well short of requirements for a subsistence level budget in the period 1810-31.[271] Furthermore with dearer food prices in 1819 the weavers' financial needs would have been greater than for most years in that period. But low wages for relief work was certainly not simply confined to

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269. <u>Glasgow Chronicle</u>, 3 Aug. 1816

270. <u>Glasgow Herald</u>, 20 Aug. 1819

271. Gourvish, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 79

Glasgow. In the same year in Edinburgh, one of the principles governing remuneration upon relief works, catering for that town's silk weavers, was that wages had to be under the general rate for unskilled labour.[272] It can be concluded, therefore, that although averting actual starvation neither of these schemes in 1819 raised any weavers or their families above the poverty line.

Between 1820 and 1845, another three major recessions necessitated extraordinary measures for relieving the unemployed. General and prolonged periods of unemployment affected the hand weaving industry in 1826, 1837 and 1841-43, while in 1831-32 there was considerable gloom in the trade at both Glasgow and Paisley. Yet, despite increasing experience in alleviating temporary distress among large numbers of the population various relief committees during these slumps applied, with minor modifications, the same relief mechanism which had been employed in the immediate post-war recessions.

The unprecedented distress of 1826 hit handloom weavers particularly severely.[273] In the face of such difficulties relief committees were established in many areas and subscriptions were raised for the support of the unemployed. Again the work of these committees was mainly restricted to the provision of work or soup to the destitute. There is little doubt, however, that the latter was still, even in the face of acute destitution, very unpopular. For example, a proposal to establish a soup kitchen at Paisley as late as 1829 met with considerable opposition. It was claimed that

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272. <u>Scotsman</u>, 29 April 1820

273. <u>Glasgow Herald</u>, 31 Mar. 1826; 29 May 1826
<u>Scots Times</u>, 1 Apr. 1826.

> unless he was actually dying for want, and if he once stooped to such degradation he [the recipient of relief from a soup kitchen] would never be able to hold up his head among his fellows.

Since no one but 'the low Irish and other dregs of society ... would take relief in this manner' those who organised relief in Paisley were implored to substitute relief work for soup kitchens.[274] This type of relief programme again, however, excluded substantial sectors of the weaving population. At Airdrie, for instance, there was a distinct preference for heads of families while those weavers who were not 'sober and industrious persons' were excluded.[275] Again, no weavers were eligible for relief work in Glasgow if they had not been resident in that city for one year, while at Pollokshaws in 1829 no 'juvenile weavers' could participate in make-work programmes.[276] Furthermore, if the principle of rewarding relief work at a less remunerative rate than general wages was again applied, relieved weavers would still be unable to sustain themselves or their families above the poverty line. Glasgow weavers in 1826 for example, were permitted to earn no more than 8d per day.[277]

The return of gloomy conditions in 1831-32 once more resulted in the institution of a basically similar programme. On this occasion, however, broth seems to have been a more acceptable form of relief, this fact in itself being possibly indicative of the sharp

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274. Glasgow Chronicle, 17 April 1829

275. J. Macarthur, New Monkland Parish; its History, Industries and People, Glasgow, (1890), p. 149

276. Glasgow Herald, 19 May, 1826
Glasgow Chronicle, 24 April 1829

277. Scots Times, 11 Feb. 1826

decline in weavers' status in the community. In Bridgeton, more than 600 people were sustained by a daily ration of soup for a period of thirteen weeks.[278] Significantly enough, none of the recipients of this form of relief in 1832 was seized by the prevailing cholera epidemic.[279] But in several respects Bridgeton weavers and their dependents were more fortunate than their counterparts elsewhere. For example, at Paisley the operations of the Supply Committee were seriously delayed while in nearby Kilbarchan nothing was done to alleviate the sufferings of that town's weavers until the 'most industrious and frugal' among them had been subjected to 'trials of the most disagreeable and sorrowful description'.[280] Again, the type of relief work eventually offered to the unemployed in Paisley and its vicinity in 1831-32 was scarcely suitable for weavers. Websters never adapted particularly well to outside work or labour requiring considerable physical strength and this problem was aggravated in 1831-32 since much of the distress occurred during winter months. Only a small proportion of unemployed weavers, therefore, took up stone-breaking in this period, since they were unable to withstand the rigours of the Scottish climate in that season.[281] There was, however, one significant departure in relief policy during this period of gloom. At both Paisley and Bridgeton some money was set aside for the purchase of blankets and for redeeming weavers' bed clothes from pawnshops.[282] This decision certainly reduced the pri-

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278. Glasgow Free Press, 2 June 1832
279. Ibid.
280. Glasgow Evening Post, 14 July 1832.
281. Ibid., 5 Nov. 1831; 12 Nov 1832
282. Glasgow Free Press, 2 June 1832
     Glasgow Evening Post, 15 March 1832

vations of some weavers' families although the fact that they were destitute of such necessities argues that there was a time lag between the onset of distress and the provision of any form of relief during which blankets and bedding had been sold or pawned to obtain food.

The by now traditional modes of granting relief were again implemented when many of the Scottish handloom weavers were thrown out of work in 1837. In such major weaving centres as Glasgow and Paisley, soup kitchens were quickly re-established, while in both towns as well as in other weaving areas relief work was again offered to ease the distress of weavers' families. Some unemployed Lanarkshire weavers, for example, took up employment in the Duke of Hamilton's colliery; work on railway construction was offered to the idle weavers of Dunfermline; while those without webs at Airdrie took part in local road construction programmes.[283] Meanwhile the Glasgow Relief Committee organised relief work in the form of preparing road metal, and provided a considerable number of relief webs for the indigent weavers of the city.[284] Again, however, it seems that not all weavers benefited from these schemes. For instance the Glasgow Relief Committee was implored to relieve only 'honest, industrious and ingenious tradesmen' who had been resident in the city for more than a year.[285] Any weavers who displayed any form of moral failure were to be rigidly excluded. Furthermore, the types

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283. Ibid., 22 April 1837
Glasgow Argus, 27 July 1837
J. Knox, Airdrie, a Historical Sketch, Airdrie, (1921) p. 68.

284. Glasgow Herald, 22 May 1837

285. Glasgow Argus, 22 May 1837

of relief work made available at Dunfermline, Hamilton and Airdrie were entirely unsuitable for all except a small proportion of the workforce who were in the prime of life. In addition, the practice of granting relief webs to the unemployed not only harmed the trade; it also meant that rates of pay for these webs were lower than prevailing piece-rates in each of these localities. Weekly relief rates paid to the unemployed weavers of Douglas were 6/- for married men, 5/- for unmarried men, and 4/- for apprentices aged from fourteen to eighteen years.[286] Again, there were delays before any relief measures were provided. At Paisley, for instance, it was decided that no provision for the unemployed could be made until all the funds of the weavers' union were exhausted.[287] Some weavers also had to wait for relief until funds which were raised nationally could be channelled to the areas of need. Finally, in 1837 it seems that there were some weavers' families who had to rely entirely on charity for relieving their distressed condition. The websters of Balfron, for example, who were 'reduced to a situation of want bordering on starvation', were assisted by a £10 donation from William Forbes, MP for Stirlingshire.[288] At Airdrie too many weavers depended upon the 'generosity of the affluent'.[289] Obviously, therefore, the extraordinary relief committees of 1837 were a long way from including all unemployed weavers within their remit, while the amount of relief provided was again insufficient to raise weavers' families above the poverty line.

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286. Glasgow Herald, 28 April 1837

287. Ibid., 15 May 1837
Glasgow Evening Post, 8 April 1837

288. Glasgow Herald, 23 June 1837

289. Ibid., 15 May 1837

The years 1841 and 1842 witnessed the return of high levels of unemployment to many of the Scottish handloom weavers. Moreover, the difficulties on this occasion were not restricted to the cotton weavers of the west of Scotland; the linen websters of the east were also to be badly hit. It was at Paisley, the centre of the cotton fancy trade, however, that the greatest proportion of weavers were without work. Furthermore, because of local circumstances unemployment in that town was to be of longer duration than elsewhere. Nonetheless, when confronted with a major crisis, familiar methods of alleviating the distress of the unemployed were again introduced in Paisley and elsewhere. For example, idle weavers in the vicinity of Douglas were given work by Lord Douglas,[290] and soup kitchens were set up at Johnston and Kilsyth, while the unemployed weavers of Dunfermline who had no other means of relief were given rations of oatmeal and potatoes.[291] Although, however, there is little indication of the effectiveness with which these measures diminished the distress of weavers' families generally, there is no reason to believe that they reduced their sufferings to any greater extent than the same measures had done in previous recessions. The Glasgow Relief Committee, for instance, had to raise their residence qualification from one year to three years while it had great difficulty in finding profitable work for the unemployed. Stone-breaking - one of the principal palliatives - still remained unpopular and poorly paid.[292] Furthermore, there is good reason to believe that the performance of relief com-

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290. Ibid., 18 July 1842.

291. Glasgow Chronicle, 18 Feb. 1842, 7 March 1842.
Glasgow Herald, 2 Jan. 1843.

292. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 141.

mittees in Paisley, from 1841 to 1843, was no more impressive than that of their Glasgow counterparts.

A series of failures in Paisley, partly caused by the depression of the town's weaving trade, culminated in the bankruptcy of the municipal corporation which brought ruin to many small investors while further losses were incurred by the failure of the Cart Navigation Trust. One important sequel to these disasters was that many friendly societies to whom the provident among the workforce had looked for assistance at times of distress had themselves failed. In the wake, therefore, of the destruction of these bastions of self-help, extraordinary measures were again called for.[293] The nature of the subsequent response of the local community to the chronic needs of the unemployed operatives, most of whom were weavers, can be classified under two broad headings. Firstly, a Manufacturers' Relief Committee was established in November 1841 with the aim of giving out relief webs to distressed weavers.[294] Secondly, a General Relief Committee was set up whose purpose was to provide work for destitute weavers who were not employed by the Manufacturers' Committee.[295]

It is fairly clear, however, that neither of these bodies began to operate until destitution among the handloom weavers of Paisley had already reached unprecedented levels. Local funds were soon exhausted and once more funds raised nationally had to be directed to the distressed town.[296] Indeed, the existence of a lag between

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293. Ibid., p. 143.

294. Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), VII, p. 5, qq. 30-31.

295. Ibid., p. 4.

296. Ibid., p. 74, p. vii.

the onset of distress and the provision of relief can be simply demonstrated by the fact that early in the recession Paisley weavers were forced to sell or pawn harnesses, mountings and other equipment necessary for weaving fancy goods.[297] Moreover, the operations of both committees were bedevilled by a lack of funds. In fact, one indirect indicator of their failure to alleviate the distress in a comprehensive fashion is the marked increase in public begging which took place in Paisley during these years.[298] Wage rates paid by the Manufacturers' Relief Committee, for example, were so low that even destitute weavers displayed a reluctance to accept their webs, while the species of outdoor labour provided by the General Relief Committee was again one to which only a few weavers could adapt.[299] In addition, greater restrictions were imposed upon the receipt of relief by this General Committee than had been the case with its predecessors elsewhere in Scotland. For instance, all weavers and their dependents who had not been resident in Paisley for ten years were not eligible for aid, while it systematically refused to grant any assistance to single weavers under seventeen years of age.[300] A further adverse factor affecting destitute websters was that this type of relief granted was also unsuitable as it encouraged improvident habits. Assistance given from stores by a system of tickets came under heavy criticism, as spirits could be

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297. _Ibid._, p. 17
Glasgow Chronicle, 6 March 1843

298. _Select Committee on Distress in Paisley_, _P.P._, 1843, (115), VII, p. x.

299. Gaskin, _op. cit._, pp. 144-145

300. _Select Committee on Distress in Paisley_, _P.P._, 1843, (115), VII, p. iv; p. lx.

purchased instead of food.[301] Overall, however, it is certain that the amount of assistance granted was insufficient for raising its recipient or his family above the poverty line. Certainly the few who were given money as relief - ranging from 1d to 3d per day - could only live at the very barest of subsistence levels.[302]

The last serious recession in the Scottish hand loom weaving trade in the first half of the nineteenth century began in 1847 and culminated in very high levels of unemployment among the remaining workforce in 1848. Although since the preceding slump the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1845 had produced in its wake prolonged and acrimonious controversy in the Scottish law courts over the rights of the able-bodied poor to relief from the Poor Law at times of unemployment, it seems that distressed weavers were once again largely assisted by extraordinary relief committees in the 1847-48 trough. For Relief Committees were once more established at Airdrie, Kilmarnock, Paisley and Glasgow.[303] Linked with these bodies, the standard relief mechanisms of soup kitchens and make-work programmes were again applied, although the stigma attached to the former method of giving relief still remained. For example it was claimed in November 1847 at Paisley that if relief was given in 'soup and such eleemosynary gifts only, the most deserving and spirited portion of those in want are essentially denied all aid.'[304]

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301. Ibid., p. 17; p. 28; p. 62.

302. '... three pence a day to each individual on one limited list, and three half-pence and one penny a day to by far the greater portion of the recipients' Ibid., p.x; p. 53.

303. Glasgow Herald, 6 March 1848.
Glasgow Saturday Post, 19 July 1847; 22 Jan. 1848; 5 Feb. 1848.

304. Glasgow Herald, 22 Nov. 1847

Despite this, the soup kitchen system was adhered to at Paisley throughout the winter, although by February 1848 complaints were voiced regarding the quality of the broth distributed. One commentator asserted that it was not fit for consumption by pigs, while another 'defied any man to find [in it] a piece of beef the size of a bean' and claimed that it degraded not just the recipient but also the donor.[305] Nonetheless, for at least part of the 1847-48 winter a total of 2,761 portions of soup was being distributed daily.[306]

Nor were the relief work programmes any more successful than their forerunners. Lack of funds again limited the amounts which could be given out in payment for relief work,[307] while the types of relief work offered to the idle consisted either of outdoor labour or weaving.[308] Unemployed weavers at Glasgow and Kilmarnock for example were once more employed upon stone-breaking.[309] But as on former occasions relief webs were offered as an alternative to outdoor labour. Almost 1,000 of the unemployed operatives of Glasgow received webs from the Glasgow Relief Committee in March 1848, although the level of remuneration, three farthings per yard, was a wage rate which was considered 'insulting to humanity'.[310] Finally, if the actions of the Glasgow Committee mirrored those in

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305. Glasgow Saturday Post, 12 Feb. 1848.

306. Ibid., 27 Nov. 1847.

307. Ibid., 22 Jan. 1848.

308. Glasgow Herald, 21 July 1848.
Glasgow Saturday Post, 22 Jan. 1848; 29 April 1848.

309. Ibid., 22 Jan. 1848
Glasgow Herald, 6 March 1848.

310. Ibid., 13 March 1848.
Glasgow Saturday Post, 19 Feb. 1848.

other weaving areas, then it seems that many were excluded from receiving assistance altogether. In Glasgow many of the unemployed, including handloom weavers, were disqualified from all forms of assistance for a variety of reasons.[311] It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that exceptional relief committees failed consistently to tackle, in the comprehensive manner required, the fundamental socio-economic problems which faced the weaving community at times of cyclical depression.

Paucity of evidence makes it difficult to estimate the success of occasional relief measures in minor weaving centres which also suffered from cyclical dullnesses. Village soup kitchens were set up in such centres as Kirkintilloch, for example, though their acceptability to the unemployed weavers of the area and their effectiveness in reducing their sufferings cannot be adequately evaluated. It is clear, however, that respectable weavers boycotted the soup kitchens established for their benefit at Kilmarnock in 1842.[312] Again if in the Ayrshire villages of Saltcoats, Stevenston and Maybole a variety of outdoor labour and relief webs were granted for reducing the prevailing distress among the weavers in April 1848,[313] it is certain that there were other rural weaving areas such as Fenwick where no such provisions were made. Nor was any aid forthcoming from the Poor Law authorities.[314] On the other hand, exactly how many unemployed weavers in villages like Fenwick obtained temporary work in other pursuits, for example as agricultural

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311. Glasgow Herald, 25 Feb. 1848
312. Gaskin, op. cit., pp. 148-150
313. Glasgow Herald, 17 April 1848
314. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 150

labourers, cannot be ascertained although the fact that rural weavers did survive prolonged periods of depression indicates that it was at best a short-lived palliative. It is also possible that the extended family system operated in such areas which meant that at times of difficulty weavers may have had recourse to the assistance of relatives. It could also be argued that rural websters grew some of their own food. But making the maximum allowance for these facts, there is no reason to suppose that weavers in rural areas fared any better during slump periods than their urban counterparts.

Contemporaries, however, did not regard either exceptional relief committees or the Scottish Poor Laws as the most desirable mechanisms for the alleviation of distress. Instead, prevailing opinion in the nineteenth century stressed the importance of making preparations for bad times. It was argued that operatives throughout their working lives should set aside some money which could be used to offset periods of distress caused by ill-health, unemployment or old age. Since it is known that many handloom weavers in the early and relatively prosperous phase of the industry in Scotland practised these virtues of thrift and self-help, then the historian must ascertain firstly, to what extent these practices were sustained over the 1780-1850 period as a whole, and secondly, the effectiveness or otherwise of self-help (or provident) institutions in alleviating either sectoral or cyclical distress in these years.

Pre-eminent among these bodies were the friendly societies. According to later reports most Scottish handloom weavers were members of such associations during the 'Golden Age' of the

industry.[315] The preamble to the articles and regulations of the Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society, instituted in 1781, stated that the -

> Society extends her beneficent hand; supplies the wants, alleviates the sufferings, and sheds a radiance over the lonely hours of distress; and when life's conflict is over, she continues to minister to the victims of Death, by contributing to the obsequies of the tomb. 316

For these benefits contributions of 4/- per annum had to be paid. Even then, however, the level of benefits in the 'Golden Age' to distressed weavers only covered in a partial fashion all their needs. In 1796, for example, the weekly payment made to a member 'in distress' was 1/6d. A similar sum was paid in 1798 as 'walking about aliment' to a sick weaver while 'bed fast element' was disbursed at the rate of 2/6d per week.[317] Nor could weavers' widows subsist solely on friendly society income, since in 1797 widows were allowed only 30/- per annum. Even at this early stage the most generous allowance was reserved for funeral expenses. For example, in 1797 the sum of 20/- was paid to widow Ralston to defray expenses connected with her husband's interment.[318] Just how typical the Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society was of weavers' friendly societies generally in these early years cannot be ascertained precisely. Certainly a similar society in the village of Fenwick with a membership fee of 2/6d per annum, also disbursed small sums to weavers who were

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315. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 364, qq. 6495-6496.

316. Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society Minute Books, Airdrie Burgh Library, Vol. I, Articles and Regulations.

317. Ibid., Vol. 5, 7 Jan. 1796; 6 Sept. 1798; wo Sept. 1798.

318. Ibid., Vol. 5, 13 Sept. 1795.

ill or in distress, and to widows, though the amount of the sum was at the discretion of that society's committee.[319] But in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, and since the Airdrie Society was considered to be one of the most successful among the Scottish websters, it can only be concluded that even in the 'Golden Age' the benefits from these societies - in the absence of other sources of income - would leave dependent weavers and their families below the poverty line.[320]

Accompanying the post-1815 fall in wage rates, however, there was a distinct tendency for membership of friendly societies to be a less common practice among the Scottish workforce. By 1834, for example, contracting wages and increased contributions had considerably reduced the memberships of Paisley weavers' friendly societies.[321] A decade later, although there were still thirty-six nominal friendly societies in that town, more than half of this total were dissolved or bankrupt.[322] Available data for Strathaven reveal a fundamentally similar pattern. The number of weavers in that village who were friendly society members fell from 370 in 1818 to 150 twenty years later.[323] Paisley and Strathaven, however, were weaving

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319. Fenwick Weavers' Society Record Book 1761-1873, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 4702(1).

320. The weekly aliment paid out by the Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society, even to 'bed fast' claimants in 1797 was only about twenty per cent of the amount which could be earned by independent hand weavers on book muslins.
Burns, _op. cit._, p. 37.

321. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1834, (556), X, p. 84, qq. 1129-1130.

322. _Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws_, _P.P._, 1844, (557), XX, p. 565, q. 10343.

323. _Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland_, _P.P._, 1839, (195), XLII, p. 8.

areas where relatively highly-paid fabrics were worked. By the late 1830s weavers' friendly societies had disappeared almost entirely from plain cotton weaving areas, while there were many linen weavers who had also severed their link with these societies by that point in time.[324] Lawrence Don, for instance, claimed that it was impossible for weavers in Aberdeen to contribute towards the town's friendly societies in 1834.[325] Where weavers' friendly societies did survive until mid-century, as at Forfar, their annual expenditure tended to be in excess of their current subscription income and they remained in business solely on the strength of funds accumulated in an earlier, more prosperous era.[326]

But even when they continued to exist after 1815 their benefits were limited both in range and amount. In 1828 'bedfast aliment' was paid at Airdrie at 4/- per week and 'walking about aliment at 2/6d weekly, while superannuated weavers received £1 10/- per annum. £1 was paid out for funeral expenses.[327] However, there was a time limit after which sick payments ceased. And, although these payments, rather surprisingly, represent sizeable increases on the amounts of aliment granted in the 'Golden Age', this is a reflection on the notoriously poor actuarial practices of friendly societies rather than an indication of financial strength.[328] It is clear,

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324. Ibid., p. 23.

325. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 472, q. 60000.

326. Annual Statement, Forfar Weavers' Friendly Society, 1852, Scottish Record Office, (W.R.H.), FS 1/12/26.

327. Airdrie Weavers' Friendly Society Minute Books, Airdrie Burgh Library, Vol. 7, 28 May 1828

328. J.H. Treble, The Attitudes of Friendly Societies Towards the Movement in Great Britain for State Pensions, 1878-1908, International Review of Social History, Vol. XV, (1970), pp. 278-279.
J.H. Treble, The Attitude of the Roman Catholic Church

therefore, that weavers' families could only subsist with great difficulty if they solely depended on such payments when the head of the household was affected by ill-health, while the aged and infirm members could almost certainly not survive simply on the 7d per week which they obtained from the society. It is, of course, true that towards mid-century some societies were paying out more in real terms than the Airdrie Society in 1828; but the actual sums allowed were, nonetheless, still insufficient to maintain families in a condition other than primary poverty. In 1848, for instance, the maximum aliment paid out by the Ceres Weavers' Friendly Society was 4/- per week. In numerical terms, however, the majority of its allowances were for sums of 3/-, 2/- and 1/-.[329] Finally it should be borne in mind that weavers who still struggled to maintain friendly society membership were often adversely affected by a series of largely exogenous constraints. Firstly, where bankruptcies took place, weavers were deprived entirely of aid for which they had already contributed.[330] Secondly, there is some evidence to show that cut-backs in allowances coincided with cyclical slumps.[331] Thirdly there are no indications of unemployment payments ever having been made to Scottish handloom weavers during the frequent periods of cyclical distress.

Almost inseparable from the friendly societies were funeral

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towards Trade Unionism in the North of England, 1833-1842, Northern History, Vol. V, (1970), p. 109.

329. Ceres Weavers' Friendly Society, Scottish Record Office, (W.R.H.), FS 1/11/4.

330. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 565, q. 10343.

331. Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115) VII, p. vii; p. 69, q. 732; p. 101, q. 1081.

societies which for small contributions financed all expenditure associated with the burial of members and their dependents. Some funeral societies, like the Freemen Weavers of Calton, bought their own part of a burial ground. Nonetheless, their activities were not solely restricted to interment; for on occasions they also performed some of the other normal functions of provident institutions. For example, the Calton Society sometimes gave aid to widows and elderly members, while occasional donations were also made to the poor of the parish.[332] It can, in fact, be argued that other weavers' funeral societies, which survived the demise of their friendly societies, operated along basically similar lines.[333] On the whole, however, it is clear that such assistance was rarely given and then only in small amounts.[334] As such they did little to alleviate any more than a small minority of the distressed weavers of a given district. Indeed, to put this form of supplementation in perspective, it must be remembered that over time an increasing number of weavers' funeral societies were incapable of performing their primary function of defraying the burial expenses of their members.

But self-help, of course, took other forms. Weavers might deposit some of their earnings in savings banks, so that a limited supply of money would be available when unemployment struck. As in the case of friendly societies, later commentators implied that during the 'Golden Age' of the industry weavers had made extensive use

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332. Minute Book of the Freemen Weavers of Calton 1786-1872, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

333. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 23.

334. Minute Book of the Freemen Weavers of Calton 1786-1872, 3 Nov. 1830; 1 Aug. 1845; 5 May 1848.

of this type of institution.[335] Indeed, even after the downturn in wages it was claimed that Scottish websters continued to husband some of their earnings through this channel. Airdrie weavers for example were closely associated with the Airdrie Savings Bank from its opening in 1835, while small deposits from handloom weavers can be traced in savings banks at both Glasgow and Paisley as late as the 1840s.[336] Nonetheless, there are clear indications that these practices were exceptional in the post-1815 period. In 1834, for instance, Lawrence Don did not think that Aberdeen weavers had any money on deposit, while James Orr considered that the same state of affairs was mirrored in Paisley.[337] Rather, then, than accepting the assertion, made a decade later, that Paisley weavers made no use of savings banks fearing that employers might discover the amounts of their deposits, and consequently lower wage rates, as being true,[338] the historian should attach greater weight to a claim in 1844 that Paisley weavers were unable to make any savings out of current income.[339] Viewed overall, the point must be underlined that the number of deposits made by handloom weavers were very small in relation to the size of the workforce. At Paisley in 1840 only 149 weavers out of a total weaving force of approximately 5,500 had accounts with the Paisley National Savings Bank,

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335. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557) XX, p. 565, q. 10343.

336. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 45.
Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842
Glasgow Herald, 28 Dec 1849.

337. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 472, q. 6001; p. 84, q. 1131.

338. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), X, p. 565, q. 10343

339. Ibid.

which was the institution used mainly by the working class of that town.[340] Again, in 1849 only ninety-two handloom weavers had any funds lodged with the National Security Savings Bank of Glasgow.[341] It can, furthermore, be argued that existing deposits came either from master weavers or from websters who were at these points in time enjoying the prosperity phase in the poverty-prosperity-poverty cycle. Apart from these, and adding a few well-paid weavers in the east of Scotland fancy linen sector and a section of the woollen weavers of the Borders, few Scottish handloom weavers had any contacts with such institutions in the post 1815 world. As agencies of self-help they attracted little support from the weaving community in their protracted period of decline.[342]

Another self-help institution utilized by a section of the Scottish workforce in the eighteenth century had been the co-operative society. Briefly the principle on which these co-operatives operated was that supplies were bought in bulk by the society, so that the need for the services of middlemen was consequently removed. Paisley weavers, for example, purchased their food directly from local farmers in the early years of the weaving trade in that town.[343] On occasions, however, it is difficult to separate these early co-operative societies from weavers' friendly societies. The Fenwick Weavers' Friendly Society certainly set up as a victualling society in 1768 and thereafter regularly purchased annual food supplies for all its

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340. Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842

341. Glasgow Herald, 28 Dec. 1849

342. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 173
Gulvin, op. cit., p. 178.

343. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1835, (556), X, p. 91, qq. 1234-1235.

members.[344] These victuals were sold to society members at special terms which included favourable credit facilities.[345] Just how many of the early weavers' friendly societies also operated in this fashion cannot be ascertained, although in this context it is important to note that the Fenwick association was considered to be the earliest example of the operation of the co-operative principle in Scotland.[346] In that sense its typicality may be disputed. In any case like other agencies of self-help the co-operative societies lapsed with the decline in weavers' wages. By the mid-nineteenth century they survived only among Border woollen weavers; for by 1800, the Fenwick Weavers' Friendly Society seems to have abandoned its victualling functions, while in 1834 it was argued that co-operative practices had been almost entirely given up at Paisley.[347]

There was one final agency through which the Scottish handloom weavers could, acting collectively, help to mitigate hardship. After 1815, a number of emigration societies were formed in Scotland. Apart from the Highlands and Islands, most of these societies were for the benefit of handloom weavers and their families.[348] In important weaving centres such as Glasgow and Paisley there were many such bodies among the weaving community in the 1830s and 1840s, while even small weaving villages such as Fenwick might possess their

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344. Fenwick Weavers Friendly Society Record Book 1761-1873, National Library of Scotland, Acc 4702(1).

345. *Ibid*.

346. W. Maxwell, *History of Co-operation in Scotland*, 1910.

347. Fenwick Weavers' Friendly Society Record Book 1761-1873. *Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers*, *P.P.*, 1834, (556), X, p. 91, q. 1235.

348. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

own emigration society.[349] Thus in 1843 there were forty-three emigration societies in Glasgow with a total of 3,354 members, of which more than half were designed to promote emigration to Canada.[350] But despite their popularity among the labourforce they were largely ineffective in reducing the dimensions of the distress experienced by the weaving community. Firstly, the number of weavers' families who emigrated formed only a small proportion of the Scottish workforce.[351] Secondly, by the 1840s when the weavers' economic position had reached its lowest point, relatively few websters were sponsored by such bodies which in itself was a clear indication of their impoverished condition.[352] Thirdly, in itself this process gave no immediate relief to the distressed since it entailed a harassing sea voyage and a difficult period of readjustment, particularly for weavers who were said to be unsuitable candidates for emigration.[353]

Moreover, weavers' emigration societies could never have existed purely as self-help agencies, since websters could not have financed

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349. Taylor, op. cit., p. 86

350. Glasgow Herald, 13 Jan. 1843
Glasgow Chronicle, 1 Feb. 1843

351. '... the fine emigrant ship, Abigail, will sail today from the Broomielaw for Quebec. Her complement of adult steerage passengers alone is 272; and the total number of souls on board, including crew and cabin passengers, will be about 360, being the largest number which has sailed from the Broomielaw this season. A portion of the passengers consists of the remnants of these emigration societies formed last year by the operative weavers; but by far the greatest proportion consists of respectable agriculturalists, farmers and labourers from all parts of Scotland....'
Glasgow Herald, 3 June 1844.

352. Ibid., 10 June 1842; 20 May 1842; 30 May 1842

353. Ibid., 30 May 1842

emigration ventures solely by their own efforts. Without state or charitable aid these bodies would have collapsed entirely.[354] Nor was the cost of emigration inconsiderable. It was thought in 1826, for example, that a family consisting of a man, his wife and three children required at least a sum of £35 3 3d for removal to, and settlement in Canada.[355] Bearing this factor in mind, therefore, it becomes clear that, left to their own devices there was little that emigration societies could offer the bulk of Scotland's weaving population for alleviating their distress.

The overall conclusion at which the social historian must arrive in relation to the practice of self-help is that in all its forms it was largely unsuccessful as a remedial measure for their distressed condition. There were, however, to be occasions when their sufferings were eased by the charitable activities of organisations or individuals. Sometimes the proceeds of social events were donated to distressed groups of weavers. For example, in 1842 a bazaar and ball were held in Paisley to help to reduce poverty among groups of unemployed weavers.[356] At other times charitable individuals provided either funds or relief work for idle websters.[357] In addition, there were instances of donations being made by individuals to weavers' emigration societies.[358] In general terms it can be argued

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354. For instance, a number of emigration societies were formed in Paisley in the early 1840s.
Glasgow Saturday Post, 23 April 1843

355. Report from the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, P.P., 1826, (404), IV, p. 224, q. 2363.

356. Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), VII, p. 50, q. 458.

357. Glasgow Herald, 5 May 1837; 27 June 1842; 1 July 1842; 18 July 1842.

358. Ibid., 11 Oct. 1841; 23 Jan 1843
Glasgow Saturday Post, 18 July 1840.

that the timing of such appeals and donations coincided with the emergence of cyclical unemployment.[359] For instance, financial assistance and relief works were both provided from these sources during the 1837 slump. Moreover, it is fairly clear that this assistance was usually granted to aid the exceptional relief committees which were set up at such times.[360] On the whole, however, the very nature of such initiative indicates that private charity played only a minor role in mitigating hardship.

One last ray of hope entertained by the Scottish websters was that the British government might take some action to ameliorate their depressed condition. Although given the general '*laissez-faire*' attitudes of successive administrations this was unlikely, some argued that the weavers had a right to assistance from the state.[361] Indeed, there was limited cause for such optimism for in 1818 parliament had approved a scheme by which 2,000 handloom weavers' families would be enabled to emigrate to North America.[362] Nonetheless, state aid to the distressed Scottish weavers was confined to this one field. Moreover, even in the realm of emigration the government did little to assist weavers who were destitute. Although advances were provided to emigrants to purchase seed corn and implements, with the borrowed sums being repayable after ten years, and although each settler was granted 100 acres of land, the fact that

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359. *Glasgow Herald*, 5 May 1837; 12 May 1837; 22 May 1837; 27 June 1842; 1 July 1842; 15 July 1842.

360. *Dumfries and Galloway Courier*, 8 June 1819
Paisley Advertiser, 20 May 1826
Glasgow Argus, 26 June 1837

361. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland*, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, p. 82.

362. Gaskin, *op*. *cit*., p. 153.

no provision was made for assisted passages rendered emigration impossible for many Scottish weavers' families.[363] Further petitioning by emigration societies in the 1820s culminated in a slightly more positive response from the government. The sequel to this shift in official thinking was that a total of 1,883 people, principally from Scottish weaving counties were helped to settle in Upper Canada.[364]

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the official enquiry into emigration from the United Kingdom in the late 1820s acknowledged that not all unemployed weavers could be reabsorbed in their trade in the British labour market, and that emigration would reduce distress in the country, a conviction was still expressed that 'private or local contribution ought to form the basis of any system of Emigration'.[365] The Select Committee finally recommended that £50,000 should be made available from the Treasury to further 'immediate Emigration from the manufacturing districts,' but it was not prepared to approve a 'permanent and continuous system of Emigration.'[366] The acceptance of this report by the government disappointed weavers' hopes and established guidelines for government policy on emigration till 1850. Self-help and charity were thus to remain the main sources of emigration funds. This viewpoint, for example, was reiterated by Earl Grey in 1847 when state aid to emigration schemes was again rejected. Not only would the proposed

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363. _Ibid._, pp. 153-154

364. _Ibid._

365. _Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom_, _P.P._, 1826, (404), IV, p. 4.
Second Report from Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, P.P., 1826-27, (88), V, p. 4.

366. _Ibid._, pp. 6-8.

schemes place a charge of two million or more pounds upon the Treasury, but, he alleged, the system of voluntary emigration - which was working satisfactorily - would be seriously deranged.[367] Clearly, therefore, state aided emigration was too short-lived and on too restricted a scale to be anything but an inadequate palliative for the Scottish weaving community. But, emigration apart, no other form of state aid was forthcoming. Although on occasions private donations were made by leading government ministers and although parliament sympathised with the sufferings of websters' families, successive governments claimed they had no funds available for such 'charitable purposes' as relieving the weavers' distress.[368]

When an overall assessment is made of the effectiveness of the various relief agencies - the Scottish Poor Law, exceptional relief committees, self-help, charity and state aid - in alleviating the suffering of the handloom weavers, the historian can only conclude that collectively considered they were successful in averting starvation. Conversely it is equally clear that all these forms of relief did not raise the families of the Scottish handloom weavers above the poverty line.

vii

During their hours of labour at the loom the Scottish websters were subject to several adverse pressures. Prominent among these deleterious influences was the atmosphere in loom shops. Since

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367. Glasgow Herald, 26 Feb. 1847

368. Ibid., 19 Dec. 1842

floors in these sheds usually consisted of the trodden earth and since scant attention was paid to the subject of ventilation it is not surprising that the atmosphere was often damp.[369] Indeed, it was alleged that 'the very wood was green with the damp',[370] while the nature of the tasks performed ensured that the air in those shops was also both oily and fibrous.[371] A final consideration which must be borne in mind is that the materials used by websters for dressing, and normally stored in loom sheds, often 'emitted a pestilent gas'.[372] In total, therefore, these factors generated an unpleasant atmosphere which had possible adverse repercussions upon the health of the workforce.

Such influences, however, had affected the weavers even in the early prosperous phase of the trade. In the context of weavers' standards of living, however, the weavers' working environment was always of less significance than the fact that increasingly in the period 1790-1850 the actual number of hours spent at the loom increased considerably; for with falling piece rates websters extended their working hours in an attempt to offset cutbacks in living

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369. First Report of Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, P.P., 1844, (572), XVII, p. 238, q. 3968

370. J. Duncan, Practical and Descriptive Essays on the Art of Weaving, Glasgow, (1808), p. 263.

371. '... [Dr McDougall] considered the business extremely unhealthy especially if the weaver sits long at his loom.
By the highly respectable evidence of Dr Gleghorn the same opinion was instantly corroborated and the matter put beyond doubt, that long hours in such damp and airless situations will gradually reduce and ultimately destroy the best constitutions.'

Glasgow Herald, 9 Nov. 1812.

372. Ibid.

standards.

In defining the trend in weavers' hours of work over time, the historian's greatest difficulty is ascertaining the length of the working day in the 'Golden Age'. Little credence can be attached to the claim that during this early period the handloom weaver could throw down his shuttle whenever he liked. Certainly as early as 1793 Glasgow websters worked a nine-hour day and a four- or five-day week.[373] However, in relation to the weavers' later experience this represented comparatively short working hours, although the lengthening of the working week after 1815 is difficult to assess precisely since the trade displayed considerable variety in this respect, with those on the poorly paid fabrics generally working longer than their co-websters.

Nonetheless the trend is unmistakable, for there are ample data for the post-war era to testify to a considerable extension of the working week for all. As early as 1815 at Paisley, for instance, any time taken off work at such times as New Year and August Fair had to be compensated for by working 'one night and two days without cessation.'[374] By 1834 weavers of fancy goods at Kilbarchan toiled for thirteen to fourteen hours daily while other websters in that village had to work a seventeen-hours' stint.[375] Shortly afterwards, in 1838, even the relatively well-paid woollen weavers were employed for sixty-five hours per week.[376] The latter were, nevertheless,

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373. Burns, op. cit., p. 38

374. D. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers of Other Days, Edinburgh, (1898), p. 14.

375. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556) X, p. 189, qq. 2497-2499.

376. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 41.

more fortunate than the generality of Scottish weavers who, in the mid 1830s were said to toil for seventy to eighty hours per week.[377] Moreover, it is certain that in the succeeding decade, with further wage decline, the working week would have been extended still further.

viii

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Scottish handloom weavers and their families enjoyed relatively good standards of housing. In Renfrewshire, for example, many of the 'industrious operative weavers' built workshops for themselves and erected comfortable houses for their families.[378] At roughly the same period weavers in Glasgow and its vicinity built single storey houses which they used as security for borrowing money with which to erect other storeys. It was, for instance, estimated that half of Bridgeton was built in this manner.[379] In Airdrie also, weavers owned their own houses and the adjacent kailyards.[380] In most areas, however, this social pattern did not long survive the downturn in wage-rates at the end of the French wars.

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377. Most of the Scottish handloom weavers in 1834 worked at least fourteen hours per day from Monday to Friday, inclusive. Thus even if some websters worked a shorter Saturday the total number of hours worked weekly was in excess of seventy. It is doubtful however, if hours worked on Saturdays were much shorter than those to which weavers toiled during the week.

378. J. Wilson, General View of the Agriculture of Renfrewshire with Observations of the Means of its Improvement and an Account of its Commerce and Manufactures, Paisley, (1812), p. 259.

379. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 52, qq. 762-764.

380. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 34

The cottages which weavers now rented in Paisley were frequently poorly lit, with low ceilings and damp walls and thatched with straw despite a local by-law which forbade this practice because of the danger of fire.[381] Extant evidence from Glasgow points to the emergence of a basically similar pattern over time. Indeed by 1834 weavers' sheds in the city were being converted into dwellings for operatives.[382] Falling housing standards were also reflected in the east of Scotland if experience at Dundee was representative of that region. Here, by the mid-1830s, very few houses were actually owned by the websters, although many of them had taken out mortgages for house construction before the conclusion of the French war.[383]

But the inability to meet high rentals was only one of the factors responsible for compelling weavers to accept less comfortable accommodation. Another significant determinant of this trend was the fact that after 1815 an increasing proportion of the workforce had their origins in Ireland, the Highlands, or in rural areas of Lowland Scotland, all of whom were accustomed to very low standards of housing.[384] In addition, in large weaving centres such as Glasgow and Paisley severe competition for accommodation forced up rentals. The sequel to this development was that websters were increasingly compelled to make their homes in the older and badly constructed properties found in the central districts of towns.[385] It

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381. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 14.

382. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 53, q. 768.

383. Ibid., p. 239, qq. 3265-3271.

384. R.B. McDowell, (Ed.), Social Life in Ireland 1800-1845, Dublin, (1957), p. 45.
C. Rogers, Social Life in Scotland from Early to Recent Times, Vol. I, Edinburgh, (1884), p. 249.

385. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 51.

would be wrong to imagine, however, that such weavers in large urban centres were the sole victims of these trends. In some small towns as well as in rural and semi-rural areas where most Scottish weavers and their dependents lived in the 1830s, landlords were often forced to accept low rents or have empty property on their hands.[386] Moreover, it was in this type of area - for example, in semi-rural towns like Maybole - that weaving agents maintained tied houses.[387] Wherever this practice prevailed, the standard of accommodation was low, while exorbitant rents were charged by those who operated what was essentially a variant upon the truck system.[388]

One of the most pressing problems associated with weavers' housing in most of Scotland after 1815 was the prevalence of overcrowding. The problem itself stemmed from the fact that in the first half of the nineteenth century the rate of growth of Scotland's population outstripped the rate of increase in its housing stock. Whereas in 1801 there were 5.46 persons in the average Scottish house, by 1851 this ratio had risen to 7.8 per house.[389] But inevitably the problem was at its acutest in those towns where the rate of population growth had been most rapid:[390] In some of the principal weaving centres - Glasgow, Paisley, Dundee, Dunfermline - overcrowding was an endemic problem among those at the foot of the socio-economic ladder. Some indication of what overcrowding involved in

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386. Chapter 2, iv

387. Weavers' Journal, 1 Nov. 1836

388. Ibid.

389. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 48.

390. Second Report of the Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, P.P., 1845, (602), XVIII, p. 58.

social terms may be obtained from a brief examination of conditions in Glasgow weaving areas.

In Glasgow generally pressure upon accommodation was particularly marked between 1831 and 1841 when the city's population increased by 30,031 without any significant increase in housing stock.[391] Not surprisingly, because of their lowly economic status, the city's websters were adversely affected by the scarcity of adequate housing; for although they did not reside in the very worst areas which 'moved even the most hardened sanitarians to astonished horror', many were located in Calton, Glenpark, Bluevale and Drygate which were in close proximity to the grossly overcrowded areas of Trongate, Bridgegate and Saltmarket.[392] It is clear moreover that by the 1840s many weaving families in Glasgow, irrespective of size, were reduced to living in single rooms. In 1842 at Pollokshaws for example, websters with five, ten and even fifteen dependents were forced to reside in single-apartment houses.[393]

Two other factors exacerbated the problem of overcrowding among Glasgow weavers' families. Firstly, it was not uncommon for weavers' families, especially those of Irish origin, to take in lodgers, since rent from this source was a useful supplement to family income.[394] Secondly, there is no doubt that the poorest among Glasgow's weavers were represented in the 8,000 inhabitants of the 600 to 700 common lodging houses which the Glasgow Police Act of 1843 failed

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391. Brotherston, _op_. _cit_.

392. _Ibid_., p. 49
Tindall, _op_. _cit_., p. 55

393. _Supplement to Glasgow Argus_, 17 Jan. 1842.

394. Brotherston, _op_. _cit_., p. 50

to regulate.[395] Overall, therefore, it is clear that in this major hand weaving centre websters lived in conditions of extreme overcrowding.

With one or two minor differences the Glasgow experience was typical of other major areas. For example, at Dundee in 1834 instances were reported of two or more Irish weaving families living in the one 'miserably furnished' house.[396] Indeed, the very fact that, in several centres many weavers' families were in arrears with their rent strongly suggests that by the 1830s they lived in the poorest possible accommodation where overcrowding was likely to be at its peak.[397] In rural and semi-rural areas, however, the pressure of numbers was not quite as great as in the large towns. In some small weaving towns and villages two-apartment houses were the norm, although one apartment usually served as the loom shop, while the entire family lived in the other room. This was the typical experience in both Paisley and its vicinity. Nevertheless complaints about extreme overcrowding were reported from several semi-rural areas. It was claimed in 1836, for example, that there was serious congestion in most websters' homes in Girvan and Maybole.[398]

A lack of basic amenities in many of the areas in which the Scottish websters resided aggravated the hazards associated with over-

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395. Renfrewshire Magazine, November 1846

396. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 240, q. 3282

397. Ibid., p. 259, q. 3529
Glasgow Courier, 9 May 1826
Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (115), vii, p. 68, q. 722.

398. C. Stewart Back, The Story of Paisley, Paisley, (1948), p. 148.
Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 149.

crowding. Despite the fact that contemporary opinion was aware of the effect of poor water supplies upon the cleanliness, hygiene, self-respect and general health of the community, water provision in most Scottish weaving towns remained intermittent and inadequate until the middle of the nineteenth century.[399] At Paisley in the early years of the century water was only to be obtained from wells and burns at some distance from weavers' cottages. It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that baths were largely unknown even in the most prosperous households; 'the best that could be done for those with a weakness for bodily cleanliness - by no means the majority of the population - was a sectional wash limb by limb with the aid of a basin'.[400] A similar pattern obtained in Glasgow where weavers' homes had no internal water supply, whilst the water pumped to public supply points all came from the River Clyde.[401] Nonetheless, in terms of the volume of water available the weavers of Glasgow were more fortunate than their counterparts in Perth, who in 1844 received only half - in _per capita_ terms - of the quantity supplied in the former town.[402] It can thus be safely concluded that throughout the major centres of the trade there was a universal scarcity of water, a social problem which was not helped by

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399. 'In addition to other causes of disease generally prevalent among the poorer classes of large towns, the almost universal scarcity of supplies of water for domestic use has been urged upon our attention as contributing in a very great degree to increase the evils under which we labour.'
Second Report of Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, _P.P._, 1845, (602), XVIII, p. 5

400. C. Stewart Black, _op. cit._, p. 148

401. _Report of Select Committee on the Health of Towns_, _P.P._, 1840, (384), XI, p. 64, q. 1120.

402. _First Report of Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts_, _P.P._, 1844, (572), XVII, p. 20, q. 139.

the fact that water supply was the preserve of private companies.[403]

Again, although there was an increasing awareness in early nineteenth century society of a relationship between poor sanitary conditions and the incidence of disease little had been done by 1850 to improve the poor standards of sanitation to which many of the working classes, including the handloom weavers in Scotland were exposed. Once more the available evidence on this aspect of the social problem is largely derived from west of Scotland weaving areas, and Edinburgh. There is little reason, however, to believe that conditions in other weaving centres were much better than those obtaining in Glasgow and Paisley. Some indication of the nature of the problem can be obtained from a brief examination of the latter town, where, adjacent to the websters' apartment, could be found 'middens' which were accumulations of 'kitchen refuse, assorted rubbish and the contents of the privy buckets',[404] in itself irrefutable proof that weavers' homes had no internal toilets.[405] Viewed against this backcloth it was not surprising that the general problem in Paisley was of such dimensions that by 1850 'sanitation [improvement] had scarcely begun to exist.'[406] Similarly, in Glasgow much of the household refuse from weavers' homes found its way not only into the courts and alleys, but also into the open gutters in the streets,[407] while the absence of adequate drainage helped to ensure that such nuisances became permanent features of the landscape.[408] But not only did the exis-

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403. Second Report of Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, P.P., 1845, (602), XVIII, p. 46

404. C. Stewart Black, op. cit., p. 148

405. Ibid. 406. Ibid.

407. Select Committee on Health of Towns, P.P., 1840, (384), XI, p. 61, q. 1071.

408. Second Report of Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, P.P., 1845, (602), XVIII, pp. 35-36.

tence of such accumulations constitute a nuisance, they also affected the lives of those who resided close at hand. Walls which were close to privvies, for instance, were constantly wet with foetid fluid which poisoned the atmosphere in rooms, tainted food, and caused notable structural damage to the buildings.[409] Adding to the sanitary problem in Glasgow was the fact that at least until 1850 a considerable amount of the town's sewage ended up in the River Clyde.[410] Finally, it is clear that these problems were mirrored in other weaving centres. Assessed in their totality, the few cautious steps taken by local authorities by 1850 in the field of sanitary reform had barely touched the fundamental issues of urban renewal.[411]

But to the problems affecting urban-based websters - overcrowding, a lack of basic amenities and poor sanitation - must be added difficulties arising out of a dearth of possessions in the individual weaver's home. Although depressing urban environmental influences were only relevant to a minority of the weaving community, the scarcity of furnishings in their homes was a common feature in both urban and rural areas. By the 1830s items such as tables, chairs, bedding and bed clothes had often, as we have seen, been irredeemably pawned, or impounded for rates payment,[412] while

409. Ibid., p. 61.

410. H.W. Bull, Working Class Housing in Glasgow, 1862-1902, M. Litt. Thesis, University of Strathclyde, (1973), p. 26

411. 'The authorities undoubtedly deserve some credit for what they are doing, but they are certainly entitled to much blame for its delay. For aught they know to the contrary their exertions might have been too late; perhaps they are yet so.' Glasgow Examiner, 28 Oct. 1848

412. Scotsman, 8 March 1829
Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842

poverty now prevented their replacement. Some indication of the extent of the depth of the deprivation which was experienced may be obtained from the fact that in 1838 the Calton weavers rested at night on floors which bore no resemblance to beds. Similarly at approximately the same point in time the websters of Aberdeen, bereft of linen or bed-clothes 'lay upon straw like dogs'.[413] Finally, it is reasonably safe to conclude that weavers' homes possessed relatively few kitchen utensils, crockery or cutlery. By the 1830s, the basic necessities for supporting a standard of living which approximated to a national minimum of civilised existence were, for the vast majority of weavers, beyond their means.

ix

Probably the best index to health problems in the first half of the nineteenth century is the mortality rate of the population. Yet global death rates must be treated with great care since life expectancy was closely related to social class. This relationship was clearly demonstrated by Dr Stark who made a thorough investigation of the total deaths in Edinburgh in 1845. Dividing the population into four classes - gentry and professional men; merchants, master tradesmen and clerks; artisans, domestic servants and soldiers; and labourers, porters and paupers - he showed that in the first grouping the average age of death was 47.22 years compared with a

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413. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 22.

Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556) X, p. 472, q. 6003.

figure of 25.88 years for the fourth class. In addition, the incidence of still births and infantile mortality was also higher among Edinburgh's poor. In the highest social class only 7.2 per cent of all deaths in 1845 took place under one year of age, in sharp contrast to 24.1 per cent for the lowest class.[414] Nonetheless it must be stressed that this Edinburgh picture was not unrepresentative of the general trend; for other social commentators, who investigated conditions in different Scottish towns, underlined the typicality of Stark's conclusions.[415]

Also compounding the problem of interpreting global mortality rates is the fact that they varied with age-group. Thus when overall death rates are broken down according to the ages of the deceased a much clearer background picture of the health pattern of various age groups emerges. At the outset, it is clear that child mortality rates increased rapidly in the early nineteenth century. For example, from 1821 to 1838 the number of deaths among the under-10^{s} in Glasgow rose sharply from one in seventy-five to one in forty-eight.[416] Moreover, for this period, the death rates for infants and very young children stood at a high level. This can be demonstrated by the fact that in Edinburgh in 1845 the death rate per 1,000 of the population stood at 427 for under-5 year olds in contrast to 357 for the adult population.[417] A final consideration, basic to an

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414. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 44

415. W.P. Alison, Observations on the Management of the Poor in Scotland and its effects on the Health of the Great Towns, Edinburgh, (1840), p. 22.

416. Select Committee on the Health of Towns, P.P., 1840, (384), XI, p. 364.

417. Brotherston, op. cit.

understanding of the health problems of the working classes in the early nineteenth century, was the fact that the number of still-births was noticeably on the increase.[418]

The actual illnesses responsible for increasing mortality rates fall into three distinct categories. The first of these groupings contained such endemic diseases as typhus and relapsing fever, both of which attacked young and old alike and were most virulent during phases of economic distress.[419] Secondly, there was a group of illnesses to which children were particularly vulnerable; this category included measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and smallpox, and more important still, a variety of intestinal complaints such as enteric fever, dysentery and summer diarrhoea.[420] Thirdly, there was cholera, which broke out in many Scottish towns in 1831/32, revisiting these areas in 1848/49 and again in 1853/54.[421] This virulent disease, however, seemed to follow a distinct pattern of its own, although it was normally accompanied by relapsing fever.

Having briefly outlined the health problems confronting the Scottish working classes generally in this period it now remains for the historian to assess their impact upon the handloom weavers in

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418. Ibid.

419. Select Committee on the Health of Towns, P.P., 1840, (384), XI, p. 64, q. 1118.

420. A.K. Chalmers, The Health of Glasgow, An Outline, Glasgow, (1930), pp. 195-197; p. 281; pp. 315-316.

421. Scottish Guardian, 22 June 1832
Glasgow Saturday Post, 20 Jan. 1849

particular. When this is attempted the obvious conclusion which emerges is that, for a variety of reasons, the websters and their dependents were particularly vulnerable to the ravages of these diseases.

Pre-eminent among the causal factors responsible for such a pattern were the economic difficulties which, increasingly over time, confronted all those who depended upon the hand loom for a livelihood. Undoubtedly, physical resistance to disease was reduced in the many instances where weavers' families lived, for protracted periods, below the poverty line. Significantly enough, the frequency of cyclical depressions and seasonal difficulties in the trade often coincided with epidemics, thus ensuring that weavers' families would be particularly vulnerable to attack during these outbreaks. In addition, it is likely that the children of websters suffered to an inordinate degree especially from intestinal illnesses, since they were inadequately nourished.

Poverty apart, however, thare are other reasons for believing that the weaving community was particularly at risk during the cholera outbreaks. The 1831/32 visitation, for example, had a devastating effect on major weaving centres like Paisley, as well as on small villages such as Balfron. At Paisley, the spread of the pestilence was aided by the ignorance and superstitions of the population: large crowds turned out at cholera victims' funerals, deceased bodies were laid out in the same rooms as families normally lived, and corpses were retained for a long time through the prevailing fear of 'burkers' or body snatchers.[422] Nor were some of

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422. Parlane, op. cit., p. 104.

these practices confined to Paisley for, elsewhere, the common Irish custom of 'waking their dead, and drinking over them from their death to their burial' helped to spread the pestilence.[423] It is possible that such misguided forms of social behaviour persisted among the websters; for the major weaving centres were again severely hit during the second visitation of cholera in 1848/49. Again, this outbreak claimed many victims in Paisley while the incidence of cholera and accompanying fevers in Glasgow was exceptionally high.[424]

Finally it is clear that some features of the weavers' social lives abetted the spread of infectious diseases generally. For instance the chronic problem of overcrowding made the isolation of affected cases almost impossible. But also of some significance was the rapid turnover of weavers' bed and body clothes to and from pawn, usually in an unwashed state.[425] Again, if of lesser importance was the propensity of websters to reside in common lodging houses to which some writers ascribed a formidable role in the transmission of disease.[426] A last factor which may have increased the websters' vulnerability to disease was their liking for drink. Certainly, contemporaries were in no doubt that the most dissolute among the population were always the first to suffer at the onset of an epidemic.[427]

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423. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 110.

424. Glasgow Saturday Post, 20 Jan. 1849; 27 Jan. 1849.

425. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 55.
Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557) XX, p. 324.

426. Brotherston, op. cit., p. 52

427. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, pp. 579-580, qq. 10569-10570.

Chapter 3

Cultural Stagnation and Decline

i

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Scottish handloom weavers were allegedly much better educated than most of their peers. It was claimed, for example, that many of those who flocked into Paisley to learn the art of weaving brought with them 'a fair education,'[1] while the indigenous websters of that town were supposedly the owners of 'libraries equal to those of ministers and professional men', and in terms of general intelligence, without any peers among the working class.[2] Moreover, it was argued that their intellectual qualities were fostered by the scope which the nature of their work gave for the exercise of 'taste, invention, harmony, art and genius,' for as one contemporary expressed it, the weaving arts stimulated the mind, while the eye was 'educated by dealing with brilliant and harmonious colours, and elegant designs'.[3] There is, of course, an obvious temptation to dismiss these claims as a gross exaggeration of the true position. This, however, should be resisted since evidence suggests that this was a general pattern, not confined to the major weaving districts of the west. The linen weavers of the east coast for instance were also described as 'proud patrons of learning'.[4] But in addition to self-instruction, the Scottish websters also had access to a multitude of agencies providing institutional learning.

Paisley town council, for example, in the 1780s attempted to

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1. Blair, op. cit., p. 57
2. Ibid., p. 46.
3. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
4. Jolly, op. cit., p. 24

increase the number of schools available in the municipality to cater for the growing number of children. Above all, they were concerned with providing schooling for all sectors of the working classes, as can be demonstrated by the fact that some of their schools, such as those in Laigh Parish and Middle Parish, had specially reduced fees for the children of the poor.[5] Simultaneously, the number of charity schools providing free formal instruction to needy children increased.[6] Most weavers, however, in the 'Golden Age' usually sent their children to the fee-paying educational establishments, as was proven, beyond reasonable doubt, by the parliamentary enquiries into the trade in the 1830s. It was largely, therefore, this firm commitment to formal education, supplemented by the love of learning fostered within the household, that allowed Scottish websters in the years before the end of the Napoleonic Wars to be amongst the most literate of all working-class groups.

However, as data culled from the fancy weaving centre of Paisley demonstrate quite conclusively a decline in their educational attainments had set in by the 1830s. In 1833, for instance, reference was made to the falling numbers of weavers' children who received formal instruction in 'the first principles of learning.'[7] In the following year it was claimed that 'great numbers' of Paisley draw-boys could not write, whilst their reading ability was

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5. Stewart Black, _op. cit._, p. 200

6. 'In 1804 there was opened, in a building in the High Street /of Paisley/ the Hutcheson Charity School, supported by funds bequeathed by several citizens of public spirit.'
Ibid.

7. _Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping_, _P.P._, 1833, (690), VI, p. 716, q. 12004.

confined entirely to the New Testament.[8] By 1844 a 'great portion' of the children of the poor were illiterate, which contrasted sharply with the situation obtaining in Paisley twenty-five years earlier.[9] Declining educational standards could, in fact, be found by this time in most weaving centres in the west of Scotland. In Glasgow where very few weavers sent their progeny to day schools in 1834, the principal avenue for their children's education had been transferred to the much more limited Sunday schools system. Furthermore, exacerbating this situation, the individual webster had, in the main, abandoned the attempt to 'educate and superintend his own children.'[10] Shortly afterwards, it was noted that weavers' children in Airdrie took little advantage of the educational facilities of the district, while at Hamilton such scant attention was paid to schooling that weavers' offspring were, at best, 'half-educated'.[11] Again, in Ayrshire weaving districts such as Irvine, Girvan and Ayr, where there were high proportions of Irish immigrants among those who wrought at the hand loom the instruction of the young was almost totally abandoned.[12] Finally, it is clear that falling educational standards of weavers' children in the west of Scotland was accompanied by an implicit repudiation among the majority of the weavers' formerly firm commitment to the cultivation of knowledge.[13]

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8. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 67, q. 914.

9. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557) XX, p. 674, q. 10729.

10. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 41, q. 670; p. 54, qq. 778-780.

11. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 25-26.

12. Ibid., p. 37

13. Symons, op. cit., p. 149

In the east of Scotland educational attainments of weavers' children were little, if any, better than in the west. In 1836, for example, the sons and daughters of Irish weavers in Aberdeen were deprived completely of any opportunity to acquire the skills of reading and writing.[14] Two years earlier, John Adam, a Forfar weaver, admitted that he could not afford at his current rate of remuneration to give his children any kind of formal schooling.[15] At Dundee also there was a marked decline in the number of children receiving instruction in 1838, while of a sample of 123 weavers' children examined in Perth in the same year, as many as seventy-five were entirely without formal education.[16] Indeed, throughout the east of Scotland the attendance of websters' children at day schools was seriously impeded by compelling economic constraints - they were usually put to work as winders and draw-boys at a very early age. As elsewhere, linen weavers' children therefore tended to rely heavily upon Sunday schools.[17] Unlike their counterparts in the west, however, it was claimed that adult weavers in the east continued, where possible, to cultivate their literary tastes. They attended lectures on such topics as political economy; they still in the 1830s retained their book clubs; and they remained readers of periodicals and radical newspapers.[18] Nonetheless, even here it is clear that probably only a few of the best paid could possibly

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14. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 157.

15. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 259, q. 3533.

16. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 204, p. 206.

17. Ibid., p. 191.

18. Ibid., p. 190.

indulge in these luxuries.[19]

The only substantial sector of the Scottish hand weavers who, by the 1830s, gave their children a reasonable standard of schooling were the woollen weavers of the Borders. At Hawick, for instance, education was both 'general and good' with reading, writing and arithmetic being taught at the parochial school. Meanwhile, at both Galashiels and Earlston basic instruction was well attended to and at nearby Jedburgh the tuition received by weavers' children was described as 'excellent'.[20] In this area also adult weavers continued to improve their own stock of knowledge. Among the websters of the Scottish Borders there were still to be found in the mid-nineteenth century, men who possessed a knowledge of 'history, politics and general literature that would adorn a much loftier station in life.'[21] But only among the numerically small number of weavers in that region was the tradition of high educational standards of weavers' children sustained by the 1830s.

For most Scottish handloom weavers' children, therefore, their only opportunity for obtaining a modicum of basic numeracy and literacy lay with the Sunday schools. There were approximately 500 of these establishments in Scotland in 1818 catering for a total of 25,163 pupils. In many of them teaching was provided free of charge by the parish ministers though a few were supported by private subscriptions. Of these, however, as many as 424 schools teaching 9,250 children were in either Glasgow or Edinburgh, leaving only

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19. Chapter 2, iii, iv.

20. Assistant Commissioners Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 40-41.

21. Bremner, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

approximately seventy-six Sunday schools in the remainder of Scotland. Not only therefore were there far too few Sunday schools outside the two main towns; this minority had also to cater for too many pupils.[22] But even where they existed in some numbers, as at Paisley, they were considered ineffective bodies for the transmission of rudimentary knowledge. Firstly, long hours at work throughout the week left children too fatigued to derive much benefit from their teachings. Secondly it was claimed that children regarded them as an integral part of their work pattern, and thus refused to apply their minds diligently to the task of learning. Thirdly, Sunday schools were only beneficial to those who had already acquired some instruction in reading. Fourthly, it is almost certain that many of these taught the'Bible only', ignoring all other facets of education. Perhaps, however, the most damning criticism of the Sunday schools system was the assertion that any educational advancement which they bestowed was insignificant in relation to the potential improvement to the health of the children, had they, instead of attending these institutions, spent their day of rest breathing the 'free and wholesome air in the open fields'.[23] Finally, in addition to the Sunday schools, a limited number of evening schools were to be found in weaving centres, although few websters or their children attended them, since classes clashed with their long working hours. But even for the very limited number of weavers who participated in their activities, doubts must remain as to how far they derived any tangible benefits from courses which

22. Select Committee of Church of Scotland on the Poor, P.P., 1818, (358), V, p. 38.

23. Glasgow Courier, 7 Nov. 1812.

only began after they had toiled for ten or twelve hours at the loom.[24]

It is reasonable to conclude therefore that weavers' children until the mid-nineteenth century continued to rely upon charitable education or, in very few cases, upon payments made by their parents for their schooling. But even the fortunate few who attended day schools faced grave disadvantages. Firstly, the grinding poverty of their parents tended to breed apathy and to reduce motivation for betterment.[25] Secondly, their lowly economic status, without a voluntary system of education, heightened their sense of social deprivation. For the inevitable sequel to unequal distribution of income in Scottish society was 'giving the rich, who have plenty of money in their pockets, a monopoly of the best talent and learning in the country, for the instruction of them and their families, and leaving to the poor man who can pay little the worst teachers and preachers in the country'.[26] Thirdly, some contemporaries commented adversely upon the very restricted nature of the curricula followed at these schools, and advocated a broader approach to learning at both elementary and more advanced levels.[29]

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24. Ibid.
25. Symons, op. cit., pp. 147-148
26. Scottish Guardian, 17 June 1834
27. 'A local school should be appointed for every thousand of the population and the education should be physical, moral and intellectual. The elementary branches may consist of gymnastics, word reading, writing, arithmetic and music, and other accomplishments for those who love them. But the mature education should embrace chemistry, agriculture, manufactures, geology, natural history including animal and vegetable anatomy and physiology, phrenology, mechanics, geometry, languages, politics, science and ethics.'
   Chartist Circular, 26 Oct. 1839.

Viewed from a national perspective it becomes clear that the marked decline in the education of weavers' children, particularly at day schools, contrasted fairly sharply with the situation generally obtaining throughout Scotland, where a slight, nonetheless measurable, improvement in educational standards was recorded. In 1815 one-twelfth of the population of Scotland were children who attended day schools, but by 1834 this fraction had risen slightly to one-eleventh.[28] Some indication of the extent to which the pattern for weavers diverged from national experience may be obtained from the fact that in 1833 the proportions of the population attending day schools at such weaving centres as Dundee, Glasgow and Paisley were one-fourteenth, one-fifteenth and one-fifteenth respectively.[29] Nor is it difficult to ascribe causes to this decline in school attendance; for despite brave attempts to maintain their children at school,[30] the Scottish weavers, in the face of increasing destitution, could not afford to pay school fees, which cost in the region of 1/- per month for each child receiving formal instruction.[31] Moreover, attendance at day school would mean further expenditure on items such as decent clothing which weavers, because of their meagre family incomes could not possibly meet.

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28. J. Scotland, The History of Scottish Education, Vol. 1, From the Beginning to 1782, London, (1969), p. 187.

29. Chartist Circular, 26 Oct. 1839.
Scotland, op. cit., p. 183.

30. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 48-49.

31. Fees paid for parish schools in rural areas in the 1830s were about 2/6d per quarter, but in the large towns such as Glasgow school costs were relatively higher, at 4/- per quarter.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, pp. 57-58, qq. 813-814.

ii

Sufficient evidence is extant to suggest that traditionally the Scottish handloom weavers had paid considerable attention to religious devotions. In the west of Scotland the early websters were 'in the main a devout and serious class, and much given to theological discussions.'[32] When the Paisley weavers of the 'Golden Age' proselytised they did so 'with discrimination.'[33] Moreover, in the opening decade of the nineteenth century those who wrought at the hand loom in the east of Scotland were 'intensely theological, often religious, well versed in all the intricacies of Calvinism and keenest of heresy seekers, scenting it from afar in phrase or simile, herein only being strong Conservatives - in a word, general guardians of the Church.'[34]

But not all Scottish weaving families, particularly in the post-1815 period adhered to the Established Church. The influx to the trade from Ireland ensured that a sizeable portion was Roman Catholic. If the proportion of Catholics to the total number of Irish in Glasgow in 1836 - two-thirds - was mirrored elsewhere it is reasonable to assume that, by the 1830s, some twenty-five per cent of all weavers in Scotland with their dependents embraced the Roman Catholic faith.[35] Again, although far from comprehensive, some

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32. Blair, op. cit., p. 65.

33. D. Gilmour, Reminiscences of the Pen Folk by One who Knew Them, Paisley, (1871), p. 28.

34. Jolly, op. cit., p. 23.

35. In the post-1815 era about one-third of the Scottish handloom weavers were of Irish extraction. The figure twenty-five per cent is arrived at here by dividing one-third by two-thirds which gives approximately twenty-two per cent. To this is added a little because of the well known propensity of the Irish to have large

data do exist to demonstrate that a high percentage of weavers' families supported Seceder and Independent churches. In Airdrie, for instance, the very first church in the town was for a congregation of Seceders; indeed of the first four places of worship erected in the town only one belonged to the 'Auld Kirk'.[36] The Airdrie handloom weavers themselves were very closely associated with the Seceders' movement.[37] Similarly in 1836 only nineteen of the forty weavers' families in the village of West Kilbride belonged to the Established Church, the remainder being Independents.[38] Furthermore, it is likely that the close links between east coast weavers and radical politics also had parallels in their religious affiliations.[39] Bearing these considerations in mind, it is not unreasonable to suggest that considerably less than half the Scottish hand weavers' families by the 1830s adhered to the Established Church.

To ascertain, however, precisely what the impact of the rapidly changing economic fortunes of the weaving communities had on the religious commitments raises certain problems because of the ambiguity of the evidence. Some, for example, would have supported the anonymous poet's claim, in 1838, that,

> Religion cheers the weaver in his cot,
> ... And charms with heavenly hope our humble lot.[40]

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families. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 101.

36. T.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 190. 37. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 45.

38. Weavers' Journal, 1 June 1836.

39. Jolly, op. cit., p. 23.

40. Anonymous, The Weaver's Saturday, a Political Poem inscribed to J.C. Symons Esq., Her Majesty's Commissioner on the Hand Loom Weavers Enquiry, Glasgow, (1838), p. 4.

On the other hand, other contemporaries argued that attendance at places of worship among websters' families fell off markedly in the post-1815 period. Certainly in the 1830s, weavers in many districts in the west of Scotland had ceased to be regular church-goers. This, moreover, was a general pattern irrespective of denomination. Thus, apart from a sharp contraction in the number of weavers' families attending Church of Scotland services, they were also less prominent than formerly at divine worship at Seceder-dominated Airdrie, and at Girvan where there was a high contingent of Roman Catholics among the handloom weaving population.[41] Although to a lesser extent than in the west, the same trend was discernible in the east of Scotland among linen weavers. This, for example, was averred to be the case at Aberdeen and at Dundee.[42] In fact by the 1830s, the only sector of the Scottish hand weaving work force who still assiduously attended Church services were the woollen weavers of the Borders.[43]

This pattern was accompanied by two contrasting phenomena, demarcated from each other largely by the age of the websters affected.

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41. T.S.A. Lanarkshire, p. 190.
    Weavers' Journal, 1 June 1836
    Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.

42. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 191, p. 206.
    Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 473, qq. 6024-6025.

43. The 'morality' of the woollen weavers of the Borders in 1838 was still considered to be of high standing. Since one of the principal components of nineteenth century morality was religious observance, it can be reasonably argued that these woollen websters of the Borders still retained the habit of church-going.

    Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, pp. 40-41.

Although many of the older generation had abandoned church attendance, they still, it was claimed, remained devoutly pious practising their religions within their own homes. Among such individuals a knowledge of doctrine and acquaintance with the Bible were to be found which were 'equal if not superior to every other class of workmen in Scotland.'[44] Conversely, the younger generation of websters, with but few exceptions principally found in the most prosperous sector of the trade, had relinquished both public worship and the practice of Christianity at home.[45] In this context, the social historian's task is therefore two-fold. Firstly, some explanation must be given for the general decline among all age groups in church attendance. Secondly, the causes of the abandonment of religious practices and beliefs, by the younger weavers must be explored.

The fact that population growth in the nineteenth century outstripped the availability of church accommodation in the manufacturing districts was only a minor contributor to the fall in church attendance.[46] Some writers argued, for instance, that a much more potent factor in bringing about this pattern was the fact that the Scottish weavers equated church-going with prosperity. Once, therefore economic hardship appeared in their daily lives church attendance would tend to be less frequent.[47] Others believed that their lengthy working week left weavers in such a state of physical and

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44. Symons, op. cit., p. 146. 45. Ibid., p. 147.

46. Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, P.P., 1837-38, (448), VIII, p. 163

47. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 41, q. 669.

mental fatigue that it was bound to have a deleterious effect upon church-going habits.[48] Again, it was asserted that a falling off in Sunday observance reflected moral failure in the individual. Nevertheless, when placed in historical perspective, it is clear that the fundamental influence in this sphere was the weaver's falling standard of living.

Firstly, falling real wages would adversely affect his ability to pay pew rents which in 1834 stood at the sum of 6/4d per annum per family member in Paisley's Seceder churches. But in addition to this outlay, contributions for the poor were also sought from members of the congregation according to individual circumstances.[49] Since, however, pews alone represented a sum equivalent to the weekly wage of a Glasgow weaver it was logical to expect economy to be made in this area by families under severe pressure. Furthermore although free seats were available to the poor in churches of all denominations in Scotland the handloom weavers were extremely reluctant to use them since such actions would be interpretated as tantamount to an admission of pauperism.[50] Reinforcing these expulsive influences, Scottish weavers and their dependents also shunned attending ecclesiastical gatherings because they were 'destitute' of suitable clothes. Websters in Airdrie for example would not attend church fearing that they would be labelled as paupers from their outward appearance. 'Hundreds' of Girvan weavers, it was argued, reacted in basically the same fashion: the church was

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48. Symons, op. cit., p. 147
49. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 84, q. 1139.
50. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 134.

ignored because their dress was of such a wretched description.[51] But perhaps the best illustration of the fact that poverty was the prime determinant of the declining habits of public worship among the weavers was contained in the thesis put forward by Lawrence Don in 1834. He argued that in order to restore the weavers in Aberdeen to their former habits it would be more important to raise their wages than to build additional churches in the town.[52] The only significant exception to this pattern was to be found among the Roman Catholic sector of the workforce where the stigma of poverty and shabby attire did not make Irish websters exceptional in the community which was dominated by those at the foot of the socio-economic ladder. In these cases increasing absenteeism from public worship was much more the product of the cultural transition from rural Ireland to urban or semi-urban communities in Scotland.

These forces, however, do not explain why the younger generation of websters had given up entirely all forms of religious devotion. One important factor in accounting for the irreligion of this group was that many of them had never been trained in the habit of church-going since their parents had abandoned attending ecclesiastic establishments with the fall in real wages after 1815. But possibly another significant influence here was the increasing degree of illiteracy among younger weavers. Thus they could not acquaint themselves with the Bible and other religious works.

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Most of the channels of high cultural achievement in the

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51. Weavers' Journal, 1 July 1836
Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.

52. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 473, qq. 6023-6024.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were principally the domain, even in Scotland, of the middle classes. This does not mean, however, that proletarian origins totally debarred the individual from making an impression upon contemporary arts and sciences. Among those from essentially working class backgrounds who contributed to the growth of an indigenous culture were several writers who were drawn from the ranks of the Scottish weaving population. Thus, one of the most famous of Paisley's sons was Alexander Wilson (1766 - 1813) who published a nine volume work on American ornithology. Similarly, James Scadlock (1775-1818), the naturalist, Hugh Macdonald (1817-1860) the essayist, and Professor John Wilson (1788 -), the eminent Zoologist and contributor to the Encyclopaedia Britannica on such topics as "Animalculae, Angling and Entomology", were closely associated with Paisley's weaving population,[53] while John Henning, the sculptor, born in Paisley in 1771 also came from a weaving background.[54] Again John Duncan, the botanist, worked at the hand loom in a number of east coast weaving centres, while James Bowman Lindsay (1799-1862) left the loom to study theology, prior to earning considerable fame as a researcher in such a variety of fields as astronomy, electricity, telegraphy, linguistics as well as theology.[55]

Nonetheless the fact remains that the main medium of cultural expression used by the Scottish handloom weavers over the period

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53. J.T. Ward, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p. 24.
Stewart Black, op. cit., pp. 205-206
Stewart, op. cit., p. 16.

54. ~~Ward~~, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p28.

55. Jolly, op. cit.
Ward, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p. 28.

1790 to 1850 remained poetry.[56] Throughout this timespan the output of the Scottish weaver poets was both prolific and highly acclaimed throughout Scottish society.[57]

The 'Golden Age' of the hand loom weaving trade was an era which witnessed a constant stream of poetical works from Scotland's principal weaving centres. George MacIndoe (1766 - 1813) who, as well as being a publican, a musician and the inventor of a muslin figuring machine, wrought silk at the hand loom in Glasgow, wrote much sentimentally religious poetry in the following vein:

> When the last trumpet's dreadful sound
> Reverbrates thro' the skies,
> Mortals, their sleep e'er so profound,
> Shall hear, awake, - and rise! 58

Alexander Smith was another Scottish poet who had close connections with west of Scotland weaving centres. Although he wrote of Glasgow 'City, I am true son of thine' he was actually born in Kilmarnock and spent substantial periods of his life in Paisley, where it was alleged that every third man was a poet.[59]

Nonetheless, despite the degree of hyperbole inherent in this claim, there is little doubt that in the early prosperous phase of the weaving trade Paisley was a town which produced a disproportionate number of weaver poets. James Maxwell (1720 - 1800), who had spent much of his life as a weaver, set his autobiography in verse

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56. Ward, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p. 22.

57. The Scottish handloom weavers had their Weavers Magazine and Literary Companion in 1818-19, the Weavers Journal in the 1830s, while the Chartist Circular, 1839-1842, contained a considerable amount of poetry relating to handloom weavers and their trade.

58. Ward, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p. 24

59. Stewart Black, op. cit., pp. 217-218

while Alexander Wilson, an ornithologist, from an identical socio-economic background, had written poems full of dialect humour prior to his emigration to the United States.[60] Another Paisley poet of note was James Scadlock (1775 - 1818) whose lines on nature themes were published posthumously.[61] But the greatest of the Paisley poets was undoubtedly Robert Tannahill (1774 - 1810) who produced a large number of sensitive lyrics and romantic poems many of which have been subsequently set to music.[62]

The poetry written read and recited by these early weavers covered, of course, a variety of topics. Nevertheless, it is fair to argue that certain major themes dominated their verse. Religion, nature and love were favourite subjects although the obvious pride they took in their work also found expression in their verse. An anonymous Paisley poet, for example, stressed the importance of his craft:

> Verge to the northward to these dreary plains,
> Where nature's bound in adamantine chains
> Where solar light and genial heat are lost,
> And all around is darkness, gloom and frost,
> Where to possess - oh! What a glorious lot,
> A double blanket or a great watch-coat. [63]

He went on to list some of the vast variety of articles which were produced by the hand loom:

> There's shirtings, sheetings, corduroys, nankeens,
> There's sacking, canvass, osnaburgs and jean,

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60. *Ibid.*, p. 206
    Ward, *Literary Weavers*, *op. cit.*, p. 24

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*
    Stewart Black, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-209

63. *Weavers Magazine and Literary Companion*, Vol. 1, p. 272.

> There's ticking, broad cloths, cassimere and checks,
> There's velvets, bombasines and bombasets,
> There's plaidings, duffle, flannel, serge and crape,
> There's gauze, lace, ribbons, sarsenets and tape,
> There's many other fabrics coarse and fine,
> Whose names prosaic will not respond to rhyme,
> And some few more which metre very well,
> I could pronounce them but I cannot spell. 64

What is perhaps more surprising to discover is that the Scottish websters' love of poetry did not disappear with the onset of sectoral depression in the trade in the post-1815 era. In Renfrewshire websters like Robert Allan (1774 - 1841) continued to produce verse while G. James Barr (1781-1860) gained considerable fame for his musical contributions not least of which was his adaptation of Tannahill's 'Thou Bonnie Wood of Craigielee'.[65] In Dundee many weaver-poets continued to attend the literary gatherings which frequently took place at Thomas Lamb's temperance hotel,[66] while in slightly more convivial surroundings, William Thom (1788-1848), whose Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand Loom Weaver earned him considerable distinction, entertained numerous gatherings with his verse in east coast taverns. Again, in the years after Waterloo the weaving town of Airdrie could boast of poetic talents of more than local fame. Indeed, the 1830s witness a proliferation of verse on the plight of the handloom weavers of Scotland generally.[67] Most of these verses contained such a wealth of intimate

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64. Ibid.

65. C. Nisbet, A Short Study in Social and Economic History in the County of Renfrewshire C.1800-1850: The Decline of the Renfrewshire Weavers, B.A. Dissertation, University of Strathclyde, (1972), p. 7.

66. Ward, Literary Weavers, op. cit., p. 28.

67. Ibid.
J. Knox, Airdrie Bards, Past and Present, Airdrie, (1930), p. 96.

detail on the life and work of the websters that it can only be assumed that they were themselves responsible for many of these productions.

There was, however, a distinct change of emphasis in Scottish weaver poetry after 1820. The grinding poverty in which many of the labour force lived was to become a frequent theme for treatment. In 'Whisperings for the Unwashed' William Thom described the desperate plight of many Scottish weaving families:

> Hark, how he waukens the Weavers now
> Wha lie belair'd in a dreamy steep -
> A mental swither 'tween death and sleep -
> Wi' hungry wame and hopeless breast,
> Their food no feeding, their sleep no rest,
> Arouse ye, ye sunken, unravel your rags,
> No coin in your coffers, no meal in your bags. 68

Although the actual work performed by the websters was still dealt with, the avocation of the joys and satisfactions associated with weaving had clearly disappeared, to be replaced in the late 1830s by bitter comment about the monotony and exhaustion of the weaver's life. In the words of an anonymous poet:

> At length the ling'ring keel appears in view,
> Roll'd on by bores, progressive to the fel;
> Behind the shaft, he rumps it neatly through,
> Unwinds the cloth and picks and folds it well,
> Brushes his thread-bare claes, and dights his face,
> And trysts to meet his wife at Glasgow Cross,
> And, heavy-laden, hastes with haflin's race,
> For weel he kens there's little time to lose,
> The bell rings two just as he tramps the wareroom closs.
> 69

At the same time a deep religious strain also is found in much of

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68. W. Thom, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

69. Anonymous, The Weavers Saturday, op. cit., p. 7.

the later poetry of the Scottish weavers, although it was far removed from the pious sentimentality of MacIndoe. Now it was asserted that the work of God, who had created all men equal, had been usurped:

> God never made his creatures slave and lord,
> Mechanic, bishop, peasant, prince and peer.
> The rich and poor are equal; He adored,
> Who fix'd mankind in this terrestial sphere;
> And why are Adam's offspring now unequal here? 70

By the 1830s weavers' poems contained scathing attacks upon those whom they saw as being immediately responsible for their depressed state. Above all they denounced their employers and the 'system' which they operated:

> That system we'll oppose while we draw breath,
> Whose dogma doth unfeelingly devote
> Our artizans to work themselves to death,
> For meagre diet and a tattered coat. 71

The worst offenders among their employers, the small corks and country agents who cut wages at the least excuse were subjects for denunciation. In 1836 J. Kirkwood of Kilsyth wrote a sarcastic epigram 'On a Weaving Agent's eating a Pound of Flesh after Dinner':

> 'Tis strange the agents live so well,
> Or take such very hearty slices,
> Since every weaver here can tell,
> Their only aim is breaking prices. 72

Nonetheless the principal recurring theme in the poetry of the Scottish weavers after 1820 was, overwhelmingly, criticism of the government. Verse was then to become one of the main vehicles for

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70. Ibid., p. 15.

71. J. McFarlane, 'Stanzas by a Weaver', quoted in Weavers Journal, 1 March 1836.

72. Weavers Journal, 1 Dec. 1836.

conveying the radical message. The Airdrie weaver-poets, for example, included 'Radical Wull', or William Millar (1797 - 1862), who had been the local leader during the 1819-20 agitation and John Craig (1796-1854) who had also taken part in the troubles of that year.[73] The titles of some of Craig's poems - for example 'On Visiting his Mother's Grave' and 'Family Afflictions' - suggest deep depression, but it was Millar who voiced radical hopes in 'The Aurora Borealis':

> 'T'is shrewdly done; but where's thy home?
> Thy hope, thy place of bliss on high?
> Where, freed from tyrants laws you roam,
> Unfettered by their tyranny. 74

Yet his message was mild in relation to what other weaver-poets advocated. J. Macfarlane, for instance, in 1836 called upon all radicals to 'eradicate the blot' caused by government's inaction over the handloom weavers' difficulties.[75] The question contained in 'The Weavers Song' was one which was echoed in many poetic works in the 1830s:

> Deprived of all that blesses man,
>   Why should I live in pain,
> To bless a greedy tyrant clan
>   Who make my labour vain? 76

In a similar vein an anonymous bard tried to impress upon the government the immediate need for reform, if only to avert revolution:

> Such are mankind, oppressors and oppressed,
> The people suffer much before they rise
> And crush their tyrants; yet if unredressed,
> They'll sweep them to destruction and despise

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73. Knox, Airdrie bards, op. cit., p. 96.
74. Ibid.
75. Weavers Journal, 1 March 1836
76. Radical Reformers Gazette, 22 Dec. 1832.

> Aristocrats as, unremote, in France,
> When anarchy ran wild; and they will bend
> Their shoulders to the yoke, like things of chance,
> And groan again; but knowledge will expand
> Man's moral right and freedom then will be his friend.
> 77

By the 1830s therefore the poetry of the Scottish weaving communities had ceased to be outward looking as it had been during an earlier age. With the possible exception of William Thom's works no poetry of note on the themes of love or nature emerged from the weaving population of Scotland after 1820. In their stead came verse which was highly introspective and bitterly critical of existing institutions. It remains to decide how such a metamorphoses in the Scottish weavers' main form of cultural expression occurred.

In this context the social historian can advance three plausible explanations for the transition. Firstly, with rapidly declining living standards after 1815, the Scottish handloom weavers had to increase their working hours considerably. This left them with little time for cultural pursuits and consequently their knowledge of literature and of nature diminished.[78] Secondly, long term poverty meant that many Scottish weavers could no longer subscribe even small sums to book clubs while, through a dearth of decent clothing, they shunned most forms of social gatherings. As they now lived almost exclusively within their own families or small communities few new ideas filtered through to the weavers, hence stifling creativity. Given, therefore, that their main intellectual contacts were so narrowly circumscribed it is scarcely surprising that their poetry became obsessed with problems which

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77. Anonymous, The Weavers Saturday, op. cit., p. 6

78. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 14.

affected their own trade. Finally, protracted social and economic distress gave added impetus to the weavers' taste for radical notions.

iv

Extended hours of work and increasing poverty were also over time to impinge upon the weavers' leisure patterns. Without suggesting that the early Scottish handloom weaver could take time off whenever he liked, it must, nevertheless, be conceded that his hours of freedom were much more plentiful in the 'Golden Age' than was subsequently the case. For example the Scottish handloom weavers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries participated in such minor sports as bowling and curling, while rural pastimes such as fishing and berrying enjoyed considerable support.[79] In addition to those leisure outlets, many in this prosperous phase of the trade were also keen gardeners.[80] Singing was another leisure-time activity in which weavers of all ages took part. Most of these pursuits, however, were more or less the exclusive province of adult websters. Younger weavers and draw-boys had their own pastimes. Various ball games were played with a round object made up from the wool with which they worked, while their ability to improvise toys from working materials was again demonstrated by their creation of tops from broken shuttles.[81] But in a more serious vein, most young weavers in this early period, whether residing with their families or hired out to employers, were encouraged to read a

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79. Ibid., p. 13

80. J. Knox, Airdrie, a Historical Sketch, Airdrie, (1931), p. 32.

81. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 15.
Stewart, op. cit., p. 15.

chapter of the New Testament every day, an undertaking to which some parents were so committed that its neglect was in certain cases enough to cancel the contract with their children's employers.[82]

These leisure patterns had, however, undergone a fundamental change by the 1830s. By that time any sporting activities had been entirely abandoned while handloom weavers' interest in rural pastimes was now reduced to taking 'skulking walks' in the countryside on Sundays.[83] Significantly enough, few Scottish websters were left with gardens by this date. In this respect Airdrie, where weavers still practised gardening arts, was very much an exception.[84] Even draw-boys and others of more tender age than adult weavers had fewer hobbies since many of them now had to work on Saturday afternoons at tasks such as cleaning loom-steads, mending harness bridles and washing brushes.[85] Finally, their habits of Bible reading, as well as their parents attempts to educate them, were largely given up.[86]

To suggest what was substituted for these pursuits presents certain difficulties. In one sense there is of course an obvious temptation to argue that, since leisure hours were drastically cut in the years after 1815, there were no replacements of earlier pastimes. But that is at best only partially true. Although the

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82. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 18.
83. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 41, q. 669.
84. J.D. Knox, op. cit., p. 34.
85. Gilmour, Paisley Weavers, op. cit., p. 17.
86. Chapter 3, i; ii.

extant evidence is sketchy and relates mainly to large urban areas it is enough to point to a newly evolving pattern. A prominent part in this pattern was, assumedly, musical entertainment. In Glasgow, for example most handloom weavers and their families had to be content with the cheapest range of musical talents which tended to be provided by itinerant street musicians.[87] On the other hand, many of the younger weavers of Glasgow and other large towns were entertained at public amusements, shows and booths, at which a 'species of dramatic performance' was staged for very low rates of admission. Invariably, however, this species of entertainment attracted hostile contemporary comment. One writer, for example, argued that 'although there may not be anything expressly to inculcate immorality such is the tendency of the exhibition.'[88] Others went much further in their denunciation, alleging that the localities in which these shows were staged were centres for the spread of crime and vice.[89] Finally, after 1815 an increasing proportion of the Scottish websters spent more and more time in the ubiquitous drinking establishments in Scotland's weaving centres, above all the'dram-shops' which were exceptionally busy on Sundays when they did not normally work.[90] Common to all these post-war leisure activities was the fact that, in marked contrast to an earlier era, the Scottish handloom weavers now played little active part in the provision of their own entertainment. This development was in itself perhaps the most eloquent commentary of the impact

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87. Kilmarnock Mirror and Literary Gleaner, April 1819, pp. 250-51.
88. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 324.
89. Ibid.
90. Glasgow Saturday Post, 23 Dec. 1848.

of a lengthened working day upon the cultural norms and values of a domestic-based workforce.

v

Throughout the entire history of the hand loom industry in Scotland the embezzlement of weft by websters was one of the fundamental socio-economic problems which confronted manufacturers. As early as 1790, for instance, the practice of yarn embezzlement had reached such dimensions in Glasgow that a number of protecting societies had been formed by manufacturers to reduce its incidence.[91] Again in the years after 1815 employers from all over Scotland voiced concern at the increasing level of yarn embezzlement, which had evaded all their attempts to eradicate the evil. Indeed, as late as 1860 the manufacturers of Galashiels were forced to set up a Committee which would 'communicate with the Working Men's Committee and take advantage of any assistance which may be likely to prevent and detect cases of stealing and dishonest dealing in Waste.'[92] From these data it can only be concluded that yarn embezzlement occurred in all sectors of the trade.

But to understand fully the causes of this malpractice it is necessary to estimate its prevalence in the different sectors of the industry. This in its turn raises certain methodological difficulties since there is a dearth of precise statistical information on the

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91. Glasgow Advertizer and Evening Intelligencer, 20 July 1790; 1 July 1791.

92. Glasgow Herald, 13 Feb. 1818; 13 Dec. 1824.
Minutes of Galashiels Manufacturers Corporation 1777-1921, Scottish College of Textiles, Galashiels, Library.

subject. The historian is therefore compelled to rely upon incomplete and fragmentary evidence to determine how far the pattern of yarn embezzlement was a reflection of the increasing impoverishment of the weavers. But in a broader social context, it is also essential to ask whether sharply falling living standards affected the general level of crime among the Scottish weaving body.

The embezzlement of working materials took two principal forms. Firstly, there was the theft of an entire web, or several webs, by a weaver who would then abscond from the neighbourhood.[93] This type of offence, however, seems to have been rare after 1815 though it had not been uncommon in the early years of the trade. A much more prominent type of theft throughout the 1790-1850 period was the embezzlement by weavers and pirn winders - and possibly also by spinners - of several bobbins of thread from each web. Cloth was thus woven thinner, with fewer shots to the inch than it was supposed to have.[94] Stolen weft was then bartered for bowls and other items through a network of hawkers in both urban and rural weaving centres, though a proportion of it also found its way to the small pawnbrokers.[95] Eventually much of this yarn was taken to 'bowl corks' who made cloth, largely from materials derived from this source. Not all 'bowl weft' was, however, made up in Scotland for a considerable quantity was sent to Belfast for manufacture.[96] Nonetheless, the illegal nature of this traffic in yarn

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93. Glasgow Herald, 7 Nov. 1806

94. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 86.

95. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 111.

96. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 86.

made quantification of the problem difficult. The only overall estimate on the extent of yarn theft was for 1834/35, when it was argued that goods made from bowl weft did not constitute one-fortieth of the total output of the hand loom weaving industry.[97] There are, however, good reasons for believing that this was a gross under-estimate of the prevalence of this malpractice in the post-1815 period.

Firstly, the estimate was made by those who opposed the establishment of Boards of Trade in the industry. It was in their interests to play down the number of illegal operators in the trade since petty capitalists were also the chief offenders in the undercutting process which Trade Boards were designed to prevent.[98] Secondly there were so many difficulties involved in detecting offenders or suppressing the trade that any general estimate of the extent of weft embezzlement can at best be an informed guess. Thirdly, in the post-war years, weft embezzlement was a complaint constantly raised by both weavers and masters as being detrimental to the trade. The weight of this evidence would in itself lead one to suggest that the proportion of the trade's total production manufactured from stolen yarn was considerably higher than one-fortieth.[99] Fourthly, local evidence for the area around Glasgow in 1838 shows that the amount of yarn 'stolen, purloined or embezzled must be very considerable; and the loss sustained by the manufacturing establishments must ...

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97. Analysis of Evidence taken before the Select Committees on Hand Loom Weavers Petitions, 1834-35, P.P., 1835, p. 82.

98. Ibid.

99. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 86.

amount to an incredible sum'.[100] Finally, it is reasonable to argue that, with increasing poverty, the temptation to enhance money wages marginally by stealing a little weft was greater than in the previous period. This correlation between destitution and the incidence of embezzlement seems to have been real enough. For example, during the extreme depression in Paisley in 1842, there was a marked rise in yarn thefts, while the practice of embezzlement never quite obtained the same levels among the weavers in the east of Scotland as it did in the west, where the real wages were at their lowest.[101]

Breaking into weavers' shops also seems to have been a frequent crime in the 1840s although the extent to which these offences were perpetrated by hand weavers themselves cannot be precisely ascertained. Weft, shuttles, harnesses and other items were stolen during these break-ins. In Paisley in 1841 there was said to be 'no species of theft more deserving of severe punishment than this, which leaves poor tradesmen without the means of earning their bread.'[102] But those convicted of this crime usually paid a high penalty. In 1839, for instance, John McLachlan of Paisley was transported for fourteen years for repeatedly committing this offence.[103] Less frequently, patterns were stolen in fancy sectors of the trade despite the vigilance of manufacturers. In this case, however, weavers along with pattern drawers, were the guilty parties.[104]

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100. Ibid. p. 91.
101. Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 190.
102. Glasgow Saturday Post, 20 Feb. 1841
103. Glasgow Chronicle, 30 Sept. 1839
104. Glasgow Saturday Post, 2 May 1840.

It was in the years after 1815 that the Scottish handloom weavers, and especially those among them of Irish extraction, became increasingly identified with lawlessness and violence. Typically, the Irish variety of violence was the outcome of a drunken brawl.[105] But the Irish weavers were certainly not the sole offenders in this respect. For example, William Mutrie, Superintendent of Police in Paisley was of the opinion that amongst the 'drunks and disorderliness' in that town in 1837 there were more Scottish than Irish culprits.[106] On the whole, however, riotous conduct was more prominent among the poor. For example, a study of police records in Calton for the first quarter of 1837 revealed that seventy-seven handloom weavers had been convicted of lawless behaviour in the burgh whereas only seventeen spinners were guilty of this offence.[107] As poverty deepened, therefore, there was a notable increase in disorderly conduct among some sections of the weaving population.

Petty thieving, a great deal of which went undetected, became common among sectors of the Scottish hand loom weaving community towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Again, this was considered to be a particular failing among those of Irish origin . At Paisley, for example, Irish families were said to be 'nearly all addicted to thieving, children as well as parents.'[108] A much less usual but more serious form of offence was cruelty to children.

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105. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. xx.

106. Ibid., p. 609.

107. First Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workers, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 216, q. 2853.

108. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 609.

Occasionally weavers found themselves facing charges of serious assault against their apprentices, particularly pauper apprentices. Instances of such crimes occurred at Laurieston in 1835 and at Kirkintilloch, where master weavers had very bad reputations, in 1845.[109] Occasionally too, Scottish websters were guilty of attacking and destroying property. In 1823, for example, a power loom factory was attacked by an angry mob at Hutchesontown while in 1842 the weavers of Dunfermline set fire to some of that town's factories.[110] Such attacks along with the destruction of webs invariably took place during periods of industrial unrest. All assaults of this nature were concerned with the protection of living standards; for they were always perpetrated against those who either gave out, or accepted, work at below average rates.[111]

Contemporaneous with this post-1815 increase in the crime rate among the Scottish weaving community was a parallel expansion in vice. By 1816 it was claimed that the number of prostitutes, a high proportion of whom were closely associated with thieves, was rising in all the principal towns of the kingdom and that prostitution had now become a feature of areas where, forty years previously, it had been quite unknown.[112] After this point in time further growth in the numbers who lived a life of vice coincided with the contraction in weavers' living standards.[113] Although this

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109. Glasgow Herald, 26 Oct. 1835; 11 July 1845.

110. Ibid., 12 Sept. 1823; 12 Aug. 1842.

111. Ibid., 29 May 1829; 18 June 1847
Scots Magazine, LXXV, 1813, p. 312.

112. Glasgow Courier, 17 Sept. 1816.

113. W.E. Logan, The Great Social Evil, Its Causes, Extent, Results and Remedies, London, (1871), pp. 72-95.

development, in itself, does not prove that recruits to prostitution came from the weaving community it is, nonetheless, possible to construct a convincing case to demonstrate that deepening poverty had this kind of debasing effect upon weavers' families.

Firstly, contemporaries were convinced that there was a direct correlation between poverty and vice. Destitution, it was argued, led inexorably to immoral conduct in an attempt to ward off malnutrition.[114] The websters themselves were prepared to admit that with increasing impoverishment 'vice began to smile over the face of havoc.'[115] Secondly, although weaving communities were not situated in the most overcrowded areas of towns, which had high percentages of criminal and semi-criminal inhabitants, the Scottish websters nonetheless resided at close proximity to these centres of vice. Thus it was possible for Scottish weavers' families to be in constant contact with the 'vicious' and to be adversely affected by their example. Finally, that section of the labour force which lived in common lodging houses could scarcely hope to escape from the corrupting influence of these establishments, since they were the haunts of prostitutes and criminals.[116] But since this residence pattern, whether temporary or permanent, was chiefly a function of lowly economic status, it can only be concluded that the post-1815 drift to vice was also primarily determined by deepening levels of poverty.

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114. *Chartist Circular*, 19 Dec. 1840

115. *First Report of the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen*, *P.P.*, 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 166.

116. Brotherston, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53

vi

The early Victorians and their immediate predecessors tended to assess all aspects of social behaviour according to moral criteria. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century the moral worth of an individual or group did not merely embrace such matters as ethics and honesty; it was related to the individual's attitudes to work and to the nation's institutions.[117] More important still, this idea of morality was associated with the need to cultivate provident habits. Any leanings towards improvident behaviour whether in the form of an excessive reliance upon credit, imprudent budgeting, or particularly a high expenditure on drink, were tantamount to immoral behaviour.

Relating this definition to the preceding discussion of relatively measurable cultural aspects of weavers' lives - educational and intellectual standing, religious observation and devotion, leisure time activities, artistic achievement, incidence of crime and vice - it is clear that, over time, the Scottish handloom weavers increasingly displayed important symptoms of moral decline.[118] Moreover, there was a simultaneous trend towards less provident habits.[119] It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that many contemporaries referred to increasing moral failure among the workforce, although their accusations of immorality may have embraced facets of social behaviour other than these relatively easily measured ones. Nonetheless, it is necessary for the social historian to examine the causal mechanism for this pattern of cultural or

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117. Chapter 3, i - iv.

118. Ibid.

119. Chapter 2, v.

moral decay.

Contemporaries blamed a number of factors for increasing immorality. Among them was the influx of Irish into the trade who, it was claimed, brought with them habits of dishonesty, indolence and improvidence. Overall their effect upon the morals of the native Scots was thought to be pernicious.[120] Others ascribed falling moral standards to the influence of younger weavers whose behaviour fell short of that of their parents, largely, it was asserted, because they had never been taught to behave in a socially acceptable manner by older weavers whose sway over their offspring had dwindled.[121] Yet others argued that the general effect of the large urban centres was detrimental to morality while the promiscuous mixing of the sexes in weaving shops and factories was also blamed for declining standards.[122] Only a few were prepared to concede that the increasing incidence of moral failure was primarily the product of the destitution of the handloom weavers,[123] although the weight of the extant evidence strongly points in that direction.

Without doubting that Irish immigration had an adverse effect upon the social lives of the local communities into which they were absorbed, it can, nonetheless, be shown that moral decline was notable in weaving areas, such as Paisley, where the proportion of Irish weavers was relatively low. In many cases, the poor cultural levels of the younger Scottish weavers resulted largely from the

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120. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 436, p. 442, p. 446, p. 466.

121. Symons, op. cit., p. 149

122. Thom, op. cit., pp. 10-12.

123. Royal Commission on the Scottish Poor Laws, P.P., 1844, (557), XX, p. 699, q. 11064.
Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 188, q, 2478.

fact that, since birth, they had known little but grinding destitution, while the failure on their parents' part to give them adequate education and supervision arose out of low incomes and long working hours.[124] The role of large towns in influencing the culture of the Scottish weaving population should be played down since in the 1830s only one-third of that population lived in large urban areas.[125] Moreover, some of the apprehension regarding the deleterious moral effect of urban centres arose out of a contemporary belief that factory work encouraged immorality. Even if factories did lead to a deterioration of ethical standards only a small fraction of the hand loom weaving community would have been affected since domestic weavers formed the vast bulk of the labour force, even in the towns.[126] Finally, it can be shown conclusively that a direct relationship existed between standards of social behaviour and the prevailing level of economic prosperity.

For example, it was demonstrated that in the depression which afflicted Paisley in 1841-42 there was 'a very serious deterioration in those social habits which had been fostered' in the town.[127] A further indication of this relationship was provided by Symons who found that the only young weavers in Scotland who, still in 1839, possessed the virtues for which their forebears had been famed were found exclusively in the better paid sector of the trade.[128]

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124. Chapter 3, i.
125. Chapter 1, ii.
126. _Ibid_.
127. _Select Committee on Distress in Paisley_, _P.P._, 1843, (114), VII, p. x.
128. Symons, _op_. _cit_., p. 147.

By the 1830s the woollen weavers of the Borders were allegedly 'more moral' than their counterparts on other fabrics.[129] It was no coincidence that their living standards were sizeably higher than elsewhere in the Scottish weaving trade. Indeed the fact that accusations of declining moral standards became more common with the continuing sectoral fall in living standards is itself irrefutable proof of the adverse effect of destitution upon social behaviour. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that the decline in cultural standards was primarily the product of the increasing impoverishment of the weaving community.

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129. Gulvin, *op. cit.*, p. 177

Chapter 4

Attempts at Trade Unionism

i

From time to time during the 1790 to 1850 period the Scottish websters made determined attempts at forming successful combinations. The motivating forces behind these moves did not alter substantially over this sixty year period; for the primary aim of almost every weavers' association was the maintenance, or advancement, of wage rates and living standards. This was the purpose, for example, of almost all the strikes among the hand weaving labour force. During these direct confrontations with their employers the Scottish websters attempted either to increase rates of pay or to forestall threatened wage cuts.[1] It would, however, be wrong to assume that the objectives of the Scottish weavers' combinations were exclusively confined to trying to regulate short term movements in piece rates.

They were equally concerned with endeavouring to safeguard the interests of the workforce in the long term. For example, they hoped to remedy the problems of a glutted labour market by introducing effective restrictions upon the entry of apprentices to the trade.[2] Like handloom weavers elsewhere they also tried to exercise some measure of social control over the use of machinery. In this context they, above all, advocated a tax upon power looms.[3] Moreover, through their trade unions, the Scottish websters could

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1. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 17 *Glasgow Free Press*, 14 Sept. 1824.
2. *Select Committee on Combination Laws particularly as to the Act, 5 Geo. IV., C95*; *P.P.*, 1825 (417.437), IV, pp. 52-54.
3. Treble, Irish in North of England, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

collectively petition the legislature for ameliorative measures.[4] This concern with these long-term objectives was a persistent theme which runs throughout the period. Thus, during the 1830s it was argued that only unions could prevent the Scottish hand weaving trade from being 'overrun by a hetrogeneous swarm of our labour-buyers, one proportion of whom are a brigand of low, speculating despoilers, the pioneers in the depreciation of our labour.'[5] Above all, it was argued that strong combinations could check the evils of undercutting, a process which was rapidly spreading throughout the trade and which meant that respectable manufacturing houses had been 'compelled to follow the Vandals in the front or be ruined.'[6] Yet, although the Scottish weavers' unions of the 1830s saw the repulsion of this type of capricious reduction as one of their major functions, they still maintained their attempts to remedy the long-term ailments of their trade through a system of Trade Boards.[7]

ii

There is some ambiguity as to the legal status of Scottish weavers' trade unions even in the late eighteenth century. Although before 1800 there is little evidence of prosecution of wage earners in Scotland for simple combination nevertheless the Procurator

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4. Weavers' Journal, 1 March, 1836
5. Ibid., 31 Oct. 1835.
6. Ibid.
7. Paisley United Weavers, Charleston District Sederunt Books, 31 March 1834, Paisley Museum.
8. The actual prosecutions did not take place since the ringleaders could not be detected.

Fiscal of Renfrewshire had considered bringing to trial some Paisley weavers who had combined to resist a wage reduction in 1773. The impending charge was intimidation and violent behaviour in the course of picketing.[8] In addition, one of the three trials for the crime of combination in late eighteenth century Scotland was that of James Granger, a Glasgow weaver, who was charged at the High Court of Justiciary in 1788 with entering into a combination to raise the wages of weavers and for having been involved in the previous year's riots. He was found guilty and sentenced to a public whipping and a seven-year banishment, though the substantive crime was that of 'rioting and mobbing'. There was no debate on the relevance of the charge of combination.[9]

The legal position of trade unions in Scotland was to become even more equivocal in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, following the passing of the 1800 Combination Laws. Some were to claim that since these laws did not incorporate any clause adapting them to Scottish legal procedure trade unions were not illegal in Scotland in the pre-1825 era.[10] John Joseph Dillon, the eminent lawyer, for example, argued in 1812 that he saw 'nothing criminal or blameable if he /a weaver/ makes known his opinion to his fellow servants and if they, concurring in the same opinion, combine, that is take joint measures to obtain redress of this evil, which affects them all in common.'[11] Clearly some contemporaries, as well as

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8. J.L. Gray, The Law of Combination in Scotland, Economica, VIII, (1928), p. 335.

9. Ibid., p. 336.

10. Pelling, op. cit., p. 26.

11. J.J. Dillon to Viscount Sidmouth, 20 Dec. 1812, quoted in Aspinall, op. cit., pp. 148-149.

later historians were convinced that trade unions in Scotland had a right to exist in this period. Yet, despite this conviction there is, nonetheless, conclusive evidence to suggest that the existence of the Combination Laws acted as an effective brake upon Scottish handloom weavers' trade unions between 1800 and 1824, and particularly after 1813.

The significance of 1813 as a turning-point stems in part from the legal decision delivered in that year in the wake of the 1812 weavers' strike; for not only were dangerous practices like web cutting and the uttering of secret oaths declared criminal but so also was simple combination rendered illegal if any degree of compulsion - that is striking, or the use of economic and moral force - was resorted to against employers.[12] The psychological impact of this judgement, with rapidly declining economic status, and, of course, the failure of the strike itself moulded the attitudes of weavers towards combinations, and this partly accounts for the poor progress made by weavers' associations in the succeeding decade. They undoubtedly regarded the legal decision of 1813 with a considerable degree of respect since they did not differentiate between the mere existence of a union and its activities, but assessed combinations largely in terms of their effectiveness. By rendering unions ineffective the judgement of 1813 killed for the time being, all hopes of successful organisation in the trade. For

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12. Earlier, in 1810, Gavin Simpson, a cotton spinner, stood trial on a battery of charges arising out of a recent strike but 'the two judges were evidently determined to allow the relevancy of an indictment for combination only', Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

instance, the preamble to the articles of the General Association of Weavers in Scotland, instituted in 1824, claimed that all their previous efforts in the direction of unionisation were paralysed by the 'iron grip of the Combination Laws'.[13] This assertion, however, is only partly true; for the significance of 1812/13 as a turning-point in the history of weavers' unions also stems from the fact that the years following the strike witnessed dramatic wage falls in the weaving trade.

Nevertheless, all previous Scottish and English legislation pertaining to trade unions was repealed in the statute of 1824.[14] Like other work groups the Scottish handloom weavers reacted to repeal by vigorously renewing their attempts at combination.[15] Nevertheless, although the Act of 1824 gave legal recognition to the existence of trade unions, any attempts at threats, intimidation or violence remained punishable in law.[16] Glasgow weavers who organised a strike against a local manufacturer, Hutchison, were warned strongly in September 1824 that the new statute rendered their actions illegal.[17] Indeed, the outcome of this stoppage was that two of the leading officials of the weavers' association were each gaoled for thirty days. At their trial it was adjudged that the most heinous aspect of their actions was the passing of a resolution to force the offending manufacturer out of trade altogether.[18] Clearly legislative

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13. Select Committee on Combination Laws, P.P., 1825, (417.437), IV, pp. 52-54.

14. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 116, q. 2008.

15. Select Committee on Combination Laws, P.P., 1825, (417.437), IV, pp. 52-54.

16. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 100.

17. Glasgow Free Press, 7 Sept. 1824. 18. Glasgow Herald, 17 Sept. 1824.

restrictions hampered weavers' combinations even in the post-1824 environment. Indeed, the general industrial unrest triggered off by that Act convinced the government that greater limitations upon workers' organisations were necessary.

The restrictive clauses in the 1824 Act were reiterated in a statute of 1825 which also made criminal any attempt to force workmen either to join a union or contribute to its funds, while adding 'molestation and obstruction' to the prohibited list of industrial actions. This Act also established one code of law for both Scotland and England.[19] Thereafter, the legal status of trade unions in Scotland was similar to that in England except in one important respect. In the former country, unlike the latter, all who engaged in a conspiracy to effect an object by illegal means - 'either by mobbing and rioting, or by violence, or by assault, still more by attempts at murder or attempts at fire raising' - were guilty of an indictable offence in common law.[20] In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, Scottish handloom weavers' unions had to tread carefully or fall foul of the law. However, as will be shown later the legal restrictions imposed in 1824 and 1825 formed but a small part of the elements which hindered the progress of combinations among the Scottish websters.[21] Of greater importance in this period were the continued decline in wage rates, which brought deepening levels of poverty to the trade.

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19. *Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers*, *P.P.*, 1841, (296), X, p. 101.

20. *First Report of Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen*, *P.P.*, 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 116, q. 2009.

21. Chapter 4, iii

iii

Handloom weavers' combinations existed in Scotland before 1790. In 1773, for instance, the silk and linen weavers of Paisley resisted wage cuts by picketing and intimidating websters who accepted work at lower than the customary rates, and by threatening masters who attempted to obtain cheap labour in rural areas of Renfrewshire.[22] Six years later, in 1779, their Glasgow counterparts formed a mob which was instrumental in forestalling legislation allowing the importation of French cambrics.[23] By this later date there were a number of weavers' clubs in existence around Glasgow: in 1780 they united in an attempt to secure a uniform scale of weaving prices but apparently did not succeed.[24] This setback, however, was not a fatal blow to early attempts at unionisation for in 1787 the Clyde valley weavers' general association was reformed to withstand wage reductions.[25] This was the prelude to the first serious strike among the Scottish handloom weavers.[26]

In July 1787 many of the weavers of the west of Scotland stopped work to combat mooted cuts in the price of weaving. Meeting in Glasgow Green they proceeded to appoint committees 'to meet with the masters, receive their ultimatums and report.'[27] Eventually it became clear to the weavers that negotiations, however lengthy, were fruitless. This realisation led to threatening letters being

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22. Smout, _op_. _cit_., p. 424. 23. _Ibid_.

24. H.A. Turner, _Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, a Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions_, London, (1962), p. 61.

25. _Ibid_., p. 65. 26. _Ibid_.

27. H.W. Meikle, _Scotland and the French Revolution_, Glasgow, (1912), p. 64.

sent to the manufacturers whose families also were subjected to general molestation by the striking websters. In an attempt to spread the stoppage webs were cut from the looms of 'blacklegs' and publicly burnt while a similar fate befell the contents of the warehouses of recalcitrant manufacturers.[28] On 3 September a mob of striking weavers, having cut a number of webs from looms in the Calton area, were burning them at Parkhouse in Duke Street when the magistrates arrived together with a detachment of the 39th Regiment of Foot. A riot ensued during which stones and brickbats were thrown at the authorities but, despite the reading of the Riot Act, the mob refused to disperse and the military were ordered to fire. Three rioters were killed on the spot and several others were wounded.[29] The same afternoon, however, the weavers reassembled and resumed their attempts at enforcing the stoppage by resorting to loom wrecking. Their riotous activities were continued the following day, although the timely arrival of the military was to prevent the prolongation of the disturbance. Although the precise number of weavers who participated in the 1787 stoppage is not known some indication of their strength may be deduced from the fact that some 6,000 people attended the funerals of the shot weavers in the Calton Burial Ground.[30]

Nevertheless the sequel to this agitation was profoundly disappointing to the weaving community; for after a two months' stop-

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28. J. Cleland, Annals of Glasgow, comprising an account of the Buildings, Charities and the Rise and Progress of the City, Vol. I, Glasgow, (1816), pp. 37-38.

29. Glasgow Mercury, 5 Sept. 1816.

30. Cleland, Annals of Glasgow (1816), op. cit., p. 38.

page, the websters of the west of Scotland were unable to prevent a reduction in wage rates, while in the following year one of the weavers' leaders received a severe sentence for his part in the proceedings.[31] Yet, despite these adverse factors, and although they were to avoid major industrial confrontations in the ensuing two decades, websters continued to support the concept of association over a wide area of the West Central belt.[32] During this period handloom weavers' friendly societies were of vital importance in keeping combinations alive. At Paisley, for instance, where weavers met regularly on a weekly basis to discuss the state of trade and wage rates being paid by various manufacturing houses, the weavers' clubs also performed the normal functions of provident societies.[33] Again, during the 1812 stoppage many weavers' friendly societies generously pledged their funds in support of the websters' action, 'a cause, the success of which seems indispensable to their /friendly societies/ existence.'[34] Some indication of the success which attended attempts at keeping the principle of trade unionism alive among Scottish weavers in this period may be obtained from the fact that in 1809 there was scarcely a village in Scotland which did not possess a weavers' union society. Acting together in 1809 they drew up the initial Articles and Regulations for the General Association of Operative Weavers in Scotland.[35] Moreover, during the

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31. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 336. 32. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

33. W. Taylor, *An Answer to Mr Carlile's Sketches of Paisley*, Paisley, (1809), pp. 301-305.

34. Printed letter signed by David Ross and Thomas Smith, Officials of Weavers' Association, Glasgow, 25 Nov. 1812. Trial Presentations, Justiciary Office, Edinburgh.

35. Ellis and Mac A'Ghobhainn, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
These Articles and Regulations were agreed upon at a meeting

intervening quiescent phase, members of these organisations had not been content with their mere existence.

Although the quarter century following the first Scottish hand-loom weavers' strike of 1787 was largely a period of industrial peace in the trade, the Scottish websters' associations were not totally inactive in important areas of social policy. In 1803 they petitioned parliament for machinery to settle disputes between masters and workmen in the cotton trade.[36] The outcome of their requests was legislation in that year regulating the descriptions and method of giving out work, while disagreements in the trade were to be settled by Justices of the Peace.[37] Later in 1808 and 1811, Scottish weavers' unions along with their English counterparts petitioned the legislature for minimum wages for the weaving of cotton fabrics. The total failure of those initiatives, coinciding with apprehensions of an impending crisis in the trade imparted the necessary momentum for the Scottish cotton websters to found a strong, national union in Scotland. Significantly enough, their co-workers in England and Ireland were similarly driven towards unionisation.[38]

Scotland generally, and Glasgow, the largest weaving centre in particular, took the lead in the process of unionisation. This was not altogether surprising since Scotland had a higher proportion of

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of delegates held at Glasgow on 24 June 1809, and afterwards were altered and improved at several subsequent meetings, particularly 6 June 1810, 21 August 1811 and 3 June 1812. Trial Presentations, Justiciary Office, Edinburgh.

36. Select Committee on Disputes between Masters and Workmen in the Cotton Trade, P.P., 1802-03, (114), VIII.

37. Gaskin, op. cit., pp. 177-178

38. Smout, op. cit., p. 424.

skilled weavers who were better educated, and more articulate than was the case elsewhere in the United Kingdom.[39] A federation of affiliated societies in all major weaving centres was formed along the lines set down in 1809, and central committees of representatives from local committees were set up at Glasgow, Paisley and Perth in Scotland; at Manchester, Bolton, Preston and Carlisle in England; and at Belfast in Ireland. Weekly meetings of delegates were held at the headquarters of the union in Glasgow.[40] Yet, despite this complex organisational structure, the aims of the weavers' associations were relatively clear-cut.

In essence, the union pressed for three goals. Firstly, it aimed at preventing the dilution of the trade by insisting upon a seven-year apprenticeship, by restricting the proportion of apprentices to weavers and by regulating the transfer of journeymen to master weaver status.[41] Secondly, it hoped to stop all forms of fraud and embezzlement in the industry.[42] Thirdly, it called upon magistrates to fix reasonable rates of wages for weaving in the cotton trade.[43] It was the attempt to implement this last objective that led to the Scottish handloom weavers' strike of 1812.

Not surprisingly Glasgow, the nucleus of the weavers' union, was to be the testing ground. Early in the year the national committee of the Scottish weavers' union met the most influential

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39. Ibid., p. 425.

40. Ibid.
N.S.A., Lanarkshire, p. 22.

41. Ibid.

42. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 179.

43. Smout, op. cit., p. 425

manufacturers of that city in the Clerk's Chamber in the presence of the Lord Provost and other magistrates. The weavers hoped that the local authority would regulate the prices of weaving in Glasgow. The municipal government however was as averse to wage fixing as central government had been, and the weavers' demands were refused. Acting upon the advice of two eminent Edinburgh advocates, Francis Jeffrey and Henry Cockburn, the websters raised an action based upon old Scottish statutes against a number of manufacturers before the Justices of the Peace in Glasgow. After examining an 'immense' number of witnesses the Justices considered the wage rates desired by the weavers to be 'moderate and reasonable'.[44] The weavers' cause was further strengthened when the Court of Session, after considerable litigation affirmed the competence of Justices of the Peace to fix wages. However, as no compelling clauses were included in the sentence of the Scottish Supreme Court, the manufacturers continued to pay the lower rates, treating the weavers' demands for reasonable wages with contempt.[45] It was thus made abundantly clear to the weavers that stronger measures were required if their demands were to be met.

The central committee of the weavers' union now called a meeting of delegates from all cotton weaving districts in the counties of Lanark, Ayr, Renfrew, Dumbarton and Stirling to which the Sheriff of Glasgow was invited to attend. It was at this meeting that, despite the Sheriff's objections, strike action was unanimously decided upon by the websters' delegates. They were 'tormented with

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44. History of the Weavers' Strike by John Wilson, their Secretary, Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

45. Ibid.

litigation and expense, and the want of a compulsitor to make the judgement of the Court effectual', to such an extent that they now took matters into their own hands.[46] The secretary of the weavers' committee, John Wilson, later explained that a crucial factor influencing their decision to withdraw their labour was a recent opinion given at the Court of Session by the Lord Justice Clerk. In the case of the paper-makers of Dalkeith he had stated 'that if the Paper-makers had applied to the Justices of the Peace, and had got their prices sanctioned by them, then they had a right to strike in any numbers.'[47] The Scottish websters struck believing that their action was legally admissible.

Almost immediately 20,000 looms in Scotland stopped working. Within days a total of 40,000 were said to be silent.[48] Nor was the strike confined to west central Scotland; it also spread to Aberdeen despite the relatively isolated location of that town.[49] The weavers' committee claimed that by December the stoppage was so successful that 'from the German Ocean to the Irish Channel, no cotton weaver is working below the full prices.'[50] Nevertheless their

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46. Ibid. 47. Ibid.

48. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 181.

49. S.D. McCalman, Chartism in Aberdeen, Scottish Labour History Journal, (1970), p. 16.

50. Address, signed by Wm. McKimmie, James Johnston, John Wilson, Alexander Richmond, Thos. Smith, 8 Dec. 1812, quoted in Aspinall, op. cit., p. 613.
Although it is impossible to ascertain precisely how many Scottish weavers had stopped work by this point in time some indication of the strength of the union may be obtained from the fact that, even as early as 1809, it extended to Lanark, Rutherglen, Hamilton, Douglas, Airdrie, Strathaven, Pollokshaws, Paisley and Kilbarchan, as well as having large branches in major centres such as Glasgow and Paisley.
Glasgow Herald, 15 March, 1813.

will to resist owed much to assistance given by those who wrought other fabrics in Scotland. Among others, both Galashiels woollen websters and Selkirk stocking weavers raised subscriptions amounting to 2/6d per worker, which were pledged for the support of their 'brethren who have been involved in these calamities'.[51] Such contributions were in every sense vital since the financing of a prolonged strike posed a fundamental problem for those who were being subjected to adverse economic pressures.

Basic to an understanding of this difficulty was the fact that striking weavers and their families had no claim whatever upon the Scottish Poor Law which provided maintenance for able-bodied poor only when they were 'by age or disease prevented from working.'[52] In the absence of this type of institutional assistance extraordinary exertions were to be made by local committees to secure money to supply food for those who could not help themselves throughout the three-month duration of the stoppage.[53] In several cases weavers' families survived with the aid of small savings accumulated during previous years of relative prosperity in the industry. Some of these savings had been made through weavers' friendly societies which now subscribed liberally to the weavers' cause and gave substantial loans to striking websters.[54] Others were

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51. Hall, op. cit., pp. 289-290.
    Aspinall, op. cit., p. 125.

52. Proclamation, by the Sheriff of the County of Lanarkshire, the Magistrates of Glasgow and the J.Ps for the Lower Ward of Lanarkshire, quoted in Ibid., pp. 140-141.

53. Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

54. Taylor, Annals of Fenwick, op. cit., pp. 301-305.
    Glasgow Herald, 15 March 1813
    Printed letter signed by David Ross and Thomas Smith, Officials of Weavers' Association, 25 Nov. 1815.

possibly aided by contributions from sympathisers generally. Nonetheless, despite this kind of supplementary income, the sacrifices made by weavers and their families were considerable. Indeed, John Wilson was of the opinion that privations suffered by websters and their dependents were primarily responsible for their eventual capitulation, although he also claimed that the prolonged nature of the stoppage had a general dampening effect upon the enthusiasm of the websters for the strike.[55] In the absence of other effective tactics, victory in this dispute went to the side which could afford to withstand the stoppage longer.

Throughout the stoppage local authorities had remained unconvinced that the weavers' intentions were peaceful, claiming that the striking websters threatened public peace. Almost inevitably one result of this form of pleading was that military support for the civil authorities was increased in some areas. Warnings were issued about 'personal injury, the destruction of property and open outrage' being perpetrated by the weaving population.[56] There were also complaints of web destruction and loom smashing while it was alleged that some weavers had been forced to withdraw their labour as they were intimidated by their workmates. Yet impartial witnesses were impressed with the peaceful conduct of the weavers during the stoppage. J.J. Dillon, for example, argued that weavers' complaints at intimidation arose out of a reluctance to offend their masters by admitting that they had stopped work voluntarily, rather than through fear of repercussions from their co-strikers.[57] More-

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55. Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

56. Aspinall, op. cit., p. 141. 57. Ibid., p. 150.

over, allegations of violent intentions were certainly denied by the weavers themselves. Indeed, John Wilson, their secretary, emphasised that the weavers were careful to incur no infringements of law.[58] In fact, there is no evidence of violence having been employed to enforce the stoppage. Instead beamers were imposed upon not to prepare webs for non-strikers and, on some occasions, ravels and other implements necessary for looming webs were taken away from 'blacklegs'.[59] And although attempts were made to introduce an element of Luddism,[60] the destruction of machinery or property never became a feature of the stoppage. Nevertheless, such insistence upon a non-violent strategy in itself offered no guarantee of success to the striking Scottish websters.

By early 1813 financial strain coupled with an increasing feeling of failure brought the strike to an end after twelve weeks. Shortly afterwards, fourteen members of the central and local committees of the weavers' union were indicted to stand trial. The Court of Justices sentenced seven of them to different periods of imprisonment, four absconded and three were not brought to trial. During their periods in gaol the weavers' leaders families were supplied, according to their needs, by the central committee.[61] Before the affairs of the committee itself were wound up, however, it was discovered that they were in debt to the considerable sum

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58. Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.
59. Glasgow Herald, 15 March 1813.
60. Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, op. cit., p. 94
61. Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

of £31 10/- to the Judiciary Court. Members of the weavers' committee now found themselves in difficult circumstances since the weavers' trade union had, by this point in time, been dissolved,[62] and despite a court action raised against the districts which had supported the association, the central committee failed to raise the sum. In this case, Sheriff Depute Robert Hamilton refused to allow the central committee to start proceedings against the refractory districts since the Scottish Supreme Court had declared the weavers' trade union an illegal body.[63] The sequel to this was that the members of the weavers' committee each had to pay between 30/- and 40/-.[64]

The failure of the 1812 strike had a profound effect upon Scottish handloom weavers' combinations. Firstly, despite a legal battle followed by a lengthy and extensive stoppage the weavers had to return to their looms at the old rates. Secondly their aim of preventing dilution in the trade was not realised with the inevitable result that the social problems created by an overstocked labour market were exacerbated. Thirdly, many considered that arbitrary punishments had been imposed upon weavers' leaders in 1813.[65]

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62. Ibid.

63. Ibid. A similar decision was made by Sheriff Campbell at Paisley in 1834 when he refused 'to enforce in a court of law the fulfilment of a contract arising out of a conspiracy to drive a manufacturer completely out of business....'
Glasgow Herald, 28 April 1834.

64. Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

65. Many eminent Scottish lawyers were of the opinion that the weavers' committee had broken no law. The feeling among Scottish weavers that their leaders had been unjustly tried and punished was intensified by the fact that at the time the trials were going on a Bill was in progress through parliament to repeal the old Scottish statutes upon which the committee's proceedings were founded. Their suspicions were added to during the trial itself. When Mr

Fourthly, the financial squabbles which were the sequel to the weavers' union's activities mitigated against the future success of a general weavers' association in Scotland, since an atmosphere of distrust between local and central committees must have arisen. Again, the financial burdens imposed upon individual weavers' leaders may have discouraged active participation in these organisations in the immediate future. Faced with this catalogue of failure it is not altogether surprising that for over a decade after their dispersal in 1813 handloom weavers' combinations made little progress. In fact, it required the positive encouragement of the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 before any further serious attempt at large-scale unionisation was made.

In the intervening decade it is clear that the Scottish websters to a large extent abandoned the organisation which they had formed in 1812. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the Scottish websters gave up completely their commitment to unionisation. But to ascertain whether or not the organisation of 1812 continued to exist in a dormant state poses considerable methodological problems since the extant evidence on combinations normally refers only to periods of industrial action. At times of 'low key' activity little mention is made of trade unions in contemporary newspapers.[66] This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the

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Jeffrey rose for the defence the court ordered all lights except those on the bench to be extinguished. Reporters, therefore, were only able to obtain a curtailed version of Jeffrey's four-hour speech.
Reformers Gazette, 30 July 1838.

66. This difficulty also confronts the historian of handloom weavers' trade unions in the north of England.
Treble, Irish in North of England, op. cit., p. 203.

1812 to 1824 period in the Scottish hand loom weaving trade was for the most part an era of industrial peace, which was occasionally punctuated by local stoppages in pursuit of particular objectives.

Yet such isolated instances do demonstrate that some websters still looked to local unions as the best agencies for safeguarding the interests of the weaving trade. For example, in June 1819 the handloom weavers of Carlisle struck in an attempt to gain advances in pay rates and shortly afterwards, 160 of their co-workers at Dumfries who also wrought for Carlisle manufacturers followed this lead. The evidence suggests that the Dumfries strikers were fairly well organised in 1819, although whether or not the weavers' combination of Dumfries was of long standing is open to question.[67] In the same year the websters of Thankerton entered into an organisation whose main aim was the restriction of entry into the trade. Although their action was loudly applauded by weavers in the west of Scotland they did not, however, for the moment follow this example.[68] In 1822 the linen weavers of Dunfermline suffered extreme distress during a very lengthy stoppage precipitated by a decision among local manufacturers to reduce the table of weaving prices,[69] although a later report from the east of Scotland, however, seems to indicate that such action was far from typical of the weavers of that area.[70] Again there was a serious outbreak of violence in 1823 at Hutchesontown, accompanied by strong ele-

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67. Dumfries and Galloway Courier, 8 June 1819.

68. Glasgow Herald, 14 June 1819.

69. Henderson, op. cit., p. 613.

70. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 194.

ments of Luddism and at least one instance of vitriol throwing. As steam looms were the principal target of the rioters it is reasonably safe to assume that hand weavers played an important part in the disturbance.[71] This, however, does not by itself give any guidance as to the extent, or indeed existence, of combinations among weavers in the area.

But the main breach in the relative calm of the 1812 to 1824 period came undoubtedly with the disturbances of 1819 and 1820. Moreover, it can be shown that as a prelude to these agitations there was considerably increased activity among weavers' associations in the west of Scotland.[72] It is possible that some of these bodies had remained in existence since 1812; but it is more likely that the weavers' clubs of the 1819-1820 period were newly formed. Certainly, their objectives were quite different from those of the earlier weavers' union. Their aims were now predominantly political in sharp contrast to the industrial objectives of their predecessors.[73] (Handloom weaver participation in the events of 1819-1820 will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5). Overall therefore it is reasonable to conclude that between 1812 and 1824 there is no evidence of any organisation among the Scottish websters on the scale of the 1812 combination, while collective action during these years tended to be local, sporadic, and

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71. Glasgow Herald, 12 Sept. 1823.

72. J. Howie, An Historical Account of the Town of Ayr for the Last Fifty Years, Kilmarnock, (1861), pp. 63-64.
Parlane, op. cit., p. 82.

73. Johnston, op. cit., p. 240.

quite un-co-ordinated.

Despite this period of relative inactivity, however, the 'principle of combination had not been broken.'[74] Rather, most of the Scottish weavers had for the time being suspended their endeavours to form large unions, although the spirit of combination remained strong, at least at the local level. Moreover, some minor attempts at uniting the workforce can be discerned. For instance, the antecedents of the Scottish handloom weavers' combination, founded in September 1824, can be traced back to the spring of that year, before the Combination Acts were repealed.[75] Overall, however, the impact of repeal was profound. The officials of the General Association of Weavers in Scotland claimed that 'the abrogation of these laws has ... accelerated a uniformity of sentiment, and a union of interest, founded upon the principles of moderation and justice.'[76] They regarded their lack of unity in the past as a principal cause of their increasing distress. 'Disunited among themselves they [the handloom weavers] have been open to the designs of the intriguing Manufacturer and have generally been pushed down to the lowest grade of human slavery'.[77] Moreover the need felt by the Scottish websters for a strong combination can be demonstrated by the very rapid rate at which the association of 1824 was formed. In this context it is important to examine what was expected to be

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74. Letter from the Sheriff Substitute of Renfrewshire to the Sheriff Depute, 18 Jan. 1813.
Scottish Record Office, RH 2-4/100, p. 29.

75. Glasgow Herald, 13 Dec. 1824.

76. Ibid.

77. Glasgow Free Press, 14 Sept. 1824.

achieved through their new union.

The General Association of Weavers in Scotland was to consist, it was hoped, of all the operative weavers in the country, irrespective of fabric worked.[78] The affairs of the union were to be placed under the superintendence of a general committee, consisting of delegates from the affiliated districts and meeting when required. The necessary arrangements for the proportional representation of districts at general meetings and for postal voting were written into the articles of the Association.[79] The complex structure of the union was again accompanied by relatively simple aims. Pre-eminent among its objectives was a commitment to halt dilution by imposing restrictions upon apprenticeship, all of whom had to be indentured. No associated weaver could take on more than two apprentices other than members of his own family while the only female apprentices allowed were the weaver's own children. In addition, strict regulations governing the times served by apprentices and journeymen were laid down.[80]

In addition the Scottish Weavers' Association was to curb all forms of malpractices in the industry. To this end a system of rewards was evolved for information concerning web or weft embezzlement or abscondees. To facilitate the realisation of this goal all associated weavers were to be issued with tickets and manufacturers were requested to grant work to none except ticket holders.[81]

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78. Select Committee on Combination Laws, P.P., 1825, (417.437), IV, pp. 52-54.

79. Ibid. 80. Ibid.

81. On more than a few occasions weavers took out webs from masters and then left the district, carrying off with them the warp and weft. Ibid.
Glasgow Free Press, 14 Dec. 1824.

Although reluctant to co-operate with the ticket system at first, fearing that their purpose was to restrict the granting of webs to unionised weavers only, the employers were eventually persuaded to recognise them in return for co-operation on the union's part in helping to stamp out all forms of fraud and dishonesty.[82] Two subsidiary objectives of the Associated Weavers were to grant rewards for any of its members who effected any 'improvement that will be of general benefit to the trade' and to pay small sums of aliment to long-term members, over sixty years of age, who were unable to work through infirmity.[83] Once again, however, the overriding objective of the Association was the maintenance or enhancement of wage rates.

As a principal part of the union's strategy it was unanimously agreed that tables of weaving prices for all the different fabrics should be printed and circulated among the branches of the Weavers' Association.[84] Select committees of websters would wait upon the manufacturers in each line hoping to persuade them to raise wages to table levels.[85] These committees were then to report back to the general committee on the success of their negotiations with the manufacturers, after which further delegations would be sent to employers who persisted in paying under table prices.[86] Thereafter, if any manufacturer persisted in undercutting all associated

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82. Ibid.
    Glasgow Herald, 24 Dec. 1824.
83. Select Committee on Combination Laws, P.P., 1825, (417.437), IV, pp. 52-54.
84. Glasgow Herald, 13 Sept. 1824.
85. Glasgow Free Press, 2 Nov. 1824.
86. Glasgow Herald, 5 Nov. 1824.

weavers were to refuse work from him, while websters who withdrew their labour from a recalcitrant master were to be supported by union funds.[87] These attempts to ensure that all work was executed at table prices were reinforced by the introduction of a system of tickets. Each web given out had to be accompanied by a ticket stating the description of fabric, the length of the piece and the price at which it was to be paid.[88] Furthermore, particular vigilance was demanded of the weavers in their dealings with small corks who were notorious undercutters.[89] In the end, however, the major confrontation, which the Weavers' Association embarked upon in 1824, was not against these petty capitalists but against a large and 'respectable' manufacturer.

In 1824, Peter Hutcheson, a Glasgow manufacturer, switched to the production of material which he called 'mediums' but which, according to the weavers, were in fact 'first' fabrics. Since he paid at less than table prices for 'firsts', other houses began to follow his example in undercutting.[90] Persistent attempts by Hutchison to take the lead in lowering weaving prices culminated in a resolution of 28 August 1824 "that the whole energies of the Association be at present confined to the grand point, namely, that of thrusting Mr P. Hutchison out of the trade.'[91] Within a fort-

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87. Scotsman, 11 Sept. 1824.

88. An example of this ticket is:-
'A 14^{00} Jaconet, 101 ells, 1400 splits, 76 gangs. Weaving per ell 4½d, winding per spindle 2¼d. This web to be divided into 6 pieces, each piece to measure 22 yards of 37 inches, to count 14 shots....' etc.
Glasgow Herald, 24 Dec. 1824.

89. Glasgow Chronicle, 9 Sept. 1824.

90. Glasgow Herald, 24 Sept. 1824.

91. Scotsman, 11 Sept. 1824.

night of passing this resolution approximately two-thirds of Hutchison's vast workforce had withdrawn their labour, the strikers and their dependents being supported by union funds.[92] In the main the stoppage was peaceful although one unfortunate incident, during which striking websters publicly burnt an effigy of George Smith, a Camlachie blackleg, was used by the establishment press to heap 'torrents of abuse' upon the Weavers' Association and its members.[93] This 'outrage' probably did little to endear the weavers' cause to public opinion. More seriously, their morale was to be further tested when two of the union's officials, John Allan and John McBeth were arrested and sentenced to one month's imprisonment each for formulating the resolution against Hutchison.[94] Initially, however, neither this setback nor the cost of the stoppage markedly dampened the Scottish websters' support for the strike or the union.

By mid-September 1824, when the weavers' leaders trials were being held, there were 13,066 associated websters in Scotland, in itself a remarkable achievement since less than a month had transpired since the union's inception.[95] Thereafter the increase in

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92. A meeting of delegates of the Weavers' Association in mid-September 1824 received reports from various districts about the success of the union's stand against Hutchison. Of 1,150 weavers who had worked for this house (in areas which gave returns) as many as 743 or 64.5 per cent of the total had withdrawn their labour. Glasgow Free Press, 14 Sept. 1824.

93. Glasgow Chronicle, 9 Sept. 1824
Paisley Advertiser, 16 Oct. 1824
Glasgow Free Press, 28 Dec. 1824.

94. Glasgow Herald, 17 Sept. 1824.

95. Scotsman, 11 Sept. 1824
Glasgow Free Press, 14 Sept. 1824.

the membership of the Weavers' Association continued to be impressive. For example, the number of weavers associated at Airdrie by 12 November was 450 representing an increase of ninety-five members in the previous month, while the Cambuslang delegate reported large increases in his district over roughly the same time span.[96] This expansion continued into the early part of 1825 when delegations were sent to such places as Kirkintilloch and Hamilton to help the weavers of these areas to form branches of the union.[97] Indeed, by early 1825, the Association had spread well beyond the west of Scotland to weaving centres like Dundee, Aberdeen and Arbroath in the east and Earlston in the Border area.[98] But of equal significance was the fact that the union was no longer solely confined to any one fabric: it now embraced those who wrought wool, silk and linen as well as cotton. Concern with expanding the Association's geographical horizons did not, however, mean that the important question of financial stability was overlooked; for in March 1825 it was decided that an emergency fund should be set up to finance future stoppages. Each associated weaver was expected to contribute 5/- for this purpose.[99] Few weavers probably realised at the time what the impending demands on this fund would be.

In the next few months the attempt to enforce the agreed rates cost the Association increasing amounts of money. Towards the end of April 1825 many of the leading houses in the hand loom weaving trade were attempting to cut pay rates.[100] Later, in mid-May,

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96. Glasgow Herald, 12 Nov. 1824; 15 Nov. 1824

97. Glasgow Free Press, 11 Jan. 1825; 3 May 1825.

98. Ibid., 7 Dec. 1824; 22 Jan. 1825; 22 March 1825; 26 April 1825.

99. Ibid., 8 March 1825. 100. Ibid., 12 April 1825

although the Weavers' Association could boast that none of their members was accepting work under table prices, this stand had already drained union funds of approximately £500, in maintenance to members who had refused low paid webs.[101] At this point in time, the allowances given by the union were 6/- weekly to unmarried journeymen and 7/- weekly to a man and his wife, with an extra 6d for every unemployed child under ten years of age.[102] However, with the downturn of the trade cycle in the summer of 1825 the financial drain upon the funds of the Association greatly increased. In mid-June £130 weekly was being paid out in strike benefits; a month later in Irvine alone £40 per week was allocated to weavers for refusing underpriced work; by August 1825 a total of £1,740 had been withdrawn from the emergency fund and unemployment was rising rapidly.[103] Moreover, the increasing financial difficulties of the Association were exacerbated by a simultaneous fall off in receipts from union members. Indeed it is likely that even at the height of the boom in early 1825 the Association's emergency fund did not reach its target of a contribution of 5/- per head since by that date a sizeable portion of the Scottish workforce already lived in a state of primary poverty. But now, with the onset of depression and rising unemployment, contributions declined.[104] Given these adverse tendencies, it is not surprising that by August many districts were complaining of financial embarrass-

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101. Ibid., 10 May 1825; 17 May 1825.

102. Ibid., 30 July 1825.

103. Ibid., 14 June 1825; 12 July 1825; 20 Aug. 1825.

104. In June 1825, for example, £100 was raised for the support of handloom weavers through a theatre concert. Ibid., 2 July 1825.

ment.[105] In the following weeks, despite gallant attempts by active members of the Association to curb wage cuts it became apparent that the organisation could not withstand determined efforts by major employers to cut rates.[106] In the last analysis a major cyclical slump had effectively broken the power of the Scottish Weavers' Association.

In the post-1825 period the absence of data on weavers' combinations indicates that there was relatively little organisation among the Scottish handloom weavers until 1832. Indeed it required the impetus of boom conditions before the unionisation of the industry was again attempted on a large scale.[107] As in an earlier period, however, the idea of combining was not entirely abandoned by the Scottish websters, and the Weavers' Association of 1824 did not disappear entirely, for it continued to enjoy a fitful existence at the local level.[108] Again although for the most part quiescent from 1826 to 1832, weavers unions were occasionally responsible for stoppages arising out of their refusal to accept low paid work. Furthermore, such action occasionally met with success, as at Airdrie in 1826.[109] Moreover, there is reason to believe that the organisational structure of the Association still survived for a time. In 1829, for instance, determined efforts were repeatedly made by weavers' delegates in the west of Scotland to resist

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105. *Ibid.*, 2 Aug. 1825; 27 Aug. 1825.

106. *Ibid.*, 10 Dec. 1825.

107. Newspaper references to weavers' combinations and their activities are infrequent and irregular until 1835 and 1836 with the return of full employment to the weaving trades.

108. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland*, *P.P.*, 1839, (195), XLII, p. 29.

109. *Ibid.*

proposed cuts in weaving rates.[110] The fact that Graham Hutchison, a Glasgow manufacturer referred to the weavers' union as 'the combination' suggests that it was no ephemeral body but had been in existence for some time.[111] Finally, it is clear that at this date the organisation encompassed many weaving areas in the west of Scotland while the activities of the union were still co-ordinated by a central committee.[112] But as in 1825 the Weavers' Association was quite ineffective in curbing wage cuts in 1829 and shortly afterwards 'was entirely broken up'.[113]

Despite considerable weakening of their economic position by the 1830s the Scottish handloom weavers nonetheless participated vigorously in the revival of trade unionism in that decade. The linen weavers of Dunfermline, for instance, took part in a stoppage which was untypically violent in the Scottish context.[114] Available evidence also points to attempts at combination among the factory handloom weavers of Dundee.[115] Yet the main achievements of the decade came neither from linen weavers nor factory weavers but from the cotton and silk websters of the west, who worked principally on the domestic system. Here, three new organisations for collective bargaining evolved among the workforce, these being the

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110. *Ibid*., p. 64
Scotsman, 8 March 1829
Glasgow Chronicle, 17 Apr. 1829

111. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland*, *P.P*., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 64.

112. *Glasgow Chronicle*, 17 Apr. 1829

113. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland*, *P.P*., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 64.

114. Gaskin, *op*. *cit*., p. 195.

115. *Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland*, *P.P*., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 207.

General Protecting Union, the Glasgow Harness Union and the Paisley Harness Union, which was also known as the Paisley United Weavers.[116]

Although the historian cannot, with any degree of certainty, establish a link between these three unions of the 1830s and the Weavers' Association of 1824 it is still reasonable to assume that some degree of continuity existed. It is possible, for instance, that those who had acted as local officials in 1824 were also active in the union a decade later. Moreover, there was a considerable degree of similarity between the Weavers' Association and the later unions in organisation and objectives. Like their predecessor the combinations of the 1830s drew up tables of wages for all the various fabrics, after consultation with the principal employers in each line. These were then presented to all the manufacturers who were demanded to pay the stipulated rates. Failure to comply with this demand would result in the withdrawal of labour from the recalcitrant employer, while as in the past weavers refusing to take underpaid work would be supported from union funds.[117] Furthermore, although they remained separate combinations a degree of co-operation between the Glasgow Harness Union, the Paisley Harness Union and the General Protecting Society can be clearly discerned, each organising a different sector of the trade in its own particular area.

From 1832 onwards these three combinations began to enlarge their geographical spheres of influence. For example, by the mid-1830s, the Paisley Harness Union had organised 10,000 members all

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116. Weavers' Journal, 31 Oct. 1835.

117. Ibid., 1 March 1836; 1 July 1836.

of whom wove fancy goods in Renfrewshire and Ayrshire, at places such as Barrhead, Kilmarnock, Saltcoats, Beith, Lochwinnoch and Largs while the Glasgow Harness Union had achieved a similar measure of success in the city and its environs.[118] Meanwhile, the General Protecting Union formed the nucleus of an organisation which embraced plain cotton weavers throughout the west of Scotland.[119] Ultimately it was hoped that together these three unions would control all hand loom weaving in Scotland; and with that objective achieved, it would then be possible, through concerted actions, to establish uniform prices throughout the trade. The historian's task is to examine whether this tripartite attempt at unionisation was any more successful than its forerunners had been.

Two criteria which may legitimately be employed to estimate the success of these three unions are the numerical strength of their memberships and the vitality of their branches and central committee. Some insight regarding the former may be gained from the claim that 'half of Scotland is unionist', and an element of support for this contention is provided by the returns of the Glasgow Relief Committee when it was shown that no fewer than 1,553 out of a total of 3,072 applicants belonged to a combination.[120] Nor was this attempt to combine the workforce confined to large urban weaving centres in the west central belt. The three unions also had branches in small villages and townships in the west, while

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118. Tindall, op. cit., p. 67.
119. Weavers' Journal, 1 March 1836.
120. Ibid., 1 Oct. 1835.
Baird, op. cit., p. 171.

websters on fabrics other than cotton in different parts of the country expressed a desire to emulate the lead of their cotton weaving counterparts in the west of Scotland.[121] Some credit for this widespread enthusiasm for unionisation must be awarded to the weavers' leaders who stressed the necessity for all websters in Scotland to become union members. Furthermore, the three organisations occasionally met to co-operate in the pursuit of common objectives. Communication between union members and branches had in fact been a problem in the past because of the dispersal of the workforce. Now the difficulty was largely erased with the advent of the Weavers' Journal as the official organ of these three unions.[122] In addition the weavers' combinations achieved substantial advances in wage rates from 1833 to 1836 in almost all woven fabrics.[123] Finally, these organisations jointly petitioned parliament on behalf of their members for Trade Boards to regulate wages in the industry. At a cursory glance, therefore, the achievements of these unions were substantial.

Yet such success was short-lived. Despite a parliamentary investigation into handloom weavers' petitions their requests for trade boards were refused by the legislature. It became clear, moreover, that it was not sufficient to have half of the workforce unionised since the process of undercutting could not be effectively curbed so long as a sizeable portion of the labourforce remained unorganised. Indeed, the websters themselves admitted that a general

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121. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 234, qq. 3206-3207.

122. Weavers' Journal, 31 Oct. 1835 - 1 Apr. 1837.

123. Ibid., 1 March 1836.

union of handloom weavers, not just in Scotland but throughout the entire United Kingdom was necessary to combat this evil.[124] Moreover, like earlier attempts at Scottish weavers' combinations the three unions of the 1830s were doomed in the face of a major industrial recession. Unfortunately, none had the financial standing required to send delegations to distant areas let alone maintain the families of striking weavers at a time when contributions to their funds were rapidly diminishing. Some indication of the difficulties confronting these combinations may be obtained from a brief examination of the records of the Charleston District of the Paisley United Weavers.

This source clearly reveals that in 1835 regular payments were made to deputations from this branch of the union not only to local manufacturers but also to remote weaving centres in Renfrewshire and Ayrshire. At the same time, even in these years of relatively brisk trade, subsistence payments to striking websters were not infrequent.[125] Not surprisingly this problem was greatly increased in years of bad trade, as manufacturers tried to transfer their losses on to the shoulders of their weavers. With the downturn of 1837 an adverse economic climate again rendered weavers' unions impotent. Symons succinctly summed up this process when in 1838 he wrote that in the south of Scotland - the area from which all earlier weavers' combinations emanated - any surviving websters' unions were 'wholly extinct to any effective purpose at present.'[126]

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124. Ibid., 31 Oct. 1835.

125. Records of United Weavers of Paisley, Charleston District Minutes of Meetings, Dec. 1834 - Aug. 1835.

126. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 55.

Nonetheless, collapse was not total; for even in the depressed years of trade following the 1837 failure the workforce to some extent maintained some form of informal contact with what remained of their combinations. This certainly was the experience at Paisley where a committee had been appointed 'to watch over the trade' when the Paisley Harness Union was suspended.[127] It is, however, difficult to estimate just how successful this watchdog committee was. Unfortunately, it cannot be ascertained whether the remnants of the Paisley association were responsible for the strike staged by eighty female workers at the Abbey Weaving Mill in that town in September 1842.[128] On the other hand it is clear that by February of the following year the Paisley organisation was becoming active again, sending delegates to call upon low paying masters and supporting full-time salaried officials. Indeed this increased activity was regarded as being symptomatic of a return of prosperity to the trade.[129] But the experience of Paisley, the centre of the fancy weaving industry, was not emulated elsewhere in Scotland in this decade.

In other weaving areas there seem to have been few attempts at organising labour after 1840. Certainly none of the ambitious schemes of the preceding decades was embarked upon. Indeed the decade as a whole witnessed little in the way of industrial action even at the local level. Inevitably, there were of course a few

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127. Scots Times, 15 July 1840.

128. Glasgow Herald, 19 Sept. 1842.

129. Select Committee on Distress in Paisley, P.P., 1843, (114), VII, pp. 101-102, qq. 1087-1091.

stoppages: but these, like the Abbey Weaving Mill strike, were among factory weavers. For instance, Glasgow dandy loom weavers who struck in September 1842 in support of a demand for increased wages, were all employed in factories.[130] Again, the websters of Dunfermline, who withdrew their labour and went on the rampage through that town in August of that year, worked 'in large shops'.[131] Clearly such handloom weavers' trade unions as remained in the 1840s were either factory-based or in the fancy trade, both of which were relatively prosperous sectors of the industry. But the rapidly dwindling army of domestic weavers were, by this decade, quite destitute of the necessary means of financing a successful combination.

iv

The hostility of the law to Scottish weavers' combinations over the 1790-1850 period has already been demonstrated. But this was not the sole adverse factor affecting the progress of these unions. General attitudes towards them were also important. In this context the reactions of three totally different social groups should be examined since they influenced not just the success of weavers' organisations but also the lives of the Scottish weaving population generally. The first of these groups were the middle classes whose views were expressed through the Liberal-Tory press of the first half of the nineteenth century. The second category comprises

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130. Glasgow Chronicle, 15 Aug. 1842.
Glasgow Herald, 15 Aug. 1842; 29 Aug. 1842.

131. Ibid., 12 Aug. 1842; 26 Aug. 1842.

other working groups whose reactions to weavers and weavers' combinations were voiced largely in the policies of their own unions. The third consists of that part of the hand loom weaving force which took no part in weavers' associations. Although their reactions to their co-workers' efforts are partly obscured by the paucity of records, the historian's task is, nonetheless, to examine the causes of their non-participation, as well as noting its impact upon the performance of weavers' unions.

Prevailing middle class prejudice against labour organisation survived beyond the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Scotland. In 1824, for instance, both the 'practicability and propriety' of combinations were doubted, in the latter case on the grounds that they forced up wages and thus weakened the manufacturers' competitive ability in both domestic and foreign markets.[132] In a similar vein in 1838 all trade unions were labelled the 'frontiers of crime' which occasioned strikes through the 'unrestrained and unrestricted tyranny of the majority'.[133] Again in 1840 it was claimed that every trade union was a conspiracy which kept down 'superior skill, conduct and industry', while its maxims were those of 'tyranny, guided by fraud, to keep in its hands the guidance of folly.'[134] But if these were the reactions of the middle classes to combinations in general in the first half of the nineteenth century, handloom weavers' trade unions were made the subject of particular criticism.

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132. Glasgow Chronicle, 11 Sept. 1824

133. Practical Working of Trades' Unions, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XLIII, (1838), p. 281.

134. J. Cleland, The Former and Present State of Glasgow, Glasgow, (1840), p. 88.

In 1824, for instance, Scottish websters were assured of the futility of striking and warned that stoppages would only result in more of their work being sent to Belfast.[135] Later, in 1841, it was asserted that combinations had adverse effects upon the individual weaver's industry, skill and capital.[136] One commentator went as far as to suggest that the distress of the Scottish handloom weavers by the 1830s was principally attributable to the success of their unions in the past, since this had encouraged heavy investment in power weaving technology.[137] Furthermore, it can be demonstrated that on at least two occasions middle class prejudice against weavers' combinations was largely responsible for their demise. At Glasgow in 1829 and at Paisley in 1837 the influential opposition of the propertied class gave rise to resolutions refusing to grant any relief to unemployed weavers until all union funds in these areas had been depleted.[138] This hostility towards combinations, of course, enhanced the distress of weavers' families by creating delays before any relief was granted, while possibly discouraging some weavers from becoming trade unionists.

Not surprisingly the sentiments of workgroups, other than the weavers, towards the websters and their unions were shaped by factors entirely different from those which influenced the bias of the middle classes. The rest of the Scottish working classes were familiar

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135. Paisley Advertiser, 16 Oct. 1824.

136. Final Report of Royal Commission on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1841, (296), X, p. 396.

137. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 135.

138. Scotsman, 15 May 1829
Glasgow Herald, 15 May 1837.
Glasgow Evening Post, 8 April 1837.

with the distress of the handloom weavers and, although initially sympathetic they, nonetheless, wished to avoid a similar fate. Basically, they interpreted the websters' dilemma in Malthusian terms, arising out of a superabundance of hands, against which their own trades must be protected.[139] This line of argument, it was claimed, persuaded the Glasgow spinners' union to finance emigration to America.[140] It also influenced a number of trade unions to adopt from their inceptions, exclusive principles. By the 1830s restrictions upon entry to their trades were being increasingly imposed by the spinners' unions and, to a lesser extent, by those of power loom workers. Thus, it was claimed by 1833 in Glasgow, 'the whole of the trades here combined, and it is impossible for a weaver to break in upon them; but their children, especially young girls, are taken in to work the power looms.'[141] If, however, Scottish trade unions generally operated on exclusive principles to the detriment of the weavers by that date, their attitudes towards the websters had hardened considerably by the end of the decade, since in the meantime some Scottish hand loom weavers committed a serious breach of the ethical code of organised labour.

On two separate occasions in the 1830s weavers were employed as strike breakers. The first of these episodes occurred during a stoppage at calico printing establishments in the west of Scotland in 1834. Master printers in Glasgow offered work to weavers

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139. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 219.

140. Select Committee on Manufacturers, Commerce and Shipping, P.P., 1833, (690), VI, p. 311, q. 5324; p. 323, qq. 5414-5415.

141. Ibid., p. 697.

at initial rates of 7/- to 8/- weekly and were successful in securing recruits.[142] Shortly afterwards, websters in many other areas, such as Milton in Dunbartonshire and Denny in Stirlingshire, followed the example of their Glasgow counterparts by accepting work at local printfields affected by the strike. As might have been anticipated the striking calico printers, infuriated at these arrangements, resorted to violence in most of the affected areas, and the strike breakers needed the protection of the authorities.[143] But the impact of the weavers' action could not be simply confined to the calico printers; it also indicated to other workgroups that they might also be the victims of this type of strike-breaking action. To some extent these fears were proved to be justified when in 1837 the 'starving' weavers of Lanarkshire took to the pits during a colliers' strike at Airdrie.[144] On this occasion hostility towards the weavers reached such an extent that the military had to guard the homes of strike-breakers while police patrolled the pitheads.[145] Although these incidents were relatively isolated they nevertheless confirmed the worst fears of other work groups, like the cotton spinners, who were now determined to protect their occupation against a vast army of poverty-stricken handloom weavers.

All available evidence points to greater restrictions being imposed upon entry to trades other than hand weaving after the mid-1830s. In 1837 at Kilmarnock, for instance, when asked why they

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142. Glasgow Herald, 7 Feb. 1834; 17 Feb. 1834; 24 March 1834.

143. Ibid., 17 Feb. 1843

144. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 55.

145. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, pp. 155-156.

still persisted in putting their children to the loom the weavers' reply was: 'We cannot help ourselves, as other trades are under the combination rules, which prohibit the admission of more than a certain number of apprentices'.[146] At the same time in Lanarkshire it was claimed that the exclusive principle operated to the extent of confining employment opportunities solely to the 'sons and immediate relations of those in combinations.'[147] Again, although in that year there were as many as 1,305 children of handloom weavers working as piecers in Glasgow spinning mills, this was but a small proportion of the total number of websters' sons and daughters in the city.[148] Clearly other workgroups through their combinations adopted attitudes which over time were increasingly on the defensive against the weavers, while the failure of the weavers' unions demonstrated to these workmen the sheer necessity for the success of their own.

On the other hand the attitudes of other workgroups had no direct bearing upon the success or failure of the weavers' combinations. In sharp contrast, however, the refusal of a substantial portion, in the 1830s as much as a half, of the hand weaving labour force in Scotland to become trade union members was bound to have adverse repercussions upon the performance of websters' associations. Although the reactions of non-unionists to the efforts of their colleagues are poorly documented some indication of their

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146. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 55.

147. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 110.

148. Ibid., p. 219.

motives can, nonetheless, be obtained from a brief examination of the weavers' newspaper in the 1830s,[149] where, it was suggested, that non-unionists were influenced into taking their stand by several factors.

Firstly, it seems that some weavers had been convinced by 'supply and demand notions' that unionisation was a futile exercise.[150] Secondly, there were many others who regarded themselves as independent labourers with a 'moral and civil right to sell their labour at any price they please'.[151] Thirdly, it appears that there were, over time, an increasing number of websters who had become apathetic to their own condition, and to the fortunes of the trade generally.[152] Fourthly it was implied that a number of dissipated websters existed who were 'indifferent or spiritless', and whose services were at the command of the small corks.[153] It is reasonable to assume, moreover, that such indifference increased over time with deepening destitution, while repeated failure seemed to add support to the arguments of those who doubted the efficacy of trade unions. Finally, it is certain that in the decades after 1815 more and more websters were not in the fortunate position of having the option of becoming trade union members. Their increasing poverty instead allowed no margin for even the smallest contributions to their co-websters' combinations.

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Despite the fact that the Scottish handloom weavers, for most

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149. Weavers' Journal, 1 March 1836.
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid.

of the 1790-1850 period, made repeated attempts at trade union formation, and that some temporary successes were recorded, a sectoral analysis can only reveal that all their efforts failed to achieve any lasting and beneficial result. This was as true of their stand against wage contractions as it was of such other goals as restricting entry to the trade, and the collective petitioning of the legislature for ameliorative measures. We must therefore finally turn to examine the reasons for the ineffectiveness of handloom weavers' combinations throughout these years.

The historian can point to several, largely unrelated, factors which were not conducive to healthy labour organisation in the trade. As we have seen, legal hostility to trade unions persisted throughout the period while influential middle-class opinion generally was not in favour of weavers' combinations.[154] Yet, viewed from the perspective of Scottish trade unionism generally, it is equally clear that the websters were no different from other groups of workmen in either of these respects since all combinations were frowned upon in the first half of the nineteenth century. It could also be argued that websters' unions remained weak because they used the wrong means of achieving their goals: their counterparts in Lancashire, for example, were criticised for using the 'old-fashioned' tactics of machine smashing.[155] Indeed, it must be pointed out that the pattern of behaviour during disputes contrasted sharply between Scotland and England, since one of the recurring themes of the Scottish weavers was an insistence upon

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154. Chapter 4, ii; iv.

155. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 58.

peaceful methods.[156] Again it is possible that Scottish weavers' unions were weakened by the high proportion of the workforce who were of Irish origin. However, this explanation too, must be discredited for several reasons. Firstly, it is possible that many of these had been members of weavers' organisations in rural Ireland prior to emigration.[157] Secondly, although they were possibly reluctant unionists in a Scottish context, Irish websters could be called upon to provide a riotous element during stoppages.[158] Thirdly, unionisation among the Scottish workforce was most successful in the west where the highest proportion of Irish weavers were also located. Clearly, therefore, these unrelated factors only had marginal impact upon the performance of Scottish weavers' trade unions, and the historian must look elsewhere for the causes of their failure.

In this context it is necessary to concentrate upon some of the features of the organisation of the Scottish hand loom weaving industry, above all the widespread dispersal and heterogeneous nature of the trade. Many contemporaries, in fact, ascribed the failure of weavers' unions to the scattered nature of the workforce. 'Hand loom weavers are very much scattered over the country, and work individually in their own shops, instead of being

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156. First Report of Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 230, q. 2916.

157. Treble, Irish in North of England, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

158. "With regard to combination among the weavers, the Irish are rather urged on by the more acute and thinking among the Scotch; but when the emergency comes the Irish are the more daring spirits; and as they are in themselves less reflective, and worse educated, they are more prone to use violence, without regard to consequences."
Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, P.P., 1836, (40), XXXIV, p. 109.

congregated in factories; this renders it more difficult for them to combine.'[159] This made it more difficult for the individual who wrought at the hand loom to know what the sentiments of his colleagues were on issues affecting the trade. Moreover, the infinite variety of fabrics worked meant that the weaver had no way of quickly ascertaining exactly at what rate he should be paid for a particular web. The twin factors of dispersal and variety thus necessitated an elaborate and expensive chain of communications with union headquarters through a system of delegates. Weavers themselves in fact acknowledged the strategic value of communicating: indeed this was the reason behind the foundation of the Weaver's Journal in the 1830s.[160] But even with the advent of this newspaper, weavers, because of the scattered nature of the trade still found difficulty in arriving at, or adhering to, a unified policy. Although among other groups of workmen, such as the cotton spinners, few dared to oppose majority decisions arrived at at large meetings, handloom weavers in remote villages or towns were not subject to that level of coercion. Nevertheless, even this admixture of dispersal and variety was not the sole aspect of industrial organisation which hindered the progress of weavers' unions.

Of equal significance was the fact that few employers in the hand loom weaving trade possessed any fixed capital. With no expensive plant lying idle during stoppages, the bargaining position of manufacturers was thus considerably improved. One contemporary

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159. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 65.

160. Weavers' Journal, 1 March 1836.

claimed that:

> Owing to the master-manufacturers having no money sunk in factories, they find little difficulty in transferring their work from places where they are combined, and where wages are thereby raised above their natural level, to those where they are not. 161

This ease of transferring work beyond the sphere of influence of the weavers' unions was not confined solely to west of Scotland cotton weaving areas. It was argued, for instance, that the futility of the Dundee weavers' strike of 1834 arose out of the facility with which the town's manufacturers recruited newcomers to the loom.[162] Others feared that combinations would have the unfortunate result of driving an even greater share of the trade into the hands of small corks.[163] Again a sizeable manufacturer warned the Scottish weavers that a recent successful stoppage had merely resulted in more of his work being sent to Ireland.[164] Finally at least some of the Scottish weavers feared that successful unionisation might result in proportionately greater power loom production than already obtained.[165] Whatever justification there was for these fears, it is clear that the 'capitalists' of the hand loom weaving trade enjoyed a degree of freedom denied to their counterparts in other areas of the economy. With no capital investment beyond their stock in trade they were not reluctant to transfer webs

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161. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839 (195), XLII, p. 65.
162. Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 207.
163. Gaskin, op. cit., p. 194.
164. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 55.
165. First Report from Select Committee on Combinations, P.P., 1837-38, (488), VIII, p. 135.

beyond their normal workforces during periods of industrial action. This enabled these manufacturers to survive during long stoppages. Their weavers, unfortunately, did not have the same endurance powers.

Probably the most crucial single factor accounting for the poor record of labour organisation among the Scottish weavers was the weak financial position of the workforce. Several points may legitimately be made to demonstrate that trade unions were ineffective largely through the poverty of the Scottish websters. Firstly, the most successful attempt at general unionisation, as well as the most determined effort to offset wage cuts, occurred in 1812 before the sectoral decline in wage rates had set in. Secondly, and the logical corollary of this point, by the 1840s with increasing poverty among the Scottish weaving community, unionisation was confined almost entirely to websters on fancy fabrics or in factories, who comprised the relatively better paid sector of the trade. But if the long-term poverty of the weavers militated against trade union formation, the visitations of chronic distress in slump periods effectively ended iniatives in this direction. For example, the great strides taken by weavers' unions in the 1820s and 1830s coincided fairly precisely with the major booms in both of those decades, while the cyclical downturns also witnessed the failure of these attempts at unionisation. Significantly enough, the websters themselves acknowledged the fact that union principles were sacrificed in the depressions of 1826 and 1829.[166] Although in the subsequent downturn of 1837 they were determined not to repeat

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166. Weavers' Journal, 1 April 1837.

these earlier mistakes they were again defeated by their inability to provide sufficient financial resources with which to keep their unions effective.

Chapter 5

Radical Attitudes and Activities

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It has already been shown that from a relatively early period in their history Scottish handloom weavers were prepared to take trade union action against harassing circumstances. Nonetheless, their reactions to adverse conditions were not solely dictated by the restricted horizons of the combination movement. In 1773 for instance, spontaneous riots broke out among the linen weavers of Dundee, while in the same year similar disturbances were perpetrated by their counterparts in the counties of Perth and Fife.[1] Moreover, at approximately the same point in time, an 'uprising' of Glasgow websters occurred - inspired, allegedly, by the stand being taken by the American colonists against the British government - when rioting weavers threatened to emigrate to 'the colonies' unless their demands were met.[2] Thus far, however, the websters were merely reacting to distressing economic circumstances and little of a distinctly political nature can be discerned in their attitudes or activities. Nor is this altogether surprising since before 1790, demands for parliamentary reform in Scotland emanated only from a small, politically conscious group made up almost entirely of landowners and merchants.

It needed the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, to produce a political awakening in Scottish society generally, and

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1. Select Committee on the Linen Trade in Britain and Ireland, P.P., 1773, III, p. 99; p. 102; p. 113.

2. J.D. Young, Review of 'A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830' by T.C. Smout, Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin, No. 28, (1974), p. 64.

amongst the handloom weavers in particular. Events in France sparked off demands for radical reform not only from the emergent Scottish working class but also from the middle classes. Meeting in Edinburgh in May, 1792 small groups of middle-class citizens, including merchants, manufacturers, lawyers and teachers, took the initiative in forming a reform association under the title of the Friends of the People.[3] This society provided a solid impetus for reform for it soon had counterparts in all the growing towns and large villages of Scotland. These local associations appealed for the support of the skilled workers who were required to pay 3d per quarter for membership. They held meetings and debates, and corresponded with radical societies elsewhere, including the Jacobins in France and the United Irishmen in Ireland.[4] Moreover, between December 1792 and October 1793 they held three 'general conventions' in Edinburgh, the third of which received delegates from many areas of England as well as from Scotland.[5]

This early middle-class enthusiasm for reform, however, was dampened by the September massacres of 1792 and by the Edict of Fraternity,and the reform societies which they had instituted passed into the hands of the petty bourgeoisie and skilled sraftsmen. Nonetheless, the Friends of the People societies survived for a time as the voice-pieces of an indigenous Scottish radicalism. Moreover, deprived of middle class leadership it was felt that they

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3. Smout, op. cit., p. 414.
4. R. Mitchison, A History of Scotland, London, (1970), p. 363.
5. Ibid.

constituted a greater threat to established government than the original societies had done.[6] It is against this background that the geographical distribution of these radical associations must be set.

The Friends of the People societies evolved mainly in industrial villages and towns in the west of Scotland, and in fishing villages and commercial towns in the east. The more active associations, however, as demonstrated by their representation at the two conventions of 1793, all came from the central belt. The only exceptions to this trend were the bodies formed in the Border towns of Selkirk, Melrose and Hawick.[7] It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that when a leading Scottish radical made a tour of the country his activities were principally concentrated on the manufacturing districts. Furthermore, since most of the Scottish websters resided in such areas, it is clear that they were likely recruits to the Friends of the People societies. Indeed, the surviving evidence suggests that their participation in this first Scottish radical movement was disproportionate to their numerical strength among the working classes.

Many reform societies, for example, were established at Paisley and Glasgow, both of which towns had high concentrations of weavers. Moreover the Friends of the People in each town embraced large numbers of 'operatives', an expression which in the context of these towns must have included many websters. Furthermore, the Glasgow societies were formed in such areas as Calton and Anderston,

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6. Smout, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

7. Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

districts which specialised in weaving; and this was to be the pattern throughout the west of Scotland. This was the case, for instance, in Ayrshire where villages like Cumnock quickly established their own association.[8] But this correlation between early radicalism and weaving was not confined to the west: in the east also reform associations tended to be formed in the weaving towns - Dundee, Perth and Dunfermline - while the radical message was quickly imbibed in rural counties such as Fife, with its scattered communities of websters.[9] So far, however, it has only been demonstrated that weavers gave broad support to the Friends of the People. But it can also be shown that an active, sometimes a prominent, role in this reform movement was played by those who wrought at the hand loom, while it is equally clear that in certain narrowly demarcated areas websters dominated the rank and file of the movement.

In small villages weavers undoubtedly comprised the largest socio-economic group supporting the societies, although leadership in such localities tended to be in the hands of petty businessmen such as innkeepers and shopkeepers. A similar pattern also obtained in a few urban areas. At Dundee and Perth, for example, where there were large class divisions between leaders and the rank and file, the 'lower' and 'lowest' class of people respectively were the principal supporters of the societies.[10] Although these epithets are somewhat surprising when applied to the weavers of the 'Golden

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8. Strawhorn, op. cit., p. 61.
9. Aspinall, op. cit., p. 18.
10. Burns, op. cit., p. 180.

Age' they can be more readily understood when the hostility of the commentator, and the prevailing depression in the weaving trade in 1792 are taken into account.[11] Occasionally, however, weavers played leading parts in the local activities of the Friends of the People. The Strathaven society, for example, was fairly typical of others when it sent a webster, James Wilson, to one of the Edinburgh conventions.[12] Again, weavers formed a significant proportion of those who visited the imprisoned reformer, Thomas Palmer, in Perth gaol.[12] Moreover, it can be argued that as middle class participation in the movement declined the proportional strength of the weavers within it increased. Finally, it is clear that the very survival of an underground reform movement in the face of repressive legislation of the mid and late 1790s depended almost entirely upon the operatives of whom a sizeable portion were weavers.

Early in 1793 a period of governmental repression began, aimed against the incipient forces of British radicalism although even before this point in time the propertied classes had already taken fright and had abandoned their reform societies.[14] Hence, although the Friends of the People continued to meet clandestinely, no distinct political movements can again be discerned in Scotland until the spring of 1797 when it was revealed that new reform associations, the United Scotsmen, existed in many parts of the country. Nonetheless in the intervening period important disturbances occurred which were a significant element in shaping the political attitudes

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11. Chapter 1, ix.
12. Burns, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 180. 13. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 181.
14. Mitchison, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 365.

of the Scottish working classes in general, and the more articulate groups of handloom weavers in particular.[15]

The Scottish militia riots of 1797 were triggered off by the (Scottish) Militia Act which reached the statute book in June of that year. Almost inevitably, when schoolmasters were ordered to draw up lists of men in their parishes eligible for conscription, there were widespread, and often violent, disturbances in some areas.[16] The riots, however, were largely confined to rural districts; manufacturing towns such as Paisley and Dundee were content merely to hold public meetings at which subscriptions were raised. Two factors were mainly responsible for the contrast in the response to conscription between town and country areas. In the urban districts there was already a pool of surplus labour from which employers could draw to replace men who were conscripted in the militia. In rural villages, on the other hand, there was no such glut in the labour market. It was largely, therefore, for economic reasons that tenant farmers opposed the Militia Act. The opposition of agricultural labourers and other rural workers was inspired to some extent by similar motives. Many of them feared that they would be unemployed once their period of conscription was over.[17] Nonetheless, despite these differences, there was to some extent a shared reaction in rural and urban areas to the government's measure: for there was a general hatred of life in the military, which was accompanied by a distrust of central government

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15. Burns, op. cit., p. 189.

16. Strawhorn, op. cit., pp. 61-62.
    Ellis and Mac A'Ghobhainn, op. cit., p. 77.

17. Burns, op. cit., p. 194; pp. 200-201.

and local officials in the years which followed the trials and conviction of Muir and Palmer.[18] The coalescing of these various factors brought rioting, assaults, threats to property and military drilling, although some of the participants also attempted to impart a more organieed and constitutional form to the campaign, by holding delegate meetings. It is against this background that the contributions of the rural weavers must be set.

Again there is a clear-cut relationship between affected localities and the geographical distribution of rural websters in Scotland. Disturbances took place, for example, at Campsie, Kirkintilloch, Kilsyth, Galston, Dalry, Fenwick and Strathaven, all of which were communities where hand loom weaving was the principal economic activity. Moreover, the weaving villages of Ayrshire seem to have been particularly active in these riots. At Galston and Dalry, for example, trees of liberty were planted while the agitators at Fenwick attempted to procure arms. In addition, disturbances continued in that county after peace had been restored elsewhere.[19] In Lanarkshire also weaver support was considerable as is demonstrated by the fact that nine of the twelve rioters arrested at Strathaven were websters.[20] Once again, however, weavers were not merely content with being led, for in some localities they took the initiative. In Stirlingshire, for instance, the riots were led by 'wild manufacturers' - among them many operative weavers who received their political training with the Friends of the People - who wished to overturn the government.

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18. Ibid. p. 201.

19. Ibid., p. 196.

20. Ibid., p. 197.

It was for this reason that the Lord Lieutenant of that County, the Duke of Montrose, argued that the best possible strategy to employ against the demonstrators, was to divide the tenants from the weavers, since the latter were more difficult to deal with. Judging by experience at Campsie this was sound advice; for at that village it was alleged that tenant farmers and agricultural labourers had been coerced into participation in the militia riots by local websters.[21]

Despite the violent tactics employed by weavers and other rioters, however, their political aims during the militia disturbances seem to have been confused in those few instances where political motivation can be discerned at all. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to overlook their historical role in the political awakening of the Scottish working classes, since they helped to precipitate a division between the broader masses in rural areas and the landed establishment. In other words they played the role in Scotland's agricultural areas which the earlier Friends of the People movement had achieved mainly in the context of manufacturing districts. This was of crucial importance since the next organised radical agitation in Scotland simultaneously embraced both urban and rural support.[22]

The United Scotsmen societies which were formed in the first half of 1797 in Glasgow and Ayrshire, and which by July of the same year had spread to Fife, Perth and Dundee, recruited their support in large towns and small villages. That support, drawn overwhelmingly from the working classes, was a clear indication

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21. Ibid., pp. 197-198. 22. Ibid., p. 189.

that the articulate elements among the common people had decided to 'go by themselves' rather than rely upon initiatives from the 'superior orders.' Their political aims were relatively simple: the attainment of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, although some of the United Scotsmen also made republican demands.[23] These societies remained in existence in many areas until 1803, although there is a paucity of information regarding their activities, since they were, of necessity, secret organisations. Despite this difficulty the social historian must attempt to assess the extent and nature of weaver participation in this new radical organisation which, unlike the Friends of the People, was purely plebean in character.

All extant evidence points to the fact that those who wrought at the hand loom were heavily involved in the movement. For instance, the United Scotsmen received considerable support from the Irish, from whom the name had been borrowed. Heavy Irish immigration was reported in the late 1790s, and it was known that many of these newcomers who took up the weaving profession, had prior links with the United Irishmen.[24] Again it is clear that most of the individuals accused of sedition in Scotland between 1797 and 1803, and most of the witnesses at their trials, were websters. Although previous radical agitations were found in localities with widely varied economic pursuits, the United Scotsmen only existed in districts where the weaving profession

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23. Young, op. cit., p. 66.
    Report of Committee of Secrecy, P.P., 1799, (157), XXV, p.33.

24. Burns, op. cit., p. 205.
    Chapter 1, vii.

was the main occupation. Thus the new radical movement was discovered only in the textile counties of Renfrew, Ayr, Lanark, Stirling, Fife, Perth and Forfar. Reinforcing this point it can, moreover, be demonstrated that the United Scotsmen societies were found, with few exceptions, in areas with high proportions of Seceders. The degree of overlap between secession and weaving as an occupation has been considered remarkable.[25]

Like their predecessors, however, the United Scotsmen failed. The arrest of George Mealmaker in November 1797, signalled the beginning of a new period of repression and although the societies survived until 1803 this was, of necessity, as clandestine organisations.[26] Thereafter they largely disappeared from the social scene. This does not mean, however, that the political energies of Scottish weavers were totally spent in the first decade of the nineteenth century. For, instead of searching for a panacea for the ills of society at large, through political reform, the weavers now attempted to solve the problems which directly confronted their own trade. These new activities took two principal forms. Firstly, they petitioned the legislature for ameliorative measures in 1803, 1808 and 1811. Secondly, the largest sector of the workforces, the cotton websters, attempted to form a strong, national union. Although this latter offshoot is more difficult to ascribe to the radicalism of the 1790s, nonetheless, conclusive evidence exists to indicate that the Scottish weavers' combination

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25. Burns, op. cit., pp. 205-206; p. 214.

26. Report of Committee of Secrecy, P.P., 1799, (157), XXV, p. 33

of 1812 developed from the reform agitations of that decade. For example, some weavers who were members of the trade union had previous links with the United Scotsmen. Indeed it became clear at Mealmaker's trial that the possessing classes in Scotland made no distinction between political and industrial organisations or activities.[27]

In summary, it can be concluded that during the 'Golden Age' of the hand loom weaving trade the Scottish websters played a predominant role, when compared with other workgroups, in the principal radical movements of the period. Furthermore, it can be accepted that they were largely responsible for the survival of demands for reform during periods of low-key activity such as 1793-97. Again, although Jacobin notions largely died out in Scotland after 1803, the Scottish websters, nonetheless, continued to make specific demands to parliament while considerable success in the field of trade union organisation was also recorded. It is therefore necessary to forward some explanation for this pattern of sustained activity during an era of comparative prosperity in the hand loom weaving trade.

It was argued by contemporaries that the nature of the trade itself contributed in some measure to the radicalising of the weaving population, although the idea, advanced by one writer, that the 'sedentary nature' of the weaver's work was responsible for embittering his attitudes to established government cannot be ser-

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27. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 66

iously entertained.[28] Much more valid was the hypothesis that the independence of the weavers in their industrial capacity shaped their attitudes in other areas of social life, including the question of parliamentary reform. In support of this thesis attention can be drawn to the fact that many Scottish websters refused to conform to the doctrines of the Established Church.[29] Of even greater significance, however, was the fact that, despite some short-term success in the field of trade union organisation, the formation of viable and lasting trade unions continued to elude them. Faced with this problem the weavers, as a first expedient, supported local, loosely affiliated, reform associations, to forward socio-economic objectives.

But if the nature of the weaving trade fostered the growth of radical attitudes and activities some aspects of the traditional culture of the Scottish websters also contributed to the same process. The weavers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had stood apart from their fellow workers in terms of both literacy and general education. This 'intelligent body of workers' were avid readers of the radical newspapers and pamphlets which appeared after 1739, while some were also familiar with theories expressed in Paine's Rights of Man.[30] Moreover, their literary societies became venues for reading censored publications to the assembled groups of websters. Yet another impor-

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28. Lord Dundonald to the Lord Advocate, 16 Dec. 1792, quoted in Aspinall, op. cit., p. 18.

29. Burns, op. cit., p. 184.

30. Chapter 3, i; iii.
Burns, op. cit., p. 185;

tant channel for communicating the radical message - albeit reaching a wider audience than the weaving population - was the pulpit. It has been argued, with some conviction, that dissenting ministers were occasionally responsible for spreading radical doctrines in weaving areas.[31]

It is, nevertheless, clear that neither the nature of the trade nor the social habits of its dependent workers were as significant in determining the exceptional radicalism of the workforce in the 'Golden Age' as were economic considerations. The fact that both the Friends of the People and the United Scotsmen flourished in years of bad trade was no coincidence. Moreover, the militia riots occurred in 1797, a year which witnessed a decline in employment levels in both the cotton and linen industries.[32] Reinforcing this point, weavers' petitions to parliament for ameliorative measures also coincided with high unemployment levels in the trade. But this alone does not explain the exceptional contribution made by weavers to these radical movements since other workgroups were also affected during periods of recession. What in this context is, therefore, of greater importance is to note that hand loom weaving was particularly susceptible to cyclical fluctuations. As slump followed slump, with only short lived intervening periods of prosperity, weavers' savings were whittled away and their status as independent craftsmen was challenged. In 1800, for example, relief provision had to be made for destitute weavers in both

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

32. Chapter 1, ix.

Glasgow and Dunfermline.[33] This coming together periodically of sharp contractions in living standards and severe blows to the weaver's pride bred feelings of disenchantment towards society generally, and the government in particular. The weavers were as a result receptive to proposals for radical reform.

Finally, their disproportionate contribution to early radical movements in Scotland must also be seen in terms of the nature of the reform movements themselves. Viewed from this perspective it is clear that at no time were the aims of the original Scottish radicals in a meaningful sense revolutionary. For example, the Friends of the People retained their middle class objectives even after that stratum of society had deserted the movement.[34] Again although the United Scotsmen articulated Painite objectives,[35] they were, in numerical terms, considerably less important than the earlier radical movements, while it is likely that the republican element among these societies drew its strength less from indigenous Scottish websters than from immigrant Irish weavers. As far as the greatest proportion of the workforce was concerned, this degree of moderation was crucial since the value system of the bourgeoisie distinctly appealed to most of the Scottish websters, as was shown by their firm endorsement of the middle class precepts of self-help, sobriety and independence. This identification with the bourgeoisie is perhaps not altogether surprising since their

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33. W.T. Barr, For a Web Begun. The Story of Dunfermline, Edinburgh, (1947), p. 124.
Glasgow Herald, 21 Oct. 1800; 24 Oct. 1800.

34. Burns, op. cit., p. 184; p. 186.

35. Ibid., p. 210.

independence, and wage rates in years of good trade, imparted to the weavers the status of aristocrats of labour. In essence, they were, therefore, merely demanding a degree of political recognition commensurate with their social and economic standing.

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In the context of radicalism among the Scottish handloom weavers the period from 1812 to 1822 possesses a logical unity of its own. Firstly, the decade coincided with a period of relatively little trade union activity amongst the weaving population. Secondly, these initial ten years of Lord Liverpool's ministry were characterised by an almost blanket hostility to all demands for reform and by the suppression of popular movements generally. Thus, although Liverpool's premiership lasted until 1827, the replacement of Lords Castlereagh and Sidmouth by George Canning and Robert Peel in 1822, brought a significant shift of emphasis to the government's domestic policy after that date.[36] Thirdly, the intervening period between the failure of the Scottish weavers' strike in 1812 and the upsurge of the economy, around 1822, witnessed deep and prolonged social and economic depression affecting the Scottish working classes generally. In particular, this decade witnessed a marked decline in weavers' money incomes and living standards. In summary, while social distress and the failure of trade unionism were factors conducive to the growth of radicalism, government policy, equally obviously, militated against its

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36. J.W. Hunt, Reaction and Reform 1815-1841, London, (1972), p. 68.

development. It was possibly these contrasting conditioning factors which were responsible for the divergent forms assumed by the Scottish reform agitation in these years.[37]

A revival of Scottish radicalism in this period came about partly through the efforts of two English reformers, Major John Cartwright and William Cobbett. Cartwright had espoused the radical cause in 1776 over the treatment of the American colonists by the British. He believed that in Anglo-Saxon times basic political rights had been possessed by the entire population. The Norman Conquest, however, had led to their destruction and their replacement by a landed, governing aristocracy. From 1776 to 1812 his main outlets for spreading the doctrine of reform were the public platform and pamphlets, but in the latter year he was instrumental in setting up Hampden Clubs in London which, hopefully, would propagate the message in a more systematic fashion. The political demands of Cartwright and his followers were fourfold. They wanted annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, vote by ballot and payment of MPs.[38] Cobbett, on the other hand, attacked the government in his weekly publication, The Political Register, in a most vigorous and racy style. In this widely read periodical bitter criticisms of industrialism, commercialism, the national debt, Lord Liverpool and fiscal policy, were advanced, while Cobbett also pressed for parliamentary reform as the cure

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37. Chapter 1, ix.

38. W.M. Roach, Radical Reform Movements in Scotland from 1815 to 1822, with particular reference to the West of Scotland, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, (1970), pp. 7-8.

for all the woes of the working classes.[39] However, it was Cartwright who gave the immediate impetus to the Scottish radical revival when, in 1815, he embarked upon a tour of Scotland - subsequent to a similar campaign in England - to promote the Hampden Clubs' movement north of the Border.[40]

Landing at Leith on 21 July, he travelled extensively, visiting Greenock, the Ayrshire coast and Paisley; Stirling and Alloa; Dunfermline, Newburgh and Perth; Coupar in Angus; Forfar and Brechin; Crail, St Andrews and Aberdeen. Strathaven, Inverurie and Montrose, Dundee, Cupar (Fife) and Kirkaldy all were to be visited twice, while he also lectured at both Glasgow and Edinburgh three times before finally returning to England by way of Kelso.[41] The interest in radical reform which was rekindled by this tour was undoubtedly furthered by deepening depression in the economy which set in shortly after the cessation of hostilities. By early 1816 this distress had reached such proportions that a meal riot broke out in Ayr, while at Paisley 'unemployment was rife, food was scarce and costly, and, with little organisation to deal with the recurring crises, misery and want were the lot of those who had to depend on casual charity for their subsistence.'[42] Moreover, the experiences of workers at Ayr and Paisley were mirrored elsewhere. It is not therefore surprising that against such a

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39. Smout, op. cit., p. 446.

40. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 18.

41. Ibid.

42. J. Howie, An Historical Account of the Town of Ayr for the Last Fifty Years, Kilmarnock, (1861), pp. 57-62.
Stewart Black, op. cit., p. 185.

background of widespread and prolonged unemployment at a period of food scarcity and high prices, a sense of bitterness towards the existing social system developed among elements of the Scottish working classes.

The initial nature of this response satisfied both Cartwright and Cobbett, for the Scottish radicals placed great stress upon the essentially 'moral force' tactics of holding public meetings and petitioning the legislature for political reform. The pattern for the rest of the country was set by large gatherings at Paisley and Glasgow. In the former town, at a meeting held at the West Relief Church on 5 October 1816 'for the purpose of considering the distresses of the country', the adverse economic circumstances were clearly ascribed to misguided government policies; and it was resolved to petition the government 'to listen to the repeated prayers of the people for being restored to their undoubted right of choosing annually their own representatives.'[43] The Glasgow meeting, held in the same month, was of even greater significance. Forty thousand people, allegedly, gathered at Thrushgrove, a field on the outskirts of the city, following the refusal of the civic authorities to allow a reform meeting to take place on Glasgow Green. Like their counterparts in Paisley, the Thrushgrove radicals ascribed the distressed state of the country, not to the transition from war to peace but to the incompetent policies pursued by the Tory government. Unlike the Paisley gathering, however, the Glasgow meeting devoted more detailed attention to the

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43. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

whole matter of parliamentary reform. It was resolved that the people must 'freely, equally and annually elect their own representatives', and the legislature was petitioned for specific reforms to secure that end.[44]

These early initiatives paved the way for a host of petitions for parliamentary reform from every suburb and village in the neighbourhoods of these two towns while further away from these centres, Hampden Clubs founded in the wake of Cartwright's tour, also demanded changes in the system of parliamentary representation.[45] Their strongest support came from the working classes.[46] Nonetheless, in the following months, with the repeated failure of petitioning, it became clear that Hampden Clubs could not provide the necessary leadership required by the radicals. At the same time the efficacy of moral force tactics generally was increasingly questioned. Beset with these doubts, and with no noticeable improvement in economic conditions generally, some of the Scottish radicals were finally prepared to listen to the persuasive arguments of local leaders who advocated the adoption of a totally different plan of campaign.

A significant proportion of the disaffected became willing to lend their support to an alternative strategy centred round the formation of secret reform associations.[47] However, the historian

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44. Roach, Radical Reform Movement, _op. cit._, p. 46.
45. Wilson, _op. cit._, p. 24.
46. _Ibid._, p. 25.
47. W.M. Roach, Alexander Richmond and the Radical Reform Movements in 1816-17, _Scottish Historical Review_, Vol. LI, (1972), p. 11.

must treat all information about these societies with great care, since it was furnished either by government spies and 'agents provocateurs' or by government officials who obtained their data from such informers and who, moreover, were apprehensive, almost to a paranoic degree, of anything which smacked of insurrection. Nevertheless once these caveats have been entered, the reality of these secret radical societies cannot be doubted. Indeed, recent research has enabled a tolerably accurate picture of their activities to be constructed.[48]

By November 1816 there were several secret societies in the Glasgow area. The critical organisations were seemingly located at Camlachie, Tradeston and Calton, but by early 1817 this Calton society, whose main doctrine was radical reform, had spread its influence through other suburbs of Glasgow, Govan, Partick, Camlachie, Parkhead, Tollcross and Westmuir among them.[49] Moreover, in January of that year oaths were introduced, secret signs agreed to, and delegates appointed to go to Paisley and Carmunnock to recruit new members, or to form links with existing societies there.[50] If government informers can be believed, these organisations - as distinct from Hampden Clubs - enjoyed considerable support for their influence was alleged to have spread far beyond Glasgow to 'other populous towns in Scotland'.[51] Nor was this allegation entirely unjustified since the presence of underground radical

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48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Report from the Select Committee of Secrecy, P.P., 1817, (34), iv, p. 7.

associations can be clearly established in Perth and Dundee. By February 1817 further attempts were made to increase the memberships of these societies, although, despite the continued failure of the petitioning movement of 'respectable' radicals it is not possible to gauge the measure of success which this new initiative encountered.[52] But on the credit side it must be noted that Scottish secret societies attempted to make contact with similar bodies in England, while a central committee had been established to supervise the affairs of this branch of the reform movement.[53]

The affairs of these widespread secret reform associations generated widespread alarm in official circles, since it was believed that their ultimate objective was the overthrow of the existing form of government by force. But their apprehension was greatly increased when it was reported that the societies were armed. Alexander Bailie Richmond, for example, had presented evidence to show that the central committee aimed at 'the complete overthrow of existing arrangements and seizure of the property of the higher classes of society.'[54] To assist them in this formidable task, they had in their possession between sixty and one hundred stands of arms, gunpowder, musketballs and cutlasses, while they also planned to seize military establishments to procure even more arms and ammunition.[55] Despite such testimony, however, the government made no immediate move against the ringleaders. It

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52. Roach, Alexander Richmond and the Radical Movement, op. cit. pp. 11-12.

53. Ibid. p. 12.

54. Richmond, Condition of the Manufacturing Population, op cit., p. 80.

55. Ibid.

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was only after a slight improvement in the state of trade in the middle of February, 1817, that Sidmouth, acting on the advice of Kirkman Finlay who feared that the committee would go undetected once prosperity returned and radicalism declined, instructed the Glasgow magistrates to apprehend the leading reformers. Within a week a total of twenty-six people were in gaol because of their involvement with the secret radical societies.[56]

Thereafter Scottish radicalism - in both its clandestine and constitutional forms - entered a period of decline. A slight improvement in the general economic climate possibly helped in this process, although it is clear that the new wave of repression, beginning with the suspension of both the Habeas Corpus Act and the Scottish Act against Wrongous Imprisonment of 1701 was the principal cause of this downturn.[57] Nonetheless it is impossible to doubt that the immediate post-war period had been marked by a distinct revival in radical activities in which the Scottish working classes had participated strongly. In this context it is now necessary to ask whether the now traditional radicalism of the Scottish handloom weavers was maintained during these years.

Within the constitutional and petitioning sector of the movement there are several indicators which suggest that it received considerable support from the Scottish weaving community. Major Cartwright, for example, chose important centres of the hand weaving industry - Paisley, Dunfermline, Forfar, Perth, Dundee and

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56. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 97.
57. Roach, Alexander Richmond and the Radical Movement, op. cit., p. 3.

Glasgow - among his Scottish venues for spreading the radical gospel in 1815. In addition, the formative meetings from which the petitioning movement evolved, were staged at Paisley and Glasgow, the nuclei of the trade in the west of Scotland. Moreover, in the latter town, where vitriolic anti-government speeches were delivered these 'symptoms of discontent and commotion' were said to be most noticeable among Glasgow's 'weavers and lower orders of people.'[58]

Again, it can be argued that the nature of 'Cobbettism' had considerable appeal to distressed handloom weavers. Indeed, the central tenets of Cobbett's creed secured a support from the Scottish websters which was quite disproportionate to their numerical strength among the Scottish working classes generally.[59] This regressive philosophy idealised the division of family labour which had existed in the recent past, but which was now largely undermined by a commercial and industrial system which was broadly supported by government policy. Only a radical reform of parliament, Cobbett argued, would reinstate the Utopia of the past. It is thus not too difficult to appreciate the alacrity with which weavers embraced this strand of radicalism since it promised to remove the harsh reality of existing social and economic conditions, and to replace them with a stable rural society reminiscent of the early years of the previous century and of the 'Golden Age' period.[60]

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58. J. Becket to the Lord Advocate, 5 April 1816. Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/226.

59. Smelser, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

60. *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, despite weaver support for this peaceful reform movement, it would be wrong to overstress their role; for it appealed not only to other elements of the working classes but, also, in the early phase of the campaign, to some middle class citizens, and to individuals of high social rank. The last category included the Duke of Roxburgh and George Kinloch of Kinloch. After 1816, however, the landowners, with the sole exception of Kinloch had abandoned the agitation, a course of action which was also taken by the upper middle classes. Thereafter the reform campaign became the domain of the petty bourgeoisie, the artisans and the working classes generally.[61]

The secret associations of 1816-17 on the other hand, were the exclusive preserve of the lower working classes. Moreover, it can be argued that the websters comprised the most formidable occupational group within these organisations. Many bodies, for example, had their origins in Calton, Camlachie and Tradeston, all of which were suburbs of Glasgow with sizeable weaving communities. Later, new associations were formed at other suburban centres of the trade such as Govan, Anderston and Bridgeton, while missionary work was also carried out at Paisley and Carmunnock, in both of which weaving was the principal economic activity.[62] But in addition to this positive correlation between the geographical distribution of the Scottish websters and the location of underground reform societies, more positive evidence can be produced not merely to implicate the

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61. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., pp. 368-369.
62. Report from the Select Committee of Secrecy, P.P., 1817, (34), iv, p. 7.

weavers in these organisations but also to prove that they formed the core of their inner leadership. For example, the first trial for sedition in Scotland for fifteen years was that of Alexander McLaren, a weaver, accused of making a speech at Kilmarnock which appealed to the 'spirit of Bannockburn'.[63] Again, of fourteen members of the central committee who were arrested, as many as ten were described in a newspaper report as 'weavers and other workmen.'[64] Furthermore, when government spies like Alexander Richmond and George Biggar were employed, their activities were exclusively pursued in weaving circles while their main informants - men like John Campbell and McDowall Peat - were, or purported to be, websters.[65] In summary, it is clear that weaver participation in this physical force strand of radicalism was proportionally greater, and more crucial in terms of leadership, than their involvement in the corresponding moral force wing of the reform movement in the years immediately after Waterloo.

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In the two years which followed the collapse of the petitioning movement and the arrest of the central committee, few demands for radical reform of the parliamentary system were voiced in Scotland. Instead, the focus of popular attentions was transferred to local issues such as Poor Law reform, the typhus epidemic and the reform of municipal corporations. To some extent

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63. Ellis and Mac A'Ghobhainn, op. cit., p. 107.

64. Glasgow Chronicle, 18 March 1817.

65. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 91.

this pattern can be explained in economic terms since radical enthusiasm was dampened by the beginning of what turned out to be an ephemeral recovery from the prevailing social and economic distress.[66] But the continuance of repressive measures also contributed to the mood of apathy, although this factor was not of crucial significance in Scotland, since some slight relaxation of the reactionary policy of Lord Liverpool's government in 1818 did not lead to increased political demands, as it had done in England. It was only with deepening depression in 1819 that interest in radical reform in Scotland revived. This revival was to have interesting parallels with the post-1815 experience, for once again part of the inspiration for this new movement came from leading English reformers. More important, however, the reawakening of 1819 also produced a similar polarisation of radical attitudes.[67]

One wing of the 1819 reform agitation consisted of those who wanted to see changes introduced in the existing system of representation, although it was stressed that such changes had to be brought about through peaceful and legal means. But one new development which characterised this phase of the movement's history was the advent of so-called union societies which spread throughout Scotland during the course of the year. The union society was the brainchild of Joseph Brayshaw, an eminent English reformer who, unlike his predecessor Cartwright, substituted total abstinence for petitioning as the most effective means of bringing

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66. Ibid., p. 136, p. 141.

67. Ibid., p. 142.
Chapter 1, ix.

the whole question of radical reform before the attention of parliament.[68] The specific political demands, voiced largely through union societies or at public meetings, were mainly for annual parliaments and universal suffrage.[69] But apart from the organisation of political meetings these societies, which levied a membership fee of 1d per week, were designed to provide a political education for the working classes, stressing not merely the central objectives of the radical campaign but also the absolute necessity for self discipline at all times, above all at reform meetings.[70] Self-discipline, it can be argued, was increasingly necessary since with reform meetings over time becoming better attended, there was a need to guard against any breakdown in public order.

Many of these gatherings were held in the west of Scotland in the first half of 1819. Although ostensibly they were called to seek some measures of relief in the face of mounting economic distress, on a number of occasions resolutions were passed for the reform of parliament.[71] The real turning-point in this campaign, however, was to be the 'Peterloo' Massacre in August 1819 which triggered off a spate of radical meetings. Although working class anger at the scale of the 'massacre' did not lead to major alterations in radical demands it, nonetheless, ensured that such demands were voiced with a new vociferousness. Working class indignation manifested itself, for instance, at a gathering held at Meikleriggs Moor, near Paisley, which was attended by local radicals as well as

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68. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., pp. 176-178.

69. Ibid. 70. Ibid.

71. Dumfries and Galloway Courier, 8 June 1819. Glasgow Courier, 28 Aug. 1819.

by groups of reformers from Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Kilbarchan, Johnstone and Dalry.[72] Reformers elsewhere in Scotland responded in a similar fashion. On 23 October contingents of radicals from East Kilbride and Cambuslang, in addition to reformers from Townhead, Calton and other Glasgow suburbs, attended a reform meeting in Rutherglen.[73] Almost simultaneously, a political gathering near Ayr welcomed visitors from the adjacent towns of Newmilns, Galston, Kilmarnock, Mauchline and Tarbolton.[74] In each of these cases the actions of the Manchester magistrates were condemned, the Tory government was denounced, and demands for an immediate reform of parliament were articulated.

Some of the radicals attending these meetings, however, were not content with mere speeches and resolutions, recalling that peaceful petitioning for reform in the immediate past had achieved nothing. On several occasions, the radical gatherings spilled over into civil disturbances. The meeting at Meikleriggs Moor, for example, was followed by a riot while at roughly the same point in time, trouble and disturbances also occurred in Glasgow.[75] Indeed by mid-September it was claimed that the whole of the west of Scotland was bordering on insurrection and alarm again spread through official circles.[76] Yet, at first sight, it seemed that the government had again exaggerated the danger of impending revolution,

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72. Parlane, op. cit., p. 83.
    Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 159.

73. Ibid., p. 162   74. Ibid.

75. Glasgow Chronicle, 14 Sept. 1819.
    Scotsman, 18 Sept. 1819.
    Glasgow Courier, 21 Sept. 1819.

76. Kirkman Finlay to the Lord Advocate, 14 Sept. 1819. Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/126.

for the passing of the 'Gagging Acts' was sufficient to curb all public demonstrations on behalf of radical reform. In another sense, however, the sequel to this legislation was to create a more potentially dangerous situation than that which it was intended to forestall. For, with radical meetings effectively outlawed, the Scottish reform agitation was driven underground and into the hands of those who used the language of physical force.[77]

Again, however, the activities of these underground associations are obscured by the fragmentary nature of the available data. Nonetheless, there is good reason for supposing that the majority of the union societies adopted a mantle of secrecy in the second half of 1819. The renewed phase of repression dating from shortly after the 'Peterloo' incident was primarily responsible for this trend, while a simultaneous increase in the number of Scottish militia forces billeted in the west of Scotland following the Paisley disturbances undoubtedly increased existing tension between radicals and those in authority.[78] Certainly by the end of the year there were union societies in Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Stirlingshire, Dunbartonshire and Lanarkshire which had abandoned the moral force precepts of Brayshaw, and embraced the alternative strategy of achieving their political objectives by physical force.[79] It was to this end these new clandestine associations succeeded, on

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77. Even before this new repressive legislation had been enacted, some of the radicals in the west of Scotland already met in secrecy.
Lt. Col. W. Thornhill to Lord Sidmouth, 18 July 1819. Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/125.

78. Stewart Black, op. cit., p. 190.

79. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 193.

16 December 1819, in forming a central committee of seven men, which would be responsible for the co-ordination of their activities. The inaugural meeting of this committee was attended by delegates from Ayr, Kilmarnock, Mauchline, Paisley, Airdrie, Kilsyth and Campsie.[80] But the burgeoning activities of union societies and their central committee were in their turn bound to arouse fears amongst the authorities that violence was being sanctioned as a legitimate weapon in promoting political change.[81]

Two alleged features of these underground societies confirmed the view of government officials that an armed insurrection was impending. Firstly, reports were circulated that radical associations were procuring arms for their members, and thus equipped giving them instruction in military tactics.[82] It was claimed, for instance, that the disaffected in rural Renfrewshire were armed with small steel instruments, about six inches long, with three feathers at the end.[83] Another report from the same county argued that local radicals were proposing to dip these 'knats' or 'radical clegs', in poison, so that they could be thrown, with maximum effect, at the magistrates and others in authority, during disturbances.[84] At Paisley, reformers boasted of the muskets they would

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80. Ibid.

81. Dugald Bannantyne to Lord Sidmouth, 14 Sept. 1819. Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/126.

82. Letter (undated) to the Sheriff Depute of Renfrewshire, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131, p. 263.
Blantyre to Major Sir Thomas Bradford, 31 March 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131, p. 301.

83. John Monteith to the Lord Provost of Glasgow (undated) Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131 p. 284.

84. Letter (undated) to the Sheriff Depute of Renfrewshire, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131, p. 263.

use but, in the event, never acquired;[85] for like the disaffected at Kilmarnock, Paisley reformers had to be content with pikes.[86] But in addition to this kind of alarmist information about the military strength of the radical forces the authorities also received reports that radical societies in many areas were in the habit of drilling their members at night.[87]

But anticipation of an armed insurrection was heightened by the beliefs that a sophisticated chain of communication existed between scattered radical societies, and that they possessed a high degree of internal organisation. This would literally give any impending insurrection a nation-wide base; for it was argued that the Scottish radicals had not merely established strong links between themselves, but that they also made contact with their counterparts in England. Delegates from Scotland had allegedly addressed radical meetings in the south, while the Lord Advocate, Sir William Rae, asserted that two leading English radicals were in Glasgow and Edinburgh 'to instruct the disaffected in the mode of proceeding'.[88] Instead of allaying such fears, the arrest of the central committee in February 1820 confirmed the suspicions of the authorities since the radical leaders, just prior to their apprehension, succeeded in destroying their papers. Not surprisingly, the official interpretation of this action was that the

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85. Stewart Black, op. cit., p. 191.

86. Ibid.
A. McKay, The History of Kilmarnock, Kilmarnock, (1858), p. 212.

87. Stewart Black, op. cit.

88. P. Holt, Review of P. Beresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A' Ghaboinn, 'The Scottish Insurrection of 1820, Scottish Labour History Society Journal, (1970), p. 35.

central committee had tried to suppress matters of a treasonable nature.[89] The Scottish authorities were, therefore, led to believe that the disaffected merely needed a signal from their brethren in the south before launching a wholesale and bloody revolution. In support of this thesis it was argued - although the argument rested largely on rumour - that groups of men could be seen in all the main Scottish radical centres, anxiously awaiting some sign to mark the beginning of insurrection, in the days following the failure of the Cato Street conspiracy.[90]

In one sense of course it must be conceded that suspicions about the activities of these societies were not totally unfounded, although their fears about the armed strength of the societies and their overall degree of support were certainly wildly exaggerated. In the event, a form of armed uprising was finally to occur in Scotland, although precisely what triggered off the 'Radical War' of 1820 is not known. It certainly was not the awaited signal from radicals elsewhere.[91] Nor can the outbreak be properly ascribed to the work of 'agents provocateurs', as some historians have recently argued, since documentary evidence exists to show that the 'address' of the radicals stemmed from the reformers themselves and not from those in the pay of the government.[92] A more likely explanation is that the insurrection was probably a spontaneous protest against political impotence and adverse economic pressures.

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89. Henry Monteith to Lord Sidmouth, 23 Feb. 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131, p. 188.

90. John Monteith to the Lord Provost of Glasgow, 2 March 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/131, p. 222.

91. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 209.

92. Holt, Review of 'The Scottish Insurrection', op. cit., p. 38.

Against a backcloth of prolonged economic distress, there was still no sign that English reformers would, as had long been anticipated, join in 'the common cause'. Hence, with growing impatience, a small group of local leaders decided to launch an initiative before their disappointed and less resolute followers abandoned the movement entirely. The fact that the 'Scottish Insurrection' coincided with slight, but measurable improvement in the economy was possibly significant in this respect. Some action would have to be taken before a major economic recovery produced a dwindling of radical support.[93]

The 'Radical War' of 1820 produced three basic responses among the Scottish reformers. Firstly there were a number of areas where the revolutionary proclamation appeared, was applauded, but little else done to support the radical cause. Secondly, in other districts the enthusiasm for the radical demands was such as to lead to industrial action or minor civil disturbance. Thirdly, there were a few areas in which limited numbers of radicals were prepared to take up arms to back up their revolutionary aspirations for a provisional government. The least active of these three responses was by far the most popular.

The inflammatory proclamation appealing to Scottish radicals to fight for 'Liberty or Death' and exhorting 'His Majesty's troops' to join the radical cause appeared in most of the manufacturing towns and villages of west central Scotland on Sunday, 2

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93. By the end of March, Manchester radicals were prepared to rise but only if an initiative in this direction came from elsewhere. Otherwise, the only rising in England was an abortive affair in Huddersfield.
Roach, Radical Reform Movements, p. 209.

April 1820. The address was exhibited at the major urban centres such as Glasgow and Paisley, as well as at medium sized towns like Airdrie, Girvan and Kilsyth. Rural areas of Lanarkshire, Dunbartonshire, Stirlingshire, Renfrewshire and Ayrshire were also affected.[94] Wherever the proclamation appeared it aroused considerable excitement among the lower orders and great consternation among the authorities and the propertied classes. However, despite being widely broadcast and despite the general interest which it raised, the radical address was not received as a call to action by the vast mass of the Scottish working classes.

It was only greeted with exceptional enthusiasm in certain localities. In Glasgow, for example, the proclamation signalled the beginning of a strike, supposedly affecting as many as 60,000 people in the city and its environs.[95] The Paisley radicals also responded to the address by stopping work and gathering in the streets.[96] At nearby Johnstone there was also a complete stoppage of work for a time, supposedly the result of intimidation by an angry mob.[97] Similarly at Kilsyth, weavers on reading the proclamation, immediately laid down their shuttles and for several days paraded the streets.[98] Yet in none of these instances were the stoppages prolonged, and all the strikers had resumed work within a week.

Nonetheless, the failure to generate a sustained mass working-

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94. Ibid., p. 213.

95. Glasgow Courier, 4 April 1820.

96. Blantyre to Viscount Sidmouth, 5 April 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/132.

97. Glasgow Courier, 4 April 1820.

98. Matthew Stevenson to William Kerr, 3 April 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/132.

class response did not deter a minimal number of the 'disaffected' from embarking upon an armed insurrection. A group of Stirlingshire radicals, composed entirely of handloom weavers, marched on Falkirk hoping to seize the Carron Ironworks. Their coup, however, ended in total failure when they encountered the 10th Hussars and the Stirlingshire Yeomanry at Bonnymuir. The sequel to the ensuing 'battle' was that nineteen prisoners were taken, and two of the leaders were later executed.[99] The only other area where this lead was followed was Strathaven. Hoping to join forces with their Glasgow counterparts, the Strathaven radicals, again composed mainly of websters, marched to Cathkin Braes, the site chosen for the encampment of the entire Scottish radical forces.[100] They discovered, however, that they alone had responded to this call to arms and on their way home 'a dozen' were apprehended, of whom one, James Wilson, was later hanged.[101] Elsewhere, there was little heart for revolution. Although there were armed groups at the Ayrshire town of Galston and Newmilns their activities eventually came to nothing, while Kilmarnock, the location of numerous public meetings in 1819, showed no inclination to rebel.[102] Paisley radicals excused their inaction on the grounds that they had insufficient guns and ammunition while the weavers of the parish of Old Monkland, all of whom were ardent advocates of reform, threw their weapons into a coal pit or returned commandeered pitchforks to their rightful owners.[103]

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99. Glasgow Herald, 7 April, 1820.
100. Ibid., 10 April 1820. 101. Ibid.
102. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 240.
103. Ibid., p. 237.

The abortive insurrection of 1820 marked the end of the second wave of radicalism in Scotland in the post-1815 period. Like the 1816-17 movement the 1819-20 phase of the reform agitation ended with none of the political objectives of the participants being realised: neither moral force nor physical force tactics had resulted in reform of parliament. The parallels between these two agitations, however, are not solely confined to the similarity of tactics employed, or to their eventual failure. Of greater significance is the fact that these two waves of Scottish radicalism received most of their support and some of their leadership, from broadly identical socio-economic groups.

The original union societies of 1819, for instance, were located in the weaving counties of the west of Scotland - Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Stirlingshire, Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire.[104] Moreover, many of the demands for political reform voiced in 1819 emanated from public meetings held to devise measures of relief.[105] And since websters were the main sufferers during this depression it can be legitimately suggested that they played a predominant role at these meetings. Again, as in the past, weaver participation was not solely restricted to the moral force wing of this agitation. When the now secret union societies met in December 1819 to establish a committee to co-ordinate their affairs, the delegates who attended this meeting came from Ayr, Kilmarnock, Mauchline, Paisley, Airdrie, Kilsyth and Campsie, all of which were weaving districts.[106] It is also clear that those areas in the

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104. Ibid., p. 193.

105. Dumfries and Galloway Courier, 8 June 1819.
Glasgow Courier, 28 Aug. 1819.

106. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, op. cit., p. 193.

west of Scotland which experienced rioting in the wake of the 'Peterloo' incident, mainly Glasgow and Paisley, had high concentrations of websters. Indeed the historian can demonstrate that the enthusiasm of the Scottish weavers for reform in 1819/20 was strongest when moral force tactics were abandoned in favour of more violent means of achieving political objectives.

Firstly, the reports which reached officials concerning the manufacture of weapons and armed drilling specifically implicated the websters of rural Renfrewshire and Paisley. Secondly, it is likely that a sizeable number of weavers had some military experience: this could be put to good effect if physical force tactics were employed. One contemporary, for example, claimed that the Glasgow radicals had been organised into sixteen battalions by the weavers, who had many old soldiers among them.[107] Thirdly, websters were identified as the workgroup who were most prominent in awaiting news from England to signal the start of the radical rebellion.[108] Fourthly, the principal attenders at the meetings at Parkhead, where the Radical 'Address' was drawn up - Robert Craig, James Brash, James Armstrong and John Fisher - all wrought at the hand loom.[109] Fifthly, those areas which reacted to the radical proclamation by taking part in civil disturbances, for example Kilsyth, were districts with large weaving populations.[110]

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107. Ibid., p. 200.

108. Matthew Stevenson to William Kerr, 3 April 1820, Scottish Record Office, R.H. 2-4/132, p. 326.

109. Holt, Review of 'The Scottish Insurrection', op. cit., p.37.

110. Glasgow Courier, 4 April 1820.
Scotsman, 8 April 1820.

Lastly, it is clear that the few who actually embarked upon armed rebellion were almost exclusively websters while the three leaders who were later executed - Baird, Hardie and Wilson - were all weavers.[111]

Two final questions must be posed about the extent of weaver involvement in the radical campaigns of 1816-17 and 1819-20. The historian must, first of all, explain why they were enthusiastically supported by the Scottish websters. Secondly, some explanation must be sought for the predominant role played by handloom weavers in the insurrectionary wing of these agitations.

Several basic influences were responsible for the general appeal of radical doctrines to the Scottish websters in this decade. The failure of the 1812 strike, for example, both denied the websters any hope of a short term solution to the problems of the trade, and effectively discouraged them, for the time being, from further attempts at organising labour on a large scale. Lacking, therefore, a strong trade union to remedy their grievances many of them now turned to parliamentary reform as an alternative panacea. Their plight, moreover, was real enough; for in the wake of the 1810 strike, websters experienced severe cut backs in wage rates. In absolute terms, in fact, the greatest wage contractions affecting the weavers, throughout the entire period from 1790 to 1850, occurred between 1812 and 1822. Furthermore, the two phases of widespread radical activity again coincided with periods of chronic socio-economic distress. As has already been shown these sectoral and cyclical influences must have had a devastating impact

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111. Roach, Radical Reform Movements, _op. cit._, p. 372.

upon the living standards and status of the weavers and their dependents; and this in turn led to criticisms of the existing forms of government. A final factor determining the nature of the weavers' response to demands for reform was that the new political idealogies - for example Cobbettism - had particular appeal to websters, while the political demands voiced by the reformers were still largely confined to universal male suffrage and the secret ballot. Those who clamoured for an equal division of property represented only an infinitesimal portion of the total number of radical supporters. Largely, therefore, the nature of the radical demands had not altered substantially since the earlier reform movements of the 'Golden Age', and websters, in giving them their support, were in a sense diverging little from the campaign for political rights which had much earlier antecedents.

But if the demands of the reformers were basically the same in the 1790s and 1812-22, the tactics employed by some of the radicals in the latter phase were markedly different from those of their predecessors; for after 1815 an increasing number of Scottish radicals embraced a physical force strategy. Precisely why the weavers played a principal role in this 'insurrectionary' element of the reform movement is not easy to decipher. It does seem, however, that socio-economic distress was again of considerable significance in this process. With their labour organisation disbanded, websters bore the full brunt of cyclical depression, in the shape of wage cuts, while recessions in their trade tended to be unusually prolonged. To this must be added an increasing awareness among intelligent weavers, especially during 1819-20, that the problems of the industry were not merely the product of

cyclical influences.

Socio-economic frustrations found expression in three distinct forms. Firstly, civil disturbances occurred but their short-lived nature suggests that they were spontaneous expressions of discontent. Secondly, secret societies, now almost a traditional feature in weaver-politics, were formed, aided, of course, by repressive legislation. Thirdly, an armed insurrection was attempted by a minority of the websters. Significantly enough this response was exclusively the province of weavers in rural villages, where no tradition of relief during periods of distress had been established.

iv

After the debacle of 1820 reform movements played little part in Scottish social life until the end of the decade. Indeed, as far as the weavers were concerned, the boom of the mid-1820s witnessed a serious attempt at general unionisation. The ensuing downturn, however, effectively applied a brake to this initiative, and by the late 1820s weavers, having again failed to gain their short-term economic objectives, were prepared to embrace the movement for parliamentary reform, as a solution to their problems. This was aided by the fact that the national reform agitation of 1830-32 occurred during a period of economic depression. Underlining this point was the fact that since the downturn of 1826 until the cyclical upswing beginning in 1833, low wage rates were the rule in weaving while the same period saw recurring un-

employment on a considerable scale in the trade.[112]

Nevertheless, the particular contribution of weavers to the agitation is not easily defined, since the issue of parliamentary reform received such widespread support throughout the country. Bearing this difficulty in mind, however, it can be argued that websters took an active part in the movement, for centres of the weaving trade were again prominent among the areas in which the major agitations occurred. These, moreover, were not confined to the west of Scotland, in contrast to the 1812-22 phase of radicalism. For example, in Dunfermline huge public processions were held in support of 'the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill', while in May of 1832 as many as 10,000 allegedly gathered at Nethertown to attend a reform meeting.[113] Again in the east, Dundee and Perth weavers' incorporations petitioned the legislature for reform.[114] Furthermore, in Scotland as a whole many of the new political unions formed in 1830 and 1831, and modelled largely on the Birmingham Political Union, were located in towns with large weaving communities.[115]

Yet, despite active participation in the movement, few of the Scottish weavers hoped to gain the franchise once the Reform Bill was passed. Indeed it has been claimed, with some justification that the 1832 Reform Act brought to an end the alliance between the

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112. Chapter 1, ix.

113. Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

114. *Glasgow Herald*, 30 Sept. 1831.
Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

115. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

working classes and the middle classes in Scotland, in the context of radical political movements.[116] It is not surprising, therefore, that although there was strong proletarian support for reform, it was nonetheless considered that the Bill's provisions were far too restricted. Significantly enough, of the occupational groups who attacked the Bill's limitations the websters constituted a formidable element. In 1834, for instance, it was claimed that the 'generality of the weavers were favourable to a lower scale of franchise.'[117] But even before this date some of the workforce openly expressed demands for its extension. In 1832, for example, the non-electors of Paisley 'persecuted' those in the town who neglected to secure the political privilege vested in them by the recent Act; some of these activists went so far as to stone one such offender.[118] Again, although not represented in parliament, the weavers of Ayr demonstrated their support for the radical candidate, Dr Taylor, by rioting in the town during the first election for the reformed parliament. In fact, on this occasion the yeomanry had to be called out and special constables sworn in before peace was restored.[119] Finally, on this point, it was asserted in 1834 by William Buchanan that the spirit of radicalism among the websters had 'assumed more the appearance of a revolutionary character.'[120]

But Buchanan was also concerned with trying to explain the root

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116. Ibid., p. 33.

117. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 207, qq. 2772-2778.

118. Glasgow Herald, 3 Sept. 1832.

119. J. Howie, An Historical Account of the Town of Ayr, op. cit., Kilmarnock, (1861), p. 103.

120. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers, P.P., 1834, (556), X, p. 96, q. 1292.

cause of such radicalism. In his view, the prime motivating factor was the lowly economic status of the weavers. Websters, he claimed, embraced revolutionary doctrines because of the low level of their wages which they in turn ascribed to the mismanagement of the economy on the part of the government.[121] The experience of the next few years in fact seemed to vindicate Buchanan's analysis, since, with the upsurge of the economy after 1832, political agitations in the main died out; and it was not until the ensuing cyclical depression that radical activity was again resumed. But in the post-1832 economic recovery the weavers abandoned their agitation for parliamentary reform in favour of petitioning the Commons for boards of trade. Petitioning was, moreover, accompanied by another development, which was by now a familiar feature of the trade during periods of boom; for with the upswing of the mid-1830s the Scottish websters made their final attempt at large-scale unionisation in the trade.

v

By 1837 with serious recession again being experienced in the economy, a new working-class reform movement - Chartism - had emerged, committed to the 'Six Points' contained in the People's Charter. These demands were for manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, payments of MPs and the abolition of the property qualification for MPs.[122] Although this movement remained in existence until 1848 its for-

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121. Ibid.

122. A. Briggs, (Ed.), Chartist Studies, London, (1959), pp. 23-24.

tunes wavered over time, the main phases of Chartist activity, like the initial one of 1837-39, again coinciding with periods of socio-economic distress in 1841-42 and in 1848. Conversely, the nadir of Chartist fortunes was experienced in the intervening years of reasonable trade. It is against this framework of reference that the role of the Scottish websters has to be assessed. In this context three basic questions have to be asked. Firstly, it is necessary to examine whether radicalism, which was by now an established tradition among the Scottish weavers, was maintained in the Chartist period. Secondly, we must discover if such radicalism as existed among websters was of the moral force or physical force type. Thirdly, reasons must be forwarded for the extent, and nature, of weaver involvement in the political movement.

The first of these problems presents the least difficulty for even at a cursory glance it is clear that, from the outset, the Scottish weavers played an active part in Chartism. If the relationship between the geographical distribution of the workforce and the location of radical activities is again employed as a rough guide to assess the extent of weaver commitment, then the significance of their role in the movement is at once established. Thus in April 1837 it was reported that reform meetings in Glasgow and Dumfries had passed resolutions in favour of universal suffrage, while similar actions were being taken by radicals at Galashiels.[123] Shortly afterwards, during the campaign staged in Scotland by the Birmingham Political Union, large reform meetings were held at Kilbarchan, Strathaven, Johnstone, Beith, Kilbirnie, Houston,

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123. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Lochwinnoch, Parkhead, Bridgeton, Newmilns, Kilmarnock, Ayr, Mauchline and Cumnock, all of which were minor weaving districts, as well as at larger centres of the trade such as Paisley and Glasgow.[124] It was partly because of the success of this campaign that the National Petition was quickly supported in Scotland, with radicals in weaving areas being among the first to adopt it. By June 1837 it had been adopted at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth and Dunfermline as well as at county meetings in Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Fifeshire.[125] A final pointer to heavy weaver involvement in the opening phase of Chartism is that weaving areas were prominent among those who protested against the death sentence imposed upon the Welsh radicals, Frost, Williams and Jones, for their part in the Newport rising. Petitions against the sentences were to be signed by 14,784 individuals in Paisley, and 20,523 in Dundee.[126]

Nor was weaver participation confined solely to the first phase of Chartism; for in 1842 it was claimed that Glasgow was a 'mass of agitation'. Prominent among the agitators were weavers' delegates from surrounding areas who met in the city and expressed the necessity of acting in concert with the Chartists.[127] Moreover a great many in Scottish weaving districts added their signatures to the National Petition during the 1841-42 phase of Chartist activity;[128] and this same pattern obtained during the last revival of the movement in 1848. At the later date support for the third Petition

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124. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

126. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

127. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

128. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

was voiced at Crieff, Kilbarchan, Pollokshaws and Dumfries, while large meetings at Aberdeen, Dundee, Paisley, Glasgow and Edinburgh adopted the National Petition and elected delegates to the forthcoming Chartist National Convention at this point in time.[129]

But apart from broad indications of weaver involvement obtainable from the location of the main radical activities, there are other good reasons for suspecting that websters played an important role in the rank and file, if not in the leadership, of the Chartist movement. It is possible, for example, that Feargus O'Connor's land scheme appealed to websters in distress in the same manner as the Utopian promises of Cobbettism had done at an earlier date. Certainly, Chartist Land Societies were formed in Glasgow, Greenock, Hamilton, Newmilns, Arbroath, Campsie and Dundee.[130] Another pointer to weaver support for the Charter is the fact that William Thomson, editor of the Chartist Circular, had earlier held the same position with the Weavers' Journal. It is possible that a degree of overlap existed between the readership of the two publications, and this possibility is strengthened by the fact that the Chartist Circular was very sympathetic to the weavers' plight.[131] Finally, it can be argued that since phases of Chartist activity coincided with economic depressions, this increased the likelihood of websters participating fully in these political movements, since the weaving community was among those worst affected by economic dislocation.

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129. Ibid., pp. 221-222. 130. Ibid., p. 213.

131. Weavers Journal, 31 Oct. 1835 - 1 April 1837.
Chartist Circular, Preface, 23 Oct. 1941.

Investigating the second problem is a less easy task since there was not always a clear-cut division between physical force and moral force groups, while judgements regarding their prevalence and strength are often clouded by the bias of the particular writer. Despite such difficulties, however, several factors suggest that the Scottish weaving community lent at least some support to the revolutionary wing of the Chartist movement. For example in 1839 both the Cumnock Working Men's Association and the Newmilns Radical Association refused to accept the recent Calton Hill resolutions which declared that only peaceful means should be employed to obtain the Charter, while the rank and file of the Renfrewshire Political Union confirmed the election of the physical force candidate, Dr Taylor, thus scorning the advice of their president, secretary and council.[132] Shortly afterwards, Chartist associations at Forfar, Kirriemuir and Dundee wished to see the implementation of the sacred month, an action which was considered by some observers to be tantamount to a declaration of physical revolution.[133] Moreover, there were in certain of the weaving districts, signs of preparations being made for an insurrection. Thus it was claimed that at Old Cumnock, Aberdeen, Barrhead, Forfar, Edinburgh, Paisley and Dunfermline working-class elements were arming themselves, while Chartists at Renfrew, Elderslie and Rutherglen were said to be prepared to go to any lengths to have the Charter accepted.[134]

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132. Wilson, op. cit., p. 165.
133. Ibid., p. 75.
134. Ibid., p. 86.

But if physical force Chartism existed among a section of the Scottish websters in the early phase of the movement, there are indications that such support persisted, albeit on a reduced scale, until 1848. In 1842, for example, the strike and demonstration at Dundee seems to have been organised by the Chartists of the town,[135] and it is possible that similar political motivation may have played a part in the violent disturbances in the same year at Dunfermline.[136] Furthermore, at an even earlier point in time Julian Harney had received warm receptions at Kilmaurs, Beith, Kilbirnie and Lochwinnoch,[137] while a Chartist meeting at Kilbarchan loudly applauded a Mr McFarlane who asserted that Chartist exertions could never be successful 'till they could rend asunder the bonds of society.'[138] Again, in 1848 Kilbarchan was quick to congratulate the French upon their revolutionary success, although it was not the only weaving centre to take such action, for it was copied at Crieff, Pollokshaws and Dumfries.[139]

Obviously, therefore, physical force Chartism was subscribed to by at least some of the Scottish websters. Nonetheless, this form of activity must be seen from the perspective of weaver involvement in the Chartist movement as a whole. When this is done, it becomes clear that those who backed up their political demands with vitriolic oratory only formed a small proportion of those weavers who subscribed to the 'Six Points'. Expressed in another

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135. Glasgow Herald, 26 Aug. 1842; 29 Aug. 1842.

136. Ibid., 12 Aug. 1842.

137. Scottish Patriot, 30 May 1840.

138. Scots Times, 8 April 1840.

139. Glasgow Saturday Post, 11 March 1848.
Wilson, op. cit., p. 222.

form, Scottish weaver involvement in Chartism entailed principally the support of a peaceful and constitutional reform.

Indeed, from the very outset, the Scottish agitation had strong leanings towards the moral force school. For example, Scotland's political reawakening was largely under the influence of Birmingham Chartists, and was helped particularly by their 'holy and peaceful' campaign in Scotland.[140] Again, this acceptance of moral force doctrines was confirmed at the Calton Hill Conference on 5 December 1838 when violent measures were rejected.[141] In addition, attempts by O'Connor and others to reverse the Calton Hill resolutions met with fairly limited success, for they were reaffirmed at Dunfermline, Airdrie, Elie, Largo, Kirkcaldy, Crossgates, Hawick, Perth and Paisley, many of these being areas with substantial weaving communities.[142] In short, most weaving centres rejected the philosophy of the 'physical force' branch of the movement. Furthermore, even those weaving areas which welcomed physical Chartism only subscribed to this doctrine in the short term. For example, despite the alleged support of the town for O'Connor, a New Moral Force Association was soon established in Paisley; the Chartist demonstration at Dunfermline in 1841 ended with a total repudiation of physical force; while even Cumnock, as early as 1840 stressed the need for 'peaceful, legal and constitutional means'.[143] But perhaps of even greater signifi-

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140. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-51.

141. *Glasgow Courier*, 8 Dec. 1838.
Scots Times, 8 Dec. 1838.

142. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

143. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
Glasgow Chronicle, 3 Nov. 1841. *Scots Times*, 2 Dec. 1840.

cance was the fact that there were several Scottish weaving areas where no evidence of support for physical force Chartism can be found. This was the case, for example, at Aberdeen where Chartism was dominated by shoemakers, tailors and weavers.[144] Moreover, the Chartist press, including the Chartist Circular, which probably possessed a considerable weaver readership clearly advocated the use of moral force tactics.[145] Overall, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the Scottish weaving community, although enthusiastically supporting reform in this period, overwhelmingly opted for the moral force wing of the Chartist movement.

Two essential causal factors which underlined their commitment to 'the good cause' were the failure of trade unionism and the total lack of success which attended petitions to parliament for ameliorative measures. Whenever adverse circumstances affected their trade, the Scottish weavers tended to look to long term, political solutions to their difficulties. As in earlier phases of their history the weaving community, in the Chartist era, were at their most active politically at times of bad trade. Nonetheless, their particular adherence to moral force methods is at first glance surprising since, in view of their lowly position on the socio-economic scale, it might be expected that weavers might support the more extreme elements in Chartism.

Yet in this respect the weavers conformed to the pattern of experience of the Scottish Chartists generally, the main portion

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144. S.D. McCalman, Chartism in Aberdeen, Scottish Labour History Journal, No. 2, (1970), pp. 6-7; p. 10.

145. Chartist Circular, 27 June 1840.

of whom repudiated the use of physical force tactics. Some part of this process has been ascribed, possibly with justification, to the direction given to the Scottish movement during its formative phase by the very able triumverate composed of John Fraser, Abram Duncan and the Reverend Patrick Brewster.[146] More important, however, was the fact that Scottish reformers, like their counterparts elsewhere, abandoned physical force methods in the wake of the Newport rising; for the sequel to the attempted rebellion was not merely the sentence of execution passed on the ringleaders - though admittedly they were later pardoned - but also the persecution and arrest of some of the most outspoken supporters of the Charter, O'Connor among them.[147] That Scottish reforming enthusiasm generally was dampened by this repression is clearly demonstrated by the fact that physical force elements reached their peak period of support in Scotland in the initial phase of 1837/39; thereafter their participation dwindled noticeably.

Undoubtedly this general Scottish moral force ethos exercised some sway over the attitudes of the websters. Nonetheless, in view of their distressed condition in socio-economic terms, further reasons must be forwarded to explain their adherence to the constitutional wing of this reform movement. Here two influences were crucial. Firstly, the Scottish Chartists set up religious and educational establishments which were attended exclusively by working class elements. For this reason, weavers felt no reluctance to participate in such activities, which served to reinforce the moderating influence on the Chartist movement.[148] Secondly, and of

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146. L.C. Wright, Scottish Chartism, Edinburgh, (1953), p. 64.
147. J.T. Ward, Chartism, London, (1973), p. 135, p. 169.
148. Wilson, op. cit., p. 104.

much greater significance, was the fact that by this point in time the Irish had been totally alienated from any violent element in Chartism and, in particular, had come to despise the principal physical force figure, Feargus O'Connor. They looked for political guidance to Daniel O'Connell, who had vehemently denounced the use of any form of physical force.[149] This was a vital factor in the rejection of physical force by the Scottish websters, for the Irish, by the late 1830s and the 1840s, constituted a formidable sector of the total workforce.

vi

In addition to recurring demands for the reform of parliament itself, bitter criticisms of specific government policies were periodically voiced by the Scottish weaving community. On several occasions during the French Wars some weavers petitioned for the restoration of peace.[150] Similarly after 1815, websters made repeated demands for a ban on yarn exports.[151] These, however, were piece-meal protests which reveal little of the political attitudes of the weavers over time. Of much greater importance in this context, there was one aspect of government policy which remained unchanged during most of the period with which this theses is concerned, and which brought constant reaction from the weavers. This was

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149. J.H. Treble, O'Connor, O'Connell and the Attitudes of Irish Immigrants Towards Chartism in the North of England 1838-48, in J. Butt and I.F. Clarke, (Ed.) The Victorians and Social Protest, A Symposium, Devon, (1973).

150. Incorporation of Dunfermline Weavers' Minutes, Dunfermline Burgh Library, 31 March 1795; 10 April 1797.

151. Smelser, op. cit., p. 131.

the policy of protection towards the agricultural interest, embodied in the Corn Laws of 1815.[152]

Even before the Act of 1815 which debarred the imports of foreign corn to Great Britain until the price of home-grown grain had reached a certain level - 80/- per quarter in the case of wheat - some Scottish websters had protested against legislative restrictions upon the import and export of grain. In September 1804, for instance, the Incorporation of Weavers in Dunfermline unanimously agreed to implore their town council to petition the legislature for a repeal of 'the late Corn Bill'[153] Again in 1814, this same body transmitted a similar request to parliament through the good offices of the Honourable George Rope, MP, in the hope that the legislature would abandon the proposed changes in the Corn Laws.[154]

Once the 1815 statute had been passed, various sections of the weaving community were quick to voice their objections. Thus even if their links with the workforce were at this point in time more tenuous than formerly it is still significant that weavers' incorporations in many areas issued petitions against the new protective system.[155] The Glasgow Incorporation, for example, claimed that 'these importation rates would be felt to a most severe degree by the operative and poor, whereas they would only be felt in a slight degree, or not at all, by the upper classes in the community.'[156]

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152. N. McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846, London, (1958), p. 15.

153. Incorporation of Dunfermline Weavers' Minutes, Dunfermline Burgh Library, 3 Sept. 1804.

154. Ibid, 23 March 1814.

155. Glasgow Herald, 10 March 1815.

156. Ibid.

But more important still, some of the areas which staged protest meetings had sizeable weaving communities. In the west of Scotland such gatherings took place in such weaving centres like Airdrie, Old Monkland, Kirkintilloch, Kilbarchan, Eaglesham, Stonehouse, Lennoxtown, Campsie, Gorbals, Hutchesontown, Lawrieston, Tradeston, Govan, Pollokshaws and the Barony Parish of Glasgow.[157] Nor was this agitation confined solely to the western counties of Lanark, Ayr, Renfrew and Dumbarton; those who wrought at the loom in the east also joined in the campaign. At Dunfermline, for example, a petition secured 2,600 signatures in the short time of two hours, while similar petitions drawn up at Leith and Stirling were signed by 3,000 and 2,600 respectively.[158]

After the initial strength of the reaction, weavers were to return to the same theme in the ensuing decade. Early in 1826, for example, weavers in the west of Scotland petitioned for repeal,[159] while in November of that same year the Glasgow Incorporation of Weavers took similar action, arguing that protection had 'not merely entailed much distress on the operative classes but [had] been extremely injurious to the interests of Manufactures and Commerce.'[160] Meanwhile the Dunfermline Incorporation of Weavers recommended that a general petition for 'total abolition' should be presented to parliament.[161] In the following year similar action

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157. Ibid., 3 March 1815; 6 March 1815; 13 March 1815.

158. Caledonian Mercury, 9 March 1815; 16 March 1815. Edinburgh Evening Courant, 9 March; 18 March 1815.

159. Scots Times, 10 June 1826.

160. Glasgow Herald, 20 Nov. 1826.

161. Incorporation of Dunfermline Weavers' Minutes, Dunfermline Burgh Library, 29 Sept. 1826.

was again mooted, when they pleaded 'that in fixing the regulation under which Corn is to be imported the very depressed State of the Classes to which your petitioners belong will not be forgotten.'[162] Given the extent of such agitation in 1826 and 1827, it is perhaps surprising that little enthusiasm greeted the modification of the Corn Laws in 1828. But such lack of response must be seen in the light of the ineffectiveness of this new sliding-scale, which one historian has described as 'an unsatisfactory compromise between the liberal views of Huskisson and the protectionist attitudes of Wellington and other right-wingers.'[163]

Nonetheless after the Act of 1828 weavers continued to agitate for free trade in corn. Moreover, if in the 1820s demands for Corn Law repeal were voiced after wider political and industrial action had produced no marked gains, this pattern was to change after 1830 when weaver agitation for Corn Law repeal was closely linked with their attempts at forming trade unions, and their demands for the general reform of parliament. In June 1832, for example, the Scottish websters were warned that although there were signs of impending cyclical recovery in the economy they could expect 'little or no solid benefit' until the Corn Laws were abolished.[164] And it seems that certain elements of the weaving population took that warning seriously; for in August a meeting of Kirkintilloch weavers passed a resolution to request all those in

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162. Ibid., 22 Feb. 1827.

163. N. McCord, Free Trade, Theory and Practice from Adam Smith to Keynes, Newton Abbot, (1970), p. 53.

164. Loyal Reformers' Gazette, 23 June 1832.

the district, now possessed of the franchise, to support only parliamentary candidates who were in favour of free trade,and above all the destruction of the corn monopoly.[165] By the mid-1830s weaver opposition to the Corn Laws had both widened and intensified; for in 1835 it was claimed that these laws had been 'complained of by political economists, the handloom weavers and some other mechanics',[166] while several witnesses in their evidence to the 1834-5 parliamentary enquiries into the trade testified to the unanimous support for repeal which existed among the Scottish websters.[167] Opposition to protection was still strong in the late 1830s and early 1840s, for Mr Symons and Dr Harding both discovered that, in their respective areas, the weavers, almost without exception, favoured repeal.[168]

Given that this hatred of the Corn Laws was, by the late 1830s, an established feature of the weavers' political outlook, it could only be expected that they would be staunch supporters of the Anti-Corn Law League. It is not, however, always easy to demonstrate the extent of weaver participation in the League's activities, since most of its energy was devoted to influencing elections, and few websters possessed the franchise.[169] Nonetheless, it can be shown

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165. Scottish Guardian, 17 Aug. 1832.

166. Glasgow Herald, 26 Oct. 1835.

167. Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers. Analysis of Evidence, 1834-35, P.P., 1835, pp. 76-77; p. 83; p. 85; p. 87; p. 89.

168. Assistant Commissioner's Report from South of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 69.
Assistant Commissioner's Report from East of Scotland, P.P., 1839, (195), XLII, p. 197.

169. Bythell, Hand Loom Weavers, op. cit., p. 230.

that they played a formidable part in the League's programme. For example, in 1839, an Anti-Corn Law Meeting at the small linen-weaving village of Dunse resulted in a parliamentary petition with as many as 700 signatures.[170] Two years later an Anti-Corn Law Prayer meeting at Paisley, held at the Secession Church, Abbey Close, which was in the centre of one of the principal weaving centres in the town, was crowded to excess, 'hundreds' having been refused access.[171] But in addition to these isolated examples it is significant that Chartism, which in Scotland received considerable support from the weavers, co-operated in the main with the League, thus diverging considerably from the pattern obtaining in England; and although there were some instances of Anti Corn Law meetings being disrupted by Chartists, the latter generally regarded themselves as 'out and out Repealers'.[172] Moreover, many of the League's spokesmen backed up their arguments for repeal by citing the instance of the handloom weavers. For example, delegates to the'Great Anti Corn Law Demonstration', staged in Glasgow in 1842, claimed that the grinding poverty of weavers and their dependents arose, not solely from low wage levels but also from high bread prices.[173]

Since weavers had constantly opposed the Corn Laws it is not altogether surprising that they greeted their repeal in 1846 with considerable enthusiasm. Smaller weaving centres like Fenwick

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170. Scotsman, 13 March 1839.

171. Glasgow Saturday Post, 11 Sept. 1841.

172. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

173. Supplement to Glasgow Argus, 17 Jan. 1842.

marked the occasion with noisy public rejoicing,[174] while major weaving towns such as Paisley also celebrated repeal by staging demonstrations.[175] All the districts which celebrated this occasion - Glasgow, Airdrie, Ayr, Perth and Strathaven - were areas in which hand loom weaving was an important element in the local economy.[176]

It remains only to explain the reasons which prompted this pattern of unwavering support. Basically it can be argued that the force of the case presented by the opponents of protection appealed strongly to the workforce. Apart altogether from the emotional impact of the argument that parliament was giving special attention to the agricultural interest while denying it to other elements in society, weavers among them, the economic reasoning of middle-class repealers struck a responsive chord with weaving communities. They accepted explicitly the view that the Corn Laws added to their own distress by reducing Britain's export potential,[177] since protection prevented other countries from earning much needed sterling, with which to purchase British manufactures.[178] However, it was probably the more obvious argument that the Corn Laws increased the price of bread and the cost of living, which exercised greater sway. For in this case weavers could argue that one of the central tenets of the new political economy could be invoked to rationalise one of their own basic needs, the need for cheaper food.

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174. Taylor, Annals of Fenwick, _op_. _cit_., p. 72.

175. _Glasgow Saturday Post_, 18 July 1846.

176. _Scotch Reformers' Gazette_, 4 July 1846.

177. _Select Committee on Hand Loom Weavers_, _P.P._, 1834, (556) X, p. 20, qq. 275-286.

178. McCord, _Free Trade_, _op_. _cit_., pp. 64-65.

Conclusion

The difficulties inherent in an attempt to outline the social history of the Scottish handloom weavers from 1790 to 1850 are compounded by the fact that over time the weavers' numbers fluctuated markedly, while the weaving trade itself displayed considerable variety in many of its principal features. Thus, it could be argued, general statements regarding the lives of the Scottish websters are only valid when related to such variables as the fabric worked and the particular form of industrial organisation obtaining.

Nonetheless, certain conclusions regarding the extent and nature of the workforce may legitimately be made. As regards its numerical strength it is clear that the labour force increased in size at a fairly steady pace from 1790 onwards, reaching a peak about 1840, after which numbers in the trade declined fairly sharply. At any given point in time more than half of this workforce was located in the counties of Lanark, Ayr, Renfrew and Dumbarton in south west Scotland, and most of these wove cotton fabrics. Another one-third approximately resided in eastern areas of the country and were engaged, almost exclusively, on linen work, while some seven per cent of the total wove woollen fabrics and were mainly located in the Border region. The remaining one-tenth of the workforce consisted of silk weavers, by far the greatest proportion of whom lived in Paisley or its environs. Moreover, as a whole only about one-third of the total workforce was engaged upon the better-paid, fancy fabrics.

Nor is there any doubt that, with very few exceptions indeed,

the Scottish weavers depended solely on the hand loom for subsistence, since, by the early nineteenth century, dual occupations, such as had been pursued by farmer-weavers, were largely abandoned. Nonetheless, the bulk of the Scottish labour force, about two-thirds in the mid-1830s, continued to reside in rural or semi-rural areas. This pattern was in its turn a reflection of the fact that the industrial organisation of the trade remained principally domestic. Furthermore, it is clear that at any point in time a sizeable portion of the workforce consisted of newcomers to the weaving districts although this conclusion applied with particular force in urban centres. Many of these recruits came from Ireland, the Scottish Highlands or were natives of the Scottish agricultural counties.

Probably the best known feature of the history of this workforce is that after 1815 the trade entered a period of prolonged decline, which in essence meant a sharp contraction in living standards for all except isolated groups of woollen weavers. Nonetheless, falling real income was not initially accompanied by a decrease in the number of operatives. Indeed, the principal causal factor accounting for rapidly falling real wages was this very problem of a glutted labour market, since weaving became the rallying-point of those who were unable to gain employment in other sectors of the emerging industrial economy.

The inevitable sequel to the emergence of this pattern was that poverty was increasingly experienced by many of those who depended on the hand loom for a living. Moreover if this social problem was serious enough at times of reasonable trade, the threat of starvation itself loomed large during periods of slump.

And although some contemporaries still regarded such immiseration as the product of improvident habits, this thesis has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the poverty of the websters arose principally out of low levels of income. Furthermore, compared to the vast numbers who were exposed to the sufferings associated with a state of primary poverty, the incidence of secondary poverty, caused by personal or moral failure, was minimal. Lastly, it is also clear that chronic want was a constant background factor in shaping the other social problems - the lengthening of the working day, poor housing standards, and vulnerability to disease - encountered by the weaving community.

No effective ameliorative measures were applied to ease the incidence and severity of the destitution problem. Institutional aid from the Scottish Poor Law, the provisions of occasional relief committees, and the weavers' own contribution through self-help agencies were, in total, quite ineffective palliatives when viewed against the backcloth of the extent of poverty among the weavers.

In the face of protracted poverty, it is not surprising that by the mid-nineteenth century, the traditional culture of the websters had undergone considerable change. Church attendance had fallen sharply and the practice of private devotions had dwindled, while very few weavers could now afford to educate their children. Moreover, the intellectual outlook of the websters, as expressed through their poetry, had narrowed considerably and, simultaneously, during their hours of leisure they had largely abandoned their tradition of self-entertainment. In addition,

the incidence of crime and prostitution among the weaving community grew, accompanied by an overall deterioration in their general moral standards.

Given the serious problems which the handloom weavers had to face, it is scarcely surprising that on occasions they reacted vigorously by attempting to improve their condition. One of their most consistent responses was their devotion to the principle of unionisation. Yet, when an overall assessment of the effectiveness of weavers' combinations is made, the only reasonable conclusion which emerges is that, in the long term, they achieved nothing. Part of their difficulty in this context stemmed from the dispersal of the trade, although the fact that they did achieve ephemeral success argues that the difficult problems of communication, to which a widely scattered workforce gave rise, could be overcome. What therefore was the principal determinant of their failure at combination was again their poverty; for websters could not sustain lengthy stoppages to combat wage cuts, which were the inevitable concomitant of the frequent recessions which the trade encountered. Unionisation itself, therefore, tended to be confined to times of peak activity.

But just as attempts at unionisation were only made during periods of good trade, so the weavers' other response to adverse economic pressures - participation in radical movements - occurred exclusively during periods of slump. Motivation behind such activity stemmed from a desire for a limited degree of social betterment through political change, although undoubtedly some were influenced by the Utopian dream of obtaining a political

panacea for all their ills. Again, however, their efforts in this direction were doomed to failure, for neither the unreformed nor reformed parliament was prepared to extend the franchise to such a low point on the social scale as that which, after 1815, the vast majority of the Scottish handloom weavers occupied.

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