

## HEANOR IN THE 19TH CENTURY

BY F. A. PEAKE

(Department of History, Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario)

At the beginning of the 19th century Heanor was a small town heavily involved in the framework knitting industry and in the embryonic coal-mining industry. In 1801 it had a population of 2,631 and like many ancient parishes embraced within its bounds a number of other and smaller communities, among them Codnor, Loscoe and Shipley. For convenience the extra-parochial liberty of Codnor Park is also included in the present study.

There had been a church at Heanor since the time of the Norman conquest. The only dissenting chapel in the parish during the 18th century was one built by the Society of Friends in 1722. In 1848 it passed into the hands of the Particular Baptists. The other chapels were all established in the 19th century. In this connection, it may be noted that, in spite of provisions made by the Act of 1836 for the solemnization of marriages in registered nonconformist chapels, most marriages in the first half of the century appear to have taken place in the parish church or one of the new churches which will be mentioned later.

At the beginning of the 19th century most of the breadwinners of the community were engaged in agriculture, framework knitting and the collieries. By 1851 the population had increased to 6,717. During that time agriculture remained static, involving about 150 families. Framework knitting declined, while mining flourished. The census returns indicate that in the decade preceding 1831 the increase of population was attributable to 'the extension of the Iron and Coal trade'. Similarly, it was reported in 1851 that 'the increase of population . . . . is attributable to the operations of a Building Society, to the opening of a coal mine, and to the extension of iron manufacture'.

Heanor, which had been declining in the 18th century, was, on the whole, flourishing by the middle of the 19th century, although the framework knitters were in a bad way. According to William Felkin<sup>1</sup> there were, in 1844, about 1,000 handframes in the vicinity. At the same time the Butterley Company employed about 2,000 men.<sup>2</sup> The handframe workers had been in difficulties since the beginning of the century. In 1845 a petition was presented to the House of Commons on behalf of the industry at large signed by more than 25,000 framework knitters asking for some alleviation of their condition. In the petition they listed their grievances and among them were injustices regarding frame rents, frauds in the payment of wages and the iniquities of the truck system.

Parliament responded by setting up a Commission of Inquiry.<sup>3</sup> Hearings were held in all the principal hosiery centres, including Heanor. The commissioner's report, issued early in 1845, attested largely to the validity of the complaints which it illustrated by evidence gathered during the hearings. One of the chief difficulties was that the trade was overcrowded. There were simply too many framework knitters and the number was increasing. Unemployed workers in other fields found it easy enough to pick up the rudiments of the trade. Very little skill was required particularly when 'cut-ups' made on wide frames were substituted for fully fashioned garments.

Another cause of difficulty was the truck system carried on, as the report of the commissioner said, 'by a large class of employers who combine with their occupations in the manufacture, shops for the sale of provisions and whom the present law has not been able to touch.' Truck<sup>4</sup> was payment in kind or in vouchers which were redeemable either at a shop kept by the employer or by a shopkeeper with whom he had a working agreement. The system had been prohibited by law in 1831, but the legislation proved to be a dead letter.

There were two problems connected with the truck system. One was the moral, if not actual, pressure exerted upon the worker to buy from the employer's shop, usually paying too high a price and receiving inferior goods in the process. The other problem was that, particularly in bad times, the worker got into debt with his employer and it was in the latter's interest to keep him so.

The evidence given by the framework knitters shows that this evil was by no means absent from Heanor. One of the manufacturers and 'putters-out' was Thomas Hogg (5514). He acted as an agent for Gibson of Nottingham and also owned some frames of his own which were let to handframe knitters (5106). In the report he was represented as profiting by the truck system, although in giving evidence he insisted that the grocer's shop complained of belonged to his father and was quite separate from his own business. Moreover, he said, there were three other shops in the village, 'regular shops', as he called them (5538) and 'six that sell things without a licence', implying that he could scarcely be accused of maintaining a monopoly. Nonetheless, James Brown, 'of Heanor, frame Work Knitter, Silk Hose Branch', insisted that 'Mr. H . . . . ' did keep a shop and that his name was over the door.

It must be admitted that there were grounds for confusion. According to Bagshaw's *Derbyshire Directory*, 1846, Thomas Hogg, Sen., a grocer, lived at Rose Cottage. With him and his family lived his son, Thomas, who in the *Directory* was described as a hosier. By 1861, according to the census returns, the son was married and living in his own establishment with his wife and two small children. At that time he was listed as a 'farmer of 36 acres'. It is possible that Thomas, Jun., was telling the truth when he assured the commissioner that his hosiery business was entirely separate from his father's shop, but it seems more probable that the separation was almost entirely fictitious and that the circumstances were as the framework knitters described them.

Incidentally, the Hoggs must have been a powerful economic force in Loscoe, if only because of their numbers. There were several of them and all had fairly large families. Of Thomas and his son we have already spoken. There was also Samuel Hogg, who by 1851 had become mine host of the *Golden Ball* and Richard Hogg, who was a beer-house keeper. One wonders whether they realised their collective influence and, if so, the extent and manner in which they exercised it.

Evidence shows that the same pressures were exerted on the miners. J. M. Fellows, reporting to the Children's Employment Commission, 1845,<sup>5</sup> spoke of the evils both of payment of wages in beer houses and of the truck system. Of the former he said that frequently the butty, or sub-contractor, having been paid by the company would appoint the colliers and children 'to meet him either at his own or some beer shop he has an interest in, and generally keeps them waiting until he considers it has answered his purpose, when the landlord produces his change and his bill'. Moreover, he continued, 'at some fields the butties are only settled with once a month or six weeks, and no subsistence is allowed them except from a tommy-shop belonging to the overlooker of the works'. In support of his contention he cited the evidence of one witness, the mother of two boys who worked in a pit near Alfreton:

they are paid [she had said] once a month and is quite sure if she wanted any money between times she could not have it otherwise than by ticket for Horsley's tommy shop; . . . . they sell bacon, cheese, potatoes, flour, bread, flannels and worsted; . . . . has known those who had money to go to Belper, save 1s. out of 3s. by buying their goods there; at this time the cheese is 10d. per lb., sugar 9d., tea 5d. per oz., the same sugar may be had at Belper for 7d. and tea 3d.

A factor contributing to the truck system was the dearth of currency at the beginning of the 19th century. This led to the practice of 'long pays' in which the payment of wages was deferred over several weeks or to the system in which the butty was paid by bank note with the responsibility of dividing the money received among those who worked with him. Because of the shortage of coinage in the early 19th century the Butterley Company began to issue vouchers or tickets with faces values of 2s. 6d. (12½p), 5s. 0d. (25p), 7s. 6d. (37½p) and 10s. 0d. (50p).<sup>6</sup> These were redeemable at the premises of

Richard Elnor of Codnor Park, who was first licensed as an innkeeper in 1804. He was described by the directories of the period as a butcher and grocer, and as landlord of the *Navigation Inn*. This arrangement, which continued well into the 19th century, gave Elnor an obvious business advantage and placed the workpeople in a position to be exploited. The extent to which Elnor used his opportunities, if he did, is unknown.

At a later date the Butterley Company prohibited its contractors from settling with their men at public houses or otherwise than in cash, but how far this prohibition was observed is open to question. In any case, not all the miners in the district worked for Butterley and no such ban seems to have been imposed by other mine-owners. In the same vein Benjamin Elliott, a bagman for I. & R. Morley of Nottingham, said in evidence before the Framework Knitters' Commission:

. . . . I have a hand that works with me now that used to receive the chief part of his money in meat and ale in this village. . . . He was working to a publican and when he went for material, there was not any till such time as the man chose to let him have it, and when he had done the work there was ale for him in payment. [5369]

Given the depressed condition of the hosiery trade the tendency was, almost inevitably, for those who could do so to leave it. In spite of this the number of framework knitters continued to increase until 1860. For those in Heanor and the surrounding district who might wish to leave the industry the only alternative occupation was mining. There seems to be some evidence that a number of them turned to it. In late 1854 or early 1855, Thomas Radford, who was described as an 'elderly but inexperienced miner',<sup>7</sup> lost his life in a roof fall in one of the Butterley Company's pits. The fact that he was both elderly and inexperienced suggests that much of his life had been spent in some other employment. Is it possible that he was a desperate and impecunious framework knitter who saw the mine as a less dreadful alternative than the poor house? That, of course, is speculation, but the following case is an example of such a transition. It concerns one Moses Buckley,<sup>8</sup> reportedly a framework knitter, who, in April 1850, applied for relief to buy a coffin for his daughter's funeral. At that time he said that he was earning 4s. 6d. (22½p) per week. This was supplemented by a further 1s. 6d. (7½p) which his wife earned as a stocking seamer. These, together with the earnings of their oldest son, gave the family a weekly income of 8s. 6d. (42½p). In the following year Moses Buckley was listed in the census returns as a coal miner. But this is not the end of the story. In the 'statistical report' of Butterley employees made in 1856 he was listed as a miner earning 12s. 0d. (60p) per week. At that time he was probably better off financially than he had ever been, but by 1861, according to the census return, he was unable to work. What had happened? Had he also met with an accident due to inexperience? That part of the story we do not know. We do know that in 1861 the oldest son had married and was living close by. The rest of the family was being supported by the wife and their two coalminer sons, aged 12 and ten.

If the framework knitters made attempts to escape from a trade which promised only poverty and starvation, the younger generation did what they could to avoid entering it. But, once again, there was little alternative. There was little opportunity for education. There was no money to apprentice them to a trade. Mining was the only solution and to that they turned. In the statistical report already mentioned there were listed 315 married men employed as miners. It has been possible to trace 145 of these and so to determine the occupation of their fathers. Twenty-two of them had been framework knitters. Thus, 15 per cent of this admittedly small sample had not followed in their fathers' footsteps, but had turned to mining which although more dangerous and less pleasant would at least provide a living wage. I suspect that there were relatively few miners' sons who became framework knitters. A study of the 1851 census returns seems to confirm this impression, although it would probably be impossible to quantify it.

Two other matters of concern noted by the framework knitters' commission were those of public worship and education. Few handframe workers, it was noted, attended any place of worship, presumably because they lacked the clothes thought to be necessary.

Similarly, few of them sent their children to school. This was partly because they were unable to pay the necessary fees, but also because as soon as the children were old enough to work their earnings were needed to augment the family income.

The one reference to either religion or education in the hearings at Heanor came from Thomas Kerry, a framework knitter from Smalley. He said:

. . . . there is a school at the church, and there are dissenters' Sunday Schools. There is a day school belonging to the church. [5505]

There was also a Free School at Smalley which had been set up as a charitable foundation at the beginning of the 18th century. In the 1840s it accommodated 14 boys from Smalley, eight from Heanor and six from Horsley Woodhouse. The boys received not only tuition but a modest quarterly pension for books and expenses. They were, however, dismissed if they did not attend regularly. There had been a National School at Heanor as early as 1823, at which time it had between 50 and 70 pupils. In answer to a further question concerning the extent to which the framework knitters availed themselves of the school, Kerry replied:

. . . . There are some that do, but there are many that do not. Mr. Fox [steward to Lord Grey] I understand, has ordered many of the parents to send their children to the church school, and pays for them; he has sent several to night school at his own expense, I understand. It is commonly the case among the stocking-makers that they are put to seaming as soon as they are able, and they are obliged to do it, and that prevents the parents from sending the children to school and, therefore, they do not get as good an education as they might, even when the means of education exist. [5506]

Among social and economic historians, for a considerable period, a controversy has been raging between two points of view nicknamed respectively as the 'optimistic' and the 'pessimistic'. The former claims that the condition of the industrial worker was better than that of his rural predecessor. The pessimist argues that his plight was far worse and that it was so largely because of the vicious exploitation perpetrated by the industrialists. I tend to take the optimistic view and to believe that, although there were evils they were fewer than previously, that they were largely unforeseen and that as soon as they were recognized steps were taken to alleviate or eliminate them. This neither ignores nor excuses those who exploited the workers dependent upon them.

As soon as the needs of the industrial workers became apparent efforts were made, both nationally and locally, to meet them. This was particularly true in matters of education and religion. Reference has already been made to the National School at Heanor. Others were built at Crosshill (Codnor), Riddings and Ironville, which, although in the parish of Alfreton, served Codnor Park. Concerning the latter it is reported that:<sup>8</sup>

the school is open to all the children belonging or working at the Butterley Works; the children which are but few in the neighbourhood are also admitted; the whole pay for reading, writing, accounts, and mechanical drawing, 4d. per week, reading and writing, 3d, reading only 2d; this school is open to all denominations; the scholars are supplied with books and stationery in the above payments.

Marion Johnson, in *Derbyshire Schools in the Nineteenth Century*, has also spoken,<sup>9</sup> although unfortunately without identifying the source, of a

new school at Heanor, begun in 1849, [which] admitted poor children at one penny a week while others paid one shilling. The penny scholars were the 'poorer attenders'. Heanor school was noted for its 'humble but zealous friends' whose 'self-denying contributions' made the school possible. 'The projectors of the school are mostly labouring men; many of them, in addition to their larger subscriptions at the commencement, give one shilling per week towards current expenses.'

Schools there may have been, but there were undoubtedly too few of them, and even these were not used as fully as they might have been. As already noted, many parents could not afford to have their children in school when they could be earning to supplement the family income. Others could not afford the fees. For the child himself there was little incentive. His parents and contemporaries set no great store on book-learning. If he was employed he would be too exhausted to concentrate on studies in such spare time as he had. I had thought that it might be possible to demonstrate

from the census returns that miners, because of their better financial position, were more likely to send their children to school than the framework knitters. My impression is that this is true but that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove it statistically.

Schools were being provided; so also were churches and chapels. In a letter to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, dated 14th July 1843, the Reverend E. Tew, curate of Heanor, pointed out that not only was Heanor Parish Church the only Anglican place of worship available for a population of 6,000, but that all the pews were appropriated. Even if the poor came to church there would be no room for them. St. James's, Codnor, and Christ Church, Ironville, were built soon afterwards and both had a large proportion of free seats. The nonconformists were in an easier position, since there were few legal impediments to restrict their expansion and they seemed better able to make use of their leading laymen. By the middle of the 19th century there were a number of nonconformist chapels in the parish, including those belonging to the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and even the Latter Day Saints (Mormons).

The only religious census ever officially taken in Great Britain was held on 30th March 1851. The results, as they apply to Heanor, are shown in Table 1. Ignoring the vexed question of appropriated pews, it is seen that there were 4,382 sittings for a population of 6,717 persons. This was rather better than the overall national provision.

Far more difficult is the interpretation of the attendance figures. As everyone knows who has had to work with them, the returns of the 1851 religious census contain certain inherent problems. The census was not universally popular and it was voluntary. As a result the returns were not always either complete or accurate. With respect to Heanor, with the possible exception of those for the parish church, I tend to believe that the returns are reasonably reliable. It is interesting to compare the local returns with the national average. For rural areas the latter was said to be as follows:<sup>10</sup>

<i>morning</i>	<i>afternoon</i>	<i>evening</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>
28·1	25·5	17·8	71·4

For Heanor the comparable statistics were:

<i>morning</i>	<i>afternoon</i>	<i>evening</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>
28·1	37·7	27·3	93·2

which would suggest that the community was far more religious, at least in terms of public worship, than many other places in the country. In terms of particular communions the statistics were as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

	<i>Morning</i>	<i>Afternoon</i>	<i>Evening</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>
Church of England ..	13·5	14·1	4·5	32·1
Wesleyan Methodist ..	6·7	3·7	5·5	15·9
Primitive Methodist ..	1·3	6·1	5·8	13·2
General Baptist ..	—	4·1	2·4	6·5
Particular Baptist ..	—	3·3	4·2	7·5
Cong. Independent ..	6·1	5·5	3·8	15·5
Society of Friends ..	0·2	—	—	0·2
Latter Day Saints ..	0·3	0·8	1·2	2·2
TOTAL .. ..	28·1	37·6	27·4	93·1

A more serious problem stems from the fact that the census provided no way of knowing how many *different* people were present at public worship on that mid-Lent Sunday and in those days there were far more 'twicers' or even 'thricers' than there are today. Horace Mann, who organized the census and compiled the results, recognized the difficulty and proposed a practical, if not altogether felicitous, solution. He suggested that the figures should be adjusted by assuming that half the number present in the afternoon had already been in the morning and that two-thirds of the evening congregation had also attended an earlier service. Thus, in order to gain an accurate picture of the actual attendance he proposed to count the whole of the morning attendance, half the afternoon congregation and one-third of that in the evening. Quite obviously this gives a more realistic picture of the number of worshippers actually present, but, as the critics were quick to point out, it militated against those places of worship which had small morning congregations or none at all. These, in general, were those of the dissenting bodies, so the adjustment was thought to give an unfair advantage to the established church. For Heanor the adjusted totals are as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
Religious Census 1851 — adjusted totals

	<i>Morning</i>		<i>Afternoon</i>		<i>Evening</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>per cent</i>		<i>per cent</i>		<i>per cent</i>		<i>per cent</i>	
Church of England ..	812	13·5	422	7·0	90	1·5	1324	22·0
Wesleyan Methodist ..	402	6·7	112	1·9	109	1·8	623	10·4
Primitive Methodist ..	75	1·2	183	3·0	117	1·9	375	6·1
General Baptist ..	—	—	123	2·0	47	0·8	170	2·8
Particular Baptist ..	—	—	100	1·7	83	1·4	183	3·1
Cong. Independent ..	368	6·1	166	2·8	77	1·3	611	10·2
Society of Friends ..	13	0·2	—	—	—	—	13	0·2
Latter Day Saints ..	15	0·2	25	0·4	23	0·4	63	1·0
TOTALS .. ..	1685	27·9	1131	18·8	546	9·1	3362	55·8

We are still left with something of a puzzle. We have a fair idea of the number of people who attended public worship in Heanor on that day. We also know that the number was comfortably above the national average. But we do not know the composition of the various congregations. We can only hazard a guess that the very poor were among the 44 per cent who stayed away.

A. R. Griffin in his doctoral thesis, 'The development of industrial relations in the Nottinghamshire coalfield',<sup>11</sup> lays great emphasis upon the influence of Methodism in this area. It was, he says, a humanizing influence, 'softening the crude outlines of the mining world'. By its educational and devotional activities it opened up new vistas of life and provided new opportunities for men and women alike. For the men, particularly, it fostered literary, oratorical, musical and organisational skills, some of which furnished the leadership in later trade union activity. He concedes that the puritanism engendered might be lacking in charity and comments that 'it was no uncommon thing for a girl to be turned out of such a home because she was "in trouble"'.<sup>21</sup> I am inclined to think that this is an exaggeration of both the positive and negative aspects of Methodism. It minimises the influence of other religious bodies if the witness of the 1851 religious census is to be believed. It is also, perhaps, less than fair to the relatives of the 'fallen women'. Immorality, while not condoned, seems to have been accepted, perhaps after a family row, and illegitimate children received into the families upon which they had a claim. They were also presented openly for baptism, at least in the established church. While the influence of Methodism in the 19th century is certainly not to be minimised, it is important to realise that there was, throughout the earlier part of the century, a moderate evangelical awakening which was not confined to Methodism.

Another indication of religious commitment might be obtained from congregational membership lists were they available. The Church of England, at that time, did not keep such records and those of the dissenting bodies have not survived. Yet another approach might be to compare the number of baptisms with the population. This, however, would exclude the Baptists who take a different approach and, in any case, the Methodist records are far from complete. Largely as a matter of curiosity I counted the number of baptisms in the Anglican churches of Heanor, Codnor and Ironville and found that between 1840 and 1870 there were 3,411, 27 of them illegitimate children. The population of Heanor in 1851 was 6,717 and of Ironville 2,276, but it is by no means certain whether the number of baptisms points to the religious conviction of the parents or the occasional zeal of the clergy. On 24th May 1825 there were 122 baptisms in the parish church — scarcely a coincidence! On an even more notable occasion in 1837 there were 473 baptisms in the week of 25th–30th June, inclusive. This marathon was apparently provoked by the vicar's offer to give a bible to every child baptized at the same time as his own. One more sample of ecclesiastical statistics — that pertaining to confirmations. The act book of the Bishop of Lichfield indicates that between 1850 and 1864 there were 317 candidates confirmed in the churches of the ancient parish of Heanor.

A further aspect of social history is the matter of geographical mobility. Few of the inhabitants seem to have migrated from any great distance. R. K. Webb, in his book *Harriet Martineau*, has suggested<sup>13</sup> that 'Norfolkmen turned up in a North Derbyshire colliery in the forties', but there is no evidence that they found their way to Heanor. Nor did the community become a haven for any of the large numbers of Irish who were flooding into England, which helps to explain the relative absence of Roman Catholics in the area. There was, also, little social mobility. A few daughters and fewer sons became school teachers, but for the most part the boys became framework knitters or miners and the daughters found work as dressmakers or servants or simply stayed at home to help in the house.

It would be interesting to know what use the menfolk made of such spare time as they had. Beer houses and taverns were plentiful and no doubt served as social centres. It has often been pointed out that Victorian working-class homes were frequently far from comfortable and an increasing family made them less so. Hence the men sought refuge in a local pub. There the entertainment ranged from conversation, drinking, the reading aloud of the latest newspaper for the benefit of the illiterate, to darts, cockfights and boxing matches, the excitement of which was increased by the laying of bets.

In the education survey which accompanied the 1851 religious census there was reference to the Heanor Artisans and Mechanics' Library. It was reported to possess a library of 400 volumes and to have a membership of 20, two of whom were women. The annual membership fee was four shillings. As there is no other reference to the institute it is possible that the entry refers to a similar institution at Ironville. White's *Derbyshire Directory*, 1857, reported that an artisans' and mechanics' library had been established at Ironville in August 1843. Yet there was no reference to it in the 1851 survey. By 1857 it was reported to have a library of 600 books and a membership of 61 persons.

Following a necessarily short survey of Heanor we are left with the picture of an under-privileged community, suffering from the decline in framework knitting, not without its petty tyrants and, perhaps, some larger ones, but with an active interest in organised religion, a measure of social concern, some involvement in education and a developing social awareness.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>S. D. Chapman (Ed.), *Felkin's History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures* (1867), 466.
- <sup>2</sup>'A Day at the Butterley Iron-works, Derbyshire', *The Penny Magazine*, February 1844.
- <sup>3</sup>Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the Condition of the Framework Knitters*, 1845. The number of the question and answer is given after each quotation.
- <sup>4</sup>George W. Hilton, 'The British Truck System in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Political Economy*, LXV (1957), 237-256.
- <sup>5</sup>Parliamentary Papers, *Children's Employment Commission*, 1842.
- <sup>6</sup>Derbyshire Record Office (D.R.O.), Furnace Ledger 'B', Butterley Papers, D.503.
- <sup>7</sup>D.R.O., Box B, Butterley Papers, D.503.
- <sup>8</sup>Application and Record Book, Codnor, 1850, N.R.O.
- <sup>9</sup>Marion Johnson, *Derbyshire Village Schools in the Nineteenth Century* (1970), 36.
- <sup>10</sup>Parliamentary Papers, *Official Census of Religious Worship*, 1851, p. clv.
- <sup>11</sup>A. R. Griffin, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (A. R. Griffin), University of Nottingham.
- <sup>12</sup>A. R. Griffin, 102, 138, 618.
- <sup>13</sup>R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau* (1960), 60.