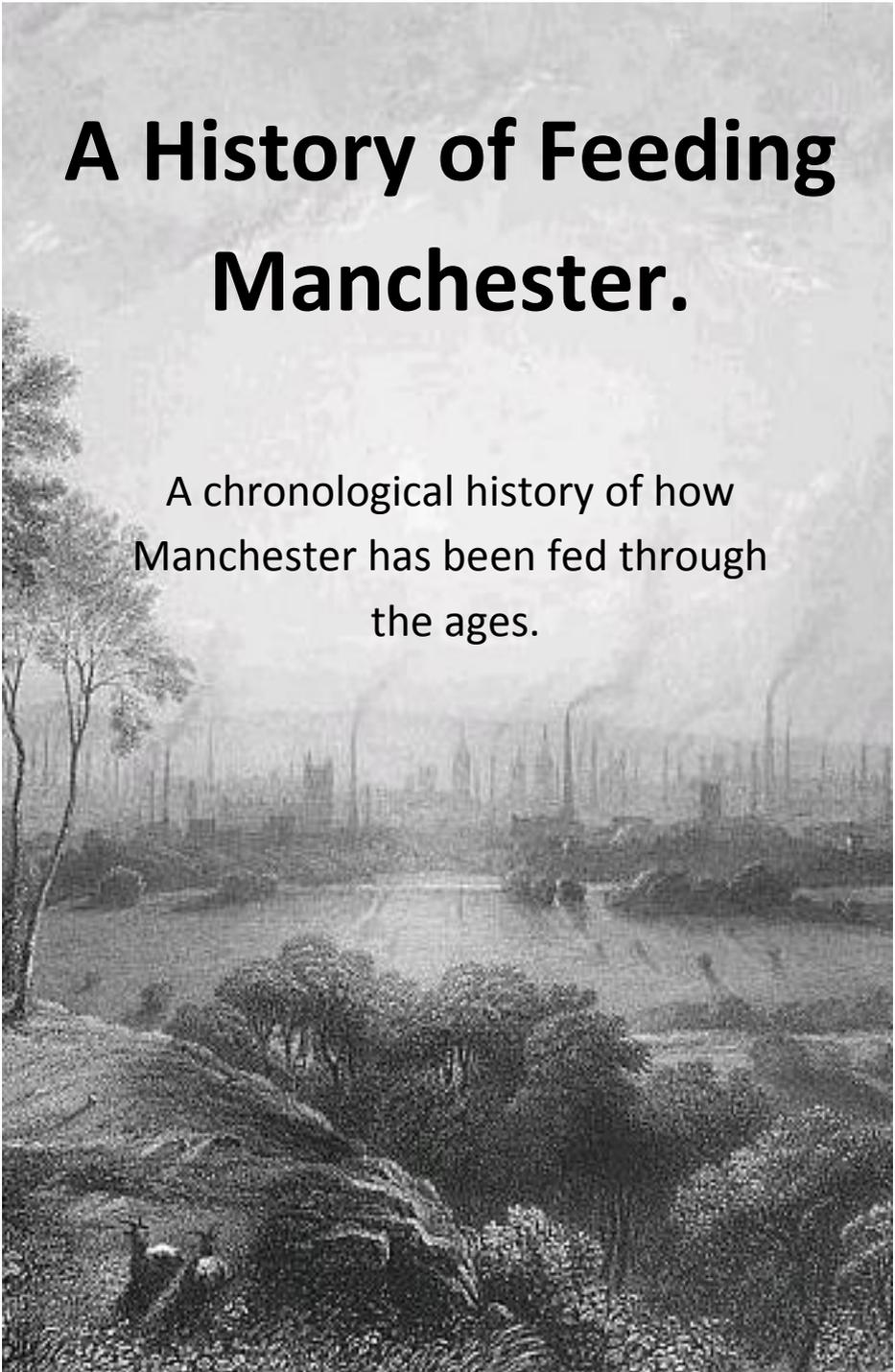


# A History of Feeding Manchester.

A chronological history of how  
Manchester has been fed through  
the ages.



## Introduction

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Manchester – the cradle of industrialization and the modern city. It was a revolution built on social and technological advances brought about by the end of feudalism which set us on a path, divorced from the '*primitive*' countryside and disconnected from the natural world, to an urban civility.

The comforts we enjoy today are built on the enterprise and exploitation of the agricultural revolution, colonialism, international trade and slavery, and ultimately the industrial revolution with the resulting urbanization of our country.

Few could predict that in just seventy years Britain would go from a kingdom of 'peasants' and cottage industries to an economy where the majority lived in town and cities, dependant on the new merchant and bureaucratic classes for our employment, housing, cloths and food.

By looking at how a changing Manchester was fed we can see our changing relationship with the countryside. How the *urban* has come to dominate the *rural* to make the most of market opportunities. Resulting in a detachment from and disregard for the pastoral, and a reverence for the metropolis.



## **Pre-1771**

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The journey begins in the late eighteenth century, the border of Lancashire and Cheshire. Farmsteads, hamlets and towns whose names allude to a lost countryside. Places like Blackley, meaning "a dark wood or clearing", Reddish derived from "reed or reedy ditch", Rusholme and Moss Side indicating marshland; Newton Heath and Barlow Moor revealing great heaths of old.

The Agricultural Revolution that began a century earlier saw massive increases in agricultural productivity through mechanisation, the four-field crop rotation, and selective breeding. The resulting increase in population led to more demand from the people for goods such as clothing. A new class of landless labourers, products of the first Enclosure Acts, provided the basis for cottage industry, a stepping stone to the Industrial Revolution.

To supply a continually growing demand, shrewd businessmen began to pioneer new technologies which led to the first industrial factories. People who once were farmers moved to get jobs in the factories.

## **1771**

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It's hard to believe today, that Manchester over two hundred years ago was a minor Lancastrian cloth township which then morphed into the pre-eminent industrial 'cottonopolis'. A process of unplanned urbanisation brought on by a boom in textile manufacture due to the importation of cotton from the colonies.

This new commodity was imported through the port of Liverpool, connected with Manchester by the Mersey and Irwell rivers. Driven by international trade; the creation of financial markets; accumulation of capital, and advances in science, but crucially cheap coal from Worsley along the Bridgewater Canal fuelling Manchester's growth.

And it is around this time that human activity (through the burning of fossil fuels) has a warming effect on the Earth's climate.

As the town grew it took significant enterprise to feed the growing population, with the newly opened canals used to transport vegetables from further afield. The working poor spent the vast majority of their wages on a basic diet, surviving on oat bread, beer, potatoes, cheese, a little meat and porridge. It was the growing affluence of a new middle class who drove the demand for meat, fish, vegetables and fruit.

To meet this growing appetite, increasing numbers of sheep & cattle were driven long distances to the town from Wales, as there was little cattle production in Lancashire. Small flocks of sheep were fattened around Knutsford & Altrincham and pig keeping was well established in the township either by individuals or butchers known as *porkers*.

Many local ponds and pits from the mining of the natural fertiliser Marl were 'well stored with tench & carp' with pike, eels, trout and salmon all available at market.

Potato growing was well established in Lancashire & Cheshire, with most potatoes for Manchester coming from Altrincham, and although green vegetables were not widely cultivated, Warrington supplies cabbages whilst Altrincham (an emerging centre for market gardens) supplied peas, beans, onions & carrots.

## 1791

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Commercial fruit growing was poorly developed but parts of Warrington supplied Manchester with gooseberries and damsons. The majority of apples & pears came from Worcester & Hereford by water.

It was observed that Manchester was '*better provided than might be expected from its inland situation*' with fish regularly sent to the town from the east coast. But even '*men with good horses*' would take two days and preservation was key.

Yet for the majority, bread is the staple food and its supply is far from assured. In 1795 Oldham food riots caused troops to be brought in to restore peace as local bread shops are attacked and looted. Three years later riots in Manchester follow the failure of the corn crop.

In response, this is the decade the first co-operatives and mutual societies are formed amongst workers who pooled their money for mutual self-support, to buy food more cheaply in bulk and to address the growing problem of adulterated food.

## 1801

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The continuing reform of the countryside, culminating in the General Inclosure Act of 1801, which sanctioned large-scale land reform played its role in increasing food production across the country and the growing power and influence of the 'landed gentry'. Yet despite such agricultural reforms, the urban poor continued to suffer food insecurity.

But for those who could afford it, there was greater variety of food than ever before and by now Manchester's middle classes could get apples from America.

In 1803 cotton overtakes wool as Britain's biggest export and by 1807 slavery had been abolished in the British Empire.

## 1811

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Food prices continue to soar in this decade. Unable to feed their families, workers became desperate. There are food riots in Manchester, Oldham, Ashton, Rochdale, Stockport and Macclesfield. 1815 saw the beginning of a series of Corn Laws, tariffs intended to prohibit the import of corn until the price of British corn had risen sufficiently - designed to support domestic corn prices against competition from less expensive foreign imports and to appease powerful landowners.

The Corn Laws enhanced the profits and political power associated with land ownership, resulting in higher prices for corn, leading to serious rioting across the country and the Peterloo Massacre in 1819. Among the throng on St. Peter's Field banners read "Liberty or Death", "Bread or Blood".

## 1821

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By the 1820's, Manchester's population stood at over a hundred thousand with over a hundred cotton-spinning mills, and the "march of bricks and mortar" continued.

Smithfield Market opened on Shudehill in 1822 and later extended to re-organise the market traders into clearly defined retail and wholesale sections. Stretford's market gardens' supplied some of the fruit for the market but pollution from Manchester took its toll on yields. While Lancashire's Ribble Valley was a major source of Salmon.

## 1831

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The Liverpool to Manchester railway opened in 1830 and towards the end of the decade was carrying 80,000 pigs to the town. The first oysters arrived from London by rail.

Manchester population continues to grow exponentially, and the first case of cholera is recorded on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1832. Ancoats was hit worst and the low-lying area around the river Irk, was hit worst of all. 674 are killed.

The first cartload of rhubarb went to market in 1833 from John Osbaldston of Altrincham and the area has become known as ‘the garden of Lancashire’, with considerable expansion due to the growing use of the Bridgewater Canal. Cucumbers and asparagus start to become more popular.

A corn exchange where grain could be bought and sold is built in 1837.

## 1841

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At the height of the Irish potato famines and with a population of almost a quarter of a million people Manchester is importing 45,000 tonnes of potatoes per year. A thriving export market of Warrington potatoes to the Mediterranean was diverted to meet Manchester’s demands. Horse manure, human waste and pig slurry from the growing township is taken by canal to the farms of Cheshire and increasingly Lancashire to fertilize crops. People of the ‘Fen Country’ speak highly of Manchester manure for its role in stimulating carrots.

In 1841 a wholesale market for ‘potatoes, other roots and vegetables’ is established on a Salford quay, with eight of the thirteen wholesale potato merchants located near Castlefield wharf. By 1845 fifteen of the 16 operated from there. Food continued to be transported short distances by cart and further afield by canal as it cost twice as much to transport farm goods from Altrincham on the newly opened commuter train line than it did by canal.

## 1851

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In 1851 the council took over the town's water supply.

In this decade Manchester officially becomes a city and the railways began to play a more significant role in bringing food to Mancunians. Rhubarb first arrived from London's Covent Garden in the 1840's followed by cauliflowers and watercress and '*things of that kind which are produced much earlier in the south*'.

The amalgamation of Manchester and Leeds with the Lancashire and York railways developed 'a very profitable traffic' of potatoes from the growing districts of South Yorkshire, Humberside and ultimately Lincolnshire. A potato market was established at London Road train station (now Piccadilly Station), but the transportation of vegetables was minor compared to the grain and flour from the East of England. The railways also allowed the majority of sheep consumed in the city to come from Ireland via Liverpool and Hamburg via Hull.

## 1861

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Potato blight and the falling price of potatoes encourage farmers to look at growing alternative vegetables. This combined with a widening circle of supply results in improved availability of vegetables and fruit through the seasons and with increased incomes vegetables becomes a more central part of the average diet

Grimsby becomes the largest single supplier of fish to Manchester, with overnight trains bringing fresh mackerel and herring to the first wholesale fish market on railway property. Additionally, Fleetwood in Lancashire becomes a major supplier of fish from the new steam trawlers and with the growing practice of ice used on boats for preservation. Most shellfish and shrimps caught in Morecambe Bay are sent inland to Manchester.

## 1871

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By the 1870's all but the most tenacious market gardeners had succumbed to pressure to channel their goods through middlemen, with an abattoir, carcass market and wholesale fish market opened in Water Street in 1872.

## 1881

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After 1845 the council took responsibility for removing refuse. At night a horse and cart came round and men removed the 'night soil'. The sheer scale of the task led to the purchase of Carrington Moss by the City in 1886, as a place for the disposal of refuse including clinker, night soil, slaughterhouse refuse, at the same time reclaiming the land for agricultural purposes. Farmers on Chat Moss were legally required by their tenancy agreements to accept a specified amount of refuse on their land, and were even obliged to pay for it!

Because of the success of this scheme, and the further expansion of the City in 1890, Chat Moss was purchased in 1895. The waste was conveyed to the Mosses by light railway. The Carrington Moss light railway was completed in 1887 and the Chat Moss light railway in 1898.

## 1891

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The development of refrigeration by the 1890s had allowed meat and fruit imports from as far away as New Zealand. Only milk, eggs and specialist market gardening expanded at this time since these enterprises did not yet suffer from import competition.

The opening in 1894 of the Manchester Ship Canal, which ran between the Mosses, facilitated the transport of the waste.

## 1901

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The Haber–Bosch process for creating synthetic fertiliser was first demonstrated in the summer of 1909, producing ammonia from the air, drop by drop, at the rate of about a cup every two hours. This revolutionary process went on to found industrial-scale fertiliser production, which today is responsible for sustaining one-third of the Earth's population, by greatly increasing food production.

Because the method could also produce the chemicals needed for modern warfare it has been suggested that without this process, Germany could not have fought the First World War, or would have had to surrender years earlier.

## 1911

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On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1911 the first British built Ford car, a model T, rolled off the production line at Ford's Trafford Park factory. The mass production of combustion engine vehicle saw the start of the demise of horses, the canals, trams and ultimately the railways for mass transportation.

At the outbreak of World War One in 1914, half of Britain's food was imported. During the war the area planted for staple crops of wheat, oats and potatoes was rapidly expanded owing to the risks to merchant ships carrying imports.

In 1917, when 2,500,000 men from across the social spectrum were given medical examinations, over forty per cent of them were found to be unfit for military service - mainly due to malnourishment.

## 1921

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In 1925, sugar beet subsidies were introduced to encourage greater home production due to the vulnerability of our excessive reliance on imports. Britain's interest in sugar beet arose during the Great War, when the supply of cane sugar was greatly reduced as German U-boats sunk the trading ships. Although, sugar beet was first identified as a source of sugar in the eighteenth century, the vested interests in the cane sugar plantations curtailed its cultivation in the UK.

## 1931

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In September 1937 saw the last loaded barge using on the Rochdale Canal.

In the 1930s, with continuing pressure from preferential imports from the Empire - such as meat from New Zealand, canned produce from Australia - Marketing Boards were set up, for milk, for potatoes and for sugar beet.

In 1939, British farms employed almost 15% of the population, yet by the start of the Second World War, 70% of our food was imported. And because of this dependency on food imports on the 8th January, 1940 (four months after the war started), food rationing came into force.

Everyone was issued with a food ration card and had to register to buy their food from specific shops. The shop was then issued with the relevant amount of food for the number of registered customers. However, as food was in short supply, the shops often did not receive enough for all their customers. News that a delivery had arrived at the shop spread fast and long queues soon formed as everyone was keen to get their share before it was all sold.

The extensive use of the water closet meant that the Carrington and Chat Mosses were no longer used for the disposal of sewage, and the light railways were sold in 1940, with the spreading of refuse ceased completely in the 1960s.

## 1941

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After a similar mobilization in World War One the Women's land army was established to replace the farm labourers who were sent to fight. At first it asked for volunteers and was later supplemented by conscription, so that by 1944 it had over 80,000 members working on the land.

Production subsidies were introduced in the UK by the 1947 Agriculture Act to persuade farmers to increase production and thus ensure national food security. Farmers received a guaranteed price for their produce and were encouraged to plough up pastures, drain wetlands and reclaim moorland and so put more land into production.

The so called 'Green Revolution' - refers to the transformation of agriculture began in 1945 but the term was only coined in 1968. It spread technologies that had already existed, but had not been widely used outside industrialized nations to the developing South. These technologies included pesticides, irrigation projects, synthetic nitrogen fertiliser and improved crop varieties developed through the conventional, science-based methods available at the time. The world population has grown by about four billion since the beginning of the Green Revolution.

## 1951

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After the Second World War agricultural subsidies and retail liberalisation created the climate for the growth of the supermarkets. Growing prosperity following immediate post-war hardship also suited new trends in retail.

By 1952, car ownership was on the increase, but public transport and cycling still accounted for most personal travel.

In 1950 Sainsbury's opened its first self-service store, in Croydon. Tesco opened its first self-service supermarket in 1954. Morrison's opened Bradford's first self-service store in 1958.

## 1961

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The Common Agricultural Policy, (a system of subsidies paid to EU farmers) begins with its main purpose to guarantee minimum levels of production, so that Europeans have enough food to eat, and to ensure a fair standard of living for those dependent on agriculture. This results in output increasing by 40% between 1960 and 1970, but agricultural manpower fell by 25%.

The supermarket chains began growing rapidly, spreading to become national chains through the 1960s and building larger stores selling larger product ranges: Tesco opened its first “superstore” in 1968 in Crawley, Sussex. With the onset of cheaper global sourcing and more ubiquitous car use, the “one-stop shop” efficiency of supermarket shopping grew in popularity. Yet still small independent retailers have a 60% share of the food retail market.

Discovery of oil and natural gas peaked in the 1960s.

## 1971

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The oil crisis of the 1973 and the energy crisis of 1979 see the price of oil increase significantly. Agriculture is hit by spiraling costs due to increase prices of fertilisers, fuel for tractors as well as increased rentals, transportation and wages, yet many horticulturalist received little increase in income as foreign competition (notably from Holland) due to the UK’s membership of the European Community.

In 1973, Smithfield Wholesale Market was re-located from Shudehill to a purpose built complex in Openshaw. It caters for fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, game and poultry, making this one of the largest of its kind in the country, but wholesalers and growers complain bitterly about the costs.

Whilst cereal growers benefit from something of a bonanza decade due to the higher prices of commodities such as wheat and barley, significant numbers of Northwest market gardeners go out of business or adapt from growing tomatoes, celery etc to growing pot plants.

## 1981

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Under Margret Thatcher's premiership planning laws are relaxed to allow the massive penetration of national retailers into out-of-town retail parks, with catastrophic impacts on town centres.

Complimenting this approach of trade liberalisation the Government proposed the '*biggest road-building programme since the Romans*'. Called a '*Roads to Prosperity*' it promises 500 road schemes costing £23 billion at 1989 prices (equivalent to about £40 billion today).

Yet, Margret Thatcher regards herself as an environmentalist describing capitalism as "a friend and guardian" of the environment, and in 1988 she made a land-mark speech to the Royal Society, accepting that global warming was a serious problem for the future!

## 1991

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Food; health and environmental issues come to the fore with the United Nation's Earth Summit in 1992, the growing concern about climate change, genetically engineered crops and numerous food scares.

Although BSE (or Mad Cow's Disease) was discovered in the previous decade, it was the 1990's when the media attention was at its most intense, when the number of cases greatly increased and the Tory government (in 1996) admitted that ten people with a new form of CJD had more than likely contracted it from BSE infected food. Against this background, cattle output from the Northwest of England fell by 15% in 1991, largely due to concern surrounding BSE, which resulted in a depressed home and export trade.

It wasn't until 2001 that it was discovered that CJD infection was twice as high in the north of England than elsewhere in Britain, leading to speculation that poorer diets may be responsible for the increased risk.

## 2001

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In this decade UK farmers supply about 62 per cent of our food needs, through 303,000 farms and an agricultural workforce of just over half-a-million -about 2% of the total UK workforce.

Yet the UK is the largest importer of food within the EU. In 1980 the UK trade gap in food, feed and drink was £3.5 billion, which increased to £5.9 billion in 1990 and is now around £10 billion.

In 2005, the government estimated that 69% of pesticides and 63 % of primary energy used in the UK for agriculture were imported, and a 2006 paper put the import figure for fertiliser at 37%, up from around 10% in the 1970s.

To complicate the picture, the UK engaged in a 'Great Food Swap' for food we are relatively self-sufficient in. For example a few years earlier, the UK imported 126 million litres of liquid milk and at the same time 270 million litres of milk was exported out of the UK. 23,000 tonnes of milk powder was imported into the UK and 153,000 tonnes exported out.

Four supermarkets (Tesco, Asda/Wal-mart, Sainsbury and Somerfield) control 75% of UK food retailing, with small independent retailer's share of the market reduced to 6%.

On a brighter note, after decades of work the Fair-trade Movement starts to become 'mainstream' with the International Fair-trade Certification Mark launched in 2002.

## References & Acknowledgements

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This summary of Greater Manchester's food heritage would not of been possible without the rigorous research and academic vigor of the late Roger Scola and his book; *Feeding the Victorian City: The Food Supply of Manchester, 1770-1870* (ISBN: 0 7190 3088 9).

Other information has been gleaned from such websites as [www.manchester2002-uk.com](http://www.manchester2002-uk.com). Additional information has come from Manchester Central Library's local studies unit and their staff.

If you would like a referenced copy of this booklet, please contact us.

Kindling is indebted to Fiona Dunk for her work in collating much of this information.

Kindling does not have the self-discipline of our local historians and so would be grateful for any mistakes or mis-interpretations to be pointed out to us.

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