THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MARSHALLS OF NORTHWICH, SALT PROPRIETORS: A SAGA OF THE INDUSTRIAL ERA IN CHESHIRE, 1720-1917

BY D. A. IREDALE, M.A., PH.D.

WHEN Thomas Marshall from the Hartford Beach, near Northwich, appeared before a parliamentary committee in London in 1817, he proudly proclaimed himself the largest salt proprietor in the kingdom. The wealthiest merchant in mid-Cheshire, Marshall determined that his family should one day sit on committees and at table with the greatest in the land. To this end he sent his son to Eton, Cambridge, and the Middle Temple. And his grandson did indeed climb towards the highest levels of society.

I FOUNDING THE FAMILY FORTUNE

During the seventeenth century the Marshalls lived in Nantwich. They began business as shoemakers, then as framework knitters. By hard work they grew prosperous, so that when Richard Marshall died in 1692 the family owned a fine "dwelling house in the welshrow" and valuable textile machinery. But living in one of Cheshire's salt towns, the family naturally acquired a "wich-house & twelve leads walling", that is, equipment for raising and boiling brine to produce salt. Salt had long been valued as a preservative and seasoner of food by the fisheries and the navy, by dairy farmers and every housewife, but during the industrial age it was to become an important raw material in the glass, soap, and chemical industries. To invest in salt, therefore, was to plan sensibly for future prosperity.

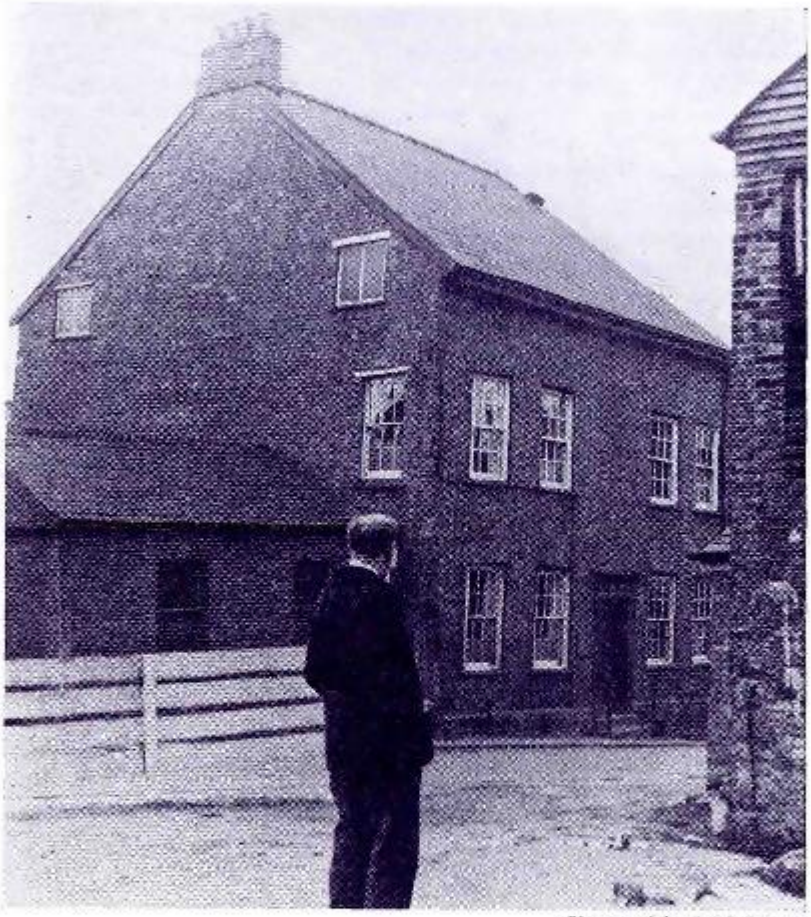
The Marshalls sent much of their cloth and, probably, small loads of salt overland to Northwich, and then by river or road to Liverpool. By the early eighteenth century some members of the family found salt production so profitable that they abandoned textiles altogether, and one young man, Thomas Marshall the younger, journeyed to Northwich about 1720 to seek his fortune there. The Northwich salt trade seemed to offer an ambitious man tremendous scope, and at least one relative already served in the town as collector of the salt tax. So, armed with references and a modest sum of money, Thomas, who lived from about 1700 until 1772, found little difficulty in

getting a post at a local salt works. Dozens of brine pits lay in Northwich town and neighbourhood, but, according to a treasury survey of 1733, they belonged to no more than five brine salt proprietors. The Barrows owned nine of seventeen brine pans noticed in the survey. But there had also been discovered, near Dairyhouse Farm in Marbury, rock salt which soon came to rival brine. As early as 1733 nine large rock mines existed around Northwich.

Thomas Marshall first became a producer of brine salt within the town of Northwich itself. After ten years as an apprentice, he began in 1734 to send salt on his own account, both overland and down the Weaver, and first appears in the records of the newly-active Weaver navigation in September of that year, when he brought up to Northwich Quay "20 tons coles" on the flat *Mary* to feed his works' furnaces. The Weaver, which flows through Winsford and Northwich to the Mersey, was at this time becoming an important artery of the salt trade. Improved locks and weirs, and, later, short newly-cut canals, made possible the use of large flat-bottomed boats to carry coal and salt cargoes. Northwich became a port linked with Lancashire, Liverpool, and the Irish Sea, and its river remained vital even after the building of the railways. The Marshalls indeed shipped salt and coal without a break from 1734 to 1874, longer than any other firm, using hired flats for the first years and then a private fleet of a dozen boats.

Marshall extended his interests as soon as his efforts and the judicious investment of his capital gave him larger profits. About 1734 he took a long lease on the brine-bearing Barons Croft in Northwich, where he erected pansheds, storehouses and offices, and dug a reservoir for brine and a cistern for the refining of rock salt. The works eventually became so enormous that an auxiliary supply of brine had to be pumped through wooden pipes from the other side of town. Marshall then leased further brine pits in nearby Anderton and Winnington. Nor did he neglect the highly-profitable rock salt. He took over Witton Hey Wood, under which a large deposit of rock salt existed, and constructed quays on Witton Brook so that the rock might be shipped the short distance to the Weaver. Unfortunately, the unscientific working of this mine led to its flooding in 1783, and finally the land above subsided to form a "flash".

The old firms in the Northwich salt trade, whether gentry like the Leicesters of Tabley or local traders like Ralph Barrow, very soon bowed themselves out of the arena as new ruthless and ambitious men like Thomas Marshall, John Blackburne,



Photograph by Frank Duncalf

Plate 11.

THE HOME AND BUSINESS PREMISES OF THOMAS MARSHALL, BRINE SHEATH BROW, NORTHWICH

and Nicholas Ashton stepped in. The Ashtons and Blackburnes had been in the salt trade since the late seventeenth century, controlling brine salt works, rock salt refineries, Weaver flats, and Liverpool business houses. The Blackburnes became the largest salt shippers in Northwich before 1740, though Thomas Marshall overtook them by 1760.

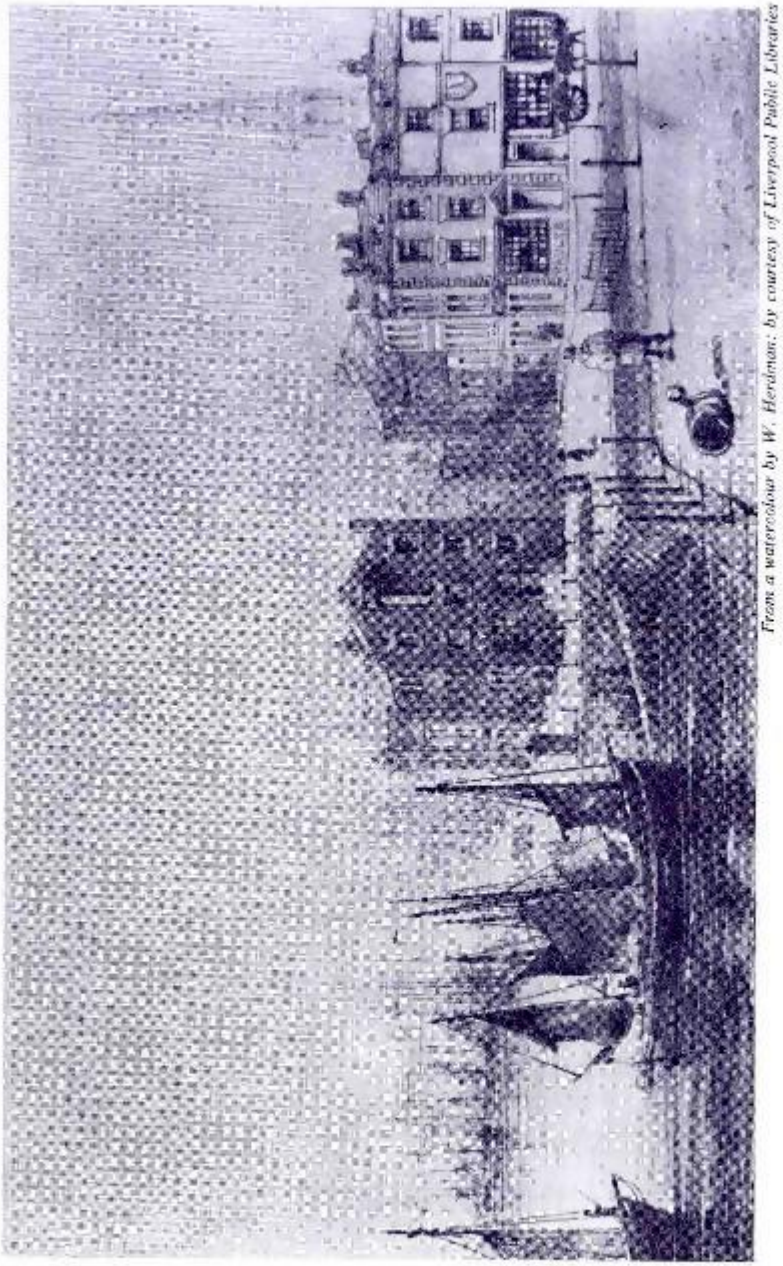
The founding of the Marshall fortune could not have been achieved so quickly—within forty years—if Thomas had not begun with sufficient capital, with business contacts, with ambition, ruthlessness, and social status. He had not had to rise from rags to riches. He worked hard and drove his labourers to great feats of production. He used to the full rich St. Helens coal, purest rock salt, mechanical pumps for raising brine, and large iron salt pans. He always sought the advice of Liverpool merchants concerning the best markets.

As early as 1729 Thomas had been described in the Witton parish registers as *gentleman*. To justify this title he later acquired a small farm, though he continued to live in a rented house at Brine Sheath Brow in Northwich all his life. Thomas had married as soon as he came to Northwich, and the eldest surviving son of this marriage, Thomas the younger, was to marry, possibly for money, the heiress of a prosperous local trader. It is interesting and significant that at this marriage in 1757 the bridesmaids were Lydia Barrow, whose father had once been Thomas Marshall's great trade rival, and Mary Brayne whose family, originally from Nantwich, served the Marshalls as solicitors and advisers.

Thomas Marshall, the founder of the family fortune, died at his home during the hard January of 1772, and was buried in a modest grave at Witton parochial chapel. Thomas the younger, then aged thirty-six, took over the family estates.

II SECOND GENERATION: A FORTUNE FIRMLY FOUNDED

The second Thomas Marshall (1735-97) greatly extended his father's estates and consolidated the gains of the first half-century's efforts. Building on the secure base of an expanding firm in a prospering trade, having foresight, patience, energy, and above all a dedicated interest, he could ensure the concern's pre-eminence in its chosen field of business. The discovery of the richer lower layer of rock salt in 1779-81 gave the ambitious man his chance. He bought land in Witton and dug 300 feet below ground a vast mine which attracted visitors from all over the world. The Marshalls gladly showed people round their Dunkirk mine and descriptions survive of this "immense,



From a watercolour by W. Herdman: by courtesy of Liverpool Public Libraries

Plate 12. LIVERPOOL: EAST SIDE DRY DOCK, *c.* 1809

Marshalls' Liverpool headquarters were No. 5, East Side Dry Dock, which is the street facing the water. The parallel street, between the premises labelled *J. Twist* and *Vaults*, is Marshalls Lane

solemn, and awful temple." One man reported in Ackermann's *Repository of Arts* for June 1814:

> "Around the walls of an extent of full three acres, lighted candles were placed so as completely to shew that extent, and lighted candles were also stuck around each of the massy pillars of salt . . . silence prevailed throughout for a while, and was then broken only by the heavy blows of the hammers with which the workmen were preparing the rock for blasting by gunpowder, while workmen, near and at a great distance, passing to and fro between us and the lights, seemed like dark shadows, and greatly aided the idea of enchantment."

The excellent rock salt, resembling "coarse brown sugar-candy", went as far afield as Russia and America.

For a quarter of a century Marshall developed his brine and rock salt business, seeking every means of improving returns on capital expended, and of increasing his company's efficiency and productivity. He thus campaigned vigorously to have communications improved so that profits of trade should not be swallowed by costs of transport. He sat on the boards of turnpike trusts, attended Weaver Navigation meetings, and went to London to urge before a parliamentary committee in 1767 the need for a Manchester-Northwich canal that might by-pass the Bridgewater Navigation. He established a River Weaver-Trent and Mersey Canal overland transhipment route between Rudheath and Northwich in 1777, and later succeeded in getting built the perfect river-canal connection at Anderton near Northwich. Marshall early realised that the secret of prosperity and industrial growth lay in his firm's independent control of salt and coal supplies and the ownership of the boats. Therefore, in addition to his rock mines, brine pits and rock salt refinery, he took leases of collieries in south Lancashire near the banks of the Sankey Canal, and brought coal to Northwich mainly on his own boats. Then he sent a younger son to Liverpool to serve as his agent there, and by 1790 had set up a counting house at East Side Dry Dock. The establishment of the office allowed the Marshalls more easily to contact powerful merchants whose headquarters all lay around the busy docks. Distance no longer delayed correspondence and the spread of news.

Many other interests occupied the energetic man's time. He invested in Lancashire lead works, bought houses and shops in mid-Cheshire, and interfered in the building of the Northwich cotton mill. The latter enterprise, begun in 1780, needed water power for its machinery. Marshall, therefore, dug a wide mill race from the river, across his own land, so that its working depended upon his goodwill. Later, when the mill failed, he used the water to raise brine.

The second generation of many prospering business families

sought through the purchase of a landed estate not merely a quiet place to enjoy free time but also the enhanced standing in the community which landownership assured. Marshall already possessed small parcels of land attached to his salt works but these he used as sites for industrial housing, timber yards, and craftsmen's premises. In 1772, for instance, he portioned off part of his Barons Croft land "so that a double range of dwelling houses may be erected thereon to form a handsome and uniform Street of eight yards wide." Marshall's New Street consisted of some seventy brick three-storeyed dwellings whose top floors contained in many cases not bedrooms but extensive workshops for craftsmen. Completed in 1775 the street provided the earliest Northwich example of tightly packed, solidly constructed industrial housing to shelter a very varied and large community. The real entry into the landowning class came in 1774 when Thomas and Elizabeth Marshall bought Hartford Green Bank manor house and estate worth some £9,000. The couple added a new wing to the house where they might entertain, and here they lived less than two miles from their Northwich counting house, salt works, and town dwelling. But they had already begun to drive the wedge between family business and life of leisure that eventually made two miles as good as two thousand miles and brought ruin to family fortunes. Like any proud landowning family, the Marshalls ordered a surveyor to produce a beautiful book, *Plans of several Estates belonging to Thos. Marshall Esqr., lying in the Townships of Rudheath, Hartford, Witton and Leftwich* dated 1785. However, Thomas so loved the business life that he still spent most of his time at the town house. Indeed, when in 1776 he purchased the lordship of the manor of Drakelow cum Rudheath with half a dozen farms and seven hundred acres of land, he had his eye first and foremost on the Trent and Mersey Canal which was then being cut through this estate. He made the Broken Cross smithy, standing right by the canal, into the central point of a busy little port with wharf, warehouse, cranes, and offices. From this place products could be moved in wagons to nearby Northwich, which did not lie on the canal's course.

Thomas Marshall controlled his industrial empire from a counting house in Northwich where lay all his files, accounts, and indexes. He refused to move to Liverpool but maintained there business contacts to keep him informed of trading matters. His smooth interlocking of every side of family business, including the country estates, produced an efficient, highly profitable firm, second to none in central Cheshire.

III SECOND GENERATION: FACING THE PROBLEM OF OVER-PRODUCTION

The salt industry expanded almost too rapidly so that the market for brine, if not for rock, soon tended to become saturated. Brine shipments from Northwich rose sixteenfold in the period 1760-1800, and rock shipments increased sevenfold. Henry Wilckens of Duke Street, Liverpool, salt proprietor and Continental merchant, a great friend of the Marshalls, wrote two pamphlets in 1798 and 1804 to emphasize this increase in production and the danger of the situation: "More salt is made than the market calls for." Production costs rose while pit-head salt prices remained stationary. Manufacturers could not stimulate demand at home by cutting prices because, especially from 1798, the salt excise duty was so heavy that pit-head prices meant very little. Marshalls charged fourpence a bushel in 1799; the customer paid fourteen shillings. Exports, taking four-fifths of Cheshire salt, were often hindered by frustrating harbour dues, expensive freightage, lack of standard measures, and, from 1793, European war. There had probably been local attempts to control production and prices to the advantage of producers, generally farmers or town craftsmen, but records seem to indicate the failure of these efforts. Hence the salt merchants could look back only to very discouraging precedents. Thomas Marshall's plans remained informal, dependent on gentlemen's agreements: in this he followed the lead of previous generations of businessmen seeking to regulate trade. But he also began a process of meetings and record keeping that made possible his sons' well-regulated Salt Traders' Association, the first Northwich body to control production, prices, and wages with any success.

The government officials who, in 1795, undertook a survey of the Northwich salt trade divided the industry into three sections: rock mines; rock salt refineries; brine works producing vast supplies that could not be absorbed by customers either at home or abroad. The officials described the vastness of the industry: "the Works are so amazing extensive . . . and immense Quantities of Salt are made . . . the Storehouses are very capacious".

Several factors helped the industry by keeping down production. The excise duty, payable at the works, involved a considerable capital outlay which only the larger proprietors could afford, especially in times of high duty. Smaller men went out of business. Then the great cost of modern salt works, with steam engines, draining equipment, and large amounts of

coal also discouraged men from entering the trade. Despite these and other discouragements, however, fifty-four proprietors remained in mid-Cheshire by 1795. Marshall therefore persuaded them by private visit and public meeting to agree on controlled wages, prices, shipment, and, above all, production. He could do nothing about the unregulated pack-horse traffic or much of the trade on the Trent and Mersey Canal, but managed to deal with the Weaver brine salt industry, the largest and most distressed branch, very adequately.

The Weaver Trustees kept detailed accounts of every flat-load of salt, coal, and other merchandise moving along the river. The record office lay in Northwich under the charge of officials like Jonathan Brayne, clerk and treasurer of tonnage from 1761 to 1767, his son Thomas Ives Brayne, treasurer from 1767 to 1793, and Thomas Chantler (1753-1816), treasurer from 1793. The Braynes and the Chantlers, salt and coal owners, landed proprietors, and town officers, also worked as the oldest of the town's firms of attorneys. The Braynes served the Marshalls from 1734 if not earlier. Thomas Marshall's counting house at Brine Sheath Brow stood close to the solicitors' office, not far from the Weaver Trustees' headquarters. Marshall could never have been for long ignorant of what was going on in the salt trade. He kept his own records of rising production and shipments, fluctuating but in the long run stagnant level of orders, increased wages, and government restrictions. He believed it would be possible to regulate the industry by using these records and began to hold informal meetings of salt proprietors with a view to forming a society about 1795. Meetings seem to have made arrangements by which each firm should limit output, though no minutes survive from this period. Thomas Marshall knew just how far he could go in controlling local merchants without their growing resentful or rebellious.

But before plans for tighter regulation could be put into action, Marshall at last succumbed to the asthmatic attacks which had plagued his later years. He died during the cruel December of 1797. He had recently estimated his estates and works to be worth £50,000—at a time when his skilled salt workers were earning £35 a year.

IV THIRD GENERATION: SOCIETIES TO SAVE THE SALT TRADE

Between 1798 and 1831 the firm of John and Thomas Marshall of Northwich, brine and rock proprietors, became the leading salt trading company. The partners, sons and joint heirs of Thomas Marshall (1735-97), stamped the industry

with their own considerable personality. They courageously expanded their interests and never lost their heads during a most difficult period of war, economic depression, rising prices and wages, and widespread bankruptcy. The firm possessed rock and brine salt works, rock refineries, collieries, Weaver flats, new and patented methods of producing salt "equal, if not SUPERIOR to the best FOREIGN SALT", Liverpool warehouses, and correspondents abroad. The partners acquired land, timber yards, a huge brick works at Hartford, houses and inns, and a shipyard. They invested in government stock, roads, and waterways. They built up by 1831 the largest and wealthiest industrial company in central Cheshire.

The greatest achievement of the brothers was to form an association to regulate the salt trade. John and Thomas had been greatly shocked by the bankruptcy of their friends, the Mort-Wakefield family, in 1803. This family, with banking, sugar, salt, coal, and landed interests, fell because in a difficult period the members could not pay within the stipulated time enormous salt taxes. The head, Thomas Wakefield, even went to prison for debt. Thus the Marshalls then and there decided to save other salt traders from the embarrassment of inadequate returns on capital expended, occasioned mainly by over-production. The brothers wrote to or visited all Northwich salt proprietors, called public meetings, secured the assistance of the solicitors, Hostage and Chantler, and finally, early in 1805, got an agreement signed by all men who mattered in the brine or white salt trade.

Three Liverpool merchants, Henry Wilckens, Joseph Leay, and William Swinton, formally agreed to buy the whole production of Cheshire brine salt through two agents based in Winsford and Northwich. An agent in Liverpool distributed all orders for salt through these country agents, and arranged to send the produce to customers at home and abroad. Permanent committees of merchants sat in Winsford, Northwich, and Liverpool to discuss and fix production figures, to make rules about the quality and price of various grades of brine, to standardize wage rates, to find means of punishing recalcitrant salt owners, and to discover new markets. John Marshall (1765-1833) headed the general committee of the society which usually met in the Marshalls' Northwich office. However, salt sent by road or canal could escape regulation, and rock production came within the scope of the agreement only to a small extent.

Thomas Marshall (1767-1831) remained the real driving force behind the society. He worried about firms which stayed out-

side the society so that they could cut prices and secure an unfair amount of trade. Marshall's views are well put by Henry Wilckens in a letter dated 17 December 1807.

"On our part we shall State that nothing but unanimity can preserve the Trade from Ruin, and that upholding the system, which for these two years has proved so beneficial, can only depend on all proprietors without the exception of one of them joining to act by the Rules established for the good of the Salt Trade. We must make less Salt, and hope for bettering our prices. That justice to all parties in this respect can only be secured by a general agent, for all the Salt made, as most assuredly, other proprietors will not allow single proprietors by forcing a trade, to run away with their accustomed participation. My opinion is, that at least ⅓ of the pans should be stopped from making, and that 7½d per Bush Common should be the maximum . . . It is clear *all* works must come in, and if one stops out the plan is done for."

In January 1808 John and Thomas Marshall met the major proprietors, including John Blackburne of Orford, M.P. for Lancashire, a salt trader who worked tirelessly for the industry in and out of parliament. The owners signed a detailed and sensible agreement to improve the 1805 document. The new Salt Traders' Association became the first powerful body in central Cheshire to control production, prices, and wages in any industry, and the Marshalls managed its day-to-day business. The salt traders were able to form their society so early in the industrial age because the centre of greatest salt production covered only a few square miles of Cheshire. Distance did not delay letters or lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, the main trade lay in the hands of five rock and five brine salt producers, and this time all brine salt owners and a few rock proprietors joined.

The records of the Weaver Trustees, of the Marshalls, and of the association served together to ensure that few producers could dodge their commitments. Thus in 1811, when a couple of firms began to sell salt below the agreed price through secret Liverpool offices, the records of shipments soon showed up discrepancies between production and official sales. Immediately, the association, at considerable loss, also drastically reduced prices, undercutting and ruining the independent firms who had already been denied wharfage and lockage facilities. An opportunist example of price fixing is seen in 1809. The Northwich committee resolved "as the Stock of Large grain'd & Common Salt is so small, & the Demand likely to be great, from the arrival of so many American Vessels, that the Price of Common Salt should be immediately advanced to 25s. & the former to 60s. per Ton."

By 1812 the society held back production to one-third or one-half possible output. Prices had risen when customers could no longer find salt in plentiful supply. The time had come how-

ever to form an even better-regulated association which might assure the manufacturers and their labour force of an adequate return for money and efforts. Thomas Marshall explained to a parliamentary committee in 1817: "Being largely concerned I had conversation with other gentlemen in the trade, and we found that unless a change took place we should all be ruined and bankrupt. We were receiving less for our salt than we paid for our coals." In fact the situation was not so desperate as this after six years of unremitting effort by society officials. However, in January 1813, Thomas Marshall formed a new "society for improving the British Salt Trade" which protected the brine salt industry, and rock to some extent, throughout the remainder of the war and the equally difficult years of peace after 1815. The society again fixed prices and production figures. A firm paid a fine for any delivery over its quota: in practice virtually all fines came from the firms of Blackburne and Marshall, straining at the leash of low production figures. In addition, the merchants in 1813 immediately raised workers' wages and Weaver freightage dues, and salt labourers continued to enjoy steady and adequate pay when their neighbours' wages were being reduced. Similarly, faithful servants, workers, harbour masters, and salt proprietors alike could expect regular free-will bounties. Regulation benefited the whole industry: prosperous proprietors could pay adequate wages to a large labour force.

But the removal of customs and excise duties on home and foreign salt between 1817 and 1826 destroyed the society. The majority of people believed that the abolition of duties would encourage trade and competition and that this would be beneficial. Thomas Marshall and members of the society spent much time in London plainly stating that duties must stay to keep prices high. Otherwise small firms would appear again and contribute to over-production. Thomas Marshall believed that he was the largest proprietor in the kingdom both in rock and white salt, and that he could speak with authority about "the distress" that would prevail with a proliferation of works. He justified rigid control of production and price fixing. But in this instance the theory was not convincing, despite the undoubted fact that an association of sorts had alone preserved the brine salt trade's existence since about 1795.

As Thomas predicted, new firms did appear and undersold the members of the society. The Blackburnes proposed impossible conditions for remaining in the society while small enterprises stayed outside offering low prices and attracting customers. Charles William Neumann of Liverpool in 1824,

having been refused admittance to the society because of his unacceptable terms, was but the first of such outsiders to survive and prosper during the difficult early months of intense competition. Between 1824 and 1831 William Furnival deliberately brought down rock and brine prices by 50% and for a time seized the trade of many society members. On 5 January 1825 the Marshalls' society collapsed as more firms rushed to increase production and reduce prices. Weaver shipments of brine doubled in five years. In fact the removal of excise stimulated home demand, especially from chemical works, and the trade survived. However, unregulated competition did not suit the industry in the nineteenth century, because it was rarely difficult to increase output far beyond the needs of the market. Limitation of production and agreement on prices there had to be, as subsequent history seems to show, so in July 1833 a meeting of salt proprietors decided to reform the Marshalls' society, taking over minute books and the careful accounting of cargoes, customers' needs, prices, the number of works, flats, labourers, and owners. The society continued until H. E. Falk founded the Salt Chamber of Commerce in 1858. This in turn survived until the creation of the first British trust, the Salt Union, in 1888. In many ways this latter company had descended directly from the Marshalls' societies for improving the salt trade.

V THIRD GENERATION: THE ENJOYMENT OF WEALTH

Despite their six-day week and sixteen-hour day, John and Thomas Marshall found time to enjoy their wealth, even though they continued to earn much more than they spent.

The two brothers had been educated at Witton Grammar School, where they developed a love of learning that stocked their library shelves with books on literature, science, history, farming, and the law. Proudly continuing their association with the school as feoffees, they continually sought fresh means of improving their minds. Although neither brother took an active part in politics, both voted regularly and avidly read newspapers. They served, when called upon, in the militia, and half a dozen turnpike trusts used their services. The Weaver Trustees and, later, local railways companies received money and advice from them.

But the Marshalls spent freely of their fortune in other ways. In 1822 they called together a committee of Hartford residents to establish an Anglican church which might combat Methodist activity. Donating the largest sums of money, they insisted on

the carrying out of their own excellent ideas and soon saw rising a handsome but modest Gothic structure in brick and stone. A church school and a reading room followed.

John (1765-1833), as head of the family, lived at Green Bank manor house. Here lay all the family's precious heirlooms, jewels, trinkets, family settlements, portraits, fine furniture, silverware, and precious China goods. The busy bachelor rebuilt the front portion of the house to provide massive drawing, reception, and bed rooms. Faced with grey stone and boasting a pretentious colonnaded porch, the house spoke of John's gentility and wealth. John spent some of his spare time in the company of his mistress, a young Hartford widow named Mary Coates. In John's company the wretched woman returned to sanity and decency: without him she turned to the bottle. Mary gave her lover at least five children and these were all handsomely provided for in John's will. Of course the respectable Marshalls could not approve of John's activities but dared not say a word until after his death. Then they removed the unfortunate woman to nearby Barnton thinking she would be out of the way. But Mary Coates continued to ask for help to supplement her income from the legacy. Thomas Marshall's wife could not bring herself to refuse: "I would not have the poor woman, whatever she has been, lost from the want of what is proper. I hear her illness is occasioned by an excess of the old inveterate habit of Drinking." By this time the woman and one daughter had opened a dame school in Barnton so that they might earn a little more money, probably to meet the mounting bills for spirits.

John Marshall died in May 1833. He received the usual fulsome obituary in the *Chester Courant* which, probably from ignorance, described the bachelor as "one of the kindest of parents". He left £7,000 in the bank and a massive amount of real property. His younger brother, Thomas (1767-1831), the "greatest salt proprietor in the kingdom", married and provided the family with its fourth generation. Thomas married Elizabeth, the daughter of William Thearsby, an exceptionally wealthy Northwich surgeon. Through the Thearsbys the Marshalls became related to the Whitleys of Ashton in Makerfield, hinge and lock manufacturers, coal and salt owners, to the Caldwells of Warrington and St. Helens, iron, coal, and salt proprietors, and through the Caldwells to the Speakmans, Watsons, and Fergusons, some of the wealthiest merchants of south Lancashire.

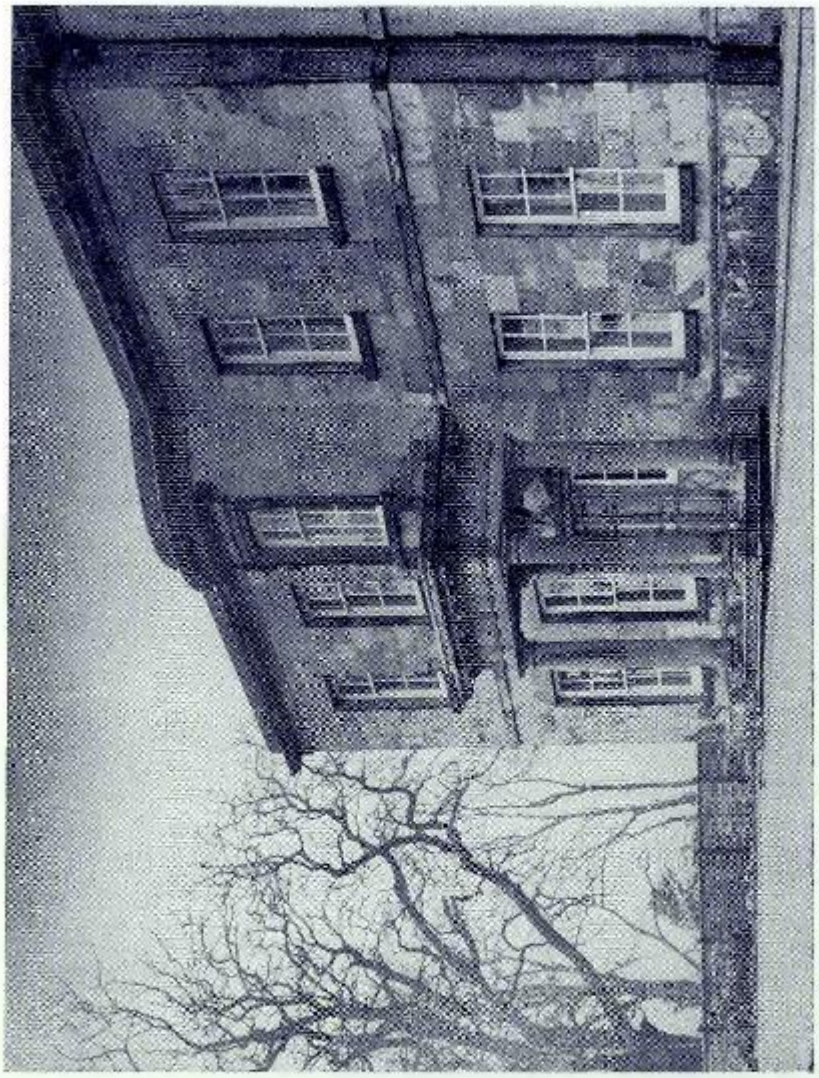
Thomas and Elizabeth Marshall abandoned the old house near the salt works and purchased a plot of land in Hartford

on the Chester highway, opposite Green Bank manor house. There in 1802 Thomas erected a brick house which he called Hartford Cottage. But as he grew wealthier this residence could not satisfy his needs. Between 1814 and 1824 he built by far the finest Regency dwelling in central Cheshire, possibly the most perfect house built round Northwich in the whole nineteenth century. With two storeys, brick walls washed white, slated unobtrusive roof, glittering bay windows flanking an exquisite iron-columned verandah and massive door, the new house stood squat in a setting of well-kept lawns, low quickset hedges, and venerable beeches and chestnuts.

The house, known as the Hartford Beach, possessed its own wash-house, bakery, piggeries, and carpentry shop. The Marshalls employed a housekeeper, cook, butler, coachman, four gardeners, and stable lads. The last served also as messengers between the Beach and the counting house. Thomas and Elizabeth furnished their home with regard to fashion and comfort. Mahogany and oak tables, bookcases, linen presses, chairs, and sideboards, a "black satin fire screen", an "Ivory and Ebony Cabinet which Miss Orrell painted", and great beds filled the massive rooms. They bought a huge service of "egg shell Enamel China" ware, wine coolers, snuffer trays, steel nutcrackers, épergnes, fruit baskets, decanters, candlesticks, valuable Venetian glass, "old foreign China", and hand-worked silver, and filled their walls with prints and oil paintings. They loved pictures of hunting and of the countryside, perhaps because they had for so long been divorced from rural pursuits. The family portraits went to the Beach in 1833.

Thomas and Elizabeth Marshall agreed to bring up their children as sons and daughters of gentlefolk. Music had long been a sign of gentility. Elizabeth the daughter grew into an accomplished performer. In her music room she kept the "Grand Piano, an old small one, and an old Harpsichord with a violin in a case, and the Harps and Guitars which she has bought lately, a tall canterbury, and two low ones which stand under the Piano". The canterburys contained "all the Music, loose and bound". Nearby stood "a double Music stand with lights." Here in the lovely room, with its moulded new-painted ceiling, its high walls papered in rich crimson-striped material, its thick carpeting, and polished skirting and furniture, the family would sit in their elegant hard-upholstered chairs to sing and play in unison. When the maid drew the heavy velvet curtains and threw logs on the huge blazing fire, the Marshalls could hardly help feeling pride in the family's achievements.

Thomas's and Elizabeth's son, Thomas, went to Eton, Cam-



Photograph by Frank Duncalf

Plate 13. THE HARTFORD MANOR

About 1820, John Marshall (1765-1833) built this new house to replace the old hall inherited from his father. Its regular Georgian plan and style contrast with the Regency Hartford Beach, which his brother Thomas built a couple of hundred yards away

Photograph by Frank Duncalf

Plate 14.

THE HARTFORD BEACH

Thomas Marshall (1767-1831) built this house between 1814 and 1824. The outer hall with its vaulting and alcoves resembled the entrance to a church. Marshall had it painted in crimson and gold with pale green and white as relief. With battens, lath and plaster fixed to the inside of the house walls he kept out damp, cold and noise, and by packing his floors with a 6-inch depth of sawdust he ensured almost perfect soundproofing. The present chimney and extension on the right are not original.

bridge, and the Middle Temple. His library ranged from Greek, Latin, and French literature to common law books, Hebrew scriptures, farming companions, and scientific works. He wrote poetry, including the long poem *Vesuvius* completed in March 1821, and became a most successful barrister, working mainly in the northern circuits.

The elder Thomas died "awfully sudden" on 21 June 1831 aged sixty-five. He was buried in Hartford church "to the Blessed Erection of which it was his High Privilege first to lead the way." Neither he nor his father nor his father before him had been born poor. Thomas, however, by massive efforts had consolidated the family fortunes and raised the Marshalls to their unquestioned position as the richest people in central Cheshire. Thomas's personal estate amounted to £7,000. His lands and works were worth at a conservative estimate £90,000.

VI FOURTH GENERATION: A CHANGE OF COURSE

Until the death of Thomas in 1831, the Marshall history had been simple: the expansion of salt interests and the investment of profits in property. Inevitably a generation had to come along which would not devote itself to business life. Thomas the younger, the fourth generation, continued to run the salt firm but his legal work prevented him from maintaining the daily management that the first three Marshalls had insisted upon.

Thomas possessed sufficient wealth to marry well. In 1832 he married Agnes Phoebe daughter of Digby Legard of Watton Abbey in Yorkshire. Agnes Phoebe's brother had married an heiress. Her sister's husband was Robert Isaac, son of the great William Wilberforce. Robert Isaac, high church Anglican, was held in high esteem by the Marshalls as example and confessor until he went over to Roman Catholicism in 1854.

In 1833, a son and heir, Thomas Horatio, was born to Thomas and Agnes. Their happiness seemed complete: the salt owners were turning again to the Marshalls' trading arrangements, fixing prices and production, meeting regularly to watch every manufacturer; Thomas's success in the law courts seemed to point either to a judgeship or to parliament. But in 1838, at the age of thirty-five, Thomas Marshall died.

During Thomas's absences from Cheshire his mother had managed, most inefficiently, the firm's affairs, but misunderstandings had been cleared up on Thomas's periodical returns. After his death his mother was left alone to ill-manage the great

business. She hated the young widow, and when Thomas died the two women faced each other with no referee. They preferred to see the business fail rather than give in on any points at issue. Agnes Phoebe felt so alone. All the servants and workers looked to Elizabeth Marshall as head of the family. Agnes, therefore, called on her brother, George Legard, for help and advice.

In 1838 Elizabeth Marshall wrote a most extraordinary will to prevent Agnes from laying her hands on the family possessions. She recited piece by piece all the goods that could go only to her daughters.

> "The Painted Wardrobe in Elisabeth's Room was her Father's before he was married, and when he got a Mahogany one he gave it to his daughter; a small nest of Drawers with Book Case over, he had made expressly for her."
>
> "The Phaeton belongs to my Daughter Elisabeth, I saw her and her sisters pay their Father for it."

To her dying day Elizabeth Marshall caused trouble in the household about the disposal of such mean and unimportant articles as a "Lavender Water Bottle and the two Eau de Cologne Bottles and Stands". She worried also about her funeral. "I hope I shall leave enough behind me to pay the Expenses". Agnes's own broken heart was healed and the family problems solved only when Elizabeth died exhausted by fear and hate in her seventy-seventh year in April 1841.

After Elizabeth's death Agnes Phoebe completely remodelled the household. She invited her unmarried elder sister, Frances, to come and live with her. She retained only two full-time male servants, the coachman and butler, and seven or eight maids. Soon afterwards Agnes made available the rebuilt Hartford Manor for her brother's use. George Legard had recently become surveyor general of the Duchy of Lancaster. Agnes left the management of the salt empire entirely to agents and accountants. She died at the Beach in 1868.

VII FIFTH GENERATION: LIVING ON PAST ACHIEVEMENT

The Marshalls' family business had depended for survival and growth on the strong authority of the family head. The early death of Thomas Marshall brought many troubles. The heir was a child, too young to give commands. His guardians quarrelled over the limits of their authority, neglecting the firm's affairs rather than hurt their pride: his friends and teachers encouraged a love of the outdoor life, hunting, rowing, cricket. Only his uncle Wilberforce, strangely enough, tried to interest the boy in industrial pursuits. So it was that the collective

leadership missed opportunities to expand the salt business, failed to modernise decrepit works, made bargains too slowly and too late, and renewed leases and contracts at disadvantageous prices. It lost the respect of rivals, customers and friends alike; lost authority; lost control; and lost business.

Thomas Horatio Marshall, the boy so early left to the care of two warring women, went first to a private school in Yorkshire, then to Eton, Oxford, and the Royal Military College. He trained as a field officer at Aldershot, and became a cornet in the Earl of Chester's Yeomanry Cavalry in 1852 at the age of nineteen. By now he had decided to serve only in the auxiliary forces, and before he retired as colonel he put in forty-six years' service. For thirty-two years he commanded the third Volunteer Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment, which he had raised.

Marshall had very early shown signs of academic ability. Uncle Wilberforce encouraged his interests, sending him books and letters of advice, hoping he would combine a life of scholarship and business in Northwich. But the public school, university, and the army cured Thomas of this idea.

Thomas Marshall (1833-1917) married in 1857 Laura Anne Stapylton, a vicar's daughter who had neither the wealth nor the high social standing of the wives of previous Marshalls. This was a marriage for love, which did the family business no good, and indeed brought grief to the husband, because Laura died giving birth to their first son, Henry Stapylton (1858-1942). Marshall remarried in 1862, another vicar's daughter, and had by her six sons and three daughters.

The Marshalls of course did not have army pay to live on. However, their rentals from mid-Cheshire farms and houses alone in 1871 produced £2,900. At this time £200 meant prosperity. The Rudheath lordship was valued at £35,000 in 1877, Hartford estate at £38,000, Croft salt works at £9,600, Witton rock salt pits at £7,000. In all, the mid-Cheshire property was worth £103,000. The family might well afford a second house. Thomas and his second wife acquired Towyn Lodge, Holyhead, and then Bryn-y-coed, Bangor. The couple tended more and more to live away from crowded Hartford and smoky Northwich. In Wales Thomas entertained lavishly. His friends numbered all the local gentry and nobility. He became a member of a London club, and his letters began to be filled with plans for visits to great houses throughout Britain. He journeyed to hunt and fish in aristocratic Perthshire where he ate with dukes, shot with earls, and had his photograph taken with lords and ladies.

Neither Thomas nor his wife were party politicians, though both remained active in public service. He sat as a magistrate for the counties of Cheshire, Anglesey and Caernarvon, and his wife helped him with pioneer work for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Both devoted time and money to the cause of Anglicanism in North Wales, substantially building up the influence of their own diocese of Bangor. For Thomas Marshall's many services to the nation and the national church, he became a Companion of the Bath in 1892, and in 1906 received a knighthood. Edward VII found in Thomas Horatio a kindred spirit. The Marshalls had at last risen to fame and social status.

But the family had abandoned their salt trading activities, and the change proved in the long run disastrous for family fortunes. During the twenty years before 1874, the Cheshire salt traders had been expanding their production but had not been making adequate profits. Overproduction depressed prices and wages. The difficulties of salt trading had for long tended to starve works of needed capital. Sir Thomas Bernard noticed in 1817 the absence of technical improvements in local works and the desolate aspect of the countryside. Unscientific exploitation caused the collapse of mines and pits, and widespread subsidence led to the flooding of many acres of mid-Cheshire. Experts predicted an end to mid-Cheshire's livelihood. In 1874 the Marshalls ceased to ship salt down the Weaver. They could hardly have chosen a more inopportune year, because at that time the first products began to leave the new factory of Brunner, Mond of Winnington. Fortunately for Northwich, this firm, eventually the largest alkali manufacturing company in the world, saved the area from vast poverty and unemployment. Moreover, the Salt Union of 1888, uniting most traders in salt, rationalised the industry and allowed planned expansion on the lines which the Marshalls had urged for a century. Thomas Horatio Marshall sold his rock and brine works at Barons Croft, Dunkirk, and Witton to the Salt Union for £12,500. Marshall felt it would not do for an officer and a gentleman actively to engage in business: "Personally I would object to be named as a Salt Manufacturer," he wrote in 1884. During that year he heard that a company wished to use Barons Croft works as a salt manufactory. The directors wondered if Marshall would sit on the board, since he owned the land. But Marshall was definite: "I am the owner of certain works, but have not manufactured salt in them for the last ten years. I will not become a manufacturer again."

Marshall's eldest son, Henry, educated at Eton and the Royal

Plate 15.

COLONEL SIR THOMAS HORATIO MARSHALL, C.B.

This photograph was taken *c.* 1909, when, after a lifetime devoted to the auxiliary forces in Cheshire, Thomas held the rank of Honorary Colonel in the new Territorial Force created by the act of 1907

Military College, agreed with his father. He loved army life, hunting, fishing, and travelling. He enjoyed an adequate income, and saw no need to engage in trade. His letters and photographs reported his continental travels in search of adventure. As a major in the Boer War he thoroughly enjoyed himself, for he had no fear. He described for his father the "free claret at breakfast, lunch and dinner" and the "electric lights over every mess table on all the troop decks, and magnificent ventilation" during the exciting journey out. Henry went hunting under the noses of the Boers, and never suffered from the ailments which killed so many of his companions. Henry's eldest son, another Thomas, also joined the army and served with distinction through the Great War.

Sir Thomas Horatio Marshall's other sons entered the army, the navy, and the church. One of them died of wounds in the West African campaign of 1900. Another served for forty years as priest in charge of a Leeds parish. The sons travelled the world.

Colonel Sir Thomas Horatio Marshall, C.B., the fifth Marshall of Northwich, salt proprietor, and the third and last owner of the Hartford Beach, died on 29 March 1917 as the world he had known crashed in ruins on Flanders fields. In his will of 1914 he provided princely legacies for the children. But these were becoming valueless during the wartime inflation. Great estates, houses, and servants could not be supported merely on dividends received from past achievements. In order to survive, the gentleman had to get back into trade and industry. Hence the family's withdrawal from salt production and the sale of their interests proved in the long run a mistake. Sir Thomas died at Bangor. His body was conveyed by rail to Hartford. There waited representatives of the army and of his own Northwich Company of Volunteers, his farm and estate tenants at Rudheath and Hartford, the staff and scholars of Hartford school which he helped to found, the vicar of the church of which he was patron, landowners, magistrates, local councillors, the head of the firm of family solicitors that had served the first Thomas in 1734, political agents, Northwich tradesmen, and local clergy. The bishop of Bangor had described Sir Thomas as the diocese's greatest layman. The historian remembers him as the last representative of mid-Cheshire's greatest salt manufacturing family.

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(1) Family correspondence, deeds of title, leases, valuations of estates, probate records covering 1740-1920. This section embraces Rudheath and Hartford as well as purely Northwich material. It also includes the documents of the Mort, Wakefield, and Yate families whose interests the Marshalls protected at various times.

(2) Business records including the archives of the Salt Traders' Society 1805-25. The Marshalls do not seem to have kept detailed accounts for their works, though regular valuations survive with miscellaneous wage and sales vouchers. However, Society books comprise minutes, accounts of cargoes despatched by each manufacturer, letter and order books, and miscellaneous correspondence.

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