

## Edward Baines on the origin of the cotton industry in England, 1835

(Baines was one of the most important 19<sup>th</sup> C. historians of the cotton industry in England. Here he describes the origin of the industry to its growth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Edward Baines. *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*, 1835, 95-102, 105-12; in J. T. Ward, ed., *The Factory System, Vol. I, Birth and Growth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 38-46.)

The exact -period when the cotton manufacture was introduced into England is unknown. The article of cotton-wool had for centuries been imported in small quantities, to be used as candle-wicks, as appears from an entry in the books of Bolton abbey, in Yorkshire, in the year 1298-"In sapo et *cotoun* ad candelam, xvii s. id."\* The next mention of cotton-wool that I have met with, is in "The Processe of the Libel of English Policie",.....originally published in 1430, and republished in Hakluyt's Collection of early Voyages: the trade of the Genoese with England is thus described:

"The Genuois comen in sundry wies  
Into this land by diuers merchandises  
In great Caracks, arrayed withouten lacke  
With cloth of gold, silke, and pepper blacke  
They bring with them, and of crood \*\* great plentee,  
Woll Oyle, Woad ashen, by vessel in the see,  
*Cotton*, Rochalum, and good gold of Genne;  
And then be charged with wolle again I werme,  
And wollen cloth of ours of colours all."

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the evidences of a regular importation of cotton become more numerous. Hakluyt records that "in the yeeres of our Lord 1511, 1512, &c. till the year 1534, diuers tall ships of London, [he mentions five,] with certaine other ships of Southampton and Bristow, had an ordinary and usual trade to Sicilia, Candie, Chio, and somewhiles to Cyprus, as also to Tripolis and Barutti, in Syria. The commodities which they carried thither were, fine kersies of diuers colours, course kersies, white Westerne dozens, cottons, [no doubt, strong woolens,] certain clothes called statutes, and others called cardinal-whites, and calneskins, which were well sold in Sicilie, &c. The commodities which they brought backe were silks, chamlets, rubarbe, malmesis, muskudels and other wines, sweet oyles, *cotton wool*, Turkie carpets, galles, pepper, cinnamon, and some other spices" \*\*\*

It is evident that cotton wool had long been in use, but, in all probability, it was only for candle-wicks, and other minor purposes, not at all for the manufacture of cloth. No mention has yet been found of the cotton manufacture earlier than the year 1641; and there are good reasons for concluding that it could not have existed very long before that period. . . .

In the year 1582, a commercial treaty having been formed with Turkey, and a Levant company established, a mercantile commission was sent from London to Constantinople and

other parts of Turkey, to learn any secrets in manufacturing and dyeing that might be useful to the domestic industry and foreign trade of England, and thus tend to give employment to "our poor people withall, and promote the general enriching of this realme"... . . . If the cotton manufacture had then been practised in England, even on a small scale, it is highly probable that this commission would have received directions either to observe the processes of the manufacture in the East, or to inquire concerning the supply of the raw material.

It is not impossible that this very commission, acting on the general principle of its instructions, might bring to England the art of making cotton cloth. But I am more inclined to think that the art was imported from Flanders, about the same time, by the crowd of Protestant artisans and workmen who fled from Antwerp, on the capture and ruin of that great trading city by the duke of Parma in 1585; and also from other cities of the Spanish Netherlands. Great numbers of these victims of a sanguinary persecution took refuge in England, and some of them settled in Manchester; and there is the stronger reason to suppose that the manufacture of cotton would then be commenced here, as there were restrictions and burdens on foreigners setting up business as masters in England, in the trades then carried on in this country, whilst foreigners commencing a *new* art -would be exempt from those restrictions. \*\*\*\* The warden and fellows of Manchester college had the wisdom to encourage the settlement of the foreign clothiers in that town, by allowing them to cut firing from their extensive woods, as well as to take the timber necessary for the construction of their looms, on paying the small sum of four-pence yearly.

At that period of our history, when capital was small, and the movements of trade comparatively sluggish, a new manufacture would be likely to extend itself slowly, and to be long before it attracted the notice of authors. That a manufacture might in those days gradually take root and acquire strength, without even for half a century being commemorated in any book that should be extant after the lapse of two centuries more, will be easily credited by those who have searched for the records of our modern improvements in the same manufacture. If the greatest mechanical inventions and the most stupendous commercial phenomena have passed almost unnoticed in a day when authors were so numerous, the mere infancy of the cotton manufacture may well have been without record in an age when the press was far less active. We may decisively infer from the first mention that has been discovered of the cotton manufacture in England, that it had been growing up for a considerable time before that account was written. This passage, memorable in the history of the manufacture, is found in a little work by Lewes Roberts, called "The Treasure of Traffic", published in 1641- It is as follows:

"The town of Manchester, in Lancashire, (says he,) must be also herein remembered, and worthily for their encouragement commended, who buy the yarne of the Irish in great quantity, and, weaving it, returne the same again into Ireland to sell: Neither doth their industry rest here, for they buy *cotton wool* in London, that comes first from Cyprus and Smyrna, and at home worke the same, and perfect it into *fustians, vermillions, dimities*, and other such stuffes, and then return it to London, where the same is vented and sold, and not seldom sent into forrain parts, who have means at far easier termes, to provide themselves of the said first materials." (Orig. Edition, pp. 32, 33.)

The same author further says: "The Levant or Turkey Company brings in return thereof (i.e. of English woollens) great quantity of *Cotten* and *Cottenyarne*, Grogram yarne, and raw silke into England, (which shewes the benefit accruing to this kingdom by that Company); for here the said cloth is first shipped out and exported in its full perfection, dyed and drest, and thereby the prime native commoditie of this kingdom is increased, improved, and vented, and the cotten yarne and raw silk obtained." (p. 34.)

From the above evidence it is manifest that the cotton manufacture had in 1641 become well established at Manchester. It not only then supplied the home trade with several kinds of cotton goods, but furnished them as a regular article of exportation from the metropolis to the distant markets of the Levant; and the importation of cotton-wool and cotton-yarn had also become regular and considerable. Manchester still retained its manufacture of linen; and as linen-yarn was used as the warp for fustians and nearly all other cotton goods in this country down to the year 1773, it may be said that the linen manufacture prepared the way for the cotton manufacture, and long continued its auxiliary. It may, therefore, from all the above facts, be regarded as in a very high degree probable, that the cotton manufacture was introduced into England towards the close of the sixteenth century, by the Flemish protestant emigrants.

The spread of the manufacture was afterwards by no means rapid. The same obstacles which impeded its growth in the other countries of Europe, impeded it in England. Owing to the rudeness of the spinning machinery, fine yam could not be spun, and of course fine goods could not be woven. Fustians, dimities, and other strong fabrics were made; but calicoes and the more delicate cotton goods were not attempted.

At this period, the extent of mercantile establishments, and the modes of doing business, were extremely different from what they are at present. Though a few individuals are found who made fortunes by trade, it is probable that the capital of merchants was generally very small, until the end of the seventeenth century, and all their concerns were managed with extreme frugality. Masters commonly participated in the labours of their servants. Commercial enterprise was exceedingly limited. Owing to the bad state of the roads, and the entire absence of inland navigation, goods could only be conveyed on pack-horses, with a gang of which the Manchester chapmen used occasionally to make circuits to the principal towns, and sell their goods to the shopkeepers, -bringing back with them sheep's wool, which was disposed of to the makers of worsted yarn at Manchester, or to the clothiers of Rochdale, Saddleworth, and the West Riding of Yorkshire. It was only towards the close of the seventeenth century, that trade became sufficiently productive to encourage the general erection of brick houses in Manchester, in place of the old dwellings, constructed of wood and plaster. So great was the increase of the manufactures and trade of England towards the close of this century, that the exports rose from £2,022,812, in 1662, (and they were about the same in 1668,) to £6,788,166, in 1699. \*\*\*\*\*

In the latter part of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, such considerable importations of Indian calicoes, muslins, and chintzes were made, as to excite the vehement opposition of our manufacturers, and to lead parliament to exclude those goods by heavy penalties.... The jealousy felt in England was not, however, on behalf of our cotton

manufacture, but of our woollen and silk manufactures; which sufficiently proves that no cotton goods were then made light qualities of those from India.

The business of calico printing was commenced in London in the latter part of the seventeenth century; and for the sake of encouraging this branch of industry, plain Indian calicoes were admitted under a duty. In 1712, the business had become sufficiently extensive to lead parliament to impose an excise duty of 3d. per square yard on calicoes printed, stained, painted, or dyed, (10 Anne, c. 19.); and in 1714, the duty was raised to 6d. per square yard, (12 Anne, sec. 2, c. 9.)....

In the twenty years from 1720 to 1740, which was a period of almost uninterrupted peace, Manchester, as well as many other commercial towns, continued to make rapid strides in wealth, population, and manufacturing eminence.

Dr. Stukely, who visited Manchester about 1720, says, in his *Itinerarium Curiosum*,-"The trade, which is incredibly large, consists much in fustians, girth-webb, tukings, tapes, &c., which are dispersed all over the kingdom, and to foreign parts."

Daniel de Foe, in his "*Tour through the whole Island of Great Britain*", published in 1727, speaking of Manchester, says, "That within a very few years past, here, as at Liverpoole, and also at Froome in Somersetshire, the town is extended in a surprising manner, being almost double to what it was a few years ago. So that, taking in all its suburbs, it now contains at least 50,000 people. [This must have included the whole-parish.] The grand manufacture which has so much raised this town is that of cotton in all its varieties, which, like all our other manufactures, is very much increased within these thirty or forty years".\*\*\*\*\*

De Foe says also, "About eight miles from Manchester, N.W., lies Bolton. We saw nothing remarkable in it, but that the cotton manufacture reached hither, though the place did not, like Manchester, seem increasing....

As linen yarn was used for the warps of cotton goods, the progress of the cotton manufacture increased the demand for linen yarn to such an extent as to inconvenience the linen weavers of Scotland and Ireland, who complained of the yam being bought out of their hands, at a high price, to be sent to Manchester, and there wrought up with cottons....

An article in the *Daily Advertiser*, of September 5, 1739, and which was also copied into the *Gentleman's Magazine*, says-"The manufacture of cotton, mixed and plain, is arrived at so great perfection within these twenty years, that we not only make enough for our own consumption, but supply our colonies, and many of the nations of Europe. The benefits arising from this branch are such as to enable the manufacturers of Manchester alone to lay out above thirty thousand pounds a year, for many years past, on additional buildings. 'Tis computed, that two thousand new houses have been built in that industrious town within these twenty years."

In a rapidly advancing country, the great things of one age are insignificant in the eyes of the succeeding age. Thus, the period of 1739, whose prosperity was so much vaunted, is now looked back upon as the mere feeble infancy of the cotton manufacture-a trickling rill, compared with the mighty river to which that manufacture has since swelled. At that time the consumption of cotton wool did not exceed I-20oth part of the consumption at the present day....

In all probability, Postlethwayt, the author of the 'Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce', approached to correctness, when, in the year 1766, he estimated the annual value of the cottons made at £600,000. He says-"The manufactures called Manchester wares, such as fustians, cottons, tapes, incle, &c. are sent on pack-horses to London, Bristol, Liverpool, &c. for exportation, and also to the wholesale haberdashers for home consumption; whence the other towns of England are likewise served, or by the Manchester men themselves, who travel from town to town throughout the kingdom. Of these goods they make, at Manchester, Bolton, and the neighbouring places, above £600,000 annually."

The following return of the quantities of cotton wool imported and exported, is taken from a report of a committee of the house of commons on the linen manufacture, published in Postlethwayt's Dictionary, under the head "Linen":

COTTON WOOL IMPORTED AND EXPORTED

Years	Imported	Exported	Retained For Home Consumption
	.....lbs.....	.....lbs.....	.....lbs.....
1743	1,132,288	40,870	1,091,418
1744	1,882,873	182,765	1,700,108
1745	1,469,523	73,172	1,369,351
1746	2,264,808	73,279	2,191,529
1747	2,224,869	29,438	2,195,431
1748	4,852,966	291,717	4,561,249
1749	1,658,365	330,998	1,327,367

In the year 1701, when the exportation of cotton goods did not exceed £23,253 (which appears to have been above the average for the next forty years,) the exportation of woollen goods (according to Dr. Davenant and Mr. Gregory King) amounted to £2,000,000, forming above a fourth of the whole export trade of the kingdom. So great has been the change in the relative proportions of these manufactures, that, whilst the

Compare the above official returns of imports and exports, for the first half of the 18th century, with the present imports of cotton wool and exports of cotton manufactures:

COTTON WOOL IMPORTED IN 1833  
 303,726,199 lbs .  
 BRITISH COTTON MANUFACTURES EXPORTED IN 1833  
 Real or Declared Value  
 £18,486,400

woollen exports have increased only to £6,539,731 in 1833, the cotton exports amounted in the same year to £18,486,400. The woollen manufacture has continued to extend, but its rate of increase bears no proportion to that of the cotton manufacture, which mocks all that the most romantic imagination could have previously conceived possible under any circumstances.

\* Dr. Whitaker's *History of Craven*, p. 384 (2d edition, 1812). This antiquarian, whose prejudices against manufactures were violent and ridiculous, says, in a note on the above extract-"This substance, (cotton,) of which the manufactory is become so extensive and so pernicious, was then imported in small quantities from the Levant".

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\*\* Woad.

\*\*\* Hakluyt, vol. II. p. 206.

\*\*\*\*Macpherson's *Annals of Commerce*, vol. II. p. 176.

\*\*\*\*\* Dr. Davenant's *Report to the Commissioners of Accounts*; and Anderson's *Origin and History of Commerce*, vol. II pp. 227, 228.

\*\* \*\*\*\*De Foe's *Tour*, Vol. III. p. 2 19.