

## **'Migrant Workers and the Yorkshire Textile Industry: Bradford from 1820 to the 1967s'.**

### Irish Migration from 1820 to 1920:

Irish 'seasonal workers' (Spalpeens) had been travelling to England to supplement their very poor incomes at home through taking up harvesting and other temporary work in England from the early 1800s. Their numbers increased in the 1820s and 1830s as Steamer Packets became available to transport workers over the Irish Sea and the Irish Midlands Railway introduced a special fourth-class fare to transport men from outlying counties such as Mayo and Sligo to Dublin. Widespread Poverty in Ireland was due in part to the systems of land management adopted by absentee English landlords and necessitated this annual exodus. The returning Spalpeens spoke of job availability in England and after 1820, competition amongst steam shipping lines and subsequent cheap passages inspired others to migrate permanently.

Many Irish choosing to migrate would have heard tales from seasonal workers of brightly lit streets, music halls, theatres and public houses to contrast with the struggle to make ends meet on meagre patches of land. This motivation overlooked the appalling level of morbidity and mortality rates in these industrial areas and after arrival, the experience of the Irish was characterized by frustration, isolation and despair. In Bradford, they were concentrated in the poorest areas of the town, such as Nelson Court, Leeds Road and White Abbey and when most were of Roman Catholic faith, with a third having no English language, they experienced much prejudice from other workers and many mill owners. The work they took was always the most labour intensive and often of lowest reward.

By 1851 the number of Irish born people in Bradford was 9,279 – forming just under 9% of the total population and these early migrations and settlements occurred before the devastating 'Great Famine' in Ireland between 1845 and 1852 that increased the numbers migrating to England and Scotland and the 'new worlds' of America and Canada to around one million Irish people. There were controversial views about how their migration 'lowered' the wages of indigenous textile workers but there is evidence that this was not the case and it is interesting how often that misinformed view is used against any migrating peoples. It is important to focus on the positive part Irish migrants played in the emergence of Bradford as the most important 'wool town' in West Yorkshire. *Sir Titus Salt*, founder of Saltaire, was a supporter of Catholic emancipation- unusual for the times.

### German Migration to Bradford from 1830 and Beyond.

The successive waves of German migration to Britain from the 1830s onwards was both from German Gentile and German Jewish groups and the number migrating in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was much smaller than that of the Irish. The number of German born people in Bradford, recorded by the census of 1851 was a mere 193 people. These migrants, whether Gentile or Jewish were not fleeing famine or persecution but there were some factors in Germany that made British life appear more attractive.

The rule of German Aristocrats that supported militarism prevented the formation of a middle class and the development of a liberal movement and the German economy lurched from growth to depression and lower wages. Attracted by the apparently more open lifestyle in Britain, the waves of German migration led to many merchants, engineers and well-educated people – an emerging middle class – to

migrate to Britain. They came to build businesses and fortunes, and, in Bradford, their small numbers had a disproportionate influence on the growing town, helping to create its wealth and fame.

Their contribution went far beyond their actual numbers and significant German men became involved in shaping the political structure of Bradford's corporate authority and in improving its public facilities through attention to sanitation and public health. Amongst the foremost were German Jewish merchants and their offspring who were to include scientists, artists, writers and composers.

By 1911, the numbers of Germans in Britain peaked at 53,324 with 30,000 in London, 1,326 in Liverpool, 1,318 in Manchester, 470 in Leeds and 533 in Bradford. There were major contributions made by the German migrants to economic, political and social life as Bradford emerged as a City from its early growth into a town – caused by the industrial revolution.

[Bradford also received internal migrants as the population movements within England, caused by a move from agriculture to industry. This brought people from areas such as Norfolk and Suffolk to the town. There was a general decline in internal migration by 1911 and the economic context affecting the textile industry, that prevailed until the end of the second World War, that may have influenced that decline].

#### Eastern European Displacement & Migration From 1945.

Following the end of World War II, substantial groups of people from Soviet-controlled territories settled in Britain, particularly Poles and Ukrainians. For example, the 1951 census showed the marked increase in the Polish-born population of the UK which at this point numbered some 162,339, up from 44,642 in 1931. Although the British economy had been shattered and faced huge shortages in raw materials and a manpower deficit, an anti-immigrant campaign by the TUC and leading unions turned public attitudes towards these migrants from acceptance to prejudice at times. The campaign orchestrated by left wing activists brought a swift response in support of these migrants from leading politicians and the media who were both more sympathetic about the situations of those displaced and aware of the need for workers to rebuild industry.

Bradford's received significant numbers of displaced people from Central and Eastern Europe. Approximately 3,400 were Ukrainian and 4,000 Polish – many of whom were Polish Service Men who had been formed into the Polish Resettlement Corp before their release into civilian jobs. Around 1,200 people came from what was then Yugoslavia and smaller groups came from the Baltic States – Hungary, Byelorussia, Austria and Germany itself. For many of these migrant's employment and permanent settlement became possible through unfilled jobs in Bradford's textile industry.

The reactions of Bradford 's people to the eastern European newcomers appears to have been generally positive. There was some prejudice but also accounts of goodwill with a feeling summed up by one Polish woman as 'as long as we work and behave ourselves, we never have a problem .... I couldn't speak English but if I didn't understand (at work) they used to take me by the hand and show me how to do it'. One man remembers 'In Bradford there was work available in textiles -- it wasn't the best kind of work, but it was work.' Many of these migrants appear to have had a 'self-imposed' ethic to be diligent in their work and quietly accept their assimilation into the larger Bradford community.

The textile industry was significantly aided in its full recovery after WW2 by these workers and the Saitaire Collection has some personal stories of Polish migrants which details many of the traumatic

events they suffered before their arrival in Bradford. These migrant groups also founded and developed facilities and networks to enable their cultural origins to be remembered with pride.

#### The European Voluntary Workers Scheme and Italian Migration to Bradford:

The European Voluntary Workers Scheme (EVW) became the collective name given to schemes for continental Europeans to 'be invited' by the British government to work in the UK in the immediate Post-World War Two period. Schemes inviting workers include Balt Cygnet and later Westward Ho! Despite its name, Balt Cygnet also accepted applicants from the Ukraine, Poland and other non-Baltic eastern European countries. In total some 91.000 people came to the UK between 1946 and 1949 under the various European Voluntary Worker schemes. The earlier schemes did use the words 'displaced people' but this came to be seen as a derogatory term and was replaced by the collective 'European Voluntary Workers or EVW' title. The schemes were responsible for engineering the migration of people from many European countries but the country that was to 'supply' many young female workers for Bradford's textile industry was Italy.

By the end of the war, the Italian economy had been all but destroyed; per capita income in 1944 was at its lowest point since the beginning of the 20th century. In 1953, an Italian Parliamentary Commission on poverty estimated that 24% of Italian families were either "destitute" or "in hardship," 21% of dwellings were overcrowded, 52% of homes in the south had no running drinking water, and only 57% had a lavatory. In the 1950s, several important reforms were launched: e.g. agrarian reform and fiscal reform and the country entered a period of economic development but by the end of the Sixties, it was estimated that 4 million Italians (out of a population of 54.5 million) were unemployed, underemployed, and casual labourers. The Italian Government established an official scheme in 1949 for recruitment of workers for overseas.

In the decade following the end of the Second World War, a mass migration of Italian workers came to the United Kingdom to be employed in Britain's factories and mines. Amongst these, many were single women aged between 21 and 30 years. Thanks to official recruitment schemes drafted by the British and Italian governments of the time, young women left Italy in their thousands, to be employed as domestic workers or in factories, especially in the textile industries of Lancashire and Yorkshire where around 2,000 Italian women came to be employed between 1949 and 1951 and their recruitment continued in Cities such as Bradford throughout the 1950s. This Italian migration of the post war period is the least well known or recorded migration to England and to Yorkshire. The Saltaire Collection has some of the personal experiences of Italian women who found work in the Bradford district and these records show how they settled permanently for the most part, many marrying British men. The experiences of a young Austrian woman who also came to work in Bradford's mills at that time is also in the collection and provides an insight into life in a nation dominated by Nazis.

#### Migration from the Commonwealth in the 1950's and 1960's.

From the late 1940s through to the 1970s, the British empire was dismantled. The Atlantic Charter of 1941, signed by Britain, stated that colonised people had a right to choose the form of government they wanted to live under. Although at the time this was a long-term ideal, after the Second World War Britain lacked the resources to hold on to colonial possessions in the face of determined independence movements. The Royal Commission on Population reported in 1949 that immigrants of 'good stock' would be welcomed 'without reserve', and potential newcomers from the Caribbean and elsewhere soon became aware of the pressing needs of the labour market in the UK.

Post-war migration attracted, for the first time, large numbers of workers and their families from outside Europe - mainly from the Caribbean and from India and Pakistan, the two separate states created by 'partition' after Britain relinquished its Indian empire in 1947. From 1948 the 'open door immigration approach' led to the arrival of non-European people to assist in re-establishing Britain's Industries. In 1951 there were 43,000 people of Indian and Pakistani descent and by 1961 there were 112,000. From the Indian sub-continent, it was mostly a migration of males seeking work in industry in the 1950s but once, settled, they began to bring their wives. Although often regarded as a homogenous group, these newcomers in fact came from a variety of backgrounds. They included Hindus from the Gujarat region of western India, Sikhs from the eastern Punjab region, and Muslims both from the west part of Pakistan and from East Pakistan (Bangladesh from 1971) The Caribbean population settling in Bradford numbered around 6,000 people and whilst the men usually found work in textile mills or in public transport, many of the women found work in Bradford's hospitals. The Saltaire Collection is keen to capture some of their stories.

For Bradford, whilst encouraging and receiving Hindus from Gujarat and Sikhs from the Punjab, most of their new South Asian population were Muslims from Mirpur in Pakistan. Here in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Government of Pakistan planned the Mangla Dam, which was to be built in the Mirpur area. They asked several thousand locals to leave the land. At that time, the British needed man-power mainly for their textile factories. Up to 5,000 people from Mirpur (five per cent of the displaced) left for Britain, the displaced Mirpuris being given legal and financial assistance by the British contractor which had built the dam. Many started working in factories, mostly in Birmingham and Bradford. In some Mirpur villages, more than half the population moved to the United Kingdom to settle in the industrial towns. This rural, impoverished district provided cheap, unskilled labour for Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.

These migrants were to suffer greater prejudice and discrimination due to their colour and their religious beliefs and as numbers grew, so did British Government concern. The government had greatly restricted immigration by the 1970s but had not stopped it altogether. Some 83,000 immigrants from the Commonwealth settled in the UK between 1968 and 1975, largely through gaining work permits or obtaining permission to join relatives. The most significant migration of people of South Asian origin came in 1972 when the Ugandan dictator General Idi Amin expelled 80,000 African Asians from the country, families who had been encouraged to settle there during the days of Empire. Many held British passports, and, amid a major crisis, the UK admitted 28,000 in two months.

The contribution made by South Asian migrants to Bradford's textile industry cannot be underestimated and the Saltaire Collection is planning to record some first-hand experiences of work in textile production and explore some of the barriers the first migrants faced in being accepted by indigenous workers. The issues of disproportionate unemployment faced by these communities as the textile industry declined in the late 1970s and early 1980's has tentacles that persist to the present day but their major contribution to the economy of the City and the rich cultural diversity of Bradford today is worthy of celebration.

[See references attached].

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