

# **REVEALING HISTORIES**

REMEMBERING SLAVERY

## **The Fight to End Slavery – A Local Story**

Slavery is the term used to describe one person becoming the property of another person. Under this ownership, enslaved people are forced to work against their will. Slavery has existed at different times in many forms in most societies throughout the world.

In 1730 Britain was the principal driving force behind the African slave trade but by the early 1800s was leading the fight for its abolition. This exhibition looked at how this struggle developed and how the people of Rochdale became linked to the fight to end slavery during the American Civil War and the resulting Lancashire cotton famine.



**Artist: John Michael Wright**  
**Date: 1660s**  
**Portrait of Miss Butterworth of Belfield Hall, Rochdale.**

The Butterworths were a wealthy Rochdale family. This picture shows a woman having water poured over her hands by a black servant. During this time it was fashionable for rich families to keep an enslaved person as a servant. These slaves were often included alongside their owners in society portraits as a sign of wealth and status.

At some point the black servant was painted out of the picture. This hidden history was revealed by x-ray when undergoing conservation in 1969. The painting has now been restored to include the missing servant.

## **2. Slavery**

Between 1500 and 1870 it is estimated that up to 12 million African people were sold into slavery and transported by European traders to the Americas and the Caribbean.

The conditions of their captivity on board ship were appalling and over a million are believed to have died during the voyage.

Britain's slave trade in Africa began in 1562. By 1619 Britain was transporting enslaved West Africans to grow tobacco in the new British colonies of North America. They were put to work as indentured servants (bound by contract) alongside labourers brought over from Britain. At the end of their contract they were given their 'freedom dues' such as a piece of land, supplies and clothes.

As British settlements grew so did the demand for enslaved labour. Africans began to be defined more specifically by their colour and race and the conditions of their captivity became harsher. More laws were passed in favour of the slave-owner, so the rights of the slaves dwindled to nothing.

In 1662, at about the time when the portrait of Miss Butterworth was painted, the British colony of Virginia passed a law which meant children born to slaves became slaves themselves.

**Description of a slave ship by Olaudah Equiano, a former slave, from Equiano's Travels first published in 1789.**

*The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. When I looked round the ship too and saw .... a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted my fate, and quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. I was soon put down under the decks and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life, so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat...*

### **3. The Transatlantic Slave Trade**

Between 1690 and 1807 British ships transported about 2.8 million Africans to the Americas as part of '**the triangular trade**'. This is the term used to describe the main trade routes that were based around the transatlantic slave trade.

**Europe:** Manufactured goods such as cloth, weapons, iron and copper were shipped to the west coast of Africa.

**Africa:** European goods were used to buy enslaved people from European or African slave-traders. The slaves were then packed into the ship's hold and taken over the Atlantic on what is known as 'the middle passage.'

**The New World:** In the Americas and the Caribbean the slaves were traded for raw materials grown by slaves on plantations (farms) such as sugar, tobacco and coffee. The ships then returned with this cargo to Europe.



Lead tobacco box 1700s



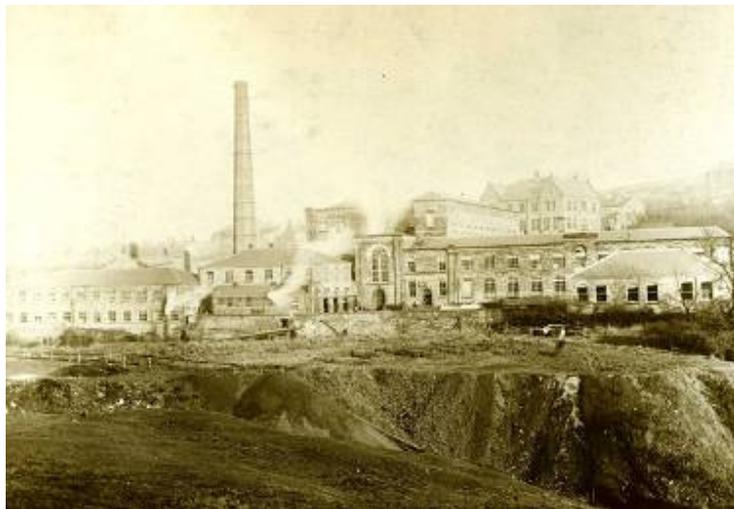
Sugar cutters



Coffee Pot 1800s

#### 4. Cotton

One important aspect of the triangular trade was the supply of cotton from the Southern states of America to ports like Liverpool and on to mill towns like Rochdale. From the 1760s the invention of new machinery and the growth of large-scale production known as the Industrial Revolution transformed the textile industry in the north of England. The increased profits made from slave-grown cotton were being fed into other businesses such as banking and the building of canals and railways. In 1791 cotton manufacturing reached Rochdale and by the 1820s overtook wool as the dominant business in the town.



Rochdale cotton mill 1800s



Cotton plant

In 1794, the American Eli Whitney invented his Cotton Gin (short for engine) which separated the cotton seed from the fibres, making production vastly more efficient. Up to then sugar had been the most important export from the Americas. Now cotton plantations rapidly spread across the Southern United States. At a time when many African Americans were beginning to gain their freedom, the demand for slave labour increased dramatically to meet higher rates of production, mostly to supply the mills of Lancashire.

## **5. For or Against Slavery**

In 1807, the transatlantic slave trade was made illegal throughout the British Empire but the 'owning' of slaves was not abolished until 1834. Even then many enslaved people were forced to become indentured apprentices (bound by contract) until this too was banned in 1838. The abolition of slavery in America did not take place until 1865 with the end of the American Civil War.

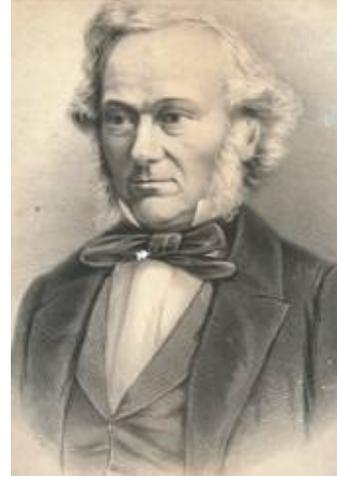
Opinion in Britain was divided over the issue of slavery. The British government and many rich landowners and businessmen tended to support the slave owners in the southern states of America. Many of these wealthy people had financial or family links with plantations in the Americas. For many years after the abolition of the slave trade, Britain continued to import slave-grown plantation produce from the southern states of America. The wealth of the north west of England depended largely on the import of cotton.

Not all businessmen sided with the slave owners of America. John Bright and Richard Cobden, both liberal MPs, ran businesses directly related to the cotton trade and were strongly opposed to slavery.

John Bright was born in Rochdale in 1811. John and his brothers took over the family cotton spinning mill at Cronkeyshaw in 1839 which became one of the most important in Rochdale. The Bright family were Quakers, a religious movement that believed in equality for all.



John Bright



Richard Cobden

Richard Cobden was born in Sussex but set up business in Manchester in 1828 with a calico print works. He became involved in politics in 1834 but decided to retire from public life in 1857. However, on returning from a trip to America in 1859 he discovered he had been elected MP for Rochdale in his absence.

Bright and Cobden achieved much as politicians and had great popular support. When slavery became the main issue of the American Civil War in 1862 they made inspirational speeches against slavery in Parliament and at large public meetings in and around Rochdale. Thousands of Rochdale folk attended these meetings in support of the anti-slavery movement.

Every Sunday many of Rochdale's working people attended the non-conformist churches, such as Methodist and Baptist chapels. Here they would have heard sermons on the evils of slavery.

In the 1860s Rochdale's Observer newspaper made a strong stand against slavery in America. It published letters written by Rochdaliens living in America giving an insight into the divisions that caused the American Civil War.

## A LANCASHIRE VOICE FROM AMERICA.

The following is from a letter written by a gentleman who has been a minister of the gospel for forty years in America; it will apprise our fellow-townsmen of the state of public opinion there, and the position our leaders occupy in the estimation of our friends across the Atlantic.

North Livermore Main, U.S.

Dear Brother,—We have terrible times here caused by the rebellion of the slaveholders, but still I believe the cotton manufacturers and their workpeople are suffering vastly more for food than we are in this country. Here the people can always find something to do, and they know nothing of hunger and want; with you it is different, when the mills are stopped all are stopped with them. I have felt the deepest sympathy with your suffering people, and the future still looks dark. I have little hope that this shocking war will soon come to an end, perhaps not for several years. If it should continue I do not know what will be the consequence to either England or America; and if it should end by the separation of the North from the South it will be infinitely worse than if it should continue now for years. Should the South gain their point and become a separate nation, war would break out again before one year. It is impossible that two nations can exist in these united states in a state of peace and friendship, there would be so many clashing interests and so much animosity that there would be everlasting confusion and contention; the consequences would be most disastrous to the English people as well as to the Americans. It was not expected when the rebellion broke out that it could possibly last one year, nor would it had not a large portion of the English aristocracy taken sides with the slaveholders of the South, and encouraged them by sympathy and the means which they furnished them, by which the rebels were able to carry on the war. Sorry I am to know and to say that these people in England are principally the cause of the protracted distress which the labouring classes are now experiencing in Lancashire. If the people and government of England were to refuse to furnish the secessionists with arms and ammunition, and other appliances of war, the contest would end and the Southern ports be opened before six months; this is

certain and capable of demonstration. We know that six piratical steamships are now building in England. Several have already been sold to them, armed, manned, and provisioned by the merchants and ship-builders of Liverpool to prey on the commerce of the United States; the "Alabama," or "290" as she was called in England, built by Laird and Co., of Liverpool, and fitted by the merchants of that port, has already taken and burnt 30 merchant vessels on the high seas. I would not believe it possible that England could have adopted such a course in favour of a slaveholders' rebellion with their professed anti-slavery professions. The class of people to whom I have here alluded surely have not taken into consideration the fact that they have been a principle cause, and are still of the continued sufferings of their fellow countrymen in your part of England. But I am glad that the working people of Lancashire have no sympathy with these slaveholders and outrageous war in support of the accursed system of slavery. All honour to your noble John Bright, the member of parliament, and the Mayor of Rochdale, and others of your fellow citizens, both for the stand they have taken on the side of the rights of the oppressed, and for the relief of their fellow-countrymen in Rochdale and elsewhere. I have long noticed with great satisfaction the course of your excellent member of parliament on the side of the rights of men, (black and white,) and am proud to be a countryman of Cobden and Bright; these names will live in history when the oppressors of the human race, whether black or white, in England or American will sink in contempt. This institution of slavery I utterly abhor, and have been fighting it ever since I came to America. Slavery is the cause of the present war and nothing else; the sentiment of the North in opposition to its extension was fast increasing, and the tyrants at the South finding that they could no longer control the American government were determined to set a government independent; if they succeed slavery will become rampant, and spread in every direction, the slave trade will be revived, and the millions of the oppressed and abused Africans will be sunk and crushed in hopeless bondage. But I believe the hand of God is moving in the present war, and that this infernal institution is doomed to perish. How true it is that God makes the wrath of man to praise him and then restrain the remainder of the wrath.

The letter below was set to John Bright following the American Civil War.

Washington D.C.  
April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1867

Hon. John Bright

Sir

The Lady Managers of the "National Association for the relief of destitute Coloured Women and Children" sometime since received from Mrs. Lincoln the Afghan which accompanies this and which once belonged to the late President Lincoln, to be sold by them for the benefit of the Institution. This has been done by subscriptions amounting to nearly six hundred dollars from Members of both houses of Congress, Officers of the Army and friends of Freedom with the promise, on our part that it should be presented to you, as some slight token of the appreciation of one who has been the Champion of Human Rights, not for England only, but for Mankind.

Be pleased Sir, to accept this Afghan valuing it not for its intrinsic worth but for its association with our martyred President and perpetuating as it does the Ensign of our National Union.

We cheerfully present you with it remembering gratefully your generous defence of this Government during our late struggle.

Understanding the issue from your long and faithful labors in the cause of Emancipation, you can the more heartily rejoice with us that our country hereafter is to be indeed the "Home of the Free."

With sentiments of the highest personal respect and with a sincere regard for the people you so nobly represent

We are

Very Respectfully

Yours

Eliza Heacock Sect'y

Mrs B. F. Wade  
Mrs Geo. Wm. McLellan  
Mrs Germond Crandell

President  
Vice President  
Treasurer

## 6. African-American Resistance

The abolition of slavery in America did not take place until 1865 with the end of the American Civil War.

The story of black resistance and emancipation in America goes back to the earliest days of their captivity. Many enslaved Africans died fighting for their freedom while others escaped. They also founded societies and churches to spread the anti-slavery message. As the anti-slavery movement grew, the stories of freed and escaped slaves were published in magazines and heard at anti-slavery meetings both in America and abroad.

The former slave Frederick Douglass, who escaped captivity in 1838, became one of the most forceful leaders of the anti-slavery movement. Douglass visited Manchester in 1847 to raise awareness of the plight of the slaves and gain support for their cause.

**Artist: Jacob Epstein.**

**Date: 1940s**

**Bust of Paul Robeson, 1898 - 1976.**



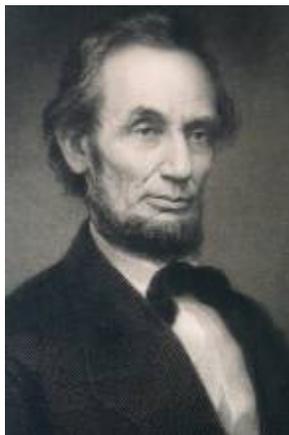
The African-American Paul Robeson was one of the most famous and controversial figures of his time. He was a civil rights activist, actor, singer and sportsman. He lived and worked in Britain between 1927-39 and campaigned for better working conditions for, amongst others, the mill workers of Manchester. Paul Robeson's father, William Drew Robeson, had been enslaved on a cotton plantation in North Carolina. In 1860 William escaped into the free state of Pennsylvania where he went on to serve in the Union Army. He later became a church minister.

This bust is part of the Bright Bequest, given to Rochdale Art Gallery by the descendants of John Bright M.P. The family inherited their wealth from the cotton manufacturing business.

## 7. The American Civil War or 'slave-owners rebellion'

By 1830 there were more than 2 million enslaved Africans in America, most of them in the South.

Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860. One of his main policies was to halt the spread of slavery. The Southern slave-owning states feared his election would destroy their way of life. On February 9<sup>th</sup> 1861 seven Southern states, and later four more, split from the Union to form the Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as President.



President Abraham Lincoln

The Civil War, between the Union North and the Confederate 'Rebel' South, began on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1861, when Confederates attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

The war became an official struggle between the "Free States" and the "Slave States" in September 1862 when President Lincoln made his Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in Confederate territories and enlisting black soldiers into the Union Army. Around 180,000 black soldiers, nearly 10% of the Union Army, would eventually fight against the South and slavery.

Much of the drama of the American Civil War was played out on the seas. The Union Navy blockaded Confederate Southern ports so that goods could not be brought in or out. The South needed its own fleet of commerce raiders or 'pirates' to attack Northern merchant ships but had no ship building industry of its own.

The Confederate Government set up a secret mission to Liverpool to buy arms and build ships using money supplied by Liverpool cotton merchants who had business interests in the Southern states.

## 8. The Confederate States Ship 'Alabama'

The greatest of these Confederate fighting ships was the CSS 'Alabama', built by John Laird at Birkenhead. During construction she was disguised as a merchant ship to deceive the British Government who had made it illegal to provide weapons and personnel for any foreign power at war. She left the shipyard with a British captain and crew and sailed for the Azores in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Away from the eyes of the British Government and North American spies she was fitted out as a ship of war.

In August 1862 the Confederate Captain Raphael Semmes took command of the CSS 'Alabama'.



Captain Raphael Semmes



The deck of the Alabama 1863

Over the next 22 months the 'Alabama' became the most successful and feared fighting ship of the Civil War. She sailed all over the world, putting out of action a total of 69 Union ships, at a cost to the North of 6 million dollars.

The closest the Alabama ever got to the Confederate States of America was in January 1863 when she sank the USS 'Hatteras', which was bombarding the town of Galveston in Texas. On board the 'Alabama' at this time was a Rochdale youth named Bell who mentions this event in a letter published in the Rochdale Observer. He also describes his part in the capture of the Californian steamer 'Ariel'.

There was anger in the American North that a Confederate warship had been built in Britain with British money, arms and crew. Britain however avoided becoming dragged

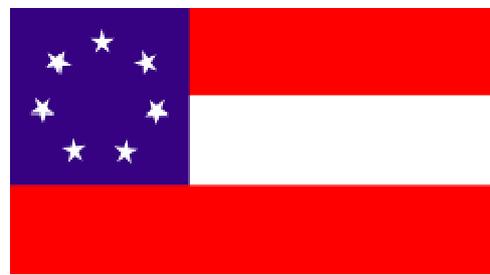
into the war because of the special relationship John Bright and Richard Cobden had with the American President.

The CSS 'Alabama' was finally sunk in June, 1864, outside the French port of Cherbourg.

**Union Flag**



**Confederate Flag**



## **9. The 'George Griswold' – A Heroic Voyage**

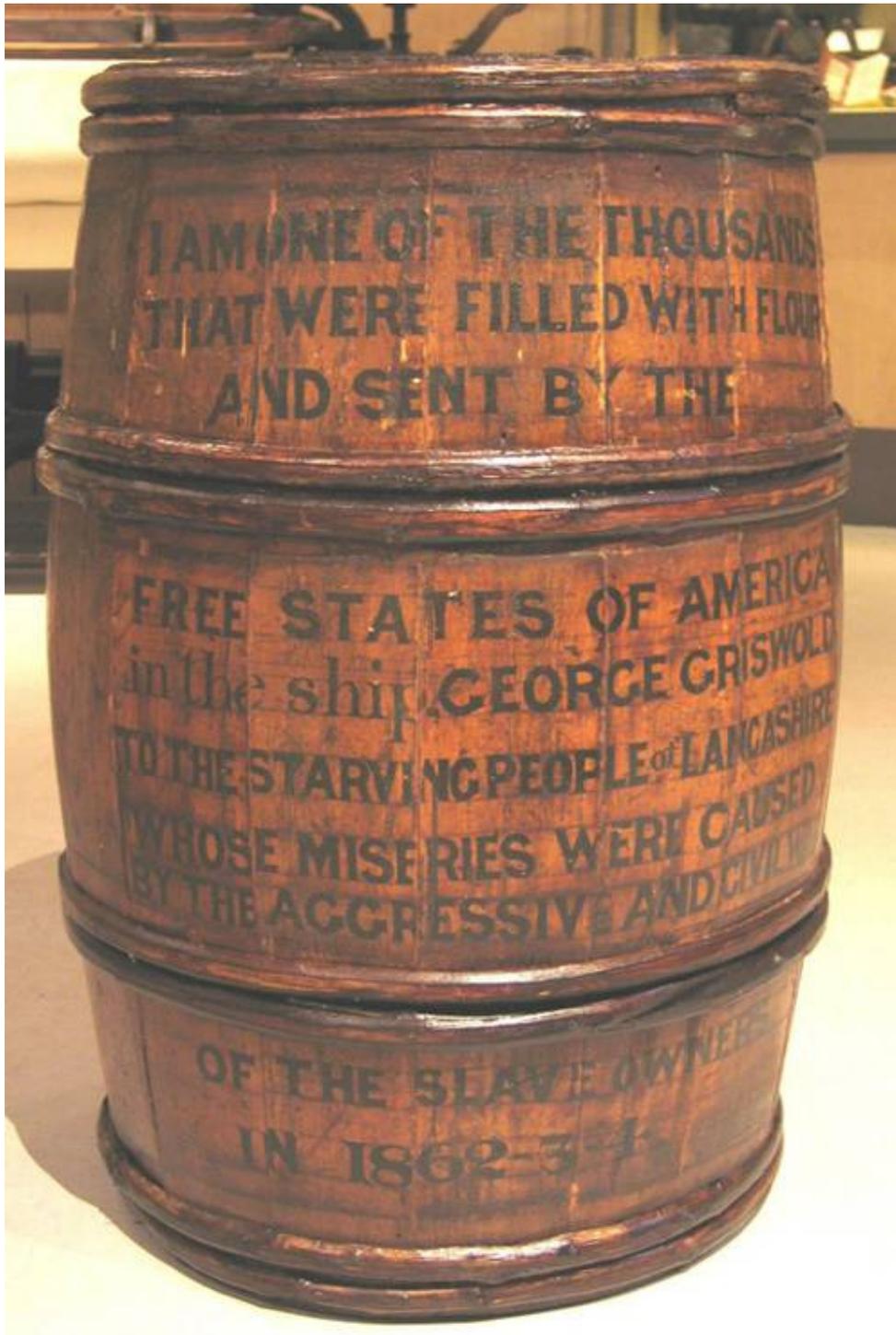
During the American Civil War the Union Navy blockaded the Southern ports to ruin the Confederate economy by preventing the export of goods such as cotton to England.

In Lancashire, by the beginning of 1862, cotton shortages had begun to bite. Cotton mills were either opening part-time or closing down altogether. Mill workers were laid off with little money to pay for food, clothes or housing. Their hardship was a direct result of the blockade yet the majority of Rochdale's mill workers followed the moral lead of John Bright's anti-slavery stance in supporting the free Northern States of America.

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1862, a meeting of cotton workers at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester resolved to pledge their support for Abraham Lincoln in his fight against slavery.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1863 the "George Griswold" docked at Liverpool carrying food sent from New York and Philadelphia to thank the starving people of Lancashire for their support for the Northern States. Amongst the cargo were boxes of bacon and bread, bags of rice and corn, and 15,000 barrels of flour.

The barrel you see here is the only one remaining from that voyage.



## **10. Lancashire Cotton Famine**

In April 1863 the Rochdale Observer reported a speech made by the chaplain of the 'George Griswold' at the Lodge street chapel in Middleton. He was said to be "cheered with the hope that cotton would come unwet by the tears and unstained by the blood of the slave".

Slave-grown cotton from the Southern states of America provided 70% of all the raw material fuelling Britain's Industrial Revolution. Half of Britain's exports were cotton fabric manufactured in the North West and at least 16% of all Britain's jobs depended upon this trade.

The cotton famine, which was a direct result of the blockade of Southern ports during the American Civil War, cost Lancashire's mill-owners about 30 million pounds. The effect of this on the whole community was devastating.

In November 1862 Richard Cobden, the MP for Rochdale, outlined the extent of the crisis in a speech at Tatham's machine works on Milnrow Rd. He noted that Rochdale contained "95 cotton mills, employing 14,071 persons: of these there are out of work 10,793, and the remaining 3,278 are not averaging more than two days a week of work".

### **Famine Relief**

Organised relief for the poor during the cotton famine came from two main sources:

#### **1. Poor rate, a tax on householders, administered by the Poor Law Guardians.**

The role of the Poor Law Guardians was to decide which of the poor in their area needed help and in what way. This might be a loan of money or admission into the workhouse. Loans and funds for the running of the workhouse came out of the poor rate. It became clear during the cotton famine that these rates would not be enough to provide for the large number of people in distress.

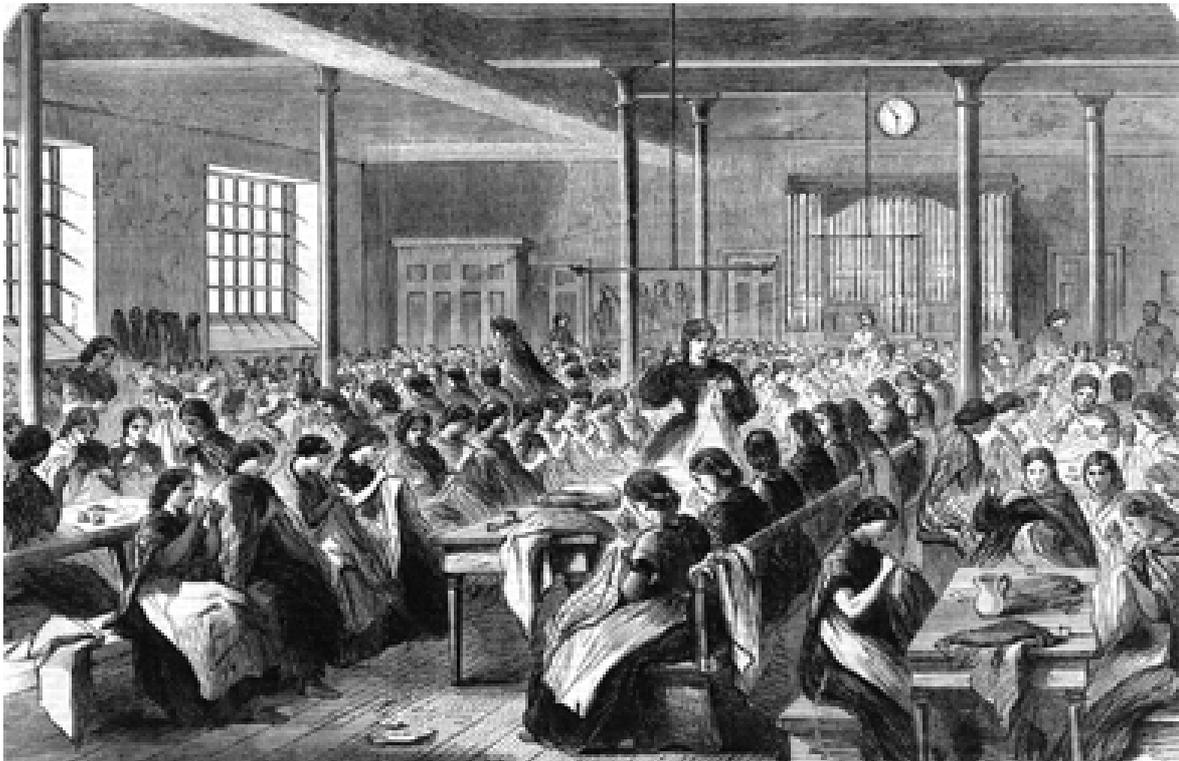
In 1863 a law was passed that enabled the Poor Law Guardians to borrow money at a low rate of interest. They used this money to establish building projects and finance public works as a way of getting some of the unemployed back into work. In Rochdale a workhouse was built at Marland and the road over Rooley Moor was repaired, which is still known as the Cotton Road.

#### **2. Charitable donations, administered by relief committees.**

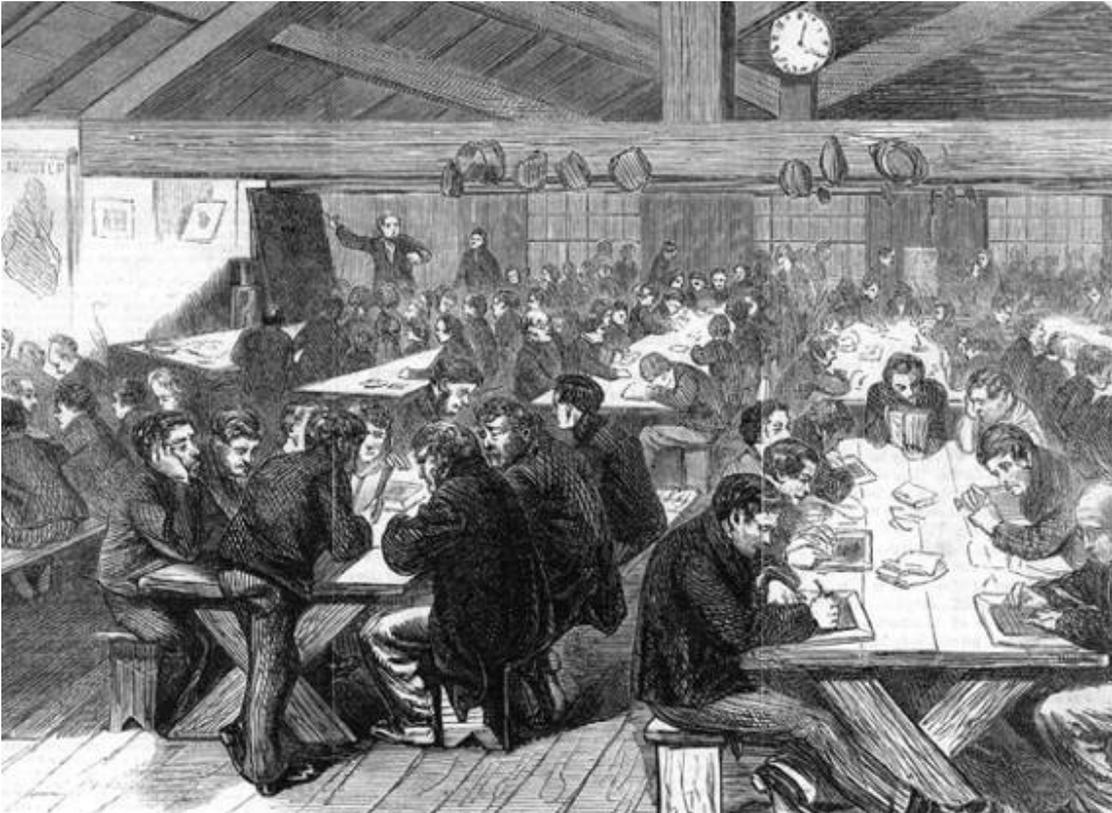
The Rochdale Cotton Famine Relief Committee was set up in February 1862 along with others in the area such as at Littleborough and Healy. Committee members would collect and distribute charitable donations. Relief usually came in the form of tickets, which could be exchanged for food, clothing and other goods.

Richard Cobden was invited to join Manchester's Central Relief Committee in April 1862. In his first speech to them he described how landlords and shopkeepers had become caught in the same poverty trap as the unemployed mill workers as they had little money for food or rent. Cobden pointed out that for many years the whole of this country had prospered thanks to the mills of Lancashire. He urged committee members to remind their friends in the South of England that it was now their duty to provide relief in this time of need. Reports about the suffering in Lancashire began to appear in the Illustrated London News, and when a letter appeared in the Times newspaper from 'A Lancashire Lad' describing the distress he had witnessed, large amounts of money were raised in London for the Lancashire relief committees.

Cobden also tried to persuade the Union States of America to lift their blockade of the Southern ports to relieve the distress in Rochdale. He argued that the blockade made it more likely that other European powers sympathetic to the Slave States would go to war against the North.



**Out-of-work women were paid to attend sewing classes. The clothes they made were sold to raise money for the relief fund.**



**The Co-op, John Bright and others helped to educate the out-of-work by providing reading and writing classes.**



**Soup kitchens were set up to help feed the starving workers.**

## 11. Co-operation and Emancipation

A group of working people known as the Pioneers laid down the principles of the modern Co-operative movement in Rochdale in 1844. During the Lancashire cotton famine these principles of Co-operation and equality were to be severely tested.

Up to the time of the famine, the Co-operative movement had grown to 370 societies throughout Britain. By 1862 the crisis in Rochdale had pushed two-thirds of mill operatives out of work, many of them Co-operative members. Some feared the cotton famine would kill the Co-operative movement in the very place of its birth.

Facing hardship and poverty the people of Rochdale stood firm in their support of co-operation and it's condemnation of slavery in the Southern states of America. Despite competition from rival merchants, and although Co-operative members were often denied poor relief, the societies managed to increase their profits during the crisis. The Rochdale Co-operative store, corn mill and manufacturing society donated £1500 towards the relief of the unemployed, setting up soup kitchens and organising educational workshops and activities. The Co-operative cotton mill also managed to open longer and pay its workers more than any other mill in Rochdale. By the end of the cotton famine the Co-operative movement had increased to 454 societies nationwide and Co-operation had proved its real worth.

Against all the odds, the Rochdale Co-operative societies had not only prospered but had played there part in supporting the people of the town through these desperate years.



The Rochdale Pioneers

**ANOTHER SOUP KITCHEN.**—At the monthly meeting of the Equitable Pioneers' Co-operative Society, held on Monday night last, it was resolved to recommend the Board of Directors to expend three pounds per week in soup or other kinds of food, to be distributed to the distressed poor of the town and neighbourhood, and the following persons were appointed to carry out the resolution, viz: Isaac Hoyle, Spotland-road, James Tweedale, 15, Taylor-street, William Cunliffe, Hamer Bottoms, Joel Cropper, 10, Middle-lane, Benjamin Standring, Robinson-street, Wm. Hanson, Redcross-street. The directors of the Rochdale District Corn Mill Society at their weekly meeting held on Tuesday last, voted three pounds per week—subject to the approval of their next monthly meeting—to be added to the Pioneers' gift, the directors of both societies to be members of the above committee. The soup will be distributed to those having tickets, (none else), at the Corn Mill, Weir-street, at eleven, o'clock this day—Saturday.

### The Co-op and Fair Trade

The concept of fair trade started in the 1950s as a partnership between non-profit importers, retailers and small-scale producers in developing countries. By the late 1980s a Fair Trade label had been developed in Holland guaranteeing certain labour and environmental standards. The concept caught on and, within years, similar labelling initiatives such as the 'Fairtrade' mark had been developed.

The 'Fairtrade' mark is now recognised as the guarantee that goods have not been produced by the exploitation of producers. Fair Trade producers follow internationally agreed labour standards:

- Recognition of trade unions;
- No child labour or forced labour;
- No discrimination on the basis of sex, or religion, or caste;
- Provision of decent working conditions.
- A proportion of profits go towards local community projects.

The Co-operative movement has taken the lead in driving forward the awareness of Fair Trade in Britain. It was the first large retailer to develop its own Fair Trade brands and expand its range of new Fair Trade products.

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-op members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Co-op Principles:

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training and Information
- Co-operation among Co-operatives
- Concern for the Community

These principles and the ethical values they represent are central to the Co-op's investment in Fair Trade. The Fair Trade initiative has now developed into a multi million pound success story improving the lives of thousands of farmers and producers around the world.



**‘We earnestly and religiously pray that the war may result in the uprooting of that accursed system of slavery which has led to it. We bid God-speed to those who seek its abolition and would add, with emphatic feeling that we shall regard a vast amount of present evil and suffering as fairly compensated, if slavery be destroyed.**

**Rochdale Observer 11.10.1862**

**‘The conduct of this district, of its working population, will stand out all the more honourably before the country when it is known under what circumstances you have borne yourselves so manfully as you have. I don’t believe there is any other part of the country where the same number of men would have borne so courageously the same amount of privation’**

**Richard Cobden, M.P. for Rochdale, 29.10.1862.**

