

ALTRINCHAM IN 1841

A CHESHIRE MARKET TOWN IN VICTORIAN TIMES



Don Bayliss (editor), Hilda Bayliss, Chris Hill, Judith Lipman, Hazel Pryor

Altrincham History Society

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Maps and drawings by Don Bayliss unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to give a view of Altrincham township and town in 1841 when the population numbered nearly 4,000, only one tenth of what it is today. Altrincham at this point in time was coming to the end of a long period in which it had not been disturbed in a major way by industrialisation. There were some cottage-weaving industries and two or three mills on what is now Grosvenor Road, but the major activities were farming, market-gardening, and provision of shops and services. It was a period before the railway, which arrived eight years later. The wonder-transport was the canal and Broadheath was a rural, canalside hamlet busy with trade. Local transport was based on the horse, of which there must have been hundreds. It is a picture of a somnolent small market town, which stretched only from St. George's to the Downs. There were two main patches of housing, one around the Market Place (Higher Town), one around Chapel Street and the Downs, linked by a thread of housing along George Street (Lower Town). All around were fields. There was a great social contrast between the people who lived in Higher Town and on the Downs in fashionable houses and the artisans and poor people who lived in the cottages of Lower Town (George Street) and the Chapel Street area.

The town was basically unhealthy. Water came from public wells, private wells and pumps. There was no sewage system as we know it. Waste accumulated in cesspits and middens, polluted the wells and was disposed of on the market gardens; the town must have stunk. There was much disease, no hospital, welfare or health system for the sick, and a high mortality rate, particularly among children.

In the past many books have given a rosy portrayal of the stage-coach period in this area. In this book the attempt has been made to restrict information to the facts available from official sources. This does not necessarily present the whole picture because, of course, this depends on the type of material which had been officially collected, for what purposes, and how we have interpreted it. The details here may appear rather dry, but, nevertheless, give, as far as possible, the first factual picture of Altrincham in one year in the nineteenth century.

The story is presented in two parts. In Part I, a number of general features of the township are described. In Part II, the township has been divided into six areas which show interesting contrasts.

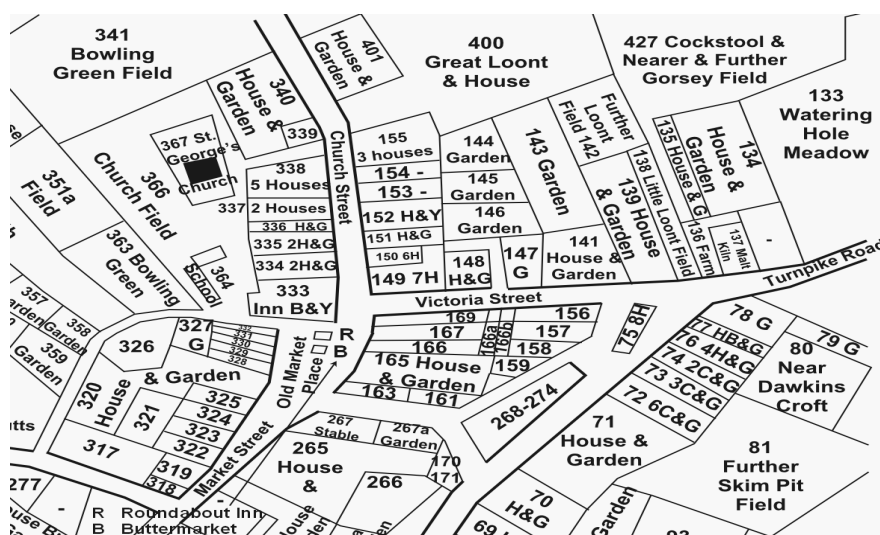
Why the year 1841? Why not 1837 when Victoria came to the throne, or 1848 when a government health enquiry was to paint Altrincham in not very pleasant colours, or 1849 when the Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway was built, which was to turn Altrincham into a commuter suburb of Manchester the regional metropolis. The reason is not a major local event in 1841, but the availability of information. 1841 is a date of convenience. Whereas the census had been taken each decade from 1801, the actual enumerators' census sheet, recording details house by house, are only available starting with the 1841 census. Hence much more detail can be given about the town and township in 1841 than from previous census reports, which only print a few figures for population and other topics for the place as a whole. The records for 3,372 individuals have been studied in Enumeration Districts 18-22 inclusive. This information will show some details about the people at the beginning of the decade 1841-51 which ended with the coming of the railway. The census, taken on 8 June, shows the number of houses, the householder, members of the family and other residents, their sex, age and occupations and place of origin.

One other main source of information used is the tithe map and schedule, which were published between 1835-8 when the old system of collecting tithes for the upkeep of the church was commuted into money dues. Nearly 500 properties were mapped and listed.

The tithe schedule and map give the name of the landowner, tenant, and property, and for the property its land use, size and titheable values (the last omitted from this study). Both types of documents give considerable amounts of information. (See Figure 1 for examples of both.) Where possible the information from the two sources has been correlated. Other information has been taken from general sources, especially contemporary directories.

PLACE	HOUSES		NAMES of each Person who abode therein the preceding Night	AGE and SEX		PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS.	Where Born	
	Uninhabited or Building	Inhabited		Males	Females		Whether Born in same County	Whether Born in Scotland, Ireland, or Foreign Parts.
Norman Place		1	Thomas Rowbottom	25		Butcher	Yes	
			Elizabeth Do		25	Do	Yes	
			Thomas Do	10			Yes	
Do		1	Betty Houghworth	65		Widow	Yes	X
			Betty Clough	50		Widow	Yes	X
			Henry Houghworth	35		Farmer	Yes	
			John Do	15		Servant	Yes	
Do		1	William Davenport	50		Shoemaker	Yes	
			Martha Do		55	Do	Yes	
			Hannah Do		20		Yes	
			Martha Do	15		Apprentice	Yes	
			William Do		4		No	
			Marion Harrington		13	Servant	Yes	

Census enumerator's record extract for the Davenport household in Norman's Place. William Davenport was a shoemaker. Note the enumerator's error – William junior was entered as female.



Extract from the Tithe map of 1835. The area shown is the Market Place and surrounding streets and fields. Church Street leads down from the top. St. George's is plot 367. Note one or two of the plots have not been numbered.

Figure 1: Examples of the chief sources.

There are difficulties with the sources. Many entries in the census are difficult to read and there can be mistakes of interpretation. There are omissions due to people being away from home. The enumerators in 1841 were sometimes at fault when going round the houses with their forms. They failed to extract some information and made wrong entries, occasionally, for example, regarding sex (see Figure 1), or spelling of names. Some people are likely to have deliberately given wrong information with regard to their ages (as they do today). Though year ages were given up to the age of fifteen, after that they were put in quinquennial (five-year) age-bands. People also gave wrong or misleading statements about occupations (for example, there are no disreputable jobs mentioned though they must have existed, such as night-soil shifters). There are gaps in the record in respect of occupations and no information on topics covered in later censuses such as familial relationships. Even a basic thing, the street number of a house was not recorded, making it difficult to locate the house in question. Similar criticisms apply to the tithe information. The maps are difficult to interpret, not being in perfect condition through age. There are discrepancies between details on the map and the recorded components in the schedule, for example, there are field and property numbers shown on the map but not in the schedule and some places in the schedule are not shown on the map.

The area selected for study was the ancient township of Altrincham, about 631 acres in size (see Figure 2), covered by the tithe map. It was one of the constituent townships of the huge parish of Bowdon and extended from Broadheath in the north to Spring Bank in the south. It was much larger than the built-up area of the town itself which only extended from St. George's to the Downs. The bulk of the township was therefore rural. Today the whole area is totally built-up, apart from a few recreation areas. It is assumed the census enumeration districts for 'Altrincham' cover the full area of the old township and chapelry.

The areas of the township and town described in Part II have been selected arbitrarily but with some sense of types of housing and differing economic and social character.

North Altrincham

A farming area which included a hamlet at Broadheath whose economy was based on the Bridgewater Canal, and another hamlet at Sandiway.

