# Labouring Barnsley, 1816-1856 : a social and economic history


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### Abstract
In the closing years of the 18th century, as linen weaving was displaced by cotton in many English towns, the industry took refuge in a few localities, one of which was the township of Barnsley. The Barnsley linen industry expanded in the first three decades of the 19th century and attracted a large immigrant labour force. But owing to competition from cotton and from linen produced in Ireland and Scotland, the town's linen trade began to decline. By the mid-1850's, it was no longer the staple industry. Coal had replaced it. This study examines the social and economic structure of Barnsley during its rapid urbanization. By employing statistical sources traditionally neglected by historians, it goes beyond other social and economic histories of the period. The problems of the Bnglish linen trade, whose history has never been written, are discussed. The plight of the linen weavers who suffered from chronic unemployment, declining wages and bad living conditions, is compared and contrasted with the position of the coal miners, whose industry, in the last years of our period, enjoyed prosperity. The industrial militancy of the weavers, who persistently tried to resist wage reductions, contrasted with the relative docility of the miners. Barnsley played a prominent role in radicalism, Chartism and other working-class movements of the early 19th century. This thesis aims to relate these developments to the community in which they took place. The class-consciousness of the Barnsley workers had marry roots: the peculiar problems of the linen trade; the oligarchic nature of its parochial institutions, dominated by employers; and the influence of its immigrant population. The ideas which interacted with these forces are also discussed.