

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF STOCKPORT'S INDUSTRY

## ORIGINS

Stockport was first documented in the 12th century, but almost certainly has earlier origins. By the 1170s a castle and parish church had been established and the town was granted a market charter in 1260 that allowed for regular market days and festivals.

The origins of Stockport's industrial development, as across much of northwest England, began in the medieval period when wool, produced on outlying farms, was gathered by merchants who then employed domestically-based weavers to make cloth for the open market. The site of the castle was occupied by Stockport's first water-powered cotton mill, which was set to work by 1778.

## STOCKPORT'S SILK INDUSTRY

In Stockport, the manufacture of silk products was the first manufacturing process to be industrialised. This industry had developed from the domestic production of buttons and the weaving of silk lace in the 17th century. The Park Silk Mill was constructed in 1732 and was the earliest known water-powered factory not only in Stockport but also in the northwest of England.

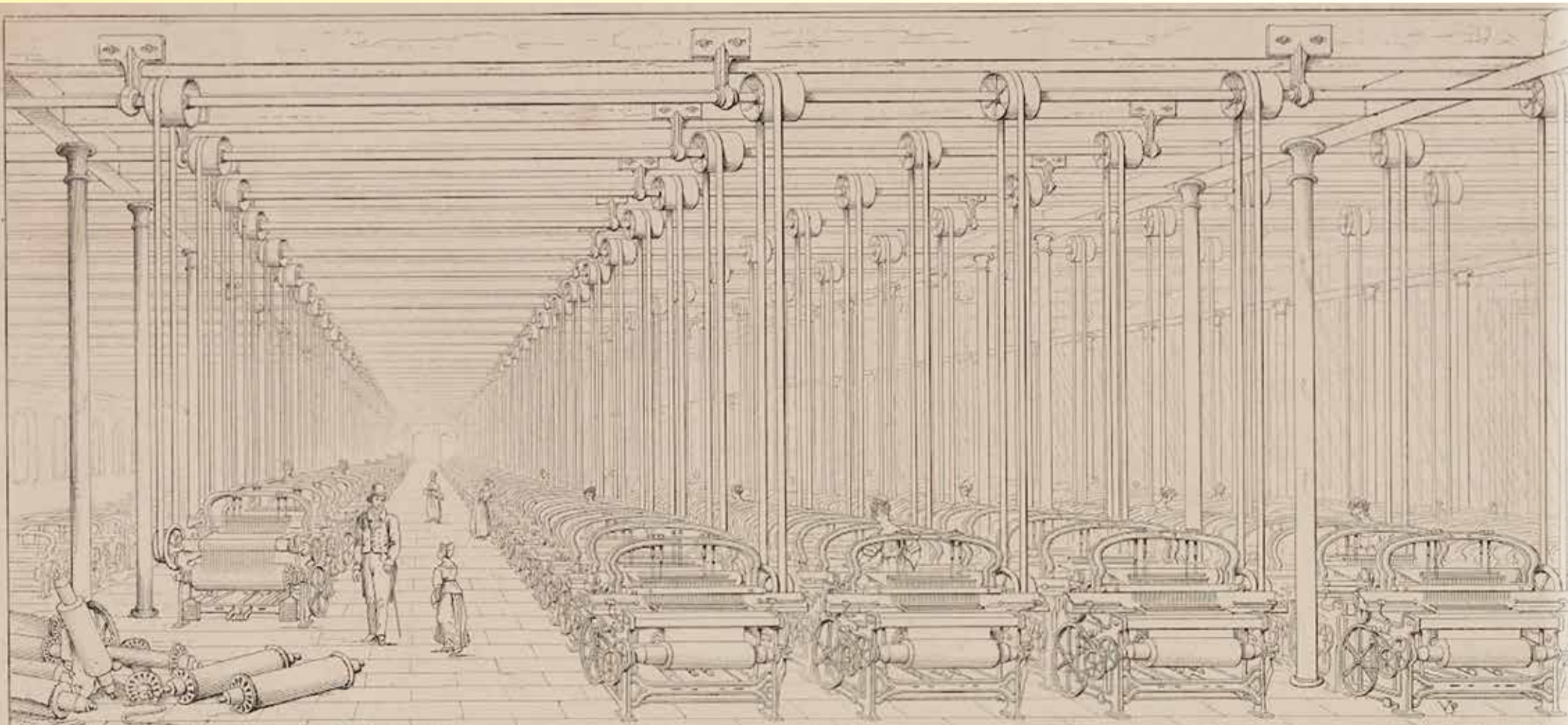


## COTTON

In the late 18th century silk production began to be eclipsed by an expansion in the cotton industry, possibly as local manufacturers diversified their business to avoid the uncertainties of the silk market. Many of Stockport's silk mills were converted for cotton production. New technologies made cotton production more efficient leading to massive expansion in industrial output in the period between the 1780s and the 1830s. Likewise, the population of Stockport grew from 5000 to an estimated 28,431 during this period.

## HATTING

Before the late 19th century, felt hat-making had existed only as a cottage industry. Over the course of the following century, Stockport became a specialised centre for mass production, for which it gained international repute. As hat production was scaled-up, and processes mechanised, increasingly larger factories were required. While factories were purpose built, others utilised existing mill buildings, such as nearby Wellington Mill. At its height, 'hatting' was a major source of employment in Stockport. The buoyancy of the industry was not to last and by 1960s only a handful of these firms were operational.



Top: Stockport viaduct, c. 1850. Coloured lithograph issued by Bradshaw and Blacklock.  
 Bottom left: Power looms at Spring Bank Mill, 1835; Bottom middle: Exhibition at the hat museum showing that would have been dyed on the moulds and hung (courtesy of Steven Tamburello) Bottom right: Detail of plan of Stockport township, 1770