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The periodicals that puzzled Dickens: The weekly balance sheets of the Preston lock-out, 1853-54

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Abstract

Charles Dickens was puzzled and intrigued by a type of print publication which was central to the Preston strike and lock-out of 1853-54 and hundreds of other industrial disputes in the nineteenth century, the strike balance sheet. This first academic study of the periodical genre summarises its structure and contents (a stirring opening address, long lists of donations sent in support of the locked-out workers featuring meaningful and allusive nicknames, snatches of verse, and threats against those who refused to contribute) and examines how it was produced, received and interpreted. Strike balance sheets demonstrated the collective and financial power of the unions, while their creation of an independent, worker-controlled public sphere of print reduced the imbalance of cultural power between workers and masters. They are also significant for what they tell us about the size, spread and consistency of the financial and moral support for the Preston workers, and as snapshots of broader trade union activity across the nation. They reveal intra-class debates and conflicts, and the rhetoric and values of the union leadership and lower-tier district delegates. Most intriguing of all, they make up a large body of print material in which nineteenth-century working-class voices are heard.

Introduction

Charles Dickens came to Preston to report on the lock-out in late January 1854, spending three days there. His visit provided material for the novel *Hard Times,* but more immediately, he wrote six pages of reportage for his magazine, *Household Words,* published two weeks later.[1] Almost a quarter of his article was given over to descriptions of a peculiar type of publication, the subject of this essay. Dickens gives the title of one, the 'balance sheet of the receipts and expenditure for the twenty-third week of the strike' (probably published either by the power loom weavers or an amalgamated committee), which he saw 'extensively posted' on walls about the town, with 'groups of working people attentively reading them'. He quotes in detail from various balance sheets, which follow a similar format: a stirring opening address or leading article, long lists

[1] C. Dickens, 'On Strike', *Household Words* 8 (11 February 1854): 553–59. Thanks to Dr Jack Southern, Dr Lewis Darwen, Professor Robert Poole and Professor Michael Sanders for their helpful advice.

of donations sent in support of the locked-out workers, from union branches, workplaces and members of the public, some of whom use meaningful and allusive nicknames. There are snatches of verse, while in another sheet Dickens finds a quotation from Thomas Carlyle. In a sheet from Bury he finds some obscure but menacing threats to those who have not paid up: 'If that drawer at card side and those two slubbers do not pay, Punch will say something about their bustles.'[2] These threats appeared in many of the Preston balance sheets.

This article picks up where Dickens left off, by giving more details of the content of the Preston balance sheets, how they were produced, received and interpreted, and their significance. I argue that the balance sheets demonstrated the collective and financial power of the unions, while their creation of an independent, worker-controlled public sphere of print reduced the imbalance of cultural power between workers and masters. They are significant for what they tell us about the size, spread and consistency of the financial and moral support for the Preston workers, but also as snapshots of trade union activity across the nation. They reveal the debates and conflicts between the workers, and the rhetoric and values of the union leadership and the lower-tier district delegates. Most intriguing of all, they make up a large body of print material in which working-class voices are heard.

This is the first systematic analysis of a largely overlooked and forgotten genre which flourished for more than a century. It examines 40 balance sheets, constituting around ten per cent of the total, taken from what is probably the most complete collection of such objects in Britain, in Lancashire Archives. The article applies the techniques of book history and periodical studies in their analysis, focusing on the sheets themselves as objects of study, rather than merely their content. I have tried to follow Peter Mandler's advice 'to evaluate not only the meanings of a text but also its relations to other texts, its significance in wider discursive fields, its "throw", its dissemination and influence; that is, the conditions not only of its production but also of its distribution and reception.'[3]

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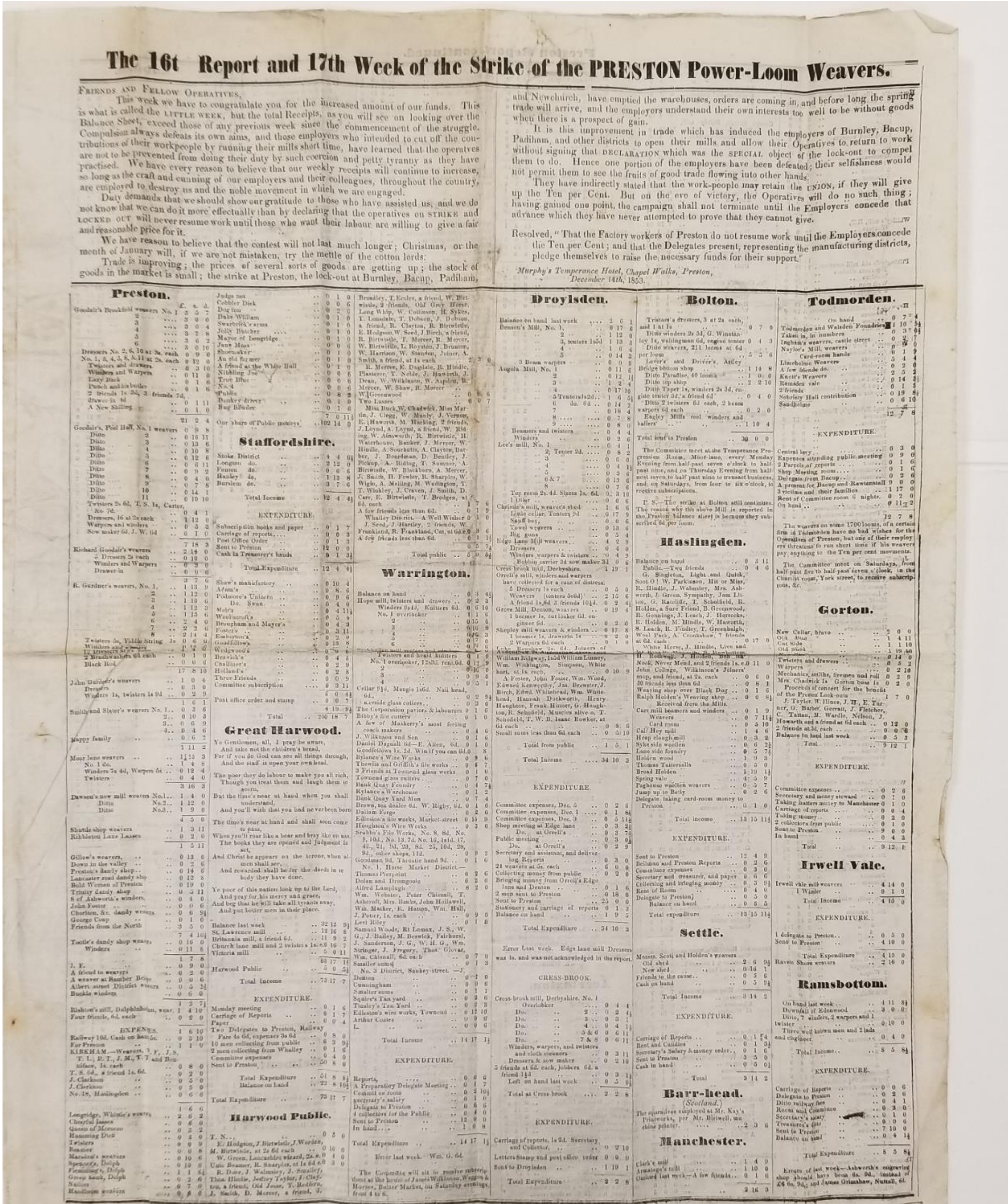
[2] Reference to the card room (where cotton fibres were combed ready for spinning into thread), drawers (who wound the warp threads onto a beam or huge bobbin, ready for weaving) and slubbers (who also prepared the cotton for weaving by removing imperfections or 'slubs' from the yarn) suggests a balance sheet published by the card room operatives' union, while the amount collected, more than £2,000, is probably taken from one published by the larger power loom weavers' union. Bustles were padding under a dress, designed to exaggerate the buttocks, worn by women of all classes: C. Willett Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, ebook (New York, 2013), 75, 84.

[3] P. Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004), 96.

Figure 1. A typical lock-out balance sheet, the *16th report and 17th week of the strike of the Preston power-loom weavers, 14 December 1853.*



The 16t Report and 17th Week of the Strike of the PRESTON Power-Loom Weavers.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW OPERATIVES,

This week we have to congratulate you for the increased amount of our funds. This is what is called the LITTLE WEEK, but the total Receipts, as you will see on looking over the Balance Sheet, exceed those of any previous week since the commencement of the struggle. Compulsion always defeats its own aims, and those employers who intended to cut off the contributions of their workpeople by running their mills short time, have learned that the operatves are not to be prevented from doing their duty by such coercion and petty tyranny as they have practised. We have every reason to believe that our weekly receipts will continue to increase, so long as the craft and cunning of our employers and their colleagues, throughout the country, are employed to destroy us and the noble movement in which we are engaged.

Duty demands that we should show our gratitude to those who have assisted us, and we do not know that we can do it more effectually than by declaring that the operatives on STRIKE and LOCKED OUT will never resume work until those who want their labour are willing to give a fair and reasonable price for it.

We have reason to believe that the contest will not last much longer; Christmas, or the month of January will, if we are not mistaken, try the mettle of the cotton lords.

Trade is improving; the prices of several sorts of goods are getting up; the stock of goods in the market is small; the strike at Preston, the lock-out at Burnley, Bacup, Padiham, and Newchurch, have emptied the warehouses, orders are coming in, and before long the spring trade will arrive, and the employers understand their own interests too well to be without goods when there is a prospect of gain.

It is this improvement in trade which has induced the employers of Burnley, Bacup, Padiham, and other districts to open their mills and allow their Operatives to return to work without signing that DECLARATION which was the SPECIAL object of the lock-out to compel them to do. Hence one portion of the employers have been defeated; their selfishness would not permit them to see the fruits of good trade flowing into other hands.

They have indirectly stated that the work-people may retain the UNION, if they will give up the Ten per Cent. But on the eve of victory, the Operatives will do no such thing; having gained one point, the campaign shall not terminate until the Employers concede that advance which they have never attempted to prove that they cannot give.

Resolved, "That the Factory workers of Preston do not resume work until the Employers concede the Ten per Cent; and that the Delegates present, representing the manufacturing districts, pledge themselves to raise the necessary funds for their support."

Murphy's Temperance Hotel, Chapel Walks, Preston,
December 14th, 1853.

Preston. · Staffordshire. · Great Harwood. · Harwood Public. · Warrington. · Droylsden. · Bolton. · Haslingden. · Settle. · Barr-head. (Scotland.) · Manchester. · Todmorden. · Gorton. · Irwell Vale. · Ramsbottom.

Source: Lancashire Archives DDHS 75 11 bill posters. Used by permission of Lancashire Archives.

The Preston balance sheets were typically printed on one side of a large sheet of flimsy paper, up to broadsheet newspaper page size, ready for pasting on to walls (Figure 1). Most of the space was taken up

by lists of contributors and amounts contributed, with a summary of income and expenditure. But, as Dickens noted, much meaning was contained in nicknames such as 'Not Tired Yet', 'Nibbling Joe', 'The Donkey Driver' or 'Cobbler Dick'. Equally, the lines of verse occasionally interspersed between the names were loaded with meaning, often written to inspire solidarity among the workers and shame those who did not support them:

> TO THE FEMALE WEAVERS IN THIS SHED.
> Ten thousand thanks to all those maids
> Who willingly support their trade,
> That Preston folks may *live* – not *die*
> For want of stuff to make a pie.
> (But SHAME *eternal shame*),
> To all those jilts who *will not* pay;
> Pray treat them with contempt,
> they *poison* e'en the very *air*
> Which echos's Ten per Cent.

The balance sheet from which this poem is taken records £49 spent on printing '17,000 Reports' such as this, giving an idea of the quantities produced and distributed for free.[4] Few newspapers of the time sold as many copies.

Like the broadside ballads of the lock-out, these balance sheets contain the voices of mid-nineteenth-century working-class people, not only in the leading articles, probably written by strike leaders, but particularly in the verse, the nicknames and the threats which were contributed by the workers. They provide a window into the culture and atmosphere of the lock-out, and of the groups and places who sympathised with the Preston workers. They go beyond the facts to give a flavour of working-class culture during the dispute. This comes partly from their emotional, evocative power as ephemera. James Mussell notes how

> the print objects that we regard as ephemeral are not supposed to survive: they belong among the unremembered throng of things that we make use of, but necessarily forget. It is this connection with the countless transient artefacts of everyday life that makes ephemera so valuable for historical research.[5]

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[4] Lancashire Archives (hereafter LA), DDPr 138 87b (2), *The 24th Report and 25th Week of the Strike of the Preston Power Loom Weavers, &c.*, in anonymous scrapbook.
[5] J. Mussell, 'The Passing of Print: Digitising Ephemera and the Ephemerality of the Digital', *Media History* 18:1 (2012), 77–92, 78.

Such ephemera are more central to some histories than others, meaning that their omission from the archive can have a disproportionate effect on entire fields of scholarship. Erickson has argued that most texts by African Americans were not in book form, so that the omission of ephemera from libraries and archives can erase huge swathes of black culture from the record.[6] Similarly, ephemera such as strike balance sheets are central to the history of trade unionism, and their scarcity distorts our view of the past. Balance sheets are missing from the list of sources used by the Webbs in their monumental history of trade unions, and from more recent scholarship.[7] While banners are prized as examples of the material culture of trade unions, it could be argued that strike balance sheets were a more significant part of nineteenth-century industrial disputes, serving a vital function, whilst also being more numerous, more widespread and equally rich in their content.

The journalist James Lowe, who also reported on the lock-out for Dickens's *Household Words,* later argued that 'the balance sheets supplied a very important channel of communication between the operatives and their leaders; they were in fact, the journals of the strike.'[8] They reveal the unions' strategy, their rhetorical techniques and the different types of power in play, particularly the power of solidarity and union discipline, and the cultural power of respectability and good behaviour.

Balance sheets were a feature of industrial disputes from at least the early nineteenth century, particularly during long-running strikes and lock-outs when solidarity funds became essential. The earliest reference to a strike balance sheet I could find in the British Newspaper Archive was from 1818, when trade unions were illegal; this is unlikely to have been the first. The genre continued long after the Preston lock-out, into the 1890s at least.[9] In Lancashire, balance sheets were printed during the weavers' strike at Padiham near Clitheroe in 1859, and in Colne during the weavers' strike in 1860-61. The long history of this genre, stretching back more than 30 years before the Preston lock-out, would have made the strike balance sheet familiar to workers. It borrowed from other types of text (newspapers, poetry, ballads, essays, political philosophy, financial balance sheets and speeches among others) to create a distinctive print genre of its own. A five-shilling contribution from 'a few spinners of Preston' to the 1841-42 stonemason's strike (13 April 1842 balance sheet) suggests that solidarity appeals in print from distant disputes would have been a common sight in the workplaces and pubs of Preston.

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[6] J. Erickson, 'Revolution in Black: Black American Alternative Press and Popular Culture at the End of the Twentieth Century', *Publishing History* 70 (2011), 105.

[7] Weavers' balance sheets during a strike at Padiham near Burnley in 1859 are the only exception, mentioned in H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Basingstoke, 1992), 40; H.I. Dutton and J.E. King, *'Ten per Cent and No Surrender': The Preston Strike, 1853-1854* (Cambridge, 1981) use balance sheets mainly to assess the scale and origin of support for the Preston workers.

[8] J. Lowe, 'An Account of the Strike in the Cotton Trade at Preston, in 1853', in *Trades' Societies and Strikes. Report of the Committee on Trades' Societies, Appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, Presented at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association, at Glasgow, September, 1860* (London, 1860), 207–64, 252-53.

[9] Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, 627/3/2, 1891 *Balance sheet for Ropemakers' Strike Fund (Women),* .

Producing, distributing and reading the balance sheets

The lock-out balance sheets were published to a schedule dictated by the weekly routines of union delegates bringing the donations to Preston, with their district accounts and reports. Dickens describes 'the Delegates from the surrounding districts coming into town with their subscription lists for the week just closed', while Bolton mill owner Henry Ashworth (a fierce opponent of unions) describes the Sunday morning scene on Preston's main street:

> In Fishergate are usually groups of idlers discussing these questions [how much money? from where?] until the arrival of the morning trains, bringing the delegates from various towns with the money. At the station, also, many are often in attendance to greet the cash -bearers, who, especially those from the more important districts, speedily announce the amounts with which they have been entrusted. As they come up Fishergate with their money bags, varying in size, from the ordinary travelling carpet-bag to the small canvass purse of the tradesman, they appear as proud of their charge as men could do who were entrusted with the most critical missions.[10]

The balance sheets were probably produced after donation lists had been compiled and checked, while the leading article would have been finished after the delegates' meeting or any meetings of each union.[11] There was much labour involved in the production of each balance sheet. In the small town of Clitheroe, weavers' union committee man John O'Neil was responsible for writing the short report for his district during the 1860-61 Colne weavers' strike. This would involve collating lists of contributions from the district's seven mills and from the public, along with comments and threats, adding up and checking amounts. He often records the time taken for this task in his diary:

> Sat 16 June 1860: We made a very good collection and sent £28 to Colne … I came home and it took me three hours to make a report for next week's balance sheet.
>
> Sat 23 June 1860: The subscriptions came in very well and we sent £28 to Colne … it took me until daylight next morning to finish the report for Colne Balance Sheet.[12]

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[10] H. Ashworth, *The Preston Strike, an Enquiry Into Its Causes and Consequences* (Manchester, 1854), 50.

[11] In the 1860-61 Colne weavers' strike, money was collected from workplaces and pubs during the week, handed in to district committees on Saturday night then taken to Colne on Saturday night or Sunday morning, with written reports for the balance sheet either taken by the deputies or posted direct to the printer in Blackburn, to arrive by Monday, the day from which they were dated. See for example, entries for 30 June 1860 and 4 August 1860, J. O'Neil, *The Journals of a Lancashire Weaver: 1856-60, 1860-64, 1872-75*, ed. Mary Brigg (Chester, 1982).

[12] O'Neil, *Journals*.

O'Neil's hours of work produced 37 lines in the Clitheroe section of the balance sheet dated 5 November 1860, taking up one fifth of a column.[13]

Table 1. Details of unions/committees publishing strike balance sheets[14]

Union	Approx membership	Members' gender	Day of publication	No. printed weekly
Card room operatives	2,000		Monday	
Tape machine sizers	40-50	Male	Tuesday	350
Power loom weavers (including winders, warpers, twisters, dressers, helpers, reachers)	9,600	Mostly female	Wednesday	15,500 to 17,000
Power loom overlookers		Male		1600
Non-member mill warpers		Male and female		200
Blackburn committee			Thursday	
Carding and spinning overlookers		Male	Saturday	200
Public and trades committee/amalgamated committee			Sunday	6,000
Spinners and Self-Actors (including minders, piecers, bobbiners)	800 spinners, 2,000 piecers and bobbiners	Spinners: male; Others: male and female		5,000
Throstle spinners (no surviving sheets)	400+			
				29,600

The Preston sheets are not always dated exactly, but it seems that the different unions and committees published their sheets on particular days of the week, perhaps linked to their weekly meetings (Table 1). The Amalgamated Committee was formed in August 1853 by Preston's craft unions outside the cotton industry, and gathered subscriptions from workplaces unaffected by the strike and from shops (shopkeepers with working-class clientele had little choice but to contribute).[15] The various sheets would have provided almost daily updates, at a time when local papers were published once a week, some Manchester papers twice a week, and London dailies, with little non-metropolitan news, only arrived in the afternoon. They are probably the best record of trade unions operating in the UK in 1853-54, particularly the more transient ones: comparison of one Amalgamated Committee sheet from early December 1853, recording donations

[13] LA, DDSP/58/1, *The Colne Strike. To the power-loom weavers of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and Derbyshire, and to the public generally*, 23rd report, dated 5 November 1860.

[14] For explanations of each role, see *Occupations in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Dictionary of Occupational Terms: Based on the Classification of Occupations Used in the Census of Population, 1921* (London, 1927), http://doot.spub.co.uk/; table information from Dutton and King, *'Ten per Cent'*, 62–63, 224; for histories of Preston cotton unions, see A. Marsh, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, vol. 4: Cotton, wool etc (Farnborough, 1980), 3, 4, 16, 46, 82, 115, http://archive.org/details/historicaldirect0004mars; J. Lowe, 'Locked Out', *Household Words* (10 December 1853): 348.

[15] Dutton and King, *'Ten per Cent'*, 65–66.

from unions around the country, against two volumes of the *Historical Directory of Trade Unions,* found only two of 13 relevant unions in the balance sheet also recorded in the directory.[16]

This journalism by non-journalists, producing pop-up periodicals, reveals how consumers of 1850s journalism understood what they read, as they assembled their own distinctive publications. They may have received technical assistance from printers, but they too were unfamiliar with periodical publishing (apart from Horsfall's limited experience of producing his own journal). Yet they produced a distinctive genre that was more than the sum of its parts. Strike balance sheets were fundamentally transparent (in their detailed records of income and expenditure) and inclusive (through the long lists of names and places). Their mode of address, frequently using the first person plural of 'we', 'us' and 'our', expressed solidarity and collectivity. As with the local reports sent into the Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star* in the previous decade, it seems likely that 'the accumulation of such reportage, column on column, week after week, imbued readers with a sense of belonging to a common crusade'.[17]

The vast majority of print produced during the dispute was consumed communally, read aloud and heard by those who could not read, or who preferred to listen. In November 1853 the *Daily News* correspondent describes the audience for the latest placard, addressed 'To the Thirty-five Associated Firms of Legree Brothers!' (a comparison of the mill owners with slave-driver Simon Legree, the villain of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). 'At the corners of the streets and opposite the doors of gateways' where the placard was posted,

> it was hugely relished by knots of the "turn-outs" who were in general content to receive its contents through a reader, who gave it aloud for the benefit of the rest. I was struck with the manner in which more than one of these men performed their task. One in particular read in a deep clear tone, with a solemnity of manner and a perfection of emphasis which I have rarely heard equalled.[18]

It is likely that the balance sheets were read aloud in a similar way, after their distribution by the same people who collected the money. Lowe reports that 'many thousands of copies of these balance-sheets were distributed through the contributing districts … they were posted upon the walls of every town, and lay upon the table of every alehouse, and found their way into every work-room and shed throughout the Cotton Districts …' The locations of the contributors show that they were read much further afield, confirmed by other evidence such as a letter in a Staffordshire newspaper urging more support, and beginning 'When I read the weekly balance sheets issued by the men of Preston …'[19] One Preston mill owner, Hawkins, told Ashworth of 'groups of five or six in each department [of his mill] reading large

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[16] Marsh, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*; J.B. Smethurst and P. Carter, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, vol. 6: Building and construction etc (London, 2016).
[17] M. Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2007), 17.
[18] 'The strikes', 'From our special correspondent, Preston', *Daily News,* 1 November 1853, p.4.
[19] Letter, 'Support of Preston Strikes', from 'A WORKING MAN', Hanley, *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 28 January 1854, p.2.

printed papers of the financial statement of the Stockport strike' shortly before the Preston dispute, for which he reprimanded them.[20] Even the figures were read aloud: 'Those who were unable to read would get others to search the sheet for them', perhaps for a mention of their own contribution, and it was common to see 'a knot of factory operatives eagerly surrounding some one who read over to them the items in the balance-sheets of the week.'[21] Dickens also noted this communal reading.[22] Such activity must have evoked an atmosphere similar to that of the weekly mass meetings, reassuring the workers that others around the country cared about their fight, that they were not forgotten, and that the money would help families to survive. The humour of the nicknames and threats, and the feeling behind the verses, would have roused emotions in the crowds of readers and listeners.

The balance sheets are evidence of widespread national support for the Preston workers, mainly from other members of their class, but with some middle-class support too. The rhetoric of their columns of figures, of income and expenditure, argues for openness, honesty and transparency. They demonstrate that working-class union delegates could efficiently and responsibly administer and account for huge sums of money. Such interpretations were occasionally seen, in grudging terms, in newspaper commentary, but opponents of the workers drew many other messages from the balance sheets.

The sheets were used to demonstrate threats, conspiracy, fraud and high wages, and to minutely track the support for the workers. Commentators focused on the threats, these 'fearful instances of intimidation' (*Kendal Mercury*) as the most negative aspect of 'these filthy documents', as the *Inverness Courier* described them.[23] As in the first decades of the century, balance sheets were used as evidence of conspiracy: in March 1854, Robert Ashcroft, town clerk and solicitor for the Masters' Association, claimed that 'illegal transactions' were recorded in the spinners' weekly sheet, recording money spent 'for removing certain parties', showing that there had been a conspiracy to prevent imported 'knobsticks' from working in the Preston mills.[24] In November 1853 the *Manchester Times* claimed to have found a £250 discrepancy in the amounts collected and the amounts distributed (working from a report in the *Preston Guardian*, rather than the balance sheets themselves).[25] This had little impact, unlike a similar claim the following month by the *Manchester Guardian*, that a quarter of all money collected went to 'chairmen, committees, secretaries and delegates' rather than locked-out workers.[26] The claims were repeated by other newspapers, and 'reprinted and placarded over the walls of this town and district' by the masters, according to the *Preston Guardian,* which proceeded to defend the operatives' accounting and demolish its Manchester namesake's allegations,

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[20] Ashworth, *The Preston Strike* 14.
[21] Lowe, 'An Account', 250.
[22] Dickens, 'On Strike', 557.
[23] 'The Lancashire Strikes' [from a Manchester correspondent], *Inverness Courier,* 15 December 1853; *Kendal Mercury,* 24 December 1853; see also 'The Philosophy of Strikes, No, III', *Morning Chronicle,* 24 January 1854, quoting *Manchester Guardian.*
[24] 'The Preston Strike', *Weekly Dispatch,* 26 March 1854.
[25] 30 November 1853.
[26] 'The Preston Strike – How does the money go?' *Manchester Guardian,* 17 December 1853.

item by item.[27] Such claims threatened the workers' whole support system, so were vigorously rebutted by union leaders from the platform, in subsequent balance sheets, and in private meetings between Cowell and Grimshaw and the Manchester editors. Grimshaw told the 24 December mass meeting that he and Cowell 'had tackled the editors of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Examiner* and *Times* in their offices, and had proved to them that their statements were not correct, and they said that they would correct them.'[28] The instinctive anti-union attitude of most newspapers shows why the unions felt the need to produce their own publications.

Perhaps the most ingenious interpretation of the balance sheets was that of *Eliza Cook's Journal,* in a leader possibly written by Samuel Smiles of *Self-Help* fame:[29]

> The vast sums subscribed by the working classes towards the support of their fellow-workers of Preston who are "out on strike," sufficiently prove their ability to lay by a large amount of savings annually … The largeness of the subscription proves that the working people of Lancashire are a wealthy class. We do not know of any class in any district of similar extent voluntarily subscribing £3,000 weekly to any cause.[30]

When newspapers could find nothing to criticise, they analysed the balance sheets in great detail, combining data from the different unions to summarise or tabulate the figures, create running totals and track trends week by week, drawing conclusions about the strength of support, numbers out of work and levels of strike pay.[31]

Typical contents of a Preston balance sheet

Most of the Preston balance sheets followed a similar format: a long title, usually including the name of the union, the number of the report and week of the strike (for example, '24th report and 25th week of the strike of the Preston power loom weavers, &c'), an epigram or snatch of verse, opening address in prose, then columns of names and amounts given, interspersed with verse, threats and praise, and summaries of income and expenditure.

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[27] 'Where the money does go – the operatives and their balance sheets', *Preston Guardian* (hereafter *PG*) 24 December 1853.
[28] Reports of mass meeting, *PG* 31 December 1853, *Preston Chronicle* (hereafter *PC*), 31 December 1853.
[29] J.E. Johnston, '*Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-54)', in *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*, ed. L. Brake and M. Demoor (London, 2010).
[30] 'How and Why Working Men Ought to Economize', *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 18 February 1854.
[31] For examples of nineteenth-century data journalism see *Durham County Advertiser*, 23 December 1853; *Sun,* 17 April 1854; *Northern Daily Times,* 2 January 1854.

Verse and quotations

Verse was used to stir emotion and, alongside literary quotations, to establish cultural capital. Taking the balance sheet of public and trades moneys for the week ending 19 February 1854 as a typical example, its sub-heading addresses its readers, 'To the working classes of the United Kingdom', followed by nine lines from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816), Canto III Stanza 84. The verse tells the reader that right will prevail, despite setbacks. The *17th report and 18th week of the Preston card-room "lock-out"* has six stanzas of verse with a similar message, 'Look up, ye toiling millions!' The poem is anonymous here, but was written by the widely published Chartist poet J.W. King and first appeared in a penny Chartist magazine, *Cooper's Journal*, in 1850.[32] The public and trades' moneys sheet for the week ending 5 February 1854 begins with six lines from Robert Burns, including 'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men', applied in the prose below to a failed attempt by three police agents provocateurs to start a riot.

These epigraphs enlist the poetic power and cultural capital of famous poets in the cause of the Preston workers, aiming to stir emotions and demonstrate intellectual worth. Some balance sheets also included verse in the body of their financial records, sandwiched between the district-by-district lists of contributions. We know where these lines were written, but not who wrote them – it may have been the local committee man who put his district's report together, or perhaps some poems were handed to collectors instead of, or in addition to, cash. Verse appeared in 14 of the 40 balance sheets examined: in six weavers' sheets, four published by the Preston amalgamated committee, one by the Blackburn committee, and one from the card-room operatives (the publishers of two sheets are unknown), with lower-paid occupations strongly represented.[33] What the poems lack in skill they make up for in feeling, often expressing hope and solidarity. These encouraging lines from an undated, untitled balance sheet in one of the scrapbooks must have been handed to a collector along with the money:

> A friend in need is a friend indeed,
> I hope all lock-outs will succeed –
> There's £1. 2s amongst the rest, --
> I hope all hands will do their best.

These lines from Church near Accrington were written when that district's ten per cent rise was withdrawn in February 1854:

> The sun will shine upon us again
> If we do not relent;

[32] *Cooper's Journal,* 1 June 1850, p.345.
[33] Workers from many different occupations used song and verse during the dispute: songs by self-acting minders, throstle spinner and doffers, and weavers, are mentioned in an article on 'The Songs and Poetry of the Preston Turnouts' by J.B. Horsfall in his *Factory Operatives' Guide,* 5 November 1853, Banks scrapbook, LA DDPr 138/87b (1).

They have taken away, this very day,
The advance of Ten per cent.

Cheer up, ye Church Parish lads,
And hear, ye bonny lasses,
And do not daunted be,--
But come, and bring your brasses.[34]

J.B. Horsfall of Royton, secretary of the power-loom weavers' union, sometimes contributed poetry to the balance sheets he printed, such as the one in the power-loom weavers' report of 19 October 1853 which included the lines:

You were never made for slaves,
To work and die for Preston Knaves;
No! God forbids that you should toil,
For those who desecrate the soil.

Opening address/leading article

The opening address or leading article expressed solidarity, gave updates on the dispute, and replied to attacks from the masters and the newspapers that supported them. Its language mixed Chartist economic analysis with political economy. This section usually followed the epigraph, and was anything from 100 to 3,000 words, beginning with an inclusive greeting such as 'Brethren', 'Friends and fellow operatives', or 'To the industrial community of the United Kingdom'. Occasionally, women were explicitly included, as in 'Brother and Sister Workers' (from a balance sheet of the card-room committee). After the greeting, this prose article typically thanked those who had contributed, gave an assessment of where the dispute stood, urged the Preston workers to continue their struggle and others to continue their support, and commended or condemned press comment, as appropriate.

The balance sheets of the public and trades' moneys, published by the amalgamated committee, tended to have the longest opening addresses. The report for the week ending 19 February 1854 is not unusual, with its 3,000-word address taking up one and a half columns. The writer expresses 'unbounded gratitude' to the Trades' Societies of the United Kingdom for their contributions, which have enabled the 'brave men

[34] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), *24th report and 25th week of the strike of the Preston power loom weavers, &c'* dated 9 February 1854, in scrapbook 2.

and women of Preston' to continue the strike even after the masters reopened the mills, and despite 'the machinations of their oppressors'. Most of the rest of this extended article consists of excerpts from, and comments on, recent newspaper articles in the *Times, Liverpool Mail, Preston Chronicle* and *Leader*. This was typical of the amalgamated committee balance sheets, but none of the others referred to newspapers or periodicals. A 2,000-word leading article from the Chartist *Liverpool Mail* is quoted in full, with its praise of the Preston operatives, its comparison of the dispute with that between the 'commons' and 'burghers' of ancient Rome, and its criticism of Bright, Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League who 'gulled their workpeople with their lying promises'. The *Preston Chronicle* is mocked for its condemnation of the unions' financial support for families emigrating in search of work, and its warning that the masters were soon to import other workers to take their place. It reprints a report from the *Leader* that factory operatives from Lancashire and Yorkshire were being rejected by the army because their unhealthy work had made them 'too stunted or too sickly to be fit for service'. The writer ends by demanding 'a small share of the wealth created by our hands, to the production of which our own good conduct and hard work have so essentially tended.' The amalgamated committee balance sheets such as this were particularly well written.

These articles use emotive language, attempting to re-create in print the atmosphere of the mass meeting. For those who did not physically feel part of a community by attending a mass meeting, they created? An imagined community.[35] In the 19 February balance sheet, for example, feeling words abound: 'intense satisfaction … the feeling is so profound… proud …unbounded gratitude … unlimited gratitude … unlimited happiness … no ordinary degree of pleasure … the most joyous hopes'. The writer hoped to stir similar feelings in the reader. The rhetoric of these addresses is similar to that of the speeches at the weekly public meetings, presumably because they were written by the strike leaders. The same phrases sometimes appear almost word for word, for example the Power-Loom Weavers' report dated 19 October 1853 says of the masters that 'their aim and object is to split up the Operatives into factions'. This wording is used by a leader of the same union, former Chartist Edward Swinglehurst, at a mass meeting in the Orchard on 20 October.[36] George Cowell and many other leaders were Chartists, explaining the frequency of Chartists ideas and language in the balance sheets.[37] The third report and fourth week of the Preston Card Room Strike uses the phrase, 'Labour is everywhere enslaved by Capital', echoing a front page article by latter-day Chartist George Reynolds in *Reynolds's Newspaper* six months earlier.[38]

The language is often melodramatic, pitting the 'tyrant' masters against the 'noble' and long-suffering workers, or comparing factory workers to slaves. Biblical quotations also appear, as in the call, 'To your Tents. Oh! Ye Sons and Daughters of Israel' (from 1 Kings 12:16), to Preston's card-room operatives in

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[35] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006).
[36] *Daily News* 22 October 1853, p6.
[37] Dutton and King, *'Ten per Cent'*, 47, 52–55.
[38] 'The overworked and underpaid', 17 April 1853. Reynolds organised subscriptions for the Preston workers in London, and published details of subscribers, subscriptions and reports of London delegates' meetings: Dutton and King, *'Ten Per Cent',* 170.

April 1854.[39] The Preston workers are often compared to slaves (Irish strike-breakers too were called 'white slaves'), and the mill owners to slave-drivers, eager to force operatives into 'a state of subjection known only in the slave states', for example. The masters are mocked as 'the Legree Brothers', a reference to the character of Simon Legree, brutal slave owner and chief villain of the hugely popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in England 1852. However, the motif of slavery had been widely used in criticisms of the factory system for decades before *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* appearing regularly in the *Northern Star* in the 1830s and 1840s, for example.[40] Newspaper reports on the dispute by Karl Marx adopt similar language.[41] Despite this confrontational language of class warfare, most balance sheets were simply asking for a restoration of wages in the mills of one town.

While the language of political economy is occasionally used, the moral economy dominates. The two discourses sometimes sit side by side in the same leading article, as in a weavers' balance sheet from February 1854. There are the 'proud and haughty Millowners of Preston' from whom the workers demand 'liberty and our rightful ten per cent … ye struggling soldiers of labour's rights'. But emigration is promoted according to the logic of political economy, as 'one of the safest and surest means of thinning the labour market …'[42]

Names and sums

After the opening address comes the heart of these documents, long lists of organisations and individuals and the amounts they contributed. It might seem far-fetched to claim that these lists too have their rhetoric and persuasive power, but it is difficult to read them without concluding that the Preston turn-outs had strong and widespread support, that other workers believed in the rightness of their cause enough to make significant sacrifices week after week, and that there was a mood of confidence and determination, but also an atmosphere of humour and warmth. That humour could also be used in cruel, threatening and misogynistic ways, to enforce compliance.

The balance sheets are usually divided into geographical sections, beginning with Preston itself, sub-divided into districts, listing workplaces, unions, pubs and individuals, followed by other Lancashire towns, then places further afield. They can be read as a proud roll call of solidarity, with the balance sheets of

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[39] LA DDPr 138/87b (3), *Thirty-third report and thirty-fourth week of the Preston Card-Room Lock-out,* April 1854.
[40] The front-page letter from Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor in the 15 March 1851 issue is addressed 'To the enslaved and impoverished millions'.
[41] G. Stedman Jones, 'Some Notes on Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement', *History Workshop Journal* 18:1 (1984), 124.
[42] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), *23rd report and 24th week of the strike of the Preston power loom weavers, &c* 2 February 1854, see also P.A. Pickering and A. Tyrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Leicester, 2000), 143; G. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in *Languages of Class* (Cambridge, 1984), 166; G. Stedman Jones, 'Some Notes on Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement', *History Workshop Journal* 18:1 (1984): 136, f.n.5.

donations from trades outside the cotton industry and from the public in particular drawing from across Britain and even Germany (coachbuilders 'Neurfundenan Wagenbauer' contributed 4 shillings and threepence).[43] In one sheet there are donations from the tailors' societies of Stafford and Crewe, the coopers (barrel makers) of Gloucester and Bristol, iron wire drawers of Birmingham, Wolverhampton bricklayers, shipwrights of Blythe, moulders of Wakefield and shoemakers of St Edmunds.[44] Some workers may have risked dismissal and other forms of victimisation for publicly contributing.

Pubs are listed with amounts collected in each place. In Ramsbottom there were contributions from the Shoulder of Mutton, the Woodman Inn and the Railway Hotel. Individual names are in the minority, perhaps partly for reasons of space, but perhaps also to avoid victimisation. There are probably more pseudonyms and nicknames, many of them richly allusive. One can imagine the subscription sheet being passed around a workshop or pub, with contributors drawing on in-jokes for inspiration, or replying through their nickname to another higher up the list. The names in Table 2 give a flavour, alluding to the violent comic character of Punch, giving encouragement, referring to local and regional foods or to popular culture such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Dickens's serial publication, *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

Table 2. Some nicknames from balance sheets

Old Punch's Carriage, 6/4
Captain and mate, 4/6
We wish you luck, 9d
New Punch's carriage, 5/5
The contest is nearly won, 1/-
Black Puddings, 6d
Napoleon's gang, 11/-
Nobody, 4s
Punch [twice], 6s each
Naples, 8d
Persevere, Humphrey's Clock, 1s each
the downfall of tyrants, 6d
Hammer and Stone, 2s
X, 2/6
Black Tiger, 2s
Jacket without laps
Win the day, 5s
Paganini, 1s
Prime Jug, 1s
Uncle Tom's Cabin, 6d

There are few women's names in the lists, the exceptions probably being businesswomen such as shopkeepers, market traders and pub landladies. Two names could possibly refer to Black people, or perhaps merely to dark complexions: 'Sambo, striker', who contributes a shilling; he comes after 'J Banister,

[43] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), *Preston Lock-Out. -- Balance Sheet of Public and Trades' Moneys*, 25 December 1853.
[44] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), undated balance sheet of amalgamated committee.

drummer', and before Allsops and Watson's Foundry, in a list of Preston contributors. His job suggests he works in a foundry.[45] The second possible Black person is threatened for not paying, in an unnamed balance sheet quoted by James Lowe: 'If that niger [original spelling] in Uncle Tom's Cabin does not pay up, Punch says he will tell what he saw him do one night.'[46] Uncle Tom's Cabin may have been a pub, or the nickname for a workplace.

The figures of pounds, shillings and pence were deeply meaningful, even emotive. Dickens noted how, at the delegates' meeting in Preston, 'one man was raised to enthusiasm by his pride in bringing so much; another man was ashamed and depressed because he brought so little'.[47] Readers may have had similar feelings at reading how much or how little their workplace or town had given. James Lowe concluded that the transparency of the balance sheets made them reliable guides to income and expenditure: 'all sums of money (however small) contributed to the funds were duly acknowledged in the balance-sheets. If they had not been, discovery must have been immediate and fatal.'[48] Frequent corrections and clarifications reveal an anxiety to be trusted with other people's money.

Threats, shaming and intimidation

Threats of violence and humiliating insults (sometimes misogynistic) against those who did not contribute are some of the least savoury but most fascinating elements of the balance sheets. A significant minority of balance sheets contain clear threats of violence to workers of both sexes, yet I have found no record of any prosecutions for these threats. There were, however, occasional convictions (x-ref to Darwen) for intimidation by collectors, who would have written threats such as those below in their district reports, collated into weekly balance sheets:[49]

> If those tenters and creelers at Crossfield Mill do not pay to their trade, Punch will say something about the rum bottle, and likewise Barney the lap-machine minder, Punch will bring him a box to show his monkey in.

[45] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), undated balance sheet of amalgamated committee.
[46] Lowe, 'An Account', 253; this word was understood to be insulting; in 1853 Carlyle purposely changed the title of his pamphlet 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' to a more offensive title to annoy liberals: S. Heffer, *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1996), 275.
[47] Dickens, 'On Strike', 557.
[48] Lowe, 'An Account', 250.
[49] Dutton and King, *'Ten per Cent'*, 64.

> If those rovers and slubbers at Wensley Fold do not pay up to their trade, and take less rum, &c, we shall tell punch about their bustles and dirty faces. Three cheers for the cock loft and the two drawers.[50]

The figure of Punch appeared often in such threats, perhaps an allusion to the violent puppet Mr Punch, who often used his stick against his wife Judy.[51] Ten of 40 balance sheets include threats, including those published by the weavers, their overlookers, the amalgamated committee, card-room operatives and tape machine sizers; there are no threats in the two spinners' sheets nor the carding and spinning overlookers' one sheet. The spinners were a more conservative, 'respectable' union.[52]

The emotional power of verse, and humour and ridicule, were harnessed to these threats, with misogyny evident in those against women. There were obscure in-jokes, mixing humour with threat:

> If William Townson would spend less money in drinking, carding, dog and cock fighting, Punch thinks he might pay something to the Preston lock-outs.
> If that young spark, Ben D., that works at Baxter's Mill, does not pay to his trade, Punch will tell him about eating that rhubarb pudding that was boiled in a dirty night cap.
> If Roger does not pay, Punch will tell about her robbing the donkey of its breakfast to stuff her bustle with.

Bustles often featured in the threats against women. These crude, personal threats were probably based on in-jokes, teasing and misogynistic 'banter' in the workplace, from both men and women, perhaps offering a glimpse of the working atmosphere of the cotton mill. It could be argued that the language used in these threats, along with the nicknames, are better guides to working-class language than dialect poetry, which has been criticised for its 'tenuous relationship to the actual speech of its writers'.[53] Anti-union critics highlighted the sexual nature of some threats: the *Inverness Courier* explained that, 'should some poor female decline to give her weekly sixpence per loom to the fund, she is assailed under a well known *sobriquet* in their report, and hints are thrown out that her private life, &c., will be exposed.'[54] In contrast, threats against men were more likely to be violent or humiliating in a non-sexual way. In the 1860 Colne dispute, some workers became uneasy with 'indecent' threats to girls and women in their balance sheets, but there is no

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[50] *17th Report & 18th Week of the Preston Card-Room "Lock-Out."* For more examples, see Ashworth, *The Preston Strike*, 45–46.
[51] R. Crone, 'Mr and Mrs Punch in Nineteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal* 49:4 (2006), 1055–82.
[52] Marsh, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, 4: Cotton, wool etc: 2.
[53] L. McCauley, '"Eawr Folk": Language, Class, and English Identity in Victorian Dialect Poetry', *Victorian Poetry* 39:2 (2001), 287 McCauley argues that this poetry is a better guide to the values than the vocabulary of working-class speakers.
[54] 'The Lancashire Strikes' [from a Manchester correspondent], 15 December 1853.

evidence of this feeling in the Preston dispute.[55] It is surprising that women were the targets of only a minority of the threats, despite being the majority of the strikers/locked-out workers.

Lowe believed that 'towards the close of the agitation' the threats 'altogether disappeared from the sheets'[56]. The surviving balance sheets give some support to this claim: there are no threats in the six published in April and May, the last months of the strike – but neither are there any in the five from the start of the strike, October and November. Between a third and a half of the surviving sheets from December to March include threats.

A successful dispute needs discipline, through social pressure or more violent methods (see Darwen in this volume). The intimidation in the balance sheets bears comparison with the tactics of the masters, who went beyond threats to use property law, sympathetic magistrates and the sanctioned violence of the police and military, together with their power to throw employees out of work. Workers had little legal protection, especially when they combined together, so it is not surprising that they devised their own ways of enforcing union discipline. In Preston, where many older working-class men still had the vote, employers could apply 'the screw' at election time in the years before the secret ballot, obliging workers to vote for the employers' preferred candidate or lose their jobs. Some tried to insist on 'the document', a written promise not to join a union, as a condition of employment. During the dispute, employers inflicted collective punishment, such as fining men who had returned to work if their adult children did not also return.[57] Employers outside the dispute used economic intimidation to discourage financial support for the Preston workers, such as a Todmorden employer who 'threatens to run short time if his weavers pay anything to the Ten per cent movements', according to an apologetic explanation in the Todmorden section of the weavers' balance sheet in Figure 1.[58]

Conclusions

The balance sheets of the Preston lock-out and strike are valuable historical documents. They tell us of the widespread support for the Preston workers, explaining how they could survive for 38 weeks without work, of the efficiency of the unions' organisation and the rhetoric of the leaders, repeated at mass meetings.

They also demonstrate the types of power at play: the numerical power of organised labour, financial power, the surprisingly effective rhetorics of financial transparency and peaceful conduct, and the cultural weight of well chosen words and neatly arranged numbers. Workers' 'overwhelming power when acting unitedly' to withdraw their labour, backed by enough money to support thousands of families through 38

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[55] Report of Accrington meeting in support of Colne strikers, *Blackburn Times* 1 September 1860.
[56] Lowe, 'An Account', 253.
[57] LA DDPr 138 87b (2), *Preston Lock-out. Balance sheet of public and trades' moneys*, 12 February 1854.
[58] LA DDHS 75 11 bill posters,*16th report and 17th week of the strike of the Preston power-loom weavers*.

weeks of unemployment, were the two most important factors.[59] The income and expenditure recorded in the balance sheets make this clear. Ultimately, the masters' superior financial power and ability to cut wages in other towns and thereby reduce the amount of money sent to Preston proved the most powerful factor of all. Transparency and respectability were both types of moral power, presenting the workers in a good light, winning sympathy and helping them to raise funds beyond the labour movement.

The openness of the union balance sheets contrasts with earlier images of unions as (necessarily) secret societies, and with the secrecy of the masters' association and its finances (no records for the Master Spinners' and Manufacturers' Defence Fund survive). Even Ashworth, the leading apologist for the mill owners, struggled to explain why the masters' 'combination' did not break the natural laws of the market, and why their activities were so hidden. According to Ashworth, 'the names of the recipients , as well as the names of the contributors, and the amount of their respective contributions, were never made known even to the contributors'.[60] The reasonableness of the workers' demands and the language in which they were expressed, and the constant calls for good behaviour, all seen in the balance sheets, provided another type of moral force. More practically, it was wise to stress the higher law of the moral economy when faced with the constant threat of military force. Most Preston workers would remember how four of their number were shot down in the street by the militia during a riot in 1842.

The balance sheets demonstrated working-class ability. They were read avidly by the employers and by influential journalists around the country. They were harder to dismiss than other types of print culture associated with the strike and lock-out, such as the low-status street ballads. Dickens and Lowe could mock the accents and names of the union delegates in their *Household Words* articles, but the leading articles and columns of figures in the balance sheets spoke without an accent, and claimed cultural equality with the masters. They demonstrated honesty and economic competence, organisational skills and high levels of literacy and numeracy, undercutting the masters' claims of economically illiterate and ungovernable workers.

What makes this print genre so distinctive is its ability, 170 years later, to convey the atmosphere and emotions of the Preston lock-out. The balance sheets are full of righteous indignation, anger, bitterness, empathy, pride, shame and hints of the fear and worry that must have been widespread over food, rent and future employment.[61] They capture the atmosphere of the mills, streets and pubs where Preston cotton workers came together. The humour in the nicknames, the praise and the threats, although heavily mediated, still carries some traces of ordinary Lancashire mill workers' voices.

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[59] W.P. Roberts, the 'miners' advocate', in the *Flint Glassmakers Magazine*, October 1851, cited in B.P. Webb and S. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1973), 183.
[60] Ashworth, *The Preston Strike*, 60. In fact, contributors to the masters' defence fund were promised that 'information will be privately afforded as to the measures which have been adopted by the committee, and which cannot otherwise be conveyed' (Advertisement in *PC*, 15 April 1854).
[61] For emotion, see also Lowe, 'An Account', 253.