1. Summary

The project sought to re-examine established views on the role of towns in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century industrialization. There were five main objectives: to carry out analysis of the occupational structure of Midlands towns; to establish a taxonomy of urban centre; to use case studies of urban industrial communities to chart their economic, social and morphological development; to investigate the relationship between internal and external factors in shaping urban industrial development; and to place the urban industrial development of the region within national and European contexts.

The first element of the project used information drawn principally from trade directories to compile occupational data sets of about 100 towns in the Midlands. This database contains approximately 150,000 entries and was used to identify the economic profile of each town. The second part involved detailed case studies of particular towns. Contrasts were drawn between places that emerged as urban centres during the period of industrialisation, established towns that failed to develop significant industrial functions but remained important as service centres, and those that were already important centres of trade but acquired significant manufacturing sectors during the period.

The regional survey revealed significant variations in urban and industrial development across the Midlands, confirming patterns found in other parts of Britain. Overall, the typology was felt to be an appropriate and a useful way of analysing urban economic and demographic regimes in the region, although the position of individual towns within the taxonomy could shift through time. These data also highlighted the lag between urban-industrial growth and development of the service sector. The case studies shed light on the dynamic relationship of internal and external factors in urban industrial development. In terms of internal factors, elites were significant in shaping local economic change, and cultural developments offered an alternative and complement to industrial growth, and also helped give identity to towns. External factors incorporated transport improvements, the development of trading networks, and local service links. Access to capital was frequently organised through local or hinterlands networks with extra-regional and national networking being less important. External relationships were shaped by competition between urban centres, and were dynamic rather than fixed.

The overall significance of this work for urban and economic history is four-fold. First, the survey of economic and population growth offers a reconceptualisation of towns as part of networks embracing both hinterlands and other towns. Second, in providing insight into the development of several towns, it has demonstrated the existence of common factors that appear important in shaping urban and industrial
growth in all towns: namely, elite groups, cultural and political institutions, service functions, and external linkages. Third, the project as a whole provides a framework for parallel studies of regional networks and economies elsewhere in Britain and Europe. Finally, a major data-base has been created, with controlled public access.

A collection of conference papers was published as J. Stobart and P. Lane eds. (2000) *Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, 1700-1840*. A major book, *Towns, Industries and Regions: urban and industrial change c1700-1840*, edited by J. Stobart, P. Lane and N. Raven will be published by Manchester University Press in 2002. This will link findings from the project with wider debates of industrialisation, urbanisation and regional development in Britain and Europe.
2. Detailed report

(a) The grant:

Duration of the project: 01/11/1998 – 06/07/2001

Research Director: Professor Peter Clark (University of Leicester)

Project Team: Dr. Neil Raven (University of Derby)  
Dr. Leonard Schwarz (University of Birmingham)  
Dr. Jon Stobart (Coventry University)  
Dr. Barrie Trinder (University College Northampton)

Research Associate: Dr. Penelope Lane (University of Leicester) - until 31/07/00  
Dr. Andrew Hann (University of Leicester) - from 09/10/00

Computer officer: Dr. Richard Goddard (University of Leicester) – until 31/12/99  
Mr. Tristram Hooley (University of Leicester) – from 22/01/00

The project had an overall budget of £70,270. Research activity was centred at the University of Leicester, where the research associate and computer officer were based. The former was employed full-time on the project, whereas the latter worked for one day per week. The project director, Prof. Peter Clark, was partly based at the University of Leicester and partly at the University of Helsinki (during the second half of the project); other team members were based at universities throughout the Midlands region. All members attended regular six-weekly meetings in Leicester to co-ordinate the research.

(b) Objectives:

The project sought to examine established views on the role of towns in the process of industrialization during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through exploring the linkages between urbanization and wider economic change. This involved studying of the Midlands as a regional urban system, examining how the experience of towns here differed at a sub-regional and local level, with the aim of moving away from traditional dichotomies between ‘old’ slow growth and ‘new’ dynamic centres, towards a new understanding of the complex range of urban economic activity.

There were five overall objectives. Firstly, to carry out a basic analysis of the occupational structure of Midland towns using trade directory data. Secondly, to establish a taxonomy of different types of urban centre through the profiling of occupations. Thirdly, to use case studies of different types of urban industrial community to chart their economic, social and morphological development. Fourthly, to investigate the relationship between internal and external factors in driving forward urban industrial development both in particular towns and over the region as a whole. And finally, to place the urban industrial development of the Midlands region within a wider national and European context.
(c) Research activity:

The project used information drawn principally from trade directories to compile large-scale occupational datasets of around 100 towns in the Midlands region, stored on a relational database. This database contains approximately 150,000 entries, about a third inherited from the earlier National Small Towns Project also based at Leicester, the remainder generated by the current project. Although the database includes some earlier directories and other sources such as parish registers and poll books, the bulk of the data comes from late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century directories. The first research task was the restructuring of the Small Town Project data to create a highly efficient and easily manipulated database. Additional entries were then added to complete the coverage of Midland towns. This new material was primarily for larger centres, and for the counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, which were poorly covered in the existing database. Occupations were coded according to the Booth-Armstrong classification scheme, and the data then analysed to identify the occupational profile of each town. Problems encountered were associated primarily with the different layout of the directories used.

The second part of the project involved detailed case studies of particular towns. Here contrasts were drawn between places such as Burslem (Stobart) and West Bromwich (Trinder) that emerged as urban centres during the period of industrialisation, more established towns like Lichfield (Schwarz) which failed to develop significant industrial functions but remained important as service centres, and those such as Loughborough (Clark) and Hinckley (Lane) which were already important centres of trade but acquired significant manufacturing sectors during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

(d) Conclusions and achievements:

Using the occupational database, along with demographic and other evidence for about 100 Midland towns the project produced a form of urban profiling. This enabled us to test the preliminary five-fold typology of industrial towns proposed in the application, which we found broadly applicable, but with significant variations in the region. Thus the county towns with industrial specialisms were largely limited to the east Midlands and south-west Midlands, the established market towns with industrial functions to parts of the east Midlands and south-west Midlands, the ab initio industrial towns and urban satellite towns to the central- and north-west Midlands, and the slow growth established towns with little industrial growth to the east Midlands and peripheral west Midlands. Such sub-regional variations appear to confirm patterns found in other parts of Britain including NW England and probably the South East. Overall, the typology was felt to be an appropriate and a useful way of conceptualizing the nature of urban economic and demographic regimes in the Midlands, although the position of a town within the taxonomy could shift through time.

The regional database was also used to shed light on the significant growth of the region’s urban business community during the period under investigation. On average the number of businesses recorded increased by a factor of three between 1790 and 1840. Throughout the period manufacturing was the largest business activity,
followed by dealing. Manufacturing concerns were found in all areas of the region, but with considerable variations between towns in the proportion of businesses involved in manufacturing - from 20% in some centres to over 50% in others. Towns with high levels of manufacturing activity were closely linked to industrial specialisms. In the case of the service sector (notably retailing), development lagged behind urban growth, although almost all towns were probably better served in the 1840s than the 1790s. The relationship between service provision and population growth was not simple, but was also influenced by the extent of the hinterland and long-standing network connections as well as by the proximity of competing towns.

Other light was shed on the complex, dynamic relationship of ‘internalities’ and ‘externalities’ in urban industrial development in the region through the case studies. For the role of elites, work on Loughborough showed the activity of the town feoffees in infrastructural investment and industrial innovation. In Burslem elite groups were important in shaping both urban and industrial development, drawing on traditional family and community resources to sustain their businesses and nurture cultural and political development. Other work (e.g. for Hinckley) showed how businessmen looked more to friends than family for networking support. At the same time, all studies found that the elite role depended heavily on other developments including the diversification of the local economy and regional transport advances.

The significance of cultural developments was illuminated by the Lichfield study that showed the town's growth as a leisure centre with the cathedral and its chapter playing a vital part in shaping the fortunes of the town. Rather than the industrial sector being crowded out by leisure growth, the latter enabled the town to compensate for the loss of its manufacturing sector, although this equilibrium was only temporary, being undermined by regional transport changes by the early nineteenth century. In other places, however, there was evidence that cultural developments (the spread of associations, theatres, libraries), though lagging behind manufacturing growth, helped to underpin economic activity and urban standing in the region.

The significance of internalities is particularly difficult to pin down in the case of the embryonic industrialising centres such as West Bromwich. Work here examined the influence of the parish enclosure act and street improvement through West Bromwich as part of the Holyhead Road project, as well as the growth and location of retailing and professional facilities along the road. The concentration of these functions is what distinguished West Bromwich from neighbouring industrial settlements with fewer pretensions to urban status, underlining the need to distinguish urban from population growth in analyses of industrialisation.

Virtually all the case studies showed the complex interaction of internal and external factors in shaping urban and industrial growth. Externalities incorporated both transport improvements (the Trent and Mersey Canal for Burslem, the Trent navigation at Loughborough, road improvement for West Bromwich) and the development of trading networks and local service and retail links with a rural or quasi-urban hinterland. Access to capital was frequently organised through local or hinterland networks. In general the emphasis was on local hinterland and intra-regional relationships rather than inter-regional or national ones, at least until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. External relationships were strongly shaped
by competition between urban centres, and were often fluid and dynamic rather than fixed.

Taken as a whole, this work has added much to our knowledge and understanding of urban and industrial growth in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. New settlements were growing rapidly in population, but only slowly acquiring the trappings of urbanity, whilst long established towns often retained a wider range of urban functions despite their relatively slow population growth. These patterns appear to have been perpetuated by the social, business and infrastructural activities promoted by the local elites.

The overall significance of this work for urban and economic history can be seen as threefold. First, the systematic survey of economic and population growth provides a broad picture of how development in one place was linked to that elsewhere. This conceptualisation of towns as part of real and interacting networks incorporating both hinterlands and other towns indicates the need for more recognition of the spatial and relational contexts in which growth or decline might occur. Second, in providing detailed insight into the development of a number of towns, it has demonstrated the existence of several common factors that appear to be important in shaping urban and industrial growth in all towns. The significance of elite groups, cultural and political institutions, service functions, and external relationships and linkages can thus be tested in other towns and other regions. Third, and linking to both of the above, the project as a whole provides an invaluable framework for further analyses. These may comprise parallel studies of regional networks and economies elsewhere in the country or detailed studies of individual towns in the Midlands. The European parallels and contexts for the project will be explored in the forthcoming book.

(e) Publications and dissemination:

A first conference entitled “Trades, towns and regions” was held on 30th October 1999 to disseminate initial findings of the research. Papers were given by members of the project team and outside speakers on topics linked to the project. These papers were published in J. Stobart & P. Lane eds. (2000) Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, 1700-1840, Centre for Urban History series, Leicester. The second conference planned for November 2000 on national and international perspectives had to be abandoned because of the national railway fiasco.

A major book, Towns, Industries and Regions: urban and industrial change c1700-1840, edited by J. Stobart, P. Lane and N. Raven is now under contract with Manchester University Press and is at advanced stage of preparation for publication in 2002. This book will disseminate information and findings from the project in wider debates of industrialisation, urbanisation and regional development. It will also link developments in the Midlands to those in other industrializing regions in Britain and Europe.

Datasets from the project will be available on a controlled basis to interested scholars via CD-Rom.
(f) Future research plans in this field

As *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* has demonstrated, urban industrial development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remains a vital subject for new research. Because of the complexity and scale of the data further collaborative projects are essential for progress in this area. Regrettably, UK funding for this kind of research is usually short-term and piecemeal. Members of the project will continue individual research in the area.

(g) Key words

urban, industry, occupations, directories, Midlands