

WALKING ROUND THE

# TOWN

Manchester inside and out, old and new. Some stories.

Whenever I walk around Manchester and see the changes, I wonder what it was like way back when, what it will be like in the future. The curiosity never fades.

Bear baiting and cock fighting at Shudehill. Thronging 19th and 20th century crowds at Smithfield Market, historic buildings revitalised and repurposed. New buildings designed to do battle with climate change. Dying Manchester stores metamorphing into dramatic living spaces.

Any city can only be viewed by looking back, any city can only be successful by looking forward. Here are just a handful of stories of both.

**The Northern Quarter's First Café Bar?**

**Carver's Warehouse. Manchester history in Yorkshire Stone.**

**Smithfield Buildings. New generation. New Imagination.**

**NQ to NY.**

**Smithfield Market. Saturday Nights in the Northern Quarter.**

**BDP. Ducie Street Greenhouse.**

# The Northern Quarter's First Café Bar?

It's hard to imagine, but three or four hundred years ago Withy Grove to Shudehill was an area of fields and hedges, with a stream flowing down to the confluence of the Irwell and the Irk at Hanging Ditch, where Manchester Cathedral stands. (And the lost river Dene, hence the name Deansgate.) It was a snake of small buildings and cottages, following the stream's course from Hanging Ditch, through Withy Grove and up Shudehill. 'Hedgerows bounded the lane,' records state.

Although where the name Shudehill comes from is not clear, Withy Grove derives its name from the willows that grew on the marshy stream banks. Willows were known as 'withins.' Willows which were used to build, using clay 'daubed' between them. This became Withingreave, then Withy Grove. There was developer trouble even in those days it seems, with a byelaw passed stating that there should be no 'daub or clay' onto Shudehill, with a special officer standing guard. A fine of 'three shillings and four pence' was levied on one transgressor in 1597.

The history books show that towards the end of the eighteenth century minor streets called Edge Street, Oak Street and Thomas Street sprang up amongst the country spaces, whilst the Shudehill Pits – ponds at the top of Shudehill – were converted into reservoirs, with another byelaw passed banning, 'Persons making a practice of drowning cats and dogs or washing dirty linen' in the municipal water supply.



NQ





THE SEVEN STARS INN.

# Cock fighting, bear baiting and prize fighting...

But it got worse, with 'The Riot of Shudehill' - angry and hungry millworkers attacking Shudehill market stalls to find food - attracting attention as scandalous activities. Soldiers were called out against nine hundred rioters, with deaths on both sides. Oh, and there are records of cock fighting, bear baiting and prize fighting...just where The Printworks stands now...

I guess that might be why the Hulme family, owners of Withingreave Hall on Withy Grove, had sold up and moved out a century before. The area was 'declining.' But then Withingreave Hall was their town house, with country residences in Reddish and Prestwich. Early cosmopolitans.

But that's where our pub stories start. It is reported - although I guess this is a sort of early seventeenth century Wikileaks - that Guy Fawkes and Robert Catesby stayed at The Seven Stars Inn on Withy Grove whilst planning the Gunpowder Plot. And, at the turn of the eighteenth century, press gangs were billeted there, to drag prospective conscripts off the Manchester streets. (No doubt the bear baiters and prize fighters were prime targets.)

Early records show the exact position of The Seven Stars - what is now the Withy Grove entrance to The Arndale.

It's a little more difficult to pin down the exact location of The Rovers Return. (Yes reputedly the name that Tony Warren nicked for Corrie.) The Rovers Return was converted from an outhouse of Withingreave Hall. When the Hall was sold in 1763 it was advertised with 'outhouses divided into three cottages and four closes of land and meadow of eight acres lying very conveniently at the higher end of Shudehill.'







But it's safe to say that it was a local hostelry, probably frowned upon by The Seven Stars just down the road in upmarket Withy Grove. The present day shot shows where I think The Rovers Return was positioned, based on descriptions and the usual practice of pubs evolving on the same site. In any case it was very close to where The Hare and Hounds now stands and, of course, right in the middle of where Shudehill market began. Whilst no visitors as famous as Guy Fawkes are reported as staying there, it was known as being one of the oldest public houses in the country. But this probably refers more to the date that the building was originally built in the fourteenth century.

But I'll muse about a couple of things. Joseph Johnson, of 17 Shudehill, was a leader for social reform and was imprisoned for twelve months for taking part in the Peterloo demonstration. I'll bet he propped up the bar in The Rovers and expounded his beliefs to anyone who would listen. And finally, in 1938, The Rovers Return was recorded as being a 'working men's café.' I'm willing to bet that was the first café bar in the Northern Quarter.



# Peterloo



# Carver's Warehouse. Manchester history in Yorkshire stone.

# 1804

Behind a modern façade on Dale Street stands a building unique in the history of Manchester. But the integrity of Carver's Warehouse was preserved in the early 2000s by careful, painstaking planning and compromise. This is the story of how a building made in 1806 was brought back to life. But first why it originally stood there.

I first went into Carver's warehouse much more than a decade ago and shortly after the phoenix rose again. What originally fascinated me was the wear around huge stone pillars in the basement; wear caused by two hundred years of erosion by water and by the constant rubbing of the hulls of barges. Because Piccadilly Basin was the confluence of waterways that flowed under and into the buildings. A practical way to move and unload goods...straight up to warehouse floors above. The original boat arches are still there at the back of the building. Much of the canal system is also still there of course and Stephen O'Malley, CEO of Civic Engineers, told me of his own involvement in Piccadilly Basin and Carver's Warehouse over almost two decades.

"It was my first job in Manchester as an engineer. We were given the task of making the existing canals serviceable, rather than stagnant, a neglected part of the waterside infrastructure which the city was turning its back on."

When the Rochdale Canal finally opened in 1804 it was following a long controversy and opposition from Parliament. Four acts of Parliament in fact, who had opposed it on the basis that it would 'drain



local water supply' to the mills. How wrong they were and how the mills thrived with water borne goods.

So step forward two hundred years and the Yorkshire stone built warehouse, originally commissioned by Halifax merchant Thomas Carver, was lying all but derelict. A discount bathroom showroom, hardly C. P. Hart. The Manchester renaissance was growing apace and eyes turning to historic buildings. Stephen takes up the story again.

"The warehouse itself was concealed by a row of tiny cottages on Dale Street. Probably clerk's cottages. Too narrow to be occupied by families. Although they were historic themselves, the planning compromise was to demolish these and open up the facade of the warehouse towards Dale Street. But to make it serviceable as a working building – stairs, lifts, access – a new facade and atrium were added. This meant that services could be kept away from the facade and the overall integrity of this unusual building – stone not the brick that dominates Manchester – could be left intact. Each of the six floors was different and so access bridges slope, adding to the drama of the space. And each of the floors are entered by the original slots used for loading and unloading."



Photo courtesy Len Grant



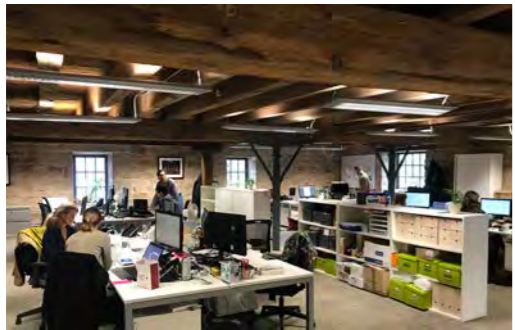


Whilst working on the engineering and obtaining detailed planning permission alongside Simpson Haugh Architects, it became clear that not only was this an exciting project, but an ideal place to work. Along with other tenants Civic Engineers occupy a floor and, following completion, Marketing Manchester then moved into the two lower floors. A great story and advertisement in itself for the City.

I can only imagine the hubbub of the Piccadilly Basin a hundred, two hundred years ago. At one end of the Northern Quarter Smithfield Market teeming with fresh food traders. At the opposite end of the Northern Quarter what can be rightly described as an inland port, teeming cotton, coal and every commodity to feed the industry of Cottonopolis.

Slowly but surely Piccadilly Basin – facing the waterways – is coming back to life. But now those waterways are for leisure and enjoyment and not for industry.

“Bringing the canals back to life helps the environment massively. Not just for people to enjoy, but bringing oxygen back into the water, growing wildlife and helping to clean the air,” Stephen adds. His first waterways engineering task in Manchester is still adding to Piccadilly Basin bit by bit. The politicians in 1806 were wrong and engineering brought Manchester to life. It didn’t drain the water supply...



# 1806



Photo courtesy Len Grant



# SMITHFIELD BUILDINGS

In the mid 90s all was not well in the area around Oldham Street. Neglect and dilapidated buildings dominated. On the corner of Oldham Street and Dale Street a block comprising nine separate buildings had long ago been acquired by Affleck & Brown, who started life as a drapery business in Oldham Street in the 1860s. It styled itself as ‘The Harrods of the North.’ The block was called the Smithfield Buildings.

# NEW GENERATION

But by the mid 1970s the area was declining, as the Arndale Centre established itself as Manchester’s retail focus. British Home Stores – BHS – was the anchor tenant of the Smithfield Buildings, running a large department store facing onto Oldham Street. When that too relocated the death knell sounded – or the journey forwards began, but with the buildings lying empty for two decades. The block of nine separate buildings – Smithfield – was bought by Urban Splash.

# NEW IMAGINATION

In the mid 1990s, Urban Splash commissioned architects Stephenson Bell to, ‘Excite us.’ Anyone who witnessed the empty, largely derelict shell would have wondered how that was going to be achieved. A small handful of years later and those witnesses saw what paved the way for regeneration in the Northern Quarter.



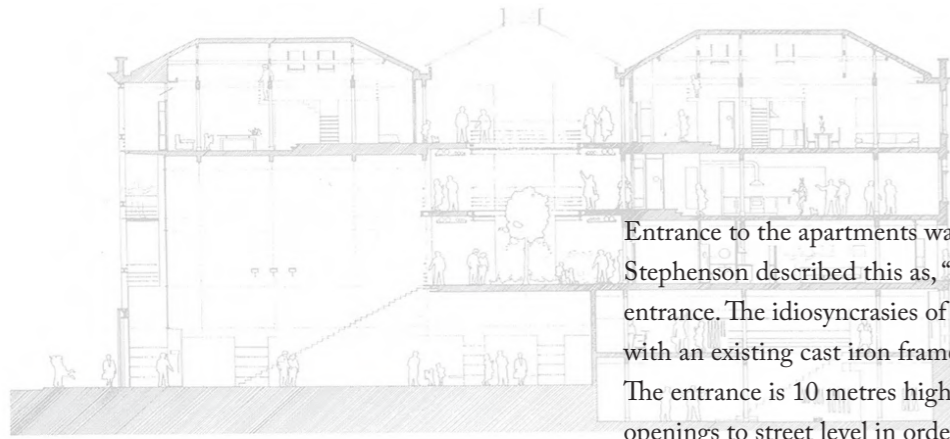
At the time Jeff Bell of Stephenson Bell said, “The challenge was to combine an ill assorted bunch of buildings with different styles, structures and ceiling heights. All we knew was that a mix of retail and residential was required.” That mix, which is now prevalent in our City, was virtually unheard of at the time. Residential and retail were, to all intents and purposes, kept largely separate. And so Stephenson Bell stripped back the many layers of generational ad-hoc changes and additions – eventually discovering the remnants of a light well in the centre of the block. “That gave us the diagram,” Jeff Bell said. The ground floor was given over to retail units, using the space in the centre of the block for storage. From the first floor and above, the former light well became a glass-roofed atrium. “This central void allowed for apartments around the perimeter, with windows looking inwards to a ‘winter garden’ and outwards towards the streets.”

That may seem a standard design more than two decades on, but Smithfield Buildings was revolutionary in its time and created a template for both new build and conversions in this run down, neglected part of our City.

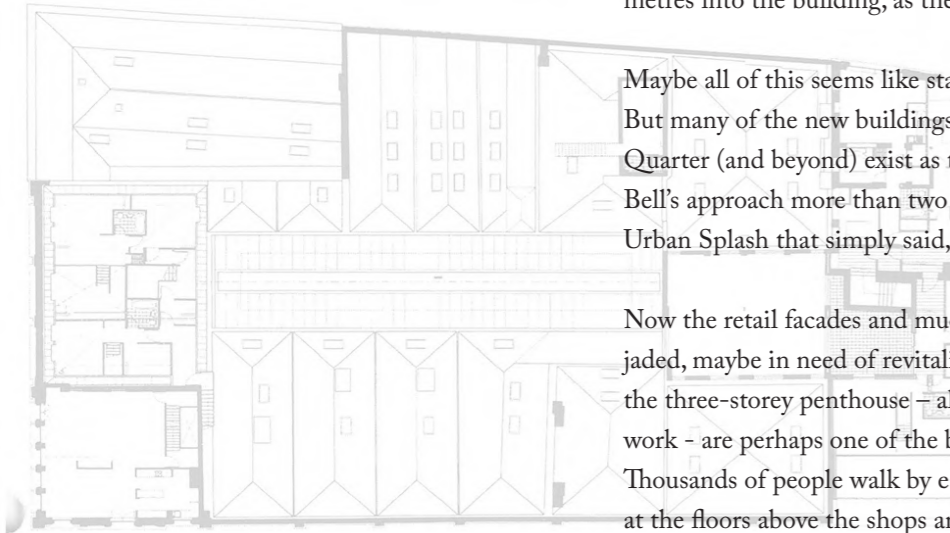
The ground floor was given over to shops – units offered as basic shells – and to give the buildings coherence at street level the facades onto Oldham Street and Church Street were replaced with zinc panels. Even consistent typographic branding was included.





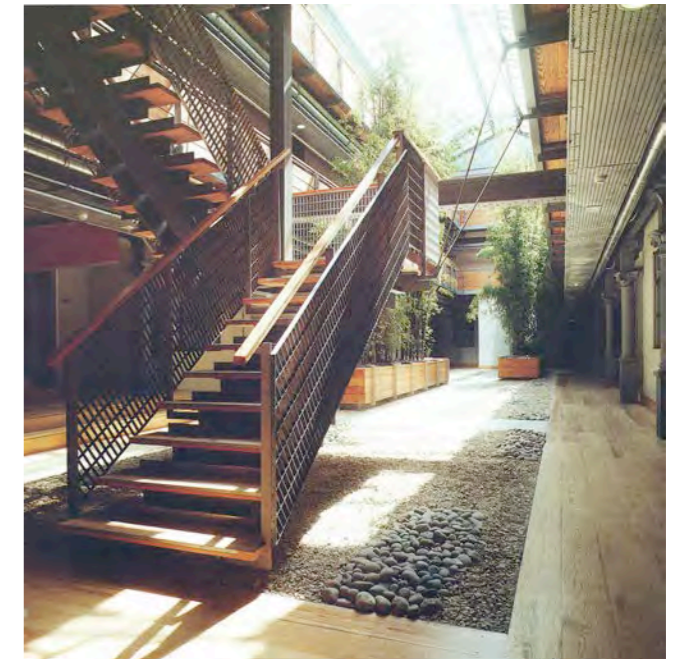
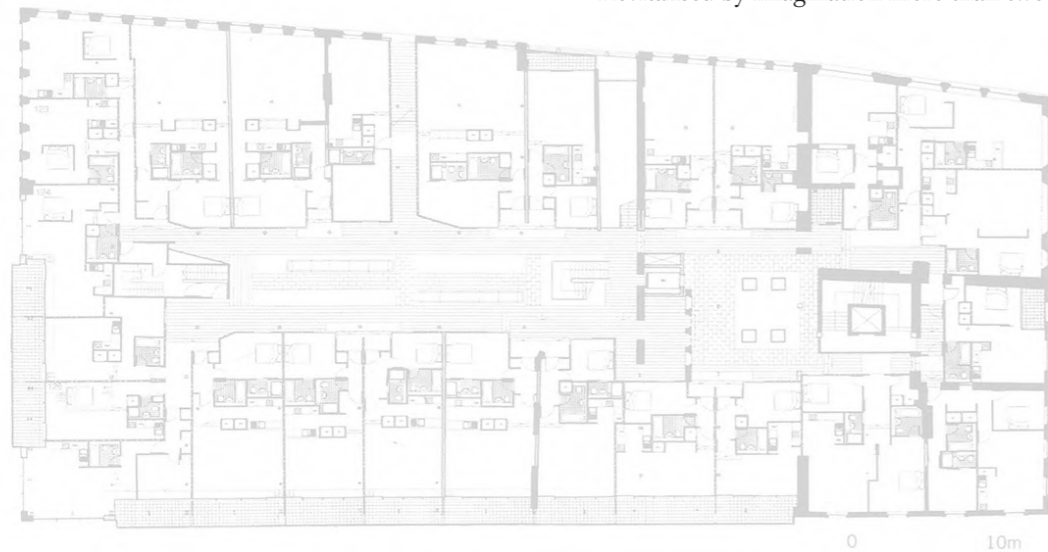


Entrance to the apartments was and still is, on Tib Street. Roger Stephenson described this as, “The place you’d least expect to find the entrance. The idiosyncrasies of the buildings have been maintained, with an existing cast iron frame spanning the height of the building. The entrance is 10 metres high. And we dropped existing arched openings to street level in order to push the colonnaded space two metres into the building, as the pavement was so narrow.”



Maybe all of this seems like standard fodder as we approach 2024. But many of the new buildings and conversions in the Northern Quarter (and beyond) exist as they do today because of Stephenson Bell’s approach more than two decades ago. Oh and yes a brief from Urban Splash that simply said, ‘Excite us.’

Now the retail facades and much of the buildings are looking a little jaded, maybe in need of revitalisation. But the quirky apartments and the three-storey penthouse – all incorporating original steel and timber work - are perhaps one of the best locations in the Northern Quarter. Thousands of people walk by each day, I guess that very few look up at the floors above the shops and take in the Manchester architecture. Revitalised by imagination more than two decades ago.





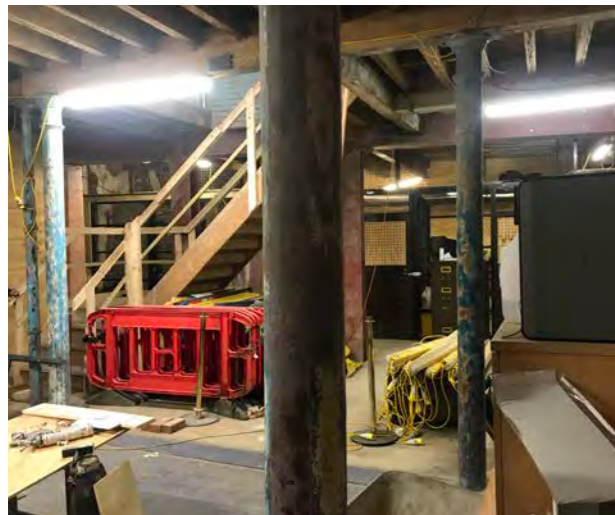
# NQ to . . . . . NY

When the start of a conversation makes you smile, then you know that the chat will be good. That's what happened when I spoke to the Location Manager for Netflix. I wanted to talk to him about filming in the Northern Quarter. He said, "Mangle Street's been in more films than John Wayne."

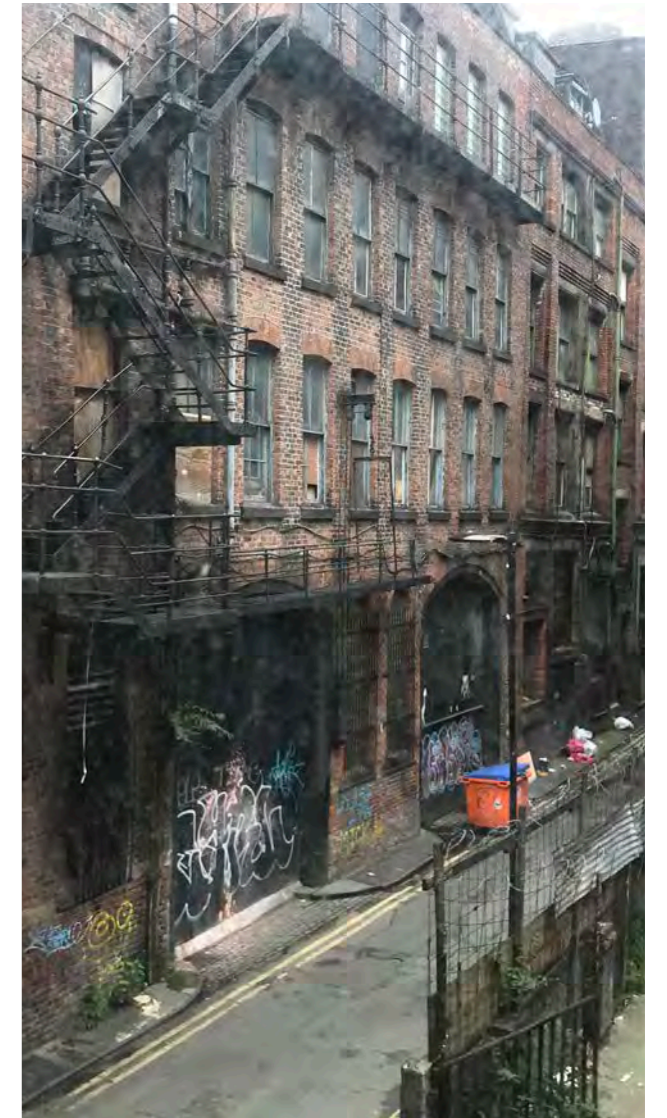


Now Mangle Street's not a name that I recognised, but when I turned off Dale Street, down what is little more than a back alley, I was instantly in Peaky Blinders territory. Somehow a strange thing to do in NQ Manchester; step from the street location of Captain America New York scenes to Peaky Blinders Birmingham scenes. But Dale Street and surrounds has been used for almost countless film and TV productions over the past decade. Perhaps even more intriguingly there is a huge swathe of virtually derelict buildings between Dale Street and Piccadilly – awaiting inevitable development – locked behind what seem innocuous and scruffy doors. Towards the end of our conversation He said, "You need to speak to the caretaker, I'll give you his number."

The Location Manager had explained his job to me. "Very early on in any production I get a script from the production team. I guess that I never stop working even for a minute, because as I drive around I mentally log buildings and locations. The script points me in the direction of possible streets, buildings, places that I can mentally link to the words and scenes that I've read. I'll suggest locations and visit them with the director and production designer. The art department will get involved with assessing what is needed to paint, decorate, make the location look authentic to the context and period of the movie or TV show."



Basically the film unit want to walk in, film and walk out, then move to the next location. Time is money. One production can be filmed all over the country, so a huge crew may have to move around. But the more that can be done in one location the better. Manchester can be New York, or London. Manchester Town Hall is often the Houses of Parliament. 'World on Fire,' was shot around Europe, but with some key scenes in Manchester. Hilton Street was perfect for a 1939 backdrop. The really good thing is that Manchester has a can-do attitude when it comes to helping with organisation. Basically my job is like organising a huge wedding every day."





And so on to Manchester's can-do attitude and on to the Development Manager of Screen Manchester. He told me that Screen Manchester is relatively new, having been established for several years. He told me that with changes over a decade ago, when Regional Development Agencies were closed, a more streamlined service for location filming was needed. First The Sharp Project, just North of the city centre, was created in 2006 to provide 200,000 square feet of studio, production and digital facility. Then in 2014 Space Studios in Gorton with 85,000 square feet of studio space as part of a huge creative campus. Screen Manchester was created to be a location facilitating service, complementing studio space. All three are Manchester City Council owned and run.



He told me that the Northern Quarter is a key asset. "Although Castlefield, Spring Gardens, the Town Hall are all popular. I have to keep a handle on all areas and when a location manager gets in touch, we'll effectively chaperone around various possibilities, help them to recce. They may have seen a location on our website, or may already have an idea for a location, but need to have a look, consider the practicalities. Or they may ask for recommendations for a location. One of our responsibilities is road closures, parking suspensions, various permits required. The 'Age Before Beauty' series screened a while ago was all based around Stevenson Square, with some inside shots in the disused buildings on Dale Street. You need to talk to the caretaker"

various keys and lock codes – and genuine pride in derelict buildings for which he has been caretaker for more than twenty years. How his job has changed. "Sometimes," he said, "the production company pay for me to stay in a hotel, be close by in case there's a problem when they're filming at night. The best one was when I had four nights in Malmaison!" Then he hesitated. "But I don't take the mickey. I get some beers from Morrisons and put them in the mini fridge. I'm quite happy with that. But it will be a sad loss to filming when all of this is developed."

When that happens the ghosts – old and new – will go too.

Here he was again. So I talked to him.

I suspect he is the most connected caretaker in the world. Well, the most connected caretaker that I've ever met. He doesn't name drop – he's far too honest, genuine and self-effacing to do that. But I don't know of too many people called Cillian. Well, only one actually. He unlocked the scruffy doors to the disused buildings (several of them) between Dale Street and Piccadilly. And it was like walking into the back lot of Universal Studios. Except it's real.

Every floor, every room, every staircase, every corner is either genuinely and beautifully crumbling, or has the remains of an adapted set. All of which seem vaguely familiar from some or other TV series or movie. Vestiges of Captain America sit in corners, ghosts of famous actors are around everywhere – along with the real ghosts.

His stories are too many to relate in this short piece, his own collection of mementos fascinating. His knowledge of what's coming up the territory of global movie makers. He walked around with



Of course we've all seen (and maybe enjoyed) Saturday nights in the Northern Quarter. The largest area of our City that has been retained to juxtapose all of the steel and glass that is emerging relentlessly everywhere else. A concentrated area that is perhaps busier than any on those Saturday nights. Although compared to the second half of the 19th century it is, today, comparatively quiet. Because history books recall crowds of up to 20,000 gathered on Shudehill, attracted by the market there. A market area which became a focus not only for shoppers, but also for entertainers and sightseers, cajolers and music. Maybe not a lot has changed then – apart from the numbers.

But what first drew the crowds on a Saturday night was the Manchester Market in Shudehill. And at that time mainly because food was sold very cheaply, before the market closed at midnight (no Sunday opening allowed). For many, working six days a week, that was the only way that a good Sunday meal could be bought. Or maybe they had no work and no money. Food and Saturday nights in the Northern Quarter have a different context these days.

Although having to buy Sunday food at midnight on a Saturday sounds tough, Friedrich Engels (statue now placed outside HOME) described the area a few decades earlier in this way: 'In the district now under discussion, from Withy Grove to Shudehill, a multitude of pigs walking about in the alleys, rooting into the offal heaps.'

My guess is that the offal was the residue from Smithfield Market, named in 1822 shortly after the potato market moved there.

The potato market led to the fish and poultry market, meat market, fruit, vegetables and flowers market, all trading from separate stalls or separate buildings, until an iron and glass roof was built to enclose the space. All quite a place to party on a Saturday night.

The size and extent of Smithfield Market isn't obvious today, although the exterior walls and cast iron pillars of the main market enclosure still exist. As does the Council built meat market on Swan Street (now Mackie Mayor) and the retail fish market (now the Craft Centre). But it's hard these days to imagine the four and a half acres bordered by these remaining buildings as one huge fresh produce market, that bustled every day from 6am.



# Smithfield Market. Saturday Nights In The Northern Quarter.

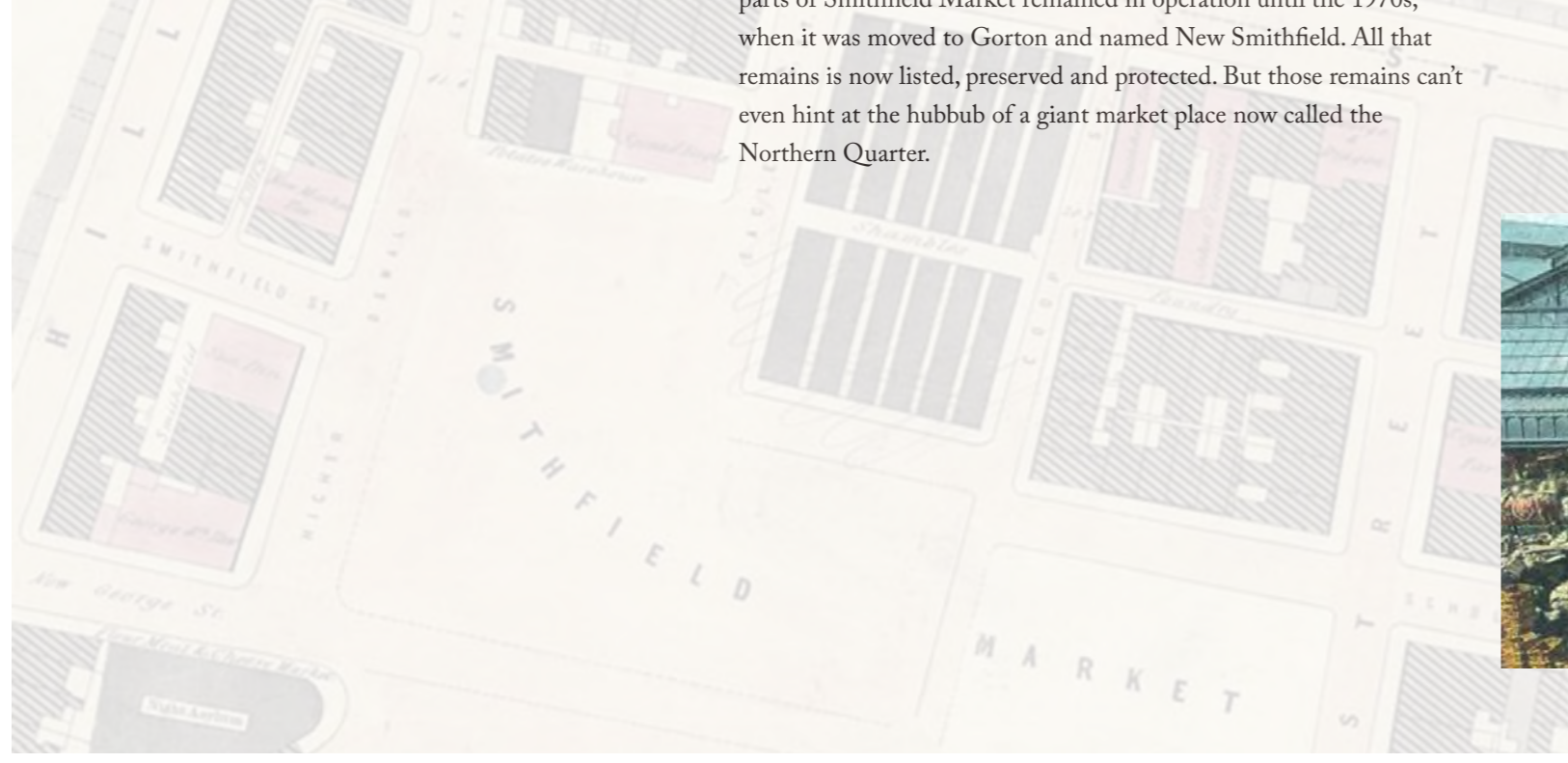






Looking at the history of Smithfield, it's also hard to imagine that it was created when the early and prosperous 19th century home owners around St. Ann's Square (then known as Acresfield) objected to a farmers market – which had been in existence there since 1222 . They didn't like all manner of scruffy people on their doorsteps. It must have been better though, than when Acresfield was the principle market place for hiring slaves! So the market was moved to the then outskirts of the town to stop annoying residents. The rest, as they say, is history. From St. Michaels (now Angel Meadow), to Ancoats and Shudehill, Engels reported the poorest of human conditions. No wonder that the population turned out for a bargain – and some entertainment – on a Saturday night.

Although declining in the face of modern distribution and shopping, parts of Smithfield Market remained in operation until the 1970s, when it was moved to Gorton and named New Smithfield. All that remains is now listed, preserved and protected. But those remains can't even hint at the hubbub of a giant market place now called the Northern Quarter.





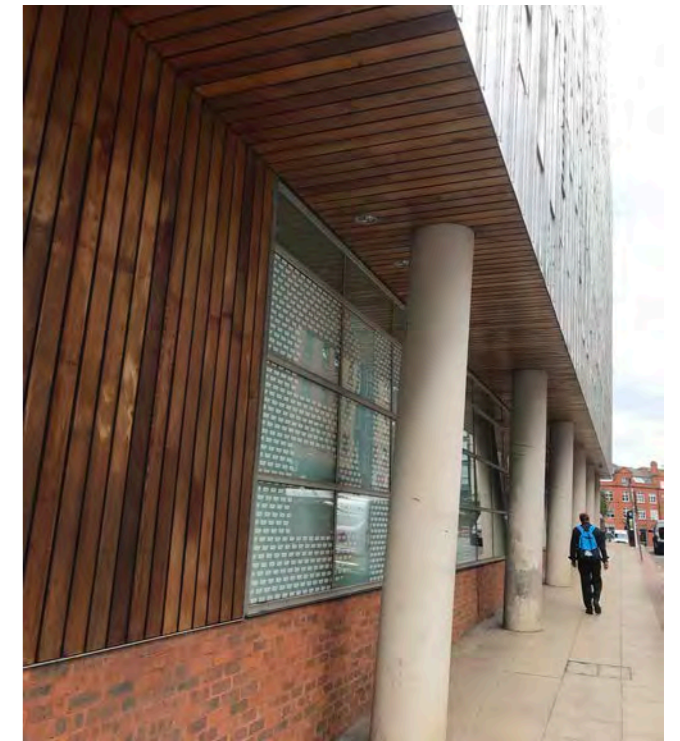
# BDP. Ducie Street greenhouse.

The history of BDP – Building Design Partnership – is fascinating in itself and maybe a subject for future articles. Founded in 1961 by George Grenfell-Baines, BDP subsequently grew to be one of Britain's largest architectural practices and its CV in design is stellar. You will know their work.

When a decision was made to move out of their long term home in Sunlight House on Quay Street around eighteen years ago, a new Manchester site was earmarked. I have been in and out of their building on Ducie Street since it opened fourteen years ago, but I took the opportunity to call in and chat with Principal Ged Couser. The green credentials of the building were the subject of our conversation. Ged recounted the difficulties of the site, in a tight space between

Ducie Street and the Piccadilly Basin canal. “There are a hundred piles supporting the building, with the canal wall itself eventually rebuilt using the original stone. But one of the key features – bearing in mind that we wanted to leave as small a carbon footprint as possible – was that all the concrete was cast on site, meaning that it didn't have to be transported from elsewhere.”

But I learn that the concrete structure itself is a key part of the building's green credentials. A look at the original model (to see the bits we can't see from below) perhaps reveals more of the ecological design – revolutionary a decade and a half ago. “It's quite simple,” Ged noted. “The South facing elevation is wrapped around by an insulated shield to prevent over heating, which also contains the ventilation







system. The North facing elevation, with views over the Piccadilly Basin, is glazed. The views are great, but this glass side allows natural light to flow through the work spaces without a lot of heat gain.”

Now using the word ‘simple’ belies the technology that is incorporated in the ‘shield.’ Small windows prevent over heating from sunlight, vents operate automatically to open and close according to the sensors and computers that are part of the environmental control system, constantly measuring heat and humidity. This system also operates on the North facing facia of the building and so a natural airflow travels through. But that allows colder air – mostly during the night time – to cool the concrete structure. Effectively the reverse of storage heaters. During the day the ‘coolness’ dissipates, to be topped up again during the night. The roof of the building also has ‘pods’ which open and close on the same system. Pods made from the same material as the new roof on Victoria Station – also designed by BDP. Ged calls them ‘inflated pillows.’

With some smaller, traditional heating a balance is achieved during working hours. Looking at vents in a wall has never been a particular fascination for me, but Ged’s explanation – again much simplified above – belies the technology built into the engineering. Technology which also includes acoustic baffling, reducing noise from outside by many decibels.

Ged continued, “We were aiming at carbon neutrality, but in effect we have achieved a carbon footprint which is around a third of that created by a traditional method of constantly heating and cooling a building using fossil fuels. This is modelled and monitored by the building control system and to offset the third that we don’t achieve we

contribute to the Carbon Neutral Company, which re-invests in other projects around the world. It’s all about using the mass and the structure to cool the space. Effectively the building’s breathing.”

And other smaller details contribute, such as using recycled rainwater to flush the loos. Fourteen years ago the building was certified as the first ‘excellent’ structure in the North by the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method. BREEAM is a much shorter version of that!

Back to the roof. There’s not only a natural green roof area, but also a brown roof area. Not something I’d heard of before, but Ged explained again. “We worked with the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Project, who were looking for a site in the Northern Quarter to attract the rare Black Redstart bird, which has very particular nesting requirements. And so up there, along with ventilation pods and a green area, is an area of rock and rubble to attract the Black Redstart, which normally nests in cliffs and rocky areas.”



The BDP greenhouse doesn’t boast a lot about its eco-credentials. But it should. I guess that inside they’re all too busy working on other ground breaking projects.

