

Boom not bust

How Greater Manchester can build the future without destroying its past



Acknowledgements

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The brilliant essays and gazetteers you are about to read are the work of Eamonn Canniffe (central Manchester) and Mike Ashworth (Oldham and Rochdale). The hours of desk-based research and legwork that underpin their illuminating texts is apparent and we are indebted to them.

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We would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who is working (paid and unpaid; often tirelessly and thanklessly) to protect, celebrate and harness historic buildings across North-West England – and in Manchester, Oldham and Rochdale in particular. You are doing vital work!

Finally, our heartfelt thanks to the Dulverton Trust whose generous support made the whole endeavour possible.

Elizabeth Hopkirk, editor

Meet the authors



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Front cover: St Peter's Square and Beetham Tower, central Manchester, Alamy Stock Photo

Back cover: Detail from the Blue Pits Inn, Rochdale

Designed by Nick Jones, Wordmule

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About SAVE Britain's Heritage

SAVE is at the frontline of national heritage conservation and sustainable re-use. We intervene to help historic buildings and places in serious and imminent danger of demolition, decay or the loss of essential character or setting. We stand apart from other organisations by bringing together architects, engineers and planners to offer viable alternative reuses.

Since the beginning SAVE has successfully fought for some of the UK's most remarkable and threatened historic buildings including Wentworth Woodhouse, one of England's grandest country houses, Smithfield General Market, the future home of the Museum of London, and over 400 Victorian terraced houses in Liverpool.

Our intervention acts as a catalyst for successful regeneration in towns and cities. From Royal William Yard, Plymouth, where SAVE devised a mixed-use scheme of residential and commercial space to create a lively place to live and work, to Saltaire, Yorkshire, where the town was designated a World Heritage Site after SAVE petitioned for the mill's restoration.

SAVE has a long history in delivering projects in the north of England and supporting the region's community groups. In 1979 we staged an exhibition on mills, sparking a huge response from people living in mill towns, and we also fight battles for individual buildings such as Sir Gilbert Scott's magnificent church, All Souls in Halifax, and Salt's Mill in Saltaire – both of which are once again significant local landmarks.

Perhaps most significantly, SAVE led the battle against the national Pathfinder programme, which proposed the demolition of 100,000 traditional terraced houses in the north of England. We brought the policy to a halt through sustained campaigning to highlight the misery that it was causing through evictions. Our battle culminated in a successful Public Inquiry for 400 Victorian houses in Liverpool. They are now being restored as family homes.

To learn more about SAVE'S work or to support us visit www.savebritainsheritage.org.



Foreword

*A fast-growing and dynamic city like Greater Manchester needs a clear vision to guide its development, writes **Henrietta Billings***

The pace of transformation and scale of ambition in Greater Manchester is awe-inspiring. Since 2018 we estimate that 27 towers up to 65 storeys have been built in central Manchester. There are 20 further towers under construction and a further 51 have been granted permission or are planned. In Castlefield alone, eight towers have been built over the last five years, and up to 17 more are under construction or approved. Manchester has more tall buildings and planned tall buildings than any other UK city outside London.

Each tower brings with it a powerful, wide-reaching impact. Tall buildings in the right places can make exciting contributions to city life but they should be planned-for robustly. In the wrong places and poorly designed, they can do needless, longstanding harm to our cities.

How many of these proposed new towers do we actually need? What are the carbon impacts of constructing them? Where are alternative, greener proposals for retrofitting existing buildings? Are local residents fully engaged in the decision-making process?

The option of mid-rise, high-density new buildings, which could also mend streets in the city broken by surface car parks, has been discounted. Instead we have a plethora of tall buildings competing for prominence.

We need evidence of the cumulative impact of these tall buildings as part of the permission process, a strategic approach informed by overarching policy, not just an assessment of

individual towers, one planning application at a time.

The heritage sector tends to be focused on responding to individual applications as they are processed through the planning system. This report gives us the opportunity to step back from assessing separate proposals and to examine the bigger picture: how we want these buildings and our heritage to shape the character and feel of places where we spend our lives and that we hand down to future generations.

SAVE's involvement in tall buildings in Manchester began in 2018. We strongly backed the Manchester Civic Society in a hotly contested legal review of the decision by Manchester City Council to green-light plans for a 41-storey tower and demolition of historic buildings – all in a conservation area in the backdrop of one of the finest town halls in England. The challenge was unsuccessful and the plans – by former Man United players-turned-developers Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs – are currently under construction.

Most recently, we were alerted to the highly controversial Reedham House proposals on King Street West, also in the city centre and a conservation area, which involve the partial demolition of a grade II-listed former horse carriage complex and its replacement with another ad hoc 14-storey tower. Recommended for approval by Manchester City Council in July 2023, the plans have united national and local heritage organisations in their concern and are now being considered for a potential call-in by the Secretary of State.

Back in 2018 we called for a strategic assessment of tall buildings in the city with policy to go with it. Five years, and many towers, later and we are still waiting. This lack of oversight for how tall buildings and demolitions are managed or understood cumulatively across the city poses a major threat to one of the key ingredients of Manchester's success – its unique and vibrant character told through its buildings and rich history.

Yet there are encouraging reasons for optimism. A campaign strongly supported by SAVE to list and rescue a 1950s mural of national significance inside Oldham's empty Church of the Holy Rosary is an example of how with determination and persistence these battles can be won. After a two-year campaign, and the backing of local, national and international art galleries, the previously unknown mural is now listed and protected, and the local community is currently forming a re-use plan to bring the building back into use around the celebration of the mural which will remain in situ.

SAVE wants to champion the rich history of Manchester, Rochdale and Oldham, and support those who are fighting to protect and celebrate their historic buildings and towns. We see this – enabled by a well-resourced and robust planning system – as a fundamental ingredient in the successful growth and economic prosperity of the region. ●

Henrietta Billings is director of SAVE Britain's Heritage

Introduction

What's the story?

*Manchester and its towers have long dominated the region, but it's time to change the narrative, writes **Elizabeth Hopkirk***

This report comes at a pivotal moment. The mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, and his combined authority (GMCA) working with all but one of the region's 10 councils published a 15-year strategic road map for housing, jobs and infrastructure last year which is now being pored over by a planning inspector. Perhaps inevitably the Places for Everyone masterplan has proved controversial. GMCA has also announced a "mayoral development zone" that will ring the northern edge of the conurbation. Branded Atom Valley in a retro reference to the city's role in splitting the atom, as well as a nod to Silicon Valley, the authorities hope it will bring innovation, investment and jobs to the outlying boroughs.

Yet, given recent demolitions, you could be forgiven for wondering if the name Atom Valley was more about blowing stuff up: the nuclear option for heritage. In May The Times published shocking images of JCBs destroying St John's Werneth, the Victorian church in whose choir Sir William Walton sang as a boy. Astonishingly, Oldham council gave its blessing to the demolition, citing concerns that the unlisted church, empty since the 1980s, could become a target for vandalism. Two years earlier the wrecking ball came calling for Hartford Mill, a handsome red-brick edifice a few blocks to the north. Designed in 1907 by FW Dixon and grade II listed, it produced cotton into the 1950s but lay empty from 1991 with the departure of Littlewoods' mail-order depot. Hartford's elegant

chimney survived, towering mournfully over the rubble for a couple more years, but it is touch and go whether it will be standing by the time you read this report. Similar fears of blight were blamed, along with the need for new housing. But as countless SAVE reports have shown (including this one – see page 56), and as Oldham councillors themselves have discussed, these grand old buildings can be successfully converted into homes – or offices, or arts centres. Reusing them – central to SAVE's mission – is common sense. Pressingly, in the climate emergency we are facing, "adaptive reuse" rather than "raze and replace" saves huge quantities of embodied carbon from being released

into the atmosphere. It also preserves the "embodied memory" of a place, a vital ingredient in a community's sense of identity which couldn't be more important at a time of economic and social struggle.

Sadly St John's and Hartford Mill are not isolated examples, as this report makes clear. Nor is the rot confined to the poorer towns outside central Manchester. Our survey of the city centre has flagged alarming news for a number of buildings, many of them listed (a level of protection that doesn't seem to count for much in Manchester). The property press regularly features glossy images of new towers, often planned in conservation areas and, in the case of Reedham House in the Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area, involving the



St John's Werneth, which was demolished in May 2023



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo

demolition of a listed building, part of a 19th-century carriage works. The council's approval, granted in July, raises important questions. If a conservation area can't protect a listed building from destruction, what does it mean for other significant buildings across the city? Heritage is one of Manchester's best and most lucrative calling cards. Yet the council's decision signals the opposite: that heritage is no longer a key characteristic worthy of protection, but rather a minor bargaining chip in the wider regeneration game. Piecemeal tower applications are reaching a point of critical mass where the city's historic fabric and skyline are being radically reshaped by uniformly large-scale schemes, all competing for prominence in often deeply historic settings. An

application for the UK's tallest block of flats outside London – at 71 storeys – was submitted as this report was being written. The lack of strong protections for how tall buildings and demolitions are managed or understood cumulatively across the city poses a major threat to Manchester's vibrant heritage. The situation is becoming urgent, but it is not new. Even Alfred Waterhouse's town hall – arguably the greatest public building of all – came quite close to being demolished in the 1940s by planners who considered it sooty and not fit for purpose. Thankfully that hair-brained plan ran out of steam (it is currently undergoing a major refurbishment), yet so much has been lost over the intervening decades, as Clare Hartwell documents in her 2002 Pevsner guide.

But there is good news. Firstly let's not forget that conservation-led regeneration has been one of the great successes of northern towns. Thirty years ago only 600 people lived in central Manchester. Today, thanks partly to the refurbishment of warehouses and civic buildings, the city centre population has risen to around 60,000. As a result of wealth generated by the industrial revolution, Manchester built numerous handsome public buildings, not only in the centre but in outlying districts. These town halls, libraries and public baths have long been important community facilities. As Manchester once again booms, attracting young people and creatives, these buildings are part of the city's distinctiveness and appeal.

this target, 12 years ahead of the national deadline, property consultant JLL has warned Manchester to “embrace retrofit”. The city is already planning to upgrade public buildings, schools and thousands of homes by 2030 and there are plenty of examples to inspire and fine buildings ripe for conversion. Even developers known for their contributions to Manchester's bristling skyline often have a converted mill or two in their portfolio. What is needed is for this to become the norm. The outdated thinking that regards towers as symbols of success is being challenged like never before. Manchester has an opportunity to lead the nation in this important task. As Mayor Burnham told Building magazine: “Manchester has always been famous for facing up to the future and bringing on the new quite quickly. If we do this with net zero I believe we will reap a large economic dividend for the rest of this century.”

In all this, the outer boroughs must not be left behind. Burnham has described Stockport as the Brooklyn to Manchester's Manhattan, but not all boroughs are faring the same. In Rochdale, SAVE was shown round Champness Hall, a glorious former theatre that we initially took for derelict because the floors were littered with plaster. We asked the chief executive of a charity based there what he would do if he were mayor. “Rip out the tram,” was his response. This is the shiny new Metrolink that the authorities have spent hundreds of millions of pounds extending to places like Rochdale in the hope of improving their fortunes. Instead it is sucking people and their spending money towards Manchester's centrifugal pull. Could the tram eventually bring people in the other direction, enabling students and others priced out of the city centre to live in Rochdale and Oldham? Probably. But not, say locals, until there's more in these struggling communities to tempt them. And that's where sustainable, heritage-led regeneration has so much to offer. Buildings that were once symbols of local pride could be exactly that again.

“Even developers known for their contributions to Manchester's bristling skyline often have a converted mill or two in their portfolio. What is needed is for this to become the norm.”

Secondly, Manchester has always been a place of innovation since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution – a “hotbed of forward thinking”, as council chief executive Joanne Roney puts it. It was one of the first cities to declare a climate emergency and has pledged to become zero-carbon by 2038. To meet

Look at Rochdale's dazzling town hall (currently undergoing restoration) and the re-opening of the culverted River Roch, or at improvements brought about by the rejuvenation of Oldham's Old Town Hall and public square. While there is a chicken and egg complexity to investment, the Atom Valley strategy aims to kick-start this by attracting international businesses and high-skill jobs. Hand in glove, the strategy should explicitly encourage the reuse of historic buildings and the repair of ruptured urban fabric such as around Mumps in Oldham and The Baum in Rochdale. Heritage and the strong sense of place it fosters must be acknowledged as a key catalyst for a sustainable, prosperous future – one that helps strengthen the unique character of proud boroughs like these.

As this report shows, there are many buildings with great potential to become homes, cafes, galleries, workplaces. And there is much fascinating social and cultural history to trade on, from the towns' dominance of the 19th-century cotton spinning industry to the birth of the co-operative movement and opposition to slavery. Why not a museum to Rochdale's musical history – spanning Gracie Fields to Joy Division – in the conveniently co-located Victorian buildings associated with them, or even a school of music skills? Why not capitalise on Churchill's connection to Oldham, his first constituency, to attract international tourists?

We hope this report will unlock a groundswell of support for the towns and buildings that feature in it. That support is needed from every quarter: residents and business owners, heritage bodies, local and national government, investors, developers and designers.

Huge thanks are due to Eamonn Canniffe and Mike Ashworth for their terrific essays and detective work in bringing these wonderful buildings to national attention. The buildings need our help. As Gracie Fields once sang, Now is the Hour ... ●

Central Manchester

Don't look back in anger

Manchester's future can be powered by its past,
writes **Eamonn Canniffe**



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo

Central Manchester

Emerging from Piccadilly rail station the visitor to Manchester is confronted by the elevated view of a robustly constructed city block in the Edwardian Baroque style with a romantic roofline of segmental pediments and corner domes. The former London Road Fire Station (1906), with its integrated living accommodation, police station and coroner's court, is a long-awaited adaptation of this landmark city structure into hotel, office and apartment re-use. Neglected for decades by its previous owners and subject eventually to compulsory purchase, the restored terracotta-clad building will be a strong lesson for the role the city's surviving heritage can play in a sustainable urban future.

Yet such significant adaptive re-use projects are not what attracts most attention these days. By any contemporary measure Manchester city centre is a thriving place. Residents and visitors alike gawp at the shiny new towers and enjoy the random haphazard light show provided by individual apartment dwellers at night. The spectacle of the city reassures some people that wealth is coming into Manchester at a rate that has not been seen since its industrial heyday in the Victorian era.

In preparation for Greater Manchester's hotly debated spatial framework (a 2037 strategic plan now called Places for Everyone), a 2019 assessment of built heritage within the wider county was rather complacent about the situation within Manchester itself. From some professional viewpoints this approach may be desirable, but for individuals living and working in Manchester the impact of tall new buildings and the loss of historic character at the local street level can feel very negative.

Yet the retention and reuse of historic buildings is one of the most effective tools we have, both for protecting a city's unique "spirit of place" and for reducing its carbon emissions. While there are

complex factors at work in any urban environment undergoing rapid change, the win-win simplicity of this message has not yet found much favour in today's boomtown Manchester.

Manchester's 19th-century architectural heritage, the warehouses, mills, civic buildings and mercantile palaces – preserved in part by decades of decline – is now in danger of being marginalised by the scale and pace of the new developments which loom over the middle of the city like a gang of encircling bullies. In the aftermath of the 1996 IRA bombing the city centre was revived in a manner which became a case study for the Blair government's "urban renaissance". The careful inclusion of heritage within the masterplan of that period (including the relocation of two 17th-century timber-framed structures) was the result of a broad consensus around the city centre's needs and an agreed vision of how the city should develop, demonstrated by the level of public participation in the masterplanning design competition that followed the bomb.

Subsequently that consensus has been overtaken by a series of rival developments keen to out-do each other in height and assertiveness with little apparent attention as to how they might contribute to a greater urban whole. The poor state of the thoroughfares that form the seams between these competing developments indicates a disregard for the public realm and the public interest

"The retention and reuse of historic buildings is one of the most effective tools we have, both for protecting a city's unique 'spirit of place' and for reducing its carbon emissions."



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo

beyond purely commercial aspirations.

Yet heritage has a vital role to play in that sense of a greater plan. Despite their reputation for laissez-faire economics, Victorian patrons and their architects adhered to a remarkably consistent aesthetic sensibility when commissioning public buildings and commercial premises. Materials were sourced relatively locally, scale was kept largely consistent and without any grand plan a proud, if decidedly polluted, city was built. The coherence of this vision can still be sensed when car traffic is light and vistas of sympathetically related groups of buildings can be glimpsed.

The survival of this historic townscape was something of a fluke.

In 1945, post-war enthusiasm for a new world predicted that a lot of the Victorian city would be swept away. That did not come to pass because of industrial decline, and when the soot-blackened buildings were scoured after the Clean Air Act the robustness, ornament and pattern of the 19th-century structures contrasted heavily with the often-flimsy sterility of the mass-produced modern office blocks.

While comprehensive redevelopment and road planning would remove large areas of 19th-century fabric, a significant moment which determined the current fractured appearance of the city was reached in the 1970s when activists defeated the road-widening scheme

for Portland Street and Princess Street which would have demolished significant examples of the “palazzo” warehouse. Their conservation and adaptive re-use as apartments and workplaces would in time play a significant part in the growth of city-centre living.

The designation of conservation areas from the 1960s onwards provided some measure of protection to significant examples of Mancunian building types, conveniently coinciding with the economic downturn between the 1970s and 1980s. At the present time, however, there is the feeling that the conservation areas in Manchester exist in name only. The Northern Quarter for example, which was developed from 1994

“While the planning of the city as a whole and for the common good remains so institutionally weak there is little prospect of significant change.”

onwards, consists of two conservation areas yet this intended protection has not prevented the construction of The Glassworks, a new 16-storey office tower at the edge of the low- to mid-rise brick-built district. Objections were swept away during a period of restricted democratic oversight of the planning process during the coronavirus lockdown. The resulting structure intrudes above the common roofline of the area and jars with the independent and alternative character which has made it such a magnet for youth culture.

The benefit of the protection of architectural heritage is that it provides identity to a place, the unique set of buildings and their groupings which tell its story. Faced with the globalising pressures of aggressive property speculation one would expect Manchester City Council to uphold the protection of the city’s character. Instead, the very permissive policy of strategic regeneration frameworks in Manchester has resulted in a scramble to build the tallest structures with little apparent thought to the consequences on the existing environments which are thrown into literal shadow below the new towers. The collective is at the mercy of the corporate. That should be reason enough to embark on a campaign to protect its character from the alien buildings the city has unwisely allowed to be constructed like a noose around its neck.

Manchester’s architectural heritage, especially its industrial examples, can hardly be said to have originated in concerns for the environment so it is something of a paradox that its survival and reuse might now be thought of as exemplary practice for sustainability.

The durability of industrial construction and its resilience to changes in economic and social context provide important lessons to the designers of the contemporary city, lessons which have

largely been ignored in the last couple of decades. Conscious as the global community is now of climate catastrophe, in Manchester unsustainable building practices continue to be embraced in the rush for seductive images of a dynamic consumer city.

Environmental consequences might be dismissed by some as apparently occurring in distant locations, but the local environment is very clearly harmed by the deadening effect the new structures have at ground level. Too many expensive and vacant ground-floor retail units derive little benefit from the density of occupation of the towers above. Contrast that with the vibrant street-level activity in areas with heritage buildings or traditional-scale urban fabric such as King Street, St Ann’s Square or the Northern Quarter where individual businesses might come and go but the built fabric adapts and evolves, attracting independent and corporate users who can spot a good opportunity. With their unique character, traditional districts are more commercially attractive – despite the difficulties they can pose in accommodating new uses – because of their diverse materials, form and skyline.

Although Manchester is no Miami, its Art Deco heritage is currently clearly perceived to have a commercial future. The appreciation for the solidity and sleekness of streamlined Portland stone forms promises extended lives for Sunlight House (1932), the former Kendal Milne building (1939) on Deansgate and the former Rylands building (later Debenhams 1932) on Market Street. The acceptance of modern heritage from this period between the wars (all three are grade II listed) should open the path to similar acceptance for later architecture. The Seifert-designed Hilton House in the Northern Quarter and the former New Century Hall (rebranded simply as New Century) are good recent examples of the

Boom not bust

repurposing of 1960s heritage. However the future of the largest coherent collection of buildings from that period, the former UMIST campus, remains in doubt from a largely unsympathetic redevelopment agenda influenced by the increasingly distant prospect of HS2 ever arriving at Manchester Piccadilly.

Adjacent to the existing station, the positive benefits of heritage-led development are no more evident than on Whitworth Street, in the stark contrast between two recently completed schemes: Manchester New Square and Kampus. The former, built after a long delay brought on by the 2008 financial crisis, overshadows Canal Street with excessively high blocks and contains a dark courtyard at street level, while the latter makes use of existing buildings (including a repurposed tower formerly part of Manchester Metropolitan University, MMU) to create a much more varied skyline and a streetscape which opens out to the Rochdale Canal. The corporate regularity of Manchester New Square and its empty ground-floor retail units contrasts rather pointedly with the more inviting mixture of old and new which characterises Kampus. Given the proximity of the two new developments spatially and in time of completion it seems to be the inclusion of older structures that gives Kampus its appeal.

At Kampus, old and new are carefully integrated but at the broader scale of the city there is often little attempt to weave them together. Instead, new and generally taller buildings are often simply juxtaposed with their smaller older neighbours with the baffling justification that Manchester is a “city of layers”.

The question arises if Manchester is unique or represents some kind of future message for the fate of urban heritage in similar British cities. The property market in the city is overheated and does not show any sign of going off the boil. However, much of the residential

market is based on the continuing stream of international students, a trend which might decline for external factors including relocation to a city which is cheaper to live in. Similarly the foreign investment which is in flight from instability in the rest of the world might prove quite volatile, creating a glut of property priced beyond the reach of local residents. The 30-year lifespan that buildings were expected to survive was of course too laughably short to address enduring concerns about sustainability. Maintenance costs for super-tall structures will prove a burden for future generations and need to be considered now by any responsible developer or local planning authority. Instead immediate profit trumps responsibility to fellow and future citizens and care for the wider environment. This prospect seems a rather bleak situation not dissimilar to that which brought SAVE into existence nearly 50 years ago. Fortunately popular resistance is a phenomenon which is often overlooked in rapidly changing cities but which, along with the resilience of existing structures, remains a significant organic force in any city that boasts about doing things differently.

It has been attempted before, but the city urgently requires a plan for its physical form if the competing forces its regeneration has unleashed are not to irreparably damage the unique character of the place. While the planning of the city as a whole and for the common good remains so institutionally weak there is little prospect of significant change.

If one takes the use of the street as a single instance, the contested and neglected nature of the situation becomes clear. The roads and pavements are often in a state of bad repair due to poor workmanship, seemingly constant construction traffic and illegal parking. The various schemes to pedestrianise and introduce cycle lanes often cause further problems because of their fragmentary implementation. Against



Central Manchester

this background in relation to the public realm what chance do individual heritage buildings have when the tissue that connects them to each other is so poorly managed? The self-congratulation in which the city indulges remains in stark contrast to the experience of citizens or visitors who struggle hard to find “original modern” among the chaos.

Uncontrolled building height is clearly the most visible area of concern in relation to the impact on heritage but in effect that particular horse has already bolted. Given the increase in building height since the construction of the 47-storey Beetham Tower in 2006 it cannot be long before Manchester’s first 100-storey tower is announced. By that stage even large industrial-era structures would appear incidental against the skyline of glass.

The ethical dimension of such a plan, necessary environmentally and for social equity in our very unequal city, should not be ignored. The environmental costs of Manchester’s boom are gross economically as well as in terms of height. It has local consequences at street level in terms of overshadowed spaces and wind tunnels, exacerbated by the city’s glum weather, but that is as nothing compared to the damage done elsewhere on the planet by extraction, manufacturing and transport processes which the creators of this unsustainable environment continue to ignore.

Opportunities still exist to project more heritage-friendly architecture and urbanism in the districts to the north of the city centre which still await regeneration and where remnants survive of Manchester’s manufacturing past. Rochdale Road at present sees some jarring juxtapositions of new development and industrial decay with the scale of new building steadily increasing. Cheetham Hill and Strangeways contain numerous surviving factories, warehouses and public buildings ripe for adaptive re-use in a generous urban grid suitable

“At present we have no vision for the future built environment of the city, just a series of rival developments which serve private interests.”

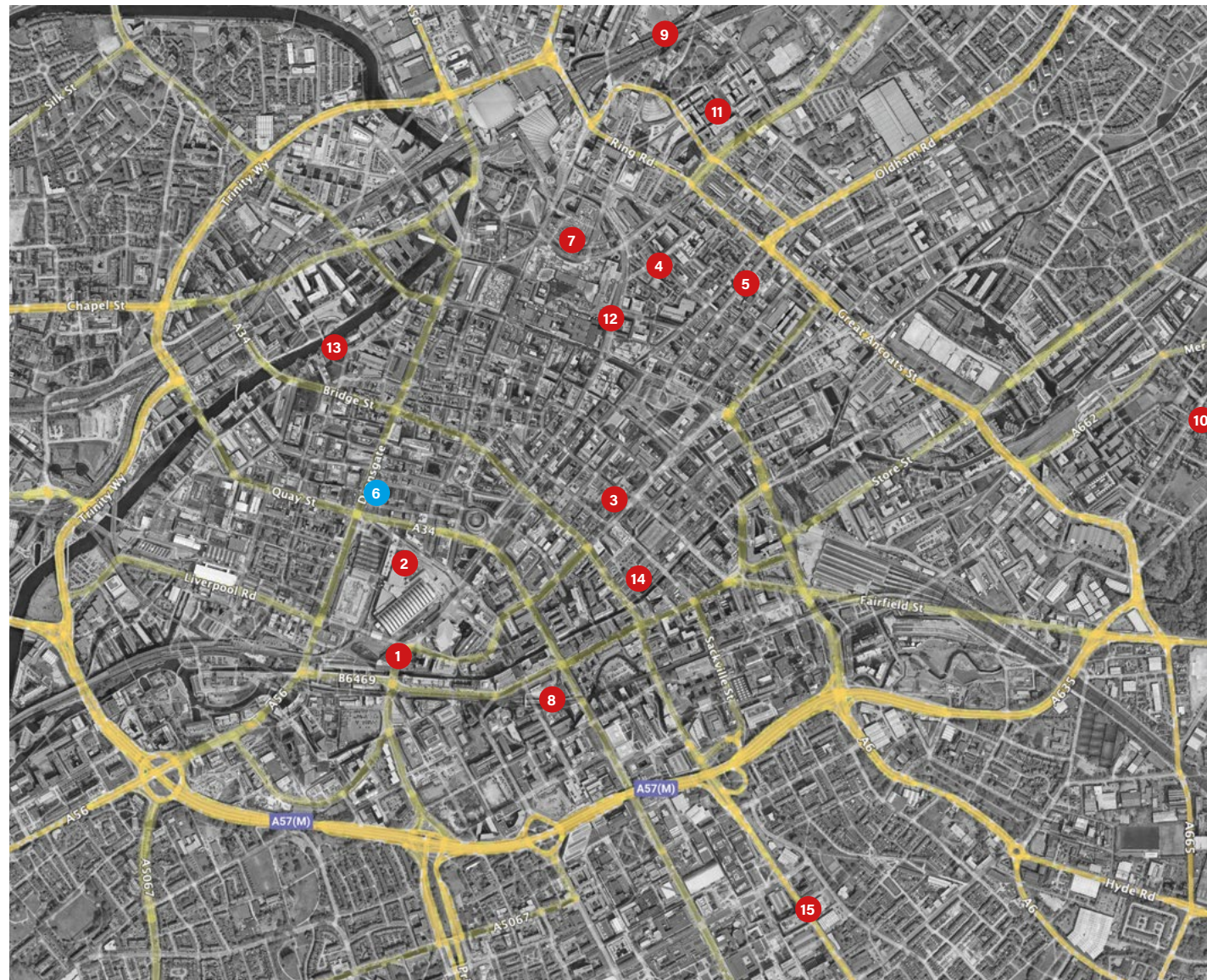
to be reimaged in the manner of the Barcelona superblock to create a walkable, sustainable neighbourhood.

A flagship project already exists in the refurbished Manchester Jewish Museum housed in the former Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue (1874) with its delightful new extension by Citizens Design Bureau (2021). The creative opportunities offered by a re-use of Alfred Waterhouse’s Strangeways Prison (1869) could galvanise the whole district it dominates if performed successfully.

After the First and Second World Wars and in the 1960s, Manchester City Council attempted to implement physical plans for the city where improvements to the the common good were the determining factors behind the design vision. Those plans were only partially fulfilled but at least the intention was clear, even if the city’s built heritage was often regarded as an obstacle. At present we have no vision offered for the future built environment of the city, just a series of rival developments which serve private interests. The city’s architectural heritage remains its enduring legacy to that future and the council should produce a plan showing how that heritage, medieval to modern, can contribute positively to the sustainable city we all aspire to see. ●

We built this city

Eamonn Canniffe leads us on a whistle-stop tour of Manchester's development since the Industrial Revolution



Map: Google Earth



1 The Britons Protection
 1811. Grade II. Listing last updated 2000
 Historic red-brick pub on Bridgewater Street which is a remnant of the early industrial town. Once used as an army recruitment centre, from which it derives its name. Philosopher Friedrich Engels, musician Guy Garvey and former New York mayor Bill de Blasio are all said to have propped up the 210-year-old bar. Interior remodelled in 1930s, remains largely intact: panelled bar, glazed tiling and ornate ceilings. Threatened by overshadowing from a proposed 26-storey tower.

2a Theatre Royal, Peter Street
 1845. Grade II. Listing last updated 1994. Architect: John Gould Irwin & Francis Chester
 A noble façade which presents Peter Street with a huge temple front. Manchester's oldest surviving theatre, it has been mothballed intermittently for decades but could provide a new performance space in a very central location.

The enduring architectural image of Manchester was formed in the middle years of the 19th century. Prior to that period it had been a typical small English town, the geography of which had led to the massive expansion of its footprint and population as a manufacturing and trading centre. Little of that unremarkable town survived the industrial development that was to follow, with notable exceptions being the Collegiate Church (now Manchester Cathedral), Chetham's School, St Ann's Church and The Shambles that once stood in the marketplace. In 1826 a visiting Karl Friedrich Schinkel was fascinated by the industrial innovations but thought it made "a dreadful and dismal impression", overwhelmed as the town centre and its residential districts were by the new factories and warehouses.

The soon-to-be city fathers of the time had a similar mind as they set about commissioning new public buildings, notably the Royal Manchester

Institution, 1825-35 (now Manchester Art Gallery) from the young Charles Barry in an austere Greek style of which Schinkel would no doubt have approved. Barry was also responsible for The Athenaeum of 1837 which would help generate a series of "palazzo" warehouses along Princess Street to create a dignified street frontage for commerce.

The political confidence of the merchants and industrialists, united behind the doctrine of free trade, saw them look to the Italian renaissance to identify their forebears and employ suitable architects who could fulfil their civic vision, men like Edward Walters who would give them a major public building with a sense of scale and magnificence in the Free Trade Hall, 1853-56 (now the Edwardian hotel). Here was a structure which rivalled the warehouses in size but was devoted to forging a new cultural identity for the industrial town which achieved city status in 1853. Edward Salomans created

Map and gazetteer of vulnerable buildings

- 1 The Britons Protection
- 2 Cox's Bar / Royal Central / Baty's Bar
- 2a Theatre Royal, Peter Street
- 3 41-43 Faulkner Street
- 4 Nos 38-45, Back Turner Street
- 5 51 Spear Street
- 5 68-70 Oldham Street
- 6 Jackson's Row Synagogue [dem. 2023]
- 7 Withy Grove Stores
- 8 The Salisbury / Grand Central / Little Ireland
- 8 Former Tatler Cinema
- 9 Charter Street Ragged School
- 10 The Church of All Souls, Ancoats
- 11 Particular Baptist Chapel
- 11 Marsden Harcombe & Co Ltd
- 11 Mason/Marshall Street industrial building
- 12 20 High Street (former Metro Cafe)
- 13 Albert Bridge House, 1 Bridge Street
- 13 Reedham House, 29 King Street
- 14 51-53 Richmond Street
- 15 Welsh Baptist Chapel, Upper Brook Street
- Demolished / demolition approved

Boom not bust



a palatial venue for the Liberal interest in his Reform Club of 1870-71 in the Venetian style.

However the pinnacle of that search for an architectural identity was to be expressed in Gothic form with the creation of Manchester Town Hall, opened in 1877. Alfred Waterhouse's highly innovative interpretation of the mediaeval as a modern administrative structure. Its awkward triangular site enabled Waterhouse to create a highly romantic skyline for what would remain Manchester's tallest building well into the 20th century. Its dramatic profile created through its elaborately carved stonework, mosaic and historical murals a form of instant heritage to rival that of older English cities.

Yet architectural fashion changed and the Gothic was superseded by the Baroque when it was introduced as a style to adorn the banks and offices of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, most notably Charles Heathcote's Lloyds Bank of 1915 on King Street.



These expensive and carefully designed and ornamented buildings sat in the context of terrible environmental pollution produced by largely unfettered industrialisation. Civic improvements, such as the creation of Whitworth Street, provided the opportunity to update and inflate the palazzo warehouse model and create large terracotta-clad institutions for education, cheek by jowl with the grim housing conditions of the factory workers.

This juxtaposition of wealth and want provoked movements for social reform but also the realisation that the industrial structures, the canals, factories and warehouses, were themselves worthy of architectural appreciation especially, just as they began to fall into decline around the time of the First World War. In 1921 Manchester Town Hall hosted a town planning exhibition with various British and European examples shown alongside and in comparison to information on Manchester itself. Rather than civic beautification, the emphasis



was on public health, but also transport efficiency for industry and residents alike. A map showing the density and distribution of tuberculosis cases indicated the pressing need for decent housing. The disease's association with the squalor of the 19th-century boom city perhaps indicates a briskly modern lack of nostalgia for Victorian heritage in progressive minds at this date.

Significant architectural works were produced in the city centre at this time such as E. Vincent Harris's Central Reference Library (completed in 1934) and his Town Hall Extension (completed in 1938), Edwin Lutyens' ziggurat-like Midland Bank of 1933-35, Joseph Sunlight's Sunlight House of 1932 and Harry Fairhurst's Lee House of 1928 (the base of a tower which was never constructed) are indicative of a growing transatlantic interest in building height and modern construction techniques which contrasted somewhat with the traditional cottage style adopted for the new council housing estates.



2b Former Cox's Bar / Royal Central / Baty's Bar

Refaced c1910-20? Unlisted

Part of the Theatre Royal development which occupies the rest of the block, the building on Windmill Street has had a number of guises but any prospect of it reopening depends on the future of the Theatre Royal itself. A dignified building in brick and grey terracotta detail.

3 41-43 Faulkner Street

1846. Grade II. Listed 1974; no updates.

Architect: Thomas Fish Taylor

The grandest of warehouse facades, stone built, with an imposing Doric pediment, the building is emblematic of many in China Town: activities concentrated on the lower floors with visible signs of neglect and abandonment higher up the building.

4 Back Turner Street

Late 18th- and early 19th-century. Nos 38-45: Grade II.

Small-scale brick-built weavers' cottages in a poor state of repair. Highly vulnerable given the compulsory demolition of adjacent properties

Central Manchester



in recent years. Number 36 was listed in 2004 but collapsed in 2005.

5a 68-70 Oldham Street

1850s. Unlisted

An eclectic stucco façade in two sections, heavily netted to protect passers-by from the crumbling plasterwork. A relic of the commercial life of this area prior to its revival as the Northern Quarter, it fronts a large deep plot.

5b 51 Spear Street

Mid-19th century. Unlisted

Brick warehouse at the junction of Spear Street and Faraday Street with distinctive blue window frames. May have been site of an Italian barometer-making and mirror repair business run by the Peduzzi family, who moved to the area in the 1840s. Adjoins 53 Spear Street which has recently been redeveloped with a new building designed by Lind Studio for Reform Developments.

6 Jackson's Row Synagogue

1953. Unlisted

Architect: Peter Cummings and Eric Levy



Recently vacated by its congregation and now being dismantled to make way for the high-rise St Michael's development which is intended to occupy the site and on which work has already begun. The present building in an abstract brick design was built to replace an earlier synagogue destroyed in a German bombing raid in 1941. A significant representation of an historic Manchester community.

7 Withy Grove Stores

1840. Unlisted.

Brick office building situated in the centre of Manchester's Northern Quarter. Now a lone reminder of similar industrial buildings on the street that have all since been lost. Distinctive façade lettering WITHY GROVE STORES reflects the mainstay occupants of the building The Withy Grove Company, which moved into the building in 1840 and rebranded as Withy Grove Stores. The company specialised in the supply of iron-banded and ironclad strongboxes for ships. Today the ground floor is occupied by a supplier of office furniture but the building was added to SAVE's Buildings at Risk register this summer.

Boom not bust



Following the Second World War, when the very detailed 1945 City of Manchester Plan was produced, the aesthetic imperative to create a visibly new city in housing and public buildings (and not just a more efficient or healthy one) was even stronger. Most Victorian buildings were expected to be demolished – including even the Town Hall itself – to be replaced by mid-rise blocks separated by wide boulevards. The comprehensive nature of this new urban vision was thwarted by the precarious economic state in the post-war period and the slowly accelerating process of de-industrialisation.

Albert Bridge House (1959) and the C.I.S. Tower (1962) are Manchester's nods to the Corbusian and the Miesian respectively, proudly assertive and autonomous architectural objects which stood apart from their urban context. At the edge of the city centre the UMIST campus provided an

institutional model for a complete modern environment. However, by the time significant new money was available in the 1960s there was the tentative beginning of concern for preservation of aspects of the past, notably in the King Street and St John Street conservation areas, long associated as they were with banking, medicine and the law. Despite the stirrings of a heritage sensibility a significant structure such as the Corn Exchange (completed in 1903) was still expected to be demolished for comprehensive redevelopment as late as 1968. It would survive but it was the Royal Exchange, the former centre of the cotton trade, that would find a new use as a theatre in 1976, an enduring achievement of adaptive re-use.

Pedestrianisation rather than road layouts would now play a major part in the city's planning activity, although the intention persisted to demolish centrally situated warehouse areas in

the vicinity of what is now China Town and the Gay Village. The energy crisis from 1973 onwards and the subsequent recession lasting over a decade would see a reprieve for many buildings such as those previously deemed disposable and which were now appreciated in heritage terms by those who saw comprehensive redevelopment as largely negative in its effects, but also by developers who saw them as profitable opportunities for residential conversion. The recognition that heritage tourism had a part to play in the economy of the post-industrial city led to a campaign for listing which took place from the early 1980s, saving much of the remaining 19th-century fabric and setting the tone for the modestly scaled and detailed developments in the next 20 years.

Dramatic change was to arrive unexpectedly, however. The 1996 IRA bomb caused widespread damage across the city centre but it was seized

Central Manchester



8a The Salisbury / Grand Central / Little Ireland

1820 onwards (refaced). Unlisted

Fragments of the enclave of Little Ireland where Engels carried out his research, the two pubs share a sloping cobbled pavement which leads down to the level of the River Medlock. Vulnerable to redevelopment, perhaps by blocks of student housing, as the pubs are adjacent to the prominent former Cornerhouse site and close to recent towers.

8b Former Tatler Cinema / Cinema 1 / Cornerhouse

C20th. Unlisted. Architect: Peter Cummings 1935. Remodelled by DCA 1998

A sleekly curved symbol of interwar modernity, the building re-faces an early cinema under the tracks of Oxford Road Station. Renovated by architect David Chipperfield in one of his earliest UK projects, the building played an important part in the city's cultural renaissance but has been empty since the Cornerhouse relocated to HOME in 2015. Boarded up and thought to be slated for demolition as part of

long-delayed plans to expand the station. The building has been on SAVE's BaR register since 2015.

9 Charter Street Ragged School

1891. Grade II. Listed 2019; no updates.

Architect: Maxwell and Tuke

A pioneering example of a building with a social purpose, the school and its adjacent Working Girls' Home on Dantzic Street uses a utilitarian language of brick and terracotta to fulfil its mission. As part of his election campaign in January 1906, Winston Churchill visited a typical Sunday breakfast service for 400 children and 400 men with another 100 outside. His government later did away with the repressive Poor Laws. The building was recently vacated by a school and is currently being used as site office for nearby developments. Overshadowed by all that surrounds it.

10 The Church of All Souls

1839-40. Grade II. Architect: William Hayley

Designed in what Pevsner describes as

"idiosyncratic Romanesque" style using brown brick with decorative carved stone dressings above doors and windows. Distinctive squared cupolas with pointed pinnacles. The church closed in 1984, and the building was subsequently used as a joinery workshop and another church. Now empty and deteriorating.

11a Particular Baptist Chapel

1907. Unlisted. Architect: J. Willis & Son

Brick façade with terracotta detail in a curvilinear art nouveau style. Isolated on busy and hostile Rochdale Road with new residential developments surrounding it. Now vacant, its historic interiors were being advance-promoted on a salvage website last year.

11b Marsden Harcombe & Co Ltd

1934. Unlisted. Architect: Ernest Ogden

Notable for its vivid green-tiled Art Deco doorway in a plain utilitarian warehouse on Marshall Street, the buildings in this area of Manchester are undergoing a series of adjacent residential developments which make them vulnerable to redevelopment.

Boom not bust



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo



11c



12

on as the first opportunity in several decades to look at the planning of the city comprehensively. It was commercially pragmatic but also quite radical, relocating the Shambles timber-frame structures closer to Manchester Cathedral to create a “new mediaeval quarter” (above). This move is a clue to the somewhat flexible and creatively minded attitude to heritage which characterises the post-1996 city, although the careful renovation of a number of significant structures was also part of the regeneration.

By the same time the implementation of the Northern Quarter Plan (1994) played a part in the city centre’s gentrification. This addressed the urban fabric and traditional scale of old warehouses and workshops converted for residential use with some design studio and creative industry workplaces.

These successes for regeneration, coming into new life in the early Blair years, attracted significant private investment to Manchester and the most

prominent landmark was the creation of the Beetham Tower (Ian Simpson, 2006) – at 47 storeys by far the tallest building in the city and positioned at the centre of the city on Deansgate. This tower would herald a new scale of construction of competitive tower building which has led to the current situation with significant Georgian and Victorian ensembles such as St Ann’s Square or Albert Square photo-bombed by distant but very tall new buildings.

In contrast during the same period much careful conservation work and new buildings of sympathetic scale and materials were produced in Ancoats where a surviving network of mills (which had been sketched by Schinkel nearly two centuries earlier) provided a framework to help order new development. Latterly the density of development has increased significantly as the area is regularly declared one of the most desirable places to live in the UK. It is an example of the attempts to

control development in the city, even in the volatile and commercially driven city centre, influenced by European urbanist movements.

A Manchester Design Guide (1997) sought to extend the permeable street pattern and perimeter block development which had been implemented in the regeneration of the Hulme inner residential district across the whole of the city. The regularity in urban pattern and form this guide tried to generate was undermined by the somewhat whimsical masterplan produced for another residential district on the edge of the city, New Islington, from 2002 onwards. Since then a series of enclaves have developed which heralded a different scale of development in the centre of the city, and a highly varied townscape which indicated the arrival of Manchester as an ambitious global city where its architectural heritage provides picturesque relief against a generic urban backdrop. ●

Central Manchester



13a



13b

11c Mason Street / Marshall Street industrial building

1920s. Unlisted

In a considerable state of abandonment this is a concrete slab building, with an open fire stair and metal windows. Open to the elements and occupied by birds.

12 20 High Street (former Metro Cafe)

1860s? Unlisted

A dignified though small corner block, in a classical style which is hard to date. Last pre-C20th building on a stretch of the High Street dominated by the Arndale Centre. Threatened by the delayed demolition and development of an adjacent site with which it is to be united. The popular café vacated the site Christmas 2022.

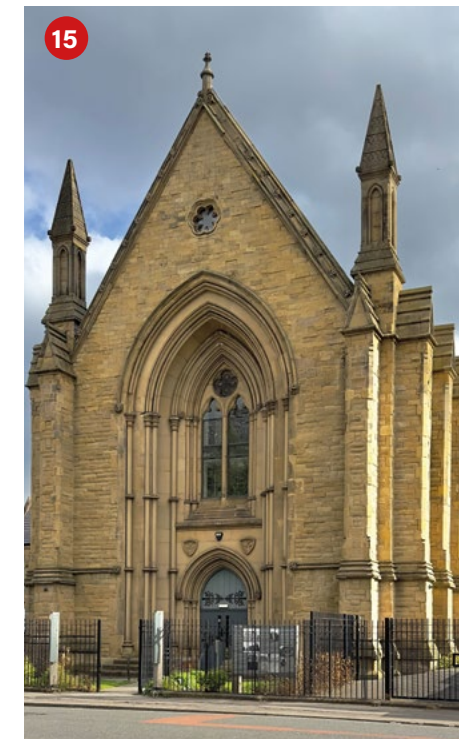
13a Albert Bridge House

1959. Unlisted. Architect: Ministry of Works

Recently vacated and now threatened by demolition in a current planning application for office and residential towers of up to



14



15

45 storeys, Albert Bridge House is one of Manchester’s earliest examples of post-war Modernism and was home to HMRC. Clad in Portland stone, the main 18-storey slab block is flanked by lower, linked pavilions and stands next to the River Irwell.

13b Reedham House

1849. Grade II. Listed 1974; updated 2020

A former industrial building on the corner of King Street West and Smithy Lane. With central pediment and pilasters, it fronts an earlier carriageworks factory building. Threatened with demolition in a current planning application for a 13-storey office building.

14 51-53 Richmond Street

1860s. Grade II. Listed 1994; no updates

A surviving, little-altered fragment of the textile trade in Manchester which has only just closed. Built from brown brick in Flemish bond, it retains exterior ironwork and other original details. Although listed, the modifications planned are likely to seriously compromise the character of the building if approved.

15 Unitarian / Welsh Baptist Chapel

1837-39. Grade II*. Architect: Charles Barry, in an early collaboration with Pugin

Partially demolished in 2005 due to neglect, the chapel on Upper Brook Street was restored and converted to residential use in 2017. However in a recently published proposal it is to be surrounded by new blocks on three sides of 8, 10 and 12 storeys, part of a wider masterplan of new student housing.

Introducing ...

Oldham and Rochdale

These historic mill towns can hum again, writes Mike Ashworth

We turn now to consider the heritage buildings and urban streetscapes of two important towns in Greater Manchester: Rochdale and Oldham. Both were formerly significant mill towns in Lancashire and both boroughs rose to importance and prosperity on the back of the international textile trade. Both have also faltered – seen in terms of both declining economic activity and rising deprivation – as these once staple trades faded away, in common with much of traditional British industry.

It is interesting to consider that nearly 40 years ago, in some of SAVE Britain's Heritage's earliest publications, a coherent argument regarding the importance of recognising and saving many of the buildings highlighted in this report was already being made. Those arguments have not changed and in fact are now more relevant and urgent than ever. It is important to recognise the roles that heritage buildings and landscapes can play in the regeneration of such towns. They not only help retain a sense of individuality and of "place" that is core to the recognition of communities and towns – but they are also one of the foundations in ensuring towns such as Rochdale and Oldham prosper again. This is even more essential given the new imperatives of sustainability and carbon-neutral development.

Happily, both towns now benefit from a deeper understanding of the urban context than was the case a decade ago. Rochdale's work on its central area Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), in

partnership with Historic England, is to be much applauded. In many ways it echoes Rochdale's pioneering work 50 years ago with the Deeplish Study on traditional housing. Oldham town centre benefits from an in-depth and holistic conservation plan adopted five years ago. This report acknowledges a debt to these two documents, as well as to many other sources. Equally we are now equipped with the important Oldham Mills Strategy document.

Our report in no way seeks to replicate any of these major studies; rather it hopes to assist in strengthening the debate around the protection and potential for re-use of many of the buildings identified. We also look at buildings that have no or minimal levels of formal protection and make the case that urgent consideration for protection should be given.

The report focuses on the towns' centres and uses their pre-1974 boundaries for simplicity. We have also permitted ourselves to cast the net a little wider where this makes sense to assess what other public or commercial buildings survive that could help revitalise their localities. These buildings, and in some cases wider areas of streetscape, add to the character of places and help define the nature of the urban grain that makes towns such as Rochdale and Oldham the unique places they are and deserve to be seen as. We hope this report will spark a wider debate that can bring additional consideration to other townships and villages within the current municipal borough boundaries.

There is much to celebrate in Oldham and in Rochdale but, sadly, much to concern us.

It would send a powerful message if the mayor's Atom Valley proposals spelled out the potential for heritage buildings to play a vital part in a re-imagined future supported by the community. The proposals should proactively encourage re-use as part of the mayor's vision for regeneration - and as part of his funding criteria.

As noted in the Oldham Mills Strategy and the Rochdale HAZ report, proper heritage appraisals for buildings are vital, and so is the protection that comes from designation and inclusion in conservation areas. Planning departments should expand the criteria for conservation areas so that previously overlooked places can be protected – as has happened with Castleton's industrial landscape of mills and houses. This would allow group value to be placed on mill 'clusters', for example, or on the large existing areas of terraced housing to the east and south of Oldham town centre.

It is vital that these appraisals are of the highest quality so that local authorities and communities can buy into and enforce them. We are all aware of the competing demands that councils such as Oldham and Rochdale face, but the expert conservation work of local planning departments must be properly funded and supported so that each town's unique but vulnerable heritage can play its full part in the regeneration that is so urgently needed. ●

Photo: Rochdale Town Hall / Alamy Stock Photo



Oldham

A considered assessment of the town's rich heritage must be at the heart of its regeneration, writes **Mike Ashworth**

Oldham has always had a different feel or character to Rochdale. Whereas the latter's town centre is deep in the valley of the River Roch, Oldham's is more that of a hilltop town and the place itself has always felt more industrial in nature. This is despite both settlements being rooted in the textile and ancillary industries. But a little over a century ago Oldham, even allowing for its earlier geographical and economic disadvantages when seen against neighbouring boroughs, had become one of, if not the greatest, cotton spinning towns in the world. Evidence of Oldham's pre-eminence can still be seen around the town centre, with major cultural and commercial buildings, and elsewhere with the surviving elements of the great Platt Brothers' works in Hartford or the few mill buildings that stand testament to the town's heritage. It is also to be found in the various surviving suburbs of terraced housing that vibrant communities call home.

But Oldham, like Rochdale, faces major and accepted challenges that are common to many ex-industrial towns in the North of England. Indeed, both boroughs, along with neighbouring Tameside, are now accepted as being places that score relatively poorly on social and economic terms even within the Greater Manchester



conurbation. This is borne out in numerous documents and reports and is acknowledged in the premise that underpins Oldham's adopted Local Plan and the recently announced Greater Manchester Mayoral Development Agency's "Atom Valley" plan that aims to address not only national but regional inequalities that are, so often, starkly illustrated in Oldham. We would argue that in this new desire to rejuvenate towns such as Oldham the heritage (buildings and landscape) that helps stamp a sense of place on such settlements must be acknowledged and worked purposefully with, not against. Oldham, like Rochdale, needs a prosperous and sustainable future and a considered assessment, along with sound, deliverable policies regarding their heritage, should be core to such urgently needed regeneration.

It is perhaps in the town centre where the now familiar story of hollowing out, seen across the UK, appears most starkly. While researching this report, one Saturday morning in early 2023 I found myself walking away from Oldham town centre down what had been one of its busiest streets, Yorkshire Street, towards Mumps. At one point I paused to look around at the buildings and realised that I was totally alone among shuttered buildings and the occasional parked car. I really did wonder if it was Sunday morning, such was the sense of that old-fashioned day when little moved and nothing opened. But it was Saturday. Arriving at Mumps I found myself looking at the virtually abandoned grade II-listed bank that lies isolated from any real urban context. As a tram rolled past, one welcome sign of investment in the town, I surveyed a car-dependent desolation of multiple lanes of traffic. These I had to laboriously cross, time and again, to find my way in order to reach any vestige of original pedestrian-scale streets.

The feeling of division and isolation that sadly surrounds Oldham's town

"I really did wonder if it was Sunday morning, such was the sense of that old-fashioned day when little moved and nothing opened. But it was Saturday"

centre and permeates its urban core must be one of the most pressing urban planning issues facing the town. Almost American in its sense of segregation, it seems to strangle any human or social vitality from the town. Streets and places, urban function and uses that once blended imperceptibly together with a more human scale now feel hostile and strangely sterile. Oldham is arguably not alone in this plight, brought about by events and policies many of which the town has little control over, but it is one of the great challenges facing the sustainability of our existing urban settlements in the next decades. How do we use the best of the past to begin re-connecting the urban, social and economic landscapes of towns such as Oldham?

It has to be said that Oldham's borough council, like Rochdale's, has been keen to develop local policies to regenerate the town centre. There is evidence of this and some real successes. Oldham's use of culture to help revitalise the central area is noteworthy. The contemporary furor regarding the fate of the famous Oldham Coliseum made for many headlines but it is hopeful to note that the theatre company itself has been announced as the anchor tenant for the borough's new theatre situated south of Union Street and which will open in 2026. So, work is forging ahead with aspects of this bold policy, much of which is aimed at celebrating and showcasing the borough's history.

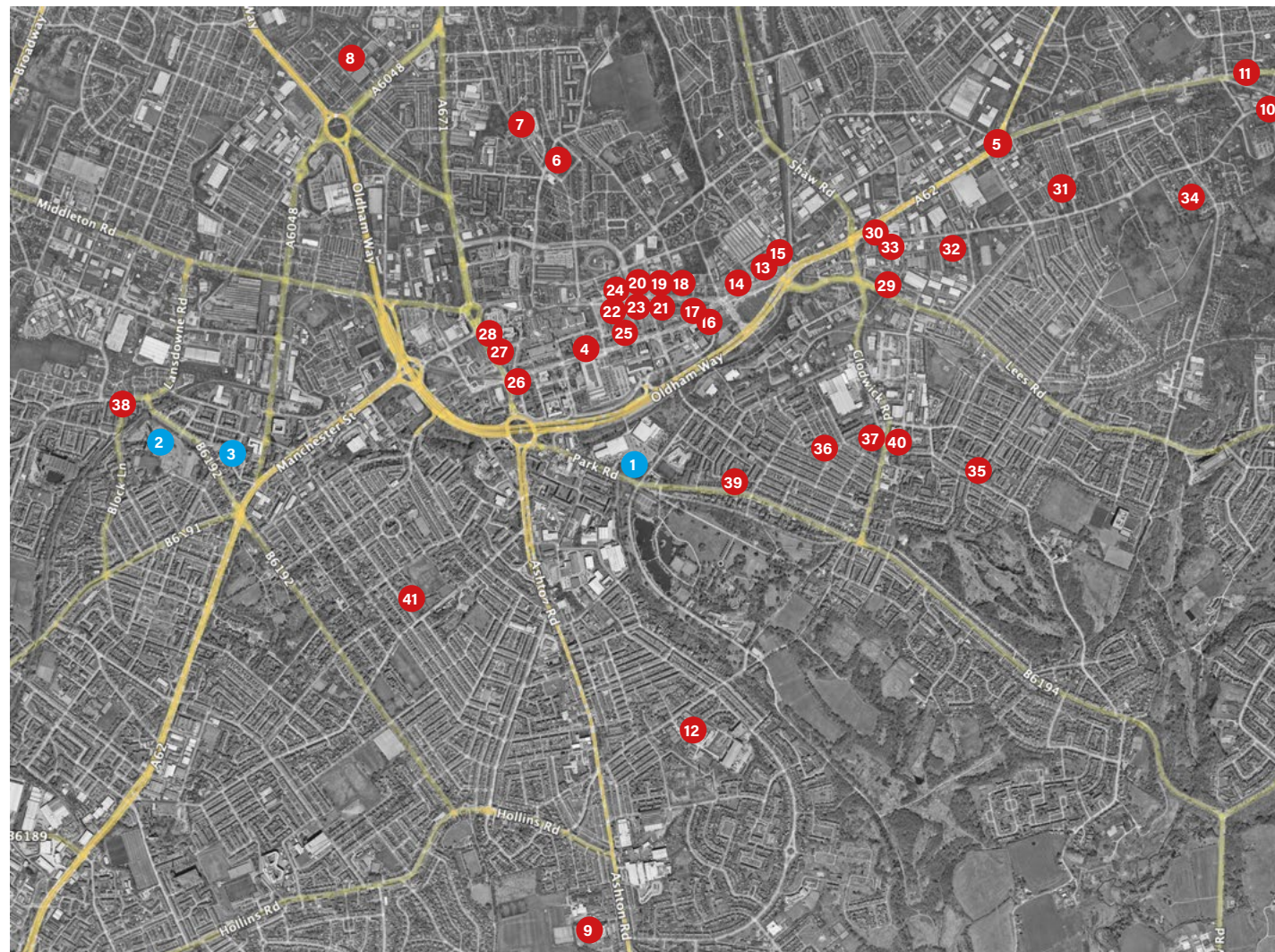
The council's aim to increase the

Map and gazetteer of vulnerable buildings

- 1 Former Park Road railway warehouses [demolished 2012]
- 2 Hartford Mill [dem. 2023]
- 3 Church of St John's Werneth [dem. 2023]
- 4 Former Prudential Assurance Offices
- 5 Hill Stores
- 6 Volunteer Drill Hall, Rifle Street
- 7 Oldham Brewery's head office buildings
- 8 Werneth Ring Mill
- 9 Bell Mill
- 10 Majestic, Cairo & Longrange Mills
- 11 Jubilee Mill, Heywood Street

- 12 Belgrave Mills, Honeywell Lane
- 13 ex-National Westminster Bank, Mumps
- 14 17-21 Mumps
- 15 Wallshaw Place and Garden Street
- 16 Oldham Evening Chronicle
- 17 167-169 Union Street
- 18 Former Royal Hotel, Horsedge Street
- 19 Former Artizan's Rest, now Harry's Bar
- 20 The Old Mess House
- 21 Hark to Topper, Bow Street
- 22 Hare and Hounds, Hunters Lane
- 23 Town Hall Tavern
- 24 Greaves Arms, Yorkshire Street
- 25 The Old Bill, Greaves Street
- 26 Former Grand Theatre
- 27 23 King Street

- 28 Austin House, 7 King Street
- 29 Oldham Mission - Mount Pleasant
- 30 Wesleyan Methodist Chapel
- 31 Star Iron Works
- 32 Crown Iron Works, Wrigley Street
- 33 Nut and Bolt Works, Dickinson Street
- 34 Greenacres Congregational Church
- 35 149-151 Roundthorn Road
- 36 90 Pitt Street
- 37 79-85 Retford Street
- 38 9 Block Lane, Chadderton
- 38 The Dog Inn, Chadderton
- 39 267 Park Road
- 40 Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr the Great
- 41 Werneth Primary School



Map: Google Earth



number of residential properties in the town centre is also to be welcomed; here is an area already “infrastructure-rich”, with retail and public transport availability, and which can only help deliver the intended sustainable urban development. In planning terms, the recently amended proposal for the Princes Gate/Mumps site is an opportunity to bring much-needed redevelopment to this area and, we argue, to ensure its scale and design allows for a successful future and the re-integration of key heritage buildings back into the urban fabric. They must not be left isolated and standing alone. In a centre such as Oldham where much original fabric survives, notwithstanding widespread demolition over decades, one driver of regeneration should be to ensure that architecturally the lead is taken from the mix and grain of the existing fabric. Not pastiche, but new development of a scale and materiality that celebrates surviving historic buildings and helps fully reintegrate them into a vibrant town centre. Equally surviving buildings will only succeed as residential units if their context is considered so as to make them desirable and therefore viable.

In terms of the recognition of heritage buildings, although Oldham

does not have a Heritage Action Zone like Rochdale's, the borough has commissioned a fine report on the Central Conservation Area from specialist heritage architects Donald Insall Associates, which we do not intend to reproduce or pillage. It makes a compelling case for extensions to the conservation area, gives a good record of the existing buildings and their heritage potential, and should help provide a sound basis for future policy and development. However, the report does not consider the wider town centre context nor the suburban areas of Oldham where buildings of equal merit and of many differing styles and uses survive and may benefit from wider exposure and more formal protection.

At risk

Formal protection is a vital tool in recognising and understanding historic buildings; however it does not stop endangered buildings from being neglected or even demolished. Sadly, one common theme running through the story of several listed buildings in Oldham over the past few years is loss. The town has a number of significant listed buildings on various “at risk” registers including some in the town centre conservation area.

In 2012 the rare, curved, multi-storey brick **Park Road railway warehouses** 1 of 1876 (grade II listed) were demolished after years of neglect led to a dangerous structure order. This year has seen the demolition of one of the finest cotton mill buildings, the grade II-listed **Hartford Mill** 2 of 1915, by FW Dixon, again after years of neglect. It is reprehensible that such historic buildings should, effectively, be allowed to be lost in this manner. While it is often argued that such structures are too “difficult”, “awkward” or “costly” to adapt, it is vital that we recall the success of major industrial reuse schemes such as Salts Mill in Saltaire, Lister Mills in Bradford, Dean Clough Mills in Halifax or the Ditherington Flax Mill Maltings in Shrewsbury. Each of these is a story not only of an important building saved and revitalised but also illustrating the important effect restoration can have on an area. Locally it is also important to consider, say, Shore Mill's successful conversion to residential use and in neighbouring Heywood, in Rochdale, the scheme to convert the important grade II Mutual Mills.

Neither can we ignore Oldham's most recent and tragic heritage loss, the demolition in May 2023 of the unlisted but important **St John's Church**

Photo: Colin Irwin, Steam Chasers



“The demolition of St John’s raised widespread condemnation, both locally and nationally, in terms of its wanton destruction, and that not even salvage or reuse was possible.”



in Werneth ³. This raised widespread condemnation, both locally and nationally, in terms of not only the wanton destruction of such a structure but also that it was done in such a way as to ensure that not even any salvage or reuse was possible. As owner, the council was able to use what the Victorian Society described as a “raw use of Permitted Development (PD) powers”. Not only does such an act show the urgent need for amendment to PD powers but it also provokes a sense of disbelief when viewed against suggestions in the council’s own adopted Mill Strategy that the local authority should itself consider issuing planning directions such as are available under General Permitted Development Orders to ensure unlisted heritage assets are

protected. This should also be viewed in light of Historic England’s 2016 report “Stopping the Rot” that looks to make use of the albeit limited powers under section 215 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 where a local authority can move to help in ensuring buildings are not needlessly lost through neglect or inaction.

Two equally iconic buildings in Oldham’s social and commercial history are both listed but are now “at risk” and in danger: In Union Street, the former commercial heart of Oldham, stands the grade II-listed **ex-Prudential Assurance Offices** ⁴ by Waterhouse, 1889. Indeed, this is often the first building that greets the eye when you alight at the Union Street tram stop – for all the wrong reasons. Loaded with buddleia,

peppered with boarded-up windows and graffiti, this fine building of faience terracotta exterior, with equally lavish public interiors, now has sections of roof missing. It appeared on the Victorian Society’s top 10 “at risk” buildings for 2020. There could, at last, be hope ahead for this woefully neglected gem. At the time of writing, planning consent has been granted for a multi-million-pound scheme of restoration and adaptation by Buttress, working with architect Shaadi Karimi. The building would be used as a “flexible, low-cost space for the creative, digital and media industries” as well as providing a cafe in the luxuriantly decorated ground-floor public areas. To achieve this, Oldham council issued a compulsory purchase notice on the owner, for which it deserves praise.

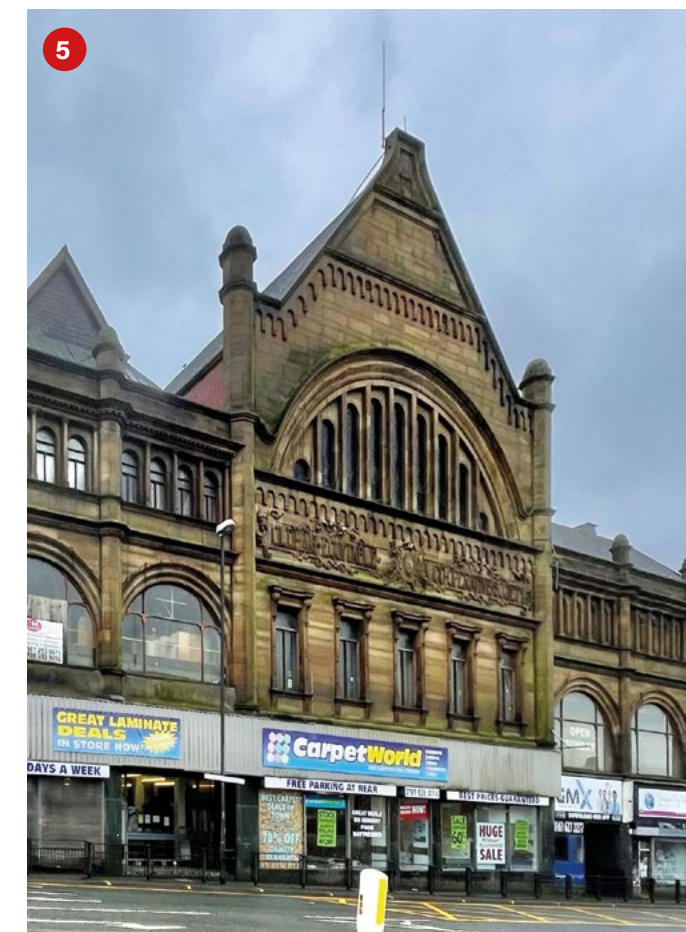


While we have some reservations about the design, we have to wish this scheme well as it should enable the building to be rightly restored as part of the town’s wonderful architectural character. It also underlines the challenges in seeing through schemes like this, let alone the economic costs of allowing such structures to decline to this degree.

Sadly, Oldham appears again in the Victorian Society’s 2021 top 10 “at risk” register, with the magnificent grade II-listed **Oldham Equitable Co-operative Society’s Hill Stores** ⁵ of 1900, by Thomas Taylor. This towering local landmark now has minimal ground-floor shop use while the rest of the interior, once regarded as a centre of the town’s social and commercial life, lies underused and forlorn.

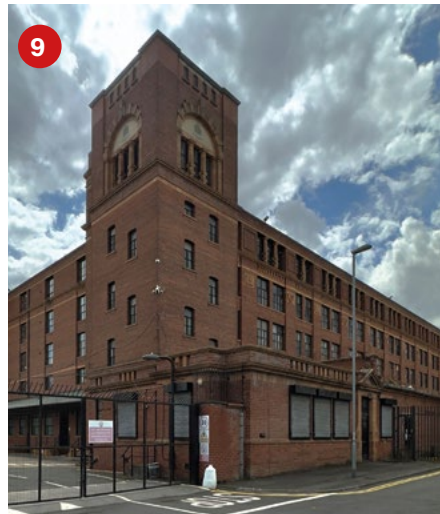
It is vital that neither of these buildings follows the fate of the warehouse and Hartford Mill. In the case of the Prudential Building, at least, this will hopefully now not be the case. We must hope for similar action from the local authority, Historic England and the owners to work together to find an equally bold and sustainable scheme to ensure the survival of Hill Stores and other buildings.

The north of Oldham is, in many ways, dominated by the striking complex of the Civic Centre and Queen Elizabeth Hall, constructed in phases and marking the bold, modern future of the 1960s and 1970s. At the time Oldham saw some major construction projects with the whole-sale redevelopment of



areas such as St Mary’s, a scheme that was documented in two Ministry of Housing & Local Government “design bulletins” of 1970. The scheme swept away numerous hillside terraces of old Victorian houses and replaced them, in a reconfigured landscape, with the Danish Jespersen 12M system-built flats and deck terrace housing. Sadly, like many other such schemes, St Mary’s sank into unpopularity and disrepair with much of it demolished in 2012. Plans to replace it with more traditional housing stock have not yet materialised and some areas are now simply landscaped open ground.

Almost at the top of the hill that carries St Mary’s to the top of the open space of Oldham Edge stands the now endangered **Volunteer Drill Hall** ⁶, by Thomas Taylor of Oldham, opened in



“Now more than ever is a time to value what is left of the mills and ensure that the survivors are properly recognised and protected rather than enduring the fate of the listed Hartford Mill.”

1894. It was in military use until 2000 when it was sold off for industrial premises until a fire badly damaged the building in 2012. The Local Volunteers in South Lancashire played an important part in various conflicts, including the Boer and First World War, as well as in the development of the Territorial Army. This bold, castellated Gothic-style brick building is a prominent landmark and forms an important piece of Oldham’s story. Yet it lies virtually roofless and derelict. It deserves formal protection to help promote a scheme to regenerate the building and must not be lost.

A little further along the slopes of the hill here, in Coldhurst Street, stands another endangered and important reminder of the history of the town. The **Oldham Brewery’s head office buildings** 7

of 1914 were designed by local architect Fred Thorpe. The Oldham Brewery was formed in 1873 although the site, an old hat factory, had been first used for brewing in 1868. The Brewery, like many similar local concerns, prospered and was responsible for many of the public houses across the town. The company was acquired by Manchester-based Boddington’s and closed soon after takeover in 1982. While much of the brewery has been demolished or heavily adapted for other purposes, this solid two-storey red-brick building stands as a reminder of this once prosperous local company. The building feels remarkably pub-like in style but has numerous details, including the granite plinth and the sandstone features to first floor framing the use of local red Accrington

brick. Of particular note is the survival in the side elevation of the etched glass windows showing the “OB” initials.

Landmark mills

Returning to lower ground, on Featherstall Road North, stands the striking landmark of the unlisted **Werneth Ring Mill** 8, a splendid twin-block mill comprising two imposing outer blocks of four storeys, each with an Italianate tower to the inner flanks, both abutting a central block. The mills were constructed in several phases, with the bulk of the structure by Stott in 1900 to replace fire loss, and another main phase by Dixon. Both buildings are still in use.

The cotton mill building, often multi-storey and in local red brick was, along with the attendant chimney, the iconic

structure of South Lancashire for over a century. Oldham had a real claim to be called “Milltown” for decades and indeed the town was home to one of the greatest architects of this building type, Stotts. Nearly 50 years ago one of SAVE Britain’s Heritage’s earliest reports drew attention to the plight of such buildings: Satanic Mills. The vast majority of the town’s cotton mills have vanished into rubble and backfill and to stand on Oldham Edge now is to see a low-rise landscape that would have been unrecognisable to generations of inhabitants and visitors. Instead we now see, in the distance, the increasingly dominant cluster of skyscrapers that denote the new Manchester. Now more than ever is a time to value what is left of the mills and ensure that the survivors are properly

recognised and protected rather than enduring the fate of the listed Hartford Mill.

Indeed, those left deserve a kinder fate and at the **Bell Mill** 9 in Claremont Street we see an example of what can be achieved. The mill, by Potts Son & Henning, dates from 1904 and ceased being an active cotton mill in 1957. Subsequently used for warehousing the building, albeit shorn of its once distinctive cupola, survives in use for business purposes.

In 2021 “The Oldham Mills strategy” was published, commissioned by the council and Historic England, and undertaken by ELG Heritage and Planning. This weighty document is a valuable contribution to the wider discussion regarding the survival of

those mills still standing and considers them in terms of their architectural, archaeological, technical, landscape setting and other contextual significance. Just as importantly the strategy, now adopted by Oldham Council, seeks to consider a weighting of factors considering the buildings’ potential survival, either in continuing industrial or employment use, or as conversion to other uses notably residential. The strategy covers the whole of the metropolitan borough but does, of course, consider mills within the area of this narrative survey. For example, the strategy attempts to consider the location of a mill alongside factors such as Oldham’s Housing Strategy Policy (2019) and the issue of development funding, the latter being a particular



issue when considering the conversion of any such structure. A case in point is Martin's Mill in Halifax where conversion was aided by a realistic local authority and landowners to produce a "unit cost" significantly better than those quoted in existing HE guidance. It highlights the need, especially when viewed in comparison with developer-led regeneration in say Manchester city centre, for new and more inventive ways of funding and enabling the reuse and regeneration of heritage buildings in more deprived areas.

It seems doubly ironic then that consent to demolish Hartford Mill was granted at the time this strategy was written and adopted. It shows that more urgent action is needed now on a more structured and holistic approach to

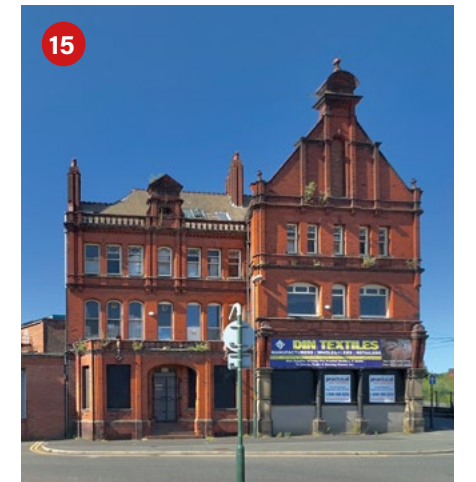
protecting mill buildings, ensuring they are protected for future generations - policies that SAVE would wholeheartedly support.

Mills often clustered together in close proximity to other mills and to the associated terraced housing. Such context is important in being able to understand the historic urban landscape of this area. Indeed, this is recognised in Rochdale council's Castleton South Conservation Area Appraisal. There are several clusters of mills in Oldham that still illustrate the groupings once found and these are well considered in the Mill Strategy document.

We can consider here one good example, the complex in Waterhead consisting of the surviving elements of the **Majestic, Cairo & Longrange Mills** ¹⁰. These

mills on Greenacres Road are still in use for commercial and industrial purposes and, even as altered and extended in more recent times, they are an excellent group of such iconic structures that are still "doing their job" and so are deserving of greater heritage protection. Nearby, in Heywood Street, stands the smaller **Jubilee Mill** ¹¹ and this, considered as being of medium importance in the Mill Strategy, is nevertheless typical of a building that deserves a more considered future than demolition given its scale and urban setting.

A second important cluster is to be found in the east of the town to the south of Honeywell Lane: a series of surviving mill buildings that formed the bulk of the various **Belgrave Mills** ¹². The group, even allowing for partial demolition,



"The building is a towering statement of the town's standing at the time."

has real value as it gives some idea of the contextual scale of such mills and, again, can be the centre of much-needed economic activity while retaining their heritage structures and value.

Returning to the town centre, one building that may soon find itself on an at-risk register is the remarkable grade II-listed **ex-National Westminster Bank** ¹³ in Mumps. Constructed in 1902-03 by Mills & Murgatroyd for the Manchester & County Bank it was

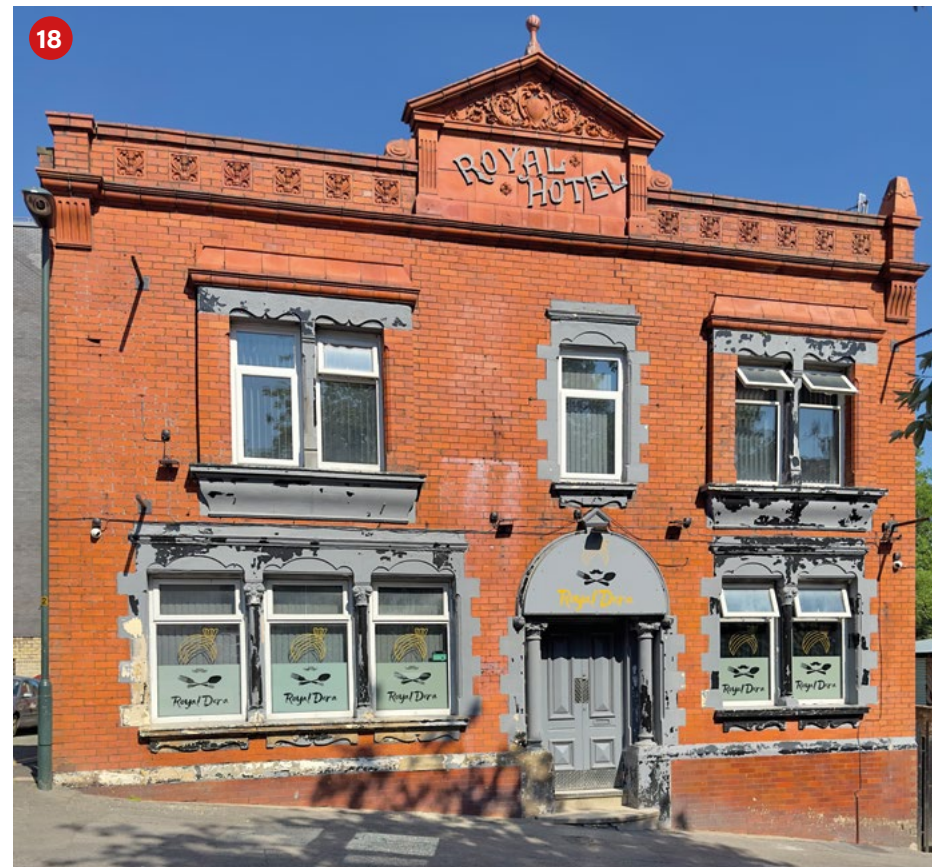
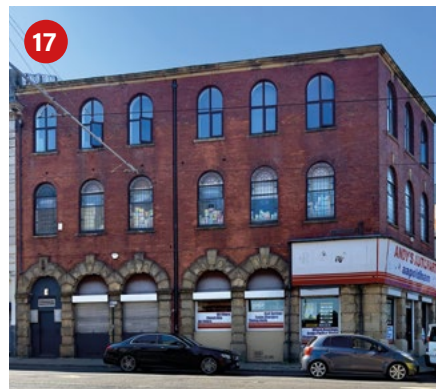
one of a number of branches built for them at a time of great commercial prosperity and this building is a towering statement of the town's standing at the time. A stunning building, it stands in close proximity to two other surviving contemporary structures in this currently hollowed-out area of the town.

Standing to the west is the substantial Victorian block comprising **17-21 Mumps** ¹⁴, rising to three storeys, with dormers, in red brick with stone detailing and with a fine Gothic-style corner tower.

To the east is the large range of associated red-brick buildings on the corner of **Wallshaw Place and Garden Street** ¹⁵, almost the only survivor of transport improvements in this area which saw the removal of the once locally famous Mumps railway bridge

as part of the substantive Metrolink works. The building is believed to have been built and connected with the locally remembered "Mumps Bazaar". It consists of a substantial three-storey building with three major elements: a main block to the east that includes on the corner the remains of a ground-floor shop; to the centre and set back, a secondary block including a fine entrance; and to the west ancillary structures that were possibly a stable block. Local records show the property, and the adjacent and long-lost Wallshaw House, in the ownership of Buckley & Prockter whose emporium, the Mumps Bazaar, was an early example of a retail department store of the type that developed in the rapidly growing industrial towns of the North. The main store, on the opposite side of Mumps, was

Boom not bust



demolished many years ago, but this survivor is an important link back to such retail buildings as well as being a fine structure in its own right.

The common thread that is lacking between this group of three buildings is an architectural context. They sit alone and isolated and surely what they require is to be brought back into the urban fabric by new buildings of a scale and design that complements the old.

From Mumps heading west we find the core of the town centre and in many ways the buildings here are well covered in the Insall report. However, several notable buildings fall outside the area of study and a few are worthy of mention here.

Following the Metrolink tracks along a remarkably intact Union Street there are several buildings of note. On the south side are the now disused head

offices of the former local paper, the **Oldham Evening Chronicle** ¹⁶. It was built in the early 1960s for the proprietors, Hirst, Kidd & Rennie, whose name appears on the fascia board. This well-designed building, dominated by eight tiled vertical bays, has a clever stepped return to the side street. It makes a positive statement to the street as well as being an important reminder of the once prominent position local newspapers held in provincial towns such as Oldham.

Opposite, running from Bow Street, the corner is dominated on the north side by a fine three-storey brick building with rusticated stone arch entries at ground level that is composed of three bays of arched windows to the gable and six to the main street. This fine, early 19th-century structure is spoilt only by the existing shop's fascia board. It stands

next to an imposing early 20th-century building, **167-169 Union Street** ¹⁷.

Running parallel to the north is Yorkshire Street, heading up towards the town centre. The modest, mostly retail properties steadily increase in stature towards the heart of the town centre, where the old town hall and parish church become noticeable. One of the building types that was most prolific and that is now most under threat is that of the public house.

Public houses and licensed premises

There are several examples of pubs in this area, many not faring well and several lost to their original purpose. But several are of architectural interest.

The former **Royal Hotel, Horsedge Street** ¹⁸ is set back off the main road and on a steeply sloping site. This

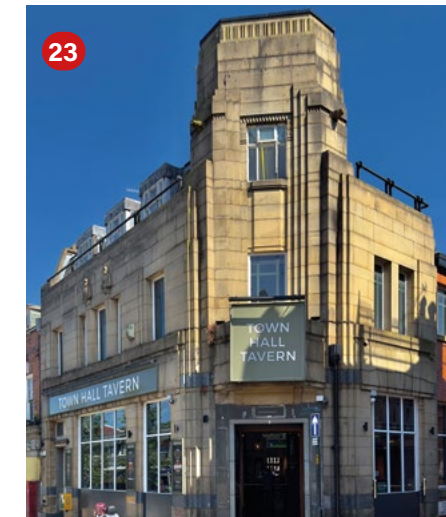
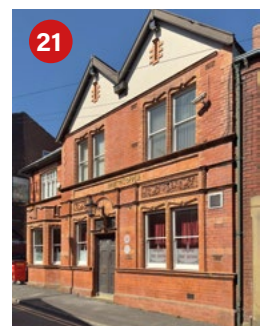


impressive red brick and terracotta building now has an alternative use and the liberal use of grey paint is to be regretted. With a fine detailed doorway its two storeys are topped by a fine pediment with the pub's name inscribed. To the south side, the pub's yard and ancillary structures are still in place.

Back on Yorkshire Street, on opposing corners of Bradshaw Street, mention should be made of two other licensed premises. To the east is the slightly streamlined "Harry's Bar" that was built in 1937 as **the Artizan's Rest** ¹⁹ by CT Taylor, Roberts and Bowman. The most noticeable point here are the blank brick panels above the door that used to house carved panels showing craftsmen at work. One wonders what has happened to these.

To the west is what was **The Old Mess House** ²⁰, an older premises remodelled

Oldham



in 1881 to designs by James Hilton and with a later Victorian porch. The building, unusually for this section of street, sits back and has a small boundary wall with decorative railings.

Off the south side of Yorkshire Street, a little way down Bow Street, can be found the **Hark to Topper** ²¹. Designed by CT Taylor and opening in 1900, this is still a functioning pub and, although the interior has been reordered, the exterior elevations are well detailed in brick and terracotta.

Back on Yorkshire Street and closer to town, on the opposing corners of Hunters Lane, we find two more licensed premises. **The Hare and Hounds** ²² is currently closed and boarded up. It is to be hoped that new uses are found for this long-standing pub that at some point expanded west to take in the adjoining property. In red brick, with sandstone

detailing the façade features twin bay windows at first-floor level, flanking the central entrance.

On the other corner can be found **the Town Hall Tavern** ²³, a café bar whose name belies a more recent origin. This handsome Art Deco-style building in sandstone with polished granite detailing was constructed in 1934 for the Halifax Building Society and is designed by Taylor & Simister. It was converted to its present use when the Halifax moved elsewhere in the town centre.

All these are literally towered over by the imposing **Greaves Arms** ²⁴ that sits on the north side of the street, on a site adjacent to the parish church and that fronts the town's war memorial. This large red brick structure, rising to three floors over a ground floor "cellar level" elevation on Yorkshire Street due to the sloping site, was arguably the Oldham

Boom not bust

Brewery Company's flagship premises. Reconstructed in 1925, and slightly set back to allow a more satisfactory public space for the memorial, the pub was converted to various uses following closure in 2014. It remains an important landmark building and deserves formal protection.

It would be good to see this building type, once such an important and vibrant part of the town's social and economic history, better understood and protection given to these locally important buildings.

In adjacent Greaves Street, an area well covered in the Insall report and in the heart of the conservation area, are several buildings that currently have no formal protection. They are worth a mention in passing. Now known as **The Old Bill** ²⁵, a former warehouse of c1880 was for many years a wallpaper showroom. This richly detailed structure with three large glazed arch openings and a high pediment also has a frontage to adjacent Firth Street.

Such impressive commercial and retail buildings form an important element of the sense of place in Oldham's town centre and it is worth reviewing what was once one of the main streets in the town, King Street. King Street has suffered from the wholesale demolition of a large swathe of the town centre along its western flank and the surviving eastern side of the street, containing several buildings of interest, now looks rather forlornly over a forbidding townscape that includes the challenging bulk of the Mecca entertainment centre. Standing, now disused and in poor condition, on the corner of Union Street, we find another challenge: the vast bulk of the former **Grand Theatre** ²⁶ (1908, by Thomas Taylor and others) which was converted in 1937 into the Gaumont Cinema. It was at this date it gained the debased Deco corner tower and entrance. Latterly in use as a club, this decaying hulk indicates the difficulty



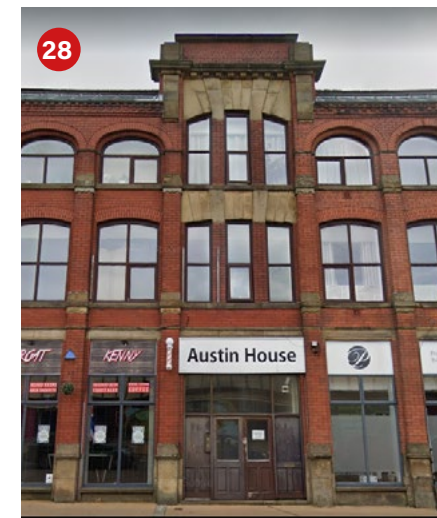
of protecting and re-using such large structures.

Further north runs a series of elevations that includes, on the corner of Barn Street, **23 King Street** ²⁷, a fascinating retail premises dominated by vast glazed elements to ground and first floor, with a detailed third storey in red brick with much sandstone detailing and surmounted by a later gable. This forms an interesting sequence that includes the buildings immediately to the south and, across Barn Street, those to the north such as Austin House at **7 King Street** ²⁸ which has already been converted to residential use.

This town centre "fringe" deserves more, both in terms of protection and streetscape development to help re-integrate it better, as well as understanding and celebrating these buildings in a more appropriate way.

Ghosts of an industrial past

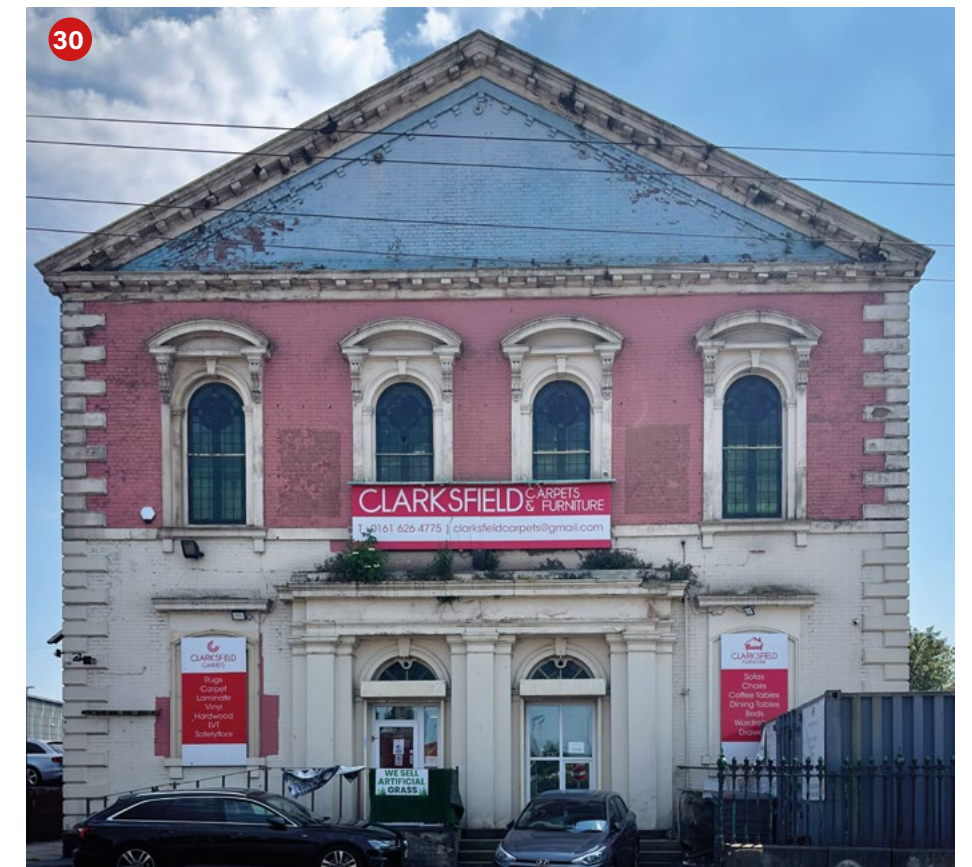
Making your way north-east from the town centre as a pedestrian is truly an urban adventure. Oldham climbs away here on to the Pennine slopes. Ripponden Road leads off to the famously exposed 1960s council estates at Sholver, while Huddersfield Road clings to the contour lines as it heads out to the old county boundary. Between Huddersfield Road and Lees Road to the south, tucked away on the fringes of the town centre and clustered around Greenacres Road, is the area once known as Townfield. Heavily and densely developed by the mid-19th century as part of the town's early industrial expansion, Townfield was, by the 1950s, the archetypical Victorian slum where poor-quality housing sat cheek-by-jowl with a variety of works and factories. The housing went as part of a series of slum clearances and



comprehensive redevelopment during the post-Second World War years and what remains is, largely, modern small-scale industrial units and factories that almost girdle Oldham town centre. This economic and commercial significance is indeed acknowledged in that the area falls within one of Oldham's Business Employment Areas contained within the Oldham Local Plan and its revisions. However, in isolated locations within the area, buildings of those earlier times survive and often display an interesting history. We consider that some of these deserve attention and protection. They, like the mills considered in their strategy, are part of the history and landscape of Oldham and can, as they often do, still provide for employment and commercial activity.

On the corner of Lees Road and Terrace Street stands a fine, quite

Oldham



Modernist façade, dated 1927, that announces itself as **the Oldham Mission - Mount Pleasant** ²⁹. Dominated by the inset doorway arch, this appears to have had later modifications, but the building's history becomes more apparent when viewed from the rear in Mount Pleasant Street. A simple brick façade with a central door, flanked by two unequal windows at ground floor and three at first floor level, includes a simple inscribed stone. This was the Wesleyan Sunday School of 1832. The building was purchased by the Town Mission in 1867 and acted during the early Victorian era as a Ragged School. This building acted as a base for missionaries who worked in the area, providing basic social and health services to the labouring and working classes who lived on these streets. In post-First World War years numbers increased

and the original building, as can be seen from the side elevation, was extended to culminate in the new 'front' entrance on Lees Road. The building is an important survivor and reminder of the importance of the Wesleyan movement in the social and religious life of industrial towns such as Oldham and charts in many ways the growth and decline of the area in which it sits.

In contrast to this modest religious building, a little to the north stands a reminder of the later importance, grandeur and standing of the Methodist community. Standing on Greenacres Road, long disused as a place of worship, stands the later **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel** ³⁰, now used as a carpet warehouse. This imposing building follows the pattern of many such chapels: plain, in brick with the twin entrance doorways extant, and with stone

Boom not bust

detailing. The tall, two-storey structure that would have enclosed a large chapel is made even more powerful by the high pediment. At first floor, the four heavily framed window apertures still encase stained glass.

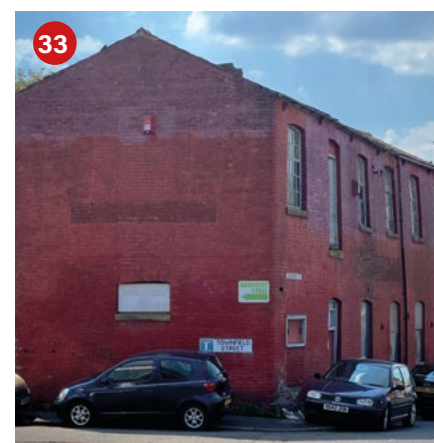
Greenacres Road is also home to a quirky, possibly early 20th-century survivor of the once numerous small metalworking industries found in the town. Set back from the road, between Ryeburne Street and Spring Street, and approached by a sett driveway is the **Star Iron Works** ³¹. Composed of two elements: that to the north being a more traditional-style factory with two-storey gable, while the façade that comprises the main entrance is surmounted by a shaped pediment in which is inset “W Toole, Star Iron Works” along with a star symbol, all in white brick. The works appears on the 1891/2 large-scale Ordnance Survey street plan of the town and, surely, a building that is still in “original” use after well over a century deserves to be protected for future generations?

A reminder of the importance of the iron industry, by way of castings for textile machinery which was one of Oldham’s most important trades, survives close by on a site bounded by Wrigley and Overend Streets.

The Crown Iron Works ³² was operated for many years by Buckley & Taylor, noted builders of steam engines that powered factories and works such as cotton mills. The now two-storey office building, in brick with details, presents a two-bay façade to Overend Street that continues with a high, powerful arcaded brick wall of 12 bays that likely echoes interior bays within the works, punctuated by a door with a date stone of 1890. The office building, with six bays to Wrigley Street, is continued for the whole block north by a multi-phase elevation that shows various elements of a once-commonplace industrial building. The Crown Iron Works is an important reminder, as is



Oldham



Platt’s old Hartford Works, of one of the town’s most notable industries and it deserves recognition.

If the Crown Works shows the grand scale of an industrial building then one other site in Townfield shows the other. On Dickinson Street, at the corner of the truncated Townfield Street, stands a modest brick structure of two storeys with a taking-in door at first floor, among early Victorian details to the window and door apertures. Although more recently painted this is a now rare survivor of a typical early Victorian industrial structure that would have once been the common building type in this area and is indicative of the early phases of development and industrialisation. Marked on the 1891/2 OS map as a ‘Nut and Bolt Works’ ³³ it is possible that this building was associated with the larger works of Lewis & William Green, who traded in this business in this area in 1908.



On the far edge of town, on the upper reaches of Greenacres Road stands another complex of religious buildings. **The Greenacres Congregational Church** ³⁴ on Callard Street and Oberlin Street can claim a history dating back to 1662 when one Robert Constantine was ejected from the living of Oldham Parish Church for his refusal to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity. Moving to a cottage in the then countryside of Greenacres, his following flourished and the current building dates to 1854, by R Moffat Smith. The church was re-ordered in the late 20th century but is still dominated by the tower, to the south-east, that includes flying buttresses rising to the spire. The church is partnered by a plainer parsonage of 1880 and the former Sunday school building of 1889, now adapted for residential use. The whole ensemble is worthy of greater recognition and protection.

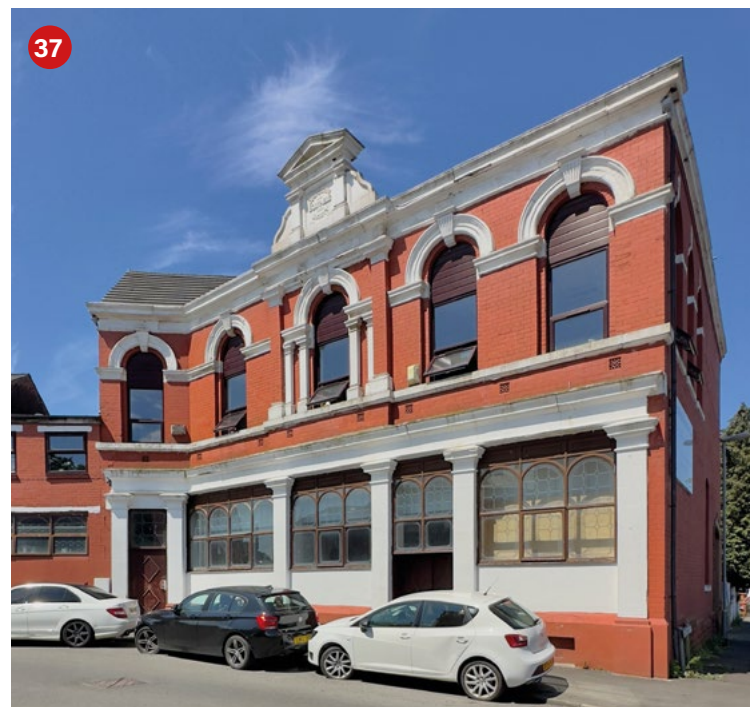
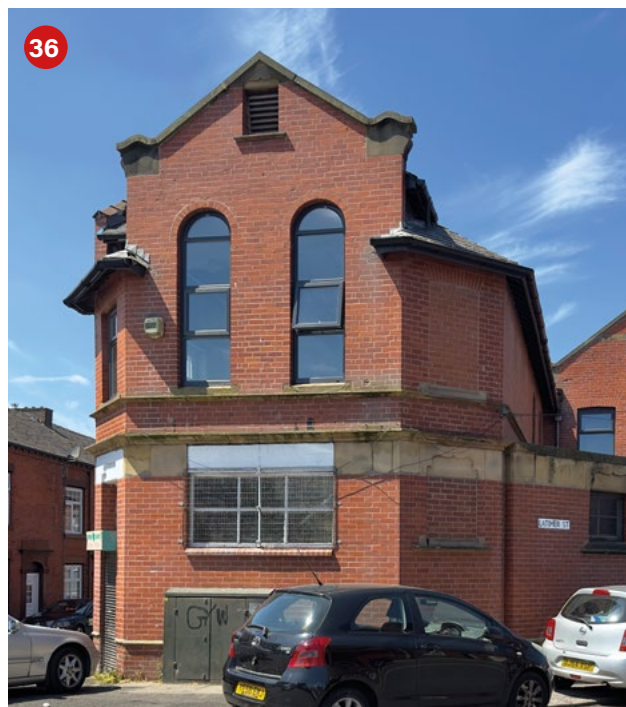
The ‘Co-op’ and the corner shop

With neighbouring Rochdale setting the scene for the development of the modern Co-Operative retail movement in 1844, Oldham’s working people were not far behind in the adoption of such principles. The first society was formed in the town in 1850 and it eventually grew into two locally important concerns. It would take until the mid-1950s for the rival Oldham Equitable Co-operative Society (OECS) and the Oldham Industrial Co-operative Society to “come to terms” and merge. Before that, they had finally agreed on a boundary of demarcation in which the Equitable broadly had the north of the borough and the Industrial the south.

In the later decades of the 20th century, before the unified Co-operative Retail Services and their small, local shops we see today, the Co-operative’s retail societies saw a dramatic collapse in the face of new competition; on one side from the new, national supermarket chains and on the other from a new wave of “corner” shops, often owned by and serving the new immigrant communities that were to be found in industrial towns such as Oldham. As such, the Oldham Co-op Societies have only left shadows on the town. We have already seen the largest shadow in the form of the “at risk” Hill Stores of the OECS, but a few of the smaller and purpose-built suburban branch shop buildings also survive. They are important reminders of the once great power the beneficially owned Co-op had in a town such as Oldham and its working communities.

The Oldham Equitable developed rapidly, along with the growing industrial suburbs in the last decades of the Victorian era, so much so that they resorted to constructing temporary timber branch shops known as “Klondyke” stores to serve customers. These were soon replaced by purpose-built stores.

Boom not bust



Possibly the grandest is that at **149-151 Roundthorn Road 35**, along with the likely adjacent store manager's house at 147. This handsome building, of red brick and stone details along with a green faience plinth, proudly announces Branch Number 17 and the date of 1907. It is now partially converted to residential use.

On a more restrained note among the surviving terraced houses of Glodwick stands the ex-branch store at **90 Pitt Street 36**. A more sober building, again in red brick but with stone details at lintel level, this stands on an awkward corner site formed of the junctions of Pitt, Spinks and Latimer Streets and dates from 1898. Comprising a central bay, now infilled at ground level, and framed by taller wings the building is still in use as a shop. The side and back elevations, to Latimer Street, make best use of the site with a small yard formed by the set back of the main block and with evidence of a taking-in door now bricked up.

A short distance away, showing the density of the branch network at the time, is **79-85 Retford Street 37** built in 1889 and

an interesting structure, again in red brick with now painted stonework, surmounted by a fine pediment containing the OECS name and date. The main façade is of four unequal bays, marking what was probably the shop entrance, but also has a single bay angled to follow the corner of the street pattern. The side elevation, to Chesterfield Street, although partially altered, still displays three tall arched windows at first floor level. This building is now in use as a place of worship.

Within the old county borough of Oldham, the agreed area of the Oldham Industrial Society was smaller and this Society made in-roads into adjacent areas, not covered by this survey, such as Hollinwood and Chadderton that were then separate local authorities. However, almost within boundary area, a fine example of an OECS branch still stands on Block Lane.

9 Block Lane 38, the corner site on a short terrace of original buildings, is still a shop, but this two-storey brick construction sits slightly higher than the adjacent house, so as to emphasise the

importance of the shop. A high ground floor gives way to a shallower first floor and the elevation is given added weight by a high central bay that rises to form a narrow pediment. Within this bay sits an inscribed slate panel stating this is a shop of the "Oldham Industrial Co-operative Society".

Other, often more modest ex-Co-operative branches survive around the town, some now so seemingly insignificant as to be almost invisible. An example is the post-war unit, the Pitsea's Branch at 356 Abbey Hills Road, now a carpet shop. The tiled fascia as seen in old photos survives and one wonders if the lettering still hides beneath the modern name board. The whole surviving terrace is itself of interest as the smaller, cottage-style residential buildings terminate at the opposite corner with the attractive **Dog Inn 38** on Lansdowne Road.

The Co-operative movement is of seminal importance in Northern industrial towns and even a brief survey such as this uncovers examples still



around the town. An in-depth, detailed survey of this building type is urgently required. These buildings are significant enough in the town – and beyond – to warrant better protection for the future.

There remain, along the suburban streets of Oldham, a few other intriguing buildings that are likely of ex-retail origins. Among the best is the block at **267 Park Road 39** and now known as Concept House. This is a fine building, as befitted a structure that faced some superior homes and the adjacent park, and it comprises a central section with two doorways and an upper storey dominated by a central arched window, flanked by two wings of three bays each. At ground floor, the original layout of entrances and windows is apparent, albeit with later alterations. The whole elevation is in red brick but with richly carved and detailed stonework banding. It includes a stone balustrade round the building and the side elevation, turning into Orme Street, is equally detailed. The corner is completed, at high level, with a small decorative turret. This is a grand

Oldham



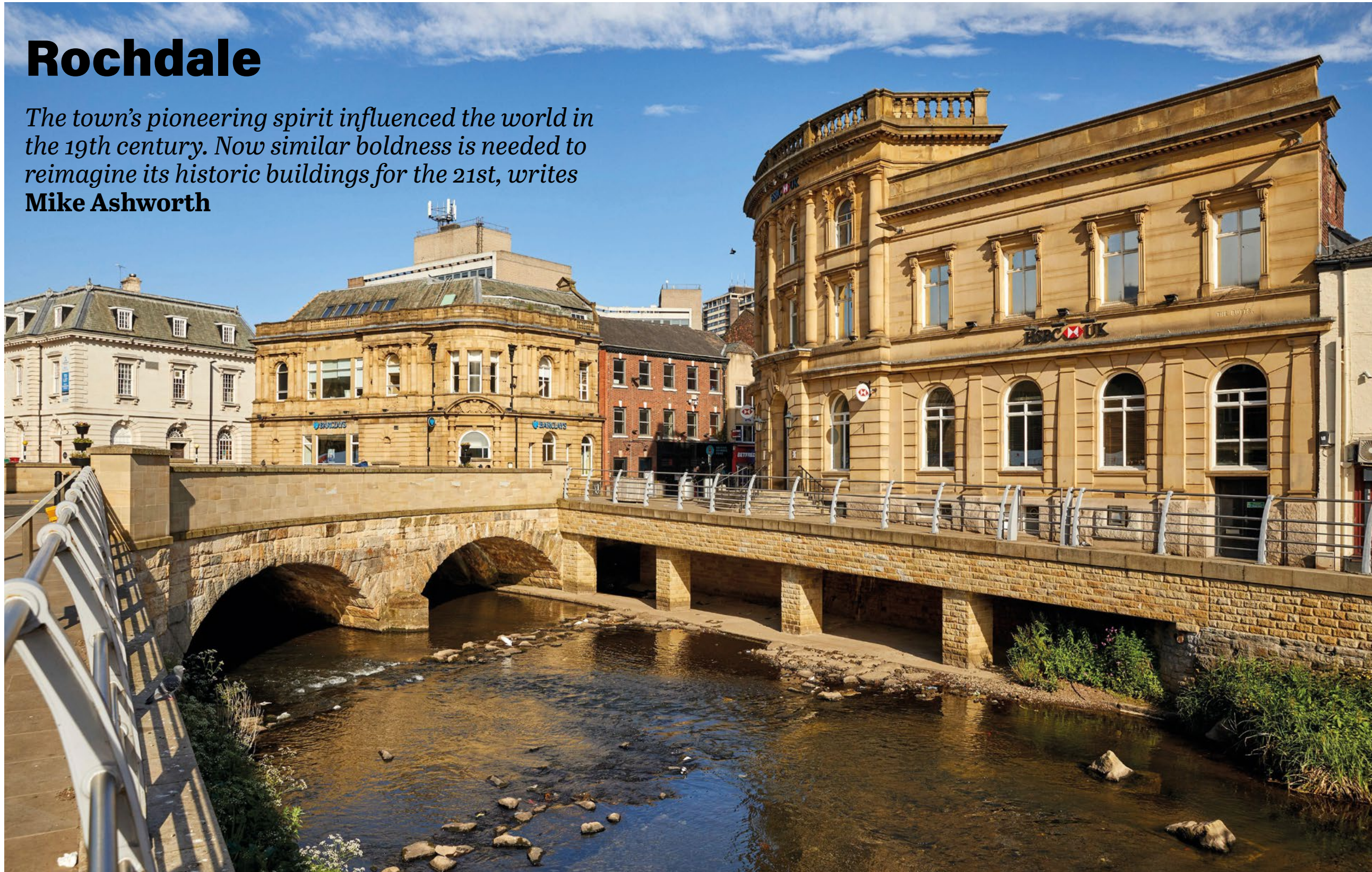
building for a suburban street and it warrants formal protection.

Among the growth areas of a rapidly expanding industrial town such as Oldham were, as we have seen, facilities and buildings that were associated with worship. One such building sits almost hidden away among the back streets of Glodwick. In Onchan Avenue is a modest yet pleasing building that is so red brick as to be almost identical to the terrace it is part of. This Arts and Crafts-style church building, single storey but with two bays and a more detailed gable end, is surrounded by a low wall topped with terracotta copings and is now **Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr the Great 40**. It speaks of an earlier movement of Ukrainians to the industrial towns of the North that took place post-Second World War, so this is an important building in many ways. It is a shame that it was not considered in the recent, May 2023, re-evaluation of Ukrainian heritage in the North West undertaken by Historic England.

One other growth area was that of education and we close this perambulation around Oldham with one outstanding example of the school board buildings that, during the late 1880s and 1890s, before local authorities took control of schools, attempted to deal with the massive growth in requirements following the expansion of state education. One board school in Oldham, that on Shaw Road, is already listed. However, of equal merit is the fine **Werneth Primary School 41** on Coppice Street. This wonderful building dominates the north side of the street and is itself dominated by the fine and unusual clock tower. The school, whose architect is unknown, opened in 1894 and has been extended in mostly sympathetic style on several occasions, notably in 1929. An apparent attempt to demolish the building, around 2000, was thwarted on the grounds of "heritage" but the building does not appear on the national register. Surely this superb local landmark and community asset deserves formal listing? ●

Rochdale

The town's pioneering spirit influenced the world in the 19th century. Now similar boldness is needed to reimagine its historic buildings for the 21st, writes Mike Ashworth



It is heartening that Rochdale Borough Council continues to support the assertion that the town's heritage, particularly in the town centre, helps to provide a springboard for the regeneration it is actively pursuing. This can currently be seen in the wonderful restoration of the town's grade I-listed town hall (WH Crossland, 1871) and the reordering of the surrounding area. This, allied to the recent re-opening of the River Roch and uncovering of one of the town's earliest bridges, should be applauded and deserves all support.

Rochdale's town centre and the near-derelict former shopping district of Drake Street form one of Historic England's Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) projects in the town. There are some encouraging signs from projects designed to help revitalise this important part of the main approach to the town centre. The council has, as part of the action plan, now implemented the restoration of a raft of buildings at the foot of Drake Street and South Parade, restoring original details such as fenestration and shop façades.

One positive outcome of the designation of the HAZ by Historic England was the compilation of the Central Rochdale Historic Area Assessment (Roethe & Williams, August 2019). This is a thorough, detailed and informative document that we do not intend to reproduce here, but we acknowledge an appropriate debt to it. It is important that the assessment is used as intended, to guide conservation policy and strategy. One of the intentions of SAVE's report is to back the assessment's findings as well as to look at extending the methodology to other parts of the town not covered in the initial HAZ or assessment.

A walk around town

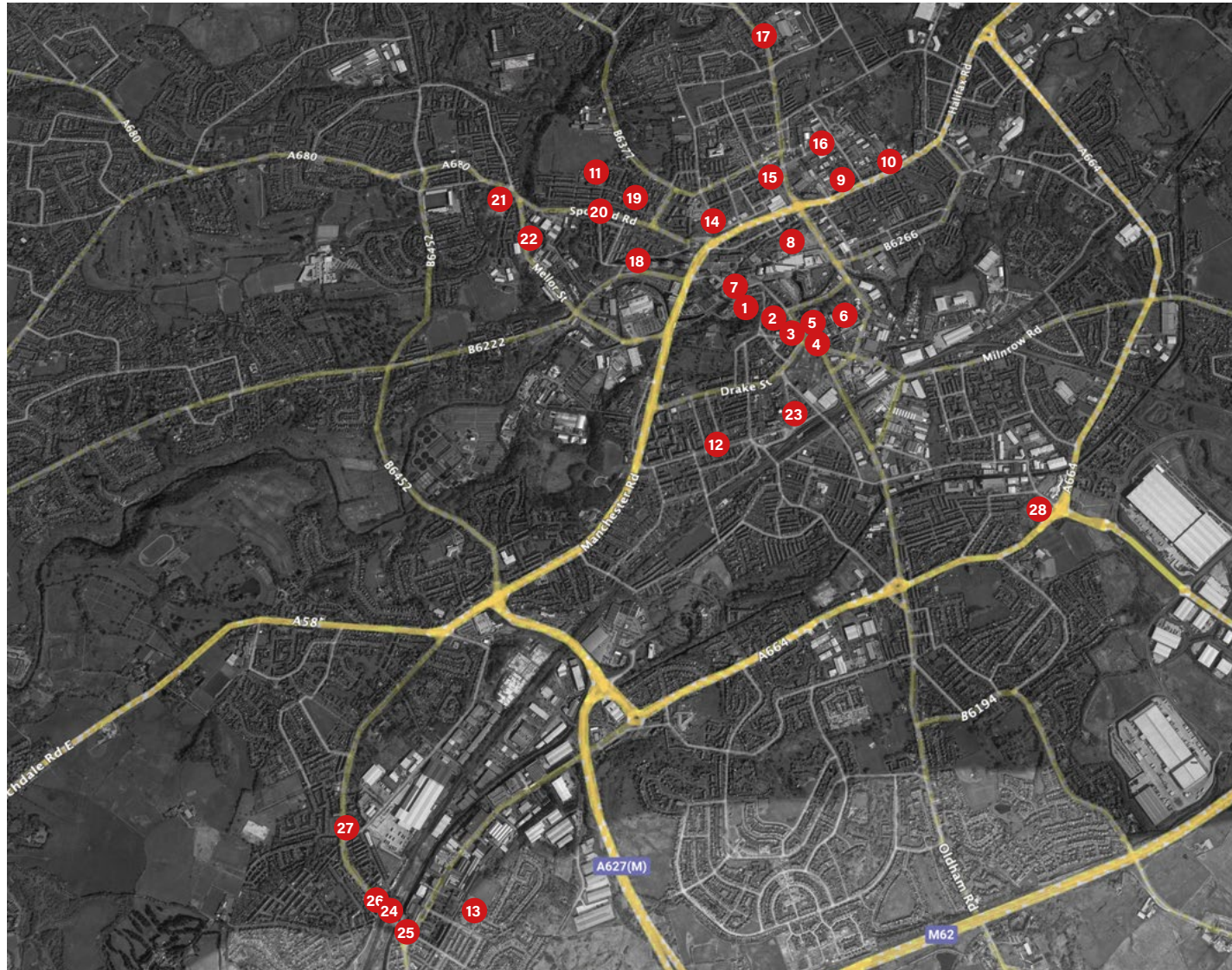
In close proximity to and facing the town hall, on Packer Street, are two fine buildings that although dating from the 20th century are appropriately faced

Photo: Alamy Stock Photo

Boom not bust

Map and gazetteer of vulnerable buildings

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1 Empire Hall | 6 Summercastle Works, Barchant Mill and the Vulcan Iron Works | 18 Tower blocks of College Bank |
| 1 The Flying Horse Hotel | 7 Rochdale Vintners Co. Ltd. | 19 St Edmund's Church |
| 2 Champness Hall, Drake Street | 8 128 Yorkshire Street | 20 Victoria Hotel |
| 2 Fashion Corner, Drake Street | 9 Lovick's furniture shop | 21 Bridgefold Mills, Spotland Bridge |
| 3 Former Rochdale Observer offices | 10 Power House, Rugby Road | 22 Rochdale Corporation Tramways Offices |
| 4 7-11 Oldham Road | 10 Heybrook Primary School | 23 Rochdale Fire Station, Maclure Road |
| 5 Baron Street Drill Hall | 11 Spotland Junior and Infant School | 23 St Peter's Catholic Church, Maclure Road |
| 5 Printing Works of Edwards & Bryning Ltd. | 12 Castlemere Board School | 24 Linden and Blue Pits Mills |
| 5 24 Baron Street Ltd | 13 Castleton Primary School | 25 The Blue Pits Inn |
| | 14 Brick Mill building, Toad Lane | 26 826 Manchester Road |
| | 15 Duke Street Mill | 27 The Farewell Inn, Manchester Road |
| | 16 Magnetic Works, Folly Walk | 27 Castleton Public Library |
| | 17 Fieldhouse Mill, Whitworth Road | 27 Castleton Swimming Baths |
| | | 28 Former Kingsway Hotel |



Map: Google Earth

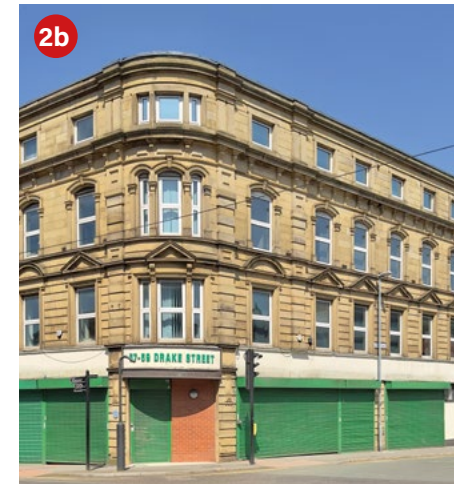
Rochdale

in stone suitable for their prestigious location. These are **The Empire Hall** **1a**, constructed in 1904 as a music hall before becoming a cinema and now used as a bar, and **The Flying Horse Hotel** **1b**. This building, although re-ordered internally, still functions as a public house as it has done since this 1926 reconstruction of an earlier building on the site.

Several new listings, on the back of the HE assessment that supported the HAZ, have recently been announced. These include the marvellous Newbold Building that forms the centrepiece to the junction between the Oldham and Milnrow Roads and that is dominated by this fine, late-Victorian structure with its corner clock tower built for the short-lived Conservative Co-operative Association. On Water Street, the surviving elements of Riverside House have also been listed at grade II but other buildings, highlighted in the HAZ assessment and noted in SAVE's walking tours of the town, remain unprotected. These include the important **Champness Hall** **2a** and **Fashion Corner** **2b**, the town's original Liberal Club, that stands opposite as well as the fascinating building on Oldham Road that certainly has links back to the earliest years of the retail Co-operative movement that has its origins in the town.

One building that has frequently been highlighted for its importance has been the old **Rochdale Observer offices** **3** on Drake Street. One of the town's few Modernist post-war buildings and locally listed, it has stood derelict for many years but has now been converted for residential use. This has to be welcomed although the apparent loss of the landmark clock from the building must be investigated!

Other recent developments include a substantial residential scheme on the site to the east of Wet Rake, in the apex of the junctions between Oldham Road and Drake Street. This is a vital site, both in terms of brownfield land use and the landscape potential to "close



Boom not bust



the view” when looking uphill away from the town centre. This was partially the site of the long-demolished Rialto Cinema as well as of later retail units and until the 1930s was the site of the Rochdale Branch Canal basin. In some respects it is a shame that some form of water feature has not been integrated into the plan. However it does point the way forward; a reuse of an inner-town, brownfield site that sits so close to existing infrastructure, such as public transport and the town centre shops. It is to be hoped it helps stitch this part of the town’s urban fabric back together again.

One other building here deserves higher recognition and protection: **7-11 Oldham Road** ⁴ which is accepted as being Branch No.2 of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers and constructed in 1864-65 under the supervision of James Cheetham. This distinctive building, of two storeys and with wonderfully detailed

first-floor arched windows flanking an oculus, is a landmark in the history of the Co-operative movement that is so closely associated with Rochdale.

The HAZ assessment makes mention of a number of small-scale industrial/residential buildings in the Baron Street area to the east of Drake Street, within the conservation area, and was one of the earliest areas of industrial expansion in the 19th century.

24 Baron Street ^{5a} has been listed at grade II but it is equally important that other buildings noted in the report are also protected. These include the former **Drill Hall** ^{5b} and the former **Printing Works of Edwards & Bryning Ltd** ^{5c} on the corner Baron and Robinson Streets, where Gracie Fields grew up.

Further east, and not in the current conservation area, is a larger area of mostly small-scale industrial premises that include the substantial, multi-date,

mill complex on Barlow and Hill Streets. These are the now linked parts of the former **Summerville Works** ⁶, **Barchant Mill** ⁶ and the **Vulcan Iron Works** ⁶. Such a survival is now less than common and this area of the town largely retains the urban grain of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As well as the welcome recognition and protection of individual buildings, such as 24 Baron Street, it is also important to find ways of recognising and sustaining the context these buildings existed in. It is arguably of less value to protect individual buildings if all around them is lost, leaving them forlorn and isolated, or the scale of surrounding redevelopment around them is such that it negates much of what is actually important about the value of the listed building. It is important that other buildings in this area are identified, their value recognised and protected. Equally,

Rochdale



the whole feel and grain of the area and the surviving heritage structures within that streetscape need to be considered. It could be that alongside additional appraisal and assessment, a wider conservation area designation is considered.

Moving away from the Drake Street HAZ and the areas covered by the town centre’s historical assessment there are areas that appear to be less well understood in terms of heritage assets and protection. These range from individual buildings and structures to wider groups of buildings and streetscapes of interest that are just as deserving of greater recognition. Rochdale should not be afraid to introduce equally bold policies as have been seen in action in Drake Street. The HAZ here has accepted the declining condition of the area – in this case already a conservation area – and has given strength to the idea of

using heritage as one of the main drivers in the sustainable regeneration that is being promoted.

To the north of the town centre, and away from the recent heavy investment in the new Rochdale Riverside retail and leisure centre, lies Yorkshire Street. This was the ancient route up out of the valley heading eastwards towards the county of that name. It was, along with Drake Street, the town’s retail heart for many years and was home to the old markets that were combined into the Exchange Shopping Centre. A product of 1970s development that delivered the town’s first covered shopping centre, it came at a price: the effective loss of the old street pattern and particularly of Toad Lane, the historic route north from the town centre. This was joined in the 1980s by another shopping centre, the Wheatsheaf, that has less visual impact on the streetscape of Yorkshire Street but, along with the new

Riverside development, leaves an impact on an already shrunken retail centre and, one suspects, some huge planning and urban regeneration conundrums. Not only are the streets at the core of the traditional town centre struggling but so are the two earlier shopping centres. It will take much bold reimagining to adapt these two shopping centres in a sustainable way, but it is a challenge that must be faced. For now, the north of the town centre, comprising the intimate grain of the narrow alleyways such as the The Walk and The Butts, the surviving section of Baillie Street and the surviving sections of Yorkshire Street, have much to offer.

In the central area lie many of the town’s existing listed buildings, typical of both “grand” mercantile structures such as banks, as well as more modest but equally important surviving 19th-century structures that were a mix of commercial



and retail establishments. In Newgate the surviving façade of the 1905 **Rochdale Vintners** 7, latterly part of Yate’s Wine Lodge, is a splendidly detailed elevation.

Moving up towards the upper section of Yorkshire Street is a fascinating mix of small-scale buildings including survivors of inter-war chain stores such as Marks & Spencer’s, as well as the once numerous local retailers. One splendid survivor, the grade II-listed **128 Yorkshire Street** 8, originally the town’s police office, is the only formally protected building.

Although much of this area is covered by both the Rochdale Town Centre conservation area and Townhead conservation area, surely this part of the town needs the equivalent of the Drake Street area HAZ and assessment? A coherent project to rejuvenate the many shop fronts and facades would bring a welcome cohesion back to this once important street and assist in the

reimagining of this part of the town centre, including its use as a residential area. Indeed, new housing can be seen effectively “behind” Yorkshire Street in the area bounded by Baillie Street and the new Riverside centre. As well as a coherent appraisal, a “heritage action plan” for the conservation areas could be a vital tool to help ensure the heritage of this important area of the town is properly understood and protected so as to help formulate policies for successful regeneration.

Yorkshire Street, beyond the Inner Ring Road, still forms a main traffic route and runs out east to the now almost destroyed suburb of Smallbridge. However, a few important buildings survive. These include the marvelously detailed, late 19th-century retail structure on the corner of Elliott Street that now comprises **Lovick’s furniture shop** 9. Further out, past buildings whose history

deserves more research and that include various now adapted early public houses, stands **Power House** 10a of 1951, a modest post-war brick building probably by the regional Electricity Board, before we reach **Heybrook Primary School** 10b. This, one of several “School Board” buildings of the era, is evidence of the investment in the education system following the introduction of universal primary school education and the growth in the population at the end of the 19th century. Heybrook, 1901, is a rather austere multi-storey brick building that forms an imposing and important landmark in the area. It should be considered for protection along with three other schools in the town. These are **Spotland Junior and Infant School** 11 of 1895, the more ornate **Castlemere Board School** 12 of 1895 and **Castleton Primary School** 13 that is noted in the relevant conservation area status report.



“The historic area around the original 1844 Co-op store and St Mary-in-the-Baum Church should be one of the most visited parts of Rochdale. Instead it is isolated, bounded by the impenetrable Inner Ring Road and the looming bulk of the Exchange Centre.”

This northern sector of the town also includes one of the most historic sites in the borough, the surviving and restored original Co-op Store of 1844. 31 Toad Lane sits on a short section of the cobbled street, opposite the grade I-listed St Mary-in-the-Baum Church (Ninian Comper, 1909/11) and the grade II-listed vicarage (pictured above) and should be one of the most visited sites in the town. However, they sit as an isolated island bounded to the north by the impenetrable Inner Ring Road and blocked to the south by the looming bulk of the Exchange Centre and car park structure. Trying to reach these sites by foot, even the short distance from the town centre, is nigh-on impossible, with all obvious routes severed. Toad Lane - Towd Lane or “the Old Lane” - used to connect the river valley town centre with the settlements to the north but is now utterly severed. To imagine a reconnection along its ancient



line is surely not impossible? A walking route from the grade I-listed town hall to grade I-listed St Edmund’s in Spotland, passing the original Co-op store and St Mary’s Church on the climb up the hill, the old buildings associated with Hanging Side Mill and the regenerated housing, could and should be a consideration in any regeneration of the Exchange Centre and a taming of the Inner Ring Road at this location.

Beyond the Inner Ring Road, St Mary’s Gate is an area undergoing much change. Once one of the earliest industrial areas of the town it included, cheek by jowl, much early housing that was swept away in the 1960s and ‘70s to be replaced by examples of now infamous “deck construction” housing. These are now, in turn, being replaced by welcome new housing developments of a more modest scale. Despite the churn of redevelopment several industrial

buildings of interest survive, evidence of that first late 18th and early 19th-century wave of industrialisation when the adoption of steam power allowed textile mills to move away from river valley and water power to steam power, using the locally available coal.

On the northern section of Toad Lane opposite Waterhouse Street stands a **four-storey brick mill building** 14 with later additions which, from map evidence, is possibly the last surviving section of the important Hanging Road Mills, the first “factory” in Rochdale. The rest of the site has been progressively cleared over many decades but this structure survives. A little to the east, past the listed Hope Street chapel complex, stands another important survivor of this phase in the town’s history, **Duke Street Mill** 15. Heading east again, to an area of mixed developments, it is easy to overlook several buildings of interest

Boom not bust



in the Princess Street area. To take one example, the surviving four-storey brick mill building now known as the “Magnetic Works” ¹⁶ on the corner of Folly Walk is of interest in its own right. Likely of early 19th-century construction and dominated by the three taking-in doors to the left side of the elevation, this old mill building helps make up what is a wider survival of more modest industrial structures.

One important survivor, to the north on Whitworth Road, is the imposing surviving sections of **Fieldhouse Mill** ¹⁷, a site that has seen much demolition and reconstruction but that has important links to one of the great figures of Victorian Britain, Sir John Bright, whose cotton concern ran the mills here.

To the west, on the slopes above the town centre, stand a group of residential structures that are difficult to overlook. These are the threatened tower blocks

of **College Bank** ¹⁸, known locally as The Seven Sisters (by Rochdale borough surveyor, WHG Mercer and D Broadbent, 1965), which range in height and are carefully positioned within the hillside landscape. Recently, consideration has been given to retaining and refurbishing these important 1960s blocks and surely, in this case, this is the better option? The towers make an important and well-considered addition to the townscape especially when seen from the south and the town hall and parish church.

Further north there exists a tightly drawn conservation area at the centre of which is the astonishing and little-known gem of **St Edmund's Church** ¹⁹ of 1870-73 (James Medland and Henry Taylor, listed at grade I). The church was largely the result of the involvement of the important local Royds family in the town during the 19th century. It is located on a boundary between the once-

grand houses facing Falinge Park and the terraced streets of late-Victorian and Edwardian terraced houses that are so typical of the old mill towns.

The church is approached from the south by the broad and aptly named Clement Royds Street that still forms an important vista with the focal point of St Edmunds. Although no “grand boulevard”, overall the street is composed of relatively simple red brick terraced housing with the occasional dash of a former retail premises. But the “feel” is remarkably intact and is enhanced by the survival of the cobbled, or sett, street surface. Such streetscapes are of real importance and this is typical of an area where careful, small-scale interventions to maintain the texture and feel of the vista would bring handsome rewards. A properly informed and pro-active extension of the St Edmund's Conservation Area would be welcome.

In this surprisingly intact area of terraced housing stands the robust red-brick municipal board school of Spotland Junior and Infant School ¹¹. This vibrant building, of multiple bays rising to a higher section marking the assembly hall, is surrounded by its original boundary wall and fencing. It deserves formal protection as one of the town's examples of board schools, such an important part of the social fabric of the town and still, in this case, used for its original purpose.

Hidden away, opposite the school on Emma Street, is the grade II-listed Sunday school building by local Arts and Crafts architect Edgar Wood who is now rightly recognised as being one of North West England's more important architects of the period, based in neighbouring Middleton. A few streets away, on the corner of Spotland Road and Clarke's Lane, stands another Edgar

Wood building; the heavily mutilated **Victoria Hotel** ²⁰. Here is another building that deserves not only recognition and protection but a sympathetic restoration. It is sadly the case that the Victoria Hotel is one of two almost lost Edgar Wood public houses in the town as the George & Dragon, 1022 Manchester Road, Castleton, is also altered to the point of loss. Much of this area is already covered by the Spotland Bridge Conservation Area and it seems sensible to link this with the neighbouring conservation area covering St Edmund's, already discussed.

A short walk north sees Spotland Road descent into the valley of Rochdale's second river, the Spod. Spotland Bridge is overlooked by the grade II listed **Bridgefold Mills** ²¹, sections of which have been successfully restored and regenerated. To the north stands one of the nation's most intractable brownfield sites, the heavily contaminated Tuner

Rochdale

Brothers asbestos processing plants; a looming reminder of the heavy legacy that forms a part of the economic and social history of such industrial towns.

Mellor Street returns to the town centre along the valley bottom, twice spanning the small River Spod on two listed ferro-concrete river bridges (1904-5 by Samuel Sydney Platt, borough engineer, in association with LG Mouchel and Partners), an interesting legacy of both the development of urban public transport and construction history. Mellor Street was opened up between 1900 and 1906 as part of the borough's acquisition and modernisation of the tram system.

The new electric trams needed a new home and the original **Rochdale Corporation Tramways Offices** ²² of 1906, with marvelous terracotta faience detailing, still survives and is worthy of formal protection. It remained in use, as

Boom not bust

offices for the Transport Department, outliving the 1932 replacement of trams by bus, and forms part of a range of structures that includes the 1960/62 bus garage sheds that itself forms a fine, almost Modernist, building dominated by its wave-form roof line. Long abandoned by the local bus operator, it survives in multi-occupation use.

We left the south side of the town with the on-going developments at the head of Drake Street and these will produce a new backdrop to the small conservation area that includes Maclure Road, the listed grade II* **St Peter's Catholic Church** ^{23a} and the **Rochdale Fire Brigade Station** ^{23b}.

The Fire Brigade Station is a handsome red-brick structure dominated by the appliance bays and wonderfully detailed hose tower that is allied to adjoining fire personnel housing which formed part of the same scheme. Opened in 1934 the brigade station can be considered a worthy example of the then new generation of stations following on from that in Leicester. Indeed this station had many of the new technological features around alarm and communications systems pioneered by Gent's of Leicester who were instrumental in this new wave of fire stations. For several years the Brigade Station's future was in doubt after operational closure and marked for disposal but due to the persistent and gallant efforts of a small number of enthusiasts the original, small-scale museum collection now forms part of the new Fireground museum and educational centre. The building, locally listed, deserves more formal national protection, given its importance in both the history of fire fighting and local, social history.

Maclure Road terminates at Rochdale's very down-at-heel railway station, a regeneration of which could be warmly welcomed. It sits at the tip of a suburb divided by the railway line that includes a web of small-scale terraced housing and "back" streets, home to a vibrant community. It is surprising that this area does not have some form



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of conservation area status, given the similarity to the Spotland Bridge/St Edmund's areas, and it is the case that this would help inform sustainable management for this part of town. It includes Deeplish, an area worthy of more study since in the early 1970s it was the site of the government-backed scheme for regeneration of traditional terraced housing as against wholesale "comprehensive redevelopment areas". The stretch along Drake Street also includes some fine residential buildings especially in the section surrounding **Castlemere Board School** ¹². This, one of three board schools identified, is now part of a thriving community and religious centre and the handsome original 1895 buildings deserve recognition and formal protection.

There remains one fascinating township to consider in this perambulation of Rochdale; that of

Castleton, some two miles to the south west of the town centre and on the traditional route to Manchester. The southern area of Castleton is already covered by the South Castleton Conservation Area status and the introduction to the original 2007 document (extended in 2012) makes for fascinating reading. It makes a strong case for the recognition and retention of a once common and now increasingly rare, traditionally Lancastrian industrial landscape. SAVE wholeheartedly agrees with the consideration given to the small-scale terraced streets and back alleys that form the main parts of this conservation area.

The late-19th and 20th century expansion of Rochdale was to include the villages of Castleton and Blue Pits, the latter drawing the centre of Castleton towards the railway station that opened there in 1836. The earlier

arrival of the Rochdale Canal here had already spurred industrial growth and the township was to become dependent on the textile trades and the ancillary engineering companies that supported it. Important concerns such as Petrie & McNaught, manufacturers of steam engines & textile equipment, Tweedale & Smalley, textile equipment, David Bridge's, manufacturers of calendaring & processing machinery and Whipp & Bourne, electrical equipment, were based here but have long since vanished. With the arrival of the M62 motorway in the 1970s, more recent development has been of modern distribution centres sited on what were works and mills.

The 1930s Rochdale ring road, an arterial road comprising Queensway, Kingsway and Albert Royds Street, loops its way around the south east of the town from Castleton. The first section of this route used the existing John Street and

Boom not bust



Collinge Street and this was home to a series of vast cotton spinning mills that sat parallel to the road, canal and railway. Although several of the mills have been demolished the southern section of Queensway still retains the now rare feel of an inner industrial area, the road lined with the surviving sections of the **Linden and Blue Pits Mills** ²⁴ (repurposed) and terminating with the magnificent grade II-listed Arrow Mill. This streetscape, mostly in the strong red Accrington brick, was once typical of the defining vision of industrial Lancashire and although it may feel strange arguing for heritage protection it is the case that the existing conservation area boundaries could be extended to include the area around the listed Arrow Mill and potentially to include what was Castleton Baths and Library. The conservation area also includes the locally listed **Castleton Primary School** ¹³, again in the trademark

red brick with sandstone details, a low-rise building rising to a small central tower and that is still in use.

These are now rare urban landscapes, home to the local community, and they are the type of places that deserve careful consideration in regeneration, helping to ensure that they again become thriving, sustainable townships with a strong sense of place and character. Castleton is already home to one of the boldest and most overlooked heritage schemes of recent decades: the reopening of the long disused Rochdale Canal that was completed in 2010. This saw, through Castleton, the complete reconstruction of a culverted section of the canal, the reopening of the main A663 bridge over the waterway and an almost herculean diversion of the severed canal using an existing occupation bridge under the M62, the construction of which had completely severed the canal.

The township boasts a cluster of fine buildings that mark the reordering of the junction to Queensway with Manchester Road, along with many older retail buildings of local interest that flank the main road. Several of these buildings are individually worthy of greater protection and they include:

■ **The Blue Pits Inn** ^{25a}, a heavy 1920s structure of red brick with a reconstituted stone façade, a reconstruction of an earlier structure. To its south side is a rare survivor of a ceramic advertising plaque for the local brewery of John Willie Lees (see back cover).

■ A little further north, currently disused, at **826 Manchester Road** ²⁶, is a remarkable three-storey ex-bank house in red brick and sandstone that is noteworthy for a fine ground-floor arched window in stone with, at top level, a stone coursing including the date of 1893. Further north is **The Farewell Inn** ^{27a}

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by HH Clough LRIBA of Rochdale, with excellent sandstone details including a hooded porch and bay both in stone, on the corner of Royle Barn Road. This building was again constructed by RT Howarth & Co Ltd. The same architect and builders were responsible for the now re-purposed Golden Ball Inn at 225 Spotland Road, Spotland Bridge. This once thriving retail section, forming the High Street, would benefit greatly from a coherent policy as to the sympathetic reordering and management of elevations and shop fascia as seen on Drake Street/South Parade in the town centre.

Castleton also contains other significant municipal buildings that we argue deserve more heritage protection. The **ex-Carnegie Public Library** ^{25b} of 1905 by Jesse Horsfall FRIBA of Manchester, in red brick with stone dressings is a notable building. Vacant for a decade following closure in 2006 it was more recently

restored to business and community use, a hopeful sign for other similar buildings. Library services are now provided in the **Community Centre** ^{27b}, another adaptive reuse of an old redbrick school building further to the north.

Further along Manchester Road can be found the **Castleton Swimming Baths** ^{27c}, a lump of an Edwardian building by Wallis & Bowden of London, in red brick but with buff faience “Hard Yorkshire Non-Slip Stone” dressings that form and accentuate the centre feature and that houses the entrances and twin oriel windows. Opened in 1910 its interiors have been remodelled, the facilities having been re-opened in 2018 for a second time. It is now run as a not-for-profit Community Interest Company but the ceramic tiled opening plaque survives. It marks Rochdale's only extant original municipal swimming paths following the closure and demolition of

the superbly detailed 1930s Main Baths on Entwistle Road.

Retracing our steps to the town's arterial road and its continuation Kingsway, mention should be made of the now disused **Kingsway Hotel** ²⁸. This fine 1930s red brick building of two storeys with a central bay and two back-set wings, designed by local architect T Townend FRIBA, is visually attractive with its surviving green tile roof. The interior of the public house is noted as being of regional importance on CAMRA's register of historic pub interiors thanks to large-scale survival of original fittings such as the revolving doors. It was constructed by the once-important local construction company of RT Howarth, who were among the pioneers of large-scale ferro-concrete construction and who, in the early 20th century, constructed many of the buildings considered in this report. ●

Restoration and reuse exemplars

Learning from the best



Photo: Capital & Centric

From the painstaking restorations of Manchester and Rochdale's magnificent Victorian town halls to the successful conversion of industrial buildings like Dean Clough Mills across the Pennines in Halifax, there are plenty of great examples of new life being breathed into the region's historic buildings. However, as this report shows, there are also far too many examples of significant and beautiful buildings being left to rot – or brutally demolished without a thought for their townscape or environmental value.

From its earliest days, SAVE Britain's Heritage has promoted sustainable new uses for vulnerable buildings as the best way of securing their future. Here is a selection of rescue, restoration and re-use projects that have caught our eye.

1 / Crusader Mill

Location: *Chapeltown Street, Piccadilly East, Manchester city centre*
Developer: *Capital&Centric*
Architect: *Shedkm*
Engineer: *Arup*
Project completed: *2022*

One of Manchester's earliest, largest and most complete industrial mill and textile machinery works complexes, originally dating from 1840s but rebuilt after a fire. Converted into 126 one- and two-bed loft-style apartments and sold only to live-in locals (no by-to-let investors).

A good example of conservation and re-use (albeit with some less thoughtful enabling development), it has driven the regeneration of Piccadilly East and saved more than 2,400 tonnes of embodied carbon. The Sunday Times described Piccadilly East as one of the UK's up-and-coming neighbourhoods.

The project aimed to preserve historical features where possible – including large windows, exposed brickwork, original cast-iron columns and wooden beams – and minimise interventions to the existing fabric, restoring the courtyard enclosure and masonry façade.

The scheme faced significant delays caused by everything from the pandemic to unexpected issues with the timber and a contractor going bust, all played out in BBC2's documentary *Manctopia*.

Adam Higgins, co-founder of Capital&Centric, said that this had not put them off further mill conversions: "Buildings like this, unless they get converted into a new use, eventually fall down and collapse. When you finish it, you create something that can almost never be replicated in a new build."

C&C has now turned its attention to restoring neighbouring Neptune Mill, a 19th-century red-brick industrial building, which it is converting into creative workspace.

2 / Lister Mills

Location: *Patent Street, Manningham, Bradford*
Developer: *Urban Splash*
Architects: *David Morley Architects, Latham and Shedkm*
Engineer: *Arup with Price & Myers*
Project completed: *2018*

Once the largest silk mill in the world, Lister Mills is a magnificent collection of grade II* buildings that dominate Bradford's skyline with a soaring 250-foot chimney inspired by St Mark's campanile in Venice. The two parallel ranges – as long and tall as Buckingham Palace – were completed in 1873 by Andrews & Pepper for Samuel Cunliffe-Lister, an entrepreneur who held a record number of patents and insisted on the latest fire-proof technology.

In its heyday Lister Mills employed 11,000 people and provided velvet for George V's coronation, curtains for the White House and parachute silk and khaki during the Second World War. Strikes there in 1890/1 led to the foundation of what became today's Labour Party.

Several years after its closure in 1992, Urban Splash, with Bradford council and Yorkshire Forward, began work to bring the structures back to life. Three practices were commissioned: Latham Architects for the Silk Warehouse, David Morley Architects (DMA) for Velvet Mill and Shedkm for the courtyard. The historic fabric was central to the project's success. Original features like exposed brick, cast iron columns and vaulted ceilings were restored and celebrated as the site was transformed into 297 homes – including two storeys of striking penthouses – and 6,500sq ft of office, retail and community space. Inspired by Lister, they used cutting-edge technology to complete this complex project on a tight budget.



Photo: David Morley Architects

3 / Farrell Centre

Location: *Eldon Place, Newcastle*
Developer: *Newcastle University School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape with Sir Terry Farrell*
Architect: *Space Architects and Elliott Architects*
Engineer: *Cundall*
Project completed: *2023*

£4.6m restoration and conversion of the jaunty grade II-listed Claremont Buildings into a free public centre for architecture and cities. The building, which dates from 1896 with additions in 1905, was originally offices over a shop but has also been used as a doctor's surgery, university chaplaincy, nursery and teaching spaces.

The centre was inspired by Sir Terry Farrell's recommendation in 2014's government-commissioned Farrell Review that every city



Photo: Jill Tate

should have an "urban room" where people can go to learn about where they live. The building now contains an urban room as well as exhibition, community and office spaces.

Reflecting Newcastle University's mission to reach net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2030, the project aimed to be an exemplar of how historic buildings can be sensitively transformed while dramatically improving their energy performance. There were a number of upgrades to improve energy efficiency while respecting the historic fabric, such as slimline double glazing in the existing window frames, secondary glazing sympathetic with existing refurbished glazing and heating/cooling provided by air source heat pumps.

Farrell Centre director Owen Hopkins said: "The Farrell Centre offers a vital new platform for debating the future of architecture and planning, ensuring that everyone has a voice in this critical conversation."

4 / Manchester Monastery

Location: Gorton Lane, Manchester

Developer: The Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust

Architect: Austin Smith Lord

Engineer: WS Atkins

Project completed: 2007 (and ongoing)

The grade II* St Francis Church and friary in Gorton is considered to be the masterpiece of Edward Pugin (son of Augustus). It was always known locally as the Monastery – as well as being dubbed “Manchester’s Taj Mahal”.

The Franciscans left in 1989 and it was a ruin by the time Elaine Griffiths stepped over crumbling masonry into the derelict nave in 1996. She was overcome by the power of its Gothic architecture and with husband Paul was determined to bring it back into use. The couple set up a charity, The Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust, recruited a team of volunteers, many of whom are still involved today, and a solid board of experienced trustees, and successfully approached trusts and charities for support.

After a painstaking £6.5m restoration of the nave, cloisters, refectory and other spaces and a new building added next door, the deconsecrated church is now a venue for weddings and a healing and wellness centre. Elaine describes as miraculous what “two ordinary people with vision and commitment can achieve”. It is a genuinely inspiring example of local passion, perseverance and skill paying off. They are now fundraising to install a Victorian organ made by the same firm that made Gorton’s.



Photo: Manchester Monastery



Photo: Radisson RED

5 / Radisson Red Hotel

Location: Lime Street, Liverpool

Developer: Radisson Hotel Group

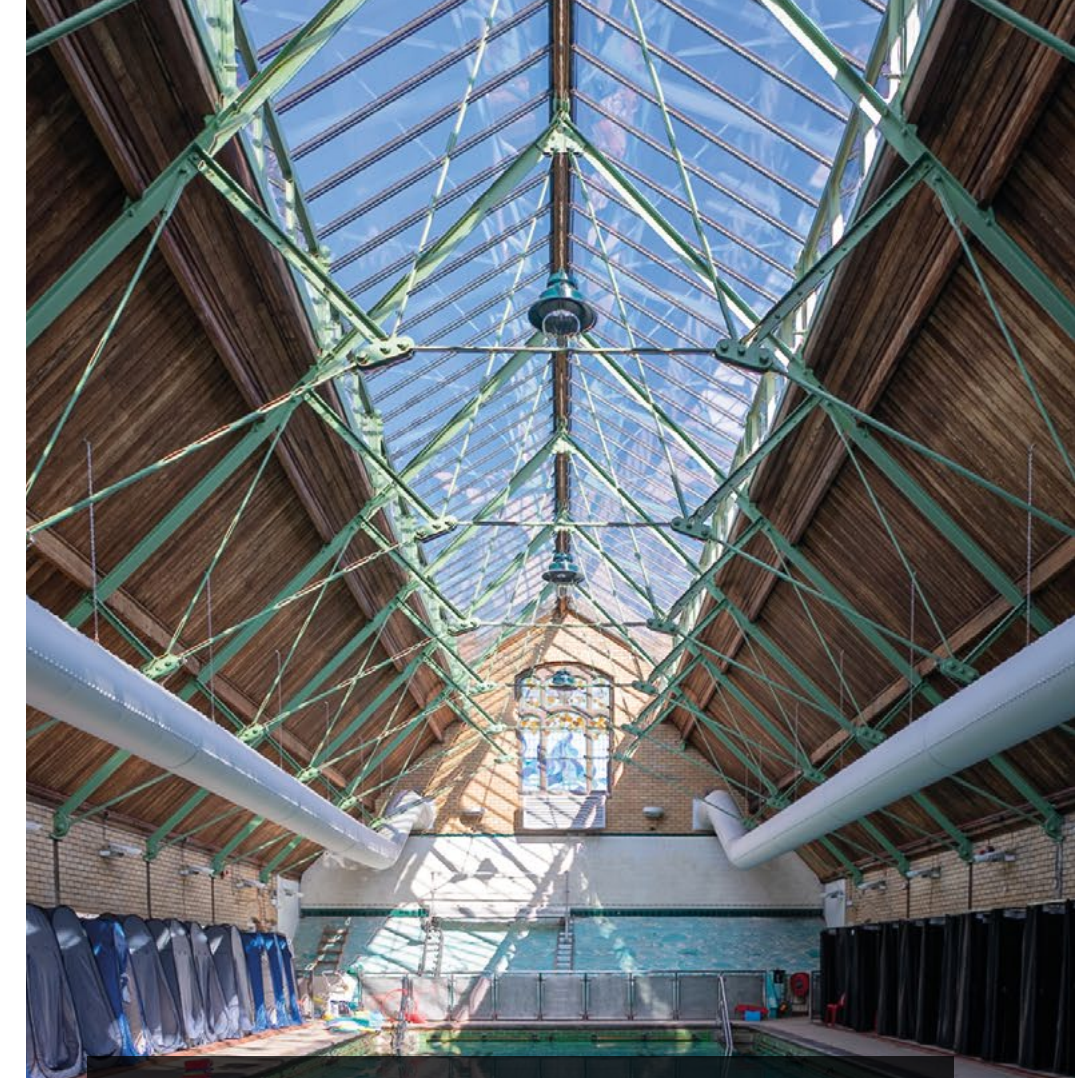
Architect: Leach Rhodes Walker

Interiors: Konzept ID

Project completed: 2022

The former North-Western Hotel, a spectacular grade II chateau of a building fronting Lime Street Station, was designed by Liverpool-born Alfred Waterhouse, better known as the architect of Manchester Town Hall and London’s Natural History Museum. It opened 90 years ago with 300 beds and many sumptuous public rooms aimed at American travellers arriving on the Cunard and White Star ocean liners, though guests are also said to have included the Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Zanzibar.

Its Victorian looks later fell out of fashion and after a spell as offices was threatened with demolition in the 1970s. Seeing its potential, SAVE featured it in one of our first national campaigns, Off the Rails (1977), alongside another favourite railway hotel, the Midland Grand at London’s St Pancras, also since restored. BR sold it for a song to the imaginative vice-chancellor of John Moores University in the 1990s. He restored and converted it into student accommodation, his team marvelling at how much original Waterhouse they found. A generation of students later it was bought by Radisson and finally reopened as a hotel to rapturous reviews last year after delays caused by the pandemic and the collapse of a contractor.



6 / Withington Swimming Baths

Location: Burton Road, Withington, Manchester

Developer: Love Withington Baths

Architect: Seven Architecture

Contractor: Armitage Construction

Project completed: 2023

Edwardian swimming baths condemned for closure in 2013, alongside other council-owned pools in Miles Platting, Chorlton and Levenshulme. A concerted community campaign, with protests and an 8,000-signature petition, led to a two-year reprieve, before a community-led group, Love Withington Baths, was awarded the right to run the pool as a private social enterprise in 2015.

In 2022 Withy Baths was awarded £900,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with the rest of the £2.2m project funded by a £1m loan from Manchester City Council and fundraising by Love Withington Baths.

The pool remained open through the seven-month project which restored the building to its former glory – with its stained glass windows, coping stones and a refurbished roof complete with new glazed roof lights, as well as the 1970s pool hall doors stripped and repainted dark green to resemble the original 1913 appearance.

One of the campaigners Ricardo Dixie told local media: “It’s great to see the building looking so splendid. When we campaigned to save the baths all those years ago we never dreamt that one day the building’s impressive features would be restored. This important work means that the baths can continue to serve its community for generations to come”.

Photo: Withington Baths



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