5 MANCHESTER: SHOCK LANDSCAPE?

Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *North and south* (1854–5) begins in the New Forest. Its heroine, Margaret Hale, is the daughter of the vicar of Helstone, a secluded village amid the woods, and a place Margaret loves. For her, like many of its other Victorian admirers discussed in the previous chapter, the New Forest with its accessible commons is a landscape of personal liberty. It affords opportunities for direct and unfettered engagement with wild nature, and also with the ordinary people of the countryside – the commoners – to whom Margaret feels closely attached:

It was the latter part of July when Margaret returned home. The forest trees were all one dark, full, dusky green; the fern below them caught all the slanting sunbeams; the weather was sultry and broodingly still. Margaret used to tramp along by her father’s side, crushing down the fern with a cruel glee, as she felt it yield under her light foot, and send up the fragrance peculiar to it, – out on the broad commons into the warm scented light, seeing multitudes of wild, free, living creatures, revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth. This life – at least these walks – realized all Margaret’s anticipations. She took a pride in her forest. Its people were her people ... she was continually tempted to go off and see some individual friend – man, woman, or child – in some cottage in the green shade of the forest. Her out-of-doors life was perfect.¹

The perfection of Margaret’s free and easy outdoor life is not to last, however. Beset by religious doubts, her father proves unable to continue his Anglican ministry, and resigns, telling his family that they must move away from the forest to the industrial town of Milton in the north of England. Margaret is distraught; she is appalled at the prospect of leaving the forest and the freedoms and pleasures it confers. But her father is implacable; his only real prospects are in Milton, and there they must go. Her first impressions of the town, a lightly fictionalised Manchester, are not encouraging:

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay … Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell. Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black ‘unparliamentary’ smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain.²

And once settled in Milton, Margaret is soon homesick for Helstone. She tells Bessy, a sickly factory operative girl she befriends, about its beautiful, peaceful landscape, with its great trees ‘making a deep shade of rest even at noonday’, its ‘turf … as soft and fine as velvet’, its ‘tinkling brooks’, its ‘billowy ferns’.³ It is a landscape that contrasts very sharply with that of the urban environment of Milton, where the people appear hemmed in amongst dense agglomerations of small houses and towering factories, and are generally oppressed by the noise and dirt of industry. Their cramped and restricted lives do not permit free roaming in the woods, and on what Margaret calls the ‘wide commons, high up as if above the very tops of the trees’ – places that Bessy finds especially appealing when they were described to her:

² Ibid., p. 96.
³ Ibid., pp. 144–5.
'I've always wanted to get high up and see far away, and take a deep breath o’ fulness in that air ... Now on these commons, I reckon, there is but little noise?'

'No', said Margaret; 'nothing but here and there a lark high in the air'.

Margaret’s early impression of Milton/Manchester, then, is of a place antonymous to Helstone and the New Forest. The forest, with its unenclosed commons, offers nature, tranquillity, beauty and liberty; Milton is a dystopia, a place of man-made squalor, ugliness, clamour and confinement. It seems to represent the antithesis of right living, a wrong turn in the course of civilisation, a shaming of England. Gaskell has other things to say about Milton further on in the novel (of which more later), but her presentation of the place in the early parts of the book can be taken as reflecting a well-established – indeed stereotypical – view of Manchester and its landscape. Generations of commentators have passed unfavourable judgement on the place: even in the 1950s, A. J. P. Taylor thought the city ‘irredeemably ugly’. For many, it represented the dark side of industrialisation: pollution, dirt, disease, capitalist class oppression. Its built landscape was often seen as either hateful or – being squarely and designedly utilitarian – not worthy of much in the way of approbatory comment.

The impress of this stereotype is evident in scholarly writing as well as cultural discourse more generally. Historians, art historians and historical geographers have not generally associated industrial environments with valued landscapes: the accent has often been on the negative, even when the cultural, economic and intellectual vitality of the urban environment is acknowledged. That said, there have been exceptions to this perspective. Some time ago, Andrew Lees made a strong case for the persistence of positive views of the city in Britain and elsewhere across the nineteenth century, though his focus was not so much on urban landscape specifically as on broader intellectual responses to rapidly changing urban culture and society. Lees’s book

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4 Ibid.
has not been noticed as much as it might have been, but recent years have seen the publication of more work emphasising the significance not only of favourable views of the city in general, but of the urban environment in particular. Richard Dennis, for example, has stressed the progressive modernity embodied in Victorian cityscapes, while Tristram Hunt has delineated the various ways in which industrialists sought to improve the civic life of the places from which they drew their wealth. More recently still, Katy Layton-Jones has pointed to the diversity of visual representations of the nineteenth-century city: even at the height of the Industrial Revolution, the rapidly transforming provincial landscape was not seen as necessarily inimical to aesthetic ideals.

Valuable and suggestive as these and other such correctives are, however, the landscape of the city has not generally been associated with constructions of national identity – or at any rate the assumption remains fairly well entrenched that the countryside plays a vastly more important role in this respect. It is here worth repeating Krishan Kumar’s remark, made in his landmark study of English national identity, that by the later nineteenth century the ‘essential England was rural’. In this interpretation, the progress of urban-industrial modernity provoked a valorisation of its imagined antithesis, a peaceful, pastoral, village England, and a concomitant deprecation of those places – such as Manchester – where it found its most vigorous expression. Modern British culture, so the argument goes, shied away from the environment of ‘dark satanic mills’, and by extension what Martin Wiener called ‘the industrial spirit’ more generally, constructing an alternative, ruralised sense of national identity, one that was socially – if not necessarily politically – conservative, opposed to the tenor of the times. The landscape of Englishness was not to be found on the streets of Manchester but in the fields and lanes of the south country.

The present chapter challenges this still-persisting view. Building on some of the work mentioned above, what follows will

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8 K. Layton-Jones, Beyond the metropolis: The changing image of urban Britain, 1780–1880 (Manchester, 2016).
9 Kumar, Making of English national identity, p. 211.
10 Wiener, English culture.
argue that from the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and on through the Victorian and Edwardian periods, Manchester and its landscape were seen in a far more positive light than is often suggested. But it was not just that the elite of the town sought to project an image of commercial and civic vitality through public works and public architecture, as Tristram Hunt has shown.\textsuperscript{11} For all that the social conditions of the city attracted concern, especially but not exclusively in the years of the ‘Hungry Forties’, the landscape of the place more generally was a potent source of patriotic pride throughout the period, local opinion asserting the national importance of the city, and national cultural discourse acknowledging this importance. In this way, Manchester became an integral part of the patriotic landscape imaginary, its urban environment supporting rather than contradicting mainstream constructions of national identity. As will become clear, Manchester was valued as an important national landscape: the essence of England was not only located in the countryside.

Manchester was the first industrial city. Situated on level ground with a good water supply and a moist climate favourable to cotton spinning, it was well placed to exploit the technological advances in textile manufacturing of the later eighteenth century. Large mills were built in the town along the Rivers Irwell, Irk and Medlock, one notable landmark being Richard Arkwright’s construction, in 1782, of Britain’s first unified cotton mill, a large, five-storey manufactory driven by a huge waterwheel.\textsuperscript{12} Steam-powered factories followed soon afterwards, the use of steam being facilitated by the duke of Bridgewater’s canal, which had reached Manchester by the early 1760s and which greatly reduced the carriage costs of coal.\textsuperscript{13} A Watt engine was installed in Piccadilly Mill in 1789, and its success prompted the widespread adoption of steam technology in Manchester cotton factories from the 1790s.\textsuperscript{14} Industrial development was accompanied by an explosive growth in the town’s population. In 1758, around 17,000 people lived

\textsuperscript{11} Hunt, \textit{Building Jerusalem}.
\textsuperscript{14} Platt, \textit{Shock cities}, p. 39.
in Manchester; by 1788 the number had reached nearly 43,000, and by the turn of the century it exceeded 70,000.\textsuperscript{15} At the time of the Great Reform Act of 1832, Manchester—with a population of 142,000—had become ‘Cottonopolis’ and what Asa Briggs has memorably called ‘the shock city of the age’.

Industrialisation had a transformative impact on the landscape of Manchester. Great blocky mills mushroomed; thousands of houses, shops, offices and other buildings were thrown up; and the town expanded rapidly. Some commentators did not like what they saw. Significant atmospheric pollution was apparent as early as 1789, one visitor in that year describing as ‘abominable’ the ‘smoke and dirt on approach to Manchester’ and finding the town itself correspondingly ‘dull, smoky, dirty’.\textsuperscript{17} Others were more withering still. John Byng, later Viscount Torrington, visited Manchester twice in the 1790s, finding it ‘a great, nasty, manufacturing town’ with nothing whatever to recommend it. The market and bookshops were disappointing, the singing in the collegiate church was execrable, the food at his inn was inedible (and the port undrinkable); he wandered about the streets for a whole day ‘without seeing anything that I should wish to see again’. The place was, he felt, ‘a dog hole’ marooned in ‘gloom and dirt’. It had nothing to offer the sensitive man of taste: ‘who but a merchant could live in such a hole’, he wondered.\textsuperscript{18}

Byng was a country gentleman, and in his remarks we see the shudder of aristocratic disdain for ‘trade’, whose rank growth in Manchester had come, so he felt, at the expense of the traditional landed interest. Dramatic changes such as those seen in late-eighteenth-century Manchester are never universally welcomed, however, and criticism such as Byng’s is best understood not as reflective of mainstream opinion, but as constitutive of protest against prevailing trends. Manchester was at the head of these trends, and many other commentators were positively enthusiastic about the part the town was playing in the progress of the nation, the transformation through industry of its landscape being an

object of keen patriotic pride. In *1771*, the London-based Scottish writer Robert Sanders reckoned that ‘[t]he trade and manufactories, particularly in all sorts of cotton, carried on in this opulent town, may be considered as one of the brightest jewels in the diadem of Great Britain’. 20 William Thomson, another London Scottish man of letters and author of a treatise on the principles of beauty in nature and art, was similarly impressed when he visited Manchester in *1785*. Like Sanders, he took the opportunity to conscript the town into the service of Britishness, declaring that ‘the industry in the manufactures carried on here and in the neighbourhood, cannot fail to excite the most agreeable emotions in the minds of all Britons’. 21

For the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century man of taste, the wealth generated by Manchester was a source of pride and wonder, more particularly so because it was seen to be aesthetically beneficial. As we will see in the case of the Thames Valley, the proceeds of trade and manufacturing were held to have a visually as well as materially enriching effect on the landscape. Approaching Manchester from the north around the turn of the nineteenth century, the well-travelled west-country antiquarian Richard Warner reached the top of a hill about two miles outside the town, which afforded him a view over ‘a prodigious champaign of country … watered by the river Irwell, filled with works of art; mansions, villages, manufactories, and that gigantic parent of the whole, the widely-spreading town of Manchester’. 22 Far from being a welt on the landscape, Manchester was seen to enhance it – not least by providing the means of its improvement and ornamentation. This perspective was still more clearly expressed in Kinder Wood’s popular poem of *1813*, *A prospect of Manchester and its neighbourhood*, which hymned the attractions of the ‘noble … rich, populous, beautiful, and variegated … plain … in which Manchester is placed’. 23 The poem described a view of this plain, here figured as ‘the

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23 [K. Wood], *A prospect of Manchester and its neighbourhood, from Chamber, upon the rising grounds adjacent to the Great Northern Road: A poem* (Manchester, 1813), p. vi.
wide extended scene, / Where spreading Commerce, Britain’s favorite child, / Supplants the shepherd’s reed, and Doric measure wild’. This was a place where ‘joys from commerce spring’, a place whose manufactures had spread across the world, so much so that ‘thy bright name extends from pole to pole’. Far from degrading the landscape, then, Manchester nurtured its surrounding ‘vassal country’, whose settlements were as ‘tender ivy’ strengthened and sheltered by the ‘broad oak’ of the burgeoning metropolis of cotton.24

Such a sensibility could even be shared by visitors to north-west England intent on admiring the picturesque, of which there were increasingly large numbers by the later eighteenth century, in large part owing to the pull exerted by the Lake District. One traveller included a stop at Manchester in a tour, taken in 1791, from London to the Lakes. But far from unfavourably contrasting the man-made town with the celebrated scenery of Cumberland and Westmorland, he made a point of admiring both. While Manchester offered relatively little in the way of picturesque attractions (though he did mention the collegiate church and Chetham’s College as two examples), it was a place whose wealth was progressively improving and civilising the local landscape:

To see barren hills and vallies laugh and sing under the influence of an auspicious trade, must give the benevolent heart the most agreeable sensations … [to see] a great part of the old pulled down to make room for spacious and ornamental mansions – these are thy blessings, O Commerce! – These are thy rewards, O Industry!25

Appreciation of the picturesque in nature co-existed with appreciation of modern, expanding townscape.26 This was consistent with the contemporary view that polite and social virtues – indeed, civilisation generally – could only really find full expression in an urban context.27 It was a view that found strong expression in the

24 Ibid., pp. 15, 17–18.
26 Layton-Jones, Beyond the metropolis, esp. pp. 42–6.
urban histories and guidebooks published in increasingly large numbers from the later eighteenth century onwards.\textsuperscript{28} Such publications were produced not only for fashionable society destinations such as Bath, but also for places such as Manchester. The first guidebook to the town, intended as ‘a kind of Vade-mecum for strangers’, was James Ogden’s \textit{Description of Manchester}, which appeared in 1783;\textsuperscript{29} similar volumes followed in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} These books, and the local histories that were also brought out, made much of Manchester’s growing national importance; expressions of civic pride, they were designed to impress the British public at large with a sense of this importance, indeed with the idea – as one put it – of the place as being ‘the second town in the kingdom’.\textsuperscript{31} Their contents emphasised not only the industry and wealth of Manchester, but also the improving usages to which wealth was put: cotton manufacture was presented as supporting rather than undermining decorous improvements to the landscape. Much was made of the laying out of elegant new streets and the widening of narrow old ones, their buildings being torn down to make way to create what one visitor in 1802 described as ‘spacious and healthy’ thoroughfares, with ‘large, handsome, and uniform’ houses.\textsuperscript{32} Much also was said in praise of the architecture of modern public buildings such as the Infirmary (1755) and – later on – Thomas Harrison’s John Soane-inspired Portico Library (1802–6) and stately Exchange building (1806–9). By 1815, one Manchester guidebook saw fit to declare that ‘the many great improvements’ made in recent years to the civic architecture and street layout of the town ‘surpass[ed] belief’.\textsuperscript{33} Industry-derived wealth had entered into a felicitous alliance with refined taste:

\begin{quote}
The numerous and splendid public structures for devotion, charity, pleasure, and business; the immense ranges of newly-erected
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} J. Ogden, \textit{A description of Manchester} (Manchester, 1783), pp. 3–4.
\textsuperscript{30} See, in particular, J. Aston, \textit{The Manchester guide: A brief historical description of the towns of Manchester and Salford, the public buildings, and the charitable and literary institutions} (Manchester, 1804); and \textit{The new Manchester guide} (Manchester, 1815).
\textsuperscript{31} Aston, \textit{Manchester guide}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{New Manchester guide}, pp. 45–7.
dwellings, houses, distributed into streets and squares, in the most eligible situations, and in a style of superior elegance ... exhibits at one view the effects of industry directed by genius, and supported by public spirited and benevolent characters. 34

The development and approbation of a polite Manchester townscape was not done in the face of any significantly increasing unease about the visual effects of the industry that had made such civic improvements possible. At least until the 1820s, negative commentary on the appearance of Manchester cotton factories was thin on the ground. This might seem odd, given the utilitarian design of Industrial Revolution-era mill buildings; the early cotton masters of northwest England did not intend for their works to beautify the landscape. Yet at the same time, the buildings they threw up had an undeniably powerful visual impact on perceptions of that landscape; indeed, they became important features of it in their own right. The Manchester manufactories, huge and novel as they were, did not escape the notice of contemporaries, for many of whom they were less an eyesore than an object of curious and even touristic attraction. Genteel visitors consumed mills as ‘sights’ in a manner not too dissimilar to how they might have consumed favoured views in the Lake District or the Wye Valley. Finding himself in Manchester in July 1800, the antiquary Sir Richard Colt Hoare made sure to call in to the library of Chetham’s College, with its fine collection of medieval texts, but he also explored the nearby textile manufactories. 35 Similarly, Richard Warner, another antiquary visiting Manchester around the turn of the century, also made a point of visiting the mills of the town, discovering ‘machines of the most beautiful contrivance’ in the cotton works of Messrs Atkinson. 36 Indeed, so common was this kind of activity that the Manchester Guide of 1804 felt ‘it is become a fashion for strangers to visit spinning factories’. 37

This fashion was part of a wider phenomenon. As Francis Klingender and Esther Moir showed some time ago, for all the influence of the picturesque in these years, the landscape of the Industrial

34 Ibid., pp. 45–6.
35 Thompson, Journeys of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, pp. 155–6.
37 Aston, Manchester guide, p. 279.
Revolution exerted considerable aesthetic appeal. Along with the cotton mills of Lancashire and the tin and copper mines of Cornwall, the salt mines of Cheshire and the ironworks of Shropshire all attracted tourist interest. Arkwright’s Cromford Mill (1771) near Matlock in Derbyshire, the first water-powered cotton spinning facility in the world, caused a sensation not just on account of its technological modernity but also because of its appearance – especially at night, with its fires and gas lights flaring. Sights such as this received approving comment from influential arbiters of taste such as Humphry Repton; they were even seen as fit subjects for artists, inspiring the work of painters such as Joseph Wright of Derby.

In some cases, and particularly before the turn of the century, manufactories and mines could be accommodated within a picturesque aesthetic. The rural location of many of the more notable sites was one reason for this, innovative technologies of production being sited amid attractive natural landscape and providing a visually striking contrast with it. Over time, however, such readings of the industrial landscape became problematic. Urbanisation and the increasing economies of scale associated with steam power made the picturesque much less compatible with industry. Factories became larger and were more typically found in built-up areas. But yet they retained some visual appeal. In particular, they could be seen as sublime objects. As Edmund Burke had put it in his hugely influential *Philosophical enquiry*, the qualities needed to produce a sublime effect included obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession, uniformity and ‘a quick transition from light to darkness’. The huge, rectilinear

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39 For whom the massive Bean Ing Mill (1792) in Leeds, then the largest woollen mill in the world, could ‘never fail to be an interesting object by daylight, and at night presents a most splendid illumination of gas light’: E. Jones, *Industrial architecture in Britain 1750–1939* (London, 1985), p. 27.

40 Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*.

41 Burke, *Philosophical enquiry*, pp. 54–74 (p. 73).
forms of mills and warehouses, with their regular lines, serried rows of identical windows and flaring nocturnal light effects, had these qualities in spades. By the early nineteenth century, the cotton factories of Manchester, though in no way picturesque, were visually interesting elements of the landscape because of their sublimity. Exuding blocky, massive power, Sedgwick Mill and McConnel’s Mill, at Ancoats, were two prominent examples.

Into the nineteenth century, then, the industrial landscape of Manchester excited more wonder and awe than it did disapprobation. The factories themselves were impressive touristic ‘sights’, and the wealth they generated was seen to have had a civilising effect on the townscape while also doing much, as one antiquary declared, to make ‘the British nation the most powerful in Europe … enable[ing] us to dispute the sovereignty of the world, with an host of surrounding and envying kingdoms’. Industry was doing patriotic work, and – especially in view of the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France – its landscape was a fit object of patriotic valorisation. For many historians, however, this did not last. As industrialisation progressed, so the argument goes, more and more critical voices were heard lamenting its ill effects: it disfigured the countryside, polluted the environment and brutalised the people. In the context of the ‘condition of England’ question that climaxed with the publication of Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring classes* in 1842, it seemed to many far less a national benison than a national evil. For the landscape historian Barrie Trinder, ‘The popular image of mining and manufacturing became one of smoke and squalor, of overcrowding, muddy streets, drunkenness and disorder … [B]etween 1815 and 1850 … and particularly [in] the years around 1840 … the English industrial landscape … became a source of shame.’ Whatever aesthetic appeal factories and workshops had exerted had disappeared by this time, or so it is claimed. The ‘romanticism of industry had completely evaporated’, writes Esther Moir. Tourists now looked exclusively elsewhere for their pleasures, as ‘Mills built of uglier materials, using cheap brick and slate, outgrowing their rural settings, sprawling

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42 J. Butterworth, *The antiquities of the town, and a complete history of the trade of Manchester* (Manchester, 1822), p. 46.

with trails of shoddy houses across miles of the Northern countryside, retained little that was pleasing to the eye.’

There is something to be said for this interpretation. No doubt there were more voices raised against living conditions in industrial areas in the 1830s and 1840s than previously, Friedrich Engels’s *Condition of the working class in England* only being the most famous example (though as Tristram Hunt has pointed out, the book’s historical significance in the British context is often overstated: it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that English-language editions appeared, first in the United States in 1886, then six years later in Britain). But examination of this critical commentary suggests that many of those who contributed to it did not see the social problems they identified as inevitable or systemic effects of industrialisation, or of the environment that industry created. For sure, the squalid living conditions of the labouring poor in Manchester could not be denied: as one observer wrote of the Ancoats district of the town in the year of Chadwick’s report, ‘Many of the houses are equal in wretchedness to the worst part of St. Giles’ [a notorious London slum]; some are in a state of dilapidation, scarcely tenantable, the garrets and cellars literally crowded with inhabitants, whilst half-fed creatures are seen hanging about the doors like hungry wolves.’ But the city and the factory system were not typically identified as the causes of this squalor, the urban-industrial world being seen as inescapable, but also as a good thing per se. Some took the line that ‘the vices of the poor labouring man are the principal source of his alleged sufferings’. Others, such as J. P. Kay in his influential enquiry into *The moral and physical condition of the working classes employed in the cotton manufacture in Manchester*, or William Cooke Taylor in his *Notes of a tour in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire*, argued

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that ‘foreign and accidental causes’ were to blame. Prominent among these causes, Kay, Taylor and others suggested, were the Corn Laws, which increased the price of bread, and Irish immigration, which – so they claimed – brought with it a host of problems. Like Liverpool, Manchester attracted large numbers of migrants from Ireland in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, the desperately poor conditions of life on the west coast of that country driving people from their homes. By 1841, over 30,000 inhabitants of Manchester were Irish-born (up from around 5,000 in 1787); ten years later, the number had reached 45,136, equivalent to 15.2 per cent of the town’s total population. These people lived in dire poverty. The area southwest of Oxford Road known as ‘Little Ireland’ was especially notorious, the cotton manufacturer and political radical Richard Cobden condemning it as exhibiting ‘all the filth, depravity, and barbarism that disgrace its patronymic land’. For commentators such as Cobden, the problem was nothing less than ‘a moral cancer’; accustomed to living more barbarously than the native English of Manchester, perhaps on account of their racial difference, the immigrants from Ireland drove down the cost of labour and so depressed living standards generally, as well as encouraging the adoption of depraved ‘Irish habits’ of behaviour. Indeed, even the minority of observers who accepted that environmental factors made ‘moral and virtuous’ living ‘almost physically impossible’ for many of

52 [R. Cobden], England, Ireland, and America, 6th edn (Edinburgh, 1836), p. 18. Engels visited Little Ireland in the 1840s, finding the cottages there ‘old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavements; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys. A horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles’: Engels, Condition of the working class, p. 98.
53 [Cobden], England, Ireland, and America, p. 18.
the Manchester poor tended to note the debasing effects of ‘the lower order of Irish, who, familiar with dirt and discomfort at home, were content with any sort of habitations that would receive them’.  

Suggesting that the problems experienced in Manchester were of foreign rather than English origin was one response to the ‘condition of England’ question as it affected the town, one means of protecting the image of the place from (autochthonous) taint. Another, more substantive, response was accomplished through the shaping of the Manchester landscape itself. From the 1820s on, the project of civic improvement begun in the later eighteenth century intensified markedly. Attempts were made to mitigate the effects of the air pollution caused by industrialisation, and these were far more systematic and less ineffective than often supposed, being limited by inadequate technology rather than any failure of will. More important than this, however, was the ongoing architectural transformation of the town. Inspired by a keen sense of local pride, the increasingly confident Manchester middle class (which controlled the levers of power in the absence of any significant aristocratic presence) was the motive force behind this transformation. New streets were laid out, and old ones were widened and improved. In the 1820s and 1830s narrow roads such as Toad Lane (previously ‘one of the filthiest suburbs of the town’), King Street and Market Street were developed into stately thoroughfares more in keeping with the town’s civic identity as the world metropolis of cotton. In the 1840s, Manchester (and Salford) acquired three public parks, their provision being presented as evidence of local manufacturers’ benevolent concern for the welfare of the common people.

Further middle-class involvement in philanthropy and good works

55 Bowler and Brimblecombe, ‘Air pollution in Manchester’.
56 For the assertive civic culture and activities of the Victorian middle class in Manchester and other northern industrial cities, see in particular Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*; and S. Gunn, *The public culture of the Victorian middle class: Ritual and authority and the English industrial city, 1840–1914* (Manchester, 2000).
57 The improvement of Market Street was particularly important. As one local writer noted in 1836, ‘Market-street was previously a mere “lane”; along which two carriages could scarcely move in line: the houses were of antique structure, for the most part in a dilapidated state, and the flag-way was in many places hardly a yard wide’: Wheeler, *Manchester*, p. 258.
found expression in a proliferation of civic institutions and societies, many of which were housed in impressive buildings. The most notable of these was the Manchester Athenaeum Club for the Advancement and Diffusion of Knowledge (1835), which offered its membership courses of lectures in various subjects, foreign language instruction, and the use of a library and newspaper room. The Athenaeum had premises from 1837 in a Charles Barry-designed palazzo-style building on Princess Street, greatly praised by contemporary commentators (‘exceedingly beautiful’, according to one guidebook). Also important was the earlier-established Manchester Royal Institution (1823), which played a leading role in promoting the fine arts in the town, and occupied a much admired Greek Revival building also designed by Barry (‘very handsome’, and ‘a splendid example of modern architecture’ were typical judgments). Public buildings connected with the town’s administration were also erected. Although Manchester was not incorporated as a borough until 1838 and did not achieve city status until 1853, the erection of a new town hall in 1822 supplied a tangible, visible representation of local civic authority, providing a prestigious architectural mask for what was in reality – at least before granting of borough status in 1838 – a confused array of local government institutions. Designed by Francis Goodwin at a cost of more than £40,000, an enormous sum at the time, the Manchester Town Hall was modelled on the Erechtheum temple of the Acropolis in Athens and had an interior decorated with specially commissioned frescoes. For all that its practical shortcomings would be exposed by the 1860s (necessitating a new town hall), early Victorian opinion concurred in praising the structure and its features, finding them ‘fine’, ‘beautiful’, even ‘magnificent’, and appropriately emblematic of

60 G. Bradshaw, Bradshaw’s hand-book to the manufacturing districts of Great Britain (London, [1854]), pp. 74, 75–6.
62 For this confusion, see the summary in A. J. Kidd, Manchester: A history (Lancaster, 2006), pp. 58–63.
63 For descriptions, see Manchester as it is (Manchester, 1839), pp. 145–6.
Manchester’s claims that the determined pursuit of money-getting was not inimical to cultivated taste. Neoclassical buildings such as the Royal Institution and town hall can be seen as reflecting the persistence of a polite eighteenth-century urban aesthetic. Indeed, it might even be suggested that the creation and maintenance of a ‘civilised’ townscape – town halls based on Greek temples, and so forth – was thought all the more necessary precisely because of Manchester’s status as a centre of burgeoning industry: the business of manufacturing needed offsetting, camouflaging even, by expressions of elevated culture. Yet, while elements of a ‘polite’ visual vocabulary can certainly be detected in the discourse, it was not a predominant presence. This is evident from the pictorial representations of the Manchester landscape popular at the time. Working-class people, ordinary passers-by, and even loiterers and beggars were notably present in many of these. The engravings in George R. Catt’s cheap *Pictorial history of Manchester* (c. 1845) provide a case in point, showing scenes suffused with what the text described as ‘an air of bustle and business-like activity becoming to the metropolis of the north of England’. Other examples can readily be found. One of George Measom’s engravings in his official guide to the North-Western Railway depicted poor street vendors plying their wares outside the town hall, while the 1857 edition of *Cornish’s guide* had illustrations of Market Street, the collegiate church and other locations showing pavements featuring people of all classes (see fig. 23).

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, then, visual representations of the Manchester landscape were typically figured in the here-and-now, not in accordance with the conventions of an older aesthetic of politeness, for all that vestiges of this aesthetic still existed (not least because older images could readily be reproduced). Something of the character of this visual vocabulary, or at any rate the

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66 G. Measom, *The official illustrated guide to the North-Western Railway ... Including descriptions of the most important manufactories in the large towns on the line* (London, 1859), p. 439; Cornish’s stranger’s guide through Manchester and Salford, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1857), pp. 3, 37.
The boisterous and popular spirit of civic pride with which it was associated, is nicely captured in the language of the ballad ‘Manchester’s improving daily’, various versions of which were in circulation between 1820 and 1850:

Oh! Manchester’s a famous town,
The great metropolis of trade, sirs,
And still is rising in renown
By the great improvements daily made, sirs.
All strangers view it with surprise,
And townfolk scarce believe their eyes,
And, looking round, cry out quite gaily,
Manchester’s improving daily.
Where Blackfriar’s Bridge was made of wood,
’Twas dangerous for folk to pass, sirs;
But now it is built of stone so good,
And nightly lighted up with gas, sirs.
Then Market-street, it was so narrow,
There scarce was room to wheel a barrow;
But see it now, it’s made so wide,
Six coaches can run side-by-side.\(^\text{67}\)

As well as being consistent with such demotic expressions of local landscape-patriotism, this new visual vocabulary did not eschew pictorial representation of explicitly industrial scenes. Indeed, in the context of the undeniably strengthening associations between industrialisation, pollution and social problems, what is striking is the extent to which industry and its appurtenances were not marginalised in visual renderings of Manchester. To take an early example, the section on Manchester in W. H. Pyne’s *Lancashire illustrated* (1829–31) gave much attention to new and elegant civic landmarks such as the Royal

\(^{67}\) Copied from MS Song book, c. 1842, in Vol. x of twelve scrapbooks compiled by Luke, James and Sam Garside, New Mills History Society, D983/10. A variant ran:

This Manchester’s a rare fine place, / For trade and other such like movements; / What town can keep up such a race, / As ours has done for prime improvements / …

Our fine town hall, that cost such cash, / Is to all buildings quite a sample; / And they say, sir, that, to make a dash, / ’Twas copied from Grecan temple / …

Once Market-Street was called a lane, / Old Toad-Lane too, a pretty pair, sir; / While Dangerous-Corner did remain, / There was hardly room for a sedan chair, sir; / But now they both are open’d wide, sir, / And dashing shops plac’d on each side, sir …

With bumping stones our streets wur paved, / From earth like large peck-loaves up rising: / All jolts and shakings now are saved / The town they’re now McAdamizing: / And so smooth and soft is Cannon-Street, sir, / It suits the corns on tender feet, sir …


Institution, but the physical evidence of manufacturing was far from absent from its pictorial treatment of the place. Some engravings caught the sublime visual effect of massive cotton mills such as Messrs Murray and Sons. Others made clear the inescapable presence of industry in the landscape generally. One engraving showed the New Jerusalem Church against a backdrop of smoke-belching chimneys (fig. 24); another, of the medieval Chetham’s College, was similarly inclusive of obvious signs of industrial modernity. 68

A later illustrated guide to Lancashire, published at the height of the ‘condition of England’ debate, was similarly content to portray the quotidian reality of industry cheek-by-jowl with civil and religious life. One particularly striking view, which was reproduced elsewhere, 69 showed the recently constructed Victoria Bridge (1839) over the Irwell in the foreground, with the collegiate church flanked by a large factory

69 E.g. Catt, Pictorial history, p. 22; Measom, Official illustrated guide, p. 438.
chimney in the middle distance (see fig. 25). Yet, rather than presenting this as a visually incongruous curiosity, let alone an obscenity, the accompanying text felt it a sight in which any visitor ought to find pleasure:

The view of and from the Victoria Bridge offers many objects of interest to the spectator. On the Manchester side we catch a glimpse of the old Collegiate Church and Cheetham [sic] College ... while in the direction of Salford we see the best constructed and tallest chimneys of factories that are to be found in the district. Indeed some of them have a good architectural effect, and were they built of stone instead of brick, when they cease to vomit forth smoke they might pass for triumphal columns.70

One of the leading suppliers of engraved views of factories was George Measom, who made a considerable fortune from his popular, affordable and much republished ‘official’ railway guides, which began to appear in the early 1850s.71 These volumes were intended not only to provide practical information about railway travel, but also advice to the tourist as to what was worth seeing. As might be expected, they contained extensive coverage of established attractions: the Lake District, picturesque old market towns and medieval castles got a good deal of attention. Yet, at the same time, the guides also had much to say about objects of tourist interest in industrial England. This was reflected in the textual commentary, but perhaps even more tellingly in the accompanying engravings, which were executed by Measom himself. So, while W. H. Smith’s 1859 edition of Measom’s Guide to the North-Western Railway included eighteen views of Oxford, fifteen of Chester and ten of Warwick Castle, it also featured thirty of Manchester.72 Among these were more views of the collegiate church amid a landscape of railway bridges, chimneys and factories, as well as pictures of factories themselves.73
Measom was probably aware of the advantages of currying favour with Manchester entrepreneurs, whose works and productions received approving notice in his guidebooks, but his presentation of Cottonopolis as a site of tourist interest was far from fanciful. Indeed, industrial England retained considerable tourist appeal throughout the nineteenth century. Herself a Manchester resident, Elizabeth Gaskell was fond of taking her visitors to see the impressive Bridgwater Foundry at Patricroft, which her friend James Nasmyth, inventor of the steam hammer and model for John Thornton (Margaret’s love-interest in North and south), had established on the outskirts of the town.⁷⁴ Indeed, Gaskell often furnished Manchester visitors with introductions to facilitate their being shown round some of the more notable factories.

Writing to one man in March 1864, she was careful to ‘enclose some of my cards’, adding that

they will enable you to see the things best worth [sic] in Manchester; viz ‘Murray’s FINE spinning-mills’, in Union St (I think) just off Ancoats Lane ... You would there see the whole process of preparing & spinning cotton ...

‘Hoyle’s’ print-works, Buxton St (Ardwick) off the London Road ... You would there see the process of printing cotton goods, – very well explained too by the person who takes you about.

‘Whitworth’s’ Machine[ry] Works ... these works are very interesting, if you do not get a stupid fine young man to show you over – try rather for one of the working men.75

Into the late Victorian period, middle-class travellers found it relatively easy to visit Manchester factories. Such visits were encouraged in the tourist literature. Bradshaw’s famous railway hand-book suggested that a visit to a factory ‘is one of the chief sights of Manchester’, and provided a list of some of the more interesting of them.76 Firms recommended in this way expected to be visited by tourists, and many actively welcomed them – with or without letters of introduction. Nasmyth’s Patricroft works was one example.77 The huge Atlas Locomotive works at Ancoats was another, the volume of visitors there causing its management to put up notices advising tourists to make donations to the employee sick fund rather than tendering direct payments to the workmen detailed to show them round.78 Established in southwest Manchester in the 1820s, Macintosh’s India rubber factory even opened a model room at their plant to satisfy the curiosity of interested visitors.79

78 Cornish’s stranger’s guide through Manchester and Salford, p. 142; Duffield, Stranger’s guide, pp. 45–6.
79 Duffield, Stranger’s guide, pp. 41–2; Measom, Official illustrated guide, pp. 455–61.
Curiosity, of course, was a good part of the draw. As implicit in Gaskell’s letter, many visitors were intrigued by the processes of industrial manufacture. In particular, and encouraged in this direction by guidebooks, they were fascinated by the power of modern machinery and the magnitude of the operations carried on in the mills. At the Atlas works tourists experienced a pleasurable frisson of awe on encountering the iron guillotine of the punching and clipping machine: ‘its descending knife deals as complacently with the thickest iron bars, as a lady’s scissors with a piece of cambric’.  

Their action memorably described in 1836 by Sir George Head in his much quoted Home tour through the manufacturing districts of England, the hydraulic presses used to compact finished fabrics also drew much comment, and so too did the mighty steam hammers pioneered by Nasmyth.  

As one guidebook remarked of the machinery used to compress clothes for transportation, ‘He who sees this, will soon see how easily the Alps might be crushed to powder, by a few thousand gallons of water, plenty of fuel, and machinery of requisite magnitude.’  

With its emphasis on the pleasurably terrible power and scale of machinery, such commentary reflected the persistence of a close connection between industry and the sublime. The aesthetics of the sublime, indeed, retained some hold on the British cultural imagination, as evident, for example, in the motivations of Victorian mountaineers, and – more relevant to our purposes here – the apocalyptic paintings of John Martin. But it was not just the fiery inner workings of factories that addressed the sublime dispensation; their external appearance continued to do so as well. Something of this almost infernal aesthetic was caught by Benjamin Disraeli’s description of Coningsby’s late-night arrival at Manchester in his eponymous novel of 1844: ‘He had passed over the plains where iron and coal superseded turf and corn, dingy as the entrance of Hades, and flaming with furnaces; and now he was among illumined factories with more windows than Italian palaces, and smoking chimneys taller than Egyptian obelisks.’

80 T. A. Bullock, Bradshaw’s illustrated guide to Manchester and surrounding districts (Manchester, 1857), p. 15.
82 Bullock, Bradshaw’s illustrated guide, p. 19.
To be sure, this was no conventional landscape of pleasure, but it was nonetheless one that fascinated many. It was interesting; it was also thrilling, transfixing. For this reason tourists did not just explore the interior of Manchester mills. They also sought views of the exterior aspect of industrial buildings – the ‘brilliant appearance’ their gas-light-illuminated windows presented at night exerted a particular appeal\(^85\) – and wandered the streetscapes in which they were situated. Guidebooks enjoined the visitor to ‘notice Birley’s, at Chorlton, and Dewhurst’s, in the Adelphi, Salford, with its tall stone chimney, 243 feet high, on a base 21 feet square and 45 feet high; to see ‘The bleach and dye works … placed up and down the Irwell and its tributaries’; to ‘direct his steps to an interesting cluster situated in Chorlton-cum-Medlock, leading out of Oxford Street, on the right hand, on the banks of the river, including the large pile, known as the Oxford Road Twist Company’s Mill, in that street’; and so on.\(^86\) Such instructions ministered to the appeal of modern industrial buildings as things stupendous, awesome; as landscape features they retained the capacity to evoke the sublime that had first become apparent in the late eighteenth century. As one piece of advice to Manchester visitors had it, ‘To get his mind thoroughly impressed with the magnitude of the manufactures of Manchester, the visitor should take a walk among the mills; and whatever his notions may be respecting their smoke and steam, and dust, he will be compelled to indulge in feelings of wonder at their stupendous appearance.’\(^87\) Such language recalled that used by contemporaries to describe the sublime in nature. For many, the landscape of Cottonopolis offered experiences quite as awesome – if of course very different in form – as those to be found in the high mountains of Switzerland, or even the remote wildernesses of the New World. In a revealing comparison, Thomas Carlyle described Manchester as ‘sublime as a Niagara, or more so’.\(^88\) Others agreed. In the course of recommending that the visitor make more than one excursion to a Manchester cotton mill, one author of an itinerary of Lancashire borrowed directly from

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\(^85\) Catt, *Pictorial history*, p. 10.


\(^87\) *Manchester as it is*, p. 201.

Carlyle in reckoning that ‘The din of machinery’ pervading the town ‘beats the Falls of Niagara all to nothing’.  

Early-to-mid Victorian Manchester was thus less a polite landscape than one of drama, sublimity and business-like bustle. The street improvements and public buildings for which the town’s increasingly assertive middle class was responsible did not run counter to this image, but complemented it. The wealth so dramatically created was perceived as having been put to architecturally wholesome civic uses, which in turn helped undermine suggestions that the factory system was having a degrading effect on the town’s character and population. By mid-century, even in the decade of the Hungry Forties, positive appraisals of the overall built environment of Manchester were routine. In 1845, the Builder described the town as presenting ‘a striking example of good taste’ in its architecture, and three years later the same journal went so far as to claim that ‘There is less bad building in Manchester than in London.’

Approving readings of the Manchester landscape became still more prevalent as the century progressed. This was in part a function of the town’s economic development. Manchester was becoming increasingly important in commercial as well as manufacturing terms. Cotton textile production remained crucial to the town’s economy – and was in fact the prime motive force behind the commercial expansion. But, as R. J. Morris has remarked, by the mid nineteenth century ‘Manchester was as much a place of warehouses, banks and shops as it was of factories’, many more of the latter now being found in satellite towns such as Oldham that clustered in its hinterland. Manchester was now not only the hub of the entire textile industry of northwest England, it had established itself as a major centre of trade and finance more generally. As Measom put it in one of his railway guides, the

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89 Redding, Illustrated itinerary, p. 10.
90 Builder, 3 (15 November 1845), p. 546; Builder, 6 (2 December 1848), p. 577 (emphasis in original).
'wonderful city' was now an 'emporium of commerce'; it was, indeed, 'the great emporium of England’s manufactures'. This economic transformation had a crucial effect on the physical appearance of the town. In its central streets, old houses and other buildings were swept away to make room for enormous and much admired warehouses. The successively rebuilt, increasingly large and elaborate Manchester Exchange came to stand as a monument to the commercial vigour of the place, quite apart from its practical function as a venue for trade transactions. With its huge central hall, the grand neoclassical building was celebrated as the largest trading exchange in Europe by the late 1830s, being a popular tourist attraction as well as an object of civic pride. A visit to see the ‘Parliament of cotton’ assembled to broker hugely valuable deals ‘with a mere word or a nod’ at ‘High ’Change’ on Tuesdays was recommended in the guidebooks. One suggested that it was ‘the first great object of curiosity to a visitor of Manchester’, another that the interior of the ‘handsome and commodious edifice’ offered ‘one of the most attractive sights Manchester can present to the stranger’.

But in fact it was the warehouses, of which according to one estimate there were 1,724 by 1857, that commanded the most attention. They became emblematic of Manchester and its landscape, to the extent that Heywood’s 1857 guide could declare that ‘Warehouses form … the staple of Manchester; to describe them is to describe it.’ To a limited extent, these often massive structures could be accommodated within the same aesthetic sensibility that valued the forms of cotton mills. At night, particularly when illuminated, they could produce attractively sublime or mysterious effects – helped in this respect by their sheer size. One popular recommendation made to visitors was to take time in the early evening to admire the blazing lights of the warehouse windows high in the sky, and perhaps to

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93 Measom, Official illustrated guide, pp. 428, 450.
95 Redding, Illustrated itinerary, p. 9; Manchester as it is, p. 200; Bullock, Bradshaw’s illustrated guide, pp. 28-9.
97 Bullock, Bradshaw’s illustrated guide, p. 6.
98 A. Heywood, Heywood’s pictorial guide to Manchester and companion to the Art Treasures Exhibition (Manchester, 1857), pp. 35–6 (emphasis in original).
linger a while to see them disappear, a row at a time, as the working day came to an end.99

During most of that working day, however, warehouses presented less a sublime than a magnificent or even a beautiful appearance. Following the model that had been pioneered by Barry in his Palazzo-style Athenaeum, local architects such as Edward Walters (1801–72) and John Edgar Gregan (1813–55) turned to Italy for inspiration in their warehouse designs.100 It was a sound choice. Purely utilitarian brick boxes would no longer do for Manchester’s increasingly self-confident class of merchant princes, who wanted their firms to project a distinctive and attractive face to the world, and more specifically to their clients, who visited the warehouses in person to make purchases and strike deals. Classical styles based on capitals and columns, while suitably grand, imposed restrictions on scale, building materials, and the dimensions and placement of windows and doors; they were thus deemed impracticable for warehouses.101 By contrast, a style based on the mansions of the Italian Renaissance offered much more flexibility, enabling buildings to be designed to any size and constructed of brick, stone or a combination of materials, and allowing for the numerous windows that warehouses required.

In addition to these practical considerations, however, Italianate designs – such as Walters’s for James Brown and Sons on Portland Street (1851–2) – projected an image perfectly in step with Manchester’s developing civic identity as a great trading capital. Without sacrificing function to form, architects such as Walters and Gregan – and by extension their clients – intended the massive, boldly ornamented warehouses they erected to evoke the splendour and wealth of the city states of Renaissance Italy. In this they were triumphantly successful. By November 1847, the Builder could declare that Manchester demonstrated that ‘we need not now point exclusively to the commercial cities of Italy’ for ‘the proof that warehouses may be designed of a character in accordance with their purpose, and yet without any absence

99 Cornish’s stranger’s guide through Manchester and Salford, pp. 142–4; Duffield, Stranger’s guide, p. 40; Heywood, Heywood’s pictorial guide, pp. 35–6.
of the graces of art’. Six years later, another observer told readers of *Fraser’s Magazine* that the warehouses of central Manchester ‘rival in architecture the palaces of Venice’. Guidebooks declared that the warehouses of Mosley Street, Portland Street and elsewhere had become ‘a very striking object of attention to the stranger’, and indeed ‘one of the most attractive features of the streets of Manchester’; they felt sure that ‘No one would think of a visit to this city without seeing them.’ Certainly it seems many visitors to Manchester followed such advice; directions to tourists as to which warehouses to see, and how best to inspect their interiors (this presented ‘no difficulty’ according to *Black’s guide*) continued to be issued right up until the First World War.

Aside from warehouses, other buildings contributed to Manchester’s presentation of itself as, in the words of local architect Thomas Worthington, ‘the Florence … of the nineteenth century’. Pre-eminent among these was Walters’s Free Trade Hall (1853–6; fig. 26). Built on the site of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, which had seen soldiers bloodily disperse a mass meeting assembled to demand parliamentary reform, the hall was a powerful monument to the city’s political liberalism and commercial identity, both of which were closely associated with support for free trade – not least on account of Manchester’s having played a leading role in the anti-Corn Law agitations of the 1840s.

The building was (and is) an architectural masterpiece. Writing in 1969, Nikolaus Pevsner judged it to be ‘perhaps the noblest monument in the Cinquecento style in England’, and indeed it was very deliberately designed to evoke – as with Walters’s warehouses – the spirit of the Renaissance. This was well understood at the time. *Heywood’s* 1857 guide described the building as ‘Italian, or Lombardo-Venetian, a style which, taken in connexion with many of the new buildings of Manchester, not inappropriately recalls the glories of the Italian

103 ‘Manchester, by a Manchester man’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 47 (June 1853), 615.
104 *Cornish’s stranger’s guide through Manchester and Salford*, p. 142; H. G. Duffield, *The pocket companion; or, Stranger’s guide to Manchester* (Manchester, [c. 1852/3]), p. 23; Bullock, *Bradshaw’s illustrated guide*, p. 17.
commercial cities in their best period’.  

Similar assessments were offered by other commentators, the consensus being that the Italianate style of the Free Trade Hall – whatever the rights or wrongs of free trade as a policy – was a great ornament to Manchester, a fitting symbol of the city’s commercial and national greatness. 

The dominance of the Palazzo style reached its apogee in the 1850s and 1860s. By this time, Italianate influences could even be detected in the design of factories, with double pilasters, stone mouldings and decorative windows being seen on some mill buildings. Victoria Mills (1867) on the eastern side of Manchester provides one such example, its architect, George Woodhouse, being a prominent exponent of Italianate-inflected factory design. One of the most striking

features of the Victoria Mills building was its ornate arcaded chimney, the shaft of which towered up from a massive seven-storey octagonal base. Chimneys could provide opportunities for architectural expression, and indeed had been praised as ‘elegant’ from the early nineteenth century on. Worthington – another architect influenced by the Italian Renaissance – even constructed a furnace chimney at Salford in the style of the tower of Siena. But stylistic eclecticism was beginning to creep in. An early and notable example of this tendency was presented by S. and J. Watts’s new warehouse complex on Portland Street (fig. 27), which was designed by the architects Henry Travis and William Mangall and completed in 1856. This ‘majestic pile of buildings’ departed from the coherent and more restrained Italianate pioneered by Walters; lavishly and variously ornamented, each storey offered a different architectural style, from Renaissance to Elizabethan.
Yet for all its stylistic eclecticism, Watts’s design was much acclaimed by contemporaries as a virtuoso essay in magnificence and grandeur, as a suitably palatial symbol of the power of Manchester commerce and of the city’s significance in national life. Surveying the scene in Portland Street in 1857, Bradshaw’s guide took a sly dig at the state of affairs on the European Continent in describing the Watts buildings as

structures fit for kings ... which many a monarch might envy. There are some eight or ten sovereign princes in Germany, whose entire revenues would not pay the cost of these warehouses. The industrial and scientific energy which has reared them is an honour to our country, and speaks well for the future of Manchester. The artistic display is all but equal to the noble enterprise which gave them being. They are, indeed, the most splendid adornment of this city.  

Routinely mentioned in the tourist literature as one of the sights of Manchester, Watts’s ‘princely structure’ became a monument to the city’s Victorian commercial identity and an object of patriotic pride. Later warehouses, while not surpassing Watts’s in the richness of their decoration, also featured bold, sumptuous and stylistically various ornamentation, an impression of palatial splendour being the visual effect typically intended. A nice illustration of their connotation with luxury is given by the fact that, as early as 1880, one warehouse was converted into an upmarket hotel (such repurposing would become more prevalent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; at the time of writing, Watts’s is owned by the Britannia hotel group).

The increasing eclecticism seen in warehouse designs was in part a function of the Victorian ‘battle of styles’ in architecture, the inconclusiveness of which resulted in diversity of architectural form. As J. Mordaunt Crook has shown, the struggle over architectural style

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115 Ibid., pp. 17–19.
118 Jones, Industrial architecture, p. 89.
was a function of the historicism of the age, of the Victorian habit of looking back to find inspiration for progress. What Crook calls this ‘acute awareness of history’, this very self-conscious knowledge of the past, presented a range of architectural styles from which to choose and gave rise to heated debate.\footnote{See J. M. Crook, \textit{The dilemma of style: Architectural ideas from the picturesque to the post-modern} (Chicago, 1987), esp. pp. 98, 126–31 (p. 131).} Arguments over the suitability of Gothic as a model for buildings in Britain were at the heart of this debate, and had a significant impact on Manchester. As was also the case elsewhere, in and around Manchester the Gothic had provided a staple template for the design of churches since the early decades of the nineteenth century, finding expression, for example, in Francis Goodwin’s St George’s, Hulme (1826–8) and Barry’s St Matthew, Castlefield (1822–5).\footnote{C. Hartwell, \textit{Manchester} (New Haven and London, 2002), p. 20.} Its popularity in this regard continued into the mid Victorian period, as seen in the erection of religious buildings such as G. S. Scott’s Christ Church, Denton (1853), A. W. N. Pugin’s St Francis, Gorton (1863), and G. E. Street’s St Peter, Swinton (1868). Following the commissioning of the new Gothic Houses of Parliament in 1836, however, the popularity of the style as one suited to secular uses grew markedly. This was particularly the case in northern England, where Gothic was perceived by many to offer an ideal model for the new civic buildings now required by burgeoning and increasingly populous urban centres.

Manchester, of course, was one such centre, and Gothic made a lasting mark on its secular quite as much as its religious architecture. Supported by Ruskin’s advocacy, a Venetian-Gothic aesthetic made the early running. Helpfully evocative of commercial greatness as well as refined taste, and so seeming especially apposite in a Manchester context, it found its most authoritative exponent in Alfred Waterhouse, who followed up works such as his Binyon and Fryer warehouse (1855–6) with the Manchester Assize Courts (1859–64). An astonishingly accomplished application of the style to a public building, the Assize Courts was much admired by contemporaries (including Ruskin, who regarded it as ‘much beyond anything yet done in England on my principles’).\footnote{Cited in G. Tyack, ‘Architecture’, in F. O’Gorman (ed.), \textit{The Cambridge companion to John Ruskin} (Cambridge, 2015), p. 109.} Guidebooks declared it to be an ‘architectural triumph’
and ‘one of the finest Gothic buildings of modern days’. Its Venetian-Gothic style provided an influential model for the work of other Manchester-based architects, including Worthington’s Memorial Hall (1863–6) and Police Courts (1868), and Edward Salomon’s Reform Club (1870).

Soon after the completion of the Assize Courts, Waterhouse was responsible for a perhaps still more impressive Gothic public building for Manchester: a new town hall (1867–77; fig. 28). Located on an awkward, triangular-shaped site off Albert Square in the city centre, the town hall was the brainchild of the middle-class Liberal businessmen who dominated mid Victorian Manchester’s local government, in particular Joseph Thompson and Abel Heywood, the building being opened in Heywood’s second term as mayor. These individuals were motivated by a keen, historically informed sense of civic pride, by a patriotic desire – as Heywood put it afterwards – to present ‘a worthy monument of the industrial greatness of Manchester and an outward and visible sign to the world that we are not wholly given up to Mammon and that the higher culture is not neglected among us’. In this, they – and their architect Waterhouse – were triumphantly successful. In the years after its completion, the building was celebrated throughout Britain as ‘the most magnificent Town Hall in England’ and, by extension, ‘the finest municipal building in the world’. It soon became a tourist attraction, one of the established sights of the city. As cheap guidebooks to the town hall explained, tours of the main parts of the building, such as the state rooms and council chamber, were available every day (a three-person ticket cost 6d); and on Saturday mornings its corridors and large rooms were thrown open to the public for free.

122 J. H.’s complete pocket guide to Manchester and Salford (Manchester, [1869]), pp. 14–15; Black’s guide to Manchester and Salford, p. 10; also E. P., Hand-book to the Manchester Assize Courts (Manchester, 1864).

123 For detailed discussion of the town hall and its construction, see C. Dellheim, The face of the past: The preservation of the medieval inheritance in Victorian England (Cambridge, 1982), Chapter 4; for Heywood, see M. Beetham, ‘Heywood, Abel (1810–1893)’, in Oxford dictionary of national biography.

124 Dellheim, Face of the past, pp. 144–5.


126 [W. E. A. Axon], Guide to the new town hall (Manchester, [1878]); Guide to Manchester town hall (Manchester, [1884]).
Chosen as the winner of a city council-run competition that had drawn 137 entries, Waterhouse’s design this time was not Venetian in its inspiration. Its precedents were instead the thirteenth-century forms of Gothic seen in the medieval civic buildings of northern France and Belgium. Redolent of the robust spirit of liberty and self-government thought to have animated the prosperous trading towns of medieval northern Europe, this language of Gothic seemed as appropriate a model as its Italian variant for a nineteenth-century city keen to memorialise its present-day industrial and commercial pre-eminence. (It certainly now seemed more appropriate than the elegant classicism of the old town hall, a building anyway too small to accommodate the great volume of local government business transacted.) As one commentator reflected in 1894,

The hall is worthy of the city which has been the birthplace of Free Trade and nineteenth-century commerce … If ever the candlestick be removed from her midst, and the commercial glory
of Manchester extinguished, let us hope that the City Hall will remain a memento as redolent of high association as those grand old City Halls of the Low Countries, which still live to speak of commercial greatness memorable, not for itself alone, but from its intimate connection with loftiest national endeavour.  

The commemorative force of the building was further underlined in the details of its decoration, much of which celebrated Manchester’s connections with free trade, commerce and industry – and by extension its contribution to national identity, national greatness and the course of national history. Adorning the exterior were roundels depicting spinning and weaving, and the coats of arms of leading manufacturers, as well as figures of St George and Queens Victoria and Elizabeth. The interior was similarly redolent of local and national pride, benefiting from such features as three huge staircases, each one built of granite from a different part of the United Kingdom; a large statue of the great free trader John Bright; and – most strikingly of all – a series of murals by the pre-Raphaelite artist Ford Madox Brown. These paintings told a confident and optimistic story of Manchester’s history from medieval times, paying notable attention to the city’s economic development. Painted on the walls of the Great Hall, their subjects included ‘the establishment of Flemish weavers at Manchester AD 1363’, ‘John Kay, inventor of the Fly Shuttle, AD 1753’ and ‘the opening of the Bridgewater Canal, AD 1761’.  

Throughout all its various iterations, Manchester’s Victorian Gothic revival did not reflect any revulsion for the strident commercial-industrial modernity of Cottonopolis. In his work on the town hall, Waterhouse saw himself as designing a building fit for the present-day needs of local government. Function was not sacrificed to form, the design being as attentive to the building’s practical operation as it was to its appearance and iconographic significance (considerations of utility were, in fact, important in the council’s decision to choose

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127 Shaw, Manchester old and new, Vol. i, p. 96.
128 On the artwork of the murals, see J. Treuherz, ‘Ford Madox Brown and the Manchester murals’, in Archer, Art and architecture in Victorian Manchester, pp. 162–207. On the murals as evidence of a desire, on the part of civic leaders, to draw on the past to craft a positive and forward-looking narrative, see Joyce, Visions of the people, pp. 182–3.
Waterhouse as winner of the competition).\textsuperscript{129} As guidebooks to the building had it, ‘The style of the Town Hall may be best described as thirteenth century Gothic’, but – they were also careful to add – ‘so far from being medieval in execution it is distinctly modern in its conception and adaptation to the multifarious requirements of the present age’.\textsuperscript{130} Such adaptation included provision of a state-of-the-art heating system, among other modern conveniences that were integrated into Waterhouse’s overall design.\textsuperscript{131} This felicitous marriage of modernity and historicity was also pulled off in other Gothic buildings of the later Victorian period. One example from London was Tower Bridge, opened to the public in 1894: for all its kitsch, this mock-medieval construction was, as Richard Dennis has shown, an effective and popular embodiment of the ‘integration of tradition and modernity’ characteristic of the Victorian city.\textsuperscript{132} In Manchester, in the years after the erection of the town hall, perhaps the most prominent example of such a building – and one more artistically satisfying than Tower Bridge – was Basil Champneys’s Arts-and-Crafts-inflected late-century masterpiece, the John Rylands Library (1890–9). Built in the distinctively English style of Perpendicular Gothic and deliberately drawing on the architecture of Oxford and Winchester, the library was lauded by contemporaries as ‘eminently an English building founded on English types’.\textsuperscript{133} Yet, for all its imaginative flights of Gothic fancy, it remained emphatically modern in its functional design. Among other things, it was one of the first public buildings in Britain to benefit from internal electric lighting, and also boasted an ambitiously high-tech ventilation system designed to filter the polluted Manchester air before circulating it around the building.\textsuperscript{134} Yet, despite all this attention to present-day needs, the Gothic was nevertheless inescapably evocative of pre-industrial times. Surveying the efflorescence of Gothic architecture in mid-to-late

\textsuperscript{129} Dellheim, \textit{Face of the past}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{131} Dellheim, \textit{Face of the past}, pp. 136–9.
\textsuperscript{132} Dennis, \textit{Cities in modernity}, pp. 10–14 (p. 10).
Victorian Manchester, Charles Dellheim has observed that ‘All these buildings created a sense of the past in one of the major citadels of modernity.’ In a sense, this is a curious conjunction. With their connotations of commercial wealth and splendour, Renaissance Venice and the prosperous medieval trading cities of the Low Countries may have provided appropriate historical models for the architectural landscape of Manchester, but why reference these precedents at all? Why did the burghers and merchants of now brashly self-confident Cottonopolis need the past as much as they did?

Certainly, their need for the past was strongly felt, and perhaps unusually so. The Gothic revival took hold with greater force in Manchester than in many other British towns and cities. But its purchase was not the only – or perhaps even the most significant – index of the city’s engagement with history. Interest not just in the past in general, but in Manchester’s past in particular, grew steadily over the course of the nineteenth century. Early histories had followed the lead of John Whitaker’s *History of Manchester* (1771–3) in making claims for the town’s being of ancient origin. While few went as far as Whitaker in asserting that the history of Manchester dated from pre-Roman times, that the place was the site of a Roman fort (Mancunium) established by Agricola in or around AD 79 was routinely mentioned. In these texts, a good deal of attention was also paid to the medieval and early modern history of the town, with authors showing a particular desire to date the origins and trace the development of its manufacturing industry.

The findings of local historians were drawn on by contemporaneous tourist guides, which presented their own historical narratives emphasising the great age of what might at first sight seem to the visitor to be the most modern of modern towns. ‘Manchester has high claims to antiquity’ was the leitmotif of these often quite lengthy accounts.

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135 Dellheim, *Face of the past*, p. 132.
138 See, e.g., Cornish’s stranger’s guide through Manchester and Salford, pp. 8–16.
139 *Manchester as it is*, p. 12; and for an example of extensive treatment, Perrin, *Manchester handbook*, pp. 11–40.
The engagement with Manchester history evident in these publications was both cause and consequence of the growth of organised antiquarianism in the town. Along with botany, geology, art collecting and other self-improving intellectual activities, antiquarianism and local history had considerable appeal for the cotton-enriched members of the Manchester middle class, and societies devoted to their pursuit flourished as a consequence. The most important of these organisations were the Chetham Society, established in 1843, and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society (LCAS), which was set up in 1884.¹⁴⁰ Both attracted healthy memberships; published papers and proceedings; and, by the mid Victorian period, had achieved a significant place in the civic life of the town. Many of the individuals involved in these societies became local figures of some prominence on account of their historical activities. A founder member of LCAS and author of Annals of Manchester (1886), an impressively comprehensive year-by-year digest of local history ‘from the earliest times’, the journalist, folklorist and librarian William E. A. Axon was one such example.¹⁴¹ Another representative figure was William Arthur Shaw, editor of several Chetham Society volumes and fellow of Owens College (pre-precursor to the modern-day Manchester University, housed from 1873 in handsome Waterhouse-designed Gothic premises on Oxford Road, to the south of the city centre). Shaw, who became a noted economic historian of seventeenth-century Britain, was also keenly interested in the local history of Lancashire and Manchester, and along with other works reflecting this interest published, in 1894, a lavishly illustrated three-volume antiquarian topography, Manchester old and new.¹⁴²

By the time this book appeared, public engagement with the Manchester past was entrenched in local civic culture. This reflected a general nationwide broadening and deepening of popular historical-consciousness in the late nineteenth century, the indices of which were as apparent in Manchester as they were elsewhere.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ W. E. A. Axon (ed.), The annals of Manchester (Manchester and London, 1886).
¹⁴² Shaw, Manchester old and new.
¹⁴³ Readman, ‘Place of the past’.
This historical-consciousness, moreover, was closely bound up with place: the fast-changing Manchester landscape was increasingly read as storied. Such was apparent from books like Shaw’s, of which a number appeared in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. One example was James Croston’s *Old Manchester* of 1875, which, in the words of its subtitle, presented ‘a series of views of the more ancient buildings in Manchester and its vicinity, as they appeared fifty years ago’.\(^{144}\) Perhaps more telling as evidence of the late-century interconnections between landscape and history was the magazine *Manchester Faces and Places*. Launched in October 1889, it contained articles on local personalities and sights of note, together with ‘fine reproductions of portraits, public buildings, and the various places of interest and picturesque beauty contained in and around the city’.\(^{145}\) Strikingly, in its coverage of ‘places’ the past loomed large. Historical landmarks such as the medieval Chetham’s College were given much attention, as were the historical associations attaching even to apparently very modern streetscapes. The domestic architecture of Tudor and Elizabethan times was a particular preoccupation. In article after illustrated article, the small and often quaint black-and-white buildings that remained in the city centre were noted and discussed, as were the very much grander timber-framed manor houses of the same era, such as Wardley Hall, that were still to be found in its hinterland.

The value so placed on the vernacular architecture of the sixteenth century was of a piece with the contemporaneous, and nationwide, appeal of an ideal of an older, more picturesque and ‘Merrie’ England, of which the folk-song and dance revival and to a certain extent the emergent landscape preservation movement were also manifestations. As with this wider phenomenon, it is possible to read Manchester’s variant of it as expressive of a reactionary impulse, a culturally conservative rejection of a now exponentially developing modernity. As also with this wider phenomenon, however, such a reading would be a mistake. Cultural engagement with the past had become more intense and pervasive as the nineteenth century progressed, and towns such as Manchester were no exception to this.\(^{146}\) Indeed, the industrial-commercial landscape of such places may itself have been an

\(^{144}\) J. Croston, *Old Manchester: A series of views of the more ancient buildings in Manchester and its vicinity, as they appeared fifty years ago* (Manchester, 1875).

\(^{145}\) ‘To our readers’, *Manchester Faces and Places*, 1 (1890), 90.

important additional stimulus to this engagement. After all, the expansion and development of Manchester had led to the disappearance of many sixteenth-century buildings in and around the city. As Patrick Joyce has commented, ‘in the new industrial towns of the north of England … the rapidity of urban and industrial changes called into being both the awareness of a past believed slipping away, and a history in which town and industry figured as symbols of national and industrial progress … economic and social advance were emphasised all the more by being given a pedigree’. Thus the increased interest shown by Mancunians in their history did not reflect revulsion for their present, but rather a desire to make sense of it, to preserve and celebrate a sense of continuity with the past, for the benefit of current and future generations. Something similar was happening in London at the same time, where – as Lynda Nead has shown – the appeal of the historical and the picturesque persisted amid the sweeping improvement works that were transforming the Metropolitan landscape. In Manchester, as elsewhere, this holding on to the past was a means of preserving a coherent sense of civic identity, of better understanding the city’s national significance and how it had come to attain this significance. It helped form the building blocks of very modern-day sentiments of local pride; as evident from the accounts in tourist guidebooks, the long and continuous history of Manchester was a subject about which many saw fit to boast. In the late Victorian and into the Edwardian period, the world did seem to be changing faster than it had done before, but the concomitant rise of what might be termed heritage-consciousness worked in step with rather than against the pace of these changes. Awareness of and care for the past and its landscapes, which involved appreciation of the still-existing and identity-bolstering continuities with former ages, made the experience of change less dislocating – perhaps even more possible – than it might otherwise have been.

Attitudes to the late Victorian cultural landscape of Manchester provide a good illustration of this phenomenon in action, and all the more so because of the immutable modernity of the place, its status as one of the ‘shock cities’ of the nineteenth century. A particularly revealing case study in this regard is the 1887 Exhibition, an elaborate

147 Ibid., pp. 180, 181.
148 Nead, Victorian Babylon.
149 Kern, Culture of time and space.
civic event held in honour of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee. In contrast to the earlier 1857 Art-Treasures Exhibition, the city council this time resolved to celebrate manufacturing, science and handicrafts as well as high culture. To this end, the enormous exhibition building erected at Old Trafford was divided into sections, the intention being to emphasise the diversity of Manchester’s contribution to national life. There were displays of musical instruments, paintings, sculpture and pottery, but also areas devoted to chemistry, manufactured goods and machinery. Indeed, the Great Hall of the exhibition building was entirely given over to machinery, presenting – or so the organisers claimed – the largest and highest-quality collection of its kind ever assembled.150 The exhibition was a great success, achieving large attendance figures in comparison with comparable events held around the same time.151 More than 4.7 million people visited over the course of 166 days between May and November, with nearly 75,000 coming on one day alone.152

Described in guidebooks as ‘probably … the greatest treat of the whole show’, and after the event as being of ‘immense’ popularity and ‘a conspicuous success’, the outdoor display of ‘Old Manchester and Salford’ was one of the real draws of the exhibition. Masterminded by local architect Alfred Darbyshire, this was a life-size exhibit of Manchester architecture from Roman to late Georgian times. Visitors entered via a carefully researched replica of the Porta Decumana of ancient Mancunium, guarded by Roman soldiers, and went through into a mock-up of Market-Sted Lane and other old Manchester streets. There they could wander among and into reproductions of old buildings, encountering as they did so exhibition employees dressed in historical costumes. The avowed intention of the organisers was to emphasise the richness of Manchester’s architectural heritage, while at the same time demonstrating – as contemporaneous guidebooks and local histories also did – the long continuities of the city’s history, stretching back to

150 W. Tomlinson, The pictorial record of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887 (Manchester, 1887), p. 103.
151 Total attendance was 4,765,137. The Liverpool Exhibition of 1886 drew 2,668,118 visitors over 156 days, with the figures for the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886 being 2,769,632 over 151 days. The footfall at the Jubilee Exhibition compared favourably even to that at the Art-Treasures Exhibition of 1857 (1,336,715 over 141 days). See ibid., p. 142.
152 Ibid.
Roman times. It was a memorial to the historic landscape of the place, and its popularity was a telling indication of the rising strength of heritage-consciousness. Above all, it reflected a concern – later shown in the pages of *Manchester Faces and Places* – with the vernacular architecture of the sixteenth century. In Old Manchester and Salford, half-timbered shops, inns and manor houses abounded, the now largely disappeared black-and-white buildings of the early modern town being resurrected for modern-day perusal and appreciation.

This valorisation of a Tudor aesthetic bled over into the rest of the exhibition. Far from looking outwards to the empire for their visual cues, as might perhaps be expected at this time, the organisers turned inwards to the English past. In a telling demonstration of modernity’s need, in Richard Dennis’s words, for ‘picturesque props’, the walls of the main exhibition hall, which housed the great display of machinery, featured Tudor-style timber-frame decorations, as did some of the doorways and entrances. As the official *Pictorial Record* described it, the sides of the nave of the exhibition building had ‘quaintly picturesque decorations … consisting principally of reproductions of old English gabled and half timbered house fronts’. Along with Old Manchester and Salford, such decorative touches expressed a desire to bring the past into the service of the present, to frame the great advances of modernity – all that sophisticated new machinery and so on – in an historical context. Of course, the ‘Merrie England’ Tudor aesthetic was no discovery of the late Victorian period, having animated the early-nineteenth-century popular ‘Olden Time’ cult, as Mandler has shown. But it did gain renewed currency in these years, finding expression in musical tastes, art and design, and – by the Edwardian period – the fashion for historical pageantry. Unlike the

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153 For details, see A. Darbyshire, *A booke of olde Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1887).
self-consciously ‘civilised’ architecture of the eighteenth century (much disparaged in the souvenir guide to Old Manchester and Salford),\textsuperscript{158} Tudor buildings seemed picturesque, homely, and suggestive of communal pleasures and comforts. They were evocative of rude but wholesome pleasures – May Day celebrations and the like – and of lifestyles of plenty for the humble as well as the great. This helps explain the appeal of the Tudor past to radical reformers and socialists in these years,\textsuperscript{159} but also accounts for its more general appeal in a country increasingly democratic both in social-cultural and political terms. Great towns and cities such as Manchester were great centres of this burgeoning democratic sensibility; it is thus perhaps unsurprising that civic celebrations such as the 1887 Exhibition should reflect so strong an engagement with this past and its landscape.

In Manchester as elsewhere, then, the relationship between heritage and modernity was supportive rather than conflictual; the two went together. A further indication of this was the way in which the Old Manchester and Salford exhibition combined heritage with consumerism. Visitors were encouraged to buy illustrated guide-books and other souvenirs, some of which could be purchased from costumed vendors in the replica old buildings. In Harrop’s Printing Office, for example, employees of the modern-day Manchester publisher John Heywood and Sons (one of them impersonating Joseph Caxton!) could be found operating old wooden presses to run off facsimile copies of the 28 November 1769 number of \textit{Harrop’s Mercury}, which were then offered for sale. Other Manchester firms ran displays in and around the houses of Old Manchester and Salford, showing the manufacture of jewellery, watches, confectionery and much else besides, examples of which could be bought by visitors. ‘Witcomb’s pipemakers … engaged in the manufacture of briar-root and meer-schaum pipes, and the drilling and shaping and polishing of amber, attracted the men-folk greatly’, while it might be supposed that children were more drawn to the scene ‘in front of old Hulme Hall’, where ‘a bevy of maidens charmingly dressed in the style of Queen Anne’s most popular figure in the Edwardian craze for historical pageants: see A. Bartie, P. Caton, L. Fleming, M. Freeman, T. Hulme, A. Hutton and P. Readman, \textit{The redress of the past}, www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/ (accessed 12 May 2017).

\textsuperscript{158} Darbyshire, \textit{Booke of olde Manchester}, pp. 53–4, 56, 67, 81.

days, bore about ices, and creams, and chocolate, under the aegis of Messrs. Parker and Sons’.  

Although not so chaotically interblended, heritage and consumerism also sat cheek-by-jowl in *Manchester Faces and Places*, which combined appreciation of the surviving picturesque buildings of the sixteenth century with enthusiasm for the brash, up-to-the-minute commercialism of department stores such as Lewis’s on Market Street (‘a huge emporium of everything, garnished on the exterior with all the architectural embellishments of a handsome and highly ornate building ... and brilliant at night with electric light and the reflections of thousands of lamps’). In its pages, articles breathlessly puffing the virtues of ‘our business places’ (principally shops) sat alongside others extolling the appeal of ‘picturesque’ relics of times gone by. This reflected a mindset that sought to preserve memories of the past while at the same time celebrating the bright benisons of modernity as manifested in the city’s landscape. Sometimes, indeed, the old buildings to which these memories attached were objects of attention precisely because they acted as monuments to a worse past, of progress made since the days they were erected. Writing of the Rover’s Return, a tiny ‘quaint and picturesque’ public house on Shude Hill, for example, *Manchester Faces and Places* averred that such buildings ‘give us some idea of the appearance of the town in its earlier days when the streets were few, narrow, and tortuous, when Market street was an old alley, and its houses, of overhanging gables, were so close that, when a broad-wheeled wagon was dragging along, the pedestrian had to exercise both patience and ingenuity to avoid destruction’ (see fig. 29).

This was a perspective that acknowledged change and modernisation as inevitable and welcome. Thus it was that *Manchester Faces and Places* could be relatively sanguine about the ongoing destruction of many of the remaining old buildings in the city centre while at the same time carrying articles detailing their history and associations.

( Something similar happened in other urban contexts: as Nead has shown in her work on London, from the 1860s the *Illustrated London*

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160 On the appeal of Old Manchester and Salford to children, see the illustrated paperback aimed at them: E. E. Haugh, *The adventures of little Man-Chester; or, Recollections of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition* (Manchester, 1887). Significantly, the sole focus of this book is Old Manchester and Salford, not the exhibition generally.


162 Ibid., 4 (1893), p. 76.
News ‘assumed the role of archivist of the city, carrying images and descriptions of old buildings demolished in the course of improvement works’. So, for all that it was important to remember buildings such as St Mary’s Church, which was demolished in 1891, it was also important to recognise when they had ‘outlived [their] necessity’.

Similarly, while the half-timbered Seven Stars and Sun Inn pubs in Long Millgate were powerfully evocative of past centuries and hallowed by local associations (the Sun Inn, as ‘Poet’s Corner’, had been

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163 ‘In regular columns with titles such as “Nooks and corners of old England” and “Archaeology of the month” it illustrated the disappearing inns and houses of Elizabethan London, creating in its pages a lexicon of the metropolitan picturesque’: Nead, Victorian Babylon, pp. 30–1.

the meeting place of an early Victorian literary circle), they were now out of keeping with the character of the modern city:

‘Poet’s Corner’ is probably about the most ancient bit of old-fashioned Manchester ... The dilapidated front leans forward on its timber support in the last stage of tottering age, looking like a ghost of the past nesting up to the proud seat of modern culture, as though to catch from juvenile voices and laughter a refrain of the jocund spirit which from under its own roof has now for ever fled. This ‘poet’s corner’ forms now an ugly angle in the street outline. Its presence spells obstruction, and even toleration for relics of the past cannot long defer its removal.\textsuperscript{165}

In the event, Poet’s Corner survived until 1923, but the attitude of \textit{Manchester Faces and Places} to the continued existence of ‘tottering remnant[s] of antiquity’ in the heart of the modern city was a typical one by the late Victorian period. Antiquarian and topographical surveys pointed to the visual incongruity such survivals presented; they seemed out of place in the city-centre landscape and disruptive of the discourse of improvement it ought to embody. In his \textit{Old Manchester} of 1875, James Croston thought the few remaining old buildings on Deansgate were ‘in the midst of surroundings entirely out of character with their antiquated features’, noting that ‘until very recently Deansgate was only a narrow and inconveniently-crowded thoroughfare’ but ‘by the spirit of modern enterprise it has become transformed into one of the most spacious as well as one of the handsomest streets in the kingdom, rivalling even Regent-Street itself in the imposing character of its buildings’.\textsuperscript{166} Twenty years later, the continued presence of at least some of these buildings on Deansgate drew a still blunter response in W. A. Shaw’s \textit{Manchester old and new}: ‘It produces something like an effect of grotesqueness and incongruity when we think of these odd buildings with their old-time associations surviving with the modern city, in the midst of the cotton mills and busy warehouse life that are becoming its chief characteristics.’\textsuperscript{167}

The problem here was not the buildings per se, but their survival in the modern landscape of central Manchester. This perspective

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 2 (1891), p. 103.
\textsuperscript{166} Croston, \textit{Old Manchester}, p. 20.
reflected cultural attitudes to the English landscape more generally. Despite the arguments of some historians, it is simply not the case that late Victorian and Edwardian opinion came to see the rural landscape of the past as very much more ‘national’, more essentially English, than the urban landscape of the present. This was a culture that accommodated both in its nationalist topography; it celebrated both – in their right place. For some commentators, indeed, the very sharpness of the contrast between town and country was perceived to be a good thing, as if the more thoroughly urbanised places such as Manchester became, the more complementary they were to the very different landscape of the English countryside. Arriving in Manchester by train, the journalist T. H. S. Escott found the scene around him ‘profoundly impressive’. He observed ‘the flaming beacon-lights of a never-ending labour’ and the ‘endless vista of watch-fires of industry’; his ears were assailed by ‘the tremendous reverberation of forges mightier than those of the Cyclops’. The stark contrast between this industrial landscape and the fields and moors of rural England, from which he had come, was inescapable, yet at the same time he felt ‘the continuity of national life and feeling is preserved unbroken … The new is ever being incorporated with the old, and the result of the process is a growing identity of interests and of feeling.’

Such sentiments illustrate a patriotic confidence about change. The growing conception of landscape – or certain landscapes – as being valuable on account of their associations with the past, or for their natural beauty, was not incompatible with this confidence. The men and women of Victorian and Edwardian Manchester could welcome modernising urban improvements while simultaneously involving themselves in historical societies, nature study, and even preservationist campaigns. Many ordinary Mancunians were active in botanical clubs, rambling and footpath associations, and the like, making full use of the city’s proximity to the Lake and Peak Districts. Yet these activities
did not imply distaste for the urban landscape in which people passed their everyday lives. One of their spokesmen was the adult education pioneer and botanist Leo Hartley Grindon, whose nature writings appeared regularly in the columns of local newspapers from the 1850s on, and also in book form.¹⁷⁰ For Grindon, the rapid growth of Manchester (a town ‘bosomed in beauty’) did not threaten wild nature, readily accessible as it was by means of the railway, which he thought a great boon to the botanist.¹⁷¹ ‘Let the bricks and mortar stride far as they will over the greensward’, Grindon thought, ‘there are always sanctuaries beyond – sweet spots where we may yet listen to the singing of the birds, and pluck the early primrose and anemone’.¹⁷² Moreover, for all his love of nature and the great outdoors, Grindon – author of a history of Manchester – also had a positive regard for the urban environment. As he told readers of his Manchester walks and wild-flowers,

The streets lead the way to as much pleasure as the field-paths. It is nothing but a thoughtless mistake which lauds the country at the expense of the town ... Like the sexes, each is complementary to the other, and each offers pleasures which only itself can give; each is best in turn, and full of compensation for what we leave behind in the other.¹⁷³

It is true that Grindon, like many others by the later decades of the nineteenth century, was increasingly aware of the negative environmental impact of great towns. For residents of Manchester it could hardly be otherwise. The smoke from houses and factories was all-pervasive. Continually hanging over the city, it blackened buildings and caused respiratory disease; such was the atmospheric pollution that the

¹⁷⁰ L. H. Grindon, Manchester walks and wild-flowers (London and Manchester, [1859]); Summer rambles in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire (Manchester and London, 1866); Country rambles and Manchester walks and wild flowers: Being rural wanderings in Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire (Manchester, 1882).
¹⁷¹ ‘Honoured for ever be the name of Stephenson! It is in facilitating men’s intercourse with nature, and the purest and most ennobling recreations they can enjoy and are capable of, that the social blessings of railways have their highest realisation’: Grindon, Manchester walks and wild-flowers, p. 7.
¹⁷² Ibid., p. 1.
¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 82.
rain was often dirty with soot (the so-called ‘blacks’). For years, the
factories that lined the rivers in and around Manchester had pumped
waste into their waters, leading foreign observers from mid-century on
to describe the city-centre reaches of the Irwell, Medlock and Irk as
‘black and fetid’. But to most English eyes, such things were an inevi-
table consequence of Manchester’s – and England’s – greatness; their
capacity to cause wider, nationwide damage to the environment was
not yet fully appreciated (as Grindon said, a lot of nature still remained
to be spoiled). There was good reason to think in this way. As James
Winter has demonstrated, the environmentally deleterious potential –
and impact – of Victorian technology was relatively limited: while it
could have transformative effects, these were largely localised, steam
power lacking the capacity to wreak the more widespread damage
that the twentieth-century spread of the internal combustion engine
would bring. Perhaps in part because of this, contemporaries did
not condemn the urban landscape of Manchester as hateful, begrimed
though it was. The Irwell was celebrated as ‘a noble work-a-day river,
with smutty face, winning the children’s bread’ through ‘labours only
paralleled by those recorded in the fable of the mighty Hercules of
old’. Indeed, the very pollution of Manchester rivers could stand
as evidence of their worth as valued landscapes. Grindon certainly
thought so: while ‘A limpid stream among the hills’ may be ‘lovely and
poetical … the most pleasing of all rivers are those of which the banks
are occupied by an industrious and intelligent population’. And, as
he wrote on another occasion, if the once plentiful trout were now
extinct in the Medlock and Irwell, ‘Are we then to murmur? – to feel
as is robbed? By no means. Nothing can be regretful that is insepara-
ble from the conditions of the industry and the prosperity of a great
nation. The holidays will be here by and by. A couple of hours’ railway

174 M. L. Faucher, *Manchester in 1844* (London, 1844), p. 17. For other examples,
see L. D. Bradshaw (ed. and comp.), *Visitors to Manchester: A selection of British
and foreign visitors’ descriptions of Manchester from c. 1538 to 1865* (Manchester,
1987), pp. 34–5 (Alexis de Tocqueville; Victor Huber), 36 (Eugène Buret); also
Engels, *Condition of the working class*.
175 Winter, *Secure from rash assault*.
177 Grindon, *Manchester walks and wild-flowers*, p. 47.
journey enables one to listen to the “liquid lapse” of streams clear and bright as Cherith.\textsuperscript{178}

Some went further still in their appreciation of Manchester waterways. Artists and photographers began to find interest and even beauty in the scenes that they offered. In this they were influenced by contemporaneous trends in visual culture towards the aestheticisation of urban landscapes, two of the more significant indications of which were James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s Thames nocturnes in the 1870s, and – later on – Claude Monet’s London series of paintings (1900–3), which also had the Thames as a focus. In January 1903, \textit{Manchester Faces and Places} featured an article about photography in and around the city. Entitled ‘Picturesque Manchester’, it noted that at a recent exhibition held by the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society, ‘no photograph commanded more attention’ than T. Longworth Cooper’s misty, foggy view of the River Irwell from Blackfriar’s Bridge, featuring barges, chimneys and other appurtenances of industry. Yet, the writer continued, the ‘beautiful photograph’ was evidence that ‘“Cottonopolis” may lay claim to the picturesque’, even ‘along the course of the inky and evil-smelling Irwell’.\textsuperscript{179} Similar scenes were increasingly popular with artists, one especially notable example being Adolphe Valette, a French Impressionist painter who came to England in 1904 and settled in Manchester, where he taught at the Municipal School of art.\textsuperscript{180} In works such as \textit{India House, Manchester} (1912), and \textit{Under Windsor Bridge on the Irwell} (1912), Valette conjured up images of striking beauty from the dank and murky rivers and canals of the city (see fig. 30). Valette’s paintings of Manchester waterways were well received at the time. In its report on the inaugural exhibition of the Manchester Society of Modern Painters, of which Valette was a member, the \textit{Manchester Guardian} commended one of his views ‘of [a] canal or river crossed by a heavy iron bridge’ for its ‘extreme delicacy of atmospheric effect’, judging it to be ‘one of the best interpretations of our city landscape that we have seen at any time’.\textsuperscript{181}


\textsuperscript{179} Manchester Faces and Places, 14 (1903), pp. 50–3.

\textsuperscript{180} For Valette, see Manchester Art Gallery, \textit{Adolphe Valette: A French Impressionist in Manchester} (Manchester, 2007); S. Martin, \textit{Adolphe Valette: A French influence in Manchester} (London, 2007); C. Lyon, \textit{Adolphe Valette} (Chichester, 2006).

\textsuperscript{181} Manchester Guardian, 19 September 1912, p. 5.
Manchester remained a valued national landscape into the twentieth century. Until the First World War, its architecture of enterprise was designedly splendid, and perceived as such by contemporary opinion. Its streets were bustling; its warehouses and department stores were palatial; its public buildings were suitably evocative of commercial greatness and civic virtue; even its polluted rivers could be seen as beautiful. As one observer noted in 1900, its status as ‘the undoubted metropolis of the north’ could be read in its landscape:

Manchester is in many respects a microcosm of England and a replica of London. In its public spirit and enterprise we see the national characteristics which have created modern England. In
its main thoroughfares we are reminded of the City of London; Market Street is the counterpart of Cheapside; substitute tramcars for omnibuses, lorries for vans, and, amid the keen bustling throng of men and women, intent on commerce or shopping, you may fancy yourself within sight of the Mansion House; what difference exists is often in the line of greater intensity in the northern centre.  

Still recommended as worth visiting in the guidebook literature, even Manchester’s factories retained visual merit in the landscape, not least because of the further increased attention given to ornamentation in their design – as shown, for example, in the use of polychromatic bricks; terracotta decorations; and the adornment of stair towers with parapets, balustrades and even copper domes.  

To be sure, the negative elements of the Manchester urban environment were never ignored, but its connotations with industry, enterprise and modernity generally made it a great national landscape. Despite spikes of concern, most notably in the 1840s, it was a fit object of patriotic pride not only for residents of Cottonopolis but also for the country at large, and remained so throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. And while the historical associations of this landscape were less strongly evident than in other of the landscapes discussed in this book, they were certainly valued: Manchester too was storied ground. These associations were integrated into a forward-looking narrative of civic progress that brought the past into the service of the present and future. In the interwar period, this use of the past would become further evident in the large-scale historical pageants and civic weeks held in the city, those of 1926 and 1938 being the most important examples. As Tom Hulme has shown, Manchester pageants – like many of their counterparts in North America – were great festivals of civic boosterism, which re-enacted the past as a means...
of stimulating pride in past achievements with a view to inspiring hope for the future.¹⁸⁵ In Manchester’s case, this meant a patriotic celebration of the city’s industrial and commercial heritage at the heart of the workshop of the world, and thus its contribution to the nation’s economic greatness and sense of identity; it did not involve any nostalgic lamentations for a lost and supposedly more authentically English rural idyll.

The story told in the Manchester pageants reflected an acceptance of change, and specifically England’s transformation from a largely rural- to a largely urban-dwelling nation. Yet it was a story that had long been embodied in the landscape of the city, and in readings of that landscape. This chapter began with Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and south*; its denouement is suggestive here, and presents an appropriate point on which to conclude. Once settled in Milton/Manchester, Margaret comes to realise that she cannot return to the land of the south. This realisation bursts upon her in the course of a visit to her old home of Helstone, in the New Forest. The landscape still retains its scenic appeal – Helstone ‘to her … would always be the prettiest spot in the world’ – but Margaret’s exposure to the very different environment of Milton has transformed her attitude to change. Whereas in her youth she had revelled in the apparently timeless aspect of her sylvan home, now she sees ‘change everywhere’ (even in Helstone), and it is on the side of change that she wishes to be: ‘If the world stood still, it would become retrograde and corrupt … Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress all around me is right and necessary.’ Thus it is that on returning north Margaret resolves to marry her lover, the mill owner John Thornton, and make her life amid the smokestacks and factories of Milton – for all that she retains strong affection for the commons, fields, flowers and trees of the New Forest.¹⁸⁶ Margaret’s bifurcated sensibility stands proxy for that of wider cultural attitudes. For all that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English men and women


displayed an increasing sensitivity to the problems of poverty, dirt and disease that afflicted towns and cities, landscapes such as Manchester could still be associated with change, progress and national greatness, and valued as a consequence. Yet, at the same time, as we saw in the previous chapter, places such as the New Forest remained valued landscapes too, though for rather different reasons. The patriotic landscape imaginary of the long nineteenth century was a capacious one, encompassing both rural shires and city streets, and the extent of this capaciousness is further illustrated, as we are about to see, by the example of the River Thames.