



Royal
Geographical
Society
with IBG

Slums, squalor and salvation

A self guided walk around Victorian Manchester



Corporation Street, Angel Meadow (c1908) © St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow: Then and Now

Find out the other side to Manchester's industrial boom
Visit where many Victorians lived and worked in poverty
Discover how religious organisations tried to improve people's lives

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks







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Slums, squalor and salvation

Discover how religious organisations helped the poor in Victorian Manchester

Introduction

1840. Manchester is booming. Its cotton industry is world famous. But life expectancy is just 26.

The story of Victorian Manchester is usually one which celebrates industrial expansion, technological advancements and economic growth. But there was another side. For ordinary people who worked in the mills and factories, life was hard, poverty was widespread and life expectancy was very short.

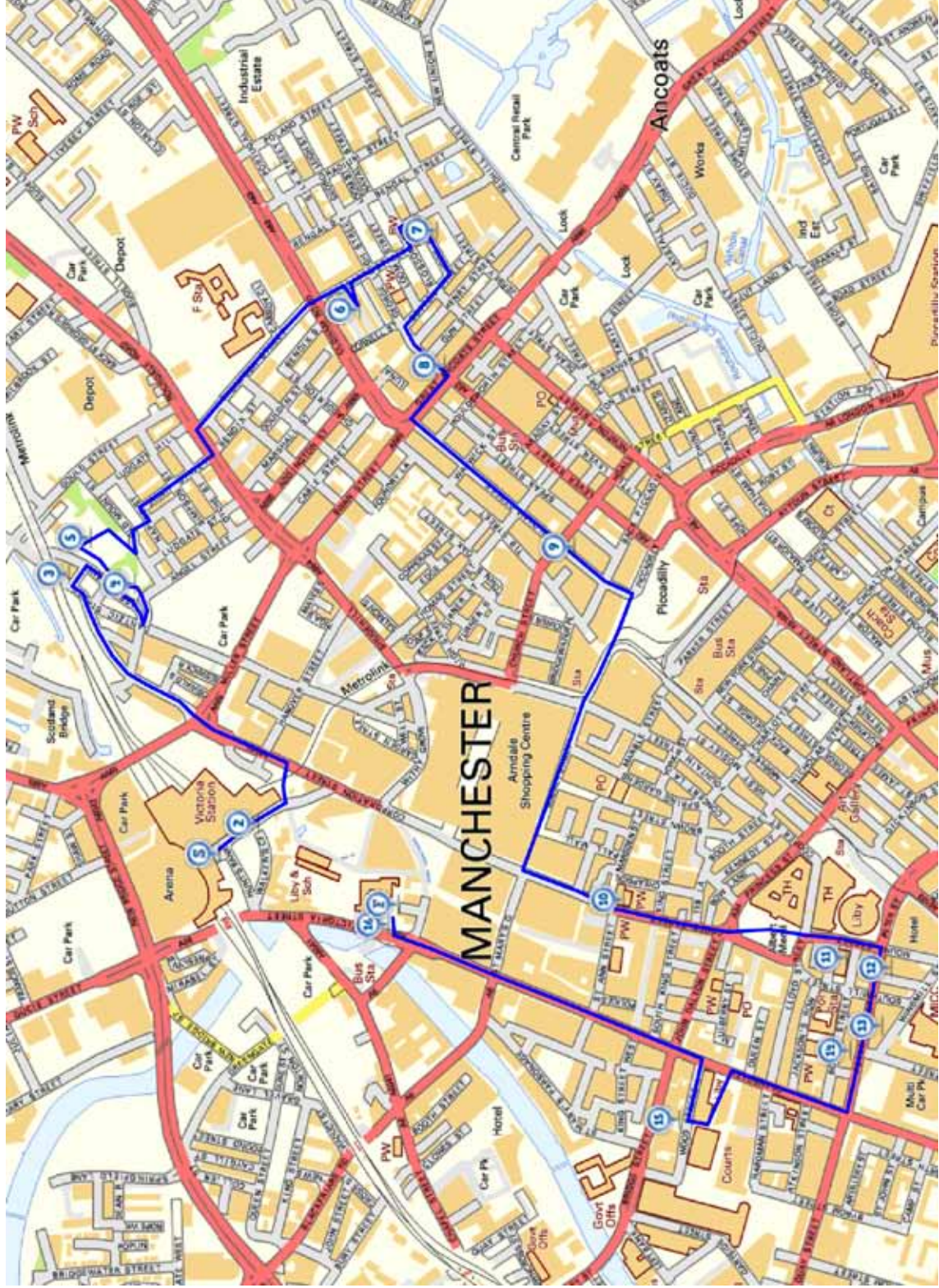
On this walk, you will discover another side of nineteenth century Manchester: teeming slums and squalid living conditions, widespread disease and chronic health conditions, child labour and illiteracy, drinking and prostitution.

In those days, the state did not provide any financial or material support to the poor. But many religious people were moved by the appalling living conditions of the working classes and decided to do something about it. Find out about the institutions that provided a variety of welfare services and made the difference between life and death for the urban poor.



Crown Lane, Angel Meadow (1899)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

Route overview



Practical information

Location	Manchester, Northwest England
Getting there	<p>Train - Both Manchester Victoria and Manchester Piccadilly are in the city centre.</p> <p>Victoria services include to Leeds and Liverpool. Piccadilly services to London Euston, Birmingham New Street, Edinburgh Waverley, Glasgow Central and South Wales</p> <p>Tram - Manchester Metrolink covers most of the city, including a route between Victoria and Piccadilly mainline stations</p> <p>Bus - served by by over fifty operators, from local to long distance routes. Routes to the start of the walk (Manchester Victoria station) include 2, 8, 31, 59, 67, 71, 73, 89, 93, 94, 96, 98, 100, 110, 135, 149, 167 and X25</p> <p>Three city centre Metroshuttle bus routes connect the mainline train stations. They are free of charge and run every 10 minutes.</p> <p>Car - Easily accessible from M6 and M62. Plenty of car parks though charges apply.</p>
Start point & postcode	Manchester Victoria railway station, M3 1PB
Finish point	Manchester Cathedral, M3 1SX
Distance	3 miles
Level	Gentle – A largely flat route around the city centre and its fringes

Conditions

This city centre walk can be very busy, especially on Saturdays. Take care crossing busy roads and look after your valuables. The route tends to be quieter on Sundays if you want to avoid the crowds.

Suitable for

Wheelchairs/pushchairs - an entirely step-free route

Refreshments

There are plenty of places to stop for food and drink in the city centre

Facilities

Public toilets at Manchester Victoria station (Stop 1), though charges apply. Along the route are free facilities at:

- The Arndale Centre (between Stops 9 and 10)
- Albert Square, before the Friends Meeting House (between Stops 10 and 11)
- The Great Northern Warehouse, opposite the former Albert Hall (Stop 14)
- Manchester Cathedral (Stop 17)
- various others in the city centre

Other info

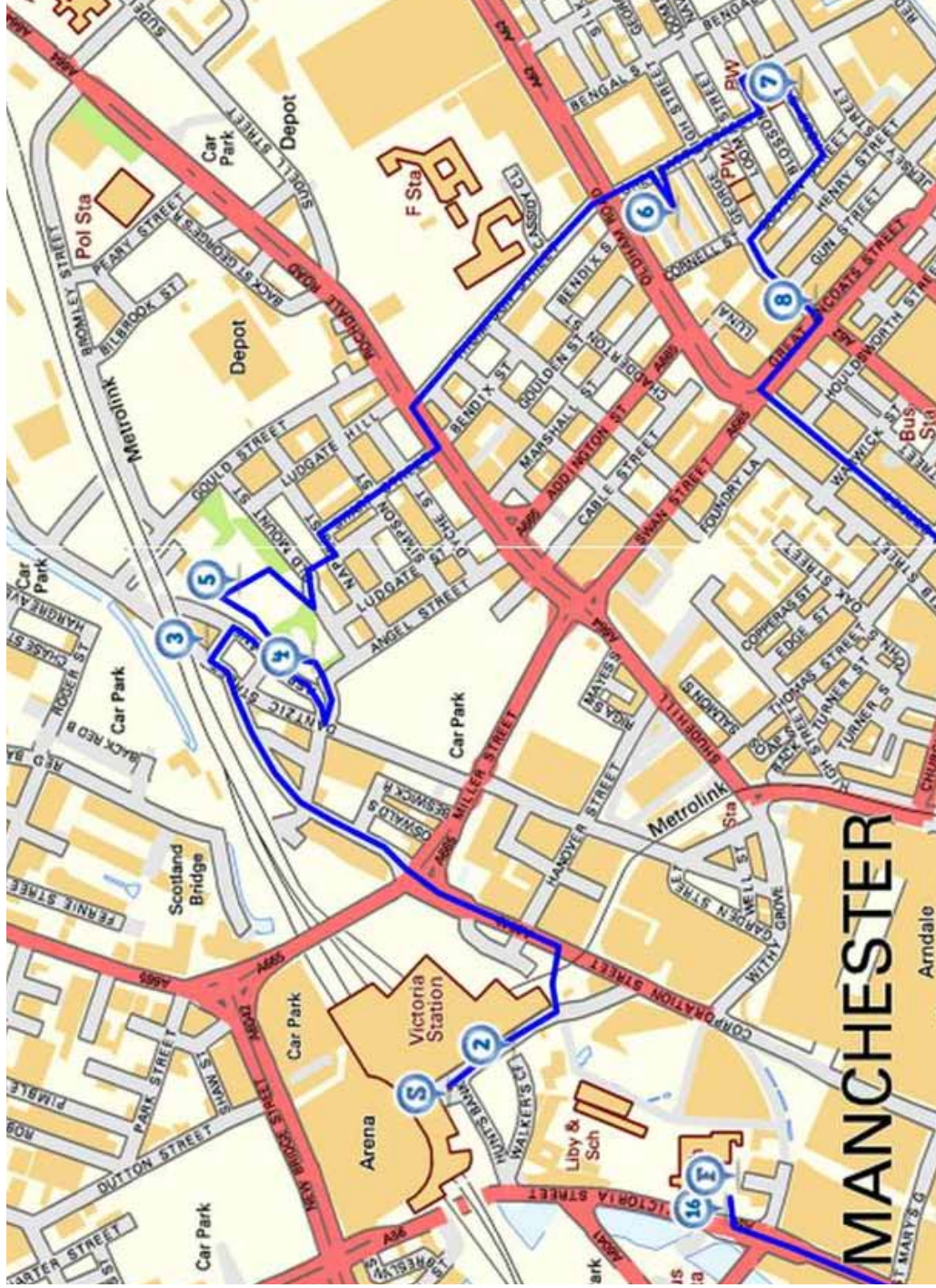
Manchester Cathedral is open daily. Entry is free though donations are recommended. A free Explorer Trail is available for children

Typical opening times are:

- Monday - Friday, 8.30am - 6.30pm
- Saturday 8.30am - 5pm
- Sunday 8.30am - 7pm

The Cathedral is used for daily for services and special events, so it is advisable to check admission times before visiting (Tel: 0161 833 2220)

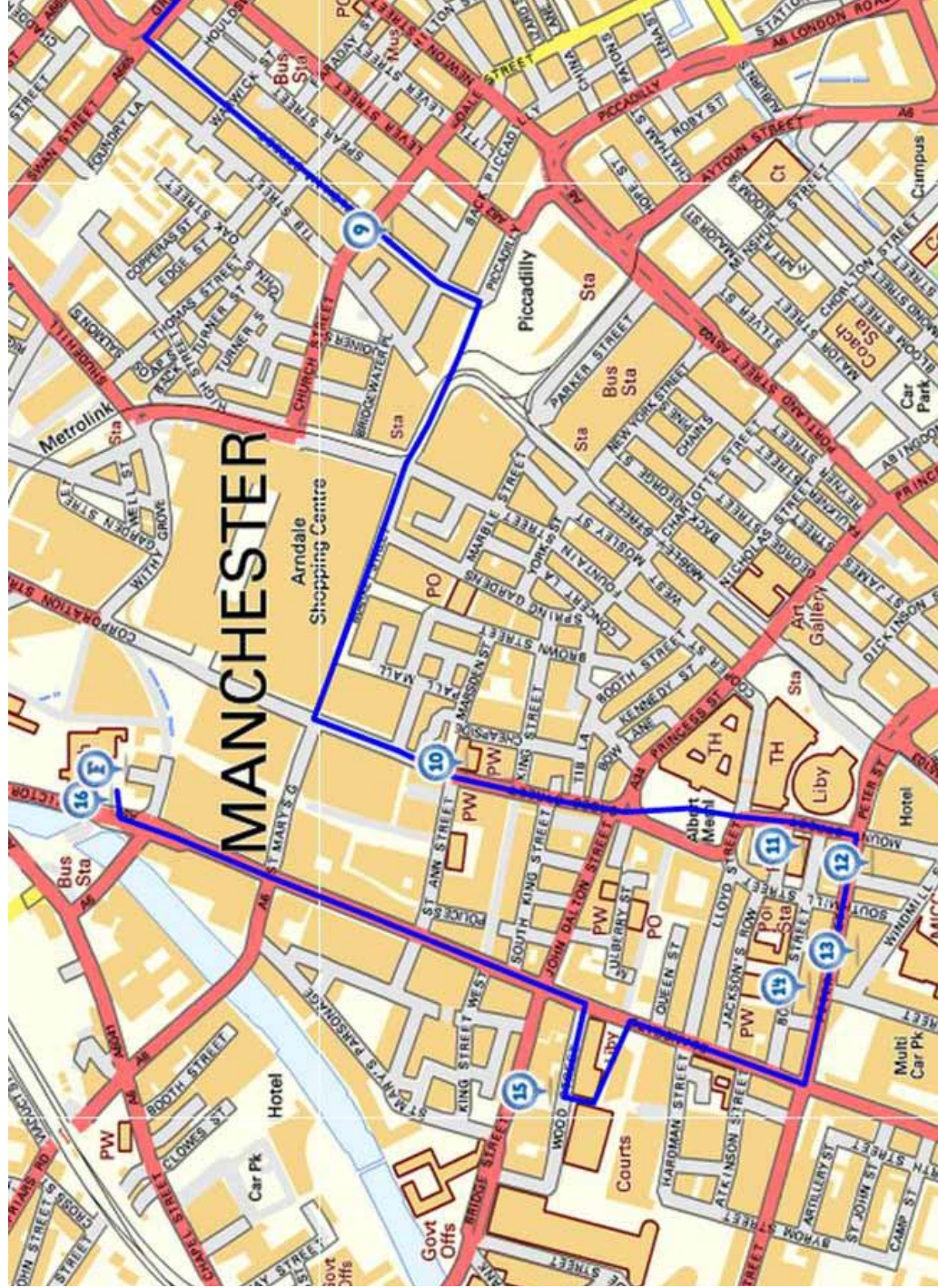
Detail of the first part of the route



Stopping points

1. Victoria railway station
2. Victoria railway station
3. Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls Institute
4. St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow
5. St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow
6. Anita Street
7. Former Methodist Men's Hostel, Hood Street
8. Former Methodist Women's Home and Night Shelter, Great Ancoats Street

Detail of the second part of the route



Stopping points

9. Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street
10. Cross Street Chapel
11. Friends Meeting House, Mount Street
12. Former YMCA, Peter Street
13. Former Free Trade Hall, Peter Street
14. Former Albert Hall, Peter Street
15. Wood Street Mission, 26 Wood Street
16. Manchester Cathedral
17. Manchester Cathedral

1. Welcome to Manchester

Victoria railway station

My name is Angela Connelly and I am a researcher at the University of Manchester. As you will hear from my accent, I'm not originally from Manchester but I've been living in this city for the last ten years and am fascinated by its history. My interests lie in architectural history, especially the stories behind particular buildings. I created this walk that tells the stories behind some of the city's Victorian buildings as part of the Manchester Local History Festival in 2009.



McConnel and Company cotton mills in Manchester (c 1820)
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

In the eighteenth century, Manchester was booming, particularly on the back of the cotton industry. The story you will usually hear about Manchester is about the successful trade and commerce that made it the world's leading industrial centre. Walking tours often take in the spectacular iconic buildings that were built to reflect the city's wealth and status. But that is only half of the story. In Victorian Manchester, extreme wealth lived side-by-side with extreme poverty. It was the 'shock city' of the Victorian age.

This walk focuses on understanding the living conditions for ordinary working class people in Victorian Manchester. The people who worked in the mills and factories and who lived in slums on the edge of the central area. And for most people these were not pleasant conditions. Life was hard, poverty was widespread and life expectancy was short.

In those days, the state did not provide any financial or material support to the poor. Instead, a range of religious and welfare agencies existed to support the poor and to improve the lives for the working classes. Most of the stops on this walk are at the remains of these institutions and we will explore the stories behind them.

The walk is circular, starting at Victoria railway station and finishing at the Cathedral nearby. It is about three miles long. The city centre is a busy but safe place to walk and pedestrianised in parts; other parts of the walk pass through quieter areas and you may prefer someone to accompany you on the walk. Please be aware of your valuables as pickpockets, unfortunately, operate in the city centre. Take care when crossing roads and watch out for cyclists. There are plenty of bars and cafes should you wish to stop for refreshments. I hope you enjoy the walk.

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Alleyways off Corporation Street, Angel Meadow (c 1908)
From St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow: Then and Now

Directions 1

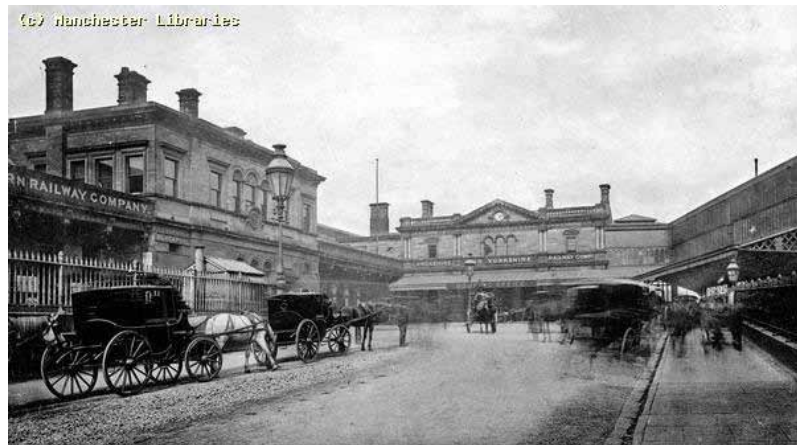
Whether you have travelled to Manchester by train or other means, make your way to Victoria railway station.

2. Teeming slums

Victoria railway station

It is appropriate to begin this walk at a major railway station, because the railways were one of the key components in industrial Britain.

Britain's first railway line was established between Stockton and Darlington in 1825. It substantially reduced the costs for transporting coal and it soon became clear that large profits could be made by building railways. Industrialists in Northwest England saw a great opportunity.



Victoria Station (1870)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

They wanted their own railway line to transport raw materials and finished goods between the port of Liverpool and the mills of Manchester and its surrounding towns. Thus the Liverpool and Manchester Railway was opened by the Prime Minister in September 1830. It was not only a goods line, but was also the world's first inter-city passenger railway with a timetabled service. Victoria Station, designed by George Stephenson, opened in 1844 and was named Victoria by permission of Her Majesty.

The building of railway lines, stations, goods yards and storage depots required land. In the centre of the city, land was cleared for this redevelopment. But as land was cleared, the overcrowded slums where thousands of poor people lived became visible. The middle classes were horrified by what they saw. It prompted a number of efforts to improve physical living conditions for the poor, such as sanitation and housing, and also to improve their general welfare. This walk will explore some of these efforts to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions. We will find evidence of these endeavours and find out what remains today.

Directions 2

If you are inside the station, make your way out of one of the exits onto Station Approach and turn left towards the city centre. At the corner of the station building, keep left and cross the tram tracks to Corporation Street. Turn left along Corporation Street. At the first major junction, make your way straight across, where Corporation Street continues. Keep the railway on your left hand side. Stop at a four-storey red brick building just before the railway bridge.

3. Cultivating respectable citizens

Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls' Home

This is the first of many Victorian institutions that you will see on this walk. As you can see from the sign, this was 'Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls' Home'. An industrial school had been opened here in 1847. The present building dates from 1866 and was subsequently enlarged in 1891 and 1900. It was renamed 'Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls' Home' in 1892.



Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls' Home
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

As with many social welfare agencies in those days, it was funded and run by volunteers who were motivated by their religious beliefs. The trust deeds from 1867 instructed that the building was "to be used, occupied, possessed and enjoyed for the purposes of a ragged school". Ragged schools were found all across Victorian Britain, as the name implies, providing free education to the most destitute youngsters.

The trust deeds went on to say that the "school shall be opened every Sunday for the purpose of giving religious instruction to children of the poorest classes and can also be used as a place of meeting by any temperance society or societies and for any other purpose or purposes of a religious, moral, scientific, literary or educational nature."



A ragged school in London
Illustrated London News (17 December 1853) © The National Archives

There were no shortage of poor people in this neighbourhood. Demand grew and the institute expanded its activities. It provided food and clothing for children. There was a Sunday breakfast for destitute men and women. Medical services were also provided. The working girls' home was on the top floor with its own separate entrance on Dantzic Street.



The separate entrance to the working girls' home
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Study For St Michael And All Angels,
Angel Meadow (1933)
© The Estate of LS Lowry
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There is an inscription on the side wall that indicates that it functioned as an 'industrial school'. It taught more than basic literacy and skills (such as carpentry for boys and home making and cooking for girls). Many in the Victorian middle class saw poverty, alcohol and overcrowding as a scourge on urban life. Institutions like these aimed to cultivate respectable citizens who would not be susceptible to the untoward temptations of city life.

Directions 3

Turn right along the front of the ragged school (Little Nelson Street) and then right again along Aspin Lane, keeping a stone wall on your left. At the junction, double back left up St Michaels' Square.

At this corner, you are at the same view point as Lowry's painting (above) although the church is no longer there.

Turn left into the park called St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow, stop inside the park.

4. A paupers' graveyard

St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow

At the last stop, we heard about the ragged school that catered for destitute youngsters. But why were there so many destitute children? This peaceful urban park holds some clues to living conditions for the poor in nineteenth century Manchester.

Most of the area which is now the park was once a burial ground. It was consecrated in 1787 and known as the 'New Burial Ground'. It was the largest cemetery in Manchester, catering for the poor who would not afford a proper burial in a church graveyard.



Gravestones from St Michael and All Angels Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Bodies were disposed of in a large hole. There were no individual ceremonies or headstones to mark the graves. Coffins were piled indifferently on top of one another. In the evening, the pit was covered with planks and locked to deter vermin.

Friedrich Engels, the famous German writer and philosopher, came to Manchester as a young man to manage his father's mill in Salford. Although wealthy, he was perturbed by the living conditions he witnessed. He wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844. At one point he describes a pauper's burial ground close to this one.



"The resting place of the outcast and the superfluous partially decayed bodies were heaped up just as it happened, the piles were driven into newly made graves, so that the water oozed out of the swampy ground, pregnant with putrefying matter, and filled the neighbourhood with the most revolting and injurious gases."

Friedrich Engels (c1840)
Wikimedia Commons

By 1816, this burial ground was full. Over 40,000 paupers are believed to have been buried here. It became an open space notorious for cock-fighting, bare-knuckle boxing, gambling and other unseemly pursuits. Conditions became so bad for the poor in the 1820s and 1830s that people began digging up Angel Meadow to sell the soil as fertiliser to farmers. The situation became so bad that an Act of Parliament was passed in 1855 to close all such graveyards and put flags down to prevent the digging.



Study For The Playground (1927)
© The Estate of LS Lowry
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The flagged area later became a children's playground and appeared in several paintings by local artist, LS Lowry.

Now the flags are gone but you can see the flat area at the bottom of the park where they once lay. Also look at the maps on the information boards which show where they used to be. The information boards also have some excellent archive images.

Directions 4

Remain in Angel Meadow Park for Stop 5.

5. Hell upon Earth

St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow

In the early nineteenth century, the area around the edge of today's park as well as the streets around was an area of dense housing. Most of the people here were Irish immigrants who had escaped the Potato Famine in their own country and had travelled across the water to look for work in Britain's booming industrial cities.

But the life they found in Manchester was far from ideal. The back-to-back houses had no yards and no toilets. People lived in 10ft by 10ft rooms and cellars that would probably have housed an entire family of three generations as well as a lodger.



Terraced houses in Crown Lane, Angel Meadow (1899)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

When he wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels described the old part of Manchester as "the frightful condition of this Hell upon Earth. Everything here arouses horror and indignation." With such conditions, it is no surprise that average life expectancy in Manchester in 1841 was just 26 years.

The area was notorious for crime, prostitution and many other social ills. An article in *The Morning Chronicle* of 1849 said: "The lowest, most filthy, most unhealthy and most wicked locality in Manchester is called Angel Meadow. It...is full of cellars and is inhabited by...bullies, thieves, cadgers, vagrants, tramps and in the very worst states of filth and darkness."

More than a generation later, conditions had not improved. The census of 1881 found that of 1,091 dwellings in Angel Meadow, 94 per cent were "unsanitary and infested with vermin". Another 20 years later, it still hadn't got better. The Reverend Mercer wrote in *Conditions of Life in Angel Meadow* in 1897: "My experience is that the very worst houses of this kind are in Deansgate and Angel Meadow...six inches often only separated the beds instead of twelve...the sheets had not been washed for weeks...the beds are full of vermin."

The slums are long gone but the park retains the original name, Angel Meadow. A group of volunteers – the Friends of Angel Meadow – have worked hard over recent years to improve the park as an open space at the same time as remembering its history.



Angel Meadow today is a quiet urban park, thanks to the work of local volunteers
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Sharp Street Ragged School, established 1853, now converted into offices
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 5

Leave the park by the top exit onto Style Street. Almost directly opposite the park entrance is an area of rough ground where cars often park. Cut through here onto Naples Street. Turn left and then take the first right into Sharp Street. On the right hand side is another former ragged school which has been renovated and is now used as offices.

As you continue up Sharp Street, note the street pattern in this area. The distance between each street in the grid pattern is very small. This was where there were rows of back-to-back terraced houses.

Turn left onto Rochdale Road. Cross over at the lights and go along Thompson Street. When you reach Oldham Road, go straight across into Sherratt Street. Stop at the top of the second street on the right, which is the pedestrianized Anita Street.

6. Private toilets

Anita Street

Although the focus of our walk is what religious organisations did to improve the living conditions of the urban poor, we can't walk by Anita Street without mentioning it.

The slums that we heard about in Angel Meadow were a real problem for the city authorities. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the city authorities began a massive slum replacement programme.

The five-storey brick block here on Sherratt Street is Victoria Square. It was built in 1894 and was the first municipal housing built by the Manchester Corporation.



Victoria Square
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There were 237 two-roomed and 48 single-roomed flats, altogether housing 848 people. The flats were paired with a communal lobby with a sink and water closet. The turrets contained communal laundries and drying rooms.

Anita Street was built in the same period. The terraces contained one and two room flats. Each house had its own outside toilet (known as a privy) so people no longer had to share facilities with other families. This was the start of a new era in housing quality was proudly named 'Sanitary Street'. By the 1960s, residents were rather embarrassed by the name so some letters were removed to make it Anita Street.



Anita Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Meanwhile, the three-bedroom houses in the next street – George Leigh Street – were also part of the same scheme. Following a Parliamentary Act, they were the first to adhere to new laws that parents and children of each sex should have separate bedrooms.

The various housing developments in these streets of Ancoats represented a new and pioneering phase in urban planning. But the rents were far too expensive for the working class families that they were intended for. When their slums were demolished, they were forced to move to squalid conditions elsewhere. Life continued just as before.



The construction of model houses in George Leigh Street with the new Victoria Square tenements in the background at left (1898)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

Directions 6

Continue along Sherratt Street towards St Peter's Church. Turn left onto Blossom Street and then immediately right into Murray Street to go round the church to look at the building at the far side. Stop at the corner of Murray Street and Hood Street.

7. Finding work

Former Methodist Men's Hostel, Hood Street

Some people were fortunate enough to have jobs and regular pay. Others were casual labourers with no guarantee of work. These people typically worked in construction or transport, working as carriers, porters or messengers. Census evidence indicates that casual workers made up a significant proportion of the labour force in Manchester.

In order to have the best chance of securing work, they lived close to places where they might find casual labour. Consequently in places on the fringe of the city, such as this area of Ancoats, almost 50 per cent of residents were casual workers.



Applicants for the Methodist Mission Labour Yard (1893)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

This was one of the most overcrowded and unhealthy areas of the city. In 1911, there were 55.7 paupers in Manchester for every 1,000 people. Along with Liverpool, these were the highest figures in the country.

On Hood Street, the Methodists opened a Men's Hostel in 1903. You can still see this inscribed in stone above the doorway in Murray Street. This building was designed by J Gibbons Sankey and replaced a smaller hostel and separate labour yard nearby. It was a venture initiated by the biggest religious social agency in Manchester – the Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission – of which you will hear more later. The home was open to those of any religious persuasion and the Mission worked with similar institutions and employers to ensure that they were not accused of unfair competition.



The former Methodist Men's Hostel in Hood Street, now sadly derelict
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The design of the building aimed to give a good quality of life to the beneficiaries. Inside, it was well ventilated and each man was given at least 400 cubic feet of space in the dormitory rooms. This gives some indication of the importance that was attached to fresh air and cleanliness to counteract the pollution of the city.

Although there was a labour yard attached to the home, the men who boarded there were made to seek work in the early hours of morning before breakfast. They were not permitted to go out in the evening and so games and pastimes were provided on site. However, the manager kept a close eye on the inmates – the offices were placed where he had the maximum amount of surveillance over the exits, the dormitories and the labour yard.

Directions 7

Walk along Hood Street with the Methodist Men's Hostel on your left. Turn right along Cotton Street. Note other street names such as Loom Street which recall the textiles industry that built this city. Turn left into George Leigh Street. Stop at the corner with Great Ancoats Street, looking at the red brick building on the left hand side.

8. Fallen women

Former Methodist Women's Home and Night Shelter, Great Ancoats Street

For the Victorians, 'fallenness' referred to female pre-marital sexual experience and was thought to be a forerunner to prostitution. The Victorian ideal was for a domesticated woman, an 'Angel in the House', so there was much abhorrence about children born out of marriage and prostitution.

In 1864, Parliament had passed the Contagious Diseases Act in an attempt to halt sexually transmitted diseases. Prostitutes could be arrested and, if they were infected, thrown into a 'Lock Hospital' for up to one year. Campaigners against the Act, such as Josephine Butler, pointed out that this did not penalise men in their demand for prostitutes. Others argued that poverty, not immorality, caused women to turn to prostitution.



The former Methodist Women's Home
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Although the Contagious Diseases Act was repealed in 1886, there was still a need to help these women. The Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission, which established the Men's Hostel that we saw at our last stop, came to their rescue. They tried a two-prong approach – on the one hand they did preventative work amongst single women who emigrated to the city without friends and family; on the other hand they rescued women who were already engaged in prostitution.

The building that you see here was the first calling point for girls and women who needed help. There were four separate functions in the building. On the ground floor was a coffee tavern to provide a non-alcoholic meeting place and the proceeds went towards the rescue work. There was a Women's Night Shelter with a day room, kitchen, baths, lavatories and cubicles, where fallen women were first brought – as long as they expressed the willingness to come under Christian influence!

Separate from this was a Home for women who were considered in need of further discipline. The 'inmates' (as they were called) were housed and given work. The fourth section was a temporary staging post for domestic servants and girls who were looking for work – perhaps new emigrants to the city who may be susceptible to untoward influences. Between 1894 and 1899, 869 women and girls were given help at this institution.



The Methodist Women's Shelter coffee tavern (1893)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

Directions 8

Cross over Great Ancoats Street at the pedestrian crossing and turn right. Then turn left into Oldham Street. Continue along Oldham Street. Immediately after the crossing of Dale Street is a large grey stone building on the left hand side. You may need to look above the shop facades to appreciate it. Stop outside the entrance.

9. A radically new kind of church

Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street



Methodist Central Hall – deliberately designed to look more like a public building than a church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The railways that we heard about at the beginning of our walk were used by the middle classes to escape from the dirt, smoke and squalor of the industrial city. Many moved to the newly-created Victorian suburbs ringing the city and were able to travel in to work by train.

With this shift in population, chapels in the city centre began to lose their congregations. This gave the Wesleyan Methodists a dilemma. Should they sell their chapel on Oldham Street and use the proceeds to fund new churches in the suburbs or should they retain a visible presence in the city centre? They came up with a radical solution.

Influential church men looked around and saw a city centre where people congregated to drink alcohol. But the Methodists were keen advocates of temperance – controlled drinking or even complete abstinence. The Methodists decided to stay on Oldham Street with a new mission.

They built a radically new kind of church – a Central Hall. It was deliberately designed not to look like a church to make it more appealing to the working classes. There is no spire or bell tower. It looks like a public building rather than a religious building.

The Minister, Samuel Collier, realised that before you could persuade people into religion, churches had to respond to the bodily and social needs of the people. He developed what became one of the largest social work agencies in Manchester – the Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission. We saw two of their institutes at the previous stops – the Men's Hostel and the Women's Home and Night Shelter.

At its height, the Manchester and Salford Mission had ten similar halls stretching throughout the inner city and six dedicated sites of social work. All of it was coordinated inside this building.

The shops on the ground floor were let to businesses in order to provide a steady income for the upkeep of the work and the building.

Collier also raised funds among the Wesleyans in the suburbs and soon amassed a voluntary workforce of 2,000 people.



The Methodist Homeless Men's Club (1909)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

Inside there was a large main hall for worship and entertainment. The alcohol-free Saturday night concert provided popular family entertainment to compete with music halls and pubs.

There were a myriad of other rooms to cater for weekly clubs and the administration of the social work. In the basement – with an entrance on Dale Street – there was a café to provide respite without alcohol. There is still one there today.

There are Methodist Central Halls in many of Britain's major cities, still fulfilling their original multi-functional mission of providing religious instruction and social welfare to anyone in need.

Directions 9

Continue along Oldham Street towards Piccadilly Gardens. Turn right along Market Street and follow it through the pedestrianised area past shops. After passing underneath part of the Arndale Centre, you reach Cross Street. Turn left. After about 200 metres, there is a pedestrian alley on the left hand side called Chapel Walks. Stop on this corner looking at the modern-looking building that is Cross Street Chapel.

10. Reformers

Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street

The church that you see now is a recent construction but there has been a chapel on this site since 1694. It belongs to the Unitarians. This is a denomination that believes that rationality, reason and science is compatible with belief in God. Unitarian membership was comparatively small but highly influential. Those who attended and adhered to it have made a remarkable contribution to liberal religion, social reform and the civic, cultural and public life of Manchester.

The minister at Cross Street Chapel between 1828 and 1884 was William Gaskell. His wife was Elizabeth Gaskell, who wrote novels such as *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Her works critically explored the relationships between rich and poor and the role of women in Victorian society.

Many rich manufacturers and merchants were associated with this chapel and the Unitarian movement. One was Sir William Fairbairn, who moved to Manchester and established large works in Ancoats fabricating a wide variety of heavy industrial ironwork. He was a member of Cross Street for half a century and devoted himself to the cause of technical education, funding the Manchester Mechanics Institution and a chair of engineering at Owen's College.

The members of Cross Street Chapel were committed to providing the infrastructure needed to raise living standards. They were also involved in campaigns for parliamentary reform and electoral reform. They also believed that free education was necessary for social reform and could even eradicate poverty. From 1734, the congregation of Cross Street also ran 'charity schools' for the lowest class of the people. Furthermore, much of the text of the 1870 Education Act was drafted by associates of this chapel. The Act expanded schooling to 5 and 12 year olds, with fees paid for the poor by the school boards. All in all, the Unitarians made a massive contribution to social reform in Manchester.



Top: Cross Street Chapel (1835)
Below: William and Elizabeth Gaskell
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons
Licence)

Directions 10

Continue along Cross Street until you reach Albert Square. Go across Albert Square in front of Manchester Town Hall and into Mount Street at the far corner. The Central Library should be on our left and the Quaker Friends Meeting House on your right. Stop outside the Friend's Meeting House.

11. Dissenters and campaigners

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street

In 1815, Parliament passed a law to protect the trade of British corn. No foreign corn could be imported until the domestic corn had reached a price of 80 shillings. This meant that the price of corn was often artificially high and the poor in cities struggled to afford it. On 16 August 1819, sixty thousand people gathered in Manchester city centre to demand an end to the Corn Laws and also to demand the universal right to vote. At that time, less than two per cent of the population could vote.



The Peterloo Massacre
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Magistrates feared there was going to be a riot. The local volunteer yeomanry – who were described as the “younger members of the Tory party in arms” – were ordered to disperse the meeting. This resulted in the deaths of 11 people, and hundreds were injured. It became known as the Peterloo Massacre. The massacre happened just around the corner from where you are now. During the incident, many of the wounded were looked after by the Quakers in their Friends Meeting House on this site. The building that you see today was built in 1829 by the architect Richard Lane but is still a Friends Meeting House.

The Quakers were a group of ‘dissenters’ who had some disagreements with the Church of England. They put an emphasis upon religious experience rather than the written word. They emphasised themes of truth, equality, simplicity and peace. They had a strong sense of social justice and were active in the anti-slavery campaign. In fact, the Quakers here made Manchester one of the key centres of anti-slavery campaigning in the UK. They were active in petitioning parliament, in raising money for the National Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in publishing anti-slavery literature, and in encouraging other communities to take up the moral crusade.



The Friends Meeting House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 11

Continue a short distance further along Mount Street. At the junction with Peter Street, look on the opposite side to the five-storey building faced with brown and orange tiles.

12. Muscular Christianity

Former Young Men's Christian Association, Peter Street

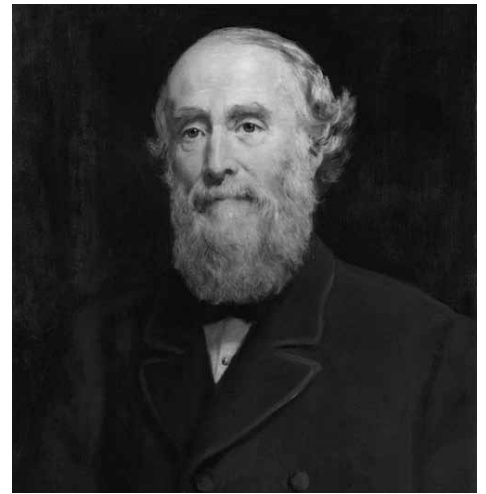
What is now St George's House is regarded as one of the finest of Manchester's tiled buildings. It is the former YMCA building and is the first of a trio of buildings that we will look at on Peter Street, which was once Manchester's entertainment district.

The first Young Men's Christian Association (known as the YMCA) was formed by George Williams in London in 1844. He wanted to do something to help young men employed in warehouses and shops.

It was believed that these men were immensely susceptible to the vices of city life. At first, the organisation was purely religious in activity. Then, through clever publicity, they developed links with other countries.

In America, the YMCA movement shifted focus to personal health and fitness. They believed that religion was a combination of body, mind and soul. This filtered through to the British YMCA and centres here developed gymnasiums, outdoor sports, educational classes, libraries, reading rooms and lectures.

We heard earlier at Charter Street Ragged School, that the activities tried to cultivate respectable citizens. Similarly the YMCA was aiming to make more complete men. It was known at the time as 'Muscular Christianity'. They wanted to develop masculinity and avoid accusations that young men were 'namby-pamby'.



George Williams (1887)
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The former YMCA building
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

This building was opened in 1912. It was innovative in style and designed deliberately to look different from other public buildings in Manchester. The light green base and creamy white exterior is quite different from the stone and red brick buildings of the nineteenth century found across the city centre.



The gymnasium at Manchester YMCA (1910)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

The building contained a swimming pool on the fourth floor; a gymnasium on the fifth had an upper gallery that was an oval running track. These requirements led to an interesting and early experiment in the use of reinforced concrete, enabling the swimming pool to be located near the top of the building.

The size of the building, boldness of the design and the complexity of the structure gives some indication of the popularity and strength of the YMCA movement in Britain in the early twentieth century.

Directions 12

Turn right along Peter Street. On the left hand side after a short distance is a very grand stone building with a series of arches along the front, stop near here. The best vantage point is possibly on the opposite side of the road but you may wish to go closer.

13. Filling the hall

Former Free Trade Hall, Peter Street

This building – now a hotel – was the Free Trade Hall. It has long held a special place in the history of the city. This was once a field and was the site of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 that we heard about earlier. In 1840, the first of a series of halls was built on the site, commemorating the massacre and the repeal of the Corn Laws.

The halls were the venue for events, concerts, meetings and plays. The world-famous Halle Orchestra – Britain’s longest-established professional symphony orchestra – was established in Manchester in 1858 and played its first concert in the hall. The hall is one of Manchester’s greatest cultural treasures, although only the façade remains today.



The façade of the former Free Trade Hall
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



A full house at the Free Trade Hall (1865)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

But the hall was not only used for concerts. Some religious groups hired the hall to hold services, rallies and crusades, particularly the Nonconformists (denominations such as the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists who had dissented from the Church of England). In the 1860s, the Baptist preacher Arthur Mursell held a series of Sunday afternoon lectures aimed at the working class who were believed to be indifferent to religion. This was a tactic in many towns and cities in Britain but Mursell achieved particular success here at the Free Trade Hall.

Thirty years later, services at Methodist Central Hall had proved so popular that they eventually hired the Free Trade Hall for extra services. They soon attracted a dedicated congregation of 3,000 people and remained at the Hall until they built new premises. This shows the strength of religious activity in nineteenth century Manchester.

Directions 13

Continue a short way further along Peter Street. Stop at the junction with Watson Street and look at the building opposite. At the time of creating this walk it was a bar called Brannigans. On the tower at the top of the building, you should be able to see the words Albert Hall.

14. The Band of Hope

Former Albert Hall, Peter Street

The Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission had been such a success. We heard at our last stop that they were regularly filling the Free Trade Hall with 3,000 people for their Sunday services. But they wanted a permanent home for this congregation.

Their opportunity came when the wealthy philanthropist Edward Aston died, as he left the Mission a substantial bequest. They selected this site because it was close to the Free Trade Hall and the Tivoli and Gaiety theatres. It was also the former site of the spinning and weaving branch of the Manchester Technical School.



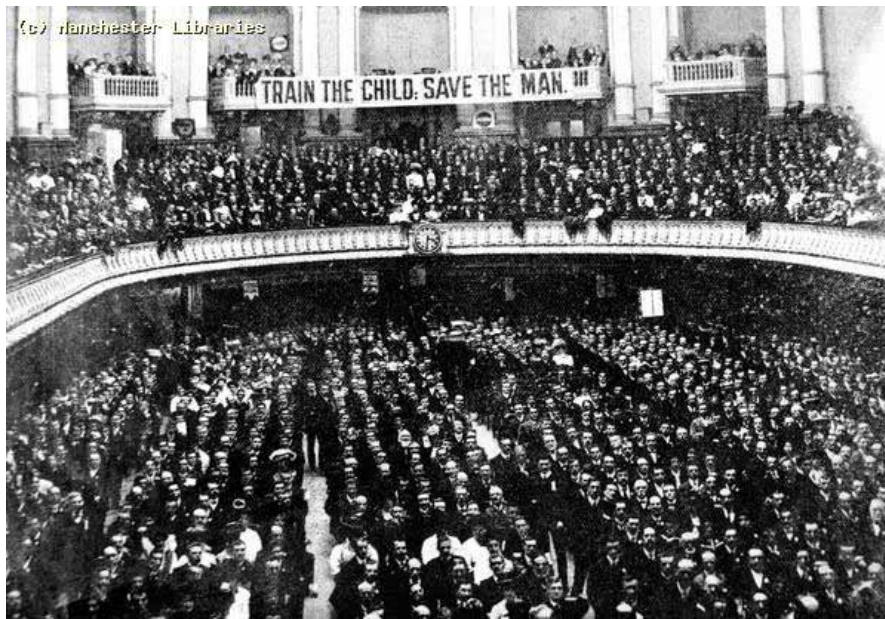
The Albert Hall could hold 2,000 people
© Stanley Walker, Geograph (Creative Commons License)

William J Morley designed the premises under the watchful eye of a building committee. The main hall contained two thousand tip-up seats with a horseshoe gallery to the second floor. Two entrances and their hallways were lined with mosaic and marble flooring. It was tiled from floor to ceiling.

The basement contained a large social club for boys, one for girls and a reading-room. There were ample kitchens for mass catering and there was even a service lift to upper floors. Lavatories were provided on all floors. On the first floor were offices for the ministers and sisters, as well as choir vestries. On the second floor were more rooms for weekly devotional and social activities. All in all, the Albert Hall and Aston Institute was very flexible premises that could host many activities at the same time. The premises was often rented out to other charitable organisations who required the use of a large public hall.

We heard earlier at Methodist Central Hall about the temperance movement – the promotion of limited drinking or complete abstinence. The Methodists were great advocates of temperance believing that alcohol was the root of urban poverty. It grew to become a mass movement in the nineteenth century.

Protagonists lobbied the government to reduce the availability of alcohol. They particularly targeted their campaign at children who could join a group called the Band of Hope where they took a pledge in favour of alcohol abstinence.



A Band of Hope workers' rally at the Free Trade Hall (1908)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries

Publicity about temperance was stronger in the city centre, where there were more temptations for people. One brochure read: "Within a distance of 500 yards from Oxford Road Station, along Oxford Street into Peter Street (where we have secured a site) there are ten places of amusement, nine of which are theatres or music halls seating nearly 25,000 people, and bringing greater crowds – perhaps the largest crowds in the city – on one thoroughfare at night between the hours of seven and eleven. There are 22 licensed places in the immediate vicinity." It was because of these temptations that the Methodists placed this building here for temperance work.

As you turn right into Deansgate (at the next traffic lights) look out for the second building on the right at the corner of Bootle Street. Look up and you will see that this is the 'Onward Buildings'. If you look above the central doorway you will find that the keystone is inscribed with 'Band of Hope'. This was one of the Band of Hope buildings and 'Onward' was the title of the first of the Band of Hope newspapers intended for children which aimed at reinforcing the temperance way of life and included music, moral tales, stories, and poetry.

Directions 14

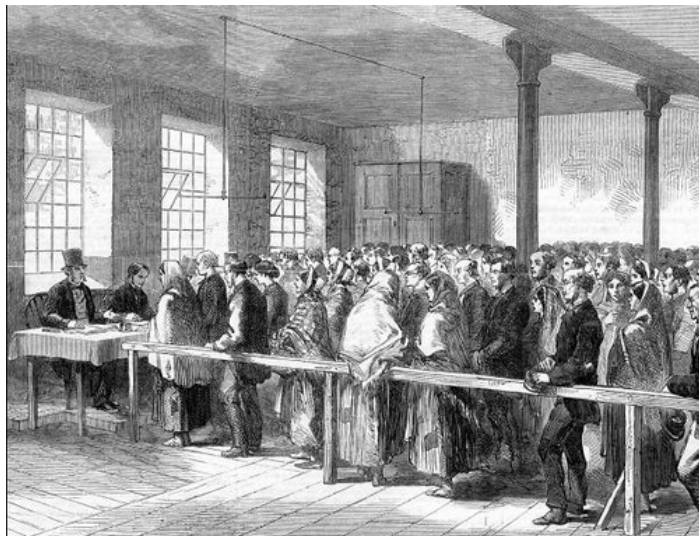
Continue along Peter Street. At the first set of traffic lights, turn right into Deansgate. After about 200 metres, there is a very modern glass building next to a Victorian Gothic building, which is the John Rylands Library. Cross the pedestrianized plaza between the two buildings and then turn right round the back of the library. This leads to Wood Street and immediately opposite is the Wood Street Mission, stop here.

15. Clogs, clothes and camps

Wood Street Mission, 26 Wood Street

Manchester's economic boom was largely due to the cotton industry. But during the American Civil War, the supply of cotton to Lancashire was disrupted. The result was famine between 1861 and 1865. The Lancashire Cotton Famine plunged many textile workers and their families into poverty. But it provided another opportunity for charitable work.

A series of social surveys in Manchester during the 1860s revealed dire poverty in the poorer quarters of the city. Here in the Deansgate area, one-third of families surveyed had a family income of less than ten shillings per week and only 12 out of 1,000 families had money in a savings bank.



People queuing for food and coal tickets during the Lancashire Cotton Famine (1862)
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Alfred Alsop, a Primitive Methodist, began the Wood Street Mission in 1869 to help children in poverty. The building in front of you was built in 1873 after the Mission was forced from its former home because of the building of Central Station nearby.

Hundreds of meals were served from a soup kitchen and thousands of pairs of clogs and clothing were given away. At Christmas, hundreds of children were entertained, given breakfast and presented with toys.



'Ragamuffins' from the Deansgate area (1880s)
By kind permission of Wood Street Mission

Meanwhile, four hundred tramps and criminals were invited to a meal and church service. Although these 'treats' merely relieved people's misery for a short time, it was no doubt appreciated.

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the Wood Street Mission ran holiday camps to take underprivileged children to the seaside – attracting thousands each year.



Wood Street Mission holiday camp at St Annes on Sea (1910)
By kind permission of Manchester Libraries



Wood Street Mission children with Santa
By kind permission of Wood Street Mission

This is still a functioning charity, helping 1,000s of local children and families affected by poverty annually. They provide good quality second-hand clothing, bedding, baby equipment and toys as well as toy and food parcels for families at Christmas time and chocolate treats and food parcels at Easter. They also run children's book clubs and help disadvantaged children with free school uniform, to help them stay in school and access a full education.

Directions 15

Turn right along Wood Street and back to Deansgate. Turn left along Deansgate. After about 500 metres, you will see Manchester Cathedral on the right hand side. Go into the cathedral grounds.

16. The work continues

Manchester Cathedral

Our walk has focused on charity and social welfare for the poor in Victorian Manchester. But it's worth pointing out that a lot of work continues today. The Welfare State, introduced after the Second World War, provided a safety net for many people and dramatically reduced poverty and increased the quality of life.

But some people have always fallen outside of the Welfare State. So many churches and chapels in the centre of Manchester have mission and outreach programmes to care for the underprivileged and marginalised. You won't find ragged schools or temperance societies, but you will still find night shelters and soup kitchens as in Victorian days.



Christmas presents being collected at Wood Street Mission
By kind permission of Wood Street Mission

Most of the outreach is to homeless people, drug addicts, prostitutes and those in prison. Many organisations give immediate practical support – such as the emergency night shelter for the homeless run by Manchester City Mission, the medical drop-in centre for the homeless run by Barnabus, and the Booth Centre here at Manchester Cathedral which offers advice and activities for the homeless.

Some organisations give longer term support in the form of counselling, education and training, and job placement. There is also support for the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are living in absolute poverty and dependent on charitable support.

So in some ways nothing has changed and religious organisations continue to care for and provide services for the poor and destitute just as they did in Victorian times.

Directions 16

Stay in the cathedral grounds and read Stop 17.

17. An alternative history

Manchester Cathedral

We're now at the end of our walk. I hope you've got a better sense of the poverty and overcrowding that characterised nineteenth century Manchester. I wanted to tell a different story of Manchester during the period of its industrial boom.

Teeming slums and squalid living conditions. Low life expectancy and poor health. Child labour and illiteracy. Drinking and prostitution. This was the reality of life in Manchester.



Wood Street Mission soup kitchen queue (c1900)
By kind permission of Wood Street Mission

We've seen how a range of different religious groups were motivated by their faith to provide social welfare. They provided food and clothes to the destitute, education and technical training to young people, shelter for working men and fallen ladies, sport competitions and musical concerts as a distraction from drinking and dancing.

In many cases, the various institutions made the difference between life and death for the urban poor. They also had political influence and contributed to the abolition of slavery and education reform. While many of these institutions no longer exist or have shifted location, their buildings stand as testament to their strength, ability to innovate and their outward looking approach in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I hope you've enjoyed hearing this alternative perspective on Manchester's history. Thank you for reading.

Directions 17

You are now at the end of the walk. You are on the edge of the shopping district and just a short distance from Victoria Station.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Angela Connelly** for creating the walk
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