

ORGANIC CITIES

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Each of these four maps show the city of Manchester. They are drawn to the same scale and the circle shows a one-mile radius from Piccadilly Gardens. They tell a story of growth and decline but also of the damage done to the city by urban professionals.

At the one level these plans tell a story about the growth of the city and how a small market town was engulfed by the explosive, almost cancerous growth of the industrial revolution. The map of today's Manchester tells another story. It shows a city that lost almost half of its population in the second half of the 20th century. This means that even as the city centre recovered and the affluent suburbs prospered the city remains dominated by a depopulated, disintegrating inner city.

The maps show not only the growth and decline of Manchester but also the structure of the city. The city that appears on the first two maps has many of the characteristics of places like Chester, York or even the Italian hill towns of Tuscany that have so inspired urban designers for generations. However while these places hold an enduring appeal to designers, they were not themselves designed. They were the collective creation of their people who, over hundreds of years, created places of enduring beauty where we still feel comfortable.

In Manchester this character has been largely lost by the time of the third map due to the rapid, rough-grained growth of the industrial revolution. However it is gone completely from much of the final map for a very different reason. What this shows is not the result of natural organic growth but the influence of the dead hand of planning. In an attempt to reform the worst excesses of the industrial city planners have sought to smooth the rough edges from the city. In doing so they have destroyed the very thing that they were trying to protect – Manchester like most other cities has been harmed as much by the reforming zeal of its city fathers as it has by the ravages of industrial growth and decline.

The challenge now is to rebuild and repopulate the city. This is happening in Manchester and the final map has been updated since it was first shown in CUBE. It now shows the Commonwealth games stadium. The development taking place around the town centre and, most dramatically, the rebuilding of Hulme. As can be seen from the plan the emerging Hulme neighbourhood is creating form and structure based that stands in marked contrast to the seeming randomness of most post-war development. Indeed the redevelopment of Hulme saw a radical change of planning policy in Manchester, subsequently embodied in the Manchester Guide to Development. This established a set of simple rules for new development based on some of the traditional towns mentioned above. The map shows that this change is starting to change Manchester but it also shows just how far we still have to go.

Manchester 1774

This map from the 18th century shows a compact market town surrounded by market gardens that had changed little over the previous hundred years. The main roads can be seen converging on the Medieval heart of the city encircled by Hanging Ditch and what used to be the only crossing over the River Irwell at, what is now Victoria Bridge. To the south the world's first canal, the Bridgewater, can be seen running alongside the Irwell.

The circle, which is common to all of the maps, represents a mile radius from Piccadilly Gardens.

Manchester 1842

This map shows Manchester just at the moment when the industrial revolution was about to break upon the city. The early mills of Ancoats, the world's first industrial estate can be seen to the north east along with a band of industry around the southern rim of the town. The gap where the town hall now stands remains as the open St. Peter's Field where the Peterloo Massacre had taken place 23 years earlier. As novels such as the 'Manchester Man' show, the city was already a riotous place at this time. Even so the rich still lived where they always had in the very centre of the city. However times were changing and it would not be long until the merchants would flee across the bogs of Hulme, Moss Side and Rusholm to the south to the city's first suburbs that were under construction in Whalley Range and Victoria Park.

Manchester 1924

This map shows Manchester in the early part of the 20th century although much of the growth took place in the 50 years following the previous map during which the city's population doubled every ten years. Great tracts have been cut through the city by the railways and the rich have now largely fled to the suburbs. The tips of Victoria Park and Whalley Range can just be seen to the south but the city was now being surrounded by a ring of affluent suburbs and the centre of the city was being abandoned to the poor.

Today it is hard to imagine the power of the city at this time – what H.G. Wells described as a "great swirling mass of humanity" and Disraeli as "the most wonderful city of modern times". It was at the same a place of deprivation and squalor as described by Gaskell and Engels. The centre retains its structure but is surrounded by an ocean of terraced housing in all directions. This housing was built quickly and often badly to accommodate the exploding population of a city that was, for a moment, the industrial centre of the world. The inability of the city to sustain these dense working class neighbourhoods, leading to redevelopment in the 1960s, is one of the causes for the fragmented nature of the inner city today.

Manchester 2004

This map shows Manchester today. The city of 1924 has all but disappeared as a result of redevelopment. While the city centre retains its character and compactness, much of the inner city has lost its form and structure. This is in part due to the city's decline but it is also the result of the way that the city has been planned. This is starting to change and the emerging form of Hulme can be seen on the plan starting to stitch the city back together again. The plan however demonstrates the enormity of the task.