

Angel Meadow: the Irish and Cholera in Manchester

Mervyn Busteed

formerly of School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester

Paul Hindle

Manchester Geographical Society

PaulHindle@talktalk.net

Aims: A walking tour to explore the size, nature and surviving features of Angel Meadow, the largest Irish district in 19th century Manchester. And to study the impact of cholera in early 19th century Manchester, notably the 1832 outbreak. Some of the origins of the Victorian concern with sanitation and public health are demonstrated.

Starting point: Victoria Station Metrolink platform A (disused) – next to W. H. Smith.

Estimated time: 1 hour.

Further information:

Aston, Joseph (1816) *A Picture of Manchester* (re-published 1969 by E. J. Morton).

Busteed, M. A. & Hodgson, R. I. (1996) "Irish migrant responses to urban life in early nineteenth century Manchester" *Geographical Journal* 162/2, 139-53.

Busteed, M. A. & Hodgson, R. I. (1994) "Irish migration and settlement in early nineteenth century Manchester, with special reference to the Angel Meadow district in 1851" *Irish Geography* 27, 1-13.

Engels, F (1845) *The Condition of the working class in England*, Translated, with foreword by V.Kiernan. Penguin, London, 1987.

Gaulter, Dr. Henry, (1871-2) *The origin and process of malignant cholera in Manchester, 1832*.

Kay, James Phillips (1832) [Secretary to the Board of Health] *The moral and physical condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture of Manchester*.

Roberts, J. (1979) *Working class housing in nineteenth century Manchester: the example of John Street, Irk Town*. Richardson, Manchester.

Stanhope-Brown, J. (1991) *Angels from the Meadow*. C. Pothecary, Woodford.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Michael's_Flags_and_Angel_Meadow_Park

Maps: The Ordnance Survey Five Foot Plan of Manchester and Salford (1840s) Sheets 17, 18, 23, 24. Sheets 23 & 24 have been reprinted by Alan Godfrey: www.alangodfrey.com

Date of last revision: December 2010.

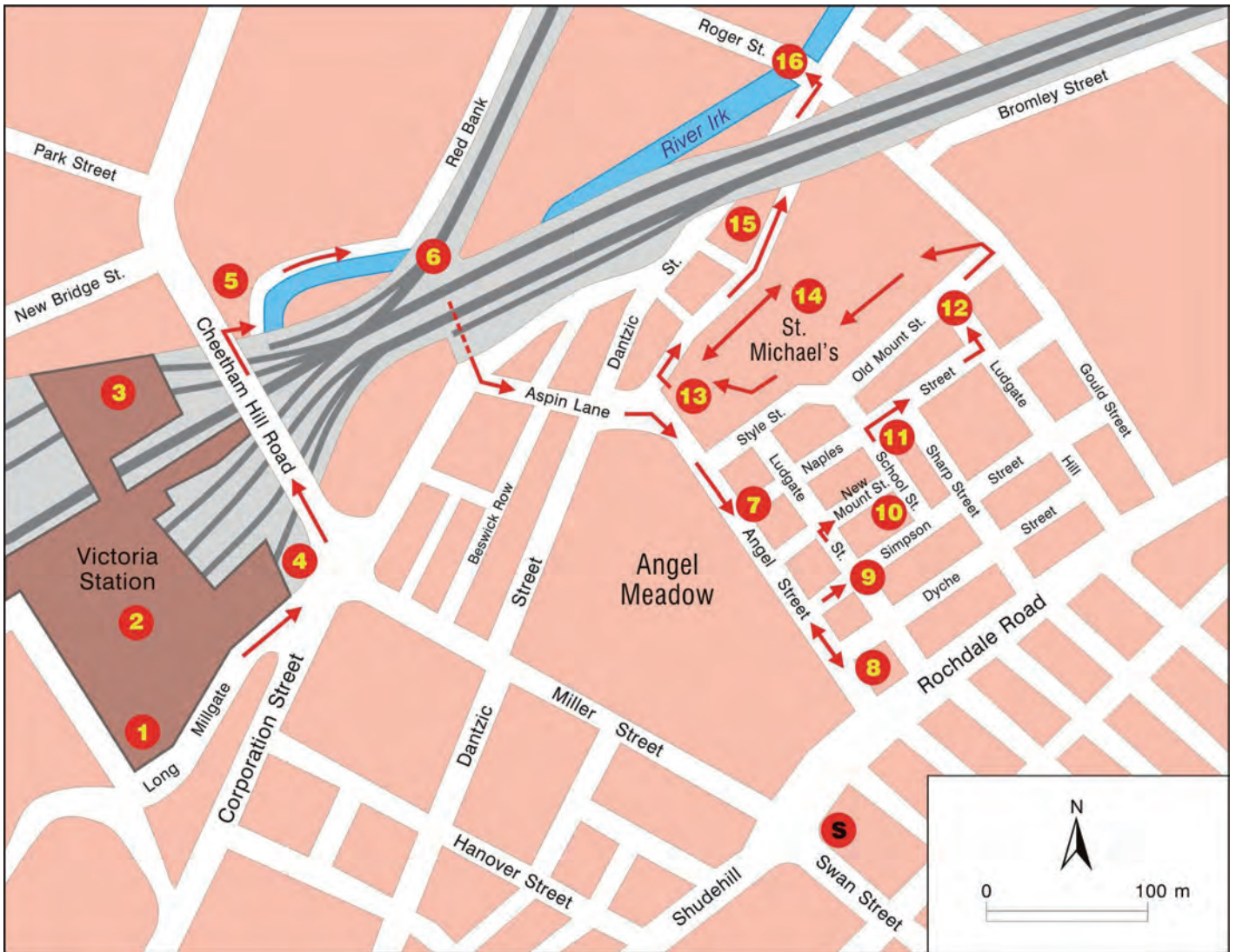
Manchester in the Early Nineteenth Century

Manchester grew rapidly during the first half of the century, due to a combination of cotton, coal, steam power and transport (canal, rail) innovations. It grew from 84,000 in 1801 to 391,000 in 1851. The greatest decennial increase was between 1831 and 1841 when the population grew by no less than 71%. Moreover, the population was concentrated at high densities. According to Asa Briggs Manchester was the 'shock city' of its age; observers were horrified and fascinated by it. Engels (1844) noted its appalling slum back-to-back housing. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) thought it almost anarchic, with no evidence of society or government. He noted its social structure of a few wealthy capitalists and middle class, but thousands of poor workmen, its unhealthy, poor, immoral inhabitants, many living in multiple

occupancy and/or cellars, its spatial & social separation of classes, its hurriedly built roads. There was a public health disaster waiting to happen.

From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows...Here civilisation works its miracles, and civilised man is turned back into a savage...[De Tocqueville, 1835]

Such published views are those of an educated middle class, who saw themselves as separate from the masses. They tended not to see divisions within the masses (Engels described one area as 'an unmixed working people's quarter'). However, David Ward (*Journal of Historical Geography*, 1, 1975) suggests that the greatest change in the 19th century was the increased residential segregation of the poor.



Manchester had great internal social and spatial differentiations, between rich/poor, sanitary/unsanitary, moral/immoral, English/Irish, working/middle class; this was summed up by Disraeli as the 'Two Nations'. Kay (1832) noted that the richer folk had moved out of central Manchester, leaving shopkeepers, operatives and labourers there. Cooke Taylor (*Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire*, 1842) noted that it was an evil that the rich had lost sight of the poor; rich Ardwick knew less about poor Ancoats or Little Ireland (a mile away) than they knew about China. The 'Two Nations' were often spatially very close together but their social interaction was minimal, and the rich barely saw the poor or where they lived.

Angel Meadow was by far the city's largest Irish quarter. For the area bounded by Long Millgate, the River Irk, Vauxhall Street, Rochdale (St. George's) Road and Miller Street, the 1851 Census recorded 18,347 residents, of which 8,048 (44%) were either Irish born or born elsewhere to two Irish parents.

Before you go

Read Engels pages 88-91 & 93-5.

Walking Tour

1. Start at Victoria Station on the disused Metrolink platform near W.H. Smith. You are above the River Irk at this point.
2. Walker's Croft replaced the old Pauper Graveyard in 1815; it is now under Victoria Station.

In the year 1815, another piece of land of large extent was purchased by the Churchwardens of the Parish, in WALKER'S CROFT....This has since been walled round, and consecrated by the Bishop of Chester, and a small chapel erected in it, for the purpose of reading the burial service. It has a fine dry, solid-laying sand, which makes it a most eligible burying place. Already many internments have taken place in this long-wanted appendage to the more than full church-yard which surrounds our venerable Collegiate and Parish church. [Aston 1816]

This parish church is now Manchester Cathedral.
See Walker's Croft on the map on page 6.

3. Note the Manchester Union Workhouse on the 5ft plan of 1840s. [an extract of the map is on page 6]. The Manchester Evening News Arena is now on this site. Go along Long Millgate.

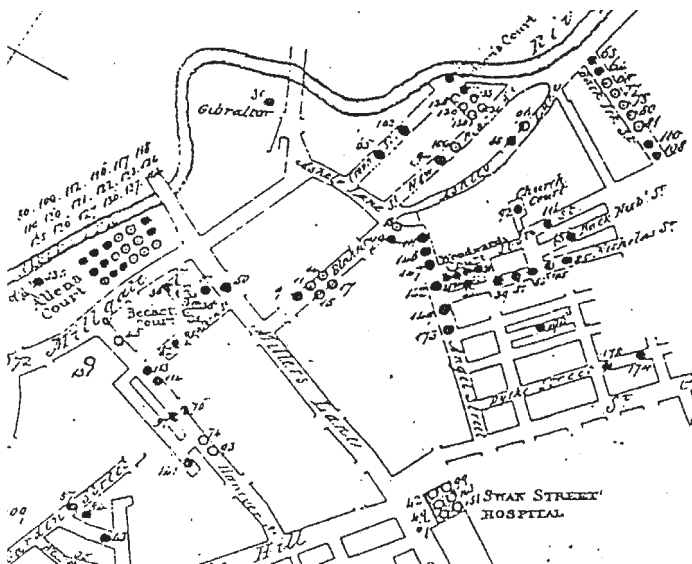
4. The site of Allen's Court is under the car park next to the Metrolink platforms. It was:

a series of courts of the most singular and unhealthy character... Access is obtained to these courts through narrow covered entries from Long Millgate, whence the explorer descends by stone stairs, and in one instance by three successive flights of steps to a level with the bed of the river. A more unhealthy spot than this court it would be difficult to discover, and the physical depression consequent on living in such a situation, may be inferred from what ensued on the introduction of cholera here. [Kay, 1832]

Asiatic Cholera spread through England in the 1830s, spread by human carriers or by contaminated food or drink. 1832 saw the first national outbreak, with some 32,000 deaths in Manchester. 1325 people contracted the disease, of whom 674 died (51%). Gaultier (1871-2) described the progress of the outbreak, giving details of each person affected. He used abbreviations as follows:

R. residence, E. employment, C. constitution, N.S. natural susceptibility, P.C. predisposing cause, E.C. exciting cause, L.C.F.&c. locality, crowding, filth, &c., D.A.E. dates of attack and event, C.N.C. communication or non-communication.

In addition he drew a map showing the distribution of deaths. Allen's Court is at the left, Gibraltar at top centre and Woodward's Court at the centre.



William Bostock, aged 55.- R. Allen's Court, Long Millgate. E. a match seller, an old soldier. C. slender. N.S. subject to severe diarrhoea and cramp in the toes, these were said to have been removed by wearing an enchanted ring, and to have returned when the ring was lost. P.C. a hard drinker, a pint of rum was nothing to him, not drunk since the pension day a fortnight before declining health,

subject to a winter cough, had received a hurt in his side on pension day. E.C. none known. L.C.F.&c. room fronted the river, ground floor, the contents from a convenience on an adjoining eminence flowed past one wall of the room, and the stench was intolerable, four inhabitants, very filthy. D. A. and E. seized with P. S. Saturday July 21st collapse on Monday, died on Wednesday, 5 AM. 25th, buried on Friday afternoon 27th. C. or N. It was falsely reported that this man had caught the disease in Warrington. His round however, for some weeks, had been Pendleton and Salford. There is no evidence that he had seen anyone ill of cholera ... The frightful explosion of the disease in Allen's court was ascribed to this man's corpse having been kept unburied for 2 ½ days. [Gaulter 1871-2]

5. Cross Cheetham Hill Road (with care), turn left and cross Ducie Bridge; at the far end go down the steps to the River Irk; the former site of Gibraltar was across the river below the weir. Kay described the area in 1832:

The Irk, black with the refuse of Dye-works erected on its banks, receives excrementitious matters from some sewers in this portion of the town – the drainage from the gas-works, and filth of the most pernicious character from the bone works, tanneries, size manufactories, &c. Immediately beneath Ducie-Bridge, in a deep hollow between two high banks, it sweeps round a large cluster of some of the most wretched and dilapidated buildings of the town. The course of the river is here impeded by a weir, and a large tannery eight stories high ... towers close to this crazy labyrinth of pauper dwellings. This group of habitations is called "Gibraltar," and no site can well be more insalubrious than that on which it is built.

6. Follow the river up to Scotland Bridge; its name suggests that Scottish cattle were once driven here; there were many tanneries near here in the 1830s. Turn right under the railway arch, noting the Irk in its own tunnel on the opposite side.

7. Go up Aspin Lane, and then up again into Angel Street as far as Nicholas Street (now Naples Street). Woodward's Court was just beyond this junction. Here there was a high concentration of cholera deaths:

No 25, Elizabeth Bousfield: aged 45.- R. Woodward's court, thence removed to No.5, Silver-street, Newtown. E. fent stitcher. C. naturally strong. N.S. easily relaxed. P.C. very destitute and dirty, slept on straw in the same room where the Nobles No 32, &c. slept. E.C. ate stinking pork for several successive days previous to her attack: this produced purging all night, but it went off in the morning; was greatly terrified at the fate of the 4 children, cases 26, 27, 28, and 32. L.C.F.&c. see the locality of 32. D.A.E. diarrhoea for several days, threatening of collapse Tuesday 26th, 2 P.M. died 29th, 6 A.M. Friday. C.N.C. Thomas Noble died on this woman's lap: It is to be recollected, however, that she had had diarrhoea for several days before the children were seized.

No 26, Thomas Noble, aged 7. R. Woodward's-court, Nicholas-street, Angel Meadow. E. mother an Irish woman, a destitute widow. C. fine healthy child. N.S. not ascertained. P.C. half starved and half naked. E.C. had a red herring for dinner the day before, and potatoes and bacon the day of the

attack. L.C.F.&c. house in the corner of a very confined and loathsome court. One side the door a large puddle full of excrementitious matter and vegetable refuse: house with 6 inhabitants, very dirty. D.A.E. seized Saturday June 23rd, between one and two P.M. died Sunday 4, A.M. 24th., C.N.C. the two younger children, 28 and 32 had been taken 2 hours before.

Swan Street Hospital was further up the hill, at the junction of Swan Street and Rochdale Road (marked as S on the map).

Ruth Cox, aged 74. - R. Swan-street Hospital. E. nurse from the first opening of the hospital. C. a short woman, bent, and shrunk with old age. N.S. subject to diarrhoea. P.C. a tippler; naturally good health; half starved. E.C. being on board wages she took her meals out of the hospital, had had nothing but slops for several days, except gin; ate some sour gooseberry pie from a cook's shop the day before her attack. L.C.F.&c. upper ward then in use, large spacious, lofty, but not well ventilated. D.A.E. seized Saturday, June 30th, about 6 A.M. with P.S. with collapse at 3 P.M. died Sunday July 31st, 3 A.M. C.N.C. It may be remarked that at the time of her attack the cholera was confined to the district in which the Hospital is situated. [Gaulter 1871-2]

8. Continue up Angel Street to the junction with Dyche (Dycie) Street. Note the gradient down towards River Irk. Angel Street was long regarded as the spine of this Irish quarter, even though only 56.5% were Irish in 1851. Note the "Beer House" at the corner of Angel Street and Dyche Street – there was a pub on this site in 1850. Such places were key social centres for Irish migrants – they provided refreshment, heat, company, a venue for the exchange of news and information on friends, family, employment and accommodation. They were also meeting places for sporting, social clubs and early trades unions and political groups such as O'Connell's Repeal Association in the 1840s and the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the 1860s.

9. Go back to Simpson Street and turn right. At the junction of Simpson Street and Ludgate Street note the narrow width of Ludgate Street. Streets such as Angel and Ludgate Streets with a natural slope down towards the Irk had an obvious advantage for disposal of liquid sewage. Before the provision of a proper sewage system, material was deposited in the streets and, given a favourable slope, liquid was carried away by gravity flow into the lower streets and, eventually, into the River Irk. However, side streets which were at right angles to the natural slope could not dispose of this matter so easily, and reports of the early Sanitary Association mention in particular the problems in such areas.

Even the installation of a proper disposal network did not fully solve the problem. The main arteries such as Angel Street were given the main sewers and side streets were provided for later. However, the junctions were frequently

aligned at the wrong angle or level, with the result that liquid matter frequently backed up and flowed out onto the surface. Since the area is underlain by boulder clay this matter often lay on the surface and became a notable source of infection, aside from the smell and nuisance. In some of the lower lying streets down by the River Irk the liquid flowed into the houses, especially those with cellars.

10. The now closed "Pot of Beer" public house at the junction of School and New Mount Streets was until 1996 known as the "Harp and Shamrock".

11. Go along Naples Street past Sharp Street Ragged School. A "Ragged School" was opened on this site in 1854 by a group of evangelical Christians who wished to raise the spiritual and moral tone of an area which was becoming notorious in Manchester for squalor and vice. Education in this period had a decidedly religious basis, and such districts were regarded as heathen mission fields akin to those in 'darkest Africa'. The curriculum was of a very basic nature – the teaching of simple arithmetic, writing and reading, along with Bible-based religious and moral instruction. Eventually there were 39 in Manchester, the last being opened as recently as 1936.

These streets set back from Rochdale Road were the core of the Irish quarter. The district is known by a variety of names – "Angel Meadow" was the most common, derived from a field name in common use long before Manchester grew over the area. Further north, down by the River Irk, the name "New Town" was used, because the first small industrial suburb of Manchester had been built there at the end of the eighteenth century. However, by 1819 there is definite evidence that there was a notable concentration of Irish in this area and the name "Irish Town" was frequently used. In the 1851 Census streets such as School Street and the small courts and alleys off it were over 75% Irish – a notably high level of residential segregation. The whole area is seen on the map on page 7.

Dr Kay described Angel Meadow in 1832 as a mass of cottages filling the insalubrious valley. He commented on the appalling living conditions and the feckless behaviour of the Irish. In the *Report on the Irish Poor* (1836) Kay blamed drink and speculative builders for the problem. Angus Reach (1847) described Angel Meadow as:

the lowest, most filthy, and the most wicked locality in Manchester ... inhabited by prostitutes, their bullies, thieves, cadgers, vagrants, tramps, and, in the very worst sties of filth and darkness, those unhappy wretches, the low Irish.'

The Irish were often reviled, and there was anti-Catholic bias. Many English feared that they might be contaminated:

it is not surprising that a social class already degraded by industrialisation should be still further degraded by having to live alongside and compete with the uncivilised Irish. [Engels, 1844]

12. Go to the bottom of Ludgate Hill at junction with Old Mount Street. Here there is a view over the former St Michael's Flags to Charter Street Mission. Go to the interpretive signs below. Originally the lower part of the area between Miller and Angel Streets and from St George's (Rochdale) Road to the Irk was an early middle class suburb of Manchester, served by St Michael's (Anglican) Church opened in 1789. However, the banks of the Irk provided ideal sites for early manufacturing and processing industries, which soon drove out the middle class residents. By the early nineteenth century mills, foundries, chemical factories, engineering works, breweries, and timber yards dominated the district. The substantial middle class houses along the front of Angel Street were taken over for multiple occupation by industrial workers and speculative builders constructed small streets and courts between and around the industrial premises.

Walk clockwise around the park through the twin gateways and a third sign.

13. This is the site of St. Michael's Church. Some gravestones survive; it is possible to do an exercise on the age of death. The church was demolished in 1935.

14. Next to the churchyard was the 'New Burial Ground', then the largest in Manchester – set aside for burying the poor. It was opened in 1787, and closed in 1816, by which time over 40,000 internments had taken place. The burial ground was known as St Michael's Flags as it was completely covered with flagstones in 1855; these have recently been removed. There are two more signs.

SAINT MICHAEL'S CHURCH

The burial place belonging to this church is not only tolerably large, but it is also adjoining to what is called the "THE NEW BURIAL GROUND", which is the largest cemetery in the town, and is appropriated to the interment of poor persons, who have no family place of burial. It is attached to the mother church, in which the register is kept; but the service is performed by the minister of St Michael's. The number of poor persons who are continually dying in Manchester must be great, and an expeditious and economical method of interring the bodies of the dead has been adopted. A very large grave, or more properly, a pit for the reception of mortality, is digged, and covered up, (when not actually in use for depositing the remains of the

dead) with planks, which are locked down in the night, until the hole is filled up with coffins piled beside and upon one another. The cavern of death is then closed, and covered up with earth; and another pit is prepared, and filled in the same manner. This cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester, the 21st day of September, 1787; since which, many thousand bodies have been interred in this singular depot (it might be said. magazine) of mortality. [Aston, 1816]

15. Charter Street Ragged School is just below the burial ground. The first industrial school here was opened in 1847; this school was opened in 1861; the present building was begun in 1866, and was enlarged in 1891 and 1900. In 1892 it was renamed as 'Charter Street Ragged School and Working Girls' Home' It provided food, clogs and clothing for children, and 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 Dantzig Street. As the inscription on the side wall suggests, some were 'industrial schools', intended to convey not only literacy but basic skills such as carpentry to the boys, and home making and cooking to the girls in order that they might become respectable, useful and productive citizens.

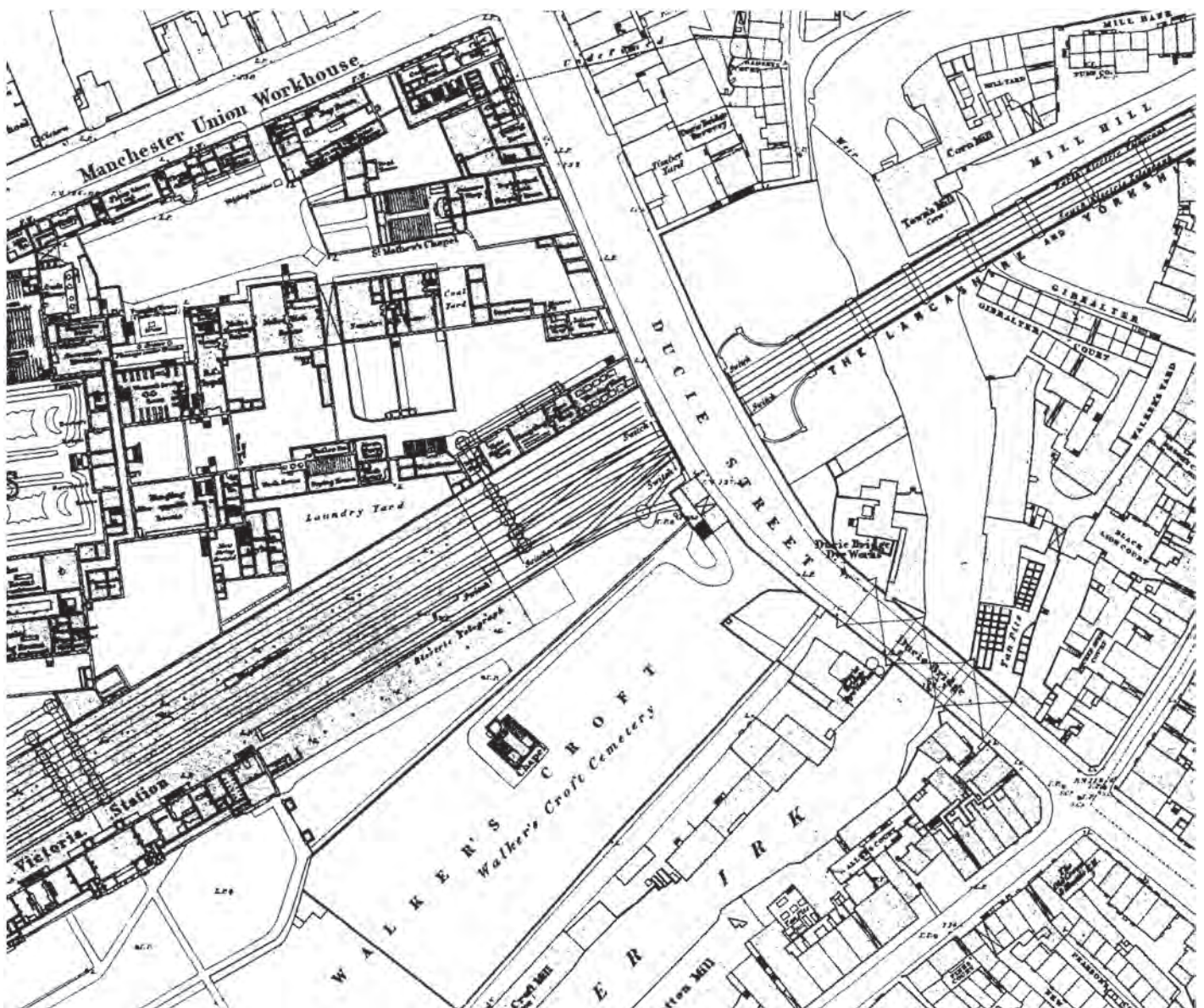


16. Go back to the site of St. Michael's, then down to Aspin Lane, past the Ragged School, under the railway arch and cross Dantzic Street to the small bridge over the River Irk. This little river, now notably unimpressive, was one of the main arteries of early industrial Manchester. By the early nineteenth century its banks were lined with fulling mills, dye works, chemical factories, abattoirs and tanneries. It was an open drain for both industrial and domestic waste. Engels in 1845 described it thus:

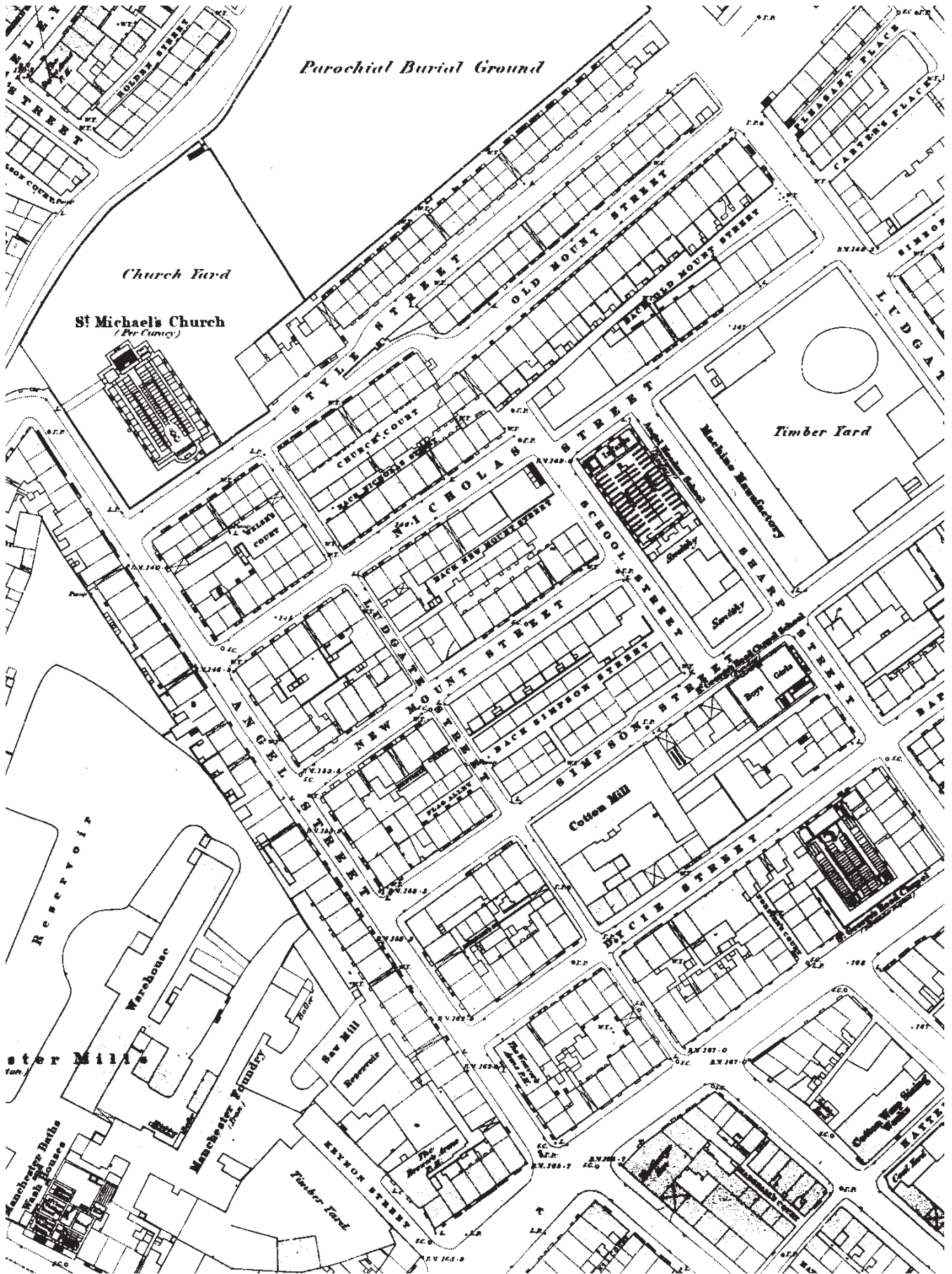
At the bottom [of the channel] flows, or rather stagnates, the Irk, a narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream, full of debris and refuse, which it deposits on the lower right bank. In

any weather, a long string of the most disgusting blackish-green slime polls are left standing on this bank, from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable. But besides this, the stream itself is checked every few paces by high weirs, behind which slime and refuse accumulate and rot in thick masses. (Engels, 1845, 89)

After the excursion, re-read Engels in association with the Busted & Hodgson articles to discover the advantages and disadvantages the Irish experienced through living in such dense residential concentrations.



Ordnance Survey five-foot plan of Manchester and Salford, Sheet 23 (1849) showing Walker's Croft, Allen's Court and Gibraltar.



Ordnance Survey five-foot plan of Manchester and Salford, Sheet 24 (1848) showing Angel Meadow.