

# **Exploring Greater Manchester**

a fieldwork guide

**Web edition edited by Paul Hindle**



Original printed edition (1998) edited by Ann Gardiner,  
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## 1.4 Castlefield

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**Aims:** To study the renovation of an historic industrial quarter.

**Starting point:** In front of Manchester Central.

**Estimated time:** 1¼ hours.

**Further reading:**

Brumhead, D and Wyke, T (1989) *A Walk Around Castlefield*, Manchester Polytechnic.

Law, C M (1993) Tourism in Greater Manchester, *Manchester Geographer*, NS 14, 38-53.

Law, C M (2001) *Discovering Cities: Manchester*, Geographical Association, Sheffield.

Makepeace, C (1980) *Oldest in the World: The Story of Liverpool Road Station*, Manchester Region Archaeological Society.

There are also many useful websites.

**Date of last revision:** March 2012 by Paul Hindle.

### Introduction

The Castlefield area lies in the south western part of the city centre in a part of the fringe zone. It is an historic district which fell into decay in the 1960s and 1970s, was rediscovered in the 1980s, has since been renovated and been given a new role in the economic life of the city centre. It can be defined in various ways but for the purpose of this trail will include Manchester Central and Granada Television.

This is an historic quarter, containing the site of the Roman settlement (AD 43), the wharves on the River Irwell (from 1734), the terminus of the Bridgewater Canal (1765), the Rochdale Canal link to Yorkshire and to a wider canal network (1800), the terminus of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway (1830), the Lower and Upper Campfield markets (1880 and 1882 respectively), and railway viaducts carrying the tracks to Piccadilly (1849) and Central Station (1878). However, just to the north of the area, high class housing was built in the early nineteenth century and St. John Street survives, once the Harley Street of Manchester.

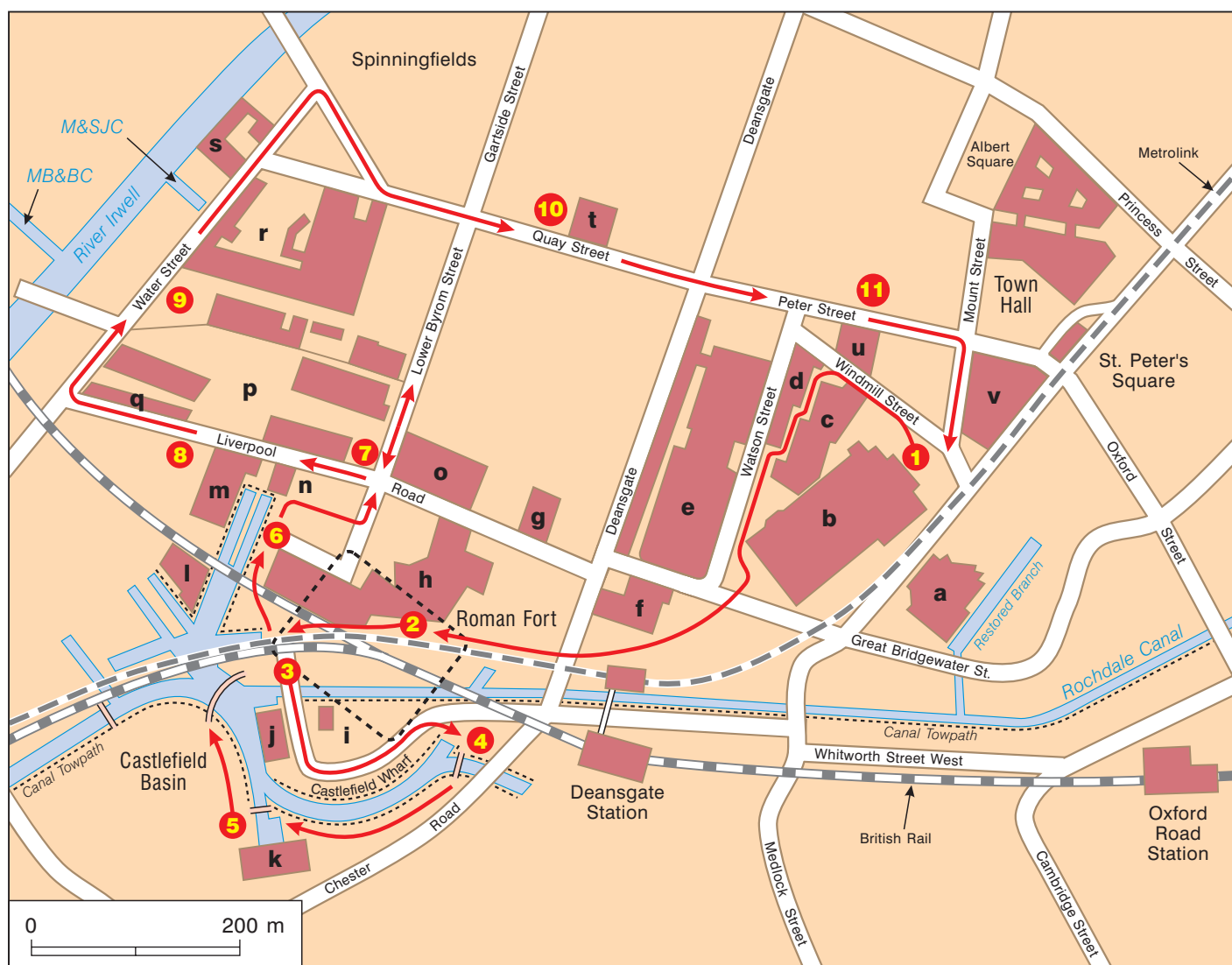
By the 1970s the area was decaying rapidly and was typical of many of the areas on the fringe of the city centre. Central Station and the Great Northern Warehouse closed in 1969, and the Liverpool Road goods depot in 1975. The Lower Campfield Market, which as City Hall had been used for exhibitions, was also closed. Older housing was being demolished, many of the canal arms had been filled in and the remaining industry was poor and unsightly and included concrete depots and scrapyards. The only growing activity was Granada TV which had moved to its site in 1956 and as well as new buildings had occupied some old warehouses.

Simultaneously however the area was being rediscovered. In the early 1970s excavations uncovered part of the site of the Roman fort. Following the closure of the goods depot a group campaigned for the preservation of the site, especially of course the original railway station, which was well received as it coincided with the build-up to the celebrations surrounding the 150th anniversary in 1980. In 1978 the Greater Manchester Council purchased both the Central Station (including the Great Northern Warehouse) and the Liverpool Road site. A year later in 1979 Castlefield was declared a Conservation Area and in 1982 an Urban Heritage Park. Gradually plans evolved not merely to conserve the area but to promote leisure and tourism. In 1983 the Museum of Science and Industry was opened in the goods depot and an Air and Space museum in Lower Campfield Market (later united as one institution). In 1986 the G-Mex exhibition centre, now Manchester Central, was opened in the former Central Station and in 1988 Granada Studios Tours opened. Between 1988 and 1996 the Central Manchester Development Corporation had responsibility for Castlefield and there was further investment in reclaiming the area and developing the infrastructure.

While much progress has been made, particularly with regard to the environment, it has been more difficult to develop visitor attractions. In place of these there has been more residential development and also offices and studios. However the leisure function has grown as shown by the number of bars and restaurants. Several events are held in the area such as the Castlefield Carnival when the area comes alive and the canals are lined with boats, but at

other times the area is less lively. A Castlefield Management Company has been formed to maintain the area and includes a Ranger Service.

*Note that there is no free parking in the area. Within Castlefield there are map and information boards.*



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|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>a</b> Bridgewater Hall         | <b>i</b> Dukes 92 Public House               | <b>p</b> Museum of Science and Industry         |
| <b>b</b> Manchester Central       | <b>j</b> Merchants' Warehouse                | <b>q</b> Liverpool & Manchester Railway Station |
| <b>c</b> Convention Complex       | <b>k</b> Castle Quay                         | <b>r</b> Granada T.V. Studios (closed)          |
| <b>d</b> Great Northern Tower     | <b>l</b> Youth Hostel                        | <b>s</b> Victoria and Albert Hotel              |
| <b>e</b> Great Northern Warehouse | <b>m</b> YMCA Castlefield Hotel              | <b>t</b> Opera House                            |
| <b>f</b> Beetham Tower            | <b>n</b> Castlefield Visitor Centre (closed) | <b>u</b> Radisson Edwardian Hotel               |
| <b>g</b> Upper Campfield Market   | <b>o</b> Air and Space Museum                | <b>v</b> Midland Hotel                          |
| <b>h</b> Roman Gardens and Wall   |  |   |

**1.** Start at the front of Manchester Central. From this position a number of sites can be seen including the Bridgewater (concert) Hall opened in 1996 and the terracotta 303 bedroom Midland Hotel (built 1903 as an hotel for the railway station). Manchester Central was opened in 1986 (then called G-Mex) as a 100,000 square foot exhibition centre using the old Central Station. Compared to other exhibition centres around the world it is fairly small and relies heavily on public rather than trade shows. A Seminar Centre (on

the western side) was opened in 1995. A £23m 800 seat Convention Complex, now incorporated into Manchester Central, was opened in Spring 2001 which was expected to attract an extra 50,000 conference visitors to Manchester; this has contributed to the hotel boom in the city centre. Also visible from this site is the Great Northern Tower, completed in 2007 and containing 257 flats. The back of the Radisson Edwardian Hotel can also be seen.

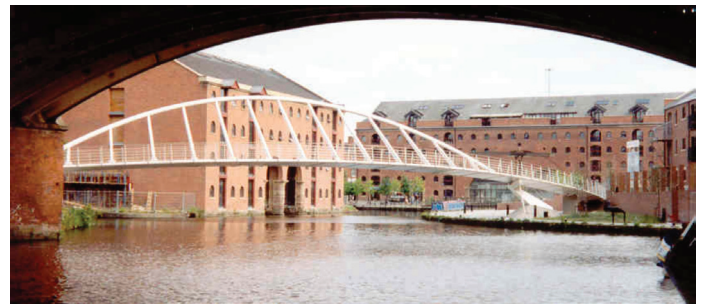
Go round the Convention Complex and between it and the Great Northern Tower to reach the rear car park; bear right onto the viaduct which used to carry the trains into Central Station. This is now used by the Altrincham branch of Metrolink (the station is now called Deansgate-Castlefield). To the right the entertainment complex, the Great Northern Experience, can be seen. This £100m development is based on the Great Northern Warehouse now containing shops, bars, clubs, restaurants and a car park to which has been added a 16 screen multiplex cinema. The tall Beetham Tower was completed in 2006 and contains a Hilton Hotel on floors 1-23 and flats on floors 24-47.

2. Follow signs to Castlefield, past the station. The two parts of the reconstructed Roman fort and the Roman Gardens (1983) can be seen below to the right. Descend the stairs or lift. Turn left and proceed under the viaducts to Catalan Square; notice the castle motif on the top of the Cheshire Lines viaduct.

3. Catalan Square (1995). This whole area was very poorly used in the 1980s, much of it occupied by scrapyards and guarded by dogs; it is now greatly transformed. At the entrance to the Rochdale Canal is the pub Dukes 92, the number being the lock number (they were numbered from the Yorkshire side). James Ramsbottom, the entrepreneur behind the pub, also converted the fire damaged and derelict Merchants' Warehouse (of 1827) into offices in 1996 and earlier in 1992 the Gail House Eastgate office complex. The new sickle span bridge was opened in 1995. Proceed along Castle Street. Ahead the old coal wharf is used for car parking, no more profitable use having been found.

4. Turn left to the partly reconstructed Grocers' Warehouse. Originally there were several warehouses in this area which were entered from below by short branches of canals (shipping holes), with the goods being off-loaded by pulleys. Only the Merchants', Middle (Castle Quay) and Grocers' Warehouses survive. The latter has lost its upper storeys but the lower half has been preserved with displays to demonstrate how the system worked. Descend the steps at the Grocers' Warehouse. On the other side of the Bridgewater Viaduct can be seen Deansgate Quay, a development of 102 apartments (2000) then varying in price from £90,000 to £256,000. The Bass Quay Bar was opened in April 1998 at a cost of £2m. Beyond this bar is a block of 100 apartments.

5. Cross the canal bridge to Castle Quay. The massive former Middle Warehouse was converted into bars, shops, offices and apartments in 1992. Turn right past Jacksons Wharf pub (1998) to Slater Wharf where there are more residential units. This area was previously occupied by low quality warehouses and old canal arms had been filled in. The development of 102 dwellings built between 1994 and 1996 involved reclaiming a canal arm. Slate Wharf and Woolam Place (see 8 below) are examples of the process of gentrification taking place in the city centre. Behind Jacksons Wharf pub is the large Citygate development of flats completed in 2002. Proceed over the sickle span Merchants' Bridge to Catalan Square and turn left to the Arena site.



6. Arena. The canal arms had been filled in and the east side of the site was used for concrete making up to the 1980s. The site has been extensively restored and an Outdoor Event Arena created (1993). In 1990 the YMCA moved from its Peter Street location to the Castlefield Hotel. A Youth Hostel was opened here in 1994 adjacent to Potato Wharf. The former Visitor Centre is on Liverpool Road (opened 1993), but is now closed. Turn right and walk up Duke Street to reach the former St Matthew's Sunday School (1827) on Liverpool Road.

7. Museum of Science and Industry. Since its opening in 1983 the museum has had an ongoing programme of development involving the renovation of all the buildings on the site; it is well worth a visit. There is a bookshop in the foyer on Lower Byrom Street. Visitor numbers are expected to exceed 1 million in 2012. Behind the Air and Space section of the museum can be seen the residential area of St John's Gardens, built in 1979-81.

8. Descend Liverpool Road past the former Visitor Centre, Woolam Place (66 dwellings built between 1993 and 1995), and, on the right, the entrance to the original Liverpool to Manchester Railway station (1830). Turn right into Water



Street. Across the River Irwell, best seen from Princes Bridge, the first length of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal was restored in 2008 as part of yet another redevelopment scheme.



9. Granada Studios. The studios of Granada Television are adjacent to Water Street and include the sets for Coronation Street, Sherlock Holmes and the Houses of Parliament; it was decided to open them as a visitor attraction in 1988. Nicknamed 'Hollywood on Irwell' they attracted between 700,000 and 800,000 visitors for several years. So successful were they that Granada decided to convert old riverside warehouses into the Victoria and Albert Hotel (1992). By 1999 visitor numbers had fallen and the management decided a revamp was necessary and the attraction was closed in 2000. However in 2001 it was decided that the attraction

was not viable and it was not reopened. Next to the Victoria and Albert Hotel the first lock of the Manchester & Salford Junction Canal can be seen; this largely underground canal linked the River Irwell to the Rochdale Canal close to where the Bridgewater Hall now stands.

10. Quay Street and Peter Street. This zone has undergone change and renovation. Cross the road to the new Spinningfields development, built in 2004-7 consisting of over 20 buildings. Beside the river is Left Bank, with 391 apartments. The rest of the developments consists of offices and some public buildings. Return to Quay Street; the former Granada car park has been redeveloped for flats and offices (Bauhaus). Old office blocks are being refurbished while new ones are being built, sometimes, as with the Skin Hospital, behind old facades. The Opera House was built in 1912 and often stages leading musicals.

11. The lower part of Peter Street has been redeveloped to become a new leisure zone linked to the Great Northern Experience. A new square has been created and there are bars and clubs in this area, one using the former church, the Albert Hall. The Free Trade Hall, the former concert hall, has been redeveloped as the Radisson Edwardian Hotel. The historic facade is all that is left of the original 1856 building, constructed on the site of the Peterloo Massacre; it was bombed during World War 2 before being rebuilt in 1952. Return to Manchester Central.