

A Yankee Lancashire?

FROM AN AMERICAN IN MANCHESTER

A NORTH OF ENGLAND city such as Manchester appears exotic, if not brutal, to day-trippers from the south or to the exile from the genteel and cosmopolitan sections of the Home Counties around London. But to an American immigrant to England—and in spite of Lord Hailsham a few such animals exist—the city is strangely familiar.

Manchester, like Chicago, St Louis and other great cities in the Middle West, owes its size and its life to industry and commerce. Pre-industrial Manchester is less significant than pre-industrial Boston, and fewer attractive features survive from that time. Technology and commerce, along with muck and brass, have dominated cities such as Manchester and Chicago to a degree far greater than in the aristocratic and “soft” south of England. It is this common industrial heritage which gives Manchester and Chicago more in common than Manchester and, say, Bath.

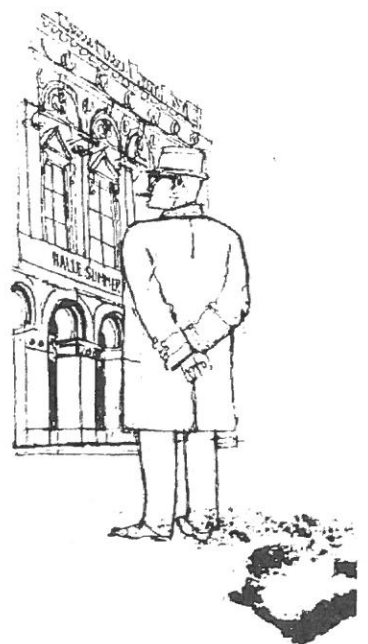
Manchester, like Houston, owes much of its fortune to a combination of available natural resources, plus the determination of man to master environment and make an inland city a seaport. The Manchester Ship Canal was a great and successful effort to alter the environment, very different from the techniques and aims of the rural preservationists further south. Trafford Park, the best known park in Manchester, has an historical basis for its name; but in the best tradition of American public relations, it is a “park” for industry—and on the American scale.

The port and the entrepôt character of the cotton trade have brought many nationality groups to settle here and, through the generations, many have gone through the melting pot process. Manchester, like many American cities, has visibly benefited from

Scottish, Irish, German and Jewish immigrants. Though not nearly so much a microcosm of Europe as Chicago, with its competing Lithuanian newspapers, its English counterpart more nearly contains a cross-section of the nations of the earth.

The coloured population is very small by American standards, though large by those of England, and still rising. In Moss Side there is the potential basis of a coloured ghetto. Middle-class home-owners do not have the middle-class American's fear of coloured neighbours. The threat here is not of forced integration with another race but with another class, as comprehensive schools are built and council housing estates spread out to the suburbs.

In the midst of this somewhat un-English ethnic goulash, one can find the Proper Mancunian, or the immigrant from Bolton or Oldham, still retaining marks of a Lancashire culture. The Mancunian can retain his distrust of trees — “I'd rather have something useful.” Enormous self-satisfaction with his regional culture makes him something akin to the rock-ribbed Middle Western reader of the *Chicago Tribune*. Unlike the 100-per-cent American, the Mancunian



appears to have no evangelizing instinct. There is an "I am an American Day," when immigrants pledge allegiance to their new homeland. But there is no "I am a Mancunian Day," when Indian exporters solemnly pledge to leave the curry powder out of stews and henceforth eat hot pot.

The centre of Manchester—dominated by department stores, offices and garish cinema lights—more closely resembles the "downtown" section of a city like St Louis than it resembles the West End of London or the rows in Chester. Unfortunately, even when the Piccadilly redevelopment scheme is completed, Manchester will not rival Chicago's Loop. Downtown Manchester, like its American counterpart, may be a bit dead at night, but in the day-time one can always go to lunch at a superior department store such as Kendal's, or crowd into Lewis's, in pursuit of a bargain in dresses or a quarter-pound of fresh ravioli. Here too, shops have begun to retreat to the suburbs. Wilmslow is the chief suburban centre, though hardly on the American scale because of the shortage of automobiles in England. The crowning feature of Wilmslow, as in many *haut bourgeois* American shopping centres, is the speciality shops with their pseudo-Georgian—or "Williamsburg colonial"—fronts.

The Victorian University of Manchester, like its science-napping American equivalents, is a product of 19th century municipal pride and munificence. Like American counterparts, it finds itself surrounded by slums. More slowly than the University of Chicago, Manchester is now seeking to redevelop its surrounding area. As in America, the presence of so many commuting staff and students makes parking a problem. And unlike Oxford, it is cars, not bicycles, that provide the most efficient means of transport. Students attend series of lectures and small discussion groups, in a pattern more familiar to those who have studied in America than in Oxford. Like many American degree-seekers, these students seem more concerned with using their education to qualify for a good job, than as a means to a superior social status.

A family man in Manchester, as in America, flees to the suburbs, away from the slums and from industry. An American is not unappreciative of the fact that these suburbs are full of new houses with big kitchens, ample power points and occasionally even central heating. In the daytime, wives visit back and forth, trailing after their children in the pattern that Whyte describes in *The Organization Man*. In the evenings, the husbands work on their cars, mow the lawn or watch "Wagon Train." Perhaps because living in Manchester is by definition Non-U, (more accurately, Non-PS, i.e. not public school good form), suburbanites here seem to concentrate upon the material goods on sale in the shops, rather than upon the intangible symbols of status hawked in *The Observer*.

is best done in the American fashion. Twice a week we drive down the Princess Parkway into a shopping centre. We stock up on staples at a cut-rate self-service supermarket. There is a German baker selling *stollen* to eat at breakfast time, and an English one offering scones for tea. A delicatessen provides a wide range of goods gathered

from Israel, Chesham Hill and Newark New Jersey. The pub now sells cold beer though calling it iced lager. Recently, enterprising small businessman, perhaps himself an immigrant, took it upon him to supply the one thing needed to make an all-American setting. That is, of course, an Italian restaurant.

Suburban sprawl here, as in America, makes an automobile a necessity. Shopping