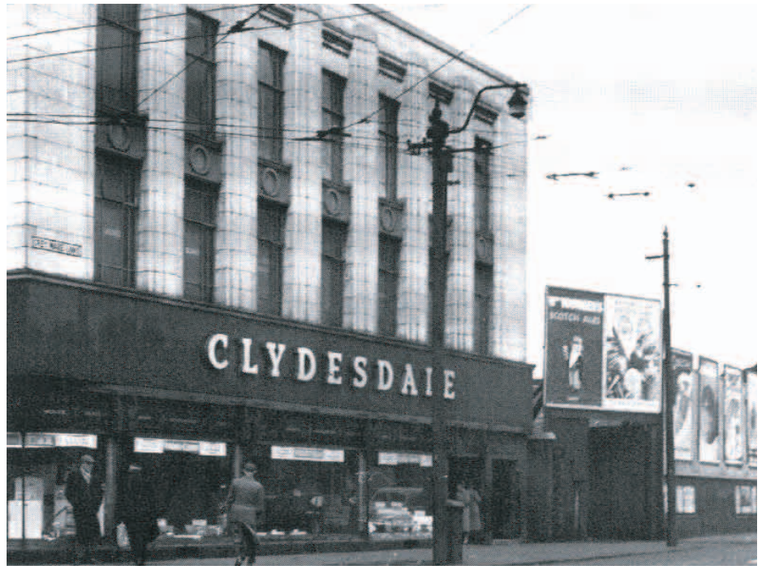










Beswick, Manchester
1960's

BESWICK
Beswick is a small district located on the east side of Manchester bounded by Ashton Old Road, Ashton New Road and Grey Mare Lane and was incorporated into Manchester in 1838. Pronounced "Bes-ick" (the "w" is silent). Before 1066, in Saxon times, the district was called "Beaces Hlaw" - Hlaw was an old word for a small hill, often used as a burial mound. By the 13th century it had changed to "Beaces Wic" indicating that the area was predominantly farm land. Who or what the Bes element of the placename signified is open to interpretataion, though the simplest and most plausible is that it belonged to a person called Bes or Bess.

Beswick lay at the very heart of Manchester's Industrial Revolution and all earlier traces are long buried beneath the industrial spoil of the late 18th and 19th centuries and much of the district still has Victorian terraced workers housing.

The district has long been known for its annual fairs and markets. Silcocks Beswick Fair was a regular event before Christmas in the days before 1939. Markets offering pies, cakes and puddings were also notable, of which only the Grey Mare Lane market survives today, and still offers similar fare.

The area went into decline as the textile industry fell on hard times after the Second World War, and a great deal of slum clearance and redevelopment took place. The notorious "Fort Beswick" concrete blocks of flats were to replace the old Victorian houses, but being built so badly, they did not last well and within a very few years they showing serious signs of delapidation.

Also, the social consequences of placing families in high rise concrete tower blocks had been so badly understood that by the mid-1970s it was clear to everyone that the blocks had to go, and they were demolished. They were replaced by more humane houses at ground level in an attempt to ressurect some vestige of the community life which the tower blocks had destroyed.

Recent new housing developments have also helped raise the quality of life in the district . Beswick is part of the New Deal for Communities project that is gradually transforming the east Manchester districts. A multimillion pound investment in the region is bringing massive improvements to housing, the environment, health and education.

walker simpson architects
33 Piccadilly Manchester M1 1LQ
Tel 0161 228 7406 Fax 0161 228 7046

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