THE EVOLUTION OF HULME: Stories Unearthed from Easton Street to Poland Place

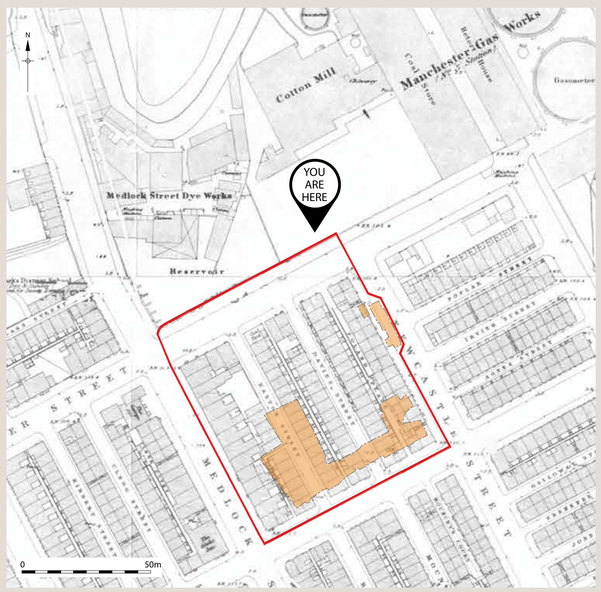
Archaeological excavations undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology ahead of the latest development at First Street have revealed a snapshot of 19th-century life beneath the streets of Hulme, uncovering workers' housing and wartime remains that reflect the area's transformation over time.



This 1901 photograph shows the alley between Newcastle Street and Fawcett Street, facing north-west toward St Philip's Church. Just a few streets away, the passage behind Easton Street and Medlock Steet would have looked similar.



Aerial view of Hulme in 1922, looking southeast. The site is outlined in red.



1844 Ordnance Survey map. The site is outlined in red and the excavation areas are shaded orange.

THE RISE OF WORKERS' HOUSING

In 2022, an archaeological excavation exposed the remains of workers' housing built on Easton Street in the 1830s or 40s. Census data shows that Manchester's population rose from 81,989 in 1811, to 216,115 in 1841, and 583,573 by 1891. Dense grids of terraced houses were constructed throughout the 19th century to accommodate this rising population and its associated industrial workforce. On Easton Street these dwellings were mostly of a type known as 'through houses' - typically two storey structures, with two rooms and fireplaces on each floor. The back room opened onto a yard furnished with an ash-filled privy. Behind the yard, an alley ran along the length of the terrace.



The remains of one of the houses on Easton Street. This photo shows the yard with drainage pipes in the foreground. The privy is visible in the bottom left of the photo, in front of a brick-lined coal store which would have been located beneath the stairs.

HOUSING REFORMS AND THEIR IMPACT

The properties at the southern end of Easton Street, fronting George Street, had cellars with fireplaces and external staircases, suggesting they were once used as dwellings. However, mid-19th century legislation aimed at improving working-class housing in Manchester, including the banning of cellar dwellings, led to the fireplaces being blocked up. The cellars were probably repurposed as storage areas after this shift.

By the late 19th century, the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act effectively made local authorities responsible for demolishing and rebuilding areas of inadequate housing. The houses on the site were condemned and by 1927 all had been demolished.

HULME AT WAR

With the onset of World War II, the empty plot served a new purpose. Three Anderson-style air raid shelters were constructed to provide refuge from bombings. The shelters had roofs made of corrugated metal sheets covered by earth and were accessed through T-shaped brick-built entrances. Other shelters were found during excavations to the south of the site in 2017.



The remains of terraced houses on Easton Street.



A fireplace in a former cellar dwelling fronting George Street, looking northwest. The fireplace was probably blocked up after mid-19th century housing reforms banned the use of cellars as living spaces.



Anderson-style air raid shelter, Poland Place.

This project was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology on behalf of First Street Developments Ltd. The investigation was designed in consultation with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service.