

Appendix II – Conservation Area Summary

From Deansgate/Peter Street Conservation Area by Manchester City Council

https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conservation_areas/1092/deansgatepeter_street_conservation_area

Introduction

The Deansgate/Peter Street conservation area lies within the city centre of Manchester, and is contiguous with other designated areas covering a substantial part of the Victorian city centre. For this reason only part of Deansgate is included in this area, most of the rest of the street being incorporated into Castlefield, Parsonage Gardens, St Ann's Square, Albert Square and Cathedral conservation areas.

The designation was made by the City Council on 26 June 1985, when several city centre conservation areas were designated and existing ones extended. It includes much of the area surrounding Peter Street and the junctions of Deansgate with both Quay Street and Bridge Street.

History

Deansgate is one of Manchester's most historic streets. During the Roman occupation it formed the route between two river crossings, the fords of the River Medlock to the south and the River Irwell to the north. The name Deansgate probably emerged in Anglo Saxon times and applied to that section of road between the present junctions of Cateaton Street and Peter Street.

Aldport Lodge, situated just south of Peter Street, was the manor house of the old town, and that part of present day Deansgate was originally known as Aldport Lane. The present name was not adopted for this stretch until Victorian times. From this manor house Lord Strange's Royalist forces fired cannon along Aldport Lane in 1642, against the Parliamentarians, who were strongly supported by the people of Manchester. The siege of Manchester brought about some of the earliest bloodshed in the Civil War.

Land on either side of the road was used for agricultural purposes until the encroachment of urban development, which accelerated in the 1730s, around the time when Edward Byrom built a substantial quay on the River Irwell.

Quay Street was built to allow access between the quay and Aldport Lane, and was extended eastwards in 1794 to link with Mosley Street. The new street was called Peter Street, named after St Peter's church which was being constructed at that time on Mosley Street. St Peter's Square, which also took the name of the church, came into being when the church was demolished in 1906.

Well into the 19th century, this part of Manchester still bordered upon open countryside. On 16 August 1819, at St Peter's Field (just off the present day St Peter's Square), Henry Hunt addressed a meeting of 60,000 people to demand radical reform of the House of Commons.

The size of the crowd so alarmed the City Magistrates that troops were called in to disperse it. Eighteen people were reported killed and 700 injured in the resulting chaos. The incident is now remembered as the 'Peterloo Massacre', and is commemorated in a plaque located on the Free Trade Hall, which was built on the site. This event, one of the most important in the City's history, undoubtedly paved the way for the 1832 Electoral Reform Act.

Townscape

The area is situated on ground which is mostly flat, although there is a gentle slope down Peter Street in a westerly direction towards the river. Deansgate is the longest and straightest street in the city centre and consequently there is a distant view to the north showing the tower of the cathedral framed by buildings on either side. To the south, railway viaducts in Castlefield cross Deansgate and terminate the view.

Peter Street, and its continuation into Quay Street, is the most important junction in the area. There is a slight change of direction in these two streets, neither of them forming an exact right angle with Deansgate. Although the Deansgate junction with John Dalton Street is a right angle, its continuation to Bridge Street is not.

These slight changes of direction mean that most sites in the conservation area are not exactly rectangular. Acute and oblique angles affect the plan form of buildings; since land in the city centre is at a premium, buildings totally cover their site and as a result more interesting buildings occur, many with corner entrances which are typical of Manchester.

Materials

The carriageway surfacing of almost all roads in the area is asphalt, while a few minor streets retain the earlier stone setts.

Footways have been replaced over the years with either tarmacadam or concrete flags, although stone flags remain, particularly in Little Quay Street, which has been extended to form a forecourt for the Grapes hotel. Few original stone kerbs remain, most having been replaced by concrete. Street lighting is provided by modern fittings, e.g. tall steel columns.

Walls of buildings are constructed from a wide range of high-quality materials such as stone, red-orange brick, terracotta and faience. Some of the stone buildings are intricately carved with fine sculptural detail. These heavy, solid materials are fenestrated by predominantly vertically-proportioned openings with sliding sash windows set back from the external face of the building.

Roofs of buildings, where they can be seen, are clad in slate which is usually blue-grey but occasionally green. The skylines of some buildings are made interesting by cornices and balustrades.

Building heights vary from fourteen-storey office developments such as Sunlight House on Quay Street, to the three-storey shops on Bridge Street and the properties backing on to them in Wood Street.

Generally, streets in the area are totally built up, presenting a complete street-wall frontage even though occasionally some buildings are set back behind the building line. At road junctions, buildings have traditionally 'held' the corner by some form of architectural emphasis.

Generally, buildings in the area display the Manchester characteristic of a tri-partite subdivision of the elevations, consisting of an over-large ground floor, a less highly modelled middle section and a varied top level seen against the sky.

Deansgate/Peter Street and its buildings today

The area is predominantly one of commercial buildings, but it also contains a significant number of places of assembly, such as a church, theatre, concert hall, opera house, synagogue and Masonic temple.

The Rylands Library on Deansgate is a landmark building, not only because its architectural quality but also for its important collection of historic books and manuscripts. Recognised as a Grade I listed building, it was designed by Basil Champneys, constructed from 1890, and opened in 1899. Since its merger with the Library of Manchester Victoria University in 1972, it makes available to readers more than five million books and manuscripts.

The library was built and endowed by Enriqueta Augustina Rylands in memory of her late husband John Rylands. Constructed in red sandstone, the interior contains some fine spaces adorned with excellent stone carvings. Especially interesting are the four levels of glass floors supported from the metal book-cases at the rear of the building.

The present Free Trade Hall (Grade II*) on Peter Street is the third or fourth building on the site, and was designed by Edward Walters between 1853 and 1856. The first was a temporary timber structure and the second burned down. The present building was almost completely destroyed during the Blitz of 1940 to 1941, and was reconstructed with a completely new interior, roof and rear elevations in the 1950s.

The monumental front facade is an Italianate masterpiece in Renaissance style with Ionic columns, balustrades and very fine carvings in the arched recesses. The Free Trade Hall was home to the Halle Orchestra since its first concert in 1858, but that changed when the orchestra moved to a new, purpose-built concert hall in 1996.

The classical-style Opera House (Grade II) on Quay Street was originally built as the New Theatre in banded, rusticated stucco, a form of render scored to imitate stone. The facade includes fluted Ionic pilasters supporting a pedimented gable with a sculpture in the central arched recess representing The Dawn of the Heroic Age.

Manchester's oldest surviving theatre building is the Theatre Royal of 1845 (Grade II) on Peter Street, which has a monumental portico and a statue of Shakespeare in a central recess. It has been used for various activities in the recent past and is currently used as a night club. The original building was designed by Irwin and Chester, but was altered by the prominent architect Edward Salomons in 1875.

Also on Peter Street, the Albert Hall (Grade II) was designed in eclectic style with Baroque and Gothic elements for the Wesleyan Mission by W. J. Morley in 1910, and after a long period of inactivity is now being utilised once again. A meeting hall is located on the first floor, with a horseshoe gallery, sloping floor and coloured glass rooflights. The finely detailed buff terracotta is formed into large traceried windows at gallery level, and the interior has a wealth of detail and floral decoration in plaster work and glazed tiles.

The Masonic temple on Bridge Street (Grade II) was designed by Thomas Worthington and Son and constructed in 1929 of Portland stone. It was designed in the fashionable stripped classical style, devoid of ornament, during the Art Deco period. Still with its original faience inn front, the Sawyers Arms on Deansgate has been totally altered internally, but it remains a contrasting and interesting building on the street wall.

Many other buildings of architectural interest lie within the conservation area, most of them being offices, and Bridge Street in particular is a well preserved example of a Victorian and Edwardian shopping street. The completeness of the 'street wall' with individual buildings of architectural quality, e.g. Wood Street Mission, creates a memorable piece of urban design.