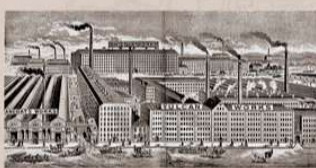


Canal, Cotton & Industry (1808–1860s)

The Rochdale Canal's Prussia Street Arm, completed by 1810, reshaped the landscape of Ancoats. The canal, built before the factories themselves, created the conditions for industrial growth, opening up new land for development and carrying both coal and finished goods to and from the city's mills.



Rochdale Canal, Union Street, Ancoats



Pigot's Map 1819 – first showing the Prussia Street Canal Arm dissecting the site

In the 1820s, cotton spinner Hugh Beaver built a multi-storey, steam-powered cotton mill on the west bank of the Prussia Street Canal Arm. Between 1825 and 1845 it expanded into a complex of engine and boiler houses, weaving sheds and a coal wharf, served directly from the Prussia Street Canal Arm. The mill spun and wove cotton cloth for export. Its bales travelled by canal to Manchester's warehouses and on to Liverpool's docks for shipment around the world.



Site map outlined on historic ordnance survey map of Jersey Street Mills, Union Street, Ancoats



Adshead's map (1851) showing Jersey Street Mills labelled Hugh Beaver's Cotton Mill



Cotton factories, Union Street, Ancoats c.1820

Excavations revealed brick engine bases, cobbled yard surfaces and clinker from the boilers, traces of the steam-driven industry that once filled this place with smoke, heat and rhythm.

Across the water, the east bank remained vacant until the 1850s, when it became the City of Manchester Screw Belt Works. Here, belting and transmission components were made — the unseen mechanisms that kept the nation's engines and looms turning and carried Manchester into its next industrial age.

Images sourced by CIVIC Heritage

Warehouse & Renewal (1930s–Today)

By the mid twentieth century, Ancoats' mills had fallen silent, and much of the site was cleared. After the dwellings were demolished, parts of the land were used for small scale light industrial and storage purposes until the 1960s, when the canal arm was infilled and warehouse and engineering uses replaced the former mills.

Excavation has revealed fragments of yard surfaces, concrete floors and brick foundations from these later industrial phases, evidence of the site's modest but continuous working life before the warehouse was built.



Murray's Mills image provided by Daniel Hopkinson

Following the closure of mills and factories, Ancoats' population fell dramatically, from around 50,000 in 1901 to fewer than 2,000 by the 1980s. Many buildings became vacant or were demolished during slum clearance programmes of the 1960s and 1970s.

By the late twentieth century, the area was characterised by derelict plots, warehouses and decaying industrial shells.

The 2008 financial crisis stalled earlier regeneration efforts, leaving the neighbourhood caught between its past and future.

In 2014, Manchester City Council, Manchester Life, and partners launched a renewed wave of investment to repopulate the area, reconnect streets, and re-establish Ancoats as a thriving neighbourhood once more.



View up and down Jersey Street, Ancoats, 2021

Between 2014 and 2022, Manchester Life delivered nearly 1,500 homes across Ancoats, supporting the growth of a balanced community through owner occupier sales and pioneering Manchester's modern private rental sector.

In conjunction with Eliza Yard and Phoenix Ironworks, Jersey Wharf forms part of Manchester Life's third phase of developments, adding a further 572 homes and over 15,000 square feet of commercial space to the now thriving Ancoats community.



Cotton field wharf Buildings



New Little Mill Building



Lampwick Quay Building

Reform & Everyday Life (1890s–1930s)

By the end of the nineteenth century, the nation's poor and often unsanitary living standards had become a national concern. A series of reform acts between 1848 and 1890, including the Public Health Acts and the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Acts, called for better homes. Reformers turned to model housing as proof that decency and industry could coexist.

In Ancoats, these ideas took shape. Between 1891 and 1893, the Manchester Labourers' Dwellings Company redeveloped the former mill site to provide 149 flats designed by C. J. Maycock. The scheme followed the old Beaver's Mill footprint and reused its foundations, anchoring reform in the site's industrial past.



Housing at Jersey Dwellings, Ancoats, c.1893



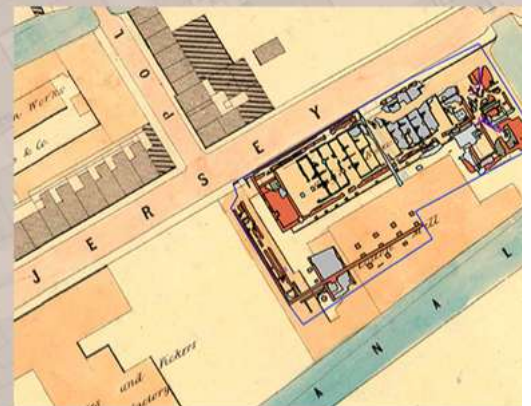
Children on Jersey Street, Ancoats, c.1900

Built in five-storey brick blocks with access galleries and shared courtyards, the design promoted light, air and community.

It was typical of that era for flats on higher floors, with better light, air and privacy, to be more desirable and command slightly higher rents, often attracting better-paid tenants.



Converted mill floor showing access corridors and rooms. The excavation uncovered the Jersey Street dwelling foundations, which in turn re-used the mill foundations. (north to top)



Excavated remains superimposed on Adshead's map of c.1851

By contrast, ground-floor units, darker, damper and closer to streets, were cheaper and home to those on lower incomes. Each dwelling had its own privies and improved ventilation. This was a radical advance on the housing it replaced.

Families of mill-hands, carters and labourers lived here, their living conditions transformed by reformist ideals.

Reform had reached the factory floor, turning industry into community.



Photograph of children

Images sourced by CIVIC Heritage