

Manchester's a gritty northern city of constant rain and Coronation Street, right? Not according to Peak Audax CTC veteran **Mike Wigley**. It's not only an industrial powerhouse, the city has music in its very soul, and Mike has devised a 100km perm which he hopes will have cyclists singing the praises of the Manchester Sightseer...



Mike Wigley

WE BUILT THIS CITY ON ROCK AND ROLL

WHICH AUDAX PERM includes the Beatles, Bee Gees, Bob Dylan and Britpop? A place of Nobel prizes and Olympic golds? A place which boasts trains, trams and buses, suffragettes, communists and the Gunpowder Plot, Van Gogh, Picasso, Gauguin and L.S. Lowry, a flying cat, a curry mile, and Whitworth screws – Manchester.

The Manchester Sightseer is a 100km ride taking in the history and culture of this great city. I was challenged to come up with an Audax event through a city that prides itself as being cycling-friendly – where Chris Boardman is Cycling Commissioner, and where British Cycling, the governing body for cycle sport, has set up home. Could I create a safe and interesting ride? I like to think the answer is yes! What follows is a glimpse of what you can expect to see...

Rivers and Canals

Manchester's location is determined by water – fast-flowing rivers to power its mills, and a canal network for transporting

raw materials and finished goods. The valleys of the Medlock, Irk, Irwell and Mersey also provide us with pleasant cycling corridors.

Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, started a revolution when he commissioned his canal, which opened in 1761 to transport coal from his mines in Worsley to Manchester. It reduced the price of coal in Manchester by about half almost overnight, as well as providing us with some our route.

Technical innovations followed. Riders can gaze in wonder at Store Street Aqueduct, the world's first skewed aqueduct. Barton Aqueduct opened in 1761 to carry the Bridgewater canal over the River Irwell but was replaced by the present Barton Swing Aqueduct, still the world's only navigable swing aqueduct, with the building of the Ship Canal in 1894.

The Ship Canal was created to give Manchester and Salford direct access to the sea. When this closed in the 1970s, the disused docks area was redeveloped into Salford Quays.

Railways

Manchester was at the forefront of the railway era, and the ride passes Liverpool Road station, opened in 1830 as the world's first inter-city station, and now housing the Museum of Science and Industry. The builders of the Liverpool-Manchester railway were nearly defeated by Chat Moss, an extensive peat bog, but they came up with a way to do it. We cross this at Astley level crossing – so watch out for frequent and fast trains.

Piccadilly Station was to be the terminus of the ill-fated Picc-Vic underground line. An earlier extension of the station led to the Star and Garter pub being moved, brick by brick, but further plans to augment the Fairfield Road platforms may mean that the pub, a listed building, will have to be "levelled down".

The other main station was renamed Victoria Wood Station for a day in memory of the Bury comedienne. It incorporates the Manchester Arena, where Kylie Minogue has made many appearances; her song The Locomotion would seem to be appropriate for the location. There was a terror attack here in 2017 which caused 22 deaths and many injuries, but it engendered a great feeling of defiance and solidarity in the area.

Manchester has an extensive network of trams. You will encounter Metrolink lines throughout the ride so take care when crossing the rails, or when riding alongside the tracks on the road. There might be no Metrolink for Leigh, but instead they have a guided bus route which opened in 2016. We use the



The railways obliterated the roman fort but added castellations to their viaducts in mitigation

convenient cycleway running alongside.

The Fallowfield Loop is a former railway line giving access to Central Station. It closed in the 1960s but has now been converted into a cycle path and provides traffic access across the south of the city.

Roads and Motorways

The Perm encounters roads of all eras, with the Roman road between Deva (Chester) and Eboracum (York), and former Turnpike Trust roads, such as those that became Bury Old and Bury New Roads.

Another wave of road-building started before WW2. Both Kingsway and the East Lancs Road are encountered. Kingsway was built in the 1930s as a dual carriageway with trams running on the central reservation, and named after George V. Four years later George himself came to open the East Lancs Road, the UK's first purpose-built intercity highway and precursor of the later motorways.

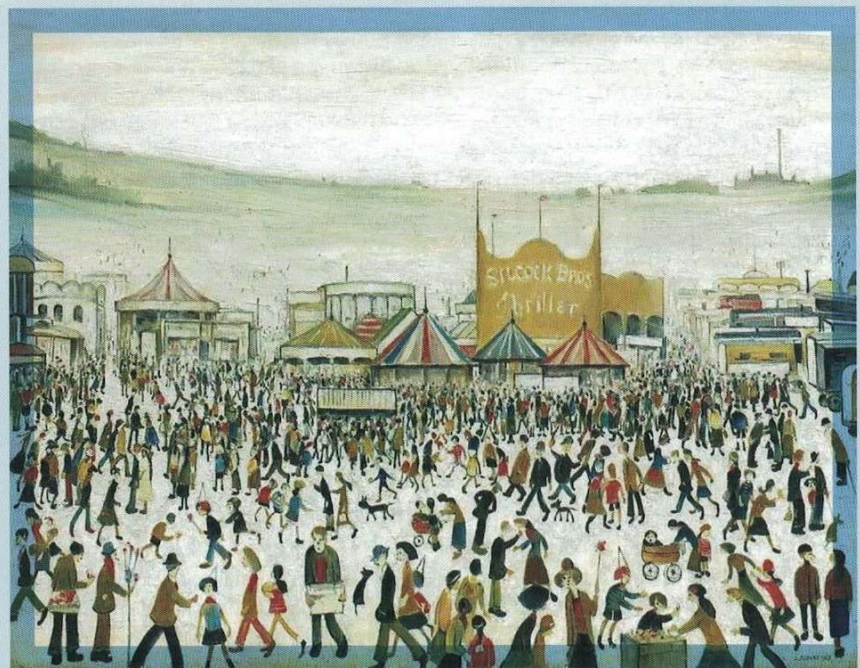
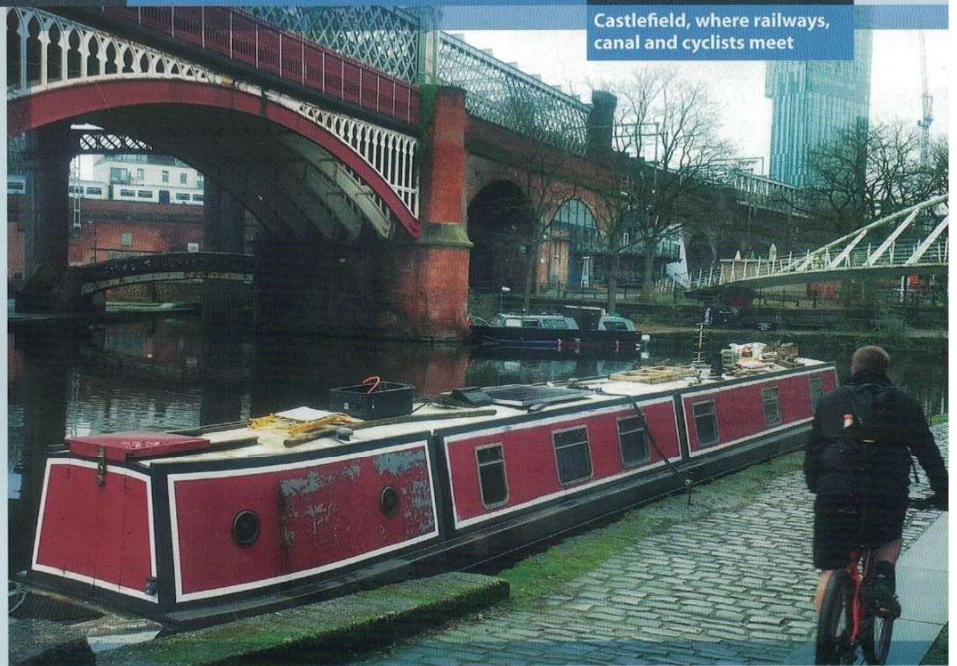
Manchester nearly had an Eastern by-pass. It was planned in 1945 but nothing was built except an odd-looking stretch of dual carriageway through a housing estate in Clayton – which we get to ride on.

The ride encounters the M52 and the M63. It is thanks to the motorways that we have Sale Water Park, another of our controls, as this former gravel pit was part of the construction effort for the M63.

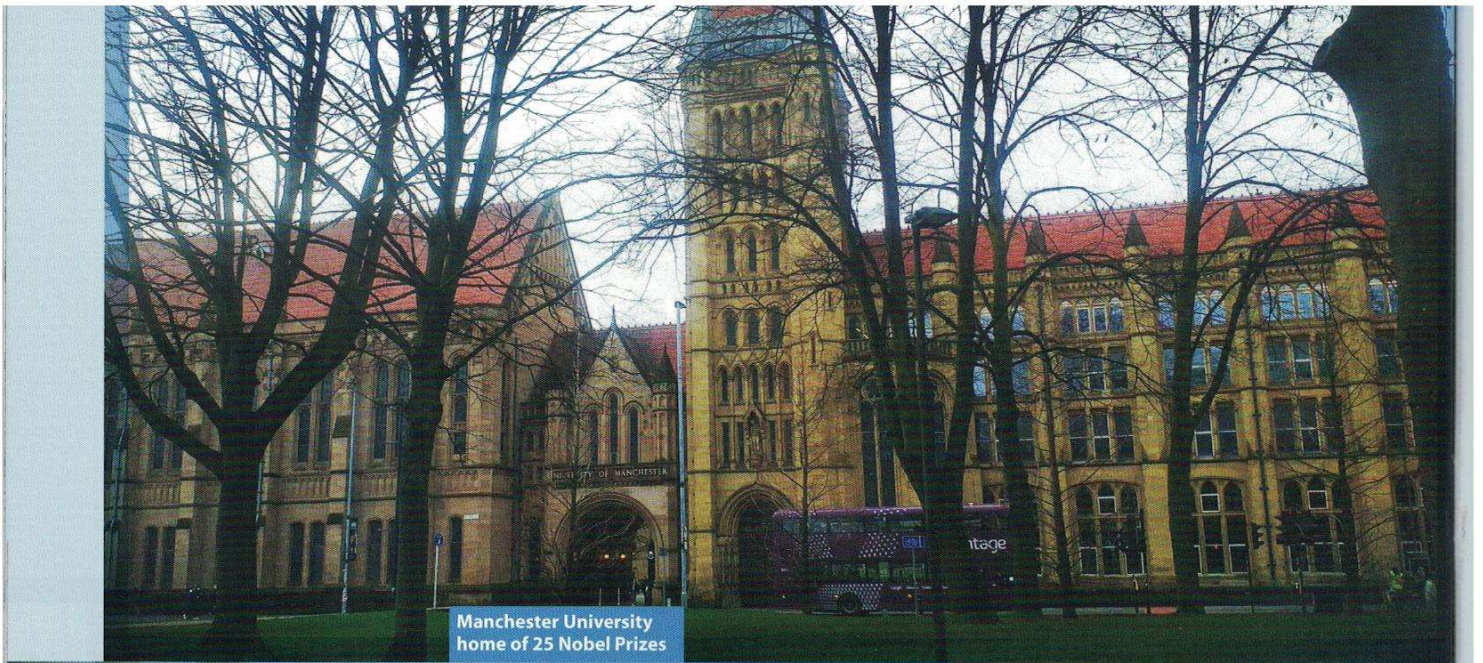
Science and Engineering

Atomic theory has its foundations in Manchester. John Dalton, who has a street named after him, introduced the concept. His pupil, James Prescott Joule, went on to develop ideas about energy, and both have an SI unit named after them. Further developments of Dalton's work came from Neils Bohr, J.J. Thompson, Ernest Rutherford and William Bragg, who all attended Manchester University, and all received Nobel prizes.

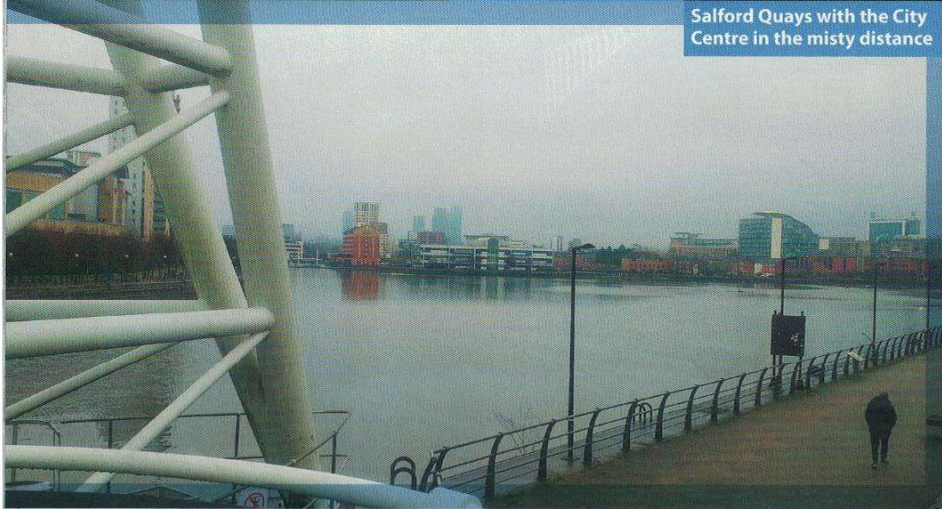
Castlefield, where railways, canal and cyclists meet



Good Friday Fair 1946 at Daisy Nook by L S Lowry



Manchester University
home of 25 Nobel Prizes



Salford Quays with the City
Centre in the misty distance

Joseph Whitworth was a Manchester engineer, famous for devising the British Standard Whitworth system for screw threads. He has a street named after him, as well as an art gallery, a fine sandstone building on Oxford Road. The Whitworth Art Gallery had a Van Gogh, a Picasso and a Gauguin stolen in 2003. The pictures were soon found in a public toilet, but don't get any ideas, as security has since been tightened up.

Charles Rolls met Henry Royce at the Midland Hotel, whether by chance or by design I'm not sure, but they went on to set up their car business, and later expanded into aircraft engines.

People

We pass memorials to some of the many people who made their home in Manchester. Alan Turing came to Manchester University in 1948 to help develop their computers. He has a sculpture in Sackville Park.

Friedrich Engels was sent from Germany to help with the family business in Salford, his father thinking that this

might encourage him to reconsider his radical views. That didn't happen. Observing the horrors of life in the slums of Angel Meadow in the Irk Valley helped in his writing of the Communist Manifesto. He has a statue in Tony Wilson Place.

The Gunpowder Plot is reputed to have been planned at Ordsall Hall, coincidentally on Guy Fawkes Street. And Pope John Paul II visited Heaton Park for a mass attended by more than 100,000 people in 1982.

Just around the corner from Deansgate there's a statue of Abraham Lincoln. It commemorates Manchester's support for the anti-slavery movement, even though abolition caused hardship as it disrupted the supply of cotton reaching Lancashire's mills.

LS Lowry was a Salford artist, famous for his matchstick men. He painted the Good Friday fair in 1946. Imagine the joy that day after the dark years of the war. The painting sold for £3.8 million in 2007, so it might be worth doing a quick sketch while you pass.

Tony Wilson worked on Granada

Reports, but was famous for setting up Factory Records and the Hacienda night club. The Hacienda no longer stands, but Tony has a square named after him at Home arts centre. He is kept company by Cheetham Hill's Jack Rosenthal, playwright and Coronation Street writer, who (of course) has a Street named after him.

When an unknown "beat combo" was signed up to play Urmston Show in 1963, no-one could have expected that by the time of the gig that summer in Abbotsfield Park, the Beatles would be famous – and end up mobbed by thousands of screaming girls.

The Free Trade Hall was built on the site of the Peterloo Massacre, a less than glorious moment in Manchester's past. Bob Dylan recorded his "Live at the Albert Hall", not in London, but here in 1966. Also appearing here in 1976 were the Sex Pistols, a concert that inspired the formation of Joy Division, The Smiths, and The Fall, all thinking they could do better.

Also on the route, the Sedge Lynn Wetherspoon was, ironically, a temperance billiard hall. The former cinema next door was the venue of the first performance by the young Gibb brothers who were born here – and would grow up to become the Bee Gees.

Noel Gallagher and his brother Liam of Oasis were Definitely/Maybe brought up in Burnage. They played three nights at Heaton Park to over 210,000 in 2009. Peel Park at Salford University is named after former Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel from Bury, who did much to encourage the creation of public parks, as well as founding the police force.

So many memorials to men! I'm sure that Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters would have had something to say about that from their home on Nelson Street in South Manchester.

Sport

Mancunians love their sport! The SportCity complex was created for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and the main stadium is now home to Manchester City. The complex is on the site of Bradford coal mine that closed in 1968. All Manchester's mines are now closed, but we pass Astley Green pit, now a Colliery Museum.

The Velodrome is home to British Cycling. There is also a Mountain Bike "skills zone" in nearby Phillips Park if you want to have a try. This was formerly Stuart Street Power Station, although the cooling towers came down in 1978. The disused viaduct across Clayton Vale was for railway access to the Power Station.

Manchester's other team started life as Newton Heath FC, and played on what is now the Velodrome carpark from 1893 until 1910. They moved to Trafford in 1910, now under the name of Manchester United. A statue of the "holy trinity" of George Best, Dennis Law and Bobby Charlton stands outside.

United's former training ground at The Cliff is also on our route. The "class of '92" went on to become a remarkably successful generation of players, some of whom eventually founded the University Academy 92, a joint venture with Lancaster University. Marcus Rashford from the current squad has a mural in Withington.

Cricket is also played at Old Trafford. Part of the road alongside the cricket ground is now renamed Brian Statham Way in honour of their fast bowler from Gorton who played for Lancashire and England. He once held the world record for most wickets taken in Test Cricket.

Buildings

Manchester is now reaching for the stars, architecturally. The CIS tower was the tallest building in the UK at 387 feet when it was opened. It is now dwarfed by eight others in the city, with another five taller buildings already under construction.

Adjacent is the "sliced egg" tower, the HQ of the Co-operative Group. The Co-op was founded in Rochdale in 1844 and you will see many of its establishments on the ride. Education is one the Group's remits, and you pass one of their Academy schools educating another generation of shelf-fillers, insurance brokers and funeral directors.

Some of the Co-op offices are on Balloon Street, so named because James Sadler made a hot-air balloon flight, only the second in the country, from a garden on the site. He also took his cat as passenger, hence the name of a nearby wine bar "Sadler's Cat".

Nearby is the Urbis Building, which opened as the Museum of the City in 2002,


but visitor numbers were disappointing, and it closed in 2010. It re-opened in 2012 as the 'National Football Museum'.

The BT Tower at Heaton Park is a landmark visible for miles around Manchester. It was supposed to be able to withstand a nuclear attack.

The Arndale Centre opened in 1971 and has had its share of critics. It was severely damaged by an IRA bomb in 1996. Although the usual Saturday crowds were supplemented by football fans for the UEFA 96 football match between Russia and Germany to be held the following day, no-one was killed. The pillar

box, sited just yards from the explosion, was virtually unscathed, and its contents were emptied a few days later and delivered as if nothing had happened.

No-one knows what first attracted 36-year-old Enriqueta (from Cuba) to the millionaire entrepreneur and philanthropist John Rylands, aged 74 when they married, but as his widow she could certainly afford to build the Rylands Library as a memorial.

Herman's Hermits once recorded a song about Manchester, with the line "It's nice to be out in the morning, when you've got somewhere to go" ... on the Manchester Sightseer. 



Alan Turing, the father of computing... fascinated to hear that the brevet doesn't need a 40-tonne truck to carry the trip computer

WHERE TO START...

There is free parking at Sale Water Park (near M60 junction 7) and Daisy Nook, while Heaton Park has a pay & display car park. You could arrive by train and start from one of several stations on the ride, although only folding bikes are allowed on Metrolink trams.

The ride has been comfortably ridden on a road bike with 23mm tyres, even across Chat Moss, but a gravel bike might be better, as the route includes canal towpaths, cycle paths and cobbles. Manchester is very much a "work in progress" and you may well find the route is a hard hat and hi-viz area, so take a map.

Don't forget to carry a lock with you in case you decide to stop along the way at a cafe. And this is Manchester so pick a day when it's not raining! This 100km event actually runs to 114km – but just think of it as 14 per cent Value Added Travel.

The ride is best done by e-brevet but can still be ridden the traditional way with a brevet card and by collecting till receipts. I hope to turn this into a calendar event from Cheadle when I can find a day when neither City nor United are playing at home.

As well as the Manchester Sightseer, I also run Perms from 50km to a full SR series. You can head into the Peak District, across the Cheshire Plains, and reach the coast in Lancashire, Anglesey, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. There are also several one-way rides with a train option for the return journey.

See www.PeakAudax.co.uk for full details.