

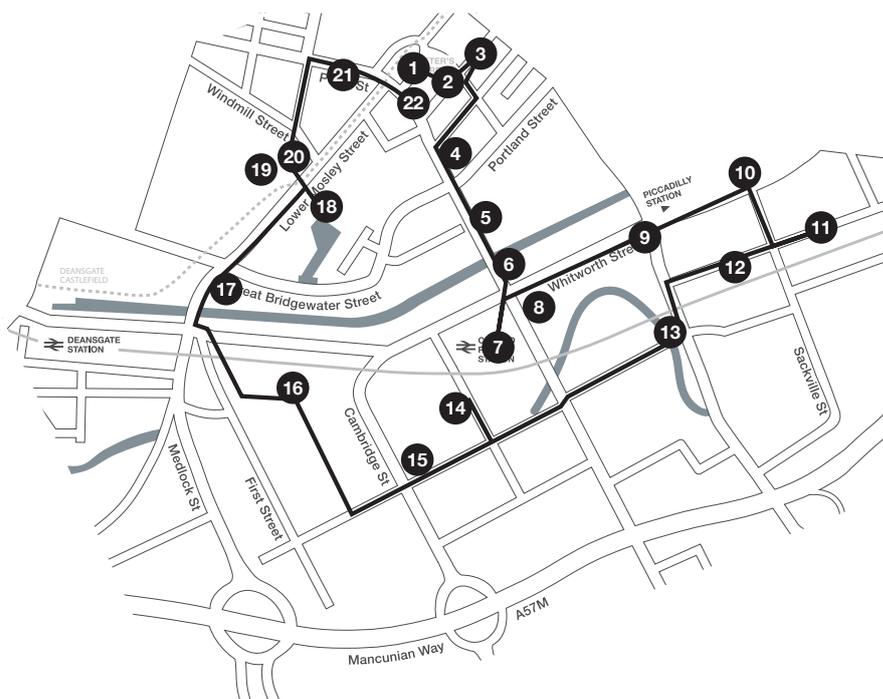
# Oxford Road Corridor

Explore the history of Manchester's knowledge quarter through some of the area's most significant landmarks and iconic buildings.

This 45-60 minute self-guided tour is part of a three-part series designed by Jonathan Schofield, Blue Badge Guide since 1996 and Editor-at-Large of Manchester Confidential. You can join at any point on the map and complete it at your own pace.

We would love to see your photos, so don't forget to tag us @OxRdMCR

## ROUTE 01 CIVIC SPLENDOUR, MILLS AND WAREHOUSES



Central Library

### 1 Central Library and the Town Hall Extension

Central Library was designed by Vincent Harris and opened in 1934. On the opening day all Manchester schoolchildren were given a handkerchief with the words 'Knowledge is power'. It is a circular building with columns and is said to reference the Pantheon in Rome. The Pantheon was a temple to all the gods whereas Central Library is a temple to all human knowledge. In 2019 it was the busiest library in the country with 1.6m readers and visitors. There are many fine spaces inside, the Shakespeare Hall at the entrance with its spectacular ceiling and stained glass, the Wolfson Reading Room under its vast dome and the elegant wood panelled Henry Watson Music Library. The new area are impressive too including the wide-open spaces in the café and local studies section.

Next door to the library is a building from 1938, the Town Hall Extension, from the same architect Vincent Harris. The fabulous tracery grille facing the Central Library bear the shields of England and Scotland. On the Mount Street side of the building there are the shields of Ireland and Wales. The Rates Hall in the building and the council chamber with its Ante Room are spectacular.

### 2 Emmeline Pankhurst statue

The statue was erected in 2018 on the anniversary of the date when some women in the UK got the vote – there wasn't full male and female parity until 1928. The bronze sculpture of the Mancunian leader of the Suffragettes is by Hazel Reeves and depicts Emmeline Pankhurst mid-speech. She is shown standing on a chair to gain height over her audience, a common practice of the fierce campaigner. On the Portland stone 'speaking circle' that wraps round Pankhurst her famous motto is incised 'Deeds not words'. We will meet Mrs Pankhurst again on the third of these tours.



Emmeline Pankhurst statue

### 3 Guardian Exchange

This is Manchester city centre's most sinister and ugly building surrounded by razor wire. It lies above the Guardian Exchange. This was part of a network of four tunnel complexes to be built in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow to maintain links with the rest of NATO should the UK be attacked by Soviet atomic weapons. The generators, entitled Marilyn (Monroe) and Jane (Russell) after the stars of the day, still sit almost 35m (115ft) beneath the city.

### 4 Junction of Portland Street and Oxford Street

On one side is a McDonalds with beautiful Art Nouveau script high on the façade reading the Picture House. This was the first purpose-built cinema in Manchester, built in 1911 for the Provincial Cinematography Theatres Company. On the opposite side of Oxford Road is the giant arcade at first floor level of the Louis Behrens & Sons warehouse from 1860. The Behrens Group is still going strong in Trafford Park a few miles to the west.

### 5 St James' Buildings and Churchgate House

Two mighty packing warehouses face each other across the road here. On the left is St James's Buildings by Clegg, Fryer and Penman from 1913. This is a vast Baroque style edifice in gleaming Portland stone with broken pediments, heavy cornices, a crazy little temple-like tower and a sumptuous entrance hall and stair. It was in a club under St James's Buildings in the 1970s where Warsaw played their second gig in 1977. They returned as the influential group Joy Division the next year and were spotted and signed to Factory Records. After the death of lead singer Ian Curtis they changed their name again to New Order.

Churchgate House, on the right, formerly the Tootal Broadhurst Lee & Co building, by J Gibbon Sankey from 1898, is more restrained but still very grand with bands of brick and terracotta. The corner details of the building, the ceramic giants – Atlantes in architectural parlance - were probably designed by WJ Neatby, the renowned head of the architectural department of tiling specialists Doulton – subsequently Royal Doulton.

## 6 The Palace Theatre

The Palace Theatre was built in 1891, refaced in 1956, it contains a gorgeous auditorium from 1913. Charlie Chaplin has appeared on the stage, as have a whole roster of top-flight stars including Frank Sinatra and more recently key performers at Manchester International Festival such as Damon Albarn, Lou Reed and Marina Abramovic. The theatre district of Manchester has often majored in music and dance. It was John Tiller in Manchester in 1890 who created the eponymous Tiller girls. He wanted to make the dancers more coordinated, so he had them link arms. With high kicks and perfect timing they became famous from New York to Paris.



## 7 Oxford Road Station

This is a fine timber station from 1960 by Max Clendinning, described as 'one of the more remarkable and unusual stations'. The surviving furniture, ticket office, cafe and ceilings, full of sweeping movement, are perfect for a station – yet surprisingly gentle. The prow at the entrance is echoed by two similar elements behind that once led some Manchester fantasists to insist the resulting profile influenced Jorn Utzon's design of Sydney Opera House.

## 8 Kimpton Clock Tower Hotel

A spectacular building with terracotta details constructed for the Refuge Assurance Company in stages from the 1890s to the 1930s. The part at the junction of Oxford Street and Whitworth Street was designed by Alfred Waterhouse, the tower and the part to the railway by Paul Waterhouse, a father and son team that would work on original university buildings further down Oxford Road. One of the most colourful descriptions ever given to a Manchester building is CR Reilly's from 1924, who thought the Oxford Street façade resembled 'a tall young man in flannel trousers escorting two charming but delicate old ladies in lace'. The building is full of symbolism such as castles (your money and future is safe with the company) and ships (echoing a theme on the Manchester coat of arms). The quarters on the clock tower feature a stylised Manchester bee. Inside there is dazzling tile work.



## 9 Lancaster House & India House

The former warehouses here, now apartments, India House and Lancaster House on the right, are by HS Fairhurst from between 1905 and 1906. Back down the street neighbouring the Palace Theatre is the white Bridgewater House from 1912 by the same architect. This whole section of street is magnificently scaled and full of crazy terracotta reliefs, sculptures, towers and rippling bays. As these buildings were being raised the UK cotton industry centred on Manchester's Royal Exchange was producing more than six billion linear yards (0.91m) of finished cotton, the nearest rival was Japan producing 56 million linear yards.

## 10 Technical School and Sackville Gardens

On a bench in Sackville Gardens is a sculpture of Alan Turing (1912-1954). He worked at the University of Manchester and is widely regarded as the father of theoretical computer science and the study of artificial intelligence. He committed suicide by eating a cyanide injected apple as his favourite pantomime as a child had been Snow White. The reason for his depression is unclear, although his prosecution for homosexuality in 1952 and his treatment with oestrogen injections as an alternative to prison were probably factors, especially as the conviction meant he was denied access to secret government work.

The mighty building here was built as the Municipal School of Technology in 1902, extended in 1957. It's crowned, although this can only be seen from the Whitworth Street side of the building, by the Godlee Observatory, home of the Manchester Astronomical Society. This wonderful 1903 space, with its telescope chamber accessed via a wrought iron spiral staircase, can be visited through the Society's website. The view from the balcony is superb. Patron and mill-owner Frances Godlee was a progressive when it came to technology. His telephone number was simply 4, not easy to forget.

## 11 Vimto bottle

This vast Vimto bottle is by Kerry Morrison. This giant sculpture marks the spot where John Noel Nichols invented the popular Manchester soft drink in 1908. Still going strong today, it was intended as a temperance replacement for alcohol, shame then that the name is an anagram of vomit.

## 12 61-63 Granby Row and Orient House

61-63 Granby Row is by GH Goldsmith from 1908. It is red brick former textile warehouse with Portland stone dressings and Art Nouveau special effects, a big bold confident building. 61-63's neighbour, Orient House, has a façade that could be from a Hollywood blockbuster of the 1930s based in Ancient Rome. This building is also by Goldsmith from 1914, this is all bluster, white faïence and a giant Ionic colonnade. It is amusing when you remember it was a textile warehouse. Round the back of the building it is all different. The Bauhaus movement would have been proud of the original utterly functional grid of glass, steel and concrete.



## 13 Factory and Lass O' Gowrie

The simple building with the blue tiles is a night club but was formerly Fac251, the headquarters of the famous Factory Records prior to its collapse in 1992. There is a hilarious scene involving the building in the film 24 Hour Party People, possibly the funniest rock and roll film ever produced. The Lass O' Gowrie pub here is a very entertaining little boozier

with some great tile work. The name comes from the first landlord who was Scottish and named the pub after the Lass O'Gowrie poem by Lady Carolina Nair.



Little Ireland Sign

#### 14 Little Ireland and the mills

On one of the 19th century brick buildings on Great Marlborough Street is a plaque marking notorious Little Ireland. Friedrich Engels, German communist and Manchester resident for almost 22 years, described the area in his 1845 book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: 'The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavements; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by effluvia'.

The area seemed to sum up the worst of the unregulated industrial revolution, in the words of another commentator, Alexis de Toqueville, Manchester was where 'everything in the exterior appearance attests the individual powers of Man: nothing the directing powers of Society'.

Little Ireland was largely and inadvertently 'slum-cleared' by the railway. Oxford Road Station and the railway arches arrived in 1849 as part of the Manchester South Junction and Altrincham line destroying Engels' broken cottages, but not without incident: three railway arches collapsed killing workmen.

This area was once one of the major manufacturing districts of central Manchester. Chorlton Old Mill here was built for social pioneer Robert Owen in 1795 before he left Manchester to set up New Lanark Mills close to Glasgow, now a World Heritage Site. Higher up the road at the junction of Lower Ormond Street and Chester Street is the mucky but glumly-striking mountain of brick that is Chatham Mill. This dates from 1820 with an extension of 1823. Some of the recent student residences around here are fake mills: a curious turn-around in reputation for the 'dark Satanic mills'.



Macintosh Mill

#### 15 The International Anthony Burgess Foundation and Macintosh Mill

In Chorlton New Mills, from the first half of the nineteenth century, is the International Anthony Burgess Foundation with its café, performance space, archive and library. The very entertaining Anthony Burgess (1917-1993), from Harpurhey in the city, is famed for his novel *A Clockwork Orange*, was a polymath. He wrote many novels but was also a screenwriter, essayist, and journalist alongside his great talent as a musician who composed symphonies. On the other side of the Cambridge Street is Macintosh Mill and is named for Charles Macintosh who pioneered, here, the raincoat known as 'the Mac'.



Friedrich Engels Statue

#### 16 HOME arts centre

This multi-function arts centre combines five cinema screens with a couple of theatres and art gallery. There is also a popular bar and restaurant. It opened in 2015 and was designed by Mecanoo architects who we will encounter again on the second of these tours. The large statue here is of the aforementioned German communist and Manchester businessman Friedrich Engels. It arrived as part of an art project for Manchester International Festival in 2017 and has been dogged by controversy. The statue had been cast in the 1960s as a symbol of Soviet Union dominance over Ukraine and when the latter country became independent in 1991 it had been torn down. The blue and yellow colours of the Ukrainian flag can still be seen on the legs of the Engels' statue and it is a focus of protest by Manchester's large Ukrainian community.

#### 17 Briton's Protection and the Tower of Light

The Briton's Protection pub was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century and has a gorgeous multi-roomed interior. Round the corner on Great Bridgewater Street is another lovely pub, Peveril of the Peak which inside has a table football machine from the 1950s, believed to be the oldest still in use in a pub. Across from the Briton's Protection pub is the Tower of Light. This elegant 40m (131ft) flue by designers Tonkin Liu is part of the £20m Civic Quarter Heat Network for the city council will generate low-carbon energy for the city.



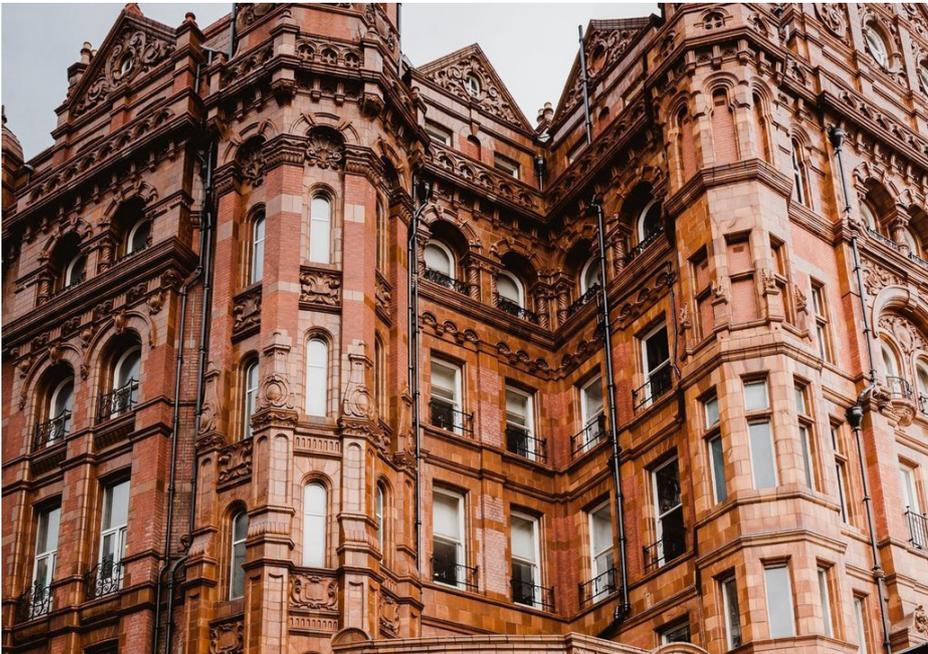
Sir John Barbirolli Statue

#### 18 Bridgewater Hall

The Bridgewater Hall, opened in 1996, is the 2,355-capacity main concert hall for classical music in the city and the main home of the Hallé Orchestra. Note the black rubber seal in front of the main entrance. This marks the division between Mother Earth and the auditorium. All 22,500 tons of the latter sit on a bed of 280 springs to shield it from external noise. Barbirolli Square in front of the hall contains Touchstone, an artwork by Kan Yasuda. The square is named after a distinguished mid-twentieth century conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli. Locals nicknamed him Bob O'Reilly.

#### 19 Manchester Central

Central Station has been reinvented as the convention, conference and exhibition complex Manchester Central. The original designer was Sir John Fowler with Sacre, Johnson and Johnstone, and it opened in 1880. It was built principally for the Midland Railway Company, and retains the widest unsupported iron arch in Britain after St Pancras in London. The brick arcades that elevated the station to track level are said to have used 34 million bricks, but also destroyed 225 houses and displaced over 1,000 people to provide space for the station. In 1969, it was decided Manchester had too many railway termini. Central Station was one of two to draw the short straw, and was closed. It re-opened in the mid-1980s working for the now-defunct Greater Manchester Council, as Greater Manchester Exhibition Centre.



The Midland Hotel

The most exciting part of the building is the interior. When it is empty, the visitor stands isolated in 10,000 square metres of uninterrupted space. It makes the individual feel reduced, so if you have friends with ego problems, lock them in there. Next door and part of Manchester Central is the Convention Centre from 2000, a tasteful and elegant design from local architects Stephenson Bell.

#### 20 Peterloo Memorial

This circular memorial in the shape of a stepped mound was finished in 2019, 200 years after the infamous event in this area when magistrates ordered soldiers to repress a large-scale and peaceful meeting. More than 50,000 people gathered here in St Peter's Fields to protest the lack of a vote and the lack of representation in Parliament. Eighteen people were killed and hundreds injured during the Yeomanry charge. Peterloo was seen as the great symbolic event that led to the Great Reform Act of 1832 when Manchester gained two Members of Parliament. The memorial designed by Jeremy Deller, is again controversial as this monument to social justice and fairness has no disabled access. Peterloo led indirectly to the formation of the Manchester Guardian, now the Guardian, in 1821.

#### 21 Midland Hotel

This was built in 1903 by Charles Trubshaw for the Midland Railway Company. The building mixes stylistic motifs with wild abandon but is one of the city's most eye-catching structures. On 4 May 1904 Charles Rolls met local manufacturer Frederick Royce in the hotel. Together they created the Rolls-Royce Motor Company. Inside Simon Rogan's celebrated French Restaurant diners have included Winston Churchill and General Patten. The Beatles were refused entry because they were dressed inappropriately. Or maybe because they were from Liverpool. Previously the Midland was the site of the Gentlemen's Concert Hall. Very polite. Next door was the People's Concert Hall, where the audience occasionally became so rowdy a wire net had to be hung over the stage to protect the performers. Less polite.

#### 22 St Peter's Square Cross

This cross marks the spot where St Peter's Church once stood, an elegant classical style church from James Wyatt. This was demolished in 1907 after the congregation had moved away. The cross is by Temple Moore. There are representations of the church in nearby paving slabs and as the trams rattle by they rumble over the bones of the people who were buried in vaults beneath the church. These include the remains of Hugh Hornby Birley, the leader of the yeomanry that charged the people at Peterloo.