

Still Making It  
East Expo  
The Hidden Gem  
Pace Setters

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# East Expo

**A showcase for brave new design or a repetition of past mistakes?  
Phil Griffin assesses the architectural talent invading East Manchester.**

**Manchester dares to be different, original, modern. Architects know this about the place.**

Previous spread:  
Will Alsop, masterplanner of New Islington, on the site of his forthcoming Chips building.

4.30 am on a January morning is no time to be at John Lennon Airport. But it's work. Well, you wouldn't do it for pleasure would you? A dozen people from Ancoats are here, and in less than an hour they'll really regret it. Their flight over the North Sea to Schipoll was more like a storm-tossed crossing in a barrel. They are the Cardroom Estate Residents' Committee, and they're here to tour Dutch housing schemes. Their guides are Sean Griffiths and Charles Holland, known in architecture circles as The FAT Boys. Their host is Matthew Harrison of Manchester Methodist Housing Group (MMHG), preferred social landlord in the transformation of the Cardroom Estate into New Islington, a government designated Millennium Community in Ancoats, East Manchester. FAT are architects, chosen by the residents, to design the first 23 houses on the new estate.

Like the flight, their day is whirlwind and windswept. They visit a residential scheme the size of a small town, outside Delft. They see award-winning houses variously clad in red and green polyurethane, timber shingles, corrugated zinc. From the tour bus they glimpse a street of timber and white-brick dormer bungalows, Dallas-style: "Those are like what we want!" The driver pulls over. On closer inspection the white bricks are moulded plastic and these bungalows have wheels tucked under their skirts. They are mobile homes and this is a Romany

settlement, legitimised by the Dutch government as part of a deal over land rights on a disused airfield. The Cardroom residents see the best of new Dutch architecture on Borneo Island in Amsterdam. This is reclaimed land and former docks, imaginatively planned and built by a stellar collection of architects selected through international competitions.

Architects and people who write about architecture (like me) can get quite excited by places like Borneo Island, whilst most people are more or less unmoved. That's because fashionable architecture isn't at the top of everybody's wish list. A house would be good; a secure affordable house in a nice place close to some proper shops, a decent school, a doctor and a dentist would be even better. Cities have always been full of bad architecture. Maybe now, there is less and less excuse. Bad architecture ends up costing us dear, in hard cash, and in dire social consequences. Which is why New Islington, Ancoats Urban Village and New East Manchester will become the show place and architecture expo that the city and the rest of the country needs. The plain fact is we can no longer afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. We must respond to new technologies and the highest design standards, and we must create genuinely sustainable communities now. It is unlikely that another cycle of housing renewal will happen in our

Bad architecture ends up costing us dear; both in hard cash, and in dire social consequences.

What's so different now? Amongst other things, Manchester is on a roll. What seemed impossible ten years ago now feels utterly achievable.

lifetime. Hence the pre-dawn rendezvous at John Lennon Airport.

Manchester is the centre for all things groovy. Musicians know this, students and young singles know it, *Big Issue* sellers know it. Most people are aware of the reputation Manchester has built over the last ten or a dozen years, for city centre regeneration and trendy apartment living. It might not be your cup of tea, and it might not be anything you would wish to share in, even if you could. It may not be what you might call 'affordable', but it is undeniable. I bet you wanted to share in the success of the Commonwealth Games. The city walked tall in July 2002, buoyed by the sense of a show well made, a job well done. The heritage of the 17th Commonwealth Games for Manchester is precisely what's happening now, east of the city, in Ancoats, New Islington and the rest of East Manchester.

Manchester dares to be different, original, modern. Architects know this about the place. Some of the best and boldest architects in Britain and, increasingly, in Europe are attracted by the partnership approach the city is famous for. Architects such as Will Alsop, whose 'Big Blue' building for the city council in Marseilles, South of France, revolutionised the way such commissions are seen today. Architects like FAT and de Metz Forbes Knight (dMFK), who have been chosen by the residents of the Cardroom to design the first two lots of social housing provision that will spread throughout New Islington. On the 16th July 2005, a magazine called *The Architects' Journal* published an important and influential list. It is called '40 under 40', and it's a survey of the best young architecture practices in the country. The Cardroom residents could have done the job for them. FAT and dMFK are on the list, so are quite a few other architects who the residents interviewed for their schemes. The early morning John Lennon Airport team proved they are on the case.

On their trip to the Netherlands they saw schemes by Mecanoo, a high profile practice based in Delft. Mecanoo are now working on a New Islington scheme with a new developer called R-Gen, set up by Fiona McCauly and Phil Summers to specialise in 'green'

architecture, to the highest ecological and sustainable standards. This is an ambition shared with Nick Johnson, the Urban Splash Development Director driving New Islington. "The prospect for New Islington is simple: we want to transform an area perceived as being one of the worst places in the city to live, in to one of the best. And we want it to be the greenest, most sustainable community we can achieve." Architects and developers who come in to New Islington will share the vision. Will Alsop, the man who created the Strategic Framework for the Millennium Community site is clear that its green credentials will be a big part of that vision.

Nobody denies that people in East Manchester have been pushed around in the past and have been variously lied to and let down by politicians and civil servants of every shade and generation. What's so different now? Amongst other things, Manchester is on a roll. What seemed impossible ten years ago now feels utterly achievable. Ancoats was a wreck. Every night was bonfire night. The mills were stripped of everything that could be flogged or melted down. A few people, including architect Ian Finlay, planner Paul Butler, Marilyn Steane of Eastside Regeneration and Peter Pemberton of Express Printers started to kick up a fuss about the state of historic mills, St Peter's Church, the Gun Street Warehouse and others. Ancoats Buildings Preservation Trust was set up. Funds were raised, important buildings enveloped, architect Owen Williams' glorious Express building was refurbished and the extension behind it bought by Carol Ainscow of Artisan Holdings as the first phase of Express Networks. In 1996, Beehive Mill on Jersey Street, home of Sankeys Soap, was the first to be converted for modern use. Ten years on and Ancoats is in a phase where some would argue - with questionable credibility - that gentrification has already gone too far.

Urban Splash ('the best property developer in the Universe', according to *The Guardian*, 25th May 2005) was appointed lead developer of the Cardroom, soon to be New Islington, in 2001. They made Will Alsop their masterplanner and, though things may appear to go slowly, in fact the pace is picking up. The new canal arm is in, Alsop's



Roger Stephenson of Stephenson Bell: delivering a new NHS health centre for New Islington.



Ian Simpson and Rachel Haugh of Ian Simpson Architects: converting the listed Ancoats Hospital Dispensary into 12 apartments and adding two new apartment blocks alongside the canal arm.



MBLC partners survey the site of their new eight storey mini tower in Ancoats.

own Chips apartment building is on site in September, with a building by local big noise Ian Simpson soon to follow. FAT and MMHG are well on with the first houses. Looking north over the Rochdale Canal into Ancoats, the conversion of the Royal Mill complex is well underway, and Murrays Mill will soon be reconfigured in a scheme by Scottish architect Richard Murphy. Looking the other way, south across the Ashton Canal, and Carol Ainscow, and Arconia architects headed by Kim Ebling are creating a development that looks almost as big as New Islington itself. Here Andrew Wallace, an up-and-coming Manchester architect may well have successfully pulled off a tricky building form, a near-circle or oval apartment block.

Momentum is a marvellous thing. The uphill push has been strenuously maintained by Lyn Fenton of Ancoats Urban Village, and her colleagues working with Tom Russell at New East Manchester. Martin Stockley, consulting engineer on New Islington, is part of a development group called Blossom Street Renewal, working up a scheme that includes the Edinburgh Castle pub. Their architect is Christophe Egret who, when he was Design

Director at Alsop Architects was the main author of the Strategic Framework for New Islington.

Ancoats associations are beginning to run deep. MBLC, a leading Manchester practice that designed the gleaming white Siemens HQ building on Princess Parkway has just designed a brand new HQ for itself. Their eight storey mini tower, three storeys for themselves and five for apartments, will be on Bengal Street in Ancoats and is potentially a mould-breaking development. Mould-breaking because the white render tower rises from a base of Cor-Ten steel – rusty metal to you and me. The contrast with its surroundings could not be more sharply drawn, except that the steel base is solidly industrial and, whilst not Manchester brick, the white render surely recalls raw white Manchester cotton.

Back across the Rochdale Canal Taylor Woodrow are developers of apartments designed by ShedKM, the Liverpool practice imaginatively re-working terraced housing on the Langworthy estate in Salford. One of the first buildings on site in New Islington will be a NHS health centre designed with his usual



Site visit: Kim Ebling of Arconia at Eastside Valley, an impressive development of offices and apartments.

Make no mistake... our city will be host to an impromptu and ongoing architectural expo that those who did not take part will be jealous of.

attention to detail by Manchester architect Roger Stephenson, of Stephenson Bell. Moving up the Ashton Canal corridor to Eastlands, quality and imagination will be benchmarked all the way to the Stadium and beyond. Already there's a swathe of funky new houses by Lovell in Beswick that not only look good but also use efficient money saving Combined Heat and Power systems. Thomas Heatherwick's massive sculptural explosion of energy at Sportcity might as suitably be titled 'B of the Building' as 'B of the Bang'. Not since the end of the nineteenth century has Manchester seen development on this scale, enterprise and ambition.

Extraordinary that Ancoats, epicentre of the explosion that rocked the industrialising world should again be the centre of seismic upheaval. Make no mistake, in five or ten years time Ancoats Urban Village, New Islington and New East Manchester as a whole are set to attract more of the best developers and architects from Britain and abroad. Our city will be host to an ongoing architecture expo that others will be jealous of. It will not be without problems. New Islington and Ancoats Urban Village sit either side of the Rochdale Canal and the historic wall of mills on Redhill Street. The two areas do not easily interconnect, and the physical barriers can't be removed. Throughout their development this will need to be borne in mind and dealt with, and at least they'll connect in terms of shared quality and ambition.

Not long ago people would tell me that Ancoats mills were torched by people who legged it back across the canal into the Cardroom estate. True or false, it's history. The whole point about the careful redevelopment of New East Manchester is connectivity; putting areas back together again and reconnecting the city. It isn't easy, which is why only the best, most imaginative and boldest people need apply. The opportunity to make Ancoats and East Manchester great and thriving places again is too rich to mess up. It would be tragic if 4.30 am at John Lennon Airport in January 2004 turned out to be a false dawn. It will not happen.

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# Made in (East) Manchester

**Despite a catastrophic industrial decline, plenty of businesses continue to thrive in East Manchester. Len Grant finds out who's making what.**

A decade ago East Manchester was described as an economic black hole. Since the early 1970s dozens of firms had closed, thousands of jobs were lost and there was little hope for a reversal of fortune.

"We had locomotive manufacturers, steelworkers, a jam factory, loads of heavy engineering... really big stuff," recalls one Openshaw resident. "There were lots of jobs, everyone was working. Then in the 80s the big crunch came and when it went, by golly, it went big style."

With soaring unemployment and a shrinking population this industrial decline led directly to the social and economic problems that are now being tackled by the regeneration agencies.

In the past three decades two out of three jobs have disappeared and whereas 60% of the workforce were employed in manufacturing at the beginning of the 70s, only 30% are employed in the sector now.

Like the rest of the UK, the service industry has overtaken manufacturing as the dominant industrial sector. In East Manchester companies like Wormald Fire Systems who have their head office here and Fujitsu, whose service arm supports their computer operations, are major employers. Fujitsu are the first tenants in the new Central Park, a 450-acre business park in Newton Heath that will soon be a significant source of local employment.

Whereas heavy engineering, chemicals

and textiles dominated the manufacturing scene a generation ago with giants like Bayer Peacock, English Steel and Bradford Colliery, now the tendency is for smaller firms tucked away on smaller trading estates or in old mills. Only 1% of East Manchester companies now employ more than 200 workers.

Typical of dozens of specialist local firms is bespoke joiners, Kays Joinery. From an industrial unit off the busy Bradford Road they make 'anything you want in wood'.

"We're getting work now because of all the new developments," explains the firm's founder, Stephen Kay. "The New Islington contractor is using us to prepare the second-hand oak railway sleepers used as part of the new road surface for Old Mill Street."

Fine Castings, housed in a redundant Conservative Club on Oldham Road, supply plaster cornices and ceiling roses for interior refurbishments as well as exporting their impressive plaster statues all over the world. "We did well out of the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's famous David sculpture last year," recalls owner Shane O'Brian, "we sold loads of 'David heads' to the Italians."

Where things are still being made in large quantities, it's electrical machinery, paper products and food processing that are the key players. Sonoco Consumer Products is the world's largest manufacturer of paperboard cans, and their East Manchester production lines work 24 hours a day, producing 60





Made in Manchester



million of these cans each year.

"We've got over 120 people working here," says Lee Yates, Sonoco's Plant Manager, "and three-quarters of them live within a five mile radius. Most have been with the company for over 20 years. It's a very loyal workforce."

Seamark, a processor of seafood products, already has two factories in the area and are just completing a new distribution centre and an eagerly-awaited, 550-seater Thai restaurant. And tucked away down a back street in Clayton, there's a bakery where they've been baking the daily bread for over 50 years.

"Before we took over 25 years ago, it used to be Price's Brothers," explains Greggs' Managing Director, Ian Pegg. "so we inherited an already skilful workforce."

From their Clayton base Greggs' workers produce the whole range of bakery and confectionery products for 130 high street shops from Blackpool to Stoke.

Practically next door, Air Products occupy a site on Clayton Lane that has been making chemicals since 1892. "We're a bit of a gem here," says Plant Manager Richard Marks. "In

an otherwise depressed UK chemical industry, we've actually doubled our volumes in the last five years."

Although East Manchester will never again be one of the 'workshops of the world', the so-called economic indicators are pointing in the right direction. Unemployment, once nearly the worst in the country, is now on a par with the rest of Manchester, although still above the national average.

Local jobs have come on stream again in recent years: 95% of Asda Walmart's employees are from the surrounding area. Central Park will eventually create an estimated 10,000 new jobs and the new retail, hotel and residential development alongside Sportcity will provide employment for many more.

When Metrolink arrives, as surely it must, East Manchester will experience another boost as doing business in this part of town makes even greater sense to developers and investors.

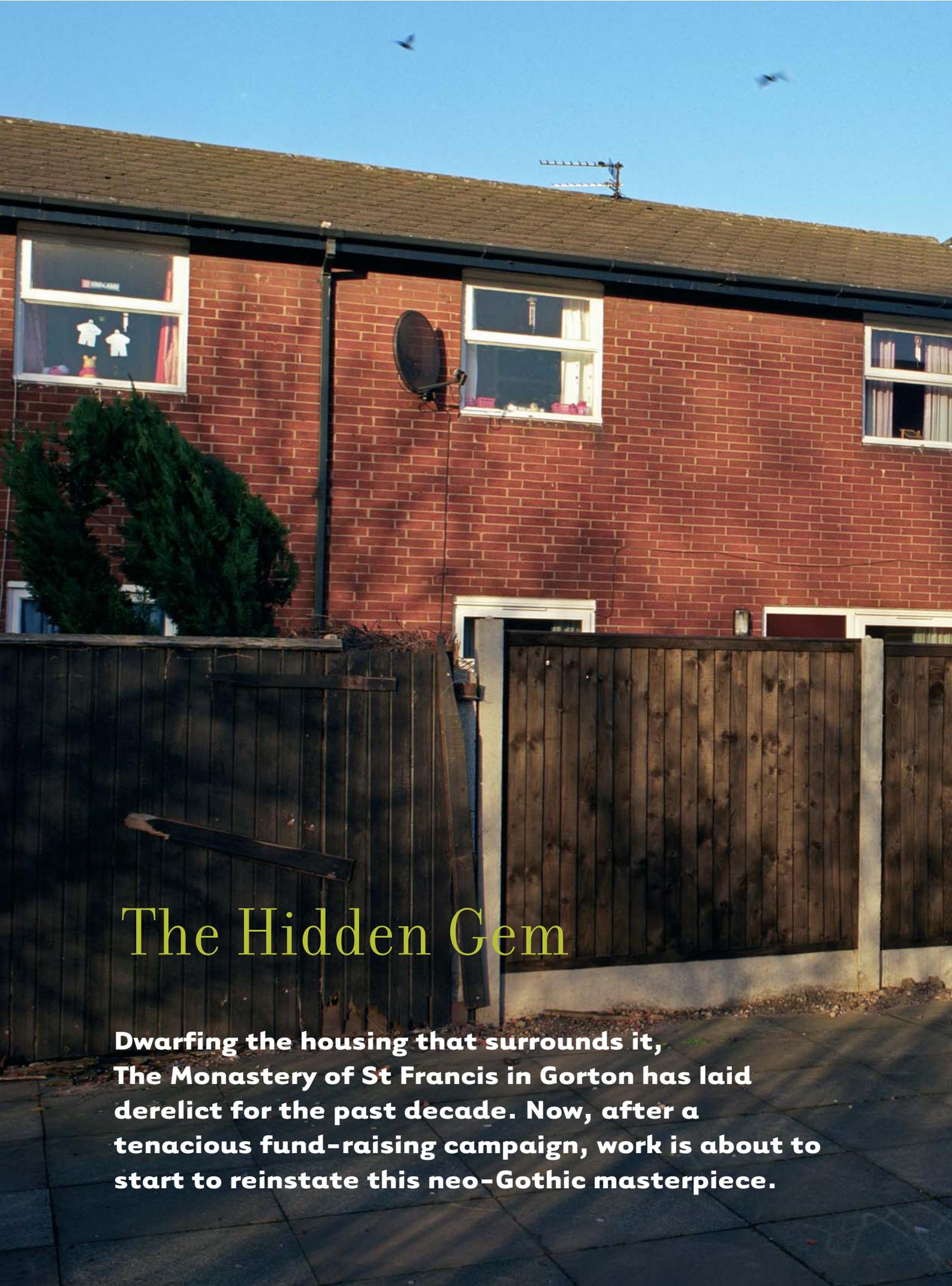


14,000 tonnes of epoxy resin are manufactured annually at Air Products in Clayton and exported across the globe.





New local bench-hand joiners have been trained by Kays Joiney in Miles Platting.



## The Hidden Gem

**Dwarfing the housing that surrounds it, The Monastery of St Francis in Gorton has laid derelict for the past decade. Now, after a tenacious fund-raising campaign, work is about to start to reinstate this neo-Gothic masterpiece.**





DEUS MEUS ET OMNIA

Plastic sheeting protects much of the floor from pigeons. Hardboard protects most of the windows from vandals. Half melted candles remain as remnants of the latest fund-raising open day.

This is Gorton Monastery and now after eight years of relentless funding bids and rewritten business plans, the Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust have announced that all the money is now in place for this remarkable church to be restored.

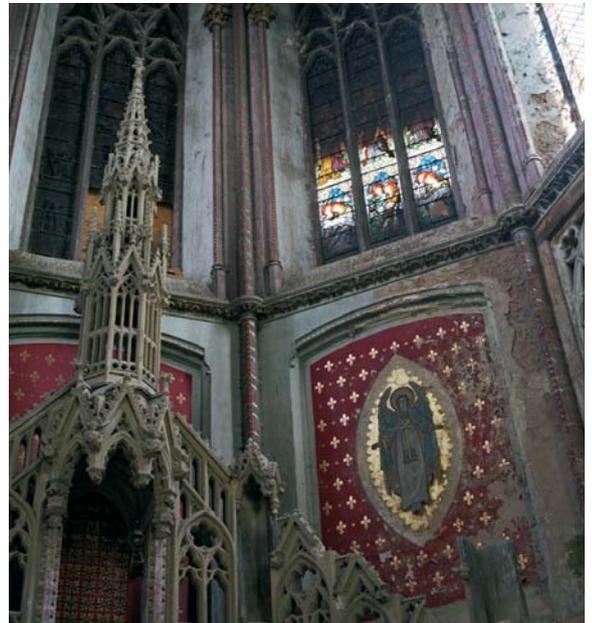
Originally commissioned by Franciscan Friars, who arrived in Gorton in 1861, the monastery was designed by E W Pugin, whose father was the architect for the Houses of Parliament. The church and adjoining friary were opened in 1872, five years before Manchester Town Hall was completed.

For over a century the church was a focal point for the community providing schools, theatres and music groups until, in the 1980s, the friars were eventually forced to sell the mighty structure to property developers for apartments.

That plan fell through, the developers sold off many valuable fittings and the church was left to the vandals and the elements. The Monastery even joined the Taj Mahal and Pompeii on the list of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the World. Twelve statues of saints were saved from export to America as garden ornaments and are now in storage awaiting their reinstatement in the nave.

When work is completed in 2007, the church will be the centrepiece of a larger plan for the site with education, training and health facilities, and will once again be the centre for the Gorton community.

L.G.

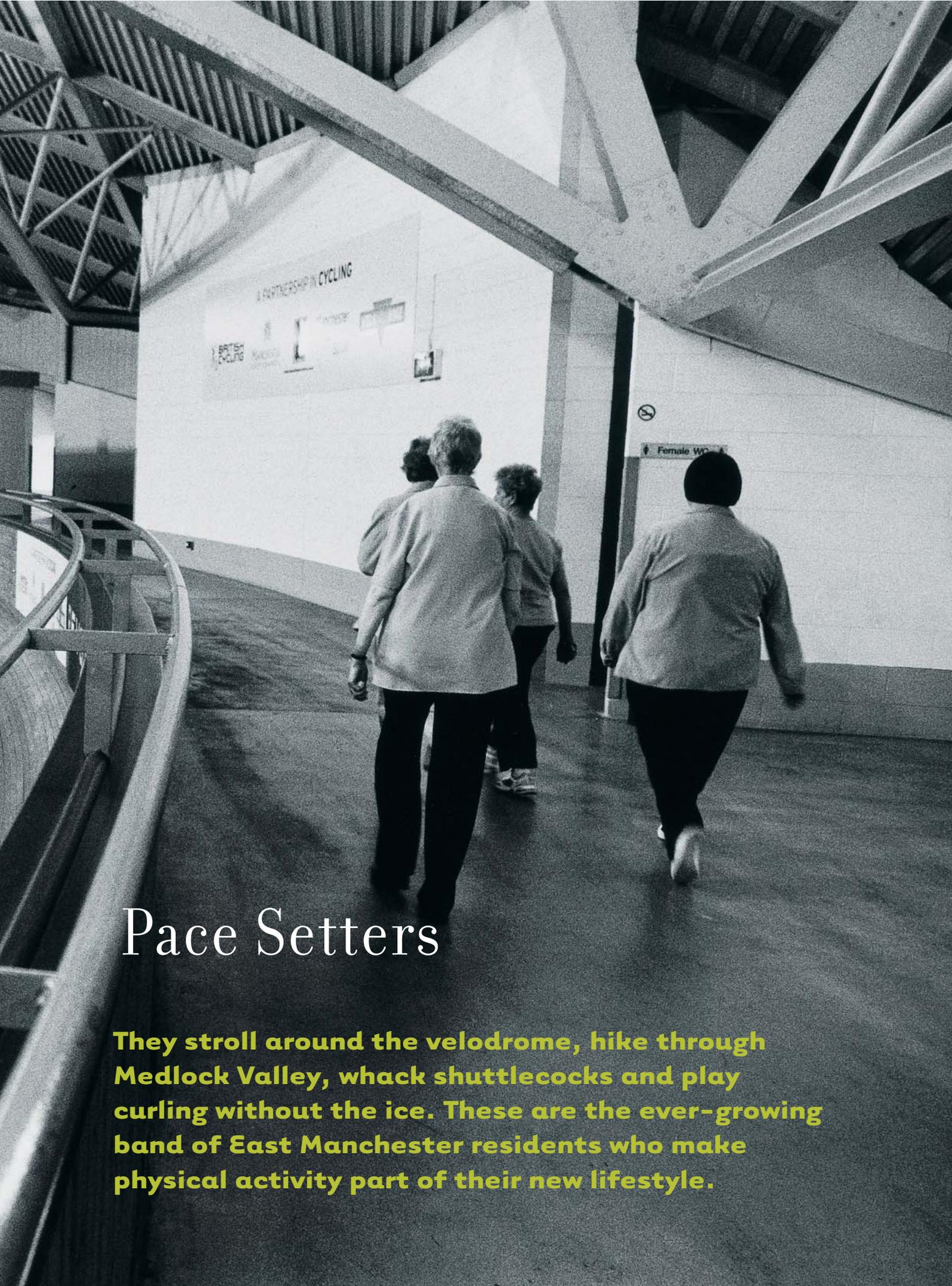




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# Pace Setters

**They stroll around the velodrome, hike through Medlock Valley, whack shuttlecocks and play curling without the ice. These are the ever-growing band of East Manchester residents who make physical activity part of their new lifestyle.**



**“This is a new lease of life for me, a second chance. And you just can’t do it without people like Craig, no way.”**

Never a smoker or heavy drinker, Bill Ronson’s heart attack at the end of last year came out of the blue. Retired for only 18 months, he found himself in North Manchester Hospital fighting for his life. “Yes, it was touch and go for a while,” he recalls, “very frightening.

“After I came out of hospital I had six weeks rest and then I started 12 weeks of rehab at the Cornerstone Centre in Beswick. That’s where I met Craig.”

Craig Jones works for PACE, the Physical Activity and Community Exercise team based out of Newton Heath Health Centre. It’s his job to sign up new recruits to the PACE programme of physical activity. People can call up and join the scheme themselves or they can be referred by their own doctor.

Craig, and two others like him working across North and East Manchester, assess each new recruit. Lifestyle options are discussed and checks made on weight, blood pressure and body fat. Then it’s a programme of activity which can include anything from digging an allotment to a gentle walk around the velodrome while the Great Britain cycling team speed around on their training session.

“We’ve recruited over 1000 new people in the last two years,” explains Ann Inman, the PACE manager, “and, like Bill, they will all be monitored as they go through the programme.”

Bizarrely 80% of us think we do enough exercise although studies show that only 30% of us actually do. “We have a huge educational role too,” says Ann. “We have to keep pushing the benefits of exercise and offering ways for people to enjoy it too.”

Each week trained health walk leaders take groups of walkers on trails through the Medlock Valley and other locations in the area. Different routes for different abilities, but all with the intention of getting people out there, doing something. So far 11,000 strollers have joined this Stepping Out programme, enjoying the social aspect of a group walk as well as feeling the health benefits.

Bill’s looking forward to his new regime of physical activity. “I love walking, I really do. I could walk for England,” he says. “I think this idea of keeping active is just brilliant and it’s good to know they will be keeping an eye on me along the way.”

On reflection, Bill puts his illness down to a stressful job and an overindulgent diet. “I’d spent all my working life in the Manchester Abattoir. Shifting carcasses of meat around from 3 am each day was probably too much of a strain on my heart. And then there’s all the steaks and chops from work, eating all that fat. I just don’t do that any more.

“This is a new lease of life for me, a second chance. And you just can’t do it without people like Craig, no way.”

L.G.

*The PACE group, part of North Manchester Primary Health Care Trust, can be contacted on 0161 681 0940 at Newton Heath Health Centre, 2 Old Church Street, Newton Heath, Manchester, M40 2JF.*

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URBAN SPLASH

## About East

We launched our first issue of **East** one cold February lunchtime at The Kippax, a local pub that Len Grant had featured in an article about local businesses benefiting from Manchester City's move to the stadium. Since then thousands of readers have been educated and entertained by the articles and photographs about how East Manchester is changing for the better.

There has been much progress in this part of town over the last few months. The first residents have moved into new houses and apartments in Beswick. They are the trailblazers for 1100 new homes in an area that, not so long ago, was blighted by poor housing and an even poorer image. As well as home buyers from outside the area taking advantage of East Manchester's facilities and Beswick's proximity to the city, dozens of new properties are being snapped up by local people whose roots are here and who want to stay.

Across East Manchester, Central Park, a sprawling business park in Newton Heath, is well under way. In June Fujitsu moved their 900 staff into three impressive purpose-built office blocks, and a new transport interchange is nearing completion. This includes a copper-clad canopy over a new Metrolink station and a new road link from Oldham Road.

Manchester's universities will come into East Manchester for the first time at One Central Park where postgraduates will conduct research alongside the New Technology Institute run by MANCAT and new business incubation space managed by Manchester Science Park. Now providing hundreds of construction jobs, Central Park will eventually become a hub of innovation and technology, creating long term employment for thousands more.

As Phil Griffin reports in East Expo in this issue, there is mounting interest in the Millennium Community of New Islington. Since the Will Alsop masterplan was unveiled, architects and developers have been scrambling to get involved. Physical changes to the area are beginning to emerge and already many of the apartments in Alsop's Chips building have been sold before the first foundation pile has been sunk.

**East** will follow the developments in New Islington, Central Park and across the whole of New East Manchester, highlighting the progress being made in what must be one of the country's most fast-moving and imaginative regeneration programmes.

Tom Russell  
New East Manchester Ltd

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## Contributors in this issue

**Len Grant** is a freelance photographer based in Manchester. For the past decade or so he has made regeneration the subject of his personal and commissioned work. In 2003 a retrospective exhibition, *Making Manchester 1990-2003* was held at CUBE. Last year he produced books about the work of Groundwork in East Manchester; the redevelopment of the Cardroom estate into New Islington, and a book about the demolition of Maine Road football ground in Moss Side. See also [www.lengrant.co.uk](http://www.lengrant.co.uk).

**Phil Griffin** is a writer and broadcaster with a special interest in architecture and urban issues. He worked for Piccadilly Radio from 1974 to 1978 and Granada Television throughout the 1980s. He wrote the column *Archisnap* for *City Life* for eight years. He was born in Ancoats.

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**In this issue of East:**

Phil Griffin checks out the architectural heavyweights shaping our city; local manufacturing is alive and well; Gorton Monastery gears up for a major facelift; and residents get fit with PACE.

