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# east



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the magazine about regeneration in east manchester





# Gothic Revival

## **Phil Griffin visits the imposing Gorton Monastery and meets the woman whose dedicated team has saved an architectural gem.**

**Its abandonment and decay were too much a symbol of the decline of the neighbourhood.**

A.W.N. Pugin, father of the architect of St Francis Church and Monastery Gorton invented the Gothic revival in Britain and made soft soap romantics of hard-nosed Victorians. Look inside the Houses of Parliament or at the clock tower that houses Big Ben. These Pugin designs from the middle of the nineteenth century conjure a world that had not existed for five hundred years. Pugin dealt in medieval iconography, chivalry, worship and ritual. The House of Lords, opened in 1847, was designed as railways spanned the globe and people were learning instant communication via telegraph.

As the modern globalised world burst into view, especially in Manchester and particularly in the 1840s, Pugin stoked his medieval, pre-Reformation revival. He wanted castles and courts, chivalry and fear of God. Pugin harked back to pre-industrial days, and he did so as the tall chimneys of Manchester belched smoke over their world. Pugin invented a romantic view based on medieval Europe and the Roman Catholic Church. His sons took up his cause. The elder, E.W. Pugin helped Franciscan monks build their church and monastery, in the Gothic romantic style, in Gorton in the 1860s. The Franciscan order eventually abandoned the building in the 1980s and a dedicated band of the supporters of St Francis Church and Monastery has triumphantly rescued the building and transformed it for the use of future generations.

The building, if not the monks, is back. It is a landmark. Its abandonment and decay were too much a symbol of the decline of the neighbourhood. St Francis is not tucked away. It is no hidden gem. It is a massive structure towering over Gorton Lane, and its condition is very obviously a symbol of the community.

Elaine Griffiths... brought a seriously wrecked building back into the community.

The church of St Francis said a lot about the Franciscan order. Various protestant and non-conformist places of worship down the road in Manchester could take what modern modest form they liked. Franciscans, like the Catholic Jesuits at the Holy Name, were with Pugin; build as big, high and elaborate as you can. Restore old values. Victorian Catholics thought the sun would never set on their high altars.

In the late 1980s the Franciscans sold the Gorton church and monastery buildings to cowboys who said they would convert them to apartments. Instead, they stripped out every bit of statuary and religious iconography, and all the valuable scrap they could lay hands on. When the developer, Zodeco, went into receivership what money it had was safely offshore. St Francis Gorton fell into the hands of receivers, Royal Bank of Scotland. It made its first appearance on the Buildings at Risk register. Friends of the Earth set up a well intentioned squat. Gorton families far and wide mourned the state of the extraordinary church of their childhood. They included Paul and Elaine Griffiths. Paul had been one of hundreds, if not thousands of altar boys who had rung the offertory bells at St Francis. When they read about the church's plight Paul and Elaine went to Gorton Lane to take a look.

Paul and Elaine Griffiths have worked in marketing in the food industry. They've had many clients over the years, including the Danish Food Centre on Cross Street in Manchester. This place is famous for the impression it made in the city in the 1970s. Its charismatic boss was Borg Ruby, and he, his son and daughter-in-law now run the mini-chain of bars in the city called Kro. These have got nothing to do with the story of Gorton Monastery, but they have a lot to do





**6 east** The restoration of the Monastery of St Francis in Gorton is essentially complete,



although a fundraising campaign to raise £1 million to restore the magnificent altar and replace missing statues is now underway.

**“We’ve rescued the building, now we must prove it’s sustainable. We are a regeneration company, and we must make the building work.”**

with changes that have taken place in Manchester across the last decade or so. In Manchester people can make a difference. It doesn’t matter where you are from, or what drives you, there is scope in the city to move projects forward. Elaine Griffiths decided that Gorton Monastery was a project she wanted to be part of. She brought her marketing skills to bear on a building that had had the stuffing knocked out of it. Elaine saw very clearly that the old proud church of St Francis and the people that can see it from their windows and pavements are one and the same.

You can build a community around a snooker hall, shopping parade, public baths or park shelter. You can whip up enthusiasm and grow self-esteem. Maybe all that’s needed is a little bit of leadership. I remember hearing an American regeneration worker talking at a seminar in Liverpool in the early 1980s, before the word ‘regeneration’ was on everyone’s lips. He was asked about leadership and who provides it. “Watch out for the old lady in weird sneakers who stands outside City Hall every morning, handing out leaflets. Odds on she’d be the best leader you’ve ever had.” Not old, no visible sneakers, but when Elaine Griffiths hands out leaflets they are really very striking, like the beautiful ‘Glorious Gorton: An Historical Storyboard of Gorton’s Heritage’. Elaine is tall and frankly attractive. If she asks you to do something, you do it, and thank her for the task. From the first moment of her engagement with St Francis she was proud of the place. She wore it like a badge, and she bore it into high places. She sorted the bank, the city council and English Heritage. She took St Francis to market, without even knowing what the market was.

“We bought the church back from the receivers for £1,” Elaine tells me on a July morning when she’s just waved bye bye to Simon Thurley. He’s the high-profile director of English Heritage and he’s just been up on a tour of inspection. Elaine has breezed him round. They’ve seen the new catering facilities, the pristine new meeting rooms with broadband terminals and suitably ecclesiastical-style light fittings. They’ve seen the refurbished “private chapel”, just right for corporate team building. They’ve clicked around the cloisters and considered the floor in the nave. They’ve discussed the high altar. “Possibly irredeemable. A lot of money, and we’re not re-opening as a church.” Elaine agrees with Simon on all points. Not because she feels she should – he is after all,

one of the holders of the purse strings – but because she’s already thought it through.

The key is the Angels Centre, an adapted primary school just around the corner from St Francis, in Endcott Close. The Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust has its office here, and gets on with a whole spectrum of community stuff, from painting for the elderly to parenting classes. Elaine and co-workers, such as Community Co-ordinator David Gray, Arts and Education Director Ilma Scantlebury, Heritage Director Tony Hurley, and Project Co-ordinator Irma Aslam, have run valuable and effective schemes alongside the church restoration. “We’ve rescued the building, now we must prove it’s sustainable. We are a regeneration company, and we must make the building work.” She has brought a seriously wrecked building back into the community, first by placing a high value on it as a ruin, and then by inventing its future, as a multi-purpose space of huge drama and distinction. Not many people could have done that. A background in marketing, and an insight into the can-do world of the likes of Borg Ruby and others in Manchester have helped Elaine to move a chronically sick building into recovery.

A woman was on the local TV news not long ago, talking about the plight of a much-loved Victorian church in her neighbourhood. She told the reporter, “We need young people to come back to mass, to preserve our heritage.” Her faith may need it but, with all due respect to her, this is not necessarily what is going to save the church. In the case of St Francis Gorton Elaine Griffiths turned out to be the leader at the door (without the weird trainers) handing out leaflets. What needs to happen now is the positive response of people citywide. St Francis is a great place for a corporate dinner, a party, recital, presentation, special night. The Gorton Philharmonic Orchestra, the oldest such amateur orchestra in the country, ten years senior to the Hallé, has already performed here. St Francis has seen its first catwalk show. Next year, the complex will start to programme throughout the year. Right now, Elaine and her team are testing the market, seeing what the building can do. Thanks to their inspired work the fabric of St Francis church and monastery is saved and secure for people in Gorton to visit and to use for years to come. It will not intimidate them, for its future is fully inclusive. That’s what I call heritage.



The Monastery is now set to become one of Manchester's premier conferencing and event venues.

# Bang On!

## Len Grant witnesses an invasion of Brazilian drummers and dancers into Openshaw.

The younger members of the band are already beating out a contagious rhythm that bounces around Crossley House's sports hall in Openshaw. The band leader, Zac Sargent, shows the way with a large bass drum slung over one shoulder.

Tonight is no ordinary practice night for east Manchester's Bloco Novo drummers and dancers. There is anticipation as they await the arrival of Maracatudo Camaleao, a Brazilian touring band who are in the North West to appear at an international street festival in Liverpool.

"We're going to the Brouhaha festival too this weekend," explains Zac, "so the parade organisers have set up this special masterclass for us."

Drums of all sizes are carried in as the musicians arrive, all sporting their red tour T-shirts. After the introductions Maracatudo Camaleao get to work with the youngsters on a piece that the two bands will play together at the parade. The Bloco Novo dancers learn new routines from the Brazilian visitors and – as the room pulsates with an ear-splitting beat – they all look as if they've been performing together for years.

Maracatudo is a style of music from north-east Brazil which involves drumming, dancing and parading. It's closely linked with Afro-Brazilian religion and the whole style is derived from a ceremony called 'The King of Congo Coronation' performed by African slaves to choose their leader.

After a break the junior band make way for the senior members and the beat goes on with more of the professional drummers joining the ever-increasing circle of musicians.

"It was brilliant," declares Zac afterwards, "it's been very special and they've showed us some really interesting stuff. They were really great with the young ones too, so they got a taste of the real deal."

"Bloco Novo has been going for three years and in that time we've developed from complete beginners to a performing band."

It's been brilliant."

*Bloco Novo practise every Thursday during term time at Crossley House, Ashton Old Road, Openshaw. New musicians and dancers are always welcome. Contact Kelly Allen on 230 6313. See and hear the band in action at [myspace.com/bloconovo1](http://myspace.com/bloconovo1).*

...they all look as if they've been performing together for years.









# Listen Up!

## **Louise Tickle sits in on ALL FM's new east Manchester show and discovers the latest radio talent.**

Once the show's wrapped up, the adrenaline rush subsides and both presenters relax...

"Oooh, we're going to give Sean some right dirty horrible nasty questions!" chortles Paul Graham gleefully into his microphone. Twiddling a knob or three and making sure the faders are up, his co-presenter Danielle Porter nods a welcome to the latest guest to park his bottom on the hotseat at the ALL FM East Manchester Community Show.

Sean McGonigle, co-ordinator of New Deal for Communities at New East Manchester, allows himself a small smile back.

Booted and suited, and therefore looking rather smarter than the casually dressed duo in the studio, McGonigle is about to be quizzed live on air by the show's listeners. Some have sent in email queries, others have had their burning questions recorded by the production team, ready for playback as the man in charge of the regeneration purse-strings makes his monthly appearance on the show.

First up is an east Manchester resident asking why some 'slum flats' haven't yet been demolished. She believes they're bringing down the neighbourhood.

McGonigle draws a breath. "I dispute that the flats in those areas are slum flats," he answers clearly, "and my opinion is that they still provide good quality accommodation. It's the people who live in them that can be the problem."

No punches pulled there then.

Paul pushes him on whether all the worst housing in east Manchester really has been improved or, alternatively, pulled down, but McGonigle is adamant that the building and refurbishment programme is on track, and the holy grail of mixed social and private housing will be achieved.

What about the big new Tesco that was going to be built in Gorton and that still hasn't appeared, asks another listener plaintively, who has clearly travelled east from his home city.

"Well, it's good to hear another Scouse accent," says McGonigle with a grin, before explaining that Tesco is still committed to the Gorton store and is currently consulting on its plans.

Suddenly the time for the interview has run out, there's handshakes and thanks all round and McGonigle nips off (closing the studio door quietly) to his next meeting. Danielle and Paul start a jokey riff about the outside broadcast that they worked on the previous weekend at the New Islington Festival and, as with all live radio shows, it's swiftly onto the next item.

Like a duck swimming along seemingly calmly yet paddling madly underwater, the on-air banter is relaxed, but 'backstage', the running of the show is fast and furious. Watching what happens in the moments when a song is playing and the presenters aren't on air is fascinating, with Paul and Danielle grabbing at CDs for the next music slot, working out timings to the second and settling in their various interviewees. The second the mic light flares red, it's back to interspersing casual chit chat with a fair old dose of mickey-taking and regular nuggets of community information.

Once the show's wrapped up however, the adrenaline rush subsides and both presenters relax as they explain what ALL FM in east Manchester is about.

Making accountable the people who spend millions of pounds of public money to

ALL FM's east Manchester presenters, Paul Graham and Danielle Porter.

deliver regeneration is a vital strand of what this community radio station does, but it's not the whole story. Having established itself successfully in Levenshulme, the east Manchester satellite and training wing of ALL FM aims to recruit and train volunteers in the IT skills needed to produce and present a radio show to neighbours, friends and relatives.

"We show them how to interview, how to edit and how to run the desk in the studio. It's a creative, fun way to learn IT skills," explains Paul Graham, who, when he's not grilling guests, is one half of the community engagement team at ALL FM in east Manchester.

"Anyone can come – we're especially looking for over-50s," adds his colleague Danielle. "There's a course accredited by MANCAT, which helps people learn to plan, prepare, produce and present. They practise all the basics, then do a live half hour broadcast each at the end of the sessions."

It might all sound a bit daunting but Paul is quick to reassure. "We don't just chuck people into the studio and open the mic," he says. "We coach people through a lot of pretend programmes, and at the moment it's one-to-one tuition, though there are plans for small classes in the future."

The training takes place in 10 three-hour sessions over two weeks, and travel expenses can be reimbursed. The medium-term plan is to get local people to produce 10 hours of programming each week that will feed into the main ALL FM schedule. This might sound ambitious, but if the station's past record is anything to go by, 10 hours won't be enough and would-be presenters will be fighting for airtime.

"ALL FM has had around 1000 volunteers over the five years it's been going in Levenshulme, and there are 170 volunteers coming in on a regular basis right now," explains Danielle. "Many of those people have progressed onto paid jobs in radio. One guy works as a sound engineer with Granada; another is working for Radio Four and Five Live; and yet another is a BBC trainee. It's about people getting the confidence to realise that they have skills."

Danielle herself is a perfect example of how the ALL FM training philosophy can work.

Having cut her teeth as a volunteer at the south Manchester base for a year, she was then employed by ALL FM as a trainer, has worked at the BBC and is now part of the launch team for ALL FM in east Manchester.

Before the station went on air in east Manchester, Paul and Danielle had been out and about encouraging local people to come in and give the training studio a whirl.

One of their most enthusiastic tutees has been 45 year-old mum and cleaner Georgina O'Brian who lives in Gorton. She completed the accredited MANCAT course, and now, seemingly still a little breathless from the thrill of co-presenting ALL FM's recent outside broadcast at the New Islington Festival, says she's keen as mustard to carry on learning how to be a radio DJ. She's even created a funky broadcast name: Mis G.

"I was so nervous for the outside broadcast," she laughs, "and everything we wrote down, all the research, all the questions for interviewees just went out the window when it came down to it. It was all in the moment, you had to think on your feet and it was very exciting."

Why has radio broadcasting grabbed her in such a big way?

"Well, I suppose I'm a good talker, so that's a start!" she says. "The thing I love about it is being in control of the whole studio, doing the desk driving, putting your CDs in – you're managing everything that goes out on air and that feels great."

Mis G's first love is music, and so her half-hour end-of-course radio showcase focused on reggae, R&B and calypso, and interviews with local musicians.

"It's given me confidence, because you have to think fast and really concentrate on lots of things at once," she explains. "And we should be getting our own shows soon!"

Move over Paul Graham. Mis G is ready to grab the mic.

*ALL FM broadcasts on 96.9FM and online at [www.allfm.org](http://www.allfm.org). The East Manchester Show with Danielle and Paul is broadcast live on Thursdays 12noon-1pm and repeated on Fridays at 2pm. Contact the show on 0161 230 7945 or [east@allfm.org](mailto:east@allfm.org)*

Above:  
Danielle discusses the running order before the show goes on air.

Below:  
Co-ordinator of New Deal for Communities, Sean McGonigle, is quizzed on regeneration issues.

(all)



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# It's Good to Talk

## As New East Manchester embarks on its largest ever consultation, Len Grant canvasses opinion on the benefits of dialogue.

**“We didn’t want to pretend that the residents were doing the designing...”**

A lot has changed since the 1960s’ slum clearances when thousands of families were moved from sub-standard homes into brand new accommodation with central heating and indoor toilets. Without consultation, many were deposited on sprawling new estates on the edge of their home cities, lured by a countryside location that distanced them from social networks and jobs.

For some years now, however, ‘community-led’ regeneration – where residents help make major decisions about an area’s future – has been the favoured approach and is a key element in the Government’s New Deal for Communities programme. But how did things change and does it really work?

As a junior planner with Manchester City Council in 1973, Barbara McLoughlin recalls a public meeting in Moss Side about the wholesale demolition of homes.

“There were only three of us from the council,” she says, “two planners and the chief executive, who in those days chaired the meetings, plus a couple of hundred angry residents.

“The plans had already been drawn up and although people were asked their opinions it was clear there weren’t going to be any dramatic changes. And that was the extent of the consultation. Quite often the purpose of these gatherings was to convince those with commercial interests – the brewers, shopkeepers and landlords – that things were happening, rather than a genuine attempt to involve and learn from the residents.”

McLoughlin went on to manage the Hulme City Challenge programme and puts much of the improvement in consultation down to the

efforts of motivated individuals and changes in the law.

“Yes, there was a generation of planners, such as myself, who came into planning to work with people, rather than work with plans. And today of course there’s legislation that requires local authorities to consult much more widely than they used to.”

Today, every new scheme starts with display boards set up in the local community centre and residents asked to fill in questionnaires about options A, B and C. Developers and architects come from behind their city centre desks to ask the locals what they really think. Some of those being questioned see it as a paper exercise, another box to tick, but for developers it’s an important process.

“Local knowledge is essential in masterplanning any new project,” says Lis Phelan of Base, the Artisan/Barratt Homes joint venture developing West Gorton, “as it’s only the people that live there who know what is right and what is wrong in their area.

“We take a holistic view of regeneration: it’s not just about bricks and mortar. We consider transport, education, leisure opportunities and jobs, and so consult with lots of different people. You can only get a true insight into an area by talking to other people, it’s crucial.”

But how much influence should residents have, and how much should be imposed on them by the so-called experts?

“We didn’t want to try to pretend that the residents were doing the designing,” says Julian deMetz of dMFK Architects who have recently completed a scheme of 14 new



# Regenera

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School / youth

# ntion Area



Depot

ANTHONY CLOSE

MATTHEW'S STREET

WIGLEY ST

HAYFIELD CL

BENNETT STREET

PW

GREGORY ST

KNIVETON ROAD

Works

ERCALL AVE

REABROOK AVENUE

ROSTRON AVENUE

School

PO

**“People ... want a plan and they want to be convinced it’s the right plan.”**

homes for Manchester Methodist Housing Association in New Islington. “They were involved consultees, if you like.”

dMFK entered a competition, were shortlisted by the client and then chosen by the residents whose new homes they would design. They had a very specific site to work with and a long list of constraints.

“I think what’s happened in this particular situation works quite well,” explains deMetz. “First, the residents interview a bunch of architects and decide which ones they appear to like and think they could get on with. Then we get to know everybody who we’re going to be designing houses for (which for us wasn’t a big deal because they’re all really nice people). When we trust them and they trust us, they really do want to hear what we’ve got to say. From then on we’d like to think we’re more expert than they are in designing buildings, which is why we’re doing what we’re doing.”

Tracey Annette, Resident Liaison Officer at New Deal for Communities in east Manchester, agrees residents need some direction when they turn up to a consultation event, and that trust plays an important part.

“People don’t want a blank piece of paper. They want a plan and they want to be convinced it’s the right plan,” she says. “Most crucially they want the truth that goes with it. There’s no point asking people what their dream home would be if there’s absolutely no way it’s ever going to be delivered.”

Annette is convinced that the consultation event should be just the beginning of a process of dialogue.

“Yes, getting the agencies and the residents together at an event is the best way,” she says, “but we have to be sure that it becomes the start of a partnership process. You need information available on how that process will continue and training on offer so residents can participate fully. They need to feel valued and aware of their role and responsibilities.”

When local homeowner Elaine Wright first attended consultation meetings about her area she was full of mistrust and scepticism.

“I wasn’t very popular at those meetings,” she acknowledges. “I was very aggressive, but that’s because I was very angry at the way our

area had been run down. I’ll never apologise for that because it all came from my heart, not my head.

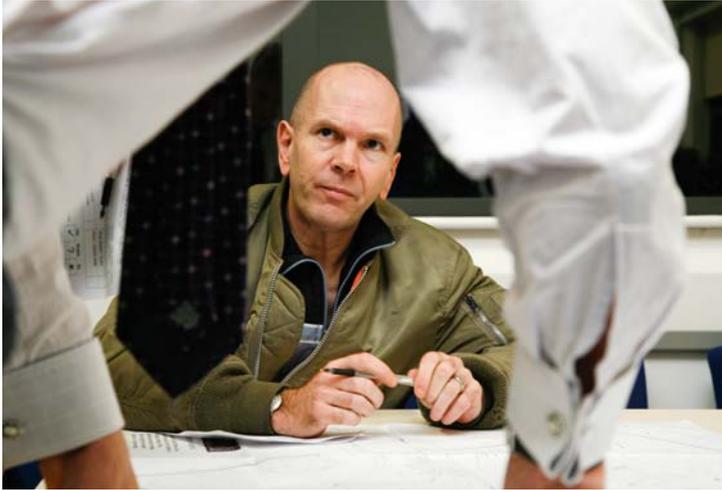
“We were listened to though and things did get done, slowly. All I ever asked for was for someone to sit down and explain what was going on. When New Deal started I was invited to sit on the board which I did but much of it came down to having a good dialogue and building up trust.”

Trust and honesty come up a lot when residents assess what makes a successful consultation. They don’t expect to be involved in the nitty-gritty of design or bombarded with facts and figures: feeling involved and valued is enough.

“Mutual respect between the residents and the regeneration agencies is all-important,” says Rev David Gray, the vice-chair of Communities for Stability, a resident group aimed at giving a voice to those in areas undergoing regeneration. “The residents have to recognise the agencies are expert in what they do, but also the community need to be recognised as experts in what will, and will not, work in their area. Unless these two aspects come together things can go badly wrong and people will feel let down.”

Rev Gray puts many of today’s social problems down to a lack of engagement and consultation during the slum clearances a generation ago.

“Back then people never felt they had a say in their own community, so they disengaged. The politicians had good intentions but also a total lack of understanding of what happens when all the social infrastructure like brass bands, amateur dramatic societies and faith groups is taken away. It caused a kind of community illness that, in a way, society has not yet recovered from. We can’t afford to get it wrong a second time.”





# Comedy divas

**What do you get when you plonk a stand-up comic on an industrial scales down at the fish market? Louise Tickle tells all.**

“My idea of slimming is, buy diet books till you’ve got enough you can stand on to reach the shelf where the biscuits are.”

A fish market bathed in the warmth of a sunny morning has more than a bit of a whiff about it. Put plainly, it reeks.

Undaunted however, Wendy Eaton and photographer Len Grant pick their way across the market’s sluiced-down concrete floor towards an industrial-sized Avery scales at the far end of the building. Wendy peers down at the metal cradle, which has a smelly mush of fish scales in a puddle at the bottom, wrinkles her nose and lets out a huge giggle. “Eeeuurgghh, look at that in there, you never want me to sit in that!” she exclaims. “Oooh, am I cod or a coley? Or a red snapper? Oh dear, let me get my towels!”

As Wendy clammers in and the needle on the scales swings round, Len snaps away and we are regaled with a constant stream of hilarious chat. Sitting in a scales in the New Smithfield Market of a Wednesday morning was not, she exclaims, at all what she expected when she signed up for a free evening class in stand-up comedy.

By day, Wendy Eaton is the manager of Openshaw Community Resource Centre. By night, she now does gigs as a stand-up, using her size as a larger lady as the main theme in her comedy material. Hence the scales and the slimming jokes that are now coming thick and fast.

“One of the jokes I often do as part of my set is about my idea of slimming compared to a man’s idea of slimming,” she says, deadpan.

“A man’s idea of slimming goes like this: eat less, run more.

“My idea of slimming is, buy diet books till you’ve got enough you can stand on to reach the shelf where the biscuits are.”

What prompted her to go on the course?

“It was because I do a lot of presentations as part of work,” she explains. “I thought it might help with that. At first I had no idea of being a comedian, but thought I could use the skills in my job. Now I’m the opposite, I want to be a comedian!”

Wendy is one of 12 people who signed up for the three-month course in stand-up comedy put on last autumn by the Arts and Culture Programme of New Deal for Communities. Once a week, she’d go along to the squash centre at Sportcity to learn about timing, how not to ‘walk on the gag’ so audiences had time to laugh, that you should pause before punchlines, and crucially she says, to notice the detail of the small things that happen in day-to-day life that can be turned into comedy material.

“I could be writing stuff in my head just going around Asda,” she says. “And I always carry a little reporter’s notebook with me, because you might have a brilliant idea for a joke, and you think you’ll remember it, but they taught us on the course that you won’t – and you don’t! – so you have to write it down straightaway.”

Since the sessions finished last December, Wendy has done gigs in Manchester and Ireland, as well as performing to colleagues and service users at the community centre where she works. And she’s not the only one.

Rachel Fairburn works as a library receptionist and says that since doing the course, comedy is now the career path she wants to pursue. After performing in the end-of-term showcase arranged by course tutor



Wendy at work at the Openshaw Community Resource Centre.

**“Funny people can come from absolutely anywhere. There is no place or age or look that dictates whether people can be funny.”**

Ashley Boroda at the Comedy Store, she entered the national ‘So You Think You’re Funny?’ competition and made it to the semi-finals held at the Edinburgh Festival. It was clearly a thrilling experience that has boosted her confidence enormously and she’s been performing ever since.

We meet – not at the fish market, but in an east Manchester alleyway that Len feels would make a good picture – the morning after she’d performed her set at the Frog and Bucket.

“Before I go on I feel terribly nervous, and I don’t hear anything of the set before mine,” she smiles. “You’re nervous because you want to do well. But as soon as you’re up there you forget about the audience and start enjoying yourself, and then they tend to go with you.”

What does she enjoy about the process of creating live comedy?

“I like the idea that you don’t have to rely on anyone else. If things go wrong, it’s your fault. But when they go right, it’s all your own work, so it doubles your sense of achievement.”

What the course has given her, she explains, is the knowledge that she can do things she’d never dreamed she could attempt. “I never thought I’d be standing up in front of people and making them laugh. I’ve got more confidence, and I’ve really got into my writing. I’d love to write for the radio and build up my experience by doing more gigs. I want to do this full time. It’ll take a few years to work up to that, but I’m working on it.”

Ashley Boroda, the stand-up and showbiz agent who proposed the course and is now teaching it second time around to a new

cohort of students, says the great thing about comedy is that people can make it from absolutely any background.

“Funny people can come from absolutely anywhere. There is no place or age or look that dictates whether people can be funny. The stand-up circuit is a genuine start-up point for people’s career in the media. Probably it’s one of the only places where being funny is all that counts.

Not everyone who comes to the evening class wants to be a professional stand-up by any means, however.

“People join because they’re interested in comedy, rather than necessarily in performance, or maybe they want to develop their writing. Others are joining to boost their confidence or to help with presentations at work,” he explains.

Interestingly, Ashley believes that as people get older, they get funnier, and says that this has played out in class, as most participants are over 35.

“As people mature, naturally they have more life experience and they know what’s original and what isn’t. Ricky Gervais is a great example. He didn’t become successful till he was in his late 30s. There are people in their 60s on the circuit who started in their 40s.”

Though he can’t make someone funny, he’ll help to find the funny side in anyone who comes along, he says, and Rachel and Wendy confirm that they received tremendous encouragement and support as they developed their sets.

Is it scary though, standing up that first time in front of people and telling a joke? “Yes, it is a bit scary, but I like that!” says Rachel.

Back at the fish market, the shoot is over and Wendy is climbing off the scales, grinning widely. “My family’s very proud,” she says. “I love it. Every time you go on stage it’s an adventure.”

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Cover: Comedy graduate,  
Rachel Fairburn.

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## About East

As we go to press with another issue of East, we're pleased to announce that New East Manchester has been named Regeneration Agency of the Year at the Regeneration and Renewal Annual Awards. The judges made special mention of the strong social element that runs alongside our physical regeneration. This award acknowledges the hard work and commitment that has been invested in east Manchester by residents, partners and all our staff at New East Manchester. But we haven't just won one award; the judges also recognised the excellent efforts of our Regeneration Assistants scheme in getting local people into local jobs. For that we won the Award for Regeneration Skills Development.

In this issue of East architectural commentator Phil Griffin marks the completion of renovation work at Gorton Monastery by profiling Elaine Griffiths, the head of the Trust that has saved this wonderful building.

Elsewhere Louise Tickle has been following some of east Manchester's cultural innovations. She has been behind the scenes at an ALL FM broadcast and chuckling along to comedian Wendy Eaton as she hits the scales at the local fish market!

During September and October we are undertaking an extensive consultation process to help guide our regeneration efforts over the coming years. We have sent questionnaires to 30,000 homes and are staging 20 drop-in sessions to hear residents' views. In this issue Len Grant reports on the benefits of consultation and asks residents and agencies alike, 'Is it good to talk?'

And finally, we have news of a new book produced by East photographer and editor, Len Grant. *From the Ground Up: New Islington 2001-2007* charts the development of one of east Manchester's most exciting schemes. Len has followed the whole process from poring over the master plan in the local pub to the first residents moving into their award-winning new homes. The book is available online at [www.cornerhouse.org/books](http://www.cornerhouse.org/books) or by calling Cornerhouse Publications on 0161 200 1503, priced £13.00.

Tom Russell  
New East Manchester Ltd

Sean McGonigle  
New Deal for Communities

## 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. His latest book, *From the Ground Up: New Islington 2001-2007*, has recently been published, charting the development of east Manchester's Millennium Community. Also see [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.

**Louise Tickle** is a freelance journalist based near Manchester. She regularly contributes features to a range of newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Community Care*, *NW Business Insider*, *Developments* and *Teachers*. Her particular interests include social justice, education, fair trade and emerging solutions to the environmental crisis.

## Acknowledgements

Len Grant would like to thank J. Sykes and Sons Ltd at the New Smithfield Market and everyone who appears in this edition of **East**.

**In this issue of East:**

Louise Tickle listens in to ALL FM and has a laugh with the comedy divas; Phil Griffin reports on a monastery's saviour; the Brazilians drop into Openshaw; and Len Grant asks, 'What's the use of consultation?'

