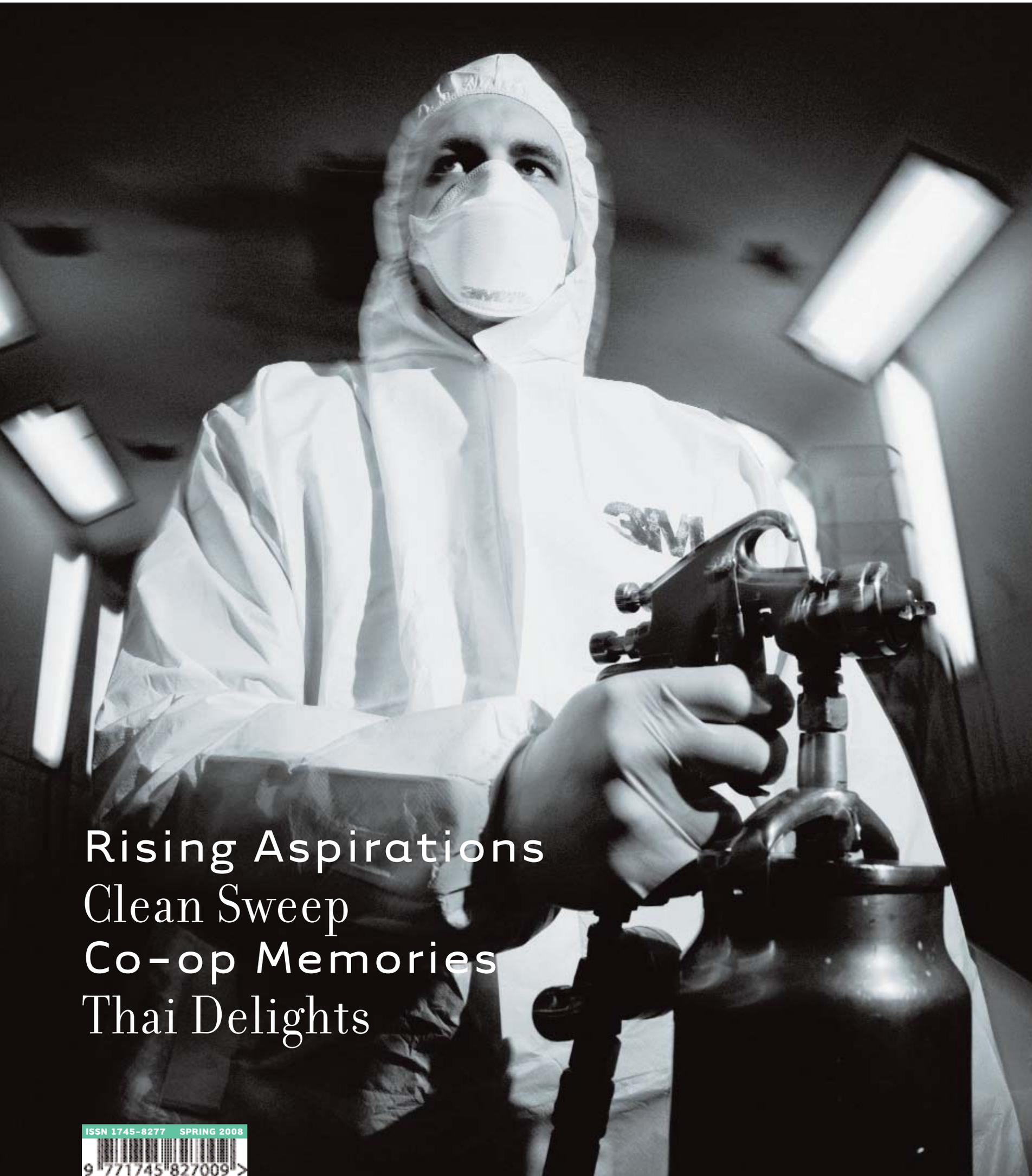


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east



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Co-op Memories
Thai Delights

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the magazine about regeneration in east manchester

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Clean Sweep

Once home to the boilermakers, steelworkers and engineers of east Manchester, these houses are no longer considered fit for the 21st century. Len Grant follows the fall and rise of Toxteth Street.



Toxteth Street experienced the spiral of decline and deprivation which characterised many inner cities: poor housing, problem residents and high levels of anti-social behaviour.

Of the seven houses on Norman Gurley's stretch of Toxteth Street only two are left occupied. The rest are boarded up, some with signs declaring that 'all material of any value has been removed'. Next door is optimistically advertised as being for sale or rent but has been empty for eight years and, like its vacant neighbours, is now uninhabitable.

In the front room of his two-up two-down 73-year-old Norman describes the new house he'll move into before the end of the year, now being built no more than 50 metres from his back gate, as part of the Housing Market Renewal Programme which will see over 500 terraced houses like his replaced by 430 new homes in a phased programme of demolition and construction.

"It'll be two-bedroomed but with a garden and somewhere to park the car," he says. "There's a space on the ground floor where I can install a lift, if I need it later." On a plan of phase one he shows where his house will fit into the bigger picture: "There'll be a three- or four-bedroomed house next to me. So I guess I'll have a family as neighbours."

They call it Toxteth Street but this area of Openshaw in east Manchester, right on the city's boundary, is more than one street. It's a grid of tightly-packed back-to-backs with Toxteth Street as its spine.

At the peak of the manufacturing heyday every home would have been occupied. Streams of men would flow to work at giants like English Steel or Ferguson and Pailin whilst housewives would 'donkey stone' the front step or chat over the back gate. Every stereotype of the northern industrial 'good old days' would have been played out on Silverdale, Gransmoor and Cheeryble Streets, so much so that the 1999 film, *East is East*, was shot here: Bowness Street rolled back in time to resemble working-class Salford at the beginning of the 70s.

Many factors have influenced the area's demise. Clearly the collapse of the manufacturing economy has meant that those who could have moved elsewhere. Some with growing families emigrated over the border to Tameside where larger family housing was available. Some kept their terraced house but moved away and rented it out with little experience of managing a property at arm's length.

Norman Gurley follows progress as Lovells start work on his new home.

By the end of the millennium, while other parts of east Manchester were gearing up for the XII Commonwealth Games, an increasing number of empty properties were appearing on Toxteth Street. Home owners were suffering negative equity and entrepreneurs looking for a quick killing were buying houses cheap and letting them to tenants who had little connection with or interest in the area.

Toxteth Street experienced the spiral of decline and deprivation which characterised many inner cities: poor housing, problem residents and high levels of anti-social behaviour.

It was exactly this deprivation that led a group of young people from the Salvation Army to move to Openshaw in 2000 and live amongst the community.

"Helping communities regenerate has been at the heart of what the Salvation Army is about," explains Church and Project Leader, Sam Ward. "We were looking for an estate that needed help and found it here."

Sam and his team resurrected a derelict Salvation Army mission hall on the edge of the area – and began offering youth clubs, parent counselling classes and family support for residents.

"There was such a feeling of hopelessness," he says. "Children just couldn't see the point of going to school or seeking out further education. They felt they had no hope of ever getting a job because their parents had never had a job. I really don't see any point in regenerating housing and building new schools if you don't regenerate the person as well. That's why I think our work amongst the community is so important."

Sam and his colleagues became involved with the regeneration process not just as residents but as advocates for those less willing or able to express their views. He reluctantly agrees with the decision to demolish. "They're beautiful and well-built," he says, "but too many of these houses are in disrepair now. Keeping this number is just not sustainable."

The clean sweep approach has been advocated by the Housing Market Renewal Team (HMRT) for some time, based on the overall aspirations of the east Manchester







Sam Ward of the Eden Project: "There's still work for us to do here."

Now, at last, things are moving. The diggers are out and residents and construction staff have posed for the photocall on the new foundations.

regeneration agencies and the desires of most of the residents.

HMRT project manager Mike Corcoran explains, "It fits the wider objectives of New East Manchester of offering existing residents a wider choice of housing and attracting new people to come and live in east Manchester."

In the Toxteth Street area, because the houses were essentially all the same size, there has never been an option for homeowners to move up or scale down. "These properties were built for factory workers 100 years ago," says Corcoran, "but we've moved on from that. We've got to make new properties that are fit for the 21st century."

It's a view that was echoed by many at the initial discussions more than five years ago. Consultations showed that residents would like to stay in the area but wanted a radical change and more choice.

The consultation process has been a long one. There have been drop-ins, newsletters, one-to-one meetings and study visits. Plans have changed to accommodate the comments of residents, not all of whom have been supportive of the Housing Renewal Programme.

The original plan had recommended wholesale demolition and included the construction of a number of flats which many residents had objected to. Flats to local people meant short-term, uncommitted tenancies. To planners apartments, as they'd prefer to call them, meant more options of house type especially for the elderly.

"After listening to people's views, we reviewed some of our plans," says Corcoran. "We've reduced the number of properties being demolished, keeping some of the larger ones in better condition around the periphery.

"We still wanted a number of apartments because there are lots of older people in the area who can't manage a house, and it would also stimulate the first time buyer market. But we've reduced the number from 70 to 36 in the revised neighbourhood plan."

Offering apartments for sale doesn't go down well with existing residents who have suffered from the disruptive tenants of uncaring landlords. But the Housing Market Renewal Team are confident new private sector licensing rules will substantially reduce previous problems. Nowadays landlords have to demonstrate they

are 'fit and competent' and are held responsible for the actions of their tenants.

The revised plan – with less demolition and fewer apartments – was announced over two years ago and yet the cogs of the regeneration machine have moved painfully slowly since then.

"We've been just as frustrated as the residents," says Corcoran. "We want this scheme to advance as quickly as possible, and at the same time we want to make sure the neighbourhood is managed effectively whilst the construction is going on."

Now, at last, things are moving. The diggers are out and residents and construction staff have posed for the photocall on the new foundations. Meanwhile compulsory purchase orders are pinned to the boarded-up front doors of the empty properties to await their absentee owners.

The developers, Lovells, will complete 83 new homes in this first phase over the next two years, and while they're building energy-efficient, secure homes with gardens and car parking, more rows of terraced housing will be emptied ready for the demolition gangs. It'll be another 10 years before the whole process of demolition and construction is complete.

So now work has begun isn't it time Sam Ward and his Salvation Army project moved on to find another area on its knees?

"We would like to be the key provider of community facilities here," he says. "There isn't a specific objective within the plans that focuses on improving the life of the individual... and that's why we think we should still be involved."

Corcoran would disagree that his team is only concerned with the bricks and mortar. "We're looking at the personal aspect of this project too," he says. "But we're not being sentimental about it. We're up front and practical. Residents are supported in making informed choices about their options."

Norman Gurley is happy with the choice he's made. He seen good times and bad in this part of Openshaw and even considered moving. But he has a strong attachment to the area and like many others just wants the tide to turn. "I'm looking forward to it, I just want to get in. It's taken so long."



MANCHESTER
City Council

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BOW

Rising Aspirations

Facilities and results continue to improve at local high schools. Roger Williams recounts some personal success stories.

One only arrived from Romania less than seven years ago. One has lived in Burnage most of her life. But Alma Dimitriu, 20, and Mahmuda Begum, 18, have plenty in common.

Between them they boast no fewer than 32 GCSEs. Both have set their sights on medical careers and hope to specialise in paediatrics. The talents of both were nurtured at east Manchester high schools.

When Alma started at St Peter's RC High School her initial difficulty understanding her schoolmates' accents was matched by their friendly curiosity at the American-inflected English she had learned in her homeland.

Not only did she adapt, she flourished, finishing with seven GCSE A*s and seven As. Two of the subjects, Italian and German, weren't even on the curriculum.

Alma is keen to acknowledge the role the welcoming school played in helping her realise her potential.

"The teachers were always helping," she says. "They were encouraging throughout. I wanted to do extra GCSEs and the school arranged it and teachers even took time during lunch hours to help with my studies."

Now, via A Levels at Loreto College in Hulme and a gap year partly spent teaching in Peru's Amazonian region, Alma is relishing her first year studying biomedical science at St Andrews. Recent graduates of the prestigious Scottish university include Prince William. After three years at its Medical Centre Alma will spend three more on a hospital-based placement in Manchester, and another two qualifying as a doctor.

Mahmuda, former head girl at Cedar Mount High School, gained even more GCSEs – 18 of

them – and is on a similar trajectory. Once she finishes her A Levels at Cheadle and Marple College, she too plans to embark on a lengthy medical degree.

While Alma and Mahmuda are talented individuals, in some ways it would be misleading to label them exceptional. Granted, not everyone leaving school is going to need a separate bookshelf for their GCSE certificates. Yet east Manchester schools' strong focus on helping pupils see beyond the confines of the classroom to promising futures ahead means you don't have to look far for stories of ex-pupils embracing their potential.

Some of the educational strides being made in east Manchester are more obvious than others. The most visible statements are the ultra-modern learning environments themselves. Wright Robinson College moved into its £43 million new home last year, St Peter's into impressive new premises in 2003. When Cedar Mount relocates into a state-of-the-art new campus in September it will complete an inspiring hat-trick. Investment continues with the creation of a new East Manchester Academy, due to open in 2010, meaning parents will have four good quality high or secondary schools to choose from.

There is no shortage of statistics to show the improvements the schools are making either. Last year, for instance, Wright Robinson had the most improved GCSE results of any Manchester school, the number of pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C rising by 21 per cent. East Manchester's attainment figures exceed the Manchester average, and are improving faster than both citywide and national performance.

East Manchester's attainment figures exceed the Manchester average, and are improving faster than both citywide and national performance.

Ex-St Peter's pupil, Alma Dimitriu will spend another three years in Manchester after her studies at St Andrews.



Accident &

Purp





Jasmine Edwards (left), a modern apprentice at a veterinary hospital: "On my first day I thought I was going to pass out!"

Neville Beischer, Wright Robinson's headteacher, takes great pride in the efforts to equip pupils for the future.

"A huge amount of energy goes into helping support youngsters," he says. "Some of them come from difficult backgrounds and every one of them has an individual story. It doesn't end with GCSE results – we love to hear how former pupils are getting on."

Guy Hutchence, head of Cedar Mount High, says: "Education is about preparing people for their future. The needs of pupils need to be paramount."

Even the infamous Ofsted inspectors have warm words such as "impressive improvements" (St Peter's), "very good and progressive curriculum" (Wright Robinson) and "high expectations of success" (Cedar Mount) to describe the three schools.

But it is teenagers such as Daniel Sammons who embody how the regeneration of east Manchester is beginning to transform not just physical landscapes, but expectations.

The 17-year-old, from Gorton, is studying for A Levels at Loreto College, aiming to progress to a computer science degree and ultimately a career in programming. He is on course to become the first person from his family to go to university.

His ambitions were stoked by a mentoring programme run in association with Manchester University which sees pupils interested in science assigned a mentor from a business working in a related field. Such schemes are just one of the ways in which schools are working closely with universities to foster achievement.

St Peter's headteacher John McNerney notes that, like Daniel, the majority of east Manchester pupils come from families without traditions of higher education. In many cases the obstacles preventing pupils from considering university are psychological rather than academic. If you listen carefully, you can hear the clatter of such barriers being overturned.

Organised visits to universities encourage young people to aspire to university and campus-based residential workshops give them a flavour of undergraduate life.

So too does another mentoring scheme where Manchester Metropolitan University students share their experiences with pupils. It can have a profound effect.

"When you get the students in it demystifies university," says Mr McNerney. "The pupils find out that students don't have horns, they aren't necessarily geniuses, they're people just like them."

But whether young people's chosen path is academic or vocational, the three schools share an emphasis on personalised, forward-looking learning.

One beneficiary of this approach is former Cedar Mount pupil Neil Cummins, 18. While Neil wasn't quite born with a spanner in his hand,

his father owns a garage and his brother is a truck mechanic. From Years Nine to Eleven, he spent every Wednesday honing his skills at a Levenshulme garage.

Building on the experience gained he's now on a three-year apprenticeship at Evans Halshaw in Old Trafford specialising in panelling, commercial body-building and spraying and hopes one day to go into business with the other two mechanically-minded members of his family.

Former Wright Robinson pupil Jasmine Edwards is also confidently acquiring new skills, albeit tending to pets rather than prized motors. Ultimately she hopes to become a zookeeper.

The 17-year-old has embarked on a modern apprenticeship in veterinary nursing, with the theoretical knowledge she gains one day a week at animal college put into practice for the rest of the time at Woodcroft Veterinary Centre in Cheadle Hulme. The practice offers a 24-hour emergency service to its clients, and her typical working day can include anything from assisting a vet who is performing surgery – sterilising and passing the surgical instruments required – to bandaging injured pets or comforting anxious owners.

"It's constantly busy," she says. "On my first day I thought I was going to pass out! You are thrown in at the deep end but I'm learning a lot and it's very rewarding."

If anything James Hasker, another ex-Wright Robinson pupil, exudes even more enthusiasm. The school's media club helped him develop his passion for animation, starting with crude efforts using Lego figures.

From those basic beginnings he has gone on to master stop motion. Now studying media at City College, 17-year-old James from Gorton hopes to follow in the creative footsteps of inspirations such as Wallace and Gromit creator Nick Park by specialising in animation.

James is quick to recognise the springboard his former school provided. "Wright Robinson has a great atmosphere," he says. "It's just a top place."

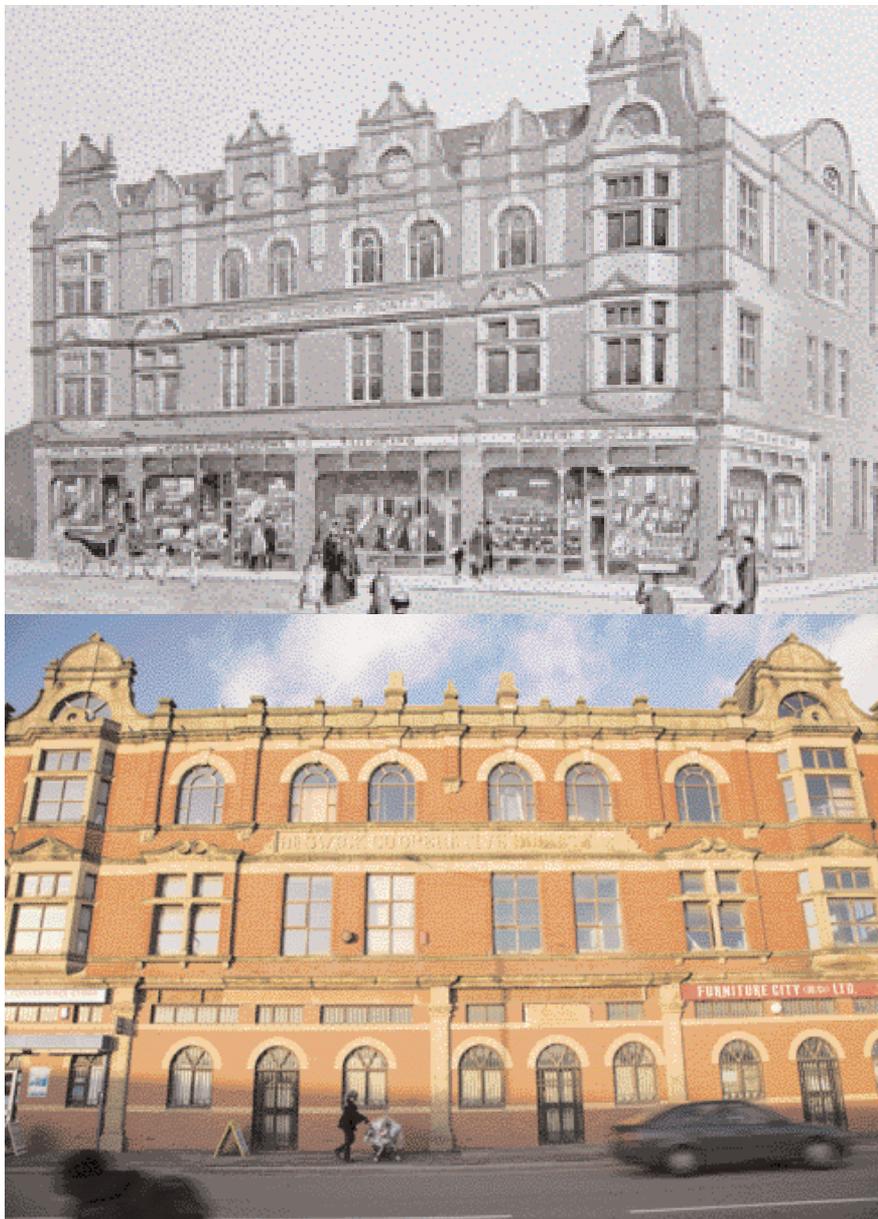
You get the feeling schools will be hearing more from flourishing ex-pupils like James, Alma, Mahmuda, Daniel, Neil and Jasmine. Talking to the six, their tales may differ but the ambition and assurance are shared. Aspirations are rising in the east.



James Hasker, left, with Stefan Mincher and Stefan Andrews, all east Manchester ex-pupils now studying media at City College.

Remember the 'Divi'?

A couple of generations ago the corner Co-op was a lifeline to many working-class families. Not many of the buildings still survive today but, as Louise Tickle discovers, the memories are as vivid as ever.



Now and then: No. 10 Branch of the Beswick Co-op at Ashton Old Road.

If you were poor in Manchester in the first half of the last century, life was exceedingly tough. If a parent died or lost their job, then your family – likely to be a large one with lots of mouths to feed – was in truly dire straits.

The three Co-operative Societies that set up grocery stores, butchers and bakers in the east Manchester area over a period of a hundred years from the mid-1800s became a vital element in the struggle for survival in this rapidly expanding metropolis. With the buying power to order groceries in bulk, Co-operative Societies could offer customers reasonable prices, and rewarded loyalty with the 'divi', an early form of cashback on money spent.

Though the shopfronts of stores owned by the Manchester and Salford Equitable Co-operative Society, the Droylsden Co-operative Society and the Beswick Co-operative Society have mostly gone now, some evidence of their existence still remains. Glance upwards as you drive along busy new arterial roads or residential streets, and you might just glimpse the odd shop name cut into the worn stone mantel above the doors of once-grand buildings and end-of-terrace properties which have long since undergone a change of use.

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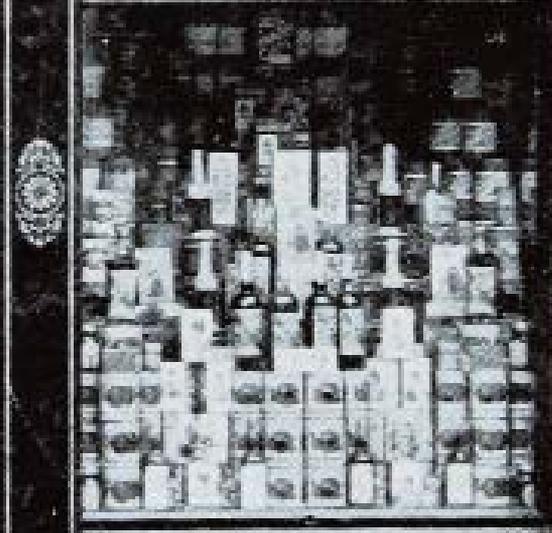
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NEW YORK
PENNY BANK



Phyllis Smith, 75, worked at the Emporium owned by the Beswick Co-operative Society, on Hyde Road in Gorton, from the age of 14 till she married at 21.

"After leaving school it was the war years. My twin sister got a job first at the Emporium, in Ladies' Shoes, and I started not long after her. I had an interview with a very stern man called Mr Lunt, and was started on a pound a week.

"The Emporium was massive. The windows were huge, just gorgeous. And it had a lift. Drapery and Menswear were on the left, Men's Shoes were on the right, and it was up the stairs to Fancy Goods and Ladies' Hats. I was on Menswear. It was a nice sociable place to work. My boss, Mr Lynch, was in Men's Suits. There were huge rolls of cloth up high, and he was a very short man, and he'd heave them down with a tremendous bang.

"In the war, when you bought anything, there was good quality and there was Utility, which wasn't as good, and was labelled so you knew. One day I was selling gloves to a man who questioned the quality – there wasn't a Utility label inside, so they were for sale at the higher price. And later, it turned out that one of the girls had been cutting the Utility labels out, selling stuff at a higher price and pocketing the difference!

"There were no tills, so you didn't give your own change. You made out a chit with the price and the amount tendered, and put it all inside this little tub which would be sucked up in a vacuum pipe to the top floor. Seconds later, the clerks would have put the right change back in the tub and they'd whiz it back to you.

"Now I go up the Co-op on my scooter, because I can't walk. This week, they said, 'why don't you become a member?' It turns out you get a card and then either cashback or tokens. It's 60 years since I started working there, and finally now I'm a member!"

A century on: No. 11 Branch of the Beswick Co-op on Vincent Street in Openshaw was opened in 1905.



Randall Cockshoot, 100, started as a shop boy aged 14 on 22 July 1922, at the Beswick Co-operative Society No. 1 Branch at 68-70 Ashton New Road. He later became a manager and finally retired in 1973.

"That first job was cleaning up, brewing up, doing all the dirty jobs. I was on 14 bob a week. I worked 48 hours, six days a week, with a half-day on Wednesdays. When I got older, I went on full pay in the grocery and provisions section. I'd be rolling and cutting bacon, packing for customers and sweeping the floor. I got a rise every year, so by 1931 when I got married, I was on £3 6s 8d a week. I had 10 days' holiday for the first few years, then it went up to 14 days. All on full pay of course – the Co-op was a good employer.

"My first shop, No. 1, was a double-sided, with bacon, eggs and butter on one side, all dried goods, flour, sugar, fine sago on the other. Customers got good service and good quality stuff. You learnt butchering skills, because you had to do all your own boning of meat. I'd bone six or seven sides a week, then you hung it from a big hook.

"We got the divi four times a year. My number was 29813, and the highest I ever got was two shillings in the pound.

"Co-ops started to decline because they didn't keep up. They tried to, but some of the prices were being cut by self-service shops. No. 1 Branch was the first to start self-service in 1954.

"After I retired I did another seven years part-time, relieving at different shops when managers went sick or on holiday. When I finished there were 40 odd branches. I'm proud to have worked for the Co-op. I've never been out of work, and never had a day's unemployment in my life. And I'm still drawing my pension now."





Marjorie Cheetham, 61, lived on Hewitt Street in Lower Openshaw, and used to go on errands for her mother to the Co-op shop on Gresham Street. The family's divi number was 205063

"You had a corner shop at the end of the street, but it was Co-op where you got your proper shopping. As a kid you couldn't really see over the counters. The walls were white tiles with a line of green ones around the middle. When I'd nip down for some bits, my mother would tell me, 'Don't you go to Dirty Gertie, because she gives short measures'. I got a good hiding once because Dirty Gertie was serving and I piped up, 'Oh, I mustn't go to you because you cheat on the weight'!

"Once we pawned the clock so we could have shopping that week. Never got it back. We had nothing really. My mum had to work all hours as a silver service waitress after my dad died, to keep the family. We'd get the cheapest things. Pig's trotters and cow's ears. I'm not joking. That was your meat, then you'd make a stew and throw dumplings into it.

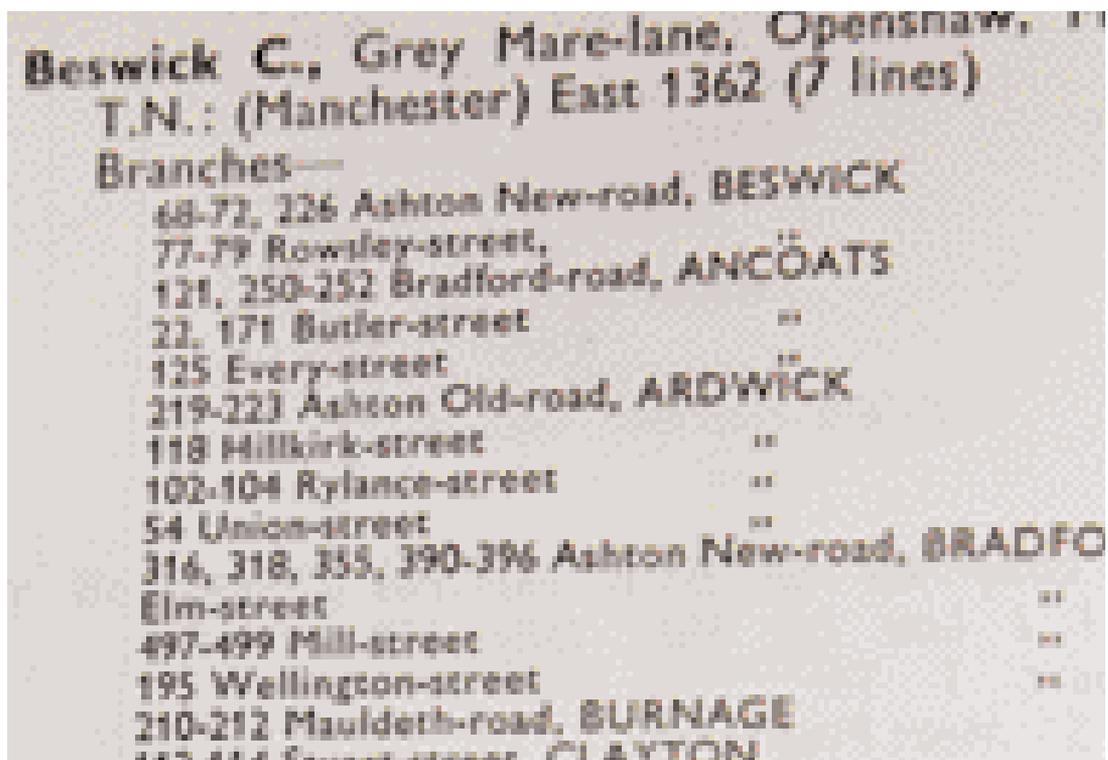
"You used to get bags of broken biscuits for thruppence. There'd be cherries in a big tin and flour out of bags. Sugar they'd put in a blue paper bag, and fold the top over and over. Bacon ribs, butter, tongue, eggs, milk, and if you could afford a piece of fresh meat, you'd go to the Co-op butcher next door.

"Bonfire night was a big thing. They would throw all the cardboard and orange boxes they'd stored in the upstairs warehouse out onto the street for us kids to collect to build our bonfires.

"The Co-op was a lifeline for people in my mam's position you know. They were able to buy in at good prices and so give us working people a bit off. The butter, ooh, it was nice from there. Really salty. I've tried all different ones, but I can't find it like that Co-op stuff."

Right: Some of the 50+ branches of the Beswick Co-operative Society as listed in the 1957 Co-op Directory.

Opposite: The corner Co-op on Ravensbury Street, Clayton.





DROYLSDEN INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED



East Meets East

Time Out critic Susie Stubbs checks out east Manchester's newest restaurant and asks if the cuisine matches the opulence.

On paper, Vermilion has got it all. A no-expense-spared interior dreamt up by one of the world's leading architects. Thailand's top chef, a man more at home catering to Thai royalty than he is to the Miles Platting masses. A drinks list the length of a small, inebriated novel. And fawning press reports that describe Manchester's most ambitious bar-cum-restaurant as 'a sumptuous affair' and 'jaw-droppingly opulent'.

But although Vermilion opened to startlingly good reviews, there have been a few dissenting voices. There are those who question the viability of a restaurant so far off the gourmet's track. Those who, while admitting Vermilion is a fabulous venture, wonder if laziness will get the better of potential diners who opt to stay in town rather than take a cab into east Manchester. This doesn't concern Manzur Ahmed, Vermilion's manager and son of owner Iqbal Ahmed. "We've been planning this for three and a half years," he says. "Initially, it was going to be an ordinary restaurant attached to the super-casino. When it became clear that the casino wasn't going to happen, we thought why not make it a destination restaurant instead?"

Destination it certainly is. Located close to the City of Manchester Stadium, there is little else here to draw the 'work hard, play hard' punters Manzur is keen to attract. Signage is sparse and, from the road, all that distinguishes Vermilion from neighbouring warehouses are its glowing red windows and rather neat car park. But step inside and everything changes: as the doors swing shut, drinkers and diners are immediately transported to another, distinctly Thai, location.

This is a place where the service is served up Thai-style: visitors are greeted with a wâi (the palms-together gesture considered polite in Thailand) before being whisked up to either bar or restaurant via a lift. Waiting on staff hover discreetly throughout, pouring drinks, offering advice, unfolding napkins. Service like this comes as something of a revelation in a city that can otherwise lean towards the 'be grateful I'm serving you' snarl.

Almost all Vermilion's waiting staff are Thai, drawn to Manchester by the reputation of Bangkok chef Chumpol Jangprai. "He's seen as a big deal in Thailand due to his royal connections," says Manzur, referring to a career that has seen Jangprai establish a renowned Royal Thai cookery school in his native country and lauded as Best Chef in Bangkok by Saveur Magazine. Jangprai's skill is evident in every dish, from the shipped-in special ingredients essential to Thai food – galangal, kaffir lime, shrimp paste – to the expert balance of sweet, sour and heat that give Thai meals their distinctive flavour.

Nothing has been done on the cheap. Vermilion was built on a budget of £4.5 million, and it shows. "We want people to feel like they are in another world," says Ahmed, "almost as if they don't know where they are." Cinnabar – the top floor bar that allows drinkers to peer down at the restaurant below – is a confection of east-meets-west design. A two-storey centrepiece of multi-coloured Buddha heads, for example, is somehow matched by dozens of glowing globes hanging overhead, which pulse through a rainbow of muted colours and lend the bar a hazy end-of-a-great-night feel.

...as the doors swing shut, drinkers and diners are immediately transported to another, distinctly Thai, location.









Walking into Cinnabar is akin to walking into one of Bangkok's most fashionable watering holes

Vermilion
Hulme Hall Ln/Lord North St,
Miles Platting, M40 8AD
0161 202 0055
www.vermilioncinnabar.com

The fact that such overblown décor works at all is down to international architect, Miguel Cancio Martins, the designer responsible for Paris's Buddha Bar. His tongue-in-cheek interpretation of eastern design unwittingly embodies the concept of *sà-nùk*, the sense of cheeky playfulness that permeates every aspect of Thai life – and it's entirely appropriate for a Thai restaurant on the edge of a Manchester industrial estate.

Martins is just one of an impressive line-up assembled to help pull off the Vermilion dream. This is the real strength of Vermilion because, while neither Iqbal nor Manzur have any direct restaurant experience, they do have the humility (and the deep pockets) required to put together the right team to deliver the project. Iqbal is perhaps best known as the chairman of Seamark, a \$200 million global seafood distributor based in east Manchester. The reason the Ahmeds went Thai with their restaurant venture is entirely pragmatic: "Our biggest business is in Asia, we have great contacts in Thailand and we love Thai food," states Manzur. But this simple explanation conceals the Ahmeds' huge ambition, not only for themselves but for east Manchester. Iqbal and Manzur weren't content to let their grand idea go the way of the casino; instead, they're the ones who've taken a gamble, spending their own cash on the kind of high-end eaterie Manchester so sorely lacks. Vermilion represents both glamour and ambition on a monumental scale, and it's this money-where-the-mouth-is action that has the power to transform east Manchester. A brave venture and one that deserves to succeed.

Dream décor – but how does the food fare?

Manchester has its fair share of Thai eateries. The city centre groans with Asian fusion restaurants. So food lovers would be forgiven for greeting news of another Thai with a 'so what?' shrug. And yet, no matter how good the Thais in town, Vermilion beats them all hands down.

For starters, few could compete with Cinnabar for pre-dinner drinks, with its lavish surroundings matched by a liquid menu that most bars can only drunkenly dream of. There are no less than nineteen different types of whisky (and thirteen brands of vodka), champagne by the bottle or glass, classic cocktails, non-alcoholic drinks and a 'signature' cocktail list that includes the Gaia Martini (£8), an intriguing mix of apple, galangal, vodka and lemon. Walking into Cinnabar is akin to walking into one of Bangkok's most fashionable watering holes – though go easy on the booze as the way to the restaurant is via a staircase in full view of diners. Pace yourself or risk a stumble.

Downstairs, Vermilion's extensive menu is dominated by finely honed Thai specialities. Pad Thai (£8) is a modest meal, its fried noodles, crushed peanuts and crisp vegetables a staple in every restaurant and roadside stall across Thailand. Sadly, back in Blighty, it's also the dish most likely to end up stodgy and bland. That Vermilion has preserved the lightness of this dish, its tamarind sauce a counterpoint to noodles and egg, is testament to the skill of the chef. Elsewhere, Kang Kiew Wan Kai (£8.50) – green curry – is the best this writer has eaten outside Thailand, with the Khang Pa Pla (jungle curry, £12) not far behind. Although the chef doesn't spare the chilli, any heat is balanced by coconut milk, sweet Thai basil or the sharp tang of freshly squeezed lime.

The menu does display an understandable (given Seamark's trade) bias towards fish but there's also a healthy vegetarian selection – our waitress told us to take our pick; the chef would rustle up a non-carnivorous option whatever we chose. Side dishes include a selection of rice, including jasmine and a just-right *khào niew* (sticky rice). With food, service and (admittedly crazy) décor this good, Vermilion offers rich rewards to gourmands willing to make the short hop out to east Manchester. Book your cab now.

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Cover: Neil Cummins on a three-year apprenticeship at Evans Halshaw

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About East

Welcome to another issue of **East**. It's with regret that we report the departure of our Chief Executive, Tom Russell, who has taken up a new post at the London Development Agency as Director of Legacy for the 2012 Olympics.

East Manchester has changed dramatically under Tom's leadership over the last seven years. From the building of Sportcity and the Commonwealth Games that were the catalyst for much of the regeneration of the area to the emergence of new housing developments – many using innovative and cutting edge design – the area is certainly changing for the better. Central Park, with Fujitsu's new HQ at its heart, is a tremendous boost for the area's economy and the approval of two Metrolink lines through the area means east Manchester will become more attractive to both new residents and new businesses. New Islington is now emerging from the former Cardroom Estate as Will Alsop's masterplan is being brought to life and Ancoats with its strong industrial heritage has risen from dereliction to become a place of choice for trendy city centre dwellers and some of Manchester's most creative companies.

Tom has done an incredible job in spearheading the regeneration of this part of the city. His drive, tenacity and long-term strategic vision for physical, social and economic change have enabled us to come a long way in a relatively short period of time.

We wish Tom every success in this high profile new role, which is hugely deserved, but we are especially sorry to see him go.

Eddie Smith
Acting Chief Executive
New East Manchester Ltd

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* charts the development of east Manchester's Millennium Community. Also see www.lengrant.co.uk.

Roger Williams is a former political editor of the *Carlisle News and Star* and *Bolton Evening News* and is currently a press officer for Manchester City Council. He has a particular interest in regeneration issues.

Louise Tickle is a freelance journalist based near Manchester. She regularly contributes a variety of features to *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times*. Her particular interests include social justice, emerging solutions to the environment crisis and efforts to mitigate distortions in world trade.

Susie Stubbs is a freelance journalist who writes for *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *Time Out*. She is Online Editor for *Time Out Manchester* and has written a number of guidebooks, including the *Time Out Manchester Shortlist Guide* and a new guide to Tate Liverpool.

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In this issue of East:

Toxteth Street eventually gets underway; Roger Williams assesses high schools' success stories; remembering the 'divi' with Louise Tickle and Susie Stubbs samples the Thai delights of Miles Platting.

