



Wish You Were Here?  
Miles Better for Jobs  
Pieces of the Past

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# Wish You Were Here?

**Wild orchids, painted ladies and kingfishers. It's hard to believe Clayton Vale is in east Manchester. Len Grant steps out to meet the people who've already discovered the tranquillity on their doorstep.**

Older local residents like Linda remember Clayton Vale as a dirty, derelict valley, another remnant of the area's industrial past.

"It's been 35 years since I've been down here," says Linda Gilchrest as she accompanies her daughter Mandy along the track from the study centre. "Back then we used to play in the lime hills and the polluted river... it was a real mess. I can't believe how much it's changed. It's amazing!"

"I came down about 20 years ago," adds Mandy, "and I really don't remember it being anything like this. I could bring the little 'un down now and she could run wild, couldn't she?"

Described as a haven, an oasis in an urban desert, a hidden gem, Clayton Vale continues to astound its visitors. Bang in the middle of east Manchester, this part of the Medlock Valley has become a magnet for walkers, joggers, cyclists, anglers, dog walkers, in fact anyone wanting to enjoy the great outdoors close to home.

A recently completed improvement programme has meant more people than ever are now enjoying the fresh air and greenery.

Carol Baguley of Groundwork – the environmental improvement agency – is a regular on the Vale, encouraging school groups to take advantage of the diverse rural landscape. "A few years ago we had a hard time getting schools down here. But that's all changed. Now we're over-subscribed and we can't fit everyone in who wants to come."

Carol's bug hunts and pond-dipping are immensely popular with the primary schoolchildren and are reinforced in the purpose-built study centre where they learn how to respect the natural environment.

"The science curriculum comes to life when the children can see for themselves the creatures they have learnt about," says John Dent, assistant headteacher at Higher Openshaw Community School, who has brought his Year 6 class down to the Vale for the day.

"We've been bringing pupils here for several years," he says, "and this year, for the first time, there have been team-building exercises which have been very impressive. We'd never normally get the chance to do these things at school and it really helps the children develop problem-solving techniques which they can apply to their school work."

It hasn't always been this way. Older local residents like Linda remember Clayton Vale as a

dirty, derelict valley, another remnant of the area's industrial past. In its time the Vale has been home to a dye works and a print works, each churning out their products with no regard to the river or the valley. Productivity came well before pollution control in those days.

For much of the last century the Clayton Infectious Diseases Hospital (later known as the Clayton Smallpox Hospital) occupied a site on the north side of the River Medlock caring chiefly for sailors disembarking at Salford Docks – bringing with them illnesses as well as produce from all over the world.

After decades of being used as a landfill dumping ground, the Vale's 140 acres were acquired by Manchester City Council in the early 1980s and dedicated as an area of leisure for local people. Paths and ponds were created and a quarter of a million trees and shrubs planted in what was to become the beginning of an on-going process of reclamation.

Together with the Lower Medlock and historic Philips Park, Clayton Vale now makes up the Medlock Valley Project which has attracted significant investment from New East Manchester (NEM) and its partners over the last few years.

NEM's environmental programmes manager, Julie Lawrence, explains: "£2.5 million has been spent on the Vale itself making it safer and more attractive to a greater range of visitors. We've laid new footpaths along the river valley so you can now walk or cycle all the way from Clayton Bridge straight through to the city centre."

Such are the recent improvements that Sustrans, the national cycle network co-ordinators, are about to allocate the Medlock Valley Way its own cycle route number. High praise indeed.

The old packhorse bridge across the river has been repaired and the iron bridge, built to transport goods to and from the dye and print works, has been replaced. Both crossings continue to be excellent vantage points to catch glimpses of the kingfishers, herons and mallard that frequent the valley.

"The gateways at Edge Lane and Bank Bridge Road have been upgraded," continues Julie, "so there are now designated places to park and it's clearer that you've arrived! It's become

Linda and Mandy Gilchrest at Clayton Vale.





**SHEILA BAXTER AND EILEEN GARSIDE** "We're in the strollers group from the Ashton and District Walking Club. We go all over for our walks: Marple, Oldham, Heaton Park, Lyme Park, anywhere really. We're both in our seventies now, I think walking's good for you, so we're going to do it for as long as possible.

"We've just walked to Philips Park and back today. It's been lovely, you don't expect all this so close to all the industry and traffic, do you?"



**RICHARD ECCLES, PARK WARDEN** "I look after all the green spaces in the Ancoats and Clayton ward. I run environment education sessions and team building sessions and also do some of the maintenance.

"To me I just like the fact I can be in the middle of the Vale and pretend I'm anywhere. You just don't think you're in the City of Manchester. It's very special."



**DEBORAH HOLT, CORPORATE SECRETARY WITH ADDLESHAW GODDARD**

"This is part of our Big Week Out when about a third of everyone in our offices gets out from behind their desks and works on worthwhile projects in the community. We've been planting flowers and doing some woodland maintenance. It's been a brilliant day."



**DAVID FARMER WITH HIS SON, GLYN** "We've cycled from New Moston down to the Bridgewater Canal near Old Trafford and then back from town along the Rochdale and the Ashton Canals. We thought we'd give it a try and cut through here, it's good isn't it?"

"It's been six years since I was here last. It's been done up since then, hasn't it? You wouldn't believe you were in Manchester. You could actually have a day out in here couldn't you?"



**AMY HAWKSWORTH AND ADELE MCEWAN** "We're both university students but today we're working with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to tidy up the steps on this slope. We get picked up in town by the minibus and brought up here to work on projects like this. It's hard work but it's interesting and in the summer it's nice to be outdoors, isn't it? It's something different."



**DAVE RICHMOND** "I'd been past these gates many times before we started the health walks. I need to lose some weight and I try to do a little bit more walking each week. I used to come on Wednesdays, but for the past eight or nine weeks I've been doing the Monday afternoon walks. And I do feel better."

"We're out in all weathers: it doesn't stop us if it's raining. It's always nice and peaceful and today we've seen wild orchids."



**STEVE** "...about three times a week... up this side... over the bridge at the bottom... back the other side..."



**IAN AND HEATHER SPENCER WITH MARLEY AND GEORGE** "We used to live near here but now we live in Chorley. Whenever we're back we come and give the dogs a walk in the Vale. It's really improved from how we remember it. You don't get so muddy now that they've made new paths."

"Marley has decided he likes water so now we can't keep him out of the river. He loves swimming!"

**“We noticed them doing up the car park so we thought we’d take a look,” says Beryl as they strode down the new pathway. “It’s amazing, a real eye-opener!”**

a much more attractive place. It’s more accessible and even cleaner now with new bins and regular litter patrols... people are taking a pride in the place.”

The network of footpaths and tracks through the woodland and on the valley floor have, for many years now, attracted the health walkers from the PACE (Physical Activity and Community Exercise) project, a local NHS initiative encouraging people to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

“The Vale has been a big hit over the years with our walkers,” says PACE co-ordinator Craig Jones. “It’s local to a lot of our clients but many of them had never set foot in the place before they started the regular walks. And since the footpaths have been improved it’s now suitable for a wider range of abilities.”

But it’s not just walkers and cyclists who are enjoying the great outdoors. The small but highly effective ‘Friends of Clayton Vale’, with their distinctive blue tops, are out and about several times a week and each year organise popular events for local residents.

“During the Easter holidays we have a whole day of activities which we call Quacky Races,” says long-time friend, Lynn Blinkhorn. “As well as all the regular stalls and traditional games we organise a plastic duck race along the river. A hundred ducks are tipped off one of the bridges and the children line the banks, cheering them on to the finish line downstream. It’s very silly, but great fun!”

And this October will see the sixth Halloween Howler where visitors come in their hundreds to show off their scariest costumes and put the spooks up each other.

“We’ve been amazed at just how many people turn up for this event,” says Lynn. “In the first year we had 450 ghosts and ghouls and that’s built up year after year. Last Halloween there were 1300, and we’re expecting even more for 2008.”

The event is free and consists of a walk in the dark down one side of the valley and back along the opposite bank. At intervals along the way volunteers are lurking, ready to scare anyone who dare venture into the ‘haunted hollows’.

“The atmosphere is electric,” says Lynn “you can hear the kids screaming as they make their way back to the study centre. It’s a great event and a good alternative to trick or treating.”

“The Howler has become more and more successful each year,” says Julie Lawrence, “and this year NEM’s Culture Team will recruit artists to work with the Friends and local groups to... let’s just say... enhance some of the scarier features!”

Every day people are discovering Clayton Vale for the very first time. Openshaw residents Beryl Stevenson and Terry Winward ventured in after they’d seen construction workers at the Bank Bridge Road entrance: “We noticed them doing up the car park so we thought we’d take a look,” says Beryl as they strode down the new pathway. “It’s amazing, a real eye-opener!”

“I thought it would all be rough ground,” adds Terry, “I didn’t think there’d be proper paths and everything. Next time we’ll come down on our bikes!”

[www.friendsofclaytonvale.org.uk](http://www.friendsofclaytonvale.org.uk)  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/leisure](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/leisure)

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**CONNOR CHITTON AND WAQAR ALI** "First you have to get some leaves and grass and put them in the tray. Then you look under stones and rotten wood and see what you can find... If there's a fly or something on a leaf you can put this tube over the fly and then suck the other tube and it goes into the tub... We've found worms, snails, slugs and a woodlouse."



**CHLOE MUNDY** "Me and my dad bring chairs and a barbecue in the holidays and camp for the whole day. We have a special place that no-one else knows about. Then we find some secret passages through the woods... with all the flowers. We love it here, don't we? I've seen a heron and a kingfisher... and loads of butterflies."



**SUE HAYES WITH MICA** "It used to get very muddy especially after it had been raining but now it's much better. The paths have really improved and I've noticed there are benches and more litter bins. I bring Mica down here about twice a week... it's much pleasanter than it was."



**TONY MULREADY** "It's what my wife calls my daily constitutional! When it's fine I come down every day, round the top and then back along the bottom. There's been a tremendous difference, it feels like you're really going back to nature. I've just been taking pictures of the ducks, there's a family over there with nine ducklings."





# End Game

**Other contestants watch intently as a tense match at the New East Manchester Rapid Play Chess Tournament comes to its close.**

Over 50 players from the North West — juniors as well as adults — competed for cash prizes in the boardroom at the City of Manchester Stadium in March. The event was organised locally by Clayton's Eagle Chess Club in association with the Manchester Chess Federation.

# Miles Better for Jobs

**It isn't just local residents who are benefiting from the PFI in Miles Platting. Mark Hillsdon meets one young apprentice whose career starts here.**

**"It seemed a good idea, so I signed up, although I'd never thought of learning a trade before."**

Curtis Buckley greets his fellow plasterers as if he's been in the trade for years. There's friendly banter, the odd quip, a playful pat on the back. But in fact Curtis has only been in the job for a few months, having joined an innovative scheme in Miles Platting that is using the area's regeneration as a way of funding jobs for local young people.

In 2006 Manchester City Council selected the Renaissance Consortium to spearhead the Miles Platting Neighbourhood Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI), a multi-million pound regeneration scheme drawing on both public and private money. The consortium comprises affordable housing specialist Lovell, the housing association Adactus Housing, LS Trillium and architects PRP and will see the renovation of over 1,500 council-owned houses and apartments over the next ten years, as well as the construction of 1,000 new homes.

The initiative will also transform the local environment but crucially the human impact of the programme will go even deeper, by offering jobs to young people, and helping to create opportunities to start careers in the construction industry.

Over the full period of the PFI, Lovell will take on 30 local people as modern apprentices, and one of these is 17-year-old Curtis.

"I left school in 2007 with a couple of GCSEs," he explains. "Then my youth club worker contacted me to tell me about the Lovell apprenticeship and asked me if I wanted to get involved. It seemed a good idea, so I signed up, although I'd never thought of learning a trade before."

Lovell's regional training advisor Sharon Tyer is in charge of administering the scheme,

as well as mentoring the apprentices. "Part of our commitment is to training and employing local people," she explains. "Any contractor and builder can go in and refurbish houses but it's nice, once you've done all that work, to leave something behind, such as well-trained local people."

Dubbed 'smart procurement' in some areas of the UK, this type of approach helps to maximise the social benefit of public spending by employing local people to carry out the local work.

"We try and have an impact while we are here and once we've left," says Tyer. "It's important to leave behind something that's sustainable."

With the Rochdale Canal running through its heart, Miles Platting is steeped in the history of the textile industry. Manchester's last cotton mills were built here as late as 1924 and the massive Victoria Mill is still standing. Since being refurbished several years ago it now offers a mixture of accommodation and office space, while Beehive Mill, on the boundary of Miles Platting and Ancoats, is now home to Sankey's Soap, a beacon in Manchester's nightlife.

The area also has a new business park and its own swimming pool but is still ranked as one of the most deprived areas in the country on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, with a raft of long-standing problems including crime, low levels of educational attainment and high unemployment.

But things are now improving for the 5,000 or so residents and the area's renovation is well underway. And for Curtis this has meant learning what it's like to work under pressure,



**“I get a good buzz helping to renovate people’s houses... If I wasn’t working here now I don’t know what I’d be doing.”**

to tight deadlines, and with other craftsmen breathing down your neck, eager to complete their part of the job.

The basic work on each home is being carried out on a tight schedule where speed is of the essence. In most cases, residents continue to live in their homes as they are being refitted.

New windows are fitted, and then the old kitchen and bathroom are stripped out. A new bathroom is fitted and preparatory work is carried out in the new kitchen.

Central heating is installed, before the electricians move in, followed by the plasterers. Then the kitchen goes in and all the tiling is done. After that the flooring, painting and other finishing touches are added.

Lynne Thornton’s house was renovated in January. She’s lived on Old Mill Street for the last 27 years but was naturally cautious about the upheaval of all the building work as her 12-year-old daughter Demilee has OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). But her fears proved unfounded.

“I explained my daughter’s condition to each group that came into my house and they were absolutely fantastic with her,” she explains. “They treated her with great respect... and had a good laugh with her as they would anyone else.”

Lynne believes that the regeneration is the best thing that could have happened to the area. “It’s going to be lovely,” she says. “Instead of looking like every house should be demolished, they are actually giving it all a big facelift and it’s absolutely brilliant. I guess they could have knocked everything down but I’m glad they didn’t. They are worth doing up and it’s given us all a new lease of life.”

As a local lad, living in Moston with his mum, a nursery worker, and stepdad, who’s a bus driver, Curtis has also seen Miles Platting starting to change. “Things have got better over the last few years,” he says. “There’s more stuff for young people to do.

“It used to be a bit rough but it’s changed a lot now. And that’s because of projects like this. It gives people more respect for where

they are living, especially when all the houses are getting done up like this.”

A talented footballer, Curtis flirted briefly with the idea of trying to make a career out of the game, but he’s glad he made the switch to an altogether different kind of apprenticeship.

He now spends one day a week studying for his NVQ Level 2 in plastering at MANCAT and the rest of the week learning his trade on site. Some of the other apprentices are following NVQs in multi-skilling and maintenance operations and they spend week-long blocks at the Lovell Craft Academy, the company’s national apprentice training centre in Leicestershire.

While he’s on the apprenticeship Curtis has a two-year contract with Lovell, and as well as all his tools, he’s also paid a wage, which he confesses he wasn’t expecting.

“I love plastering although it’s harder than it looks,” he says. “I get a good buzz helping to renovate people’s houses, especially when you know the people, too. If I wasn’t working here now I don’t know what I’d be doing.”

So what happens to the apprentices when Lovell moves on from Miles Platting?

“When they’ve completed their apprenticeships, wherever possible, we look at absorbing them into our own workforce, or with our subcontractors,” says Sharon Tyer. “In many ways it’s up to them to sell themselves to the subcontractors and tell them, ‘Look, I’ve worked with you for two years, I’ve done a good job, so how about taking me on full-time?’

“It’s a very rewarding job,” she adds. “We do tap into socially-excluded groups and the disengaged and that’s when you get a feeling of fulfilment. It’s great when at the end of it they come out with a qualification and they’ve got a good chance of getting regular employment. It makes it all worthwhile.”

“I’ve known Curtis since he was in primary school,” says Lynne, “he’s a belting lad and they’ve all done a brilliant job here. This is my dream kitchen.”





A photograph of a person with reddish hair performing a handstand on a blue mat in a gymnasium. The person is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and black pants. Their legs are raised and bent at the knees. In the background, other people are visible, including a man in a white shirt and black pants standing with his hands on his hips. The gymnasium has a green floor with blue lines and a yellow wall.

“Ready...Hep!”

**Not the run-of-the-mill gym sessions for these local residents. Places on a free trapeze course funded by New East Manchester were snapped up quickly in February as Skylight Circus Arts put participants through their paces.**

“Its about improving people's core strength, flexibility and general well-being,” says tutor Lindzi Miller. “It’s a fun, sociable and immensely rewarding experience.” So much so that an additional course for young people has been organised by popular demand.

# Pieces of the Past

**Ian McKay's collaborations across the generations are rooted in local history but, as Phil Griffin discovers, have a clear eye on the future.**

There's a handsome drinking fountain just inside the gates to Philips Park in east Manchester. It was erected in 1896 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the park that is named after Mark Philips MP, the campaigner for public parks for all. The first three of which – anywhere in the world – opened on 22nd August 1846. They are Peel Park in Salford; Queen's Park, Harpurhey; and Philips Park, on the banks of the River Medlock.

Close by the drinking fountain is a plaque commemorating Pte William Jones who survived the Zulu massacre at Rorke's Drift in January 1879. He was awarded the Victoria Cross by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle in 1880, for saving the lives of fellow soldiers. He drifted, first in Birmingham, then in Manchester. He had a small part in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. He entered the Bridge Street Workhouse in 1910, died in 1913 and is buried in a common grave in Philips Park cemetery.

Parks and cemeteries, streets and buildings are the ballast of cities. Things retained to keep us stable. Stories. Images. The great community chest. On Saturday 28th June 2008 Manchester's Lord Mayor Mavis Smitheman and Sir Gerald Kaufman MP were amongst the dignitaries marking the official opening of the new Gorton Market Hall. Not a dignitary, but delivering a speech on the day, was the artist Ian McKay. He guides the Gorton Visual Arts Group and they have just created a monumental mosaic made up of 57 panels which, mounted end-to-end, would run 37 metres. The work is installed in

sections in the market hall. It commemorates Gorton's famous Belle Vue Zoological Gardens. Very few people got to hear Ian's (or anybody else's) speech on the day, due to the lack of a PA system. I pushed to the front and caught him quoting this maxim: "If you are always looking backwards you will lose the sight in one eye. If you never look back, you will lose the sight in both."

Ian McKay used to be a display artist. A sign writer. He was made redundant. He signed up for an arts foundation course at MANCAT. "That's when things really changed for me. My eyes were opened. I'd never really looked at art before then. Now I can't get enough." He went on to complete a degree course in Visual Art at Salford University. He's now based at The Angels at Gorton Monastery. "I told them when I got the job it is to do with finding a way to continue with my own work. This work room is my studio when the group aren't about." That's when Ian made his painting of the Philips Park drinking fountain.

Ian McKay is not inclined to look on the Gorton Visual Arts Group as anything other than a group of people engaging with ideas and various fine art techniques. They are a group of artists and they have come up trumps with their monumental mosaics. Next time it's silk-screen printing. Before that there'll be a few trips to the seaside, Fleetwood, Llandudno and Colwyn Bay. They will take photos, draw and make postcards. "You should come on one of our trips. Bags of sweets and singing all the way. They really are

**"That's when things really changed for me. My eyes were opened. I'd never really looked at art before then. Now I can't get enough."**





20 east Year 8 pupils at Cedar Mount work with Ian to produce colourful panels for their new school which opens in September.







A piece at a time: under Ian's guidance members of the Gorton Visual Arts Group painstakingly assemble mosaics inspired by Belle Vue zoo and amusement park.

fantastic." They are a community of artists, and they will turn their hands to whatever Ian has dreamt up, and raised the money for.

Making the Belle Vue mosaics was stimulating, uplifting even. It jogged people's memories, got the group telling and collecting stories. They began breaking tiles and sticking them on board last September. "I'd applied to Tesco who have funding for community art projects. They told us they'd help, then they withdrew the offer. Then the new Market Hall offered us their space. So I measured it up, and it amounted to a lot of mosaic, and we didn't really have any money. So, as well as doing the work the group was fundraising, and I was begging tiles. Pilkington's were going to give us loads but then got jumpy about health and safety issues of working with broken ceramics, and their liability. Then B&Q said we could have a ton. It never occurred to me that they'd all be white!"

The Gorton Visual Arts Group started working all hours. As the installation deadline loomed, they conscripted help from local schools. It is difficult to match this relaxed band of people in their converted – not to say congested – classrooms with the scale and quality of the work they have produced. They worked from photographs and postcards, from book illustrations and scraps of drawings. There are Red Indian chiefs in full head-dress standing on the rear platform of a tram. There are sliding speedway Aces throwing up mud and grit. There are polar bears and chimps, reptiles, hippos, ring master and glamorous assistants. And the Belle Vue Bobs. The world famous roller coaster, opened in 1929 and finally demolished in 1970. My mum was convinced people had been thrown off them, flying across Hyde Road and Kirkmanshulme Lane. I needed no such dissuasion. There'd been a couple of fires in the superstructure and I got





It is now a permanent public art fixture at the new Gorton Market.

queasy just looking at it. I wouldn't even ride the more sedate scenic railway. I'd have had no credibility with the Gorton lads.

I guess every Mancunian over forty has a Belle Vue story. Wrestling, Jimmy Savile at the Top Ten Club. The King's Hall Christmas Circus. It is just these things that feed Ian McKay's interest. He doesn't wallow in it, and he takes a very contemporary view of what it is he should be doing with his group. "It's giving people something to do, of course, but it's bringing things out of them. The Belle Vue project has been terrific, even though there were times when I seriously thought we'd bitten off more than we could chew." He doesn't look like a worrier. In fact he looks quite carefree. I'm probably wrong. He marks his life before and after redundancy. Ian never looked at a painting until he was made redundant by the Newton Display Group of Berry Street in Salford. He was a member of NATSOPA (National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants) and worked for the Co-Op Press too. Now it is a totally different world.

And that is the point. Ian is from Beswick. His dad was an Ancoats lad. Now Ian's own son will do an Arts Foundation course. Skills, judgement and self-motivation are what carry him forward now. "The foundation course at MANCAT did it for me. I just want to find ways of carrying on with my own work, my own painting. This is my studio when the group goes home. The thing is, they will turn their hands to anything. Kids, students aren't necessarily like that. Our group gets on with it. I still can't believe we got the Belle Vue mosaics finished on time. But we did. And that's part of the commitment."

Archiving the city and bringing forward bits from its past is an increasingly important role. Ian McKay is aware of the pleasure and the interest he can help stimulate, but I'm not sure he gets the full force of his own commitment. Consider that the regional role of TV has shrivelled to little more than reporting gruesome local crime.

Documentaries on such as Belle Vue are rarely made now. Local press is shrinking on a diet of thin day-to-day soup, lacking the resources to run well-researched features.

There are creditable exceptions of course, but little will draw the audience response that the Gorton Market installation will generate.

The benefits of the work of the Gorton Visual Arts Group spark between the creators and their audience in a very live sense. I believe very strongly in the continuing existence of Ian McKay and fellow artists. Regeneration is an overworked word, and an under-evaluated process. A Tesco Extra is not an engine of regeneration. There is no point here in repeating arguments to do with the death of the High Street. I hope that Gorton enjoys its Tesco. For a community to be a neighbourhood, for a network of roads and buildings to be a place, for a place to be cherished, it needs cherishing. As a society we are becoming a little too clever at narrowing the aspect of our vision. A little slapdash about the dignity of memory and the respect that is due to people who have been this way before. To Pte William Jones VC, hero of Rorke's Drift, who died in the poorhouse. Ask the people of the Gorton Visual Arts Group what they think of Belle Vue and let them point you to their work. Watch Ian McKay as he moves around his adopted classroom studio. Both eyes flashing behind owl glasses. Both eyes with the clearest vision.

**"... Our group gets on with it. I still can't believe we got the Belle Vue mosaics finished on time. But we did. And that's part of the commitment."**

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Jordan Blythe, Higher Openshaw Community School.

Back Cover:

Detail of the Belle Vue mosaic by Noreen West of Gorton Visual Arts Group.

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## About East

Welcome to another edition of our award-winning magazine about the regeneration of east Manchester.

In this issue we take the lid off one of east Manchester's best kept secrets. It's 25 years since the City Council bought the 56-hectare Clayton Vale, then just a neglected landfill site, and started the reclamation task that has made it a treasured nature reserve. New East Manchester and its partners – including the Northwest Development Agency, the European Union Development Fund and the Environment Agency – have invested more than £2.5 million over the past few years to continue this improvement and, as photographer Len Grant has discovered, the Vale has now become a favourite haunt of many local people and an eye-opener for new visitors.

Meanwhile, writer Mark Hillsdon has been on a voyage of discovery of his own. In Miles Platting, amongst the multi-million pound PFI programme, he has seen how housebuilder Lovell is recruiting and training local young people to help in the refurbishment of hundreds of homes. In particular he has met Curtis Buckley, an apprentice plasterer, working on improving his neighbours' houses. A fascinating story of community involvement.

Elsewhere in **East**, Phil Griffin writes about Ian McKay, an artist based at The Angels in Gorton, whose work with all ages is making an impact across the area. The Belle Vue mosaic – a 56-panel artwork – has just been unveiled at the new Gorton indoor market. It's the work of a dozen or more local people celebrating the heyday of Belle Vue zoo and entertainment centre. Ian has also inspired Cedar Mount high school pupils to produce panels influenced by graffiti art that will adorn the walls of their new school from September.

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](http://www.lengrant.co.uk).

**Mark Hillsdon** is a freelance writer who came to Manchester as a student 20 years ago and never left. He's written for a diverse range of publications from *Esquire* to *Country Walking*, as well as several national newspapers. A consultant editor on the *Time Out* guide to Manchester, he is currently working on his first children's novel.

**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.

**In this issue of East:**

Jobs for the boys (and girls) in Miles Platting; Phil Griffin talks to the Gorton-based artist working across the generations; residents try out their pikes and inverted crucifixes; and Len Grant sees who's taking the air on the Vale.

