

## Case Study

## Greengate Baths, Collier Street, Salford



**Opened** August 27 1856  
**Closed** c.1880  
**Address** Collier St M3 7DW  
**Architect** Thomas Worthington  
**Cost** £9,913  
**Pool sizes** 1st & 2nd both 53' x 25'  
**Owner** Ask Developments  
**Listed** Grade II\* (1980) and on Buildings at Risk Register since 1998

Tucked away in a forgotten back street, yet only a short stroll from Manchester's busy Deansgate, our first case study is of a genuinely unique building. Boarded up and virtually derelict, Greengate Baths is the oldest surviving public baths in Britain, and one of only five public baths to be listed Grade II\*.

That it operated as a baths for barely 25 years, and spent the following hundred years or so as a warehouse cannot be denied.

But as the sole surviving example of the earliest generation of public baths in the mid 19th

Viewed in 2003, the boarded-up façade of Greengate Baths retains its original crest on the upper storey (nearest the camera). Just legible, it states 'Manchester & Salford Baths & Laundries Erected Anno Domini MDCCCLV' (although it opened the following year). The central attic storey provided living accommodation for the baths superintendent and his family.

century it is of immense historical and architectural importance.

Today, surrounded as it is by a dual carriageway, industrial units and new developments forming part of the Greengate Embankment regeneration area, it is hard to picture how deprived and densely populated this part of the city was in the 1850s. And yet unlike their counterparts in London, Birmingham, Liverpool or Preston, neither of the local authorities in Manchester or Salford were prepared to adopt the 1846 Act. Instead, in 1854 local philanthropists and businessmen stepped into the void by forming the Manchester and Salford Baths and Laundries Company, with 7,000 shares of £5 each.



As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Greengate Baths was its first venture, for which the company hired an untested but promising local architect, Thomas Worthington (1826-1909), whose front elevation and chimney design (see left) clearly shows the influence of his recent tour of Italy.

Unusually, the first and second class pools were of equal dimensions, at 53' long (to suit the site rather than any stipulated minimum), but as was the norm, no provision was made for women, other than in a separate slipper bath section at the side.

The baths was undoubtedly popular. In its first five months it was used by 16,000 people, and as it had cost barely a third of

Cornwallis Street in Liverpool or Kent Street in Birmingham, the company was delighted. One of its leading shareholders, an engineer, declared that Greengate would be an example across the kingdom, and was much superior to any of the baths he had visited in London.

But he was mistaken.

Problems with ventilation in particular – remedied by Worthington in his two other baths for the company (see page 42) – persuaded Salford Corporation, who took the baths over in 1877, to build new baths on nearby Blackfriars Road instead. (These opened in 1880, and in 2001 were converted into offices).

Until recently it was hoped that a similar fate might save Greengate Baths. Having served from 1880 until around 1990 as a warehouse, it then stood empty and unguarded. Its chimney had already been demolished in the 1980s, and in 1998 it was placed on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register.

Three years later it was bought by Ask Developments. They spent £400,000 on securing the fabric against further deterioration, but after considering various options to convert the shell into offices or residential units, a collapse in the property market in 2008 left its future as uncertain as ever – a relic in desperate need of deliverance.

Apart from the remains of the warehouse floor, the First Class pool is remarkably intact, as are Worthington's roof trusses. Springing from cantilevered iron consoles, these were arch-braced using an early form of laminated timber, with cross bracing in the spandrels. After being superseded by steel for many years, timber is now back in vogue for pool design.

