



Played in Manchester

The architectural heritage of a city at play

by Simon Inglis (this extract © English Heritage)

The Manchester Grammar School pavilion at the Lower Broughton Playing Fields, Salford, was designed by James Murgatroyd of Mills and Murgatroyd and opened by the Lord Mayor on August 1 1899. It cost £1,125 to build, plus £782 to drain and prepare the pitches. Remarkably intact over a century later, the pavilion is still in use by local schools.

Introduction

by Malcolm Cooper, English Heritage



This detail from an undated painting in the Lancashire County Cricket Club museum at Old Trafford appears to be from the period when cricket first established itself in the Manchester and Salford areas, between 1815-25. An early set of rules belonging to Broughton Cricket Club, formed in 1823, states that no fielder be permitted to smoke or lie down during play.

As many of us who live and work in this great city of Manchester are surely aware, sport plays a fundamental role in the health and welfare of our communities. Whether one plays or watches, swims or runs, kicks or catches; whether one is for the Reds or the Blues, the Sharks or the Aces, or even if one is only dimly aware of crowds gathering, of games being played, of hopes being raised or dashed, we can hardly fail to recognise that sport is as much a part of the fabric of city life as are the arts, the sciences, commerce and industry.

As the public body responsible for protecting and promoting the historic environment, English Heritage has, over the years, undertaken the study of a diverse range of building types. Our work with ancient monuments, churches, great houses and buildings at risk is well known.

But in addition to conservation, another part of our role is to address our fieldwork and analysis to specific building types, or sites, that are poorly understood, and which may be at risk as a result.

We have in recent years, for example, made great advances in our understanding of industrial structures (factories, mills and so on), domestic architecture (such as back-to-back housing and prefabs), commercial and leisure-oriented buildings (shops, cinemas and public houses) and even telephone and post boxes.

We also maintain a register of historic parks and gardens, which now includes some 1500 sites, amongst them a number of public parks in the Manchester area.

Given these areas of concern, we are delighted therefore to turn to the subject of sport, and in particular to this brand new series of English Heritage publications under the inspirational title of *Played in Britain*.

Starting with *Played in Manchester* we hope the series will develop into a wide ranging, comprehensive and informative record of the best of this nation's extraordinarily rich sporting heritage.

And it is quite extraordinary.

Incredibly, most of the sports played at international level today

– including football (by far the world's most popular sport), cricket, rugby (both union and league), hockey, tennis (both lawn and real), bowls (both crown green and flat green), golf, archery, water polo, snooker... the list goes on – were either invented, or at the very least developed, honed and codified for popular consumption by British sportsmen and women, administrators and officials.

But what of British sport's architectural heritage?

Sports architecture, and the very places where sport is played – the parks and gardens of sport, as it were – have not enjoyed the level of attention that many people feel they deserve and need.

As a result, a number of buildings and sites have been lost before their historic, architectural and social worth has been properly assessed.

This rate of loss has been especially accelerated in the last decade or so following the much stricter health and safety guidelines imposed since the terrible tragedies at Bradford in 1985 and Hillsborough in 1989.

Sport's more rigorous safety regime has placed considerable pressure on our older facilities.

Yet it has also led to the creation of some of the wonderful new facilities we see all around, not least in the north west, where the 2002 Commonwealth Games has helped transform the cityscape with a number of breathtaking venues; the City of Manchester Stadium at Sportcity, for example.

In turning our attention to sporting heritage we are therefore not turning our backs on progress.

On the contrary, because the pace of modernisation is so rapid, now is the absolutely the right time to take stock of what historic buildings and sites we have, and make sure that we evaluate them, record them, and where appropriate, work with partners to ensure that they are either conserved for sporting use, or adapted for other uses that will secure their long term viability.

It was to assist us in this process that in 2001 English Heritage's North West Region decided to commission a pilot study entitled *A Sporting Chance - Extra Time for England's Historic Sports Venues*.

Furthermore, with the Commonwealth Games on the horizon, we decided to focus specifically on Manchester.

Starting with a blank sheet of paper and no preconceptions, project leader and heritage consultant, Jason Wood, and his team of experts (Simon Inglis, Clare Hartwell, Julie Graham, Gill Chitty and Frank Kelsall) took on the not inconsiderable task of mapping out the issues that might inform English Heritage's future approach to sporting heritage at a national level.

As they soon established, this is a complex, often emotionally

charged area in which there are scores of examples of interesting buildings, highly cherished by their owners and users, but many others where disuse and dereliction has set in.

Not surprisingly they found that one man's shrine is often another man's unwanted eyesore.

Conversely, they also came across apparently humble buildings or sites which turned out to be far more significant than even regular users were aware.

Here are just a few of the examples featured in this book.

Manchester, the study was able to establish, has the three oldest purpose-built Lads' Clubs still in active use in Britain today, one of which, the Salford Lads' Club, has recently been listed Grade II.

Probably the oldest sports ground in Manchester, it transpires, is on Moor Lane, which we now know formed part of Manchester's first proper racecourse at Kersal Moor in 1681, and has been open space set aside for sport ever since. Behind the ground is a road, Neville Road, whose route follows almost exactly the path of the racecourse itself.

We discovered why there is a Tennis Street in Old Trafford, a Cricket Street in Denton, and a Robin Hood pub in Cheetham Hill. We found a delightful 1960s turnstile block at the Belle Vue greyhound stadium, which is also, incidentally, the oldest greyhound stadium in Britain; a well preserved Edwardian billiard room in an Eccles pub; a modernist bowls and tennis pavilion in Wythenshawe Park, and a Salford company which is only one of two left in the world making wooden lacrosse sticks. We found an historic real tennis club within a short stroll of the city centre which



even some of the city's sporting cognoscenti did not know existed.

We learnt that the now empty Manchester Ice Palace in Derby Street, built in 1910, is the oldest surviving rink in Britain, but that one of the first ice rinks in the world had been in Rusholme.

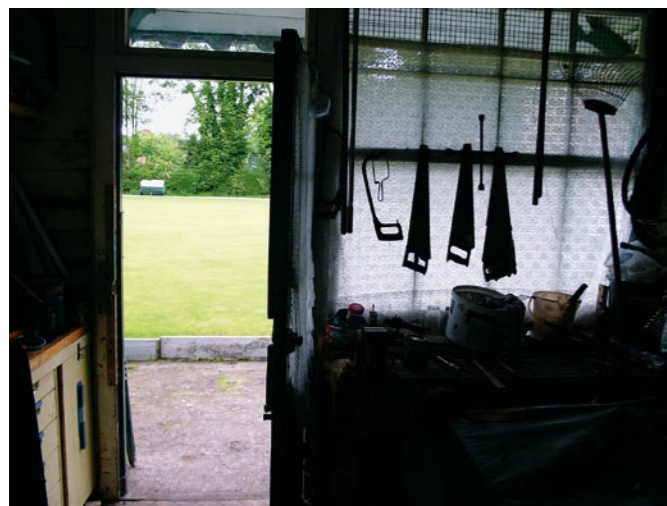
And of course we were all reminded of the deep emotional ties that bind people to buildings when the disused Victoria Baths in Hathersage Road attracted an avalanche of votes to win BBC Television's *Restoration* series in 2003, an initiative that English Heritage was happy to support.

Played in Manchester represents just one aspect of the work carried in the pilot study; the site visits and the related historical research.

Another vital element of the study was a comprehensive survey of public views and attitudes.

Jason Wood and his colleagues talked to hundreds of individuals; officials of governing bodies, representatives of strategic authorities, local planners, club officials and historians, sports fans and players. They asked, what do Mancunians think about sporting heritage? >>

As the groundsman's sign at Manchester United's Old Trafford stadium suggests, visitors from overseas love to visit Britain's many famous sports venues. United's museum, which opened in 1998, attracts up to 250,000 visitors a year and is one of the north west's leading tourist attractions. Manchester City now have their own museum too, at the City of Manchester Stadium. But might other sports-related sites in the Manchester area also be of interest, to local residents as well as to visitors and tourists? Could a greater understanding of sporting heritage help to regenerate certain areas of the city, or help revive pride in neglected grounds and open urban spaces?



Sports clubs not only fulfil an important role in promoting health and community life. They also act as the unofficial guardians of a substantial proportion of our urban green space. Stamford Bowling Club in the centre of Altrincham (above), play on a green that dates back to at least 1844 and is part of a Conservation Area. Even non-bowlers recognise the importance of this historic open space. But in October 2004 the club faced eviction after a massive rent rise, and the future of the green is now in serious doubt. Hundreds of bowls and other urban sports clubs have succumbed to pressure from developers in recent decades.

» Which buildings and which sports-related sites did they believe were of interest, or of importance?

And what criteria did they use in making those assessments?

Were these buildings and locations valued for their architectural qualities, or for their cultural significance, for their associations with specific individuals, or events perhaps? Or simply because they were part of the local scene and fitted in well with the surroundings?

When speaking of sporting heritage, as one would expect, respondents often emphasised the value of tradition, and of the sense of belonging and identity that well established sports clubs engender.

Often location was deemed more important than modernity. Nor were new facilities necessarily wanted if costs were likely to rise as a result. Above all, a clear majority emphasised that access to affordable and accessible sports facilities and open spaces was the most important factor in their judgement, and that these amenities needed protection.

But it also became clear that there are no hard and fast rules. Every case has to be judged on its merits, while everyone seemed to agree that the needs of spectators and players should not come second to that of conservation.

Many hard working club officials spoke a great deal about both the pleasures and pains they experience in looking after much loved but creaking properties; of the costs of basic maintenance and of the difficult balance they face between preserving the best of what they have – because this was part of their club's appeal – while at the same time needing to offer more modern facilities in order to attract younger members.

Many in this position felt strongly that they were not given enough help or support to preserve their buildings and open spaces. All the advice they were getting from governing bodies and funding agencies was geared towards replacement rather than renewal.

Two reports which readers may find offer a useful background to the *Played in Britain* series are *Power of Place: the Future of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage, 2000) and *The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future* (DCMS 2001). Both are listed in the Links section on page 130.

Both documents emphasise the need to widen public access to the historic environment, to take into account those aspects of the historic environment that people value most, and to engage those people who feel excluded from the planning process.

All these and a number of other recommendations relating to the future management of our historic environment apply equally to sport.

For some groups within society, indeed, sport clearly offers an ideal platform on which to build a greater awareness and appreciation of our wider heritage.

Inevitably this book is only a small step in a much longer process. Many of the issues highlighted by the study go far beyond the remit of English Heritage.

Also inevitably the approach we have taken will not meet with universal approval.

For example, it might seem odd to readers that we have not dedicated individual chapters to major sports such as football and cricket, whereas there are sections on minority sports such as archery and lacrosse.

This was deliberate, partly because we felt that the historical background to those sports is already well covered in other works – of which a select few are listed in the Links section – but also because our emphasis is on areas that we feel are less well known, or researched, and may therefore merit wider recognition.

Equally, there are several sports which, in the Manchester area at least, do not possess or are not associated with any historic buildings or sites. Hockey is one such example.

In other cities, no doubt, other sports would come to the fore, while others that are strong in Manchester, such as lacrosse, might not feature at all.

While calling this book *Played in Manchester* we also fully acknowledge that the study area takes in not only the city of Manchester but also Salford, parts of Trafford, Tameside and Stockport. It does not extend to the Greater Manchester areas of Bolton, Rochdale or Oldham. »



▲ Rita McBride's **Arena** is one of 35 artworks located on the **Irwell Sculpture Trail**, a Lottery-funded joint venture between the Arts Council of England, Salford City Council and three other local authorities straddling the Irwell. Five metres tall, the 'sculptural amphitheatre' sits atop a turf embankment overlooking the river, the Littleton Road Playing Fields

and Manchester United's Academy Ground (see map on page 35).

Speaking at its installation in 2002, McBride explained, 'I have always been fascinated by the structures and the scale of structures built for spectacle.'

It is a fascination shared by many, drawn not only towards the action, but towards the intimacy of enclosed spaces and the hum of

the crowd. No-one who watches or plays sport needs to be persuaded of the power of place, or of the value of historic sporting locations.

Indeed based on the idea of a sculpture trail, an Irwell Valley sports heritage trail – and a similar one in Old Trafford perhaps – might be one practical way to celebrate this important part of our shared cultural and historic legacy.

Withington Baths, Burton Road opened its doors in 1913 and retains many original features, including its coloured glass panels, floor tiling and Salford-made Ellison's turnstiles. Designed by the City of Manchester's Architects Department under the directorship of Henry Price, Withington is the oldest functioning public baths in the Manchester area.



» Limited by time and resources, we chose as our boundaries the area lying within the M60 motorway belt, with occasional forays beyond – to the likes of Davyhulme, Ashton, Altrincham and Stockport – only in cases where we considered there to be buildings of specific interest or relevance to the overall story of sporting heritage in the Manchester area.

The map opposite shows the extent of the study area and the key sites featured within the book.

To all those who feel strongly that, as separate political entities, Salford, Trafford, Tameside and Stockport should not be bracketed within the general heading of Manchester, or that entries from Radcliffe or Oldham should have taken precedence over ones from Sale or Urmston, we offer our sincerest apologies.

But to borrow a sporting phrase, the referee's decision is final. We had to draw a line somewhere.

One last caveat. It is not this book's aim to express English Heritage's policy.

Nor does it set out to tell the story of sport in Manchester.

Rather, it offers a guide to the city's history, as told through its sports buildings.

This is, admittedly, a novel approach, and one we recognise may well prompt discussion. But

that is only to be welcomed. As stated earlier, this is the first step on a long journey.

We nevertheless hope that it will help to inform and delight all those whose lives are touched by sport, in one way or another.

We wish to thank Manchester City Council for their generous support for *Played in Manchester*. Their commitment is yet another demonstration of what sport means to the city and its people.

Finally, one of the most rewarding aspects of the Manchester study has been the goodwill and support we received from across the city's sporting fraternity – a testament not only to people's desire to celebrate our sporting heritage, but also, we feel, to the positive character of the many individuals in this city who dedicate much of their lives, often without financial reward, to the sustenance of community life.

We hope that *Played in Manchester* will help to make those people's efforts more appreciated, and supported.

We also hope that readers will be spurred into visiting and enjoying the many fascinating sites featured in the book, and in the process, help to ensure that this city's wonderful sporting heritage will be recognised, celebrated and safeguarded for many years to come.

This is an extract from *Played in Manchester* by Simon Inglis

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photographs by Simon Inglis and David Brearley



Top left A personalised crown green bowl, made from lignum vitae (a now protected form of hardwood), awaiting restoration by Premier Bowls of Stockport.

Top right The 1948 FA Cup Final ball used when Manchester United beat Blackpool 4-2, on display at the Manchester United museum.

Below left A medicine ball found at the Salford Lads' Club, Ordsall, possibly supplied when the club opened in 1904.

Below right Another vintage lignum vitae bowl, c.1880, from the skittle alley of the Manchester Tennis and Racquet Club, on Blackfriars Road, Salford.