

Lowry, Robert Roberts & Salford

During his lifetime Lowry travelled throughout the British Isles but Salford remained at the heart of much of his work. He moved to Pendlebury in 1909 and it was there that he was first inspired to depict the industrial landscape around him.

In 1976, the year Lowry died, Robert Roberts' memoir, *A Ragged Schooling: Growing Up in the Classic Slum*, was published. Roberts, one of seven children whose parents ran a corner shop, became an engineering apprentice at the age of 14 before retraining as a teacher. Born in 1905 he was growing up in Salford at the time Lowry moved there. The city which came to fascinate Lowry was the city Roberts described.

Salford had improved since Engels' damning description of the city quoted above but 'much that was vile remained'. Station Road, where Lowry and his parents lived, was a more prosperous area than the streets where Roberts grew up, but Lowry knew the whole city well, partly through his role as rent collector. Although he was familiar with his tenants' way of life he did not pretend to be one of them. He maintained a distance, remaining an observer: 'I just painted what I saw – or the way I saw it, and what I wanted to paint.'

Towards the end of his life, living in Mottram-in-Longdendale, Lowry rarely visited Manchester and Salford, saying both cities had changed beyond recognition. Roberts' 'village', south of Peel Park and bordered by Oldfield Road and Cross Lane, was similarly transformed: 'That little world between the railway lines...has now been swept away... Perhaps the next generation will landscape it...and all that dark excrescence of an industrial age, like the poor folk who lived and toiled there, will have vanished like a lost medieval village.'

All Salford quotes are taken from Robert Roberts *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* 1971 and Robert Roberts *A Ragged Schooling: Growing up in the Classic Slum* 1976

'Before 1914 most working men put in not less than a 54-hour week, starting at six in the morning, with a break of half an hour and one hour for breakfast and dinner.'





a town of eighty thousand inhabitants, which, properly speaking, is one large working-men's quarter... Whoever passes over... sees filth and wretchedness...

Friedrich Engels *The Condition of the Working Class in England* 1845



LS Lowry with local children
on the streets of Salford 1957
Photo by Popperfoto Getty Images



Panoramic view of Salford
Salford Local History Library collection

The Lodging House 1921
© The Lowry Collection, Salford

In 1921 Lowry exhibited eight works in an exhibition in Manchester. Though none of his pictures sold at the time, *The Lodging House* did sell later, Lowry's first work to do so. 'It was to a friend of my father's... He gave me £5 for it.'



'By ten o'clock every morning all beds in a common lodging house had to be vacated and made again, ready for the evening. A municipal inspector called regularly, and any man found too ill to rise was removed at once to the workhouse.'

'With us', boasted one dosshouse keeper, 'a bloke gets a kip and a meal – half a saveloy on bread and marge; a penny mix – ha'p'orth o' tea with a ha'p'orth of sugar; and a Woodbine! How's that, then? Bed, breakfast, and send 'im out smokin' for fourpence!'



The Corner Shop 1970
Private collection
© The Estate of L.S. Lowry.
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'The shop, like its competitors around, opened at 7a.m. and closed an hour before midnight. 'The rest of the time,' my mother said, 'was my own''

'In an ordinary week at the start of the century she served some four hundred and fifty customers and took about eight pounds, mostly in pennies, halfpence and farthings. ...The cloth money pouch Mother washed frequently...but so dirty was the coinage handled that soon the inside became soot dark again.'

'With cash, or on tick, our villagers, about three thousand in all, patronised fifteen beer houses, a hotel and two off-licenses, nine grocery and general shops, three greengrocers...two tripe shops, three barbers, three cloggers, two cook shops, one fish and chip shop...an old clothes store, a couple of pawn brokers and two loan offices.'



Ellor Street 1960
Salford Local History Library collection



The Flat Iron Market c.1925
© The Lowry Collection, Salford

The market occupied a triangular plot of land which gave it its name. Lowry's view, made in chalk, is sketched in a looser style than many of his pencil drawings.

'Those in greatest need found even the old brokers' shops too expensive: they bought everything from the local Flat Iron Market. ...established close by a ganglion of railway lines, it lay constantly under the thickest smoke pall in Britain.'



Flat Iron Market, Chapel Street, Salford 1894
Photograph by Samuel Coulthurst. Courtesy of Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council

Samuel Coulthurst was a street photographer who took many photographs in Manchester and Salford using a camera concealed on a handcart.

'One sunny Wednesday afternoon [my mother] took me to **Peel Park**. We sat on a high esplanade and looked far over the countless chimneys of northern Manchester to the horizon. On the skyline, green and aloof, the Pennines rose like the ramparts of paradise. 'There!' she said, pointing. 'Mountains!' I stared, lost for words.'



Looking down into Peel Park from the steps Salford Local History Library collection

'Our own technical institute had opened its doors in 1896 and had been dubbed 'Royal' by Edward VII. The sons of Under-managers, foremen and top class mechanics were soon flocking there. We in the village looked upon it with awe, but nobody would have the courage to enter. We had a relative, a young millwright of real ability, who did venture here, then walked round and round the building and came home. He decided, he said, that it wasn't 'for people like me.'

Lowry attended life drawing classes at the **School of Art** based in the Technical College for many years and made a series of drawings showing the views from the windows as well as numerous studies of Peel Park.



A View from the Window of the Royal Technical College, Salford, looking towards Manchester 1924 ©The Lowry Collection, Salford

'Window curtaining with us had high significance; the full drape, if possible in lace, being a necessity for any family with pretensions to class. No one scorned the clean modest half curtain, but a newspaper across the panes showed all too clearly that still another household had been forced to hoist the grey flag of poverty.'



Flowers in a Window 1956 ©The Lowry Collection, Salford



Flowers in a window Salford Local History Library collection



A Fight c1935 ©The Lowry Collection, Salford

'...bitterness and bad blood...burst on the community in drunken Saturday night brawls. ...before the **fighting** proper began between the males, housewives shrieked abuse at one another, ... aiming to prove to the world that the other party and its kindred were 'low class' or no class at all. One waved, for instance, a 'clean' rent book (that great status symbol of the times) in the air, knowing the indicted had fallen in arrears.'

'As a child before the first world war I hardly knew a weekend free from the sight of brawling adults and inter-family disputes.'



Houses in Broughton 1924 ©The Lowry Collection, Salford

'One saw a quarter of a class sixty 'strong' come to school barefoot. Many had rickets, bow legs or suffered from open sores.'



Coming out of School 1927 ©The Estate of L.S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2015

'Sometimes an outing took us over the Irwell. 'Keep away!' our elders admonished constantly. 'You'll get fever.' We heeded them not, for here tumbled a river on whose purling waters the very rainbows appeared, at times, to melt, though basically it ran the colour of plain chocolate.'



The River Irwell at the Adolph 1924 ©The Lowry Collection, Salford

‘The real social divide existed between those who, in earning daily bread, dirtied hands and face and those who did not.’



Coming from the Mill 1930
©The Lowry Collection, Salford

‘The day’s work usually finished at 5.30 p.m. People generally lived closer to their work than they do now but most were too tired at the end of it to take part in leisure activities outside the home except at week ends, when factories closed on Saturday at mid-day or one o’clock.’



Acme Spinning Mill, Pendlebury
Salford Local History Library collection

The Acme mill in Pendlebury appears in many of Lowry’s industrial scenes. He told various stories about how he started painting the industrial landscape around him but often claimed that seeing workers leaving Acme mill at the end of the day was what first inspired him.



Mill Girl 1912
Private collection
©The Estate of L.S. Lowry,
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‘On some building sites a foreman might find fifty labourers pleading for a mere half-dozen jobs. It was not unknown for him to place six spades against a wall at one hundred yards’ distance. A wild, humiliating race followed; **work** went to those who succeeded in grabbing a spade.’



Women in shawls
Courtesy of
Manchester Libraries,
Information and
Archives, Manchester
City Council



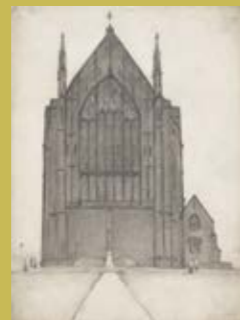
Francis Terrace, Salford 1956
©The Lowry Collection, Salford



Francis Terrace, Salford
Salford Local History Library collection

Lowry was commissioned by the curator of Salford Museum & Art Gallery to record some of the areas in Salford which were due to be demolished in the 1950s. Francis Terrace was one of the locations Lowry chose to draw. Built in the 1850s the terrace was self-contained and overlooked another street below. Although Lowry’s drawing seems accurate at first glance it is rare that his works are entirely topographically correct. Here he has altered the scale and position of the buildings seen at the end of the street and added a chimney.

St Augustine’s Church was close to Lowry’s home in Station Road. He drew and painted it several times, focusing on the building, which he presents as a huge, brooding form, rather than its surroundings. The tall memorial in the foreground of the church is removed completely in Lowry’s drawing, though he includes a smaller memorial to those killed in an explosion at Clifton Hall Colliery.



St Augustine’s Church, Pendlebury 1930
©The Lowry Collection, Salford



LS Lowry at St Augustine’s Church
© Harold Riley

Oldfield Road Dwellings were built by the Yorkshire and Lancashire Railway Company to house artisan workers. There were 60 ‘houses’ in all, facing Salford Royal Hospital, on the edge of the area where Robert Roberts grew up. The distinctive shape of the building - curved at one end and rectangular at the other - fascinated Lowry. The Dwellings were demolished in around 1970.



Oldfield Road Dwellings 1926
©The Lowry Collection, Salford



Oldfield Road Dwellings
Salford Local History Library collection