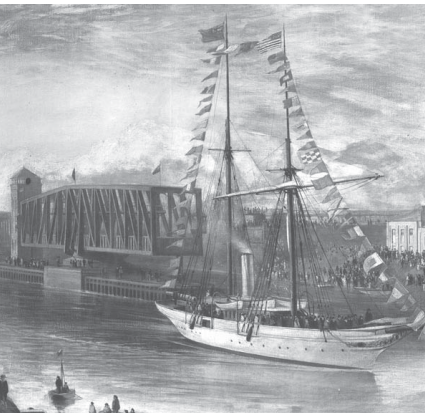
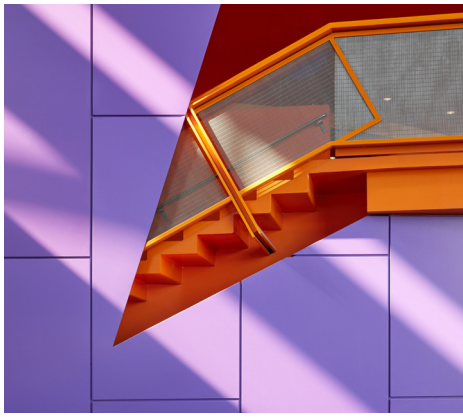
TWO LOWRYS, ONE CITY

LS LOWRY, THE LOWRY AND THE CITY OF SALFORD





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LOWRY 25 YEARS OF CREATIVITY

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HERITAGE UNLOCKED

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INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Lowry celebrated its 25th anniversary. A standout Millennium project, it has become a leading cultural organisation; home to one of the most impressive artistic programmes in the UK, and consistently one of the most popular visitor attractions in the North of England.
As the original catalyst to Salford Quays - now one of the most successful cultural regeneration projects in the world - Lowry is central to the story of Salford. This is a city that was a 19th century industrial powerhouse; was exposed to the toughest challenges of 20th century economic turmoil; and has started the 21st century as one of the country's boldest and most ambitious beacons of renewal.

The artist LS Lowry was witness to Salford, as well as its noisy neighbour Manchester and the surrounding towns and villages, at their best and their worst. His paintings were unsentimental, but quietly passionate in their belief that the city is nothing without its citizens. 'A street is not a street without people,' he said, '... it is as dead as mutton.' Lowry is a proud home to the world's largest public collection of his work. He is as central to its character and ambitions, as he is to the city of Salford itself.

Fig 1: Lowry, on Salford Quays, 2025

CHAPTER ONE

1887 - 1976

'We have to travel with the times...'

1887 - 1976

There is not a fixed Salford in reality, rather there has been a Salford that has been fashioned by - and thus reflects the impact of - the likes of Lowry himself; folk singer Ewan MacColl, who wrote *Dirty Old Town* about his home city; poet John Cooper Clarke, known as the 'Bard of Salford', and now, the panning shots on *BBC Breakfast* that position the broadcast in the heart of Salford Quays.

Before all this, a number of landmark developments, influential individuals and 'red letter days' had played a major role in shaping Salford and have left their legacies on the city's built-environment, its people, social and cultural life, and artistic representations or snapshots of what has been mischievously described as the 'other city' to Manchester.[1] The area around the then-town had experienced steady growth prior to an industrial revolution that 'catapulted the village into a major centre of manufacturing and engineering'.[2]

In May 1887, the Prince and Princess of Wales arrived in Salford as part of their visit to the region for the Royal Jubilee Exhibition in nearby Old Trafford. A showcase for the achievements, art and industry of the nation, the Exhibition included a series of mock streets showing 'Old Manchester and Salford', complete with attendants in period costumes, designed to highlight how rapidly the area was changing.

Fig 2: 'Old Salford' street, at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, 1887

The accelerated industrial development had brought many amenities to Salford associated with the process of rapid urbanisation. By the time of the Royal visit, there were an array of churches, schools and cultural venues including Salford Library which had opened in 1850, and housing crammed with factory workers. Perhaps the proudest addition to the City had been Peel Park, the first public park in the country funded entirely by public subscription. Opening its gates in 1846, it was free for everyone.

This apparent civic and cultural progress was juxtaposed with the oft-cited descriptions of Frederick Engels, writing in 1845, of Salford as 'unhealthy, dirty and dilapidated…the whole of Salford consists of courts and lanes which are so narrow…I am sure that the narrow side streets and courts of Chapel Street, Greengate and Gravel Lane have never once been cleaned since they were built'.[3]

However, the major change that would define the area in which today's Lowry and Salford Quays are situated was yet to come – although work had begun to transform the land. Salford in 1887 was in the throes of extensive change and engulfed in urban turmoil. The Royal Jubilee Exhibition at Old Trafford juxtaposed its 'Old Salford' with huge models of the 'Course of the Manchester Ship Canal, and the adjoining country, on a scale of one foot to the mile'.[4]

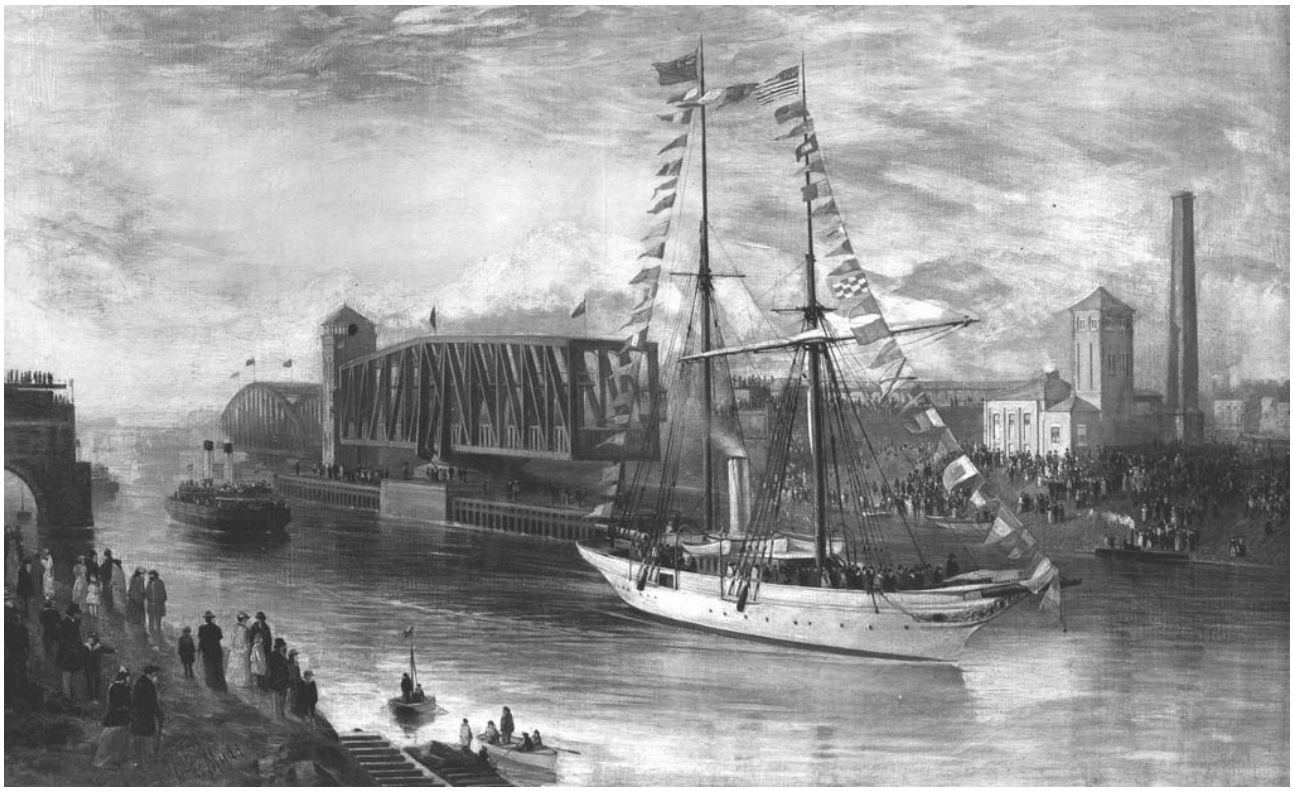

Fig 3: Opening of the Ship Canal, Manchester Evening News, 1st January 1894

Work commenced on the dock at Salford on 20th December 1887, on the extensive plot of land known as the Mile Field, lying between Trafford Road and New Barns racecourse.[5] The Manchester Ship Canal was an inland waterway designed to allow ocean-going vessels to connect 'Cottonopolis' - the nickname for the huge cotton-manufacturing city of Manchester

- to the sea, without incurring Liverpool's port charges. At the same time, it would bypass the costly freighting of goods via the railway.

Some 49 days earlier on 1 November 1887, Laurence Stephen Lowry was born at 8 Barrett Street in Stretford, two miles from the new development that would leave an indelible mark on the industrial landscape.

By 1890, a reporter for the *Widnes Examiner* was in no doubt as to the transformative nature of the development of the Ship Canal:

> ***Salford Docks: How strange a sound these words have! I wonder what one of the old handloom weavers who used to throw the shuttle in a Salford cellar would say if he could "revisit the pale glimpses of the moon" and see how the scene of his favourite walks is changed. He would surely imagine himself in another planet altogether; for no one, however intimate his knowledge of the district of the west of Salford might have been, could now recognise his whereabouts if dropped down on the Canal side of Trafford Park. Here like the huge docks that are to contain the argosies which we all look to bring increased prosperity to industrial Lancashire. Where Pomona - the former scenes of great horse shows, athletics festivals, political demonstrations, and other junketings of not quite so staid a character - once stood huge basins now lie exposed, and steam navvies, shrieking and puffing locomotives, and a small army of men have been busy at work the whole livelong day.***[6]

Manchester Ship Canal was officially opened by Queen Victoria in 1894. Around 16,000 men and boys had worked on its construction, delivering a venture that would transform the economic and social make-up of the area and its people for both current and future generations. It brought to the area more than 5,000 jobs, ensuring 7.5 million tonnes of cargo were handled each year - predominantly cotton, but also a huge raft of goods, from coal and carbon to cattle and coconuts.

Side-by-side with the industrial developments of the docks, the evolution of civic and cultural life continued and in 1889 Salford became a County Borough. The development of new education and cultural institutions was as indicative of an area's significance and sense of civic pride as was the rise of industry and economic prosperity. In 1896, the Salford Working Men's College (which had been founded 1858) merged with the Pendleton Mechanics' Institute (founded 1850) to create the Royal Technical Institute, Salford. It became a key institution for technical education in the city, later evolving into the Royal Technical College and ultimately the University of Salford.

It was from a Royal Technical College window that LS Lowry was to draw some of his most iconic views of Salford.

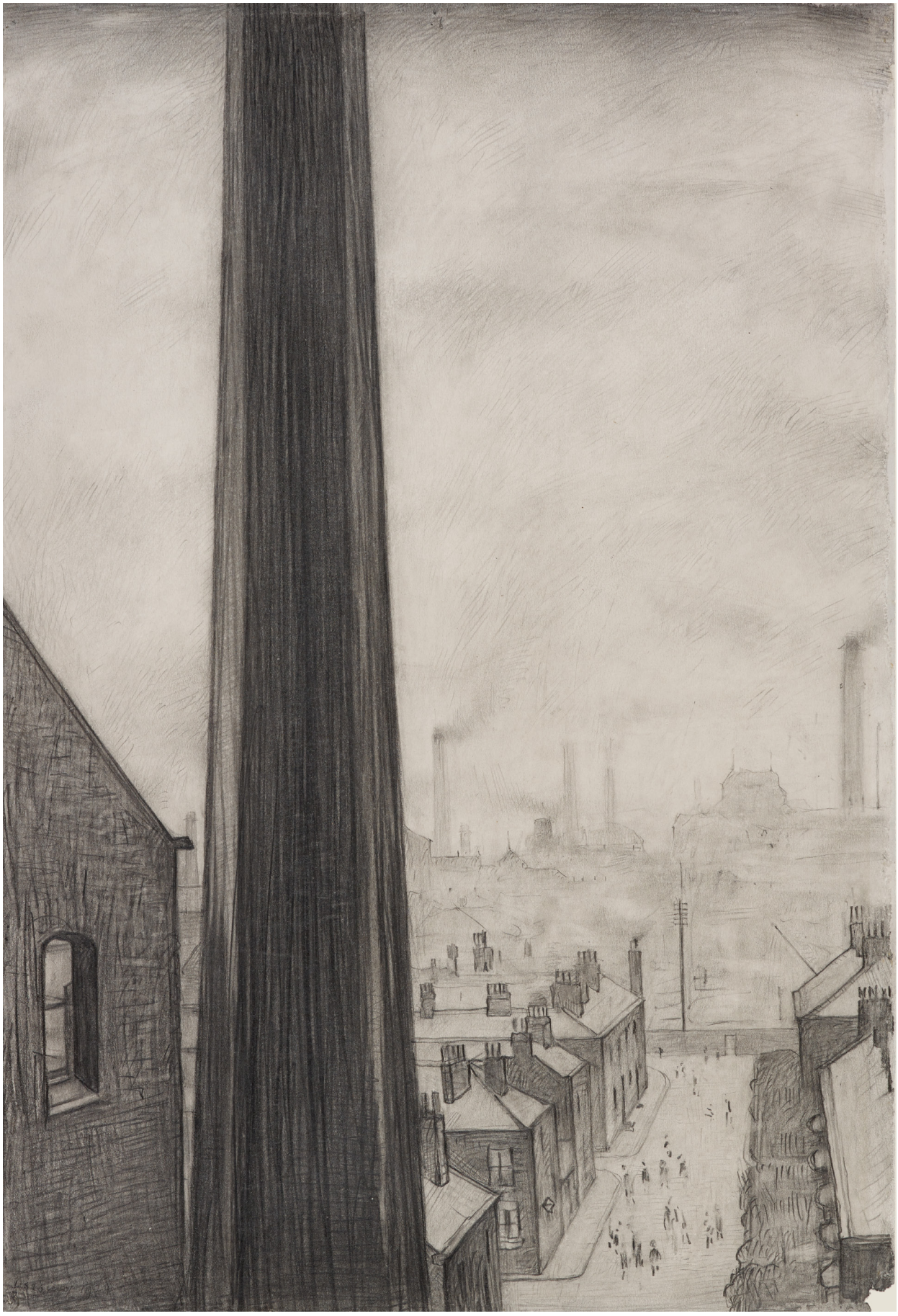

Fig 4: *A View from the Window of the Royal Technical College, Salford 1924 by LS Lowry*

Yet, despite this cultural evolution that afforded education, heritage and leisure provision, there were harsh realities for those that, rather than having concern for high cultural fulfilment and education progression, were instead primarily focused on day-to-day survival in the increasingly crowded, dirty and decaying working-class housing areas of Salford.

The rapid rise in population and industrial growth – as with towns and cities elsewhere in Britain during a period of unprecedented population increase and economic migration - made for squalid, cramped and dangerous social conditions in Salford. This was arguably most apparent in the living conditions of those workers and their families that toiled to bring industrial prosperity and new trade to the region including through the Manchester Docks.

Engels' decrying of the conditions of Salford are well-known and much cited, but arguably of more significance to the period is a study that emerged in 1904 that looked back on the recent developments and experiences of Salfordians and Mancunians focusing specifically on housing conditions. T.R. Marr's *Housing Conditions in Manchester & Salford* report of that year outlined the historic and early 1900s living conditions for the two areas in a damning, sobering read with arresting statistics.

By 1901 nearly half the population of Salford (106,649) lived in overcrowded, often damp, dark and poorly constructed tenements of less than five rooms that allowed disease to spread freely and contributed to rock-bottom hygiene standards. Salford and Manchester regularly appeared amongst the top dozen towns with the highest death-rate, a sad statistic made all the more damning and indicative of the prevalence of bad conditions given that the areas too experienced 'a great influx of young and healthy people from the country'.[7] The area was characterised by high intemperance as the public house became the go-to area for entertainment and comfort given the 'few or no opportunities for wholesome recreation', not least amongst those of the lower classes living in extreme poverty, and unsurprisingly drunkenness made the area a dangerous and disorderly place to encounter.

One account in 1904 provided a detailed description of a district of Salford, most likely Ordsall, where residents were largely unskilled and earned less than a £1 per week – the marker at the time on or around the poverty line:

> ***A school and mission room are within the area, and there is a well-equipped Lads' Club outside. It is a district of mean streets; the streets themselves narrow and dirty, the houses old, out of repair, and many occupied by careless and untidy tenants … Smells, which are unpleasant if not unwholesome, are caused by one or more of the factories near.[8]***

One year later, in July 1905, there was a royal return: The perils of the working class appeared a million miles away when King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra visited Salford to open the new Dock No.9 at the Port of Manchester – which now forms the 'North Bay' body of water between MediaCityUK and Lowry.[9] This latest development would build on the steady increase in tonnage that had seen the Port of Manchester ranked fourth-largest in Britain in 1905.[10]

The progress at Salford aligned with the ambitions of the country and was heralded as an indication of a continued role in the import and export achievements of the Empire. For Salfordians and Mancunians alike, it meant employment.

Fig 5: Navvies, working on Manchester Ship Canal, undated

Fig 6: Sketch by Frank L. Emanuel, reproduced in Dodge, A Salford Venice

This sketch (previous page) was drawn by Frank L. Emanuel, who was capturing the industrial scene of Salford several years before LS Lowry began focussing on the same theme, when he moved to Pendlebury in 1909.

The developments at Salford meant that the Docks would later play an important role in both World War efforts. With a major hub of manufacturing at nearby Trafford Park and shipping available along the waterway, the area was at the heart of ensuring provisions, engines, munitions and more made it in and out of the country.

In 1926, Salford became a city, against a curious backdrop of local progress, urban development and industrial prowess in the wider arena of a General Strike and increasingly troubled industrial relations at a national level.

At this point, the cotton industry had experienced significant decline, with major closures and redundancies and the region looking to diversify and adapt to a post-cotton future, one centred around an eagerness to promote a Salford that was centred around progress, industry and green spaces. Indeed, a promotional film of the time self-styled Salford as "The Gateway to South-East Lancashire".

Of course, despite the accolade of city status, Salford was still susceptible to the national and international implications of economic decline and severe depression. Salford-born Walter Greenwood's novel, *Love on the Dole* (1933), reflected the economic and social realities of grinding poverty and unemployment in his city's working-class community, particularly in the densely populated area known as Hanky Park, in Pendleton.

Four decades later, Robert Roberts' *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (1971), shone a light on the harsh realities of that era and how 'in the richest country in the world so many could possess so little'.[11]

When it was finally confirmed that city status was to be conferred on Salford, it was by then the worst-kept secret in Parliamentary circles and a subject of speculation and hints in the press for several weeks before. Nevertheless, despite the economic hardships of the era and industrial struggles, the new city status was celebrated in a variety of ways. The city's municipal and public buildings adorned their premises with flags amidst what the *Manchester Evening News* dubbed a 'burst of civic pride' that included an extra day's holiday for local schools and the police band playing in front of the town hall.[12]

Yet, akin to the scepticism and cynicism that was later to meet proposals to regenerate Salford Docks in the 1980s and 90s, there was some 'sentimental regret at the new change [to city status]' amongst older Salfordians. Then-Deputy Mayor Alderman Billington counted:

> ***Ah, but we are in 1926 now. We have to travel with the times. We have improved our status. This gives us a better shop window.***[13]

Despite the civic boost provided by city status and accompanying celebrations, the reality for Salford – as it was with many industrial centres - was one of struggle. The export industries were in decline and the impact of a severe global economic downturn from 1929 and throughout the 1930s, known as the Great Depression, set in. There were major changes in Salford's built environment too as back-to-back houses were felled in a partial slum clearance.

And it is that changing skyline of a struggling Salford which we associate with many of LS Lowry's depictions of the city in the 1920s and 30s, including those artworks created from the window of the Royal Technical College. He recounts having missed a train at Pendlebury Station and, upon leaving, he saw, against a damp, dark sky, the Acme Spinning Company Mill 'turning out' (closing-down) for the day. 'I watched this scene – which I'd looked at many times without seeing – with rapture.'

Lowry's subsequent body of work prompted one writer to describe Lowry as having:

> ***… represented the industrial North so successfully that the world came to see it through the prism of his paintings. In his pictures, people move in crowds yet appear lonely … His motifs – chimney, mill, warehouse, terraced row – reflected the repetitive narrowness of factory and slum life.***[14]

Fig 7: *Francis Terrace, Salford 1956 by LS Lowry*

In the decade following the Second World War, Salford was undergoing the latest iteration of reconstruction, meaning 'the Salford of the past would be no more'.[15] Slum clearances continued, creating scenes Lowry described as "battlefields".[16] He acknowledged that the Salford he had known was changing rapidly. "It's gone." he said, "Absolutely gone. It's amazing how it's gone".[17] In an interview with his friend Hugh Maitland, LS Lowry revealed how his works depicting Salford in the 1950s reflected his awareness of change:

> ***After a time [Salford City Art Gallery] wanted me to do some of the buildings that might not last for a very long time … There are pictures of churches – half a dozen churches that have now gone – and recreation grounds … I did a lot of things.[18]***

Amongst the drawings and paintings he made at Salford Art Gallery's request was *Francis Terrace, Salford* (1956).

By the 1970s, Salford, like much of the country, was experiencing a period of major industrial decline, with traffic on the Ship Canal now almost a trickle. And Salford's most famous artist was in the final decade of his life. In 1972, *Granada Television* produced *Lowry at 85*, providing a retrospective on the artist's life as he revisited his work and reflected on his career. Visiting the LS Lowry Room at Salford Art Gallery, he reflected on how the people in his work were more 'happy than they are today' and how 'when the cotton trade disappeared, my interest disappeared.' He lamented too, in interviews with Angela Bogg:

> ***It's all very strange that everything I associated with when I was young has gone. And I feel I don't belong here'[19]***

He expressed hope that his work would survive the mills that, as he noted, were disappearing each time he revisited the area. "Everywhere you go from Ashton to Rochdale, there's another mill been pulled down".[20] "It's progress, but it doesn't interest me" he said, adding:

> ***It's only my way of looking at it, I'm an old man. People brought up [now] will like them properly…and I feel like I don't care for them. It is progress I admit. I don't care for them; I'd like it to stand still as I remember it which you can't do.[21]***

Continuing, Lowry asserted:

> ***I've seen a lot of things happen here. I don't like change; I don't like my old friends going … [but] we can't all stay here forever. [22]***

Nonetheless, LS Lowry had accepted the Freedom of the City of Salford, and in 1975, having shunned every recognition he had been offered, he also accepted an honorary degree from the University of Salford.

In announcing the death of LS Lowry in February 1976, the *Manchester Evening News*' comments section paid tribute to a man so readily associated with the region and posited the idea that there should be some memorialisation and lasting tribute to the artist:

> ***Great artists open our eyes to what we have always seen but never noticed. Canaletto's Venice, Cezanne's apples, Turner's seascapes imprint the artist's vision on our imaginations and force us to realise what we have missed in the world around us. And so does Lowry's Lancashire. Now Lowry is dead, the great body of work he left, much of it still unseen by the general public will be evaluated, and his place in the history of British art allotted... He and his work deserve a more lasting memorial. There have been suggestions that his house in Mottram should be preserved as a Lowry museum, and that a Lowry gallery should be opened somewhere in the region he knew and painted so well. This is not the moment for grand, expensive schemes...but local authorities in the region should be alert for a chance to buy in more of his paintings and other memorabilia in preparation for the time when money will be available for a permanent and worthy home for them.***[23]

Fig 8: LS Lowry at the Honorary Graduate Ceremony, University of Salford, 1975

CHAPTER TWO

1976 - 2000

'Lowry's town has gone now...'

1976 - 2000

In 1979, Andrew Grimes' declared that in an article in *Manchester Evening News*, that: 'Lowry's town has gone now'[24]:

> ***They knocked down the old houses in terraces and back streets in the belief that it would make a better life for people in central Salford. But the high-rise blocks of flats which replaced them seem scarcely better … Salford's buildings – that is to say those put up since 1950, which amounts to nearly everything that stands, are depressing, especially the tower blocks, some 20 storeys high, in which Salfordians have been forced to live.*** [25]

Continuing his tirade at the changes, Grimes declared "modern Salford is a sprawl without a centre." He lamented the rise of "King Koncrete", posited that the adjustment must be hard to make for those "reared in the Lancashire town that Lowry knew" but conceded that the problems were a "symptom of misery, and many Salfordians have, for no fault of their own, much to be miserable about".[26] It had become a familiar complaint, reminiscent of previous Salford generations who resisted change.

But again, there were other voices recognising the need for rebirth, embracing modernism and the economic opportunities it might offer for the next generations. The same year there were efforts by local authorities to deliver a three-year programme to revitalise the inner areas of Salford and Manchester that included earmarking funding for industrial development.[27]

It was an uphill battle. By the early 1980s, the economic decline of Salford continued with the closure of the Salford Docks in 1982, sounding a death knell for the port industry where the horns of ships once sounded. This brought the loss of around 3,000 jobs and a profound impact on the wider economic fortunes of the supply industries, surrounding businesses and communities. The following year, Salford City Council took the bold step of purchasing the site (on which Salford Quays is now based) to arrest the threat of the area suffering the post-industrial abandonment evident across the North.[28]

In stark contrast to bemoaning the loss of the town that Lowry had once known, the development plan for Salford Docks sought to undertake a wholesale regeneration of what was once the industrial heartland of the area but now stood redundant. In 1985, the Salford Quays development plan was published that was to provide the framework for the first incarnation of the site that would ultimately see extraordinary transformation.

The ambitious proposals of the 1980s sought to bring a transformation that would shift perceptions of Robert Roberts's 'classic slum' to a cultural epicentre that ultimately replaced Lowryscapes with bold visions, some stalled plans and ultimately the pathway to The Lowry.[29]

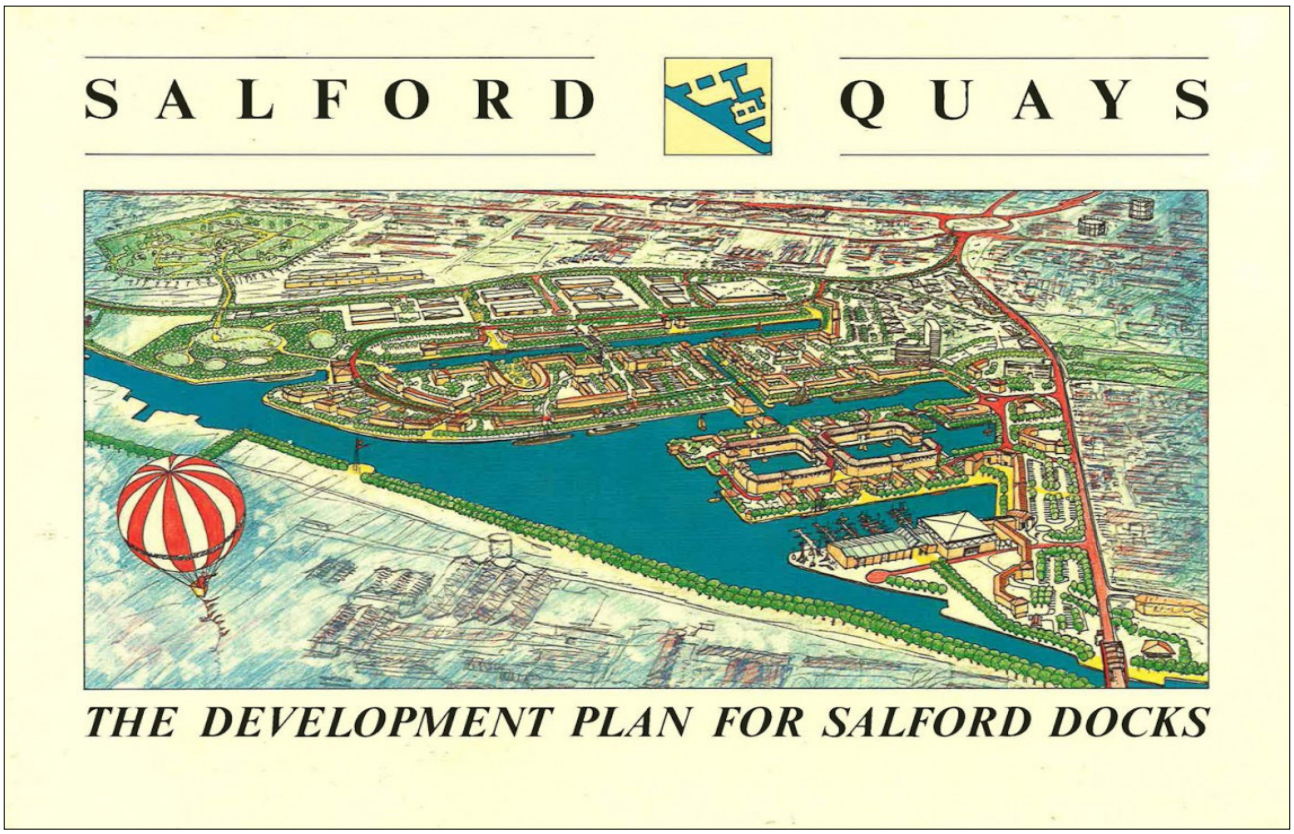

Fig 9: Brochure for Salford Quays: The Development Plan for Salford Docks, 1985

In 1986 the Secretary of State for the Environment Kenneth Baker formally launched the Quays development. This was a vision that looked forward but recognised the past as a combination of wholesale changes were coupled with implicit and explicit attachment to the Docks of yesteryear, as evident from this *Salford Reporter* extract from the same year:

> ***The evocative names of the old quays along the way have been retained. Sandpiper Quay stands close by Trafford Bridge. Clippers Quay is part of Salford Quays, but there are swans there now instead of sailing ships. Merchant's Quay is full of office blocks built of red brick in the style of the old shipping warehouses.***[30]

The project brought rapid change and improvement measures for the waterways that now surround Lowry. This included water improvement and inland network programmes in the mid-1980s as new fish stocks replaced the freight and new canals and locks were constructed that would facilitate use of the water for leisure rather than industry. On land, new bridges were built and infrastructure developed so that the people of Salford and visitors to the area could now promenade along public walkways and enjoy water sports. At the same time, there was a recognition of the maritime and industrial history of the site. Detroit Bridge was relocated in 1988 to its current location whilst initially cargo cranes and dock artefacts were retained and incorporated into the regenerated waterfront. Leisure facilities including the Copthorne Hotel and a new multiplex cinema were built alongside new housing and office spaces.

The combination of public and private investment meant that over £280m had been invested into the area including from the Department of the Environment and European Regional Development Fund and the project was acclaimed in the government's 'Action for Cities' report as an exemplar of regeneration. The success of the scheme attracted an array of visitors including Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Michael Heseltine and HRH Duke of Edinburgh as the contrasting politics of the locality and national government were put aside.

In 1991, Councillor Bill Hinds, the leader of Salford City Council, was able to assert that:

> ***Salford Quays has already established itself as one of the City's greatest success stories, winning international acclaim as a model for urban waterside regeneration. This once derelict area of Ordsall has been transformed beyond recognition into a bustling centre for commerce, housing and recreation. But the story doesn't end there …***[31]

A Salford Centre Seminar was held in July 1992, presenting audacious Masterplan proposals for The Salford Centre, a cultural and architecturally striking landmark development, to an invited audience of potential users, performing arts companies, arts agencies and community representatives. Later, a sketch of the Royal Albert Hall was superimposed by consultant architect Peter Hunter exactly to scale onto the proposed site at Pier 8 on the Quays and momentum gathered for the new centre to boast two theatres, hosting a total of 1,600 people, a gallery to house Salford's LS Lowry Collection, and an array of visitor facilities. These proposals ultimately provided the framework for the institution that would mark the coming of the new millennium: The Lowry.

Fig 10: Royal Albert Hall/Lowry scale comparison, © Shepherd Epstein Hunter

Architects Sir James Stirling and Michael Wilford, a partnership known for their prominent post-modernist style, were selected to prepare the masterplan for the Salford Centre from a Europe-wide competition. Following the death of Stirling in 1992, Michael Wilford Associates took up the baton, and The Lowry was named as one of Britain's twelve landmark projects for the Millennium, with £64m of funding being announced in 1996. Several agencies contributed, including The Arts Council, who funded the two performing spaces – a 1,730-seat Lyric Theatre and a 466-seat Quays Theatre; The Heritage Lottery Fund, who supported the LS Lowry galleries and study centre; and the Millennium Commission who funded other elements of the scheme, including a children's gallery called Artworks.

Nowhere was the importance of this major development underlined than in contrasting headlines in *The Salford Reporter* of 22 February (before the news broke) and *Manchester Evening News* that same evening. The former's front-page headline read 'CITY COUNTS COST OF CUTS' as 50 jobs were axed at the City Council, street cleaning budgets slashed, student awards axed and public toilets closed. Hours later the *Manchester Evening News*'s front page hailed 'SALFORD'S GREATEST DAY IN LIVING MEMORY'.

Announced hours before the 20th anniversary of LS Lowry's death, the Salford Centre, now rechristened The Lowry, would include a new gallery hosting the largest single public collection of the artist's work. The Chairman of the North East Ordsall Tenants Association captured the social benefits for the local community:

> ***This is brilliant. It's a chance for the people of Ordsall to become more interested in the arts. The schools have already been involved. It's a wonderful opportunity. It's going to bring lots of jobs to the area and I would like to see a lot of those offered to local people. This will do so much to raise people's hopes. The feeling here is 'At last, maybe I can get a job'.***[32]

The *Manchester Evening News* seized on the moment to hail the funding as representing 'a triumph of determination over cynicism', pointing to those who had said 'Salford had no chance of winning lottery cash, not least because neighbouring Manchester is expecting huge grants towards the cost of a stadium to host the Commonwealth Games in 2002'.

In April 1996, The Lowry Trust held their first meeting and responsibility for delivery of the scheme was handed over from Salford City Council. Just over a year later, on 19 June 1997, a procession was held by local schoolchildren as a time capsule was buried on the site as part of the ground-breaking ceremony. In the years leading up to the new millennium, a spate of changes on site and around the new venue followed, not least the arrival on Salford Quays of Metrolink tram system in 1999.

CHAPTER THREE

2000 - 2025

'The Lowry brings pride to Salford...'

2000 - 2025

Writing in *The Independent* in April 2000 ahead of a gala opening (before the official opening) as work continued on the building, Thomas Sutcliffe's headline read 'New Lowry rises in a drab industrial landscape'.[33] His article outlined a reluctant, although qualified acceptance of the transformative change that The Lowry had catalysed:

> ***This isn't a grim scene of industrial dereliction anymore - it's a grim scene of industrial banality; uniformly veneered with the shed-buildings and off-the-peg office developments. The Lowry, on the other hand, is intended to be a "flagship building", or, as Michael Wilford put it, "a honeypot" to draw visitors to an area otherwise notable for its windswept vacancy.***[34]

A more optimistic tone was forthcoming from Manchester MP (later Sir) Gerald Kaufman who described the building as "Salford's Guggenheim", referencing the cultural centre, supported by the Guggenheim Foundation, which had opened in the Spanish city of Bilbao in 1997. It acted as the catalyst for what became known as the 'Bilbao Effect' - a dramatic urban regeneration strategy transforming a declining industrial city into a thriving cultural hub.

The Lowry opened its doors on Friday 28th April 2000. *The Times* declared 'The Lowry brings pride to Salford':

> ***The opening of the Lowry reveals a Salford that refuses to knuckle under. The artist it is named after imposed his vision on a blighted industrial sprawl and thus earned it recognition. Now modern urban planners are trying to do the same… The Lowry, with its complex of galleries, theatres, auditoriums and bars will work to breathe new pride into a region. With an opening programme that includes the Paris Opera Ballet, it shows a Salford looking outward for its fortunes, just as it did in the days when it served as an international port… The city is not rejecting its flat-cap and pipe-puffing past. Rather it has founded confidence to build a new identity upon its industrial heritage… The Lowry will transform Salford by capturing its grimy past and gleaming future.***[35]

The Lowry's opening productions included a huge community production *To You,* with children from local schools performing alongside the Salford Youth Orchestra; The Paris Opera Ballet, who had not been seen in Britain for 16 years; and, soon after, the National Theatre's production of *The Oresteia*. Each was a pointer towards The Lowry's ambitions to ensure high quality community and schools' creative engagement, to bring the best international companies to Salford, and to place the city firmly in the touring ecology of the country's most revered companies.

In its first year, over one million people came through The Lowry's doors and it was quickly clear that its impact on Salford would echo, not only Bilbao's Guggenheim, but similar cultural projects in Stuttgart, Paris and Tokyo.

Awards followed for the new architectural landmark of the region alongside further national acclaim and visitors from across the country. Such was the popularity that then Lowry Chief Executive Stephen Hetherington conceded that whilst The Lowry was not conceived as a national attraction and instead "designed to belong here in the heart of Salford", the sheer early success had seen the venue become a national attraction with a national profile.

Such enthusiasm and immediately apparent successes came even before the official opening of the venue by HM Queen Elizabeth II on 12th October 2000. Just as her great-great-grandmother HM Queen Victoria's visit had officially heralded a new era for an area which had been all but abandoned two decades earlier and consigned to the past but was now very much part of the present and the future.

In Deyan Sudjic's book *The Lowry – A Landmark* published in 2001, the wider significance of the new addition to Salford Quays was emphasised once again:

> ***The Lowry has transformed Salford. It is a remarkable popular success, turning a derelict industrial backwater into a focus for the whole of Britain's North-West, attracting people not just to its diverse programme of cultural events but also to experience its rich sequence of public spaces. It has become a new kind of city centre, bringing life to a collection of redundant dockland wharves.***[36]

Despite some initial challenges as experienced across a number of Millennium Projects, The Lowry endured. Group Chief Executive Julia Fawcett grasped the opportunity to reflect on what had been achieved and the importance to Salford:

> ***We have now been open over four years and have welcomed more than three million visitors. Our aim has been to offer all an experience of art – whether in our galleries or in our theatres – an experience that would entertain, challenge and inspire. So, for example, an international company such as the Kirov Ballet, a ground-breaking production from Donmar Warehouse and a local production from Salford Musical Society have all been part of our programme… The Lowry works hard to try to ensure that people living on our doorstep see the building and organisation as part of their own personal, local landscape, fully open and accessible to them.***[37]

The Lowry also proved to be a magnet for a new cultural clustering in the surrounding area, from Commonwealth Games activity and the opening of the Imperial War Museum in 2002 to the landmark development of MediaCityUK at Salford Quays, including a major relocation of national broadcasters, most notably the BBC and ITV Studios, adding an estimated £1bn to the local

economy as new creative industries have sprung up to serve the clustering. Beyond the pounds and pence, education and learning opportunities have also thrived - in 2024-25, over 25,000 people, mainly young people, participated in 2,740 sessions at Lowry.

Much transformative change has occurred on and around the site of where Lowry stands today, notably spearheaded by the toil of the tough navvies that began literally shaping the future of Salford, and what would become Salford Docks, all the way back in 1887, the year LS Lowry was born. The theme of transformation has been a constant, whether it be in the rise and fall of the port underpinned by global commercial networks, the ambitious vision of the city in the 1980s that brought renewal and reinvention to the area, or the culture-led twenty-first century transformation into sites of performance, pictures and public broadcasters.

On 25th April 2025 - in echoes of the opening production of *To You* - Lowry and independent theatre company Not Too Tame launched *Gods of Salford*, produced as part of Lowry's 25th anniversary programme. It brought together 25 young people from the city, alongside professional actors to deliver a performance reimagining Greek mythology on the modern streets of Salford, characterised by working-class defiance and resilience. Hugely popular, *Gods of Salford* undoubtedly encapsulated what Lowry is all about – creativity, opportunity and making the arts accessible to all.

Fig 11: Lowry, 2025

ENDNOTES

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