



Manchester: Mapping the City

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Given that my cartographical horizon barely extends beyond the Cities of London and Westminster, this richly illustrated volume on the mapping of Manchester, part of Birlinn's Mapping the City series, presented me with a kind of alternative universe, cartographically familiar, yet different. In that respect, although its authors don't explicitly set out to do so, this volume is of particular interest from a comparative perspective.

The volume opens in 1728 with eighteenth-century panoramic views of the City, concluding in 2016 with a look at the challenges faced by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. However, rather than focusing on individual maps and plans of Manchester, with exceptions, such as Casson and Berry's plan of 1741, the book takes a largely thematic approach and its 54 chronologically arranged chapters consequently cover topics such as '1788: The development of estate land in the growing town', '1904: Mapping Manchester's slums', '1956: Fantasy transport – unrealised plans above and below ground', and '1975: Air pollution and smoke control areas'. Although all chapters have a year date, they normally cover their respective topics well beyond their nominal year, even up to the present day. Examples of his include the chapters on 'Municipal parks', 'Entertainment' and on 'The Arndale'. In effect, the book is not solely concerned with the mapping of Manchester (and indeed, Salford), but with the City's history *per se*, from a town of just 10,000 inhabitants producing woollens and other cloths in the early 1700s, to "the world's first industrial complex" in the 1800s and to today's "logical complement to the otherwise overweening dominance of London". The chapter entitled '1831: Spinning mills and the making of Cottonopolis' is an excellent example of such urban history. In this, the book benefits from its authors' combined specialisms in Manchester's regional history, urban policy studies, and geography, stressing that maps "became important tools in planning and managing the town".

That does not mean that cartography gets short thrift, but the maps presented in this volume are rarely the focus in themselves, but a means of understanding the development of the city. That said, several chapters do focus on specific maps, including unpublished ones, such as when the authors address the controversy over whether Charles Laurent's 1793 plan of the city is a rip off of William Green's work for his plan of 1794, concluding that Laurent must have undertaken some original surveying, even if he stole some of the big picture cartography from Green. Another map deserving special attention is Joseph Ashstead's 1851 map of the City (surveyed in 1849), the detail of which exceeds anything available, for example, for London during those same years, making it so much more than just "a handsome piece of art and cartography". The quality of the book's production, evident throughout, makes its chapter on the Goad insurance plans a particular delight. Here, as in the case of many other chapters, the page facing each chapter is used to provide a detail of one of the maps included in that chapter. Although I have worked with Goad's plans before, I had only ever been interested in their mapping of the streets and have only now, thanks to a two-page spread, come to really appreciate the incredible level of detail that these maps provide on the use of individual rooms within the buildings depicted.

Some other gems featuring in this volume are a "political map" of the 1819 'Peterloo Massacre', showing the positions of the troops and of the crowd, its key identifying, for example, "18. Manchester Yeomanry cutting at fugitives"; the Victoria Station's still surviving railway wall map, painted directly onto white tiles bricks in 1906; and the fascinating story of the City's first detailed street directory city-centre map, published by an amateur cartographer, Andrew Taylor, as late as 1996! These aside, a special mention must go the book's chapter 'Soviet mapping – a view from the east', reproducing details from a 1972 Cold war military map, which, while based on Ordnance Survey mapping, was supplemented with additional information, possibly even from on-the-ground observations, and on which all place names are shown in Cyrillic to aid pronunciation.

Overall, in the field of urban historical cartography you surely cannot get a better book than this. I certainly cannot think of a publication on the cartography of London which matches not only the breadth and depth of this volume, but also the quality of its production, from the weight of its paper, to its binding and the sharpness of its reproductions. Further volumes in this series will be welcomed.

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