Maps show us much more than the way from A to B. Today’s GPS and satnav technology may bring us real-time travel updates, but physical maps can be important historical documents – and some are stunning works of art. Researchers have opened up the archives across the city to tell the story of Manchester’s dramatic growth and transformation through these cartographic delights.

More than 100 street maps, land surveys, engineering plans and promotional bird’s-eye views have been brought together in a new book, Manchester – Mapping the City is researched and written by Emeritus Professor Brian Robson and Dr Martin Dodge, of the University’s School of Environment, Education and Development, and Terry Wyke, an Honorary Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University. It is the first history of the city seen through the eyes of its cartographers and their maps.

The maps help to illustrate how Manchester developed as it grew rich on the cotton trade from the late 18th century, experienced periods of boom and bust through the Victorian period, and began its post-industrial transformation in the 20th century and into the 21st century. The Peterloo Massacre, the...
There are rich and well-preserved collections – in the Central Library, Chetham’s Library and The University of Manchester Library among others – with a fantastic array of Manchester-related cartographic material,” says Dr Dodge. “We are also lucky to have many generous and enthusiastic librarians. Maps are fascinating in the messages they deliver, what’s left in and what’s left out. Often overlooked in the past, digitisation projects and new publications are now making them more accessible. I hope that our research encourages more people to explore the changing cartographic stories of the city.”