

## **Sandbach History Society: Report of the December 2024 meeting**

**Speaker: Brian Groom**

At the online December meeting of Sandbach History Society, Brian Groom gave a fascinating talk about his new book "Made in Manchester" which was published in May 2024. It follows on from his very successful book "Northerners".

The book covers not just Manchester and Salford but the wider Greater Manchester area where local identities can be extremely sensitive. However, Mr Groom said that having been brought up in several different areas he had no problem identifying himself as a Stretfordian, Mancunian, Lancastrian, and a Northerner.

Mr Groom said that the recorded history of Manchester really began with the Romans. Around 79AD they built a manor fort above the confluence of the Irwell and Medlock rivers in order to control the local tribes. A civil settlement was created outside the fort, made up of soldiers' families with shops and workshops. The Romans were there for two hundred years, but little now remains of the fort which was largely destroyed by canal and railway development in the nineteenth century.

Few records of the area exist until the time of the Norman Conquest when Manchester was part of the Royal Manor of Salford which covered 350 square miles and had a sparse population of 3000. Within that, Manchester was a tiny village surrounded by peat moss and moorland.

By Elizabethan times Manchester had become a manufacturing area for woollens and linens with its products sold across the country. Mr Groom said that one of the strangest episodes in the history of Manchester was the appointment in 1596 of John Dee, an alchemist, mathematician, astrologer, and scientist as warden of Christ's College which trained clergy. He is thought by some to have been a model for the magician, Prospero, in "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare. Dee is credited with first coining the term "The British Empire" as he advocated England's imperial expansion. He tried to talk to angels to find out the meaning of life and consequently encountered resistance from Puritan fellows. John Dee ended up in debt and poverty and after some of his family had died of the plague, he left for London.

In the eighteenth century Manchester became nationally known due to the development of the cotton industry as work moved from the home to the factory. Richard Arkwright's cotton spinning mill was a source of wonder and the country's first purpose-built canal was opened in 1761 to transport coal from the Duke of Bridgewater's mines in Worsley to Manchester. By the turn of the new century Manchester was becoming known as "Cottonopolis" and was the heart of the Industrial Revolution. Its prominence was due to a number of factors including the existing textile skills of the workers, the rivers, the close sources of coal, the fact there were a few craft guilds and the proximity of the port of Liverpool.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Manchester Ship Canal had been built, a thirty-six mile waterway linking Manchester to the Mersey estuary enabling the city to become the third busiest port in the country. Financed privately initially, its construction had to be completed using public funds and it was opened by Queen Victoria in 1894. On the banks of the canal industry developed, the largest of which was at Trafford Park. Initial plans were for villas and a racecourse, but it became a large industrial estate, employing 12,000 people in 1903 rising to 75,000 by 1975. To a certain extent the inter war recession which affected the whole country was mitigated in Manchester by these developments.

Mr Groom said that Manchester is proud of its radical heritage. The Peterloo Massacre of 1819 at a rally in support of democratic reform helped pave the way for the 1832 Reform Bill even though it was brutally suppressed at the time. Later Marx and Engels conducted research in Chetham's Library and later wrote the Communist manifesto. The TUC first met in the city in 1868, and the suffragette movement was begun in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst from Moss Side in the 1880s.

In the twentieth century the area continued to develop and in 1931 Manchester Corporation under the leadership of the Lord Mayor, Ernest Simon, bought land from the Tatton family to create Wythenshawe Garden City with the aim of housing 100,000 people. This target was eventually reached in 1965.

However, during the Second World War, Manchester suffered a blitz from German bombers. Mr Groom said that this occurred on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1940 and this Christmas blitz killed over 1000 people. Also affected was his mother and her family whose house was bombed. As they did not have time to get to the cellar the family hid under a table and survived. He said if it were not for that table he would not have been here today.

After 1945 the Manchester area went into a steep decline and was affected by the fashion for building high-rise modernist buildings in the inner city. This was some of the worst housing stock in the country and had to be eventually demolished.

There were two football disasters, the first in 1946 at Burnden Park where Bolton Wanderers were playing Stoke in the FA Cup. Thirty-three fans were crushed to death and four hundred injured in a highly overcrowded stadium. This event tends to have been overshadowed by the Munich air disaster of 1958 when the plane bringing the Manchester United team back from Munich crashed on a frozen runway and twenty-three people including many of the "Busby Babes" were killed.

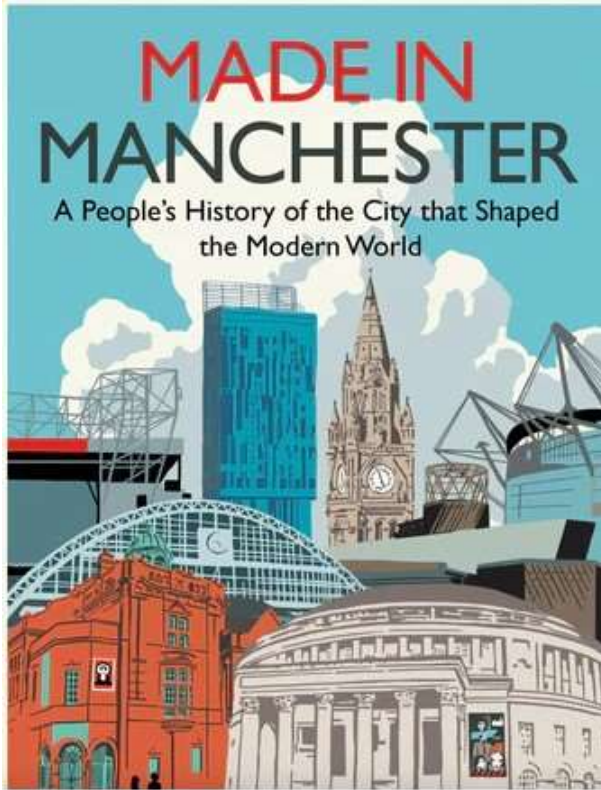
Despite the IRA bombing in 1996 when fortunately, there were no deaths, the city recovered and was once again flourishing with new skyscrapers being built and jobs being created in business and finance. Today Manchester is in the global spotlight as a test case for modern urban living. Mr Groom said that for those who wish to learn more about the colourful history of Manchester it is in his book.

The next meeting of Sandbach History Society will be online on Tuesday January 7th at 8pm when Anthony Annakin-Smith will talk about "Parkgate, the seaport with no sea". For more information, go to the Society website, <https://sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk>, Visitors are most welcome but please contact the Society first at [info@sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:info@sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk)

*Richard Vickery 13/12/24 1062 words*

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2. John Dee, Wikipedia, in the public domain
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4. Manchester Skyline 2020, Chris Clarke , Wikimedia Commons.



1. Book cover



2. John Dee



3. Peterloo Massacre



4. Manchester Skyline , 2020