



Mary Turner researching in John Street, Collyhurst

## MARY TURNER (1921-1989)

When Mary Turner died on September 28 this journal lost one of its best and most individual reviewers. Collyhurst also lost the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable researcher into its past. Mary wrote two volumes on its history and claimed quite rightly if somewhat tongue in cheek, to be the world authority on the area. It was not however, Mary's style or inclination to be confined to the slow methodical assembly of information and interpretation which, for her, made many historians and academics in particular to be pitied rather than respected. Such an approach often made history dull, quite inconceivable so far as Mary was concerned. She did not write a great deal other than the work on Collyhurst mentioned earlier, a brief piece on population, another in the *History Workshop Journal* and one or two others. Even the titles reveal her lively and often irreverent approach. Who else would entitle a projected paper (unfortunately never given) "Medical History from the bottom up: Scatological gleanings from Victorian Manchester — 'anus mirabilis Victorians'?"

Mary will be better remembered for more intangible contributions based partly on her own personality and partly on her approach to local history. She cut an impressive personal figure — the fattest historian on two wheels, she claimed. Mary Turner on one of her succession of 90c.c. motorbikes was a well-known sight on Manchester roads, not to mention her trips to Eire and the Continent, all in pursuit of her latest passion — the Irish.

For many years she held very popular WEA classes which in themselves served to stimulate an interest in local history for many people. In this forum and elsewhere she helped to preserve for posterity much that would otherwise have been lost, persuading others that their own experiences were worth writing down. Her house was crammed with relics of Manchester's past and used not only to live in but on many occasions to teach in — thirty plus children and teacher all engaged on GCSE projects on one memorable occasion.

On her own admission Mary went almost daily to the Local History Library in Manchester Central Reference

Library. Her account of how she operated was that she ordered material from catalogues and calendars 'which looked interesting' and waited with gleeful pleasure for the results. For Mary Turner one of the most important questions was "Who else would be interested in this?". This is perhaps her most important contribution to Manchester's local historians. She disseminated information, effected introductions and generated enthusiasm for Manchester's past and in so doing has certainly affected present and future writing and the study of Manchester's history. Anyone who met and talked to her felt more cheerful and stimulated after her characteristically abrupt and rapid departure as she rushed to yet another venue. One of her delights was to collect historical oddments. It was, for example, Mary's story that underneath Manchester Garages on Wilmslow Road, lies buried a horse which had been present at the Battle of Waterloo. This was typical. It might not be a significant fact but it *was* interesting. This certainty that the past was worth recovering and that to do so was *pure pleasure* marked Mary Turner out from the army of worthy and earnest historians. She went out with a flourish. Who else would have insisted on her crash helmet being cremated with her?

Just before she died, Mary submitted this piece as a first draft, for publication in the *Review*. We are pleased to publish it.

As a lasting memorial to Mary, a fund has been established to provide, in the first instance, for the proper binding and storing of the extensive collection of local history material that Mary bequeathed to the Local History Department of Manchester Central Reference Library, which was almost Mary's second home. The Memorial Fund Committee also hopes to put on permanent display in the Local History Department one of the items from Mary's collection — a framed commemorative handkerchief of the opening of the Central Library in 1934 to which a suitably inscribed brass plaque will be attached. Donations should be addressed to: **Mary Turner Memorial Fund, c/o Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford. M5 4WX.**