

ART AND SOCIAL REGENERATION: THE ANCOATS ART MUSEUM

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The Manchester Art Museum was one of a number of late Victorian schemes aimed at taking Art to the People. First suggested in 1877, the Art Museum did not find a permanent home in Ancoats until 1886. The venture was the brainchild of the Manchester philanthropist, Thomas Colgan Horsfall (1841-1932), who sought to 'alleviate the miserable dullness and emptiness of the life lived by a very large proportion of the inhabitants of Manchester'. The Art Museum was one of many schemes which he sought to promote 'an ideal for life in Manchester'.¹

Born in Manchester during the 'Hungry Forties' and coming to manhood during the Cotton Famine, Horsfall 'heard much, and saw something, of the slums of Ancoats and Angle Meadow' as he grew up. Reports in the 1860s revealed the extent of 'educational destitution, in some inner city areas of Manchester'.² Later surveys showed that housing conditions in parts of Ancoats were appalling, the death rate was horrendously high and the level of poverty was comparable with that found by Charles Booth in East London.³ Indeed, by the 1880s Ancoats came to be regarded as 'the Bethnal Green of Manchester'. Like its London counterpart, Ancoats was sometimes seen as the embodiment of all that was degrading, immoral and dangerous in the late Victorian city. 'To many,' wrote a local woman, 'I am aware that Ancoats is an unknown region, a sort of Dark Continent or Alsatia, where most of the vices of savagery and a few of those of civilisation (including scuttling and drunkenness) may be practised without much fear of eliciting uncomplimentary remarks from pharisaical neighbours'. Of course, such a picture was overdrawn, and other correspondents to the local press were quick to point out that Ancoats was 'not exactly like Sodom and Gomorrah', that although it did have its blackspots, it was in the main a district of honest, hard-working people.⁴

Because of its notoriety Ancoats did attract slummers, philanthropists and reformers. The response to 'The Bitter Cry of Ancoats and Impoverished Manchester' meant that by the 1890s Ancoats had become 'a great centre of social work'.⁵ Some of that work was recreational and cultural. The Art Museum was one of a number of schemes aimed at feeding the 'starved minds' of the working classes and remedying the 'absence of civilising agencies' in the inner city areas of Manchester. It was an embodiment of the late nineteenth century liberal belief that 'culture' might be a socially cohesive force in society, and that in particular 'art should again become a teacher, an agent in the social reform and elevation of the people'.⁶

A People's Palace

By the late 1870s there was some evidence of an artistic revival in Manchester. 'In the last few years a different spirit has come over Manchester,' *The Times* reported in 1880: 'A demand has sprung up for playgrounds for the young, for parks, for picture galleries and all'.⁷ T. C. Horsfall embodied that 'different spirit'. Influenced by the works of John Ruskin, Horsfall began to try to encourage the 'guiding classes' to provide the civilising agencies that the poor 'soot begrimed' citizens of Manchester lacked. The Manchester Art Museum was 'formed for the purpose of giving effect to

Ruskin's teaching'.⁸ Its central idea was that the aesthetic tastes, the moral capacity and the skills of the working classes would be stimulated and their character developed through the study of art, nature and human life. The love of nature and art had to be sown in areas where the dwellers in the slums were 'excommunicate, not of the churches, but of nature'. Horsfall regarded young children as the 'most promising seed plots'.⁹

Horsfall first outlined his scheme for an Art Museum and picture loan collection for schools in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* in February, 1877. The Art Museum was meant to provide recreation as well as instruction, and by supplying music and other forms of entertainment Horsfall hoped to attract adults as well as children to his 'People's Palace'.¹⁰ A copy of Horsfall's letter reached Ruskin, who praised the proposals in *Fors Clavigera*. Encouraged by Ruskin's response, Horsfall expanded his proposals and published them in a pamphlet entitled *An Art Gallery for Manchester*. While Horsfall admitted to his future wife that it was difficult to convince most Mancunians that 'art had anything to do with life', his proposal attracted the support of about a hundred of Manchester's leading philanthropists and cultural emissaries.¹¹

Locally, Horsfall's pamphlet was analysed in some detail at the Manchester Literary Club, and members of the Club, like J. H. Nodal, George Milner and W. E. A. Axon, were among the Art Museum's most active supporters.¹² Promoters of



T.C. Horsfall in 1876.

alternative local ventures in Ancoats, like Charles Rowley, also backed this scheme.

At a meeting in the old Town Hall in December 1877 a Committee was appointed to promote the venture.¹³ At their first meeting they announced that 'the central principle of the museum will be that knowledge shall be used by those who have it for the good of those who have less'. The Committee, which was chaired by George Milner, included Horsfall, Nodal, Axon, Rowley, Rev. W. A. O'Connor, Dr. A. Samelson, William Walker and Rev. J. A. Steinthal. Their very first task was to establish and publicise the aims of the Committee. A printed scheme was published which stated that the role of the Committee was as follows:

To obtain suitable premises in a central part of the town, for the purposes of an Art Museum.

To place in these premises a carefully made collection of Paintings, Drawings, Etchings, Autotypes and Engravings — all of subjects which are either already interesting to most English people, or, by description and explanation, can be made interesting to them.

To form collections of Casts, Pottery and Bronzes.

To increase knowledge and love of Nature by showing in the Museum large scale drawings of Trees, Plants, Leaves, Rocks, etc.

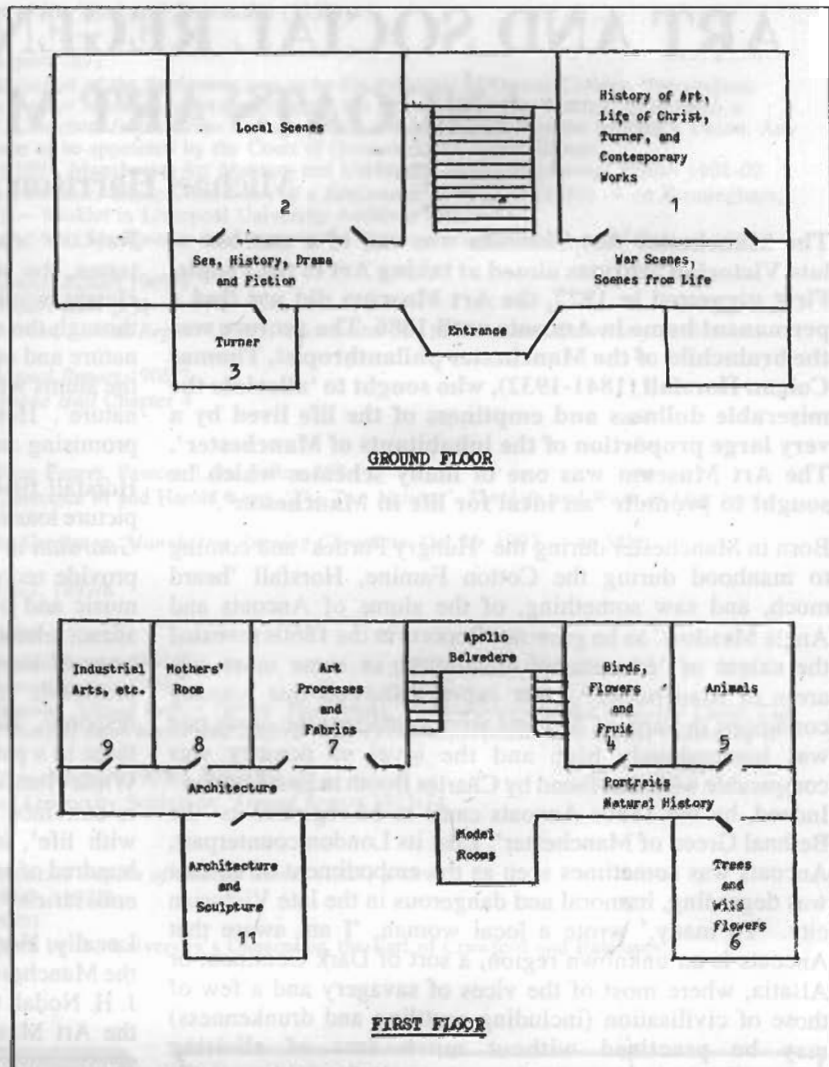
To tell in words, as briefly as possible, the tale which each work of Art tells in form and colour and to explain the processes of the Art of which it is a product.

To provide for the delivery of short and familiar Addresses on the subjects exhibited in the Museum; and, generally on subjects connected with Literature and Art.

To provide some good Music, instrumental and vocal, and also selections from the best English Literature — the same pieces and songs to be repeated until they are well-known.

To open the Museum on Sunday afternoons.

The main concerns of the Committee were to build up their collections and find suitable premises for the Art Museum. At the same time as exhibits were bought and gifts and loans were sought for the collection, a site in a densely populated district was sought. The Art Museum Committee had decided that for reasons of time and economy they would not build premises for themselves. Charles Rowley suggested one of his warehouses in Pomona Place. A number of other warehouses and several sites in Ancoats were mooted, but the Committee initially plumped for Carpenters' Hall. This building, owned by the Fieldens of Todmorden, was near two railway stations, and 'in the midst of a vast population'. Unfortunately, their plea for a moderate rent for their philanthropic scheme fell on deaf ears. The Fieldens' agent was not moved by their claim that 'the establishment of such humanising influences as our proposed 'Art Museum' in the midst of a teeming population of somewhat debased



Plan of the Art Museum in late 1880s.

tendencies must give a better tone to the locality and naturally cause an improvement to the property in question'. George Milner suggested Ancoats Hall might provide a suitable alternative. (He and Horsfall knew it because of their connections with the new working men's club that had been founded there.)¹⁴ The Hall which was owned by the Midland Railway had an impressive entrance hall, a newly decorated staircase, and had rooms that were well lighted by day. It could also be rented cheaply. Interestingly, in view of the Museum's later move to Ancoats Hall, the Committee came to conclusion the 'the opening of the Museum in this building could not be considered a fair test to indicate either failure or success in the future'. Their main concerns centred on the cost of alterations, the lack of security in the old building and, significantly, its distance from the houses of the 'better classes' who were expected to help in the Museum.

Lacking a home for the Art Museum, the Committee started to build up its loan collections. These small collections, which had 'a directly educational purpose' began to be sent out to schools and Sunday schools whilst small exhibitions of selected works were held in local clubs and hall.

By 1880, however, the Committee were seeking to work with the City Council. The Art Museum Committee put on an exhibition at the Town Hall in the summer of that year. Their hope was that this would facilitate discussions with the Council. They seem to have had some success, in that the Parks' Committee made an informal offer of space in the proposed Queen's Park Museum.



A caricature of Horsfall which appeared in a local newspaper *Manchester City News*, 17 February 1912).

At the same time that Horsfall was trying to gain support for the Art Museum in Manchester, he took every opportunity to publicise his scheme elsewhere. He delivered papers at Social Science Congresses and Art Congresses, gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction and wrote innumerable pamphlets and letters. He systematically sought the help of eminent people as a means of raising the status of the venture. A host of people from the worlds of art, education and philanthropy signified their approval of the scheme. These included G. F. Watts, Sir Frederick Leighton and P.G. Hamerton, the editor of *The Portfolio*. John Ruskin, William Morris, Rev. Stepford Brooke, Professor Flinders Petrie and Harry Quilter were among those who provided advice on art processes and the works of art then being collected.¹⁵

Although generally supportive, the eminent authorities sometimes expressed their reservations about the venture. John Ruskin, who had a low view of Manchester, and Mancunians, still remarked to Horsfall, 'You can't be wrong in getting good and beautiful things put anywhere within the sight of numbers of people' but later acknowledged 'that until smoke, filth and overwork are put an end to, all other measures are merely palliative'.¹⁶ Horsfall agreed with

Ruskin on this issue and hoped that viewing the contents of the Art Museum would stimulate a desire among the working classes to improve their surroundings.

William Morris helped Horsfall with the textiles, wallpapers and the Model Rooms at the Art Museum, but he was increasingly inclined to think that Horsfall had 'got hold of the wrong end of the stick'. By 1884 Morris was telling Horsfall that he believed that 'we should waste our strength trying to rebuild the present society while its basis remained untouched'.¹⁷ Horsfall did not respond to Morris's call for him to join the Socialist camp. Horsfall only committed himself to a limited form of 'practicable Socialism'. He agreed with the dictum of his friend, Rev. Samuel Barnett: 'It is impossible to make the poor rich, but it is possible by 'nationalising luxury' to make more common the better parts of wealth'. Art was a central element in this reformist view of society.¹⁸

Search for Premises

It took some time for the Art Museum to find a home, and even longer to find a permanent one. From the start the Committee lacked funds, a situation caused in part by the trade depression of the 1870s. The Committee were in an invidious position; they had difficulty in raising money until a practical start had been made; but it was difficult for them to commit themselves without more funds. Things began to improve when, after long negotiations, the Council agreed in 1882 to allow the Art Museum Committee to take space in the museum being built at Queen's Park, Harpurhey. Eventually, two rooms in the Queen's Park Gallery were offered to the Committee and they were able to show their exhibits to the working-class residents of north Manchester for the first time in 1884.

However, the arrangements had a number of disadvantages. Some of the conditions imposed at the Gallery, including admission charges and the closure of the Gallery on weekday



D.G. Rossetti, Study for 'The Blessed Damozel' (1876). Given to the Art Museum by the artist 'as a sign of approval of its objects and methods'.

evenings, were unacceptable to the Art Museum Committee. They also chafed at the lack of space to exhibit their collection properly.¹⁹ The Art Museum Committee finally decided that if the scheme were to be given a proper trial, larger premises in a populous area were required. An agreement was therefore signed with the Midland Railway Company for Ancoats Hall, at the low rent of £30 per annum. Undoubtedly, Ancoats Hall offered them more space and unfettered action. The Committee's experiences at Queen's Park possibly led them to ignore their earlier qualms about the accessibility of the site for middle-class helpers. The collection was consequently transferred to Ancoats Hall, and the Museum was officially opened on 7 October 1886.

Given their belief that the people in the vicinity of the Museum would require educating, the Committee tried to organise the collection in as logical and helpful way as they could. The sought to make it 'as easy as possible for persons quite ignorant of art to acquire the knowledge and the habits needed to enable them to feel the best influences of work of art'. To this end Horsfall took the advice of Professor Flinders Petrie, the Egyptologist and curator, and endeavoured to make the Museum 'an illustrated text book'. The works of art and design displayed in Ancoats Hall were given labels and were accompanied by extracts from the works of Ruskin, Morris, Hamerton and other eminent authorities. Books, available in the Ancoats Free Library, were also recommended to those wishing to gain a fuller knowledge of the history of art.²⁰

Organising Art

It is possible to get a clear idea of the contents and organisation of the collection from contemporary handbooks and accounts (See plan). The exhibits in the Entrance Hall were intended to give some idea of the nature and the range of the contents of the Art Museum. The visitor would be greeted by busts of figures, ancient and modern, formally introduced to casts of the Parthenon frieze and Assyrian reliefs, uplifted by scenes of natural beauty, encouraged by engravings of popular contemporary work by Luke Herkomer and Marcus Stone, assured by woodcuts of English working girls and amused by studies of laughing faces. Examples of metal and glasswork, vases and pottery were also prominently displayed in showcases in the Entrance Hall. In the pottery showcase, some contemporary jugs and vases were exhibited 'to show that things pleasant to look at and good for use could be substituted for many of the ugly things now used in English houses'. The residents of Ancoats were to be encouraged not only to buy prints of artworks but also well designed consumer goods for their homes.

The exhibits in the Entrance Hall were unusual in that they were not arranged thematically or chronologically, like the rest of the collection. Rooms One and Eleven and the upper north corridor were intended to promote a knowledge of the history of art, sculpture and architecture. Given the Committee's limited resources it is hardly surprising that most of the exhibits were reproductions. Water colour copies, oil sketches, woodcuts, engravings, etchings, lithographs, chromo-lithographs, photographs, plaster casts and electrotype copies featured extensively. The Arundel Society's chromo-lithographs were among those used to illustrate the history of art. Sketches by contemporary artists were provided to give some idea of the skills of the great colourists of the past. Frederic Shields produced several colour studies of works of the Venetian School. His studies of Veronese's *Adoration of the Magi* were intended to show the effect of line, colour and light and shade.



James Hey Davies, *An Ash Tree in Winter and An Ash Tree in Summer* (both 1883) A pair of paintings by a local artist aimed at an urban audience who were 'excommunicate...of nature'.



Room One also contained 'improving' pictures of sacred subjects and the life of Christ by modern, mainly English, artists. The work of William Holman Hunt figured

prominently in this section. Engravings of *The Scapegoat*, *The Light of the World* and *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* were on display. An especially prominent place was given to *The Triumph of the Innocents*, which was placed in a frame made by C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft. This work could be said to epitomise the efforts of the art philanthropists.

'It is hard to imagine,' Alan Crawford rightly suggests, 'an object more strongly associated with the vanished late Victorian ideal of social reform through art than this, with its reproduction from Holman Hunt, its quotation from Ruskin, made in London's East End by reformed craftsmen to bring light and culture to the poor of Manchester'.

This Room also included a collection of pictures and copies relating to death (perhaps, an appropriate subject in an unhealthy area like Ancoats). In this group was a study in chalk by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for his picture, *The Blessed Damozel*. It was given by him to the Art Museum 'as a sign of approval of its objects and methods'. A number of works by G. F. Watts dominated this section. These included reproductions of *The Angel of Death*, *Love and Death and Time*, *Death and Judgement*. (Watts later presented a full scale study for *The Court of Death* to the Museum). The Committee were aware of the need to provide full explanations for these allegorical works 'as many people fail to understand such pictures'. It is difficult to know whether copies of mystical works by Burne-Jones or Albert Moore's 'graceful pictures' hung nearby were better understood.

The other main gallery on the ground floor contained landscapes. Horsfall particularly valued the paintings of nearby beauty spots by local artist like William Robinson, George Sheffield, Ward Heys and Eyre Walker. The lack of success of the Art Museum's Rambling Club would indicate that these works did not generate the interest in these localities that Horsfall hoped for.

A small room on the ground floor was given over to the works of J. M. W. Turner. Its existence is a measure of Ruskin's influence on the Museum and its promoter, T. C. Horsfall. Indeed, Ruskin arranged for William Ward to copy several of his Turner paintings for the Art Museum. Other works in this Turner section included engravings from the *Picturesque Views* series and autotypes from the *Liber Studiorum*. The exhibits were accompanied by notes from Ruskin and Rev. Stopford Brooke.

The lower corridors were hung with pictures of the sea and improving tale-telling scenes from history, literature and drama. The latter groups included Shakespearean scenes by Ford Madox Brown and Holman Hunt. A plaster copy of the *Venus de Milo* was the focal point of lower northern corridor, while the lower southern corridor contained scenes from nineteenth-century life by the Frenchman Millet, Frederick Walker and Luke Fildes.

The staircase landing was dominated for many years by a cast of the *Apollo, Belvedere*. (It was replaced after the First World War by a portrait of Horsfall). To provide a context for the sculpture, the walls were hung with illustrations of life in Ancient Greece and Rome. At the head of the stairs there was a group of pictures 'representing human life lived



Ruben Santoro, Basket Makers in Naples (1878). One of a group of paintings 'representing human life lived under conditions which contrast strongly with those of life in Manchester'.

under conditions which contrast strongly with those of life in Manchester'. These included works by the Italian artist, Ruben Santoro, of life in Naples.

The upper corridor was devoted to the history of architecture, geological formations (illustrated by oleographs by Hölzel of Vienna) and portraits of distinguished figures. The Royal family, artists, writers, inventors and eminent Mancunians figured in this gallery of worthies.

The Model Workmen's Room which was originally furnished with goods at prices 'not exceeding those paid by workmen for ugly and uninteresting things' by W. A. Banson for Morris and Company, was to be found at the head of the stairs. The editor of the *Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* expressed moderate support of 'this modest and very suggestive piece of furnishing'. T. Raffles Davison, however, in an effusive article in the *British Architect*, proclaimed, 'No exhibited example of the art of furnishing has come



Ford Madox Brown, Study for 'Madeline Scott' (1883). One of the popular works in the Mothers' (later Children's) Room.

nearer to the spending capacity of the lower middle class than that in the new Art Museum at Manchester'. One obvious problem, however, remained. Although the Art Museum's immediate catchment area was on the more respectable fringes of the 'Dark Continent' of Ancoats and it was not peopled by 'the residuum', it was very much a working-class district with working-class wages.²¹

The Model Workmen's Rooms were later refitted by King and Heywood of Liverpool under the direction of the Liverpool architect, Edmund Rathbone. The total cost of the furniture and fittings in the sitting room and bedroom exhibited (excluding books and crockery) was £15; a sum held to be within the reach of a thrifty artisan. It was thought by the Committee that since the furniture was simple in design some of the local residents (many of whom were cabinet makers) might make similar pieces. It was also hoped that Wood Carving and Drawing Classes introduced at the Museum would encourage this process. Although Horsfall and his friends often acknowledged that Ancoats was 'desperately hard to move' they believed that the Model Workmen's Rooms were one of the successes of the Museum.

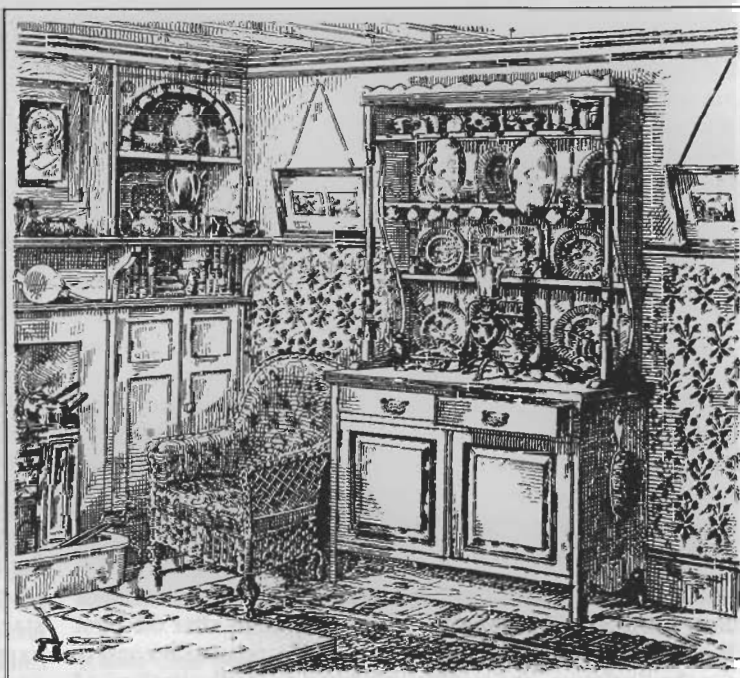
'What I saw in the Art Museum, in its days of activity,' Horsfall recalled in 1910, 'of the strong influence on working people, familiar only with ugly and untidy homes, of models dwellings, simply but pleasantly furnished, so convinced me that dwellings of the kind have a stronger influence for good than almost any other thing which can be shown in an Art Gallery'.²²

Another room on the first floor which had an impact, locally and internationally, was the Mother's Room. Its contents were largely chosen 'for the purpose of

interesting children'. The room, with its illustrations to tales by Caldecott and Walter Crane, portraits by Ford Madox Brown and scenes by Helen Allingham, was often visited by children. As the children rarely came with their parents, the Art Museum Committee felt that, although the exhibits stimulated children, their hopes of promoting a healthy family life had been something of a failure. They were pleased to see that the idea was taken up on a larger scale in America at the Brooklyn Museum. The Art Museum Committee ultimately changed the name of this room to the more accurate one of Children's Room.²³

In a further attempt to try engage the women of the district, the adjacent room contained a selection of English woven fabrics. Not surprisingly, these included Morris fabrics. A further exhibit was a Model Dress which was intended to show that 'simple dresses, very beautiful in form and colour, could easily be obtained by most working women'. The Committee supplied paper patterns of the dress for 2d.²⁴ Most of the space in this room was given over to illustrating the various methods used in the production of works of art. A series of representations of Norham Castle, using different techniques, helped to illustrate these differences.

The intent of a series of etchings by Ernest George, of parts of beautiful old towns in Belgium, was different. Here the aim was to encourage 'righteous discontent' among the residents of Ancoats with their environment. 'It is hoped that some of those who look at these etchings and see through the window the filthiness and ugliness of Modern Ancoats', an 1888 Handbook noted, 'will feel a desire to help make Manchester a little more like the subjects of these pictures than it is now'.²⁵ Although in the last years of the 1880s and in the early 1890s there were signs of working class and middle class interest in the condition of Ancoats, it is implausible to suggest that it had much to do with these etchings. It did, however, have much to do with the other reforming activities of the Museum's supporters.



The Fireplace of the Model Sitting Room from the Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher, 1885.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PICTURES.

A PAPER

READ IN 1883, AT ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL, BENNETT STREET, MANCHESTER,
AND PRINTED FOR USE IN THE MANCHESTER ART MUSEUM.

BY
T. C. HORSFALL.

MANCHESTER:
PRINTED BY TAYLOR, GARNETT, EVANS & CO., LTD.
1915.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

The final room in the Art Museum was devoted to chromolithographs or examples of the Industrial Arts. These ranged from Swedish embroideries to Italian silks, from Chinese pottery to Japanese lacquer work.

The response to the Museum in the press was positive. The Art Museum was compared, not unfavourably, with the People's Palace and Toynbee Hall in London. The main merit of the Art Museum lay, the *Manchester Guardian* suggested, 'not so much in the building or in the collection, as in the intelligent and logical arrangement of the exhibits'.²⁶ A *Handbook* was produced in 1888 which further sought to explain 'the arrangement of the pictures and of painting out how the various groups may be studied with advantage'. Horsfall himself wrote an artistic primer, entitled *What to Look for in Pictures* (1883), a pamphlet containing *Suggestions for a Guide Book for Life* (1883) for use by visitors to Ancoats Hall, and an essay on *The Use of Pictures and other Works of Art in Elementary Schools* (1884).

Although the information contained in these booklets and on the labels attached to exhibits were meant to make it possible for visitors to the museum to use it profitably by themselves, Horsfall felt that personal explanation was necessary because many lacked the background knowledge of Art that would enable them to profit more from the historical sections of the Museum. Middle-class guides were not only valuable because they could impart information but also because they could encourage 'a kindly fellowship between rich and poor'.²⁷ Horsfall was too optimistic when he suggested that such schemes could do much to bridge the gap between the classes in late Victorian Manchester. He was also somewhat dismayed by the fact that the Manchester middle classes did not welcome 'a system which makes that kind of activity which has given them their purest pleasure' the focus of their

philanthropic efforts.²⁸ Although the Art Museum never became the focal point for leisure activities among the adults of Ancoats, the Committee could claim some success in attracting support from members of the local Mutual Improvement Society and Working Men's Club. This clearly shows that there was a measure of agreement between working class self-improvers and middle-class philanthropists.

A People's Parlour

The Art Museum was, of course, always more than just an Art Gallery. It was promoted as a 'People's Parlour', a recreational centre for the district. Music, entertainments and popular lectures were on the timetable from the beginning, and were seen as a necessary complement to the art collections at Ancoats Hall.

When the Art Museum opened its doors in Ancoats in 1886 an enormous number of people visited the Hall; 'genuine interest brought some, mere curiosity more'. After the initial rush, an average of 2,000 people a week visited the Museum. A large proportion of the visitors came chiefly for the musical and other entertainments. Approximately 300 'real Ancoats people' regularly attended on Wednesday evenings to listen to music, songs, readings and recitation.²⁹

A picture of these early days can be gleaned from the diary of Henry Brooke, the curator of the Art Museum. He noted in particular the enthusiasm of the local children, and he was especially pleased when they started to show an interest in Art. Concerts and story-telling sessions attracted 'the very essence of Ancoats juvenile society'. The middle-class helpers often expressed surprise at the respectability and orderliness of the audiences.³⁰ They were always presentable as a clean face was a condition of entry. (Malcolm Lynch later testified to the efficiency of Settlement soap). Of course, the children were sometimes restless. Indeed, after a couple of years at Ancoats Hall, the Committee came to the conclusion that the 'chatter and clatter' of children interfered with the usefulness of the Museum to older visitors. They decided to admit fewer children during normal hours, but, to compensate for this, music and readings were specially provided for children on Monday and Thursday evenings.³¹

It was not easy to keep a balance between art and recreation. 'It became evident', the first Annual Report recorded, 'when the curiosity aroused by the opening of the Museum had been satisfied, that the mere exhibition of works of art, even with the aid of written and oral explanation, would not suffice to attract a sufficient number of visitors to the Museum to make it a force in the neighbourhood'. Horsfall and his helpers claimed not to be dismayed by this, maintaining that 'the people in the immediate neighbourhood of the Museum would require educating to a complete understanding and enjoyments of its contents'.³²

Although there were signs by 1890 that a growing number of working people were beginning to take a serious interest in the contents of the Museum, adults and children both came chiefly to Ancoats Hall for the entertainments. It is clear that the working classes used the Art Museum as they did other 'elevating institutions', in a way that suited them rather than in the way envisaged by their promoters. Indeed, by arranging more entertainments the Committee acknowledged as much; although they could still, to a great extent, control the programme.

The formation of the Singing Class and Choral Association was a great stimulus to the Art Museum. Music had always



The main staircase of the Horsfall Museum in the 1920s. Beaumont's portrait of Horsfall (reproduced separately) can be seen on the landing.

figured in Horsfall's plans: 'My pet ambition is to make good bright music one of the chief amusements of English workpeople'. By promoting what he saw as 'good' music he sought to wean the working classes away from the music halls and public houses where they had 'free and easies'. The Ancoats Hall concerts were popular with both children and adults. It was found that 'no lean or flashy songs need be provided to appeal to supposed popular tastes'. The building of a new iron-framed hall in 1892 increased the capacity. The 600 seater hall was usually filled, and often there were long queues for the children's concerts.³³

In the early years at Ancoats Hall it might be suggested that the recreational aspects of the work predominated over the aesthetic, at least as far as the visitors were concerned. To a certain extent the balance was redressed after 1894. Partly as a result of pressure from the members of the Art Museum Committee, the New Education Code of 1895 allowed time spent under the guidance of teachers in museums and art galleries to be counted as school time. The new rules gave a fillip to the Art Museum. Not only did the number of scholars visiting the Museum increase, so also did the general attendance figures. By the end of 1895-96, the annual attendance figure of over 77,000 visitors was more than double what it had been in 1890-91. The New Code encouraged more teachers to bring their children to the Museum, and seemed to generate 'fresh interest' in the scheme.³⁴

Although Horsfall and the Art Museum Committee, had, to a certain extent, specifically targeted children, the numbers of school visitors was never as high as they had hoped for before 1895. This may have been caused by the pressures of

the school system, the cultural poverty of the elementary school teachers or lack of interest on the part of the children. The fact that the Committee's schools' loan scheme had not been fully operative also meant that the link between the Museum and the schools was not as strong as had originally been envisaged.

The plan to have circulating loan collections for schools had been part of Horsfall's scheme from the start. Several sets of pictures had been formed before the Art Museum found a home. They were meant not only to stimulate an interest in art among the young but also to introduce pupils to the type of works found in the main collection. Unfortunately, because of lack of funds, the Committee were unable to extend the scheme for some years after their move to Ancoats Hall. A donation of £1,000 by Horsfall paid for most of the 45 sets of pictures in circulation by 1890.³⁵ A further donation from the Procter Trustees allowed the Committee to increase the number of sets to 220 after 1892.³⁶

Such windfalls were welcome because that Art Museum was often short of funds. The number of local people supporting the scheme was never great. The Annual Report of 1891-92 strikes a familiar note:

The practical indifference of those at whose very doors it is being carried out will be in remarkable contrast with the widespread interest it has elicited elsewhere, and the high commendation it has received from so many of the foremost authorities in art and education, both in this country and abroad.

The union with the University Settlement in 1895 did not improve the financial situation greatly. The Art Museum was only able to continue its work because of large injections of cash from Horsfall and occasional donations from benefactors, like Lord Derby.

Given Horsfall's friendship with Rev. Samuel Barnett and the readiness of many to compare the Art Museum with Toynbee Hall in east London, it is hardly surprising that Horsfall offered the Manchester University Settlement a home in Ancoats Hall. Indeed, the Settlers soon became responsible for the educational and recreative work done in the Museum. Despite the continued anxiety about funds, there were signs of progress. The decision to provide rooms for women Settlers in the Hall, because it was believed they were 'better able than men to foster social life and to make the Art Museum a drawing room for the district', seems to have been justified. They stimulated the work of the Art Museum Choral Society and promoted Mothers' Meetings in conjunction with the Manchester and Salford Ladies' Health Society. At last the women of Ancoats were responding to the presence of the Art Museum in their midst. By 1899 'a large army of women' could be seen proceeding to the New Hall of the Museum to listen to talks and engage in musical activities.³⁷

At the turn of the century, the Art Museum Committee were also expressing themselves happy with the response of children to the Art Museum. Children's entertainments were still well attended and the Hall was packed to capacity. On the educational side, teachers seemed more willing to announce their support for the Museum's work. Indeed, they were sometimes pleasantly shocked by the response of their pupils: 'It is surprising to discover how long they will remember anything they have thought out and seen for themselves'.³⁸

Things soon changed, however. With the arrival of T.R. Marr from the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh in 1902, the

Settlers became more concerned with 'the collection and dissemination of sociological facts' and the promotion of a 'healthy and vigorous sense of citizenship'.³⁹ It proved difficult to reconcile the smooth running of the Art Museum with the social research of the Settlers. By 1908 the Art Museum was showing signs of neglect.

A new warden, J.H. Whitehouse, a follower of Ruskin who had previously worked at Bournville and Toynbee Hall, arrived in 1909. He resolved that the Art Museum should be cleaned and reorganised. Whitehouse, however, entered Parliament in 1910, leaving the reorganisation to be completed by Horsfall and J.W. Graham, the Museum's Honorary Treasurer.⁴⁰

The lack of enthusiasm for the work of the Art Museum among the middle-class visitors and Settlers was apparent by 1912. The Committee decided to appoint a permanent curator to fill the gap left by the volunteers. The Committee were lucky in their choice, for in Bertha Hindshaw they received, as Mary Stocks has shown, 'the lifelong devotion of a single minded enthusiast'. Over the next few years Miss Hindshaw supervised the re-arrangement of many of the rooms. 'Her organisation of the pictures', the Committee were soon reporting, 'had added greatly to their value and usefulness, and her talks to classes of schoolchildren and to the children of the district who flocked on Sundays to her informal conversations were of real moment as part of the Settlement's efforts to spread in Ancoats the sense of love and beauty'.⁴¹

Municipal Control

As a result of Miss Hindshaw's efforts the Art Museum seemed to enjoy a new lease of life. Tension between the Settlers and the Art workers remained obvious. Horsfall began to express his regret 'that so much of the Art side of the Museum was sacrificed to secondary work'.⁴² The transfer of the Art Museum to the City Council seemed to be the best way to ensure that its work would continue. The City Council agreed to take over the Art Museum in 1918. The timing seemed apt, as Horsfall pointed out to Councillor Todd just before an agreement had been reached:

*If the Art Gallery takes over the Art Museum, formed for the purpose of giving effect to Ruskin's teaching, that will certainly not be the least useful way of observing the centenary of his birth.*⁴³

It was also appropriate that after the takeover the Museum should be re-named the Horsfall Museum. It was a recognition of the fact that T.C. Horsfall had given the Art Museum (in the words of his friend J.E. Phythian) 'not only the major part of its contents, but also such full measure of thought'.⁴⁴

Bertha Hindshaw's commitment to the original ideals also ensured the Museum's survival. The Horsfall Museum did not succumb to the Ancoats atmosphere and changing fashions until 1954.⁴⁵ If it had survived another generation, its significance might have been recognised once again; for Horsfall certainly anticipated a recent plea that 'through art, museums must take a leading role in helping us to perceive and respect — or be outraged at — our surroundings'.⁴⁶

'They could only set an example'

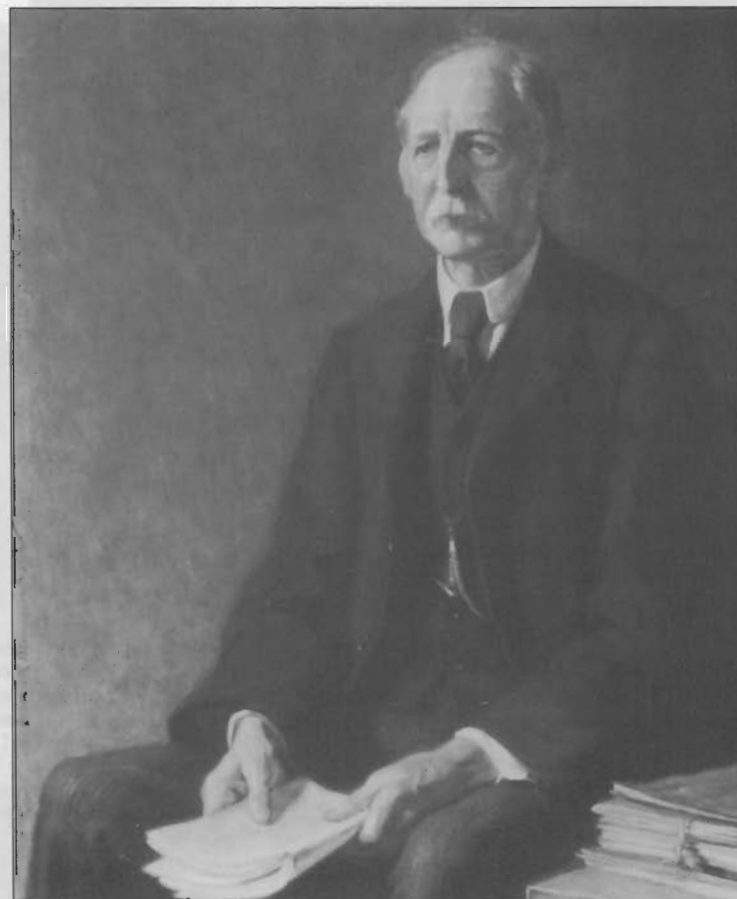
Like its London counterpart, the Whitechapel Gallery, the Ancoats Art Museum was a product of an age which believed that art and philanthropy could be reconciled. Those beliefs were threatened when reformers became preoccupied with 'attempts to straighten out the bodies of those whose minds they were cultivating'.⁴⁷

One measure of the Museum's success was, that despite the tensions, the compromises and the set-backs, it survived for nearly seventy years. There is also sufficient evidence to suggest that Horsfall's ideas influenced other reformers: Samuel Barnett, John Ruskin and Ellen Gates Starr of Chicago acknowledged their debt to Horsfall.⁴⁸ The Art Museum did not, however, effect the dramatic changes that Horsfall had hoped for in 1877. It did not 'cultivate the masses', nor did it bridge the gap between the classes. This was hardly surprising. 'They could not regenerate England and Wales from Ancoats', Sir John Gorst gently reminded the Art Museum Committee, 'they could only set an example'.⁴⁹ It was, as we have seen, an example that was followed elsewhere.

Other aspects of the Art Museum's work were taken up by others. The schools' loan collections organised by the Art Museum Committee can be seen as forerunners of the Rutherford Loan Scheme operated in Lancashire and Yorkshire since 1925. The practice of exhibiting and pricing furniture and domestic products has gone on apace. The local collection at the Art Museum seemed, in part, to anticipate the survey work advocated by Patrick Geddes and later planners.

It is more difficult to evaluate the impact of the Art Museum on the local community for they have left fewer records. Those who have, like Malcolm Lynch, confirm that the local response was varied. As he observed in *The Streets of Ancoats*, there were always those who preferred to watch the shunting trains through the windows of Ancoats Hall than listen to Miss Hindshaw talking about Greek gods.⁵⁰

While it is obvious that the public houses of Ancoats did not lose all their customers to the Art Museum, local people were attracted to Ancoats Hall in significant numbers. 'Nobler forms of recreation' were perhaps better than no recreation,



Beaumont's portrait of T.C. Horsfall.

particularly when a choice could be made as to which parts of the cultural programme could be taken up. Similarly, visits to the Art Museum might prove to be a popular alternative to school lessons.

There can be no doubt that the entertainments at Ancoats Hall were popular. The art collections, however, appealed to a narrower section of the local community. Children frequented the Museum more than adults, who felt the lure of other attractions. There is some evidence, for instance, that the opening of the Ardwick Empire Cinema had a detrimental effect on the concert audiences at Ancoats Hall.⁵¹

Organised visits to the Art Museum by school children assumed greater importance from the mid-1890s. Their

numbers were not inconsiderable: 1,500 children a week were visiting the Museum by 1917. A survey taken five years later among local parents indicated that children liked to go to the Museum with their teachers and frequently talked about what they saw and heard there. The parents were also overwhelmingly in favour of their children being taken to Ancoats Hall. Not surprisingly, the number of children who wanted to go to the Museum in their own time was not so great, but over a quarter indicated a desire to do so.⁵² This would seem to confirm Miss Hindshaw's assertion that children did return to the Museum on Saturdays, during holidays and even after they left school. Perhaps the Art Museum did bring 'some light and pleasure into the lives of children in poor districts', as she claimed.⁵³

NOTES

- 1 An essay by the author entitled, 'Art and Philanthropy: T. C. Horsfall and the Manchester Art Museum' was published in A. J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts, *City, Class and Culture*, Manchester, 1985. That study explored more fully the ideological background to the scheme and the network of reformers involved. Horsfall's work in housing reform and town planning can be explored in M. Harrison, 'Housing and town planning in Manchester before 1914', in A. Sutcliffe ed., *British Town Planning: the formative years*, Leicester, 1981.
- 2 H. C. Oats, 'Inquiry into the Educational and other Conditions of a district in Ancoats' *Transactions of The Manchester Statistical Society* (henceforth *Trans. M. S. S.*) 1865-66.
- 3 F. Scott, 'The Conditions and Occupations of the People of Manchester and Salford', *Trans. M. S. S.* 1888-89; T. R. Marr, *Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford*, Manchester 1904.
- 4 *Manchester City News*, 3 October 1888; 10 October 1888.
- 5 J. H. Crossfield, *The Bitter Cry of Ancoats and Impoverished Manchester*, Manchester, 1887; W. Brindley ed. *The Soul of Manchester*, Manchester, 1929, p.239.
- 6 T. C. Horsfall, *An Art Gallery for Manchester*, Manchester, 1877, p.2f.
- 7 *The Times*, 15 September 1880.
- 8 T. C. Horsfall to Councillor F. Todd, 17 January 1918 Horsfall Museum Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- 9 *Pall Mall Gazette* 26 November 1889; T. C. Horsfall, *The Need for Art in Manchester*, Manchester, 1910, p.32.
- 10 *Manchester Guardian*, (hereafter *M.G.*), 27 February 1877.
- 11 T. C. Horsfall to F. E. Reeves 23 December 1877, Betts collection, Norwich. See also M. Harrison, 'Art and Philanthropy' p.122ff.
- 12 *Manchester Literary Club Papers*, 1877-78, (4) pp. 179-89.
- 13 For this section see Manchester Art Museum Minute Books, Manchester University Settlement.
- 14 See M. Harrison, 'Social Reform in the late Victorian and Edwardian Manchester, with special reference to T. C. Horsfall', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester 1988, Ch. 5.
- 15 See letters of support in *The Manchester Art Museum*, Manchester, 1883, p.20f.
- 16 J. Ruskin to T. C. Horsfall 23 January 1883; J. Ruskin to T. C. Horsfall 19 November 1878. Copies in Betts Collection, Norwich.
- 17 For the correspondence between Morris and Horsfall, see D. F. Skinner, *T. C. Horsfall: a Memoir*, 1949. (Copy in Manchester Central Library Archives).
- 18 S. Barnett, *Practicable Socialism*, London, 1888; T. C. Horsfall 'Practicable Socialism', *Ancoats Recreation Programme 1889-90*.
- 19 *Memorandum on the Relations existing in February 1885, between the Committee of the Manchester Art Museum and the Parks and Cemeteries Committee of the Town Council of Manchester*.
- 20 For this section see *Handbook to the Manchester Art Museum*, Manchester, 1888. See also the Catalogue of the Horsfall Museum Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- 21 A fuller account of the response to the Model Rooms can be found in M. Harrison, 'Art and Philanthropy' p. 131ff.
- 22 T. C. Horsfall, *The Need for Art in Manchester*, p.41.
- 23 *Ibid* pp32-33.
- 24 *Handbook*, p.70.
- 25 *Ibid* p.68.
- 26 *M. G.* 26 March 1887.
- 27 T. C. Horsfall, 'Art in Small Towns and Villages', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 1878
- 28 T. C. Horsfall, *An Art Gallery for Manchester*, p.5.
- 29 *M. G.* 26 March 1887. See also Manchester Art Museum, *Annual Report 1888*, p.6.
- 30 Diary of Henry Brooke, Manchester Central Library, Archives (M.S.708273 Mal)
- 31 *Annual Report 1888-89* p.3.
- 32 *Annual Report 1888* p.6.
- 33 *Annual Report 1900-01* p.15.
- 34 *Annual Report 1890-91* p.8 and 1895 pp.5-10.
- 35 *Annual Report 1889-90* p.5.
- 36 *Annual Report 1891-92* p.5.
- 37 *Annual Report 1898-99* pp.5-8.
- 38 *Annual Report 1900-01* pp.13-14.
- 39 See *Annual Report* for 1904 and 1905.
- 40 M. Stocks, *Fifty Years In Every Street*, Manchester, 1956, p.39.
- 41 *Ibid* p.46.
- 42 Manchester City Art Gallery, *Minutes of the Art and Education Committee*, 7 May 1912
- 43 T. C. Horsfall to Councillor F. Todd, 17 January 1918. Horsfall Museum Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- 44 J. E. Phythian to M. Howard, n.d., Horsfall Museum Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- 45 Manchester City Art Gallery, *A Century of Collecting 1882-1992*, Manchester, 1983, p.18.
- 46 J. B. Hightower quoted in K. Hudson, *A Social History of Museums*, London, 1974, p.74.
- 47 *Annual Report 1904* p.10.
- 48 *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 8 October 1886; T. C. Horsfall, *The Study of Beauty and Art in Large Towns*, London, 1883, p.4; M. Phythian to J. E. Phythian 24 April 1920, Tylecote Collection, Manchester Central Library.
- 49 *The Times*, 31 October 1896.
- 50 M. Lynch, *The Streets of Ancoats*, London 1985, p181.
- 51 M. Stocks, *Fifty Years in Every Street*, p.25.
- 52 'Manchester Art Museum', *The Beacon* (1992) Cutting in Local History Library, Manchester Central Library.
- 53 Manchester Education Committee, *Courses of Lectures of Elementary School Children in Museums and Galleries*, September 1922, p.14.