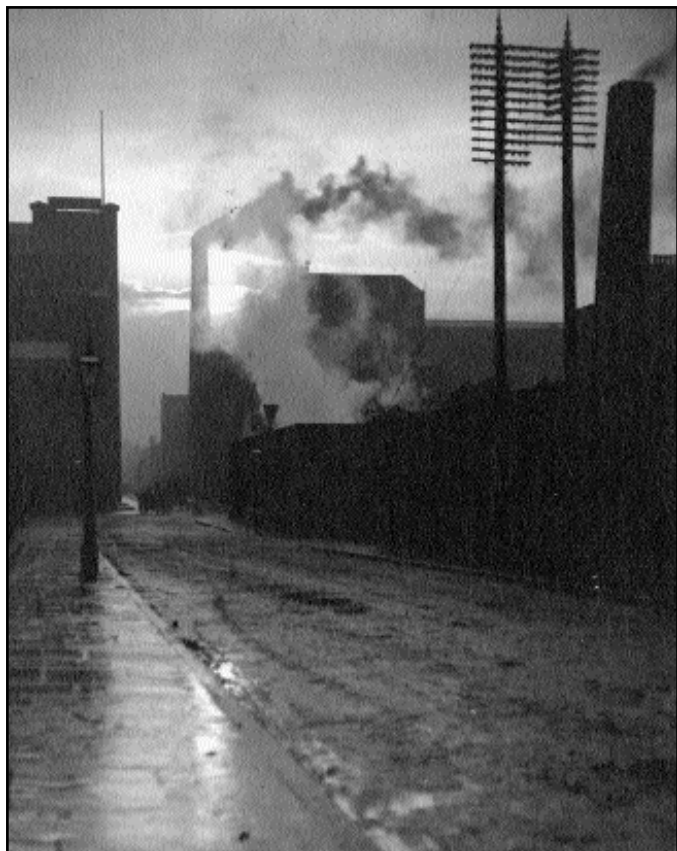


THE COMPUTERISED LOCAL IMAGE COLLECTION AT MANCHESTER ARCHIVES AND LOCAL STUDIES

Paula Moorhouse



Hulme Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock, from Oxford Road, Manchester. J. Shaw, 1912

The last number allocated in the last of a row of black leather bound Accession Registers is 145, 416. That represents the acquisition of photographs, prints, drawings, paintings of local interest by Manchester Public Libraries from 1932 to 1996. Today, the leather bound volumes remain on the shelf and the prints remain in their cabinets on the fourth floor of Central Library. The means of accessing the majority of the prints is now via five public access computer terminals in Manchester Archives and Local Studies on the first floor of Manchester Central Library. Ease of use and access to the prints, for staff and users, has been greatly improved and a huge potential for exploiting the collection has been opened up. The prints let us see the history of Manchester. People who would not choose to read - or are unable to read - a book about their history can look at what their city was like in the past. They may find a picture of the street where they lived as a child or the school they attended. Researchers and historians can see photographic evidence of how an area or a particular building looked before demolition or alteration. We can provide images to family historians, researchers, publishers, galleries, schools and local history groups quickly in a digital form or as high quality laser prints. This is a short account of the history of acquisition of

pictorial material by Manchester Public Libraries, the digitisation of the Computerised Local Image Collection (CLIC) and the uses and users of the collection.

The Home of CLIC - Manchester Archives and Local Studies

There has been a separate Local History Library in Manchester Central Library since 1957. The name changed to Local Studies Unit in 1991 when the Archives Department and the Local History Library were relocated, as a combined service, on the first floor of Central Library. Currently the name is Manchester Archives and Local Studies (MALS) reflecting the two parts of the service.

A Short History of Digitisation

Prior to digitisation, the retrieving and refiling of the prints consumed staff time. Batches of prints to be refilled hung round on trolleys like patients in a busy A&E Department. The sight of a pink print request form approaching the Local Studies counter caused the heart to sink - it foretold at least half an hour wrestling with ancient filing cabinets, not to mention the wait for the notorious Central Library lift. And what could be more dispiriting, for staff and customer, to discover that the prints selected from the card index were not what were wanted at all? The idea of digitising the Print Collection was very attractive. It would reduce the wear and tear on the original prints and transform public access by allowing customers to browse the whole collection.

That idea became reality when, in October 1995, Manchester City Council offered to fund a pilot project if we produced an acceptable proposal. We had a limited time to identify companies capable of designing suitable software and carrying out the digitisation. We knew we wanted the images available in a digital form that could be easily accessed by our library users, but beyond that had no experience of how to achieve our aims. We investigated various companies. None seemed to offer exactly what we wanted until Ken Potter and Ian Smith pitched in. Operating as House of Images, they had worked on similar, smaller projects for libraries, broadly understood our aims and had some software solutions and the willingness to listen. In effect, they designed a system for us, using commercially available software as a basis and refining the capabilities according to our requirements. House of Images carried out the scanning and data input to give us a digitised collection of 10,000 images. The system devised was a genuine collaboration, House of Images had the technical knowledge but we had the understanding of how it would be used in a public library context. A number of other clients - library authorities, museums and commercial organisations were subsequently attracted to the House of Images system.

The new digital service was launched to the public in September 1996. On computer terminals in the Local Studies, our cus-

tomers could browse all City Centre views, together with a selection of images on popular topics such as sport, cinemas, housing conditions and Manchester in the Second World War. Even at the time, this was the largest collection of digital images to be made directly available in a public library, without the need for supervision by a member of staff.

In 1998 a successful bid was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to digitise an additional 67,000 images. House of Images won the contract. A librarian was employed to keyword prints of all the suburbs of the City of Manchester, from Ancoats to Wythenshawe, as well as subjects such as railways, the cotton industry, halls, schools and churches, to prepare them for digitisation and data input and carry out quality control. Glynis Reeve, the librarian employed to manage the project, and Ian Smith of House of Images developed a love-hate relationship which kept the job moving along smoothly. The numbers of images available to the public grew as batches of prints were added throughout the course of the project. At the official opening on 18 July 2000, the novelist Jane Rodgers gave a heartfelt speech on the value she placed on visual information when carrying out research for her novels and the importance of richly-stocked libraries as a source of knowledge and inspiration. (There was, at that time, some speculation about the future organisation of various special collections within Central Library and Jane was an eloquent defender of the traditional role of libraries and Central Library in particular.)

The resulting collection, Manchester Computerised Local Image Collection (CLIC), is available on five public access computers in Central Library. The collection contains images relating to Manchester and its region, both past and present. There are street scenes, buildings, general views, pictures of people as individuals or groups, and events and activities portraying the social history of the area. Strongly represented are images of the Industrial Revolution and its effects on the lives of the city's population. In addition, the collection contains an almost complete street-by-street photographic survey of the city for the period 1950-70, a key period in the post-war redevelopment of the city.

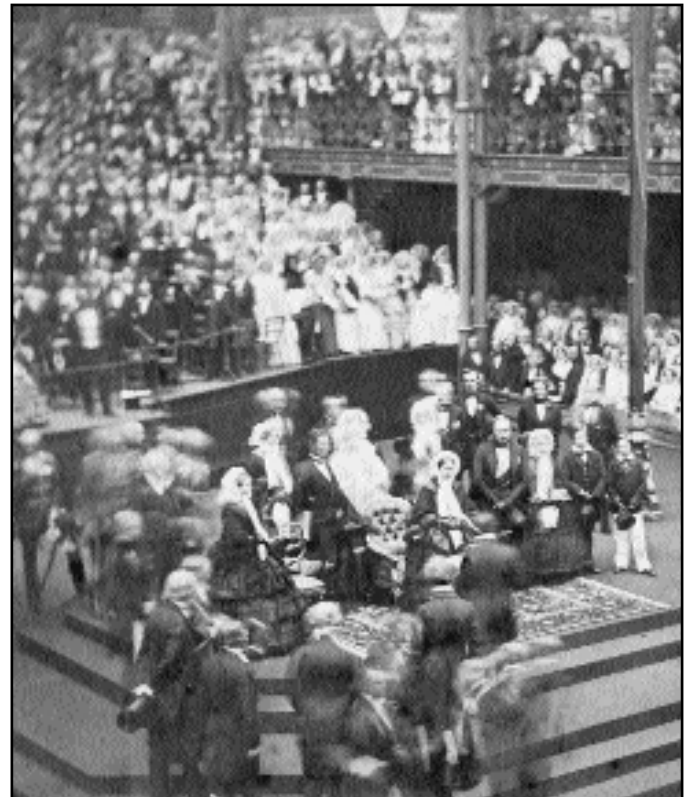
The Francis Frith Collection, started by the photographer Francis Frith in 1860, is a unique photographic record of towns and villages in Britain from 1860 to 1970. The collection was digitised during the 1990s and can now be found at www.francisfrith.com. At the end of the digitisation project, the owners of the Frith Collection offered the originals for sale (unfortunately MALS could not afford any). Unlike them, we intend to keep the original prints. We cannot produce them for general use but they are available for the making of photographic prints and, of course, there is a substantial proportion not yet digitised. The Heritage Lottery project allowed the digitisation of all prints of the City of Manchester and many others but, for cost reasons, photographs of Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire could not be included.

Digitisation has undoubtedly increased use of the collection and there are the statistics to prove it, quoted in the MALS Annual Report 2002-3.¹ In the year before digitisation, 1995-6, there were just over 700 recorded users of prints. In 2002-3

there were 9,135. The 'web trends' statistics are perhaps more impressive - even though less than 1% of the digital images are on the MALS pages of the Manchester City Council website. In a twelve month period between October 2002 and September 2003, there have been over 125,000 visitor sessions to the images part of the site. The tilled income generated from the sale of laser copies in 2002-3 was £8,240. This does not include reproduction fees. We have had a few £1,000 cheques from publishers and the BBC (for Simon Schama's *History of Britain*) but smaller amounts are very welcome.

The Photographic Collections of MALS

As may be expected, Manchester played its part in the early history of photography. In 1841, John Benjamin Dancer produced daguerreotypes and went on to develop his microphotographs. John Johnson opened the first commercial



Opening address by Queen Victoria, Art Treasures Exhibition, Abnet Hall, Cheadle, Manchester. A. Brothers, 1857

portrait studio in the city in 1843. In 1864, Alfred Brothers, a professional photographer and member of Manchester Photographic Society, was the first person to use magnesium to create a 'flash' illuminating a photograph. He put into practice the work of Bunsen in Heidelberg and Roscoe in Manchester in identifying magnesium as providing a light most similar to daylight. Mather in Manchester developed a magnesium ribbon and a holder for photographic purposes. The Manchester Photographic Society was founded in 1855 by James Prince Lee, the first Bishop of Manchester. The list of members from the early years of the society reads like a *Who's Who* of influential scientists, engineers and innovators - names well known in other fields such as James Prescott Joule, William Fairbairn and John Benjamin Dancer.

The work of some of the mid-nineteenth century photographers, such as Alfred Brothers and James Mudd, is represented within the collections of Manchester Archives and Local Studies, including CLIC. Many people will be familiar with Mudd's 1859 photograph of the river Irwell from Blackfriars Bridge, described by Mark Crinson as 'the single most-reproduced image of nineteenth-century Manchester'.ⁱⁱ



**River Irwell, from Blackfriars Bridge, Manchester.
James Mudd, 1859**

The Local History Library acquired substantial numbers of photographs taken by the photographers of the City Engineer's Department. Some of these are of rather specialised interest – I am thinking here of views of Victorian and Edwardian sewers and drains or the ones illustrating details of building subsidence (cracks in walls). Some capture a moment of social interaction incidentally (a crowd of curious by-standers gawp into a crater caused by the collapse of one of those sewers or women and children stare belligerently from the doorway of a condemned court). However, the main concern of the City Engineer's photographers was to record the bricks of the city not its humanity. In addition to the prints already in the Print Collection, as part of the Lottery-funded project, over a thousand full plate-glass negatives were brought to Central Library from an attic in the Town Hall and digitised.



**Back of 497, Rochdale Road, Collyhurst, Manchester.
J. Jackson, 31 May 1910**



**Platt Fields Park lake on opening day.
J. Jackson, 1910**

The growth of the photographic collection and the sheer size of it today are largely due to the efforts of members of the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society (MAPS). The Society was founded in 1885 'for the purpose of encouraging the Science and Art of Photography' and by 1889 it was the largest society of its kind in the UK. Members contributed to two major surveys of Manchester and surrounding areas. The Rev. H.J. Palmer, President of the Society in 1888, was the first to recognise the value of systematically photographing buildings due for demolition, prompted by the demolition of a group of buildings known as Gibraltar. The *Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1890 stated 'such work will be absolutely invaluable to the historian and antiquarian of the future.' George Wheeler, in a talk to the Society, said that

*portions of the city are in a constant state of transition and in a few years hence the people who take our places will have but a vague notion of the general character of the streets and buildings as they are today unless we, or some other society, come to their rescue.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Between 1892 and 1900, a group of photographers, including Samuel L. Coulthurst, produced a series of photographs showing buildings and streetlife of Manchester and Salford. A set of 232 Platinotype photographs was presented to the Town



**Flat Iron Market, Chapel Street, Salford.
S.L. Coulthurst, 1894**

Clerks of the Cities of Manchester and Salford in 1901. Coulthurst had contributed 66 of these photographs. He seems to have had some difficulty in motivating other members of the society. In 1897, he wrote,

[t]hat I was dragged into the Photographic Survey of Manchester and Salford, I cannot deny, many times I regretted it; however, I resolved to stick to my guns and see through to the end what others had deserted.^{iv}

Coulthurst's work has been the subject of books, journal articles and exhibitions, most recently at the Lowry, and he deserves further exposure. We should be grateful he did indeed stick to his guns as his photographs of working people going about their business provide an incomparable picture of Victorian life. CLIC features all 232 photographs from the survey, including Coulthurst's and other photographs by him.



**Near Brown Street, Market Street, Manchester.
J.W. Wade, 1900**

The work of recording Manchester and Salford received a boost in 1938, when Alderman Joseph Crookes Grime presented a Challenge Cup to be awarded annually to the member who was judged to have made the best contribution to the year's work. An annual exhibition was held in Central Library each March and the prints contributed were mounted and stored by the Library. The 1938 constitution of the Photographic Survey Record of Manchester stated that

[t]he objects of the Survey Record organisation shall be to maintain a photographic record of Manchester and the immediate neighbourhood for preservation in the Central Library; the record to include features of the City such as buildings which may be scheduled for demolition or alteration, general activities, customs, costumes, characters or anything relative to the general life of the City which may change in the course of time.^v

By 1957, a separate Local History Library promised better public access to the photographic collection and members of the Society were being encouraged to contribute to the work of the Record and Survey sub-committee with this illustration of the sort of work needed:

Remember that your out-of-focus picture of little Willie in Platt Fields may also have an in-focus background showing the Lord Mayor feeding ducks and it may be the ONLY PICTURE IN EXISTENCE THAT WILL PROVE THAT A LORD MAYOR USED TO FEED THE DUCKS.

The Library never did get that particular example but it epitomises a way of thinking about the value of photography as a means of creating a historical record for the city.



Harry Milligan, on Hyde Road Bridge, with trade mark cigarette in the corner of his mouth. Manchester, 1958



Central Station, Manchester. H. Milligan, 1957

In an article in the *Manchester Review* of Autumn 1958, Harry Milligan, Manchester Public Libraries photographer during the 1950s and 60s, sets out a history of the survey.^{vi} He emphasised the direction given by the Library to the members of the Society and acknowledged that, whilst there are other ways of creating a collection, this one was proving very successful. Milligan was a driving force behind the activity throughout the 1950s, 60s and early 70s that led to over 50,000 photographs being added to the collection. Tom Brooks, one of the group, is credited with over 8,000 of the 77,000 in the digitised collection. Fortunately for us, besides being the most prolific, he was the photographer most interested in getting the people who lived in those terraced streets into his pictures. He did knock on doors, explain what he was doing, and invite people to be in the photos. Many of his photographs have little groups of rather self-conscious children standing or sitting on the pavements outside corner shops or terraces. People looking



Saville Street, Miles Platting, showing the sign to denote a play street. T. Brooks, 1963

at the collection have recognised themselves or a son or daughter now in his or her thirties or forties, and I have been privileged to share the surprise and excitement of that discovery.

Dorothy Wildgoose was another MAPS member employed by the Manchester Public Libraries. She contributed to the work of the Record and Survey Sub-committee from the 1950s until the 1970s. She lived in Moss Side and her personal involvement in the life of that area is reflected in her photos. There is a series of pictures of the street parties held to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 and a set taken in 1972 of a couple of library assistants modelling some of the fashions of the day. (Many of the styles would be perfectly acceptable to my teenage sons' friends thirty years on!)



Cranwick Street, Moss Side. Street party celebrating Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. D. Wildgoose, 1977

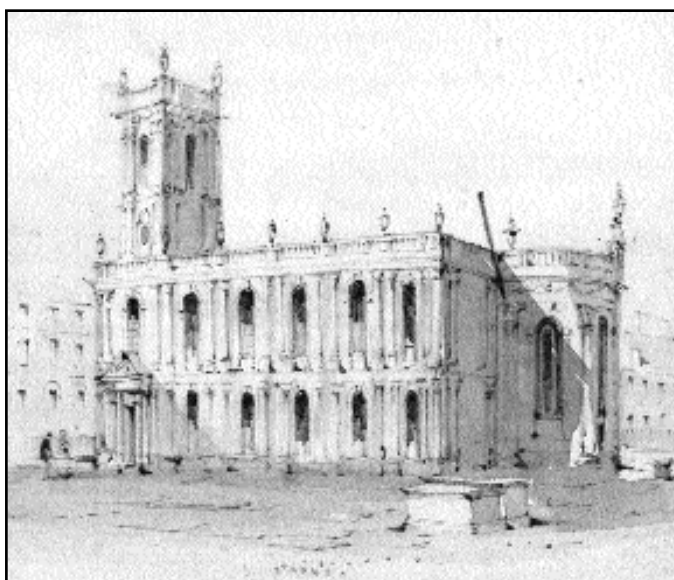
Whilst in terms of numbers the work of MAPS and the photographers employed by the City Council makes up the bulk of the collection, there are significant contributions from other sources such as donations from individuals and organisations. The largest single donation must be the collection of Thomas Baddeley. This Salford photographer bequeathed his life's work of 7,500 photographs plus lantern slides, engravings and lithographs, the earliest dating from 1900, to Manchester Reference Library on his death in 1956. Aerofilms, now Airviews, donated the majority of the 900 aerial views, dating from the 1920s to the 1980s, to the Library but retained the copyright. They form the most significant batch of digitised photographs for which the Library does not hold the copyright.

The city of the twentieth century and the latter part of the nineteenth century is well recorded by the photographic art but the



Top of Market Street, Manchester. Engraving. J. Ralston, 1822

collection is not just photographs. Early nineteenth-century Manchester is portrayed in prints, drawings and paintings. Some are anonymous, notably the cartoons and illustrations showing the 'terrible scene' at Peter's Field on that fateful day of 16 August 1819. There are elegant tinted etchings of Manchester's prestigious buildings, such as the second Exchange, the Friends' Meeting House and the Hall of Science at Campfield - the world's first public lending library. Henry Gould James and John Ralston, a Scot living in Manchester, provided us with a fascinating glimpse of Manchester in the 1820s. Ralston made a series of drawings of streets like Market Sted Lane, medieval houses jostling down to the Market Place and the imposing Dr White's house on King Street. Luke Clennell, working in the 1850s, created a set of exquisitely-observed drawings, recently added to the digitised collection.



St Ann's Church, Manchester. Drawing.
CW. Clennell, c. 1850s

The Uses and Users of CLIC

The desire to see the pictures can be the trigger to encourage the use of computers in the elderly, or people who thought they had no need for computers. We frequently encounter a potential customer who protests that they cannot use a computer. After a brief introduction, they are still there an hour later exploring those long-gone streets and forgotten memories and they are back the following week with a friend or two! Introducing a newcomer to the system and sharing their memories of working at Smithfield Market, unloading oranges, or what it was like to be one of nine children growing up in Chorlton-on-Medlock in the 1960s is one of the reasons I love this job.

In addition to people exploring family or local history, there are those requiring images for public dissemination. Traditionally, the demand has been from the publishers of books, but increasingly we are approached by representatives of the new media - film and television companies and web-designers - some with the wealth of global corporations behind them, others with shoestring budgets and lots of charm. A recent phenomenon is the growing number of requests from property developers and architects redeveloping a mill or other industrial building. The

images may serve to illuminate structural alterations or aid the reconstruction or they may merely give a little historical interest to a glossy brochure. And then, conversion complete, there are the interior designers wishing to contrast a slick new apartment with its former appearance. From all these commercial users we demand the payment of reproduction fees, in addition to the cost of providing the image. Typically the cost of a digital image, plus reproduction fee, would be £35, but there is often scope for negotiation. The fees may be reduced but Manchester Archives and Local Studies should always be acknowledged and credited as the source.

I would not want to list all recent uses but perhaps a few notable examples will give an idea of the variety of use. New Moston History Society have produced their 2004 calendar using selected images. The indefatigable Friends of Victoria Baths have used several of our thirty photographs of the Baths, some dating back to 1906, in exhibitions, as postcards and to provide architectural information. The BBC featured images on the *Restoration* programme and in an article in the *BBC History Magazine*. Images from the collection have been used in various exhibitions at Manchester Science and Industry Museum and the People's History Museum, but the most inventive and stimulating appearance was as part of Bill Longshaw's wonderfully evocative but unsentimental 1962 exhibition at the Lowry. A monochrome 1960s street, recreated using life-size sets and artefacts, was complemented by selections of the work of the MAPS photographers. 'Then and Now' is a long running feature in *Manchester Evening News*. Every Saturday, a picture from the collection 'then' is contrasted to the same view taken 'now'. A recent book, *The Changing Face of Manchester*, published by the *Manchester Evening News*, features a selection of these pictures.

The five terminals in Central Library are constantly busy but how do we increase the access to people who are not able to visit the Library, Manchester or even the UK? The collection deserves to be promoted and appreciated by a wider audience. The obvious answer is via the web and we are actively investigating the logistics of how this could be achieved and financed. There is a small but significant web presence in the MALS pages of the Manchester City Council web-site. Picture your Street was an interactive feature devised by Margaret De Motte, a librarian working in MALS who had particular responsibility for web-site content. A form invited people to suggest a street giving a reason for their choice in under a hundred words. We could never guarantee having a suitable picture of every street but the best ones, pictures and reasons, were mounted on the web-site. Unfortunately, we no longer add to Picture your Street but it did become very popular - almost too popular - up to 200 requests a month, including requests to be put in contact with long lost friends and relatives. We have no means of satisfying these requests and no desire to rival Friends Reunited, although the founders of that service have become multi-millionaires!

Two hundred images were added to the web site with the help of an award from the Wolfson British History Programme. This also allowed the creation of a CD-ROM of 3000 images, which was distributed to schools and libraries in the City of Manchester. We worked with the Schools Improvement Service to select images of relevance to the National Curriculum. Our

latest educational collaboration has produced Picture Book Moss Side, a teaching pack to be used in the Key Stage 3 Citizenship curriculum. Through a series of worksheets the experiences of James, growing up in Moss Side in the 1960s, are contrasted with those of children today. James is the lively and imaginative narrator of Joe Pemberton's semi-autobiographical novel, *Forever and Ever Amen*; his descriptions of Moss Side are brightened by memories of holidays in St Kitts, birthplace of his parents. Our partners for this project were Trinity High School in Hulme and Joe Pemberton himself. Picture Book Moss Side can be found in the Educational Resources section of the MALS web pages.

The Future

And so to the future. The Library Services Vision Statement states that 'the Library Service will make a significant contribution to the lives of the people of Manchester'. I believe that the Computerised Local Image Collection has an important role to play in achieving the objectives of the statement.

If I could have three wishes for the collection, I would wish, first for the whole collection to be on the web, with an interactive feature for comments and fully set up for processing orders for prints.

Second, a whole team of workers exploiting the full potential of the existing collection. We need to develop partnerships working with community groups, Surestart projects, old people's homes, schools, Skills for Life tutors and students, people doing reminiscence and oral history work and use the pictures as a catalyst, setting off memories and developing skills and a sense of history. We need to start a dialogue with the people who



Corner of Jenkinson Street and Rosamond Street West, Chorlton-on-Medlock, Manchester. (Site of what is now the Geoffrey Manton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University). F.M. Cockerton, 1956

remember the Manchester of the 50s and 60s and 70s. Those people may have generations of Mancunian ancestors or they may, like James in *Forever and Ever Amen*, bring the memories of another culture and another place to their experiences of Manchester.

People like Samuel Coulthurst, the Rev Palmer and Harry Milligan had the right idea. The photographic record they created for us is 'absolutely invaluable' but it is also silent. Who are the people in Tom Brook's pictures? What were their names? Did they like living in Rudyard Street? What brought their families to Manchester? What were their hopes for the future? If we were to undertake a survey now, it would not be just a set of photos, it would have to incorporate people's experiences. This leads me on to the third wish - a third survey, a twenty-first century survey, a collaboration, not just between the library service and local photographers, but involving the people who live and work in Manchester in the recording of their lives, communities and surroundings to create a pictorial legacy for the future.

Contact Details

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The Manchester Local Image Collection may be accessed at:
www.images.manchester.gov.uk

Email: archives@libraries.manchester.gov.uk

Information about the services of the Library Service and Manchester Archives and Local Studies including the MALS Annual Report 2002-3, Picture Book Moss Side, the Library Service Vision Statement can be found at www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries

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Selections of pictures from the Computerised Local Image Collection have been reproduced in numerous publications including, most recently:

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Manchester Evening News, *The Changing Face of Manchester: Memories in and around the City from the late 1800s to the 1950s and How it is Today* (Manchester, 2003).

Manchester Memories (Halifax, 2002).

Notes

ⁱ Manchester Archives and Local Studies Annual Report 2002 – 3 can be found in the pages of MALS on www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries.

ⁱⁱ M. Crinson, 'Photography and the industrial city: Manchester and Salford, ancient and modern', *Word and Image* 18:4 (2002), pp. 295-314.

ⁱⁱⁱ H. Milligan, 'The Manchester Photographic Survey Record', *Manchester Review*, 8 (1958) pp. 193-204.

^{iv} S.L. Coulthurst, 'Notes on a photographic survey', *Amateur Photographer*, 2 Apr. 1897, quoted by Mark Watson in *The Samuel L. Coulthurst Photographs: Victorian Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 2003).

^v Constitution of the Photographic Survey Record of Manchester organised by the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society and the Manchester Public Libraries, *Manchester Amateur Photographic Society Record*, 1938.

^{vi} Milligan, 'The Manchester Photographic Survey Record', pp. 193-204.