

Terry Wyke, Brian Robson and Martin Dodge

Manchester: Mapping the City

Birlinn (2018)
(£30 hardback)

ISBN 9781780275307

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In 1889, the architectural artist Henry Ward Brewer published in *The Graphic* a bird's eye view of Manchester city centre, one of a series of such panoramas he produced for British cities. As the authors of *Manchester: Mapping the City* point out, there was no single scenic viewpoint which determined how Brewer should compose his picture. He chose to imagine a view across the Irwell from Salford, emphasising the warehouses, railway stations and factories which made this a global centre of manufacturing and trade, set among its



H W Brewer a bird's-eye view of Manchester in 1889 (1889) [detail]

churches, civic buildings and educational establishments. It was in other words a celebration of municipal pride and the extraordinary transformation of what had been a small provincial town little more than a hundred years previously into a centre of imperial trade. *Manchester: Mapping the City* is a similarly celebratory work, illustrating the development of the city from early eighteenth-century panoramic views to the Greater Manchester Combined authority's *Key diagram* of 2016. From the view of the traveller looking *into* Manchester from across the river in Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's *The South West prospect of Manchester in 1728*, the perspective shifts to that of the expansive, even expansionist, hub of the city region extending its influence outwards.

The book, which is one of a series of cartographic city histories by the Scottish publisher Birlinn (previous volumes have dealt with Glasgow, Edinburgh and Oxford), consists of 54 short chapters. Each is based around a single map or panorama, illustrated in full and with detail, occasionally with additional illustrations from other maps. The authors are Manchester-based academics with many publications about the city to their names as well as major contributions to cartography and the history of maps. But this is a book for the general reader and largely eschews critical discussion. It is essentially a book for the map lover and the general reader with an interest in the history of Manchester – and perhaps in urban history more generally. The positive side of this is that it presents a rich variety of published maps, reproduced to a good start for a relatively inexpensive book. (Only occasionally does the quality of reproduction let the reader down – the detail of Salford City Council's *Salford music map* (2008) needs a magnifying glass to be read.)

This is a celebration of the map as object of fascination. That there is such a wide selection is of course positive, especially for the earlier period since it allows the authors to give us the feel of a fairly systematic tour through the development of maps of Manchester until about the mid-19th century. After that, the potential material is overwhelming and at this point the lack of a strong narrative begins to have its effect. Rather than a history of mapping in Manchester, this is a history of Manchester as illustrated by published maps, and a fairly conventional history at that. The authors give us a decent range of maps by themes – alongside the street maps used for planning, fire insurance and tourism are maps of the drink trade (produced by the temperance movement) and theatre, maps of racecourses and football grounds, a map of Coronation Street and one of 'Britain's First Urban Heritage Park' at Castlefield. There are transport maps of every type, not least because of Manchester's pioneering role in both canals and railways. There are maps to inform and persuade, to entertain and to attract visitors. There is a map which was intended to help visitors work out what their taxi fares should be. The book is not short of examples of the uses to which maps could be put. There is unfortunately very little about the perspectives of users.

Despite the historical-cartographical expertise of the authors and the copious illustrations, and notwithstanding the demands of producing a trade book, I was left

with a feeling of missed opportunity. The constraints of the format mean that questions are often raised but not answered – what does it tell us that George Stephenson's surveying was so indifferent that his 1824 map entitled *A plan and section of an intended railway or tram-road from Liverpool to Manchester* that another survey had to be commissioned from Charles Blacker Vignolles, working for George and John Rennie? Even so, Stephenson not the Rennies, won the contract to build the line and the rest is history. Or why was it that, despite detailed mapping of cholera cases by Henry Gaultier, honorary physician at the Chorlton-on-Medlock Dispensary, no progress was made in identifying the nature of the disease, something which had to wait for John Snow's mapping of cholera in Soho on 1853-4?

The book's focus is on printed maps, largely from commercial or government sources. There is very little about what could be considered as counter-mapping. The exception is the discussion of the maps made for the inquiry into the Peterloo massacre of 1819. The radical newspaper, *The Manchester Observer*, published a plan of the area showing the assembled crowd on St Peter's ground and the disposition of troops. In defence of the case brought against the Manchester yeomanry in 1822, the Geographer Royal, James Wyld, was brought in to produce what the authors here describe as the 'official' plan, which became the most widely reproduced. WE are left wanting to know much more about how the maps were deployed in argument, whether in the court room or in the press, but space does not permit. There is nothing which could be called ethnocartography, unless we count the city centre maps of the self-taught cartographer, Manchester resident Andrew Taylor. Taylor produced street maps full of his own contextual information using OS maps as a base from 1996 until 2013 by which time Google maps meant that few felt the need to pay for a paper map of city centre facilities and attractions. Taylor's maps though were much more like Phyllis Pearsall's A-Z of London than the work of Rebecca Solnitt.

The later chapters, including almost all that cover the period after 1945, are particularly frustrating in that most of them say nothing about the maps. The text concerns itself only with a historical account of major events, culminating in an enthusiastic account of regeneration and reconstruction by public private partnership after the economic disasters of the 1980s and the bombing of the Arnedale Centre in 1996. There is due reference to strategic planning initiatives, the establishment of the regeneration company New east Manchester, Urban Splash's redevelopment of New Islington, and the development of cooperation between local authorities across the Greater Manchester city region. The Northern Powerhouse gets a mention although Andy Burnham (the first mayor of Greater Manchester) doesn't, although this isn't a cartographic point. What is missing is any discussion of the changing style of maps as the cartographer's art was used to illustrate bright expansionist visions of the future at every level from the estate to the region. But this history is strangely old-fashioned – perhaps a telling comment on the publishers' interpretation of their

market. This is a history of the development of the built rather than the social environment. The consequence is some surprising omissions. There is no reference to Manchester's gay community, even though there are plenty of maps of Canal Street and the surrounding district - see for example those produced by [Travelgay](#), [Gayife Manchester](#) or even a retrospective look by the [Manchester Evening News](#) at how the area has developed since 1997. Some of these would also serve to introduce the move of the map into digital formats, a subject which is not covered in the book. Nor is there any discussion of mapping the ethnic diversity of Manchester, although the materials are clearly available – see for example the maps produced by [Manchester University's Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity](#) in 2013.

While this is undoubtedly a book which will fascinate anyone who knows Manchester and has an interest in maps, does it have a wider appeal? From a historical perspective, it is fascinating to have in one place the succession of cartographic representations of this most spectacular of industrial cities during the period of its extraordinary growth in the nineteenth century and the subsequent remaking of the city in the early 20th century. For this, and for the sheer exuberance of the illustrations, the answer to the question is that it does.