

hearmanchester.com/
HUMAN

John Robb: I'm John Robb and you're listening to hearmanchester.com, a series of 10 audio portraits exploring the rich and varied history of Manchester from the towpath of the Rochdale Canal that cuts through the heart of one of the greatest cities in the world.

In this series we're covering all sorts, from industry, poetry, science and the environment. I am just by Princess Street behind the BBC, and all around me are apartment blocks that have sprung up to cater for the new breed of urban dwellers, drawn in by the great shopping and nightlife on their doorsteps.

From just about anywhere along the Rochdale Canal, you can see Britain's tallest residential building. The mighty Beetham Tower rises 168m into the sky. A little closer to the ground, and a lot closer to the canal, property developers like Urban Splash have transformed how we live in the city centre.

One of their top people is Nick Johnson who has joined me as I walk along the canal through the city centre to Castlefield

Nick Johnson: Frankly I'm amazed we've never really capitalised on it in a way we perhaps ought to – because it's such a resource, it's so fantastic, I mean, built for the industrial revolution, originally to ship the coal from Worsley, to feed the machines that fed the industrial revolution in the centre of Manchester. There are certain

places that have taken real advantage of it – you look at Dukes, you look at certain places in the village where there's a direct relationship between the bars and the restaurants and the canal – but we're in this stretch near Whitworth Street, where you've got this fantastic canyon of buildings from the industrial revolution, we've got the old Tootles building, and on the other side what was St Mary's hospital, this site was vacant for years and years and eventually it was developed about seven or eight years ago for apartments and then directly in front of us the St James' building.

JR: It's interesting now that in your development about a mile from here, you've actually built that whole brand new area, you've actually built a canal so the canal's turned round from being a backwater or a place that people consider dirty to a place people really want to live by.

NJ: Well, it's symbolic of the way cities, post-industrial cities have shifted as well. People didn't used to live in the centre of Manchester – and yet the most desirable buildings for conversion are the old mill buildings with the cast iron columns and the exposed timber floors, all part of the industrial heritage but for many years considered unusable, unworkable and I think the canals had the same stigma really, but I'm a lifelong canal boater, canal enthusiast – I have a boat, have had a boat ever since I was a kid and

they're a real fascination for me and there's a real therapeutic quality of being next to the water and that's why the people are prepared to pay more. It's quite interesting, there's added value to being next to the canals. And you're right, we built a new canal. We're going to struggle going through this tunnel to keep together. We built the first new canal in New Islington, a major regeneration project on the east side of the city, and the reason we did that was because we wanted to create a sense of place, and canals and water are a fantastic way of creating that sense of place – if you look at Castlefield – that wasn't done deliberately, it was a product of the need to get goods in for the industrial revolution. In actual fact, Castlefield is an amazing place, and I know you know it because you go running round there. Not only is it a resource – the bars and restaurants – for the people who live there, but the people who utilise the canal for recreation purposes as well. There are loads of things that happen next to or on of the canal, and that's one of the reasons why we wanted to build one and that's been a real privilege, a really exciting proposition.

Clint Boon: I'm Clint Boon of the Inspirational Carpets

CB: Manchester's where I'm from and B, Manchester's where I've chosen to stay. I've had lots of opportunities to move away from

it, but always, always inside this is where I want to stay and I don't think that will ever change. Fortunately I'm married to a woman who feels the same so that's good.

JR: *Manchester has changed a lot in the last twenty years, from the post-industrial period to a period where it's a creative city. What I'm interested in now is, like, to speak to a young creative living in the city, and what the city's like to live in now, so I'm with Natalie Curtis, a young photographer, who's done pictures of the canal..*

Natalie Curtis: Yes I did, the bit of the canal down at the end of Deansgate. There's lots going on, it's a lot smaller than London – some might think that's a bad thing, but I think it's good, cos you get to know people and find out what's going on and it's easier to find out what's going on and stuff.

JR: *I mean, like, there's a sort of image of Manchester fixed with what your dad was doing with his music with Joy Division, do you think that kind of Manchester's completely different to now?*

NC: I think it has changed a lot, it's not as miserable looking as it was, and then it hasn't changed in the way that it's quite small and it's easy to get to know people and stuff.

JR: *In a visual way, as a photographer, do you see the city looking very different especially in the context of the canal, which is quite weird, standing here, cos that's not changed from a hundred years ago. In a visual way has the city changed?*

NC: Oh yeah definitely, there's a lot of glass around now – it's changed a lot – all the new buildings going up, I find it difficult to give people directions, because there's new buildings going up all the time, and it's changing every week.

JR: *What about the buildings, are these buildings particularly photogenic?*

NC: I really like looking at the light and the water and the way the water moves, I find it quite hypnotic really.

Everyone moans about the rain, but from the point of view of being a photographer Manchester looks best in the rain, cos the pavements are all shiny and it looks more glamorous in photos when it's been raining..

JR: *Yeah, that's fantastic isn't it, and the sky, look at the sky, it's beautiful isn't it..*

NC: I didn't move far, I'm only from Macclesfield, I know other people who've moved here from further afield and I think it's an easy city to move to from elsewhere cos everyone's so friendly, there's lots going on.

JR: It's not always so friendly. If I go this way on the towpath then I end up at the ground of Manchester City and if I go this way then I get to Old Trafford and the home of Man United. For many people living in the city means pretty much one thing, you're a red or a blue. I'm a tangerine – but that's a different story.

JR: One of the most interesting thing about Manchester is the patchwork of international communities which contribute to the flavour of the city and its arts and one of these communities is the Chinese, and I'm here in the Chinese Arts Centre with Ying Kwok, to discuss the Chinese and the Chinese community.

Ying Kwok: A lot of the situation for the Chinese people when they migrate to foreign country is where they have one relative or someone they know from a foreign country and they make an initial contact – or in case they think that in case something happen they have someone to contact – I think London was the very beginning was the very beginning when Chinese people start to move to England and later on it start to develop to the north west

and Manchester is such a city. Chinatown is located right in city centre and the city centre is not that big so when Chinatown started to develop it's like a little square it's like a little town that's why it so dominates and when new people want to move to England they research around it's like where the Chinatown be in a good location, and where would a good place be to start their business, especially related to catering, Manchester would be their first choice.

JR: Chinatown in Manchester is fantastic – I argue you're not a proper city unless you've got a Chinatown

YK: Chinatown has been located in England, no matter what Chinatown in which city, they have a long history of development, you can trace back two or three generations of development, which is like back to early nineteenth century there is Chinese people living there, so through all that time they were so much merged or absorb some culture they have a lot of influence from local UK culture, from the food and also how to run the business, so it's very much a special Chinese identity, you won't exactly find it in China, it's also a kind of Chinese identity which is only available in UK I would say.

City living has really caught on over the past 10 years and there is loads to do if you decide, like I have, to make the centre of Manchester your home.

JR: If you've enjoyed this programme, why not venture further along the Rochdale Canal and discover more portraits of our magnificent city at hearmanchester.com.