

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.

The canal wouldn't exist at all and I wouldn't be stood beside it if it wasn't for Manchester's mighty industrial heritage. At the turn of the 19th century this was the Britain's boom town, thanks mostly to cotton. Jonathan Schofield has been writing and talking about 'industrial Manchester' for years. We are at the Town Hall.

Jonathan Schofield: When we say industrial city we don't just mean factories and chimneys; it was an industrial society, I think that was different, and what that meant was that for the first time along this canal, the Rochdale Canal – this was pointed out by a German guy called Schinkel a very famous architect – he said, it's the first time in the world where factory chimneys are bigger than churches and palaces. So there was an immediate physical and visual impact on the world. The canals were part of that. This was a lot of things coming together. So you had the technologies invented in the 18th century which allowed quicker production. We were lucky, we had a coalfield nearby. The Bridgewater Canal brought coal into Manchester; it just went mad – it's hard to envisage, I think the only way

we can look at it now is if we compare those erupting Chinese cities.

And all along this canal, really it went from almost gentle countryside to our south, by the university, to canyons of factories – one on the other side of Oxford Road, which is where Churchgate House is now, was for a while the biggest locomotive works, building trains, in the world – even though it wasn't even next to the railway line, they had to put them in bits onto the railway line and reassemble them. Crazy things. Just where Minshull Street is and Aytoun Street, in that area and over towards Chorlton Street, there was a whole array of very famous factories and workshops.

JR: *So it wasn't purely just cotton.*

JS: No. There is that idea that Manchester was just cotton and it's not true. It was cotton as far as really the exchange was concerned – so what subsequently happened after the factories, the whole area along the canal really became a cotton warehousing area, so factories before, then cotton warehouses, to sell cotton around the world, it became the clearing house of cotton, the centre of the commercial aspects of cotton. Cotton might have been the driving force but in the end it became engineering, light engineering, it was then printing, it was a newspaper centre as well – so there were

all these things feeding into what became a fully operable city. You go and look at the 1849 maps of Manchester which were produced to incredible detail, and from what is Central Library to Oxford Road station, crossing the canal, which is what, I don't know, less than a kilometre, there were seventy different types of business from violin makers through to tea importers, through to this big locomotive works – the whole thing – and that was in what – if you'd come here sixty or even fifty years earlier there probably wasn't even many houses down Oxford Road.

JR: *I am just strolling up to Minshull Street, and I am keen to find out how that same diversity is still at play in the modern industrial Manchester, this is more a digital revolution than industrial. I'm stopping for a drink and a chat with Jane Lawton who runs Grow Box Gardens and someone I think is typical of the modern industrial entrepreneurs that have sprung up in the city.*

Jane Lawton: Basically we buy the nation's waste – board, paper, we repulp it, remix it – and we make into planting containers called gro-boxes. The hi-tech bit in that is the fact that what we do is when we buy all the boards and all the paper we then, sort of, add soil nutrients and we have to use hi-tech innovative machinery. We've made good use of the internet, which means that we can actually sell our products very easily – we sell

in South Africa, in Switzerland, we sell in Poland, and we're just about to launch in Australia at the moment, and we really do manipulate the whole of the digital industry.

JR: *So in a lot of ways Manchester is the first post-industrial city, the first modern city and it's still really modern. Do you think it's a market leader in this kind of field?*

JL: Yeah definitely – as far as innovation is concerned it's definitely a market leader, you look at how many patents that are coming out of Manchester – it has more patents filed per month than anywhere within England – and Manchester has more patents filed per month than anywhere else in the UK, and it's great because people are driving forward all the time the innovation within the world and people are looking at what we're doing here – copying, replicating it and driving forward the change.

I photographed the canal for my A-level project and that culture, the canal culture of who was living down there is very different to the canal culture of who is accessing it now, because it's now almost come to the other end where you've got the affluent areas, you've got your great city living flats, you've got everybody, you've got your bars, you've got people enjoying the canal as a whole. Once the canal was restored, Manchester in itself almost got its pride back a

little bit. The canal is the innovative backbone of the city – historically it always has been – and you're starting to get a lot of life back within the canal just as we're getting a lot of life back in the entrepreneurial business community of Manchester.

JR: Well, Jane's had to go but in her place on the towpath is Anna Target, an example of one industry which has definitely flourished in the city – the media.

Ann Target: I work for a company called Winning Pitch who are actually experts in entrepreneurial development.

JR: *Manchester's the perfect place for this hi-tech revolution?*

AT: I think hi-tech companies are very much at home in Manchester just because of how far along they are and because of the rise of new media I think it's just going to be blown away – Manchester is just going to go straight into the future as one of the most important cities for hi-tech industries.

JS: There's still actually a surprisingly big manufacturing sector in the UK and a lot of it in Greater Manchester and so people are working within those service industries, from three people working in a design consultancy through

to a thousand in a call-centre – in many respects it's as diversified as it was in the past, it's just not so charmingly obvious as a violin maker on Oxford Road.

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.