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John Robb: I'm John Robb and you're listening to hearmchester.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.

One of the coolest things Manchester is famous for is a real tradition of political and cultural radicalism, promoting everything from free trade to vegetarianism.

Just up Oxford Road from the canal is Petersfield where, on 16th August 1819, thousands gathered to demand electoral reform. 15 protesters were killed by rampaging cavalry, in an event now known as the Peterloo Massacre. I've met up with Jonathan Schofield – author of the City Life Guide to Manchester – in Albert Square, just by the Town Hall. So Jonathan, let's start talking about Peterloo, which I think is, like, maybe the most notorious radical moment in Manchester's history.

Jonathan Schofield: Radicalism is part of the city and it's inevitably part of the city. Briggs, the historian, called us the least aristocratic city in the UK. Because of that there's far freer air, I suppose, cultural air around here. Peterloo, yeah, it was the beginning in many respects, although there had been things earlier such as the vegetarian movement which began in 1809 in Salford when a preacher called Cowherd,

which is hilarious, persuaded his congregation to give up meat and alcohol, and then we had the Peterloo massacre and then we got loads of different things. We were the first people to really exploit the libraries, the public libraries which came along in the 1840s, to give people a chance, give people a leg up. You know, you can educate yourselves now, we'll provide the books and the materials and you can try and educate yourselves. There was the secular education movement, so it was free of religion, there was an anti-death penalty movement based in Manchester in the 1850s, which is quite surprising, just a whole welter of new ideas.

JR: *So in many ways it was like the California of the 19th Century?*

JS: It's a brilliant analogy because we were very new world, almost right from the beginning of the 19th century we were a proto new world city so therefore we didn't have to bother about that. Of course, money always mattered, you know that would always matter, but within that containment field that was Greater Manchester in a way, you could have this little bubbling ferment of ideas coming up.

JR: *Is this what attracted Marx and Engels here? Or was it purely just because Engels had a mill here anyway?*

JS: It was one of the weirdest coincidences in history that Friedrich Engels' father was in partnership with a Dutch guy who had a factory here. He wanted to take him out of Germany because he was getting these radical ideas in Germany, and sent him to exactly the wrong place in the world. Exactly the wrong place. Chartism was massive in Manchester; everything, he couldn't believe his luck. Karl Marx would visit Engels for long periods of time. Engels was here on and off for twenty two years, significant portion of his life, and Marx and Engels both liked to drink. Engels in particular was a charming character in many respects. I just claim for any old pub, that it definitely had Marx and Engels in there. Briton's Protection, right by Rochdale Canal, you know just round the corner from it, oh got to have, they've got to have been in there! Like New Order later on. Marx, Engels, New Order!

JR: *It was theirs.* (Laughs).

One of the great radical movements was that of the suffragettes, who successfully fought to win the vote for women. The campaign had all been very polite until a public meeting at the Free Trade Hall in 1905 saw suffragettes, including members of their most famous clan, the Pankhursts, heckle the great and the good, including Winston Churchill. The Pankhursts are very much part of the fabric of Manchester's radicalism, and I'm meeting Naomi

Buckley from the Pankhurst Centre, just off Oxford Road – which played a huge part in Manchester's radical history – to get a better idea of their contribution.

Naomi Buckley: Well, they were very much a Manchester family. There was Emmeline, the mother, Cristobel, Sylvia and Adela, her daughters. She had two sons and they died, the Pankhurst men didn't do very well. They died quite early on and her husband died also. They were all from Manchester and Emmeline was originally from Moss Side from quite a wealthy, middle-class, privileged background. You know, she wasn't poor like most of Manchester was back then.

JR: *There were quite a few working-class suffragettes whose names haven't gone down in history as much as well.*

NB: Yeah, Annie Kenny being one. She was from Oldham; she worked in a mill since she was nine years old. I think she was one of a very large family. Very, very, very poor. She's like a shining example of how someone who had to work all those long hard hours, actually found the time. She unionised where she worked, she was involved in the independent Labour party also from the north-west.

JR: *So what happened to the radical impulse of Manchester? Is it still here or has it just fizzled out?*

NB: The political activism that Manchester saw in the nineteenth century and eighteenth century, it was direct action, it was people getting involved in protests, chaining themselves to things, burning things down. Nowadays, I don't think you see so much of that in Manchester. The discontent and radicalism I think comes out more in creative means in Manchester nowadays, I think that's why we have such a succession of successful music and artists and cultural influences, but its not directed at politics anymore 'cos I think there's a lot of disillusionment, whereas I think in the nineteenth century you felt if you burned enough things down, you could change it.

The key figures that initiated the movement were all from Manchester; they were all local women. They had the support of Manchester men which gave them power, the radicalism started in Manchester and the living monuments, the buildings that they frequented are still here for you to see. The Free Trade Hall has got to be one, even though it doesn't have a blue plaque, it does have, it has one for Peterloo, but – that's where this meeting, where the radicalism and the, sort of, violent aspect of the suffragette movement came to the forefront. The Pankhurst

Centre is where the first meeting of the suffragette movement was held; the Women's Social and Political Union on Nelson Street, and then you've got to think, Oxford Road is just a living monument if you like, because this is where all the marches went on. Down Oxford Road, you've got from Peterloo to the suffragette movement to the Anti Corn-Law League marches, all the way along Oxford Road and it really is the avenue of giants!

We've always been brassy, chippy, loudmouthed, bolshy people! And I think that it's part and parcel of the heritage, part and parcel of the heritage, so naturally Manchester's still very much of a city not having that old snobby hierarchy like places do in other parts of the UK, Edinburgh maybe, London, I still think we've got it and it does manifest itself from time to time, whether it be in music or in pure politics.

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.