



Donald Insall Associates
Chartered Architects and Historic Building Consultants

Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan



Contact information

Kate Martyn (Associate Director)

kate.martyn@insall-architects.co.uk

Tel: 0161 359 4326

Megan Hari (Historic Buildings Advisor)

megan.hari@insall-architects.co.uk

Tel: 020 7245 9888

Donald Insall Associates

63 Quay Street

Manchester

M3 3EJ

manchester@insall-architects.co.uk

0161 359 4326

This report and all intellectual property rights in it and arising from it are the property of or are under licence to Donald Insall Associates or the client. Neither the whole nor any part of this report, nor any drawing, plan, other document or any information contained within it may be reproduced in any form without the prior written consent of Donald Insall Associates or the client as appropriate. All material in which the intellectual property rights have been licensed to DIA or the client and such rights belong to third parties may not be published or reproduced at all in any form, and any request for consent to the use of such material for publication or reproduction should be made directly to the owner of the intellectual property rights therein.

Contents

[Conservation Area Boundary and Proposed Extension Areas Map](#)

[Streets and Spaces Map](#)

[Building Dates Map](#)

[Heritage Assets Map](#)

[Use Character Areas Map](#)

[Views and Vista Map](#)

[Appraisal](#)

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Assessment of Significance	9
3.0	Location and Setting	10
4.0	The Historical Development of Central Oldham	13
5.0	Character of the Conservation Area	29
	Listed Buildings	
	Buildings Proposed for Inclusion on a Local List	
6.0	Views and Vistas	64
7.0	Townscape Details	70
8.0	Negative Features and Opportunities for Enhancement	81
9.0	Proposed Extensions	87

[Management Plan](#)

	Introduction	1
A.	Enhancement	3
B.	Regeneration	7
C.	Community Engagement	12
D.	Management	14

[Gazetteer](#)

Conservation Area	2
High Street	3
Church Terrace	8
Yorkshire Street	10
Union Street	14
Albion Street	20
Curzon Street	21
Lord Street	22
Church Lane	23
Church Street	26
Clegg Street	27
Greaves Street	30
Hunter's Lane	34
Queen Street	35
Retiro Street	39
Proposed Extension Area 1: High Street East and Parliament Square	42
Henshaw Street	45
Market Place	48
Albion Street	51
Curzon Street	52
High Street South	53
Parliament Square	56
Proposed Extension Area 2: Yorkshire Street, Retiro Street East and Waterloo Street	57
Yorkshire Street	58
Retiro Street	62
Walter Street	63
Waterloo Street	64
Union Street	66
Proposed Extension Area 3: Harrison Street	68
Proposed Extension Area 4: Cultural Quarter	70

Preface

*To be written in conjunction with Oldham
(to be completed)*

Donald Insall Associates
Chartered Architects and Historic Building Consultants



Appraisal

Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

1.0 Introduction

Defining Conservation Areas

Conservation areas are '*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*',¹ and are recognised for their distinctive townscape, including their buildings, streets and public realm. With regard to the British planning system, conservation areas are considered as '*designated heritage assets*;' any proposals for change or development must assess the effect that the development might have on the character and appearance of the area. The Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area was first designated in November 1975.

Related Policy and Guidance

Once designated, Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local authorities to review the character and boundaries of its conservation areas; this appraisal of the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area by Donald Insall Associates provides the evidence base for this review process. As a Supplementary Planning Document it will also support the implementation of the existing adopted Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development (Joint DPD, 2011) policies, including Policy 24 Historic Environment, inform the review of Oldham's Local Plan and support wider town centre regeneration initiatives. The overall appraisal strategy is based on Historic England's English Heritage

1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 69.

Guidance, in particular, Historic England's *2016 Advice Note 1 – Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* which clearly sets out guidance on the production of management plans and conservation area character appraisals.

Aims of the Appraisal

The Oldham Joint DPD, 2011 guides development in the Borough and recognises that the aim of conservation area designation is more likely to be fulfilled if there is detailed agreement and understanding of the particular characteristics of an area which contribute to its special identity. The Council has therefore undertaken, as resources permit, character appraisals for all the conservation areas in the Borough.

This appraisal builds upon the *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal* prepared by Stephen Levrant: Heritage Architecture for Oldham Metropolitan Borough in 1997. It describes the historical development and character and appearance of the conservation area. It aims to identify and explain important local features, identifying buildings which contribute to the area, distinctive streetscapes and important local views. It also identifies features which detract from the area's character and outlines opportunities for positive change.

Paragraph 186 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that '*when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic*

interest and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.' The appraisal has carefully considered opportunities to extend the boundary of the conservation area and makes recommendations for four extensions. It also suggests a number of buildings with '*a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated*'² for inclusion on a proposed local list of heritage assets and identifies buildings which may benefit from inclusion on a local heritage at risk register.

2 National Planning Policy Guidance, paragraph 39.

Future Use

This document serves as a precursor to a wider *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan* document by Donald Insall Associates, which has been generated following consultation by both the local authority and local community. Upon completion of both elements of the conservation area appraisal and management plan, the document will be adopted to serve the following key purposes:

- Address the challenges facing this 'at risk' area;
- Understand the significance of the conservation area and suggest opportunities to enhance its character and appearance;
- Stimulate local interest in both the protection of and careful development of the conservation area for present and future generations;
- Encourage wider use and enjoyment of assets within Oldham Town Centre;
- Encourage the conservation, repair, reuse and management of the area's historic features;
- Inform the Local Plan review and its implementation and future development management;
- Support town centre regeneration;
- Achieve the removal of the area from Historic England's *Heritage at Risk Register*.

Interactive Format

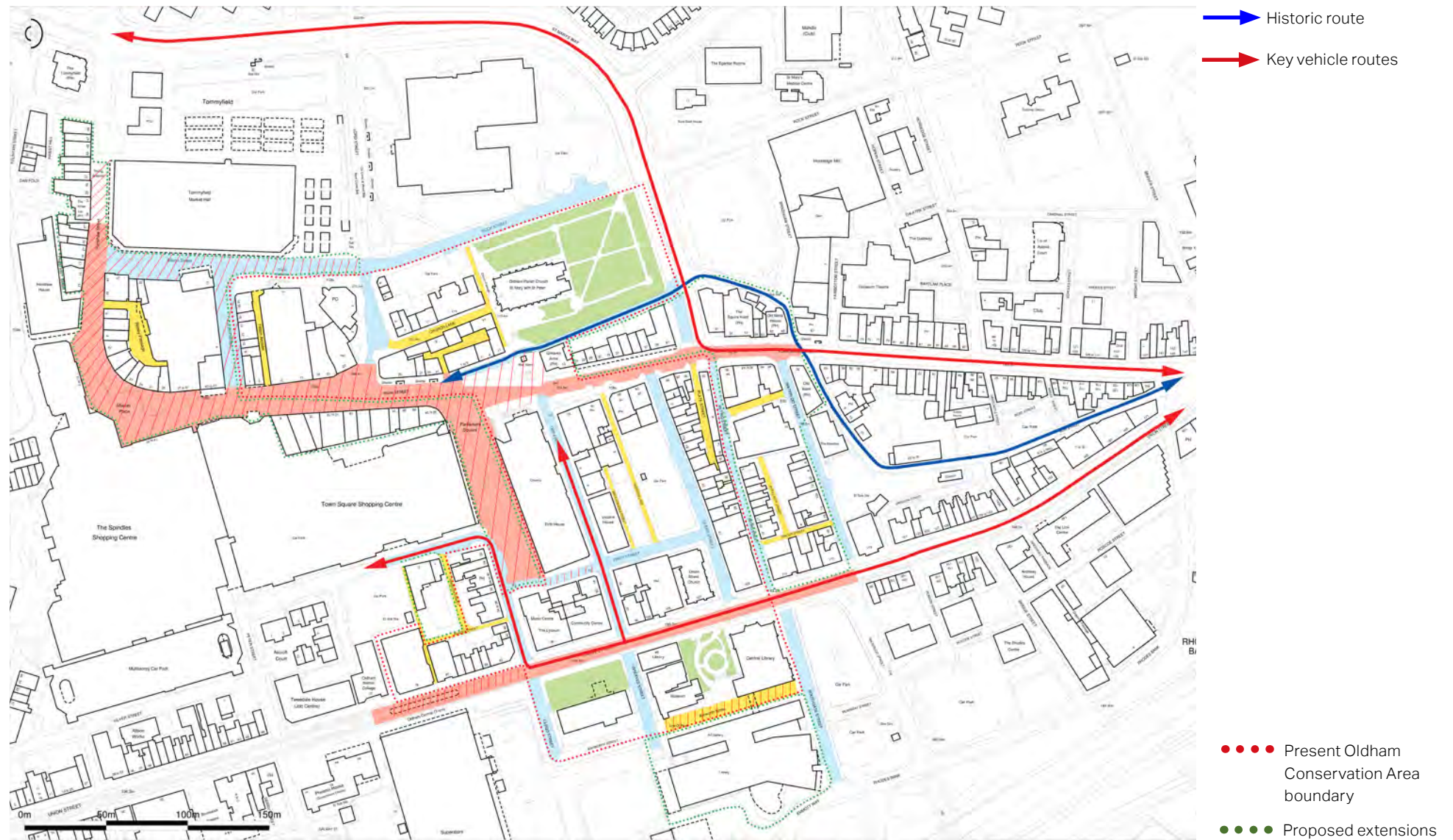
This document has been designed to serve as a practical guide for the present and future care of the conservation area. The digital version features interactive navigable elements which enhance its range and ease of use by both the Council and local community. These include:

- Front cover links which navigate directly to the Appraisal, Management Plan or Gazetteer sections as required;
- A contents page with headings which directly link to the different sections within the appraisal and plan;
- Navigable headings at page corners, including one which returns users to the contents page;
- Interactive map keys which link to relevant sections within the text where applicable; and
- Interactive icons at the base of the Gazetteer pages which navigate to conservation area buildings and buildings within proposed conservation area extensions.

Conservation Area Boundary and Proposed Extensions



Streets and Spaces



Building Dates



Heritage Assets



Existing Use Character Areas



Views and Vistas



2.0 Assessment of Significance

Oldham is a characteristic industrial town in this region, its early development largely overlaid by the physical manifestation of rapid industrialisation. The principal defining feature of Oldham however, which sets it apart from other former mill-towns near Manchester, is the hilly topography of the town centre. This topography affords striking views of the surrounding area and contributes to both historic context (with a number of mills visible) and setting with the hills in the distance, capturing an entire cross-section of Oldham and its surroundings in a single frame [Plate 2.1].

The Town Centre Conservation Area is located near the summit of the hill. As the town's historic expansion generally followed a pattern of ribbon development, the conservation area's main arteries comprise High Street and Yorkshire Street to the north and Union Street to the south, which eventually intersect before continuing eastward on to Mumps. While the shopfronts of High Street and Yorkshire Street maintain a sense of lively commerce, Union Street retains much of its original air of formality, a lasting result of its mid-late 19th century grand civic architecture. The smaller north-south streets connecting the two thoroughfares generally offer a more intimate, domestic scale, and comprise a good deal of quaint, 19th century terraced cottages now converted for office and retail use. When viewed collectively, such elements exude a rich and diverse historic character representative of a thriving Victorian industrial town. They cumulatively provide a sense of Oldham's dramatic history; a modest hill-top wool town (not unlike those of the Cotswolds) transformed in the space of half a

century into a global manufacturing hub that linked cotton plantations of the American south with Britain's colonies in Asia.

Green space has been allocated by way of the broad expanse of the Church of St. Mary and St Peter's churchyard at the north of the conservation area and via the verdant library garden south of Union Street. Otherwise, the streetscape largely reflects its industrial history, and with the exception of small garden spaces and local efforts to provide container plantings, greenery is somewhat scarce. Instead, a diverse mix of mid-19th century to early-21st century building stock nestled within a 19th-century streetscape is what defines the immediate setting of the conservation area and generates the most interest.

Oldham Town Centre has a high density of listed buildings and numerous buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the area, some of which exhibit qualities worthy of inclusion on a local list.

The conservation area, however, is not without its issues; it appears on Historic England's *Heritage at Risk Register*, principally owing to its number of existing vacant and deteriorating heritage assets. While a considerable number of buildings make a positive contribution to the appearance of the conservation area overall, they frequently exhibit detracting features, including modern windows, poor condition and, most detrimentally to the overall character of the area, poor shopfronts and signage.

There have been enhancements to the public realm in recent years which have uplifted the general character; however, even Parliament Square at the heart of the conservation area and adjoining the landmark former Town Hall conversion feels underused. The conservation area lacks a sense of identity (metaphorically and literally); it would benefit from extension to allow for a more coherent boundary and the inclusion of surrounding buildings which reinforce its character. It also faces significant challenges in terms of wayfinding into the town centre and commercial core from the tram stops along Union Street and addressing the dead-end which the Spindles Shopping Centre has created to the west of the High Street and Market Place.

3.0 Location and Setting

The Borough of Oldham is located roughly five miles northeast of central Manchester and forms part of the wider municipality of Greater Manchester. While its relationship to this urban centre has played a significant role in town development, Oldham also enjoys close proximity to the hills of the Peak District National Park, and views of the neighbouring countryside make an equally significant contribution to its character.

The Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area is located at the heart of the town, concentrated around Oldham's highest point crowned by the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter **[Plate 3.1]**. From this apex a conglomeration of major thoroughfares and close-knit streets fall away to Mumps in the east and Union Street in the south, offering sloping, long-range views of the surrounding industrial and natural landscape.

In terms of the immediate setting of the church and conservation area, an open green area directly to the north where the leisure centre previously stood is now cleared for redevelopment **[Plate 3.2]**. This area sits at a higher point than the conservation area itself, and therefore is an especially sensitive location in terms of its potential impact. The area directly east of the churchyard (to the north of the conservation area and historic route comprising Old Church Street) is also an open space, left vacant after the demolition of a former mill. While this area sits lower and somewhat screened in views by trees, this is presently underutilised as a car park **[Plate 3.3]**. A number of what appear to be former industrial buildings in red brick, some more attractive than others but all with impressive massing, lie to the east of this.



Plate 3.1 St. Mary's Church at the apex of the conservation area

The northwest area of the conservation area is largely bounded by the 1990s red brick neo-vernacular Tommyfield Market premises, which front directly onto Albion Street **[Plate 3.4]**. West of the High Street, three to four storey mid to late-20th century buildings faced predominantly in brick and stone, form the southwest edge of Market Place **[Plate 3.5]**. This includes the Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre, a large, late-20th century retail development which resulted in the loss of a number of 19th century streets and drastically changed the historic streetscape. The topography slopes away eastward behind this, where Oldham Civic Centre is the prominent and isolated 20th century feature of the skyline **[Plate 3.6]**.

The area immediately south of the conservation area is largely dominated by car parks, including the area directly south of the Oldham Central tram stop, which services a large Sainsbury's **[Plate 3.7]**. However, these carparks slope away from the higher ground where the

more significant buildings are located and their impact is lessened. Union Street continues in either direction from the conservation area; to the east it extends downhill into Mumps and includes additional Grade II-listed buildings at nos. 115, 117, 121 and the Royal Oak Public House. These assets are interspersed with a mix of late-19th century, early-20th century and post-war buildings. Most share the same scale and materials but overall the street lacks a sense of architectural cohesion. To the west, Union Street comprises a mix of late-Victorian and modern architecture **[Plate 3.8]**. Just north of Union Street and to the southwest of the conservation area, a 19th-century range of close-knit buildings known as Jackson Pit straddles George Street and slopes downhill. This area is, however, separated physically from the wider conservation area by the Spindles development, and forms its own small enclave of late-Victorian domestic and small industrial buildings.



Plate 3.2 Open area immediately north of conservation area



Plate 3.3 Car park fronting the Church Street historic route



Plate 3.4 Tommyfield Market along north side of Albion Street



Plate 3.5 Mid-to-late-20th century architecture to southeast of Market Place



Plate 3.6 Oldham Civic Centre to east



Plate 3.7 Car park and Sainsbury's to south



Plate 3.8 Diverse range of buildings along Union Street to west

4.0 The Historical Development of Central Oldham

The following history included in **Sections 4.1-4.5** is derived from the April 1997 *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal* by Stephen Levrant: Heritage Architecture. **Section 4.6** includes a summary of major development within the conservation area since the adoption of this document. Accompanying maps and images have been sourced from Oldham Local Studies and Archives, unless otherwise stated.

4.1 Location and Population

Oldham is situated to the immediate north east of Manchester and now forms part of the Greater Manchester conurbation. The name "Oldham" originates from a combination of old English: ald; and old Scandinavian: holmr, meaning "old promontory".

The town does indeed spread over a high prominence commanding views over the surrounding countryside, a characteristic, which in past times, was regarded as a positive criterion and distinct topographical advantage [Plate 4.1].

Until the middle of the 18th century Oldham was surrounded by farms that the freeholders occupied and worked. They provided wool for the north midlands weaving industry that covered an area from Bolton in the east, to Leeds and Wakefield in the west. This was almost entirely cottage based, the farmers and their labourers also weaving and spinning the wool. The balance of industry (home weaving) and farming became tipped in favour of the former as the industrial revolution gathered pace and a new class developed. Its origins, if not actually in Oldham, certainly stem from the new

milieu generated in the area generally. Thus the same families who in the mid-18th century were farmers and yeomen had 50 years later become heads of the town's chief manufactories. At the height of its fame as a world renowned industrial centre Oldham boasted the largest number of cotton spindles in the world.³

4.2 Origins and Development

Origins

The town developed from a small hill-top settlement situated on an ancient cross-Pennine route that linked Manchester and York. It was not served directly by any Roman road of consequence, and until the Industrial Revolution it remained a very small settlement with an agrarian economy, providing wool for export to Yorkshire for spinning. The Church has ancient origins and was a prominent landmark until the late 18th century [Plate 4.2].

The streets of Oldham provide the most evocative link with the past growth of the town. The exposed elevation – regarded in the past as a major attribute – prevented any central connection with the canal system, and it was not until 1842 that the railway was navigated through a precipitous terrain to provide the transport link demanded by the enormous expansion of trade produced at the peak of the Industrial Revolution.

It is from the streets that the pattern of development and history are traced. The colonisation of the hilltop prominence was dictated largely by the advances in road building technology, which exploited advantageous routes over the irregular topography.

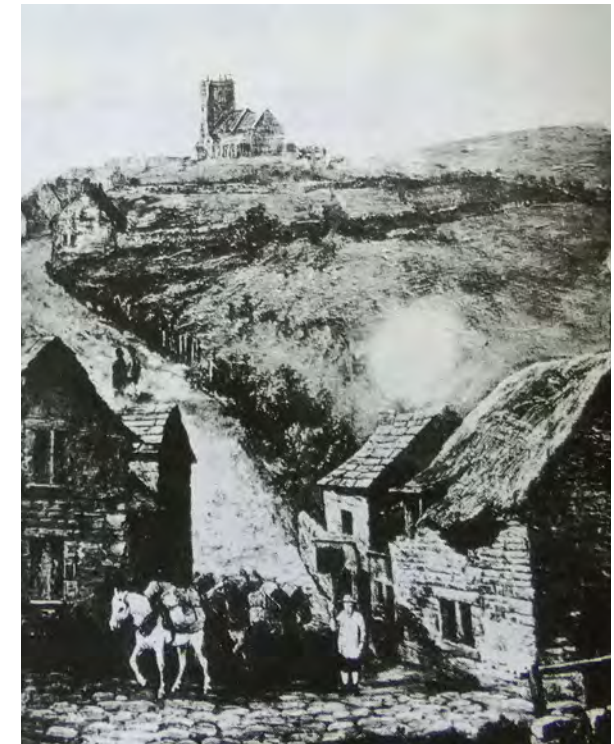


Plate 4.1 The ancient highway through Oldham, 1760 (McPhillips 1997)

3 Levrant, S. 1997. *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal*, p. 3.



Plate 4.2 Oldham c. 1780, looking from Horsedge toward Bardsley (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Early Days

The earliest known map of the town is a depiction of c. 1756 by Butterworth, which was drawn in 1817, to enable comparison of the town at those two dates (Butterworth orientated the map incorrectly by lining up the route from Manchester with West Street, which was the principal route at that time; in fact, the early route from Manchester actually entered Oldham via King Street from the south) [Plates 4.3 and 4.4]. Butterworth's source for the early map is uncertain. The principal thoroughfare was called Goldburn, which from Mumps (then a separate settlement) followed the line of Bow Street, Church Street and, possibly, Church Lane, then becoming Main Street at the same point as today's High Street [Plate 4.5]. The main through road to Manchester, running south from High Street, was Water Street, later George Street. The road to Rochdale also joined Main Street at this point, forming an important junction which is now beneath the Spindles Shopping Centre.

The most historically intact area of the town is thus, the "Square" by the Church, at the junction of Yorkshire Street and High Street, known in the early 19th century as Mill End. At that time, it was more definitely a square, but the steep terrace at Church Street always prevented a uniformity of a formal square. It was balanced at the west end of the High Street by Market Place, then at the junction of Henshaw Street and George Street. From that nucleus the town streets then spread north/south, starting as passages between the ribbon-developed buildings, hence their narrow width today.⁴

4 Levrant, 1997, p. 4.

Yorkshire Street provided a more direct route to Mumps, cutting across the steep hillside at the end of the 18th century, and eventually marooning many of the older properties in what became Bow Street. Union Street was driven through a series of gardens at low level to provide a bypass, but it was not developed fully until well into the 19th century, after achieving turnpike status in 1825 [Plate 4.6]. It assumed a grand civic dignity following establishment of a Charter of Incorporation making Oldham a Borough in the mid-century.⁵

Traffic

The principal traffic to and from the town were merchants and goods on waggons, travelling between Lancashire and Yorkshire. The route via Oldham had been established in pre-Roman times. The main centre for production of cloth was West Riding and transport and distribution westwards, was via trains of pack-horses. The first Turnpike Trust which affected Oldham was not created until 1734, but until well into the latter part of the 18th century Oldham was relatively isolated.

The first coach service through Oldham began in 1790, as a stopping point on the Manchester to Wakefield route. The remaining years of the century saw an expansion of road construction to accommodate coaches, with routes through Oldham linking to Huddersfield, Ripponden and Hull. All traffic passed through the Town Centre of High Street/Yorkshire Street (then part of Goldburn) and through what is now Bow Street. The High Street was thus very narrow for a major

5 Levrant, 1997, p. 5.

thoroughfare even by late 18th century standards, and there were complaints due to the congestion of traffic. Land was acquired in 1823 and 1828 to widen the route.⁶

The Population

The large population explosion from the late 18th century saw the transformation from an obscure village into an internationally known town. In 1714 there was a population of 1,732; in 1801 this had risen to 12,024, by 1826 it reached 20,000, and by 1901, had reached 137,246. The chief industry was cotton milling, but coal was a major contributor and later, engineering. These three industries had a major effect on the development and character of the town. Pits, mills and workshops developed and were operating within the town, co-existing with residential and commercial properties.

6 ibid

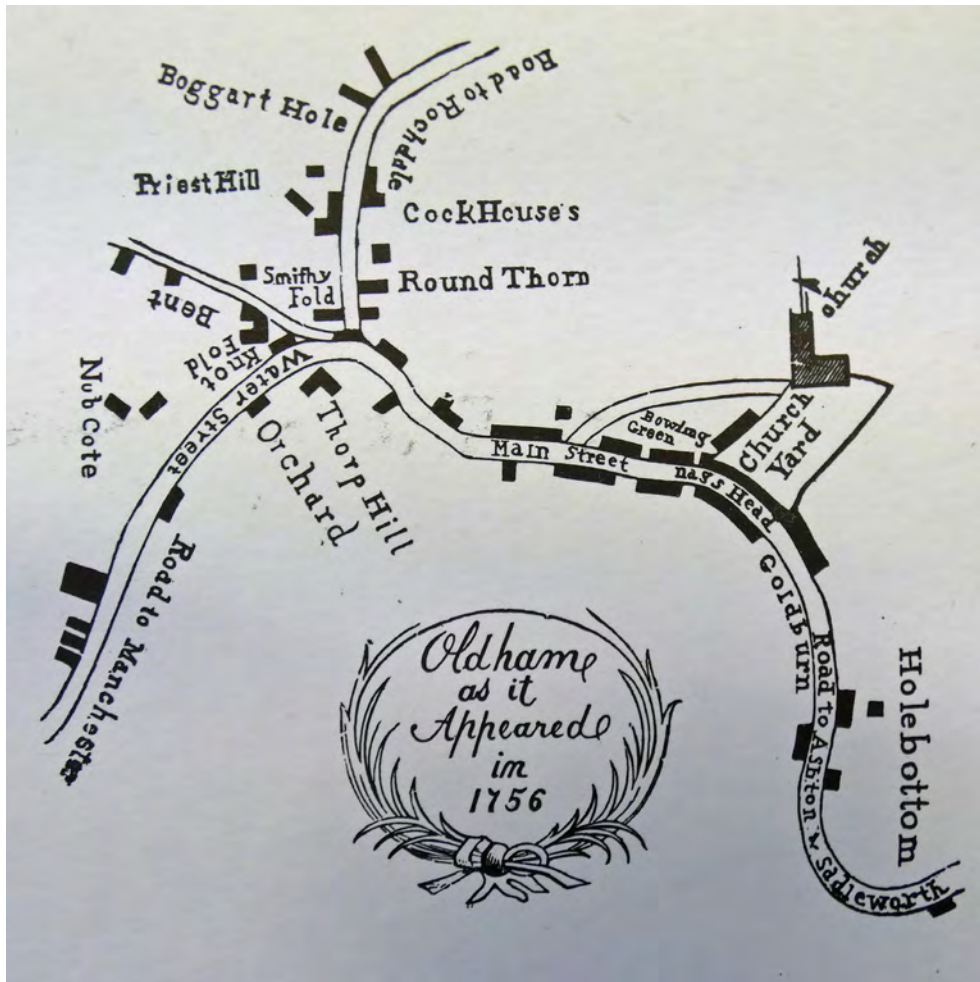


Plate 4.3 Oldham in 1756, by Butterworth (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.4 Butterworth's map of Oldham, 1817 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.5 The principal thoroughfare of Goldburn (McPhillips 1997)



Plate 4.6 1848 Ordnance Survey, 19th century ribbon development (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Industry

Milling

Prior to the bulk importation of cotton from America and India, wool weaving had been the principal cottage industry, centred on Yorkshire. The hills around Oldham were heavily grazed by sheep, providing the raw material. Introduction of cotton, together with the development in technology and working practices, fuelled the Industrial Revolution. The first mills appeared in Oldham in the last quarter of the 18th century, and there were 12 within the parish by 1778, all using water power. A further 20 years saw the introduction of steam power and the further expansion of business. By 1794, Oldham was established as a centre for the manufacture of fustian – a mixture of cotton and linen, and for hat making.

Among the earliest mills was that erected at Water Street (later Manchester Street) very near the Market Place by James Smethurst, and James Lees built one at a similar date in Church Lane. Others were sited at Holebottom, off Yorkshire Street, and Sheepwashes off Union Street. The coming of steam power demanded newer and bigger buildings, and by 1805 there were 30 mills.

By 1825 there were 65 mills in the area, all built since 1800, most were spinning cotton and all were steam powered [Plate 4.7]. They provided employment for over 6,600 families. By 1833 there were 11,000 cotton mills in the entire region, of various sizes. It was the siting of the mills on the outskirts and further reaches of the town from the 1770s onwards which shaped the pattern

of development. These grew to house and service the workers, and eventually coalesce with themselves and the town [Plate 4.8].⁷

Hat Making

The origins of hat making in Oldham are obscure, but by 1817 there were 22 firms producing 1,000 hats per week, an output second only to London.

Coal Mining

Mining was carried on extensively throughout the area from an early date, mainly for local domestic heating, until the improvements in roads and canals allowed export further afield. By 1714 there were 14 collieries in Oldham and like cotton, the industry expanded dramatically with the introduction of steam power. Unlike the mills, the number of mines did not increase gently, but production of coal accelerated. The ready supply of coal assisted the spectacular growth of the cotton industry and its export to Manchester assisted the prosperity of the town.

Engineering

Engineering developed from the late 18th century as an off-shoot of the cotton industry – for maintaining and repairing the spinning machinery. This developed into machine making and by 1821 there were 21 engineering firms. The growth in the use of steam also required engineering services, and by 1832 there were 92 steam engines in use in the town.

7 ibid

Growth

Throughout the remainder of the 18th century the town consolidated and expanded upon the foundations laid early in the century. The 62 mills of 1832 had become 265 by 1880, and at that time Oldham was converting 25% of the entire raw cotton imports to England.⁸

8 Levrant, 1997, p. 6.



Plate 4.7 Oldham from Glodwick, 1831 by J.H. Carse (Gallery Oldham)

Development Pattern

The shape of the town can be clearly traced from the original nucleus at the summit of the hill, around the Church at the confluence of roads and trackways to High Street. Each phase of subsequent development and expansion has left its mark on the town and its buildings as the town progressed from agrarian through manufacturing to commercial economy. The topography dictated the size, position and direction of routes; the siting of mills and mines led to concentrations of population. The increase in working population led to demand for commercial development. The Tommyfield Market was an outdoor market started as a private venture in 1856 and was purchased by the Corporation in 1865 (the present Tommyfield Market building was erected in the 1970s after fire destroyed the earlier Victoria Market Hall). The construction of the Market Arcade in 1880 by Oldham's most prestigious architect, Sir Sydney Scott, was followed by the Hilton Arcade in 1893. The decline of industry forced the development of services, leisure and commercial industries, and the town is now poised for a new phase of cultural renaissance, fuelled by the new financial and social environment.

The Elevated Position

The elevated position was regarded as an advantage in the past, the town being regarded as "pleasantly situated on an eminence, commanding an extensive and delightful prospect..." The distant views across the countryside are particularly important today, when set as a backdrop to the built environment.

The transformation over a relatively short period from village to large town is very apparent in the buildings, and many examples of the stages of this development survive.⁹



Plate 4.8 Oldham, mid-19th century, view from south (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

9 *ibid*

4.3 Historic Uses and the Built Environment

Former Uses

Early Development

The pre-industrial town served the agrarian community as the primary activity, the industrial town was dominated by the secondary factors and the services for it. The post-industrial town of today is a centre for the tertiary sector providing services for the informal economy which replaced the structured system of the industrial era. In the early development of the town, intensive mixed uses were located in the centre, and there was no distinct separation of residential, commercial and industrial. Early maps show a quarry in Yorkshire Street, coal pits in Greaves Street, Union Street and Rhodes Bank, and mills throughout the area.

It was only in the latter years of the last century that some polarisation of uses took place, driven by the improved transport facilities and the development of the commercial/retail element. The decline of traditional manufacturing industries was followed by the emergence of an informal economy. Oldham, like many similar towns, changed from being largely a centre of production to become largely a centre of consumption.

The Plan Form

The plan form of the area is substantially the result of the road developments. The earliest buildings were erected in ribbon fashion, adjacent to High Street, Goldburn (Yorkshire Street and Bow Street) and George Street. Increased traffic demanded road improvements, resulting in the formulation of Yorkshire Street and

Union Street, and Rhodes Bank, serving mills and mines. As more mills were built, roads were constructed or enlarged to serve them. Henshaw Street, for example, is named after the owner of the mill it served.

The narrow north/south roads linking Yorkshire Street and Union Street developed from the alleyways, defining the plots of individual buildings originally fronting Yorkshire Street. Many of the early buildings still remain in situ. The semi-regular grid is a result of this later development, whereas the earliest route (Goldburn) followed the easiest contour around the hill [Plate 4.9].

The maze of smaller streets which originally marked the western entrance to the town via George Street, Water Street and adjoining streets were swept away in construction of the Shopping Centre. Some of this early route still survives, but is largely outside the conservation area, in Jackson Pit.

Union Street

Union Street developed into the grand civic route containing the finest buildings. Despite its relatively early creation, it did not flourish until well into the 19th century. It remains surprisingly undisturbed, although there are modern replacement buildings on several sites. It also contains the main concentration of listed buildings, some outside the conservation area.

Linking Streets

Greaves Street and Queen Street being particularly fine. The smaller streets contained the earliest urban housing of modest artisan dwellings or shops, and there

is a surprising harmony between the larger commercial buildings and these smaller ones, which has to do with detail, scale and proportion.

Spread of Development

The rapid spread of development during the Industrial Revolution, which saw enterprises fail as fast as they grew, was not conducive to carefully orchestrated urban planning. The interspersed of large-footprint industrial buildings with smaller buildings set a pattern which remains up to the present day [Plate 4.10].¹⁰

10 Levrant, 1997, p. 8.



Plate 4.9 Baines Lancashire map of 1824 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.10 1932 Ordnance Survey, present Conservation Area site marked in red (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

4.4 Key Space Development

Town Hall (Parliament) Square

The most important space within the conservation area is undoubtedly the Town Hall Square or Old Market Place, also known for a short time in the early 19th century as Mill End [Plate 4.11]. Although not the exact topographical apex of the Hill on which Oldham was founded, it is very near that and forms a base for the Church of St. Mary set high above the terraced roadway. Until recent years, this formed the prominent landmark for some considerable distance, although it had to compete with numerous mill chimneys (including one next door on the County Court site).

This highly distinctive space had always been enclosed by prominent and high-status buildings, and its idiosyncratic terrace marking the line of the old road at the formation of Yorkshire Street, now provides a major landscape element which emphasises the propitious topography of the town. The formation of “space” rather than an enlarged street dates from the time of the Yorkshire Street construction in c. 1808. Certain characteristics have remained from that date, in the form of surrounding buildings.

The two periods of road widenings at the entrance to High Street have both times preserved the rounded form of buildings to the corner of Clegg Street, and the steep fall away down Yorkshire Street has always provided a view out over the surrounding countryside [Plate 4.12]. As the topography falls from north to south as well as

west to east, the larger buildings to the south being set lower tend to present a more even skyline than would otherwise be the case.¹¹

Union Street

Union Street, driven through an undeveloped area of the town in the early years of the 19th century sometime between c. 1806 and c. 1814, was the first “modern” thoroughfare in Oldham [Plate 4.13]. Probably intended to bypass the congested and narrow town centre, it did not really achieve that until much later in the century, following the construction of the north/south linking streets to High Street and Yorkshire Street. The uninterrupted straightness creates a unique space in the town, and one which is uncommon in many urban settlements of similar date [Plate 4.14].

Yorkshire Street

Yorkshire Street is the other principal thoroughfare within the conservation area, its present form indicated on a map of c. 1805. This broad street was to replace the winding, narrow Goldburn (Church Street/Bow Street) and act as a continuation of the High Street. It lacks the civic formality of Union Street, is far steeper and less uniform [Plates 4.15 and 4.16].

11 Levrant, 1997, p. 20.



Plate 4.11 Town Hall Square looking west, c. 1890 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.12 Town Hall Square looking east, c. 1900 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.13 Union Street looking east, nos. 87-93 on left, c. 1880 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.14 Union Street looking east, spire to Union Street Chapel in background (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.15 Jubilee celebrations, Yorkshire Street, 1899 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)



Plate 4.16 Yorkshire Street from Waterloo Street, c. 1890 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

4.5 Archaeological Significance

Ancient Monuments

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the conservation area or its immediate surrounds. There are no ancient above-ground structures in evidence. The oldest recorded building was the previous parish church, demolished to make way for the present structure, and its foundations may still remain beneath the present churchyard.

Early Settlement Records

Although only written records tell of early settlement on this route to Yorkshire, there is little or no above-ground evidence. There may be remains of early buildings adjacent to Bow Street, but later developments are likely to have damaged them. There were records of some early thatched buildings noted in the latter years of the 19th century, but all trace of these has now gone.

Industrial Archaeology

The area is still rich in industrial archaeology but is fast losing many of the remaining buildings. The advances made during the Industrial Revolution were responsible for a proliferation of mills and workshops, and the rise and fall of various business concerns resulted in many changes over a relatively short timescale. The important feature of this development was the construction of mills within the urban fabric. Some of these still remain on Bow Street and behind Union Street, but the majority lie outside the conservation area, or have now been demolished. The demand for larger premises required development outside the concentrated town centre.

There is an excellent survey of Oldham's mills,¹² and it is recommended that some surviving examples might be worthy of inclusion on the local list.

Canals and Railways

The canal and basin are too far from the conservation area to be included in this assessment, and the impact of the canal has little recognisable effect on the remaining character, although it was a prime instigator of wealth, particularly in respect of mines.

Very little now remains of the railway systems which served the town and surrounding areas. The earlier stations have all vanished, and the iron bridge over to Glodwick still survives, though outside of the conservation area.

Mines or Pits

There appears to be no visible physical remains of mines or pits within the conservation area or town centre, although the whereabouts of several are shown on the maps. Archaeological assessments may be pertinent before development on vacant sites to ensure that no unsecured shafts are breached, as well as allowing recording of any remains, as so much has already been lost.

Foundries and Workshops

Foundries and workshops which did exist in the town centre have not been recorded or researched in detail. There is some interesting and pertinent data

to be gathered on this subject, particularly where architectural or building ancillary materials may have been locally manufactured. The building construction of many early industrial buildings is important and can often be demolished without true understanding of its importance. For example, the highly important Dronsfield Offices in King Street seem to have escaped listing and vanished. This was a pioneering concrete construction, designed by J. Henry Sellers in 1906-7 and noted in several books.¹³

12 Gurr, D. and Hunt, J. 1989. *The Cotton Mills of Oldham*.

13 Levraut, 1997, p. 11.

4.6 Recent Development within the Conservation Area

In addition to general changes in building use, renewal of shopfronts, etc., a number of new schemes have been implemented within the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area since it was last appraised in 1997.

Proposals to create a new 'Cultural Quarter' in Oldham were approved in c. 2000 just south of the conservation area, comprising the construction of a new library building, and Listed Building Consent was granted for adaptations to the Grade II-listed Oldham Library for its conversion into a community heritage centre in c. 2014. The resulting 2002 construction framed the existing library garden along its southern edge and created a new pedestrian route linking the former museum and Friends' Meeting House on Greaves Street to the east with the library complex; related works for the conversion and enhancement of the historic library building are presently underway.

Additional public realm improvements were implemented just north of the conservation area by way of a public realm art scheme in 2001, located in the space between Curzon Street, Albion Street and Tommyfield Market featuring semi-permanent, sculptural works. Just south of this, a fenced-in children's playground was installed within the open space of Market Place in 2014 along with a planted garden space, and further greenery schemes have been introduced throughout the conservation area in recent years along its pedestrian routes.

The most significant change to occur within the conservation area townscape has been the erection of the Town Hall extension designed by BDP in 2016, which had a dramatic impact on the public realm through the renewal of Parliament Square. Previously in use as a bus station and car park, the space was re-imagined as pedestrian-only public realm. The scheme also included the conversion of the Grade II-listed Town Hall from a redundant civic building into a café, cinema, gallery and event space with a modern glazed frontage to Parliament Square **[Plate 4.17]**. The stark brick façade of the shopping centre to the east was re-clad in updated modern and sympathetic materials, further framing the square and southward views into the surrounding landscape.



Plate 4.17 Oldham Town Hall, 2018

4.7 Research Resources

The following items were listed as consulted references in the 1997 Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal by Stephen Levrant.

Ashworth, W. and Tunbridge, J. 1990. *The Tourist Historic City*.

Bates, P. 1877. *Handy Book of Oldham*.

Bateson, H. 1985. *A History of Oldham*. Otley, Yorkshire: Amethyst Press.

Butterworth, E. 1838. *History of Oldham*.

Butterworth, J. 1814. *History of Oldham*.

Castells, M. 1989. *The Information City*. Blackwell.

Gurr, D. and Hunt, J. 1989. *The Cotton Mills of Oldham, 2nd Edition*. Oldham Leisure Services.

Hayes, C. n.d. *Oldham Past*. Oldham: Book Bargain Centre.

'History along Oldham's Bus Routes, the East Route Springhead to Oldham Town Hall' in *The Chronicle*. 18 May 1963.

Kreiger, E. 1982. *Oldham in Old Picture Postcards*. Zastbonner, Netherlands.

Kreiger, E. 1986. *Oldham in Old Photographs*. Hendon Publishing Co.

MacKeith, M. 1980. *Shopping Arcades, 1817-1939*. Mansell.

MacKeith, M. 1985. *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*. Mansell.

Magee, R. 1992. *The Inns and Alehouses of Oldham and Their Licensees, 1714-1992*.

Magee, R. 1994. *The Oldham Beer Houses and Their Licensees, 1928-1994, Parts 1 and 2*.

Mantoux, P. 1961. *The Industrial Revolution in the 18th Century*. Cape.

McPhillips, K. 1997. *Oldham, the Formative Years*. Neil Richardson.

Mee, A. and Beckwith, F. 1973. *Kings England – Lancashire*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Millar, J.S. and Thompson, D.A. 1976. *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Draft Report*. GMC.

Millet, F. 1988. *Going Up Town*. Oldham Leisure Services.

Millet, F. 1996. *Oldham*. Archive Photograph Series.

Oldham Corporation. 1928. *Oldham and its Industries: Official Handbook of the Corporation*.

Oldham Museum and Geological Society. n.d. *Building Stones of Oldham*. (pamphlet).

Pevsner, N. 1969. *The Buildings of England: South Lancashire*. Harmondsworth.

Shaw, G. n.d. *Annals of Oldham and District, Being a Chronological History, 1784-1798*.

Smith, M. 1996. *Bygone Oldham*.

Stafford, J. 1973. *Oldham as It Was*. Hendon Publishing Company.

Stubbs, F.J. 17 May 1930. 'When Roman Emperors Used the Highway Through Oldham' in *The Chronicle*.

Tesdell, O. and H. 1996. *Revitalizing Historic Urban Quarters*. Architectural Press.

5.0 Character of the Conservation Area

5.1 General Character

Oldham town centre benefits from a dramatic topography which rises up to the Former Town Hall and Parliament Square and then again up the terraced steps surrounding the war memorial to the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter [Plates 5.1 and 5.2]. This gives an inherent hierarchy to the town, skewed only by the prominent civic-style buildings running along Union Street which followed later in the 19th century. It also affords long-range views to the mills in the middle-distance and the hills in the long-distance, which enriches the understanding of the town's historic and geographical context [Plates 5.3 and 5.4]. Alongside the density of listed and unlisted buildings of merit, this also serves to elevate the conservation area above the general urban sprawl it is set within.

The retail core of the town centre runs westwards from Parliament Square; mixed in character it is defined by a handful of high-quality, four/five storey, 19th century buildings faced in brick and stone that provide anchors between which more typical (and frequently detracting) retail frontage lies [Plate 5.5]. The streets which run north-south connecting the two principal routes of the town (High Street/Yorkshire Street and Union Street) are more domestic in scale, occupying typically uniform plots [Plate 5.6]; the east of Greaves Street is the exception to this with set-piece buildings of higher status reflective of their position opposite the former Town Hall. In contrast to this regular street pattern the remains of the older route through the town is still legible in Church Street/Old Church Street and leading out of the conservation area along Bow Street [Plate 5.7]. Isolated by the rerouting of roads, indeed, Church

Lane and Church Passage have an atmosphere which recalls Oldham as an isolated hill-top town before its 19th century industrial development and expansion.

Despite the high quality of the built environment, large pedestrianised areas and the flagship conversion of the Old Former Town Hall, the conservation area has a generally down-at-heel atmosphere. At ground level, poor quality retail frontages of inappropriate designs dominate the streetscape. Many important and substantial buildings are clearly vacant; and the resulting lack of maintenance and human activity detracts from the character and appearance of the area.



Plate 5.1 The rising topography builds up to the former Town Hall, Parliament Square and Church of St Mary and St Peter at its peak



Plate 5.2 The Church of St Mary and St Peter crowning the centre of the conservation area



Plate 5.3 View south from churchyard which surmounts the town centre



Plate 5.4 Views through the heart of the town centre out to the country beyond



Plate 5.5 High Street looking east with Hilton Arcade and Barclays Bank acting as anchors in the streetscape



Plate 5.6 Domestic character of Queen Street with change in topography accommodating the grander HSBC bank on the corner with Union Street



Plate 5.7 Historic route through town centre along Bow Street (as it approaches junction with Yorkshire Street)

5.2 Streets and Spaces

Primary Spaces

Union Street

Union Street is a large-scale and grand thoroughfare. Constructed between 1806 and 1814 it has a formal boulevard character framing views to the west and east (it became as a tram route in 2014, with the Oldham Central tram stop at the western end of the conservation area boundary). Despite only being within the conservation area for a relatively short length and forming its southern boundary for an even shorter length (with the Cultural Quarter buildings which front on to it extending further south), visually it demarks the southern edge of the town centre. The vista is terminated to the west by St. Mary's with St. Patrick's RC Church whilst to the east the street curves away down the hill. The changing topography allows more substantial buildings such as the 2002 Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library constructed as part of the new Cultural Quarter to be discreetly tucked away behind the buildings fronting Union Street [Plate 5.8].

The street is dominated by grand late 19th century civic architecture. The principal buildings are of the highest quality and are all listed, although they lack the architectural cohesion of other parts of the conservation area. The use of these buildings is civic and commercial, the civic buildings now largely positioned within the group defined as the Cultural Quarter (including the library, forthcoming Heritage Centre, Old Museum and Oldham Gallery and Library). The sheer scale and grandeur of the buildings, however,

makes them vulnerable to loss of active use and a number are currently (or are to become) vacant including the Prudential Building, the former post office and the Lyceum.

Small-scale buildings and 20th century replacements are visually dominated by these landmark buildings but also form an important part of the urban fabric [Plates 5.9 and 5.10]. To the south-west corner of the conservation area is Medtia House, a modern building which stands in the location of the former public baths. In itself it makes a neutral contribution to the conservation area; however its set-back from the street introduces an uncharacteristic piece of landscaped public realm at odds with the robust architectural character of the town centre.

High Street

Only one townscape block on the northern side of the High Street is currently located within the conservation area. In townscape terms it has a weak corner, with the modern buildings at nos.1 and 3 cutting into the corner of the Hilton Arcade block (an important local landmark containing a Victorian arcade recommended for inclusion on the local list of buildings of merit). Typical of many high-quality buildings in the conservation area, they in the main part form a dead frontage, despite the replacement of the poor arcade shopfronts in recent years, giving an overall atmosphere of vacancy and neglect. Externally the retail frontages to almost the entire townscape block are poor [Plates 5.11 and 5.12].

This group banks away, reducing the prominence of the modern block which turns the corner onto Lord Street to reveal the Grade II-listed Barclays Bank. A prominent feature in the townscape, this terminates views below Church Terrace, which again banks away to reveal to Greaves Arms [Plate 5.13].

Parliament Square/Yorkshire Street

Parliament Square is a new piece of public realm laid out in association with the adaptive reuse of the Grade II-listed former Town Hall as a cinema and leisure complex. The scheme by BDP opened in 2016 and includes a substantial contemporary extension which runs down the side of Parliament Square facing the re-fronted Town Square Shopping Centre and curved façade at nos.32-24 High Street, which draws the eye along the pedestrianised High Street (this area is currently located outside of the conservation area). Parliament Square itself is a substantial new piece of urban public realm which adds to the civic atmosphere of the town centre core; the street planters featuring skyline maps of the surrounding mills are noteworthy, as are the Oldham owls positioned on plinths (one within the conservation area and the facing three currently in an area outside at the southern end of the square) [Plate 5.14].



Plate 5.8 Union Street, view into conservation area showing boulevard character, centrally running tram and new library housed discretely behind former library



Plate 5.9 Union Street, tram stop and the Prudential Building in the foreground



Plate 5.10 Union Street smaller scale buildings between the larger set-piece architecture, in this case the Lyceum



Plate 5.11 Hilton Arcade, recommended for inclusion on local list but marred by poor retail frontage and detracting building at nos.1-3 which cuts away corner



Plate 5.12 Poor retail frontage along Curzon Street at ground floor to Hilton Arcade group



Plate 5.13 Grade II-listed Barclays Bank on the corner with Church Terrace and the Greaves Arms positioned behind



Plate 5.14 Converted former Town Hall and new public realm surrounding

Set below the church, this is the heart of the town centre, where retail and leisure meet civic and religious uses. It is also the original centre of the settlement as reflected in the different types and architectural styles of high-status buildings and dominated by the colonnaded façade to the Former Town Hall and its contemporary extension. From the peak of the hill (with only the war memorial and church set above), the manner with which the topography falls away in views along Yorkshire Street and down Parliament Square provides dramatic long-distance vistas of mills and countryside which informs the broader context of the heart of Oldham, and its origins as a Victorian mill town [Plates 5.15 and 5.16]

Secondary Spaces

Church Terrace/Street

Church Terrace banks away at the end of High Street and rises up to the war memorial and the church steps, revealing a key piece of public realm in the town centre formed at the time Yorkshire Street was laid out, and the historic path through the town rerouted at the beginning of the 19th century. The Greaves Arms is located at the top of the terrace and is a highly prominent feature centred on the same axis as High Street; it is currently vacant and in need of reuse to maintain its important contribution to the local townscape. The street is cobbled and leads to Church Street which falls dramatically down the side of the churchyard, picking up the early route through the area. No.11 Church Terrace stands on the corner with Church Passage and is Grade II-listed – displaying the vernacular sandstone on its return elevation. The railings to the distinctive raised pavement and terrace and the war memorial are also

listed and provide a dwelling space at the heart of the town centre partially enclosed by the sandstone ashlar walls set away from its busy activity, looking out over Parliament Square and to the long-range vistas of the conservation area's wider setting [Plates 5.17 - 5.19].

Greaves Street

Greaves Street runs north-south between the principal routes; its western edge is bound by the former Town Hall extension [Plate 5.20]. Its eastern edge manages the topographical transition with a series of individual high-quality buildings of differing characters, but all of interest (including the Nat West Bank on the corner and Edgar Wood building at no.5 (both Grade II-listed), and No.3, Victoria House and the Old Bill both proposed for inclusion on the local list). These buildings give a formal edge to the framed southward long views of the highest quality and lead down to the high-status buildings on Union Street.

Curzon Street/Albion Street/Rock Street

The east side of Curzon Street and south-east side of Albion Street are included in the conservation area. However as they are experienced, they are not distinguished from their surroundings which are located outside of the conservation area which also contribute to its character (as reflected by the extension proposed) including the modern Tommyfield Market, which forms the northern edge to the street and, to a casual observer, the conservation area. Despite being modern in aesthetic, the late-20th century additions which front Albion Street and Lord Street do not detract from the character of the conservation area and successfully

navigate the corners they occupy. The fabric of the pedestrianised public realm is high quality and the townscape features are well ordered, although it still feels like a back-of-town space and would benefit from a better sense of identity and vibrancy when not in use by the market [Plates 5.21 and 5.22].

Rock Street forms the northern edge of the conservation area and very much has this character, with the rears of the buildings lining Church Lane backing on to it with car parking behind and the open former leisure centre on its northern side [Plate 5.23].

Queen Street and Retiro Street

These streets follow the north-south axis running between Yorkshire Street and Union Street. Typically lined with domestic-scaled terraces of small-scale plot sizes and continuous rooflines which follow the slope of the hill. Whilst residential in character the buildings are typically in office/commercial use. A number of shared features are retained, including a continuous cornice to the eaves line, chimneys and window/door compositions; whilst numerous windows have been replaced these tend to be sash-style windows which do not shout out as modern features, however oversized casements and poor signage detract. The significant change in levels allows for larger-scale buildings to be accommodated; at their southern end they meet Union Street, providing bookends of more substantial buildings at both the northern and southern terminations [Plates 5.24 and 5.25].



Plate 5.15 Parliament Square leading into Yorkshire Street with long-views eastward and rising Church Terrace to War memorial on the left



Plate 5.16 Raised pavement at eastern end of Yorkshire Street with decorative railings and lamps



Plate 5.17 Church Terrace looking towards High Street



Plate 5.18 Listed war memorial set on terracing with Church of St Mary and St Peter behind and the Greaves Arm to its right

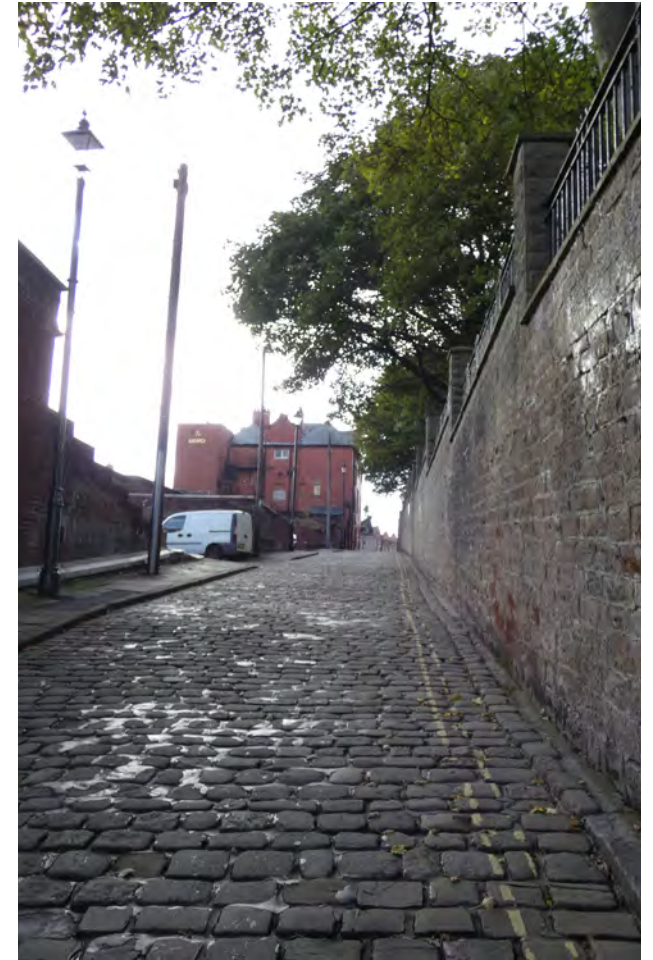


Plate 5.19 Church Street which falls away dramatically with tall retaining wall to churchyard garden



Plate 5.20 Eastern facade of former Town Hall extending southwards along Greaves Street



Plate 5.21 Looking east along Curzon Street across pedestrianised public realm



Plate 5.22 Looking southwards down Curzon Street



Plate 5.23 Looking north along Retiro Street, only left side is currently within conservation area



Plate 5.24 Looking north along Greaves Street and run of high quality buildings which mediate change in levels and form worthy neighbours to listed Town Hall



Plate 5.25 Rock Street fronted by the rear of buildings on Church Lane

Intimate Spaces

Church Lane

Church Lane has an intimate and domestic character which is unique to the remainder of the conservation area. It is the oldest intact street in the conservation area marred only by poorly-considered road markings, signs and poor infill to the cobbled streets. The narrow road width, the height of the flanking buildings and their architectural character gives a deeply historic atmosphere, as if one has stepped into another world from the town centre. Whilst the later (1827-30) Church of St. Mary and St. Peter now terminates the view, Church Lane forms part of a prehistoric route which passed through the town, running in front of the former parish church before the enlargement of the churchyard and lowering of the now-severed Church Street, in 1805. The buildings are almost entirely listed – including the cobbled road. The use of the street is predominately legal/office use following the opening of the County Court in 1894, which steps up in scale towards the church; however, this is now run by the Methodist Church as café and youth centre and the buildings which originally stood at the south-western end of the street have long since been demolished and replaced by the chambers of Barclays Bank and to facilitate road-widening schemes **[Plate 5.26]**.

Alleyways, Back Streets and Passages

Church Passage is a narrow passage which runs alongside the church grounds and connects Church Terrace, Church Lane and Rock Street **[Plate 5.27]**. A further alleyway runs up the side of the Prudential Building; this is a tight space which currently feels underused and not particularly inviting, not least because of the obviously vacant and deteriorating character of the Prudential Building itself **[Plate 5.28]**. The pedestrianised area which forms the southern boundary of the Cultural Quarter also has an intimate character, set within the heart of the key buildings which surround it, away from the principal thoroughfare of Union Street **[Plate 5.29]**.

Set behind the secondary streets which run north-south there are a number of back streets which are typically lined by the rears of the buildings facing the secondary streets, often including car parking and exhibiting poor-quality extensions and alterations and plant equipment **[Plate 5.30]**. These necessary, 'back-of-house' streets are in places given undue prominence owing to the large surface level car parks which have formed chasms in the tight built form. These become even more intimate in places where buildings are tightly knitted together, such as between Church Terrace and Church Lane and along Plate Street **[Plate 5.31]**.



Plate 5.26 Church Lane with the Church of St Mary and St Peter terminating the view and the return elevation of Barclays Bank in the foreground



Plate 5.27 Church Passage connecting Church Terrace and Church Lane



Plate 5.28 Alley running alongside Prudential Building



Plate 5.29 Public realm set in the heart of the Cultural Quarter



Plate 5.30 Typical 'back-of-house' appearance of buildings as seen from back streets behind

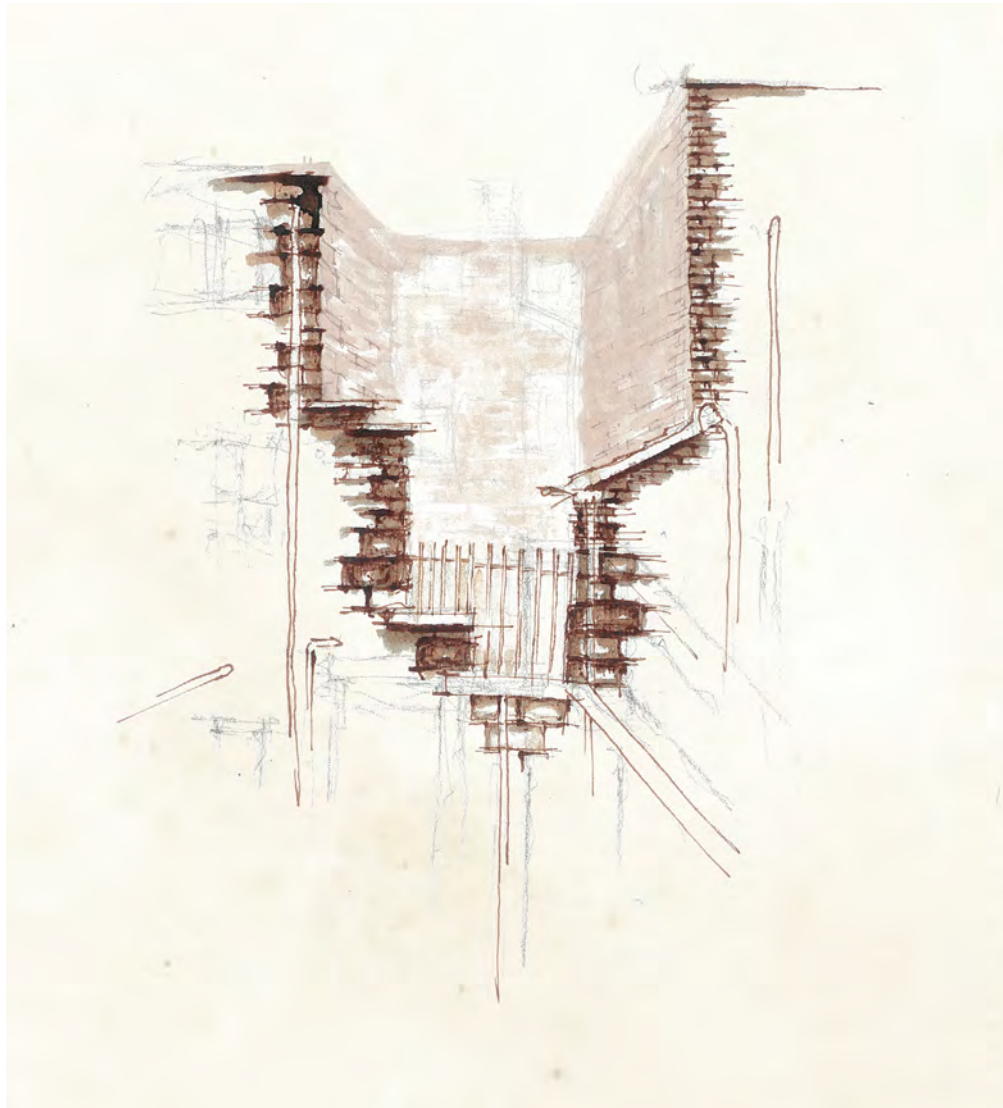


Plate 5.31 Forgotten backland spaces

5.2 Land Use

The Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area covers a relatively small area which comprises the uses expected of the town centre core, ranging from civic and religious use to retail and entertainment. A town centre is the sum of such parts and, given the size of the conservation area, is not considered necessary to break it down into character areas. Instead these uses are typically grouped and expressed through the architecture of the buildings they inhabit and the surrounding public realm.

Shops/Restaurants and Cafés

The conservation area's commercial core is centred on the townscape block bound by High Street and Curzon Street; this extends out of the conservation area along Market Place, north into Henshaw Street and within the Spindles Shopping Centre opposite. At the other side of Parliament Square this commercial activity continues along Yorkshire Street and again extends out of the conservation area. This strong commercial character means that the often poor-quality retail frontages dominate what are otherwise handsome buildings forming a disjointed relationship between the human experience at ground floor and the robust 19th facades above [Plate 5.32]. Small pockets of individual buildings of shop or restaurant use are found elsewhere in the area, typically housed in domestic-style buildings.

Financial and Professional Services/Offices

Professional services, particularly legal offices, are prevalent within the conservation area and, broadly speaking, are located in three areas: Church Lane adjacent to the former Magistrates Court; within the domestically-scaled terraces on Queen Street and Retiro Street; and also in pockets along Union Street. These uses can typically be accommodated within existing buildings without any major impact, although signage in places is poor and the buildings still tend to suffer from neglect and poor replacement windows [Plate 5.33].

Non-Residential Institutions

The large-scale buildings along Union Street in the area now designated the Cultural Quarter are of a grand scale and architectural style characteristic of such uses. These buildings read as architectural set-pieces and include the former library, former post office, Masonic Hall and the Lyceum, and are set to either side of the grand boulevard of Union Street with Oldham Park set below street level at the heart. Currently these buildings suffer from a high proportion of vacancy, indicating the need for adapting buildings of scale for new 21st century uses. [Plate 5.34]. Religious buildings are similarly architecturally distinct, with the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter at the northern end of the conservation area, the now-religious use of the former Magistrates Court and the United Reform Church within the heart of Cultural Quarter [Plate 5.35].

Assembly and Leisure

Assembly and leisure buildings share a similar typology to the institutional uses outlined above, reflected by the mix of these uses within the Lyceum. The former Town Hall has now been successfully adapted and extended to house a cinema [Plate 5.36], reflecting the ability of such buildings to accommodate major change and reinvention, whilst Victoria House's conversion to a boxing gym is reflective of a more low-key but equally successful scheme of adaptation.

Sui Generis

There are some uses which do not have a use class which are known as 'sui generis'. Those highlighted on the map are currently outside of the Town Centre Conservation Area boundary (such as the nightclub on Waterloo Street) although it should be noted that there are buildings with 'sui generis' uses within the general defined use character areas outlined above.



Plate 5.32 Impact of poor quality retail frontage, roller shutters and signage on quality of building above at 22-24 Yorkshire Street



Plate 5.33 Professional services on Queen Street



Plate 5.34 Former Post & Telegraph Office, most recently the Local Studies Archive and about to be vacated



Plate 5.35 Masonic Hall and Union Street Church



Plate 5.36 Extension to former Town Hall to house new cinema

5.3 Buildings

The architecture of Oldham is centred on its period of growth and prosperity, and principally dates to the mid-to-late 19th century, with some 20th century redevelopments and infill buildings. The style of architecture is typical of many northern industrial towns, including a number of high-status buildings for civic use and banks; this character is interwoven with smaller buildings of a domestic scale on the smaller connecting streets which run on a north-south axis, the now much-altered Market Place/High Street and the quiet environs around Church Lane, the latter terminated by the prominent Grade II*-listed Church of St. Mary and St. Peter.

Listed Buildings

Oldham Parish Church of St Mary with St Peter (Grade II*)



Plate 5.37 Church of St Mary and St Peter

The Church of St Mary and St Peter is Oldham's Parish Church, built in a simple gothic style in coursed and squared rubble to designs by Richard Lane between 1827-30. It comprises a west tower with clasping porches, nave and aisles accommodated under a single Welsh slate roof. The lining buttresses break the roofline with decorative pinnacles. A church has existed on this site since 1280, the current church being constructed to meet the growing population that the Industrial Revolution brought to the town.

War Memorial (Grade II*)



Plate 5.38 War Memorial

The listed status of the war memorial also includes the memorial wall, piers, gates and steps to St Mary's churchyard and forecourt walls, steps and balustrade (south side) and the railings to St Mary's Churchyard (west side). The list description notes that whilst the ensemble is listed as a group, it is only the war memorial components which warrant the II* status.

The memorial stands on a raised stone-paved area and aligns on the same axis as the churchyard entrance and the church's south porch. It was erected as a permanent memorial to the men of Oldham killed in the First World War and consists of a granite base surmounted by a bronze sculpture by Albert Toft depicting five soldiers making their way along the trenches in order to go 'over the top' into battle.

Former Town Hall (Grade II)



Plate 5.39 Former Town Hall

The Town Hall was constructed in 1841 and extended in 1879-80 by George Woodhouse of Bolton and Edward Potts of Oldham. The main block facing Yorkshire Street is in an austere Greek revival style, faced in ashlar, rusticated to ground floor and with an Ionic portico spanning the central three bays of seven. The long ranging extensions to Greaves Street and Firth Street also remain. The building was vacant and in a very poor condition from the 1980s until a major scheme to convert it into a leisure complex including a cinema and restaurants by BDP was completed in 2016. This scheme has brought about major change at the heart of the conservation area including a substantial extension to its west side and new surrounding public realm.

Prudential Assurance Buildings (Grade II)



Plate 5.40 Prudential Assurance Building

The Prudential Building was constructed in 1889 to designs by Alfred Waterhouse. It is constructed in red brick with elaborate terracotta dressings set on a polished granite plinth with polygonal towers over the entrance to each side and rich ornamentation. The western return façade is clad in glazed brick. The building is vacant and in a very poor state of repair and is recommended for inclusion on a local heritage at risk register; it occupies a prominent location adjacent to Oldham Central tram stop and is in urgent need of reuse and restoration both for the conservation of the building itself and to improve the identity and wayfinding of the conservation area.

The Lyceum and Art School (Grade II)



Plate 5.41 The Lyceum

The Lyceum and Art School were built in a single block and form one of Union Street's earliest buildings. The Lyceum was constructed in 1856 with the art school added in 1881 to designs by Pennington's of Manchester; it is of outstanding quality and is an important part of the Union Street townscape. The block exhibits an elegant neoclassical stone frontage with cast iron lanterns and robust railings, urns at the roofline and well-kept greenery all contribute positively to streetscape. Pediments to bays within each half of the building are inscribed with 'Lyceum' and 'Science and Art'. The Neoclassical design and fenestration pattern continues across the return elevations wrapping around to both Clegg Street and Greaves Street. Later white railings within the lightwells detract from the otherwise high quality decorative ironwork; the vacant half of the building is in a poor condition and a new use is required.

The Masonic Hall (Grade II)



Plate 5.42 The Masonic Hall

The Masonic Hall was constructed in 1880 again in rusticated rubble in the Greek revival style including a portico with fluted Doric columns. A further red brick rear wing was added in 1924. It counterbalances the former post office and library on the facing side of the street and collectively they have a strong visual presence. The building is vacant and in a poor condition; it is in need of reuse, repair and refurbishment to secure its long-term conservation.

Union Street Church (Grade II)



Plate 5.43 United Reform Church

The United Reformed Church was built in 1877 and was formerly a Congregational chapel. It follows the pattern for rusticated rubble with a squat central tower in the south wall with a six-light decorated window and wide plain stepped Early English arch to porch. The church sits next to the Masonic Hall and forms part of the grand architectural group with the former post office and library. The church is currently on Historic England's At Risk Register although it is noted that it has recently been the subject of a scheme of repair and refurbishment.

The Central Library (Grade II)



Plate 5.44 Former Central Library

The Library and Art Gallery were constructed in 1883 (with additions in 1894) in rusticated rubble, with a Romanesque style entrance and cresting to the pitched roof ridge. To the street frontage the cast-iron railings and terminating piers flanking the entrance steps with cast-iron globe lamps are good examples within the conservation area. Vacated by the new library and gallery constructed to the rear, the building is soon to be brought back into use as a Heritage Centre.

Former Post Office (Grade II)



Plate 5.45 Former Post Office

The Post Office building was built in 1877; constructed in brick with stone dressings and a shallow pitched roof in the neoclassical style. In most recent times it has been in use as the Local Studies Archive which is now to be relocated into the former library building.

109 Union Street (Grade II)



Plate 5.46 109 Union Street

The bank building dates from 1892; it exhibits a French Renaissance style; the steep hipped roofs of the outer pavilion towers are of particular interest crested with ironwork detailing.

5 Greaves Street (Grade II)



Plate 5.47 5 Greaves Street

The office building by Edgar Wood was built in 1901-02; it has a handsome ashlar frontage with full height pediments defining the three bays and Arts and Crafts detailing.

10 Yorkshire Street (Grade II)



Plate 5.48 10 Yorkshire Street

Constructed as a bank in 1890 to a neoclassical design, the stone-faced facade forms an elegant pair with the former Town Hall.

Listed Buildings on Church Lane (Grade II)



Plate 5.49 Listed buildings on north side of Church Lane

The listed buildings on Church Lane include the former Court House and Offices constructed in 1894 to designs by Henry Tanner in red brick with white terracotta dressings. The decorative and grand building at the north-west end of Church Lane is now in religious use as a café and community centre.



Plate 5.50 Listed buildings on south side of Church Lane

7, 9 and 11 Church Lane were originally constructed as houses c.1800 in brick with stone dressings; on the facing side of the road 8 and 10-14 Church Lane were also constructed c.1800 – 10-14 a grander group of three-storeys with stone dressings.

25 - 37 High Street (Grade II)



Plate 5.51 25 and 37 High Street

The Barclays Bank occupies a prominent location on the corner with Lord Street with four principal bays to High Street, a single return bay to Lord Street and a seven bay rear elevation fronting onto Church Lane; all ashlar faced. The main entrance is set in a canted angle with a tower and dome over.

11 Church Terrace (Grade II)



Plate 5.52 11 Church Terrace side return to Church Passage with sandstone finish

Originally constructed as a house in the early 19th century, although an earlier 18th century structure may also remain. The façade is constructed in brick on a stone plinth; the return elevation to Church Passage is stone – with poor quality uPVC windows.

Buildings Proposed for Inclusion on a Local List

Throughout the conservation area there are buildings and groups of buildings which reinforce its character – these are identified as buildings where the external appearance is considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

In addition, there are a number of buildings which have ‘a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated’¹⁴ above and beyond the contribution they make to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These include structures or features which have been identified as an important part of Oldham’s heritage due to architectural, historic, or archaeological significance, and are recognised as irreplaceable heritage assets which contribute to the quality of the local environment and sustain a sense of distinctiveness.

As such, we propose their inclusion on a ‘local list’ of buildings of architectural and historical merit; this would not grant a building or structure statutory protection nor would works to a locally listed building require listed building consent, but the special interest of the building would be a material consideration in the planning application process.

In addition, on the basis that Grade II-listed buildings outside of London (except for places of worship) are not eligible for inclusion on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register, it is proposed that a local heritage at risk register be created for both Grade II-listed building and those otherwise of merit within the conservation area. This would include those buildings at risk as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development, or which are considered vulnerable to becoming so.

In the first instance these lists would be limited to buildings or structures within the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area; however, the following lists have been drafted in a manner which would allow them to be extended to include buildings throughout Oldham Metropolitan Borough.¹⁵

14 National Planning Policy Guidance, paragraph 39

15 Criteria for inclusion is taken from Historic England Advice Note 7: Local Heritage Listing (May 2016), p.9

Local List of Heritage Assets

Building: Hilton Arcade



Plate 5.53 South face of Hilton Arcade



Plate 5.54 Interior of Hilton Arcade

Date: 1893

Rarity: Unique within the conservation area; the last remaining arcade and fragment of the early commercial development.

Aesthetic Interest: High quality Victorian arcade design with modern shopfronts replacing a previously detracting ground floor frontage and a restored glass roof set above steel trusses. The upper floors and windows are almost entirely original including rare light fittings.

Group Value: The Albion Street and Curzon Street facades are largely intact, forming a prominent feature in the conservation area with handsome stone detailing

(although the modern shopfronts and signage and in places the condition detract). The corner building at 1-3 High Street is a modern building which bears

no relationship to the arcade in terms of its scale, composition or design and as a consequence detracts to both its High Street and Curzon Street elevations. Nos. 15 and 17 High Street to its western side have been redeveloped and have a more comfortable relationship to the High Street elevation (and unapologetically contrasting to Albion Street replacing Market Avenue, the original arcade).

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: The arcade was built to designs by Wild Collins and Wild, a partnership established in 1876 who designed at least 22 mills in the Oldham region at the end of the 19th century as well as churches and schools (including St. Peter's Oldham (1900) and St. Mark's Glodwick (1875)).

Landmark Status: The arcade and its wider block form a prominent feature in the High Street townscape which dominates the modern retail development which has occurred around it. In long views along High Street it forms a significant historic landmark which allows the eye to then bypass to the next striking landmark of Barclays Bank looking eastwards.

Social and Communal Value: The arcade forms part of Oldham's social history and the development of retail around the Market Place/High Street all of which established Oldham as a regional shopping centre.

Building: Greaves Arms

Plate 5.55 Greaves Arms

Date: 1925

Rarity: The Greaves Arms forms part of a fairly common typology of pubs constructed in the early 20th century in Oldham.

Aesthetic Interest: The building is a substantial stand-alone building of an eclectic architectural style; constructed in terracotta and red brick with stone dressings, it successfully juxtaposes the surrounding architectural styles and materials.

Group Value: The building forms part of the heart of Oldham Town Centre, set at an elevated level between St. Mary's and St. Peter's Church and the Old Former Town Hall it is one of the town centres most prominent buildings and forms an important backdrop to

Parliament Square. It also stands as the final of three key historic nodes in the High Street including Hilton Arcade and Barclays Bank.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: The Greaves Arms replaces an earlier inn which stood on the site, originally known as the Blue Ball dating to the first half of the 18th century; it was lastly named after its owner in 1826 becoming the Greaves Arms.

Landmark Status: The building occupies a landmark position in views eastwards along High Street as Church Terrace rises and banks away; its prominence is emphasised by manner which Yorkshire Street falls away and the elevated pavement which runs alongside with handsome iron railings and the wider public realm in this location which provides a setting for the war memorial.

Social and Communal Value: The reconstruction of the pub in 1925 allowed it to be set back further from the war memorial which had been erected in 1923, allowing a greater public space for remembrance around the memorial. The pub is now vacant and a new use needs to be found to retain its communal and landmark value.

Building: 3 Greaves Street



Plate 5.56 3 Greaves Street

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Landmark Status: No.3 forms stands at the northern end of a run of 'set-piece' buildings and is a worthy neighbour in terms of its quality to Edgar Wood's Grade II listed building adjoining.

Date: Early 20th century

Rarity: The stone frontage and composition of the building is at odds with the prevailing character of the conservation area.

Aesthetic Interest: The building has a classical stone facade with corner quoins and lugged architraves at first floor and prominent details, and downpipes add interest. The original rear elevation is concealed by a later extension in red brick.

Group Value: Located opposite the Former Town Hall it stands in a run of 'set-piece' architecture just to the north of the Grade II listed building by Edgar Wood. Again differing from the common typology within the conservation area, the buildings forms a part of this important piece of townscape.

Building: Victoria House, Greaves Street



Plate 5.57 Victoria House, Greaves Street

Date: Early 20th century

Rarity: Purpose built as a billiard hall, the building has a low height and large footprint which reflects its original function and at odds with the prevailing composition of the surrounding buildings.

Aesthetic Interest: The building has a handsome façade constructed red brick with distinctive faience detailing providing visual interest which breaks down its massing. The steep pitched roof has large rooflights again reflective of the internal function.

Group Value: Victoria House is located opposite the Former Town Hall and in a run of 'set-piece' architecture including the Edgar Wood office building to the north. Its low height and the change in topography causes a crescendo effect as the road rises to Yorkshire Street – enhancing the setting of the more important buildings.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: The building was originally used as a snooker hall, then council housing offices and a college before becoming vacant. Oldham Boxing moved into the building in 2011, a use well suited to the building's form.

Landmark Status: The building occupies a prominent location on the corner of Firth Street and Greaves Street; further emphasised by the open car park to its rear. It stands at the southern end of a run of 'set-piece' buildings, opposite the Former Town Hall and is subservient to their status, expressed in their architectural design.

Social and Communal Value: The building has been used for different social and community functions throughout its lifespan – most recently as the home of Oldham Boxing which has brought the building back into use providing a key community facility.

Building: The Old Bill, Greaves Street



Plate 5.58 The Old Bill, Greaves Street

Date: Late 19th century

Rarity: The highly decorated facades of the Old Bill, dominated by numerous openings, give it prominence in the locality.

Aesthetic Interest: Constructed in sandstone, the building exhibits a high detailed façade with decorative arched window openings, quoins and pilasters and a prominent dentiled pediment. The side return is similarly detailed with a dentiled cornice and numerous arched window openings.

Group Value: The building sits on the south-east corner of the junction with Firth Street and opposite Victoria House, the domestic scaled buildings on the south side of Firth Street and the southern corner of the

Former Town Hall. Although all distinctively of their own architectural character they form a group of high quality buildings reflective of the town's Victorian prosperity.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: Originally a good quality warehouse or office its use was typical of the Victorian expansion of the town.

Landmark Status: The decorated façade and prominent dentiled pediment give the building prominence in views in which it appears such as along Firth Street.

Social and Communal Value: The building is reflective of the industrial prosperity of the town in the 19th century.

Building: 31 Queen Street

Plate 5.59 31 Queen Street

Date: Late 19th century

Rarity: Whilst not a rare typology in its own right the building occupies an important role terminating views eastwards along Firth Street and flanked by Victoria House and the Old Bill which stand on the corner of Greaves Street.

Aesthetic Interest: The prominent white painted stone detailing and arched window openings add richness to the Victorian red brick building with the central projecting bay with pediment and flanking pilasters forming a pleasing composition. The rear elevation has a modern bulky extension.

Group Value: In views along Firth Street the building forms part of the group of high quality buildings including the two corner buildings on Greaves Street (all either listed or proposed for inclusion on the local list).

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Landmark Status: The decorated façade gives the building prominence as the terminating feature in views along the new public realm of Firth Street.

Social and Communal Value: The building is reflective of the industrial prosperity of the town in the 19th century.

Building: The Old Museum (Former Friends Meeting House and Former Museum), Greaves Street



Plate 5.60 Former Museum and Friends Meeting House, Greaves Street

Date: Late 19th century

Rarity: The building's decorative classical design is reflective of high status community buildings of the period, however rare in terms of the design of Friend's House which typically have a more restrained character – better reflected in the side wing (former museum building) immediately to the north also included within this entry.

Aesthetic Interest: Constructed in red brick the building has numerous classical decorative features including a substantial pediment over the central bay set above a dentiled cornice, arched openings to entrance

porches set on pilasters and interesting brick detailing to the arched window openings. The iron lanterns are particularly fine.

Group Value: The Old Museum sits within a group of buildings now designated as 'The Cultural Quarter' which includes the former post office to the north, the former library and the modern library building. Located on a 'side street' to Union Street the building serves a secondary role within the group.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: The Old Museum occupies the former Friends Meeting House and adjoining former museum building.

Landmark Status: The buildings stand on the southern boundary of the conservation area but not at a key point of entry with the Oldham Gallery bookending the street.

Social and Communal Value: The buildings are reflective of the urban industrial prosperity and culture of the town in the 19th century.

Feature: 1870s cast-iron railings and lamp standards between the War Memorial and Parliament Square

Date: 1870s

Rarity: Whilst railings are found throughout the conservation area, this stretch of Victorian cast-iron railings is poised near the centre and peak of the conservation area and in the foreground of a number of local views. It also includes a number of lamp standards with globe lanterns.

Aesthetic Interest: The railings and lamps act as a strong complement the War Memorial above them, framing it and adding depth to the view of the memorial and St. Mary's Church from the street.

Landmark Status: The railings mark the transition between the High Street, Parliament Street and Yorkshire Street.

Social and Communal Value: The railings and lamps are reflective of the urban industrial prosperity and culture of the town in the 19th century.

5.3.3 Buildings Which Make a Positive Contribution to the Conservation Area

Many more modest buildings make a positive contribution to the character and quality of the conservation area; this may be for a number of different reasons. These include their townscape contribution, such as the domestic-scaled terrace groups on Queen Street and Retiro Street; architectural quality; and decorative features across many buildings on the principal streets that are reflective of the town's prosperity through its rapid development, or historic or cultural associations including public houses **[Plates 5.61 – 5.64]**.

Whilst there are numerous buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area (as identified on the map) in many instances their architectural quality has been compromised by poor alterations. With respect to those with retail frontages, many facades have almost been severed in two between the ground and upper floors. Despite this, these buildings still exhibit strong qualities; positive contributions that could be greatly enhanced by remedying the detracting alterations.

5.3.4 Buildings Which Make a Neutral Contribution to the Conservation Area

In some cases, buildings may have been so severely altered that their character has been irreversibly damaged however their scale and materials still blend into the surrounding townscape. These have generally been identified as neutral. Similarly, buildings which do not strictly follow the established character and appearance of the conservation area but not to the extent that this is immediately apparent or considered harmful are also identified as making a neutral contribution.

Negative buildings are identified as those which, due to their scale, detailed design or materials, are incongruous in relation to the predominant character of the conservation area. These are described in more detail in [Section 8](#).



Plate 5.61 18-20 Greaves Street turning into Firth Street and the domestic-scaled building to rear of Lyceum



Plate 5.62 39-40 High Street



Plate 5.63 Town Hall Tavern at 18-20 Yorkshire Street



Plate 5.64 Queen Street Barbers

5.4 Materials

Levrant's 1997 *Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal* outlines the prevailing materials utilised within the area, other than isolated new buildings constructed in the last 20 years (largely referred to elsewhere in this document and typically contemporary, including the use of glass and render); this remains unchanged and is detailed below.

Whilst stone was the prevailing building material until the introduction of the railway, this is no longer a defining feature of the buildings in the conservation area (other than as decorative dressings [Plate 5.65], although it is possible stone remains but is now refaced in brick. The buildings within the conservation area can be generally divided into two construction materials: brick with stone dressings for the majority, with the higher status and/or civic buildings faced in sandstone. The latter is principally York stone, although there are interesting exceptions such as the Old Bill on Greaves Street [Plate 5.58] faced in local sandstone (from Oldham Edge, easily transported owing to its close proximity) and Edgar Wood's building at 5 Greaves Street [Plate 5.47], faced in Bath limestone.

The two banks at the heart of the town centre (Nat West and Barclays [Plates 5.48 and 5.51]) are both faced in stone; Darley Dale gritstone above on imported black gabbro; and coal measure sandstone above on Scottish Delbeatie Granite, respectively. The Former Town Hall is also constructed in coal measure sandstone; with Millstone Grit used for the plinth to the extension in Firth Street.

The church is constructed in Kinder Scout Grit with the late-20th century vestries at the eastern end constructed in Liverpool Red sandstone taken from St. Peter's Church, demolished for the construction of the Spindles Shopping Centre [Plate 5.66]. Church Lane contains original local sandstone buildings refaced in brick, but with sections of sandstone exposed on Church Passage [Plate 5.52]. The church retaining wall which runs along Church Street comprises a mix of Oldham Edge stone at the bottom with local sandstones on top [Plate 5.19].

Terracotta and faience-faced buildings are also found within the conservation area. The materials are used principally as decorative devices on buildings of architectural quality, such as Victoria House in Greaves Street which incorporates faience elevations to break down and model the massing of its large footprint [Plate 5.57]. Glazed bricks are also found within the conservation area, typically in more confined, intimate spaces to reflect light into tight-knit spaces.¹⁶

Ironwork is used as a decorative feature to the buildings of higher status in the area; the best example of this is to the Lyceum, where the high-quality detailed ironwork forms a key part of its overall aesthetic, although the utilitarian white handrails, etc. to the lower ground floor detract. Lanterns mounted on piers flanking the entrance stairs are also handsome features. Good examples also feature to the former library and within the Hilton Arcade; the decorative ironwork on its front façade is also a feature of interest [Plates 5.67 - 5.69]. The ironwork cresting to the steeply pitched roof of the

HSBC building is handsome in its own right, but also an attractive skyline feature in a number of surrounding views.

Roofs are largely Welsh slate.

¹⁶ Levrant, 1997, pp.23-25.



Plate 5.65 Stone doorcase to vernacular brick building on Clegg Street



Plate 5.66 Liverpool Red sandstone to Church of St Mary and St Peter eastern vestries



Plate 5.67 Decorative lantern and railings to Lyceum

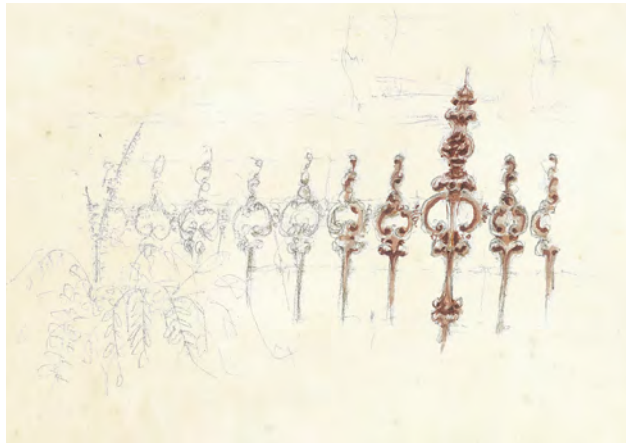


Plate 5.68 Decorative railings



Plate 5.69 Decorative ironwork at entrance to Hilton Arcade

6.0 Views and Vistas

Oldham's position on a hill sets it apart from the general urban environment which connects it to Greater Manchester. As outlined above the topography plays an important role within the town centre in terms of the relationship of buildings and spaces to one another and the crescendo towards Parliament Square and the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter. This is not also without its negative impact, however, such is the poor sense of arrival via the tram into the town centre brought about by the need to run the tram line along the lower southern boundary.

However it is looking out from within the conservation area where the topography really underpins its significance **[Plate 6.1]**.



Plate 6.1 Impression of view south from Parliament Square

6.1 Panoramic Vistas

Oldham is a dense urban environment; therefore views are also entirely framed by buildings. However, the position of the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter at the peak of the town and the open churchyard allows for a panoramic vista eastwards over the suburbs of Oldham to the hills which form the northern end of the Peak District and the geological divide from Yorkshire. This is a powerful backdrop which roots the town in its context and, both literally and metaphorically, elevates it above its surroundings, further emphasised by the currently vacant site to the north side of Rock Street **[Plate 6.2]**.



Plate 6.2 Panoramic views from church yard

6.2 Key Long Views

The long views are particularly powerful in terms of the understanding of Oldham and its historic and geographical context. From the peak of Yorkshire Street, stood in the formal setting of Parliament Square, the land falls away, framed by the flanking retail terraces, their lower roofline creating perspective which over sails the foreground of trees and dense housing to reveal a powerful view towards the hills beyond **[Plate 6.3]**.

Looking southwards through Parliament Square and Greaves Street are more significant long range views. To Greaves Street this view is lined by the handsome collection of buildings on its east side and the Former Town Hall, whilst to the west side of the Former Town Hall the new public realm of Parliament Square provides an open vista before the rear of the Lyceum comes into view; although a substantial building in its own right, the fall in the topography comfortably accommodates it. Otherwise the fall in the land draws the buildings down out of view and over a swathe of housing to reveal a wall of mills in the middle distance, their rooflines punctured by a chimney and tower, overlapping into the interlocking spurs of the countryside behind. In a single frame so much of Oldham's history is captured **[Plates 6.4 and 6.5]**.

At the eastern end of Albion Street and at the crossroads with Lord Street there is an important long-range view looking eastward and westward where the religious church spire and civic centre tower act as nodes which communicate to each other in terms of their apparent scale (the civic centre set further in the distance and at a lower level). The spire and tower are the only two buildings which currently puncture the roofline in any meaningful manner, clearly articulating the status of the religious and civic centres of the town **[Plates 6.6 and 6.7]**.



Plate 6.3 Long-range views eastwards afforded by steep topography



Plate 6.4 Long view south through Parliament Square



Plate 6.5 Long view south along Greaves Street



Plate 6.6 Church of St Mary and St Peter spire sat at the opposite end of the town centre from the civic centre tower



Plate 6.7 Civic centre tower sat at the opposite end of the town centre from the Church of St Mary and St Peter spire

6.3 Key Short Views

The topography leading to the core of the town also creates a number of short-range views which contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area. In these cases key listed buildings and those which make a positive contribution to the conservation area are visible in sequence, formally framing the view, and often with the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter, former Town Hall or Parliament Square terminating them.

Looking eastward along High Street the Hilton Arcade and Barclays Bank puncture the more typical retail frontage to draw the eye along to the Greaves Arms which occupies a prominent position before Yorkshire Street falls away, leading the eye over this 'edge' into the long view outlined above [Plate 6.8]. Yorkshire Street provides pleasing views from the opposite direction, highlighting the curve of the thoroughfare and also looking in the direction of Parliament Square [Plate 6.9].

A number of short-range views look towards the Church of St. Mary and St. Peter, including across Parliament Square, above the war memorial terracing and looking northwest from Old Church Street [Plates 6.10 and 6.11]. The key short-range view of the church, however, is the framed view along Church Lane, with the church and its spire as the terminating feature [Plate 6.12]. Further short views of interest include the framed view along Albion Street, across the pedestrianised space to the handsome run of 19th century shopfronts on Henshaw Street [Plate 6.13], and from the southeast corner of Firth Street and Greaves Street looking northward up Greaves Street toward the Town Hall, which affords perhaps the only view where the building's south and



Plate 6.8 Looking eastwards along High Street from Hilton Arcade, passed Barclays Bank and to the Greaves Arms and into the long view beyond

eastern elevations can be appreciated nearly in their entirety [Plate 6.14]. Likewise, looking northward along Retiro Street from its base at Union Street provides a key view of the conservation area's domestic-scale buildings in the middle-ground and distance [Plate 6.15].

Union Street is a wider urban boulevard with views in both directions, framed by the grand set-pieces of architecture and with the tram line further serving to draw the eye along the linear path. The straight and open character of Union Street gives the conservation area a blurred boundary which the short range views pass through; to the west this is terminated by St. Mary's with St. Patrick's RC Church and to the east as the road curves and banks away toward Mumps [Plates 6.16 and 6.17].

Just south of Union Street, the northward view from Gallery Oldham looks upward through Oldham Park and its gates onto the north side of Union Street and is framed by some of the conservation area's most significant buildings. The view includes the Grade II-listed late-19th century Union Street Church, Masonic Hall and the bank at 109 Union Street, and is flanked by the Grade II-listed former post office and former central library [Plate 6.18].



Plate 6.9 Short-range view looking west up Yorkshire Street toward Parliament Square



Plate 6.10 Short view across Parliament Square to war memorial and Church of St Mary and St Peter



Plate 6.11 Short view across Parliament Square to war memorial and Church of St Mary and St Peter



Plate 6.12 Short view along Church Lane terminated by the spire of the Church of St Mary and St Peter



Plate 6.13 Short view along Albion Street framing the handsome 19th century shopfront



Plate 6.14 Short view from the southeast corner of Frith and Greaves Street toward the Town Hall



Plate 6.15 Short view looking north along Retiro Street from Union Street



Plate 6.16 View east from Union Street with flanking civic buildings before the street falls and banks away



Plate 6.17 View west along Union Street with St Mary's and St Patrick's RC Church in the background



Plate 6.18 Short view from Gallery Oldham looking north toward Union Street

7.0 Townscape Details

7.1 Public Realm

Oldham Town Centre benefits from being largely pedestrianised with areas of shared surfaces allowing access. This gives emphasis to the pedestrian experience and allows the buildings which line the streets to be better appreciated. Conversely, this allows detracting features such as poor retail frontages to also dominate.

7.2 Hard Landscaping

Outside of the largely pedestrianised/shared surface areas discussed below, the roads are typically tarmacked with large York stone flags for the pavements with kerb edges. To the southern end of Greaves Street a rare section of riven-finished York stone flags remains and Harrison Street on the western edge of the conservation area has a cobbled roadway [Plate 7.1].



Plate 7.1 Cobbled roadway to Harrison Street

7.2.1 Retail Core

The entire town centre retail area (both inside and outside of the current conservation area boundary) benefits from a uniform hard surface of large York stone flags to the footpaths and smaller setts within the roadway, which is both attractive and durable and very much adds to the character of the area. Larger granite setts define crossing points and add visual interest to larger open areas of paving such as to Albion Street. The town centre has a shared surface with no level change between the footway and roadway, instead defined again by the granite setts and bollards (discussed below). As High Street extends in front of the former Town Hall the roadway is tarmacked, but otherwise the finish remains the same [Plates 7.2 and 7.3].

7.2.2 Parliament Square

Parliament Square is a new urban realm laid out and associated with the adaptive reuse of the former Town Hall. The surface is laid in York stone flags with large curved planters housing street trees. Public art is provided through the inscription of the mills which surrounded the town on the planters and a plinth with an owl seated on top – taken from the Oldham Coat of Arms. The square is largely outside of the conservation area but the whole space down to the pedestrianised area along Firth Street very much forms part of the experience of the area with three opposing owls at its southern end (and forming a parliament), integrated benches and steps and terraces mediating the change in levels and providing outdoor space for the restaurants housed in the lower level of the former Town Hall. The square was laid out to also provide a large event

venue which gives the feeling of a large empty space – although with the benefit of affording an open vista to the long-range view looking south [Plates 7.4 and 7.5].

7.2.3 Church Environs and War Memorial

Church Lane, Terrace and Street retain large square setts; whilst asphalt infilling and recovering, road markings and parking detract they still make a significant contribution to the overall quality and historic character of these spaces. Church Passage, the steps and area in front of church and surrounding the war memorial are all laid with York stone flags [Plate 7.6]; to the churchyard these include memorial flags [Plate 7.7].

7.2.4 Union Street

Union Street public realm was upgraded as part of the introduction of the tram in 2014, including York stone and granite-style kerbs around the Oldham Central tram stop and new planters. The tram stop is integrated into the public realm as a raised platform in the centre of the street with a shelter following the TFGM designs, branding and yellow colourway; the tramline itself is a fairly inconspicuous feature.



Plate 7.2 Level pedestrianised surface demarked by granite setts and bollards



Plate 7.3 Shared surface running along northern edge of Parliament Square with tarmacked roadway



Plate 7.4 Parliament Square open space



Plate 7.5 Parliament Square extending south with three owls on plinths at southern end



Plate 7.6 Terrace in front of war memorial



Plate 7.7 Memorial stones in church yard

7.3 Trees and Soft Landscaping

Oldham is a town which developed during industrial expansion where luxuries such as trees and green open spaces were not considered, and therefore do not form part of its character. Whilst the town centre still retains a sense of a hard urban environment, the addition of street trees to the public open spaces on Albion Street and within Parliament Square has not diminished the overall character of the area or the sense of its industrial past. The way the town centre is used and occupied has changed since this time and the introduction of attractive planting, such as the planters laid out as part of Oldham in Bloom only serves to soften and uplift the appearance of the area for occupants and visitors alike [Plate 7.8].

Churchyard

The churchyard sits on the north-western corner of the conservation area; despite being one of the few lungs of open green space in the town centre it has an air of being underused. This is quite possibly brought about by the terracing and stairs which separate it from the main thoroughfare and its high retaining wall which borders its southern front. The more penetrable boundary walls along St. Mary's Way and Rock Street front roads which feel outside of the town centre. Regardless, it is a historic space of high significance occupying the summit of the town centre which contributes to the setting of the church. Immediately to the north is the now-open site of the former leisure centre which rises slightly above – currently its landscaped edge makes a positive contribution, however owing to its further elevation any development

proposed has the potential to impact the character of the area [Plates 7.9 and 7.10]. Trees have been added to the car parks which surround its north-eastern edge, softening their impact on the setting of the churchyard.



Plate 7.8 Street planter and plants hanging from street furniture

Oldham Park

This is a semi-enclosed, formal garden area of late 19th century origins set between the former post office and former library on the south side of Union Street. It is open to the pedestrianised area and modern gallery on its southern side and allows views of civic buildings flanking on three faces and north to the United Reform Church [Plates 7.11 and 7.12].

Medtia House

A small area of landscaping and planting exists in front of Medtia House on Union Street. This is uncharacteristic for the hard urban town centre and breaks the consistent pavement line. [Plate 7.13].



Plate 7.9 Church yard garden



Plate 7.10 Church yard garden



Plate 7.11 Oldham Park from Union Street level



Plate 7.12 Oldham Park looking back at Union Street Chapel



Plate 7.13 Media House, 80 Union Street

7.4 Street Furniture

Iron railings are a feature within the conservation area – particularly to the listed buildings along Union Street, as would be expected of their set-piece design and location on a boulevard of this nature. The Grade II-listed 19th century cast iron railings with integrated street lamps around the churchyard and war memorial are of the finest quality, reflective of the importance of this civic space at that time. They now occupy a prominent feature within the reworked public space alongside the steps, rising footpath and walls **[Plate 7.14]**.

Street lamps are predominately modern but of a consistent decorative design throughout the High Street and down into Yorkshire Street up to St. Mary's Way; here the design changes but remains consistent **[Plate 7.15]**. Along Union Street, which includes the tramway are utilitarian highways lamps, as well as to some of the side streets. The area surrounding Parliament Square and the war memorial becomes confused where a number of different street lamp styles (linked to different public realm schemes) meet. Within the streets surrounding the former Town Hall this includes ornate lanterns which reflect the design of the remaining historic lamp standards on Rock Street, to Church Terrace and those which have been repositioned in front of the Former Town Hall **[Plate 7.16]**. Supplementary street cameras and lighting are utilitarian in character and of no merit but are a necessary evil.

Bollards feature heavily in Oldham, in part of owing to the shared surface through the town centre. They are typically finished green with gold bands and the remaining original ones are also embossed with the

Oldham owl (these have been reinstalled with no consistency to the direction the owl faces) **[Plate 7.17]**. Planters throughout the retail area are a mix of more substantial stone planters and round units in the same green finish with gold bands. There is a general build-up of street clutter, however this is largely all set on the same line and other than the proliferation of litter bins and unsightly telecommunications cabinets this is largely limited to the planters, bollards and benches – although food vans which park on High Street add further obstructions **[Plate 7.18]**. At the ends of the pedestrian areas are gates; these typically follow the style of the traditional green bollards **[Plate 7.19]**, although to the southern end of Parliament Square these are modern bollards which can be lowered into the ground. Discreet, modern wayfinding signs have been installed, although they struggle to compete with the busy retail environment along High Street, whereas near the tram stop on Union Street wayfinding is distinctly lacking **[Plate 7.20]**. The 'historic' street signs again in green with a gold trim are attractive and give a sense of the historic town centre; although these are perhaps too subtle as markers of the conservation area **[Plate 7.21]**.



Plate 7.14 Railings and lamps integral to quality of terracing surrounding war memorial and leading up to church



Plate 7.15 Modern decorative street lights



Plate 7.16 Traditional street lamps



Plate 7.17 Street bollard with owl



Plate 7.18 Street furniture is fairly restrained in the conservation area although food vans add clutter to streetscene



Plate 7.19 Street gates



Plate 7.21 'Historic' street signs



Plate 7.20 Modern wayfinding signs

7.5 Public Art

Parliament Square is framed by the 'parliament of owls' on tall plinths facing one another and the low level planters giving context to the surrounding industrial landscape, inscribed with the mills and suburbs which surround [Plates 7.22 and 7.23]. In addition, a statue dedicated to suffragette and Oldham native Annie Kenney was unveiled in Parliament Square on 14th December 2018, marking the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, which gave some British women the right to vote [Plate 7.24]. In the area of public realm to Curzon Street/Albion Street are the rather kitsch, colourfully-tiled mill and a number of decorated inserted metal sponsored setts [Plates 7.25 and 7.26].

The predominate feature within the townscape, however, is the war memorial located on the raised area above Parliament Square outside the Greaves Arms, alongside the bronze plaques attached to the church wall immediately behind [Plates 7.27 and 7.28]. The memorial comprises a large granite pedestal resembling a mausoleum set on a shallow base with a large bronze sculpture place on top depicting five infantrymen going 'over the top' by Albert Toft. The memorial occupies a prominent elevated location above the town centre and aligns with the church steps and south porch behind.



Plate 7.22 Owl on plinth at northern end of Parliament Square



Plate 7.23 Planters with surrounding setting inscribed



Plate 7.24 Annie Kenney memorial statue, unveiled in December 2018



Plate 7.26 Metal sett inserted in Albion Street



Plate 7.27 War Memorial



Plate 7.25 Kitsch public art in Albion Street



Plate 7.28 Bronze plaques with memorial dedications

7.6 Heritage Plaques

There are a number of Oldham heritage plaques commemorating interesting historical events and people associated with the borough found throughout the town centre. According to Oldham Council,

There are no formal criteria for the selection of subjects for plaques although the general principle followed is that the event or person should be eminent and sufficiently famous to be familiar to a succeeding generation.

Plaques located within the conservation area include those marking the incorporation of Oldham as a Borough in 1849 [Plate 7.29] and the service of Winston Churchill, MP for Oldham in 1900 [Plate 7.30], both located at the Town Hall; that commemorating Oldham's Victoria Cross Holders at 11 Church Terrace [Plate 7.31]; that marking the site of the first Yates's Wine Lodge at 8A High Street [Plate 7.32]; that commemorating John Lees, originator of fish and chips at Market Hall [Plate 7.33]; that commemorating Joseph Platt, a figurehead of the Northern Union rugby league at 11 Queen Street [Plate 7.34]; and that marking the former home of John Bunting, Lancashire mill magnate at 115 Union Street [Plate 7.35].



Plate 7.29 Plaque commemorating the incorporation of Oldham as a borough, Town Hall



Plate 7.30 Plaque commemorating the service of MP Winston Churchill, Town Hall



Plate 7.31 Victoria Cross Plaque, 11 Church Terrace



Plate 7.32 Plaque noting the site of the first Yates's Wine Lodge, 8A High Street



Plate 7.33 Plaque commemorating John Lees, Market Hall



Plate 7.34 Plaque commemorating Joseph Platt, 11 Queen Street



Plate 7.35 Plaque marking the former home of John Bunting, 115 Union Street

8.0 Negative Features and Opportunities for Enhancement

8.1 Detracting Buildings

Only a couple of buildings within the conservation area detract from its overall character and appearance in their entirety; more typically, buildings are marred by negative features and alterations which could be remedied. There are also some buildings which detract from the setting of the conservation area. These are located within areas identified for the proposed extension of the conservation area boundary, and as such they are discussed in Section 9 below.

1 – 3 High Street

1 – 3 High Street is an unassuming building of the late 20th century; the red brickwork with inset channels and pitched, slate-clad roof behind have some aesthetic quality. However, its small scale is completely at odds with Hilton Arcade adjacent, and the block which extends north along Curzon Street. Occupying a prominent corner location (currently on the boundary of the conservation area) nos. 1 -3 appear as if they have eaten away at the original handsome group, completely diminishing the strength of this townscape block. This is exacerbated further by the poor retail frontage and signage [Plate 8.1].

19 – 21 Queen Street

The pair form part of a continuous early-to-mid-19th century terrace group which is otherwise faced in brick. However, the rendered facades at 19 and 21 interrupt the uniformity of the terrace group and substantially detract from the overall appearance of the group, exacerbated further by the modern uPVC casement windows [Plate 8.2].



Plate 8.1 1-3 High Street detracting from the composition, scale and detailing of the Hilton Arcade block



Plate 8.2 19-21 Queen Street

8.2 Detracting Features

Vacancy

A number of key buildings within the conservation area are vacant and in poor condition; typically they are large-scale buildings occupying prominent locations and significantly detract from the character of the conservation area. Most critical is the Prudential Building, which is clearly in a deteriorating condition and is recommended for inclusion on a local at risk register [Plate 8.3]. Others include the vacant half of the Lyceum, the soon-to-be-vacated former post office, the Masonic Hall and the Greaves Arms (see entries in the Gazetteer for further details). Whilst not strictly vacant, the Hilton Arcade has an air of vacancy owing to the dead frontage that the shops backing on to the central arcade have created [Plate 8.4].



Plate 8.3 The Prudential Building, vacant and in a deteriorating condition



Plate 8.4 Blank shopfronts along the Hilton Arcade

Condition

As well as the more critical condition issues associated with the vacancy of the key buildings listed above, there is a widespread issue with the general condition of buildings within the conservation area that is principally centred on general upkeep, repair and decoration – in the main part this is linked to economic factors and a poor understanding of the heritage value of building [Plate 8.5]. Typically this worsens in the back street areas with poor extensions, alterations and addition of plant, etc. [Plate 8.6].

Retail Frontage

The most significant detracting feature within the conservation area is the retail frontage. Oldham Town Centre benefits from being largely pedestrianised, and as a consequence the human experience at ground level is dominated by a ground floor-level of buildings unhindered by traffic. Whilst the absence of traffic is a major benefit, the poor-quality contemporary shopfronts, often comprising large, single-glazed openings, projecting box signs and internally illuminated and often oversized fascias, dominate otherwise typically handsome buildings above and overly intrude into the streetscene. Roller shutters are also commonplace, creating a deadening frontage when closed and adding to the perception of crime and antisocial activity at night time [Plates 8.7 – 8.9].



Plate 8.5 Poor condition typical of many buildings within the conservation area



Plate 8.6 Plate Street typical of 'back-of-house' areas within the conservation area



Plate 8.8 Poor shopfronts and signage across 15 -17 High Street which fails to relate to architecture of building above



Plate 8.9 Poor shopfront infilling historic archway at southern end of Clegg Street



Plate 8.7 32 Yorkshire Street with poor shopfront and signage, roller shutters and unsightly flues

8.3 Public Realm

The public realm is generally positive with good-quality, hard landscaping, two large public spaces and two smaller pockets of landscaped areas. Whilst the area in front of Medtia House is at odds with the prevailing character, attempts to soften the hard urban industrialised character of the conservation area through the introduction of street trees and planting in association with Oldham in Bloom have not diminished its inherent character, whilst making it a more pleasant environment for its inhabitants and visitors. Subsequently, there is no reason why the area in front of Medtia House could not be embraced as a small pocket of soft landscaping, particularly given its key location opposite the tram stop.

Street clutter is not a major issue across Oldham Town Centre. However, there are areas where the build-up becomes obstructive, particularly along High Street where the number of planters, bollards and benches are further cluttered by excessive bins, unsightly telecommunication cabinets and phone boxes principally serving commercial advertising. Temporary street food vans also create an additional obstruction [Plate 8.10]. Around the tram stop there is also a proliferation of signage, and the change in design of street furniture between areas – particularly around Parliament Square, can become unsightly.

The two key areas of public realm, to Albion Street and Parliament Square, whilst attractive in terms of their surfacing and the features within Parliament Square, suffer from a lack of vibrancy. The area has a 'back-of-town' feel in Albion Street when not in use by the market,

whilst in Parliament Square the need for a versatile space for hosting events creates a large, open expanse that otherwise goes unused [Plates 7.4 and 7.5].

In isolated areas the pavements are tarmacked rather than flagged, which detracts from the quality of the urban realm, and in some areas the dominance of concrete surfaces creates a drab character.

Wayfinding/Connectivity

In terms of wayfinding, the elevated position of the town centre does it no favours, hindered further by the substantial intervention that the construction of the Spindles Shopping Centre created. In essence the town is closed off to the western side; this and the lower level of the tram stops prevent a natural route into the town centre. In addition, Parliament Square does not align with the new tram stop, so the natural processional boulevard which Parliament Square could offer, drawing people up into the heart of the town centre and capped by the church behind, appears incidental [Plate 8.11].

Identity

Once inside the heart of the town centre the retail activity of the High Street dominates, but otherwise there is a lack of definition of the conservation area, and it has been noted through public consultation that some parts of the area feel 'ignored' and that Oldham lacks an identity more generally. The conservation area diffuses into its surroundings, and areas such as the Cultural Quarter and Parliament Square lack the buzz of activity that their names would suggest. The whole conservation area and proposed extensions would benefit from a clearer definition and celebration of what is there.

Vacant Sites

There are a number of cleared vacant sites within the conservation area and along its boundary (or within the proposed extensions) now used for parking. The most substantial are the cleared sites between Back Greaves Street and Queen Street which form a chasm in the conservation area and would benefit from appropriate redevelopment [Plate 8.12]. The small empty site to the west of the Prudential Building on the fringe of the conservation area is overgrown and is a detracting feature which does not draw people northwards or give any sense of the town centre which lies beyond (see Plate 8.3).

Other areas where car parking dominates, such as the rear of Church Lane buildings facing Rock Street and on back streets, would benefit from enhancement. However, parking needs to be accommodated, and on the conservation area boundary and tucked away within the back streets is the most appropriate location [Plate 5.25].



Plate 8.10 Street clutter including advertising on telephone boxes, advertising boards, food vans, bins, planters and benches



Plate 8.12 Large vacant site between Back Greaves Street and Queen Street



Plate 8.11 The southern end of Parliament Square peters off into Clegg Street and does not align with tram stop or provide natural wayfinding into the town centre

8.4 Threats / Risks

The biggest threat facing the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area involves economic factors. The care and maintenance of the historic environment, particularly those buildings in private ownership, cannot occur without the finances to do so. Whilst owners can be incentivised financially, this is a burden on the local authority at a time of diminishing resources. Recognition also needs to be given to the fact that private building owners also face other challenges economically, and indeed there are competing factors when it comes to long-term maintenance and security (for example, preference for modern materials and measures such as roller shutters and CCTV cameras).

There has been a significant shift in the nature of retail in recent times; this can have a particularly significant impact on towns such as Oldham, which already suffer from economic deprivation. Creativity and forward thinking is required to ensure that the High Street stays ahead of its time and adapts and changes as necessary.

A lack of engaged ownership of the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area by the communities who inhabit it can also be one of its biggest threats – if building owners and the general public more widely understand the significance of the heritage assets within the town centre and have a sense of pride in them, it will be easier to steer the area through a process of enhancement.

8.5 Wider Context and Development Proposals

Oldham Council is actively pursuing regeneration initiatives as part of the requirements of Greater Manchester for improved residential provision in conurbation centres which focus on the areas surrounding the conservation area. The management plan provides guidance on how regeneration, and development more generally, could be better-rooted in the conservation area and could assist in its enhancement and the reuse of vacant buildings.

8.6 Opportunities

There are numerous opportunities for enhancement of the conservation area, which are outlined in detail in the management plan. These range from small-scale reinstatement of historic features and improvements, to shop fronts and signage, to the redevelopment of vacant sites and adaptive reuse of vacant heritage assets.

The management plan will also outline ways in which the planning system can assist in achieving the enhancement of the conservation area through directives such as Article 4 Directions and Local Development Orders. There are also initiatives such as Heritage Action Zones and Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas which will be explored alongside other transport and public realm schemes currently being pursued through Transport for Greater Manchester.

9.0 Proposed Extensions

Oldham Council has a statutory duty to review the character and boundaries of its conservation areas. As part of this appraisal four extensions are proposed to the existing conservation area which extend beyond its current boundary. Whilst these extensions commonly exhibit more negative and neutral features, they also include fine individual buildings and shared characteristics with the conservation area.

9.1 High Street East and Parliament Square

Parliament Square is a substantial public space which sits at the heart of the conservation area; its partial exclusion from the conservation area is a symptom of the poor-quality townscape which previously existed before this part of Clegg Street was redeveloped. The square experientially forms part of the core of the conservation area in its entirety, benefitting further from the new façade to the Town Centre Shopping Area implemented to reflect the new cinema extension to the former Town Hall which it faces, and turning the corner into High Street **[Plates 9.1 and 9.2]**.

Currently only a small section of Oldham's retail centre forms part of the conservation area, with only one side of the street included along High Street, Curzon Street and Albion Street. In the first instance the extension proposes to include the public realm up to the building line to ensure that areas of public realm are not severed in two by an imaginary boundary; rather, it is suggested that the whole environment that is experienced is included **[Plate 9.3]**. It is also proposed to extend the boundary to include a larger swathe of the retail core,

including buildings on the south side of High Street into Market Place and north to include Henshaw Street **[Plate 9.4]**. This has the added benefit of linking the north side of the town centre across Albion Street and including almost all the area of pedestrianised public realm contained by the varied and often positively-contributing buildings which flank it.

The hard landscaped, pedestrianised public realm continues through this area; townscape features of particular interest include the striking fountain and lighting standard in Market Place in front of Spindles Shopping Centre, the large planted bed associated with the Oldham in Bloom project and a playground adjacent **[Plates 9.5 and 9.6]**.

The extension includes many buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area; of particular merit is the curved group of buildings turning the corner from Market Place into Henshaw Street with a distinct form and Art Deco design **[Plates 9.7 and 9.8]**, and the carved-and-painted sandstone capitals and corbel brackets depicting different trades to the fine row of 19th century shops on Henshaw Street **[Plates 9.9 – 9.13]**. At the heart of the proposed extension, a group of modern buildings at 35-47 Market Place, which in part extend the full depth to Albion Street, detract from the established character of the area, although in instances such as the Yorkshire Bank with its substantial cantilevered overhang, buildings comprise architectural interest in their own right **[Plate 9.14]**. This area suffers from the same issues with detracting shopfronts and signage as found elsewhere within the conservation area **[Plates 9.15 and 9.16]**.



Plate 9.1 Parliament Square and facade of Town Centre Shopping Centre



Plate 9.2 Early-20th century terrace which turns corner into High Street



Plate 9.3 Extending boundary to include the whole width of public realm



Plate 9.4 Proposed extension to include wider pedestrianised public realm



Plate 9.5 Market Place fountain and lighting standard



Plate 9.6 Play area in centre of Market Place



Plate 9.7 Art Deco building turning the corner between Market Place and Henshaw Street with large planted bed in front



Plate 9.8 Art Deco detailing



Plate 9.9 19th century terrace of shops on Henshaw Street



Plate 9.10 Carved capital and corbel brackets to 19th century retail frontage on Henshaw Street



Plate 9.11 Carved capital and corbel brackets to 19th century retail frontage on Henshaw Street



Plate 9.12 Carved capital and corbel brackets to 19th century retail frontage on Henshaw Street



Plate 9.13 Carved capital and corbel brackets to 19th century retail frontage on Henshaw Street



Plate 9.14 Interesting cantilevered design but detracts from overall character of conservation area



Plate 9.15 Poor signage and shopfronts within proposed extension



Plate 9.16 Poor signage and shopfronts within proposed extension causing harm to overall appearance of building which makes a positive contribution to the conservation area

9.2 Yorkshire Street, Retiro Street and Waterloo Street

Yorkshire Street is a principal street within the conservation area which extends from Parliament Square and High Street, and as such links into the heart of the conservation area. It was constructed as an extension of the High Street at the turn of the 19th century, replacing the historic route which meandered up to the church. Its steep topography means that it falls away quickly and the building typology becomes fairly indistinct as a secondary retail street. At the top end of the street, however, is a collection of buildings which extend the established character of the conservation area, and are proposed for inclusion **[Plates 9.17 and 9.18]**. The proposed extension also picks up the historic route (Goldburn – the main route over the Pennines from Manchester to Yorkshire) through the town as it crosses over from Bow Street into Old Church Street, and then alongside the church gardens up Church Street. The large surface car parking to the north of Old Church Lane currently offers a 'quiet' backdrop, in the place of a former mill **[Plate 9.19]**. However, it is a sensitive location on the historic entry into the conservation area which requires careful redevelopment that takes into consideration the sensitivity of its location and successfully addresses the steep, changing topography.

The modern block between Church Street and Yorkshire Street at 21 – 41 Yorkshire Street is a detracting feature at odds with the prevailing character of the conservation area, and has diminished the historic character of Church Street. However, it occupies a key location mediating between the differing levels of the two streets which bound it. It is of particular importance to the setting of historic Church Street, and its suggested inclusion within the conservation area recognises both this and the opportunity for future enhancement. This follows for the detracting block which stands on the corner with St. Mary's Way **[Plates 9.20 – 9.22]**.

The extension also includes The Old Bank Public House, which is proposed for inclusion on the local list.



Plate 9.17 Handsome group of late 19th century buildings at 34 - 48 Yorkshire Street which make a positive contribution to the conservation area



Plate 9.18 Old Mess House which sits on corner of historic route through town



Plate 9.19 Old Church Street, part of the historic route through the town and with the currently 'quiet' backdrop



Plate 9.20 21 - 41 Yorkshire Street, a modern block at odds with the prevailing character of the conservation area



Plate 9.21 Rear side of 21 - 41 Yorkshire Street block providing poor backdrop to the historic character of Church Street



Plate 9.22 Modern block on corner of St Mary's Way and Yorkshire which does not follow the established character of the conservation area

Building: Old Bank Public House, Yorkshire Street



Plate 9.23 Old Bank Pub stood on narrow site between Bow Street and Waterloo Street

Date: Late 19th century

Rarity: The building occupies a prominent isolated position at the junction of Yorkshire Street with the historic route which curves away south-eastwards.

Aesthetic Interest: It is a neo-classical design in channelled ashlar to Yorkshire Street with a central projecting entrance bay with return elevation in red brick with stone dressings to Waterloo Street and Bow Street. The stone string courses extend along the return elevations with handsome window surrounds and keystone detailing. Vegetation growing out of the roof and the state of some windows suggests it may be in a poor condition.

Group Value: The building occupies an isolated position at the head of Bow Street and Waterloo Street.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: The building was originally a bank, the quality of its architecture reflective of the town's prosperity in the 19th century.

Landmark Status: The building occupies a prominent position in the townscape, emphasised by its isolation and that it stands at the junction with Bow Street – part of the historic route through the town.

Social and Communal Value: The building is reflective of the industrial prosperity of the town in the 19th century.

The last area of the proposed extension covers the remaining linking streets between Union Street and Yorkshire Street; whilst subject to alteration and exhibiting detracting features, they share the same character as the west side of Retiro Street at least in part (already within the conservation area), featuring continuous terrace groups of domestically-scaled buildings with continuous sloping eaves, slanted to follow the gradient of the street and unbroken by party walls, and elements of early shopfronts on Waterloo Street which make a positive contribution to the conservation area [Plates 9.24 to 9.26]. The nightclub which spans between Retiro Street and Waterloo Street is a major intervention which detracts from the established character of the area, and the Limo Lounge garage-style infill to the terrace group on Waterloo Street breaks its historic building line, which is further marred by alterations to the remaining facades [Plates 9.27 and 9.28].

9.3 Cultural Quarter Public Realm

Gallery Oldham and the attached library are integral to the character and public focus of the Cultural Quarter of the conservation area and form a sympathetic modern addition which takes advantage of the changing gradient to sit comfortably behind the Victorian streetscape on Union Street despite its scale; the area of public realm formed by the pedestrianisation of Ashworth Street is also integral to the character of this space. They are therefore proposed for inclusion within the designated area [Plate 9.29].

9.4 Harrison Street

Harrison Street currently lies on the western boundary of the conservation area, tucked away behind Clegg Street and Union Street, and retains its historic cobbled setts within the roadway. The buildings at 1 and 3 Ascroft Street and their rear boundary wall are dominant features within this backland area almost forgotten behind the Town Square Shopping Centre. However, the buildings are steeped in historic industrial character and are thus worthy of inclusion in the conservation area, as well as inclusion on the local list [Plates 9.30 - 9.32].



Plate 9.24 Handsome terrace on east side of Retiro Street



Plate 9.25 Poor quality alterations including modern windows, roller shutters and signage to southern end of terrace group



Plate 9.26 Examples of poor ground floor frontage and more sensitive solution within proposed extension on Union Street



Plate 9.27 Modern nightclub which spans between Retiro Street and Waterloo Street



Plate 9.28 Unsightly infill within terrace group on Waterloo Street



Plate 9.29 Pedestrianised public realm to south side of Cultural Quarter



Plate 9.30 Rear elevation of Ascroft Street buildings including historic boundary wall and cobbled roadway to Harrison Street



Plate 9.31 Vacant site adjacent to 1-3 Ascroft Street and behind the Prudential Building on Union Street

Building: 1 and 3 Ascroft Street



Plate 9.32 1 - 3 Ascroft Street, front elevation

Date: Late 19th century

Rarity: The buildings are some of the only historic industrial buildings remaining in the conservation area; others having been cleared previously for redeveloped or leaving detracting chasms in the townscape.

Aesthetic Interest: The buildings exhibit charming industrial character although they are in poor condition and in need of refurbishment and in the case of No.3 reuse. No.3 retains numerous original features; replacement modern windows at No.1 detract.

Group Value: Nos. 1 and 3 Ascroft Street are an isolated group set in this backland area; No. 1 is in residential use whilst the No.3 is currently vacant. They are surrounded by open spaces including the rear yard to the buildings themselves, now used as car parking, and a carpark to

the west which may offer potential for redevelopment to support the reuse and refurbishment of the main buildings.

Archaeological Interest: Founded principally in interest of built form discussed above and below.

Historic Association: Links to the industrial development of the area.

Landmark Status: The buildings are a prominent feature on the north west side of this tight backland area, otherwise largely concealed from the conservation area other than oblique views westwards along Ascroft Street.

Social and Communal Value: The building is reflective of the industrial prosperity of the town in the 19th century.

Plate List

Section 2 – Assessment of Significance

Plate 2.1 Views form part of a wider historic context

Section 3 – Location and Setting

Plate 3.1 St. Mary's Church at the apex of the conservation area

Plate 3.2 Open area immediately north of conservation area

Plate 3.3 Car park fronting the Church Street historic route

Plate 3.4 Tommyfield Market along north side of Albion Street

Plate 3.5 Mid-to-late-20th century architecture to southeast of Market Place

Plate 3.6 Oldham Civic Centre to east

Plate 3.7 Car park and Sainsbury's to south

Plate 3.8 Diverse range of buildings along Union Street to west

Section 4 – The Historical Development of Central Oldham

Plate 4.1 The ancient highway through Oldham, 1760 (McPhillips 1997)

Plate 4.2 Oldham c. 1780, looking from Horsedge toward Bardsley (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.3 Oldham in 1756, by Butterworth (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.4 Butterworth's map of Oldham, 1817 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.5 The principal thoroughfare of Goldburn (McPhillips 1997)

Plate 4.6 1848 Ordnance Survey, 19th century ribbon development (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.7 Oldham from Glodwick, 1831 by J.H. Carse (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.8 Oldham, mid-19th century, view from south (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.9 Baines Lancashire map of 1824 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.10 1932 Ordnance Survey, present Conservation Area site marked in red (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.11 Town Hall Square looking west, c. 1890 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.12 Town Hall Square looking east, c. 1900 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.13 Union Street looking east, nos. 87-93 on left, c. 1880 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.14 Union Street looking east, spire to Union Street Chapel in background (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.15 Jubilee celebrations, Yorkshire Street, 1899 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.16 Yorkshire Street from Waterloo Street, c. 1890 (Oldham Local Studies & Archives)

Plate 4.17 Oldham Town Hall, 2018

Section 5 – Character of the Conservation Area

Plate 5.1 The rising topography builds up to the former Town Hall, Parliament Square and Church of St Mary and St Peter at its peak

Plate 5.2 The Church of St Mary and St Peter crowning the centre of the conservation area

Plate 5.4 Views through the heart of the town centre out to the country beyond

Plate 5.5 High Street looking east with Hilton Arcade and Barclays Bank acting as anchors in the streetscape

Plate 5.5 View south from churchyard which surmounts the town centre

Plate 5.6 Domestic character of Queen Street with change in topography accommodating the grander HSBC bank on the corner with Union Street

Plate 5.7 Historic route through town centre along Bow Street (as it approaches junction with Yorkshire Street)

Plate 5.8 Union Street, view into conservation area showing boulevard character, centrally running tram and new library housed discretely behind former library

Plate 5.9 Union Street, tram stop and the Prudential Building in the foreground

Plate 5.10 Union Street smaller scale buildings between the larger set-piece architecture, in this case the Lyceum

Plate 5.11 Hilton Arcade, recommended for inclusion on local list but marred by poor retail frontage and detracting building at nos.1-3 which cuts away corner

Plate 5.12 Poor retail frontage along Curzon Street at ground floor to Hilton Arcade group

Plate 5.13 Grade II-listed Barclays Bank on the corner with Church Terrace and the Greaves Arms positioned behind

Plate 5.14 Converted former Town Hall and new public realm surrounding

Plate 5.15 Parliament Square leading into Yorkshire Street with long-views eastward and rising Church Terrace to War memorial on the left

Plate 5.16 Raised pavement at eastern end of Yorkshire Street with decorative railings and lamps

Plate 5.17 Church Terrace looking towards High Street

Plate 5.18 Listed war memorial set on terracing with Church of St Mary and St Peter behind and the Greaves Arm to its right

Plate 5.19 Church Street which falls away dramatically with tall retaining wall to churchyard garden

Plate 5.20 Eastern facade of former Town Hall extending southwards along Greaves Street

Plate 5.21 Looking east along Curzon Street across pedestrianised public realm

Plate 5.22 Looking southwards down Curzon Street

Plate 5.23 Looking north along Retiro Street, only left side is currently within conservation area

Plate 5.24 Looking north along Greaves Street and run of high quality buildings which mediate change in levels and form worthy neighbours to listed Town Hall

Plate 5.25 Rock Street fronted by the rear of buildings on Church Lane

Plate 5.26 Church Lane with the Church of St Mary and St Peter terminating the view and the return elevation of Barclays Bank in the foreground

Plate 5.27 Church Passage connecting Church Terrace and Church Lane

Plate 5.28 Alley running alongside Prudential Building

Plate 5.29 Public realm set in the heart of the Cultural Quarter

Plate 5.30 Typical 'back-of-house' appearance of buildings as seen from back streets behind

Plate 5.31 Forgotten backland spaces

Plate 5.32 Impact of poor quality retail frontage, roller shutters and signage on quality of building above at 22-24 Yorkshire Street

Plate 5.33 Professional services on Queen Street

Plate 5.34 Former Post & Telegraph Office, most recently the Local Studies Archive and about to be vacated

Plate 5.35 Masonic Hall and Union Street Church

Plate 5.36 Extension to former Town Hall to house new cinema

Plate 5.37 Church of St Mary and St Peter

Plate 5.38 War Memorial

Plate 5.39 Former Town Hall

Plate 5.40 Prudential Assurance Building

Plate 5.41 The Lyceum

Plate 5.42 The Masonic Hall

Plate 5.43 United Reform Church

Plate 5.44 Former Central Library

Plate 5.45 Former Post Office

Plate 5.46 109 Union Street

Plate 5.47 5 Greaves Street

Plate 5.48 10 Yorkshire Street

Plate 5.49 Listed buildings on north side of Church Lane

Plate 5.50 Listed buildings on south side of Church Lane

Plate 5.51 25 and 37 High Street

Plate 5.52 11 Church Terrace side return to Church Passage with sandstone finish

Plate 5.53 South face of Hilton Arcade

Plate 5.54 Interior of Hilton Arcade

Plate 5.55 Greaves Arms

Plate 5.56 3 Greaves Street

Plate 5.57 Victoria House, Greaves Street

Plate 5.58 The Old Bill, Greaves Street

Plate 5.59 31 Queen Street

Plate 5.60 Former Museum and Friends Meeting House,
Greaves Street

Plate 5.61 18-20 Greaves Street turning into Firth Street
and the domestic-scaled building to rear of Lyceum

Plate 5.62 39-40 High Street

Plate 5.63 Town Hall Tavern at 18-20 Yorkshire Street

Plate 5.64 Queen Street Barbers

Plate 5.65 Stone doorcase to vernacular brick building
on Clegg Street

Plate 5.66 Liverpool Red sandstone to Church of St Mary
and St Peter eastern vestries

Plate 5.67 Decorative lantern and railings to Lyceum

Plate 5.68 Decorative railings

Plate 5.69 Decorative ironwork at entrance to Hilton
Arcade

Section 6 – Views and Vistas

Plate 6.1 Impression of view south from Parliament
Square

Plate 6.2 Panoramic views from church yard

Plate 6.3 Long-range views eastwards afforded by steep
topography

Plate 6.4 Long view south through Parliament Square

Plate 6.5 Long view south along Greaves Street

Plate 6.6 Church of St Mary and St Peter spire sat at the
opposite end of the town centre from the civic centre
tower

Plate 6.7 Civic centre tower sat at the opposite end of
the town centre from the Church of St Mary and St Peter
spire

Plate 6.8 Looking eastwards along High Street from
Hilton Arcade, passed Barclays Bank and to the Greaves
Arms and into the long view beyond

Plate 6.9 Short-range view looking west up Yorkshire
Street toward Parliament Square

Plate 6.10 Short view across Parliament Square to war
memorial and Church of St Mary and St Peter

Plate 6.11 Short view across Parliament Square to war
memorial and Church of St Mary and St Peter

Plate 6.12 Short view along Church Lane terminated by
the spire of the Church of St Mary and St Peter

Plate 6.13 Short view along Albion Street framing the
handsome 19th century shopfront

Plate 6.14 Short view from the southeast corner of Frith
and Greaves Street toward the Town Hall

Plate 6.15 Short view looking north along Retiro Street
from Union Street

Plate 6.16 View west along Union Street with St Mary's
and St Patrick's RC Church in the background

Plate 6.17 View east from Union Street with flanking civic
buildings before the street falls and banks away

Plate 6.18 Short view from Gallery Oldham looking north
toward Union Street

Section 7 – Townscape Details

Plate 7.1 Cobbled roadway to Harrison Street

Plate 7.2 Level pedestrianised surface demarked by
granite setts and bollards

Plate 7.3 Shared surface running along northern edge of
Parliament Square with tarmacked roadway

Plate 7.4 Parliament Square open space

Plate 7.5 Parliament Square extending south with three
owls on plinths at southern end

Plate 7.6 Terrace in front of war memorial

Plate 7.7 Memorial stones in church yard

Plate 7.8 Street planter and plants hanging from street
furniture