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### Original Citation

Norris Nicholson, Heather (2001) Two tales of a city: Salford in regional filmmaking, 1957-1973. Manchester Region History Review, 15. pp. 41-53. ISSN 0952-4320

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# TWO TALES OF A CITY: SALFORD IN REGIONAL FILM MAKING c.1957-1973

Heather Norris Nicholson

This discussion considers the role of moving image in constructing aspects of regional identity, with particular reference to footage produced by two very different filmmakers who filmed in Ordsall, Salford during the 1960s. Their respective footage covers a period of profound social and physical change associated with housing clearance and urban renewal schemes. This article, which is based upon archival film footage in the North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University, seeks to convey the richness and multi-faceted nature of this footage and to highlight its value in the historical exploration of identity formation.<sup>1</sup> The piece begins with a brief consideration of archival film as a source of historical evidence and associated issues of interpretation.<sup>2</sup> This is followed by an introduction to the locality that features in the two filmmakers' work and brief reference to how it has been represented in the past. Attention then turns to each of the filmmakers: first, John Michael Goodger, former lecturer at the University of Salford, who made a trilogy of films to chart the changing character of Ordsall in the late 1960s; second, Ralph Brookes, an amateur home movie maker who also documented the transformation of the terraced streets around where he lived. These contrasting versions of Ordsall highlight some of the challenges offered by using film in a study of regional identities. They also illustrate the enormous potential of such material in helping to elucidate the shifting and multiple nature of place meanings.



Girls in Whit Walk procession Cheetham Hill 1969. This still image taken from film footage by Mr Ralph Brookes captures the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood. His home movies provide a visual record of old and young people taking part in local festivals and street events prior to urban redevelopment. (Film still supplied by North West Film Archive at the Manchester Metropolitan University)

## Framing Places in Moving Image

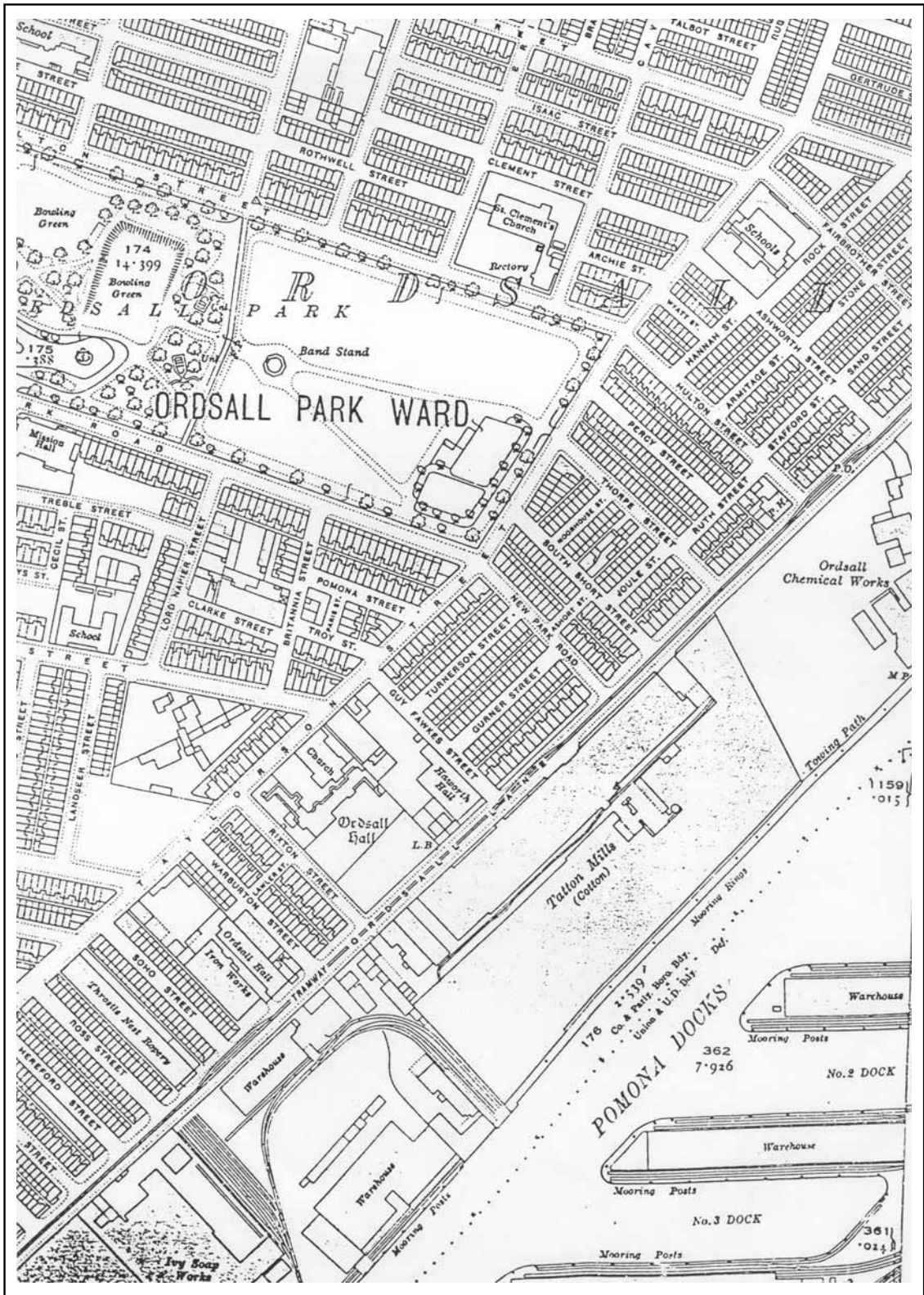
Places, just like people, change over time. Their evolving character contributes both to their distinctiveness and to the composite nature of their nuanced identities. This inherent dynamism

prompts Doreen Massey to regard place as a process rather than a stable and clearly defined entity.<sup>3</sup> This perspective has a visual analogy: while more bounded and static notions of place approximate to the visual identity trapped within a single exposure in a still photograph, moving imagery would appear to disclose a more progressive sense of place. An unfolding of meanings seems possible as the moving lens encompasses a wider gaze and allows us to look beyond the single frame.<sup>4</sup> *But is it that simple?*

Film has the capacity to offer a realistic sense of place since the medium may be used to record *real* localities undergoing processes of change in *real* time, albeit constrained by practical and perceptual variables. Yet we encounter an intriguing paradox when seeking to interpret the construction of place identities through moving imagery. Filmmakers tend to edit and reassemble scenes, situations and events into specific versions of time-space logic. Images fix places in cinematic approximations of both time and space rather than offer us actuality. Film may be understood as a persuasive tool in its seeming ability to ascribe and then perpetuate particular meanings and identities to places. Moving imagery thus presents infinite variations on real, imagined and symbolic social and physical settings often under the guise of bringing the texture of lives and landscapes clearly and tangibly to viewers.

Although a filmmaker only ever offers an approximation of a place, that version may become significant in shaping subsequent perceptions of a locality's identity. The film may have been intended as an evocation of place rather than somewhere to recognise or experience in a literal sense. Perhaps, its portrayal of place was only incidental background and of no particular importance at the time. Our own gaze may look beyond the fore-grounded subject which time, knowledge and interest have combined to render insignificant in comparison to the wider setting. Moreover, if physical change occurs, that surrogate version of somewhere at a different time gains status as a tangible, visible and authoritative portrayal of something no longer in existence. Where different cinematic versions exist of a place now utterly transformed, it is possible to re-assemble some of the richness of association, meaning and identity associated with that locality. Filmic ways of seeing become a means to both revisit place identities in the past and help us to contextualise particular meanings and identities.

Given the manipulative nature of image making, the stories films tell often disclose more about the person/persons in charge of the filming, than about those in front of the camera. Such imagery is a product of combined individual and wider societal influences which affect how scenes are understood as subjects to film and to be subsequently viewed. The handling of the subject matter may have its genesis in decisions or influences far from the lives and landscapes framed by the lens as the politics of showing and being shown in moving image encode other practices of



Street plan of a section of the Ordsall area in 1922 showing terraced neighbourhood where Mr Ralph Brookes lived, worked and filmed. Many of his home movies may be related to specific streets, homes and people from this locality in and around New Park Road where the Brookes family ran a newspaper shop until redevelopment and his own relocation into new housing.  
*(Reproduced by courtesy of City of Salford Development Services)*

socio-spatial inequalities within and between societies.<sup>5</sup> Control of the camera and the capability to frame - or exclude - others has long associated the history of photography and film-making with wider power relationships determined by race, ethnicity, gender, status, occupation and education. The filmic versions of 1960s Salford considered here are no exception.

### **Salford in Image and Reality: A Vignette**

Ordsall lies close to the centre of Manchester and is the southernmost part of inner city Salford, bounded on two sides by the Manchester Ship Canal.<sup>6</sup> The construction of the canal (1887-1893) prompted the rapid growth of modern dock and ship repair facilities, transport links, warehouses and extensive industrial development. Unplanned housing development quickly followed; first low quality cheap and crowded dwellings for industrial workers, then rows of by-law terraced housing were built over adjacent open land. The resultant concentration of worsening environmental degradation and poverty typified the excesses of late nineteenth century unregulated urban and industrial growth. Hard-hit by subsequent economic and technological changes, the housing areas of Salford remained neglected by public policy-makers until the mid twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to this neglect, the area's proximity to Manchester, and its distinctive visual and social character attracted much literary and artistic attention. The long-running soap opera *Coronation Street* is part of a long established interest in portraying aspects of the Salford locality. *Hobson's Choice* (1915) by the Lancashire playwright, Harold Brighouse, Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) and Louis Golding's novels, *Magnolia Street* (1931) and *Five Silver Daughters* (1934) all powerfully evoke the everyday world and a heightened sense of place. Such writings map out the terrain of tiny areas in the sprawling city conurbation combining naturalism and social reportage with more conventional naturalistic plot and narrative form.<sup>8</sup> A fusion of observation and imagination also underpins the visual portrayal of Salford at different times. During the twentieth century, the busy canvases of L.S. Lowry (1887-1976) helped to construct a distinctive visual identity comprising industrial scenes of mills, terraced housing and public spaces filled with tiny stick-like people.<sup>9</sup> Popularised perhaps by its ability to evoke the flickering quality of early silent movies, Lowry's style readily lent itself to evolving colour printing techniques during the 1920s and 1930s. It has, for many people, become the quintessential if somewhat clichéd image of Salford - used as an opening image by the first filmmaker to be discussed in the next section and in the naming of the Lowry Centre at Salford Quays.

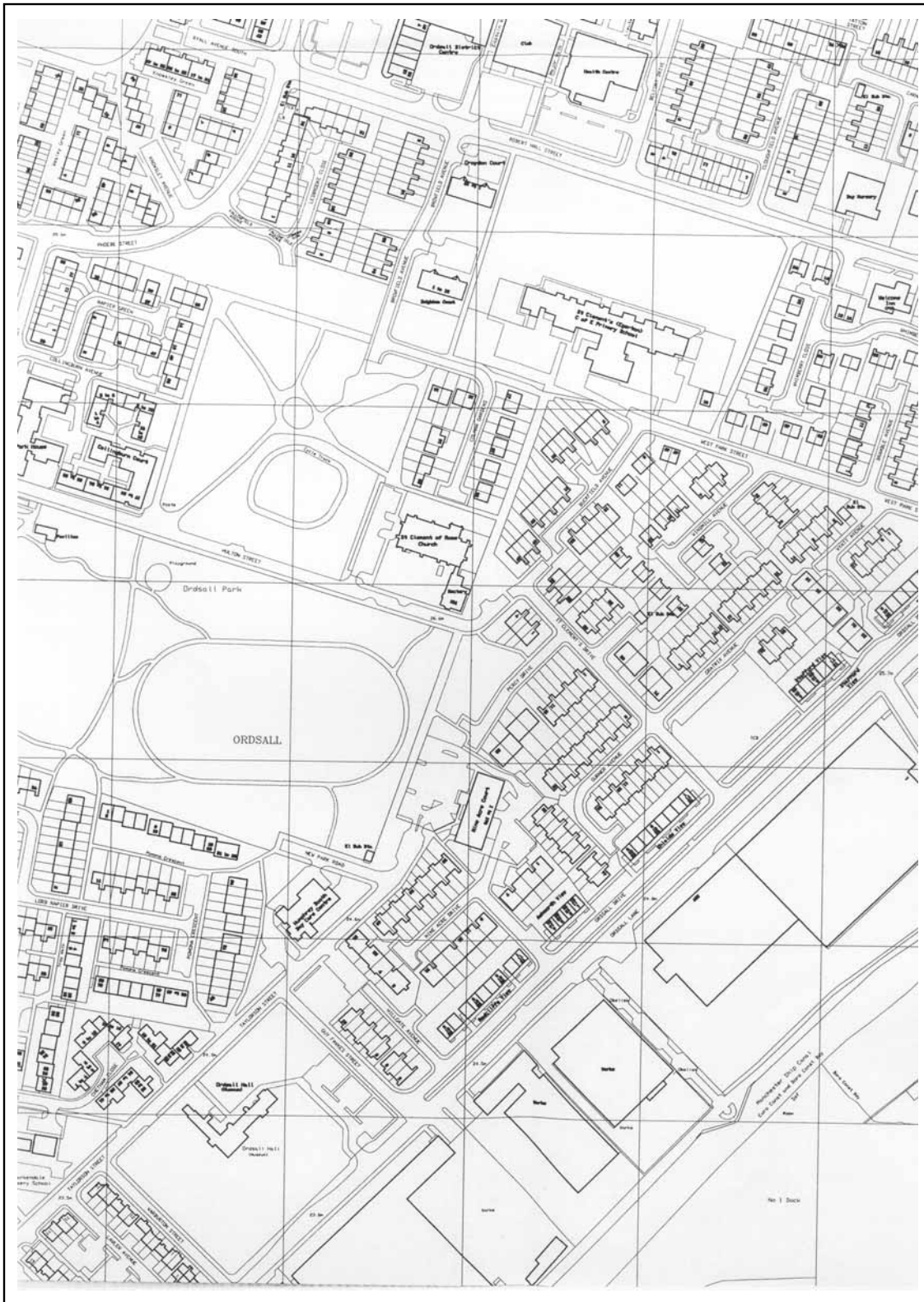
These were public images of Salford in circulation by the middle decades of the last century. By the end of the Second World War, Salford, like other industrial parts of Britain, had a backlog of six years' postponed maintenance of the built environment. Nearly 2,000 homes had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair while an additional 28,000 had experienced lesser damage.<sup>10</sup> The problems of many of those who lived and worked in the city were compounded by economic decline, creeping technological obsolescence and industrial dereliction. There was a severe shortage of suitable land for new development. The concept of refurbishment would not enter housing policies for another twenty years and relocation to new over-spill areas was small-scale

(although some did happen, for instance, at Worsley, Irlam and Little Hulton). Instead, planners sought technical solutions for the needs of the local residents: housing clearance and renewal schemes were perceived as the means to tackle problems of dilapidation, poor infrastructure, changing household sizes and overall population growth. Through a long-drawn out process of redevelopment, the locality was transformed and its physical fabric and social character - long noted for a strong sense of community based on close association through family, friends, workplace as well as social and cultural activities - irrevocably altered.<sup>11</sup> The "new" Ordsall was a mixture of council flats, maisonettes and housing estates. As a city authority housing publication confidently pronounced in the early 1960s, it was a time when "the little house around the corner was to be replaced by the shops down below".<sup>12</sup> Such words capture the spirit of the times: a period of prolonged government involvement in planning and public policy making, fired by a vision of enlightenment and modernity to be achieved through urban renewal and non-consultative decision-making.<sup>13</sup>

For social commentators, Ordsall epitomised what Robert Roberts later described in his portrayal of Edwardian Salford life as the classic slum.<sup>14</sup> For planners, health and housing officers and City council workers, Ordsall's only hope was physical redevelopment. There was greater ambivalence among local residents; some wished to go: others - at one point, a poll suggested 44% of adults, particularly older people living on their own - wished to stay, and some accepted the need for change but deplored the tactics used in the redevelopment process.<sup>15</sup> Such sentiments have been gathered through oral history projects and the visual record explored here also captures some of that ambivalence. Both types of historical evidence highlight the complexities of identity formation. The multiple meanings of Ordsall as an ordinary place made special by its associated memories, familiar landmarks, annual events and special occasions is particularly apparent in the home movies of and local resident and amateur filmmaker, Ralph Brookes. However, first, let us consider how John Michael Goodger, a non-resident, negotiated and gave meaning to his own sense of Ordsall's character through the lens of his camera.

### **John Michael Goodger: From Classroom to Classic Slum as Filmmaker**

Michael Goodger was born in 1934 in India of British parents. He came to Britain in 1946 at a time of widespread expatriate movement prompted by the mounting political tensions in the lead up to independence and partition the following year. Goodger's background in the arts and music made him well placed to enter the emerging post-secondary realm of teaching liberal and general studies in Salford. In his early thirties, his initial experiments with filmmaking resulted in two short documentaries about the civic duties of being mayor and Salford Rugby League. At the time, interest in locality-based and experiential environmental learning was rapidly expanding. Goodger's foray into producing his own teaching materials may be set against the emergence of an array of national associations, curricular initiatives and new types of teaching resources for the support of environmental, including urban environmental, education.<sup>16</sup>



Street plan of Ordsall area in 1990 showing how redevelopment has reduced New Park Road to a short cul-de-sac on the southern side of Ordsall Park. The grid iron pattern of red brick terraces has been replaced by a mixture of lower density housing in semi-open plan estate design with more landscaped space. Higher development, typical of 1960s and early 1970s planning approaches to public housing provision, has been reduced to fewer storeys as part of the regeneration and refurbishment scheme known as the Ordsall Project.

*(Reproduced by courtesy of City of Salford Development Services)*



By 1967, urban renewal schemes in Salford offered an obvious focus for Goodger's multi-disciplinary approach to issues of urban ecology, town design and planning aesthetics.<sup>17</sup> Current pedagogical trends as well as contemporary ideas about urban design and aesthetics, community and social welfare and town redevelopment thus informed Goodger's next ambitious filmmaking project. Motivated by a "strong sense of disappearing history", he wished to record on film the fast "changing face of Salford's housing" and to offer teaching examples that were familiar and relevant to his students, many of whom came from the Salford area.

*Somewhat in a pioneering spirit, I took a simple 16mm camera into the slums of Salford with the original intention of supplementing the visual material I already used in my lectures on urban renewal. But I gradually became aware of the need to do a lot more than merely return with footage of slum houses.*<sup>18</sup>

Over the next four years, Goodger's film project evolved swiftly. Collaboration with friends and colleagues meant that from its amateur beginnings in 1967 on 100' spools of Kodachrome, the project rapidly became a professional undertaking in terms of production team, technical complexity and overall vision. By 1971, after several years of shooting, editing, script writing, recording and studio-work, and with the help of university funding, *The Changing Face of Salford* was complete.<sup>19</sup>

Goodger and his team converted 7200' of Ektachrome commercial quality film stock into two colour documentaries with sound of professional standard that sought "to examine the life, problems, hopes and fears of a typical community of slum dwellers in Salford".<sup>20</sup> The first film, *Part One: Life in the Slums* (30mins) portrayed people living in Salford just before and during the demolition and early re-housing process. *Part Two: Bloody Slums* (33 minutes) offered a historical overview of the area's growth, and decay, the local authority's decision to clear "unfit dwellings" and a step by step account of procedures of homes being vacated and houses demolished to make way for redevelopment. A third section, *Salford - The Other Side*, was planned in 1971 to complete the trilogy: its draft script offered scenes of the city's new estates, parks and of recently finished blocks of flats and maisonettes. (In the finished version, attention focuses more upon Salford's green spaces and historical associations than on redevelopment so it is not discussed in this comparison of Ordsall's housing areas.)<sup>21</sup>

Although first envisaged as a teaching aid, Goodger recognised the powerful role of moving image in reaching out to wider audiences, including public planners, council members and local residents. Television's mandate for education as well as entertainment through public broadcast was still relatively recent but documentary reportage was well established as a tool for raising public awareness of social issues. Both academics and planning professionals were already becoming familiar with the growing sense of unease over imposed decision-making, social alienation and local people's exclusion from centralised, bureaucratic policy-making.<sup>22</sup>

Making the films prompted considerable comment, as is discussed in the next section, but so did their screening, and *The Changing Face of Salford* soon became more than subject matter for student seminars. Although this article addresses some of the issues arising from imagery and commentary in relation to regional identity and place meaning, another story could be told about the film's reception. The following details attest to some of the extent of interest prompted in different contexts by Goodger's films.

As early as August 1967, local interest had prompted the *Salford City Reporter* to include an article, entitled "Varsity film will tell housing story".<sup>23</sup> Local opinion was polarised between those in favour of exposing the problems and those people who considered that Goodger's focus on slums cast a slur over the city's reputation and their own identity. Controversy grew as administrators sought to distance the university from Goodger's work although its financial support of the project was already local knowledge. The unrest went further as Goodger's footage was a grim reminder that scenes of urban poverty so starkly portrayed in the seminal film, *Cathy Come Home* (1966) were not limited to London. In April 1970, the University Council refused the BBC and Granada permission to show Goodger's Salford films although eventually, there was a private screening in the House of Commons in November 1971. There were also many responses by Salford Corporation, community groups and student audiences about the films' portrayal of the city and media coverage.<sup>24</sup> In the light of extensive regeneration in Salford following the closure of the docks in 1982 and the launch of a development plan that was typical of the private-public redevelopment strategies promoted by the Conservative government during the 1980s, it would be interesting to re-examine past controversies and compare the issues, goals and the representative voices at different times of urban renewal.<sup>25</sup>



Aerial view of Manchester Docks looking towards Ordsall, 30 July 1969. The mix of terraced housing and newer developments are clearly visible as are the high rise buildings of Manchester. The proximity of the docks to the terraced streets of Ordsall affected the neighbourhood's development, character and ultimately its decline. Both film makers recorded aspects of dock activity and their changing significance in the lives of local people. The rise of containerisation is apparent as there are both old and new forms of shipping along the docks that have now become Salford Quays. (Reproduced by courtesy of Manchester Ship Canal Company)

## Identity and Belonging: On and Off Camera

Goodger was aware of how his own background, education and received accent distanced him from the people he wished to portray in the films as a “typical slum community”. He recognised the value of local material in his teaching and wished to “get under the skin” of the neighbourhood but was unsure how to bridge the social and spatial divisions between classroom, civic hall and the terraced streets of Ordsall.<sup>26</sup> The film project brought self-realisation as well as technical skills as a director: his initial concern about attracting unwelcome attention by his “well-heeled appearance” prompted him to wear overalls and cloth cap when out filming furtively. Catching sight of his own reflection in a shop window prompted him to reconsider his wish to “avoid unpleasantness” by trying to “hide his middle class background”. Self-recognition prompted a change in attitudes from “one of apprehension to one of sympathy”. It was an important moment in his move towards openness and a more receptive way of relating to his subject matter. Honesty, directness and respect for the lives around him enabled him to establish what he felt was a closer rapport with people “with whom one could be at ease, interested in my activities (rather than my clothes) as much as I was in theirs, especially because I was recording for posterity their hopes and fears, their surroundings, their ways of life”.<sup>27</sup>

During the project, Goodger believed that local opinion shifted from being curious (“Would it be on telly, mister?”) to indifference and finally towards the familiarity that he sought as a vital component in “sympathetic and yet unsentimental” documentary filmmaking.<sup>28</sup> Goodger was acutely aware of being an outsider and asked a colleague, John Garner, to narrate the film’s commentary because of his local knowledge and, in Goodger’s view, his more appropriate sounding voice.<sup>29</sup> Goodger also wished to strive for visual authenticity and tried to avoid staged effects. One exception was his sequence of coal being delivered along a back alley. According to his notes, this scene was improvised for cinematic effect as he could achieve heavier breathing and louder footsteps than was possible from the sounds created by the actual coal man in rubber-soled boots. On another occasion, Goodger asked some children to throw stones at a newly vacated house and apparently received a reprimand from a neighbouring housewife for “not knowing better”! Generally, however, Goodger claimed that his work portrayed the locality and the changes taking place through the eyes of a “typical” Salford family.<sup>30</sup>

*The Changing Face of Salford* charts the transformation of Ordsall’s terraced streets through a mix of panoramic, medium and close up shots from indoors, street level and bird’s eye views. *Part One: Life in the Slums* brings together scenes of streets, rooftops and smoking chimneys, dark alleyways - “one of the most famous areas of back entries in the country”, the film tells us - with occasional glimpses of green, and everywhere the mix of factories and terraced houses “standing in tired weary ranks”.<sup>31</sup> Imagery is edited to convey a single day with the city “coming to life”, displaying its industrial and human routines and eventually, like local children being put to bed, closing down for the night. The grim reality of living, working and growing up in this environment is heightened by frequent scenes of children (and dogs) playing in the streets amid parked cars, litter, discarded household items and the dirt and rubble of demolition. Indoor footage pans around squalid, damp, poorly lit and ventilated

homes. Again, kitchen scenes of the children’s weekly scrub in the zinc bathtub and crowded bedrooms visually encode the poverty and deprivation of Ordsall’s “mean streets graced by noble names”. Imagery and words plus song lyrics from Ewan McColl’s, *Dirty Old Town* endorse the film’s message: Goodger’s footage discloses his belief that while the need for change is undeniable, the condemned yet familiar environment may still be regarded with affection even if it must give way to the new.

*Bloody Slums*, the second part of Goodger’s film project, records Ordsall’s demolition from c.1967 to 1970. Here, fact, historical detail and a clear account of local authority procedures combine in an authoritative commentary. The script eloquently evokes the locality’s character as well as the filmmaker’s hope and the planners’ vision that environmental change will transform people’s lives and “open up a new world to enjoy life in vastly improved conditions”. Again, there is emphasis upon benefits for the next generation, “because the new Salford must be for the children”. The film’s message thus appeals to prospective audiences beyond the interests of Goodger’s undergraduates: its recognition that renewal also involves personal loss - “it’s a ghost town full of remembrances and not all of them bad” combines with the anticipation of a better future for “the children who will one day inherit the new Salford there will be another day... and a less tolerant generation”.<sup>32</sup> Such a message would still resonate with a generation that had experienced World War Two.

## Reading the Image on the Screen

While any audience - past or present - will derive different meanings from the imagery and accompanying text, Goodger’s project allows a number of observations to be made in relation to construction of place meaning and regional identities. In his dissertation, written one year after the completion of *The Changing Face of Salford*, Goodger stated his wish to portray Ordsall through the eyes of “a classic slum family” yet, I would suggest, as viewers, we can only see Ordsall’s residents *from* Goodger’s vantage point, as mediated by the camera and by the visual apparatus of cinematic form.

But Goodger is not simply an outsider; there are elements of negotiation which shape the flow of images and the commentary; his positionality in relation to class, professional and academic interests and local contacts illustrate that there are different degrees of insider/outsider relations. His closer affinity with the classroom than the civic hall (“smart alien men from the Public Health Department on inspection rounds”) ensure didacticism and scepticism about civil servants’ visions of improving society.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the filmmaker’s perspective is multi-layered: whilst readily fitting into existing conventions of middle-class photographic safaris and voyeurism upon working class lives, and recognisably part of mid-century ethnographic documentary film-making, Goodger’s imagery and accompanying text prompts consideration of other perspectives too.

Ambiguities occur within the narrative. Prevailing planners’ ideologies inform but do not completely constrain Goodger’s perspective. Image and commentary certainly convey strong links between environment, housing and physical health, which is reinforced by frequent analogies between people and their surroundings as in the words, “There is a miasma of decay here

applicable to more than the buildings. The occupants, in chameleon-like manner, taking on themselves the erosion of the surroundings” and at an earlier point, “Though, in the end, with awful finality, the surroundings will stamp their indelible mark on the inhabitants...”<sup>34</sup>

Goodger’s familiarity with planning issues, however, ensures that Ordsall’s anticipated transformation is not merely presented as an exercise in architectural and environmental determinism. References to the legacies of bureaucratic neglect, financial malpractice, inadequate social provision and policy and the inheritance of substandard housing stock that “still stand(s) as shabby monuments to social injustice” ensure that Ordsall’s residents are not simply victims of their surroundings.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, even though they remain largely silent through the commentary and appear as passive pawns of public policy making, Goodger is unequivocal about their inherent qualities of resilience. He depicts children unconcernedly at play and people’s daily routines and neighbourly contact amidst the dilapidation. His endorsement of the gritty determination of the people whom he films is apparent in the line, “something in the human spirit (that) always tries to rise above the effects of decay and time”.<sup>36</sup> The strength of family and community is tangible. So too is the condemnation of faceless bureaucrats unable to ease the appalling conditions during demolition - “like the bloody western desert” and “living like pigs - them us left ‘ere!”<sup>37</sup>

*The Changing Face of Salford* was completed two years before the publication of Robert Roberts’s important exposure of the city’s living conditions in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> Both men evoked the same term, “the classic slum” to describe what they found at different periods. The historical analysis offered by Roberts is made starkly immediate by Goodger’s imagery and a commentary that questions prevailing planning ideologies and assumptions. *Bloody Slums* explicitly raises two questions: “Are our present policies for slum clearance humane enough?” and are the new “communities” (my emphasis) being created are better than the slums they replace?<sup>39</sup> In striving for balance, Goodger is cautious in accepting the still widely held professional view of technical and physical solutions as the source of improved social well-being: “presumably better things await the dispossessed slum dweller. But new estates will not be presented as heaven after the hell of the slums”.<sup>40</sup> Amid the streetscapes, we are informed that “these are the people left behind and that “others have been re-housed in conditions undreamed by previous generations.” Separation, dislocation and disruption are rife: renewal brings a sense of loss as well as of anticipation. We also witness the vitality, ethnic diversity and neighbourhood enjoyment found in the annual funfair. The comment, “But at least there’s no colour bar” is a telling reminder of how, in many areas, prejudice and xenophobia still found expression at this period.<sup>41</sup>

The *Changing Face of Salford* is a powerful evocation of the past, a past that we now know cannot only be understood from official records. Whilst clearly far from being an insider’s account of how lives and landscapes were profoundly affected by Ordsall’s redevelopment, Goodger’s material constitutes a kind of filmic counter-narrative on sixties’ planning ideology and history. The use of documentary film, as David Clarke suggests, to “popularise,

universalise and legitimate modern urban visions” in the post-war period has been well documented by John Gold and Stephen Ward but Goodger’s presentation is more exploratory and polemical.<sup>42</sup> I believe it is helpful to see the filmmaker’s encounter with Ordsall more as a dialogue, perhaps even a conversation, between teacher and learner in which roles shift as spoken and unspoken perspectives by old and young, insider/outside, and those with or without experience, expertise and authority are juxtaposed. Far from being a middle-class missionary foray into the desolation of urban dereliction, it is more fruitful to see Goodger’s footage as a site of intersection between different systems of meaning. Although an outsider, his footage displays sensitivity to the complexities of belonging and sense of place. He illustrates how the realities of having a home, friendship and familiar surroundings co-exist with the actualities of material impoverishment and physical discomfort. Modernist visions of social betterment, based on a premise of re-ordering the physical environment assumed a rather tidier version of human existence than was the case. Goodger’s perspective thus denotes a transitional stage in Britain’s planning history: experts no longer had absolute unquestioned authority but the rise of more participatory forms of planning and residents’ involvement in renewal schemes was yet to occur.



Ralph Brookes, aged twelve, outside his family’s newspaper shop in New Park Road, Ordsall, August 1913.

(Reproduced by courtesy of Mr Brookes/Salford Museum and Heritage Service)

### Ralph Brookes and Mean (ingful) City Streets

Attention now turns to consider the second filmmaker, Ralph Brookes (1900-1997) who began to film scenes of people in and around Ordsall during the later 1950s.<sup>43</sup> Brookes was born in Smith Street, Ordsall into a family of six and by the age of eleven, he had already begun to develop a detailed knowledge of the locality as he collected and delivered later editions of the *Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle* after school. He joined the Navy during the First World War and in 1921 began to work in Salford Docks. Brookes moved from being a dock worker into the family news agency during the 1930s and for decades documented aspects of neighbourhood life in the terraced streets around his shop using a still camera. Locally, he was known as the ‘Man with the camera’.<sup>44</sup>

Brookes began to use a cine camera in the later 1950s, possibly prompted by the desire to record on film his young grandchildren as they became an increasingly important focus of family



gatherings and outings. Between 1957 and 1974, he made over ninety home movies using silent, colour Standard 8 millimetre gauge cine film. These images, although never intended for more than family viewing, do not solely focus on domestic and family occasions: at times, contemporary historical interest may be drawn primarily by many of the incidental details included in scenes of children at play or other family members but Brookes was also an inveterate recorder of the activity that took place outside his shop and in neighbouring streets. Collectively, his footage, offers a detailed and intimate portrayal of Ordsall during a period that includes the years covered by Goodger's films.

Ralph Brookes' footage is relatively unusual for this date as it offers an insider's -and older person's - perspective upon a working class locality and neighbourhood. Generally, the costly hobby of amateur filmmaking was restricted in Britain as a leisure time activity of more affluent families - and usually the male member of those families - until the 1970s when the increasing availability of relatively cheaper camera equipment gradually brought moving image within the reaches of working people. Although, middle class families from Salford and the Greater Manchester area had been telling stories on film about themselves at home and abroad, for decades, Brookes' material offers a unique portrayal of Ordsall's terraced neighbourhoods through local eyes.

Brookes presents a vignette of lifestyle and experiences at a time of profound socio-economic and physical transformation. Scenes occur against a backdrop of economic decline and worsening unemployment among Salford's dock-workers and deserted quaysides. Adults walk, talk together and go about their daily routines before his lens while children live and play surrounded by the effects of environmental decay, neglect and council-led re-housing schemes. Although filming in the same locality at approximately the same time, his evocation of Ordsall contrasts with Goodger's scenes of inner city dereliction. Brookes' footage has an immediacy, directness and sense of place rooted in local knowledge, experience and a trusting relationship with people he also knew as customers and neighbours.



Redevelopment of Ordsall during the mid 1970s. Looking towards the docks. The terraced houses were replaced by high rise blocks of flats, maisonettes and houses set in an open plan layout that lacked the local shops and facilities that had featured in much of Ralph Brookes' footage. (Reproduced by courtesy of Norman Jackson/Salford Museum and Heritage Service)

Interviews with Ralph Brookes reinforce the impression given by his footage that he was a familiar and well-liked local figure.<sup>45</sup> Although, children and young people sometimes perform to the camera, generally his unobtrusive presence means that we see Ordsall informally through his eyes at street level, indoors and from upper storey windows. The selective nature of filmmaking means that the footage reflects Brookes' own inclinations or opportunities to roam with his camera, which never enters the workplace or crosses beyond the school gates. Gender, age, interests and experience shape what and how he films. Brookes' visual patchwork offers a discontinuous narrative of community events and encounters. Unlike Goodger's professional product, much is unedited and takes the form of a visual diary, rather than following a pre-determined plan or an imposed story line. His montage of every day moments and special occasions with family, friends or neighbours identifies some of the distinctive rhythms and micro-geographies of a particular time and place. Brookes' depiction of Ordsall has an inclusivity, directness and richness of perspective absent from Goodger's work which, like more official histories, notwithstanding its empathetic approach, constructs and contains the locality as a slum. This may be illustrated by considering how specific imagery captures facets of individual, family and neighbourhood experience.



Wyatt Street decorated for the Coronation in 1953. Street parties, jubilees and other special occasions were popular subjects for local photographers. The value of archival film footage often lies in its portrayal of everyday activities and scenes as well as the documentation of special events. (Reproduced by courtesy of Salford Local Library Service)

Brookes charts the minutiae of continuity and change within his immediate surroundings.<sup>46</sup> Local life is more varied, less grim and much more full of humour than in Goodger's bleak portrayal and wry comments. Brookes' visual archive comprises anniversaries, seasonal gatherings and special family events such as wedding or christenings. Domestic scenes focus on meals, arrivals and the exchange of gifts. Picnics or open-air concerts in the local park, walking by the deserted docks during a strike and outings or holidays are part of Ordsall life. Carnivals and funfairs, brass band competitions and Whit Walks all denote locally-focused lives which occasionally include visits to the zoo, seaside, an air show or even Manchester City Centre. Brookes discloses spatial networks and patterns of encounter for adults and children that reflect particular socio-economic contexts, time and localities. His footage of children at play in streets, back alleys and amidst clearance debris or building materials accords with Goodger's imagery and also with the autobiographical accounts of activities

in similar northern towns albeit at earlier times.<sup>47</sup> As children grow, their play shifts from doorstep and gutter to street corners, alleys and open areas where all kinds of games and fantasy develop away from adult supervision. Household bric-a-brac, demolition sites, harmless trespass onto building sites under the apparently casual gaze of two policemen all evoke a level of unproblematic relaxed independence which is absent from Goodger's images of childhood squalor. The gulf between the two filmmakers' versions of urban childhoods is illustrated in a sequence by Brookes: footage captures a group of boys of different ages including younger ones wearing masks around an almost completed bonfire for Guy Fawkes' Night on land newly cleared of housing. The scene is colourful and playful as boys and dogs clamber precariously among piled up house timbers and abandoned furniture.

Whit Walk processions and other church festivals feature prominently in both filmmakers' record of Ordsall. They punctuate the community's calendar as major shared outdoor events. Brookes and Goodger record both young and old in costumes as musicians, dancers, marchers, and standard bearers as well as onlookers, in their Sunday best. By the late 1960s, many of the Whit Walk scenes in Ordsall and adjacent neighbourhoods include children of Caribbean and Asian background. In Brookes' material, young Sikhs and Muslims stand among the pavement spectators, while children of different ethnic backgrounds process holding banners and streamers. These brightly attired figures, like the multi-ethnic funfair crowds in Goodger's films, attest to the area's residential diversity which, as in other dock areas, reflected long established patterns of international connections based upon the changing linkages of empire, dominions and commonwealth. Such scenes are important components of Salford's social, ethnic and visual history and such evidence of the city's cultural diversity in the past contributes to present day understanding and peoples' sense of belonging.

Ordsall's street processions illustrate the church's continuing contribution to urban experience at a time of spreading secularisation. Organised activities available to local people still came largely through an involvement with the local church. The presence of Black and Asian children and families may denote an inclusivity and tolerance within the Whitsun crowds not readily found within more official records of sixties Britain. In these brief allusions to Ordsall's migration history, it is tempting to speculate that both filmmakers capture the emergence of new faith communities. Their cinematic streetscapes certainly record a facet of changing local experience and emerging new urban identities in which faith, culture, ethnicity, race and class would become increasingly significant. The diversity of what it means to be an insider is also apparent. Such imagery has particular significance for the history of black and Asian communities and neighbourhoods in the city.

As Ordsall means such different things to the two filmmakers, their different handling of similar subject matter is unsurprising. More unexpected, perhaps, are the omissions, again a result of specific ways of looking. One intriguing instance is Brookes' portrayal of girls dancing around a maypole in an otherwise empty terraced street. The scene attests to traditional activities more usually associated with rural areas and offers evidence of an unexpected cultural practice surviving in an area which

increasingly, during the sixties, came to be labelled as problematic by planning professionals and welfare workers. Significantly, despite the prevailing academic interest in comparisons of urban and rural living, no signs of rurality occur in *Life in the Slums* and *Bloody Slums*: for Goodger, a brief glimpse of the park, and a close up of a solitary weed growing up through bricks and paving stones symbolises the alienating environment and emphasises the gulf between present and the locality's now unrecognisable medieval origins as a hunting forest.

As the various threats and promises of re-housing and relocation gradually re-shape Ordsall's physical and social fabric, Brookes maintains a warm and candid view of the neighbourhood. His family is still fore-grounded but visual snippets of their lives are captured against constantly changing surroundings. It seems that as the locality underwent change faster than his rapidly growing grandchildren, the streets and buildings themselves assume increasing significance as subject matter. Brookes highlights people's responsiveness to change. The demolition of churches, pubs, houses and, ultimately, his own news agency, removes familiar landmarks and clearance brings new settings for new patterns of activity.



West Craven Street, looking towards the junction with Robert Hall Street during urban redevelopment. Boarded up shops are apparent at the corner of Pritchard Street on the right and further into the distance. (Reproduced by courtesy of Norman Jackson/Salford Museum and Heritage Service)

On the new housing estates, for instance, the multiple entrances of flats and maisonettes mean fewer doorsteps where adults may stand and toddlers may play, perhaps signalling a retreat indoors. Faces at windows particularly of older people occur more in Brookes' panning views across featureless housing blocks but sunny days also prompt families out into the fledging landscaped spaces across which old and young pass as they create informal paths and meeting places. In *The Changing Face of Salford*, Goodger portrays new developments as a presence beyond fore-grounded scenes of demolition. Brookes takes us into and among the modern housing as he seeks out the local people who have always been the subject of his gaze. His visual snippets of biography, through their walk-on cameo appearances, define his version of Ordsall as a physical and social entity. His affectionate portrayal of neighbours and local people captures the vitality within the ordinariness of their world and constructs his sense of a community undergoing change. Notwithstanding the socio-

economic hardships and prolonged uncertainties of multi-phased urban redevelopment, his films highlight that, for those that lived, worked and played there, this locality was much more than the mean streets perceived by contemporary professionals.

when and why they choose to select and record specific moments, vantage points and subjects. Similar scenes recur in their respective footage but are imbued with different significance. As viewers, we may identify moments of common interest and recognise



Oxen cart at the corner of New Park Street, Ordsall. Before he owned a cine camera, Mr Ralph Brookes photographed many varied aspects of his neighbourhood from the 1930s onwards and provides a rich visual history that includes special occasions, everyday scenes and now rather forgotten aspects of the locality.

*(Reproduced by courtesy of Ralph Brookes/Salford Museum and Heritage Service)*

## Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed regional identity at a very localised level, focusing on an area that has changed now beyond recognition. Indeed, the 'new' Ordsall has itself undergone further transformation as a later generation of planners and council workers sought to tackle the neighbourhood's multiple needs through new strategies during the eighties and nineties. Ordsall exemplifies how places change and are changed over time in response to external as well as internal processes, their identities layered and informed by constantly evolving contexts and meanings.

Visual imagery is an important constituent of memory. Images become part of the iconography of symbolic, real and imagined identities.<sup>48</sup> Framing places in moving images for future recollection invests everyday life with new significance. In the instance of Ordsall, the ordinary becomes extraordinary through being singled out for seeing more than once. Through their visual narratives, both of the filmmakers considered here build stories that link self and locality. Their cinematic mapping of streets and spaces approximate to neither official nor administrative definitions and histories of the area. In different ways, they each evoke an alternative sense of place, through how, what, where,

elements of stories, themes and interests but, as with any historical material, we may miss allusions and intentions and contexts. Filmic representations of place are inscriptions of environmental, social and cultural history, values and visions filtered to us through the cinematic gaze. While some elements may be constant and recurring, others tie to specific moments. Place identity, as reminded by Mark Twain's words about the Mississippi "is not a book to be read once and thrown aside", for not only does it have a new story to tell every day, but, like most places, it has many stories to tell.<sup>49</sup> As the two filmmakers illustrate, those stories may be told in very different ways.

The stories told in moving imagery are also a valuable source of evidence within the study of regional and local historical change during the past hundred years. Since the capacity - and the desire - to tell stories about ourselves and others in visual form has been such an integral part of twentieth century experience for many people, finding ways to access those narratives of times past is an increasingly important component within regional and local history. As evolving camera technologies ensured that more and more aspects of everyday life as well as more unusual events

and occurrence were recorded in moving imagery, this record of life in the regions by those who lived, worked or visited, provides valuable windows upon past conditions and situations. Long overlooked by film historians as unglamorous and seemingly rather provincial components of film-related activity and research, a growing and inter-disciplinary network of researchers now seek to interpret and emphasise the historical value of archival moving imagery.<sup>50</sup> The combined pressures of growing research interest, ever-expanding collections of material to catalogue, conserve and make accessible to different users and a sense of being undervalued within the wider networks of public information and archival resources, have meant that film archivists have worked very hard to raise the profile of both their archives and their holdings.<sup>51</sup> Within the past three years, intense lobbying by those

who work in or closely with archival film has resulted in steps towards greater recognition and the prospect of improved financial support at regional level.<sup>52</sup> As access to film collections continues to improve and as archivists continue their diverse programmes of outreach both at home and abroad, new challenges and new possibilities inevitably arise for understanding historical change at local and regional level. The scope for comparative studies of places, collaborative projects between archives, thematic exploration of issues and opening up of opportunities to explore visual histories through different ways of seeing all signal that moving imagery has an exciting contribution to future work. The present focus on the different ways of seeing offered by the two regional filmmakers in Salford has been a small step in that direction.

## NOTES

- 1 The North West Film Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University, Minshull House, 47-49 Chorlton Street, Manchester, has a collection of over 25,000 items which date from the 1890s to the present. Its on-line catalogue may be accessed at <http://www.nwfa.mmu.ac.uk>. I would like to thank Maryann Gomes for her initial suggestions on comparing film footage by the two film makers considered in this article. I am also grateful to two of her colleagues, Lisa Ridehalgh and Mark Bodner, for their help in making available material for the original conference presentation and for subsequent publication. I would like to thank Melanie Tebbutt for inviting me to share this work at the interdisciplinary conference, 'Regional Identities. Shifting Boundaries and Contested Meanings', organised by the Manchester Centre for Regional History at the Manchester Metropolitan University, 13-15 September 2001.
- 2 See also H. Norris Nicholson, 'In Amateur Hands: Framing Time and Space in Home Movies', *History Workshop Journal*, 43, (1997), pp.197-212; H. Norris Nicholson, 'Moving Memories: Image and Identity in Home Movies', in N. Kapstein, (ed.), *Jubilee Book. Essays on Amateur Film* (Charleroi, 1997), pp.35-44.
- 3 D. Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today*, June, (1991), pp.24-29; for comment, see also L. McDowell and J. Sharp, (eds.), *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (1999), p.201.
- 4 The term gaze used through this article refers to a strategy of representation and how meanings are depicted and constituted through the position of the image-maker and subsequent viewers. The term derives from the seminal writing on the politics of visual representation by L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Reprinted in L. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (1989), pp.14-26.
- 5 These issues are discussed more extensively in H. Norris Nicholson, 'Telling Travellers' Tales: The World Through Home Movies', in T. Cresswell (ed.), *Engaging Film*, (Lanham, Md., Rowman and Littlefield: January 2002).
- 6 C. Makepeace, 'Salford Docks.' *Notes to Ordnance Survey, 1;25000, 1908*. Reprinted by Alan Godfrey, (1985).
- 7 City of Salford. *Census Ward Profiles: Ordsall*, (1991); City of Salford Development Services, *The Ordsall Project*, ref. Y:Mn-5536 (undated) . Thanks are due to staff at Ordsall Neighbourhood Office, City of Salford Development Services, Robert Hall Street, Ordsall, Salford.
- 8 See S. Laing, 'Presenting "Things as they are": John Somerfield's *May Day* and *Mass Observation*', in F. Gloversmith, (ed.), *Class Culture and Social Change* (Brighton, 1980), pp. 145-147; M. Bradbury, (ed.), *The Atlas of Literature*, (1996), pp. 208-211.
- 9 M. Jacobs and M. Warner, (eds.) *Art in the North*, (Oxford, 1980), pp.25-26.
- 10 City of Salford, *See Your City. A Review of Post-war Progress* (Salford, 1961).
- 11 I. Brotherton and R. Hughes, (eds.), *Barbary Coast Revisited. A Book by Ordsall about Ordsall - the Heart of Salford Docklands*. (Salford, 1994). Thanks are due to the staff at Salford Quays Heritage Centre, Ordsall, Salford for their assistance in making available transcriptions of interviews with Ralph Brooks and for their willingness to unearth other published and unpublished materials relevant to this research.
- 12 City of Salford, *See Your City. A Review of Post-war Progress* (Salford, 1961).
- 13 For a sense of comment on planning ideologies in the 1960s, see R.E. Pahl, *Patterns of Urban Life*, (1970), pp. 127-131; R. Frankenburg, *Communities in Britain. Social Life in Town and Country*, (Harmondsworth, 1966); B.T. Robson, *Urban Social Areas*, (1975); for contemporary comment, see the introduction to P. Davidoff, 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning' (1965), in R.T. LeGates and F. Stout, (eds.), *The City Reader*, (1996), pp. 423-424.
- 14 R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford in the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century*, (Harmondsworth, 1973).
- 15 M. Goodger, *Part One: Life in the Slums. The Changing Face of Salford*, Film No. 430, North West Film Archives. Nigel Pivaró (Terry Duckworth of Coronation Street and an Ordsall resident), 'The Exodus' in I. Brotherton and R. Hughes, (eds.) *Barbary Coast Revisited. A Book by Ordsall about Ordsall - the Heart of Salford Docklands*, (Salford, 1994).

- 16 Growing concerns about the nature of urban living and the critical response to the grim documentary on housing need, *Cathy Come Home* (1966, dir. Ken Loach; script writer Jeremy Sandford) prompted much activity that sought to increase public awareness and participation in aspects of planning and environmental decision-making from the later 1960s. Further impetus followed the publication of the *Skeffington Report* (1969) and included unprecedented emphasis on the importance of environmental education and locality studies. See, for instance, discussion of resources in Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson, *Streetwork* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) and Colin Ward, *The Child in the City* (London: Architectural Press, 1978, 1990).
- 17 John Michael Goodger, *The Slums of Salford with Particular References to Living Conditions and Slum Clearance*. A thesis with film submitted for the degree of M.Sc. University of Salford, 1972. I am also grateful to the filmmaker for further telephone conversations about his work.
- 18 John Michael Goodger. Personal correspondence file, North West Film Archive.
- 19 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.iii.
- 20 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p. 7.
- 21 Although Goodger's thesis contains only a passing reference to a third film about 'new Salford' (1972, p.146), *Salford - The Other Side* (in colour and with sound was made in c. 1971 to complete the Ordsall trilogy (Catalogue film no. 1365). It starts with street scenes of the neighbourhood prior to redevelopment and although there are brief scenes of new housing schemes, it focuses more upon the locality's hidden historical houses, associations and green spaces in travelogue rather than documentary style. Also listed in the holdings of the North West Film Archive is *New Developments in Salford* (1969-70). This footage is colour, silent and 1 min 35 long (Catalogue film no. 3356) It portrays new building in contrast to the deprivation of *The Changing Face of Salford* and was filmed around the flats of the Broadwalk area.
- 22 See, for example, comments on alternative planning ideologies in R.E. Pahl, *Patterns of Urban Life*, (London, 1970), pp. 127-131.
- 23 *Salford City Reporter*, 25 August 1967.
- 24 John Michael Goodger, 1972. P.146. In addition to the section of his thesis entitled 'Criticism Appendix', references to responses to his work recur through paperwork and personal correspondence files kept by the North West Film Archive. The private screening of *The Changing Face of Salford* was to a housing committee in the House of Commons (November 1971).
- 25 By the 1970s, industrial decline, containerisation and changes in global economics had made Salford's docks commercially unviable. Continuing decline prompted the closure of Salford Docks in 1982, local council purchase of former docklands from Manchester Ship Canal and designation of an Enterprise Zone where incentives would encourage private investment. A multi-phase redevelopment strategy was launched in 1985 based upon partnership between Salford City Council, central government and private developers and businesses. Regeneration has brought about a mixture of high quality residential, business, leisure and cultural activities on former dockland areas that lie adjacent to local authority housing estates. Details derived from Salford City Council, *Salford Quays. The Development Plan for Salford Docks, 1986* and other materials made available by the Chief Executive Department, Civic Centre, Swinton, City of Salford.
- 26 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.iii, p.10.
- 27 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.9.
- 28 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.10; A comment in private correspondence between Dr B.S. John, Department of Geography, University of Durham to Goodger (16 February 1971) suggests that *Life in the Slums* "succeeds not only by its visual beauty but also by its sympathetic and yet unsentimental treatment of the social aspects of the slum."
- 29 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.19.
- 30 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.10, p.27.
- 31 *Life in the Slums*.
- 32 *Bloody Slums*.
- 33 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.38.
- 34 *Bloody Slums; Life in the Slums*.
- 35 *Life in the Slums*.
- 36 *Life in the Slums*.
- 37 *Bloody Slums*.
- 38 See note 14.
- 39 John Michael Goodger files. North West Film Archive.
- 40 John Michael Goodger, 1972, p.41.
- 41 *Life in the Slums*.
- 42 J. R. Gold and S. V. Ward, "'We're going to do it right this time': Cinematic Representations of Urban Planning and the British New Towns, 1939-1951,' in S.C. Aitken and L. E. Zonn, (eds.), *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*, (1994), pp. 229-258; See also D. Clarke, (ed.), *The Cinematic City*, (1997), p.11.
- 43 Transcript of interview with Ralph Brookes, 6 December 1990, Salford Quays Heritage Project, Salford. Tape Nos. 091-093.



## Erratum

**Heather Norris Nicholson**

Two Tales of a City

MRHR v15, 2000, pp. 41-53.

It has been brought to our attention that the footnotes 44-52 in Heather Norris Nicholson's article have been missed out. These are reproduced here, with apologies to the author.

<sup>44</sup> Maryann Gomes, (1998) 'The representation of working people within the NWFA collection with particular reference to local topical films and home movies', was presented at *The Past as Present: The Home Movie As Cinema of Record*, a conference organised by The Getty Research Institute for the History of Arts and Humanities, Los Angeles, CA, 3-6 December 1998. p.11.

<sup>45</sup> Transcriptions of taped interviews with Ralph Brookes, made in 1990, are held by The Salford Quays Heritage Project, 3 The Quays, Salford M5 2SQ.

<sup>46</sup> The Ralph Brookes collection contains 93 films made c.1957- 1974 and 64 films were made during the 1960s, a time of significant redevelopment in Ordsall. For brevity, the following discussion refers only to the overall series of accession numbers rather than listing details for individual films: 1782-1793; 2308-2386; 2342.

<sup>47</sup> R. Hoggart, *A Local Habitation. Life and Times, 1918-1940*, (Oxford,1988).

<sup>48</sup> During the 1990s, identity emerged as a complex and highly contested concept and gave rise to pluralistic, dynamic and variously constituted notions of identity formation. For wider discussion, see M. Keith and S. Pile, (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity*, (1993); S. Pile and N. Thrift, (eds.), *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, (1995); M.R. Somers, 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach', *Theory and Society*, 23, pp. 605-649.

<sup>49</sup> A. Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*, (New Haven, Yale, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Two excellent guides to collections exist in printed form: D. Kirchner, ed. *The Researcher's Guide to British Film and Television Collections*, London: British Universities Film and Video Council, 1997 (fifth edition); D. Kirchner, ed. *Film and TV collections in Europe: the MAP-TV Guide*, London: British Universities Film and Video Council, 1995. On-line access to catalogues exists for some regional archives.

<sup>51</sup> A more detailed definition of Public Sector Moving Image Archives is offered by the *UK Film Archive Forum*: 'Repositories for the custody and preservation of and access to the history of our times as recorded on film, videotape and other moving image formats. Such archives contain works made by amateur and professional producers for cinema, television and other purposes. These archives encompass the history and culture of moving image media and respect the integrity of the works above any commercial or short-term exploitation. These institutions operate for the public good on a 'not for profit' basis'. UK Film Archive Forum (2000) *Towards a Policy for the UK Moving Image Archives*.

(Available at: <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/faf/movinghistory.htm>. page 2 Accessed 3/4/2001).

<sup>52</sup> Film Archive Forum, *Regional Specialist Film Archives. Guide lines for establishment. Appendix 2* March, 1999. See also UK Film Archive Forum, *Towards a Policy for the UK Moving Image Archives, 2000*.(Available at: <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/faf/movinghistory.htm>.)