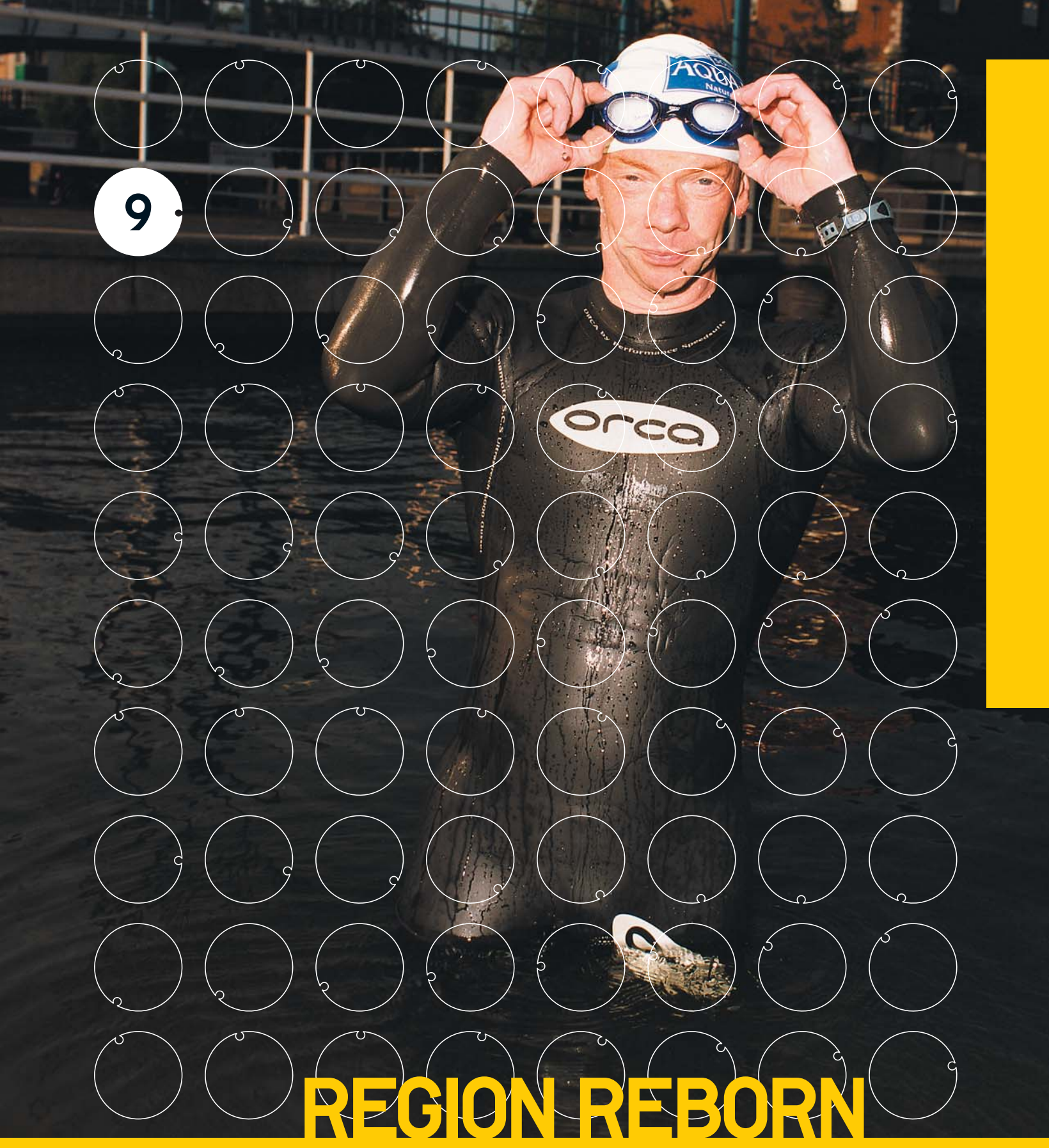


9

REGION REBORN

HOW DO WE CONSERVE AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND BRING REGENERATION, PROSPERITY AND A NEW QUALITY OF LIFE TO OUR COMMUNITIES? IN REGION REBORN, **DAVID WARD** SKETCHES OUT THE ROLE THAT CULTURE HAS PLAYED IN REGENERATION. **STEVE CONNOR** EXPLORES THE DIFFERENCE THAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT CAN MAKE FOR LOCAL PEOPLE. **IAN HERBERT** EXAMINES IMPROVEMENTS TO OUR COASTLINE AND OUR NETWORK OF RIVERS AND CANALS. FINALLY, **PENNY STREET** TAKES A LOOK AT BIODIVERSITY AND THE ISSUES FACING THOSE WHO WANT TO CONSERVE NATURAL AREAS OF THE REGION.

Manchester Triathlon Club training in a cleaned-up Salford Quays. Photo by Len Grant.

palaces for the people

Theatre, art and entertainment for the masses are sweeping aside the derelict wastelands left by the Industrial Revolution as Liverpool and Manchester have used the power of culture to bring new life and new opportunities to England's Northwest.

THE REGENERATION CULTURE OF ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST.
WORDS BY **DAVID WARD**. IMAGES BY **LEN GRANT**.

A CENTURY AGO, Manchester put one over on Liverpool by bringing the sea to the city: the Manchester Ship Canal allowed cargo ships to steam out of the Mersey along a watery highway to Cottonopolis. Or at least to a huge inland port at Salford, a mile or so from Manchester's grand town hall.

Thirty years ago, the docks were dying. In time, the port became a derelict wilderness, its stinking waters bubbling with pollution.

Two years ago, in the opening months of the new millennium, a huge glass and aluminium building with theatres, galleries and restaurants opened on Pier 8 at the heart of the former docks. It cost about £100m and was named in honour of L.S. Lowry, the Salford artist whose prints hang over many a British suburban fireplace.

Critics have been divided over its architectural significance but the public has flocked in: year one saw The Lowry almost overwhelmed by 1.2 million visitors who came to wonder at its orange carpets and purple walls.

At the western end of the canal, Liverpool's decline matched Salford's. The glory days of the city, one of the world's great maritime centres in the 19th Century, faded as shipping moved away from the Atlantic trade to containerised shuffles from east coast ports to the continent. Liverpool's Albert Dock, a great square of warehouses on the city's magnificent waterfront, fell empty; ships no longer brought anything to store in them. But the dock took on a new life. Now it houses shops, restaurants, a popular maritime museum and a branch of the Tate Gallery which displays the occasional Lowry but usually confronts visitors with something more radical.

Two cities, two versions of regeneration through culture, a word that in this context embraces sport, shopping, tourism and heritage as well as high art. Trade and manufacturing, which made the Northwest rich during and after the Industrial Revolution, have nose-dived. But culture, so the argument goes from Sydney to Bilbao, can bring in investment, jobs and tourists.

The process continues: Liverpool is planning a prestigious new building on the waterfront for a museum of the city and is thinking about letting Everton Football Club build a new stadium just up the river at King's Dock. The city has also just reopened the Walker Art Gallery after a £4.3m renovation and is one of the frontrunners to be European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Back at the other end of the canal, in the borough of Trafford on the edge of what was, in its day, the world's biggest industrial estate, a new building, jagged in design and clad in shimmering aluminium, faces The Lowry across the water.

This is the £30m northern branch of the Imperial War Museum and it opened in July to a design by Daniel Libeskind, architect of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. It is his first British building; he has designed an extension to London's Victoria and Albert Museum but they haven't got round to building it yet. Entry to the museum is free and they are expecting 300,000 visitors a year. The building has already attracted international interest.

Visitors can, at this point, hop on a tram (itself a tool of economic regeneration) and ride in style from here for a cultural tour of the centre of Manchester, which was blasted apart by an IRA bomb in 1996.

They can stroll off to The Bridgewater Hall, the city's 2,400-seat concert venue and home to three regional orchestras. It runs without subsidy, manages to make a profit and may have persuaded a few captains of commerce that Manchester is both civilised and worthy of investment.

Or they could walk north, past Manchester Art Gallery which reopened in May after a £35m extension and refurbishment scheme, and on towards the cathedral to discover a blue, glass ski-slope of a building called Urbis. It cost £30m, opened in June and houses an interactive experience of life in the world's cities in the 21st century. Close by, the city's old corn exchange houses swish designer shops, and a former newspaper publishing complex is home to bars, shops and cinemas.

These projects, through a mix of public and private investment, have brought new life (and much new money) to a formerly dead end of the city centre.

Back to the Ship Canal, and facing The Lowry a new building has risen, much less distinguished but packed with outlet shops that bring in bargain hunters. Not far away, new homes and apartments are nearing completion. The Lowry has stimulated much of this scurry of new development. Felicity Goodey, a former BBC journalist, hails The Lowry as "the sexiest building in the North" and says it has brought the sunshine back to Salford. On a good day (and don't believe everything you hear about the amount of rain that falls in the Northwest), visitors can sip their cappuccinos or designer beers in one of its bars and watch that sun set along the length of the ship canal.

Goodey has cause to be euphoric. She chaired the steering group that brought The Lowry into being and sees it and its neighbours (museum, shopping centre and, not far away, Old Trafford, home of Manchester United) as a crucial group of contrasting attractions which have helped bring people and prosperity back to a forlorn area of Greater Manchester.

"The conjunction of The Lowry, Old Trafford and Imperial War Museum North was quite deliberate," said Goodey. "From the outset of The Lowry project, we recognised that we needed to create a new destination. You need big attractions to fuel the short break tourism market. You have to have a critical mass. So we lobbied furiously to lever in Imperial War Museum North."

The Lowry, Britain's landmark millennium project for the arts, was built with the help of £70m of lottery money. Imperial War Museum North missed out on lottery cash; it was funded instead with the help of £12.5m from Peel Holdings, owners of the Ship Canal and Liverpool Airport and developers of the huge Trafford Park shopping centre. Other money came from Trafford Council, the Northwest Development Agency and Europe. The outlet centre opposite The Lowry and its cinemas are an entirely commercial development; rents gained from it contribute to the upkeep of Salford's collection of paintings by L.S. Lowry and to The Lowry's educational outreach work.

The Lowry, says Goodey, has put the heart back into Salford Quays, where, with the help of commercial developers, Salford City Council had managed to erect new homes and office blocks in the teeth of the recession in the 1980s. That project brought in £350m of private sector investment and 4,500 jobs.

The Lowry has brought in a further £300m from the private sector and has, directly and indirectly, created 5,700 extra jobs.

"It's phenomenal," added Goodey. "And there is as much, if not more, in the pipeline. The story of The Lowry is one of vision and innovation by a northern council. Salford City Council realised that if it was to effect a major transformation of a city long renowned for poverty and deprivation, it had to raise aspirations and change the image, not just for people looking in but, most importantly, for the people of Salford themselves.

"The city told local people that they did not have to put up with no hope, with the second rate, that they could aspire to the best."

Salford had looked west to Baltimore and north to Glasgow (European city of culture in 1990) to see the impact of cultural investment and had determined on an arts-based project of some kind for Pier 8.

"The city realised that if it was going to do this, it had to do it properly," said Goodey. "It wasn't any good building a little local theatre; they had to think big. The building had to be of international significance and quality. But it also had to be rooted in the local community. That was not an easy thing to pull off but I would argue that we have done it."

Surveys show that 30 per cent of visitors to The Lowry's galleries (characterised by their absence of reverent silence) do not consider themselves regular museum or gallery goers. Goodey talks with romantic passion of the local people who drift into The Lowry, of the head of a local school who says it has transformed the aspirations of her children, of the curious bag-carriers who cross the divide from the shopping centre to The Lowry.

Ask her for evidence and she will admit most is anecdotal. It would be nice to know exactly how many residents of the nearby Ordsall estate have ventured to The Lowry, which receives no public revenue funding, to see Madam Butterfly or Swan Lake. But no one can deny the economic impact of the building. Its glass-walled Compass Room up on the roof is available for wedding receptions, which have proved to be a nice little earner.

Thirty years ago, no one would have dreamed of going to a Salford dockside to celebrate a marriage. Or to see an opera.

SURVEYS SHOW THAT 30 PER CENT OF VISITORS TO THE LOWRY'S GALLERIES DO NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES REGULAR MUSEUM OR GALLERY GOERS

Previous page: The people of Manchester said they wanted a city park, and they got one. In the shadow of Urbis Manchester based actress Alberta Agyeman on the pillow lawns of Cathedral Gardens. Above: Mary and Audrey at The Lowry, The Quays.

evolutionary justice

WHEN THE LAND IS NEGLECTED, COMMUNITIES FRAGMENT AND WHEN OUR NATURAL CAPITAL IS PLUNDERED, REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS STAND READY TO STEP IN AND HELP COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES TO THE BENEFITS THAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES CAN DELIVER.

WORDS BY **STEVE CONNOR**

Photo: Noel Waller of the Wasteland to Woodland project, restoring a stone wall in West Cumbria.

THE GREEN SHOOTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RECOVERY ARE MAKING AN APPEARANCE THROUGHOUT ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST

You know when you've hit a town or city with some attitude. First there's the obligatory town-twinning on the sign as you enter, signalling a partnership with some unpronounceable outpost just to the east of Vladivostock. Then there will be a 'Glorious Gardens' or 'Barnesville in Bloom' competition won suspiciously for three years running by the Rector's wife. A shiny new sports centre, a couple of famous sons or daughters and some link with Elizabethan aristocracy and you're there: civic pride in all its plumped up glory.

Oh and one more thing: if you're anywhere North of Watford, it will also be the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. Myriad towns lay claim to being the haloed ground where the earliest engines started steaming or the jennies started spinning: 'First railway journey began here!' will read the plaque; 'Birthplace of internal combustion', runs the strapline.

Whether the Northwestern town of St Helens would put Ironbridge's nose painfully out of joint and grasp for revolutionary cradle status is up for debate, but one thing is certain: industrialisation and St Helens are well nigh synonymous. At its height, in the early to mid-20th Century, the town employed more than 20,000 miners and had 30,000 people working in the glass industry - 'World Class in Glass', states the sign as you cross the town border. Then there is the towering viaduct: a powerful symbol of muscular planning across which the steel wheels of Stevenson's Rocket took the first, plucky, rail travel pioneers.

Fast-forward to the late 20th Century: the ravages of consecutive oil crises, economic downturn and manufacturing decline had hit the town hard. Unemployment was rife, land lay derelict, shops were shuttered and the town was on its uppers. But the disastrous state of affairs sparked off resolve, not despondency. A series of new pioneers came onto the scene, following in the footsteps of the earlier industrialists. Regeneration came to St Helens in the form of new partnerships and fresh initiatives.

The Community of St Helens Trust, for example, was the UK's first enterprise agency, launched in 1978 and soon to become the model for 400 other, similar agencies across the UK, fostering start up enterprises and small businesses. The town was also used as a pilot for the first Youth Training Programme and vitally, for the first Groundwork Trust.

The Groundwork Federation now includes more than 45 individual Trusts working across the UK and delivering community-led regeneration, small business advice and environmental improvement programmes. In 1981 the first Trust was launched in St Helens, headed up by the now-Professor John Handley. It began by establishing a pioneering 'Wasteland to Woodland' programme that built a partnership to transform derelict and neglected areas of land; these areas would one day become part of the Mersey Forest, England's largest community forest. Then, as now, the Trust was steered by a partnership that included local businesses, authorities, community representatives and volunteers. Such partnerships are branded as standard sustainability kit nowadays: in the early eighties they were cutting edge and revolutionary.

Alongside Groundwork came other mould-breaking programmes that would today seem commonplace. Urban renewal was pretty much born in St Helens with the 1988 Ravenhead Renaissance, a partnership of public and private players that co-ordinated the reclaiming of 250 acres of derelict land south of the town's centre. As major cities won big cash injections courtesy of Urban Development Corporations, St Helens' partnership drew in private sector investments to regenerate the town; in turn, these unlocked public monies. In total, the partnership found more than £70 million for new investments and regeneration projects. One good example is the Greenbank Project. Launched in 1990 by St Helens Council, Pilkington plc and Milverny Properties, the project reclaimed 50 acres of heavily contaminated land that sat unstable, unusable and unsafe.

The regeneration of St Helens continues to this day and the town's Groundwork Trust is thriving, as are the region's 14 other Trusts. In total across the region Groundwork Trusts are actively involved in 1,200 community regeneration projects each year and busy implementing the Government's Welfare to Work strategy, advising businesses through a new 'Enworks' network and managing Landfill Tax programmes.

The green shoots of environmental and social recovery are making an appearance throughout England's Northwest through partnerships such as these. Directed and driven by a new review of derelict land; urban regeneration companies; the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA); European assistance; and most importantly, by the imagination of people who know what the community wants.

The two community forests - Red Rose and Mersey - are an excellent example. Initiated in 1994, the Mersey Forest is creating the largest of England's twelve 'Community Forests', multi-functional forests created within and by local communities. The Mersey Forest covers a total of 110,000 hectares of land across Merseyside and North Cheshire and involves nine local authorities, the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Agency and a range of private, public and environmental organisations.

A similar scheme, the Red Rose Forest, covers 292 square miles of land across Greater Manchester bringing individuals, schools and communities together to reclaim local wasteland or support forest initiatives. Their work is sorely needed: at just six per cent tree cover, England's Northwest is the least wooded of all the UK regions.

Elsewhere across the region, more woodland is being promoted. A new 'Wastleland to Woodland' programme, this time in West Cumbria, has won the support of the NWDA in the form of a £1 million campaign to reclaim 15 derelict sites in rural and urban areas. New forests will be created for the public to enjoy, with the first areas in the programme being North Walney and Hawcoat quarry. There is the successful 'ELWOOD' partnership bringing new woodlands to Lancashire and, more recently, a Newlands initiative led by the Forestry Commission that will feed £10 million into land reclamation that has community woodland as the principal end product.

From new forests to new communities, there is now a good chance that for the region with the lowest tree cover and some stubborn, entrenched pockets of poverty, environmental improvement and community renewal are starting to be more than well-meaning phrases: partnerships are putting sustainable development into practice right across England's Northwest.

From a coast synonymous with trade, to a dense and sometime factory-lined network of canals and rivers, the waterways of England's Northwest tell the story of a troubled, industrial past. Fast-forward to the 21st century, and they are rapidly becoming a central part of the social, environmental and economic renewal of the region.

future flows

WORDS BY **IAN HERBERT**. IMAGES BY **LEN GRANT**.

"If with a stick you stir well
The poor old River Irwell,
Very sick of the amusement
You will very soon become:
For foetid bubbles rise and burst
But that really is not the worst,
For little birds can hop about,
Cry-footed in the scum."

These words rang out through the backstreets of Manchester at the turn of the 20th Century. They told the full, sorry story of water; the Northwest's vast natural resource, which was used and abused as the workhorse of the Industrial Revolution.

Back in 1901, when the popular street poem was probably first coined, the merchants of Liverpool and Manchester were falling over themselves to put the resource to work; commercially speaking, both cities walked on water. Manchester had thrown up its famous Ship Canal less than ten years earlier to bypass the ocean-going trade that had made Liverpool the finest port in Britain's Empire. The rivers Mersey, Medlock and Irk fed the cotton and silk mills and the canal network shipped the Duke of Bridgewater's coal for sale at Manchester's Castlefield. Water helped to make England's Northwest the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

There are plenty of documented descriptions of the environmental price that was paid in the process. An old Scouse joke once said that you wouldn't drown if you fell into the Mersey Estuary: you'd die of poisoning instead. As recently as 1972, Jeremy Bugler devoted a chapter in his book 'Polluting Britain' (Pelican) to "the country's most polluted estuary and river system." He called it "Mourn for the Mersey." The catalogue of filth he depicted didn't include the 221 million gallons of sewage and 193 million gallons of trade effluent that the Mersey and two of its tributaries brought down to the estuary every day.

All that was before the Mersey Basin Campaign (MBC). Launched 17 years ago, it remains at the vanguard of cleaning up the mess with a multi-billion pound, 25-year programme for 2,000 kilometres of rivers, canals and streams funded by Government, Europe, United Utilities, the Environment Agency, local authorities and industry. The wise old heads in urban regeneration, who have seen myriads of fleeting public/private sector partnerships stagnated by political agendas in the post-industrial era, reserve particular respect for the way MBC seems to have bonded its partners over time.

There was one clue to the riches that water might once again offer as the Campaign got down to business in the 1980s - the retail and residential development centred on the redbrick warehouses of Liverpool's Albert Dock, which was quietly on the way to becoming one of the most popular tourist attractions in Britain. Beyond that, no one had lost much sleep over water management since the demise of the old Lancashire Rivers Board in the 1950s - a body that was well meaning at best, managing neither to stop nor significantly control the development of artificial silk and viscose industries with their noxious effluents.

Within three years, though, MBC was effecting change, most notably at Castlefield in central Manchester where the network of rivers and canals became the focus for some bold proposals to regenerate 187 hectares of land and disused, derelict buildings into today's hotels, bars, office space and waterside residential accommodation. Then, in 1999, came what MBC chairman Joe Dwek - the formidably successful Northwest industrialist and ex-regional CBI chairman - describes as the "symbolic breakthrough".

At the World River Symposium in Brisbane, Australia, the MBC received the £45,000 prize for the best river clean-up campaign in the world. On riverbanks where people were once advised not to throw lighted cigarettes into the water for fear of igniting rising gases, anglers were scrambling to buy fishing rights; a kingfisher survey had been launched and seals and octopuses were swimming.

Dwek had taken over a partnership that was bursting to effect change through teamwork, but he injected a new, corporate rigour to the organisation. "A great deal of thinking had been done by the mid 1990s but it had gone stale," said Mr Dwek, who took on the job for three years but has just accepted an invitation to stay on for a fourth, taking him through to January 2004. "It needed some cost/benefit exercises and a look at value for money. The thing about ecology is it's fluid and flexible. It's not like an industrial product - you have to be adaptable. I'm not sure Mersey Basin had adapted to change."

Adaptation was needed: the changes going on around his MBC and around the region's waterways were seismic, not least in property development. By the 1990s, business people were noticing the appeal of Castlefield and the Albert Dock and developing a penchant for combining water with sophisticated city centre accommodation amid the architectural authenticity of brick warehouses. The trickle became a flood, and such is the demand for loft-living in today's Manchester that developers are actually building new warehouses in which to install flat-hunters. Urban Splash, the pioneering development firm founded by Tom Bloxham, discovered the Bridgewater Canal to be every bit as profitable as the Duke of Bridgewater had 225 years earlier, and Manchester's first £2 million apartment can now be found on its banks. Significantly, the first £1 million apartment at Liverpool's Beetham Plaza has views across the Mersey.

But neither quite compares with the development of the apparently unprepossessing waters of Salford Quays. In the 1980s they sat stagnant and devastated by the anoxic sediments, foul odours and mats of surface sediment that were the results of excessive gas production. Today, fewer than 20 years later, the Quays are an object lesson in the symbiosis of an improved environment and commercial investment.

The MBC's initial efforts centred on the litter and the smell. Then in 1999 the Healthy Waterways Trust, part of MBC, stocked the Quays with 12,000 coarse fish and introduced gabions filled with brushwood to help with spawning habitat; the Quays now has the fastest growing fish population in the UK.

The improvements have gradually unlocked colossal commercial potential. Business units that now employ 12,000 people and homes for 300 families were established in a development that was completed in April 2002 alongside the landmark Lowry Centre. Daniel Libeskind's Imperial War Museum North was opened in July 2002 and almost unthinkably, the Quay's once choked, murky waters were fine enough to take the Manchester Commonwealth Games swimmers in the same month, as part of the event's triathlon competition.

To preserve the quality of the environment five purpose-built, semi-submerged oxygenation units - thought to be the largest ever made - are now pumping 30 tonnes of oxygen a day into the Quays. The system is part of the Water Quarter project for the Quays - the biggest harbour improvement of its kind in the world and a source of great excitement to Joe Dwek.

"Of all we have achieved, this is the pinnacle for me," said Dwek. "The oxygenation is superb. It's right up there alongside a vivid canal boat journey to the Eastern Docks in the Estuary, which I will always remember. I saw hundreds of birds, including peregrine falcons, out in the [Mersey] estuary, and even a fox lying on his back in the sun."

Dwek is keen to outline some of the MBC's lesser-known accomplishments, too. At Wigan Flashes it helps the Lancashire Wildlife Trust to conserve a home for half of the UK's 13 resident pairs of bitterns: the habitats have been created where depressions caused by subsidence from the mining industry have formed a mosaic of wetlands. In Manchester's Northern Quarter the underground River Tib will soon form part of a new 'green lung' in the city centre. The Mersey Waterfront Regional Park - the regeneration of coastland sites around Merseyside - will follow soon. There are also plans for a new canal, the first of its kind to be built in 200 years, which will take narrow boats cruising past Liverpool's famous Pier Head along a new half-mile stretch of water that will capitalise on one of the finest waterfronts in Europe. More prosaic aspects of sustainable water management may not grab the headlines but they are no less important. For instance, a £500m improvement programme through United Utilities has meant the closure of 28 outlets that used to discharge Liverpool's raw sewage into the Mersey and the removal of the city's sewage to one of the world's biggest treatment plants, at Bootle.

WHERE PEOPLE WERE ONCE ADVISED NOT TO THROW LIGHTED CIGARETTES INTO THE WATER FOR FEAR OF IGNITING RISING GASES, ANGLERS WERE SCRAMBLING TO BUY FISHING RIGHTS

Another huge challenge facing United Utilities is preservation of water supplies: in the year 2000/01, 463 million litres of water per day was lost to leaks alone. Matching supply and demand is another tough water management issue, amid dramatic evidence of climate change. The summer conditions of 1995, in which Cumbria's Haweswater reservoir became 89% empty and there were water shortages, may become commonplace by 2050.

Water is a global issue and will be one of the focal points for the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in August 2002. Research by the California-based Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment and Security, among others, indicates that the amount of water available per person is falling, while demand is growing - fuelled by rising living standards and population growth. According to the United Nations, 1.1 billion people worldwide have no access to clean water supplies and 2.4 billion lack decent sanitation.

Closer to home, in the Northwest, come the challenges associated with dereliction. The region has the highest amount of derelict land of any English region (around 6%) and with dereliction can come contamination and polluted ground water. With no one to pick up the environmental and inevitable financial cost, local authorities face an expensive dilemma.

The environmental and commercial prize for success is writ large in Manchester's latest marketing campaign. "This is not Venice..." state the campaign's posters, beneath images of sparkling water. "...3 canals, 4 rivers, 5 miles of waterfront leisure - this is Manchester."

Environmentally, it is an uncomfortable comparison - Venice has no sewage works so the effluent from the millions of tourists that visit goes straight into the canals and the shallow lagoon, causing a thick soup of algae and the smell of rotting vegetation. But the Northwest has spent 15 years putting right those kinds of mistakes. Don't expect it to repeat them in a hurry.

Title page: Julia Stansfield and Carine Van Schie of the Manchester Triathlon Club take to the waters of Salford Quays
Right: Mark Champion of The Lancashire Wildlife Trust inspects the Bitterns habitat at Wigan flashes

priority: biodiversity

FOR AN INDUSTRIAL REGION, ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST STILL HAS A WEALTH OF NATURAL ASSETS TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE. OLD ENEMIES AND NEW DANGERS LOOM LARGE AS OUR REGION PUTS PARTNERSHIPS TOGETHER TO PROTECT OUR NATURAL HERITAGE.

WORDS BY **PENNY STREET**

The Northwest has a rich and varied landscape, with grasslands, heathlands, woodlands, uplands and coastal areas that all contribute to our region's unique character and nature. Within these diverse habitats are some of the rarest species in the UK, including 'UK priority species' such as the otter, brown hare, bittern, great crested newt, lady's slipper orchid and yellow marsh saxifrage. We also have endemic species such as the stonefly, dune helleborine and Lancaster whitebeam.

A host of programmes and projects exist to protect and enhance our biodiversity. Many of these are aimed at protecting habitats and ecosystems, and there are literally hundreds of designated conservation areas in place - including the world-famous Lake District national park, as well as National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Other initiatives are targeted at protecting particular species that are in danger of extinction.

In the UK government's 1994 Biodiversity Action Plan almost 60 activities for conservation work were identified, stretching over the next 20 years. Important principles for future biodiversity conservation in the UK, such as partnerships, information provision, target setting, and awareness raising were established, as was a key feature of the UK's approach: the development of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs).

While landscapes and wilderness offer us valuable philosophical or spiritual experiences - we certainly all feel the need to 'get away from it all' at some time - there are practical, everyday reasons to protect our biodiversity. It provides many of the essentials of life: plants give us the clean air and food we need to survive, and the materials to make clothing, furniture and medicines. We also know that conservation of biodiversity has a key role to play in maintaining the rich and diverse character of the Northwest's countryside - and that is crucial for the Northwest's economy. Attractive and healthy landscapes generate tourism and create demand for environmental products. A recent study showed that over 100,000 jobs in the Northwest are related to the environment, accounting for around 2.1 per cent (almost £3 billion) of the region's GDP.

Despite these many and obvious benefits, we are losing species and habitats at a frightening rate. In the UK alone, over 100 species have been lost over the past 100 years, with many more in danger. In less than a lifetime, we have seen the loss of 98 per cent of wildflower meadows, 448,000 kilometres of hedgerows, over two million skylarks and 95 per cent of high brown fritillary butterflies. In Lancashire alone, species such as the corncrake, marsh St John's Wort and large copper butterfly have disappeared over the last 100 years. True, extinction has been a fact of life since life first began, but nearly all past extinctions occurred by natural processes - the major cause of extinction today is human activity, much of which is leading to the loss of species at an ever-faster rate.

An underlying cause of biodiversity loss is the growth of human population and its requirements for food, wood and other resources. But many other human activities are contributing to the problem, too. Changes in land use through increased development, housebuilding and construction of roads, all reduce the area available for natural vegetation and associated wildlife. Conversion of agricultural land from mixed uses to monocultures, removal of hedgerows, and fragmentation of habitats all leave isolated and vulnerable pockets of biodiversity.

And new threats are emerging all the time. Climate change - occurring at a faster rate than ever, as a direct result of human activities - could have a drastic effect on biodiversity. Global warming causes species to shift both northwards and to higher elevations in the northern hemisphere. If there is no suitable habitat to move to, then species will suffer. Many types of wildlife depend on natural signals such as temperature, day length or rainfall to time their life cycles. If these signals change as a result of climate change, then species may become out of step with the plant or animal species on which they depend for food or shelter.

All this leads to the need for more and better protection for biodiversity at local, regional, national and global levels. The Northwest has made a good start. In 1999, a biodiversity audit was carried out of the whole region. This resulted in the identification of 82 habitats (of which 37 were designated as UK Key Habitats), and the profiling of 97 species of conservation importance. The audit has been used as the foundation for the development and implementation of biodiversity action plans across the region - LBAPs have already been developed for Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cumbria, the Isle of Man and North Merseyside.

A range of players are working to meet the many challenges facing the region in terms of preserving and enhancing its biological heritage for future generations. Partnerships between government bodies, voluntary organisations and the private sector are working to find new ways of bringing biodiversity back into our towns and cities, reclaiming derelict and abandoned areas, and enhancing those areas already recognised for their landscape and wildlife value.

biodiversity, sustainable development and people

ENGLISH NATURE

It is a new beginning for England's Northwest: across our region we are restoring the environmental deficit we inherited from the industrial revolution and from intensive farming. We are also creating a wildlife rich environment, one in which people can work, rest and play.

We have major biodiversity assets in the region, including a spectacularly rich coast, 80 per cent of which is of international importance for its habitats and associated birdlife. We also have the unique uplands of the Lake District, the Forest of Bowland and the South and NorthPennines. We have 435 sites of Special Scientific Interest and 31 National Nature Reserves.

But challenges still confront us. The majority of our lowlands only have small, fragmented habitats, a result of intensive agricultural management and the development of industry, housing and infrastructure. English Nature's aim is to ensure that future generations can enjoy and benefit from a wealth of wildlife as a major part of their quality of life. As the government agency that champions wildlife and geology, it is actively working with a wide range of partners including farmers and other land managers, local authorities, business and the voluntary sector to place biodiversity and nature conservation at the heart of a future that benefits all.

Our timing could not be better. Government commitments to sustainability and biodiversity have coincided with regional and local action. Two early challenges are to get major biodiversity assets restored to good condition and to re-establish the framework of wildlife habitats across the countryside to enhance the long term viability of our wildlife, particularly in relation to climate change. We also need to provide people with more opportunities to appreciate and enjoy wildlife on their doorstep.
English Nature works within the Northwest Biodiversity Forum bringing together the public, private and voluntary sector to facilitate the delivery of the government's biodiversity targets as an integral components of sustainable development. We also work with the National Centre for Business and Sustainability and Sustainability Northwest, on business and biodiversity delivery.

Progress has also been made in building biodiversity and nature conservation targets into the Regional Planning Guidance and into the region's Action for Sustainability framework. Locally, Biodiversity Action Plans set out the action for local biodiversity delivery, within a partnership approach. Community Strategies will help ensure direct involvement of people and local communities in this process.

In providing this nature conservation service, English Nature employs 72 staff and puts an extra £4.5 million into the regional economy through direct investment in the natural heritage. This is a part of the wider, growing environmental economy that contributes a £2 billion turnover and over 100,000 jobs within the region.

From new beginnings to new opportunities: ahead of us, we see a chance to combine biodiversity with more sustainable rural futures in which farmers produce quality products that include wildlife-rich landscape, protecting the best and enhancing the rest. We can also bring more wildlife back into our towns and cities, improving the quality of life, providing safer walkways and green spaces to restore the human spirit in a world that is more hi tech, hectic and competitive.

In the Forest of Bowland, local people are directly involved in environmentally friendly farming, delivering biodiversity as well as conserving the landscape and producing quality foods. This also helps to sustain the rural population. Photo: Jon Hickling.

Most of the north west coast is internationally important for its waders, wildfowl and maritime habitats. The Ribble Estuary, one of the largest National Nature Reserves in England. Photo: Dick Lambert.

Landscape scale solutions creating habitat networks and corridors increase the viability of wildlife and its ability to respond to the inevitable climate change. As sea levels rise, coastal management provides the opportunity to create new habitats.

Enhancing the wildlife character of wild areas, especially in the uplands, restoring lost species and habitats and increasing their value for public enjoyment will simultaneously increase the sustainability of rural communities.

These are challenges, chances and opportunities that mark our new beginning.

www.english-nature.org.uk

Sustainable Development and our Historic Environment

The north west region's history is reflected in the extraordinary richness and variety of its archaeological remains and its buildings. These range from prehistoric remains such as Castlerigg stone circle in the Lake District and Roman remains such as at Hadrian's Wall, though to the innovative mills and warehouses in Manchester and the internationally important seaport at Liverpool.

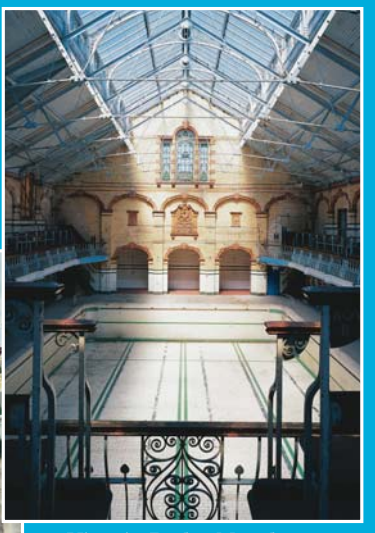
The remains of our past are important not only for education and tourism but are becoming increasingly valued for the contribution they make to local distinctiveness and the sense of place they give our towns and our countryside. They also represent significant investment in terms of the energy and the materials used for their construction. Many are robustly constructed and if properly cared for can have extremely long lives.

Of course change is both inevitable and necessary, but it is important to ensure that the best of the past plays an central role in our future. English Heritage works with a range of partners and local communities to better understand what is important and valued both locally and nationally, and gives a wide range of advice to ensure that important buildings and remains are not inadvertently lost. Manchester, for example, has a great sporting tradition and we have recently undertaken a study of its historic sports grounds and facilities a part of a wider national study.

If you would like to find out more about this project or our other work, please contact our Customer Services Department on 0870 333 1181 or alternatively visit our website at www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Period games and pastimes

Bellevue Greyhound Stadium, Manchester



Victoria Baths, Manchester

Medieval Jousting

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- half price admission to historic attractions in Wales and Scotland
- most importantly, you will be making a personal contribution to help conserve England's heritage

Please call our Membership Department on **0870 333 1181** for further details on joining, or visit our website at **www.english-heritage.org.uk** Alternatively you can join at any of our staffed properties.

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