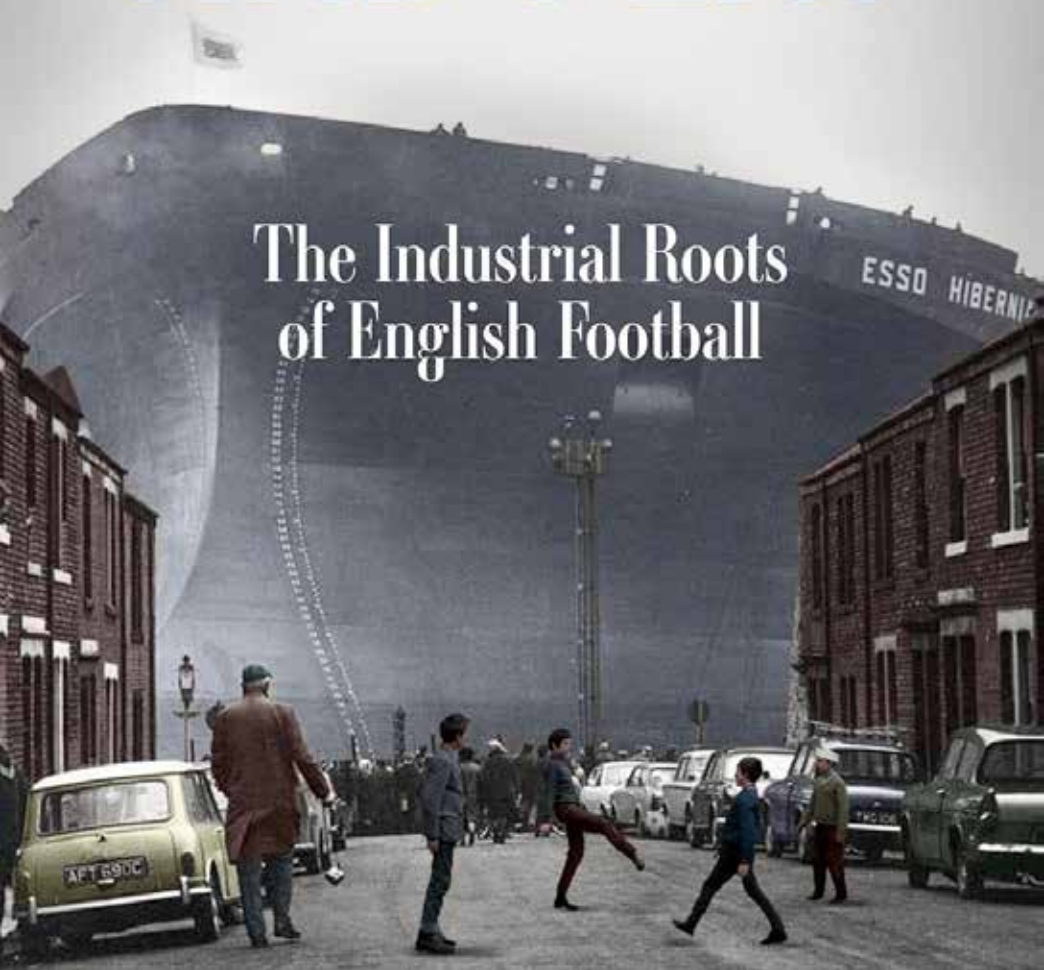


David Proudlove

WORK AND PLAY

The Industrial Roots
of English Football



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Part One:
The Big Boys

Before the Red Devils

'Manchester is my heaven'

Sir Matt Busby

MOST PEOPLE probably know the story of the birth of Manchester United and the club's origins in east Manchester, or Newton Heath to be precise, just under three miles from the city centre.

Pre-Industrial Revolution, the area was dominated by low-grade agriculture, but eventually was swallowed up by engineering, textiles, and coal mining. Newton Heath's most famous companies were the aircraft manufacturer Avro – before their relocation to Chadderton and Woodford – and Heenan and Froude, who produced the structural steelwork for Blackpool Tower. The biggest name to originate from Newton Heath, though, is Manchester United Football Club.

The Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway company was one of the largest in England, having been established in 1847 through the merger of several other railway companies. The company ran the most heavily trafficked railway in the country, and operated until 1922 when it was merged with London and North Western Railway to create London, Midland and Scottish Railway. One of the company's greatest legacies can be found in Manchester's Victoria station where a spectacular glazed tile map of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's network forms part of the station's war memorial. It is one of Manchester's most impressive and

spectacular sights, and if it was ever proposed to demolish this, I'd be sat there in front of the bulldozers.

In 1877, a Liverpudlian gentleman – a fact that must stick in the craw of most Mancunians of the red variety – named Frederick Attock was appointed the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's carriage and wagon superintendent to be based at their new site in Newton Heath. Attock became widely admired throughout the company and in particular at Newton Heath, and when he retired due to ill health in 1895, he was granted a £500 gratuity, while staff within his department raised a further £400 alongside a tribute that stated, 'They most sincerely place on record their high appreciation of your urbanity and kindness in all matters affecting their welfare.'

But Attock's biggest and most noteworthy achievement was probably the formation of Newton Heath L&YR Football Club. Alongside other members, Attock led the club's creation in 1878 just 12 months after arriving at the company, and was named its first president. Attock's position within the railway company had led him to establish some very high-profile connections and he exploited these to benefit his fledgling football club. His relationship with both Arthur Balfour MP – who was prime minister from 1902 until 1905 – and the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, Charles Prestwich Scott, led to them both having spells as the football club's vice-president.

During the club's early years, the backing and support of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway proved effective, firstly in terms of having a base – the works dining room was used for club business – and securing a place to play their football, and secondly in terms of attracting players: as well as picking up men from the Newton Heath works, the club was able to attract players from farther afield – most notably Wales – in the hope of not just playing football, but of securing work with the railway company.

The club was first based on North Road, directly opposite the Newton Heath works, adopting the company's green and gold colours for the club's first shirts. North Road provided a football ground and cricket ground, laid out on land owned by the Diocese of Manchester, which had an initial capacity of 12,000, and with a pitch that was described as a 'muddy, heavy swamp in the rainy months'. Due to its location alongside the Lancashire and Yorkshire railway line, the ground was often covered in clouds of steam from passing trains, which could prove to be an amusing distraction, and in addition, the ground had no changing rooms and so teams had to prepare in the Three Crowns, a public house a short distance away on Oldham Road.

Newton Heath L&YR's first games at North Road took place during 1880 when they played a series of friendlies against other railway companies, though the first recorded match came in 1883 when they hosted Blackburn Olympic reserves in the Lancashire Cup first round, a fixture that Newton Heath L&YR won 7-2.

In 1885, football became a professional sport – Newton Heath L&YR signed their first professional players during the summer of 1886 – and many other clubs secured wealthier backers. As a result of their efforts to remain competitive, the club overstretched themselves financially due to a growing wage bill, and so they dramatically raised admission prices in order to increase revenue which didn't have the desired effect.

As plans for the Football League were developed during 1887, Newton Heath began to look at expanding North Road in a bid to secure election. They failed and instead became a founder member of the Combination in 1888, and then the Football Alliance, which merged with the Football League ahead of the 1892/93 season.

In 1891, they took the decision to utilise their financial reserves to build two stands, a decision that caused a rift with the railway company, which refused to provide any

monetary support towards the project. This tension between the football club and the railway company contributed to the replacement of Frederick Attock as club president, and the following year, the club became a limited company and ended its relationship with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway company completely, becoming simply Newton Heath Football Club. This rupture led to the railway company refusing to pay the lease on the ground, while the Diocese of Manchester – unhappy with the club charging admission fees – took the decision to increase the rent. Tensions between the club and the Church increased, and in May 1892, the diocese attempted to evict Newton Heath from North Road.

Following the Football Alliance's coming together with the Football League, Newton Heath joined the First Division for the start of the 1892/93 season. At the end of their first season as a Football League club, the Diocese of Manchester sought to evict them from North Road once again. After the first eviction attempt, club officials had been searching for a potential new home and they found one on Bank Street three miles away in Clayton, and so they began to develop plans to move.

The ground off Bank Street was owned by the Bradford and Clayton Athletic Company and was known as the Bradford and Clayton Athletic Ground. The ground was shoehorned in between a railway line and a chemical works, and was a short walk from the Ashton Canal, in an area described by the *Lancashire Evening Post* as 'a dismal, evil-smelling neighbourhood, which no one cared to visit'. However, that didn't dissuade the club, and it was let to Newton Heath for eight months a year and occasional summer evenings for pre-season training, then they left North Road and began the 1893/94 season in their new home.

In readiness for the new campaign, the club built two new stands – one behind the goal at the Bradford End, and

one that ran the length of the pitch – while the Clayton End was built up into a terrace with a capacity of ‘thousands’. The new season began well for Newton Heath as they beat Burnley in the opener at Bank Street, 3-2 in front of a crowd of 10,000 thanks to a hat-trick from Alf Farman. That was about as good as it got and they finished the season in bottom place, being relegated to the Second Division.

The playing surface at Bank Street was never the best, and indeed, developed a bit of a reputation and not in a positive way. During the 1894/95 season ahead of a fixture with Walsall Town Swifts, their opponents branded the pitch a ‘toxic waste dump’ and refused to take to the field. The match officials eventually persuaded them to play the game, and the final score was equally toxic for them: Newton Heath walloped them 14-0, which some argue is the biggest win in Manchester United’s history. The Swifts remained unhappy, though, and lodged an official complaint with the referee which was referred to the Football League. The league were sympathetic towards Walsall’s gripes and ordered the game to be replayed. The Swifts did better the second time round: they only lost 9-0.

Although the retention of the ground’s running track – retained at the request of the athletic club – proved a little restrictive, Newton Heath began exploring options to expand Bank Street, and in 1895 acquired a 2,000-capacity stand from Broughton Rangers Rugby League Club which was erected in time for a local derby with Manchester City.

As the 19th century drew to a close, Newton Heath continued to look at expansion, but financial pressures associated with players’ wages meant that their plans remained on the drawing board, though they managed to persuade the *Manchester Evening News* to open an office at Bank Street, which helped with income generation. However, matters came to a head in January 1902 when a

winding-up order was issued against the club. At the time, Newton Heath had debts of more than £2,500.

With the future looking bleak and Bank Street on the brink of repossession, wealthy local brewer John Henry Davies formed a small consortium – which included then club captain Harry Stafford – which provided £2,000 to save and stabilise the club. At the same time, they changed the club colours to red and gave it a new name: Manchester United Football Club.

Manchester United then began to invest heavily in Bank Street – Davies himself funded the building of a new 1,000-seat stand – and by 1906, the ground had a capacity of 50,000. And two years later they secured their first major honour, winning the First Division title. Twelve months on they lifted the FA Cup, and the club determined that Bank Street could no longer be sufficiently developed in line with their ambitions, so took the decision to move to a new site outside the city of Manchester: Old Trafford, in neighbouring Stretford.

Bank Street was sold to the Manchester Corporation for £5,500 on a sale and lease back arrangement which allowed United to play their football there while Old Trafford was being developed. The club's final game at Bank Street saw them host Tottenham Hotspur on 10 January 1910 in front of a crowd of just 5,000. United won 5-0. By this time, Bank Street was deteriorating and shortly after the club departed, the Bank Street Stand was destroyed in a storm. Despite the damage, United's reserves continued to use the ground for another two years before the freehold was finally handed over to the Corporation.

Manchester United's time in the east of the city was over.

* * *

Today, east Manchester is a similar but different place. As industry went into decline across the north, east Manchester

was hit especially hard, becoming a case study in dereliction and poverty during the Thatcher and Major years. But by the late 1990s, Manchester City Council was mobilised and developing plans to enable serious change. Those plans ended up involving both North Road and Bank Street, with Bank Street helping to bring sport back to the area.

Following their election in 1997, the Labour government pledged to address economic under-performance and inequalities across the regions and created the Regional Development Agencies, which worked in partnership with local authorities, the private sector and other organisations and gave them annual budgets running into hundreds of millions of pounds; the north-west's Regional Development Agency had the highly original name of the North West Development Agency (NWDA).

The NWDA quickly set about supporting the city council in its efforts to regenerate east Manchester, helping it develop plans to bring first the Olympic Games to the area – a bid that ultimately failed – and then the 2002 Commonwealth Games, which was secured.

In order to enable the required change, the agency issued a series of Compulsory Purchase Orders across east Manchester, one of which covered a large area just off Oldham Road, and included North Road.

Following the departure of Newton Heath in 1893, the two stands at North Road were dismantled and sold for £100, and the site and its surroundings became playing fields for the local populace until Moston Brook High School was eventually built. The school was closed by the city council in 2000, and in 2002, almost 90 acres of land – including the school – was assembled by the NWDA and the council in order to create what was badged the North Manchester Business Park.

The project hasn't panned out as was originally envisaged, and some 20 years later, there are still numerous

vacant plots, though the business park is home to Greater Manchester Police, while the actual site where Newton Heath played their football is home to three office blocks, one of which houses the scandal-ridden software company Fujitsu Services. The business park is served by the Metro's pink line. And just as the plans for the North Manchester Business Park were being formulated, Manchester hosted the Commonwealth Games, with one of the Games' principal venues being the Manchester Velodrome, now part of the National Cycling Centre.

The velodrome – an Olympic-standard facility – was opened in 1994, and was developed by a joint venture between Manchester City Council, Sport England, and British Cycling, and cost around £10m to build. The facility has been well-used by the public over the years, and has been central to Britain's rise to the top of the sport in recent times. In 2011, the National Indoor BMX Arena was built alongside it. The whole complex was developed on Bank Street alongside the old red brick terraces that characterise the neighbourhood, and specifically the former home of Manchester United. Today, it is hard to imagine that a football ground with a capacity of 50,000 once stood there.

Post-Games, Manchester City – who were born in nearby Gorton in 1880 – arrived in the area having agreed to leave their home in Moss Side – Maine Road – to take on the City of Manchester Stadium. The move provided the foundations from which the modern version of the club developed, eventually attracting interest from the United Arab Emirates in the form of the Abu Dhabi United Group who have gone on to transform the club and the area – physically at least – through the development of the Etihad Campus.

The Etihad Campus has attracted hundreds of millions of pounds of investment, from both the taxpayer and the

private sector, and it is a whole new part of town, albeit a fairly exclusive one. But it's pretty impressive too taken at face value, and when you consider the state that this part of east Manchester was in back in the early 1990s, change was very much necessary.

And there was to be another footballing arrival in east Manchester in 2015, when FC United of Manchester brought their brand of punk football to Moston to rub shoulders with their more illustrious neighbours.

FC United was formed in 2005 by Manchester United supporters disillusioned by the direction that the club had taken since the 1990s, and has a completely different philosophy. The catalyst for the club's formation was the takeover at Old Trafford by Malcolm Glazer, but the disillusionment had been lingering for some time. After a successful launch as a Community Benefit Society, the club began its life in the North West Counties Football League, sharing Gigg Lane with Bury. But they were always targeting a move to east Manchester, where Manchester United was born all those years ago, and in 2010, they announced that they had identified a site for the club's first permanent home: the Manchester City Council-owned Ten Acres Lane sports ground in Newton Heath, alongside the old Jacksons Brickworks.

However, within 12 months of the announcement, the city council withdrew its support for the proposals. But a new site was quickly secured a couple of miles away in Moston, and by 2015, FC United had built the 4,400-capacity Broadhurst Park – including the erection of Northwich Victoria's old Dane Bank Terrace – at a cost of £6.5m. With around 5,000 members, FC United are the second-biggest supporter-owned club in the country.

Manchester United may have left east Manchester more than a century ago, but thanks to Manchester City and FC United, football is thriving there once again, though the two

models of ownership and the philosophies that underpin the clubs are a world apart.

* * *

The Manchester United that we know today is a completely different beast to the one that left east Manchester for Stretford back in 1910. Many legendary teams were built that brought armfuls of silverware back to Old Trafford, with names such as Sir Matt Busby, Sir Bobby Charlton, George Best, Bryan Robson, Sir Alex Ferguson, Eric Cantona, and Wayne Rooney becoming synonymous with both the club and the English game. And Old Trafford – originally built by the passion of ordinary people – eventually developed into English football’s largest club stadium with a capacity of 74,140. But although it’s now very much a corporate amphitheatre, it is still very much rooted in an industrial community on the fringes of Trafford Park – the world’s first purpose-built industrial estate – bounded by the red-brick terraces of the outskirts of Stretford, and wedged in between a heavily trafficked railway line that heads westwards towards Cheshire and Liverpool, and the historic Bridgewater Canal.

When they left for Old Trafford they effectively severed their connections – however tenuous they’d become – with their original industrial roots. Now, they are a privately owned corporate behemoth, bought by American elites the Glazers using a debt-fuelled model; the ‘Trafford Red Sox’ as a Manchester City-supporting former colleague likes to call them, which has its own irony of course. And while the Glazers may have done very well from it all, the club itself has had an air of decline about it since the retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson back in 2013. Although Old Trafford is still a place where you can ‘smell the history’ in the words of José Mourinho, there has been no serious investment in Sir Bobby Charlton’s Theatre of Dreams for around 20 years. And over the same period, many of the club’s rivals

have overtaken them in terms of infrastructure, corporate facilities, and more recently on the pitch, and as a result, the disenchantment with the Glazer regime has continued to grow.

The Glazers were seemingly alert to this. Their presence at Old Trafford is limited at best, but they went on to engage footballing super-architects Populous to produce a masterplan to guide the redevelopment of the stadium. However, progress has stalled, though Populous's chief executive Chris Lee is pushing for a wholesale redevelopment, while former United full-back, now pundit, property developer and joint owner of Salford City, Gary 'Red Nev' Neville has said, 'I do think that Manchester United should always be at the forefront of stadiums, have the best facilities, and they have fallen behind.' And at the same time, there has long been speculation that the Glazers are willing to sell the club, with a figure of £5bn to £6bn mooted as a potential sale price, which led to billionaire Ineos founder and chief executive Sir Jim Ratcliffe recently acquiring a 27.7 per cent stake in the club with a view to taking control of 'footballing matters'.

These 'footballing matters' include what to do about Old Trafford. Ratcliffe is leaning towards the potential replacement of Old Trafford with what he has described as a 'stadium for the north' on land alongside the existing ground, a job which he describes as a 'no-brainer'. Indeed, since securing his stake in Manchester United, Ratcliffe has wasted little time and has quickly gotten his teeth into this, proclaiming the project to be about more than just Manchester United, leaning on Greater Manchester's metro mayor Andy Burnham to get involved and insisting that the goal should be a stadium holding 100,000 people that is able to host FA Cup finals and England internationals.

And in March 2024, the Old Trafford Regeneration Task Force was launched by Ratcliffe, chaired by Lord Coe, while other high-profile members include Burnham, Trafford

Metropolitan Borough Council chief executive Sara Todd – a Manchester City supporter – and the aforementioned former Red Devils defender Gary Neville. Ratcliffe has assembled a forceful, vocal and influential team, and has more recently taken up arms against proposals for an independent football regulator which the new Labour government looks intent on introducing.

Neville has previously been quite vocal about Old Trafford's future prospects, and at the same time, he also owns Hotel Football alongside the ground, meaning that he has an obvious vested interest in the success of the area's regeneration. But it is Andy Burnham who is at the forefront of talking up the project, claiming that the redevelopment of Old Trafford and the wider area will be the 'biggest regeneration scheme in the country', and that it will 'set this city up to be the capital of football around the world in the 21st century'.

It is basically the so-called Manchester Model applied to the beautiful game, a blurring of the lines between football, property development and politics, perhaps conveniently and deliberately so. It is expected that an announcement on the direction of the project will be made towards the end of 2024, and no doubt Burnham will work with Sara Todd to establish one of his Mayoral Development Zones which will provide the basis to pour significant sums of public money into the scheme.

Some may feel that Ratcliffe has played things smartly to date, pulling Burnham into the equation as the political figurehead that he needs to champion his cause. However, Burnham may well have misread the room on this one. Manchester United is one of the biggest clubs in the world, and Ratcliffe is the richest man in the country. Although Burnham is clearly doing his job, how will he square throwing his weight behind the Old Trafford project in that particular context with his commitment to regenerating areas

such as Rochdale, whose own local club has lost its place in the Football League in recent years and is experiencing existential challenges, while his new acquaintance Mr Ratcliffe is telling us all that the Premier League's Big Six should have greater rights? The mayor has big questions to answer.

These days, Manchester United is less a football club and more a football mega-brand, the plaything of super-rich elites who probably don't even know where Newton Heath is, and perhaps care even less. And though the red lines on a map don't exist in the real world, they are no longer a part of the city of Manchester, meaning that Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council can boast that the biggest football club in the world is theirs – and they often do – and Sir Jim Ratcliffe will no doubt milk that for all it is worth. From the outside looking in, the Ratcliffe era looks as unappealing as the Glazer years, though Manchester United supporters may well disagree.

When Frederick Attock started his works team back in 1878, I think it's safe to assume that he would not have envisaged what it would eventually become, and would probably be disturbed in many ways by its evolution.