

Northern renaissance

Former docklands have been transformed into an eye-catching mix of TV studios, galleries, restaurants, theatres, flats, shops and a landmark museum. **Norman Wright** tours Salford Quays



The Imperial War Museum North from the water with The Lowry on the left

FIRST THING on a sleepy Sunday morning and there was already someone standing under a giant *Coronation Street* sign, pointing up at it for a photograph. Behind the wall you could just see the tops of those familiar grimy terraced roofs... although there was no sign of the cat.

This is the new set of the national institution soap opera at ITV's base in MediaCityUK at Salford Quays, Greater Manchester's showcase waterfront. A closer look at the tops of the buildings and you can see they are propped-up façades.

It's a great spot for a picture, though, and there's another one across the water on the BBC side of the Manchester Ship Canal – the *Blue Peter* studios.

Further into the heart of MediaCityUK is the huge piazza – a public space twice as big as Trafalgar Square.

Day to day, the piazza is somewhere for staff from the media and digital industry offices to grab a breath of fresh air and for visitors to Salford Quays to wander, perhaps in the hope of spotting a TV star or two.

The previous evening it was turned into a very effective outdoor performance area for HONOUR, a new artistic commission to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War.

The 45-minute, immersive, multi-sensory event was an exciting collaboration between artists from the UK and Europe, bringing memories of war to the modern backdrop of MediaCityUK and The Quays. Inspired by the words of Great War poets and the stories of



Main picture: The *Coronation Street* set
Below left, the *Blue Peter* studio
Belowcentre: The HONOUR show about to start
Below right: The Manchester Cruises boat heads past the IWM North and up the River Irwell

ordinary men and women, HONOUR reached its emotional peak as hundreds of voices drawn from local choirs rose up in song.

Earlier, giant images were projected on to the buildings, dancers interpreted the agony of battle, and fireworks reflected in thousands of windows sent explosive echoes down the steel and glass canyons of the city.

There will surely be many more evenings in this spectacular setting.

Although the Media City is basically a series of office blocks, albeit designed to give a modern and dramatic skyline, it does add quite a new dimension to the established phases of The Quays. It's an interesting urban stroll, easy because it's flat. Then you can take the bridge over the canal to the *Coronation Street* sign.

There's also a forest of giant satellite dishes beyond the ITV building alongside the canal – like a field of alien mushrooms that could be straight out of *Doctor Who*.

From there you can walk along to the Imperial War Museum North and then back over the Lift Bridge to the Lowry



Theatre and Gallery and the Lowry Outlet shopping centre.

The theatre and particularly the museum have striking modern architecture that fits well into the former industrial setting. The once-busy docks are now stretches of leisure water that reflect the building designs and give a spacious backdrop to the flats and apartments clustering around them.

Manchester Cruises give you a different perspective to see the whole of the Quays from the water as you travel the Manchester Ship Canal, tracing the history of one of the most important canals in the world. The 45-minute sightseeing cruise sails around Salford Quays, part of the canal and the River Irwell at weekends and during school holidays. You travel under the the Salford Quays Lift Bridge, a prominent backdrop



to shows such as *BBC North West Tonight*. This working bridge was designed by Carlos Fernandez Casado and gives access to and from the River Irwell and Ship Canal. Cruise times are Monday to

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Main picture: Outlet shopping at Salford Quays
 Below left: The Copthorne Hotel
 Right: The Imperial War Museum North and its viewing tower
 Below right: The newly refurbished Emirates Old Trafford cricket ground



“The jagged shape of the IWM North makes it one of the most iconic buildings on The Quays skyline. Clad in aluminium, the landmark building is a visionary symbol of the effects of war”



Sunday hourly between 11am and 2pm, Saturday hourly between 11am and 3pm. Tickets £10.50, children £6, families £25. You can find out more information at: (www.manchestercruises.com).

For a longer time on the water, you can take a relaxing ride along the Ship Canal with Mersey Ferries. Ship Canal Cruise is a full-day excursion between Salford Quays and Liverpool. Sailings are on selected dates between April and October. Information from: (www.merseyferries.co.uk).

Unsurprisingly, with the centenary this year and the Imperial War Museum

North one of its mainstays, the First World War is given its due showing.

As well as the HONOUR event on the weekend we visited the magnificent musical War Horse was playing at the Lowry Theatre as part of its nationwide tour. The production is wonderful and the spacious stage and facilities of the Lowry mean that shows can give the full West End effect.

The Lowry Theatre houses two main theatres (Quays and Lyric) and a studio showcasing a world-class programme of musicals, comedy, drama, dance and music. Website: (www.thelowry.com).

The Lowry, jutting into the canal with water on three sides, also houses two art galleries showcasing the work of contemporary and new artists. It also

boasts the largest collection of L S Lowry works. Designed by the renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, the jagged shape of the IWM North makes it one of the most iconic buildings on The Quays skyline.

Clad in aluminium, the landmark building is a visionary symbol of the effects of war.

The award-winning museum houses two large exhibition spaces that tell the stories of people affected by war.

Families can delve deeper into some of the subjects explored in the gallery at the hands-on Action Stations and be submerged in the sights and sounds of conflict in the Big Picture Show.

Climb the 180 steps to the top of the AirShard to take in the views across The Quays (better still, take the lift). Website: (www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-north).

Another of the attractions that brings more than seven million visitors to The Quays every year is the Lowry Outlet, boasting more than 80 shops, including designer names, offering up to 70 per cent reductions from the High Street. Website: (www.lowryoutlet.co.uk). There's also a seven-screen cinema and restaurants.

One of the world's most famous football stadiums, Old Trafford – home to Manchester United – rises majestically from across the Irwell.

Tickets for matches are hard to come by but you can visit the award-winning Museum and Tour. Website: (www.manutd.com/museum). Tickets for



a Lancashire game at the newly named Emirates Old Trafford cricket ground are not a problem unless it's a big one-day or T20 game. International games are also tougher to come by. Ticket booking line, tel: 08 444 999 666, website: (www.lccc.co.uk).

The whole of The Quays is a pleasant flat walk but you don't have to travel that way. The Metrolink tram serves The Quays really well on the line from Piccadilly Station in the centre of Manchester to Eccles.

A weekend travelcard is just £5.80 for all

journeys after 6pm on Friday until the last tram on Sunday.

We stayed at the Copthorne Hotel and with a station just outside and across the road it was easy to get up to The Lowry for our theatre time. We also travelled in and back to the centre of Manchester using the tickets – a real bargain and an excellent, frequent service.

Speaking of Eccles, try the Eccles cakes at the Imperial War Museum's café. They are the real thing – and so is Salford Quays... a great-value venue for a day out or mini-break.





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Passport to Salford Quays

Getting there

- By car: The Quays is ten minutes' drive from Manchester city centre, 20 minutes from Manchester Airport, and a quarter of a mile from the motorway network. From the M60, take junction 12 for the M602 and follow signs for The Quays
- By Metrolink tram: The Eccles line serves the area, stopping at Salford Quays, MediaCityUK, Harbour City and Broadway. Website: (www.metrolink.co.uk)
- By bus: Bus services provide links to The Quays, either running near The Quays itself or Trafford Park, within easy reach via the new MediaCityUK footbridge. Website: (www.tfgm.com/buses).

Where to stay

- The Copthorne Hotel is a four-star waterfront hotel with 166 bedrooms. Website: (www.millenniumhotels.co.uk/cophornemanchester)
- The Old Trafford Lodge is a three-star hotel at Emirates Old Trafford Cricket Ground and has 68 bedrooms, 36 of which boast balconies overlooking the famous cricket pitch, a perfect spot to take in the match. Website: (www.lccc.co.uk/otl.php).

Where to eat

- The Lowry Restaurant: 200-seater dining with waterfront views

- The Chop House at The Copthorne Hotel: an extensive à la carte menu with lovely quayside views

- A 400-seater food court at The Lowry Outlet along with five plaza restaurants
- The newly refurbished Watershard Café and Kitchen at IWM North offers views across The Quays, a wide selection of hot and cold meals, family activities and special 'ration pack' meals for children.

Find out more

- For more information, see the website: (www.thequays.org.uk), Facebook: (www.facebook.com/VisitTheQuays), Twitter: (@quays_partnership).