

A close-up photograph of a terracotta sculpture of a young man with curly hair, looking upwards. The sculpture is set against a background of ornate, colorful decorations, including a large, golden, textured object on the left and various floral and geometric patterns in the background. The text "British Art Studies" is overlaid in white, serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the vertical center. Below it, the text "April 2017" is also overlaid in white, serif font, centered horizontally and slightly below the vertical center.

British Art Studies

April 2017

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Cover image: Francis Alexander Skidmore and Sir George Gilbert Scott, Hereford Screen (detail), 1862, painted wrought and cast iron, brass, copper, timber, mosaics, and hardstones. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Given by Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry (M.251:1 to 316-1984).. Digital image courtesy of Justin Underhill

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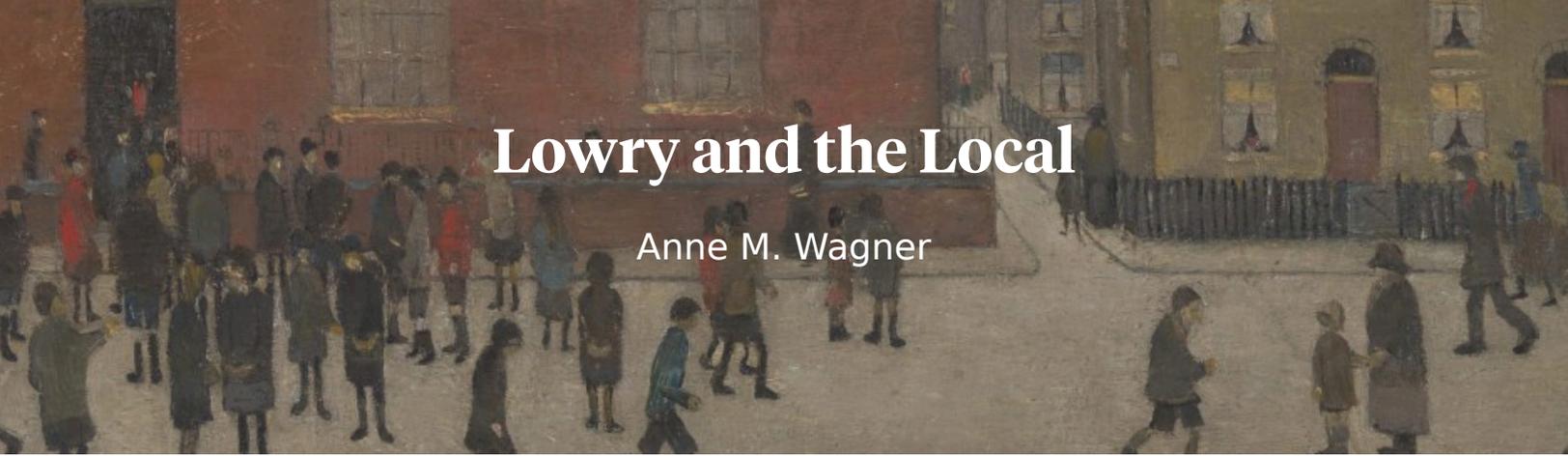


PAUL MELLON
CENTRE

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Lowry and the Local, Anne M. Wagner



Lowry and the Local

Anne M. Wagner

Abstract

This essay concerns a group of drawings made and exhibited in 1930 by L. S. Lowry in Ancoats, then a notorious (and pictorially unpromising) Manchester slum. Though many are now lost, we know enough about those that survive to say something about the representational project they exemplify. What does it mean to draw a slum? Lowry, one of the few artists to take up this question, adopted a notably uninflected manner, descriptive, but not dramatic. His images depict, but do not preach, adopting a reserve that spoke to and of their local audience, the founders and patrons of the Manchester University Settlement. Hitherto unpublished documents establish this context, when studied alongside a wide range of other materials. These include contemporary maps and photographs, social and urban histories, and theories of drawing and knowledge.

Authors

Art Historian

Acknowledgements

This essay is dedicated to John Barrell. The author offers warm thanks to those who have helped in the development of this essay, especially the staff of the Paul Mellon Centre, in particular Maisoon Rehani, Tom Scutt, and above all, Sarah Victoria Turner. Their support has been steadfast and energizing. Thanks as well to Neil Walker, Curator, Djanogly Gallery; Claire Stewart, Curator, The Lowry, Salford; Helen Little; Julian Bell, for the opportunity to speak on Lowry's drawings at the Prince's Drawing School, London; John Barrell; and T. J. Clark, who introduced me to Lowry's work.

Cite as

Anne M. Wagner, "Lowry and the Local", *British Art Studies*, Issue 5, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-05/awagner>

Locating the Local

At the heart of this essay is a discrete group of twenty-six urban landscape drawings by L. S. Lowry (1887–1976). All were made using pencil on white wove paper; all seem to share the same dimensions; all were briefly exhibited together in late March 1930, then promptly dispersed. Some—particularly those initially purchased by the exhibition’s invited viewers—are still known to us; the rest are now lost.¹ The selection of images directly below is a group of drawings that may have been part of the exhibition, based on their subject, medium, dimensions and style (figs. 1 - 14). Although our knowledge of the group is incomplete, we know more than enough about its history to suggest that it presents an exemplary instance in the aesthetic and social life of art. Taken together, the drawings summon an artist, Lowry; a time, the first years of the Great Depression; and a place, the worn-out working-class Manchester area of Ancoats, a place identified from the 1830s as a notorious slum.² By 1844, according to Friedrich Engels, it already contained “a vast number of ruinous houses, most of them being, in fact, in the last stages of inhabiteness”.³ Hence Engels’s damning insistence that “no more injurious method of housing the workers has yet been discovered than precisely this.”⁴

TWENTY-SIX DRAWINGS OF
ANCOATS

BY
L. S. LOWRY.

EXHIBITED AT THE
MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT,
ANCOATS HALL, MANCHESTER.

March 25th and 26th, 1930.

- ✓ 1. Every Street Playground.
- ✓ 2. The Round House.
- 3. St. Mary's Church, Beswick.
- ✓ 4. Stony Brow.
- 5. Rochdale Canal Wharf.
- 6. Garden Place. No. 1.
- ✓ 7. Canal Scens.
- 8. Backwater.
- ✓ 9. Across the Medlock. No. 1.
- 10. Wesley Street. No. 1.
- 11. Crowther's Buildings, Pin Mill Brow. No. 1.
- ✓ 12. Johnson's Buildings.
- ✓ 13. Across the Medlock. No. 2.
- ✓ 14. The Lock House.
- 15. Limekiln Lane Railway Bridge.
- 16. Wesley Street. No. 2.
- 17. Garden Place. No. 2.
- ✓ 18. The Cliff, Palmerston Street.
- ✓ 19. Beswick Fair.
- ✕ 20. Old Houses, Great Ancoats Street. No. 1.
- 21. Crowther's Buildings, Pin Mill Brow. No. 2.
- ✓ 22. Playground, Holt Town.
- ✓ 23. Pollard Street.
- 24. Store Street. Canal Bridge.
- 25. Old Houses, Great Ancoats Street. No. 2.
- 26. Fairbain's Buildings, Store Street.

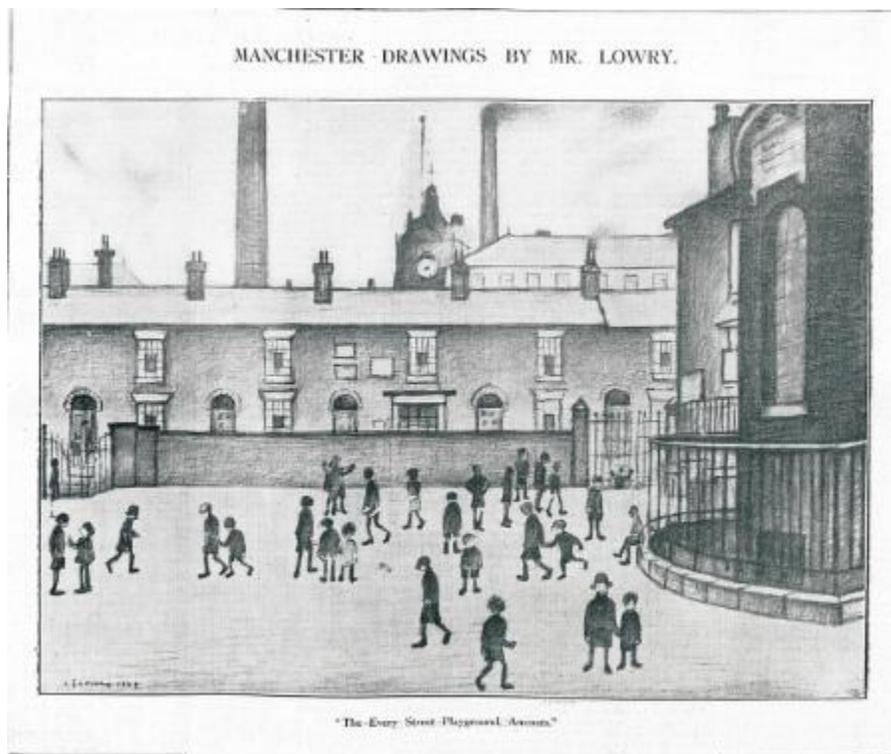
Drawings, framed, four guineas each.

Unframed, three and a half guineas.

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Figure 1.

Photocopy of hand list of drawings included in, Twenty-Six Drawings of Ancoats, by L. S. Lowry exhibited at the Manchester University Settlement, Ancoats Hall, March 25-26, 1930. Collection of The Lowry. Location of original list unknown. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford



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Figure 2.

L. S. Lowry, *The Every Street Playground, Ancoats*, 1929, pencil on paper. Illustration published in *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1930, p. 9. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 3.

L. S. Lowry, The Round House, Ancoats, 1929, pencil on paper, dimensions unknown. Collection of Manchester Settlement. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of Manchester Settlement/ The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 4.

L. S. Lowry, *A Fairground*, 1929, pencil on paper, 27 x 37 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 5.

L. S. Lowry, Ancoats, Manchester, 1929, pencil on paper, 27.9 x 38.1 cm. Collection of Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 6.

L. S. Lowry, Crowther's Buildings, Ancoats, Manchester, 1930, pencil on paper, 38 x 28 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 7.

L. S. Lowry, Garden Place, Tutbury Street, Ancoats, Manchester, 1930, pencil on paper, 27 x 36.5 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 8.

L. S. Lowry, Great Ancoats Street, Manchester, 1929, pencil on paper, 11.3 x 19.7 cm. Collection of The Lowry. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 9.

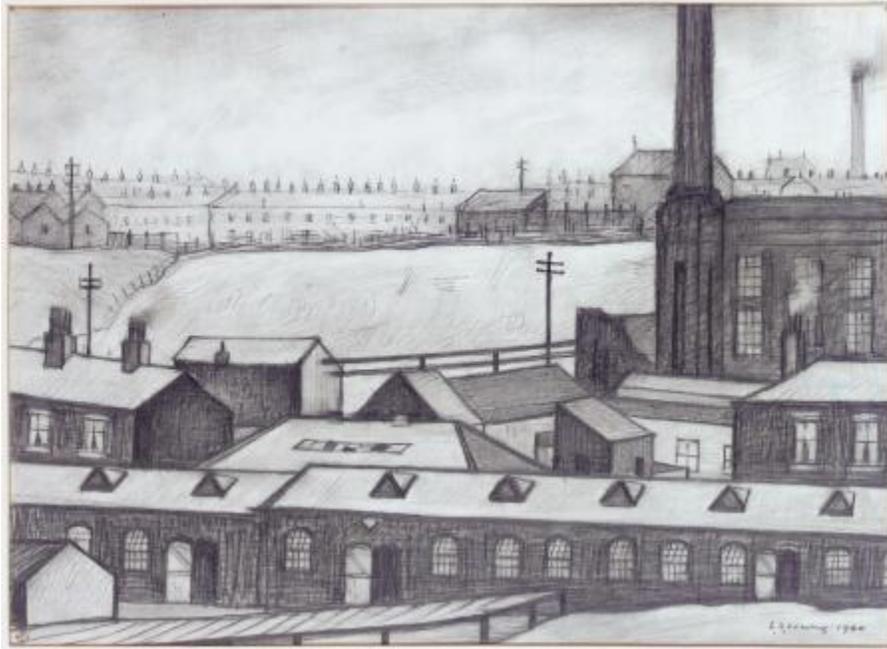
L. S. Lowry, Great Ancoats Street, Manchester, 1930, pencil on paper, 27.7 x 38.1 cm. Collection of The Lowry. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 10.

L. S. Lowry, Junction St, Stony Brow, Ancoats, Manchester, 1929, pencil on paper, 28 x 38.3 cm. Collection of Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 11.

L. S. Lowry, Palmerston Street, Manchester, 1930, pencil on paper, dimensions unknown. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017/Sotheby's, London



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Figure 12.

L. S. Lowry, Pollard Street, Ancoats, 1929, pencil on paper. Illustration published in *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1930, p. 9. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



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Figure 13.

L. S. Lowry, *The Viaduct, Store Street, Ancoats*, 1929, pencil on paper, 27.9 x 38.1 cm. Collection of Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 14.

L. S. Lowry, Canal and Mill Scene, 1929, pencil on paper, 28 x 37 cm. Collection of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Lakeland Arts Trust, Kendal, Cumbria. Digital image courtesy of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Lakeland Arts Trust, Kendal, Cumbria / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017

Ancoats was hardly a propitious site or subject, yet Lowry was asked not only to draw this dystopia, but also to do so with a local exhibition as his goal. As this essay shows, the works he made in response to that invitation are singularly laconic experiments in urban description. More than this, they redefine “description” in strikingly contextual terms. Already an accomplished draftsman, on this occasion Lowry produced a suite of drawings that paid scrupulous attention to setting down the main characteristics of a singularly ordinary urban place: *place*, meaning a recognizable location marked by distinct and identifiable features—a

definition to which we return.⁵ Thanks to the efficiently predictable effects of perspective, the lineaments of his chosen locations are meant to be convincing, without being “interesting” in any familiar pictorial way.

The special qualities of the Ancoats drawings summon a mundane urbanism, a matter-of-factness, that seems to beg for a word of its own. I think enviously of *urbescape*, for example, which, not many decades later, the painter and printmaker Prunella Clough was to devise.⁶ But for Clough such a landscape was by definition devastated: a post-nuclear world of cranes and cooling towers, held hostage by threat. Where Lowry’s urban drawings are concerned, this is not the case. Lowry’s world is clearly urban, but it is also ordinary, though seldom domestic; his drawings show factories and smokestacks, but also steeples, schools, stores, and playgrounds. Some sites are deserted, certainly, but in other contexts adults and children move along prosaically; life goes on.



Figure 15.

L. S. Lowry, Swinton School's Courtyard, 1929, pencil on paper, 38 × 27 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



Figure 16.

L. S. Lowry, *The Football Match*, 1930, pencil on paper, 26 × 37.2 cm.
Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017

When Lowry made these drawings, he knew his audience would not only recognize the world he depicted and confront it with assumptions and expectations beyond his control. Did he work with those expectations in mind? Such questions can be difficult for art historians to answer, yet in the case of the Ancoats drawings, answers can be deduced or inferred if we begin from the absolute basics, and work out from there. How did such an unusual commission come about? What were its results? Why does it matter that when Lowry drew these streets and junctions, he was working in a section of Manchester that had long since exemplified many of the more noxious aspects of urban industrial life? How, if at all, did Lowry manage to convey the human experience of such an inhumane place? Or do Lowry's Ancoats drawings fail to suggest "places" at all? Both a general sense of the local terrain and the particular nature of its characteristic structures must surely play a role in what viewers are shown. An image must locate its audience *somewhere*—this is essential to landscape depiction—and this necessity remains true even after buildings and pavements have sealed away the earth that lies beneath.⁷

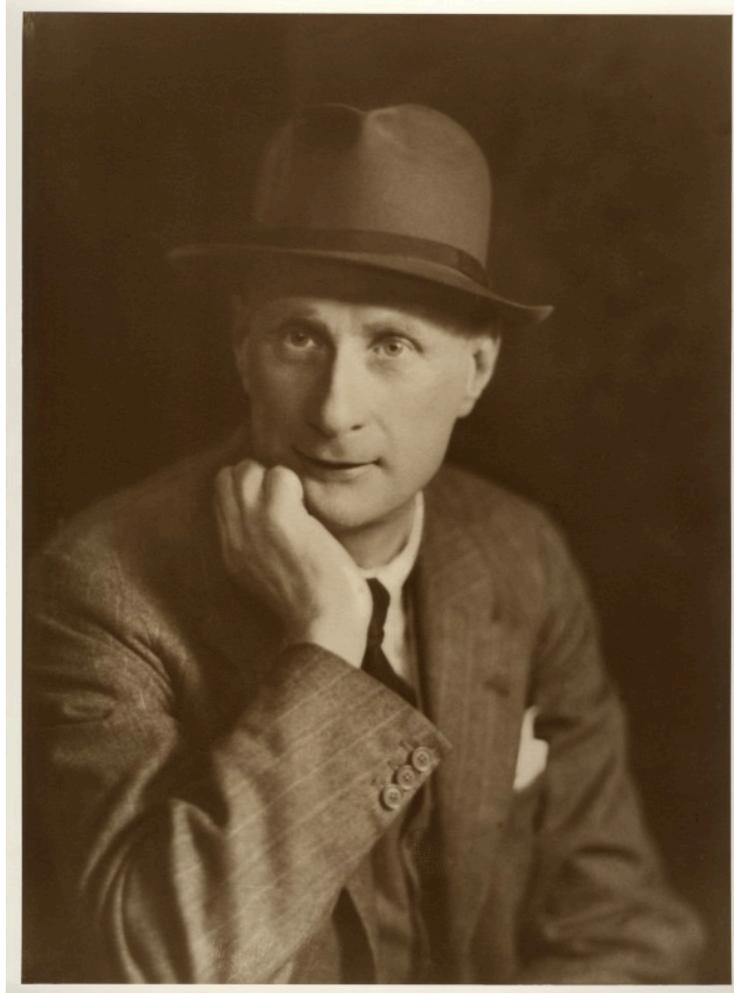


Figure 17.

Elliott & Fry, L. S. Lowry, late 1920s, half plate glass copy negative. Collection of National Portrait Gallery, London. Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London

At the time that Lowry drew *Ancoats*, he had already established his name as an artist. Not only had he been exhibiting for a decade, but the late 1920s had also brought a string of real successes: paintings included in shows in Paris, London, Leeds, and Manchester; respectful, even penetrating reviews in the *Studio* and *Manchester Guardian*; and a few important sales, among them *Coming Out of School*, a canvas that would enter the Tate.⁸ Such responses are undoubtedly not to be taken as the achievements of a novice, yet at the same time Lowry was not yet fully “in character” as the artist we like to think we know.⁹ If we want an image of the man we are concerned with, it is hard to do better than the studio photograph now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, which the artist travelled to London to have taken at a flourishing society studio, Elliott and Fry, a firm that since 1863 had pursued its business of photographing a clientele drawn principally from the middle class (fig. 17).¹⁰ Hence the portrait’s very existence says

something about Lowry's sense of himself at this moment, just as his drawings speak of his increasingly visible place in the civic world of Manchester, the context that brought him a remarkable commission to produce a suite of drawn urban views.

Yet at this point in his career, Lowry apparently had yet to exhibit any drawings. Then, in 1930, he assembled a show. Its twenty-six landscapes do not amount to much when set against the thousands Lowry is sometimes said to have produced. Yet as a group united in conception and exhibition, they are more or less unique.¹¹ Remember that a great many of Lowry's pencil studies—perhaps the majority—were simply jottings, scribbled notations made on the fly, in the street or leaning in a doorway.¹² It is easy to forget, given such suggestive impressions, that he also drew in the studio; it was there that the Ancoats drawings were certainly worked up. Lowry presumably put them together deliberately, carefully, with an exhibition in view. Its purpose, to repeat, was the depiction of Ancoats, that notorious slum. And when the group was shown for the first and only time, it was in Ancoats itself, under conditions that point to its rhetoric of place.

It is not just the constants in subject, exhibition, and intention that define the Ancoats drawings as a focused set. Equally significant is their distinctly local address, that aspect or quality of drawn depiction that Philip Rawson, in his 1969 book, *Drawing*, called "touch". Perhaps the term nowadays seems a bit old-fashioned: so be it. Contrary to the tactile concreteness it implies, Rawson insists that touch is an "intangible" aspect of the expression of any drawing, which "oddly enough, is best translated into words that have a kind of moral value, in the broadest and most liberal sense".¹³ Touch, Rawson continues, is the feeling of the work, or if not of the work itself, of what we may infer from it about the maker and subject. In the end, I shall argue that the "kind of moral value" this group of Lowry's drawings possesses is a function of their approach to their location. More precisely stated, they declare a stance or conception towards the local, while also depicting a particular locality, a place. And both, at least in part, are a matter of touch. When critics question just how "in touch" Lowry actually was with the urban worlds he depicted, the two senses of the word start to collide.

One further preliminary is needed. In suggesting that Lowry's Ancoats drawings convey a concept of "the local" I suggest that they evoke the particularities of a place, Ancoats. But I also want to say — recruiting ideas developed by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz — that not least as drawings, or *because* they are drawings, they exemplify "crafts of place". These are the pursuits, according to Geertz, that work by the light of local knowledge.¹⁴ His examples include sailing, gardening, politics, poetry, law, and ethnography—this last, of course, a reference to Geertz's own vocation, which like the others he mentions is rooted in "seeing broad principles in

parochial facts". Drawing too is such a practice; or if not all drawing, then certainly Lowry's drawings of Ancoats, which is to say, among other things, that as a place Ancoats shaped Lowry's artistic identity, as well as the other way around.

"Lonely Cottages"

By 1930, Lowry had reached the phase in his career when, as his critics did not fail to remind him, his signature subjects began to seem run of the mill and he questioned what to do next. This is the context in which Lowry accepted an invitation to present a two-day exhibition at the Manchester University Settlement, a charitable institution established in Ancoats in 1897. As its name declared, it was an offshoot of the settlement movement founded in London in 1884 to address the increasing impoverishment of the industrial working class, and to do so in the areas of the city where such abuses were lived out.

The question was where the appropriate poor were to be found. In London, the answer was Whitechapel; in Manchester, it was Ancoats, in the city's east end. Though by the early nineteenth century Ancoats had become the most populated quarter of the city, ironically enough, its name is likely to come from an Old English phrase meaning "lonely cottages"—"*ana cots*".¹⁵ These romantic origins had nothing to do with the standard back-to-back housing endemic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: wretched structures that existed, as Engels observed, "in the shadow of the largest mills of Manchester . . . colossal six- and seven-storeyed [*sic*] buildings towering with their slender chimneys far above the low cottages of the workers." Far from lonely, these structures were "almost never built singly, but always by the dozen or the score; a single contractor building up one or two streets at a time". The pattern aimed at profit, clustering working-class dwellings around airless courts and dividing cottages using walls, to cite Engels, "as thin as it is possible to make them". How thin might this be? A single brick, or even half a brick, when they were laid end to end. Often a cottage would have only one windowed wall out of four.¹⁶ The two diagrams Engels provided could serve as a guide to building on the cheap (figs. 20 and 21).



Figure 18.

J. Ryder, Ancoats, Great Ancoats Street, corner of Every Street, *new flats built on slum clearance land, taken from the grounds of Ancoats Hall, 1960s.* Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries



Figure 19.

J. Ryder, Ancoats, Great Ancoats Street, *view of slum clearance land corner of Palmerston Street, showing back of terraced houses on Pin Mill Brow and property facing Ashton Old Road, 1960s.* Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries

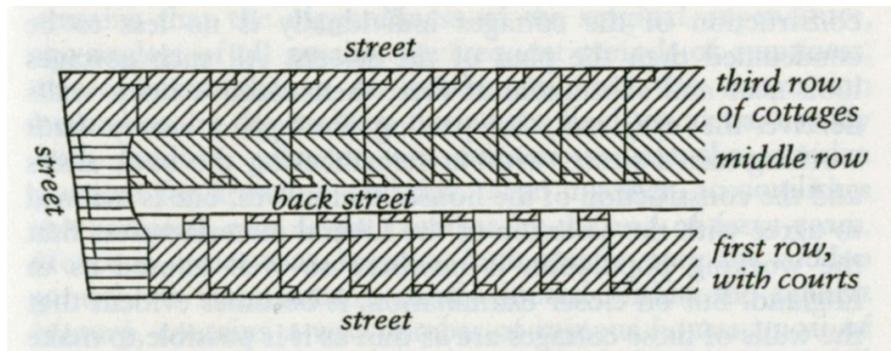


Figure 20.

Illustration from Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Edited and introduced by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford World Classics, 1993), 69. Translation based on the original English version by Florence Kelley-Wischnewetsky, 1887

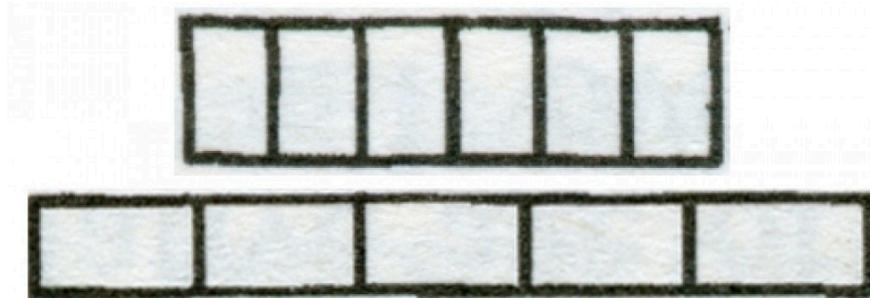


Figure 21.

Illustration from Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Edited and introduced by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford World Classics, 1993), 69. Translation based on the original English version by Florence Kelley-Wischnewetsky, 1887

The housing types and living conditions Engels observed in Ancoats were still in use a century later. To turn from his diagrams to the detailed maps of the area produced during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is to notice the density of the local built fabric, including the infamous courts (fig. 22). But it is also to grasp that at least during the peak years of production, the big mills cohabited with smaller stores, workshops, and yards—enterprises as likely to cater to the working people of the area as they were to employ them.

Initially the Manchester Settlement established its offices at the eastern end of Great Ancoats Street, between Every Street and Palmerston Street, on a site once occupied by Ancoats Hall, the seventeenth-century country house of the local line of Mosley baronets.¹⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, the family had left Ancoats behind. Predictably, no doubt, given the wave of industrialization then transforming Lancashire, both their manor and the land it stood on passed into the hands of newly prosperous local merchants and

manufacturers. The old hall was eventually torn down, its timber and plaster fabric rebuilt in the assertively functional medium of brick. But then both the new brick structure and its run-down gardens were sold to the Midland Railway Company as a site for a goods station; the company's offices, meanwhile were housed in one end of the hall.



Figure 22.

G. E. Anderton, Ancoats Old Hall, Manchester, 1900, dimensions unknown. Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries



Figure 23.

G. E. Anderton, Ancoats Old Hall, Manchester, 1900, dimensions unknown. Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries



Figure 24.

G. E. Anderton, Ancoats Old Hall, Manchester, 1900, dimensions unknown. Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries

These changes evidence the rapid transformations brought about by the active intervention of new industries and new capital in the built fabric of Ancoats—as Henri Lefebvre would put it, the place had been “attacked by industrialization”.¹⁸ A counter-attack was not far behind. It took the form of social initiatives launched by critics of the exploitative treatment of factory workers and their families. In Ancoats one such effort was launched in 1886, when a part of the new Ancoats Hall (or more accurately, its brick replacement) became the site of the Ancoats Art Museum, established on the site by the philanthropist Thomas Coglan Horsfall (1841–1932) ([fig. 22](#)). A follower and correspondent of John Ruskin, his aim was an institution that, in fulfilment of Ruskinian principles, would be “small, selective, educational, and specifically targeted at the working man”.¹⁹ Hence his alliance with the Manchester University Settlement. The two institutions occupied the same premises until the Settlement moved to a nearby location on Every Street, in a building with its own role in the local history of reform.

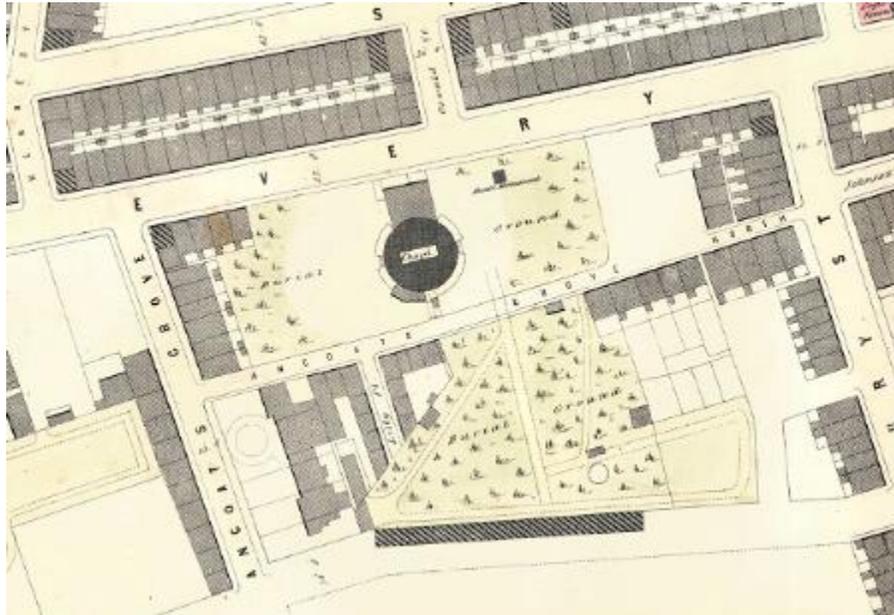


Figure 25.

Bassano Ltd, Mary Danvers Stocks (née Brinton) Baroness Stocks, December 1938, bromide print. Collection of National Portrait Gallery, London. Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London

The new site was centred on a century-old circular chapel, built in the 1820s by members of the Salford branch of the Bible Christian Movement, a relatively local ministering sect: its tell-tale footprint, surrounded by a burial ground, appears on nineteenth-century maps ([fig. 26](#)). The Round House, as it was soon known, seems to have been fairly easily repurposed to house the university's mission, though of its interior arrangements precious little is known. What can be said about its appearance relies on a few period photographs, one of which was published in 1945 ([fig. 27](#)). It was published in a brief history of the Settlement by Mary Danvers Stocks (1891–1975), a suffragist and economist educated at the London School of Economics, whose husband, J. L. Stocks (1882–1937), was elected professor of philosophy at the University of Manchester in 1924 ([fig. 25](#)).²⁰ After he died she moved to London to take up an active career in education, politics, and

broadcasting until her death. In the years around 1930, however, she played a crucial part in the activities of the Settlement, where among other tasks she regularly took it upon herself to write the Christmas play. The title of one such effort, "Every Man of Every Street", seems to convey the tenor of the place quite well: on Every Street, it declares, dwell ordinary people living ordinary lives. With one exception: the university men and women who briefly settled in Ancoats lived there by choice.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 26.

Joseph Adshead, Adshead's Twenty Four illustrated maps of the Township of Manchester, 1850-1851 (detail showing the configuration of a typical Ancoats court). Collection of Chetham's Library. Digital image courtesy of Chetham's Library / Digital Archives



Figure 27.

Unknown photographer, The Round House, circa 1930-45, frontispiece from *Fifty Years in Every Street: The Story of the Manchester University Settlement* by Mary Danvers Stocks (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1945)



Figure 28.

A. W. Johnson, Round Chapel, Every Street, Manchester, 1900. Collection of Manchester Libraries. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Libraries

It was Stocks who seems likely to have been behind the Settlement show. The suggestion finds support in the text of a letter addressed to me towards the end of the Lowry exhibition held at Tate Britain in 2013. It came from a visitor with a story she thought I should hear:

Mary Stocks had approached Lowry about doing a show of his drawings for the University Settlement. In order to get as much interest as possible, she wanted him to do things in Ancoats. She herself did not see what there was to draw in the area and mentioned this to Winifred Gill, who was working at the Settlement. Miss Gill disagreed saying that she had found a number of places that made good subjects. Mary Stokes asked her to show Lowry these places, which she did. It was a very quiet tour. Neither of them said very much. Lowry took no notes but remembered every place and went back to draw them.²¹

In relating this story, my correspondent implied—though was not concerned to justify—her sense that Gill should be understood as if not the author of Lowry’s drawings, then at least someone to whom substantial credit was due. Yet in the end, of course, Lowry was the artist the Settlement decided to show, a decision that lends weight to the idea that Stocks chose the artist best able to arouse “as much interest as possible” in the Settlement’s work.

Enter Lowry, Miss Gill at his elbow, as the artist charged with representing Ancoats as a site for social work. By late March 1930, he had assembled a large group of drawings for a brief exhibition and sale on Settlement premises—it was only open eight hours all told. Even so, a hand list was printed, complete with titles and prices; the surviving copy remains our only guide to what was shown (fig. 29).²² The outcome of this brief show is a topic we will return to before long.

No	1.	Tray cart. Bayground. St. by J. L. Skiba.			
"	2.	The Board House. S. Frankenburg	pl.	4	15
"	4.	Story Room. St. by Miss B. Higgins or Mr. Frankenburg.		18	16
"	9.	Across the Yard. St. by Mr. Gail.	pl.	2	20
"	15.	Across the Yard. No. 2. J. L. Skiba.	pl.	4	2
"	14.	The Lock House. St. by Mrs. E. T. Smith.	pl.	1	1
"	15.	Across the Yard. J. L. Skiba.	pl.	4	1
"	20.	Bayground. St. by Mr. Gail.			
"	23.	Behind Street. St. by A. Cashmore.	pl.	3	18
"	25.	Old House. St. by Mrs. Frankenburg.	pl.	3	18
"	18.	Palmerton Street. St. by Prof. Clay.		4	4
"	7.	Canal Lane. Mr. Chas. Rowland.	pl.	6	13
26. Various Drawings					
		Meeting in the General Office of Mr. Chas. Rowland	pl.	3	18
		Street in stock post.	pl.	3	18
12.		Johnston's Buildings. St. by Prof. Watson.		3	18
		5. 20. 10		5	18
				2	18
Cheques paid over -					
		Mr. Rowland. £11. 0. 6			
		Cashmore. £3. 13. 6			
		Frankenburg. £7. 17. 6			
		Mr. Gail.			
		Cash. £8. 13. 6			
		£26. 5. -			
		Balance			
		£26. 5. -			
		Receipts			
		2. 19. 3.			
		Colony St. 11. 7			
		£3. 10. 10			
		less 4. 2			

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Figure 29.

Photocopy of a page from a lost ledger listing works sold at Twenty-Six Drawings of Ancoats, by L. S. Lowry exhibited at the Manchester University Settlement, Ancoats Hall, March 25-26, 1930. Collection of The Lowry. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford



Figure 30.

Paul Popper, L. S. Lowry walking on Oakfield Road, Manchester, 1957
Digital image courtesy of Getty Images

For now, consider Lowry as he set about discovering the pictorial possibilities latent in Ancoats, by looking at the Settlement itself—its distinctive premises and immediate surroundings—and then moving further afield. The Every Street site was not far from the River Medlock, and also close to a mill and dye works flanked by tenements along two sides. The artist made two drawings, numbers 1 and 2 on the hand list, intended to locate the viewer within the Settlement's walled enclosure, a space today given over to weeds, trash, and grass (fig. 31). In the centre of the plot, a low brick wall retraces the shape of the Round House, while a few carved gravestones conjure up the burial ground that in the nineteenth century was a feature of the site. In Lowry's two drawings (figs. 2 and 3), by contrast, the earth reads only as a much-scuffed surface, inhabited mostly by children dwarfed by the gates and wall that close them in. Most stand or walk, alone or in pairs, the older children leading the younger ones. One lone little figure stands against the bars, looking out.



Figure 31.

The brick wall that remembers the Round House building, Every Street, Manchester, March 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography

If the presence of this isolated little body conveys why it seems hard to tie down the tone of these drawings, Lowry's overall approach to the place itself was above all prosaic, rather than performative. Consider in both Round House drawings how Lowry treats the distinctive features of this keyhole-shaped structure: its windows, both their distribution and framing; its wall and gates; its noticeboard and plaque—all this has been faithfully recorded. Look, too, at the artist's standpoint, not only in view of the Settlement's linked volumes, but also in relation to its place in an urban context. As Lowry sees it, that world has surface and depth. In front of the walls of the Round House runs Every Street. A row of modest houses lines its other side. Behind them rise assorted roofs and a pair of smokestacks, one closer to Every Street, the other a bit further away. Between them is a clock tower, which presumably marked the entrance to a mill; time is money, they say.²³ Yet all this has been accomplished unobtrusively, so to speak, without any impressive display of "technique". Instead information rules the day, as if to ensure that the small world the drawings summon seems convincing, as well as straightforward, even matter of fact. To my eye they suggest that when Lowry "went back to draw" the sites Gill showed him—I doubt they were unfamiliar to him—he was careful neither to celebrate nor to deplore.

Instead, he produced a set of drawings marked by the same pragmatic neutrality characteristic of his Every Street views. I imagine he worked steadily, with the exhibition in view. And it is clear that he went ahead with a fairly clear idea of the sort of subject he wanted to show. On the list of titles,

four are tellingly generic: *Canal Scene* (no. 6), *Backwater* (no. 7), *Across The Medlock* (in two versions, nos. 1 and 2; on the hand list, these are 9 and 13), and *The Lock House* (no. 14).²⁴ As for the rest, the titles they bear were clearly intended to summon particular streets and familiar buildings. Yet even these are fairly general, if not laconic in tone: simply consider numbers 20 and 25, *Old Houses, Great Ancoats Street, Nos. 1 and 2*; or number 22, *Playground, Holt Town*. If Lowry's aim, as John Berger puts it, was "to represent the historic", then he did so by a process best thought of as a sort of transference: in lieu of desolate people we are given desolation of place. The world depicted in Lowry's work, Berger suggests, is simultaneously "civic and deprived".²⁵ Today, in the aftermath of sweeping transformations to Ancoats fabric (initially mooted in the mid- to late 1930s, and then, in the 1960s, undertaken with a vengeance), many of the old names persist: Holt and Beswick, Wesley Street, Pollard Street, Palmerston Street, Store Street, Pin Mill Brow. The hill once called Stony Brow is there too, though no longer on Junction Street; it is Jutland Street now (fig. 32). Nearby is a viaduct the artist also drew (fig. 33). Yet to know a name is not the same as recognizing a place. Information about Ancoats in the early 1930s is sparse. Of the social and material world that Lowry depicted, precious little remains.²⁶

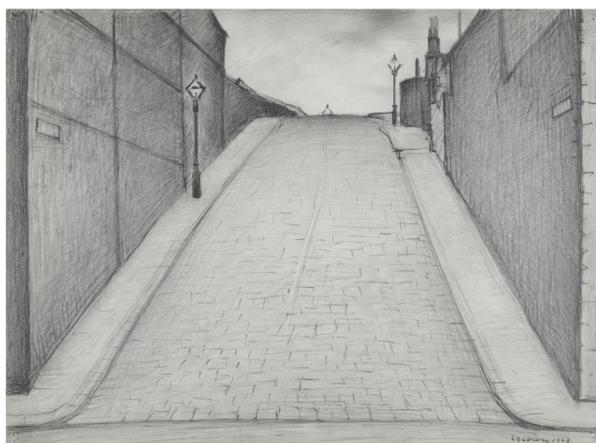


Figure 32a.

L. S. Lowry, Junction St, Stony Brow, Ancoats, Manchester, 1929, pencil on paper, 28 x 38.3 cm. Collection of Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017



Figure 32b.

Jutland Street (formerly Junction Street), Manchester, March 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography



Figure 33a.

L. S. Lowry, *The Viaduct, Store Street, Ancoats*, 1929, pencil on paper, 27.9 × 38.1 cm. Collection of Manchester Art Gallery. Digital image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery / The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017

Figure 33b.

The Viaduct, Store Street, Ancoats, March 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography

The same might be said of Lowry's drawings. Of the twenty-six included in the initial exhibition, only eleven can be identified with any certainty today. Less than half, in other words, of which two are known only in reproductions that appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*, along with a notice of the show (figs. 2 and 12).²⁷ Even so, I think there is just about enough historical and visual evidence to make some suggestions about the show's character and what it achieved. Consider its pictorial purposes and conceptual scope: here are drawings that tie their ambitions to a strikingly even-handed application of marks.²⁸ This communality, like their seemingly identical measurements, argues for the idea that they were made for the occasion, as a considered response to the Settlement's invitation to draw—and to draw attention to—a particularly notorious inner-city neighbourhood, a place first singled out by Engels for its back alleys and low cottages, and then, a century later, by the Settlement, as its principal frontier. To insist on the obvious, Ancoats was the Manchester neighbourhood it felt most called upon to help. When its officers turned to Lowry to draw it, the request was not merely a tribute to his strength as a draughtsman. It was also a test of his ability to take hold of the character of Ancoats, to show it as a *place*—a problem that Mary Stocks was not alone in being unable to solve. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, Lowry emerged from the project with a “firmer grasp of slum landscape”.²⁹

Everything suggests that his patrons were pleased, though perhaps not to the extent sometimes claimed. For a start, it no longer seems certain that the show sold out, as has consistently been asserted.³⁰ Nor is it the case that it was held in the Round House, as I myself once thought. Instead it was installed in the Ancoats Art Gallery, where both the University Settlement

and Midland Railway had space.³¹ What this means, of course, is that like his patrons, Lowry's audience was not working class. To examine the remaining financial records of the Settlement (though incomplete, they are in the Manchester University Archive) is to discover a careful ledger entry of the drawings that were sold, along with the names of their purchasers and how each paid, by cash or cheque (fig. 29). The result is a cache of information about ties of patronage and taste. The network extended from the university and its more socially minded professors—among them J. L. Stocks, husband of Mary and a noted Professor of Philosophy since 1924; Frederick Ernest Weiss, Harrison Professor of Botany; and Henry Clay, first Professor of Political Economy and subsequently Professor of Social Economics—to Mrs E. T. Scott, wife of the recently appointed editor of the *Manchester Guardian*; Lawrence Haward, the first Director of the Manchester City Art Gallery; Hilda Cashmore, the Settlement Warden from 1926–34; Margaret Pilkington, Manchester philanthropist, proficient watercolourist, and skilled engraver; Sydney Frankenburg, who inherited a successful Salford rubber factory and whose wife, Charis Ursula Frankenburg, was a follower of Marie Stopes and co-founder with Mary Stocks of the Manchester and Salford Mothers' Clinic; and finally, a Mr W. M. Gile and a Mr Gibson, about whom nothing is currently known.³² Mrs Renold bought three drawings, Frankenburg two. Three went to Mary and J. L. Stocks. And as if this is not enough, the ledger also tells us that not all of the drawings on sale were framed and hanging in the show; Mrs Renold picked up *Street in Stockport* and *Meeting in the General Strike* in this way.³³

These are patrons who had some sort of interest—not necessarily an aesthetic one—in the question of what it means to grasp a slum. Acquaintances and colleagues rather than friends, most were involved in the work of the Settlement as officers of its governing board. Others—Frankenburg, for example—were presumably present out of conviction or belief.³⁴ Can such a place, or non-place, be captured? How could its particular version of nothingness be drawn? *Slum* is a word that denotes bleakness and desolation, all that is “loathsome, dreary and decayed”. How did Lowry go about the task of depicting the mundane anti-monuments—mill, canal, viaduct—that marked the physical centre of working-class life? He clearly made the task his project, and his single-minded focus suggests that its outcome should be understood as a suite or series in which each image, no matter how distinctive, has a place in a larger whole. Each is soft lead pencil on paper, deployed to straightforward purpose, without flourishes of any kind: judging from those that can currently be identified, each measures about twenty-seven by thirty-eight centimetres;³⁵ and each found its focus in the area's physical structures—the lay of its land, the shapes of its buildings and road works—rather than its human population, the people of all ages who bore the brunt of the “poverty, dirt

and overcrowding” of its “mean streets” (both Stocks and Engels use this phrase).³⁶ In the attention he brought to the neighbourhood’s various features, Lowry shares something with the social geographer, who ties human experience to the physical environment—our dwelling in, and transformation of our material worlds—rather than the ethnographer. It is here that Geertz’s terms seem most effective: these drawings work “by the light of local knowledge”—even if that light is thick with smoke. Yet Lowry offers no retreat from the city’s shared spaces; his Ancoats drawings do not include interiors: the local is not to be found inside closed doors.

What I am after here is to convey, with thanks to Rawson, that the *Manchester Guardian*’s idea of an artist’s “grasp” summons something larger and less technical than composition alone. For while these images seem to show Lowry working with a whole new sense of the framing limits of his paper, and savouring the blunt decisiveness possible with pencil, these strategies are a means to an end. Lowry has put aside what critics initially saw as the “almost oratorical power” of his art, its marvellously contradictory effects of “populous desolation”, in favour of a newfound clarity in figuring the differences among his chosen sites. The result is no less “oratorical” than Lowry’s earlier imagery, but now it is as if the speaker is quite deliberately expanding and varying his topics and terms of address. The result is a set of slum views—more specifically, views of Ancoats, the archetypal slum—that are insistently diverse in subject and form. A canal, a settlement house, a cul-de-sac, a viewpoint, and many smoke stacks—all these combine to make up Ancoats: a slum, granted, but even so allowed its own concrete presence as a place. Lowry has sought out—perhaps even discovered— a set of features that are emphatically distinctive, without the viewer’s experience devolving into effects that are merely pictorial or, worse, picturesque.



Figure 34.

L. S. Lowry, *City Scene, St John's Parade*, 1929, pencil on paper, 28 × 38 cm. Collection of the British Council. Digital image courtesy of British Council Collection, London/ The Estate of L. S. Lowry. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017

They are saved from that fate by the artist's distinctive ability to present the most ordinary feature of the urban landscape—a view over roofs, a stark city square—as a tonal or compositional tour de force. The result was “grimy but classical”, to make use of one of the *Manchester Guardian's* better turns of phrase. For a gloss on this contradictory concept, we can do no better than to turn back to what in my eyes remains the most memorable of this set of works: *Junction Street, Stony Brow, Ancoats, Manchester*, 1929 (fig. 10).

If this drawing is grimy, this is because of Lowry's graphic skill. His drawings, as one critic put it, are saturated “with the black substances of the industrial atmosphere”, and their structures are “finger-rubbed into squat grey masses”. In a monochrome drawing, grime is seen as “colour”, and Lowry developed his already considerable expertise with the pencil to represent inner-city dirt.³⁷ Thesis two: if the drawing is classical, this is because its design is rock solid, yet active as well. Its structure is built out from the bottom corners using diagonals that carry the composition, shaping space as they go. Lowry is doing nothing more than mining the familiar magic of perspective, yet the result—its delaying of visual satisfaction—still seems as unfamiliar, as “strange [a] tour de force”, as it did eighty-odd years ago.³⁸ We have arrived, so the title tells us, at both a brow of a road and its junction; such a moment should be consequential, and yet we do not know

what lies ahead: we cannot see that the way will lead to the multi-storey dry-salting factory built by Thomas Hassall and said to be the only one in England.³⁹ Instead the composition is open to both anticipation and threat.

The reason that *Junction Street, Stony Brow* seems so significant is not because, as so often happened with other compositions, Lowry used its layout again. On the contrary, as far as we know, the design seems to have been unique in this series, and infrequent in the artist's work as a whole.⁴⁰ There is no denying that any such example of singularity within the work of so repetitive an artist gives the exception added force. In this case, that force results in a subtle staging of the complexities of place, a staging that leads to the question, "Is this a place at all?" Yes and no. In Lowry's slum drawings, we know we are somewhere—the sheer matter-of-factness of Lowry's use of his pencil, its pragmatic decisiveness, insists on this—yet as strangers we don't quite know where.

Grey on Grey

In an earlier essay on Lowry, I argued that to see what is distinctive about this series it is useful to compare it to another account of the visual world of the slum.⁴¹ My choice fell on a speech made by Larry Meath, one of the protagonists in Walter Greenwood's 1933 Manchester novel about working-class poverty and labour, *Love on the Dole*.⁴² Early in the story we come across Meath, a mill hand and would-be reformer, speaking to a crowd about the realities of their shared life: "Labour never ending, constant struggles to pay the rent and to buy sufficient food and clothing; no time for anything that is bright and beautiful. We never see such things. All we see are these grey depressing streets; mile and mile of them; never ending."⁴³ Endlessness, in other words, not only shapes Meath's rhetoric; it is the very form of working-class life, which extends from Salford's streets to the men that throng through them on their way to work, "a great procession of heavily-booted men all wearing overalls and all marching in the same direction". Tobacco smoke rises above them, all blue and grey, and the air resounds "with the ringing rhythmic beat of hobnailed boots".⁴⁴ Passages like these are not merely descriptive; they are transformative, finding the force within sameness and a song in the ring of heavy boots. These effects make for what in that initial essay I presented as an aesthetic characteristic of the 1930s. In that context, I called it the art of the grey monotone. The phrase still fits.

All the more significant, then, that Lowry's efforts to describe the Ancoats area—its canal, its mills by the dozen, its chemical works, cloth finishing works, foundries, glass works, and aircraft factory (founded as early as 1910), its hospitals, and schools—did not simply repeat this single sombre note. His Ancoats was not uniform, however consistent its grey. On the contrary, his drawings claim that that urban space is deep and often jumbled; every here is backed by a there, which often impinges. And there is an insistent presence latent within its characteristic structures, and in what we might well call its infrastructure today. How striking that each sheet in the series focuses on a different urban feature, a different component of its fabric, as if to suggest that together, these cyclopean stone steps and that viaduct; this junction, shop front, church, and smokestack; this quiet canal and empty road—that all these things, taken together, make this place what it is. It is an assertion that not only draws deeply on a fund of local knowledge, but also aims to demonstrate to its audience what it too knows, or should know, about this place. According to Henri Lefebvre, such features comprise the “symbolic dimension” of the city: “monuments, but also voids, squares and avenues, symbolizing the cosmos, the world, society, or simply the state”. ⁴⁵



Figure 35.

Nicolas Lancret, Study of a Tree, 1705-1743, red chalk, 34.8 x 25.3. Collection of the British Museum. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

This idea of local knowledge returns us to Rawson's conception of touch: touch, to repeat his central notion, is an "intangible" aspect of the expression of any drawing, which—I quote Rawson once again—"oddly enough, is best translated into words that have a kind of moral value, in the broadest and most liberal sense." It is good to be wary of any critic who uses words like "moral" and "intangible", even one who agrees that they are odd. This said, there *is* something at stake in Rawson's phrase. Touch turns out not to be straightforwardly tactile at all; instead *texture* is the term he chooses to name the artist's application of marks to the page. Its effects may be brought about unconsciously or systematically, but in either case, texture results. Or as Rawson puts it, "the draughtsman does not *draw* texture, he *produces* it. Its actual marks are not part of the structure of his design." ⁴⁶ Texture, in other words, is not a means of rendering the surfaces of things in the world. On the contrary, it is the textural qualities of the medium that are

at stake. In Nicolas Lancret's undated *Study of a Tree* (fig. 35), for example, texture points to the softly smudged syncopation of short comma-like strokes that indicate sunlight playing on leaves and branches. Their emphases result not from careful emulation (chalk depicts tree) but rather from a successful substitution, in which strokes of chalk stand in for a tree.



Figure 36.

Michelangelo Buonarroti, Row of Figures for the Deposition of Christ (Studies for a Pietà and an Entombment), 1540, black chalk on off-white paper, 18 × 28.1 cm. Collection of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Digital image courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Touch is something else. Speaking of a black chalk drawing by Michelangelo exploring the *Deposition* (fig. 36), Rawson insists that “there can be no mistaking the extreme tactile affection with which the touch of the old Michelangelo sets down and develops his figures.”⁴⁷ In the same way, there can be no mistaking the presence and actuality that Lowry gives to his Ancoats views. This is a place we are asked to consider, and thus get to know. Hence our encounters with it are markedly direct. This world coheres. At the same time, the artist’s depictions of it are not particularly detailed. This is true, but still not quite right: substantial, perhaps, and spatially distinct. At any rate, such images do not turn our first thoughts to what we know of graphic ellipsis, or suggestive evocation, although—the point is crucial—these are effects that Lowry could and did deploy. I think, for example, of the black chalk shorthand that sets down the *Bandstand, Peel Park* (fig. 37) made in 1924 in Lowry’s own town of Salford, while transforming its clustering listeners into a comically alien crowd.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 37.

L. S. Lowry, Bandstand, Peel Park, Salford, 1924, pencil on paper, 17.7 x 25.4 cm. Collection of The Lowry. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 38.

L. S. Lowry, *A View from the Window of the Royal Technical College, Salford, looking towards Manchester*, 1924, black chalk and pencil on paper, 55.5 x 38 cm. Collection of The Lowry. Digital image courtesy of The Lowry Collection, Salford

Consider too the *View from the Window of the Royal Technical College*, also drawn in 1924 (fig. 38); there the thrill lies in the telescoping vista, which rushes past the parterres while statues dance a jig. The College, like Peel Park, was in Salford which, as just noted, was where the artist lived. There too he studied drawing and clearly often drew. Yet to put these two sketches of Salford's one-time cultural centre in touch with his views of Ancoats is to demonstrate that there can be no confusing the two. Their differences are above all a matter of Lowry's touch. If Rawson is right, if touch does translate into terms that have a kind of moral value, in the broadest and most liberal sense, then it seems worth reopening the question, in Lowry's case, of the values his drawings put into play.

To my eye, the work that Lowry did in Ancoats seems strikingly matter of fact. The marks he used are spare, though neither elusive nor ambiguous. Few go to waste, and none look extraneous. The result seems entirely purposeful, so much so as to suggest that as an approach to drawing, plainness is a choice—a style, or anti-style—that needs perfecting. Achieving it requires practice and thought.⁴⁸ But more than this, to devote such terse sufficiency to the depiction of aspects of the city that go mostly undepicted was for Lowry something of a founding principle. Perhaps the idea was that visibility and presence are essential, if the task is to conjure a world in its symbolic dimension, as Lefebvre would say.

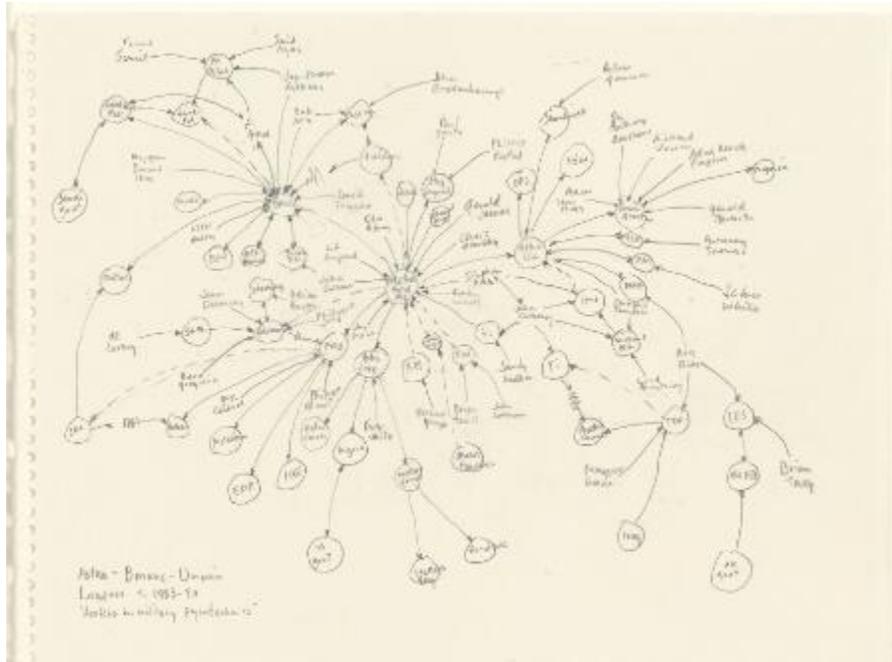
Local and Global

Many years after Lowry drew Ancoats, his old friend Hugh Maitland (1895–1972) began to put together a never-published Lowry biography, which provides invaluable details on the decades the artist spent working full-time collecting rents.⁴⁹ (Not incidentally, Maitland, a notable microbiologist, was Professor of Bacteriology at the University of Manchester, and from 1927 directed the Public Health Laboratory, which specialized in the diseases of the poor.)⁵⁰ Maitland wrote that the artist “had an inordinate interest in the names and positions of the streets . . . in the poorer districts of the city and a perfect knowledge of them. They seemed in themselves to have a special significance for him.”⁵¹ The implications of this comment lie in the idea that Lowry’s quasi-cartographic fascination with the streets of the city lay in his ability to read past the map’s abstractions to locate some other, “special” meaning, perhaps even truth: the truth of life *there*. Maitland saw that truth as testifying to Lowry’s hitherto hidden role as a rent collector, and doubtless it did. Yet it also gives evidence of the artist’s connection, even commitment to an urban network, and the extent of his efforts to convey something of the visual complexity—and perhaps even the social significance—of a representational project rooted in the physical fabric of life in the slum.

I offer the phrase “representational project” because although far from felicitous, it insists that Lowry’s work was knowingly assertive, even demanding, in tone. It asks us to dwell, as we don’t often do, on the painter’s awareness of his audience, and his exercise of intention and choice.

I hope it goes without saying that in my view, the idea (even the cause) of the local remains worth defending—maybe more so, when the global has become its counter-term. Frictionless, mobile, placeless, globetrotting: it is everything that the local is not. It is difficult to imagine the global ever being drawn. Difficult, but not impossible—I think, for one example, of the US artist Mark Lombardi, who died in the year 2000. His legacy takes the form of a

concerted effort to discover and describe the proliferating networks of connection, the financial scams, corruption, and crime that shape the placeless trade in influence, oil, money, and arms, and the sweeping arcs and vectors he made use of to describe the wide compass of that exchange.⁵² In these works—for example, *Astra - Bmarc - Unwin, London c. 1983-90*, “dealers in military pyrotechnics” (fig. 39), which he produced in the year of his death—it is the fatal emptiness of the paper that stands for the ability of the powerful to blank out the world. Within that blankness, everyday life, ordinary connections, have been erased.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 39.

Mark Lombardi, *Astra - Bmarc - Unwin, London c. 1983-90*, “dealers in military pyrotechnics”, 2000, pencil on notebook paper, 22.9 x 30.5 cm. Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift. Digital image courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Estate of Mark Lombardi / Scala, Florence

In Lowry’s drawings, by contrast, even nowhere is somewhere: a world presented by his pencil as solid presence, a matter of spatial and structural fact. A slum has become a locus, a landscape, in other words, where such a thing, such a possibility, had never existed before. It leaves us reflecting on the eventual erasure of this world and its structures, and what is to be found there instead. In the case of Ancoats, what remains is not much—close to nothing at all. The Round House was demolished in 1986. In its place is only a plaque, plus a shape traced by a low brick wall. In 2009, a structure known as the “New Roundhouse” (figs. 40 - 43) was completed in Openshaw to

rehouse the Manchester University Settlement. Again, the choice has fallen on a struggling neighbourhood, this one three miles east of the Every Street site.



Figure 40.

The brick wall that remembers the Round House building, Every Street, Manchester, March 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography



Figure 41.

Commemorative Plaque at the site of the Round House building, Every Street, Manchester, March 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography



Figure 42.

New Roundhouse, Manchester University Settlement, Openshaw, Manchester, March 2017 Digital image courtesy of Paul Grogan Photography

Towards the end of the run of the Lowry exhibition, which closed on 20 October 2013, I received a letter from the British artist Margery Clarke, who was born in Manchester in 1926 and befriended by Lowry in 1940, when she was fourteen. When she turned twenty in 1946, she was sent to Hamburg to complete her National Service, and in 1954 she married and moved away. I mention these facts because they are part of the reason I am inclined to think that the event she described in her letter should be dated to sometime during the Second World War, or soon after—perhaps about 1948–9.⁵³

Here is what she wrote:

After the usual slap-up lunch in a nice restaurant, as was his wont for me, LSL said, "I want to show you something." Thereupon we made our way to the bustling Piccadilly and turned off into what I learnt was Ancoats. Seemed to be a compact area squeezed within two main roads. The noise of the traffic disappeared as we wandered round the streets. It seemed to be a different world, not just still but utterly silent, almost disembodied. People occasionally passed us, like ghouls, though there were one or two soft short signs of recognition to him. Time disappeared in the greyness. It was calm and quietly encompassing, like a dream. Eventually we found ourselves on the outskirts at the bottom of the steps (which was one of his subjects) overlooking the area with its huddled terraces and some smoking chimneys. "Awful, isn't it", he said. "Can't they be moved to better housing?" I asked. "It's a community and can't be broken up like that."⁵⁴

But Lowry was wrong. Communities can be broken up, as was Ancoats. The transformation was radical. What he did get right, I think, is his analysis of urban space. If he drew a place, but not its people, perhaps this was in recognition that people need a place to be. In Ancoats, it is still needed, even though "urban renewal" and rebuilding have recently begun all over again.⁵⁵

In his recent book on the Welsh landscape artist Edward Pugh, John Barrell describes another version of local knowledge than the one Geertz sets out. For Barrell, such knowledge is manifest in the recognition that local viewers brought to Pugh's images—a nod of familiarity, Barrell calls it, which comes with "the pleasure of knowing where that was" and perhaps even that it could be a landscape too.⁵⁶ Lowry is not Pugh, nor is Mary Stocks to be equated with Pugh's middle-class patrons. Even so, the differences in their

motives notwithstanding, Stocks and Lowry, like Pugh and his patrons, were after local knowledge of a place. They aimed to make Ancoats visible as an urban site or fabric that, though worn and threadbare, still contrived to cohere. Its buildings and viaducts, tenements and chimneys served to construct a minimal scaffolding for urban life. And it is this minimal density, this coherence that in Ancoats has since been lost. Landscapes need continuity; do away with such connections and the urbscape has won. Such a malign victory is possible when people fail to see—and thus to grasp—the implications of place. No risk of Lowry committing such an error. He knew full well, as he put it, that “he had lived through the time of social awareness.”⁵⁷ But more than this, in living through such a time, he made that awareness his own.

Footnotes

- 1 At present there is no catalogue raisonné of drawings by L. S. Lowry, nor indeed any estimate of how many he might have produced. (A catalogue of the artist's paintings, by contrast, is currently underway.) The first study of the artist's drawings was undertaken by the artist and writer Mervyn Levy (1914–96); *The Drawings of L. S. Lowry* (London: Cory, Adams and Mackay, 1963), with introduction and notes by Levy. Other key resources for any student of Lowry's drawings are Michael Leber and Judith Sandling, *L. S. Lowry* (London: Phaidon, 1987), and most recently the catalogue of the important exhibition curated by Neil Walker at the Djanogly Art Gallery, *Lowry* (Nottingham, 2011–12), with essays by Michael Howard and Charlotte Wildman.
- 2 For a richly readable treatment of the history of Ancoats, see Michael E. Rose, with Keith Falconer and Julian Holder, *Ancoats: Cradle of Industrialization* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2011). Available on line at <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/ancoats/ancoats.pdf>
- 3 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, Introduction by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71. See also Alan Kidd, *Manchester: A History* (1993; Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing Ltd., 3rd ed. 2006).
- 4 Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*.
- 5 It is worth noting that animals, like humans, demonstrate a strong sense of place.
- 6 I thank Catherine Spencer for introducing me to Clough's use of this phrase. For a sample of Spencer's work on Clough, see Catherine Spencer, “Covert Resistance: Prunella Clough's Cold War ‘Urbscapes’”, in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, ed. Catherine Jolivet (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 171–94; Catherine Spencer, “Abstraction's Ecologies: Post-Industrialization, Waste and the Commodity Form in Prunella Clough's Paintings of the 1980s and 1990s”, *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, doi:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/cspencer
- 7 For stimulating remarks on the “sedimentary strata of history” invoked here, see Clare Warden, “Ugliness and Beauty: The Politics of Landscape in Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*”, *New Theatre Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Feb. 2013): 39.
- 8 For an exploration of these seldom-noted successes, see T. J. Clark and Anne M. Wagner, *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013). See also the fine chronology provided by Helen Little in the same volume (208–25). The Duveen Paintings Fund was a short-lived patronage scheme set up by Lord Duveen in 1926 for the purchase of contemporary art; the purchased works were stored at the Tate, and remained there even after acquisitions lapsed in 1929. Lowry's *Coming out of School* (1927) was bought in 1927, in the wake of its inclusion in the “*Daily Express*” *Young Artists Exhibition*, 1927. It was formally presented to the museum in 1949. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lowry-coming-out-of-school-n05912/text-catalogue-entry>
- 9 For a useful reminder of the variety of attitudes towards Lowry and his work among art critics currently publishing in Britain, readers might wish to survey the range of views voiced by journalists in response to the above-mentioned retrospective, *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life*, mounted at Tate Britain in summer 2013. Note that my essay in the book accompanying the show refers to some of the works and issues discussed here. See Anne M. Wagner, “Lowry, Repetition and Change”, in Clark and Wagner, *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life*, 93–110.
- 10 See <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp06938&role=art&wPage=543>. The present essay draws its information from this useful source.
- 11 The only parallel to the Ancoats drawings in this or any other period of Lowry's life was a set of twelve illustrations he produced for *The Cotswold Book* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931). For an account of the circumstances of their making, see Shelley Rohde, *L. S. Lowry: A Biography* (1979; Salford: Lowry Press, 3rd ed. 1999), 170–75.
- 12 A good sample of the artist's urban drawings is reproduced in Judith Sandling and Michael Leber, *Lowry's City: A Painter and his Locale* (Salford: Lowry Press, 1999).

- 13 Philip Rawson, *Drawing* (The Appreciation of the Arts, Vol. 4), gen. ed. Harold Osborne (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 123.
- 14 Geertz's formulation is the premise of his essay "Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective", first published in 1983, which forms the centrepiece of Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). It can also be consulted on line at http://hypergeertz.jku.at/GeertzTexts/Local_Knowledge.htm. Invoked here is the first sentence of that essay. Note that Geertz follows this initial characterization of his concept by describing it as a "cast of mind, a to-know-a-city-is-to-know-its-streets approach to things". This is a cast of mind Lowry certainly possessed.
- 15 This etymology is suggested and supported in Eilert Ekwall, *The Place-names of Lancashire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1922), 35; consulted on line at https://archive.org/stream/placenamesoflanc00ekwauoft_djvu.txt
- 16 Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, 69, 70.
- 17 Although the history of the Mosley family can be traced to the creation of a baronetcy bearing that name in 1640, the branch of the family resident in Ancoats is known as the third baronetcy, and included as the sixth holder of the title Sir Oswald Mosley (1896–1980), founder of the British Union of Fascists.
- 18 Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. E. Kofman and E. Lebas (London: Blackwell, 1996), 74.
- 19 See Stuart Eagles, "Thomas Coglean Horsfall and Manchester Art Museum and University Settlement", 2009, *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, www.infed.org/settlements/manchester_art_museum_and_university_settlement.htm.
- 20 Mary Danvers Stocks, *Fifty Years in Every Street* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1945). Stocks remains an important source for historians of the Settlement, particularly its early years.
- 21 Winifred Gill (1991–1981), an artist whose niece was my correspondent's cousin, is particularly known for her involvement in the running of the Omega Workshop, but was also active on many other fronts. In addition to her work in the Settlement movement, she was also involved with the Lake Mere archaeological dig, and was active at the BBC, both as a broadcaster and in audience research. Margaret Bennett, Gill's long-time house-mate and the aunt of my correspondent, Chrystine Bennett, was the one to initiate the effort to sort through Gill's papers and eventually to offer them to the Bodleian, Oxford. <http://www.cluttergone.co.uk/Winifred.html>. Bennett's efforts led to a BBC Radio 4 programme on Gill (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jxc77>), and also to a 2009 Courtauld exhibition, which devoted a room to Gill's work. Unfortunately, on the evidence of the Bodleian website, the bulk of these collections does not yet seem to be publicly available.
- 22 At present, the only known record of this hand list is preserved as a photocopy in The Lowry, Salford. The invitation to the annual meeting of the governing board of the Settlement is housed along with other items relating to the Settlement; see note 30 below. The same flyer was used to invite the board to Lowry's brief exhibition. The text of this paragraph reads: "You are also invited to view a collection of 25 PENCIL DRAWINGS OF ANCOATS made by Mr. L. S. Lowry at the special request of the Settlement. The drawings, which are for sale, will be on view in the Common Room, Ancoats Hall, before the meeting on March 25th, from 12 to 6 p.m., and also on Wednesday, March 26, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tea at the Buffet ninepence each." As is clear, the source of the information that there were twenty-five drawings in Lowry's show (as opposed to the twenty-six listed on the flyer) lies here. The same text, moreover, clears up the misconception, which I once shared, that the drawing show was in the Round House itself.
- 23 The nineteenth-century maps of the area published by Adshead position two mills just north of Every Street: J. & L. Williams Cotton Mill, which lay between Tame and Harrison Streets, and J. & J. L. Gray's Cotton Mill, which along with Swindells and Williams chemical works, was built between Harrison and Pollard Streets.
- 24 It seems likely that the placelessness telegraphed by these titles is keyed to the fundamental link between canals and rivers on the one hand, and notions of continuity and transit on the other.
- 25 John Berger, "Lowry", in *The Moment of Cubism and other Essays* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 107.
- 26 The paradoxes of Lowry's relationship to this disappearing world are considered in H. Roy Merrens and Glen Norcliffe, "L. S. Lowry and the Heritage Movement", *Manchester Region History Review* 8 (1994): 50–53.
- 27 Two drawings from the show were reproduced in the *Manchester Guardian* on 25 March 1930, as halftone illustrations. The review itself, "Mr Lowry in Ancoats", ran on a different page from the illustrations.
- 28 "Mr Lowry in Ancoats", *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1930.
- 29 "Mr Lowry in Ancoats", *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1930.
- 30 In her biography of the artist, Shelley Rohde advances this claim. see Rohde, *L. S. Lowry*, 185–86. It is not supported by the surviving records of the Settlement—in particular, the ledger entry preserved among the Settlement archives, MUS/1–MUS/7, which lists the titles of drawings sold from the show along with their numbers on the surviving hand list, and annotates them with the names of the purchasers, how payment was made, and whether the work was sold framed.
- 31 From 1870, the Midland Railway maintained offices in the Hall, close by its goods depot on what was once Mosley land. See "Ancoats Railway Station", Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancoats_railway_station#CITEREFKellert1969

- 32 Sydney Solomon Frankenburg (1881–1935) was a member of a conservative Jewish family in the city headed by Isidor, founder of I. Frankenburg and Sons, which after a merger around 1920 became Greengate Leather and Rubber Works, and advertised itself as “the first British manufacturers to produce Rubber-proofed aeroplane and balloon fabrics.” See <http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:Im19091009Fl-Frankenburg.jpg>. In this context it is worth noting the reminiscences of Kate Herbert (b. 1928), an artist born in Salford who met Lowry while a student at the Salford College of Art, and who remembered his attraction to Greengate, where he often walked and drew. See the blog written by Herbert’s granddaughter, Naomi Racz: <https://blacktoprain.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/lowry-and-kate-herbert/>

Note, however, Herbert’s memories place Lowry in Greengate during or after the Second World War. For an overview of the history of the Frankenburg firm, see http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Greengate_and_Irwell_Rubber_Co

One further relevant aspect of Sydney Frankenburg’s biography is his role as the husband of Charis Ursula Frankenburg, née Barnett (1892–1985), who with Stocks and Flora Blumberg, founded the Manchester and Salford Mothers’ Clinic, which, according to Prof. Bill Oliver, was the first place outside London to offer free family planning advice to women. See <http://www.citizenscientist.org.uk/welcome/success-in-salford/mary-stocks-charis-frankenburg-and-flora-blumberg-pioneers-of-family-planning/>
<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/frankenburg/frankenburg.html#frankenburg.A>

Charis Frankenburg would go on to publish *Common Sense in the Nursery* (1934) and *Not Old, Madam, Vintage* (London: Galaxy Books, 1975), her memoir. In the 1960s, the *Guardian* published a good number of her letters to the editor.

- 33 Not all these names can be traced, but there is enough information to be able to place these individuals as among Manchester’s intellectuals and taste-makers, and, as in the instance of Sydney and Charis Frankenburg, to begin to understand something of the left and liberal ties among them.
- 34 See Frankenburg, *Not Old, Madam, Vintage*, 121 and *passim* on her husband’s charitable nature.
- 35 Lowry, of course, would have understood these dimensions in inches, making use of a pad or packet of paper with uniform sheets. Note, however, that for a Lowry drawing to have these dimensions is not evidence enough that it was on view at the Round House show.
- 36 The phrase is drawn from a 1904 report by T. R. Marr, *Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford*, cited by Mary Stocks in *Fifty Years in Every Street*, 9. Stocks also cites Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, 8, and takes up his phrase, “mean streets”.
- 37 Levy, *Drawings of L. S. Lowry*, 15.
- 38 “Mr Lowry in Ancoats”, *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1930.
- 39 This information comes from <https://m.facebook.com/manchestermemorylane/posts/1121617434563978>. Such websites provide valuable sources for memories and photographs of an industrial and residential landscape that has since been almost entirely erased.
- 40 Perhaps the most similar are among the drawings Lowry made at the invitation of his friend Harold Timperley to provide illustrations for the latter’s *A Cotswold Book* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931). There were twelve in all, some of which approach, but do not achieve, the stark minimalism of Lowry’s Ancoats work. For the general circumstances of the commission, see Rohde, *L. S. Lowry*, 170–75.
- 41 Wagner, “Lowry, Repetition and Change”, 99–100.
- 42 Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933; London: Vintage Classics, new ed. 1993), chapter 3.
- 43 Greenwood’s descriptions return to a longstanding claim about life in the labouring towns of northern England, one already articulated in the nineteenth century. In particular, there are echoes here of the observations of the critic Angus Reach writing in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849: “In general, these towns wear a monotonous sameness of aspect, physical and moral . . . In fact, the social condition of the different town populations is almost as much alike as the material appearance of the tall chimneys under which they live. Here and there the height of the latter may differ by a few rounds of brick, but in all essential respects, a description of one is a description of all.” Cited by Rob Powell in *In the Wake of King Cotton* (Rochdale Art Gallery, 1986), 12.
- 44 Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, chapter 3.
- 45 Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 116.
- 46 Rawson, *Drawing*, 187.
- 47 Rawson, *Drawing*, 193. Rawson is concerned with a drawing in the Ashmolean Museum customarily dated c. 1540.
- 48 Among Lowry’s Ancoats drawings is to be found a study/finished drawing pairing, which confirms this point. It is made up of two views of Great Ancoats Street, one of which is dated 1929, the other—and more finished—version dated 1930.
- 49 Lowry worked as a rent collector and accountant for the Pall Mall Property Company, located on Brown Street, in central Manchester, on a site now occupied by Tesco. Famously, he remained there from 1910 until 1952, when he retired at the age of sixty-five with a pension of £200 per year. According to Rohde, “His duties soon took on a regular pattern: Longsight and Old Trafford on Mondays, Hulme and Higher Broughton on Tuesdays, Withing on Wednesday mornings, and the remainder of the week employed as a cashier in the front office.” Much of the information she offers on the artist’s working life came from Clifford Openshaw, who joined the Pall Mall Property Company in 1928. See Rohde, *L. S. Lowry*, 89–94 and *passim*. Founded in 1895, the Pall Mall Property Company survives, with offices in Lytham St Anne’s, Lancashire; see <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00043386>.

- 50 Details of Maitland's role at the University of Manchester can be gleaned from the website of the university library. See also the obituary by A. W. Downie for the Society for General Microbiology, now the Microbiology Society, 1 May 1973, *Journal of Medical Microbiology* 6: 253-258, doi:10.1099/00222615-6-2-253
- 51 Maitland MS, 4. A photocopy of Maitland's unpublished manuscript is in the archive of The Lowry, Salford. My thanks to Claire Stewart, Curator.
- 52 See Robert Hobbs, ed., *Mark Lombardi: Global Networks* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2003). This exhibition circulated among eight galleries and museums in the US and Canada, including the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, where I was fortunate to see it in 2004. The scale of the drawings, and the intricacy of their execution made this direct encounter especially valuable.
- 53 Margery Clarke and her son Paul Clarke today run a small gallery, "The First" Gallery, which operates from their home in Bitterne, Southampton, and still maintains a website; see <http://www.olfocsls.org.uk/first/>. Among the artists the gallery represents is Crispin Eurich (1936-76), who took some memorable photographs of Lowry in Stockport.
- 54 Undated letter from Margery Clarke to the author, autumn 2013.
- 55 The initiative, dubbed Ancoats Urban Village, is detailed in a paper dated June 2011 and titled "Lessons from Ancoats Urban Village and Islington Millennium Village, Manchester". The text is the effort of the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Network. See http://urbed.coop/sites/default/files/Ancoats%20and%20New%20Islington%20report_0.pdf
- Note too that the policy of representing and preserving the area as an industrial landscape is expressly articulated as part of the city's approach to its conservation. See http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conservation_areas/1216/ancoats_conservation_area
- 56 John Barrell, *Edward Pugh of Ruthin, 1763-1813: "A Native Artist"* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 31-32.
- 57 Lowry, as quoted by T. J. Clark in "Lowry's Other England", in *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life*, 73.

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