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Cotton Field Park

This park began life in 2002 as part of an ambitious £200m ‘Millennium Village’ project for New Islington. It sits alongside the first new canal arm built in the city since the Manchester Ship Canal was completed more than 100 years earlier.

The park and the canal work in tandem and include a pine-crowned ‘garden island’ and large numbers of frisky Canada Geese. The Cotton Field canal arm also features a marina with house and leisure boats. There are some fine indie places for food and drink on the eastern side.

A fun element is to cross the hefty three-way New Islington footbridge which opens off Redhill Street, walk a few paces and look under the bridge to its shadow. If you catch the light just right, then reflected on the water you might see the words CAST NO SHADOW. This riffs amongst the ripples on the Oasis song of the same name as a nod to the city’s musical legacy: the joke, of course, being the bridge does cast a shadow.

Mayfield Park

This is 6.5 acres of freshly minted loveliness which opened in 2022 on what was one of the most industrialised sites in the world. Some of the massive girders which culverted the river and held up the factories have been re-used as ornamental features.

The winding River Medlock adds a special magic: look out for 30cm long brown trout in the river, the best place to spot them is under the Baring Street bridge close to the entrance of the park. You might even spot a kingfisher; seemingly incongruous in this still intensely urban environment between a motorway and a 1910 railway warehouse, now a leisure facility.

The park designers, Studio Egret West, have done a remarkable job, one which includes a large playground straddling the river designed by Massey & Harris. These are the stats: 120,000 plants brought in, 140 trees spread across 58 species, 70 metres of the River Medlock unconverted, 230 square metres of rain gardens, 2,400 square metres of wildflower meadow and around 2,100 square metres of lawn.

Sackville Gardens & Kampus

Sackville Gardens was originally named Whitworth Gardens in honour of engineer and philanthropist Joseph Whitworth. There’s a lot of Mr Whitworth in Manchester. His generosity and that of his trustees, provided the mighty former college building across from Sackville Gardens and his eponymous street. His money also provided Whitworth Hall at the University and Whitworth Art Gallery and Whitworth Park amongst others.

Sackville Gardens lies in the Gay Village. This is marked by the seated statue of Alan Turing holding an apple by Glyn Hughes from 2001. Turing’s work influenced so much of the digital world in which we live. His Turing Test remains the test for AI. Turing was gay and convicted of homosexuality in 1952 when it was illegal for males. He committed suicide (some people dispute this) during his time at Manchester University by eating a cyanide injected apple in 1954 for, again, disputed reasons.

The Gardens, which is a focus for many Pride events in August, also has the Beacon of Hope sculpture by Warren Chapman and Jess Byrne from 1997 in commemoration of HIV and AIDs victims. Its northern edge hugs the Rochdale Canal.

A very short walk away is the lovely Campus Garden, tiny and surrounded on three sides by apartments and food and drink businesses, the fourth side again fronts Rochdale Canal. The garden site is a filled canal arm and has an almost tropical atmosphere. Worth seeking out.

Many of the benefits of going outside include improve your mood, reduce feelings of stress or anger, help you take time out and feel more relaxed, improve your physical health, improve your confidence and self-esteem, help you be more active, help you meet and get to know new people and connect you to your local community.