

Underground Manchester

A guide for teachers

The Gallery

Underground Manchester tells the story of Manchester's water supply and sanitation from Roman times to the present day.

Using the gallery

The entrance to Underground Manchester is in the ground floor (road level) entrance hall of the Station Building (Building 3). This is shared with The Making of Manchester Gallery and includes a brief three-minute video about the history and current use of Station Building. Stairs lead down to Underground Manchester in the cellars of the Station Building. People in wheelchairs or with pushchairs will need to use the lift in the Gas Gallery to enter and leave Underground Manchester. The gallery is organised into several small sections and follows a long, winding route. It would be advisable to split a class into smaller groups. Children below the age of 12 will find the text on the display panels challenging. There are no toilets in the gallery - other than those on display!

National Curriculum

The gallery is relevant to the following:

- Science (hygiene and disease/microbes)
- Design and technology (water supply)
- History (Romans, Victorians/Public Health)
- Geography (water/rivers)

What's in the gallery

The Funeral Scene

A display with soundtrack of the 1847 funeral of 2½-year-old John Wood. Tombstone inscriptions provide evidence of the high levels of infant mortality in early nineteenth century Manchester. Many people died from diseases caused by contaminated drinking water.



Roman Britain

A recreation of a Roman latrine highlighting the lack of privacy but sophisticated standards achieved by the Romans. Running water was used to flush the channels in the latrine. Display panels illustrate and discuss Roman bathhouses and aqueducts. Roman clay pipes are on display.

Medieval Times

Only the rich or religious orders enjoyed good sanitation. Displays include a fifteenth century pottery urinal from Norton priory. Elsewhere a growing population dumped waste into the street or river.

Manchester: The Filthy Town

Wooden water pipes and a chamber pot represent the eighteenth century. While bathing was rare, a wash stand is evidence that it had started to become common among the

better off towards the end of the century. The wooden water pipes show that by now parts of the North West had simple water distribution systems.

Water for an Expanding Town

Stone water pipes illustrate an attempted solution to the demands of a rapidly growing Manchester. The hand-operated water pump on display would have been typical of the way many of the inhabitants would have had to pump ground water to the surface. Display panels explain the role of cholera epidemics and campaigning by sanitary reformers in leading to the improvement of Manchester's water supply, notably with the opening of reservoirs in the Longdendale Valley in 1851.

Down the Drain

Display panels and an audio recording of *The Ballad of the Flood* of 1872 highlight the problems caused by inadequate drainage. Exhibits of u-shaped and egg-shaped sewer pipes with explanations of their problems lead onto models and images of Manchester's first (1889) and second (1911) sewage schemes.

Reconstructed Sewer

Walk through the reconstruction of the late 1830s sewer reclaimed from under Bridgewater Street. Listen, smell, feel and imagine what it would be like in a sewer. At the end of the sewer a model night soil cart and display explain late Victorian approaches to the disposal of excrement prior to the development of modern sewage filtration beds. Push a button to activate a model percolating filter.

Water for the Home

Reconstructions of different types of toilets are on display:

- Pail closet – introduced by Manchester Corporation in 1872, the pail would be emptied once a week and its contents removed by night soil cart,
- Privy-midden, a closet built over a refuse, or ash, pit. This was the forerunner of the pail closet.
- Tipper toilet – an attempt to conserve water by using dirty water from the kitchen sink to flush the waste away,
- Water closets – a backyard outdoor flush toilet typical of the type in common use by the start of the twentieth century (see right).



Exhibits in this area also record the use of water for keeping clean:

- Lever Brothers advertising film,
- Mass produced brands of soap,
- Display of domestic washing equipment including a posser and mangle,
- Reconstruction, including washing machine and hot air dryer closets, from Moss Street public baths, Bolton, 1924.

Water in Modern Life

Display panels and two interactive computer-based exhibits about the water cycle and modern water treatment, supply and use in the North West. The exit from here leads to the 1830 Warehouse and the Making of Manchester gallery. Halfway up the stairs is an interactive display about keeping water clean and safe.