

## **A view of NCUK university towns (Salford)**

If one looks at a list of NCUK universities one might be led to wonder where on earth Salford is. In fact the slogan of the university gives the game way - 'University of Salford - A Greater Manchester University'

Greater Manchester is a very large area of about 1300 square kilometres created in 1974 as a result of the Local Government Act of 1972. It is made up of ten separate metropolitan boroughs. Of these, one of the closest to Manchester itself is Salford, separated only by the natural boundary formed by the Irwell river. In fact, Salford University is probably closer to Manchester city centre than large parts of Manchester University are. The creation of metropolitan areas of this type is not entirely strange in the UK context, nor is it new. The area of Staffordshire known as The Potteries centres around Stoke-on-Trent, 82 km south of Salford has been recognised as a distinct entity for many years. It comprises the towns of Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton which are all well-known individually as pottery towns.

Salford itself is about 200 miles north west of London and is only a few miles from Manchester international airport. It is the terminus of the ship canal that links Manchester to the Mersey (Liverpool) and the sea. The canal was completed in 1894 and was a major contributor to the prosperity of the area. Now the old Manchester Docks have been regenerated to form Salford Quays, a new area which provides a mix of culture, shopping and leisure around the waterfront. In 2007 the BBC announced that several of its departments would be moving from London to the Quays.

Salford has many claims to historical notoriety. It was the scene of the first railway fatality, when the MP, William Huskisson fell under George Stephenson's Rocket. The reason given was that two tracks were very close together. (When I first came to Britain I was warned that the separation between tracks was significantly less than in my native Ireland, whose rail gauge is 7.6cm narrower than in Sri Lanka. I was warned never to lean out of the window of a moving train, in case someone was doing the same thing in a train travelling in the opposite direction.)

Salford has long held a reputation for radical thinkers and activists, some good, some bad, depending on one's personal opinion. Emmeline Pankhurst led the suffragette movement which campaigned for votes for women. It was in a pub in Salford that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels met to discuss their Communist Manifesto.

A particularly famous Salfordian was the 'Match-Stick Men' artist, L.S. Lowry. The Lowry building on the Quays holds a collection of the artist's work, and is also a theatre.

The composer Peter Maxwell Davies, currently Master of the Queen's Music, was born in Salford. He studied at the University of Manchester and at the Royal Manchester College of Music which was and is a very highly regarded music conservatoire.

A perhaps surprising Salfordian was Alistair Cooke. Despite his upper-class accent (more associated with Southern England), his father was an iron-fitter and Methodist preacher who became a guest-house manager in the famous seaside town of Blackpool 50 miles away. But "who" you might ask "was Alistair Cooke?" He was a radio legend of our time whose weekly "Letter From America" was heard by millions of BBC listeners. Even in the darkest days following the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the aftermath of 9/11 his soft voice conveyed a sense of calm assessment. Many of his broadcasts can be downloaded from YouTube and it is reported that the scripts for the entire 2869 transmissions are to be made available online via the University of East Anglia, Norwich.