

► REAL ◀ ROCHDALE

WINTER 2025
ISSUE 27





Greg Couzens

A warm welcome to Real Rochdale magazine

We have a feature showcasing the artistic talent of the internationally acclaimed mural artists who came to paint in Rochdale town centre. Malcolm Journeaux photographed the stunning artwork and spoke to the artistic director of the mural festival, Norden-based Hayley Garner.

We take a look at Voltalab Sound Studios, a boutique recording studio housed in the iconic Cargo building in Rochdale town centre, and the Rochdale Music Stories project, a celebration of Rochdale's musical history.

Heywood Cricket Club enjoyed a superb 2025 season winning their division and the cup - you can read about their success on page 12.

You can also read about Rochdale AFC Women's team on page 15.

Liz White interviewed Reverend Anne Gilbert (Area Dean of Rochdale), and the borough's two 'Young Poets in Residence', Sasha Mostafa and Alende Amisi.

Syke Community Base is more than just a community centre, it is a place where "laughter, friendship, and a true sense of belonging" can be found - read about it on page 30.

Greg

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Cover - Mural by Smug

Known for hyper real murals that fuse nature and humanity, Smug's latest mural features 'Auntie' Suriya Begum - Rochdale legend, community champion, everyday hero. Chosen through an open call, her portrait was taken pre-festival and transformed into a mural that radiates pride, warmth and grit.

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Printing

Jones & Brooks Ltd, Rochdale



ROCHDALE: A PLACE FOR LIFE

by Nikki Staley

From its proud heritage to its exciting future, Rochdale is a place where people can put down roots, raise families, and enjoy an active and fulfilling life at every stage. Today, the borough is undergoing a renaissance, investing in its people, places and communities to ensure prosperity for generations to come.

A town of culture and heritage

Rochdale is the birthplace of cooperation, and that spirit of community still runs through the town today. The Rochdale Pioneers Museum keeps alive the story of the first cooperative store, while Touchstones, the borough's art and heritage hub, is undergoing a multi-million-pound transformation. When it reopens, it will offer a vibrant year-round programme of exhibitions, family activities, workshops and talks.

As the Greater Manchester Town of Culture, Rochdale is proud to host a packed calendar of events, from food and drink festivals to literature, art and music, creating opportunities for people to come together and celebrate. With heritage, creativity and community at its heart, Rochdale is a destination for culture lovers of all ages.

A town centre to be proud of

The transformation of Rochdale's town centre has already delivered a £250 million regeneration. Rochdale Riverside combines shopping, dining, leisure and entertainment, while Number One Riverside brings together library, council and civic services in a modern hub. The River Roch has been uncovered, restoring medieval character to the heart of town, and the Grade I listed town hall has been carefully restored to its Victorian splendour.

The refurbishment of Heywood Civic Centre and the creation of the Middleton Development Corporation will add even more vibrancy, creating new spaces for culture, business and community life across the borough, and this is just the beginning.

A town that keeps you active

With thirteen Green Flag parks, the dramatic Pennine landscape and Hollingworth Lake, a hub for sailing, kayaking, and windsurfing, Rochdale makes it easy to lead an active lifestyle. Walking routes, nature reserves and outdoor groups encourage residents to connect with the natural environment, while leisure centres across the borough provide modern, accessible facilities for every generation.

A town for families

Families thrive here. With over 85% of schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding', Rochdale offers children the best start in life. Beyond the classroom, Your Trust venues deliver sports, arts and leisure activities, and a year-round programme of family events and festivals ensures there is always something to enjoy together. Safe green spaces, thriving communities and affordable homes make the borough an ideal place to grow up.

A town for every stage of life

Rochdale is a place that grows with you. Independent cafés, bars and restaurants are flourishing alongside festivals such as the Feel Good Festival, Street Eat and the Ignite Fire Festival. Beyond the town centre, Middleton Arena and Heywood Civic Centre provide a stage for live music, theatre, comedy and community events. Whether you are starting out, raising a family, or enjoying later life, Rochdale offers something for everyone.

A town connected and ambitious

Rochdale's location in Greater Manchester means fast, easy connections. Trains, trams and buses link to central Manchester in as little as 15 minutes, while Manchester Airport opens up global opportunities.

The borough is also looking firmly to the future. Atom Valley, one of the UK's most significant growth zones, will drive economic prosperity, creating jobs, skills and opportunities in advanced manufacturing, green industry and innovation. It represents the next chapter in Rochdale's story: a place that honours its heritage while building for the future.

Rochdale is a town for today and tomorrow, a place to enjoy culture and heritage, raise a family, stay active, and thrive at every stage of life. This is just the beginning of a new chapter in the borough's renaissance.



VOLTALAB

SOUND STUDIOS

Voltalab Sound Studios is a boutique recording studio housed in the iconic Cargo building in Rochdale, with a fascinating back story. This infamous and impressive recording space is renowned and revered amongst music fans and recording industry professionals alike, and synonymous with the seventies and eighties Manchester music scene.

Cargo Recording Studios opened in 1978 under the direction of owner engineer John Brierley, who built the sixteen track studio from the ground up after leaving his job at Granada. His vision from the outset; to build a recording space that produced a brand new sound, the likes of which hadn't been created anywhere else. Artists rapidly discovered that Cargo captured a much sought after live energy within a recording studio setting.

With bands like Gang of Four recording critically acclaimed debut single *Damaged Goods* at Cargo and Tony Wilson introducing Joy Division to the space, Cargo quickly gained credibility as a studio for adventurous music makers. Factory Records producer Martin Hannett became a fan, favouring the grassroots feel of the place. Subsequently, he recorded Joy Division and OMD, with Brierley and his right hand engineer Colin Richardson.

Open 24/7 for three months straight at its peak, they had a constant stream of UK indie bands through their doors, cultivating quite a reputation for creating outstanding records. Bands travelled from all over the UK and Europe to record in Cargo – a revolving door of one band leaving as the other arrived.

The building was front and centre in the 2002 film *24 Hour Party People*. Fans of the film may particularly recall a pivotal scene where Hannett had Joy Division drummer Stephen Morris record the drums for 1979 record *She's Lost Control* on the roof of the studio. This scene sums up the entire essence of Cargo; anything goes to achieve the perfect sounds that artists and producers are looking for.

In 2008, Voltalab founders Jamie Alsop and Marc Lewis met and just a year later launched their first studio; an old machine room in a neglected textile mill near Rochdale. The pair, bonded by a shared love of traditional recording techniques, decided on the space for their passion project purely due to its unique acoustics. Together, they converted the mill, running it for three years as a commercial studio, before spotting an opportunity that they couldn't resist.

In 2009 a blue plaque was placed on the Cargo building, in recognition of the role the studio



Photo: James Oldham

played in the music scene not only in the North West but throughout the UK and into Europe too. Well-versed on the history of the space, Alsop and Lewis set their sights on leasing the Cargo building and begun planning on how to preserve its legacy during the next iteration of Voltalab.

Loaded with musical heritage, the building re-opened as Voltalab Sound Studios in 2013, following a year-long build and substantial reinvestment in the space and its kit. Lessons learned from the first Voltalab studio build helped make the most thoughtful use of the space, whilst being mindful of its laudable legacy. Installation of parts of the old studio into the new space bring a little piece of Voltalab history into the Cargo building.

In 2014, Alsop took sole ownership of the studio, with Lewis relocating to The Midlands to launch a new events production company.

Under Alsop's expertise, the building that housed all of this incredible history has been lovingly rebuilt, with every custom-designed feature considered thoughtfully and with an astounding attention to detail. Alsop's vision to preserve the fascinating Cargo history, whilst respectfully reinvigorating and refreshing the studio for future generations of music makers, has been achieved. Brand new sounds are being created here, whilst fondly respecting the fascinating heritage of the space.

Now making records for over a decade, Voltalab - like Cargo Studios before it - helps artists and musicians create incredible music.

ROCHDALE MUSIC STORIES

Rochdale boasts a rich and diverse musical legacy; from Gracie Fields to The Courteeners, Lisa Stansfield to Autechre. It's also the town where Joy Division recorded their seminal track Atmosphere, and where ground-breaking music continues to thrive.

Now, as part of Rochdale's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture, Rochdale Development Agency has launched 'Rochdale Music Stories' a new collaboration with Voltalab Sound Studios and John and Rosemary Barratt from The Stockport Music Story. The project is designed to celebrate the borough's musical heritage through a studio-recorded compilation album featuring local artists reinterpreting and reimagining tracks that were recorded at Cargo Studios and Suite 16.

The limited-edition high-quality vinyl featuring the reworkings will be released together with a live showcase event at Champness Hall on Saturday 14 March 2026 where the tracks will be performed.

The project aims to honour Rochdale's musical legacy while spotlighting the energy and diversity of its current music scene.

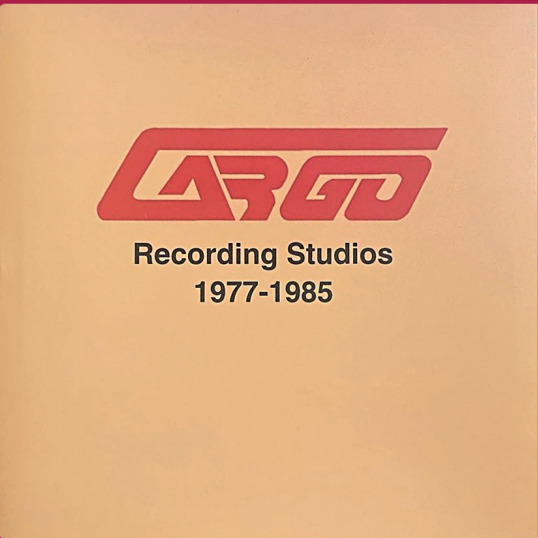
ARTIST	ORIGINAL ARTIST	TRACK
Blvckout	A Certain Ratio	All Night Party
Desyfer & Emma Konnanov	Happy Mondays	Twenty Four Hour Party People
From The Ground Up	The Stone Roses	Elephant Stone
Jennifer Reid Ft: Bloom Music Community	The Fall	Totally Wired
K-Estate	Gang of Four	Damaged Goods
Leo HC	The Chameleons	Up The Down Escalator
Medley	New Order	Dreams Never End
Mercy Kelly	Inspiral Carpets	Keep The Circle Around
Micah Stalgic Ft: Local Vocals	Joy Division	Atmosphere
PoolEra	OMD	Electricity

CARGO STUDIOS BOOK

The Rochdale Music Stories Project was kicked off with the launch of a new book, by author Chris Connelly, which documents the rich history of Rochdale's Cargo Studios from 1977 to 1985.

Chris spent twelve years researching the 360-page hard-back book which features over a thousand pictures. There is an introduction from Cargo's founder and studio engineer John Brierley and a foreword by Peter Hook, who recorded there with Joy Division and New Order and continued the legacy when he bought the premises and ran it as Suite 16 Studios.

Cargo Studios is where ground-breaking tracks from Joy Division The Fall, Gang of Four, The Chameleons, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, A Certain Ratio and many more were recorded.



Clint Boon, Martin Moscrop, Chris Connelly, Andy McCluskey & Peter Hook at the launch of the Cargo Studios book at Voltalab Studios

ROCHDALE BEER TO CELEBRATE SPECIAL YEAR

Brewers in Rochdale teamed up to create a beer celebrating the town's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture.

The cask ale, named 'Signo', is a 4.5% golden ale, brewed with all British ingredients and described as having a sweet flavour with hints of peach and apricot, along with a gentle citrus vibe and a subtle herbal note to finish.

With a nod to Rochdale's heritage, the beer's name, 'Signo', was inspired by the town's Latin motto featured on its coat of arms, 'Crede Signo', which translates as 'Trust in this sign.' The strapline 'Confidence and trust in culture' accompanies the name on pump clips and marketing, reflecting Rochdale's year in the spotlight.



*Leanne Jones (Wakey Wakey), Jon Duffin (CAMRA Rochdale Oldham and Bury),
Anthony Jones (Wakey Wakey), Councillor Sue Smith, Eloise Gettings (Twisted Mule Brewery and Tap House),
and Domenico Iannidiaardi (Twisted Mule Brewery and Tap House).*

Councillor Sue Smith, cabinet member for communities and co-operation, visited the Wakey Wakey Brew Company in Rochdale to help launch the beer and meet some of the brewers involved, along with a representative from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), Rochdale Development Agency, and Rochdale Business Improvement District (BID) who have supported it.

Brewers who joined forces to make the special edition beer are Wakey Wakey Brew Company, Twisted Mule Brewery and Tap House, Brid's Cross Brewing, the Serious Brewing Company and Whitworth Valley Brewing.

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HEYWOOD CRICKET CLUB

DOUBLE WINNERS

Heywood Cricket Club, based at Crimble in the heart of the town, has a proud history stretching back over 150 years. Known for producing homegrown talent and creating a welcoming community atmosphere, the club fields four senior sides and a thriving junior section.

This year has been one of the most successful in recent times, with the 1st XI writing a new chapter in the club's history. The 1st XI completed a remarkable league and cup double, winning the GMCL Championship and the GMCL Championship Cup. Promotion to the GMCL Premier II Division was secured with a few weeks to spare, and the cup was lifted in dramatic fashion after a nail biting victory over old rivals Milnrow in a packed final at Roe Green, a game that will live long in the memories of all that were there.



League Winners

Richard Slatem finished the season as the league's leading wicket-taker with 68 wickets, underlining his consistency and match-winning ability. Marty Walters and Riley Mackay both finished in the top 10 league run scorers, Walters passing 600 runs with a brilliant century at Hadfield. Behind the stumps, Wes Hunt led the entire league with 32 dismissals. With the ball, Will Purser, and professional Greg Butterworth featured alongside Slatem in the division's top 10 wicket-takers. The team effort was reflected in every department, with key contributions right through the side.

League-winning captain Bobby Cross said: "This group has been fantastic from day one. The commitment, skill, and team spirit has shone through every week. To win the league unbeaten until the final few weeks shows the consistency of the players and the depth of talent we now have at the club."

Cup-winning captain Will Purser added: "Winning silverware is always special, but to lift the cup in front of such incredible support made it unforgettable. Every player has stepped up this season, and to deliver the double is a huge reward for the hard work that goes in across the whole club."



Cup Winners

With promotion secured and the club back in the top flight, Heywood CC is determined to keep building on this success. The commitment to producing local talent, improving facilities, and engaging the community remains at the heart of everything the club does.

Photos: Millie Waller (<https://www.instagram.com/milliewallerphoto>)



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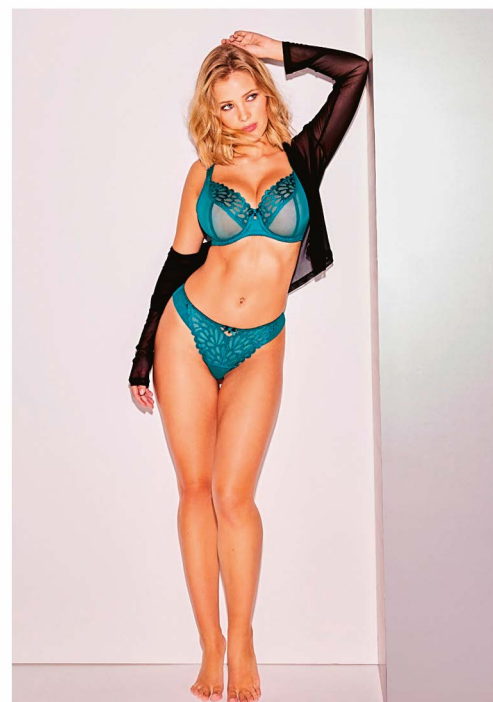
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ROCHDALE AFC
WOMEN'S TEAM



Back Row: Brooke Strudwick, Alicia Barnett, Ellie Southworth, Phoebe Duckworth, Sophie Coates, Ellie Jones, Erin Whyte, Daisy Mason.
 Front Row: Daisie Hastwell, Katie King, Nicole Malpus, Leah Jackson, Tanya Nash, Hollie Burke, Gracie Smith, Caris Valente.

Not pictured: Abigail Nolan, Lilly Dale, Holly Hayden, Isabelle Hunt, Melissa Miranda, Grace Wilson, Georgia Cocking, Olivia Jones, Cienna Williams, Eleanor Ashton, Ellie Fergus, Gracie Lawler, Sophie Lister, Dolcie O'Connor.

Rochdale AFC Women's team entered the Greater Manchester Women's North West Division in 2023, following a restructure of the team in open age form.

Under the stewardship of experienced manager Lee Atkinson, the squad achieved cup glory in their first season as they claimed the Premier Cup with victory over Salford United Juniors.

Their second season provided history for the club in a first-ever promotion; after a third-placed finish, the club made the step up to Tier Six to compete in the North West Regional Central Division.

Dale have started life in the league well and beat Atherton Laburnum Rovers in a game played at the Crown Oil Arena in front of hundreds of supporters.

Led by captain Brooke Strudwick, the club has seen changes in coaching and playing staff in the hope of sustaining their future in Tier Six and above. Jordan Morris has joined as assistant to Atkinson (they previously worked together at Bolton Wanderers), and new faces such as Sophie Coates, Erin Whyte, Katie King and Daisy Mason provide optimism for a successful season.

With games predominantly played at Kingsway Park School, spectators can support the team this season free of charge.

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SQUARE GALLERY



A striking outdoor art gallery can be found in front of the refurbished Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall.

Six double-sided exhibition stands with built-in seating form the appropriately named ‘Square Gallery’ providing space for residents and visitors to relax and enjoy the scenery as well as viewing 12 square panels that host new exhibitions every few months, providing a high-profile platform for arts organisations, artists and community groups to exhibit their work.

Future exhibitions at the Square Gallery will include a takeover by Rochdale Youth Arts Festival in March 2026 - the closing event of the town’s year in the cultural spotlight co-produced with the borough’s young people. The Square Gallery’s programme is curated by Rochdale Creates, which brings together arts organisations in the borough.

Councillor Sue Smith, cabinet member for communities and co-operation at Rochdale Borough Council, said: “The Square Gallery is a fantastic addition to the town centre and with thousands of people walking past each week it brings art into the heart of the community, making it accessible and part of everyday life. With seating included it’s got a really practical use too and I encourage residents who would like to see their work featured to get in touch.”

If you are interested in staging an exhibition at the Square Gallery, email:

admin@rochdalecreates.co.uk

You will need to cover the cost of printing and installation.



BUILDINGS TRANSFORMED INTO DRAMATIC LANDMARKS

Buildings in Rochdale town centre have been transformed into dramatic landmarks, each telling a story inspired by Rochdale's history, people and culture.

Internationally acclaimed artists descended on the town in September for Common Walls, a mural festival and arts event, that has brought large-scale artworks to the town centre.

Onur

Globally acclaimed for radiant, detailed large-scale murals, Onur's festival piece is pure Rochdale energy inspired by Rochdale's Gracie Fields' wild tune 'The Rochdale Hounds'. A tribute to heritage, humour and home town pride.

Culture Co-op

Zahirah Hafiz, Elizabeth Chandler, and Evan Barlow. Culture Co-op reimagine the past. Three artists teamed up with Rochdale's communities to reimagine the history of a former textile warehouse through Islamic Arts. Panels transformed boarded up windows into vibrant images that celebrate heritage, identity and creativity.



SECA

Seca paints sound and soul. His mural dives into Rochdale's role in the 'Madchester' music revolution of the late 80s and early 90s, Cargo Studios, 24 Hour Party People, and raw cultural energy. It's vivid, loud, and rooted in a movement that still shapes the music of today.

Cabasa

Led by Rhian Kempadoo-Millar, Lizzie Rigby and Emily Wood, the mural dives into women's unheard stories around reproductive health. Inspired by voices from Rochdale's Soul Sisters, Seriously Crafty and beyond, it's bold, beautiful and rooted in lived experience.





Insane51

The Greek muralist has pioneered the 'double exposure' technique to create murals that shift to reveal two worlds. Exploring the balance between fragility and renewal, this mural is inspired by a poem from Rochdale school children created as part of Wild Wonders 2024. Grab some 3D glasses and see it shift.



.Epod

.Epod blends classical flair with urban edge. .Epod's mural 'TOTALE WIRED' riffs off The Fall's track recorded right here in Rochdale. The subject is caught in a web of tech and media, wired to forces beyond their control. It's sharp. It's surreal. It's a mirror to modern life.

AYLO

Aylo's mural, 'Dreams Never End' is inspired by New Order's track; recorded in Rochdale's Cargo Studios, it's a bold tribute to the ongoing fight for women's rights and the role of the Rochdale founded Co-op in women's suffrage.



HAYLEY GARNER

Norden-based, award winning mural artist Hayley Garner (aka AYLO), was the artistic director of the Common Walls mural festival in Rochdale.

Hayley was born and brought up in Rochdale, attending school at Oulder Hill, where she often got into trouble for drawing in her exercise books.

That early interest in art has been developed into a career that has involved travelling all over the world creating stunning murals.

Hayley began painting murals as a teenager to hone her artistic skills.

Her artwork now sells for thousands of pounds but the road to get to this point wasn't easy as for many years she struggled to make enough to earn a living.

Those tough times never dimmed her determination to create art on an epic scale and has brought the acclaim she now enjoys.

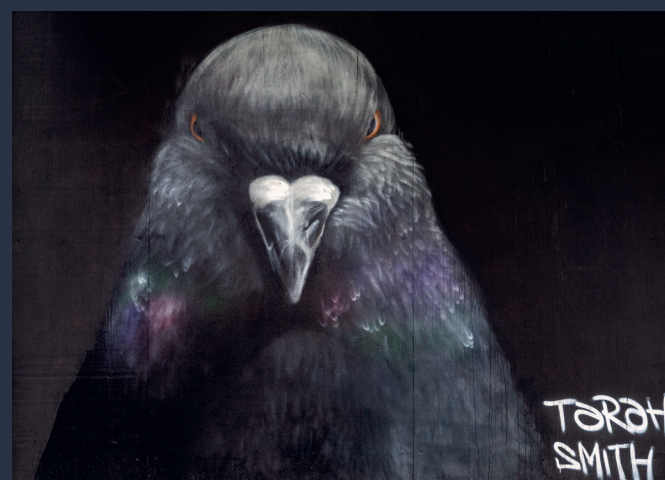
When she first started out Hayley says she couldn't wait to leave Rochdale, but having lived away from the town she then couldn't wait to return.

Whilst she still travels the world painting, Hayley is now firmly rooted back in Rochdale and said she is "proud to have brought such talented mural artists" to her home town for the Common Walls festival.

Hayley mentors a local mural artist, Jamie Buckley, and also now an aspiring mural artist, Tarah Smith, whose murals (left) you can also see in Rochdale town centre.

Hayley's 'Dreams Never End' mural (see centre pages) came fourth in the September poll of the worldwide Street Art Cities awards and qualified for the final in January.

AYLO



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SYKE COMMUNITY BASE

BUILDING COMMUNITY, ONE CUP OF TEA AT A TIME

If you walk through the doors of Syke Community Base, you'll find more than just a community centre, you'll find laughter, friendship, and a true sense of belonging.

Tucked in the heart of Syke, the Base is a place where neighbours become friends, where older residents can beat loneliness with a friendly chat, and where people of all ages come together to share skills, learn something new, or simply enjoy each other's company.

From over 50s social afternoons and crafts to exercise classes and children's activities, there is always something happening.

"It's not about one type of person or one group," says one volunteer. "It's about everyone, whether you're five or 85, there is something here for you."

The Base is also a place of support during harder times. Many who come through the doors aren't just looking for activities, they are looking for a listening ear, advice, or a safe place to feel part of the community. The staff and volunteers go out of their way to make sure no one feels left out.

What makes Syke Community Base truly special is the people behind it; a small but passionate team, supported by dedicated volunteers, keeps the centre running, from planning events to serving tea. Their hard work ensures that the Base continues to be a warm and welcoming hub for everyone.

As a charity, the Base depends on the kindness and support of the local community. Fundraising events, monthly donations, and volunteer time all play a huge role in keeping the doors open. Every contribution, big or small, helps to protect this much-loved space for the future.

So next time you're passing by, pop in for a brew. You might just find yourself staying for much more than a cup of tea.

To see the full timetable of activities and find out what's on, visit
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RYDER & DUTTON OPEN NEW OFFICE IN ROCHDALE TOWN CENTRE

Ryder & Dutton Estate Agents has opened a new office at 8-12 St Mary's Gate in Rochdale town centre.

Branch manager Kris Street said: "As the branch manager of our Rochdale office, I'm thrilled to announce the opening of our brand-new branch in the heart of the town centre.

"This exciting move marks a new chapter for our team and strengthens our connection within the local community that we're so proud to serve.

"Our modern office offers a welcoming space, with greater visibility and easy access for clients, making it even easier to buy, sell, rent or invest in Rochdale and the surrounding areas.

"We're excited to become an even bigger part of the town's growth and look forward to supporting our clients along the way."



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REVEREND ANNE GILBERT - AREA DEAN OF ROCHDALE

by Liz White

The Reverend Anne Gilbert, Area Dean of Rochdale, carries a deep pastoral heart and a wealth of experience into her role. Her appointment as Area Dean is part of a strategic vision to foster mission and empower clergy across the Deanery.

Her early life was spent in Goodshaw Vicarage, Rawtenstall, where her father served, he was also vicar in Sudden at St Aidan's in 1975-80. There clearly is a family influence which led her to answer her own calling.

Anne's journey to ordained ministry began after a distinguished 25 year teaching career at Hathershaw College in Oldham, specialising in Religious Education and British Values.

She enjoyed teaching but in 2018 she felt a calling to ministry, following in the footsteps of her father, brother, and nephew - each Church of England clergy. She was ordained at Manchester Cathedral in the summer of 2019.

Her early years were spent as curate at St Andrew's in Dearnley. Working with Rev Rachel Battershell, they saw the parish through the difficult years of Covid. Anne remembers this time as being very challenging, when you didn't know from one day to the next what was going to happen.

In June 2021 she officially became Vicar of Rochdale Parish churches, uniting St Chad's, St Mary in the Baum, St Edmund's, St Luke's, and St Peter's into a vibrant, integrated team. Throughout her curacy and first incumbency, Anne has been recognised for her pastoral sensitivity - particularly as Deanery Funeral Champion - founding a bereavement support group at St Chad's in May 2023 to offer hope and companionship for those grieving. Her work as voluntary chaplain at Springhill Hospice is very important to her.



The Right Revd Mark Davies (Bishop of Middleton) blesses Revd Anne Gilbert at her licensing as Area Dean



Revd Anne Gilbert with Mayor Janet Emsley & Consort to the Mayor, Ken Emsley

Anne is known for her inclusive approach. At St Chad's and St Mary in the Baum, she's fostered a welcoming environment for migrant and Farsi speaking families, adapting liturgies, offering translated booklets and prayer trees, and celebrating Iranian festivals such as Chaharshanbe Suri and Nowruz. She remarks: "The biggest thing is welcome... it's about being willing to adapt and learn."

Beyond her ministry, Anne is an avid dog lover. She and her two loyal companions - Barney the terrier and Lola the Cockapoo - can often be seen walking through Rochdale. Lola frequently accompanies her on parish visits. Her adult children Bethan and Andrew, live nearby. She has Irish roots and remembers her grandfather's farm in Ireland as a source of childhood wonder.

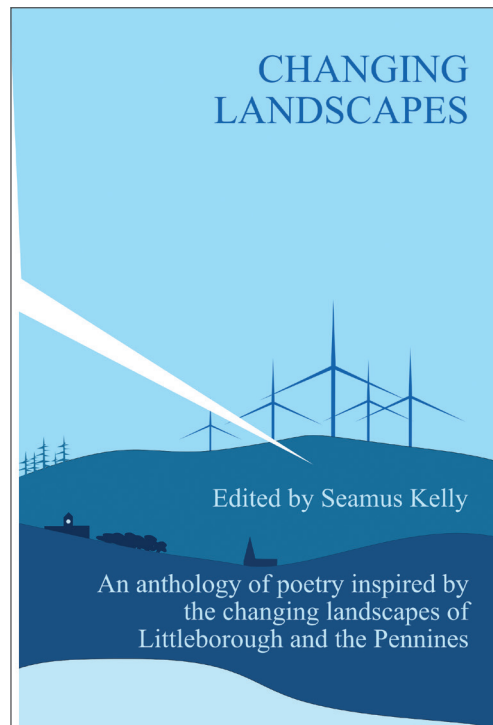
Creativity plays a central role in Anne's life. An amateur artist and drama enthusiast, she hopes her new position as Area Dean will allow her the flexibility to pursue these passions more regularly.

A highlight in Anne's personal life was a life-changing trip to South Africa, where visiting a township church, she witnessed faith's power in communities facing adversity.

Anne's environmental awareness is deeply personal. She often quotes an c saying: "We have not inherited the land from our parents, we are borrowing it from our children." It reflects her conviction that faith and caring for creation are inseparable.

As Area Dean, her vision is clear: to guide the Deanery through change, rooted in communication, listening, and collaborative mission. She finds genuine joy in "meeting and working with a variety of people" and savours the unpredictable nature of daily ministry life. Whether walking Barney, supporting bereaved families, or nurturing cross cultural communities, Anne Gilbert embodies a modern ministry that is inclusive, creative, and deeply engaged with the world she serves.

CHANGING LANDSCAPES



This anthology has been created by local poets responding to the changing landscapes around Littleborough and the Pennines Township of Rochdale.

Following a series of workshops, the poets bring their own thoughts and ideas, each delivered in their own personal style.

To improve access to poetry for those who might have difficulty reading smaller text, this work has been produced in a large print format.

The book will be launched on Friday 28 November 2025 at Hare Hill House, Littleborough by the Mayor of Rochdale Councillor Janet Emsley.

Copies are free to organisations working with people with sight loss issues.

For further information email: lizwhitecreative@gmail.com

SASHA MOSTAFA ROCHDALE YOUNG POET IN RESIDENCE

by Liz White

Sasha, born and raised in Rochdale, is currently taking a gap year filled with work, travel, and poetry.

A passionate writer since the age of 14, she first began penning poems for fun, inspired by a piece she read about friendship while travelling by train. Since then, poetry has become a meaningful creative outlet for her, culminating in an award in the prestigious Tower Poetry Competition last year.

When the opportunity to become a Poet in Residence in Rochdale arose, Sasha leapt at the chance. She said: "I've always written for myself, never thinking of poetry as a career, but this residency has given me a glimpse of what life as a working artist could be like. It's been amazing to connect with the community, hear people's stories, and learn from a professional poet."

Sasha draws inspiration from poets like Carol Ann Duffy, whose accessible style resonates deeply with her. She aims to write poetry that is equally relatable and clear, believing that everyone can create something powerful using their imagination. While she recognises poetry can be a deep form of emotional expression, she's just as interested in its playful, light-hearted potential.

Beyond writing, Sasha is highly musical - she plays both piano and French horn, performing with the Stockport Youth Orchestra. Although she enjoys drama, stage fright has kept her from pursuing it further.

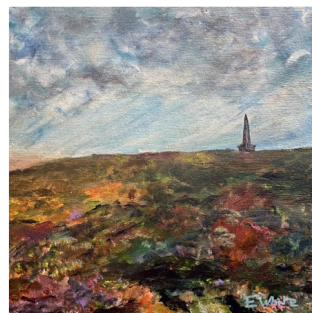
She attended Manchester Grammar School and has loved reconnecting with Rochdale through the Town of Culture initiative.

Locally, she volunteers with the Scouts, mentoring young people and helping them reach their goals - something she finds especially fulfilling.

With family in Egypt and a love for French culture and literature, Sasha hopes to explore more of Europe in the future, while continuing to grow as a writer and artist.



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ALENDE AMISI ROCHDALE YOUNG POET IN RESIDENCE

by Liz White

Alende's journey from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Rochdale in 2006 as a young refugee is one marked by resilience, creativity, and community.

A former pupil at St Patrick's RC Primary School and later St Cuthbert's RC High School, it was in Rochdale's classrooms that he discovered the power of poetry.

At just 12 years old, he penned his first poem about the moon - a symbol of freedom through his young eyes.

Now studying for a PhD in psychology at the University of Cumbria, Alende combines academic insight with artistic expression.

His writing often explores themes of life and mental health from a male perspective, aiming to create space for young boys to connect with their emotions through verse. He believes poetry can be a bridge - helping others understand and express feelings often left unspoken.

As a Young Poet in Residence, Alende celebrates the people and places that shaped him. He is currently working on his debut poetry collection *Tethered*, due for publication in 2026, which touches on universal themes such as love, loss, and healing.

Deeply inspired by Rudy Francisco's honest and grounded style, Alende finds beauty in everyday realities and seeks to reflect that in his work.

Alongside poetry, Alende is passionate about music. He runs AAspire Records, a local label focused on uplifting Rochdale's music scene and empowering young musicians.

Creativity runs in the family - his four sisters are artists in their own right, and their crafting sessions are a frequent source of joy and inspiration.

Grateful for the welcome he received nearly 20 years ago, Alende is committed to giving back to the community that embraced him. Through poetry, performance, and mentorship, he continues to inspire Rochdale's next generation.





Model: Janet Hallows

HAIRDRESSING TREND

by GREG COUZENS

SCULPTING

JANET'S TRANSFORMATION

Every client is a new canvas, and with Janet the challenge was to reveal the beauty of her curls that had been hidden by years of straightening. She relied on excessive heat, spending hours trying to control her hair, yet never felt it reflected who she truly was.

Through sculpting, my freehand cutting technique, I was able to give Janet her curls back. Using a tiny blade, I worked curl by curl, shaping her hair exactly as it fell. The result was a natural three dimensional form, soft yet full of movement, volume and individuality.

The transformation was remarkable. Janet no longer spends hours styling her hair. Instead, she simply wets it, lets it dry, and the cut falls into place with effortless grace. What was once time consuming and frustrating has become liberating and joyful.

For me, sculpting is more than a haircut. It is an artistic process that celebrates texture, shape and individuality. My blade is my chisel, the hair my clay, and each style becomes a unique piece of wearable art.

Sculpting gave Janet not only her curls, but also the confidence and freedom to enjoy them.

JUDO: MAURICE CLARKE AWARDED 6TH DAN

In the world of judo, the journey through the Dan grades is not merely a measure of technical skill, it is a reflection of character, contribution, and lifelong dedication. The rank of 6th Dan, or Rokudan, stands as a rare and prestigious milestone, awarded not for competitive triumphs alone, but for decades of service to the art, the community, and the spirit of judo itself.

To be awarded the 6th Dan by the British Judo Association is to be recognised as a true elder of the sport - someone who has not only mastered technique but has shaped the culture, mentored generations, and upheld the values of mutual welfare and respect. It is a grade that honours wisdom, humility, and the quiet leadership that inspires others to grow.

Rochdale Judo Club President Maurice Clarke embodies all that this grade represents. His legacy is etched not just in medals or accolades, but in the countless lives he has touched, the standards he has upheld, and the unwavering example he continues to set on and off the mat.

It's now more than fifty years since Maurice gained the grade of black belt 1st Dan. His promotion record reads as follows:

1st Dan	-	8 June 1973
2nd Dan	-	5 February 1991
3rd Dan	-	23 February 2000
4th Dan	-	5 July 2010
5th Dan	-	7 March 2017
6th Dan	-	26 August 2025

In the earlier days, Dan grade status was incredibly rare in the UK. Maurice achieved his first Dan in the open-weight era, despite his diminutive stature and weighing in at a mere 10 stone. Never one for self-promotion or claiming bragging rights, he waited nearly twenty years before grading again.



Rowena Birch (BJA President), Maurice Clarke, Richard Barraclough (BJA Vice-President)



Maurice Clarke with his 6th Dan belt

Category D of the promotion criteria for 6th Dan states that it is reserved for ‘exceptional club activity’, and that is Maurice to a tee. He has been the prime mover in building the status and reputation of Rochdale Judo Club, recognised by the club over a decade ago with the title of Honorary Life President and also by the BJA as a Life Member.

Among the many he has influenced over the years are Warren Schofield (7th Dan) and Dave Duffy (6th Dan), both of whom have no hesitation in attributing their own achievements in large part to Maurice’s guidance. He continues to lead by example, still voluntarily coaching twice a week at the age of 89.

The management team at Rochdale Judo Club felt that one further promotion, to 6th Dan, was both well-deserved and long overdue.

The portfolio presented to the BJA for consideration was comprehensive and extremely impressive. Fittingly, the supporting tributes included alongside the application form came from Richard Barraclough (8th Dan), who regularly trained with Maurice in his heyday; a glowing letter from Alan Jones MBE (8th Dan); heartfelt words from Seth Birch (7th Dan); and an endorsement from the BJA NW Area Committee, who voted unanimously to support the bid.

Letters of support from Rochdale Judo Club were also included, Warren Schofield, Dave Duffy, and Eddie Thomas all wrote compelling arguments for the case.

Widely known by the nickname ‘Peter Pan’, Maurice continues to defy his age and acts as a mentor to every new generation of judoka that passes through the club. His longevity is a marvel to behold, and it is impossible to calculate the number of judoka upon whom he has had an incredible and lasting influence over the past sixty-plus years.



Rochdale's trailblazing law firm for schools

When it comes to law firms, specialisation is nothing new, but a firm dedicated exclusively to the education sector? That's something entirely unique - and it's happening right here in Rochdale. Founded by local entrepreneurs Dean Hulse and David Yazdi, HY Education Solicitors has become a name synonymous with legal excellence in the education sector. Borne from Rochdale's own HY Solicitors, their story of creating "the schools only law firm®" is one of northern grit and bold thinking.

A Rochdale vision becomes a UK first

When Dean and David started their own law firm back in 2015, they knew they wanted to be different from the typical high street law firm model. Coming from industry as opposed to traditional private practice, this meant a focus on working with commercial clients and rejecting the offer of services in areas such as wills and probate, family law and personal injury.

As the business grew, one pattern stood out: more and more schools were seeking their help. This in itself was nothing new; schools, like businesses, have to deal with complex issues and have always needed legal support. However, something surprising stood out – there was no law firm in existence that was exclusively dedicated to the sector. David Yazdi recalls: "While many law firms specialised in education, they did so on a departmental basis. By hiving out our education department into a separate firm, we could create a pretty distinct USP, something which is difficult in the legal sector where most things have already been done."

The education world, like any specialist area, needs lawyers who truly understood schools, speak their language, and can offer advice rooted in the realities of daily school life. David adds: "We call ourselves boutique, but boutique typically means you practice in a niche area of law, e.g. sports law. While aspects of education law are unique, such as SEND, we've put a spin on the boutique moniker to say that our specialism is the client, not the law. Essentially, we are a full service law firm but with a focus rooted in the unique characteristics of the client."

With that insight, Dean and David made a bold decision: to create the UK's first and only law firm dedicated solely to the education sector. That leap of faith paid off. What began as a Rochdale start-up has grown into a nationally recognised education law firm, serving hundreds of schools and multi-academy trusts across the country.

From start-up to the Legal 500

HY Education Solicitors was granted its licence by the Solicitors Regulation Authority in 2019 and commenced trading in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. For most new businesses the timing might have seemed disastrous. Schools were closing their doors, uncertainty was everywhere, and the education sector was facing pressures unlike anything seen before. Despite this, in just five years, HY Education Solicitors has achieved what many established firms take decades to do - earning a coveted place in the Legal 500, one of the world's most respected independent guides to the legal profession.

For the founders, it's more than an accolade - it's validation.

"Being recognised by the Legal 500 is a huge honour," says Dean Hulse. "We are proud Rochdaliens and, as far as we are aware, we are the first firm from Rochdale to achieve a ranking."



The Legal 500 recognition places HY Education among the country's top firms for education law, next to international juggernauts such as Eversheds Sutherland and Pinsent Masons, but what makes it remarkable is how they've done it; without losing their personal touch, their community roots, or their Rochdale accent.

Though their clients stretch all across England, HY Education Solicitors' heart remains in Rochdale. Their offices at Sandbrook Park, shared with another local success story, Zen Internet, are a symbol of Rochdale's growing ecosystem of forward-thinking businesses.

"Rochdale is part of our DNA," says Dean. "You don't have to be in the City to lead your field and, with the education sector, having a more personable, down to earth approach is really attractive."

Why schools choose HY

So, why do schools across the country turn to HY Education Solicitors?

The answer lies in their specialism. With over 600 education clients, the firm deals with everything from multi-academy trust formation, mergers, and conversions, to High Court judicial review claims. They also handle the vital everyday issues that keep schools running smoothly - employment and HR, safeguarding, SEND, parental complaints, and data protection.

Unlike generalist firms, HY's entire model, from its processes to its language, is built around school realities, not legal jargon. That means faster, clearer, and more practical advice. Schools get solutions that are not just legally sound, but operationally smart. "There's no need for clients to explain their specialist lexicon or acronyms, the team already gets it and we can get straight down to business", says Dean. In short, at HY they can talk like teachers but think like lawyers.

The firm has grown steadily, recruiting talented solicitors and professionals who share their mission, most of whom are from Rochdale or the surrounding areas. Each new team member is developed not just in their legal skills, but in terms of their communication, empathy and commitment to the education community. The result is a firm that feels more like a trusted partner than an external consultant - "we can tell clients that we exist solely for them and them alone, that creates an emotional contract stronger than you may typically get in a lawyer/client relationship", David adds.

Leading the way for the future of education law

HY Education's journey is far from over. With a growing national footprint, the firm is investing in new recruits and exploring emerging areas such as AI in education governance and compliance.

And their vision for the future? To make HY Education Solicitors a household name in the education sector, trusted by every headteacher, CEO, and school leader in the country.

As they continue to grow, their success shines a light on something bigger - the potential of Rochdale as a hub for innovation, dynamism, and national leadership.

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