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Mediating the Transformation of Sheffield Since 1990

Chris Corker and James Fenwick

Introduction

The process of deindustrialisation in the northern English city of Sheffield has involved a range of stakeholders – academic, industrial, cultural, and political – mediating a transition to a new post-industrial economy and identity following the collapse of its once thriving steel industry. Between 1978 and 1984, there was a rapid decline in employment within the city's steel industry, with some estimates suggesting over 60,000 jobs were lost in just six years.[1] By the end of the 1980s, unemployment was rife across Sheffield, while much of its urban core and East End, stretching from the city centre to the Lower Don Valley (an approximate distance of 5 km), had entered terminal decline, with many former cutlery workshops, warehouses, and factories becoming derelict.[2] Yet despite this, "Made in Sheffield" and "Steel City" remained defining monikers of Sheffield the world over, with the memory of its steel industry and heritage persistent through the material presence of "Made in Sheffield" on stainless steel objects in most countries.

In part, this has been a result of those very stakeholders that have attempted to regenerate Sheffield's identity and economy away from its steel industry heritage, also selectively drawing upon the city's past in a process of brand promotion, public relations, heritage building, and civic identity formation in order to address a variety of audiences, both within and outside the city. Stakeholders have attempted to mediate Sheffield's transformation to the city's citizens, to businesses, and to tourists. Whether those stakeholders have engaged with Sheffield's past, revised it, or romanticised it has depended upon the target audience, leading to different representations of what Sheffield's post-Steel City identity is all about. To those living in Sheffield with a clear memory and attachment to its steel heritage, cultural and political stakeholders have sought to make sense of the city's past, embracing it and memorialising it. To the outside world, stakeholders have negotiated new representations that have either typically rebranded Sheffield as a city reborn in a bid to move past old and even negative associations with its recent steel industry heritage, or mythologised its Victorian-era steel heritage as part of a new environmental, green narrative for the city.

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But whatever the audience, the aim seems to be to differentiate Sheffield as somehow unique because of its past and its potential future.

It is Sheffield's political, cultural, and industrial leaders who, since the mid-1980s, have attempted to redefine the city with a multiplicity of identities and marketing campaigns: Sports City, Outdoor City, Music City, Snooker City, and Creative Sheffield. Each of these generic categorisations has drawn upon facets of Sheffield's character and heritage, while also typically reframing the reality of the dominating, centuries-long branding as the Steel City. These attempts to redefine the city have been accompanied by physical urban regeneration projects overseen by development and planning companies – a mixture of private, public, and private-public partnerships – with a focus on the city centre and the Lower Don Valley. Led by industrial, political, academic, and cultural figures, these attempts at urban regeneration brought into conflict varying ideologies of what Sheffield once was and what it could become. Was it a city with an independent spirit and entrepreneurial heritage? Or was it a radical city representing collectivism, comradeship, and alternative culture? The process of deindustrialisation and the opportunities and challenges it has brought have allowed for a variety of competing ideas and programmes, some of which have succeeded and others of which have failed, but all of which have ultimately led to a multifaceted transition from Steel City to post-Steel City between 1990 and 2020.

The process of transforming Sheffield was further confused by the mediating processes of culture and media, in particular film and television. In 1997, *The Full Monty*, a film about a group of unemployed steelworkers in Sheffield who decide to form a stripping troupe in order to make money, became a global box office hit and received multiple Academy Award nominations. *The Full Monty* placed the issue of Sheffield's deindustrialisation firmly in the public consciousness, presenting a vision of the city as run-down, derelict, and downtrodden, and struggling to overcome the loss of its steel industry. The city was stuck in the past, as were the central characters in the film, all attached to an identity strongly rooted in the traditions and nostalgia of the heavily trade-unionised 1970s. The "*Full Monty* image problem", as some industrial and political leaders in Sheffield came to view it, was a mediating process of deindustrialisation out of the control of those most responsible for it.[3]

This chapter examines the stakeholders involved in the mediation of Sheffield's transition to a post-Steel City from 1990 onwards, considering three key case studies. The first focuses on the city's Lower Don Valley, which was the site of the World Student Games in 1991. The urban planning company Sheffield Development Corporation (SDC), chaired by industrialist Hugh Sykes, had overseen the regeneration of Sheffield's East End. Sykes was incredibly influential in crafting a vision of rebirth for Sheffield that centred on the introduction of retail and leisure. The SDC was a private company that had to collaborate with council leaders and departments, such as the Department for Employment and Economic Development

(DEED). The DEED was crucial in selling the new vision of Sheffield being crafted by Sykes and the SDC in the early 1990s, using the World Student Games as an opportunity to show Sheffield's new global confidence. The second case study focuses on the Sheffield One urban planning company in the early 2000s, a company in which Hugh Sykes was again influential, alongside public relations strategists. Sheffield One was focused on redeveloping the city centre, overseeing the completion of the *Heart of the City* regeneration programme, and masterminding a new publicity campaign to convince both citizens and businesses of the potential for a New Retail Quarter. The final case study focuses on the new cooperative movements and independent businesses in the city in the 2010s that have taken on the role of urban regeneration. Specific attention is given to the Leah's Yard project and the way in which it has embraced previous attempts to rebrand Sheffield, but has done so through the mythmaking process of memory, heritage, and independent craft-making.

The chapter makes use of sources held at the Sheffield City Archives, focusing on the records of the World Student Games, the SDC, and the Sheffield One partnership, alongside new promotional material for the *Heart of the City 2* regeneration programme and the Leah's Yard development. It primarily focuses on public relations material, as well as visual evidence (photographs and film footage), to consider the ways in which Sheffield's transition to the post-Steel City, and ultimately its deindustrialisation, was mediated to both the city's citizens and businesses and professionals outside Sheffield in an attempt to convince them to relocate to the city. In doing so, the aim is to foreground the paradoxical nature of this process in which those "doing" the mediating were simultaneously drawing upon Sheffield's steel industry heritage while also persistently searching for a new future and identity.

Steel City in Crisis

Sheffield's industrial base had built up in two key areas. Since the 17th century, cutlery and the traditional crafts had developed around the city centre, resulting in tightly packed lanes and cramped housing. The city centre consisted of smaller businesses of often one or two people undertaking one part of the cutlery manufacturing process in a system described as "backstreet capitalism".[4] By contrast, the "heavy industries" of bulk steel manufacture were congregated in the city's East End along the Lower Don Valley, extending from the outskirts of the city centre in a northeast direction.[5] It is these two areas upon which successive regeneration efforts have focused.

At the start of the 1980s, unemployment in Sheffield remained below the national average. In January 1980, around 15,000 people were out of work, or 5.1% of the workforce.[6] By the end of the 1980s, there had been some 77 plant closures in the city, based on figures derived from industrial units employing more than 100 people across multiple locations.[7] The true figure

of business closures in Sheffield during the 1980s is undoubtedly far higher. Vast areas of the East End of Sheffield were soon left empty as many of the former steelworks were demolished, while the city centre had entered terminal decline, particularly its south-east corner. As such, the physical landscape of Sheffield that had for so long been dominated by steel production, and had for decades visually represented the Steel City identity, was replaced by a "massive expanse of vacant, quite literally de-industrialised territory and space".[8]

Stakeholders involved in the urban regeneration of Sheffield from the 1980s onwards had a much larger role than merely coping with the proliferation of void spaces and promoting the construction of new buildings to supplant the steel factories and workshops. They also had to form a new narrative about the buildings that were replacing the steel industry. Sheffield City Council's City Promotion Committee had for several decades produced film and media content to promote the city, but this was prior to the collapse of the steel industry. Promotional videos such as Jim Coulthard's *Sheffield… City on the Move* (1972) and *Sheffield… International City* (1980) were produced at a time when the city enjoyed full employment in the steel industry. However, the former film had since become associated with Sheffield's decline following its ironic use as the prologue to *The Full Monty*. The function of publicity from the 1980s onwards needed greater nuance and new selling points for the city.

Several organisations and committees emerged during the 1980s that fulfilled the functions of publicity as part of a wider remit of urban planning and regeneration. The approach of these groups reflected what has generally been framed as a "radical" programme of local economic governance and investment undertaken by Sheffield City Council in the 1980s.[9] This radical approach was embodied by the DEED, established in 1981 at the centre of Sheffield's urban regeneration through to the mid-1990s. The DEED's task was to ignite a new economic base, with a focus on cultural industries and activity, to promote investment in the city and to attract new businesses. Led by Labour Party councillor Helen Jackson, later to become a Member of Parliament, the DEED seconded a range of local academics, most notably Sheffield Polytechnic's Sylvia Harvey, based in the Centre for Popular Culture, and local cultural figures, such as the photographer and artist Matthew Conduit. These individuals were responsible for researching, developing, and promoting a new economic and cultural identity for Sheffield, leading to a broad-ranging series of proposals that focused on arts, culture, and sports.[10] Key projects that emerged included the establishment of the *Cultural Industries Quarter* (CIQ), a newly zoned area in the south-east corner of the city centre consisting of former cutlery workshops and factories transformed into art galleries and office space for creative businesses; the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, which eventually became the Showroom Cinema and Workstation office complex, designed to promote Sheffield as a centre of the

cultural industries in the north of England; and the World Student Games of 1991.

The DEED and the urban regeneration projects and activities it promoted encapsulated the left-wing politics for which Sheffield City Council had become known in the 1980s.[11] It was an ideology further influenced by the presence of humanities academics and cultural leaders. Figures like Sylvia Harvey, for example, were associated with radical left-wing organisations, such as the Independent Film-Makers' Association. The identity that emerged as a result of the efforts of the DEED and the cultural stakeholders involved was one of resistance and opposition, of Sheffield as a radical site of culture, media, politics, and collectivism.[12] Indeed, such was the strength of this identity that the city came to be nicknamed the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire", while the efforts to regenerate the city through culture (specifically through the creation of the CIQ) were adopted by other cities across the United Kingdom and Western Europe.[13] The work of the DEED during this time, and the projects that emerged, led to a more stable identity because of the way in which Sheffield's identity was directly linked with culture. As the contemporary urban and social commentator Franco Bianchini argues, Sheffield's image was associated with "media, design, fashion, high technology and other expanding economic sectors".[14]

Yet by the start of the 1990s, this image and attempt at regeneration by the DEED that focused on culture and people was faltering.[15] This was primarily a result of external political contexts in which the national Conservative government was emphasising the greater need for private and private-public partnerships in urban regeneration. In Sheffield, this led to the establishment of the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee (SERC) in 1987, which oversaw the organisation of public-private partnerships. In contrast to the DEED, however, the committee was dominated by industry and business figures, such as Hugh Sykes, who also had a role in enterprise-focused bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and the SDC, formed in 1989 and of which he was chair. The SDC was one of a number of new Urban Development Companies announced by the Conservative government to implement regeneration projects. Together, the SERC and the SDC were focused not on culture but on retail, commercial, and leisure projects.[16]

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Sheffield was subjected to a range of successive business partnerships and public-private urban regeneration companies, each bringing new stakeholder visions and ambitions, ultimately leading to a persistent instability in the transformation from Steel City to post-Steel City. At times, these stakeholders were enacting new government policy initiatives or responding to the perceived failure of previous stakeholders and organisations, in particular the DEED. In part, this was because the DEED's work as a whole came to be framed in the press as a failure because of its direct involvement in the city's hosting of the World Student Games in 1991, an event that turned into a financial disaster for the city council. But what every stakeholder group was faced with, whether public or private, was

the need to either confront and overcome or embrace and enhance the memory, nostalgia, and heritage of Sheffield's steel industry past.

Sports City

The redevelopment in the 1980s and 1990s of the Lower Don Valley, the main industrial site of Sheffield's steelworks, was largely overseen by the SDC and the local council-funded Sheffield City Trust. The former was focused on land beautification, transport – including the development of Sheffield City Airport – and commercial and retail property development, including progressing planning proposals related to the Meadowhall Shopping Centre, which opened in 1990. The Sheffield City Trust oversaw the development of new sporting venues that would serve as the key sites in the World Student Games of 1991, the Don Valley Stadium and the Sheffield Arena among them. These two buildings fell just outside the jurisdiction of the land for which the SDC was responsible, but following the council's successful bid to host the World Student Games, the SDC, the council, and the Games Secretariat worked together to promote the regeneration programme underway in the Lower Don Valley generally.

From 1988 to 1991, a series of promotional brochures and leaflets was produced in partnership between the SDC and Sheffield City Council, focusing on the new urban redevelopment projects and the new economic and cultural identity being crafted for Sheffield. Much of the promotional material was honest and open about the abrupt loss of Sheffield's steel industry, often overemphasising the derelict wasteland that had been left behind as a result, as outlined in the promotional leaflet *The Vision Becomes a Reality*:

> The early '80s saw a rapid decline in Sheffield steel and heavy engineering industry, resulting in the loss of over 25,000 jobs and leaving one third of the Lower Don Valley disused. […] None of these growth sectors would choose the area for investment in the midst of dereliction and an impoverished environment. Hence, the development of the East End Park, Canal Corridor, and other "greening" projects are seen as essential background to plans both for regenerating industry, supporting existing firms and helping attract a new range of users into the valley.[17]

The leaflet goes into detail about the material and social realities of the urban regeneration underway, signalling on a map the names of new buildings alongside information about the former steel factories they were replacing. Take the following two examples for the Don Valley Stadium and the Grass Bowl:

> DON VALLEY STADIUM has a 40,000 seat (19,000 covered) capacity, with Olympic standard synthetic track and field facilities and an 85

> m indoor practice track, suitable for multi-sports use. The site was reclaimed from the dereliction of the former Brown Bayley's steel works.
>
> THE GRASS BOWL. Formerly occupied by Brown Bayley's steel works, extensive reclamation works have transformed the badly contaminated site into an impressive open air showground and amphitheatre. A reclaimed scrap basket used to charge the furnaces celebrates Sheffield's containing prominence in the steel industry.[18]

The SDC and Sheffield City Council were promoting an image of Sheffield as a city reborn and having found a new confidence. This was best reflected in the promotional brochure, *It's My Future*, developed specifically for the World Student Games. The front image was a startling symbolic photograph of a newborn baby scrambling over the derelict wasteland of the former Brown Bayley's steel foundry, while in the background, set against a dawn sky, is the construction site of Don Valley Stadium. It was a photograph commissioned as part of the Sheffield Project series, undertaken by the Untitled Gallery. Taken by Anna Fox, the photograph's presence as the opening image to the brochure was clear: this was Sheffield's rebirth.

The *It's My Future* brochure was produced as a glossy photo history of Sheffield, from the Early Middle Ages to the future. Throughout, it contains images of Sheffield's fiery steel foundries juxtaposed with images of the derelict wastelands upon which the World Student Games would take place. One such image, which documents the exposed foundations of a former steel factory, is captioned "February 1981: unemployment in Sheffield exceeds national average".[19] This approach was taken across all of the publicity material relating to the World Student Games: Sheffield's urban regeneration and the reasons for it were explicitly laid out. Another document, produced by the SDC as an invitation to potential private investors, stated that the World Student Games would be the "most important days in Sheffield's 700-year history".[20] The organisations most involved in the mediation of Sheffield's deindustrialisation recognised the global promotional opportunity the games presented, as the SDC set out in its invitation:

> The two weeks of the Universiade […] provide the ideal opportunity to see Sheffield in its new light. That's why we would like you to be our special guest for a two-day programme of professional appraisal and relaxation in and around the city. […] Our proposal is simple: take time out to see the extraordinary progress being made in transforming Sheffield into a leading European city. Sit back while we show you the regeneration process happening around you.[21]

The mediation process of deindustrialisation in the early 1990s made visible the void left by the steel industry and attempted to capitalise on its memory. The opening ceremony of the World Student Games featured an elaborate performance in which actors dressed as steelworkers presented a history of

Sheffield's steel industry. Hundreds of actors marched out into the centre of Don Valley Stadium and, with the use of prop steel girders and tools, proceeded to erect a crucible furnace that would serve as the World Student Games' torch. Accompanied by an industrial soundtrack, the performance (which foreshadowed the similarly elaborate 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony) enacted the material presence and memory of the steel industry that once stood in place of the stadium. As the performance unfolded, captions on screen narrated the history of the city's steel industry.[22]

The World Student Games was a celebration of Sheffield's heritage and its future. Regeneration was at the heart of the entire event. But unfortunately, the intended promotional opportunity that the games were meant to bring did not necessarily come to pass. British television only marginally covered the games: a late-night package was broadcast daily by the host broadcaster Sky Sports, while Yorkshire Television was allowed the rights to show a series of 30-minute highlight packages in the Yorkshire region.[23] The long-term impact of the World Student Games and the urban regeneration of the Lower Don Valley has been mixed. The failure to secure adequate sponsorship for the festival meant that the costs were mostly covered by Sheffield City Council, leaving the city indebted for many years to come. Meanwhile, the Don Valley Stadium, which was touted as a regeneration project that would benefit the city for decades, was demolished in 2013 as part of wider council budget-saving measures. The demolition was protested by a group called Save Don Valley, which gathered close to 6,000 signatures in a bid to save the stadium, citing the building's "cultural and historical importance".[24] The destruction of the stadium symbolically reflects the persistent turbulence of urban regeneration in the city and the ambivalent approaches taken between the 1980s and 2010s. The Don Valley Stadium site has since been replaced with an Olympic Legacy Park, consisting of educational, sporting, and recreational facilities funded by the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, and the government agency UK Sport.

Gentrifying the City

Despite all of the investment and effort of the SDC and the DEED in the 1980s and 1990s, Sheffield was typically framed in some media reports as still being a city in decline and as lacking the infrastructure of a modern, forward-looking city.[25] Sheffield's identity was viewed by some within the city's political establishment as being too closely aligned with the negative representation that also surfaced in *The Full Monty*. Alison Nimmo, the executive overseeing the regeneration plans in the early 2000s, said, "We've got to try to get away from *The Full Monty* image".[26] But this comment betrayed a tension between political forces, which believed Sheffield's future depended on a move away from its heritage and old identity as the Steel City, and the population, which needed to be convinced that Sheffield required a new identity alongside its physical regeneration. These tensions marked a

wider shift in urban regeneration policy in the United Kingdom from 1997 onwards with the election of Tony Blair and his "New Labour" party.

In the late 1990s, New Labour initiated an Urban Task Force, which set out proposals for an era stemming from New Labour's desire to instigate social mixing and the promotion of middle-class employment and culture, though urban studies academics such as Loretta Lees have argued that New Labour's "urban renaissance" was in fact gentrification.[27] The report noted how urban decline in the United Kingdom's major cities continued, despite repeated investment and policy initiatives over the past two decades. The aim was to create sustainable cities that would "bring people back into our cities, towns, and urban neighbourhoods".[28] To achieve this, the government placed an emphasis on the "creative economy": the economic exchange of ideas, in both creative and non-creative sectors, to drive business and investment.[29] This creative exchange of ideas was seen to be facilitated by the "creative class" – university graduates, academics, and professionals – in social and cultural spaces within urban cores.[30]

Sheffield One was one of three new urban regeneration companies formed out of New Labour's policy initiative. Incorporated in February 2000, Sheffield One's mission was to "spearhead the regeneration of Sheffield City Centre" and to "develop Sheffield as a vibrant and attractive European city".[31] Sheffield One was a public-private partnership, working with Sheffield City Council and local and international businesses. Hugh Sykes – former chairman of the SDC – remained a central presence at Sheffield One throughout its existence, first as deputy chairman and later as chairman. Sykes had turned his attention from the regeneration of the Lower Don Valley area of the city to the city centre in plans that he framed as merely being an "extension of existing strengths" in the city's ongoing redevelopment.[32] Sykes wanted the urban core to become a "complementary attraction" to the East End retail developments, primarily Meadowhall. To achieve this vision, leisure and retail had to be at the "heart" of the city centre, with Sykes's vision being to make Sheffield "the north's biggest cultural and commercial mecca".[33]

Sheffield One established a series of key projects to transform the city centre, including the completion of the *Heart of the City* redevelopment programme (which had commenced in the mid-1990s), the creation of a New Retail Quarter, the development of a new mixed-use leisure area around the City Hall and Leopold Square, and the building of an e-campus on the eastern edge of the centre. The projects were focused on igniting the city's creative economy and stimulating a lively leisure and nightlife scene, with the aim of attracting middle-class professional workers as residents.

Sheffield One's ambitious masterplan for the redevelopment of the city centre was released in April 2000 and was one of several public relations documents that Sheffield One published between 2000 and 2007. The company would only successfully realise half of its key projects listed in the masterplan, with some left abandoned or eventually being initiated once Sheffield

One ceased operating. In selling this masterplan to both inhabitants and local businesses, Sheffield One highlighted how it intended to transform the city into something entirely new. The masterplan never directly refers to Sheffield's steel industry heritage, nor to the fact that the economic challenges were a result of the loss of this former industrial base. Take the opening foreword by the then chairman Peter Middleton, who uses ambiguity to discuss Sheffield's past and its economic problems:

> Everyone knows about the difficult recent economic history of the sub-region and of the City. But we are absolutely confident that we have many of the raw ingredients that we need to build a new and vibrant City economy. […] Sheffield has the potential to reinvent itself as a 21st Century City founded on its unique environmental qualities and situation, its dynamic higher education sector, and its history of high-quality manufacturing innovation and skills. […] The City has an international reputation in precision engineering and skilled craftmanship and "Made in Sheffield" is still a worldwide mark of quality.[34]

Instead of admitting that the Made in Sheffield moniker had a direct association with the steel industry, Sheffield One linked it to creativity, artistry, and craftsmanship. When discussing heritage, evasive phrasing is used, such as "green heritage". Sheffield One's public relations strategy relied on foregrounding change, transformation, and creativity in an attempt to convince citizens and investors that Sheffield had moved beyond its *Full Monty* image. Take the following extracts, each of which stresses the notion of transformation, reinvention, and creativity:

> The economy is facing a time of unprecedented change and globalisation and Sheffield must capitalise on this. […] Sheffield is at a crossroads. It stands on the threshold of change. The City faces an immense challenge, but also an immense opportunity, to redefine its future and to create a new vision and image for itself. […] The vision for Sheffield is of a prosperous and commercially successful City at the heart of a city-region which is reinventing itself as a new and dynamic modern economy.

The vision of a creative Sheffield was framed in language akin to the urban redevelopment policies of the New Labour government. The aim was to promote Sheffield in such a way as to entice a new "creative class" to come and live, work, and play in the city and ultimately ignite a new knowledge economy, as outlined in the masterplan's executive summary:[35]

> Marketing the city will be fundamental. Sheffield needs to build a more positive image as a dynamic City of skills and enterprise. Our aim is to

> create the right buzz that will help to attract the brightest individuals to live, work, and learn in Sheffield.[36]

The clear priority for achieving this vision of a creative Sheffield was the New Retail Quarter. Sheffield One's masterplan included comparisons of Sheffield with other tourist destinations. This included the suggestion that the proposed retail quarter would make Sheffield the "Covent Garden" of the north, even the Italy of the north; the latter comparison arose from the idea that a café culture could be encouraged if the New Retail Quarter was a success and a new middle-class demographic moved into the urban core.[37] The New Retail Quarter would be situated in the very centre of the city, between the area of the Town Hall/Pinstone Street in the east and Trafalgar Street in the West, an approximate area of 860,000 square feet. It involved redesigning large swathes of the city' central area, including developing new street layouts and building new accommodation for major retail outlets. As *The Guardian* reported, the plan would lead to "sweeping crescents for the retail area, new street patterns, a glass-covered galleria area and more public squares".[38] Sheffield One devised several promotional leaflets that were targeted specifically at citizens to inform and convince them of the vision in the lead-up to a public consultation.

The first of the leaflets, dating from around 2002, outlined the plans for the New Retail Quarter in rather abstract terms. It stated that the vision for the project was for a "new quarter to be distinctive, creative and innovative", with new streets and buildings "of the highest quality, setting new standards in European retailing", as well as a "dramatic new covered square".[39] These wording and images craft a narrative of urban "renaissance": the rebirth of Sheffield as a major regional capital within Europe.[40] Sheffield One even envisaged terraces and piazzas filled with cafes and bars, with the leaflet not containing any images of contemporary Sheffield but rather a photograph of a European city (the exact location is not specified on the leaflet) showing a pedestrianised boulevard lined with coffee shops and tables, and people drinking, socialising and riding bikes, with the caption "a quality shopping environment".[41] As such, what Sheffield One was selling was a city unrecognisable as British, let alone northern, but rather international. A much larger public relations document published in 2002 took a similar approach when describing the New Retail Quarter.[42] Again, there are no contemporary images of Sheffield, nor any mention of its Steel City identity; instead, there are uncaptioned photographs of the interior of the British Museum's Great Court and the courtyard of London's Covent Garden juxtaposed against a map of the proposed redesigned street layout for the New Retail Quarter.

A further promotional leaflet was published ahead of a public consultation about the New Retail Quarter. In contrast to previous public relations

material, no images of a European city were included. Instead, the leaflet laid out what the point of the New Retail Quarter was from the perspective of Sheffield One. "The ambition is to create a retail area that will transform the shopping and leisure experience for everyone who visits the city centre and ensure a retail offer that is appropriate to a city of the size and regional significance of Sheffield.[43]" Arguably, the phrasing in the leaflet, again targeted specifically at the people of Sheffield, was misdirected. Rather than suggesting that the New Retail Quarter would benefit inhabitants, the leaflet hinted that it would be to the benefit of people *beyond* Sheffield.The public consultation on the New Retail Quarter revealed wider concerns from citizens that the project would not be "sympathetic" to the character and heritage of Sheffield. Some of those who responded to the consultation clearly indicated a desire to retain architectural heritage, to create new buildings of which Sheffield could be proud and which were in keeping with the architectural style of its older buildings, and to make Sheffield different and distinct from other northern cities in the United Kingdom.[44]

Despite the extensive planning, public relations and investment, the New Retail Quarter did not come to pass as envisaged. Sheffield City Council, reviewing the aborted plans in 2010, blamed the 2007–2009 "Great Recession", which had led to key developers contracted to the project pulling out.[45] By 2007, Sheffield One was dissolved and replaced by a new urban regeneration company, Creative Sheffield. But during its brief existence, Sheffield One had rebuilt elements of the city centre, including the revitalisation and beautification of public spaces around the central railway station, the Peace Gardens, and Tudor Square. However, it was the failure to realise the New Retail Quarter that left Sheffield One's legacy tainted, as Hugh Sykes commented in his memoir: "What a dreadful wasted opportunity for the city; it could have transformed the perception of Sheffield both by business and the general public".[46]

The vision and public relations strategies that Sheffield One had been crafting for Sheffield were laid out in a final review document in 2007 as a legacy handover to Creative Sheffield. It was hoped that successive urban regeneration companies and stakeholders would build upon Sheffield One's legacy. As Andy Topley, the final chief executive of Sheffield One, stated in the document, "[Sheffield One's] plans have been designed to mesh with the first economic and marketing plans of Creative Sheffield in order to ensure a seamless transition and avoid any lag in the regeneration momentum".[47]

Mythologising the Past

By 2015, a new urban regeneration scheme had emerged, this time as a strategic partnership between Sheffield City Council and the real estate management company Queensbury. Like urban regeneration partnerships before it, the *Heart of the City 2* project, as it was labelled, was discussed as being the

future of urban regeneration partnerships. However, a key distinction seems to be in the way Sheffield City Council is partially framing this new partnership as a break with past failures. One prominent publicity quote from Nalin Seneviratne, the council's Director of City Centre Development, states, "It's a challenge, but that's where we've decided 'enough is enough', we need to fix it and get it right. As it's the council taking control, we can do that. We can take that long-term view".[48]

Significant aspects of the *Heart of the City 2* redevelopment masterplan, most notably its proposal for a retail zone in the city centre, are in effect the plans initiated by Sheffield One for a New Retail Quarter in the early 2000s. But in contrast to Sheffield One's vision, heritage, memory, and independence play a central role in the public relations strategies of *Heart of the City 2*, as set out in the initial masterplan:

> Historic buildings are seen as critical to retaining the character of this part of the city centre and creating a scheme that is genuinely unique. […] Rather than create new streets, the scheme will follow existing street patterns – important in enabling the retention of more of the existing heritage. […] The masterplan includes the retention of the Pinstone Street frontages, with a new vision to bring them back to their former glory.[49]

What has been emphasised in selling *Heart of the City 2* is community, local tradition, and craft making. These three ideas have been linked to heritage and the past through mythmaking. Here, we refer to Henry A. Murray, who states that mythmaking

> […] does not refer to any actual perceptible event as such: the mythic event that is described in words consisting of a procession of images in the storyteller's head, that is, it is an *imagined* event… One that may be partly or wholly visionary, like a dream or hallucination, or one that may replicate quite closely the essential features of some observed overt occurrence.[50]

Heart of the City 2 harks back to a vision of Sheffield's steel industry, its Steel City status, as being about the environment, the Victorian era and *little mesters*, rather than the reality of poor working and sanitary conditions, disease, poverty, low life expectancies, the daily dangers of working with grinding wheels and steel furnaces, and general factory conditions. *Little mesters*, a term local to the Sheffield dialect and roughly translated as "master craftsmen", were self-employed workers who would rent space in workshops and factories to produce their own goods, typically cutlery and small tools. However, the romanticism linked to the notion of the *little mester* is in itself about civic identity: Sheffield as a place of makers, creators, and independents. This contemporary view drastically overlooks the reality of tens of thousands of workers heading to factories on a daily basis and having a

named employer, rather than being a self-employed artisan, in the history it draws characteristics from.

One of the key *Heart of the City 2* projects that embodies this idea of the Steel City myth is Leah's Yard. Located on Cambridge Street, Leah's Yard was a mid-19th-century cutlery works. The council approved a bid for the redevelopment of the property, now a Grade II-listed building, by the local Sheffield Science Park Company (SSPCo). The SSPCo, which has been in existence since the 1980s, operates Sheffield Technology Park, a non-profit organisation that serves as a business start-up incubator, coworking space, and entrepreneurship facilitator. The SSPCo subtitled its proposal for Leah's Yard as the "soul of Sheffield", accompanied throughout by black and white images of *little mesters*. In stark contrast to previous attempts that either marginalised or misplaced local heritage, the SSPCo instead made it integral to its entire proposal and to the vision of Sheffield's future:

> Sheffield has long been synonymous with merging the city's industrial past to its creative future. In the 1970s pioneering artists like The Human League and Cabaret Voltaire utilised abandoned cutlery works to create the new electronic sounds of the future; the old Victorian nuts and bolts factory Yellow Arch was the place that Arctic Monkeys honed their world-conquering sound; the crumbling factories and warehouses of Kelham Island are now some of the UK's finest food and drink destinations.[51]

The plan is to restore Leah's Yard into a functioning creative space for independent businesses and the self-employed: a 21-century *little mesters* workshop. This will involve a collective of social enterprises turning Leah's Yard into a "maker's space": a coworking creative hub for artists, freelancers, and creative professionals. The proposal document makes it clear that the vision for this redevelopment is about bringing back to life the true heritage of the city:

> Looking back on the way Little Mesters workshops operated, you see that Sheffield was built on a network of independence. It's a really critical part of the city's identity and we want to connect to that.[52]

Sheffield City Council and Queensbury rely on promoting *Heart of the City 2* as locally focused, in contrast to previous regeneration attempts that had looked towards other cities (London) and even other countries (Italy) to sell the vision of what Sheffield could become. Heritage and memory in *Heart of the City 2* mean promoting Sheffield as "unique", a word that frequently occurs in publicity material. This has even involved appropriating journalistic quotes in development publicity, such as the slogan "This is a city that isn't trying to be London".[53] The mediators of this new phase of urban regeneration and identity formation for the city are local businesses, entrepreneurs, and independents brought together by Sheffield City Council. It is a process

of cooperation that aims to solicit the use of Sheffield's heritage as a brand promoter and to use these individuals as the embodiment of that heritage.

Conclusion

Four decades after the collapse of its steel industry, Sheffield has been the site of repeated urban regeneration attempts that have sought to grapple not only with the building and renewal of the physical landscape but also with its past. Each phase of urban regeneration has seen a revision, rejection, and even revival of the memory, identity, and heritage of the Steel City image, culminating in the most recent attempts at mythmaking: the city's past as one of independent spirit embodied in the romanticised notion of the *little mester*. The process of transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial city has been mediated by a range of stakeholders: national government, private business, property development managers, local cultural and political figures, academics, and local independent employers. Each had a different stake in the local heritage. For some, this heritage has been a hindrance, preventing international investors from recognising Sheffield's future economic potential. For others, it is the absolute selling point for their own brand of business: unique Sheffield.

The abrupt collapse of Sheffield's economic base and industrial heart in the 1980s led to a physical void in the landscape that has never truly been replaced, nor fully resolved in the civic identity. Sheffield is an instrumental case study for wider discussions about city identity formation and the role of heritage. As a former steel city – arguably, *the* Steel City – Sheffield has had to transition from an identity rooted in strength, masculinity, and power. The myth and potency of steel industries lie in the symbolic integration of fire, metal, earth, and human labour.[54] The detritus and destruction of the city's steel factories and workshops represented not only the erasure of its infrastructure but the obliteration of the purpose, function, and very meaning of the city.

The transition to post-Steel City has therefore involved a process of negotiating the memories of this past and the pain it has caused. But the mediating agents most implicated in this process have been selective in what should be remembered. Was Sheffield a mighty industrial city that exploited its predominantly working-class population, or was it a city of creativity, green heritage, and independence? It serves the aims of those mediating agents to shape the memory towards the latter, embracing the present not as a break with the past, but as the continuous story of Sheffield into the future. The selected mythos of the past, with its independence, artisans, creativity, and both small- and large-scale manufacturing, can serve as an inspiration for future generations, as seen in the more recent redevelopment of Leah's Yard.

The difficult process of understanding the industrial heritage of Sheffield since 1990 is demonstrated in this chapter. Redevelopment projects of the early 1990s looked to the past but did so in a limited manner; with the

demolition of steelworks perhaps too recent in memory to fully embrace or romanticise, they instead drew from a myth of Sheffield's history. This approach continued into the 2000s, with an attempt to erase the history of Sheffield and commence a new historical narrative, leading to the collapse of the Sheffield One project. It is only now, with a renewed emphasis on the heritage and mythology of the Steel City in redevelopment projects, that the strategic value of history to the city has been realised. While somewhat sanitised, it is by understanding and celebrating the past and its inspirational possibilities that success may be achieved in Sheffield's perpetual redevelopment.

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