# The rise and fall of Greater Manchester's most notorious pubs



In Greater Manchester, a handful of pubs have, over the years, garnered reputations as 'rough' or notorious establishments, leaving lasting impressions on their communities. Though some were cherished local hubs, others became well-known for incidents of disorder or had links to criminal activities. Many of these pubs have since closed or been demolished, with their locations repurposed.

One such pub was The Flying Shuttle in Highfield Road, Farnworth. Opened many decades ago, it was remembered fondly by locals for its live music and community spirit during its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. However, in later years, concerns about drug dealing emerged. In March 2012, Bolton Council suspended its licence following police worries that it was being used by dealers. Licensing officer PC Garry Lee likened the situation there to the Wild West, stating that even John Wayne "wouldn’t have been able to sort it out". After its closure, arsonists reportedly set multiple fires at the establishment in protest. The pub was eventually converted into a convenience store, now operating as a Premier Store and Post Office, with the beer garden changed into shopper parking.

The Rocket, located on New Lane in Breightmet, Bolton, opened in 1961 and was known by some as a lively community centre, while others labelled it as one of the roughest pubs around. Despite its troubled past, regulars formed a loyal following. In 2015, the pub changed hands, and plans for demolition were submitted citing antisocial behaviour. Local residents, including long-time patron Karla Hornby, objected to its loss, with Karla expressing to the Manchester Evening News her deep disappointment at the potential demolition, saying, "I know it has had a bit of trouble in the past, but all pubs do. The Rocket does a lot for the local community." Despite protests, The Rocket was demolished, with its site now occupied by a Spar shop that retains the pub’s name on the signage.

Billy Greens in Collyhurst, made famous in a 2004 Sky TV documentary titled 'The Toughest Pubs in Britain,' was once a focal point of estate life. Named after a celebrated local boxer and landlord, the pub was known for its rough clientele and colourful characters. A striking anecdote from the documentary described a chaotic night involving a sheep brought into the pub, a crossbow, and an ensuing injury. The pub closed in 2011 and was eventually demolished, leaving behind only a vacant area where it once stood.

The Brass Handles in Pendleton was the scene of a notorious gangland shooting in March 2006, when two hitmen burst in and shot David Totton and Aaron Travers. Though both victims survived, the assailants were overpowered and killed with their own firearms. The pub was subsequently purchased by Salford council and demolished in 2010 as part of a regeneration scheme. Councillor John Warmisham, who supported its demolition, referred to it as "a blight on the area" and expressed hope for positive redevelopment to attract new residents. Local resident Andrew Berry, who lived opposite the pub for twelve years, voiced relief at its removal, stating, "Everything changed when a handful of gangsters appeared and it turned into a hell-hole." Bobby Speirs was jailed for life after being convicted as the mastermind behind the attack, along with others involved in the incident.

The Eagle pub in Hulme was renowned for its flat-roofed design and its location amidst the Hulme Crescent estates. It earned a reputation as one of the most infamous boozers in the area, frequented by an eclectic mix of characters including a former boxer and a heavy metal enthusiast. In the 1970s, the pub was run by the well-known wrestler Honey Boy Zimba, whose wrestling style was notable for headbutting. Additionally, The Eagle was popular among Manchester’s punk scene for a time. By the late 1980s, urban decay led many families to leave the Hulme Crescents, and the estate along with the pub was demolished in the 1990s, barely three decades after construction.

Lastly, The Pepperhill on Bedwell Street, Moss Side, gained notoriety for its association with gang warfare during the 1980s and 1990s. It was the base of the Pepperhill Mob, an armed gang involved in violent rivalry with the Gooch Gang, named after Gooch Close in Moss Side. While The Pepperhill pub was eventually closed to curb the violence, the gang known by its name relocated and rebranded as the Doddington Gang. The premises were renamed The Saltshaker and repurposed as a community centre, and today the building serves as an Islamic centre. The surrounding estate's streets and alleyways were also remodelled following these turbulent times.

These six pubs reflect a complex social history, marked by vibrant community life as well as episodes of disorder and violence. Their stories, gathered from various reports and local memories, highlight the diverse roles played by public houses in Greater Manchester’s urban landscape over the years.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://camra.org.uk/pubs/flying-shuttle-farnworth-122631> - Details the closure and history of The Flying Shuttle in Farnworth, corroborating its operation as a former pub and its eventual conversion to other uses.
* <https://camra.org.uk/pubs/flying-shuttle-farnworth-122631/feedback> - Confirms the closure of The Flying Shuttle and its transformation into a convenience store, supporting details about its post-pub usage.
* - No valid URL found for The Rocket in Breightmet. Local news archives or Bolton Council planning documents would be needed to verify its demolition and community impact.
* - No valid URL found for Billy Greens in Collyhurst. The Sky TV documentary 'The Toughest Pubs in Britain' is not directly accessible online to corroborate its depicted incidents.
* - No valid URL found for The Brass Handles in Pendleton. News reports or Salford Council regeneration records would verify the 2006 shooting and 2010 demolition.
* - No valid URL found for The Eagle in Hulme or The Pepperhill in Moss Side. Manchester City Council archives or historical urban planning documents would confirm their demolition and cultural roles.
* <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/nostalgia/six-dodgy-greater-manchester-pubs-31437303> - Please view link - unable to able to access data