

History

This building and its site have a history going back to 1753, when Thomas Torkington bought this part of what was then called Turner's Meadow and built two dwelling houses. Adjoining buildings were put up, a paved street was created, and Turner Street had arrived.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the site was being used for manufacturing as well as living, and in 1867 Bernard Duckworth, a dealer in cloth, built a warehouse at number 16 and acquired number 20 which was at that time a shop. In 1890 he built a warehouse on the final part of the current site, then known as Elbow Street.

If you walk round to the back of the Centre, you will see that the facade there looks quite different to the one you have seen on Turner Street. You will notice larger, many-paned windows and less massive brickwork which give a lighter appearance to the building on that side. These unmatched facades are now the only visible evidence of the complex history of the building.

During the twentieth century the buildings were combined and used for a motorcycle, wireless and electrical goods business which was liquidated in 1962. An estate agent bought the property for £8,050, after which it was used for storage.

In 1994 it was acquired by the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (now Triratna Buddhist Community) and after two years of renovation and conversion work, done mostly by volunteers, it opened on 13th July 1996 as the Manchester Buddhist Centre.



Ground Floor

As you stand by the **reception desk** and look around, you may first of all feel the impact of the building materials – warm earthy brick, plain wood, great expanses of glass and the slender iron pillars and beams which carry the weight of the whole building. Throughout the Centre these original materials have been uncovered by the patient labour of volunteers.

The appreciation of building materials appropriately used and honestly revealed formed one strand in nineteenth century architectural thought; here that same integrity finds expression throughout the building.



Looking through the windows onto Turner Street you will see the street through **decorative metal screens** in the shape of entwined lotus plants. In the Buddhist tradition the lotus is a symbol of purity and growth. The window screens, together with the railings at pavement level and the sculpture of the **Three Jewels** of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha over the entrance were commissioned for this situation.

Facing the door is **Head of the Buddha**, a painting by **Mahabodhi**.

The **batik panel**, above the seated wooden Buddha figure, is by **Kiranada Sterling Benjamin** and features a line of poetry by Sangharakshita, the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community.

As you move towards the back of the ground floor through the bookshop, you will pass a sculpture, **Angel** by **Sahaja**, made from scrap metal and a symbol of the spiritual life.

Along the wall is a collage showing before and after images of the Centre conversion work. Beyond this, the building opens out into a tea area. Notice high up on your left a sculpture of a seated figure. This is **Vajrasattva**, an archetypal form of the Buddha, made by **Aloka**.

As you turn through the door on your right and climb the first flight of wooden stairs, you will find a tangible reminder of the past of the building in the tread of each step, worn into curves by the feet of generations of working people. Different art works can be found hanging here.

First Floor



On the first floor are two shrine halls which are used for meditation, ritual, courses and larger gatherings. Notice a large reproduction of the **Buddhist Wheel of Life** in the corridor. Such images are traditionally placed outside shrine halls and reflect the various states of mind one might find oneself in. Awareness of one's state of mind is a valuable preparation for meditation. Please leave your shoes on the rack and, if there is no one meditating, enter the **Vajra Hall**.

The Vajra Hall is open to people wishing to meditate during the day. The sculpture, or *rupa*, of the Buddha here is seated in meditation posture on a carved wooden lotus shrine. The rupa is by **Aloka** and the shrine was carved by **Achalabodhi**. Around the shrine you can see the traditional offerings of flowers, symbolising impermanence; candles, symbolising the light of knowledge; and incense, symbolising the far-reaching influence of a life well led.

As you turn away, you will see a traditional painting known as a *thangka* on the wall facing the shrine. Thangkas are painted in water-based pigments on cloth and designed to be rolled up for protection. This one is of **Avalokiteshvara**, a Bodhisattva figure embodying compassion, in his thousand-armed form. You can see the circle of his many hands, ready to help beings in a multitude of different ways.



The **Lotus Hall** lies beyond the copper door at the far end of the first floor passage. The large golden rupa here is of the **Buddha Amitabha**, embodying infinite light. The figure is in meditation posture, seated on a lotus, but unusually is holding a lotus flower out to us. Notice how the sculptor, **Chintamani**, has brought traditional and Western elements together, the form being treated quite realistically while most aspects of the pose are familiar from countless older figures of the Buddha. The bronze original of this, now in Germany, is believed to be the first large Buddha figure cast in Western Europe.

Turning away from Amitabha, notice the many small rupas lining both sides of the iron beam above your head. These were made in clay here at the Centre from a model by **Varaprabha**. There is a long tradition of using such figures as offerings.

On the wall facing the shrine you will see seventeen brilliantly-coloured pictures. These reproduce sections of a large thangka, or painting, of scenes from the life of the Buddha.

As you take a last look round this hall, see how the structural elements of the old warehouse are revealed.

Second Floor

The **Sangharakshita Reference Library** is straight ahead of you as you go through the door.

Facing the door is a portrait by **Paramabodhi** of Ugyen Sangharakshita, the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community (formerly the Western Buddhist Order and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order).

The corridor leads to **Bodywise**, our natural health centre.

Basement

Earth, a vegetarian cafe and organic juice bar is located in the basement – please enter by the flight of steps outside the front of the building or by the lift.

A changing environment

The Buddha taught that nothing is permanent, that everything is in a state of change.

When you visit, some of the artworks, rupas and thangkas in the Centre may have been moved to different positions in response to changed circumstances or events in the Buddhist calendar.

**We do hope you have enjoyed your visit to the Centre. Please ask if you have any questions.
PLEASE RETURN THIS SHEET TO RECEPTION BEFORE YOU LEAVE, THANK YOU.**