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DAN DUBOWITZ AND ALAN WARD

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Archival material is mixed with newly commissioned images and interviews to explore the relationship between the people of Manchester and two of its most iconic buildings

In 2010, Manchester City Council partnered with engineering firm Laing O'Rourke on a multimillion-pound refurbishment of two of the city's historic buildings, its Grade II listed Town Hall Extension and the Central Library, both of which reopened in March this year. Photographer Dan Dubowitz and artist, book designer and publisher Alan Ward were given unfettered access to the buildings during the renovations. They spent 18 months creating *Citizen Manchester*, a project jointly funded by the developers, which draws on the idea that architecture can shape society and culture.

The idea of capturing the shifting relationship between the city's flagship buildings and its residents lies at the heart of the project, which aimed to "capture the moment when the public and staff had been locked out", says Dubowitz, an architect by training, whose photography centres around absence, dereliction and the transformation of a city's identity through its buildings.

"We were the only people allowed inside. Alan and I had an initial induction, which enabled us to go anywhere on site whenever we wanted, with a completely open brief. The photographs we took are not documents of the construction process as such; they're more to do with the transformation of identity - of the city, its buildings and people. The photographs record a unique cultural moment in time that no one else experienced."

The duo also responded to archival material in the library's collections and conducted interviews with everyone from the leader of the council to cleaners, architects and people on the street, asking to hear their personal stories about the buildings, which form part of the project's narrative. Quotes from the interviews are incorporated into a book and are used as captions in the accompanying exhibition, open until 22 June, for which large-scale photographic interventions are set within the fabric of Manchester Central Library and Manchester Art Gallery.

"We wanted to include archival images that feature people to contrast with our images of the spaces," he adds. "Together, the stories, archival images and our photographs form the artwork... It's about allowing the viewer to put themselves into the project and to make their own connections." *BJP*

