

The Landmark Trust

THE STATION AGENT'S HOUSE, LIVERPOOL ROAD, MANCHESTER

This simple but handsome house was built in 1808 for dyemaster John Rothwell, a partner in the Rothwell & Harrison dyeworks on nearby Water Street. The site now lies within the Castlefield Conservation Area, named after the four forts the Romans built here because of the same road and river connectivity that the Liverpool Manchester Railway (LMR) also exploited. The Rivers Irwell and Medlock run nearby, feeding into the Mersey. In 1765, the Bridgewater Canal reached Castlefield. The area became a major transshipment point, as a variety of industrial premises developed along the canals and rivers.

The 1820s became a time of frenzied jockeying, as entrepreneurs tried to work out how to maximise the potential of steam as a form of transport. The very first steam railway was the Stockton-Darlington line, which opened in 1825, primarily to carry coal although a few passengers also rode behind the outbound engines. In the early 1820s, the Liverpool & Manchester Railway Co (LMR) was formed, with guidance from the steam railway pioneer, George Stephenson. By then, the only vacant land in Castlefield was a small area bounded by Charles Street, Water Street and Liverpool Road, on which stood the house then known as 41 Liverpool Road, as built for John Rothwell in 1808. The land acquisition was a complex process, involving Acts of Parliament as well as persuading the Bridgewater Canal Company not to obstruct the development of the railway. The LMR acquired this land for its Manchester terminus in February 1829.

John Rothwell's well-placed house on the corner of Liverpool Road and Water Street then became the home of the world's first Station Agent, Joseph Green, the anchoring 'pin' around which all the rest of the station developed. A three-storey corner house with basement, it is trapezoidal in plan with a one-bay extension to the rear, where there is a service yard. The main façade of the house has large sash windows and is dominated by the front door (today a 1980s restoration faithful to the original), standing between Doric stone columns beneath a stone pediment.

Through 1830, a viaduct and bridge were built by George Stephenson behind Station Agent's House to bring the 31-mile track to the passenger platform. A large warehouse was built on the other side of the track. In June 1830, construction began of the Coach Offices, soon known as the Passenger Building, next to the Station Agent's House. Its architect is unconfirmed. This had two lofty booking halls at street level, one for first-class passengers and the other for second-class, and two corresponding waiting rooms on that building's first floor at rail level, giving onto the world's first passenger platform. A short metal footbridge still leads out from the second floor of the Station Agent's House directly onto this now disused railway platform (re-developed as a highline walk).

The line's grand opening took place on 15 September 1830, attended by the Duke of Wellington but disrupted by Liverpool MP William Huskisson's unfortunate accident, when he fell into the path of *Rocket*, which ran over him. He died the same day.

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Despite this inauspicious start, the railway was an instant success and other buildings and warehouses sprang up all around. In 1844 the line was extended to Manchester Victoria Station, which now became the passenger terminus, leaving Liverpool Road as a major freight depot. Joseph Green was succeeded as Station Agent by Edward Norden (by 1851) and Thomas Kay (by 1861), career railwaymen who also lived in the house with their families. By the 1870s, however, the house was rented to non-railway tenants; in the 20th century, the ground floor was converted into a shop, selling at various times sausages and car parts. The freight depot declined after the war, and in 1975 British Rail closed the line.

In 1980, the 250th anniversary of the railway's opening, a trust was formed to regenerate the area with a new museum, today called the Science & Industry Museum (SIM). The Museum chose Station Agent's House for their first offices and carried out a comprehensive restoration in the 1980s. They removed the mid-20th century shop fronts and recreated the original fenestration and doorcase (the blind upper storey windows were blocked by 1830). This returned the exterior of the building to much as it looked in the early 1800s. The interiors were fitted out for office rather than domestic use. By the 2020s, more of the wider site had been brought back into use. SIM no longer had a purpose for the house and turned to Landmark for help with a new use.

Externally, the only substantial change Landmark made was to create a new disabled access at the back, linking to an easy access bedroom and bathroom on the ground floor. A lift has also been installed, ensuring everyone has access to the large first floor living space.

Internally, the run-down building needed to be refreshed and upgraded for 21st-century use. We have done everything possible to make this Regency brick building efficiently and sustainably warm. An air source heat pump supplies heating and hot water for use. The draughty 1980s single-glazed sash windows were replaced with bespoke double-glazed sash frames. Chipboard floors were removed and new redwood pine floors installed with good thick boards. The walls are lined with a thick layer of sheep's wool, followed by lime plaster that includes tiny fragments of cork for better heat retention. The staircase is original, its moulded wooden handrail curving up three floors. A new oval skylight was installed in the stairwell, in keeping with the house's Regency origins.

The open plan first floor room, with its fantastic panorama of the Manchester skyline, has been kept as one communal room for sitting, eating and dining. Its floor was re-laid in parquet, and new kitchen units put in at one end, with a woodstove at the other and a new hearth stone in local grey limestone. A small cast iron safe built into the external wall has been left in situ. Bathrooms have been installed on all three floors, one with a fantastic view from the bath across the 1830 viaduct. We have chosen not to furnish the house as a Victorian station master's house but rather as the hardy, adaptable dwelling it has always been, reflecting the breezy 1830s, the heyday of passenger trains. From George Stephenson's time onwards, this house has been recognised as a building of substance worth keeping - a lesson in re-use and adaptation to bear in mind in our present day.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays to pay for their future maintenance. The Station Agent's House sleeps up to 8 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk.

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