



Engels' Beard

and daring to believe in the social transformation of society
at University of Salford

Reviewed by [Mark Iddon](#) September 2016

The New Adelphi building at the University of Salford was completed over the summer 2016 and has celebrated its opening with the launch of a specially commissioned sculpture / bouldering wall, adjacent the new building, called **Engels' Beard**. The piece was created by **Jai Redman** of

[Engine Arts Production Company](#)

which is based in Salford. The sculpture is almost 5m high and is made of fibre glass and there is a small exhibition in the new building which features a

[video](#)

of the making of the sculpture.

The launch event featured a brass band, flag bearers, the participation of a local primary school (**Clarendon Road Primary, Eccles**), and the University of Salford Chancellor and Writer in Residence, Jackie Kay, giving the first public performance of her poem 'Thinker' inspired by the artwork.

The idea for the sculpture was inspired by a passage from Dave Haslam's, 1999 book 'Manchester England,' which mentions an attempt to bring a statue of Engels to Manchester from a former Eastern Bloc country in recognition of Engels' time in Manchester, but the plan never came to fruition. The University of Salford's Art Collection commissioned the work over 2 years ago and unveiled the sculpture during freshers' week at the New Adelphi building.

Friedrich Engels came from Bremen in Germany in 1842, aged 22, where he came to work for his father's cotton manufacturing business at Victoria Mill in Weaste, Salford. The building has since been demolished to make way for the M602 motorway. Manchester was then growing from a small town towards major city status at the beginning of the industrial revolution benefiting from the transport and canal system to be able to export production via Liverpool to America and China.

Engels wrote '***The Condition of the Working Class in England***' whilst in Manchester which

was published in German in 1844 but wasn't published in English until 1892. He was a young man when he wrote this book and he was yet to develop his ideas with his compatriot Karl Marx. Engels with Marx wrote ' **The**

Communist Manifesto

', published in 1848 and at the time of the unsuccessful uprisings in Germany. The manifesto was written in response to the events that were actually happening at the time and was never meant to be a blueprint of how communism could be established and was never intended as a document to stand for all time. Engels left Manchester in 1844 for the continent, but returned in 1850 when he feared arrest in Germany for his part in the uprisings.

Marx and Engels should really be remembered for the development and articulation of the theory of historical materialism. They understood that the structure of society was always in transition and was not natural but should be understood in terms of economic relations. With the advancement of capitalism there was a conflict between the owners of the means of production (Bourgeoisie) and the wage earning labourers (Proletariat) who must sell their labour as a means of subsistence. These alienating and inhuman tensions could only be resolved when the ruling class were overthrown and the means of production were socialised. They realised that these tensions were not visible but disguised by the ideology and the predominant bourgeois understanding of the world at any given time.

The way to bring about change, Engels argued, is by the development of class consciousness and Engels provided finance for Marx so he could develop his theories through the three volume book '**Das Kapital**', which had to be completed by Engels in his later years. Engels lived in Manchester, until he moved to London in 1870, until his death in 1895. Engels wrote two other important books, ' **Socialism: Utopian and Scientific**' in 1883, and ' **The**

Origins of Family, Private Property and the State

' in 1884 as well as many articles and letters. The origin of family was considered to be a most important contribution to feminist theory in its attempt to make a materialist analysis of the origins of patriarchy.

Marx's starting point was that 'philosophers had only interpreted the world, but the point is to change it'. The final paragraph of '***The Communist Manifesto***' concludes that '*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite*'. The writing and ideas of Marx and Engels allowed the possibility of change for an alternative to, or progress beyond capitalism, for nearly 150 years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto and shaped world politics for the majority of the 20th century.

It is great that the University of Salford have commissioned '**Engels' Beard**' to remember this great man but we should also note that Marx and Engels were much more than thinkers, writers and philosophers and their main concern was to bring about the social transformation of society. In a period where there doesn't seem to be the possibility of change or an alternative way to organising society we could do well to consider these men, their ideas and method of understanding the relations in society, who boldly believed in the possibility of change and social transformation.

Jai Redman is currently exhibiting at Manchester City art gallery in an exhibition called 'Paradise Lost' until September 2017.