

The end of Coronation Street

The light was fading fast and the rain had returned. Standing on a heap of rubble, **Denis Thorpe** pointed his camera and wondered if he would ever get the picture. Keith Wilson hears how one of *The Guardian's* finest photographers prevailed

The time April, 1979

The place Salford

The event *It was a story that was familiar to thousands of families living in Britain's inner cities - local councils trying to find a satisfactory alternative to the Victorian slums that were being razed to the ground. Denis Thorpe toured the wet streets of Salford, looking for pictures that could tell the story about slums, bulldozers, concrete and hope*

IT WAS A straightforward assignment. *The Guardian* was preparing a feature on the state of local housing in Salford, so the paper's Manchester-based photographer Denis Thorpe was asked to supply the pictures to accompany the story by writer Lesley Adamson.

'She had come up from the London office,' Thorpe recalls, 'and I had taken her around Salford all day.' As city tours go, this had to be one of the grimmest. In Adamson's own words: 'Nowhere were the Victorian slums worse than in Salford, nowhere the new concrete jungles more miserable.' The rows of 'back-to-backs' as typified by Salford's Archie Street had even become immortalised as the scene-setting opening shot for TV's *Coronation Street*. But the local council was trying hard to correct the mistakes of the past and that is what the photographer and reporter were here to record on a wet day in April, 1979.

Salford was Thorpe's patch, he had lived in Greater Manchester for more than 20 years and was familiar with the sound of bulldozers knocking down Victorian slums. 'After I had been driving with the reporter I thought I still needed a picture and so came back on my own,' he remembers. Stopping his car near a street of boarded-up terraces, he noticed a pile of rubble at one end from where the bulldozers had already been. At the other end of the street were some of the new council houses that had been built in their place. Thorpe scrambled up the debris to get an elevated view of the street.

'I was teetering on the rubble trying to get a picture,' he says. 'I think I had nearly given up, the light was fading, but then I noticed a little group coming and there was no time to change the film or camera. Normally, I used a Leica M2, but for this job I had two Nikon F2 bodies, each loaded with Ilford FP4 which was my favourite film.'

