Founded in 1888 Adelphi lads club was the first club of its type in Salford. It was formed to provide for the needs of lads from the deprived industrial districts of Adelphi and Greengate.

The club’s origins stretch back to 1868 in the guise of the Adelphi Ragged School. When the Ragged School closed its premises one of the teachers, Walter Southern aged just 23 decided to start a boys club in the old school building.

Adelphi Lads Club officially opened its doors on October 3rd 1888 at its first home in the old mill on Pine Street. In Walter Southern’s own words the club aimed to;

“Direct these lads energies into channels more elevating than congregating in gangs at street corners”

The founding of the Adelphi Lads Club was testament to the growing concern for the welfare of lads from the working class poor in the latter Nineteenth Century.

By 1889, 156 lads had joined and its efforts drew the attention and patronage of local businessmen and philanthropists pleased by the clubs ever expanding efforts to provide pastimes for local youngsters.

The support of men such as Benjamin Armitage and Harold Lee led in 1890 to the construction of a new and more suitable home for the club situated on Hall Street.
Adelphi’s early attempts to occupy the local lads took many forms. Classes were offered in everything from book repair and clog repair to singing and painting. The club was aiming to give the lads a rounded and suitable education as well as giving them something to do.

While not all the early classes were a success, the club was soon able to better establish for itself a consistent membership. All the while conscious of its social responsibilities the club would even insist on cleanliness, providing communal washing facilities for lads.

The relationship between club and lad was formalised by the founding of a so-called ‘Rosetta Committee’ of 12 lads. This group would inform the club’s executive of any ill’s, social or physical affecting its young members.

The club was to many both a second home and a second family.

It was the provision of sports at the club that would garner the affections of club members the most. The club provided a gymnasium and snooker room and both activities were very popular, the club winning The Inter Club Gymnastics Competition of 1904.

The club offered football and rugby of both the Union and Northern Union varieties with some considerable success. After winning a cup final against Hugh Oldham Lads Club the wagon containing the winning Adelphi team was mistaken for Broughton Rovers, who had the same day beaten Salford in the ‘Northern Union’ Rugby Cup Final. The Adelphi team had its path through Manchester’s Market Street cleared by police in an impromptu victory parade.

The strength of the club’s team sports reflected the desire to provide local lads with new opportunities. For many to compete successfully in so many sports would not have been possible and their gratitude would prove crucial in the club’s future.
The club’s silver Jubilee celebrations of 1913 were followed by the outbreak of war a year later. Adelphi’s premises were taken over by the adjoining Broughton Copper Company to increase wartime capacity.

Many of the club’s lads joined the armed forces, 1080 in total, 207 of whom would not return. The war would also see the loss of valuable club officers like Harold Sutton who ran the cricket and football teams for some years.

When the war ended in 1918 the club had a number of challenges to face. The Hall Street building was no longer usable and Walter Southern, now in his fifties, was in ill health. However the time and work that he and men like him had invested in the club was to enthuse a new generation to revitalise it.

In 1919 Arthur Gregson became Secretary in the absence of Walter Southern, a position he would go on to hold for almost 30 years. Without premises the club would hold camps and organise sports teams, even winning the Lads Club Football League Division Two in 1919.

By 1921 such efforts to keep the membership of the club together were rewarded when the club was able to begin building a new home at Cannon Street in Salford.

The club’s new home opened officially on December 18th 1921. Traditional activities such as Gymnastics and snooker were able to be re-established and thrive. Adelphi had survived the Great War, thanks in no small part to the club’s positive and supporting attitude to its members for over 20 years.
The noble intentions of many lads clubs in the latter nineteenth century would lead to the provision of new activities which would otherwise be beyond the reach of most lads.

For Adelphi lads the annual camping expedition was one of the most unique activities on offer, providing the opportunity to escape industrial Salford and giving the lads a holiday which would otherwise be out of their reach.

The camp of 1892 at Bisham appears to be the first recorded lads club camp anywhere in the country.

From 1893 to 1899 the camp was to be held at Great Hucklow in Derbyshire, in cottages loaned by the Reverend Lawrence Scott of Denton in the philanthropic spirit of the time.

After camps at Prestatyn from 1900 to 1908 the club would move its annual camp to Deganwy. The club continued to camp here annually until very recently.

The early camps were run by Walter Southern until his ill health presented. From 1919 onward ‘camp commandants’ such as Thomas Barnes would organise and run camping expeditions.

The camps provided food and fresh air activities for members for decades to come. Memories of camps often being held in great affection by generations of members, with trips continuing until the 1990’s.
Adelphi continued to grow under Arthur Gregson’s leadership, adapting to changing times by installing a cinema machine in 1928 and extending the Cannon Street facilities to include a men’s club.

As the club celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1938 all seemed well, the club even having an average annual membership of 650 people.

Adelphi had won cricket tournaments such as the Manchester & Suburban League in 1933, 1935, 1935 and 1936. There was also success in football with the team winning the Lads Club League Division One title in 1935.

In 1937 Adelphi lad, Stanley Pearson even made his professional debut for Manchester United scoring in a 7-1 win away to Chesterfield. Stanley went on to play for England.

The Second World War years would have as much of an effect on the club as the Great War did and the club building was again taken over, this time for the rehabilitation of servicemen.

Continued ill health also forced Walter Southern, now 80 to resign in 1945, 57 years after he began the club. The club would lose instructors in fitness, football and culture and even after the war the club would have to suffer further through the resignation of Arthur Gregson, Secretary since 1919.

The club quickly began to feel the loss and it was becoming increasingly apparent that it was lacking in staff and equipment and was in urgent need of renewal. This would come in the form of Charles C. Barker’s appointment as Chairman of the executive committee and Bernard Aldred’s appointment as Honorary Secretary.

The club would rally under their leadership but not without problems.
In the 1950’s Adelphi was one of the oldest surviving and most traditional clubs in Britain.

Society had changed post war, charitable donations were harder to come by and the raising of the school leaving age along with the new activities pursued in schools, would all have drastic implications for the club over the coming decades.

Adelphi had an advantage in this new climate in the form of its traditional outlook and huge contingent of old boys. These factors meant that the club was somewhat insulated from the changes that had lead to the closures of other clubs.

The opening of new high rise housing by Salford Corporation in 1962 bolstered membership considerably, the club going on to add a canteen in 1968.

The club was protected from the force of change in no small part by the strength of its sporting tradition. Indeed the club won five successive Manchester Amateur Cup titles from 1954-1958.

Even Gymnastics would continue at the club until the 1980’s, long after the activity had been made redundant in other clubs by the growth of physical education in schools.

Adelphi continued to offer sports and pastimes such as board games while also adding to its facilities. In 1978 funds for an outdoor floodlit sports ground and squash court were gained from the ‘Inner City Grants’ programme.

Such was the affection for the club that upon his retirement as general Secretary of the Greater Manchester Federation of Boys Clubs, Jim Buckley would become club President.

For over 125 years Adelphi Lads Club has offered local young people the opportunity to improve themselves, make friends and have fun. In its time club workers would use their positive experiences at Adelphi to form other clubs, most notably Ancoats Lads Club.

It is tribute to the need for the club that generations of locals put so much effort into keeping alive the traditions that Walter Southern put in place.