

# Further information

## Websites

[birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk)  
[visitbirmingham.com](http://visitbirmingham.com)  
[birminghammuseums.org.uk](http://birminghammuseums.org.uk)  
[libraryofbirmingham.com](http://libraryofbirmingham.com)

## Books

WH Haywood  
*The Work of the Birmingham Civic Society  
from June 1918 to June 1946* (BCS, 1946)

Phillada Ballard (editor)  
*Birmingham's Victorian & Edwardian Architects*  
(Oblong / Victorian Society, 2009)

Andy Foster  
*Pevsner Architectural Guide to Birmingham*  
(Yale, 2005)

George T. Noszlopy  
*Public Sculpture of Birmingham*  
(Liverpool University Press, 1998)

George T. Noszlopy & Fiona Waterhouse  
*Birmingham Public Sculpture Trails*  
(Liverpool University Press, 2008)

## Credits

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Birmingham Museums Trust

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# THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIC SOCIETY CITY HERITAGE TRAIL



THE  
BIRMINGHAM  
CIVIC SOCIETY



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[birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Information contained  
within this guide is correct  
at the time of publishing.



THE  
BIRMINGHAM  
CIVIC SOCIETY



# Birmingham Civic Society



Birmingham Civic Society was founded on 10 June 1918. Its members were inspired, in part, by a desire to create a better society following the devastation caused by the First World War.

From the outset, the Society's main objective was to influence the regeneration of the city after the end of the First World War. It was an influential voice in helping to create new parks and other public amenities and in preserving and improving the quality of the built environment.

In its early years, under the guidance of Honorary Secretary William Haywood (1876-1957), the Society focussed its efforts on buying land to create public open spaces. It also provided designs and funds to make improvements to some of the city's existing parks.

In the 1920s and 30s the Society campaigned to preserve Stratford House (successfully) and Aston Almshouses (unsuccessfully). It also played a leading role in preventing the Repertory Theatre from closing by raising additional funds. In 1939 the Society ensured the Cathedral's Burne-Jones stained-glass windows would be protected from German bombing raids by moving them to safe storage in a mine in Wales.

After the Second World War the Society was unable to prevent the loss of notable buildings during the wholesale redevelopment of the city centre. However, it played an important role in rescuing and restoring a number of important pieces of public art.

In the 1950s the Society erected the first of its Blue Plaques which honour significant people who have lived or worked in the city.



Blue plaque unveiling



Trees for Life planting event

## The Civic Society Today

Today the Society continues to lobby for an improved urban environment and strongly promotes active citizenship.

The Society's Next Generation Awards encourage young people to play a role in the future of their city and the Renaissance Awards recognise the most successful conservation projects in the city.

The Society continues to advise on planning and environment issues and to oversee the Blue Plaque programme.

One of the Society's other major contributions to civic life is through Birmingham Trees for Life. Since it was launched in 2006, this programme has planted more than 70,000 new trees in Birmingham's parks and open spaces.

The Civic Society is open to everyone and is made up of people who value the city they live or work in.

## The Birmingham Civic Society City Heritage Trail

The purpose of this trail is to help both residents and visitors to discover the many different aspects of Birmingham's heritage, and the Civic Society's role in helping to preserve it.

The city centre route will take between 1 and 2 hours. The out of town trail is most easily done by car, although all of the sites included are accessible by public transport.

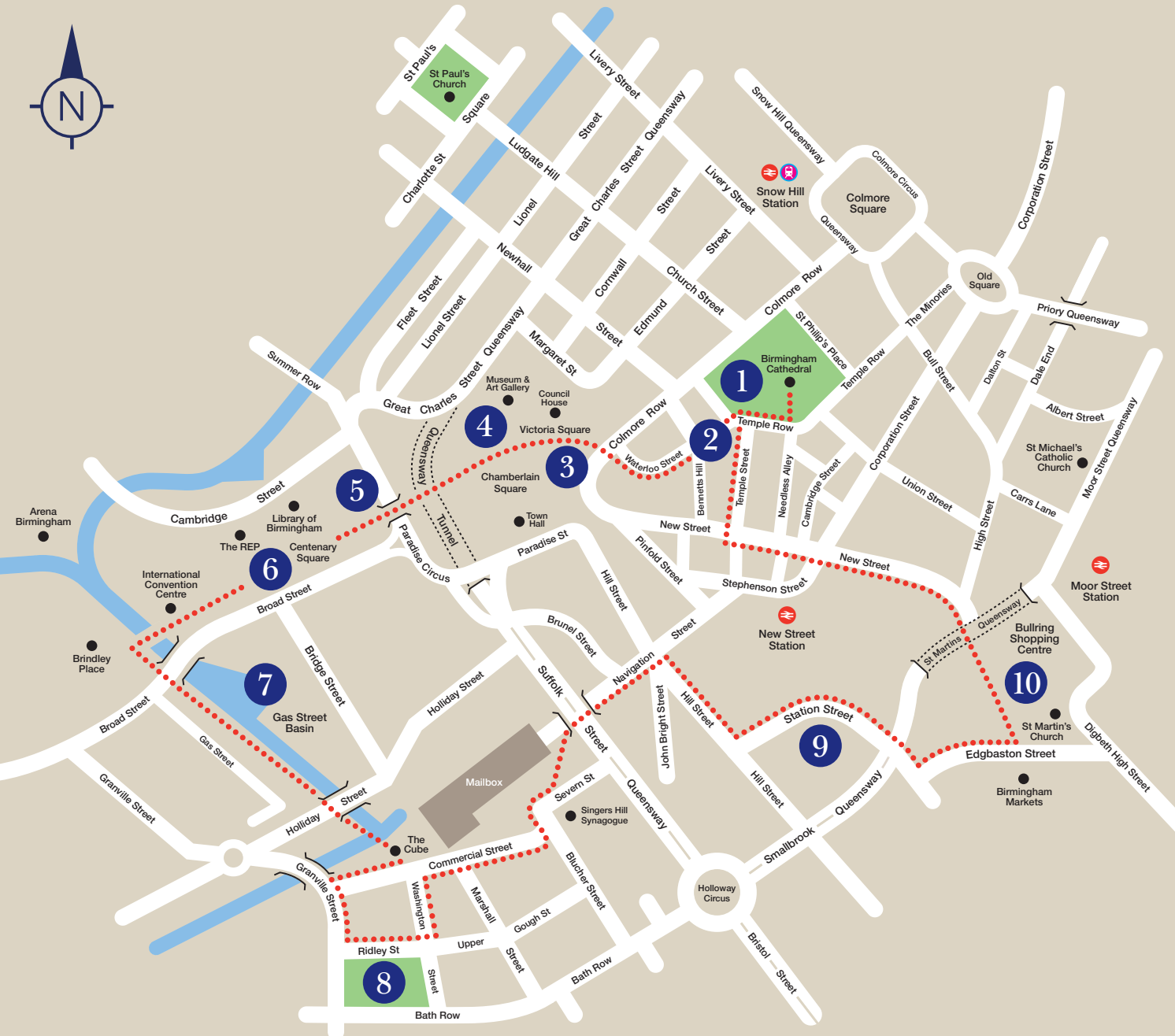


Stratford House, Bordesley



# Birmingham Civic Society City Centre Heritage Trail

This pleasant walk takes advantage of some of the more distinctive and attractive aspects of the city and should take between 1 and 2 hours. **Please note** this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.



# 1

## Birmingham Cathedral

Designed by the Warwickshire gentleman architect Thomas Archer, St Philip's was built as a parish church and was consecrated in 1715. It became the city's cathedral in 1905.

Between 1885 and 1897 St Philip's was enhanced by the addition of four magnificent stained glass windows designed by local artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 Birmingham Civic Society funded and oversaw the removal of the Burne-Jones windows into safe storage in a Welsh slate mine. The cathedral subsequently suffered severe damage during the Birmingham Blitz and so the Society's actions almost certainly saved these outstanding works of art from destruction.



The Archbishop of Canterbury admiring the Burne-Jones windows



Removal of the Burne-Jones windows for storage, 1939



William Westley North prospect of St Philip's Church, 1732

# 2

## Bennetts Hill



The Birmingham Banking Company building

Bennetts Hill was created as part of the development of the Inge estate in the early 19th century and boasts a number of fine Victorian and Edwardian buildings.

These include the former Birmingham Banking Company designed by Thomas Rickman and Henry Hutchinson and built 1830-31. The corner entrance was added by Henry Yeoville Thomason in 1868.

Number 37 was home to the original offices of the Birmingham Civic Society. Today the building is the Wellington public house.

The artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones was born at number 11 and a Civic Society blue plaque commemorates the location of his former family home.



The Wellington



# 3

## Victoria Square

Victoria Square was so named following the unveiling of Thomas Brock's marble statue of the queen in 1901.

In 1951 the Civic Society paid for the statue to be recast in bronze by William Bloye as part of the national celebrations for the Festival of Britain.

Designed by the architect Henry Yeoville Thomason in 1874-75, the Council House was the venue for the inaugural meeting of the Civic Society in June 1918. The entrance lobby contains a unique blue plaque which commemorates five generations of the Martineau family who all served as Mayor or Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

Across the square is Grade I listed Birmingham Town Hall which was the city's first public concert hall and auditorium. Opened in 1834, it was designed by Joseph Hansom and Edward Welch.



Queen Victoria statue



The River by Dhruva Mistry



The Town Hall

# 4

## Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery



Museum & Art Gallery

Opened in 1885, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is a must-see venue for anyone wishing to learn more about the history of the city.

The *Birmingham: its people, its history* exhibition galleries feature a number of displays relating to the redevelopment of the city following the First World War. The galleries won a Civic Society Renaissance Award following their completion in 2012.

Outside the main entrance of the Museum is the extravagant gothic Chamberlain Memorial Fountain. Unveiled in 1880, the memorial was designed by the Birmingham architect J.H. Chamberlain to celebrate the achievements of MP and former mayor Joseph Chamberlain.

The memorial's original fountains were lost in the 1960s but in 1978 the Civic Society funded two new fountain bowls to celebrate its Diamond Jubilee.



Chamberlain Memorial Fountain

[birminghammuseums.org.uk](http://birminghammuseums.org.uk)



*Birmingham: its people, its history* exhibition galleries



# 5

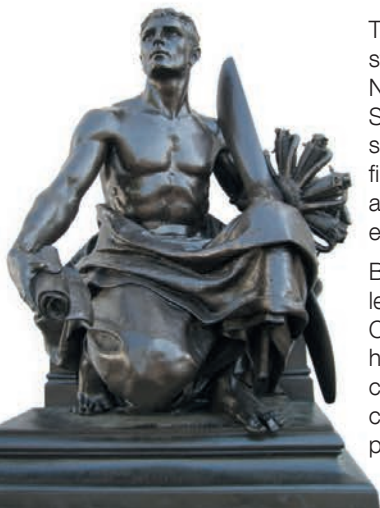
## Hall of Memory



Hall of Memory



Frontline by William Bloye  
Below: Air Force statue by Albert Toft



Completed in 1924, the Hall of Memory was built to commemorate the 12,320 Birmingham citizens who died during the First World War.

Designed by local architects S.N. Cooke and W.N. Twist, the octagonal Doric-style building is made from Cornish granite and Portland stone.

The exterior has four bronze statues representing the Army, Navy, Air Force and Women's Services by the Handsworth-born sculptor Albert Toft. Inside are three fine low-relief sculptural plaques by another local artist, William Bloye, entitled Call, Frontline & Return.

Bloye went on to become a leading member of Birmingham Civic Society. During his career he undertook numerous public commissions including statues and carved reliefs on libraries, hospitals, pubs and other buildings.

# 6

## Centenary Square

Centenary Square was created in 1989 to mark 100 years of Birmingham achieving city status.

During the 1920s and 1930s an ambitious new Civic Centre complex was planned for the square, to include a cathedral, planetarium and a host of other public buildings.

Most of the scheme was never realised - the only elements completed were the Hall of Memory and Baskerville House. However, the original 'civic' vision for the square has largely been fulfilled with the opening of the Repertory Theatre in 1971, Symphony Hall and the International Convention Centre in 1991 and the Library of Birmingham in 2013.

For a fine birds-eye view of the square and its surroundings the Library of Birmingham's rooftop garden is well worth a visit.

[libraryofbirmingham.com](http://libraryofbirmingham.com)



Model of the unrealised Civic Centre scheme by William Haywood, 1939  
© Birmingham Museums



Library of Birmingham



Boulton, Watt & Murdoch by William Bloye

# 7

## The Canal Network

Designed by the engineer James Brindley and opened in 1772, the Birmingham Canal was created to connect Birmingham with the Black Country coalfields.

In 1795 the Birmingham & Worcester Canal was constructed to the south of the Birmingham Canal with both terminating at what is now Gas Street Basin.

With the advent of the railways and improved road transport in the 19th and 20th centuries the canal network fell into disrepair.

During the 1990s Birmingham's canals were comprehensively restored as part of the wider regeneration of the city centre. The transformation of these waterways has continued ever since, with two of the most recent major canal-side developments being the Mailbox (completed in 2000) and The Cube (2010).

[canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk)



Canalside houses



Gas Street Basin



The Mailbox

# 8

## St Thomas' Peace Garden



Colonnade from Hall of Memory

St Thomas' Peace Garden on Holloway Head was designed around the ruined tower of St Thomas' Church. The tower was the only part of Thomas Rickman's 1829 structure to survive the Birmingham Blitz of 1940.

In 1953 the site was laid out as a public garden based on the designs of the Civic Society to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The Peace Garden includes a colonnade which had originally formed part of the Hall of Memory but which was relocated here when Centenary Square was laid out in 1989.

On the way back to the Mailbox it is well worthwhile to make a short detour to view the fine exterior of Singers Hill Synagogue.



St Thomas' Church Tower



Singers Hill Synagogue

# 9

## The Old Rep

Opened in 1913, the Old Rep was the first purpose-built repertory theatre to be built in the United Kingdom.

Designed by architect S.N. Cooke, the construction of the theatre was funded by its artistic director Sir Barry Jackson.

During its early years the theatre was beset by financial difficulties and it was threatened with closure in 1923 and again in 1934. On both occasions the Civic Society was instrumental in securing its future through successful fundraising appeals.

The theatre remained the home of the Birmingham Repertory Company until 1971 when the new Repertory Theatre was opened in Centenary Square. Today owned and operated by the Birmingham Ormiston Academy, the Old Rep is still a working theatre.

[oldreptheatre.co.uk](http://oldreptheatre.co.uk)



The Old Rep



Sir Barry Jackson  
by William Bloye



The Birmingham Repertory Theatre

# 10

## The Bull Ring

Japanned tray depicting the Bull Ring c1812  
© Birmingham Museums



St Martin's Church



Nelson Memorial

Established around 1166, the Bull Ring was the site of the medieval town of Birmingham's weekly market.

St Martin's was the town's original parish church and dates from at least 1263. It was substantially rebuilt by Birmingham architect J.A. Chatwin in 1873-5.

On the terrace above the church is Sir Richard Westmacott's fine statue of Admiral Lord Nelson. Unveiled on 25th October 1809, it was the first figurative memorial to Nelson in the United Kingdom.

When the memorial was restored following the completion of the new Bullring shopping centre in 2003 it was missing its original iron railings. The Civic Society successfully campaigned for the return of the railings which were finally reinstated in 2005.



# 12

## Handsworth Park



Handsworth Park was created between 1880 and 1898 when the surrounding area was still part of Staffordshire. The park consists of 63 acres of landscaped grassland, including a large boating lake, bandstand, flower beds, mature trees and shrubs.

On its northern side the park is connected to the graveyard of St Mary's Parish Church, the final resting place of industrialists James Watt, Matthew Boulton and William Murdoch. The three men all have memorials inside the church.

In 1922 Birmingham Civic Society designed and paid for the creation of a new formal 'Sunk Garden' near the Grove Lane entrance. The garden featured as its centrepiece a bronze sculpture of a child holding a lamb designed by local artist John P. Walker. Sadly this was stolen in 1988 and has never been recovered.

Right: Handsworth Park Bandstand  
Below: St Mary's Parish Church



# 13

## Cannon Hill Park

Cannon Hill Park was given to the city of Birmingham by the philanthropist Louisa Ann Ryland in 1873.

The park contains a memorial to members of the Scouting movement in Birmingham who were killed during the First (and later Second) World War. The memorial was designed by the Civic Society's Secretary William Haywood and was unveiled on 27 July 1924.

During the 1920s the Civic Society funded new formal gardens next to the Boy Scout Memorial.

Cannon Hill also includes a fine memorial to the soldiers of the Warwickshire Regiment who were killed in the second Boer War. Completed in 1906, the memorial was the work of Handsworth-born sculptor Albert Toft (1862-1949).



Right: Avenue of trees laid out to the designs of the Civic Society



Boy Scout Memorial



Boer War Memorial

# 14 Highbury and the Henburys



Highbury Hall

Highbury was home to Joseph Chamberlain, influential Mayor of Birmingham and controversial national politician. Completed in 1878, the house was designed by the architect J. H. Chamberlain in the Venetian Gothic style.

Following Joseph's death in 1914, his son Austen put the estate into trust in 1919. A public park was established adjacent to the house in 1921.

In January 1923 the Civic Society purchased 42 acres of parkland from the adjacent Henburys estate for £9,000. This was gifted to Birmingham City Council and more than doubled the size of the public park around Highbury.

In 2015 the Chamberlain Highbury Trust was established to preserve and restore the house and grounds and give them a sustainable future.

[chamberlainhighburytrust.co.uk](http://chamberlainhighburytrust.co.uk)



The Henburys



Joseph Chamberlain

# 15 Kings Norton

Originally part of Worcestershire, the village of Kings Norton was incorporated into Birmingham in 1911.

At the northern end of the village green, 13th century St Nicolas' Church, the Tudor Merchant's House and the 17th century Old Grammar School make up the finest collection of early buildings in Birmingham.

To the north of the village centre is Kings Norton Park and Playing Fields. This was created after Birmingham Civic Society purchased the 25 acre plot in 1920 and gifted it to the City Council. The Society also paid for laying out formal gardens, and providing new benches and gates at the Pershore Road entrance to the park.

[saintnicolasplace.co.uk](http://saintnicolasplace.co.uk)



The Merchant's House



St Nicolas' Church



Old Grammar School



Kings Norton Park

# 16

## Northfield



St. Laurence Parish Church



The Great Stone



The Village Pound

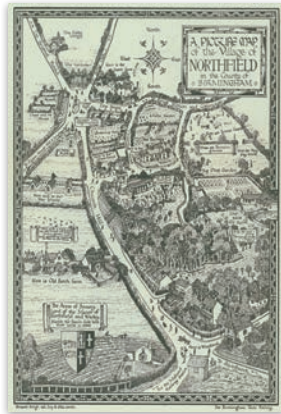


The Great Stone Inn

The uncontrolled expansion of the Birmingham suburbs following the end of the First World War was a particular concern to the Civic Society. The Society encouraged the City Council to ensure that the historic fabric of previously distinct villages like Northfield were not completely overwhelmed by new housing, industry and infrastructure.

Thanks to the Society's efforts the historic core of Northfield still survives today. St Laurence Church's Norman doorway is the oldest piece of architecture in Birmingham and the 13th century chancel is one of the finest in the Midlands. The nearby Great Stone Inn and Village Pound date from the 17th century.

The Civic Society's first land purchase for public open space took place in Northfield in February 1920. The 10 acre plot became known as Daffodil Park.



# 17

## Lickey Hills



Heathland habitat

One of Birmingham's best-loved green spaces, Lickey Hills Country Park covers 524 acres and is located 10 miles south west of Birmingham city centre.



Beacon Hill Toposcope

The founding of the park dates back to 1888 when the Birmingham Society for the Preservation of Open Spaces purchased Rednal Hill and donated it to the Corporation. Over the next 35 years further land was acquired, much of it funded by the Cadbury family.

Rising 297m (975ft) above sea level, Beacon Hill is the most famous viewpoint in the Lickeys. At the summit is an early 20th century toposcope located in a small 'fort' which was built in 1988 to celebrate the park's centenary.

In 1918, the Earl of Plymouth, whose estates originally included the park, became the first President of Birmingham Civic Society.



Earl of Plymouth's obelisk