

Birmingham Women's Heritage Trails

Further Information

Websites birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk
bswaid.org
womenshistorybham.org.uk

Books Margaret D. Green
Birmingham Women
(Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2000)

Sian Roberts
Great War Birmingham: Remembering 1914 - 1918
(Stroud: The History Press, 2014)

Nicola Gauld
Words and Deeds: Birmingham Suffragists and Suffragettes 1832 - 1918
(West Midlands History, 2018)

Louise Palfreyman
Once upon a time in Birmingham: Women who dared to dream
(Emma Press, 2018)

Kathleen Dayus
The Girl from Hockley: Growing Up in Working-Class Birmingham
(Virago, 2006)

Credits This trail builds on the work undertaken by a number of individuals and organisations over the last 40 years. Particular mention should go to Professor Catherine Hall, Women's History Birmingham, Dr Sian Roberts, Nikki Thorpe, Dr Nicola Gauld and Rachel Gillies.

Development of this trail leaflet, including additional content and photography by Chris Rice and Irene de Boo.



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William A Cadbury
Charitable Trust



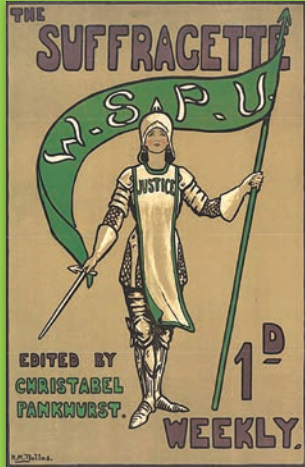
Birmingham Women's Heritage Trails



Introduction

Like most places, Birmingham's history has traditionally focussed on the achievements of notable men.

This is perhaps not that surprising as for hundreds of years women were denied the same opportunities as men. The lives of most women centred on the home, bringing up their children and supporting their husbands. Job opportunities were limited and, when available, were confined to poorly-paid factory labour and piece work.



Poster advertising the Suffragette magazine, 1912

Abolition and Parliamentary Representation

Two of the causes that were significantly advanced by women in Birmingham were the abolition of slavery and female suffrage (the right for women to vote in elections).

Founded in 1825, the Birmingham Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves was the first and most important female abolitionist organisation in the country.

Birmingham women also played a significant role in the campaign for female suffrage. The influential (and peaceful) Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society was formed in 1868. After 1903, some women joined the more militant Women's Social and Political Union – the suffragettes – who were prepared to commit unlawful acts to attract publicity for their cause.



Women's anti-slavery medallion

Most of the women who feature on this trail were only able to make their mark because they came from wealthy backgrounds. They also often came from Quaker and other non-conformist communities whose attitudes towards women tended to be more progressive.

The stories and achievements of women from working class backgrounds and different ethnicities tend to be much less well known – although some of these hidden histories are now gradually being revealed.



Female munitions workers



Suffragette banner

© Birmingham Museums Trust

Female suffrage was also advanced by the role played by women during the First World War. Birmingham was a centre for the production of armaments and thousands of women took the places vacated by enlisted men at Kynoch's, BSA and other munitions factories.

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act was passed which allowed women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification to vote. However, it was not until the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 that women over 21 finally achieved the same voting rights as men.

The Birmingham Women's Heritage Trail

This trail aims to highlight some of the most notable individuals and events that have contributed to women's history in the city.

The trail is a joint project between Birmingham Civic Society and Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA).

Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid grew out of the 1970s women's movement. More than 40 years on, the organisation is the leading provider of support services for women and children affected by domestic violence and abuse in the West Midlands.

Founded in 1918, Birmingham Civic Society was established to help preserve and celebrate the city's heritage, improve the urban environment and promote active citizenship.



A number of Birmingham suffragettes were sent to Winson Green prison

1

Birmingham Cathedral



The churchyard is home to the grave of the music hall star Nanette Stocker (*below*), 'the smallest woman in the kingdom', who died at the age of 39 in 1810.

In March 1914 the cathedral was targeted by suffragettes who daubed painted slogans inside the building, including on some of the Burne-Jones stained glass windows.



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

Between 1885 and 1897 St Philips was enriched by the addition of four magnificent stained glass windows designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

Three of the windows – the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Ascension – were funded by the Birmingham heiress Emma Villers Wilkes (d 1891). She was something of an eccentric and specified that there should be no cattle in the Nativity or blood in the crucifixion scenes!



Right: The Archbishop of Canterbury admiring the Burne-Jones windows

2

Colmore Row

Colmore Row was named after the Colmore family who owned the nearby New Hall estate.

In 1746 Ann Colmore secured a private Act of Parliament to allow the family to sell their land for development, thus enabling the expansion of the town in the 18th century. The eastern end of Colmore Row was named Ann Street in her memory. In the early 1850s Ann Street was the venue for meetings of an early feminist group, the Birmingham Maidens Club.



Detail of 1778 map showing Colmore Row and Ann Street

23 Colmore Row was the original address of Redfern & Co. solicitors who employed Mary Pickup (1881-1938) as Birmingham's first woman solicitor in 1923. Women were unable to practice as solicitors until Parliament passed the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919 and Mary was one of four women in England to pass her final law exams in 1922.



Ann Street by Allen Everitt

3

The Council House and Victoria Square

Victoria Square is home to the Council House, constructed 1874 - 75 as the seat of Birmingham Corporation (now the City Council).

Prior to the 20th century local politics in Birmingham was an entirely male affair. The first woman to be elected as a city councillor was Ellen Pinsent in 1911.



Top: Ellen Pinsent
Above: Theresa Stewart

A further twenty three women were elected as councillors between 1911 and 1939. Female representation has increased significantly since the Second World War and the City Council currently has 42 women out of a total of 101 councillors.

The first (and so far only) female leader of the council was Cllr Theresa Stewart (1930 - 2020), who held the role between 1993 and 1999.

Standing in front of the Council House, Thomas Brock's 1901 statue of Queen Victoria (recast in bronze by William Bloye in 1951) is still only one of a handful of public artworks in the city that depicts a woman.



4

Birmingham Town Hall



Birmingham Town Hall from Chamberlain Square



Nina Simone



Peggy Seeger

The spectacular Grade I listed Town Hall was the city's first public concert hall. Based on the temple of Castor and Pollux in ancient Rome, it was designed by Joseph Hansom and Edward Welch and opened in 1834.



Over the years it has provided a performance venue for numerous female artists including Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield ('The Black Swan'), Peggy Seeger, Nina Simone and Sandy Denny.

The building was the main concert hall for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) for many years. Founded in 1920, the CBSO always included female musicians unlike many other orchestras of the time.



The Town Hall was also a venue for political meetings as well as musical performances. In November 1916 the suffragette Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst (*left*) spoke here. During the First World War she suspended her suffragette activities and strongly promoted the war effort.

5

Chamberlain Square

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery was the scene of a militant suffragette attack on 9th June 1914 when Bertha Ryland (1882-1977) slashed George Romney's painting *Master Thornhill* with a meat cleaver.



Mason College, 1880s



Dr Mary Sturge



Mason Science College originally occupied the northern side of the square. One of the first women students to graduate from the college was Dr Mary Sturge (1862-1925), great-niece of the anti-slavery campaigner Joseph Sturge.

Mary was only the second woman to practice medicine in Birmingham and worked at the Women's Hospital for many years. The philosopher Constance Naden (1858-1889) was another graduate, whilst the pioneering geologist Ethel Shakespear (1871-1946) also worked at the college for a time.

Although there are only a handful of public artworks in the city which depict women, there are several more which were created by women artists. These include the reclining bronze sculpture (*left*) of Thomas Attwood MP by Sioban Coppinger and Fiona Peever, completed in 1993.

6

School of Art, Margaret Street

Designed by the architect John Henry Chamberlain, and opened in 1885, the School of Art (*right*) was one of the first educational institutions in Birmingham to admit female students.

Notable women graduates included Georgie Gaskin, Constance Smedley, Kate Bunce, Emmy Bridgwater and Mary Newell.

Georgie Gaskin (1866-1934) won prizes for metalwork and book illustration whilst a student at the school, and went on to become one of the most influential female jewellers of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Birmingham-born Emmy Bridgwater (1906-1999) was a leading member of the British Surrealist movement. Her influence on British Surrealism has been compared to that of Salvador Dali on the French surrealists.



Portrait of Georgie Gaskin by her husband Arthur Gaskin



The Life Class, Birmingham School of Art, 1888

As well as donating Cannon Hill and Small Heath Parks to the people of Birmingham, Louisa Ryland (1814-1889), contributed half of the funds required to construct the School of Art.

7

Centenary Square



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

At the heart of the square is the Hall of Memory (*left*) which was built to commemorate the 12,320 Birmingham citizens who died during the First World War. The four bronze statues on the exterior of the building include one to the Women's Services.



Opened in 1991, the International Convention Centre occupies the site of Bingley Hall. In September 1909 Prime Minister Herbert Asquith visited Bingley Hall to address members of the Liberal party. Women were prevented from attending the meeting but two suffragettes climbed onto the roof of a nearby building and threw slates at Asquith's car whilst others attempted to rush the police barriers.

In total 10 women were arrested and sent to Winson Green prison where some of them were force-fed after they went on hunger strike.

Above: Women's Services statue by Albert Toft

Below: Industrial exhibition at Bingley Hall, 1865



8

Library of Birmingham



The spectacular Library of Birmingham was designed by Francine Houben, founding partner of the Dutch architectural practice Mecanoo.

The building was formally opened on 3 September 2013 by Malala Yousafzai (*above*), the Pakistani schoolgirl and educational activist who made Birmingham her home after surviving an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012.

The library houses a number of internationally significant collections, including the Boulton & Watt archives and the Birmingham Shakespeare Library. The latter includes 18th century actress Sarah Siddons' personally annotated copy of *Othello*.



Outside the front of the library is Birmingham-born artist Gillian Wearing's 2014 bronze *A Real Birmingham Family* (*left*). It depicts local sisters Roma and Emma Jones with their two children.

9

Jewellery Quarter & Coffin Works



Completed in 1863, the Argent Centre is a former pen factory and is home to the excellent Birmingham Pen Museum (penmuseum.org.uk)

During the 19th century three-quarters of the world's pens were manufactured in Birmingham, with the trade located in and around the Jewellery Quarter.

Unlike most other factories in the city, 80% of the workers employed by the pen-manufacturers were women. Although they were often governed by strict rules forbidding talking and singing, the pen factories were still regarded as good employers by their female staff.



Joyce Green



Coffin Works Tour

At the south-eastern edge of the Jewellery Quarter on Fleet Street is the Coffin Works museum. Originally the premises of Newman Brothers Ltd, the site is a fascinating time capsule which survives thanks to the efforts of the remarkable Joyce Green (1931-2009).

Joyce began working for the company in 1949 and when it finally closed in 1998 she led the campaign to turn it into an industrial museum.

10

The Tree of Life, Edgbaston Street

The Tree of Life (right) by Lorenzo Quinn commemorates the 2,421 civilians who were killed by German bombing raids on Birmingham during the Second World War.

Women were key to the Birmingham war effort between 1939 and 1945. Thousands of women worked in the city's armaments and other factories. Many others served in the armed forces, or performed vital duties as nurses, ambulance drivers, ARP wardens and other roles.



Female Civil Defence team, 1940



Edith Wills MP



Although German bombing raids caused widespread damage to the city, the war also had a number of positive consequences for women. These included the creation of the National Health Service, improvements to housing and education, and a general raising of expectations.

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of this was the election of Birmingham's first female MP, Edith Wills (1892-1970), who won the seat of Duddeston for the Labour Party in 1945.

Birmingham Women's Heritage Trails

Out of Town Map

11

St Alban's Church, Highgate



St Alban's Church in Highgate was completed in 1881. One of the highlights of the Grade II* listed building is the spectacular reredos (altar screen) created by Kate and Myra Bunce in 1919.

Kate Bunce (1856 - 1927) was a Birmingham artist and poet inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement. Her father John Thackray Bunce was a leading liberal and editor of the Birmingham Post.

Kate studied at the Birmingham School of Art in the 1880s, first exhibiting artworks with the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in 1874 and with the Royal Academy from 1887. She was elected as an associate of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in 1888.

As with a number of her other church commissions, the St Alban's reredos was created in partnership with her sister Myra (1854-1919), with Kate producing the painting and Myra the decorative metalwork.



St Alban's reredos

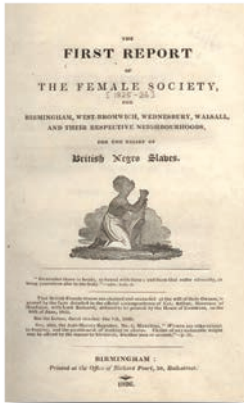
Please note this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.

All routes are accessible by public transport.

For up to date transport information please visit tfwm.org.uk

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Edgbaston: Sophia Sturge and Constance Naden



Edgbaston has numerous connections with Birmingham women's history.

The Quaker abolitionist Sophia Sturge (1795 - 1845) lived at Southfield, a large villa which previously occupied the site of 64 Wheelays Road, Edgbaston.

Sophia was one of the founders of the Birmingham Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, which led the nationwide campaign by women during the 1820s.



Joseph Sturge

Following the final abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, Sophia worked to help former enslaved people adjust to the conditions of freedom. In 1844, for example, she raised funds to open a school in Jamaica.

In 1815 Sophia became housekeeper to her famous abolitionist brother Joseph (1793 - 1859), and it is he rather than she who is commemorated with a Birmingham Civic Society blue plaque on the present building.

Another remarkable woman, the scientist, philosopher and poet Constance Naden (1858 - 1889), *right*, lived in nearby Charlotte Road for most of her life.



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Edgbaston: Catherine Osler, Florence Barrow and BSWA

Catherine Osler (1854-1924), *right*, national suffragist campaigner and President of Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society, lived in Norfolk Road for many years.

The influential Quaker and humanitarian Florence Barrow (1876 - 1964), *below*, lived at 35 Frederick Road from 1909. During the First World War and its aftermath she was a refugee relief worker in France, Russia and Poland.



In 1924 Florence was a founding member of the Copec Housing Improvement Society and spent 30 years improving working class housing in the city. She also helped refugees fleeing fascism in Germany and Austria during the 1930s.

Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA) also has its roots in Edgbaston. In the late 1970s a group of women established a squat in an empty building on Priors Road and gave shelter to women fleeing abuse. Local housing workers and police referred women and their children there, and the project eventually went on to become BSWA.



14

University of Birmingham

Unsurprisingly there are many notable women associated with the University of Birmingham.



Birmingham-born Dame Hilda Lloyd (1891 - 1982) was a pioneering obstetrician and midwifery specialist whose innovative ideas helped save the lives of numerous women and children in the city.



Dame Hilda Lloyd



Victoria Wood

Margery Fry (1874 - 1958) was warden of the women's residence at the University of Birmingham from 1904 to 1914. She went on to become an influential prison reformer and was also one of the first female magistrates in Britain.

Famous graduates from more recent times include actress and performer Victoria Wood (1953 - 2016), politician Ann Widdecombe and broadcaster Jane Garvey.

Just across the road from the university, King Edward's School was home to the US Women's Army Corps 6888th Central Postal Battalion between February and May 1945. The battalion was the first and only all-black female unit to be posted overseas during the Second World War.



15

Cannon Hill Park

Cannon Hill Park was given to the city of Birmingham by Louisa Ryland (1814 - 1889) in 1873.

Her grandfather, John Ryland, made his fortune from the wire drawing trade. His wealth passed to his son Samuel which he in turn bequeathed to his only child Louisa.



Louisa Ryland

Louisa never married and devoted a large part of her fortune to making gifts to a range of Birmingham charities and other institutions. It has been estimated that during her lifetime she made donations to the value of some £180,000 - the equivalent of £13m today.



Louisa gifted 57 acres of land to create the park and also funded its landscaping, ornamental planting and a variety of recreational facilities. She preferred her gifts to be made anonymously and so did not want the park named after her. However, she did attend the opening which took place on 1st September 1873.



Map of Cannon Hill Park in 1892

16

Bournville

Elizabeth Cadbury (1858 - 1951), *right*, married chocolate manufacturer and philanthropist George Cadbury in 1888.

The couple championed a wide range of good causes including housing, education and health. Following George's death in 1922, Elizabeth continued her work to improve the lives of ordinary people, particularly women and children. She was awarded an OBE in 1918 and made a Dame in 1934.



Bournville was also home to the formidable trade unionist Julia Varley (1871 - 1952), *left*, who came to Birmingham from Yorkshire in 1909 at the invitation of Edward Cadbury.

In 1910 she helped to organise the famous women chain-makers strike in the Black Country. Twice imprisoned for suffragist activism, she was the first female member of the Birmingham Trades Council and in 1931 was awarded the OBE for championing the cause of working women.

A dedicated Bournville Women's Trail is available from Selly Manor Museum.



17

Northfield and Kings Norton



Newspaper cutting covering the arson attack on the Library in 1914



The library was rebuilt in 1914 and remains a well-used community venue to this day.

The 16th century Old Grammar School in nearby Kings Norton (*below*) was also a target of suffragettes in April 1913. Fortunately, although two windows were broken to gain access, no other damage was done.

The following message was chalked on the blackboard: *'Two Suffragists have entered here, but charmed with this old-world room, have refrained from their design of destruction.'*



Opened in 1906, Northfield Library's main claim to fame is that it was burned down by suffragettes!

The attack took place on the night of 12th February 1914. Although no organisation ever claimed responsibility for the fire, a note with the slogan 'Give Women the Vote' was found at the scene. A book by Christabel Pankhurst with the inscription 'to start your new library' was also found nearby.