

THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIC SOCIETY



Annual Review 2025

Working together to make Birmingham a better place for everyone

For over 100 years, Birmingham Civic Society has worked to make Birmingham a better place for everyone. We are a membership body made up from a wide range of volunteers who encourage community engagement and promote pride in our city.

Our work involves many activities and aims some of which include:

- Improving our green spaces
- Inspiring the minds of young people through our Next Generation Awards
- Promoting and improving our built environment, architecture and public art
- Celebrating the heritage of our city by installing Blue Plaques and History Plates

President

The Lord Mayor of Birmingham

Vice Presidents

The Bishop of Birmingham
Sir Frederick Crawford DL
Lord Jones of Birmingham
Rt. Hon The Lord Rooker

Support Team

Jo Dunlop
Next Generation Awards

Kay Dashti
Admin Support (to Feb 2025)

Trustees

Trustees of the Society as of 2025 AGM:

Stephanie Bloxham [Co-Chair]
Matthew Vaughan [Co-Chair]
Chilufya Dawo
Jacky Griffin
Indi Deol
Dr Nicola Gauld
Professor ID Grosvenor
Richard Sapcote
Steve Teague

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Co-Chairs' Introduction

This year has been one of steady progress and renewed focus for our organisation. As Co-Chairs, we are pleased to report that we are in a stronger position than we were this time last year, both financially and strategically.

Acting on Feedback from Members

At the AGM held in January 2025, members asked us to strengthen our financial resilience, review options for donations and re-establish our focus on Public Art. We took that feedback seriously and it shaped our priorities throughout the year. In the follow-up AGM held in September 2025, we reported back to members on our more stable and sustainable financial position. This has given us greater confidence as we plan and invest in our future work.

Strengthening the Board

We were really pleased to welcome new Trustees during the year. They bring valuable skills, fresh perspectives and additional capacity to support delivery of our priorities. Their contribution is already helping us to strengthen governance and drive activity forward.

Blue Plaque Virtual Map

A key achievement this year has been the launch of our new Blue Plaque virtual map, a fantastic asset for the civic society and the city. The interactive map shows the locations of all the Blue Plaques, Renaissance Awards and History Plates across the city, enabling people to explore plaques online and broadening engagement beyond physical locations.

Communications and Member Engagement

We appreciate the importance of clearer and more consistent communications. We are in the process of reviewing our communications approach with renewed focus.

We want our communications to be purposeful, inclusive and co-created with members. Over the coming year, we will continue developing a clearer strategy that strengthens engagement, improves transparency and ensures members have meaningful opportunities to shape our direction.

Looking Ahead

As we enter the new year our priorities are maintaining financial stability, embedding our refreshed communications approach, increasing our membership and impact across Birmingham.

With special thanks to our dedicated Trustees, volunteers and members for their continued commitment to the work of the society. The progress made this year reflects collective effort, and we look forward to building on this together as we move forward.

[Matthew Vaughan & Stephanie Bloxham](#)

Co-Chairs



Citizenship

The Citizenship Committee has maintained its focus on activities for young people across the city that support and encourage community spirit and active citizenship

Next Generation Awards

The Next Generation Award scheme celebrated its 20th birthday in 2025 – a significant milestone. Over these years it has worked with more than 38,500 young people, all of whom showed their concern and enthusiasm for improving their communities. The Next Generation Awards is an assessed project-based programme for 11–14-year-olds, which develops pupils' skills in team working, ICT, presentation, creative writing and problem solving, and encourages pupils in Birmingham to become active citizens who contribute positively to the future of our city. The Next Generation Awards continue to attract large numbers of pupils from a wide and diverse range of schools.

The projects in each school are assessed, and the best projects are put forward for the semi-finals, and then the finals in October. All the assessment panels were staffed by volunteer assessors, who find it a fascinating and inspiring activity supporting community-based work. Please let us know if you are interested in joining our band of assessors.

The NGA semi-finals were held at Anthony Collins solicitors and at Birmingham Newman University in July, and this year's 20th anniversary NGA finals were held at Birmingham Newman University on 16 October.

Five teams presented their ideas to a panel of judges in front of an audience over 100 people including pupils, staff, parents, friends, Birmingham Civic Society trustees and members, and The Deputy Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Ken Wood. The Society was delighted to welcome Michael Sheehan as guest of Honour, Michael was involved at the very start of the Next Generation Awards 20 years ago, and helped to devise the scheme.

Our winning team in October 2025 was a group of students from Bartley Green School, with a project called "Together in Translation", through which they developed innovative approaches to learning English as an additional language, based on the experiences of several of the team members. The pupils developed their ideas into teaching and learning materials and strategies. The team was awarded the Birmingham Newman University prize of £1500, together with mentoring, to enable them to develop further their project. The other finalists were:

- Bishop Vesey's Grammar School with their well-developed Road Safety project that included the delivery of road safety training to local primary school pupils using VR headsets
- King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys with their creative Mindful card game, developed to help improve the mental health of their peers,
- King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls, with an innovative project to help substance abusers by providing a range of support kits,
- Yardleys Secondary School with their positive Make Birmingham Beautiful Again project which had a range of initiatives to clean up the environment.

All the finalists demonstrated enthusiasm, creativity, care for their communities and the desire to make change for the good.



If you are involved with any secondary school in Birmingham, please encourage it to participate in the Next Generation Awards. Feedback from schools is positive, and we are keen to increase the number of schools participating.

Last Year's Winners

We are also continuing to support the winning team from 2024, St George's School Edgbaston, to help them to develop their intergeneration project, and hope to be able share news on progress soon, as well as the winner from the previous year, King Edward VI Northfield School for Girls, who won the NGAs in 2022/23 with their Crime Busters project. This aimed to help combat the huge issue of knife crime in Birmingham. The team was paired with a mentor, Alison Cope who tragically lost her son Joshua Ribera to knife crime. Alison is very experienced in working with schools across the UK with similar objectives. The plan developed for Alison was to deliver a number of talks in schools across Birmingham, which have now been completed. Alison's series of powerful talks warned of the consequences of youth violence, and explained the link between social media and the increase in youth violence, as well as the reality of youth violence, alongside a message of resilience, choice and love to over 1500 pupils and teachers. One school commented, 'It was brilliant thank you. I wasn't in the assembly but the words "you could hear a pin drop" was repeatedly mentioned by staff. There were 120 pupils present and 6 staff. I know that several of our y9s went up to Alison at the end to thank her for coming in.'

School Stars Awards

This initiative was established during lockdown and found to be a great vehicle for putting under a spotlight the great work done by primary and secondary schools across the city to support their wider communities. This year we had nominations for community activities from Christ Church CofE primary School, for its outstanding dedication to inclusion, safety, and community, particularly as a designated School of Sanctuary, and Thornton Primary School for its fantastic Helping Hands school food and clothes bank. We were delighted to present these schools with their School Stars Awards at the Next Generation Awards final in October 2025.

The Next Generation Awards and School Stars Awards are run by a brilliant part time paid colleague supported by many wonderful volunteers.

The funding for all the costs is provided through successful bids to a wide range of charities including:

The Limoges Charitable Trust, The Roger & Douglas Turner Trust, CB and HH Taylor 1984 Trust, The Edward & Dorothy Cadbury Charitable Trust, The Grimmitt Trust, The Baron Davenport's Charity, The Roughley Trust, The GJW Turner Trust, The Harry Payne Trust - Heart of England Community Foundation, The George Henry Collins Charity, The William A Cadbury Trust, The Miss Albright Grimley Charity and The WE Dunn Charitable Trust. Invaluable support has also been provided by Anthony Collins Solicitors, and our partnership with Birmingham Newman University has been a source of significant financial support, expertise and advice.

We are grateful for all the funding and support that continues to be provided so generously.

Planning

As a reminder our ethos and aims; *to promote the highest quality in the design of buildings and the public realm, considering all areas of our built environment including planning, architecture, conservation, regeneration, urban design, transport and landscape architecture.*

This year we welcomed new committee member Sandy Taylor ex Head of Climate Change and Environment team at Birmingham City Council. The committee now comprises of eight members. For this year we are aiming to recruit Landscape, Transportation and Academic representatives to help extend the expertise of the committee.

Planning Applications

Our core activity is to review and comment upon planning applications within conservation areas of Birmingham, provide feedback as a 'critical friend' in ensuring development are suitable and to good design.

Year	Applications Consulted upon	Letters of Response
2025	85	17
2024	99	25
2023	185	34
2022	155	54
2021	197	55

The table highlights a trend we have seen for a few years, for less planning applications and a smaller number requiring our input. While BCC consult us on applications, we also check lists of those submitted to ensure we are aware of all those we would like to be, and in general we are happy that we are being consulted appropriately.

The reason for the low number of applications is probably related to the depressed local economy and an overall lack of development. The Birmingham City Council Planning Dept do have some problems because of budget constraints which has affected their ability to quickly respond, leading to frustration from developers to progress schemes, but the overall number of applications in the pipeline is outside of their control. The low proportion of responses we have made reflects that the schemes being submitted are less complex. A planning application could be for something as simple as a signage application all the way through to a development such as Smithfield or HS2, so not all merit a response.

We formally responded to the *Birmingham City Council - Your Birmingham. Your Future* proposal with a considered and supportive document.

Renaissance Awards

Every year we hold an open competition to celebrate the best regeneration project undertaken in the City.

Following a selection process of nominations, the judging panel visited three finalists and awarded Vittoria Works in Jewellery Quarter as the winner. The careful and considered approach to retain existing features within a residential conversion, led to the highest scores.

For 2025, as insufficient nominations worthy of the awards, we have deferred until next year.



Planning Committee Great Debate

Every year we aim to hold a public debate on key issues which affect our built environment. This year the event theme was *Is There a Lack of Civic Realm and Civic Space in City of Birmingham*.

Our concern was about how new developments, both recently completed and in progress, do not provide adequate open spaces and compounded by the lack of schools, medical centres and community amenities. Also, is this providing a family friendly community within our city.



We secured five excellent speakers including Birmingham City Council Director of Planning. It was a great success and we wish to extend our thanks to Arup who provided the space and refreshments at no cost.

Heritage

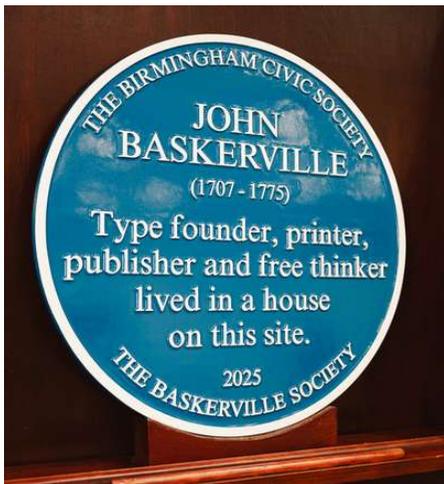
It will come as no surprise that the bulk of the Committee's activities have again focused on Blue Plaques. The distinct blue roundels with white text are a well-recognised feature in the city's landscape and form a visual connection between Birmingham's past and present. Bringing the past into the present is an ongoing reminder of achievement. This month is a good example. A Blue Plaque on the wall at 946 Warwick Road in Acocks Green tells you a story, it reads:

'John Curry, world champion ice skater and gold medal winner at the 1976 Winter Olympic Games, lived here.'

Curry revolutionised ice skating, turning it into art. February marks the fiftieth anniversary of Curry's achievement. He died in 1994.

Throughout our heritage work we recognise the legacy of Birmingham's industrial pioneers, explore the artistic contributions of local creatives, and identify sites of political and social influence so that we can offer a deeper understanding of the City's evolution.

This year we have awarded three Blue Plaques. We partnered with the Baskerville Society to mark the 250th anniversary of the 18th century printer, print designer, businessman and Enlightenment figure John Baskerville (1707-75). The Blue Plaque is on Baskerville House, built in 1938 on the site where, in 1745, Baskerville built his home and workshops set in a large park called Easy Hill. He made his fortune through the manufacture of fashionable japanware whilst forging a worldwide reputation as a printer. His typographic experiments had an international impact and the volumes he created in Birmingham are recognised as masterpieces of the art and craft of book making.



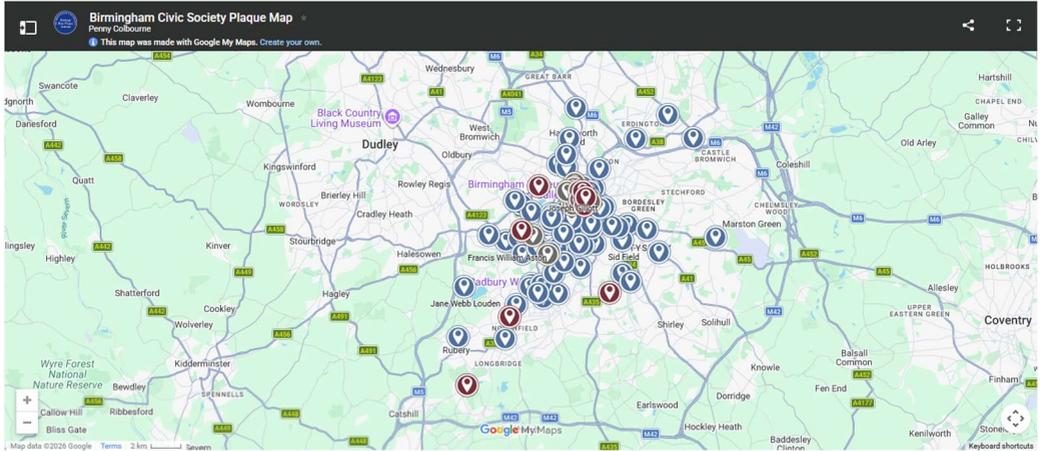
October saw the installation of a Blue Plaque for Dame Elizabeth Cadbury (1858-1951) at Bournville Junior School, the school she opened 119 years ago. Dame Elizabeth was a prominent Quaker philanthropist and activist known for her dedication to education, social welfare and international peace. She was actively involved in the development of Bournville Village, focusing on the welfare and education of women and children. She opened the Woodland Hospital (now the Royal Orthopaedic), built a holiday home for children from inner-city slums, campaigned to provide medical inspection in schools, and led efforts to provide housing and schooling for young European refugees in both World Wars. As Daniel Callicot, Heritage Manager at Bournville Village Trust, said: "We are very proud to see Dame Elizabeth recognised with a Blue Plaque and we hope it will inspire all the pupils at Bournville Junior School who will see it each day to reach high and achieve amazing things."



At the end of the year we worked in partnership with *B: Music*, the charity responsible for Birmingham's Symphony Hall and Town Hall, to install a Blue Plaque. The Town Hall is Birmingham's oldest events venue and at 190 years old it has played a pivotal role in the story of the city, witnessing many important events, including Charles Dickens' first ever public reading in December 1853 of one of the world's most famous stories, 'A Christmas Carol.' An audience of nearly 2,000 people attended and listened to a reading that lasted over 3 hours. A second reading followed a few days later and Dickens insisted that seats be reserved for 'working men and their families.' With *B: Music* we wanted to commemorate one of the Town Hall's most important moments and raise awareness of the author's special relationship with Birmingham. Installing the Blue Plaque has also connected with the venue's wider archive and restoration project. Following the unveiling of the Blue Plaque the Town Hall hosted an evening reading of 'A Christmas Carol' by the actor Anton Lesser.

Blue Plaques Map

Running parallel to delivering Blue Plaques, Penny Colbourne, as Blue Plaque Coordinator, has been tirelessly working with the Civic Society's new website to create an online Blue Plaque map to improve local knowledge of the 100 or so Blue Plaques that have been awarded since the activity began. In addition, she has done a ward based survey to identify the distribution of plaques across Birmingham.



Beyond our Blue Plaque activity we have actively engaged with Birmingham City Council's [BCC] Birmingham Heritage Strategy Group, supported Birmingham Heritage Week and worked with other agencies including the Friends of Birmingham Archives and Heritage.

Public Art

With the Public Art Committee no longer functioning, this year the Heritage Committee, on behalf of the Civic Society, offered support until a new Committee was established.

The Chair met with Toby Watley (Birmingham Museums Trust/Public Art Gateway) and the artist Viv Astling to discuss ways forward including (i) the possibility of a pre-meeting on Heritage Committee days to progress Public Art business and (ii) an invitation for Viv Astling to attend BCS Trustee meeting as an Observer.

The good news is that in 2026 a new BCS Public Arts Committee will be taking shape in the coming months as it brings together new Society members who will be adopting the RACI model (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) of project management. The group have scheduled their first formal meeting to take place in March and Simon Cane, former Director of Public and Cultural Engagement at the University of Birmingham, will attend the March Trustee meeting as an observer.

The year has seen some changes in the Heritage Committee. Toby Watley has had to step down due to the ongoing demands that Toby is having to manage as Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) aims to fully open up the museum. Toby has been replaced by Jo-Ann Curtis, Senior Curator (History) at BMT. John Gale, who has been on the Committee for at least 25 years, worked as an engineer for over 40 years making street and traffic signs amongst other things. Five years before retirement the



Civic Society asked John to design the iconic Blue Plaques and he has been designing and installing them ever since. John decided to retire from the Heritage Committee this year after designing the Charles Dickens Blue Plaque (see above).

Looking Forward

As we enter 2026 current Blue Plaque initiatives are focused on finding sites for two plaques that we are awarding to ITV in the Midlands: ATV Centre, Central TV Studios, 1969-1997 and Alpha Television, the birthplace of ITV in the Midlands 1956-1968.

Bertz Associates, a non-profit arts and heritage organisation based in Birmingham, have received a grant from Arts Council England to deliver an exhibition in the Library of Birmingham of the work of German born Jewish photographer Lisel Haas (1898-1989), who became a refugee artist in the city in 1938. On arrival in the UK, she quickly re-established herself as a photographer despite institutional and cultural barriers.

The John Feeney Charitable Trust is funding a Blue Plaque to accompany the exhibition, which will take place later in the year.

There have also been exploratory discussions around future plaque funding which would focus on Birmingham's history of equality and diversity and this will be on the Committee's agenda in the Spring. There are also ongoing discussions with the University of Birmingham, who have their own Blue Plaque scheme, around partnership working with BCS, Birmingham City University and the University of Liverpool to fund and deliver a Blue Plaque for Mary Mitchell, Birmingham's first female Landscape Architect who designed and delivered the University's Vale campus and was a pioneering designer of children's playgrounds.



The Birmingham Civic Society

9 Margaret Street
Birmingham B3 3BS

07775 308062
info@birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk
www.birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk
Twitter @BirminghamCivic
Instagram @BirminghamCivic

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