

# Birmingham Trail One: Birmingham Civic and Commercial Buildings

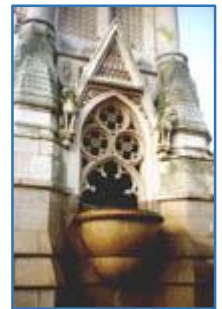
We start our walk at the portico of

1. **Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery**, listed Grade II\*, 1884-9, Chamberlain Square, by H.R. Yeoville Thomason. This bold, classical styled establishment was built from the profits of the Municipal Gas Dept., the stone in the entrance hall carrying the words, "By the gains of Industry we promote Art". The Art Gallery is well worth a visit and renowned for its fine collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which includes Ford Maddox Brown's "The Last of England". There are also masterpieces by Edward Burne Jones, Holman Hunt, John Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, many donated by Birmingham businessmen and Civic leaders. A fresco, by Joseph E. Southall, a member of the "Birmingham School", (a group of artists and craftsmen who formed themselves into the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft at the beginning of the 20thC), is situated at the head of the staircase, and depicts Corporation Street in 1914. The Industrial Gallery, one of the best visible examples of a High Victorian iron and glass exhibition room, (obscured by false ceilings and converted into offices and store rooms in the 1950's) was restored in 1985, to celebrate the Museum's Centenary. The original galleries were re-furbished and filled with displays of Applied Art, appropriate to the Industrial Gallery's first function. This is very attractive, as is the Edwardian Tea Room. The tall clock tower is known as "Big Brum" and built as an expression of civic pride.



Chamberlain Square was originally the heart of Victorian Birmingham and was enclosed by Mason College, the Liberal Club and the Public Library, now all demolished. All that remains is the

2. **Chamberlain Memorial** Grade II\* of 1880, designed in a Venetian Gothic style by John Henry Chamberlain (no relation) to commemorate the public services of Joseph Chamberlain, mayor of Birmingham who was then to become a Birmingham M.P. and later Colonial Secretary, who was only 44 years at the time, and whose head is depicted at the fountain head, by T Thomas Woolner, the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor. On the steps behind the Town Hall is
3. **The Statue of Thomas Attwood**, a little known but important leader, and is one of the first two M. Ps representing Birmingham after the Reform Bill of 1832, a believer in monetary reform and a supporter of the ideals of the Chartists.
4. **The Town Hall** Grade I, and designed by Joseph Hansom of Hansom cab fame, and Edward Welch and started in 1832. Modelled on the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum, the Corinthian peristyle is of pure classical architecture. It is constructed in brick and faced in Anglesey marble and set on a rusticated podium. By 1834, the architects were declared bankrupt, and Charles Edge, the architect of the Market Hall, supervised the completion. The interior is of the Georgian assembly room type with a towering organ by Hill, decorated by J.H. Chamberlain in 1880. The original neo-Greek details were altered in 1927 when a new gallery was added. In the 1880s, the architects, Martin & Chamberlain, enlarged the entrance, and the front podium has recently been glazed. Mendelssohn's "Elijah" and Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius", were first performed here. There are plans to restore the building to the original designs and at the time of writing it is empty and there is no access available at present.

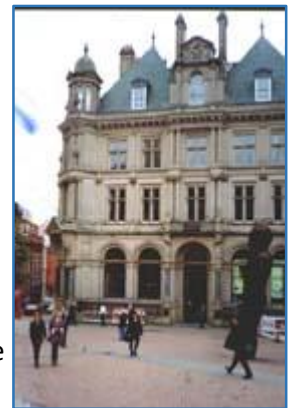


5. **The Council House**, listed Grade II\*, built in 1874-9 by H.R.Yeoville Thomason adjoins the Art Gallery and faces Victoria Square. Following a competition, the winning design was chosen by Alfred Waterhouse. It is in a Renaissance style with a rusticated base, portico and a central dome. The main facade has a mosaic by Salviati, who executed the mosaic on the Albert Memorial in London, (the sculpture by Lockwood, Bowton & Sons) portraying Britannia rewarding the manufacturers of Birmingham. A fine staircase rises under the slightly Moorish styled dome to a suite of grand reception rooms overlooking a statue of Queen Victoria by Thomas Brock R.A. unveiled in 1901.



6. **Queen's College Chambers** listed Grade II is a 1904 re-fronting by Mansell and Mansell in Gothic buff terracotta and brick, now grafted onto an office block. Queen's College grew out of a school of medicine and surgery, founded in 1825, was transferred to Mason College, and developed into Birmingham University.
7. The new steps and pool in **Victoria Square**, with statuary are by Dhruva Mistry and were installed in 1992. The Iron Man by Anthony Gormley is 20 feet tall and presented to the City 1993 by the T.S.B. after a public competition.

8. **1, Victoria Square**, Grade II, was built in 1891, by Sir Henry Tanner. This French Renaissance styled building, until recently the T.S.B. Headquarters was originally Birmingham's Head Post Office. Threatened by demolition in the early 70s, it was saved by the Victorian Society in 1978, although the parcels and sorting offices were demolished.



9. **New St.** When New St. was new we do not know, but it was laid out and the open-field strips converted into burgage plots, in medieval times. In 1848, L & NWR decided to build New St. Station on the south side of New St. and at the same time agreed to allow Midland Railway trains to use it. Seven acres of slums were demolished to provide space for it. In the last two decades of the 19thC. New St. was largely rebuilt and over 100 years later it has become a pedestrian street. The City have now introduced a policy to improve this elegant Victorian street. On the right hand side are,

10. **Nos. 80, 81, 82**, Grade II on the corner towards Pinfold St. is a mid 19thC Venetian Gothic styled building of four storeys in red brick. Recently restored, the elevations show pilasters, segment headed windows and an elaborately bracketed cornice. The buildings behind the facade are gutted.



11. **Nos. 84, 85 & 86 and 88, 89 and 90** Grade II, are all four storeyed, re-furbished facades with new building behind.

12. **Nos. 92 & 93 New St. and 2-5, Ethel St.** Grade II, late 19thC, stuccoed, three storeys of classical style. Opposite is the entrance to the present galleries of

13. **The Royal Birmingham Society of Art.** Just inside, the main staircase is flanked with the lists of the names of all the past members of the Society and those of the illustrious Victorian artists who have served as honorary Presidents since 1842. Among them you will find J John Everett, Millais, Holman Hunt, Edward B Burne-Jones, Frederick Leighton, George Watts, L Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edward Poynter Frank B Brangwyn, Charles Eastlake, Joseph Southall and A Arthur Gaskin. Architects such as J.A. Chatwin, John Henry Chamberlain, W. H. Bidlake and Charles Bateman etc. are also listed. This Society, founded in 1814, has a fine history, having a new exhibition building by Thomas Rickman and an inaugural opening in 1829, and a Royal title in 1868. For many years exhibitions at the RBSA were regarded as being second only to the Royal Academy. Unfortunately, the lease expired and the original circular gallery and the columned portico across the pavement in New St. disappeared in the early years of the 20th C. The building was pulled down, and the site re-developed with a small gallery built on the first floor. The City lost a distinctive

landmark and a major cultural institution although it is still worth visiting when an exhibition is in progress. Opposite is

14. **The Piccadilly Arcade**, by Nicol & Nicol, was originally built as a Picture House, reportedly the first of Birmingham's cinemas. It opened in 1910 and was converted into an arcade in 1926. The slope of the original building still survives as do the original shop fronts and a brass handrail.



15. **No. 128 Dillon's, formerly the Midland Bank**, Grade II, 1867-9, built by Edward Holmes, as the head office of the Birmingham and Midland Bank, is a restrained classical palazzo with Greek details. The grand entrance has coupled marble Ionic columns supporting the entablature. The original dome has been raised and a new interior inserted, creating a unique book shop.

16. Of interest in the next block is **No. 135, King Edward's House**, by Essex & Goodman with J.A. Suggitt, 1936/7, a large block of retail and office building built on the site of Sir Charles Barry's and Augustus Welby Pugin's King Edward's School of 1833-7 and built before they designed the Houses of Parliament, but in a similar style.

17. **Queens Corner** is at the junction of Corporation St. and New St. and designed by W.H. Ward in 1879.

18. **Nos. 35-40 New St.** designed by H.R. Yeoville Thomason in the 1870's as three stone faced commercial palazzi in the Italianate style which became the headquarters of the Birmingham Post & Mail until 1965. These buildings have had their facades re-furbished but behind have been demolished and rebuilt. The designs of the original shop fronts have been replaced.

19. **Newton Chambers 43 Cannon St. and 41-42a New St.** Grade II, is a fine buff-terracotta block for offices and retail, by Essex, Goodman and Nicol, in 1899. This contains murals and decorative tiles from the "Kardomah", an Art & Crafts coffee house, all of which are to be re-furbished in 1998. Temple St. is a turning on the right, and on the left of Temple St. is

20. **The Trocadero**, Grade II, built in the mid 19thC. by Charles Edge originally for the Norwich Union Fire Office. In the 1900's a fine yellow-glazed front, with an Art Nouveau flavour, was added.



21. **Temple Buildings, Nos. 51,52,53 New St. and 20A Temple St.** Grade II, are rare, early 19thC. buildings, possibly by Charles Edge, and still remaining after the Victorian re-development.

22. **Nos. 51 52 & 53 New St. and 18 & 19, Bennett's Hill** Grade II is an important corner site in stone. The buildings were built in 1906, by Riley & Smith in an Edwardian Baroque style. A shallow dome flanked by figures and polygonal and domed cupolas stands above a building with Ionic pilasters, broken pediments and decorative garlands.

23. Turn right up **Bennett's Hill**, laid out in 1827 and named after the family who farmed here. On the right is

24. **Nos. 26-33, Bennett's Hill, The Midland Bank**, Grade II, formerly the Birmingham Banking Co. of 1830 by Thomas Rickman & Hutchinson which was built as a Corinthian styled, rectangular temple, behind two ranges of free-standing columns with capitals recalling the order on the temple of Vesta at Tivoli. In 1868, Yeoville Thomason rounded the corner, provided a new entrance flanked by Corinthian pilasters and also probably designed the extension down the hill. On the left is



25. **No. 8 Bennett's Hill**, now Bennetts Wine Bar, was The National Westminster Bank, and formerly the National Provincial Bank, Grade II\*, is a re-building in 1869 and 1890 by John Gibson, of the original bank, designed in 1933 by C.R. Cockerell. It has a recessed semi-domed corner entrance, surmounted by a superb coat of arms, a fine coffered ceiling and four sculpted panels representing Birmingham industry by S. F. Lynn. The two storeys are articulated by a giant Corinthian order, and tall windows have semi-

circular heads to the ground floor. The building is very grand and symbolises the strength of Birmingham banking of the 19thC. The restrained interior is of a neo-Grec/Egyptian style of a 1920's refurbishment. On the left is

26. **No. 7 Bennett's Hill**, The Britannia Building Society, including 37A Waterloo St. Grade II, is a mid/late 19th C. stone faced building on the site of the News Room, built in 1825. No, 36 Waterloo St. Grade II, 1830, is probably an extension of the News Room to house copies of the public records and books of reference. This has columns copied from the "Tower of the Winds", in Athens and the anthemion decoration was inspired by the Threadneedle St. colonnade to the Bank of England by Sir John Soane. On the left are
27. **Nos. 6-1 Bennett's Hill** Grade II, of 1827 are plain classical styled houses, probably by Charles Edge, some originally having shops on the ground floor. The painter Edward Burne-Jones was born in Bennett's Hill, note the plaque on the side of No. 11. William Morris was a frequent visitor here in University holidays and he developed a close association with Birmingham. Most of these houses have been gutted and "facaded". Cross the road and note
28. **No. 38 Bennett's Hill, and no. 37**, Grade II, which are both three storied palazzi of 1868-70, and probably by Yeoville Thomason, with some stucco and some classical details such as a doorway with a shell motif and some segmental and triangular pediments.
29. **Nos. 36-34 Bennett's Hill**, was originally Parr's Bank and then the Alliance Insurance Building, (probably by Leonard Stokes). A five storey building of green Quarella stone dating from about 1909, and originally pale green the arched ground floor windows have been altered and thin granite and mosaic added. Turn left into Waterloo St. and then turn left again into Temple Row. Temple Row was originally developed in 1821, and the name was derived from a wooden building erected in the fields nearby which served as a temporary theatre. The corner building is
30. **No. 44 Temple Row West, Birmingham Midshires Building Society**, Grade II\*, originally Ocean Assurance, is late 19thC. by Mansell & Mansell. This is a fine office block in the late Flemish Gothic style, with well detailed red brick and buff terracotta elevations. Note the classical shells and Flemish gables of the Early Renaissance upper storey.
31. **Portman Building Society** built in the 1880s is a classical styled office block with arched windows, stucco and rusticated ground floor, which has been mutilated.
32. **Fuller's Old Joint Stock Wine Bar**, formerly Lloyds Bank, and originally Birmingham Joint Stock Bank Grade II, was built in 1862-4 by J.A.Chatwin. The height of this building destroyed the original regularity of Temple Row West of the 1820s, being entirely out of scale. The two unequally proportioned storeys provided a ground floor banking hall of some grandeur and originally, the two stories of columns supported a fine line of urns.
33. **No. 3 Temple Row**, is a classically styled house with Corinthian columns and was probably lived in by Samuel Lines, the Birmingham artist, who was buried beneath the Egyptian styled monument opposite in 1863.
34. **The Church of St. Philip**, becoming Birmingham Cathedral, in 1905, a Grade I listed building, well worth a visit, was completed in the early 18thC. and designed in the style of English Baroque. The concave sides of the tower and the unexpected details round the west door-cases are its most striking Baroque motifs. The architect was Thomas Archer, a Warwickshire man, who was influenced by Sir Christopher Wren and studied the works of Bernini and Borromini. It was refaced in 1864/9, and extended in 1883-4 by J.A.Chatwin, another local architect and a pupil of Sir Charles Barry 1851/3. The original shallow apse was replaced by a chancel and Archer's full-height pilasters were continued by Chatwin on the inside walls by free standing Corinthian columns. The interior is beautifully decorated and the four magnificent stained glass windows, The Nativity, The Crucifixion, The Ascension, and The Last Judgement, dating from 1884-97 were designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (who was christened here and lived near here as a boy) and were constructed by Morris and Co.
35. **The Church Yard** was originally enclosed by walls and railings with several entrance gates and piers. The bronze statue in front of the porch is of Charles Gore, the first Bishop of Birmingham 1905-11, by T. Stirling Lee. In the church yard, there is a drinking fountain of cast iron, set in stone. It was brought here from Christ Church,



demolished in 1899 on its site opposite the Town Hall; and a monument to John Heap (aged 88) and William Badger who were killed constructing the Town Hall, which is made up of a piece of a column wrought by one of the men.

36. At the end of Temple Row West is **Colmore Row**, named after the family who owned this land and subsequently developed it on 99 year leases. (This part of Colmore Row was originally known as Ann Street, named after one of the family). From 1866 onwards the leases expired and buildings were eventually replaced. On the opposite side through the trees is the opulent

37. **Grand Hotel** in the style of the French Renaissance designed by Thomson Plevins in 1875, and remodelled by Martin and Chamberlain in 1891. Some of the interior rooms, such as the ballroom, are worth visiting.

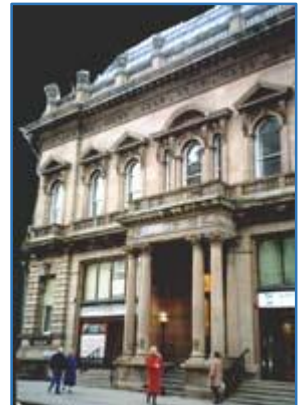


38. **Nos. 57-73 Colmore Row** were built around 1870, and have been gutted and facaded. The grand Banking Hall in Nos. 63-65, Grade II (originally of the Dudley and District Bank), has been retained. Ask if you may see it. Again, Yeoville Thomason was the architect, and it is interesting that his manufacturing grandfather, Sir Edward Thomason, a pupil of Matthew Boulton, lived at No. 63. William Doubleday & Edward Holmes, both architects, practised from Nos. 67, and 61 respectively. Turn left and walk along Colmore Row back towards the Council House,

39. **Nos. 75-77, Colmore Row**, Grade II, are again by Yeoville Thomason

40. **Nos. 79-83, Colmore Row**, now The Royal Bank of Scotland, Grade II is again by Yeoville Thomason, and originally occupied by silversmiths which may account for the medallions of Lorenzo Ghilberti & Benvenuto Cellini on the facade.

41. **Nos. 85-89 The Union Club**, now Bamford Trust House Grade II, was built in 1869, by Yeoville Thomason, and some think it is his best work. It is of a two storied classical design with a rusticated ground floor, two additional floors being added in 1988.



42. **Nos. 102-106, Colmore Row**, Grade II, was built in 1827 by Charles Edge and housed the offices of the important local architects, Martin & Chamberlain at No. 104.



43. **No. 110, Colmore Row**, Grade II, built in 1902 by William Henman and Thomas Cooper for the Scottish Union and National Insurance Company, is an original composition of two squat towers enclosing a bay, with banding of grey granite and shiny bright brick. Soon to be another wine bar.

44. **No. 114, Colmore Row**, Grade II, was built in 1912, by Paul Waterhouse, the son of Alfred. Built in an Edwardian Baroque style, in stone, a figure of Atlas was originally positioned over the door.

45. **No. 122, Colmore Row, The Eagle Insurance Building**, and now the Bank of Scotland, 1900, is a Grade I listed building by W.R.Lethaby in association with the local architect

Joseph L. Ball. The Warwickshire version of the "Buildings of England" by Nikolaus Pevsner & Alexandra Wedgwood says, " It is one of the most original buildings of its date in England". The five bay facade has been regarded as a landmark in the history of architecture as Lethaby attempted to break away from historical styles and every detail he added was meaningful. He combined Tudor Revival mullion and transom windows with Byzantine doorways, putting at the top a primitivist hoodmould of triangles and parabolas. The crested eagle was drawn from classical Syrian temples; the wavy lines were a Byzantine symbol for clouds and the discs represented the sun as shown in the golden bronze doors with their circular sun symbols. The post and beam construction, point the way to the framed structures of today.

46. **No. 130, Colmore Row** Grade II, designed with a small dome in 1904, is in the style of the period of Christopher Wren but with a typical Edwardian polished granite base. Now the Birmingham Tourist Office. Do have a look inside at the plaster and marble decoration on the walls and ceiling.

47. Now return to the **Art Gallery, visit the Edwardian tea-room**, and look at the collections.