



Manufacturing and migration

Explore Birmingham's industrial and cultural heritage

1. Welcome to Birmingham **Bullring Shopping Centre**

Welcome to Walk the World. This walk in Birmingham is one of a series of walks in different parts of the UK. Each walk explores how the 206 participating nations in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have been part of the UK's history for many centuries. Along the routes, you will discover evidence of how many Olympic and Paralympic countries have shaped our towns and cities.

Birmingham has been described as the 'Workshop of the World' and vies with Manchester over which is Britain's second most important city. On this walk we will be exploring Birmingham's heritage which is built on trade and manufacturing. We will also see the influence of the waves of immigration that have occurred over the centuries making Birmingham an ethnically and culturally diverse city.

Since the Middle Ages the centre of Birmingham has been subject to constant change, and today it is undergoing yet another transformation as part of the Big City Plan. On the walk we look at the architecture of some of the old buildings that have survived as well as that of the modern architecture in areas where regeneration is taking place.

Throughout the walk we will look for evidence of how Birmingham's physical and cultural identity has been shaped by its connections with other counties.

The walk starts in The Bullring and ends in Victoria Square. It is a flat walk of less than two miles along pavements and pedestrianised streets which is suitable for all ages. Where there are steps an alternative route is shown for wheelchair users. The walk is in a busy city environment, so please be careful as you cross roads. I hope you enjoy the walk.

Directions 1 - Make your way to the statue of a bull outside the West Mall on Level 3.
Listen here to Track 2.

2. Bull baiting

Bull statue, The Bullring

Birmingham's heritage is closely tied to manufacturing and trade, so it only seems right that we start our walk in the Bullring. Today this is a modern shopping centre, but its history as a market stretches right back to the twelfth century when Peter de Birmingham obtained a charter from King Henry II.

It is thought that the name 'Bull Ring' came about from the sport of bull baiting which took place here. Dogs were set on bulls with spectators betting on the outcome. The use of animals for sport and wagering has been practiced all over the world for centuries.



Bull sculpture at The Bullring shopping centre
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The oldest recorded type of animal fighting is cockfighting, which dates back over 2,500 years. Baiting often involved animals indigenous to the region, for example elephant fighting in India, tarantula fights in South Africa, and fish fights in China. In Britain, bull baiting was outlawed by Parliament in 1835, and all animal fighting is now illegal.

The current shopping mall was designed by Benoy. This firm of architects has its origins in Nottinghamshire, but has grown to be an international company which now operates out of Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Beijing, Shanghai and Singapore as well as UK.

Country links - China, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Hong Kong, India, Singapore, South Africa, United Arab Emirates

Directions 2 - From the statue of the bull, turn immediately right towards the church. Walk for 100 metres until you reach a statue of Nelson. Listen to Track 3.

3. Rule Britannia

Admiral Nelson statue

This is a statue to Admiral Lord Nelson. You might wonder why a city located right in the heart of England would have a statue to a sea captain. Of course London has a statue of Nelson on a column in Trafalgar Square, and there are others in ports like Liverpool and Portsmouth. But why is there a statue of him here?

Nelson has a special place in the hearts of the people of Birmingham. The reason is that his naval victories gave Britain command of the seas and this allowed Birmingham to export its manufactured goods to the four corners of the world.



Rear-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson
Wikimedia Commons

Nelson himself visited Birmingham in 1802 after his victories at the Battle of the Nile and Copenhagen. A few years later the people of Birmingham were greatly saddened by his death at the Battle of Trafalgar and were the first in England to erect a public monument to honour him.

Every year Lord Nelson's great victory at Trafalgar in 1805 is celebrated with a ceremony led by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham during which a garland of flowers is placed on the statue.

Country links - Denmark, Egypt, France, Spain

Directions 3 - Walk down the steps or follow the ramp to the front of St Martin's Church.
Stop here to listen to Track 4.

4. A reluctant soldier

St Martin's Church

From a sailor we now meet a soldier. This church dates back to the nineteenth century but one has stood here by the market since at least the thirteenth century. It is named after St Martin of Tours, the patron Saint of Soldiers, who was born in Hungary in 316.

Legend has it that at the age of ten St Martin went to a Christian church against the wish of his parents. He wanted to become a monk but his father was a senior officer in the Roman Army and at the age 15 he was required to join too.

He was posted to Amiens in France and it is there that he is said to have met a beggar outside the gates in a snowstorm. St Martin impulsively cut his own cloak in half and shared it with the beggar. St Martin then had a dream which convinced him to become baptised as a Christian. So he left the army and became a monk.

St Martin's Day, which falls in November, is celebrated in many countries of Europe. In Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands children process through the streets with paper lanterns.

St Martin's Church contrasts sharply with the modern Bullring shopping centre and in particular the eye-catching Selfridges building. This was designed by Future Systems, a firm founded by Czech architect Jan Kaplický. It is covered with 15,000 shiny aluminium discs which are said to have been inspired by French designer Paco Rabanne's chainmail dresses.



St Martins Church next to the Selfridges Building
© Gavin Warrins via Wikimedia Commons

Country links - Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands

Directions 4 - Walk round to the back of St Martin's church by the silver and blue Selfridges Building. Cross the road at the traffic lights and continue down the right side of Digbeth for about 100 metres. Stop opposite Digbeth Police Station. Listen to Track 5.

5. Irish influence

Digbeth police station

We are now in Digbeth, which is where the settlement of Birmingham originally developed. Just down the road is the River Rea where there was a bridge in medieval times. This whole area has been identified for regeneration under the Big City Plan, and there is a project for major development that would cover the area from the police station all the way back to the Bullring.

This part of Birmingham is regarded as the Irish Quarter. Records show that there has been an Irish community in Birmingham since the 1600s.



The Dubliner pub sign, Digbeth
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Many people migrated from Ireland in the mid 1800s to escape poverty and famine. Another wave of Irish immigration occurred in the 1950s. Many were labourers who helped build roads and houses during Birmingham's re-birth in the 1960s. Economic decline in Ireland in the 1980s led to yet another wave of immigration, particularly of young people, many of whom found work in the catering and service sectors.

The early Irish migrants lived in the poorer parts of Birmingham like Digbeth, Deritrend and Sparkbrook. As their fortunes improved many moved out of the city centre and into the suburbs. Today the Irish population of Birmingham is around 20,000 or 2 per cent of the total.

There are several Irish bars in this area and just along the road is one of the most popular, the Dubliner. You would see much more evidence of the Irish here each March when large crowds celebrate St Patrick's Day and hold the third largest parade after New York and Dublin.

Country links - Ireland, United States of America

Directions 5 - Walk through Upper Mill Lane passage beside Smithfield House and turn right into Moat Lane. Head back towards St Martin's Church. Before you reach the church, cross over at the traffic lights to the open market. Listen here to Track 6.

6. Foreign fruits

Bull Ring market

Right alongside the modern indoor Bullring shopping centre is a colourful outdoor market which operates from Tuesday to Saturday. It is next to a Rag Market and an indoor market that sells carpets and household linens, adult's and children's clothing, fish and meat.

Here at the outdoor market you will find fresh fruit and vegetables of all kinds. In the past you would have found local produce that was in season. But with today's global transport systems you can now buy fresh produce from all over the world, many reflecting the cultural backgrounds and tastes of Birmingham's diverse communities.



Worldwide fruit for sale at the Bull Ring
Mike Jacksden © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

In early spring when this walk was researched we found lettuce and tomatoes from Spain, oranges from Jamaica, ginger from China, watermelons from Panama, plantain from Ecuador, bananas from the Dominican Republic and okra, chow chow and pineapples from Costa Rica. See what you can find for sale on the different stalls.

Country links - China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Spain

Directions 6 - Walk to the bottom of the market, away from the church, and turn right along Upper Dean Street passing the Rag Market on your right. Continue for about 200 metres past the indoor market until you reach Pershore Street. Cross at the traffic lights and walk in to the centre of the Arcadian Shopping centre. Listen to Track 7.

7. Chinatown

Arcadian shopping centre

We are now at the centre of another immigrant community, and from the architecture and signs you will recognise this as Chinatown.

You can find Chinatowns in big cities around the world. Many of these are port cities where Chinese populations grew as a result of trade links. The story in Birmingham is somewhat different. The Chinese population did not develop until after the Second World War. In 1950 the Chinese population was just 200 and it was in the 1960s that men came here from Hong Kong and The New Territories.



Chinese blackboards in the Arcadian shopping centre
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Many of them set up catering businesses and, as the Chinese take-away grew in popularity, so more Chinese came and brought their families with them. A cluster of Chinese businesses developed around Hurst Street and by the 1980s this area was officially recognised as the Chinese Quarter. Now the Chinese population is estimated to be around 12,000. The Arcadian shopping centre here is the focus for the Chinese community's colourful New Year celebrations.

Country links - China, Hong Kong

Directions 7 - With the water feature at the centre of the shopping centre in front of you, take the exit to your right to Ladywell Walk. Turn left and follow the road to the right. Turn left into Thorp Street, and follow this for 150 metres to the main road. Turn right and you will see a Chinese pagoda in the centre of the roundabout. You reach this by a pedestrian underpass. Listen to Track 8.

8. A take-away pagoda

Holloway Circus

In the centre of this busy roundabout are a Chinese garden and a pagoda. The pagoda contrasts starkly with the modern Raddison Blu Hotel which towers above it. Behind the pagoda is the story of an immigrant who has helped to shape the culture and cuisine of Birmingham, and the whole of UK.

Wing Yip arrived by boat in 1959 from Hong Kong at the age of 19 with just £10 in his pocket. He opened a Chinese restaurant in Clacton-on-Sea and went on to open more restaurants and take-aways in East Anglia. Ten years later he opened a grocery shop here in Birmingham.



The Chinese pagoda, Holloway Circus
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

From these small beginnings he has grown a food empire that now employs 400 people and supplies more than 2,000 Chinese restaurants around the country. Today his stores provide foods from Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Wing Yip himself has an Honorary Doctorate from Birmingham University and an OBE for his services to the Oriental food industry.

Wing Yip gave this pagoda to Birmingham as a gesture of thanks to the city for providing him with a home. It is made of marble and stone from the Fujian Province in China where it was sculpted using traditional craft techniques.

Country links - China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam

Directions 9 - Leave the pagoda through the subway by the mosaic walk - take the steps or the ramp. At the top are traffic lights. Cross the main road, Holloway Head, here. Turn left crossing Ellis Street, then turn next right into Blucher Street. Continue along Blucher Street for 200 metres until you reach a synagogue on your right. Listen here to Track 9.

9. Jewish migration

Singer's Hill Synagogue

The building that you are now outside is the 'Singers Hill' synagogue which dates from 1856 and has played an important part in the lives of the Jewish community in Birmingham. Records suggest the presence of a small Jewish community as far back as the thirteenth century and there was certainly a synagogue here in the eighteenth century.

Anti-Jewish uprisings in Russia in the late-nineteenth century led to large movements of Jews from the parts of Eastern Europe ruled by Russia, including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Many came to Britain and the Jewish population in Birmingham increased.



Singer's Hill Synagogue
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Numbers increased again with further immigration by Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Between the two World Wars there was a thriving and close-knit Jewish community in the Holloway Head area just south of here. In the 1930s the Jewish population reached around 6,000. In the row after row of back to back houses were dozens of Jewish backstreet tailoring workshops, which supplied hand-made suits to retail tailors across the city.

This close community was to be short lived. The area was badly damaged by bombing during the Second World War and the community was scattered. The Jewish population is now spread thinly round the city and numbers have fallen as some have chosen to move to Israel while others have migrated to larger communities in London and Manchester.

Country links - Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine

Directions 9 - Continue past the synagogue and enter The Mailbox building directly ahead of you. Make your way up to the seventh floor using the escalators or lifts and stop outside BBC Birmingham. Listen to Track 10.

10. Broadcasting live

BBC Birmingham, The Mailbox

The Mailbox is a good example of the building and rebuilding that has taken place in Birmingham over the centuries. The name Mailbox reflects this building's past. When it opened in 1970 as the Royal Mail sorting office, it was the largest mechanised sorting office in the country. Canal side wharves were demolished to make way for it and a tunnel connected it to New Street Station.

The building re-opened in 2000 as an upmarket development of offices, shops and restaurants. Among the residents here is BBC Birmingham where we are now.



BBC studios at The Mailbox
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The BBC moved here in 2004 from their previous studios at Pebble Mill. You can tour the studios and there is a large public space where you can see live broadcasting taking place.

During the 1960s BBC Birmingham pioneered television programmes for the Asian community. Large numbers of people from the Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean and South Asia had settled in Birmingham in the post-war period. Most were fleeing from poorly-paid jobs and hardship on farms and plantations which supplied goods to Western markets.

Today around one third of the population of Birmingham is non-white; Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean being the largest ethnic groups. One of the studios you can see broadcasting live here is the BBC Asian Network, a radio station serving people who originate from around the Indian subcontinent.

Country links - Bangladesh, India, Pakistan

Directions 10 - Walk to the glass exit doors overlooking the canal and stop just outside.
Listen to Track 11

11. A jewellery box

The Cube

As you look over the canal you can't fail to see the square building ahead. This is the final part of the Mailbox redevelopment and is called The Cube. It houses residential apartments, a boutique hotel, retail space and a rooftop restaurant.

The Cube has been designed by Birmingham-born Ken Shuttleworth's firm MAKE Architects. He previously worked with Sir Norman Foster on some of the world's most iconic buildings including the Swiss Re building in London known as 'The Gherkin', HSBC's headquarters and Chek Lap Kok airport in Hong Kong and the Commerzbank Tower in Frankfurt.



Ornate window frames on The Cube
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The striking modern design is inspired by the jewellery and engineering heritage of the city. It is based on the concept of a jewellery box. The exterior of the Cube is clad in projecting gold, silver and bronze aluminium panels and glass. The cladding has been developed by a specialist company called Wicona which originated in Germany.

On your way to the next stop take the opportunity to go inside this 'jewellery box' and look at the impressive internal architecture in the central lightwell.

Country links - China, Germany, Switzerland

Directions 11 - Now follow the walkway past the Cube, turning right and crossing the canal bridge. Continue along the canal path for 200 metres until you reach the Gas Street Basin. Listen to Track 12.

12. Canals and cocoa

Gas Street Basin

No walk around Birmingham could be complete without mentioning the canals. As the Industrial Revolution began in the 1760s Birmingham was a town of 35,000 people. It was developing slowly as a manufacturing centre as being in the centre of England it was hindered by not having a port or even a river with access to the sea. Roads were poor and goods had to be transported by wagon or packhorse.

Birmingham's business people soon recognised that canals could help overcome this weakness. By 1800 Birmingham found itself at the hub of the canal networks.



Bar bridge, Gas Street Basin
MIke Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The canals made it possible to transport raw materials like coal cheaply and this fuelled Birmingham's growth as a manufacturing centre. Birmingham is said to have more miles of canals than Venice.

The canal has also played an important role for Birmingham's famous chocolate manufacturer. In 1847 John Cadbury built a cocoa manufacturing factory in Bridge Street just across the canal from here. Later Cadbury moved its factory to Bournville to the south of the city, which is also on the canal network. The canal provided transport for raw materials right up until the 1960s. Cocoa came from Ghana and Central and South America and cane sugar from the Caribbean. These goods were imported at Bristol and Liverpool docks then transported by canal to the factory.

Many other products were imported to the Cadbury factory. They included spices from China; timber from Scandinavia, Russia and Canada; oranges from South Africa, brazil nuts from Brazil; honey from Chile and even ribbons from France.

Country links - Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, France, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Nigeria, Norway, Russia, South Africa, Sweden

Directions 12 - Continue along the canal, passing under Broad Street Tunnel. Stop by the next footbridge opposite the ICC. Listen to Track 13.

13. Indoor records

The National Indoor Arena

Look along the canal and you can see a white round building. This is the National Indoor Arena which opened in 1991. It is a flexible venue that hosts sporting and entertainment events as well as conferences and exhibitions.

The roof of the Arena covers an area of over 10,000m² and is constructed from the MERO KK tube and node system which was developed in Germany. The roof is supported by almost 5,000 tubes and 1,300 nodes.

Bands such as Coldplay and Oasis have played here and in 1998 the Arena hosted the Eurovision song contest. The event was hosted by Irish-born Terry Wogan and Swedish-born Ulrika Jonsson and was won by Dana International of Israel. Sir Cliff Richard has played here over 50 times and it has also hosted many other entertainment events such as the spectacular Disney on Ice shows, The Lord of the Dance, Cirque Du Soleil and La Traviata.



Ethiopian runner Kenenisa Bekele
Wikimedia Commons

As an international sporting venue the Arena has hosted over 30 different sports ranging from tennis and badminton to boxing, snooker and darts. In 2010 it hosted the Wheelchair Basketball World Championships. It has a Mondo athletics track which was first used at the European Indoor Athletics Championships in 2007. A total of fourteen Indoor World records have been set here, two of which still stand at the time of writing. These are the men's 1,000m record held by Wilson Kipketer of Denmark via Kenya and the men's 5,000m held by Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia.

Country links - Denmark, Ethiopia, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Sweden

Directions 13 - Cross the footbridge and enter the International Convention Centre. Walk up the stairs or use the lifts and stop by the Symphony Hall. (There is flat access to the ICC by taking the lift a few yards further down the canal bank). Listen to Track 14.

14. An organ of regeneration

The ICC (International Convention Centre)

The International Convention Centre, or ICC, was one of the first new buildings to be built in Birmingham and is regarded by some as the seed for the regeneration that has occurred since.

One of its main purposes was to attract new industry to the city at a time when manufacturing was in decline. It was opened in 1991 by Jacques Delors the French President of the European Commission at the time.



Symphony Hall has the largest mechanical organ in the country
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Since it opened the ICC has helped raise the profile of Birmingham internationally, hosting 110 international conferences. In 1998 it was the site for the G8 Summit meeting of world leaders whose core members are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the USA.

As well as a convention centre, the building contains the Symphony Hall that seats over 2,000 people. Considered to have outstanding acoustics, it is built to a traditional 'shoebox' shape. This design dates back to the great halls of the late-nineteenth century such as Vienna's Musikverein and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

The Hall's organ has over 6,000 pipes and is the largest mechanical organ in the country. It was hand-built by Johannes Klais Orgelbau, a family firm from Bonn with an enviable reputation worldwide. You can also find Klais organs in concert halls in Athens, Kraków, Brisbane, Reykjavík, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Beijing.

Country links - Australia, Austria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Singapore, United States of America

Directions 14 - Leave the International Convention Centre by the doors by Symphony Hall. Go into Centenary Square and listen to Track 15.

15. A new chapter

Library of Birmingham

We are now at a flagship project of the Big City Plan for the regeneration of Birmingham. A new library is under construction here and is due to open in 2013. The library is intended to become a major cultural destination with more than three million visitors a year.

The architect for the striking new building is Francoise Houben of the Netherlands. Appropriately it sits next to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the historic Baskerville House that we will see later. In keeping with Birmingham's history of regeneration, when this library opens the current City Library will be demolished.



The facade of the new Library is inspired by lacework
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Look across the road and you can't miss a golden statue. This is known as the 'Golden Boys' statue and features Birmingham's famous engineers Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdoch. Others nickname it the 'Carpet boys' after the partly rolled-up plan of a steam engine that they are looking at.

These three men were pioneers of the Industrial Revolution in late-eighteenth century England. James Watt's steam engine and William Murdoch's invention of gas lighting have made them famous throughout the world. Birmingham-born Matthew Boulton harnessed their talents in a company that made everything from tableware and copper coinage to steam engines.

Country links - The Netherlands

Directions 15 - Walk past the front of the new library to the domed building ahead of you which is the Hall of Memory. Listen here to Track 16.

16. Lest we forget

The Hall of Memory

The Hall of Memory was erected in the 1920s as a memorial to the citizens of Birmingham who died in the First World War. Further memorials were added later to remember those who died in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts including those in Korea, Vietnam and the Falklands.

Inside the Memorial is a sarcophagus-shaped dais made of Siena marble. On top of this is a casket containing two books which are the rolls of honour for the First and Second World Wars.



The Italian marble sarcophagus dais
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There are also three Art Deco bas-relief plaques depicting scenes from the First World War by local artist William Bloye. Each has an inscription, the first reminding us of how many people from Birmingham suffered in the Great War. It reads "Of 150,000 who answered the call to arms 12,320 fell: 35,000 came home disabled".

The Hall of Memory is built from stone from Portland Bill near where the 2012 Olympic sailing events are taking place in Weymouth and Portland.

Country links - France, Germany, Italy, South Korea, Vietnam

Directions 16 - Just behind the Hall of Memory look for a sculpture outside Baskerville House called 'Industry and Genius'. Listen here to Track 17.

17. A fine font

Industry and Genius sculpture

This sculpture illustrates the work of typographer John Baskerville. Born at Wolverley in Worcestershire, he developed a passion for books and lettering. As a young man he became a skilled tombstone engraver. In about 1726 he came to Birmingham and set up a school in the Bull Ring where he taught writing and book-keeping. Baskerville House stands on the site of his former home.



The Baskerville 'g' as used around the world
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Later he set up a business in the manufacture of japanned goods. This was an early form of enamelling based on the style of goods from India, China and Japan which had become popular in Europe. John Baskerville's japanning business made him a wealthy man and allowed him to turn his attention to his main passion, typography.

He experimented with paper-making, ink and the printing process, and he made his first typeface in 1754. This produced finer and more delicate lettering than anyone had achieved previously. He used it for an edition of Virgil followed by fifty or so other classics, as well as an edition of the Bible for Cambridge University Press.

Baskerville was a friend of Benjamin Franklin who had his own printing business in Philadelphia. Franklin took Baskerville's typeface designs back to America where they were adopted for federal government publishing.

Baskerville is one of the greatest typefaces ever developed and you can see it illustrated in the sculpture here. It is used by the University of Birmingham and features in the logo of Canada. You may well have it as a font on your own computer.

Country links - Canada, China, India, Japan, United States of America

Directions 17 - Continue on the pedestrian way and enter into Paradise Forum under the Central Library. Go straight through this and exit into Chamberlain Square. Listen here to Track 18.

18. Big Brum

Chamberlain Square

This square contains some notable old buildings and a memorial to Joseph Chamberlain in gratitude for his services to the City. He was a Birmingham businessman as well as mayor of the city and a Member of Parliament. The memorial contains mosaics by Salviati Burke & Co of Venice who also provided the mosaic on the Council House in Victoria Square.

Joseph Chamberlain was President of the Board of Trade between 1880 and 1885 in Gladstone's second government. Subsequently he moved on to be Secretary of State for the Colonies. He was instrumental in ending the Boer War in 1902 and worked actively to promote Anglo-Afrikaner relations in South Africa.



Big Brum - the Museum and Art Gallery clock tower
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

To your right is the back of the Town Hall and across the Square is the Museum and Art Gallery with its clock tower nicknamed 'Big Brum'. You can see a bridge linking this to another building which resembles the Bridge of Sighs in Venice.

There are several other statues in the square including one by Irish sculptor Sioban Coppinger of another politician, Thomas Attwood. His bronze statue sits on the steps, having left his plinth and scattered his bronze pages. Attwood was a successful businessman and Birmingham's first MP. He first became involved in politics when he joined a campaign against the East India Company which he believed was restricting foreign trade and causing unemployment in Birmingham. His evidence to a parliamentary committee was partly responsible for the government restricting the East India Company's monopoly.

Country links - Ireland, Italy, South Africa

Directions 18 - Leave the square between the Museum and Town Hall and you will enter Victoria Square. Walk to the fountain in the centre of the square and listen to Track 19.

19. Floozie in the Jacuzzi

Victoria Square

This square is named after Queen Victoria and her statue here is considered to mark the centre of Birmingham. In 1993 the square was redeveloped and pedestrianized. A competition was held to create a water feature to sit in the square.

The winner was sculptor Dhruva Mistry who was born in Gujarat, India. He created a fountain called The River. In the middle is a monumental female figure that represents the life force, but locals soon nicknamed it the "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi".



The "Floozie in the Jacuzzi"
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Mistry also created two smaller figures at the bottom of the fountain, which represent youth, and two Sphinx-like animals. If you look at the rim of the upper pool you will see lines from the poem *Burnt Norton* by American born T S Eliot. These were engraved by a Dutch artist Bettina Furnée.

At Christmas time Victoria Square is the venue for the Frankfurt market which sells crafts and German food. A Christmas tree is donated each year by the Swedish engineering company Sandvik which has its headquarters nearby at Halesowen.

Country links - Bangladesh, Germany, India, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Sweden, United States of America

Directions 19 - Walk to the lower end of the fountain and to your right you will see a statue of an iron man. Stop here and listen to Track 20.

20. Iron man

Victoria Square

We end our walk with a statue by the British artist Anthony Gormley. Gormley is perhaps most famous for his Angel of The North sculpture in Gateshead. He has created other projects with figures like the one here and displayed them around the world. One hundred iron figures stand permanently looking out at the sea on the beach at Crosby near Liverpool, and another hundred currently stand in Vorarlberg in the mountains of Austria. In another project, Gormley put statues on the top of buildings in London and Manhattan.



Iron: Man by Anthony Gormley
Mike Jackson © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The Iron: Man statue is said to represent the traditional skills of Birmingham and the Black Country but as a piece of art it divides opinion. It is a fitting place to end our walk however as it shows how Birmingham is a city with a proud heritage of manufacturing and migration plus somewhere that is always changing.

We started the walk in the area where Birmingham began as a market town and have seen evidence of Birmingham's trade and manufacturing history. We saw how migrants have been attracted to Birmingham over the centuries and we have walked through some of the areas where they settled. And we have seen the current Big City Plan taking shape in new spectacular buildings.

Birmingham sits right in the heart of England but it is an international city. On this short walk in the city centre we have found links to 52 of the counties that will be participating in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Maybe you spotted more. If you did, please let us know.

We hope that you have enjoyed this walk and that it has helped you look at Birmingham with new eyes. If you look on the Walk the World website you will find more in different parts of Britain that you can try. Why not think about creating your own walk?

Country links - Austria, United States of America

Directions 20 - If you wish to return to the start of this walk in the Bullring, follow New Street from the bottom of the Square.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Walk the World walk:

- **Mike Jackson** and **Gary Gray** for creating the walk and taking photographs
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