

The Right to Vote: Birmingham Heritage Trails

This document was produced as part of *The Right to Vote Project*, run by Birmingham Archives & Heritage in partnership with the Parliamentary Archives and Parliamentary Outreach, in 2010.

The people of Birmingham and the rest of Britain only won the right to vote through a long and difficult campaign for social equality. Birmingham had a central role in much of the activism that was part of the long road to universal suffrage. Many of the sites in Birmingham where key events of this campaign took place still exist and this walking trail takes you around a selection of them in the City Centre and highlights others in the Suburbs of the City.

The walking trail of the City Centre will take about an hour and a half if you visit all the sites, but it can be shortened easily by missing out the sites in the Bull Ring and Digbeth.

The tour of 'Right to Vote Sites in and around Birmingham' will require a car or public transport.

For further information on *The Right to Vote Project*, go to: www.parliament.uk/communities

Images (excluding A: Dodford) are from the collections at Birmingham Archives & Heritage. For further information on this trail or additional sites in Birmingham contact:

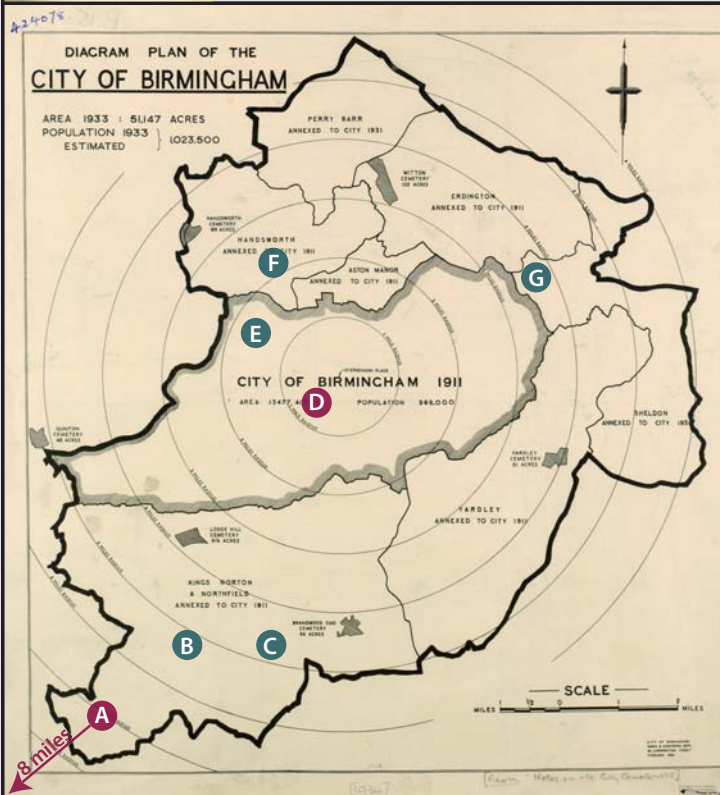
Birmingham Archives & Heritage - Digitisation & Outreach Team. Phone 0121 464 1619 or e-mail digital.lab@birmingham.gov.uk



A: Dodford, near Bromsgrove



Chartist Village of cottages built 1848-49, with 4 acre small holdings, as part of the Chartist Land Scheme. A land company by popular subscription was set up to buy land for a series of 'Chartist villages', allowing the occupants the right to vote. *[Image courtesy of the Parliamentary Archives]*



Right to Vote Sites in and around Birmingham

B: Carnegie Library, Northfield



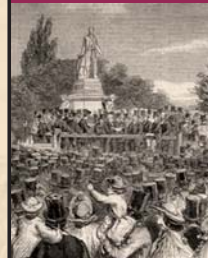
Set on fire during the evening of 11th February 1914. Most of the building and its contents were destroyed. On the spikes of railings at the rear a Suffragette sign read "Give women the Vote". A book by **Miss Christabel Pankhurst** was also found, with the note "To start your new Library".

C: Kings Norton Railway Station



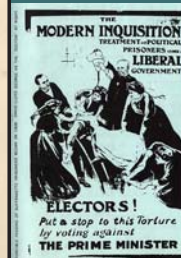
Suffragette arson attack on the 15th March 1914. A number of coaches on a railway siding near Kings Norton Station were set on fire. Due to difficulties in obtaining a water supply £1,000 of damage was caused. On a nearby line a copy of 'The Suffragist' was found.

D: Sturge Statue, Five Ways



Statue at Five Ways roundabout at the top of Broad Street of **Joseph Sturge**, Quaker (1763-1817), a famous local anti-slavery campaigner who also fought for universal suffrage. He supported the Birmingham Chartists and engaged in demonstrations for parliamentary reform.

E: Winson Green Prison



Imprisonment of Suffragettes, who went on hunger strike to protest at their treatment as criminals, not political prisoners. The women were forcibly fed, the first occurrence recorded in this country, in 1913, which prompted much debate in the press and in the House of Commons.

F: Handsworth Park



The boathouse in Victoria Park, Handsworth was set on fire on 22nd April 1913. It was only partially damaged, but two boats were destroyed. Two empty paraffin tins and three flags of the colours of the **Womens Political Union**, together with a 'propagandist' newspaper, were found nearby.

G: Bromford Racecourse



In May 1914 the grandstand was burnt down by militant Suffragettes. It was then requisitioned by the military during WW1 and used as an anti-aircraft station in WW2. Though redeveloped as a racecourse in 1958, the last meeting was held in 1965. The site has since been built on.

1: Bingley Hall



Speeches by **John Bright MP** (1811-89) in support of the 1867 2nd Parliamentary Reform Act took place here. On 17 September 1909, Suffragettes climbed on the roof of Bingley Hall, to protest against Prime Minister Asquith who was speaking there.

2: Broad Street



Starting point of a great procession to Soho Road in 1884, of bands and banners, led by **John Bright MP**, for the 3rd Reform Act - the vote for agricultural workers. *[A statue of Bright is in Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, and a plaque in Central Library]*

3: Chamberlain Square



Statue of **Thomas Attwood**, Birmingham Banker and Parliamentary Reformer (1783-1856), founded the **Birmingham Political Union** [BPU] in January 1830, which was regarded as the most effective political organisation at exerting pressure for parliamentary reform.

4: Town Hall



Speeches in 1842 by **Joseph Sturge** for the **Birmingham Complete Suffrage Union**, a mixed middle-working class group supporting the vote for all men. **Mrs Pankhurst**, leader of the **Women's Social & Political Union** [WSPU], spoke at the Town Hall to supporters in 1912.

5: Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery



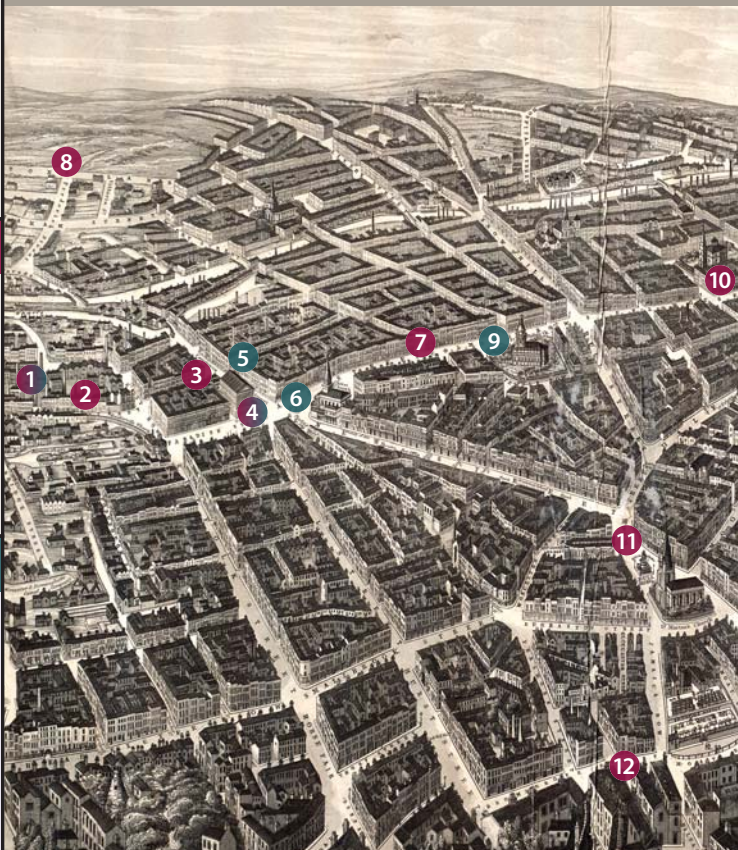
Site of Suffragette protest in 1914. **Bertha Ryland** was arrested for slashing Romney's painting of 'Master Thornhill'. She reportedly said "I attack this work of art deliberately as a protest against the government's criminal injustice in denying women the vote."

6: Victoria Square



In 1909, the planned rally to welcome **Charlotte Marsh**, on her release from Winson Green Prison was stopped by the police for fears of civil unrest. She was one of the first women to be forcibly fed in Winson Green Prison following her detention there.

Right to Vote City Trail



8: Newhall Hill



Gathering of the Unions, site of mass outdoor BPU meetings, including the most famous rally of 7 May 1832 with an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 attendance of Political Unions, who travelled from all parts of the Midlands and further afield, in support of the Reform Bill.

9: St Phillip's Cathedral



In 1913, a National Procession for female suffrage, led by the **National Society for Women's Suffrage** (NUWSS), stopped on its way to Hyde Park and a service was held in the Cathedral. In 1914, the Burne Jones windows were daubed with white enamel paint in a Suffragette attack.

10: Steelhouse Lane



Brookfields, the site of the largest outdoor meeting in the 1860s of reportedly over 150,000 attendees. It was led by John Bright, Liberal MP for Birmingham, to agitate for the 1867 2nd Reform Act - to give most urban working class men the vote.

11: Bull Ring



Favoured meeting place for Chartists during the summer of 1839 agitating for Parliamentary Reform. There were several episodes of tension between the police and agitators, which erupted into violence, including the **Bull Ring Riots** of July 15th 1839.

12: Cheapside



Mr Beardsworth's Repository, a large building where horse auctions were held, which could hold thousands. It was used as a place for meetings of the BPU, where Attwood lectured and tactics were discussed to help pass the 1832 1st Reform Act.

7: Newhall Street



New Jerusalem Chapel, a Chartist Church of 1840, led by **Arthur O'Neill** (1819-96). After imprisonment for addressing striking miners in the Black Country in 1842, O'Neill became a Baptist Minister. He was also active in Chartist meetings in Birmingham in the 1860s.

Right to Vote City Trail Directions

Please take care whilst walking around as some of the roads can be busy. Please also note that surfaces on the trails may be uneven. We cannot accept responsibility or liability for any loss, damage or inconvenience which may arise from undertaking all or part of the trails. All information was correct, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of inclusion.

Start the walking trail by standing in front of the entrance to the International Convention Centre [ICC] in Centenary Square. This is the site of **Bingley Hall** 1

Walk across Centenary Square, with the REP Theatre on your left and cross the bridge beyond the Hall of Memory. Pause here and look across Broad Street on your right. This was the site of the Chartist march 2

Walk through The Forum, under the Central Library and enter Chamberlain Square. Walk down the steps to the right of the Chamberlain Memorial Fountain and at the bottom of the steps you will see a **statue of Thomas Attwood** 3

Facing the reclining statue, the **Town Hall** is directly behind you 4

From the same spot you can look across to your right to the **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** 5

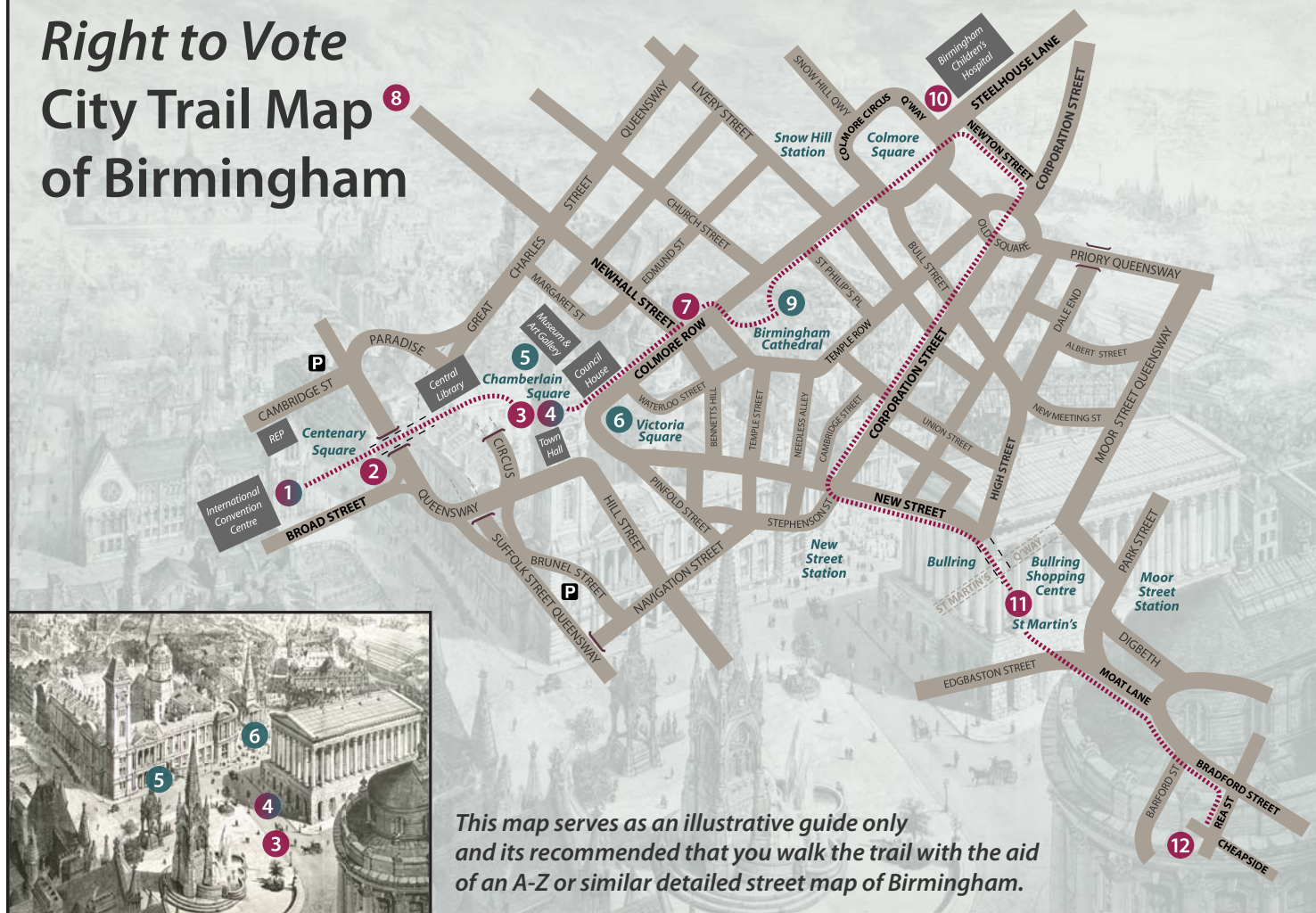
Walk to the right, out of Chamberlain Square, into the open space of Victoria Square 6

Walk to your left in front of the Council House and continue into Colmore Row. Stop at the top of **Newhall Street** 7

From here you can look down the hill towards the site of the **Gathering of Unions on Newhall Hill** 8

Cross the road and walk into the Cathedral grounds. Inside **St Phillip's Cathedral** are the Burne Jones stained glass windows 9

Right to Vote City Trail Map of Birmingham



This map serves as an illustrative guide only and its recommended that you walk the trail with the aid of an A-Z or similar detailed street map of Birmingham.

Walk out of the Cathedral grounds and continue along Colmore Row, past Snow Hill Station on your left. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing, go down the circular steps and onto Colmore Circus Queensway. Cross the road and bear left into Steelhouse Lane and walk towards the Children's Hospital, stopping on the corner of Newton Street, the site of **Brookfields** 10

Turn right into Newton Street and turn right again into Corporation Street and walk the whole length of it to the junction with New Street.

You can shorten the trail at this point by turning right to return to the start. If you want to complete the trail...

turn left into New Street and at the end turn right into the Bullring shopping complex. Walk past Nelson's Statue and go down the steps towards St Martin's Church and the old **Bull Ring** 11

Bear left past the open market and then turn right into Moat Lane. Walk across both crossings, staying on the right hand side of the road. Bear right into Bradford Street, cross the road and go straight on. Turn right into Rea Street. Crossing this is **Cheapside** and to your right would have been **Beardsworth's Repository** 12

This is the end of the *Right to Vote* City Trail.