

CHILDREN'S LIVES: CITY TRAIL

This trail explores sites of significance for the history of children in central Birmingham. Running from Steelhouse Lane to Five Ways, it highlights a few of the many personal and institutional stories which illuminate how the care of poor children changed from the 18th century onwards. Birmingham has often been at the forefront of social change and reform in Britain, and this walk provides glimpses of improvements in health care, education, working conditions, and humanitarian philanthropy for the children of Birmingham, and in some cases beyond.

Despite all the demolition and architectural developments which have changed the face of the city over the past couple of centuries, the landscape retains some key sites and buildings that are part of this story. Photographs and documents from the Library of Birmingham's archive collections also bring to life the experiences of children's lives in the past.

Produced by the Children's Lives Project and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund: <http://www.hlf.org.uk>



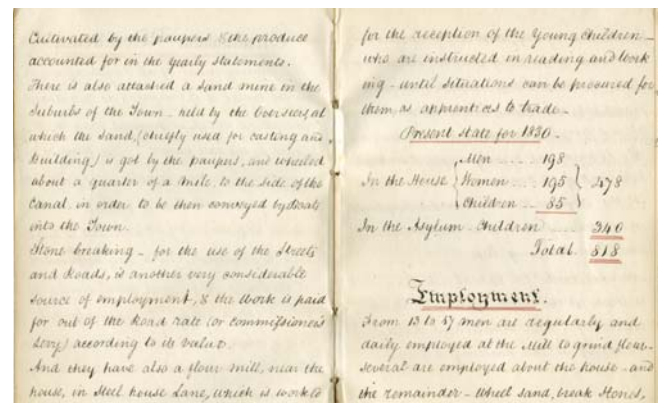
Children's Workhouse Victoria Law Courts, Corporation Street

Poor adults who could not support themselves were sent to the workhouse. Poor children who were either orphaned or whose families could not

maintain them were placed in a children's workhouse called the Asylum for the Infant Poor where they would live and work. This document describes the work done by poor children under the age of 13. At the time it was written in about 1830 there were 124 children in the Asylum making pins, 11 working at glass polishing and 56 making lace.

Birmingham Workhouse was located on land between Steelhouse Lane and Lichfield Street until 1852 when it moved to a purpose built site at Winson Green. From 1879

'cottage' homes were built outside the city at Marston Green to care for destitute children in a healthier environment and away from the 'corrupting' influence of adult paupers. These were some of the earliest cottage homes in the UK, where children lived in a self-contained community.



Booklet describing Birmingham Workhouse, 1830s [MS 2126/EB9/1829]



Birmingham & Midland Free Hospital for Sick Children Children's Hospital, Steelhouse Lane

In 1861 the Birmingham and Midland Free Hospital for Sick Children was established in

Steelhouse Lane with 16 beds in the former Eye Infirmary. It was founded at the instigation of Birmingham physician and health reformer Thomas Heslop (1823-85), who was convinced that children could not be cared for properly in adult hospitals. By 1863 it was treating 8,000 children, and in 1869 the in-patients moved to a building on Broad Street which had previously been used as the maternity hospital.

Admission was free for those who could not afford to pay for medical attention and patients' families were means tested

to prevent abuse of the system. The Hospital depended on subscriptions and charitable donations to fund its services. The General Hospital, established in 1779, was later on this site until 1998 when the Children's returned and was renamed the Diana, Princess of Wales Children's Hospital.



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Children's Court Corner of Steelhouse Lane and Newton Street

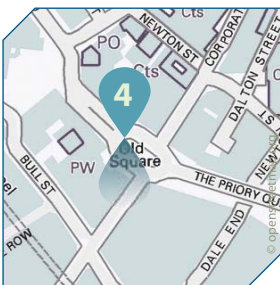
On 1 April 1905 Birmingham introduced the first separate Children's Court in Britain at the Victoria Law Courts. Until then child offenders were tried in the same court as adults. This special court for under 16s met on Thursday mornings, and saw 25 in its first session - all boys. Birmingham's experiment led to children's courts being set up across Britain as part of the 1908 Children's Act.

In 1929 Geraldine and Barrow Cadbury paid for a new purpose built children's court on this site. Geraldine (1865-1941) was a Quaker and believed the court was there to protect and not simply punish children. In 1920 she was one of the first two women in Birmingham to be appointed

as magistrates – until 1919 only men were eligible – and subsequently became recognised nationally as an expert on young offenders. The ceremonial key showed the figure of Justice, unveiled and without a sword, reflecting Geraldine's belief in justice with understanding.



Birmingham School Board newscutting on children's session [SB B/1/11]



The Slums Upper Priory, Old Square

This is one of a series of photographs by photographer James Burgoyne showing the conditions in slum properties in Birmingham. These properties

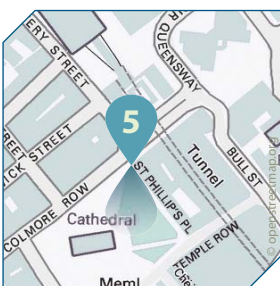
were to be demolished as part of the 1870s Improvement, or 'Slum Clearance', Scheme.

Many of these houses were unsanitary and could be death traps for children. The Coroner's Inquest records from this period show that the home was one of the most dangerous places if you were young. Many children died when their clothes caught in the open kitchen fire, or by suffocating as over crowding meant that whole families often had to sleep together in one bed.

On the other hand many working class children loved the freedom that they had playing outside in the back-to-back courts and streets, far more freedom than that allowed to more materially privileged middle-class children.



Rear of 12-13 Upper Priory, 1875 [Improvement Scheme Photo 115a]



Birmingham Blue Coat School Corner of Colmore Row and St Philip's Place (no longer standing)

The Blue Coat School stood at the east end of St Philip's churchyard. It opened as a charity school in 1724 to board and educate poor children, as long as they belonged to the Church of England. The children were 'nominated' as deserving of a charitable education by a sponsor and once admitted the boys and girls were taught to read, write and do basic accounts. They were then apprenticed in their early teens – boys into a trade and girls usually into domestic service.

The name of the school comes from the distinctive blue uniforms in which the children were clothed.

This photograph of the Blue Coat pupils is particularly interesting as it also includes the names of the children. The Blue Coat School archive includes information on hundreds of children who attended the school.



Blue Coat School Girls, by Sir Benjamin Stone, 1910 [Stone 8/43]



King Edward's School New Street, near Odeon (no longer standing)

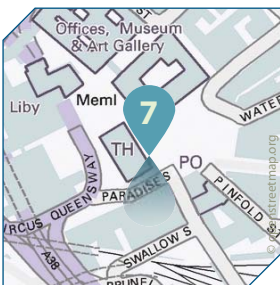
King Edward VI School had occupied a site in New Street since 1552. In 1833 Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860), who is best known for designing the Houses of Parliament, won a competition to design a new school building. Barry was assisted by the Gothic revival architect Augustus Welby Pugin, in both Westminster and King Edward's School. Pugin was closely connected to Birmingham through his partnership in the firm of John Hardman & Co. who designed the interior fittings and furniture.

Barry's new building opened in 1838 and educated many famous pupils, including the geneticist and founder of eugenics Sir Francis Galton, the artist Sir Edward Burne-

Jones and writer J.R.R. Tolkien. In 1935 the school left New Street and moved to Edgbaston, and Barry's imposing building was demolished in 1936. Part of the Barry building was saved however, and still exists today as part of the current school in Edgbaston.



King Edward's cloisters, New Street, by S.J. Ford, 1906 [WK/B11/912]



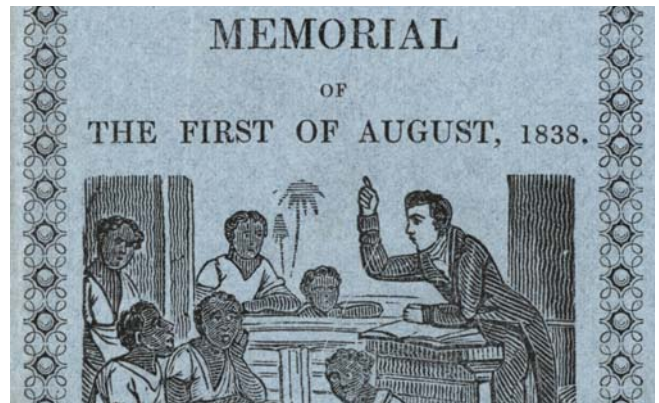
Town Hall Victoria Square

Town Hall has been the site of important events and public meetings in Birmingham since it was opened in 1834. On 1st August 1838 the abolitionist Joseph Sturge (1793-1859) led

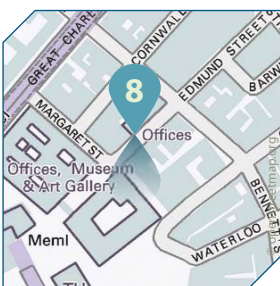
a march from the Town Hall to Heneage Street to lay the foundation stone of Birmingham Emancipation School. The building of the school was one of the ways in which Birmingham marked the abolition of the apprenticeship system in the Caribbean, the system that replaced slavery.

Sturge was one of the leading campaigners for the abolition of apprenticeship, which he perceived as slavery by another name, and emphasised that this event was not a celebration, as slavery still existed in other parts of

the world. He is said to have led the march accompanied by a black child and a large group of local Sunday School children who sang hymns. Each child on the march was given a copy of this memorial booklet to commemorate the occasion.



Memorial booklet, 1 August 1838 [IIR 62 158748]



Birmingham School Board Offices Edmund Street

The Elementary Education Act of 1870 established the framework for the schooling of all children in England and Wales between the ages of 5

and 12 and created new public authorities called School Boards. Previously a chronic lack of school provision meant that many children did not go to school, or attended for very short periods only. The Birmingham School Board set about improving this situation by building over 40 additional schools during its lifetime.

Its members were elected by the public and the first Birmingham Board included the well-known nonconformists Joseph Chamberlain and George Dawson when it was

created on 28 November 1870. The first woman to be elected to the Birmingham School Board was the Quaker Eliza Sturge in 1873. The School Board office was here at 98 Edmund Street until its responsibilities were transferred to the City Council's newly formed Education Department in 1903.



School Board Offices, by T. Lewis [WK/B11/1010]



The Canals Gas Street Basin, off Broad Street

Birmingham's canals were particularly important for the city's industrial success. The construction of the first canals in England in the 18th Century

provided trading routes across the Midlands, and also led to families living on the canals.

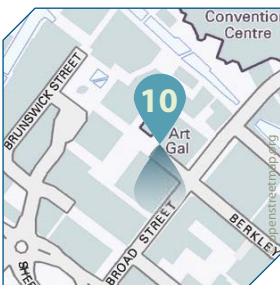
Children would sometimes work on the canal, particularly if their family lived on a barge. These children are often not represented within historical records as the nature of canal work demanded frequent travel.

In the 1930s there was concern for the education of children living on the canals and despite opposition from

canal women, schooling was made compulsory for these children. However it was still possible to get around the system, and in 1952 a 12 year old girl who had never attended school was found working on the canal.



Children on canal boats, c.1911 [WK/B11/5434]



Oozells Street Board School Ikon Gallery, Oozells Street

A year after the Birmingham School Board was established in 1870 it made education compulsory for 5-13 year olds. Oozells Street Board School

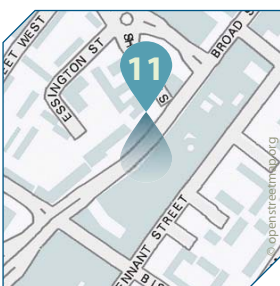
was built between 1874-76, designed by local architects Martin & Chamberlain who built many of the new schools. Schooling in this era strictly segregated boys, girls and infants in separate departments with different entrances, class rooms, head teachers, and playgrounds.

At the time, as the map shows, this area near Birmingham's busy canal network was very industrial and the school was surrounded by foundries and metal works. Like other schools in similar settings many of the children came from

poor homes and would often be absent due to illness, bad weather, truancy and seasonal work. Girls were often kept home to look after younger children. Oozells Street Board School is now one of the few remaining 19th Century buildings in Brindley Place and is home to the Ikon Gallery.



Ordnance Survey 25" map showing part of Ladywood, 1887 [F8/1st ed.]



Broad Street Children's Hospital Corner of Broad Street and Sheepcote Street

The first Children's Hospital had been established in 1861 in Steelhouse Lane. In 1869 it took over the building of

the 'Lying-In' or maternity hospital on Broad Street, before moving again to a new building in Ladywood Road, which opened in 1916 after several years of fundraising.

Nearby on the corner of Broad Street, now Five Ways Shopping Centre, stood the factory of Kunzle Cakes Ltd., founded by Christian Kunzle (1879-1954) a Swiss born chef and chocolatier. Kunzle was also President of the Children's Hospital during the 1930s. He developed a scheme for sending sick children, particularly those suffering from

Tuberculosis, from Birmingham to his house in Davos, Switzerland. The first party of 30 children arrived in 1932, to recover in the clean mountain air. A blue plaque above the Santander bank now marks where the factory once stood.



Children's Hospital decorated for Christmas, c.1910 [HC/BCH/7/6/1]



Monument to Joseph Sturge Five Ways Island (in front of the Marriott Hotel)

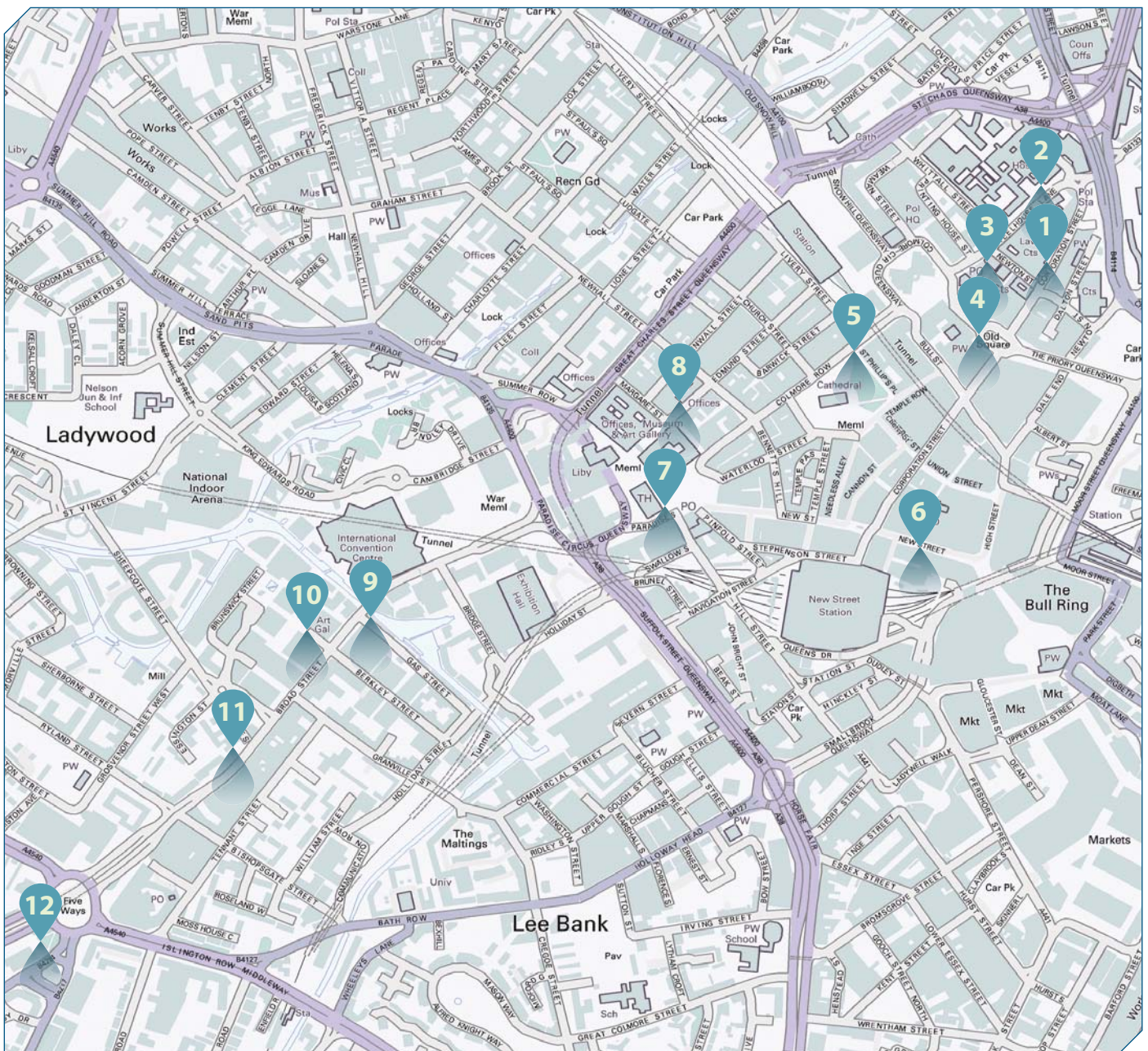
The Quaker Joseph Sturge (1793-1859), who moved to the town from Bewdley in 1822, was one of Birmingham's greatest standard-bearers for reform. As well as being one of the most significant antislavery campaigners in Britain he was a pacifist who travelled to meet the Tsar of Russia in 1854 in an attempt to stop the Crimean War.

Sturge was also a supporter of universal suffrage at a time when only a handful of men could vote, and established adult schools for workers. In 1854 he set up the first reformatory at Stoke Farm to deal with young offenders, and he supported infant schools, Sunday Schools and playgrounds.

The statue shows Sturge with his hand resting on a Bible, whilst below him are two female figures - 'Peace', and 'Charity' who is shown nurturing a child symbolising the emancipated slave.



Engraving of Joseph Sturge [Birmingham Portraits]



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