

LUNAR SOCIETY CITY CENTRE WALK and Guide to 18th Century Birmingham



Further information

Websites

www.lunarsociety.org.uk
www.birminghammuseums.org.uk
www.libraryofbirmingham.com
www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk
www.theassayoffice.co.uk
www.historywm.com

Books

Uglow, Jenny:

The Lunar Men (Faber, 2002)

Jones, Peter M.

Industrial Enlightenment (Manchester University Press, 2013)

Mason, Shena (ed):

Matthew Boulton: Selling What All The World Desires
(Yale, 2009)

Dick, Malcolm (ed):

Matthew Boulton: A Revolutionary Player (Brewin, 2009)

King-Hele, Desmond

Erasmus Darwin: A Life of Unequalled Achievement
(Giles de la Mare Publishers, 1999)

Mason, Shena: *Soho House Guide*

(Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, 2002)



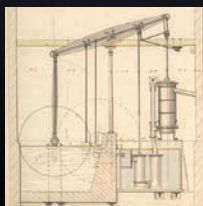
The authors would also like to thank Malcolm Dick and Brigitte Winsor for their permission to adapt the maps from their 'Joseph Priestley's Birmingham' trail in this guide.

Credits

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Photography: Birmingham Museums, Library of Birmingham,
Birmingham Assay Office, Visit Birmingham, Chris Rice and Dave Walsh

Produced by www.davewalshcreative.co.uk



THE LUNAR SOCIETY

Birmingham
MUSEUMS

Birmingham
MUSEUMS



The Lunar Society of Birmingham

William Westley's East prospect of Birmingham, 1732



Matthew Boulton, by C.F. Von Breda, oil on canvas, 1792

Founded around 1765, the Birmingham Lunar Society was an informal group of friends whose lively meetings and conversations, letters and experiments were to have a global impact on scientific understanding during the late 18th century.

The group was so-called because it met on evenings when the moon was full to give its members enough light to find their way safely home. To begin with, they called themselves the Lunar Circle, the more formal title 'Lunar Society' being adopted in 1775.

The Society comprised some of the outstanding minds of the day. It was jointly founded by metalware manufacturer and polymath Matthew Boulton and physician and poet Dr Erasmus Darwin. Other members included physician and mathematics tutor Dr William Small, Unitarian minister and discoverer of oxygen Joseph Priestley, steam engineer and

inventor James Watt, pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood, clockmaker and geologist John Whitehurst, Quaker arms manufacturer Samuel Galton, glass manufacturer and chemist James Keir, physician and botanist Dr William Withering, unorthodox educationalist Thomas Day and agricultural innovator Richard Lovell Lovell Edgworth.

The Birmingham Lunar Trail

The purpose of this guide is to provide visitors with an introduction to the Lunar Society and 18th century Birmingham by following in its members' footsteps.

The city centre walk takes in the surviving historic sites most closely associated with the Society's members, together with the places where one can still see examples of their work and influence.

The out-of-town guide focuses on the sites associated with the Lunar Society which can be visited by the public.



Erasmus Darwin, by Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, 1734-1797

The Lunar Society then and now

The Age of Enlightenment

The Birmingham Lunar Society was a product of what we now call the 'Age of Enlightenment' – the intellectual and philosophical revolution of the 18th century that ushered in the modern world.

As well as generating scientific advances, Enlightenment ideas questioned the very nature of 18th century government and society. Many members of the Lunar Society were nonconformists and free thinkers who believed that the same rational principles as were used in scientific investigation should be applied to make the world a better place through social and political change.

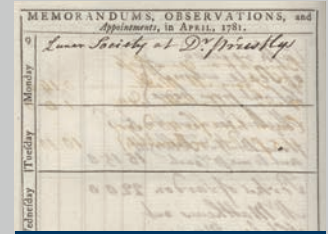


The Lunar Room, Soho House

Most of the group actively supported the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and also championed the revolutions in America and France. However, such views were not without risks. Joseph Priestley's republican sympathies led to his being driven out of Birmingham by an angry mob, and later forced him to emigrate to America.

The Fall and Rise of the Lunar Society

By 1800 the Society was in decline. It continued to meet with the sons of Boulton, Watt & Galton adding to the membership, but by 1813



Matthew Boulton's diary entry for Lunar Society meeting, April 1781

most of the older members had died or left. On the 8th August that year the remaining members drew lots for the society's library of scientific books and the group was formally dissolved.

Some 18 decades later its inspiration still lingered and around 1990 the Lunar Society was re-established by a group of Birmingham citizens led by Dame Rachel Waterhouse. Although Birmingham has changed almost beyond recognition, its people remain ever open to ideas. The new Society adopts the original Lunar aims and, welcoming members from all walks of life, seeks enlightenment and progress in the context of the modern world. To this end, the Lunar Society forums connect scientific, economic, social and cultural thinking as the Society seeks to catalyse action for the common good.



Today's Lunar Society also looks to the future

For more information about the modern Lunar Society visit www.lunarsociety.org.uk or email info@lunarsociety.org.uk

Lunar Society City Centre Walk

This pleasant walk takes advantage of some of the more distinctive and attractive aspects of the city and should take between 1-2 hours.



Please note: this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.

For an exact plan of Birmingham City Centre use an up-to-date A-Z or equivalent.

1

St Philip's Cathedral

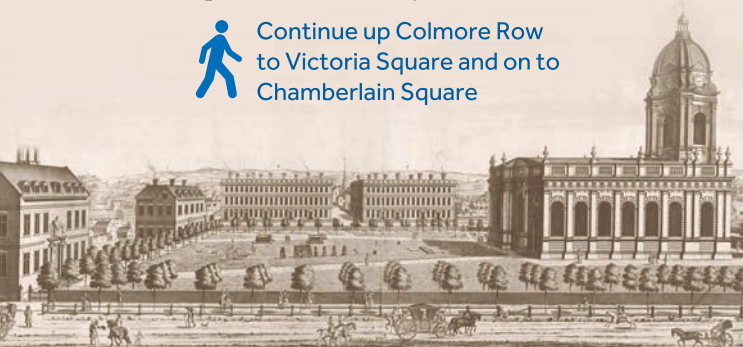
The starting point for the walk is St Philip's Cathedral, designed by Thomas Archer and consecrated in 1715.

St Philip's was one of the architectural showpieces of Georgian Birmingham. It was the venue for Matthew Boulton's christening in 1728 and William Small was buried here in 1775.

Nearby on Temple Row was the site of Dudley's Hotel where Joseph Priestley's speech supporting the French Revolution sparked the Priestley Riots of 1791.



Continue up Colmore Row to Victoria Square and on to Chamberlain Square



Above, Westley's prospect of St Philip's Cathedral, 1732



Dr William Small



St Philip's Cathedral today

2

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



Birmingham: its people, its history



Erasmus Darwin, by Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, 1734-1797

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery has a wealth of collections and displays relating to the Lunar Society and 18th century Birmingham. The new permanent exhibition *Birmingham: its people, its history* looks at the town through an 18th century visitor's eyes.

The Museum also has an internationally significant collection of 18th century fine and applied artworks including Joseph Wright's insightful portrait of Erasmus Darwin.

Open daily except 25 & 26 December.

For more information visit www.birminghammuseums.org.uk or telephone 0121 303 2834.



Waiter & wine jug, Boulton & Fothergill 1774-5

3

James Watt & Joseph Priestley, Chamberlain Square

Across Chamberlain Square on the steps facing the Museum & Art Gallery are the statues of two key members of the Lunar Society: steam engineer and inventor James Watt (1736-1819) and chemist and discoverer of oxygen Joseph Priestley (1733-1804).

The marble statue of Watt was designed by Alexander Munro in 1868. Francis Williamson's statue of Priestley was originally carved in marble in 1874 but this material deteriorated and so the figure was recast in bronze by William Bloye in 1951.



Continue through Paradise Forum
into Centenary Square



James Watt (1736-1819)
by Alexander Munro, 1868



Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)
by Francis Williamson, 1874,
and William Bloye, 1951

4

Library of Birmingham

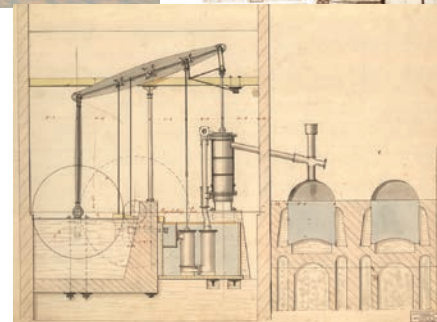


Designs for sword hilts
and other objects from
the Boulton & Fothergill
pattern books



Above:
The Library of Birmingham

Right:
Drawing of a Boulton
& Watt engine built for
Benyon, Benyon & Bage's
Shrewsbury flax mill



The new Library of Birmingham is home to one of the biggest and best collections of 18th century archive material in the world.

The extensive Boulton & Watt archive consists of several million letters, documents and other original paper records.

The Archives, Heritage & Photography section is on Level 4. For more information on the Boulton & Watt archive and how to access it, visit www.libraryofbirmingham.com or telephone 0121 242 4242.



Cross Centenary Square
to Broad Street

5

Centenary Square and Broad Street



Boulton, Murdock and Watt
by William Bloye

Across Centenary Square on Broad Street is William Bloye's group statue of Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdock. The famously hard-working and imaginative Murdock was a gifted engineer and inventor although not a member of the Lunar Society.

This was probably because as an employee of Boulton and Watt he lacked sufficient social status – in spite of Enlightenment ideals of equality!



Continue back across Centenary Square and through the International Convention Centre to the Birmingham Canal

6

Brindley Place and the Birmingham Canal

Named after the famous engineer, James Brindley, Brindley Place occupies the site of the canal wharves from which many Birmingham manufactures were shipped across the world.

Several of the Lunar Society's members were investors in the town's early canal system which began with the Birmingham Canal in 1769.



Turn right along the canal towpath towards the National Indoor Arena.

Cross over the footbridge in front of the Arena and turn right along the canal towards Farmer's Bridge and Cambrian Wharf



The Birmingham canal at Brindley Place

Dating from 1803, the Kingston Buildings (now Austin Court) are typical of the warehouses that lined the town's canals in the 18th and 19th centuries



7

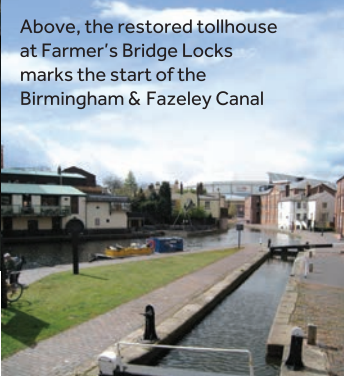
Farmer's Bridge and the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal



The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal looking towards Newhall Street



Above, the restored tollhouse at Farmer's Bridge Locks marks the start of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal



Completed in 1789, the Birmingham and Fazeley canal was one of the catalysts for the development of Birmingham's famous Jewellery Quarter.

The canal was built close to New Hall, former home to the Colmores, one of the most important families in Georgian Birmingham. New Hall was used by Matthew Boulton as a warehouse for a number of years until demolished in 1787.



Follow the towpath down past the two long flights of locks to Newhall Street.

A flight of steps leads up to street level, emerging almost opposite the Assay Office

8

Assay Office Birmingham

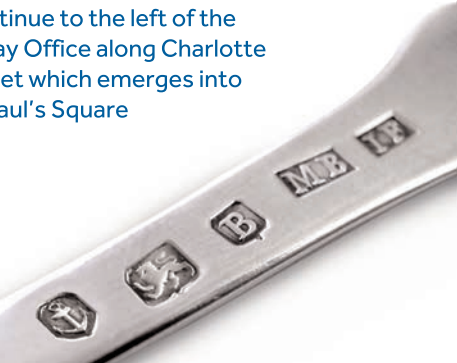
Matthew Boulton led the campaign to establish Birmingham's first Assay Office in 1773. The original premises was the King's Head Inn on New Street.

The Newhall Street building dates from 1877. Group visits are available by arrangement, telephone 0121 236 6951 for further details.



Continue to the left of the Assay Office along Charlotte Street which emerges into St Paul's Square

Spoon handle showing the 1774 Birmingham hallmark with the makers' mark of Boulton & Fothergill



Above, the Assay Office in Newhall Street



Staff at The Birmingham Assay Office hallmarking a modern silver jug by Martin Pugh



Right, Silver candlesticks based on designs by James Wyatt, Boulton & Fothergill, 1774

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St Paul's Square

Francis Eginton's East Window



St Paul's Church



This handsome Georgian square was developed in the 1770s and 1780s on land formerly owned by the Colmore family.

Designed by Roger Eykyn of Wolverhampton, St Paul's Church was consecrated in 1779. Both Matthew Boulton and James Watt worshipped here for a time.

The church features a painted window of *The Conversion of St Paul* by Francis Eginton who worked for Boulton at the Soho Manufactory for many years.

The church is open 10am-4pm, Tuesday – Saturday.



To return to the start of the walk proceed up Ludgate Hill, cross over the Great Charles Street Queensway pedestrian bridge and continue up Church Street to Colmore Row

10

Museum of the Jewellery Quarter

A ten minute walk from St Paul's Square is the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter.

Located in the original factory of the jewellery manufacturing firm of Smith & Pepper, the museum tells the story of jewellery and metal-working in Birmingham from the middle ages to the present day.

Many of the techniques and processes demonstrated on the fascinating factory tour are exactly the same as those used in the 18th century.

The museum is open all year round, Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am - 5pm (last tour at 4pm), closed Sundays and Mondays except Bank Holidays.

For more information visit www.birminghammuseums.org.uk or telephone 0121 348 8140.

Museum of the Jewellery Quarter



Jewellery demonstration on the factory floor

Lunar Society Out-of-Town Guide

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Edgbaston Old Church and Hall

Church Rd, Edgbaston, B'ham B15 3SH

The out-of-town trail consists of publicly accessible sites associated with the Lunar Society, the most important of which is Matthew Boulton's home, Soho House.

Edgbaston Old Church



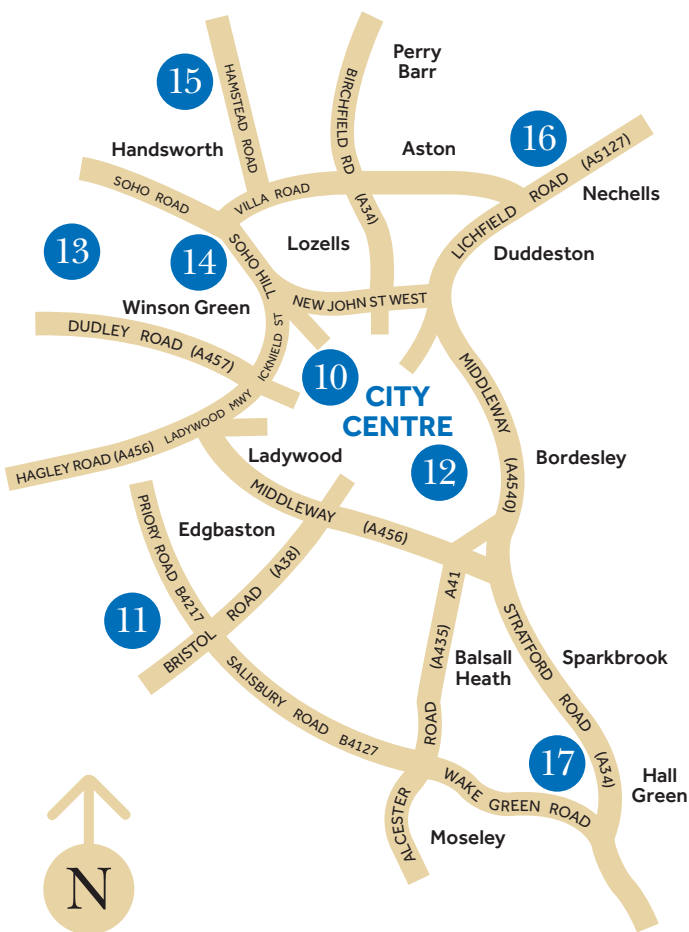
Above: engraving of Edgbaston Hall

Left: Withering memorial

Edgbaston Hall was the home of Lunar Society member Dr William Withering. He pioneered the successful use of digitalis, found in foxgloves, to treat dropsy (today known as oedema) which can be caused by heart failure. Withering is buried in Edgbaston Old Church – his memorial stone decorated with carved foxgloves.

The church is open most days – telephone 0121 454 0070 to confirm opening times.

Please note that Edgbaston Hall is now a private golf club so is not publicly accessible without prior appointment. To view the exterior of the Hall and the blue plaque commemorating Withering call 0121 454 1736.



Please note: this map is only an approximate guide to the relative sites.
For public transport information contact Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or visit www.networkwestmidlands.com

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Thinktank, Millennium Point

Curzon Street, Birmingham B4 7XG

Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum, contains a variety of displays relating to the Lunar Society. The highlight is the huge Boulton & Watt Smethwick Engine – the oldest working steam engine in the world.

If you are walking from the city centre you may pass St Michael's Catholic church on Moor Street. This was built in 1803 as a Unitarian meeting house to replace the one Joseph Priestley had ministered to but which was burnt down during the 1791 riots. The meeting house was purchased and consecrated by the Catholic church in 1862.

Thinktank is open daily except 24, 25 and 26 December. Admission charged.

For more information visit www.thinktank.ac or telephone 0121 202 2222.



Above: Thinktank at Millennium Point
Below: The Smethwick Engine in action



St Michael's
Catholic Church

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Soho Foundry, Smethwick

Foundry Rd, Smethwick B66 2LL

Interior of
the Soho
Foundry



William
Murdock's
cottage



Built for the construction of Boulton & Watt steam engines in 1796, the main part of this huge building still survives. William Murdock lived in one of the cottages nearby.

Please note the Soho Foundry and Murdock's Cottage form part of the Avery Weigh-Tronix works and are only accessible by special appointment.

For more information or to arrange a visit to the Avery Historical Museum contact: alound@awtxglobal.com or telephone 0121 568 1667.

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Soho House, Handsworth

Soho Avenue, Birmingham B18 5LB

Soho House was the home of Matthew Boulton between 1766 until his death in 1809. The house was a regular venue for meetings of the Lunar Society.

Soho House is now a museum run by Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, and contains fine collections of ormolu, silver, furniture and other important material associated with Boulton.

Soho House is open from Easter to the end of October, Tuesday to Sunday 12 noon – 4pm, closed Mondays except Bank Holidays. Winter guided tours every Thursday at 11am.

For more information visit www.birminghammuseums.org.uk or telephone 0121 348 8150.

Pair of Ormolu & Blue John ewers, Boulton & Fothergill, c1772



Above:
The dining room – a regular venue for meetings of the Lunar Society

Soho's elegant exterior was designed by the architect James Wyatt

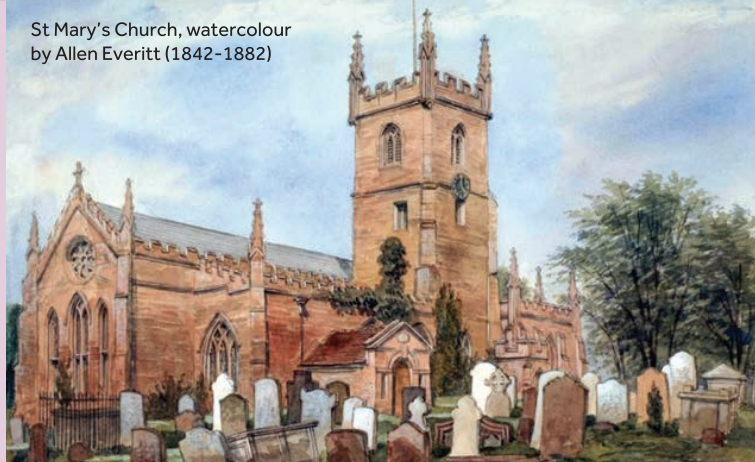


15

St Mary's Parish Church, Handsworth

Hamstead Rd, Birmingham B20 2RB

St Mary's Church, watercolour by Allen Everitt (1842-1882)



St Mary's Church today



Boulton memorial by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdock are all buried in St Mary's Church. Boulton's memorial was sculpted by John Flaxman, one of the most gifted sculptors of the age. The James Watt memorial chapel was added in 1826, probably by Thomas Rickman. The large statue of Watt was created by Sir Francis Chantrey (1781 – 1741).

Open Saturdays 2pm – 4pm between May and September or by prior appointment. For further information call 0121 554 3407.

16

Aston Hall, Aston

Trinity Road, Birmingham B6 6JD

Constructed between 1618 and 1635, Aston Hall is one of the finest Jacobean country houses in the country. In 1817 the Hall was leased by James Watt junior, son of the steam engineer and business partner of Matthew Boulton's son, Matthew Robinson Boulton.

Now a museum run by Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, the Hall contains significant collections of furniture, silver and other material associated with Watt Junior.

Aston Hall is open from Easter to the end of October, Tuesday to Sunday 12noon – 4pm. Closed home match days and Mondays, except Bank Holidays. Winter guided tours every Wednesday at 11am.

For more information visit www.birminghammuseums.org.uk or telephone 0121 348 8100.

James Watt Junior's
elephant coach badges



The Great Hall



Aston Hall from
Lady Holte's Garden

17

Sarehole Mill, Hall Green

Cole Bank Road, Birmingham B13 0BD

The attic
floor or
garner



View of the mill from
the dipping platform.
The chimney is a mid
19th century addition

Although better known for its association with the young JRR Tolkien, Sarehole Mill has a link with Matthew Boulton who leased it between 1756 and 1761.

When Boulton took over the lease of the mill, the family business was still based in Snow Hill in Birmingham town centre. Boulton probably used Sarehole as a rolling mill to produce sheet metal until he moved all production to his new Soho Manufactory in the 1760s.

Today Sarehole is a museum run by Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and one of two surviving working watermills in the city.

The Mill is open from Easter to the end of October, Tuesday to Sunday 12noon – 4pm, closed Mondays except Bank Holidays. Winter guided tours every Friday at 11am.

For more information visit www.birminghammuseums.org.uk or telephone 0121 348 8160.