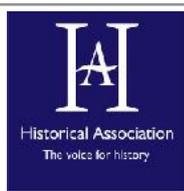


A personal selection of local, British Isles and world, history.

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BEORMINGAHĀM

Helen Young writes for the excellent *Mid-Trent & Mercia Historian* but is also a City Guide. You can access her self-guided walking tour of Brum at <https://www.pandemictoursapp.com>. There is more to Birmingham than most of us realise so do read on....



Birmingham has been a settlement for more than 1,400 years. It's believed to have been established by Beorma's people - the Beormingas. They were a Saxon tribe who travelled south along the Tame Valley to settle in the area. The 1553 Survey of the Borough of Birmingham documents 18 streets within the city.

Birmingham did not grow around major rivers like many other UK cities. Birmingham does have small rivers, but they do not pass through the centre - the city built itself around a network of canals that connected the country together, forming the most important piece of infrastructure of the time. It's often claimed that Birmingham has more canals than Venice; while this isn't entirely true, with 35 miles of waterways, Birmingham does have more miles of canal than Venice. The canals were dug out to transport goods and materials, like coal and iron. At the time, they were the quickest and most efficient form of transport. As many canals meet in the Midlands, Birmingham really is the heart of the country's canal network. Maintaining the canal network was expensive, and trains and road vehicles soon rendered the canals redundant. By 1980 all commercial use of Birmingham's canals had stopped, and they had fallen into ruin for a short time. Today, the canals of Birmingham's city centre provide a scenic backdrop to the restaurants, shops and entertainment facilities that now line its banks.

There are many interesting sights along the canals of Birmingham. Here are a few not to miss:



The Mailbox

The roots of the Mailbox (left¹) trace back to Birmingham's industrial heyday when it served as a sorting and storage facility for Royal Mail. Erected in the 1970s, this imposing structure was a bustling hub. There is a network of underground tunnels beneath the city, which once served industrial purposes. These were relatively easy to excavate as the underlying geology is soft sandstone. One

of the main tunnels is 400m long and was used to transport cages full of mail between the Mailbox and platform 12 of New Street Station. However, as times changed, so did the nature of communication. With the decline of traditional postal services, the Mailbox also declined. The canal side area was left derelict and crime rates increased. The area underwent a transformation in the early 2000s, evolving into a multifaceted destination that seamlessly blends commerce, culture, and luxury. The increase of people in the area, along with housing along the sides of the canal, reduced crime levels and turned this part of the city into a desirable place to be.

Gas Street Basin

Gas Street Basin (right²) is situated where the Worcester and Birmingham Canal meets the Birmingham Canal Navigations, known as BCN. The origins of Gas Street Basin



date back to the late-18th century. When the Worcester & Birmingham Company started their canal at Gas Street Basin, the BCN insisted on a physical barrier to prevent the new canal from benefiting from their water. The Worcester Bar was constructed to divide the two canals. Goods had to be moved by hand between boats on either side. Although the canals are now joined via a lock, the Worcester Bar still exists, with boats moored to both sides of it. A small plaque dedicated to it can be seen on the side of the Canal-side pub. During the 1990s much of the area around the basin was redeveloped and the older buildings and many of the Grade II Listed buildings were refurbished and repurposed. Today, Gas Street Basin has evolved into a vibrant leisure and entertainment destination.

Brindley Place

This area (right³) is named after the renowned engineer James Brindley, who was an influential figure in the development of Britain's canal system during the 18th century. Born in 1716 in Buxton, Derbyshire, Brindley's visionary



work revolutionised the transportation of goods and raw materials across the country. He constructed what's often thought of as the first English canal of economic importance, connecting the coal mines of Runcorn to the textile mills of Manchester in the north-west of England. Brindley's canals become the lifeblood of the country and he is thought to have been responsible for around 360 miles of the country's canal network. His accomplishments almost certainly helped to hasten the Industrial Revolution. Brindley Place is a historic district of wharves and warehouses. It is one of the most visited and commercially successful areas of Birmingham with around four million visitors a year. The modern-day development combines contemporary architecture with the historic roots of the canal network. Birmingham's Sea Life Centre is found here, along with the Legoland Discovery Centre. The waterfront was revitalised, creating a seamless integration of the old and the new.

The Roundhouse



The Roundhouse (left⁴) was designed by architect W.H. Ward and constructed in 1874. It is one of Birmingham's most distinctive, but perhaps least known about, buildings. It was originally designed as stables for around 50 horses, and a stores facility for Birmingham's Corporation Tramways. The horses would have been used for laying the early roads in the city and for carrying goods. Most of the horses were sold around the 1950s and the building remained in use by the council until the 1990s. The unique circular shape of the building served a functional purpose, allowing trams to be

turned around efficiently on the turntable within. Its strategic location near the canal network made it an integral part of Birmingham's infrastructure. It was crucial for the transportation of goods and people during the city's industrial heyday.

As transportation evolved, the Roundhouse fell out of use. Most of it has now been transformed into office space. It houses display spaces and has a stable made up to show how the buildings would have looked. In the courtyard are planters with names on them. These were all named after horses that were shown as being kept in the Roundhouse from a document dated from 1916. To the front of the courtyard are two houses where the workers would have lived. Ed: HS2 whilst being constructed at Curzon Street station, uncovered the remains of a roundhouse built in 1837 to a design by Robert Stephenson, it could well be the oldest railway roundhouse in the world.

There are many other interesting features along the city centre's canals. *Cambrian House* used to be a toll house for the canal. It is typical in that it is small-scale version of a Georgian building, with two-stories and multi-pane sash windows. The *Coffin Works* is a Grade II listed building that was used by the Newman Brothers. Fittings for the funerals of Winston Churchill and Princess Diana were manufactured here. The site now houses a museum. If, like many others, Birmingham isn't top of your list of cities to visit, please do think again – there's lots to see if you know where to look.

Ed: If you are wondering about the photo on page one, it is my favourite Brum building - The Library, the largest municipal library in Europe.¹⁰

THE OTHER BIRMINGHAM

Tom Holland's and Dominic Sandbrook's *The Rest is History* (Bloomsbury Publishing 2024) contains some amazing pieces. None more so than a letter from JRR Tolkien (right)⁵ to his publisher Sir Stanley Unwin (below)⁶ in July 1945, sent from Pembroke College Oxford. Here are the key excerpts.

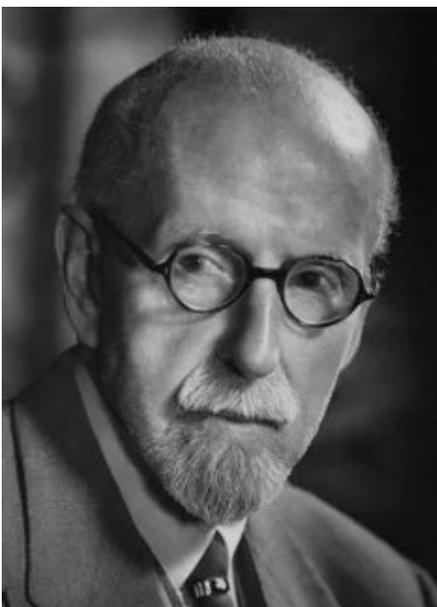


One of the book's main preoccupations is, of course, with death. As you know I spent some of the last war fighting on the Western Front, those endless miles of seething, tortured earth inspiring the darker elements of Mordor.

I have served as an air-raid warden in North Oxford, doing my best for house prices in the desirable OX2 postcode - but it has still informed my writing. I think you will like the Nazgûl, pterodactyl-riding figures of terror who patrol the sky as a kind of air defence system.

More pertinently, perhaps, in this age of totalitarianism, atomic bombs, concentration camps and Clement Attlee, the ring at the heart of the novel is a symbol of intellectual, technological and moral corruption. How much evil can we inflict in the name of conquering evil? Can we defeat Sauron without breeding new Saurons? This brings me to my second theme: the inevitability of loss. We may, perhaps, have lost ourselves in recent decades; what is undeniable, though, is that we have lost old friends and old certainties. And although this isn't an overtly Christian story, it is about the greatest loss of all - the fall from a prelapsarian state of grace (such as being orphaned aged twelve and having to live near the Five Ways roundabout in the centre of Birmingham) - and the possibility of redemption (such as moving from Birmingham to Oxford).

While I don't want to give away the ending, is it possible that the only way to destroy Sauron is to destroy yourself, like Christ himself? *The Lord of the Rings* is also a book about the future - and about the past. You will remember how I combined these two elements in *The Hobbit*, dropping our domestic, rural, nostalgic, pipe-weed smoking prime minister, Stanley Baggins, into my day-job land of dwarves, dragons, spiders and elves.



I have tried to do something similar in this sequel. As well as tapping into our deep past: the opening scene is inspired by one of my earliest memories - a firework display to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. Aged five, I watched that display from the village of Sarehole, in North Worcestershire, an idyll of meadows and streams, mills and copses, in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia - the inspiration for the land of Rohan, as well as the Shire in *The Hobbit*.

Such idylls are, of course, always under threat: the theme of this book, as much as its prequel. I recall how Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain's smouldering imperial leviathan, threatened to overwhelm my Sarehole, just as Sauron threatens the Shire. You ask about the ending. I am contemplating a penultimate chapter called *The Scouring of the Shire* in which bossy, big-government, house-building jobsworths tax all the decent hard-

working yeomen of England. But we will see.

Yours sincerely

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.

MEDIEVAL SURGERY⁷

Veronica writes ref J&T No. 144: Henry VIII was not the only royal prince of the time who was a jousting enthusiast, nor the only one to sustain a serious injury. In 1559 Henry II of France, a popular and competent king, sustained an injury which left him with the splinters of a lance deep in his eye. Despite rather gruesome attempts, using the head of an executed felon, to work out how to save the king, he died a few days later. To go to another Henry, who received a serious facial injury, but was saved by what must be one of the most amazing examples of battlefield surgery, as a result of which this Henry's life was saved, also amazing in the circumstances.



In 1503 Henry IV rode against Henry Percy's - 'Hotspur's' - rebel army at Shrewsbury. He gave a command to his eldest son, Henry, Prince of Wales - Prince Hal, later Henry V - who played a significant role. In the battle, Henry was hit in the face by an arrow. Despite this he went on fighting for half-an-hour before they dragged him off the field, which might leave you

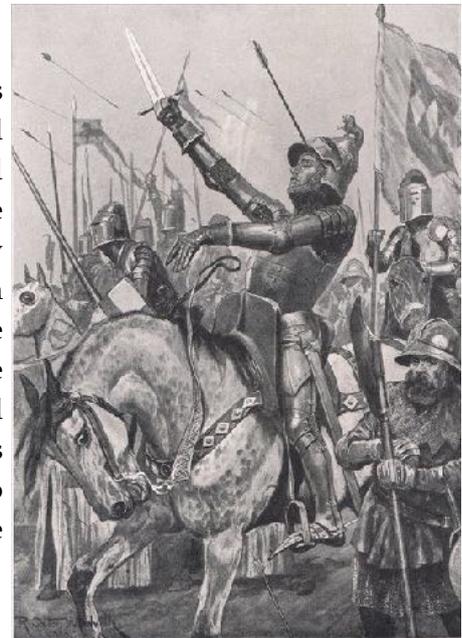
impressed by his courage, or his determination to wreak slaughter amongst the enemy. (Worked well at Agincourt.) . He was taken to Kenilworth Castle, where surgeons removed the arrow shaft, but left the arrowhead six inches in his face, which left it close to vital structures, including his spinal cord. No one was prepared to attempt anything more, understandable since the most likely result of intervention was the death of the prince. Eventually, the king's surgeon, John Bradmore arrived, having been taken out of gaol in London to attend. Bradmore was from a family of surgeons and was very experienced. He was also a metal worker, being referred to as a gemster, meaning he made jewellery and could do fine work.

It was several days since the wound and the flesh was closing around it. Bradmore needed firstly to open it. He did so by making some fine pieces of elder, wrapped in clean linen soaked in honey and rosewater, a bactericide, making them gradually larger. He then used a surgical instrument he himself made for the purpose (below⁸). To avoid life-threatening movement of the arrow he had to remove it gently and carefully. His instrument allowed him to position tongs close to the arrow (this was all done by feel - microsurgery without the microscope), then to gain firm hold with the tongs. He then gradually removed the arrowhead with a screw mechanism, he had incorporated. It was out, but the ever-present risk of infection threatened. Every day over the next weeks, Bradmore carefully cleaned the wound using bactericides, starting at the full depth of six inches and gradually moving out, using a new technique still used today, to ensure the



wound healed from the inside out.

How do we know all this? Bradmore, no doubt proud of his work and justifiably so, has left us a detailed description of all he did, both in Latin and English versions, with red underlining and even a neat diagram of his amazing little instrument. This has allowed careful investigation of how it was done. The King gave him a pension and a royal pardon for his counterfeiting - least he could do. Ironically, during the battle, Hotspur raised his visor and received an arrow in the face (right⁹). That killed him. No, Prince Hal didn't kill Hotspur in single combat, leaving Falstaff to make a hilarious attempt to take the glory, but it's a lot more amusing. Back to Henry VIII - I think Henry was cruel and vindictive because Henry was cruel and vindictive.



Ed: John Bradmore (died 1412) wrote *Philomena* a treatise on surgery that contains the information above. His techniques were groundbreaking and underpin some modern surgery techniques. Examples are the development of a clamp that could stop bleeding without cauterising the wound. Development of the bracelet and hoop to reduce fractures, a precursor to modern casting techniques. Use of a sponge soaked in narcotic solution to anaesthetise patients during surgery. Another surgeon was Thomas Morstede (1411 - 1450) who served Henry IV, V and VI. His manuscript was *A Fair Book of Surgery* and he was asked to *raise equip and lead* a company of surgeons during the Agincourt campaign of 1415.

APOLOGIA

John writes: I feel I must comment on the article about the bombing of Dresden (J&T No.144). The bombing was undertaken by 772 RAF bombers (under Harris) as well as 527 of the USAAF (under General Carl Spaatz) as a joint operation. It was at the specific request of Stalin, who saw Dresden as a major railway & communications hub, threatening to hinder his army's move westward to defeat the Germans. This was confirmed by the military planners in London and Washington, ultimately by Churchill and Eisenhower.

The modern estimate of deaths is actually 25,000, and these are the Germans own figures. Compare this with the firestorm created in Tokyo only 3 weeks later by the USAAF, when 90,000 were killed, and a further million made homeless. And this at a time when the Nazi war machine was still slaughtering up to 10,000 civilians a day. Of course, Dresden was dreadful, but so was the London Blitz, Coventry, Hiroshima and Stalingrad. Harris did not retire to Africa to avoid criticism. Having been brought up and lived in Africa for many prior years, he chose to live there for several years before returning home, to live in Goring on Thames.

Ed. A lesson in using multiplecp sources.

1. Mailbox photo courtesy of Expedia.
2. Gas Street Basin photo courtesy of booking.com.
3. Brindley Place photo courtesy of Tripadvisor.
4. Roundhouse photo courtesy of architects Burrell Foley Fischer.
5. JRR Tolkien courtesy of Harper Collins publishers.
6. Sir Stanley Unwin courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
7. Includes information from Raphael Holinshead's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (1577), Wikipedia and knightstemplar.co/exploring-the-impact-and-legacy-ofjohn-bradmore/
8. Bradmore's instrument courtesy of The Worshipful Company of Fletchers.
9. Death of Henry *Harry Hotspur* Percy, from a 1910 illustration by Richard Caton Woodville Jr.
10. Courtesy of Wikipedia.