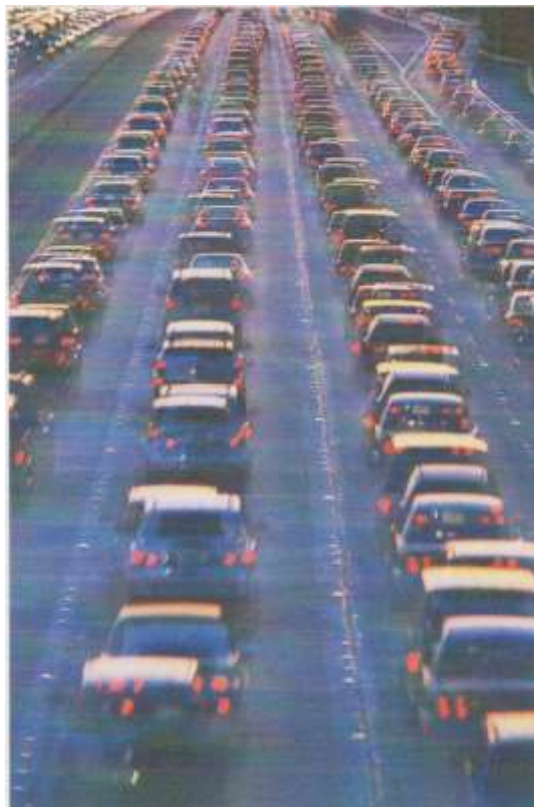


The Inner Ring Road, Underpasses & Murals of Birmingham

Keith M Jordan





CONTENTS

	Page
List of Illustrations.	(i)
List of Photographs.	(ii)
Introduction.	(iv)
Chapter 1. Inner Ring Road.	1.
Chapter 2. Aspects of Demolition.	4.
Chapter 3. Sir. Herbert Manzoni.	7.
Chapter 4. Subways & Underpasses.	8.
Chapter 5. Circus Murals.	15.
Chapter 6. Bell Street.	45.
Chapter 7. Subway Paintings.	47.
Chapter 8. Building Mural.	56.
Chapter 9. Wall Painting.	58.
Bibliography.	59.
Index.	60.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
1. 1952 Map of Birmingham City Centre.	2.
2. 1972 Map of completed Inner Ring Road scheme.	3.
3. 2005 Map of Birmingham City Centre.	14.
4. Numbered plan of Old Square mural.	27.

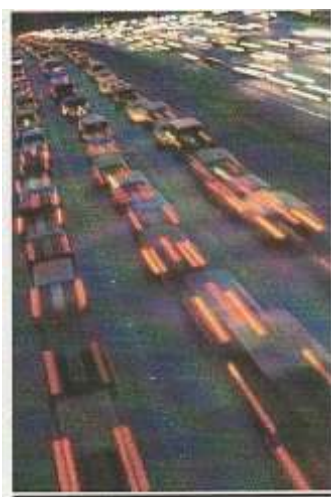


LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

	Page
1. Hill Street subway beneath Smallbrook Queensway.	3.
2. Demolition in progress.	4.
3. Paradise Street.	4.
4. Smallbrook Street/Suffolk Street.	4.
5. Reference Library, Ratcliff Place.	5.
6. Reading Room in the Reference Library.	5.
7. Birmingham College of Technology.	6.
8. Gridlock at St. Chad's Circus.	8.
9. Colmore Circus.	10
10. Holloway Circus.	10.
11. Lancaster Circus.	11.
12. Masshouse Circus.	11.
13. Old Square.	11.
14. Paradise Street.	12.
15. St. Chad's Circus.	12.
16. St. Martin's Circus.	13.
17. Civil War mural, Colmore Circus.	15.
18./19/20. Watt, Boulton, Priestley & Murdoch mural (3 photos).	16.
22/23. Colmore Square.	18.
24. Holloway Circus mural.	19.
21. Overall view of Watt, Boulton, Priestley, & Murdoch mural.	17.
25/26/27. Holloway Circus mural (3 photos).	20.
28. Typical Lancaster Circus subway.	21.
29. Lancaster Circus.	22.
30. Entrance to Lancaster Circus subway.	22.
30. Looking towards Moor Street Queensway.	23.
31. Priory Queensway/Moor Street Queensway.	24.
33/34/35/36. Old Square mural (4 photos).	25/26.
37. Old Square.	28.
38. Paradise Circus.	29.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS (CONT'D)

		Page
39/40/41.	Paradise Circus subway (3 photos)	29/30.
42.	Subway near Fletcher's Walk.	31.
43/44.	John F Kennedy memorial (2 photos).	32.
45-51.	Snow Hill mural (7 photos).	35/36/37.
52.	Manzoni Gardens.	40.
53-58.	St. Martin's Circus mural (6 photos).	41-44.
59.	Bell Street subway.	45.
60/61.	Bell Street mural. (2 photos).	
62/63/64.	Smallbrook Queensway subway (3 photos).	47/48.
65/66/67.	High Street subway (3 photos).	49/50.
68/69/70.	Moor Street Station subway (3 photos).	51/52.
71/72/73/74.	Subway near Masshouse Circus (4 photos).	53/54/55.
75/76/77.	Lower Bull Street mural (3 photos).	56/57.
78.	Wall Painting — Constitution Hill.	58.



INTRODUCTION

I have been a member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group now for approximately 15 years. During this period I have been involved in numerous projects, most of which necessitated, to a lesser or greater extent, the taking of photographs.

Anyone connected with local history will I believe, sooner or later, become aware of the importance of incorporating some sort of photographic evidence. It is incredible how quickly things change in the modern world, sometimes in a matter of months, or even weeks, in certain circumstances.

Over the years, I have therefore gathered together a collection of snaps, mainly in and around Sutton Coldfield, but also including all sorts of miscellaneous material. It was only when I was looking through the card index I noticed I had accumulated many pictures of the city centre, most of which were associated with Birmingham's notorious ring road.

The Council are now making great strides towards the dismantling of this barrier, the old subways and underpasses are disappearing quite rapidly and routes which I had once been used to walking are no longer in existence.

It came to me that perhaps details of why the Inner Ring Road was built, what it looked like in its entirety, why it resulted in failure and what sort of conditions the people of Birmingham had to endure during the 1970's, 80's & 90's, might be of interest.

Hopefully, this brief summary will provide a record of a period in Birmingham's history that, when one looks back, I think will always be regarded as a controversial one.

Keith M Jordan
Sutton Coldfield 2006.



CHAPTER 1. (INNER RING ROAD)

This is the story of the Inner Ring Road, or Queensway as it is officially known, and the Paintings & Murals which were to be found in the subways and underpasses beneath the road.

It is a relatively short story, as the ring road which encircled the central core of the City Centre, and given the less than affectionate title of the 'concrete collar', did not last for much more than 30 years in its original concept.

The idea of building an 'inner loop' around the City Centre had first been suggested as far back in time as 1917. The advent of the Second World War, however, was to prove a watershed and, despite heavy demands made upon the depleted staff of the Public Works Department by civil defence duties etc., much thought was given to the problems Birmingham would face in post-war reconstruction and planning.

In October 1941 the City Engineer & Surveyor indicated the basic lines of approach, which he thought ought be taken. As a result, four Advisory Planning Panels were appointed, upon which members of the City Council and outside bodies were represented. These panels investigated the following remits: -

- (a) Traffic Problems.
- (b) Limitation of the City.
- (c) Redevelopment Areas.
- (d) Housing.

Apart from rebuilding bomb-damaged properties and slum clearance, the most pressing problem in the City Centre was traffic congestion. In 1942 the Advisory (Traffic) Planning Panel reported to the City Council on the principles for the future planning of the central area.

The City Council duly approved the scheme in July 1944 and work began on preparing a Parliamentary Bill to obtain the necessary powers to construct the Inner Ring Road, as it was to be called.

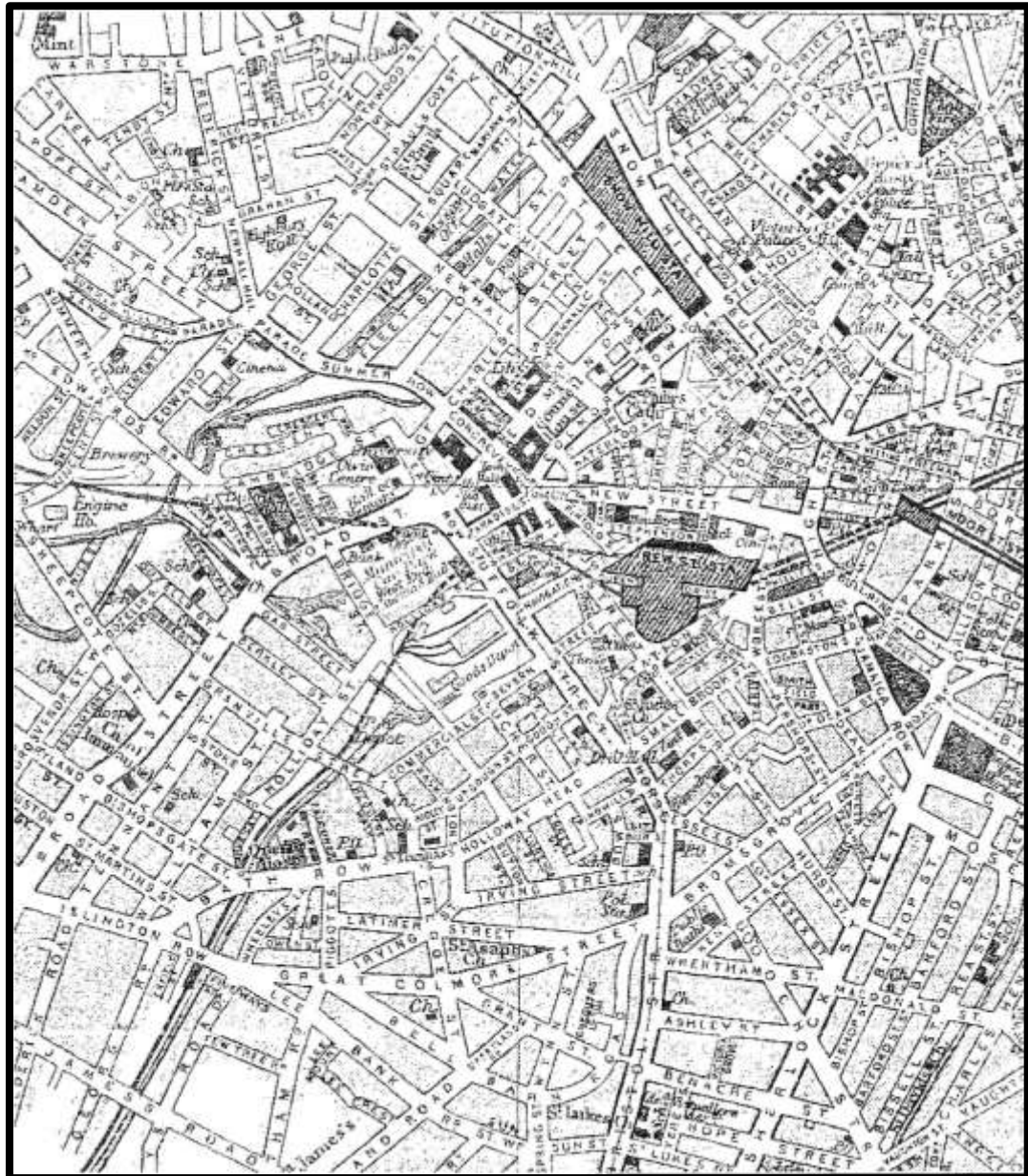


Illustration 1. *1952 Map of Birmingham City Centre*

After many years of delay and frustration the then Minister of Transport the Rt. Hon. Harold Watkinson finally gave his approval for the scheme to proceed on the 18th January 1957. Shortly afterwards work began on the first section of the road between Horse Fair and the entrance to New Street Station.

On the 8th April 1959 a small portion was opened — the pedestrian subway beneath the road leading from Hill Street to Hurst Street. This was also the first subway constructed in the country to be the only means by which pedestrians could cross the road.



1. *Hill Street Subway beneath Smallbrook Queensway.*

The Inner Ring Road then continued to advance around the City Centre and the first section of the road proper was opened on the 11th March 1960 by the Rt. Hon. Ernest Marples. The complete circuit was first used by traffic on the 4th January 1971, the official opening taking place on the 7th April that year, when the Queen visited Birmingham.

The total length of roadwork constructed was 3.5 miles, out of which the 'Ring' itself accounted for 2.25 miles and there were 52 pedestrian subways.

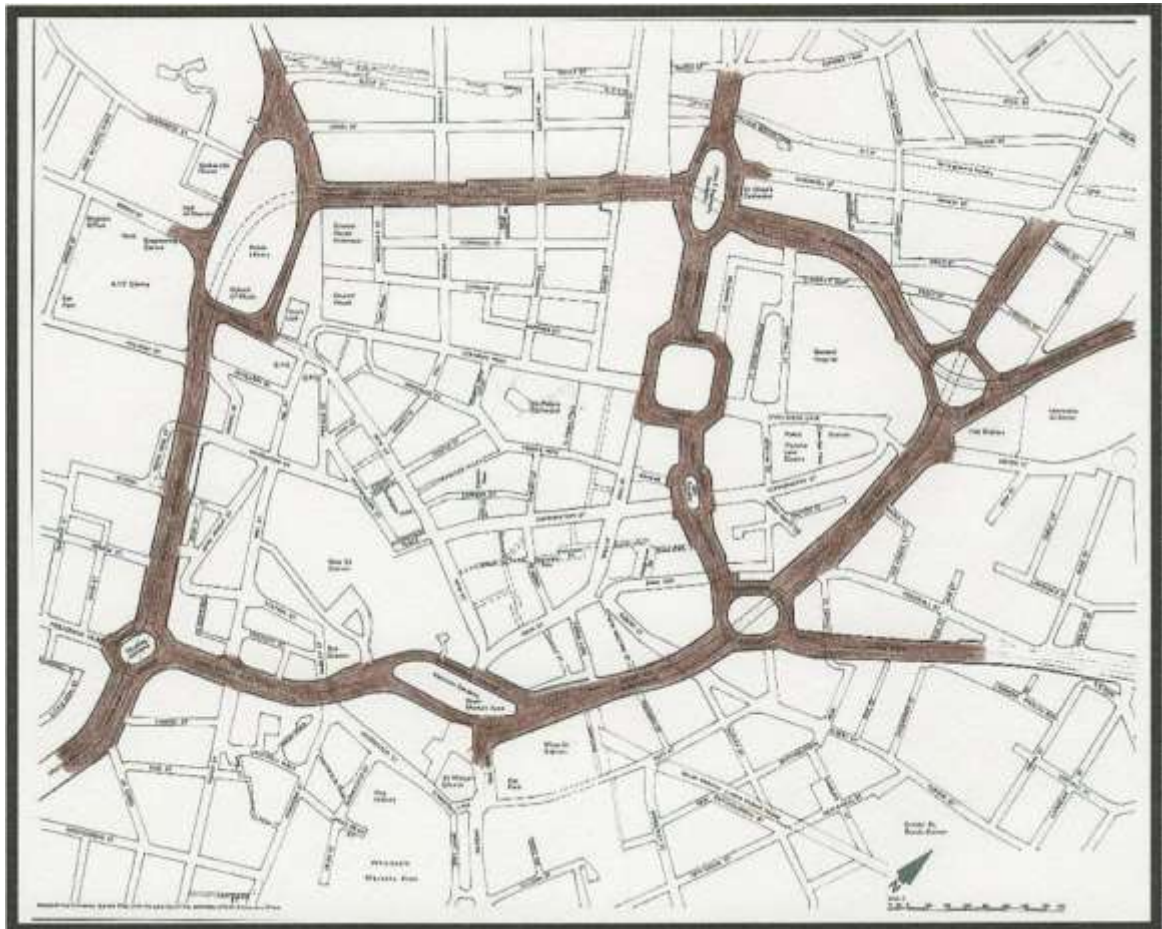


Illustration 2. *1972 Map of completed Inner Ring Road scheme.*

CHAPTER 2. (ASPECTS OF DEMOLITION)

For many Birmingham citizens, it appeared that the City Centre from the mid-1950's right through into the 1970's was one big building site with new holes seeming to materialize overnight. All around them the old Birmingham they had known was being pulled down.



2. *Demolition in Progress circa 1963.*



3. *Paradise Street circa 1971.*



4. *Smallbrook Street/Suffolk Street - clearing the way for Smallbrook Queensway 1957.*

Demolition of large swathes of the city were greeted with very mixed feelings and newspaper articles of the time included statements such as: -

- (a) *'Demolition destroys both slum property and architectural treasures.'*
- (b) *'Bulldozers were determined to succeed where the Luftwaffe had failed.'*
- (c) *'Man must have created in central Birmingham one of the most hostile localities on earth.'*

In contrast, however, Geoffrey Winter of the Yorkshire Post described Birmingham as '*A giant, shedding tattered clothes and struggling into a new suit.*'

I must admit that my own memories of the time tended to sympathise with the earlier comments and two examples spring readily to mind, namely:-



5. *Reference Library, Ratcliff Place.*

(i) The magnificent Reference Library in Ratcliff Place was tragically replaced by the present Central Library in 1971. This complex being later famously described by Prince Charles in a very derogatory fashion when he likened it to "*A place where books are incinerated, not kept.* "



6. *Reading room in the Reference Library.*

The Reading room in the Reference Library I remember well from my own early days as a student, when I used it often. I always thought it had a unique atmosphere and character about it.



7. *Birmingham College of Technology.*

(ii) Another building I had personal knowledge of was the imposing Birmingham College of Technology in Suffolk Street, which was pulled down in the late sixties to make way for a bland office block with a row of shops beneath. Today, these shops are mostly boarded-up, giving a sad and neglected air to the area.

Unfortunately, one could cite many other instances of what could aptly be described as 'vandalism' during this period.

In any given subject there are contrasting views and, in their brief review of the history of Birmingham over the centuries, the City of Birmingham Information Department described the development of parts of the city, as follows: -

'Adjacent to the City Centre, five massive areas have been re-developed in their entirety. New roads, underpasses, flyovers, open spaces and landscaping are the necessary expensive and impressive ancillaries to serve the housing and shopping estates. Birmingham is not resting on its successes, but is looking ahead, continually seeking to improve where improvement is needed: striving to maintain all that is best in the city.'

CHAPTER 3. (SIR HERBERT MANZONI)

The principal figure in the building of the Inner Ring Road was Herbert John Manzoni, who was the City Engineer & Surveyor during this period.

He was born in Birkenhead in 1899 and was educated there and at Liverpool University. He subsequently served three years under the pupilage of the Borough Engineer of Birkenhead and stayed on as a general engineering assistant.

In 1923 he was appointed as an engineering assistant in the Sewers and Rivers Section of the Public Works Department, Birmingham and four years later was promoted to be Chief Engineer of that Section. He was appointed Deputy City Engineer & Surveyor in 1929 and, on the 17th July 1935, he became City Engineer & Surveyor.

He was responsible for the planning and construction of the Inner Ring Road. for the five Redevelopment Areas involving a vast area of slum clearance and for various traffic schemes.

In 1941 he was awarded the C.B.E. and he was Knighted in 1954. In 1961 Birmingham University gave him an honorary DSC. degree. On his retirement in 1963 he joined the firm of W V Zinn & Associates, as a Consultant.

He died on the 18th November 1972, after a period of ill health. He left a reputation of Manzoni and Birmingham being looked upon as synonymous.

There is no doubt that the Inner Ring Road was Manzoni's project, which he pushed through by way of his own personal determination and the high regard in which he was held by local politicians and councillors alike.

Sir Herbert Manzoni's basic approach was expressed clearly in his very positive views about the useful life-span of Birmingham's buildings, in which he argued *"They should be constructed to last 15-20 years and should then be pulled down."*

He disliked all things old and Victorian. In 1957 he expressed his opinions about rebuilding in a way which still has repercussions for Birmingham. He said: -

"I have never been very certain as to the value of tangible links with the past. They are often more sentimental than valuable. In fact, I sometimes deplore the modern tendency to pay exaggerated respect to everything old."

He subsequently went on to say: -

"As to Birmingham's buildings, there is little of real worth in our architecture. Its replacement should be an improvement."

Little room for doubt in those statements then!

CHAPTER 4. (SUBWAYS & UNDERPASSES)

The Inner Ring Road was an 'engineer's plan' and not a 'planner's plan', giving priority to the needs of traffic rather than pedestrians.

During the 1960's & 1970's Birmingham underwent rapid change on an unprecedented scale, in terms of building and highway construction. Although this resulted in considerable commercial activity and a very high level of vehicular access into the heart of the city, it also produced a physical environment that fell short of public aspirations.

The Inner Ring Road created a barrier around the central core, presenting a depressing and unfriendly environment and a centre through which pedestrian movement was difficult, lacking in cohesion and creating a very poor image. Quite often, the only way around or across the City Centre for pedestrians was through dark and threatening subways.

They eventually became thoroughly disliked by pedestrians. Through the 1980's & 1990's they became dirty and dangerous places, where people felt apprehensive to walk because of increasing numbers of muggers. Very rarely were they used at night and they became the haunts of drunks, miscreants, beggars and homeless sleeping rough.



A short newspaper article written for the Sunday Mercury by Richard Williamson on the 26th April 1998 successfully encapsulates the story of Birmingham's failed attempt to segregate vehicular & pedestrian traffic in the City Centre and the way people now view the experiment, which took place during this period.

Surfacing from tunnel vision

By Richard Williamson

THEY called it the Upside Down City... but it was a civic dream that turned into an urban nightmare.

Now the reality of Birmingham's underworld is a bleak tunnel where people scurry past a blank-faced beggar.

In Colmore Circus a newsagent looks out on a bleak, empty, windswept cavern where only the pigeons seem happy.

There is something sinister and soulless about the strip lights, cold tiles and starkly empty walkways of Kennedy Subway. The pedestrians look as if they can't wait to reach the open air.

Soon, it will all be swept away for good.

Yet it began with high hopes and idealism in the 1950s when Sir Herbert Manzoni began masterminding a city for the future.

The buildings that survived Hitler's bombers were falling to the demolition men and in their place rose a concrete and glass metropolis that would be the most modern city in Europe.

A crucial part of the plan was to separate the people from the cars.

While the traffic kept moving overhead on the new ring road, pedestrians would be safe down below in a labyrinth of subways.

It was intended to be a bustling, bright world, decorated with murals. There would be busy kiosks and arcades of shops to tempt the strolling passers-by.

Here and there you can still catch a glimpse of how it was all meant to be.

A young woman peers into a shop window in the Bull Street subway and a shopper hurries towards St Chad's Cathedral while drivers fume in a traffic jam.

But the truth is that Birmingham's tunnel vision turned the city into a place where most Brummies fear to tread.

Now the subterranean city is disappearing.

The first subway to go was at Paradise Circus,

followed by the Hurst Street underpass. There are trees in the Old Square instead of a deep hole.

Colmore Circus, St Chad's, Masshouse, Bull Ring... one by one they will all be filled in.

The irony is that many of the streets where once the car was king are now pedestrianised as Birmingham changes its shape yet again.

The certainty is that few of the reluctant human moles who come blinking into the sunlight will mourn the passing of a topsy-turvy city.

And these pictures will soon be a page in the underground history of Birmingham.

Newspaper cutting from Sunday Mercury dated 26th April 1998.

In addition to the complex network of subways, the Inner Ring Road also spawned eight large underpasses, or circuses as they were designated. They say there is always '*an exception to the rule*' and, situated on Priory Queensway between Colmore Circus and Masshouse Circus, Old Square retained its original name.

The following photographs show the various circuses in alphabetical order:-



9. *Colmore Circus 1975.*



10. *Holloway Circus can be seen towards the bottom left of the photograph.*



11. *Lancaster Circus.*



12. *Masshouse Circus.*



13. *Old Square 1967.*



14. *Paradise Circus 1975.*



15. *St. Chad's Circus.*



16.

St. Martin's Circus 1973.

In the photograph of St. Martins Circus, Manzoni Gardens can be seen quite clearly. These were named after Sir Herbert Manzoni, the City Engineer & Surveyor, details of whom were given in the previous chapter.

It is perhaps somewhat ironic that the gardens have now disappeared completely beneath the new Bull Ring shopping complex. Bearing in mind his firmly held view that any construction should only last 15-20 years before being pulled down, I am sure he continues to rest easily in his grave!

Another strange fact is that, in 1972, Manzoni Gardens became the site of a giant statue of 'King Kong'! It was 23 feet high and made of fiberglass, the work of Nicholas Munro and was loaned to the City by the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation.

It received a very mixed reception from the people of Birmingham and was sold the next year to a car dealership in Stratford Road, Birmingham, who sold it on in 1976 to a firm in Edinburgh, who used it to advertise their open market.



'King Kong ' in Manzoni Gardens.

Following the completion of several successful schemes involving Colmore Circus, Priory Queensway, Old Square, Masshouse Circus, Moor Street Queensway, St. Martin's Circus & Smallbrook Queensway the character of the City Centre is slowly changing.

The 'concrete collar' has been broken in several places and, by examining the latest map below, it can be seen that, from St. Chad's Circus round to Holloway Circus, the road patterns have drastically altered.

Pedestrians can once more hold their heads up high, as they are no longer forced against their will into the subterranean depths of underground passageways and traffic interchanges.

Plans are already in hand to remove the St. Chad's complex and long term negotiations are in progress in respect of Paradise Circus.

Perhaps within the next decade or so, the infamous Inner Ring Road will no longer exist in its original format and can therefore be safely confined to the history books.

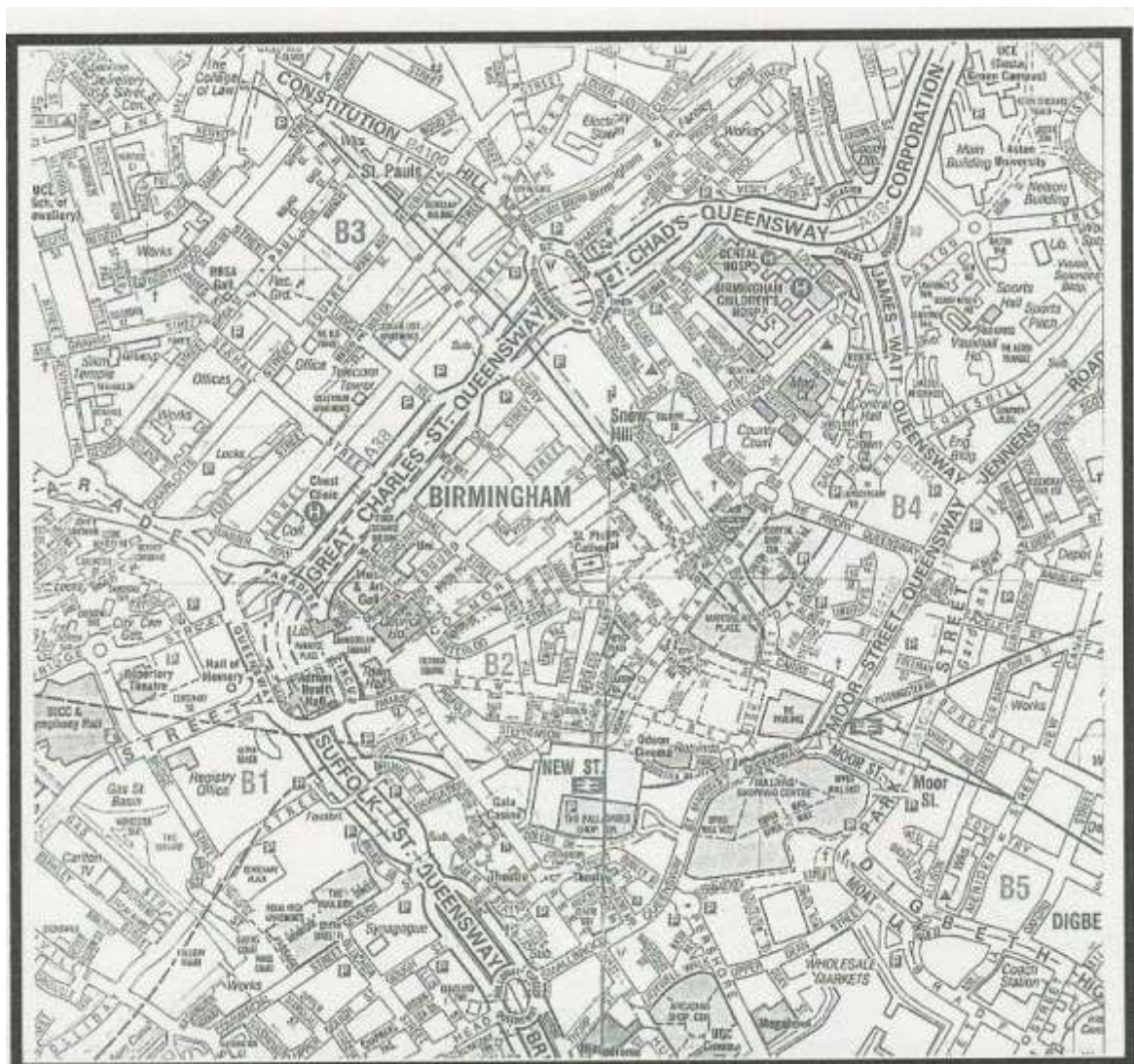


Illustration 3.

Map of Birmingham City Centre 2005.

CHAPTER 5. (CIRCUS MURALS)

Attempts were made over the years to make the subways and underpasses more user friendly, hence the advent of commissions being issued for artists to produce designs for murals and paintings to partly cover the large expanses of soulless and depressing concrete.

Colmore Circus



17. *Civil War Mural 1996.*

The mosaic mural facing north was designed and carried out by William Mitchell & Associates of London. It was 50 feet long x 12 feet high. It depicted a battle between Royalist and Parliamentary Forces during the Civil War, which took place between 1642 & 1646.

Near to the site of the mural in Steelhouse Lane (hence the name) there was a blade mill, which produced many thousands of sword blades & pikes for the Parliamentary side.

The mill was destroyed when Birmingham was attacked by Royalists led by Prince Rupert in the year 1643.

The clay used for the darker tiles in the mural was from a clay pit on the site of the Battle of Adwalton Moor in Yorkshire, where Lord Fairfax led Parliamentary Forces against William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, on the 30th June 1643.

The total cost of the mural was £2,000.



18. View 1. *Watt, Boulton, Priestley & Murdoch mural 1997.*



19. View 2.



20. View 3.



21. *Overall view of Watt, Boulton, Priestly & Murdoch mural 1997.*

A second mural facing West and situated beneath the underpass itself was also designed by William Mitchell & Associates. The size also was 50 feet long x 12 feet high

This one, however, illustrated Birmingham at the time of the Industrial Revolution. It commemorated famous Birmingham Sons namely:- James Watt (1736-1819) & Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), who designed, constructed and developed the steam engine, Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), the non-conformist minister, who discovered oxygen etc. and William Murdoch (1754-1839), who developed the production and use of coal gas.

The overall cost of this mural was also £2,000.

Colmore Circus no longer exists in its original form. Thankfully, the pedestrian underpass and subways have all been filled-in and brought up to street level. A new luxury office complex has been built and this is fronted by a pleasant landscaped & paved piazza, which has been named Colmore Square.

It is not known whether the murals were saved but this is unlikely to be the case, due to the cost involved in removing thousands of individual mosaic tiles and recreating them in another location.



22. View 1.

Colmore Square 2005



23. View 2.

Colmore Square 2005

Holloway Circus

This mural was unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham Alderman H E Tyler J.P. on the 30th June 1966. It is positioned on the inside face of the wall on the north of the underpass, facing towards Smallbrook Queensway.

The mural is based on an original painting by L A Howles ARIBA of the City Architects Department and was designed and constructed by Kenneth Budd. It is 85 feet long x 14 feet high.

It depicts the activities of the Horse Fair, which was held in the street of that name in the immediate area.

The market, or fair, was discontinued by the City Council in 1911, due to lack of support when, on the day, only 11 horses and 1 donkey were brought. The Corporation received a total of 3s 9d as their share of the transactions, against the overall cost of 12s 3d for holding the fair.

The fair was previously held twice a year at Whitsuntide & Michaelmas.

The scene on the mural includes an open top electric tram circa 1908 and lamps which are replicas of those then in use. One of the figures in the crowd represents Mr. D S Thomas who, when the mural was unveiled in 1966, was an Alderman and Chairman of the Committee and after whom the gardens in the underpass were named.

The cost of the mural was £8,000.



24. View 1.

Holloway Circus mural 1997.



25. View 2. *Holloway Circus mural.*



26. *Overall view of mural.*



27 *Side view of mural.*

Lancaster Circus

Lancaster Circus carries an elevated section of the Aston Expressway in a graceful curve, on massive concrete supports.

The area below has been landscaped on several different levels and includes trees and grassed banking.

Pathways crisscross the interchange, but the only means of access is via subways. The circus, however, is quite well used during the daytime as the Birmingham Children's Hospital is situated just off the Queensway in a South Westerly direction. Birmingham Council offices are to the North and, of course, the large Aston University complex is to the East.

No murals or paintings were commissioned for Lancaster Circus and the only decoration in evidence is in the subways, which have patterned glazed tile wall surfaces.



28. *Typical subway leading 10 & from Lancaster Circus.*



29. *Lancaster Circus, showing elevated section of the Aston Expressway.*



30. *Entrance to one of the subways at Lancaster Circus.*

Masshouse Circus

The sprawling area beneath Masshouse Circus never rose above being a strictly functional space and for most of its time it was used as a municipal car park. No attempt was made by the Council to improve the look of the interchange in the way others were.

Recently, radical changes have taken place to Masshouse Circus and the elevated sections of the Queensway at this location have been removed and the whole area lowered. The massive roundabout has also been demolished, much to the relief of everyone. This was designed to open up the route from the centre of the city through to 'Eastside ' and is essential for the regeneration of the new area around Millennium Point, the new Matthew Boulton College of Technology and for the further development opportunities planned by Birmingham City Council, in partnership with the private sector.

Unfriendly pedestrian subways have disappeared and been replaced with an attractive tree lined boulevard, surface level crossings and a bus interchange.



31. *View from Priory Queensway, looking towards Moor Street Queensway where Masshouse Circus used to be.*



32. Looking towards the junction with Priory Queensway from Moor Street Queensway. Matthew Boulton College can be seen in the centre background and on the right is the first of the new buildings which will eventually transform the new Masshouse area.

Old Square

Old Square was a dismal little shopping precinct hidden away beneath the junction of Priory Queensway with Corporation Street, Subways spiralled out from it in all directions.

The mural in Old Square was commissioned by the Birmingham Public Works Department at a cost of £940. It was designed and erected by Kenneth Budd & Associates, who were also responsible for the mosaic mural at Holloway Circus.

It comprised a bas-relief wall panel in cast brass and iron, on a fiberglass backing and its interlinking sections depicted incidents, personalities & buildings associated with Old Square over the centuries.

It was 26 feet long x 5 feet high and was unveiled on the 21st April 1967 by Alderman C V Simpson, Chairman of the Public Works Committee.

In the early Middle Ages, an Augustinian Priory stood in the vicinity of Old Square — hence the name Priory Queensway. The site later came into the ownership of the de Birmingham family and the square itself, one of elegant and imposing town houses, was built in 1713. Over the next century or more, many prominent citizens made their homes there.



33. *Overall view of Old Square mural.*



34. *Close-up View of left hand section of mural.*



35. *Centre section of mural.*



36. *Right hand section of mural.*

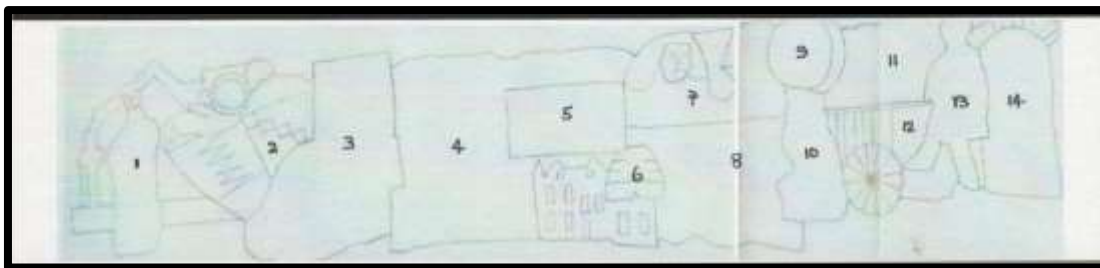


Illustration 4. *Numbered plan of mural — see below for full details*

- 1 Augustinian friar from the Priory.
- 2 The Coat of Arms of the de Bermingham family, who subsequently owned the land.
- 3 The 'Bell' Tavern & the 'Saracens Head' Inn, which stood there in the 16th century.
- 4 The square was designed by William Westley and built by Thomas Kenney in 1713.
- 5 John Wilkes, the famous lock maker, lived at No. 9 between 1713 and 1734.
- 6 Samuel Lloyd lived in the square at No. 13 in 1770. He was the founder of Lloyds Bank and the original motif of the bank was the 'beehive', now of course superceded by the famous 'black horse'.
- 7 Edward Hector, Surgeon & Doctor, lived at No. 1 where he was frequently host to Dr. Johnson.
- 8 At No. 11 was the 'Great Room' and in 1765 a Ball was held there for the Duke of York.
- 9 Samuel Grafton also lived at No. 13, albeit it ten years later than Samuel Lloyd. He was a member of the highly regarded Lunar Society, an organization which came into being around 1776. Other members included such men as Matthew Boulton, James Watt, William Withering, Erasmus Darwin & Josiah Wedgwood.
- 10 In 1794 Miss Lloyd, one of 16 children of Samuel Lloyd, is reported to have eloped from No. 14.
- 11 In 1791 the Revolutionary riots broke out and houses in the square, notably No. 15, were marked for destruction by the mob, but were subsequently saved after fierce fighting.
- 12 Mr. Chavasse crashed his horse & gig into iron railings which stood about the square. This led to their removal in 1829.
- 13 In 1838 William Scholefield became the first Mayor of Birmingham. He lived at No. 1 in the square.
- 14 The square rapidly changed from a residential to a commercial centre during the 19th century and the last of the houses was demolished in 1895.

Happily, the shopping precinct and associated subways have now disappeared completely. The huge hole in the ground has been filled-in and the site brought up to street level. The new square has been paved & landscaped and trees planted. Control of pedestrians is via designated surface level traffic crossings.

Another encouraging point is that the Kenneth Budd mural was saved and has been re-erected in the square, in a similar position to before. This can just be seen on the far right hand side of the photograph.



37.

Old Square —present day view.

Paradise Circus

Paradise Circus covers a large area which contains many important buildings including the Central Library, School of Music, Conservatoire, Adrian Boult Hall, Paradise Forum and the Copthorne Hotel.

Most of the buildings in question were erected in the 1960's boom period and consequently do not possess very much in the way of architectural merit and one is therefore faced with vast expanses of concrete.



38. *Paradise Circus viewed from Paradise Street, looking towards the Birmingham School of Music in the foreground. The Central Library can be seen in the background.*

Although a wide and impressive walkway has now been built above Paradise Circus Queensway in the direction of Centenary Square, the International Conference Centre & Brindley Place, elsewhere the original subways still predominate.

Neither murals or paintings were considered for this site and inevitably the area is now starting to look its age and has a run down and neglected air about it.



39. *Subway entrance to Paradise Circus from Paradise Street.*



40. *Close-up view of subway entrance to Paradise Circus.*



41. *Interior of subway itself, looking towards the steps leading to Fletcher's Walk.*



42. *Subway near Fletcher's Walk, leading 10 Broad Street, Civic Centre & Summer Row.*

St. Chad's Circus

My own personal opinion is that St. Chad's Circus is the best of Birmingham's interchanges. It is smaller than most of the others and has more character. It is nicely landscaped and contains two very important murals, namely:-

J F Kennedy memorial

This memorial was commissioned by Birmingham's Irish community and not, as usually was the case, by the Public Works Department. An amount of £6,000 was raised during the early 1960's.

It was designed and carried out by Kenneth Budd & Associates and is 40 feet long x 10 feet high.

It was unveiled on the 8th July 1968 by Mr. John Molloy, the Irish Ambassador to Britain. A short service of dedication was conducted by Archbishop Dwyer.

The Birmingham Public Works Department provided the site and a water feature was built with a trickling cascade in the foreground.



43. *Two views of the John F Kennedy memorial, St. Chad's Circus.*



44.

The object was to produce a memorial in terms which would be understood in the future equally well as at the present time. The central theme of the design is Kennedy's contact with the people, especially emphasizing his attempt to integrate white and black communities.

The multi-coloured mosaic depicts the President surrounded by people of all races with hands outstretched towards him. Among the crowd is the face of Dr. Martin Luther King.

To the left of the centerpiece is represented his family background, his Irish ancestry being depicted by the landscape and Celtic cross, the latter being the symbol of his faith. Kennedy's wife and children are also illustrated.

To the right of the centerpiece his status as 35th President of the United States of America is depicted by the flags, seal and capitol buildings.

On the far right is suggested national and international conflict, an ever-present reality during the period of Kennedy's Presidency.

The flanking tablets are inscribed: -

'In tribute to John F Kennedy, President of the United States of America 1960-3'

'There are no white or coloured signs on the grave-yards of battle '

An article appeared in the Birmingham Post dated the 21st March 1997 which related to the John F Kennedy memorial. It was sparked by the fact that the mural could possibly come under threat as part of the next phase to make the city centre more pedestrian friendly.

Birmingham councillors were quoted as saying *'Murals commemorating historic events should be saved when bulldozers are sent in to demolish walkways in Birmingham City centre '*

Nothing was heard for a number of years until another article appeared in the Birmingham Post dated the 28th August 2002. This was prompted by plans for Snow Hill having moved a stage further.

At the same time a further small background article was written by Neil Connor.



Newspaper cutting from the Birmingham Post.

Irish community's anger over move of JFK mosaic

By Neil Connor

Community Affairs Reporter
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Birmingham's most popular public mosaic is at the centre of a bitter tug-of-war between a Catholic cathedral and the city's Irish community.

The John F Kennedy mosaic in St Chad's Church is to be pulled down and rebuilt as part of the Snow Hill development.

The decision was made by the city council's planning committee after consulting with the nearby St Chad's Cathedral and the Catholic Church.

But Irish community leaders voiced their disappointment yesterday as they were hoping the cathedral could be placed in the newly developed Irish Quarter in Digbeth.

The memorial was built in 1968 at a cost of £6,000 from public donations organised through the Irish Catholic Fund.

A planning committee member claimed the deal so long it is in the St Chad's area could not be reversed.

Birmingham Irish Community Forum spokesman Pat O'Neill said: "To date, we the Irish community have not been consulted, but I do believe a group of people in the St Chad's area have asked for it to be kept where it was."

"The Irish community put the money together to build it and erect it. We hoped that the city would have the courtesy to consult us about its future."

"St Chad's may be the best place for it,



The council has negotiated with the cathedral, but who are they? It is not an Irish cathedral. It is a cathedral for the people of Birmingham, it does not speak for the Irish community

Chris Allen Nangle

but the Irish Forum, the true representatives of Irish community in Birmingham, have not been consulted, so we do not know if this is the case."

Forum member Michael Long, who also sits on the St Patrick's Day committee, said: "We have been trying to get the memorial moved to Digbeth. That is what the Irish community want."

"A number of people in the Irish community are very disappointed to hear the news that it could be staying in St Chad's."

Irish-born councillor Mike Nangle (Lab Hodge Hill) said he had seen the minutes from the planning meeting when the decision was made to site the mosaic a mile from its current position. He said: "The council has negotiated with the cathedral, but who are they? It is not an Irish cathedral. It is a cathedral for the people of Birmingham; it does not speak for the Irish community."

"I am saying let's ask the Irish community, it was their money that built it and so useful for people were involved at the time."

A Birmingham interviewee Snow Hill and St Chad's Circus was approved by the city council cabinet in May this year.

The scheme envisages a high-quality development of flats, office blocks up to 12 storeys high, hotels and shops built on a site between Snow Hill railway station and Snow Hill Quadrant.

Planning chiefs want to remove the memorial as part of the multi-million pound redevelopment.

Chris Peter Douglas Gibson (Cons Walsley), who sits on the planning committee, said: "A few people in the Irish community were contacted and expressed the view that it should remain in St Chad's, but there is a considerable group of people in the Irish community that feel if should be moved to the Irish Quarter. The decision for it to stay at St Chad's cannot be changed as it is now a contracted part of the redevelopment."

"I am absolutely certain that we consulted with the cathedral and the Catholic Church. They definitely wanted to be kept near the cathedral. Whichever decision we took, for some people it would have been the wrong one."

Birmingham Post newspaper article dated the 28th August 2002.

Talks continued and on the 7th April 2003 Neil Connor wrote a follow-up article setting out the latest position regarding the memorial.

Irish set to win battle for Kennedy mosaic

Exclusive

By Neil Connor

Community Affairs Reporter
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Birmingham's Irish community is set to claim victory in their campaign to have the city's tribute to John F Kennedy moved to the heart of the Irish Quarter in Digbeth.

Discussions are currently ongoing between Irish community leaders and developers behind a £50 million scheme to transform Digbeth to move the JFK mosaic there from its current position at St Chad's Circus.

The mosaic was at the centre of a bitter tug-of-war between the Irish community and the nearby cathedral last summer.

After consulting with the cathedral and the Catholic Church, the city council's planning committee decided it should be pulled down and rebuilt as part



of the Snow Hill development.

But Irish community leaders and Irish-born councillor Mike Nangle have opened talks with retailer International Stock, which is behind the proposals to transform the two-acre site between Digbeth High Street, Bradford Street and Ren Street.

Coun Nangle (Lab Hodge Hill) said: "We believe we are in a very good position to get the mosaic relocated to Digbeth now."

"We are involved with discussions with International Stock and

it is very promising." A spokesman from International Stock, which is the owner of the land and developer of the Deritend Bridge scheme, said: "We are in discussions with the Irish Community Forum and Councillor Nangle with a view to bringing the mosaic to Digbeth."

The development, including apartments, a hotel, shops and offices, will be just 300 yards from the new Bullring and the landmark Selfridges store. The memorial was built in 1968 at

a cost of £6,000 from public donations organised through the Irish Catholic Fund.

A blueprint to revitalise Snow Hill and St Chad's Circus was approved by the city council Cabinet in May last year. Planning chiefs want to remove the memorial as part of the multi-million pound redevelopment.

A council spokeswoman said: "Clearly the Irish Community would like it to be in Digbeth and all options are still on the table."

Newspaper cutting from the Birmingham Post.

At the time of writing, the Irish Quarter development is proceeding apace and there appears to be a good chance of the mural finding a new home in another part of the city.

In view of the fact the Irish community commissioned the memorial initially, it does seem appropriate that they should have a say in deciding where it should be re-erected when St. Chad's Circus finally knows its fate.

Snow Hill Mural

This is probably the most striking of all the murals in Birmingham and it is also one of the largest in the world. The mural is so long it incorporates the openings of two subways into the design, as portals of railway tunnels.

It took a team of researchers six months at Swindon's Railway Museum to ensure every last detail of the locomotives and the rolling stock was absolutely right.

The mural is in five panels and comprises 1.5M pieces of Italian mosaic. It is 300 feet long x 16 feet high and was designed and constructed by Kenneth Budd & Associates.

It depicts the history of Snow Hill and its links with the Great Western Railway and its route from London's Paddington Station.

It was unveiled on the 14th July 1969 by Alderman C V G Simpson, the Deputy Mayor of Birmingham.

The mural was commissioned by the Public Works Department at a cost of £30,000.



45.

View of part of the Snow Hill mural.



46. View 1. *Sectional view of the Snow Hill mural.*



47. View 2.



48. View 3.

Close-up view Q/Snow Hill mural.



49. View 4.



50. View 5.

Close-up view of Snow Hill mural.



51. View 6. *Photograph showing how the mural incorporates the subway entrances.*

Inset panels tell the story of the mural in words, but not so vividly as the mural itself. The five panels contain the following information:

Panel 1.

Construction of the Great Western Railway line to Snow Hill began in 1847. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was engineer in charge and the contractors were Peto and Betts. By 1852 the 129 mile track from Paddington via Oxford was complete - 7 '0" broad gauge to Oxford 4 '8 " narrow gauge from there to Birmingham - with a third rail provided for the 7 '0 " track. Narrow gauge became standard for the whole country in 1892. Signals were hand operated by railway police.

Panel 2.

The first Snow Hill station was opened on 1st October 1852. A special eve of opening train left Paddington pulled by Daniel Gooches 'Lord of the Isles' which had been on show at the Great Exhibition. This was derailed at Aynho but successfully completed the journey the following day after a change of engine. Nine years later narrow gauge track was extended to Paddington providing a 3 hour 20 minute express service. Unheated carriages were lit by oil pot lamps and bar and disc signals were operated from trackside capstans.

Panel 3.

In 1871 a new station was built to accommodate the great increase in traffic. Expresses like No. 162 Cobham designed by William Dean and driven by driver Hughes travelled direct from Paddington at average speeds of 52.7 mph. The maximum being 62.75 mph. Carriages were of the clerestory type. Toilets were introduced in 1873. A familiar sight at the turn of the century was Dash the station dog his station collecting box strapped to his back Signals were operated by Worcester levers at track level but by 1900 signal boxes became standard on main lines.

Panel 4.

Between 1909 — 1914 the 'Old' station was replaced by Snow Hill in its final form without interruption to regular services. G J Churchward succeeded William Dean as Chief Engineer and by 1912 his locomotives like No. 2906 'Lady of Lynn ' and the 'Saint' and 'Star' classes were providing a regular 2 hour express service from Paddington. Carriages were painted maroon but later reverted to the familiar GWR chocolate and cream livery.

Panel 5.

Larger and more powerful 'Castle' and 'King' class locomotives were introduced by Charles B Collett during the nineteen twenties and thirties. When the War came in 1939 Great Western's familiar livery was replaced by austerity grey and in 1948 the GWR merged its identity into British Railways. Snow Hill continued as part of Western Region until 1967 when by order of Parliament it ceased operation as a main line station.

After the last-ever express left Paddington for Snow Hill in 1967, the station continued to handle local trains until 1972 when it closed completely. In 1987, however, a new smaller local station was opened on the same site. This is also the terminus of the Midland Metro line from Wolverhampton to Birmingham.

Talks are now in an advanced stage with the private sector regarding the redevelopment of the Snow Hill site, including St. Chad's Circus. Plans have been put forward and a start is anticipated in the next year or two, once approval has been granted.

It will be interesting to see what decisions are finally made regarding the fate of these two important murals. One can only hope that common sense prevails and a solution, together with the appropriate funds, are provided to ensure the people of Birmingham continue to enjoy them.

In a Birmingham Post article dated the 21st March 1997, a fitting comment was made by Mike Leddy (Labour - Perry Barr) regarding the potential loss of these murals. He said: -

"This is part of Birmingham's history. It would be civil vandalism if we simply destroyed them."

St. Martin's Circus

It is not known who designed the mural in St. Martin's Circus as, unlike most of the major works around the city centre, no plaques were erected to provide details of either the subject of the mural or who unveiled it.

It was, however, both large and extremely colourful and succeeded in bringing a point of interest to, as well as brightening up, a particularly down-beat part of the city.

It was situated at the extreme end of Manzoni Gardens and lay between two subways, one of which led to New Street Station, the other to the markets in the Bull Ring.

It is safe to assume it was completed during the same time scale as the others, which would put the date somewhere in the mid-1960's.



52. *Manzoni Gardens with mural in the distance.*



53. View 1. *Mural with the Bull Ring Centre and Smallbrook Queensway in the background 1997.*



54. View 2. *Close-up view of St. Martin's Circus mural.*



55. View 3.

Close-up view of St. Martin's Circus mural.

In view of the close proximity of the markets in the Bull Ring, it is appropriate the mural depicts a scene from a medieval market.

Included in the overall design can be seen the following activities:

A cart pulling a large cask of ale or wine.

Cow and goats being taken to market.

Vendor selling his wares.

A woman taking a rabbit or coney to market in her basket.

A man holding up chickens for inspection.

Entertainers and Mummers on a stage.

Bear baiting with dogs — a popular pastime in those days!

A miscreant in the stocks, with others awaiting their turn.

Sheep in an enclosure, with one being slaughtered.

In the background are dwellings over the various periods and St. Martins Church, the first of which dates back to Norman times.



56. View 4.

Close-up view St. Martin's Circus mural.



57. View 5.



58. View 6

Close-up view of St. Martin 's Circus mural.

The date 1166 in the last photograph refers to the time when Peter de Bermingham bought from the King the right to hold a weekly market in his castle.

Markets in those days were a lucrative industry and Peter was shrewd to petition for one so early.

Much later on William Hutton, Birmingham's first historian, describes the chaos that was 18th century market day in Birmingham thus: -

"For want of a convenient place where sellers may be collected into one point, they are scattered into various parts of the town. Corn is sold by sample, in the Bull Ring; butchers' stalls occupy Spiceal Street; one would think a narrow street was preferred, that no customer should be suffered to pass by. Flowers, shrubs etc., at the end of Philip Street and Moor Street; beds of earthenware lie in the middle of the footways; and a double range of insignificant stalls, in the front of the shambles, choak up the passage: the beast market is kept in Dale End: that for pigs, and horses in New Street: cheese issues from one of our principal inns: fruit, fowls and butter are sold at the Old Cross: nay it is difficult to mention a place where they are not. We may observe that if a man hath an article to sell which another wants to buy, they quickly find each other out."

St. Martin's Circus, along with the subways and mural, now no longer exist. They lie beneath the huge modern Bull Ring shopping complex.

CHAPTER 6 (BELL STREET)

A subway from St. Martin's Circus led into Bell Street. This in turn went down a fairly steep incline into the open market area of the Bull Ring Centre.

It was sandwiched between St. Martin's Queensway and the buildings of the Bull Ring Centre, in particular the indoor market hall & Woolworths.

It was a dismal little street which was often used by the market traders to unload their produce which, in turn, led to a litter problem.

An attempt was made by the council to make the near 20'0" high wall on the side flanking the Queensway more attractive by decorating it with large glazed tiles highlighting Birmingham's importance in the manufacturing industry during its earlier years. Included were button motifs, nails, nuts & bolts, interlinked chains, spades etc.



59. *Subway entrance from Bell Street, leading into St. Martin's Circus.*

Also prominent in the design were two statements emphasising Birmingham's stature during this period -

(i) Birmingham - City of 1,000 Trades.

(ii) Probably in no other age or country was there ever such an astonishing display of human ingenuity as may be found in Birmingham.

The work was completed in 1986 but, as the photographs show, the finish started to deteriorate quite badly with many of the tiles falling off and it came as a relief when the area was demolished to make way for the new Bull Ring shopping complex.



60. View 1.

Close-up of part of the Bell Street mural.



61. View 2.

Bell Street mural.

CHAPTER 7. (SUBWAY PAINTINGS)



62.

Smallbrook Queensway subway.

Smallbrook Queensway

The subway shown in the photograph provided a direct link through to St. Martin's Circus.

In the background can be seen the base of the Rotunda. The subway itself exits outside the entrance drive to New Street Station.

The tiled walls of the subway were given a open painted design with the view to deterring, or at least reducing, the attention of graffiti artists.

As the Birmingham indoor & outdoor markets were in close proximity just the other side of St. Martin's Circus, this was used as the main theme. Shown are various items which could be purchased in the markets such as fruit & vegetables, fish, poultry, garden plants, boots & shoes, pots & pans, records etc. A set of weighing scales, pricing tags and a woman laden down with shopping bags are also in evidence. There is also a circular plan of the area included in the design with the Rotunda prominent.

The original ploy to beat graffiti was a success but, as the painting itself deteriorated over the years, it is difficult to decide which was the lesser of two evils!

The whole subway area has now been demolished to make way for a re-designed Queensway, as part of the new Bull Ring shopping complex.



63. View 1.

Smallbrook Queensway mural.



64. View 2.

High Street

Situated almost outside the old 'Times' building, now a Waterstones book store, this small subway led pedestrians beneath the High Street towards the old Bull Ring Centre and the open markets.



65. *View of subway entrance, looking down from High Street.*

In 1987 a series of three paintings considerably improved its appearance.

The theme was the immediate area around High Street over a 200 year period. A plaque described the display as 'The Bull Ring throughout the ages '

The first painting was of the 'Shambles' in 1787, which was in the vicinity of Moor Street and St. Martin's church. It was a row of butchers' shops or stalls.

The second painting was a view of the old Bull Ring in 1887, looking down from the High Street and showing St. Martin's church in a prominent position.

The Bull Ring, previously known as Corn Cheaping, is a well known symbol of Birmingham throughout the country, the traditional heart of its commercial life since the 12th century. In the 1960's the old Bull Ring vanished, except for St. Martin's church.



66. *Close-up view of Subway painting of the 'Shambles'.*

The third painting was of the Bull Ring Centre in 1987, which replaced the old one. The Rotunda is also highlighted. This was designed by James A Roberts and built by George Wimpey. It is a unique round office block, 25 storeys high, which is a well known landmark and synonymous with Birmingham City Centre.

When the new Bull Ring shopping malls were built, the developers insisted upon this icon being retained as part of the overall scheme. It is presently being completely modernised and transformed into luxury apartments, with high quality shops beneath.

The subway was demolished and lies beneath the Bull Ring complex.



67. *The three paintings in High Street subway.*

Moor Street Queensway (1)

This subway was situated beneath Moor Street Queensway, at the rear of the 'Pavilions' Shopping Centre.

It led to Moor Street Station and Digbeth.

The walls were decorated by paintings covering a variety of subjects, ranging from Hampstead Colliery to the Market Hall in the old Bull Ring and the Pyramids in ancient Egypt!

Market Hall

The foundation stone for the Birmingham Market Hall was laid in February 1833, the architect being Charles Edge. It was a huge building, being 365 feet long, and the interior contained enough room for 600 stalls.

Sadly, on the night of the 25/26th August 1940, the hall was hit by incendiary bombs which reduced it to an empty shell. Despite its condition it was used as an open market for a further 20 years before being demolished to make way for the Bull Ring Centre.

The subway was demolished when the road system around the new Bull Ring shopping complex was completed and Moor Street Queensway lowered.



68. *Subway beneath Moor Street' Queensway, leading to Moor Street Station.*



69. View 1 *Close-up of paintings in Moor Street Queensway subway.*



70. View 2

Moor Street Queensway (2)

This subway was also situated beneath Moor Street Queensway but a little further along in the direction of Masshouse Circus. It was reached via Dale End.

The walls were adorned with paintings of Birmingham, old & new. Included in the chosen subjects were the following: -

Chamberlain Place including the Museum & Art Gallery.

Five Ways & the King Edward VI Grammar School.

Town Hall

Broad Street.

Council House.

National Exhibition Centre.



71. *View of Moor Street Queensway subway from New Meeting Street.*



72.

Town Hall.

Town Hall

In 1829 it was decided by the Street Commissioners that Birmingham should have a 'town hall'. Eventually they chose a design by two young and ambitious architects named Hansom and Welch, based upon the temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome.

Hansom was unfortunately made bankrupt, as a result of him greatly underestimating the cost of construction and another architect, Charles Edge, who also designed Birmingham's Market Hall, stepped in to complete the work.

The building was finally completed in 1849 and, despite its appearance, is not built of stone but brick which was then faced with Anglesey marble.



73.

Council House.

Council House

The foundation stone for the Council House was laid in 1874 and it took a further five years to complete.

The architect was Yeoville Thomason and he based his design on a classical form, which blended in well with the nearby Town Hall.

The mosaic above the entrance is by Salviati.



74.

National Exhibition Centre.

National Exhibition Centre

For over one hundred years Birmingham staged its exhibitions in Bingley Hall, Broad Street, even though it was built in just six weeks back in 1850.

By the early 1960's it was generally agreed that a replacement needed to be found. A suitable green field site was found at Bickenhill, next to the airport.

It was not until 1970, however, that the city finally received firm government support and a substantial grant.

Construction began in February 1973 and the National Exhibition Centre was officially opened by the Queen four years later.

Since then it has been an unqualified success and several expansion projects have taken place.

CHAPTER 8. (BUILDING MURALS)

This mural was situated on the exterior of a building forming part of the 'Martineau Square' shopping centre, overlooking Lower Bull Street.

It was designed by Hans Schwarz and erected in 1966. It was commissioned by the J Seymour Harris Partnership, Architects of 'Martineau Square'. The mural was made of plastic and reinforced glass by David Gillespie & Associates of Farnham, Surrey.

It comprised twelve panels each size 250cm high x 500cm wide.



75. *Building mural in Lower Bull Street, looking towards junction with Corporation Street.*

The twelve panels showed different aspects of Birmingham, past and present, taken from old & new town maps and aerial photographs of the city.

The panels depict the following subjects: -

- St. Philip 's Cathedral.*
- The Bull Ring.*
- Gas Street Canal.*
- New Street Station.*
- Spaghetti Junction at Gravelly Hill.*
- University of Birmingham.*
- Victorian Back-to-Back Housing.*
- Old Jewellery Quarter.*
- Bournville Factories & Gardens.*
- Contemporary Housing Development.*
- Car Factories at Longbridge.*
- Corporation Street/Bull Street.*



76. *Lower Bull street mural - Close up view of three of the panels.*

The shopping centre was demolished in the late 1990's to make way for a new development named 'Martineau Place'.

It is not known what happened to the mural, but one must assume it also was destroyed.



77. *Building mural in Lower Bull Street, looking towards Dale End.*

CHAPTER 9. (WALL PAINTING)

I should like to end on an unusual note. Positioned at the bottom of Snow Hill on Constitution Hill is this striking painted wall mural.

A large blank expanse of exposed brickwork was available and some enterprising individual thought it would be an ideal space to use and try something different.

This type of art has both its supporters and detractors, who think it is only one step up from graffiti. At the very least, however, it provides a talking point and for followers of Art at least this is half the battle.



78.

View of mural from St. Chad's Circus.

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INDEX

Advisory Planning Panels, 1.
Advisory (Traffic) Planning Panel, 1.
Aston Expressway, 21.
Aston University, 21.
Battle of Adwalton Moor, 15.
Bell street, 45. 46.
de Bermingham, Peter, 24. 27. 44.
Bingley Hall, 55.
Birmingham Children's Hospital, 21.
Birmingham College of Technology, 6.
Birmingham Council House, 54. 55.
Birmingham Market Hall, 51. 54.
Birmingham Public Works Department, 24. 31. 35.
Birmingham Town Hall, 54.
Boulton, Matthew, 16. 17. 27.
Budd, Kenneth, 19. 24. 28. 31.
Bull Ring Centre, 41. 45. 49. 50. 51.
Bull Ring shopping complex, 13. 44. 45. 48.
Cavendish, William, 15.
Central Library, 5. 28. 29.
Charles, Prince, 5.
City centre, 1. 3. 4. 6. 8. 9. 14.
City Council, 1. 19.
City Engineer & Surveyor, 1. 7. 13.
Civil war, 15.
Civil War mural, 15.
Colmore Circus, 10. 14. 15. 17.
Colmore Square, 17. 18.
'concrete collar', 1. 14.
Constitution Hill, 58.
Corporation Street, 24.
Danvin, Erasmus, 27.
Demolition, 4.
Dwyer, Archbishop, 31.
'Eastside', 23.
Edge, Charles, 51. 54.
Fairfax, Lord, 15.
Fletcher's walk, 30. 31.
Gillespie, David & Associates, 56.
Grafton, Samuel, 27.
Hector, Edward, 27.
High Street, 49. 50.
Hill street, 2.
Hill Street subway, 3.
Holloway Circus, 10. 14. 19. 20. 24.
Horse Fair, 2. 19.
Housing, 1.
Howles, L. A., 19.
Hurst Street, 2.
Hutton, William, 44.
Industrial Revolution, 17.
'inner loop', 1.
Inner Ring Road, 1. 3. 7. 8. 10. 14.
Kennedy, John. F., memorial, 3 1. 32. 33.
Kenney, Thomas, 27. 'King Kong', 13.

INDEX (CONTINUED)

Lancaster Circus, 11. 21. 22.
Leddy, Mike, 40.
Limitation of the City, 1.
Lloyd, Samuel, 27.
Lower Bull Street, 56. 57.
Manzoni Gardens, 13. 40.
Manzoni, Herbert, Sir., 7. 13.
Marples, Ernest, Rt. Hon., 3.
Martineau Square, 56.
National Exhibition Centre, 55.
Newcastle, Duke of, 15.
New Street Station, 2. 40.
Old Square, 10. 11. 14. 24. 25. 28.
Paradise Circus, 12. 14. 28. 29. 30.
Paradise Street. 4. 29.
Parliamentary Bill, 1.
Peter Stuyvesant Foundation, 13.
Priestley, Joseph, 16. 17.
Priory Queensway, 10. 14. 23. 24.
Public Works Department, 1.
Queen, 3.
Queensway, 1. 21. 23.
Ratcliff Place, 5.
Reference Library, 5. 6.
Roberts, James. A. , 50.
Rotunda, 47. 50.
Rupert, Prince. 15.
Salviati, 55.
Scholefield, William, 27.
Schwarz, Hans, 56.
Simpson, C. V. G., Alderman, 24. 35.
Smallbrook Street, 4.
Smallbrook Queensway, 3. 4. 14. 18. 41. 47. 48.
Snow Hill mural, 35. 36. 37. 38.
St. Chad's Circus, 12. 14. 31. 32. 35. 40. 58.
Steelhouse Lane, 15.
St. Martin's Church, 42. 49.
St. Martin's Circus, 13.14. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45.47.
Stratford Road, 13.
Suffolk Street, 4. 6.
Sunday Mercury, 9.
Thomas, D. S., 19.
Thomason, Yeoville, 55.
Tyler, H. E., Alderman, 19.
Watkinson, Harold, Rt. Hon., 2.
Watt, James, 16. 17. 27.
Wedgwood, Josiah, 27.
Westley, William, 27.
Wilkes, John, 27.
Williamson, Richard, 9.
Winter, Geoffrey, 5.
Withering, William, 27.
Yorkshire Post, 5.