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Introduction

The University of Birmingham is a public research university which received its royal charter in 1900 as a successor to Queen's College, Birmingham (founded in 1825 as the Birmingham School of Medicine and Surgery), and Mason Science College (established in 1875 by Sir Josiah Mason), making it the first English civic or 'red brick' university to receive its own royal charter.

Joseph Chamberlain may be considered the founder of Birmingham University, and was largely responsible for the university gaining its Royal Charter in 1900 and for the development of the Edgbaston campus.

The initial 25-acre (100,000 m²) site was given to the university in 1900 by Lord Calthorpe. The grand buildings were an outcome of the £50,000 given by steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to establish a "first class modern scientific college". Funding was also provided by Sir Charles Holcroft.

The missing piece in the jigsaw - Bramall Building

Whilst the University of Birmingham, was conceived in 1900 and the University opened in 1909, the master plan for its buildings was not completed, until 2012, when 112 years later the University opened a 450-seat concert hall, called the Bramall Music Building, which completes the redbrick semicircle of the Aston Webb building designed by Glenn Howells Architects. Their role was to design the missing pavilion which had to be squeezed into the original buildings that formed part of Aston Webb's masterplan. The implementation required the Bramall Music Building to mesh in with the original buildings in a very imaginative way, using 21st century building technology.

Aston Webb architect for the University of Birmingham had devised in the masterplan in 1900 that 'a grand semi-circle of five linked pavilions arranged around an enormous Italianate clock tower, with the clock tower forming the grand centrepiece of the scheme.'

Whilst the tower and four of the pavilions were built, the £250,000 budget ran out, leaving a gap 'like a model's mouth with a tooth missing'. It was surprisingly not picked up later when

the University was expanding. Now, more than a century later, a generous donation from Birmingham alumnus and former chairman of social housing construction firm Keepmoat, Terry Bramall, filled the gap.

The campus has a wide diversity in architectural types and architects. “What makes Birmingham so exceptional among the Red Brick universities is the deployment of so many other major Modernist practices.”

The campus expands

Influenced by the Aston Webb tradition, with his own style, Holland W. Hobbiss designed the St Francis’ Hall, to the north of University Road East in 1936 which was extended between 1968-9 and now part of the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.

Just down the road, to the south of University Road East, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts was built as an art gallery and concert hall in 1939. The Grade I listed Art Deco building was designed by Robert Atkinson and opened in 1939 by Queen Mary. The first building to be purpose-built for the study of art history in the United Kingdom. Voted as one of only five galleries outside London to receive five stars for having “Outstanding collections of international significance”. By 1954, the University negotiated with the Calthorpe Estate to acquire additional land in Edgbaston for 3 Villas, now called the Vale and in 60s the halls of residence were built.

This large, banked area, off Edgbaston Park Road, was designed by landscape architect Mary Mitchell including mature trees from the former gardens and in 1962 started with the creation of a 3-acre (12,000 m²) artificial lake.

Also, at this time in the 60s many large buildings were constructed in a range of styles and building materials into the expanded campus. During the 80s and 90s more teaching and research blocks appeared.

The Pritchatts Park Village will house over 700 undergraduate and postgraduate students. Halls include ‘Ashcroft’, ‘The Spinney’ and ‘Oakley Court’, as well as ‘Pritchatts House’ and the ‘Pritchatts Road Houses’, completion is due in 2024.

Houses turned into University Buildings

Around 1900s the neighbouring streets to the north of the University started to be built with rather grand and imposing houses. Where families like the Nettlefolds established themselves in small country styled estates.

To the casual traveller who drives along the local roads to the University, one notices the University of Birmingham's crests on sign boards outside many of the houses in this area, which are part of the extension to the University campus on Pritchatts Road and Edgbaston Park Road.

To illustrate just one property, approximately opposite Pritchatts Road on Edgbaston Park Road, is Winterbourne, built for John and Margaret Nettlefold and bequeathed to the University of Birmingham 40 years later by John Macdonald Nicolson.

Commissioned by John and Margaret, Winterbourne was built as a family home for the Nettlefold family in 1904. The 7 acres (28,000 m²) garden is what we might call a high status suburban "villa" garden after the Arts and Crafts movement.

John Nettlefold whilst mostly remembered for his family's firm of Nettlefolds, makers of screws, that early in 1900 became part of the conglomerate Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds, now GKN plc, was an industrialist, social reformer and a philanthropist. He had a strong religious background and a civic conscience devoting much of his time to town planning and in social reform, in particular improving the lot of people in poor and overcrowded courtyards, we now call 'back-to-backs', an example of which the National Trust curate near the Hippodrome. John Nettlefold's most notable contribution was in 1907 he established the garden suburb Moor Pool in Harborne, for artisans to rent at market rates.

Originally designed as a small country estate with rustic outbuildings and large gardens, Winterbourne showed examples of local craftsmanship throughout the house. Margaret Nettlefold designed the garden, inspired by the books of garden designer Gertrude Jekyll.

In 1917 John's ill health started to fail and two years later Margaret sold Winterbourne to the Wheelock family, who stayed there with their nine children until 1925, when local businessman John MacDonald Nicolson was the last private owner of the house and a keen gardener, he developed many new areas, including a scree garden and small alpine features around the garden. The University inherited the house and garden on John's death in 1944.

After a period of restoration, the garden was Grade II listed by English Heritage in 2008. The garden became the University's Botanic Garden and new areas for teaching and plant conservation were developed within the historic layout.

The garden was adopted as the university's botanic garden, being used as a research garden for the Department of Botany and the house as a hall of residence for female undergraduates. In the 60s the house became the home of the university's Extramural Department, later

renamed the School of Continuing Studies. By the 1990s it was being used for teaching and office space. In 2010, the newly restored house and garden were opened to the public as a heritage site. Winterbourne now welcomes around 70,000 visitors each year. It became an Arts Council accredited museum in 2017.

Further thoughts about the University

During 2022 Commonwealth (Birmingham) Games, the University was chosen to be the venue for constructing seating, lighting, and broadcasting for hosting hockey and squash events; whilst also hosting 3,500 athletes during the event, in the student accommodation in the Vale.

People connected with the University:

Sir Edward Elgar,	composer
Sir Granville Bantock,	composer
Charles Lapworth,	geologist
Sir Nikolaus Pevsner,	British historian
Margery Fry,	prison reformer
Stanley Baldwin,	British Prime Minister
Neville Chamberlain,	British Prime Minister
Ann Widdecombe,	minister of state
Anna Soubry,	British High Commissioner to New Zealand
Simon Le Bon,	Duran Duran, musician
Christine McVie,	Fleetwood Mac, musician
Desmond Morris,	zoologist, and broadcaster
Lisa Clayton,	first woman to sail the globe single-handed.

10 Pictures of Birmingham University

(1) Birmingham University,	Robert Bolton Sick Bay, Pritchatts Road
(2) Birmingham University,	7 Pritchatts Road
(3) Birmingham University,	11 Pritchatts Road
(4) Birmingham University,	13 Pritchatts Road
(5) Birmingham University,	54 Pritchatts Road
(6) Birmingham University,	Winterbourne, Edgbaston Park Road
(7) Birmingham University,	Lucas House, Edgbaston Park Road
(8) Birmingham University,	Peter Scott House, Edgbaston Park Road
(9) Birmingham University,	Priorsfield, Edgbaston Park Road *
(10) Birmingham University,	Park House, Edgbaston Park Road

* On the University Campus Map G15 is shown as Westmere, on the board at its entrance it is called Priorsfield

I am indebted to Birmingham University website, other websites connected with the founding fathers, Josiah Mason, Joseph Chamberlain; Mason College and Queen's College Campus; Winterbourne.

Any views expressed in this article are mine and are my interpretations of any of the documents that I have encountered, I apologise for any inaccuracies.

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31st May 2023