



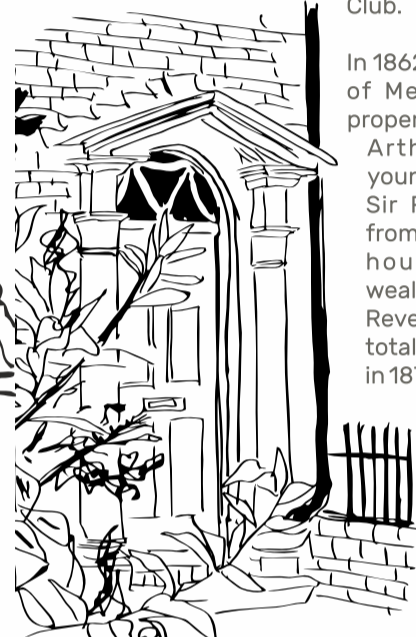
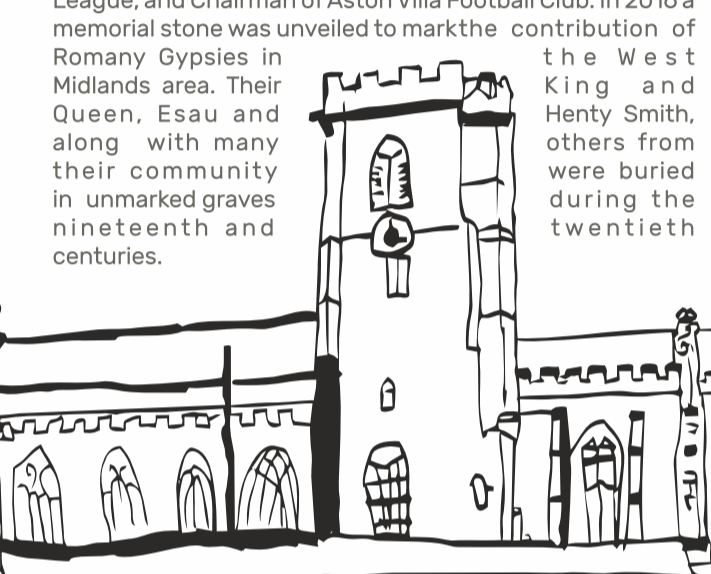
## St Mary's Church

St. Mary's Church is the oldest building in Handsworth, with the first stone building erected around 1160, although it is probable that earlier worship occurred on the site. Placed at the meeting of tracks from Birmingham to the south, Walsall in the north and West Bromwich to Aston in the East, the Church was well placed to serve surrounding settlements.

Sometimes known as Handsworth Old Church or the Cathedral of the Industrial Revolution, it was a sometime place of worship for Matthew Boulton, and is now the resting place of Boulton, James Watt, and William Murdoch, with striking memorials to the three pioneers in the core of the Church. Matthew Boulton's grave was initially in the grounds of St. Mary's, but subsequent expansion to meet the needs of a growing congregation in the nineteenth century meant that his tomb now lies within the walls of the St. Mary's.

Other notable graves within the churchyard include singer Webster Booth, music hall performer Harry Freeman, and William McGregor, a founding member of the Football League, and Chairman of Aston Villa Football Club. In 2016 a memorial stone was unveiled to mark the contribution of Romany Gypsies in Midlands area. Their Queen, Esau and along with many their community in unmarked graves nineteenth and centuries.

the West King and Henty Smith, others from were buried during the twentieth



In 1862 William Stratford Dugdale of Merevale Hall passed the properties on to his son-in-law Arthur Wellesley Peel, the youngest son of Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. Documents from this time show that the houses were occupied by wealthy residents, including a Reverend Pearse, who paid a total of £22 for his annual rent in 1875!

Colin has original deeds and documents relating to the houses which record the first owner as William Stratford Dugdale, an ancestor of Sir William Dugdale, a onetime Chairman of Aston Villa Football Club.

## Overview



Legacy West Midlands' Handsworth Heritage Trails have been developed to showcase the multi-layered and diverse history of Handsworth.

Originally launched in 2013, this heritage project explores some of Handsworth's fascinating stories, as well as incorporating regular volunteer training for those interested in becoming tour guides of the area.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England, the original walking tour has now been split into four separate tours, which allows a more in-depth exploration of four key themes which emerged during initial research. Legacy West Midlands' four heritage trails are:

**Secret Gardens** Exploring the hidden green spaces of Handsworth.

**Lunar Links** Discovering unexpected links to the world famous Lunar Society around Handsworth.

**Roots, Rights and Resistance** Uncovering the history of protest in the area.

**Pugin in Handsworth** Uncovering the little known link between this significant architect and the Handsworth area.

This leaflet looks at key sites around the area which feature on one or more of the walking trails

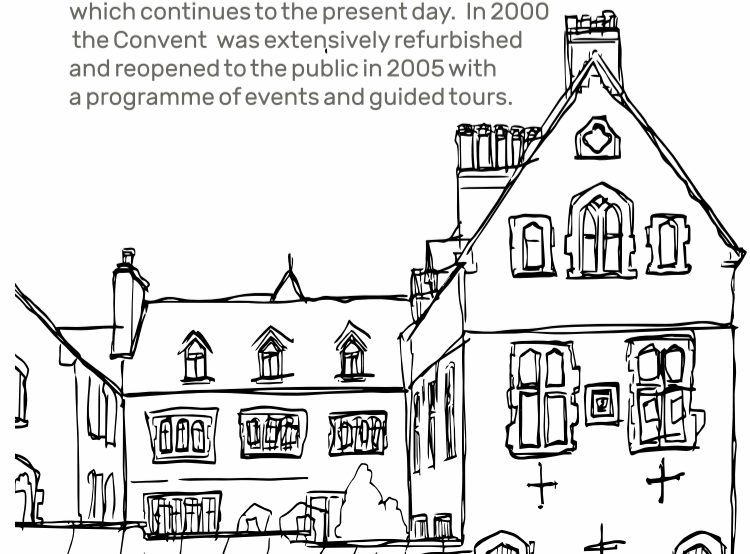


## St Mary's Convent

In 1840, the Bishop of Birmingham wrote to Catherine McCauley, asking her to establish a convent which would administer assistance to the poor of the Handsworth area. The project was possible thanks to a gift of land given by prominent Catholic John Hardman, and support from the Earl of Shrewsbury, who gave £2000 towards the completion of the building. St. Mary's Convent opened its doors in August 1841, with four Sisters who had undertaken their religious instruction in Dublin. Included in the four novitiates was Juliana Hardman, the daughter of John Hardman, who became the first Reverend Mother of the Convent.

St. Mary's Convent was designed in a simple Tudor-Gothic style by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin. Pugin was a prolific writer, designer, architect and critic, whose celebrated works included the Palace of Westminster. Pugin worked on a series of buildings around Birmingham including St. Chad's Cathedral, which was the first Catholic Cathedral to be built in the United Kingdom since the Reformation.

Since the founding of St. Mary's Convent, the Sisters of Mercy have provided support to the local community, which continues to the present day. In 2000 the Convent was extensively refurbished and reopened to the public in 2005 with a programme of events and guided tours.

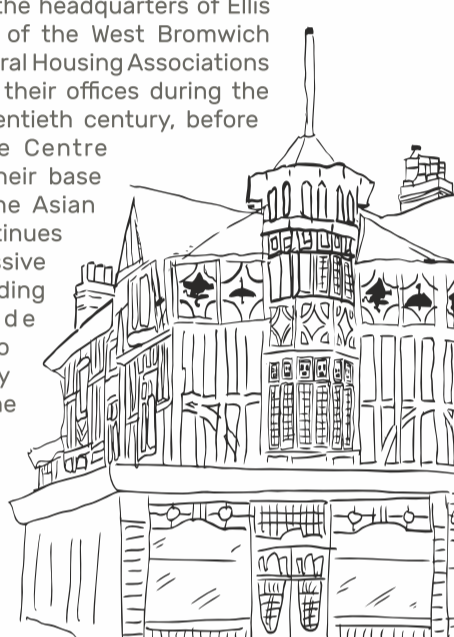


## Asian Resource Centre

The Old Toll Gate House, built in 1904, stands on the site of an earlier Toll House, which was one of several buildings and turnpikes built in the Handsworth area during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Stagecoach traffic grew from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, and tolls were collected from travellers passing along this road until the gates were removed in 1872 and the road was disturnpiked in 1879.

After falling out of use as a Toll House, the brick building was used as a private home and a girls' school. Following its demolition, it was replaced with a mock Tudor building, which still has many of the original Arts and Crafts features intact today.

This building, now the Birmingham Asian Resource Centre, has been the base for a variety of shops and businesses since its creation, including a bakers and a grocer. Subsequently it was the headquarters of Ellis Travel and a branch of the West Bromwich Building Society. Several Housing Associations used the building as their offices during the latter part of the twentieth century, before the Asian Resource Centre made the building their base during the 1990s. The Asian Resource Centre continues to care for this impressive Arts and Crafts building today, and provide support and advice to the local community from their base in the heart of Handsworth.

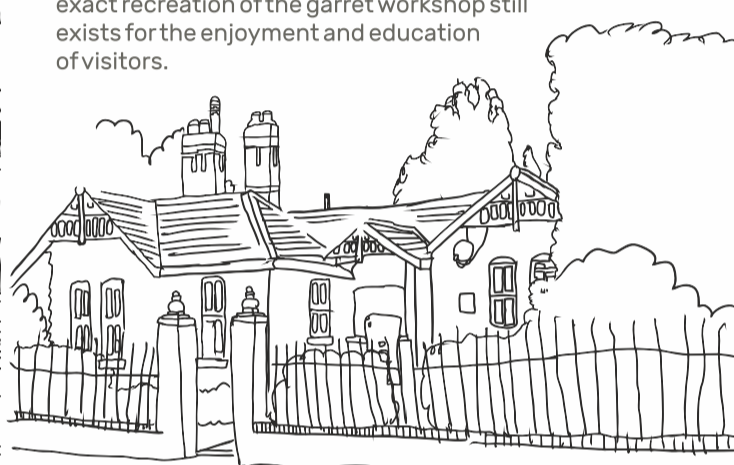


## James Watt Gate House

The Gatehouse was a nineteenth century addition to the Heathfield Estate, where James Watt lived from June 1790 until his death in August 1819. James Watt's improvements to the steam engine played a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution; the engine provided an economical and reliable source of power for a host of mines, canals and factories.

Samuel Wyatt was commissioned to create Heathfield Hall for James Watt in 1789. The surrounding Heathfield Estate was laid out as a park, its elevated position giving impressive views across to the neighbouring St. Mary's Church and Grove Estate. After Watt's death in 1819, Heathfield Hall remained virtually untouched for over a century, with tours of his workshop offered during centenary events marking one hundred years since Watt's death in 1919. Shortly after this, Heathfield Hall and the remaining Estate were sold off for development, and today no physical evidence remains of the Watt family home.

James Watt's workshop was located in the attic of Heathfield Hall, and following the decision to demolish the House, the contents of the workshop were gifted to the nation by Major James Miller Gibson Watt. 8300 objects were relocated to the Science Museum in London where an exact recreation of the garret workshop still exists for the enjoyment and education of visitors.



## Soho House

Soho House was the home of the eighteenth century industrialist Matthew Boulton, and a regular meeting place of the Lunar Society. Boulton took out a lease on the Soho Estate in the 1760s, and built the Soho Manufactory soon afterwards, which was one of the first factories of the modern age. All that remains of the Soho Estate today is Boulton's impressive home, which was remodelled and extended in the 1790s to include modern conveniences like a warm-air heating system and a flushing Bramah toilet.

The elegant Dining Room at Soho House was the meeting place of the Lunar Society, who met monthly around the time of the full moon, using the moonlight to illuminate their homeward journeys. The Society included many great thinkers, engineers and inventors including James Watt, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood. Matthew Boulton continued to live at Soho House until his death in 1809. Since this time the House has been used for a variety of different purposes including a girls' school, a hotel, and a hostel for single policemen.

Birmingham City Council began extensive restoration work of Soho House in 1990, and it opened as a museum in 1995. Today Soho House Museum is open to the public throughout the year. The house contains many pieces of original furniture and ornaments made at the Soho Manufactory.



This leaflet accompanies the four heritage trails within Handsworth. These are:

Secret Gardens

Lunar Links

Roots, Rights and Resistance

Pugin in Handsworth

Legacy West Midlands would like to thank our funding partners and the young people who have assisted with the design and development of this leaflet. Legacy West Midlands runs a regular schedule of walking tours during the year, and can also arrange one-off walks or events for interested parties.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK A TOUR, PLEASE CONTACT US

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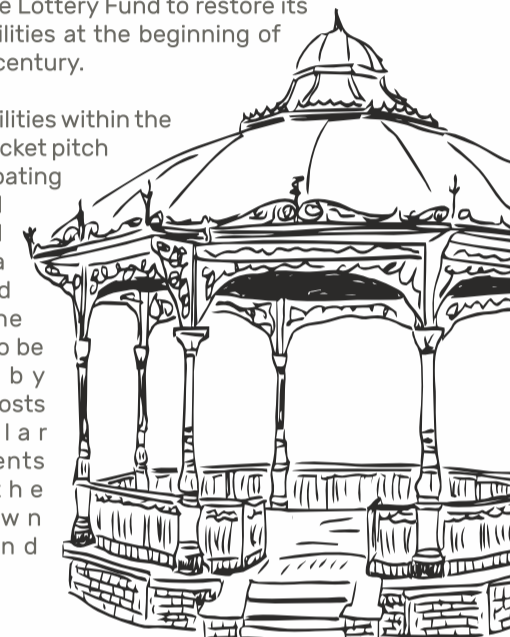
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## Handsworth Park and Bandstand

As the population of Handsworth grew exponentially during the nineteenth century, the Handsworth Local Sanitary Board began to consider the creation of a public park from 1882 onwards. Twenty acres of the Grove Estate were purchased in 1887, and Richard Hartland Vertegans was commissioned to lay out the Estate as public pleasure grounds. He organised the planting of trees to provide a variety of sounds as well as a visual tapestry of seasonal colours. The park was opened to the public on 20th June 1888, a year after the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and was initially named Victoria Park.

Additional land continued to be added to the Victoria Park, and it was developed by Borough Surveyor Edwin Kenworthy. The Park was renamed after Handsworth was absorbed within Birmingham's boundaries in the Greater Birmingham Act of 1911. Handsworth Park now comprises 63 acres, and received significant investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore its gardens and facilities at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Features and facilities within the Park include a cricket pitch and pavilion, a boating lake, a listed bandstand and Umbrello, a sports centre and an arts trail. The Park continues to be well used by residents, and hosts many popular community events including the Simmer Down Festival and Vaisakhi.



## Handsworth Heritage Trails





## Thornhill Road Police Station

The Thornhill Road Police Station is distinguished by its imposing stonework entrance and carved lettering, which tells of its former use as a Staffordshire Police Court. Built towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was used as a court room until 1911 when Handsworth was subsumed within the greater Birmingham area.

This Victorian redbrick building was erected slightly later than the Library and Council House on the Soho Road, but like its predecessors the building also reflects the civic pride of that era. Unusually it was not built in a prominent location, but is set amongst the residential housing of Thornhill Road. Over the years the building has had many internal alterations to make way for extra offices and accommodate the changing needs of the police force.

Thornhill Road Police Station became the focus of protest during the latter part of the twentieth century. Members of Handsworth's community believed that policing of the area demonstrated discriminatory practice. During disturbances in Handsworth, peaceful protestors filled Thornhill Road and presented petitions to the station to raise areas of concern including police brutality and false imprisonment. Superintendent David Webb developed a 'community policing' approach to address concerns and improve community relations.

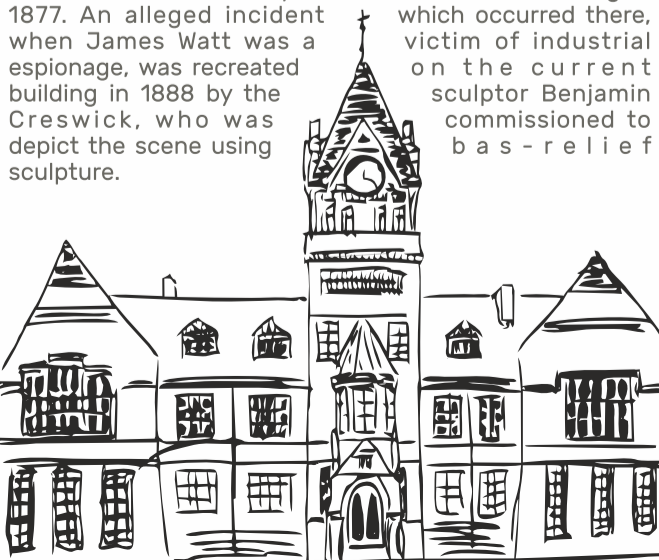


## Handsworth Library and Council House

The building, now in use as the South and City College Handsworth Campus and Handsworth Library, was originally known as the Handsworth Public Buildings, and housed the Handsworth Council House. One of the oldest buildings on the Soho Road, the construction of this impressive structure with its distinctive clock tower began in 1878. The Handsworth Urban District Council began meeting here from 1879 onwards, and the Library opened to the public on 1st May 1880. The ratepayers had voted for a 'penny rate' which would fund a library open to all. The library was immediately popular, with 28,810 volumes issued by the end of the first year.

Handsworth remained part of Staffordshire until 1911, and pride in the Staffordshire connection is reflected in the Staffordshire knot motif which appears around the building. After the construction of this important community building, the centre of Handsworth shifted and began to develop along the Soho Road.

An earlier building on the site was the Waggon and Horses Staging Inn, which stood for over a century before it was demolished to make way for the current building in 1877. An alleged incident when James Watt was a victim of industrial espionage, was recreated on the current building in 1888 by the sculptor Benjamin Creswick, who was commissioned to depict the scene using bas-relief sculpture.



## Heritage Trails



Approx 6974 Steps



Approx 3782 Steps



Approx 3541 Steps



Approx 3750 Steps

