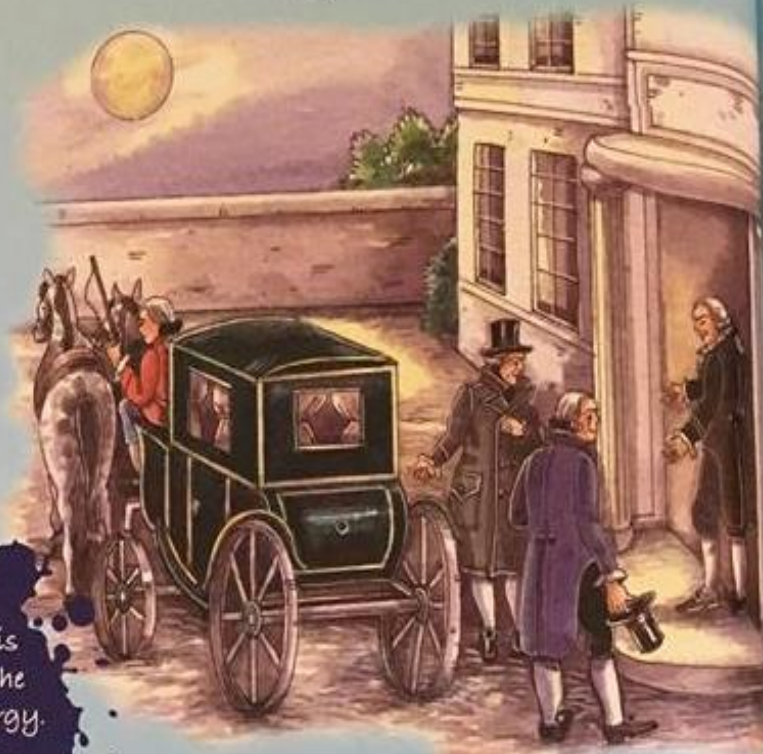


Machines and Manufacturing

As the evening sun sets behind Soho House, with its grand columns and beautiful gardens, the carriages start to arrive. Industrialist Matthew Boulton welcomes his guests for tonight's Lunar Society meeting – some of the sharpest brains in Britain. Tonight Scottish engineer James Watt will present plans for his powerful new steam engine. Ideas fly around the table until past midnight. There are no streetlights, but the bright moon lights the members safely home.

James Watt gave his name to the watt, the unit of electrical energy.



A gilded statue of Boulton, Watt and Murdoch stands on Broad Street. It was made by William Bloye in 1956.

Handmade - or Machine-made?

Birmingham's Lunar Society met from 1765 – always on the night of the full moon. That is why its members were known as the 'Lunatics'! It brought together great engineers, scientists, businessmen and inventors.

Eighteenth century Birmingham rang with the sound of thousands of hammers of skilled metal-workers in small workshops. Many children and young people worked with them, to earn money so their families could eat.

The Lunatics set about using science to make manufacturing easier and quicker. They built factories and invented huge, powerful machines which could do the work of many people.

News of the Lunar Society spread far and wide. William Murdoch was a young Scottish engineer and inventor. In 1777, he walked 480 km to Birmingham to ask for a job with Boulton and Watt. They took him on!

TUDOR 1485-1603

STUART 1603-1714

GEORGIAN 1714-1837

VICTORIAN 1837-1901

MODERN TIMES
1902-NOW

Canals

Two rival companies built the canals that today meet at Gas Street Basin.

Britain's roads were terrible, especially in winter. Transporting Birmingham's metal goods was slow, difficult and expensive. The canals changed all that. James Brindley, one of the Lunatics, built Birmingham's first canal in 1772.

Soon more canals criss-crossed Birmingham than Venice! Birmingham's metal goods were loaded onto barges and carried across the country.



SPOT THIS!

Can you spot this statue of Thomas Atwood, Birmingham's first Member of Parliament in 1832? Clue: check the steps in Chamberlain Square.



The Slave Trade

The metal trade had a grimmer side too. Birmingham's chains, padlocks and guns were used in the slave trade. They imprisoned African people taken as slaves to the Caribbean.

But many people in Birmingham wanted to end slavery. Olaudah Equiano was a freed slave. He campaigned to end slavery. In 1790, Equiano visited Birmingham to spread the word. From 1825 the Female Society for Birmingham called for a speedy end to slavery. Slavery was banned at last in 1833.



How do we know?

This is how the writer Arthur Young described Birmingham, which he visited in 1791.

The capital improvement since I was here before is the canal; the port in the town crowded with coal barges is a noble spectacle. I looked around me with amazement at the change effected in twelve years; this place may now probably be reckoned the first manufacturing town in the world. From this port you may now go by water to Hull, Liverpool, Bristol, Oxford and London.

This portrait of Equiano appears in 'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African', published in 1789.

...1790 EQUIANO VISITS BIRMINGHAM...1833 SLAVERY ABOLISHED IN BRITAIN...