

Further Information

Websites

Jameswatt2019.org
Libraryofbirmingham.com
Birminghammuseums.org.uk
Revolutionaryplayers.org.uk
Historywm.com

Further Reading

Malcolm Dick (eds) & Kate Croft
The Power to Change the World: James Watt (1736-1819) A Life in 50 Objects
(Alcester: West Midlands History Limited, 2019)

Ben Russell
James Watt - Making the World Anew
(Reaktion Books Ltd, 2014)

Jenny Uglow
The Lunar Men
(Faber, 2002)

Peter M Jones
Industrial Enlightenment
(Manchester University Press, 2013)

Credits

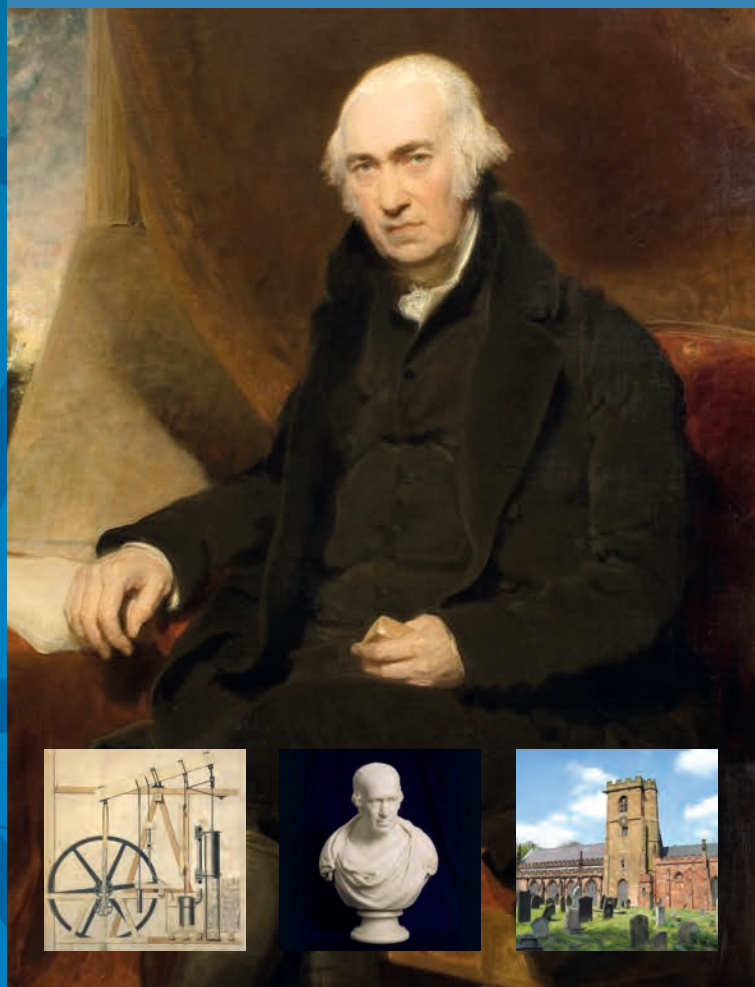
Written by Chris Rice
Photography by Chris Rice,
Birmingham Museums Trust,
Library of Birmingham,
Assay Office Birmingham

Main cover image:
Sir Thomas Lawrence, Portrait of James Watt (1736-1819), 1812.
© Birmingham Museums Trust.

Information contained within this guide is correct
at the time of publishing.

Designed and produced by Dave Walsh Creative.

James Watt City Centre Walk and Guide to Georgian Birmingham



THE LUNAR
SOCIETY



jameswatt2019.org
@LunarSoc #jameswatt2019

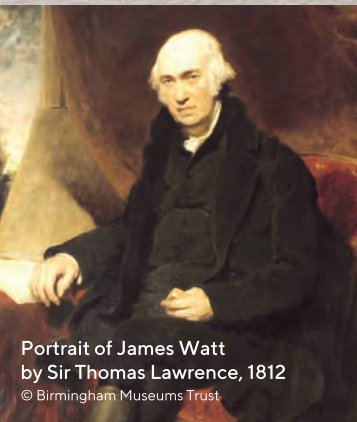


THE LUNAR
SOCIETY



JAMES WATT

Father of the Industrial Revolution



Portrait of James Watt
by Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1812
© Birmingham Museums Trust

In addition to his steam engine work, Watt was a man of many other talents – scientific instrument maker, civil engineer, chemist, inventor and member of the renowned Lunar Society.

During his lifetime he was famous, and after he died he was elevated to the status of a national hero. In the last thirty years, however, awareness of Watt has diminished and so the 2019 Bicentenary provides an opportunity to revisit and review his achievements.

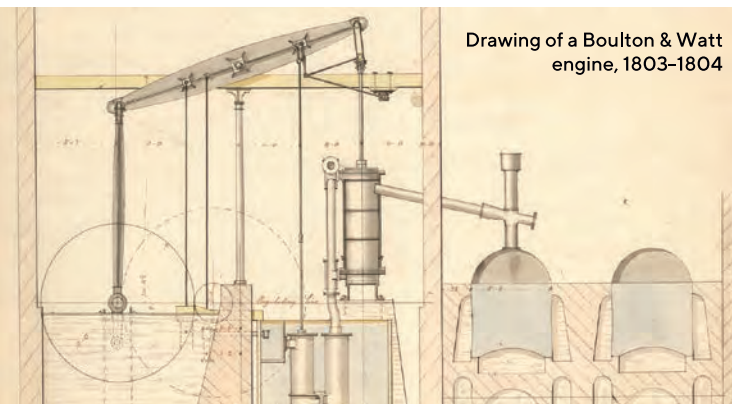
The James Watt Trail

The purpose of this guide is to enable residents and visitors to learn more about James Watt by following in his footsteps.

The city centre walk will take between 1 and 2 hours on foot. The out of town trail is most easily done by car, although all of the sites included are accessible by public transport.

2019 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of the steam engineer James Watt (1736–1819), one of the most important figures associated with Birmingham's industrial history.

Watt moved to Birmingham in 1774 to enter into a partnership with industrialist Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) to manufacture an improved steam engine. The Boulton & Watt engine was to become, quite literally, one of the drivers of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and around the world.



Drawing of a Boulton & Watt
engine, 1803–1804

JAMES WATT

A brief biography

James Watt was born in 1736 in Greenock, Scotland, the son of a prosperous ship owner.

At the age of twenty-one Watt accepted a job as scientific instrument maker at Glasgow College (now University). Here he was given the task of repairing the University's model Newcomen engine.

His study of the model led him to design a new feature – the separate condenser – which when fitted to a full-sized engine made it both more powerful and fuel efficient.

In 1774 Watt moved to Birmingham to enter into partnership with Matthew Boulton to manufacture an improved steam engine that incorporated the separate condenser. In 1781 he invented the 'sun and planet' mechanism to enable rotary motion so that his engines



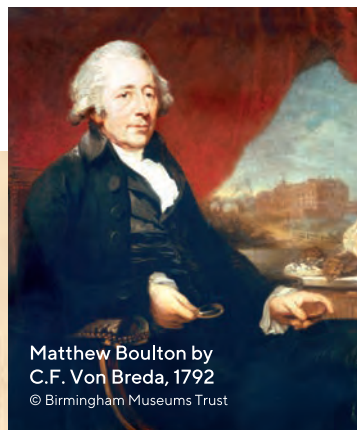
Heathfield Hall,
c1901

could power factories and mills as well as pump water. He also developed the concept of horsepower to calculate royalties where his engine replaced horses.

In addition to engineering Watt was a talented chemist who was jointly responsible for proving that water is a compound rather than an element. In 1780 he invented the first reliable document copier. He was a member of the famous Lunar Society, along with such other leading thinkers as Boulton, Erasmus Darwin, Joseph Priestley and Josiah Wedgwood.

The Boulton & Watt steam engine business was highly successful and Watt became a wealthy man. He built himself a new house, Heathfield Hall in Handsworth, where he retired in 1800.

Watt died at Heathfield on 27th August 1819 aged 83.



Matthew Boulton by
C.F. Von Breda, 1792
© Birmingham Museums Trust

For further information visit jameswatt2019.org

James Watt City Centre Heritage Trail

This pleasant walk takes advantage of some of the more distinctive and attractive aspects of the city and should take between 1 and 2 hours.

Please note this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.



Please check individual websites for details of venue opening times.

1

Birmingham Cathedral

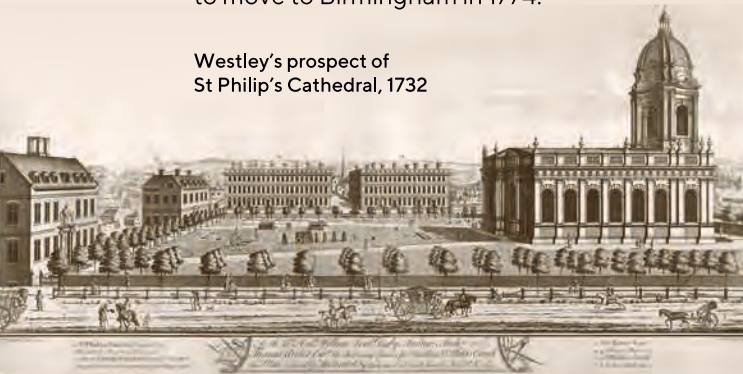
birminghamcathedral.com

The starting point for the walk is St Philip's Cathedral, designed by Warwickshire gentleman architect Thomas Archer and consecrated in 1715.

St Philip's was one of the architectural showpieces of Georgian Birmingham. Matthew Boulton, James Watt's business partner, was christened here in 1728. Watt's fellow Lunar Society member William Small lived nearby and was buried here in 1775.

Small was instrumental in persuading Watt to move to Birmingham in 1774.

Westley's prospect of
St Philip's Cathedral, 1732



Above: Dr William Small
Right: St Philip's Cathedral today

2

Waterloo Street and Bennetts Hill



© Birmingham Museums Trust

Above:
1821 view by
Samuel Lines
prior to the
laying out
of Waterloo
Street

Right: The
Birmingham
Banking
Company
building



In James Watt's day the area occupied by Waterloo Street and Bennetts Hill consisted mainly of gardens and orchards.

The two new streets were created in the 1820s as part of the redevelopment of the Inge family's estate. The area is notable because unlike the rest of the city centre many of the original Regency buildings survive.

The Birmingham Banking Company building on Bennetts Hill was designed by the architect Thomas Rickman, who was also responsible for the design of the James Watt chapel and memorial plinth at St Mary's Parish Church in Handsworth.

3

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

birminghammuseums.org.uk

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is a must-see venue for anyone wishing to learn more about the history of the city.

The *Birmingham: its people, its history* galleries feature a number of displays relating to James Watt and 18th century Birmingham.

The Museum also has an internationally significant collection of 18th century fine and applied artworks including silver by Matthew Boulton, ceramics by Josiah Wedgwood and paintings by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Joseph Wright of Derby.

Birmingham
Museum &
Art Gallery



*Birmingham:
its people, its history*



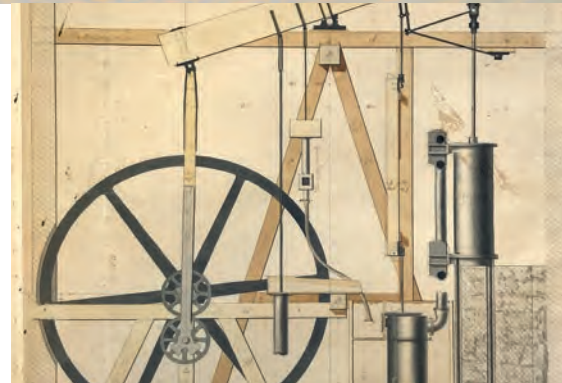
Portrait of Erasmus Darwin
by Joseph Wright, c1770

4

Library of Birmingham

libraryofbirmingham.org.uk

The Library
of Birmingham



Boulton &
Watt rotary
steam engine
design, 1792

The Library of Birmingham is home to one of the biggest and best collections of 18th century archive material in the world.

This includes many thousands of letters, documents and other paper records relating to James Watt, Matthew Boulton and their circle.

For more information on the collection and how to access it, visit the Library of Birmingham website or telephone 0121 242 4242.

5

Centenary Square



Boulton, Murdock and Watt
by William Bloye

Centenary Square is home to William Bloye's striking group statue of Matthew Boulton, William Murdock and James Watt.

The statue was commissioned in 1939 but was not unveiled until 1956.

Although often overshadowed by his two employers, William Murdock played a vital role in the success of Boulton and Watt's steam engine business. For many years he lived in Cornwall, advising on the installation and maintenance of the steam engines which pumped water out of the tin mines. He produced a prototype of a steam powered carriage and also was instrumental in the development of gas lighting.

6

Brindley Place and the Birmingham Canal

Named after the famous engineer, James Brindley, Brindley Place occupies the site of the canal wharves which were built alongside the original Birmingham Canal.

Completed in 1772, the canal was critical for the industrial development of Birmingham. It provided a more efficient means of moving finished goods out of the landlocked town and also allowed the cheaper and easier transportation of coal from the Black Country to power Boulton & Watt's steam engines.

Prior to coming to Birmingham in 1774, James Watt worked for several years as a canal surveyor and civil engineer in Scotland.



The
Birmingham
Canal at
Brindley
Place

Dating from 1803, the Kingston Buildings (now Austin Court) are typical of the warehouses that lined the town's canals in the 18th and 19th centuries



7

The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal



The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal looking towards Newhall Street



Left: New Hall as depicted on Westley's map, 1731

Completed in 1789, the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal was one of the catalysts for the development of Birmingham's famous Jewellery Quarter.

The canal was built close to New Hall, former home to the Colmores, one of the most important families in Georgian Birmingham.

When James Watt first moved to Birmingham he lived in New Hall for a time. The house was also used as a warehouse by Matthew Boulton until it was demolished in 1787.

8

Former Birmingham Assay Office

theassayoffice.com

Below: the restored tollhouse at Farmer's Bridge Locks



This splendid Victorian building was home to Birmingham's Assay Office between 1877 and 2015.

The Assay Office was established by Matthew Boulton in 1773. Its original premises were situated in the King's Head Inn on New Street. James Watt was elected as one of the Assay Office's governing Guardians in 1789.

The Assay Office moved to a brand new building on Icknield Street in 2015.

Group visits to the Silver Collections are available by arrangement.

Telephone 0121 236 6951 or email: gem@theassayoffice.co.uk for further details.



Left: The former Assay Office

Below: The new Assay Office



Spoon handle showing the 1774 Birmingham hallmark with the maker's mark of Boulton & Fothergil



9

St Paul's Square

www.stpaulsjq.church



St Paul's Church



Francis Eginton's East Window

This handsome Georgian square was developed in the 1770s and 1780s on land formerly owned by the Colmore family.

Designed by Roger Eykyn of Wolverhampton, St Paul's Church was consecrated in 1779. Tradition has it that James Watt and Matthew Boulton worshipped here for a time.

The church features a painted window of *The Conversion of St Paul* by Francis Eginton (1737-1805).

10

The Jewellery Quarter

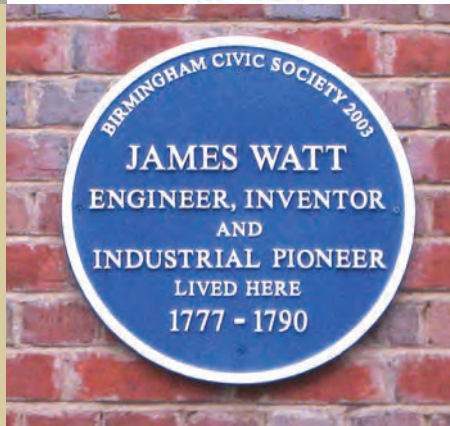
A five minute walk from St Paul's Square is Regent's Place. This narrow street features a blue plaque marking the location of Watt's second Birmingham home, Harper's Hill, where he lived between 1777 and 1790.

A longer walk will bring visitors to the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter on Vyse Street.

This fascinating working museum tells the story of jewellery and metal working in Birmingham from the Middle Ages to the present day.

One of the reasons Watt moved to Birmingham was because the town possessed the skilled metalworkers to turn his new steam engine into a reality.

Harper's Hill



Museum of the Jewellery Quarter

James Watt Out-of-Town Guide

11

Thinktank

Curzon Street, Birmingham B4 7XG
birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank

The out-of-town trail consists of publicly accessible sites associated with James Watt and the Lunar Society.

Please note this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.

For public transport information visit networkwestmidlands.com

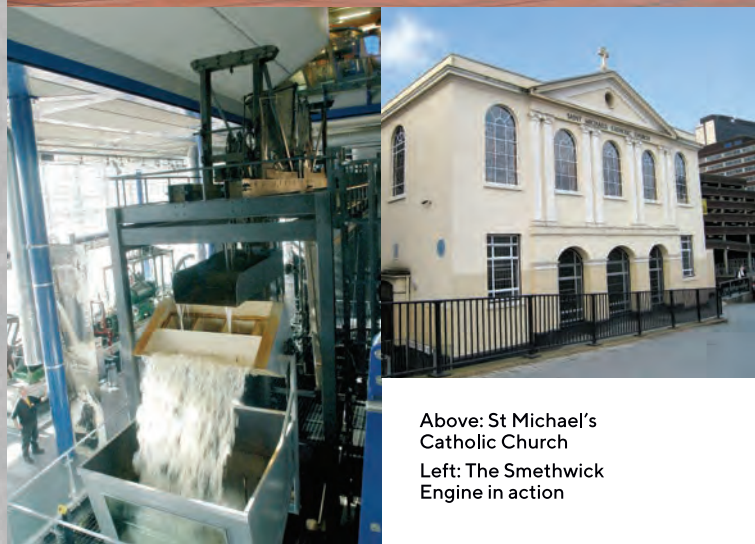


Please check individual websites for details of venue opening times.

Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum, contains a variety of displays relating to James Watt and the Lunar Society. The highlight is the huge Boulton & Watt Smethwick Engine – the oldest working steam engine in the world.

If you are walking from the city centre you may pass St Michael's Catholic church on Moor Street. This was built in 1803 as a Unitarian meeting house to replace the one Joseph Priestley had ministered to but which was burnt down during the 1791 riots.

Thinktank at
Millennium Point



Above: St Michael's
Catholic Church

Left: The Smethwick
Engine in action

12

Edgbaston Old Church and Hall

Church Road, Edgbaston, B15 3SH
edgbastonoldchurch.org.uk

Edgbaston
Old Church



Above: Engraving of Edgbaston Hall
Left: Withering memorial

Edgbaston Hall was the home of James Watt's fellow Lunar Society member Dr William Withering. He pioneered the successful use of digitalis, found in foxgloves, to treat dropsy (today known as oedema) which can be caused by heart failure. Withering is buried in Edgbaston Old Church – his memorial stone decorated with carved foxgloves.

Please note that Edgbaston Hall is now a private golf club so is not publicly accessible without prior appointment.

The church is open most days from 10am to 4pm.

13

Soho Foundry

Foundry Road, Smethwick B66 2LL

Built for the construction of Boulton & Watt steam engines in 1796, the main part of this huge building still survives. William Murdock lived in one of the cottages nearby.

Please note the Soho Foundry and Murdock's Cottage form part of the Avery Weigh-Tronix works and are not currently accessible to the public. Visitors can, however, catch a glimpse of the terrace of workers' houses through the archway of the 1925 Foundry Road gatehouse building.

A more distant view of the Foundry can be seen from the Rabone Lane bridge and the canal towpath.

Soho Foundry
main gate



William
Murdock's
cottage

14

Soho House

Soho Avenue, Birmingham B18 5LB
birminghammuseums.org.uk/soho

Soho House was the home of Matthew Boulton between 1766 until his death in 1809. The house was a regular venue for meetings of the Lunar Society.

The house was remodelled in the 1790s by the architect Samuel Wyatt, who also built James Watt's house at Heathfield.

Soho House is now a museum run by Birmingham Museums Trust, and contains fine collections of ormolu, silver, furniture and other important material associated with Boulton.

Below: The Dining Room – a regular venue for meetings of the Lunar Society

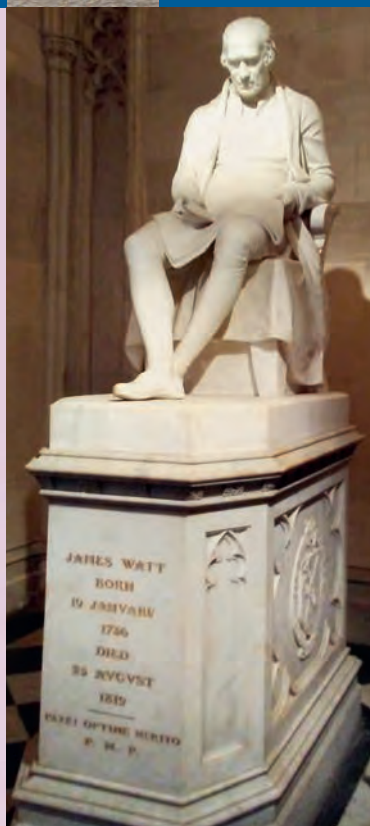


Pair of Ormolu & Blue John ewers, Boulton & Fothergill, c1772

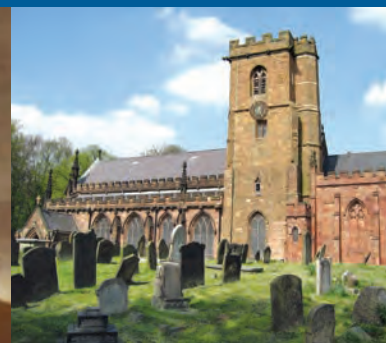
15

St Mary's Parish Church

Hamstead Road, Birmingham B20 2RB
handsworthstmary.org



Above: James Watt memorial
 Right: Matthew Boulton memorial



Soho House

James Watt, Matthew Boulton and William Murdock are all buried in St Mary's Church.

The James Watt memorial chapel was added in 1826 by the architect Thomas Rickman.

The statue of Watt was created by Sir Francis Chantrey (1781 – 1841), the foremost sculptor of the Regency period.

Boulton's memorial was sculpted by another talented artist, John Flaxman (1755–1826).

16

Heathfield, Handsworth

33 Radnor Road, Birmingham B20 3SP

The success of the steam engine business meant that Watt could afford to build Heathfield Hall, a handsome new house on Handsworth Heath, a few miles outside of Birmingham.

Designed by the architect Samuel Wyatt (1737–1807), Heathfield was completed in 1790. When Watt retired from business in 1800 he continued to experiment and invent in a workshop located in one of Heathfield's attic rooms.

Heathfield Hall was demolished in 1927 to make way for new housing. However, Watt's workshop was preserved in its entirety and moved to the Science Museum in London where it can still be seen today.

The only surviving building from the Heathfield estate is the Gatehouse Lodge which is now a private house.

Below:
Heathfield
Hall by
Allen Everitt,
1835



Watt's attic
workshop
at Heathfield
House

17

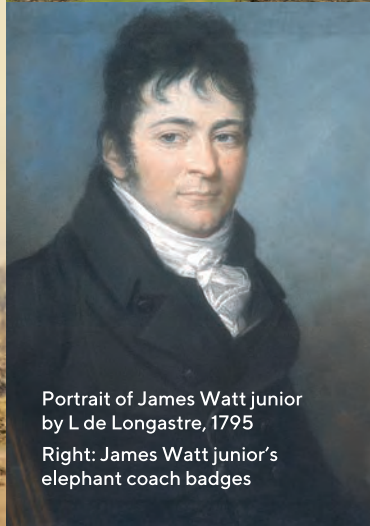
Aston Hall

Trinity Road, Aston, Birmingham B6 6JD
birminghammuseums.org.uk/aston



Left: Aston Hall from
Lady Holte's Garden

Below:
The Great Hall



Portrait of James Watt junior
by L de Longastre, 1795

Right: James Watt junior's
elephant coach badges



Completed in 1635, Aston Hall is one of the finest Jacobean country houses in England.

Between 1818 and 1848 the Hall was leased by Watt's son, James Watt junior. He took great care to preserve the historic fabric of the house and his careful stewardship helped ensure that this important building still survives today.

Now a museum run by Birmingham Museums Trust, the Hall contains significant collections of furniture, silver and other material associated with Watt junior.