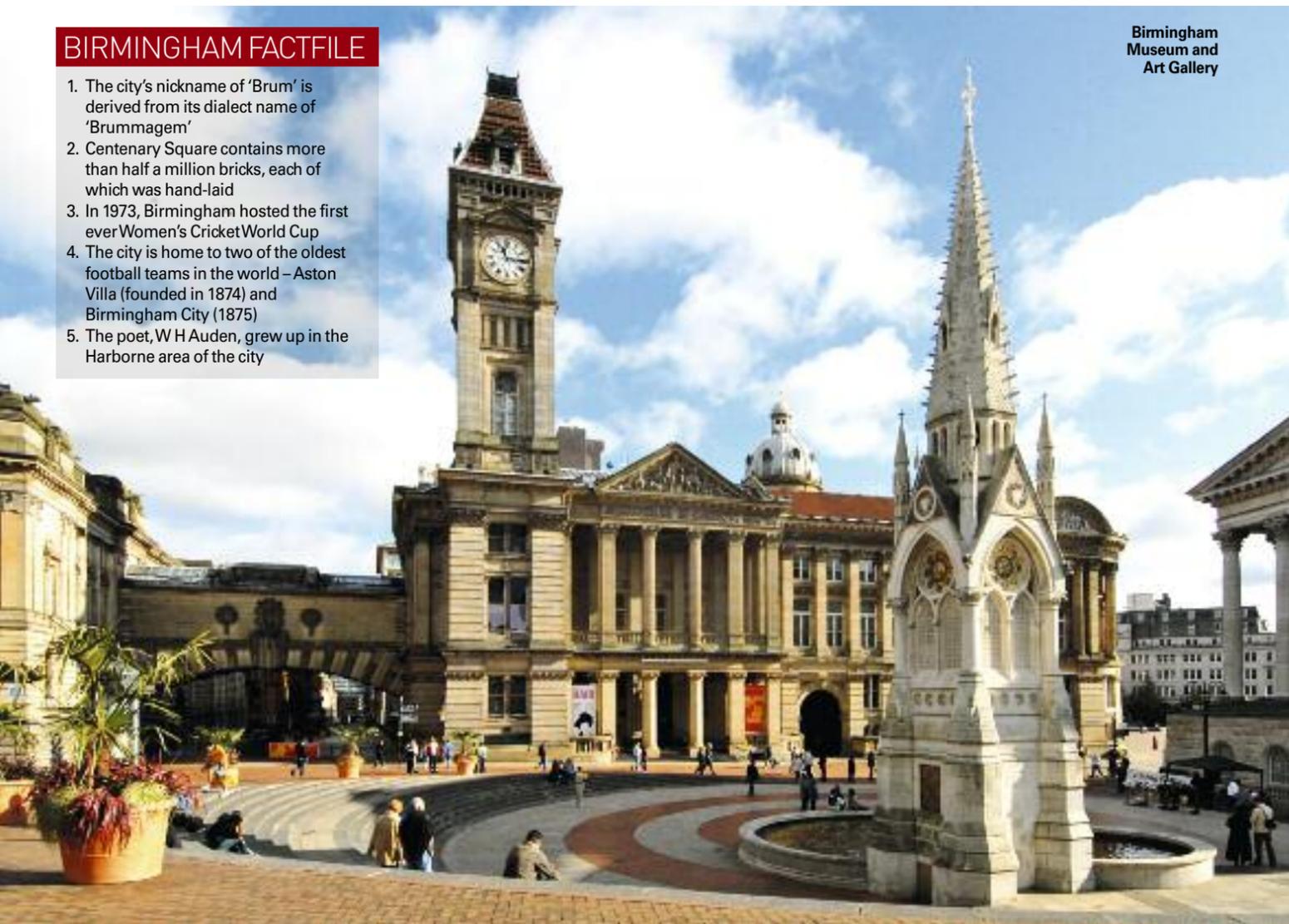
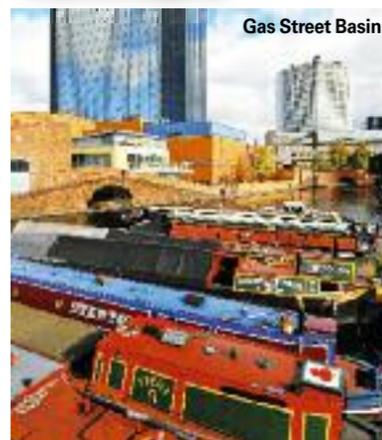


BIRMINGHAM FACTFILE

1. The city's nickname of 'Brum' is derived from its dialect name of 'Brummagem'
2. Centenary Square contains more than half a million bricks, each of which was hand-laid
3. In 1973, Birmingham hosted the first ever Women's Cricket World Cup
4. The city is home to two of the oldest football teams in the world – Aston Villa (founded in 1874) and Birmingham City (1875)
5. The poet, W H Auden, grew up in the Harborne area of the city

Birmingham
Museum and
Art Gallery

Selfridges

Birmingham Canal Main
Line and Brindleyplace

Gas Street Basin

Council House and
the 'Flooie in the
Jacuzzi'

The best of Birmingham

Don Jolly picks out the highlights of a visit to Britain's second most populous city

Chocolate
sensation:
Cadbury World

The city of Birmingham came to prominence during the Industrial Revolution, driven by the likes of Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdoch. The trio worked to produce a state-of-the-art steam engine, and a gilded statue in their honour, known locally as The Golden Boys, overlooks Centenary Square.

Things have changed in recent years, of course, with heavy industry now all but gone. Regeneration has gone on apace, however, with industrial buildings making way for new structures or converted into offices and apartments, while Birmingham's many miles of canal (it has more canals than

Venice) are now used for leisure instead of shipping goods out of the city.

Centenary Square is a good place to start a city visit because that is where the Tourist Information Centre is located, at the award-winning, Postmodern Library of Birmingham. In a corner of the square, near the library, the Hall of Memory commemorates 12,230 Brummies who died in the First World War. Meanwhile, the recently re-developed Birmingham Repertory Theatre, next door to the library, offers a wide range of cultural events.

More culture is on hand at the square's Symphony Hall. Considered one of the finest concert halls in the world, it shares

another glitzy building with the International Convention Centre. Pass through this and you come to the Birmingham Canal Main Line and, via a footbridge, Brindleyplace, an attractive office area boasting waterside bars and restaurants as well as the Ikon Gallery of contemporary art.

Follow the canal's towpath north-west and you reach, firstly, the National Sea Life Centre. Across a bridge, the National Indoor Arena hosts sports events plus music and comedy. Forthcoming star visitors include Kylie Minogue, Lady Gaga, James Blunt, Chris Rea, Miranda Hart and John Bishop.

back. Some 500 jewellery businesses now operate in and around Vyse Street, along with the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter. Trains run between Jewellery Quarter station and Snow Hill station, near the centre.

TREASURE TROVE

Back in the centre, you can see even more treasures at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in Chamberlain Square, most notably elements of the Staffordshire Hoard, the largest cache of Anglo-Saxon gold ever found. Discovered in a field in 2009, the hoard consists of more than 3,500 items. Meanwhile, the art gallery contains the world's largest public collection of Pre-Raphaelite art.

Linked to Chamberlain Square, Victoria Square is dominated by the impressive-looking Council House and the classical lines of the Town Hall. Notable artwork in the square includes Antony Gormley's leaning *Iron: Man* and a water feature by Dhruva Mistry called *The River*, which features a reclining female nude known affectionately as the 'Flooie in the Jacuzzi'.

A few minutes' walk east of the squares, Birmingham's Baroque cathedral of St Philip was completed in 1715. The building contains stained glass windows by Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones.

To the south, between the railway termini of New Street and Moor Street, is Birmingham's main shopping area, with pedestrianised New Street leading to the Bullring centre, marked at the entrance by a large and fierce-looking bronze bull. Here, too, is Selfridges' iconic architectural landmark store – completed in 2003, its smooth lines are covered by 15,000

Back at Brindleyplace, you can join boat trips to explore more of the canals, or follow the towpath on foot to Gas Street Basin, where narrowboats are moored. Further on, the Mailbox, once the Royal Mail's main sorting office in the city, now features upmarket shops and restaurants on the waterfront.

North of the canal area, the Jewellery Quarter is a must if you are in the market for a special gift. Craftsmen moved into workshops originally set up in the mid 18th century and they have not looked

aluminium discs. A close neighbour is St Martin's Church, its fine spire towering over this sparkling temple to consumerism.

If markets are more your idea of a good shop, there are three behind the church – one indoor, one open and, in between, the Rag Market. Some 600 stalls sell everything from fresh produce to clothes and trinkets.

Birmingham has the appearance of a modern city these days, very different from the 19th century when cheap back-to-back housing was crammed into every available space to accommodate the rapid population growth. Such dwellings soon became slums and, by the 1970s, most had been demolished. Today, just four back-to-backs remain, in Hurst Street. Restored by the National Trust, they are open for visits.

If you have kids in tow, one Birmingham sight you might like to include is Cadbury World in the southern suburb of Bournville (advance booking recommended). It offers a great opportunity to learn all about chocolate – where the raw ingredients come from and how to make it. And you get to eat some too...

INFORMATION

SITE

For your visit to Birmingham, stay at Chapel Lane Club site – details can be found on p125 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*. To book, call 01342 327490 or see caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook. Chapel Lane is close to the railway station at Earlswood, which has an hourly service to Birmingham Moor Street (journey time 23 minutes).

