

Restoring The Chamberlains' Highbury



The Chamberlain Highbury Trust



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JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN ESQ. M. P.

Proposed Mansion.

MOOR CREEK NEAR BIRMINGHAM.



ELEVATION LOOKING NORTH.



Foreword



Les Sparks OBE
Chair, Chamberlain Highbury Trust

Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914), businessman, social reformer and controversial politician and imperialist, had an early involvement in civic leadership. He was elected mayor of Birmingham in 1873. His pioneering efforts in educational reform, slum clearance, improved housing, and municipalisation of public utilities led to Birmingham being described as the *'best governed city in the world'* (*The Harpers Monthly* 1890).

The house called 'Highbury' and its surrounding 30 acre estate form one of Birmingham's most important heritage sites. Commissioned by Joseph Chamberlain and completed in 1880, the Grade II* listed house was designed by the prominent Birmingham architect J. H. Chamberlain. The grounds are listed Grade II on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

The Chamberlain legacy is still the subject of debate and rightly so. Joe Chamberlain, as Churchill commented, 'made the weather' politically and was both adored and hated. The Commonwealth and the rich ethnic and cultural diversity we celebrate in today's Birmingham, is distant from his time yet connected, for good or ill, to decisions made by 'Brummagem Joe'.

If modern Birmingham is to continue to grow and prosper, then the development of purposeful and ethical leadership models will be central to the stewardship of its public and private institutions and the promotion of successful entrepreneurship across its diverse population.

Leadership matters, at local, national or international level. Highbury, located just 3 miles from Birmingham city centre, makes it a unique urban oasis for purposeful leadership training and inter-cultural conversations. Its rich heritage and setting provides a strong foundation reminding us all that, as a City, we have achieved great things and we can do so again.

The Chamberlain Highbury Trust envisages an important role for Highbury as a place where people from all backgrounds, and the young in particular, can learn about civic leadership and governance and debate the future of their city and region.

Left, Highbury drawing of elevations, 1878
Courtesy of the Library of Birmingham

Restoring The Chamberlains' Highbury

Why is Highbury so important?

Highbury is an exceptional example of a mansion house and grounds created by a wealthy industrialist in a suburban location.

It is remarkable for its Venetian Gothic architecture and its wealth of craftsmanship and decoration. Whilst its architecture and landscape are of high quality, it is the site's close association with Joseph Chamberlain and his family that ensures its national importance.

The decline of Highbury

Following the death of Joseph in 1914, the house was used for convalescing soldiers of the First World War. Austen Chamberlain established the Highbury Trust in 1919 to manage the estate and in 1932 the Trust was passed to the City Council *'for the general benefit of the citizens of Birmingham'*.

Although parts of the building continue to be used for private functions, the charitable purposes of the site have become obscured and there is generally no public access to the house and its unique heritage.

Following extensive public consultation there was the recognition that new governance and a new operating model were needed to restore the property and to take full advantage of the range of educational and social opportunities that this unique site offers Birmingham, the UK and the world.







The Chamberlain Highbury Trust – who are we?

The Chamberlain Highbury Trust was established as an independent charitable trust in 2016 to preserve and restore the house and grounds and give them a sustainable future.

Our aspiration is to make Highbury fully accessible to everyone and regain its rightful place in Birmingham's historical and cultural landscape. Highbury is situated in Moseley and Kings Heath Ward and borders Sparkbrook, one of the most deprived wards in a city with high levels of deprivation.

Nationally, with only 23% of board members being women and 5% from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, developing socially diverse leadership is a priority. Birmingham is one of the youngest cities in the UK with over 40% of its population under the age of 25 years.

Most importantly, we want Highbury to engage young people from all backgrounds and encourage them to take inspiration from the Chamberlain family heritage. We want them to critically reflect upon leadership in all its forms and to take their place in the future of the region and country.



The Highbury Restoration Project

The immediate goal of the Chamberlain Highbury Trust is to raise the funds to restore the House and Grounds, and to create a wide ranging programme of activities which draws upon major themes in the history of Highbury.

Although superficially in reasonable condition, the house requires treatment of dry rot, roof repairs, new leadwork and rainwater goods, masonry and brickwork repairs and re-pointing, joinery repairs and

local structural repairs. Some of the fine decorative interiors in the principal rooms have also suffered damage and so require restoration.

The Grounds also require significant works to reinstate the original setting to the house. These include demolishing the eyesore 1960s caretaker's house, reopening the original driveway, removing inappropriate planting and conserving historic features like the crucible wall, gateways and the terracotta balustrade to the Rock Garden.









Alongside the repairs we will deliver a range of essential improvements and new facilities. These include the complete renewal of the building's heating, mechanical and electrical services, a lift to improve circulation and access, and a tea room and toilets for visitors to the house and grounds. We shall create a dedicated new learning space for schools and other educational groups.

The physical works will be accompanied by a wide-ranging engagement and activity programme with new interpretation of the history of Highbury and the Chamberlains, including talks and tours, study days and courses, exhibitions and performances, and a comprehensive formal education programme.

We will also develop a vibrant volunteering programme, deliver a wide-ranging programme of public and community events and provide training for staff, volunteers, local people and partner organisations.



Historical Timeline

Date	Chamberlain and Highbury	Birmingham and the World
1836	Joseph Chamberlain born in Camberwell, London	
1854	Chamberlain moves to Birmingham	
1861	Marries Harriet Kenrick (d 1863). They have two children, Beatrice and Austen	
1867		Chamberlain & Jesse Collins form the Birmingham Education League
1868	Marries Florence Kenrick (d 1875), a cousin of his first wife. She and Joseph have four children, Neville, Ida, Hilda, and Ethel	
1869	Chamberlain elected a councillor for Birmingham	Birmingham Education league becomes the National Education League
1873	Chamberlain elected mayor of Birmingham	
1874		Chamberlain takes the Birmingham water and gas supplies into municipal ownership.
1876	Chamberlain elected as Liberal MP for West Birmingham	
1878	Chamberlain purchases land near Moseley and starts building Highbury	Works commences on the construction of Corporation Street
1879		George Cadbury establishes new factory at Bournville
1880		Chamberlain Memorial constructed in Chamberlain Square, designed by Martin & Chamberlain
1886	Chamberlain resigns from Gladstone's government	Gladstone's 1st Irish Home Rule Bill defeated
1888	Marries third wife, the American Mary Endicott (1864-1957)	
1889		Birmingham granted city status by Queen Victoria
1894	Chamberlain enlarges the Highbury estate	
1895	Chamberlain appointed Colonial Secretary	Conservative – Liberal Unionist Coalition win general election



Date	Chamberlain and Highbury	Birmingham and the World
1899		Outbreak of Second Boer War (ends in 1902)
1900	Chamberlain appointed Chancellor of the University of Birmingham	University of Birmingham receives its Royal Charter
1901		Death of Queen Victoria
1903	Chamberlain resigns as Colonial Secretary	Chamberlain Clock constructed in Jewellery Quarter
1906	Chamberlain suffers a stroke and withdraws from politics	Conservative - Liberal Unionist Coalition defeated by a landslide in the general election
1914	Chamberlain dies	Outbreak of First World War Highbury used as a convalescent hospital 1915 - 1918
1919	Austen Chamberlain (Joseph's eldest son) gifts Highbury to the Trustees of the Highbury estate	
1921	Public Park created from 75 acres of the Highbury and Uffculme estates (known as Highbury Park from 1933)	
1925		Joseph's elder son, Austen (1863-1937) wins the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the Locarno Pact between France and Germany
1932	Highbury trustees transfer the estate to Birmingham City Council	
1937		Joseph's younger son Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) becomes Prime Minister
1939		Outbreak of Second World War
1940	Highbury Palm House, hospital pavilions and Stables demolished and replaced by Chamberlain House	
1984	Highbury undergoes restoration by Birmingham City Council	
2016	Chamberlain Highbury Trust established	

The Chamberlains



Chamberlain family portrait c1900: Neville, Austen, Joseph, Beatrice and Mary
Courtesy of Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham

Joseph Chamberlain was born in London in 1836. At the age of 18 he moved to Birmingham and made his fortune as a partner in his uncle's and father's screw manufacturing business.

The Chamberlains were Unitarians and political radicals and so Joseph had been brought up with a strong belief in helping to improve the lot of the poorest members of society. He was particularly concerned with the school system and campaigned for the introduction of free, compulsory, secular education for all children.

In 1869 Chamberlain became a member of Birmingham Corporation and in 1873 he was elected Mayor. He set about transforming the town and ultimately it was hailed as '*the best governed city in the World*'. He set up new municipal water and gas companies which not only significantly improved the health of the population but also generated funds for new public services. Under his leadership the council undertook extensive slum clearance and constructed a brand new urban boulevard, Corporation Street. His administration also built many new schools as well as new public libraries, swimming baths and municipal parks.

Chamberlain later became one of the founders and the first Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, which gained its Royal Charter in 1900.



In 1876 Chamberlain was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for West Birmingham. However, his prominent career in national politics was controversial and ultimately unsuccessful - he never achieved his ambition to be prime minister and managed to split both of the main political parties. Nonetheless his influence on the country's political landscape was such that Winston Churchill commented that it was Chamberlain who *'made the weather'*.

In 1906 Chamberlain suffered a stroke and withdrew from active political life. He died in his London home in 1914 and was buried in Key Hill Cemetery, Hockley.

Souvenir postcards issued for the royal opening of University buildings at Edgbaston, 1909 and Joseph Chamberlain's 70th birthday and parliamentary representation
Royal opening postcard courtesy of Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham

His sons were also notable leaders: Austen served as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Foreign Secretary and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and Neville who after successes as Minister of Health and Chancellor of the Exchequer, achieved the highest public leadership role in the country as Prime Minister from 1937-40.



Highbury



Highbury was used as a convalescent hospital during the First World War
Courtesy of Birmingham Museums Trust

In 1878 Chamberlain bought 26 acres of agricultural land near Moseley to build a new house and gardens. Designed by the prominent Birmingham architect, John Henry Chamberlain, the house was completed in 1880, when the Chamberlain family took up residence.

The estate was originally landscaped by Edward Milner, a pupil of Joseph Paxton, and further work was carried out by Edward's son, Henry. The Chamberlains introduced many new features to the grounds including a Dutch garden, an Italian garden and a rock garden. Highbury had a Palm House, which led through to thirteen glass houses designed to house Joseph Chamberlain's orchid collection.

In 1888, Chamberlain married his third wife, Mary Endicott, and the years that ensued were a golden age for Highbury, with the house providing the setting for large-scale entertainment and political meetings, as well as acting as a refuge for Chamberlain from the hurly burly of national politics.

During the First World War Highbury was used as a convalescent hospital, and afterwards it became a treatment centre for disabled ex-servicemen. A public park was established adjacent to Highbury in 1921. Comprising some 75 acres, and including part of the Chamberlain estate, it was known as Highbury Park from 1933.

In 1919 Joseph's son Austen conveyed the original estate to the Highbury Trust which in 1932 then gave it to Birmingham City Council as sole Trustee 'for the general benefit of the citizens of Birmingham.'

The Future

The Chamberlain Highbury Trust was created in response to the concerns and needs of the community, and our success in the long term will depend on our continuing to consult and involve local people.

In addition to restoring the building and establishing a sustainable business model, we will work with local people to make Highbury a lively, participative community space facilitating inter-cultural conversations and encouraging engagement through a programme of large and small scale events aimed at a range of audiences.

Using the unique environment created by Joseph Chamberlain, Birmingham's first and most famous civic leader, we want to identify, educate and develop the leaders of the future. We will provide learning and personal development opportunities for those young people who aspire to become leaders. Everyone involved will be helped to fulfil their true potential.

The Highbury Estate will be restored to its former glory and secured as a place for education, enjoyment, entertainment and endeavour for the general benefit of the citizens of Birmingham (and beyond) just as the Chamberlain Family intended when the Estate was given in Trust for the people in 1919.





Further reading & Acknowledgements

Further reading

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