

A short overview of the socio-economic aspects of immigration into Birmingham

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What attracts people to come to Birmingham?

A place that has provided opportunity for invention and ingenuity:-

- Embraced commerce and trade
- Assisted in the development of the industrial revolution
- Combined civic pride with social reform
- Has welcomed newcomers seeking work

A very (very) short history

- Long tradition of wool and leather (going back to medieval times)
- Eighteenth century Birmingham became a citadel of scientific and technological development through the efforts of The Lunar Society (see Jenny Uglow's *The Lunar Men*)
- In 1791 Birmingham was considered to be "the first manufacturing town in the world"
- Created a demand for workers willing to be employed in the plethora of small high-value metal items such as buttons, buckles, guns and jewellery
- Tradition of welcoming those willing to be part of a dynamic and skilled workforce employed by free-thinking entrepreneurs

A very (very) short history

- Development of canals and railways created a demand for workers (navigators – “navvies”) who were frequently Scottish and Irish
- Origin of Birmingham as a favoured destination of Celts
- Irish Famine (1845-1849) created influx (though living in slums in Upper Digbeth (close to New Street Station))
- Large industrial employers (Austin and Lucas) created demand in early twentieth century
- Post-war construction and expansion of industry a key to further immigration by Irish, Blacks and, latterly (1960s and 1970s) Indian and Pakistani community

Socio-economic aspects of immigration

- Net contribution to economy (despite what some 'red tops' suggest)
- Cultural impact (catering etc) 'Balti Triangle', Chinese Quarter
- Continued tradition of Birmingham as a place welcoming outsiders though with periods of hostility ("No blacks, No dogs, No Irish" in 1950s and "Rivers of blood" speech in 1968, Pub bombings of 1974)
- Demographics show that Birmingham is a city of the young whose ethnic origins are non-English
- Many new entrepreneurs from 'ethnic' communities

Challenges created by immigration

- High levels of deprivation (especially unemployment) in particular inner-city areas with high concentration of recently arrived immigrants
- Creating opportunities for all and reducing social exclusion and poverty of aspiration
- The need to develop new skills as traditional industries decline (a need for a new wave of innovative industries in workshops)