**Chapter II**

**Culture and Architecture**

Birmingham is the cultural centre for a wide area, with a great history in music and literature, a distinctive vision in fine art, sculpture and design, many museums, galleries, theatre and festivals and an impressively unique architecture.

**2.1 Music and Literature**

Birmingham bands have had a major impact on the British musical culture starting with the 1960s, when the “*Brum Beat*” era featured blues and progressive rock.The most iconic bands of that period are The Moody Blues (the inventors of a fusion between classical music and rock) and Velvett Fogg (a psychedelic rock band, formed with the main purpose of taking the pop music to a higher level of creativity).The 1970s saw the rise of reggae and ska with bands as Steel Pulse, UB40, The Beat and others.Also, during this period the Electric Light Orchestra and Wizzard were formed from a merger between the members of The Move and The Idle Race.

As a whole, the city is Birmingham is seen as the birthplace of heavy metal music, with Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, Magnum, Napalm Death and two members of Led Zeppelin being local.Other popular bands or singers being connected with Birmingham are: Ocean Color Scene, Duran Duran, The Spencer Davis Group, The Streets, The Twang, Jeff Lynne, Ozzy Osbourne, Tony Iommi, John Lodge, Steve Winwood and many others.

Literature figures associated with Birmingham are: Samuel Johnson, an 18th century poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer, Arthur Conan Doyle, a physician and writer, mostly known for his stories about the detective Sherlock Holmes, and many others.

Nowadays, Birmingham plays an important role in the contemporary literary scene, with local authors including David Lodge, Jim Crace, Jonathan Coe, Joel Lane and Judith Cutler. Birmingham is also the home of the United Kingdom’s longest-established local science fiction group, launched in 1971 and which organizes the annual event Novacon.

**2.2 Art and Design**

The distinctive culture of art and design is dominated in Birmingham by the historic importance of the applied arts to the city’s manufacturing economy.While other industrial towns were based on the manufacture of bulk commodities, Birmingham’s economy from the 18th century was built on the production of manufactured goods for the European luxury market.

Also, Birmingham is considered an important centre of Victorian art, mostly within the Pre-Raphaelite and Arts and Crafts movements.The most important artists are the watercolorist David Cox, whose later works make him a grand precursor of impressionism, the symbolist Edward Burne-Jones, Walter Langley, the first of the Newlyn School painters and Joseph Southall, the leader of Birmingham Group (important school of artists in Romanticism).

The Birmingham Surealists were an informal grouping of artists and intellectuals associated with the Surrealist movement, based in Birmingham from the 1930s to the 1950s.In the early years the group was distinguished by its opposition to the London-based vision of surrealism.However, as the World War II approached, the London-based group fell under the influence of European exiles and the ideological approaches of the two groups merged, giving rise to an increasingly co-operative and overlapping parts of a wider international surrealist movement.Hallmarking members of this group were the artists Conroy Maddox and John Melville, the art critic Robert Melville, Emmy Bridgewater, Oscar Mellor and Desmond Morris.

Birmingham is the only English city outside London to have an unbroken Tradition of sculpture production dating from the 18th century.The first recognizably sculptor from Birmingham was Edward Grubb, who was producing ecclesiastic carvings and statuary in Birmingham by 1769.Other important fine art stone carvers were Peter Hollings, Benjamin Creswick, Albert Troft, William Bloye, Raymond Mason and many others.

Birmingham’s role as a manufacturing and printing centre has supported strong local traditions, iconic works by Birmingham designers including the Baskerville font, Ruskin Pottery, the Acme Thunderer whistle, the Art Deco branding of the Odeon Cinemas and the world-wide known car, the Mini.

**2.3 Museums, Galleries, Theatre and Festivals**

The largest theatres in Birmingham are Alexandra, The Rep, the Hippodrome and the Old Rep.The Birmingham Royal Ballet resides in the city as does the world’s oldest vocational dance school, Elmhurst School for Dance. Entertainers associated with Birmingham are: Sid Field, Tony Hancock, Martin Shaw, Julie Walters, Adrian Lester, Trevor Eve and Paul Schofield.

There are two major public art collections in Birmingham, noted in the whole world.Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is known for the works by the Pre-Raphaelites and a significant selection of old masters such as Bellini, Rubens, Canaletto and Claude. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts is one of the finest small art galleries in the world, with a collection of representing the Western art from the 19th century to the present.Other museums owned by the city council: Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Soho House, Sarehole Mill, Cadbury World, Ikon Gallery and Thinktank.

Birmingham is the home to many national, religious and spiritual festivals.The Birmingham Tattoo is a long-standing military show held annually at the National Indoor Arena, featuring massed military bands and spectacular displays.Birmigham Pride, a week-end long gay and lesbian festival takes place in the gay village and attracts more than 100.000 visitors each year.The city’s largest single-day event is St. Patrick’s Day parade, the second largest in Europe, after the one in Dublin.Multicultural events are Bangla Mela, Vaisakhi Mela and the Birmingham Heritage Festival (a Mardi Gras style event in August).

Other festivals in the city include Moseley Folk Festival, which takes place in Moseley private park, The Birmingham International Jazz Festival, Birmingham Comedy Festival, which has been headlined by such acts as Peter Kay, The Fast Show, Jimmy Carr and many others, and Off The Cuff Festival.Also, there are the biennial International Dance Festival Birmingham, which involves indoor and outdoor performances, and the Frankfurt Christmas Market, which has become the United Kingdom’s largest outdoor Christmas market and the largest German market outside Germany, attracting round about 3 million visitors each year.

**2.4 Architecture**

Birmingham is a product of the 18th, 19th and 20th century, its growth beginning during the Industrial Revolution.Unfortunately only a few buildings survived from its earlier history, but those that did are protected.There are 1946 listed building in Birmingham and 13 scheduled ancient monuments.

Medieval traces can be seen in the oldest churches in Birmingham, mostly in the parish church St. Martin in the Bull Ring.Other buildings from the medieval and Tudor periods are the Lad in the Lane, the Old Crown, Blakesley Hall, Saracen’s Head and Old Grammar School in Kings Norton.

Georgian buildings also survived, including St. Phillip’s Cathedral, Soho House, Perrott’s Folly, the Town Hall and much of St. Paul’s Square.The Victorian Era saw extensive building across the city, major civil buildings such as the Victorian Law Courts (in characteristic red brick and terracotta), the Council House and the Museum & Art Gallery being constructed.The need to house the industrial workers gave rise to miles of redbrick streets and terraces and many back-to-back houses.

Birmingham City Council now has an extensive tower block demolition and renovation programme.There has been a lot of construction in the city centre in the recent years, including the award-winning Future Systems’ Selfridges building in the Bullring Shopping Centre, the Brindleyplace regeneration project and the Millennium Point science and technology centre.

High-rise development has stopped since the 1970s due to enforcements imposed by the Civil Aviation Authority on the height of buildings as they could affect the aircraft from the airport (as in the case of Beetham Tower).