BULLRING HISTORY

Its earliest transformation in the 1200’s from an agriculturally insignificant village into one of the greatest industrial cities in the world, earned it a reputation as ‘The city of a thousand trades’. Birmingham’s importance has been forged and fashioned by its own people. It is not a site of strategic defensive importance, and has no castle, port, or river. The city emerged solely as a result of its ability to craft, manufacture, and trade goods.

The site of Bullring, beneath the St Martin’s Church, has always been the city’s historic market centre, and began life in 1166 when Birmingham was awarded a charter giving it the right to have its own market. During the 18th century Mercer Street was renamed to Spiceal Street due to the growing meat and grocery trade, which had taken over in that area.

By the 1950’s the old Bullring site seemed to have everything, from shops like Chapmans selling birds, the Army & Navy store, and the largest Woolworths of its day.

In the 1960’s the market site became one of the country’s most celebrated examples of revolutionary urban planning with the dramatic development of the old Bullring, at the time one of the world’s largest enclosed shopping centres outside America, and at the forefront of shopping centre design. The three symbols of the era were the circular Rotunda building, the swathe of ring roads encircling the old market centre site, and at its heart the Bullring Shopping Centre with some 32,500m2 of supermarkets, shops and markets which opened in May 1964.

By the 1980’s, and despite its trading history, Birmingham had little to offer in terms of the burgeoning growth of new generation retailers and department stores. The old Bullring Shopping Centre was tired and jaded, and the city had only one department store - a retail offer which was not on a par with Birmingham’s growing status as a leading centre for business and culture.

The redevelopment of the 40-acre Bullring site by The Bullring Alliance is another milestone in the city’s history of innovation. The 110,000m2 scheme has been cited as the catalyst for Birmingham’s transformation into a world class retail capital - bringing modern, retail space into the city with department stores for Debenhams and Selfridges, over 160 shops, cafes and restaurants, 3,000 new car parking spaces, new open spaces, walkways and performance areas, and iconic new architecture.

Drawing on Birmingham’s historic street patterns, Bullring is composed of a series of traditional streets, squares and open spaces, which once again link New Street and High Street to St Martin’s Church, the open markets, Digbeth and beyond. Bullring provides a gateway to the east side of the city where plans are in place to regenerate the area and create a public park and learning quarter.

As part of the Bullring development existing landmarks such as the Rotunda, the old Moor Street Station, and St Martins Church have been cleaned and restored, and long lost historic Birmingham street names, going back as far as the 18th century, have been reintroduced.

A new pedestrian walkway next to St Martin’s Queensway has been called ‘Swan Passage’ after the nearby
ancient route of ‘Swan Alley’, which appears on the 1731 plan of the city. Other names to reappear include Spiceal Street.