



The Birmingham Tolkien Trail



Further information

Websites

Birmingham Visitor Information:
www.visitbirmingham.com

Birmingham Museums Trust:
www.birminghammuseums.org.uk

Birmingham City Council:
www.birmingham.gov.uk/tolkien

Books

The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien (George Allen & Unwin, 1937)

The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien
(Published in three parts, George Allen & Unwin 1954-55)

The Roots of Tolkien's Middle Earth,
Robert S. Blackham (Tempus, 2006)

Sarehole Mill Guide, Shena Mason
(Birmingham Museums, 2001)

Credits

Original text researched by Chris Upton,
Revised by Kristina Williamson, 2001 and Chris Rice, 2013

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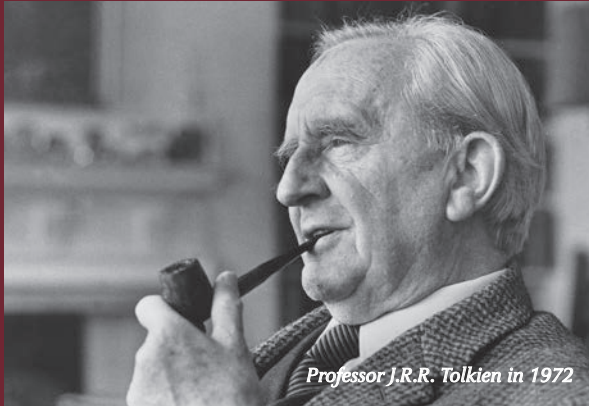


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Information contained in this guide is correct at the time of publishing

J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND BIRMINGHAM



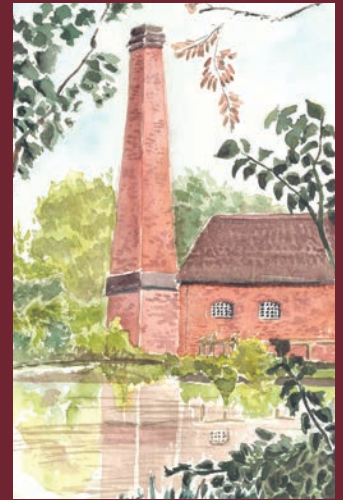
Professor J.R.R. Tolkien in 1972

J.R.R. Tolkien is one of the best known authors in the world. His epic work *The Lord of the Rings* (published 1954-55) was voted the most popular book of the twentieth century. His children's story *The Hobbit* (1937) is equally famous, and the two works have been translated into dozens of languages worldwide.

Tolkien lived in nine homes in the south of Birmingham during his formative years from 1895 to 1911, when he left to study at Exeter College, Oxford. Although he never lived in the city again, he referred to Birmingham as his home town and to himself as a 'Birmingham man'. Later in life he explained that he drew inspiration for his writing from the people and landscapes of the city and the surrounding countryside.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born on 3 January 1892 in Bloemfontien, now in South Africa. His parents, Arthur and Mabel Tolkien, were originally from Birmingham but had emigrated to further Arthur's career in banking. In 1895 Mabel took Ronald and his younger brother Hilary to Birmingham to see their grandparents for the first time. Whilst they were visiting her parents in Kings Heath, Mabel received news that Arthur had contracted rheumatic fever. Sadly, he died before she was able to return to South Africa.

With no desire to return to South Africa, the family settled in the hamlet of Sarehole where they lived for four years. In 1900 they moved to a house on the Alcester Road in Moseley from where Ronald could take a tram to King Edward's School, then located in New Street in Birmingham city centre.



*Watercolour of Sarehole Mill
by Heike Vajen*

The family soon moved again to Westfield Road in Kings Heath and then to Ladywood and a house (now demolished) in Oliver Road, in order to be near the Catholic Oratory church. Mabel, a recent convert to Catholicism, drew strength from her new faith. Diagnosed as diabetic, she died in 1904 while convalescing at the Oratory's retreat near Rednal.

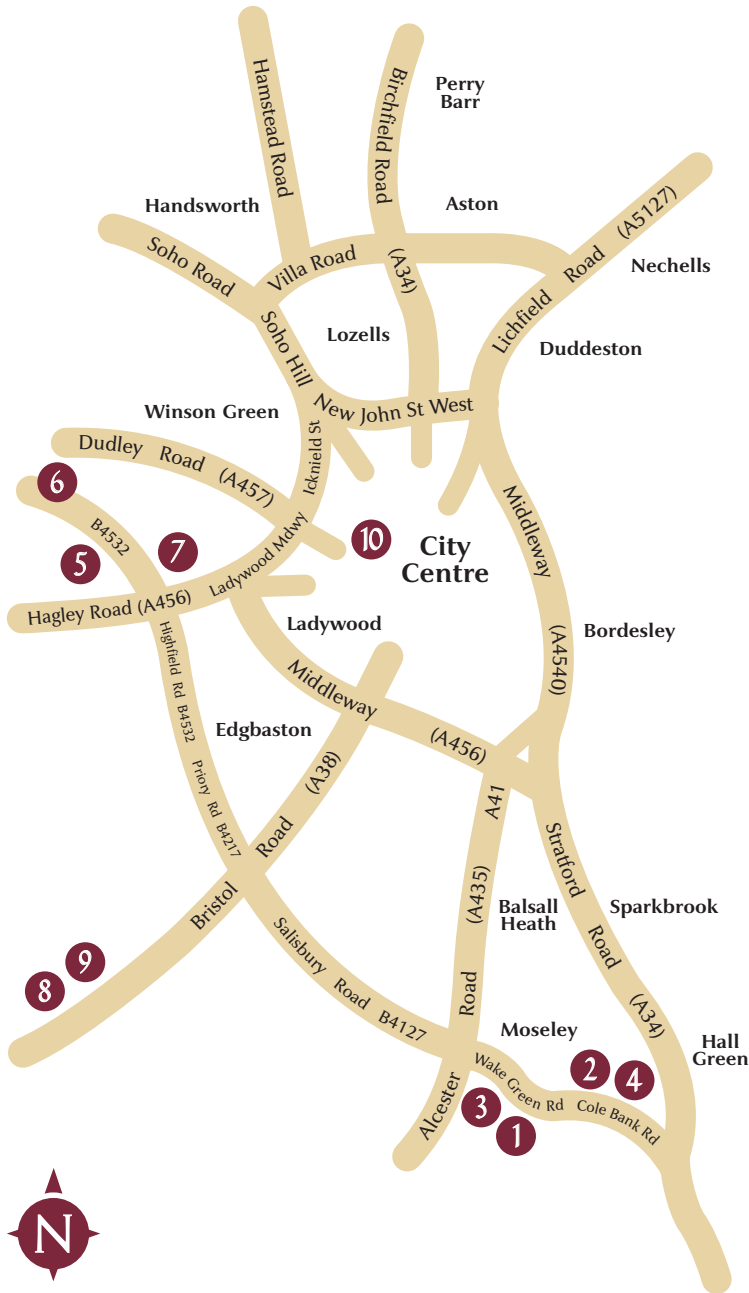
Following their mother's death, the boys remained in the Ladywood/Edgbaston area. They originally lived with their aunt in Stirling Road, but they were not happy and moved to lodgings in Duchess Road. Four years later they moved to their last Birmingham address in Highfield Road, where Ronald learnt that he had gained a place at Exeter College, Oxford. With the exception of army service, a spell as a lecturer in Leeds and retirement in Poole, Tolkien was to live and work in Oxford for most of his life.

Tolkien died on 2 September 1973, aged eighty-one.



Kings Heath High Street

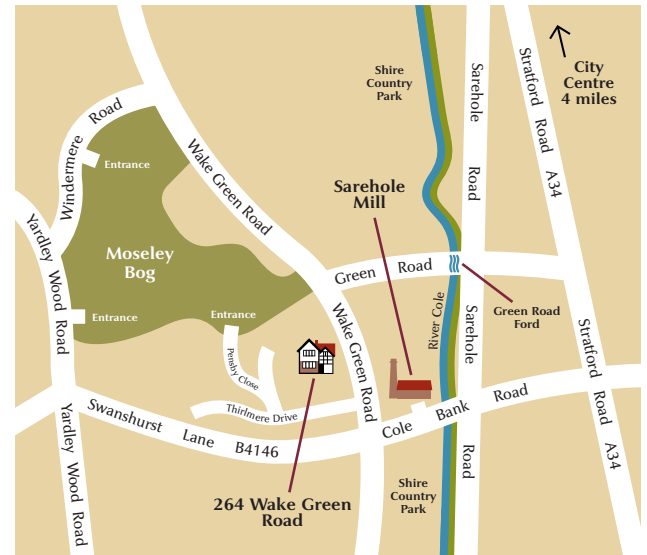
The Birmingham Tolkien Trail



Edgbaston & Ladywood

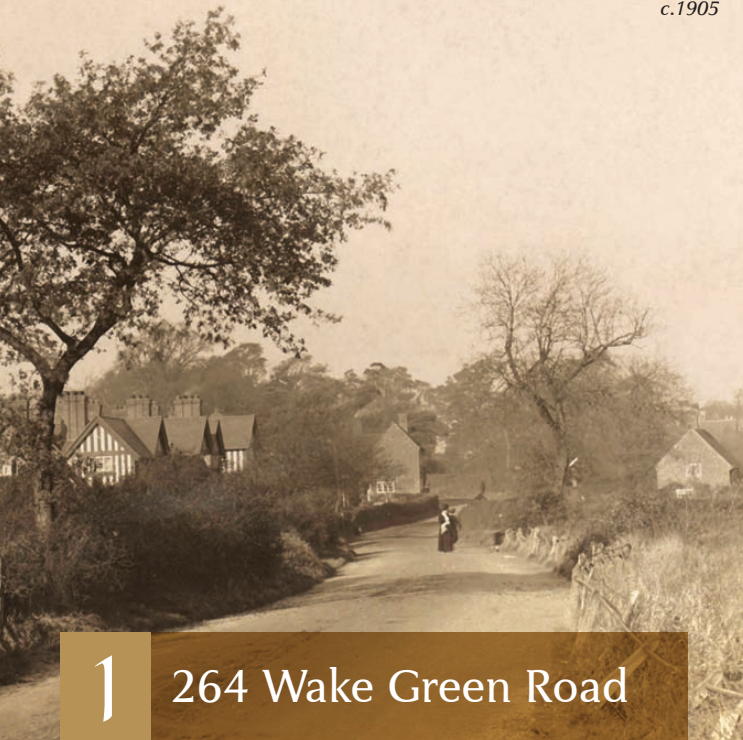


Hall Green & Moseley



Please note: these maps are only an approximate guide to the relative sites.

For public transport information contact Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 or visit www.networkwestmidlands.com



1 264 Wake Green Road



In 1896 the Tolkien family moved to 5 Gracewell Cottages (now 264 Wake Green Road) in the hamlet of Sarehole. At the time the area was completely rural and Tolkien said that the times he spent here were the happiest years of his youth.

Sarehole is said to have been the model for “The Shire”, the

home of the Hobbits, and memories of this country childhood were to colour much of his later writing.

Please note that 264 Wake Green Road is a private residence.



2 Sarehole Mill

Ronald and his brother Hilary spent many hours exploring the grounds of Sarehole Mill and being chased off by the miller’s son, whom they nicknamed the ‘White Ogre’. In the 1960s Tolkien contributed to the public appeal to restore the Mill as a museum.

Today Sarehole Mill is part of Birmingham Museums Trust. As well as being a working watermill, the museum features the *Signposts to Middle Earth* exhibition which tells the story of Tolkien’s connections with Sarehole and the surrounding area.

Opening Times

April-October, Tuesday-Sunday 12.00noon-4.00pm.
Closed Mondays except Bank Holidays.
November-March, Weekly guided tours on Fridays at 11am or by appointment.

Cole Bank Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B13 0BD
Telephone: 0121 348 8160
Website: www.birminghammuseums.org.uk



Watercolour of Moseley Bog by Heike Vajen

3 Moseley Bog and Joy's Wood

Tolkien later lamented the encroachment of the suburbs upon his former home but there is one place that 'civilisation' missed: Moseley Bog. The Bog was an ideal place for Tolkien's childhood adventures. It was once a storage pool for Sarehole Mill, and is also the site of two Bronze Age 'burnt mounds'.

The Bog is recalled in Tolkien's description of the 'Old Forest', last of the primeval wild woods, where 'Tom Bombadil' lived. It is now preserved as a Local Nature Reserve managed by the Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust.

The Bog is a short walk from Sarehole Mill via Thirlmere Drive and Pensby Close. The site can also be accessed from the entrance on Yardley Wood Road or from Wake Green Playing Fields via Windermere Road.

Telephone: 0121 454 1199

Website: www.moseleybog.org.uk



4 The Shire Country Park and Cole Valley

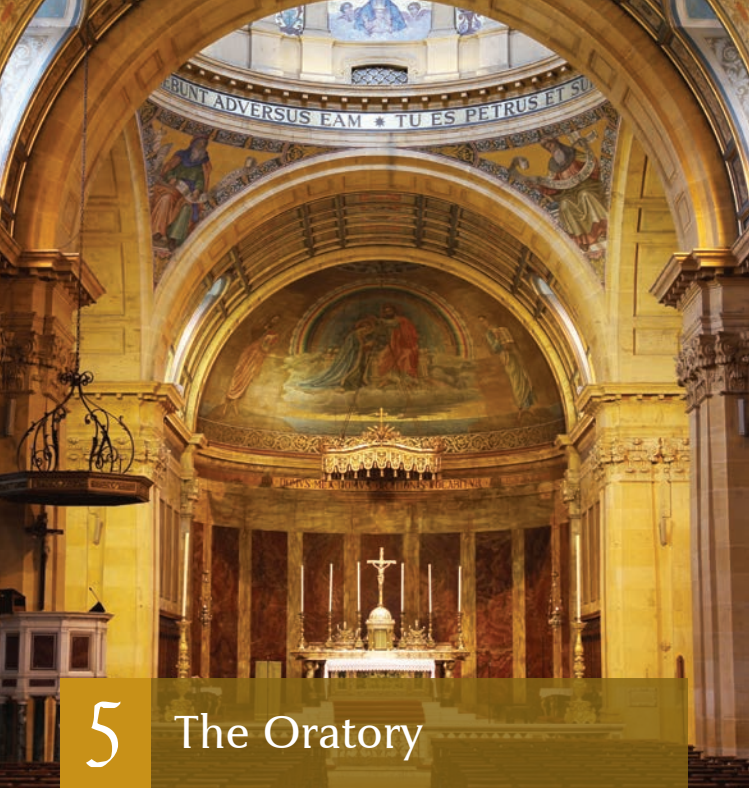
The Shire Country Park follows the attractive and varied valley of the River Cole as a green ribbon for some four miles from Small Heath to Yardley Wood. It was named in 2005 to reflect Tolkien's links with the local area.

The park contains wetland, grassland, woodland and heath, and supports a wealth of animal, plant and insect life. Herons, mallards and moorhens are a common sight, and if you are lucky you may spot a kingfisher hunting for fish along the meandering river.

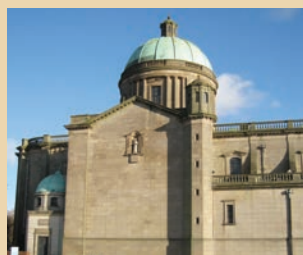
The ford at Green Road (formerly Green Lane) is one of the few remaining fords along the Cole Valley and would have been very familiar to the young J.R.R. Tolkien.

The Birmingham Parks Ranger Service and The Friends group run a range of events and activities in The Shire Country Park.

For more information telephone 0121 675 0937 or visit The Shire Country Park Friends website: www.shirecountryparkfriends.org.uk



5 The Oratory



When Tolkien's mother converted to Catholicism in 1900, the family worshipped at St Anne's Church in Alcester Street, Digbeth.

After moving to Edgbaston in 1902, Mabel and the boys attended Cardinal Newman's Oratory on the Hagley Road. The family lived nearby in Oliver Road and, for a time, Ronald was enrolled at St Phillip's School, at that time located in the same street.

The friendship of Father Francis Xavier Morgan, who became the boys' guardian, was a source of strength during Mabel's illness and subsequent death.

Visits by appointment.

Telephone: 0121 454 0496

Website: www.birminghamoratory.org.uk



6 Perrott's Folly and Edgbaston Waterworks Tower



Whilst living in Edgbaston the young J.R.R. Tolkien would have been very familiar with two distinctive local landmarks.

The extraordinary 96ft (30m) Perrott's Folly is named after John Perrott who had it built in 1758. The crenellated gothic tower was originally part of a hunting lodge. In the 19th century it became one of the first weather recording stations in the country.

Along the road at Edgbaston Waterworks stands a later Victorian chimney tower. The tower was part of a complex of buildings designed by J H Chamberlain and William Martin around 1870.

The pair are said to have suggested *Minas Morgul* and *Minas Tirith*, the Two Towers of Gondor, after which the second volume of *The Lord of the Rings* is named.

The Tolkien brothers lived with their aunt in nearby Stirling Road between 1904 and 1908.



Plough & Harrow Hotel
c.1910



7 Highfield Road and the Plough & Harrow Hotel



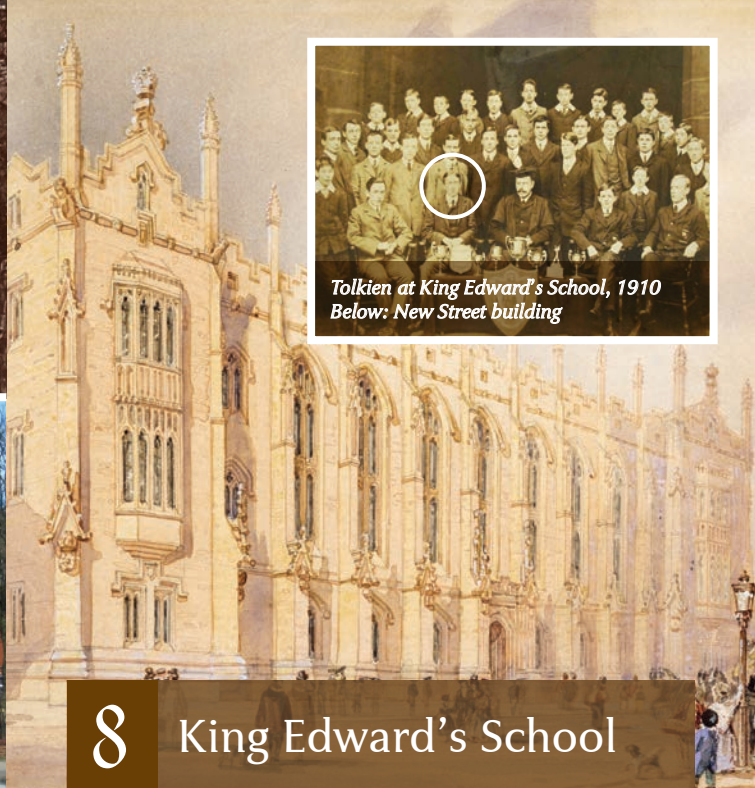
Whilst living in lodgings in Duchess Road, Tolkien had met and fallen in love with nineteen year old Edith Bratt. He was only sixteen at the time and his guardian Father Morgan attempted to put an end to the relationship by moving the

two boys to Highfield Road. It was Tolkien's last Birmingham address.

In 1913, aged 21, and whilst still at Exeter College in Oxford, Tolkien re-established contact with Edith and their romance was rekindled. They were married in the Spring of 1916 in Warwick and in June of that year spent a night in Birmingham at the Plough & Harrow Hotel. Ronald was most likely on embarkation leave prior to his departing for France as an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers.

Telephone: 0121 454 4111

Website: www.ploughandharrowhotel.co.uk



Tolkien at King Edward's School, 1910
Below: New Street building

8 King Edward's School

Tolkien attended King Edward's School in New Street between 1900 and 1911.

He proved to be a good all-rounder. As well as pursuing his academic studies he was an enthusiastic sportsman, actor, librarian and secretary of the debating and literary societies.

The school moved to its present site in Edgbaston in 1935. Sadly, the New Street building, designed by Sir Charles Barry and AWN Pugin, was demolished in 1936. However, a whole corridor was saved and rebuilt in Edgbaston as the new school chapel.

Guided tours of the chapel are available on Friday afternoons at 2pm during term-time. Please telephone in advance to check availability.

King Edward's School, Edgbaston Park Rd,
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2UA

Telephone: 0121 472 1672

Website: www.kes.org.uk

*Hospital beds in
the Great Hall*



9

The University of Birmingham

During the First World War the University of Birmingham was requisitioned by the army as the 1st Southern Military Hospital. Various parts of the campus were used as temporary wards, including the Great Hall.

In November 1916 Tolkien was brought to the hospital from the Somme after being diagnosed with trench fever. He stayed in the hospital for six weeks and although he gradually recovered his health over the next 12 months he never returned to France.

The Chamberlain Tower, the university's most familiar landmark, may have been another source of inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings*. At night, the tower's brightly illuminated clockface is thought to have provided Tolkien with the idea for the terrifying Eye of Sauron.

The Great Hall is open to the public during office hours.
Telephone: 0121 414 3344
Website: www.birmingham.ac.uk

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Library of Birmingham



The striking Library of Birmingham holds material related to Tolkien in the Archives & Collections section on Level 4.

Next door to the library, a blue plaque on the Birmingham Repertory

Theatre commemorates Dr J. Sampson Gamgee, a local surgeon and founder of the Birmingham Hospital Saturday Fund.

Tolkien used the name 'Sam Gamgee' for Frodo's faithful companion in *The Lord of the Rings*. 'Gamgee tissue' was the local name for cotton wool and the surgeon's widow lived opposite Tolkien's aunt in Stirling Road so he would have been very familiar with the name.

Telephone: 0121 242 4242
Website: www.libraryofbirmingham.com