

Chamberlain, Joseph Austen (1836-1914)



Joseph Chamberlain was born in Camberwell London, coming to Birmingham aged 18 to work for his uncle Joseph Nettlefold at his screw factory. He was elected as a Liberal town councilor 1867 and became mayor of Birmingham in 1873 holding the office for three successive years. He was responsible for domestic gas and electricity, the building of Corporation Street and the beginnings of slum clearance; largely thanks to Chamberlain Birmingham famously became known as 'the best governed City in the World'.

He entered Parliament 1876 and became Gladstone's President of the Board of Trade 1880. He was largely responsible for the fall of the Liberal government following which he led the Liberal Unionists who joined a coalition with the Conservatives; Salisbury appointed him Colonial Secretary 1895 after which Chamberlain was instrumental in directing government colonial policy during the Boer War.

He built and lived at Highbury in Moor Green now owned by the City; his library remains intact. He was married three times; his eldest son was Austen Chamberlain; his son by his second marriage was Neville Chamberlain, who also became Lord Mayor of Birmingham and then Prime Minister.

Chamberlain suffered a stroke in 1906 and left politics; he died 1914.