

Professor Carl Chinn MBE, FRSA, FBirm.Soc

Professor of Birmingham Community History

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Arts Building



About

I am Professor of Birmingham Community History; author of over 20 books on the history of Birmingham, the Black Country and the urban working class in England; a writer for the Birmingham Mail and Express and Star, and broadcaster on BBC WM.

Biography

A social historian with a national profile, Professor Chinn is also a broadcaster, newspaper columnist, public speaker, writer, charity fundraiser and campaigner for the rights of working-class people and the recognition of the importance of manufacturing. Professor Chinn is the author of 29 books that include studies of working-class housing, urban working class life, working-class women's lives, manufacturing, Birmingham, the Black Country, and ethnic minorities.

He has appeared as an expert on various television programmes, including Channel 4's 'History Hunters' with Tony Robinson and BBC 4's 'Edwardian Larder'. In the Midlands he is a long-running columnist on local history for the Express and Star and the Birmingham Mail; he has a weekly local history show on BBC WM and regular history slots on BBC Midlands Today; and he was the expert on ITV's 'The Way We Were' series. Professor Chinn has appeared on numerous Radio 4 programmes, including those presented by Libby Purves and Laurie Taylor. More recently he presented the series 'Centre of Our World', looking at various ethnic minorities in Birmingham, and 'Manufacturing Matters' a polemic for manufacturing on 'The World Tonight'.

Professor Chinn's broadcasting and writing on housing, working-class life, poverty, women, ethnic minorities, and the importance of manufacturing is deeply affected by his family's working-class background and life in the back-to-backs of Birmingham. This affinity led him to take a prominent role in the campaign to save the last back to backs in Birmingham and turn them into a National Trust Museum. Professor Chinn also featured strongly in the fight to ensure the re-opening of Birmingham's Town Hall, in the drive for a memorial to the paupers who died in Birmingham Workhouse, and in the campaign for a fitting memorial for the victims of the Blitz in Birmingham. He has been an active supporter of the Birmingham St Patrick's Parade and is chairman of the Birmingham St George's Day Association, which has led the way in celebrating England and Englishness in a positive and embracing way.

An ardent supporter of manufacturing, Professor Chinn was a key figure in the battle to keep the Longbridge car factory open in 2001 and has since been supported the struggle for jobs at Chubb, Alstom, HP Sauce, and Smith and Nephew.

Throughout his work in the community, his overarching aim has been to push across the belief that each and every person has made their mark upon history and that each and every person has a story to tell – not only about themselves but also about their people who came before them. Professor Chinn believes passionately that history must be democratised and that the lives of supposedly 'ordinary' people matter because the people themselves matter. To these ends his work has focused upon those who too often have been excluded from or marginalised by formal history: the working class, especially the poor; women; and ethnic minorities.

Crucially he feels that people should tell their own stories and not have them mediated through the words of others. Those stories can be told in many ways – whether it be in letters, poems, life stories, creative writing, photographs, paintings, drawings, recordings or videos. This local, community and family history has a two-fold social purpose in modern society. First, through an awareness of our own past and that of others we can bring people together, recognising the commonality of human experiences through our own lives and stories and those of others who may appear to be different to us. Second, an understanding of the past can provide a vital bond of continuity for young people living in a perpetually changing world, giving them a sense of place and belonging and an appreciation of the fact that the rights we now enjoy were gained through the hardships of those that came before.

For many years Professor Chinn has received letters and photos from Brummies across the world. They are gathered now in the BirminghamLives Archive, which contains over 40,000 letters, hundreds of life stories, thousands of interviews, cine film, tens of thousands of photos and a wealth of memorabilia. Together they make up probably the biggest collection of working-class life history for any one place in the world. At present Professor Chinn is in discussions with Birmingham Archives and Heritage about handing over this priceless collection to the City - so long as it is made accessible.

A keen supporter of local charities and good causes, for which he has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds in the West Midlands, he has also helped build homes for orphans in Romania and more recently volunteered on renovating a school in the Andes in Ecuador. In 2001 Professor Chinn was awarded the MBE for his services to local history and to local charities

Teaching

Professor Chinn teaches various undergraduate courses focusing on urban working class in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Postgraduate supervision

Masters level

Urban British History Post 1750: working-class life; gender; ethnicity; leisure; housing; manufacturing and business; work; politics.

Doctoral level

Urban British History Post 1750: working-class life; gender; ethnicity; leisure; housing; manufacturing and business; work; politics.

Research

Professor Chinn's research focuses primarily on the democratisation of history, and in particular urban working-class life in Birmingham and the Black Country.

Recently he has finished a five-volume study of the street names of Birmingham. His research is also concerned with migration patterns; the socio-economic differences within the working class; coping strategies against poverty; the identification of neighbourhoods; the mechanisms of neighbourhood life; gender; ethnicity, leisure and work.

Past research has considered the blitz on Birmingham during the Second World War; working-class housing in Birmingham; the social and manufacturing history of

Past research

- The lives of poorer working-class women in urban England, 1870s-1950s.
- Working-class housing in urban Britain 1840-1960s.
- Illegal betting and bookmaking in urban Britain - 1750s- 1980s.
- The social and manufacturing history of Birmingham, 1086-1990s.
- Italians in Birmingham, 1840s- 1950s
- The poor in urban Britain and working-class responses to poverty, 1840s-1950s.
- The Blitz on Birmingham, 1940-42.
- The Irish in Birmingham
- A history of Cadbury and the West Bromwich Building Societ

Other activities

Carl hosts a local history show on BBC Radio WM every Sunday, writes weekly local history columns for the Express and Star and Birmingham Mail, and edits the monthly Carl Chinn's **Brummagem Magazine** (http://www.carlchinnnbrum.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=14).

Personal website: www.carlchinnnbrum.com (<http://www.carlchinnnbrum.com/>)

Publications

- **Sunday local history radio show** between 10 am and 1 pm on BBC Radio WM www.bbc.co.uk/england/radiowm/carlproginfo.shtml (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/england/radiowm/carlproginfo.shtml>)
- Weekly local history articles in the Birmingham Mail and Express and Star.
- **Carl Chinn's Brummagem Monthly Magazine:** www.carlchinnnbrum.com (<http://www.carlchinnnbrum.com>)
- Poverty Amidst Prosperity. The Urban Poor in England, 1840-1918 (1st published Manchester University Press: 1995; new edition, Carnegie Publishing, 2006)
- Better Betting With A Decent Feller: Bookmakers, Betting and the British Working Class, 1750-1990 (1st edition Harvester Wheatsheaf: 1991; new, extended and revised edition, Aurum Press, Autumn 2004)
- Birmingham. Bibliography of a City (edited; University of Birmingham Press: 2004)
- Black Country Memories (Brewin Books and Express and Star: Autumn 2004)
- Birmingham Irish. Making Our Mark (Birmingham Library Services: 2003)
- Proper Brummie: A Dictionary of Birmingham Words and Sayings, co-authored with Steve Thorne (Brewin Books: 2001)
- The Streets of Brum. Part 5 (Brewin Books, 2009)
- The Streets of Brum. Part 4 (Brewin Books, 2007)
- The Streets of Brum. Part 3 (Brewin Books, 2006)
- The Streets of Brum. Part 2 (Brewin Books, 2004)
- The Streets of Brum. Part 1 (Brewin Books, 2003)
- Black Country Memories. Volume 5 (Brewin Books and Express and Star, 2008)
- Black Country Memories. Volume 4 (Brewin Books and Express and Star, 2007)
- Black Country Memories. Volume 3 (Brewin Books and Express and Star, 2006)
- Black Country Memories. Volume 2 (Brewin Books and Express and Star: Autumn 2005)
- Black Country Memories. Volume 1 (Brewin Books and Express and Star: Autumn 2005)
- Brum and Brummies 4. Volume 3 (Brewin Books, 2005)
- From Little Acorns Grow: 150 Years of the West Bromwich Building Society (Brewin Books 1999)
- Homes For People: 100 Years of Council Housing in Birmingham (first published Birmingham Books: 1989, expanded and revised edition Brewin Books: 1999)
- The Cadbury Story: A Short History of Cadbury(Brewin Books 1998)
- Brum Undaunted. Birmingham During the Second World War (Birmingham Books, 1996)
- "We All Come From Round Sora": Italians in Birmingham, c. 1821-1919', in, Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts, eds,
- *The Duty of Discontent. Essays for Dorothy Thompson* (Mansell, 1995), pp. 251-69
- Birmingham: The Great Working City (Birmingham Books, 1994)
- Was separate schooling a means of class segregation in late Victorian and Edwardian Birmingham?', in *Midland History*, (Vol. XIII: 1988)

Expertise

Social history of the English working class c.1850-1970; history of Birmingham and the Black Country; history of manufacturing in the West Midlands; social history of ethnic minorities in the West Midlands

Alternative contact number available for this expert: [contact the press office](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/contacts/index.aspx) (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/contacts/index.aspx>)



