

B:M



HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

KANYA KING CBE

*She made Britain
recognise that
Black music is
British music*



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B:IM

We are the change we seek

Eighteen years ago, Barack Obama gave us words that still feel like both a challenge and a call to action:

"Change will not come if we wait for some other people or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Those words feel particularly poignant this year.

The theme for Black History Month 2026 is **Honouring Our Communities**, and it has been an absolute privilege to spearhead a campaign that has introduced me to hundreds of extraordinary people from Black communities across the UK. United by a determination to make a difference.

Our **Honouring Black Britain** campaign received a tremendous number of nominations. Sadly, we could not include everyone. But I want to say this to every person who was nominated: **someone saw you. Someone valued your contribution.**

Never underestimate what that means. Because history is not only made by the people whose names appear in textbooks. History is being made every day by ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Driven by passion, personal experience, faith, frustration or simply a thirst for justice, they are starting enterprises, volunteering their time, mentoring young people, raising funds, feeding families, creating safe spaces, tackling inequalities and plugging gaps that should never have existed in the first place.

They are not waiting for somebody else to fix things.

They are being the change. People like **Jenny Gordon**, whose community group has become a lifeline for older Black people in Southampton. **Fos and Jud**, who joined forces through Peckham Soup Kitchen to support people in their community. **Ayan Mahamoud MBE**, creating opportunities for new generations of British-Somali artists.

You may not know their names... yet. But they are making history now.

Of course, there are names in this edition that many will recognise. **Stormzy**, who continues to use his platform and resources to help young Black people turn talent and ambition into opportunity.

And the incomparable **Kanya King CBE**, founder of the MOBO Awards, who sadly died earlier this year.

ONE MINUTE TO REMEMBER

Honouring our communities must also mean remembering those upon whose shoulders

"Change will not come if we wait for some other people or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."



we stand. Throughout this edition, we pay tribute to stalwarts of Black British life who are no longer with us.

This October, we are asking everyone organising an event or activity to do something very simple.

Pause for one minute of silence to remember the pioneers, activists, artists, educators, campaigners, community leaders, parents, grandparents and quiet revolutionaries who helped shape the communities we know today.

People such as **Lord Herman Ouseley**, **Baroness Rosalind Howells**, **Alex Wheatle**, **Eric Huntley** and **Bonnie Greer**. And I cannot allow this edition to pass without acknowledging the death of **Professor Jason Arday**.



His death sent shockwaves through many parts of the Black community. In the weeks before his death, he had been subjected to intense public scrutiny following allegations which he denied. Whatever views people held about the issues surrounding him, behind the headlines was a human being. He was a son, a loved one, a colleague and a man whose family now lives with a loss that cannot be undone.

For many Black people, particularly within academia, his death has raised painful emotions and difficult questions about scrutiny, accountability, race, public judgement and the human cost when debate becomes relentless.

We include in this edition a poem dedicated to Professor Arday, written by a close friend, which seeks to capture some of that pain and the wider questions his story has left behind.

Sometimes honouring our community means celebrating. Sometimes it means remembering. Sometimes it means refusing to look away from difficult conversations.

And sometimes it simply means stopping long enough to say: **we see you, we remember you and your contribution mattered.**

MAKING TODAY'S HISTORY VISIBLE

Black History Month will always provide a space to remember the giants whose lives have shaped our collective story. We will continue to remember the names of so many whose courage changed the world. But history cannot only be something we look backwards to find.

That is why this year we are deliberately shining a light on the unseen, the unsung and the perhaps unfamiliar people who are sacrificially working to make their communities better right now. That is why you will see them front and centre on our posters.

Because today's community champion may be tomorrow's historical figure. And we should not have to wait until somebody is gone before we tell them that what they did mattered.

“HISTORY IS NOT ONLY BEHIND US. WE ARE MAKING IT NOW.”

Barack Obama will be in the UK this October, and perhaps somehow this magazine will find its way into his hands. If it does, I hope he sees that, eighteen years later, communities across Britain are still answering his call.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Whether you embrace Black History Month wholeheartedly or still question why a month dedicated to Black history is necessary, its purpose remains important.

It gives us an opportunity to remember **who we are, what we have contributed and where we come from.** There is still so much we do not know. So many stories waiting to be uncovered. So many names waiting to be spoken. So much history waiting to be reclaimed, recorded and shared.

Together, we form a magnificent tapestry. A tapestry of creativity and courage. Compassion and community. Resilience and resistance. Service and sacrifice.

Time and again, our communities have stepped forward to support, to serve, to meet a need, to plug a gap, to open a door or simply to make sure somebody has something to eat. That deserves more than a footnote.

That is Black history.

And this October, we honour it.

We honour **them.** And perhaps most importantly, we remind ourselves that history is not only behind us.

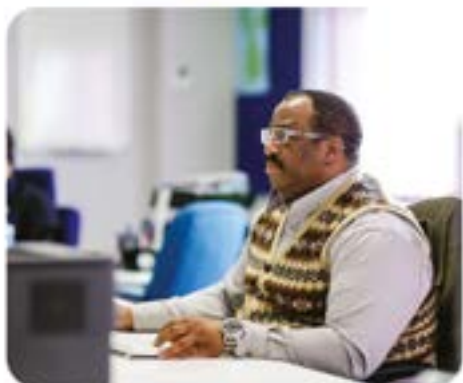
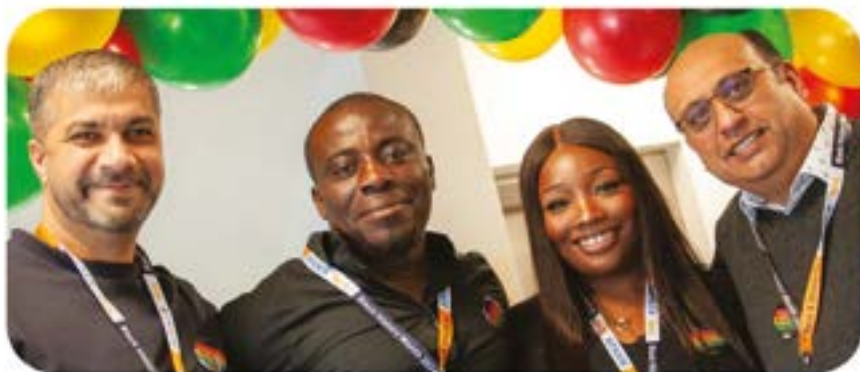
We are making it now.



By Cherron Inko-Tariah MBE

Editor, Black History Month UK Magazine

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KANYA KING CBE

She made Britain recognise that
Black music is British music

BY CLAUDIA WEBBE

Some people come into your life. And then there are those who were always supposed to be in it.

The Kanya the world knew was the founder, the visionary and pioneer, the woman who remortgaged her house to create a national platform that gave Black British music the recognition it deserved. The Kanya I knew was all of that too, but she was first a friend. She was funny in a way that surprised people who expected only the polished professional. She was fiercely loyal. She rang when you were quiet, not only when you were in the spotlight. She asked, and genuinely needed to know, how you really were. She noticed. She remembered. She held on to the small things: your mother's health, your job interview, the piece of information you had almost forgotten telling her.

She was born in Kilburn on 12 February 1964, the youngest of nine children, to a Ghanaian father and an Irish mother. Her father died when she was thirteen. She had her son at sixteen and left school. A careers adviser told her she might, if she was lucky, one day manage the local supermarket. She spoke about that line for the rest of her life. "That put a fire in my belly," she told the Evening Standard, "and gave me the motivation to say, why should I not have ambition?" She studied English literature at Goldsmiths. She worked as a television researcher at Carlton. And in 1996, she remortgaged her home, organised the first MOBO Awards in six weeks, and put the appreciation and celebration of Black British music on the national stage for the first time.

What she built was not just an institution. It was an argument. A thirty-year insistence that Black music was not a subculture, not a genre, not a niche, but the beating heart of British culture. Before MOBO, Black artists were already shaping the sound of a nation that refused to see them in the mirror. Over the decades that followed, grime, UK garage, drum and bass, Afrobeats, R&B, gospel and reggae became central to British youth culture, yet remained too often marginalised by the institutions that claimed to represent British music. Black artists were present only at the margins, as guests in a house they had largely furnished themselves. Kanya did not wait for an invitation to change that. She built the alternative institution.

Kanya King built what we now call British music. That sentence is not sentiment. It is the plain historical record. In March 2026, UK Music's landmark Black Music Means Business report estimated that music genres of Black origin had contributed more than eighty per cent of the total value of recorded music in the UK over the past thirty years:



*"For thirty years,
Kanya King made
space where
there was none.
For Black artists.
For Black audiences.
For a Britain that
has still not fully
thanked her."*

£24.5 billion out of a £30 billion market. The industry that told her in 1996 there was no market for Black music had, in fact, been sustained by the culture she refused to let be ignored. She built the market anyway. What is remarkable in retrospect is not just that she did it, but how thoroughly she did it.

MOBO was no gesture. It became a professionally run, globally recognised organisation with infrastructure, reach and authority. It went from the Connaught Rooms on 18 November 1996 to arenas. It moved out of London to cities including Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Coventry, Sheffield, Newcastle and Manchester, a deliberate act of cultural geography that said Black music belonged to the whole of Britain. She built MOBO Unsung to nurture emerging talent before the mainstream knew their names. And in the final year of her life, she opened the House of MOBO in Gipsy Hill, South London: a community venue, a gathering place, a physical declaration that belonging is something you build when the existing structures will not build it for you.

She did not just succeed personally. She changed what was structurally possible. She created a model of Black-led institutional authority, of cultural legitimacy built outside the existing power structures, that others now operate within.

Her values were straightforward and she lived them. She believed Black music was British music, and that the country had a debt to the artists who had shaped its sound while being kept at its margins. She believed young people should not have to risk everything to be seen. She believed in mentorship, not as a slogan but as a habit: the phone calls, the introductions, the quiet advocacy in rooms the mentee never knew about.

Artists including Stormzy, Little Simz and Ms Dynamite did not simply emerge. They rose into a landscape Kanya had transformed. Craig David, Skepta, Kano, Amy Winehouse and Dave all stood, at some point, on a stage she had built with her own determination and nerve. MOBO changed the terms of recognition for Black artists in British music. It forced mainstream Britain to acknowledge Black creativity on its own terms rather than on terms negotiated by gatekeepers who had never believed it belonged there.

Kanya was a formidable networker. The warmth, the encouragement, the way she changed the temperature of every room she entered: those were not merely personal qualities. They were the engine of everything she built.

Over almost thirty years, I witnessed what the world rarely sees: the late-night calls, the scribbled plans, the moments of private doubt followed immediately by that unshakeable resolve. I watched her carry whole communities on her shoulders while still remembering every birthday, every quiet

grief, every dream someone had mentioned only once, months before. She held people. She held me.

There was a cost. Building an institution from nothing, in a culture that has historically treated Black creativity as raw material rather than intellectual and artistic leadership, exacts a price that is rarely spoken about openly. The isolation of being the first. The exhaustion of having to prove, again and again, what should never have been in doubt. The emotional labour of carrying not just your own organisation but the hopes of a community that has been told, for generations, that its culture does not count. Kanya carried that. I watched her carry it with what looked like ease, and I knew, from the inside of our friendship, how much invisible weight that ease concealed. Black women who build institutions in hostile environments do not simply face professional obstacles. She faced a particular kind of structural loneliness: knowing she was doing something the system was not designed to support, and that if she stopped, it stopped. She never stopped.

She was extraordinarily brave. Her cancer was a deeply personal battle, fought with the same characteristic determination she brought to everything else. She used the last part of her life to campaign for early cancer detection, particularly in Black communities. She knew that the worse cancer outcomes faced by Black women in this country were not medical anomalies but consequences of structural inequality. It angered her. That anger belongs in her legacy too.

When cancer came in September 2024,

I was there. Stage 4, they told her. There is no stage 5. She told me: "I have decided I am walking my own stage, on my own terms." Months after being told she had months to live, she stood on the MOBO stage in Newcastle in February 2025 and told the room: "I never allowed someone to define my limits. Not in life. Not in business. And I am certainly not going to have that happen now." I heard people ask her what it was like to be dying. She replied: "I am too busy living to know."

The next generation of Black British creative leaders owes her more than gratitude. They owe her the same fearlessness, the same refusal to accept that Black excellence is anything other than central to British life.

For thirty years, Kanya King made space where there was none. For Black artists. For Black audiences. For a Britain that has still not fully thanked her. My task as her friend is simpler: to say that the woman behind the achievements was every bit as remarkable as the achievements themselves, that I loved her, and that I miss her.

Almost thirty years of friendship was not enough. It was never going to be enough.

Claudia Webbe was the Member of Parliament for Leicester East from 2019 to 2024. She was a close personal friend of Kanya King CBE for nearly three decades.

Kanya King CBE (1964–2026)

Her funeral programme records her date of birth as 12 February 1964, the date I knew throughout our almost 30-year friendship. The year 1969, cited in many published profiles, is incorrect. Kanya passed away peacefully on 3 June 2026.



Ralph Ottey

The Jamaican Airman who answered Britain's call

Ralph Ottey lived an extraordinary life that stretched from Jamaica to wartime Britain and from service with the RAF's 617 Squadron to more than seven decades of family and community life in Lincolnshire. Following his death in 2026 at the age of 102, we remember a man whose story speaks not only of wartime service, but of determination, belonging and the contribution of a generation of Caribbean men and women to modern Britain.

"When I was 16 I wanted to be at Churchill's right hand!"

It is a wonderfully vivid recollection from Ralph Ottey and one that captures something of the young man he once was. Born and raised in Little London, Jamaica, Ralph grew up thousands of miles from Britain, but when war came he was determined to play his part. In 1944, aged 19, he joined the Royal Air Force hoping to become an Air Gunner. That decision would change the course of his life.

His journey to Britain took him first to the United States. While waiting for transport to England, Ralph and other Jamaican recruits were stationed at a military camp in Virginia, in a country where the armed forces were still segregated. Ralph later recalled that the Jamaican servicemen were accommodated on the white side of the camp and had little contact with Black American soldiers.



"When I was 16 I wanted to be at Churchill's right hand!"

From America he crossed the Atlantic in convoy before beginning 13 weeks of demanding RAF training at Filey in Yorkshire. Ralph remembered exercises designed to transform young civilians into servicemen capable of depending on one another under pressure. One particularly difficult exercise involved crossing a river carrying their equipment. The lesson behind the training stayed with him: in wartime, being properly prepared was not simply about yourself; the person beside you might depend upon you.

Ralph had joined the RAF hoping to become an Air Gunner, but when the time came for his posting he was told that motor drivers were needed instead. Initially he was assigned to drive a sanitary lorry – hardly the role he had imagined when he volunteered.

But Ralph took advice from another Jamaican serviceman: whatever job you were given, do it well. He did.

After impressing his sergeant, Ralph was given a new assignment as driver to a senior officer serving with **617 Squadron – the Dambusters** – at RAF Woodhall Spa. The officer played an important role in determining whether aircraft were ready for operations, placing Ralph close to the working heart of one of the RAF's most famous squadrons.

The reputation of 617 Squadron is well known. Ralph also remembered the human reality behind it. Aircraft left on operations and sometimes did not return. Crews were lost, and their absence was felt throughout the station.



As Ralph later put it: **“The camp mourns because we are all in it.”**

Those few words say a great deal about wartime service. Everyone had a job to do, but everyone also understood the risks being faced by the men around them.

Ralph was already thinking about the life he hoped to build when the war ended. During his spare time he studied accountancy, with the RAF paying for his course, preparing himself for his eventual return to civilian life. He was also an accomplished cricketer and a talented fast bowler.

Ralph was serving with 617 Squadron at Woodhall Spa when VE Day came. Although the war in Europe was over, preparations were being made for operations in the Far East. At last, Ralph began training for the role he had originally wanted – Air Gunner. Before that training could lead to active service, Japan surrendered and the Second World War came to an end.

After demobilisation, Ralph received an RAF scholarship to study Business Studies before returning to Jamaica. There he put his skills to practical use, including helping to establish a rice mill in his community. He later began training for a management career with Tate & Lyle.

But there was another reason England remained important to him. During his wartime years, Ralph had met the woman he intended to marry. His employers wanted him to remain in Jamaica, but Ralph had made a promise. As he later recalled: **“I had a pull in England, which was greater than them, and that was the girl who I married.”**

He returned to Britain, married his fiancée and built a new life in England. What had begun with a young Jamaican volunteering for wartime service became a lifelong connection with Britain and, particularly, with Lincolnshire.

Looking back across his long life, Ralph spoke with gratitude about what his RAF years had taught him. One lesson was strikingly simple: **“The one thing I learned... to listen. You have to listen.”**

***“I was ready to play my part,
I volunteered. I don’t regret it;
I don’t regret one minute of it.
It changed my life.”***

And of his decision to volunteer, he remained equally clear:

“I was ready to play my part, I volunteered. I don’t regret it; I don’t regret one minute of it. It changed my life.”

Ralph Ottey died in 2026 at the age of 102, bringing to a close a remarkable life that had begun in Jamaica more than a century earlier. His death also reminds us that the generation who personally witnessed and participated in the Second World War is disappearing. With them can go stories that complicate and enrich our understanding of Britain’s past.

Ralph’s is one of those stories.

His recognition through **Honouring Black Britain 2026** is therefore both an honour and an act of remembrance. We recognise the young Jamaican who volunteered to serve, the RAF serviceman who became part of 617 Squadron, and the man who returned to Britain to build a family and a life.

Ralph Ottey gave his service to Britain at a moment when the country needed it. He then became part of the Britain that emerged from the war.

His life deserves to be remembered, and his story deserves its place in British history.

Creating a better world of work for all Black workers

community

Community has spent decades supporting, advising and bringing together working people from across the UK.

Community is proud of our diverse membership. Throughout Black History Month, our reps will be celebrating in their workplaces, raising awareness and promoting the rights of Black workers. **Many Black workers still face discrimination and harassment at work (41% — TUC) but most do not report it (1 out of 5).** We’re committed to creating workplaces where racism in all forms is not tolerated and everyone is given equal opportunities to succeed.

With Community in your corner, you can:

- talk confidentially to an expert about any issue you face at work
- get support to address unfair practice, bias and prejudice in your workplace
- be part of the fight to create fairer and more equitable workplaces.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the work we do to support Black workers across the UK, and how we can help you too.





PRIVATE ENA COLLYMORE-WOODSTOCK BRITISH ARMY



WING COMMANDER JOAN OCHUODHO ROYAL AIR FORCE

A Shared Spirit for Service

Meet two remarkable individuals whose combined experiences represent almost a century of service.

Ena Collymore-Woodstock OD MBE, WWII Army veteran and magistrate

Born in Jamaica in 1917 Ena was a pioneer from the beginning of her working life. At age 20, she brazenly responded to an advert for a 'Male Clerk' by applying for the job as an administrative clerk in a magistrate's court in – and succeeded.

During WWII thousands of people from the Caribbean volunteered to serve in the Armed Forces. In 1943, Ena was one of the first women to volunteer and sail to the UK. After surviving a torpedo attack on the way, Ena joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) and was assigned the role of stenographer, but the role did little to satisfy her adventurous nature.

"There was an overall enthusiasm to be part of the War effort, I wanted to do my part... I wanted more responsibility and more action... I didn't come here to do what I was doing at home."

Ena petitioned the War Office and eventually they sent her to an evaluation unit where she chose to join the Anti-Aircraft Command and became a radar operator, plotting the movements of Allied and enemy aircraft. She was the first Black woman to serve as a radar operator in the British Army, at first in Oswestry and she was later posted to Belgium, providing information to the guns around Brussels.

Following her demob in 1946, Ena took a secretarial job in the War Office while studying for a law degree and would go on to achieve a series of firsts. She was the first Black woman to train at Gray's Inn to become a barrister. On her return to Jamaica, she was appointed Clerk of Courts for St. James Parish – the first woman to hold that post. In 1953 she was the first woman to be appointed as



ENA, THE YOUNG LAWYER

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PHOTOS OF ENA, COURTESY OF THE FAMILY. PHOTOS OF JOAN, COURTESY OF JOAN OCHUODHO

Assistant Crown Solicitor. Then in 1959, Ena became Jamaica's first woman to hold judicial office when she was appointed a Resident Magistrate. She later helped to shape Jamaica's child justice framework.

Ena's passion for community cohesion also saw her serve 10 years as Chief Commissioner of Girl Guides in Jamaica and president of the area council for Soroptimist International.



At the time of her passing, in December 2025, Ena was the oldest female veteran of the British Army. Her remarkable 108-year life encompassed a period of extraordinary social transformation, and through her achievements she not only witnessed history but played an active role in shaping it.

Wing Commander Joan Ochuodho, RAF, FA Council

Joan Ochuodho was born in Kenya, the 11th child in a happy family of 12 siblings. Education was championed in her family and when she was 19, she came to the UK with the ambition to combine a degree with a work placement at an accountants. She admits she didn't have "any sense of where I was going with it... I think in my mind I just wanted to be successful at whatever I chose to do."

It was a giant billboard at a train station in South Harrow that changed everything. "We saw a billboard with a Royal Navy person, of Commonwealth origin. There was a title: 'Join the Navy.'" The friend she was with suggested they join. "I said: No! because I couldn't swim at the time. But he called the careers office and gave them our details." A short time later Joan received some leaflets and she recalls the moment she read about the RAF, "there was almost a penny drop moment of - the world could be your oyster, Joan!"

"I remembered the admiration I had for the Kenyan Air Force when I was young and so contacted the RAF Careers Office in London straight after, having learnt that Commonwealth nationals could Serve in the RAF."

Joan was 24 when she joined RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire. She worked hard from the outset and earned three trophies at the end of initial recruit training. Her potential was recognized by officers who encouraged her to think about commissioning. "That was a big deal!"

At the time, there were few women in the senior ranks, but Joan was encouraged by "a lot of inspiring people around me who saw something in me that maybe I didn't see at the time." Joan has excelled in her military career, been deployed to Iraq, Nigeria and the Falkland Islands and achieved the rank of Wing Commander.

She is also a keen footballer; she played for RAF Uxbridge and once for the RAF's women's team at White Hart Lane. "We

were thrashed, but that's a story for another time!" When the chance came for Joan to be involved in football administration, "it was a no-brainer." In 2023, Joan was appointed as the RAF's representative to the FA Council, sitting on the People and Culture Committee.

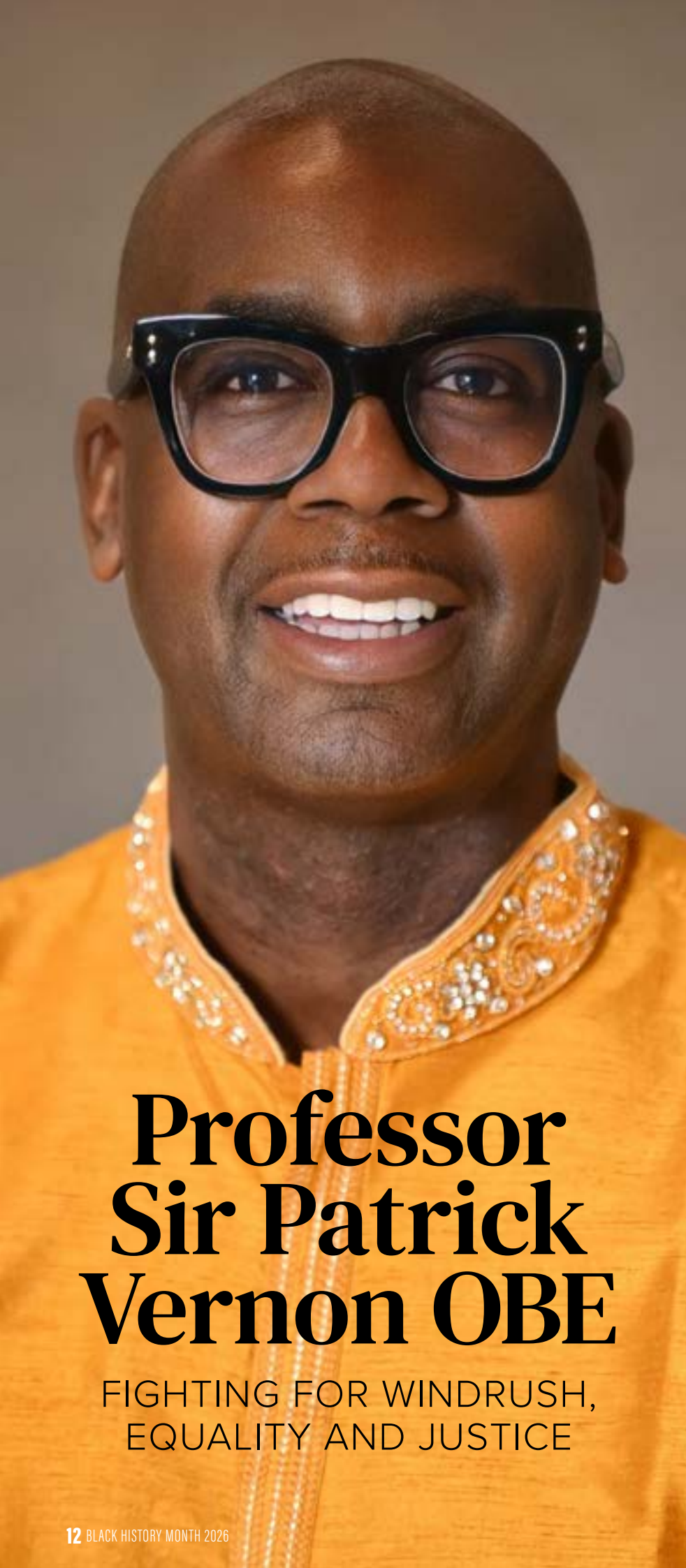


"To be part of the Council, to work very closely with the first female head of the FA, Debbie Hewitt, has been a real privilege... just walking into Wembley from the tube station, I get goosebumps; for me it's the togetherness it brings... it has such an opportunity to bring communities together."

In 2026 Joan was appointed Station Commander at RAF Wittering, in charge of an operating base that employs 1,400 personnel in expert units fulfilling critical defence output.

Reflects Joan: "Representation matters - when young people see role models who look like them and have similar backgrounds, it broadens their horizons and helps them envision possibilities they might not have considered otherwise."

Discover more stories from our
Armed Forces community at
www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/rbl

A portrait of Professor Sir Patrick Vernon OBE, a Black man with a shaved head, wearing thick black-rimmed glasses and a bright orange traditional garment with a decorative beaded collar. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

Professor Sir Patrick Vernon OBE

FIGHTING FOR WINDRUSH,
EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Every 22nd June, communities across Britain mark Windrush Day. There are school assemblies, exhibitions, music, family stories, public events and moments of reflection. It has become part of our national calendar. But national days do not simply appear. Someone has to make the argument that a community and its contribution deserve to be recognised. Professor Sir Patrick Vernon OBE was one of the people who did exactly that.

For years, Patrick campaigned for a permanent national day recognising the contribution of the Windrush Generation and their descendants. He understood that the story of those who came from the Caribbean after the Second World War was not a side note to British history. It was British history. These were people who worked in our hospitals, transport systems, factories and public services; people who raised families, established businesses and helped shape modern Britain. Patrick wanted that contribution to be acknowledged properly, not occasionally and not only during Black History Month.

***“People prepared to
keep making the case for
national recognition.”***

The establishment of Windrush Day was therefore more than a symbolic victory. Today, children take part in Windrush projects at school, families see the experiences of parents and grandparents reflected in exhibitions, and communities gather to celebrate what that generation brought to Britain. Behind all of that were years of campaigning and people prepared to keep making the case for national recognition.

But Patrick’s work around Windrush did not end with celebration. When the Windrush scandal came to light, the conversation changed dramatically. People who had lived in Britain for decades found themselves having to prove their right to remain. Some lost jobs and access to services. Some were detained. Others faced removal from the country where they had built their lives and raised their families.

Patrick responded in the way he has throughout his career: he campaigned. His parliamentary petition demanding action attracted more than 180,000 signatures. He called for those affected to receive justice and compensation and established the Windrush Justice Fund to help people access legal advice and practical support. He has also continued speaking out long after the first wave of public outrage passed. As Patrick has said: “A lot of Windrush victims want to be acknowledged, want justice and want their day in court, and that’s just not happening.”

Those words take us beyond statistics and government schemes. They remind us that behind the Windrush scandal are individuals and families who have lived with its consequences for years. Patrick has continued to raise concerns about compensation, mental health, accountability and people who have died without receiving the justice they sought.

That persistence is important. Campaigning is one thing when an issue dominates the headlines. The harder work comes when public attention has moved elsewhere but people are still waiting for answers. Patrick has stayed with the issue, continuing to ask whether promises have been fulfilled and whether those who suffered have been treated fairly.

“Recognition without justice remains incomplete for Windrush Day.”

It also explains why he has described the relationship between Windrush celebration and the continuing scandal so clearly: “Recognition without justice remains incomplete for Windrush Day.”

There is something powerful in that statement. We should celebrate the Windrush

Generation, but celebration cannot replace justice. Windrush cannot simply be music, food, flags and photographs from the 1950s. The story must also include the discrimination people faced, the barriers they overcame and the injustice experienced by members of the very generation Britain now celebrates.

This combination of recognition and action runs through Patrick’s wider work. His 100 Great Black Britons campaign challenged the absence of Black figures from familiar accounts of British achievement. It encouraged people to discover men and women whose contributions had too often received little attention and opened up a wider conversation about who we recognise as having shaped Britain.

For many young people, it provided an introduction to Black British figures they had never encountered in the classroom. It also reinforced something Patrick has argued throughout his career: Black history in Britain did not begin with the Empire Windrush in 1948. Black presence in and contributions to this country stretch back centuries.

His work has also extended across public health, mental health and racial inequality. The subjects may appear different, but the principle is remarkably consistent. Patrick has repeatedly asked institutions to listen to communities, recognise inequality

and understand the real impact that decisions can have on people’s lives.

In 2026, his own contribution received significant national recognition when he was knighted for services to racial equality and social justice. It is fitting that someone who has spent so much of his life fighting for others to be acknowledged should himself receive such an honour.

Yet a title is not the real measure of Patrick Vernon’s contribution. The measure can be seen every 22nd June, when communities across Britain mark Windrush Day. It can be seen in the continuing fight for people still seeking justice. It can be seen in the Black British figures brought to wider attention through 100 Great Black Britons. And it can be seen in the national conversations about equality, belonging and justice that he has helped keep alive.

That is why recognising Patrick as part of Honouring Black Britain 2026 feels so appropriate. He has spent decades standing alongside communities, challenging institutions and making sure that important stories and injustices are not allowed to disappear from public view. His contribution has been about more than recognition; it has been about ensuring that recognition leads to action, fairness and change.



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FROM RESERVIST TO REGULAR: WHY **MALEMBE MAKAWA** CHOSE A FULL-TIME RAF CAREER



For Malembe Makawa, joining the Royal Air Force was about more than finding a career. It was an opportunity to challenge himself, develop professionally, and become part of an organisation built on service, teamwork, and personal growth. Today, serving within the RAF's People Operations profession, his journey from RAF Reservist to Regular Service member demonstrates how the RAF can provide a pathway to personal achievement, professional development, and long-term career success.

FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH SERVICE

Malembe was initially drawn to the RAF by its reputation for professionalism, leadership, and commitment to developing its people. Seeking opportunities to broaden his experience, gain valuable skills, and contribute to something larger than himself, he saw the RAF as an organisation where ambition and hard work could be transformed into meaningful achievement.

The opportunity to gain qualifications, build confidence, and serve his country while making a positive difference strongly appealed to him and ultimately inspired him to begin his Service journey.

DISCOVERING THE RAF THROUGH THE RESERVES

Rather than entering full-time service immediately, Malembe chose to join the RAF Reserves. The role offered the perfect balance between military service and civilian commitments, allowing him to experience RAF life while maintaining flexibility in other aspects of his life.

The Reserves provided an opportunity to develop both personally and professionally while contributing to operational outputs and working alongside like-minded individuals. It was a chance to test himself in a challenging environment while becoming part of a motivated and supportive team.

For Malembe, Reserve service quickly became a rewarding experience. Through military training, professional development opportunities, and collaboration with Regular personnel, he developed a broad range of skills and gained valuable insight into the wider RAF mission. However, beyond the training and experience, it was the culture and camaraderie that left the greatest impression.

Working with people from diverse backgrounds and sharing a common purpose fostered a strong sense of belonging. Like many Reservists, Malembe found pride in contributing to RAF operations while continuing to grow as an individual.

MAKING THE MOVE TO REGULAR SERVICE

As his experience within the RAF grew, so did his desire to pursue a full-time military career. Exposure to Service life reinforced his belief that the RAF was where he wanted to build his future. The opportunities available for career progression, leadership development, and greater responsibility made the decision increasingly clear.

For Malembe, transferring to the Regular RAF felt like a natural progression. He wanted to immerse himself fully in the organisation, contribute more consistently to its mission, and take advantage of the broader professional opportunities available through full-time service.

A SMOOTH TRANSITION

Although the transfer process involved a number of stages, including administrative, medical, and career management requirements, Malembe found it to be an exciting and positive experience.

His previous experience as a Reservist proved invaluable during the transition. Having already gained exposure to military culture, expectations, and ways of working, he was able to move into Regular Service with confidence. The support available throughout the process helped ensure a smooth transition and reinforced his commitment to the organisation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

A key benefit of Regular Service, according to Malembe, is the opportunity it provides for social mobility and career progression.

The RAF offers access to professional qualifications, continuous learning, leadership development, and a wide range of career

experiences. Regardless of background, individuals are given the opportunity to succeed through their commitment, effort, and potential.

Malembe believes these opportunities can be life-changing, providing personnel with skills, experiences, and qualifications that support both military and personal development throughout their careers.

His family has been highly supportive of his decision to pursue a full-time RAF career. They recognise the opportunities available through Service life and take pride in the progress he has made, appreciating both the stability and sense of purpose that come with a military career.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Now established in Regular Service, Malembe remains focused on continued development and making a positive contribution to the RAF.

He is looking forward to expanding his professional expertise, taking on greater responsibility, and further developing his leadership skills. Equally important is the opportunity to continue working alongside dedicated colleagues and supporting RAF personnel across the organisation.

For Malembe, becoming a Regular is not the end of a journey but the beginning of a new chapter, one built on service,



opportunity, and continuous growth.

His story highlights the valuable role the RAF Reserves can play in introducing individuals to military life and preparing them for a successful transition into full-time Service. It is a reminder that, for those seeking challenge, development, and a meaningful career, the RAF offers opportunities to achieve all three.

"Joining the RAF Reserves gave me a taste of military life, but transitioning to the Regular RAF allowed me to fully commit to a career built on service, development, and opportunity. The journey has been incredibly rewarding, and I'm excited about what the future holds."



A portrait of Bell Ribeiro-Addy, a Black woman with long, dark dreadlocks, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark turtleneck and a dark shawl or cardigan. The background is a plain, light grey.

Honouring our communities means fighting for justice

BY BELL RIBEIRO-ADDY MP

Like most people who grew up in Britain over the past century, I didn't learn about Black British history in school in any meaningful way. For almost forty years, Black History Month has sought to fill this gap. In a nation that remains reluctant to face its imperial history head-on, it has provided a vital space to reflect on the struggles, successes and stories of Britain's Black communities, excavating histories long excluded from our national narrative. It has shown a wider audience that Black history is integral to British history and that you cannot fully understand modern Britain without understanding the role that Black communities have played in it.

We honour our communities through commemorating and celebrating this history. But honour is about respect as well as recognition. And all too often, we still see daily examples of the disrespect faced by

the Black community in ways that are inseparable from our country's imperial past.

As my old history teacher said, "we study the past to live the present with an eye on the future". This year's theme is "Honouring Our Communities". It is important to ask what honour truly requires.

Because Black History Month can never simply be about showing gratitude for the change we have seen. It must always be an honest reckoning with how far there is still to go. Our North Star in all of these debates and discussions this month must be justice.

Seventy-eight years after the Empire Windrush docked at Tilbury, and eight years after the scandal broke, many of the people who helped rebuild Britain are still waiting for the compensation they are owed. The Home Office has paid out only a fraction, to a fraction of those eligible, while hundreds

of claims sit undecided. Unlike survivors of other major state scandals, those impacted by the Windrush scandal are not entitled to free legal advice. Many in this elderly cohort have died without seeing a penny of justice. Others have given up, defeated by a scheme run by the very department that wronged them in the first place, asked again and again to prove their Britishness.

The case of the Windrush Generation, often rightly invoked as exemplars of the Black British contribution, illustrates perfectly the gap between symbolic memory and actual justice. It is rank hypocrisy to celebrate Windrush Day in June each year whilst failing to provide effective redress for the injustices they endured.

We must be cautious of complacent narratives about progress and continual improvement. Things can get worse as well as better. Just two summers ago, we saw

the worst racist rioting in a generation. With mosques attacked and hotels housing asylum seekers set alight, Black and brown families were told, in the most direct terms imaginable, that they did not belong. Earlier this year, the same violence returned to Belfast. Homes were burned, families driven out overnight, migrants and people of colour hunted through their own streets by masked mobs organised online. Each time, the response from our politicians follows the same pattern: swift condemnation, promises that lessons will be learned, then silence, until it happens again. We cannot claim to honour our communities while the state continually fails to confront organised, ideological violence against them.

This violence has deep roots in an imperial ideology that sought to justify the mass trafficking, kidnap, torture and forced labour of millions of African people and the militarised seizure of a quarter of the world's territory. Without steps to actively confront this ideology on the streets, on the airwaves, in our classrooms and our institutions, it can take hold all too easily and mutate into something worse still.

We still walk in the shadow of Empire. The wealth that built modern Britain, its

banks, insurers and financial institutions, was seeded by profits from enslaved labour and colonial extraction. That money never really left; it simply compounded and changed form. Our legal system still carries the fingerprints of empire, not least in immigration rules that grew from attempts to control who could call Britain home after empire collapsed. Our schools taught a version of British greatness with the violence edited out, which is why so many of us grew up without knowing our own history. The countries hit hardest by climate breakdown today are overwhelmingly the same countries stripped of the resources and infrastructure to withstand it. And the aid Britain now offers is a fraction of what was extracted in the first place.

Our foreign policy follows the same pattern. Britain continues to resist a conversation that African and Caribbean nations have been demanding for years. When CARICOM and the African Union call for reparations, our government's answer is to change the subject, or offer cheery words about "looking forward, not back." In a sign of changing times, UN delegates voted this year to recognise the Transatlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity.

Britain's abstention only places our country more at odds with a growing international consensus.

I don't say any of this in despair. I say it because to tackle any issue, you have to get to its roots. Action can begin when we acknowledge not only this history but its enduring legacy and impact on life in Britain and the countries and people it colonised and enslaved.

It means climate adaptation funding that reflects historical responsibility, a curriculum that tells the whole story, and a government willing to sit down and talk about repair with the nations and descendants of those Britain enslaved and colonised.

This is the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations, which I'm proud to chair. It's why I urge everyone reading this to join us at the 2026 UK Reparations Conference at Friends House, Euston, on 17th October. This is an important chance to bring reparations together to move this conversation from the margins to the mainstream.

Commemoration matters. It reminds everyone that our history matters. But truly honouring our communities is ultimately a question of justice.

Chisom Uwaezuoke: Building safer healthcare through innovation

As a senior nurse in infection prevention and control, **Chisom Uwaezuoke** combines expertise, leadership and innovation to protect patients and strengthen healthcare.

Chisom Uwaezuoke is a Senior Nurse for Infection Prevention and Control with NHS Wales. His work is guided by a personal vision: to leave the world a healthier place than he found it.

Infection prevention and control is fundamental to safe healthcare. This work reduces infection risks and protects patients, staff and the public. Chisom's contribution strengthens patient safety, improves system performance and helps embed high-quality practice across diverse healthcare environments.

He has led public health initiatives, supported organisational readiness and contributed to the development of safe, resilient healthcare systems. Central to his approach is the ability to translate professional standards into practical action while encouraging collaboration across the health service.

Chisom holds an MSc in Infection Prevention and Control from the University of Dundee and a Leadership and Management

in Health certificate from the University of Washington. These qualifications reflect a commitment to combining clinical knowledge with leadership.

He is looking towards the future. Chisom envisions an AI-enabled healthcare system in which digital transformation helps infection prevention professionals move beyond traditional approaches. Predictive modelling could support earlier detection of risks, allowing teams to act before infections spread and improving protection for patients.

His vision is ambitious, but its purpose remains deeply human: preventing harm, strengthening services and delivering safer care. Through leadership, knowledge and innovation, he is helping build a healthcare system prepared for future challenges.

Chisom's work reflects Honouring Our Communities by recognising that community wellbeing depends upon people who quietly protect public health. His contribution demonstrates how professional excellence and forward-looking ideas can make healthcare safer for us all.



A close-up portrait of Bonnie Greer, a Black woman with short, dark, spiky hair. She is looking slightly to the left with a gentle smile. She is wearing a dark grey jacket over a dark shirt and large, light-colored, oval-shaped earrings. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Bonnie Greer OBE

1948–2026

Writer, playwright and broadcaster Bonnie Greer, who died on 15 September 2026 aged 77, brought knowledge, wit and independence to British cultural life. We remember her life, her work and her enduring contribution to literature, theatre and public debate.

Bonnie Greer was someone you listened to. Not because she demanded attention, but because she brought something worth hearing: a connection others had missed, a piece of history that changed the argument, a perspective that made a familiar subject feel less settled.

Her death following a brief illness leaves a considerable absence in British cultural life. To television audiences, she was a recognisable and thoughtful presence. To readers and theatre-goers, she was a writer whose interests stretched far beyond the subjects on which broadcasters most often invited her to speak.

Born in Chicago in 1948, the eldest of seven children, Greer grew up on the city's South Side. She studied theatre with David Mamet in Chicago and Elia Kazan in New York. Those cities provided the early settings for a creative life that would eventually take her across the Atlantic.

She moved to Britain in 1986 and became a British citizen in 1997. By then, she was developing a career that would make her an important participant in the country's artistic and intellectual life.

Her American upbringing remained part of her work. Living in Britain gave her another vantage point, allowing her to consider the histories and contradictions of both countries. She could speak about belonging without making it sound simple, and about culture without treating it as something fixed.

The writer behind the familiar face

Television made Greer widely known, but her writing deserves equal attention.

Her play *Munda Negra* received the Verity Bargate Award. Her novels included *Hanging by Her Teeth* and *Entropy*, while her work for radio brought dramatic storytelling to another audience.

In *Obama Music*, she drew together music, personal memory and the history of Chicago. Her biography *Langston Hughes: The Value of Contradiction* explored the celebrated writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Her memoir, *A Parallel Life*, offered a further account of the experiences that had shaped her.

The range was substantial. Fiction, biography, memoir and drama each offered her a different way to examine a life or pursue an idea.

In *Marilyn and Ella*, she explored the relationship between Marilyn Monroe and Ella Fitzgerald. The work brought together subjects that recur across her career: artistic achievement, racial prejudice, women's lives and the possibilities of solidarity. It was also theatre, built around people and performance rather than an abstract argument.



That distinction matters when remembering her. Greer did not simply comment on the work of others. She knew the demands of making something herself.

Knowledge, wit and conviction

On *Newsnight Review*, Greer brought a writer's understanding to discussions of books, film and theatre. Her contributions combined close attention to the work with a sense of the wider world from which it had emerged.

She was equally memorable in political debate. Her appearance on *Question Time* alongside British National Party leader Nick Griffin in 2009 placed her in an exceptionally charged broadcast. She challenged racist ideas with composure and historical knowledge.

It remains a defining television moment, although it should not be allowed to stand for her entire public life. Greer's interests were too extensive, and her contribution too varied, to be contained in one encounter.

She could discuss a performance, a political argument or a historical question with the same seriousness. There was authority in her knowledge, but also wit and an individual way of seeing things. She did not sound interchangeable with anyone else.

A life beyond the page

Greer also took on responsibilities within some of Britain's most prominent cultural institutions. She served as a trustee and

later deputy chair of the British Museum, and held board positions at the Royal Opera House and the London Film School.

From 2013 to 2018, she was Chancellor of Kingston University. In its tribute, the university remembered her commitment to free expression, education and equality, as well as her contribution to its own community.

She was appointed OBE for services to the arts in 2010 and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2022.

These appointments and honours record the public recognition of her work. Her husband, David Hutchins, spoke of something more personal when announcing her death: her humour, generosity and ability to bring people together.

His tribute offered a glimpse of the person beyond the broadcasts and public appearances — a loved partner and companion, whose loss is felt privately as well as publicly.

There is much to return to in Bonnie Greer's work: plays to encounter, books to read and arguments to reconsider. The familiar television face was only one part of a life spent writing, thinking and participating.

She leaves behind the example of an independent mind, and work that deserves to keep finding readers and audiences.

She is survived by her husband, David Hutchins.

Bonnie Greer OBE, 1948–2026.



Dr Wanda Wyporska

Honouring communities, history and the power of being heard

Historian, activist, author and Chief Executive of Black Cultural Archives, **Dr Wanda Wyporska** believes that history is never neutral. It must be collected, protected and told by the people whose lives it records.

When Dr Wanda Wyporska speaks about community, she is careful not to use the word in the singular. “Whenever people say community, I say communities,” she explains. “Togetherness is a feeling of solidarity. Community needs to be non-hierarchical in that sense. Solidarity means we are doing it together, for each other.”

It is a distinction that goes to the heart of her work. Communities are not fixed labels or neat categories into which people can easily be placed. They are shaped by heritage, family, language, memory, friendship, politics and lived experience. They can change throughout a lifetime.

For Dr Wyporska, identity has never been straightforward. Born to a Polish mother and a father from the Windrush generation, she grew up immersed in her Polish heritage. She studied Polish history, literature and language at University College London, was President of the Polish Society and spent time living in both Warsaw and Kraków. Yet, growing up in a town where there were only a handful of Black people, she was also aware of being visibly different.

“Community can be something that changes,” she says. “When I was younger, I felt very connected to the Polish side of my life. I grew up in a town where there was a handful of Black people. I couldn’t escape being different. But I chose the way in which I wanted to be different.”

Her Polish identity became especially important following the absence of her father, who left when she was two. It was made tangible through family customs, stories shared by her grandmother and a love of languages. At the same time, racial injustice could not be ignored.

“I’ve always worked on racial injustice and injustice,” she says.

“When you grow up as a Black person, you can’t grow up and fail to see racism. And when you experience it, you can’t ignore it.”

Her mother raised her to be politically aware, and growing up in the 1980s made that awareness unavoidable. Politics was present in everyday life, as were questions about race, equality and whose experiences were acknowledged.

Today, as Chief Executive of Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, Dr Wyporska leads one of Britain’s most important institutions for preserving the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent. For her, Black history is not simply a subject to be remembered once a year. It is an active and necessary form of resistance.

“Black history is a political activity,” she says. “Preserving our history, to contest the established history, is something very critical. We are in charge of our own history, and therefore nobody can say that we are wrong because we have the evidence.”

That belief is central to the work of Black Cultural Archives. The organisation collects, preserves and shares the stories, records and objects that tell the wider history of Black people in Britain. It is a place where visitors can encounter abolitionists, feminists, activists, artists, families and communities whose lives have too often been reduced, overlooked or excluded from mainstream accounts of British history.

Dr Wyporska describes it as an immense privilege to lead an organisation with such an important role. “Black Cultural Archives has a huge role in Black British history in making sure that our stories are valued and told,” she says. “We have over 6,000 young adults coming through our doors, and we are teaching them about Black abolitionists, feminists and the active history of our people, that we weren’t just passive.”

As Chief Executive, she recognises that leadership brings responsibility as well as opportunity. “Having that position of responsibility allows you to have the platform to bring up that injustice,” she says.

Her passion for history is also rooted in genealogy. For Dr Wyporska, tracing family histories is not only about discovering names and dates. It is an act of recognition.

“When I am looking through registers of enslaved people, just reading their names in my head is honouring and saying that you have not been forgotten. I am going to feel your presence and feel what you went through.”

This simple but powerful act reflects the spirit of *Honouring Our Communities*. It reminds us that people who were denied power, freedom and visibility still deserve to be named, remembered and treated with dignity.

Among her favourite items in the collection are imperial coins featuring Septimius Severus, the Roman emperor born in what is now Libya, who spent time in Britain during the second century. For Dr Wyporska, they offer a powerful challenge to the idea that Black presence in Britain is recent.

“They show presence of being here in the second century,” she says. “It sets the tone of how Black people have been here for a long, long time.”

Dr Wyporska’s work is grounded in the conviction that history can help people understand themselves and one another more fully. It can challenge the false divisions created by labels and remind us of the connections that exist across cultures and generations. “We have far more that we share than we don’t,” she says.

By leading Black Cultural Archives, advocating for racial justice and encouraging people to explore their own histories, Dr Wanda Wyporska is helping ensure that voices once silenced are heard and acknowledged. Her message is clear: we do not need to become the same in order to stand together. We honour our communities by recognising their differences, preserving their stories and working collectively for a more truthful future.

As she puts it, “It is communities, not community.”

By L.J Mark



GILBERT CLARKE

Gilbert was born in Jamaica in 1925. He and his brother and sister lost their father when Gilbert was three. A bright pupil who stayed on a year longer at school, leaving at 16, Gilbert used his interest in mechanical and electrical things to charge up old batteries, make good other old electrical products and reuse light bulbs.

He quickly gained employment at Henderson bookstore, but his passion remained mechanics, and he only stayed a week. His next job, which lasted just over a year, was not in mechanics but selling men's suits, shirts, shoes and other clothing.

In 1943 news came that volunteers were wanted by the RAF. To be accepted, candidates had to pass entry tests. Gilbert lied about his age, passed the tests and on 17th March 1944, along with the other successful volunteers, enlisted and was sent to Kingston Palisadoes RAF camp. After being kitted out and receiving some basic training, they were sent on a troop-carrying ship to Britain via the United States.

Gilbert would explain his reason for joining years later, "I volunteered like so many millions of others from Britain, the

Commonwealth and elsewhere out of a sense of duty, to fight for king and country, to play my part like all the veterans here today in ensuring we left the world a better place for everyone".

The journey to Britain was marked by torpedo attacks on their convoy by German U-Boats which hit a number of the ships. Gilbert finally docked at Liverpool on 3rd June 1944.

He would be stationed in camps around the country, initially in Filey in Yorkshire and then in Cambridge and elsewhere. While at the camps Gilbert would undergo physical training, combat training and attend classes to study radio and radar mechanics and engineering. They were also taught to identify both Allied and Axis planes and ships.

"...to fight for king and country, to play my part like all the veterans here today in ensuring we left the world a better place for everyone"

While at Cambridge studying radar equipment servicing, Gilbert and his class heard a heavy, droning noise. Gilbert recalled: "We all rushed outside to see what was happening. It was hundreds and hundreds of aircraft of all kinds; you could hardly see the sky. Our tutor, Chiefy Brown, said: 'It's started boys!' and everyone started cheering and waving them on. That was when we first knew D-Day was underway."

Gilbert would put his keen interest in

electrics and mechanics to good use. He went on to train in what were, at the time, cutting-edge technologies to be a radio and radar mechanic repairing the wireless thermionic equipment in Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancaster bombers.

After the war Gilbert was finally demobbed on 9th July 1948 and settled in the UK and used his new-found knowledge to become a radio and TV engineer. Music was a big part of his life, having learnt how to play the piano in the RAF and he continued to play right up until the end of his life. He worked tirelessly into his 90s ensuring that the service and sacrifice of all who came from the Caribbean and beyond is remembered. Gilbert participated in the annual pilgrimage to Ypres organised by the British West India Regiments Heritage Trust (BWIRHT) and in 2021 he spoke at the 77th anniversary of D-Day which also marked the opening of the British Normandy Memorial. In 2025, the BBC used his voice in the New Year's Eve fireworks display saying the words "I feel very proud that I did something for peace."

Gilbert died on 23rd May 2026, at the age of 100. Speaking of his passing, Paul Chambers, Chair of BWIRHT, said, "He served his country with honour during wartime and dedicated his later years to ensuring the memory of Black Caribbean servicemen would never be forgotten... His was a remarkable life of service, resilience and dignity. Gilbert will remain forever part of our story."

PROFESSOR UZO IWOBİ CBE

A lifetime of work for racial equality in Wales

From establishing Wales's first African Community Centre to influencing national policy, Professor Uzo Iwobi CBE has spent more than two decades challenging racial inequality, supporting communities and ensuring that Black Welsh history is recorded.

Professor Uzo Iwobi CBE has worked across community organisations, education, policing and government to advance racial equality in Wales. Her contribution has not been confined to one institution. She has helped establish organisations, advised public bodies, mentored young people and created platforms through which Black communities can influence the decisions affecting their lives.

Originally from Nigeria, Uzo studied law at the University of Nigeria. She qualified as a solicitor and barrister and was called to the Nigerian Bar before moving to Wales in the early 1990s.

Beginning a new life in Wales exposed her to cultural exclusion and racism. Those experiences helped shape the direction of her public work, but they did not define its limits. Uzo used her legal training, professional knowledge and personal experience to address barriers affecting Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

She worked as a lecturer in law at Swansea Law School for nine years. Education would remain an important part of her career, whether through university teaching, professional development, public speaking or mentoring people seeking to enter civic and professional life.

In 2004, Uzo joined South Wales Police. During the same year, she founded the African Community Centre in Wales, the first organisation of its kind in the country, and served as its chair for 15 years.

The Centre provided a practical response to the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population. It offered support, cultural activities and opportunities for African communities to organise and speak collectively about the issues affecting them.

Uzo later served on the Police National Diversity Team based at the Home Office. In that role, she contributed to national work on equality and diversity involving the Association of Chief Police Officers, police forces across the UK and other public bodies.

She also served as a commissioner with the Commission for Racial Equality until it was replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007.

These appointments gave Uzo opportunities to influence policy, but her work remained closely connected to community experience. She understood that national strategies could only be effective if they reflected what people were encountering in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and public services.

That connection between public policy and community



knowledge became central to Race Council Cymru, which Uzo founded and now leads as chief executive.

Race Council Cymru works to challenge racial discrimination and promote equality across Wales. It brings together organisations and individuals, supports people experiencing racism and encourages public institutions to engage directly with the communities affected by their decisions.

The organisation's work extends across advocacy, education, research, community development and cultural activity. Under Uzo's leadership, it has become an important national voice on race equality.

Her contribution has also helped establish a stronger public record of Black history in Wales.

As one of the founders of Black History Wales, Uzo has supported events and educational programmes celebrating the achievements of African and Caribbean people. This work has challenged the idea that Black history in Britain is centred only in England or begins with recent migration.

Black people have contributed to Welsh life across generations, yet many of their experiences were missing from mainstream accounts of the nation's history. Uzo has helped bring those stories into schools, exhibitions, public events and national conversations.

In 2018, she launched and facilitated the first national Windrush celebration in Wales. Her subsequent work with the Windrush Cymru Elders programme helped record the lives and experiences of African-Caribbean elders who had helped build modern Wales.

The project included the exhibition *Our Voices, Our Stories, Our History* and an accompanying film. Together, they allowed members of the Windrush generation to describe their journeys, working lives, families and contributions in their own words.

Recording those accounts was more than an act of commemoration. It created an educational resource and ensured

that future generations would have access to a fuller account of Welsh social history.

Between 2019 and 2021, Uzo served as a Specialist Policy Adviser on Equalities to the Welsh Government. She has also served as an independent adviser to the Senedd Commission and contributed to the scrutiny of Wales's anti-racism work.

Her wider initiatives include the Zero Racism Wales campaign, the Black Lives Matter Wales Policy Forum and the National Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Youth Forum for Wales. These projects have created opportunities for people of different generations to contribute to public debate and hold institutions accountable for their commitments.

Alongside her community and policy work, Uzo has continued to support education and leadership development. She was appointed Professor of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and is a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales.

She has also mentored young people and adult learners, helping them develop the confidence and skills needed to pursue their ambitions and take part in public life.

Uzo was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2008 for services to community relations and communities in South Wales. In 2022, she was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to racial equality and for championing diversity and inclusion.

These honours recognise an extensive record of service, but the clearest measure of her work can be found in the organisations, programmes and opportunities she has helped create.

Professor Uzo Iwobi CBE is being honoured because she has turned advocacy into lasting public and community institutions. She has challenged discrimination while creating practical routes through which people can seek support, develop leadership skills and take part in decisions.

Her work has strengthened racial-equality campaigning in Wales and helped ensure that Black Welsh experiences form part of the country's public history.

Through law, education, policy and community action, she has shown how determined leadership can change institutions and create opportunities for others to shape what comes next.



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Honouring those who came before us, inspiring those yet to come

BY ROB NEIL OBE



Black History Month celebrates notable individuals while also recognising the families, neighbourhoods, institutions and movements that sustain us. This year's theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, invites us to remember those whose lives and work created opportunities for others.

Black British history does not live only in books, archives and museums. It lives in the communities shaped by people who devoted themselves to justice, equality, creativity, innovation and service. Honouring those we have lost means recognising not only their achievements, but also the foundations they laid, the barriers they dismantled and the people they inspired.

Here, I remember ten remarkable people whose lives touched my own journey or made a lasting difference to communities across the United Kingdom and beyond. Their stories remind us that progress is never accidental. It is built through courage, vision, persistence and service.



LORD HERMAN OUSELEY

Born in 1945, Lord Herman Ouseley became one of Britain's most influential advocates for racial equality. After three decades in local government, he became its first Principal Race Relations Adviser, Chief Executive of Lambeth Council and the first Black person to lead the Inner London Education Authority, overseeing more than 1,000 schools and colleges.

He later headed the Commission for Racial Equality and spearheaded football's Kick It Out campaign. Created a life peer in 2001, he continued bringing principled leadership to debates about race, equality and civil rights. Herman died in 2024, leaving a legacy of fearless action and a determination to make equality an expectation, not merely an aspiration.

IVAN ROBERT MARTIN, KNOWN AS "BOBBY"

Born in 1964, Ivan Robert Martin was a hardworking civil servant and devoted Christian whose faith shaped the compassion, integrity and humility with which he served others.

During his career with Her Majesty's Prison Service, now HM Prison and Probation Service, Bobby championed fairness and opportunity. As an active member of the Black staff network RESPECT, he advocated passionately for diversity and inclusion and helped create a more equitable workplace.

Bobby died in 2018, but his servant leadership and steadfast commitment to justice remain an inspiration to everyone who knew him.

DAME CAMILA BATMANGHELIDJH

Born in Tehran in 1963, Dame Camila Batmanghelidjh became a colourful and unconventional community leader who devoted her life to supporting some of Britain's most vulnerable children, including many from Black and ethnically diverse communities experiencing poverty, trauma and exclusion.

As the founder of Kids Company, she challenged governments and wider society to understand the complex needs of disadvantaged young people. Her advocacy brought national attention to childhood trauma, safeguarding and mental health, insisting that every child deserved dignity, care and opportunity. Following her death in 2024, her compassion continues to influence those working with vulnerable young people today.

AUDREY ADAMS

Born in 1961, Audrey Adams transformed profound personal tragedy into a lifelong campaign for justice. Her 15-year-old son, Rolan Adams, was racially abused and murdered in Thamesmead in 1991. Rolan's death, followed two years later by the murder of Stephen Lawrence, helped expose the terrible reality of racist violence in south-east London.

Audrey and Rolan's father, Richard Adams, established the Rolan Adams Family Campaign. As a founding member of The 1990 Trust, Audrey continued campaigning for racial equality, civil rights and stronger communities. Her work empowered Black voices and inspired generations of grassroots activists. Audrey died in 2024, leaving a legacy that reminds us lasting change is often built from the ground up.



WAYNE BROWN

Born in 1970, Wayne Brown was a dedicated firefighter who became one of Britain's most senior Black fire officers and Chief Fire Officer of West Midlands Fire Service.

Across a 27-year career, he promoted public safety, leadership, diversity and inclusion. His appointment showed future generations what was possible within public service. Wayne died in 2024, but his achievements continue to encourage greater representation across Britain's emergency services.

CAPTAIN NEIL FLANIGAN MBE

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1924, Captain Neil Flanigan was a pioneering aviator and committed community activist. In the 1940s, he broke barriers as one of the first qualified instrument technicians serving with RAF Bomber Command, demonstrating excellence in a field where Black representation was limited.

He later spoke passionately about the experiences and contributions of the Windrush generation. Awarded an MBE for community and voluntary work, he died in 2024 after a life representing courage, resilience and decades of service to both British and Jamaican communities.



PROFESSOR SIR GODFREY “GEOFF” PALMER

Born in 1940, Professor Sir Godfrey Palmer was a distinguished scientist, academic and civil rights campaigner, a true polymath.

His pioneering research into the barley abrasion process transformed aspects of the malting industry internationally, while his academic work inspired generations of scientists. In later life, he became a powerful voice for racial equality in Scotland. Through research, education and campaigning, he helped illuminate Scotland's role in transatlantic slavery. When Geoff died in 2025, he left a legacy demonstrating how scientific excellence and social justice can combine in one extraordinary life.

RAY LEWIS

Born in 1963, Ray Lewis was an outspoken and determined leader who believed discipline, education, responsibility and high expectations could transform young lives.

A former headteacher and youth mentor, he dedicated much of his life to the Eastside and Westside Young Leaders Academy. Founded to support Black boys at risk of exclusion, the academy developed into a source of education, character-building and leadership for young people from Black

and minority ethnic communities. Thousands benefited from its guidance and belief in their potential. Ray died in 2024, but his legacy lives on through the generation of future leaders he helped prepare.

NOEL REGINALD THOMAS

Born in Antigua in 1936, Noel Reginald Thomas lived an extraordinary life spanning nursing, military service, science, occupational health and safety, trade unionism, politics and education. Yet his greatest legacy was one of service, faith, courage and creating opportunities for others.



After becoming the first male graduate of Holberton Hospital Nursing School, Noel travelled to Britain in 1958 and joined the Royal Air Force. He served for 22 years, rose to Sergeant and undertook scientific work in countries including India, Turkey, Thailand and Nepal.



His commitment to Antigua remained strong. He served as General Secretary of the Trade and Labour Union and as a Senator, advocating for working people. After retiring from the RAF, he established

a distinguished second career in occupational health and safety, viewing it not simply as compliance but as a way to protect lives and strengthen communities.

Noel generously shared his knowledge, contacts and encouragement. His philosophy was simple: “Once you have climbed, turn around and help somebody else climb.” His legacy lives in the people he mentored, the standards he raised and the doors he opened.

KYLE CAREY BIRCH

Born in 1998, Kyle Carey Birch was a gifted singer, actor and performer whose creativity reached audiences across stage and screen. He was equally admired for his generosity, compassion and encouragement of fellow performers.

At just 26, Kyle had secured his first leading role in the West End. His death in 2024 was deeply felt throughout the performing arts community, where colleagues remember both his exceptional talent and abundant kindness. His star burned briefly but brightly, leaving an enriching glow.

HONOURING OUR LEGACIES

These ten people came from different professions and backgrounds, but they shared resilience, courage and a belief in service. They opened doors for others and understood that equality required action as well as words.

Their stories stand beside those of countless unsung heroes, including teachers, nurses, artists, faith leaders, trade unionists, carers, volunteers, entrepreneurs and community organisers, whose everyday actions have strengthened Black Britain.

Remembrance is itself a form of community. Every young person inspired by these lives, every campaign continued in their names and every barrier removed because of their example keeps their legacies alive.

Their work is unfinished. The greatest tribute we can offer is not simply to remember them, but to continue building the fairer and more inclusive society to which they devoted their lives.

May their memories remain a blessing, their achievements a source of pride and their legacies an inspiration for generations to come.

Pauline Campbell

Community, Courage and the Fight for Justice

Author, advocate and lawyer Pauline Campbell has built her life around challenging injustice, strengthening communities and reminding people of their worth. As a pro bono lawyer for Justice4Windrush, she believes barriers may shape our journeys, but should never define our potential.

Campbell's story has been shaped by family, identity, racism, setbacks, renewed confidence and a lasting commitment to justice. It is also a story of determination: learning when to take control of your direction and knowing when to grab the wheel.

Growing up British-Jamaican

Campbell's parents were part of the Windrush generation. As a British-born Jamaican, she grew up carrying both her parents' hopes and the complexities of living between cultures. "For our parents' generation, we were the ones expected to achieve, not them," she explains.

As a child, however, she did not constantly analyse her identity. Jamaican culture was simply part of everyday life. "As children we were not aware of it. There was no dilution, we got it head on from our parents' background. It was automatically something we grew up with; it was part of our culture."

Campbell spent her first ten years on an Orthodox Jewish street, where hers was the only Black family. The family later moved to Tottenham, to a street where almost everyone was Jamaican. "We moved from one side of the scale to the other, and both were equally beneficial to us." It was only as she grew older and encountered established institutions that she became more aware of how race shaped other people's perceptions of her. "The difficulties we were going to face became more and

more apparent the older we got, and the more we began to embroil ourselves into the establishment."

When someone else defines your potential

One experience had a lasting impact. A teacher told Campbell that she was not "an A-level student". Today, she recognises the comment within a wider context of race and low expectations. At the time, she simply believed her teacher. "I didn't think that it was racism at the time. I just believed my teacher."

This came after she had already been told to "go back to where I came from" and made to feel that she did not fully belong in Britain. Campbell also saw Caribbean pupils struggle in an education system that often treated difficulties as evidence of limited ability rather than considering the

cultural and social barriers they faced. "We were from the Caribbean, and we weren't doing as well as our fellow students, but that was also put down to our inability rather than the cultural barriers that we were facing."

Her father encouraged her to reject those limitations, but as a child she trusted the authority of her teacher. "Why question my teacher?" It is one reason Campbell shares her story today. She wants young people to question negative assumptions about their potential rather than internalise them.

Not every teacher discouraged her. Earlier teachers had recognised qualities that could make her an excellent lawyer: intelligence, confidence and a willingness to speak up. Campbell was fascinated by law, and becoming a lawyer would have made her parents proud. But her confidence had been damaged, and rebuilding it would take time.

Rice and peas and fish and chips

Campbell's identity and experiences later inspired her book, *Rice and Peas and Fish and Chips*. The title reflects how she sees herself. "Every Sunday we would have rice and peas, and every Friday you are having fish and chips. You can't separate the two."

For Campbell, Britishness and Jamaicanness are not competing identities. "I love my fish and chips, and I love my rice and peas. And that is a culmination of who we are, who I



am, what I stand for and what I love.” She wanted the book to reflect the richness of her experience, not focus only on hardship. “I had the best of both worlds, and the book had to be that, not just the negatives.” That balance of acknowledging struggle without allowing it to define an entire life runs throughout Campbell’s story.

Rebuilding confidence

Campbell returned to education and completed her degree in her early thirties. The biggest difference was confidence. She came to understand that ability does not disappear simply because circumstances prevent it from flourishing. “You can never stop being good at something. You just forget that you are good at it when other things stop you from focusing on it.”

For 14 years, Campbell worked as a benefits counsellor and in administration. She gradually took on more complex cases and corporate complaints, rediscovering her ability to write, analyse arguments, navigate systems and advocate for others. Initially, she considered studying English literature because of her love of writing and ambition to become an author. But she also wanted a profession that could offer greater financial opportunities.

Law brought those interests together. “I always enjoyed law, and law is literally reading all the time and drafting and writing. So, I got the best of two worlds in choosing to do law.” Leaving behind security was difficult. “The scariest part of the journey was the beginning. When you decide to jump ship, all the safe things in place are left behind.” For Campbell, changing direction requires accepting uncertainty and remaining focused. “If you want to truly change your life, you must focus on you.”

Fighting for Justice4Windrush

Today, Campbell uses her legal skills as a pro bono lawyer with Justice4Windrush, supporting people affected by the Windrush scandal. For her, the work is deeply personal. “People seem to think lawyers make loads of money, but for me, the most powerful fulfilment is when I don’t earn a penny.”

She represents people trapped in systems that have left them feeling powerless. Some have been unable to prove their documented history

in Britain and have faced devastating consequences involving employment, housing, healthcare, education and their right to remain in the country. Campbell’s role involves more than legal representation. “It is all about using my skill and my knowledge to give a voice to individuals who felt like I did.”

Many people who approach Justice4Windrush have lost confidence after years of being challenged, disbelieved or failed by institutions. Campbell therefore sees restoring self-belief as part of her work. “It is not just about representing them as a lawyer; it’s giving them the confidence they need to believe that they’re worth something.” Her message is clear: “They are worth the fight.”



Pull the ladder down

Campbell understands the importance of visibility. She puts herself forward to respond to issues in the media, contribute to discussions and highlight the work being done. “If people recognise what you’re doing, it only does a ripple effect for others.” Success, she believes, comes with responsibility. “Don’t pull up the ladder. Pull the ladder down and enable other people to climb that ladder and come behind you.”

That principle is central to her understanding of community. Communities become stronger when people share knowledge, challenge injustice together and resist retreating into individual success. The struggle for justice also requires different communities to communicate and learn from one another. “If we come together and talk to each other and learn from each other, I think we’re in a stronger position.”

She recalls a phrase used by Justice4Windrush CEO Collin McFarlane: “Once you know, you care.” Awareness must lead to action. “Every fight for equality is about shocking people into action.”

Community is strength

Ask Campbell what community means and her answer is immediate: “Community is strength.” For her, community means “holding each other to account and overcoming our differences so that the community can thrive.”

She worries that some people distance themselves from the communities that supported them once they become successful. Campbell has consciously resisted that. “As a lawyer, I’ve not changed my accent at all. As long as you know your stuff and you are a professional, you never need to lose your authentic self.” Achievement does not require becoming someone else. “No matter where you go and how high up you get, the one person you can never lie to is yourself.”

Campbell also believes strong communities must make room for difficult conversations. People will disagree, disappoint one another and sometimes take positions that appear contrary to their communities’ interests. But permanent rejection is not always the answer. “We tend to criticise one another more than we should. We should be working together to thrive and to strive.”

Even people who have taken the wrong path may possess knowledge that can help others avoid it. “The best people to teach you how to get out of gangs are ex-gang members. Bring them in because they can help the change.”

“We should be working together to thrive and to strive.”

Knowing your worth

Pauline Campbell’s journey is about more than becoming a lawyer. It is about what happens when potential is underestimated, confidence is damaged and someone chooses to rebuild anyway. It is about holding British and Jamaican identities without surrendering either. It is about using professional success to defend people pushed to the margins. And it is about remembering where you came from when opportunities arrive.

From the student who believed she was not capable of A-levels to the lawyer helping others challenge powerful institutions, Campbell’s life shows the danger of allowing other people to decide our worth. Her response has been to reclaim that power and use it for others.

That may be the most powerful expression of community: **knowing your own value, helping others recognise theirs and never pulling the ladder up behind you.**

By L.J Mark



MORE THAN MUSIC:

*Keith Killgo on legacy,
community and the
enduring sound
of The Blackbyrds*

“If you expose somebody to something, that’s half the battle.”

– KEITH KILLGO

Few bands can claim to have created music that continues to resonate across generations, decades after it was first recorded. Fewer still can say their influence lives on through sampling, education and the countless artists inspired by their work.

For Keith Killgo, a founding member of the legendary Blackbyrds, success has never been measured solely by chart positions or platinum records. Instead, it has always been about purpose, people and passing on knowledge.

Speaking with warmth, humility and quiet conviction, Killgo reflects on a remarkable journey that has taken him from the neighbourhoods of Washington, D.C., to concert halls across the world. Yet, despite international acclaim, his heart has never strayed far from the community that shaped him.

DOING IT IN THE PARK

One of The Blackbyrds’ most iconic recordings, *Rock Creek Park*, emerged from an impromptu jam during a soundcheck.

As the band experimented with grooves before a performance, something special began to take shape. Returning to Washington, D.C., the melody naturally found its identity as memories of childhood surfaced.

Rock Creek Park was where friendships were forged, families gathered, bikes were ridden and life unfolded.

“It was part of our DNA,” Killgo recalls. “When we started singing it, it just fell together.”

What began as a deeply personal reflection has become an international anthem, sampled by artists around the world and celebrated by generations who may never have visited the park itself.

BEYOND THE MUSIC

While audiences know The Blackbyrds for timeless classics such as *Walking in Rhythm* and *Rock Creek Park*, Killgo believes the band’s greatest achievement lies elsewhere.

Under the guidance of jazz legend Donald Byrd at Howard University, the group became proof that education and artistic excellence could thrive together.

“When people tell the story of The Blackbyrds,” he says, “I hope they remember that we started as musicians, but we infused education into everything we did.”

For Killgo, the band’s journey represents something far greater than commercial success.

“It represented that you could take five Black men and grow them into professionals.”

His voice becomes emotional as he reflects on those early years.

“We had no idea how the music business worked. We didn’t know about royalties or recording or any of that. But now we can teach the next generation. Hopefully, that’s the legacy that lives on.”

TECHNOLOGY CHANGES. HUMANITY DOESN’T.

As both a musician and educator, Killgo has witnessed extraordinary change in the music industry. He embraces technological innovation, recognising the opportunities digital platforms create for artists to reach global audiences. Yet he also believes there are important lessons that technology can never replace.

“You can’t AI a violin,” he says with a smile. “You have to play it.”

While artificial intelligence offers exciting possibilities, he believes the emotional connection between performer and instrument remains irreplaceable.

“That’s where the emotion comes from. AI can’t feel what’s in your heart.”

He also advocates for stronger accountability around sampling and intellectual property, believing innovation should never come at the expense of recognising those whose creativity laid the foundations.

“If you can connect with the community, the community will serve as your base.”

COMMUNITY IS EVERYTHING

Perhaps the most powerful moments of the conversation come when Killgo speaks not about music, but about people, particularly the young people he continues to teach in Washington, D.C., despite having spent decades touring internationally, many of whom live with the realities of poverty, homelessness and violence.

For Killgo, community is a daily commitment, something he captures simply when he says, “Community is everything. It is where people get those experiences. It’s where people get to know who you are.”

Teaching, mentoring and simply showing up have become as important to him as performing on stage, particularly when working with children and families facing extraordinarily difficult circumstances. “I teach children whose families have lost

everything. Sometimes what people need isn’t complicated. It’s someone asking, ‘How are you? How are you feeling?’”

His work reminds him that genuine service cannot be performed from a distance, and it has also led him to question whether artists are doing enough to make a meaningful difference within their communities. “I don’t think we as artists do enough,” he reflects. “Everybody wants to start a foundation. But what are we really doing? How are we really serving these people?”

It is a challenge directed not only at musicians, but at all of us.

A GOOSEBUMPS MOMENT

Despite a career spanning more than five decades, one of Killgo’s most treasured memories happened only recently.

Performing at London’s Union Chapel, The Blackbyrds finally played their music accompanied by live strings, something audiences had heard on their recordings but rarely experienced in concert.

Standing quietly during the soundcheck, Killgo was overwhelmed.

“It was one of the most elating concerts I’ve ever played.”

For an artist whose catalogue has stood the test of time, it was a reminder that music can continue to reveal new beauty, even after decades.

HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

As Black History Month celebrates the theme Honouring Our Communities, Keith Killgo embodies exactly what that phrase represents, with a story that is not simply one of musical achievement, but a testament to lifelong learning, mentorship, generosity and service.

From creating timeless music to shaping future generations in the classroom, he has remained committed to the belief that talent carries responsibility and that the impact of a successful career can extend far beyond the music itself. “If you can connect with the community,” he says, “the community will serve as your base.”

His message is both beautiful and simple: success is not only measured by what we achieve, but by what we leave behind and the difference we make in the lives of those who follow us.

Perhaps that is why The Blackbyrds continue to inspire, because their greatest legacy is not just the soundtrack they created, but the doors they opened for others to walk through.

DR ANDREW BROWN

The work of showing up

In Croydon and beyond, Dr Andrew Brown has spent years turning concern into practical help – and ensuring that people facing illness, grief or crisis are not left to cope alone.

By the end of 2025, Croydon BME Forum's building on Mitcham Road had been transformed. Donations filled the premises. Volunteers sorted food, clothing, medical supplies and other essential items. Barrels were packed, vehicles were loaded and containers were prepared for shipment to Jamaica, where Hurricane Melissa had damaged homes, schools, businesses and livelihoods.

At the centre of the operation was Dr Andrew Brown.

Andrew had responded to news of the hurricane by calling together residents, churches, schools, businesses, voluntary groups and elected representatives. What began as a local appeal grew into a wider relief effort, with collections extending into other London boroughs and as far as Newcastle and Ipswich.

Over six weeks, the response brought together approximately 450 volunteers. His nomination records that goods valued at more than £400,000 were collected and over £50,000 was raised.

Yet the value of the appeal cannot be understood through figures alone.

For people in Britain with relatives and friends in Jamaica, the hurricane brought anxiety, grief and a sense of helplessness. The relief effort gave them somewhere to go and something useful to do. They could bring a donation, pack a box, share news or work alongside others who understood what the disaster meant.

Andrew made sure the operation remained connected to events in Jamaica. Regular meetings were held with local partners, while a dedicated bank account and financial records helped maintain transparency. He later travelled to Jamaica





with volunteers to assist with the distribution of aid across eight parishes and 32 towns and communities.

Tools were supplied to help residents repair damaged homes. Farmers and small businesses received assistance as they tried to begin again. Schools, churches and local organisations helped ensure that donations reached the people for whom they were intended.

The relief operation reveals something important about Andrew. He does not see service as something that begins and ends with a job description. When he recognises a need, his instinct is to gather people, find the resources and remain involved until help reaches its destination.

That same instinct has shaped his work in Croydon.

As Chief Executive of Croydon BME Forum, Andrew leads an organisation that many residents have come to regard as a place of safety and practical support. It connects people with health services, counselling, employment guidance and advice, while also carrying their concerns into meetings with public bodies and decision-makers.

Andrew's particular strength is his ability to move between two worlds. He understands the pressures faced by councils, health services, universities and voluntary organisations, but he also understands why residents may feel ignored, mistrustful or reluctant to seek help.

He knows that publishing information is not the same as reaching people.

That understanding has been important in the Forum's health work. Andrew has helped researchers engage Black communities in projects concerning stroke awareness, high blood pressure and cancer screening. He has supported discussions about how health professionals communicate with people whose experiences and concerns have not always been reflected in mainstream services.

The purpose is not simply to persuade residents to attend an appointment or participate in research. It is to create conditions in which people feel respected, can ask questions and are able to make informed decisions about their health.

This approach can also be seen in the "Can U C Me" cancer-awareness initiative. What began in Croydon expanded into neighbouring boroughs, opening conversations about a subject that some families once found difficult to discuss.

Andrew's influence, however, is not confined to the Forum's own programmes.

Karen Bryson's nomination describes what happened when her organisation, Bright Futures 4 All CIC, was still small and struggling to establish itself. Andrew initially entered its story as a landlord, but he soon became much more.

He helped its founders understand governance, develop a stronger organisational structure and navigate the difficult process of applying for funding. He introduced them to parliamentarians and youth-sport partners, opening doors that can remain closed to small, Black-led organisations

without established professional networks.

Those introductions helped Bright Futures 4 All expand its work with young people and families.

This kind of contribution often remains invisible. Andrew did not place his own name at the centre of the organisation or seek to take ownership of its success. He used his experience and relationships to help someone else's idea survive.

"He used his experience and relationships to help someone else's idea survive."

His willingness to step forward has also mattered during moments of profound grief.

Following the killing of 15-year-old Elianne Andam in Croydon in September 2023, Andrew helped bring together her family and friends, Croydon Council, the Metropolitan Police and the Whitgift Foundation.

At a time of shock and sorrow, the response required sensitivity as well as organisation. It provided space for people to remember Elianne, support those closest to her and express their grief safely. Andrew also assisted with the unveiling of a memorial painting created in her honour.

Not all his work takes place during moments of public crisis. Much of it is quieter: supporting his church, mentoring young people, encouraging residents to speak up or helping an organisation make the connection it needs to continue.

In 2025, he helped Croydon BME Forum purchase its building. It may be one of the most enduring achievements of his time there.

Community organisations frequently operate from temporary premises while depending on short-term funding. A permanent home gives the Forum greater stability, but its importance is not only financial. It means residents know where to find it. It provides a visible place where advice can be sought, difficult conversations can happen and different generations can meet.

It is a statement that the people the Forum serves have a recognised and lasting place within the borough.

Andrew is repeatedly described by those who nominated him as a quiet leader. His contribution is not built around personal attention. It can be found in the organisation that secured its future, the small charity that grew after receiving his guidance, the family supported through grief and the volunteers who discovered that they could help people thousands of miles away.

Dr Andrew Brown's story is not simply about the position he holds. It is about what he chooses to do with the access, knowledge and relationships that position has given him.

Again and again, he has used them to open a door, bring people together or answer a call for help. That is the work of showing up—and staying long enough to make a difference.

PROFESSOR DAWN EDGE

By placing culture, family and community knowledge at the heart of her research, **Professor Dawn Edge** is challenging inequalities in mental health care.

For someone experiencing psychosis, accepting help can require enormous trust. That trust can be much harder to establish when the service offering support does not understand the person's culture, family relationships, faith or previous experiences of care.

Professor Dawn Edge has built her work around closing that gap.

As Professor of Mental Health and Inclusivity at the University of Manchester, Dawn has examined why African and Caribbean communities can experience poorer access, treatment and outcomes within mental health services. Her research challenges the assumption that one standard form of care will meet everyone's needs.

One of the clearest examples is the Culturally-adapted Family Intervention, known as CaFI. Created for people of African and Caribbean heritage affected by psychosis or schizophrenia, CaFI brings together individuals, relatives and mental health



professionals to provide support that is more closely connected to their lives.

Culturally informed care is not simply about changing the language used in a consultation. It means understanding how mental distress may be discussed within a family, how relatives can support recovery and how faith or spirituality may influence someone's response to treatment. It also means recognising how racism, disadvantage or previous experiences with services can affect a person's willingness to ask for help.

Through CaFI, the knowledge held within communities is treated as an important part of developing care. People are not expected to fit themselves into a service that was created without considering their experiences. Instead, the support is adapted around the individual and the relationships that matter to them.

This principle runs throughout Dawn's work. Her research has explored health inequalities, perinatal and child mental health, digital health, offender health, spirituality, resilience and recovery. Across these different areas, she has sought to improve the way research, policy and professional practice respond to people who are marginalised or poorly served.

Her influence can also be found in the classroom. Through teaching, curriculum development and mentoring, Dawn has supported undergraduate and postgraduate students preparing to become researchers and health professionals. She encourages them to consider not only a person's diagnosis, but also the social and cultural circumstances surrounding their health.

Dawn has also played an important part in equality work at the University of Manchester, supporting initiatives including the Race Equality Charter and Athena Swan. As the university's first Black female professor, she reached a position in academia where Black women remain significantly underrepresented.

That achievement has made her a visible role model, but her importance extends beyond visibility. Dawn has used her position to speak about Black experiences within professional environments, question established practices and create opportunities for others to progress.

Her leadership is rooted in empathy and in a determination that nobody should receive poorer care because services have failed to understand them. She has connected academic research with the concerns of families and communities, helping to bring experiences that were previously overlooked into conversations about treatment and policy.

The change Dawn is pursuing is practical: research shaped with communities, professionals trained to recognise inequalities and mental health care that listens before deciding what support a person needs.

Her work presents health services with a clear challenge. People should not have to leave their culture, identity or life experience outside the consultation room in order to receive care.



Tony Fairweather

Preserving history, creating community

Through literature, exhibitions and community events, Tony Fairweather has spent decades celebrating Black culture and ensuring the Windrush story reaches future generations.

Born in Clapham to Jamaican parents, Tony Fairweather understood the importance of culture, representation and belonging. During the 1980s, he opened Narada in Brixton, one of Britain's first Black bookshops. Combining books, art and cultural artefacts, it gave Black readers access to stories and ideas rarely found in mainstream shops.

Tony later joined *The Voice* newspaper, managing the Voice Book Club, which became the UK's largest Black book club. He founded The Write Thing, promoting Black writers through events and working with figures including Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ben Okri, Andrea Levy, Malorie Blackman and Bernardine Evaristo.

His commitment to celebration also inspired In Celebration of My Sisters, a long-running annual event honouring African and Caribbean women through music, comedy, dance and recognition.



At the centre of Tony's heritage work is the Windrush Collection, a touring exhibition recreating the front rooms, kitchens and

bedrooms of Caribbean family life in Britain. He began collecting after seeing treasured household objects discarded when Windrush elders died. Tony understood that these belongings carried stories about family, dignity, resilience and home.

He brought the collection to the stage through The Windrush Front Room and explored the generation's courage in his novel *Twenty-Eight Pounds Ten Shillings: A Windrush Story*. Together, these projects restore individuality to people too often reduced to a ship, date or photograph.

Tony's achievements span literature, heritage, entertainment and charitable service, but share one purpose: preserving Black history while creating spaces where culture can flourish.

In honouring Tony Fairweather, we celebrate a guardian of community memory who ensures the Windrush story remains alive, accessible and ready to pass on, perfectly reflecting Honouring Our Communities.

Education without boundaries

When it comes to equality, we believe that meaningful change comes through action. Our vision? To be the best modern university in the UK by 2030.

Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Action Plan sets out our journey to deliver this ambition and become sector leading in equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our Race Equality Charter Bronze Award recognises our commitment to progressing race equality across the university. Through our ambitious five-year action plan, we are working to enhance the representation, progression and success of staff and students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, creating a more inclusive and equitable community for all.

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Interview with:

IAN THOMAS CBE

Town Clerk and Chief Executive of
the City of London Corporation

As Town Clerk and Chief Executive of the City of London Corporation, Ian Thomas CBE occupies one of the most senior leadership positions in the City. Ian is also the first Black person to hold the role in its 750-year history. For Black History Month 2026, Jerome Williams, Director of EDI at City Bridge Foundation, speaks with Ian about representation, fairness and opportunity; the generations whose shoulders he stands on; and the responsibility that comes with opening doors for those who follow.



Jerome Williams: As a Black CEO operating at the highest levels of London, what does your presence in that space represent, not only for you, but for the generations coming behind you?

Ian Thomas: I would say it's absolutely not for me or about me, but I understand that representation is incredibly important. It demonstrates to people that, irrespective of one's background, you can operate at the highest level in august and significant organisations such as the City of London Corporation. The Corporation is a global institution, an iconic institution.

I was appointed to this role through a thorough, transparent and merit-based process. If meritocracy were truly working as it should in this country, I believe we would see far stronger representation than we do today.

We will always need to work on the supply chain through coaching, mentoring, networking and so on, but there is so much talent out there. The issue leans more towards the glass ceiling, stifling opportunities for exceptional Black talent, that unfortunately appears to be omnipresent.

Recruiters, not just the people hiring, but the search agencies too, need to become more comfortable resisting the temptation to recruit in their own image.

JW: Black History Month 2026 is themed "Honouring Our Communities". Who are the people or communities whose shoulders you stand on, and how have they shaped the leader you are today?

IT: If I talk about individuals, I will inevitably miss key people out. So, I would talk about the Windrush generation, alongside the African and African American movements that have helped make this country what it is today.

The UK is one of the world's largest economies, and Black communities are integral to that story. Their contribution is evident across every aspect of national life, from helping to meet the needs of the post-war period to serving in civic life, public service, engineering, science, culture, the arts, financial and professional services, entrepreneurship, academia and the NHS. Wherever you look, Black people have played a critical role in shaping the country we know today.

I stand on the shoulders of those who made the extraordinarily brave decision to come here and help rebuild this country after the Second World War. Without their courage, resilience, vision and determination, neither I nor others in similar positions would be here today.

Those are the shoulders I stand on, for sure.

JW: The City of London is synonymous with power, wealth and influence. Where do you believe Black communities are still underrepresented in those conversations, and what needs to change?

IT: In the broadest terms, underrepresentation continues to exist at the highest levels of decision making.

The Corporation's membership is

becoming more diverse, with notable progress on gender representation. However, with 125 Members, there remains more to do to improve Black representation, particularly given the diversity of the communities we serve.

The City of London is much more than the Square Mile. Our services extend across Greater London, including some of its most deprived communities, through City Bridge Foundation's support, our open spaces such as Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest, education, arts and culture, the Port Health Authority and much more. We also play a national and international role in driving economic growth, representing the financial and professional services sector, and through our City of London Police, providing national leadership in tackling cybercrime and fraud, the fastest growing of all crimes across the globe.

To optimise productivity and performance, we should continue doing more to attract people of colour into senior roles across the Corporation and the sectors we work with. This is not only about the Corporation itself, but also the many firms within the Square Mile and the partners we work with beyond it.

There is broad recognition that people remain underrepresented in the most senior positions, and we must keep working hard to change that.

JW: Can I push you a little on that? What do you see as being effective? What needs to happen to create greater opportunities

for underrepresented people?

IT: Me being here is, in itself, a powerful statement.

I became Town Clerk at the start of 2023, and the announcement of my appointment rightly focused on my achievements, because they are what brought me here. But my presence as a Black man in this role also carries significance. It has never happened here before. While I have not had many conversations about that since taking up the role, I fully understand what it means to hold this position.

My presence here should send a clear message: the most senior people in this organisation were prepared to appoint a Black person to its top role. That is exactly what happened.

Great credit should go to the appointment panel and to Chris Hayward, Policy Chairman at the City of London Corporation. I went through seven interviews for this role, so it was not down to Chris alone. But as Chair of the panel, he put meritocracy first and played a pivotal role in ensuring the panel itself was representative.

Some organisations place one Black person on an interview panel and assume the work is done. That can become a box-ticking exercise. This was different. There were people in the room with real influence, whose voices would be heard. I mention Chris because he chaired the panel, but others were equally focused on one thing: appointing the best person for the job.

That is a strong testament to the Corporation and its leadership. They created a process that welcomed an application from someone with my background, regardless of race, and ensured it was fair and transparent.

Throughout my career, Jerome, I have always said that I do not ask for favours, only fairness. It comes back to my earlier point: if meritocracy were truly alive and well, we would not have a representation problem.

JW: Success can create access, but leadership can create opportunity for others. How are you using your position, networks and influence to open doors and ensure others can walk through them?

IT: I do not have a drawbridge. My career has been built on keeping it down.

Throughout my career, I have been inspired by those who came before me, including Linda Bellos OBE, Heather Rabbatts CBE, Dame Sharon White and Derrick Anderson CBE. I have looked up to people who achieved great things, and their example has encouraged me to work harder. Dr Owen Williams, former Chief Executive of Calderdale and, until recently, a prominent NHS chief executive in the North, and Wallace Sampson OBE, former CEO of Harrogate Borough Council, are other

examples. As someone from the North of England, seeing a Black man achieve what they did in the region, as chief executives, was genuinely inspiring.

Seeing others succeed has been hugely motivating. Growing up, many of us were told by our parents that, as Black children, we would need to work at least twice as hard to make progress and fulfil our potential. That belief gave me the confidence to keep striving too.

Most of the people I have approached for help have been incredibly generous with their time. I learned from that and have tried to do the same. So, no drawbridge. I am open to mentoring and coaching others. I hold a Level 7 qualification in coaching and mentoring and, since gaining it in 2014, I have tried to use it well.

I have had many mentees over the years. The intensity of that coaching and mentoring varies, but I remain in touch with people, and my door is always open if they want to discuss an issue or need advice or support.

JW: How many people do you think you've mentored?

IT: It has to be in excess of 50.

“I DO NOT HAVE A DRAWBRIDGE. MY CAREER HAS BEEN BUILT ON KEEPING IT DOWN.”

JW: 50? Clearly giving back is very important to you.

IT: Absolutely. I'm sitting here thinking I probably mentored 12 or 13 people just in the last year. It's incredibly rare for me to turn anyone down. When I have, it has generally been because of workload or because I've already had too many people to support at once.

I also believe in reverse mentoring. I've taken part in reverse mentoring schemes both here at the Corporation and in my previous role as Chief Executive at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council. I really enjoyed those programmes, but I also got a lot from them. I believe you can learn from everyone.

JW: When future generations look back at this period of Black British history, what do you hope they will say you did with the platform, power and responsibility you were given?

IT: I didn't come to the City of London Corporation to exercise power. I'm here to do a job.

I describe myself as a genuinely ordinary bloke, who happens to have an extraordinary job. I'm here to deliver for the Corporation.

My legacy should be about what I have delivered, working alongside our elected Members and the amazing staff team we have. That's what legacy means to me.

It isn't about saying, "I was here and I did this as a Black man." It's about being able to say that I came here and delivered for the Corporation, because ultimately, I'm a professional and that is my job.

When I look back on my time here, I'd like to say that I left the place in a better position than when I found it. But that can only happen through the work you do with others.

When you look at our elected Members, all the institutions we have, our service departments and the eclectic mix of services we deliver, this is a huge endeavour involving a great many people.

I'd like to look back fondly on the sheer volume of what we delivered together during my time here.

JW: And finally, given the theme of this year's Black History Month, who would you like to honour?

IT: My late mother.

That connects back to your earlier question. Without people of her generation, would we be here celebrating the achievements and contributions of Black people in quite the same way?

Of course, our story did not begin with Windrush. Black people have been part of this country's history for much longer, and anyone who studies that history properly will see that our contribution began long before then. Even so, the post-war period was undoubtedly significant, alongside the movements taking place from Africa and America.

That is why I would honour my mother. My father was there too, of course, but she was the driving force. She was the matriarch of our family and the person who set the standards.

What her generation achieved remains, to me, a powerful example of transformational leadership. They left a different country, climate and culture to come here, build families, create networks, put down roots and raise their children.

My parents were not academics, but they had immense ambition for their children's education and future prospects. They worked hard in the NHS, transport and steel, and carried an extraordinary determination to see the next generation succeed.

They navigated that chapter of their lives with courage and grace, meeting the defining challenges of their time with dignity. I have deep admiration for my mother, and I will always honour her and those like her.

JW: Thank you, Ian. I think that's a really fitting way to end our conversation.

PAUL CHAMBERS

Born in Jamaica, in 1960, Paul Chambers joined the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) in 1980. The following year he was selected by the JDF, and nominated and sponsored by the Jamaican Government, to attend the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for Officer Training. In his military career he rose to the rank of Captain, serving with Caribbean forces when they joined the US invasion of Grenada in 1983.

In 1993 Paul came to the UK with his family and settled in London. An amateur historian, Paul had a deep interest in those from the West Indies who bravely answered the 'clarion call' to serve what was then called the 'mother country' in World War One. Paul had an immense sense of duty to make a difference in the community, change the narrative, unearth and celebrate the sacrifices of these soldiers.

During 2021/22 he set up the not-for-profit British West India Regiments Heritage Trust (BWIRHT)), the focus of which is "Preserving and promoting the proud military heritage of the West Indies".



Paul has been the inspiring force tirelessly campaigning and committed to the BWIRHT Mission: dedicated to commemorating and acknowledging the military heritage of West Indian and Caribbean service personnel; educating and enlightening the public about their service, sacrifice, contributions; and advocating for meaningful recognition within the Armed Forces community and wider society both now and for the future. This moving mission is simply down to Paul's vision, perseverance and significant hard graft as BWIRHT Chair to open the eyes of the British community and around the world. One cannot underestimate the personal mission he is on to bring to life and shape Britain's understanding of this national subject in perpetuity.

The Royal British Legion proudly supports the work of BWIRHT and, in particular, the annual pilgrimage to the battlefields of Belgium and France which is the jewel in the crown of BWIRHT's activities. Aptly named 'Cum By Yah', attendance ranges from predominantly Black current and veteran service personnel from all three services, civilians, the clergy and media. Indeed the 2024 excursion was featured on the British Forces Broadcasting Service and included

the most senior Black British Officer.

The British Army is now mirroring Paul's unique work with Op REFLECT Global Chapter: the Army's focus on shared heritage that connects communities, builds trust and inspires future service. Paul's life, leadership and service is indeed helping to shape Britain, but it is doubtful that those participating in Op REFLECT will truly know or fully appreciate Paul's significance in its conduct.

Yet Paul believes his work is not done. A NRPSI (National Register of Public Service Interpreters) registered Interpreter for Jamaican Patois, he is now quietly influencing and contributing to the British National memorial communities. Invited to be a Council Member of The Memorial Gates charity, the charity educates the public on the part played by soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Commonwealth and Nepal in the World Wars and Paul is playing his part without expectation; sacrificing even more of his time without seeking praise. Moreover, working tirelessly with BWIRHT Strategic Director Sue Liburd, in 2025 they successfully managed to persuade Lewisham Council to formally pass a historic motion to recognise the service

and sacrifice of Caribbean soldiers' lasting contribution to British history with their own British West Indies Regiment Memorial Day on October 26th each year. Paul's hope now is that this will be replicated in hundreds of communities across the country.

In addition, behind the scenes, it was Paul's passion and drive to do the right thing at two Black RAF WW2 'centenarian' funerals (Mr Neil Flanigan MBE 99 years 10 months and Gilbert Clarke 100 years) and secure high profile and military attendance to pay their respects and celebrate the contribution these men had made to Britain throughout their lives.

In summary, over time through consistent acts of care, leadership and responsibility, Paul has contributed to the Black community and beyond, shaping, supporting and sustaining in so many ways, without seeking recognition. He simply has a drive and passion to do what is right for the Black community in Britain and beyond. His selfless contributions are absolutely part of everyday life and yet too often go unseen. Critically his story needs to be told as it changes the narrative for all communities, but especially the Black communities, across Britain.

PROFESSOR MYRTLE EMMANUEL: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH RACE EQUITY

Through teaching, research and community partnership, Dr Myrtle Emmanuel is challenging inequality and ensuring students' lived experiences shape education.

Dr Myrtle Emmanuel is Associate Professor in Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour and Academic Lead for Race Equity at the University of Greenwich. Social justice sits at the heart of her teaching, leadership and research.

In the classroom, Myrtle uses a collaborative, decolonial approach, drawing upon students' experiences and stories to inform teaching and the curriculum. Her work has helped remove institutional barriers, creating fairer opportunities and more supportive educational experiences for students throughout Greenwich Business School and the wider university community.

Myrtle spearheaded the university's Decolonising Academic Pedagogy group and helped lead its Race Action Plan and successful Race Equality Charter submission. Her student-led "unconferences" have challenged traditional hierarchies, encouraged new thinking about human resources and helped create mentoring, internship and work-placement opportunities.

Her influence reaches well beyond the

university. As principal investigator for the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Re-igniting Windrush Folk Stories and Songs project, Myrtle worked with councils, community organisations and creative partners to develop a culturally relevant mental-health toolkit for African-Caribbean communities. Her work has also contributed to discussions about Black mental health and Windrush experiences presented to Parliament.

Myrtle's commitment has been recognised through student-led honours, the University of Greenwich Inclusivity Champion Award and its Excellence Staff Award. In 2025, she was highly commended at the Black Talent Awards and invited to the King's Garden Party.

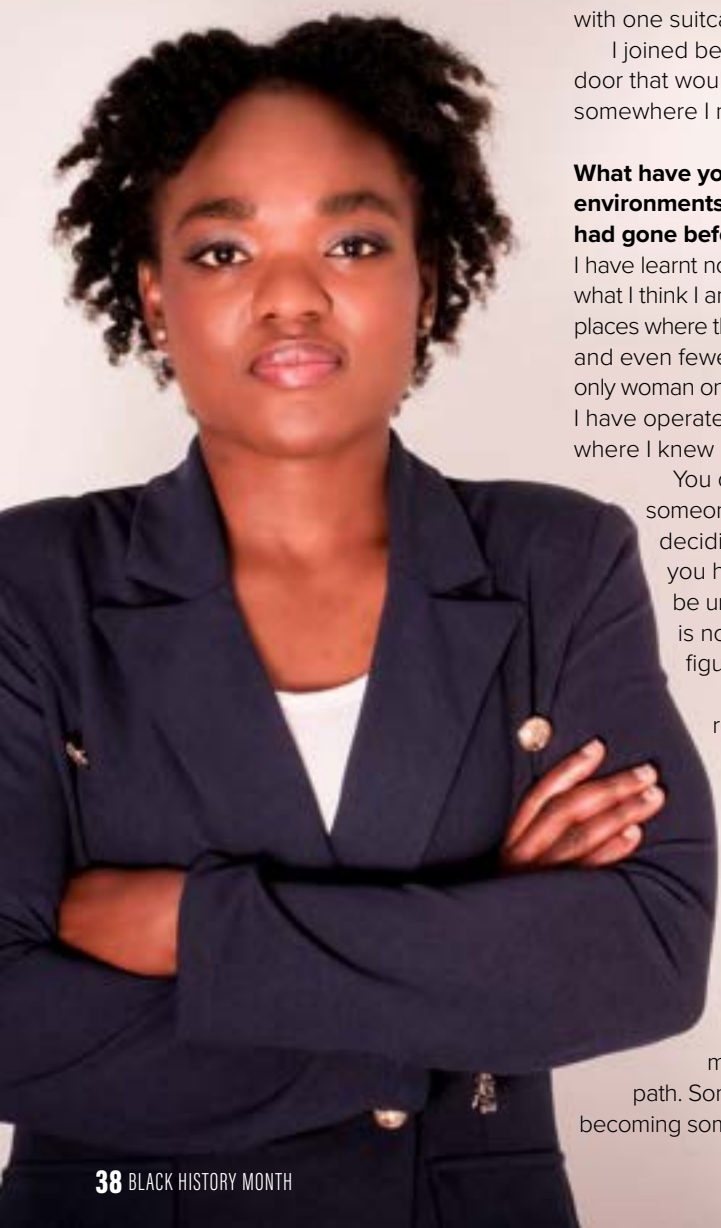
Her nominator, Louise Owusu-Kwarteng, celebrates Myrtle's "profound integrity, courage and unwavering commitment to positive change". Those qualities can be seen in every space she enters.

In honouring Dr Myrtle Emmanuel, we celebrate an educator who turns listening into action and knowledge into opportunity – perfectly reflecting *Honouring Our Communities*.



TAKING UP SPACE AND LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN

Sergeant Afua Amponsa was nominated for Honouring Black Britain 2026 in recognition of her service, leadership and commitment to creating opportunities for others. From demanding infantry exercises in Kenya to an award-winning NATO appointment, she has built a career defined by courage and resilience. She speaks to Black History Month Magazine about her unexpected journey into the British Army, the importance of representation and helping the next generation believe that they belong.



What first inspired you to join the British Army?

The honest answer is that I never planned to join the Army. I studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics because I wanted to work in politics, government, policy or diplomacy. After university, things did not go according to plan. I kept applying for graduate jobs and being rejected.

One day, while on my way to the library to print CVs, I saw a billboard that said, "Army: Be the Best." It caught my attention, so I went home, looked into it and thought, "Why not? What have I got to lose?"

I first applied to become an officer and failed the Army Officer Selection Board. That could have been the end of the story, but I was advised to try the soldier route. Suddenly, I was packing up my one-bedroom flat and going to basic training with one suitcase.

I joined because I was trying to find a door that would open. That door took me somewhere I never imagined.

What have you learnt from entering environments where few Black women had gone before?

I have learnt not to limit myself according to what I think I am capable of. I have been in places where there were not many women and even fewer Black women. I was the only woman on the first SpecINF cadre, and I have operated in infantry environments where I knew I was different.

You do not always need to see someone who looks like you before deciding you belong. Sometimes you have to be the first. That can be uncomfortable because there is no blueprint, so you have to figure it out.

I have also learnt that resilience is something you build through rejection, failure and being outside your comfort zone. During basic training, I genuinely considered quitting. I called my mum, and she talked me through it, prayed for me and reminded me why I had started. I stayed. A difficult moment does not necessarily mean you are on the wrong path. Sometimes it means you are becoming someone you have not met yet.

What stands out about Exercise Haraka Spear in Kenya?

It was one of the biggest learning experiences of my career. I was a relatively new Private, my trade was HR, and I was attached to B Company, 1 SCOTS. These soldiers were fit, experienced and accustomed to the field.

I had to learn quickly while dealing with the heat, little sleep and more than six weeks without everyday comforts. I was also the only woman among more than 60 men.

I did not want to be the person the team had to carry. I listened, watched closely and asked questions. I fitted into the team, not by losing who I was but by understanding its rhythm and culture. I did not want special treatment; I wanted to be useful.

They could see that I was inexperienced, but they could also see that I was willing to learn, work and face the same discomfort. That is how I earned their respect.

Sometimes you do not overcome a challenge by trying to prove you belong. You get stuck in, contribute and let your actions speak for you.

"Sometimes you must be the person who changes what the room looks like."

How did your NATO appointment broaden your understanding of leadership?

At NATO, I worked alongside people from different countries, each bringing their own procedures, cultures and ways of thinking. Everyone still had to work towards a common objective.

I learnt that international cooperation is not about everybody doing things the same way. It is about working effectively when they do not. You must listen, communicate clearly, build relationships and understand that your way is not automatically the right way.

You do not have to agree on everything or work in exactly the same way to achieve something together. What matters is finding the common purpose and understanding how each person or organisation contributes to it.

What did your military awards mean to you?

Both were surreal. At NATO, I did not even know the award existed. Then I found myself

at SHAPE receiving the Military Member of the Year award from SACEUR, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

I was the most junior-ranked recipient, the only woman and the only person of colour. I remember thinking, "How did I get here?"

My role at the Joint Logistics Support Group was new, and I was building it as I went along. I was not seeking recognition; I simply wanted to do my job well.

It taught me to give my best because you never know who is watching or mentioning your name in rooms you do not know exist.

Receiving the Colonel Commandant's Recommendation in 2025 was another humbling moment. I dedicated it to my Triple A Foundation team. My name was on the recognition, but it represented everybody who believed in the vision and helped make it real.

How do you build trust with young people from underrepresented communities?

The biggest thing I bring to recruitment is representation. Sometimes it is not about telling somebody, "You can do this." It is allowing them to see somebody who looks like them doing it and think, "Maybe I can too."

I am honest about my journey. I did not grow up wanting to be a soldier, and I know what rejection feels like.

I am not there to give young people a sales pitch. I explain what the Army can offer, including the opportunities and challenges, and allow them to make an informed decision.

My message is to occupy the space. If you are the only Black person, the only woman or the first person from your background in the room, do not assume you do not belong.

When you occupy that space, you change the picture for the person coming behind you. They can see that someone like them is already there. You do not have to become somebody else to belong. You can occupy the space, be yourself and still succeed.

What inspired you to establish the Triple A Foundation?

It comes down to opportunity and access. Many young people have ability, ambition and potential but lack what they need to move forward.

A child may not have a uniform or stationery. A girl may miss school because she cannot access menstrual products. A young person may be able to learn digital skills but have no computer.

Our work covers education, technology, menstrual health and support for children at risk of becoming street-connected. The projects differ, but the purpose is the same: removing barriers and creating access to opportunity.

Potential without access can remain only potential. We cannot change everything



overnight, but if we create one opportunity and that leads to another, we have started something.

What looks small, a school bag, a computer, a scholarship or someone believing in you, can become the access point to something much bigger.

"When you occupy that space, you change the picture for the person coming behind you."

What advice would you give a young Black woman considering the Armed Forces?

Look beyond your gender and colour. They are part of who you are, but they do not define your limits. Do not enter a room, see nobody who looks like you and decide it is not for you. Think, "Maybe I am meant to be here."

Make the application. Take the opportunity. Do not be afraid of being the first. Do it afraid, but do it anyway.

If you wait for the room to look like you

before entering, you may never walk through the door. Sometimes you must be the person who changes what the room looks like.

Do not be discouraged by rejection. I failed the Army Officer Selection Board, but the alternative route gave me opportunities I could never have imagined.

Do the work, ask questions and find people who will support you, but never believe that you must become somebody else to succeed.

Remember that your journey is not only about you. Another young Black woman may be watching and wondering whether she belongs. Be the representation you would have wanted to see, and help her through the door.

That is what *Honouring Our Communities* means to me. We honour those who came before us, but we must also make the path easier for those coming behind us.

Make the application. Take the space. Do the work. And when you get there, leave the door open for someone else.

Douglas Hamandishe has spent much of his working life serving others. Before becoming Mayor of Medway, he worked for more than 20 years as a mental health nurse and later became a digital health leader.

As a Black Mayor who arrived in Britain as a refugee, he understands the importance of representation – but believes visibility must be matched by genuine opportunity.

For Black History Month, we spoke to Douglas about **Honouring Our Communities**, what leadership means to him and why some of the people making the greatest difference are often those receiving the least recognition.

What does “Honouring Our Communities” mean to you?

For me, this theme is deeply personal because community is not defined by geography: it is not a postcode or a collection of buildings, but people. It is the neighbour who quietly checks on an elderly resident, the volunteer who gives up their weekends, the youth worker who refuses to give up on a young person, and the parent working two jobs while still finding time to support the local school.

As Mayor of Medway, I have the privilege of meeting these people almost every day. They remind me that leadership is not about standing in front of a community; it is about standing alongside it.

As a Black Mayor, I also recognise that representation matters because, when someone sees a person who looks like them serving in civic leadership, they begin to believe those spaces belong to them too. That is not about me, but about widening the doorway for others.

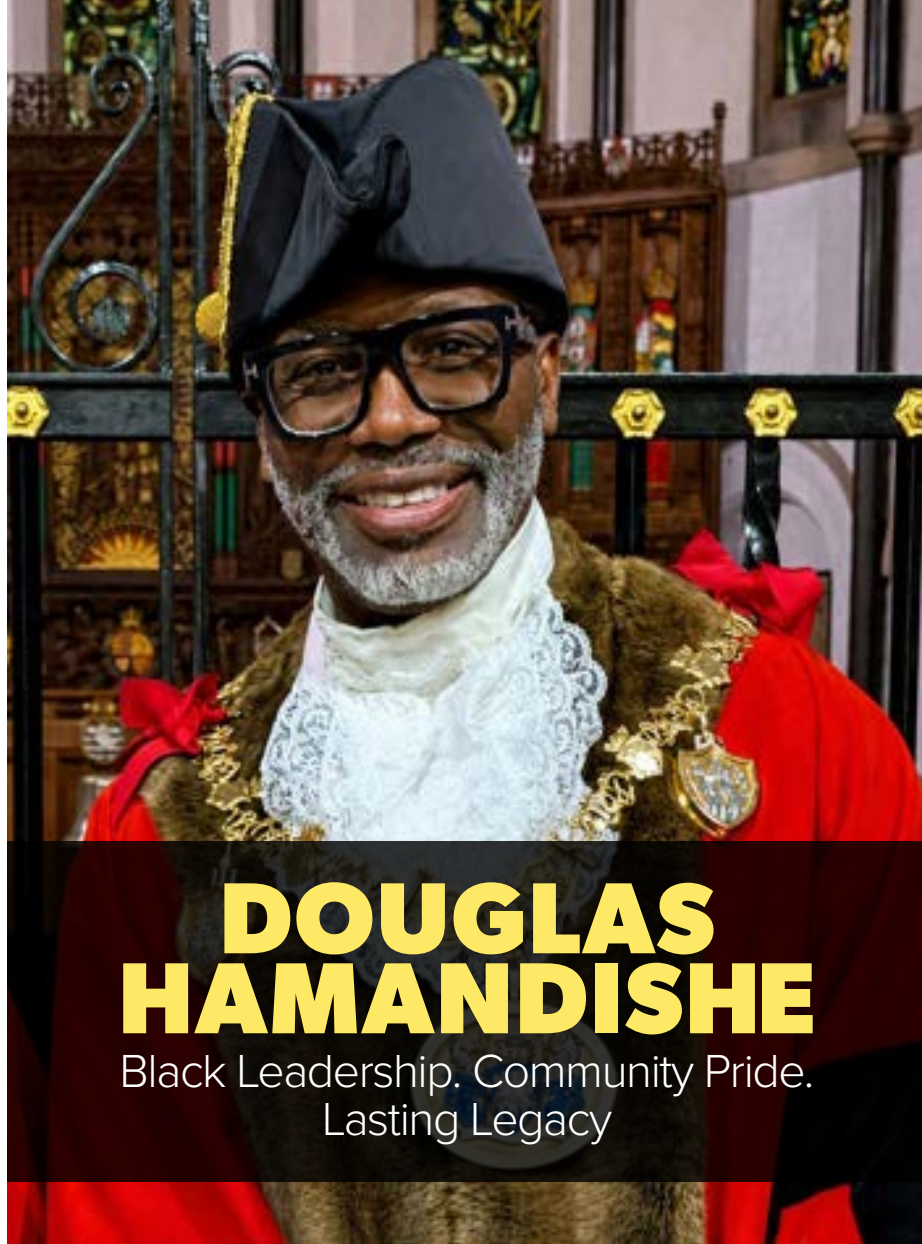
Honouring our communities means making the invisible visible. It means celebrating those whose names may never appear in history books, yet whose kindness, courage and service shape history every day.

Who are the unsung heroes in your community?

Without hesitation, our volunteers across Medway, whom I meet giving thousands of hours each year without asking for recognition. They organise community events, mentor young people, support families facing hardship, visit those who are lonely and simply make life better for somebody else.

I often say that anyone can turn a garden into a desert, but turning a desert into a garden takes courage, commitment, hope, faith and belief.

That is what our volunteers do: they cultivate hope where others see problems, and, if we want stronger, more cohesive communities, we must celebrate those who serve rather than simply those who succeed.



DOUGLAS HAMANDISHE

**Black Leadership. Community Pride.
Lasting Legacy**

What message does your election as Mayor send to young Black people who may never have imagined themselves in civic leadership?

Never allow someone else's imagination to define the limits of your own.

We often hear the phrase, “You have to see it to be it,” and there is truth in that, particularly when representation has been lacking; however, I would also encourage young people to believe in what they cannot yet see, because every pioneer was once the first.

I arrived in Britain as a refugee. If you had told the younger Douglas that one day he would become Mayor of Medway, I probably would not have believed you.

Life has taught me that your circumstances may shape your story, but they never have to define your ending.

My election says something very simple: **You belong. Your voice matters.** Leadership is not reserved for certain people; it belongs to anyone willing to serve with humility, integrity and compassion.

If my journey encourages just one young person to believe they can make a difference, then becoming Mayor has

achieved something far greater than wearing the chain of office.

How has your own experience shaped the way you lead?

Before politics, I spent more than 20 years as a mental health nurse.

That taught me something no textbook ever could: every person carries a story that you cannot see.

I learned never to rush to judgement. Behind a difficult conversation there may be grief, trauma, fear or simply someone who feels unheard.

Being Black, being a refugee, working in healthcare and now serving as Mayor have reinforced one lesson: people flourish when they are treated with dignity.

Leadership begins with listening, but it cannot end there. It also means having the courage to take responsibility for difficult challenges.

What issue facing Black communities deserves greater attention from local leaders?

Opportunity. Not simply equal opportunity on paper, but genuine access to it. Whether

through education, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, civic participation or leadership, too many talented people struggle to see a pathway forward.

Positive role models beyond music, sport and entertainment need to be more visible. Representation is important, but representation without opportunity changes very little.

Local leaders must create pathways that enable people not only to dream, but to participate, contribute and lead.

As Jabali Men's Network encourages, we must "lift as we rise".

At the same time, our communities must demand more of ourselves. Families, communities and institutions all have a role to play in educating, motivating and supporting our young people.

How can local authorities move beyond symbolic gestures and create lasting change?

By listening before leading, because communities do not need councils to arrive with all the answers; they need councils willing to work alongside them. Real change happens through long-term relationships rather than one-off consultations.

We must invest in young people and support grassroots organisations over the long term so that their true impact can be measured. Culture should also be celebrated

throughout the year, rather than only during Black History Month.

Most importantly, success should not be measured by how many meetings were held, but by whether people's lives genuinely improved, because that is how trust is built.

If you could introduce one initiative to increase opportunities, what would it be?

I would establish a National Community Ally Leadership Programme.

It would connect experienced leaders from business, healthcare, education, politics and the voluntary sector with young people through mentoring, coaching and practical leadership experience.

"Your circumstances may shape your story, but they never have to define your ending."

Talent is everywhere, but **opportunity is not**. One conversation can change confidence, one mentor can change direction, and one opportunity can change an entire family for generations.

Who are you honouring this Black History Month?

I am honouring those whose names most people will never know.

The carers, nurses, teaching assistants, foster parents, community organisers, youth workers, faith leaders, grandparents raising another generation, and volunteers who transform lives without recognition.

History is often written about extraordinary moments, but communities are built through acts of kindness, and these people deserve our gratitude during Black History Month and every day.

If I had to name one individual, it would be Steve Biko. His message about dignity, identity and freeing the mind still resonates.

Before a community can transform its circumstances, it must believe in its worth, power and potential.

ABOUT DOUGLAS HAMANDISHE

Douglas Hamandishe is the Mayor of Medway, a registered mental health nurse, digital health leader and advocate for community cohesion. Having arrived in Britain as a refugee, his journey has been shaped by resilience, public service and a belief that leadership is measured not by status, but by service.



Through more than 120 plaques, landmark monuments and decades of cultural work, Dr Jak Beula, also known as Nubian Jak, has transformed how Britain recognises the African and Caribbean people who helped shape its national story.

As founder and chief executive of the Nubian Jak Community Trust, established in 2006, Jak has created a visible public record of people, organisations and events too often overlooked. His career has crossed the arts, social work, education and heritage. A former performing artist and model, he became the first Black International Face of Interflora, but his most enduring contribution has been as an educator, cultural historian and designer of public memorials.

The Trust has installed more than 120 plaques in Britain and internationally, commemorating figures including Mary Prince, Ignatius Sancho, Frederick Douglass, Claudia Jones, Stephen Lawrence, Bob Marley and Althea McNish. In 2024, it unveiled the UK's first blue heritage plaque honouring Martin Luther King Jr at the London church where he preached in 1961.

Jak also designed the African and Caribbean War Memorial, permanently unveiled in Windrush Square, Brixton, in 2017. It honours more than two million African and Caribbean service personnel who supported Britain and its allies during the First and Second World Wars. He later designed the Windrush and Commonwealth NHS Nurses and Midwives Statue, unveiled at Whittington Hospital in 2021.

Through publications, workshops, exhibitions and commemorative events, Jak ensures that each memorial becomes an educational resource. Working with historians, families, schools, councils and cultural organisations, he has turned overlooked stories into lasting public history.

Jak Beula is being honoured because he has changed the landscape of British memory. He has placed names on walls, memorials in public squares and knowledge in young people's hands, helping establish Black British history as an essential part of Britain's past, present and future.

JAMES BARNOR

Honouring the people who shaped his remarkable life



James Barnor's extraordinary career spans almost eight decades, connecting Ghana's journey to independence, the international fight against apartheid, London's Swinging Sixties and the growing African diaspora in Britain.

It was an absolute honour to attend James Barnor's exhibition at the October Gallery. Witnessing such an inspirational character left me full of hope.

Barnor is the embodiment of "Honouring Our Communities", from highlighting the foundations of our communities and our people to celebrating our contributions and hopes for the future through legacy.

As one of Ghana's first photojournalists, Barnor contributed to the international anti-apartheid publication *Drum* magazine, as well as capturing the Swinging Sixties and the African diaspora in England. His aspirations transcended the two nations, leaving an impeccable legacy that is still discussed today.

"I wish there were younger people here, so that they can learn from my 97 years and build on it."

Just sitting in the same room as Barnor and listening to him condense his life and achievements into a two-hour talk, I could feel his past, present and future honour.

Honouring Barnor through the people he honours

"Learning from others more than books."

This quote from the talk stuck with me because initially I thought, "Isn't learning from books learning from others?"

However, Barnor's growth is about direct, natural contact rather than edited, indirect contact. Practical and active learning was still achieved, despite him not attaining the same level of



academic achievement that this generation is advised it needs to succeed.

During those two hours of discussion, the majority of his gleeful talk was about the people who made him. Hearing about these interactions and the lessons he learned reinforced Barnor's physical symbolisation of "Honouring Our Communities". The most important part is the skeleton: the people who shape us.

Therefore, here are just a few of the names Barnor honoured in his talk.

A.Q.A. Archampong

"London is the place for you!"

As the quote above shows, Archampong played a significant role in encouraging Barnor to come to London to learn and apply his skills. Barnor described him as a "top-class teacher and great friend" and later turned to Archampong for advice when choosing a name for his own studio, resulting in the birth of the Ever Young studio.

Dennis Kemp

"Meeting Dennis Kemp changed my life."

Kemp was a war veteran and trained medical photographer who gave Barnor his first Kodak camera, shared his knowledge of colour photography and provided him with a home during his stay in London. His mentorship contributed greatly to Barnor's developing talent and passion for photography, with Barnor later taking his knowledge of colour photography back to Ghana.

Kemp's 1960 portrait of James Barnor now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.

These are just two of the many people Barnor discusses with great detail and affection, and I could sense his admiration and sincere gratitude for those who helped shape the man he is today.

Reflective sentiments

Reflecting on his eventful journey, particularly his time in London, Barnor stated:

"I did more than anyone expected, and it was wonderful."

His words suggest that expectations

are possibilities rather than certainties and should not limit what we believe we can achieve.

Barnor's achievements have crossed both geographical and generational boundaries, reflected in his nickname, "Lucky Jim", which he acquired because he was alive when so much was happening. What makes him even more inspirational is that he chose to capture those moments through his lens, becoming part of the history unfolding around him.



At 97, Barnor may not be as active behind the camera as he once was, but he continues to preserve memories through his talks, ambitions and work for the future.

He hopes to exhibit photographs he considers among his best but which have

not yet been showcased, while also teaching modern photographers and young people about his story and the traditional photographic skills he acquired.

His commitment to the future can also be seen through the foundation he established in 2022 to preserve African cultural heritage and support emerging African talent, as well as his desire for more people to document his experiences, perhaps in a book, so that his message can reach wider audiences.

I therefore recommend keeping an eye out for future biographies, articles and exhibitions documenting his remarkable life and work.

James Barnor has been shaped, supported and sustained by the people in his life, and he is now using what he has learned to continue that cycle for another generation.

"I will never forget the people who helped and made me."

Where to see Barnor's work

Barnor's work can be seen during the remainder of the year at Africa Fashion, Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris, France, and Ibrahim Mahama: Le Temps des récoltes, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France.

Between 2026 and 2027, his work will also be presented in Sunday Best at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Canada.

For more information about this year's exhibitions, please visit: **James Barnor | Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière.**

By L. J. Mark





BY
FRANCES
JARDINE

GHANA, YOUR GATEWAY TO AFRICA

From the energy of Accra and the history of Cape Coast to Ghana's food, landscapes and warm hospitality, a journey with Jata Tours is an invitation to experience the country through the eyes of the people who call it home.



tell you about within the confines of this magazine, but one thing is for sure: Ghana is here and waiting to welcome you to share its ancient land and modern dreams.

ARRIVING IN ACCRA

Shortly after touching down at Kotoka International Airport in the nation's capital, Accra, I met with my fellow travellers at La Villa Boutique Hotel. Here, tucked away in the cosy neighbourhood of Osu, I got my first taste of Ghanaian hospitality. Our relaxed "Welcome to Ghana" group meal was a lovely way for our award-winning Ghanaian guide, Bonney Laaye, to introduce himself and for us to introduce ourselves to one another.

Our first morning in Accra found us exploring the crowded, busy and, at times, a little bewildering Makola Market. As the sights, sounds and aromas all vied for attention, one couldn't escape the slightly electric feeling of actually living in the moment. This was Africa; the Africa I had hoped to find, even dreamed of finding.

As the aromatic fragrance of cinnamon, mace and woodsmoke wafted over me from a myriad of spice sellers and kebab stands, I was filled with a blissful feeling of connection with my fellow human beings in a way I had never experienced before. This was only the first morning of the first day of my trip and I was already hooked. There was more, so much more to come, as I let Ghana wash over me like a dream come true.

The historic harbour community of Jamestown, the memorial park to Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, with its statues and fountains, and the impressive National Theatre of Ghana made for a fantastic and intoxicating introduction to the country.



Fresh off the plane from my recent trip to Ghana, I was surprised to find myself struggling to adequately describe the country to curious friends and colleagues. There's so much more to see, do, touch and taste in Ghana than I could easily describe in a WhatsApp message or text.

The twelve days I spent in Ghana with Jata Tours were more than just a break; they felt like a breakthrough. If I were to distil my takeaways from my unforgettable trip into one sentence, I would say that Ghana is a land of stories, a land of echoes and echoes of stories. Like Ghana, each of us is a story, and inside ourselves resound the echoes of the stories of those whose lives led to our own.

For Jata Tours, one of Ghana's great stories is the story of the Ga people. According to Ga oral tradition, their ancestry can be traced through generations of migration, with some traditions linking the Ga to one of the lost tribes of Israel. Oral tradition tells of ancestors leaving the Middle East and venturing west in search of new lands, travelling through Ethiopia, Sudan, the Lake Chad region and the Niger Delta before reaching the Gulf of Guinea and the ocean. Here, on the shores of the wild Atlantic, the Ga established their communities in the land we now call Ghana.

There's more to see, do, touch and taste in Ghana than I can

CONFRONTING THE PAST

The next day I took a deep breath as our coach pulled out onto the westbound highway, heading for the historic slave-trading forts of the Gulf of Guinea. It was several hours later that I finally breathed out, as the brilliant white edifice of Cape Coast Castle came into view.

An eye-opener for some, a cathartic experience for others, these ancient forts are places where the past is confronted and where wounds may begin to heal. These sites were fundamental to the transatlantic slave trade, and walking through them brings visitors face to face with a period of history that many still struggle to come to terms with.

Irrespective of the personal impact of the forts on those who visit, these symbols of both oppression and hope are, without doubt, unforgettable places of profound and striking beauty. Like Ghana, each of us is a story, and inside ourselves resound the echoes of the stories of those whose very lives led to our own. People and countries may well endeavour not to repeat the sins of the past, but echoes never really fade away.

BEYOND GHANA'S SADDER PAST

Venturing beyond the legacy of Ghana's sadder past, we headed into the tropical landscape to experience the majesty of nature at its finest before travelling to Charlestina Beach Resort for two days of oceanside luxury. After another night dining in the capital, we continued our journey to Lake Volta, one of the world's largest artificial lakes by surface area.

We swam in fresh waterfalls surrounded by Ghanaian rainforest and enjoyed an onboard buffet during a cruise across the lake. There were moments for history, moments for reflection and moments simply to enjoy being in one of the most beautiful corners of West Africa.



GHANA: ONE BIG HEART

A geographically small nation of around 92,000 square miles, home to numerous ethnic groups, more than 80 living languages and one big heart, Ghana's official language is English. With its easy culture, organic food, kind-hearted people and tropical weather, Ghana welcomes you with its warm embrace as you are seduced by the incredible tapestry woven into the life force that shapes this magical land.

Ghana and Ghanaians relish welcoming the curious, the adventurous and those with a re-found spirit, showcasing the country's beauty and culture in a way that is infused with natural warmth, hospitality and generosity of spirit.

Jata Tours differs from many other West African tour companies in that it is 100% Ghanaian-owned and staffed. Ghana is the team's land and home. The company's award-winning and experienced guides aim to give guests an easy and enjoyable experience. Its small groups generally comprise around 15 to 20 guests, with opportunities to socialise as well as time to relax independently.

Jata Tours believes that a Ghanaian adventure should be so much more than just a break. Having experienced the country with them, I understood what they meant. For me, it felt like a breakthrough.



AND THEN THERE IS THE FOOD

It wasn't just the music, the dance or the marriage of the people to the rhythm of life that I was finding so irresistibly spellbinding. The food was a delicious surprise. From peanut soup, tasty jollof rice and palm wine to drop doughnuts and mangoes that tasted like sunshine, my tummy was already thanking me for the trip!

Food is part of the rhythm of life here. Meals are shared, conversations flow and before long you begin to understand that Ghana is not simply somewhere you visit. It is somewhere you experience.

That is why I am going back. And this is why you should go too. Forget what you know, or think you know, about Africa. Ghana is waiting to welcome you; her people are ready to share their ancient land and your modern dreams.

So, what are you waiting for? Take your first step and discover Ghana for yourself.

ABOUT JATA TOURS

Jata Tours is a 100% Ghanaian-owned and staffed tour company offering small-group journeys through Ghana. With experienced, award-winning local guides, Jata Tours introduces guests to Ghana's history, culture, food, landscapes and people while providing an easy and enjoyable way to explore the country.

Groups are generally made up of around 15 to 20 guests, allowing plenty of opportunity to socialise while still having time to relax and enjoy the journey independently.

To find out more about forthcoming tours or to make an enquiry, visit jatatours.com.



CHARMAINE SIMPSON

Filling the missing pages of history



Through Black History Studies, Charmaine Simpson has created spaces where people can discover African and Caribbean history, strengthen their identity and connect knowledge of the past with confidence in the present.

When Charmaine Simpson speaks about Black history, she speaks about something living: knowledge that belongs in classrooms, museums, communities and family conversations throughout the year.

It was this conviction that led her to establish Black History Studies with her husband, Mark Simpson, in March 2007.

"I founded Black History Studies with my husband Mark because we saw a significant gap in the education available on Black history topics that are often missing from school curricula," she explained in 2024. "Our goal was to address these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Black history."

Together, Charmaine and Mark created the organisation they felt their community needed: a place where people could learn about history from an African perspective and encounter subjects rarely explored in formal education.

Under Charmaine's leadership as Chief Executive Officer, Black History Studies has developed courses, presentations, webinars, film screenings, walking tours, museum visits and community events. These activities bring people together not only to receive information, but to ask questions, challenge inherited assumptions and discuss how history continues to shape contemporary life.

Charmaine summarises the mission through the words of historian Arthur Schomburg: "African history is nothing but the missing pages of world history." For her, restoring those pages is not an interest confined to October. "We believe that it is very

important that all history should be taught to everyone and throughout the year, not just in Black History Month," she says. "Black history is a subject that can be interesting to all."

Children and young people have remained central to this work. Before establishing Black History Studies, Charmaine worked across the public and voluntary sectors and supported young people through the London Borough of Brent and Crime Concern in Wembley and Harlesden. She later delivered Black history sessions in Britain and in schools in Washington State in the United States.

She also created learning materials connected to The Great and Mighty Wall and developed the Before the Slave Trade resource, helping parents and educators introduce young people to African history beyond the familiar starting point of enslavement. As Charmaine insists, "Our history did not start with African chattel enslavement. On our curriculum, history starts at the origin of humanity."

That principle is important. When Black history is taught only through slavery, colonialism and racism, children are denied the opportunity to learn about African civilisations, scholarship, innovation, political thought and cultural achievement.

Education, however, is not limited to the classroom. Charmaine and Mark also wanted people to encounter history through place. As Director of Black History Study Tours, Charmaine has helped promote cultural tourism to locations of African heritage.

Black History Studies has organised group tours to Egypt and destinations across Europe, alongside visits to institutions such as the British Museum and Liverpool's International Slavery Museum. Walking tours and study visits transform streets, monuments and museum collections into spaces of learning. They allow participants to stand in the places where history happened and understand that African heritage is present across Britain, Europe and the wider world.

ALL HISTORY SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO EVERYONE AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, NOT JUST IN BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

Charmaine has also brought overlooked history into public view. In 2022, she developed content for the Untold Stories History Trail in Gladstone Park, celebrating people of African and Caribbean heritage connected to Brent.

In November 2024, Black History Studies became the first organisation to operate from Islington's Black Cultural Centre. Its programme of education, community cinema and heritage activities helped create a space where Black voices, culture and knowledge could be shared and celebrated.

Charmaine's commitment to learning is reflected in her own academic journey. After earning a first-class degree in Economics from the University of Hertfordshire, she continued her studies and, in 2022, graduated with merit from the University of West London's MA in Global Black Studies, Decolonisation and Social Justice.

Her work as a financial educator and financial-literacy advocate extends the same philosophy into another area of community life. Whether she is teaching history or helping people understand money, her purpose is empowerment through practical knowledge.

Charmaine and Mark's contribution has received several honours, including the Marcus Garvey Award from Westside Young Leaders Academy in 2022. Yet their greatest achievement can be seen in the community of learners they have built over nearly two decades.

Honouring Charmaine Simpson means recognising a woman who has made education an act of community service. By restoring missing pages, challenging narrow narratives and taking people directly to places of African heritage, she has helped people see history, and themselves, with greater clarity, confidence and pride for generations still to come.

HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026



KANYA KING CBE 1969–2026

She created a platform where Black music could be celebrated on its own terms, changing who was seen, heard and recognised in British culture.



AYAN MAHAMOUD MBE

Through Somali art, literature and culture, she has created spaces where memory is preserved, identity is affirmed and communities come together.



DR ANDREW BROWN

His work begins with people – strengthening health, wellbeing and community support by listening closely to the lives behind the statistics.



TREVOR BLACKMAN

For more than two decades, he has invested in young people, creating the opportunities, encouragement and belief from which futures are built.



PROF. UZO IWOBİ CBE

Her work has given voice, structure and strength to communities across Wales, placing racial equality firmly within public and civic life.



DR JAK BEULA – NUBIAN JAK

Through plaques, monuments and educational projects, he has made overlooked Black British lives and achievements visible in the public spaces of the nation.



DR WANDA WYPORSKA

Her leadership brings together equality, history and public life, helping ensure Black British stories are preserved, understood and given the recognition they deserve.



THE RT REVD ROSE HUDSON-WILKIN

She has devoted her life to faith and public service, bringing pastoral care, moral purpose and a deep commitment to the communities she serves.



PROF. SIR PATRICK VERNON OBE

Through history, campaigning and public service, he has helped ensure that Windrush stories are remembered and their significance understood.



LORD WOOLLEY OF WOODFORD

For more than three decades, Lord Woolley has worked to widen political participation, challenge racial inequality and open routes into leadership and education.

Simon Woolley, Baron Woolley of Woodford, has devoted his public life to a simple but powerful principle: Britain's institutions should reflect and serve the full diversity of its people. As a campaigner, crossbench peer and educational leader, he has helped people from underrepresented communities recognise that their voices belong in the places where decisions are made.

His commitment to opportunity is rooted in his own life. Fostered and later adopted as a young child, he grew up on a council estate in Leicester. He left school without A-levels and later returned to education through an access course – an experience that changed the direction of his life. He studied Spanish and English Literature at Middlesex University before completing a master's degree in Hispanic Studies at Queen Mary University of London. That journey gave him a lasting understanding of how easily talent can be overlooked when people lack encouragement, confidence or a clear route forward.

In 1996, he co-founded Operation Black Vote, becoming its first director. The organisation was created to address the political underrepresentation of Black and minority ethnic communities and to encourage greater involvement in Britain's democratic life. Its work has included voter-registration campaigns, civic education, leadership programmes and initiatives designed to help people understand how political institutions work.

Lord Woolley's approach has never been about telling communities what to think or which political party to support. It has been about ensuring that people recognise the power of their vote, feel able to question those in authority and have

opportunities to become leaders themselves. Operation Black Vote has worked across political parties, helping to build a stronger pipeline of councillors, magistrates, school governors, public appointees and prospective parliamentary candidates.

When the organisation began, only a small number of Black and minority ethnic MPs sat in the House of Commons. Representation has grown considerably since then. That progress belongs to many campaigners and communities, but Lord Woolley and Operation Black Vote have played an important part in keeping political inclusion on the national agenda. His work has demonstrated that representation is not merely symbolic: decisions are stronger when they are informed by a wider range of experiences.

His commitment to equality also took him into national public service. He served as an Equality and Human Rights Commissioner and, from 2018 to 2020, chaired the advisory group for the Government's Race Disparity Unit. The Unit brought together data on inequalities across areas including education, employment, health, housing and criminal justice. Lord Woolley argued that reliable evidence could make disparities harder to ignore and give communities a stronger basis on which to demand change.

In 2019, he was knighted for services to race equality and later that year was made a life peer. As Lord Woolley of Woodford, he sits as a crossbencher in the House of Lords, retaining political independence while contributing to debates about equality, democracy, education and social mobility. His elevation to the Lords placed a long-standing community campaigner inside one of Britain's most influential institutions, but it did not separate him from the concerns that had shaped his work.

“For Lord Woolley, opening a door is only the beginning; people must also be able to enter, contribute and thrive.”

Education has become another important part of his leadership. In October 2021, Lord Woolley became Principal of Homerton College, Cambridge. His appointment brought his personal story full circle: someone who had once left school without A-levels was now leading a college at one of the world's best-known universities. At Homerton, he has championed academic excellence alongside widening participation, inclusion and the belief that universities should actively seek talent in every community.

He has also supported programmes that prepare people from underrepresented backgrounds for senior leadership. These initiatives do more than help individuals advance. They challenge organisations to reconsider where they look for ability, whose potential they invest in and what leadership can look like. For Lord Woolley, opening a door is only the beginning; people must also be able to enter, contribute and thrive.

What makes his contribution especially valuable is the connection he draws between political power, education and community confidence. A young person who sees someone like themselves in Parliament, university leadership or public life may begin to imagine a different future. A registered voter may realise that their voice can influence local and national priorities. A mentoring opportunity may become the first step towards years of public service.

In honouring Lord Woolley of Woodford, we recognise a leader who has spent decades making British democracy more inclusive and opportunity more widely shared. His journey from a Leicester council estate to the House of Lords and the leadership of a Cambridge college is remarkable, but his wider legacy lies in the paths he has helped create for others. Through persistence, practical action and faith in overlooked talent, he has helped more people believe that public life belongs to them too.



From campaigning for women and girls in Kenya to making political history in Derry, Councillor Lilian Seenoi-Barr has built a life around advocacy, representation and making public institutions work for people whose voices are too often overlooked.

Long before Lilian Seenoi-Barr entered politics, she understood that leadership begins with taking action. Born and raised in Kenya and proud of her Maasai heritage, Lilian began campaigning for the rights of women and girls early in her life. In 1999, she co-founded a project supporting Maasai girls at risk of early forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The work also pressed for stronger legal protection and better access to primary education for disadvantaged communities.

In 2010, Lilian arrived in Northern Ireland as a refugee and made Derry her home. Starting again in a new country gave her direct experience of the barriers migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can face, from navigating unfamiliar public services and encountering discrimination to rebuilding a life without established support networks. Rather than allowing those experiences to limit her, Lilian used them to help others.

In 2012, she founded the North West Migrants Forum, providing advice, advocacy and practical assistance while challenging racism and negative stereotypes. Today, she serves as its Chief Executive Officer. The organisation has become an important voice for Black and minoritised communities across the region, helping people understand their rights, access services and participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Her move into elected politics brought that community experience directly into local government. Lilian joined Derry City and Strabane District Council through co-option in June 2021 as an SDLP representative for Foyle side. In 2023, she was elected to represent the area, becoming the first Black person elected as a representative in Northern Ireland. Then, in June 2024, she made history again when she became Mayor of Derry City and Strabane, the first Black mayor in Northern Ireland.

The significance of that moment went well beyond one individual achievement. For Black children, migrant families and minority communities, it demonstrated visibly that civic leadership was not a space closed to them. But Lilian was determined that her mayoralty should be measured by more than the history it made. She pledged to be a mayor for everyone: approachable, visible and committed to serving communities



Lilian Seenoi-Barr

The campaigner who became Northern Ireland's first Black Mayor

across the district.

During her year in office, she supported the signing of the Financial Deal for the Derry Strabane City Deal, intended to create new economic, cultural and employment opportunities. She also represented the district internationally, promoting Derry and Strabane as a place of innovation and investment. At the same time, community work remained central.

Her One Big Weekend, One Big Cause programme supported the BUD Club, which works with children and young people with disabilities. The initiative brought people together through culture, music and fundraising. Lilian also established Our Guildhall, Our Place, an inclusive youth hub that gave young people a voice within one of the district's most important civic buildings. She hosted a birthday celebration for children and young people with additional needs and organised a Christmas gathering recognising residents who had gone out of their way to help others.

These were not simply ceremonial activities. They reflected her belief that public institutions should feel open and responsive to the people they exist to serve.

Her influence has also travelled far beyond Northern Ireland. Lilian addressed the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference in Washington and, at Howard University's 2025 commencement, received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree recognising her contribution to

human rights, equality and public service.

Her historic rise was not without opposition. Lilian faced racist abuse and personal threats following her appointment as mayor. She refused to allow that hostility to determine how she carried out the role. She continued meeting residents, visiting schools, supporting community organisations and representing the district.

That response matters. Representation cannot only mean opening a door; it also means ensuring intimidation does not decide who is entitled to walk through it.

Lilian Seenoi-Barr is being honoured not simply because she became Northern Ireland's first Black mayor, but because of the work that came before and after that milestone. Across more than two decades of campaigning and public service, her work has supported women and girls, migrants, refugees, young people, disabled children and families. She has taken experience gained through grassroots campaigning into the council chamber and used public office to widen participation rather than simply occupy a historic position.

Her journey shows that leadership can begin a long way from government buildings. It can begin with protecting a girl, helping a newly arrived family or challenging a system that is not listening.

Lilian Seenoi-Barr made history, and then used that moment to help more people believe that public life could include them too.



A fireside chat with:

Professor Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE

From discovering computers as a curious child to founding Stemettes and becoming one of Britain's most influential voices in technology, **Professor Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE** has spent much of her career challenging assumptions about who belongs in STEM. For **Black History Month**, she talks about curiosity, community, representation and what lasting change in technology really looks like.

Anne-Marie Imafidon's relationship with technology began long before she knew there was a career attached to it. As a child, she was encouraged to explore, experiment and ask questions – whether that meant using her father's computer to type out *Little Red Riding Hood* or taking apart a VHS tape simply because she wanted to know what was inside.

That curiosity would eventually lead her into mathematics, computer science and technology, and later to the creation of Stemettes, the award-winning social enterprise encouraging girls, young women and non-binary young people into STEM.

We spoke to Anne-Marie about the importance of curiosity, the people who helped expand her sense of what was possible, why representation is only the beginning – and what it really means to honour a community.

BHM: You entered the world of STEM at a very young age. What shaped your curiosity and willingness to give things a go?

Professor Anne-Marie Imafidon: My confidence and curiosity were shaped by my parents' willingness to indulge my curiosity: I was allowed to use my dad's computer, which he was supposed to use for research, to type out *Little Red Riding Hood*, and I infamously broke the VCR player because I wanted to see what was inside a VHS tape.

My curiosity was really encouraged in that way, and in terms of confidence, I don't think I have particularly high or low self-esteem – I just have esteem.

There's an assumption that I was confident in doing those things, but it was more that I was willing to give things a go; it wasn't about being overconfident, but the absence of fear.

If something worked, great; if it didn't, it didn't, and when things did work, that naturally gave me more confidence going into the next challenge.

BHM: You achieved a great deal at a young age. What was it actually like moving through academic and technology spaces at that stage of your life?

Anne-Marie: For me, those environments were interesting because I was focused on the maths or computer science I was doing and the problems I was solving, rather than what was happening around me – maybe that's a weakness of mine, but that would be my answer.

BHM: Were there people who helped shape your sense of what was possible in STEM?

Anne-Marie: I did internships and joined programmes like the Windsor Fellowship, which allowed me to see that these careers and jobs actually existed.

People like Tim Berners-Lee were visible influences, and I also remember reading an American tech magazine featuring women entrepreneurs and thinking, “I’m a little bit like them. That’s something I could do.”

More than anything, though, my engagement with STEM came from loving maths and computer science rather than knowing there was a career attached to them; it wasn’t until I was around 13, when we had careers advice at school, that I discovered roles like systems analyst and management consultant.

I often say that I started Stemettes, but I got into the industry without having had Stemettes myself: for some people, “If you can see it, you can be it” is absolutely true, while others don’t even know the career exists until much later.

BHM: Through Stemettes, you’ve supported thousands of young people. When did you realise the significance of what you were building?

Anne-Marie: The first significant moment came after we started Stemettes in February 2013: by December that year, I was invited to a meeting at Number 10 with Michael Gove, who was Education Secretary at the time, and David Willetts, who was Universities Minister.

I hadn’t started Stemettes fully understanding the scale of the problem, but within 11 months I was sitting at the heart of government discussing it, and that was the moment I realised, “Wow, this is a big deal.”

The second moment was receiving the letter about my MBE; you associate MBEs with people who’ve worked on something significant for many years, so it was meaningful that the work had already been recognised.

“FOR ME, HONOURING YOUR COMMUNITY MEANS BEING IN SERVICE TO IT AND DOING YOUR DUTY TO HELP IT THRIVE.”

BHM: This year’s Black History Month theme is “Honouring Our Communities”. What does community mean to you?

Anne-Marie: Community is people: it’s connection, understanding, sharing, the ups and the downs.

There’s only so much you know or experience as an individual, and it’s when you connect those experiences with other people that they become meaningful.

Until you know someone else is experiencing the same things, it’s hard to understand what needs to change at a systemic level, within institutions or across communities.



Community continues to shape my work by refining what our impact needs to be, what programmes should look like, what policies are needed and what messages need to reach people who aren’t already connected to these communities, whether that’s listening to young people through Stemettes, shaping advocacy work or working with government.

For me, honouring your community means being in service to it and doing your duty to help it thrive.

BHM: Much has been said about widening access to STEM. Who is still being left out?

Anne-Marie: It’s interesting because much has been said, but perhaps less has actually been done, and there are still many people being left out, whether across gender, class or ethnicity.

It’s not just about entering STEM – remaining in STEM often becomes untenable because the environment can be so hostile, and we see this across academia, industry and entrepreneurship.

The reason people are still being left out is because systems continue to do what they’ve always done: if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always got.

We don’t consistently value talent in all its forms.

Talent is evenly distributed; opportunity is not.

There are also historical legacies around who has traditionally been valued in engineering and technology, who gets funding and whose contributions are recognised, and those legacies still shape the industry today.

BHM: You’ve worked inside major institutions as well as building Stemettes. Where do you think real change happens – inside systems or outside them?

Anne-Marie: The answer is really across systems and depends on the nature, scale and timescale of the change you’re trying to achieve.

The issue of women in tech isn’t one problem; it’s many interconnected problems requiring different solutions.

You can make significant short-term changes within your own organisation, but if you’re aiming for long-term, systemic change, then institutions have to be part of the solution.

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT HAVING DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN THE ROOM; IT’S ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE BEING REFLECTED IN POLICIES, DECISION-MAKING AND WAYS OF WORKING.”

BHM: Representation is often discussed as a solution. What does meaningful representation actually look like?

Anne-Marie: Representation is the first step; meaningful representation is when people genuinely have a sense of belonging and organisations operate equitably.

It’s not just about having different people in the room; it’s about those people being reflected in policies, decision-making, ways of working, and how people enter and leave organisations.

For me, meaningful representation enables organisations to move towards equitable practice – doing things with people rather than to them or for them, and thinking about long-term change as well as short-term outcomes – ultimately changing the nature of what an organisation does and what its norms become.

That’s what I’ve been working towards throughout the years of running Stemettes.

BHM: Looking ahead, what would lasting change in STEM look like – not just in access, but in culture and leadership?

Anne-Marie: Lasting change would mean technology genuinely solving more problems than it creates, with different kinds of people better enabled and supported by the products, services and systems that exist.

It would also mean better representation across every part of the sector, alongside pay equity, greater flexibility and workplaces where people can take time out when they need to.

Ultimately, when someone asks:

“What does an engineer look like?”

The answer should simply be:

“What does a human look like?”

Claudine Reid MBE

Seeing the possibility in people

For more than 30 years, **Claudine Reid MBE** has combined business with community service, creating employment, supporting vulnerable people and helping women turn their ideas into opportunities.

A conversation with Claudine Reid can change direction quickly. Someone may begin by describing a problem or an idea and leave with the beginnings of a business plan.

Her nominator says Claudine sees potential in almost every person and situation. Where someone else might see an obstacle, she begins looking for the people, knowledge and partnerships needed to find a way through it.

That approach has shaped more than three decades of work in Croydon and beyond.

Since 1996, Claudine and her husband, Patrick, have led PJ's Community Service, a social enterprise providing care and support for vulnerable adults and children alongside education and enterprise services for new and developing businesses.

Their work has provided essential services to thousands of people and created employment within the local community. It demonstrates that a business can be commercially effective while remaining firmly connected to the people it serves.

Claudine has become particularly known for encouraging women, including African and Caribbean women, to enter business and social enterprise. She understands that a promising idea is not enough on its own. People may also need confidence, practical advice, access to finance and someone willing to introduce them to the right opportunities.



Over the years, she has advised central and local government, worked with senior leaders from the corporate and charitable sectors and served as a school governor. She has also maintained her connection with grassroots work through her church and her support for young people.

In 2020, Lloyds Banking Group appointed Claudine to chair its Black Business Advisory Committee. The committee was established to help the bank understand the barriers faced by Black business owners and develop practical recommendations to help businesses start, grow and access support.

Claudine brought the experiences of entrepreneurs into conversations with one of the country's largest financial institutions. During her five years as chair, she worked to improve understanding between the bank and Black-owned businesses and argued for actions that could produce meaningful change.

Her support for women took on a new form during the Covid pandemic. When lockdown prevented people from meeting, Claudine began a virtual Saturday gathering called Navigating Life.

The sessions were initially expected to continue for only a few weeks or months. Six years later, women still gather online every Saturday morning. Participants join from Britain, Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, with some waking in the early hours to take part.

The meetings have developed into a place where women can share knowledge, discuss challenges and showcase their skills. What began as a response to isolation has become an international community built around encouragement and learning.

Claudine now divides her time between Britain and Jamaica. Following the destruction caused by Hurricane Melissa, she worked with groups supporting affected communities. Her involvement extended from organising relief and longer-term rebuilding projects to helping feed residents and joining teams constructing homes for people who had lost everything.

She continues to mentor and train women across generations and countries. Her recent work includes encouraging women to engage with artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies so that they are equipped to participate in a rapidly changing economy.

The different parts of Claudine's life, including care, enterprise, education, faith, mentoring and disaster recovery, are connected by the same instinct. She asks not only what somebody needs today, but what they might be able to build next.

Claudine does more than tell people that they have potential. She helps them find the confidence, knowledge, contacts and practical route needed to use it.



In memory of Professor Jason Arday: Why Black British scholarship must be protected

I've been reflecting on the death of Professor Jason Arday and on what his loss means at a time when Black scholarship, Black academics and the institutions that support their work are facing growing challenge.

It brought to mind Martin Niemöller's powerful poem, *First They Came* which was a warning about what can happen when we remain silent as others are targeted, marginalised or erased.

Inspired by its structure and spirit, I wrote: **After They Came for Black British Scholarship**

A reflection on where we are now, what may be at stake, and why those who value Black British scholarship, history and knowledge cannot afford to remain silent.

Written in the style of Martin Niemöller's "First They Came".



First, they came for Professor Hakim Adi,
at the University of Chichester in 2023,
and with him went a programme in the History of Africa and the
African Diaspora.

I watched the course close and told myself
it was only one department.

Then they came for Professor Robert Beckford,
at the University of Winchester in 2024,
a scholar of Black Theology, Climate and Social Justice,
and I told myself
that universities were facing difficult times.

Then they came for Professor Deirdre Osborne,
at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2024,
whose work gave voice to Black British Literature
and helped build a place for those stories to be studied.
Alongside Professor Joan Anim-Addo,
she helped create the pioneering MA in Black British Literature,
a field long neglected, yet rich with histories,
languages, memories, and resistance.
Together they made space
for voices too often left off the reading list,
and for students who finally found themselves in the curriculum.

I said nothing,
because the course itself survived.
Yet a programme can remain on paper
while the people who imagined it, nurtured it,
and gave it life are gone.

Then they came for Professor Kehinde Andrews,
at Birmingham City University in 2026,
the United Kingdom's first Professor of Black Studies,
as Black Studies programmes were dismantled
and Black scholars were placed at risk.
I told myself
surely someone else would speak.

One by one,
the fields grew smaller:

African History.
Black Theology.
Black British Literature.
Black Studies.

One by one,
the lecture theatres lost their custodians,

the doctoral students lost their mentors,
the archives lost their champions.

The names were different.
The institutions were different.
The years were different.

But the story began to sound the same.

Then they came not with redundancy papers,
but with headlines, columns, speculation,
and a thousand judgments delivered at speed.

And Professor Jason Arday,
scholar of Sociology of Education, Race and Social Justice,
whose journey reached the University of Cambridge in 2023,
found his life examined line by line,
his story weighed,
his character contested,
his humanity too readily forgotten.

Some said it was scrutiny.
Some said it was accountability.
Others saw a spectacle,
a frenzy that demanded more and more
from a man already carrying the burden
of being one of so few Black professors
to reach such heights.

And when news came of his death
in 2026,
the arguments continued,
but his voice did not.

By then the lesson was no longer about
one scholar,
one university,
one discipline,
or one year.

It was about what happens
when institutions celebrate symbols,
but fail to protect people.

It was about what is lost when Black scholarship is diminished,
Black mentors are removed,
Black voices are exhausted,
and we discover too late
that every absence leaves the whole academy poorer.

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THE RT REVD ROSE HUDSON- WILKIN MBE

A life of faith and public service, bringing pastoral care, moral purpose and a deep commitment to the communities she serves.

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin MBE has built a remarkable ministry around faith, courage and service. As the first Black woman to become a bishop in the Church of England, she has made history. Her ministry has taken her from local parishes to Parliament and has included serving Queen Elizabeth II as one of Her Majesty's Chaplains. Yet the importance of her life cannot be measured through historic appointments alone. She has remained committed to offering pastoral care, speaking with moral clarity and ensuring that people feel seen and valued.

Rose was born and raised in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where faith and community formed an important part of her childhood. She was educated at Montego Bay High School for Girls and later at Birmingham University. At the age of 18, she came to Britain to join the Church Army, training to serve communities through practical Christian mission. She was commissioned as an evangelist in 1982.

Rose trained for ordained ministry at Queen's Theological College. She was ordained as a deacon in 1991 and became a priest in 1994, the year the Church of England first ordained women as priests.

After serving her title at St Matthew's Church in the Diocese of Lichfield, she spent sixteen and a half years ministering in Hackney. At Holy Trinity with St Philip, Dalston, and All Saints, Haggerston, she served communities shaped by enormous cultural diversity as well as social and economic pressures. Her ministry was grounded in being present: listening to families, supporting people through difficult moments and building relationships beyond the church walls.

In 2007, Rose was appointed one of the Chaplains to Queen Elizabeth II, serving the late Queen while continuing her parish ministry in Hackney.

Three years later, Rose became the 79th Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, the first woman and the first person from an ethnic minority to hold the position. Her responsibilities included leading daily prayers, conducting services



and providing confidential pastoral care to MPs and parliamentary staff. Alongside this national role, she remained connected to parish ministry in Hackney and later at St Mary-at-Hill in the City of London.

She served Parliament during periods of political division, public tragedy and national uncertainty. Following the deaths of MP Jo Cox and police officer Keith Palmer, her pastoral presence provided comfort within a grieving parliamentary community. MPs later praised her compassion and willingness to seek out those who were struggling.

In November 2019, Rose was consecrated as Bishop of Dover and Bishop in Canterbury, becoming the first Black woman bishop in the Church of England. She now has oversight of the Diocese of Canterbury, covering a wide area of Kent and its many different communities. Her stated priorities, prayer, Bible reading, generosity and evangelism, place spiritual renewal alongside service to others.

Her appointment carried enormous symbolic importance. For Black women and girls, and for others rarely represented in senior church leadership, her presence

challenged assumptions about who could become a bishop. She has consistently used that visibility to encourage others, while making clear that leadership must be rooted in integrity, love and responsibility.

Rose has also been an influential voice on racial justice, the inclusion of women and the experiences of the Windrush generation. Her mother and other relatives travelled to Britain as part of the wider Windrush story, experiencing considerable challenges while working to make the country their home. Rose has spoken of the resilience passed from one generation to another, captured in the powerful message: "They survived, so we must thrive."

LEADERSHIP IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT OCCUPYING A POSITION. IT IS ABOUT HOW THAT POSITION IS USED IN SERVICE OF OTHERS.

Her wider service has included membership of the Church of England's General Synod, representing the Church at the World Council of Churches and serving

on the Anglican Consultative Council. She was also a member of the Windrush Commemoration Committee. In recognition of her public service and work advancing equality, she was appointed MBE in the 2020 New Year Honours. In April 2026, she became a Church Commissioner.

Her approach to ministry is perhaps best expressed in her own words: "I am committed to giving, and will continue to give, my best in serving all those entrusted to my care." That commitment extends from young people and families within local communities to those serving in some of Britain's most prominent public institutions.

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin's life demonstrates that leadership is not simply about occupying a position. It is about how that position is used in service of others. In honouring our communities, we recognise a woman whose faith has carried her across continents and through some of Britain's most important institutions, without losing sight of the individual person before her. Her legacy is one of barriers broken, communities strengthened and faith expressed through courageous public service.

SCRATCHYLUS REGGAE AS THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

The international reggae artist uses music to restore cultural pride and strengthen younger generations.

Scratchylus believes reggae can educate as powerfully as it entertains. For the international artist and Black history advocate, music provides a way to challenge distorted histories and help younger generations understand that Africa's story did not begin with slavery or colonialism.

Throughout his career, he has used reggae for education, cultural storytelling and social awareness. His music explores African and Caribbean heritage, the Windrush Generation, identity and the importance of knowing where we come from.

This purpose is central to *Our Story*, his collaboration with his daughter Empress Reggae and Jamaican artist Sizzla Kalonji. The song grew from his concern that African history is too often absent from classrooms, books and the media, or presented mainly through slavery and oppression. He wants children to encounter a fuller account that includes African civilisations, knowledge, creativity, leadership and achievement.

Its message is captured in the refrain:

"They only mention His Story, teach the children Our Glory."

Scratchylus describes reggae as "the people's university" because songs can travel where speeches and essays may not. A lyric can be remembered, repeated and carried into everyday life. He has also called music an "educational vaccination"—something that strengthens young minds against messages that make Black children feel small or disconnected from their heritage.

This approach shapes his live appearances and Black History Month university tours, combining performance, discussion and debate. In 2026, he released *Windrush Generations*, honouring those whose journeys and achievements helped shape modern Britain.

In honouring Scratchylus, we recognise an artist who uses reggae not only to entertain, but to educate, question and inspire. Through rhythm, reasoning and cultural storytelling, he is helping younger generations reclaim their history, strengthen their identity and move forward with pride.



MAURICE COORE CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF CHAMPS CAMP

Former UK light-heavyweight champion **Maurice Coore** has spent three decades carrying forward Phil Martin's vision, using boxing and mentoring to give young people in Moss Side discipline, resilience and opportunity.

Maurice Coore, who fought under the nickname 'Hardcore', is a former UK light-heavyweight champion. He has spent the last thirty years running the Phil Martin Centre in Moss Side, Manchester, having taken on the legacy and mission of his former trainer and mentor, Phil Martin. Philip Martin Adelagan, known as Phil Martin, was the UK's first Black British boxing promoter, trainer and gym owner.

Martin's gym, Champs Camp, was opened in 1981 in the wake of serious unrest in Moss Side, which was echoed in other British cities, including Toxteth, Liverpool; Brixton, London; and Chapeltown, Leeds. Phil Martin wanted to do something for young people in Moss Side and, in response to the troubles he saw around him, he built a boxing gym where he offered young men hope, discipline and resilience and challenged the long-standing association of Moss Side with guns and gangs. Coore continues this legacy today with a range of activities for young boxers, male and female, aged 11 and over, and professional fighters.

Martin went on to guide numerous boxers to British, European and Commonwealth title contests. With four British champions on his books by the early 1990s, including Coore, Champs Camp was one of the most successful boxing clubs in Britain.

Throughout his career, Martin also nurtured amateur boxers



and devoted much of his time to training and mentoring young people in both boxing and life skills. This is an important part of his legacy and a model that former Martin students continue to follow at clubs across Manchester, Oldham, Salford, London and Liverpool.

Despite its success, Champs Camp was largely ignored by the sporting media and shunned by national sports organisations during the 1980s and 1990s, including England Boxing and the British Boxing Board of Control, which treated Black leadership in boxing with scepticism and derision.

The present-day lack of public knowledge about the history of Champs Camp sadly echoes the ways in which Martin and his gym were ignored by the sporting establishment of his day. This is a particular tragedy given today's public appetite for history that more accurately represents the injustices of the past, the long-running story of diversity in British society and the triumph of individuals and groups over adversity.

To address this issue, and as part of a campaign to put up a statue for Martin in a city with no public memorials to non-white Mancunians, Maurice Coore is leading a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported project with a historian from the University of Manchester to preserve the legacy of Champs Camp and Martin.

The project is preserving a unique and extensive archive of film and photography, recording a wide-ranging set of in-depth interviews with people who worked and trained at the gym, and producing a permanent digital archive accessible to everyone. The project will also create new teaching materials for schools to use during Black History Month.

The project brings together the Moss Side Boxing and Athletics Association — the charity that Phil Martin established and which runs Champs Camp, now led by Maurice Coore — along with Manchester Histories, a multi-award-winning charity that works collaboratively to reveal, share and celebrate Greater Manchester's diverse histories and heritage; Northern Light Film; and Rekindle, a Hulme-based charity that embraces young people who feel discouraged by the current educational system and encourages them to fall in love with learning.

Maurice Coore is a well-known fixture of the Moss Side community. His tireless dedication to promoting boxing and preserving the legacy and vision of Phil Martin and Champs Camp, the UK's first Black-led boxing gym, is something that deserves recognition.

Honouring Maurice Coore

Honouring Maurice Coore through Honouring Black Britain 2026 recognises far more than a successful boxer. It celebrates a man who has spent three decades ensuring that the discipline, belief and opportunity Phil Martin offered him continue to reach new generations.

By protecting the history of Champs Camp while keeping its work alive for young people, Maurice has preserved a vital Black Mancunian legacy and made it a living force within Moss Side today. His story shows how individual achievement becomes a community legacy when knowledge is shared and opportunity is passed on.



HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026



ADE ANIFOWOSE

Through rhythm, positivity and encouragement, he uses music to build confidence, support wellbeing and bring people together across Leicester.



CLAUDINE REID MBE

For more than three decades, she has opened doors for African-Caribbean women, entrepreneurs and communities, helping people turn ideas into opportunity.



DEAN FOSTER

Through Peckham Soup Kitchen, he offers far more than food, providing dignity, opportunity and trusted support to families and young people.



PROF. DAWN EDGE

Her work challenges mental healthcare inequalities, ensuring African and Caribbean families receive support that understands their culture, experiences and needs.



MAURICE COORE

Through boxing and mentoring, he continues the pioneering legacy of Champs Camp, giving young people in Moss Side discipline, confidence and opportunity.



RALPH OTTEY 1924-2026

His wartime service with the RAF's 617 Squadron represents a generation of Caribbean men and women whose courage became part of Britain's story.



MONICA D. BROWN

Through broadcasting, education and community archives, she helps Black communities tell their own stories and ensure those memories are never lost.



JAMES BARNOR

Through a lifetime behind the camera, he has documented Black life across Ghana and Britain, preserving history while inspiring new generations of photographers.



JENNY GORDON

She leads Southampton's Priory Road Community Group, creating a culturally rooted space where Black elders find friendship, support, celebration and protection from loneliness.



FROM PRIVATE TO CHAPLAIN: A LIFE OF SERVICE

Chaplain (Captain) Abimbola Felix Oluwasona MBE reflects on his Army career, his calling to ministry and the privilege of supporting others.

Abimbola Felix Oluwasona joined the Army in 2006 and rose to Warrant Officer Class One (WO1) before commissioning as a chaplain. Now serving with the 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, he shares the experiences that have shaped his journey.

What inspired you to join the Army?

I was inspired by a friend who was serving in the Army at the time. It was like, "Bims, go and check it out. You may like it." And I did.

I joined the Army in 2006 and became a WO1 in 2024. I served with 9 Regiment RLC, progressing from Private to Corporal, before serving as a Sergeant with 27 Regiment RLC. I went on to serve at Army Headquarters as a Staff Sergeant, Headquarters Field Army as a WO2, and 101 Operational Sustainment Brigade as a WO1.

What did becoming a WO1 mean to you?

The day I became a WO1 was one of the proudest moments of my career. It wasn't just a promotion; it was recognition of years of service, hard work, and commitment to both my profession and the people I had the privilege to lead.



What meant the most to me was knowing that I had earned the trust and respect of my commanders, peers and subordinates.

Becoming a WO1 also brought a greater sense of responsibility. I understood that I was now expected to set the standard, mentor younger soldiers and use my experience to influence the unit in a positive way.

While I felt proud of what I had achieved, I was equally aware that the appointment was about service and stewardship rather than personal success.

When did you first feel called to ministry?

I first answered God's call to ministry 26 years ago when I was ordained. However, my sense of calling began much earlier, as I felt God drawing me into ministry from a very young age.

My calling to chaplaincy can be traced back to my time as a Corporal in the Army.

Even then, I sensed God's direction towards this ministry, but the opportunity was not available at that stage.

Many years later, when God opened the way for the Redeemed Christian Church of God to become an Endorsing Authority, that long-held calling to chaplaincy was reignited and brought into clearer focus.

I believe God works according to His timing, and I am grateful that the opportunity to fulfil this aspect of my calling has now become a reality. Although the journey into chaplaincy has only just begun, it is the continuation of a calling that has been developing throughout my life, and I remain thankful to God for His guidance and faithfulness.

How difficult was the decision to leave your WO1 rank and become a chaplain?

Giving up my rank as a WO1, a rank I had worked towards throughout my military career, was not a decision I took lightly. It was one of the most significant and challenging decisions I have ever had to make.

The decision brought a period of genuine reflection and internal conflict, as I needed to be certain that I was responding to God's call and not simply walking away from something I had spent years striving to attain. However, as I prayerfully considered the opportunity, I became increasingly convinced that chaplaincy was where God was leading me.

What ultimately shaped my decision was the understanding that ministry, and particularly military chaplaincy, is fundamentally about service. The opportunity to provide pastoral, spiritual and personal support to service personnel is both humbling and deeply rewarding.

Looking back, although relinquishing my WO1 rank was difficult, I have no regrets. I





I see it not as a sacrifice of status, but as a transition from one form of service to another.

What did receiving your MBE mean to you?

A defining moment in my career was being appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire in the 2023 New Year Honours List. To receive such recognition from His Majesty The King was both a great privilege and a profoundly humbling experience.

I regard it not only as a personal achievement but also as a reflection of the dedication, teamwork and support of the many people with whom I have had the privilege to serve throughout my military and ministerial journey.

I was also honoured to receive a Commendation from the Commander Task Force for my service in Sierra Leone. This recognition was particularly meaningful as it reflected the contribution made during a demanding operational deployment.

I AM LIVING PROOF THAT YOUR BACKGROUND DOES NOT DEFINE YOUR POTENTIAL. YOUR ATTITUDE, COMMITMENT AND DETERMINATION DO.

As a chaplain, how do you know you are making a difference?

What I have come to appreciate is that making a real difference is not always found in dramatic events, but often in being consistently present for people when they need support most.

One of the privileges of chaplaincy is that people often feel able to share concerns they may not discuss with anyone else. Knowing that someone has felt heard, valued and supported, and seeing them regain confidence, hope or resilience, is when I know I have made a positive difference.

For me, the greatest measure of success as a Padre is not recognition or visibility,

but knowing that I have been available to serve others, helping them face life's challenges with greater strength, perspective and hope.

What has your experience been as an ethnic minority soldier?

When I joined the Army, being identified as a Foreign and Commonwealth soldier sometimes created challenges, particularly around cultural understanding and perceptions, even after I became a British citizen. At times, this led to friction and misunderstandings.

However, I have seen the Army evolve significantly. My overall experience has been overwhelmingly positive. The Army has given me remarkable opportunities to serve around the world, gain professional qualifications, earn a master's degree and progress to the rank of WO1.

In my final trade career, more than half of the WO1s were from ethnic minority backgrounds. For me, that demonstrates that the Army recognises talent, commitment and performance above all else. Had ethnicity been a barrier, I would not have reached the level I did.

The Army has been a place of challenge, growth, opportunity and achievement.

Did you ever consider leaving?

Actually, yes, but only at an early stage when I thought I would have to leave to further my education. I stayed because the Army gave me the opportunity to study.

As a Corporal, I was granted a one-month career break to complete my master's dissertation, with full support from my Commanding Officer.

How do you support your wider community?

Service to the nation is central to who I am. I have served as a school governor at three schools in the UK, including as Chair of Governors at one.

I have also organised youth development, mentoring and empowerment programmes across the country, and I currently serve as a trustee of a charity.



What would you say to a young person who isn't sure the Army is for people like them?

I would say: don't let anyone tell you the Army is not for people like you. The Army is for people who are willing to work hard, demonstrate character and take opportunities when they come.

As someone from an ethnic minority background, I understand those doubts. My advice would be to judge the Army by what it can help you become, not by assumptions or stereotypes.

I am living proof that your background does not define your potential. Your attitude, commitment and determination do. The Army changed my life for the better, and it could do the same for you.

If you are interested in becoming an Army Chaplain please email:
ArmyCG-Chaplain-Recruiter@mod.gov.uk
for more information.



HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026



THE LORD OUSELEY 1945–2024

Across public life and football, he challenged prejudice with persistence and purpose, leaving a lasting legacy of equality, fairness and social justice.



PAUL CHAMBERS

Through heritage and remembrance, he works to ensure the service and sacrifice of Caribbean military personnel are preserved, honoured and passed to future generations.



LUDWIG RAMSEY

From the fire service to community leadership, he has spent decades serving others, strengthening communities and keeping Black history alive for generations.



ADE WILLIAMS MBE

Through community pharmacy and public health, he has brought healthcare closer to people, combining professional expertise with a deep commitment to service.



PAULINE CAMPBELL

Through law and advocacy, she has stood alongside Windrush victims, helping them pursue justice, fair compensation and recognition for the wrongs they endured.



CLLR LILIAN SEENOI-BARR

From campaigning for women in Kenya to community leadership in Derry, she has devoted her work to advocacy, service and giving voice to those too often overlooked.



SUE LIBURD MBE DL

Across the Armed Forces, healthcare, business and civic life, she has made leadership a form of service, supporting people and strengthening communities.



PROF. ANNE-MARIE IMAFIDON MBE

Across mathematics, computer science and education, she has inspired a new generation to pursue STEM while helping shape the future of science and technology.



LORD WOOLLEY OF WOODFORD

For decades, he has widened political participation, opened doors to leadership and helped ensure Black communities have a stronger voice in public life.



DR MAHAMED HASHI

CREATING HOPE THROUGH COMMUNITY ACTION

Drawing on lived experience, Dr Mahamed Hashi has become a powerful advocate for young people and vulnerable communities, turning personal adversity into practical action across Lambeth.



Dr Mahamed Hashi understands the consequences of violence, poverty and inequality not only as a community leader, but through his own life.

Having survived both a stabbing and a shooting, Mahamed has spoken openly about the physical and psychological effects of violence. Rather than allowing those experiences to define his future, he used them to deepen his understanding of trauma and strengthen his determination to support young people.

Within months of being seriously injured, he returned to community work because, as he explained, “young people in our area need to see hope that you can bounce back positively from these kinds of things.”

That belief has shaped a lifetime of service.

In January 2013, Mahamed and fellow youth worker Solomon Smith founded Brixton Soup Kitchen after recognising the need for a welcoming place for people experiencing homelessness or severe hardship.

The Soup Kitchen offers more than food. It provides warmth, companionship, clothing, outreach and practical support without requiring a referral. Over the years, it has served hundreds of thousands of meals, both at its Coldharbour Lane centre and through deliveries and outreach across London.

Mahamed’s approach is grounded in dignity. He understands that people facing homelessness, poverty or exclusion do not want to be patronised or pitied. They

want to be listened to, treated with respect and given the support needed to regain confidence.

In the same year, Mahamed founded New Beginnings Youth Provision, an organisation helping young people move away from gang involvement and towards education, training and employment. Its work focuses on developing life skills, widening choices and giving young people the tools to build a different future.

“Young people in our area need to see hope that you can bounce back positively from these kinds of things.”

DR MAHAMED HASHI

His leadership has also extended into public life. Mahamed has served on numerous community and professional forums concerned with policing, stop and search, mental health, probation and public safety. He was a founding member of Lambeth’s Black Mental Health Commission, which later developed into Black Thrive, and has contributed to the Mayor of London’s Child Obesity Taskforce.

In 2018, Mahamed was elected as a councillor for Stockwell, becoming Lambeth’s first councillor of Somali heritage. He later served as Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, leading work addressing

serious youth violence and violence against women and girls.

His role has frequently required him to work where trust between communities and public institutions has been severely tested. Following high-profile deaths and critical incidents, he has helped create opportunities for residents to question public bodies, voice concerns and receive information directly from the police, the Independent Office for Police Conduct and community leaders.

Mahamed was nominated for *Honouring Black Britain 2026* by John-Paul Ennis, who describes him as an inspiration to frontline practitioners and someone who has dedicated his time to giving young people and vulnerable residents the strongest possible platform from which to thrive.

What makes Mahamed’s work distinctive is the connection between grassroots experience and public policy. He understands what happens on the street, but also how councils, police, health services and community organisations must work together to create lasting change.

The 2026 theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, asks us to recognise those who transform experience into service and adversity into hope. Dr Mahamed Hashi embodies that spirit.

Through food, youth provision, public leadership and advocacy, he has repeatedly shown vulnerable people that they have not been forgotten, and shown young people that even after violence and trauma, a positive future remains possible.

TREVOR BLACKMAN

Turning conversation into opportunity

Through schools, radio and mentoring, London social entrepreneur Trevor Blackman creates platforms where young people and under-represented communities can speak for themselves.

Trevor Blackman believes that conversation can change lives - but only when people are genuinely heard.

Across more than two decades of work in youth development, broadcasting and community leadership, he has created opportunities for people whose voices are frequently overlooked. His work brings together education, media, culture and social justice, with a particular focus on improving the life chances of young people.

Since 2020, Trevor has served as Chief Executive Officer of Edmonton Community Partnership in north London. The partnership connects 21 schools with more than 40 community organisations, bringing education and community support closer together.

Its programmes create opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as music, media, sport, wellbeing and the arts. The work supports children and young adults between the ages of six and 25, while also recognising the importance of families and the wider community.

At the centre of Trevor's approach is a simple question: what happens when talent exists but access does not?

Young people may have ability, ambition and ideas but lack the professional networks, equipment, training or confidence needed to develop them. Schools can play an important role, but they cannot address every challenge alone. Trevor has helped Edmonton Community Partnership build relationships that connect young people with organisations and adults able to support their development.



**“
People grow
when they are
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given the tools
to use it.
”**



The aim is not to decide a young person's future for them. It is to widen the range of futures they can imagine and give them practical opportunities to explore those possibilities.

Trevor has mentored thousands of young people and adults during his career. His nomination highlights his particular commitment to Black LGBTQ+ boys, who can experience racism and homophobia while also struggling to find spaces where all parts of their identity are understood.

Being seen and heard can be transformative for a young person. It tells them that their ambitions matter and that they do not have to hide who they are to be accepted. Trevor's mentoring seeks to provide that recognition while also offering honest guidance, challenge and encouragement.

His work with young people is closely connected to his career in broadcasting. Over almost 20 years, Trevor has worked with organisations including the BBC, ITV, Kiss FM and Choice FM. He is also the creator and presenter of Trevor Blackman Now on Maritime Radio.

The programme is built around thoughtful and sometimes challenging conversations. Its guests have included educators, artists, activists, grassroots organisers and community leaders from across Black Britain and the wider African diaspora.

Rather than speaking about communities from a distance, Trevor creates space for people to describe their experiences in their own words. The conversations explore culture, education, politics, identity and the decisions affecting people's everyday lives.

Broadcasting, for Trevor, is therefore more than entertainment. It can connect people who may never meet, bring local concerns to a wider audience and introduce listeners to ideas and experiences that receive little attention elsewhere.

He has taken this mission further through Ape Media, a platform dedicated to amplifying under-represented voices and developing community-focused storytelling. Through the organisation, Trevor has also been working

to establish #ALLINRadio, a speech-led digital radio station intended to serve young Black and ethnically diverse listeners while remaining open to everyone.

The proposed station combines news, culture, current affairs and personal storytelling with content created and led by young people. An important part of its purpose is training the next generation of broadcasters, giving young participants the opportunity to learn how to research, produce and present their own programmes.

This matters because representation is not only about who appears in front of a microphone. It is also about who selects the stories, asks the questions, controls the equipment and makes editorial decisions.

By teaching young people the complete process of broadcasting, Trevor is helping them move from being the subject of media coverage to becoming creators with the power to shape their own narratives.

His experience has also been recognised through the Clore Leadership Programme, and he was selected for the British Council's Cultural Leaders International scheme. He has contributed to national conversations about youth strategy, bringing the experience of community work into discussions about how services and opportunities for young people should be developed.

Yet Trevor's influence is perhaps most clearly understood at a local level. It can be found in a young person making their first radio programme, a family finding support through a community partnership or a student discovering an opportunity beyond the school gates.

It can also be found in the relationships between schools and community organisations. These connections help ensure that local knowledge is not ignored and that programmes are created with communities rather than simply delivered to them.

Trevor's work across education and broadcasting is united by one belief: people grow when they are trusted with a voice and given the tools to use it.

His nomination describes a leader who has no intention of slowing down. Trevor says that he will “rest when I am dead”—a phrase that captures both his energy and his sense of urgency.

For him, there are still too many young people whose ability is not being recognised and too many important stories that remain unheard. Through Edmonton Community Partnership, his broadcasting and his mentoring, Trevor Blackman is working to close that distance between potential and opportunity – one conversation at a time.

Leading by example: SSGT JULIE ROBINSON

Staff Sergeant Julie Robinson reflects on leadership, learning and supporting others during 19 years in the British Army.

Now Unit Catering Manager at 27 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, Julie's career has included training military chefs, leading catering teams overseas and mentoring the next generation of soldiers.

What inspired you to join the British Army and become a chef in the Royal Logistic Corps?

I wanted a career that offered challenge, structure, and opportunities for personal and professional development. The Army's values of courage, discipline, respect, integrity, loyalty, and selfless commitment appealed to me. I wanted to be part of an organisation that makes a meaningful contribution at home and overseas.

I chose to become a chef because food service plays a vital role in maintaining the morale, wellbeing, and operational effectiveness of personnel. Being an RLC chef allows me to combine my passion for cooking with military service, developing culinary skills and leadership qualities while working as part of a close-knit team.

Can you tell us about your military career so far?

I have served 19 years in the British Army, undertaking a variety of rewarding appointments. I served with 27 Regiment RLC as a Chef Class 2, before progressing to the Coldstream Guards as a Chef Class 1 and Production Supervisor. I subsequently served with the Welsh Guards and Scots Guards as a Production Supervisor, overseeing catering operations and maintaining high standards of food service.

I was also an Instructor at the Catering Training Wing, Worthy Down, delivering the Defence Basic Chef and Chef Class 1 courses and developing the next generation of military chefs. I am currently the Unit Catering Manager for 27 Regiment RLC.

Throughout these appointments, I have had the opportunity to develop both my catering expertise and my ability to lead others. As a Production Supervisor, maintaining high standards of food service delivery was central to my responsibilities. Teaching at Worthy Down gave me the opportunity to help others develop their skills, while my current appointment brings together

catering management and support for the team's career development.

What does your current role involve?

As Unit Catering Manager, I am responsible for a team of 10 chefs and manage all catering operations, ensuring compliance with policy and delivering an effective catering service. I also support personnel with their development and career goals. It is a highly rewarding career.

How does working as an Army chef differ from civilian catering?

The role extends far beyond preparing and serving meals. As an Army chef, you are first and foremost a soldier, prepared to deploy, operate in challenging environments, and support military operations worldwide.

Unlike many civilian chefs working in fixed kitchens, Army chefs must deliver high-quality catering in locations ranging from modern dining facilities to field kitchens during exercises and deployments. This often involves catering for large numbers with limited resources and under demanding conditions.

Providing nutritious, balanced meals directly supports soldiers' physical and mental wellbeing, enabling them to perform at their best. Alongside culinary expertise, Army chefs develop leadership, management, instructional, and logistical skills.

I have found that the Army offers unique opportunities for personal development and career progression, combining catering with leadership, teamwork, and supporting operations in the UK and overseas.

For me, the role is rewarding because it combines my passion for cooking with the opportunity to support others. Food service is an important contribution to morale, wellbeing, and the effectiveness of personnel.

Which exercise or overseas assignment has had the greatest impact on you?

Exercise WARFIGHTER had the greatest impact on my professional career and personal development. As the first female Staff Sergeant to lead the exercise, it was rewarding to command and manage a team of 40 chefs in a demanding operational environment.

“It taught me that setbacks are not failures; true failure only occurs when you stop trying.”



Over three months, I coordinated resources, motivated personnel, and ensured the successful delivery of catering support. I learned to view every challenge as an opportunity to adapt, innovate, and overcome obstacles.

The experience reinforced the importance of resilience, teamwork, and effective communication. It taught me that setbacks are not failures; true failure only occurs when you stop trying. Those lessons continue to influence my approach to leadership and my development as a senior non-commissioned officer.

Leading 40 chefs required me to consider both the successful delivery of the service and the people making it possible. The opportunity significantly enhanced my leadership and management skills. It was a rewarding and memorable experience, and the lessons I gained continue to shape how I respond to challenges.



Can you describe providing catering under particularly challenging conditions?

During Exercise WARFIGHTER, temperatures at each location were extremely high. Delivering three meals a day placed considerable physical and mental demands on the catering team.

As the lead, I supported and managed the chefs, ensuring their welfare remained a priority while maintaining the required catering output. This included monitoring working hours, encouraging regular hydration, and promoting effective rest periods to minimise heat-related illnesses and fatigue.

Despite these conditions, the team demonstrated exceptional professionalism, resilience, and teamwork. By prioritising wellbeing and maintaining clear communication, we sustained high standards and successfully met the needs of all personnel. This reinforced the importance of balancing operational requirements with the welfare and safety of personnel.

What professional qualifications have you completed during your career?

My qualifications include Level 3 and Level 4 Nutrition, Level 2 and Level 3 Food Safety in Catering, and Level 4 Managing Food Safety. I have also achieved a Level 5 qualification in Coaching and Mentoring and hold a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons) in Business Management.

How do you support, mentor and develop soldiers?

I support soldiers within 27 Regiment RLC by designing, implementing, and leading a Regimental mentoring programme. Personnel can enrol and receive tailored guidance to help them achieve their professional and personal development goals.

I am also the Coordinator and Mentor for the Army Multicultural Network. I support personnel from diverse backgrounds, promote inclusion, and provide mentoring opportunities that encourage career progression.

These responsibilities enable me to contribute to the development of future leaders while fostering a positive and inclusive environment that supports the success of all personnel.

Have you been involved in charitable or community work?

Over the past two years, I have worked alongside the chefs from 27 Regiment Catering Department, organising catering support for the Step by Step Charity Annual BBQ in Aldershot.

The event raises vital funds to support homeless and vulnerable young people in the local community. Through this initiative, I have contributed my professional catering expertise to support a worthwhile cause and strengthen the unit's engagement with the local community.

What achievement makes you most proud?

Receiving the 101 OSB Brigade Commander's Commendation and Chief of Defence Staff coin for outstanding performance catering for VVIP guests for Armed Forces Day.

What challenges have you faced, and what helped you overcome them?

One of my greatest challenges was completing my BSc (Hons) in Business Management while balancing operational commitments. During my first year, I deployed to Germany for three months, followed by a further three-month deployment to the USA in my second year.

The demands of deployment, combined with the time difference, made it particularly difficult to manage my professional responsibilities and academic studies.

The unwavering support of my husband and daughter motivated me to remain focused and determined to succeed. During deployment, I used every available spare



moment to catch up on missed lectures, review course materials, and complete coursework to stay on track.

Through effective time management, self-discipline, and resilience, I successfully balanced work and academic responsibilities. Overcoming these challenges strengthened my determination and enabled me to complete my degree while continuing to meet the demands of military service.

What would you say to a young person, particularly someone who may not see themselves represented in the Armed Forces, considering an Army career?

The Army provides opportunities for people from all backgrounds to develop professionally and personally. It offers world-class training, education, travel, leadership development, and the chance to be part of a team where everyone works towards a common goal.

My advice would be to believe in your abilities, seek out mentors, ask questions, and take every opportunity available to you. The Army can provide a rewarding and fulfilling career, and your unique experiences, perspective, and talents are valuable assets that can make a real difference.

There may be times when you feel challenged or out of your comfort zone, but those experiences often help you grow the most. Don't focus on whether people like you are already represented. Instead,



focus on what you can bring to the organisation and the example you can set for others who may follow in your footsteps.

AYAN MAHAMOUD MBE

Giving Somali culture a home in British life

Through Kayd Somali Arts and Culture, Ayan Mahamoud MBE has preserved a rich cultural heritage while creating opportunities for new generations of British-Somali artists.



“Kayd” means preservation in Somali. It is a fitting name for the organisation Ayan Mahamoud MBE established in Tower Hamlets in 2009.

Ayan understood that preservation was not simply about protecting objects or recording the past. It also meant keeping language, poetry, music and stories alive by giving people opportunities to experience and create them.

As a Somali refugee, Ayan knew how displacement could separate people from the places, traditions and memories that had shaped them. London was home to a large and long-established Somali community, yet Somali artists and stories remained largely absent from the city’s major cultural institutions.



Kayd Somali Arts and Culture was her response. It created a space in which Somali culture could be presented with confidence, care and ambition—not as a small community activity, but as an important part of London’s cultural life.

At the centre of Kayd’s work is the Somali Week Festival. What began as a local event in Bethnal Green developed into the largest Somali cultural festival outside the Horn of Africa, bringing poetry, literature, music, theatre, discussion and visual art to venues across London.

“Ayan has demonstrated that Somali culture does not sit outside British cultural life. It is already part of it - and through Kayd, the people who carry that culture have a place to be heard.”

Its events have taken place at organisations including the British Library, Rich Mix and the Southbank Centre. Elders and internationally recognised performers have appeared alongside young artists taking their first steps into the creative industries.

Bringing different generations together is central to Ayan’s work. Somali culture has a particularly strong oral tradition, and the memories carried by older musicians, poets and storytellers can easily be lost if they are not recorded and shared.

Kayd has digitally archived more than a decade of festival performances, including appearances by celebrated artists who are no longer alive. Family events enable children to engage with Somali stories and language, while writers’ rooms and artist development programmes give emerging voices the time and support to develop their work.

One of the clearest examples of this support is *Dugsi Dayz*, written by Sabrina Ali and produced by Side eYe Productions, a collective founded by young British-Somali women.

The play, a joyful reimagining of *The Breakfast Club* set during detention at a dugs, or Islamic school, began its journey at Rich Mix as part of Somali Week. Kayd backed the production and helped it reach wider audiences, giving the creative team space to develop the work.

Dugsi Dayz went on to win the Popcorn Writing Award in association with BBC Writersroom and the Untapped Award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. It later reached the Royal Court Theatre and toured nationally, bringing a British-Somali story to audiences across the country.

Its success shows what can happen when new writers are given more than encouragement. Kayd provided a stage, practical support and an organisation prepared to believe in the work before the wider theatre industry had recognised it. This early backing can be crucial for artists whose stories have had fewer opportunities to reach mainstream stages.

Ayan has also supported filmmakers, musicians, playwrights, directors and actors who struggled to find routes into professional arts organisations. Through this work, British-Somali artists have been able to tell their own stories rather than having their community interpreted by others. Kayd has also created connections between generations, allowing established cultural



figures and emerging artists to learn from one another.

In 2015, Ayan was appointed an MBE for promoting cultural understanding between the UK and the Somali region. She later served as Somaliland's representative to the UK, bringing her cultural leadership into diplomacy.

Her lasting achievement, however, can be seen in the community and cultural institution she has built. For older generations, Kayd protects music, poetry and memories

that might otherwise disappear. For younger British Somalis, it provides somewhere to develop their talent, explore their heritage and create work that speaks to their lives. In this way, preservation is also about ensuring that culture continues to grow and find new audiences.

Ayan has demonstrated that Somali culture does not sit outside British cultural life. It is already part of it, and through Kayd, the people who carry that culture have a place to be heard.

Constantia “Pennie” Pennie

Faith, justice and lasting change

A pioneer in social work, fostering and advocacy, Pennie has spent her life opening doors for Black children, families and professionals.

What a life. What a legacy. What an extraordinary woman. Born in St Kitts, Constantia “Pennie” Pennie came to London with determination, faith and a heart to serve. In the 1960s, she became the first Black Head Girl at her school, breaking a barrier when opportunities for Black women were limited.

After studying psychology, Pennie became a social worker and a respected voice for Black families and professionals. She co-founded the Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals, providing support, mentoring and empowerment. Through her leadership, she inspired and guided hundreds of students and professionals across the UK.

As Head of Lambeth Family Finders, Pennie worked tirelessly to find loving Black adoptive and foster families for Black children. Her work changed hundreds of young lives, helping children grow with identity, culture and belonging. She later became Assistant

Director of Children's and Family Services for the London Borough of Lambeth.

Pennie also qualified as a lawyer and earned seven degrees. She went on to found Subari, a fostering agency built on love, excellence and advocacy for vulnerable children and families.

Despite every title and qualification, she has remained humble, approachable and always willing to help. Her unwavering Christian faith guides her service to her church, families and people experiencing difficulty. She mentors, encourages and gives without seeking recognition.

Nominator Jendayi Berry describes Pennie as “a trailblazer, a leader, an advocate and a mentor”, but above all as a servant.

Pennie embodies *Honouring Our Communities*. Her legacy lives through the children whose futures she shaped, the professionals she mentored, the families she championed and the opportunities she created for generations to come.



STORMZY USING SUCCESS TO OPEN DOORS

Through scholarships, publishing, football and long-term community investment, Stormzy is helping young Black people turn their talent and ambition into opportunity.

Of everyone put forward for Honouring Black Britain 2026, Stormzy received the highest number of nominations. That response reflects the depth of public respect not only for his music, but also for the opportunities he continues to create for young people and Black communities.

Michael Omari Owuo Jr, known to millions as Stormzy, has become one of the most influential figures in modern British culture. Raised in Thornton Heath, south London, he built his career through talent, determination and a strong sense of where he came from. His wider legacy is now being shaped by what he has chosen to do with that success: create opportunities for other people.

Stormzy's debut album, *Gang Signs & Prayer*, made history in 2017 as the first grime album to reach number one on the UK Albums Chart. In 2019, he became the first Black British solo artist to headline Glastonbury Festival. These achievements placed Black British music and culture at the centre of the national conversation. Yet Stormzy has consistently understood that representation becomes even more powerful when it is accompanied by practical action.

Education has been central to that commitment. In 2018, he launched the Stormzy Scholarship at the University of Cambridge to support Black students from the UK. The non-repayable scholarships cover tuition fees and provide maintenance grants, reducing the financial pressures that can prevent talented young people from applying to or fully participating in university life.

The programme began by supporting two students each year and later expanded through a partnership between the Merky Foundation, the University of Cambridge and HSBC UK. By August 2025, Cambridge reported that 56 Black students had received full tuition and living-cost support through the programme. At least ten further scholarships were made available for students beginning their studies in autumn 2026.

“Talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not.”

The importance of the scholarship reaches beyond its financial value. It sends a powerful message to young Black people who may have believed that institutions such as Cambridge were not intended for them. Stormzy has helped make higher education feel more visible and attainable, while challenging assumptions about who belongs within Britain's leading universities. Cambridge has also reported a substantial rise in applications and admissions from Black UK students since the scholarship was established.

Stormzy has applied the same approach to publishing. In 2018, he launched Merky Books in partnership with Penguin Random House UK. The imprint was created to publish bold, distinctive writing and provide opportunities for voices that have often been overlooked by the

traditional publishing industry. Through its books, events and New Writers' Prize, Merky Books encourages aspiring authors to believe that their experiences, ideas and stories deserve to be read.

By placing Black British stories and writers within mainstream publishing, Stormzy is helping young readers see their lives reflected in books. At the same time, he is showing future writers that a professional career in publishing is possible.

Merky FC, launched in 2022, extends this work into football. The initiative was established to improve representation in off-pitch roles across the sport. It helps young Black people access paid



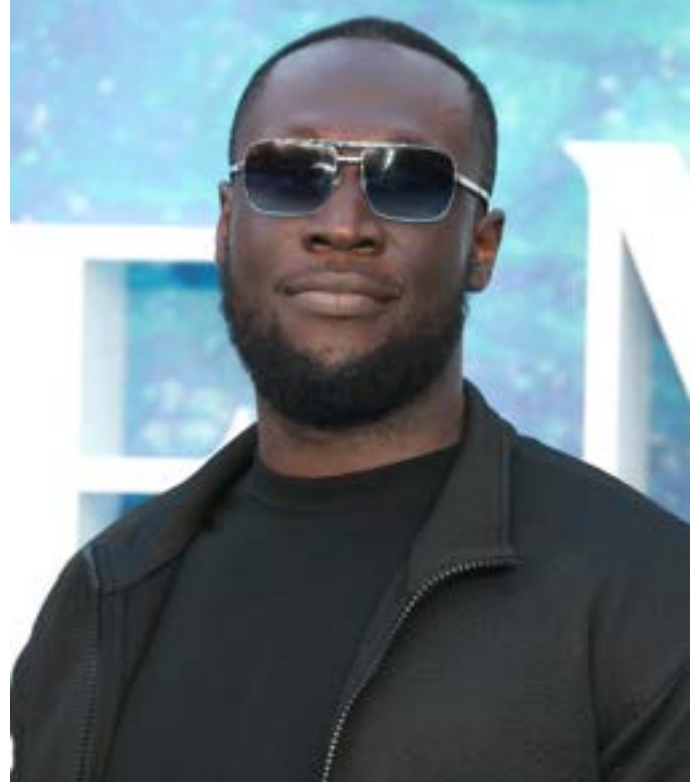
placements and professional opportunities in areas including operations, marketing, media, data, technology and creative production. These careers may be less visible than playing football, but they are essential to the industry.

The opening of Merky FC headquarters in Croydon created a physical home for that ambition. Combining a football pitch with facilities for music, gaming and learning, the centre gives young people somewhere to develop skills, make connections and explore different career paths. By May 2026, Merky FC was reported to have secured more than 80 placements, turning encouragement into measurable opportunity.

“Stormzy deserves recognition not only for reaching the top, but for helping others rise with him.”

Stormzy’s community support also operates on a broader level. In 2020, the Merky Foundation pledged £10 million over ten years to organisations, charities and movements working for racial equality, justice reform and Black empowerment in the UK. It also donated £500,000 to a scholarship programme supporting young people from underrepresented and under-resourced communities. These commitments demonstrate that his philanthropy is not based on a single campaign or moment of publicity, but on sustained investment.

Across education, literature, football and community action, Stormzy follows a consistent principle: talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not. His projects are designed to remove financial barriers, widen professional networks and give people



the confidence to enter spaces from which they have historically been excluded.

Stormzy’s legacy is still being written. He remains an artist of enormous reach, but his most enduring contribution may be the opportunities created for those coming behind him. By using his influence to fund education, develop careers and strengthen Black organisations, he has shown that success can be shared. In honouring our communities, Stormzy deserves recognition not only for reaching the top, but for helping others rise with him.

Jenny Gordon: The heart of Priory Road Community Group

Through voluntary leadership and loving care, **Jenny Gordon** has helped a long-running Southampton lunch club flourish as a place of friendship, dignity and genuine belonging.

In her late 60s, Jenny Gordon is the voluntary Chair of Priory Road Community Group in Southampton, a lunch club predominantly serving African and Caribbean people aged over 65. Before being elected Chair, Jenny volunteered as the group’s Treasurer.

Since taking on the role, the group has flourished. Jenny leads a dedicated committee and ensures members are kept engaged, informed and well fed through activities and a wholesome weekly lunch. With her sunny personality and loving nature, she makes the group a happier place, and members look forward to seeing her each week.

The group has been running for nearly 20 years, and founding members say it is better than ever thanks to Jenny’s leadership. She has introduced more activities, invited external speakers to discuss health and wellbeing, Black mental health and online safety, and developed partnerships that

provide members with opportunities.

Jenny also ensures Southampton’s elders are acknowledged and celebrated. She helped co-found and co-ordinate the city’s official Windrush Day celebrations, now in their third year.

Priory Road Community Group is essential to the city. It gives Black elders a culturally relevant place to meet, socialise and support one another, helping protect them from loneliness and isolation.

Alongside being a wife, mother of four, grandmother of nine and great-grandmother of one, Jenny continues to lead the group despite mobility difficulties. Members’ adult children often thank her for creating a space where their loved ones feel valued, respected and have fun.

Jenny’s contribution reflects *Honouring Our Communities*: recognising the people whose voluntary service, compassion and consistency hold communities together and make everyday life brighter for others.





Zarah Henry - a young entrepreneur with a bigger purpose

At just 17, Zarah Henry has built a successful cake business while creating opportunities for other young people

Zarah Henry founded Heaven's Delights, a Birmingham business creating personalised cakes for celebrations and corporate events. Each order reflects the person or occasion, combining creativity, professional standards and close attention to detail.

Her ambition reaches beyond baking. The Cupcake Brunch brings people together around food, entertainment and conversation, while its Future Workforce Programme gives young people practical experience at real events. She wants success to benefit others.

Participants learn how to communicate with customers, work as a team, manage responsibilities and conduct themselves in a professional setting. For some, it is their first opportunity to experience a workplace and discover what they can contribute. Zarah understands that confidence grows when young people are trusted with meaningful responsibilities, so she gives them space

to learn by doing.

She visits primary schools to speak about enterprise, self-belief and future possibilities. Her example makes the message real: age need not prevent someone from starting, leading or helping others.

In 2025, Zarah was named the Midlands regional winner of the Peter Jones Foundation's National Entrepreneur of the Year competition. The achievement secured her a business grant and a place in the national final. She was also chosen as Head Girl at Swanshurst School for 2026, representing fellow students within school life.

What makes Zarah remarkable is not simply that she has built a business at 17. It is that she is already using what she has created to open doors for other young people. Heaven's Delights may begin with cakes, but Zarah's larger purpose is helping young people recognise their abilities, gain experience and believe that their ideas deserve a chance.

Jacqueline Roberts - preserving heritage and inspiring generations

Through steelpan, research and community leadership, Jacqueline Roberts helps African and Caribbean communities preserve their heritage and pass it to future generations.

Jacqueline Roberts is co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of SV2G, St Vincent and the Grenadines 2nd Generation, an African and Caribbean arts and heritage organisation in High Wycombe. For over 20 years, she has used culture to educate, connect generations and challenge inequality.

Under Jacqueline's leadership, SV2G developed its School of Steelpan, offering lessons and workshops from the age of six. Learners can progress to the Wycombe Steel Orchestra or choose steelpan for GCSE and A-level music. The programme protects a Caribbean musical tradition while giving young people confidence, discipline and opportunity.

Jacqueline has led projects exploring Windrush, migration and Vincentian heritage. Her Coming Back Home oral-history exhibition was shown in Parliament. She wrote *The Beautiful Spotted Boy*, the first book examining an eighteenth-century

Black presence in Buckinghamshire through the story of George Alexander Gratton.

Working with the University of Warwick, Jacqueline helped communities research thousands of Black prisoners of war brought from the Windward Islands to Britain in 1796. She also coordinated community participation in the War and Resistance in the Caribbean trail at St Paul's Cathedral, bringing interpretation to monuments connected to Caribbean history.

Jacqueline has advocated for racial justice through advisory roles within the criminal-justice sector and the Home Office. SV2G received the King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2024, while the University of Warwick awarded Jacqueline an honorary Doctor of Letters in 2026.

Her nominator, Professor Kate Astbury, describes her as an inspirational leader who creates partnerships from the local to the global.

For Jacqueline, heritage is not simply

about preserving the past. It is about uncovering overlooked stories, sharing them with new generations and giving communities a deeper connection to their history, culture and identity.





Ade Williams MBE *The People's Pharmacist*

From a community pharmacy in South Bristol to national NHS leadership, Ade Williams MBE has worked to make healthcare more accessible, personal and responsive to the realities of people's lives.

People rarely enter a community pharmacy carrying only a prescription. They may also be worried about an elderly relative, struggling to heat their home, confused by medical advice or frightened by symptoms they have delayed discussing. Some do not know which part of the health service can help them. Others simply need someone who will listen.

At Bedminster Pharmacy in South Bristol, Ade Williams MBE has built his approach around those conversations. Clinical knowledge matters, but so does understanding the person standing on the other side of the counter. It is this combination that has earned him the affectionate description of the "People's Pharmacist".

Ade was born in Nigeria and moved to the United Kingdom as a teenager. Raised by a single mother with four children, he grew up believing that people should look beyond their own comfort and help others whenever they can. Living with an aunt in Brighton who worked as a nurse encouraged him to pursue healthcare. He studied pharmacy at the University of Portsmouth and joined Bedminster Pharmacy in 2013.

There, Ade helped develop the pharmacy into more than a place where medicines are dispensed. It became an accessible health and wellbeing centre where residents could ask questions, receive advice and be connected with wider support.

A community pharmacy usually requires no appointment, and patients often know the staff by name. Ade has used that trusted position to address inequalities through vaccination

outreach, mental-health awareness, period-poverty initiatives and campaigns supporting people living in cold homes. His work recognises that health cannot be separated from housing, income, isolation and the other pressures shaping everyday life.

That principle became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. As access to many services became difficult, Ade and his colleagues remained available, helping patients understand changing guidance and supporting vaccination efforts. In 2020, photographer Rankin selected him as one of 12 NHS workers whose portraits marked the health service's 72nd anniversary, representing community pharmacists who continued supporting patients throughout the crisis.

"Healthy communities need clinical services, but they also need shared occasions that reduce isolation, build relationships and create a sense of belonging."

His service to the NHS and the South Bristol community, particularly during the pandemic, was recognised with an MBE in the 2022 New Year Honours.

Ade has since taken the experience gained across the pharmacy counter into national and regional healthcare discussions. Through NHS boards, professional organisations and the General Pharmaceutical Council, he asks what policies will mean for people without digital access, those who lack confidence in clinical settings and communities whose previous experiences have created mistrust.

He brings the same values to training future pharmacists. Trainees are encouraged to develop not only clinical competence, but also confidence, cultural awareness and an understanding of advocacy. They learn that every patient brings their own history, fears and circumstances into a consultation.

He also shares health information through BBC Radio Bristol, newspaper columns and television appearances. His style is direct and accessible, helping audiences make sense of subjects that can otherwise feel technical or remote. For Ade, public communication is another way of ensuring that knowledge reaches beyond professional circles.

Ade's commitment to South Bristol also extends beyond healthcare. He chairs the organising committee of the Bedminster Winter Lantern Parade, known locally as Bemmy Lanterns. The event brings schools, families, artists, businesses and residents together, filling local streets with handmade lanterns during the darkest part of the year.

Organising a community parade may seem far removed from pharmacy, but it reflects the same belief in human connection. Healthy communities need clinical services, but they also need shared occasions that reduce isolation, build relationships and create a sense of belonging.

Across these roles, the pharmacy counter remains his point of reference. It is where national policy meets everyday life: where a vaccination campaign encounters uncertainty, digital access becomes a practical barrier and financial circumstances determine whether medical advice is realistic.

Ade Williams has shown that a local pharmacy can be a clinical service, a trusted source of information and a doorway into wider support. The name "People's Pharmacist" is fitting because his work begins with people – their questions, their difficulties and their right to be treated with dignity. Whether he is supporting a patient, organising a lantern parade or contributing to an NHS board, Ade keeps the same concern in view: healthcare must reach people as they are, wherever they are.

DEAN FOSTER AND JUNIOR MOHAMMED

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH SERVICE

Known locally as Fos and Jud, the co-founders of Peckham Soup Kitchen are tackling food insecurity, mentoring young people and strengthening relationships across Southwark.

Every Friday afternoon, Peckham Soup Kitchen provides food in Peckham Square. On Wednesdays, volunteers deliver meals to vulnerable residents. The work is practical: preparing, packing and delivering nutritious food. Yet Dean Foster and Junior Mohammed understand that a visit can matter as much as a meal. A conversation may reveal that somebody is lonely, struggling with living costs or unsure where to seek help. Returning each week allows trust to develop.

Their nominator, Denise Ramsey, grew up in Southwark and witnessed their dedication after the foundation she leads supported the kitchen. She describes Dean's contribution as "practical, compassionate, community-led and deeply rooted in service to others."

Dean, known throughout the community as Fos, grew up locally and has spent much of his life bringing people together. He began by organising football matches and teams before supporting an after-school club. He later established the clothing brand SN1 Wear, whose shop became an informal community meeting place where he encouraged people to remain focused and make positive choices.

His community involvement led to a position with Southwark's anti-violence service, helping young offenders find employment and suitable housing. The experience reinforced his belief that young people need more than warnings about crime. They require trusted adults, practical opportunities and reasons to believe their future can be different.

Junior, known as Jud, brought more than 15 years of community-support experience to the partnership. Beginning as a youth worker, he later became an employment officer assisting ex-offenders and people experiencing homelessness. Before the pandemic, he organised a music event that brought talented young people together and gave emerging artists a platform for creativity and achievement.

Of Junior, Ramsey writes that he has created change through "service, compassion and an unwavering commitment to the community of Southwark". His work reflects a belief in the transformative power of opportunity and the importance of giving young people positive ways to develop their abilities.

In 2022, Dean and Junior co-founded Peckham Soup Kitchen in response to

the cost-of-living crisis and growing food insecurity. Beginning at Dene Community Centre, the organisation developed weekly food provision alongside doorstep deliveries. Give Back Fridays remain open to the wider community, while Door2Door Wednesdays take meals and support directly to vulnerable residents.

Food is the starting point, but not the limit of their work. Dean and Junior recognise that food insecurity can be connected to low income, poor health, insecure housing, unemployment, loneliness and social exclusion. A hot meal cannot resolve every difficulty, but it can provide immediate relief, create human contact and open the door to further assistance.

Peckham Soup Kitchen also mentors young people and provides activities intended to strengthen physical and mental wellbeing. Its programmes have included sports and fitness, boxing, film and media, cooking, arts, cultural activities, volunteering and employability support. The aim is to build confidence and resilience while guiding young people towards education, employment and positive community involvement.

The co-founders' approach is rooted in relationships. They understand the area because it shaped them, and they know support is more effective when it comes from people who are consistent, approachable and familiar with local pressures. People using the kitchen are treated as neighbours rather than statistics, with dignity protected regardless of their circumstances.



Dean and Junior have brought together residents, volunteers, businesses, funders and community organisations around a shared commitment to helping others. Their work gives volunteers purpose, strengthens local connections and demonstrates what collective action can accomplish. As Ramsey observes, people are made to feel "welcomed rather than judged, supported rather than stigmatised, and connected rather than isolated".

That commitment has continued through difficult conditions. After Peckham Soup Kitchen had to leave its Rye Lane premises, its founders and volunteers continued serving people from a van outside Peckham Library while searching for a permanent home. Losing the building reduced the space available for conversations and wider support, but it did not end the food provision.

Dean's response captured their shared determination: "Building or no building, we're still going to do it."

Dean Foster and Junior Mohammed were nominated separately for Honouring Black Britain 2026, recognising the distinct experience and commitment each brings to their shared achievement. Their nominator believes their work represents a tradition of Black British leadership that is often under-recognised: leadership built on "trust, relationships, service and action".

Their contribution can be seen in the meals prepared, the young people mentored, the volunteers mobilised and the residents who know that somebody will return the following week. Through Peckham Soup Kitchen, Dean and Junior demonstrate a straightforward but powerful form of leadership: understand what people need, treat them with dignity and keep showing up.



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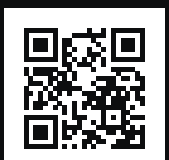
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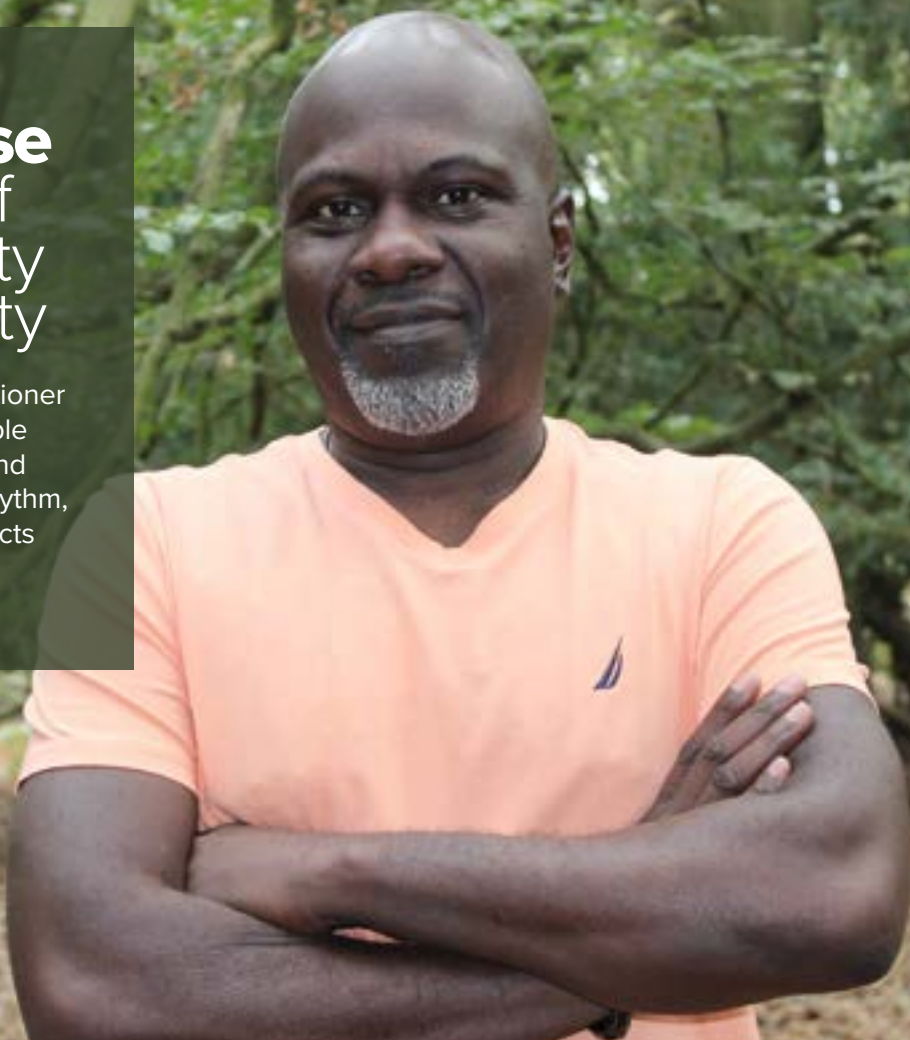


SCAN TO JOIN FREE

Ade Anifowose

The Power of Music, Positivity and Community

Leicester-based percussion practitioner **Ade Anifowose** is helping people connect, express themselves and improve their wellbeing through rhythm, encouragement and everyday acts of kindness.



Some people make a difference through grand gestures. Others do it quietly and consistently: encouraging a colleague, welcoming someone into a room or helping a person discover something they did not know they were capable of. Those who know Ade Anifowose say he belongs firmly in the second group.

Ade is recognised by his colleagues for his enthusiasm, kindness and genuine passion for helping others. From the moment people meet him, his upbeat personality and infectious positivity become clear. Whether he is facing a challenge or celebrating someone else's success, he brings energy, encouragement and optimism to the situation.

His nomination describes someone who goes above and beyond, not only as a colleague but also as a member of the wider Leicester community. He is always prepared to offer a kind word, share an idea or help someone who needs additional support. His positive attitude lifts the people around him and encourages others to believe in themselves.

Music is at the centre of Ade's community contribution. Through the creation of Percussion Discussion, he has used percussion and drumming to help people express themselves, connect with

others and strengthen their wellbeing.

For Ade, music is about much more than rhythm and sound. It is a universal language capable of bringing together people who may otherwise have little in common. Percussion can help people release emotion, reduce stress, build confidence and experience the simple joy of creating something together.

"He celebrates the achievements of others with the same enthusiasm he brings to his own work."

Ade has worked to make these experiences welcoming and accessible. People are encouraged to participate regardless of their age, background or previous musical experience. There is no expectation that someone must already know how to play an instrument. What matters is their willingness to take part.

This approach creates an environment where people can relax, contribute and feel included. By sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge, Ade helps participants discover that music can provide an important outlet for emotions and support their overall mental fitness.

His community work also reflects the

way he treats people in his everyday life. Ade is described as a generous and collaborative colleague who understands that lasting success comes through people working together. He celebrates the achievements of others with the same enthusiasm he brings to his own work.

He does not seek recognition or reward. Instead, he leads through his actions, integrity and genuine concern for the people around him. His influence can be seen in the confidence of those he has encouraged, the friendships created through music and the welcoming spaces he has helped build.

Ade's story is a reminder that community leadership does not always come with a formal title. It can be found in the person who consistently offers encouragement, brings people together and uses their skills to improve the lives of others.

His contribution through music, friendship and mental wellbeing captures the spirit of Honouring Our Communities. He has shown that sustained acts of kindness and compassion can have an influence far beyond the moment in which they are given.

The nomination, written with thanks from Ade's line manager, Sophiea Penny, concludes with a simple message that perhaps says it best:

"Thank you for being you and for all that you do."

IFEYINWA NWAEJIKE

Publishing a Richer Picture of Africa

Through her Belfast-based publishing studio, Ifeyinwa Nwaejike is creating books that encourage readers to explore African landmarks, histories and cultures beyond familiar stereotypes.

Ifeyinwa Nwaejike founded IFy Atelier after a period of uncertainty led her back to a longstanding interest in creativity. Rather than allow that difficult chapter to define her future, she began building an independent publishing and creative studio in Belfast.

Her aim was to produce thoughtful books that encourage people to slow down, become curious and learn about cultures as individual and varied experiences.

The idea behind her first publications came from an observation. Colouring books were widely available, but relatively few introduced readers to African places in a way that combined creativity with accessible information.

Ifeyinwa responded by developing the *Iconic African Locations Colouring Book* series. The books allow children and adults to explore landmarks and stories from across the African continent while taking part in a relaxing creative activity.

They are not intended to present Africa as one place with a single history or identity. Each location offers an opportunity to learn about a different community, landscape or cultural experience.



This distinction matters to Ifeyinwa. She believes Africa, Africans and ethnic-minority communities are too often described as if they are all the same.

By focusing on particular locations and their individual stories, her books encourage readers to look beyond simplified narratives. They show a continent shaped by many countries, languages, traditions, environments and historical experiences.

Creating the books has required Ifeyinwa to become more than a writer. As the founder of an independent studio, she has taken responsibility for production, distribution, marketing, metadata, rights management and relationships with customers and retailers.

Many of these tasks are largely invisible to readers, but they determine whether a book can be discovered, ordered and

distributed successfully.

Her publications are now available through book retailers in Britain and overseas. The growing distribution of the series allows a small Belfast publisher to reach readers far beyond Northern Ireland.

Ifeyinwa also writes about creativity, identity, culture and resilience. Through magazine contributions, her website and a LinkedIn newsletter, she reflects on life as an ethnic-minority woman in Northern Ireland and the wider United Kingdom.

Her work contributes to discussions about representation and belonging. It encourages people to ask questions about places and communities rather than accepting stereotypes or relying on a narrow set of images.

This is particularly relevant for younger readers. Seeing African history and culture treated as subjects worthy of exploration can help Black children feel recognised while introducing children from other backgrounds to stories they may not encounter elsewhere.

Ifeyinwa's contribution to Britain combines cultural education with entrepreneurship. She is building a creative business in Belfast while widening the range of stories available within independent publishing.

Her books do not tell readers what they should think. Instead, they invite them to look more closely, colour, read and discover something they may not have known before.

Through that simple approach, Ifeyinwa is creating opportunities for learning and helping readers develop a more detailed understanding of Africa and its many cultures.



HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026

B:M
2026



BOLANLE OYEDIRAN

Through Wonderful Way CIC, she combines practical support with long-term guidance, helping people build confidence, opportunity and stronger futures.



CHARMAINE SIMPSON

Through Black History Studies, she has made Black history more accessible while building knowledge, confidence and empowerment in the community.



TONY FAIRWEATHER

He is a lifelong champion of Black literature and Windrush heritage, helping preserve stories, celebrate culture and bring Black British history to wider audiences.



PROF. MYRTLE EMMANUEL

Through education and race equality work, she has helped challenge inequality, reshape institutions and place students' lived experiences at the centre of change.



GILBERT CLARKE 1925-2026

He was a Second World War RAF veteran whose life stands as a lasting reminder of the service and sacrifice of Caribbean personnel in Britain's wartime history.



OLIVIER TSEMO

Through his leadership at SADACCA, he has strengthened community wellbeing, cultural inclusion and the representation of African and Caribbean communities in Sheffield.



SCRATCHYLUS

Using music, performance and education, he brings African and Caribbean history to life, inspiring pride, cultural awareness and learning in new generations.



SUSAN PITTER

Through exhibitions, heritage work and community leadership, she has helped ensure Caribbean and Black British stories are preserved, shared and remembered.



CLLR DOUGLAS HAMANDISHE

As a community leader, nurse and Mayor of Medway, he has shown a strong commitment to representation, inclusion and opportunity through public service.



The idea began at a funeral. When Susan Pitter attended the funeral of her father's friend, known affectionately as Sunny Man, she expected to say goodbye to someone she had known for years. Instead, the funeral programme introduced her to parts of his life she had never known.

The moment came a year after the death of Susan's own father, Hermerde, in September 2017. Reading Sunny Man's story changed how she viewed the programmes that families take home from funerals and often keep for decades.

They were more than orders of service. Within their pages were photographs, family histories, journeys and achievements. Each one held a record of a life that might otherwise be remembered only by those who had known the person directly.

Susan realised that one programme could preserve one person's story. A collection of them could reveal the experiences of an entire generation.

That idea became *Eulogy*, a heritage project created with Dawn Cameron and Jamaica Society Leeds. Families across the city entrusted the project with funeral programmes, photographs, keepsakes and memories relating to 76 Jamaicans who had made Leeds their home.

These were deeply personal possessions, connected to love and loss. Families shared them because they trusted Susan and her colleagues to present their relatives with dignity.

Many of the people featured had arrived in Britain during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. They came to work, raise families and build new lives, frequently while facing racism, hostility and restricted opportunities.

Susan did not want hardship to become the only way they were remembered.

She wanted visitors to encounter them as complete human beings: parents and partners, friends and neighbours, workers, church members and community builders. Their stories contained humour, faith, ambition, friendship and love alongside the difficulties they had faced.

Presented at Leeds Central Library in 2019, *Eulogy* offered an intimate history of Jamaican life in the city. It brought private memories into a public space without taking away their personal meaning.

The exhibition became the most popular staged in Room 700 and was extended in response to public interest. Its success demonstrated that these stories mattered beyond the families who had preserved them. They formed part of the history of Leeds itself.

For younger generations, *Eulogy* offered an opportunity to see parents and grandparents differently. The people they knew mainly through family roles appeared



Susan Pitter

After discovering how much of a person's life could be held within a funeral programme, Susan Pitter began preserving the memories of Leeds' Jamaican community for future generations.

as young adults who had crossed countries, established homes and helped shape the city around them.

Susan has continued to recover experiences that might otherwise remain outside the historical record.

Rebellion to Romance explored the lives of second-generation West Indians growing up in Leeds during the 1970s and 1980s. It examined not only racism and resistance, but also music, friendship, relationships and the everyday experiences through which young people formed their identities.

For King, Country & Home recognised West Indian RAF personnel and the families who supported them during the Second World War. The exhibition placed their service and sacrifice within the wider story of Britain's wartime history.

Across these projects, Susan begins with the memories held by families and communities themselves. She brings those memories together with research and public presentation, ensuring that the people whose lives are being represented remain central to the story.

Her contribution to Leeds extends beyond exhibitions. In 2001, Susan became the city's first Black Lady Mayoress. She has worked for more than two decades as a cultural heritage producer, curator and community leader, and has served as a trustee of organisations including Leeds Playhouse and the National Poetry Centre.

Yet her work is not concerned only with preserving the past.

As a co-founder of Out of Many People,

Susan is also helping children and young people find themselves within literature. In February 2026, the organisation presented the inaugural *Likkle Lit Fest* at Leeds Central Library.

Authors, illustrators, artists and storytellers came together with children and families to celebrate Black children's and young-adult literature. The festival created a space in which young readers could discover books that reflected their lives while encountering the breadth of Black storytelling.

There is a clear connection between *Eulogy* and *Likkle Lit Fest*.

One began with documents created at the end of people's lives and asked how their memories could be protected. The other places stories into the hands of children who are beginning to imagine what their own lives might become.

Together, they show why representation must reach in both directions. People need access to the experiences of those who came before them, but they also need to see that their own voices and possibilities belong within the stories being written now.

Susan Pitter has helped families recognise that the memories kept in drawers, cupboards and photograph albums are not insignificant. They are part of the history of a community and a city.

Her work began with the discovery that an entire life could be held within a few folded pages. Since then, she has helped ensure that those pages are opened, their stories are valued and the people within them are not forgotten.

DR ADEBOLA ADISA

BUILDING BELONGING IN DARLINGTON

Through Brave Hearts North East CIC, Dr Adebola “Bola” Adisa is bringing Black children, women and families together while encouraging them to participate fully in the wider life of Darlington.



Dr Adebola Adisa is a GP and the founder of Brave Hearts North East CIC, a community organisation created to build friendships, support wellbeing and reduce isolation. The group began in May 2018 after friends asked Bola to join them in Darlington's Race for Life. She recognised that more could be done to encourage women from ethnic-minority backgrounds to participate in the event and support the work of Cancer Research UK.

What began as a WhatsApp group grew into a wider community network. Members took part in the following year's Race for Life, and Brave Hearts later became a registered community interest company.

Under Bola's leadership, the organisation has developed activities for children, teenagers, women and families. Its work responds to the isolation experienced by people who may have moved away from relatives, work unusual shifts or spend much of their time caring for young children.

Bola has helped create spaces where women can meet, share information and enjoy time together. Activities have included health talks, exercise, film nights, meals, social events and creative sessions.

These gatherings may appear simple, but they offer something important: a place where people can form friendships, discuss their wellbeing and feel part of a community.

Bola has also worked to ensure that Black children in Darlington have positive opportunities to meet and celebrate their identity. She established a children's choir that has performed at community events and in care homes for older people.

By singing in care homes, the children have shared their talent while connecting with a different generation of local residents. The choir has given them confidence and allowed them to take an active role in the life of the town.

A teenage mentoring platform created by Bola helps strengthen communication between young people and their families. It provides a space where teenagers can talk, receive guidance and develop supportive relationships.

“BRAVE HEARTS BRINGS FAMILIES TOGETHER, SUPPORTS LOCAL CAUSES AND HELPS PEOPLE FEEL THAT DARLINGTON IS THEIR HOME.”

Her community work is not limited to activities organised by Brave Hearts. Bola encourages members to participate in library events, races, summer fairs and other occasions taking place across Darlington.

The group has donated to food banks and schools and has supported wider local causes. Her nomination also describes how she campaigned successfully for the return of a school crossing patrol after cuts placed the service at risk.

This willingness to speak up reflects Bola's understanding of community leadership. She supports the Black community while also contributing to issues affecting residents more widely.

Her work as a GP brings an additional understanding of the relationship between isolation, mental wellbeing and physical health. Brave Hearts provides opportunities for people to become more active, receive useful health information and develop friendships that can continue outside organised events.

Bola's contribution to Britain can be seen in the stronger community she is helping to build in Darlington. She encourages families to take part in local life rather than remain on its margins, while ensuring that Black children and adults have spaces where they feel supported.

Her nominator describes Bola as “a community builder at heart”. That description fits a woman who has turned a small group of friends into an organisation that brings families together, supports local causes and helps people feel that Darlington is their home.

Professor Diane Ashiru-Oredope: *Protecting lives and shaping global health*

A pharmacist and public-health leader, Professor Diane Ashiru-Oredope combines scientific rigour, compassionate leadership and a commitment to equity.

Professor Diane Ashiru-Oredope is one of Britain's most influential public-health leaders. Her work has made a lasting contribution to patient safety, antimicrobial resistance and health equity.

As Lead Pharmacist for Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare-Associated Infections at the UK Health Security Agency, Diane has helped shape Britain's response to a serious public-health threat. She has also served as Deputy Chief Scientist at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and is Honorary Chair and Professor of Pharmaceutical Public Health at the University of Nottingham.

Internationally recognised for her leadership in antimicrobial stewardship, Diane led the development of "Start Smart – Then Focus" and created the global Antibiotic Guardian campaign in 2014. She also chairs the English Surveillance Programme for Antimicrobial Utilisation and Resistance, helping ensure that evidence



informs policy and practice.

Diane's contribution reaches beyond science and medicine. She has mentored

trainees from minoritised backgrounds, challenged systemic barriers affecting Black and minority ethnic pharmacy professionals, and championed more inclusive education and leadership. Her work has helped create safer, more supportive pathways for healthcare professionals.

A prolific researcher and communicator, Diane has contributed to more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, advised governments and global-health organisations, served on international editorial boards and delivered TEDx talks. Her achievements include being named Public Health Pharmacist of the Year, delivering the Peter Wildy Prize Lecture and becoming a Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and Commonwealth Pharmacists Association.

Her nominator, Amandeep Doll, describes a woman whose work has "saved lives, influenced global policy and inspired countless professionals to lead with purpose and integrity".

Horace Wright: A lifetime of faith, culture and community

Affectionately known as Kahun Montu, Horace Wright has spent more than four decades bringing people together and strengthening Black identity, health and wellbeing.

A father, husband, brother and community elder, Horace Wright has devoted his life to serving people. His journey began as a DJ and activist, supporting Black liberation and cultural pride. He later developed businesses, writings and teachings that help people understand scripture through African eyes.

Across North and East London, Horace has organised cultural celebrations, delivered free sermons and classes, and offered guidance to generations. For many, he has become a father figure: someone who listens, encourages and believes in people when they may struggle to believe in themselves.

His commitment to wellbeing led him to establish Strength in Silver, an outdoor fitness programme created for Black men over 50. The initiative addresses isolation and health inequalities by making exercise supportive, welcoming and affordable.

Horace is also a director of the Tree

of Eternal Life, a holistic health store in Tottenham. More than a shop, it has become a community hub where people can discuss health and wellbeing openly in a culturally familiar environment. Through his Health Practitioners Corner programme on Supreme FM, he shares information and encourages listeners to care for their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

In 2020, Horace received a Haringey Hero Award for his longstanding contribution to the community.

His nominator, Sherrelle Parke, and fellow members of the Holy Qubic Church describe him as "a stalwart of community unity and togetherness". Their tribute captures him simply: "He inspires, he encourages, he teaches, he truly cares."

In honouring Horace Wright, we celebrate a lifetime of consistent service and a leader who has helped people rediscover culture, confidence and hope, an embodiment of Honouring Our Communities.



GLENICE ALLISON

Helping others feel seen, supported and valued

Through mentoring, advocacy and compassionate leadership at Birmingham Metropolitan College, Glenice Allison is helping Black staff and students find their voices and pursue opportunities. Natalie Simmonds-Alleyne pays tribute to a colleague whose dedication often goes unseen.

Glenice is a true superstar who embodies the spirit of service, community advocacy and transformational change that sits at the heart of Honouring Black Britain 2026. Her hard work often goes unseen, which is why I want to honour her contribution.

Since becoming Chair of the BMet BAME Network in 2023, she has led with integrity, compassion and an unwavering commitment to improving the experiences and opportunities of Black and racially minoritised staff and students within the Birmingham Metropolitan College community and beyond.

Her leadership is defined by consistent action, courageous advocacy and a deep commitment to creating environments where people feel seen, supported and empowered to succeed.

Under Glenice's leadership, the BMet BAME Network has continued to strengthen its role within the college. She has helped ensure that it remains a source of support and belonging, while also influencing anti-racist practice, fairness and cultural change across the organisation.

One of her most significant contributions has been her leadership in the design and implementation of the Realise Mentoring Programme. This initiative was developed to support students identified as being at risk of disengagement, underachievement or exclusion, with a particular focus on the experiences and barriers faced by Black and racially minoritised learners.

Glenice recognised that many young



BY NATALIE
SIMMONDS-
ALLEYNE

people were navigating education while also facing challenges linked to representation, confidence, identity, inequality and belonging. She helped shape a mentoring model rooted in empathy, cultural understanding, encouragement and aspiration.

The programme created meaningful connections between students and mentors, providing guidance, advocacy, positive role modelling and practical support at critical stages of learners' educational journeys.

Empowerment was central to this work. Students were given opportunities to build confidence, strengthen resilience, improve engagement and begin to see themselves reflected within spaces of achievement and leadership. The programme helped learners feel valued and understood.

Glenice understands that inclusion requires systems of care and opportunity that respond to lived experience. Her work on Realise reflects this belief and demonstrates the importance of mentoring that recognises learners' cultural backgrounds and individual circumstances.

Alongside this, she has continued to influence wider organisational change through her contribution to anti-racist safeguarding reform, staff voice initiatives, governance representation, inclusive policy development and cultural inclusion strategies across BMet.

She has consistently advocated for

fairness, accountability and belonging, ensuring that the experiences of Black staff and students are not overlooked, minimised or ignored.

What distinguishes Glenice's leadership is her ability to combine strategic influence with humanity. She leads with calm strength, emotional intelligence and authenticity, creating spaces where people feel safe enough to speak honestly and supported enough to grow.

Colleagues and students alike describe her as approachable, thoughtful, empowering and deeply committed to community. These qualities are central to the trust she builds and the support she provides.

Her impact extends beyond individual projects or institutional outcomes. Through her leadership, staff and students have felt encouraged to find their voices, pursue opportunities, challenge barriers and believe that change is possible.

At a time when equity and inclusion work can feel difficult, exhausting or undervalued, Glenice has remained steadfast in her commitment to collective progress and community care. She demonstrates leadership grounded in service, courage and the determination to create better futures for others.

For these reasons, I believe Glenice is deeply deserving of recognition through Honouring Black Britain 2026 for her contribution to education, equity, mentorship and community leadership.

DR NORMA GREGORY

Ensuring our histories are remembered

Through community research, education and exhibitions, Dr Norma Gregory has dedicated decades to preserving overlooked histories and securing African Caribbean people's place in Britain's shared story. Her work brings recognition to lives and contributions that deserve to be remembered.

For Dr Norma Gregory, preserving history means making sure that people's experiences are recorded, shared and understood. Across her work as a historian, educator and curator, she has helped bring African Caribbean stories into public view, connecting community knowledge with museums, educational resources and the wider historical record.

Born in Nottingham to Jamaican parents who came to Britain in the 1960s, Norma developed a passion for education, literature, the arts and media. Her career has included years of teaching and mentoring in schools and higher education settings in London and Nottingham, alongside her work researching and communicating history.

In 2013, she established Nottingham News Centre CIC, a social enterprise dedicated to researching, preserving and sharing diverse heritage. Through publications, exhibitions, community projects and educational resources, the organisation helps widen access to stories that have been under-represented or misunderstood.

One of her most significant contributions is founding the Black Miners Museum, an online archive preserving and sharing Black miners' history. The project brings together experiences that belong within Britain's industrial story, recognising the people behind the work and the communities of which they were part.

Through oral histories, photographs and other historical material, this work gives former miners opportunities to have their experiences preserved in their own voices. It also provides families, researchers and younger generations with ways to explore an aspect of British working life that has received too little attention. Nottingham Trent University has described the project as addressing a gap in the documentation of Black British miners' experiences and contributions.



The exhibition Norma curated, *Digging Deep: Coal Miners of African Caribbean Heritage*, takes those stories to wider audiences. Personal narratives, memories, portraits and creative work reveal the diversity of Britain's mining communities. Its presentation at venues including The Common Room in Newcastle has helped bring these accounts into spaces associated with the country's industrial heritage.

The research has also received support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. In 2017, Nottingham News Centre CIC was awarded funding for *Digging Deep: Coal Miners of African Caribbean Heritage, National Narratives from across the UK*. That support reflects the project's scope: gathering histories across communities and making them available as part of a shared national record.

The significance of this work lies in the detail that personal testimony can preserve. A photograph offers a face; an interview adds a voice, a memory and a perspective. Together, these materials help readers and visitors understand industrial history through the people who experienced it, giving individual lives their place within a much larger story.

Norma's commitment to community history extends beyond mining. Her book, *Jamaicans in Nottingham: Narratives and Reflections*, published by Hansib in 2015, combines oral history with archival and contemporary photographs. It documents Jamaican contributions to the city, preserving experiences that connect family histories with Nottingham's wider social and cultural life.

She has also helped bring Black history

into the city's public spaces. After researching the life of George Africanus, she led a campaign for a blue plaque at his former home in 2014. This work helped secure public recognition for a figure remembered as one of Nottingham's earliest successful Black entrepreneurs. It demonstrates how historical research can change what people encounter and learn about in their everyday surroundings.

Her contribution has earned national recognition. In 2023, she won the Social Enterprise Women's Champion award at the UK Social Enterprise Awards. The award recognised her leadership at Nottingham News Centre CIC and its work diversifying heritage education and developing content for new and diverse audiences.

Nominating her for Honouring Black Britain 2026, Christopher Weir describes her as "consistent, courageous and direct". His tribute recognises her sustained community heritage and educational contribution, alongside her work at national and international levels.

What connects these different projects is a commitment to making people's contributions visible. Whether through a recorded interview, an exhibition, a book or a public memorial, Norma creates opportunities for histories to be discovered, understood and passed on.

That commitment reflects the spirit of *Honouring Our Communities*. Preserving the past is also a service to the future: it gives coming generations a fuller account of the people who shaped the places they call home. Through Dr Norma Gregory's work, overlooked voices gain a lasting place in Britain's memory.

LUDWIG RAMSEY

A Life of Service in Chesterfield

From the RAF and the fire service to classrooms, community halls and local government, Ludwig “Lud” Ramsey has spent years helping people feel recognised, supported and included.

The story of Ludwig “Lud” Ramsey can be traced through several different forms of public service. He has served in the Royal Air Force, worked as a firefighter, represented residents in local government and helped children understand Black history. Today, he is best known in Chesterfield as the chair of the African and Caribbean Community Association.

To the people who know him, however, Lud is not defined by a list of positions. He is the person who welcomes newcomers, organises activities, turns ideas into action and makes time for those around him.

That sense of welcome is remembered by the friend who nominated him for Honouring Black Britain. When the nominator and their companion first arrived at the African and Caribbean Community Association in 2023, Lud made sure they felt that they belonged.

The association, known locally as ACCA, provides a meeting place for African and Caribbean people and the wider Chesterfield community. Its activities include luncheon clubs, wellbeing sessions and social groups, as well as Black History Month events, Windrush commemorations, workshops and school visits.

As chair, Lud helps bring those different parts of the organisation together. Some activities celebrate culture and history; others provide practical support, reduce loneliness or simply give people somewhere friendly to meet. All of them reflect the belief that a stronger community is built through regular contact and shared experience.

Education has become an especially important part of Lud’s work. He has visited schools across Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire to speak about Black history, racism, equality and the value of living in a diverse community. Working with the



Chesterfield FC Community Trust and ACCA, he has helped deliver workshops about the Windrush generation, Black role models and the experiences of people who challenged racial discrimination.

Lud believes that equality education must begin in schools. Children who are given the opportunity to understand different histories and communities are better prepared to recognise prejudice and treat diversity as a strength.

His approach is personal as well as historical. During school visits, Lud has shared stories from his own life and career, including his experiences as a firefighter and even footage from appearances on *Gladiators* and *Ninja Warrior*. These details help children see Black history not as a distant subject confined to textbooks, but as something connected to people living and working around them.

The response from pupils has been memorable. Following one visit, a Year 6 pupil described Lud as “an amazing person who has worked hard to get where he is”. Teachers also reported that his visit had left a lasting impression on their classes.

Lud’s ability to lead has been shaped by his earlier service in the RAF and the fire service, careers requiring discipline, responsibility and the ability to remain calm when others need support.

As a councillor in Derbyshire, Lud brought another Black voice into local

decision-making. Representation at that level matters because councils make choices that affect people’s daily lives, from public services and community facilities to education and local support. His presence also gave younger Black residents an example of someone from their community taking a seat at the table.

The work led by Lud and his fellow volunteers at ACCA has been put forward for the King’s Award for Voluntary Service. The nomination reflects the time and care required to maintain an organisation that people can rely upon, not only for major celebrations, but throughout the year.

Lud’s achievements have taken him into some unusual places, from military service and firefighting to television challenges and council meetings. Yet the work for which he is most warmly recognised often happens quietly: greeting someone at a community event, arranging a school visit or ensuring that an older resident has company and a hot meal.

In Chesterfield, Ludwig Ramsey has helped create a space where African and Caribbean heritage is celebrated and where people from different backgrounds can meet one another with greater understanding.

His nomination came from someone who experienced that welcome personally. It is a simple but important measure of his work: people remember how Lud made them feel when they walked through the door.

Sado Jirde

Building power across the South West

BASED ON A
NOMINATION
BY ANGELIQUE
RETIEF

Sado Jirde is a movement builder in the truest sense of the word. At a time when commitments to racial justice can struggle to translate into lasting change, she has dedicated herself to the patient work of building collective power across the South West of England. Her leadership has focused on solidarity, strong community organisations and the conditions necessary for Black communities to thrive over the long term.

As Director of Black South West Network (BSWN), Sado has brought together Black-led organisations, researchers, creatives and campaigners. She recognised that advancing racial justice in the region required coordination, opportunities to develop strategy and investment in leadership. Above all, it required trust between people and organisations working towards shared goals.

That trust is built through sustained relationships. It grows when organisations have opportunities to listen to one another, understand different experiences and identify where their priorities meet. Sado has made this work central to her leadership, helping people see how their individual efforts contribute to a wider movement.

Through forums, partnerships and regional gatherings, she has connected organisations that previously worked in isolation. She has strengthened relationships between grassroots groups and larger institutions, helping Black-led voices become more organised and influential. For leaders carrying significant responsibilities within their own communities, these connections offer both practical support and a sense of solidarity.

The revitalisation of platforms such as the South West Race Equality Action Group reflects this commitment. Bringing organisations together creates opportunities to develop shared analysis, agree priorities and coordinate campaigning. It allows local concerns to inform a regional agenda, supported by people who understand the communities behind them.

Sado's approach is grounded in an understanding that racism operates through institutions, systems and everyday relationships. Addressing it requires engagement with public bodies alongside investment in the people affected. Her work has therefore included support for community healing spaces,

recognising the pressures that individuals and organisations experience while challenging inequality.

She has also championed leadership programmes that equip Black leaders to navigate difficult political and institutional environments while remaining accountable to their communities. Developing leadership means helping people gain the tools and confidence to exercise influence, with a clear understanding of whose interests they are there to serve.

Her support for Black-led enterprises, cultural initiatives and research collaborations recognises the connections between economic power, public narratives and policy. Communities need resources to sustain their organisations, opportunities to represent their own experiences and evidence that can strengthen their arguments for change. Each contributes to their ability to shape the future.

One of Sado's most significant strengths is her ability to connect different worlds. She brings community organisers into conversation with academics, creatives with policymakers, and funders with grassroots

leaders. These relationships help knowledge and experience move between spaces that can otherwise remain separate.

Through initiatives such as the South West Race Equity Research Network, she has supported research that responds to lived experience and serves community priorities. This work helps ensure that evidence can be used by the people whose lives it concerns, strengthening shared understanding and informing collective action.

In a region often overlooked within national conversations about race equality, Sado has insisted that the South West matters. She has helped bring greater attention to Black communities beyond London, demonstrating the knowledge, creativity and ambition that exist across the region.

Angelique Retief's nomination describes the impact of this work in the stronger connections between Black civic organisations. Leaders who once operated alone are now part of networks offering support and shared purpose. Public institutions are increasingly being asked to build sustained relationships with communities and involve them meaningfully in shaping decisions.

The longer view remains central to Sado's leadership. Community organisations face financial pressures, while commitments to equality can change with political priorities. She has concentrated on building relationships and structures capable of enduring beyond individual funding cycles, giving communities firmer foundations from which to organise.

That work creates room for planning as well as responding to immediate needs. It enables organisations to consider what they want to build together and how they can use their collective experience to get there. Progress depends on people having the support and resources to remain involved.

Sado Jirde's contribution lies in this sustained commitment to collective strength. She has nurtured relationships, supported leadership and helped create possibilities for organisations across the South West. Her work carries the conviction that Black communities should have the power to shape their own futures, supported by a movement rooted in accountability, collaboration and hope.



Dr Zidane Salmon - Shaping minds through education and literature

As an English teacher, school leader and author, **Dr Zidane Salmon** is helping young people develop the confidence to understand their identity, express themselves and recognise what they can achieve.

For Dr Zidane Salmon, education is about more than examination results. It is about helping young people find their voices, understand the world around them and develop confidence in their own abilities.

As Second in Department of English at St James' Catholic High School in Barnet, London, Zidane combines classroom teaching with responsibility for supporting the wider English department.

He contributes to curriculum development, mentors colleagues and helps maintain high standards of teaching and learning. His approach is based on collaboration, consistency and respect rather than authority alone.

Within the classroom, Zidane is known for bringing literature and language to life. He creates an environment in which students feel able to contribute, ask questions and challenge themselves.

His teaching encourages young people to look beyond the words on a page and think about identity, society and the experiences that shape people's lives. While academic progress remains important, he also wants students to become confident thinkers who can express their ideas clearly.

This matters particularly for young people who may not always see themselves reflected in the books they study or the leadership around them.

As a Black educator and school leader, Zidane provides a visible example of what can be achieved through education, commitment and self-belief. His presence helps students recognise that leadership and academic excellence can take many forms.

His influence also extends to his colleagues. He is regarded as dependable under pressure, thoughtful in his decisions and willing to invest time in the development of others.

Writing about identity and belonging

Alongside his work in education, Zidane is a published author whose books explore identity, resilience, morality and cultural belonging.

His works include *Roots and Wings*, *Sanctified Sins* and *His Brother's Keeper*.

Roots and Wings examines the relationship between heritage and aspiration – the pull of where someone comes from and the desire to determine where they are going.

Sanctified Sins explores personal struggle, moral complexity and the contradictions that influence human behaviour. *His Brother's Keeper* considers responsibility, loyalty and the family and community relationships that shape identity.

Across his writing, Zidane draws attention to experiences connected to Caribbean heritage and life within British society. His work creates space for perspectives that have often been underrepresented while exploring themes that can speak to readers from many backgrounds.



His roles as teacher and writer strengthen one another. His experience in the classroom keeps him connected to the questions young people are asking about identity, opportunity and belonging. His writing, in turn, brings an additional depth and cultural perspective to his teaching.

An influence within his community

Zidane's contribution is important because it reaches people in different ways.

In the classroom, he helps students develop their academic skills and confidence. Within his department, he supports colleagues and contributes to the quality of education across the school. Through his books, he encourages wider conversations about identity, culture and responsibility.

He is also helping young people see that creativity and education do not have to exist separately. A person can be a teacher, leader and author, using each role to strengthen the others.

Zidane Salmon's work reflects the Black History Month 2026 theme, **Honouring Our Communities**, because his contribution is rooted in helping others grow.

His impact can be found in the students who feel heard, the colleagues he supports and the readers who recognise parts of their lives within his stories.

Through education and literature, Dr Zidane Salmon is helping young people understand where they come from, consider where they want to go and believe that their voices have value.



Constance Winifred Mark MBE BEM

ARMY VETERAN AND ACTIVIST

Constance was born in Kingston, Jamaica. Her father taught in a British Army school and when she was 16 when war broke out. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) at the age of 19, serving in Jamaica as a medical secretary to the assistant director of medical services at the British Military Hospital.

Connie's duties included typing up the medical reports which sometimes involved documenting the horrific injuries sustained from bombings and combat as soon as the men arrived back in Jamaica.

"The Military Police would come to get me wherever I was and I had to be down at that troop ship. And that's really when the reality of war came home to me because you saw men leaving hale and hearty and you see them coming back on stretchers, you see them coming back in wheelchairs, some blind."

The fight for equality that was to define Connie's life started in the ATS. When directed to clean a British officer's private quarters, she refused. After six months, she was promoted to Lance Corporal, and six months after that to Corporal. Each time, she was denied a pay increase. Each time Connie protested, but to no avail. She fought all her life for, but never received the back pay owed to her as a result of her promotions.

When the war ended, her commanding officer put in for her to receive the British Empire Medal (BEM), but her recognition was denied. Connie believed this was due to her earlier refusal to act as a personal charwoman to the British officer.

"Connie Mark spent her life fighting for recognition and equality, ensuring that the contributions of Black women and Caribbean servicemen and women were never forgotten."

Despite this, when the ATS was merged into the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1949, Connie signed up for further service. In 1952 she married Jamaican fast bowler Stanley Goodridge, who had been contracted to play cricket in Durham. Connie remained in Jamaica to complete her service before leaving for the UK in 1957. Stanley and Connie had two children, but they would later separate. Much later, Connie remarried and moved to London, taking the surname of her second husband, Michael Mark.

In the UK, Connie returned to her work as a medical secretary. She also became well known for her contributions to a range of charitable, community and educational projects. She joined the West Indian ex-Servicemen's Association and pressed for them to add women to the title of the organisation, continuing her fight for the recognition of women's contributions to the war effort.

Connie's passion for the Caribbean made her a champion of its culture and a formidable force within the Black community. She was much in demand for her poetry and storytelling events, using oral history to inspire young people. She became a patron of Descendants, an organisation aimed



at supporting youngsters of African and Caribbean descent.

In 1980, she founded the Friends of Mary Seacole, which was later renamed the Mary Seacole Memorial Association. Seacole had also been born in Kingston, Jamaica and was a pioneering nurse during the Crimean War, whose contributions left a lasting legacy in the medical profession.

In 1989, when preparations were being made to celebrate the contribution of servicemen and women on the fiftieth anniversary of the war's outbreak, Connie began lobbying for the inclusion of those from the Caribbean. She applied for a grant from the Greater London Arts Council and put together an exhibition of photographs that she collected from service personnel and the archives of the Imperial War Museum for the anniversary celebration.

"Connie Mark fought to ensure Black and Caribbean service was never forgotten."

In 1992, Connie was finally awarded the British Empire Medal for her service during the war and in 2000 she received an MBE for her service to the community.

Connie Mark passed away in 2007. The following year, a plaque was unveiled at her former home in Hammersmith, Mary Seacole House.

In 2018, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote, The Voice newspaper listed Connie Mark among eight Black women who had contributed to the development of Britain.

Hoden Mohamoud

Quiet Leadership, Lasting Impact

From volunteer to Children and Young People Lead, Hoden Mohamoud has remained guided by compassion, humility and a determination to support the families of Tower Hamlets.

Some people make their greatest impact away from the spotlight. They do not seek praise or recognition; they simply notice what needs to be done and step forward. Hoden Mohamoud is one of those people.

Born and raised in Tower Hamlets, Hoden is proud of her Somali heritage and the community that shaped her. As a mother of four, she understands both the joys and challenges of family life. That lived experience helps her connect naturally with parents, who see someone who listens without judgement and genuinely understands their concerns.

Hoden began her journey with the Women's Inclusive Team as a volunteer. The East London charity supports women, children and families through culturally responsive, community-led services.

From the beginning, Hoden was the person who stayed behind after events, offered assistance before being asked and quietly completed whatever needed doing. She did not ask whether a task was part of her role. She simply wanted to help.

Her commitment and natural ability to connect with people led to a position as a Project Worker. Hoden coordinated individual and corporate volunteering programmes, ensuring that volunteers felt welcomed and that each activity created a lasting benefit.

"Hoden leads through her actions, motivated by care rather than recognition."

Whether she was organising teams to transform WIT's preschool, improving community spaces, preparing food for the community kitchen or supporting local events, Hoden brought people together and made everyone feel part of something meaningful.

She also became an important member of WIT's social media team. Through authentic storytelling and engaging content, she helped more women and families learn about the organisation and the support available to them.

Hoden's dedication eventually led to her promotion to Children and Young People Lead. She now oversees five projects supporting children, young people and families across Tower Hamlets. Despite the greater responsibility, colleagues say she remains as approachable, humble and caring as when she first volunteered.

One of her proudest achievements is leading WIT's Little Explorers, a pilot Stay and Play project for families with children aged from birth to six who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Understanding how isolating life can sometimes feel for parents of

children with additional needs, Hoden worked to create a welcoming space where families could feel safe, understood and supported. More than 80 parents and children attended the first session – a powerful sign of both the need for the project and the trust families had placed in Hoden.

Yet numbers alone do not explain her influence. What defines Hoden is the way she makes people feel. Children naturally gravitate towards her, parents trust her, volunteers feel valued and colleagues know she will step forward whenever support is needed.

Hoden was nominated for *Honouring Black Britain 2026* by Zainab Jama, who describes a woman motivated by care rather than recognition. Whether mentoring a colleague, helping another team or supporting an event, Hoden leads through her actions.

Her journey from local volunteer to leading services for children and families offers a powerful example to young women across Tower Hamlets. It shows what can happen when talent is recognised, opportunities are created and someone remains committed to serving the community that raised them.

Hoden Mohamoud embodies the spirit of *Honouring Our Communities*. Her contribution may often happen quietly and behind the scenes, but its impact is visible in every child, parent, volunteer and colleague who has felt supported because she chose to help.



HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026



CHISOM UWAEZUOKE

His work in nursing and public health is helping create safer healthcare, using knowledge and innovation to protect patients and prevent infection.



CHARLES ADEGBORO

In the classroom and through boxing, he gives young people the confidence, discipline and encouragement to believe in what they can achieve.



CONSTANTIA PENNIE

Across a lifetime of service, she has opened doors for Black families and helped children grow with dignity, opportunity and pride in their heritage.



DR MAHAMED HASHI

From Brixton Soup Kitchen to community safety, he has turned lived experience into practical action against homelessness, poverty and violence.



HODEN MOHAMOUD

Beginning as a volunteer in the community that raised her, she now leads services helping children and families feel understood, supported and valued.



HORACE WRIGHT

For more than four decades, he has brought people together through faith, culture, health and community action, strengthening Black identity and wellbeing.



JACQUELINE ROBERTS

Through steelpan, heritage and historical research, she has helped African and Caribbean communities preserve their stories and pass them confidently to future generations.



SAMANTHA TORINDO

Through law and advocacy, she stands alongside those facing injustice while working to change the systems that too often fail them.



JEREDYNE JESTINA STANLEY

Through Rivers, she has helped women overcome isolation and hardship, creating opportunities for learning, safety, confidence and greater independence.





ANDRÉ PHIPPS



CHAR BURNETT



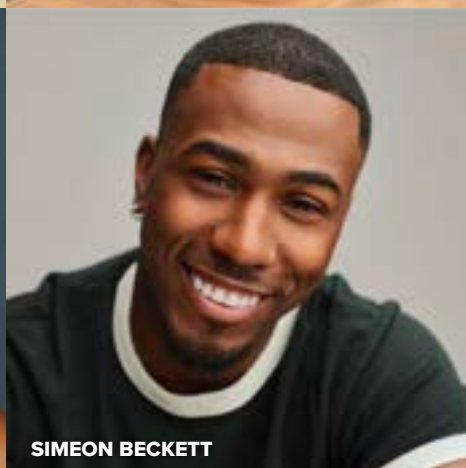
JORDAN BENJAMIN



KADE STENSON



MARY FRANCIS



SIMEON BECKETT

"We're all in this together"

THE NEW GENERATION OF BLACK PERFORMERS REDEFINING THE STAGE

High School Musical's rising stars reflect on identity, representation, community and why every performance is bigger than themselves.

Twenty years ago, *High School Musical* by Disney carried a strong message; be yourself. This October, as Black History Month UK honours our communities, that lesson feels more relevant than ever and it's being carried now by a new generation of Black performers taking the *High School Musical* stage.

Black History Month UK Magazine sat down with the six black cast members from the stage production marking the film's 20th anniversary including Char Burnett (*Frozen*; *The Book of Mormon*, West End) as Taylor McKessie, Jordan Benjamin (*Hamilton*; *The Little Big Things*, West End) as Chad Danforth, Simeon Beckett (*Back to the Future*, West End; *Hamilton*, UK & Ireland tour) as Zeke Baylor and ensemble members Mary Francis,

André Phipps and Kade Stenson. What emerged wasn't just talk of a beloved musical. It was a conversation about identity, legacy, and what it truly means to build community.

Refusing the box

Landing a role in *High School Musical* was deeply personal for one cast member. "I'm Black and I'm gay. People sometimes think that decides which roles you're right for. But being on a show this big shows you don't have to fit into anyone's box but your own."

His freedom isn't performed for anyone; it simply is. "You can be gay and still be masculine. Just be yourself." That is representation doing its real work: not asking permission to exist, but showing a younger generation there was never a box to begin with.

Making the familiar new

Stepping into characters the world already loves could easily have been daunting. Instead, the cast treated it as an invitation.

"There's pressure when folks already love these characters, but we had the freedom to make them our own. We weren't copying but bringing ourselves." As another put it, a character only truly lives once a real person brings their own voice, quirks and story to the page. New faces on this stage don't just diversify it, they deepen it.



Dreams, undeterred

For some in this cast, this production is the dream first imagined as children. One, stepping into their first lead role after years in the ensemble, spoke of what it meant to do this for family: *"My sister loved High School Musical growing up. Doing this for my family? There's nothing better."*

Another traced the dream back to age five, watching from the audience, certain of something everyone else called unrealistic. Their advice, delivered with a laugh that filled the room: *"Stay delusional."* Because, as they explained, *"people always want to tell you what's realistic. But sometimes, you have to believe before anyone else does."* That is the quiet engine of Black excellence...the ability to see a future before the world agrees to build it.

Standing on strong shoulders

Asked whose shoulders they stand on, none of the cast reached first for celebrity. They named parents, grandparents, the everyday people who made sacrifices for dreams they themselves never lived to see. *"Our parents did the groundwork so we could be here. Now we get to show younger Black artists: you can do this too."* One recalled

a mother's quiet honesty that she wished she'd had these chances as a child. In a single generation, the impossible became real. That shift, from one generation's sacrifice to the next generation's stage, is precisely what this year's theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, asks us to hold onto. Progress is never a solo act. It is built by families, neighbours, teachers and mentors investing in futures they may never witness themselves.

Performing for the ones still watching from row one

Representation carries weight but increasingly, it carries hope too. *"If I spot a little Black boy in the front row, sometimes I think: tonight's for you."* There was a time when being the only Black performer in a cast meant carrying every expectation alone. That has begun to shift. *"With more people around who look like me, my existence isn't always political. I get to just be an artist."* Not simply more Black faces on stage, but the freedom, finally, to be known first for talent.

What community really means

Community, the cast agreed, is rarely complicated. *"It's someone pushing you to keep going when you want to give up. It's*

someone saying, I see you." One offered the simplest definition of all: *"Community is love. My dad always said, it takes a village. Whether we're helping each other with choreography, checking on mental health, or just reminding somebody they're crushing it; it really does take a village. And those relationships last long after the stage lights go down."*

More than a show

"We're all in this together" has been an anthem for *High School Musical* for twenty years. For this cast, it isn't just a closing number. It is also a description of how they move through the world. Communities that lift each other up. Artists who refuse to be told what's possible. Young people chasing dreams whether or not anyone else can see them yet.

That is what history in the making looks like.

LONDON

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Dr Delroy Beverley JP Turning adversity into opportunity

From business and education to justice and community service, Dr Delroy Beverley JP has spent decades opening doors for others.

Born into poverty in a working-class Black family, Dr Delroy Beverley refused to allow disadvantage to define his future. Instead, he transformed lived experience into purposeful action, building a record of leadership across business, education, justice and voluntary service.

Randolph Victor, who has known him since the 1990s, describes Delroy as a principled, courageous and deeply compassionate leader who consistently chooses "the hard right over the easy wrong".

As Regional Chair of the Institute of Directors for Yorkshire and the North East, Delroy has used business leadership to challenge entrenched inequality and widen opportunity. He gives his time freely to others. For more than 15 years, he has mentored young people excluded from mainstream education or growing up in single-parent households. Through Speakers for Schools, he has reached more than 6,000 students.

Delroy has served as a Non-Executive

Director and Audit Chair at the British Library, with responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion. At the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, he has advised leaders and mentored international cadets. His service includes the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Housing Board and Ofqual.

Today, Delroy serves as a magistrate and advises the Mayor of West Yorkshire and the Chief Constable on policing ethics. He encourages people from disadvantaged communities to consider joining the magistracy.

In 2026, he received the Freedom of the City of London, recognising his contribution to business, education and social mobility. He remains grounded in Huddersfield, serving his local community with humility.

Dr Delroy Beverley's life demonstrates how adversity can become agency. In honouring him, we celebrate leadership that leaves doors open behind it for future generations, an inspiring embodiment of *Honouring Our Communities*.



Jeredyne Jestina Stanley A lifeline for women and families

Jeredyne Jestina Stanley helps women in Crawley gain skills, find practical support and face difficult circumstances with greater confidence.

Jeredyne is a selfless and caring person who puts the needs of others before her own. She is compassionate and empathetic about other people's well-being.

After seeing women face isolation, language barriers, domestic abuse and immigration problems, Jeredyne began helping women and children through her church in 2007. Two years later, she used her own money to establish Rivers, a Crawley charity supporting women and families facing disadvantage. Registered in 2015, Rivers has supported about 2,000 women and now helps around 300 each year.

Rivers for Women provides a women-only place to learn in comfort. Jeredyne bought computers and arranged lessons in English, numeracy and basic digital skills. These sessions helped women build confidence, support their children's education and become more independent. Women facing abuse, isolation or immigration difficulties were also directed towards specialist help. She has

worked with other charities, the police and the local MP to ensure community concerns reach public decision-makers directly.

When the pandemic placed families under even greater pressure, Jeredyne approached Tesco for food donations. Twice weekly, she and volunteers prepared and delivered food parcels to residents, struggling families and single mothers. More than 450 families received support, including help buying baby food and clothing. She also worked alongside the NHS to share trusted information about Covid vaccination.

Jeredyne has involved more than 70 volunteers in teaching, mentoring and supporting others. A women's learning project launched in 2017 enabled participants to graduate and receive certificates celebrating their progress. Her work has received local and national recognition.

Jeredyne has shown what sustained care can achieve: women supported, families strengthened and people given the confidence to move forward.

OLIVIER TSEMO - BUILDING VOICE, BELONGING AND OPPORTUNITY

Through his leadership at SADACCA, Olivier Tsemo has strengthened connections, widened opportunity and ensured African and Caribbean communities have a voice in Sheffield's future.

Olivier Tsemo is Chief Executive Officer of the Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association, known as SADACCA. His contribution can be measured not only by the organisation he leads, but by the lives, relationships and opportunities strengthened by his work.

SADACCA has served Sheffield's African and Caribbean communities for generations. Under Olivier's leadership, it continues to provide a culturally familiar and welcoming place where people of all ages can find support, celebrate their heritage and build relationships. Its work spans care, health and wellbeing, youth engagement, education, employment, enterprise, music, sport and culture.

Olivier understands that strong community institutions must do more than provide services. They must help people feel represented, respected and included in decisions affecting their lives. He amplifies community voices and ensures that lived



experience informs research, policy and public-service delivery.

Partnership is central to his approach. Olivier has brought together community

organisations, universities, local authorities and cultural institutions. As a co-investigator in the Ethnicity and Unequal Ageing project, he has helped explore how ethnicity and structural inequality shape later life, contributing community knowledge to research creating a fairer future.

He has championed African heritage and cultural participation, encouraging understanding between communities. Those who work alongside him recognise a leader who serves with humility, integrity and compassion, develops others and creates opportunities for future leaders.

Olivier's work reaches beyond any single project. It strengthens the foundations that allow communities to support themselves, influence decisions and plan confidently for the future.

In honouring Olivier Tsemo, we celebrate quiet, consistent and collaborative leadership that helps people feel seen, connected and empowered, an inspiring expression of Honouring Our Communities.

Charles Adegboro

Building Confidence in the Classroom and Beyond

As Head of Mathematics, **Charles Adegboro** helps young people overcome challenges, recognise their abilities and aim higher – both in the classroom and through the Box Fit club he runs at his school in York.

For many young people, mathematics can feel intimidating. A difficult problem or disappointing result can quickly become the belief that they are simply “not good at maths”. Charles Adegboro is working to change that.

As Head of Mathematics, Charles is recognised not only for his knowledge of the subject, but also for his ability to build confidence in the young people he teaches. He works hard to ensure that students feel supported, challenged and motivated, whatever their starting point.

His approach is rooted in the belief that every student has the capacity to progress. Those who are struggling receive additional guidance, while students who are already doing well are encouraged to aim even higher.

Through clear explanations, engaging lessons and consistent encouragement, Charles has helped students develop a more positive relationship with mathematics. Young people who may once have doubted themselves have discovered that, with the right support and determination, they can achieve more than they imagined.

Charles was nominated for *Honouring Black Britain 2026* by Amelia Butler, who described him as far more than a mathematics teacher. Her tribute presents a dedicated educator, supportive leader and approachable role model who genuinely cares about helping young people become the best versions of themselves.

Students know they can ask Charles questions, seek his advice and learn from their mistakes. He treats people fairly and with respect, creating an environment in which young people feel comfortable enough to try, even when they are uncertain of the answer.

His commitment to young people also extends beyond the mathematics classroom.

Charles runs a Box Fit club at the school, sharing his passion for boxing and physical fitness with students. The



club gives young people an opportunity to stay active while developing discipline, determination and self-confidence.

Box Fit reinforces many of the values Charles promotes in his teaching: consistency, focus, hard work and the willingness to keep going when something becomes difficult. Students learn that progress rarely happens immediately. It comes through practice, patience and the courage to learn from setbacks.

The lessons gained through Box Fit can help young people in many other areas of their lives. They learn to manage frustration, remain focused and understand that difficulty does not mean failure. It is often simply part of the process of improving.

Another quality students value is Charles's gift for storytelling. He shares stories from his own experiences and about people who have overcome

challenges to achieve their goals. These stories are entertaining, but they also remind students that setbacks are a normal part of any successful journey.

A story told at the right moment can remain with a young person long after a lesson has ended. It can offer encouragement when they face a new obstacle or begin to doubt themselves.

The 2026 Black History Month theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, asks us to recognise people whose everyday work strengthens the lives of those around them. Charles Adegboro represents that spirit.

Through mathematics, Box Fit, storytelling and personal encouragement, he is helping young people develop knowledge, resilience and self-belief. His work reminds us that great teaching is not measured only by examination results. It is also found in the student who begins to believe, “I can do this.”

Samantha Torindo: Advocacy rooted in action

Working across law, governance and community advocacy, Samantha Torindo combines frontline experience with a determination to change the systems behind injustice.

Samantha Torindo is a multi-disciplinary leader whose work connects the realities faced by individuals with the decisions made in courtrooms, organisations and policy settings. She understands that meaningful change requires both immediate support and long-term reform.

Her approach is grounded in action. Whether defending disadvantaged people, managing national corporate responsibilities or contributing to high-level policy, Samantha brings courage, accountability and purpose. She examines the structures and regulations behind inequality and works to make them fairer.

This ability to move between grassroots advocacy and institutional leadership distinguishes Samantha's contribution. Her experience on the front line ensures that the voices of people affected by injustice are not lost when policies are discussed or decisions are made. At the same time, her understanding of governance

enables her to turn lived experience into recommendations for lasting change.

Her work places her in challenging environments. Yet she remains prepared to ask difficult questions, confront unfairness and accept responsibility for achieving better outcomes. Her leadership is bold, but it is also rooted in service and the belief that institutions should be accountable to the people they affect.

Her nominator, Godfrey Nengomasha, describes Samantha as possessing a rare combination of "courtroom-tested grit and sophisticated institutional leadership". He celebrates her refusal to remain within the comfort of the boardroom when people need someone beside them.

Samantha's strength lies in her ability to work on both sides of change: standing beside people when they need support while challenging the systems that allowed injustice to happen. Her work brings lived experience into the places where decisions are made, helping turn individual struggles into lasting reform.



Anna Njie: Where culture and community come together

Through Go Africa, Anna Njie has created welcoming spaces where culture is celebrated, young people flourish and local businesses find new opportunities.

Anna Njie believes culture can preserve history, build confidence, support livelihoods and bring neighbours together. Through the Go Africa Community Hub, she turns that belief into practical programmes for African and Caribbean communities across London.

Go Africa is a social enterprise working across culture, education, enterprise and wellbeing. Under Anna's leadership, people can explore their heritage while gaining skills and opportunities for the future.

Young people are central to her work. Workshops in African arts, crafts and storytelling give them room to create, explore their heritage and express themselves. For those disconnected from their cultural roots, these experiences strengthen confidence and reveal the history they carry forward.

Anna also supports African and Caribbean entrepreneurs. Community markets, business showcases and enterprise programmes give traders places to promote products and develop

their businesses. This helps local talent become more visible and creates routes towards income and growth.

Her festivals, exhibitions and community gatherings bring people from different backgrounds together through African culture. They provide stages for artists and encourage conversation, curiosity and respect between communities.

Anna has extended this work through the development and programming of the Black Cultural Centre in Islington. The centre combines cultural activities with business mentoring, wellbeing programmes and practical support for individuals and families. Her health initiatives are designed around the needs and experiences of African and Caribbean communities, helping services reach people more effectively.

Anna's achievement is not simply the number of projects she has delivered. It is the network of people, businesses and ideas she has brought together. Through Go Africa, she is making culture part of everyday community life while opening doors for others.



DR CHERYL DIANE PARKINSON

*Helping young people see
themselves in stories*

Through her teaching, research and writing, Dr Cheryl Diane Parkinson explores Black identity, challenges stereotypes and encourages a deeper understanding of history.

Jacqueline Parkinson celebrates her sustained leadership, cultural contribution and commitment to education.

I would like to honour Dr Cheryl Diane Parkinson for her sustained daily leadership, professional excellence, cultural contribution and community commitment.

Cheryl completed her undergraduate degree in English Literature in 1998. She then studied for an MA in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature in English with Professor David Dabydeen at the University of Warwick in 2001 and became a secondary school teacher in 2004.

As a teacher, she was shocked when another adult commented that she should have a sign above her door reading: "Beware: Educated, Strong Black Woman." This negatively intended comment stayed with her and later became a catalyst for her PhD studies.

It was also as a teacher that she became involved with the Black Teachers' Association. She wrote about her experience at a conference where she sought legal advice concerning a classroom display at a parents' evening entitled "The Good Side of Slavery".

She began her PhD in 2011. As the only Black student, she noticed how few Black women she encountered within teaching or academia were educated to doctoral level. This was something she felt she could help change.

Her PhD thesis, *Exploring the Fictional Origin of Stereotypes of the Angry Black Woman and the Strong Black Woman*, examined negative stereotypes towards Black women in Britain. Her research contributed to the exploration of the treatment of Black women, expanding knowledge and making a cultural contribution.

As a teacher, Cheryl demonstrates sustained daily leadership. She has delivered lunchtime lectures around Black History Month in schools in London, Coventry,



Cambridge and Peterborough. She has also written a module on slavery and the slave trade, approaching the subject with sensitivity towards the experiences of enslaved people and their descendants.

She is part of a school anti-racism club that validates students' experiences of racism both in and out of school. She also helped develop an anti-racism policy within her school that is now operational.

Through *Stories for Change* with the United Kingdom Literacy Association, she is involved in using stories to help change how topics are taught. This includes how teachers address racist language in texts, with protecting and educating students at the heart of the work. The aim is for this continuing professional development to reach schools nationally.

Cheryl has written a scheme of work around Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, focusing on Britain, empire and the role of Caliban. She has also used poetry to support learning, including Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*.

Her wider community contribution includes guest lecturing at Atlantic Technological University in Ireland on the hidden descendants of African slavery, exploring narratives of identity and belonging.

At Goldsmiths, University of London, she has lectured on decolonising the curriculum, examining the National Curriculum and changes needed to make it more inclusive. She has also delivered workshops on identity and belonging in schools in London, Cornwall, Coventry and Buckinghamshire.

Her book *Last Girl In* was longlisted

for the Branford Boase Award and the Little Rebels Award in 2024. In 2025, she won the UKLA Brenda Eastwood Award for Diversity and Inclusion, recognising the impact of her work.

She also received a GLL Literary Award in 2026, with further workshops planned at Boston Library and two schools in Spalding, Lincolnshire.

Last Girl In explores identity and belonging through Kerry Ann, who travels backwards in time, is taught cricket by her teenage grandfather and experiences the London race riots of 1958.

Her forthcoming book, *Grendlesham*, is due for publication in 2027. A modern-day Beowulf story, it places a Black protagonist within a retelling of a foundational Old English epic. Published by Dinosaur Books, a Black-owned business, it continues Cheryl's commitment to weaving Black British history into fiction that entertains and educates.

Further school and community workshops are planned for 2027, continuing her work with young people across different settings.

Cheryl demonstrates sustained daily leadership through her work in schools, the wider community and nationally. Through fiction and nonfiction, teaching, workshops and lecturing, she engages people with questions of history, identity and representation.

I believe her impact is significant. Her commitment to challenging prejudice and changing understanding through education makes her deeply deserving of recognition through Honouring Black Britain 2026.



Councillor Rahima Farah

Building trust, bringing communities together

Through public health, practical support and civic leadership, Councillor Rahima Farah works to ensure that communities in Liverpool are heard and supported.

Abdi Adam pays tribute to a leader whose compassion and determination are helping people overcome barriers and access opportunities.

By Abdi Adam

It is with great pride that I celebrate Councillor Rahima Farah, whose leadership and community commitment have made a difference across public health, civic representation and social justice.

As a public health specialist and

community advocate, she has consistently demonstrated a deep understanding of the barriers faced by Black and minoritised communities. She works tirelessly to address them with compassion, cultural understanding and practical action.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rahima played a vital role in addressing vaccine hesitancy within ethnically diverse communities. Recognising that trust and access were significant barriers, she worked at a grassroots level to bring healthcare directly into communities.

Through collaboration with local organisations and faith groups, she helped establish pop-up vaccination clinics in trusted community locations. Using community WhatsApp groups, word-of-mouth networks and culturally appropriate messaging, she helped ensure that accurate health information reached

people in ways that felt safe and relatable.

This work supported efforts to increase vaccine uptake among Black communities that were often overlooked or underserved. It demonstrated her ability to turn public health priorities into meaningful action shaped around people's circumstances and concerns.

Rahima's commitment to tackling health inequalities continues through her work as a social prescriber, helping people access services and support suited to their needs. Her approach recognises that health is shaped by social, economic and cultural circumstances, alongside access to clinical care.

A key strength of her leadership is her determination to ensure that underrepresented voices help shape healthcare delivery. She has led and contributed to public consultations exploring

how ethnic minority and Muslim communities, including Black African Muslim communities, experience mental health services.

By creating inclusive spaces for dialogue, she has enabled people to share their experiences, concerns and suggestions. This work helps bring lived experience into discussions about services, challenges stigma and encourages greater cultural awareness within mental health provision.

In public life, Rahima brings the same commitment to listening and representation. As a councillor representing Toxteth, she works to strengthen relationships between local government and communities who have often felt excluded or unheard.

Through regular engagement and advocacy, she creates opportunities for residents to influence decisions affecting their lives. Her approach is grounded in being available, understanding concerns and helping people navigate the organisations and services on which they depend.

Her dedication received national recognition when she won the Community Champion award at the 2024 LGIU and CCLA Councillor Awards. It was a fitting acknowledgement of her commitment, although awards can only capture a fraction of the difference she makes through her everyday work.

Her contribution to women's health further demonstrates her commitment to equity. Through her involvement in the Liverpool Women's Health Taskforce, she advocates for policies and services that recognise the diverse needs of women from different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

“She helps communities and institutions understand one another, working to ensure that services are accessible, inclusive and culturally aware.”

She challenges approaches that assume everyone faces the same circumstances and promotes support that respects the realities of the communities she serves. Listening to those experiences is central to her understanding of effective public service.

Beyond policy and advocacy, Rahima remains deeply rooted in practical community support. She works closely with organisations such as New Beginnings Improving Lives CIC to help vulnerable families, particularly those from migrant and minority backgrounds, access food banks, fuel assistance and

housing advice.

Her ability to connect people with the right support at the right time makes a meaningful difference to those experiencing hardship. It is in these everyday acts of service that her care for the community is especially clear.

Rahima is also committed to creating better opportunities for young people. She champions local employment and vocational training initiatives in Toxteth, recognising how economic inequality can contribute to long-term disadvantage.

By supporting pathways into employment for young people from diverse backgrounds, she helps create opportunities for them to build confidence, develop skills and shape their futures.

For me, Rahima is a leader who embodies courage, compassion and purpose. She helps communities and institutions understand one another, working to ensure that services are accessible, inclusive and culturally aware.

She is a trusted community figure, an advocate for change and a role model for future generations. Her contribution to public health, social justice and community empowerment makes her deeply deserving of recognition through Honouring Black Britain 2026.



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Corporal Caleb Jones

Service, self-belief and supporting others

From growing up in Grenada to supporting troops in Norway's extreme cold, **Corporal Caleb Jones** has built an Army career around teamwork and service. Now working with the recruiting outreach team at Woolwich, he speaks about mentoring soldiers, challenging stereotypes and helping young people see new possibilities.

INTERVIEW BY OLUWAGBENGA DANIELS

What inspired you to join the British Army?

Throughout my formative years in Grenada, my leadership qualities and ability to function as part of a team were recognised by mentors and elders in my community. My uncle took note and advised me to join the Army, something no member of my family had done at that time.

In many ways, it was a chance to live up to those expectations. On a personal level, it was a way to see the world and fill a void within myself. Looking back, I don't regret a second of it.

Can you tell us about your military career so far?

I've been incredibly fortunate as a chef in the Royal Logistic Corps. I served with 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery in Plymouth from 2018 to 2021. After promotion to Lance Corporal, I moved to 4th Regiment Royal Artillery at Alanbrooke Barracks in Thirsk, where I served from 2021 to 2025.

During my eight years as a chef and production supervisor, I've deployed on numerous exercises and an operational tour. These included a jungle exercise in Belize in 2019, a cold-weather winter survival package in Norway in 2020, and Operation Elgin in Kosovo in 2023. I was then promoted to Corporal and moved into Recruiting Group.

What does your current role at Woolwich involve?

I'm the Operations NCO for the outreach team at Woolwich. My responsibilities include liaising with civilian colleagues, Army Careers Centres and other outreach teams, managing our programme of activities and assigning personnel to the jobs best suited to them.

Our team brings together people from across the Army, including engineers, infantry soldiers, medics, military police, signallers, tank crew and aircrew.

I frequently visit schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities. I relish the opportunity to inspire young people from my own and other backgrounds who might never have thought an Army career could be a natural fit for them.

I take great pride in challenging stereotypes and changing how the public sees the Army.

How has working outside your chef trade changed your experience?

Army life can be very regimented, and finding room for innovation or unfamiliar methods can be challenging. Working outside my trade, it's refreshing to see things done differently and have greater opportunities to bring about change.

"Never limit yourself, your imagination or what you believe you can achieve."

Which overseas assignment has had the greatest impact on you?

I deployed to Romania and Bulgaria at the beginning of 2025, just before joining Recruiting Group. Although I was thousands of miles from home, I found we shared common values: putting family first, respecting our elders, and a sense of discipline and respect.

I arrived not knowing what to expect and departed feeling as though I'd lived there for years. I now have an incredible amount of respect and admiration for the people of both countries.

What has been your most demanding working environment?

Norway in 2020 was a real eye-opener. Supporting troops in temperatures of minus 28 degrees Celsius gave me a new understanding of what the human body can do with proper training and the right equipment.

The relationship between physical fitness and mental strength in those conditions should never be taken for granted.

What qualifications have you gained?

I've completed NVQs in professional cookery and personally enrolled on and completed a qualification as a production





chef supervisor, preparing me for a head chef role in a civilian establishment.

Outside my trade, I've used my learning credits to complete first aid at work and door supervisor courses. I plan to use further learning credits towards a degree in either business management or social work.

How do you support and mentor other soldiers?

As a Corporal and one of the older members of the team, soldiers naturally look to me for professional and personal guidance. I never shy away from those responsibilities. I relish the opportunity to share my knowledge.

When I need support, I have an excellent chain of command and a trusted group of peers around me. We're consistently looking for ways to develop and advance as a team.

Are you involved in community or charitable work?

Outside the Army, I've worked with The Little Things Charity, providing hot meals for homeless and disadvantaged people at Old Street. We also distribute clothing, groceries and other items provided by volunteers and through charitable donations.

“Motivation comes and goes, but a disciplined individual will always find their way back to the path.”

What achievement makes you most proud?

In 2024, I received a Brigade Commander's Commendation for Commitment and Dedication as part of 7th Light Mechanised Brigade.

It recognised my efforts during the busiest year of my career. It was a timely reminder that hard work does pay off.

What has helped you through difficult times?

The Army doesn't always provide motivation or a clear sense of direction. Many soldiers

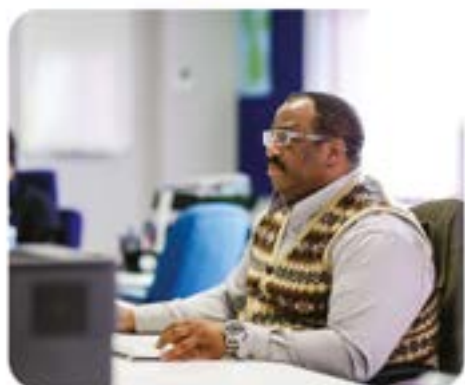
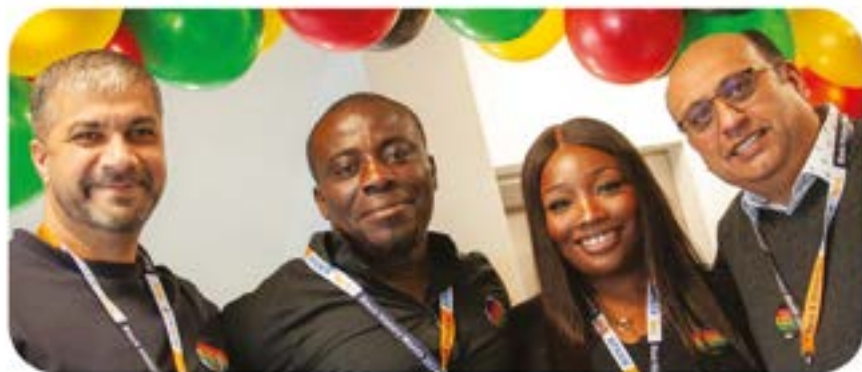
admit to feeling stuck or unseen from time to time. I'm no different.

My faith has been my saving grace during those times, alongside a “glass half full, never half empty” mentality. I firmly believe happiness comes from within. Motivation comes and goes, but a disciplined individual will always find their way back to the path.

What would you say to a young person who doesn't see people like themselves represented in the Armed Forces?

You'll never know until you try. I relish the opportunity to prove wrong those who say we can't or don't belong.

Never limit yourself, your imagination or what you believe you can achieve. A passage I return to is 2 Peter 1:5-6, which speaks about building on faith with goodness, knowledge, self-control and perseverance. Those qualities mean a great deal to me.



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Patrick Burrows

Fighting, smiling and determined

BASED ON A NOMINATION BY PAULINE ANGUIN

“Fighting, smiling, and determined” is how Pauline Anguin introduces her nomination of Patrick Burrows. It is a description that captures the spirit of a man who has turned his own experience of prostate cancer into a source of information, encouragement and support for others.



Patrick has lived in Wembley, North London, all his life. Many people know him through his work as a driving instructor or as “DJ Instructor” on community radio station Roots FM. Those familiar connections have taken on another purpose through his regular workshops, “Breaking the Silence on Prostate Cancer: Real Talk”.

In December 2023, at the age of 60, Patrick was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Pauline explains that the cancer returned despite treatment and that he was continuing to receive treatment when she submitted his nomination. Throughout this experience, he made a decision to reach out to others facing similar challenges.

Living with illness can bring questions that are difficult to put into words. Medical appointments, treatment choices and changes to everyday life can feel overwhelming. Patrick’s response has been to create opportunities for people to hear clear explanations and speak openly with others who understand what they are going through.

In the year leading up to his nomination, he had been holding regular workshops to improve understanding of prostate cancer within the wider community. The sessions bring medical clinicians together with people who have personal experience of diagnosis and treatment, allowing professional knowledge and lived experience to inform the conversation.

Clinicians speak on a range of topics relating to prostate cancer. Community members share what treatment has meant in their own lives. Together, these contributions help make unfamiliar processes easier to understand and give attendees room to raise concerns that they may have kept to themselves.

Patrick brings particular openness to conversations about sex and intimacy during

and after treatment. These can be difficult subjects to discuss, even with people close to us. His presentations address practical questions about maintaining a sex life, approaching the subject with factual information, humour and a willingness to speak plainly.

Pauline describes his ability to ask the questions others may feel too embarrassed to raise. That willingness helps create a setting in which sensitive concerns can be acknowledged. People have an opportunity to understand what they may need to discuss further with their own healthcare teams.

Women are welcome at the workshops and participate in the discussions. Partners, mothers, sisters, friends and colleagues can all be part of someone’s support network. Having space to ask their own questions helps them better understand the experiences of loved ones living with prostate cancer.

This inclusion recognises that a diagnosis affects relationships as well as the person receiving treatment. Supporters may have worries they find difficult to express or questions about how best to help. Real Talk gives them a place in the conversation, with their own concerns recognised.

Although the workshops are based in North West London, awareness of Patrick’s work has spread. Pauline’s nomination records invitations to deliver sessions elsewhere in London and in cities including Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Manchester, particularly in places with significant Black communities. These invitations reflect interest in the approach he has developed locally.

Behind the workshops is a substantial personal commitment. Patrick has been paying costs from his own pocket, including venue hire, free refreshments, printed information and awareness materials. Audio-visual equipment, support group

activity and the organisation of future events also require time and resources.

Making the sessions welcoming and accessible involves work that audiences may never see. A venue must be arranged, speakers brought together and information prepared. Patrick has taken on those responsibilities alongside the demands of his own treatment.

To help sustain the workshops, he has also been fundraising. On 2 May 2026, he organised a black-tie dinner and dance to raise money so that the work could continue. It was another way of bringing people together around a shared concern for community health.

Pauline’s nomination places Patrick’s motivation at the centre of his contribution: he wants the journey to be easier for those who come after him. His workshops encourage people to become better informed, ask questions and seek professional advice about their health.

Patrick Burrows has used the relationships he built over a lifetime in Wembley to open conversations that can be hard to begin. Through Real Talk, he offers his community knowledge, companionship and the reassurance of being heard. Fighting, smiling and determined, he continues to make room for others while navigating his own experience of cancer.



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MONICA D. BROWN

Making sure every story matters

Through a career spanning more than forty years, Monica Brown has helped people find their voices and share their experiences. Amy Hurst, on behalf of Warwickshire County Record Office, celebrates a communicator and community advocate helping to ensure that Black histories take their place in the county's shared record.

By Amy Hurst, Warwickshire County Record Office

Monica Brown is an inspiring communicator and community advocate whose work is changing how Black histories and lived experiences are preserved and celebrated. During more than forty years in broadcasting, education, journalism and communications coaching, she has consistently empowered others to find their voices and share their stories with confidence and authenticity.

Born in Birmingham to Jamaican Windrush-generation parents and raised in both Warwickshire and Jamaica, Monica brings a deeply personal understanding of migration, identity and cultural memory to her work. That understanding, combined with her naturally warm manner, allows her to connect with people across generations and backgrounds.

Her career has taken her through television production and directing in Jamaica, national radio broadcasting, university teaching in media production, and award-winning work in communications and media engagement. Across these different settings, she has helped people recognise the value of what they have to say and develop the confidence to say it.

At Warwickshire County Record Office, we see these qualities in her work on Telling Our Own Stories. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, this initiative addresses the historic under-representation of Black and other global ethnic communities county's archives. Monica is our project manager and, for us, she embodies its purpose.

Her passion, skills and experience have helped us connect with overlooked groups, including communities of African Caribbean descent, throughout Warwickshire. She has encouraged people to revisit their heritage, recognise their contribution to the county's history and take practical steps to preserve and share their experiences.



Working alongside archivists, Monica supports communities through workshops and ongoing guidance. She encourages them to create their own archives and contribute to the official county history. Her philosophy is simple: “everyone’s story matters.” This belief runs through every aspect of her work, giving people confidence that their experiences deserve to be heard and remembered.

The impact is significant. Under Monica’s leadership, Telling Our Own Stories has helped collect and preserve previously unheard narratives. A major milestone has been acquiring the first personal archive of a Black Windrush-generation individual connected to Warwickshire. For our service and the communities we work with, this represents an important step towards a more inclusive historical record.

Its importance reaches beyond a single collection. Preserving Black lives and experiences within formal archives helps build a fuller understanding of Warwickshire and the people who have shaped it. Monica’s work is helping to ensure that these contributions become part of the county’s history, available for future generations to

explore and understand.

The project also empowers individuals to collect oral histories, giving participants a sense of ownership and pride. Monica draws on her broadcasting experience to help people capture these lasting testimonies. By supporting communities to record their own voices, she helps preserve the personal experiences and perspectives that bring history to life.

We have seen this work encourage conversation and appreciation, strengthening connections between people and supporting collective well-being. The process of sharing a story can be meaningful in itself. Through Monica’s encouragement, participants have opportunities to reflect on their experiences and recognise their place within a wider community history.

A former colleague describes Monica as “a force of nature”, and her influence extends far beyond this project. As a communications coach and educator, she has worked with students, business leaders, community members and professionals, equipping them with the confidence and skills to express themselves clearly.

Those she mentors often go on to

inspire others. This is an important part of her contribution: the encouragement she offers does not end with one conversation, workshop or project. It continues through people who feel better able to share their knowledge, tell their stories and support those around them.

Monica’s work addresses both historical absence and present-day representation. Her commitment to education, inclusion and cultural preservation helps future generations inherit a richer, more accurate understanding of Warwickshire’s past and present. She believes communities should have an active role in deciding how their experiences are recorded and remembered.

For these reasons, we believe Monica deserves recognition through Honouring Black Britain 2026. In celebrating her, we honour a lifetime dedicated to empowering others and safeguarding heritage. Her work reflects connection, inclusion and truth, demonstrating that when communities have the means to tell their own stories, they enrich the understanding of us all. It is a contribution whose value will continue to grow as future generations discover the voices and experiences she has helped preserve.

Dr Agatha Nortley-Meshe

Opening doors for Black leaders in Healthcare

From caring for patients as a GP to shaping NHS services in London, Dr Agatha Nortley-Meshe has combined clinical leadership with a commitment to supporting others. Agnelo Fernandes celebrates her achievements and her encouragement of aspiring Black healthcare leaders.

By Agnelo Fernandes

Dr Agatha Nortley-Meshe has shown courage, integrity and compassion throughout her career, caring for patients while helping other Black healthcare professionals progress into leadership.

I had the privilege of being her GP trainer and am incredibly proud of what she has gone on to achieve. As a Black woman of Ghanaian descent in senior NHS leadership, she is an inspiration to many, particularly women of colour.

Agatha is a GP, a wife and a mother of two children, both of whom she had while studying at medical school. Alongside these responsibilities, she has gone on to hold senior leadership positions, serving as Assistant Medical Director at the London

Ambulance Service and subsequently as NHS England’s Medical Director for Primary Care in London.

Throughout her career, she has championed equality, diversity and inclusion, from frontline practice to national level. As a Black GP and a leader within the wider NHS, she has mentored, supported and nurtured the leadership aspirations of Black healthcare professionals, including those seeking to progress to board level.

Her support for others is grounded in authenticity and her own experience. She speaks openly about the experiences of Black women in senior leadership and the barriers they can encounter. Through mentoring and contributions to forums, she

has helped create opportunities for women to share those experiences and discuss how to overcome obstacles to progression.

As a GP, Agatha has touched the lives of thousands of people. Through her wider NHS leadership, her influence has reached many more. Her work with the ambulance service, digital first-contact services and NHS 111 has contributed to the transformation of urgent and emergency care.

In her NHS England role, she has also helped shape the development of neighbourhood working, bringing together primary care, local authorities, communities and the voluntary sector. This work reflects the breadth of her contribution, connecting clinical care with the organisations and people who support communities.

For me, the qualities that define Agatha’s leadership are courage, commitment, integrity and compassion. She uses her experience to encourage others, particularly Black people with ambitions to take on greater responsibility and contribute to their communities.

I am proud of her achievements and equally proud of the support she gives to those following her. Her achievements show what is possible; her mentoring helps others believe they can achieve it too.



HONOURING THE ENFIELD CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION

Forty years ago, a quiet but powerful movement began in Enfield, rooted in cultural pride, neighbourly solidarity and a determination to support Caribbean people across the borough. Today, the Enfield Caribbean Association (ECA) remains one of Enfield's most enduring community charities, touching thousands of lives through its social, cultural, educational and wellbeing work.

The ECA's story begins with Ken "Gilbert" Allen, a Jamaican-born educator whose influence still shapes the organisation. Arriving in Britain in 1962, Allen first trained as an engineer with the London Stock Exchange before finding his calling in education. He went on to work in primary schools in Hackney and later lectured in Electronic Engineering at Southgate College, building strong links with local families.

In 1986, Allen founded the Enfield Caribbean Association as a charity dedicated to advocacy, cultural celebration and practical support. His contribution to education and community life was recognised in 2007, when he was named a Freeman of Enfield. Although he passed away in 2019, his legacy remains central to the ECA's mission.

Allen was supported by John La Rose, the Trinidadian publisher, activist and founder of New Beacon Books in Finsbury Park, along with a committed network of volunteers. Together, they helped the ECA become a lifeline for Caribbean families at a time when many institutions failed to meet their needs or recognise their experiences.

The organisation's beginnings were modest. From a Portakabin in what is now the Asda car park in Edmonton Green, Allen offered informal advocacy and advice. As demand grew, this developed into a more structured support network, helping residents with housing, benefits, social care and access to local services.

In the 1990s, the ECA launched one of its most influential initiatives: the Enfield Caribbean Supplementary School. At a time when Black children were often underestimated in mainstream education, the school helped improve academic confidence and achievement while strengthening cultural identity.

Health and wellbeing have also been central to the ECA's work. Its gentle exercise



OVETA MCINNIS

classes offer more than fitness, creating connection, routine and community for people who might otherwise feel isolated.

The Friday Luncheon Club has proved especially popular with older members of the community. Held at Green Towers in Edmonton, it is supported by volunteers and management, who help serve meals, lead gentle exercise and organise occasional games. More than a weekly meal, it offers companionship, activity and a welcoming place to connect.

Under the leadership of its current chair, Oveta McInnis, the ECA continues to honour its founding legacy while responding to changing community needs. As it looks ahead to the next 40 years, the organisation remains committed to preserving Caribbean heritage, strengthening local support and ensuring its work continues to serve future generations.

ABOUT AVRIL NANTON

Until January 2026, when I retired, I worked as an independent tour guide specialising in Black history in London, a path I came to after being made redundant in my 50s and struggling to find work. Encouraged by a friend who was already a guide, I joined the Clerkenwell and Islington Guiding Association course. The training was demanding, with exams, evening classes and Saturday practical sessions, and required us to learn full walking routes in detail. As part of the course, I also gave a presentation on Arsenal Football Club, including its move from Woolwich Arsenal to Highbury and the Black footballers who had played for the club.

For the course, I created a complete 12-stop Black history walk around Islington, beginning at Angel Station and ending at



AVRIL NANTON

Sadler's Wells Theatre, a venue with important links to Black dance companies. I was told that a walk of this kind in Islington had not been done before. After passing my exams in 2016, I continued developing walks, including *Black Statues Around Westminster*, based on my presentation *Black Statues Around London*. That walk highlights around six statues and monuments in central London connected to Black Londoners. I have since created walks through the City of London, Hyde Park war memorials, Tottenham and Islington, with the wider aim of showing that every London borough has Black history worth discovering.

In 2018, Jody Burton and I began developing *Black London: History, Art & Culture in Over 120 Places*, an accessible book designed to introduce readers to overlooked Black figures, sites and stories across the capital. Published on 22 June 2021, Windrush Day in the UK, the book received an enthusiastic response, with coverage in newspapers and magazines and appearances on ITV local news, BBC local news, BBC Radio London and London Live. We later worked with Blue Crow Media on the *Black History London Map*, published in September 2022, which features 50 sites connected to the Black history of London and offers another way for people to explore the city's Black heritage.

Today, I remain active in my community, volunteering with local groups, organising a litter-picking initiative in my local park, and making time to visit museums, exhibitions and other cultural events.





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Ena Collymore-Woodstock OD MBE

WWII veteran, magistrate and Girl Guides commissioner

Ena Collymore-Woodstock packed an extraordinary amount into her 108 years, breaking new ground and serving as an inspirational trailblazer for women on both sides of the Atlantic in professions traditionally regarded as 'men's work'.

Born in Spanish Town, Jamaica, in 1917 Ena Joyce St Clare Collymore was a pioneer from the beginning of her working life. At age 20, she brazenly responded to an advertisement for a 'Male Clerk' by applying for a job as an administrative clerk in a magistrate's court in Spanish Town. No women worked there; they were not permitted to sit on juries until 1945.

Ena recalled people dropping by out of curiosity to see "this young miss who applied for the job of male clerk". She would return as Resident Magistrate 22 years later, the first Jamaican woman to hold judicial office.

In 1943, Ena was one of the first women to leave the Caribbean to volunteer in WWII. They sailed to England, surviving a torpedo attack on the way. On arrival, Ena joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the women's branch of the British Army, and she was sent with other female recruits to a training base in Surrey, where they lived in freezing accommodation and were



trained in military drill. She was assigned the role of stenographer, but this didn't suit her adventurous spirit.

"There was an overall enthusiasm to be part of the War effort, I wanted to do my part... I wanted more responsibility and more action... I didn't come here to do what I was doing at home."

Eventually the War Office heeded her requests for more challenging work and sent her to an evaluation unit where Ena opted to join the Anti-Aircraft Corps and became a radar operator, plotting the movements of Allied and enemy aircraft. She was the first Black woman to serve as a radar operator in the British Army, at first in Oswestry and she was later posted to Belgium.

Around 600 Caribbean women volunteered to join the ATS in the war. Following her demob in 1946, Ena took a secretarial job in the War Office while studying for a law degree and would go on to achieve a series of firsts in the field of law.

She was the first Black woman to train at Gray's Inn to become a barrister and was called to the bar in 1948. On her return to Jamaica, she was appointed Clerk of Courts for St. James Parish, the first woman to hold that post. In 1953 she was the first woman to be appointed as Assistant Crown Solicitor. Then in 1959, Ena became Jamaica's first woman to hold judicial office when she was appointed a Resident Magistrate.

In 1951 Ena had married and went on to have three children. Maternity leave was not for her. When she became the first woman to sit on the bench in 1959, the





Gleaner, Jamaica's leading newspaper, marvelled that she "combines the two demanding worlds of homemaking and career". Her son would travel with her in his bassinet to courts around the island and later her children would sit at her feet and listen as she passed judgment.

When juvenile courts were introduced on the island in 1964, Ena served as its chair. Having studied the psychology of juvenile delinquents, she believed in youth rehabilitation and helped to shape Jamaica's child justice framework. Her judicial role extended beyond Jamaica to the wider Caribbean working in the Cayman Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat and Anguilla.

Throughout this time, she was also very active in the Girl Guides and served for 10 years as Chief Commissioner for Jamaica, for which she was appointed an MBE. She was also president of the Caribbean area council for Soroptimist International, a global women's volunteering organisation, working to improve the status of women and children in the Caribbean. She was instrumental in forming clubs in the Turks and Caicos Islands, Anguilla and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Ena's legacy in law, advocacy and community involvement has continued with all her children being involved in community work, and through three generations of lawyers. Her daughter is a Kings Counsel, two granddaughters are lawyers (in Jamaica and Barbados), her grandson a lawyer in Florida and a granddaughter who is a social worker and licensed therapist. Her first granddaughter, Amanda Riley-Jordan, from the family's third generation of lawyers, said

that community spirit was a huge theme of Ena's life, a lesson in "selflessness" that Ena had passed down. "You cannot have a full life if you are only living for yourself," she said.

Ena Collymore-Woodstock's remarkable life was defined by determination, strength and a pioneering attitude, enabling her to succeed while serving in the British Army

and in the legal profession. She consistently opened doors for others to follow. She was the oldest female veteran of the British Army at the time of her passing in December 2025. Her 108 years spanned periods of profound social change, and through her many achievements she not only witnessed history but helped to shape it.



BERNADETTE THOMPSON OBE

Turning inclusion into action

A respected leader in people, culture and inclusion, **Bernadette Thompson OBE** has spent her career opening doors, challenging inequality and helping Black professionals to progress and thrive.

Known to many colleagues simply as Bernie, Bernadette Thompson is admired for combining strategic leadership with deeply personal support. She mentors, coaches and advocates for others, using her influence to amplify voices that might otherwise be overlooked.

Today, she is Director of People and Culture at North Middlesex University Hospital and Community Services. Her NHS career has included senior inclusion roles at King's College Hospital and Barts Health, following more than two decades of public service across several government departments and agencies.

Throughout that journey, Bernadette has worked to make inclusion part of how organisations operate and make decisions. Her leadership has helped create pathways for underrepresented talent, improve workplace experiences and demonstrate that fairness and organisational success must go hand in hand.

One of her most significant achievements was co-chairing the cross-government Race to the Top G6/7 Network for five years. Created to support ethnic minority civil servants in the grades immediately below the Senior Civil Service, the network grew to connect more than 1,000 members. It provided mentoring, development opportunities, leadership programmes and access to senior figures across government, helping colleagues prepare for progression while challenging the barriers holding them back.

Bernadette was nominated for *Honouring Black Britain 2026* by Samantha Ming, who describes her as one of the most influential and respected people, culture and inclusion leaders she has worked with. What stands out in Samantha's tribute is not only Bernadette's professional record, but her generosity and accessibility.

Beyond her executive roles, Bernadette continually gives her time to Black-led initiatives. She has supported the Black Talent Awards, served as a judge for the Black Healthcare Awards, contributed as a Trustee of Black Inclusion Week and advised Black Women in HR.

Within the NHS, she created the Black Women on NHS Boards group to raise

aspirations and strengthen support for Black women seeking senior leadership and board positions. It reflects her ability to turn a recognised inequality into practical action that helps others see a route forward.

Samantha describes Bernadette as someone who is always mentoring, coaching, advocating and making "good trouble" for the Black community. Wherever she goes, she says, Bernadette leaves a legacy of impact—and what she affectionately calls "sparkle".

That warmth matters. Bernadette's influence is not limited to strategies, committees or job titles. She makes time for people, rarely turns someone away and will go the extra mile to offer encouragement. She understands that meaningful change is created through human relationships as well as institutional decisions.

Bernadette received an OBE in 2021 for services to diversity and inclusion. Yet

formal recognition has never stopped her from continuing to serve. She remains resolute in championing race equality, improving workplace culture and helping future generations move into spaces where Black people have historically been underrepresented.

The 2026 theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, asks us to recognise those who use their experience, influence and opportunities to support others. Bernadette Thompson OBE embodies that spirit. She leads with purpose and courage, but also with generosity, humanity and pride in her Black identity.

Her career shows what becomes possible when aspiration is turned into action. By opening doors, challenging systems and encouraging others to recognise their own potential, Bernadette is not simply creating change for today. She is building a lasting legacy for those who follow.



TASE OPUTU

NOMINATED
BY AMANDEEP
DOLL

Leading pharmacy into a new era



Tase Oputu's election as the first President of the Royal College of Pharmacy in 2026 marked a significant moment for British pharmacy. For a profession concerned with the health of millions, it also brought an experienced NHS leader and committed advocate for racial equity to a position of national influence.

Born and raised in Brixton to Nigerian parents, Tase grew up with an understanding of the value of education. Her father was a nurse, helping to spark her interest in healthcare. Her mother, who raised five children, impressed upon her the importance of gaining qualifications and establishing a profession.

In a reflection published by Barts Health NHS Trust, Tase recalled the racism her mother experienced while working in the 1970s. Education offered something enduring: knowledge and skills that belonged to you. That belief helped shape her determination to succeed and her concern for the opportunities available to others.

Her career has taken her through hospital pharmacy, senior NHS responsibilities and professional leadership. Alongside her work in Britain, she volunteered in Tanzania, an experience she has described as renewing her appreciation of the NHS and strengthening her desire to make a positive difference to people's lives. Barts Health

Today, she serves as Associate Director for Medicines Optimisation, Medicines Value and Performance at NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board. Behind that lengthy title is work with a bearing on patients: helping ensure that medicines are used safely, effectively and fairly, while making responsible use of NHS resources.

Her responsibilities include high-cost medicines, governance and performance across the health system. These are decisions

with consequences for people managing illness, receiving treatment or relying on medication to maintain their independence. Bringing professional judgement to those decisions is an important part of protecting both patient care and the sustainability of services.

Tase's national leadership developed alongside this clinical and organisational experience. Elected to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's English Pharmacy Board in 2021, she became its Chair in 2023. She helped guide the profession during the transition towards a Royal College, before being elected its first President in March 2026.

As President, she leads the College's Senate, helping to shape its professional direction. The responsibility gives her an opportunity to influence how pharmacists are represented and supported, and how their expertise informs discussions about healthcare. Royal College of Pharmacy

For Amandeep Doll, who nominated Tase for Honouring Black Britain 2026, her commitment to inclusion is central to understanding her contribution. The nomination describes someone who has consistently highlighted the experiences of Black pharmacy professionals and encouraged colleagues to take their place in decision-making.

That commitment has included NHS staff network activity and helping to deliver the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's first major event focused on Black and minority ethnic professionals. Such work creates opportunities for colleagues to share experiences, raise concerns and discuss obstacles that can otherwise remain outside formal professional conversations.

Tase has drawn attention to the under-representation of Black professionals in senior positions. Her response has included mentoring and encouraging others to seek roles of influence. For people considering their next step, that encouragement can help turn an uncertain ambition into an application, a conversation or a willingness to put themselves forward.

Her nomination connects this work to a wider belief in public service. It recognises the importance of a leader who understands that professional excellence and fair access to opportunity belong together. Supporting talented colleagues to progress strengthens the institutions in which they work and broadens the experience available to inform decisions.

In July, Tase was named joint Pharmacist of the Year at the Black Healthcare Awards, sharing the honour with Dr Yeyenta Osasu. Presented by the Caribbean and African Health Network, the award recognised her leadership, contribution to pharmacy and commitment to tackling health inequalities. Royal College of Pharmacy

The recognition brought together several strands of her career: care for patients, service to her profession and sustained attention to whose voices are heard. Those priorities connect her everyday NHS responsibilities with the national role she now holds.

Becoming the first President of a Royal College is an achievement that will remain part of the profession's history. The work that follows will be measured through the organisation she helps build, the colleagues it supports and its contribution to better healthcare.

Tase brings to that task the experience of an NHS pharmacist and the conviction that opportunities should be open to everyone. From Brixton to national leadership, she has carried forward a belief in education and service, while encouraging others to recognise the value of their own experience and the contribution they can make.

ROBERT ADOLPHUS SMITH



In 1914, 20-year-old Robert Adolphus Smith was living in Good Hope, Clarendon, Jamaica, then part of the British Empire. When the First World War broke out, thousands of Caribbean men volunteered to defend Britain; more than 15,600 enlisted, with around two-thirds coming from Jamaica. Despite this enthusiasm, the War Office was reluctant to allow Black soldiers to fight against white European forces and even considered repatriating them. Intervention by King George V led to the establishment of the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) on 26th October 1915.

Robert joined the 7th Battalion in 1917. His three-year-old sister Sarah later recalled him kissing her goodbye before leaving - she would never see him again.

Facing Inequality and Hardship

From the outset, BWIR soldiers faced discrimination. They were largely restricted to labouring roles including digging trenches, carrying ammunition and serving as stretcher bearers. They were not permitted to become officers or use weapons in combat. Camps were often segregated, and although some battalions later saw active service in Palestine, opportunities for recognition were rare. Even so, Caribbean soldiers were denied pay increases granted to other troops.

Training for the regiment began at Seaford in Sussex in late 1915. The cold climate and poor accommodation proved devastating for men accustomed to Caribbean conditions. Nineteen soldiers died from pneumonia and mumps.

Conditions were just as harsh at sea. One battalion aboard the SS *Verdala* encountered freezing temperatures after being diverted to avoid German ships. Without proper winter clothing and lacking warm food due to frozen pipes, many soldiers suffered severe frostbite. By the time help arrived, it was too late for many: two men died, and over 100 suffered frostbite, some requiring amputations. Numerous others were so weakened they had to be repatriated without ever seeing the front line.

Service and Sacrifice

In June 1917, Robert's battalion was deployed to Belgium in preparation for the Third Battle of Ypres, known as Passchendaele. Canadian troops played a key role in the campaign, and a nearby dressing station became known as Canada Farm. On 12th September 1917, the area came under heavy bombardment. Robert was wounded and died the same day. He was buried at Canada Farm War Cemetery alongside four other BWIR soldiers killed in the same attack.

His parents received compensation of £3 and 4 pence (equivalent to about £180 today) for their son's death.

A Family Legacy

Robert's story survived through his sister Sarah, who later became part of the Windrush Generation. She passed his memory on to her daughter, Beulah Coombs. For years, the family believed Robert had no known grave until Beulah's daughter, Zennia, discovered its location and shared a photograph with Sarah shortly before her death.

Beulah later learned Robert had been awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal: items she remembered playing with as a child. She visited his grave with family members, leaving a photograph of Sarah there.

In 2017, Beulah attended the unveiling of the African and Caribbean War Memorial in London. She later published a book about Robert in 2022 and revisited his grave in 2025. His legacy continues through descendants, including a great-great-nephew serving in the British Army.

Robert Adolphus Smith is no longer forgotten; his story represents both the service and struggles of Caribbean soldiers in the First World War and continues to inspire new generations to recognise their place in British history.

HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

HONOURING BLACK BRITAIN 2026



ZARAH HENRY

At just 17, she is turning enterprise into opportunity, creating practical experiences that build confidence, skills and ambition in other young people.



STORMZY

He has turned cultural influence into opportunity, using music, education and philanthropy to open doors for young Black people and invest in the next generation.



SERGEANT AFUA AMPONSA

Through Army service, representation and education, she is opening doors for young people and showing that leadership creates opportunities for others.



DR DELROY BEVERLEY JP

He has transformed personal experience of disadvantage into a lifetime of service, opening pathways into education, business, justice and public life for others.



ANNA NJIE

She has created spaces where African and Caribbean culture, enterprise and community can flourish, strengthening identity while turning cultural pride into practical opportunity.



AKEIM MUNDELL BEM

He has placed community at the heart of education, turning compassion into practical support and helping young people and families overcome barriers to opportunity.



ADEBOLA ADISA

She brings families together in Darlington, using advocacy, community action and support to reduce isolation and strengthen everyday lives.



IAN THOMAS CBE

Through civic leadership and public service, he is helping shape a more inclusive City of London while widening opportunity and representation for others.



PROF. DIANE ASHIRU-OREDOPE

Her pioneering work in public health has protected lives, influenced global thinking on antimicrobial resistance and inspired a new generation of healthcare leaders.



Born in Hackney and raised in Waltham Forest, Jahran Allen-Thompson MBE grew up during a period marked by postcode conflict and youth violence.

Those experiences gave him an early understanding of the pressures facing young people and the importance of creating opportunities within communities. They also shaped his belief that leadership should be measured by the difference it makes to people's lives.

As Mortuary Service Operations Manager in East London, Jahran leads an essential service that supports communities during some of their most difficult moments.

Between 2022 and 2024, he designed and supervised the construction of key forensic facilities in London while continuing to manage mortality operations against the pressures created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Leadership should be measured by the difference it makes to people’s lives.”

Services could not stop while construction took place. Jahran had to coordinate staff, contractors and partner organisations while ensuring that the deceased and their families continued to be treated with care and respect.

His contribution helped protect an important public service and improve the facilities on which London's communities depend. Although much of this work happens away from public attention, it makes a real difference to families experiencing grief and loss.

Jahran's commitment to community also extends beyond his public service role.

Through Red Light Busking, he has supported work that records and shares stories from London's communities, including experiences that might otherwise receive little recognition.

These stories form an important part of local identity. By helping people share their own memories and experiences, Jahran contributes to a better understanding of the communities that have shaped London.

He also works at C-suite level within the charitable sector, where he challenges structural barriers and supports the creation of more inclusive routes into opportunity.

His work focuses on the practical ways organisations can improve. This includes identifying processes that exclude people and helping to develop systems



JAHARAN ALLEN-THOMPSON MBE

Leadership rooted in community

*Through public service, community storytelling and work to remove structural barriers, **Jahran Allen-Thompson MBE** is helping to ensure that people are treated with dignity and communities are not overlooked.*

that are fairer and more accessible.

As a Black man with dyslexia, Jahran understands that people can face several barriers at the same time. He uses this personal understanding alongside his professional experience to help organisations recognise where change is needed.

Across his work, Jahran's contribution is rooted in service. He has helped strengthen essential facilities, supported families at times of loss, created space for community stories and challenged systems that restrict opportunity.

His story reflects the Black History Month 2026 theme, *Honouring Our Communities*, because it demonstrates that community leadership takes many forms.

It can mean managing an essential service under pressure, protecting people's dignity, making sure local experiences are recorded or challenging an organisation to become fairer.

Through his work, Jahran Allen-Thompson MBE shows how leadership can remain connected to the people and communities it is intended to serve.



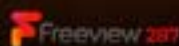
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Honouring our communities

A love letter to those who made us rich!

This year, as we celebrate Black History Month and the theme *Honouring Our Communities*, it is an opportunity to celebrate the unsung heroes of our communities: those people who silently built the foundations that allowed us to exist, thrive, and belong.

It's for my Mum, who every Saturday would offer a bowl of the best lamb neck soup to anyone who stopped by. It's for Aunt Myrna, who would look after me when my Mum went to work or give us some milk when we had none. It's for Mr Merchant and Miss Adeline, whose pardna helped my Mum buy our family home. It's for Aunt Anne, who would take 20 kids to Margate one summer, still the best summer ever. It's for Aunt Comfort, who would feed us rich egusi soup. As I rolled the soft pounded yam through my fingers and glided it through that beautiful soup, it whispered to my soul that I am African before I am anything else. It's for Brother Spanish, who would pick people up in his van from what felt like every borough in London and bring them to his church in South London.

If you asked some people today, they would say we fell into every index that tells you how poor or disenfranchised a community is. However, if you asked me, I would tell you then and I would tell you now: **We were rich. Culturally, spiritually, and collectively.**

These people smiled in the face of adversity. They danced when there was something to celebrate and even when there wasn't. A floating tenner could always be found when you needed it. They ate food that nurtured the soul, food that, looking back now, was probably a silent

love letter to a memory and yearning of home. And when they found the world too much, they would simply kiss their teeth and return to the comfort of the home they found in community. Life wasn't perfect, but somehow community made it easier.

Today, we live in a world where communities are becoming more transient. Rising living costs are forcing people to move, people are travelling further in search of better jobs, and digital interactions are increasingly replacing face-to-face encounters. We are becoming lonelier, regardless of age. We are exposed to a constant stream of information that tells us the world is a scarier place. Lock the door. Keep the danger out. But where has that got us?

Community is, and always has been, crucial to our survival as Black people. We need the protection, belonging, nourishment, love, joy, peace, happiness, food, and safety that community provides. What we must never lose sight of is the fact that community has allowed Black people to thrive despite living within systems that never valued or prioritised us.

So, as I celebrate the unsung heroes of the community that raised me this Black History Month, I find myself asking: Am I carrying forward the legacy of community? How am I contributing to strengthening the fabric of community that provides a safety net for so many people? How am I honouring that legacy for future generations? These are questions we must all ask ourselves, because community has always been our strength, and its power will continue to propel us towards a more connected and prosperous future as Black people.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Thomas is a recognised leader in social value, community investment, and inclusion within the housing sector. With more than 15 years of experience, she has dedicated her career to creating opportunities for people and places that are too often overlooked, building programmes that drive social mobility, strengthen communities, and create lasting impact.

As Social Value and Fundraising Manager at MTVH, Kelly works to break down barriers and create pathways for residents to thrive through employment, education, and community impact. She recently served as Event Director for UNIFY, helping to shape sector-wide conversations around race, equity, and inclusion within housing.

Alongside her professional role, Kelly is a Trustee of Partnership for Young London and The Greggs Foundation, where she continues to champion young people, social justice, and the power of community to transform lives.



Salome Mare-Walsh

Creating meaningful change wherever she goes

Salome Mare-Walsh was nominated for Honouring Black Britain 2026 in recognition of her work as an NHS psychotherapist, entrepreneur, community leader and advocate for equity. Her colleague **Daniyal Irfan** explains why Salome's influence extends far beyond her professional role.

BY DANIYAL IRFAN

It is a great privilege to celebrate Salome Mare-Walsh as part of Black History Month. Salome is a psychotherapist working within the NHS and an entrepreneur whose commitment to creating meaningful change extends far beyond the boundaries of her formal role. Through her professional work, leadership, advocacy and unwavering commitment to equity, she has become an influential figure whose impact is felt across healthcare services, communities and the lives of people from minoritised backgrounds.

What stands out most about Salome is not simply the range of positions she holds, but the values that underpin everything she does.

She is driven, motivated, compassionate and deeply approachable. She possesses a rare ability to connect with people from all walks of life while remaining steadfast in her principles. She is not afraid to challenge systems, question assumptions or advocate for change when she sees injustice.

This courage, combined with her warmth and authenticity, makes her a respected colleague, leader and role model.

Salome's work is guided by a commitment not merely to equality, but to equity. She understands that treating everyone in exactly the same way does not necessarily produce fairness. True fairness requires us to recognise and address the barriers people may face because of their racial, cultural or social backgrounds.

Whether through her work within the NHS or her own private enterprise supporting people from minoritised communities, Salome consistently works to create opportunities, amplify voices and improve access to support for those who have historically been underserved.

As Chair of the MECN in Merseyside, Salome has demonstrated outstanding leadership by bringing together people from different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Through this role, she has helped to foster connection, understanding and collaboration across communities.

Her leadership creates spaces in which people feel heard, valued and empowered. The importance of this work cannot be overstated. In a society where many people continue to experience exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation, Salome's

efforts help to build stronger, fairer and more inclusive organisations and communities.

What makes her achievements particularly remarkable is that her influence reaches far beyond what might typically be expected of someone in her position.

Salome demonstrates that creating meaningful change does not require holding the most senior title within an organisation. Instead, she shows what becomes possible when someone combines vision and determination with genuine care for other people.

Whatever her formal position may be, Salome finds ways to make a positive difference, inspire others and challenge the status quo.

As a colleague, I have always enjoyed working alongside her. She brings energy, insight and purpose to everything she does. Her contributions extend beyond individual projects or pieces of work; she helps to shape the culture of every environment of which she is a part.

She encourages others to think critically, act compassionately and remain focused on the people and communities they serve. Her influence is felt not only through her direct actions, but also through the way she inspires those around her to become better advocates, practitioners and leaders.

As someone from a South Asian background, I personally recognise and appreciate the importance of Salome's work.

While her contributions undoubtedly benefit Black communities, their impact reaches far beyond any single group. Her advocacy and leadership have positive implications for people from a wide range of minoritised backgrounds. Her commitment to justice, inclusion and opportunity helps to create the conditions in which everyone has a better chance to thrive.

This ability to build solidarity across communities is one of Salome's greatest strengths. She recognises that our experiences may differ, but that progress becomes possible when people listen to one another, challenge inequality and work together.

If there is one quality that best captures Salome's contribution, it is her ability to create meaningful change wherever she goes.

It often feels as though Salome could be placed in any environment, organisation or community and would quickly identify opportunities to make a positive difference. This is a testament not only to her professional skills and expertise, but also to her character.

She notices who is not being heard. She recognises where barriers exist. Most importantly, she is prepared to do something about them.

For her leadership, advocacy, professional excellence and unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion, Salome is richly deserving of recognition.

Her contribution embodies the spirit of Black History Month and this year's theme, *Honouring Our Communities*. Her story reminds us that stronger communities are built by people who are willing to listen, lead, challenge injustice and make space for others.

Salome does all of these things with courage, warmth and integrity.

I can think of few individuals more deserving of recognition than Salome Mare-Walsh.



DR FRANCIS IFEDAPO AWOLOWO

OPENING DOORS FOR BLACK SCHOLARS

Through the ASPIRE programme, Dr Francis Ifedapo Awolowo has helped Black and Mixed-Black heritage students find pathways into doctoral research. Faith Ogala shares a personal tribute to the mentor whose belief, encouragement and advocacy helped her see new possibilities for her future.

BY FAITH OGALA



Every transformative movement begins with individuals who challenge the limitations imposed by existing systems. For many Black and Mixed-Black heritage students, particularly in Sheffield and Manchester, that individual is Dr Francis Ifedapo Awolowo.

Dr Francis, a Senior Lecturer in Financial Management Accounting at Sheffield Hallam University, is the visionary behind the Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence (ASPIRE), an initiative designed to prepare Black and Mixed-Black heritage students for doctoral study.

Developed through collaboration between Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University and Advance HE, ASPIRE was intentionally created by Black academics for Black students. Its mission is clear: to dismantle barriers that have historically restricted access to postgraduate research and nurture a generation of confident Black scholars.

What distinguishes ASPIRE is the passion driving it. Dr Francis developed the programme from personal experience, recognising the challenges many Black students encounter in academic environments where representation is limited and pathways into research can feel unclear.

Rather than accepting these realities, he chose to create an environment where Black students are acknowledged, prepared

and empowered. Since its launch in 2021, ASPIRE has mentored fifty-nine Black and Mixed-Black heritage students, with fifteen progressing to fully funded PhD programmes. Behind those figures are changed lives, new opportunities and futures that once seemed beyond reach.

Central to these accomplishments is Dr Francis's unwavering commitment as a mentor. He actively engaged with the scholars he supported, dedicating long evenings to preparing us for the realities of doctoral applications. He organised mock

interviews to build our confidence and reviewed our research ideas, challenging us to think critically while offering encouragement during moments of self-doubt.

Dr Francis also invested in our lives beyond academia. During late-night preparation sessions, he remained present, providing guidance, encouragement and reassurance. For many of us, these moments became sources of spiritual support.

He prayed with us and reminded us that our journeys mattered, emphasising that our presence in research spaces was significant.



When we questioned whether we belonged, he spoke passionately about the importance of our voices and scholarship.

One of the most powerful aspects of his mentorship was his advocacy for us in spaces we had yet to access. He mentioned our names in rooms where we were absent and highlighted our potential to colleagues, institutions and decision-makers. In doing so, he opened doors we had not known existed.

Personally, the influence of ASPIRE and Dr Francis's mentorship is immeasurable. I often contemplate what my path might have been had I not met him and become part of the programme. His encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue opportunities I once considered unattainable.

I am now a second-year doctoral researcher at Sheffield Hallam University. His influence also led me to become a published author, inspiring me to write about mentorship itself after experiencing firsthand how a mentor can alter the direction of a life.

Dr Francis helped us reimagine ourselves. He reshaped our understanding of our potential and our responsibilities as emerging scholars. Many students who have passed through ASPIRE now carry that same commitment to mentorship, representation and service into their professional journeys.

His leadership has created a ripple effect. The scholars he has mentored have opportunities to supervise students, influence research, contribute to policy and support others who follow in their footsteps. The impact of that encouragement can continue far beyond the programme itself.

At a time when discussions about inclusion in higher education can remain largely theoretical, Dr Francis has demonstrated what meaningful change looks like. He has created a community where Black students are prepared, supported and encouraged to pursue research excellence.

His belief is that when people are truly seen, supported and believed in, they can succeed and make a difference to the world around them. For those of us who have experienced his mentorship, that belief is reflected in the time, care and commitment he gives.

Black British history is shaped by people who create pathways for others. Dr Francis firmly belongs among them. Through his vision, mentorship and steadfast advocacy, he has helped Black scholars recognise their potential and take their place within academic life.

For his leadership, his personal investment in students' lives and his contribution to educational equity, I believe Dr Francis deserves recognition as someone helping to shape a more inclusive academic future.



Severine Ntanda Kipili Leading with compassion

Through Bora Shabaa Refugee Association in Hull, Severine Ntanda Kipili supports hundreds of displaced people to thrive in their new home. Paula Bielby pays tribute to her generosity, compassion and quiet, measured strength.

By Paula Bielby

Severine developed and leads an amazing charity, Bora Shabaa Refugee Association in Hull, having come to the city as an asylum seeker many years ago. From a small voluntary group led by volunteers, the organisation has grown, and Severine now supports hundreds of displaced people to thrive in their new home.

She has invested in her leadership development to become a confident advocate for others and secured Reaching Communities funding to grow the support her small team can offer to those traumatised by their experiences. This funding enables the team to extend its work, supporting people as they build their lives in Hull.

At the heart of Bora Shabaa's mission are Severine's core values. Compassion means treating every person with respect and kindness. Integrity means always operating with transparency, professionalism and trust. Inclusivity means promoting fair access to health, care and opportunities for all.

Empowerment is about building confidence and resilience through participation and learning. Collaboration means working openly with local partners, strengthening connections between people and places. Together, these values guide the charity's work and reflect the care Severine brings to supporting others.

Severine is also a founding member of HEYLAN, a collective of Global Majority leaders in Hull working together to strengthen their collective leadership and empower their communities. Her involvement reflects her commitment to working alongside others and building connections across the city.

This collective has secured collaborative funding to provide connected support for a wide range of migrant communities in a holistic and joined-up way. Working together allows these leaders to strengthen the support available to the communities they serve.

Severine raises her voice for those who go unheard and whose needs are greatest. She does this with a quiet and measured strength, supporting others with humility and kindness and putting their needs ahead of her own.

She is a wife and mother and manages to balance all of her commitments with grace and poise. Alongside those responsibilities, she continues to lead her organisation and contribute to the wider community through her work with fellow leaders.

Severine deserves to be recognised for her generosity, compassion and leadership. Her commitment to others is at the heart of everything she does, and our community benefits from the care, kindness and determination she brings to her work.



Pte James Munroe Franklin, Battle of the Somme

James Munroe Franklin was underage when he enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915. Serving with the 4th Battalion, he is widely believed to be among the first Black American soldiers to be killed in action in the First World War.

James was born in Mississippi and while still young his family moved to Hamilton, a port city in Ontario, Canada. After his mother's tragic death in childbirth, he was placed in a Street Boys' Home where he stayed until he was 14. He then found lodgings with a local family, became a library assistant and secretary for his local church and worked as a clerk and messenger boy at a prominent local drugstore. All four of the owner's sons had volunteered to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).

It was one of the sons who signed James's papers of enlistment in July 1915. James was 15 and lied about his birth year to be accepted.

In April 2016, the CEF 76th Battalion

left Halifax on the SS Empress of Britain, arriving in Liverpool in early May. Here the battalion was broken up and its men dispersed to those units which needed reinforcements. James was assigned to the 4th Battalion, which was to acquire an extraordinary war record, fighting in battles synonymous with the terrible sacrifices of the war: Ypres, Passchendaele, Vimy Ridge, Amiens and the Somme, which began on 1st July.

James had undoubtedly seen much action by the time Canadian units began moving up to the Somme front line in August. At the end of the month they were in support trenches near La Boisselle. The 4th moved from village to village, pushing back German attacks and enduring heavy artillery fire. The Allies aim was to take the German Regina Trench, the longest on the Western Front, defended by vast stretches of barbed wire. The unit's commanding officer wrote in his diary that demolishing the barbed wire used up their supply of bombs.

On 8th October, according to family

history, James was ordered to load his pack mule and carry combat supplies forward. His supply party took 12 casualties that morning as it crossed open ground. It is believed that James was among the dead, just four days short of his seventeenth birthday. The Chicago Defender, an African-American newspaper, reported that Franklin and his mule were "blown to pieces" by a "huge grandmother shell."

In his will, Franklin left \$250 to St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church, where he had worked as assistant secretary.

An estimated 1,300-1,400 Black Canadians served in WWI, most of them in segregated units. However, as the Chicago Defender reported, James "who gave his life that democracy should rule the wide world over," was the only Black soldier in his Battalion.

James Munroe Franklin's name appears on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial alongside those of more than 11,000 Canadian soldiers killed during the War who have no known grave.

Sue Liburd MBE DL

Born in 1962, Sue's father hailed from Nevis and her mother from Jamaica, both part of the Windrush Generation who responded to the UK's call to help rebuild the nation after the Second World War. Her father initially came to the UK for National Service but chose to remain in the Royal Air Force, dedicating his life to military service.

Growing up in a military family meant frequent relocations, but it also fostered a sense of community and belonging. Sue fondly remembers her time in Cyprus as a child, where military families formed a supportive community.

Sue's younger brother, Michael, following in their father's footsteps, became an engineering mechanic in the Royal Navy and served during the Falklands War.

Sue pursued a career in nursing, inspired by her mother, and specialised in mental health nursing. She identified a gap in her knowledge, especially when working with women with postnatal depression and psychosis, and consequently trained as a midwife to better understand the issues. Sue has played a large part in the evolving public perception of mental health.

Despite her success in the NHS, Sue felt her potential might be limited and found that the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army

Nursing Corps offered the opportunities she sought. In 1987 she took a service commission with the Army. Initially at UK bases, she was then sent to Germany to work on the opening of a new military hospital. Sue's Army career also took her to locations including Cyprus and Hong Kong, fulfilling her passion for travel and new experiences.

Sue took her opportunity to reshape and modernise the Army by joining round table discussions on improving diversity and inclusion, and by getting involved in schools liaison and recruitment.

However, as she approached a decision that required a 16-year commitment, Sue ultimately decided to leave to pursue new opportunities outside of the Army.

She currently sits as a non exec director or advisor on a number of voluntary organisations and businesses, and also

sits on the Veterans Advisory Board. This body provides advice, and challenges the diversity of thought, to the government on veterans issues and is chaired by the Minister for Veteran Affairs.

Sue is also one of the founders of the British West India Regiments Heritage Trust.

Alongside her non-executive and advisory roles, she contributes to national conversations on veterans, remembrance, inclusion and organisational trust.

Among the many recognitions conferred, Sue was awarded an MBE in 2016 for services to Business, Charities & Voluntary Organisations; named IOD Midlands Director of the Year - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (2021); and elected Fellow Royal Society of Arts (2022). Sue is currently High Sheriff of Lincolnshire.

Through her tireless work, and as a role model, Sue continues to demonstrate her deep-rooted commitment to reducing inequalities in health, education and employment, and in advancing more equitable, inclusive and sustainable workplaces. She is ensuring that the stories of the Windrush generation and Black personnel in British military history are not forgotten. Sue is helping to shape the next phase of the diversity and inclusion agenda.



Carrol May Nelson

Helping children see themselves in stories

Carrol May Nelson was nominated for Honouring Black Britain 2026 for her contribution to children's literature and her commitment to improving the representation of African-Caribbean and dual-heritage children. Her son, Jonathan Nelson, explains how memories of Jamaica inspired the much-loved *Dolly May Stories*.

BY JONATHAN NELSON

I am proud to celebrate my wonderful mum, Carrol May Nelson, author of the much-loved children's book series *The Dolly May Stories*.

Through her books, Mum is helping to improve the positive representation of African-Caribbean and dual-heritage children in literature. Her stories allow children to see themselves, their families and their cultures reflected positively in the books they read.

Carrol was born and raised on the beautiful Caribbean island of Jamaica. She has now lived in Manchester for 57 years, but her childhood memories remain at the heart of her writing.

Her stories were inspired by memories of her grandmother's mountain garden, a place where nature, creativity, storytelling and imaginative play shaped her early life. That garden became the inspiration for a magical world through which new generations of children could explore their heritage and imaginations.

Mum began writing after struggling to find picture books that reflected her own family and community. She recognised that African-Caribbean and dual-heritage children were still too rarely represented as the central characters in joyful and imaginative stories.

After retiring, she decided to help fill that gap herself.

As a mother of three and a grandmother,

she understands how important it is for children to encounter books in which they can recognise something of themselves. She also believes children should have opportunities to learn about families, cultures and experiences that may differ from their own.

"Representation in children's literature should not be the exception; it should be the norm," Mum says. "I want children to feel seen and valued, and to be excited to read stories that reflect their own families, cultures and dreams."

Her stories are written to capture children's imaginations and encourage a love of reading. Created for children aged three to eleven, they combine playful learning with explorations of nature, family and cultural heritage.

The books are intended to support children's early literacy development while allowing them to experience the joy and freedom of imaginative storytelling.

Mum's first book, *Dolly May and the Magical Enchanted Garden*, was published in 2019. It has since sold more than 2,000 copies and has made a strong impression in classrooms.

Teachers have spoken about its effectiveness in promoting confidence, cultural awareness and creative thinking among young readers. Headteacher Andrea Nelson has described how the book

empowers children academically and socially by allowing them to see themselves reflected in a story.

For children who rarely encounter characters who look like them or families resembling their own, that experience can be extremely powerful. A story can tell a child that they matter, that their culture is valued and that their imagination deserves space to grow.

"I want children to feel seen and valued, and to be excited to read stories that reflect their own families, cultures and dreams."

The second book, *Dolly May and Mally's Alphabet Game*, was published in 2021. It continued Mum's mission to make learning playful, inclusive and culturally meaningful. A third book is due to be published for Black History Month 2026.

Her contribution, however, extends far beyond writing the books themselves.

Mum has worked tirelessly to promote greater representation through schools, libraries and community events. She has also used radio, podcasts and other media platforms to raise awareness of the importance of diversity in children's publishing.



She has partnered with Manchester Museum, part of the University of Manchester, as the coordinator of the Children's and Authors' Literary Fanfare Event. The event celebrates African heritage, culture, identity and creativity through books, storytelling and hands-on activities.

Initiatives such as this demonstrate the power of literature to educate, inspire and connect young people. They also give children and families an opportunity to experience stories that celebrate their identities and introduce them to different cultural perspectives.

I believe Mum's books are making an important contribution to children's literature locally, nationally and internationally. They are helping parents, teachers and young readers gain access to diverse stories and enjoy cultural experiences that have too often been missing from mainstream publishing.

Her achievements are particularly inspiring because she began this chapter of her life after retirement. Rather than seeing retirement as the end of her working journey, she used it as an opportunity to follow her creativity and address a problem she could see within children's publishing.

She transformed memories of her Jamaican childhood into stories capable



of travelling into homes, classrooms and libraries. In doing so, she has created something that connects generations: the garden of her childhood now inspires the imaginations of children growing up many years later and thousands of miles away.

Mum's work shows that it is never too late to begin something new or to make a meaningful difference.

Through *The Dolly May Stories*, Carrol May Nelson is helping children develop their

reading skills, explore their imaginations and take pride in who they are. She is also helping to shape a literary landscape in which more children can feel recognised, included and valued.

These are the reasons I believe my mum deserves formal recognition. I could not be prouder of everything she has achieved and the difference her stories continue to make.



AKEIM MUNDELL BEM **Putting community at the heart of education**

Educator and community leader Akeim Mundell BEM turns compassion into support for young people and families across Greater Manchester.

Akeim Mundell began working in education at just 16 as a teaching assistant. Through determination and a belief in education's power to transform lives, he became one of the country's youngest assistant principals by the age of 28.

Today, at William Hulme's Grammar School in Manchester, Akeim leads Education with Character, personal development, community engagement and fundraising. He has helped reimagine the school as a place serving its pupils and wider community.

Among his most important initiatives is a free daily School Pantry, supporting thousands of families facing financial hardship while protecting their dignity. His Uniform Swap Shop provides free school clothing, reduces costs and encourages sustainability. Back-to-school vouchers, festive gifts and free breakfasts offer support when families need it most.

Akeim also created an annual Community Afternoon, bringing families, local organisations

and services together. Through Culture Days, awareness events and partnerships with the Stephen Lawrence Foundation, Kids of Colour and Rekindle Supplementary School, he helps ensure that every pupil feels seen, valued and celebrated.

His influence reaches beyond Manchester. Akeim delivers keynote speeches and training to educators nationally, sharing practical approaches to inclusion, pastoral care and meaningful community partnership.

His service earned him the British Empire Medal, while the University of Bolton recognised him as an Honorary Alumni Fellow. His mother and nominator, Hilrette Hazle, describes him as "an educator, a community builder, a role model and a tireless advocate for equity".

For Akeim, education reaches far beyond the classroom. By responding to the everyday challenges facing pupils and their families, he has helped build a school community where practical support, opportunity and a sense of belonging go hand in hand.



The S.Hi.Ne Committee

Creating Belonging in Higher Education

The Sisters in Higher Education Network is helping women from underrepresented backgrounds find support, confidence and community within universities across the North and beyond.

NOMINATED BY DR GLORIA O. BOTCHWAY

For many women working or studying in higher education, entering a university does not automatically bring a sense of belonging. Some find themselves isolated, overlooked or questioning whether there is a place for them within academia.

The Sisters in Higher Education Network, known as S.Hi.Ne, is working to change that.

Based in Newcastle, the network brings together women academics and professional staff from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds who share a commitment to supporting others.

The committee includes Dr Gloria O. Botchway, Chair; Dr Lucy Currie, Culture, Education and Heritage Lead; Dr Princess Bwanya, Events Manager; Dr Maryam Garba, Project Manager; Dr Ekaete Efretuei, Finance

Manager; Dr Rebecca Walker, General Secretary; and Cynthia Oguna, Research Assistant.

Together, they provide mentoring, advice, educational resources and opportunities for women to build professional connections. Their work is particularly important for those from underrepresented or disadvantaged communities who may be navigating higher education without an established support network.

FROM AN ONLINE MEETING TO A GROWING NETWORK

S.Hi.Ne began in 2020 when a small group of women met online to discuss the challenges they were experiencing as Black women in higher education.

That first conversation proved both engaging and empowering. It gave

participants an opportunity to speak honestly, share experiences and recognise that they were not facing these challenges alone.

From those early virtual meetings, S.Hi.Ne developed into a growing network offering workshops, seminars, conferences and regular “Sip and Chat” sessions.

These events help women develop the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate academic life. Just as importantly, they create a community in which participants can feel heard, supported and understood.

The committee’s work is not limited to women. It offers advice and resources to academics more widely, helping colleagues understand the barriers that can affect women from different racial, cultural and social backgrounds.

For Dr Gloria Botchway, who nominated

the committee for recognition, the strength of S.Hi.Ne lies in the commitment of its members. They continue this work alongside demanding full-time roles as academics and professional staff, often using their evenings and weekends to organise events and support others.

Despite funding difficulties and other setbacks, the team has continued to develop the network because its members understand how valuable that support can be.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT AND NEW CONNECTIONS

S.Hi.Ne's work is built around practical action. The network provides coaching and mentoring, helps academics and students locate useful resources and creates opportunities for women to meet others facing similar professional challenges.

It has also established a research portal through which colleagues can connect and explore potential collaborations. This has helped form new professional relationships and encouraged academics to share knowledge rather than work in isolation.

In June 2026, S.Hi.Ne held a conference at the University of York. Participants spoke about the reassurance of discovering that they were not alone and the confidence

they gained from meeting people who understood their experiences.

Feedback received by the committee showed that these events can have a lasting effect. For someone who has questioned whether they belong in higher education, meeting others with similar experiences can replace uncertainty with confidence and isolation with community.

S.Hi.Ne also works with universities and organisations including the University of York, the University of Sunderland and the Women in Higher Education Network. Through these partnerships, it provides workshops and activities for both staff and students.

The committee now hopes to extend its work into schools, encouraging younger girls to have high aspirations and consider futures within higher education.

"I AM BECAUSE WE ARE"

At the centre of S.Hi.Ne is the African philosophy of Ubuntu: **"I am because we are."**

This captures the committee's belief that progress is strengthened when people share knowledge, create opportunities and support one another.

The network also embraces the idea that "it takes a village". No single person

can remove every barrier within higher education, but a committed community can make those barriers easier to identify and challenge.

Dr Gloria Botchway's contribution and the work of S.Hi.Ne have been highlighted by Newcastle City Council. The council recognised the network's support for women and international students, including its work around cultural integration, microaggressions and confidence.

Dr Botchway describes the committee members as mentors, role models and advocates for equality. Their impact can be seen in the women who no longer feel alone, the professional connections created and the confidence participants take back into their studies and careers.

S.Hi.Ne's contribution reflects the Black History Month 2026 theme, *Honouring Our Communities*. Its members are creating the kind of community they once needed themselves, one built on support, shared experience and the belief that every woman deserves the opportunity to thrive.

Through their dedication, the S.Hi.Ne Committee is showing what can be achieved when women come together not only to advance their own careers, but to hold the door open for others.

Bolanle Oyediran - helping people find a wonderful way forward

From food parcels and financial guidance to employability and confidence-building programmes, Bolanle Oyediran helps people move from hardship towards lasting independence.

Bolanle Oyediran is the founder and leader of Wonderful Way CIC, a non-profit community interest company supporting individuals and families experiencing poverty, debt, unemployment, homelessness and domestic abuse.

Her nominator describes her as the organisation's "soul" because she understands that people need more than one form of help. An urgent food parcel may answer today's need, but guidance with money, employment and confidence can change what happens tomorrow. She brings these strands together, meeting immediate pressures while preparing people for a more secure future.

Through the Intervention Café, people receive free food parcels alongside money-management advice, employability guidance, personal development and signposting to further support. The programme reaches County Durham and communities across



northern and central England.

Young people are central to Bolanle's work. The ten-week REAM programme supports people aged 16 to 25 in supported accommodation or outside education, employment and training. It develops

resilience, financial skills and employability, helping participants prepare for work and independent living.

Wonderful Way CIC also provides mindset and career-growth coaching. These programmes help people recognise barriers, build resilience, plan their development and identify the strengths they can bring to work and wider life.

Bolanle has also gathered a committed volunteer team, giving others a meaningful way to contribute their knowledge and experience. Her nominator speaks warmly of the encouragement she gives women, always supporting them and cheering them towards their potential.

Bolanle's contribution is practical, thoughtful and sustained. She meets people where they are, whether they need food, advice, confidence or a route back into work. Through Wonderful Way CIC, she is helping individuals and families replace uncertainty with choices, skills and hope.

MATTHEW JOHNSON

A legacy of service, a commitment to others

Inspired by his grandfather's community work, Matthew Johnson has built a career dedicated to racial equity and social justice. Emily Farquharson pays tribute to the chief executive of Race on the Agenda, whose support has helped her find confidence, develop her ideas and recognise the value of her own voice.

Matthew Johnson's journey is rooted in a family legacy of community service, inspired by his grandfather's work within communities in Birmingham and Sandwell. It is a legacy that he carries forward and actively strives to build upon.

From this, he has developed a career clearly defined by a sense of responsibility to others. Over the past 16 years, his work across the UK and internationally, including in Africa, has consistently centred racial equity and social justice.

Through his contributions as Head of Research at organisations such as the Runnymede Trust and the Black Equity Organisation, alongside his engagement with the NHS Race and Health Observatory, he has helped shape critical conversations around race and inequality. His work has always remained grounded in ensuring that Black and Global Majority communities, especially Caribbean communities and Windrush descendants, are represented, meaningfully heard and valued.

At Race on the Agenda (ROTA), community voice is at the heart of everything we do, and this is a direct reflection of Matthew's values. He ensures that our work is shaped by the communities we serve, rather than imposed upon them. In doing so, he has built a culture of trust, inclusivity and shared purpose.

As CEO, Matthew brings these values into every aspect of his leadership. He has guided the organisation through a period of significant growth, strengthening our work in London while intentionally expanding its reach across the UK.

His work in the West Midlands, particularly in housing and racial equity, alongside his role on the Centre for the New West Midlands Board for Employability and Skills Leadership, reflects a commitment to change that responds directly to the needs of communities.

At the same time, Matthew has supported the organisation in its goal to begin expanding globally. Care and integrity are vital to this approach, ensuring that international work is grounded in genuine

“THROUGH HIS LEADERSHIP, HE DRIVES CHANGE, CREATES PATHWAYS, UPLIFTS VOICES AND INSPIRES THOSE AROUND HIM TO DO THE SAME.”



understanding and creates a positive impact for the communities involved. Connecting local, regional and global work in a meaningful way is a defining strength of his leadership.

A focus throughout Matthew's journey has been his dedication to creating opportunities for others, particularly young people. He understands the barriers that many face and actively works to remove them.

Through supporting and hosting my apprenticeship opportunity at ROTA, he has created a pathway into a space that otherwise felt inaccessible. Through his mentorship and support, I have been able to grow in confidence and recognise the value of my own lived experience.

Matthew creates an environment where perspectives like mine are welcomed and seen as essential. This has led to opportunities I would never have imagined at this stage in my career, including developing ideas

and leading projects, as well as opportunities to speak at conferences, with the possibility of doing so internationally.

What has made this experience particularly meaningful is the trust and freedom I am given to present my work authentically, in my own voice. Matthew recognises that lived experience brings insight and understanding that cannot be taught. His support has allowed me to recognise that value in myself and bring it into the work I do.

Matthew leads with empathy, care and authenticity. He has created a working environment where the team feel safe, valued and empowered to contribute meaningfully.

His support also extends beyond professional development. He shows genuine understanding of the realities people navigate outside work, including caring responsibilities, neurodivergence

and health challenges. This understanding of people as individuals is what makes his impact so lasting.

Matthew's journey is one of legacy, purpose and impact. He honours the work that came before him while actively engaging with communities today to shape a more equitable future. Through his leadership, he drives change, creates pathways, uplifts voices and inspires those around him to do the same.

And his journey is not yet complete, as I am sure he would say himself. Recognition offers an opportunity to bring greater attention to the work he has done and will continue to do, and to the further difference that work can make for the communities he serves.

For these reasons, I believe Matthew Johnson truly embodies the spirit of Honouring Black Britain 2026 and is richly deserving of this recognition.

LIMAHL BUNTYN

Giving young people someone to trust

BY ANGIE
NGUYEN, NEW
WOODLANDS
SCHOOL,
LEWISHAM

Through football, mentoring and practical support for families, Limahl Buntyn helps young people facing some of the toughest challenges. Angie Nguyen, of New Woodlands School in Lewisham, pays tribute to his commitment and the trust he has built.



I am proud to nominate Limahl for Honouring Black Britain 2026, in recognition of his exceptional service, leadership and commitment to supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in our community.

Limahl has devoted his time and energy to working with disadvantaged children and young people who face significant social and economic challenges. He consistently supports those on the periphery of education and society, particularly young people at risk of gang involvement, county lines exploitation and serious youth violence. For many, he has been a vital protective presence at a critical point in their lives.

Through grassroots community work, Limahl provides practical and emotional support that makes a real difference. He prepares and distributes meals to families and young people in need, offering care and helping people maintain their dignity. This practical support is an important part of his commitment to the community, responding to immediate needs alongside his work with young people.

He also coaches football, using sport as a powerful way to engage young people and build discipline, teamwork

and self-belief. Football provides a positive alternative to the streets and an opportunity to feel part of something. Through coaching, he encourages qualities that matter beyond the game: responsibility, cooperation and belief in what can be achieved with others.

Beyond this, Limahl mentors young people in essential life skills, offering guidance, stability and encouragement where these are often lacking. His support brings together practical help and the reassurance of having someone who believes in their potential.

He plays a crucial father-figure role for many, modelling consistency, responsibility and hope. His presence offers young people a sense of belonging and a belief that their lives can follow a different path. That consistency is central to the trust he has built.

Limahl's impact is not defined by titles or recognition, but by the lives he has helped to redirect. Preparing meals, coaching football and mentoring young people are all expressions of the same commitment: helping those around him feel supported and see possibilities for their future.

His work embodies the spirit of Honouring Black Britain, recognising those whose everyday actions quietly strengthen communities. I believe he deserves recognition for the care he gives, the example he sets and his commitment to young people who need someone dependable in their corner.

What unfolded was far more than a book launch. It became an emotional and deeply personal conversation about justice, resilience and the responsibility to continue fighting, even when the odds appear insurmountable.

For more than two decades, Crump has represented families whose names have become synonymous with the struggle for racial justice. Yet rather than dwelling on his extraordinary legal victories, he spoke candidly about the emotional burden of carrying so many stories of grief and injustice.

Responding to a question about how he copes with the psychological toll of his work, Crump reflected on the recent death of one-year-old Cohen Wiley, who was fatally shot by police after officers pursued a vehicle over the alleged theft of a box of nappies.

"I will use all my resources, all my influence to say that that little Black baby named Cohen Wiley's life mattered, and we won't let them turn the page," he said. *"We will make them release this video so people can see the truth of what happened."*

For Crump, writing fiction became more than a creative exercise; it became therapy.

"We live in a world where we see so many unbelievable injustices inflicted, especially on Black and Brown people," he told the audience, describing how victims are too often put on trial after they have lost their lives. Whether speaking about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor or countless lesser-known cases, his frustration was clear: society repeatedly searches for reasons to diminish the humanity of those who have already suffered the ultimate injustice.

Yet despite the weight of these experiences, Crump's message was one of hope.

"Justice is possible," he declared. *"We keep fighting and we don't give up the fight"*

One of the evening's most memorable moments came as Crump shared a story about the late Reverend Jesse Jackson during an equal pay discrimination case in Chicago. Facing what appeared to be an unsympathetic judge, Crump admitted that even he had begun to feel defeated.

During a court recess, Jackson quietly pulled him aside.

"You don't drown because the water is deep. You drown because you stop kicking."

The audience fell silent as Crump repeated the words that have stayed with him ever since.

"Whatever you do, you can never stop kicking... I don't care how stacked the cards are against you, you just keep kicking. I don't care what the odds are. You just keep kicking. As long as you keep kicking, you will make it to the other shore."

The courtroom battle eventually ended



Ben Crump Inspires London Audience with a Powerful Call to "Keep Kicking"

The atmosphere inside the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton was one of anticipation. On 25 June 2026, campaigners, lawyers, activists and community leaders gathered to hear one of the world's most recognisable civil rights attorneys, **Ben Crump**, discuss his remarkable career and the launch of his debut novel, *Worse Than a Lie: A Beau Lee Cooper Novel*.

in victory, with the judge allowing the case to proceed before it was later settled. But for Crump, the lesson transcended the legal system.

"As long as we keep kicking," he said, *"we will overcome."*

That philosophy also inspired his decision to write *Worse Than a Lie*. While legal thrillers have long entertained millions of readers, Crump noticed something was missing.

"Never in those great books had I seen a Black hero trial lawyer," he explained.

Influenced by pioneers such as Thurgood Marshall and inspired by authors including John Grisham, Crump wanted to create a protagonist who reflected communities rarely centred in legal fiction.

His fictional lawyer, Beau Lee Cooper, is designed to do more than solve courtroom mysteries. Crump hopes the character will inspire young people to imagine themselves as advocates for justice.

"Little Black children and little minority children can look at him and say, 'When I grow up, I'm going to be like that Black hero lawyer.'"

For Crump, representation remains transformative because, as he reminded the audience, *"children will be what they can see."*

Throughout the evening, Crump spoke with warmth, humour and humility, despite the enormity of the issues discussed. His admiration for civil rights giants including Thurgood Marshall, Reverend Jesse Jackson and Reverend Al Sharpton was evident, but so too was his determination to inspire a new generation of lawyers, campaigners and community leaders.

The event concluded with audience questions, heartfelt tributes and enthusiastic applause before attendees queued to have their books signed by the New York Times bestselling author.

Those leaving the Black Cultural Archives carried away more than a signed copy of *Worse Than a Lie*. They left with a simple but profound message that resonated far beyond the walls of the venue.

When faced with injustice, discrimination or seemingly impossible odds, don't stop. Keep kicking.

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Electrician ■

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Communications Infrastructure Technician ■
Cyberspace Communication Specialist ■
Digital Reserves ▲

AIRCREW

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Weapon Systems Operator
Weapon Systems Operator Aircrew Linguist

INTELLIGENCE

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Intelligence Analyst (Linguist)
Intelligence Analyst ■

AIR & SPACE OPERATIONS

Control Officer
Operations Officer
Air Traffic & Weapons Controller ■
Operations Specialist
Aviation Data Analyst
Firefighter ■
Flight Operations Manager ▲

GROUND COMBAT & SECURITY

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RAF Regiment Officer
RAF Police ■
RAF Regiment Gunner ■

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People Operations Officer - Media ▲
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