**Black History – Research Guide**

**Guide to records**

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

**Introduction**

In the 2021 Census, Coventry City Council found that just under half of all school-age children were from an ethnic minority background. As well as its diversity today, Coventry has historically been the home of many leading Black figures. One major example is Ira Aldridge, the nineteenth-century actor who managed Coventry’s Theatre Royal in 1828, becoming the first Black theatre manager in the UK. We hold archival documents and newspapers relating to Aldridge’s roles in Coventry, including his most famous part as Shakespeare’s Othello.

Perhaps the most prominent area for Black artists in Coventry is the music scene, specifically the 2 Tone genre. This was named after the 1979 ‘2 Tone’ record label, established in the 70s, with ska and reggae influences. Bands formed in Coventry like The Specials and The Selector led the movement, which worked to combat racism and bring people together through great music. You’ll find many books on our Reading Room shelves about 2 Tone and its key figures.

In 2003, the Vibes project carried out 11 oral interviews with Coventry’s major Black musicians, looking at musical influences from West Africa and the Caribbean Islands. The original recordings and written summaries are available in our collections. This links also to ‘Champion Sound’, a film looking at the history of reggae sound systems from the 1950s, narrated by Pauline Black – lead singer of The Selecter.

In the sporting world, Coventry City F.C. signed the first Black South African player in 1956, Steve “Kalamazoo” Mokone. Copies of the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, available to view in our Reading Room through our British Newspaper Archive subscription, describe how Mokone had to pay his own fare for his journey to the UK, and initially had to work as site staff at the football ground to support himself. He soon became one of the top players in the league.

Other sports figures have included the boxer Randolph Turpin, who became world middleweight champion in 1951. More recently, Errol Christie excelled as a both an amateur and professional boxer in the 80s. Both have biographies in our Reading Room.

Coventry’s Black history also relates to slavery and colonialism, and our archives expose these legacies also. Samuel Greatheed, an MP for Coventry between 1747 and 1761, owned a major slave plantation in St. Kitts that he inherited from his father. Our Borough Archives, the oldest records in our collection, feature a 1747 Circular for Greatheed’s candidacy.

The resistance to slavery and other atrocities has also been strongly felt in Coventry, from the African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass who gave a speech at St Mary’s Guildhall in 1859, to more recent protests. Our collections contain flyers, leaflets and reports from various groups who have stood up to racism and inequality.

Beyond this, we also hold scrupulous records of the lives and achievements of ordinary local people. Our Oral Histories, which include ‘Coventry Lives’ and ‘Invisible Histories’, shed light on Black and other ethnic minority communities in the early 2000s.

Within our pamphlets, you can find out more about the often marginalized histories of Black women, such as Julie Kemp who migrated to Coventry to work as a Health Visitor. She described her now home as ‘the greatest, most caring city in the whole of the United Kingdom’.

We’ve detailed below some of our key items relating to Black history at Coventry Archives, but this list is by no means exhaustive. If you think there is a person or event that we have missed, please let us know by emailing archives@cvlife.co.uk and we would be happy to hear your contribution.

**Archival Materials**

BA/L/15/1/2 - Circular in favour of [Samuel] Greatheed's candidacy, c 1747

CCA/2/3/189 - Deeds relating to property at 'Coventry Theatre' or The Theatre Royal, Smithford Street, later The Empire Theatre

SUB-SECTION: PA2600/8/2 - RACISM, 1970-1986 (with flyers, leaflets, reports)

PA2600/3/12/6 - Flyer for Coventry Carnival Against Racism, early 1980s

PA2581/2/3/3 - Correspondence file - Includes copy of Commission for Racial Equality response to Macpherson Enquiry, Black History Month details, advertising posters "aimed at dispelling the stereotypes and myths attached to certain racial groups", criticism of the Commission, press releases, 1998-999

CCE/8/1/1/304 - News cuttings containing information relating to 20th Century Coventry. Key Words 'Ethnic Minorities, migration and population.', 1992

PA2581 – Coventry Racial Equality Council - This collection is a series of reports, minutes and memorandum concerning racial equality within education, work and housing. The organisation was previously called the Coventry Community Relations Council until it changed it's name in 1992

PA2917/1 - 'Champion Sound' DVD: 'A Film by Frontline AV' , the history of reggae Sound Systems from the 1950s, narrated by Pauline Black. Champion Sound: Celebrating The History of Coventry Sound Systems

PA2277/1 – Oral Histories – interviews carried out in 2000-2001. Of particular relevance in terms of Black History are ‘Coventry Lives’ and ‘Invisible Histories’

PA2277/2 – Summaries for the above Oral Histories

PA2277/3 - Vibes Project - Eleven oral history interviews with some of the major Black musicians within Coventry, to uncover the history of musical influences from West Africa, Caribbean Islands and England, 2003 – 2004

PA2277/4 – Vibes Summaries

**Pamphlets – all JN 325.1**

Coventry – A Multicultural City – Lord Mayors Communication for Racial Harmony, 1983

Limelight: African-Caribbean Arts and Culture Magazine, Issues 7-10, 1992

Black & Minority Ethnic Services & Organizations Guide, 1994-95

African Caribbean Business Association Ltd. Mission statement, 1996

Black & Minority Ethnic Organization Guide, 1997

To Coventry from Umeze Eziama Ubakala, by Julie Kemp (Coventry Reminiscense Theatre) 1989

Celebrating Coventry’s Black History & Heritage Month, October 2002

Coming to Coventry: West Midlands History Vol 1 2013

Coming to Britain, by Jos Williams

Coventry Diverse-City: Equality and Diversity: A Guide to Cultural Etiquette (Coventry Partnership)

**Books**

JN 796.334 - *Coventry City Footballers 1908 – 1993: The Complete Who’s Who*, by Martin and Paul O’Connor (Harefield: Yore Publications, 1993), Steve Mokone mentioned on p.152

JN 796.334 - *Cyril Regis: My Story – The Autobiography of the First Black Icon of British Football* (London: Carlton Books Ltd, 2010)

JN 784 - Books on Two-Tone in Coventry, including The Specials and The Selecter

JN 301.36 - *Coventry Voices*, by Tim Lewis (Red Horse Publications, 1987)

PX 796.83 - *The Tragedy of Randolph Turpin*, by Jack Birtley (London: New English Library, 1975)

JN7 96.83 - *No Place to Hide: How I Put the Black in the Union Jack*, by Errol Christie (London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2010)

JN 792 - *Coventry’s Forgotten Theatre: The Theatre Royal & Empire*, by Ted Bottle (Wiltshire: The Badger Press, 2004), mentions Ira Aldridge on p.79-82

**Newspaper Articles**

See the *Coventry Herald*, 1828 – 1833, for articles about Ira Aldridge

See the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 1956, for articles about Steve Mokone

Newspapers can be consulted on our microfilm readers, or using the digital British Newspaper Archive – we have a subscription in the Reading Room.