

Herstory of Birmingham



NOTE TO THE READER



This zine is about women who played an important role in Birmingham's rich and diverse history.

We are starting our journey at the Roundhouse, a place that has recently been renewed with a purpose to help visitors to see Birmingham a little differently.

In its heyday, the Roundhouse was a hub that supported down to earth, essential tasks as a city council depot and a lively stables and stores. A resource for the Birmingham Corporation (the early version of Birmingham City Council), the Roundhouse was a cog in a much wider network of similar locations that did their part to keep the second city ticking over.

After falling into disuse in the early 2000s, the Roundhouse faded into the background, but now with support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, and a range of other trusts and foundations, the Roundhouse has been revived. Roundhouse Birmingham, a new independent charity, was created to operate and care for the Roundhouse for years to come.

So what's the Roundhouse today? It's a workplace; a pit-stop on a journey; and a place to start new ones. An old place put to new, practical use.

Who are we?

In 2020, we began working on this zine as part of Don't Settle's Curator programme. Don't Settle is a Beatfrees project that empowers young People of Colour, in Birmingham and the Black Country, to change the voice of heritage through the arts, research and governance.

Our group is made up of writers, artists, photographers and designers that share a strong connection with Birmingham and a desire to unroot histories that have played an essential role in the growth of this city.

Why "Herstory" of Birmingham'?

We wanted to give a voice to those who have been traditionally underrepresented.

During our research, we had a lightbulb moment! We learnt about the nation's female lamplighters. Sadly, along with the stories of many significant women, they have failed to reach our history books. But you can help us honour the women who not only brought light to our streets, but paved the way for women's equality and helped create the diverse and vibrant city we live in.

This is a journey that spans across the globe. How so? Well, people have migrated to Birmingham from all over and through their labour, campaigning and creativity they have shaped and continue to shape the city today.

MEMORIES OF MIGRATION

Migrant communities from all over the world have contributed to Birmingham's cultural and industrial significance and role in innovation. It's important that their contributions are not forgotten. Thanks to the work of the Birmingham Black Oral History Project, we are able to access some of the most remarkable stories of migration to our wonderful city.

The Birmingham Black Oral History Project, set out to preserve the memories of older Black and Asian migrants including those of Esme Lancaster. In the interview she tells her story, which goes all the way back to her grandfather's memories of being kidnapped from Ghana by human traffickers.

Migration, forced or voluntarily, played a huge part in Esme Lancaster's life and ancestry. In the early 1950s, Esme migrated to England to further her study in social work. She tells the interviewer about her arrival in Birmingham. She says "the conditions of living when we first came here, made me cry for months and months". Being one of the first Black social workers in the UK, she spoke against the discrimination in her work and she was awarded an MBE for starting and running Young Mothers' Relief Association in Handsworth.

Sadly, Esme Lancaster passed away in 2009 at the age of 91. Her memories of migration, and legacy in striving for equality and justice will live on forever.



NEXT STOP: LADYWOOD!

Did you know Ladywood is one of the most diverse areas of Birmingham? And it's home to the Roundhouse! People from all over the world have migrated to Ladywood and there are at least 20 languages regularly spoken in this area. Ladywood has always been a place of rich community spirit, but the stories of the people who lived here are often forgotten.

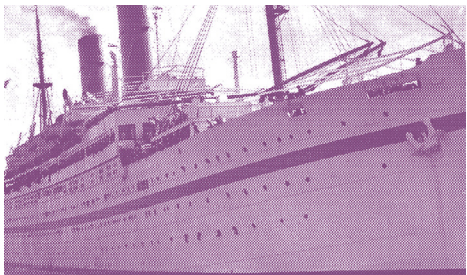
Many women have struggled through hardship, some supporting large families through poverty, others working on the front line during wars and the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, some have united to ensure their community is not forgotten and divided.

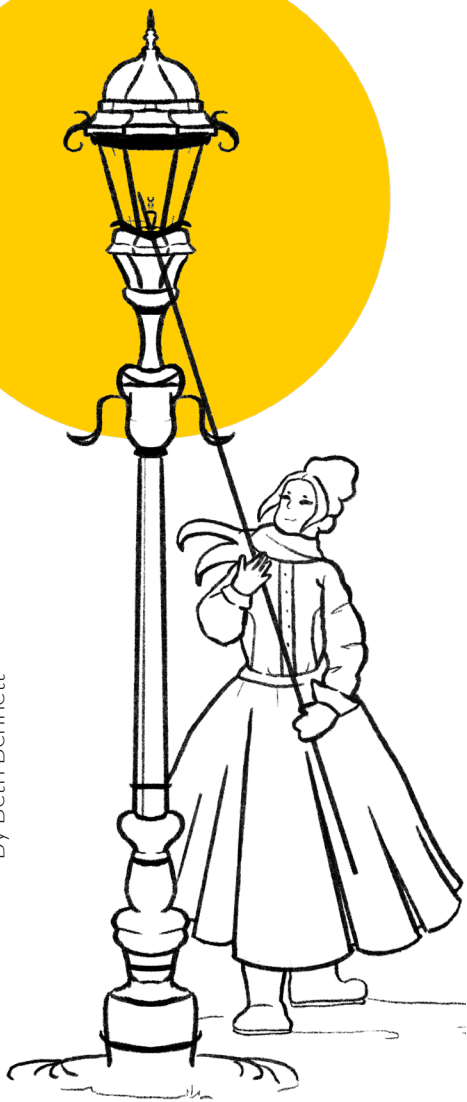
What is your experience of Ladywood?

At the end of this zine is a postcard for you to write down your own stories of Ladywood and hand them to a member of the Roundhouse team in the Visitor Centre.

What places are significant to you in Ladywood?
What changes have you seen in Ladywood?
What do you love in your community?

We would love to know so we can continue to collect the history of this wonderful community.





LIGHTING THE WAY

Can you imagine Birmingham without lampposts on our streets? It would have been dark and unsafe! For this reason lamplighters, who were mainly men, were praised for their contribution to making Birmingham a safe place to live.

However, women lamplighters were often greeted with distrust, ridicule and, in some cases, violence. Those who saw the need for a greater labour force supported the employment of women. However, like the Mayor of Chester who “hoped that kindness and consideration would be shown” to woman lamplighters in 1915, many anticipated the poor treatment of women in such roles.

Newspapers from the North of England and Scotland feature stories on women taking on the role of lamplighters as a significant part of the war effort. However, then, as now, women were denied equal pay. In the Liverpool Echo in 1917, one woman recalls how they had not received the war bonuses despite doing the same work as the men. She says, “they turn out in the early morning extinguishing, and also clean and light the lamps. They also get their full share of any painting which is to be done.”

In 1961, the Birmingham Daily Post said that Britain’s last woman lamplighter, Mrs Laura Butler, died at age 87. She had seen the big changes to lamplighting, “looking after both the oil lamps which lit the village many years ago, and the gas lamps which replaced them” and contributed to the safety of those in the village of Duffield.

The stories of women in such roles are hard to come by. The stories of female workers of colour in Birmingham are even harder to find. Due to efforts to belittle migrant histories, the significance women of colour played in many industries and communities has been disregarded.

This zine is a tribute to ALL women who contributed to our city and who, like our lamplighters, lit the way for future generations.

IMPERIAL SISTERHOOD, INEQUALITY IN THE FIGHT FOR ABOLITION

What do we mean by ‘Imperial Sisterhood’? It sounds like an oxymoron, doesn’t it? Well, you’d be correct. It’s a complicated issue, so let’s break it down.

The fight for the abolition of slavery and the fight for women’s right to vote are linked. White middle class women fighting for suffrage also campaigned for abolition. However, in many cases, the efforts from the white middle class were not in the name of equality for all.

Clare Midgley, in her paper *Anti-Slavery and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, argues that support for abolition was often framed within Christian morality and white superiority. In white led campaigns, instead of being shown as their equals, Black and enslaved women were made to look passive and in need of guidance and help from their white, middle class counterparts.

To challenge this, we are highlighting the efforts of Sarah Parker Remond who campaigned for both women’s rights and abolition in the face of such oppression.

Sarah Parker Remond (1826-1894)

Known on a global scale during her fight for abolition, Sarah Parker Remond came to Birmingham in 1861. She gave a speech at Birmingham Temperance Hall on the abolition of slavery. She was the first woman to take a public Anti-Slavery lecture tour in the UK!

She spoke of the extremes of exploitation suffered by enslaved people, and empathised with the struggles and oppression amongst other groups - most notably, the white working class in England.

She was connected to Birmingham through two women-led societies, one was the Female Society of Birmingham and the other was an interracial and mixed gendered society.

Sarah Parker Remond challenged the depiction of Black women within the suffrage movement and campaigned for equality for all. Help us spread the word of her work by telling your family, friends, and teachers.





@dayaillustrations

CATHERINE COMES CALLING

There are many single moments in history that you may not know about. Such as a moment in time where a historical figure crossed paths in a place that is very familiar to you. To think they might have walked down the same street as you, stood by your house or visited your church.

It is these hidden histories which can change the way you experience a place. We are reminded of the importance of the places we live and the communities around us. We are reminded of our own places in history just by thinking about the people who have been here and the journey that life has taken them on.

For us Birmingham changed when Catherine came calling....

Princess Catherine Hilda Duleep Singh (1871-1942) was the daughter of Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last Sikh emperor, and his wife Bamba Müller, meaning Catherine had Indian, German and Abyssinian heritage.

Catherine's father unsuccessfully tried to gain support after he lost the throne, battling threats from British colonial rule. Whilst under the care of Arthur Oliphant by order of Queen Victoria, Catherine met German governess Lina Schäfer. Lina became her closest confidante, and later, her life partner.

Catherine's sister Sophia joined the Women's Social and Political Union as a

suffragette and actively campaigned for women's rights through census evasion. The census evasion involved supporters of women's suffrage refusing to complete the census as a revolutionary act. As Vicky Iglikowski-Broad states in her essay "No vote, no census", the 1911 suffrage census protests, campaigners argued "if they were not treated as citizens with a voice, they would not let themselves be counted on the census."

Catherine was passionate about her heritage, visiting India several times during her life, in spite of losing both of her parents and being restricted by the British government. She championed women's rights, becoming a suffragist as a member of Fawcett Women's Suffrage Group and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

It was in 1912 that she visited Birmingham to open "a forest of Christmas trees" in aid of the "Constitutional Women's Suffrage Works."

During WW1 and WW2, Catherine also stayed in Germany with Lina. It is known that both she and Lina helped Jewish families to escape persecution, staying together in Germany until Lina's death in 1938. Catherine then returned to England where she later died in 1942. It is through her passion, bravery and legacy of social activism that she now lives on.

(SOME) WOMEN GET THE VOTE

After years of campaigning from women from all walks of life, only some women were given the right to vote. In 1918, the Representation of the People Act extended the vote to all adult men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30, who owned property.

Though the act of 1918 was a breakthrough moment, for women of colour a lot was left to be desired. How many women of colour would have owned property in 1918 to meet the qualifications? The act discriminated against working class women and women of colour on purpose. These groups had already struggled with less representation within the campaign for women's suffrage as they often didn't have the means to strike or protest, and if they did campaign, they often received more severe punishments than their white and/or middle class counterparts.

It wasn't until 1928, through the Equal Franchise Act, that all women over 21, regardless of status, were able to vote on equal terms to men.

However, according to historian Dr Sumita Mukherjee, "once the 1928 amendment to the Representation of the People Act was passed, 'British subjects' of all races were allowed to vote. But this in no way meant race relations in Britain were progressive." While women of colour were very much a part of

the movement, they still had attitudes on empire and race to contend with, and still do to this day.

In an article written by journalist Yomi Adegoke, she says that "the activism of black British women in particular became truly visible when they began leading the fight against racial injustice in the UK."

Adegoke highlights the efforts of Claudia Jones, who founded the West Indian Gazette in 1958 and the globally known Notting Hill Carnival in 1959. The West-Indian Gazette (WIG) reported on many anti-colonial struggles in the UK and around the world, and is known for its anti-imperialist arguments and feminist leadership. According to Carole Boyce Davies, biographer of Claudia Jones, the WIG played a crucial "role in developing the Caribbean diaspora in London". Not only did the WIG reflect on and document the experiences of people from the Caribbean, but also of those of Asian and African descent.

The important relationship between the fight for gender and racial equality is highlighted again. Adegoke suggests it can be easy to separate Black women's history of activism in Britain into neat categories. However, she argues that for Black female activists, like Claudia Jones, "both their sex and race were central to their work. And it is our job to ensure their position at the intersection of both identities no longer permits the erasure from either movement."

To see Yomi Adegoke's article, scan the QR code below:



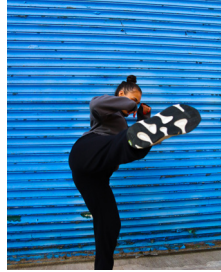
Needs Not Words.

"You alright, Bab".
Bounces and draws on
the Shopkeeper's tongue.
It reverbs in my heart
and eardrum. I smile
in response, warmed
from somewhere deep
inside, Gather my things
and step-out onto
Stephenson Street.
That interaction reminds
me that New Street
Station may now be
called Grand Central and
look like the lovechild
of a spaceship and
The (all-seeing) Eye of
Sauron. But the people
of Birmingham will keep
on being Brummie. The
people of my home city
seem to possess that
salt of the earth quality,
Kindness that's warm
and oh so chummy.
There's no mistaking
these re-vamped busy
streets where the
banished cable-cart
trams of the 19th century
have transformed and
modernised into state-of-
the-art Urbos trams.
Sleek and shiny, Blue-
worms burrowing out
further into neighbouring
cities, connecting us
whilst simultaneously
turning us into
overground commuters.
I expect nothing less
from this city that's
always shape-shifting
and evolving: You only
earn monikers like
'The Cradle of The
Industrial Revolution' or
'The Workshop of The
World' by continually
transforming.
And that's the heart
of the matter, the
grey slippery slabs of
pavement are the bones,
The canals, which we like
to boast about, telling
anyone that cares to
hear, There are more
here than Venice; these
canals were the veins
feeding and fueling.
Trades: jewellery,
incoming chocolate
treats, cotton, sugar.
Things you might not a
first realise had a direct
hand in feeding slavery.



TALES FROM THE CONDUIT CITY

The peoples desire for
these things supporting
that exploiting industry.
I have always loved living
in this city. I knew that
it came with a rich and
complex history woven.
And interlocking like a
heavy metal tapestry. Yet
if anyone were to ask me.
"If you could time travel,
where would you go?"
It was a no-brainer for a
person that looks like me:
Melanin dripping from
the crown of my hair to
the tip of my toe I had
assumed the hallowed
halls of history were a
no-go.
That's until I started
digging and excavating.
Learned about great
women in history /
presently that share or
shared this great city



with me or just made a
whistle-stop-tour. I just
wanted to learn more
and more!
Like Ida B Wells when
she came here to
Birmingham in 1894 to



tell her story. She regaled
at large about the
horrors of bondage and
slavery. Told the truth.
That in the south of the
States Even though the
proclamation had opened
the gates. The plantation
politics remained; And
the black bodies that had
turned up maimed and
lynched were no mystery.
What was more exciting
to discover was that she
was walking in the ashes.
Of the trailblazer activist
Sarah Parker Reymond
who lectured tirelessly
in 40 cities From
Birmingham to Belfast
The first black woman
ever to do so in the UK.
And a century before
Diane, there was another
people's Princess,
Catherine Hilda Duleep

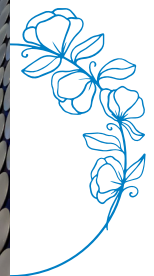


Tales from the Conduit City is a
narrative poem written in the first-
person. Its aim is to draw parallels
between 19th & 21st century
Birmingham whilst highlighting
prominent women of colour who
have significantly contributed to it,
the UK and the world.

I have drawn from my fondness
of Birmingham City and added
interesting historical knowledge
about this city that I think many of its
inhabitants won't know. Whilst still
creating a rhythmic flow that should
carry readers and listeners through
like the waters of the multiple canals.

@Lexialegend

Singh, who turned her lip
up at privilege (in parts).
To stand in solidarity with
her suffragette & blood
sisters,
To swing the tide of
things and give women
the right to vote.
Standing in Brindley
Place drinking in the
scenery,
Tasting all the
mouthwatering flavours
from the modern
eateries, Dancing in
the air with the music
produced from the bars. I
step onto a narrowboat.
For afternoon tea. Float
away with thoughts
of the future. What
will you make of my
contemporaries?



WOMEN OF BIRMINGHAM TODAY

What about women in Birmingham today? Here we pay tribute to women in modern Birmingham, learn of the diversity in their experiences and hear what they think still needs to be done.

To make this page we reached out to women of colour either from or based in Birmingham and the West Midlands to tell us about their experiences. How do they see the world today? How do they celebrate their identity? Who are they inspired by? And what would they like to see change in Birmingham?

Loreal Stokes | She/Her | 26 | @lotusloreal

As a young mixed race woman, I see myself as the bridge between perspectives. The governing systems of this world are founded in racism and misogyny. It is about time we invested in young women of colour to dismantle these systems. But with authenticity. I want to see more Black and Mixed race women in positions of influence in Birmingham. As one of the most diverse cities in the UK, we have more than enough talent to invest in. I want to see curls and afros in leadership positions. I want to see representation where it is needed most.



Geeta Lal | She/Her | 26 | @geeta_lal_

Hey! My name's Geeta Lal and I've lived in the West Midlands most of my life! Growing up, Birmingham was always a place for celebrations or to visit family and friends. From Soho road trips for weddings to going to church with friends, I was always surrounded by my South Asian (SA) community, forever feeling like home. However, I have always felt uncomfortable seeing SA men's sexualised glares on Soho road since I was a teen. This starring culture is an all too familiar story for WoC and needs to stop.



@radhika.photos



Nompumelelo Ncube or Nom for short | She/Her | 24 | @nomncube

I am a photojournalist who is incredibly passionate about representation! I believe images are like visual codes, a universal language of some sort. With that comes a big responsibility in how we tell stories and, in particular, stories from and for marginalised communities.

I know it's cliché to say my mum is the woman who inspires me, but it's true. It is the way she carries herself and how she is intuitive, full to the brim with kindness and love.

I think we can dismantle discriminatory systems, introduce legislation, educate the masses, and commit to telling diverse narratives but it all begins with the individual. It takes humility, genuine compassion and love to reflect on how your words, behaviours, thoughts can affect others and be active in being better. Racism and misogyny are not just human rights issues, they're a heart issue too. Equity is everyone's responsibility. The question is how much do we emphasis on the internal work that combats discrimination? And why do we view activism as political?"



WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU

We would like to thank the amazing people who have not only helped make this zine happen, but have contributed to its creativity and accessibility.

Commissioned Artists: Lexia Tomlinson, Daya, Beth Bennett, Zaina Mayat

Voice Artists: Maya Willcocks and Chelsea Mills

Sound Producer: Marley Butler

Photographers: Rhadika Muthanna, Adam Jones, Bas van der Horst, Daniel Adesina, Hin Bong Yeung, Karen Uppal, Sarah Doffman, Shane Rounce

Illustrators: @Jcomp, @pikisuperstar

Researchers: Dr. Kadian Pow - Birmingham City University

Roundhouse Intern: Prachi Kapoor

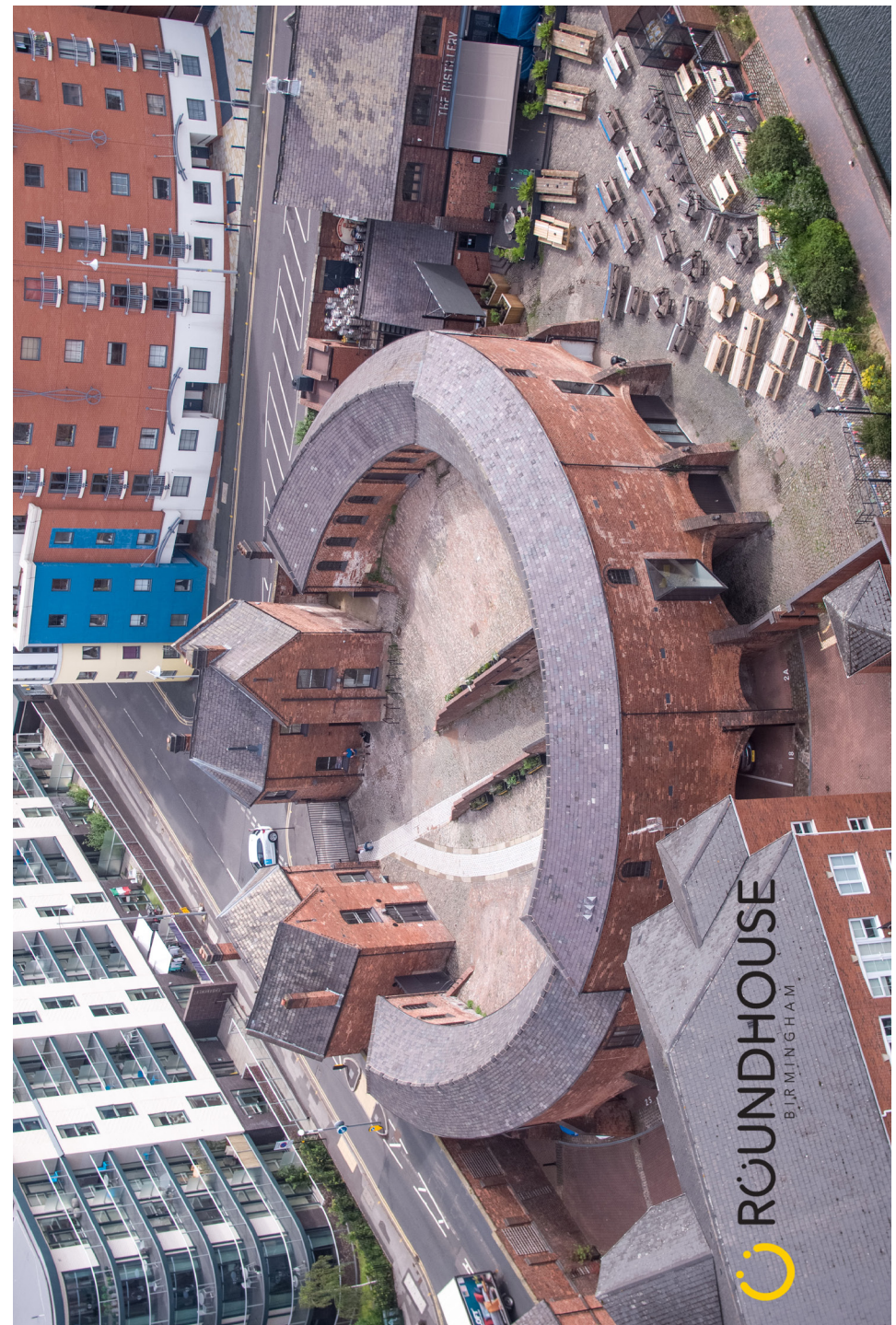
Roundhouse Birmingham's volunteer researchers: Jo Prinsen, Maggie Jager, Jim Henry and Janet Wilkinson

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Don't Settle is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund



DON'T SETTLE
ROUNDHOUSE
BIRMINGHAM



#SeeTheCityDifferently



POSTCARD

@bhamroundhouse



@zaina.mayat

ZINE CURATORS

Avi | She/Her |

I've been volunteering on this project for over a year now along with my teammates. We came up with everything from the concept of the zine and the content we'd like to feature, helping to achieve what we hope to be an accessible and intriguing history of Birmingham. One of the most enjoyable things has been creating the zine from scratch, being there as it evolved whilst working with others who I have actually never met and enjoying the creativity of like minded people.

Harry | He/Him |

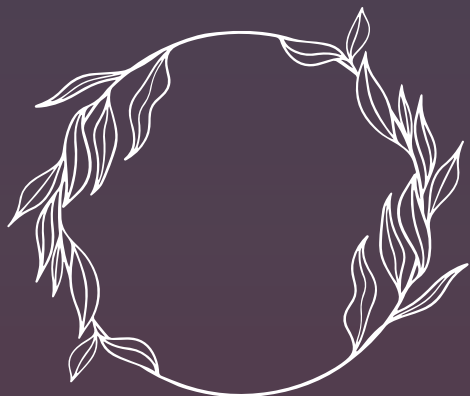
This project has given me the opportunity to learn about and amplify some of the untold stories from Birmingham's past. The zine is a product of collaboration and exposure to the ideas, tastes and principles of my fellow curators.

Nathan | He/Him |

It's been an incredibly long and interesting year living with Covid-19. But this volunteering opportunity provided me with a space to learn new skills and feel part of a community with my fellow curators. It's wild how much I have learned about this incredible city - stories, places and people that aren't public knowledge. I hope that this zine provides an insight into the untold histories of this wonderful city.

Beth | She/Her |

In this project I have gotten to develop illustration skills and use my art to tell a story! I loved learning more about Birmingham and giving a voice to those who stories deserved to be told. It's been so lovely to work in a team to create a zine as it's always something I've done on my own I really enjoyed hearing everyone's creative inputs and ideas and I'm so grateful to have been a part of this opportunity.



Cover by Beth Bennett