



SEVEN SAINTS OF ST PAULS

STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

The Seven Saints of St Pauls are large-scale murals located Bristol's eastern neighbourhood of Saint Paul's, which celebrate local Black history. They are found on the side of residential buildings along seven adjacent streets, constituting one of the most visible, accessible forms of public art.

They are key figures of the local community and founders of the St Pauls Carnival. Completed in 2019, their production coincided with the 50th anniversary of the iconic carnival, in Bristol and the 70th anniversary of the Windrush Generation.

MURALISM AS AN ART FORM IS WIDELY CONSIDERED AN INHERENTLY POLITICAL ART GIVEN THE WAY IN WHICH IT TAKES UP PUBLIC SPACE, OFTEN PROPERTY.



ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES



Bristolian artist Michele Curtis led the initiative and worked with local muralists Paintsmiths to make these permanent artworks come to life. There was some support from LiveWest - a housing developer in the South West.



As this case study looks to a site which is found on exterior walls rather than full buildings, we came to think about architecture in terms of street layouts and site locations. There are sixteen streets in St Pauls and the final sites selected for the murals were chosen carefully in that one saint, Owen Henry (pictured left), is facing the house where he lived and another saint, Dolores Campbell, is situated on Campbell Street.

MAPPING THE SAINTS

Carmen Beckford MBE

Race Relations Officer at Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee (CCC) and first community development officer at Bristol City Council, first Black female recipient of an MBE in the South West.

Audley Evans

Co-founder of CCC, coordinator of the Bristol Bus Boycott.

Roy Hackett OBE

Co-ordinator of the Bristol Bus Boycott, co-founder of the CCC, chair of the Bamboo Club, oldest member of Bristol Race Equality Council. Awardee of the Jamaican High Commissioner.

Owen Henry

Co-founder of Homeland's Travel Service, chartering cheap flights to the Caribbean to enable families to more easily reunite. Co-founder of United Housing Association (UHA) and the CCC. Heavily involved in Bristol Bus Boycott.

Dolores Campbell

Co-founder of UHA and the CCC's first female member.

Barbara Dettering

Co-founder of UHA.

Clifford Drummond

Inaugural secretary and treasurer of the CCC, co-founder of Homeland's Travel Service.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

The 2001 Census shows Black Caribbean residents in Bristol as the third largest ethnicity at 1.5%. In the 2011 Census we see an increase, but by far the largest change is the arrival of Somali refugees, making the community of people of African heritage grow rapidly from 0.6% to 2.8% of Bristol's overall population. The Black presence in Bristol dates back to around 400 years ago. The transatlantic slave trade history is often the story we hear first.

St Paul's is a unique neighbourhood with a distinctive cultural identity. It's predominantly made up of residents of African and Caribbean heritage, with the large majority arriving in the 1950s and 1960s. It has been undergoing redevelopment over the last 50 years and gentrification has been significant in the last ten years.

We met Michele Curtis who talks about her motivations to platform local Black role models. More than paintings in a gallery, she highlights stories of Dolores Campbell, Owen Henry, Roy Hackett, Audley Evans, Clifford Drummond, Carmen Beckford and Barbara Dettering. These are the seven saints who put on the first carnival in 1968 to celebrate the unity that helped to end the "colour bar" on the city's buses. The Bristol Bus Boycott prevented recent West Indian immigrants joining bus crews despite labour shortages. These seven were campaigners by nature, fighting for the first race equality laws in the UK.



USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

PRESENT

The murals sit on the exterior walls of seven buildings of varying residential or commercial use. Those sites would have played an integral part in the 'carnival route' - of past, current and future celebrations - as this journey is always shifting. They act as viewing points, stopping places and more. The artist's motivation to provide access to and leave a visible stamp of important stories, renders the current day use an open air political gallery. If Bristol's benefactors from slave trade have names chiselled into the city's architecture, the murals are now seeing those that have campaigned against this also be recognised in legitimised, appropriate ways.



REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIVERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

The whole neighbourhood of St Pauls is the site of significance. The people, the Seven Saints, take centre stage and the built environment steps in to offer a canvas for this heritage to be platformed. Whilst the area is changing and being gentrified at a rapid speed, this community has had a say through artistic expression and, in turn, created a placemaking case study.

Michele Curtis talks from a place of pride when she highlights the achievements of the Seven Saints. That sense of pride is reflected now as those that walk past make a connection with new narratives about their heritage. The sheer scale and beauty of the artworks may inspire those who know nothing to find our more and shift perspectives. We see 'community service' in all threads of this case study - the need to counteract injustice and amplify and re-tell the positive stories, using our built environment to leave large and visible traces.



"A lot of people have come to me (to discuss Colston). I had NPR wanting to talk to me about placemaking, the fabric of place and what that means and I didn't really understand why they wanted to talk to me. I'm not really involved in the conversation around changing Colston. When he asked why, I said it was because I don't have the time to sit around, have those dialogues and then wait and wait and wait. I want to take action, and the only way that I can do that as an artist is to make a space our own, claim that space. St Pauls has been a major part of the African Caribbean community for generations, and people keep talking about gentrification, gentrification, gentrification and talking about who cares about carnival and all these kind of things. Having exhibitions isn't enough. I need to put the murals up where everybody can see and everybody can learn and it's factual information. It's not made up, it's not a dream, it's not a fairy tale. This is my community, this is who we are, this is what we do."

Michele Curtis

