

Case Study: African Lives in the North East

Heritage Schools working with a community organisation to share with schools the history of people of African descent in the North East

African Lives in the North East and Heritage Schools

Members of the North East England African Community Association, with colleagues from other heritage organisations, set up the African Lives in the North East project¹ in 2020 to spotlight the lives of people of African descent who have lived in or visited the North East from the Roman period to the 21st century, in order to demonstrate the diversity of the region, and to combat racism.

The project team wanted to make this information accessible to schools, so they partnered with Heritage Schools to create a wall chart featuring 24 people of African descent, both famous and little-known, of very varied occupations, from the Roman period to the 21st century.

The wall chart is a comprehensive resource titled "African Lives in Northern England". It features a central title and a map of the North East region, highlighting Northumberland, County Durham, and Cumbria. The chart is organized into several columns, each representing a different category of individuals:

- ROMANS:** Profiles include Aelius Modestus, a Roman senator and jurist, and Aelia Modestilla, a Roman noblewoman.
- EARLY RESIDENTS:** Profiles include B. Mayken Marston, a 17th-century African woman, and B. Mayken Marston, a 17th-century African woman.
- AFRICANS IN UNIFORM:** Profiles include B. John-Robert, a 19th-century African man, and B. John-Robert, a 19th-century African man.
- WRITERS:** Profiles include B. Charles Dickens, a 19th-century English novelist, and B. Charles Dickens, a 19th-century English novelist.
- ORATORS:** Profiles include B. Frederick Douglass, an American abolitionist, and B. Frederick Douglass, an American abolitionist.
- SPORTS PEOPLE:** Profiles include B. Muhammad Ali, a 20th-century American boxer, and B. Muhammad Ali, a 20th-century American boxer.
- MEDICAL PEOPLE:** Profiles include B. Robert M. Johnson, a 20th-century African American physician, and B. Robert M. Johnson, a 20th-century African American physician.
- ENTERTAINERS:** Profiles include B. Paul Robeson, an African American actor and singer, and B. Paul Robeson, an African American actor and singer.
- NATION BUILDERS:** Profiles include B. Nelson Mandela, a South African anti-apartheid leader, and B. Nelson Mandela, a South African anti-apartheid leader.

The chart also includes a central section titled "African Lives in Northern England" which provides an overview of the project's goals and the importance of recognizing the diverse contributions of people of African descent to the region's history.

The wall chart of African Lives in Northern England

The Heritage Schools Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM) and Historic England's Archive Education Manager worked closely with the African Lives in the

¹ <https://www.africanlivesnortheast.co.uk/>

North East team to create a suite of learning resources² to supplement the wall chart: an interactive map showing where people lived or visited, a PowerPoint presentation about the people with questions to encourage further research, and a digital version of the wall chart.

“As in the risk of focusing only on enslavement and the ‘victim’ status of African people, there is a risk in focusing only on high achieving Africans or those of African descent. It is a necessary antidote to racism and exclusion, yet our teaching needs to demonstrate a valuing of each other as human beings, rather than high achievers or model citizens” - African Lives in Northern England, Introduction & Guidance for Teachers

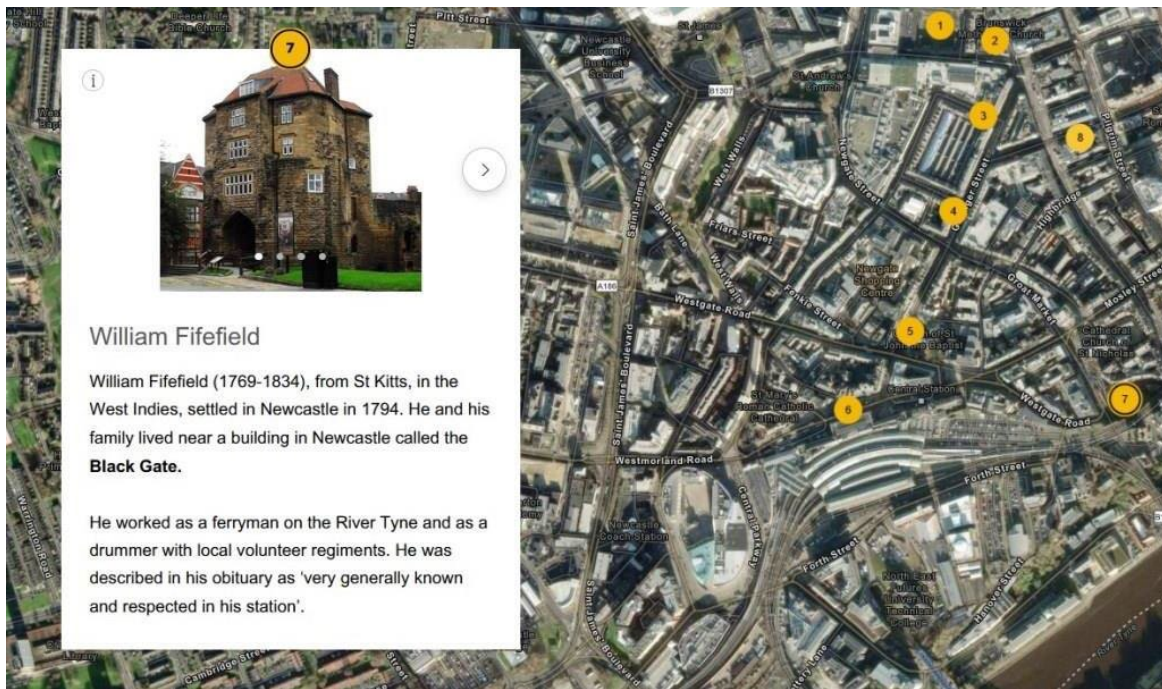
The following year (2024), Heritage Schools and the African Lives in the North East team decided to produce two StoryMaps^{3 4} which could be used by adults or children, so that they could see the diverse and lesser-told stories of the city’s buildings and understand how the built heritage of Newcastle was related to people of African descent. The African Lives in the North East team suggested the people, buildings and content which should be included, and they worked very closely with the LHEM and Historic England’s Archive Education Manager, who produced the two StoryMaps and the accompanying resources. The StoryMaps and resources can be used in the classroom or as walks in Newcastle.

The LHEM trialled the StoryMap walks with three Primary schools and one Secondary. In addition, the African Lives in the North East team and the LHEM delivered a CPD walk for 25 teachers from other schools so that they now have the confidence, skills and knowledge to lead the walks themselves for their pupils. The online resources include detailed guidance for leading the walks and using the resources, including using appropriate language, how to deal with emotional responses and challenging questions, and realising that finding out about these African Lives is likely to have a different effect on the descendants of those enslaved and the descendants of those far removed from enslavement.

² <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/teaching-activities/african-lives-northern-england/>

³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/teaching-activities/significant-people-from-africa-newcastle-ks3/> (Newcastle North walk)

⁴ <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/teaching-activities/significant-people-from-africa-newcastle-ks2/> (Newcastle Central walk)



Screenshot of part of the Central Newcastle StoryMap

"We were hoping to correct the misconceptions about people of African descent and of the history of the North East. We were hoping to provide a more accurate picture. We were hoping that they would be able to see that it was something embedded in the North East, not something in a book or something that people told them about, but something they could experience themselves and something which was in a very familiar place, like the [Eldon Square] Leisure Centre or Central Station – something they could see as a real part of their lives" - Project Co-ordinator, African Lives in the North East

Case study interviews

For this case study, interviews were carried out with teachers and pupils at two of the schools which piloted the walks: St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary, Kenton, Newcastle and Kingsmeadow Community School, Dunston, Gateshead; and with the project co-ordinator of African Lives in the North East.

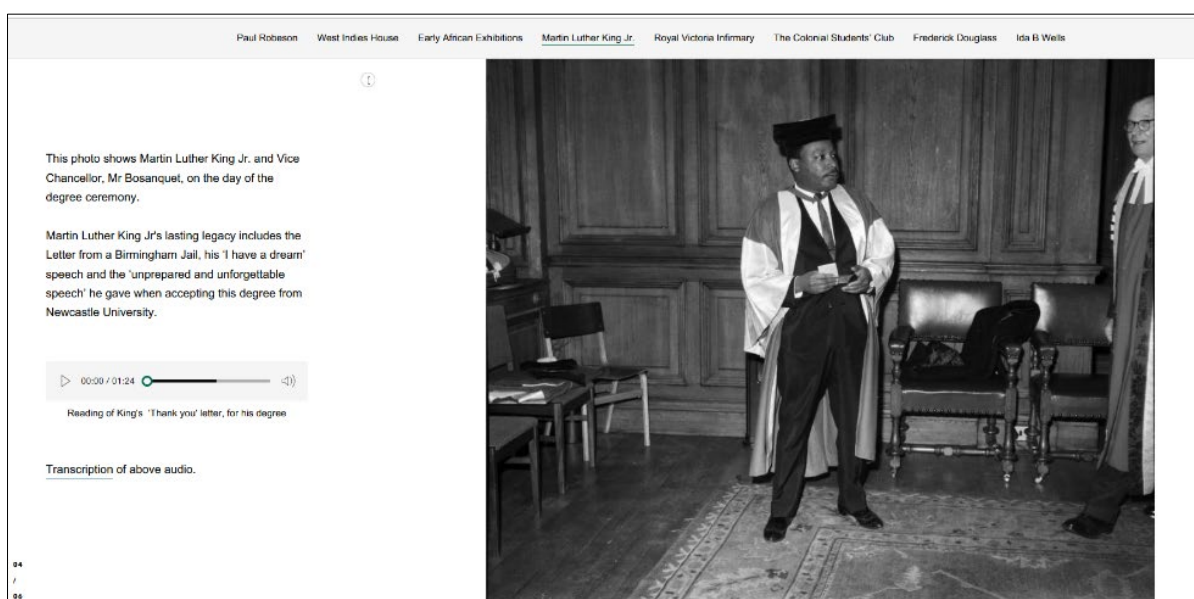
St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary is in a suburb of Newcastle. It has 240 pupils, 29% of whom are eligible for pupil premium and 19% have English as an additional language. The school had already achieved the Heritage Schools Award before taking part in the African Lives in the North East walk.

Pupils who are keen on History can apply to be Heritage Heroes and are given History-related tasks to do. The four Heritage Heroes, and two other applicants, from years 3, 5 and 6 went on the walk, along with nine pupils from St Cuthbert's partner school, St

George's Catholic Primary, Newburn. St George's is working towards the Heritage Schools Award.

Kingsmeadow is a diverse secondary school with 950 pupils, 45% of whom are eligible for pupil premium. Many pupils have arrived relatively recently from other countries, and over 30 languages are spoken. Kingsmeadow is working towards achieving the Heritage Schools Award, which will include a more local focus across the curriculum.

All the Year 8 pupils (seven classes) trialled the African Lives walk in summer 2023, as part of their study of the American Civil Rights Movement. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. had visited Newcastle in 1967 to receive an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law at Newcastle University.



This photo shows Martin Luther King Jr. and Vice Chancellor, Mr Bosanquet, on the day of the degree ceremony.

Martin Luther King Jr's lasting legacy includes the Letter from a Birmingham Jail, his 'I have a dream' speech and the 'unprepared and unforgettable speech' he gave when accepting this degree from Newcastle University.

00:00 / 01:24

Reading of King's 'I thank you' letter, for his degree

Transcription of above audio.

Part of the online resource about Dr Martin Luther King's visit to Newcastle University

The African Lives in Newcastle walks

There are two routes, Central Newcastle and North Newcastle, which have been designed to stir curiosity and a sense of pride in Newcastle's rich and diverse past. Each walk focuses on individuals, groups of people and places associated with men and women of African descent who have visited, lived, worked or studied in Newcastle, for example abolitionist Olaudah Equiano who visited in 1792 and Muhammed Ali who came to raise funds for boys' boxing clubs in 1977.

The schools which trialled the walks chose locations from both of the walks, to fit best with what the pupils were studying and their interests. The African Lives team and the LHEM from Heritage Schools emphasised to the teachers (and to those on the CPD walk) that it is important to choose a variety of people for the walk, and not just focus

on enslavement and abolition, for example, so that participants get a broad perspective and stereotypes are not perpetuated.

Teachers who wish to lead walks themselves can choose which locations to visit, and use the photographs of the relevant people and buildings, and background information provided in the online resource.

Impacts on pupils of the African Lives walks

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary



LHEM with St Cuthbert's pupils at the Black Gate, near the home of William Fifefield

Before the walk, the pupils had not known that people of African descent had been living in and visiting Newcastle for hundreds of years, and that they had been involved in many fields: medicine, education, theatre and so on. They found out more about enslavement and abolition and agreed that it was important to learn about it:

"We found out how Black people had to work harder to get their say, and they had to group together to try and be heard. They had to have lots of different routes to get out of slavery" - Year 6 pupil

The pupils also found out about contrasting reactions to people of African descent. Referring to abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass (who lectured in Newcastle in 1846 and 1860 to huge audiences, and whose freedom was bought with the help of the Richardson family of Newcastle) for example, one pupil said:

"Some people didn't judge by their colour or religion. Some White people helped them get their statements heard" - Year 6 pupil

In contrast, the pupils were dismayed to learn that in 1950 a Nigerian couple (Victor Oyenuga, studying Agriculture at Newcastle University and Sabinah Onabajo, training to be a nurse at Princess Mary Maternity Home) could only find one church, St John's

Grainger Street, which would welcome them. However, they did have great support amongst the wider local community, because 4,000 people attended their wedding.

"I expected that everyone would be welcomed in church then" - Year 5 pupil

The pupils said that taking part in the African Lives walk, and the other local history topics which they have studied, has made them feel more proud of where they live.

"Knowing that people who were impacted by the transatlantic trade in enslaved people – knowing that they came to Newcastle – that was quite impactful, and it's not just an abstract concept. We have quite a good abolitionist legacy in Newcastle – it makes it relatable. It's a huge topic and it makes it relatable for the children" - History Lead

The knowledge gained on the walk has piqued the pupils' curiosity, and they said that they would now like to find out about how people, who had been enslaved, lived once enslavement was abolished. For example, how they made a living and whether they were still judged for having been enslaved.

Kingsmeadow Community School

Kingsmeadow trialled the African Lives walk as part of their study of the American Civil Rights movement. The Head of Humanities and the LHEM had chosen parts of the Central and Northern walks, to include the people most relevant to the students. They went by train to Newcastle Central Station to start the walk. Many of them do not go to Newcastle and had not travelled by train before, so this was a new experience for them. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, had arrived in Newcastle at Central Station, as had Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Visiting Newcastle University, where Dr King had received his honorary doctorate, was another place which the school wanted the students to experience. The students had already learned about Dr Martin Luther King Jr. as part of their Civil Rights studies, but the other people featured on the walk were new to them.

The Head of Humanities said that the students had engaged very well with the content of the walk and were respectful of the information which was shared, as some of it was challenging with regard to racism and injustice.

"What seemed so far away, that they had been studying about America, was really relevant in their home city and they had a lot to be proud of about their heritage of acceptance and equality. It was a positive message of acceptance and the power of engaging with other people" - Head of Humanities



The LHEM with Kingsmeadow students near the location of the former West Indies House (14-16 Lovaine Place, now demolished), a hostel for African and Caribbean workers in Britain

The four students who took part in this case study interview said that what they had learned on the walk had made them more proud of Newcastle:

"I was surprised how many people came to the North East – how many inspiring people there were and they caused stuff to happen and changed the future for the better for everyone else so that everyone has equal rights" - Year 9 student

The Head of Humanities felt that it was hard to say how much impact the walk had had on the students, compared to the whole Civil Rights topic which they had studied, but the walk had definitely opened the students' eyes to the power of peaceful protest through learning about people who had spoken about abolition of enslavement at public meetings in Newcastle, such as Ida B Wells and Frederick Douglass. The students were already aware of the importance of acceptance of diversity, as the school has students from so many different ethnic backgrounds.

The students used some of the online resources in the classroom after the walk. They each researched one of the featured people, and designed a blue plaque to commemorate them.

Impacts on teachers and the school as a whole

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary

The History Lead had not been aware of many of the people featured in the African Lives walks, nor of their connection to local places.

"The amount of times I've walked past these places – I didn't know there was a music hall on Nelson Street" - History Lead

The Nelson Street Music Hall was the venue for many speakers against enslavement, including Henry "Box" Brown. Henry "Box" Brown escaped enslavement by being posted in a wooden box from Richmond to Philadelphia, where enslavement was illegal and he could become free. The pupils had already learned about Henry "Box" Brown in school because the History Lead felt that his story is quite an accessible way to learn about enslavement, but he had not known that Brown had visited Newcastle.

The History Lead plans to use information from the African Lives walks where possible for all year groups, and will take pupils on the walks as well as using the resources in the classroom. This also fits in with teaching British Values and increasing Cultural Capital.

In previous years the school had focused on people such as Harriet Tubman, the African American NASA mathematicians and Nelson Mandela for Black History Week. In future the History Lead will include some of the people from the African Lives walk to provide more local context. Thus, all children in the school can benefit from this resource and better understand the impact of people of African descent in Newcastle.

Kingsmeadow Community School

From next year, the African Lives walk and resources will be used as part of Year 9's study of the 1950s and 1960s as the school's History curriculum is changing. The project has shown Newcastle is a historically important area for equality and human rights, and staff and students will use the African Lives in the North East resources for other year groups where applicable. The Head of Humanities said that it will definitely change how she teaches the Civil Rights movement – the topic had focused on the United States with a little about the Bristol Bus Boycott, but now there will be more emphasis on local North East people and places associated with civil rights.

"We will continue to use the Storymap and make sure the students realise it is near where they live" - Head of Humanities

African Lives in the North East is the first Heritage Schools project which the school has taken part in, and the Head of Humanities is keen to explore how local heritage can be included more in the curriculum with a view to achieving the Heritage Schools Award. A curriculum focusing on local heritage has been shown, through other Heritage Schools case studies, to increase students' engagement and attainment and increase their understanding of where they live.

Impacts on the African Lives in the North East project, through working with Heritage Schools

The African Lives team had a vision for how they wanted to reach schools with their research as a means of combating racism and so that children and young people could learn about the roles of people of African descent in the North East, and the places associated with them. They knew that partnering with Heritage Schools would provide them with the contacts and skills to promote African Lives in the North East to schools.

"The whole thing is about tackling racism. We have to be very careful in the walks to keep it up front, and to talk about resilience and challenge and working together, so I think we are very aware of the possible emotional impact of the walk and how do you work with that, and how do you allow yourself not to be distracted into just talking about enslavement or talking about other oppressions. I think it's emotionally packed: language, resilience – these are the things we want to bring out. It's action-oriented learning – not just learning at a cognitive or emotional level, it's like: "now we know, what are we going to do?" - Project Co-ordinator, African Lives in the North East

Working with Heritage Schools has enabled the African Lives in the North East project to connect with schools in the region, through the LHEM introducing schools to the walk and the online resources. African Lives in the North East is promoted in all the other CPD sessions which the LHEM delivers, to reach as many teachers as possible.

Historic England's Archives Education Officer created the comprehensive StoryMap and online learning resource, which supports teachers to lead walks themselves, or they can use the resources in the classroom. The learning resource is on the Heritage Schools website, so any school (in the North East or beyond) can easily access it.

Summary

The African Lives in the North East online resources and walks are proving to be an effective way to enable children and young people to understand issues regarding racism, diversity, inclusion; the history of people of African descent in the North East and the places associated with them. The African Lives team have been able to reach a much greater number of schools through partnering with Heritage Schools.

The pupils and teachers who took part in this case study said that they had learned a lot about the achievements of people of African descent who had lived in or visited Newcastle. They found out that Newcastle has a history of supporting equality and promoting the abolition of enslavement. They could relate more easily to these issues because they could visit the locations “on their doorstep” where the people of African descent had lived, worked and given talks to create change and made a difference.

St Cuthbert’s Catholic Primary and Kingsmeadow Community School now have the African Lives walk and online resources embedded in their curriculum for future years, and the other schools which took part in the CPD walk are equipped to lead their own walks to find out more about African Lives in the North East.