

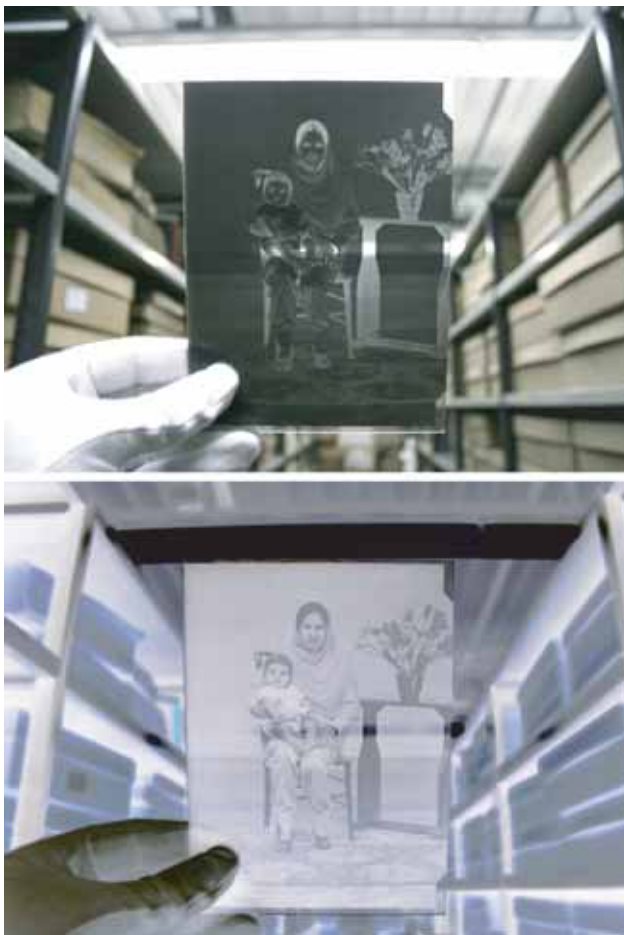
Connecting Histories

Newsletter

Issue 3 - Winter 2005

Artist in Residence - Keith Piper

Over the past few months internationally renowned artist Keith Piper has been working with some of the photographic and archive collections in City Archives and the Central Library. Keith, who was brought up in Birmingham, is well known for his work exploring racial and cultural differences and representation.



'Negative Positive' by Keith Piper, 2005

This work was part of a bigger Arts Council project called *Necessary Journeys*. He used material from the Dyche Collection [described on next page], the Stone collection [photographs from all over the world], and documents relating to abolitionist Joseph Sturge and his Montserrat Lime Company. Keith then developed new work responding to the material that he found.



'Ghosting The Archive' by Keith Piper, 2005. Derived from the Sir Benjamin Stone photographic collection [Birmingham City Archives]

Writing in the *Necessary Journeys* book Keith described some of his motivation: "As a boy of Caribbean descent growing up in Sparkbrook in the 60s and 70s, I was made aware of the engineering legacy of Boulton and Watt, but never told that their steam engines peppered the slave-holding plantations of the Caribbean islands where my parents came from, and of how utterly dependent the city's wealth and development was upon this trade...I was never told about the somewhat contradictory but vigorous tradition of anti-slavery activism engaged in by individuals such as Boulton, Watt and Joseph Sturge. Equally, I was left unaware of the traditions of political activism brought to the city by waves of Asian and West Indian workers such as Henry Gunter...The traces of these stories and many others lie in the Birmingham City Archive. It will be my intention to reactivate some of them."



'Ghosting The Archive' by Keith Piper, 2005



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Connecting Histories

The Dyche Collection



Keith's reconstruction of a moment of discovery in the Dyche collection

Some images which Keith Piper found in the Dyche Collection had a very personal resonance. When looking through a box of photographs of the African Caribbean community in Birmingham in the 1950s Keith came across photographs of his family. If you would like to see whether you too can identify some of the people in Dyche's photographs, please get in touch with us.



One of the many unidentified studio portraits in the Dyche Collection

The Dyche Collection provides a photographic record of African Caribbean and Asian newcomers to the city since the 1950s. The archive relates to two portrait studios run by Ernest Dyche (1887-1973), who opened his first in Bordesley Green about 1910 and another in Balsall Heath a few years later. The clientele changed significantly in the 1950s, reflecting the incoming wave of migrants from Africa, the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent, many of whom visited the studio to have portraits made for friends and family back home. By the time it ceased operating in the mid 1980s, the studio had inadvertently documented the development of the first and second generations of this initial wave of immigration.

The Dyche Collection is available in Local Studies on Floor 6 of Birmingham Central Library [0121 303 4549].

Victorian Migrants and Refugees

Patsy Davis has been researching the Irish presence in Birmingham and has made good use of *Finigan's Journal*. The Journal provides an evocative picture of early Victorian Birmingham, through Thomas Finigan's missionary work in the slums, where he encounters a wide range of nationalities, beliefs and political outlooks, and has to contend with severe poverty, epidemics, as well as personal hostility. Patsy identified this extract of note: "I visited several houses in Thomas St. again this day - I went into Court 9...I met in this court a married woman, a native of the Cape of Good hope" 7 October 1837.

The Journal is available at Birmingham City Archives [0121 303 4217] quoting reference MS 3255.



A Thomas Street Court, 1875
[Birmingham Central Library, Local Studies: Improvement Scheme 102]

Getting Involved

In October *Connecting Histories* attended a volunteering fair at Birmingham University Guild of Students. The response was phenomenal and over 50 students expressed an interest in getting actively involved with *Connecting Histories* and other community heritage projects in the city. If you are part of a community project and could benefit from some volunteer help, or would like to volunteer yourself, then please contact us.



Birmingham University Guild of Students, October 2005

Connecting Histories

Featured Collection

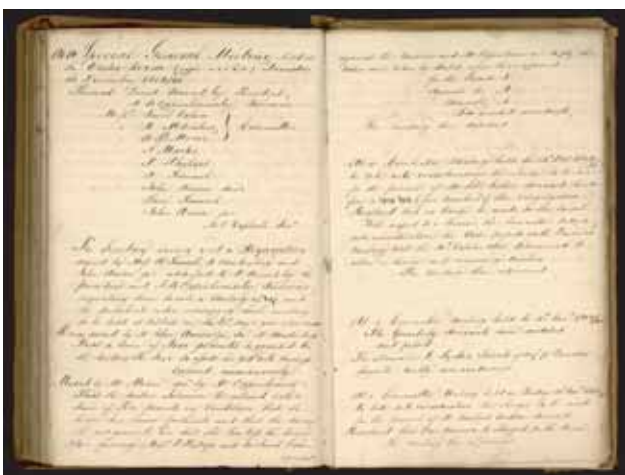


Chief rabbi's visit to Birmingham, 1970s [JA/2/F]

The Birmingham Hebrew Congregation

The Birmingham Hebrew Congregation archive, the oldest collection included in the *Connecting Histories* project, reflects the growth and development of Birmingham's Jewish community during the 19th and 20th centuries.

There have been Jews in Birmingham since at least the 18th century. Birmingham historian William Hutton, writing in 1730, described a small and poor group 'whose society is entirely confined to themselves, except in the commercial line' and who 'still preserve the faint resemblance of their ancient worship'.



Volume of Birmingham Hebrew Congregation committee minutes, 1826-1841 [JA/1/A/1/1]

By the 1820s, the earliest surviving minutes of the synagogue governing Council show signs of greater prosperity. The Congregation owned a cemetery, had built a new synagogue in Severn Street, employed a rabbi and a kosher butcher, and had written a Code of Laws.

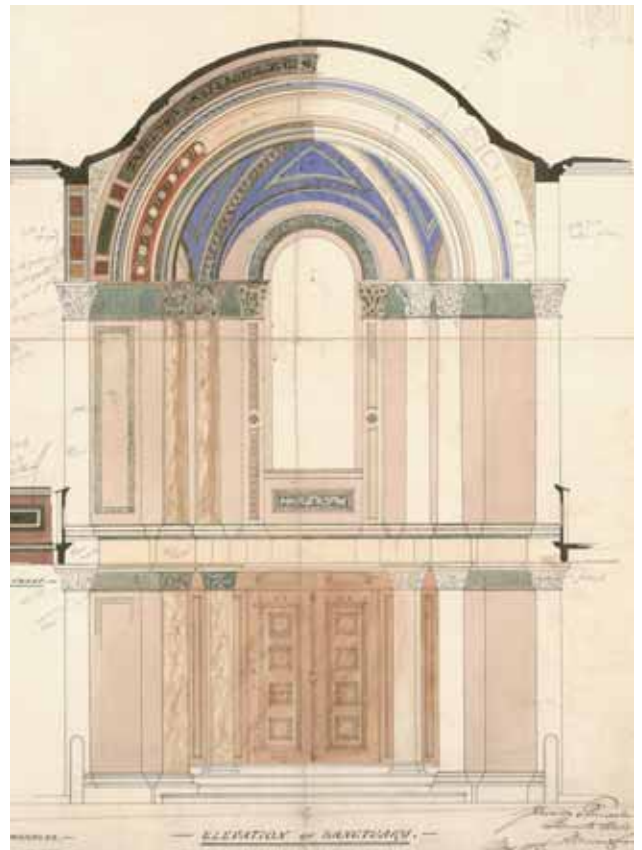


The Birmingham Jewish Arts Society cast for 'The Lady of Belmont', 1926 [MS 2520/1]

Education and poor relief were well organised: the Birmingham Hebrew Philanthropic Society was founded in 1828, the Hebrew School in 1843, and the Hebrew Educational Aid Society in 1851.

The end of the 19th century saw the creation of the Dramatic Society in 1870, followed in the 20th century by other arts organisations and social clubs including the Jewish Arts Society, Jewish Youth Council, and the Jewish Boys' and Girls' Club. It is good to have three small collections of 20th century personal papers, belonging to Zoe Josephs, Constance Davis, and Dorothy Gillman, as the rest of the archive comes from organisations.

This year, the Congregation celebrates 150 years of worship in their magnificent Victorian synagogue at Singers Hill and we wish them a hearty "Mazel Tov."



One of the drawings for Singers Hill Synagogue, 1878, from Yeoville Thomason's architectural plans [MS 1460]

Exhibitions and Events

Black Victorians



'Study of Head of Girl for The Beloved' Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1865-66
[Courtesy of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery]

Black Victorians:
Black People in British Art 1800-1900
Waterhall Gallery of Modern Art,
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery
28 January – 2 April 2006 (free)

This important exhibition considers the representation of people from the African diaspora in British Art during the 19th century, and the role that celebrated and unsung black figures played in British society at this time. The approach is multi-media: paintings, sculpture, drawings, photographs, printed and ephemeral material. The result is the first bringing together of a wealth of material that has previously been largely ignored. Black figures are seen to figure in all walks of life from the army and church to the theatre and a considerable presence as artists' models. This event proposes a new reading of British Art of this period which throws light on the world that Black Victorians inhabited.

Connecting Histories Open Day

Connecting Histories - New Communities and Birmingham's History

Birmingham Central Library Theatre

18 March 2006 (free)

This event is an opportunity for community groups to openly discuss the heritage, history and experience of their community and will also showcase aspects of the *Connecting Histories* project. There is a huge amount of heritage work going on in communities in Birmingham with a large number of groups developing oral history and community archive projects. If you'd like to know what's going on in the city and explore how different communities view their heritage and how it impacts on their identity and daily life, then this event is for you. The day will focus on activities from a number of communities in the city including the Irish, African Caribbean, Asian and Jewish communities.

Proud History

Proud History

The Gallery, Floor 1, Birmingham Central Library
1 February – 20 February 2006 (free)

Displayed in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans History Month, this exhibition looks at local LGBT histories. It also highlights the need to identify, collect and preserve documents, photographs and artefacts, currently held by individuals and organisations, so that they can be used for further research into LGBT history. For more information on how you might get involved, or if you want to take part in an oral history project to record LGBT lives and experiences, then please contact us.



Birmingham Pride 2004 © Brigitte Winsor

Connecting Histories

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