# *Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project*

## Leader's Story: Thelma Balfour 'A hard worker'

**Authors**: Gale Richards with Leoner-Gardner Howard, and Julie Large.

Thelma Balfour (née Sims) was born in St Ann, Jamaica and came to England in June 1962, aged 23. Thelma lived in London for a few years and that is where she met the man that was to become her husband Lebert (Bert) Balfour. She found a job in a Wimpy Bar, and later in a sweet factory, whilst she was in London.

After they married, Bert and Thelma decided to move to Birmingham to be closer to Bert's relatives there. They moved in 1965, when Thelma was pregnant, and initially lived in Moseley where Bert's cousin was, and Thelma worshipped at St Paul's Church on Moseley Road. After the baby was born, Thelma got a job making cash bags, and then later worked as an auxiliary nurse, at a number of hospitals in Birmingham.

In 1969, while at work one day Thelma met Mrs Green (also from the Caribbean), who invited Thelma to come to Edward Road Baptist Church. Not long after that, Thelma and Bert moved to a house near Edward Road, and she has worshipped at Edward Road Baptist Church, ever since.

Thelma recalls that when she first arrived at the church, she found everyone to be quite friendly. The congregation, however, was quite small

in number, – when the children went into Sunday school, there could be as few as eight or ten adults in the congregation. That recollection of a low number of adults corresponds with the church members' meeting minutes on 26 March 1969, that record a membership of eighteen church members for the previous year.

When Thelma first arrived at the church, she remembers that she (and most of the other Black people) usually went straight home after the service. Twelve years after she first started attending the church, in 1981, Thelma was baptised and received into membership at the church. The minutes of the church members' meeting minutes on 20 March 1981, confirm plans for Thelma's baptism in the Easter Service on 19 April, and the church roll indicates that she came into membership on 17 May 1981.

The 1980s, are remembered by Thelma as a time that many of the Black people became more actively involved in leading things in the life of the church. She believes this was prompted by the minister of the time actively encouraging the Black members to get involved, when a significant number of church members had left the church. The church members' meeting minutes indicate that Thelma was elected a deacon 22 March 1991. She was the second Black woman in the life of the church to hold this role.

As Thelma looks back on more than fifty years at Edward Road Baptist Church, she describes herself as having acted as 'head chef and chief bottle washer'. This is because during her time she has done everything from the washing up and cleaning, to catering, helping to serve communion, and undertaking administrative tasks for the church.

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## References

‘Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project’ oral history interview with Thelma Balfour, 12 February 2026, conducted by Gale Richards and Leoner Gardner-Howard.

Edward Baptist Church, Church Roll Book.

Edward Road Baptist Church Members’ Meeting Minutes 26 March 1969.

Edward Road Baptist Church Members’ Meeting Minutes 20 March 1981.

Edward Road Baptist Church Members’ Meeting Minutes 22 March 1991.