# *Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project*

## Leader's Story: Louise Pennicooke 'The quiet nurturer'

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

Oral history accounts suggest that Louise Pennicooke started attending Selly Park Baptist Church in the early 1960s, when she would have been possibly in her twenties but certainly no older than thirty. This was a time when the church was actively seeking to connect with the large 'West Indian'[1] community that was settling in Birmingham. For example, the deacons' meeting minutes 10 July 1962 refer to church members being encouraged to invite any 'West Indian' neighbours or friends they may know to the church.

Edwin Fasham, a longstanding white British church member suggests as a 'West Indian', 'she was just accepted as part of the congregation, and, you know, as a member'. Edwin recalls Louise in those early days as a regular attender, self-sufficient, having a job, possibly at Cadbury's, being quite happy, and living relatively locally, until recently. He also recalls her from quite early on attending Bible studies after the Sunday evening service, that were held in people's homes (known as house groups), and sometimes hosting these groups in her home, too.

[1] At the time the term 'West Indian' was commonly used to describe people from the Caribbean.

Louise is believed to have been the first Black person to occupy a formal leadership role in the life of the church. She was elected to the leadership team on 7 December 2003. This was at a time when the church had not long transitioned from having a traditional diaconate made up of elected deacons and the minister, to having an elected leadership team, comprising leaders and the minister. The transition and change of name was designed to indicate a shared role, and to divest some of the power that was perceived to come with the title of deacon.

Leaders' meeting minutes 1 February 2004 indicate that one of Louise's responsibilities was overseeing the ministry to older people. Additionally, the leaders' meeting minutes 7 March 2017 suggest that Louise was involved in planning meetings with the minister to develop the church's overall strategy for the pastoral care of people connected to the church. Louise's name also appears on several church rotas in the early 2000s, relating to caring for plants, arranging flowers, and serving coffee after the Sunday morning worship service.

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## References

'Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project' oral history interview with Edwin Fasham, 23 January 2026, conducted by Gale Richards and Leoner Gardner-Howard.

‘Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project’ oral history interview with Kathleen Fraser, 16 March 2026, conducted by Gale Richards and Leoner Gardner-Howard.

Selly Park Baptist Church Deacons’ Meeting Minutes 10 July 1962.

Selly Park Baptist Church Annual General Meeting Minutes 7 December 2003.

Selly Park Baptist Church Leaders’ Meeting Minutes 7 March 2017.