Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project

Oral history interview, Kathleen Fraser, at her home in Bournville, Birmingham. Conducted by Gale Richards (principal investigator) and Leoner Gardner-Howard (co-researcher).
Also present in the room: Keith Fraser (son of Kathleen Fraser)
16 March 2026

<u>Begins at 8 mins 42 seconds:</u>

Kathleen: …I was at a college in Kingston doing typing. Then from there, I came Over here. My sister, oh, I'll tell you more about that. My sister, oh, that lives near the church in Selly Park. She has her family there, married and living there. It's just a walk distance to Selly Park church. So, she thought I should join her. So, she agreed that I should come over, you know, and stop with her. So, when she was, um, arranged me to come over, she had got a neighbour, a Neighbour from Selly Park, um, and, um, yes, is neighbour and friend. His name is, he was living by the university, the Bournbrook Road that road right by the university gate. That's where Dr. Birdsall was living. He worked as a full-time worker at the university.
And he was living in Bournbrook Road. So, um, for some reason or other, he, he was known to my sister and her family. My sister was already married from Jamaica. So, she and her husband were, were living, you know, down, not in Selly Oak, um, in, Canon Hill somewhere down there. And Dr. Birdsall left from the church. He got in touch with her and he, he invited her to join the Selly Park Church as well. And, he got, helped her to get the house. And, and the same road that he was living. Dr. Birdsall and his family, as a family as well. So, my sister was living in the same room that their neighbour that helped her to get into the Selly Park Church and to get the house and the Bournbrook Road. So that's when she was living there. So, I joined her from there.

Gale: So, do you remember what year it was that you came to England?

Kathleen: 1962.

Gale: Okay, 1962. And by that time, had you already been baptised?

Kathleen: I didn’t get baptised until I came over here.

Gale: Okay.

Kathleen: I was baptised at Selly Park Baptist Church. And I was married, I got married there as well, and continued from there…
(ends at 11 minutes 8 seconds)

<u>Continues at 11 minutes 18 seconds:</u>
Gale: And do you remember what year it was that you were baptised?
Kathleen: 63. It was quick. It was because my sister encouraged me to be in the church and that's what she did. She encouraged me to join the church. She was like a second mother because my mother wanted her to be responsible for me as well. So, she encouraged me to get into the church and to get baptised from there.
Gale: And your sister's name?
Kathleen: Gwendolyn Smith. I'll show you a photo I've got of her after our conversation. Sorry, I don't want to forget because it's very important. The same Dr. Birdsall that got her the house on Bournbrook Road and got her into the Church of Selly Park. So, when I came up from Jamaica, he was the one that, help my sister, went with my sister toLondon to fetch me when I came off the plane, you know. He was such a good neighbour and friend to my family, you know. So, when I came up to Jamaica, from Jamaica, my sister had a little daughter out there by the name of Cutie. So, Cutie was only about eight and I was about 19. So, Cutie and I came up together. So, when we came up on the plane, and Dr. Birdsall and my sister, they came down to London to fetch us off the plane. So, you see what good neighbor that man was, yeah. And he was a choir master at Selly Park Baptist Church as well, and full-time employment at the university, Birmingham University. He was at full-time employment. I know him as Dr. Birdsall, and his wife's name is Irene. And this is big, oh, Dr. Birdsall, Mr Birdsall and Dr. Birdsall. So, his wife Christian's name is Irene and he's Neville. So, after I came up by my sister, do you know what Dr. Birdsall did again? He took me on the first job. He spent one whole day to put me into a job. What a neighbour from Selly Park, Baptist Church…(**<u>ends at 13 mins 36 seconds)</u>**

<u>Continues at 15 mins 46 seconds</u>
Gale: So, what year did you get married?
Kathleen: 65
Gale: And the name of your husband?

Kathleen: What was that?
Gale: The name of your husband when you got married, what was the name of your husband, first name?
Kathleen: What about my husband?
Gale: First name, what was his name?
Kathleen: Donal. Donal Fraser.
Gale:
So, tell us more about what it was like when you first came to England and when you first came to Selly Park Baptist Church, what was it like? What did it feel like?
Kathleen: It was good. It was good, man. Yeah, always enjoy worshiping. Whatever. You know, you're worshiping God and you're in the church, so I always, whatever. You know, in the church, you don't expect it. You're worshiping God, but they've got to be cooperative with people and think about God, so that's what my main mind was on. And do you remember which Black families church members were there when you arrived who was there, Black church members, in 1962, I think you said, is when you arrived. Who were the Black families there, or Black church members, at Selly Park Baptist Church, when you arrived? Do you remember?
Kathleen: Oh, who was the Black families. Mr. MacFarlane.
Gale: Mr MacFarlane.
Kathleen: Yeah, Mr. MacFarlane. Yeah, of course. I remember them. But it was a church with mostly white, you know, but it was a friendly, nice church, you know. And one thing I didn't mention, when I just came up with when I came up with Jamaica and Dr. Birdsall was that cooperating and helping the family of us.
And a new minister came from Liverpool by the name of Mr. Mawdsley.
Gale: Mr. Mawdsley did you say? Mr. Mawdsley
Kathleen: Yeah, Mr. Mawdsley. I've got the photos I show to you when we have finished talking.
Gale: Okay. Yeah.
Kathleen:
And Mr. Mawdsley, he was just as nice as Dr. Birdsall, both of them, cooperate again and helping us, you know, which was, you know, just let God send them.
He was, they were helpful to me and they were helpful to my sister and his family. And they always found out if we need anything, in need of anything that we all, you know, and they always said. And Mr. Mawdsley, the one that officiated at my

wedding was a new minister.
I've got his photo I will show to you as well, yeah. So, Mr. Mawdsley and his family, they came up from Liverpool and he were the minister of the church…
Gale: And what were the roles, the things in the church that, what were the activities, roles that... Oh, the activities. So, like say yourself, your sisters, the other Black families like the McFarlanes, what kind of things did they do in the life of the church? Were there particular activities they did? Like singing or what, how did you contribute to the life of the church? How did they? How did you contribute? Did you sing in, you know, you mentioned a choir, did you sing in the church?
Kathleen: I was in the choir. I was in the choir at the church as well, yes, I was there. And I goes to choir practice during the week, prayer meeting, it depends what I'm able to go in a bit, but I was a regular member in choir practice to prepare for Sunday and prayer meeting, yes. And while I was at home, while I was there, this lady, Mrs. Williamson, I don't know if you have met her, Mrs. Williamson and Mr. Williamson, they are in the church, they are members in the church, and Mrs. Williamson went out, you know, she worked in the days and I work in the days, and during the evening, after choir practice or prayer meeting, and she had a car, and she'd really take me home, you know, because I'd be on the street waiting for the bus, late at night, and she always makes sure to take me home in her car, Mrs. Williamson, always do that also. Choir practice, our members meeting to do whatever, she always did in the early, she and I are also one of the members in the church.
Gale: And they were not from the West Indies?
Kathleen: Oh, no, they were white.
Gale: Yeah. Again, that's really interesting.
Kathleen: Going back to Mr MacFarlane. He was on the leaders. He was very helpful in the church.
Gale:
Was he a deacon? You said he was on the leadership. Do you remember if he was a deacon?
Kathleen: Mr. MacFarlane?
Gale: Yeah
Kathleen: No, he wasn't a deacon. He was very helpful. I think he was a builder, and I think anything needing church, to be honest, he really assisted in helping,

and sometimes, you know, he takes up offerings in the church, you know, different, he helped in different various ways. He was very helpful in the church**.**

(ends at 21 minutes, 13 seconds).