Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project
Oral history interview of Angela Richards (the daughter of Gloria Richards), 7 August 2025 @ Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church.
Conducted by Gale Richards (principal investigator) and Marcia Smith (co-researcher).

Gale: As you know, I am Gale, this is Marcia and what we need to start with is by you saying your name and when you first started coming to this Six Ways Baptist Church.
Angela: My name is Angela Richards, and I have been coming here since I was 8 / 9 years old and I am now 67, so a long time. How I started here, was because our family had just moved to Erdington. It was nearer to my dad's work. And we were out playing in the front garden with my 5 brothers, as we used to. We used to see somebody, which is Heather June, now Heather Cook, walking past, and they lived at the top of the road, she and her aunty, Marjorie Falkner, were in the Girl's Brigade. And they would walk past every day. We used to watch them walking past. they would say hello, in their uniforms. About two weeks after, they told us where they were going, and asked if I wanted to go to Girl's Brigade. They asked to speak to my mum. I said yes. She said yes, and so they came to collect me the next week, so that's how I came to be involved with Girl's Brigade and the church. At that time, Heather had a brother. There was Boy's Brigade, and Scouts used to be here, at the same time. Her brother Martin, her older brother, used to pick them up on the way, and that's how they got into Boy's Brigade and the Scouts, with my two older brothers.

Gale: And can you remember roughly what year that would be?

Angela: Hmmm, let me see… so that would be… I was 8… End of the 60s, early 70s… end of the 60s. I'm not exactly sure what year but it was then.

Gale: And so, your family, were they already coming to the church at that point, or no?

Angela: No, we weren't going… we lived over the other side of Birmingham in Edgbaston, so we used to go to a church there, but at that time when we moved here, at that point we hadn't found a church because we hadn't been here that long then.

Gale: Okay. So, thinking about our focus on trying to establish when the first Black church member, Black deacon, Black pastor, as this is part of the project. Early in the 1960s, we believe there were

some Black members of the congregation. Do you have any sense from what you can remember as a child, as to, who was around, in terms of Black men and women?

Angela: Yes, perhaps I may have joined Girl's Brigade a little bit earlier, but I remember at that point, Mr and Mrs Morrison were here at that point. I'm not sure if there were one or two others. There might have been others but the church was majority white. I know that there were Black people living around the area but they weren't part of the church.

Gale: Tells us what you can remember about Mr and Mrs Morrison.

Angela: They had children about our age group, and Mr Morrison was more involved in the church. He seemed to be a bit more involved than Mrs Morrison. I got the impression she was more involved in raising the family, but still making sure that they came to church, had a church background. Mr Morrison, I know he was around the church, but at the age of around 8 or 9, 9, 10ish, I can't say that I really noticed him much.

Gale: Okay. Marcia is going to ask you about Gloria.

Marcia: With Gloria coming into the church, she possibly came in the same time or after you?

Angela: My mum sent us to church, she did not go to church, but she used to come and support us with Girl's Brigade things, activities – Girl's Brigade displays and anything that was going on, and also with the boys, with Scouts and Boy's Brigade. She used to come and support us with that. And she would come occasionally, but again I suppose with a young family, 6 children and working as well, the opportunity wasn't always there to do that, but she did send us along to church.

Marcia: How/what do you think she felt being one of the few early Black members of the church?

Angela: She sent us along, I think because she came from a church background, and she grew up in Jamaica in the church, so she wanted to continue that. When we came here, it was the other side of Birmingham, she was involved in the church there, when she came to the church in Edgbaston they weren't welcomed, at all, and she said that. At one point they were told they were in the wrong church. Therefore, they ended up going to… or forming… supporting themselves to develop their own church and support, so it was a majority Black church. When we came here (Erdington), she

still sent us to church, but she didn't go because she was working and bringing up a family and everything. But I know it was a priority, she used to go Christmas, and those kinds of times, but she wasn't as involved as she is now, but she used to send us along. But to me, it's always been an important part of her life, to make sure that we grew up with that understanding, and then the choice was ours, eventually.

Ends at 9.55

Starts at 19.55

Angela: Mrs [Dass] Duncan, Dass, she Dass came after my mum, I think my mum came. I think my mum spoke to Dass about coming and she came after my mother. Others started to come, some stayed and some didn't. As my mum got more involved, she did encourage them to come, yes, it wasn't very welcoming, you know, at that time, it wasn't really, some people were saying that they are not putting up with it, not comfortable on a Sunday, could only sit in certain places, not able to stay where they want, made to feel uncomfortable and moved around, so, yes, I could understand. Some did stay, yes, push forward with it. I think Mr Morrison had some rough times with it, being the only Black man, as a deacon and church member, as well. I don't believe he had an easy time because the people that were here then, like the Girl's Brigade, it was a different situation. A lot of them were business people with shops on the High Street, some where in professional jobs, teachers etc., if you didn't carry a particular status, you didn't have a say, you didn't have much of a say, that was how the majority was, they had the majority say. I used to go to church members' meeting. I stopped going. I just thought there was no point in going. I started going again when Sheila Martin [Revd Sheila Martin] started encouraging people to go. She also had a different style as well. I started to go back to church members' meetings then. She sort of rode it out.

Ends at 22.44.

Starts at 24.55

Marcia: So, how would you really describe the way your mum, Gloria responded to the way participants in church would have received her?

Angela: She, my mum, wanted to get involved, and her faith, I believe kept her strong, even though she felt that people were trying to push her out and move her along. And even told her that this wasn't a church for her, she stood firm. She wasn't the sort of person to be pushed out of church, so, she, did, and got people involved. I would describe mum as a people's person. She would get people involved with the church with every aspect of it. She also want to contributed, to show we could all contribute – the church wasn't just for one person it was for everybody. People supported

her and encouraged her to become a deacon and even at the deacons' meetings, the old timers were there that didn't want certain and didn't want to go certain ways, but she did stand her ground, she didn't let them push her around…

Ends at 26.57.

Starts at 28.14.

…then you would have the church members…I remember coming to church members' meetings and they were saying Gloria mention this and mention that and tell this and tell them that, and she would be taking all the hits for this… then one day she said "Why can't you say it, why can't you all say it"? Some of them still haven't got the character to speak up to those dominant ones, but she was just that kind of person that would not be pushed out. A lot of people say that because of her attitude, her strong attitude, the fact that she made sure that things were fair, that is why things changed, it had to change. Those people didn't like the fact that different people were coming in and having a say about when things could happen and what could happen, this caused change and those people did leave because of that. You know we have had ministers that needed somebody like her, they needed her there because they could see that she had the character to say it as it was and say it scripturally and biblically as well, so it wasn't a case of we're doing this and that. I can remember her saying also that when the older people retired from work [like her] and wanted to get more involved in the church, they used to do thinks like volunteer on the cleaning rota, washing up after catering events, and then all of a sudden, the people who used to do it were not doing it anymore, that meant it was the Black people, the Black women were the ones doing the cleaning, washing up after things at church, and putting things away, it seem to just turn, so that they were doing it and the other people had just eased themselves out of it. They [Black women] carried on doing their thing, they were not just going to stop. But then she [Gloria] got involved with making sure that things happened. So, she used to do jumble sales to raise money for the church, because the church did go through a bit of a hard time, as more Black people were coming in more white people were leaving, less money was coming in. There was all of that was happening as well. So, they did the jumble sales, they raised money, we had fundraisers, we had gift days. There was a lot of things then that used to happen in that respect there. So, she did that. That seemed to all be very successful. Then she moved on with doing other things. Then, she did the gospel concert, once a year we used to have a Caribbean cooking thing – where people could come, give a donation, that raised money as well. Then she formed a singing group and things seemed to develop and be more interesting. The gospel concerts raised a lot of money and became an annual thing and it brought a

lot of people into the church. It really did bring people into the church. So, we had…you would sell tickets to raise money, selling to other churches, and she sold tickets to everybody, and even if they weren't coming, they just never said no to her, she was that kind of approachable person, they would want to contribute towards it even if you never went. She also got different people involved with it, was not just Black people, someone designed the tickets, it was a white person, that she would give different people to sell tickets, even if they were not coming, she got them to help to contribute to the food or the catering side of things, a lot of the English older women were good at baking cakes, so they could bring things in. No-one was excluded people were included really. That was really quite successful.

Ends at 35.00.

Starts at 37.35

Marcia: This is a double question. How would you personally describe the contributions of Gloria to church life and why does society and know you have gone through an awful lot of that so far? I could ask the other question after.

Angela: When she retired, she was up and down on the High Street every day, and just looking, it was like a holiday, going up there at that time Erdington was very different, so she knew the man in the carpet shop, she knew the man and the woman in the food shop that sold the meat on the corner, she knew people in Bon Marché, when it used to be up there, she knew people all up and down the High Street. And the good thing about that was that they would support with things as well. So, if we needed carpet or a rug, or needed carpet fitting she would know where to go and she could get a discount for it as well, she knew how to get a discount and a bargain. She would go up there to see if there was any bargain and was able to get things free by asking if they would like to contribute as well. It was good that she knew people in the community and up until or just before Covid, I used to go up there, I went up the High Street, if I see people, people would ask me, "How is your mum?" you know, in the shops, "Haven't seen your mum, is she alright?" They would just ask me how she was. She was quite popular. People knew her, she was always there buying something, they connected her with the church. So, that was you know, an interesting side of things. And from the church perspective, other churches knew her as well, she would get in involved with them, if they had a Bible study or prayer meeting, because she used to go to people's houses to pray, with them. People would ask her to come and pray for their brother or husband, it wasn't just this church, it was churches around and about that knew her. She got quite involved, even with Chester Road Baptist Church. She was quite involved with them. They used to go on church

holidays and she would go with them, and the majority of the time, she and Carmen were the only Black people. But they got friendly with them. They soon discovered that she wasn't this person that they thought, how they used to view Black people. They got quite friendly with her. She often tells me that when they went on these holidays, that they went to Scotland, a couple of times, and that they used to go – stop in the hotel, they would serve her and Carmen first…, I thought, how does that work? How did that happen? Why did they serve them first? And she said, "well, they don't like the English people!" They used to get all the best treatment. And in the end, a couple of the ladies some of the other women would ask mum and Carmen to order their meal for them, because they get better treatment down there…

Gale: Just to say, when you say Carmen

Angela: Carmen O'Connor, Carmen who sadly passed away almost two years ago now…
Ends at: 42.15.

Starts at 43.44
Marcia: The other tail end question, I suppose, is the naming of the hall. How did that come about would you say?

Angela: Well, I was quite shocked because I think I heard about it last, really. How I heard about it, I was at a deacons' meeting, I had missed a previous deacons' meeting and I was at the deacon's meeting when [Revd] Gerard [Goshawk] said, he had spoken to Gloria and she had said she was happy. He feels that she is the appropriate and right person to have the Hall named after her because she is always up at the church. she virtually lives there, always doing things there, whatever, and so he said that, all of this had been discussed at a previous deacons meeting that I was not at. So, when I left, I said to my mum when I got home, "Did you know?", she said "Yes, Gerard did tell me, about it." It did reduce me to tears because I was so surprised, but I thought what a nice thing to do for somebody who served the church, and has raised so much money, and has done a lot to bring people to the church, and bring a lot of the community to the church and brought the church into the community. You know, not everyone can do that. It was a nice thing. It was a lovely thing to be able to remember her for. Because sometimes people don't do these things until people are long gone. I thought that was nice that she could live to see it, nice to live to see it, and, yes, when it was brought up at the church members' meeting, it was nice that everyone thought, yes, she is the right person to do that. It was just nice because I know that, she has given a

lot to the church. She did jumble sales when people needed things. I know people used to ring her for assistance and things. When we had the jumble sales she used to have a store room down there. Every minute I was taking her up to the church to get something for somebody. She even gave away my food mixer, my hairdryer, a lot of my things that went really. I would be thinking where is it? Where is it? And then, I would be looking in the room and it's there, my things are there and she is giving them to people if they need it. A rug or something like that, quite often it was for people who needed curtains and bedding, those sorts of things really. Cups and plates and things like that really. People used to ring her for all sorts of things. I don't really know what, she would be on the phone with them. I don't know who or what, she used to do a lot to help people, in different ways and if they had issues, she would help them out. So, it was a nice picture…

Ends 47.42.

Starts:48.06.

Gale: …because you have spoken in very general terms. This is your mother. So how do you feel to be the daughter of Gloria Richards?

Angela: Hmmm…How do I feel? I think proud, honoured really, that…and it is so nice to come every week and see so many people that appreciate her and know that they can speak to her, and if they need assistance or advice, although she hasn't got the legs, her legs aren't strong enough now, but she can still help them, so yeah it's a nice feeling to see that, when people come and they're always friendly, hugging her, or giving her a kiss or helping her it's nice. I think she's been a blessing to a lot of people.

Ends at 49.31