

Welcome to the *Deptford Black History Walking Tour*. It was devised by Jody Burton. Jody is a Librarian, and co-author of *The Black London History Map*, and *Black London: History, Art and Culture in Over 120 Places*.

Jody is of Caribbean heritage and grew up and still lives in the borough of Lewisham. She studied Caribbean History, is a bibliophile who loves art, and also hosted a Black Arts Group via Meetup. It's this background that has led to her work around uncovering and sharing the stories of Black history, art and culture in London.

This walk focuses on her home borough of Lewisham and explores the Black history and presence in Deptford, and the local landmarks that attest to it.

The walk is a five mile loop. It begins at Deptford Lounge and leads up Deptford High Street to the river, returning through New Cross. The last stop is at Brookmill Park near to Deptford Bridge DLR station, where you can head off, or continue for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to complete the loop and walk back to our starting point.

An audio-guide of the walk, read by Jody, is available at spreadtheword.org.uk/black-history-walk. This transcript provides directions, throughout, and a map is available on the final page of this document or via the QR code below.

Do make sure to pay attention to traffic and other pedestrians as you follow the walk and keep safe.

AUDIO GUIDE



GOOGLE MAPS ROUTE



START



We start outside Deptford Lounge on Giffin Street. Stand with your back to the Deptford Lounge building and head right up Deptford High Street. After 300 yards, take a right on Lamerton Street. Follow this to the end and cross over Creek Road, taking a slight left to go down McMillan Street. Follow this to the end until you see Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre. To the left of this you will see St. Nicholas' Church. This is our first stop.



STOP 1: ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCH, DEPTFORD GREEN

1

On the wall at the main entrance – on the corner of Deptford Green and Stowage – view a Greenwich and Deptford History Trail plaque decorated with two ships. It states that a church has stood on this site since the 12th Century, the tower dates back to the 1300s. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of travellers and sailors and the entrance here features a skull and crossbones gateway. Sir Francis Drake and Captain James Cook visited the church before their travels. You can walk around the grounds but to see inside is by appointment only or at service times. The church has memorials to naval families; links to slavery and a strong connection to the royal Tudor musician John Blanke.

In 1511 King Henry VIII celebrated the birth of his short-lived son with two days of festivities. The 60ft painted Westminster Tournament Roll, held at the College of Arms in London depicts this occasion. The trumpeter John Blanke was one of the royal musicians who played at this event; riding on horseback, dressed in livery and sporting a turban, he appears twice on the roll. What's significant is that John Blanke was Black and his image is the earliest named person of Black origin in England.

In her book *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*, Miranda Kaufman imagines the scene:

"And how would they depict his dark skin? It was not a pigment they would be accustomed to using. Indeed, it might be the first time anyone had painted a Black Tudor."

In fact in Blanke's second appearance on the roll, the unnamed artist has omitted to colour his hand black.

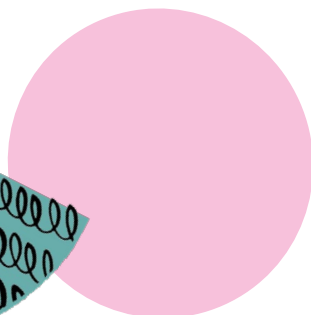
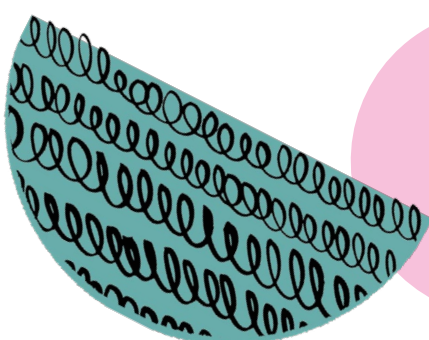
Blanke is believed to have arrived in England from Spain along with Catherine of Aragon, who later became Henry VIII's first wife. This was a period when Black musicians featured across European courts. Trumpeters played a vital role in royal ceremonies; they denoted authority and prestige.

Kaufman writes of Blanke: *"Men of the trumpeter's status were more often married at the local parish church of St Nicholas."* Meaning, it's likely Blanke was married in this very church.

We know for certain that his marriage took place in January 1512 from National Archive records of wedding gifts received from the King. In addition, documents also show Blanke's successful petition for a pay rise.

His image on the Tournament Roll and a BBC Black History Plaque form part of the Tudor display at the Old Royal Naval College, the former royal palace of Greenwich.

Continue up Deptford Green, following it round to the left as it becomes Borthwick Street and skirts the edge of Twinkle Park. At the far end of Borthwick Street you'll meet a gated enclosure where Borthwick Street meets Watergate Street. This is our second stop.





STOP 2: MASTER SHIPWRIGHT'S HOUSE

2

Inside this gated enclosure is the Master Shipwright's House that formed part of the first royal dockyard. It is one of the few remaining parts of Deptford's dockyard which was initially established in 1513 by Henry VIII and was also known as The King's Yard.

Walk down the cobbled path from the gate and stop before the steps that lead down to the river bank. Stand on the balcony platform on the right and admire the view ahead. This area, Deptford Strand, was formerly a fishing village prior to the building of the docks. Greenwich can be viewed to the right, and Convoys Wharf (The King's Yard) to the left is now a gated development site. Ships were built and repaired at the Wharf until its closure in 1869.

In 1562 John Hawkins, a merchant and the treasurer of the Navy, sailed from Deptford on the first slaving voyage to the Guinea coast. His second voyage was supported by Queen Elizabeth I and, on the third, he was accompanied by Sir Francis Drake.

Hawkins's coat of arms and crest depicted enslaved Africans, and his three journeys in the 1560s prepared the path for the so-called triangular trade between England, Africa and the New World, of which slavery formed a key part. The Transatlantic Slave Trade operated for nearly 300 years.

The Master Shipwright's House was bought and restored in 1998 and is now a creative space for artists and performers. It's worth visiting to view the building and its outdoor theatre space with the backdrop of the Thames.

The historical thriller *Blood and Sugar* by Laura Shepherd is set in Deptford in the 1700s. The town is described as a ... "gateway port to distant oceans and untold riches... where fortunes in sugar and slaves are made and lost"...

It starts: "*The fog hung thick and low over the Thames. It rolled in off the water and along the quays, filling the squalid courts and dockside alleys of lower Deptford... Now and then the fog lifted, and Nathaniel Grimshaw caught a glimpse of the Guineamen anchored out on Deptford Reach: spectral lines of mast and rigging against the dawn sky.*"

Guineamen were large cargo slaving ships built or converted for human transportation to and from the Guinea coast of West Africa. The Royal African Company – founded in 1660 – also exploited the gold from this area. The Guinea coin, was minted in Britain with gold supplied by the Royal African Company between 1663–1814, and was in circulation until decimalisation in 1971.

A local community group Museum of Slavery and Freedom (MoSaf) organises walking tours of the area and is campaigning to have a museum built at Convoys Wharf to highlight the key role Deptford played in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its abolition.

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Turn back away from the river and walk along the cobbles to rejoin Watergate Street. Walk a hundred yards further on and turn right at the pedestrianised Prince Street, past the Dog and Bell pub. At the end of the pedestrianised section, continue straight ahead on Prince Street until you reach the mini-roundabout. Turn right along Evelyn Street and then right shortly after along Grove Street. Continue for 300 yards on Grove Street until you reach the open ground of Lower Pepys Park on the right. Take the path through Lower Pepys Park, cross Millard Road and go up the steps into Pepys Park and on until you reach the river again. Turn left along the river for 100 yards until you reach the tall block of Aragon Tower.
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STOP 3: ARAGON TOWER, PEPYS' ESTATE

3

At the base of the tower overlooking the Thames are a sculptural collection of historical, local, creative, and contemporary faces named: *The Wall of Ancestors* by Martin Bond, created in 1997.

Olaudah Equiano, enslaved, abolitionist, and author (1745–97) is one of the sixteen characters depicted. He has become a recognisable figure and has even appeared as a Google Doodle. Equiano's face is in the bottom row of the set of eight on the right hand side. The faces from left to right on that row depict Queen Elizabeth I, Olaudah Equiano, and Michael Hamilton, followed lastly by Catherine of Aragon. Other portraits include Sir Francis Drake, Phineas Pett a renowned shipwright, and Russian Tsar Peter the Great who studied ship building at Deptford Royal Docks.

Equiano was born in 1745 in Nigeria where he was captured and enslaved as a child. His journey took him to America, London, and the Caribbean as both an enslaved person and a sailor. When his captain visited London, Equiano stayed in Greenwich, he learned to read and write, and was baptised in Westminster.

Later in 1762 after a period at sea his ship sailed from Portsmouth to Deptford. Arriving at the docks Equiano was forced from the ship by his master and traded to the captain of an outgoing ship. After a further six years of enslavement, he was able to purchase his freedom and became an instrumental figure in the abolitionist movement in London.

His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, published in 1789 was an international success and is still in print today.

In Chapter IV he writes of his kidnapping: "*But I have served him, ... many years, and he has taken all my wages and prize-money, for I only got one sixpence during the war: besides this I have been baptized: and by the laws of the land no man has a right to sell me.*"

He used his book and his voice alongside others including a group of free Black men named the "Sons of Africa" to campaign for the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Equiano features in my book *Black London* and has numerous commemorations in London. They include a Nubian Jak Community Trust blue plaque unveiled in December 2021 in Greenwich, where he briefly stayed. Also in the area, view the bronze bust: *Olaudah Equiano – African, slave, author, abolitionist* by local sculptor Christy Symington at the Queen's House.

With your back to the river and facing the tower, head down the left hand side of the tower, cutting through into a small carpark and following Longshore straight on. Keep straight on until you hit Grove Street again. Turn left here, before taking the next right onto Oxestalls Road. Follow this until you find the entrance to Deptford Park straight ahead.





STOP 4: DEPTFORD PARK, EVELYN STREET

4

You will notice that the park benches in Deptford Park all feature small metal plaques commemorating Deptford's naval history as well as local historical figures and places. Olaudah Equiano's plaque can be found if you turn and walk to the left from the entrance. There is a small error in the spelling of his first name.

It reads:

*Writer and abolitionist.
Arrived as a slave in Deptford.
Purchased his own freedom in 1768.*

Other plaques include a commemoration of Queen Elizabeth I and of the Deptford Royal Dockyard, which reads:

*Established by Henry VIII in 1513.
The heart of Royal Navy Ship building.
Exploration and royal might for 350 years.
Decommissioned in 1869.*

In *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham*, Joan Anim-Addo explains how the population, particularly of seafaring centres became more diverse and also unwelcome: "These Black people brought into the country through ports like Deptford established a presence not favoured by the crown."

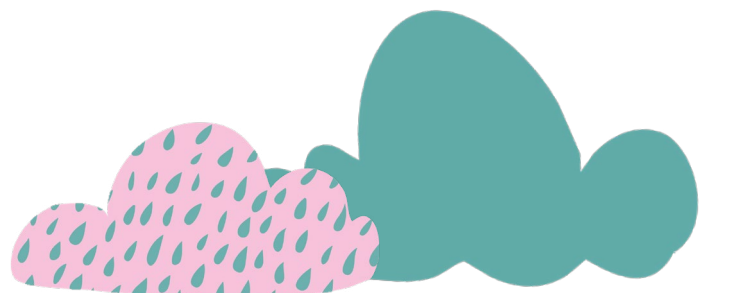
In 1601 Queen Elizabeth I proclaimed that all "negroes and blackamoors" be speedily expelled from England.

However, by 1760 the population of Black Londoners was estimated at between 10–15,000 and included enslaved people, runaway slaves, servants, seamen, and free men and women.

To see more about Olaudah Equiano, you can visit the Equiano Plinth and African Garden in Telegraph Hill Lower Park, New Cross. This community art collaboration involved local school children. The colourful three-sided ceramic plinth is topped with a bust of Equiano and depicts his life as a child, a slave, and a freeman.

Additionally, see *Runaways London: History, Storytelling and Escape from Slavery*, a creative and educational project on the Spread the Word website.

When you're finished exploring the park, leave at the far left corner from where you entered, at the corner of Scawen Road and Grinstead Road. Follow Grinstead Road under the railway bridge before taking an immediate left onto Trundleys Road. Take the right fork to join Sanford Street and follow this for 700 yards until the road bends to the left and you reach Fordham Park. Enter the park, and continue down the right hand side of the park.



Pause here to see the New Cross Fire Memorial **a** which lists the names of those who died as a consequence of the fire in 1981. An event we will discuss later. Continue along this edge of the park, continuing straight on, joining Clifton Rise as you leave the park, and climbing to meet New Cross Road.

As you reach New Cross Road, note the small brown plaque next to the pub on your right commemorating the Battle of Lewisham. **b** This is also an event we'll be discussing later on.

Now turn right along New Cross Road and continue for a few yards before you see the large stone building of Deptford Town Hall on the other side of the road.

STOP 5A: NEW CROSS FIRE STATION

5A

Another 10 minutes further down New Cross Road in the direction you've just been walking, past New Cross Gate station, is New Cross Fire Station. It's an impressive brick building and worth the additional walk if you're feeling up to it.

There you will see a red London Fire Brigade plaque to George A Roberts BEM (1890–1970), which was unveiled in 2018. It commemorates Roberts' role as a First World War soldier, Second World War fireman, and community leader. Roberts arrived in London from Trinidad in 1911 and settled in South London. He was one of the first Black servicemen with the Middlesex regiment in the First World War and served in the Auxiliary Fire Service based at New Cross station during the Second World War. He fought for ex-servicemen's rights, was one of the founders of The British Legion, and was awarded a British Empire Medal in 1944.

Roberts was one of more than two million African and Caribbean servicemen and women who served in both world wars. Many still faced a hierarchy of discrimination with regard to pay and conditions, and were given supporting menial roles. In *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham* Joan Anim-Addo states how in 1995 their contribution was excluded from the Government's 50th anniversary commemoration of the end of the Second World War, with the focus solely on Europe.

Roberts was painted in his Auxiliary Fire Service uniform by the artist Norman Hepple and features in the permanent Auxiliary Fire Service exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth.

Roberts was also an instrumental figure in The League of Coloured Peoples, established in 1931 by Doctor Harold Moody (1882–1947). The organisation campaigned for equality and actively challenged the "colour bar" – the racial discrimination faced particularly with regard to housing and employment, as well as admittance into certain places such as hotels and restaurants.

Dr. Harold Moody came from Jamaica and studied medicine in London in 1904. He set up his own practice, and lived and worked in Queens Road, Peckham where an English Heritage plaque has since been erected in his honour. During the Second World War in November 1944 Moody was one of the first to attend a V2 rocket attack at the Woolworths department store on New Cross Road.

If you're standing outside Deptford Town Hall, you should just be able to see an Iceland store on the far side of the road, further down towards New Cross Gate. This stands on the site of that Woolworths store and a Lewisham Borough plaque there commemorates the 168 lives lost in the bombing.



STOP 5B: DEPTFORD TOWN HALL

5B



If you made the detour to New Cross Fire Station, well done; and you should now be back outside Deptford Town Hall.

Deptford Town Hall opened in 1905 and was acquired by Goldsmiths University in the 1990s. The ornate façade on the front of the building highlights the maritime history of the area with a ship weathervane at the very top and four naval figures in the niches. These figures all have links to slavery including Sir Francis Drake the English explorer who circumnavigated the globe and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I, and who accompanied John Hawkins on his third slaving voyage, as discussed earlier.

Students at the University protested in 2019 for the removal of the statues. Following a public consultation, the University decided to erect explanation panels and aims to continue the conversation about Britain's role in slavery. In contrast, the local Sir Francis Drake primary school, near Deptford Park, has changed its name to Twin Oaks following discussions and a vote.

In 2014 Goldsmiths University erected a plaque and renamed its new academic building after Jamaican-born Professor Stuart Hall (1932–2014). He was an academic writer and Cultural Studies pioneer who challenged and critique the politics of identity, race, and representation in post-colonial Britain in the 1970s and 80s. This building is not open to the public and can only be accessed via the main entrance to the University.

Facing the Town Hall, turn left along New Cross Road back the way you came. At the Marquis of Granby pub, take the right fork, stopping after a hundred yards or so at the mural on the building on the right hand side.



STOP 6: VIEW THE BATTLE OF LEWISHAM MURAL AT GOLDSMITHS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

6

This mural was created in collaboration with the community and installed in 2019. It illustrates the successful counter-demonstration in 1977 by 4,000 locals and organised groups that stopped a planned far-right march by the National Front from New Cross to Lewisham. This period was at the height of poor police relations, racial tension, and the rise of the National Front. The image captures the confrontation of the opposing groups: civil rights activist Darcus Howe is in the centre with the police holding riot shields – the first time they had been used on the UK mainland.

This event is also commemorated by the Lewisham borough plaque we saw on Clifton Rise earlier.

Retrace your steps to join New Cross Road again, turning right to head away from Deptford Town Hall, towards New Cross Station. Pass the station, and continue 150 yards until you reach the plaque outside 439 New Cross Road marking the site of the New Cross Fire.





STOP 7: THE NEW CROSS FIRE

7

This plaque marks the site of the New Cross Fire. In January 1981, thirteen young Black lives were lost in a blaze during a 16th birthday party, followed by a later suicide. All fourteen names are inscribed on the stone memorial you saw earlier in Fordham Park.

The fire was initially thought to have been caused by a firebomb, but forensic evidence later stated it had started internally, and inquests concluded an open verdict. "13 dead and nothing said" was the slogan used when six weeks after the fire 20,000 people marched for justice and in protest to the indifference from the national press, police, government, and Queen, following no expression of condolences. "The Black Peoples Day of Action," as the march was called, started in New Cross and ended in the heart of the publishing district on Fleet Street.

A commissioned artwork outside the Cummin Up Caribbean Takeaway at 265e New Cross Road, commemorates a number of Black milestones, including the 40th anniversary of the New Cross fire as well as the 50th anniversary of the Lewisham's first Black police officer, David Michael MBE.

A double commemoration plaque also resides at the entrance of the Civic Suite at Lewisham Town Hall, Catford.

In 2007 the New Cross Fire Bursary Awards scheme was set up by Lewisham Council to remember the young victims of this tragedy by supporting a small group of outstanding students attending Goldsmiths University.

Continue along New Cross Road until you reach Deptford Bridge DLR station. Here, on the right hand side of the road, take a right just before you reach the station, following the footpath along the Ravensbourne River. Keep following the path straight on until you cross a bridge, reaching a modern grey building.



STOP 8: BLUEPRINT FOR ALL

(formerly named the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust)

8

At the gated entrance of the building on the left, slightly secluded by a fence and bushes you can view a Nubian Jak Community Trust blue plaque and beneath it a mosaic portrait of Stephen Lawrence by Southbank Mosaics.

The plaque reads:

*Stephen Lawrence (1974–1993)
Son, outstanding student and prospective architect.
Taken too soon but will never be forgotten.*

The centre is a social enterprise, specifically delivering employment and support to prospective architects. Stephen was murdered in a racist attack in Eltham. His parents Doreen and Neville Lawrence fought a long campaign for justice in which they highlighted the institutional racism of the Metropolitan Police. Finally, in 2012 two of the five suspects were convicted. 22nd April 2019 marked the first Stephen Lawrence Day.

In 2000, The University of Greenwich founded The Stephen Lawrence Gallery in partnership with Doreen Lawrence, who was a former Humanities student there. This exhibition and event space at 10 Stockwell Street in Greenwich, serves students, alumni, and is open to the public.

In 2013 Lawrence received an OBE for services to community relations. Baroness Doreen Lawrence features in the book *100 Great Black Britons*, a concise historical and contemporary collection of biographies that also includes Darcus Howe, Stuart Hall, Doctor Harold Moody, Olaudah Equiano and John Blanke.



FINISH



As we have seen, the Black history and presence in Deptford stretches back into the past longer than acknowledged. History is ultimately a collection of facts and stories but, who gets to select and tell them?

I hope you have found it interesting to discover more about Deptford, the layers, events, people, and places in history that on one hand have been overlooked, and on the other, hidden. Black history is British history and together they tell our collective story. If you would like to uncover more locations connected to Black history in London check out my map and book with Avril Nanton.

Black London History Map (2022)

Black London: History, Art and Culture in Over 120 Places (2021)

This is the end of the guided walk. To return back to the start, retrace your steps along the Ravensbourne River up to Deptford Bridge Station and turn left along the main road, back the way you came. After 200 yards, take a right up Deptford High Street, where after a further 400 yards you will be back outside Deptford Lounge.



MORE INFORMATION & FURTHER READING

Jody Burton

[instagram.com/jodyb_21](https://www.instagram.com/jodyb_21)

[instagram.com/blacklondon21](https://www.instagram.com/blacklondon21)

Black London History Map, Jody Burton and Avril Nanton (2022)

Black London: History, Art and Culture in Over 120 Places, Avril Nanton and Jody Burton (2021)

Museum of Slavery and Freedom

www.mosaf.org.uk

[instagram.com/mosaf](https://www.instagram.com/mosaf)

Runaways London

spreadtheword.org.uk/runaways

Books

Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham, Joan Anim-Addo (1995)

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Olaudah Equiano, (1789)

Black Tudors; The Untold Story, Miranda Kaufman (2017)

Blood and Sugar, Laura Shepherd (2020)

100 Great Black Britons, Patrick Vernon and Angelina Osbourne (2020)



