

History detectives



SCAWDI (Sparkbrook Caribbean & African Women's Development Initiative) are a Birmingham based community group who specialise in working with local volunteers to research the early presence of Black people in the West Midlands.

Since 2006 we have run four programmes piecing together different aspects of this heritage. In the beginning... looked at Black slaves who came to this region to live with wealthy land owners; History Detectives took this work further to identify as many Black individuals who came here before 1918, constructing short biographies of a few of them; most recently, A day in the life... is a project to create a Black heritage trail which will detail the locations that are attached to these stories which vary from parish churches to pubs, Roman ruins and whole market towns. Each of these has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The fourth was an English Heritage sponsored programme looking at the role of women in Birmingham's abolition movement.

SCAWDI has volunteers from a variety of backgrounds who help with research, photography, events and many other aspects of our work. Some have an existing interest in local history through groups such as the Centre for West Midlands History. Others are exploring the diverse histories of this region for the first time, or perhaps they have experience investigating another area such as family history.

We have presented our findings over the last few years at many events, including Birmingham History Day in 2009 and 2010, run by the Centre for West Midlands History at the University of Birmingham, the lunchtime lecture at Birmingham Library as well as local TV and radio. Access to wider audiences through such opportunities have proven to be a valuable source for sharing information and contacts that have contributed to our successes to date.

All of our projects have supporting publications that can be purchased. An initial survey of the results of our research to date 'The Black Presence in the West Midlands: 1650-1918' by David Callaghan is included in a special edition of the journal, Midland History, 'Ethnic Community Histories in the Midlands', edited by Malcolm Dick and Rajinder Dudrah (vol. 36, no. 2, Autumn 2011).

- **SCAWDI website** (<http://www.scawdi.co.uk>)
- **Midland History journal** (<http://www.maney.co.uk/index.php/journals/mdh>)