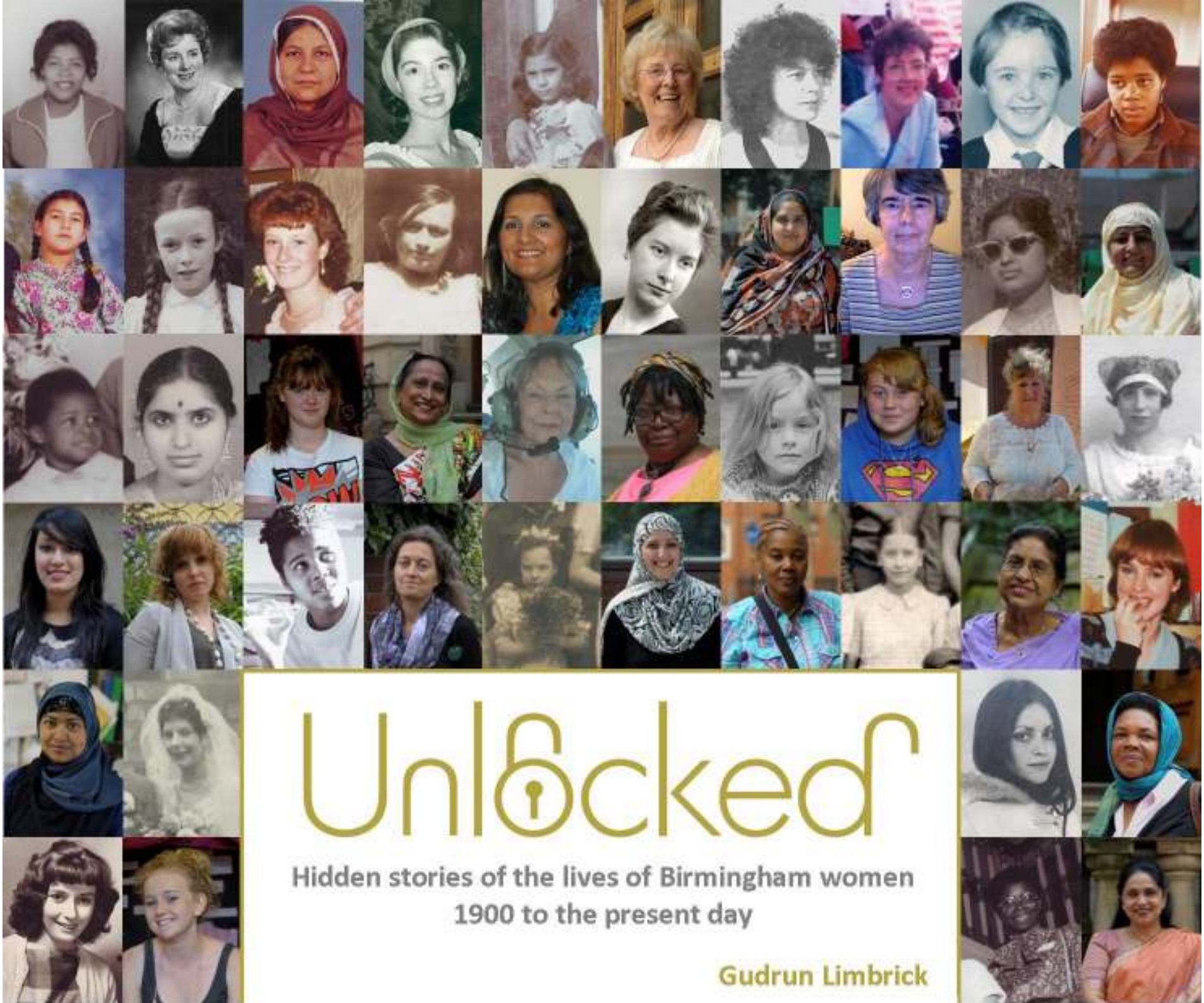

Unlocked

Hidden stories of the lives of Birmingham women
1900 to the present day

Gudrun Limbrick

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Gudrun Limbrick BA Hons Oxon MA B'ham

Contents

Foreword
by The Rt Hon Clare Short

This series of short accounts of the life stories of women in Birmingham underlines two important truths. The first is that Birmingham is a treasure to the world in the diversity of its people and the good relations with which we rub along together. At a time when the world is increasingly divided by differences of religion and identity, Birmingham stands as a beacon to the joy of people of all religions and ethnicities living in one great city and learning from each other about the profound issues of life, as well as the pleasures of different food, music and life patterns.

The second, more immediate purpose of this book, is a strong reminder that women are part of history. Each woman included in the book has a story to tell of how her life was shaped and how she shaped the future. Old ideas, that there was no sense in educating girls, seem ridiculous but it wasn't so long ago that such thinking was commonplace, as some of these stories testify. And of course such thinking is still prevalent in parts of the world. Or there is the old stereotype that, in years gone by, women got married and had children and all their material needs were provided for by their husband. Again these stories tell us that reality is much more variable.

Obviously these stories are mere glimpses of part of the life stories of some Birmingham women, but there are reminders that each and every one of us has a story to tell and makes our own contribution to the unfolding of history.

Clare Short

Images: Clare Short at the launch of the Unlocked exhibition.

Introduction

The montage of photographs on the cover of this book covers a hundred years of Birmingham women. They are a seemingly disparate group of women but many of them are inter-linked. There are a few photographs of the same women from different times in their lives. Other pictures depict women in the same family — from great grandparents to great grandchildren. Through this project, and the groups with whom we worked, several of the women pictured have now become friends.

This diverse, seemingly random, collection of interlinked photographs I felt in some way reflected the history of women in Birmingham I wanted to portray. And this is what you will find on the pages of this book - snapshot, random, and occasionally linked, memories and stories from women in Birmingham.

It is by no means a comprehensive history of this city, and we would not pretend that the memories recorded reflect the experiences of all women in Birmingham. Instead it is a series of snapshots of women's lives over the past hundred or so years.

All the members of the team, including our many invaluable volunteers, have thoroughly enjoyed talking to all these women about their memories.

I hope it brings back some memories for you.

Gudrun Limbrick
February 2014

One of my personal favourite photographs to come out of this project: Helen Brain and her friend Lottie having a drink of stout in the Hare and Hounds, Kings Heath, in around 1960

The Unlocked Project

Nearly two years in the making, *Unlocked* is the culmination of a Heritage Lottery funded project focusing on the stories of women living and working in Birmingham across the twentieth-century to the present day.

Project participants took part in a series of oral history workshops producing more than forty separate interviews and creating an online archive, gallery and DVD. A series of special events were also held including a Community Festival Day at Welford Primary School and an Open Day at the Bangladesh Women's Association in Small Heath, at which participants were able to record their memories.

A series of collages was produced by young people who worked with photographer Vanley Burke at the 610 Centre in Kingstanding. The collages look back on the experiences of women in the past and express the young people's hopes, fears and aspirations for the future.

From the end of September 2013, the project held a large exhibition in the Community Gallery of Birmingham Museum. This included the collages, portraits of participants by Vanley Burke, clips of oral history recordings, and artefacts and photographs that women had brought in to illustrate their memories.

A project to unlock the memories we thought we'd forgotten or that we simply don't get a chance to talk about

Arranging the portraits of the project participants for the exhibition at the museum

Themes

The memories featured in this project covered myriad different topics, perspectives and time periods. To add some focus, we chose to look at specific themes which seemed to feature strongly in the first oral history interviews we undertook:

- Creativity
- Independence
- Relationships
- Aspiration
- Action
- Diversity
- Equality
- Challenge

The excerpts of interviews in this book loosely follow these themes but lives are complex and so crossovers are common.

The 'Diversity' theme panel from the Unlocked exhibition, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Creativity

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of creativity

Anne Farag: on dancing in the 1960s

"We used to go to a pub called the Golden Eagle and there was a dance place called the Shoop upstairs which all the students used to go to. And it was fantastic. One of the things that Birmingham gave me was a love of dancing which has gone all through my life. I also used to go to a dance hall, the WestEnd Ballroom, Suffolk Street. It was a big big dance hall with spring floors. We used to go dancing there every Saturday afternoon when I was quite young. I still dance now – I tango dance all over Europe and I attribute it to the fact that I danced so much in Birmingham.

Sarah Dunlop: on her nan's job as an enameller

"My Nan had an astonishingly good job – she was a badge enameller so she was a good artist and she would hand-enamel, sitting in a line with other ladies and she would paint on badges – beautiful tiny work. It was piecework and she was good and quick.

Badrun Pasha: on her mother's embroidery

"My mother embroidered this cloth in the 1930s. She was very highly skilled and the colours are still as bright and as fresh as when she first made it, even though it is now around 70 years old. My mother died young, this cloth is something that I very much treasure.

Above: the cloth embroidered by Badrun Pasha's mother
Left: An enamel badge of the type Sarah's Nan might have made

Birmingham women in public art

Several women feature in Birmingham's public sculptures and art. The most famous is no doubt the statue of Queen Victoria after whom Victoria Square is named. The square used to be known as Council House Square but was renamed in 1901 when the statue was unveiled. Was this the last place named in her honour during her lifetime? She died just twelve days after the ceremony.

Victoria Square is also the home of the sculpture known as the Floozie in the Jacuzzi. Dhuvra Mistry's sculpture, actually called The River, was chosen through an international competition and was unveiled in 1994 by another member of the royal family, Diana, Princess of Wales.

Looking up at the Council House, there are various impressive friezes. The main frieze shows Britannia with outstretched arms with men representing the city's traders and manufacturers gathering around her.

The Memorial Hall in Centenary Square was built to commemorate those who were killed or injured in the First World War. Outside it stand three statues of men, representing the Air Force, the Army and the Navy, and a fourth, a statue of a woman, who represents the Women's Services.

Our city's coat of arms also includes an unnamed woman. Alongside a man with a hammer, stands a woman carrying a book and a palette representing the city's artistic side.

Birmingham's coat of arms as depicted in stained glass in the museum

Left: Queen Victoria, Right: Women's Services

Above: Britannia Right: The River

Working at Cadbury's

Doreen in the 1950s

Doreen Goodall ***was born 1934 in a back-to-back in Bishopsgate Street. After school, she went to Art College and set her heart on working for Cadbury's.***

"I went to art college when I was 15 and I was there for about five years. I don't know how my parents did it, keeping me in education until I was twenty.

"I wanted to work at Cadbury's and when I first applied they said 'oh no, you haven't got enough experience, you don't know anything about how to produce a piece of finished artwork'. So I got a job at Kenrick and Jeffersons in West Bromwich, a printer's. When I was 24 I wrote again to Cadbury's and they said yes. I was at Cadbury's for twelve and a half years. When we first went it was like being in a school. It was all girls, our desks faced front and our boss was like a school mistress. There were no men and only very rarely did men come in. And they only very rarely actually came in to talk to the girls. This went on well into the 1960s and I think it was the 1970s when a man actually come into the office to train to be an office manager. This gave the whole office a different feel. The conversations became different.

"We were paid £10 a week or something like that. To me it was a great deal of money, well, it *was* a great deal of money. Let's face it. I loved my time there, absolutely loved it and I got better at it. My designs were being chosen. I can remember my first design I ever had chosen which was a tin, a big round tin of Lucky Numbers, it was called, and I did the design on that and that was the first design

Two of Doreen's designs for Cadbury

I ever had chosen. I was over the moon!

"We were just given a blank carton and you would sort of think 'what can I do on this that's different?' and the sort of equipment we had, it wasn't computers then, it was brushes and you dipped them in water and you put the paint on and hopefully you would come up with something different. You had to do about three designs and so I would do one with perhaps clowns on for children - clowns playing with balls and hoops and things and another might have birds on for an older person and another with flowers on so you'd have three different designs.

"And you may have all three chosen and so they went into a committee and if they were chosen you went onto finished artwork and you always did it one and a half times bigger than the actual thing or twice the size and it was great fun. It was lovely. I used to love doing it.

The all-female staff in Doreen's department at Cadbury's. Doreen is second from the right

"Neighbours used to say to my mother about her sending me to college and to art college, 'you know what will happen, she'll just leave and have a baby and she won't do anything with her education'. That was the attitude then, that women shouldn't be educated to that extent. I hated it. I felt the neighbours were watching and waiting for me to let my mom and dad down. Which, of course, I wouldn't have done. I think ideas were changing though. And in the 1960s things suddenly changed and young people suddenly took over. Women's roles changed. And women were going out and doing what they wanted to do."

"I felt the neighbours were watching and waiting for me to let my mom and dad down"

A very Brummie trade

Anne Farag ***fell in love, almost by accident, with one of Birmingham's oldest trades - making jewellery***

"It was the mid-1960s and my mother found a course for me at the Birmingham School of Jewellery which was a vocational course and you didn't need any O levels, not at that time anyway, I think it changed shortly after. So I got on a jewellery course. I loved jewellery as many girls do. I had no idea before she found this course that I could have even gone to college to learn to make jewellery. It was a complete surprise.

"I loved it from the moment I stepped through the door. I can remember the first lesson I had was actually enamelling and I was just besotted with it. I mean I don't enamel now but I just thought it was one of the most wonderful things I could have done. I loved the tools. I loved the smell of the place. I loved everything about it. I loved the teacher. I loved absolutely everything. It was such a happy accident my mother stumbling across it.

"I did all sorts of things like enamelling, engraving, casting. I loved gemology. We did a little bit of life class, how to draw jewellery in a traditional way for the trade. So it was a really brilliant course and it was highly technical which most of the other courses at the Jewellery School weren't. They were very design-based so consequently they didn't have that really good grounding that I got.

"I knew I wanted to be a designer and I wanted to be self-employed and I just wanted to make whatever I wanted to make which at the time was rings. I was mad on rings – all I could think about was making rings. We were in the last stage of the course and I was offered a spare bench. Someone who was in the jewellery trade and had a factory had two spare benches up in the attic of his very Dickensian factory. He offered them to me and a friend for free. And he would give us advice, help us with finishing or anything else we needed. So in the morning I would go and work in a casting factory

Anne's stall in the Oasis Centre, with Anne in the foreground (top right)

to earn some money and then in the afternoon I would go to his place and do my jewellery designing and making. I was there for about 18 months I think, maybe two years.

"Because it was the 1960s, we wanted everything to be new and shiny and American so there was that going on in Birmingham but Hockley was really really old and it smelt. There were little old terrace buildings that had been made into little workshops and you could look into basements and see people toiling away. It was very Victorian so I was very aware then about how old Birmingham was and what a grubby delightful place it was. It was so interesting to see all these people working away. You walk around Hockley now you can't see anyone at work.

"In 1971, somebody got in touch with us (me and my boyfriend at the time who was doing silver-smithing) and offered us a stand in Oasis in town. It was a brand new, purpose-built building in a strange sort of crocodile shape from Corporation Street all the way back to Marks and Spencer's. We went and visited it while they were laying it all out and building it and everything. It was very dark and gloomy, which I think it still was when we were actually in it.

"It was all very exciting. Everyone that was taking part in it seemed to be very young entrepreneurs with lots of ideas and it felt that anything was possible. So we were given this opportunity to have an outlet right in the middle of Birmingham which was unheard of - they were all really big shops or very expensive units otherwise.

"It was still all about rings for me then - very large organic rings and lots of floral things. 'Floral' sounds like they were quite traditional but they were big heavy things. It was very unlike what anyone else was making. And also some ear rings and quite a lot of wire work which was quite art nouveaux.

"I am still designing and making jewellery now."

"I was very aware what a grubby, delightful place Birmingham was"

One of the organic rings Anne made in the very early 1970s. The ring, made in silver, was carved in wax before casting.

Independence

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of independence

Valerie Cowley: on finding 'child-friendly' work

"When I was young I wanted to work in Finefare behind the tills. As I got older I wanted to be a teacher but at my school going to university or college was never mentioned, you just went out to work. Now you are encouraged to get an education and I am always encouraging my children. I did shop work when I left school – Tesco and Lo-Cost - but when I had my children shop work wasn't any good because you had to work weekends and Christmas. So I got a job at the 610 Youth Centre.

Julia Frances: on attitudes to education in the 1960s

"My sister and I were the first girls in our family to stay on in education. The prevailing attitude was that girls didn't need it because they were going to get married. My mum said that we should because you never knew what was going to happen. And she was right. Although I did get married, it ended in divorce but I was able to support myself.

Syeda Amina Bibi: on attitudes to education

"Parents are getting wiser and saying, why can't my daughter study and be a wife, and a housewife, and have children, and get herself a good job as well? I'm really pleased that things have changed. It feels like my daughter's education is taken much more seriously than even mine was. I was the first woman in my family to get a degree.

Right: a school photograph of Julia in 1960.
Above right: Syeda photographed in 2013 by Vanley Burke for this project

A reluctant businesswoman

Born in 1930 in Poole,* Heather Anderson *moved to Birmingham with her parents in 1939. She enjoyed school but left when she was 14 and embarked on a 56 year career as a hairdresser.

Heather in the 1950s

"When Mum was going to have my little sister, I was at school. Mum was friendly with a woman named Joyce who ran a hairdresser's and she said one day that it would be a nice idea if I became a hairdresser because Joyce was looking for someone to train. I could do it for six months before doing an apprenticeship. I think that perhaps children wouldn't have been advised like that today or perhaps wouldn't have let their mothers talk to them like that but at that age everything your parents said you took as gospel. And mum said it would be lovely to be a hairdresser. But I was at grammar school and in a favoured position to have a good education. For years after I wondered why I hadn't said to mum that I wanted to stay at school.

"Because my mother had this birth mark she was bullied a lot about it. It started at her eye, and went down her face. She was sent to a private school but they weren't very keen—they just took the fees if you know what I mean. They would send her home half an hour before everyone else so that no-one would take notice of her. I think that was why she was perhaps not very keen on education. She thought as long as you were happy with life that was the most important thing. I think perhaps *she* wanted to be a hairdresser making people look better and sending them out with a smile on their face.

"I worked at the hairdresser's in the mornings and looked after my little sister in the afternoons. So I was really the nurse maid and learning a trade at the same time. I didn't stop working until I was 70. A lifetime really. And actually I did really enjoy hairdressing, I enjoyed the psychological part where you're really a counsellor. The hairdressing you did really on automatic pilot having done it so long

and knowing all the basic things. People would come to you with their problems and you'd listen to them and if they wanted advice, you'd give it.

"So I did my training and worked in Ethel Street for a while but then I looked for somewhere else. Because I was on my own with my son, if I had worked for another hairdresser, you wouldn't be able to have time off if you needed it, if your child had chicken pox or anything like that. So I wanted to find a place where my son could be upstairs in the flat and I could be downstairs working if it was the school holidays.

"So in 1958, I found a hairdresser's shop in Selly Oak and a friend lent me £1,000 as long as I paid it back in twelve months. I paid for the fixtures, fittings and good will, the landlord didn't want to sell the building. It was a very stiff lease, if there was anything that needed doing, you had to pay for it. I had to pay for my solicitor and for their solicitor. And they put the rent up. You would see blocks of shops owned by the same people and the whole block was run down as none could afford to do any improvements.

"When I had the shop, I had seven girls working for me and they were really happy times. They all had a story to tell. My mother came and worked in the shop, and my sister did. I sort of grew into it but I do wonder what would have happened if I hadn't left school.

"I found it easy really. I used to work long hours quite late into the evening but I enjoyed it really. I feel like I've never been to work in my life because I enjoyed meeting all the people and I thought how lucky I was. The customers were like friends. I wasn't a businesswoman, I never wanted to have a business and I made the mistake of not putting the prices up properly. And if customers said they couldn't afford it, I'd tell them not to worry about the money. I came out of the shop after 42 years with a £500 overdraft and no money and living in a council flat. I wonder now why I wasn't more prudent but I was just happy making people happy."

Heather experiences great comfort and support from her faith and her local church, Christ Church

"I enjoyed the psychological part of hairdressing"

Birmingham's assay office

Reflecting Birmingham's rich history in metalwork, we have the world's largest assay office. **Fiona Fraser** ***joined it in 1962.***

"It was a very unusual job, very interesting. There can't be many people who have seen inside the assay office, let alone know what goes on there.

"Goldsmiths don't use pure gold or silver because it would be too soft to stand up to wear. So they add alloy to harden it and the proportion of alloy is very strictly controlled by law - the assay is the test of this. If the article passes the assay, it gets the honour of a hallmark. If it doesn't it is returned to the maker to be melted down. And the maker starts again.

"When the article arrived for assay, it already had the maker's initials. If it passed, it got the symbols of the office, Birmingham's symbol (being the anchor), the silver quality and the year.

"The assay office was a red stone building in Newhall Street. When you went through the door you could feel the weight of history settling around you. Not just Birmingham's industrial heritage but six centuries of hallmarking, the first office being in London. Birmingham's turn came in the eighteenth century when it had already become the workshop of the world. Several manufacturers, including Matthew Boulton, were getting very edgy about sending all their production down to London for marking and petitioned parliament for a new office along with Sheffield. There were some good legends in the office and one is the story of how Birmingham got the anchor symbol. Perhaps there is a grain of truth to it. When the petition was drawn up and ready to send to London, Sheffield and Birmingham realised they hadn't chosen their respective symbols. So they decided to toss for it. Sheffield won. Because the campaign meetings had been held in a pub called the Crown and Anchor, they chose the symbol of a crown. Matthew Boulton, having lost, got the anchor which explains why Birmingham, an inland city,

A hallmark from the Birmingham Assay Office on a silver bangle. The initials 'AF' for Anne Farag (her story is on page 11) are on the left, then the anchor symbol for Birmingham, a lion which certifies the silver quality and the letter 'Y' which denotes the year 1973.

"There can't be many people who have seen inside the assay office"

has an anchor as its badge.

"The assayers worked on the floor below us and although they were always friendly, they didn't like people crowding around them so we kept ourselves to ourselves.

"We, the markers, worked at benches and desks in the middle of the workroom. We used a hammer and punch to tap the marks onto the articles. You had a press the size of a school microscope and you settled the article into its bed and checked that you had fitted the correct punch, checked the article and flicked the press handle and that was that. Accuracy was everything.

"The punches were kept in the punch desk which was like an ice cream kiosk with shelves and shelves of open drawers. The person in charge had to know exactly where each punch was and what it was used for and be able to flick them out quickly. I have a very good visual memory so eventually they put me in charge of the punch desk. I was very proud of myself.

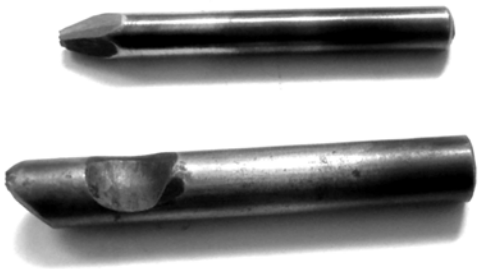
"I remember watching the marking of the medal which was being presented by the Astronomical Society to Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space. A very senior marker was brought in to do this.

"The women I was working with really impressed me. I have never met a bunch of women like them. There was a great sense of community. There were never any absences or lateness. They were very skilled and proud and many were following family members into the trade. At lunchtimes, they would do their knitting. I am the world's worst knitter but I could do tatting, a form of lace-making. Before I knew where I was, I was giving tatting lessons.

"There really was a tremendous sense of community amongst us. They did their job as good as it had to be and then a little bit better. And they were very kind and helped me enormously. If any of them are reading this book, I would very much like to say thank you to them. They taught me so much."

Above: Birmingham Assay Office in its current home on Newhall Street where it has been for 135 years. A new building is underway and the assay office will be moving in 2014

Below: two hallmark punches



The sexual revolution

In the early 1970s,* Dorothy Limbrick *worked at the newly formed Birmingham Brook Advisory Centre.

"I first became involved in Brook through a friend. She was involved with Brook and as we got to know each other and she learned more about my circumstances as a single parent, she said I might be interested in doing sessional work as a social worker. They only employed qualified social workers and we were quite rare in those days. Brook in Birmingham had been going year or two then. They were certainly very busy. Brook was in London for a couple of years, Birmingham was next.

"As a social worker, I had two main tasks. The first was to see everyone coming in for any of the services. It was a fee-paying service and clients had to be registered as members. I took all their details and made an assessment of their particular situations and needs. The second main task was to counsel people after they had had a pregnancy test - positive or negative - about what their next course of action was. Perhaps talking to them about contraception and finding out their ideas on that if it was negative and looking at their options if the test was positive. I was also available throughout each clinic in case we were needed depending on what situations arose.

"The demand was amazing. Quite clearly Birmingham had a huge young population - through the teacher training colleges, polytechnics, universities. And the student welfare services sent people to us because there was nowhere else to send them. You couldn't go to your GP. It was just wonderful to work somewhere in a field where people were desperate for help, for the service and were just so delighted to find sympathetic, fairly young staff, and mainly female staff. It was not wholly female, but as female as we could get it because although people came with their partners, it was almost invariably the women who were asking for the help even if the other

The availability of the Pill, from the early 1960s, was arguably one of the things that kick started the sexual revolution, and gave women in many communities in Birmingham greater control over their own bodies

half of their couple had come. Mostly women came together, two young women giving each other courage because it was quite a frightening thing to do - admitting to strangers that you had had or were intending to have sex and therefore needed contraception and you were not married.

"The whole reason that it was set up was because the Family Planning Association [FPA] couldn't cope with the demand from people who were not married because they only saw married people. The FPA had widened their group to people who were engaged and therefore about to be married (which involved a lot of young women going to Woolworths and buying rings and then coming back and saying they were engaged) but to have somewhere like Brook where you could go and tell the truth and for that to be acceptable, the young people just thought that it was wonderful. However a lot of other people thought that it shouldn't be allowed, to put it mildly, because these people were not married, but also because they were young people and then also because we would talk to anyone who wanted the information about *all* their options after a pregnancy test so it wasn't just about abortion, that was only one of the options that we talked about, but we did talk about it. People objected on all sorts of grounds and we used to have a terrible press.

"the young people just thought that it was wonderful"

"That was one of the reasons why youngsters tended to come together with a friend. We really were talked about like some sort of monsters leading people astray so it made it quite frightening. On occasion, there were even demonstrations outside the clinic trying to put people off coming in and trying to stop the staff from coming in. It got very heated and very unpleasant at times because we didn't have any age restrictions. So there were lots of reasons for people to dislike us and one very big reason for the young people who were desperate for the service to be very keen."[6]

Dorothy in the mid 1970s

Relationships

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of relationships

June:
on being in a noisy family

"I was adopted when I was baby, I was only six years old. They had five children. I have just got very happy memories. My mom was my mom and my dad was my dad and I had all these brothers and sisters. I always felt happy. Home life was busy and noisy with lots of children. Even as I was growing up mom and dad carried on fostering. Sometimes I'd go home after school and there'd be a new baby there.

Heather Anderson's parents' wedding in 1925

Anon:
on marriage in the 1980s

"I had an arranged marriage. I think I was engaged from about the age of twelve. That was really because of pressure to do that from the rest of the family. That marriage didn't work out and I know that people from the mosque said things to Dad about that. I then had a love marriage and there was a lot of stigma for my dad about that too, especially as my husband is not in my caste. But I always felt my family supported me.

Taslima Akbar:
on attitudes to being unmarried

"In my community and family set-up, the girls get married quite young. Maybe you had a career, maybe you didn't, but certainly you were having kids by the time you were 25. For me, it is different. I'm not married, I don't have children, but I do own my own property. I am always being asked about it. Other communities have progressed so that this is more usual. Why haven't we progressed?

My Nan

Childhood memories of the relationship with a grandparent in the 1970s and 1980s.

"My Nan, Lily, was born in 1918, the fourth youngest in a family of eleven children.

"Her father, Charles, was droving cattle from Somerset where he lived and his route took the cattle through the Midlands where he met Nan's mother, Florence. I don't know if he ever got the cattle to wherever he was taking them to but he settled here, married my great grandmother in 1903 and got a job as a labourer in a brewery.

"When you are a kid, you take Nans for granted I suppose but she was a big character in my life. I lived with Nan and Granddad and their youngest son, Nick, for a time as a child, and, after that, they would regularly look after me when Mom was working. I went on holiday with them to Skegness once or twice.

"I remember Nan would bath me in the kitchen sink - I must have been very young then! She had a fire in the kitchen which would heat the water.

"Her rice pudding was the best in the world - with the skin being my favourite bit. But tea was my favourite meal with lots of slices of buttered bread, corned beef and celery dipped in salt. As a special treat she would make me sugar sandwiches or a glass of pop which was half Ribena and half lemonade. It's probably miraculous that I still have my teeth!

"Most of my memories of Nan are in the kitchen perhaps making another pot of tea (served with lots of milk) and listening to Radio WM while Granddad was watching Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks on the TV. But we did go shopping - often to the big veg. market in Bearwood opposite the Bear pub.

"When Granddad had a win on the Pools, she bought me a winter

Nan photographed in the late 1970s

"As a special treat she would make me sugar sandwiches or a glass of pop"

school coat. It was full length, bottle green and very padded. I must have looked like a walking sleeping bag but I loved that coat!

"Nan had a mangle out the back and I loved having my go at turning the wheel on washing day. She once put all the wet, but well mangled, clothes on the line on a particularly cold day and my young uncle and I were delighted when she went to get the washing in as everything, still completely flat, had frozen solid.

"I always felt loved by my Nan and could feel very confident that she was always very proud of me, but I also got the impression that she was a bit nonplussed by us. My parents didn't have the same conventionality that Nan seemed to have, and, when they split up I imagine it worried her. She used to say that I was the worrier but we'd often sit and fret together. Maybe that's something I inherited from her.

"Nan died when I was in my early twenties, before my younger sister really got the chance to get to know her. This is a real pity. One of the best things about being a Brummie is having a Nan."

"One of the best things about being a Brummie is having a Nan"

That's me as a baby with Nan and my uncle in the 1960s

I don't remember that kitchen but I do remember the biscuit tin on the table. Seeing it there takes me right back to being with Nan. It was, of course, always well-stocked

Safety in city life

When* Ruth Middleton *came to Birmingham and couldn't find the groups and services she needed, she did something about it.

"When I look back, I think I have always been aware of it. And that most of my friendships at school, and crushes etc., were with women and also being aware that there was something different in that. Although I did have boyfriends, they weren't actually the relationships that really mattered to me and then when I was about 17 I started to form more intimate relationships with women.

"Then I decided to move to Birmingham with Rachel who was my partner at the time. We were really looking for jobs and a new start and came to a city because, even though it wasn't that long ago, it felt safer to be in a city where there were lots of people, and lots of different, diverse people. Choosing somewhere to live then in the late 80s, early 90s, we were still very much aware of homophobia. It could be a very threatening place to be a lesbian, say sharing a house or whatever.

"We did make a mistake and went to live in Stechford, which was the biggest mistake because unfortunately there was quite a lot of National Front activity and it became very obvious that our neighbours had worked out that we were together and weren't very keen on that. We had a number of incidents such as tyres being let down and scratches on the car and doors being knocked on late at night and things which I think were probably fuelled because they didn't want a couple of lesbians living in the area.

"When we got to Birmingham, we really didn't know how to find other gay people. We really wanted to meet people like ourselves who were just starting work and it was quite difficult because the gay scene at the time appeared to us to be focussed on the Nightingale Club which in those days was renowned for being pretty much men-only. It was a membership club and women could be allowed in if they got a man to sign them in. There were a lot of

Ruth addressing a conference as Director of Focus on Mental Health in 1999

lesbians in Moseley and Kings Heath but a lot of the things that were going on were basically friendship groups. There were things going on but it was quite hard to access if you didn't know anyone and you didn't live there.

"One of the things we did was to contact Lesbian and Gay Switchboard for advice. And then I got involved as a volunteer and stayed with them for about ten years. We were an information service primarily but we also did a lot of listening. Section 28 had just come into force and men were calling about HIV tests - there were some big issues. It had been running since 1975 and we were then basically operating out of a cupboard taking hundreds of calls.

"The other side to my story is that I was very involved with politics and so was very much involved in Estelle Morris's election and worked with Clare Short in Handsworth. I think Birmingham politicians, although there were quite a lot of exceptions, were keen to work with lots of different communities, not just around sexuality.

"After a while, I became more involved with gay politics as opposed to Labour politics. If you sit on the Switchboard phone line as often as I did, you became very aware of the needs and that no-one was taking up those needs. For example, I was trained as a mental health nurse and so I was very aware that gay people with mental health needs who went to the general mental health organisations, were being referred to Switchboard. And what we could do was limited, having very limited resources. So we formed an ad hoc group called *Switched on?* which aimed to bring the mental health world and gay people together a bit. Our initial awareness-raising events were massively oversubscribed.

"I also set up an umbrella group for all the lesbian and gay groups in Birmingham. They were all massively underfunded whereas the rest of the voluntary sector was growing. We provided linkages with the Council and a voice for the community." 6

Birmingham Lesbian and Gay Pride started in 1997 and is now one of the biggest gay festivals in the country

Left: a labrys pendant a popular piece of jewellery with lesbians in the 1980s and 1990s

Aspiration

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of aspiration

Below left: Ann Williams in the 1950s
Below right: Chloe and Rayanne, quoted on this page, became involved in this project through the 610 Youth Project in Kingstanding members of which were photographed by Vanley Burke.

Ann Williams: on leaving school in the 1950s

"After my father died I said I did not want to take the 11+ because I thought my mother would not be able to afford the uniform or the after-school activities. The careers advisors at school suggested I go to Dunlop or Fisher & Ludlow. Instead I took a job as a telephonist in the exchange on Newhall Street. When my youngest child was four, I took a job in a coach company. I started as a dogsbody and built the company up until I was the director of a successful coach company.

Rayanne McGuirk: on sporting aspirations

"I like to do rugby and boxing. I saw Katie Taylor, the Irish boxer, win gold so I want to do it again. Boxing makes me feel strong, not weak, like I'm my own person. Some people think if you're a girl you should not be doing it but I think 'I can do it and I can be better than you!'

Chloe Callow: on her career aspirations

"I'm in Year 10 so I'm doing my GCSEs at the moment. I want to be a child minder or a youth worker. With the cutbacks and everything, people are losing their jobs so there might not be jobs for child minders so that worries me. My dad's not working, my mom's not working. It's hard to get jobs.

Taking to the stage

Fiona Thorburn ***joined Birmingham Rep as a student after developing a love of the theatre as a child.***

"When I was at school, I was a regular member of the audience at the Birmingham Rep, every fortnight from 1950 onwards so my memories do go back quite a long way. I'd also been hopping around doing children's things for a long time. I'd started broadcasting in Broad Street at the old BBC studios at the age of nine. I was working with adult radio actors who were treating me as an adult—the fact that I was nine didn't really matter.

"In 1955 there was a series of very popular poetry events in the Rep auditorium, at lunchtimes I think. My mother and I used to go. I remember particularly Margaret Rawlings, tall and beautiful, making us rock with laughter with 'when I am old I shall wear purple'. Outreach hadn't been invented as a term but I remember going to get-togethers of cast and audience after first nights.

"Shortly after that, when I was around 18, I was lucky enough to become a student at the Birmingham Theatre School in a lovely, wobbly eighteenth century building in Holloway Head founded by Mary Richards who was a former member of the company at the Rep. There were seven theatres in the West Midlands then and she would persuade, cajole, bully them to give her students any small evening job. So you found yourself sewing buttons, an extra in a crowd scene... I can't honestly remember if we got paid or not. What mattered was that we were there, working in real theatre alongside people we admired tremendously. And all this in addition to a hard day at school: 10am to 6pm fencing, singing, period movement, IPA (a way of notating actual sounds so that you reproduce accents).

"We were only ten years away from the end of the War and there

Above: Fiona in around 1959

Above left: BBC Midlands was the first regional BBC having been set up in 1927. Initially based in studios on Broad Street, the BBC moved to Pebble Mill in 1971 and again to the Mailbox in 2004.

were still bomb sites and derelict patches in the city centre. There was never ever enough money. Education committees wouldn't give grants for anything as frivolous as a drama school. So we made do. It was considered very classy to have nylon stockings with dark seams and I remember sessions at lunch time when girl students would stand on tables and the boys would helpfully draw black lines down the backs of our legs with eyebrow pencils.

"We did learn from and admire the great actors who were at the Rep. Like the statuesque beauty, Nancie Jackson, who could convey fire and venom so powerfully. And the power of Albert Finney.

"And of course there was Sir Barry Jackson [founder of the Rep]. My first meeting with him was actually a funny one. I was playing a lady in the court of Anne Boleyn in a splendid costume in yards of velvet and brocade which needed a lot of turning room. I was hurrying from the dressing room up a flight of very narrow very steep stone stairs and I realised that the great Sir Barry was trying to come down and there was no way we could pass each other. I flattened myself against the wall like a housemaid at Buckingham Palace but Sir Barry stepped back, swept me a courtly bow and said 'Madam, your need is greater than mine', retreated and let me go up. I was barely 18 and he probably didn't know my name but he accepted me as a proper professional member of the company.

"The Rep's official photographer, Lisel Haas was a photographer in Germany but once the Nazis came, she made her escape. She was a very sweet person and insisted on doing my wedding photographs as a present.

"We were a very happy company. I don't remember any backstage nastiness. Nobody was snooty or sarcastic. We loved our job and were just so glad to be working.

"Later on, after my time at the Rep, I went to Scotland and worked in various theatres there. I am proud to say I remained a professional member of Equity until very recently." 6

"the boys would helpfully draw black lines down the backs of our legs with eyebrow pencils"

The original Rep building on Station Street, now known as the Old Rep

This is an excerpt from an interview conducted by Gudrun Limbrick for REP100, the project celebrating the Rep's Centenary in 2013. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the Birmingham Rep and Fiona herself.

Putting aspirations on hold for marriage

Valerie Coco ***was choosing between careers in art, teaching or modelling but falling in love changed all that.***

"I was born in Birmingham and spent my childhood in Castle Bromwich until I was about seven or eight before moving to Walsall.. My parents sent me to private school and were very proud of my sister, my brother and me in our smart little uniforms and they had really high expectations of us receiving a good education.

"But at school I thought the arithmetics teacher wasn't very good and I struggled with maths which knocked my confidence. I always wanted to become an art teacher but it was like facing Mount Everest because I couldn't get over the hurdle of maths.

"After school, I went to Walsall Arts College which I loved - I'd excelled at art all through school.

"I was also introduced to modelling there and when the principal of the school wrote a book, they put me on the cover. At that point I was toying with the idea of becoming a photographic model or with the idea of a teaching qualification or a degree in art. But I fell in love while on holiday in Italy, got married and moved to Sicily.

"In Italy, it was really really tough. I came from a quite a modern England really—especially Birmingham where I would go out with my friends and I had my own car. We used to go to nightclubs and things. In Sicily when I was married I wasn't allowed to go out, I had to have a chaperone. I always had someone with me, either my father-in-law or my mother-in-law or cousins of my husband. I wasn't allowed out anywhere on my own. When he was at work, my husband would leave me at my mother's house and she was very very old-fashioned. She didn't speak Italian, she spoke Sicilian so I had to pick up this new language. Even though I'd studied Italian, I couldn't understand these people. I had to learn how to speak Sicilian. And they didn't like the fact that I wore mini skirts. My

Valerie (right) and her sister in the mid-1950s

"I wasn't allowed out anywhere on my own"

mother-in-law didn't like me to go on the balcony because passing cars could see me in my mini skirt. It was a nightmare it really was.

"My husband's promise to me was that I could go to Catania University and study art and become an art teacher but that never came about. I felt that I had to do everything he wanted. I had two children over there—they were brought up Catholic and I wasn't Catholic so I had to learn about Catholicism and go to church.

"Things did get better and I did teach in a primary school - art and English. And eventually we opened up a language school and I taught there. I also started getting on much better with my mother-in-law and she's actually become a very good friend.

"When I was so unhappy while I was in Sicily I immersed myself in my art and I used to paint all the time. I did wonder what life might have been like if I'd stayed in England. Every time my parents came to visit, I wanted to go back with them but I didn't have the courage to up and go. I stayed until 1997 when my youngest was 18. I'd had enough and it was time to think about me.

"Neither of my children have settled here"

"My daughter came back with me and we both enrolled on degree courses at Wolverhampton. I felt so proud when I got my certificate. And then I got my PGCE as well. My son stayed in Sicily with his father but we were in constant contact.

"After a time, my daughter returned to Sicily. Neither of my children could settle here. I think it is because they were born there and their roots are there, and all their friends are there. And I don't think they could get acclimatised to the weather and the food here. I go back every year to see them, sometimes twice a year.

"Currently I am working as project manager in Birmingham but am still planning to get back into the art world. We'll see!"

Valerie in an early modelling photograph

Young women's aspirations

We asked some of the young women at the 610 Youth Centre, Kingstanding about their aspirations.

Some of the young people and staff at the 610 Youth Centre, photographed by Vanley Burke for this project in 2013

Elisse:

"I'm going to college at St Johns Centre in Warren Farm. I'm doing Childcare Level 3. I'm doing a placement in a nursery with children with special needs like autism, Down's syndrome, special needs. My passion is working with children, doing different activities with them. I want to be a top manager of a string of nurseries.

Shannon:

"I'm doing an Extended Diploma in fashion and textiles at college. I'm hoping to get enough points to go into footwear design at De Montfort University. It's one of the only universities and one of the best universities to do footwear design in the UK. Last week I designed and made a cotton shoe. It's in canvas so you can wear it in your house, but you can't wear it outdoors. It's kind of good. I'm proud of myself.

Lisa Symons:

"I'm really interested in animals. I want be a vet but I chose my options before I decided what I wanted to be. We had our dog put down and now I know what it feels like to have your dog put down. I want to be a vet so I can help other people go through it. I need to get really good grades in sciences. I don't think the university tuition fees should be so much because it's your education. Obviously it can't be free because people have got to pay for it but I don't think it should be as high as it is. I'll have to take out a loan when I go to university and I think I will live at home.

Tasha:

"I am doing art, history, physics and biology at college. I want to go to university in Plymouth - even though it's along way away. I want to do marine biology. The ocean and marine life has always been my big fascination. I've started looking now even though it's two years away.

Vicky Greaves:

"I'm doing my Diploma Level 2 in Fitness Instructing to become a gym instructor. From there I want to go on to do my Level 1 in Exercise and Music. And then I want to work on a cruise ship as a gym instructor. That's what I'm hoping for.

Action

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of action

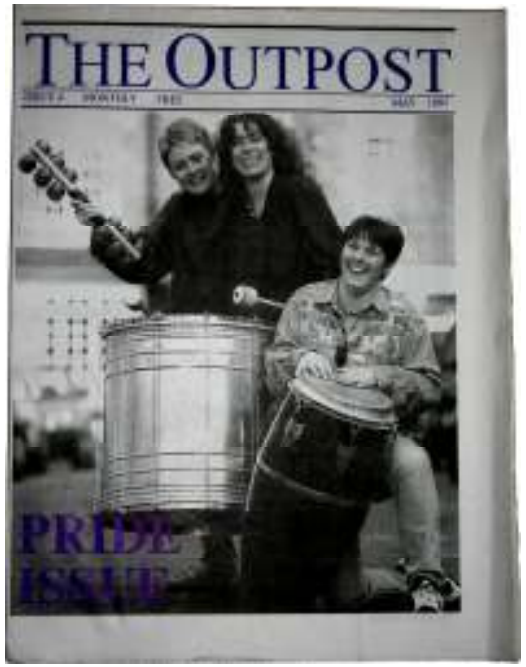
Joycelyn Faulkner: on the Birmingham Black Sisters in the 1980s

"We got talking about how it would be nice to have a group for black women in Birmingham. We started Black Women Sisters from scratch. We went on demonstrations – like CND and Anti -Apartheid. Back in the 80s we were very good at activism. Women came from all over Birmingham.

Left: The Birmingham Black Sisters banner in Trafalgar Square in the 1980s

Shirley Bozic: on being political in the 1960s

"I'm very interested in politics and was very involved in local politics before I was married. I joined the Labour Party and became secretary of the Young Socialists. I feel women still have a barrier to break to be taken seriously in male arenas – what used to be exclusively male arenas. I feel very passionately when I see women being patronised as I think women are totally equal. Nowadays I think there are women who have forgotten those days when we were fighting for equality and they say they no longer want to be feminists, etc. I feel sad when I'm with my young grandchildren and we see toys just for girls and toys just for boys. But I don't spoil their fun.



Top: The Bangladesh Women's Association in 1975 at a charity event in Carrs Lane Church

Above: Outpost, the Birmingham newspaper for the lesbian, gay and bisexual community in the 1990s which was set up by a woman and produced by a largely female team (not pictured)

Working in the community

Badrun Pasha ***set up the Bangladesh Women's Association at the start of the 1970s, and it is still going. She also had a long career in social work.***

"In 1963, when I was 24, I arrived in this country. My husband had come here to study law in 1961. We got married in August 1963 and I came to this country in October. I had a master's degree in social welfare—I got the result on the day of my wedding. Coming to England was not my big dream but people were starting to come here for higher education.

"My mother's legacy was education. Women's education was not that common at the time. We were living not very far from Calcutta and a school for Muslim girls had been set up there. My grandmother had died when my mother was six months old so my mother was brought up by her aunt and uncle. They enrolled my mother in the school in Calcutta for a correspondence course. When my mother married my father, she came to the village where my father was living and it was an illiterate place and so she set up a school for girls in her own house. They were taught Bengali, English, embroidery work. Sadly my mother died young but it is this legacy that she left me that drives me to do the work I do here in the Bangladesh Women's Association.

"When I came to England I had to do other social work qualifications - on top of the degree and master's I did in Bangladesh. I went to evening classes when we lived in Leicester for a time.

When we came to Birmingham in 1970 there weren't so many Bangladeshi people. People didn't start bringing their families until after 1971.

"We lived in Small Heath which was very different to now. I was an immigration counsellor at the time for the Immigrants' Advisory

Badrun's parents

"It is my passion, I think it is in my genes to do all this work"

Service. Then I moved to Birmingham Social Services. My husband also joined Social Services, both of us in Family and Child Services.

"I set up the Women's Association in 1970. It was the East Pakistan Women's Association at first. Then in 1971, it became the Bangladesh Women's Association. I used to run all the activities and everything from my home. Because I was a social worker and worked for the City Council, my proposals for work in the Bangladeshi community were accepted. I could see the need—I could see it through my work but also just through my neighbours and being in the community. I think that people respected me because I had a good position in Birmingham City Council.

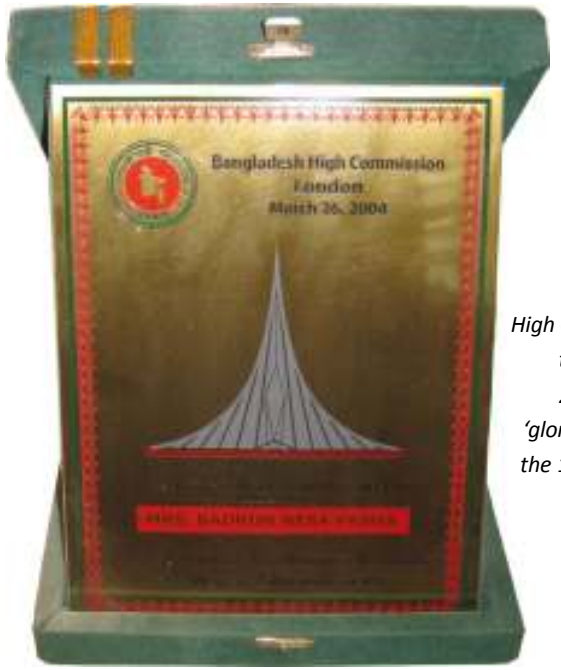
"When I first started it, there weren't so many Bangladeshi people and many of them coming from East Pakistan were here as students and were educated and had a good understanding of what they were coming to. It then became more family work, working with the whole family - the children's education, health, cultural conflict, the future, and the issues for girls like arranged marriages, running away from home, the greater freedom of boys. We spent time talking to the parents about these issues.

"I was also very involved, of course, in the Bangladesh Liberation Movement. My husband and I set up the Bangladesh Action Committee from our house in Small Heath. It was the focus of the movement here.

"In 1978, when my children were still young, we set up a Bangla School in Small Heath so that we would not forget our own roots and we started to celebrate our own cultural programme so that we share the understanding of our own culture and events like Ramadan and our national days.

"I retired in 2002 but then I set up the Sircer Pasha Welfare Trust with my own money to care for the poor in rural villages of Bangladesh. It is my passion, I think it is in my genes to do all this work."

Badrun with her husband who died in 1983



An award presented by the Bangladesh High Commission to Badrun in 2004 for her 'glorious role' in the 1971 War of Liberation

A political time

Taslima Akbar, ***a careers advisor, remembers the 1960s and 1970s as a political time for her family.***

"I came from a big family so my earliest memories are of lots of noise, lots of laughter. My parents were from Bangladesh so the food that we ate, the language that we spoke at home, was different to what other young people had at school.

"We were big on birthdays, with parties for us so that having a cake, blowing out the candles are my first memories really. I can also remember being taken to the library by my sister, choosing our books and walking home. Mum was very clear that education was important. I think we went every week to get our books.

"Now when I look around the city I see how diverse it is in terms of cultures and in terms of how visible those cultures are. Now you can see the young girls wearing the hijab or the burka and you can go into Tesco and buy samosas. When I grew up it wasn't that visible. At school I don't remember learning about any other cultures. It's Black History Month now—I don't remember having that. I don't remember celebrating any festival like Eid or Diwali. There was no acknowledgement of other cultures. For me, you went to school, and it was all very English and when I went home there was a different language, different foods, different smells. There was no crossover.

"The Bangladeshi community in Birmingham is small and it's new so we were separate again. And the food that we ate and the language that we spoke was different from other Asian young boys and girls at school. So English people knew about the Indian or Pakistani culture, but I would have to explain that I might have a brown face but it was different. I still get that now.

"Get an education, get a good job, get a career, that was what was important to my mum. When we were growing up, it was less about the religion and more about the culture, but I think our identity is

Taslima in 2013

"When we were growing up, it was less about the religion and more about the culture"

more about religion since 9/11 and everything that has gone on. I don't remember people being overly religious before. My mum didn't wear a burka when she was younger for example, that has happened only recently. In the 1960s, she wore a headscarf but it was nothing like what young people are wearing now.

"We lived in a mixed area when we were little. I mean we didn't live in Small Heath or anywhere like that There was a German family down the road who used to make our clothes for us. It was a mixed area like that. And we'd be out all day playing outside, down the park. We didn't live near other Bangladeshi families but we would go out visiting all our aunties and uncles. My mum came over in the 1950s, my dad in the 1960s and the community was really quite political. My mum was a member of an organisation called the Bangladesh Women's Association which was set up by someone called Mrs Pasha which really brought the community together to highlight what was happening in East Pakistan as it was. Mrs Pasha started it and invited all the women along. There was a lot of fundraising. We had coffee evenings and we'd all take part. Someone would sing a song, someone would read a poem. One year I compered it. All the community would come together and all of those people were like my aunties and my uncles. We did that for several years - raising money, going on demonstrations.

"I went to university and did a politics degree. My parents seemed very liberal - I knew people who were told what to study and who to marry and all that. but my parents didn't do that. My dad worked, and my mum worked in a factory. That was interesting because it was the first time we'd seen her in western clothes. Usually she wore a sari but for work she wore a smock top and trousers. It was a hard job - making pots and pans - and very noisy. My sisters looked after me and my brother and got us ready for school and all that. My sisters were my role models then, I really wanted to be just like them."

"My mum was a member of an organisation called the Bangladesh Women's Association"

An event about the liberation of Bangladesh by Birmingham women in around 1971

Our first female Leader of the Council

Theresa Stewart*, a councillor in Billesley, was elected as the Leader of Birmingham City Council in 1993.*

Theresa pictured in 1997 when she was Leader of the Council

"I was born in Leeds, and having lived in a few different places, came here in 1966 as my husband got a job at Birmingham University.

In Birmingham, we found a very nice house in the University district which was lovely. The city was very much bigger than Doncaster where we had been living. I couldn't push the pram into town to do the shopping or anything like that. It took a lot of getting used to. I joined the Labour Party here and got very involved in that.

"I had been teaching maths, I have a maths degree, but. having got four children, and the youngest when we came here was only four, I didn't want to take a full-time job teaching so when I was asked to stand as a councillor, I said yes. I stood in Selly Oak in 1968 and 1969 but didn't get elected. The following year I stood in Billesley and just missed it by 92 votes but in July of that year, when I was almost 40, I was elected in a bi-election when the previous councillor, Freda Cocks, stood down to be an alderman.

"As a councillor I was very active picking up people's problems, having advice bureaux and it involved an awful lot of writing. And at that time, there was no secretarial support at all. Quite a lot of the male councillors worked in offices and they got their secretarial help there. I had to had write everything, I didn't type in those days and I can't remember when I got a computer.

"You could organise your own life mostly apart from meetings, so I was still able to care for my children. In the evenings I had advice bureaux but my husband could look after the children then. His work meant that he could box and cox with me.

"I very much enjoyed it - helping people and taking up issues and I enjoyed the meetings. We had a committee system and you could

raise issues, discuss them and make decisions in committee.

"My issues at the time were primarily children's issues—parks, play areas, schools. I always felt there were issues of importance relating to women, lots of issues. I certainly felt very strongly about the lack of women in political positions. I remember being extremely angry about a Labour Party political broadcast in about 1972 when they brought Shirley Williams on with a shopping basket which I thought was very patronising. I was on the Social Services Committee from around 1972 and chaired it for a time.

"In 1993, I was elected as Leader of the Council, the first female Council Leader the city has had. I wanted to become Leader simply because I thought I could do it better than my opponents could. And I did! As a councillor I was very committed to education, schools and social services and I felt that the money going into big building projects like the NEC, the Convention Centre and the NIA at the time could be better off going into these things. After my election, I immediately held a budget meeting and we were indeed able to put more funding into schools.

"I didn't really feel any antagonism towards me as a female leader, and the press didn't make much of it which is a good thing. In 1999 Albert Bore was voted in and has been Leader ever since. The following year I was voted in as the Lord Mayor of Birmingham. In 1973, when our first female Lord Mayor, Marjorie Brown, was voted in, I thought it was amazing. Liverpool had first had a female Lord Mayor in 1926 so it was about time we had one. We've had female councillors since 1911 so it was time we were recognised in this way.

"I really don't know why more women haven't followed. I think it is partly to do with the lack of pay. When women do stand as councillors, they tend to do very well with the voters.

"I was a councillor in Billesley for 32 years. I was lucky and kept being re-elected - and my husband I still live in Birmingham."

The Midland Metro tram no. 11 is named after Theresa. In August 2013, 'The Theresa Stewart' had a paint job in the old Birmingham Corporation colours of blue and cream. This was to mark the 60 year anniversary of the end of Birmingham's first tram era

"I certainly felt very strongly about the lack of women in political positions"

Diversity

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of diversity

Rayanne McGuirk: on being Irish in Birmingham

"In Ireland people are more friendly. We go back there every year as we still have family there. I've always been Irish. We don't really spend time with other Irish people or families in Birmingham. There's not a lot of Irish people in the school or where I live.

Julia Frances: on coming to a multi-cultural Birmingham

"When I came to Birmingham from Widnes I had recently qualified as a teacher. In Widnes everyone was white British. At college in Hull it was the same. I went to college in the 70s and we had one lecture about teaching people from ethnic minorities but no other training. When I started at Anderton Park School I didn't recognise any of the names on my class list. The majority of the children in the class were of Pakistani origin and a few African Caribbean. Perhaps two or three were white. I thought it was very exciting and a bit of a challenge for me.

Amina Choudhury: on an old-fashioned community

"I find that in Birmingham the Bangladeshi community is more traditional because we have moved forward in Bangladesh. And the parents who came here very early stuck with that old village, traditional way. They want their daughters like that and their sons like that, you know. But Bangladesh is actually moving way forward. Our prime minister is a woman, half the ministers are women, our opposition leader is a woman so there is a sort of power – women power is there.

Left: An invitation to the St Patrick's Day Dinner and dance in 1977. Birmingham now hosts one of the largest St Patrick's Day events in the world.
Above: Maxine Walker's family relaxing in front of the TV in Nechells in the 1970s

Growing up in Handsworth

Joycelyn Faulkner ***was born in 1959 in Marston Green and moved to Handsworth when she was very young.***

"I was born in Marston Green Hospital (years later I discovered my vicar was born on exactly the day in the same hospital, our parents must have known each other!) then my parents moved to Leamington Spa when I was young but then they bought a house in Handsworth where I grew up, in Murdoch Road. We've sold it since because my father died a few years ago but it had some happy memories, loads of happy memories. I had seven brothers and sisters, Pauletta who died some years ago, Neville my older brother, Derek my other brother, Michael who died, Carleen, Janet and Sharon the baby. I was third oldest.

"We all lived in one room, shared a bed in one room, all of us. It was higgledy piggledy, as you can imagine. All different ages. It was not a nice experience I seem to remember. Then when we got the dog, I would have the dog on the bed and they hated that.

"I almost burnt down the house when I was young – by reading books. I loved to read but my parents said we had to have the lights out by a certain time as it was expensive. So we used candles and I left a candle burning and it burnt a chest of drawers right through but it just smoked and didn't set alight luckily. I've no idea how that happened.

Joycelyn (on the left) and her parents and two brothers in the 1960s

"I remember my mom teaching me to cook at a very early age. I could cook from the age of eight. Cutting and dissecting the chicken and cooking Caribbean chicken. We call it Caribbean chicken here in my family. You know, rice and peas and chicken: the staple diet of the Caribbean. Making dumplings, fried dumplings, and plantains. Salt fish and ackee for breakfast. That was delicious. Love that for a Christmas meal. Christmas was an event in our household. All

celebratory – we'd wear our best bib and tucker as it were – our best clothes and we had lots of food. It was lovely. Brilliant. Really nice food. We had beef, roast beef – which was my mom's only concession to English dining. Mainly it was Caribbean fare which was lovely – we didn't mind. I still carry on her legacy to this day, cooking Caribbean food. My children love it.

"Growing up in my family, boys and girls were treated differently. My brothers were treated like kings by my parents. They didn't have to do anything. They didn't have to do wash loads like we girls had to do nor look after the younger family members which I was really put out about. My brothers had much more freedom, the girls were kept indoors. But luckily my father got a dog which had to be exercised and nobody liked the dog except me so I would walk the dog and go off to see my girlfriends.

"It was quite a close-knit community in Handsworth and everyone knew what was going on and if you got into trouble they'd know about it and we'd get one hell of a beating so we had to be on good behaviour, really good behaviour. I remember when I met my husband who's a white guy. It was unusual back in those days in the 1970s/80s. And when I kissed him everyone knew about it and my parents were horrified!

"My father said 'no way! No way are you marrying a white guy'. But I persevered and 35 years later we're still together, happily married.

"Me and my husband moved to Moseley, I'm a ghetto girl from Handsworth so I thought 'no way!' because it looked so posh. We lived in a nice private flat, really leafy area, all the municipal things got done, it had a very good bus route, everything. My first son was born in Sorrento, he was the first child in the set of flats which was mainly elderly people. And I was the only black person in the flats so I stood out a mile. Even out on the road, I stood out a mile. I just shrugged it off. The wouldn't talk to me and they complained about the noise my son made, I just ignored it. After I had my second child we moved to Kings Heath and we've been very happy."

Joycelyn was part of Birmingham Black Sisters in the 1980s, a group that attended many CND, anti-apartheid and other marches

A keen knitter, Joycelyn took part in 'yarn-bombing' the Museum to welcome the Jamaican Olympic team to Birmingham in 2012

An upbringing that wasn't the 'norm'

Emma Tucker*, who is now 31, had what could be considered both a 'non-mainstream' education and a 'non-mainstream' upbringing, and blossomed creatively.*

"My father was from Poole and mum is from Weston Super Mare. They came to Birmingham to be arty and study and find themselves. They moved into a huge Victorian house with lots of Bohemian hippy-type people. Mum would object to the word hippy but I don't know how else to describe them. Perhaps they are uncategorisable. My dad was definitely a hippy - a beatnik hippy if there is such a thing. My parents were screen printers and did posters for bands like UB40 who were the happening thing in Birmingham.

"So I was born there but the landlord was trying to evict us all so Mum rented a little house in Selly Oak and we moved, just the two of us. My dad had a house in Handsworth. And they did a time share with me and I went back and forth between them. I think Nigel was having me Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays I think they were having me half-half. I went to Tiverton Junior and Infant School. I lived with Mummy and went to stay with Nigel (that is my dad—Mummy is Mummy and Nigel is Nigel).

"I love learning, learning's awesome"

"I hated school. I was like 'what is this about?' I'm very dyslexic but perhaps if I had been tested and got the support… I got headaches and stomach aches from the stress of not wanting to go to school. But how weird because now I work in a school - all my career has been in education. I love learning, learning's awesome. But mainstream education wasn't for me.

"Then I went to Kings Norton Girls'. I remember choosing the

Emma with Nanny in around 1984

school and walking 'round with mum. It was a girls' school and there were reasons why I chose it—I thought it would be better. That whole thing of being ten/eleven and thinking that boys were smelly. But boys actually dilute things quite a lot. They are quite useful. I didn't have the greatest time at Kings Norton Girls'. I didn't love it. I ended up, in Year 9, going to Wake Green Centre which was basically for school refusers and people who were chucked out. I was neither really. They just suggested it to me and I agreed to go. I suspect there was a lot more going on that I didn't know about involving Mum and Dad.

"I really liked Wake Green. It made much more sense to me. It was a Victorian house, converted. And the teachers there really cared. You can't work there unless you really care, because it was really hard work. In mainstream schools there are kids who take up all the teachers' time which isn't fair or they get sent to a place just for those sorts of people. There would be just four or five people in a class. It was a different atmosphere, a different way of learning. But I didn't get what I wanted. They could only offer six GCSEs so I only have six. I could have done more.

"Out of school I did Stage 2 which is a youth theatre which I joined when I was about ten. For me., being on the stage, it's the place for me. Although I haven't acted for years as there are a lot of people out there who also think that the stage or the screen is for them, I was involved in productions but also did LAMDA exams. I found I could read if it was dialogue so I taught myself to read through reading plays. Scripts have different gaps in and one of my biggest problems is that I see tracts within text. I don't see words, I see the spaces between the words. The way scripts are broken up really helps me.

"My first job was with Stage 2. I started by making masks for *Romeo and Juliet*. Then I started doing set designs and doing workshops for children. And then directing. And photography. My career has evolved from this group I joined as a child. Strangely, I now work, still in the arts, in a huge secondary school".

A self-portrait in around 2012

Equality

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of gender equality

Mary Hill: on equal pay in the 1960s

Of course in those days, we didn't have equal pay and that lasted for years. I remember one school master saying to me 'well *you* don't expect to get equal pay do you?'. It perhaps wasn't a big amount of money but salaries were so small that it made a big difference. I think that some men felt that women would be best off at home looking after their children.

Rachel MacGregor: on invisibility

I had a few meetings with the tech guys at work which was fine but then I met them again with a colleague of mine who was a man. He actually had nothing to do with the project but they addressed all their comments to him. I might as well have not been there.

Lesley Shedwick: on gender equality in the 1980s

I was always aware that it did seem to be the men who progressed rather than the women. It was harder for women initially. There wasn't the flexibility that there is now for job-sharing when you have children. My daughter went to nursery full-time when she was five months old so that I could go back to work full-time, something I'd been through myself as a child.

Lesley receiving an award in 1997 from Councillor Theresa Stewart for the community work of West Heath Library

Gaynor MacDonald: on gender equality

The culture is stronger now for women to reach senior positions. But I think it is still very important for women who reach senior positions to encourage other women. I don't mean favouritism but being aware that not all women will have an easy route. I have tried to pass onto my daughters the idea, and will also encourage my granddaughters, that they can do anything.

Helena Duignan: on memories of Clare Short

My first memory of Clare Short is of her on the news tearing porn magazines off the top shelves in WH Smith's. I was a teenager and I thought what she was doing was brilliant.

Women in Birmingham politics

The twentieth century saw significant developments in democracy in the UK. At the start of the century, women could neither vote in elections or stand in elections. The women's suffrage movement saw a passionate fight which eventually ended in equality between men and women in terms of voting.

In 1918, women aged over 30 were given the right to vote. Later that year, they were given the right to stand for election. It took another ten years before there was complete equality however and the age at which women could vote was reduced to the same as that for men. It was not until 1928 that everyone over the age of 21 could vote, regardless of gender.

Birmingham City Council's first Lord Mayor was appointed in 1896, since then 103 people have been given the title, Of these, 97 have been men, with just seven female Lord Mayors:

Marjorie Brown	1973 - 1974
Freda Cocks OBE	1977 - 1978
Marion Arnott-Job	1996 - 1997
Sybil Spencer	1997 - 1998
Susan Anderson	1998 - 1999
Theresa Stewart	2000 - 2001
Anita Ward	2011 - 2012

Theresa Stewart was not only our sixth female Lord Mayor, she also has the accolade of becoming, in 1993, the first female Leader of Birmingham City Council.

Of the 120 councillors currently in office in Birmingham City Council, 37 are women.

Birmingham's first female MP was Edith Wills, elected in 1945. Remarkably she was the first of only ten:

Edith Wills	1945 - 1950
Dame Edith Pitt OBE	1953 - 1966
Dame Jill Knight OBE	1966 - 1997
Doris Fisher	1970 - 1974
Sheila Wright	1979 - 1983
Rt Hon Clare Short	1983 - 2010
Dr Lynne Jones	1992 - 2010
Rt Hon Baroness Estelle Morris	1992 - 2005
Gisela Stewart	1997 -
Shabana Mahmood	2010 -

Joining the Women's Movement

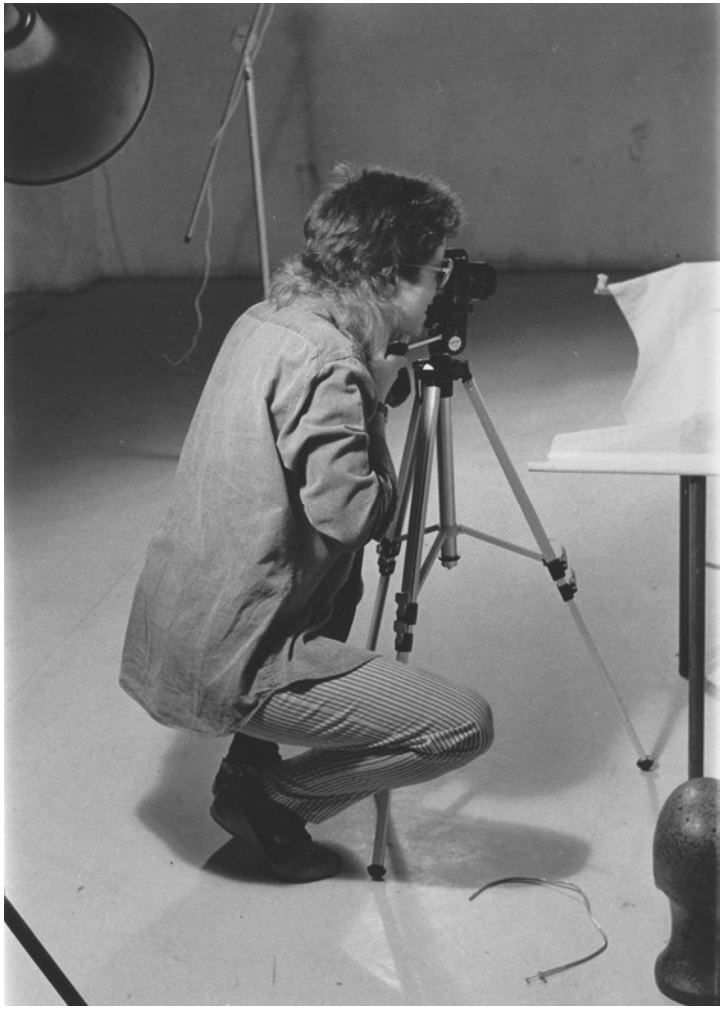
Charlotte Tucker ***came to Birmingham as a young woman in the 1970s not sure what her career might be.***

"I was born in 1951, so I'm sort of a baby boomer, but right on the edge. I can still remember rationing of orange juice and stuff like that. I was born in Worle, a small village near Weston Super Mare.

"I went to Art College in Liverpool. I really enjoyed the Foundation year and I was doing textile design but I didn't feel really confident about it and I wasn't sure that that was what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to do sociology. But looking back at it, I think a lot of it was because of my boyfriend at the time. So I went with him to Cardiff University to study Sociology and Law but we'd broken up by the third year. I had a great time there but I still didn't know what I wanted to do.

Some people went straight into a career and perhaps got married and had kids but I think at the time, the early 1970s, I think people were looking for alternative things to do. I didn't feel so much that I needed to have a career. I remember the card my dad wrote when I graduated which said 'here's to a long a prosperous career' which was tongue in cheek as he knew I didn't have a career in mind. I went to Bristol and worked as a croupier which I enjoyed but you didn't see much daylight. Then I worked in a screen printing business as a stencil cutter. I was the only woman who was working there except for the secretary in the office.

"I then came to Birmingham to do a post grad teaching year. I didn't think I'd like Birmingham. I'd never actually been but I'd been through on the train and it looked dreadful. Birmingham's such a big sprawl. But I still wanted to be in a city because nothing really goes on in the countryside or in small towns. So I came to Birmingham because I knew someone who worked in Saltley Action Centre and I knew that even if I only stayed there for a year at least I'd have one contact. I moved into a flat in Carlisle Road which was great and



Charlotte at a photography workshop

"This was taken at one of a series of women's photography workshops held at the Arts Lab, when it was located at The Triangle, Gosta Green. They were run by Sue Green and Rhonda Wilson in, I think, the early eighties"

very studenty. There were four flats in two adjoining houses and the two flats above had seven people living there and we all socialised together and we would take it in turns to cook and we'd eat together.

"I remember sitting 'round a candle reading Wind in the Willows because of the Three Day Week power cuts. It was quite a political period. I can remember one of the people in the flat taking me on the Number 8 bus route to see the 'Eight Wonders of the World' one of which was where Arthur Scargill came over the hill with the miners in Saltley.

"I was going to go into teaching, but I got side-tracked into screen printing again and had my own business called Pink Ink. We made fly posters and music posters and stuff for small theatre groups like Midland Red and Red Banner and for the Arts Lab at Gosta Green. I then joined the Reprographics Department at the University of Birmingham with two other women. I had my introduction to graphic design there and computer design programmes were coming in. We did posters for UB40, Steel Pulse, Duran Duran.

"I became very involved in the women's movement. Even looking at holiday jobs when I was in Weston, I could do washing up in a hotel, I could work in an ice cream parlour but the really choice jobs, like deck chair attendant, were only for boys. And they got better pay. It was just a better job. I do remember that in the 1960s, you couldn't have an HP agreement if you were a woman, without it being signed by your husband or your father. Women's money was men's money and women's debts were men's debts as well.

"I went to a lot of all-women discos and workshops and things. I remember taking Emma, my daughter, to a women-only music workshop. I think young people today would say that that was sexist but at the time we were trying to build independence so you had perhaps positive sexual prejudices. There was a lot about women supporting each other then. I don't know if that sort of thing still goes on or if I am just getting older and don't seek it out any more."

Charlotte with her daughter in around 1983

"There was a lot about women supporting each other then"

The significance of clothes

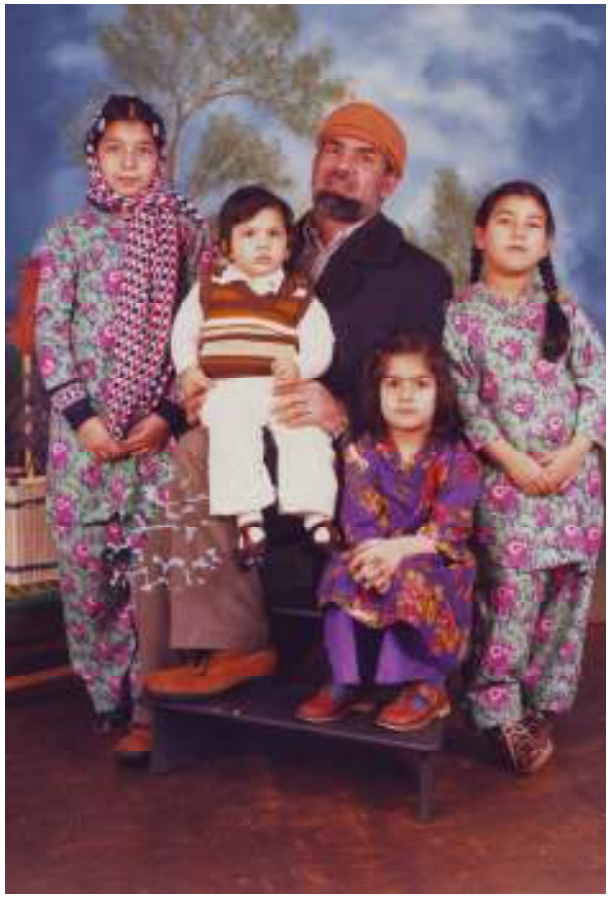
At school in Handsworth* Zaida Begum *experienced a different religion to the one she knew at home.

"I live in Handsworth and have two children at Welford Primary and one at Holyhead.

"I was born here and my dad came from Attock Ghorghusti in Pakistan in the 1950s or 1960s. I don't have much information on it because I have only ever been there once, when I was about two. I have never been back or taken my own kids. My parents had an arranged marriage in Pakistan and then dad kind of left her there and ended up coming here to make a better life, work and earn some money to send back there. Some years later, I assume about five or so, my mum came over.

"We did the cultural thing as a Pakistani family would do. But my father would let us get away with a lot of things that other kids our age could not do. He was more westernised in a way if that makes sense. He wasn't as strict as some of the other parents back then. We had friends and it was more strict for those guys whereas our dad would let us get away with a lot of things. Mum was not as westernised as my dad. He was very easy-going. I felt she was more strict.

"We went to a Catholic school, St Mary's School. We had a bible that we were given. My dad never said we shouldn't read the bible or go to school. He never protested against us getting involved in whatever at the school. We'd go to Christmas assemblies and I would sing the school hymns. After school we would have to go to the mosque or the guy would come to the house and read us our Islamic studies. But I never really thought of it but yes we were at a Catholic school and then Muslim in the evenings. My parents knew it wasn't an Islamic school but I think maybe they didn't know it was Catholic. There were a couple of other Muslim families there and Sikhs. It was multi-cultural in that way.



Zaida (on the right) with her father, two sisters and her brother in the 1980s

"We were at a Catholic school in the day and had Islamic studies in the evenings"

"At home we were allowed to watch telly and videos whereas back then, a lot of my cousins and friends weren't. My parents weren't that strict. We had Smash Hits magazine. We were allowed to do all that but we knew we had to pray when it came time to pray.

"Me and my sisters knew we could get away with a lot knowing we weren't going to get a severe punishment from our dad. We were more scared of what our mum would say, or what she would do. We knew we could get dad on our side. In school I can remember Mufti Day, I don't know if they call it that now. We were always in Asian clothes, we didn't wear westernised clothes but that day we wanted to wear jeans and a top, it would have been a blouse then, and mum said no. I just started crying and dad came home and he took me and my sister to the shops, the local shops, and he got me a pink blouse and a blue pair of jeans. My mum wasn't happy but my dad allowed us to. I don't know why he did really.

"He would always say that if we have come to this country then we have got to adapt to the rules of this country and the way people are here. We can't put the rules of Pakistan on the kids here.

"I went to Handsworth Girls' School and that was ok but we weren't allowed to wear skirts. We had to have trousers on and that was a big issue with me and my sister. Why did we have to cover up when other girls didn't? But we weren't allowed to go to that extreme.

"About four years ago, when I was 34, I decided to cover up and wear a hijab. Before that my hair was loose and I wore western clothes. I decided to be covered as I had been delving into my religion a lot more than I had when I was a kid. All the Islamophobia that there is now, I wanted to look into it more and work out why people have these weird conceptions about my religion. Yes, there are bad people who use it in a bad way but we all get stereotyped because of it. It has made me want to say we are Muslims and stand up for our beliefs."

Zaida's mum, with her head covered

"When I was 34 I decided to cover up and wear a hijab"

Wearing the trousers

Women in trousers was not a common sight in Birmingham until around half way through the twentieth century.

Mary Hill:

"For my work, I went into one school in Birmingham, I had gone in a decent skirt and jacket and so on because in those days trousers weren't sort of allowed for women, and the Head said 'I'm glad to see you in a skirt, all my staff wear skirts.' I just looked at her wide-eyed and I said 'oh, do the men wear kilts then?' Oh she was furious. But I couldn't resist that – it's such a silly attitude.

"When I was visiting another school, the PE teacher came in wearing a red trouser suit, and the Head just looked at her and said, 'you're not coming into this school like that!' The PE teacher went off, she took her trousers off and she came back wearing just her jacket. And she said 'is this alright?' And the Head said 'oh yes, that's perfectly alright'. But the teacher had to be careful how she moved because it was such a short jacket. She really wasn't decent. It is things like that that have changed luckily."

Doreen Goodall:

"My mother used to point out women wearing trousers and say how horrendous it was but, by the 70s and 80s, she was wearing trousers herself."

Heather Anderson:

"I don't think women were really wearing trousers until the War. We'd got used to wearing siren suits (like the onesies there are now) so I think we got used to the idea of trousers. I can remember me and my mum wearing our siren suits and tin hats to go 'round the places that had been bombed and handing out cups of tea." 6

Heather wearing trousers in 1946

Challenge

Quotes from Unlocked participants on the theme of challenge

Doreen Goodall: on being a child in the Second World War

"In the War, I went to St Thomas' School. I can remember two or three children shared a desk because it was so crowded. Father was in the Home Guard and so was away for days. Going into the shelters was fantastic because we were all in it together. The adults would sing to drown out the sounds of the air raids. Then I was evacuated and I remember running wild and not going to lessons. When I came back, my parents sent me to Greenmore College as my mom was worried about my education. They went without to be able to afford it. It amazes me how they did that.

Left: Heather Anderson: "In 1946, food in post-war England was still difficult Large posters encouraged people not to go on an ordinary holiday but to spend time working on the land 'getting grub for our country' so my friend and I did just that in Salford Priors."

Vicky Greaves: on caring for her granddad

"I live with my Nan and Granddad and my Granddad has not long been diagnosed with dementia so I care for him a lot. I don't really get time to myself as much as I'd like do. My Nan can't do everything so I help out when I'm not at college. It's very hard.

Above: a child's evacuation case

Heather Anderson: on being evacuated

"We carried our gas masks and mother told us to be good. We were evacuated on a chara-banc. We were given a bag with a couple of Nice biscuits and a tin of Nestlé milk and told that it was for our new home but we didn't know what that meant. We were taken into a hall and country folk came in and chose children. We went with a family in Leicestershire. Our parents would cycle from Birmingham to see us when they could.

Birmingham in 1900: What's changed?

Modern conveniences

While electricity in homes was possible, even as late as 1911 less than 2% of households had made the switch from coal-fired ranges. Outside earth closets were common, the flush toilet a rarity. Most working class households were still dependent on shared water taps in the yard. The vacuum cleaner wasn't invented until 1901. Even the radio was only work-in-progress.

Housing

Slum clearance was underway at the turn of the century with areas of back-to-backs being cleared. However, many families were still living in poor, cramped conditions.

Looking after those in need

As 1900 was long before the welfare state had come to be, Birmingham's provision for the destitute still focused on the workhouse (City Hospital stands on the workhouse site) where people could go if they were desperate. This was run by the Birmingham Union Guardians of the Poor, a kind of forerunner of Social Services. Some almshouses for destitute elderly people existed but for most, the workhouse was the only option. Abandoned, orphaned, disabled or destitute children were sent to the Union-run cottage homes at Shenley, Erdington or Marston Green or the large orphanages like Sir Josiah Mason's Orphanage in Erdington or the Princess Alice Orphanage at New Oscott.

Getting around

Electric trams were relatively new in the city having taken over from horse-drawn trams just ten years before in 1890. Cars were still work-in-progress. Most journeys were on foot or by horse-drawn carriage.

A Birmingham family c1900

A Birmingham electric tram

A smaller city

Places that we now consider key parts of Birmingham were not yet part of the city such as Aston, Handsworth, Erdington, Yardley and Northfield. Birmingham boundaries were expanded to incorporate these places in 1911 (with the exception of Northfield which was added in 1919).

Number of Brummies

In 1900, Birmingham had a population of around 500,000. By 2013, it had doubled - to around a million people. However, the increase has not been steady: a peak in 1951 (at around 1.1 million) was followed by a decline for the next fifty years. We are currently experiencing a population increase again but are not yet at the 1951 level.

An education interrupted by war

Joyce Potter *remembers living through the War.*

"I was born in Birmingham, my early years were in Bournville. I haven't really ventured far in my life in terms of where I live. My parents moved to Northfield in about 1936. I've lived 'round that area all my life.

"There were three of us. My sister was ten years older than me, my brother six years older and then I came along. My childhood was a very happy childhood. We were a very happy family. We had relatives in Plymouth so holidays before the Second World War were with Uncle Frank. We had lots of lovely times there and on my mother's side of the family, my aunt lived in Princes Risborough so we would holiday there as well. These were the holidays that children had in the 1930s. It was all visiting aunts and uncles.

"War seemed to change everything. At my age, the war years were very interesting. I realised the sadness of the war and what it meant one day when my mom and a neighbour were absolutely sobbing, I feel quite emotional now. It was when the Ark Royal battleship went down and they realised that one of the young boys in Farren Road, that's where I lived, could have been on it. And indeed he was.

"Of course when war broke out I was nine and I didn't go to school for six months. The schools were closed because they were building air raid shelters so it was two days a week in different places. So my education was a bit rustic to say the least. But the headmaster told my mother he felt I was capable of going to grammar school but my mother had reservations and certainly so did I. I wanted to be a secretary. The cinema was the only entertainment then and I had seen the women in films playing secretaries and so on cloud cuckoo land I thought that was what I wanted to be so I finished up at the British School of Commerce on Paradise Street until I was 15."

War-time in Birmingham, 1942. Pictured is Flint Green Nursery which, along with several others in the city, was opened to care for children whose mothers were working

"When war broke out I was nine and I didn't go to school for six months"

Getting lost in another world

When* Lavinia Bousfield *was 68, she lost her husband which led to her writing her first novel.

"I have twenty great grandchildren which is quite a lot to cope with - especially at Christmas.

"On Tuesdays I go to my writing group where I meet Heather who is also involved in this project. We all tell our different stories because we're all writing novels. We're all hoping to be famous one day I suppose. This is what has kept me going because it is six years ago since I lost my husband. I was absolutely at a loss. My life seemed as if it had come to an end. I didn't know what to do. My youngest daughter, she sort of took over everything and I stayed with her for a while. And then she said she thought I should go back to my own house and see how I might manage. I went for a few days at first and then gradually I got back into the run of living on my own and coming to terms with being on my own. It was very very hard for the first two years I tell you. And joining that writing group is what has given me inspiration to go out and write. I'd only ever written poetry but they invited me into the group and said why didn't I write a novel and now I'm on the fourth one. The main thing is that it has been very therapeutic. Sometimes I'm at my computer and I'm there for a few hours. I look at the clock and think 'oh my goodness me!' All the time has just melted away. And when I go to the writing group and we read what we have written, it all comes alive and it's exciting. We're all writing different stories. Some about pirate ships, others children's stories, wizards and dragons and things. Heather's writing a very interesting book.

"There's a gentleman there who is editing my books for me. We've edited my first book nine times. It's a trilogy and I'm now doing the second book. It's a historical story set in the reign of George III and

Lavinia and her late husband on their wedding day

"I don't regret one day of my time with him. We'd been married 27 years when he died"

the slave trade and about how the aristocrats made their wealth from the sugar and rum and what the family got up to.

"Unfortunately, I have a problem with my spine which causes considerable pain at times. Through that I've had to give up my car. We did have a caravan so I sold that and used the money to go on a cruise to the Caribbean and saw all the places that I have been writing about. I've been to the plantations and it has given me a good insight into what it was like for the slaves. And I've learnt a lot about the history of it. It makes you feel humble for what has gone on in the past. I'm trying to bring this out in the book as well. I hope one day people will read it and perhaps ponder on it a little.

"All I think about is the characters in my books now. It's like they're part of my family. I think and plan what they might be doing next. I find it very fulfilling because living on my own I could be just sitting about and doing nothing and feeling very lonely.

"Heather and I do calligraphy together and we draw and paint so life is never dull. In fact there don't seem to be enough hours in the day. I try to be independent because I don't want to lean on my family too much although I have four children and I know I only have to pick up the phone and they'd be there for me. I am blessed really.

"I have got a little puppy now, my little friend. I have called him Fentworth after the family in my book. Only the other night, I heard my neighbours had been burgled. It does make you feel vulnerable—especially as the two houses next to me are up for sale. I hope that Fentworth would see them off.

"My husband, he was my second husband, he was a lot older than me, he was 14 years older than me. I had my youngest with me then and I said me and my daughter are a package deal really. But he was a good man. He was a wonderful, caring man and he really enriched my life. I met him at a family wedding and my sister said she was going to introduce me and I said 'don't bother, I'm not interested'. Four months later we were married. I don't regret one day of my time with him. We'd been married 27 years when he died."

Lavinia, with Fentworth and a copy of the first book in her trilogy

Birmingham's Bull Ring

Ann Williams ***remembers the hardships of growing up in 1950s Birmingham that were simply part of every day life.***

"Our parents did their best but they didn't have the knowledge or the money to do everything. So that changed a lot. Same as everything changed a lot. Birmingham has changed so much from what I remember it.

"Like the old Bull Ring which was way back in 1950. You used to go down some steps into the fish market and under these steps sat an old lady and she was blind. She sold andy carriers and I can still remember her shouting out 'andy carriers!' And it turned out that she was the grandmother of a cousin of mine but she wouldn't tell me. She was a lot older than me and she wouldn't tell me that her nan sat under the steps selling andy carriers. But it had a lovely atmosphere. You'd go up the steps of the fish market and all down the Bull Ring to St Martin's Church and there was the barrow boys selling their wares. We'd meet our gran and our aunt every Saturday in the Bull Ring and just have cup of tea. I think it was the only way of communicating. There were no phones.

"We used to have some periwinkles with the pin. You'd put your pin into these periwinkles. That was a treat that was. And on a Sunday the ice cream man used to come 'round on a bicycle with a basket in front selling ice cream.

"The rag and bone man would come 'round and he used to give you a chicken if you gave him some rags. And the boy next door, he gave him some rags and he had a chicken – he had a chick and it grew up into a chicken and they kept it in the living room but it never laid eggs."

"On a Sunday the ice cream man used to come 'round on a bicycle"

The Bull Ring, after sustaining some damage in the second world war, was initially redeveloped in the early 1960s. The next redevelopment in the early 2000s led to the Bull Ring Shopping Centre becoming the busiest in the United Kingdom in 2004

Unlocking Memories

"When I first heard about it, I thought I didn't have very much to say, but as we talked about our memories, I felt the fog clearing"

Unlocked project participant

This project was started with the idea of gathering memories from a range of women about their lives in Birmingham. Rather than simply rush in, take an oral history and then leave again, we decided to spend time building up relationships with particular groups of women. The three groups we worked with most closely were the women at Welford School, a writing group in Kings Norton and the Bangladesh Women's Association. Our aim in working so closely for a number of months was to gain the trust of the women but also to share understanding - for the groups to get an understanding of the project and for us to gain an understanding of the groups.

Some participants got involved in all elements of the project - taking part their own interview, interviewing other people, having their photograph taken by Vanley Burke, producing artwork for the exhibitions, attending open days - others took on smaller, but by no means less important, roles. It was very much an opportunity to be as involved as participants wanted to be.

Some of the Unlocked activities:

- Six-month consultation prior to project starting
- Training sessions in oral history taking
- Training sessions in archive skills
- Undertaking oral history interviews
- Open day for all participants in the museum
- Collage-making sessions with Vanley Burke

Through these activities, Unlocked aimed to provide participants with as much involvement in the project as they wished, as well as the opportunity to meet other participants.

Photography credits

Many of the photographs we have used have come from participants' own family albums. It has thus not always been possible to establish who the photographer might have been. However, we have done our best to ensure that we have appropriate permissions to reproduce these photographs.

All photographs not attributed below were taken by Gudrun Limbrick

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31. Left: From Joycelyn Faulkner's personal collection

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610 Youth Centre, Kingstanding

Bangladesh Women's Association, Small Heath

Birmingham Youth Service

Boldmere Adult Education Centre, Sutton Coldfield

Kings Norton Community Library

New Heights, Warren Farm Community Project, Kingstanding

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Selly Oak Adult Education Centre

Ward End Community Library

Welford Primary School, Handsworth

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Kuldeep Heera, Project Lead, Birmingham Adult Education Service
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The Unlocked blog:
www.libraryofbirmingham.com/event/Events/unlockedexhibition

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Back cover: portraits by Vanley Burke

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Unlocked

Hidden stories of the lives of Birmingham women 1900 to the present day

Unlocked is a unique series of memories of women about life in twentieth century Birmingham. These excerpts from oral history interviews, together with participants' own family photographs and artefacts, represent a remarkable snapshot of life in the UK's second city in a century of great change.

"These stories are reminders that each and every one of us has a story to tell and makes our own contribution to the unfolding of history."

The Rt Hon Clare Short