



The Camberwell Black History Walk Guide



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Edited by **Tony Coleman** | Images by **Tayo Fatunla**



In this guide walking directions are shown in *italics*
descriptions of the featured people are in plain text.



Scan this QR code to download
the tour to your phone in Google
maps.

The tour will show you where you
are on the route. And help you to
find the next stopping point.

Or visit:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/b56PxSwMMF7K5Hdr8>

At each stop you can find a plaque that describes an
important person in Camberwell's black history. Click the
code on the plaque to hear this guide spoken
by a young actor from Theatre Peckham.

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Start at the Lectern on the Green

The lectern is located near to the entrance to Camberwell Green that is next to the bus stop on Camberwell Church Street. Leave the Green and go to the main crossroads. Cross to the opposite corner (the south side of Camberwell New Road). Walk west toward the Oval. After 50 yds, just before the bus garage, take the first left which is Warner Road. On your left are a row of apartment blocks making up the Samuel Lewis Trust Estate. You will find the walk plaque on the railings outside of block 301 – 348 (3rd block along).

1. George Roberts, Warner Road, Camberwell SE5



On the wall is a Southwark Heritage Blue Plaque for **George A. Roberts BEM, MSM (1890-1970)**. He was born in Trinidad. He was tall, at 6' 2" and served in the British Army in the First World War. According to the wartime magazine, *Every Week*, he distinguished himself by his "extraordinary" ability to throw bombs a great

distance back into enemy lines, as he did with coconuts as a child.

He was active in the Royal British Legion from the 1920s and served as a fire fighter during the Second World War. In 1944 he was awarded the British Empire Medal "for general duties at New Cross Fire Station" and for his part as a founder and pioneer of the discussion and education groups of the fire service.

"If what I am doing can assist in some small way to bring about a better understanding and a true fellowship amongst the peoples of the earth, I shall be extremely happy" Roberts told the BBC radio programme *Calling the West Indies* on 4 May 1947.



Left: George Roberts
Right: Stephen Bourne successfully campaigned for a plaque to George Roberts. Here he is standing in front of the plaque at its unveiling.

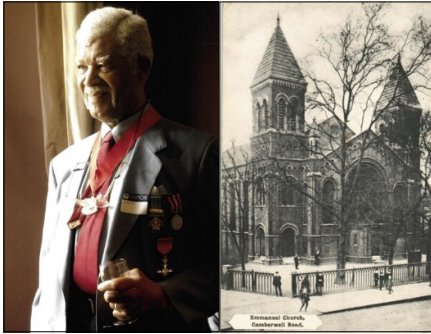
Return to Camberwell New Road and go back to the crossroads by the Green. Cross and walk up Camberwell Road going north toward Walworth for a few minutes. Just after Blucher Road you come to Bishopsmead, 238 Camberwell Road. The plaque is on the end wall of the block facing the road.

2. Sam King, Site of Emmanuel Church, Camberwell Road SE5



Bishopsmead, a block of flats on the Castlemead estate in Camberwell Road, was built on the site of Emmanuel Church. **Sam King MBE (1926-2016)**, born in Jamaica, was married at this church in 1954. He was a Camberwell resident at the time, living in nearby Sears Street.





Sam served as an engineer in the RAF during the Second World War. He was stationed at RAF Hawkinge, a fighter base near Folkestone in Kent.

After the war he returned to Jamaica but came back to Britain on the Windrush in 1948. He helped to found the *West Indian Gazette*, the first newspaper in Britain

written specifically for a black readership. He co-founded the Notting Hill Carnival.

Active in local politics, in 1983 he was elected Mayor of Southwark becoming the only black mayor in London at that time. In 1996 he helped to set up the Windrush Foundation and campaigned on behalf of settlers in the UK who came from the Caribbean.

At his funeral on the 19th of July 2016 Jeremy Corbyn, the then Labour leader, paid tribute describing him as a “legend”, saying “He educated Londoners with Caribbean food, Caribbean culture, Caribbean music. London is a better place; Britain is a better place thanks to him and his family.”

Carry on up Camberwell Road to the lights and cross, walking east along Bowyer Place. Take the third on the right turning into Sears Street. Sam King lived here at number 7 when he worked as a postman. Go down Sears Street to the bottom. Left into Notley Street, then right into Edmund Street. Pass the end of Sam King Walk on the left. Continue south, and after the Picton Street junction the road turns into Benhill Road. Pass the Benhill Road nature garden on the right. The garden is a quiet oasis, it is worth stopping here a moment to feel its tranquility. After a few minutes turn left into the road called Brunswick Park. You will find the plaque on the railings to your left opposite number 16.

3. Una Marson, 16 Brunswick Park SE5



Southwark Heritage Blue Plaque for **Una Marson** (1905-1965), poet, feminist and the first black woman programme maker at the BBC (1940-1945).

Una was born in Jamaica where she founded her own magazine, *The Cosmopolitan*, aimed at a young middle-class Jamaican audience. Her articles

encouraged women to join the work force and to become politically active. The magazine also featured Jamaican poetry and literature. In 1930, Marson published her first collection of poems, entitled *Tropic Reveries*, that dealt with love and nature with elements of feminism. It won the Musgrave Medal from the Institute of Jamaica.

She first arrived in London in 1932 and stayed at the home of Dr Harold Moody (page 6). From 1932 to 1939, she moved back and forth between London and Jamaica. She wrote for newspapers advocating feminism and highlighting race issues in England.

In 1941 she joined the BBC and went on to become the producer of the radio series *Calling the West Indies*. This was broadcast to the Caribbean on the BBC's Empire Service. One of her roles was to invite West Indian servicemen and women into the studio to read messages to their families in the Caribbean. She

also introduced a literary segment called *Caribbean Voices* which enabled many Caribbean authors to broadcast their poems and short stories. More than 200 authors appeared on the show including many leading literary figures.



Caribbean Voices has been described as “the single most important literary catalyst for Caribbean creative writing.” After the war Una moved back to Jamaica but *Caribbean Voices* continued until 1958 when the BBC replaced the Empire Service with the BBC World Service.

Continue east along Brunswick Park with the park to your left. At the end you will see the former St Giles’ Hospital in front of you, a red brick building with attractive gables and towers. It is now an apartment block called Peacock House. You will find the walk plaque on a brick pillar on your left as the railings curve round the junction.



Facing the blue plaque, turn to your right and walk south on St Giles Road until you get to the main road, Peckham Road. Turn left and then take the first left into Havil Street. Walk 100 yds up Havil Street and on your right you will come to Theatre Peckham. You can see the next walk plaque through the window of Theatre Peckham. It is on the column at the corner.

4. Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Former St Giles’ Hospital, St Giles Road SE5



Southwark Heritage Blue Plaque for the actress **Marianne Jean-Baptiste** who was born there in 1967. Her mother was from Antigua and her father was from St Lucia. She was classically trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

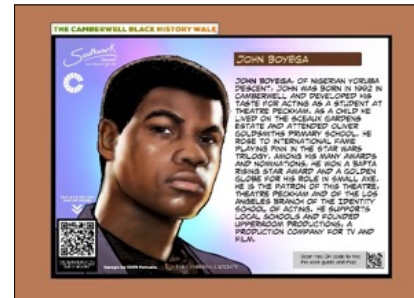
In 1996 Marianne was the first black British actress to be nominated for an

Oscar for her role in Mike Leigh’s acclaimed film *Secrets and Lies*. She was also nominated for a Golden Globe and a BAFTA for this same role.

In 1999 she was acclaimed for her portrayal of Doreen Lawrence fighting for justice for her son’s killing in Paul Greengrass’s TV drama *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*.

Relocating to the USA, she was seen in the popular TV series *Without a Trace* (2002-2009). On a rare visit to the UK, she was much praised for her stage performance in the 2013 Royal National Theatre production of James Baldwin’s play *The Amen Corner*. It was during this trip that she attended the unveiling of her Southwark Heritage Blue Plaque in Camberwell.

5. John Boyega, Theatre Peckham, 221 Havil Street SE5



The foyer of Theatre Peckham includes a mural (unveiled in 2020) of the internationally acclaimed actor **John Boyega** who plays Finn in the *Star Wars* films.

John is of Nigerian descent; he was raised on the Sceaux Gardens estate in SE5 which backs onto Theatre Peckham. He was a pupil

at the Oliver Goldsmith Primary School (also in Camberwell on the corner of Peckham Road and Southampton Way SE5).

His first acting role was as a leopard in a play while at primary school. At the age of nine, he was noticed by Teresa Early, the founder of Theatre Peckham, a learning theatre for young people. He spent his time at the theatre outside school hours between the ages of nine and fourteen and he went on to be a student there. Later, in 2016, he became a patron of the theatre.





After Theatre Peckham, he trained at the Identity School of acting in Hackney. He became the Patron of its Los Angeles branch when it opened in 2018. He made his debut film appearance in *Attack the Block* (2011) and received the 2015 BAFTA Rising Star Award.

He supports local schools and founded UpperRoom Productions, a production company for TV and film.

Walk back up to the main road and turn right. Walk west for a few minutes until you see St Giles' Church. Cross the road and you will find the next plaque underneath the church noticeboard on the grass at the front. It is next to the passage that runs up to the right of the church.

6. John Primmero, St Giles' Church, Camberwell Church Street SE5



John Primmero was a servant to Sir Thomas Hunt. He was baptised at St Giles' Church on 3 April 1607. The witnesses included Sir Thomas Hunt himself, Mr Cox and Mrs Mary Grymes. When Primmero died a few years later, his burial was registered also at St Giles' Church "for Sir Thomas Hunt" who

is described by William Harnett Blanch in Ye Parish of Camberwell (1875) as the "Sheriff of Surrey and Sussex". Hunt died in Camberwell in 1625.

The old church, as seen in the picture on the plaque, was destroyed in a fire and the new church was built in the 1840s. It was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

Continue west along Church Street crossing Camberwell Grove and Grove Lane. Turn next left into Wren Road. Walk up the road to the apartment block called the Colonnades. It stands on the former site of the Camberwell Green Congregational Church. To find the walk plaque look to your right and slightly behind you. It is attached to the brick wall.

7. Dr Harold Moody, Wren Road, Camberwell SE5



Dr Harold Moody was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1882, the son of a pharmacist. In 1904 he sailed to the United Kingdom to study medicine at King's College, London. He finished top of his class when he qualified in 1910, aged 28. Dr Moody started his own medical practice in Peckham in February 1913.

In addition to his work as a popular GP, he was a highly respected community leader for Britain's black community from the 1920s to the 1940s.

In 1931 he formed the League of Coloured Peoples. The League was concerned with racial equality and civil rights in Britain and elsewhere in the world. The visitors book at Dr Moody's home in Queen's Road, Peckham included many notable black people such as C. L. R. James, Jomo Kenyatta, Una Marson (page 4), and Paul Robeson.

He was part of the running of the Camberwell Green Congregational Church in Wren Road where he became a deacon and lay preacher. The site of the church is now the apartment building called the Colonnades.

In 1944 there was a terrible incident in New Cross when a V2 rocket fell on the shopping centre. Nearly 200 were killed and hundreds injured. Dr Moody was one of the first on the scene.





In the winter of 1946-47, Dr Moody made a strenuous five-month fund-raising tour of the USA and the Caribbean but on his return home he died of acute influenza on 24 April 1947.

His funeral service took place at the Camberwell Green Congregational Church on 1 May 1947. A bronze portrait of Dr Moody by his brother Ronald is displayed in Peckham Library.

Pass to the right of the Colonnades building and walk through Butterfly Walk Shopping Centre. At the other end of the mall turn left onto Denmark Hill and walk 50 yds to the corner and turn into Orpheus Street. You will find the plaque on the wall to your left a short way along.

8. Belle Davis, Corner of Orpheus Street and Denmark Hill, site of the Camberwell Palace of Varieties



Belle Davis was one of many black stars to become successful in music halls in the Edwardian era. She was an American expatriate, born in New Orleans, of European and African ancestry. The tall, beautifully dressed soprano spent most of her adult life in Britain. She stood out from other black or blackface singers/



entertainers of the Edwardian era by performing songs that did not come from the minstrel show tradition. Belle sang graceful melodies and comic numbers. On stage she presented herself as a sophisticated, elegant woman

of the world, not the stereotypical bandanna-wearing 'mammy'.

Belle first toured Britain in 1897-98. She decided to make her home here when she returned in 1901. In London in 1902 she became one of the first black women to have her voice recorded when she took to a microphone to sing 'The Honey-Suckle and the Bee', one of the most popular music hall songs of the day. She toured Britain extensively from 1901 to 1918 and appeared in music hall tours that took her all over the country. In London she topped the bill in many music halls including Brixton, Walham Green (in the parish of Fulham) and Clapham. Belle made the first of her first appearance at the Camberwell Palace of Varieties on 24 November 1902. She returned there many times.

You have now reached the end of the Camberwell Black History Walk. If you need refreshment, you can find plenty of amenable cafes and pubs nearby.

Thank you for your interest, we hope you enjoyed it, please tell your friends.



Acknowledgements

Stephen Bourne, the author of the walk, was born in St Giles' Hospital, Camberwell SE5 and attended Oliver Goldsmith Primary School from 1962-1969. He was raised on the Sceaux Gardens Estate in the 1960s and 1970s. Stephen is a historian, and his many black British history books include the following:

- Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television, Continuum, 2001, ISBN 0826455395
- Speak of Me As I Am: The Black Presence in Southwark Since 1600, Southwark Council, 2005, ISBN 0905849426
- Dr Harold Moody, Southwark Council, 2008, ISBN 978-0905849430
- Esther Bruce: A Black London Seamstress, History and Social Action Publications, 2012, ISBN 978-0954894375
- Evelyn Dove: Britain's Black Cabaret Queen, Jacaranda Books, 2016, ISBN 9781909762350
- War to Windrush: Black Women in Britain 1939-1948, Jacaranda Books, 2018, ISBN 9781909762855
- Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the Great War (2nd edition, revised and updated), The History Press, 2019, ISBN 978-0750990820
- Under Fire: Black Britain in Wartime 1939-45, The History Press, 2020, ISBN: 978-0750994354

He also writes extensively on LGBT subjects.

Many thanks to Tayo Fatunla, a local Camberwell artist, for his engaging graphics on the main lectern panel and the plaques around the walk.

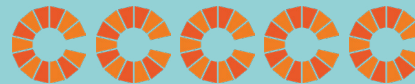
Thank you to Theatre Peckham for their support. You heard the voices of Princess Nwafor and David Mensah speaking the words from this guide. They were recorded by Jamel Alatise at Theatre Peckham with the support of James McGuinness.

Thank you to Joseph Cartwright, Head of Fine Art and Photography and to Sacred Heart School for hosting a workshop for the artist to explore visual ideas with pupils.

Thank you also to Marie Staunton of SE5 Forum for Camberwell and to Kelly O'Reilly, Debbie Allen and Kelly Blaney of Camberwell Arts for their inputs at key moments in the development of the walk. Thank you to Southwark Council for funding the installation, it was also co-funded by the Camberwell Society.

Tony Coleman

The Camberwell Society
4th January 2024



The Camberwell Society is proud to be a member of Camberwell Identity. The Camberwell C is the symbol of Camberwell. It is made up of Camberwell bricks forming a C and representing the well of Camberwell. Download for free from: www.camberwell.life