HFL Education

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2026

Honouring Our Communities

Black History in Hertfordshire

Black history is part of Hertfordshire's history.

Records show Black people living, working and raising families in Hertfordshire more than 450 years ago. The county's archives also reveal connections with slavery and abolition. More recent photographs, oral histories and community records tell the stories of people who came to Hertfordshire from the Caribbean and elsewhere and helped shape the communities we know today.

The 2026 Black History Month theme, **Honouring Our Communities,** provides an opportunity for schools to discover these histories and recognise the people who have contributed to Hertfordshire's past and present.

This resource provides local stories, reliable sources, and ideas that can be adapted for pupils of different ages.

Black History is Hertfordshire History

Research by **Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies** has uncovered records of Black people living in the county over several centuries. Parish registers, muster rolls and other documents provide glimpses of people whose stories have often been absent from traditional accounts of local history.

Fortunatus – the earliest person of African descent traced so far in Hertfordshire's records. His baptism was recorded at Cheshunt in 1570. The parish register identifies him as Black and records his age as approximately 17 or 18.

Little else about his life has yet been discovered.

Find out more: Herts Memories

Explore: What can one historical record tell us about a person? What remains unknown?

John Accomy – appears in a 1596 East Hertfordshire muster roll, an official register recording the names, attendance and status of people associated with a military unit, ship or workplace. He is listed as a servant of the English politician Henry Capell. His baptism was recorded at Little Hadham in 1599.

Later records show that he married, raised a family and lived in Hertford and Brickendon. He was buried at All Saints in Hertford in 1638.

Together, these records allow us to piece together part of the life of a Black man who lived in Hertfordshire for more than 40 years.

Explore: How do historians build a picture of someone's life from different historical records?

Find out more: Herts Memories

Hidden Histories

The **Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories project** explored the lives of African and Caribbean people in Hertfordshire as well as the county's connections with slavery and abolition.

The research reveals individual lives that connect Hertfordshire with much wider histories.

Africk Hunsdon – in 1711, Africk, described in the historical record as a native of Africa, was baptised at Hunsdon. He was a servant of the Bluck family at Hunsdon House, once a favourite residence of Henry VIII. Africk was known only by his place of origin and place of residence; his original name is lost to us.

He later married Dorothy Jordan. Their son, also called Africk, remained in Hunsdon and became a publican.

Find out more: Herts Memories

Francis Barber – was born enslaved in Jamaica and brought to England as a child. After gaining his freedom, he became closely associated with the writer Samuel Johnson.

During the 1760s, Barber attended school in **Bishop's Stortford.** Evidence of his time there survives in the order book of a local hatter.

Find out more: Herts Memories

George Edward Doney – was captured in Gambia as a child and enslaved. He was later brought to England and lived and worked in Hertfordshire.

His baptism was recorded in Watford in 1774, and his grave can still be found at St Mary's Church in Watford.

Find out more: Herts Memories

A Hertfordshire timeline

1570	1596	1711	1760s	1774	1950s–60s	1976
Fortunatus recorded in Cheshunt	John Accomy appears in an East Hertfordshire muster roll	Africk Hunsdon baptised at Hunsdon	Francis Barber attends school in Bishop's Stortford	George Edward Doney baptised in Watford	Caribbean families establish new lives in Hitchin and Letchworth	Watford African Caribbean Association established

Today communities continue to research, preserve and share Black Hertfordshire history

Explore the evidence: These stories can be adapted for different ages. Pupils might:

- Locate each person on a Hertfordshire map
- Place their lives on a timeline
- Examine what an archive record can tell us
- Identify what remains unknown
- Investigate one person's story in greater depth
- Consider why some people's lives are better represented in historical records than others.

Hertfordshire, Slavery and Abolition

Hertfordshire was connected to the wider history of the transatlantic slave trade.

Research through **Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories** has identified people in the county with connections to slavery and the slave trade, as well as people involved in campaigns for abolition. At the same time, people of African descent were themselves living in Hertfordshire.

This provides an opportunity to explore the complexity of local history and connect Hertfordshire with national and global events.

Explore: What can Hertfordshire tell us about Britain's relationship with slavery?

Find out more: Herts Memories

From Windrush to Hertfordshire

After the Second World War, people from Caribbean countries were among those who travelled to Britain to work, study and establish new lives.

This national story is also part of Hertfordshire's history. North Hertfordshire Museum's **From Windrush to North Herts – A New Life in a New Country** used photographs from the 1950s and 1960s to explore the experiences of Caribbean families who settled particularly in **Hitchin and Letchworth.**

The museum asked local people to help identify people in the photographs and add information about their lives, demonstrating the importance of community knowledge in preserving local history.

Enquiry: What can photographs tell us about migration, family and community? What other evidence could help us discover more?

Find out more: North Hertfordshire Museum and North Herts Council.

Honouring Our Communities Today

Black history continues to be researched, recorded and made in Hertfordshire today.

Our Stories: Tracing Black Histories in Hertfordshire

The **St Albans Black History Research Group** works with local people and St Albans Museum + Gallery to uncover and share Black histories.

Its **Our Stories: Tracing Black Histories in Hertfordshire** project explored **2,000 years of history,** from Roman Verulamium to Black communities living in Hertfordshire today.

The project brought together historical research, original sources, artwork, and oral histories.

In 2026, the group's work continues through an oral-history project linked to **Honouring Our Communities,** culminating in a public mural.

Explore: Who decides which stories are remembered? Whose stories from our own communities should be preserved for the future?

Find out more: St Albans Museum + Gallery

Hertfordshire Lives

Black people have contributed to Hertfordshire through community leadership, public service, sport, culture and many other areas.

Althea McLean OBE – Community – Althea was one of the founders of the Watford African Caribbean Association, established in 1976. She has served the organisation in a number of roles, including trustee, director and chair.

Find out more: Watford African Caribbean Association

Sherma Batson MBE DL – Public service – Sherma served as a councillor and was **Mayor of Stevenage in 2014–15.** She received an MBE for services to local government and the community in Hertfordshire and was later awarded the Freedom of the Borough of Stevenage.

Find out more: Herts Memories

Roland Butcher – Sport – After moving to England from Barbados as a teenager, Roland developed his cricket through **Stevenage Cricket Club.** In 1980 he became the first Black cricketer to represent England at senior international level and, in 1981, the first to play Test cricket for England.

Find out more: Herts Memories

Micaelia Clarke – Community voice – Micaelia is Chairperson of **Black Voice Letchworth** and has worked with local organisations to strengthen engagement with Black communities.

Find out more: Healthwatch Hertfordshire

People to Discover

There are many more Black people with Hertfordshire connections whose lives and work provide starting points for learning.

Anthony Joshua OBE – born in Watford; Olympic gold medalist and former unified world heavyweight boxing champion.

Sir Lewis Hamilton - born and raised in Stevenage and is a seven-time Formula 1 World Champion. He began his karting career at Rye House Raceway in Hoddesdon. He also founded the charity Mission 44, which helps young people from underrepresented backgrounds to thrive in education and access careers in STEM. He has invested in programmes supporting young people in his hometown of Stevenage.

Gary Younge – born and raised in Stevenage; journalist, author, broadcaster and academic whose work has explored race, politics and society.

Find out more: Herts Voices | HFL Education

Samuel Kasumu – social entrepreneur, author and former government adviser. Existing Herts Voices resources include an interview and school materials exploring his story.

Find out more: Hertfordshire Grid for Learning

Reba Younge – Gary's mother, came to the UK in 1962 from Barbados as a nurse. She later settled in Stevenage with her three young boys and retrained becoming a teacher, community activist and anti-racist campaigner.

Find out more: Reba Younge? | HFL Education

Aida Kiraya – founder of Wonderful and Different, creating children's books that promote representation and positive conversations about difference.

Kit Brown – primary school teacher, footballer, author and social media influencer. Kit shared his personal journey into teaching, speaking about the rewards and challenges of the profession and what inspired him to pursue it as part of our Herts Voices project.

Find out more and watch Kit's talk here

Find out more: Choose one of these people – or someone from your own community – and investigate:

- What is their connection with Hertfordshire?
- What have they contributed?
- What can we learn from their story?
- Which reliable sources can we use to find out more?

Discover Black Hertfordshire

Schools can use local museums, archives, libraries and community organisations to explore further.

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford
Original documents and research, including Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories.

St Albans Museum + Gallery
Black history research, exhibitions and oral histories, including Our Stories.

North Hertfordshire Museum, Hitchin
Local migration and Windrush-related histories, including experiences of Caribbean families in Hitchin and Letchworth.

Hertford Museum
A starting point for exploring Hertford's local history and communities

Stevenage Museum
Local history collections providing opportunities to investigate the people and communities that have shaped Stevenage.

Hertfordshire Libraries
Local history collections, Black History Month resources, reading materials and community activities.

FIVE Ways to Explore Black Hertfordshire

Investigate – Discover one Black person connected with your town or local area.

Locate – Create a map or timeline showing Black Hertfordshire stories.

Connect – Link a local story to learning already taking place across the curriculum.

Listen – Collect and value stories and memories from members of the local community.

Preserve – Identify a person, photograph, object, place or story that deserves to be remembered for the future.

A question for every school: What can we discover about Black history in our local area?

Black History Month: Sources and Further Exploration

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) / Herts Memories

Explore local archive collections, historical research, and community heritage projects, including African and Caribbean People in Hertfordshire before 1830 and Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories. Research includes individuals such as Fortunatus, John Accomy, Africk Hunsdon, Francis Barber and George Edward Doney.

Website: Herts Memories

History Collections: Herts History

St Albans Museum + Gallery

Home to the Our Stories: Tracing Black Histories in Hertfordshire project and the St Albans Black History Research Group, which has researched Black histories in Hertfordshire spanning over 2,000 years.

Our Stories Project: Our Stories: Tracing Black Histories in HertfordshireMemories

Black History Research Group: Black History Research

North Hertfordshire Museum

Features From Windrush to North Herts: A New Life in a New Country, exploring the experiences of Caribbean families who settled in Hitchin and Letchworth during the Windrush era.

Exhibition Resource: From Windrush to North Herts

Watford African Caribbean Association (WACA)

One of the longest-running African Caribbean associations in the UK, founded in 1976. The website includes information about its founders, history, community projects and Black History Month activities.

Website: Watford African Caribbean Association

Stevenage Museum and Stevenage Local History Resources
Local history collections providing opportunities to investigate the people and communities that have shaped Stevenage, including records relating to Sherma Batson and civic leaders.

Website: Stevenage Museum

Hertford Museum
A useful starting point for exploring Hertford's local history, communities and migration stories

Website: Hertford Museum

Hertfordshire Libraries
Offers local history resources, Black History Month materials, reading lists and community activities.

Website: Hertford Libraries

Herts Voices
A Hertfordshire programme connecting schools with inspirational speakers from racially diverse backgrounds. Resources include interviews with Samuel Kasumu and other role models.

Website: Herts Voices

Wonderful and Different
Children's books and resources created by Aida Kiraya, celebrating diversity, belonging and representation.

Website: Wonderful and Different

About the Project: About Wonderful and Different

Black History Month UK
National Black History Month website providing resources, articles and educational materials. The 2026 theme is Honouring Our Communities.

Website: Black History Month UK

Website: 2026 Theme: Honouring Our Communities