



Untold Stories was a three year diversity project funded by the Heritage Lottery fund and supported by other key partners and funders including Cambridge City Council. The project ran from 2005 to 2008 and was managed by Momentum Arts. Untold Stories sought to highlight and celebrating their lives, histories and experiences.

The mission statement for the project was:

*Celebrating and recording the richness of cultural diversity in our history and cultivating a deeper appreciation of our diverse heritage in Cambridgeshire.*

Following consultations with groups and individuals, a Local Steering Group was established to help with the initial Black History and Heritage phase of the project. After the application to HLF was successful and following discussions with HLF, a smaller Advisory Group was formed, and the scope, aims and methodology of the project were set out.

The Untold Stories project was launched with an event at the Guildhall, a community venue in Cambridge, on November 4th 2005. The event was attended by over 300 people with a keynote speech from writer and broadcaster, Ekow Eshun. It was viewed as highly successful and “tremendously exciting” by those who attended. The project was formally launched by the mayor of Cambridge. The mayor offered the following comments 3 years later:

*“I recall the launch of Untold Stories in November 2005. The large hall of the Guildhall was packed with happy people and there was a wonderful concert with a gospel choir, I think, and a band made up of Jewish and Arab Israelis, if I remember aright. I was impressed by the quality of leadership and the ambitiousness of the three year plan”.*

The project comprised of 4 key strands:

The first strand of the project to be delivered, **Local and Historical Role Models (LHRM)** was defined in the following terms: The celebration of Local and Historical Role Models through a marketing campaign to identify 10 Influential Black and Asian Role Models. The campaign involved a community outreach programme to encourage both inner city and village schools to participate together with community groups, local residents and visitors. The project also aimed to develop a mobile exhibition, host workshops in schools and encourage participation in festivals such as Cambridge Word Fest (literary festival). Momentum Arts worked with other Black History and

Heritage service providers such as the University of Cambridge, MENTER and Cambridgeshire County Council.

A total of 171 distinct nominations were received, a shortlist was drawn up and the Top 10 Role Models were chosen by an advisory panel. The winners were announced at an award ceremony held at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge on October 30th 2006. In addition to this campaign there was also the publication of the Black historical role model Olaudah Equiano which was researched and written by historian Angela Osborne.

The longer-term impact of the exhibition has been particularly felt in the local hospital, Addenbrookes, where the exhibition was of particular interest initially due to one of the Top 10 Role Models being a doctor at the hospital. The level of positive reaction to and engagement with the exhibition, however, far exceeded that local interest factor. In an interview conducted with the exhibition organiser at Addenbrookes, it was revealed that in the past, attempts at exploring diversity had met with some hostility with a feeling that certain groups were getting 'preferential treatment'. In this case, though, because of the celebratory tone and the high quality materials, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive and welcoming.

One of the recipients of an award explained the effect both it, and being featured in Cambridge Untold, had had on his life. He had since been recruited as a mentor for Cambridgeshire Probation Service and was asked to give a speech at the Akashi festival in Cambridge. He has since been inspired to act as a mentor to young people.

**Cambridge Untold:** was a magazine recording the lives and experiences of Mill Road's Black and Minority Ethnic business owners. The first of its kind, Cambridge Untold was a highly successful publication with a print run of 2,000 copies and has been disseminated, locally, regionally, nationally. The stories focussed on a series of interviews with shopkeepers from the ethnically diverse area of Mill Road. It transpired that many of the trades people had very interesting stories to tell in relation to their arrival and settlement in Cambridge. A writer was recruited to carry out interviews with the aim of celebrating the diversity of Mill Road and, in his own words,

*"providing a clearer snapshot of what Cambridge really is".*

Having delivered an explanatory letter and spoken to traders, he made a selection from those willing to be interviewed attempting to ensure a balance of gender, age and country of origin.

2000 copies of the magazine were printed, 500 of which were distributed free of charge, including at the launch party held at Ditchburn Place (a sheltered housing complex), which was opened by the mayor and attended by over 100 people. The rest of the magazines were sold in businesses on Mill Road and neighbouring streets. The magazine was glossy, highly professional and attractive.

At the time of the publication there was a minority view among white Mill Road traders that those featured in the magazine had gained an unfair trading advantage through the free publicity. The overwhelming consensus, however, among both traders and residents, was that the magazine provided a fascinating insight into the lives of the people who run the independent shops of which Mill Road residents are so proud.

**Reminiscence Workshops:** This strand of the project aimed to record the lives and experiences of the older and younger people from BME communities within Cambridgeshire. Reminiscence was the essence of Untold Stories allowing the 'untold stories' to be heard. The stories were captured in an array of imaginative ways using creative techniques such as drama workshops and web-design.

As previously mentioned, as part of this strand, research was commissioned into Joanna Vassa, daughter of Olaudah Equiano. This was published in the form of a small book, under the title Equiano's Daughter. 5000 copies were printed, 2000 of which had been disseminated by June 2008. The remainder was distributed at the final event, donated to the Equiano Society and placed with Cambridgeshire County Archives and Cambridge Folk Museum.

As an additional part of the strand, a blue plaque commemorating Equiano was commissioned and installed in St Andrew's Church, Soham in Cambridgeshire, where he was married. The vicar at St Andrews Church felt such enthusiasm for the plaque that he overrode the normal timescales for approval to ensure its inclusion in the celebratory events. He commented in the guestbook used at the Remembering Equiano evening that he was

*"very glad to have been a part of this splendid project".*

Using information and technology and reminiscence and oral history skills to publish and document the lives of ordinary people from Black and Ethnic Minority communities the project worked with organisations like Age Exchange. By working with the Cambridge Folk Museum the project created an interactive memory box to encourage both local people and visitors to record their own experiences.

The Untold Stories project worked with Young Asylum Seekers; this part of the project strand was considered to have been very successful, with the participants becoming increasingly forthcoming about their experiences, and showing evidence of bonding which their teachers had not previously seen. The students felt validated as users of English as a second language, and expressed a sense of personal worth having shared their stories. They felt pride in the finished DVD of their mural.

The Bangladeshi Women's group leader felt empowered by the training she received and was able to explain to her community the aims of the project. The participants were excited by the idea that other people could hear their stories and wanted them to reach other communities. The group leader felt

that more time was needed as there are many stories other than childhood to be told.

The Jewish Elders group was led by a recipient of a Top 10 Role Models award subsequently became interested in the project and therefore underwent the reminiscence training. When interviewed, he reported the experience as hugely rewarding and interesting, explaining how much he had learnt about Jewish culture and how he had shared his own life experiences with the group. He and the group discovered many shared experiences, despite their different cultures. In his words,

*“learning is like a deposit account where interest is added the more you put in.”*

**Storytelling:** This strand of the project brought together a group of storytellers in order to capture their stories by creating murals and mosaics. They worked with children and young people in schools throughout Cambridgeshire to create a series of arts works and record a collection of stories culminating in the CD:Rom publication: The Beginners Guide to Cross Cultural Storytelling. This project strand brought together storytellers from BME communities by developing workshops, collections and exhibitions.

An Artist-facilitator was appointed to source storytellers for the forum, which was successfully achieved. The participants were from different backgrounds and with different levels of experience of storytelling from complete beginners to fairly experienced. Contact was initially made by momentum arts with a large number of different communities. Although some did not ultimately take part, there is evidence of network and relationship-building and it was attempted that the project should encourage inclusiveness.

The Untold Stories project was an exciting and hugely successful and ended in a event that took place on 20th of June 2008 at the Corn Exchange where over 1,000 local people attended to celebrate the end of a project with an evening of speeches, dance and music.