



Remembering Forgotten Links

Andrew Simons reflects on past Tide~ projects and suggests some new ones.

Andrew is now a community worker in the Birchfield area of Handsworth



We have been organising food parcels for families and older residents once a week with help from two local social enterprises and food provided from FareShare. Birchfield West where I work, and Lozells, are two of the areas in Birmingham most affected by Covid-19 and a big issue is the disproportionate impact the virus has had on the black and ethnic minority

community which in Birchfield is 86.6% of the population.

... and then we had the murder of George Floyd. This has added to a growing sense of injustice and a demand for change.

It was with this in mind that I looked at [‘Forward Thinking’](#) and especially the pages on *Discovering Forgotten Links*. Following the removal of Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol there is now a petition to remove statues in Birmingham.

The petition goes on to mention Joseph Chamberlain, James Watt and Matthew Boulton. There is an [interesting interview here](#) about **James Watt and his involvement in managing his father’s trans Atlantic business.**

Boulton and Watt are both buried in St Mary’s Church, Handsworth, just down the road from where I work. I think this raises some major questions of how to respond to these challenges in terms of education.

Does it help to understand the past by removing monuments and street signs or is there a way of using these artefacts to engage with the issues?

There are lots of contradictions here - Joseph Chamberlain was lauded for his municipalisation of water and gas and its impact on the health of Birmingham people and yet went on to be Colonial Secretary in the national government at the height of colonialism and imperialism.

Likewise, the Cadbury family built a model village for its workers but bought over half its cocoa from plantations in Sao Tome and Principe - where conditions were akin to slavery.

When we did the **‘Discovering Forgotten Links Project’**, Paul Bracey and myself did a lot of research around the Cadbury family and slave grown cocoa. This is well documented in two books

- ❑ **Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics, and the Ethics of Business**
- ❑ **Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery, and Colonial Africa**

What this raised were some interesting parallels with contemporary issues around modern slavery and exploitation. The Cadbury family did eventually disinvest in cocoa from Sao Tome and Principe and then moved on to Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana.

I think this whole area would be worth revisiting in the current context.



The Change.Org Petition

“Birmingham is one of the most diverse cities in the UK. We stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protesters in Bristol who pulled down the statue of slave trader, Edward Colston. Our city is littered with statues of men who remind us of the painful and murderous links with slavery and colonialism. This bloody history should be acknowledged and taught in all Birmingham schools but from an anti-colonial perspective, so that our children can learn the true lessons of the past. However, these men should not be immortalised in statues.

In acknowledging ‘Black Lives Matter’, we demand Birmingham City Council follow other cities and remove all memorials which glorify those linked with slavery and British colonial history. We also demand that all universities, colleges and schools in our city remove statues and rename buildings which glorify or are named after men who have instigated, profited from or benefited from slavery and colonialism.”

The other area where I would be interested in contributing is around rebuilding the relationship between schools and the wider community.

Working as I now do as a community development worker; I have become reacquainted with the work of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich.

Their ideas have helped shape asset based community development - the idea of starting with the gifts, skills and strengths of local people - and how institutions can sometimes end up undermining the capacities of local communities to meet needs in health, education etc.

There are lots of young people that are losing out at present, but what can the community do to help to address that deficit? It takes a village to raise a child, is a bit of a cliché, but still relevant.

We are part of an initiative called **Creative Civic Change** and are about to distribute art packs to children and families in the Birchfield area. It was planned to be a school residency, but we are now having to do it differently. The photographer [Vanley Burke](#) is involved in the project.

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