

# PATWAH

## A LOVE STORY



# WHAT IS TELLING?

Telling is an Arts Council England funded project which seeks to tell the stories of four small arts organisations in Leeds and Bradford. Starting in late 2016, we recruited four organisations – two in Leeds and two in Bradford - to collaborate with us in uncovering the stories of what engagement in arts and cultural activity can do for people.

We wanted to find out if there is something specific that engagement with the arts can deliver that can't be delivered through other interventions? What claims can we reasonably make for the arts and for participatory arts in particular? How do artists, volunteers and organisers benefit?

We set out to answer these and other questions by engaging in conversation with artists, participants, volunteers and others involved with the organisations. First, though, we started off by bringing the organisations together to find out what their understanding and experience is of evaluation; what their expectations of the project are; and how we can work together to uncover the stories of their work. This exercise helped us to refine our enquiries.

Participating organisations then went on to let us know who they felt we should talk to in order to uncover their stories. Once we'd talked with the relevant people associated with each organisation we made evaluative stories which tell us and wider audiences about the projects and the impacts that they have.

Whilst we wanted these to feel like rigorous enquiries, we also wanted them to feel like compelling stories, rich with individuals' lived experiences.

When the organisations had had an opportunity to digest the stories, we provided each with a small budget with which to engage an artist to interpret and adapt the stories using an art form which feels relevant to the organisation.

We also recruited two critical friends to the project: Professor Kevin Hylton of Leeds Beckett University and Colin Grant, BBC producer and writer of a number of creative non – fiction titles. They supported us in critically reflecting on our practice over the course of the project. The project also benefited from the support of Jane Earnshaw of Leeds City Council's Leeds Inspired programme and Bobsie Robinson, Cultural Policy and Strategy Manager at Bradford Metropolitan Council.

## MAKING THE STORIES

Organisations were then invited to suggest individuals we might speak to who would help us to respond to their enquiries. These might be audiences, supporters, artists or anyone else whom the groups felt had insights which would illuminate the enquiries. Over the course of the story making process, we also spoke again to key contacts in each organisation, clarifying and refining enquiries.

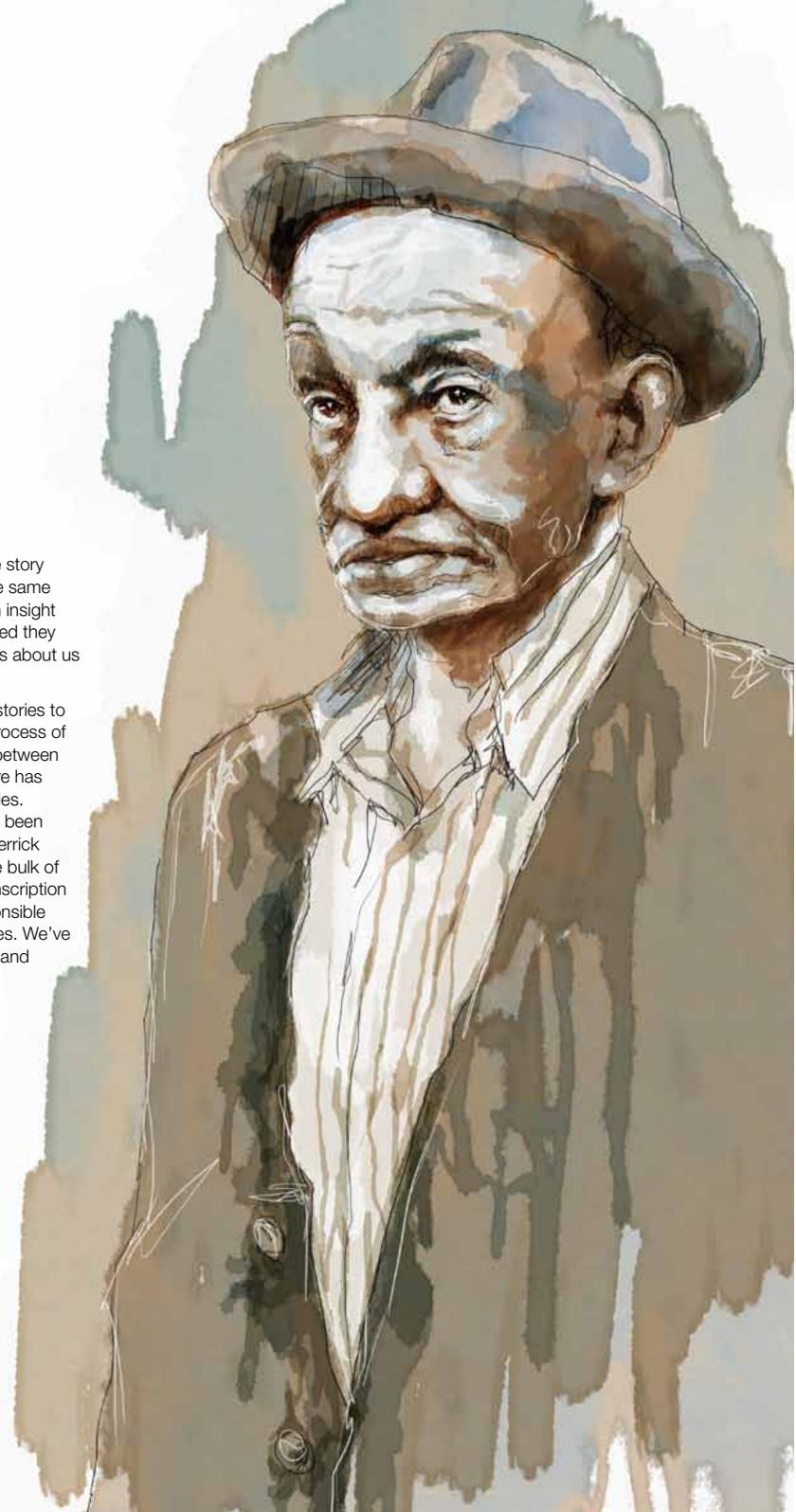
Each interview was recorded and transcribed. We then worked through the transcriptions, looking out for and noting themes and areas of interest. Though these were informed by the original enquiries that groups had identified, inevitably new themes emerged and we found ourselves meandering into unexpected territories. For this reason, the stories reflect both the groups' areas of interest and our own.

Without exception, we found that talking to and listening to people allowed for unexpected insights to rise to the surface. We ended up speaking to far more people than we had anticipated but it felt like a worthwhile investment.

Once we had listened to the interviews and read the transcripts, we discussed what we had heard and read. We recorded our own conversations and some of what we said to each other has become part of the stories. We took the decision to include ourselves in the narratives because we felt that it might help to shine a light on how the stories were made. We are not objective narrators, observing from a distance.

We brought ourselves to the story gathering process and in the same way that readers will gain an insight into the people we interviewed they are free also to form opinions about us as story tellers.

For clarity, we consider the stories to be co authored through a process of discussion and consensus between the two of us. However, there has been some delineation of roles. Thus, whilst both of us have been present at each interview, Derrick has been responsible for the bulk of the interviewing and the transcription whilst Dawn has been responsible for writing drafts of the stories. We've worked together on refining and agreeing final drafts.



# PATWAH: A LOVE STORY

Patwah is a collective of community activists in Bradford. Most have a background in youth work and all are first or second generation African Caribbean. They share a belief that their culture is unrepresented - or certainly under represented - in the city and that Patwah has a role to play in reversing this trend. For Patwah, culture is open to wide interpretation and so its programme of activity has included spoken word poetry (a particular passion of Mycall, Patwah's Chair), health promotion, Dads and Sons events, an event which coincided with International Women's Day and at least one literature event.

Patwah has been active since the beginning of 2016. However, it's the latest in a long line of black cultural and artistic groups and venues in Bradford going back to the 1970s and 1980s. Some spaces – Checkpoint, The Dominican Association and MaPA (Mc Millan Playground Association), for example – still exist, though the range and volume of their work has shifted over time. We'll discuss MaPA later in this story because it has acquired particular meaning amongst activists in the city and is host to many of Patwah's activities.

Bradford has also been home to self – organising collectives such as Sankofa Sistah and Nubian Men which no longer exist. Their influence, though, is evident in Patwah's organising principles and in its activities which are underpinned by notions of self - help, voluntarism and an understanding that culture is something which should be preserved and passed on to subsequent generations.

The key players in Patwah are a small group of community and cultural activists who have all been active in Bradford's African Caribbean communities for many years. Most – if not all – have been youth workers and it feels clear that the group's activity is influenced by an understanding that there is common cause amongst all people of African descent. In conversation, group members conflate the terms African and African Caribbean and it felt clear to us that the overarching term Black 'is not one with which group members necessarily feel entirely comfortable. Despite its origins as an empowering, self - defined classification, Black is felt by some to be an indistinct and ill-defined way of describing people whose origins are in Africa. Some who are particularly opposed to its categorical usage will say things like there's no such place as Black Land. Which is difficult to argue with.

Though group members state that they produce events for all African communities, we came away with a strong sense that Patwah is particularly committed to providing spaces and opportunities for the city's African Caribbean population to meet, share, revive and celebrate aspects of its culture. Everyone we spoke to as we constructed Patwah's story referred to a sense of fragmentation and dispersal and loss and this may help to explain the impetus and sense of urgency which seems to underlie Patwah's work.

What is certainly clear is that the proportion of Bradford's population which defines itself as African Caribbean is decreasing and is ageing. With the introduction of ethnicity classifications in the 1991 census, there has been a process of differentiation and segmentation amongst ethnic groups and this has meant that it has become possible to distinguish categorically between one minority ethnic group and another across a whole range of variables.

One of the things that the data tells us is that there has been an increase in the numbers of people from the African continent becoming resident in the UK to the point that they now outnumber Caribbean people of African descent. What is the case for the UK as a whole is true also for Bradford. In a city whose population is estimated at 531,200, approximately 3,500 people in Bradford describe themselves as being of Black Caribbean background. This compares to 5,000 who describe themselves as Black African and 4,600 who define themselves as being of mixed Black British and white origin.

The story of Patwah attempts to unpick what it is that the group does and what motivates its members, supporters and audiences. We've also tried to situate Patwah in its uniquely Bradfordian context, paying particular attention to the way in which the city's

African Caribbean population has been dispersed across the district. It is the view of some of those involved with Patwah that this dispersal – or pepper potting as one interviewee described it – has resulted in the silencing of a distinctly African Caribbean voice in the city. For others, the dispersal was an unintended consequence of much needed physical regeneration in the areas where black people had settled in the city.

Whatever the explanation, the effect is that the community is scattered. Patwah founders have long memories and, talking to them, there was a visceral intensity to their sense of having been separated from each other and therefore weakened. A number of the people we spoke to noted that the city has no elected members who are of African Caribbean descent. This, they say, means that it can feel as if there is no one to represent their interests. We came away with the clear view that one characteristic that unifies Patwah's activities – cultural, artistic, educational, health promotional and often a combination of all four - is that they function as a vehicle for assembly, conversation and joint endeavour.

Everyone we spoke to whilst making this story used invisibility as a metaphor to describe the position of African Caribbean people in Bradford and this, too, is something we discuss.

The story has been constructed from a series of interviews we carried out. With one exception, interviewees were suggested by Patwah members on the basis that they each had a perspective on the group's work. The one person whom we approached independently was a senior housing professional and long - time cultural activist in the city who helped us to understand the series of events which led to the dispersal of Bradford's African Caribbean community.



# WHY A LOVE STORY?

We decided to describe Patwah's story as a love story because as it developed it felt as if it exemplified many of the conventions of a classic love story. The people we spoke to generally harked back to a halcyon time when all was well and the African Caribbean community had a strong, stable base supported by infrastructure including community organisations, clubs, shops and businesses. This was followed by a period of abandonment and loss signified by the dispersal of a community across the city. Latterly – and using Patwah as a vehicle – there has been an attempt to revive the relationships and connections which were a feature of the community.

The challenge for Patwah is to test if it remains possible to recapture what was lost or perhaps to make something new and valuable. Or to walk away.

## WHAT PATWAH IS FOR: IT'S FOR PEOPLE FOR WHOM READING OR TALKING ISN'T STRANGE

Mycall Isrell is one of five people who drive Patwah's activities; his formal role is that of Chair. The others in the core group are Sandra and Maureen who are sisters, and Pauline and Bony (or Bones, or Tony); all are or have been youth workers. We spoke to all of them at various times and to others connected with Patwah: Rebecca and Paul who combine youth work and entrepreneurial community activism; Babs who's a health worker and regular attendee at Patwah events; Ashford who describes himself as a young creative and studio owner; and Nigel who's a senior manager in a local housing association and whom we approached independently.

We learned that those in the core group had all been activists in Bradford over many years and that each had - separately and together - worked to galvanise African Caribbean communities in the city. They seemed all to have known each other for a long time. Their paths had crossed and diverged and crossed again.

Patwah is grounded in an approach to community and cultural development which has deep roots in Bradford. It's an approach which was anchored in a network of African Caribbean led organisations that flourished in the 1980s and 1990s. For a city with a small African Caribbean community that has for some time been outnumbered by most other minority ethnic communities, Black Bradfordians have been remarkably successful in establishing bricks and mortar spaces alongside formal and informal collectives of political and cultural activists. Almost everyone we spoke to mentioned a group that we hadn't previously heard of: Nubian Men, Sankofa Sisters, Black to the Future, The Survivors and others.

In some ways, Patwah feels like the most recent iteration of successive - or perhaps overlapping - attempts to nurture and celebrate African Caribbean culture in the city. Along with its predecessors, Patwah has adopted a multi - dimensional approach to promoting the arts with a strong commitment to self help and a willingness to combine arts and culture with efforts to improve other, perhaps more immediately pressing aspects of the African Caribbean experience such as health and wellbeing.

Amongst Patwah's promotions there have been women's events and men's events; events for fathers and sons; and others for mothers and daughters. There was an African market and a literature event, or perhaps two. Events have included a talk about prostate cancer by a natural body builder alongside drumming workshops. They've drawn audiences from across age groups but rather fewer young people than organisers would have hoped for. One of the people we spoke to – Bony – mounted an impassioned argument for more out of school programmes and for events which enable families and children to come together. He and a group of his friends – The Survivors - had taken it upon themselves to organise a Family Day. They met the costs themselves and he told us that there was plenty of demand for more of the same. The thing was, people didn't realise quite how much work went into making these things happen.

We met Mycall a couple of times – first at one of Patwah's meetings and then he visited us in Leeds. Mycall is a natural orator with strong rhetorical skills. That he has a particular interest in spoken word poetry is no surprise and his regular show on ECB Radio – Step Faword – reflects this.

Patwah has also provided a platform for writers, makers and other artists. Its portfolio is broad. Though it doesn't specifically focus on any one audience segment, it felt clear in our conversations that it makes particular efforts to produce events that appeal to Bradford's African Caribbean communities.

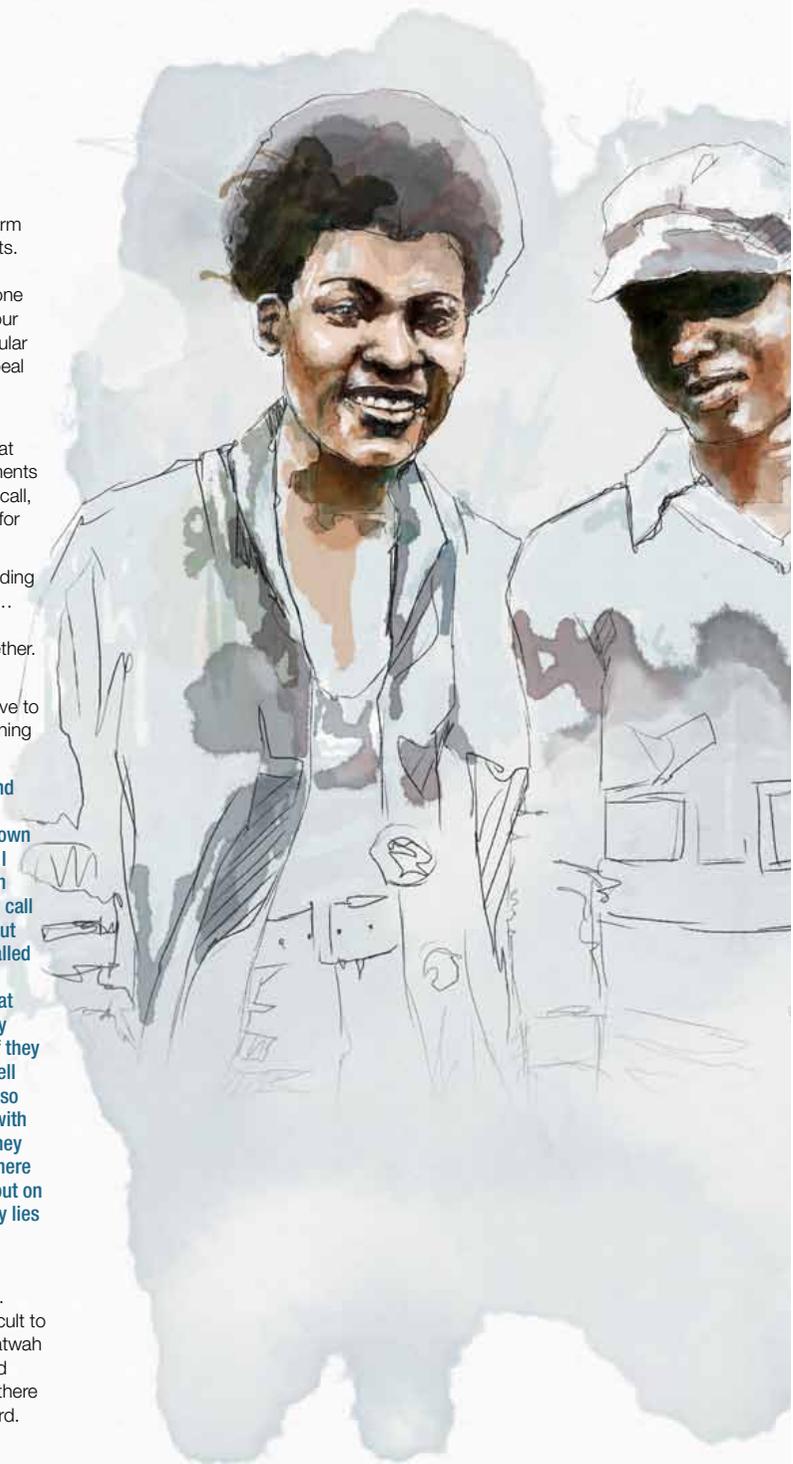
We were interested in learning what draws together the disparate elements of Patwah's programming. For Mycall, it's about making time and space for thought and conversation:

I think it's for people for whom reading or thinking or talking isn't strange... because nowadays people are so scared to talk, you know, get together.

For Maureen – another Patwah founder – there is also an imperative to communicate and to pass on learning across the generations.

**It's our responsibility as parents and grandparents to ensure that those realities from our parents trickle down .... When my children were young I used to say to them, 'You see when you go out of here, that's what you call England or Bradford or whatever but when you get into my house it's called Jamaica. Because that's who I am and those rules and regulations that I got from my grandparents and my aunts – they served me well and if they served me well it will serve you well and my daughter is the same way so my grandchildren are brought up with that respect and understanding. They need to know who they are and where they're from and when they walk out on the street nobody can tell them any lies about their history.'**

We spoke at length to a number of people associated with Patwah. Despite this, it sometimes felt difficult to deduce precisely what it is that Patwah does. Different people emphasised different aspects of the work and there is little in the way of a written record.



# INVISIBLE

Though each person we spoke to had their own take on what Patwah is and why it is important, there was a strong sense in all of our conversations that connections are slipping away; that there is an imperative to provide opportunities for people to come together, to talk to each other and – as one of the people we spoke to described it – to make space for fellowship.

Early on in our conversations with people associated with Patwah, we noticed that themes of invisibility and voicelessness were discussed and returned to repeatedly. One person asked us,

## DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FEEL INVISIBLE?

This was not a rhetorical question and it was one that Derrick was able to answer rather better than I – we'll get on to that presently.

For my part and thinking back to those early conversations, I know that I heard what people said about feeling invisible. I listened and I took notes, some of which I underlined. But I didn't understand how it might feel and I didn't appreciate that it means being unseen, and – by logical extension – being unheard.

Or, as Mycall described it,

**If you're not visible, nobody knows you're there.**

Like most of the people we spoke to, he referred to a process of dispersal which meant that over time African Caribbean communities in Bradford no longer had an established geographical base. It was only later on in our conversations that we began to unpick how and why communities might have become dispersed but the first explanation – Mycall's - was perhaps the most striking,

**...the Black community just went, 'Whoosh!' Just scattered.**

It felt sudden and unexpected: as if you might wake up one day and turn around and wonder where everybody

had gone. Mycall was not the only person we spoke to who expressed that sense of sudden atomisation.

As the community dispersed, so too did what Mycall described as visible symbols of a Black presence in Bradford: the African Caribbean shops and businesses that were a feature of Lumb Lane and Manningham Lane have gone and that's not all that's gone and is missed,

**It could be a group of Black guys walking down the road. For me, these things count. You know what I'm saying? Even if it's not a conversation, it's that eye contact...it sounds depressing but it is depressing.**

At Mycall's suggestion we spoke to Bony, a long time associate and fellow traveller of Mycall's. We met with him at Mary Seacole Court, an extra care housing scheme in Little Horton which was originally developed to meet the needs of an ageing African Caribbean population in Bradford but whose residential and other facilities are now also used by other communities. Though minority ethnic populations have a younger age profile than the majority White British population, the Black Caribbean population has the oldest median age amongst minority ethnic groups. We met in Mary Seacole Court's on site restaurant at the end of a lunch service whose menu was dominated by traditional English dishes.

It turned out that Derrick already knew Bony, but as Bones. Someone else we spoke to knew him as Tony. It was clear that Bony has some sway in the building and he was able to persuade a member of staff to make us each a cup of tea despite the kitchen having closed for the day.

Like Mycall, Bony has a background in youth work but he's worked with people of all ages. Talking to him, it felt like action and agitation are in his blood. He works with Patwah and with other informal collectives to make things happen: he believes that more people should actually do things rather than waiting around for funding and permission. His hands draw every point that he makes and it would be difficult to imagine him sitting still for long.

We got the impression that Bony is a less visible, less formal presence in the Patwah infrastructure.

**I'm not there as often as I'd like to be. It's all right starting something but you can get lost and then you've got to stop, sometimes it's best to do that... The others are more creative and they sit down to plan things. I'm one more to talk straight and sometimes talking straight is not so good so I tend to be more behind the scenes.**

Bony talks about Bradford as:

**The place where I feel comfortable, where I know where I can walk around – I know where I can and can't go as a Black man.**

Despite that, he's noticed changes over the years and some of these are unwelcome. He spoke about weakened connections, about walking these streets where he feels at home and comfortable and recalled how things were:

**Then, we all knew each other. Now, a lot of the youths out there – I don't know who they are or who their parents are...**

We didn't ask him (and perhaps we should have, or perhaps not) whether he thought that they would know who he is – whether he is visible to them.

For Maureen, too, Patwah helps to counter a prevailing sense of invisibility:

**Because out there in the outer world we're not seen and we're hardly visible and my goal is to make us visible.**

Over the course of Telling, Derrick experienced a recurrence of a condition which means that his voice deteriorates and weakens, turning him into a much quieter and more reticent person than is usually the case.

Keen to draw on whatever resources we might have to illustrate and illuminate the stories we were making, I wondered if Derrick might have an insight into what it feels like to be less heard and less noticed in the world. So I asked him,

**Thinking about the voice thing – and at the risk of really stretching the analogy or universalising your individual experience so it applies to an entire community...**

He cut me off. (He may have raised a palm, as if stopping traffic).

Let's not do that...

I modulated my enquiry,

**...d'you think if you haven't got a voice - does it increase your sense of isolation?**

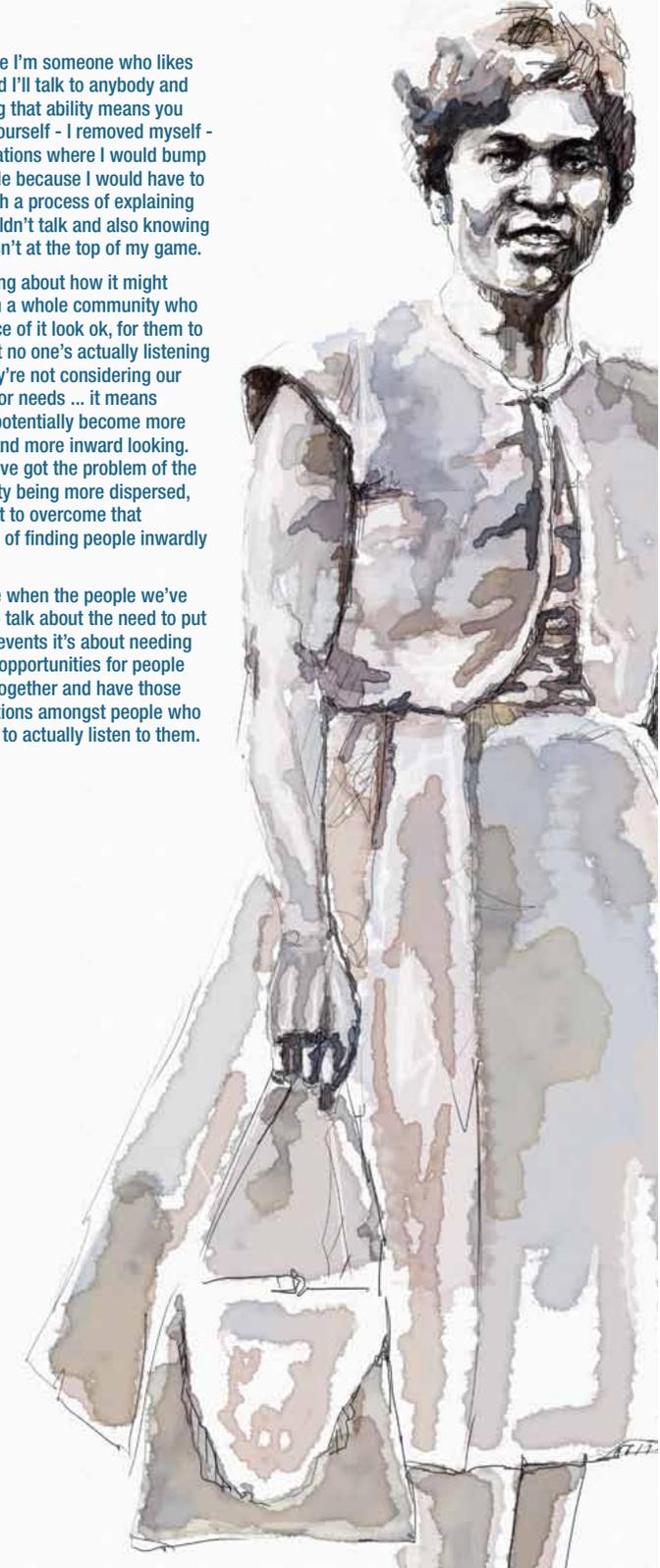
He paused for a moment and then – despite his evident misgivings about the enquiry - he said,

**It becomes hard work to be normal – do the normal things that you would take for granted and I can imagine that over a period of time you'd feel pushed further and further into a shell.**

**In my case I'm someone who likes to talk and I'll talk to anybody and not having that ability means you remove yourself - I removed myself - from situations where I would bump into people because I would have to go through a process of explaining why I couldn't talk and also knowing that I wasn't at the top of my game.**

**So, thinking about how it might impact on a whole community who on the face of it look ok, for them to know that no one's actually listening to us, they're not considering our thoughts or needs ... it means that you potentially become more isolated and more inward looking. Then you've got the problem of the community being more dispersed, you've got to overcome that challenge of finding people inwardly to talk to.**

**So maybe when the people we've spoken to talk about the need to put on those events it's about needing to create opportunities for people to come together and have those conversations amongst people who are going to actually listen to them.**



# A VOCATION

At 29, Ashford Graham – Francis is probably a good 20 years younger than most of the people we spoke to about Patwah. That Mycall suggested we talk to him reflects his keenness to engage younger people in Patwah's programme of work.

Ashford describes himself as a creative. He's been involved with music and music production since he was about 12. When we met with him he was wearing a baseball cap whose peak bore the legend, KUTM. KUTM (Keep Up Team Movement) is a self – organising collective of music and other creatives working in Bradford. The way Ashford described it, KUTM felt like a contemporary, entrepreneurial take on some of the groups developed by people of perhaps his parents' age – groups like Sankofa and Nubian Men which Nigel Guy would later talk to us about.

When we met with Mycall it felt clear that he was impressed and inspired by this small group of Black men working, organising and creating together. Mycall saw in the group a spirit of vitality and creativity and worked to involve them in Patwah's events.

**These guys are hip hop, grime, rapping. And they started their own clothing label...it was fantastic to see a group of young men who had goals who were inspiring and were driven, motivated and together in the sense that they knew what they wanted...**

We met in the dimly lit control room of Ashford's studio – Rubix Cube Music Lab – in the Thornton area of Bradford. The space is accessible via a fire escape staircase on the outside of the building; it felt a little precarious on a late afternoon in winter but this may have been because I had the previous day fallen and cut my head quite badly.

There is a photograph of Ashford and me, taken in his live room at the end of our conversation. In it, Ashford is a study in creative introspection and I am grinning, my face partly obscured by my hand. Most of the conversations we had about Patwah were preceded by my explanation of why a cut which became a bruise which became a scar bloomed on my forehead.

Thornton is a bit out of the way but Ashford believes that it can be beneficial for musicians to step out of their familiar environments and work in new spaces. The Studio has been running for over a year and there have been ups and downs, as is common with new businesses.

Ashford struck us as a serious, thoughtful man whose commitment to his work is total and all consuming. The studio is a vocation or a calling which he can't resist:

**I enjoy [the work] a lot. To the point where sometimes I wish I did something else. That's the truth, you know. Like it's got to the point where I'm so refined in this area that when I do something else – like another job – I get down and I get upset. I don't feel like I'm useful. I don't feel like I'm helping anyone. You see, I have this skillset and this mind set so I've just got to do it now.**

The environment can be challenging, though. People are in a hurry and they don't always appreciate how long it takes to produce something of quality. Ashford likens the process to baking a cake. There's a process that needs to be gone through which can't be rushed. At the same time, though, the people he works with are operating within their own constraints:

**Not a lot of people have disposable income to afford creative art [but] the industry depends on disposable income and not many people around here have got that. But we do have a lot of talent and it comes from that situation.**

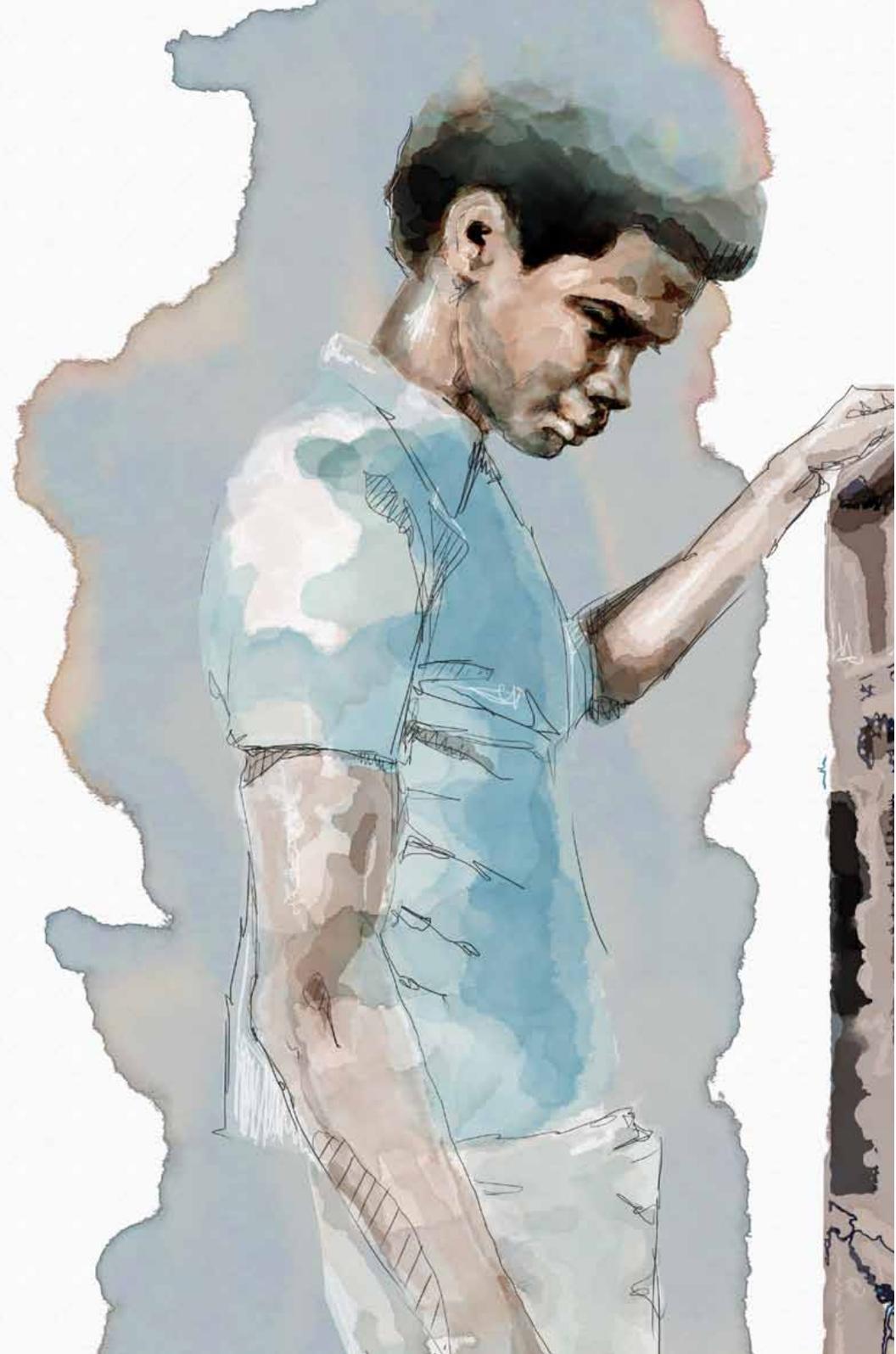
So, for a studio owner like Ashford, finding talent is the least of the challenges he is likely to face. Creativity may spring directly from the worlds they inhabit but those lived experiences mean that they lack the resources to pay for the support they need to express their creativity. Like Bony and Mycall, Ashford is concerned that there are voices and experiences which should be represented but which are unseen or unheard:

**The culture is a thing that can easily be lost if nobody is actually packaging it up and showing it. So it can easily get lost over time. Things are very multi-cultural now ... so if there's nobody from the African Caribbean community doing it, these things will fade away.**

Though Ashford will work with any creative person who wants to work with him, he is aware that a culture – an African Caribbean, Bradfordian culture – is changing or is disappearing and that it is important that people feel that their experiences and cultures are represented.

**Before, there was MaPA and people went there... I came through MAPA - like all the young African Caribbeans I know are from MaPA. We all went there – play schemes, after school clubs – but that's not around now so for the younger generation I don't know where they're going to see people like themselves.**

MaPA was discussed as a place with totemic significance by everyone we spoke to. Located in what was known as Newby Square, in the 1980s it was a vibrant, multi purpose space which was home to youth provision, host to community events and a venue for parties and dances. Though MaPA still exists, the community it served has moved to neighbourhoods across the city. Patwah is active in endeavours to reinvigorate the space so that it once again becomes a hub for African Caribbean communities in the city.





# YOU'RE NOT IN GREEN LANE NOW

We interviewed Babs at her home. She'd just got in from work and we apologised for imposing on her. She told us we were welcome and made us each a cup of tea.

While we talked, I found myself glancing round her back room which was full of photographs and ornaments and the detritus of a family Xmas. In one corner a pile of soft toys climbed the wall. The room reflected a woman who is very connected to family and community.

We were joined by Babs' cat which – she warned – would talk to us. And it did. I told her that I used to have a cat like that.

In an unexpected reversal of interviewing conventions, Babs asked us to tell her a bit about ourselves. Derrick summarised what Telling is, its purpose and background. He talked at some length about research and evaluation and our practice. Babs listened patiently but it felt as if she wanted us to cut to the chase. After a couple of minutes, she summarised: **So, it's like future thinking then? Thinking about where they're going and where they want to get to?**

We explained to her that we'd go through some questions and assured her that despite her suspicions, there wouldn't be a hundred and one of them.

Babs is a regular attendee at Patwah events. She enjoys the variety of content and the opportunities they present to reconnect with people she's not seen for some time. It matters to her that these events are for Black people: **Being in Bradford, you try and find things that are for Black people – that involve Black people... They had like a Carnival thing when they went back to the past looking at history and where we've come from. They did it through looking at music. And then there was African dancing and drumming and tie dying, different foods.**

Before we left Babs to get on with the rest of her evening, she told us that Bradford had changed over the years. Each new group is put through the wringer:

**Now it's very diverse... When I was growing up I've been through that stage where they didn't like Black people – been through the National Front times – I've been through all that. But now the table's turned because they don't like Eastern Europeans. They didn't like the Africans but it's so diverse now and people do try to get on but there's still segregated areas. There's the affluent white areas and the Asian areas. We've got a lot of Europeans now – they put them in similar areas. It's like they're cataloguing them.**

Babs has moved from the area she grew up in but she talked to us about her earlier experience of remaining behind in what had been a predominantly Black area when others moved out:

**We had places we could go. We had New Edition, we had Mayflower, we had Perseverance. We had a community of Black people. I don't know if people were threatened by Black people. They put us here, put us there and then you see the people change. I had some friends and I still lived at Green Lane when they moved [away] so when we visited them, it was like:**

She put on a shrill, posh voice: **Ooh, you can't walk on the grass. You're not in Green Lane now.**

What was it they were trying to say? They'd moved to a white area where they were dotted in amongst white people. It was for you to be accepted and so a lot of the time you conformed to how they were.

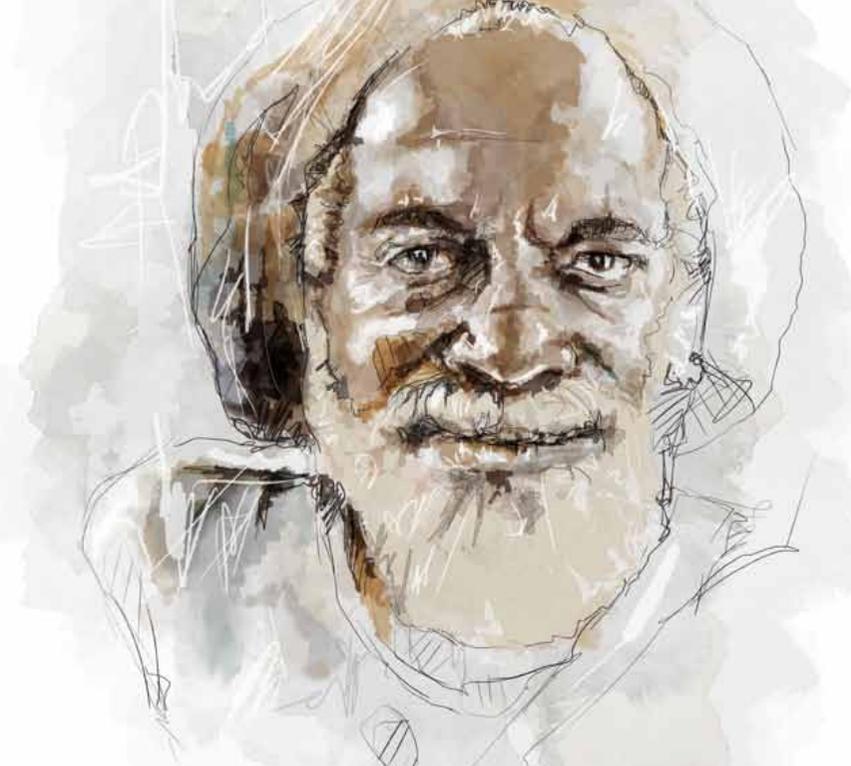
It felt as if the years had peeled back and she was suddenly back there, offended and affronted by former neighbours who carried on like they were better than her.

White communities were not always entirely embracing of their new neighbours. People would say things like, **Don't bring your boom boom music here.** For Babs, it was as if they were trying to take out of you what's already instilled in you.

For Babs and for many others like her, Patwah delivers to a continuing need for spaces where Black people can come together and be certain of seeing others who look like them and who share similar experiences.

# A COMMUNITY WITHOUT WALLS

One of the final people we spoke to about Patwah was Nigel Guy. He's a proud Bradfordian and he told us about the city's central role in the textile industry, the fact that the Independent Labour Party was founded there and how at one time it was much wealthier than Leeds. He spoke about his children who are now grown. He thought it unlikely that they'd return to Bradford.



We decided to speak to Nigel because after our first few conversations it felt as if we were missing something. Reference was frequently made to dispersal, fragmentation and to a sense of dislocation. When we tried to press the point and to better understand where this feeling might come from, it felt as if what we were asking was so basic, so fundamental that we ought already to have known the answer. We wondered whether perhaps in this small community there is a shared and taken for granted understanding which we didn't have access to but which we needed to learn about if we were to be able to make sense of Patwah's story.

I suggested reading, desk research, Googling madly until something rose to the surface. Derrick suggested that we talk to a former colleague of his – Nigel – whose parents are Jamaican but whose roots are firmly in Bradford.

Towards the end of our conversation – after he'd spoken to us for a good couple of hours and patiently submitted to our increasingly forensic questioning and then bought us lunch – he said: **The initials of my first two names are N S. So, if you put that together with my last name, it's NS Guy and if you say it quickly it sounds like 'a nice guy'.**

He also told us that historical planning decisions have meant that Bradford's African Caribbean community has become fragmented and that Patwah is the most recent of a number of efforts to enable connections to be re-established: **In terms of Patwah...it had a historical context in terms of learning history. It was about cultures and people trying to keep community involvement alive because of the dispersed communities we have in Bradford.**

There are reasons for that in terms of how Bradford's African Caribbeans were dispersed.

Nigel is the Managing Director of Firebird Homes, an arms length company which manages development on behalf of Manningham Housing Association, one of a diminishing number of Black and Asian led housing associations in Yorkshire. We arranged to meet with him at his office in late January on what turned out at that point to be the coldest morning of the year. The receptionist at Nigel's workplace occupied an unenviable position directly opposite the automatic doors, the cold slicing through intermittently. We waited in reception, as far away as we could from the entrance. Next to us, two men worked their way through a housing application form on a desktop computer.

Nigel is warm and open and he could not have been more hospitable. As is often the case with housing development specialists, his office walls were pinned with plans and drawings though new development is reportedly sluggish just now. Nigel speaks carefully and he qualifies much of what he says. We wondered whether this came from working in a political environment where everything

can be subject to interpretation and an off the cuff comment can be received as a promise.

He was at his most animated when he talked about his prior involvement with Nubian Men, with the National Black Men's Forum in the late 1990s and with spoken word and other cultural event promotions in the city. But what we wanted to learn about first was his understanding of what other interviewees had referred to as a process of dispersal. We asked him whether he felt it had been an active, purposeful process. In his view, it was not that simple. Dispersal had been the unintended consequence of a set of planning and regeneration decisions which had originally been made in response to community demands for improved housing.

Placing what happened later in context, he told us about where and why Caribbean communities had settled in Bradford when they first arrived in the late 1950s and 1960s: **They gravitated towards the Manningham area. It's where [work was] in terms of textiles and other things and what housing was available was**

**located there. People were not living in local authority housing. When they came it was very difficult to get into.**

**Until such time as they'd established themselves in private accommodation and some could buy... you'd have families sharing a four bed terraced house with four families – you know the history. So there were centres of community by virtue of necessity and then there was the opportunity for people to live in different areas and establish themselves in those different areas.**

**One specific area where there was a good established community was the Newby Square area in BD5. It was a local authority housing scheme consisting of houses, walk up flats – and then you've got the tall twelve storey flats there. That would be the 1970s and early 80s.**

Newby Square became home to significant numbers of the city's African Caribbean community and around it grew the businesses and organisations which met the community's needs. The problem was, though, that the condition of the housing stock was very poor.

**The fabric of the buildings became unsustainable and it was the African**

**Caribbean community and certain community activists at that time which lobbied and campaigned for them to be pulled down and for better stock to be put in their place.**

Listening to Nigel patiently explaining his understanding of what happened, it felt as if he's recounted the sequence of events before.

People still talk about the good old days of Newby Square with it being the epicentre of where the majority of African Caribbean people were present, establishing networks and activities. They had MaPA which was a centre and is still going... but that's probably the only residue left of what it was previously. The ironic thing – the thing we shouldn't lose sight of – is remembering that it was the community who were rallying and lobbying the local authority that these living conditions were not great.

So successful was the community campaign that the local authority commissioned research which uncovered the health hazards associated with the housing. Following on from this, an investment plan was developed which included the demolition of the existing scheme and

its replacement with higher quality affordable housing. First refusal for housing in the new scheme would go to existing tenants who – whilst development took place – would be moved temporarily to other housing in the city.

**The problem that happened was that the demolition did take place and the community was rehoused in different areas so you had a bulk of people that was living in one particular area – had created their sense of belonging - that was then rehoused not in one area but in various areas of Bradford so people over time established themselves in these areas. [They were] pepper potted across Bradford District and by the time those new homes were available they'd established roots.**

What happened then was that people didn't move back in the way that had been anticipated and as a consequence what had been a centre of Bradford's Black community felt and looked very different. The bigger challenge for the community was how it would define and place itself. As Nigel put it: **How do we call ourselves a community when it's a community without walls?**



# MAPA: A CORE ENABLER

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Paul is someone who combines a professional background in youth work with activism and entrepreneurialism. Mycall recommended that we talk to him because the organisation he leads – MaPA – has hosted Patwah events. MaPA is located in what was Newby Square.

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We interviewed him and his colleague, Rebecca, at MaPA just before the youth club was due to open. As a building, MaPA felt typical of custom – built 1970s youth provision. Our sat nav suggested an inexplicably indirect route which got us close by but not quite there and by the time we got inside we had already tried to enter an adjacent building.

Though Paul is not himself African Caribbean (he mentioned to us that his father is Indian), it is clear that he has strong historical connections to Black communities and that these are very important to him. In fact, until 1990 he was youth work lead at MaPA. He looked back fondly on those times, comparing them with how things are now: **We only employ two people. We used to, in its heyday, employ in the region of 20 full time workers. And I've always made sure that whoever is employed under my team had to reflect the community so there were African Caribbeans, Asians and there were white. It had to reflect the community that used it. It was called positive discrimination at the time to make sure that you've got that but it's not allowed anymore.**

With the shrinking of the Youth Service in Bradford, new operating systems have been devised which can enable spaces to continue to deliver services. Paul describes MaPA's current role as being that of a core enabler which hosts other organisations and provides groups such as Patwah with a space from which to deliver their activities: **When I came back this place had nothing. There was nothing going on here. I've retired but I've come back as a consultant – I also have my own company so I do my own stuff as well – MaPA employs my company to do this.**

I commented that the current operating model is interesting. He said that it's a good model. It's certainly lean, and Paul is committed to making it work. MaPA is becoming a hub for a number of organisations – or partners – which pay to use space in the building. Patwah is not amongst those paying partners; they get to use the space for free. It felt to us as if this generosity might in part be motivated by Paul's fond memories of what MaPA used to be and who it used to be for. He told us that at one time, they were able to negotiate late licences to hold dances and events. They were always heaving apparently.

For the final 10 minutes or so of the time we spent at MaPA, Paul showed us a collage of photographs that he's been constructing and which represents (and, in some cases, memorialises) the individuals – workers, young people, friends, families and supporters – who have been involved with MaPA over the years. Amongst them were pictures of Paul with his team and of Dynamo (the magician) and of people who are now involved with Patwah.

There were hundreds of fragments of images. It felt as if Paul could name every person represented and that given the chance and the time, he could cover the entire wall with photographs.

As he showed us the collage, young people began to arrive for the youth club. None was Black.

Paul's take on where the African Caribbean community has gone and why it's gone is blunt and unambiguous: **It's 43 years old is MaPA ... I was seconded to work here. This was primarily set up by the Black community. If you look at the board over there you'll see the community and it's an African Caribbean community that set this up...It's changed over the years; changing communities so the Black community has moved out... to wherever there were vacant council houses in Bradford - instant dispersal of a Black community by moving them all over Bradford so the community was split up straight away.**

Derrick asked him how he felt about that.

**Well, it's disgraceful. MaPA is probably the last place where it's got its roots in the African Caribbean community, their culture. You've got Checkpoint in Bradford, which is small with little structure, you've got the Dominican Centre but that only acts like a club really where you go for a drink or a funeral.**

Paul is not alone in feeling that MaPA is a last bastion of a Black, African Caribbean presence in the city. Maureen – one of Patwah's founding members and the organiser of a Saturday School which operated out of MaPA for many years – also spoke about its former and potential role in the city: **Politically, we're scattered all over the place. More so now that we've got emerging African communities. Nobody knows anyone. People don't socialise as much and there's nothing to do. For me, working with MaPA as years went on it was used less and less. The idea is to get people to come back to use that space because it's theirs. We should use what we've got which is ours.**



# DAMN IT, I'M WORTH IT

In the course of the wide ranging conversations we had with people associated with Patwah, we learned a great deal about why the organisation does what it does, where its roots lie and the context in which it operates. What felt more difficult was to define and differentiate precisely what the group does. In our experience, this is rather unusual. More often, we have come across organisations which are clear about what they do but are less clear about their driving mission.

Patwah's full name is Patwah Arts and Media but its activity does not necessarily reflect this. Even Mycall who is one of the custodians of the group's mission is clear that programmed events might include a highly varied line up. For outsiders looking in – as we have – the individual elements of a Patwah event can appear a little random and arbitrary. Audiences and collaborators, however, seem less concerned and very able to accommodate a mixed menu of activity. It felt very much as if individuals take from events what they choose, so for Babs she is able to meet with

people she has known for a long time and whom she rarely sees under other circumstances. They have also provided an opportunity for her to meet with and listen to inspiring speakers. She mentioned to us a writer who had had a particular impact: **I really enjoyed the women's day – it really opened my eyes. And it was, like, you can do more. There was a writer there with her book. She'd come from Jamaica to London and she showed how hard it was but she said if you're determined and confident you can achieve anything. The book was called, Damn it, I'm Worth it.**

She went upstairs and brought a copy down for us to have a look at. Derrick flicked through the book, describing its contents as a bit racy.

For Ashford, on the other hand, Patwah events are a platform for creatives:

**Not necessarily musicians but poets or authors of African Caribbean heritage... he was giving young people like myself on this creative journey a platform and stage to let you know you're not alone.**

Looking at a Youtube video of a Patwah event, one contributor talks at length about the event as a vehicle through which positive messages about health and wellbeing can be communicated.

Rebecca is herself an artist and like Mycall, she has an interest in spoken word. When she thinks of Patwah and of what it produces she focuses in on that: **I think from my talks with Mycall they're into poetry and spoken word and he's very passionate about it... I do a little of that myself. We're always talking about things like that and I think his ambitions are absolutely fantastic for what he'd like to achieve. I think he's very frustrated that because he's probably working full-time he can't dedicate the time to Patwah, that his ambitions are kind of up here and the reality of it is down here.**

**The last [event] they did had African Caribbean drummers and there was men, women and children. It was really vibrant with lots of different things going on. If something like that were to happen on a regular basis and he could move on the ideas he's got for spoken word it would be just fantastic to see that happen.**

When we first spoke to Mycall it felt as if the revival of spoken word in Bradford was a key focus for Patwah. We learned that ten or so years ago there had been a resurgence in spoken word amongst Black people in the city spearheaded by Nubian Men and others. Events had taken place at The Alhambra Studio and they had been well attended and received. For Mycall, Patwah had the potential to be a vehicle through which a new spoken word movement could be nurtured:

**I said, why don't we come together and revive the events? Let's make it formal, let's create a group, let's create a constitution, let's go down that road instead of just the usual informal coming together. So I contacted Bony and we got together. Then I knew Maureen with the youth work as well so I thought it would work because she also ran Saturday Schools. She also had contact with younger people and we tried to get the younger people galvanised within that creative sphere. She roped her sister along – they came hand in hand as a package.**

The first time we met with Patwah we attended one of its regular meetings. Present were Mycall, Sandra and Pauline. It was a cold, wet evening and I remember thinking that it takes some commitment to come home after a long day's work and then trek out to a poorly heated meeting room. We talked to the group about what it was we were trying to do: to tell the stories of small arts organisations and to have those stories guided by what it was group members wanted to know about what they were doing and why. We told them that sometimes you can be so busy doing stuff that you don't have time to pause and to think about why it is you're doing what you're doing.

The group nodded politely but it turned out that they were very clear about what drove them. As they spoke, I scribbled down phrases and snippets: bringing people together; recognition; praising us as a people; being visible; doing something African centred; sharing voices.

And perhaps in the end, this is what is at the heart of Patwah. It's perhaps an analogue approach in a digital age or – as Mycall described it towards the end of our conversation with him:

**For me, it's not like I'm here to preach. If anything, it's just providing the space... you know, let's find a space and bring something in – bring a cake and a box juice, you know, bring a game or something.**

There is much to admire about Patwah. That it exists at all is an achievement. It is not reliant on external funding and has not – as far as we are aware – attempted to secure ongoing investment. Whilst this means that its ability to programme events is limited, it is at least autonomous and is not driven by external stakeholders' priorities and expectations. It knows its constituency well, though it does feel that its attempts to reach out to and engage young people have not perhaps been as successful as might have been hoped and this perhaps signifies a weakness in Patwah's approach.

Learning about the events which Patwah has organised, it feels as if they might particularly appeal to an audience which attended similar events in the 1990s and perhaps 1980s. They reflect a broad - brush approach to community and cultural engagement which can include a vast array of activities connected by a generalised Afrocentric approach. Perhaps they appeal most to people whose experiences are similar to those who organise the events.

As we tried to pull together the strands of the various stories we'd been told, Derrick remarked that, **They're kind of talking about themselves, aren't they – maintaining their own legacy, their own footprint? If there's no memory of the Black community, there's no memory of them.**

And the history of that first generation to be born and brought up here is a specific one. The Race Relations Act only received Royal Assent in 1976 and blatant, explicit racism was commonplace. National Front newspapers were sold in city centres and outside football grounds and terms like nig nog and coon were in common usage on TV and elsewhere. That generation withstood all of that and some – like Mycall, Sandra, Maureen, Bony and Pauline – went on to develop groups and informal collectives which celebrated a culture which was denigrated. The extent to which that approach has currency for a younger generation is unclear. Young people tend to do what young people want to do.

For Mycall, though, none of this is wasted: **Sometimes I've been running around doing Patwah business and... I think I should be doing such and such, but I do feel – well, I could be off doing something else much worse than what I'm doing. I could be in the bookies or around at a friend a burn weed and chat rubbish. But that's not where I am, you know. I'm out there trying to do something.**



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