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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells October 2026

Honouring Our Communities

Susann Savidge, Chair of Somerset African Caribbean Network, shares news of a an exhibition which looks at a special period in Somerset's history.

An exhibition opening in Street to mark Black History Month will shine a light on a local story of refuge, resilience and welcome in Somerset. Roots, Routes & Resilience, at Shoemakers Museum, Street explores the links between Emperor Haile Selassie I, his former home Fairfield House in Bath, and Somerset. It forms part of wider celebrations organised by Fairfield House to mark the 90th anniversary of his arrival in Somerset. Forced into exile after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie came to Britain with his family seeking safety and support.

The exhibition in Street is inspired by the 2026 Black History Month theme, 'Honouring Our Communities', and celebrates the people, places and shared experiences that shape who we are. Created in collaboration with Fairfield House, Shoemakers Museum and Somerset African Caribbean Network, it invites visitors to look again at Somerset's past and discover the Black histories that are part of our shared story. Susann Savidge Chair of Somerset African Caribbean Network

said, "In my role at the former Somerset Race Equality Council, I would receive emails promoting Black History Month events happening across the country. It got me wondering why that never happened in Somerset.

"So, it is a real joy to see Somerset now celebrating Black History Month. It feels very special to see people coming together to learn from and take pride in our Black history."

When Haile Selassie visited Street, 4,000 people came to welcome him. His decision to later gift Fairfield House to the elders of the Black community, helped create a place where Black history, culture and community continue to be honoured. As Roots, Routes & Resiliance shows, these stories are not elsewhere, they are here, rooted in Somerset, and they deserve to be known.

shoemakersmuseum.org.uk/event/roots-routes-and-resilience/

News in brief

Rededication service

The wartime grave of a German pilot shot down over Porlock more than 86 years ago has been rededicated. The special service marked the installation of a headstone for Wilhelm Reuhl, who was just 20 when he lost his life during the Second World War. His grave, marked by a simple wooden cross, was cared for by local people in Porlock. Over the years, this act of respect and remembrance led to friendships between Reuhl's family and the residents of Porlock, creating a remarkable story of post-war reconciliation and understanding.

Taizé pilgrimage 2026

Young adults from Bath and Wells joined pilgrims from across the world for a week of prayer, reflection and friendship at Taizé this summer. Led by Bishop Michael, the diocesan group travelled to France to share in the rhythm of the Taizé community, with the opportunity to join in times of simple worship, Bible study and silence. Nineteen-year-old Charlie, from St Mary's, Ilminster, said the experience had helped him to refocus his faith: "Being surrounded by people who live in the fullness of life really refocuses my mind on what is planned for me."

Udderly unforgettable

The arrival of a bride to her wedding usually causes a bit of a stir but one bride marrying at Holy Cross, Mark became an international news story after she chose to make her entrance on an unusual mode of transport. Farmer Victoria Lee arrived astride her favourite Swiss cow, White Chocolate Button. After the wedding, while guests made their way to the reception, Victoria and her new husband Mike went back to the farm to milk the cows before joining in with the festivities.

Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

Every story honoured

By Fiona Gibson, Bishop of Taunton

In August I had the immense privilege of meeting Lynette Richards-Lorde who came to Flourish House with her daughter Chrissy Richards-Levi and Susann Savidge, Chair of Somerset African Caribbean Network. Hearing Lynette's story of faith, courage, and public service was a joyful and humbling experience.

She came to Taunton, aged just 19, in 1959 in answer to an invitation from the British government to come to the UK to work in the NHS. Initially training as a nurse at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton, Lynette then became a midwife and, during a distinguished career in hospitals across the UK, became the UK's first Black divisional nursing officer for midwifery. And it all started right here in Somerset!

You can read more about Lynette's story on the diocesan website but, for me, the most moving part about meeting Lynette was seeing how extraordinarily humble she is, and what a great impact she has had on the lives not just of the mothers she helped during pregnancy and delivery, but on British society as a whole.

October is Black History Month. It's easy to think it's solely about learning more of the history of Black people across the world, and that's an important part of it. But more than that, it's about acknowledging and celebrating the history of those of Global Majority Heritage who have played, and continue to play, an integral part in British society and churches for centuries. Black History Month teaches us all more about our collective story.

Rt Revd Tim Wambunya, Bishop of Wolverhampton, invites us all, however we mark Black History Month, to allow our celebrations to "help us become more truly intercultural communities, where every story is honoured, every gift welcomed, and every person cherished in Christ."

We'd love to hear about your plans to do just that, wherever you are across our diocese.

Bishop of Taunton

Interview

Remember, celebrate, learn

Jason Selormey, is a member of Bath and Wells Lament to Action Group. He shares more about Black History month.

Why is Black History Month important?

It's a reminder of the importance of celebrating the history of people who may not always have been celebrated. Even the purpose of its inception here – to improve the self-esteem of the African and Caribbean diaspora tells you that this month is momentous for all of us and should be for everyone in the UK.

Why would you encourage people to engage with it?

Black history is human history. We are interconnected. It's important we recognise every part of the human experience even the parts that may be difficult to face. It makes such a difference to see all people celebrating black history.

Does learning Black history help challenge stereotypes?

Part of the conditioning of racism is that black people can only be seen through lenses dictated in proximity to whiteness. Like all humans, black people can be represented in a wide variety of ways and Black History Month allows people to look at us in those ways.

Does our understanding of history change when we hear another perspective?

It allows us to see history as less about stories and more about the human condition. When we listen to different perspectives we learn that we have more in common than we think.

Why is it important to celebrate everyone's contribution?

It's the everyday people in your life who make the most difference; at work, school, hospital, shops, these are the people who really feel your impact.

How can we engage with Black History Month meaningfully?

By engaging with Black people in your community. It doesn't need to be grand or a huge public display, it could be as simple as telling your local post person they are doing a great job and you appreciate them. Read about it in the UK, why it is important, and try to practice anti-racism and support for all marginalised groups.