

Owen Henry

■ Biography

Date of birth: 21st September 1928

Place of birth: Jamaica

Date of arrival in the UK: 1955

Owen Adolphus Henry was born in Jamaica and went to school in the capital, Kingston. After leaving school, he found work as a mason. He came to England in 1955, where he started work at the Fry's Chocolate Factory in Bristol.

In 1962, he started a travel business in Grosvenor Road, St. Paul's. It later moved to St. Nicholas Road, and he continued to operate Homelands' Travel Service, which arranged chartered flights to Jamaica and other places, until his death in 1989.

During the 1960's, Owen started social events in a basement room in City Road, St. Paul's. Caribbean people would meet friends on a Saturday evening, play dominoes, talk about home and listen to calypso records on a radiogram. He had a sound system called Honey Bee and he played it at basement parties.

When Jamaica became independent in 1962, Owen organised the Independence celebrations and this is still an ongoing annual event. He was also one of the chief organisers of the Jamaican Independence Religious Services which were held annually at Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ in St. George.

During the 1960s, there was a lot of open racial discrimination in Bristol, and so in 1963, Owen and others met in Roy Hackett's home in Easton, and they started the Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee to highlight the problem. This group supported the boycott of Bristol buses, and Owen campaigned alongside Paul Stephenson, Roy Hackett, Guy Reid-Bailey, Prince Brown and others. The Boycott became well known and had the support of Tony Benn MP and Lord Leary Constantine. Within six months, they were victorious and the Bristol Omnibus Company had to lift their ban on employing Black people.



Owen Henry

In 1968, the Committee also formed the St. Paul's Festival Committee. In those days, the celebrations started two weeks before with a knockout competition for the Louis Sealey Cup (Louis Sealey was a Barbadian cricketer). There were different matches and sports that ended on the last day of the festival. The Metropol Cinema which was then at the top of Grosvenor Road was where the Lord Mayor and the judges of the best floats used to sit. This festival, now called the St. Paul's Carnival, has been running successfully ever since.

Owen also helped to set up The Bristol West Indian Parents' and Friends' Association in May 1970. They helped people from the Caribbean with education, housing, welfare and health problems. They also took groups abroad and met in Horley Road Community Centre.

Owen Henry also formed an International Youth Exchange in 1976 and 17 young people of Caribbean descent visited Jamaica on an educational programme for six weeks. On a trip from Holland to Belgium, Owen found he had left his suitcase behind and it amused him that while he was busy organising others he hadn't organised himself!

In the 1980s, people from the Commonwealth had to apply for British citizenship or lose their right to stay because of new laws passed by the government. Owen often helped people with their applications and other immigration problems.

Owen was also a member of a lot of committees like the Bristol Council for Racial Equality. He was also on the Police Liaison Committee, set up after the St. Paul's Riots in 1980 to try and improve relations between the police and the community. Friends remember that Owen would always speak his mind and he would liaise with the police on behalf of people he thought were being treated unfairly.

In 1979, Owen was awarded the Order of Merit by the Jamaican Prime Minister for his support for people of Jamaican origin. Friends remember him as a good community leader, who would publicly challenge the City Council if he thought they were badly treating the Black community in St. Paul's. He was a much-respected, genuine person, who was passionate about what was happening in the community. He had radical opinions when addressing aspects of racism, and was fearless, with nothing being too big for him to tackle.

Barbara Dettering, a friend, says about Owen:

“ He was a person who strived fearlessly to bring about justice for all. ”

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■ Teachers' Background Notes

(Based on an interview with Barbara Dettering)

Owen Adolphus Henry was born in Jamaica and attended Jacks River Primary School and later Windward Road School in Kingston. After leaving school he found employment as a mason.

He came to England in 1955, where he worked at Fry's Chocolate Factory in Bristol. In 1962, he started his travel service business in Grosvenor Road, St. Paul's. Later it moved to St. Nicholas Road, where he continued to operate Homelands' Travel Service, from which he arranged chartered flights to Jamaica and other destinations until his death in 1989.

During the 1960s, Owen started social events in a basement room in City Road, St. Paul's. Caribbean people would meet friends on a Saturday evening, play dominoes, talk about home and listen to calypso records on a radiogram. He had a sound system called Honey Bee and he played it at basement parties.

When Jamaica became independent in 1962, Owen organised the Independence celebrations and this is still an ongoing annual event. He was also one of the chief organisers of the Jamaican Independence Religious Services held annually at Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ in St. George.

During the 1960s, racial discrimination was blatant in Bristol, so Owen and others formed a committee to highlight the problem. In 1963 a group met in the front room of 5 Bellevue Road in Easton, the then home of Roy Hackett, and there the Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee was formed.

This group supported the boycott of Bristol buses in which Owen Henry campaigned alongside Paul Stephenson, Roy Hackett, Guy Reid-Bailey, Prince Brown and others. The campaign attracted media attention and the support of Tony Benn MP and Sir Learie Constantine. Within six months, they were victorious and the Bristol Omnibus Company had to lift their ban on employing Black people.

In 1968, the Committee formed the St. Paul's Festival Committee with Rev. Roy Blake. In those days, the celebration started two weeks before

with a knockout competition for the Louis Sealey Cup (Louis Sealey was a Barbadian cricketer). There were different matches and sports that culminated on the last day of the festival. The Metropol Cinema at the top of Grosvenor Road was the site of the dais where the Lord Mayor and the judges of the best floats used to sit. There was no funding then for the Carnival, so businesses like Fowler's Motor Cycle Shop and Fletcher's Hardware Shop donated floats. This festival, now called the St. Paul's Carnival, has been running successfully, with only minor interruptions, ever since.

Owen was also instrumental in establishing The Bristol West Indian Parents' and Friends' Association in May 1970. This grew out of the Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee, which was made up of people from all the different islands in the Caribbean. Later people from individual islands, like Barbadians and Dominicans, branched out and formed their own groups.

The Association helped people from the Caribbean with education, housing, welfare and health problems. It took groups abroad and it also has a branch in Newport, Wales. It uses Horley Road Community Centre and has connections with the Pioneer Council Hostel, United Burial Scheme, St. Paul's Community Association, United Housing Association, OSCAR (Organisation for Sickle Cell Anaemia Research), People's National Party (Bristol), and the Bristol West Indian Cricket Club.

Owen Henry also formed the Bristol branch of the International Youth Exchange in 1976. The same year, 17 young people of Caribbean descent visited Jamaica on an educational programme for six weeks. On a trip from Holland to Belgium, Owen found he had left his suitcase behind and it amused him that while he was busy organising others he hadn't organised himself!

In the 1980s, people from the Commonwealth had to apply for British citizenship or lose their right to stay because of new laws passed by the government. Owen often helped people with their applications and other immigration problems.

Owen was also an associate member of the West Indian Standing Conference, Ashley Labour Party, and Bristol Council for Racial Equality. He was also on the Police Liaison Committee, set up after the St. Paul's Riots in 1980. There had been a build up of tension locally, and the Bristol West Indians' and Friends' Association had warned the local government that issues such as employment for Black people needed to be addressed. Friends remember that Owen would always speak his mind

and he would liaise with the police on behalf of people he thought were being treated unfairly.

In 1979, Owen was awarded the Order of Merit by the Jamaican Prime Minister for his support for Jamaican nationals. Friends remember him as a good community leader who would publicly challenge the City Council for the poor treatment of the Black community in St. Paul's. He was a much-respected, genuine person, who was passionate about what was happening in the community. He had radical opinions when addressing aspects of racism, and was fearless with nothing being too big for him to tackle.

Barbara Dettering says about Owen:

“He was a person who strived fearlessly to bring about justice for all.”