

CAMPBELL, RACHEL ELIZABETH (Betty) (1934 - 2017), teacher and community activist

Name: Rachel Elizabeth Campbell
Date of birth: 1934
Date of death: 2017
Spouse: Rupert Alexander Campbell
Parent: Simon Vickers Johnson
Parent: Honora Johnson (née O'Leary)
Gender: Female
Occupation: teacher and community activist
Area of activity: Education; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Authors: Jessey Clarke, Deleshia Clarke

Betty Campbell was born Rachel Elizabeth Johnson on 6 November 1934 at 6 Maria Street, Butetown, Cardiff. Her mother, Honora (née O'Leary), known as Nora, was a Welsh Barbadian and her father, Simon Vickers Johnson (1903-1942), a merchant seaman, had come to the UK from Jamaica when he was fifteen. Her father was killed during the Second World War when his ship was torpedoed. Her mother struggled financially to provide for the family after his death and occasionally worked as an illegal street bookmaker. Despite her family shortcomings, at Mount Stuart Primary School Betty was top of her class, resulting in her being awarded a scholarship to the Lady Margaret High School for Girls in Cardiff. She became pregnant whilst doing her A-levels, and in 1953 she married the child's father Rupert Campbell, a fitter's mate at the time. They went on to have four children together, and eventually fourteen grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren.

Betty Campbell's ambition from a young age was to become a teacher, despite being told by a headmistress that the prospect of a black teacher was impossible. Campbell stated that upon hearing this she went back to her desk and cried, the first time she had ever cried in school. Nevertheless, these words made her all the more determined to tackle prejudice and achieve her ambition. In 1960 she was one of the first female students to attend Cardiff Teacher Training College. She qualified as a teacher in 1963, and taught first in Llanrumney, and then at Mount Stuart Primary, which she had attended as a child and where she was to teach for twenty-eight years.

Butetown was one of the UK's first multicultural communities, but tensions would often arise within the community for this very reason. Campbell being a black woman understood first-hand the challenges of being discriminated against and she had experienced hostility from some of the parents. 'They hadn't seen a black teacher before', she said. 'It was as if you could do a job, but if you are black, you were not quite as good.' Not wanting to see the youth in that area go through the same experiences, Campbell always made sure that the local children felt welcome at her school. She promoted the benefits of a diverse society and wanted to enlighten her students about the immigrant experience, all the good and bad history that came with it.

On a trip to the United States, Campbell attended a seminar where she learned about anti-slavery activists and the civil rights movement. When she became Wales's first black head teacher at Mount Stuart in the 1970s, she began teaching children about slavery, black history and the system of apartheid that operated at the time in South Africa. Campbell taught a series of workshops on the role of Butetown's citizens and their countries of origin in the Second World War. Under her leadership, Mount Stuart School raised its profile across the United Kingdom and became a model for multicultural education. In 1994, Prince Charles attended the school's annual St David's Day Eisteddfod and in 1998, she was invited to meet Nelson Mandela on his only visit to Wales. Her inclusive outlook and progressive views caught the attention of powers beyond Wales, and in the 1990s she was appointed to the Home Office's race advisory committee and to the Commission for Racial Equality. In 2007 she played a key role in the launch of Black History Month Wales.

Campbell served as an independent councillor for Butetown on Cardiff city council from 1991 to 1995, and from 1999 to 2004. In 2003 she was awarded an MBE for services to education and community life.

Betty Campbell died at the age of eighty-two on 13 October 2017. Hundreds of people lined the streets of Cardiff to pay their respects. She had touched many lives and inspired so many. The First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones described her as 'a true pioneer' and an 'inspiration to other black and ethnic minority people'.

In 2019 BBC Wales held a public vote to decide who should be the subject of Cardiff's first statue of a named woman, and Betty Campbell topped the poll. In September 2021 a statue of her by the sculptor Eve Shepherd was unveiled outside the BBC headquarters in Central Square, Cardiff.

Authors

Jessey Clarke

Deleshia Clarke

Sources

BBC Hidden Heroines: [Betty Campbell](#)

[Betty Campbell 1934 - 2017](#)

'Betty Campbell: Wales's first black headteacher took civil rights history into classrooms' *The Independent*, 08 November 2017

Personal information from Rachel Clarke (grand-daughter)

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: [Campbell \[née Johnson\], Rachel Elizabeth \[Betty\] \(1934-2017\)](#)

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Betty Campbell](#)

Additional Links

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