

Rosie Douglas Primary School – The story of the mural



The new Roosevelt Douglas Primary School at Portsmouth was officially opened on the morning of 20 February, 2009 before a large and appreciative crowd who filled the central courtyard for speeches and presentations. The school was constructed with funds provided by the Regional Council of Martinique

and designed by Dominican architect Mark Frampton in a tropical minimalist style. The contractors were Stewco Construction Company. Towards the end of the function a mural depicting the life of Roosevelt 'Rosie' Douglas, after whom the school is named, was unveiled by the President and Vice President of the Regional Council of Martinique.

This mural was painted and donated to the school by Dominican artist and historian, Dr. Lennox Honychurch. It was felt that it would be good that the pupils should have some idea of the person after whom their school was named and that the best way to do this would be to provide a sort of illustrated story board that told the life story of Roosevelt Douglas. The mural is painted in oil colours on a sheet of 4 x 4 plywood and is mounted on a curving inner wall near the entrance of the school.



The story of Rosie's life that is depicted here begins to the left of the painting with images of the house where he was born and grew up on Bay Street, Portsmouth, just off the main Borough's Square. Behind is a scene from the Douglas family Estate at Hampstead which was also part of Rosie's early life and which provided his father with the funds to send him to school and university. Above that is an image of



the 1930s US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt after whom Rosie was named. The painting is dominated in the centre by a portrait of Douglas when he was Prime Minister of Dominica in 2000. To his right are pictures of him as a 14 year old teenager and as a radical student activist in Canada in the 1960s. Above this is a representation of the protest action at Sir George Williams University in Canada in 1969 when the computer centre was occupied by demonstrators and a fire broke out. The bars of a prison cell and clenched fists with handcuffs depict his years in prison in Canada before he was released and deported to Dominica in 1974.

The map of Africa and the words, Pan Africanism, indicates the period when Rosie got involved with the international pressure to end apartheid in South Africa with visits to Libya and Tanzania to organise resistance training for ANC activists. Then in the latter half of the 1970s he became increasingly involved in local politics and the youths and national flag represent his foundation of Popular Independence Committees in support of independence for Dominica. This also represents his period as a member of the Committee of National Salvation formed during the political crisis of May – June 1979.



His leadership in developing closer relations with Cuba and the provision of Cuban scholarships for Dominican students is indicated by the map and flag of Cuba linked to three students representing doctors, architects and engineers. The flag of France recalls his close relationship with leading politicians in the French Antilles and his advocacy of the development of closer ties with France. This was also manifested by his organisation of cultural exchanges between Dominica and our French neighbours such as the Fete Marin at Portsmouth. Rosie's assumption of leadership of the Dominica Labour Party after his brother, Mike, died in 1992, and the eventual victory of the party in the 2000 general elections, forms the top right image in the mural. Here a mass of supporters in red T shirts listen to one of his campaign speeches. To end the story is a depiction of Rosie's death on 1 October 2000 at his house near the Portsmouth market where thousands of Dominicans from all corners of the island converged there in a spontaneous act of sympathy as the news of his sudden death spread through the population. It also represents the massive funeral procession that passed the same spot on 14 October 2000 on its way to the Portsmouth Roman Catholic church. The life story returns to start of the painting as his body was interred on the family cemetery at Hampstead.

This work of art brings to ten, the number of murals that have been painted by Lennox Honychurch in churches and public buildings around Dominica.