



2007: WHERE WE STAND

The British slave trade was abolished on 25 March 1807. The present British government is promoting a large-scale Bicentenary commemoration of this event, involving government departments as well as leading cultural organisations and voluntary groups across the country. More than £16 million has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to Bicentenary projects. Television, radio and the press are giving unprecedented coverage to the history of slavery and abolition. On 27 March there will be a National Service of Commemoration, broadcast live from Westminster Abbey. In the future, learning about slavery and abolition will be a compulsory part of the National Curriculum in British schools.

What does all this mean? Why do many people feel doubts and concerns about such a commemoration? This issue of our Newsletter gives voice to some concerns, as well as welcoming the opportunities which the Bicentenary provides for reflection, commemoration and education. Northamptonshire Black History Association supports local Bicentenary events, with a view to developing a deeper long-term understanding of Black History in our county. Issues arising from the Bicentenary have been discussed by the NBHA Committee and we have agreed upon the following general statement.

The 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade



Gustavus Vassa
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2007 is an important year which gives us all a chance to reflect on the role of Britain in the Slave Trade. Many different organisations and government departments are focusing on the Bicentenary, which prompts NBHA to look critically at how Britain's role has been misrepresented, and how this lack of acknowledgement affects us all.

Britain acquired enormous wealth from the Slave Trade. This is the main reason why it continued for so long and was so fiercely defended. Let us use the Bicentenary to study how racism was constructed to feed a political and economic argument, and how those racist stereotypes are still used consciously and unconsciously today.

The government is making the history of slavery a compulsory part of the National Curriculum, but this must be a well-thought-out policy and very well executed in the classroom. Teaching about the Slave Trade could perpetuate stereotypes that Black people are always victims with no control over their own lives and futures.

2007: WHERE WE STAND... cont

It is important to acknowledge that there were many free Black people in Britain who fought hard to end the barbaric trade. Those who were enslaved in the Caribbean also fought for their freedom.

Slavery is not all there is to African History. It would be wrong to acknowledge this aspect without also raising awareness of the long-term history and achievements of the African continent and its people.

NBHA is working to commemorate the Bicentenary, but urges restraint in any celebrations as the 1807 Abolition Act did NOT abolish slavery. We hope that the 2007 commemorations will raise awareness of Black History locally, nationally and internationally. This will help us to build the future of NBHA, as a community organisation promoting research and education about all aspects of Black History.

Some Key Facts about Abolition:

1807 The British slave trade was legally abolished: no more slaves in British ships.

1833 Slavery was abolished in the British colonies of the Caribbean, but abolition was delayed by the introduction of forced apprenticeships.

1838 Slavery was finally abolished in the Caribbean, with £20 million compensation for the masters and nothing for the former slaves.

Britain continued to benefit economically from slavery into the twentieth century. The last slavery abolition within the British Empire took place in Sierra Leone in 1928.

Some kinds of slavery continue to the present day.

Slave Trade Abolition in Pictures

Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano), pictured on the front page, was probably the most outstanding black campaigner against the British slave trade. He travelled the country selling his remarkable life history, and also worked closely with parliamentary leaders such as William Wilberforce (shown holding the scroll of the 1807 Abolition Act). The



William Wilberforce
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Freedom Fighter
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images of both these men are included on the Bicentenary postage stamps which will be issued on 22 March 2007.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, pictured here as 'Freedom Fighter', led the largest-ever slave revolt in the Caribbean. This picture shows the defeated French rulers of St Domingue forced to accept a settlement with the victorious black general. The independent Republic of Haiti was declared in 1805, just two years before the British government agreed to



Shackled captive
copyright Getty Images

abolish the British Slave Trade. In contrast, the passive image of a shackled captive was the most popular logo of the white anti-slavery campaigners in Britain.

2007 Bicentenary: What We Think

The Editors of the Newsletter asked a range of people active in local community work and interested in Black History the following questions:

1. **How should we commemorate the 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade?**
2. **Do you think this year's commemoration will have a lasting impact?**

Here are some replies we received.



Donna Palmer-Smith, Community Development Worker for BME groups

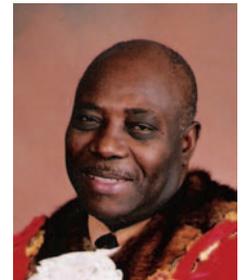
1. We should commemorate 2007 by exploring and exposing the true facts about the trade and mourning and agreeing the real numbers of lives lost and Africans taken into slavery. The profits made during slavery should be linked to today's markets and globalisation giving the community some closure and agreement about the facts.

2. No, not from central government and many institutions, they will tick a box to confirm they have completed and tackled the issue. Community organisations and individuals will use this opportunity to continue its lasting effects.

Mike Prescod MBE, former Mayor of Wellingborough

1. Whilst we should acknowledge the lateness of the apology from the British government for the enslavement of millions of Black slaves, we the descendants of the victims enslaved believe we are still enslaved by its legacy. This legacy continues today in Britain by an array of government policies through the guise of anti-racist, cohesiveness, multi-culturalism and other cosmetic gestures to placate us. I do not believe it is possible to commemorate an event which is soaked in the blood of our forefathers and the future of Black people in Britain remains uncertain. Where is the investment? The community cannot enable and lead, due to cuts, reduction of services, etc.

2. I do not believe it would have a lasting impact, because the government and others do not speak of the future of the Black community, except in negative terms. Yes, many of the crude aspects of racism have subsided but are not eliminated, which continues to affect our children. The list is endless, because society denies it is the result of enslavement of Black people.



Mary Clarke, Director of the Doddridge Centre

1. I think it is crucial to clarify that we are **not** celebrating the bicentenary of the end of the British Slave Trade, merely the passing of the Act to abolish it. Unfortunately the trade did not end in 1807, that was just the date the legislation came into effect.

2. Yes, it will reawaken old memories for some of us and introduce new knowledge to others. Hopefully it will galvanise all kinds of campaigners for social justice, who will be reassured by the fact

that although change may not come quickly, it does come; provided we stand together to challenge the status quo.

Paul Crofts, Equality and Diversity Officer, University of Northampton

1. It would be good if we could abolish modern-day slavery – including child labour around the world, the international trade in human beings for the sex industries and to provide cheap labour for global capitalism.
2. Sadly, no. The continuing and hard struggle for racial justice (and other human rights) will just have to continue as normal. The commemorations may, however, play an important role in raising awareness and placing these struggles into their historical context.


Neelam Aggarwal, Chairperson, Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation

While reflecting on the diverse past, let's make a collective commitment to work together to build strong and supportive communities and move towards an inclusive society based on mutual respect to benefit the whole of society. Let's hope that, by commemorating, we leave the best possible legacy for our children – the future.

Alan Howard, Local Teacher

1. Well I'm not sure we should - especially as the establishment will be wanting to emphasise the role of white liberals and philanthropists to the total neglect of how African peoples sustained a constant struggle to resist, subvert and survive the inhuman practice maintained by Europeans for almost 400 hundred years.
2. Not really - it may enable some people to assuage their own feelings of guilt or to pretend that the history of slavery is well and truly past and forgotten. However, we know slavery in various forms continues and that the legacy of the Transatlantic slave trade lives with us and impacts on people of African descent in the present day.


Claire Crouch, Community Worker

1. If the racist establishments of Britain are serious about making a genuine commitment to the commemoration, they should make a gesture which is centuries overdue, put their money where their mouths are and offer reparation and/or repatriation to all peoples of African descent.
2. The impact of the bicentenary will last as long as people's conscience, morals, values and attitudes allow it to.

2007 Bicentenary in Northamptonshire

A project called **Freedom from the Past: Long Time Coming** commemorates the 1807 Abolition Act and the wider fight against the slave trade through musical, drama and historical workshops in Northampton from January to August. There will be a service at the New Testament Church of God (5pm) and an event in St Giles Church (7pm) on **25 March**, the date the Act was actually passed 200 years ago. This project is supported by Churches Together, the Excellence Cluster, Northamptonshire Black History Association and English Heritage. For more information and a full programme of events you can participate in, please email Mary Clarke at projects@rubi.me.uk or write to Mary Clarke, Project Manager, c/o English Heritage, 44 Derngate, Northampton.

Nikki Taylor writes:

We are now six months into our HLF-funded Education Project, **Northamptonshire Black History: Shaping the Future**. Lots of developments are starting to take place.

We have recruited three authors to write curriculum resource packs which will be a gateway to Black History resources, enabling teachers to develop their own activities in relation to various levels of the National Curriculum. The first pack is called **Walter Tull: Sport, War and Challenging Adversity**. Packs will be produced under this title for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and all schools in the county will receive a FREE pack later this year. The second pack, **From Slavery to Emancipation**, will be written for Key Stage 3 and will be ready to purchase from September. We have set up a panel of local teachers to test, comment and advise prior to the publication of these packs.

As part of **Shaping the Future** we are working closely with Northampton Museums. The first aim is to review the ethnographic collections to provide identification and interpretative comment. An ethnographer has been appointed to work in consultation with local community groups. A freelance educator has also been appointed to help integrate Black History into learning resources and museum gallery interpretations. Loan boxes will be created for use by schools and other visiting groups, together with a resource pack called **Representations of Empire**. NBHA and museum staff will work closely with community organisations to develop local museum collecting policy, aiming to develop areas for future collecting that will more fully reflect black communities.

At the NBHA Committee meeting on 18 January 2007, Davey Ivens from Museums, Libraries and Archives East Midlands attended to show us work that is being produced at Kettering Museum. The Museum is developing a loan box focused on William Knibb, the famous local missionary and anti-slavery campaigner. Davey showed us pictures of some of the objects and documents that will be contained within the box, and we were pleased to be able to offer him our feedback.

Don Allen writes:

The first community education project, 'Food Through the Generations', finishes during March. Jenny Labbon has led well-received interview workshops with participants both in Kettering (ESOL group) and in Northampton (Dostiyo group). Recipes have been collected which I am currently collating into a book. We have a number of interesting recipes, ranging from the Northamptonshire Clanger to the Nella Nandu Curry. To find out more you will have to wait for our book to be published!



*Washing Bell Peppers
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Show and Tell at the Doddridge Centre

On 19 December Northamptonshire Black History Association hosted an unusual event at the Doddridge Centre, Northampton. Museum staff brought a variety of interesting objects from around the world for NBHA members and other visitors to examine.



These objects are part of the Northampton Museum's ethnographic collection, and very little information is held about most of them.



Community members who attended had a lively discussion, and were able to offer their own personal knowledge of some objects. This gave valuable information to the Museum staff which will be used when interpreting and displaying the objects in the future.



You can see from the photographs that there was plenty to intrigue us, and a good time was enjoyed by all!

Watch this space for more news as NBHA's work with local museums develops during the year. We hope to mount our own museum exhibition this autumn.

Thank you to Paul Bingham who took these pictures of the event, and also to Rachel Silverson and Nikki Taylor who led the discussion.

In 2005 the Northamptonshire Black History Association Newsletter carried a short article about a mysterious local resident known as 'the man with gloves'. We asked if anyone could identify this gentleman, and now we have an answer. We even have a photograph, thanks to History teacher Chris Perkins, whose recent letter to Nikki Taylor appears below.



Dear Nikki Taylor,

Re. Mr de Louis. I have had a chat with former headmaster of Eaglehurst College, Mr. Ian Phillips, where Mr. de Louis was employed as a teacher in the 1960s.

He could recall that Mr de Louis fled Ethiopia in the 1930s when Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed. He went to Europe where he taught in France. He then came to England where he had a relative and lived in the Delapre area. He taught at Eaglehurst College until about 1968. He was well-read and educated and always impeccably dressed. He was a very private man. He became ill and went into hospital in the late 1960s. His health deteriorated and he went to live with his relative, whereabouts unknown.

Hope this is of some use. Chris Perkins

Some More Local News

On Saturday 17 February NBHA was invited to attend and give a brief presentation at the Somali Forum meeting. This event was very well attended and gave a chance for the Somali Forum to demonstrate its achievements to date, as well as to share their work with other organisations, including ourselves.

On Sunday 25 February NBHA was invited to participate in the Chinese Supplementary School and Senior Citizens Club New Year celebrations at Duston School. There was a variety of attractions, including students dancing and singing, and there was even a fashion show!

The NBHA Race2Score Black History drama performance on 8 February was most unfortunately snowed off, but as we go to press another performance is scheduled for an audience of local schoolchildren and others on 13 March at the Castle Theatre, Wellingborough.

The new course in Black British History at the University of Northampton has attracted plenty of interest. Students are writing Special Studies on subjects of their own choice, which range from the History of Caribbean Food to Black Entertainers in Victorian Britain.

NBHA is looking forward to this year's Northampton Carnival, on 9 June. A launch event took place at the Picturedrome on 1 February and preparations are well under way around this year's exciting theme: Earth, Air, Water, Fire.

The Alliance for Black Children has received funding to put on their second Caribbean Festival in Wellingborough on 18 August 2007. This outdoor event in the town centre will include a tropical market, live entertainment and arts workshops. For information on how to take part, please contact Ama Dixon at ABC (01933 222775).

- **25 March** Commemorations of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade in Northampton (see page 4)
- **19 April** NBHA Committee Meeting, Northampton Guildhall, 6.30
- **21 April** Spring Boroughs multi-cultural event
- **28 April** NBHA Day Trip to London (information below)
- **7 June** NBHA Committee meeting, Northampton Guildhall, 6.30
- **9 June** Northampton Carnival
- **12 July** NBHA Annual General Meeting
- **18 August** ABC Tropical Festival in Wellingborough

Stop Press: NBHA Day Trip to London, 28 April

Tickets will soon be on sale for our Day Trip to Greenwich, London. We are planning to link up with the Black Heritage Group based in Deptford, who will host us for a Caribbean-style lunch. After lunch we will travel to the National Maritime Museum, location of the 2007 Understanding Slavery project. A museum visit will be followed by free time to undertake a choice of activities, some more 'historical' than others! You can visit the Greenwich Observatory, walk by the Thames at Greenwich Pier, follow the footpath under the river to the Isle of Dogs, explore Greenwich Market, or take the Dockland Light Railway to the Museum of Docklands. Tickets for this trip are likely to go fast, so please **phone the Doddridge Centre (01604 590967) to reserve your ticket now!** Prices will be confirmed very shortly: we expect to charge £14 for adults (£12 for NBHA members) and £7 for children under 16, with £6 extra for the (optional) Caribbean lunch.

Oral History Update

A further batch of interviews will be deposited at the Northamptonshire Record Office at the end of March; this brings the total available to the public to over 100. These interviews represent a huge wealth of information about the lives, experiences and opinions of the interviewees. We would urge you to visit the Record Office and discover the value of these unique recordings.

When visiting the Northamptonshire Record Office it is important to take some form of identity. For more information please contact:

**Northamptonshire Record Office, Mereway, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton.
Telephone 01604 762129.**

Where can you find us?

Northamptonshire Black History Association is based at

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Website: www.northants-black-history.org.uk

Please contact us at this address for further information on all NBHA's activities.



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