



Newsletter

June 2004 Volume 2, Issue 2

ANOTHER FIRST FOR THE PROJECT

On 19 May 2004, the first Black community archives, processed and collected during the lifetime of this project, were placed at Northamptonshire Record Office. This is yet another important milestone for this community-led Black History Project, which celebrated the establishment of the Oral History Archive in January (see last Newsletter).

These records relate to the history and development of the Ghana Union, which was established in 1976. They include photographs, letters, minutes of meetings, the constitution and promotional material for the Durbars in 1987 and 2000. These archives provide a unique insight into the activities of the Ghana Union as well as their contributions to the history of the county.



Mr Arthur, Chair of the Ghana Union, Mrs Arthur, Mr Darkko, Mr Elliott and Mr Opoku present the collection of records to Sarah Bridges, County Archivist.

These records are available for members of the public to examine, although ownership is retained by the Ghana Union.

Sheila Stone and Stephen Johnson from the Heritage Lottery Fund also attended the event. Mr Johnson, Director of Operations, said “The Heritage Lottery Fund has been delighted to fund this project, documenting the contributions to Northamptonshire’s history by many of its diverse communities. Their history is everyone’s history, and the deposit of the records of the Ghana Union are a key step in recognising that fact.”

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Living in Northamptonshire: The Ghanaian Experience

A year ago, Leticia Narh joined the project as a volunteer. During this time she produced a booklet about the experiences of Ghanaian's living in the county. On 31 March the booklet was launched at Weston Favell Library; copies are available in local libraries and community centres. Leticia writes of her experiences below:

Writing this book has been like running a marathon. I had to research the background of Northampton, gather information through interviews, learn to conduct and transcribe oral history interviews and do a course in Desk Top Publishing. Then I had to write a booklet that would be published locally, all this while heavily pregnant and looking after a young daughter.

I got involved with the project after I met Allison, a fine British lady, not long after I moved to Northampton. I expressed how bored I was at home and how much I wanted to get out and do something with my life. Allison put me in touch with the project and it was the friendly voice at the other end of the phone that encouraged me to go further.

I was about four months pregnant at the time and could not get anyone to care for my daughter so I took her with me. I met the team who were really considerate and we discussed opportunities for getting involved. However, paying for childcare was a big problem and they said they would try to work something out. A short time later they managed to get some funding from the Community Champions Fund and I was invited to start working with the project.

For me the interviews were the most exciting parts of this work. The idea of getting out there and talking to people was a bit scary, but I knew that if I could brave it with the first one I would go a long way. The tricky bit was handling the mini-disk recorder - it was so petite and I felt very clumsy around it, fearing I might destroy it or somehow rub off the interview.

Unfortunately my second child, a little boy, decided to arrive after my second interview and I found myself in hospital thirty five weeks into my pregnancy. Once I got out however, I felt very professional as I was set up at home with a computer to practise my typing skills and to start transcribing the interviews I had made. My partner had to return to work to pay the bills and so it was really slow, juggling between the baby, the naughty one and the computer. All three were new experiences to me and sometimes I broke down in tears wishing I had a helper. When my son was old enough he joined my daughter at the nursery and I was determined not to give up.

I found it very difficult when it came to writing the booklet. My only previous experience had been at school when I wrote fiction. This time I was expected to plan and make sure I met the deadlines. During this time I also learnt how to do Desk Top Publishing to enable me to design the booklet. It was not easy for me to get the pictures in place – the picture of Michael Opoku as a child kept dashing out and changing position for no reason.

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WANTED: Administration Officer (until July 2005)

SALARY: £15933 (local authority scale 20) + Stakeholder Pension

We are seeking a flexible person with good communication, clerical and administration skills to be part of the team working on this unique project.

The successful candidate will provide all basic administrative and clerical support to the Project Team eg. filing, word-processing, general correspondence, telephone/ reception work. The post will also involve specific activities relating to the project eg maintenance of database. A significant proportion of time will be devoted to audio typing and the transcription of interviews.

Criteria - applicants need to possess:

- Good literacy, numeracy, verbal and word-processing skills
- Quick and accurate typing skills, with the ability to audio type
- Ability to work to deadlines and undertake routine administrative work
- Ability to work with a range of groups and people
- Experience of working in an office environment

The project is based in Northampton but has a countywide remit.

For an application form send an A4 SAE (42p stamp) to:
**Northamptonshire Black History Project, Doddridge Centre,
109 St James Road, Northampton, NN5 5LD**

For further information contact Carolyn Abel on tel. 01604 590967

The closing date for applications: 10am on MONDAY 5 JULY 04

Living in Northamptonshire - continued from page 2

After a painful editing process, which most writers must experience, the booklet went to the printers. When it returned I could not believe it when I saw my name on the front page. I thought I was just writing in the name of the Black History Project, but then I realised I could call it 'my book'.

The stress, the anxiety and the struggle has paid off, and I say ayekoo (thank you) to the Northamptonshire Black history Project. They have given me a chance of a life time. Before I went to them I was at my wits end, seeing nothing but a dark, dark tunnel before me. Now, I feel alive again. I am forever grateful for them looking beyond the obstacles that I was facing in my life and offering me this opportunity. Thanks also go to our sponsors, my family and to all who have contributed in diverse ways towards its success. The final word must go to the people who gave up their time to be interviewed, particularly Mr Arthur. Thank you all.

Oral History Update

Booklets containing summaries of oral history interviews are now available in the county's local libraries and University College Northampton. Full interview transcripts and recordings are available at the County Record Office.

In May 2003, Sham Naib was interviewed as part of the project. His was one of the first interviews to be placed at the Record Office in January this year.

Sham was born and educated in India and arrived in Britain in the late 1960s. As a newly qualified teacher, he took up his first teaching post at a school in Wellingborough in 1969. On his arrival he was pleased to “*to see quite a few Indian people in the town.... They were very happy people already hiring halls, celebrating some of the Hindu festivals.*” Sham quickly became involved in the local community and attended the first meeting of the Community Relations Council (CRC - now known as the Racial Equality Council) in 1973 when he became vice-chair and then chair of the Education Committee.

Sham’s involvement with the CRC was long and extensive but he gradually reduced his time as he helped to set up the Hindu Temple in Wellingborough. He went tirelessly from door to door trying to raise funds to build the temple. All he asked of people was to make a promise “*And so we made a list of all the promises and we said ‘the day we buy the building, would you pay?’ And those were the firm promises*”. Sham was also instrumental in trying to secure planning permission for the Temple against which they received considerable local opposition. Eventually Sham secured the support of the Chief Planning Officer and on the “*15th or 16th*” time the application went through.

Sham recalls the opening of the Temple in 1975 when they held a procession through the town. People from the Hare Krishna Temple in Bedfordshire came to help carry statues through the town on a chariot. About 7000 people, from a range of backgrounds, followed the procession and Sham feels that “*it was something that [the] town never forgot.*”

Unfortunately, in 1977 the Temple caught fire and so the community sought to rebuild it. Sham received numerous letters of support from sympathisers, some of whom had resisted attempts to build the Temple in the first place. Once the Temple was rebuilt, Sham managed to secure a grant from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to employ 12 young people to paint murals from Sham’s sketches. As Sham said “*They just made it beautiful and there’s no other word for it.*”

(Record Office reference number: Sound Recording, NBHP 2003.37ai-ii)

Recording Local Voices: How to do an oral history interview

Do you want to record your family history or find out more about your parents' and grandparents' experiences? Maybe, you want to document important local events or changes in your area?

Oral history can help you record and document the recent and living past. It is a fascinating way to find out more about individual experiences set against a back drop of national events such as the Second World War.

The Northamptonshire Black History Project is running a one day oral history training session which is open to anyone. It will take place on:

Tuesday 6 July at 10am - 4pm

The session will cover:

- ◆ Understanding the role and importance of oral history interviewing
- ◆ Using and handling recording equipment
- ◆ Developing questions and interview techniques
- ◆ Ethics and copyright

Cost: £10.00 per person (includes tea & coffee)

Venue: Tomlin Room, Doddridge Centre, Northampton

Lunch: Available in Centre Café, very reasonable prices

Booking: Please book by Friday 2 July 2004.

Contact Maria Patten, Administration Officer

Telephone: 01604 590967

To find out more please contact: Julia Drake, Oral History Officer

Talks and presentations

- **Local history: a different perspective - 7.30 pm on 25 June 2004**

Rushden Local History Society, Southend Junior School, Rushden

- **The latest from the Black History Project - 7.00 pm on 17 June 2004**

Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council AGM, Victoria Centre, Wellingborough

- **Local history: a different perspective - 1.00 pm on 29 June 2004**

African Caribbean Elders Society, Northampton

Ferrers' Voices Revealed

On Wednesday 26 May, a launch celebrating the work of the **Ferrers' Voices** project was held at Ferrers Specialist Arts College in Higham Ferrers. Mark Dean and Jenny Campbell of Inspiration FM and BBC Radio Northampton were the special guests.

Between January and April, students from the college worked with the Black History Project on this initiative. The students aimed to discover the experiences of being a young person from different generations and cultural backgrounds. This research involved interviewing people using mini-disk recorders and video cameras. The result is a short film and exhibition based on people's experiences of growing up and some of their earliest memories.



The team from Ferrers Specialist Arts College

Students discovered that people's memories and experiences varied greatly. For example, one interviewee said "My father was very, very strict so we weren't allowed to run around the streets or do anything...". Others talked about some of the problems they experienced, "People take the mick out of my freckles and say I'm fat.", whilst another commented "Only three of us in the entire school had any colour at all."

The afternoon was a great success and students received certificates from Threshold Studios, who helped with the training, for the quality of their work.

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"Black" is defined in the context of this project as "any individual or group who defines their identity by reference to visibility vis-à-vis the effects of racism. It includes people and groups from visible minority communities, especially those with African and/ or Asian origins."

Community archiving continued from front page

The significance of such community records are not to be underestimated.

Currently, if you visit the Record Office you will only find the records of two organisations that have links with local Black communities - Wellingborough African Caribbean Organisation and the Racial Equality Council. It means that anyone wishing to find out about the range of contributions and activities of Black communities, now and in the future, will find it difficult to uncover.

It is also important for all community groups and organisations to preserve the records relating to their activities. It allows anyone new to the community to understand the origins of their group and to learn from their past.

The Northamptonshire Black History Project is currently working with the United Social Club, Dostiyo Asian and Women Girls Centre and NACO to archive the records of these long established and active community groups. If any other group or individual would like to consider archiving their records please contact Nicola Taylor, Community Research Officer, to find out more.

As John Arthur, Chair of the Ghana Union, said “*important things happen because of ordinary people and it is vital therefore that their records are preserved*” for future generations. Otherwise we continue to have an unbalanced perspective on the world around us.

Ferrers' Voices continued from page 6

To find out more about what the young people discovered, you can watch the film and see the exhibition at the following venues:

Ferrers Specialist Arts College - 26 May - 8 June. Tel. 01933 313411

Higham Ferrers Library - 10 - 16 June. Tel. 01933 314842

Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council AGM - 17 June. Tel. 01933 278000

Rushden Library - 19 - 27 June. Tel. 01933 312754

BBC Radio Northampton - 2 - 23 July. Tel. 01604 239100

Future tour dates:

The school will be arranging more tour dates in the next academic year. However, if you would like to display the exhibition and film at a local community centre or venue near you please contact:

Northamptonshire Black History Project on tel. 01604 590967.

Interested in getting involved in the Management Committee?

Our community representatives on the Management Committee include the following groups:

- African Association
- Council for Ethnic Minority Communities
- Bethel United Church
- Dostiyo Asian Women and Girls Centre
- Ghana Union
- Islamic Pakistani Community Centre
- Liberian Association
- Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council
- Northamptonshire Somali Community
- Sri Guru Singh Sabha
- Wellingborough Black Consortium

- Wellingborough African Caribbean Association (WACA)
- West Indian Parents Association

This is your opportunity to participate.

Membership is open to anyone prepared to get involved. We are keen to hear from people outside Northampton and Wellingborough, particularly in rural areas.

If you, or your organisation, are interested in participating please contact Carolyn Abel, Director, on telephone 01604 590967.

Our other partners include:

- Libraries and Information Service
- Northampton Museums & Art Gallery
- University College Northampton

And finally, where can you find us?

The Project team are based at:

Northamptonshire Black History Project
Doddridge Centre
109 St James Road
Northampton NN5 5LD

The core team includes:

Carolyn Abel - Director
Julia Drake - Oral History Officer
Nicola Taylor - Community Research Officer
Maria Patten - Administration Officer

You can contact us on:

Telephone: 01604 590967

Website:

www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk

Email:

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Comments, feedback or contributions welcome