



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Black History
P R O J E C T

Newsletter

December 2003 Volume 1, Issue 4

And so Black history continues...

As Black History Month, Diwali, Ramadan and Eid come to an end for another year, it is worth remembering that Black history is still being created and celebrated through the rest of the year. As well as the activities of this project, there is an opportunity for you to vote for your favourite 100 Great Black Britons on the website listed below.

Launched in October this year, the website represents an opportunity for us all to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Black Britons, none of whom were represented in the BBC's 'Great Britons' vote, earlier this year.

Visit www.100GreatBlackBritons.co.uk and nominate your choices from the list. There is also an opportunity to enter a schools competition and win cash prizes - we strongly encourage teachers and young people to get involved in this initiative, if at all possible.

What's on in this Newsletter?

Meanwhile the work of the Black History Project continues at a pace.

Since the last edition of the Newsletter, we have conducted another 24 interviews, reached a total of 400 recorded Black history references and recruited another 10 sessional workers to the project.

In this issue you can find out about:

- Marjorie Morgan's reflection on a recent interview (p3)
- The latest Black history discoveries (p4)
- Some useful websites (p 6)
- How you can get involved (p7 & 8)

“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.”

Oral History Sub-project Update

These people are just some of those who have been interviewed since September:

- **Mark Addo**, Northampton interviewed by Michael Opoku
- **Jamil Amar**, Northampton interviewed by Julia Drake
- **Marlene Blake**, Wellingborough interviewed by Jenny Labbon
- **Shashi Dholakia**, Wellingborough interviewed by Marjorie Morgan
- **Ullric Gravesande**, Northampton interviewed by Julia Drake
- **Alan Howard**, Northampton interviewed by Julia Drake
- **Jenny Labbon**, Wellingborough interviewed by Sylvia Bowmer

If you would like to be interviewed or nominate someone, please contact Julia on 01604 590967.

Archive Sub-project Update

Over the past months, Nikki Taylor has been working closely with Meharban Plahay (Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Kettering) and Juliette Baxter (Record Office) to produce a video tour of the Record Office. This video is available for loan by any group that would like to find out more about what the archive does and what it looks like. Contact Nikki for further information.



As part of their induction, Sessional Workers and Volunteers tour the Record Office, Wootton Hall, Northampton, in July 2003.

Marjorie Morgan (Sessional Worker) interviewed Shashi Dholakia in October. This is her response to that experience.

Linking the past, future and present

It has often been said, but there is real truth in the cliché "communication is the key". As an oral history sessional worker I have had the opportunity to see into the past, revel in the beauty of the present and anticipate the future.

Speaking with people from different communities groups uncovers so many common hopes and dreams that are alive in each and every group.

People talk about their homes, the places they have lived, their personal hopes for their families and communities. The common theme is how dedicated these people are to making a difference to the quality of their lives in Northamptonshire - for themselves and their children: because this is their home.

One such passionate person is Shashi Dholakia who has his home in Wellingborough. Shashi is always in demand and he is constantly willing to give of his time to help others. When I caught up with him at the Hindu Temple in Highfield Road, he had just extracted himself from the arms of his grandchildren with whom he was enjoying the half term break and the Diwali festivities. This doting grandfather has a mild manner and a deep desire. His desire is to break down invisible barriers and build long lasting links. His main weapon is communication. Shashi has worked tirelessly, since his arrival in Wellingborough in 1966, to make himself and his immediate community at home. He has succeeded. Shashi has done this with the unfailing support of his wife Usha.

In 1996 - 97, Shashi and his wife were chosen as Wellingborough's Mayor and Mayoress. Together they continued to make positive changes by communication and sharing. Shashi introduced an anti-racism declaration to the mayors of Wellingborough's twin towns in France and Germany. This initiative has now been taken up in twin towns in a number of cities and towns throughout Europe.

Apart from helping people, Shashi also has a passion for cricket in particular, and sport in general. In the early 1970s, to encourage local community participation, Shashi started a Hindu Youth Club which later, together with a number of other people, laid the foundations for the Wellingborough District Hindu Association. His desires have been fulfilled as the Association which once accommodated around 100 people now caters for well over one thousand people on regular occasions.

The driving force for Shashi has been to make his home in Wellingborough. His efforts have not gone unnoticed. Shashi was contacted by the Indian High Commission who told him that he had been nominated and was to be awarded with the "Jewel of India" by the President of India. Shashi says that he felt proud when he was called forward to receive his recognition award, and especially proud when it was noted that he had contributed to Indian culture in his home town of Wellingborough in the UK.

Research Sub-project Update

Below is some of the evidence of Black people living in Northamptonshire. If you have more to add or other references please contact Nikki 01604 590967.

Noticeboard - Black history discoveries

Posted by Paul Bingham (Sessional Worker)

- "Richard A Black Boy Aged 9 years Born in 'yr. east' 28th July 1751", *St John the Baptist, Thorpe Manderville Parish Register, 1751*
- "Peter Alexander Sambo, a negro servant to Lord Viscount Hinchinbrook was buried January 15th A.D. 1775", *Horton Burials Register 1775*

Posted by Elizabeth Jordan (Gretton Local History Society)

- "Richard Dare, a black man buried on 31 March 1770", *Gretton Parish Register 1770*. Richard Dare married Ann Medwell in 1749, they had 11 children. Their son Robert married Elizabeth White in 1784 and they had seven children.

Gerald Landsberg (Sessional Worker) has followed this lead and found the names of 11 children baptised in the village, with the possibility of a further two children.

Posted by Terry Bracher (Librarian)

- "WEEDON - On Monday last Mr. J Andrew Jackson, an American fugitive slave, delivered a narrative at this place, of his bondage and escape. On Wednesday the history was repeated at Kislingbury, and on Monday evening he is to deliver and address on the same subject in the Milton Hall, in this town. His wife, a Creole slave, accompanies him." *Northampton Mercury, 15 January 1859*

Posted by Barbara Reeves (Member of the public)

- Obituary for Prince Kim Rahal, cousin to the Sultan of Morocco, who was killed in a road accident in 1912. He had been living for a number of years with Reverend R. S. Leverton at Wootton Rectory. *Northampton Independent, March 2nd 1912*

Posted by Gerald Landsberg (Sessional Worker)

- "NEGRO PUGILIST'S HOLIDAY IN STRIKE DISTRICT", *Northampton Mercury 26th June 1914 (page 6 column 5)*.

Reference to a farm labourers' strike across Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire in 1914. It is claimed that a Mr Whitehead invited two Negro Boxers from London to defend workers on his farm. The boxers were Jim Johnson, cousin of heavy weight champion Jack Johnson, and Bob Scanlon. Mr Whitehead denied the claims, as did the two boxers.

Nikki Taylor fronts the stall at Roots (below left). Thanks to Esmahan Abdalla, Masuda Ahmed, Sylvia Bowmer, Shamim Chowdhury, Piso Freemantle, Gerald Landsberg, Michael Opoku and Mavis Williams for also helping us at the festival.



Ana Morris quietly listens to some of the oral history interviews on tape at the festival.

Noticeboard continued

Posted by Marjorie Morgan (Sessional Worker)

- "Was Paul Robeson's visit to the Savoy on 8th May his first visit to the town?"
Northampton Independent, May 13th 1960

An article in which Mrs Mabel Cawood thought not. As a young reporter in the 1920s she remembered being sent to see a young negro singer at Grove Road Methodist Church. She recalled "a great vibrant bass, subdued and controlled in the greatest of spirituals" and thinks this young man could have been Robeson. Not so, says Mr W. Arnold, who believes the young singer was Mr Roland Hayes. Hayes sang at the Grove Road Church on December 8th 1922. However, both in 1922 and 1960 the pianist was Mr Lawrence Brown.

Posted by Nikki Taylor (Community Research Officer)

- "The Teacher who wears a Sari", *Northampton Independent, July 29th 1960*

Article and photograph of Mrs Chhaya Rudra, a teacher at Gladstone Road Infants School and Spencer Secondary Modern, both in Northampton. Her husband was employed at one of the town's large footwear firms and studied the boot and shoe industry at Northampton College of Technology.

Pupils who were taught by Mrs Rudra would only be in their forties now, can anyone remember being taught by her? If so, please call Nikki on tel. 01604 590967.

Forthcoming events

Over the coming months we will be giving talks to a range of groups around the county. If you would like us to come and talk about the project, the county's Black History or the Oral History interviews we have undertaken so far, please contact us on tel. 01604 590 967 and we will see what we can offer you.

- **Hidden Histories of Northamptonshire - 7.30pm on 12 January 2004**
Northamptonshire Family History Society, Northampton
- **Northamptonshire's Hidden Histories - 2.30pm on 20 January 2004**
Weston Favell Mother's Union, Northampton
- **Local history: a different perspective - 10.30am on 29 January 2004**
Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, Guildhall Road Tel. 01604 838111
- **Latest from the Northamptonshire Black History Project - 7.30pm on 24 May 2004**
Wellingborough Archaeological and Historical Society

Useful websites

Moving Here - 200 years of migration to England

Why not have a look at the 'Moving Here' website?

This site is described as the "*ultimate database of digitised photographs, maps, objects, documents and audio items recording migration experiences of the past 200 years*".

By visiting www.movinghere.org.uk you can view the online exhibition or read the stories of people who have come to Britain from a range of backgrounds.

The Northamptonshire Black History Project has made a small contribution to this website (go to *Stories* and *Read stories*). You can add your own story to the website by clicking on *Tell us your story*, or complete the online survey.

Black Presence: Asian and Black History in Britain, 1500 - 1850

The National Archives, formerly the Public Record Office (PRO), have produced a website relating to Black history 1500-1850. Go to www.pro.gov.uk/pathways and click on *Black presence* to view the online exhibition.

Write a review of these websites

Interested in writing a review of these two websites for our next newsletter? Tell us what you think of them, are they easy to use, how do you think they could be improved? Please contact the project office on tel. 01604 590967.

Interested in becoming a Volunteer?

Contact us to find out how you too can get involved

Experience

You don't need to be an expert or have had experience of working in these areas (see below). The only requirement is that you are passionate about helping us to record and promote the contributions of Black people living in Northamptonshire over the past 500 years or more.

Training

We will provide relevant training, so why not find out more about how you can get involved and perhaps learn some new skills?

Contact the office on tel. 01604 590 967. We look forward to meeting you.

Research Volunteers

We are looking for people willing to:

- Assist with original research into the history of the Black presence in Northamptonshire and/ or
- Help collect and record the archives of Black organisations and individuals

Oral History Volunteers

We are looking for people willing to:

- Conduct oral history interviews with a range of Black people and communities and/ or
 - Work with young people and school groups
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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 Somali Community
- Sri Guru Singh Sabha

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

This is your opportunity to get involved.

Membership is open to anyone prepared to get involved. We are particularly 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.

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 main project team includes:

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

You can contact us on:

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Comments, feedback or contributions welcome
