



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
**Black History**  
P R O J E C T

Newsletter

June 2003

Volume 1, Issue 2

## Black history is not just for October!

Over the last few months it has become increasingly apparent to us that there is confusion about the role of our project vis-à-vis Black History Month, which has been celebrated nationally since 1997.

Increasingly we are being asked what we are organising for Black History Month or how the programme is progressing.

To clarify, the Northamptonshire Black History Project is not here to organise and coordinate events as part of Black History Month. There are already many groups and organisations across the county who, year on year, run fantastic programmes for this annual celebration. Instead, it is our job to record and celebrate the histories that are being written every month of every year!

Black history is not just about October. Rather than being a one-off annual event, Black British history is an integral part of all of our histories and something that is with us all the time. We will not understand our collective past or our

future if we fail to acknowledge the presence and contributions of those Black people who have been living with us for generations. Our pasts and our futures' are intimately linked.

To reiterate, the Northamptonshire Black History Project aims to record and promote the history of Black people in the county over at least the past 500 years.

The focus of our work involves:

- (1) Oral history interviews with people of all ages
- (2) Collecting and preserving the archives of Black community organisations and individuals
- (3) Original research into the Black presence

In the process we aim to redress the imbalance in the way history is taught and communicated in our classrooms, lecture halls and the wider community.

This works alongside Black History Month celebrations .

**“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.”**

## Forthcoming events

### Exhibition at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery 2 August to 14 September, 2003

"I feel like I'm the sun, every time I go down I always come back holding a new dream and hope." (Esmahan Abdalla)

Earlier this year, Esmahan Abdalla made a short film about what it is like to live in Northampton, with the close support of Julia Drake, our Oral History Officer.

Originally from Somalia, 18 year old Esmahan explores living in Northampton through interviews with members of her family, friends and people from other African communities living here.

To see this fascinating short film and a display of Somali objects, visit Northampton Museum and Art Gallery on Guildhall Road, Northampton.

Esmahan's film will also be distributed to local schools as part of the Citizenship curriculum. The film will be inspirational to young and old alike. It will also help to give future generations an idea of what it has been like to live in 21st century Northampton. An archival copy of the film will be deposited at the County Record Office at Wootton Hall.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Esmahan has worked very hard to pull this film together, in between college, exams and work.



**Esmahan and Caroline Huff-Baines at video training, March 2003.**

We would also like to thank Ismail Ali, Austin Madu and others for participating in the film.

Threshold Studios provided the training and a lot of support editing the film.

Finally, the film project was generously supported by funding from SRB 5, as part of the Northampton Partnership.

If you are interested in making your own film about living in Northampton or any other part of the county, please contact Julia Drake. We would love to hear from you.

#### **Museum opening hours:**

Monday to Saturday 10 - 5pm

Tel. 01604 838 111

[www.museums@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:www.museums@northampton.gov.uk)

**Did you know that in 1888 the Hawaiian Princess Kailuani came to study at Great Harrowden Hall?**

## Forthcoming events

### Black History Month 2003

During Black History Month, we will be holding another recruitment drive for sessional workers.

To support this, we will be organising two Open Days in Daventry and Kettering to enable you to find out more from project staff. You will also have the opportunity to receive assistance in completing the application form.

This will be generously provided by Northampton College, via the Council for Ethnic Minority Communities.

Dates will be confirmed in the next issue of the Newsletter, so watch this space.

A list of the events that we will be attending during Black History Month will also be available in the next issue.

### Museum morning for the Over 60s on 11 September 2003

If you are interested in finding out more about the Oral history sub-project, Julia Drake, Oral History Officer, will be speaking at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery from 10.30am –12pm on 11 September.

Contact the Museum (01604 838111) or Julia to find out more.

### Festivals and events

We will be attending the following events during the summer months and we are looking for volunteers to help:

- **3 August 2003 - Roots Festival**  
Irchester Country Park, near Wellingborough. Joint stall with Race Action Northampton
- **15-17 August 2003 - Balloon Festival**  
Race Course, Northampton. Joint stall with the Hate Crimes Unit.

If you are interested in taking part please contact us. Likewise, let us know if there are any other events around the county which we could also attend.

### Records Group Meetings

Our Community Research Officer, Nikki Taylor, will be holding monthly meetings at Northamptonshire Record Office from September.

The purpose is to get together to carefully examine archival documents held at the Record Office. Other groups already meet at Wootton Hall but none is devoted to looking for Black history references.

So much has already been discovered, so who knows what other treasures we will find if we only take the time to look!

To find out more contact Nikki.

## Research Sub-project Update

Nikki Taylor runs monthly meetings for sessional workers and volunteers engaged in research for the project. This provides an excellent opportunity for people to report back on their discoveries and share their experiences of research.

As part of the activities of the group, in May and June they went behind the scenes at the County Record Office and the Local Studies Library in Northampton. The next group meeting will take place at Northampton Museum in July.

If you are interested in getting involved with researching Black history you are more than welcome to join the team. Contact Nikki for more information.

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### Latest Black history discoveries

One of our team recently discovered that the still popular Kin Wa Chinese restaurant in Sheep Street, Northampton opened in 1959.

The owner, Mr Ma On Woon, came to Britain in 1957 and by 1962 he had opened restaurants in Coventry and Luton and planned to open another in Peterborough.

(Northants Independent, September 1962, page 35.)

On 27 January 1869, the School Log book for Isham National (Primary) School records that "Children rather excited on account of the visit of a Negro boy".

On 2 February 1869, the same Log book shows that "A Negro enters as scholar". It is possible that this is the same child.

(Log book of Isham National (Primary) School, 1869)

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### Work in progress - Can you help?

Piso Freemantle, one of our sessional workers, is currently following up a report of a Black man who looked after the elephants at Robert Fossett's circus. This was reported to us by local resident, June Edwards. He was working with the circus during the Second World War and apparently died in Northampton in 1962. Piso is looking through the obituaries for 1962 to see if she can find out more about him.

You may already have found references to him in the newspapers or other sources through your own research - are you willing to share this information with us? Or maybe you visited the circus and remember seeing this man with the elephants? We are keen to trace him and find people who remember seeing him. Please contact Nikki Taylor if you have any helpful information for this reference or any other Black people living in the county over the centuries.

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## A Study trip to Twywell and Woodford by Thrapston

In April, project staff visited Twywell and Woodford by Thrapston (near Kettering) to look up Black history references, previously discovered by volunteers of the Northamptonshire Black History Group.



The first stop was Twywell Church in search of Susi and Chuma, who brought the body of the explorer David Livingstone, to Zanzibar after his death.

We met with David Stuart Mogg, writer and researcher, and Jenny Bradshaw, Church Warden at Twywell, who were able to tell us more and show us around.

In the church, tucked behind the village, there is a small wooden display cabinet with items associated with Susi and Chuma (see above). It includes a photograph of the two men and a copy of David Livingstone's journal.

Jenny also showed us the wonderful carvings on the pews in tribute to the Reverend Horace Waller, an avid anti-slavery campaigner.

The carvings on one pew illustrate the horrors of slavery and the move towards emancipation; while the pew opposite depicts African animals.

### About Susi and Chuma

In 1874, having ensured that the body of David Livingstone reached Zanzibar for shipment to Britain, guides Susi and Chuma were denied passage themselves. Some months later they arrived at Twywell, where, with the Reverend Horace Waller, they interpreted Livingstone's notes and maps and contributed to the book "The Last Journals of David Livingstone".

### Woodford by Thrapston

Our second stop was the churchyard at Woodford by Thrapston to visit the gravestone of Catherine Prentice.



Otherwise known as 'Kitty', she was an African and a nurse for the Reverend G.A. F. Watson.

Catherine died in 1865 and was buried at Woodford.

Her death is recorded in the burial records of Woodford on 28 May 1865.

## Oral History Sub-project Update

Over the past few months the Oral History Sub-project has been rapidly growing.

So far, over 59 interviews have been recorded with people across the county. Some of these include Anaselia Morris, Tony Smith, Floyd Douglas, Sarwat Khakar, Sham Naib, Joesph Instiful and Niranjan Jani.

If you want to find out who else has been interviewed, or you would like to

nominate someone to be interviewed, including yourself, contact Julia Drake.

With the help of Rose Brown, our Administrative Assistant, we have also managed to transcribe over 21 of these interviews.

This means that you will be able to read or listen to interviews given by people from your communities or find out about people living in other communities in Northamptonshire.

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### Extracts from an interview with Trevor Hall in August 2002

Trevor Hall, otherwise known as Ras Jabulani, was the first person to be interviewed for this project. Born in Gloucester in 1957, his parents arrived in Britain from Manchester, Jamaica, in the early 1950s. In the 1960s, when his father returned to Jamaica disillusioned by life in Britain, Ras and his mother moved to Northampton. Throughout his school life at Military Road, Vernon Terrace and Cliftonville Schools, Ras experienced “hostilities from the white kids” as there were “not too many Black people to relate to as a youngster.” It meant that, as Ras recalls, “if you weren’t fighting to either make friends with some white boys, you’d be fighting against them.” Some of the hostility also came from teachers.

Feeling let down and frustrated by the society around them, Ras and his friends decided to “start teaching ourselves more about ourselves”. Already looking towards Rastafari, they “used to meet and get some teachings” but they felt that their needs were not catered for by other youth centres. Ras, and others, such as Horace Cohen and Lee Bryant, “decided to set up their own organisation”.

Faced with opposition from the authorities they decided to squat in the unused Salvation Army building on Sheep Street and eventually won the right to use the building. Their new organisation was called MFM or Matta Fancanta Movement, meaning “come guard yourself against self-destruction”. As Ras states, “the whole purpose of MFM was to create a base so that one can meet, share, learn and go out and be a man, be a woman.” They ran drumming, dance and Black history classes as well as nurturing other youth groups in Leicester, Derby and Coventry.

While MFM no longer exists, many young Black people in Northampton recall visiting and participating in the activities run at the venue. These include people like Mark Dean, a founder of Inspiration FM who himself works closely with young people. If you were involved with MFM at any point in your life, we would love to hear from you. Contact Julia Drake on tel. 01604 590 967.

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**Have you ever thought about** what you are going to do with those dusty old boxes of paperwork relating to your organisation or your personal life?

**Are they taking up valuable space** in your home or organisation?

**Have you ever wondered** if they would be of interest to anyone else?

You may think that your records are of no use anymore but you are wrong!

They are an invaluable record and archive of the activities of Black communities living and working in Northamptonshire.

### So what are Archives?

They are:

- a permanent record of society's cultural heritage
- the non-current records of groups, institutions or individuals
- the records of everyday activities such as letters, minutes, diaries, audio recordings, photographs etc
- an essential tool for historians, researchers and people who want to find out more about their locality, their past and their communities

### Why do we need Archives?

We need to ensure that these records are archived in order to:

- preserve the legacies of our society, its various communities, and all people involved in its development

- provide an educational resource to promote greater understanding between different communities/groups
- provide an opportunity for people to learn about the past directly from original sources
- ensure documents are preserved for the future and are not damaged, destroyed or lost forever

### And why should you get involved?

Currently, the County Record Office at Wootton Hall only holds the records of two organisations that relate to the history of Black communities in the county. These are Wellingborough Racial Equality Council and WACA.

This lack of information fails to convey the diversity of groups and bodies working with, and on behalf of, our Black communities. Nor is it possible to easily find this information anywhere else.

If we cannot find this information now, future generations are going to find it even harder to learn out about the activities and history of Black people living in Northamptonshire.

Your involvement in the deposit of the old or non-current records of individuals and organisations is vital to creating Black history for the future.

Please contact Nikki today and put your mark on the historical record!

**Did you know that Black writer and composer, Charles Ignatious Sancho had been employed as a valet by the Brudennel family, near Corby, in the 18th century?**

## 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
- 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 590 967.

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## 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

You can contact us on:

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**Website:**  
[www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk](http://www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk)

## Comments, feedback or contributions welcome

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