



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

Newsletter

March 2003 Volume 1, Issue 1

Introducing the Northamptonshire Black History Project

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Northamptonshire Black History Project. This county-wide project is itself one of many firsts — the first (and only) Black History Project in the County; the first community based Black history initiative working across the three major areas of oral history, community archiving and historical research; and one of the first to be actively owned and steered by the County's local Black communities.

The direction of our work is decided by the Project's Management Committee.

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

- * African Association
- * Black Arts Consortium

- * Doddridge Memorial United Reform Church
- * Dostiyo Asian Women and Girls Centre
- * Ghana Union
- * Islamic Pakistani Community Centre
- * Kemet Music Production
- * Sri Guru Singh Sabha
- * Wellingborough African Caribbean Association
- * Wellingborough District Racial Equality Council
- * West Indian Parents Association

Membership is open to anyone prepared to get involved. We are particularly keen to hear from people outside Northampton.

If you, or your organisation, are interested in joining please contact Carolyn Abel on Tel. 01604 590 967 or via email: carolyn_abel@hotmail.com.

All Project Staff are now appointed

The latest recruit, Nicola Taylor, joined the project team in January 2003 as Community Research Officer. Some of you will have already met the other members of the team which include: Julia Drake, Oral History Officer and Carolyn Abel, Director.

Excitingly we have also just recruited the first of many invaluable Sessional Workers to assist us with our activities. We shall be welcoming them in the next issue of the Newsletter. If you want to get involved see page 2.

Did you know that the earliest record of a Black person in the County discovered so far is of "Peter the Saracen" a cross-bow maker living in Northampton in 1205?

"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."

So what are we doing?

This three year project aims to record and promote the history of Black people in Northamptonshire from at least the 16th Century to the present.

It involves three main areas of work:

- (1) Oral history interviews with people of all ages, but particularly elders
- (2) Collecting and preserving the archives of Black community organisations and individuals in the County
- (3) Original research into the presence of Black people in Northamptonshire over the past 500 years or more.

Whilst the project officially began in June 2002, much work has already been undertaken in the County over the last twenty years. This has included the Wellingborough Oral History Project, the African and Caribbean Elders Society publication "Cold Arrival" and Julia Bush's "Moving On" project.

Similarly a group of volunteers formed the Northamptonshire Black History Group and were responsible for revealing numerous hidden Black histories. And Black History Month continues to celebrate the Black contributions to British society.

But none of this can be done without your help!

As a voluntary, community-based project, we need your help to enable us to realise our aims. And there are lots of opportunities for you to get involved, both big and small.

We are recruiting volunteers and sessional workers to work with us on oral history interviews, historical research, community archiving or organising events.

We are particularly keen to hear from people for whom English is a second language. So if you speak Bengali, Punjabi, Patois, Somali or Chinese, for example, we would love to hear from you.

We are also looking for people who live in

other areas such as Towcester, Corby, Daventry, or any of the villages in the County, who could help us to search the graveyards, parish registers, newspapers and other records in these areas.

The opportunities to get involved are endless so if you have ideas about what you would like to do just email, ring or visit our offices at the Doddridge Centre in Northampton.

We will provide relevant training and support to enable you to participate in this unique and exciting community project.

Go on, give us a call today!

Community Archiving and Historical Research

The history of Northamptonshire and Britain has an unacknowledged past. This past concerns the presence and contributions of people of Asian, African and Caribbean origins.

The reasons behind these omissions are complex and many. For example, these are the histories of ordinary people who left little in the way of material goods or written records. Also, written records are by their very nature selective and biased, rarely recording the full spectrum of social life. To find the Black presence it is necessary to look behind the published histories and undertake a detailed exploration of primary sources such as parish registers, newspapers, wills, gravestones, paintings and photographs.

But the evidence is there. And we know this through the work of the Northamptonshire Black History Group. We must pay tribute to the endeavours of Paul Bingham, Neville Cornwell, Terry Bracher and Paul Crofts who sought out and have revealed some of this evidence.

As the Community Research Officer, Nicola Taylor, is continuing this research with her team of sessional workers and volunteers. Future editions will reveal the latest discoveries.

Nicola will also be working to collect and preserve the records of today's Black individuals and community organisations to ensure that the evidence of their activities and contributions are present in our museums, archives, local studies centres and classrooms for future generations.

How can you help?

Tell us if you have found any references to Black history through your own research or enquiries.

Contact us if you want to help us search the records for Black British history.

Advise us if there are any organisations or people we should speak to about their activities in and with Black communities.

Forthcoming events

Adult Learners Week - Discovering your Black roots 2—4pm on Saturday 10 May at Northampton Central Library

Acclaimed British author Paul Crooks will talk about his thirteen year journey to trace his African forebears. This quest took him from north London to the Caribbean, and from there to the Gold Coast of Africa where his story began. 'Ancestors', his award winning novel, is based on this amazing story.

A great opportunity for you to find out how to research your own family history. Paul Crooks and Terry Bracher, Local Studies Librarian, may be able to help you start on your own journey. You will have the opportunity to look at relevant websites and pick up hints.

To find out more contact: Carolyn Abel on Tel. 01604 590 967

What is Oral History?

Oral history is an audio (or video) recording of a person's unique life story. It is an invaluable source of information about people's lives, attitudes and experiences which can not be found in paper records, photographs or objects.

Importantly, oral history allows us to 'hear' the real voices of people in our recent past and present. This is particularly important when uncovering the history of Black people in Britain, as they are often missing or hidden within our historical records.

The Oral History Sub-project aims to collect the voices of today's Black people and communities before they are lost forever. It means that our children,

This is what one person said about being interviewed:

"...this is the thing that will bring people closer, if you communicate with each other..."

(Sylvia Bowmer, Northampton)

grand-children and future generations will not have the same difficulties we experience when looking for Black British history. They will be able to hear these stories and discover what it was like to live in 21st Century Northamptonshire.

Since November 2002, our Oral History Officer, Julia Drake, has very been busy interviewing people. To date, with the help of others like Jenny Labbon, 25 people have been recorded in Kettering, Northampton and Wellingborough. Some of these people have included: Trevor Hall, Mrs Lateef, Meharban Plahay and June Gulley.

These interviews will soon be available at the County Record Office at Wootton Hall.

But, we are still looking for people willing to share their story. So if you want to talk to us or know of someone we should approach please contact Julia in the office.

Alternatively, if you would like to help us with the interviews, particularly if you have another language, contact Julia.

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

You can contact us on:
Tel. 01604 590 967
Email: carolyn_abel@hotmail.com
j.e.drake@talk21.com
nikkki12@hotmail.com

Comments, feedback or contributions welcome.

Did you know that Paul Robeson, American singer, actor and political activist sang at The Savoy on Abington Square in Northampton on 8 May 1960?