



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Black History
P R O J E C T

Newsletter

September 2004 Volume 2, Issue 3

LESS THAN A YEAR TO GO...

With less than a year to go, we, the project's committee and staff, are looking at how it can be sustained beyond July 2005. Having already achieved so much, the project is looking to build upon the fantastic resources that have been brought together over the last two years.

It is essential that the resources created are disseminated more widely - we can not let these histories be forgotten again. These include an extensive oral history archive, a growing community archive and Black history references stretching back 800 years!

We have drawn up a range of ideas and would like to find out what you think.

In the future we propose to focus on education, both formal and informal. The aim is to promote historical, social and cultural understanding and cohesion among all our local communities. Briefly, these activities would include:

- Produce and promote national curriculum resources for use in schools and extended schools incorporating local examples and resources
- Create performance based on the wonderful and fascinating stories contained within the oral history interviews and histories of the more distant past. This work would involve working with local artists, community groups, schools and local students and institutions.
- Produce affordable Black history publications and trails based on the Black histories of the county
- Run an accredited Black Studies course in partnership with University College Northampton
- Provide training to groups and individuals in oral history interviewing techniques, archiving and historical research

If you have any views about these proposals, alternative suggestions, or would like to get involved with taking the project forward, please contact Carolyn Abel on tel. 01604 590967 or via email: director@northants-black-history.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

“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 Update

The latest batch of oral history interviews to be placed at the County Record Office include the individuals listed below. Why not visit the Record Office to find out more about their life stories? You can listen to or read their interviews in dedicated spaces at the Record Office.

- Joseph Acquaye
- Mark Addo
- Garfield Liburd
- Daniel Mayhew
- Clive Mendes
- Randall Mendes
- Sue Mendes
- Godfrey Salem
- Cheryl Ricketts
- Ravi Sharma



Listen to Ravi Sharma's interview and find out about his experiences and life in Kettering (left).



Albert and Mooren, Godfrey's siblings, 1930s

You can also see other information associated with these interviews that tells you more about people's personal lives.

For example these photographs relate to Godfrey Salem, his life and his family.

We interviewed Godfrey in 2003 and you can see more images linked to him on page 6 and at the Record Office.



Godfrey in the arms of his brother, Albert, 1941

The Record Office's opening hours are as follows:

Monday	10.30am - 4.45pm	Thursday	9.00am - 7.45pm
Tuesday	9.00am - 4.45pm	Friday	9.00am - 4.15pm
Wednesday	9.00am - 4.45pm	Saturday	9.00am - 12.15pm

Two Saturdays per month (please check dates with Record Office)

Northamptonshire Record Office, Wootton Hall Park, Mere Way, Northampton NN4 8BQ. Tel. 01604 762129. Website: www.northamptonshire.gov.uk

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.

Extracts from an Interview with John Brownell by Christine Thomas in March 2004

John Brownell was born in Monrovia, Liberia on 8th October 1968. He was the tenth of eleven children. His father was well educated and the family owned a Rubber Plantation. When he was young his parents separated and in 1979 his father died without a will and there were disputes among the family over the estate.



He attended school from the age of four and was an able pupil. *"I use to be very good at school, I was number one at my school but unfortunately I use to be very bad in the yard... I was very naughty."* However, he persevered with his education and after he graduated from the Catholic High School in 1986 he went on to Monrovia University to study Physics.

From 1989 when the Civil War started, his life and education were disrupted. In June 1990 he fled to Sierra Leone as a refugee *"in fear of his life"* after a dispute with a student soldier who later branded him a *"rebel supporter"*. In 1991, after peacekeepers came to Liberia, John returned to Monrovia and resumed his studies when the University reopened in 1992, finally graduating in March 1994.

During his final year at University, John designed a solar drying system which more than halved the time for food drying compared to conventional methods. As a result of his work, he was invited to Italy to take part in a project researching non-conventional energy. Unfortunately, due to the war the letters did not arrive in time. However, he got his chance in 1998 when he went to Trieste University, Italy, which had links to the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, to study for a PhD.

While there he met his future wife Juliet (from Northampton) who was on holiday visiting Venice. *"this day I saw her trying to find direction and nobody could speak English to her, so ... I show her direction and then we changed email address and then we started talking from there."*

In April 2001 he came to live in Northampton. He was unable to get a job using his physics qualifications and eventually got a job at a warehouse on Brackmills which he finds very *"frustrating"*. He attends St Mary's Church of England Church in Far Cotton and plays football for the Dalepak Company team.

In September 2003 his daughter, from a previous relationship, came to join him and his wife. She had been missing behind rebel lines with her mother for three years. After the war she lived with his mother in Monrovia.

In April 2003 he helped found the Liberian Association in Northampton and is the current chair. He has organised fundraising appeals to send supplies to refugees in Liberia. John hopes one day to return to Liberia and help rebuild his country.

A day in a graveyard by Catherine Earnshaw, Sessional Worker

On 27th July 2004, Michael Opoku and I met with eight members of Northamptonshire Family History Society in the graveyard of Raunds Methodist Church. Our purpose was to help them in a small way with their extensive survey of the county's gravestones, while we hoped to uncover graves relating to previous Black inhabitants of Northamptonshire.

We were warmly welcomed and John Orton explained why it is necessary to make records of churchyards, and how it is done. We were then paired off with very experienced people, who explained the specialist forms they use. I was placed with a gentleman named Ted.

Whilst detailed log books have been kept for cemeteries, church graveyards were often filled without making note of who was placed where. Therefore, it is necessary to record each memorial stone to create a list of burials. This leads to immediate difficulties because many people could not afford to have a stone carved and their details have since been lost. Also, damage from weathering and abuse mean that the erected gravestones may not be intelligible. A skilled and experienced eye may glean more from a memorial, but they can still not read what is not there.

The process of collecting information is long and detailed, involving the creation of maps of the graveyard, allocation of unique reference numbers and careful recording of inscriptions and dates on headstones. Standard language is used to ensure there is uniformity for the Society's publications and that architectural terms are clear to the public with no specialist knowledge. Accurate recording enables readers to gain a fuller understanding without visiting the site and they benefit from the Society's skills without having to struggle themselves.

Some inscriptions were clear and obvious; some needed deciphering where letters were worn. Only what could be proven was written down, as a slight omission is better than a misleading record. On occasions Ted could read whole words where I only saw stains, but at other times, I could see letters in shapes left by rain damage where Ted did not. A change of angle or the strength of the sun can alter what is seen, as can experience, expectation and haste - working in pairs meant we were able to check each others work.

The use of tools – water sprays, scrapers and brushes was kept to a minimum, although it is generally thought better to disturb some ivy than to miss an inscription. At times the work became more like archaeology than reading, as Michael helped unearth a fallen and partially buried headstone! After transcription, the memorial was put back as it was found.

The Society also records memorials found within the church itself such as tombstones, wall plaques, kneeling cushions or vases. At Raunds Methodist Church, the memory labels inside songbooks will be transcribed.

At the end of the day, everyone expressed thanks for our assistance, and hoped that we would return. I think both Michael and I were disappointed that the graveyard was too large to finish that day, as it would have been nice to see the task through to its end.

The day facilitated a great exchange of knowledge, as many had either not heard of the Northamptonshire Black History Project, or knew little about it. One person commented that we “*wouldn't find anything in Northamptonshire; blacks were only slaves.*” They were therefore very surprised to hear of early crossbow makers, athletes, acrobats and much more besides! From early scepticism came a respect for researching a hidden side of history, just as they were doing with the gravestones. I also learnt about Methodism, the history of non-conformism and making gravestones, as well as Ted's role in the war!

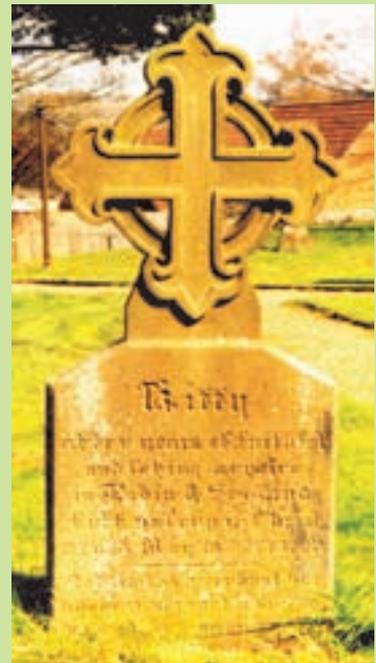
Throughout the day, our presence triggered memories of seeing memorials to slaves, references to other countries, or even unusual names in odd places. Wendy, John and Ted promised to look up their recollections and let us know.

Michael and I agreed that the day was very productive for the project and Northamptonshire Family History Society. The outcome may yet be further enhanced by references the Society members have found in their notes since. I personally enjoyed meeting the people involved and am pleased to have learnt a new skill. **(Catherine and Michael are Sessional Workers with the Project)**

If you are interested in getting involved in the Northamptonshire Family History Society graveyard survey, contact John Orton on tel. 01604 470631

From previous work we are aware of three gravestones relating to Black people in Northamptonshire.

- Charles Bacchus, servant to Richard Bond was buried in the graveyard at Culworth Church on 13 March 1762. He was only 16 years old.
- A gravestone at Blatherwyke marks the death of Anthony Williams in 1836 aged 29 years when he allegedly drowned saving his employer, Mr O'Brien while they were fishing on the lake. However, Lucy Locke in her “Memories of a Villager” recalled that Anthony lived for a few years and died of a cold.
- Catherine Prentice was buried in 1865 at Woodford by Thrapston. The inscription on her gravestone (opposite) states that she was “not merely a servant but above a servant a sister beloved”.



Community archiving update

Since the successful deposit of the Ghana Union records at the Record Office in May this year (see last Newsletter), staff have continued to work with a range of groups to help them to preserve their records for future generations. We are currently working with Dostiyo Asian Women and Girl's Centre, United Social Club and Northampton Afro Caribbean Organisation, which also includes the records of an umbrella organisation, Northampton Council of African and Caribbean Organisations. With Record Office staff we are also sorting through the records of Wellingborough Black Consortium, already at Wootton Hall Park.

While sorting through these is extremely time consuming, it is fascinating work. We have been able to piece together the experiences of a range of individuals and community organisations in Northamptonshire during the 1970s and 1980s, and sometimes earlier. Some of the issues that faced groups then are still current today, such as funding struggles and meeting community needs.

We have also been working with individuals to preserve their personal archives and memorabilia. This is important as it gives an insight to the activities of individuals in their daily lives. Usually these records are complemented by a life story interview conducted by one of the team. As a result we have been able to make links between people and organisations to build up a more complete picture of the history of Black communities in Northamptonshire.

A personal archive: Godfrey Salem

These images relate to the history of Godfrey Salem (see page 2). His father, Abdul Salem, born in India, fought as part of the Cheshire Regiment in the First World War. He lived, worked and married in Northampton from the 1920s until 1971, when he died (left above and below). They had three children. The eldest Albert, was a talented artist (top right) who fought in the Second World War; his sister, Mooren was part of the Land Army. Their youngest, Godfrey, was born in Northampton in 1937. From these images you can get an impression of people's lives. Why not have a look at your own records and see what treasures you can uncover?



Godfrey's mother and sister in Northampton (above)

Talks and presentations**Local history: a different perspective - 10am on 29 September 2004**

Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, Guildhall Road, Northampton

Coming in December - Discovering your Black Roots

As part of the BBC's National Family History Weekend, the Northamptonshire Black History Project has invited Patrick Vernon, founder of the 100 Great Black Britons website, to talk about researching family history. It will take place on Saturday 4 December - time and venue to be confirmed.

To reserve a place call Eric Asumang, Administration Officer, on tel. 01604 590967 or email: admin@northants-black-history.org.uk.

Black History Month

While bearing in mind that Black History is not just for October, Black History Month is shortly upon us. Below are just a small sample of events to be held. Contact your local community centres and libraries to find out more.

7.30pm, 1 October, Black History Month Launch presented by Black Consortium and Borough of Wellingborough

Spectacular showcase featuring Wellingborough's local community acts. FREE but you will need to book tickets at the box office on tel. 01933 270007

7- 9pm, Wed 6 Oct (8 sessions) SHANGWE CREATIVE WRITING

Workshop for Black & Dual-Heritage Women of African & African-Caribbean descent at Wellingborough African-Caribbean Association, Rock Street, Wellingborough. 7-9pm for 8 weeks starts 6 October ends 24 November. £2 per session. To book tel: 07960 120468.

Black History Trails - Northamptonshire Libraries Internet Gateway

Visit any library to follow the Black history trail around Northamptonshire on the Internet Gateway. For more information contact you local library.

WordWorks Live Literature Programme

Northamptonshire Libraries' autumn programme of live author talks, readings and workshops begins in September looking at the diversity of talent in the current British literature scene. Guests include Patrick Augustus, of Babyfather fame, Alex Wheatle, who wrote the cult fiction novel Brixton Rock, and Nisha Minhas, author of Chapatti or Chips? For more details contact Kate O'Brien on 01604 237959 or pick up a leaflet in your local library.

8.30pm, 30 October, Big Deep Roots Black History Month Finale at the Castle

Featuring Mabulu (Mozambique) Nu-generation African band fusing traditional roots with rap & hip-hop. £10 (£7).

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

You can contact us on:

Telephone: 01604 590967

Website:

www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk

The core team includes:

Carolyn Abel - Director
Julia Drake - Oral History Officer
Nicola Taylor - Community Research Officer
Eric Asumang - Administration Officer

Email:

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- admin@northants-black-history.org.uk

Comments, feedback or contributions welcome