



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Black History
ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

Autumn 2006

Volume 4, Issue 3

NBHA Lottery Success!

Northamptonshire Black History Association is celebrating the award of a major grant of £249,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund educational activities based upon local Black History research. Thanks are due to all those supporters of our work whose contributions have made this success possible.

Northamptonshire Black History: Shaping the Future is the title of our new two-year project, which begins on 1 October 2006. We want to 'shape the future' through education, challenging narrow and prejudiced views of British history which have all too often ignored the Black presence in our country and our county. Ignorance of Black History contributes to racism. Knowledge of Black British History provides new insight into our shared past, and is important for our shared future.



Walter Tull and his brother
Reproduced by permission of Phil Vasili

We will be working with local schools, local community organisations, local museums and the general public across Northamptonshire to spread this message. The opportunity is now there to share the outcomes of NBHA research with the widest possible audience. With your help and continued support, we will succeed in making sure that local Black History is never forgotten.

Does everyone in our county know the story of Walter Tull, local sporting legend and military hero? Or about this county's role in Atlantic slavery and the anti-slavery movement? Or about its links to the rise and fall of the British Empire in India? In two years time we hope that everyone will know!

Meet the Team



Supported by the **Heritage Lottery Fund**

Here are some of the people whose work will make the new NBHA education project a big success. During July and August the NBHA committee advertised and appointed to three new posts, funded from the Heritage Lottery Fund grant. There were well over a hundred enquiries about the posts, over thirty applications, and two days of interviews. Thanks to all the NBHA members who contributed to this process, and congratulations to all the successful candidates.



Nikki Taylor – Project Director

Nikki is well-known to everyone as the NBHA's Community Education Officer, and as leader of the recent successful football and drama project, Race2Score. In her new role she will have overall responsibility for managing the education project on a day-to-day basis.

Don Allen – Community Learning Officer

Don Allen is an experienced and qualified community worker who has recently been working for the Probation Service in Northamptonshire. His job will be to lead the development of three community learning projects and to promote wider informal learning about Black History.

Raahil Javaheri – Administrator

Raahil Javaheri comes from Peterborough, and is a recent History graduate from York University. She will be based at the NBHA office in the Doddridge Centre, acting as the administrative lynchpin for the education project as well as providing support for other NBHA activities.



Our First AGM



Terry Bracher (Treasurer), Bobb Lewis (Chair), Julia Bush (Secretary)

The Northamptonshire Black History Association held its first Annual General Meeting on 13 July 2006. It was attended by 20 members and 6 supporters. Bobb Lewis (Chair) proudly welcomed and thanked everyone and a new committee has now been elected. Minutes of the meeting have been circulated and are available from the Doddridge Centre. After the meeting there was a performance by the Race2Score group, which concluded with thanks to the performers and comments by Morcea Walker and Bobb Lewis on the importance of drama to the NBHA's work.

We Were There

On the 17 June 2006 the Northampton Black History Association (NBHA) joined the Doddridge team and took part in the Northampton Carnival. It was a beautiful hot afternoon, a great day for such a show. The procession was vibrant and colourful and everyone that took part had a fantastic time creating a wonderful atmosphere. We carried our own rainbow banner.



Ian Thorne and Ruchira Leisten with the NBHA banner

NBHA extends its thanks to Morcea Walker for bringing Northampton Carnival back to life and thanks also to Mary Clarke for bringing together the diverse community groups of the Doddridge Centre.



Drama

RACE 2 SCORE

On Saturday 1 July, Cripps Hall, Northampton was brought to life by students from Kingsthorpe Community College and Unity College Northampton.



Race 2 Score Students visit Chelsea Football Club

After three terms of work looking at Black British History, the students were proud to share with the audience their performance called ***Black or White ... who cares? It's Just a Colour.***



Students visit the Northamptonshire Record Office



Students visited the Imperial War Museum (London)

The performance celebrated a hundred years of diversity in Northamptonshire.

Northampton Museum and Art Gallery is currently participating in an exciting project funded by Renaissance East Midlands to create a series of object handling boxes that will be available for use by local community groups. The boxes will be produced to provide an opportunity for local people to use original objects from the museum collections to engage with and learn about their history.



Rachel Silverson

As part of this project Rachel Silverson, Community History Officer at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, would like to talk to people about their experiences of moving to Britain and to Northampton specifically. This will form the basis of a box entitled “Moving Here” to explore the issues surrounding people from diverse cultural backgrounds who have left their individual

countries to settle in Northampton. An integral part of the boxes will be to provide personal accounts and memories of moving to the town, as well as people’s experiences and first impressions of Northampton itself. All first-hand accounts would make a valuable contribution to this project.

The project will be part of an ongoing working partnership between Northampton Museums and Northamptonshire Black History Association.

If you are interested in taking part in this project please contact Rachel Silverson at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery on 01604 837001, or e-mail rsilverson@northampton.gov.uk

Donna Palmer-Smith writes...

Paul Robeson was an enigmatic, world famous, captivating scholar, singer, songwriter, actor, and professional football player in his youth, as well as a political activist. He visited and performed in Northampton 46 years ago.

In May 1960 he gave a memorable recital on the 8 May at the Savoy Cinema Abington Square, now the Jesus Centre, that enthralled and spellbound the audience. Pianist and his

accompanist for 35 years,

Lawrence Brown was highly commended alongside Robeson for their performance at the time. Robeson also visited All Saints Church, in search of information regarding sightseeing in Northampton.



Paul Robeson. Copyright: Getty Images

Paul was born in Princeton, New Jersey, 1898. In school he excelled in singing, acting, academic studies, athletics and debating, and played his first role in *Othello*, graduating with Honours from Somerville High in 1915.

He was refused entry to Princeton University, because he was Black. Instead he attended Rutgers University 1915-1919, only the third Black student to attend. Despite facing racism he was accepted into the highest fraternities. He earned 15 varsity letters in football, baseball, and track and field, and graduated in 1919 with the highest honours.

Robeson is best known for his stage and film career spanning some 40 years. He appeared in 11 films between 1925-42 such as *Songs of Freedom* 1936, *Proud Valley* 1940, and *Showboat* 1936. On stage he was the second Black actor to play *Othello*, after Ira Aldridge, in 1930.

He campaigned for equal rights all around the world and was conversant in over 25 languages. He sang in support of the Welsh miners struggle of the 1930s, exposed racism in the USA and much more.

Robeson was under FBI surveillance from 1941-1974 for his political activities before he died in 1976.

Robeson was one of the most highly gifted and distinguished men of the last century, a spearhead and forerunner in the civil rights movement; he understood the plight of the working classes and spoke out about political injustice across the globe.

Oral History Update

The work of depositing interviews at the Northamptonshire Record Office has continued steadily, with a further 18 added since the beginning of the summer. These include the following people:

Ashley Sinclair; Marjorie Bradshaw; Michael Kwabena Opoku ; Brian Silk; Mervyn Felix; Debbie Brown; Olivia Chan; Cynthia Dyer; Theresa Forrester; Edley Beckford; May Green; Myrle Roach

Brian Silk's interview was part of the 30th Anniversary of the Wellingborough District Race Equality Council. Contributing towards the Black Resources Lifework Programme, Michael Kwanbena Opoku talks about the traditional Ashanti Naming Ceremony.

Why not visit the Record Office to find out more about the lives of these individuals at: **Northamptonshire Record Office, Mereway, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton. Telephone 01604 762129.**

Apology to Michael Mcmillan

The editors of the NBHA Newsletter would like to apologise to Michael McMillan for our serious oversight in omitting from our June issue an acknowledgement of his curatorship of the West Indian Front Room exhibition at the Geffrye Museum, which provided the inspiration for Shirley Brownbill's article and the source for her accompanying photograph. The exhibition ran from October-February 2005-06, and was visited and enjoyed by a number of NBHA members. It was funded by the London Museums Hub, and linked to other projects under the banner: Caribbean Rewind: a part of our history.

4 October - 6.00pm Enrolment for University / NBHA Black British History Course, Park Campus, University of Northampton

26 October - 6.30pm NBHA Committee, The Guildhall, Northampton

14 December - 6.30pm NBHA Committee, The Guildhall, Northampton

18 January 2007 - 6.30pm NBHA Committee, The Guildhall, Northampton

Jawi Theatre Collective and the Creative Arts Forum present:

STEPPING STONES

A collaborative community theatre play

Using the oral history interviews collected by the Northamptonshire Black History Project as a stimulus, local artists and performers have created this unique community play which will be touring the county in October and November. This project is funded and supported by the University of Northampton's Office of Educational Partnerships and Lifelong Learning, The School of Arts and Northamptonshire Black History Association. Performance dates and venues:

5 October : Avenue Hall, University of Northampton, Avenue Campus. 01604 893017

6 October : Isham Studio, University of Northampton, Avenue Campus. 01604 893017

7 October: The Castle Theatre, Castle Way, Wellingborough. 01933 229022

14 October: Performing Arts Theatre, Northampton College, Booth Lane, Northampton. 01604 734107

28 October: The Masque Community Performing Arts Centre, Kettering. 01536 720330

3 November: Northampton College, Daventry. 01604 736316

Where can you find us?

Northamptonshire Black History Association is based at

Doddridge Centre, 109 St James Road, Northampton NN5 5LD

Phone: 01604 590967 Website: <http://www.northants-black-history.org.uk>

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

Please contact us at this address for further information on all NBHA's plans and activities, and please come and join in!
