



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Black History
P R O J E C T

Newsletter

March 2004 Volume 2, Issue 1

ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE LAUNCHED

On Saturday 31 January 2004, we celebrated the establishment of the project's oral history archive at the County Record Office. This event represents an important milestone in the project, which saw the first 12 interviews officially placed at the Record Office (see page 3 for more).

The event was attended by over 80 people who took great delight in the talk given by our guest speaker, Yvonne Brewster. Yvonne was a founder of Talawa, Britain's leading Black theatre company, and has an impressive track record in theatre production both in Britain and Jamaica. She is a brilliant performer, clearly demonstrating the power of the spoken word and the value of an oral history resource.

Phil Sawford, MP, also took time out of his busy schedule to give a welcome talk. We too received words of support from Benjamin Zephaniah, Tony Clarke, MP, and Paul Boateng, Chief Secretary to the Treasury. You can read these on page 4.

'Sound booths' available at Record Office

The project also secured funding from East Midlands Museums Libraries and Archives Council (EMMLAC) to create a dedicated space to enable you to listen to the oral history interviews. This included the purchase of tables, chairs, listening equipment and display boards. You will also be able to see a display about the project and the oral history interviews.

This is your opportunity to find out more about Northamptonshire's recent Black history. The Record Office staff are very friendly and more than happy to help set you up with the interviews.

So don't delay, visit the Record Office at Wootton Hall Park, Northampton, today!

New leaflet inside

Inside this Newsletter you will find a leaflet promoting the oral history archive. It also includes the opening hours and contact details for the Record Office. If you want more copies of the leaflet to pass onto family members, friends or colleagues please contact us on 01604 590967.

"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."

A tribute to Randall Mendes

Sadly on 17 February, Clive Mendes, informed us that his father, Randall, had died after a long illness. The Northamptonshire Black History Project would like to join the local community in celebrating the life and contributions of Randall Mendes to Northampton. His story and memory will live on for current and future generations in an interview conducted shortly before his death.

Despite being very ill at the time, Julia Drake, Oral History Officer for the project, interviewed Randall and his wife, Sue, in their home on 11 December 2003. During this 3 hour interview, Julia was able to find out about their lives and involvement in Weston Favell and District Credit Union. The Project is extremely appreciative of the time that Randall and Sue gave to enable us to capture their fascinating histories.

As a result of this interview, the project has recorded a significant piece of the local history associated with *Weston Favell and District Credit Union*. Established in June 1976, the Union started with 15 members and is today one of the longest running and most respected community based credit unions in the country.

When he was living in London, Randall had been involved in a credit union and wanted to set one up in Northampton. As Randall said in his interview, at first "he was *struggling to make people understand*" what a credit union was and that the "*hardest job was to convince*" people to participate. However, by talking to people at work, Randall managed to persuade 15 people to join (including his future wife, Sue). Although at first meetings took place in the front room of the Mendes' house, they later shifted to Thorplands Community Centre and then Standens Barn. The first deposit into the Union was £17.00.

Weston Favell and District Credit Union was open to anyone and everyone, irrespective of culture or ethnicity. Both Randall and Sue felt that it was a very strong community organisation that brought people together from a whole range of backgrounds. They used to have monthly meetings and ran outings and trips to the coast which often required at least three coaches. Sue said "*it was a happy something, like a family.*"

For nearly 30 years, Randall was the Treasurer for *Weston Favell and District Credit Union*, and managed the books, sometimes working late into the night to ensure everything balanced. During this time, the membership grew from 15 to its current level of around 900. It is a 'credit' to the commitment and tenacity of Randall that the organisation has grown to be so strong and well respected. He has helped to ensure that people living in Northampton have had access to low interest loans, a means of saving and provided opportunities to meet and develop lasting friendships for almost 30 years.

Interviews available now

The death of Randall Mendes serves to highlight the importance of the creation of the project's oral history archive. From the end of January the first 12 interviews conducted by the project became available for you to find out more about local experiences of living in the county. You can listen to the recordings on audio tape or mini-disk, or read a summary or full transcript of the interviews at the Record Office. These first recording are the result of interviews with the people listed below:



- **Barbara Bongay**, Northampton
- **Sylvia Bower**, Northampton
- **Joseph Dixon**, Northampton
- **June White-Smith-Gulley**, Northampton
- **Trevor Hall**, Northampton
- **Sarwat Khakar**, Wellingborough
- **Joeph Intsiful**, Northampton
- **Farhat Lateef**, Northampton
- **Sanaa Lateef**, Northampton
- **Sham Naib**, Wellingborough
- **Dipana Patel**, Northampton
- **Meharban & Mohinder Plahay**, Kettering

Coming soon to the Record Office

Interviews with the following people will be deposited at the Record Office in the coming months. Watch this space for the next batch of recordings.

- **Danny Mayhew**, Northampton
- **Garfield Liburd**, Northampton
- **Joseph Acquaye**, Northampton
- **Mark Addo**, Northampton
- **Ravi Sharma**, Kettering
- **Godrey Salem**, Northampton

Latest people interviewed

Since our last Newsletter was published these people have been interviewed:

- **John Arthur**, Irchester
interviewed by Leticia Narh
- **Charlie Brown**, Northampton
interviewed by Peter Weston
- **Horace Cohen**, Northampton
interviewed by June Gulley
- **May Green**, Wellingborough
interviewed by Jenny Labbon
- **Randall & Sue Mendes**, Northampton
interviewed by Julia Drake
- **Clive Mendes**, Northampton
interviewed by Julia Drake
- **Akram Zaman**, Northampton
interviewed by Julia Hartley

If you would like to nominate someone to be interviewed contact Julia Drake.

Words of support for the project

At the launch of the oral history archive, the project was delighted to receive words of support from Benjamin Zephaniah, Tony Clarke and Paul Boateng. It is important for a community-led project like ours to receive external recognition of the significance and purpose of our work.

However, it is also crucially important that our local communities value the work we do. This seemed to be confirmed by the response of local people at the launch who have since described the event as “*uplifting*”, “*emotional*”, “*moving*” and “*powerful*”. For this we pay tribute to all the people that have contributed, become involved and supported the project over the past 18 months. Thank you all.

Benjamin Zephaniah, poet and writer

“The Northamptonshire Black History Project is a great example of what the world needs now. If we leave it to the people in power to write our history we should not complain when we are portrayed negatively, but if we begin to record and write our own history we may then have a clearer vision of our future. I think this project is great; as I go on my travels I shall let the world know that history is being made in Northamptonshire.”

Tony Clarke, MP for Northampton South

“I just wanted to send my congratulations to the project on the continued progress you are making towards the research, publication and dissemination of Black History, particularly as so often your research enriches what is already known of Northamptonshire’s past.

I understand that you have completed your first deposit of oral history interviews with the Records Office. I have no doubt in my mind that this will not only assist in correcting a void that has been allowed to be created within the records but in addition it will enable all of those who follow you down the path of recognising and celebrating the lives and experiences of Black Northamptonians to carry out their work with much greater ease.

My only wish is that your sterling work receives more attention in our local media. Congratulations once again.”

Paul Boateng, Chief Secretary to the Treasury

“Congratulations to the Northamptonshire Black History Project for depositing the first set of oral history interviews at the County Record Office. This information will become a valuable collection. It will present the history of the community, and demonstrate its significance in the history of Northamptonshire - and Britain.”

Research Update

Below is some of the evidence of Black people living in Northamptonshire. To date we have recorded 475 Black history references. If you have more to add to the details below or other references please contact Nicola Taylor on 01604 590967.

Noticeboard - Black history discoveries

Posted by Paul Bingham (Sessional Worker)

- John Edward (Eddie) Parris played for Northampton Town Football Club from November 1937 to June 1939. He appeared 26 times and scored 7 goals for the club. John Parris was born in Chepstow on 31 January 1911.
Grande, Frank (1988), Who's Who - The Cobblers: The Story of the Players 1920 - 1988. Sporting and Leisure Press

Posted by Laura Turley (Sessional Worker)

- "Adelaide Hall Loses Fur and Jewels", *Northampton Mercury* 1 November 1946, page 3. "Miss Adelaide Hall, the coloured stage and radio star who is appearing at the New Theatre this week, is the latest victim of London jewel thieves."

Posted by Mavis Williams (Sessional Worker)

- Mavis found various articles in the local and national press relating to Anita Neil, an athlete and member of the Olympics team in 1970. The articles are in a cuttings file in Wellingborough Library.

Anita Neil formed part of a Great Britain relay team that set a new world record at an event in Portsmouth. Anita also won the 100 yards sprint and equalled the UK All Comers' record of 10.6 seconds. Unfortunately this record was not ratified because of slight wind assistance. Anita however went onto to represent Britain in the Mexico Olympics in 1970. Anita worked as a machinist for Ideal Clothiers in Wellingborough.

One of the articles Mavis examined reported the following:

"TO ANITA - A BRONZE", *Daily Express, Thursday 18 September 1969, submitted by Desmond Hackett in Athens.*

"Anita Neil, a dusky little 19 year old beauty, won a bronze medal for Britain this afternoon to liven a day in which our men had trailed drably in the European Games. Anita, 5ft. 4in of speed from Wellingborough, Northants, turned on a smile of happiness that matched the glowing sunshine when she realised she had won a medal. It was a joy to watch her as she jigged around, hugging her team mate Valerie Peat, whom she beat into fourth place." The article also shows a photograph of Anita running in the race.

Anita still lives in Wellingborough. If anyone knows how to contact her, we would love to talk to her about her experiences. Please contact us on 01604 590967.

Research Update - continued

In the previous Newsletter we reported on the reference to Richard Dare posted by Elizabeth Jordan. Gerald Landsberg, Sessional Worker, has pursued this lead and reports in more detail on his findings below.

Following the lead given to us by Elizabeth Jordan of Gretton Local History Society, I continued to research the family of Richard Dare. To recap, Richard Dare married Ann Medwell in 1749 and through further searches I was able to track down 10 children who were baptised and appear in Gretton Parish registers.

The eleventh child, however has proved more enigmatic because s/he does not appear in the baptismal register. However, it is possible that this child is Nathaniel Dare who was buried on 14 April 1764. One theory I have is that he was still born and was not therefore baptised.

Of the other children, John and William died during infancy, barely yet two years old. However, one of the sons, Robert, married Eliazbeth White on 13 July 1784. He appears to have had eight children, seven of whom were baptised and appear in Gretton Parish records. A daughter, named Anne, had her own daughter known as Martha with an Edward White. Martha was illegitimate and appears on the baptism register as such. Another of Richard Dare's daughters, Mary, married a John Stephenson on 2 October 1780.

Looking back at the 1851 and 1881 census it is curious to find no more mention of the Dare family. It could be that they had moved away from the area to another county. The only other people I have come across named Dare are in areas such as Devon, Leicestershire and Watford. Another possibility is that the spelling of the surname changed over time, particularly as it was not uncommon for officials to spell names in a variety of ways. Alternative spellings of Dare may be 'Dair', 'Dear' or 'Deer'. If anyone has any suggestions please contact me via the project office.

Forthcoming events

Over the coming months we will be giving presentations 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 01604 590967 and we will see what we can offer you.

- **The Oral History Perspective - 7.30pm on 23 March 2004**
Soroptimist International, Sunley Management Centre, Northampton
 - **Local history: a different perspective - 7.30pm on 7 April 2004**
Brackley and District Historical Society, Methodist Church, Brackley
 - **Latest from the Northamptonshire Black History Project - 7.30pm on 24 May 2004**
Wellingborough Archaeological and Historical Society, Wellingborough
-

Mary Seacole is the Winner of 100 Great Black Britons Campaign

Mary Seacole was nominated as the winner of the campaign to find the top 100 Great Black Britons, launched during Black History Month in October 2003.

Mary Seacole, originally from Jamaica, became a nurse in the Crimean War and was highly regarded by all those that came into contact to her. However, her contributions were largely ignored until the mid-1980s when she was 're-discovered' by Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewberry.

The results were announced to coincide with Black History Month in the United States, which takes place in February. Visit www.100greatblackbritons.com for more info.

Campaign for a statue of Mary Seacole

In November 2003, Clive Soley, MP for Ealing Acton & Shepherds Bush, hosted the launch of a campaign for a permanent memorial to Mary Seacole in London. It has recently been proposed that Mary's statue fill the vacant fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square.

To support this campaign write to your local MP urging them to pursue this action. To find out more write to: Clive Soley MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Race Action Northampton are looking for volunteers

Do you have time on your hands? Perhaps you would like to learn new skills?

If so, why not become a Volunteer with Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council (REC) in the Northampton Office.

Contact Jocelyn Williams, Racial Equality Officer, on telephone 01604 603868 or email her on jwilliams@northamptonshirerec.org.uk. You can also find out more about the REC on their website: www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk

Women's Creative Expressions: Perspectives of Black and mixed-race women

A notice from Nicola Moore, Editor, Women's Creative Expressions

I am compiling an anthology of essays, autobiography and poetry contributions that portray the perspectives of Black and mixed-race women of African and African-Caribbean descent. Themes include race, culture, gender, heritage, ethnicity and identity. The book will be a powerful medium for Black and mixed race women to explore, celebrate and reflect upon and share their experiences.

For more information please email: nickimurphy@lycos.co.uk or ring 07952 778912.

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

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:

Telephone: 01604 590967

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Comments, feedback or contributions welcome