

HISTORY

MATTERS

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**PRESENTING THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AND
CARIBBEAN PEOPLE IN BRITAIN**

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Welcome to the History Matters Journal

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 issue of the History Matters Journal. We'd like to extend our appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the Journal's growth. To those who have read and shared it across your networks, contributed pieces of research, and offered constructive criticism, thank you! The Journal was created in 2020, with the aim of providing a digital space for people to share information and ideas relating to the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain, and encourage more research in this area.

How much has changed over the last several years? The history of African and Caribbean people in Britain, or 'Black British' History, is still underrepresented and under-researched. However, there have been some major advancements in recent years, including groundbreaking heritage projects dedicated to promoting public engagement in 'Black British' history, the publication of various books - many of which have been featured in the Journal's review section, and an increase in the number of people of African and

Caribbean descent on postgraduate history courses in the UK. We believe that this Journal is contributing to this important shift. And as such, we ask that you continue to support our work in any way you can.

We are always looking for ways to improve the Journal with every issue. If you have suggestions, or constructive criticisms, please send them to us. If you come across historical material, or you have begun working on a new area of research, let us know so that this information can be shared within these pages. We are particularly interested in presenting shorter articles (between 500-1,000 words), as well as imagery, poetry and other creative works. As always, we are interested in showcasing the work of young people. This Journal intends to showcase an inclusive and accessible range of research work. So, if you are working on an aspect of history relating to African and Caribbean people in Britain, please do get in touch via: hismatters@gmail.com

History Matters Conference: 3rd New Perspectives on African and Caribbean People in Britain, 2024

Through a series of presentations and discussions, this conference seeks to provide a platform for the sharing of knowledge regarding the histories of African and Caribbean peoples in Britain.

Our previous conference convened by History Matters (2021) brought together scholars and activists to explore how young and emerging scholars of 'Black British' History, particularly those of African and Caribbean heritage, were pushing the boundaries of knowledge and redrawing the field. Many of the conference's presentations were subsequently published in *New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*, edited by Professor Hakim Adi.

This conference will be open to the public, and will again focus on highlighting research produced by young and emerging scholars, particularly those of African and Caribbean heritage, who remain poorly represented within the wider history field as well as in academia.

Call for papers

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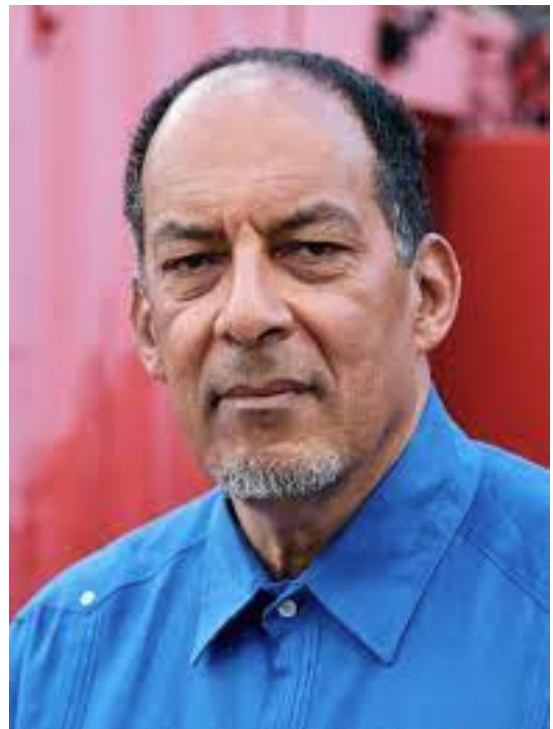
History Matters invites paper proposals for the 3rd New Perspectives on African and Caribbean People in Britain conference which will take place in November 2024 (location tbc). Proposals of up to 350 words, including a short bio, are due by 31st March 2024.

History Matters particularly welcomes research papers focusing on historical periods before 1900; on women and gender history; on LGBT+ histories; on the history of African and Caribbean people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; on the history of continental African communities and organisations in Britain; and the historical relationships established by those of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain with the African continent and the wider African diaspora. However, proposals covering all fields of 'Black British' History are welcome.

University of Chichester make Professor Hakim Adi, redundant

We are writing to inform our friends and supporters that the University of Chichester has made the unjustifiable decision to make world leading expert and the first person of African descent to become Professor of History in the UK, Professor Hakim Adi, redundant. This news comes over a month into our campaign to save the MRes History of Africa and the African Diaspora Course, which also aimed to safeguard Professor Adi's post at the university. We stand in firm solidarity with Professor Adi, who has done so much to bolster the reputation of what is otherwise a small, mid-ranking and little known university. As his students have attested, Professor Adi's expert teaching and mentorship has been a large source of recruitment and publicity for this institution, although these facts have now been forgotten. As we have stated throughout our campaign, Chichester's decision is a clear attack on the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain and globally, and we will continue our fight to hold the institution accountable for its discriminatory actions.

We should also state that, throughout this entire process, Chichester has not consulted its students or considered the impact this decision will have on their studies. Their position also completely contradicts their commitment to safeguarding students and their wellbeing. The decision to make Professor Adi redundant has plunged his



postgraduate students, who are all of African and Caribbean descent, into an unknown future. Professor Adi's redundancy provides confirmation that the MRes will not be reinstated at Chichester, cutting off a one of a kind pathway into the study of African and African Diasporic history. Despite this, we want to acknowledge the huge public support this struggle has garnered, exemplifying the great need for initiatives such as the MRes, and Professor Adi's influence on the historical field. In a short space of time, we have amassed over 12,000 signatures on our [petition to save the MRes](#),

and have begun a GoFundMe - [the Save the MRes Defence Fund](#) - for the purpose of supporting Professor Adi's students who have been impacted by Chichester's decisions, and their legal battle in light of the university's breach of the Equality Act 2010. We have raised over £3,000 in three weeks, and are so grateful to everyone who has supported us in this fight so far. We refuse to give up, and will continue to fight in defence of the integrity of our history which is under such a vicious attack in higher education and across wider society. In this fight, we appeal to everyone to please help by signing our petition, donating to the go fund me, publicly declaring your support, and continuing to hold the University of Chichester accountable for its appalling actions. For regular updates on the campaign, visit our campaign page on the History Matters website.

With thanks,

The Save MRes History of Africa and the African Diaspora campaign committee



**History
of
Africa
and the African
Diaspora**

Save the MRes Campaign update

By Hannah Francis

This fight began in July 2023, after the University of Chichester suspended all recruitment to Professor Adi's course in the MRes in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora, threatening the course's continuation and his role as course leader. The university made it clear that they were threatening the position of the first British person of African heritage to become a professor of History in the UK. Vice Chancellor, Professor Jane Longmore, and the institution came under fire for taking this action, without the consultation or knowledge of Professor Adi, and have asked for economic justification for Professor Adi's role and the course.

As reported by the *Guardian* on Sunday 23rd July:

[A] spokesperson said the university had made the difficult decision to suspend or close a number of postgraduate courses that were not viable as the cost of delivery outweighed the income from fees received. The MRes in the history of Africa and the African diaspora was suspended after a review by the curriculum planning committee.

*The spokesperson added: "Since the programme launched in 2017, the university has invested over £700,000 into the delivery of this programme but has only received £150,000 of tuition fees during this same time period."*¹

Initially, the idea for the MRes course emerged as a recommendation from the History Matters conference in 2015, much like the Young Historians Project. Intended to mainly train mature

¹ Aamna Mohdin, '[Outrage over UK university's plan to cut African history course and its professor](#)', 23/07/23.

students of African and Caribbean heritage as historians, many people of all ages have gone on to study the course. Further, the course has attracted students from Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Hong Kong as well as many from Britain. Seven MRes students have gone on to undertake studies at PhD level, six of them at the University of Chichester. The course serves histories which are currently underserved in Britain and its institutions: the histories of Black people and members of the African diaspora in Britain.

In solidarity, many of Professor Adi's past and present masters and PhD students rallied together to pen an open letter to Professor Longmore, and began our campaign to stop the redundancy of Professor Adi and the axing of the course.² The campaign gained a significant number of supporters, not only in the UK but across the world, since its launch in mid-July soon after members of History Matters learned of the news. Since, we have gained over 12,000 signatures on our petition to save the MRes, and have begun a go fund me - the Save the MRes Defence Fund - to Professor Adi's students who have been impacted by Chichester's decisions, and their legal battle in light of the university's breach of the Equality Act 2010. We have raised almost £900 in just under two weeks which our campaign team are so grateful for. This money will go towards prioritising the wellbeing and support of Professor Adi's current students, all of which have had no communication with the university in regards to how this unjustifiable decision will impact

² History Matters, '[Open Letter to the University of Chichester](#)', 13/07/23.

them, their degrees and their mental health.

As stated by his past and present students in their open letter to Longmore, Professor Adi's expert teaching and mentorship has been a large source of recruitment and publicity for this institution, although these facts have now been forgotten. As we have stated throughout our campaign, Chichester's decision is a clear attack on the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain and globally, and we will continue our fight to hold the institution accountable for its discriminatory actions.

We want to extend great thanks to those who have expressed solidarity and support for Professor Adi, the course and current students now in limbo in light of Professor Adi's redundancy.

In the first two weeks of the campaign, members of History Matters and the Young Historians Project have been in contact with networks and allies to rally together, securing a £500 donation thanks to UCU Oxford, primarily their incoming Equalities Officer Exec for UCU Oxford Branch and Young Historians Project member Holly. Professor Adi made appearances in broadcasted content including the History Hotline, a podcast dedicated to black history hosted by YHP member and PhD History student at Queen Mary University London Deanna Lyncook,³ as well as an interview with Professor Silvester Henderson, an educator and speaker.⁴

We learnt early on that the University of Chichester had been trying to keep news of Professor Adi's redundancy and course being axed, alongside a reported 17 further redundancies being made at the institution. In the university's Humanities Department, fellow colleague of Professor Adi's, Dr. Dion Georgiou, and the BA Modern History is also being threatened. A petition to support Dr. Georgiou has been started by Modern History graduate Ray, who praised both the MRes and BA courses as integral to widening our scope and looking beyond White European history within and outside of the academy.⁵

3 History Hotline, '[University of Chichester Suspends Black History Masters Course](#)', 20/07/23

4 Professor 4 Life, inc, '[An Interview with Legendary, Dr. Hakim Adi, University of Chichester - Britain, England](#)', 20/07/23

5 Change.org, '[Stop the axing of the Modern History](#)

We also got firm backing from UCU Chichester, posting their statement on 25th July, with UCU general secretary Jo Grady stating the university's decision to axe the course and the first Black British professor of the history of Africa and the African diaspora as an 'attack on Black academia.' She went on to say:

*It is no surprise that only 1% of UK professors are Black when a university like Chichester is willing to sack the UK's first African-British professor of history and shut down a course created to train Black academics. Chichester's management urgently needs to show it is committed to widening access into higher education and reverse this awful decision.*⁶

By the tail end of July, many more supporters came together across all platforms. For example, the team at Newzooroom Africa organised an interview with Professor Adi and their presenter Dudizile Ramela. Professor Adi noted that the only other member of the history department at the university to be threatened is "of Commonwealth heritage" in regards to Dr Georgiou's Cypriot and Guyanese heritage, and his teaching of history using a global, interdisciplinary framework. The university's decision to axe the only two academics centering these global and diasporic histories is evidently reflective of the failure of higher education institutions' and our current Government's lack of support for the employment and retention of Black, Asian and other academics from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and lack of willingness to include these histories in our collective memory of modern Britain, and lack of marketise these courses. Currently, just 11% of professors in Higher Education are of Black, Asian or other ethnic backgrounds, with just 1% of those identifying as Black.⁷ Further, Higher Education and our current Government

[at the University of Chichester and staff redundancy](#)', 29/07/23

6 UCU, '[University of Chichester's Axing of African History Course an 'attack on Black academia](#)', 25/07/23

7 Nadine White, '[Just 1% of UK professors are Black, new figures reveal](#)', 01/02/2022.

have a track record of threatening and targeting courses that teach diverse histories, particularly in relation to Britain and its empire from the late 16th century to the present day, such as the axing of the UK's only MA in Black British History at Goldsmiths, University of London (2021) and threats to cut courses such as the masters degrees in queer history and black British literature (2022) at the university.⁸ In addition, the publication of the Conservative Party's Inclusive Britain strategy, following the controversial publication of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities' report, further concretised the party's commitment to limit our histories being taught in schools too.⁹ Despite claiming to want to develop a more inclusive curriculum, the party is committed to pressuring teaching staff to adhere to its published impartiality guidance, limiting the opportunity to facilitate discussions around topics such as 'Critical Race theory' without penalisation.¹⁰ This hostility not only exists at university level, but permeates

8 Zak Garner-Purkis, '[UK's only Black British History course faces axe in Black History month as London university to cut 52 staff](#)', 26/10/23; see also: Vincent Møystad, '[Universities, financialisation and the fightback at Goldsmiths](#)', 12/04/22.

9 Conservative Party, '[Inclusive Britain Update Report](#)', 17/04/23

10 Conservative Party, '[Political Impartiality in Schools](#)', 17/03/23.

throughout the entire education system. Despite the sad news of Professor Adi's redundancy, we must continue to challenge this, and continuing to support this campaign and fundraiser publicly and loudly is just one way to do so.

We saw some further incredible signs of solidarity from the UCU, with a statement of support from its Black Members' Standing Committee noting that its members had all lended their signatures to the petition. Following claims from the University and its Vice Chancellor Professor Jane Longmore that the course had not made enough cash - no viable reason to cut such a rich course of African and diasporic history- the Black Members' Standing Committee demanded that:

The University of Chichester's management, including VC, Professor Longmore, must provide an immediate answer to the following:

- What impact assessment was undertaken by the University before the course was suspended and Professor Adi chosen for redundancy?
- What was the process followed in selecting Professor Adi for redundancy?
- What was the University's own criteria for suspending the course and making Prof Adi redundant?
- What plans are the University making to admit



Black students on to courses going forwards?

You can read the rest of the statement [here](#). Considering the significant strides already made by the campaign, the Oxford and Chichester UCU branches finally released a short statement calling upon UCU General Secretary Jo Grady to support the campaign at a national level on 15th August. Despite the loss of the MRes- we must continue to make noise and spread news of this ongoing campaign across the country!

Other supporters included black-led and leftist media such as the *Voice*, the *Socialist Worker* and *Soweto Live*, as well as various organisations and news sources that gave Professor Adi an opportunity to speak about his present experiences of institutional racism and discrimination, and why it is so important to teach Black Histories in our current political climate in the UK.¹¹ In a particularly pertinent interview, Professor Adi sat down with Peter Dwyer from the Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE), discussing the campaign. The interview went in depth into the subject of universities in the UK who have claimed to have taken a stand for equality with the documentation of EDI initiatives and documents, however when asked by Dwyer of his experiences of communication with the University of Chichester regarding the reasoning behind their dismissal of him and axing of the MRes he recalled that:

when I went to the person responsible for [the] EDI, he said to me, Well, I can't say anything, and I can't do anything. So if the person, Senior Manager, and responsible for these things cannot do anything, where you have a course on the history of Africa, the African diaspora that brings black students to the university- And we have to remember that Chichester... is one of the most monocultural... if I can use that expression, universities in the country...

Now what's happened, because we've been able to establish this kind of cohort[s] of black postgraduate

11 Richard Sudan, '[Students fight for Professor Adi](#)', The Voice, 17/08/23; see also: Sophie Squire, '[We'll keep fighting to save African history course - professor Hakim Adi](#)', Socialist Worker, 19/08/23; see also: Pedro Mzileni, '[Global Moves to Erase Black History Must be Opposed](#)', Soweto Live, 07/08/23

history students, probably the biggest concentration of you know, British based, you know, black historians in the country, we've not managed to do that... And as I say, in the past, they have boasted about it.

But now, it's as if it doesn't really matter. You know, that's the impression you get: it doesn't really matter, the students don't really matter, the Professor definitely doesn't matter. But more important[ly], even though the students and myself [are important] the history doesn't matter.

The behind-closed-doors nature of the University of Chichester's decision to axe the course indicates a clear disregard for the wellbeing of its students and a dedicated member of staff who has been employed by the institution since 2012. It is very clear. Institutions and our current government are not considering Black History as part of and pivotal to British History. The outcome of our campaign, despite our efforts, proves that.

However, we cannot let them forget we are here to stay, and here to fight now more than ever.

Author biography:

Hannah Francis is a Masters of Research graduate, who studied the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester. Francis's research has been published as, 'The Black Parents' Movement', a chapter in *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*. Alongside this, Francis is also a member of the Young Historians Project and History Matters.

Statement from students: Standing in Solidarity with Professor Hakim Adi

Dear friends and supporters,

We are now almost four months into our campaign, which began with the intention of saving the MRes History of Africa and the African Diaspora and Professor Hakim Adi's post from being axed by the University of Chichester. It has become a new fight, as it is clear that the university has no intention of reinstating either. The university has directed a brutal attack on our studies, future careers, and history as a discipline. Chichester University has thrown us into a state of confusion, and it is only through our unity and resolve as the largest cohort of postgraduate History students of African descent in the UK that we continue to stand as a collective and challenge their actions. We have sought legal advice to hold the university accountable for breaking the UK Equality Act of 2010 and its code of conduct.

Alongside challenging the treatment we have received as students, we stand in solidarity with Professor Adi, our supervisor and course coordinator, in fighting for the defence of our history that is under attack across the higher education sector on a global scale. We enrolled at the University of Chichester specifically to access the mentorship, knowledge and expertise of a world-leading scholar in the historical field and to access a unique, one-of-a-kind pathway to becoming future historians of Africa and the African Diaspora.

In making Professor Adi redundant, the university has made itself unsuitable to support us. We must clarify that we refuse to continue our studies at the university without Professor

Adi, and replacing him will be challenged. The University of Chichester has repeatedly demonstrated that not only do they have no sympathy for the extreme upset they have caused their students with their unfounded decision, but they also have no appreciation for how much we have contributed to the institution or historical field more broadly. For example, the university recently incorrectly stated that the MRes course has only produced one graduate in the last three years, which is a heinous and easily disprovable lie. The MRes has produced nine graduates in the stated amount of time, six of whom have gone on to study for their PhD at Chichester. As the university undoubtedly has a record of its past and current students, this lie highlights the lengths Chichester will go to discredit the successful MRes initiative and disrespect its students. Without Professor Adi, we see no future at Chichester and will keep up the struggle to find a new home for him and the MRes course. Both are too essential for the academic world to lose.

The Struggle Continues!

A.S. Francis – PhD student
Danny Thompson – PhD student
Claudius Adisa Stephens – PhD student
Aziz Abdulhay – PhD student
Tirivashe Jele – PhD student
Elaine Buchanan – PhD student
Rey Bowen – PhD student
Marlene Worrell - PhD student
Esther Stanford-Xosei, PhD Student
Meserette Kentake - MRes student
Leanard Phillip - MRes student
Emmanuel Amavor MRes student
Jabari Osaze - MRes Student
Petra Toyin Haynes - MRes Student
Gillian Benneh - MRes Student
Del White - MRes Student

Artwork by
Ameena
McConnell



<https://www.change.org/p/stop-university-of-chichester-s-axing>

Interview with the London Metropolitan Archives

Unforgotten Lives: Rediscovering Londoners of African, Caribbean, Asian and Indigenous Heritage 1560-1860

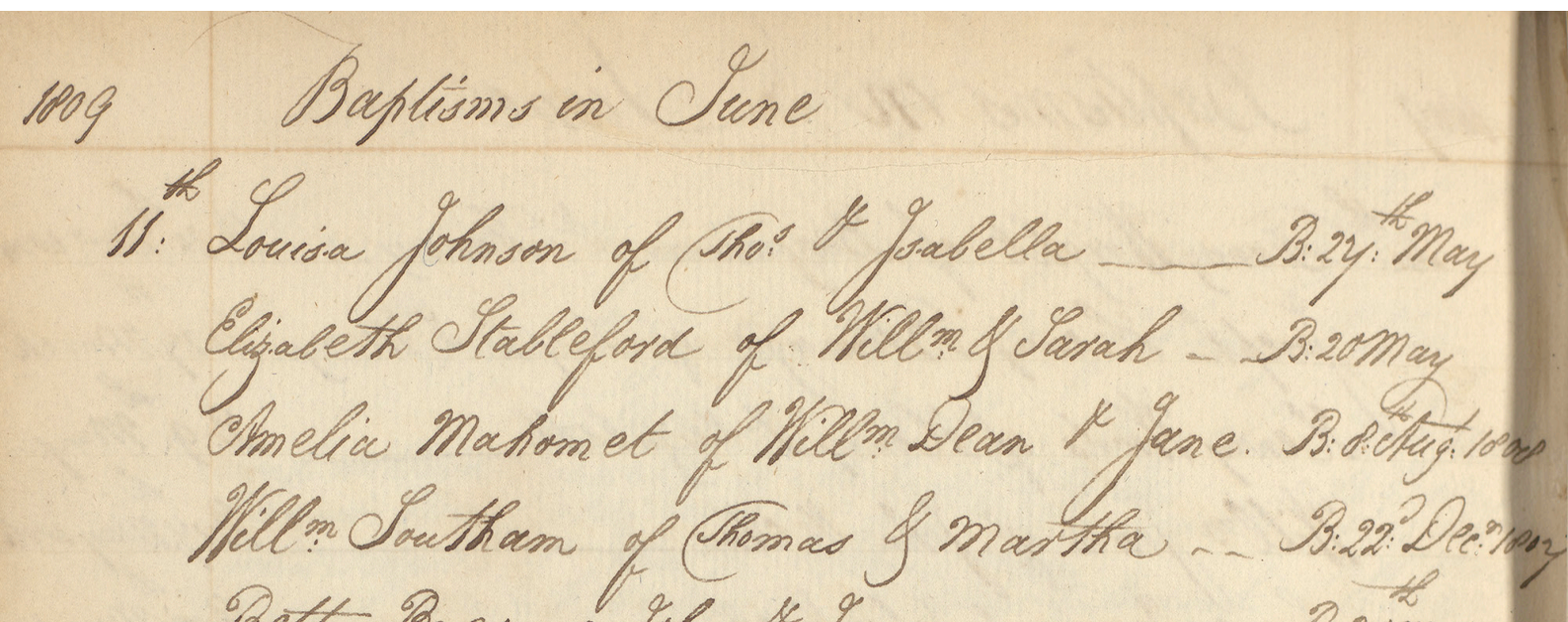
By Laurence Ward

The *Unforgotten Lives* exhibition opened in April this year with a sold-out exhibition launch event. This is an incredibly exciting moment for the London Metropolitan Archives and for Black/Asian histories in London. What does the exhibition entail? How did the development of the project begin?

Unforgotten Lives presents the stories of Londoners of African, Caribbean, Asian and Indigenous heritage who lived and worked in the city between 1560 and 1860.

The idea for the exhibition emerged when we

relaunched the *Switching the Lens* dataset in 2020. This was the merging of two volunteer projects: one at London Metropolitan Archives, the other at started by the Guildhall Library Manuscripts team which had begun in 2000s and focused on searching parish registers of baptism for references to people of colour. It was relaunched in November 2020 as a combined dataset, embedded within our online catalogue. The scope of the project was broadened, images were included, more contextual information was provided around the register entries and issues of language and terminology were discussed.





We gave the project a new name: *Switching the Lens: Rediscovering Londoners of African, Caribbean, Asian and Indigenous Heritage*. The idea of 'Switching the Lens' emphasised a change in focus and a proactive approach to highlight the importance and relevance of data about historic London's diverse communities. The project continues today and our team of volunteers are still searching the registers. Some 3300 entries have been identified to date.

As part of its relaunch, we researched some of the lives to explore what information could be found from other sources. We wanted to piece together stories so that these were not just names on pages. The idea for an exhibition emerged from this work: the idea of expanding this research and presenting some of the stories of Londoners of African, Caribbean, Asian and Indigenous Heritage over a 300-year period 1560-1860.

What are the motivations behind an exhibition like this? Why is the exhibition significant for

the London and historical community? Why is it important to highlight the lives in this exhibition?

Hopefully the exhibition works on many levels and will inspire conversations and debates. But we had one or two specific aims. The first is to counter a common misapprehension. I think most people acknowledge that London's populations are diverse. But many assume that this migration is very much a post second world war phenomenon.

A major aim of this exhibition is to provide archival evidence for the presence of people of colour in London which predates this by at least 500 years (and almost certainly more); and to show that Londoners of colour have been ever present in pretty much all aspects of London life since Tudor times.

Despite the fact that scholars and activists have been countering these myths for decades, sadly this exhibition still feels all too necessary today

because these histories continue to be neglected, marginalised and excluded from mainstream British history.

Unforgotten Lives is about raising the profile of these histories. Not as specialist history or niche history but celebrating the centrality and importance of people of colour in shaping the history of London and Britain. This exhibition is very much about being active: rebalancing, celebrating and promoting shared histories.

And finally, we want to inspire further research. To inspire people to engage with London's history in all its complexity and diversity.

Can you tell us a little bit about the research behind this project? What kind of historical materials did this research stem from?

Little of this is new. It's important to emphasise that. Our use of 'Rediscovering' in the exhibition title embraces the fact that this history has always been present.

We wanted to steer clear of the idea of uncovering 'forgotten' or 'hidden' history. Because neither statement is accurate. This exhibition shows that these histories are in plain sight in the archival record if you care to look. So, they are not hidden. And far from being forgotten, these histories have been researched extensively and celebrated by scholars and activists for decades.

This exhibition pays homage to this huge body of research – it couldn't have happened without it. In fact, the Greater London Council (whose records are held here at London Metropolitan Archives) curated an exhibition back in mid 1980s called *The Black Presence in London* which showcased similar content.

So, we began with this huge body of research and applied it to the wealth of sources held at London Metropolitan Archives. And we're spoilt for choice in that respect: you'll find parish registers, churchwardens accounts, records of civic government, court records, family papers, electoral registers, land taxation records, probate material, business records, published journals and prints and maps on display.

We were also very lucky to work with the fabulous *Mapping Black London* project research team at Northeastern University London and of course our team of Switching the Lens volunteers who provided the thousands of names from the parish registers in the first place.

How did you choose whose stories were included in this exhibition? What challenges did you face with creating an exhibition about African, Caribbean, and Asian individuals between 1560-1860?

The exhibition is based around stories of individuals. On one level, we just wanted to present interesting stories of London life. Stories people could engage with which reflect the diversity of experience and circumstance. The remarkable and the everyday. Getting away from the idea that this is specialist history but showing that it's simply part and parcel of London life. Ever present and familiar. So, showcasing stories of love, family, status, resistance, discrimination, poverty, wealth and work – familiar themes.

But focusing on individuals doesn't mean ignoring the context of these lives. When we start asking why so many of the people identified in the records might have ended up in London, we inevitably begin to examine London's historical links to colonialism and enslavement. Although colonialism was not the sole reason for the people presented here being in London during our period, it played a significant role.

In terms of challenges, there have been quite a few. Obviously, many of these issues are contentious. These are complex and uncomfortable themes: a reckoning with the difficult truths of Britain's imperial history and its ongoing legacies. They are also deeply traumatic and it's worth emphasising that much of the content exhibited is harmful and possibly triggering.

We were conscious of the responsibilities around presenting marginalised histories and histories of marginalised groups. We won't necessarily have always got it right, but we've wanted to approach subjects in as reflective and informed a way as



possible.

We've been mindful of how we present the stories, making sure this is not an exercise in 'othering'. The stories are not defined by 'race', nor do they present a single history/voice for people of colour. Although in many cases we are not able to tell the full stories in any detail, we hope to show the diversity, richness and complexity of people's lives.

Language and terminology were definitely challenging. The historic language used to describe 'race' in documents is often inaccurate and imprecise and poses difficulties for interpreting data. Such language is often itself racist and harmful and this is why we've included trigger warnings throughout.

We've thought carefully about the language adopted in our own description work too and strived to use terms that communities and individuals use to describe themselves. But we

acknowledge that terminology is not universally agreed upon and we recognise our own work may cause offence or harm.

We've also needed to consider the limits to archival sources: the omissions and silences; the fact that these are fragments of lives; that we often don't know, for example, birth names; that individuals are rarely given voice; and that they are so often being written about and categorised by the record creators.

Conversely, however, we are dependent on individuals being 'racialised' in the records. There are many examples of individuals who we know to be people of colour from other sources but who are not identified as such in the archival record and who potentially remain invisible to researchers in this respect.

Who are some of the historical figures that this project uncovers? Does the exhibition cover any well-known black figures in London? If so, how

does the exhibition change our perception of these individuals?

We feature some 50 individuals in the exhibition. We encounter servants, princes, sailors, soldiers, diplomats, writers, poets and publishers, activists and abolitionists, musicians and performers, entrepreneurs, traders and skilled artisans.

There are many familiar figures featured: Dean Mahomed who set up the first Indian restaurant in London in 1810; Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana, abolitionists, writers and founding members of the Sons of Africa in 1787; Dido Belle brought up in an aristocratic family at Kenwood House, Hampstead from 1760s; Ignatius Sancho, the first person of African heritage to vote in a Parliamentary election in 1774; and Ann Sancho, his wife, who established one of the first Black publishing

businesses in 1800s; Jonathan Strong and James Somerset who challenged racism in landmark court cases in 1760s and 1770s; radical activist Robert Wedderburn who linked movements for working class rights with demands for an end to slavery and called for simultaneous revolutions in Jamaica and England; Ellen and William Craft who staged an intervention at the Great Exhibition in 1851 to protest slavery in US; and Phillis Wheatley who published her volume of poetry in London in 1773, becoming the first published African American woman poet. It is also possible that we have identified the name of the Black servant of painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose identity until now has been in question.

There are of course many more people featured who are less well known, such as Mary Fillis, a Moroccan woman baptised in 1597; Prince Dederi Jaquoah, who was baptised in the City



of London in 1611; Katharine Auker from Barbados who takes her employer to court in 1690; John Morgan, a Bengali Muslim, who travels to London to look after a cheetah for the governor of Madras in 1764; Yemmerrawanyea, a First Nations Australian who performed a song of the Eora Nation in London in 1790s, thought to be the first such documented performance in Europe; Amos Anderson an African American sailor who served in the Royal Navy and ends up as a Greenwich Pensioner in the Royal Hospital for Seamen in 1813; Assing, a Chinese cook on board an East India Company ship who dies in 1815; and Fanny Eaton who modelled for pre-Raphaelite artists in 1860s. We could keep going as there are many more!

Their individual stories are sometimes astonishing, other times, more every day. But they are richly varied and collectively they speak from the heart of London's history, reframing perceptions of immigration and presenting evidence of the complex historical relationships between London, the UK and the world.

What are the most interesting features of this exhibition?

It's an obvious point but the exhibition makes clear the global nature of London's history and development. Colonialism was not something which just happened overseas, it was experienced on the streets of London. London was transformed, both directly and indirectly, by the wealth and power generated through enslavement and colonialism and its history cannot be separated from these colonial links. Its populations were just one visible embodiment of these links. This history is everywhere if you choose to see it.

In some respects, the most exciting thing about the exhibition is that this is only the very beginning. The wealth of information found researching *Unforgotten Lives* suggests that we have only scratched the surface. For every story which is presented here, there was another which we had to overlook; and for many of these lives, there are multiple questions which

remain unanswered and await further research. We hope to continue that research and we hope that visitors will be inspired by these stories to explore further.

The potential to connect some of the lives featured is tantalising. A name in one document can sometimes link or lead to another story. We might find that two individuals lived so close to each other as to beg the question: did they know each other; did they ever meet? The idea that communities existed and developed over the centuries is interesting in this respect.

The fact that many of the stories featured in the exhibition are fragmentary, also encourages us to approach London's history in different ways. That individuals are documented in archival records provides indisputable evidence of presence, but sometimes we can only imagine the wider stories and this requires us to engage more creatively with the records.

How has the public received the exhibition so far?

A major aim of this exhibition is to inspire conversation and discussion. We set up a reflection zone in our Information Area to encourage visitor responses to the exhibition and provide further reading around the displays. It's early days but we have had positive comments so far. We would love people to come and view the exhibition and give us feedback.

The exhibition is free to the public and is open until March 2024. What are the plans for the exhibition over the next year and beyond? What are the LMA's aims for continued engagement with the exhibition and early-modern Black and Asian histories?

We have been busy over the past month creating an outdoor version of the exhibition which will be displayed at Aldgate Square throughout July and move to St Paul's Cathedral Gardens in August. We're running regular curators' tours and there are a series of private viewings in July, August and September with a chance to see

additional original material not currently on display. We've made some great connections with researchers working in this area, and we hope that there will be more before the exhibition ends.

We're planning a programme of talks, a conference in September and there's been a call for artists to create artistic responses to the exhibition. We're keen to plan other exciting events. The *Switching the Lens* project continues with an ever-growing team of volunteers; and we are working to apply what we've learnt about language and terminology to the wider catalogues at LMA to remove harmful language in catalogue descriptions or at least provide warnings about content and provide context.

Author biography:

Laurence Ward is Assistant Director at London Metropolitan Archives, with 20 years of experience in archive management.

...man baptizatus erat. 2^o die Octobris.
 Susanna Howard filia Ricⁱ baptizata erat 16^o die Octobris.
 Francisca Kriston Baptizata erat 17^o die Decembris.
 Charles A boy by Etmiacōn. x. or xii. yers old brought by
 Sr. Walter Rawliffe from Guiana baptizd 13^o Februarij.
 In^o 1593. Ursula filia Johis Dine baptizata

The Historians Toolkit: using film as a historical source, part 1

By Anna Osarose

Films can reveal rich and significant information about a particular period of time; they can reveal attitudes in culture and provide insight into the political and social climate of the era under research. Film has been an influential and important part of human life for decades; it has been used to promote political agendas, share ideas, advertise, and entertain. It can be considered essential that modern historians use film as part of their toolkit as film was the first form of mass communication in the 20th century.¹ Nevertheless all film, like any source must come under scrutiny.

Modern historians highlight the value of using film as a primary source however the source must be subject to thorough examination. It is also important to note that the analysis of a film does not only apply to what is on screen but behind the camera too. The entirety of the production needs to be taken into account, thus my use of the term 'film' is not limited to mainstream blockbuster movies but encompasses non-fiction film such as documentaries, newsreels and advertisements.

The National Archives provides a helpful checklist of interrogative questions that could be asked when analysing film sources; some of these questions will be applied to a one-minute public information film about new laws protecting people of colour from discrimination in housing and employment.

The one-minute public information filler is a 1 National Archives, '[Can you believe your eyes?: Using film as evidence in history](#)', archived 02/02/2022.

primary source released in 1969 by the Central Office of Information (COI)² - a medium used by the UK government to (in a questionable manner) communicate to the public about issues such as education, rights, health and safety.³ In this particular film, the public is informed about changes to the Race Relations Act 1968. The intended audience is for both 'white' British citizens, as well as people of colour, who are instructed during the film to get advice from a Citizens Advice Bureau or the Race Relations Board if they are a victim of racial discrimination. This government film has a clear message from the COI, that 'racial discrimination is an ugly business' and goes on to highlight changes in the Race Relations Act 1968, which officially came into action on 26 November 1968.⁴ The changes made to the existing 1965 Race Relations Act, now made it unlawful for people to discriminate against people of colour and stop them from accessing 'jobs, housing, supplying goods and services to the public' based on their 'race' or the colour of their skin.

The film uses the analogy of football, with scenes of a football match, fans, and a voiceover describing the 'funny crowd, the British, who shout our heads off demanding fair play in a game of football, but outside some of us stand by watching others being kicked around'. The analogy of 'fair play'

2 Central Office of Information (COI), '[Race Relations Board](#)', 1969.

3 National Archives, Central Office of Information: Public Information Films, Ref: INF 32

4 COI, 'Race Relations Board'.



Evidence of housing
discrimination in the UK,
Central Office of Information,
1969



Evidence of employment
discrimination in the UK, Central
Office of Information, 1969

continues throughout the short film to promote equal rights and reinforce the Race Relations Act 1968. The reprimanding-like tone of the voiceover, scenes of black and brown people being turned away from jobs and housing, along with the scenes of children from different 'racial' backgrounds playing together, appears to set the scene for a strong message promoting equality. One might even go as far as feeling enamoured by the Great Work of the British, ensuring people of colour are treated fairly and not 'kicked around' as the voiceover declares. However, there can (in most cases) be a more complicated story behind a source - this is the historian's duty to uncover.

In the case of this public information filler released in 1969, the source carries wider historical significance. During the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Britain was part of a series of race related disturbances, where gangs of white British people attacked black people, vandalised their homes, community centres and roamed the streets 'ni**er-hunting', indiscriminately attacking black people.⁵ Even in light of this attack, being black carried a new weight in the mid-1960s, it marked a time of political formation, collective activism, and a fresh

energy for positive change from black people.⁶

Furthermore, the U.S. civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s came to Britain. In 1957, Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King visited London, six years later amidst continued racial tension in Britain, 1963 witnessed the 4-month boycott in Bristol, where the Omnibus Company refused to hire Asian or black crew members. The boycott aimed to 'draw attention to racial discrimination in Britain, and it is believed that this event led to the passing of the 1965 Race Relations Act.'⁷ Moreover in 1965 a group Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) was set up to campaign against racism in Britain, and in February 1968, nine months before the Race Relations Act 1968 came into force, African American novelist James Baldwin spoke about pursuing freedom, to an audience at the West Indian Students' centre in London's Earl's Court.⁸

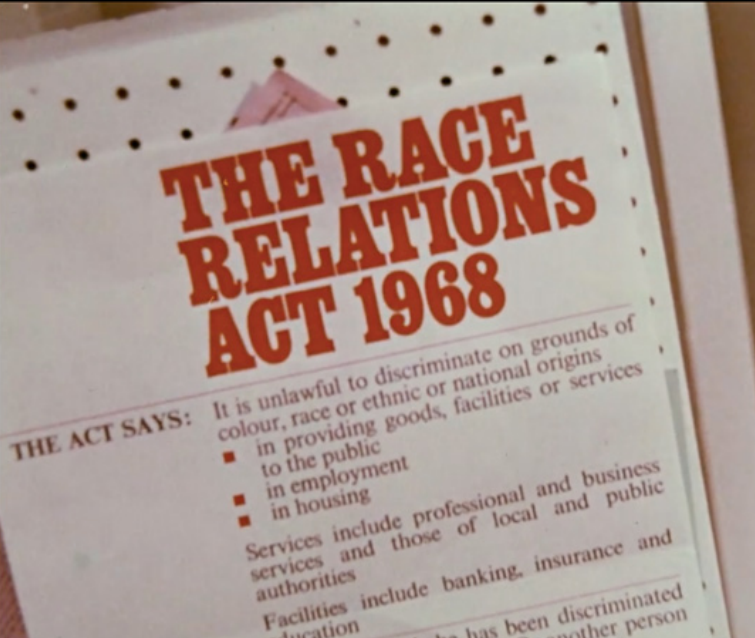
Having taken into account some of the wider historical events around the time the public

⁶ Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985*, (University of California Press, 2019), p.6-7

⁷ Sisanda Myataza 'Black History Month - How far have we really come?', 29/10/2021

⁸ Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985*, p.1

⁵ David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.346 - 347.



A glimpse of The Race Relations Act 1968 to legitimise the message in the film, COI 1969

THE RACE RELATIONS BOARD
ST. STEPHENS HOUSE,
VICTORIA EMBANKMENT,
LONDON S.W.1.

where people of colour can go for support if they are treated unfairly in light of the new law COI 1969

information film was released, a new set of questions arise for the historian that require further examination: was the film aiming to ease tension? To what extent was the film in response to political activism, campaigns and push-back from the black community? Questions also need to be asked around the preservation of the film, and censorship.⁹ Jeffrey Richards explains that 'the aim of censorship universally was to maintain moral, political, social and economic status quo and avoid anything smacking of controversy.'¹⁰

Asking questions about the one-minute public information film has started to show the possibilities of what historians can learn from using film as a historical source. Using this particular film begins to open up an understanding of what was happening in 1950s - 1970s Britain, as 'films and television programmes do not operate in a vacuum but respond directly to what is going on around

them.'¹¹ The examination of the public information film only begins to scratch the surface. If historians who aim to use film as evidence, ensure their source is embedded in concrete research, interrogation of facts, and study of audience reception, in which the film was produced,¹² especially when it comes to black history, valuable insight to confidently move forward in expanding the territory of black historical research is likely to be one of the natural outcomes.

Author biography:

Anna obtained her PGCE and QTS in 2009, and since then has taught in a range of educational settings, including mainstream schools, alternative provisions and university. She holds a BA in English (Literature), MA in English Education and MA in Black British History.

⁹ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies, Studying History on Film*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.192

¹⁰ Jeffrey Richards in Sarah Barber and C.M. Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text, A Student's Guide to Approaching Historical Sources*, (Routledge, 2010), p.78

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

In Memory of Roy Sawh

(1934-2023)

By Tionne Parris

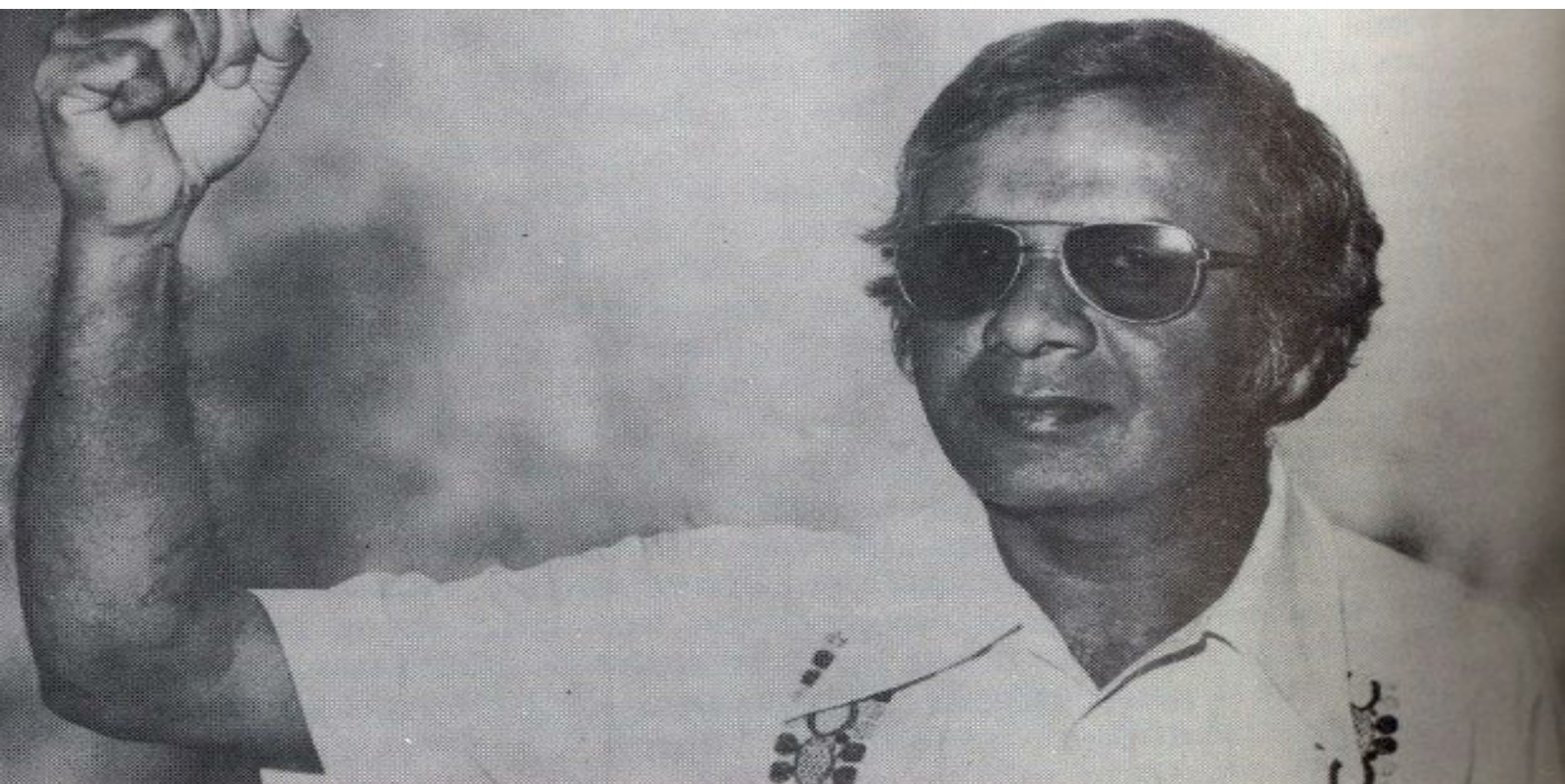
In April of 2023, we received the sad news that Roy Sawh had died. As a notable activist of the British Black Power movement, Sawh contributed greatly to struggles for equality and justice in Britain. He emerged in an era in which the concept of ‘political blackness’ was at its height, and Sawh aligned himself with people of colour throughout Britain. He stated: ‘To be black in those days was defined by the fact that you were not white.’¹ Between 1960 and 1980, he was at the forefront of anti-racist grassroots organising. In

¹ Roy Sawh interviewed by Bryan Knight, [‘A Speaker Like No Other’](#), (feat. Roy Sawh), YouTube, May 2020.

recent years, he had generously contributed to a number of interviews, conducted by independent researchers and academics alike. In 2021, the Young Historians Project interviewed him as part of our upcoming project, *The History of Black British History*. Using his own words, we would like to shine a light on Roy Sawh’s life and his impact.

Early life in Guyana and Britain

Born on January 11th 1934 in what was then ‘British Guiana’, Sawh was affected at an early age by the conditions of labourers on sugar plantations. He reflected on his childhood, saying:





Labourers and children of Indian heritage walking down a street in Guyana in the early 1920s,
The Field Museum Library, CC BY-SA

I grew up on a sugar estate and a sugar estate is the next thing to slavery, really. Because when slavery was abolished the British had to find some way to bring all the workers on the sugar estates, because in those days sugar was one pound a pound, and it was very vital to the British economy.²

From an early age, Sawh was faced with the grim realities of colonial rule when he learned of his parents' past. His father was born in Bihar, India, and at six years old, he was sent from Calcutta to 'British Guiana' and bonded to a sugar estate. He would not be released from this work until he was around twelve years old. Like his father, Sawh too was put to work as a child. His mother, however, wanted her children to escape this cycle of hard labour: 'my mother made sure that we had a good education, so we would be aspiring to better things and get better jobs'.³

Growing up, Sawh shared that as a student in school, he was not taught anything about his heritage or history. This perpetuated the myths of Empire:

2 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr, 'Interview With Roy Sawh', Sounds From The Park, 28/06/2013

3 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr, 'Interview With Roy Sawh', Sounds From The Park, 28/06/2013

I didn't know my parents came from India. I thought we were always West Indians. But it's when I came to England - then I realised that my parents were from India, because I started to read history books... Well, they taught history to suit themselves. To portray how great they were, and all they did was, they came to help the colonials. And we, who were the recipient[s] of the injustice perpetrated by the English, we knew that that was not right.⁴

In 1958, Sawh decided there were no prospects for him in his birthplace, and so he sought a life and education abroad: 'I realised I had to learn, I had to know more about history, and a reason why we came. Because in Guyana, we never had a university. If you want university education, you had to come abroad'.⁵ He saved any money he earned and aspired to go to England, where he could become an accountant and earn enough money to return home and provide for his parents. Eventually, he purchased a ticket to Victoria Station, London, and began his new life. His introduction to Britain, however, was not what he expected:

When I came [laughs], I was sitting at Victoria station for hours and I was looking around, and it was dark

4 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project, January 2021.

5 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project, January 2021.

*and foggy and, and I'm going, 'Maybe I'm in the wrong country. This is not the England I read about when I was in school. This is not the England they used to show us in films in the country about, you know, Great Britain.'*⁶

His first job was cleaning toilets in a hotel. This, Sawh said, was a great disappointment - 'I wouldn't do that in Guyana, no matter how poor I am'.⁷ Nevertheless, he had come to study and he tried to follow his plan. He enrolled in a night school and continued to work as a cleaner alongside this. After a year of working and studying, the strain of juggling the two became too much and Sawh quit his studies. However, one Sunday afternoon after work, he happened upon a sight that would change the trajectory of his life.

*I finished about two o'clock, and I came out and I looked across and I see all these people in what is called Hyde Park – I didn't know that was Hyde Park, Speakers' Corner, I knew nothing about it – and I went down there, over, and I saw all these people and I saw these people speaking on the platform. I just stood there fascinated and then I went to one platform and I saw a black guy was speaking, and I just stood there and thought, 'My god, this is fascinating.'*⁸

Sawh returned the following week and witnessed a speaker from the Socialist Party explain the history of colonialism in Guyana. After a brief chat with the speaker, he learned the Socialist Party held regular meetings at which they discussed 'the social principles of justice'. He was enthralled and decided to try speaking at Hyde Park himself. After a shaky start, the experience invigorated him: 'I came down from the platform and then I realised that, if I had to speak, or wanted to speak, I had to know what I was talking about'.⁹ From then on, he sought out materials to educate himself any way that he could:

When I walked the streets of London, I used to pick up newspapers from the bin. And I used to

6 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr.

7 Ibid,

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.



take them home and read them, because that's the only way I could get information. I didn't have a radio. And then when I became unemployed, I spent my winter days in the library...I was fascinated by the different books.¹⁰

In this quest for knowledge he enrolled again in educational courses, this time studying philosophy over the summer, and returned to Hyde Park regularly to practise speaking:

*I got better at it, because I knew my history, I checked up, started reading about what's happening in the world, the British Empire, and I learned more and more and more and more about it.*¹¹

Through his studies, and using his lived experience, Roy Sawh developed an anti-colonial and anti-racist critique of Britain and transmitted his views through his appearances at Speaker's Corner. The late 1950s in Britain were characterised by widespread social tension, with the colour bar and rampant racism a part of daily life for black people in Britain.

With this context, Sawh (among others) viewed

10 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project, January 2021.

11 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr

Speakers Corner as a venue for marginalised people to have their voices heard, at a time where it was difficult to find a platform in print, in the media, or elsewhere. Standing at Speaker's Corner, people could gather, learn, and most importantly mobilise.

So, he honed his craft and became more confident in speaking. Somehow, the leader of Guyana at the time – Cheddi Jagan – heard about Sawh's activities and offered him the chance to study officially at Moscow State University and he readily embraced the chance to learn more at an international institution. Unfortunately his time there was short lived when he witnessed, what he believed to be, instances of violent racism in the area:

*When I went there, I was really disappointed. Because black students, their bodies were floating in the Moscow river, stabbed by local people. And the authorities refused to accept that it was happening. And when I complained they wouldn't do anything about it. So I called a strike among the students, and they deported me.*¹²

As a result, he returned to London in 1965 and went back to working in a hotel. Nevertheless, his experience had only motivated him further. He continued to frequent Speakers' Corner, and slowly built a reputation for himself as a fiery orator.

'King of Speakers Corner'

When prompted to share who inspired him to speak up in the first place he listed Karl Marx, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Voltaire, Satre and Stokely Carmichael. Channelling these compelling individuals at Speakers Corner, he was known for his engaging method of speech. Surviving video clips show how he would mock hecklers and respond in jest to those who disagreed with him.¹³ He soon became known as the 'King' of Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner through his witty critiques of the British empire. His style was a deliberate choice, as he said 'When I started to speak, I was

12 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project
13 Roy Sawh, [Speakers Corner Hyde Park PT 2](#), YouTube, 30/12/2011

very serious. And then I realised that people wouldn't stay [and] listen to you if there wasn't some reason. And I decided to introduce humour. Because people would appreciate what you say more, if you had humour behind it.'¹⁴ Sawh was asked what he learned most from his time in Hyde Park, to which he responded: 'I learned you had to be prepared to accept different people might have different ideas, even though despicable they are or, you know, ridiculous they are and I always accept the basis that people are entitled to their own opinion.'¹⁵

However, his militant Black power rhetoric eventually got him into trouble with the law. In 1967, while on the podium, he was asked, 'If you were in (Apartheid) South Africa, how would you solve their problems?' to which he quipped: 'Every white family in South Africa has a Black cook. With rat poison, you can solve the problem overnight.'¹⁶ He had been under surveillance by police already, so he was charged under the Race Relations Act for this comment and prosecuted for 'inciting racial hatred', for which he paid a fine of £120 (over £2,700 today). Whilst many may agree that the statement was inflammatory, it is worth noting that this was a year before Enoch Powell gave his infamous 'Rivers of Blood', without consequence. Sawh wasted no time in pointing out this hypocrisy and would go on to highlight the fact that the Race Relations Act, which was enacted to prevent racial discrimination in Britain, saw 5 of its first 6 charges applied to Black people.

UCPA & Free University for Black Studies

In 1965, Sawh allied himself with Michael De Freitas (later Michael X) in the creation of the Racial Action Adjustment Society. From this, in 1967, Sawh also went on to form the short-lived Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA) alongside Obi Egbuna. The organisation's members had been meeting regularly at Speakers Corner and it was a precursor to Black Unity and Freedom Party, as

14 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project
15 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr.
16 Ibid.

well as other Black Panther adjacent formations in Britain.

Around this time, Sawh returned to formal education briefly when he was granted a scholarship at a college in Birmingham, but again he found himself at odds with the educational authorities who ran the course:

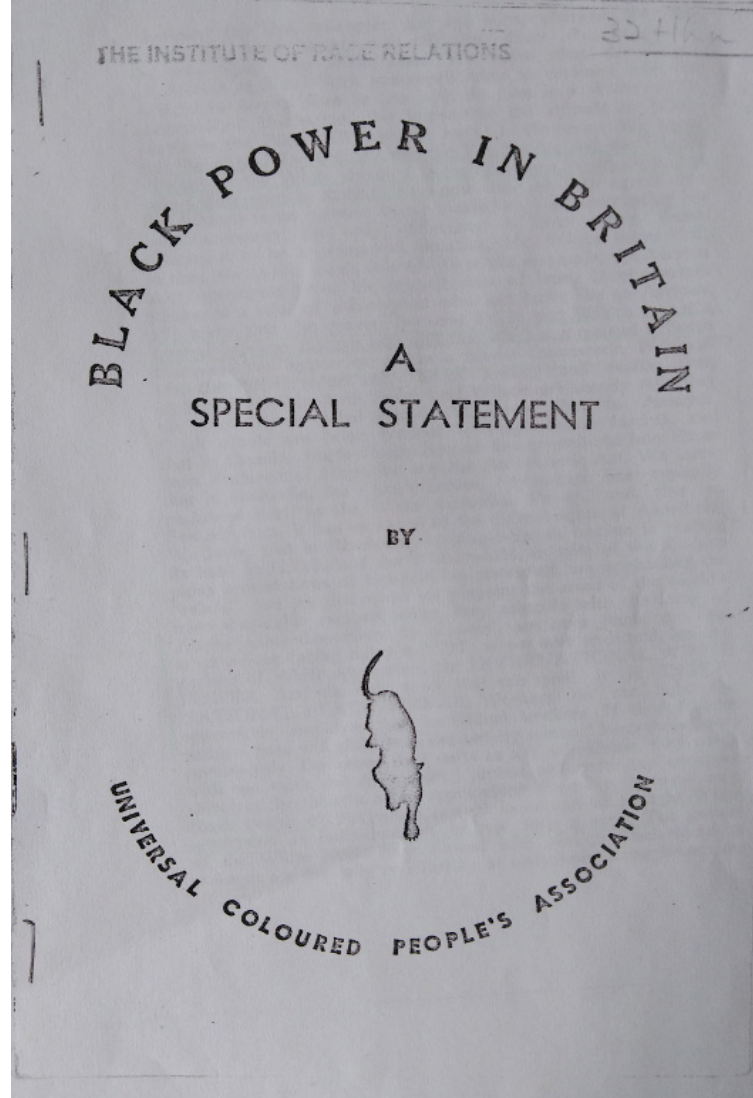
When I went to classes, when question time come, I would ask question. And it's always the same routine, how we [the British] went to civilise the Africans, and how they went to develop the country. And I keep saying to the professor. "But if you develop the country, and you spend all this time, how come the country is still underdeveloped?" I had a grant from the London Education Authority, and they withdrew my grant, and I was kicked out. Then I came back to London. And then I decided I can't work with these white people. We have to do our own thing. And that's how we started.¹⁷

Reflecting on his consistently bad experiences in education, Sawh resolved to create the Free University for Black Studies in 1969. Rooted in the emergence of supplementary schools throughout the 1970s, classes were free for all to attend. Its goal was to offer lessons in history and other disciplines to people of colour, for people of colour, created by people of colour. The university met three times a week according to Sawh, 'Monday night for Asian studies, Wednesday for Caribbean studies and Friday for African Studies'.¹⁸ It aimed to disrupt colonial narratives that were taught in other British academic spaces, and Sawh stated that at the Free Black University 'critical thinking and intellectual freedom was the motto'.¹⁹ While the university no longer exists, it should be remembered as a crucial interlocutor in the organisation of independent black education, and it remains a shining example of what can be achieved at a community level.

Through it all, Sawh crossed paths with historic figures like Stokely Carmichael, Claudia Jones, 17 Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.



Black Power in Britain, UCPA pamphlet, 1967, Special Branch Files, UK

and Michael X, and in 1987 published an autobiography exploring his life titled *From Where I Stand*.²⁰ He continued to visit Speakers Corner for 30 years. When asked why he finally stopped, he said: 'When we got rid of Maggie Thatcher as Prime Minister, I thought, 'Mission accomplished', you know. I stopped speaking and by that time I was getting on too'.²¹

From his life, we may draw vital lessons for aspiring young historians of today. British life has changed in a myriad of ways since the 1960s, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the activists who came before us. People like Roy Sawh laid the foundations upon which we stand, by fighting for our history to be told in this country. Before we ended our interview, back in 2021, we asked what advice Sawh could give young people about the future and about

20 Roy Sawh, *From Where I Stand*, London: Hansib Publications), 1987

21 Roy Sawh, interviewed by Rosa Vilbr

our current moment. To this, he said:

My advice to them is to take care of your community, take care, have an interest in your history, try and do some community work to help those who are less fortunate. And to make sure that people get the right education, you can help and you can help by starting to do something now. Not tomorrow, now.²²

Author biography:

Tionne Parris is a PhD History student at the University of Hertfordshire. Parris specialises in African American protest history, with emphasis on the U.S. Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her research focuses on Black Radical Women (namely Communist and Communist affiliated activists) of the mid-20th Century in the U.S and the long-term impact of their activism on the Black Power Movement. Parris is a coordinator of the Young Historians Project, and member of History Matters.

²² Roy Sawh, interviewed by the Young Historians Project.

Roy Sawh, copyright Sophie Polyviou,
Sounds From The Park



From Black Boy Lane to La Rose Lane: Our Fight for Racial Dignity and Pride in Haringey

By Councillor Michelle Simmons-Safo

Why rename Black Boy Lane?

The question of changing the name of the street was raised by a resident as part of a consultation started in the wake of the death of George Floyd. Haringey Council had an extensive consultation and engagement with the community. The feedback found that many other residents shared the concerns about the racial connotations of the name and the impact its continued use has on Black people in Haringey.

In the first phase of consultation, it was decided that if renaming were to go ahead, the street would be renamed as 'La Rose Lane' in celebration of John La Rose, a former Haringey resident, publisher, essayist, poet, and champion of Black history and equality.

Haringey Council was committed to acting to both address inequality and celebrate the rich diversity of our borough.

The Campaign to rename Black Boy Lane, can be traced back to the 90's, with Baroness Martha Osama, leading to successfully rid the Pub of its name and the caricature. However, the change of the name of the road did not go any further

The zeal to peruse this change was reignited after the murder of George Floyd and supported by the votes within the Cabinet and elected Councillors. There was also support from the wider branches of the Constituency Labour Party. Nevertheless, as with any campaign it was not all smooth sailing, there was opposition to the name change, however the prevailing sentiment was that change was needed and essential.

Hence; the 23rd January 2023 was a monumental day. The unveiling of La Rose Lane filled me with euphoria. I simultaneously laughed and cried. I did not believe in my lifetime that I would see this change.

I am a daughter of the soil of Tottenham. My parents brought our home in Tottenham N15 when, my Mother was pregnant with me in 1968

My earliest memories of Black Boy Lane was walking the full length of the road with my older two siblings with a paraffin can in my hand. Seeing the name conjured up uneasy feelings. I was 8 years old.

I do not know why, but as a little Black girl, I thought that this was a road where Black children were killed particularly Black Boys. Later when I started Tottenham County Secondary School and we learnt about the transatlantic slave trade. My peers and I thought it was a place where slaves were sold at auction to the highest bidder.

It was unavoidable not to pass the road as it was on route to all my local destinations so there was no escape. I would pass and “kiss my teeth” as it was offensive and I had a feeling of apathy that I will never see the back of this constant reminder of my position in society as a Black woman.

History is based on interpretation as well as facts, I may not have had the precise facts surrounding the naming of the road, however I was an expert in the ramifications of passing the road.

This road did not fill me with pride or raised shoulders, unlike when I pass Nelson Mandela Road in South East London. Also passing the Mary Seacole statue fills me with Pride and

Belonging. Closer to home the statue's at Hackney Town Hall, makes me feel important and that I belong. The once Black Boy Lane gave the total opposite, feelings of subservience and despair.

Author biography:

Michelle Simmons-Safo is an Activist and a Poet. She has a Degree in Psychology, and Masters Degree in Psychiatric Social Work, AMHP accreditation and Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and management from Middlesex University. She has worked 22 years managing mental health services within the NHS. Currently is managing CAMHS in Hackney and is an elected Councillor in her Home ward. Michelle uses her poetry to amplify the voices of the marginalised communities, especially the Black community.



Records in Focus: The National Archives and Windrush 75

By Kevin Searle

It might have come to your attention that the 22nd June 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush.¹ While it's certainly true that the landing of the Windrush has received a disproportionate amount of focus in the broader study of African and Caribbean people in Britain,² it might nonetheless be worth highlighting some of the documents that The National Archives has digitised to mark this important anniversary. These resources will be of use to students from Key Stage 3 onwards, as well as to researchers new to the area, and those more experienced.

The [Windrush portal](#) on The National Archives' website provides access to the resources produced to mark the occasion, including blogs, a podcast, and educational material. Also of interest to students in the area will be the digitised selection of records which appears under the heading [Commonwealth migration since 1945](#). This includes a range of documents, from records concerning the socio-economic

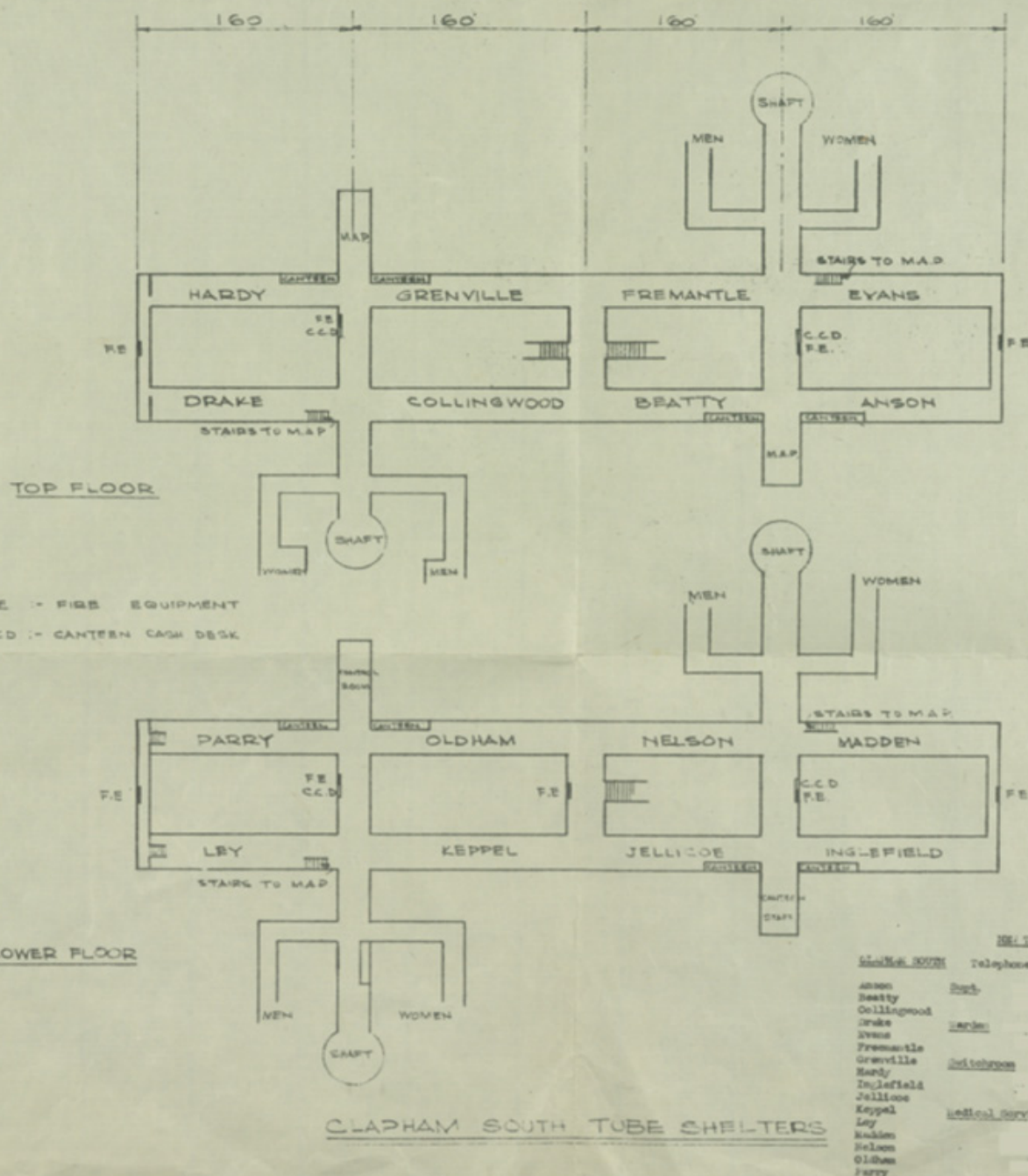
1 Interestingly, the passenger list actually records the date of arrival as the 21st of June, 1949. This has led some researchers, such as Matthew Mead, to suggest that the ship spent a night in port before disembarkation. See: Matthew Mead, 'Empire Windrush: Cultural Memory and Archival Disturbance' *MoveableType*, Vol.3, (2007) p.11
2 Hakim Adi, *African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History*, (London: Penguin, 2023).

conditions in the British Caribbean (such as a telegram about a labour dispute at The Tate and Lyle estate in Jamaica, in the late 1930s), to documents relating to the Race Relations Acts of the sixties (such as a leaflet explaining the functions and powers of the Race Relations Board). It is important to remember that The National Archives is the official archive of the UK government and so its records do more often than not represent the voice and perspective of the state (although there are exceptions like the pamphlet 'A West Indian in Britain', co-authored by a young Dudley Thompson and HD Carberry and containing biting observations about what the newly arrived are likely to find in Britain).³

One document that caught my eye in particular is a hand-drawn diagram of the Clapham South Tube Shelters.

It's a relatively well-known fact that four years

3 It might also be worth noting that the Windrush landing cards are not included. These documents (which would have helped many wrongfully labelled as 'illegal immigrants' after spending decades living, working, and contributing to Britain, to prove their status) were destroyed by the Home Office, and never transferred to The National Archives. For a broader discussion of what Amelia Gentleman describes as the "Windrush Betrayal", see: Amelia Gentleman, *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* (London: Faber, 2019).



after the shelters were opened during the Second World War, they were used to provide temporary accommodation for many of the migrants who arrived aboard the Windrush. Further documents show that 236 people from the ship stayed at the Shelter and they were charged around 2 shillings a night, which included [board and meals](#).⁴ Their location too, near the top of Coldharbour Lane provides one of the key reasons that the Caribbean community in London, developed around Brixton.

Taking a closer look at the document however we

4 Lisa Berry-Waite, [‘Empire Windrush passengers accommodated at the Clapham South deep shelter’](#), National Archives Blogs, accessed 18 August, 2023)

can see some familiar names as well, as the tunnels were named after British naval commanders. On the top floor is ‘Drake’, presumably after Sir Francis Drake, one of Britain’s earliest traders in enslaved people, who trafficked thousands of Africans into bondage in the Americas and was also the cousin of John Hawkins whose role in the slave-trade is much better known. Also named is Keppel, presumably after Augustus Keppel, the commander-in-chief of the Jamaica station during the Seven Years War, who fought to defend British slave-trading interests; and the list goes on of violent racists involved in various colonial campaigns.

When naming the tunnels after these figures, it’s

unlikely the designers thought the descendants of the people the former had been instrumental in the oppression of, would one day occupy those very spaces – driven to migrate by the continuing legacy of poverty and hardship in Britain's colonies. These entangled histories – literally written (or at least hinted at) on the walls through signage as well – long before the West Indian migrants had even stepped foot on the Windrush, once again confirm A Sivanandan's oft-quoted statement: 'We're here because you were there.'

These original documents provide an important entry point into researching post-war migration at the National Archives and make vital connections to the broader contexts and entangled histories which gave it rise.

Author biography:

Kevin Searle works as a records specialist at The National Archives. His most recent publication is the chapter, 'Before Notting Hill: The Causeway Green "rioting" of 1949', in the book, *Black British History: New Perspectives*

Review - Pearl Prescod: A Black Life Lived Large

By A.S. Francis



In June of 2022, the Institute of Race Relations published an exciting new resource, tracing the life, times and influence of Pearl Prescod (1920-1966). The production of this pamphlet, entitled *Pearl Prescod: A Black Life Lived Large*, was a huge step in correcting an omission in the historical record.

Pearl Prescod, born on the Island of Tobago, arrived in London on a music scholarship, settled in the Notting Hill area of London, a historical hub for Britain's Caribbean community, and became a central figure in Black cultural activism and community resistance against racism. As

the Institute of Race Relations has articulated, the pamphlet 'tells the largely overlooked story of a generation of anti-colonial artists and activists who questioned Britain's role in the decades following World War Two'.¹

Pearl Prescod had an impactful yet relatively short career due to her unexpected passing in 1966. Her story has often appeared peripherally within explorations of more well known Black activist women of her generation, such as Claudia Jones and Amy Ashwood Garvey. However, as *A Black Life Lived Large* demonstrates, Prescod left her mark in a number of fields, including in performing arts and within the local Black community. Life for a Black artist was not easy in London in the 1950s and 1960s, and Prescod often took small walk-on roles, frequently playing housemaids or perceived minor characters in film and TV, as well as working on radio plays. According to the pamphlet, many of her roles in this period were 'insignificant', and highlight the reality of work in entertainment, and the struggle to make a steady living. Despite this, she made a notable mark and participated in a change around the coverage of Black stories in British entertainment, evidenced by her role as Harriet Tubman in a 1961 BBC documentary, 'Come Along To Freedom'.

Prescod's big break came in 1965 when she was cast in the role of Tituba in Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible', produced and directed by theatre great Laurence Olivier. With this, she became the first Black actor to be invited as a guest in the National Theatre Company. A year later, in

¹ Institute of Race Relations, [*Pearl Prescod: A Black life lived large*](#), June 21st 2022.

1966, Prescod travelled to Senegal as a member of the Pan African Players, appearing in two dramas at the Pan-African festival of Art and Culture. Throughout her performing career she worked to uplift and celebrate Black culture and Pan-Africanism through artistic and cultural channels. Obi Egbuna, Nigerian playwright and one of Britain's architects of what would become the Black Power movement in the late 1960s, described Prescod as his 'literary godmother' and credits his successful writing career to her.² Prescod's connections with other activists is a line of enquiry which has been explored by historical projects in the past, such as in Marika Sherwood's *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, but this pamphlet presents Prescod finally as the protagonist.

A Black Life Lived Large, in providing a general biography of Prescod, weaves together her career history, details of her social life and network of friends, as well as her involvement in Black community building and Pan-Africanist projects. This narrative provides us with a well-rounded understanding of her as an individual, but also as a participant in a wider movement for social change. The pamphlet brings Prescod's

2 Institute of Race Relations, *Pear Prescod: A Black Life Lived Large*, (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2022), p. 7.

joyous presence to life with a great collection of photographs and visuals, from photos of her in action in theatre productions, to press coverage of her career achievements. It is also fitting that the Institute of Race Relations would play such a central role in recovering the story of Pearl Prescod, given that its former chair and longstanding cultural activist, Colin Prescod, is her son. In sum, the pamphlet offers an important, accessible, and enjoyable entryway into learning about a remarkable woman, and a key figure in Black British history. *A Black Life Lived Large* will, I'm sure, inspire others to take an interest in participating in this very necessary recovery project.

Author biography:

A.S. Francis is a PhD student researching women's involvements in Britain's Black radical organisations during the 1960s-1980s, and the development of a Black women's movement. Francis has recently published *Gerlin Bean: Mother of the Movement*, celebrating the longstanding and far reaching activism of Gerlin Bean. Francis is also a consultant to the Young Historians Project, and co-founder of the *History Matters Journal*.



Review - A Hidden History: African women and the British Healthcare Service, 1900-1949

By Idil Longe

On this episode of [‘A Hidden History’](#), The Young Historians Project dives deep into one of the most important systems of the modern age: The British Health Service. The video tackles a much overlooked element of the British healthcare service, that being its many accomplished African nurses. It pays homage to the many strides they have taken to improve not only the livelihoods of others through their practice, but of the wider African Medical community as a whole through diligent activism. Overall, this video shows how African history really is a large factor in shaping the way that we receive healthcare to this day.

There are a variety of elements of this episode that start important conversations around the activity of African women in the medical field. The mentions of union activity and the protection of industrial workers in Great Britain with the National Insurance Act show some of the strides that these professionals have taken to call respect upon their work. Additionally, this represented that elements of the health service that we benefit from to this day were often revolutionary steps towards public health.

The stories of these accomplished and well travelled women, such as Lulu Coote, are key to the progression of the healthcare system as a whole. They show the achievements of Black women operating across and within the British diaspora. Agnes Savage and her various

interdisciplinary achievements, such as achieving a 1st class honours in medicine and studying at the Royal College of Music, represent the academic diversity of African women.

Alongside the many achievements represented in this video, the reality of oppression and discrimination is shown honestly. The emphasis on the restrictions of African individuals in the medical field, especially in the instance of the ‘whites only’ hospitals, were incredibly challenging hurdles. However, as mentioned in the episode, they present a greater testament to the achievements of these African medical professionals across their career.

The visual aids in these videos, such as the timeline with photographs and drawings, were key aspects in animating these histories. These were important in allowing these women’s histories to be humanised.

This episode of ‘A Hidden History’ looked within the cracks of British History to uncover the untouched legacies of African nurses in Britain. These women truly were the unsung heroes of the British Health service.

Author biography:

Idil Longe is a second year undergraduate student of History and Politics at Queen Mary University of London. They are interested in the documentation

... And by David Kwao Fianko

Episode one, '[A Hidden History: African women and the British Healthcare Service, 1900-1949](#)', is a clear and expressive account of the contributions of African women in the British medical service. Discussing trailblazers of the likes of Olare Green, Irene Ighodaro, Susan Ofori Atta, and Lulu Coote. This episode brilliantly charts their personal histories, anchoring this to their time in the British medical profession. Complemented by an animated timeline and colourful imagery, which traces their lives. The history of African women in the British Healthcare Service, is explained in a way that is easy to digest. This makes it a great educational tool that can be used for all to understand this important history.

What I also love, is the way this episode greatly interweaves historical context, situating African women within the historical and material conditions they faced within British society. This allows us as the audience, to picture and learn about what African women in the medical field had to overcome. As they paved the way for so many in the medical profession. This episode is

a must watch - an important focus of history: educational, accessible, and brilliant!

Author biography:

David Kwao Fianko is a member of the Young Historians Project

