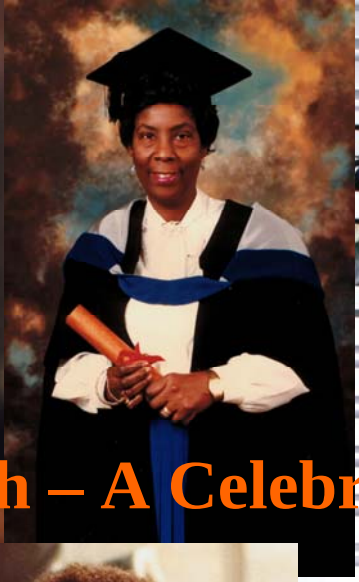
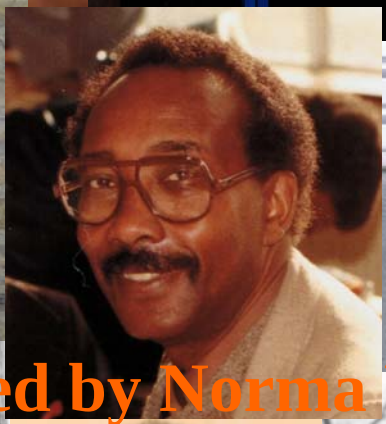
Black British – A Celebration





Edited by Norma Williamson

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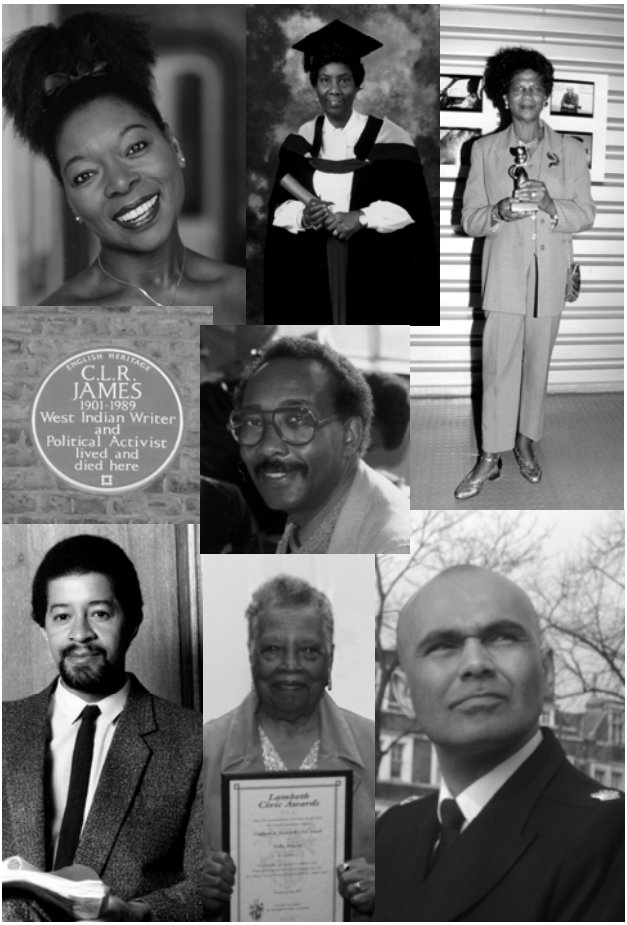
CONTENTS



Cover Photograph

Top row (L to R): Floella Benjamin; Eileen Walkin: Gloria Bailey

Middle row: Blue Plaque to C.L.R. James; Donald Hinds

Bottom row: Herman Ouseley; Dolly Adams; Paul Wilson

PREFACE

On 23 February 1807, following twenty years of relentless campaigning by William Wilberforce and many others, finally Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of abolition of the slave trade. This was not the end of slavery as such, only of the trade in enslaved people in the British Empire; but it was the first step on a march that continues to this day.

Two hundred years later, the bicentenary of this event has been celebrated throughout Britain and the world. On 25 March 2007, in the Brixton heart of the London Borough of Lambeth, a commemoration was held, organised by the Brixton Society.

On a fine spring day, many gathered to hear a gospel choir and moving speeches; to offer prayers and to plant bulbs in commemoration. The speech given by local MP, Keith Hill forms the introduction to this book.

We also wanted to create a more permanent celebration: this book celebrates the enormous contribution to our national and local life made by black British people. Here are stories of people who have become famous, as well as of “ordinary” people who have achieved extraordinary things. All are triumphs of talent and hard work over prejudice and bigotry. They are, by turns, amusing, moving and inspirational.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- We must first acknowledge the dreadful fact that slavery still exists in many forms throughout the world today despite being prohibited by the *1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and many other conventions and laws. For more information contact Anti-Slavery International, Thomas Clarkson House, The Stableyard, Broomgrove Road, London, SW9 9TL or www.antislavery.org.uk.

- Our grateful thanks to all those who contributed to the event on 25 March 2007: Asafo Drummers; Sozo House of Praise Gospel Choir; The Worshipful the Mayor of Lambeth Councillor Liz Atkinson**;** The Right Honourable Keith Hill, MP; Superintendent Paul Wilson, representing Lambeth Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police**;** The Reverend Stephen Sichel, Vicar of St Mathew's with St Jude's**;** Norma Williamson, Brixton Society Treasurer; Dr Floella Benjamin, OBE, Chancellor of the University of Exeter; Derrick Anderson, CBE, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lambeth; Devon Thomas, Chair of the Brixton Business Forum; Lambeth Libraries;, Lambeth Parks; the Ritzy Cinema; the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association; Veolia Environmental Services; and event organiser: Sarah Slater.

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Editor, Norma Williamson

INTRODUCTION

Speech given by The Right Honourable
Keith Hill, MP
25 March 2007

Madame Mayor, councillors, ladies, and gentlemen, and not least: officers of the Brixton society, whom I wish heartily to congratulate for having thought to initiate this very special occasion for commemoration and celebration.

It is a somewhat poignant coincidence that we meet today in the shadow of the Tate Library here in Brixton.

Sir Henry Tate was, of course, a great local and national benefactor

Although not at all himself involved in slavery and the Slave Trade, his name is forever associated with sugar.

And it was in the production of sugar above all (though also of tobacco and rice) that the origins lay of the bloody Slave Trade whose abolition in the British Empire we now commemorate exactly 200 years ago today.

The scale and horrors of the Atlantic slave trade were so great that it is difficult for us now to comprehend them.

It is thought that in the three centuries of the trade as many as 20 million Africans died- in Africa, in the Atlantic Passage and the Americas.

Over the course of the Slave Trade, at least 450,000 black Africans died as a consequence of the Atlantic Passage: one in five in the seventeenth century, one in ten in the eighteenth century.

At the height of the Slave Trade, the average life expectancy of slaves reaching the West Indies was a mere seven years- such were the effects of poor diet, strict surveillance, harsh punishment and unremitting labour- from which only children under the age of 6 and a few aged and infirm were exempted.

In the eighteenth century, in Barbados, one in three slaves died within three years of arrival.

In the West Indies as a whole, half the slave women never bore a child who survived beyond infancy.

Nor should we be in any doubt about British complicity in this evil.

In the eighteenth century, British ships carried 2.5 million slaves across the Atlantic, leading the Portuguese who carried 1.8 million, and the French who carried 1.2 million.

Great fortunes were made in this country and great dynasties were founded on slavery and the Slave Trade.

As Eric Williams- later to become the first premier of a free Trinidad and Tobago- demonstrates in his wonderful book, Capitalism and Slavery, the British industrial revolution itself was born out of slavery and the Slave Trade.

That the trade, in the British Empire, was brought to an end by act of Parliament on 25 March 1807: Slavery itself, in the Empire, was ended twenty-six years later in 1833.

And there could be no more fitting place to commemorate the bicentenary than here in Brixton where the descendents of those West Indian slaves first settled in great numbers; next to Windrush Square, in front of Raleigh Hall where we intend that the National Black Cultural Archives should be located.

We are conscious also, and proud, of our local connection with the leadership of the anti-Slave Trade movement- member of the so-called Clapham Sect based on Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common.

Above all, the great William Wilberforce, whose home is commemorated in the Wilberforce Estate in Battersea, John Venn, whose curacy at Holy Trinity is remembered in Venn Street in Clapham; and Henry Thornton, MP for Southwark, who is remembered in Thornton Road in Streatham.

We remember the other evangelicals who led the abolition movement: John Newton, Granville Sharp, James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson.

We remember also the former slaves whose works and witness contributed hugely to the movement: Ottabah Cugoano who, in 1783, published his “Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Commerce of the Human Species”; and Aladuah Equiano, whose autobiography became a best seller of the time and played a major part in highlighting the barbarities of the Slave Trade.

All these are the great abolitionist names handed down to us by history.

But we must also recognise that the campaign to end the Slave Trade could not have succeeded without a vast mobilisation of public opinion in this country.

Hundreds of thousands of ordinary British people read the abolitionist pamphlets, attended the meetings and signed the petitions against the Slave Trade: one petition from the inhabitants of Manchester measured over 7 metres in length.

In one of the first consumer boycotts in history, hundreds of thousands of people refused to use West Indian sugar.

It was women, of course, for all the obvious reasons, who were at the forefront of the Sugar Boycott.

And once abolition was secured, and the agitation to end slavery itself moved into even higher gear, it was women who continued to sustain the campaign.

We know that, by 1831, there were no fewer than 73 women's Anti-Slavery societies in the country.

At one point in the Anti-Slavery campaign, it is thought that no less than a quarter of the British population was refusing to use West Indian sugar.

And yes, history does hand down to us the names of two of these women leaders- Lucy Townsend and Elizabeth Heyrick of Birmingham- and we salute them too.

Yet, finally, we should never forget that there was one further group of people who, whatever the difficulties, however hopeless the circumstances, never gave up the struggle against slavery, but whose names- with one of two shining exceptions- are inevitably lost to history- and they were the slaves themselves.

History does not record the names of many slaves who threw themselves into the ocean at the African ports, and died, rather than submit themselves to slavery; or of those slaves, who when the opportunity presented itself, commandeered the ships and turned them back towards Africa.

Nor does history record the names of the runaway slaves, the maroons, who inhabited the Blue Mountains of Jamaica and the "cockpit country" of the West Centre, and who were so effective at bush fighting and plantation raiding that the English were forced to negotiate a peace treaty with them in 1663.

The truth is that, however cruel the regime, the masters and overseers could never break the slaves' longing to be free.

That is why, in the Caribbean throughout the eighteenth century, there was a succession of uprisings: the largest in Jamaica in 1760, killing 90 whites and subsequently ruthlessly suppressed.

The greatest, and most successful, revolt of all was that led by Toussant L'Ouverture, who in 1790 in Haiti, inspired by the French Revolution, declared the first Black Republic and abolished slavery, and about whom the great Clr. James, himself a Brixton resident, wrote in his book The Black Jacobins.

In the years that followed up to the end of slavery, there were further rebellions- in Grenada, Dominica, St Vincent, Tobago, Barbados, and a very large revolt, led by Sam Sharpe, in Jamaica in 1831.

Sadly, slavery- either as such or in the forms of indentured labour and human trafficking- continues to blight the lives of millions of our fellow human beings throughout the world.

We know also in our own country that we continue to suffer the scourges of racism and unequal opportunity.

So, the struggle goes on.

I draw two hopeful conclusions from the events we commemorate today.

First, from the Slaves themselves of an indomitable will in human beings to be free.

Second, from the Abolitionist Movement in this country, of the fundamental decency of people in the face of injustice.

I believe it is this yearning for freedom and justice which means that in the end we shall overcome.

Eileen Walkin and Keith Hill

Mary Seacole

Charismatic black nurse who became a heroine of the Crimea

A biography by Daphne Marchant

It is difficult to portray this wonderful woman because she left no legacy, in that she did not keep a diary or write letters. However, there is ample evidence from newspaper cuttings, her own autobiography "The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole" and the biography by Jane Robinson published in 2005.

Before turning to the life of Mary, it is worth considering what the conditions were in places like the Caribbean before the abolition of slavery in 1807. Why was slavery so popular to Europeans and the Americas?

There were many reasons, but of course the chief attraction was cheap labour. The Spanish, for example, had grown sugar cane in their country since the 8th century, but after discovering that it would grow well in the Caribbean climate, Columbus took the first sugar cane plants there and they were worked by the indigenous natives. They quickly died of ill treatment by their masters, and there soon became a labour shortage. Because of this shortage, the slave trade started and slave labour was introduced from Africa. People were taken from their home in Africa and transported to the new world. Those who survived the dreadful sea journey worked long and hard in the sugar cane fields. This was only the beginning of the horrendous slave trade.

In the 17th century other Europeans began to claim land in the Caribbean — the English occupied Barbados in 1625 and Jamaica

in 1655. The French took over Martinique, Guadeloupe and St Dominique.

During the 18th century, the city of Liverpool was transformed by the trade with Africa. Anyone visiting the City today can still see signs of the trade existing in the walls of large buildings; for example the shackles which slaves were forced to wear at all times. There are also drawings in the Museums, of the slave ships built to hold as many slaves as possible - in layers - they were placed end to end and were unable to lie down. Of course, because of sickness and the dreadful conditions, many did not survive the journey.

Laws and punishments in the British Caribbean were severe; slaves had absolutely no rights. Colonial authorities drew up the laws on each island which were controlled by the planters. The slaves were forbidden to become Christians, learn to read or write or to marry. Punishments — for example, whipping could leave permanent scarring and execution by hanging or burning was used for slaves who rebelled. At the height of the slave trade, Great Britain had millions of slaves more than any other European country.

From the late 18th century, the anti-slavery movement in Britain forced the government to attempt to control the excessive violence of some planters. As a result, limits on slave punishments were introduced in many colonies, but not all adhered to the limits and continued to treat their slaves mercilessly.

However, there were reformers like William Wilberforce MP who led the campaign in Parliament following the foundation of the Abolition Society. He worked closely with Thomas Clarkson who went to the ports of Liverpool and Bristol collecting evidence

about the trade, and the conditions of the ships in particular. He passed the information to Wilberforce who used it in the House. Wilberforce, after several unsuccessful attempts to get a bill passed, outlawing slavery, eventually succeeded in 1807, but emancipation did not come until 1838.

The life and story of Mary Grant (later to become Seacole) started in 1805. She was born in Kingston, Jamaica, the daughter of a free black Caribbean woman and a Scottish army doctor.

People born of mixed races were known as Mulattoes. They had few civil rights before the abolition of slavery - no vote, barred from public office and professions although some were well taught because some free Jamaican planters used to send their children to European schools. The majority lived in poverty and in fear of re-enslavement. The laws restricted land ownership, but some grew coffee or bred cattle. Some men worked on plantations as overseers, or did bookkeeping; others piloted boats or became fishermen.

The Mulattoe women in the superior classes became self-supporting, for example doing laundering, selling dry goods, ribbons, silks and laces.

Mary's mother ran a store – cum- hotel with her daughter, Jane. The store - cum- hotel was more like a club where drunkenness and gambling were forbidden. It was frequented by officers in the British army, but was also somewhere the ordinary soldier could enjoy clean and wholesome food.

Mary obtained her medical training largely from her conversations with the British army surgeons who came to the hotel. Her mother was known as a doctress, (Creole medical art had evolved on the

plantations, based on knowledge of herbal medicine and midwifery brought from Africa).

Mary had heard tales about places abroad and always wanted to travel. When she was 12 years old she visited England, travelling on a large sailing ship to Bristol and then by coach to London. In London she met her father's family for the first time. She liked it in London, but found it strange that she was considered different from other children because her skin was brown. She preferred to call it yellow! She returned to Jamaica after a year and became quite famous for the wonderful pickles which she sold in her mother's store.

On 10 November 1836 she married Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole in Kingston It was thought that Edwin was the godson of Nelson, the famous British Admiral, but many people gave their sons his names in his honour. However, the Seacole family claimed that Nelson became Edwin's godfather after Mary's mother had treated him for yellow fever.

It was very rare for a white man to marry a coloured woman. Lifelong liaisons were still common and locally respectable. Mulatto women tended not to marry officially because white women disdained to welcome them into society and they were never treated as real wives. But Mary was proud and Edwin keen to do things properly. Mary and Edwin had tried unsuccessfully to run a business in another part of the island, but largely due to Edwin's poor health it became necessary to return to Kingston. Unfortunately, in spite of Mary's loving care he died in October 1844 aged 41 years. .

Following Edwin's death Mary, now a widow at 39 moved back to her mother's house at Blundell Hall, which had been built

following a fire which destroyed nearly all the properties in Kingston.. Very soon after Edwin's death, Mary's mother Jane also died. Her three children, Mary, Louisa and Edward were left to take care of Blundell Hall. Thereafter, calling it "my house", Mary took charge. She worked hard and became successful. Suitors came along, but she preferred to keep her independence.

At the same time the army built some barracks with hospital facilities on the side of the Blue Mountain. By l841, it was occupied by the survivors of the 60th rifles following the death of thousands of colleague in a battle in the autumn of 1840,. The officers and medical personnel visited Blundell Hall and occasionally billeted there. The arrival of the 97th rifles brought visitors and prosperity to her business.

Tragically in 1850 another visitor landed at Kingston Harbour - a stowaway that had smuggled itself in some clothes sent to a Dolly Johnson, a washer woman. It killed her and scores more at the harbour. It was part of the Asiatic pandemic which dispatched millions. Mary had never seen it before and together with a doctor tried to treat the disease, but it wasn't until she got to Panama in 1851, that she could claim to have cured anyone.

This terrible disease was Cholera which, when it left Jamaica, left the island depleted and weakened. All this and the local routine began to pall and so she looked for other avenues. She left Louisa to manage the store and went abroad to Panama to visit Edward who had gone there previously. Whilst there she diagnosed cholera from the corpse of a baby who had died of a fever. Edward was sceptical, but when a close Spanish friend had the same symptoms, Mary treated him with Mustard plasters and drinking water containing cinnamon, and he recovered.

Mary kept in touch with what was going on in Europe through conversations with army personnel and reading the British newspapers of the day, albeit they reached the islands about three weeks late. Thus, she was aware of the war in Europe. Britain, France and Turkey were fighting Russia in an area called the Crimea. Her soldier friends had been sent there.

The army had been run down from the time of Waterloo, and as usual, was hopelessly unprepared for such a war, either militarily or as regards caring for the sick and wounded. For example, 27,000 troops crossed the Black Sea to the Crimean Peninsula. When fighting began medical officers set up tents on the battlefields. Primitive conditions were aggravated by grossly inadequate supplies of food, drugs, clothing and surgical apparatus. General Sir George Higginson wrote in his diary on 9 August that his battalions had just returned after a 3 week expedition, minus 7000 men who had fallen victim to cholera and malarial fever. A further 1000 male cholera sufferers created a crisis.

The public outcry was so great in the press, made by uncensored journalists such as William Russell of *The Times*, that Sidney Herbert, Secretary of State for War had to take immediate action. Money poured in to the fund set up by *The Times*, and the Government agreed to the demand for female nurses and Sisters of Mercy to be sent to the Crimea.

This was when Florence Nightingale became the founder of modern nursing, as Superintendent of the female nursing establishment.

Mary was very keen to join the nurses at Scutari, thinking she would be made welcome because of her vast experience. She went

to the Belgravia office where Mary Stanley was recruiting for the second band of nurses to be sent to the front. It was not to be: she was rejected many times in spite of glowing references from quite senior army personnel. She felt this very keenly and it was the first time she had really been faced with the problem of colour prejudice.

Undaunted, Mary went to the Crimea at her own expense, and set up an establishment known as the British Hotel where all ranks could obtain good food, nourishing drinks, clean linen and medical treatment. She set herself up as a “Sutler” which was the precursor of catering in the Army.

An interesting character came into her life at this stage - one Alexis Soyer, who was an excellent chef, having trained in Paris with his brother. He had become chef to the Duke of Cambridge who was in command of the army. He designed the kitchen of the Reform Club in London, largely patronised by the leading Liberals of the day. He had previous experience, helping to improve the conditions of the army in Ireland. When sent to the Crimea by the army he revolutionised army catering both within army hospitals and further a field. He worked with Mary and gave valuable advice at the British hotel.

Mary was revered by the troops because she went straight to the sick and wounded. She could be seen out on horseback in all weathers to give the troops baskets of medicines of her own making. Her medicines were on one mule; hams and wines on another. She recruited two Jamaican cooks, some Turks and a young woman named Sarah. Her actions were reported by William Simpson, a well known war illustrator. Army Surgeon Dr Douglas Reid said she did not spare herself, supplying hot tea to sufferers as they waited to be lifted into the boats in the bay.

She was different from Florence Nightingale who was essentially an Administrator, keeping within the hospitals, and to whom we owe so much for her founding of proper nursing methods in hospitals.

Before Mary had gone to England, she had taken a partner in the running of the store - Thomas Day, a relative of Edwin Seacole, which proved to be successful during the war in the Crimea. However, the war ended very abruptly and the firm of Seacole & Day was left with expensive redundant stock without a genuine market in 1856.

Mary was obliged to return to England because of her reduced circumstances. She took lodgings in Tavistock Street and was soon in the limelight. The Times of 26 August 1856 reported that she had made a guest appearance at the Dinner to the Guards and was taken around the Gardens on the shoulders of the soldiers.

In November she was declared bankrupt, but the Times published letters from well wishers. Veterans took up the cause immediately and by February 1857, she was given a first class certificate which meant she was no longer a debtor; she wrote her autobiography which proved to be a best seller.

A Grand Military festival for her benefit was held on 27-30 July 1857 at the Royal Surrey Gardens. It was attended by many well-known people, but in spite of brilliant publicity, the organizing committee had not done the necessary homework and expenses had escalated. If things had been successful, she would have received £228.00 (£9000 today) which, if well invested, would have provided a modestly comfortable lifestyle in London.
She did receive some money through an appeal launched by Lord Palmerston.

Queen Victoria was pleased to express approbation of her services and took interest in her future welfare. She was awarded the Crimean medal and her bust was carved by Queen Victoria's nephew, Count Gleichen, who knew her in the Crimea.

Mary did not remain idle for long e.g. Capt Cooper of the royal household confirmed that she was a privileged guest at Marlborough House where she used her skill as masseuse on the Princess of Wales for her lameness.

Mary prospered well into old age, living in Paddington (1881 census).

She died on 14 May 1881, having suffered apoplexy for 16 days, and was in a coma for 3 days. She is buried in St Mary's Catholic cemetery, Harrow Road, Kensal Green, London NW1O. The exact date of her conversion to Catholicism is not known, but it is considered to be when she was in her mid-fifties.

The fact that her initial impact in Britain did not survive long into the 20th century in no way undermines her importance. No serious attempt to restore her historical status was made until the centenary of the Crimean war in 1954, when the Jamaican Nurses Association (then called the Jamaican General trained Nurses Association) elected to call their Kingston HQ "Mary Seacole House" and also named a Ward in Kingston Public hospital after her. Not until 1973 did she again make news in Britain, through the efforts of the British Commonwealth Nurses War Memorial Fund and the Lignum Vitae club (Jamaican women's club based in London). The two London organisations invited members and friends to the re-consecration of her grave in the Catholic

cemetery, Kensal Rise. The author of this booklet visited this annual ceremony when she was Mayor of Lambeth, in 1998.

Mary's importance was given further publicity in October 1980 when the exhibition "Roots in Britain" was launched. On 28 November 1983 Lambeth honoured Mary by naming a building in Clapham High Street after her, and the plaque was unveiled by Lord Pitt.

The Mary Seacole Memorial Association (MSMA) have since 1981 commemorated Mary's life and legacy with an annual wreath laying ceremony, luncheon and lecture on the second Saturday of May. During 2007, the Mary Seacole celebrations will focus on the publication of "Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in many lands"

So we are remembering her in the 21st century.

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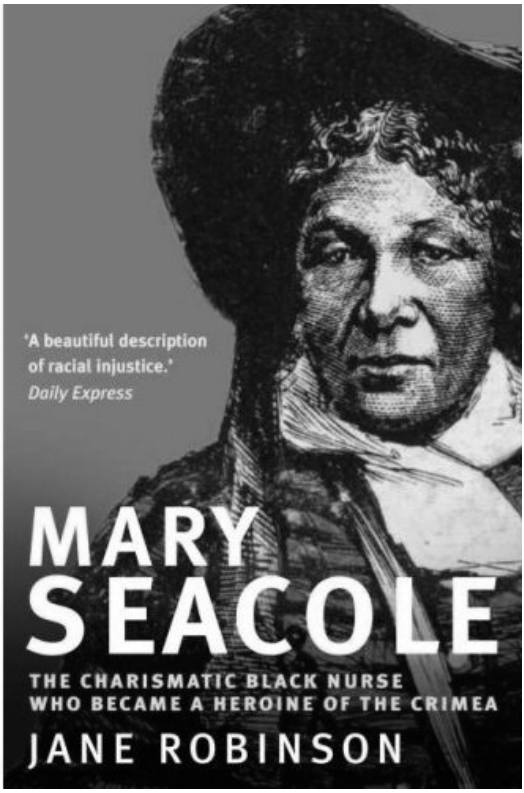

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C.L.R. James

Brixton does not have many blue plaques to commemorate its distinguished residents, and they are widely scattered. However, one can now be seen as you pass along Railton Road from Brixton towards Herne Hill.

Political activist, novelist, playwright, historian and renowned cricket writer C.L.R.James (1901-89) is commemorated by an English Heritage Blue Plaque in Brixton. It was unveiled on Friday 8th October 2004 by his nephew, journalist Darcus Howe, at the official re-opening of the newly-extended Brixton Advice Centre in Railton Road.

From 1981 until his death on 31 May 1989, James lived on the top floor of 165 Railton Road. It was while living here that he enjoyed the reputation of an elder statesman, giving a wide ranging series of lectures on Channel 4 television in 1983.

Cyril Lionel Robert James was born in Trinidad on 4 January 1901, the son of a schoolteacher. He immersed himself in the history and culture of the small colonial society in which he grew up. During the 1920s, in addition to his growing reputation as a cricket reporter, he began to write novels.

James came to England in 1932, spending a year in Lancashire helping the great West Indian cricketer Learie Constantine with writing his memoirs. James began to reach a wider audience as a cricket writer, with occasional pieces appearing in what was then the *Manchester Guardian* until the 1960s.

James's move to London in 1933 marked his increasing involvement in left-wing politics through the Independent Labour Party and the Trotskyist movement. In 1938 he produced a play "Toussaint L'Ouverture" about the slave revolt in Haiti, with Paul Robeson in the title role, followed in 1937 by a book on the subject. From 1938 to 1952 he lived and worked in the United States, producing some of his most important political writing.

In 1953 he returned to Trinidad and campaigned variously for decolonisation and the appointment of Frank Worrell as the West Indies' first black cricket captain. However, he later broke with Eric Williams, Trinidad's first president, and was expelled in 1966. In 1981 he came to live at 165 Shakespeare Road, above the offices of *Race Today*, a magazine published by his nephew Darcus Howe.

On his death in 1989, his body was returned to Trinidad for his funeral in Tunapuna Cemetery.

As Darcus pointed out at the unveiling, CLR James would have appreciated the fact that the plaque is actually on the Shakespeare Road frontage of the building, and in good company with several other literary figures commemorated by local road names, including Robert Burns Mews and Derek Walcott Close.

Brixton Advice Centre

The Advice Centre itself is by now something of a local institution, started in 1966 by volunteers from Lambeth Council staff, at the inspiration of George Greaves, then the Community Relations Officer. Initially it operated from a hut behind Railton

Methodist Church, then from 1972 in the newly-rebuilt Community Centre. Eventually BAC was able to lease a shop building at 167 Railton Road, and became an indispensable part of the local community for legal and financial advice.

Somerleyton Road was one of the first areas where West Indian migrants had established themselves in Brixton, but in 1966 Lambeth Council began clearing that area, reinforcing the trend for growing families to move the short distance across the railway lines to the area around Railton Road. Most of the houses were large, old and neglected, and there was much casework arising from poor conditions, overcrowding, tenancy issues and debt.
With the Council emptying houses over wider areas in readiness for its grand plans, new issues arose around squatting and dereliction.

In the late 1970s, the Advice Centre, under its then director, Hartley Dean, played a valuable role in co-ordinating residents' objections to Lambeth Council plans for demolishing the surrounding area. It went on to host residents' meetings with Council officers to discuss improvements.

Probably its valued role as part of the social infrastructure helped it survive the 1981 riots intact, but the 1980s were hard times financially and at one stage No.167 was repossessed due to unpaid rent. In the 1990s funding from Brixton Challenge and Lambeth Endowed Charities allowed BAC to buy No.167 outright. Further fund-raising enabled BAC first to acquire the adjoining corner shop, No.165, and then to combine and renovate both properties.
During the building works, BAC was able to continue operating out of a converted stables on the other side of Shakespeare Road, previously the offices of their architects, Greenhill Jenner, who by then had moved to Clerkenwell, EC1.

Dolly Adams

I was born in San Fernando, in Trinidad, one of nine children - seven brothers and one sister. I was educated at a Canadian mission school until I was fifteen. After leaving school, I stayed at home to look after my younger brothers and sister, whilst my mother was in full time employment.

Whilst looking after my siblings I attended the local YMCA for classes in cake decoration, artificial flower making, keep fit and Scottish dancing.

Although my mother was a practising Hindu, she allowed us to choose our own religion, so I attended Sunday school at an evangelical church. I also went with a friend to the local Church of England where I was eventually christened and confirmed.

I met my future husband when I was twenty. He was a footballer and a heavyweight boxer. We got married three years after we met and had two children in Trinidad, a boy followed by a girl. By the time our second child was born my husband had become a professional boxer and decided that if he was to progress in boxing he would have to seek more opportunities in England. He emigrated to London in 1950 and the children and I followed in October 1955. We lived on Kensington High Street for a short period before we moved to Sutherland Square off Walworth Road. In 1957 we finally set up our permanent home in Arlesford Road, Lambeth, where our small family of four expanded to six following the birth of our two girls.

My first impression of England was that the days were very short and dark and the buildings grey. It was a complete culture shock

and I thought I would not be able to stay in England without sunshine.

My first job was as a machinist, making ball gowns in a building at Oxford Circus, and as the only ethnic minority worker I found everyone very friendly and nice. I remained with that company for four years, after which time I decided to become a full time mother. In order to stay at home and help financially with household bills I became a child minder looking after children whose mothers worked mainly for the NHS. At a later date I also worked as an office cleaner for OCS.

As my children grew up my working life changed. I was encouraged by my eldest daughter's friend from art school to become a model. I approached Camberwell Art School and was accepted as a model; from there I also modelled at Goldsmith College, Sir John Cass College and Bryan Shaw School of Arts and Crafts. This kept me fully occupied for about 15 years. During college holidays I worked in the catering department of Jones and Higgins in Peckham.

When I moved to Arlesford Road I joined St Andrews, Church of England, at Stockwell Green. The parishioners were not very welcoming to newcomers, particularly members of the ethnic minority community. However the vicar, Father Paul Simmons, was keen to embrace newcomers and encouraged them to participate fully in the church. Following the death of one of the two serving churchwardens I was encouraged by one of the curates to put my name forward to become a churchwarden. I was unopposed and was appointed as Father Paul's first appointee, his first black, and first female warden. I held that position for ten years, at which time I decided that it was time to give someone else a chance.

Following my resignation, Father Paul asked me what type of work I was interested in doing, to which I responded my preference would be to work with children, but there were no openings at the time for this type of work. However, he advised me to visit the Stockwell Good Neighbours shop on Stockwell Road, where they sold second hand clothes, shoes and books and held a small stock of groceries which were sold at a reduced price. I am pleased to say that I was appointed as the shop manager. The shop was frequented by a large number of refugees who lived at the YMCA in Stockwell and whom I befriended. From this we set up a drop in centre where we served free coffee, tea and biscuits and lent a listening ear.

From the same premises I started a club for black people, which was called “Dolly’s Club”. Age Concern Lambeth at this time started to sell ethnic grocery reasonably cheaply (cheaper than the local shops) and supplied Dolly’s Club with these goods, which made the club very popular.

The premises in Stockwell Road were owned by the British Legion and after a few years we were asked to vacate them. Lambeth Council was approached for new premises and they provided Stockwell Good Neighbours with a building, so Stockwell Good Neighbours and Dolly’s Club moved to their new premises in Landor Road, Stockwell.

Dolly’s Club became a mixed club (not just for ethnic minorities) and became the blueprint for other new clubs, with Lambeth Council advising new organisations to visit Dolly’s Club before starting up. I worked there until I retired in 1995 at the age of 73.

Whilst working at Stockwell Good Neighbours I was approached by an ex-Mayor of Lambeth to join the Board of Trustees of Age

Concern Lambeth, and I am still a participating member of the Board. It has also been my pleasure to serve as Vice Chair and then Chair of Lambeth Caring Houses Trust which cares for mentally handicapped individuals who were released into community care.

As part of my service to the community I became accredited with Alcohol Concern as well as being involved in mediation work for the Lambeth Mediation Service dealing with neighbours in dispute.

During the past 30 years, in addition to my other activities, I have attended millinery, cake and jewellery making , patisserie and pottery classes, (now closed due to lack of funding). I continue to visit church members who are in hospital or housebound.

I was pleased to accept the Lambeth Civic Awards for my voluntary work in the community, particularly with older people.

Derrick Anderson

Born in London in 1957, I could be described in the parlance of contemporary writing on immigration as a first generation Black Briton. I have to say, although such descriptions are often used in the pejorative sense, the reality is that ‘me and mine’ and subsequent generations of newcomers have made an indelible mark on the face of Britain. Whether in politics, sport, the Arts, Commerce, Education and increasingly in Science and Technology, Black Britons are now very evident in the management, administration and practice of several of the nation’s key institutions. Seeing myself as a Black Briton has not only shaped the way I connect with the society in which I live, it has helped to forge in my mind’s eye what I think is achievable in terms of career, social interaction and politics. As a consequence of this, to understand my approach to the world you will need to grasp my personal history and the accidents and happenings which have left me in the place I am today.

I undertook the whole of my primary and the early part of my secondary education in schools in North and East London. My mother, brothers and I moved to the Midlands in the late 60s. The 60s was a period of difficult race relations in the UK, characterised by the infamous Enoch Powell MP in his ‘rivers of blood’ speech. Though Grammar schools had been abolished in London by then, they remained in the Midlands for a few decades more. Through the tenacity and persistence of my mother and the good fortune of a place left vacant by someone who failed to attend at the start of term, I found myself installed amongst the most ‘privileged’ students at King Edward VI Grammar in Birmingham. After what was described in my first end of year report as a ‘shaky start’ I made a reasonable recovery to achieve the necessary grades to go on to university. On reflection this was

not without considerable ‘insider help’ from one or two teachers, determined that I should survive the worst excesses of what was a very middle class experience.

My first years at Birmingham University largely replicated the events at the grammar school - a slow start followed by a dash to the finishing line where I obtained a joint honours degree in Psychology and Physical Education. My education was completed with a Masters degree in social work from Leicester University which allowed me to train as a social worker whilst enjoying the benefits of a living wage!

Having completed my Higher Education I set about getting what my mother would often refer to as a ‘Real Job‘. However, even by then, the world of work was not alien to me. Throughout the period of my Higher Education I toiled in the evenings and at weekends to make ends meet. During the summer months the time was spent, either teaching on Harambee summer schools or competing in Decathlon competitions at home and abroad. My first proper job, however, was with an organisation called Nacro (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders). Now an internationally recognised authority in offender support, in the late seventies the entire organisation was run from a small terraced property in Stockwell. The Nacro job helped me build confidence in working with public bodies and ‘officialdom’ at the highest level. It also provided the first management platform (albeit with responsibility for just two members of staff and a network of thirty or so youth placements). The Nacro experience was followed by a spell running a community music project for local talent. The eight track recording studio at the centre of this project became home, play and work for more than two years.

The operating model upon which the music venture was built in the early Eighties was what one would call in today's jargon a Social Enterprise. Other Social Enterprises followed, including the creation of an international dance touring company - Kokuma - performing arts and initiatives in the UK and Africa concerned with creating employment opportunities for those less fortunate and with fewer life chances than me.

The first substantial opportunity to manage a significant number of staff was provided in 1982 when I joined the staff of the UK Sports Council (modern day equivalent being Sport England). As Deputy Director of the 'Action Sport programme' for the West Midlands, I took responsibility for 40 full-time and 400 part-time staff. This provided a nationally recognised platform for me to undertake the very work I had for many years previously carried out in the community on a voluntary basis. On the back of a challenging (though rewarding) period of three years, I relocated 'up north' to the city of Bradford to take up the post of Deputy Director, Yorkshire Arts Association. As chance would have it, whilst at the Association I developed a very positive working relation with the Community Arts movement in the area. In 1986 at the time of the abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils, a number of local authorities moved to set up Cultural Services Departments. I was appointed to the post of Head of Culture, and then went on to Head of Leisure where I stayed until 1991.

The Wakefield experience was an unusual one for several reasons. It was my first real engagement with a political organisation. It was also my first major management job where as a Black man in substantially White working environment I came face to face with both overt and covert racism. The fact that good progress was made against difficult circumstances provided the platform for promotion to a directorship with Wolverhampton Council in 1991.

The Wolverhampton experience (5 years as Director and 10 as Chief Executive) provided many and varied rewards. Whilst with the council it was possible to build a national profile with both Whitehall departments and the House in Westminster. Having co-ordinated the council's winning bid to achieve 'city status' as part of the Queen's millennium celebrations and worked successfully to establish strong inter-authority relations across the seven major councils in the West Midlands, I was made a CBE in the New Year's honours list for 2003. The latter part of my stay in Wolverhampton brought recognition for my academic writing with regard to cultural matters. In 2004 Stoke University offered me an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of my writing on the future of the arts in the UK. I delivered an hour long speech in 10 Downing Street in the presence of the Prime Minister and other cultural luminaries from institutions across the UK and Europe. Other achievements and appointments of note include a Non-executive position on the Home Office main board in 2002; a place on the West Midlands Passenger executive in 2003; Chair of Sport England West Midlands Board in 2004; Regions and Nations Advisor to 2012 Olympic bid team and more recently, board member of UK committee for VSO.

When not writing, creating artistic product, mentoring, or offering support to voluntary organisations, I work on a voluntary basis in Southern Africa. I have developed close links with several communities in Southern African Countries. There I have established a number of self-funding self help projects, each designed to create local employment and educational opportunities. The theme of creating opportunities has run deep in all that I have endeavoured to achieve over my 30 years of public service. It has been an honour and privilege to serve in this respect and I look forward to many more rewarding years of action here in Lambeth.

Gloria Bailey

Gloria Bailey (nee Campbell) was born on 29/1/29 in the district of Devon, in the parish of Manchester, Jamaica, WI.

The fifth of nine children born to Eva Victoria and Arthur Theopholis Campbell, she grew up in a small family home in the Jamaican countryside, where the emphasis was placed firmly on discipline and education.

"We may have been poor, but Arthur Campbell had firm principles and set very high standards for his children", Gloria recalls. "We always had to be well behaved and presentably dressed when in public, and respectful to adults at all times; especially to Mama. My father fought for Britain in the First World War and, being ex-army, he was a very disciplined man. "A.T.", as everyone called him, was a real stickler for detail. I can still see him sitting on the front porch polishing his shoes until they shone. He was very particular like that and brought his sons up to be the same. I remember the boys having to stand in a row in the front yard "backs straight, heels in, toes out" as he walked along the line inspecting them. To this day my brothers have maintained the discipline he instilled in them." Despite the strict domestic regime there was lots of fun and laughter in the Campbell household and Gloria remembers her childhood as being a happy one.

Education was a priority, and all the children were encouraged to work hard at their lessons. Gloria excelled at school, completing the statutory Elementary Course of Studies at age 13 – two years ahead of her peers – and went on to become a teacher. It was whilst teaching at the Mount Airy school in the neighbouring parish of Clarendon that she met and married Stanford Bailey;

affectionately known to all as “Mel”. At the time of their marriage Mel was a farmer; tending his own land but regularly undertaking farming contracts in America. The overseas work was well paid, but having to endure long periods of enforced separation was hard for the young couple. So Mel gave it up and, intent on improving their prospects, they decided to emigrate to the UK. Together they set sail for England in the autumn of 1954; leaving behind two young daughters. The girls would eventually join them two years later when the couple had settled in the country, becoming part of a growing family that would ultimately swell to seven children.

“Coming from a slow-paced, quiet life in the Jamaican country to the hustle and bustle of London, England was a huge culture shock…and it was cold!”, says Gloria. “Those early years were hard, but we had each other to lean on and we got a lot of support from other West Indians who had arrived in England before us. We settled in Brixton, which already had a large black population. In those days there was a strong community spirit and everybody helped each other out. It wasn’t easy finding accommodation back then – some landlords actually had signs on the door stating ‘NO DOGS. NO IRISH. NO BLACKS’ – but someone would rent you a room in their house where you could live until you had saved enough to get a place of your own.”

Finding work could be equally challenging. Gloria’s teaching qualifications were not recognised in the UK so she was forced to give up her profession and take unskilled jobs. Mel worked for London Transport as a guard on the underground trains before transferring onto the buses, where he served as a bus conductor for over 20 years.

Gloria continues, “The first job I got was at the Strand Palace Hotel, delivering linen to the chambermaids. They had never had

Gloria Bailey – family portrait c.1960

a black person working there before and it did cause a bit of a sensation. Everywhere I went people would stare at me with mouths wide open. It was a very strange experience." From there she went on to work in a day-care nursery, where the children were even more curious than adults at the hotel had been, and much more forward. "They asked all sorts of questions about where I had come from and would lick their fingers and rub my hand, to see if the colour came off! One of them even asked me if I had a tail! That did make me laugh."

It was during a period of employment as a bus conductress – or "clippie" – with London Transport that Gloria had one of her more unpleasant experiences, narrowly escaping attack by a gang of "teddy boys". These were the "skinheads" of the day, with a similar reputation for violence and disorder. Routemasters were the standard vehicles in service at the time and every bus had a two-man crew: a driver plus a conductor to collect the fares. Late shifts on busy routes could be a nightmare for conductors confronted by unruly drunks or targeted by robbers who knew they carried large sums of money. Gloria was fortunate in having a good working relationship with her driver, who always looked out for her. "Gloria", he would say, "if you get any bother just give me four sharp rings of the bell, and I'll be out of my cab like a shot to give you a hand."

On the night in question a large group of teddy boys boarded the bus and headed for the upper deck, Gloria following behind shortly after. Picking up the story, she recounts: "There were about 15 of them; half seated at the front of the bus, half at the back. I asked the first boy I came to for his fare and was told that one of his friends sitting up front was paying for the group. As I moved forward towards the centre of the aisle I heard one of them whisper "Get her now!" and they all jumped up out of their seats

and rushed towards me. To this day I don't know how I did it but, in a flash, I wriggled past them and was back down those stairs, ringing the bell for dear life." Her driver was equally prompt in pulling over, retrieving the trusty iron bar he kept under his seat for just such occasions and ordering the thugs off the bus, wearing the most menacing look a genuinely nice man could muster. "It was over so quickly", continues Gloria. "Luckily, I was not hurt but I was badly shaken and it is an experience I will never forget."

Juggling the demands of having a full-time job and raising a rapidly growing family was hard work, but Mel was a hands-on father; sharing the childcare equally with his young wife. "We used to do shift work, so one of us could always be home to look after the children, but we hardly got to see each other. In fact, one evening, when the London smog was particularly thick, we actually passed each other in the street – without noticing – as I was hurrying home from my shift and he was rushing off to work!" During periods when she could not go out to work, such as before and after the birth of another baby, Gloria did child-minding at home; looking after the children of other working mothers.

Once her own children had reached school age Gloria went back to work full time but, tired of doing unskilled jobs, she decided to train as a GPO telephonist. This was a job she really enjoyed and she remained in the field for nearly 20 years – working for the travel companies Thomas Cook and Cunard Shipping, respectively – until she gave it up to become a full-time foster carer in 1982.

Over the next 17 years Mel and Gloria acted as surrogate parents to scores of children who, for various reasons, had been taken into Council care. Foster children of all ages, coming from different

social and ethnic backgrounds, were welcomed in the Bailey home and absorbed into their large extended family. “When we first started fostering we had short to medium-term placements”, Gloria explains. “The children would come to us for just a few weeks or months, depending on the circumstances of each case. As time went by the placements got longer and longer, and some children ended up living with us for years. Two of them stayed permanently.” Mel and Gloria were considered model foster parents; highly regarded by the Local Authorities they worked with. So much so, that they were chosen to front a campaign for the National Foster Care Association, aimed at recruiting foster carers from the black community. “Fostering was hard work, but very rewarding”, says Gloria. “When I think of all the children we fostered over the years I feel good knowing that Mel and I played a role in their lives and that, even though they are grown up now with kids of their own, they still remember ‘Nan’ and ‘Grandad’”.

Gloria finally retired from fostering after the death of her husband, Mel, who had suffered ill-health for many years and passed away on 12th November 1999, 45 years to the day the couple arrived in England.

Not content with raising a family of seven whilst working full-time, then going on to foster countless children belonging to other people, Gloria also found time to organise numerous events and activities for the community. A woman of boundless energy, she joined the CSV/RSVP charity as an organiser/volunteer in 1983; running after-school clubs for local children, arranging annual street parties for local residents and taking care of older people in the community. Following the death of her husband of nearly 50 years – with more time on her hands – she threw herself into her voluntary work with even greater vigour. Showing no signs of slowing down in advancing years, Gloria continued to build on an

Gloria Bailey with colleagues from RSVP meeting
Speaker Betty Boothroyd at the House of Commons, 1996

impressive catalogue of noteworthy achievements. Her list of credits currently includes: Executive Committee Member, Friendly Almshouses; Executive Member/Trustee, Streatham Darby & Joan Club; Member of the West Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association; Member of the Rotary Club; Parent/Governor, Norwood Girls School; Founder/Chair, Make A Difference Afro-Caribbean Senior Citizens' Community Group (now affiliated to Age Concern/Darby & Joan Club).

Through Gloria's efforts, Make A Difference has helped to revitalise the Streatham Darby & Joan Club: bringing in new members and organising annual events to celebrate Commonwealth Day, Black History Month and Remembrance Day. These events are now established as regular dates in the club calendar – saving a vital, but previously underused, community facility from almost certain closure.

The proud recipient of a Lambeth Civic Award in 2002 and a Diversity Award for services to the community, Gloria greatly appreciates the public recognition of her hard work that she has received. For her, however, real achievement is measured in much more personal terms. "My greatest source of pride are my children", says Gloria. "When I look back to where we came from, and think of all the trials and tribulations Mel and I went through, I feel very proud to know that we managed to raise seven children in this country, three of whom are university graduates and all of whom are doing well for themselves. Being a parent is not easy – it can be the hardest job in the world – but Mel and I did our best and I am very proud of what we achieved."

Floella Benjamin, OBE, Hon DLitt (Exeter)

I was born Floella Benjamin in Trinidad on 23 September 1949. My father invented my name - 'Flo' being short for 'flower' and 'Ella' (after Ella Fitzgerald, the jazz singer), meaning 'best of all'. I am one of six children; my policeman father was a keen musician who left Trinidad in 1958 to play jazz saxophone in England and around the world. The family all settled together again two years later, in South London. Here I first encountered racism, some from other children, some institutional.

I remember crying with disappointment and thinking of ways to escape back to the sun. Of course things only got worse. Winter set in and the trees began to shed their leaves, leaving bare skeletons through which the icy wind blew. Then there was snow! I had only seen it on Christmas cards, but nothing could have prepared me for the real thing. I remember waking on a freezing morning, the smell of the paraffin heater still lingering in the air. The room was filled with a strange eerie, white light. I climbed out of bed, wiped the condensation from the window and there it was, a pure dazzling blanket of snow. I will never forget that feeling, especially how it seemed to obliterate the greyness and depression that had enveloped me since my arrival in London. I stared in amazement and it was at that moment I knew I had fallen in love with snow. I get the same feeling each time I see, it even now.

My mother, of course, having no experience of snow, kept all six of us off school that day, but we soon learnt how to cope. Mind you, I never got used to the idea of playing snowballs, but just liked to watch others from afar, in the warmth.

Spring brought relief from the darkness and gave me a sense of hope and optimism. I'm sure that's why I love the sight of the first daffodils; it's a sign of a new beginning.

When we first arrived in England we lived in one room, all eight of us. We had no access to a garden, which made my mother very sad, as she is a great natural gardener. She was so proud of the one she had back in Trinidad and longed to create one here. Eventually my parents managed to save enough

to buy a house in Beckenham, Kent.

We first visited the house at 2pm on a Sunday afternoon to view it, but within ten minutes a squad of police officers came to arrest us. Apparently the neighbours called the police to say a woman and six children had broken in and were stealing the tiles off the roof!. This incident did not deter my resilient mother who believed that if we lived in a middle class area it would mean we would get the best schooling, health care and jumble sales! Suffice it to say, most neighbours moved out, except the Polish family who had had the same treatment bestowed upon them when they moved in. I was determined to get the best education, because my mother drummed into me that education was my passport to life and I took that advice on board. I was an excellent school athlete, but I was forbidden from taking a running trophy home to share the glory with my family like my predecessors - perhaps they thought we would steal it. But I didn't let barriers like that put me off the track of success.

With ambitions to become Britain's first black woman bank manager, I worked as a bank clerk for two years. But I got six months' leave of absence from the bank in 1969, when I successfully replied to an advert seeking singers and dancers for the hippy stage musical *Hair* - I never returned to the bank. Until then I had only sung in school shows and with my father's jazz band at weekends. I was one of the few cast members in *Hair* who didn't appear nude, a promise I made to my mother who wouldn't have approved. It was here that I also met my future husband, Keith Taylor, a stage manager. Subsequent West End roles included *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1972, *The Black Mikado* in 1974 (as Pitti-Sing) and *The Husband-in-Law* with Kenneth Williams in 1976.

My television debut came in 1973 when I appeared in six episodes in the prison drama *Within These Walls* (ITV, 1973-78). Other acting roles included sitcom *Mixed Blessings* (ITV, 1978), drama serial *Send in the Girls* (ITV, 1978) about a team of sales promotion girls, *Waterloo Sunset* directed by Richard Eyre in 1980, and the first episode of *Bergerac* in 1981. I received critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival in 1977 for my performance in *Black Joy*, the British entry that year. I joined the *Play School* team in late 1976, following in the footsteps of black presenters Carmen Munroe, Johnny Silvo and Derek Griffiths.

While my acting roles stereotyped ethnic minorities, nurses or prostitutes, with *Play School* I was taken at face value as an energetic presenter, singer and dancer, and characters like 'Reggae Rita' helped me to introduce black culture to young viewers. It was there I made the production team realise the importance of reflecting diversity on the screen by showing images of black and Asian faces in illustrations which up until then were excluded from the screen. I later persuaded publishers to reflect the diversity of our children in their books; again at that time there were none. I did the same thing when I became a member of the Royal Mail Stamp Advisory Committee, in 1989; there was no diversity representation on stamps before I arrived.

I joined *Play Away* from 1976 and soon became a children's television stalwart in sketch show *Fast Forward* (BBC, 1984-87), the first series of game show *How Dare You?* (ITV, 1984-87) and *Lay On Five* (BBC, 1985-86). My adult presenting roles include BBC2 music magazine *Musical Chairs* (BBC, 1979), animal quiz *Monkey Business* (BBC, 1985), *Daytime Live* (BBC, 1987-89) and ITV's *Wish You Were Here…?* I formed my own production company in 1987, Floella Benjamin Productions, producing and presenting *Treehouse* (Channel 4, 1987), *Playabout* (BSB, 1990),

Hullaballoo (Channel 4, 1994-96) and *Jamboree* (ITV, 1998-2001), all semi-educational pre-school shows reminiscent of *Play School*. Primetime productions include *A Taste of Cuba* and *Statues and Monuments,* both for Carlton.

My book, *Coming to England* (1995), describing my early life, was dramatised for television by my production company in 2003. My husband Keith was both director and DoP. It won an RTS (Royal Television Society) Award in 2004.

I have worked hard to encourage diversity in all the organisations and committees I have been associated with. They include Women of the Year Lunch where I was Chairman for five years, Chairman of BAFTA -Television and OFCOM Content Board.

I am also a Governor of the National Film & Television School and have held numerous committee positions which included the CDN (Culturally Diverse Network) which encouraged broadcasters to reflect the diversity of our society in the media. I am a Governor of Dulwich College and Chairman of The Pegasus Opera Company. I was installed as Chancellor of the University of Exeter in 2006.

I believe in giving back to society and helping young people to reach their full potential, so I have set up ‘Touching Success’, an initiative to encourage youngsters to feel aspirational and worthy about themselves. I teach them to smile, because winners smile!

I was awarded an OBE for services to broadcasting in 2001, also a BAFTA Special Award in 2004 and an Honorary Doctorate at the University of Exeter in 2005 for having had an influence on British society.

I am still serving Britain's children by being involved with both the production and appearing on children's programmes such as the CBeebies hit series *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies* and producing a new BBC7 radio comedy series, *Hey Diddle Diddle*. This year I played cameo roles in the feature films *Run Fat Boy Run* directed by David Schwimmer and *Rendition,* opposite Jake Gylenhall.

I am the Vice President of Barnardo's and NCH and a Patron of the Sickle Cell Society, where I have created an award for a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the charity. I also made a commitment to run 10 consecutive London Marathons and have raised thousands for charity.

I campaigned for twenty years for a Minister for Children which finally became a reality in 2003. I did it because I want the world to put all children first, when it comes to their wellbeing. I believe and always say 'childhood lasts a lifetime' - everything around them has an effect on their lives. So I will endeavour to do my best for children and get others to see the importance in doing so. Whenever I am asked, "When are you going to move on Floella?" I say how can you move on from the future because that is what our children represent.

My husband and I are proud of our two children's achievements, and have always dedicated our lives to them by putting them first. I know that they will pass on this legacy to their children in the future. If each day I can make a difference to young lives, then I will continue to do so and die a happy woman.

Norma Jean Cameron

Memories of Brixton in the 60's as a Teenager

I was 17 ½ yrs when I first moved to Brixton. There was a huge population of West Indians in Brixton. There weren't a lot of young people around at the time, especially teenagers, as it wasn't that long after the war and people were beginning to start families again. You could count the young West Indians on your hands because not many West Indian parents were able to send for their children 'back-home'. Most West Indians in Brixton were in their 30s - 40s. Children in the 60s were not allowed to walk through Brixton Market on their own. Their parents always knew where they were.

Brixton was not busy like it is now. There was no tube station, only buses. The early buses from Brixton were packed with people on their way to work. You could just jump on them as there were no doors; it was a tight squeeze. I remember buses from Brixton were numbers 159, 59, 3 and 2b, all except the 2b are still in operation today.

There was no shortage of work so lots of West Indians could find works. Not everyone had a car and so it wasn't as busy as now. There were no barriers on Brixton Road, no traffic lights and no pedestrian crossing.

There were not many council flats in central Brixton, just a few scattered houses. At the time I heard a man bought a house for £600. Brixton train station was always there. I never used to travel by train; mainly white people took it. I remember you could hear the sound of the trains and peoples' footsteps above as you walked under the bridge..

On a Sunday Brixton was very quiet; people stayed home to rest or went to church. There weren't many small churches around at the time. Not many people went to church on Sundays in Brixton. A lot of West Indians tended to go to each others houses or have parties.

Crime was low in Brixton, though you would hear of a fist fight. This was usually about dancing with someone else's girl friend , but this only happened around once every one to two years,

The shops, and newsagents were owned by white British. Brixton had lots of small as well as a few medium size shops. The small butchers and fishmongers, were well known for selling good quality products. Although the market and shops were busy and was the major shopping centre in South London, it was not as crowded as it is now.

Bon Marche (a branch of John Lewis) was the major department store in Brixton, and the most expensive. I never used to go there because it was for rich people - a bit like Harrods. Morleys was one of the major shops at the time, and was popular for curtains.

However it was expensive, especially if you were not working. There was also a James Walker, Jeweller, in Brixton, where I got my wedding ring. Barleys Bank was always in Brixton, I remember that the staff were really nice, very smart, wore suits and they cared for people. There were a few other major store, such as Littlewoods, British Home Stores, C&A and Dorothy Perkins and of course Marks & Spencer

People would start their shopping from as early as 7am and could be finished before 10am. They would either carry a shopping bag or wicker basket. People did not tend to take young children shopping as the dads stayed at home with them. You wouldn't see many young men hanging around on the street in Brixton as they also stayed at home.

Brixton indoor market was very busy but wasn't overcrowded. People would start shopping from the back of the market and finished at the front. They knew all the stall owners, who were also white British. People would come from far and wide to buy West Indian food, because it was sold hardly anywhere else. My mother lived in Battersea, yet went all the way to buy food in Brixton. People would dress smartly to go shopping.

In those days people were more loving and willing to socialise; if you met a friends whilst out shopping and invited them round for later, that invitation would be extended to others by word of mouth, as many people did not have telephones. People entertained themselves by playing their radiograms and took it in turns to have parties at their houses because there were no night clubs in Brixton and at that time only white people went to the Pub. The house parties would go on until the early hours with free drinks and food (curried goat and rice or fried fish) provided.

Pauline Herman

An Obituary by Dr. Martin Green

Pauline Herman was a leading member of the Community in Lambeth and used her skills, talents and networks to great effect, making a major contribution to improving the lives of many people from Lambeth's rich and diverse community.

Pauline's working life began in Lambeth, the Borough she loved so much, with her appointment to a post at St Thomas's Hospital. It was not long after starting her first job that her commitment and competence was rewarded with fast progress up the career ladder which resulted in her appointments to some senior posts in various Health Authorities throughout London and the Home Counties. In both her work and personal life Pauline was driven by strong core values and a desire to root out injustice and to support people who were marginalised by society, or denied access to services and support. This commitment to humanity was particularly evident in Pauline's voluntary work, which she pursued with energy and vigour. One of her most outstanding achievements was the work she did for many years as Chair of Age Concern Lambeth. During her time as Chair, Pauline established the organisation as the leading older persons group in the Borough and formed a strong partnership with the Older Peoples Forum and the Pensioners Action Group. As well as her commitment and hard work on behalf of older people, Pauline also worked tirelessly for Children's causes and her willingness to help and support intergenerational work made a real difference to the lives of many people, young and old,

As well as pursuing a successful career and giving so much time and energy to charitable causes, Pauline was at her happiest when

she was with her warm and loving family. She was immensely proud of her Caribbean heritage and was a great role model as a strong and confident black woman, at ease with herself and showing respect and understanding to others.

Pauline Herman made an immense contribution to the community of Lambeth and she is loved and remembered fondly by everyone who knew her.

Donald Hinds

Home to Brixton

I lived in Brixton from 1956 to 1969. Eight years later I returned to Brixton to teach at Tulse Hill School from 1977 to 1985. I have been living in Greenwich since 1969; yet nowhere in London has had such a grip on me as Brixton. I think the reason is similar to why I still cling to the memory of running wild as a boy in the hills and gullies above the Yallahs River in Western St. Thomas, Jamaica. It is a first passionate love thing!

Donald Hinds at Tulse Hill School in 1984

Let me begin at the beginning. I got my first sight of Brixton on either 23rd or 24th of August 1955. My mother and my stepfather had managed to get themselves re-housed by Southwark Council after my stepfather had been duped into leasing a derelict building near the Elephant and Castle. He was anxious to provide accommodation for his wife, my mother, who was due to arrive in London in late November 1951. This accommodation was a one-bed flat with the strict rule that no one else could reside there, so when I arrived I was registered as living at 3 Geneva Road, a single room occupied by an old friend of my mother and her partner. The arrangement was that Geneva Road would appear on all the official documents pertaining to my proof of residence in the Mother Country. At that time Geneva Road which was to all intents and purposes the undoubted slum capital of all slums surpassing its neighbour, Somerleyton Road.

So Geneva Road was the address I gave when I went to the Labour Exchange in Coldharbour Lane, which had attached itself like an appendage to Brixton Market. I can still remember the excitement (or was it just confusion) among the clerks when I presented to the clerk dealing with me my Third Jamaica Local Examination Certificate issued in 1953 by the Education Department, Jamaica, signed by HH Houghton, Director. Until then, the young woman's attitude as it appeared to me was: 'Oh crikey... another one... bloody hell! Will someone turn the bloody tap off?'

Her countenance changed as she showed my certificate to others in the office. This led me to believe it was the first to have been offered to them. If it was, it did not bring me much reward, since others were being offered the same job as me without the benefit of a Jamaica Local Examination Third Year Certificate. It was then I wished that the Certificate had shown that I had passed with

a distinction in teaching as it did in the Jamaica Gazette which announced the successful candidates in October of that year.

I was sent to the London Transport Recruitment Offices, adjacent to Baker Street. A fortnight later after training at Chiswick, and later Camberwell Garage, I was posted to Brixton London Transport Garage where I was to become the fifth or the sixth black bus conductor and let loose on the already suspicious passengers who depended on routes 57, 95, 109 on weekdays and 133 on Sundays. I remained in post from September 1955 until January 1965, 9 years and 4 months.

I enjoyed my time on the buses. I was told some wonderful stories and even made some friends. I recall the old man who might have been in his eighties then who told me that his memory went back to the days when there were verges on the roads, and that sheep were driven from pastures in Surrey to the slaughter houses in Spitalfields Market via Brixton Hill. He also told me that Elizabeth the First came to Brixton in a boat leaving the Thames at Vauxhall and sailing up the Effra when she visited Sir Walter Raleigh, whose residence was somewhere near Raleigh Gardens off Brixton Hill. None of these might have been true, but they were grist to the mill of a Colonial who was planning to write the great West Indian novel which also would be the great Brixton novel! (Literary Agents and Publishers, please note they are still in a drawer marked unpublished).

An incident which took place within weeks of my going to Brixton Garage continues to amuse, and at the same time annoy, audiences when I am asked to talk about the early days of black migration to South London. The cleaner at the Garage was a large woman past middle age. She approached me and in front of several conductors and drivers declared in an accusative manner

that I reminded her of someone. It was a brave statement to make, since white women who had black male acquaintances at that time were fiercely criticised and often shunned with the vehemence of lepers in Biblical times. I would have in all probability forgotten what she said had she not brought it up the next day and again several days later as she struggled to recall the personage, of whom I reminded her. I even suggested that she might have been thinking of Harry Belafonte, whose handsome profile had been seen in *Carmen Jones* and was thrilling audiences everywhere; or Frank Wonell whose strokes on the cricket field matched his good looks. I went so far as to mention Paul Robeson whose great voice and physique had been thrilling aristocratic women since he played Emperor Jones in the nineteen thirties. She shook her head in dismissal. A week or so later she approached me again this time in great triumph.

“Yes I remember.”

“Good. Who is it?”

Drivers and conductors gathered around for the denouement.
“You remind me of the *golliwog* on the Robertson’s strawberry jam bottle.” She delivered her statement with the timing of a music hall comedienne and waddled off with her brush and cleaning bucket.

I do not recall any of the conductors and drivers making a comment; neither did I, but it was years before I could face a jar of Robertson’s strawberry jam. Living conditions in Brixton were grim. As a bus conductor I met many black people, or coloured, as we were called then, who would ask me if I knew of any rooms for rent. A family would live in a single room, and it was not unheard of for five or six men to share.

My parents bought a house in Crawshay Road SW9 in the summer of 1956. I was allocated a tiny box room which I felt obliged to leave when my sister joined us in 1957. A friend rented me a room in Leander Road. It was a spacious front room, with a gas ring for cooking placed in a metal tray on the floor, and items of second hand furniture which were barely serviceable. I paid him two pounds, ten shillings per week. My wages then were about eight pounds per week.

Brixton market was the town's Piccadilly Circus. If you ventured among its stalls often enough you were bound to meet a distant relative whom you did not know had joined the trek to England. It was not long before salt fish, yams, sweet potatoes, pigs tail and bacon knuckle could be bought in First Avenue or was it Second Avenue? Of course there were the big department stores Morleys, Bon Marché and others now long-forgotten. Before there was Jacobs the Photographer, there was Jeromes the photographer, where it was obligatory for new arrivals to go and pose for a picture to be sent back home. I posed for my picture wearing my bus conductor's uniform.

The four cinemas were ABC next to the Town Hall, the Astoria at the beginning of Stockwell Road, the Clifton, half way up Brixton Hill and the Pullman next to the Tate Library. I remember that the Pullman had a winter notice, "It is warmer inside" and a summer notice, "It is cooler inside". Once I saw two young lads queuing up to go in to see a French X-rated film. The cashier said to the little (and younger looking) lad, "Sorry, you cannot go in", whereupon he whipped out his birth certificate (obviously belonging to the older fellow) to prove he was eighteen. From a critic's point of view the film was not worth the bother. Of course, there was also the Empress Theatre behind Morleys store and a

long-forgotten cinema in Herne Hill. Some enterprising black entrepreneurs made several attempts at opening clubs, only to have them closed as quickly by the police. However, the birthnight (they were never birthdays) parties went on in the front rooms. We smooched to the crooning tunes of Billy Eckstein and Sarah Vaughan, of Shirley and Lee, the rhythms of Antoine 'Fats' Domino's "Blueberry Hill" and Lloyd Price with his unforgettable "Staggerlee". We danced the mento to the calypso sounds of "The Trek to England" and "Banana, Banana, Banana"!

Brixton boasted what must have been the first black-operated record shop in this country at 250 Brixton Road, owned by Ex-RAF Theo Campbell. That is where we went for our Jazz, Rhythm and Blues and Calypso records for our radiograms. Immediately above Theo's shop was the first black commercial newspaper, the West Indian Gazette which was edited by Claudia Jones. I became the paper's principal reporter from 1958 to 1965. Above the Gazette offices was a law firm staffed by all black law-clerks. The Gazette covered the riots in Notting Hill and the outcry of tenants of the Rachman estates. We reported the Rivonia trial which showed the calibre of men like Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe et al in South Africa's incredibly long walk to freedom.

Turning to the arts, we celebrated the novels of Caribbean writers, Jan Carew, George Lamming, VS Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, Samuel Selvon et al. From this corner of Brixton we scoured the entertainment scenes for any mention of black artists such as Bosco Holder, Edric Connor, for Nadia Catouse, Cy Grant and Sylvia Winter on television.

We published the picture of June Allyson Bailey, the first black sales girl in a Brixton store, and probably the first in London. We were even there when Trinders, the butcher, decided to sell goat

meat, so essential for curry goat and rice. We publicised Brixton's first Indian Restaurant, the Taj Mahal in Vining Street.

I was present at the editorial meeting, when the idea of a Carnival in London was planned, on 30th January 1959 at St Pancras Town Hall. It was not the Notting Hill Carnival, but it was the forerunner. The paper also promoted a series of Paul Robeson concerts to raise finds for its precarious financial situation. The first took place at Lambeth Town Hall. I still have the picture of the then Mayor and Mayoress, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Paul and Essie Robeson and Claudia Jones to prove it.

The 1958 Notting Hill race riots did not spread to Brixton. The majority opinion is that in 1982 the riots in Brixton were not racial. A wise man once said integration took place first in South London; the rest of the great metropolis had ethnic groups.

The pages of the South London Press are great for charting the arrival and settling in of black immigrants in South London; from the reception of the Windrush immigrants in 1948 and even the turbulent debate on race in 1957. I arrived in Britain on 22nd of August 1955. The headline in the South London Press was to me a twenty-one gun salute:

"LOVELY WEATHER FOR JAMAICANS: Newcomers in Brixton Go Straight to Work."

What a welcome!

Della McKenzie:

I was born Delphina Carmela in Jones Town, Kingston, Jamaica, in 1940. Everyone back home knew me as Phina, but I never liked this nickname and changed it to Della when I got to England. My early memories of schooling at the Alpha Academy in Kingston were not very pleasant. It was a Catholic School and the nuns were overly strict; I remember my ears being boxed for the terrible crime of being five minutes late for school. It did not help that I was a bit of a rebel even at that time.

We were six kids; and I remember my mother telling me how my oldest sister, Gloria (who was adopted), my sister, Barbara, and brother, Lewis all moved to Aruba with my parents when my father worked there, owing to the lack of employment in Jamaica. However, they moved back to Kingston when war broke out and I was born soon afterwards.

Mackie, as I called my mother (whose real name was Myrtle), was the driving force and the brains behind the family. She saw the potential for my father as a carpenter in London and insisted on his leaving to better his prospects on his own. She could turn her hand to most things and even taught my brother a bit of carpentry. She had to cope with our large family by herself and though Dad sent some money – it was never enough and she had to work as well to subsidise our education and living expenses. When my father kept postponing sending for us, she decided to join him in London, and took my youngest brother with her. The rest of us were left behind to be looked after by my older sister, my mother's cousin and a friend, Aunt B.

I remember Aunt B and how well she cared for us – despite the many pranks we played on her. Years later I located her when I

returned to Jamiaca in my thirties. A friend introduced me to her on a surprise visit and she studied me hard before saying “Of course, it is Phina!” I was very impressed as my hair was cut very short at the time and it was a good thirty years since she had last seen me. She belonged to that generation who did not need book-learning for their wisdom and perception.

When Mackie arrived in London she waited for Dad to return from work at the address she knew he lived at. When he returned he was completely taken aback to see her and told her that she could not stay there and had to leave. She realised that he was living with another woman and left. Mackie found herself stranded with Lewis at Victoria Station, when a couple (a young African man and his European wife) perfect strangers, took them in for the night. The next day she rented a room in Saltoun Street, Brixton.

Mackie took a job at TMC and I remember her telling me that she was puzzled at the ladies toilets always being full of curious women each time she visited it; until one day when she actually caught one of them peeking from below the partition - she came out, and pulling down her skirt and panties, said, “Look – no tail!”.

My younger brother, Eric, who was then attending school, was what was known as ‘a latch-key child’. One of the English neighbours, seeing this, suggested that he should stay with their son. This worked out very well and the two remained friends for a long time afterwards. That family had a fish stall in Brixton market and stayed in touch with our family for a great many years. I remember saying hello to them at the market whenever I passed and I also know that the husband lived to a ripe old age.

Mackie sent for the rest of us one by one, starting with my oldest brother, as she knew he was old enough to find work. I arrived by plane when I was fifteen and it was my turn. I landed at Heathrow where I was met by my mother. My first impression of London at seeing all the tall chimneys on the roof-tops was that it was a factory town. We returned to the two bed-roomed flat that the family had moved to in Clapham North. Soon afterwards Mackie took a larger two bed-roomed flat in Villa Road, where my mother, sister and I shared one room and my brothers occupied the other.

Our next house was to be a large one in Burton Road which was sold to us by a very kindly Jewish lady at a very reasonable price, at a time when other agencies would treble the price when they saw that we were immigrants. God bless her soul for the help she extended to Black families who were unable to get mortgages through the normal channels. My mother ran a savings scheme called 'Partners', which helped her and other Jamaicans in London who needed larger sums of money for a particular purpose like buying a house.

This was an exciting time for me in my teens. I even remember attending an Oswald Mosley meeting at Hyde Park when he returned to London for the 1959 general election; and his rabble-rousing words - "What comes out when Black and White come together?" …and the crowd shouting back "Tell us, tell us!". He had that way of getting them worked up and he replied "That...dirty… grey …colour!" pausing between words for effect. One English lady in the audience said "Look at my daughter", pointing to the pretty girl next to her "She is not grey – she is beautiful"; and Mosley replied "There goes another scumbag!" He would probably be furious if he saw England now. I left the meeting early, because that was when the trouble usually started

and fights broke out, but of course I never told my mum that I had been there.

My first paid job was as a typist-cum-dogsbody (…it was definitely more the latter), at a big firm in the Haymarket called DE&J Levy. In my spare time I helped at a record shop on 250 Brixton Road. This was unpaid work, which did not really please my mother – but it was the place to be where everything exciting was happening. The shop belonged to Theo Cambell, a legendary name now, and at the time a favourite meeting place for Jamaicans in London. Theo was an ex-soldier and I remember him telling me an incident that happened when he was in the army. He never saw action but held a desk job. One day a German POW came to clean his office and they got talking. The German asked him why he was working for the English and Theo told him that the Jamaicans were also British; at which the man said "After the war I will be a free man – but you won't be!" I also helped upstairs where the West Indian Gazette was being published by a remarkable woman called Claudia Jones.

Claudia was my Svengali. Her influence on me was to open my mind and broaden my knowledge over the years, even after she died at such an early age. She was the editor of the Gazette, which targeted the growing Black community in London; her aim was not just to entertain them but to educate them as well. Her interest in people covered many other nationalities, and they were drawn to her as well. She even started the carnivals that have now become a yearly event in London. Claudia took me along to many interviews and had me making notes; I particularly remember visits to the House of Commons, and meeting celebrities like the great Paul Robeson and his wife. I was speechless and in awe of this man and recollect how moving his taped message was at her

funeral. A woman standing next to me took my hand and said "We will survive. We shall overcome".

While helping Theo and Claudia I met a girl called Faye Craig, who was an actress and dancer, married to an Englishman. They had a beautiful baby boy who I looked after sometimes. She came round one day and said "I need to put a group together for the production "Thank Your Lucky Stars". It was like Top of The Pops at that time. I asked if I could bring along a friend who was also a dancer (- she really wasn't trained, though she had talent). So Faye put the routine together and we did the show, which travelled round the country.

I remember meeting my idol, Adam Faith, on the coach returning from the studios in Birmingham. Someone told him that I was a fan of his and he came and sat next to me and we chatted. Later I was in shows that he produced and acted in (like 'Love Hurts'), but there wasn't much contact. He was quite a lad with the ladies.

I tried getting office jobs, but my first love being dancing, I trained with a group and we travelled around all over Europe and the Middle East; including Beirut, Italy, Greece and Norway. Beirut was particularly beautiful and I feel so sad to see what has happened to it now.

At this time Mackie was also working as an actress. She had bit-parts in films and TV shows, including 'Kathy Come Home', 'Dangerman', 'The Saint' – and even a small part in 'Live and Let Die'. In which I also had a part as a dancer. It was around this time, in the early 1970s that I met and fell in love with a young Black American ex-soldier who was working in London as an underwriter. A year later our beautiful son was born. His light blue eyes may have come from my side of the family; I have

always meant to trace our family history sometime – I am sure it will be very interesting. People were always surprised to see his light coloured eyes against his tanned complexion and he had to get used to their staring over the years.

I was to join my fiancé in America, as he had moved there with his firm, but I was torn between him and Mackie, who was very unwell by then. Her health had been seriously affected by the compulsory purchase of the house in Burton Road by the local government, who had plans to redevelop that section of the road. John Major lived in the section that was not touched. Mother knew him and his family at that time, and found them very friendly.

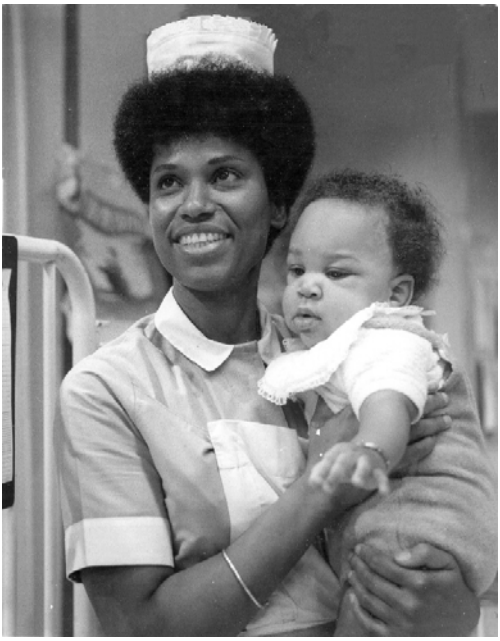
My mother's house was five storeys high and she had a few tenants living with her. At that time other landlords were just chucking out their tenants, but Mackie insisted on the council re-housing them. As she was in her late 60s she couldn't afford another mortgage, and the council were offering her a fraction of the market value after they had deducted the money taken for the tenants. I tried to get a lawyer who would take on her case, and with great difficulty found one who was very passionate about the injustice to her.

Mackie lived on her own in the house and she was being harassed by one of the council staff, who asked her why she would not move and suggested that she return to her own country – in the nastiest racist language possible. He would never have got away with it today! I had moved into a house in Thornton Heath with a friend who was a singer. I asked her not to open the door to him when I wasn't there, but she had to do so when he was so persistent. Ultimately Mackie had a nervous breakdown, and I decided that it was not worth pursuing the case at the risk of her

health; we had no choice but to accept the paltry amount she was given. I have never forgotten the vindictiveness and cruelty of that man who ruined my mother's health; she had been such a strong, hardworking and upright lady all her life and never completely recovered from the loss of her home under these circumstances.

Della McKenzie in "The Garnett Saga", c.1986

I live in my own house now in Thornton Heath. I am still acting and my son has followed in my footsteps – even appearing in the popular series ‘The Bill’…that is when he is not tinkering with his cars. Over the years I have appeared in a great many TV programmes and films, apart from my modelling career. I played a nurse with my real life baby son in ‘General Hospital’; appeared in many episodes of ‘The Bill’ (including one with him when he was ten years old); and a part in ‘The Garnett Saga’, just to name a few.



In recent years I have taken part in Black History events; including appearing at the Swiss Cottage with a guest panel discussing what it means to be a black actor in a predominantly white industry, along with Alister Bain, Marsha Miller and Geoff Burton; and at Lambeth Archives with the multi-talented Alex Pascall OBE, and the author Donald Hinds, who had also worked with Claudia Jones on the Gazette. On the acting front it has been mainly promotional material for firms like Selfridges, McDonalds, documentaries on TV and a great many photographic stills. In my late 60s now I think of that generation of women like Claudia Jones and Mackie and all that they went through in paving the way for the West Indian women of today.

Vincent Osborne

The Brixtonian – Rhum Shop, Café, Restaurant

I was born in St Kitts, the second child of three, and I was lucky enough to grow up in an extended family that included my grandparents, and great grandparents. I am not sure whether I was aware that I was growing up in privilege, but I certainly enjoyed the comfort and freedom of my early existence. My maternal grandfather, James Theophilus Maynard was the overseer of several plantations – sugar, citrus, peanuts – I never knew his age, both my grandparents insisted that they were too young for the title, and so they were uncle Jim and auntie Jane. Neither was I ever aware of his employers, a white lace netted world of colonial ghosts perhaps. I remember the enforced silence as aunt Janie sat doing the books and wages. I never forgot Aunt Janie's nightly ritual - she would sit at her table with a kerosene lamp, and putting on her gold rimmed glasses (which possessed only one arm, a piece of string the substitute for the other) would meticulously read all the day's newspapers. This was due to the fact that my great uncle was in printing, and committed to social change in St Kitts, and she took a deep interest in her brother's work. He eventually opened his own press, printing greeting cards among other things, and took up a post as a church sexton. A social consciousness ran through the family, my great aunt Vida came to England in the late 40s/ early 50s to read social science at Liverpool. Another great uncle John was a doctor in New York where he ran two practices, one in Harlem where he charged no fee, and one in Mt. Vernon where he made his living. My great grandmother had earned herself the nickname *church mouse*, as she could always be found in a church.

My younger brother, Colin, and I remained behind when my parents left with my older brother for England; we stayed for a year with Momma, our great grandmother. Momma's industrious nature had passed on to her daughter and granddaughters – my aunt and cousins – they lived together in a huge house in an area of St Kitts called Greenland. I remember the beautiful kitchen garden with plants laid out in perfect rows – thyme, lettuces, sweet potato, pumpkin – we never bought any vegetables; I remember how the grape vine twined on its wooden arbour. Each Saturday the women of the house prepared what they called the tray; a platter of sweet pastries, sugar cakes, cashew, peanuts and pinchie (a sweet popadom-like pastry), and carried it to the market. It was also on Saturday that Momma slaughtered a chicken in a ritual that always traumatised us. She would wring the neck, then hold the creature high above her head and bring it down with a slam. Then taking the machete, we removed the head with one clean motion. Wry laughter enlivened her kindly features as we screamed at the sight of the headless body running around the yard.

At night Momma would frighten us with tales of Anansi, the trickster and shape shifter, the spider-man. Momma had two long bottom teeth in the front of her mouth, which she used at the climax of each tale to chilling effect, as we screamed. Momma's fair complexion reddened as she curled her top lip inward and drew the teeth up so they touched the tip of her nose.

After a year with Momma in Greenland, we moved to Canada estates to stay with uncle Jim and aunt Janie and this time I always refer to as the fattening process. It had become almost a custom that as parents leaving for England left children at home in the Caribbean, those to whose charge the children were left would make every effort to ensure that the parents knew their children

were being well cared for. For us, this meant a near unlimited indulgence in the most exquisite foods of tropical paradise, and it was glorious. We were the only children in the massive farmhouse, known locally as The White House, a two-storey structure that imposed itself against the local bungalows. There was a chapel in the basement that I cannot ever remember being used, but it was always kept in pristine condition by the many servants in the house. I remember the most beautiful set of Morris chairs in the drawing room and lots of fine china. It was amazing just how much food was constantly being prepared, especially by aunt Janie, who, despite the presence of so many servants, was constantly cooking. The soup every Saturday particularly stands out in my memory, as I could never understand why the liquor was always served separately from the meat and vegetables. Every so often my brother and I had to endure the great washout; we were taken down to the beach where turtles were caught and drained of their oil, which flowed bright orange. We were then given this oil to drink, after which we would spend weeks on the loo, but we felt our bodies entirely invigorated, and our complexions shone like silk in the Caribbean sun.

At school we were taught by *one eyed* Miss Barker to sing, to write the alphabet on a slate, and to announce our names and addresses. At five in the evening we were sent to Major Graves, a Barbadian of the Salvation Army, and we learned Maths in the morning and English in the afternoon, as my mother insisted that if you had no aptitude for either of these, you could not master any other discipline, and education would be wasted on you. On Fridays we were allowed singing as a treat.

I remember the excitement I felt when the time came for us to leave and join our parents in England, but when the day came I wept buckets. I knew how much I would miss aunt Janie, I felt she

was the only one who was truly sensitive to the person I was, and the only one by whom I felt truly understood. In the warm evenings, before the last shower before bed, aunt Janie would sit me on her knees while she sat in her rocking chair, and give me rides while I looked out over the coconut grove casting shadows, and the sea beyond shimmering red in the twilight. Aunt Janie lost both her legs to diabetes before she passed away.

My brother and I left St Kitts for England with our aunt Millicent, who too was emigrating, and was to be our guardian for the journey. Enroute we spent a night in a guesthouse in Barbados, and were served rice, split peas, and salt-fish. “No relish (meat) on a Sunday?” my brother and I complained, and probably spoilt to the core, sent the poor landlady scuttling out to find some. From Barbados we sailed to Calais, and then to England. Birmingham made no real impression on me, except for the size and uniformity of the houses. At home, houses were restricted to two storeys, and living in a two-storey house was a mark of wealth. “We are rich!” I screamed at my brother as I saw the four storey house we were to call home, How my heart sank when my father told me we were living only at the bottom of the house.

My secondary education was at Queensbridge School, as bland an experience as one could have anticipated, having landed on these shores. The headmaster was one Rolloson, the epitome of arrogance bred of ignorance, of twisted misanthropy mistaken for pride. On one occasion Rolloson had called a Roman holiday; this was the name given to the ritual where all the male pupils and staff of the school were gathered around misdemeanants to witness them receiving the six mandatory lashes.

The five boys were accused of stealing from the local village, Moseley. Four of the boys were black, and after he had finishing

administering his punishment, he turned to the gathering and proclaimed, “The day any Black boy becomes Head Boy in this school, I’ll fly the Union Jack”. Unfortunately he had retired by the time I made Head Boy. Rolloson was not typical of the staff at Queensbridge, but neither was he untypical. On a parents evening, the science teacher, Mr Grant, whilst demonstrating a classroom experiment, turned to my father and remarked “don’t worry, you won’t understand this”. He could not have picked a worse target for his odious quip; my father a brilliant chemist, coolly and systematically, took him apart.

The only ambition I ever truly held was to become an actor; on hearing this, my mother dragged me in front of the television and asked, “Do you see any black faces on this thing?” So when I left Queensbridge I attended Bournville College to complete a HNC in Business Studies. In truth I only subjected myself to the course because it gave me the chance to be with Auldine - my future wife, who was doing her pre-med there - without her mother, sisters, brothers, or any other of her chaperones. Even so it wasn’t long before I had had enough, and after the HNC, I decided to join RAF telecommunications. Had I been a pilot or a gunner, my experience there may have been different, but as it was, what followed after the relish of liberty in the first six months had worn off, was five years of routine and utter tedium. On Gan in the Maldives, as idyllic a location as one could conjure, men walked around the island naked - they called it *Tranny Trogging*, a desperate and empty device to relieve the suffocating ennui of 600 men exiled to paradise. I spent time posted in Cyprus and the Persian Gulf, however the isolation of Gan was a permanent state that characterised RAF life, but it offered a great deal of time for thought, and I reflected often on my ambition to act. I also had independence and money for the first time, so when I left, the RAF Auldine and I were married, and soon after, we had our son.

Auldine was a tremendous encouragement and support when I decided to enter drama school in Birmingham. I had to audition for a grant, which I received, and which covered the cost of fees and living expenses. I was 29, and being in what seemed, after the forces, such a chaotic and capricious institution, peopled by youngsters, overcharged with pretensions and uninformed by experience, proved more difficult than I had imagined; but on the whole, drama school was an escape to freedom. I landed parts at the National Theatre, as well as in *Brideshead Revisited*, *Taste of Honey*, and worked with Sheila Delaney.

"This, is not Brixton!" was my wife's reaction to her first encounter with an area of south London far greener, far calmer than either of us had anticipated. I imagine the fact that I cannot remember at what point in the 80s I uprooted my family from Tamworth, and arrived in Brixton – that is to say whether pre- or post- riots – as a measure of Brixton's status as social and political pariah.

It was with curiosity that I took up an invitation to dinner by Michael Fish of Mayfair's Embassy Club, one of London's *must be seen in places* of the time, and a Brixton resident. Instead of the dialectical opposition to Thatcher's vision of the new British enterprise; a place of alienated youth, a belligerent and hostile community palpably racked by racial tension, I found myself facing a double fronted house in Leander Road, pink and red, in a quiet and spacious road, lined with gorgeously large Victorian houses, a befitting residence for the designer of the Kipper tie, and owner of the first male boutique on Carnaby St. It was in the streams of table conversation that the rupture between the Thatcherite dream, and the many lives concentrated in this Brixton, very much awake to its place in the Thatcher project, was

realised, and I listened with increasing interest. Throughout, I kept a silent opinion on the matter, that I yet remained to be impressed in any way by the area, as I had been by what I saw as the potential of Islington for example; true, I had not encountered the half-expected running battles pitched outside the entrance to Brixton tube, but this was testament only to the crass and pervasive nature of the media caricature of the area. I was eventually drawn into conversation with a gentleman by the name of Jonathan Campbell, who was insistent that there existed no black middle class. Even I, at this point, had little appreciation of how uneasily his free expression and principled assurance would sit in my mind alongside the typically prodigious opinion of Darren, my six-year-old son, who, having spent his entire young life in Tamworth and Wardour St, was to assert on his arrival in Brixton "it is nice to be in the majority". In counter to this increasingly heated debate were the more jocular, almost cajoling remonstrations of one Anthony Ormingster, a designer who wished to persuade me of what could be accomplished in Brixton. Before leaving, Jonathan, the misguided social anthropologist, offered me his hand and an invitation to his club in Bond St, a peace offering so that we might part on good terms.

Over the next few months or so, under the infectious enthusiasm of Anthony, I became familiar with the area, and it was as he had promised, a pleasant eye opener. The politics was far more progressive, than aggressive; the atmosphere more vibrant and congenial than thuggish; there were many impressively literate minds and voices; good will and energy. I remember Emile in particular, an Antiguan hairdresser who had opened up a smart salon right above the underground station, finished with a décor that entirely discarded the bland, macho functionality expected of a barbershop. Emile's manner and professionalism, his vision, originality and conviction made an impression on me, and I began

to see how the struggle against perceptions, could itself, be inspirational; Emile was certainly inspirational.

I decided to take up Jonathan, my dinner antagonist, on his invitation, and during a pleasant evening in Napoleon's, Bond St, I became acquainted with a man whose ideas and attitudes were far more sympathetic to my own than I could possibly have expected. Not only did we part as firm friends, but also the vague possibility that we could become business partners was already beginning to form.

I set up home with my family in Helix Rd, Brixton Hill, and now the true significance of those snatches of reggae and calypso from passing cars and open windows, of which I had before now taken little notice, began to take hold. We were at home here, and a certain lease of energy came from that realisation; as a family, we were perhaps mentally and physically freer here, now, than we had ever been. On a midsummer's night, when the house was yet barely furnished, with no proper kitchen and much of our vessels and utensils still in boxes, we set out two tea chests in the dining room, lay two old doors on top, and spread some white linen across them. We arranged white flowers, and candles on this improvised dining table, and with courses of stuffed baby poussin glazed with honey, proceded to enjoy a dinner party with at least twenty family and friends. It was not long before a steady procession of passers-by was peering through the window, open to the pleasant evening breeze, until at last one passing gentleman remarked, "Welcome to Brixton Hill". We were indeed welcome, and Helix Rd, already by coincidence home to Donna Croll, an old friend with whom I had attended both music and drama school back in Birmingham, seemed the most natural place to be. Dawn Hill and her husband Martin, were amongst the warmest and most delightful residents, and were responsible for introducing us to

Helix Rd *Society*, with all its wonderful colour and eccentricity. We also developed a strong and lasting friendship with a couple not dissimilar to ourselves, following an argument concerning my refusal to vote Labour, (though voting Tory was never even a consideration), citing its commitment to cosmetics and tokenism, with an utterly charming and passionate Janet Boateng, canvassing for her husband Paul. Then there was Holy Trinity Church, Tulse Hill, around which much of our existence had begun to evolve, and which perfectly captured the spirit of Brixton at its best, mixed in age, class, and ethnic background. The Vicar was a man of deep, one might even say, moving sincerity, of passionate and honest faith. A Ugandan committed to the development and opening up of church music, which he believed key to the to the life of the spirit, a commitment that drew into its circle members such as Ian Hall, a brilliant music professor, and the first black music master at Eton; and it was a commitment he took all the way to the Archbishopric of York: John Sentamu, with whom we also found firm and lasting friendship.

The novelty of the our move wore away, the novelty of at least not feeling in an isolated minority, and of living amongst a empathetic black middle-class, and it dawned that for all its life and bustle, outside of school and church events, Brixton was socially and economically unresponsive to the diverse existences of its residents, especially of its black middle-class. There were a few rough pubs and some greasy spoons, but little that was appealing, above all to families. It was an area that was also frustrated by a lack of things as simple as worthwhile shopping, indicative of the dearth of any political ambition to create a sustainable and diversified local economy. An obviously considerable and untapped clientele would make their way to Streatham, or the West End to spend. I had, after five years in the RAF, returned to the stage, my first love, but now as a struggling actor with a

mortgage and the education of two children to consider, and with all that I had learned from my move to Brixton, it was time to set out my own stage.

"The Brixtonian" in Beehive Place

Jonathan Campbell and I decided we would open a bar-restaurant, and I began scouting for properties with A1 usage. I had come to consider it typical of the people especially the business community in Brixton that even potential rivals, including Emile the salon owner, were helping us to locate suitable properties, even when they themselves intended to bid for the buildings. We eventually set our sights on a property in Dorrell Place, and encountered our first hurdle as our application for a licence to operate an A3 commercial property, was met with an unexpected

barrage of opposition from Lambeth council. One councillor remarked, “Black people do not drink wine”. (It later transpired that this particular councillor owned a bar in Brixton, and in jarring exception to the general outlook of local business, felt he could do without the competition). After pressing our case we were *invited* to an informal town planning inquiry, where, after a pre-meeting, the committee were fully expecting to turn down our appeal. We left the meeting having won our case, a win that would change the local policy that prevented an A1 commercial property from being converted to A3 use. My own conspiracy theory regarding the initial opposition we encountered, of which I am yet to be disabused, is that it was in fact politically rather than commercially driven. It seemed to me that the Labour council harboured a petty fear of losing its base through gentrification, a lack of vision the implications of which need no demonstration.

Banks were incredibly racist. Anything considered a *Black business project* was sent away from the local branch to Norwood. The manager there was a joyless character we nicknamed “Gorby”, after the Gorbachev*esque* mark he sported on a balding head, and which somehow completed an unforgiving physical presence. If he were to consider our loan application with any seriousness, we were to return to him with a business plan. In the banking mentality of the time, (and I am unsure of how much has changed since), requesting a business plan from black loan applicants, was an effective but polite “No”. In response, Brixton displayed its talent for defiance and surprise, and for gifting the right ingredients for success, at the right time. On a tube on my way to Oval Theatre, I happened to ask a gentleman on his way to the cricket where the theatre was. He turned out to be a Pakistani named Riswan Bilgrami, and aside from being one of the most hauntingly handsome human beings I have ever met, he was also something of a financial wizard. He joined us with another friend

Paul Scriver, a brilliant architect, and together we threw ourselves with a quite unexpected passion, almost an inexplicable catharsis, into the creation of a business plan. When completed, we had created not so much a plan, as a mini-masterpiece, of environmentally sensitive, and sustainable commercial thinking, precise, visionary, and beautiful. I hope it is not simply personal prejudice when I claim that back in Norwood "Gorby" was simply shocked by the completeness of the plan into approving the loan, even though by this time I had no more than £10 left in my account. The plan was never returned to us, and I am told that the bank continues to use it as a model business plan in its management training.

So there I was, surveying this derelict, and crumbling building in Dorrell St, all obstacles surmounted, all opposition overcome, Brixton was now calling our bluff. The path up until now had seemed clear, but now I found it difficult to envision how this skeleton of an edifice could serve anything like the ideas we had. As I looked up at the sky through the bare rafters of the long collapsed ceiling, beneath me, the concrete cellars yawned like an open pit. The place had been some kind of café, and the scent of boiled cabbage was a ghostly companion as I walked around in silent contemplation of the space. Coming across the dilapidated lavatories, I noticed an old cistern with a now faded manufacturer's name embossed on the decaying tank: Brixtonian.

In order to procure the finest rum stock, I went island hopping in the Caribbean discovering that Martinique alone had at least a hundred rums of its own. When I returned, I had imported over a hundred and fifty varieties, from islands such as those of the Lesser Antilles, where rum production was not big enough for commercial export. The Brixtonian opened to a more rapturous reception than we could have hoped for; there was an entirely

positive response to the possibility that the bar was altering the image of the Brixton clientele. We had a good mix of black and white city workers, as well as people who had set up offices in the local area. Yvonne Thompson for instance, who had set up in the area London's first black-owned PR company, was amongst our earliest. With few positive stories coming out of Brixton, The Brixtonian was regularly receiving good write ups from the likes of The Observer, and Time Out, becoming that publication's *Bar of the Year*, as well as on Radio and TV. The quality of the surrounding space also improved with the presence of The Brixtonian; we lobbied the council and had the dark alleyway re-lit, and the best lighting in the area is still to be found on the junction of Dorrell Place and Nursery Rd, where many women had previously felt it too unsafe to walk. Soon we could count Bertice Reading, and Petula Clarke; Adelaide Hall, Harriet Harman, Fenella Fielding, Tony Banks and Desiree among our familiar clientele, mingling with the open Brixton crowd.

Where we had been expecting around 50 for our first New Year's Eve, over 300 turned out. We set out a marquee that covered the side of the building, and continued along the alleyway. The atmosphere was perfectly pitched, the night possessed glowing warmth as people danced to DJ Jerry Liset's mixes of calypso and Latin, drinking and pleasantly conversing. In the middle of the dance floor, a wonderful character, a solicitor by the name of Michael proposed in all seriousness to a very pretty girl, who answered, "but I always thought you were gay". "No" retorted the lawyer "only gay by association". By 4am, there remained a group of our regulars, Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst among them, who we decided to have as guests for New Year's breakfast. We served scrambled egg, smoked salmon with mint tea and fresh bread prepared by David White, who would remain our chef for twenty years. On the back of the success of The Brixtonian, we

opened up The Brixtonian Backayard, Covent Garden. Fuelled more by adrenalin than stressed, I was now running on 3-4 hours sleep a-night. I looked forward to each new challenge, excited at the possibility and prospect of the new in each day.

A carol service became part of the Brixtonian Christmas tradition; I had become involved in sponsoring young black singing talent, and over the years we were treated to some extremely promising voices. I remember one year, after the service, how a group of very middle classed English guests, who obviously found it difficult to associate young black men and women with classical music, sat in stunned rapture as two young, very fine South African sopranos and a bass, worked their way through a sumptuous impromptu performance of Mozart. The Brixtonian Notting Hill Carnival float was another of our annual institutions, sponsored by the bar, and some of our finest rum labels. Regulars and friends were invited to dress up, and dance the night away as we paraded through the streets of West London.

After we had been open in Brixton for fourteen years, Jonathan became seriously ill. We decided to close the Covent Garden bar in order to concentrate on Dorrell Place, as without Jonathan's full input, the two venues had become impossible to run. It was however the beginning of the end, as the health of my friend and business partner deteriorated rapidly. Jonathan was totally committed to the business, not to the profit of it, but to the vision. We had deep mutual respect and trust; his strength was in the organising and running of the kitchen. He was an enthusiastic cook, but did not have a natural talent; Caribbean flavours and technique threw him, but he was always learning. He managed wages, National Insurance, and taxes with an un-harassed competence I could never have managed. I plied my energies into press and marketing, the menu décor and aesthetics of the two

Brixtonians. I was always aware that it was an irreplaceable partnership. After Jonathan's death, I left the country for a while to consider the future, leaving what remained of the business to the trust of his family. On my return, I unfortunately became embroiled in unpleasant dealings with them regarding Jonathan's stake in the business. Their involvement proved disastrous, and as I lost the will and energy, The Brixtonian came to an end.

Brixton has always seemed to me stuck in a political and economic pattern, one massive step forward, and two massive steps backward. Though house prices seem to have no ceiling, increasing along with the national trend and in accordance with the local transport links to the city, the overall quality of life in the area that provoked my first complaints, and led to the Brixtonian venture, have simply not improved; I venture to say it has worsened. There is an utterly charming market space, famous for its Caribbean produce; but why do the council not assist with and ensure a better presentation of Brixton Market? What has happened to the famous Brixton theatre, the name of which escapes me, the first to offer pantomime with live animals? There was a small theatre in St Martin's Lane, but when it was pulled down for housing development, there was no insistence that it be replaced. Electric Avenue is so-called as the first street to be lit by electricity in Britain, and as such, one of the first in the world. Where are the tourists to see this and other places in Brixton, with its gathering of cultures, and its memories of the fight to keep social consciousness alive, when the rush for profit had all but obliterated it? For all the talent concentrated in the area, there are no arts venues through which it may be channelled; there remain only a commercial cinema and a few tacky assembly halls. The shops are better presented than when I first arrived, but the quality of what is on offer is still sub-standard, and the commercial life of the area in general is still too much characterised by Pound Shops

and Sportswear. The high road is overrun with places for hair extensions and bleaching creams, where cafes and craft shops should be providing better infrastructure, and a more attractive community space. In this regard, areas of south London such as East Dulwich, and Peckham are leaving Brixton behind. The night economy has increased, with lots of recognisable spin-offs of The Brixtonian, but they are not pulling in people from the wider areas. The city workers that frequented our venue are now travelling east to Shorditch and Brick Lane.

Brixton needs to reinvent itself; local government, as well as the local community need to find and build on a greater sense of cohesion. Ambitions for a shared space need to converge, and be driven forward by a greater commitment to vision, and purposeful leadership. Brixton occupies an important part in my memory. It is true that the bar was once held up at gunpoint, but it was also the bar in which I regularly entertained Nina Simone.

My lasting memory of Brixton? Perhaps it is of standing in that ghost of a building, with all that untapped potential, simply waiting for the inspiration to move forward.

Herman Ouseley

Public service and concern for people of all backgrounds has always been a dominant feature of Herman Ouseley's life. He has endured extremes in poverty and race hatred but has always aspired, like many others, to do his best for himself and to contribute to the well being of others. This is a snapshot of some of his life experiences.

Although I lived in nearby Peckham for 47 years of my life I have always had a close association with and affection for Lambeth. I attended William Penn School in North Dulwich, where most of the pupils were from Lambeth. Our main school rivals were from Tulse Hill and Kingsdale schools but we also had class rivals in the posh schools of Alleynes and Dulwich College, who regarded us disdainfully as 'losers'.

The street market in Brixton was a weekend shopping lure for my family with its exotic range of foods and its African/Caribbean settlements. At the beginning of the 1960s those settlements were the overcrowded slums of Geneva, Somerleyton and Railton Roads, ultimately to be condemned and redeveloped.

My working life took me into local government as a Junior Clerk in town planning and administration with Middlesex County Council. In 1965 I moved to its successor body, the GLC, but found it then to be soulless. I moved on to the London Borough of Hackney to pursue my interest in town planning. A year later I applied for the post of Administrative Officer in the Department of Architecture and Planning for the London Borough of Lambeth. In those days, racial discrimination was rampant. It was only a year after the colour bar was formally ended with the Race Relations Act of 1965 and I owed my successful appointment to

the Head of Planning and Administration, John Bland, who steadfastly refused to kowtow to the demands of the hierarchy to maintain an all white status quo. In those days, Black people were described politely as 'coloured' and 'darkies' and denigrated as 'niggers', 'wogs', 'sambos' and 'coons'. I have had all of those labels at one time or another but the experiences helped to strengthen my inner drive to identify with the underdog, the deprived, the discriminated against and the disadvantaged; and not to let insults and abuse deflect from developing a positive approach to changing attitudes and behaviour. Racist insults were hurtful and lawful, but never as detrimental as being denied opportunities to work, to earn money to exist, or to socialise because of the colour of your skin which was actually brutal in its effect on peoples' lives.

One of my first acts of defiance and non-compliance with Town Hall bureaucracy was to provide extra help and guidance to households seeking to have inside toilets and bathrooms; I wanted to make the process much easier for poor households without them being bogged down by excessive paper and planning demands from the Council, so I would spend time showing people how to get through and round the system. The guys who ran planning and development did not give a damn about poor or deprived people. They did not live in the borough so had no empathy with local experiences and aspirations.

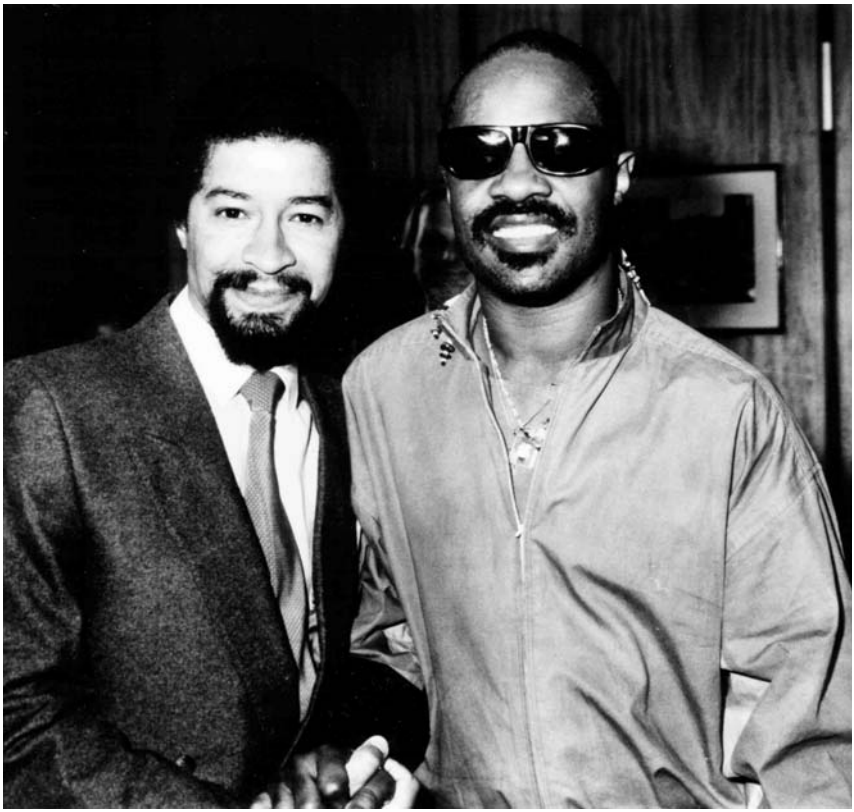
The opportunity to work directly with needy groups in the community took me into social welfare services and I spent three years managing residential care services for the elderly of Lambeth. This was a highly valued service, and a key period in the development of residential care services, as we created excellent new purpose-built provision for old and frail individuals, many of whom were housed in huge, impersonal London-wide

institutions. It was a great pleasure to work with so many skilled and dedicated carers, who were predominantly of Irish, Caribbean and African backgrounds. In the best traditions of British public service they gave their best efforts at all times. Inspired by their efforts I wanted to do more at a personal level across a broad range of people and this led me to take on a five year stint as the Manager of the Council for Community Relations in Lambeth, during which time I was involved in the full range of issues facing young people and families. This included setting up or providing support, including fund raising, to local projects such as the Angell Town Adventure Playground (one of the first of its kind in London), school holiday play schemes, supplementary school, detached youth schemes, a hostel for the homeless, skills training programmes, the Abeng Community Centre and a residential holiday centre in Hertfordshire to take children and young people out of their humdrum environment and provide them with leisure and educational development opportunities. This also brought me into collaborative contact with many people in Lambeth and beyond, who were engaged in fantastic voluntary and community work. The work was exhausting but always satisfying when you realised the pleasure it gave and the benefits received by those with the greatest needs. Some of the key figures at the time included Rudy Narayan, Bob Nind, George Greaves, Rene Webb, Gloria Cameron, and Courtney Laws. There were many others; too many to list.

Once again, seeing others committed to excellence in public service provision inspired my next challenge. Having experienced the worst of bureaucracy both inside and outside the Council I decided that I would try to see if I could help to make Council services more user friendly and accessible for the public, especially those most in need. The Council had decided to set up a Race Relations Unit in 1978 to guide its policies and practices on

equal opportunities and fair treatment for all, and was to be a pioneer local authority in this respect. I was very lucky and privileged to be asked to head the Unit. My role was to lead the team, advise members and officers, negotiate and oversee the implementation of changed practices and challenge and root out all forms of unlawful discrimination. Although there was strong political commitment, especially from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ted Knight, in many parts of the Council there was denial and resistance; in some others there was a recognition and acknowledgement that unfair practices and processes had to be reformed. Discrimination was most apparent in housing and employment. Black and minority ethnic households were to be found in the least desirable and over-crowded accommodation and in the lowest graded and worst remunerated jobs. On one occasion, when I approached the Directorate of Construction Services in 1979 to ask about their nepotistic recruitment practices, I was told in no uncertain terms by one of the Union convenors: "Don't think you are going to bring a truck load of niggers onto one of our building sites on Monday morning and tell us to employ them. It won't happen here!" So much for making life easier or fairer for those on the outside trying to get access to an opportunity to work or to engage some service or facility. In spite of such opposition, during the two year period 1979 - 1981, progress was made on all fronts and other authorities across the UK wanted to learn from Lambeth's experiences and developments.

When the GLC set up its Ethnic Minorities Unit in 1981, I was given the opportunity to replicate the work in Lambeth on a bigger canvass across the Greater London area. This I did until 1984, the year celebrated as 'London Against Racism' year, when I returned to Lambeth as an Assistant Chief Executive to steer their community involvement and participation strategy. Whilst we



Herman Ousley with Stevie Wonder, January 1984

established good links with an array of solid community and voluntary organisations across the Borough, their opportunities for genuine involvement and participation in decision making were miniscule. This was a deception I could not tolerate indefinitely. The reality was that the elected members, not entirely surprisingly, wanted to hold onto as much of their power as possible and devolution and localism were superficial. My next challenge was as a Director of Education at the Inner London

Education Authority in 1986, and then as Chief Executive until its abolition in 1990.

Having overseen and helped to steer successfully the hand-over of education services from the ILEA to the 13 new education authorities, I returned to Lambeth for a three-year stint. This would eventually bring to a close a twenty year career with the Borough. It was a time of great stress for staff, members and the public. The Council was not collecting the poll tax, it had badly mismanaged its affairs, there was low staff morale and no clear sense of purpose, other than to challenge the government as being anti-working class, anti-local authority and anti-Lambeth. One of my first tasks was to reorganise the Council, which meant merging and reducing departments, balancing the books (in theory) by cutting costs and reducing the workforce by over 3000 jobs. Try as I did to inject some sanity into the political processes, there was too much undermining going on. That in itself could be the subject of a book. While investigating corruption, I had silent intimidating phone calls in the middle of the night, my car tyres slashed, windscreen smashed, bricks thrown through my windows at home and an endless stream of threats. Undaunted, I ploughed on but, after three years of strife, I handed in my notice in spite of being offered a new four year contract with a substantially increased salary. By then my sanity and my existence were far more important than accepting their offer. I had to move on and let someone else take the baton for a fresh start.

After I left Lambeth Council in 1993 I was surprised to be offered the opportunity to become the Executive Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. My interview with the then Home Secretary did not go as well as I had hoped and, when it concluded suddenly after only 20 minutes when he was called away to an urgent meeting, I thought that was that. Even after it

was offered to me I was in two minds about whether to accept such a poisoned chalice. Friends convinced me that, after Lambeth, the CRE would be a case of 'out of the fire and into the frying pan'. Some choice I thought! Nevertheless, I accepted the challenge and spent seven years at the CRE until 2000, when I decided to take charge of my life and extricate myself from being institutionally owned and taken for granted; other people told me from time to time that I was a “piece of publicly owned property”, which is how I was once described by someone in the Home Office.

The CRE was a great experience in challenging racism and discrimination. In spite of seven successive years of budget reductions by both Conservative and Labour governments, we did ‘more with less’ and raised money from the private sector for much of our promotional work. Our advertising campaigns, which were aimed at shocking people to look at their attitudes on race, were internationally acclaimed, although they were also criticised for being offensive and capable of reinforcing prejudice. It is worth noting that at the end of my tenure at the CRE, race and immigration were not high on the list of the publics concerns, whereas today, in 2007, they are right at the very top of people’s anxieties.

In spite of the challenges of discrimination, deprivation, disadvantage, poverty and exclusion, one fact remains an overwhelming inspiration to me and others: so many wonderful people across the country, including Lambeth, give their time and dedication willingly and freely in the care and service of men, women and children, in order to create communities and neighbourhoods free from prejudice, hatred, discrimination and exclusion.

Eileen O. Walkin

My British Journey

My name is Eileen O. Walkin. I must admit that I am honoured and humbled to be asked to pen my Autobiography in Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. My contribution, as a person of black Afro-Caribbean origin, to life and culture in today's Britain has been varied and integrated.

I have worked in paid employment in Central Government and unpaid voluntary work in Local Government and the Community. And I would like to think I have played a part in several aspects of life and culture in today's Britain. I welcome the challenges and I try my utmost to integrate in a positive manner.

I was born in the beautiful Island of Barbados in the Caribbean, the second sibling from a family of eight children. I was brought up in comfortable surroundings with a traditional upbringing in a Christian home. Love and respect have always been advocated in the family motto. I am quite sure that my Barbadian upbringing reflects my contribution to British Society.

After completing college I was employed for nine years in the Barbados Civil Service, in the departments of Magistrates Courts and the Treasury. Wishing to further my education abroad, I resigned and came to England to study law. My parents were very supportive and financed my full-time education to enable me to achieve my ambition. I thank my parents immensely; blessings be upon them.

I was introduced to London on Sunday 12th September 1965, at about 6.30 am, when I arrived at Heathrow Airport from New York where I had spent a few days. The weather was rather cloudy and cool - about 62°F. Mr. Harrison, a British Council representative, met me at the airport. We got a coach to Victoria, and then a black taxi to the students' headquarters in Hans Crescent, Kensington, which was to be my temporary accommodation. Twenty-eight students met in the lobby at Hans Crescent. We were given maps and accompanied Mr. Harrison on a brief tour of London.

The following morning I went to Kennington College in St. Georges Road, and at 3.30 pm I visited the British Council to make arrangements for my permanent accommodation. A charming young lady, Elizabeth, about 20 years of age, in her second year at medical school, and employed by the British Council on a part time basis, was to accompany me.

Elizabeth and I walked to Oxford Circus underground station. We got off at Oval station and crossed the road to Bus 133. We sat upstairs, my eyes feasting on unfamiliar scenes such as Brixton market, Lambeth Town Hall, Pratts department store, Lyons tea house, Streatham's Tate library with a large circular clock projecting from the building. I seemed to see many churches, including two at a corner, looking at each other. These were St. Leonards and a Catholic Church. The spires seemed to be equally tall. As we approached the Thrale Hall in Mitcham Lane, Elizabeth told me to pull the cord, for a request stop opposite a Methodist Church.

We got off the bus and walked about 100 yards. I said, "Elizabeth, there is Conyers Road." We turned into the road - it was tree-lined

and clean. There were panoramic views of a row of large detached and semi-detached dark red brick houses.

I thanked Elizabeth for pointing out various landmarks. I told her my first impression of London was very positive. I was excited and knew that I would love it here. We walked for about three minutes down the road and there was No 10 on the right. I stood on the pavement for about a minute, eyed the house up and down, then entered through the small black iron gate, and softly pressed the door bell. The door opened and I was warmly welcomed by the friendly owners, Mr. Patrick and Mrs Zena Westmass.

This was my first permanent address in England. And after forty-two years I continue to love it.

During my academic life I attended various colleges and universities and acquired a number of qualifications. I was the first black President at Hillcroft Residential College, Surbiton, where I studied Liberal Art. I was a representative of the Students' Union, Representative of the Academic Board and Committee for Post Graduate Students.

While at University, I fell in love with a handsome, genuine, decent young Christian man, from the Turks and Caicos Islands. Newton and I were both studying Marketing. Also a lecturer, Newton worked with the British Civil Service. We got married, and he is the 'apple of my eye'; we love each other dearly. May we continue to be a blessing to each other. Without him I could not have had peace of mind or carry out my study, work and voluntary work successfully. My husband supports me fully. Now retired, Newton is a full-time Christian writer, with two published books.

My paid employment in Britain was with the Crown Agents and the Civil Service. At the Crown Agents , I worked in the Marketing Department where I dealt with the public and with representatives dealing with overseas East Asia. I also worked on the desk for Africa, Nepal, Brunel, Indonesia, St. Helena and the Falkland Islands.

Eileen Walkin watching the Queen at The Crown Agents, 1977

My time in the British Civil Service was with the Citizens Charter Unit. This was the legacy of Prime Minister John Major. My last post before retiring from the Civil Service was in the Parliamentary Works Office dealing with inter-departmental issues.

Since I retired I seem to be working more hours (voluntary and community work) than when I was in paid employment. I have to be careful not to take on too much voluntary work so as to leave some quality time for my husband and me.

I have been actively involved in education for many years at the Oval school in Croydon. I attended Bromley College and completed a Certificate in Special Needs and also a Certificate in Classroom Assistance, to qualify me to deal with children with special needs. I continue to do my practical work at the Oval school weekly, helping the children with reading and writing, which has been a great pleasure. I always try to address new challenges by keeping myself well informed and knowledgeable on current issues.

As a Local Authority School Governor, my role is to make a positive contribution to children's education. And I am called to account. I am responsible with other Governors, Schools and Established Organisations for the children's welfare. I spend about six hours a month attending meetings and working to further the schools' development. I have enjoyed my role as a Governor at Broadmead School. And although the curriculum was prescribed I gave the Head teacher support and advice, drawing on knowledge and experience. I respect the Head teacher's position as professional leader of the school. As a Governor I support the children by attending Assemblies, school plays, annual events and similar activities.

St. Leonards Church, the venue for The Homeless and Drop In "Spiral" Centre. This was started in 1990 by the Rev. Dan Shackell and the congregation of St Leonards and English Martyrs, in Tooting Bec Gardens, SW16. As an active member of this Church and a member of the Parochial Church Council (PCC). I was one of the original members and volunteers to be involved in setting up the "Spiral" Centre. We started it at Christmas to see how it would go, and staffed it entirely by volunteers using donated food and clothes. Forty five people attended. I worked on a rota basis on Sundays, Christmas and other holidays.

The centre then opened every week for a few years with a formal approach, and the project was registered as a Charity. These disadvantaged people who are homeless, drug and/or alcoholic orientated, need someone to listen to them, offer support and advice and help with their presenting issues. I get a sense of satisfaction working with these people and find it very rewarding spending quality time with them. The clients who attend the centre are appreciative of the time given by the volunteers. The centre once attended only by white clients is now attended by a more diverse client group, reflective of the community.

West Croydon Refugee Day Centre is another "Drop In" centre but for refugees and asylum seekers. The drop in centre is held at West Croydon Baptist Church, Whitehorse Road, Croydon. I have been a volunteer for the last eight years. I go on Tuesdays from about 10.00 am until 1.30 pm, helping mainly in the section distributing dry goods food to take away. Some of the attendees are people who are disfigured from the ravages of war, for example, burns, broken feet, blindness, and many emotional disabilities.

For those who do not speak or understand English interpreters are on hand to give assistance.

I am also a volunteer for an organisation called “Cold Weather floating Shelter” based at West Croydon Baptist Church. This has been established for about four years. About ten churches in Croydon, from various denominations, rotate each night to accommodate clients from October to March. They are given a bed and a meal. There is television to watch and table games to play. They are given breakfast the following morning, and a packed lunch to take away. They will go to another church the next evening and so continue from week to week. My duties are to help with refreshments such as cakes, biscuits and hot drinks, but most of all to talk and mingle with clients so they do not feel isolated from the volunteers.

Carers UK Croydon Branch Outreach. This is an outreach Charity Organisation. I have been a volunteer for the past eight years. My main function is to distribute leaflets and literature in the foyer at Mayday Hospital or in the libraries. The information mainly concerns about health issues, help with filling in forms, and advice on where to obtain further information.

The Barbados Overseas Womens League (BOWL) UK, deals with outreach for the awareness of high blood pressure and hypertension which are prevalent among the black Afro-Caribbean Community.

Headway is an organisation that I am involved with that help clients with brain damage, often through motor cycle or car accidents. They are trying to return to and circulate within society and are usually handicapped.

Other organisations I am associated with are the Croydon Street Champion, Woodside and Ashburton Neighbourhood Partnership and Canning and Clyde Road Residents Association.

My church life has always been my main strength. Without it I do not know if I could survive. I have always been involved in a myriad

My interests and social activities are also varied, for example, listening to classical music, reading, lawn tennis, walking swimming, travelling. I am also a member of Croydon Literary Society, Streatham Literary Society, Brixton Society, Make A Difference Club: Black and the Afro-Caribbean concern.

I have come to the conclusion that it is important to promote understanding of cultural diversity and racial harmony in the community.

I would like to think I have contributed in a positive manner within and among British Society. I may not be in the glaring media of television or pictorial sensational tabloids, but my contribution has been positive, challenging and rewarding. I am well integrated in society from my paid employment to my voluntary work. I love to write and perform Contemporary and Religious Anthology poems and sonnets.

My vision is to: ‘Love One Another’, summed up in my sonnet below:

Let us begin to share the beauty of love
Oh what a joy it would be
Vanishing ill thoughts and deeds
Extremities of harshness to be obliterated

Over and forgiven, forgotten
No one to be thought of - as belittled
Everyone with love to be committed

Anger and brutality to be in the past
Never to be resubmitted - but gone at last
Outlook positively to be the new ‘cool’ for all
Through the twenty-first century and beyond
Happiness would be the new vision
Everyone to be participating without being driven
Rowing love and laughter today and thereafter.

Paul Wilson

Paul Wilson joined the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in 1979 as a legal clerk. In 1983 he completed his initial police training at Hendon and there followed a number of postings across South London as a PC, Sergeant and Inspector. He served as a Chief Inspector in New Scotland Yard's Corporate Planning Unit followed by a year as professional standards and performance lead for Kensington & Chelsea Borough. Paul is currently the superintendent with lead responsibility for Community Safety and Partnership matters in the London Borough of Lambeth. Of African-American and European heritage, Paul is one of a handful of black superintendents in England and Wales and is the most senior black police officer to have served in the London Borough of Lambeth.

Paul has been actively involved in race equality issues for much of his police career and is the architect and past chairman of the Metropolitan Black Police Association (BPA) and has also held the position of chair for the National Black Police Association (NBPA). In 1999 Paul served as a member of the Home Secretary's 'Stephen Lawrence steering group' and is currently a member of the Department of Communities and Local Government's Race Equality Advisory Group (REAG). In 2001 Paul was seconded to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, where in addition to his role in developing policy for the implementation of Neighbourhood Wardens, he was also involved in the government's 'community cohesion' work that emanated from the civil disturbances in Bradford and other northern towns during 2001.

Paul holds a Master of Science degree in community safety from the University of Leicester and in 2003 received a Fulbright Fellowship to research community-policing approaches in a number of major cities across the United States of America. Paul is a trustee for ENCAMS, the Keep Britain Tidy campaign group which aims to improve environmental quality and reduce antisocial behaviour.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

The Brixton Society is the amenity group covering the whole of the Brixton area, from Stockwell to the South Circular. We aim to make Brixton a better place to live and work in, and to give local people a voice in what happens to our surroundings. We take an interest in many environmental and community issues, and we have published several other works on local history topics.

The activities of the Society include Open Meetings on a variety of subjects, guided walks around the area, and discussions on planning matters. All these are free and everyone is welcome to attend.

The main way that the Society keeps members informed of events is via its Newsletter. This is produced 4 times a year and is delivered to members free of charge. We are always anxious to keep costs down and use our own members to distribute to the majority of our members.

The Society also runs stalls at the Lambeth Country Show, at Open Days run by the Lambeth Archives in Knatchbull Road and at other local events through the year. A full range of our publications is on display at these events.

The Brixton Society is a Registered Charity (No. 1058103) and is registered with the Civic Trust and the London Forum.

For more information, visit the Society's website at:
www.brixtonsociety.org.uk
or write to: Brixton Society Secretary
82 Mayall Road,
London, SE24 0PJ

This book is a celebration of the contribution made to our national life by black British people. Here are stories of people who have become famous, as well as of "ordinary" people who have achieved extraordinary things.

It has been produced to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.

This book has only been possible as a result of a grant by Awards for All

LOTTERY FUNDED

NO DOGS. NO IRISH. NO BLACKS
-in a landlord's window, quoted by Gloria Bailey

Lord Ouseley
Name, style and title
Raised to the peerage as Baron Ouseley, of Peckham Rye in the London Borough of Southwark
- UK Parliament website

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