

Review: Black History Research Day



Vanley Burke talking about his archive. Photo: Izzy Mohammed

On 23rd September 2006 *Connecting Histories* held a free event in Handsworth Community Library to launch the catalogue to the Vanley Burke Archive and our web based *How to Research Black History* learning package.

The event featured a range of talks and workshops, and an estimated 200 people passed through the doors. The day opened with a talk by the historian and genealogist Paul Crooks who spoke about tracing his family history back through the plantations of Jamaica to their beginnings in West Africa, a presentation which highlighted the massive interest in family history that exists within the African Caribbean community.

Other speakers included Dr Roi Kwabena on the value of cultural literacy, Martin Glynn on history and learning in



Paul Crooks talking about his family history. Photo: Izzy Mohammed

the black home, Sarah Blackstock on black professionals working in the heritage sector, *Connecting Histories'* Dr Andy Green on researching the history of slavery and abolition in Birmingham, and Professor Ian Grosvenor spoke about the *How to Research Black History* learning package and the importance of researching black history. The afternoon also featured a talk by Vanley Burke who described how and why he set about collecting his archive as part of the celebrations to launch the detailed catalogue of the material. A copy of the catalogue and examples from Vanley's archive can be found in *Collections* and *Exhibitions* on www.connectinghistories.org.uk

Thanks to all the speakers, poets and storytellers who took part, and to everyone in the audience for their many contributions and questions which made it an enjoyable and informative day. The feedback was very positive and there was an overwhelming desire for more events of this kind. One visitor said: "I have been in Birmingham for 18 months and this afternoon has been one of the best, informative, enjoyable I have had. Thank you."



Edna Mae Francis, by Vanley Burke [MS 2192]

Website News

The *Connecting Histories* website is now live and two of the five sets of learning resources, based on the archive and local history collections in Central Library, *How to Research Black History* and *Campaigning for Social Justice*, are now online. Another two, *Migration and Settlement* and *Archives as Social Knowledge*, will be available by the end of this year, and *Performing Resistance* by May 2007.

CONNECTING HISTORIES

Website in Focus

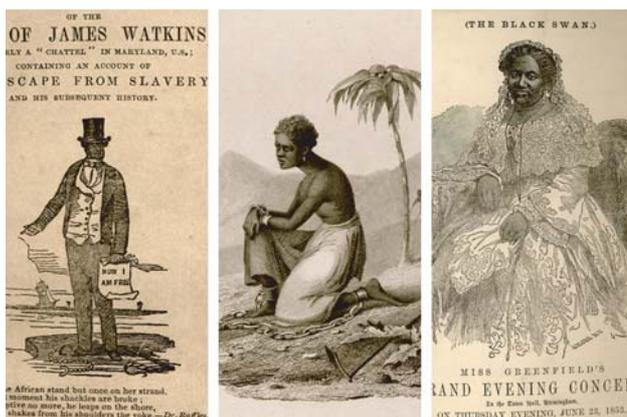
Online Learning



Extract from the 'How to Research Black History - Case Study' menu

How to Research Black History aims to introduce the user to a wide range of historical sources. It is arranged in 3 parts: *Sources* covers various historical documents and artefacts including material from archive, library, and museum collections, and the landscape and buildings around us; *Case Study* gives an example of how we tried to solve a particular historical puzzle by identifying a black school girl who lived in Birmingham in 1913; and *Resources* lists books and websites that you might find useful in starting your own research.

Both the *Sources* and *Case Study* are accompanied by detailed commentaries by Professor Ian Grosvenor, based on his research in black history over many years. These commentaries aim to introduce and explain the historical material in the learning unit and explore some of the issues we have to think about when undertaking historical research. As these commentaries are only our interpretation of the sources and yours may well be different, we have also provided a *Notepad* facility so that you can write your own views on this material.



Extracts of documents from 'Birmingham Antislavery' in 'Campaigning for Social Justice' online learning



IWA protest march, 1969, from '20th Century Campaigns for Social Justice' online learning. Photo courtesy of Birmingham Post and Mail

Campaigning for Social Justice explores the history of campaigning in the city and how you would go about doing further research in this area. It takes two specific examples to illustrate the sources you could use to research and write similar stories about other campaigns in the city. Again there is a detailed *Resources* section which provides ideas and starting points that will hopefully inspire you to begin your own research.

In *Birmingham Antislavery* you will find a history of abolitionist campaigns in Birmingham written by Dr Andy Green. As well as giving a general introduction to abolition in the city, Andy focuses on three themes in the 19th century: the *Birmingham Antislavery Society* and one of its leaders Joseph Sturge; the part which Birmingham women played in the campaign in *Ladies Antislavery Societies*; and the role played by key black figures such as James Watkins in *Black Abolitionists*.



Cellar Youth Club, 1962, Sparkbrook Association [MS 1914] from '20th Century Campaigns for Social Justice' online learning.

In *20th Century Campaigns* Sarah Dar compares the role played by two campaigning groups in the city, the *Indian Workers Association* and the *Sparkbrook Association*. IWA was a grassroots migrant organisation whilst the second was a philanthropic non-political organisation mainly led by white middle class professionals. Both organisations campaigned on similar issues and Sarah explores issues like housing, educational activities, discrimination and equality in the workplace and the role of women.

CONNECTING HISTORIES

Featured Collection



George Hallett, South Africa, 1997. Photo: Benny Gool

George Hallett

George Hallett was born in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1942. His early inspiration to become a photographer came from the movies he saw at the Friday night film show at the primary school in the fishing village of Hout Bay. On the way home, as friends enacted scenes from the films, Hallett would be thinking about the camera angles, composition and dramatic lighting that had impressed him.

Hallett started freelancing for the famous South African magazine *Drum* in 1964, but the politics of segregation made it virtually impossible to find other work. He therefore decided to leave for London. Hallett has subsequently worked worldwide, in countries as diverse as France, Zimbabwe, and the Netherlands.



Beehive, Soho Road, from 'Handsworth through Southern Eyes', 1971

Hallett's links with Birmingham began in 1971, when he was commissioned by the Times Educational Supplement to provide images to accompany an essay, by Godfrey Palmer, titled *Handsworth: Caribbean Black Country*. The essay, that appeared in TES regular feature, *Photoreport*, analysed the findings of the critical 1970 Runnymede

Trust report, *Race in the Inner City*, or *The Handsworth Report* as it came to be known, about race relations in the Handsworth area of Birmingham. Although the report was highly critical of the state of race relations, from Hallett's South African perspective Handsworth was a 'revelation' and his images reflected the intimacies of what he perceived as a relatively culturally cohesive and racially diverse community.



Bingo Hall, Soho Road, from 'Handsworth through Southern Eyes', 1971

50 of the images taken from this project were exhibited in Soho House Museum in 2002, as *Handsworth through Southern Eyes*. This exhibition was part of a project which exchanged the work of a South African photographer in Birmingham (Hallett) with that of a Birmingham based photographer in South Africa. The Birmingham based photographer was Vanley Burke, who had visited South Africa in 1990 and 1996 to photograph the lifestyles and activities of black people in South Africa in the period of Mandela's release and a newly created post apartheid state. Burke exhibited *Council of the Elders: Veterans of the South Africa Liberation Struggle* collection (Birmingham City Archives: MS 2192/A/N) at Museum Africa, Johannesburg in December 2002.

One interesting story that came to light during the exchange project concerned the photograph shown below of two boys outside a grocery store taken by Hallett in Handsworth in 1971. The shop was that of Burke's parents and the schoolboys are his brothers. This link symbolised the hidden connections between histories in Birmingham and South Africa.



Shop Front, Grove Lane, from 'Handsworth through Southern Eyes', 1971

George Hallett *continued*

Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa

"This thing called reconciliation... if it means this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back... then I agree, then I support it all"

Mother of Christopher Piet, who was murdered in a police ambush in Gugulethu, South Africa.



Kriel family lawyer looking at a photograph of the body of freedom fighter, Ashley Kriel, 1997

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act was passed in South Africa in 1995, calling for a commission to be set up to uncover the truth about the atrocities committed during apartheid. Controversially, perpetrators of atrocities and abuses could apply for amnesty from the commission if their acts were politically motivated and if they gave a full disclosure of those acts. Reconciliation rather than retribution was the aim.

The commission was the subject of an exhibition at the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry, in 2004 and this part of the archive comprises the material gathered for that project.



The amnesty hearing of Chris Hani's killers, 1997



Untitled photograph, 2000, selected and mounted, but not exhibited

George Hallett photographed the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission alongside another award winning photographer, and the former anti-apartheid activist, Benny Gool. The photographs include images from amnesty and other special hearings, including:

- Amnesty hearing for the killers of Steve Biko, freedom fighter and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.
- Hearing into the police ambush in Gugulethu at which seven young men were killed.
- Hearings into the roles the armed forces and the judiciary played in supporting the apartheid regime.
- Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's special hearing into her activities during apartheid.
- Amnesty hearings for Eugene 'Prime Evil' De Kock, whose speciality was torturing freedom fighters until they agreed to work for the apartheid government. These men were called Askaris.



Askari and bodyguard, 1997

The collection [MS 2249] is available at Birmingham City Archives on Floor 7 of Central Library [0121 303 4217] and a catalogue of the archive is also available on www.connectinghistories.org.uk