

Title: Black History Month in Hammersmith and Fulham

By Sharon Tomlin

Historically during the month of October, Black History Month - residents, the local authority, community groups, voluntary organisations and community leaders have celebrated aspects of the lives of people from ethnically marginalised communities, particularly from the African and Asian diasporas who have contributed to the borough.

This year sees a strong focus in the borough on creating change and addressing inequalities in areas of local life by working across all sectors that aim to create transformational change and reform paths of accountability.

At Sobus, we aim to capture and celebrate the efforts of organisations with diverse and inclusive approaches that leads to transformational changes for residents and statutory, voluntary and community organisations in the borough.

In honour of the contributions made by local residents we highlight some of the stories that are usually left out of the mainstream narrative.

An overview of some of our local contributors

Ellen Craft (1826 – 1891)

During the Victorian period she migrated from the United States of America where she was born as an enslaved African American. She married William – also an enslaved man in 1846. They both set up on a plan to escape to freedom.

Esther was of light-skinned appearance who could pass for being a white person. She travelled to England in disguise by cutting her hair and dressing in male clothing as a white, sickly male slave owner seeking medical treatment and her husband accompanied her as the enslaved person.

They migrated to England and settled (now 26 Cambridge Grove) in Hammersmith where they raised five children then returned to the USA in 1868. Her contribution was as a social justice campaigner against enslavement of people. Both Ellen and William created a space in her home by becoming one of the centres for the Abolishment Movement in Britain.

In 2007, Urbanwise – then Hammersmith and Fulham Urban Studies Centre produced an education resource pack for schools. Sharon Tomlin of Sobus contributed as a voice of Ellen Craft.

Ellen Craft was bestowed the Blue Plaque at the address the family lived in, 26 Cambridge Grove in Hammersmith that was unveiled on 30th September 2021.

Marcus Garvey (1887 -1940)

Born in 1887, Jamaica was a writer, editor, academic, publisher, public speaker, activist. He lived at 53 Talgarth Road, Fulham. He also studied at Birkbeck College, London.

He was an advocate of fighting social injustice particularly for the people of African diaspora. One of the vehicles created to address this was through the organisation that he founded, Universal Negro Improvement Association. One of the main aims of the organisation was to uplift “his people” by freeing minds to gain independence.

Marcus was awarded the status of National Hero of Jamaica and conferred with the highest honour of the Order of Jamaica

Esther Bruce (1912 – 1994)

Born in 1912 in Fulham the daughter of Guyanese father and Scottish mother, Esther (given name Josephine Esther) was of mixed heritage who recounted her life story living in West Kensington during World War II. Her story is littered with relevant social history of work, encounters with Marcus Garvey and Elizabeth Welch, experiences of school and many more.

Sources

Ellen Craft

- London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham: <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/articles/news/2021/10/hammersmith-blue-plaque-celebrates-abolitionists-and-former-slaves>
- Urbanwise London (2007): <http://urbanwise.london/slavery/victorian.html>
- Antislavery Usable Past <http://antislavery.ac.uk/items/show/861>

Marcus Garvey

- Urbanwise London: <http://urbanwise.london/slavery/ww2.html>
- Jamaica Information Service (JIS): <https://jis.gov.jm/information/heroes/marcus-mosiah-garvey/>

Esther Bruce

- Hammersmith United Charities: http://hamunitedcharities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Aunt_Esthers.pdf
- Hammersmith United Charities: http://www.hamunitedcharities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/A_Ship_and_a_Prayer.pdf

List of events during October 2021

London Brough of Hammersmith and Fulham:

<https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/articles/news/2021/09/black-history-month-events-october>

Black History Month: <https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/>