

**Keep Smiling
Through:**

Black Londoners on the
Home Front 1939 - 1945

Resource Pack

An exhibition at the Cuming Museum exploring the contributions made by black Londoners during the Second World War.

April 1 to November 1 2008

The Keep Smiling Through Exhibition was made possible by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund



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Keep Smiling Through: Black Londoners on the Home Front 1939 to 1945

Introduction

This exhibition uncovers previously untold stories from South London and beyond. It explores the positive and negative experiences of black Londoners and focuses on the wide variety of roles they played on the home front in the Second World War.

Black Londoners on the home front were active in a variety of roles. They served their local communities and supported the war effort as doctors, nurses, entertainers, civil servants, government and BBC employees.



Homeless people from the East End move into a block of luxury flats in the West end, September 1940.
Source unknown, courtesy of Stephen Bourne.

Many black Londoners volunteered as civilian defence workers, such as firewatchers, air raid wardens, stretcher bearers and mobile canteen personnel. These roles were crucial to the home front, which was the name given to the activities of the civilian population in a country at war.

This exhibition also reveals the contributions made by Britain's colonies. From 1941 the British government began to recruit service personnel and skilled workers from Africa and the Caribbean. Fund-raising drives in the colonies supplied much needed equipment to Britain's war effort. This support was of vital importance in boosting the moral of the British people during the war.

London's black wartime population

When war broke out on 3 September 1939, there were at least 15,000 people of African descent in Great Britain.

During the war black Londoners were found in all walks of life. Some settled here from Africa, America and the Caribbean. Others were born in London of mixed parentage. There were working class families in many parts of London. Britain's largest black community was in east London's dockland, where a 1930s survey recorded 1500 black seamen and 250-300 black working class families.



Map from Nancie Hare's 1939 report on black working-class families in London. Courtesy of Stephen Bourne.

London's black community also included people from professional and middle-class backgrounds. There were many black students from West Africa and the Caribbean studying at London's universities, colleges and hospitals.

Civil defence and the blitz

London was harder hit by German bombing than anywhere else in Britain. The civilians of London played a huge role in protecting their city. Many civilians contributed to the defence of their city, by volunteering as air raid precaution wardens, fire watchers or as members of the Home Guard. The League of Coloured Peoples' newsletter praised the work of Black 'front-liners': "*In London especially one is amazed at the numbers of coloured men who have accommodated themselves to the novel circumstances of the war...*"



London Borough of Lambeth Light Defence group, c.1945. Three members of the Civil Defence team pictured are black, including Len Bradbrook, seen seated in the front row on the right. Len was a well-known member of the Lambeth community and was also involved in running the Boys Brigade and played a prominent role in the Lambeth Mission and Ideal Cinema.

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During the 'blitz' of September 1940 to May 1941, bombing killed over 43,000 civilians and more than a million houses were destroyed or damaged. Unfortunately during this period some black Londoners were evicted or barred from air raid shelters. Some encountered racism and discrimination while looking for new accommodation after their homes were bombed.



Bomb damage at the Elephant & Castle.
From the collection of the Southwark Local History Library.

E.I. Ekpenyon's story

E. I. Ekpenyon trained as an air raid warden as soon as war broke out in 1939. He was a Nigerian studying law in London. Ekpenyon was responsible for running air raid shelters, keeping lists of local residents, helping with rescue work and enforcing the blackout regulations in the Marylebone area. During his air raid shelter duties, he encountered and challenged racism:

“Some of the shelterers told others to go back to their own countries, and some tried to practice segregation... I said I would like to see a spirit of friendliness, cooperation and comradeship prevail at this very trying time in the history of the Empire.”

During the war Ekpenyon made several broadcasts for BBC radio in ‘*Calling West Africa*’. He also appeared in a film made by the Colonial Film Unit that featured the ‘Katsina’ tank, built from funds raised in Nigeria. After the war, he could not afford to resume his law studies, and worked as a postman. He died aged fifty-two in 1951.

Esther Bruce's story

Esther Bruce was born in Fulham in 1912 and worked as a seamstress in Chelsea. During the war she served as a Fire Guard at Fulham and Brompton hospitals.

Armed with a stirrup pump, a helmet and an armband labelled

Fire Guard, Esther watched for incendiary bombs and fires from

the hospital roofs during air raids. Incendiary bombs were filled with combustible chemicals and were dropped in clusters to start fires. Fire Guards were responsible for putting the fires out, although the bombs could explode at any moment.

After her father's death in 1941 Esther moved in with Granny Johnson, a local mother figure. Esther also experienced the hardship of food rationing. She was lucky to be able to ask her relatives in Guyana to send food parcels.



Esther Bruce, 1943.
Courtesy of Stephen Bourne

Esther remembered “*They were better off than us because the Americans were based there. Two weeks later a bloody great box arrived. Everything was in it, all sorts of tinned food ...*”

In 1991 Esther co-authored her autobiography, *Aunt Esther's Story*, with her nephew, Stephen Bourne. She died in 1994 at the age of eighty-one.

The evacuee experience

Many black children were evacuated from cities to protect them from air raids. They were often sent to country communities with no experience of black people. Joseph Cozier was ten years old when he was evacuated from Canning Town to Wiltshire: *“There was a crowd of us from the East End, but we were the only coloured children... We were taken to the village hall where villagers came and picked the children they wanted, but we were left out. They only picked the white children, except one boy who had impetigo...”*

Not all children were evacuated. Some stayed with their families because they were too young. Kenny Lynch was the youngest of eleven children born to a Barbadian father and English mother. He remembers *“we used to go down to these air raid shelters every night, and we were bombed out of about three houses”*.

Leading and inspiring the community

Wartime Britain was not without racism. A number of people worked hard to bring an end to discrimination in Britain. Many black citizens with positions of responsibility and access to local authorities became representatives for



Cecil Belfield Clarke, from Barbados, came to England to study medicine in 1914 and was a GP for fifty years at his surgery at the Elephant and Castle. Courtesy of Stephen Boume.

the black community. Community leaders, including Dr Harold Moody, Una Marson, Dr Cecil Belfield Clarke and Sir Learie Constantine, were involved in the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP). Membership included professional black people seeking social change. From 1931 the LCP was the most influential organization campaigning for the

civil rights of African and Caribbean people in Britain. During the Second World War, as thousands of black workers and soldiers came to Britain from Africa and the Caribbean, the workload of the LCP increased. This gave it greater purpose and influence.

Inspiring leaders: Dr Harold Moody

Peckham based GP Dr Harold Moody was an ambassador for Britain's black community. He campaigned to improve the situation for African and Caribbean

settlers in Britain. Born in Jamaica in 1882, Moody qualified as a doctor in 1912 and started his

practice in King's Grove in Peckham in 1913. His experiences of hardship and racism led him to help found the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) in 1931. Moody's home in Queen's Road, Peckham, became its base. Many important black figures visited, including singer Paul Robeson, and Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana.



Dr. Harold Moody, National President of the Christian Endeavour, 1936.

Courtesy of Dr Killingray and the Moody Family.

During the Second World War five of Moody's children joined the Forces. In 1940, his son, Charles Arundel, became one of the first black officers in the British Army. Dr Moody campaigned against the colour bar that existed in the armed services, resulting in a change of the rules that allowed black servicemen to become officers. Moody died in 1947 and thousands attended his funeral in Camberwell.



Colonel Charles Arundel
Moody.

Courtesy of Dr Killingray and the
Moody Family.

Una Marson and the BBC

During the Second World War Una Marson became the BBC's first black programme maker. She volunteered as an air raid warden in her spare time. Una arrived in London from Jamaica in 1932. She was

secretary to the League of Coloured Peoples and campaigned on black women's issues such as discrimination in the nursing profession.

In March 1941 Una was appointed as programme assistant on the BBC's Empire Service. She later became presenter of BBC radio's *'Calling the West Indies'* through which she helped many service men and women from the Caribbean stay in touch with their families during the war.



Portrait of Una Marson from the BBC's Empire Service's weekly listing journal, 'London Calling', 1943. The Empire Service (or Overseas Service) broadcast to parts of the British Empire, including the West Indies and Africa.

Courtesy of Stephen Boume

Una was widely respected and counted literary figures such as George Orwell and T. S. Eliot among her BBC colleagues. Her international circle included prominent African Americans, such as writers Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. Una died from a heart attack in Jamaica in 1965. In 2005 she was awarded a Southwark Blue Plaque.



Una Marson and Leary Constantine, from the BBC's Empire Service's weekly listing journal, 'London Calling' August 1942

Courtesy of Stephen Bourne

LEARY CONSTANTINE,

the world-famous cricketer from Trinidad, is now the Ministry of Labour's Welfare Officer for the two hundred Jamaican technicians working in British factories. He is seen broadcasting about his work in Britain in a BBC programme for the West Indies. With him is the BBC's West Indian programme producer, Una Marson

Black wartime entertainers on the home front



Elisabeth Welch, 1940's.
Courtesy of Stephen Bourne

Entertainers played an important role in raising the morale of the British public during the Second World War. At the outbreak of war, there were many black entertainers, musicians and bandleaders working in Britain.

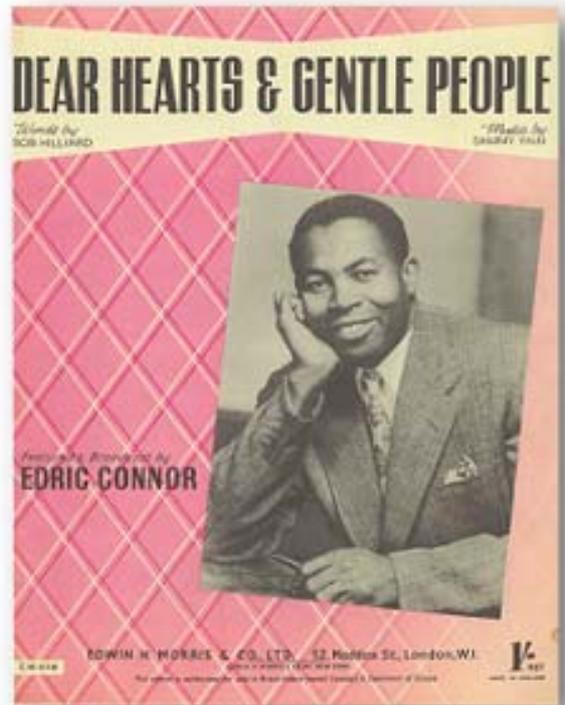
Better known entertainers

included Ken 'Snakehips' Johnson

from Guyana, Adelaide Hall and Elisabeth Welch from America, and Leslie 'Hutch' Hutchinson, a star of the cabaret circuit, from Grenada. The singer Evelyn Dove was born in London with African/ British parents and often made broadcasts for the BBC.

In addition to entertaining the troops and munitions factory workers, many entertainers were employed by the BBC. They regularly made broadcasts for light entertainment

programmes. In 1943 singer Adelaide Hall had her own series 'Wrapped in Velvet'. In 1944 the Trinidadian folk singer Edric Connor arrived in Britain and began making broadcasts for the BBC. He was keen to raise the profile of the British West Indies.



Song sheet for Edric Connor, 1940's. Courtesy of Stephen Bourne



Fela Sowande, pianist and composer, from the BBC's Empire Service's weekly listing journal, 'London Calling' September 1942.

Courtesy of Stephen Bourne

An entertainer's story: Adelaide Hall

Singer Adelaide Hall was one of Britain's most important morale-boosting stars and reached the mass British public with her broadcasts and tours. Born in New York, Adelaide moved to London in 1939. An internationally famous jazz performer, she joined the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) in 1943. She worked tirelessly for the war effort, performing around the country civilians and the armed forces.



Studio portrait of Adelaide Hall, 1940's.

Courtesy of Kate Greer and Iain Williams.

During one of London's heaviest air raids in 1940 Adelaide was performing at the Lewisham Hippodrome. The air raid siren sounded: "*... no one could leave the theatre because it was too dangerous ... so we carried on and I managed to get the audience to join in many of the songs*". She continued until 3.45am when the all-clear sounded.



She also entertained people in underground shelters. *“We didn’t worry too much about the terrible risks we were taking because we wanted to keep up the morale of the forces and the public”*.

Adelaide Hall and her Nigerian accompanist Fela Sowande at her West End nightclub in 1940, shortly before it was destroyed in the blitz

Courtesy of Stephen Bourne.

An entertainer's story: Ken “Snake Hips” Johnson



Ken Johnson, 1940.
Courtesy of Stephen Bourne and Andy
Simons.

By 1939, band leader Ken Johnson and his West Indian Dance Orchestra were already well known. Johnson's main achievement was to provide a positive image for black musicians in Britain, and show that Britain could produce a bandleader as sensational as Americans like Duke Ellington.

Ken was born in British Guiana in 1914 and was educated at a private school in Marlow, Buckinghamshire. Instead of studying law, he decided swing music was his future and started out as a dancer. He rose to fame in the 1930s with his dance orchestra and enjoyed a long residency at the Café de Paris near Piccadilly. Situated underground, the Café de Paris was advertised as “London's safest restaurant”. However during a raid in 1941 two bombs

crashed through the roof, onto the dance floor. One exploded in front of the bandstand and immediately killed Ken, who was just twenty-six. Around thirty other people also died.



Courtesy of Stephen Bourne

The home front in the Caribbean and West Africa

To the people of the Caribbean and Africa the war may have seemed a long way away but wartime restrictions and German U-boats patrolling the Caribbean and the Atlantic brought the war to the remotest parts of the British Empire. People living in Caribbean islands such as Jamaica, Montserrat and Trinidad had a strange experience of the war. There were fears that Germany might attack so the islands introduced black out regulations, air raid sirens and wardens to impose the rules. Food rationing was also introduced. In Jamaica there was an internment camp for German and Italian prisoners of war. German U-boats patrolling the Caribbean attacked passenger ships and destroyed shipping. Vital freight was destroyed, contributing to the shortages of basic commodities.

Fundraising and recruitment for the home front in the colonies

At the outbreak of the war the people of the British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean were encouraged to show their loyalty to Britain or the “Mother Country”. Many citizens of these distant countries made huge contributions to the war effort. Some stayed at home and helped through fundraising or sending food parcels. Others made the long and dangerous journey to Britain to volunteer for the armed services or for civilian roles.



Sam King came to England to from Jamaica to volunteer in the RAF during the war. He was Southwark's first black Mayor in 1983 and he was awarded an MBE from the Queen in 1998.

Courtesy of Stephen Bourne.



Young black woman at a factory in the North West of England listening to the BBC during a break. From the BBC's Empire Service's weekly listing journal, 'London Calling', September 1942.

Courtesy of Stephen Bourne.

Around 2500 people came to work in factories in England or as foresters in Scotland. Propaganda including films produced by the Colonial Film Unit played an important role in recruiting civilians from Britain's colonies for the war effort

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Oral History Project

As part of this project, we interviewed black elders from the Caribbean and from Africa, about their memories of the Second World War and the years immediately following.

As well as the specifics of the wartime situation (rationing, blackouts, submarine attacks, and other hardships), the interviewees also spoke about everyday life in the 1940s in their home countries – everything from food and music to school life and family life. Many of them were young children during the war years; so their memories have the episodic quality and the clarity and sharpness of a child's-eye view.

The Washing Line

This installation is part of an outreach project with three groups of black elders in Southwark. It uses textiles to express the wartime memories of the participants, who were children in the Caribbean or in Africa during the 1940s.



Members of the PACO elders group discussing photographs from the project.

Photograph by Jody Kingzett.

The traditional skirt has an underskirt made from fabric similar to the recycled flour sack cotton used in the Caribbean with photos contributed by members of PACO elders' group. These represent the Second World War as part of a continuity of experience, which includes family memories and migration to England.

In the Caribbean "make do and mend" rag rugs were often backed on to hessian salvaged from rice sacks. The rugs show the shapes of Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana, the home countries of PACO members.

The "flour-sack cotton" pillowcases are decorated with photos from the Imperial War Museum's collection. They were selected by members of Blackfriars Settlement black elders' group, reflecting an uncovering of the hidden story of black people's contribution to the Home Front.

The headphones hanging on the washing line carry spoken memories contributed by members of the Golden Oldies group at Walworth Road Methodist Church.

100 Black Londoners (1939)

It has been estimated that about 15,000 Black people were living in Britain in 1939. The following is a partial list of Black Londoners who were living in the capital city on 3 September 1939 when Britain declared war on Germany.

Names are followed by their country of origin and a brief description of their role in the Second World War.

Robert Adams (British Guiana) *actor who worked as an Air Raid Warden*

Amanda Ira Aldridge (Britain) *voice teacher, daughter of Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge (1807-67)*

Granville 'Chick' Alexander (Jamaica) *actor who worked as an Air Raid Warden*

Amy Barbour James (Britain) *concert singer*

Carl Barriteau (Trinidad) *musician*

Peter Blackman (Barbados) *Pan-African Marxist and scholar*

Cyril Blake (Trinidad) *musician*

Sam Blake (Jamaica) *actor who worked as an Air Raid Warden*

Buddy Bradley (USA) *choreographer, American expatriate*

Esther Bruce (Britain) *seamstress who undertook war work (hospital cleaner and fire watcher)*

Joseph Bruce (British Guiana) *coach painter, father of Esther Bruce (died 1941)*

Dr. Cecil Belfield-Clarke (Barbados) *medical doctor and Pan-Africanist*

Alexander Sylvan Campbell (Jamaica) *father of Cleo Laine*

Sylvia Campbell (Britain) *Cleo Laine's sister*

Alexander Sylvan Campbell (Britain) *Cleo Laine's brother*
Lauderic Caton (Trinidad) *musician*
Avril Coleridge-Taylor (Britain) *composer and conductor, daughter of composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)*
Hiawatha Coleridge-Taylor (Britain) *son of composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*
Anita Cozier (Britain) *factory worker*
Charles Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Christopher Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Eileen Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Eustace Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Joan Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Joseph Cozier (British Guiana) *dock worker*
Joseph Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Richard Cozier (Britain) *evacuee*
Ivor Cummings (Sierra Leone) *Assistant Welfare Officer (Colonial Office)*
Frank Deniz (Britain) *musician*
Joe Deniz (Britain) *musician*
Yorke de Souza (Jamaica) *musician*
Evelyn Dove (Britain) *singer*
Frank Dove (Britain) *former Olympic athlete, Air Raid Warden*
Rudolph Dunbar (British Guiana) *classical musician and war correspondent*
E I Ekpenyon (Nigeria) *Air Raid Warden in St. Pancras*
Ray Ellington (Britain) *musician and PT Instructor in RAF*
Rudolph Evans (South America) *night club owner*
Nathaniel Fadipe (Nigeria) *writer*
Farad Kerr Fahmey (West Africa) *film extra*
Napoleon Florent (St Lucia) *actor*
Josephine Florent (Britain) *daughter of Napoleon Florent*

Reginald Foresythe (Britain) *musician and composer*
Frisco (Jocelyn Bingham) (USA) *nightclub owner and American expatriate*
Amy Ashwood Garvey (Jamaica) *political activist*
Marcus Garvey (Jamaica) *political activist (died 1940)*
Laureen Goodare (Britain) *nightclub dancer*
Coleridge Goode (Jamaica) *jazz musician*
Sidney Graham (Britain) *eastender*
Adelaide Hall (USA) *entertainer and American expatriate, married to Bert Hicks*
Ike Hatch (USA) *night club owner and American expatriate*
Cyril Henriques (Jamaica) *barrister*
Fernando Henriques (Jamaica) *scholar and Air Raid Warden*
Pauline Henriques (Jamaica) *actress and broadcaster*
Bertram Hicks (Trinidad) *nightclub owner, husband of Adelaide Hall*
Leslie Hutchinson (Grenada) *cabaret entertainer*
Leslie 'Jiver' Hutchinson (Jamaica) *musician*
Ellis Jackson (USA) *musician, American expatriate*
Reverend E. N. Jones (Laminoh Sankoh) *member of the West African Students' Union*
Ken 'Snakehips' Johnson (British Guiana) *bandleader (died 1941)*
Marie Kamara (Britain) *evacuee*
Cab Kaye (Britain) *musician*
Bertie King *musician*
Cleo Laine (Britain) *child who became an internationally acclaimed jazz singer*
Turner Layton (Britain) *cabaret entertainer, American expatriate*

W. Arthur Lewis (St. Lucia) *lecturer at London School of Economics*

Gladys Lynch (Britain) *evacuee, sister of Kenny Lynch*

Kenny Lynch (Britain) *child who became a 1960s pop singer*

Oliver Lindsay Lynch (Barbados) *father of Kenny Lynch*

Ernest Marke (Sierra Leone) *nightclub owner*

Una Marson (Jamaica) *poet and broadcaster*

Orlando Martins (Nigeria) *actor*

Prince Monolulu (British Guiana) *racing tipster*

Charles 'Joe' Moody (Britain) *son of Dr. Harold Moody*

Christine Moody (Britain) *daughter of Dr. Harold Moody*

Cynthia Moody (Britain) *evacuee and niece of Dr. Harold Moody*

Garth Moody (Britain) *son of Dr. Harold Moody*

Harold Moody (Britain) *son of Dr. Harold Moody*

Dr. Harold Moody (Jamaica) *community leader*

Joan Moody (Britain) *daughter of Dr. Harold Moody*

Ronald Moody (Britain) *son of Dr. Harold Moody*

Johnny Nit (USA) *dancer and American expatriate*

George A. Roberts (Trinidad) *fire officer*

Eslanda Robeson (USA) *anthropologist and wife of Paul Robeson*

Paul Robeson (USA) *actor and singer, American expatriate*

Paul Robeson Jr (USA) *son of Paul and Eslanda Robeson*

Harry Scott (USA) *entertainer, American expatriate*

Connie Smith (USA) *actress and entertainer, American expatriate*

Norris Smith (USA) *entertainer, American expatriate*

Chief Ladipo Solanke (Nigeria) *founder of the West African Students' Union*

Fela Sowande (Nigeria) *musician and composer*

Louis Stephenson (Jamaica) *musician*
A. A. Thompson (Jamaica) *academic and General Secretary of the LCP*
Leslie Thompson (Jamaica) *musician*
Ernest Trimmingham (Bermuda) *actor*
Ed Wallace (USA) *entertainer, American expatriate*
Elisabeth Welch (USA) *singer, American expatriate*
Eddie Whaley (USA) *entertainer, American expatriate*
Eddie Whaley Jr (Britain) *son of Eddie Whaley*
Dave Wilkins (Barbados) *jazz trumpeter*
Josephine Woods (Britain) *dancer*

Resources

Useful addresses

Black Cultural Archives, 1 Othello Close, Kennington,
London SE11 4RE
Tel: 020 7582 8516

Black and Asian Studies Association, C/O ICS, 28 Russell
Square, London WC1B 5DS
www.blackandasianstudies.org.uk

Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ
Tel: 020 7416 5000

Southwark Local History Library, 211 Borough High Street,
London SE1 1JA
Tel: 020 7403 3782

Lambeth Archives, Minet Library, 52 Knatchbull Road,
London SE5 9QY

Tel: 020 7926 6076

Newham Archives and Local Studies Library, Stratford
Library, 3 The Grove, London E15 1EL

Tel: 020 8430 6881

Further reading

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Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900-1960*

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Bill Schwarz (editor), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*
(Manchester University Press, 2003)

Marika Sherwood, *Many Struggles: West Indian Workers and
Service Personnel in Britain (1939-45)* (Karia Press, 1985)