



Built into history

The buildings we live amongst and walk past every day have many stories to tell about the Black presence in Britain. Heroes and heroines of past generations made their mark in many places and English Heritage works with Black communities and historians around the country to make these stories visible.

In London, the GLC blue plaque to the Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole (1805-1881) was re-erected by English Heritage at 14 Soho Square, W1, on 29 November 2007 – almost exactly a hundred and fifty years after the Crimean War heroine stayed at the address. Seacole came at the head of a poll in 2004 to find the greatest black Briton; her plaque, which formerly adorned her now-demolished home at 157 George Street, Marylebone, was unveiled by Professor Elizabeth Anionwu of the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal before a large and enthusiastic crowd. Other speakers at the unveiling were Margaret Hodge MP, the Minister for Culture, Ziggi Alexander, one of the original proposers of the plaque and a co-editor of the most recent edition of Mary Seacole's autobiography, and Dr Edward Impey, English Heritage's Director of Research and Standards.

At 5, Hamlet Road, Upper Norwood SE19, a plaque to Ira Aldridge (1807-1867), the greatest Black classical actor of Victorian times, was unveiled by Oku Ekpenny of the Aldridge Bicentenary Project in autumn 2007. The house, which Aldridge named Luranah Villa after his mother, was lived in by him at the height of his career in the early 1860s. Aldridge challenged racist attitudes head on when he appeared in Shakespearian roles such as Othello, King Lear and Shylock.

Across the country, in 2008, English Heritage has recommended new listings for historic sites that mark the Black presence. From Shropshire to Watford and from Windermere to Stoke Newington, memorials to the lives of Black people brought to England by the slave trade have been protected for the future. You can find out more about the whole range of sites from our website at www.english-heritage.org.uk/abolition.

English Heritage isn't only about preserving



Top: Professor Elizabeth Anionwu with the plaque to Mary Seacole re-erected at 14 Soho Square on 29 November 2007
Bottom: Diverse Stories project members visit Temple Church, Bristol. *Copyright Gill Loats.*



historic sites however. It is also making sure that the human stories attached to the places we live in are handed down. During 2007, English Heritage Outreach in the East Midlands worked in partnership with Churches Together in Northampton, Northampton Schools Excellence Cluster and Northamptonshire Black History Association on a series of activities triggered by the Bicentenary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was important to everyone involved that the legacy of this work was about more than slavery. We wanted to be able to show the breadth and depth of Black people's involvement in British

history. As a result, the project is now working on producing a 'Black history ruler'. We are looking at representing Black people who have made their mark in British history in a range of fields including politics, social affairs and sport.

When we consulted young people they were excited by the idea of having historic images of real people on the ruler with information about the person on the reverse. The ruler will go into production in autumn 2008 and information about how to get the ruler for free can be obtained from the Northamptonshire Black History Association web site soon.

The Diverse Stories project began in 2007 with participants from Malcolm X Elders, an Afro Caribbean elders group (and an open group of adult participants from the local community) taking part in a creative writing project, jointly supported by Show of Strength Theatre Company, Our Stories Make Waves and English Heritage, to mark the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Act. Project members began work by visiting English Heritage's Temple Church, Bristol and exploring its links with the slave trade and the abolition movement. Participants responded to the subject matter as they wished, resulting in a range of dramatic monologues covering themes such as slavery, racism, trade, childhood memories of living in Jamaica and migration from the Caribbean. The resulting monologues were shared with family and friends of the project members at a rehearsed reading by a professional actor. To ensure a permanent record, 2008 has seen the development of this project with a selection of the participants' stories recorded on audio CD as a lasting legacy of the work created.

Everyone can be involved in passing on our shared heritage – take a look at the English Heritage website for details of events and exhibitions in Black History Month and throughout the year. Watch out for the "Equiano's London" walk on 28th October 2008 and the Sparkbrook African and Caribbean Women's Development Initiative "Interwoven Freedom" touring exhibition based on the campaign of the Birmingham women's Abolition movement.

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