Introduction

Founded in 1981, Black Cultural Archives’ mission is to collect, preserve and celebrate the heritage and history of Black people in Britain. Our unparalleled and growing archive collection offers insight into the history of African and Caribbean descent in Britain and includes personal papers, organisational records, rare books, ephemera, photographs, and a small object collection. The bulk of the material is drawn from the twentieth century to the present day, while some material dates as far back as the second century.

This is an introductory subject guide to the Rastafari movement and includes a list of selected sources held by the Black Cultural Archives which relate directly to Rastafari.

Background

Emperor Haile Selassie I

Rastafari has been defined as ‘a movement of Pan-African redemption, confronting the inequities forged in the days of slavery and colonialism that continue to reverberate across physical, mental and spiritual dimensions’.

The origins of the Rastafari movement can be traced back to the 1930s with the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I on the 2nd November 1930 in Ethiopia.

Emperor Haile Selassie I was born on the 23rd July 1892 in Harrar, Ethiopia, and was known as Lij Tafari, and later known as Ras Tafari, from which the term “Rastafari” derives. Through a mixture of political events and by gaining the respect of others, Ras Tafari advanced from holding administrative posts to being made the Chief Advisor, the Regent and Heir to the Throne when Empress Zauditu sat on the throne of Ethiopia (1913-1930).

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1 Ras Cos Tafari, Sister Stella Headley, Ras Shango Baku, Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Rai I, Sister AddishiwotAsfawosen, Focus: When Britain Loved Rastafari<http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/focus-when-britain-loved-rastafari/> [last accessed 13 January 2016].
Ras Tafari succeeded to the throne after Empress Zauditu; he was officially recognised as Emperor Haile Selassie I and traced his lineage back to King David, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Emperor Haile Selassie I’s coronation in 1930 was a momentous occasion, an event which was attended by over 70 Heads of State and representatives of world nations. To the Rastafari movement the coronation was seen as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy in Revelation Ch 5, Vs 5: “The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” It also fulfilled the prophetic utterance popularly attributed to Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the leading Pan-Africanist of the early 20th century: ‘Look to Africa. When you shall see a Black King crowned, know that the day of Redemption is at hand’.

Other Jamaican lay preachers of the time such as Leonard Howell, Joseph Hinds, Nathaniel Hibbert and Archibald Dunkley, independently of each other, also began to assert the divinity of the Emperor in public meetings throughout Jamaica. Their converts, gleaned primarily from the oppressed peasant class of Jamaican society, formed the bedrock of the early Rastafari movement. Though generally perceived in its infancy as a religious movement with ‘cult’ status, Rastafari embraced a broad and growing spectrum of members as a socio-political force based on African values of self-determination, independent thought and rejection of colonial dominion. Emperor Haile Selassie I was celebrated as the Black Messiah, (God and King), who would lead Africans out of the subjugation and servitude they had suffered for 400 years at the hands of European enslavers and colonisers. The movement offered hope of deliverance to displaced Africans in the Diaspora, captives of western society (‘Babylon’), yearning for true liberty and return to their ancestral homeland.

**Growth of Rastafari**

Like many other movements, Rastafari has evolved since its inception. Today, Rastafari can mean different things to different people. It can be spiritual, religious, political, cultural or social, or a mixture, and has been defined as a decolonising process. For Christoper A. Hagelin, ‘Rastafari is a revolutionary cultural reaction to the colonialism, down-pression, slavery, and persistent poverty that has marked Jamaica’s past and present’. Rastafari has now spread far beyond its island origins as a lifestyle (‘livity’) that is embraced by millions worldwide, who seek a more spiritual or moral way of life based on peace and love, equal rights and justice for one and all.

Often caricatured and misunderstood, Rastafari has sometimes fallen victim to negative stereotyping, exploitation, and even abuse. Aspects of the movement have been commandeered by mainstream industries, and this commercialisation of Rastafari sometimes fuels misconceptions around the movement and persecution of its followers.

Today, Rastafari come from all walks of life, representing all classes and peoples within a movement that was first dominated by impoverished African descendants in the Jamaican slums. Though Emperor Haile Selassie I is seen as a divine personage, He himself did not openly ascribe to this and spoke of his own mortality. Rastafari are varied in their theological beliefs regarding the Emperor, but unified in their broad adherence to the socio-cultural

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2Rastafari and Slavery[^1] [last accessed 13 January 2016].
persuasions of the movement. Though there is no specific leader, Leonard Percival Howell is recognised by many as the first Rastafarian preacher in Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1930s.

There are several main groupings within Rastafari, known as ‘Houses’ or ‘Mansions’ of the movement: Nyabinghi Order, Twelve Tribes of Israel, Ethiopian World Federation and Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress (“Bobo Shanti”). Some Rastafari are also members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. There are also thousands of adherents who are unaffiliated to any specific group. Nevertheless, there is also a strong sense of interconnectedness and synergy throughout the global movement.

Rastafari beliefs

Some of the fundamental beliefs of the Rastafari movement are the very reasons why the movement is so misunderstood. Listed below are some of the key, and perhaps some of the most misunderstood beliefs, though this list is by no means exhaustive.

Marijuana– Leonard E. Barrett writes that the use of marijuana contributes to the negative image of Rastafari. Marijuana is used during worship and sacred rituals, including ‘reasoning’ sessions, but is not necessarily used by all Rastafari. The use of the herb is confirmed in a number of biblical passages: ‘And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good’ (Genesis 1:12). Western society (or ‘Babylon’) outlaws the use of the herb as a drug, ignoring its sacramental nature and potential medicinal benefits, thus resulting in the criminalisation and stigmatisation of Rastafari. In his report on the 1981 uprisings, Lord Scarman wrote that ‘I have no doubt that cannabis smoking by some has done substantial harm to Rastafarian reputation in this country’.

Dreadlock hairstyles – Barrett also argues that the dreadlock hairstyle, one of the most recognisable features of Rastafari, can contribute to the negative image, ‘which some people feel is wild and unattractive’. This matted hairstyle was adopted by several Rastafari in the 1930s and lives on as a legacy today, confirmed once again in the Bible: ‘All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow’ (Numbers 6:5). Rastafari locks represent the objection to the use of sharp implements on the human body.

Reggae– Reggae music can be seen as synonymous with Rastafari, and for some it is seen as an earlier counterpart of Calypso, both genres being ‘a medium of social commentary’ and expressing a tradition of cultural retention practised by enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean. Reggae is a medium through which Rastafari protest against

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3 Akala, Roots Reggae and Rebellion (BBC Radio 4, 2014), [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b049yhcz](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b049yhcz) [last accessed 13 January 2016].

4 The Livity of Rastafari: Untold Stories <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ4VS42sOLQ> [last accessed 13 January 2016].


7 Barrett, The Rastafarians, (pp. xiv-xv).

8 Barrett, The Rastafarians (p. xiii).
oppression. Popularisation of the musical genre in the 1970s, including the music of Bob Marley, means reggae has now also attained ‘incredible international authority’. ⁹

**Terminology**— Rejection of Western terminology is one way Rastafari began the decolonising process that is integral to the movement. Rastafari reject the use of Western derogatory terms when referring to women, including terms such as ‘chick’, instead choosing respectful terms such as ‘Sister’, ‘Queen’, or ‘Empress’. Other examples include using positive language, such as ‘strong-end’ instead of ‘weekend’, and ‘overstand’ instead of ‘understand’. In addition, Rastafari rejects the use of Westernised ‘isms’, including the rejection of the term ‘Rastafarianism’. Rastafari adopts the term ‘Babylon’ to refer to the corrupt, oppressive and power-hungry materialistic Western societies.

**Introductory Timeline of the Rastafari Movement: Key Events**

23 July 1892 Lij Tafari Makonnen is born at Ejersa Goro, near the city of Harar in Ethiopia, to Ras Makonnen Wolde Mikael and Woizero Yashimabet Ali.

1896 Lij Tafari’s father, Ras Makonnen, plays an important part in the Battle of Adwa where Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II triumphs over the Italian army.

1911 Ras Tafari marries Woizero Menen Asfaw.

1913 Emperor Menelik II dies.

1914 Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood Garvey found the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) in Jamaica. Subsequently they migrate to the U.S.A.

1916 Ras Tafari crowned as Negus (King) Chief Advisor, Regent and Heir to the Throne. Empress Zauditu sits on the throne.

1923 Ras Tafari succeeds in getting Ethiopia recognised as a member of the League of Nations, a mostly European international organization. Ras Tafari envisages that membership will place Ethiopia on the world stage once more and might also help to prevent any invasion of Ethiopia.

1924 Ras Tafari visits the UK.

1927 Marcus Garvey is deported from the U.S.A.

2 November 1930 Coronation of Ras Tafari, from this point onwards known as Emperor Haile Selassie I. (“Selassie” means “Power of the Trinity”). The Emperor breaks with convention to ensure that his consort, Menen Asfaw, is crowned Empress on the same day.

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1933 Leonard Howell advocates six key principles for the Rastafari religion in Jamaica. Howell, who has past ties to the Garvey movement, comes to be recognised as the first Rastafari preacher.

July and August 1935 Public protests held in London in support of Ethiopia against the build-up of Italian invasion forces on the Ethiopian border. The protesters express anger at the British government for failing to actively support the sovereignty of Ethiopia. Organizers include famous English activists such as Sylvia Pankhurst and many African intellectuals and activists, including Amy Ashwood Garvey, CLR James, George Padmore and Jomo Kenyatta.

3 October 1935 Italy invades Ethiopia despite Ethiopia’s membership of the League of Nations. Europe fails to support Emperor Haile Selassie I.

May 1936 Sylvia Pankhurst begins to publish *New Times and Ethiopia News*, a newspaper intended to inform the British public of the events in and concerning Ethiopia. The paper runs for 20 years and is distributed across Europe, Africa, North America and the Caribbean.

3 June 1936 After months of fighting the Italians have occupied Addis Ababa. Emperor Haile Selassie I arrives in Britain with a plan to present the Ethiopian case personally to the League of Nations.

30 June 1936 Emperor Haile Selassie I addresses the League of Nations, a speech which was only reported in full in the UK media by Pankhurst’s newspaper.\(^{10}\)

21 September 1936 Emperor Haile Selassie I and his family move to Fairfield House, Bath. From this residence the Emperor agitates for Ethiopian sovereignty on the world stage, coordinates refugee relief, and seeks to direct the Ethiopian resistance against Italy.

February 1937 Italian fascists murder 30,000 Ethiopians in just three days, a barbaric war crime which is condemned by the British public.

August 1937 The Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated is established in New York, by Dr Malaku E. Bayen, nephew and personal physician of Emperor Haile Selassie I following a discussion in Bath with a delegation of prominent African Americans.

1938 The British Government formally acknowledge Italy’s sovereignty over Ethiopia. Again, the wider British public condemn this act.\(^{11}\)

1940 Leonard Howell sets up the first Rastafari settlement in Pinnacle, Jamaica.

June 1940 Mussolini declare war on the allies. The Emperor leaves Bath for Sudan.

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\(^{10}\) Ras Cos Tafari, Sister Stella Headley, Ras Shango Baku, Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Rai I, Sister AddishiwotAstawosen, *Focus: When Britain Loved Rastafari*<http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/focus-when-britain-loved-rastafari/> [last accessed 13 January 2016].

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
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5 May 1941 Five years exactly after his departure, Emperor Haile Selassie I re-enters Addis Ababa with the support of Ethiopian and Commonwealth soldiers. Mussolini’s colonial venture is defeated.

6 Feb 1945 Bob Marley is born in St Ann parish, Jamaica.

1950 Two Rastafari conventions take place wherein migration back to Africa is expected.

October 1954 Emperor Haile Selassie I and members of the royal family return to the UK. The Emperor is presented with the freedom of the city of Bath.

1955 The Imperial government grant land in Shashamane/Malco da (Ethiopia) to the Ethiopian World Federation and its members for services rendered during the Italian invasion.

1956 Sylvia Pankhurst moves to Ethiopia at the request of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

1958 The Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress (EABIC) is founded in Bull Bay, Jamaica, by Prince Emanuel Charles Edwards.

1960s The Rastafari movement begins to make its presence known in the UK, especially in London. The Observer newspaper wrongly asserts that Rastafari “object to washing”.12

27 September 1960 Sylvia Pankhurst dies in Ethiopia and is given a state funeral. Emperor Haile Selassie I names her Walatta Kristos, an honorary Ethiopian.

1961 The first Mission to Africa sees Rastafari from the Caribbean visit five African states, including Ethiopia, on an official fact-finding tour for the purposes of repatriation.

15 February 1962 Empress Menen Asfaw passes on.

25 May 1963 The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is established with a headquarters in Addis Ababa. Emperor Haile Selassie I becomes its first chairperson.

1963 Coral Gardens “incident” sees hundreds of Rastafari in Western Jamaica rounded up, jailed, and tortured. This marks the nadir of the relationship between Rastafari and Jamaican authorities.

1965 An unofficial second Mission to Africa takes place.

April 1966 Emperor Haile Selassie I visits Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Haiti and Jamaica. Arriving in Jamaica on 21st April, the Emperor receives the largest reception ever for any individual either visiting or leaving the country. Caribbean populations slowly start to look upon the Rastafari movement in a more positive light.

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12 Ras Cos Tafari, Sister Stella Headley, Ras Shango Baku, Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Rai I, Sister Addishiwot Asfwosen, Focus: When Britain Loved Rastafari <http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/focus-when-britain-loved-rastafari/> [last accessed 13 January 2016].
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1968 Twelve tribes of Israel founded in Kingston, Jamaica by Vernon Carrington (Prophet Gad)

1969 United Black Improvement Organisation (UBIO) is active in the UK.

1970 A group of Rastafari establish their own Headquarters known as Rastafari HQ or Tabernacle/Temple in St Agnes place, Kennington. Through the years the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Rasta International and Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated work from the location.

1972 Yohannes Local # 33 of the Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated is functioning in West London. This local makes a request for the establishment (1974) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the UK.

1970s Reggae music penetrates international airwaves, popularising Rastafari. Bob Marley is seen as the master of Reggae music.

1974 Emperor Haile Selassie I is deposed in a coup by the Derg, a military junta led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam.

1975 Emperor Haile Selassie I disappears from the world stage; Rastafari view reports of his death as a hoax.

April 1981 Societal tensions between the police and the Black communities in Britain eventuate, in part, in uprisings. Lord Scarman leads a report into the uprisings and holds meetings with Rasta International to understand the reasons behind the tensions. In his final report, Lord Scarman writes the following:

There was no suggestion in argument, nor any indication in evidence, that the Rastafarians, as a group or by their doctrines, were responsible for the outbreak of disorder or the ensuing riots. The Rastafarians, their faith and their aspirations, deserve more understanding and more sympathy than they get from the British people.

11 May 1981 Bob Marley passes on, after a fight against cancer.

July 1981 Major Rastafari conference at Brixton Town Hall.

1983 Len Garrison publishes his work, Black youth, Rastafarianism, and the identity crisis in Britain, the first published text to critically examine Rastafari in Britain.

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13 Ras Cos Tafari, Sister Stella Headley, Ras Shango Baku, Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Rai I, Sister AddishiwotAsfawosen, Focus: When Britain Loved Rastafari<http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/focus-when-britain-loved-rastafari/> [last accessed 13 January 2016].

14 Scarman, The Scarman Report, p. 76.
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1992 The Rastafari community worldwide celebrates the Centenary of Emperor Haile Selassie I with a significant delegation from England, Jamaica and the Caribbean visiting and celebrating in Ethiopia.

2001 The census shows there are approximately 5,000 Rastafari living in England and Wales.

2007 Rastafari HQ/Tabernacle at St Agnes Place is raided by extra special police forces, leading to the destruction of the entire building.

September 2007 Large numbers from the Rastafari community travel to Ethiopia to celebrate the 2000 Ethiopian Millennium.

27 March 2011 The 2011 census shows that there are approximately 7,906 Rastafari living in England and Wales. The largest number are located in London (2,629), followed by the West Midlands (1,005).

1 August 2014 First ever UK Reparation March takes place in London organised principally by Rastafari Movement UK. Subsequent annual marches take place.
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Black Cultural Archives – Collections

Please find below a list of selected sources held by the Black Cultural Archives which relate directly to Rastafari, including both archive material and also books from the reference library.

What is archive material?

An archive can mean a single record, or it can be an entire collection containing thousands of records. Everyone creates their own individual archive which includes letters, photographs and diaries. In the heritage sector, archives refer to unique records which are kept for their historic or social value. The archive collections at Black Cultural Archives include mostly paper records, including personal papers, periodicals, ephemera, and photographs. Black Cultural Archives, however, are increasingly receiving more and more digital material.

What is the reference library?

The reference library at Black Cultural Archives is accessible to all visitors to the reading room and currently holds 8,000 catalogued book titles. The library collection spans the majority of the later twentieth century and covers a variety of subject areas surrounding art, anthropology, education, history, and racism, as well as sociology.

Archive

1. BCA

The records of Black Cultural Archives cover the governance of the organisation from 1981 onwards.

BCA/5/1/139, Rastafarian Culture, 1990s. Includes “Rastafarians – your questions answered” information sheet, flyers for books on Rastafari, Afro-Caribbean Education Resource project information sheet on Rastafari.


BCA/7/6/1/6, Tools of the Trade exhibition, October 2001-2003. Includes material on Rastafari hairstyles.

2. Ephemera

This collection comprises of ephemera collected by Black Cultural Archives. Ephemera includes material such as posters, leaflets, programmes, etc. Ephemera material is usually created for short-term use, thus is transient, but it is important to permanently preserve ephemera as a window into social and cultural history.

EPHEMERA/68, Copy of “Illustrated” Magazine, 1941. Including an article on Haile Selassie, written by Sylvia Pankhurst.


3. Garrison

The Garrison collection consists of the papers of Len Kwesi Garrison (1943-2003), community activist, academic and historian. Len Garrison was a founder of the Black
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Cultural Archives and the papers include material regarding the organisations with which he was involved, aspects of his research, academic papers written and gathered by him, personal papers, photographs, postcards, invitations, and educational resources. The GARRISON collection covers the years 1947-2003.

GARRISON/2/2/9, Papers related to educational matters, c1978-1982. Includes a draft letter/article by Frances Morrell, Deputy Leader of the Inner London Education Authority in response to a report on ACER, ILEA funding, and Garrison’s “Black Youth, Rastafarianism and the Identity Crisis in Britain” which was called “Tory Anger at ‘dangerous book’.

GARRISON/2/2/10, “Black Youth Annual Penmanship Awards winning essays 1981”. Includes several relevant essays including ‘What Rastafarianism means to me’ by Karline Smith, and ‘What Rastafarianism means to me’ by Ras Eugene (Judah) Lange.


4. PERIODICALS

The PERIODICALS collection is enormously varied and includes magazines appealing to a wide readership. The collection currently covers the years 1936-2008.


5. RUNNYMEDE PRESS CUTTINGS

Contains press cuttings amassed by the Runnymede Trust on race relations issues.


RC/PC/10/03/I, Individual cases of discrimination in employment, 1989. Various press cuttings on individual cases of discrimination, including: Rastafari wins tribunal against a company who refused to interview him for a job, on the basis that his dreadlocks would offend people – it was ruled that Rastafari are a distinct ethnic group.

RC/PC/10/03/M, Individual cases of discrimination employment, 1993. Various press cuttings on individual cases of discrimination in employment, including: Race Relations Act test case regarding Rastafari.

6. RUNNYMEDE RESEARCH FILES

Contains research files amassed by the Runnymede Trust on race relations issues.

RC/RF/14/05/A, Health issues among Black and ethnic minorities, 27 May 1964-October 1995. Press releases, articles and reports on health issues among Black and ethnic
minorities. Includes material on health issues among Rastafarian communities, amongst others.


7. **WILLIAMS**

The WILLIAMS/ collection was deposited with Black Cultural Archives by Mrs N Elizabeth Williams, wife of Howard Williams, in 1998. The collection contains slides, research and reference material amassed by H G Williams.

**WILLIAMS/11, Reference material – education, 1977-1982.** Lists of books for the “multicultural society/classroom library”, articles on Rastafari, and a study on race and streaming in school.

8. **WONG**

The WONG/ collection was donated by Ansel Wong in December 2008 and comprises of original material and publications relating to the early years of Ansel Wong’s career and involvement in activism.

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Reference Library

1.4 BAR  The Rastafarians: The Dreadlocks of Jamaica / Leonard E. Barrett.

1.4 BIS  Blackheart Man / Derek Bishton.


1.4 LEE  Rastafari: the new creation / Barbara Makeda Lee.

1.4 MIL  Between two cultures?: the case of Rastafarianism / Robert F. Miles.

1.4 MIN  The Rastafarians / E.E.Cashmore.

1.4 PLU  Movement of Jah people / John Plummer.

1.4 TRO  Rastafarianism, reggae and racism: N.A.M.E.handbook 1978 / Barry Troyna.

1.4 WIL  The Rastafarians / K.M.Williams.

1.10A NAG  Rastafarian music in contemporary Jamaica: a study of socioreligious music of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica / Yoshiko S.Nagashima.


299.6 BAR  The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance / Leonard E. Barrett.

299.6 OWE  Dread: the Rastafarians of Jamaica / Joseph Owens.


299.6 ZIP  Rastafari in the third millennium: a universal philosophy / Werner Zips.

301.45 GAR  Black youth, Rastafarianism, and the identity crisis in Britain / Len Garrison.

305.699 CAM  Rasta and resistance: from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney / Horace Campbell.

920 SEL  Rasta: Emperor Haile Selassie and the Rastafarians / Black Starline Inc.
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Other Sources

Websites


Ras Cos Tafari, Sister Stella Headley, Ras Shango Baku, Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Rai I, Sister Addishiwot Asfawosen, *Focus: When Britain Loved Rastafari*<http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/focus-when-britain-loved-rastafari/>[last accessed 13 January 2016].

*Rastafarian History*<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/rastafari/history/history.shtml>[last accessed 13 January 2016].


*The Livity of Rastafari: Untold Stories*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ4VS42sOLQ>[last accessed 13 January 2016].

About Sylvia Pankhurst:
  *Background*<http://www.sylviapankhurst.com/about_sylvia_pankhurst/background.ph p>[last accessed 13 January 2016].

Books


Other institutions

**Bishopsgate Institute**<http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/> Relevant material at Bishopsgate includes Greater London Council reports on the Rastafari community and a funeral appreciation for Jah Bones in the Bernie Grant Archive.


**George Padmore Institute**<http://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/> The collections held at the George Padmore Institute include issues of The Voice of Rasta.

**Imperial War Museum**<http://www.iwm.org.uk/> Imperial War Museum hold photographs of Haile Selassie’s coronation in 1930.


**Victoria and Albert Museum**<http://www.vam.ac.uk/>The V&A Museum holds collections related to Ethiopia, which are well documented on their online catalogue.


If you have any queries regarding this subject guide or would like to book an appointment to view archive material then please contact the Collections team at archives@caheritage.org.uk. Alternatively, you can call 0203 757 8510 or 0203 757 8511.