



African Lives in Northern England

From Roman Times to
the 21st Century



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Foreword

We are delighted that you are about to read our booklet. This project started when Barbara Kentish and I met for the first time over a cup of coffee in Heaton Park, Newcastle, in August 2020. Barbara then suggested compiling a calendar to show the black presence in the North East to counter ignorance and racism. A group of historians, researchers and equality activists was assembled and our 2021 calendar of African Lives in Northern England, produced in two months, was sold out before it was printed. Encouraged, an expanded project team then produced this booklet (in eight months, this time) collaborating with Historic England (historicengland.org.uk) on creating school resources along the way.

The aim of this booklet, to widen the general understanding and appreciation of black lives in northern England, required a specific focus in order to do justice to one set of hidden histories. The decision to focus on people of African descent arose from the initial conversation, the recognition that the first-known African settlement in England was in this region (within the garrison of Hadrian's Wall) and the context of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in 2020. Similar reasons influenced the decision to limit case studies in the booklet to those of African descent who have lived or are living in, or who have made significant visits to, the North East and Cumbria.

Though the origins of us all can be traced archaeologically to the Rift Valley in East Africa, we have focused on those who confidently and comfortably claim an African heritage, in full or part, and whose claim is reflected in their wider experience. This experience which often includes racism, managed or overcome, is also a story of lives enjoyed with the wider non-African communities.

We have strived to be consistent in using language that reflects our aims, for example, in using the term 'of African descent' for this specific group and reserving the term 'black' for the wider grouping of people of colour. But we have quoted sources which do not clarify whether they use the term 'black' for 'of African descent' or for the wider black constituency. We have also used the terms 'enslaved persons', 'enslaver' and 'enslavement' rather than 'slave' etc., as the former indicates that people were actively enslaved while the latter suggests that being a 'slave' is a natural condition, avoiding accountability for the act of enslaving. But we have repeated historical terms such as the 'anti-slavery society'. We share our rocky journey towards more accurate terminology.

We also share our journey in presenting African Lives in Northern England. Ordinary lives, particularly the lives of women, were haphazardly recorded and this, coupled with a predominantly male population of African descent in the United Kingdom until the 1960s, has limited our inclusion of female figures. The few paragraphs on each person are unable to convey their complex lives. We have supplied our sources and encourage you to delve deeper, while recognising that all sources are subject to memory, perspective and interpretation.

This booklet on the presence and success of those of African descent in the North East of England is a stage in the journey of dispelling the myth that the North East is exclusively white and monocultural. Africans and their descendants have been and still are part of the tapestry that makes this society richer through diversity.

Beverley Prevatt Goldstein, Editor and Coordinator African Lives in Northern England Project

Africans in Northern Britain in the Roman Period

Northern England was part of the Roman Empire for over 300 years. It marked the North West corner of their mighty domain, which surrounded the Mediterranean, taking in parts of Germany, France, Spain, the Balkans, Syria, Egypt and the coastal plains of North Africa right up to the Atlantic.

It was in many ways a cosmopolitan Empire, with people travelling right across it and connecting distant regions. Northern England had a high military presence, as shown by the forts, marching camps, and most famously by the frontier known as Hadrian's Wall, today a World Heritage Site. The Wall zone alone had a massive garrison, estimated at some 15,000 soldiers.

The Roman army drew its soldiers from across the Empire, and it was common practice to station soldiers in a different part of the Empire to the one they originated from. On Hadrian's Wall there were units whose soldiers were originally raised in places such as Romania, Syria, Belgium, Iraq and Mauretania in North West Africa.

The Numerus Maurorum Aurelianorum

The one unit recorded on Hadrian's Wall known to originate from North Africa was based at the fort of Burgh by Sands in Cumbria. It was called the Numerus Maurorum Aurelianorum (the Unit of Aurelian Moors), and was formed in North West Africa in the area that is Algeria/Morocco today. Its name suggests that it was raised in the late 2nd century AD, during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. It is believed that it was based at the Roman fort at Burgh by Sands (Aballava) through the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It may have arrived in Britain with the Emperor Septimius Severus at the start of the 3rd century AD. We have two pieces of evidence for this unit's existence: an altar, dated to 253-8 AD, found repurposed as a building stone in the wall of a cottage at Beaumont near the fort at Burgh by Sands, names it, and it is also listed in a Roman document, the Notitia Dignitatum (generally dated to the 4th century AD), as part of the garrison for the site.

There is also evidence of North African cultural influence on life on the Wall. Archaeological excavations at several sites, including Segedunum Roman Fort at Wallsend, have uncovered examples of casserole pots and flat dishes for use on a brazier, in styles that were common in North Africa.



Plaque at Burgh on Sands commemorating the first African community recorded in Britain

Archaeologists call this pottery 'Africa red slip ware'. These designs reached all the way from Africa to northern Britain. It could indicate troops cooking in their native tradition, but it could also be a cooking style that had spread more widely.

Victor

One undeniable piece of evidence of someone from North Africa on the frontier zone is the tombstone of Victor, who came from the same area of North West Africa as the unit at Burgh by Sands.

The Victor Tombstone is one of the finest tombstones from Roman Britain. It is a memorial to Victor, the 20-year-old freedman of Numerianus, a cavalry trooper. The tombstone is almost certainly not a likeness of Victor and was most likely carved by a Palmyrene sculptor (Palmyra is part of Syria today). The final section of the inscription translates to describe Numerianus as the person 'who most devotedly conducted him [Victor] to the tomb'. This is not a standard form of text for a military tombstone; does it hint at something more? We cannot know what the relationship between Victor and Numerianus was, but it is conceivable that they were lovers. The quality of the tombstone – which stands out among those more generally found on the frontier – does speak of Numerianus' devotion to his freedman.

So, a fascinating tombstone that reminds us people can have multiple identities and stories.



The Victor Tombstone

Gaius Cossutius Saturninus

Victor's is not the only tombstone of a North African found on Hadrian's Wall. Another tombstone, found at Birdoswald Roman Fort (known to the Romans as Banna), recorded the death of Gaius Cossutius Saturninus, who is described as being from Hippo Regius, now the city of Annaba, Algeria. Saturninus was a Roman legionary, and his name confirms that he was a citizen of the Roman Empire, which gave him added rights. He was a member of Legio VI Victrix, which was stationed at York.

Considering how rare Roman tombstones are, it is notable that two of those found along Hadrian's Wall record the presence of named North African individuals, living (and dying) on the Roman frontier in northern England.

Septimius Severus

We know of another African who visited northern England in the Roman period, and that was the Emperor Septimius Severus, who ruled the Roman Empire from AD 193–211. Severus was born in Lepcis in what is now Libya. His family was part of the elite of the city, and a mix of Roman and African descent. He lived in Lepcis until his late teens, when he went to Rome to complete his studies. He went on to a senior career in the Senate and was a provincial Governor and General before taking power at the end of the 2nd century AD. He came to Britain in the early 3rd century AD. He appears to have overseen a significant building programme along Hadrian's Wall itself, including the conversion of the fort at South Shields from a regular fort to a dedicated supply base. This was generally seen as preparation for an invasion northwards into Caledonia. However, Severus' health was failing, and he died in York in 211 AD.



Septimius Severus by Elena Onwochei-Garcia (2021)

Other studies of remains from Roman York and London clearly reveal the presence of people from Africa in Britain. Scientific analysis, including that of DNA from skeletal remains, has shown that people from Africa were present across Roman Britain, including the North East and Cumbria. The Wall zone may have been the edge of the Roman Empire, but it truly consisted of people from all across that Empire who lived, served and died here two millennia ago.

Authored by Bill Griffiths and Don O'Meara, with thanks to Alex Croom.

Early Residents

After the end of the Roman empire, we have no more glimpses of Africans in northern England until the 18th century, when we come across some of whom we know only their names, some of whom we can only see their faces, and just a few of whom we know more.

Galba was a 'native of America' living in Northumberland in 1727. The term used means that he was probably born there and not in Africa, and was brought to England as an enslaved person. In that year Galba signed an 'indenture' with Sir William Blackett of Wallington, which has been preserved in the Northumberland Archives. Indentures were a type of contract, generally signed by apprentices who bound themselves to serve their masters, under certain conditions, for a specified number of years. Galba's contract, however, required him to serve Sir William and his heirs for the whole of his life and gave Sir William 'the sole property and disposal of my person'. Nothing more has been found out about him. There were already legal doubts about whether English law recognised slavery on English soil, so the reason for the indenture would have been to establish Sir William's legal rights over Galba.

Galba may have been in the position of a household servant, like the young black man on the edge of a portrait of Captain Robert Fenwick and his wife and sister-in-law, painted by William Bardwell in the 1740s. A young black servant can be seen just entering the scene, holding a bowl of exotic fruit. Including servants, especially black ones, in portraits was a way of demonstrating the wealth of the person who had commissioned the picture. The Fenwicks were a wealthy Northumberland family and had cousins who were enslavers in the colony of Carolina, America.

One reason there is no trace of Galba beyond his indenture may be that enslaved people were often given new names on baptism or to denote ownership, linking them to the family they were serving. For example, Blackett Shafto, bearer of two names of rich Northumberland families and servant to William Shafto of Jamaica, was baptised in 1778 in Ovingham. Researchers at Northumberland Archives have discovered a scattering of baptism and burial records which mention that the individuals concerned were black, but many other records contain no such information.



Portrait of Captain Fenwick, his Wife Isabella Orde and her Sister Ann by Thomas Bardwell (1704-1767)

William Fifefield was a ferryman on the Tyne and a drummer in several local militia regiments at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. We know about him from a warm obituary in the local newspaper on his death in 1834. This described him as 'very generally known, and very much respected in his station'. He arrived in Newcastle from St Kitts in the Caribbean in 1794, a time when Britain was in the grip of an invasion scare, and he quickly joined the Newcastle Volunteers. He continued to be active in the local volunteer regiments until at least 1825. At the same time, he earned a living through his ownership of a 'Comfortable' – a small ferryboat on the Tyne, so-named because it had a canopy to shelter passengers. These were worked by oars and travelled up- and down-river with the tide. However, by the time of his death 'the march of steam threw him and his Comfortable into the shade', as his obituary puts it.

Fifeield married Margaret Wintrup, daughter of a Northumberland farmer, at St Mary's Gateshead in 1803, and had two children, both baptised at St Nicholas' in Newcastle. On his death in January 1834, aged 65, he was buried at St John's Church. His son William Thomas was a hairdresser in the Groat Market. There are three newspaper reports of William Thomas coming up before the magistrates in 1827-8, and in 1831. While William Thomas was punished in the earlier cases, in 1831 it was the watchman who was reprovved for acting beyond his powers.



The Mayor's Barge on the Tyne by John Wilson Carmichael (1799-1868)

We know considerably more about 19th-century resident **Mary Ann Macham**. She was born in Virginia, USA in 1802, the daughter of a 'gentleman's son' and an enslaved woman. Taken from her mother at 15 months, she lived with, and was treated kindly by, her father's sister. At the age of 12, after her aunt's death, she was sold as a 'slave', cruelly whipped and frequently imprisoned at weekends. She carefully planned her escape and, helped by a friend who was held enslaved by the Harbour-Master, lived precariously in the woods for many months awaiting a boat to England. Despite help from some crew members, and, in one account, the captain, who turned a blind eye despite the offer of a substantial reward for her capture, she was hungry and in hiding for most of her four-month boat trip. She arrived in North Shields via Belgium, Grimsby, Hull and York in December 1831, and was met by two women from the Spence family, a Quaker family active in the anti-slavery movement. She was baptised in North Shields Baptist Church.

Mary Ann Macham seems to have been the only enslaved woman who managed to escape to Britain by stowing away on a ship. Living first with the Jordeson family in Dockwray Square, North Shields, she moved in 1833 to live as a servant and nursemaid with the Spence family in Howard Street until her marriage in 1841 to a local widower and roper, James Blyth. They were married in Wallsend Parish with his only child, 16-year-old Mary, present. The census data indicates they lived in North Shields, principally in Howard Street. James Blyth became a banker's porter, possibly to the Spence family, who had expanded into banking from the drapery business. There is no record of any children and Mary Blyth had moved out to work as a domestic servant locally. James Blyth died in 1877 and Mary Ann Blyth then lived with the Irwin family in Nelson Street, North Shields, and subsequently with relatives in South Benwell, Newcastle. She is recorded as 'a retired servant, living on her own means'.



Mary Ann Macham

She died in 1893, at the age of 91, and was buried in her husband's grave, next to the Spence's plot amongst eminent North Shield Quaker families, in Preston Cemetery, Tynemouth.

Mary Ann Macham's life has been researched by volunteers at the Old Low Light Heritage Centre in North Shields. *Breaking Chains*, an award-winning exhibition about her, was held there in Autumn 2019. A crowdfunding campaign raised the money for a memorial stone for her in Preston Cemetery.



Picture presumed to be of John Kent

John Kent is said to have been Britain's first black policeman, though this title is also claimed for others. He can also claim to have been one of the earliest black railway workers. According to his obituary in the local newspaper in 1886, his father Thomas was brought to Cumbria as an enslaved man in the middle of the 18th century, by 'Nabob Graham' of Rickerby House. Thomas worked as a gardener locally, and had five sons and five daughters. Kent was born in 1795. As a young man he worked as a servant and labourer in Carlisle, and then as a watchman, before joining the newly created police force in 1835 in Maryport.

There, he saved a colleague, and dealt with a serious disorder, bringing violent perpetrators to court. In Carlisle, he became a day constable and held the office of Mayor's Sergeant. He is recorded as having saved a boy from drowning and a colleague from assault. Since the police were also firemen, he received insurance rewards for bravery in this field. In 1844, Kent was dismissed, along with several others, for being drunk on duty, by a 'new broom' superintendent. He went on to become a railway policeman, before being employed in the signal box at Carlisle's Citadel station for 13 years. In his last few years he was an attendant in the first class gentlemen's waiting room at the station.



John Kent's plaque, Maryport

Kent's death in July 1886, aged 90, was noted in the Carlisle Patriot as the 'Death of a Carlisle Notable', and his obituary took up most of a column. Maryport Council has put up a plaque to celebrate his service there between 1835 and 1837.

Authored by Sue Ward, with thanks to Barbara Kentish.

Seamen

The growth of the North East has always been closely linked to its maritime connections. Whether it was the export of coal, glass, steel and chemicals, or the construction of ships, the sea has played an important part in the industrial development of North East coastal towns. Shipping was also an important way of connecting communities, and many of the North East's early communities of African descent came to the region as sailors and seamen.

Through the 18th century we have records for the arrival of many individuals to the North East, often as the personal servants of ships' captains. One of the earliest recorded names we have for an African presence in the North East is a man named **Wandoe**, who arrived in the region with Captain Roger Carnaby some time before 1713. Other maritime connections include evidence in the records of St Nicholas Cathedral, which show an African boy named Thomas Gateshead being baptised in 1762, having arrived with ships from Admiral Pocock's fleet. Later we know of a **Charles Reed** baptised in 1778 in St Maurice's Eglington, having come to England with Captain Charles Ogle. Unfortunately, like many ordinary people living at this time, we know very little about the personal lives of sailors of African descent other than their names being recorded in official records, such as a record of baptism. In these cases we are also reliant on those recording the baptism making a note of the place of birth or origin of the individuals – something which may not have been done in all cases – and therefore underestimate the African presence in the region.

In a few cases, however, we know a lot more about their lives. One of the best known examples of the African presence in the Royal Navy in the 18th century is **Olaudah Equiano** (see also 'Orators'). Though most famous for his work as an Abolitionist campaigner and for his biography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, Equiano spent much of his life from when he was a boy until he was 18 working at sea. This included being present at several important naval battles of the Seven Years' War (1756-63). He also went on an expedition to the Arctic in 1773. During this voyage, Equiano was on board the same ship as a 14-year-old coxswain named Horatio Nelson, who would later become famous as Admiral Nelson, leading the British victory at the Battle of Trafalgar.

During the 18th century, records show that most British naval ships had sailors from all over the world on board, including those from Africa and the Caribbean. These sailors were such a common presence that in 1777 Admiral George Young issued orders that warships serving in the Caribbean should be limited to no more than four African or Caribbean sailors. However in times of war this rule was often flouted, and the presence of an African (or African descendant) man in Daniel Maclise's famous painting *The Death of Nelson*, as well as those depicted on the bronze panels at the base of Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, are examples of how normal their service was seen at the time, both in the battle, and also for the public when the memorials were erected.

From the 1860s there was a small, but permanent, black community on the Tyne, which included people from across the growing British Empire. This was mainly a male community of Somali and West African seamen, who were part of a multicultural community of sailors on the Tyne. This community included not only Africans, but people from the West Indies, Yemen, India, China, Japan, Russian, Scandinavia, Greece and Spain, to name but a few places. Some of these people were well-known local figures, such as a Krooman boy from West Africa, who was notable due to the distinctive Krooman tattoos on his face, and a Jamaican named Ramsey, who was in charge of the South Shields Poor Law Union in 1912.

With the change from sail-powered to steam-powered shipping, there was an important shift in shipping practices which would affect seamen and their employment. There was a decline in the need for skilled sailors, and a shift towards lower-paid jobs, which were regarded as less skilled. These included the stokers, firemen and greasers who worked in the hot, dark engine rooms of the new steam ships. Poor pay and conditions often resulted in industrial action, and in June 1866 a seamen's strike took place on Tyneside. *The Newcastle Daily Chronicle* reported on 25th June 1866 that: 'Whatever may be the feeling of the people of America or elsewhere against colour, it is not participated in by our tars [an old term for a sailor], who walk arm in arm with the coloured man'. This suggests a strong sense of community and support amongst those working in the shipping industry in this period, regardless of their 'race'. This was not a period without prejudice however, and evidence from magistrates' courts

at the time suggests black defendants, who were frequently sailors on shore leave waiting for their next posting, were treated more harshly than white defendants for petty offences. This was highlighted in liberal newspapers such as the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, which printed articles at the time, denouncing racism.

Some of this prejudice can be seen in the unequal pay and conditions that might be attached to a seaman's place of employment. Though seamen's unions had managed to negotiate equal pay and conditions for seamen hired on British ships in British ports, this did not apply to those hired from colonial ports. This led to many black sailors jumping ship when docked in Britain, in order to secure better pay and conditions when signing on to another ship. These men formed the nucleus of the continuous black communities which have existed in the North East since the late 19th century.



Simon Sheffield

Though many of these men moved away from the region when they signed up to another ship, some settled in the ports and married local women. In a few rare cases the photos of these men can be found in the records of the Tyne and Wear Archives. These include rare photos of **Simon Sheffield**, a ship's fireman, and another of **Louis Offie** (1880-1931) from Mauritius, who worked as a ship's painter. Offie married a woman named Sarah Taylor in South Shields and would later serve in World War I, in the Durham Light Infantry and Labour Corps.



Louis Offie

This population of sailors played a vital role in World War I, particularly working for the merchant marine, transporting supplies to Britain. The demand for seamen grew exponentially as the numbers of people conscripted into the army and navy grew and Britain needed to import materials for the war effort.

After World War I, rising unemployment led to tension between different seamen's groups and a decline in the solidarity that characterised earlier periods. This was fuelled by rumours that black seamen were accepting jobs below minimum rates of pay. In reality these tensions were often exacerbated by employers as part of 'divide and rule' tactics. Others accused the National Union of Seamen of stirring up racial tensions to distract from its own failings. This became a particularly prominent issue in North Shields on 25 March 1930, during a dispute over the employment of Somali seamen, who formed an important part of the African community of sailors on Tyneside during this period.

A legacy of the post-World War I tensions was government amendments to the earlier 1914 Aliens Restriction Act. The changes to this Act made it compulsory to provide evidence of nationality before being accepted to work on a British ship; evidence which many colonial seamen were unable to provide. This meant that many black seamen who were legally British subjects could now be classified as '*alien residents*' and therefore liable to internment or deportation. This was a particular issue for people who were unemployed or destitute, and therefore placed a great pressure on black seamen during the periods of high unemployment in the inter-war period.

Even when employment began to rise in the mid-1930s, the British Shipping Act of 1935 only allowed that two out of every 35 crew could be 'aliens'. This prejudice was sometimes encouraged by the trade union movement. The North East representative for the National Union of Seamen encouraged the preferential hiring of seaman based on their skin colour during World War II.

A key figure in the black community opposing prejudice at this time was **Charles Udor Minto** (see also 'Community Builders'). Minto was originally from Nigeria, and arrived in the North East during World War I, as a seaman. He married a local woman and in May 1942 opened Colonial House at 3 Northumberland Place, North Shields: a hostel and social space for the North Shields black community. At this time about 60% of the male black community in North Shields were estimated to work in shipping. This included **Cecil 'Cliff' Sealy** from Barbados, a merchant seaman who lived in North Shields from the 1940s–

1970s, and **Louis Offie, Jr.** (1917-1976), who followed his father (mentioned above) into the life of a merchant seaman.

By 1950, due to changing shipping practices (particularly using dock machinery, which required fewer men) and the shift from coal-powered to oil-powered ships, the population of African and African-descendant seamen began to decline. This ended one chapter in the maritime history of the region, just as another chapter was being opened after the arrival of the Empire Windrush.



Cecil 'Cliff' Sealy

Authored by Don O'Meara, with thanks to Hannah Kent for providing information on the conditions of merchant seamen in Tyneside during the inter-war period.

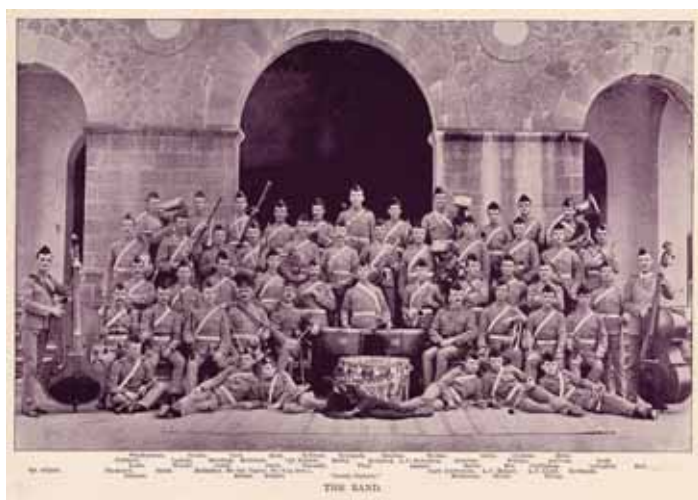
Soldiers and War Volunteers

The first evidence of African soldiers in the north after the Roman period is in a regimental band playing in Alnwick in 1795. Regimental bands added status to the regiments and in battle could encourage the troops, amplify orders and attend to the wounded. There are also records of three individual band members.

Tommy Crawford, known as 'Black Tommy', lived in Darlington when he was pensioned off from the 2nd Queens Dragoon Guards. He was also a bricklayer's labourer and died in 1830, reportedly grief-stricken at the death of his 13-year-old son.

Loveless Overton from Barbados, a staunch freemason and joiner, was a trumpeter with the Ayrshires in 1799 and with the First King Dragoons in 1800 and 1825. He is pictured in the baggage train of the First King Dragoons in Newcastle. He is believed to have tried unsuccessfully to join the Freemason societies in Barbados in 1823 and considered starting one for people of African descent in Barbados. He also spoke out against enslavement. He was retired in 1828 due to a 'shortness of breath', and died in Ireland.

James 'Jimmy' Francis Durham was with the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Regimental Band, and was also the first African to join the British Army as a fully enlisted soldier on the same terms as white recruits. He was enrolled as Boy Soldier No. 6758, aged 14 years old, in July 1889, with the permission of Queen Victoria.



Jimmy Durham with The Band

Durham (original name Mustapha) was found, aged one, in Northern Sudan on New Year's Day 1886, following the battle of Ginnis between the Durham Light Infantry and a local Dervish army. He was alone near the captured Arab boat on the Nile River, with the Dervish army having been defeated. The Sergeant named him Jimmy Dervish and he was regarded as 'the regiment's pet'. When the Battalion was ordered to India, the sergeants kept him with them, contributing towards his upkeep. He was baptised James Francis Durham and travelled with the DLI to India and Mandalay.

Durham returned in 1902 to the North of England, was welcomed into Sergeant Robson's family, and, later the same year, married Jane Green, the sister of the quartermaster sergeant at Bishop Auckland. He went with the DLI to Cork where he divided his time between the regimental band, playing clarinet and violin, and running the Army Temperance Association.



Jimmy Durham in Cork, Ireland

On 8 August 1910, aged only 27, and three weeks before the birth of his daughter, Durham died from pneumonia. He was buried with full military honours in Fermoy Cemetery in Ireland.

First World War

Thousands of Ghanaian men and 15,000 West Indians fought in the First World War, while one million Africans worked as carriers in Africa. The British West Indian Regiment (BWIR), formed in the First World War, fought principally in Egypt, the Middle East and Palestine. When reassigned to labouring duties and discriminated against in pay and conditions, they mutinied at Taranto, Italy in 1918.



The British West Indies Regiment in camp on the Albert–Amiens Road, September 1916

The valour of these African and West Indian troops was not acknowledged in either the London Victory Parade or in formal burial rites. Volunteers of African descent living in Britain were usually rejected or assigned to segregated regiments such as the Royal Engineers (Coloured Section) or the BWIR. The bar to those 'not of European descent' was randomly applied, with the footballer **Walter Tull**, and **Roy and Norman Manley**, who were Jamaicans studying at Oxford University, accepted into the regular army. One of the few records of serving Africans from this region is of **Louis Offie** who served in the Durham Light Infantry and Labour Corps (see also 'Seamen').

Second World War

At the beginning of the Second World War, the British Government responded both to pressure, applied by the League of Coloured Peoples, and need. In October 1939 it lifted the bar requiring 'pure European descent' to join the army. 372,000 Africans, 12,000 West Indians and 130,000 African Americans fought in or with the British army.

Approximately 110 West Indian women were reluctantly accepted into the Auxiliary Territorial Service and Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and an African American Women's Army Corp rescued the overwhelmed postal service.

People of African descent in the North East responded positively to the lifting of the colour bar and the opportunity to serve. Charles Minto, the warden of Colonial House in North Shields (see also 'Seamen' and 'Community Builders'), publicly encouraged his fellow Africans to join up. But their offers were often either ignored, as with Dr Wellesley-Cole of Newcastle (see also 'Doctors'), or needed influential intervention. According to Collins (1952), it was Minto's intervention which enabled five men from the North East to join the RAF. Also, prompted by its welfare officers, the Colonial Office enabled some African seamen, who had been abandoned in Liverpool by their shipping line, to move to North Shields to enlist in the Royal Army Service Corps and to train as engineers.

Robert C Mgbaronye, born 1921 in Lagos, Nigeria, was a teacher who gave up his prestigious job at Lagos High School in 'the hope of taking part in the fight for freedom'. He worked as a labourer in Freetown, Sierra Leone, before stowing away on a ship bound for England. He spent three days in the ship's bunker without food or water before revealing himself and working for his passage on board. Being a British subject, he could land, and he stayed at the Colonial House, North Shields. He worked as assistant secretary to the warden, who approached the RAF on his behalf. In the newspaper article from 8 June 1943, on which this profile is based, Mgbaronye said, 'I am undaunted in my efforts to do my best for the war effort'. It is not clear whether Mgbaronye achieved his goal of joining the RAF. The article emphasises his devotion to the Empire, though for many hopes of employment, a better life and adventure also played a part in their volunteering.

Forestry Workers

Seamen, technicians and forestry workers of African descent are likely to have had similarly mixed motives for helping in the war effort. 900 forestry workers were recruited from Belize to cut the timber needed for coal and shipping. They worked from seven camps in Scotland, and travelled to West Indies House in Newcastle and Colonial House in North Shields when on leave or having absconded. Unlike the forestry workers from Canada and Australia, they were classed as civilian and so were paid less, and provided with inferior transport and accommodation – and the local population was warned not to socialise with them. The colonial welfare officers who tried to improve their living conditions were criticised for doing this by the Ministry of Supply.



British Honduran Forestry Unit in camps in Scotland

When the British Honduran Forestry Unit was disbanded in 1944, 250 men chose to stay in Britain, with about 125 moving to the North East. The welfare officers struggled to find accommodation and employment for them, with the Royal Navy, RAF and Rolls Royce all rejecting them on grounds of colour. Some found employment on the North Eastern Railway and in industry. Collins identified more than 16 people from this group living in North and South Shields in the 1950s.



British Honduran Forestry Unit socialising at Colonial House, North Shields

It is likely that for women of African descent in the North East (estimated at 10-20% of the African population), the opportunities for contributing to the war may have been similarly limited, as shown by the Land Army's initial rejection of Amelia King because of colour. Nevertheless, Dr Ighodaro's work treating war casualties and working in the decontamination squad at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle (see 'Doctors') and the story of **Pauline Henriques**, the only black woman in Carlisle during the war, suggests that there may be unheard stories.

Pauline Henriques (1914-1998) was born in Jamaica to a wealthy family and arrived in London with her parents in 1919. In 1939 her husband's job moved to Carlisle and, shortly after, he enlisted in the navy. Comfortably off, married, with a young daughter, Henriques was not expected to seek employment. However, she joined a group of young mothers demanding to contribute to the war effort. While taking in evacuees, she taught herself to type and got a job typing invoices at the Air Ministry. She joined Carlisle Theatre Company as an actor and producer, having trained at London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, and found that 'everyone found it an interesting novelty to have a black woman involved'.



Pauline Henriques

Henriques left Carlisle in 1944 and worked as an actor and broadcaster with BBC Radio's West Indian and West African services, including the programme *Caribbean Voices*. She was the first black actress to appear on British television in 1946, and in 1950, on a national tour, she played Emilia in *Othello* in mining village halls in the North East. Tired of being offered parts as an American maid, she trained as a social worker, working with young unmarried mothers and with Brooks Advisory Centre, becoming their national Vice-Chairman. In 1966 she became Britain's first black woman magistrate and in 1969 she was awarded an OBE.

While the colour bar often kept people of African descent out of military roles, essential and key work was done by those of African heritage in the North East. It is particularly in its seamen and shipping – solid North East institutions – that the contributions of people of African descent in the North East to the war effort can be seen most clearly.

Authored by Beverley Prevatt Goldstein, with thanks to Barbara Kentish and Hannah Kent.

Engineers

Whether technical, naval, industrial, electrical, chemical, civil, with engineering it often comes down to the same thing: problem solving. If you want to solve a problem, then you need innovative and diverse ideas. More inclusion leads to more innovative engineering solutions. This diversity in problem-solving skills means that engineers from African and Caribbean backgrounds have contributed greatly – even against major odds. Here are a few examples of individuals who have contributed to this region with their engineering knowledge.

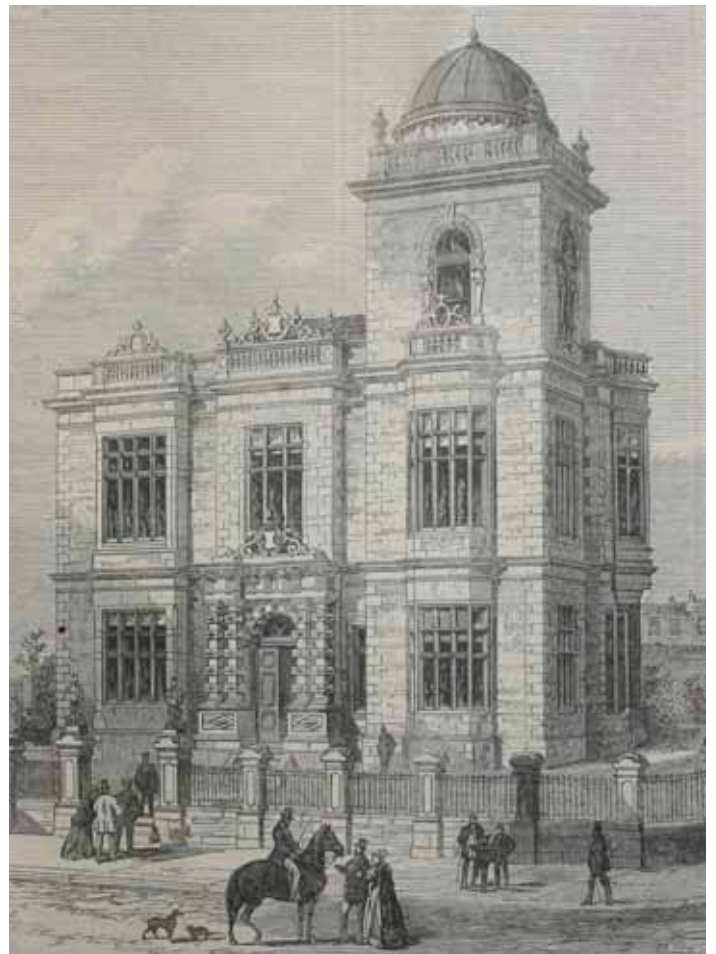
Michael Yanni, born in 1918 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, arrived in England via Trinidad, North America and Canada. An educator by background, he was looking for more adventure in his life and so had taken to the oceans as a seaman. Wanting to help with the war effort, he and a dozen fellow Africans set sail for England rather than return home. According to his contemporary, the journalist and musician Rudolph Dunbar, the Africans were badly treated on a French shipping line, then dumped in Liverpool without pay. Eventually the Colonial Office transferred them to their hostel, West Indies House, Newcastle, in 1941.

The version of this story told by Yanni's in a government-sponsored broadcast to West Africa to promote the war effort is different. His journey to England was wonderful, with entertainment organised by the US President's wife in the North American ports. He agreed to retrain in mechanics on a variety of different engines, after the Ministry of Labour/ Colonial Office suggested that the war effort could use motor engineers and technicians. He then enjoyed working as a fitter. After a period of loneliness when he first arrived, he soon made friends, citing the kind and generous fellow workers and wonderful facilities at West Indies House. It was not long before he got into the swing of things in the region, with travelling, theatre/cinema visits, and joining the hostel's football team.

The two stories were expressed around the same time to different audiences. It is possible that a wish to please the Colonial Office, his sponsors, and/or to show himself in a favourable light back home, influenced the more positive version. It is a reminder of the caution needed when interpreting both oral and written history.



Band at Colonial House, North Shields

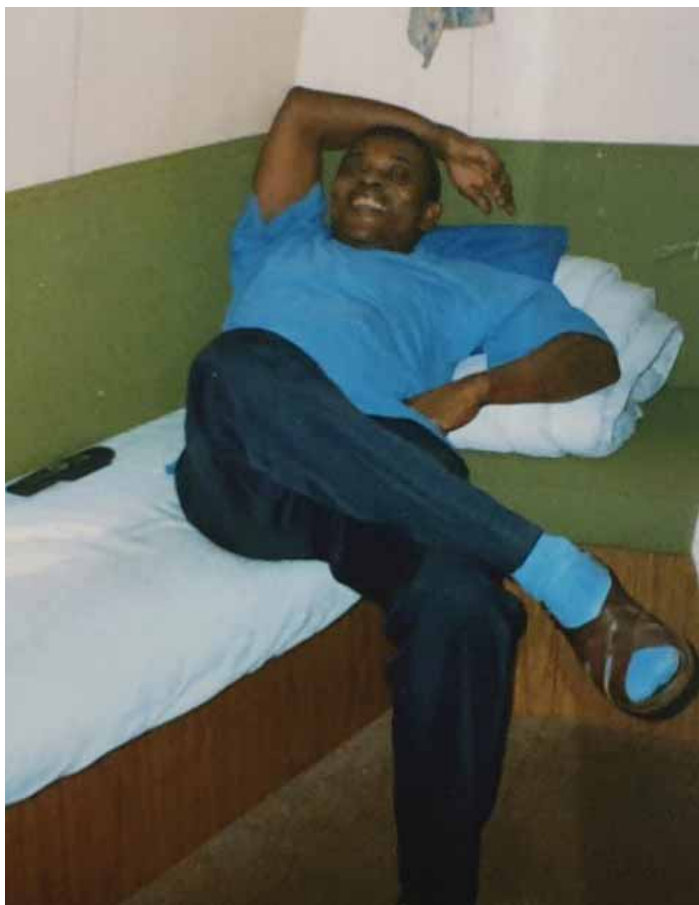


South Shields Marine College, 1869

Seafaring was the route through which many early engineers arrived in this region, with South Shields Marine College being a particular attraction. South Shields Marine College, which was founded in 1861 by Dr Winterbottom, a former surgeon-general in Sierra Leone, was the premier marine college in the United Kingdom, and attracted students worldwide including Benjie Crentsill and Jonas Abladey.

Benjie Crentsill, born 1941, originally travelled from the Gold Coast in Ghana in 1957, and found himself at Swan Hunter's shipyard in Wallsend, building the ships that were an important part of the fabric of the North East. He was looked after by fellow workers at the yard and soon earned their respect, growing quickly fond of the area and its people.

At Swan Hunters, he also got to build ships for Nigeria and Ghana, a source of pride for him. Here was an African man using the skills he got in his homeland and the newly acquired skills in his new UK home, building something to send back to his country of birth. Full circle.



Benjie Crentsill relaxing in his cabin

Whilst working at the shipyard, Crentsill and other Ghanaian colleagues attended South Shields Marine College, where he trained and then qualified in naval engineering. It was then he set out for a life on the seas, working on oil tankers as they spanned the globe. The next 50 years were spent on the waves as a mechanical and a naval engineer.

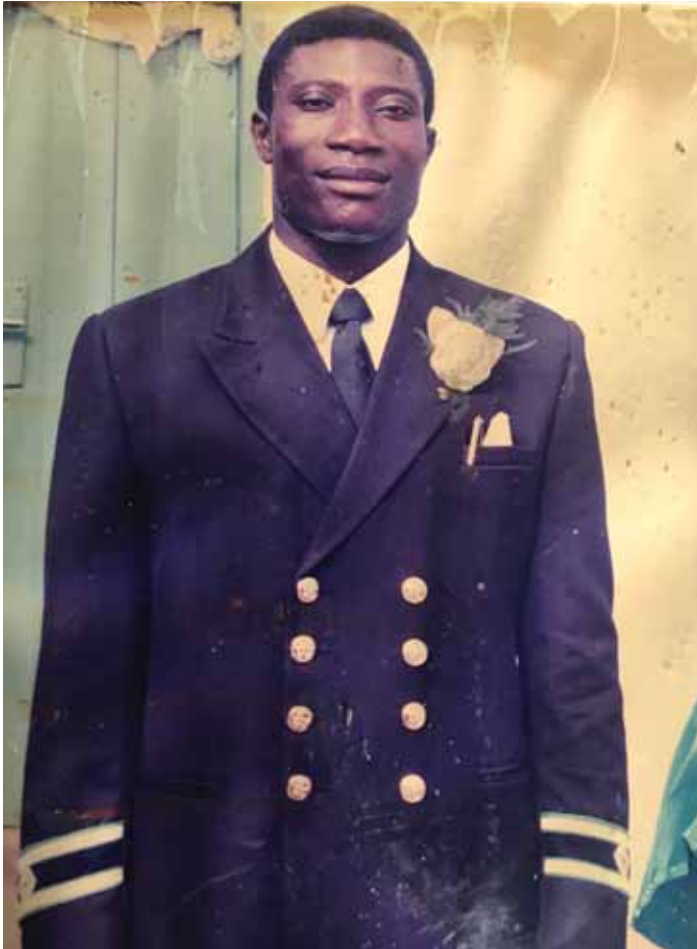
As Chief Mechanical Engineer, it was his job to keep the ship running – and to use this knowledge and experience to show the next generation how to do it.

Many, many cadets and trainees throughout the decades have found their feet in the naval world because of his training. He taught them not just the technical aspects of running a ship, but also a wider world view and their place in it. And his phone still rings when they need a little engineering know-how. He is still there for them.

Jonas Abladey was born in Kpone, Ghana, in June 1960. After completing his City and Guilds in Telecommunications and Electronics in Ghana, he enrolled at the Regional Maritime Academy in 1985 to fulfil his ambition of going to sea.

He worked as a Radio and Electronics Officer from 1989–2001 in Ghana's Black Star Line and other shipping companies. He loved it: the discipline, getting to know other places and cultures, and particularly enjoyed time spent at ports in the Far East, USA and South America.

As conventional communications were being replaced by electronic, he enrolled in the South Shields Maritime College in 1999 to upgrade his skills. Here, he gained a BTEC in Marine Electrical and Electronic Engineering, finding the switch to engineering 'challenging but interesting'. Despite enjoying his job at sea, he soon sought jobs which would enable him to spend more time with his family, ensuring his children were cultured, disciplined with good manners and God-fearing. He first worked as a British Telecommunications electrical engineer and, following a Master's in Environmental Health and Safety at Sunderland University in 2013, he is now a Health and Safety Officer.



Jonas Abladey

Abladey was determined to contribute to the South Shields community, despite initially experiencing racial harassment, and so became a governor at all the schools his children attended, a community governor at South Tyneside District Hospital and at South Tyneside Homes. Abladey feels his family has benefitted from life in South Shields, while keeping links with Ghana, where he and his wife remain fully involved as elders of the family.

Newcastle Labour MP, **Chinyelu 'Chi' Onwurah** is North East born and bred. She was born in 1965 in Wallsend to a Nigerian father who studied dentistry at Newcastle Medical College and an Irish mother whose family had worked in the Wallsend shipyards. An extremely proud Geordie, Onwurah sees one of her roles as championing the North East's industrial heritage. That, the roles in social change (suffragettes and fair trade), and the resilience, support, and solidarity that North Easterners can show for each other are some of the reasons she is grateful to represent the region in Parliament.

Before she took up public office in 2010 as MP for Newcastle Central, Onwurah made her mark in engineering. After graduating from Imperial College London in 1987 with degrees in electrical engineering and business management, she worked in Europe, the United States and Africa in hardware and software development and strategy. She became a Chartered Engineer and Fellow of the Institute of Engineering and Technology and, as Head of Telecoms Technology at Ofcom, designed a revolutionary printer circuit board on which later designs were based.



Chinyelu 'Chi' Onwurah

She was inspired by the Turbinia at the Discovery Museum and knew from age seven that her path was in science and engineering. She credits her teachers at Kenton High School, who were committed to helping her achieve her aims, even though engineering was not an area traditionally for women then, and especially not for African and Caribbean women.

She is now paying that forward, striving to use her role to encourage, foster and inspire the next generation – especially girls and members of the black community – into science and technology. She is currently the shadow minister for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy and uses her role as Chair of Parliamentary Group of Diversity and Inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths to encourage and promote the inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds.

Engineering appears to provide transferable skills that are a springboard for many other careers, including teaching mathematics, anti-racist education and football. **Spencer Morgan**, born 1962 in Oxford, of Jamaican parents, arrived in Newcastle in 1980 to study engineering at Newcastle Polytechnic (Northumbria University). Following a further qualification in mechanical-engineering, Spencer was the first worker of African descent at NSK, a Japanese company of 750 workers, where he stayed for 11 years before moving into teaching Mathematics, English, IT and Employment Skills to mature students.

Morgan initially faced isolation and hostility in the North East, but this diminished when he joined local football teams and African-Caribbean societies. Morgan is known in the North East for his DJ-ing specialism in soul and reggae music, and his extensive knowledge and promotion of African history.

Shaka Hislop (see also 'Sportsmen') followed his degree in mechanical engineering from Howard University, USA with a football career and co-founding Show Racism the Red Card. Hopefully, role models such as those mentioned here – and the different ways they have used their engineering base to educate and better the lives of those around them – will encourage more into the field.

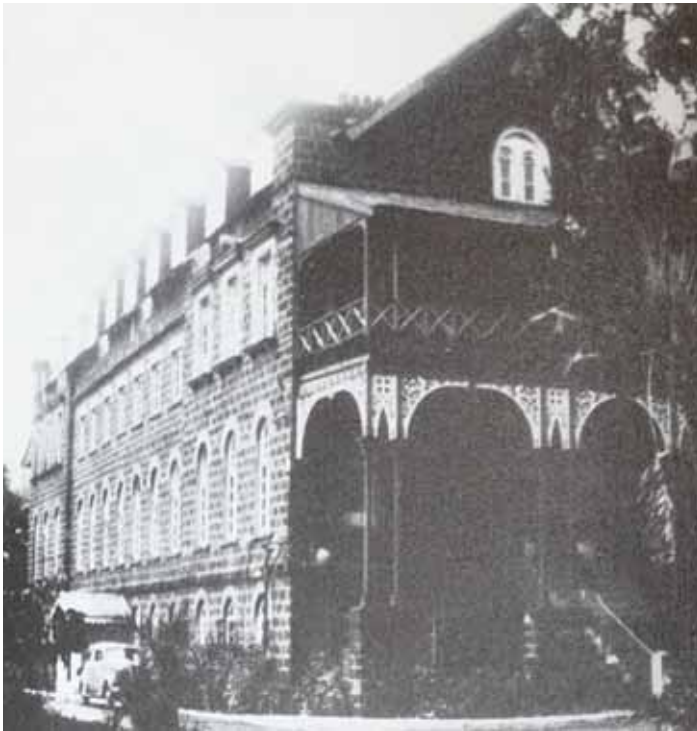
Authored by Justine King, with thanks to Beverley Prevatt Goldstein. Many thanks to Jonas Abladey, Benjie Crentsil, Spencer Morgan and Chi Onwurah for taking the time to give us their oral histories.



Spencer Morgan

Doctors

A medical profession was highly valued by West Africans as it ensured professional status and could also lead to self-employment. The latter was important because of the then colour bar in employment in Britain and British West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia). Prior to 1953, training in Britain was the only route to practising medicine in the British Empire, with Durham University being a popular choice as it was linked to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone.



Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Founded in 1827, affiliated to Durham University

Hastings Kamuzu Banda, born 1898, lived three different lives: as a peasant, a doctor and a king. He is remembered as the doctor who led Malawi to independence but who also instituted a very repressive regime.

Aged 16, he walked from Nyasaland (Malawi) to South Africa to attend secondary school. In 1925 he left his farming jobs for a Methodist college in New York and in 1937 he obtained his medical degree, the first from Nyasaland.

Needing a medical degree from a British university to be able to work as a doctor in Nyasaland, he obtained a second medical degree from the University of Edinburgh and set up a practice in Liverpool. He gained a reputation for free care for the poor, even paying the rent of those facing eviction.

He was the first President of the Liverpool branch of the League of Coloured Peoples (a national black-led advocacy and support organisation). During World War II, he was placed in the North East. He was a popular doctor in Blyth and in North Shields, where there was a hospital mission for 'coloured' seamen.



Young Dr Banda

After the war, Banda worked in general practice in London. He represented Nyasaland African Congress at the Pan-African Congress at Manchester in 1945 and returned to Nyasaland in 1958 after an absence of 42 years. Banda toured Nyasaland, with his speeches against the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland being enthusiastically received. In 1959 a state of emergency was declared and Banda was arrested.

According to a local story, staff at the hospitals in North Shields and Blyth at the time of Banda's arrest went on strike, asking for him to be released. Coincidentally, Banda was released from prison and invited to London for talks. He became the first Prime Minister of Malawi, later declaring himself President for Life. He died in South Africa in 1997, aged 99.

Robert Wellesley-Cole was born in 1907 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In 1928, having already earned degrees from Durham and London University, he travelled to Newcastle to study medicine at Armstrong College (Durham University), Newcastle. He qualified in Medicine and Surgery (1934), gained a Doctorate in Medicine (1943) and overcame racism to become the first African Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (England) in 1944. He then set up a general practice and surgery at Denton Burn and Whickham View in West Newcastle.

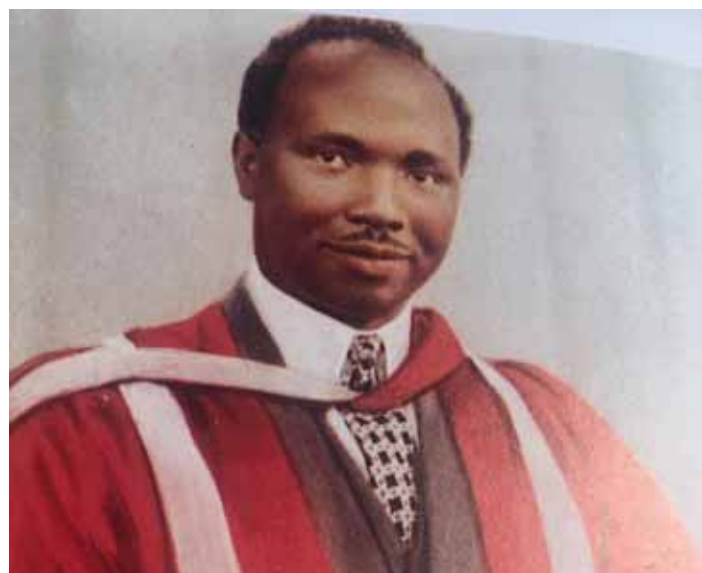
Dr Wellesley-Cole was among those who challenged the exhibition of Africans in the human zoo at the North East Coast Exhibition at Newcastle Town Moor in 1929. In 1930, he co-founded Newcastle International Club and in 1940,



Wellesley-Cole and his first wife Anna, married at St Paul's Elswick, West Newcastle, 1932

the Society for the Cultural Advancement of Africa 'to bind the students here, African, West Indian and American negro, in a self-conscious and race-conscious unit'. In 1943 club members organised an exhibition of arts, crafts, and music titled Africans to Tyneside at the Hatton Gallery (Great North Museum), Newcastle.

Dr Wellesley-Cole was active in the West African Students Union and the League of Coloured Peoples, and on Colonial Office-led committees. He promoted the educational and economic progress of West Africa and the movement towards self-government within a partnership of equals.



Dr Robert Wellesley-Cole, Doctorate in Medicine, 1943, Newcastle Medical School, Durham University

He left Newcastle in 1949, working first in Nottingham and then, from 1962, in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, setting up the latter's first institute of medical training. He later worked as an ophthalmologist in London, published his second book, *An Innocent in Britain*, and died in 1995.

Irene Ighodaro (née Wellesley-Cole) was born in 1916 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Her brother, Dr Wellesley-Cole (above), arranged her entrance to Newcastle Medical School in 1938 and in 1944 she became the first Sierra Leone woman to qualify as a doctor. She worked at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, specialising in gynaecology, and during the war also treated war casualties. In 1945 and 1946 she successfully managed her brother's practice at Denton Burn, Newcastle, during his overseas trip.

Dr Ighodaro was a member of the West African Student Association (WASU) and the League of Coloured Peoples. She was the only woman to present a paper at WASU's conference on West African problems in 1942, where she advocated for hospitals, schools, and free education in West Africa. In 1940 she helped set up the Newcastle-based Society for the Cultural Advancement of Africa and in 1946 the first West African Women's Association in England.



Dr Ighodaro graduating from Newcastle Medical School



Dr Ighodaro in Benin City, Nigeria

In 1949 she moved with her Nigerian husband, a law graduate from Durham University, to Nigeria. In Benin City (Nigeria) she challenged the limitations on women, insisting on paying tax so she could vote. She was the first President of the National Council of Women's Societies and of the Nigerian Association of University Women. In 1958 she was awarded an MBE. Her life inspired the establishment of the Dr Irene Ighodaro Memorial Foundation. The Foundation aims to further the advancement of women by stimulating public awareness of women's issues and contributing towards the education of women through a scholarship scheme for girls in secondary schools in Benin City.

Irene Modupeola Thomas was born in 1917 and attended the best secondary school for girls in Lagos, Nigeria, Queens College. However, she wanted to study sciences, a subject not taught to girls at that time. In 1934, she became the first girl in Lagos to attend an all-boy's school.



Irene Modupeola Thomas

She preferred being a doctor to an accountant in her father's firm and in 1947 her father arranged her entrance to Newcastle Medical School. As one of the very few African women in her group, she had to battle against many prejudices. Her ambitions to do surgery having been curbed, she specialised in gynaecology, a more acceptable choice then. After graduating in 1954, she worked in the Royal Victoria Infirmary, where she gave birth to her first child in 1955. She then returned to Nigeria to fulfil her childhood ambition of reducing maternal mortality in childbirth.

Dr Thomas was one of the early female doctors in Nigeria and president of the Nigerian Association of University Women. She co-founded the Motherless Babies Home. She also campaigned against female circumcision at local, national, and international levels. In 2001, she set up the Dr Irene Thomas Endowment Fund for the prevention of harmful practices against women and girls. In recognition of her service to the country, she was awarded the Order of the Niger (OON). She died on Christmas Day 2005, aged 88.

Abayomi 'Yomi' Olusola Sobo was born in 1931 in Lagos, Nigeria. His childhood ill health influenced his decision to become a doctor and he joined other Nigerians at Newcastle Medical School (Durham University). He specialised in radiotherapy and oncology (treatment of cancer) but, finding that posts in radiation oncology were reserved for English people, he returned to Nigeria. At the onset of the Biafran War he returned to Newcastle, working at the Royal Victoria Infirmary.

Wanting to progress his career in radiation oncology, from 1974 Dr Sobo worked with the World Health Organization in Liberia, West Africa. Here he established the first oncology department, radiotherapy centre and cancer registry on the West Coast of Africa. In 1984, he handed over the management of the Cancer Centre to the people of Liberia.

He returned to North East England and worked for North Tyneside Health Authority and for Gateshead Health Authority until he retired in 1991. He participated fully in the Union for International Cancer Control both whilst working in radiotherapy in West Africa and while working in Public Health in the North East.

Dr Sobo was a preacher at Ponteland's Methodist Church, a trustee of Age UK Northumberland, of Mental Health Concern and an active member of Lions International.



Dr Abayomi Sobo graduating from Newcastle Medical School

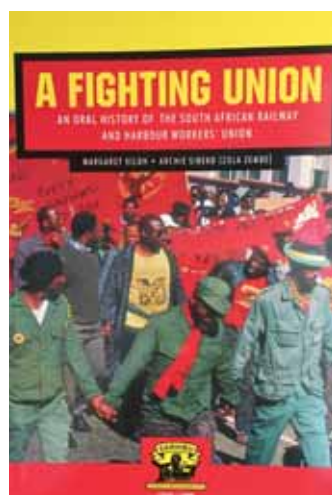
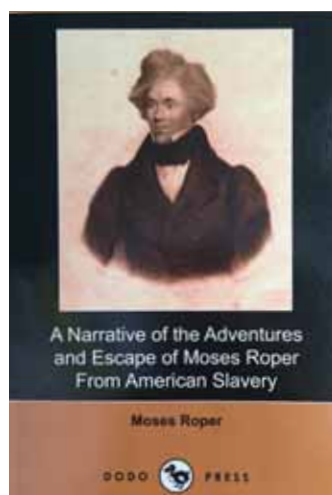
For over 20 years, prior to his ill health, he organised the collection of unused spectacles, enlisting the help of inmates of Durham prison to grade the lenses and repackage them to send them all over the world.

The doctors described above are the first of many medical practitioners of African descent who have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the North East. In 2020, 6.5% of NHS staff, or 79,287 people, were of African descent. The estimate for the North East would be approximately 24,400 people (ethnicity-facts-figures.services.gov.uk, 26 January 2021).

Authored by Caroline Afolabi-Deleu and Beverley Prevatt Goldstein, with thanks to the family and friends contributing to the history of Dr Hastings Banda, Dr Wellesley-Cole, Dr Irene Ighodaro, Dr Irene Modupeola Thomas and Dr Abayomi Sobo.

Here are several men and women of African and mixed heritage who have had a significant influence on the literature, history and poetry of the North East. All of these are authors and/or poets who have gained numerous awards both nationally and internationally for their authored works, as well as their activism around anti-racism and the promotion of diversity. We wanted to highlight all authors and poets here, but we had to make a very difficult decision to focus our attention on eight authors/poets due to space limitations although we recognise that there are several that have been omitted, many of whom are working ceaselessly at the local community level. Please know that we salute them all.

Moses Roper, born in North Carolina in 1815, published a book titled *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery in 1837*. The book documented the horrors of his life as an enslaved man in North America and was said to be the first such account delivered to British reform audiences. Roper promoted his book through a series of lecture tours including at several venues in the North East. In 1844 Roper stated that he had sold over 25,000 copies of this book, including 5,000 in Welsh.



Chris Mullard, born in 1944, lived in Newcastle in the 1960s to mid-1970s and studied sociology at Durham University. He is a well-established author and race activist and has written six books on social issues including race relations and development. His first text, published in 1973, was titled *Black Britain* and is described as the first book written by a black man who was born and raised in Britain. In this book, Mullard argued that Britain is a racist society with discriminatory policies, attitudes and practices which, if not addressed, would result in race civil war and riots.

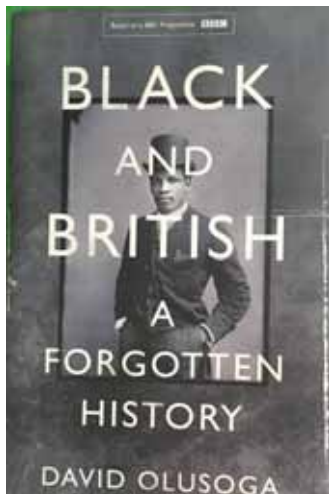


Archie Sibeko (see also 'Nation Builders'), born in Kwezana, South Africa in 1928, lived in Tynemouth for several years. In addition to being an active trade unionist and African National Congress (ANC) activist, he was also an author of three books. These include an autobiography, published in 1996, titled *Freedom in our Lifetime* (with his wife Joyce Leeson). In 2000, he published *A Fighting Union* (with Margaret Kiloh), said to be the only historical record to document the history of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, focusing on the influential South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union.

John Alfred Clement ('Jack') Mapanje, born in 1944, is an internationally acclaimed Malawian writer and poet. His first book of poems, *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981), was considered politically subversive, and he was imprisoned in 1987 without charge or trial by dictatorial Malawian President Hastings Banda. The book, banned in Malawi, nevertheless received widespread praise internationally and was awarded the Rotterdam International Poetry Award (1988) and the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award (1990). Mapanje, released from prison in 1991, came to the UK in exile and has written and published several other volumes, some largely composed while he was incarcerated in Malawi. He has lectured at many universities in the UK, including the School of English at Newcastle University.

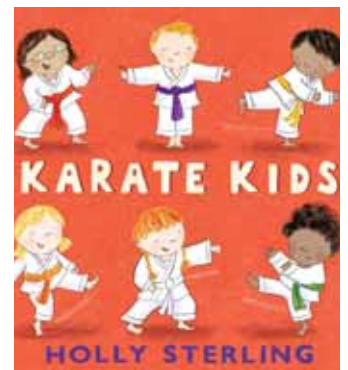
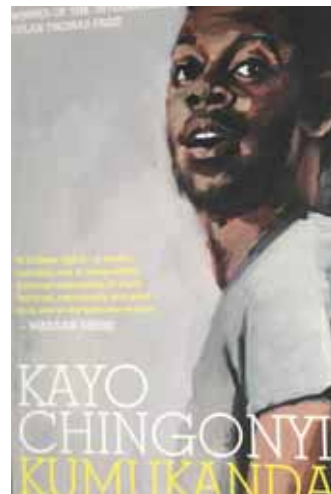
Authors and Poets

David Olusoga, born in 1970 in Lagos, Nigeria, migrated to Britain at five years old and grew up in Gateshead. He is a renowned documentary film maker, broadcaster, and author of several history books. His books are often related to his documentary films, and perhaps the most popular is *Black And British: A Forgotten History* (2016), following the documentary of the same name. This book charts the long relationship between the people of Africa and Britain and has won several prestigious awards. Olusoga's other important historical texts include *The World's War*, which won First World War Book of the Year in 2015.



Degna Stone, a poet and academic born in 1974, has lived in Newcastle since 1999. In 2015 she received a Northern Writers Award for poetry. Stone co-founded the North East-based *Butcher's Dog* poetry magazine in 2012 and is a contributor to the *Book of Newcastle* (2020), which features ten short stories from the city's most popular literary talents. Stone has also published a few pamphlets: *Between the Floorboards* (2010), *Record and Play* (2013), *Handling Stolen Goods* (2019) – which includes poems that speak of protest and of the contradictions of race and class in Britain – and, most recently, *Weighing of the Heart* (2021).

Kayombo ('Kayo') Chingonyi, born in 1987 in Zambia, migrated to the UK in 1993 and has lived in Newcastle. A poet and editor, his most famous work to date is *Kumukanda* (2017). The poetry book explores race, identity, and masculinity, celebrating what it means to be British and not British. The book won the International Dylan Thomas Prize, one of the most prestigious literary awards for works published in English by young writers aged 39 years old and under. Chingonyi currently lectures in Creative Writing at Durham University. His highly praised and newest work *A Blood Condition* (2021) has been shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Poetry Collection.



Holly Sterling, born in 1987, has resided in Sunderland for many years. A children's author and illustrator, she is passionate about all forms of diversity, something that is reflected in her children's stories. Sterling's debut picture book, *15 Things Not To Do With a Baby*, with text written by Margi McAllister, was nominated for The Kate Greenaway Medal in 2016, and listed as one of *The Independent on Sunday's* 'Top 15 Books of 2015'. Sterling has illustrated 15 picture book titles, including *Hiccups* (2017). Her most recent authored and illustrated book is *Karate Kids* (2020) which combines Sterling's passion for illustration with her love of karate.

Authored by Donna Chambers, with my deepest appreciation to Beverley Prevatt Goldstein who provided the inspiration and leadership for this project. I am indebted to her for her passion and desire to shine a light on the many contributions made by people of African and mixed heritage to North East culture and society.

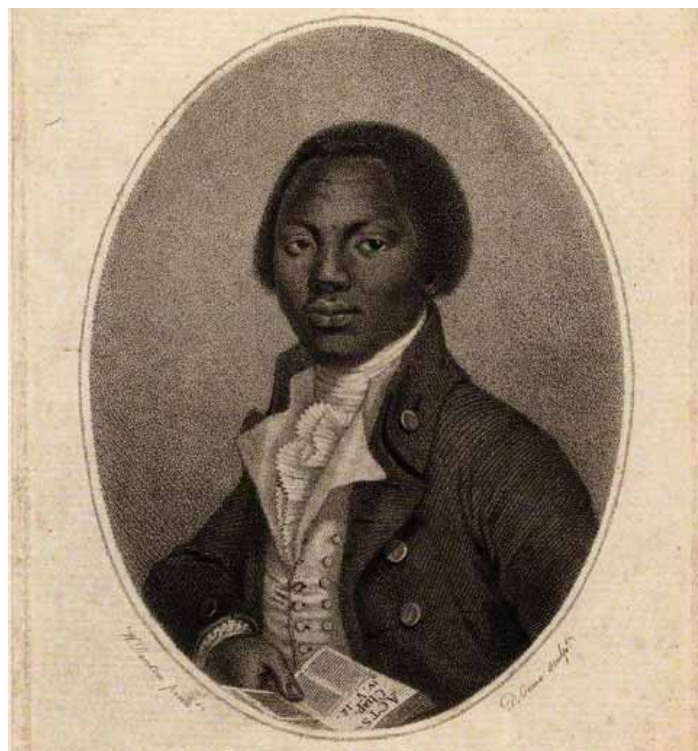
Orators

The orators below have one common theme: challenging racism. Some orators found it tactically necessary to focus on one expression of racism, i.e. enslavement, ignoring the racism in Britain, as well as the inequalities experienced by women, by the working poor and by the Irish. However, many eventually and courageously fought for wider equality.

Olaudah Equiano, born Gustavus Vassa in 1745 in Nigeria, was enslaved as a child and transported to the Caribbean and North America. Arriving in Britain, aged 12, he was baptized but subsequently resold and transported to the Caribbean again. As an enslaved seaman (see also 'Seamen'), he travelled widely, including on an Arctic exploration. He bought his own freedom in 1766, continued travelling and finally returned to Britain in 1777 where he was an active member of the British abolitionist movement. He was a member of the 'Sons of Africa', a group of freed Africans who wrote letters and made speeches against enslavement. He alerted Granville Sharpe to the Zong massacre, where 131 enslaved Africans were thrown overboard while still alive, with the court case increasing support for abolishing enslavement. Equiano's numerous speaking tours to anti-slavery meetings across England, Ireland and Scotland, both promoted his book, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1781) and increased public antagonism towards the trade in enslaved Africans.

In September 1792, Equiano stayed in Bigg Market, Newcastle for six months. From here he also spoke at Stockton and Durham, and visited a mine to compare the conditions endured by the miners and those enslaved. Equiano advertised his speaking tour in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle before his arrival in the city, and was welcomed by the active Abolition Society in Newcastle. Equiano expressed appreciation for the sales of his book and the reception which he received in Newcastle and the North East both in the Chronicle on 6 October 1792 and in the Newcastle Courant on 8 October 1792, offering 'warmest thanks... for your fellow-feeling for the Africans and their cause.'

The sixth edition of Equiano's book quotes a Belfast abolitionist's statement that Equiano was 'a principal instrument in bringing about a motion for a repeal of the Slave Act', with the trade in enslaved Africans being abolished in 1807, ten years after Equiano's death.



Olaudah Equiano



The Slave Ship, 1840 by J.M.W. Turner (likely influenced by Zong massacre)

Ellen Craft (1829-1891) was born in Georgia, North America. She, with her husband, William Craft, escaped from enslavement in 1838. She had very light-coloured skin and, disguising herself as a white gentleman, Ellen pretended to be travelling to Philadelphia for medical treatment, with William as her 'slave'. The use of a sling to indicate an arm that could not be used was an essential strategy to avoid Ellen being asked to sign her name on the train journey (enslaved persons were not allowed to learn to read or write).

After the Fugitive Slavery Act of 1850, when escaped persons could be recaptured, the couple sought refuge in England. Harriet Martineau, who later resided in Tynemouth, arranged their early accommodation and further education. Ellen Craft was prominent on the anti-slavery platform with her husband, William Craft. They spoke at Newcastle, Sunderland, and Carlisle at anti-slavery meetings in 1851.

At dinner parties and in her writings Ellen Craft boldly challenged the enslavement and brutalisation of people of African descent. In 1852, Ellen published an open letter to refute the rumours that she was tired of the responsibility of freedom and wanted to return to enslavement: 'I had much rather starve in England, a free woman, than be a slave for the best man that ever breathed upon the American continent'. In 1860, the Crafts published *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* which demonstrated their ingenuity and courage in travelling on a train with enslavers, risking detection and death. The Crafts made their home a refuge for other abolitionists, and returned to the US in 1868 after enslavement was abolished there.



Ellen Craft

Frederick Douglass was born enslaved in 1818 and visited Britain three times: 1846-7, 1859 and 1881. He publicised the evils of enslavement and, of his 280 talks, 29 were in cities and villages throughout the North East and Cumbria.

Douglass attracted huge crowds and reinvigorated the anti-slavery movement. The Newcastle Chronicle carried the story of the special train needed for the crowds from Sunderland, and North and South Shields who attended his evening lecture in Gateshead, and of the apology sent by Charles Dickens when he could not attend one of Douglass' London talks. Douglass, at the Nelson Street Music Hall in Newcastle, spoke of his joy that 'Newcastle had a heart that could feel for three million of oppressed slaves in the United States of America'. He was warmly welcomed by abolitionists in Darlington, Gateshead, and Newcastle who funded his US printing press and newspaper, with the Richardsons of Newcastle also purchasing his freedom. Douglass' first book, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, 1845, was reprinted three times in Ireland and Britain.

Frederick Douglass was criticised by some of his white abolitionist supporters in England for not fitting the stereotype of a 'slave', and for his stance against Christians and clergy who owned enslaved Africans. Douglass had stated 'I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding... partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land [the US]', and he attacked the Free Church in Scotland for their financial dependence on enslavers.



Frederick Douglass initial plaque at installation ceremony, 2018

Douglass challenged enslavement in the US through his newspaper and publications and, with his first wife Anna Murray, enabled 200 enslaved people to escape via the Underground Railroad. As an elder statesman, he supported the Women's Right to Vote, Home Rule in Ireland, and Haitian interests when he was the US Ambassador to Haiti.

Celestine Edwards, a lay preacher, temperance activist, student doctor and editor, was born in Dominica in 1858 to freed Africans. At age 12, he stowed away and worked on ships until he settled in Britain in the 1880s. He lived and worked in Sunderland from 1880 to 1882 as a labourer, insurance salesman and as 'the Negro Lecturer'. He addressed a full house at the Assembly Hall on Fawcett Street on 29 September 1891, in which he challenged the notion that Africans belonged to a separate and inferior species. His speeches were regularly reported in the Sunderland Echo newspaper (23.09.1891; 26.09.1891; 30.09.1891). He went with Ida B Wells to Newcastle and Darlington in 1893, supporting her anti-lynching campaign, and funded her 1894 campaign.

His lectures across Britain to audiences of sometimes around 1,000 people highlighted the racism underpinning enslavement, lynching and segregation. He challenged racism in Britain stating that 'Britain is the birth-place of the very essence of the seed of prejudice against the negro race'. He condemned the brutal invasion of Uganda and Rhodesia by Britain, and the role of the Protestant missionaries. He also challenged the black minstrel caricatures and discrimination against Chinese immigrants in Canada and Australia, and supported Britain's first Indian MP and Indian self-determination.

Regarded as Britain's first black editor, Edwards edited the Lux and Fraternity journals, wrote religious pamphlets, a biography of the formerly enslaved Bishop Walter and, under a pseudonym, the book *Hard Truth*.

In a speech in Newcastle on November 3 1894, Edwards expressed confidence about the eventual emancipation of the black 'race'. Worn out by his continuous campaigning, Edwards returned to Dominica in 1894 and died in 1895. He is commemorated by a plaque, erected in October 2020, at the site of the old Assembly Hall, Sunderland.



Celestine Edwards

Ida B Wells was born enslaved in 1862, six months before enslaved people were freed in the US. Her parents prioritised education, encouraging Wells to become a teacher. Fired for speaking about the conditions in segregated black schools, she wrote for the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight, which she co-owned. In 1883 she refused to give up her first-class seat in a white-only carriage and took the railroad company to court. In 1892, following the lynching of Thomas Moss, she began writing about lynching, initially in Memphis, and then in Brooklyn, after her Memphis printing press was burnt by a white mob.

Wells took her fundraising, anti-lynching campaign to Britain in 1893. She addressed a large audience at the Friends Meeting House, Newcastle on 18 May 1893, where she shocked them with graphic stories of the mutilations and deaths of black people from lynching. The Newcastle Leader described her as 'a bright intelligent young lady of colour' seeking 'justice and money', and was confident that 'many humanitarians will, in Newcastle... help the stranger in her cause'. She also spoke in Darlington, and returned to Newcastle in 1894.

She encouraged huge crowds in Manchester and Liverpool to boycott the American cotton produced in 'slave'-like conditions, despite this being the mainstay of their economy. In London she founded the first overseas Anti-Lynching Committee, whose members included the Archbishop of Canterbury and 20 Members of Parliament.

In the US, Wells, a feminist and one of the first women known to keep her family name, campaigned for the rights of African Americans, workers and women. She died in 1931 and was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2020 for 'her outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against [4,084] African Americans during the era of lynching'.



Ida B Wells by Mary Garrity

Martin Luther King, Jr., born in 1929 in Georgia, was a Christian minister and a civil rights activist. He was greatly influenced by the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi, though accepted illegal action was sometimes necessary. King used boycotts such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, protests such as the Birmingham Campaign (1963) and marches such as those in Washington (1963) and Selma (1965) to push for legislation against racial discrimination. His

lasting legacy includes the Letter from a Birmingham Jail and his 'I have a dream' speech. The priority he gave to non-violence lost him some African American support, but possibly contributed to the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965), and to his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. His later overt objections to the Vietnam War, dissatisfaction with capitalism, and leadership of a Poor People's Campaign lost him further support. He was arrested 29 times, harassed by the FBI and assassinated in 1968.

On 13 November 1967, King visited Newcastle to receive an honorary doctorate degree in Civil Law from Newcastle University. In his acceptance speech, King called on all nations of the world to confront racism, war and poverty. King said to his hosts, 'You give me renewed courage and vigor to carry on in the struggle to make peace and justice a reality for all men and women,' and later wrote that the award 'was a tremendous encouragement, far overshadowing the barbs and arrows from the daily press'.

In 2017, a statue of Martin Luther King, Jr., was installed in the university on the 50th anniversary of his visit to Newcastle, and his portrait was illuminated on the Students Union Building.



Illumination of face of Martin Luther King, Jr., Newcastle University, 2017

Authored by Austin Oshegbu, with assistance from Beverley Prevatt Goldstein.

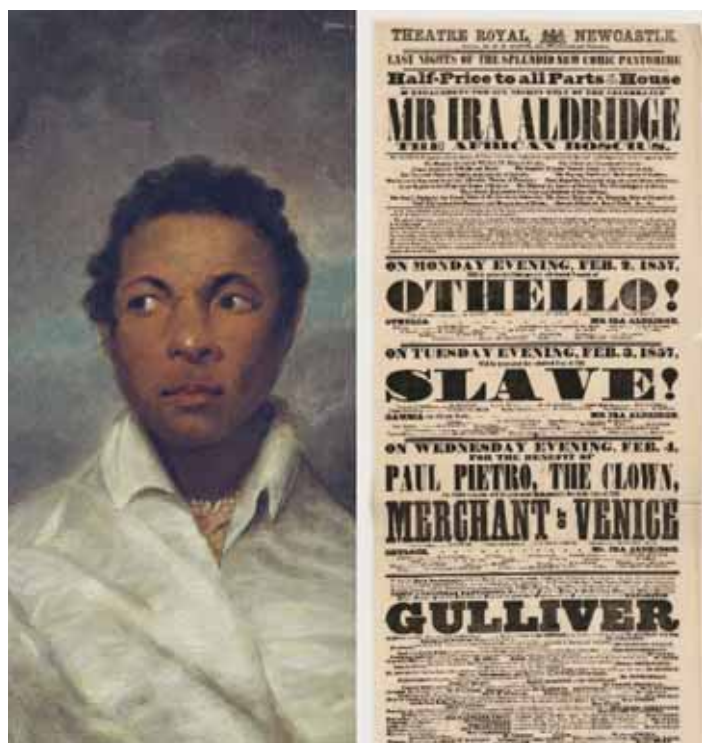
Artists and Entertainers

This section embraces both globally recognised performers whose visits to the region left an enduring legacy, and those who live or have lived in the region and have made a lasting contribution to the cultural scene and to community life.

US-born **Ira Aldridge** (1807-67) was renowned as the first Shakespearean actor of African descent. In the early 1820s, Aldridge performed in New York with William Brown's African Theatre, the first African American theatre company. He then journeyed to England, where in 1833 he played Othello on the London stage.

He subsequently made his career largely in provincial Britain and continental Europe, where he found a welcome and professional opportunities, receiving awards from both the Prussian and Russian states. He was billed as 'The African Roscius', named after Quintus Roscius Gallus who was one of the most famous actors in ancient Rome. He became a British citizen in 1863.

Aldridge performed several times in Newcastle between 1827 and 1857. A room at the Theatre Royal Newcastle carried his name for several years. A playbill from his 1847 performance at the Theatre Royal of Aldridge was included as part of the



Ira Aldridge and Playbill, 1847

Shakespeare in Ten Acts exhibition at the British Library in 2016, which commemorated the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

Aldridge performed elsewhere in the North East region. He was so popular when he performed in Berwick in the 1840s that additional dates had to be found in the calendar. He also played comedies where he inserted the names of local figures.

He is the first African American to manage an English theatre (Coventry) and the only actor of African American descent among the 33 actors of the English stage honoured with plaques at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Aldridge used his position on the stage to speak out against enslavement and to advocate for racial equality, and would speak to the audience on a variety of social issues that affected the United States, Europe and Africa. His impassioned oratory invariably received positive responses. He died in Poland in 1865 prior to his planned concert in the USA following its abolition of enslavement.

The great singer, stage-and-film actor and civil rights campaigner **Paul Robeson** (1898-1976) – who, like Aldridge, played the role of Othello many times – visited the North East of England on a number of occasions in the 1940s and 1950s. He delighted crowds with songs such as 'Ol' Man River' at venues throughout the region including City Hall, Newcastle. On one occasion he was given an open-topped bus procession around Newcastle City Centre.

In 1949 he played two free concerts in Gateshead after being invited to perform by the Labour Party. Robeson had been 'blacklisted' in America because of his anti-racism and pro-worker stance. His arrival in Gateshead caused considerable controversy at the time, as there was a local election just six days later; the opposition accused Labour of attempting to influence the voters with the concerts. Whether true or not, members of all parties turned up, and were thrilled to hear Robeson sing in St John's Church and Bensham Cinema. It was recently revealed that he was shadowed by security services on this visit to Tyneside and throughout what was an extended period in the UK, at the request of the US Embassy.

He was a major influence for peace and freedom for many oppressed peoples and suffered for the stand he took for the civil rights movement. Proud to be the son of an enslaved African, he was eventually honoured by many and, in the words of the actor Sydney Poitier, 'when Paul Robeson died, it marked the passing of a magnificent giant, whose presence among us conferred nobility on us all'.



Paul Robeson

Orville 'Rocky' Byron (1929-2013) came to live in the North East from his homeland of Trinidad. He became Trinidad limbo champion in the late 1950s, earning the nickname 'King of Limbo'. By the age of 28, his career had taken off, and top calypso singer Small Island Pride invited Byron to go on tour with him to Guyana.

In 1961, he set sail for England, but was thrown off the ship in Hamburg, Germany, for being a stowaway. He eventually ended up in Newcastle where he lived for many years, marrying a local lass and becoming a proud father to three children. Byron successfully auditioned as a singer for Tyne Tees Television's *One O'Clock Show* – a 40-minute weekday lunchtime variety show – and also worked with the local Race Relations Council and in a variety of other jobs. He was Secretary of the Tyneside West Indian Association for a number of years.

He was a natural entertainer and showman, and he earned some additional income from entertaining as a singer and dancer in working men's clubs and other venues in the North East.

Known for his kindness, sense of fun and an unshakeable passion for his crafts of wire-bending and costume-making, Byron was easily identifiable by his extravagant suits, layered with gold chains and rings on every finger. His smile could light up a room, mostly for the warmth it radiated – but it is said that the two rows of gleaming gold teeth also played a part!

When he left for London in the early 1980s, he became closely involved with the Notting Hill Carnival. He was part of the glue that keeps alive the true spirit of Carnival, by passing on lasting traditions to the next generation. In his prime, he won a string of awards for having the best band and best costume. He even had a starring role in Irish boy band Boyzone's 'No Matter What' official video, which has had over 50 million views on YouTube.

Maurice Dezou, from Côte d'Ivoire and now Liverpool based, was active in the North East over many years as cultural broker and producer, consultant and artist. As a film maker he produced content for Channel 4, BBC and African networks, and for 16 years was a lecturer in television and film production in Middlesbrough. As a musician, he produced and performed at many festivals, including as founder/director of World Fest, an annual international music festival in Middlesbrough. He produced *The Story of Reggae in Britain* with the founder of reggae dub, Dennis Bovell.



Maurice Dezou

Further work within the creative industries includes founding CVFM community radio station on Teesside, as creator of Makoura Music and Chair of the African Arts Association, taking African culture and music into local schools and communities. He worked with and supported new communities of asylum seekers and refugees on Teesside with their creative development and practice.

Dezou set up and played in his band Roots Melody, created the Cafe International world music venue in Middlesbrough, and helped establish Waka Waka Africa North East, an agency promoting African and Caribbean culture and heritage through performance and exhibition. He was a regional member of the board of Arts Council England and a board member of Stockton Arts Centre. He also helped establish the Middlesbrough Black and Minority Ethnic Network.

Peter Morgan was born and adopted in South Wales. His adoptive mother was of Barbadian mixed heritage. Having been brought up in Coventry in a multicultural home and community, he took his ancestry for granted. A DNA test bought for him by his son revealed that he has African ancestors.

Morgan studied at and graduated from the famous Northern School of Music (now the Royal Northern College of Music).



Peter Morgan

In 1976 he moved to Sunderland. Between 1976 and 2002, as well as being head of a school's music department in Sunderland, he took his musical talents to the region's club circuit playing organ. Since then, he has developed his music into the world of big band jazz, playing piano and trombone. He is the leader of the famous Customs House Big Band, based in South Shields; the Blyth Big Band; and the East Coast Swing Band. In 2020, he formed the Peter Morgan Trio to play jazz in small ensemble setting. His most recent project is the formation of the North East Jazz Orchestra.

Among many talented contemporary female singers and musicians with North East connections (drummer Hannabiell Sanders, US born, now Newcastle resident; soul singer Lulu James from Tanzania who grew up in South Shields), perhaps the best known is singer **Emeli Sandé, MBE**, born in Sunderland in 1987 and raised in Aberdeenshire by an English mother and Zambian father.

She has had two number one singles and her album, *Our Version of Events*, spent ten non-consecutive weeks at number one and became the best-selling album of 2012 in the UK, with over a million sales. In 2012 she performed in both the opening and closing ceremonies of the London Olympics. In 2013, at the Brit Awards ceremony, she won two awards: Best British Female Solo Artist and British Album of the Year – she now has four Brit Awards in total.

Sandé is also a songwriter of some distinction, having composed not only her own material but also written successfully for many other well-known artists. Much of her material is influenced by her commitment to the promotion of peace and equality. In 2019 she was appointed as the new Chancellor of the University of Sunderland.



Emeli Sandé

Authored by David Faulkner with thanks to musician Runde Hlalo for his assistance.

Sportsmen

The personal journeys of the sportsmen reflect their determination and grit to succeed against the numerous obstacles of racism, stereotyping, and failures. However against all adversity, many have achieved greatness. Increased opportunity and further research is needed to reveal similarly great sportswomen of African descent.

Arthur Wharton was born in the Gold Coast (Accra, Ghana) in 1865. His father, a Methodist minister and missionary, was born in Grenada, West Indies, to a Scottish father and African mother. His mother was of the Fante royal family and a prosperous Scottish family. He was sent to school in London, and then to Staffordshire and Darlington (1884) to train as a missionary. However his love for sport took him in another direction.

Wharton is commemorated as the Worlds' First Black Professional Footballer to play in an English League. He was a formidable goalkeeper, playing for Darlington Cricket and Football Club from 1885 to 1888, with the song 'Wharton for Darlington' being popular in 1886. He played for numerous clubs across the region, and for the 1887 festival celebrating Queen Victoria's 50-year reign, with the Prince of Wales as a spectator.



Arthur Wharton

Wharton represented Darlington Cricket Club at the Amateur Athletics Association championships at Stamford Bridge, astounding the 2,000-strong crowd by winning both his 100-yard heat and the final in ten seconds – the first time anywhere in the world this had been reliably recorded. He held this English Championship title in 1886 and 1887. After Darlington, Wharton played for numerous football teams in Yorkshire and Lancashire until 1902. Until 1907 he often returned to Darlington for the summer's cricket. The finances of football clubs and players were insecure and Wharton, who got married in 1890, also ran a tavern and subsequently a tobacconist shop. He worked as a colliery worker in Yorkshire for 15 years, enlisting for the British Home Guard in 1914, and died in 1930.

In 2003, Wharton was inducted into the Football Hall of Fame in Manchester. In 2014, a statue honouring Wharton was unveiled at St George's Park National Stadium, Manchester and in 2020 a mural was created commemorating his 155th anniversary in Darlington. Shaun Campbell, local Darlington campaigner, has worked tirelessly both in Ghana and the UK to ensure Arthur Wharton is properly commemorated.



The Arthur Wharton statue at St George's Park

Lloyd Lindbergh 'Lindy' Delapenha, the first Jamaican to play professional football in England, was born in 1927 into a middle class family in Spanish Town, Jamaica and was named after Charles Lindbergh, who made the first solo flight across the Atlantic on the day Delapenha was born.

In 1946, aged 18, he boarded a prisoner-of-war ship originating from Japan, for England. During his compulsory National Service with the Royal Fusiliers, he was spotted in Egypt by a football scout, signed up by Portsmouth in 1948, and transferred to Middlesbrough in 1950.

He became 'Boro's' leading scorer in the 1951–56 seasons, scoring 93 League and FA Cup goals in 270 appearances. Middlesbrough Football Club wrote on its website, 'Famed for his rocket-like shot, he was the first black player to represent Boro. The Jamaican forward was a loyal club servant for almost a decade, during which time he earned a place in the hearts of all Boro fans who saw him play.' Delapenha also played professionally for Horden Cricket Club in Durham Senior League Games.



Lindy Delapenha

In 1958 Delapenha left Middlesbrough and played for Mansfield Town, Hereford United and Burton before returning to Jamaica in 1964, as 'he realised he was getting older and the weather wasn't getting warmer'. He co-ordinated sporting events for Jamaica's sugar factories before spending 30 years at Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, where he introduced coverage of international football.

In an interview in 2014, Delapenha spoke of knowing one other black person in Middlesbrough, who shouted loudly at all the matches for 'his kid'. He also said there was much less racism in football in the 1950s, coming from only a few fans and never the other players.

Delapenha was inducted into Jamaica Sports Hall of Fame in 1998 and died in Kingston, Jamaica in 2017, aged 89. In 2021 he was posthumously awarded the English League Championship medal.

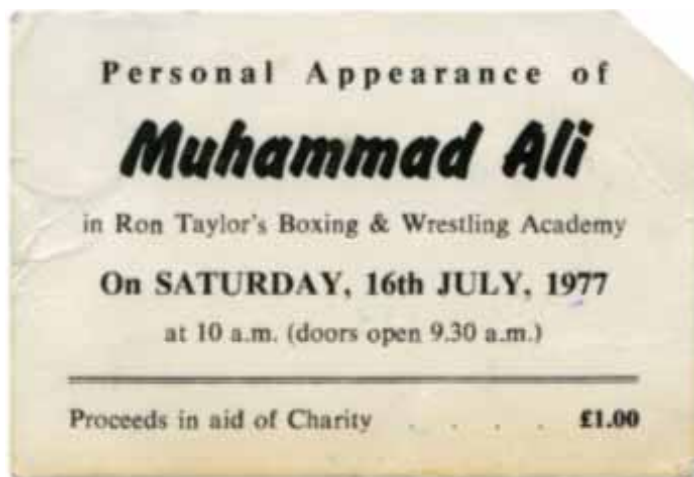
Muhammad Ali, a professional boxer, entertainer, activist, and philanthropist, visited Newcastle and South Shields in 1977. Nicknamed 'The Greatest', Ali is widely regarded as one of the greatest boxers of all time, winning 56 of his 61 matches.



Muhammed Ali's wedding being blessed at Al-Azhar Mosque, South Shields

Ali toured South Shields in an open-topped bus to huge crowds, visiting South Shields' Gypsy's Green stadium, and playing at a charity darts match. Ali and his new wife Veronica had their recent marriage blessed at the Al-Azhar Mosque on Laygate Lane in South Shields. A crowd of approximately 7,000 well-wishers and 300 guests witnessed the blessing.

Ali also visited youth clubs in Washington and Newcastle where he met local boxers including Danny Larty. 16,900 people gathered in Eldon Square, Newcastle to watch his televised broadcast. Here, Ali praised Newcastle, saying 'this is like heaven compared to America... the greatest impression I've had here is the peace that's in the city. The serenity. The unity.'



Ali's local engagements

Born in 1942 as Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr., Ali converted to Islam in 1961 changing his name to Muhammad Ali. Ali donated millions to charity organisations, youth education and disadvantaged people of all religious backgrounds. It is estimated that Ali helped to feed more than 22 million people afflicted by hunger. In 1966 Ali refused to be drafted into the military, citing his religious beliefs and ethical opposition to the Vietnam war. This earned him the respect of millions worldwide, though he was stripped of his boxing titles and only avoided prison following a successful appeal to the US Supreme Court.

Ali was an actor, the author of two autobiographies, and a successful musician – receiving two Grammy nominations. Ali retired from boxing in 1981 and died in 1996 with Parkinson's disease, possibly related to his boxing injuries.

Daniel 'Danny' Cofie Lartey was born in Accra, Ghana in 1930. He was a boxer in Ghana, and in 1950, he stowed away on a British ship, hiding in the cocoa containers. Such was Lartey's personality that, when discovered, the captain gave him a job and negotiated for him to rejoin the ship after he had spent two weeks in jail in Australia, as he had no papers. He settled in Cardiff in 1951 where he both started a family and became a professional boxer. His boxing activities saw him travel with Europe's largest boxing fair, Ronnie Taylor's Travelling Boxing Ring, to Ireland and across England, including to the Hoppings Fair, Newcastle.

In 1959 he moved to Newcastle, where he married, had five children, and supported local youth clubs and African societies.



Danny Lartey

He greeted Muhammad Ali at the West End Boxing Club in 1977 with the traditional Muslim greeting. Ali was impressed and held on to Lartey's hand, possibly surprised to receive a Muslim greeting by an African man in Newcastle. Lartey had several jobs after boxing, including being a plasterer. Lartey regularly attended the Reggae nights at the Hoochie Coochie club in Newcastle where he was pampered by the staff and fellow dancers with free drinks. He would dance to his favourite tune, Bob Marley's 'Three Little Birds' with the biggest smile on his face.

Universally described as a 'True Gentleman', Lartey was humble, unassuming, devoted to his family and always saw the best in people. He died in 2020 leaving behind a legacy of kindness and generosity.



Shaka Hislop

Shaka Hislop was born in London and moved to Trinidad at the age of two. He excelled academically and was awarded a soccer scholarship to Howard University, USA, graduating with an honours degree in mechanical engineering. While there he was scouted and went on to sign with Reading FC in the 1992-93 season, Newcastle United in 1995-98 and then West Ham United, where he was known as the 'Gentleman At The Goalpost'.

At Newcastle United, injury and battling for opportunities to play affected his career at the club. But in Newcastle, Hislop used his status as a professional football player to make a difference. In 1995, Hislop was at a petrol station near St James' Park when he was confronted by a group of young people shouting racist abuse at him. After one of the group realised that they had been shouting at Shaka Hislop, the Newcastle United football player, they came over to ask for an autograph (a request he politely declined). However recognising the power of education and positive role models, he joined the board of the newly founded Show Racism the Red Card. He and his team mates assisted the organisation, touring schools promoting the anti-racism message. Show Racism the Red Card, now in its 25th year, is the UK's largest anti-racism educational charity, and Hislop still remains very much involved as the organisation's Honorary President.

Shaka Hislop, with dual nationality, eventually chose to represent Trinidad and Tobago, and played for them 26 times, captaining the team in five matches. After the 2006 World Cup tournament, a euphoric achievement for the twin nation, Hislop was awarded the Chaconia medal in gold in 2006, and inducted into his nation's Sporting Hall of Fame in 2008.

*Authored by Patricia Poinen with Beverley Prevatt Goldstein:
thank you Beverley for your constant guidance.*

*Thanks to Dezmond Lartey, Justine King and Shaun Campbell
for their support and contribution to this publication.*

Builders of Nations and Communities

Nation Builders

The common themes here are the goal of equality and the method of collective action. The different contexts, locations and time periods led to the different methods: legislating for social reform, supporting and advocating for the marginalised and armed struggle.

Charles Duncan O'Neal (1879-1936) was born in Barbados. His parents prioritised education and he won a scholarship in 1899 to Edinburgh University to study medicine. There he joined Keir Hardie's Independent Labour party, and social reform became his priority. As a medical practitioner in Newcastle (1904-10) O'Neal looked after labourers and miners. He lived in Whitburn and Fulwell in the Sunderland area and served on the local council as an Independent Labour member.

He returned to Barbados in 1910 but, depressed by the colonial laws against the working classes, spent the next 14 years in Dominica and Trinidad practising medicine. On his return to Barbados in 1924, O'Neal worked, with others, to start the Democratic League which encouraged voter registration among the poor and working class. The League campaigned for the abolition of the oppressive Acts against workers, for the abolition of child labour, for compulsory free education, for expanded worker protection and for better working conditions for women. Women had leadership roles in both the Democratic League and the Working Men's Association (an early workers' union which O'Neal started). O'Neal continued to advocate for these reforms when elected as MP for Bridgetown in 1932 until his death in 1936.

His challenge to the deep-seated racism of the 1920s and 1930s in education, religion, at the workplace and in housing, and his forming of a working-class movement, was exceptional for someone of his professional status. O'Neal is one of the ten national heroes of Barbados and is commemorated by a \$1 stamp and a \$10 note. One of the two bridges in Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, bears his name.

Ivor Cummings was born in West Hartlepool in 1913. His parents, Dr Ishmael Cummings from Sierra Leone and Joanne Archer from Yorkshire, worked at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle. Cummings' application to join the army was rejected because he was not 'of pure European descent' and in 1935 he became the warden at a government hostel in London for students from Africa and the Caribbean.



The Charles Duncan O'Neal stamp

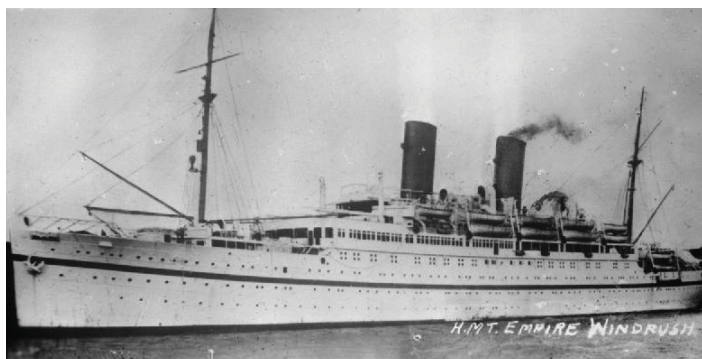
In 1941 Cummings became the first person of African descent to join the colonial office. As Assistant Welfare Officer he oversaw the well-being of people of African descent living in Britain as part of government schemes – scholarship students and later war workers.



West Indies House, Newcastle

Cummings regularly visited the North East, liaising between the students and the university authorities and working with the wardens of the colonial hostels, West Indies House in Newcastle and Colonial House in North Shields, where he personally heard the seamen's complaints. Having welcomed the foresters from British Honduras (see 'Soldiers and War Volunteers'), he sought to improve their accommodation in Scotland and to find jobs for them in Scotland and the North East when their unit was disbanded. Here, he quietly challenged racism, including that of the Royal Navy.

His national role included mediating between the London police and African and West Indian students, seamen and gas workers. In 1948 he met the Caribbean passengers on the Windrush ship, supporting many in finding accommodation and jobs. His selecting of Clapham South Barracks to accommodate the West Indians led to Brixton becoming a centre for this community.



HMT Empire Windrush

Despite being uneasy with his status as an employee of the colonial office, many Africans and West Indians protested vigorously when, in 1947, Cummings was refused accommodation at a hotel in Lagos, Nigeria, because of his skin colour. An embarrassed British government reduced its colour bar in West Africa. In the 1950s Cummings trained Ghana's diplomatic officers at the Ghana High Commission in London, and engaged West Indian professionals in developing Ghana. Cummings was awarded an OBE in 1948 and died in 1992.

Archie Sibeko (1928-2018) moved to Tynemouth in 2002 and enjoyed time with his family, playing croquet and gardening. He fostered links between North East arts companies and Eastern Cape, South Africa, and set up

and supported Tyume Valley Schools, South Africa. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Newcastle University in 2017 for his contribution to overcoming racial discrimination.

Archie Sibeko – renamed Zola Zembe to protect his family from the apartheid government, then renamed Zola Ntambo to pass more easily in Rhodesia – was awarded the Silver Order of Luthuli in 2005 for his contribution to South Africa's struggle for racial equality.



Sibeko and family at home in Tynemouth celebrating the Doctorate from Northumbria University, 2017

Sibeko was born in Kwezana, South Africa and qualified in agriculture. However, reluctant to enforce the racist agricultural policy, he worked as a railway labourer. He was active in the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) and South Africa Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). This led to his active membership of the African National Congress (ANC), of its military wing, and of the South African Communist Party. After spending a brief period in jail following the Treason Trial of 1956, Sibeko left South Africa in 1963 to avoid further imprisonment. He then trained in guerrilla warfare in Russia and held leadership positions in guerrilla camps in Tanzania and Zambia.

In England from 1970, Sibeko worked on the shop floor in Manchester, encouraging trade union membership. Subsequently he developed SACTU from its London headquarters and worked with trade unions in Britain and worldwide to publicise events in South Africa and to gain funds to support its unions. On his return to a free South Africa

in 1990, Sibeko was elected Vice-Chairperson of Western Cape ANC and Honorary President of SARHWU, working with them until ill health in 1992 led to his return to England. Moving to Tynemouth with his 2nd wife to enjoy the sea and family, Sibeko found the Geordies to be 'very warm and welcoming'.



Sibeko sharing his books with Nelson Mandela, 2008, Dorchester Hotel, London

Community Builders

Minto, Suadwa and Sangowawa share the same goal (equality) and the same method (collective action) as the nation builders, and are among those who built and are building communities in the North East.

Charles Udor Minto (see also 'Seamen') was born in 1900 in Calabar, Nigeria. A Nigerian boxing champion, a seaman and a cook, he settled in North Shields, where he taught boxing skills. He founded the International Coloured Mutual Aid Association (ICMAA) in North Shields in 1939. As an earlier association had collapsed due to divisions, he worked hard to bring the Kru, Mende, Yoruba, Ibo, Barbadians, Jamaicans, and British Hondurans together, while engaging with white patrons. The Association aimed 'to provide funds for the relief of members; to fund education and training for children; and to promote self-respect and self-defence among the coloured race and their descendants throughout the United Kingdom'.

Minto negotiated with union officials, the port welfare officer, employers and the local Ministry of Labour to change the conditions in North Shields, of which an official memo to the Colonial Office said, '*the colour prejudice was quite unbearable. Coloured men on land remained in a perpetual state of unemployment*'. He publicly challenged James Ockleton, the North East Coast Secretary of the Seamen's Union who said white seamen should be given priority.

The Association also helped children to remain at secondary school, with the Red Cross and Tynemouth Education Authority supplementing the family income.

Minto advocated for a hostel for the increasing number of seamen, and in 1942 Colonial House was opened by Harold Macmillan (later Prime Minister). The hostel held dances, concerts and an annual Children's Christmas party, with users forming a band and a football team. These events brought Africans and non-Africans together – for example, every child of African descent was encouraged to bring a white child to the Christmas party.



Minto (right) in the kitchen of Colonial House, North Shields

Minto organised services for the local seamen of African descent lost in the war and a victory party for the African troops who had marched in the Victory Parade in 1946. He regularly communicated with the Colonial Office on behalf of the members and residents, affiliated ICMAA to the National League of Coloured Peoples, and engaged in BBC broadcasts to West Africa. Minto was awarded an MBE in 1949 and died in 1960.

Tony Suadwa was born in 1933 in Kumasi, Ghana, of the Asante tribe. He sailed to England in 1961 to train in business management and secretarial studies at the College of Commerce (later Northumbria University), Newcastle. Achieving a Masters' Degree in Business, he worked as a manager at the DHSS in Longbenton, Newcastle until his retirement.

Suadwa's initial feelings of isolation and ongoing experiences of racism led to his commitment to 'bringing people together'.

He restarted the Ghana Association in his front room, making links with the local Nigerian and West Indian Association. Suadwa led the police liaison work, being an early member of the Northumbria Police and Community Relations Group, and becoming its Chair in 1991. He co-founded the North East branch of the Standing Conference of African Organisations (SCAFRO). From premises in Elswick, Newcastle, SCAFRO organised parties, functions, a youth group and a bar, as their members were not welcome in Newcastle's bars and clubs. SCAFRO's premises were burnt down in the 1980s and its activities gradually ceased.



Tony Suadwa with the Diversity Award

In 1997 Suadwa founded the North East of England African Community Association (NEEACA). Despite insecure funding, NEEACA brought many communities together, supporting smaller African groups, assisting individual Africans and organising social, cultural and educational events for all. He also ran dancing, drumming and storytelling workshops in many schools in the North East. Suadwa is pleased to have tackled racism through breaking down barriers between different groups and through educating children.



Suadwa drumming

Suadwa is content with his two lives: his life in Ghana, which he visits annually, and his life in Newcastle. In Ghana, since 2010, he has been Head of the family of 200 people, responsible for major decisions and the ceremonies with the family Gods. In Newcastle, he is content with his family and community activities, and would not live anywhere else.

Folasade 'Sade' Sangowawa was born in London in 1960 to Nigerian parents who were studying in England. She moved to Nigeria when she was two years old. In 1979 she moved to Boston, Massachusetts, for her BSc in Business Management. Since 1991 she has lived in England, moving to Middlesbrough, Tees Valley in 1994. She found it difficult to get a job despite her qualifications (which by then included an MBA) and her experience. However, she eventually got a job with Corus Steel through an agency in Hartlepool where colour was not an issue.

Frustrated with the lack of awareness of different cultures in Middlesbrough, she founded Taste of Africa in 2004, with encouragement from the manager of the International Centre, Middlesbrough and the African community. The first Taste of Africa celebrated the positive side of Africa and its people with a night of poetry, fashion, drama, drumming, food and recognition of Africans contributing to Teesside.

Sangowawa says, 'My journey in Tees Valley has been laced with hope, triumph, pain, successes, failure all wrapped up in one.' She experienced difficulty in raising resources (financial and otherwise) to continue the Taste of Africa events. Statutory organisations expected her to do it for free for 'your people', and the stereotype of black people was

that 'they don't do things well'. She persevered despite experiencing institutional racism and some initial hostility from the black community and from women.



Folosade Sangowawa

In 2005, Taste of Africa hosted the first diversity awards dinner in the North East; in 2014 it hosted the Black History Youth Awards, and in 2021 it hosted Irin Ajo Mi, which celebrates the journey of black Teessiders. Its community organisation, Cultures, provides support to black minority ethnic migrants, promoting economic independence and understanding of British systems.

The events have supported numerous young people who are now responsible adults, contributing to the various communities they live in. The events empower them to believe in themselves and do the things which benefit them and the wider community. Sangowawa believes, 'it is our duty to rewrite our own narrative'.

Authored by Beverley Prevatt Goldstein, with assistance from Hannah Kent and Pat Poinen and with thanks to Tony Suadwa and Sade Sangowawa, and Sibeko and Leeson family.

Afterword

This project was undertaken by a community of volunteers who share an interest in the history of African and African descendent communities in northern England. One of our many challenges was how to fit all the potential stories into one small book.

This book is one step in what we hope will be an ongoing process. It is hoped this publication will encourage further research into our region's history, and further works that either explore these stories in more detail, or find new and currently undiscovered information. The historical and community archives of the region still contain many untold stories which are waiting to be discovered; stories from those with links to the Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia, Southern Arabia and the wider Global South.

As this publication demonstrates, this work is not only for professional historians or those based in universities. It could be undertaken by anyone with an interest and a passion for our history. This research is not separate from the general study of north eastern and northern history, but part of understanding the fullest range of this history, and how diverse stories are woven into the fabric of the development of our region, from prehistory to the present day.

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Northern England

The North East of England has a long, valuable and yet untold history of breaking racial barriers and black excellence- from Frederick Douglas to Arthur Wharton, providing the foundations for modern-day campaigns such as Show Racism the Red Card. Those stories need to be told so that we can all appreciate the truest tapestry of what the North East of England actually is and fully represents.

**Shaka Hislop, retired footballer, Newcastle United and Trinidad and Tobago,
Honorary President, Show Racism the Red Card.**

In my own work on 'slavery' I have hugely benefitted from important research done at a local and regional level – which continues to enrich our understanding not only of black history but of the historical shaping of British history at large. African lives in northern England is another important contribution to our historical understanding and to the recognition of the role played by people of African descent in the shaping of Britain.

**James Walvin, Professor of History Emeritus, University of York, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature,
Winner of Martin Luther King Memorial Prize.**

This fascinating booklet offers a wonderful window into the lives of peoples of African descent in Northern England– and of the enormous contribution peoples of African descent have made to culture, politics, science, technology, sport, education and the economy in the north of England. A timely, engaging, and informative resource, the booklet will inspire local communities, as well as teachers, students, and scholars, to uncover even more about the region's rich multicultural heritage.

Brian Ward (Northumbria University) is author of Martin Luther King in Newcastle upon Tyne: The African American Freedom Struggle and Race Relations in the North East of England (Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2017).

As a contribution to the reinterpretation and remaking of North-Eastern history through the lives and narratives of the sung and unsung residents and visitors of African descent, this booklet plots a course towards a new kind of society: one anchored in and embracing fully the principles of dignity, equality and justice for all.

African Lives in North East England and Cumbria is not a publication simply to be bought and put on a shelf but, rather, is one that deserves to be studied and fully digested. Its poignancy within the context of the Black Lives Matter Movement is profound, and though a booklet in size, its scope in its imagining of a future society that could and should come to be is monumental.

**Professor Chris Mullard, CBE DL HonLLD, formerly Community Relations Officer, Tyne and Wear,
and formerly Director of the Centre for Race and Ethnic Studies.**

