

The Black Cultural Archives: Brixton, London



The Black Cultural Archives (BCA) is a national institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of diverse people of African descent in Britain.

Founded in 1981, BCA (<http://bcaheritage.org.uk/about/>), the brainchild of the late Len Garrison (one of the founders of the African Peoples Historical Monument Foundation) has set out to collect, preserve and celebrate the heritage and history of people of African descent in Britain. BCA is the UK's first dedicated Black heritage center in Brixton, London, opening in July 24, 2014 in a new £7 million location (London, SW2 1EF, Windrush Square) that will enable BCA to provide greater access to the archive collection with dedicated learning spaces and an exciting program of exhibitions and events that explore British history from a unique perspective. Specifically, BCA offers insight into the history of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain with the bulk of the collection drawn from the twentieth century to the present day, although some materials date as far back as the second century. The collection includes personal papers, organizational records, rare books, ephemera, photographs, and a collection of small objects. Hence, the Black Cultural Archives recognizes the importance of untold stories and thus it provides a platform to encourage enquiry and dialogue that place people and their historical accounts at the heart of everything.



After a thirty year wait, The Black Cultural Archives opened its doors to a purpose-built £7 million building in Windrush Square in central Brixton in July 2014. The host of the event was Henry Bonsu, featuring (a partial listing) a libation by Chief Omilade Oladele, an opening address by Paul Reid (the Director of Black Cultural Archives), local singer and spoken word artist Floetic Lara, words from Dr. Doudou Diène, local renowned dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, conscious calypso poet Alexander D Great, harmonic jazz saxophonist Lascelles James and an enthusiastic crowd.







The Black Cultural Archives centers around the renovated Grade II listed Raleigh Hall, which contains a learning zone, cafe and shop, plus office and administration spaces, while a new limestone wing houses the archive store and an exhibition space on the ground floor.



African and Caribbean War Memorial Unveiling at The Black Cultural Archives: November 2014



Dignitaries, community leaders, veterans and local residents braved the brisk autumnal weather to attend the unveiling of the UK's first African and Caribbean War Memorial at the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, London to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the sacrifices made by African and Caribbean servicemen and women.



Nations in Africa and the Caribbean were profoundly affected during the world wars, sending people, materials, and funds to aid the war effort. Over 165,000 troops from Africa died during the conflicts, however, their contribution and service has gone widely unrecognized in Britain.



Whilst commemorating the past, the organizers also placed great importance on the future legacy and youth education. During his speech, Innocent Opia, Consular at the Uganda High Commission, commented “Let us not forget nor focus on the wrongs of the past, but build a strong and united future for the next generation”. Other noted guests included Cllr Adedamola Aminu, Mayor of Lambeth, Arthur Torrington CBE, Jak Beula, chair of the Nubian Jak Commemorative Plaque Scheme, the acting High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago, Mr Tedwin Herbert, and the Honourable Aloun Ndombet-Assamba, High Commissioner for Jamaica. Mr. Herbert (Acting High Commission for Trinidad and Tobago) in his remarks added that the memorial “...will make a lasting and engaging legacy for the men and women from Africa and the Caribbean who contributed to both World Wars; men and women who set tone for future generations.” The War memorial was unveiled in the presence of High Commissioners from seven African and Caribbean nations. The memorial was created via a partnership with the West Indian Association of Service Personnel, and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Lambeth Council, the two and a half ton monument is sculptured from rare Scottish Wint, and features the names of all the African and Caribbean regiments which contributed to Great Britain’s war effort during WWI and WWII.

References

BrixtonBuzz (The Prince Albert, 418 Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, London SW9 8LF), marthalovesblog (photos), <https://www.facebook.com/events/408803199260313/>, Colin Pryce, <http://thisweeklondon.com/article/paul-reid-black-cultural-archives/>.