

Homage to Canning Town African Ancestors *a heritage project*

by

IROKO Theatre Company

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Homage to Canning Town African Ancestors

(a heritage project)

This resource pack contains information useful for schools and features questions that encourage active learning.

Project Activities:

- Research into the lives of Africans living in and around Canning Town in the early 20th century;
- Oral interviews with Africans in Canning Town and surrounding areas;
- Vox Pops with people living on roads with African names;
- Community exhibition of research findings in Grassroots, West Ham;
- Composition and performance of a musical theatre piece based on the research findings;
- Archiving of research findings with Media Trust;
- Research presentation workshops with Media Trust volunteers;
- Downloadable online resources.

Project Supporters:

- University College London
- Media Trust
- The British Museum
- Newham Volunteers
- St. John's Church, Stratford
- African Divo Arts

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Some of the Active African Associations and Organisations in the Early 20th Century

West African Student's Union (WASU)

League of Coloured People (LCP)

Coloured Men's Institute

League Against Imperialism

African Hostel Defence Association

International Institute of African Languages and Cultures

The West African Youth League (WAYL)

**The Colonial Seamen's Association
(Linked to the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) founded 1931)**

Some Key Individuals of the Time

Ladipo Solanke (Nigerian - WASU co-founder and Africa House founder)

Herbert Bankole-Bright (Nigerian - WASU co-founder)

Kamal Chunchie (Sri Lankan - Coloured Men's Institute founder)



Claude McKay (Jamaican – poet and writer for *Dreadnought* in Bow)

He interviewed London dockworkers to get an alternative perspective from that of white sailors. His later novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* reflect his experiences as a black dockworker and sailor with characters in the docks, discussing class, race and imperialism.

Stella Thomas/Marke (Sierra Leonean) became the first African woman barrister in 1933. WASU recognised her as 'The first female Ogboni Agba. Miss Thomas was the first lady barrister-at-law in the whole of West Africa'.

Kofoworola Aina Moore – Lady Ademola (Nigerian) First African woman to graduate from Oxford University and WASU member

Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore (Lady Ademola)

Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore (Ademola), 1913-2002, became the first black woman, the first African woman, and the first Nigerian woman awarded an Oxbridge degree when she graduated from St. Hughes College, Oxford, in 1935. Oxford University had refused to award any degrees at all to women until 1920.

More information about Lady Ademola can be found in the book *“Ten Africans”: The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria*, Second Edition, by Margery Perham (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).



Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore (Lady Ademola)

Why I came to England at the age of 11 in 1924

“The Principal of the C.M.S. Girls’ School which I was then attending in Lagos, told my mother that although I was one of their most promising pupils, I could not sew, and my mother, feeling very much ashamed of me on seeing the grubby pillow-case I had submitted for our terminal examination in sewing, began to agitate for me to be sent somewhere where I could learn to use my hands as well as my head.



Source: *“The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria”*

Nationality Act

British women who married foreign men were classed as “aliens” under the 1914 Nationality Act. In the 1920's the Marriage Registrar gave a “Warning Statement” to women that they would lose British “protection” once married to an “alien”.

Some local women in Canning Town married to Africans risked their citizenship and social standing as a result of the Nationality Act.

In 1953 the inter-racial marriage of Labour MP, Stafford Cripps’s daughter, Peggy Cripps to Law student Nana Joe Appiah caused international uproar. The marriage inspired the 1967 comedy-drama “**Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner**”, starring Katharine Hepburn and Sidney Poitier.

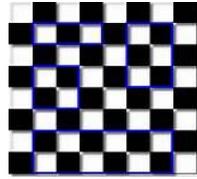
Sailors Attacked

In July 1917, several sailors were attacked in their lodging houses and on the streets in Canning Town.

The Daily Express blamed interracial relationships:

“In consequence of the infatuation of white girls for the Black men in the district some of the inhabitants are greatly incensed against Blacks.”

“Draughtboard Alley”



By the 1930s, the largest Black population in London lived in the Canning Town area. Crown Street became known locally as “Draughtboard Alley” because both Black and White people lived there. There were also a number of Black people living in Catherine Street. This community was largely destroyed by the Blitz in 1940 during the Second World War, when the docks were heavily bombed and local housing destroyed.

Source: *Newhamstory*

Ethnic Mix

A 1937 survey of Canning Town recorded that there were “1500 black seamen and 250-300 black working class families”. The author noted: “Most of the men have married women from the dock areas, people whose families have lived there for some time and usually the children of docks”.

Review of contemporary material shows that two images of the multi-ethnic dock community existed. The first was the reality of multi-ethnic communities living, working socialising and marrying. The second was the view of biased onlookers looking in with prejudice and misunderstanding.

It was known from the Census of 1931 that by 1930s the largest Black community was living at Canning Town.

SOAS

Early 1920s saw an increasing focus on African studies in London with the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures formed in 1926.

In 1938 a large donation from the Rockefeller Foundation for African linguistic research led the “School of Oriental Studies” to add “African” to its title and become the “School of Oriental and African Studies”.

War Effort

The contributions that the African people made to the war effort and their willingness to serve, are all too often overlooked and forgotten, neither valued nor appreciated. Their commitment both during the years of conflict and those immediately after the war were vital to Britain. The reconstruction during the post war years was in no small measure due in part to those people of colour who supplied the labour force that was important to Britain's recovery.

**Source: Oku Ekpenyon (MBE), *West End at War,*
A of City of Westminster Archives Project**



Silvertown: an aerial view of the results of a bomb during the Blitz.

“Bitten with the Idea of Flying”



Robert Ngaronye, a 22 year old Ibo from Nigeria saved enough money to get to Freetown where he stowed away on a ship bound for Liverpool, initially in order to study medicine. He stayed at the London Hostel for Colonials, Colonial House.

Robert heard that a fellow countryman, Pilot Officer Peter Thomas, "got bitten with the idea of flying", he then abandoned his medical studies and decided to pursue a career in the Royal Air Force.

“KATSINA” The Tank

In June 1942, the Emir of Katsina of the then Northern Provinces of Nigeria, and his brother Emir of Daura, also of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria and their subjects raised fund to purchase the tank “Katsina” as a gift to His Majesty’s Government.

*Source: E. I. Ekpenyon of Calabar: A London Air-Raid Warden
A of City of Westminster Archives Project*

Origins of African Street Names Around Canning Town

South Africa

The 1st Boer war 1880 –1881 and 2nd Boer War 1899 –1902 were fought between the British and South African Boers. These events, recorded in the street names, led to the capture of **Pretoria** in 1900 and the conversion of the Boer republics into British colonies. Scouting Movement founder Baden-Powell became a national hero for his involvement in **Mafeking**.

The Second Boer War: 1899-1902 led to following street names:

LADYSMITH RD (E16),
PRETORIA ROAD (E16),
KIMBERLEY ROAD (E16),
MAFEKING ROAD (E16)

Origins of African Street Names Around Canning Town

East Africa

The streets below recall a sequence of events between 1884 –1896 covering the fall of **Khartoum** from British control; the murder of General Gordon and the subsequent reconquest by Britain under Kitchener.

NILE ROAD, (E13)
KHARTOUM ROAD, (E13)
DONGOLA ROAD, (E13)

South of the Egyptian frontier, on the **Upper Nile**, the three cities of **Dongola**, Berber, and Khartoum formed a triangle of trading hubs. As such they were key to the control of Upper Egypt.

Major General Gordon had been sent to Sudan to help evacuate citizens when Britain decided to abandon the country after a rebellion.

On March 18, 1884, the Mahdist army laid siege to Khartoum, it was cut off completely. Under pressure from the public, in August 1884, the British government sent a relief force to Khartoum. This was known as **The Nile Expedition** 1884 –1885. The relief force proceeded slowly up the Nile passing through Dongola. This gave rise to the English regatta competition of “**dongola racing**”.

General Gordon’s last journal entry, dated 14 December 1884, read, “Now mark this, if the Expeditionary Force, and I ask for no more than 200 men, does not come in ten days, the town may fall; and I have done my best for the honour of our country. Good bye.”

In January, the entire garrison was slaughtered, including General Gordon. His head was cut off and delivered to the Mahdi. The relief force arrived two days later to find the city fallen and Gordon dead.

Ras Prince Monolulu: The Racing Tipster



Peter Carl Mackay/McKay, a.k.a, Ras Prince Monolulu was a horse-racing tipster, and something of an institution on the British racing scene from the 1920s until the time of his death in 1965. Monolulu claimed to be a chief of the Falasha tribe of Abyssinia, but the reality is that he came from the Caribbean Island of St Croix (now part of the United States Virgin Islands).

He was particularly noticeable for his brightly coloured clothing; as a tipster, one of his best known phrases was the cry "**I gotta horse!**" which was subsequently the title of his memoirs. The man was as colourful in character as his wardrobe and was a familiar sight at Britain's racecourses from the 1930s to the 1950s.

"Taking and backing a Monolulu tip would have been part of the fun."

Source: mybrightonandhove.org.uk

The Historic Walk

In 1935 the West African Students Union organised a walk to Piccadilly Circus in traditional African dress. Titilola Folarin, from Nigeria, described the walk thus:

“Many of our English friends who saw us expressed their pleasure and satisfaction at the show; but what struck me most was this, that about a week after whilst passing through Regent Street we discovered in some of the show windows a certain number of ladies’ hats, almost exactly in the same style and shape of how we tied up our ‘Gele’ on the day we passed through that district a week before.”

Religion & Faith

Several African men plus some of their wives and children attended the Barking Road Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Canning Town, where there was a class on Thursdays. Others went to the Poplar Wesleyan Mission and the East End Mission and its branches. Some also attended the King's Cross Central Mission.

Other churches that had ties with the black community were: the Presbyterian Church and Settlement, the Baptist Chapel in Cotton Street, Poplar, the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Frederick Road, Canning Town, a spiritualist meeting in Hackney and a branch of the Christian Community of London in Custom House.



A student from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) at SOAS in 1946
© IWM (D 29302)



West African technicians listening to a broadcast at the Overseas Club. ©
IWM (D 10370)

Some of the African Businesses in Canning Town Today

In the course of our research we contacted some of the local business owners in Canning Town. The beauty, fashion and restaurant/catering industries are the most promising small businesses conducted by Africans in and around Canning Town. Below is a list of some of those that we spoke to:

Bantuway Butchers is one of the leading butchers and food processing companies in London. The London Business Resource ranked it as the most famous butchers among Africans in the UK. Bantuway has also received an award from the Queen for *“its significant participation in the small business sector”*. **Contact: Mr and Mrs Ideh; www.bantuway.com.**

Prime Coffee offers a premium coffee service and has been serving customers since 2000. Ernie O. Mathews established Prime Coffee and demand for his coffee comes from beyond East London. Headquarters are located in Canning Town, but it has many branches in London. **Contact: Mr. Ernie O. Mathews; www.prime-coffee.com.**

African Youth Organisation is a charity that works within the community supporting the young African Diaspora via its charity shops and community projects. **Contact: Dr Samuel Egharevba; www.ayorg.org.**

Taris is a popular African restaurant specialising in Nigerian cuisine. The restaurant is well established within the community and serves traditional dishes to its varied clientele. **Contact: Mrs. Ayebatari Olusola; 0871 961 0168.**

Sources/Useful Websites

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Questions

Key Individuals

1. In your own words explain why Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore came to England?
2. How old was Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore when she arrived in England?
3. In what year did Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore arrive in England?
4. What was the name of the school that Lady Kofoworola Aina Moore attended in Nigeria?
5. What was the name of the school that she attended in Nigeria?
6. Who was Ras Prince Monolulu?
7. Where did Ras Prince Monolulu come from?
8. What was Ras Prince Monolulu's Nickname?
9. What sport was Ras Prince Monolulu associated with?

Write a 50-word description of your own fictitious Canning Town African Ancestor and include their name, age, country of origin and profession.

War Effort

1. What was the name of the tank given to Britain in 1942 by two people from an African country?
2. What was the name of the country/province that the tank came from?
3. What was the relationship between the two people that donated the tank?

If you could make a positive contribution to the war effort at that time, what would it be and why?

Street Names

1. From what country is the road name Mafeking Road taken?
2. Write down two road names in Canning Town that were taken from East Africa.
3. When did The First Boer war take place?
4. When did The Second Boer War take place?
5. When did The Nile Expedition take place?
6. Who was General Gordon?

In your own words, describe the efforts of General Gordon in fighting for England.

General Knowledge

1. The 1914 Nationality Act class British women who married foreign men as what?
2. In what year did “School of Oriental Studies” add “African” to its title?
3. Why was Crown Street known locally as “Draughtboard Alley”?
4. What year did the West African Students Union organise a walk to Piccadilly Circus in traditional dress?
5. How many black seamen lived in Canning Town in 1937?
6. Name up to three successful African-owned businesses in Canning Town today.

With your knowledge of Canning Town today, if you were to set up a business, what would it be and why?

Score

Homage to Canning Town Africans: 1 - Thanksgiving

Juwon Ogungbe

Juwon Ogungbe

Baritone 1
Ba-ba I-ya

Baritone 2
Ba-ba I-ya

Baritone 3
Ba-ba I-ya

Treble Recorder

Percussion

6
Bar.
Fa-thers, mo-thers

Bar.

Tr. Rec.

Perc.

Song Notations (Libretto/Script 1)

Thanksgiving

Baba

Baba

Iya

Iya

Fathers, mothers, ancestral spirits

Fathers, mothers, ancestral spirits

Our forbears from Africa, we salute you today

Today, today we salute you today

You walked these streets and you kept your heads high; In Canning Town, Custom House and the docklands of London

Docklands of London

We want to thank you for paving the way

We want to thank you for paving the way

Dalu

Dalu

We thank you

Yes!

E se

E se

Nagode

Nagode

In the 1920s and 30s, your presence was felt on the docklands streets; Mixing with local families, till the area was nicknamed as “Draughtboard Alley”

Black, white, white, black. Dudu, funfun, funfun, dudu

You made your mark

Yaw: You made your mark

We want to thank you for paving the way

We want to thank you for paving the way

Dalu

Dalu

We thank you

Yes!

E se

E se

Nagode

Nagode

We offer you kola for bitter sweet memories

E se Iya, Nagode Baba

We offer you palm oil, for memories of home

Dalu, we thank you everyday

Akara, we offer to warm your bellies

E se Iya, Nagode Baba

And spicy moin-moin to sharpen your taste buds

Dalu, we thank you everyday

We value your wisdom, your love and guidance; we feel your protection and we salute you;

For the past, the present and the distant future, we still need your presence, so we salute you.

E se o, Nagode o, Dalu, we thank you

E se o, Nagode o, Dalu, we thank you.

Score

Homage to Canning Town African Ancestors 15: Seeds you planted

Juwon Ogungbe

Juwon Ogungbe

$\text{♩} = 110$

Baritone

Baritone

Baritone

Piano

Triangle

$\text{♩} = 110$

We hail the an-ces-tors of

We hail the an-ces-tors of

We hail the an-ces-tors of

Song Notations

(Libretto/Script 2)

Seeds You Planted

We hail the ancestors of Canning Town
You lift our spirits up; Never down
Seeds you planted have grown to bear fruit,
Grown to bear fruit for your descendants;

You made your sacrifices, big and small
The whole community can now stand tall
Seeds you planted have grown to bear fruit
Grown to bear fruit for your descendants;

African nations are independent, thanks to your inspiration
Canning Town is booming with African business today
We hold the baton, so we hope and pray
Your values will live on in future days
Seeds you planted have grown to bear fruit
Grown to bear fruit for your descendants

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Our volunteer researchers and blog writers;

Jenny Farren, BA., MA.

Jenny studied History at UCL, assessing the interaction of East and Western cultures during the Crusades. Her MA at Birkbeck, examined the concepts of “outlaw” and “wilderness” in popular culture - on the edge of society - subversive ideas of politics and cultural identities were expressed. She is now researching human rights, crime and policing through case law, legislation, online databases and journals, interviews and historic records.

Andrew Turley, BA., MA.

Andrew is a 23 year old researcher from the flatlands of Lincolnshire. He recently graduated from an MA course in Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester. As part of the degree, he completed a short documentary on a Haitian family living in the Bahamas. Now living in Aldgate East, he is currently volunteering for a couple of research projects around East London.

Illina Huq, BA., MA.

Illina is currently studying her MA in International Politics and Human Rights in City University London. She took her Honours and Masters in Economics from University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. She also has a Post-Graduate Diploma in International Relations from University of Dhaka.

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