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Tracing your Caribbean family

Southwark local
history library
and archive

Mr Sam King, MBE Southwark's first black mayor



A guide on how to get started and information on family history resources

There are a host of sources available to help you trace your Caribbean family. We list some in this booklet which is intended as a basic guide and includes a little advice on how to prepare and start your Caribbean family search. The sources mentioned are by no means exhaustive. As the field of genealogy continues to grow and become more popular, so do the number of organisations and companies offering family history services of one kind or another. For a more detailed history on the Caribbean presence in the UK, the slave trade or step by step advice on tracing your Caribbean ancestry please see our sections on family history resources and publications in this booklet.

Southwark local history library and archive has access to many of the family history resources mentioned in this guide which are free to use by the general public. Whether you need to access books, photographs, old newspapers, census records, parish records, electoral registers or the internet, the staff are on hand to guide you.

If you need more information on our local history or family history resources you can contact us by calling **020 7525 0232** or **email local.history.library@southwark.gov.uk**

Details are also available on our website page **www.southwark.gov.uk/localhistorylibrary**

Tracing your Caribbean family history is similar to tracing any kind of family history and many of the resources needed to do it are too.

You may find that it is possible to find Caribbean ancestors as far back as the mid 1800s without going outside of the UK to research. Indeed, during the 1700s in the UK, black people worked as domestic slaves in the homes of the rich until the practice was made illegal in 1774. The slave trade (including the shipment of slaves to Britain) ended in 1807 and eventually slavery ended in the British Empire with the passing of The Slavery Act in 1833. It is likely, however, that you will touch on the period of slavery during your family history search.

Your ancestry has taken time to evolve. So too will your family history research. Take your time and persevere.

Beginning the search

Which side of the family do you wish to search – your mother's or father's? Once you have decided, start with yourself and work backwards through your chosen side of the family.

Speak to as many family members as possible

Collect their stories and memorabilia. Stories will give you many clues and details to help build your tree. Write down as much detail as possible. It is not uncommon for family members to say, "I heard that we were related to the Smiths in England....", or "... my grandmother would always make us hold our knives and forks this way". These sayings can give you clues about dates, places, cultural habits and so on which will be useful in making links, building a picture and a timeline about your family. For family members living in the Caribbean, ask them if they would be prepared to gather information for you. If you plan to visit the Caribbean for a holiday, it might be a good opportunity to use some of your time to research yourself and perhaps visit the island's archives (see section on family history resources within the Caribbean).

Record oral history

When talking to family members, think about how you will record their stories. Do you prefer note taking to tape recording for example? Would your interviewee be happy to be filmed? Be prepared for some family members who refuse to tell you anything, some memories may be too painful, traumatic

or embarrassing to recall. Often, family members feel more comfortable speaking with people outside their own family.

Collect information and documents

These should include

Names - try to get the formal name because these are the ones that will be mentioned on formal documents. Nicknames, aliases and maiden names will also be useful.

Addresses - including those where people worked and lived.

Photographs - as well as being a record of what relatives looked like, they will also hold clues as to how people lived.

Records of births, marriages, deaths (civil registration) - these are the most important records you will need in family history research as they prove family links, history and timelines. For people who were born, married and died in England and Wales after 1 July 1837 it should be possible to get certificates in the UK.

For Southwark residents requiring certificates after 1900 contact

The Southwark register office

34 Peckham Road

London SE5 8QA

Tel: 020 7525 7651

Email: registrars@southwark.gov.uk

For information on civil registration and certificates before 1900 contact

The general register office certificate services section

PO Box 2

Southport PR8 2JD

Tel: 0845 603 7788

Email: certificate.services@ips.gsi.gov.uk

Both offices charge fees for ordering certificates.

Records for select countries have been compiled on microfilm and microfiche by the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS). These can be accessed at the London Family History Centre. The centre will be housed temporarily at the National Archives until 2013 while refurbishment works are carried out.

The Caribbean islands began their civil registration records at different times. You can contact the country directly (usually their library and archives or Ministry of Information departments) by telephone or via their websites (cheaper option).

A couple of important things to note when doing your search

Use variations on name spellings.

For example, the name Mitchell may also be entered as Mitchel or Catherine may be entered as Katherine. Also, during slavery many people did not get baptised until adulthood and many women gave birth out of wedlock with their children assuming the father's or slave owner's name.

Records of baptisms, marriages and burials

These records are useful, when for example, the birth has not been registered or in the case of marriages the names of witnesses are necessary. These records would have been kept by local churches in the country. Some churches in the Caribbean will still hold these records, otherwise contact the country's information or archives departments (see section on family history resources within the Caribbean). Southwark local history library holds parish records containing the baptisms, marriages and burials on microfilm for the ten ancient parishes of Southwark from 1500s to the early 1900s (for some of the parishes). Contact us for more information, or visit **www.southwark.gov.uk/localhistorylibrary**

Dates and places of embarkation and disembarkation

Passenger lists covering the period 1878 to 1960 are held at The National Archives. These may include the passenger's name, date of birth or age, the port of departure and arrival and name of the ship they traveled on. This information can be accessed free of charge at the National Archive or remotely through the subscription websites, **www.ancestry.co.uk** and **www.findmypast.com**. Access to ancestry is available free of charge at Southwark local history library and archive.

Slave registers

The slave registers are crucial records for researching slaves and slave holders for the period c1814 to 1835 when slavery in the British Caribbean (and Mauritius and Cape Colony) was abolished under the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. From 1821 copies of the registers, which were produced locally were sent to the Office for the Registry of Colonial Slaves in London. These registers are now held at the National Archives in the series referenced T 71. You will need to visit the archives to view this material.

Census records

The census is a complete count of the population of a place taken collectively on a specific date. The 1841 census is considered to be the first modern UK census and censuses have been taken every ten years since. The census can give details about family and other people living in the house at the time. Details may include the full names of all occupiers of the household, exact age, relationship to head of household, sex, occupation, parish and county of birth, medical disabilities and employment status. For family history researchers, the census is useful not only to make ancestral links but to provide information on other family members living at an address and how they all lived. The census can also be used to substantiate other formal records. People of black or minority ethnicity may be described in these earlier census returns as 'negro'.

Southwark local history library and archive holds census returns on microfilm for the whole borough from 1841 to 1901, and provides free access to all UK census returns online, including 1911. You can also view them on the subscription websites **www.1911census.co.uk** (powered by Find My Past), and **www.ancestry.co.uk**

For census information for the Caribbean islands, contact the government's planning, statistical or information departments. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, you would contact the Central Statistical Office on **(868) 623 6495/623 7069** or email **info@cso.gov.tt**

Other important documents worth collecting

The following list of documents will give you information about your family's past, the type of people they were and may enable you to make links between family members. Official records, for example, like school or college ones may be sourced locally in the country. It may be possible to do a general website search or contact the education department of the country you are searching.

Look out for documents relating to profession/career

- Personal letters
- Financial documents e.g. rates
- Service records*
- School records
- Land, property deeds
- Press cuttings

- Books e.g. bibles, school books, prayer books
- Awards, gifts, prizes
- Old sayings, characterizations (this can give clues to dates and places)
- Audio visual material (film, photographs, audio tapes)

*Very few records are available with regards to Caribbean people who undertook military service for the British Empire. There are some records for soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment and the West India Regiment during World War I and these may be found using the reference WO 364 at the National Archives. Otherwise diaries, memorabilia, photographs, films and oral histories are available at

The Imperial War Museum
Lambeth Road
London SE1 6HZ
Tel: 020 7416 5320
Web: www.iwm.org.uk

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's 'Debt of Honour' register lists the men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died during the two World Wars. You can search their records at <http://www.cwgc.org/>. A general website search may elicit further information.

Storing and preserving documents and visual material

Think about how you will store your documents and information. Protect fragile, old photographs, film and documents, they are valuable. Advice on preserving family history documents can be sourced from family history magazines and websites. We have listed the most important points here

- Keep documents and photographs flat and file them in acid free folders. Folders containing acid will damage your documents and photographs
- Do not laminate documents or photographs
- Precious documents should be handled as little as possible
- Keep documents and photographs in a dark place (daylight will cause them to fade)
- Remove paperclips and other such metal stationery from documents and photographs as they can cause damage
- Make a copy of your films, video and audio and if possible a digital copy that preserves the integrity of the images and sound (we advise that you get advice about film transfer)
- Keep all material in a safe, dark and damp free place

Making a family tree

Try to build a timeline for your family members using the information you have gathered. This is called a family tree.

You can do this yourself by hand or you may like to do it electronically using a genealogy website. Some of the books listed under our bibliography section or one of the genealogy websites listed below will be able to help you get started. Remember, some of the websites may charge a fee for using the family tree software or may ask you to register before giving you access to free software, but often the advice and tips given are free.

www.genesreunited.com - Free family tree software

www.misbach.org/pdfcharts/ - Misbach Enterprises free family tree charts

www.familysearch.org - Free family history software

www.accessgenealogy.com/family_tree_chart.htm - Free family history maps and tools to download

www.ancestry.com - Subscription website, free family tree software

www.familytreemaker.com - Comprehensive family tree software

www.pharostutors.com - Provides Online courses on family history

www.RootsMagic.co.uk - Genealogy software

Once you have planted the roots of your tree and done your initial research your tree can start to grow and family members can be added branch by branch. We wish you luck with your research.

Family history resources and services

Caribbean family history

The following websites either offer advice on tracing your Caribbean ancestry, give examples of the experience of undertaking Caribbean family research or provide more historical context in regard to slavery and immigration and the migration of Caribbean people throughout the world. Most websites are free and you will be able to access them from Southwark local history library free of charge.

www.movinghere.org.uk (free)

www.everygeneration.co.uk (free)

Caribbean Ancestral Research Association (CARA London). Regular group meetings, Caribbean genealogical research support

www.cara-london.org.uk (free)

www.solihull.gov.uk/caribbeanfamilyhistory

www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/get_started/caribbean_01.shtml
(free)

www.caribbeanfamilyhistorygroup.wordpress.com (free)

Collecting, preserving and celebrating the history and culture of Black people in Britain **www.bcaheritage.org.uk** (free)

www.afrigeneas.com (subscription)

www.channel4.com/programmes/empires-children (free)

www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory (free)

www.aambh.org.uk (free)

Archives and Museum of Black Heritage

Genealogist: Sharon Tomlin

Email: **sharon@tomlinso.com**

General family history

Listed here are some of the popular family history resources accessible mainly via the internet. Some of the sites may require a subscription fee. You will be able to access these sites from Southwark local history library free of charge.

The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU

Tel: 020 8876 3444

You will need to apply for a free reader's ticket to view original records.

The London Family History Centre **www.londonfhc.org**

For births, marriages, deaths, censuses, church records and other indexes for the world, now available online are digital images for Jamaican civil registration births and pre-civil registration records **www.familysearch.org**

As well as records like the above you will be able to see the slave registers for the period 1812 to 1834 for Britain's former colonies, including the Caribbean at **www.ancestry.com**. The registers list the names of the slaves and the names of the slave owners (subscription site, free to use at Southwark local history library).

www.findmypast.com (subscription, free index) contains passenger lists from the UK 1890 to 1960 and includes migrants and people returning to the Caribbean, UK births, marriage and death indexes 1837 to 2005, UK censuses (partially indexed by name).

For information on plantations, slave records, aliens registration cards, naturalisation records, and passenger lists contact The National Archives, **Tel: 020 8876 3444**, **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk** for online documents **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline**

The Society of Genealogists' National Library and Family Education Centre is the UK's foremost family history society providing a wealth of information and resources including a genealogical library and education centre. Their address is

14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA

Tel: 020 7251 8799

Web: www.sog.org.uk

The London Family History Centre holds good baptism, birth, marriage, burial and death records for mainly countries such as Anguilla, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and St Kitts. The temporary address until at least 2013 is

London Family History Centre

The National Archives, Richmond TW9 4DU

Tel: 020 7589 8561

Web: www.londonfhc.org

Information and sources by country

The following is a list of contacts for finding family records in some of the Caribbean islands. For islands not mentioned here contact their government archives department or Ministry of Information.

Anguilla

Anguilla Library Service

The Valley
Anguilla

Tel: (264) 497 2441

Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Judicial Department

The Valley
Anguilla

Tel: (264) 497 2377

Web: www.gov.ai/vitalrecords.php

Antigua

The National Archives

Rappaport Centre
Victoria Park
St Johns, Antigua

Tel: (268) 462 3946

Email: archives@candw.ag

Web: www.wien2004.ica.org/en/member/antigua_%2526_barbuda_national_archives

The Registrar General's Office

High Court
High Street
St John's, Antigua

Tel: (268) 462 3929

Bahamas

Department of Archives

PO Box SS-6341
Nassau, Bahamas

Tel: (242) 393 2175

Email: archives@batelnet.bs

Web: www.bahamasnationalarchives.bs

Registrar General's Office

PO Box N532
Nassau, Bahamas

Tel: (242) 322 3316

Barbados

Barbados National Archives Department of Archives

Lazaretto Building
Black Rock
St Michael, Barbados

Tel: (246) 425 1380

Email: bda@caribsurf.com

Registration Department

Supreme Court of Barbados
Law Courts
Colleridge Street
Bridgetown, Barbados

Tel: (246) 426 3461

Tombstones and Burials
(Barbados and Antigua)

Web: www.tombstones.bb

Plantation owners index

Web: www.plantations.bb

Barbados manumission

Web: www.plantations.bb/manumission/

Slave compensations

Web: <http://compensations.plantations.bb>

Barbados Department of Archives

Black Rock
St James BB24001
Barbados

Belize

Belize Archives and Records Service Department

26/28 Unity Boulevard
Belmopan, Belize

Tel: (501) 822 247

Email: archives@btl.net

Web: www.belize.gov.bz/archives_dept/belize

Registrar General

Supreme Court
Belize City, Belize

Tel: (501) 277 377

British Virgin Islands

Library Services Department

Flemming Street
Road Town

Tortola, British Virgin Islands

Tel: (284) 494 3428

Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Government of the British Virgin Islands
Central Administration Complex
Road Town

Tortola, British Virgin Islands

Tel: (284) 494 3701

There is also a helpdesk which you can direct emails to: helpdesk@dgo.gov.vg

Cayman Islands

Cayman Islands National Archive

Government Administration Building
Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands

Tel: (345) 949 9809

Records centre

Email: Records.Centre@gov.ky

General enquiries

Email: CINA@gov.ky

Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages

General Registry Department
Tower Building
Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands

Tel: (345) 244 3404

Dominica

National Documentation Centre

Government Headquarters
Roseau

Commonwealth of Dominica

Tel: (767) 448 2401

General Registrar

Bay Front

Roseau

Commonwealth of Dominica

Tel: (767) 448 2401

Grenada

Public Library/National Archives

2 Carenage

St George's, Grenada

Tel: (473) 440 2506

Registrar General

Church Street

St George's, Grenada

Tel: (473) 440 2030

Births and Deaths

Ministerial Complex

Botanical Gardens

St. George's, Grenada

Tel: (473) 440 2806

Email: pmoffice@gov.gd

Guyana

National Archives of Guyana

26 Main Street

Georgetown, Guyana

Tel: (592) 227 7687

Email: narchivesguyana@yahoo.com

General Register Office

GPO Building

Robb Street

Georgetown, Guyana

Tel: (592) 225 7561

Jamaica

Jamaica Archives

Spanish Town, Jamaica

Tel: (876) 984 2581

To request online certificates contact

The Registrar General

Vital Records Information

Twickenham Park

Spanish Town, Jamaica

Tel: (876) 749 0550

Email: information@rgd.gov.jm

www.rgd.gov.jm

Jamaica Archives and Records

Department

Ministry of Information

Culture Youth and Sports

Corner of King and Manchester Streets

Spanish Town, Jamaica

Tel: (876) 984 5001, (876) 984 8254

Email: jarchives@jard.gov.jm

Web: www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com

Montserrat

Montserrat Public Library

Tel: (664) 491 3797

Email: publiclibrary@candw.ag

Registrar General

PO Box 22

Plymouth, Montserrat

Tel: (664) 491 2129

St Kitts and Nevis

National Archives

Government Headquarters

Church Street

Box 186

Basseterre, St Kitts

Tel: (869) 465 2521

Nevis Archives and Library

Nevis Historical and Conservation Society

Nelson Museum

Bellevue

Charlestown, Nevis

Tel: (869) 469 0408

Email: archives-library@nevis-nhcs.org

Registrar General

PO Box 236

Basseterre, St Kitts

Tel: (869) 465 5251

St Lucia

St Lucia National Archives

PO Box 3060

Clarke Street

Vigie

Castries, St Lucia

Tel: (758) 452 1654

Email: stlunatarch_mt@candw.lc

Civil Status Registry documents

Registrar of Civil Status
Peynier Street
Castries, St Lucia

Tel: (758) 468 3195

Email: civilreg@candw.lc

Web: www.stlucia.gov.lc

St Vincent and the Grenadines

Archives Department

Cotton Ginnery Compound
Frenches
Kingstown
St Vincent and the Grenadines

Tel: (784) 456 1689

Email: document@caribsurf.com

Registrar General

Government Buildings
Kingstown
St Vincent and the Grenadines

Tel: (784) 457 1424

Trinidad and Tobago

National Archives
PO Box 763
105 St Vincent Street
Port-of-Spain, Trinidad

Tel: (868) 625 2689

Registrar General's Office

Registration House
South Quay
Port-of-Spain, Trinidad

Tel: (868) 623 2450

Tobago Registrar General's Office

Jerningham Street,
Scarborough, Tobago

Tel: (868) 639 3210

**Web: www.natt.gov.tt/
(search for genealogy)**

Turks and Caicos Islands

Turks and Caicos National Museum

Guinep House
Front Street
PO Box 188,
Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos

Tel: (649) 946 2160

Email: museum@tciway.tc

Web: www.tcmuseum.org

The Registrar's General Office

Front Street
Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos

Tel: (649) 946 2800

Who else is tracing my Caribbean family?

Forums for some of the Caribbean islands where people post messages researching their family history

www.genforum.genealogy.com

Search country name in 'jump to forum'

Barbados

Bahamas

Haiti

Jamaica

Virgin Islands

Trinidad

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com

a website enabling people to facilitate each other with their family history research.

The DNA route

DNA research is available to trace your family lineage. DNA research does not tell you the history of your family but will tell you about your family's heritage, roots and migration patterns. It will enable you to make links with family members in other parts of the world. This route for tracing the family tree has become popular with the advent of family history television programmes. The following websites offer DNA testing and all charge for the service.

Genes reunited

www.genesreunited.co.uk

International DNA project

www.dnaancestryproject.com

Family Tree DNA

www.familytreedna.com

Oxford Ancestors

www.oxfordancestors.com

DNA Worldwide **www.dna-worldwide.com/ancestry-testing**

The GENUKI website provides an explanation of the process of DNA testing, comparing a number of DNA testing companies. **www.genuki.org.uk/big/bigmisc/DNA.html**

Motherland is a documentary film made by the production company Takeaway Media (that was shown on Channel 4 Television) which traced the family lineage of three black British people using DNA techniques **www.takeawaymedia.co.uk/productions_motherland.htm**

Useful publications

Genealogy

(*available at Southwark local history library or Peckham library. Local libraries may also stock.)

*A Tree Without Roots: The Guide to Tracing British, African, and Asian Caribbean Ancestry, Paul Crooks (Arcadia Books Ltd, 2008)

*Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors: Sources in the Public Record Office, Guy Grannum (Public Records Office, 2002)

Tracing Ancestors in Barbados: A Practical Guide, Geraldine Lane, (Genealogical Publishing Co., 2006)

Jamaican Ancestry: How to Find Out More, Madelaine E Mitchell (Heritage Books, 1998)

Jamaican Records: a Research Manual, Stephen D Porter (Stephen D Porter, 1999)

Immigrants and Aliens: Guides to Sources on UK Immigration and Citizenship, R Kershaw and M Pearsall (PRO, 2000)

Tracing Your Family Tree: Discover Your Roots and Explore Your Family's History, Kathy Chater (Lorenz Books, 2003)

The Genealogist's Internet, Peter Christian (PRO/The National Archives)

Immigrants and Aliens: a Guide to Sources on UK Immigration and Citizenship, R Kershaw and M Pearsall, (The National Archives, 2004)

Caribbeana: Miscellaneous papers relating to the history, genealogy, topography and antiquities of the British West Indies, Vere Langford Oliver (c.1910, The National Archives)

Researching Your Jamaican Family, Jennifer O'Sullivan-Sirjue with Pansy Robinson (Arawak publications, 2007)

Caribbean Family History Research: from 17th century to present day. In: The Family and Local History Handbook Book 13, Sharon Tomlin (Robert Blatchford Publishing Ltd, 2010)

Caribbean history

www.southwark.gov.uk/slavetrade

(All available from Peckham library, other Southwark libraries may stock)

Pieces of the Past: a Stroll Down Jamaica's Memory Lane by Rebecca Tortello, Ian Randle Publishers, 2007

In the Shadow of the Plantation: Caribbean History and Legacy, Ed. By Alvin O Thompson, Ian Randle Publishers, 2002. The Making of the West Indies, by F R Augier, S C Gordon, D G Hall, M Reckford, Carlong Publishers (Caribbean) Ltd., 2005

India in the Caribbean, Ed. By Dr David Dabydeen, Dr Brinsley Samaroo, Hansib Publishing Ltd., 1987

Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness by Richard Smith, Manchester University Press, 2004

Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present by Deborah Willis, W W Norton and Co., 2000

Van Der Zee: Photographer 1886-1983, Harry N Abrams, Inc., 1998

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, written by Himself, Ed. By W Sollors, W W Norton and Co. Inc., 2001

The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, Mary Seacole, Black Classics, 1999

Speak Of Me As I Am: the Black Presence in Southwark Since 1600 by Stephen Bourne, Southwark Council, 2005

Keep on Moving: The Windrush Legacy: The Black Experience in Britain from 1948, T Sewell, Voice Enterprises Ltd., 1998

The Trader, The Owner, The Slave: Parallel Lives in the Age of Slavery, by James Walvin, Jonathan Cape Publ., 2007

Southwark local history library and archive

John Harvard Library

211 Borough High Street

London SE1 1JA

Tel: 020 7525 0232

Email: local.history.library@southwark.gov.uk

Web: www.southwark.gov.uk/localhistorylibrary