

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE



THE ISSUE OF TRUTH: REPRESENTING
BLACK BRITISH HISTORY

21ST -22ND SEPTEMBER 2023

ORGANISERS: OLIVIA WYATT AND DEANNA LYNCOOK
PHD STUDENTS - QUEEN MARY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



ABOUT US

The Confernece

Building upon the ideas of scholars such as Kennetta Hammond Perry, Jade Bentil and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the conference will be a space for contributors to interrogate the notion of 'truth' within histories of Black people in Britain. As we study minoritised peoples for whom the institutional archive is often a site of dehumanisation and marginalisation, we invite participants to question:

- Whose truth is being represented in the materials that we use?
- Whose truth is heard and whose is forgotten?
- How can we change the perception that certain truths are more credible than others?
- How can we depict the many truths of Black British History, the vitality of Black life as well as the traumatic experiences that shape it?
- How can we reflect the diversity of opinion as well as the united front posed by Black activists?

This conference brings many voices together, from a range of fields, to foster a sense of community between academia, community research groups and those who disseminate these histories to the public – we can collectively imagine the future of Black history and its position within mainstream narratives of Britain.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE



THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2023

09:00 – 09:30 Welcome & Tea

09:30 – 10:00 Introductions by organisers

10:00 – 11:30 Early modern Black Britain:

Ningfen Wang, Hannah Cusworth, Jamie Gemmell, Jessica Sache and Alan Rice
— chaired by Miranda Kaufmann

11:30 – 11:45 Break

11:45 – 12:45 Politics and Activism:

Liam Liburd, Leonard Butingan, Jamie Banks — chaired by Bill Schwarz

12:45 – 13:15 Black Liberation Front & Brixton Black Women's Group activist
Zainab Abbas interviewed by A.S. Francis

13:15 – 14:15 Lunch

14:15 – 15:45 Social Histories:

Holly Cooper, Marianna Golinucci, Jessica White — chaired by Caroline Bressey

15:45 – 16:00 Break

16:00 – 16:45 Public historians and curators:

Weyland McKenzie-Witter, Elizabeth Cooper, Susan Pitter — chaired by Tej Adeleye

16:45 – 17:30 Scholar activists in conversation: Hakim Adi, Jade Bentil and
Aleema Gray

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

FRIDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER 2023



09:00 – 09:30 Welcome & Tea

09:30 – 10:30 Keynote Speech:

Kennetta Hammond Perry

10:30 – 10:45 Break

10:45 – 12:15 Racism within the State:

Ingrid Abrahams, Juanita Cox, Myya Helm, Anirbaan Banerjee — chaired by Hannah Francis

12:15 – 13:15 Lunch

13:15 – 14:45 Representation and the Media:

Alexandrea Keith, Aasiya Lodhi, Anais Makhzoum, Meghan Mills-Amissah — chaired by Rob Waters

14:45 – 15:00 - Break

15:00 – 16:30 BFI - Streaming of *Empire Road* followed by panel discussion

16:30 – 16:45 Closing Remarks

16:45 – 17:45 Drinks Reception

PAPER TITLES

THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2023

Panel One: Early modern Black Britain

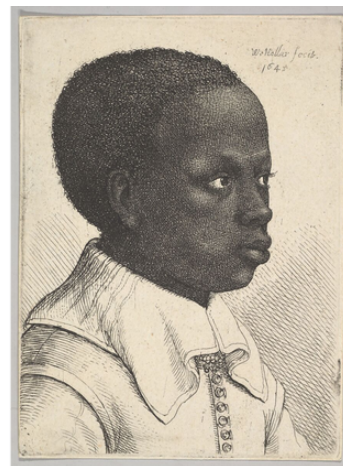
Chair: **Miranda Kaufmann**, author of *Black Tudors* (2017)

Ningfen Wang — *Wenceslaus Hollar and Peter Stent: a case study on interpreting early modern printed representations of black African children*

Hannah Cusworth — *Using autoethnography to explore 'truth': the role of West African knowledge in the British mahogany trade*

Jamie Gemmell — *Reckoning with Race in Early Modern London, 1655-1730*

Jessica Sache and Alan Rice — *Facing the Past: Reimagining narratives*



Wenceslaus Hollar,
Head of a young Black boy (1645)

Panel Two: Politics and Activism

Chair: **Bill Schwarz**, author of *The White Man's World* (2011)

Liam Liburd — *Experience and Analogy: Black British History and British "Fascism"*

Leonard Butingan — *Black Against Borders: Black British Activism and Fortress Europe*

Jamie Banks — *"See Locks, Think Rasta, Blame Ganja": Cannabis Psychosis, Medical "Truth", and the Pathologisation of Black Drug Use in Post-War Britain*

Zainab Abbas, activist and member of the Black Liberation Front in conversation with **A.S. Francis**, author of *Gerlin Bean, Mother of the Movement* (2023)



Neil Kenlock,
c. 1970s

PAPER TITLES

THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2023

Panel Three: Social Histories

Chair: Caroline Bressey, author of *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste* (2017)

Holly Cooper — *Regionality, space, and community in postwar Coventry and Warwickshire*

Marianna Golinucci — *The Issue of Truth: interrogating the archives, recovering Black Scottish voices*

Jessica White — *Where is the Black female typist? Searching for Black women's office work in post-industrial Britain.*



A group of young men jostling in front of the camera, 1977
(Vanley Burke)

Panel Four: History in the Public Realm

Chair: Tej Adeleye, writer, audio producer, arts programmer and trustee of the George Padmore Institute

Weyland McKenzie-Witter, Elizabeth Cooper and Susan Pitter in conversation.



Book launch for *The Poetry of Nicolas Guillen* in the New Beacon Bookshop, March 1976 (GPI)

Panel Five: Scholar activists in conversation

Chair: Aleema Gray, curator and historian of Rastafari in Britain

Hakim Adi, Jade Bentil and Aleema Gray in conversation.

PAPER

TITLES

FRIDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER 2023

Panel Six: Racism within the State

Chair: Hannah Francis, Research Analyst at Runnymede Trust and YHP historian

Ingrid Abrahams — *The Experiences of Black Senior Leaders in Education: Representing their Truth*

Juanita Cox — *Windrush, The Scandal, and Production of History*

Myya Helm — *Voices from the Depths: Illuminating Black Coal Miners' History through Autoethnography*

Anirbaan Banerjee — *"fire, corpus, body, house": Literary and Filmic Counter-Archives of the New Cross Massacre*



Beryl Gilroy, c. 1960s
(The Estate of Beryl Gilroy)

Panel Seven: Representation and the Media

Chair: Rob Waters, author of *Thinking Black* (2018)

Alexandrea Keith — "People just had talent": Black Women's Theatre Activism in London

Aasiya Lodhi — *A Mid-Century War of Position: George Lamming, Stuart Hall and the BBC*

Anais Makhzoum — *Art for truth's sake? Caribbean artists and the notion of "Black Britishness"*

Meghan Mills-Amissah — *Harmonising Histories: Exploring Black British Culture through Hip-Hop Museology and Museum Practice*



Caribbean Artist Movement
Meeting, c. 1960s (GPI)

Panel Eight: British Film Institute (BFI) – Streaming of Empire Road (1978-79)



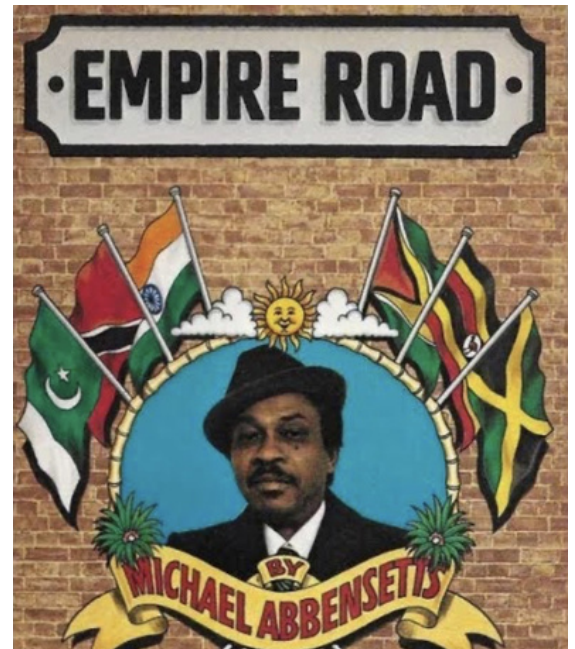
Empire Road is a British television series that was aired by the BBC from 1978 to 1979. It was produced by **Peter Ansorge** and written by **Michael Abbensetts**. Born in Guyana, Abbensetts was the first Black British playwright to be commissioned to write a television drama series.

The series was filmed and set in Handsworth, an inner-city suburb of Birmingham that became the home of many post-war migrants predominantly from the Caribbean and South Asia. It highlights Black life outside of London in a way not commonly seen on British TV.

Cast members of *Empire Road* included **Norman Beaton**, **Corinne Skinner-Carter**, **Wayne Laryea**, **Joseph Marcell**, **Rudolph Walker** and **Rosa Roberts**. It was described as “the Black Coronation Street” and it ran for two series. The second series of the show had an all-Black production unit, a rarity even today.

Empire Road was released at a time where British TV portrayed very few Black characters and oftentimes the representation was tokenistic. Memorable shows from the period include **The Fosters**: the first British sitcom to feature an all Black cast; **Desmond’s**: a sitcom conceived and co-written by **Trix Worrell** in the late 1980s; **The Real McCoy**: a sketch show full of Black and Asian comedic talent in the 1990s.

In this panel we will use *Empire Road* to discuss the ways in which entertainment can be used to influence historical work, as well as the individuals who sought to bring Black life to TV. We will also explore the methods used by visual media to depict the vitality of Black life and the traumatic experiences that shape it, in the past and present.



CONFERENCE BIOGRAPHIES ORGANISERS



Olivia Wyatt (she/her)

Olivia is a PhD student and Teaching Associate at QMUL whose research investigates the politics of complexion within Black British communities throughout the twentieth century. In 2020 she co-organised *From Margins to Centre?: An undergraduate conference on marginalised histories*, supported by the University of York, the RHS and the BME Small Grants Scheme. She has also worked on projects that explore the community activism of Black women in Leeds, the contributions of African women to the British health service (Young Historians Project) and the imperial connections between the Lascelles and the Caribbean (Harewood House Trust). She is a recipient of the Women's History Network MA Dissertation Prize, the Marion Sharples Prize and the ACAP Inspirational Young Person of the Year Award (Yorkshire, 2021).



Deanna Lyncook (she/her)

Deanna Lyncook is a PhD student in History at Queen Mary University of London. Her research takes a transnational approach to the experiences of West Indian children in the British education system in Britain and its Caribbean colonies, in the second half of the 20th Century. She is the founder host of the weekly podcast The History Hotline where she discusses events and individuals that have shaped Black history in Britain and the Caribbean. She has curated an oral history exhibition at the Museum of Methodism and has also worked on historical research projects for the Society for Caribbean Studies, the University of Leeds, BBC Radio London and the Times Radio. She is also a co-ordinator for the Young Historians Project, that works on research projects to document neglected aspects of Black British History.

CONFERENCE

BIOGRAPHIES

PANELISTS



Ningfen Wang (she/her)

Ningfen is a History PhD student from QMUL, with interests in the mediality of printed images and objects, visualisation of intellectual ideas and the migration of images and people. Her PhD thesis explores visual representations of black African boys in intaglio prints in 17th century England.

Hannah Cusworth (she/her)

Hannah is an AHRC funded PhD researcher working in collaboration with English Heritage and the University of Hull. Her work explores the history of mahogany furniture in three London villas, the people who were involved in the Atlantic mahogany trade in the long eighteenth century and the process of researching histories enmeshed in slavery. Hannah was Head of History at a South London secondary school and also works as a freelance consultant for organisations such as the BBC, National Maritime Museum and British Film Institute.

Jamie Gemmell (he/him)

Jamie is a historian of race and power in the early modern Atlantic World. He is a History PhD researcher at King's College London. His current project is a social history of race that works to understand how life in London changed as Britain developed Atlantic systems of racial slavery between 1655 and 1730. This work is particularly focused on London's Black inhabitants. He is also Assistant Editor at the University of Maryland's [Slavery, Law, and Power Project](#) and co-convenor of a [Symposium](#) reflecting on Imtiaz Habib's Black Lives in the English Archives. He is former EIC of [Retrospect Journal](#).

Alan Rice (he/him)

Alan is a Professor in English and American Studies at the University of Central Lancaster. He is the Director of UCLan Research Centre in Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MIDEX) and Co-director of the Institute of Black Atlantic Research (IBAR).

Jessica Sache (she/her)

Jessica is a Digital Archive Project Co-ordinator for Facing the Past.

Liam J. Liburd (he/him)

Liam is Assistant Professor of Black British History at the Durham University. His current research focuses on Black radical analyses of fascism and white supremacy and considers how historians might use these to transform our understanding of the broader politics of race in modern Britain. He is also in the process of trying to turn his thesis - on the relationship between British fascism and the British Empire - into his first book, under the working title: Thinking Imperially: The British White Supremacist Movement and the Politics of Race in Modern Britain.

CONFERENCE BIOGRAPHIES

PANELISTS

Leonard Butingan (he/him)

Leonard is a PhD candidate in history at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His dissertation "Spectres of Empire: Black British Activism and Cultural Politics in Neocolonial Britain 1976-2000," supervised by Dr. Marc Matera, traces the ways in which reparations activists, feminists, queer intellectuals, grassroots activists, literary figures, anti-fortress Europe activists, and houseworkers understood racism, sexism, and homophobia as parts of a neocolonial order, and in relation to Black transnational movements. Butingan believes that historical and other forms of academic research should be used for communal work and not limited to the ivory tower. He currently works with Grassroots Black Left, a British based multi-generational anti-racist coalition of African, Caribbean, and Asian thinkers and activists.

Dr. Jamie Banks (he/him)

Jamie is a teaching fellow in the Centre for the History of Medicine, at the University of Warwick. His current research project, initially funded by a Wellcome Trust ISSF grant, explores the social and cultural histories of cannabis use in post-war Britain. His first publication - about the history of cannabis, mental illness, and migration in the Colonial Caribbean - was shortlisted for the 2022 Royal Historical Society's Alexander Prize. He currently co-holds a SSHM/Wellcome Trust grant with Dr Peder Clark, for the ECR network JOINT. He is also writing up outputs for a Social and Cultural History Society BME Activities Small Grant, co-held with Dr Jess White, to help catalogue the periodical collections of the George Padmore Institute.

Zainab Abbas (she/her)

Zainab is an activist within various organisations in the UK Black Power movement. She was the International Secretary of the Black Liberation Front. A leading protagonist for women's rights and social change in Britain, Abbas was also a member of the Brixton Black Women's Group, a foundational Black Feminist organisation in Britain. During the 1970s she also worked within the medical administration to raise awareness for Sickle Cell Anaemia and to improve conditions for NHS staff.

A.S. Francis (she/they)

A.S. Francis is a PhD student researching women's involvements in Britain's Black radical organisations during the 1960s-1980s, and the development of a Black women's movement. In addition to this PhD research, Francis is in the process of writing a book celebrating the longstanding and far-reaching activism of Gerlin Bean, which will be published in October 2023 as part of LW's Radical Black Women series. Francis is also a consultant to the [Young Historians Project](#), member of the [History Matters collective](#) and co-founder of the [History Matters Journal](#).



CONFERENCE BIOGRAPHIES PANELISTS



Holly Cooper (they/them)

Holly is a queer, disabled, black British historian. They are halfway through their first year of DPhil studies at the University of Oxford, currently researching community histories of the outer-inner city, focusing on Coventry and Warwickshire. Their DPhil is supervised by Dr. Meleisa Ono-George and funded by the University of Oxford Black Academic Futures scholarship. They are a Royal Historical Society Postgraduate Member, as well as an experienced researcher, currently working on the Oxford/UCL project "A portrait of the teaching of Empire, Migration and Belonging in English secondary schools". They recently obtained their MA Black British History at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2022, and their BA History from the University of Lincoln in 2020.

Marianna Golinucci (she/her)

Marianna is a third-year PhD student at the University of Glasgow in the Centre for Gender History, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Scottish Graduate School. Combining archival documents, oral histories and literary sources, her research investigates the multifaceted experiences of activism (campaigning groups, cultural associations, community work, politically motivated literary production) of women of African and Asian descent in 1970s-1990s Scotland. Marianna obtained a two-year master's degree in Modern, Post-Colonial and Comparative Literatures from the University of Bologna in 2020.

Jessica White (she/her)

Dr Jessica White is a lecturer in Black British history at the University of Liverpool. Her research focuses on the intersections of race and gender in post-war Britain.

Susan Pitter (she/her)

Born in Leeds to Jamaican parents, Susan is a heritage producer with a background in communications in the cultural, private and public sectors in the UK and Jamaica. Susan's work with Jamaica Society Leeds has seen her curate the 2019 Eulogy exhibition on the lives of first-generation Jamaicans. In 2020 she was named one of eight National Lottery Heritage Champions whose images were superimposed on Stonehenge in recognition of their heritage work and remains committed to illuminating under-represented, under-valued narratives of the Black British experience. In 2022/23 she directed the Society's Out of Many Festival for which she curated two exhibitions; Rebellion to Romance on the lives of second-generation West Indians coming of age in 1970s and 80s Leeds and For King, Country & Home exploring the lives of the city's West Indian WWII RAF service men and their families. The ambitious festival programmed international names from visual arts, literature and music alongside community participation with equal importance.

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Elizabeth Cooper (she/her)

I am currently a freelance lecturer, researcher and curator. My work as a scholar within and outside the academy has focused on the changing limits and possibilities of freedom in the Atlantic World during the 19th and 20th centuries – through specific explorations and interventions into the histories of labour, racism and popular culture in the post emancipation Black Atlantic. My curatorial work includes the critically acclaimed *Windrush: Songs in a Strange Land* (British Library, 2018) and *Sowing Roots* (Garden Museum, 2021-22). Instigating public conversations around history, culture and belonging is at the core of my teaching, scholarship and curatorial work.

Weyland McKenzie-Witter (he/him)

Weyland is the founder and director of the NELLO. NELLO's multimedia archive project, *Assata's Chant and Other Histories* is out now. Weyland is an award nominated multidisciplinary Audio Artist, Creative producer and writer from London, whose work focuses on using creative productions as a means of telling suppressed history. As an audio producer he has produced on *Small Axe: The Podcast* the companion for Steve McQueen's award-winning series, Spotify's award winning series *Decode*, BBC's *Who Was Michael X*, *The Echoic Archive* for Somerset House, as well developing and presenting *The Black and The Green* a BBC Radio 4 doc on climate change. Weyland was a development producer on the guardian *Cotton Capital*. He was nominated for the "Best New Producer" award at the 2021 Audio Production Awards.

Jade Bentil (she/her)

Jade is a writer and DPhil researcher in History at the University of Oxford. Situated in Black feminist thought, her scholarship uses oral history methodologies to centre the experiences of Black women of African and Caribbean descent in Britain and their long history of rebellion. Jade's debut book, *REBEL CITIZEN*, uses oral history interviews to explore the lived experiences of Black women who migrated to Britain following the Second World War and is forthcoming from Allen Lane.

Hakim Adi (he/him)

Hakim is a Professor of the History of Africa and the African Diaspora and is currently one of the few historians specialising in this field. He developed the History Matters initiative and journal and co-founded the Young Historians Project where he is a consultant historian. He founded the MRes History of Africa and the African Diaspora at University of Chichester in 2017. However, the course was recently suspended despite its uniqueness, popularity and the public outcry that followed the announcement. His many publications focus on the history of the African Diaspora in Britain, the influence of Communism and Pan-Africanism on anti-colonial activism. Recent publications include an edited collection of essays titled *'Many Struggles'* (2023) and *'African and Caribbean people in Britain A History'* (2022) which has been shortlisted for the prestigious Wolfson award (2023).

CONFERENCE BIOGRAPHIES PANELISTS



Dr Aleema Gray (she/her)

Dr Aleema is a Jamaican-born curator, researcher and public historian based in London. She was awarded the Yesu Persaud Scholarship for her PhD entitled *Bun Babylon; A community-engaged history of Rastafari in Britain*. Aleema's work focuses on documenting Black history in Britain through the perspective of lived experiences. Her practice is driven by a concern for more historically contingent ways of understanding the present, especially in relation to notions of belonging, memory, and contested heritage. She is the founding member of the Young Historians Project and is currently the Lead Curator for Black British Music Exhibition at the British Library.

Ingrid Abrahams (she/her)

Ingrid is a second year PhD student in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. She has taught in Birmingham secondary schools for over 35 years working across a variety of roles from teacher to Executive Head teacher. She was also an Ofsted inspector focussing on teaching and learning and curriculum.

Juanita Cox (she/her)

Dr Juanita Cox completed her PhD in Caribbean Studies at the University of Birmingham in 2013 and is a recipient of the R E Bradbury Award. She is currently a Research Fellow working on a 3-year AHRC-funded project, 'The Windrush Scandal in its Transnational and Commonwealth Context', at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. In 2017, she co-founded the ground-breaking series, Guyana SPEAKS, a key monthly event in the calendar of the London-based Guyanese diaspora. She is also a trustee on the board of the Oral History Society.

Myya Helm (she/they)

Myya Helm (she/they) is a first-year History and Welsh History Ph.D. student at the Cardiff University School of History, Archaeology, and Religion. She received a bachelor's degree in political science and international studies from West Virginia University in West Virginia, USA. As a British Marshall Scholar, she is interested in comparatively analyzing racial identity, racial discrimination, and the working-class exclusion of Black coal miners in predominantly white coal mining communities.

Anirbaan Banerjee (he/him)

Anirbaan Banerjee is a PhD candidate in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. His dissertation project studies how inter-diasporic relations were negotiated between Black and Asian diasporas in the print and visual cultures of post-1945 Britain, and situates these negotiations within global discourses of racial justice circulating during the twentieth-century movements for decolonization.

CONFERENCE **BIOGRAPHIES** PANELISTS



Alexandrea Keith (she/her)

Alex Keith is a History doctoral candidate at Northwestern University. Her research interests include Black Women's Histories, Black arts activism, and Black internationalism. Her dissertation juxtaposes the cultural politics of two Black theatre groups: the Kuumba Theatre Workshop in Chicago, Illinois, and the Negro Theatre Workshop in London, England during the late 20th century. She studies the evolution of the cultural politics of both groups from their foundings to their participations in either the First or Second World Black Arts Festival in Africa. She also serves as the Graduate Student Advisor for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship where she mentors undergraduate students of colour. Prior to graduate school, Alex graduated with majors in History and African and African American Studies from Dartmouth College.

Aasiya Lodhi (she/her)

Aasiya Lodhi is a Senior Lecturer in Media at the University of Westminster. She is currently writing a book on the mediation of colonial ideologies in Britain and post-war BBC Radio. In 2022 Aasiya led an AHRC-funded project on race, gender and archival erasure, tied to the BBC's centenary – Reclaiming a Lost Past: Black British Women, Visibility and the BBC.

Anaïs Makhzoum (she/her)

I'm a 1st year PhD student at the UPJV (Amiens, France), and I work on the articulation of cultural policies / cultural diplomacy and the politics of identity and memory through Commonwealth (re)presentations in selected London-based museums and galleries. I have a double Master's in Research and Teaching in Anglophone Studies from the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. I was a Visiting Research Fellow with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London and I am a Visiting Research Student at King's College London.

Meghan Mills-Amissah (she/her)

Meghan is a Ph.D. student in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. Her doctoral research is funded by the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities and looks at Black British Popular Culture and its relationship within UK Museums and wider diaspora.

CONFERENCE BIOGRAPHIES PANELISTS





Dr Michelle Yaa Asantewa

Dr Michelle Yaa Asantewa is a writer, independent scholar and cultural consultant. She is the co-founder of Way Wive Wordz Publishing, Editing and Tuition Services, a multidisciplinary platform of specialising in cultural educational, creative expression and academic development. Her books include the young adult novel *Elijah, The Awakening* and other Poems, *Guyanese Komfa: the ritual art of Trance*, *Something Buried in the yard*, *Mama Lou Tales: a folkloric biography of a Guyanese Elder*. Dr Asantewa delivers courses and workshops in creative writing, on Black Writers/literature, African History and culture. She is editor and publisher of *In Search of Mami Wata: Narratives and Images of African Water Spirits* (2020).

Craig Riley (he/him)

Craig Riley is a designer and founder of studioRILEY. After more than twenty five years at a leading interpretative design firm, where he was a Director leading national and international projects, Craig set up his own practice to pursue the design of objects and spaces and experiences. With the help of Michelle Yaa Asantewa, Craig led an effort, with support of family, to have his Uncle, Michael Abbensetts recognised for his contribution to British Culture - as playwright and screenwriter - with an official Nubian Jak Community Trust blue plaque. As part of the campaign, various archive materials were collected from family, friends and colleagues and the next step is to bring this together to create the Michael Abbensetts Archive.





We would like to extend our sincerest thank you to all those who have worked with us to convene this conference.

We are grateful to all our panelists, chairs and speakers who have given up their time to present their work and share in wider conversation about the issue of truth and representation within Black British History.

With thanks to the History department at Queen Mary University of London, the Chabreja Centre for Historical Studies at Northwestern University, the Institute of Historical Research and the British Film Institute.