



South West Dorset Multicultural Network Newsletter

January 2008

Black history month events

Bill Drayton - From slavery to reconciliation

Bill Drayton is a direct descendant of two slave-owning families from Charleston in South Carolina. His great-great grandfather, Theodore Drayton Grimke, left the States shortly before the Civil War of 1861-1865.

Bill came to the Corn Exchange in Dorchester and gave a talk about his own personal journey to reconcile his Christian faith with knowledge that his family had in the past been slave owners.

Bill has visited the site of the family plantation, met with his Afro Caribbean relations and has researched his family's background, discovering two famous abolitionists, as well as slave owners. His talk was about his own personal journey, and how he is now campaigning so that modern day slavery is also recognised, and challenged.

The evening ended with a friendship drum circle facilitated by Kofi Leo of Abeng Music.



www.dorsetforyou.com/multicultural-network

Produced by the Community Enabling Division

Working for West Dorset

Multi Cultural celebration success



The Black History Month celebration day was a great success, with over 100 adults and children who came to participate in the event, workshops and performances and find out more about Black history. The aim of the event was to celebrate Black history in the UK and the important contribution black and ethnic minority people make to our multicultural society.

The day was launched by the Mayor of Dorchester and followed with a poetry reading by Louise Adjoa Parker from her critically acclaimed collection 'Salt, Sweat and Tears' which explores issues of racism in the West Country. Louise brought copies of her latest publication 'Black History in Dorset' researched in collaboration with the organisation DEED.

Adults and children enjoyed the drumming and storytelling by Noah Messomo. Music, workshops, art and African food was served up by the Ifa Yarouba Contemporary Trust and the Soundbite Café. Further children's activities were provided by West Dorset District Council's Action Van, which can be hired for community events. Black women were celebrated in an exhibition organised by Kofi Leo of Abeng Music and Ross Morrison ran a Black History workshop.

Despite a rainy Saturday, everyone had a great time - It was fantastic opportunity to meet people, try different food and activities in a welcoming environment. Feedback collected on the day from both adults and children was really positive, the adults enjoyed meeting different people, looking at the stalls and thought it was an inspiring and important event to hold, good comments were also given on how to improve the event for future years. The children liked the drumming, learning circus skills (diablo and juggling) face painting, sweets and just about everything.

For more information on future events view www.dorsetforyou.com/multicultural-network. If you can volunteer for events - let us know - Call Sue on 01305 252204.

Who's Who in West Dorset



Each edition we will be focussing on a resident from West Dorset from a black or minority ethnic background. This edition we are delighted to have interviewed **Louisa Adjoa Parker**, who gave such an interesting talk at our AGM, and gave a poetry reading at the Multi Cultural celebration for Black History Month.

Louisa, do you come from Dorset originally? If not, how long have you lived here, and what prompted you to make the move?

I was born in South Yorkshire, then moved to Cambridgeshire until I was 12, then to South Devon. I've always lived in predominantly white areas and this was even more pronounced when I moved to Devon. When I was 19; I moved to Lyme Regis as my Mum had come to live with a partner here and I wanted a change. It was a great place to bring my daughter up, with lots of space and the beautiful beaches.

Have you enjoyed living in West Dorset, what are the good and bad things about living in a rural area?

I have enjoyed living here but at first I didn't feel welcome because of my skin colour, and also I was aware that I was a single Mum and there was a lot of negative press about us at the time. So I felt doubly categorised and discriminated against. It took a long time to build my confidence in myself as a person, and to feel I belonged. I do feel accepted now, and people seem to have more respect for me because I've educated myself and developed my writing.

The bad things about living here are the lack of anything! Multiculturalism, work, interesting events, shops, bars and so on. Now I'm older I feel more settled living in the countryside without these things, and have had to create my own work. I think people are ignorant about diversity and this is something that all minority people face on a daily basis. I believe that most people here don't mean to be racist, but lack the knowledge or experience to behave appropriately when they meet people from different backgrounds to their own.

I love the countryside, fresh air, landscapes - they are beautiful - the coastline, the lack of people....I could go on! We really are very lucky to live in such a great part of the world, and when I go to cities, it brings it home to me. I love travelling around and going to new places, but always glad to come back to my quiet little seaside town. I don't think I'll stay here for ever, but it will always be my home.

What prompted you to start writing poetry; did you have any early influences and when did you have your first piece published?

I first wrote poetry as a young child - I have one piece pinned to my fridge! I also wrote hundreds of adventure stories. As a teenager I wrote a diary for several years, recording my life in great detail. I am hoping to publish these if I can get any interest as I believe it is a unique testimony of a mixed heritage girl in a seaside town in the Eighties - life was hard. I didn't write at all for several years then began to write articles and poems when I went back to education, and it just went from there. I think writing has changed my life, and my sense of self. It is therapy, pure and simple. It makes me so happy to be able to express my feelings that I tried to brush off for a large part of my life. I have always been an avid reader and have spent many happy hours escaping into the world of words. Words are art to me.

The first piece I had published was about five or six years ago with a new magazine, Coffee House Poetry, and I felt so proud to have done this. I kept writing poetry and got feedback from others, and eventually I realised it was more than just a hobby. I want to be able to reach people and make them laugh and cry and feel inspired like others have made me feel.

Your writing on black history in Dorset is extremely well researched and written. How difficult has it been to find sources of information?

To start with you often have 'leads' and chase them, like piecing a detective story together! I gathered loads of material from a wide range of sources and then start to write it up. I had some help from another writer, Sean Creighton, who sent me snippets of info. Also the Dorset History Centre looked out for interesting references. general books on the slave trade and black history are useful when you have specific manes to look for. Many local history books, if you read them from cover to cover, have little snippets too. It is a patchy business as you're starting from scratch - this work is new in Dorset. I've found talking to people helpful as well, and really enjoyed gathering the research.

What has the reaction to the hidden histories exhibition been? Have people been surprised to discover the extent of Black History in Dorset

There's been a great response to the project, with a lot of interest and people are really surprised to learn that we have this history here. I hope people feel empowered by this, as I do. When you know your history and what happened with Britain and the countries we colonised, you can't see the present in the same way - its been shaped by the past in so many ways and Black and Asian people amongst others played a huge part in the development of the West. All the things that go on today - anti-immigration, scapegoating and so on - are often a continuation of what's happened in the past.

Louisa's poem 'Rag Doll' has been chosen to be included in the Forward Book of Poetry 2008. Louisa's book, 'Dorset's Hidden Histories'. Is available through DEED Priced £8.95 Contact: DEED Tel: 01202 739 422 Email: Info@ deed.org.uk www.deed.org.uk

Forthcoming Events

Holocaust Memorial Day - 25 January 2008

The South West Dorset Multi Cultural Network will once again be hosting a free event marking Holocaust Memorial Day on Friday January 25th 2008, at the Corn Exchange, High West Street Dorchester, 12.30pm - 1.30pm

The event includes a dance choreographed to highlight the effects of bullying, and also includes contributions from Dorset school and college pupils, as well as a variety of stands and displays. Please join us on this important day.

Giant Bird Table Watch - Arne Nature Reserve

Come along and learn to identify birds using binoculars and telescopes at Arne Farm. Watch a variety of garden and farmland birds feeding on our giant bird table. Get advice on identifying them and find out how you can take part in Big Garden Birdwatch. Meet at RSPB Arne nature reserve car park, Near Wareham, Dorset 11am - 3.00pm

Puss in Boots - Bridport Pantomime Players

Electric Palace Bridport 22nd -26th January 2008 -

Contact Jo Hawker 01308 - 424957

February Half Term - Sherborne Museum

Free workshops for children - Monday 18th make a 3D backdrop for the new season window display based on Sherborne Abbey with artist Darrell Wakelam. Tuesday 19th amazing musical instruments with Nick Crump. Wednesday 20th Thomas Hardy drama workshop with Caroline Hart-call for details : Judy Nash 01935 872667 email info@sherbornemuseum.co.uk

Dorset Women's Day - 8 March 2008

A free event to mark International Women's Day organised by WAND (Women's Action Network Dorset) This years theme is Dorset women and food - lots of fun for women and families - men also invited! Saturday 8th March Bridport area venue to be finalised. Look out for details mid February.

Swanage Blues Festival - 7 March 2008

A celebration of The Blues in all its forms - rural, urban, electric and acoustic in a variety of indoor venues around the delightful seaside town of Swanage, Dorset. Contact Swanage TIC 01929 422885

Help for insulating your home and heating improvements

Insulation and Heating improvements are available from:

The Government - for people who are on certain statutory benefits and own their own home or rent from a private landlord. This scheme may install measures (subject to conditions) for heating and improving insulation up to a maximum of £2700.00 (or £4000.00 for oil central heating).

Energy providers - for all people who own their home or rent from a private landlord and regardless of savings, income or which company you use. Measures provided, where appropriate, are Cavity Wall and Loft Insulation. If you are not on a prescribed statutory benefit you will have a contribution towards the subsidised cost of the works.

Advice on how to apply: Contact Dorset Energy Advice Centre on freephone 0800 512012

Gryphon Leisure Centre in Sherborne offers the best in health and leisure

A friendly and happy place to come and exercise, we offer exercise to music classes, a fully air conditioned fitness suite, badminton and squash courts as well as an artificial pitch for hockey and football bookings. There are activities for children and adults, which should offer something for everyone.

Memberships or casual "pay as you play" options make the centres activities accessible to all.

The Centre offers concession to over 60's, under 16s, all those in full time education/training, the disabled and those continuing from exercise prescription. Bring this newsletter to the Centre in Sherborne and receive a 10% discount on an induction to the fitness suite or a half price court or exercise to music class.

For further information you can call our reception on 01935 8141011 or visit our website on

www.dorsetforyou.com/gryphonlc

How to keep in touch with the Network

If this is not your own copy of the newsletter, you can request your own edition by calling Sue Bickle on 01305 252204

You can also become a voting member of the network and take part in consultation by requesting a membership form (membership is free.) You can also find out about events and activities by visiting our web page: www.dorsetforyou.com/multicultural-network