

Colville

community history project issue 2 March 2013



Mosley and Michael X Local Horrible History Talks



Tuesday May 7 5.30-7.30pm Oswald Mosley The North Kensington Leader featuring Mark Olden, Cathi Unsworth and 58 Riot Westway TV film In 1959

Mosley stood as the fascist Union Movement candidate for North Kensington, at the time of the racist murder of Kelso Cochrane in Kensal. Mark Olden, the author of *Murder in Notting Hill*, speaks about his investigation into the Cochrane case, and Cathi Unsworth reads from her novel *Bad Penny Blues*, featuring a scene set in the Mosley election rally that took place outside the library.



Tuesday June 4 5.30-7.30pm Michael X The British Malcolm slideshow by Tom Vague and Royal Babylon film by Heathcote Williams Michael de Freitas

aka Michael X and Michael Abdul Malik, hustler, pimp, Rachman associate landlord, community activist, Black Power leader, Carnival founder, hippy, friend of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, murderer; 'a Trinidadian boy who came to England and became the man he was in the hothouse atmosphere of Notting Hill, and that doesn't say it all but most of it.' Mike Phillips, *Notting Hill in the 60s*

North Kensington Library

108 Ladbrooke Grove W11 1PZ Free—book a seat at the library
020 7361 3010 libraries@rbkc.gov.uk www.rbkc.gov.uk/libraries twitter.com/rbkclibraries

May/June



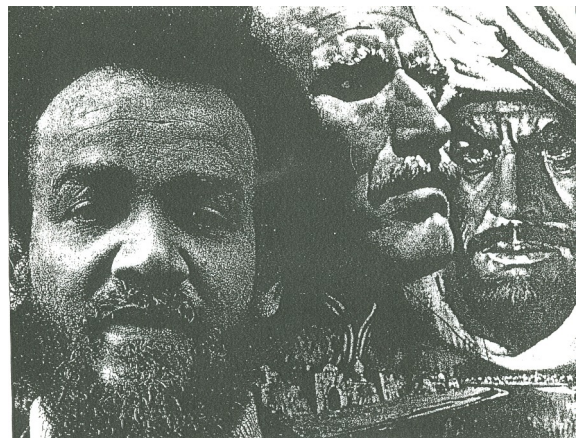
Tuesday May 7 5.30-7.30pm Oswald Mosley The North Kensington Leader featuring Mark Olden, Cathi Unsworth and 58 Riot film by Westway TV

The least sympathetic character of the four major Colvillians, who should have met the same fate as Christie and Michael X. Yet, on his appearance at the Earl of Portobello pub in Kensal (then the Earl of Warwick), shortly after the 1958 race riots, he was greeted with a resounding chorus of 'For He's A Jolly Good Fellow'. In the 30s there was local street fighting between the Colville communists and Mosley's Black-shirts from Harrow Road, when the latter held a pro-Mussolini rally at the junction of Portobello and Blenheim Crescent—at the time of the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia (then Abyssinia). Mosley's Union Movement election campaign HQ in 1959 was on Kensington Park Road opposite the synagogue, which was subsequently daubed with swastikas. After appearing at well-attended street meetings around the area, he came last in the election. The Union Movement newsletter was called *The North Kensington Leader*.

Tuesday May 21 History of Colville slideshow talk Adult Learners Week from the London Free School to the Colville Community History Project **October Black History Month** Amy Ashwood-Garvey, Rhaune Laslett and the 1966 Carnival, and the Claudia Jones 1963 anti-racism march from Ladbroke Grove to the US embassy.

The Colville ward of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, containing most of Portobello market and Notting Hill Carnival, is bounded by Ladbroke Grove to the west, the Westway to the north, St Luke's Road/Ledbury Road to the east, and Ladbroke Gardens/Westbourne Grove to the south. The area was known locally as the Town, as opposed to the Dale to the west. In the middle ages it was part of the manor of Notting Barns, which passed from the feudal landlords, the de Vere Earls of Oxford, to Margaret Countess of Richmond, Westminster Abbey, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Lord Burghley, Walter Cope, the Anderson family and, at some point in the 18th century, the Talbots.

Tuesday June 4 5.30-7.30pm Michael X The British Malcolm slideshow by Tom Vague, Royal Babylon film by Heathcote Williams and discussion In *Royal Babylon*, Heathcote Williams asks 'Who killed Michael X?' and points the finger at Elizabeth Windsor aka Queen Elizabeth II, for signing his death warrant in 1975. Michael went to the gallows in Port of Spain, Trinidad for the murder of Gale Benson and Joe Skerrett. In *The Bank Job* film Gale Benson is an MI5/6 agent, infiltrating Michael's RAAS movement to prevent him blackmailing the state with Princess Margaret sex photos. After his demise 'MICHAEL X' graffiti appeared on the Ladbroke Grove railway bridge and the wall around Buckingham Palace. However, his former associate Darcus Howe says his execution was the only decent thing the corrupt Trinidadian government of the time did. Michael was involved with most things in the 60s, in one way or another, most notably co-founding Notting Hill Carnival with Rhaune Laslett in 1966.



For a hundred years, the Colville area was Portobello farmland and the fields were known as Barley Shotts, then in the late 1840s the fields became the Portobello Pleasure Gardens and staged horse races, fairs, concerts and hot-air balloon launches. The Powis and Arundel street names are thought to be derived from the other titles of the Talbot Earls of Shrewsbury; but could also be from the developer WK Jenkins, who hailed from Hereford on the Welsh border and came up with the local street names from that region. The Welsh were also one of the first ethnic communities in the area.

Colville is probably named after the general Sir Charles Colville (1770-1843), who fought against Napoleon in the Peninsular War and the Waterloo campaign, was later Governor of Mauritius, and also gave his name to the colvillea bush. Sir Charles was a member of the Colville of Culross clan. Colville is a Norman name, meaning castle on a hill, probably derived from the town of Colville between Caen and Bayeux in Normandy.

Colville Community History Project

contact tomvague@gmail.com www.vaguerants.org.uk

History of Colville 1860s-1960s

'In Powis Square in the 1920s the first black members of the community settled. But principally the people were Russian Polish and Jewish immigrants, as well as Irish, sometimes 'immigrants' from different parts of England—the depressed areas, Lancashire and others. Many of the people who lived there became legends, people who made their names into real folk myths. Eccentrics, mad-men, political radicals, poets and artists: Chicago Kate (who lived in Basing Road), the Englisher (a British born Jew), the Presser (the quiet communist theoretician), Schmooser, the best dancer in Notting Hill. Stallholders in Portobello Road for generations, many of them still represented; Rosie, an Irish woman who kept a vegetable stall and who spoke fluent Yiddish.' Dave Robins *Notting Hill Interzone International Times* 30 May 1968

The Powis and Colville squares were built in the 1860s as upper-middle class residences, but are said to have gone into an immediate social decline, and by the 1880s some were already sub-divided into flats. The estate was sold to Edward Strutt and Hickman Bacon, who formed the Colville Estate Limited. On Charles Booth's 1900s poverty and prosperity map the Colville squares are still solidly well-to-do orange. The ward on the whole is a pretty even mix of well-to-do, fairly comfortable, poverty and comfort mixed, and moderate poverty, with a few very poor blue mews streets and one wealthy yellow row on Ladbrooke Gardens. Despite its subsequent decline and gentrification, Colville was much the same leaving the 20th century—apart from the mews.

25 Powis Square 1900s



Powis Square's multicultural reputation was established in the 19th century by 'the Wren College' for the Indian civil service, and the accompanying boarding houses 'occupied by men of Oriental birth', which acquired the square the nickname 'Little India'. The first celebrity resident was Princess Clemence Bonaparte, the widow of Napoleon's nephew Louis Lucien, who lived at 2 Powis Square at the turn of the 20th century. By the 1930s, the Powis and Colville squares were described as 'largely a slum area turned into one-room tenements', with a quarter of the properties un-let.

When Mark Strutt inherited the Colville estate in 1948 he found "there wasn't a cupboard that didn't have somebody living in it... The houses had been sub-let and sub-sub-let without our consent, and they were filled with prostitutes, burglars, murderers and negroes." Strutt concluded that the 'escalating costs could only be covered by being ruthless', and sold the estate. In 1955 around a hundred Colville properties came into the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel George Sinclair, about a third of which were farmed out to Peter Rachman.

As the go ahead was given for recruitment from the West Indies to ease the post-war labour shortage, London landlords became notorious for displaying 'Flat to Let' notices amended with 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs'. But it wasn't long before some landlords began to cater for the new black housing market. Through such pioneers as Sam Selvon, the author of *The Lonely Londoners*, a West Indian community sprang up around Powis Square amidst the existing racial mix of Irish, eastern European Jewish, Cypriot and Maltese. As more West Indians and Africans sought accommodation in the area, housing exploitation escalated with rooms being split into sections and people sleeping in shifts.

Hedgegate Court on Powis Terrace became the first and most notorious Rachman slum as he acquired most of the street; closely followed by St Stephen's Gardens to the east. The other Colville Rachman houses were 31, 32, 44 and 45 Powis Square, 3, 4, 6 and 7 Powis Gardens, 20, 22, 27, 28 and 29 Colville Road, 2, 9, 10, 19, 22 and 24 Colville Terrace, and 90 Lancaster Road.

By the late 50s about 7,000 black people had settled in Notting Hill, mostly in the Colville area which was then known as 'Brown Town'. In most accounts, conditions deteriorated after Rachman handed over control of houses to black sub-landlords, and things really fell apart as his former henchmen tried to wring a profit out of the deteriorating slums.

With most local pubs unwelcoming, West Indian hustlers developed their own scene consisting of various types of clubs; after-hours drinking clubs, basement-clubs for day-time gambling, rent parties, and the most famous, blues, clubs, dances or parties, named after the Blaupunkt radio-gramophone, rather than blues music. Blues dance music went from jazz, calypso and Jamaican rhythm 'n' blues, through ska and rocksteady to dub reggae. The first is said to have been in the basement of Fullerton's, the tailors on Talbot Road, where Duke Vin was the selector. Then Bajy opened a café and cellar-club (which must have become the Globe) and the Montparnasse was further along Talbot Road. On Powis Square, the Rachman basement flat of Michael de Freitas hosted a residency of the jazz pianist Wilfred Woodley. Along Westbourne Park Road there was the Number 51, Fiesta and Calypso, and Colville Terrace featured Sheriff's gym club and the Barbadians' blues.

The Jamaican tailor Clifford Fullerton, who arrived on the Windrush in 1948 and set up shop on Talbot Road in the early 50s, has unusually fond memories of the rock'n'roll years in his *Multi-racial North Kensington* recollection:

"The best times for the shop were the 50s. All the fellows wanted a hand-made suit, mostly West Indians and we worked a lot with the Teddy boys. At that time Teddy boys used to be well-dressed." The site of Fullerton's is currently occupied by Raoul's restaurant.

Blues clubs are now celebrated for transforming Notting Hill from a dreary slum into the heart of multicultural London, but at the time they were generally not appreciated. After the 1958 riots stemmed from noise complaints about them, the clubs played an integral part in the formation of the first tenants' associations, the Profumo affair and counter-culture. At the height of the trouble in '58, white rioters surged out of Notting Dale across Ladbroke Grove into Colville to besiege Rachman's black ghetto, smashing windows of West Indian houses and cafés. Molotov cocktails were thrown as West Indians fought back from the Calypso club, on the corner of Ledbury and Westbourne Park Road, and Totobag's café at 9 Blenheim Crescent.



The Colville Hotel Charlie Phillips

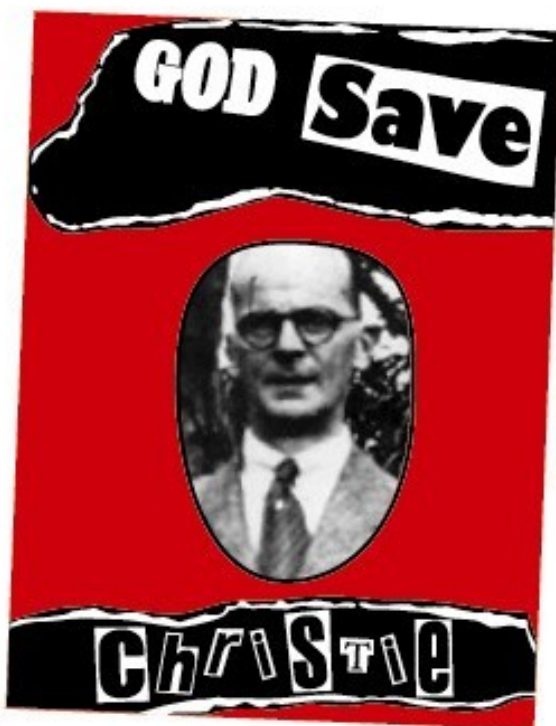
Black people did soon establish a presence in local pubs, most notably the Colville Hotel at 186 Portobello Road on the corner of Talbot Road. The Irish/West Indian local, known affectionately by the latter as 'the Pisshouse', was frequented by the *Absolute Beginners* author Colin MacInnes and famously photographed by Charlie Phillips. After becoming a bikers' pub and hosting a Class War conference in the 80s, it was revamped as the Colville Rose and then the First Floor bar/restaurant. In the early 90s the bar appeared as the rave scene local in *London Kills Me*, and in 2007 it was reconverted into a 60s pub for scenes in *Hippie Hippie Shake*.

Colville Community History Project

contact tomvague@gmail.com www.vaguerants.org.uk

NOTTING HILL HORRIBLE HISTORY TALKS

Rachman Febuary 26th Christie March 5th 5.30 -7.30pm



North Kensington Library 108 Ladbroke Grove W11

GOD Save



The Library