

# GEORGE PADMORE INSTITUTE

## NEWSLETTER NO 13 - DECEMBER 2008

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*The time just flies when you're having fun and it's hard to believe that we are nearly at the end of our two-year Crossing Borders Archive Project already as the end of 2008 approaches. As ever, staff and volunteers alike have been kept busy with events, archive work and plans for the future, but we're also really pleased with the progress we have made. Our thanks go out to the committed band of people who have continued the Institute's work so enthusiastically as we look forward to one of our most challenging projects yet – taking on the archives of our late and much-missed founder, John La Rose.*

### **The Crossing Borders Archive Project**

The *Crossing Borders Archive Project* started in November 2006, focusing on the archives of the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books (1982-95) and of European Action for Racial Equality and Social Justice. Project Archivist Sarah Garrod is working hard to complete the project by deadline date January 2009, aided and abetted by a motley crew of volunteers – Hannah Baker, Margaret Chevis, Zuleika Dobson, Janice Durham, Wole La Rose and Sarah White. Together the team have worked wonders on these collections, which we aim to add to the website catalogue in 2009.

During this time a number of patient freelancers – Hannah Baker, Maya Garcia de Vinuesa, Usha Harte, Nisha Jones, Celia Macey, Nicole Moore and Teresa Palmiero – have also been transcribing some of those inspiring forums held throughout the Book Fairs, ranging from discussions on Carnival to radical publishing, from political debates on the crisis in the Caribbean to the impact of new technologies. And Roxy Ade Harris has been digitising some of those forums too, so we can make available in an audio format, for example, the amazing voice of C L R James opening the first Book Fair in 1982. Thanks so much to our volunteers, staff and freelance workers for helping to open up the Book Fair archives.

### **The Imperial War Museum Partnership**

The GPI was one of three partners in *Journeys of Change Two* (September 2007- March 2008), a project led by the Imperial War Museum (IWM) to help build partnerships between museums, archives and young people from local communities. Museum Educator Sarita Mamsari and Sarah Garrod (Archivist at the GPI) worked with two groups of students, one from the Kokayi Supplementary School, Islington and the other from the John Loughborough School, Tottenham. Choosing an object from the IWM as a starting point, each group traced their own journey of investigation to discover how black communities had been affected by conflict during the 20th century. Students gained practical experience working in museums and archives as well as learning to research and debate history. Highlights of the project included a panel discussion with Roxy Harris and Winston Best plus some splendid artwork including pictures of John La Rose, Cy Grant, a Lancaster Bomber, Caribbean men arriving at Tilbury and a poem about John La Rose.

The work produced by the students will be housed in the IWM archives. The project was challenging but fulfilling and it was a joy to see youngsters absorbing so much information. Few had had the opportunity to visit the IWM before and we hope to be able to welcome students back to the GPI archives in the future. Participation has helped us to forge links with local schools and has also secured us an ongoing relationship with the IWM as they seek to broaden their pool of resources for teaching black history. See [www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/88/website/index.html](http://www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/88/website/index.html) for a

full overview of the project. A micro site of the project also features as part of the current *From War to Windrush* exhibition at the IWM (finishes 29 March 2009).

### **GPI Generation**

GPI Generation is a new group at the GPI that encourages participation from young people and anyone new in the activities of the Institute. In 2006 they showed the film *Dream to Change the World* to a group of young people and held a discussion about their responses to John La Rose's legacy and their own lives and work. In March 2008 GPI Generation held a showing of Dave Chappelle's *Block Party* with a post-film discussion. In June the group met and formalised their intention of running a videography project and film club. The first person they intend to interview on film will be Irma La Rose, long-standing Trustee of the Institute and political activist. Irma was born in Venezuela and was a member of the radical Youth Council in the Caribbean, attending the World Youth Conference in Romania. She was involved in campaigning for independence in colonial Trinidad and other activist work. If you're interested in joining GPI Generation please email Remi Harris at [remi\\_harris@lycos.com](mailto:remi_harris@lycos.com)

### **Public Events**

As ever, the GPI has put on an eclectic mix of public events through 2008. The year started with a public launch of our new website, which had been managed by Jon Hadley from Bristol. We were very pleased to be able to unveil the classy new site to everyone – so although Jon has now moved on to other projects, we send him our thanks for his help.

**Ian Macdonald:** In March, as part of the celebration of GPI Trustee Ian Macdonald's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the bar and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a QC, the GPI hosted a talk by this most respected of legal minds. Ian's timely discussion of 'Expulsion, Rendition, Detention and Torture' brought up number of issues, including the origins of torture and indefinite detention by the US on the basis of obtaining intelligence to prevent another 9/11 attack, Ian's own role as a Special Advocate in SIAC, why he resigned and more. It was a thought-provoking and insightful evening.

**James Kelman:** Two months later we were absolutely delighted to host a book launch for our comrade and supporter, Booker Prize-winning writer James Kelman. James was in conversation with GPI Trustee Roxy Harris, talking about his new book, *Kieron Smith, boy*, as well as his writing and use of language. The event was the only London launch of this internationally renowned author, and was repeated at the Cheltenham Literature Festival in the autumn.

**'Black Liberation Struggles: Movers and Movements':** The three July events had an international flavour. David Hilliard, a founding member and former chief of staff of the Black Panther

Party, visited from the USA. He spoke about *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service 1967-1980*, a collection of pages from the original groundbreaking editions of the Black Panther Party's official news organ, selected and edited by him. This weekly periodical was distributed in the USA and internationally and, in its heyday, sold several hundred thousand copies every week. It ultimately became the most influential independent black newspaper in the USA and was part of the inspiration for the setting up of a UK Black Panthers organisation. It was an eye-opening talk given by this iconic and eloquent figure of African American history.

This talk was followed soon after by an equally riveting presentation from acclaimed academic Carole Boyce-Davis, who discussed the activism, writing and legacy of Claudia Jones (1915-64), the pioneering Afro-Caribbean radical intellectual, dedicated communist and feminist. Carole had named her new book on Claudia *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* when she discovered that Claudia is buried in Highgate cemetery in London to the left of Karl Marx — a fitting location given Jones's expansion of Marxism-Leninism to incorporate gender and race into her political critique and activism. Finally, the month ended with a full house to hear Black British writer Colin Grant talk about his eminently readable new biography on Marcus Garvey, *Negro With a Hat*. The story of the Jamaican who was for a time in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the most famous black man in the world both fascinated and entertained the appreciative audience.

**Autumn Programme:** In early November actor, producer and director Anton Phillips teamed up with painter, writer and musician Errol Lloyd to celebrate Aimé Césaire's groundbreaking *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* and to pay tribute to the late writer, who died in April 2008. As this newsletter is being written, we are looking forward to hearing pioneering singer, actor and writer Cy Grant, who will launch his new book, *Rivers of Time: Collected Poems*, with a reading and reminiscences on his incredible life story. Thanks to everyone who took part in all our events this year for their time and trouble — it has been a great year for our audiences.

## Website

As mentioned above, the start of 2008 saw the public launch of our new website. Not only has website whizz-kid Jon Hadley made our archive catalogues fully searchable by all the internet search engines, but he has, we feel, captured the right look of what the GPI is about through his design. We were also really pleased to be able to publish a section on the site of tributes paid to John La Rose, both from the time of his death two years ago and at the various tribute events held since then in the UK and Trinidad. Please do have a look when you're next surfing the web, it's a great chronicle of the wide impact John's life had on so many people around the world.

## Publishing

OK, we admit it, it's the end of yet another year and the second and third volumes of talks in the *Changing Britannia: Life Experience with Britain* series have yet to see the light of day. Next year we promise (at least for one)! And for the DVD of the tribute concert held for John La Rose in 2007 too, we hope.

## Future Projects

As mentioned above, our current *Crossing Borders Archive Project* is due to end imminently. The Institute (and three of us in particular) have recently been tearing out our collective hair

applying for funding to start work on John La Rose's personal archives. We are waiting to hear about one grant bid and are in the throes of starting a new funding application to our current sponsors, the Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of this long application, we hope to be able to help to organise an annual John La Rose lecture and also to publish some of John's unpublished work. But we are looking to start the main mammoth task that is John's archives (just his address books are enough to scare the archivist) as soon as possible from February 2009, so if you have any ideas for funding, or if you have a Lottery win, please do remember us!

## Fundraising Lunch

The 2007 Fundraising Lunch was as delicious as ever and raised £855.82. Thanks are extended to Janice Durham, Jeffrey and Joyce Simon and to all those who donated dishes and who came. This year's lunch is on **Sunday 7 December** so see you there. Please don't forget to GIFTAID your donations.

## Other News

We are very sorry to announce the deaths this year of two long-time friends of the GPI. In February local resident and supporter **Joan Goody** died at the age of 83. She was an inspiring teacher of English and was described in the Guardian as 'a quiet revolutionary who detested the hierarchies in education'. In March acclaimed Montserrat poet and writer, **Archie (E A) Markham** died suddenly in Paris at the age of 69. Archie had recently retired from Sheffield Hallam University but was still closely associated with that institution as Emeritus Professor of the Creative Writing department. Both of them will be missed.

**John La Rose Short Story Competition:** This was held as part of the international conference, 'On Whose Terms? Critical Negotiations in Black British Literature and the Arts' organised by Goldsmiths College in London in March 2008. The judges were Howard University Professor R. Victoria Arana, publisher and writer Margaret Busby, acclaimed novelist Courttia Newland and literary activist Kadija Sesay. After a wealth of interesting entries, the judges chose 'Written in Stone' by Molara Wood. This lovely piece of work will be published soon in *Sable* magazine. Thanks to everyone who helped to organise this competition, to the judges and all the entrants.

**OWTU News:** June 2008 witnessed the retirement of Errol McLeod, who had been President General of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad for 21 years. An old friend of many GPI Trustees and a long-standing comrade of John La Rose's, the Institute sent a message of appreciation for all the work Errol had done over the years, including the links forged and maintained with us in the UK through the OWTU's regular participation in events such as the International Book Fairs of Radical Black and Third World Books. Azim Hajee and Karl John represented the GPI in Trinidad at the Passing of the Torch Ceremony to the new President General, Ancil Roget. David Abdulah, another stalwart comrade, has been elected to the post of General Secretary of the OWTU. Our congratulations to David.

**Ending on a High!** We were delighted this year to learn that New Beacon's most recent publication, the wonderful novel by Erna Brodber, *The Rainmaker's Mistake*, had been shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Caribbean Region. Although the book didn't win, it was nice to see Erna getting some of the acclaim that her writing so thoroughly merits.

Finally, onto an achievement by the younger generation. In the autumn Roxy Ade Harris launched his album, *Welcome to*

*Floorboogie.* A lively launch was held in North London and was enjoyed by all. We'd like to wish Roxy every success!