

The Saffron Centre

The former Lucas lighting factory in Highgate which is now called the Saffron Centre and forms part of Bhat Singh Sabha (Highgate Ltd) is aiming to install 50 solar panels and 27 wind turbines in a bid to produce a year round supply of energy. The Saffron Centre, which is a community resource centre, benefited from a £2.5 million refurbishment in late 2005 with half the money secured from the European Regional Development Fund and the rest through the Sikh community.

By converting to reusable and sustainable sources of energy the organisation aim to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by over 18 tonnes per year. Bhat Singh Sabha have received support from a number of local organisations and political figures. It is hoped that the knock on effect of the proposed project would be to encourage others to switch to cleaner alternative forms of energy and help create a cleaner safer environment. Chief executive Shiv



Singh said of the new proposed initiative, "We hope that people will see how a move to renewable energy sources can make a major difference to everyone's quality of life".

On offer at the centre is a 50 place Day Nursery that has proven so successful the organisation plan to expand the service. As well as catering for the children's needs the Saffron Centre offers training and vocational skills development to parents and the community. Through their links with Matthew Boulton College, Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust, Birmingham Early Years department and the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce the centre offers a range of services.

In addition to these services the centre is equipped with a state of the art conference centre which can cater for up to 500 guests. The catering facility, which was given a 5 star rating by Birmingham City Council Health Inspectors on www.scoresonthedoors boasts the latest in new technology and enables the organisation to reduce their waste emissions.

Interwoven Freedom the journey of Black History

By Selina Brown

Madam CJ Walker was the first Black female self-made millionaire, Garrett Morgan was the creator of the gas mask and Marcus Garvey was a Jamaican born Black Nationalist. These are just a few Black people throughout history that have shaped our current society, their innovation and aspiration is remembered throughout October in Black History Month.

Black History Month has been celebrated across the UK every October for over 30 years, each year growing from strength to strength. The month is a time to highlight and celebrate the achievements of the present African and Caribbean communities. Whilst equally remembering the accomplishment and beauty, within the history of their cultures.

This year holds great significance as it marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. The Slave Trade Act passed in 1807 did not end slavery, but outlawed the slave trade throughout the British Empire, making it illegal for British ships to be involved in the trade. Importantly it marked the beginning of a fight to end the transatlantic trafficking of human beings within the British Empire. For over 400 years this inhuman trade had tragically ended lives and brutally separated millions of Africans from their homeland.

During the 1820's Quaker women in Birmingham played a leading



role in the advocacy of the abolition of slavery (not achieved until 1838) by creating the first female anti-slavery association. Recently, local Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook women embarked on a journey to explore this facet of hidden history and bring it to life, resulting in a project called 'Interwoven Freedom.'

SCAWDI (The Sparkbrook Caribbean & African Women's Development Initiative) – a community development organisation founded 10 years ago, were keen to explore the role middle & working class white women played in the abolitionist movement: from the boycott of sugar & cotton, to the creation of silk work bags, complete with manifesto's, sold to raise support funds. 200 years on, a group of SCAWDI women entered into a unique collaborative partnership with 'English Heritage' to create their own workbags & manifesto's – from the perspective of Caribbean & African women in Britain.

'Interwoven Freedom' is a unique view of social history seen through the eyes of local women, ranging in age from 13 – 70+. Each participant created their own workbag and written manifesto, mirroring those created by female abolitionists of the early 1820s. Over 12 weeks this summer, the group visited archives, exhibitions and historic houses, gaining a powerful insight into that period. They worked alongside textile artist, Karina Thompson, and local writer/broadcaster, Ava Ming. The women explored their own creativity, designing modern bags with historical themes. They used fair-trade cotton and the beautiful traditional, hand woven Kente cloth from Ghana to make the bags, weaving their own stories into the designs. They wrote poems, tracts and stories as illustration.

Through patterns woven onto fabric and poems written on paper a story was recaptured. The women were emotionally able to explore the feelings of the female abolitionists and slaves over 200 years ago. Barbara Willis-Brown founder of SCAWDI said the project has been incredibly successful, actively involving ordinary local women and helping them to create a piece of social history. It demonstrates "Man's inhumanity to man, and women's support for other women. That's a powerful thing. That's a powerful story".

SCAWDI's Heritage project is currently developing a Black History Education & Resource Unit for school and community use; also creating a specialist Outreach Library Collection, in collaboration with Balsall Heath Library.

'Interwoven Freedom' can be viewed at The Drum, Potters Lane, Aston (until 2nd Nov) when it moves to The Mailbox, before touring the West Midlands. For more information on SCAWDI's Heritage programme, call Sarah Blackstock on 07956 326 916.