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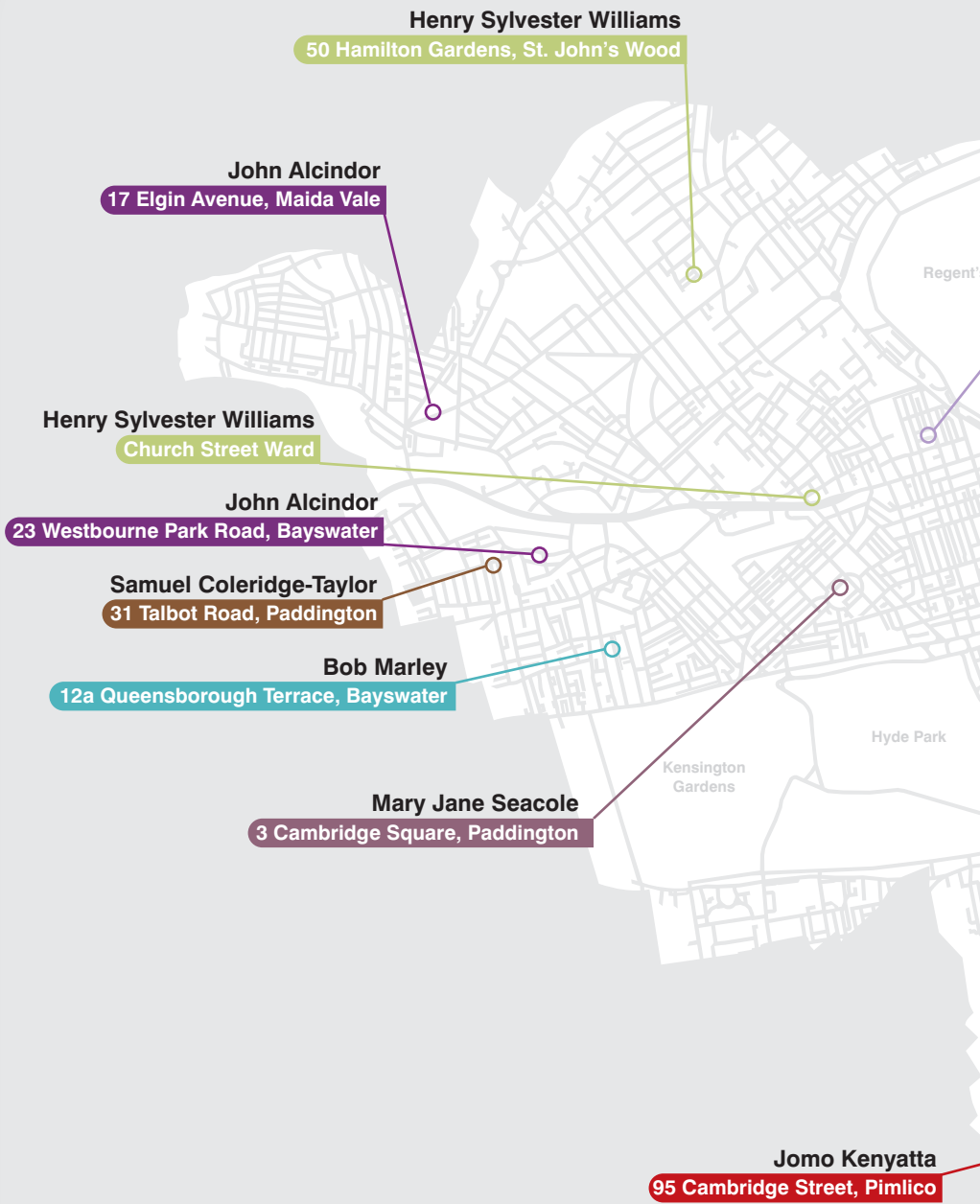
# Black History in Westminster

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City of Westminster





**William Davidson**

12 Elliotts Row, Marylebone (now Dorset Square)

**Jimi Hendrix**

23 Brook Street, Mayfair

**Olaudah Equiano**

10 Union Street, East Marylebone (now 73 Riding House Street)

**Amy Ashwood Garvey**

Carnaby Street, Soho

**Mary Jane Seacole**

14 Soho Square, Soho

**Jimi Hendrix**

Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, Frith Street, Soho

**Ira Aldridge**

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden

**Robert Wedderburn**

Hopkins Street, Soho

**William Cuffay**

St. Martin's-in-the-Fields

**Ottobah Cugoano**

80-82 Pall Mall, St James's

**Ignatius Sancho**

St. Margaret's Church, Westminster

**Ignatius Sancho**

Charles Street, Mayfair (now King Charles Street)

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**

Caxton Hall, Westminster

**Ignatius Sancho**

Christchurch Gardens, Victoria Street



# Foreword

Westminster has a rich and diverse cultural history. Today, around 30% of Westminster's residents belong to black or minority ethnic communities and over 150 languages are spoken across Westminster's schools.

There are a large number of different ethnic minority groups in the city, with African-Caribbean residents constituting one of the larger minority groups.

This cultural diversity has a long history; with people from black and ethnic minority communities having lived and worked in Westminster since at least 1511.

In celebration of Black History Month, this booklet provides just a glimpse into the lives of some of Westminster's most gifted black residents through history.

I very much hope you enjoy reading this booklet and it awakens your curiosity to discover more.



**Sir Simon Milton**  
**Leader of Westminster City Council**

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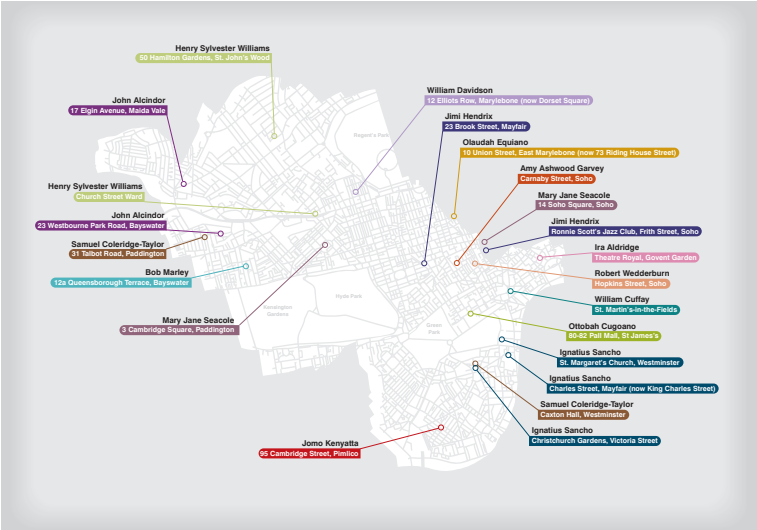
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# Introduction: hidden heritage

The City of Westminster lies at the heart of London, world famous for its national monuments, buildings and institutions; its unique cultural heritage makes it both a distinctive and attractive place to visit, live and work.

Yet behind the more familiar monuments, iconic buildings and landmarks, the heritage of Westminster is also made up of other, perhaps less familiar histories of the many diverse people who have worked and lived here. Their stories form an integral part of the rich and evolving heritage of the City of Westminster.

This booklet therefore celebrates the lives and contributions of a few of Westminster’s most talented black residents. Amongst them, musicians, abolitionists, writers and revolutionaries, who have contributed to the diverse, multi-ethnic Westminster of today.



Each historic figure featured in this booklet is colour-coded. See where they lived or worked in Westminster on the fold out map at the front of this document



## Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970)

Jimi Hendrix was born Johnny Allen Hendrix in 1942 in Seattle and was known as 'Young Jimmy'. He took an early interest in music and taught himself to play guitar by listening to records, though he never learned to read music.

Widely recognised as one of the most creative and influential musicians of the 20th century, Jimi Hendrix pioneered the explosive possibilities of the electric guitar. Hendrix's innovative style of combining fuzz, feedback and controlled distortion created a new musical form that redefined the electric guitar. His musical language continues to influence a host of modern musicians.

In 1966, Jimi was still playing the rounds of smaller venues in New York, when he met up with the Animals' bassist Chas Chandler, who was to become his manager. Chandler was impressed with Jimi's performance and returned again in September 1966 to sign Hendrix and move him to London to form a new band.

Having installed the young guitarist in the Hyde Park Towers Hotel in Inverness Terrace, Bayswater; Chandler's first move was to change Hendrix's name to 'Jimi'. In October 1966 Jimi Hendrix played his first significant UK concert at Regent Street Polytechnic, later to become the University of Westminster. The Jimi Hendrix Experience quickly became an essential fixture in London's music scene.



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“When I die, I want people to play my music, go wild and freak out and do anything they want to do.”

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Hendrix's flat was at 23 Brook Street, on the doorstep of the London music scene of the late 60s. It was a short stroll from legendary venues like the Marquee, the Speakeasy and the Saville and he would spend many evenings wandering from club to club looking for a chance to play. Upon learning that the composer Handel had lived next door at 25 Brook Street 250 years beforehand, he went to a local record shop and bought some works including '*Messiah*' and '*Water Music*.'

Although Hendrix experienced overwhelming success in Britain, it wasn't until he returned to America in June 1967 that he ignited the crowd at the Monterey International Pop Festival with his incendiary performance of '*Wild Thing*'. Literally overnight, '*The Jimi Hendrix Experience*' became one of the most popular and highest grossing touring acts in the world.

Following a live performance with Eric Burdon and War at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club on Frith Street in Soho, Jimi returned to the Samarkand Hotel in Kensington. The following morning, Jimi was found unconscious, having vomited in his sleep. Medics were unable to revive him and he was pronounced dead at St. Mary Abbott's hospital just after midday on 18th September 1970.

Sources:

- [www.handelhouse.org/house.htm](http://www.handelhouse.org/house.htm)
- [www.jimi-hendrix.com](http://www.jimi-hendrix.com)

Newspad (Paddington, Bayswater, Hyde Park and Maida Vale Newsletter) [www.newspad.co.uk](http://www.newspad.co.uk)



## Amy Ashwood Garvey (1897-1969)

Amy Ashwood Garvey was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica, in 1897. Her political activities started as a teenager and in 1914, at the age of seventeen, Amy Ashwood became one of the founding members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), when she first met Marcus Garvey. The Association sought to unite “all the people of African ancestry of the world into one great body to establish a country and Government absolutely of their own”. Later Amy went on to organise the women’s auxiliary of the UNIA.

In 1918 she travelled to America, where she worked as Marcus Garvey’s chief aide in the UNIA and secretary of its New York branch. Amy married Marcus Garvey on Christmas Day, 1919 and went on to become a director of the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation, as well as establishing the Negro World newspaper.

After her marriage to Marcus Garvey ended in 1922, she became a world traveller. Her dedication to the cause of black social welfare and politics continued and in 1924, she was instrumental in founding the Nigerian Progress Union.

In 1935, Amy Ashwood Garvey moved to London, living in Bassett Road, Ladbroke Grove. She established her restaurant, the Florence Mills Social Parlour, in Carnaby Street with the Trinidadian and calypsonian musician and composer, Sam Manning.

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## A crusader for Black Nationalism, feminist, writer, playwright and businesswoman, and the first wife of Marcus Garvey.

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Whilst in London, Amy remained active in the cause of Pan-Africanism and in equality for women. Her restaurant served as a meeting place for fellow Pan-Africanists and students and she was involved in establishing an African women's centre in London. Following the murder of Kelso Cochrane in May 1959 by six white youths, Amy chaired the committee to organise approaches to Government over black/white relations. Amy Ashwood Garvey left London to live in West Africa in 1946. She died in 1969, aged 72.

Sources:

- [www.aaregistry.com/african\\_american\\_history/1954/Amy\\_Garvey\\_and\\_frontline\\_activist](http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1954/Amy_Garvey_and_frontline_activist)
- [www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/garvey/peopleevents/p\\_ashwood.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/garvey/peopleevents/p_ashwood.html)
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## William Cuffay (1788-1870)

William Cuffay was born aboard a merchant ship in 1788. The son of an African naval cook and former slave, Cuffay's family settled in Chatham, Kent where he became a journeyman tailor.

Cuffay's political involvement began when the new Tailors' Union went on strike in 1834 and he lost his job. Enraged by the way he had been treated, Cuffay became convinced that workers needed to be represented in Parliament and so joined the struggle for universal suffrage. By 1839 he had helped to form the Metropolitan Tailors' Charter Association and become an important figure in the Chartist movement in London, demanding constitutional and social reform to improve conditions for the working class.

In 1841, Cuffay was elected delegate from Westminster to the Metropolitan Delegate Council and by 1842, he was also elected president of the London Chartists; dubbed by *The Times* as 'the black man and his party'. He adopted a hard line position in his politics and became a class-leader in Soho, where he lived in lodgings. Cuffay was married twice in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields and once in St. James'.

The British establishment was greatly threatened by the Chartist movement, fearing any public unrest the marches and petitions they planned might ignite. There is a common misconception concerning Cuffay's involvement in the extremist factions of Chartism. In part, this was due to the press,

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## A principal leader of the Chartist movement, the first mass political movement of the British working class.

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especially Punch, which characterised him as a figure of derision. He was also described in 'The Gentlemen's Magazine', September 1848 as "a little tailor of about 40 years, but possessed of consummate effrontery."

In 1848, a police spy accused Cuffay and ten other activists, of planning to set London ablaze by starting fires in Seven Dials, Marylebone and Paddington. They were arrested, charged and sentenced to be transported to Tasmania for 21 years. Despite being cleared of all charges after three years Cuffay remained in Tasmania, where he worked as a tailor while maintaining his involvement in radical politics. He died in poverty in Tasmania's workhouse in July 1870, aged 82.

Sources:

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- [www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/cuffay\\_william.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/cuffay_william.shtml)
- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Chcuffay.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Chcuffay.htm)

Dictionary of Labour Biography p.77 Ref: VFCHA920CUF

Goodway, David London Chartism 1838-1848 Cambridge University Press, 1982



## Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1889-1978)

Born sometime between 1889 and 1895 in the Gatundu region of British East Africa (now Kenya), Kamau wa Ngengi was orphaned at an early age. Brought up by his grandfather, a medicine man, Kamau's early life was spent assisting in the provision of traditional Kenyan medicine. In 1914 he converted to Christianity, taking the name John Peter Kamau, and later Johnstone Kamau.

Kamau entered politics in 1924, joining the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) – an organisation based in Kenya's Central Highlands, largely interested in the land rights of native Kenyans. The KCA were to play a key role in shaping modern Kenya.

In 1929 Kamau made his first visit to Britain, sponsored by his KCU colleagues, to lobby the government on the issue of Kikuyu land rights, which were gradually being eroded by a land rights policy biased in favour of white settlers. This mission was unsuccessful and Kamau returned in 1931 to take up the issue again, along with his opposition to the practice of female circumcision.

From 1931 Kamau spent 15 years in Britain and he lived at 95 Cambridge Street, Pimlico between 1933 and 1937. Whilst in Britain, he took the name Jomo Kenyatta and studied at the Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham, University College London and at the London School of Economics. He also published *'Facing Mount Kenya'* during this time, an anthropological study of Kikuyu customs.

In 1946 Kenyatta became president of the Pan-African Union, an anti-colonialist organisation, which included members from most African States.

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## The first president of Kenya and a Kenyan national hero.

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In this capacity he helped found the Pan-African Federation, which had its first meeting that year.

Returning to Kenya in 1947, Kenyatta's renewed involvement with the KCA brought him to the attention of the Kenyan authorities. By the early 1950s, the government of the time were struggling to put down an insurgency known as the Mau Mau uprising and had invoked emergency powers to this end. One of their first acts under emergency powers was the arrest and trial of the leaders of the KCA. Kenyatta served six years hard labour followed by two years in exile before his conviction was eventually overruled.

Upon his return from exile in 1961 Kenyatta was appointed to the legislative council of the Kenya African National Movement (KANU). The party stood in the general elections of 1963 and won 67% of the vote, forming Kenya's first autonomous government. Following the declaration of Kenyan Independence in December of the same year, Kenyatta became Kenya's first president – a position he held until his death.

Kenyatta maintained cordial relations with the British Government during his presidency – encouraging white farmers to stay in Kenya and colonial civil servants to remain in their posts, ensuring a smooth transitional period. However, Kenyatta's authoritarian approach to government was not without its critics. Heavy handedness in dealing with dissent and opposition left Kenya without a viable opposition party and his security forces were publicly linked to the murder of opposition figures.

Kenyatta died in 1978 in Mombasa and today remains a Kenyan national hero.

Sources:

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jomo\\_Kenyatta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jomo_Kenyatta)  
English Heritage: Blue Plaques News, 15/03/05



## Bob Marley (1945-1981)

Robert Nesta Marley was born in Jamaica, the son of a Liverpool-born captain in the West Indian regiment of the British Army. In the early 1960s, Marley joined up with friends to form 'The Wailing Wailers'. The group quickly became well known in Jamaica, their music both reflecting and leading the evolution of reggae. In 1967, Marley converted from Christianity to Rastafarianism. His group was renamed The Wailers and after being joined in 1970 by Aston and Carlton Barrett, who formed the rhythm section, they began to attract international acclaim.

It was in the early 1970s that the group came to London and here they were signed by Island Records, a London-based company founded in Jamaica. At this time, Marley is reputed to have lived in various locations, including 34 Ridgmount Gardens and at 333 Old Church Street, near the King's Road, as well as at 12a Queensborough Terrace in Westminster.

In 1972 they recorded '*Catch a Fire*' and throughout the 1970s undertook various tours in the UK, playing famous venues such as London's hip Speakeasy club and the Lyceum. His songwriting skills continued to develop; in 1974 Eric Clapton had a hit with Marley's '*I Shot the Sheriff*' and in 1975 The Wailers had their first major hit with '*No Woman No Cry*'. Soon after, the group was again renamed becoming 'Bob Marley and The Wailers'.



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## Socialist, artist and musician, Bob Marley emerged from the slums of Kingston to achieve worldwide fame.

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Throughout the later 1970s, Marley's songs became increasingly spiritual and political, often focusing on the turmoil then present in Jamaica. In December 1976, during the Jamaican general election campaign, an attempt was made on Marley's life and he fled once again to London. Here he wrote and recorded the album 'Exodus', which featured Marley's biggest hits, including '*Jamming*', '*Waiting in Vain*' and '*One Love*'.

By 1980, Marley had a worldwide following and his music had become closely associated with the black political independence movement and freedom fighting in general. His health, however, was deteriorating and in 1981 Marley died from cancer at the age of only 36.

Sources:

- [www.bobmarley.com/life](http://www.bobmarley.com/life)
- [www.bobmarleymagazine.com](http://www.bobmarleymagazine.com)



*Mary Jane Seacole (nee. Grant)*  
by *Albert Charles Challen*  
oil on panel, 1869

## Mary Jane Seacole (1805-1881)

Mary Jane Seacole (nee. Grant) was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1805. Her father was a Scottish soldier and her mother a black Jamaican healer who ran a boarding house where she cared for invalid soldiers. Mary learned the arts of Creole medicine from her mother and soon gained her own reputation as 'skilful nurse and doctress'.

In 1836, Mary married Lord Nelson's grandson, Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole, who died just eight years later, in 1844.

Mary travelled widely and upon her second visit to London in 1854 heard about the nursing crisis in the Crimean War. Given her medical experience, Mary offered her services as a nurse to the War Office. However, her applications were rejected upon grounds of her ethnicity. Mary then funded her own trip to the Crimea, where she tended the wounded on the battlefield and established the 'British Hotel' for sick and convalescent officers.

Upon her return to London at the end of the Crimean War, Mary Seacole was bankrupt. The press highlighted her plight and a benefit festival, supported by Crimean commanders and hundreds of performers, was held in the Royal Surrey Gardens. She was awarded the Crimean Medal, the French Legion of Honour and a Turkish medal for bravery.

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“I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead.”

WH Russell, 1857

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In 1857, Mary was living at 14 Soho Square, where she wrote her autobiography: *'The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands'*, re-printed by Oxford University Press, 1988.

Her last years were in London, where she acted as a confidante to some members of the Royal family. A bust of Mary was made by the sculptor, and Queen Victoria's nephew, Count Gleichen.

Mary died on 14th May 1881, at her home at 3 Cambridge Square, Paddington. She was 76. She is buried at St Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green.

Unlike her contemporary, Florence Nightingale, the efforts of Mary Seacole faded into obscurity. Only recently is her contribution to British medical history being recognised.

Sources:

- [www.maryseacole.com/maryseacole/pages/aboutmary2.html](http://www.maryseacole.com/maryseacole/pages/aboutmary2.html)
- [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/09\\_02\\_04/Tuesday/info4.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/09_02_04/Tuesday/info4.shtml)
- [www.bbc.co.uk.history/historic\\_figures.seacole\\_mary.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk.history/historic_figures.seacole_mary.shtml)
- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/mary\\_seacole.html](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/mary_seacole.html)



**Above: 14 Soho Square, one of Mary Seacole's Westminster addresses.**



## Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797)

The facts of Equiano's early life are the subject of much debate. According to his autobiographies, he was born in 1745 in Essaka, an Igbo village in the Kingdom of Benin and then kidnapped by slave traders at the age of 10 or 11. He was later purchased by Captain Henry Pascal, a British naval officer and worked as a slave on ships and plantations all over the world, experiencing at first hand slavery's many cruelties.

In 1766 Equiano gained his freedom and settled in London, where he became a Methodist in 1773. He became a commissary of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor (formed in 1786) which was based in Warren Street, London. While there he exposed various atrocities, such as the callous drowning of 132 sick African slaves from a ship at sea, because the insurance company would only pay compensation to the owners of those who drowned and not for those who died of disease on board.

In 1788, Equiano lived at 13 Tottenham Street and in 1789 he moved to what was then 10 Union Street and is now 73 Riding House Street. From this address he published his autobiography entitled '*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*' in 1789 (Vassa was his slave name).

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“Torture, murder and every imaginable barbarity and iniquity are practiced upon the poor slaves with impunity. I hope the slave trade will be abolished.”<sup>1</sup>

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The book was reprinted 17 times and translated into several languages, giving powerful ammunition and added momentum to the anti-slavery movement. John Wesley read the book just before his death in 1791 and recommended it to William Wilberforce, the leading advocate in Parliament for the abolition of the African slave trade.

In 1792, Equiano strongly supported an abolition Bill passed by the House of Commons, but it was rejected in the House of Lords. The African slave trade was finally abolished in Britain in 1807, ten years after the death of Olaudah Equiano.

A green plaque marks the place where Equiano lived at 73 Riding House Street.

Sources:

- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Sequiano.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Sequiano.htm)
- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/olaudah\\_equiano.html](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/olaudah_equiano.html)

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from chapter 12 from Equiano's autobiography *'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself'* 1789



*Left: John Alcindor's home at 23 Westbourne Park Road, where he lived from 1915 until his death in 1924.*

## John Alcindor (1873-1924)

John Alcindor was a Senior District Medical Officer in Paddington in 1921. Known as the 'Black Doctor of Paddington' he was a well known figure in the local area and his home became a place of welcome for Africans in London. His friends included Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and the daughters of Ira Aldridge.

Born in Trinidad in 1873, he was educated at St Mary's College, Port of Spain, Trinidad and received a government scholarship to study medicine at Edinburgh University from 1893 to 1899. He moved to London and worked at several hospitals including Plaistow, Hampstead and Camberwell, before setting up his own medical practice in Paddington in about 1907.

He lived first at 17 Elgin Avenue, Maida Vale, but moved to 31 Talbot Road, Paddington in 1909. In 1912 Alcindor moved again to 37 Westbourne Park Road, and three years later to 23 Westbourne Park Road, where he lived until his death in 1924. At first his home and surgery were together, but in 1913 he moved his surgery to 201 Harrow Road.

Most of his patients were poor and it is said that he never turned anyone away. From 1917 Alcindor also worked as Medical Officer of Health for the Paddington Poor Law Guardians. He carried out research and had articles published in professional journals on influenza, cancer and tuberculosis. He noted the effects of unhealthy surroundings and insufficient food on the health of Paddington's poorer residents.

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“Dr Alcindor had a considerable practice among the poor of the Harrow Road neighbourhood, and was very popular among those who used to avail themselves of his medical skill and knowledge.”

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In July 1919, Alcindor was involved in the first Pan-African Conference held at Westminster Town Hall (now Caxton Hall), as well as attending the Paris Pan-African Congress. From c.1919 to 1923 he chaired the African Progress Union and in August 1921 took part in the Pan-African Congress at Westminster Central Hall. At this time he was suggesting that West Indians should settle in Uganda.

He was 38 when he married Minnie Martin in 1911; her parents disapproved of the marriage and cut her off from the family for marrying a black man. John and Minnie had three sons: Frank (b.1912), Cyril (b.1914) and Roland (b.1917).

John Alcindor died at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, at the age of 51. His obituary in the Bayswater Chronicle of 1st November 1924 states: “Dr Alcindor had a considerable practice among the poor of the Harrow Road neighbourhood, and was very popular among those who used to avail themselves of his medical skill and knowledge. He was both modest and unassuming in his bearing; also of kindly and sympathetic disposition.” His funeral was held at St Mary of the Angels, Westmoreland Road (now Moorhouse Road) in Paddington. He is buried in St Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green.

Sources:

- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk?SLAalcindor.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk?SLAalcindor.htm)
- [www.blackpresence.co.uk.php](http://www.blackpresence.co.uk.php)



## Ira Aldridge (1804-1867)

The first classical black actor in the UK, Ira Aldridge was born in New York in 1804. As a young man, he developed a love of the theatre and aged just 17, emigrated to England, believing there would be more opportunities to pursue a career in acting. His first known London appearance was in 1825 at the Coburg Theatre (now The Old Vic). At this time, Aldridge met and married Margaret Gill who came from Yorkshire. He subsequently appeared at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket and the Lyceum theatres and played Shakespeare's King Lear, Macbeth and Shylock.

Aldridge was the first black actor to play Othello - at Covent Garden in 1833. Although acclaimed in the provinces, in London he was the victim of a racist campaign in the press when objections were made to him playing alongside a white actress, Ellen Tree, who played Desdemona.

As a result many London theatres refused to employ him which led him to leave England and tour Europe and Russia. He then appeared on the stage in Brussels, Cologne, Basle, Leipzig, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Danzig, St. Petersburg, Moscow and Munich to great acclaim. While in Russia, Ira became one of the highest paid actors in the world when he received £60 for every performance. He became a British citizen in 1863 and married Amanda Brandt following the death of his first wife.



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The UK's first classical black actor, appearing at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, Coburg Theatre (now The Old Vic), and Lyceum theatres.

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Ira Aldridge died while on tour in Poland on 7th August 1867. Following his death, Amanda Brandt continued to live in London with their two daughters: Luranah (b.1860) and Amanda (b.1866). They lived at 2 Bedford Gardens, off Kensington Church Street, which became a meeting place for London's black middle class. Luranah studied in Belgium, London, Paris and Berlin and became an internationally celebrated concert music singer. Amanda studied at the Royal College of Music (1883-1887) and until her death in the 1950s, taught vocal technique and the piano. One of her pupils was Frank Alcindor, son of the Paddington doctor, Dr John Alcindor.

Sources:

- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SLAaldridge.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SLAaldridge.htm)
- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/ira\\_aldridge.html](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/ira_aldridge.html)



## Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, musician and composer, was born on 15th August 1875 at 15 Theobalds Road, Holborn. His father, Daniel Peter Taylor, was a native of Sierra Leone and trained as a physician at King's College, London.

Samuel was raised by his English mother and stepfather. He sang in a local church choir and studied the violin. In 1890, Samuel secured a place at the Royal College of Music, where he initially studied violin, but later changed to composition.

In 1898, aged 23, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor rose to prominence. His '*Ballad in A Minor*' was commissioned for the Three Choirs Festival at the suggestion of Edward Elgar. His best known work, '*Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*', became the most popular English choral-orchestral work of the time.

In 1899, he married fellow student Jessie Walmley. Their two children, Hiawatha (b.1900) and Avril (b.1903) became distinguished composers and conductors. He was a close friend of Dr John Alcindor and frequently lodged with him at 31 Talbot Road, Paddington.

An avid supporter of Pan-Africanism, Samuel collaborated with the African-American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906). In July 1900, he was in charge of the musical programme at the Pan-African Conference, held at Westminster Town Hall (now Caxton Hall).

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“Personally, I consider myself the equal of any white man who ever lived, and no one could change me in that respect.”<sup>2</sup>

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By 1903, Samuel was a lecturer at Croydon Conservatoire, Professor of Composition at Trinity College, Crystal Palace School of Art and Music and Guildhall School of Music. Despite his success as a teacher, conductor and composer, he had difficulties supporting his family, as a single work only received a small one-off payment from the publisher.

On 1st September 1912, Samuel died of pneumonia, complicated by exhaustion from overwork. He was 37. The circumstances of his death prompted the adoption of a system of royalties for composers in the UK.

Sources:

- <http://spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SLAcoleridge.htm>
- <http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Song.html>

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<sup>2</sup> From a letter of complaint in The Croydon Guardian, 1912



*Left: Schomberg House, 80-82 Pall Mall, the former residence of Richard Cosway, to whom Cugoano was a servant*

## Ottobah Cugoano (1757- ?)

Ottobah Cugoano was born on the coast of present-day Ghana and brought to England as a slave in 1772. Aged 16, he was baptised John Stuart at St James's Church, Piccadilly on 20th August 1773; advised that this would win him his freedom.

By the 1780s he had entered the service of Richard Cosway, the fashionable painter (after whom Cosway Street, in Marylebone is named), who lived at Schomberg House, 80-82 Pall Mall from 1784-1789. Cugoano was taught to read and write and before long emerged as one of the leaders and spokesmen of London's black community. He was a friend of Olaudah Equiano and a neighbour of Ignatius Sancho.

Cugoano wrote several books and was very involved in campaigning against the slave trade and supporting poor black people in London. In 1787 he published an account of his experiences 'Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species', in which he was the first African to demand publicly the total abolition of the slave trade and the freeing of all slaves.

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“If any man should buy another man... the enslaver is a robber and a defrauder of that man every day... It is as much the duty of a man who is robbed in that manner to get out of the hands of his enslaver, as it is the duty of any honest community of men to get out of the hands of thieves and villains.”<sup>3</sup>

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Cugoano disappeared from listed records and it is not known when he died. There is no known image of Ottobah Cugoano.

Sources:

- [www.blacknet.co.uk/history/Cugganno.html](http://www.blacknet.co.uk/history/Cugganno.html)
- [www.spartacus.schoonet.co.uk/USAScogoano.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoonet.co.uk/USAScogoano.htm)

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<sup>3</sup> From Narrative of the Enslavement of a Native America (1787)



*Left: Print of portrait of William Davidson, taken from Authentic History of the Cato-Street Conspiracy; with the Trials at Large of the Conspirators. 2nd edition, Kelly, 1820, by George Theodore Wilkinson.*

## William Davidson (1786-1820)

William Davidson was born in the 1780s, the illegitimate son of the Jamaican Attorney General. At the age of 14 Davidson was sent to Glasgow to study law.

In Scotland, Davidson made the first of the public protests that were to define his life, arguing for parliamentary reform. After a spell in the Royal Navy and time spent in Birmingham running his own cabinet making business, he married a widow and became a Wesleyan Methodist. However, he lost his faith in God and became a political activist after the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. This event saw peacefully protesting men, women and children killed by forces of government, seeking to repress opposition at a time of rapid industrialisation and great social upheaval.

At this time Davidson lived at 12 Elliotts Row, Marylebone (later Dorset Square), close to the old Lords Cricket Ground. Davidson joined the nearby Marylebone Reading Room, set up after the Peterloo Massacre, where he was able to read radical newspapers and discuss political matters, sometimes hosting such discussions in his home.

Around this time Davidson was introduced to Arthur Thistlewood, a radical activist, who had previously spent time in prison for opposing the government. Davidson, Thistlewood and a group of others decided that the quickest way to bring about reform was by direct and dramatic action. With the two men forming part of the central Executive of Five, they stood at the

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## A public protester throughout his life, arguing for Parliamentary reform.

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centre of a conspiracy to murder a number of senior government figures they believed would be gathering for dinner at a house in Grosvenor Square on 23rd February, 1820. On that evening, the conspirators gathered at a hayloft in Cato Street near Edgware Road, only to discover when the police raided and arrested some of the men present, that a spy in their midst had betrayed them.

On 28th April 1820, William Davidson, Arthur Thistlewood, James Ings, Richard Tidd, and John Brunt were found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death.

At his trial Davidson said that he felt vindicated for trying to overthrow the government as he considered them to have betrayed the rights of the people as set out in the Magna Carta.

On 1st May 1820 the five were hung at Newgate Prison in the last public hanging and decapitation in England. William Davidson's body was buried in quicklime in the prison yard.



**Above: Detail from the execution at Newgate, showing William Davidson, 1820. (Copyright Westminster Archives)**

### Sources

- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRdavidson.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRdavidson.htm)
- [www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/caribbean/politics/politics.htm](http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/caribbean/politics/politics.htm)



*Left: Portrait of a Negro Man, c.1780 probably Ignatius Sancho, previously thought to be Olaudah Equiano*

## Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780)

The first African prose writer whose work was published in England, Ignatius Sancho was born on a slave ship. At the age of two, he was given to three sisters from Greenwich who called him 'Sancho' because they thought he looked like Don Quixote's squire. They thought slaves should be kept ignorant, but he managed to teach himself to read and write.

Sancho later ran away from the sisters and became butler to the Duke of Montagu. Whilst working for the Duke, Sancho's taste for art, literature and music was encouraged and he was able to publish his work whilst still a servant including a set of songs and three sets of dances which appeared in the years 1767-1779.

In 1758 Sancho married Anne Osborne, a black woman from the Caribbean, at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. Their six children were all baptised at St. Margaret's. The Duchess of Montagu bequeathed him money with which he opened a grocer's shop in Charles Street, Westminster (now King Charles Street), where he entertained many famous figures of literary and artistic London.



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“Let it no longer be said by half informed philosophers and superficial investigators of human nature, that negers, as they are vulgarly called, are inferior to the white nation in mental abilities.”

*Reviewer of Sancho's 'Letters'*

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Two years after his death his *'Letters'* were published, which were much admired for their literary style and were an immediate best seller. He is buried in the ground adjoining Christ Church, Broadway, which is now a public garden: Christchurch Gardens, Victoria Street.

Sources:

- [www.brycchancarey.com/sanch](http://www.brycchancarey.com/sanch)
- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/ignatious\\_sancho\\_htm](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/ignatious_sancho_htm)



**Above: Christchurch Gardens, Victoria Street**



## Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911)

Born of African descent in Arouca, Trinidad, Williams was the first child of a Barbadian immigrant, Bishop Williams, and his wife Elizabeth. He attended Arouca School and in 1887, at the age of 17, became a teacher. Wanting to study law, in 1891 he went to New York and Canada before arriving in London in 1896. He attended King's College and in December 1897 was admitted to Gray's Inn to study law.

As a student, Williams became increasingly pre-occupied with African issues and was instrumental in forming the world's first Pan-African Association in 1897. In 1900 Williams called the first Pan-African Conference in Westminster, a three day event which attracted delegates from all over the world, at Caxton Hall, then Westminster Town Hall on Caxton Street.

Williams was also a strong supporter of the Church Army Temperance Society, through which he met his wife, Agnes Powell, a white woman, whom he married in 1898. His first official job was as a lecturer for the Temperance Society but he also lectured widely on colonial issues including giving a lecture at a meeting at the House of Commons in 1899.

In 1902, having qualified as a barrister, Williams left his wife and children in London and went to Cape Town, becoming the first black man to practice in South Africa.

Returning to London in 1904, he turned his attention to local government, having failed to secure a seat as a Liberal MP.

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## One of the first two people of African descent to be elected to public office in Britain and Westminster's first black councillor.

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In 1906 he was appointed as the Labour candidate for Church Street Ward in the Borough of St Marylebone as well as to the Committee for Improvements and Housing, and the Legal and Parliamentary Committee. An article in the Marylebone Mercury, 17th November 1906, heralded the achievements of Williams, but failed to mention he was black. He was, in fact, the only black man on any council in England at that time.

During this period his house at 50 Hamilton Gardens, St. John's Wood, saw an almost endless procession of guests and visitors ranging from Basuto royalty to destitute Jamaican seamen.

On 15th February 1907, a photograph of Williams appeared in John Bull Overseas (which appears on the poster Celebrating the Black Presence in Westminster 1500-2000, produced by Westminster's Archives Centre). This shows him with a delegation of Basuto chiefs who had been expelled from their lands in the Orange Free State in 1882 for having sided with the British. He supported their case and arranged a large meeting at Exeter Hall which was addressed by Keir Hardie on their behalf.

On a visit to Liberia in January 1908, Williams caught black water fever and nearly died. In August 1908 he decided to leave London to return to Trinidad with his wife and three children, setting up in practice as a solicitor. However, his health never recovered and he died on 26th March 1911 at the age of 42, leaving a pregnant wife and four children: Henry, Charles, Agnes and Elizabeth.

Sources:

- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/henry\\_sylvester\\_williams.html](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/henry_sylvester_williams.html)



## Robert Wedderburn (1762-1835)

Robert Wedderburn, born in Jamaica in 1762, was a lifelong campaigner against slavery, for the rights of the poor and for the freedom of the press.

Wedderburn's father James, a successful Scottish physician and sugar planter in Jamaica, fathered a number of children by one of his slaves, known as Rosanna. Robert, the first of the Wedderburn offspring, gained his freedom at birth – one of the conditions that James Wedderburn had placed on the sale of the pregnant Rosanna. Rosanna was never granted freedom and the brutality he witnessed toward his still enslaved mother and grandmother were key in forming young Robert's opinions on slavery.

Robert sailed for Britain aged 16 and made his way first to his father's house in Edinburgh, where he was turned away as a scrounger. Making his way to London, Robert became involved in the growing abolitionist movement and also with radical groups arguing for Britain's poor. During this time Wedderburn worked as a tailor to support himself.

After four years in London, Wedderburn met Thomas Spence, leader of a revolutionary group advocating land reform – by whatever means necessary. Spence had developed a system of 'land nationalisation', which would see all land owned in common by small local communities, with the only taxes payable being made to those communities.

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## A lifelong campaigner against slavery, for the rights of the poor, and for the freedom of the press.

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Wedderburn was one of Spence's great admirers and combined his passion for abolition with his enthusiasm for land reform. In Wedderburn's vision, a simultaneous revolution of Caribbean slaves and the British poor would pave the way to a society of racial and social equality. When Spence died in 1814, he and thirty nine other key admirers or 'disciples' formed the Society of Spencerian Philanthropists, a group committed to the continuation of Spence's ideals.

Government concern about this radical group led to the placing of undercover agents within the society to report on their activities. A mass meeting in Islington turned violent when the authorities attempted to disperse the crowd; a man was stabbed and the four leaders of the group were arrested – leaving Wedderburn in charge. Meanwhile the spies continued to compile their report on Wedderburn and the meetings of the Spencerians.

By 1818 Wedderburn was a jobbing tailor with a stall near St. Martin's Lane, doing mending and patching and selling pamphlets.

In 1819, Wedderburn opened a Unitarian chapel in Hopkins Street, Soho where, agents reported, up to 200 people would pay six pence a head to listen to 'violent' and 'seditious' speeches. At one such meeting Wedderburn was alleged to have argued that a slave had the moral right to kill his master. This comment saw him sent to jail charged with sedition and blasphemy.

This was the first of three stretches in jail for Wedderburn – the second time for 'blasphemous libel' and the last in 1831 after butting heads with the authorities again, this time over the freedom of the press. In 1824, he published 'The Horrors of Slavery', with a dedication to Wilberforce (who visited him in prison).

Wedderburn died in London in 1835, two years after the Slavery Abolition Act 1833.

#### Sources:

- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SLAwedderburn.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SLAwedderburn.htm)
- [www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/robert\\_wedderburn.htm](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/robert_wedderburn.htm)



## The Green Plaques Scheme

Westminster City Council launched a commemorative Green Plaques Scheme in 1991. By means of a green plaque, the scheme seeks to draw attention to some of the many famous former residents of Westminster.

Sometimes a building may be commemorated for its own significance and plaques may occasionally be placed on the site of a building which no longer exists.

There are green plaques on over 55 sites in Westminster; erected to remember important people from many walks of life and from different times, from the Tyburn Catholic Martyrs (1535-1631), whose green plaque is at 8 Hyde Park Place, to Terence Donovan, photographer (1936-1996), whose green plaque is at 30 Bourdon Street. The council's Green Plaques web site contains a full list of those who have been commemorated by a green plaque and where you can find them.

The Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association first approached the council for a commemorative plaque for Olaudah Equiano in December 1998. Equiano had been included on a wall mural in Fitzrovia and there was already a lot of local

knowledge about his significance to the area's social history. By the following summer the Association had secured sponsorship as well as the support of the Equiano Society, based in Orpington, Kent. The plaque was unveiled on 11th October 2000 to coincide with Black History Month every October.

If you would like to find out more about the Green Plaque Scheme, or possibly propose a building or person who should be commemorated, please visit Westminster's website at:

**[www.westminster.gov.uk/leisure/greenplaques/index.cfm](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/leisure/greenplaques/index.cfm)**

## Westminster Archives Centre

The City of Westminster Archives Centre houses extensive collections relating to Westminster past and present, including official local government records from 1460 onwards, books, pamphlets, prints, drawings and photographs, maps and plans and electoral and parish registers.

The collections include a wide range of resources for Black History, including a collections guide: Sources for Black and Asian history at the City of Westminster Archives Centre, a resource pack 'Hidden Lives', and an online exhibition, 'Celebrating the Black Presence in Westminster 1500-2000.'

You can visit the Archives Centre at:

10 St Ann's Street,  
London SW1P 2DE.

For general enquiries telephone: 020 7641 5180 or visit the website at: [www.westminster.gov.uk/libraries/archives/blackpresence/](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/libraries/archives/blackpresence/)

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