

An A-Z of Merton's Black Heritage: Part Two.

MUSIC: Merton musical associations.

SLICK RICK (real name Richard Walters.)

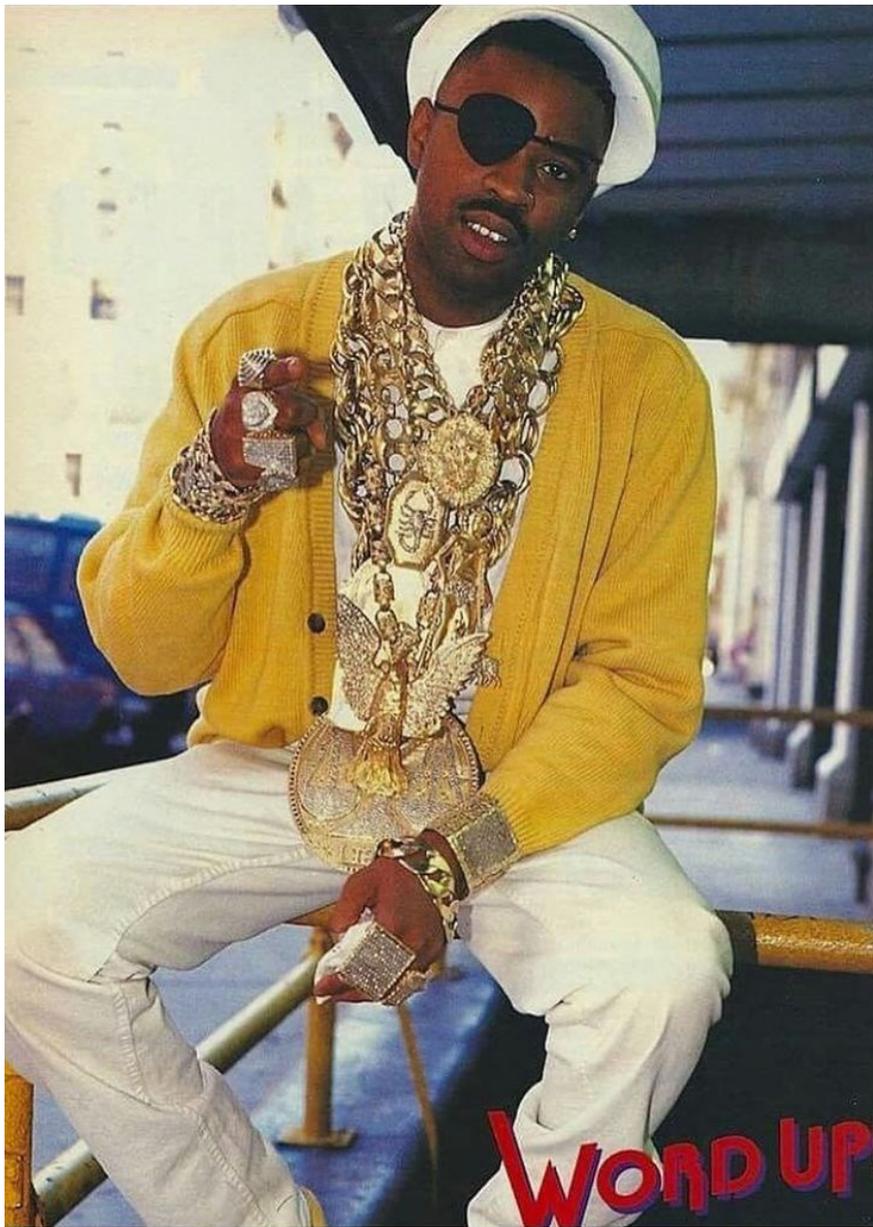
Of Jamaican heritage, Rick was born in Mitcham in 1965 and sadly blinded in one eye during childhood.

In 1976 his family emigrated, settling in the Bronx district of New York. After studying at the Laguardia High School of Music & Art, Rick began rapping and beat-boxing as part of the Get Fresh Crew. Then known as MC Ricky D, Walters appeared alongside Doug E Fresh on “Top of the Pops” and “Soul Train,” performing their hit singles “The Show” and ”La Di Da Di.”

In 1986 Rick joined the leading rap/hip-hop label Def Jam Records. His album “The Great Adventures of Slick Rick” reached No. 1 in the Billboard R&B/Hip-hop chart.

After a five year jail term for injuring his bodyguard cousin (and a passer-by,) who had been extorting money and threatening his family, Rick released a further two albums but these had mixed reviews. His fourth album “The Art of Storytelling” was released in 1999 to critical acclaim and featured collaborations with OutKast, Raekwon and **Snoop Dog. He has also worked with Will.i.am.**

After reforming his behaviour, Rick was pardoned of former charges and given U S citizenship. He now mentors youngsters against violence and supports **humanitarian charities.**



(Left) Slick Rick pictured during the late 1980s and (right) performing in Los Angeles in 2009.

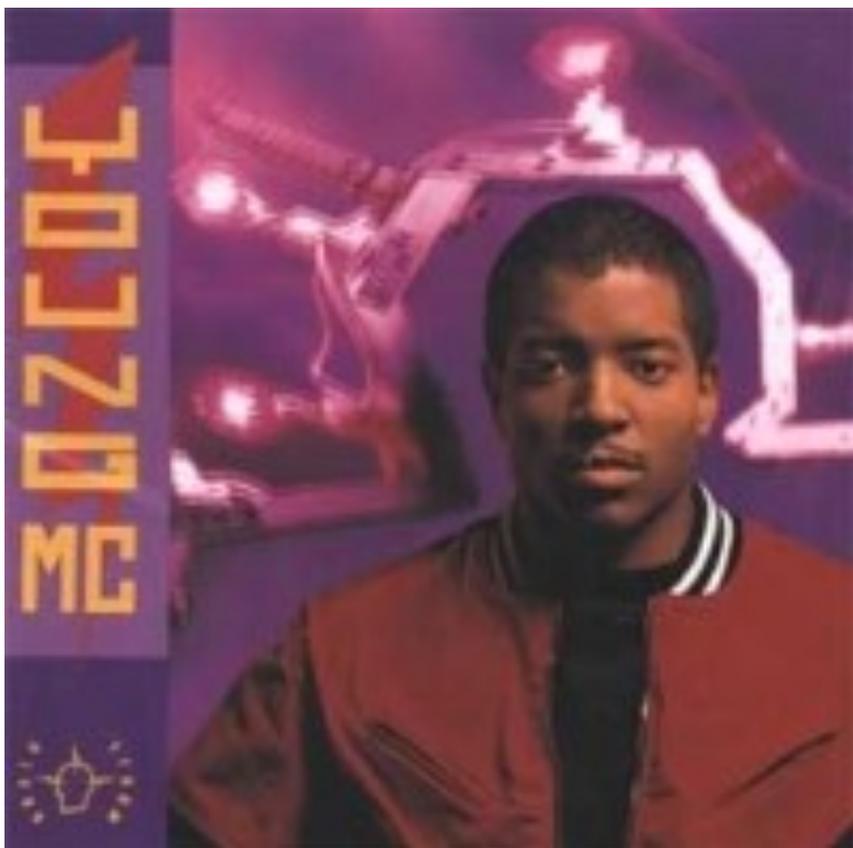
YOUNG MC (Real name Marvin Young)

A Hip-hop, rapper and producer, Marvin is the son of Jamaican immigrants and was born in South Wimbledon in May 1967. When he was eight, his family emigrated to New York and he was educated in Upper Manhattan.

Young was awarded an economics degree from the University of Southern Carolina. Here he also secured a record contract, after rapping over the phone to producers from the *Delicious Vinyl* label. He wrote songs such as “*Wild Thing*” and “*Funky Cold Medina*” for Tone Loc and in 1989 his single “*Bust a Move*” won a Grammy for the Best Rap record. His debut album “*Stone Cold Rhyming*” went platinum at No 9 in the Billboard Hot 100. His follow-up “*The Principal’s Office*” was also nominated for the MTV Best Rap Video in 1990.

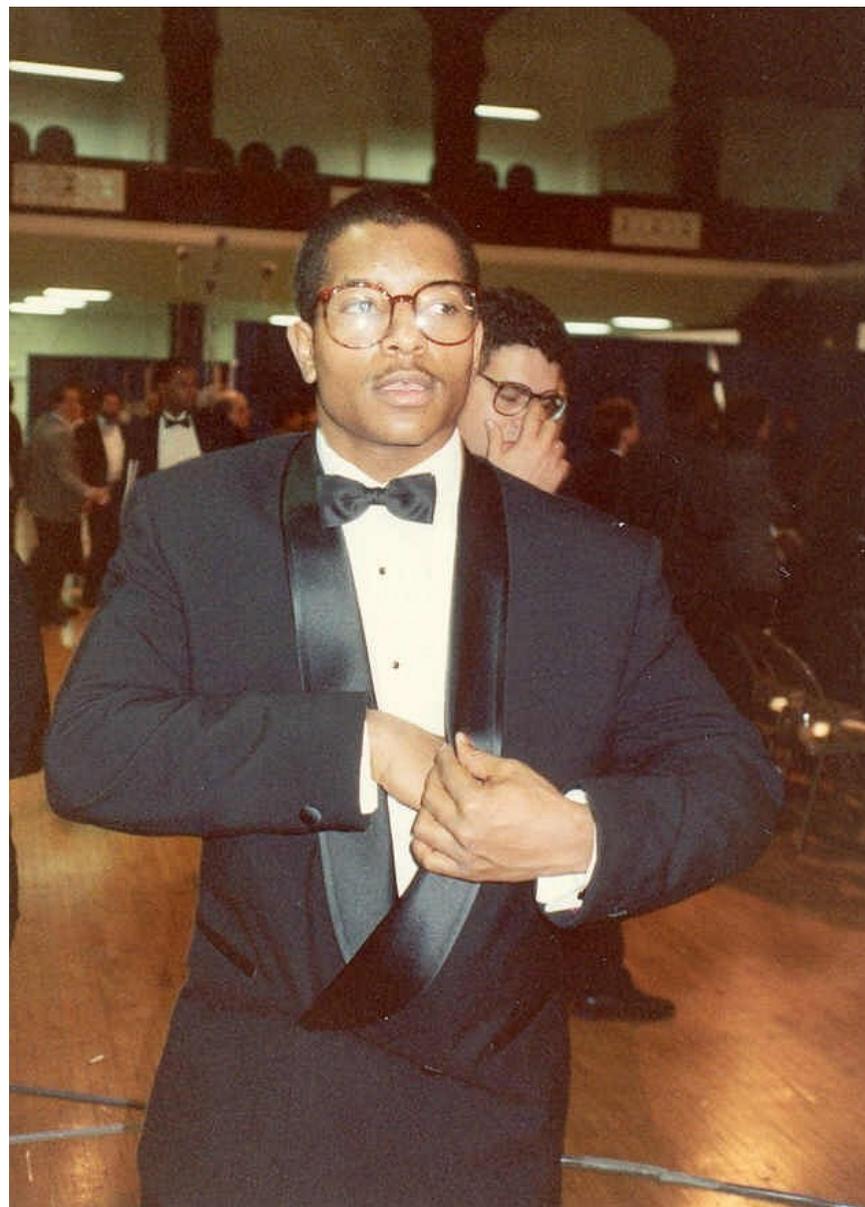
In 1991 Young moved to Capitol Records but his next two albums “*Brainstorm*” and “*What’s the Flavor?*” were not commercial hits. He moved to Overall Records in 1997, before starting his own label in 2000.

Since 2002, Young had focused on acting, appearing in the film “*Zero Sum;*” and “*Up in the Air*” with George Clooney. In 2005 he also won the U S version of *Celebrity Fit Club*, donating his prize money to the Humane Society.



(Left) Young MC's album 1991 album
"Brainstorm."

(Right) Marvin Young backstage at the
1990 Grammy awards.



MIKE LINDUP

Born in London in 1959, Mike is the son of British Jazz composer, David Lindup and his Honduran wife, actress and singer Nadia Cattouse (herself part of the Windrush Generation.)

Mike showed a natural talent for music and started composing at the age of three. He studied piano, percussion and composition at Chethams School of Music and sang in chamber choirs, before graduating from Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Mike is best known as the keyboard player, singer and founder member of the British Jazz-funk band *Level 42*. The band has enjoyed huge success from the 1980s onwards with hits such as *Something About You*, *Leaving Me Now*, *Running in the Family* and *Lessons in Love*.

Mike has also enjoyed solo success with music ranging from Jazz and Pop to Samba. In 1985 he played with the London School of Samba at Notting Hill Carnival. Today he runs music workshops in addition to solo and Level 42 performances.

He is one of several entertainers to have lived in Raynes Park.

ESSENTIAL

LEVEL 42



(Left) Mike Lindup (2nd from right) pictured with his band-mates from Level 42 during their 1980s heyday.

(Right) Mike pictured c.2017 during one of his solo concerts.



MASTER SHORTIE (Real Name Theo Jerome Kerlin)

Theo was born in Mitcham in 1989. His interest in music was nurtured by his father, who ran a London Jazz bar and encouraged Theo to listen to many different genres. He started rapping at the age of 12 and spent a couple of years at the Kids in the Biz Academy in East London.

After completing a Music Technology course at Nescot in Merton, Theo began recording and producing Hip Hop songs. By complete contrast, he also appeared in a West End production of "The Lion King."

In 2005, Kerlin started to support American urban acts at the Hackney Empire, the Scala and Shepherd's Bush Empire. In September 2008, Theo Kerlin released his debut single, "Rope Chain", alongside a music video which gathered popularity on YouTube. In December 2008, as Master Shortie he was enlisted in the Sound of 2009 poll and tipped as "the one to look out for in 2009."

He really gained success the following year, releasing his album "ADHD," supporting Basement Jaxx on their tour, appearing at the Wireless Festival and supporting "Lil Wayne" at The Hammersmith Apollo. He and his record label Odd One Out were signed to RCA and Sony in 2010.

In recent years he has worked with diverse artists from Ed Sheeran and Rizzle Chicks to Bruno Mars.



(Left) Master Shortie, pictured in 2009.
(Right) Kerlin's 2012 collaboration with
US artist, Bruno Mars.



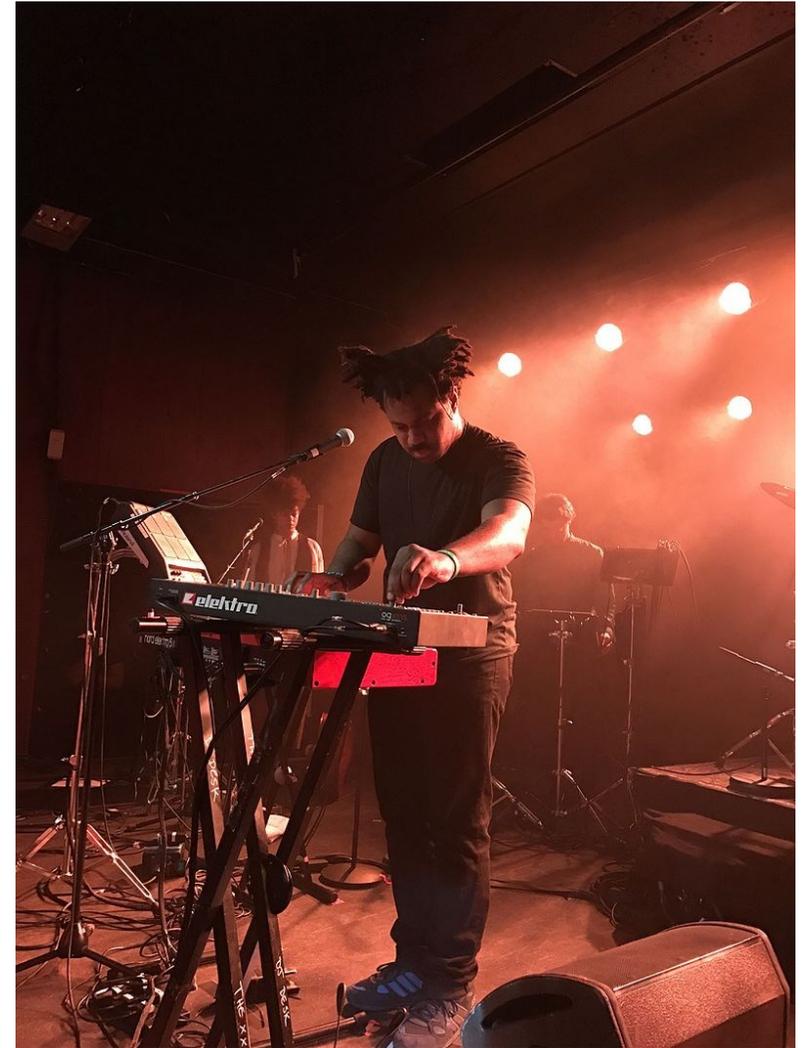
SAMPHA (Real name Sampha Lahai Sisay)

Born in Morden in 1988, Sampha was introduced to music by learning to play the family piano and listening to records given to him by his siblings. As a teenager he grew interested in music production, sharing a home studio with his older brother.

In 2007 he got a major career break after meeting London music producer Kwes through his work on Myspace.com. Working with the Young Turks recording label, Sampha has developed a reputation for soul, electronic and R & B music. He has collaborated with many famous artists including Drake, Kanye West and Jessie Ware.



Sampha pictured on stage during performances in 2016



NHS - a vital role as medical staff and key workers.

There is a strong connection between the black community and the history and development of the National Health Service from the late 1940s to the present day.

In 1949 the Ministries of Health and Labour, the Colonial Office, the General Nursing Council and the Royal College of Nursing began a deliberate policy of recruiting from the West Indies. Advertisements were placed in the local press inviting young female students to apply for nursing training at hospitals from Bristol and Cardiff, to Edinburgh, London and Manchester. Applicants had to be 18 - 30, literate and prepared to sign a 3 year contract.

Initial recruitment was aimed at hospital auxiliary staff (orderlies, receptionists, cooks and telephonists), nurses or trainee nurses and domestic staff such as laundry workers, cooks and maids. By 1955 there were 16 regional recruitments schemes across the Caribbean, in addition to direct recruitment by British hospitals.

Hundreds of young men and women travelled to the UK to gain qualifications and employment opportunities. Many Caribbean trainees became midwives, State Enrolled nurses and psychiatric nurses - some faced prejudice and systemic challenges which made further career progression difficult. However through hard work, humour and determination, they began to make inroads into other fields of medical practice.

Today over 20% of NHS staff are from BAME backgrounds. The Health Service employs over 72,000 black staff from surgeons and consultants, to anaesthetists, lab technicians, researchers, doctors, nurses, therapists and support staff.



Award winning nurses, pictured at Wilson Hospital, Mitcham, c.1963.
During the 1950s and '60s many young women were recruited to the NHS from the Caribbean.



Prize-giving for the class of 1964, St. Helier Hospital, Wrythe Lane, Sutton.

Amongst those pictured here were trainees receiving awards for everything from general nursing and patient care, to theatre work and State Enrolled nursing. In addition to St. Helier Hospital, Wilson Hospital, Mitcham, Nelson Hospital (Merton) and Wimbledon Cottage Hospital also ran training courses for nursing staff.

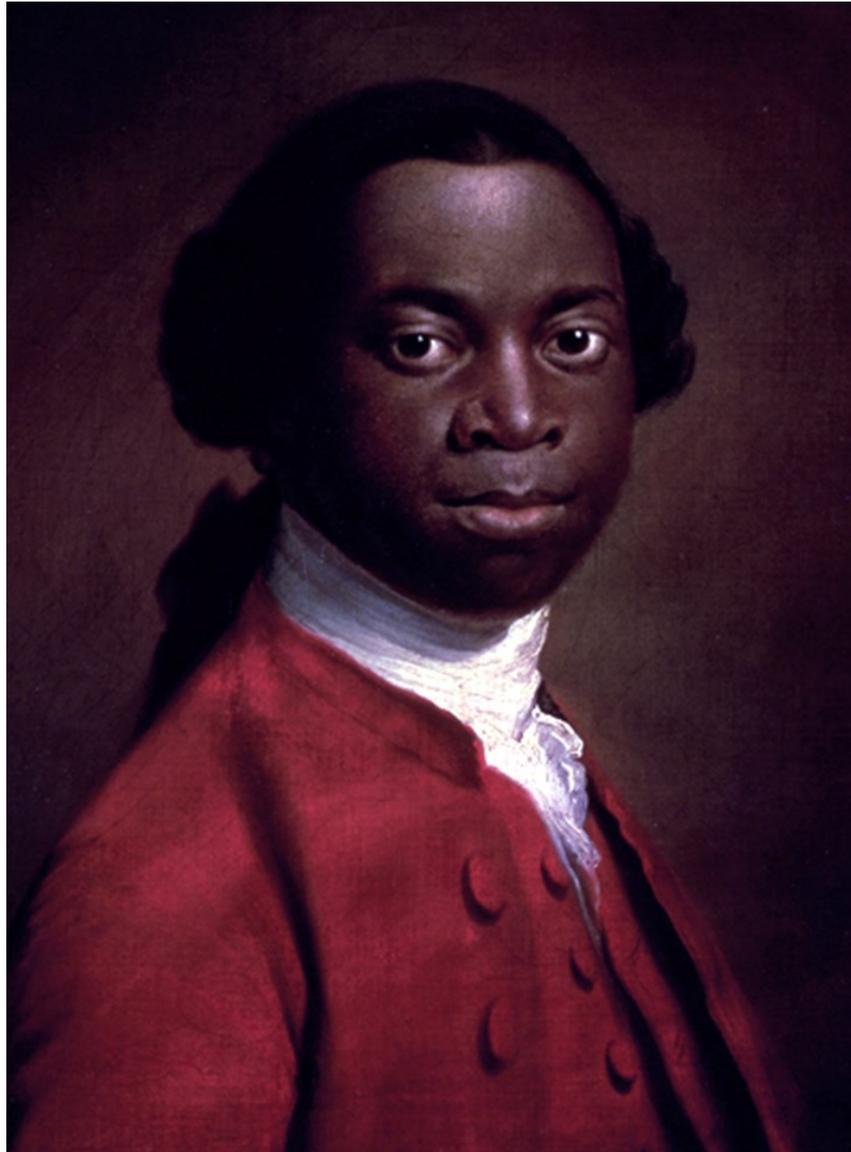
OLOUDAH EQUIANO.

Born in West Africa in 1743, Equiano was enslaved at the age of ten and eventually brought to England in 1757. A sailor for part of his life, he fought in the British campaigns against the French and eventually bought his freedom in 1766. His local connection, is an indirect one, as he is known to have accompanied Lord Nelson (later a Merton resident,) on an expedition to the Arctic in 1773.

By the 1780s Equiano had settled in London and was working as a barber. He became increasingly active in the anti-slavery movement and in 1783 campaigned for the punishment of traders who had drowned 132 Africans, thrown overboard from the slave ship Zong.

For a period, Equiano worked as a commissioner for an experimental colony in Sierra Leone. This had been organised as a settlement for Indian sailors and poor blacks, however the area was in the heart of slave trading territory. When the black settlers asked to be moved elsewhere, they were threatened with arrest - of the 350 migrants, many died from disease or malnutrition, others were captured by French slave traders.

Equiano was accused of defrauding the settlement of supplies and dismissed. An eloquent man and gifted writer, he continues to write articles for newspapers and journals and was also an accomplished speaker for the anti-slavery movement.



THE
INTERESTING NARRATIVE
OF
THE LIFE
OF
OLAUDAH EQUIANO,
OR
GUSTAVUS VASSA,
THE AFRICAN.
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.
VOL. I.

*Exalt, God is my salvation; I will not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he is my salvation.
And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name,
declare his doings among the people. Isaiah xlii. 2, 4.*

L O N D O N :

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[Entered at Stationer's Hall.]

Former slave Olaudah Equiano settled in London having bought his freedom in 1766.
(Right) - the title page of his autobiography - he was a gifted writer and orator for the anti-slavery movement during the 18th century.

PARISH REGISTERS - evidence of early black residents

The majority of early historical records in Britain were created by those with power - the Church, the Crown and the landowning classes. Many early black residents in the UK were travelling merchants, sailors, slaves and servants, with few freedoms, limited resources and little access to education - sadly this means there are relatively few surviving records to record their existence.

Amongst those records that do survive, parish registers provide some evidence of early Settlement. They show that black people were living in Merton from the 17th century, if not earlier.

The register of **St. Lawrence's Church, Morden** refers to:

Affrica Pazy, Born Morden 1673; John Prime, Buried Morden, 1773 and James Smith, Buried Morden, 1776.

Registers from **St. Mary's, Wimbledon** refer to:

*Richard Mingo, Servant of Captain Richard Scott & his wife Elizabeth, Baptised at Wimbledon
Caesar Omadine, Servant to Thomas Osborne, Lord of the manor, Baptised 1703*

William Reid, Buried Wimbledon, 1703

John - Servant to Lady Georgiana Spencer, Baptised Wimbledon, 1746

and Anthony Small, Buried Wimbledon, 1804.



(Left) St. Lawrence - parish church of Morden, 19th century

(Right) St. Mary's - parish church of Wimbledon, pictured during the 18th century.

FATIMA QUAHSHEEBAW - Maid to Lady Emma Hamilton at Merton Place.

Fatima Quasheebaw was a twenty year old Coptic Christian woman, brought to the UK from Egypt by Naval commander, Admiral Lord Nelson, following his victory at the Battle of the Nile. She is said to have been a “gift” for his lover, Lady Emma Hamilton - it is not clear whether Fatima was a slave, or a servant of free status - the former seems most likely.

Fatima worked at Lady Hamilton’s maid and may also have cared for Horatia, Emma and Nelson’s young daughter (whose identity was kept secret for fear of a scandal.)

In 1801 Lord William Douglas wrote a skit on life at Merton Place which refers to Fatima:

*Let not poor Quasheebaw, fair lady, think
Because her skin is blacker than ink
That, from the muse, so attached and true!
Though in her cheek there bloom no blushing rose
Our muse nor colour nor distraction knows
Save of the heart - and Quasheebaw’s , I know
Is pure and spotless as a one night’s snow.*



Merton Place, home of Admiral Lord Nelson and his lover, Emma Hamilton.
Pictured c.1805

Fatima is said to have been adopted by the Hamilton family and held in high regard - she was baptised by Reverend Lancaster at St. Mary's Merton, at Nelson's request and given family names. The parish register records:

Hamilton, Fatima Emma Charlotte Nelson, from Egypt, a Negress about 20 years of age, under the protection of the Right Honourable Lady Hamilton, was baptised April 26 1802.

In later life, possibly after the deaths of Nelson and Lady Hamilton, Fatima's mind is said to have "become disturbed." It is not clear if this was the result of mental illness, some life trauma or dementia in old age. Sadly she is said to have ended her days in an asylum.



Top: It is possible that Fatima Quasheebaw, lady's maid to Emma Hamilton, may have been similar in appearance to the young woman shown in this contemporary painting.

Left: St.Mary the Virgin, Merton.

Fatima was baptised here in a ceremony attended by Nelson and members of his household, 1802.

BILL RICHMOND - “The Black Terror” - bareknuckle boxer.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the area of Wimbledon Common, just off the Portsmouth Road, was a popular venue for bareknuckle prize fights.

Eighteen fights were held between 1780 and 1819, drawing large crowds and enthusiastic Gamblers, eager to bet on who would be the victor. An open location was chosen so that onlookers could make a quick exit, before the parish constables arrived.

Amongst those taking part were leading names in contemporary boxing, including Henry Pearce “The Game Chicken” and Edward Bourke the “fighting butcher.” Another star “Pugilist” known to have fought at Wimbledon was Bill Richmond or “The Black Terror,” referred to by some as the first black sporting icon. Born into slavery on Staten Island, New York, Bill was freed at the age of 13 by British army General Percy, who is said to have been so impressed with his fighting prowess that he brought him back to England. He was raised and educated in York and became a cabinet-making apprenticeship - this level of education was then rare for a black man living in Britain. He also married a local woman.

Often the victim of racism, Bill honed his fighting skills in Yorkshire street brawls. He later moved to London, where he was employed by boxing enthusiast, Lord Camelford, cousin of Prime Minister, William Pitt (himself a regular visitor to Wimbledon.)

Richmond challenged boxing veteran George Maddox to a fight on Wimbledon Common and suffered a bruising defeat in nine rounds - this was one of only two fights he ever lost.



Bill Richmond - boxer and London icon, pictured c.1812.

When his patron, Lord Camelford, was killed in a duel, Bill Richmond began boxing with renewed vigour, possibly out of financial necessity. He won 17 of his 19 prize fights, including victories against Jack Holmes and the Jewish fighter Youssop. He also started training other fighters, notably rising star Tom Cribb.

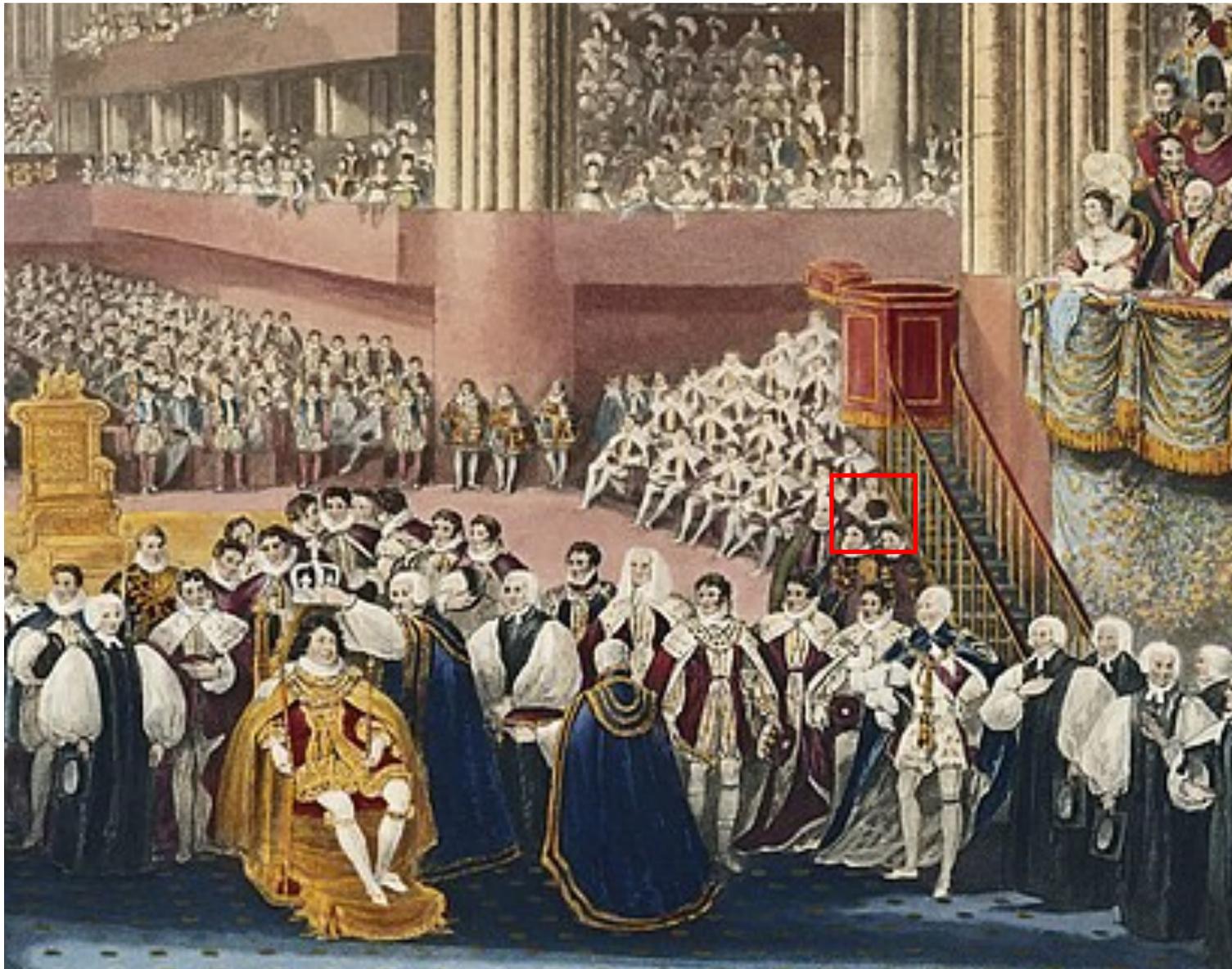
Richmond had a further comeback in 1808 and won numerous fights, increasing his popularity. He also avenged himself against George Maddox in a “gruelling encounter.”

In late life Bill became the landlord of the Horse & Dolphin pub in Leicester Square. He was also the trainer of boxer Tom Molineaux and returned to the ring himself in 1814, aged 50 - far beyond the retiring age for most of his fellow fighters. He even completed a 23 round bout to beat Tom Shelton, a boxer half his age. This led a contemporary commentator to state: *“Impetuous men must not fight Richmond as in his hands they become victims of their own temerity. The older he grows, the better pugilist he proves himself.”*

Bill was truly an icon of Georgian London. He continued to train men in the art of boxing, including the poet Lord Byron and even acted as an usher at the coronation of George IV in 1821. Richmond died, age 66, in 1829 - despite being famous in his own lifetime, it was not until 1999 that he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.



Bill Richmond, shown far right, watching his protégée,



Detail from the 1821 coronation of George VI in Westminster Abbey, showing Bill Richmond in his ceremonial dress.

THE SLAVE TRADE - For and Against

Although it is hard for us to stomach, by the 18th century a large proportion of the British economy was founded on its links to the slave trade. Some merchants became bankers, Those banks and insurance companies offering services to slave traders expanded rapidly and made cities like London very wealthy. The slave trade played an important part in providing British industry with raw materials like cotton, tobacco, sugar and spices, boosting the economy and the profits of plantation owners in America and the Caribbean. Some industries also benefited from exchanging factory-made goods for slaves.

Where towns or cities retain high status buildings from this period - whether private mansions or large public buildings, is highly likely that they are linked in some shape or form to the trade. Merton is no exception - both Wimbledon and Mitcham were home to politicians, diplomats and wealthy businessmen whose fortunes were linked to slavery during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Eagle House on High Street, Wimbledon Village, was built for Robert Bell, a founder member of the "Society of Adventurers" that evolved into the powerful East Indies Company which derived considerable wealth from trading in slaves. Part of the management committee, Robert invested £2,600 (a vast sum) in the East India Company's trading voyages, however The financial return was such that he was able to spend £1,200 on the construction of Eagle House in 1617.



Eagle House, High Street, Wimbledon - built in 1617 for East India trader, Robert Bell.

The property survives and now houses luxury flats.

Eagle House on London Road, Mitcham, was built in 1705 for James Dolliffe, a founding member of the South Seas Company which traded in slaves, spices and other exotic products. Dolliffe personally invested at least £10,000 and amassed a vast personal fortune as profits soared.

Between 1815 and 1824, Wimbledon House, Parkside was home to Sir Joseph Marryat MP, whose fortunes were linked to trading with the West Indies and the USA. He was very active in defending the slave trade, printing pamphlets, addressing Parliament and representing the interests of plantation owners. In fact he and his family owned plantations in Trinidad, Grenada, Jamaica and St. Lucia. It is even said that, as a young merchant in Grenada in the 1780s, he may have fathered a child by an enslaved woman and this daughter, Ann, was given property in the form of land and slaves.

Controversy also surrounds Sir Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, Home Secretary, who leased Cannizaro House on Westside, Wimbledon, from 1785 to 1806. He is accused of fighting the abolition of slavery, even after initial legislation banned British ships from trading in 1807. This was partly to from economic necessity, as British industry depended heavily on slave-farmed cotton, tobacco and sugar. However Dundas himself had little direct involvement in the slave trade and is said to have recognised that the only way to get an abolition bill on the Statute book was to insert the word “gradual” into the legal proposals. This allowed time for lobbying to change attitudes and ensured that the trade was ultimately abolished.



Eagle House, London Road, Mitcham - built in 1705 for South Seas trader, James Dolliffe.
The building survives and is now a school for children with special needs.



Sir Joseph Marryat M P (pictured in 1810) and his home, Wimbledon House, Parkside.

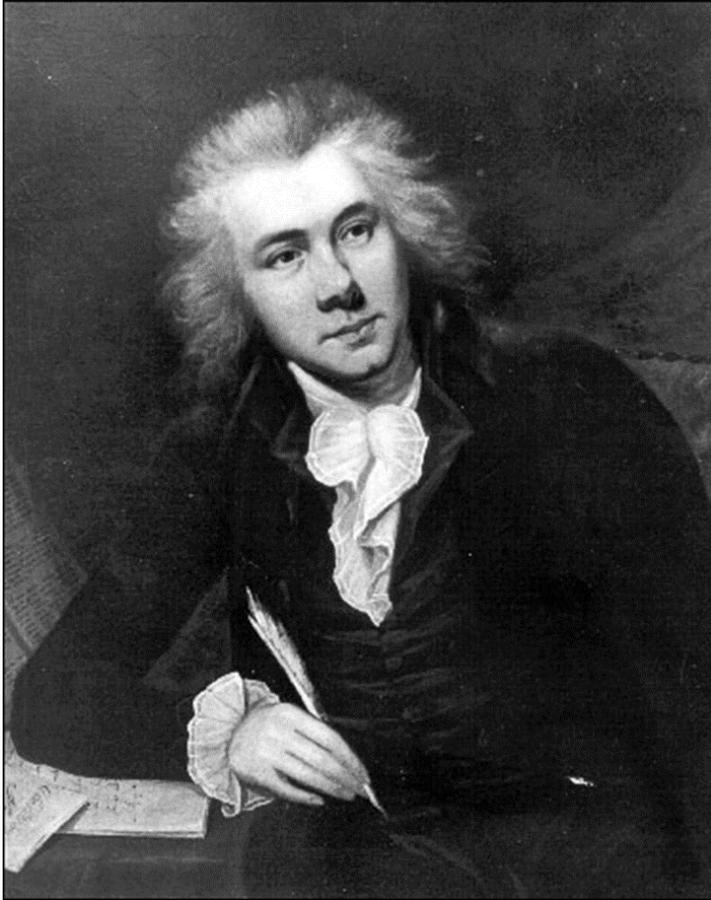
The property was demolished during the last century.

Merton was also home to some leading opponents of the slave trade - the most famous of whom, William Wilberforce M P, who lived at Lauriston House, Southside, Wimbledon between 1777 and 1787. He spent three years of his childhood living at the property following the death of his father in 1768 and inherited the house, after the death of his uncle.

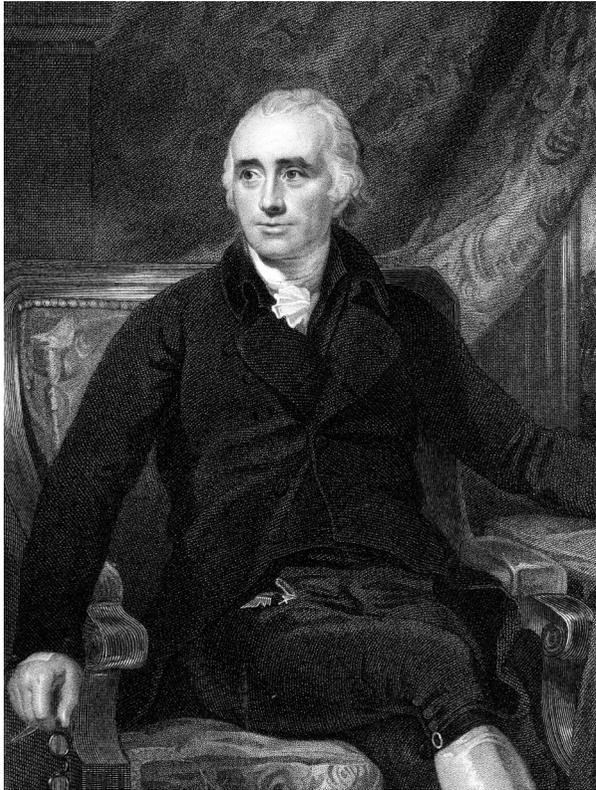
At the age of twenty-one, William became the youngest MP in British Parliamentary history and was enjoying a wealthy and sometimes mischievous lifestyle, often hosting lavish parties for his friends and fellow MPs. During the 1780s, he became increasingly influenced by Methodism and the evangelical preacher, Isaac Milner, with whom he toured Europe. Determined to abandon his former lifestyle and dedicate himself to good causes, he sold his Wimbledon estate and threw himself into lobbying for social reform.

William's chief interest was the campaign to abolish slavery and he spent the next twenty years petitioning Parliament, writing articles, giving speeches and touring the country to promote the cause. He enjoyed some success in 1807, when British ships were banned from trading in slaves. However it was not until 26 July 1833, that the Abolition Bill finally passed at its third reading. Wilberforce died three days later.

Mitcham was also home to anti-slavery campaigners, possibly helped by its Quaker and Methodist communities. Mitcham Grove, a sizeable property near the River Wandle, was home to senior banker Henry Hoare from 1786 onwards. His brother, Samuel, was treasurer of the Abolition Committee, campaigning for an end to slavery - Henry is also likely to have been a supporter of the anti-slavery movement.



(Left) William Wilberforce MP c.1780 and (right) Lauriston House, Southside - his Wimbledon home between 1777 and 1787.



(Left) Senior Fleet Street banker, Henry Hoare and (right) Mitcham Grove, his home from 1786 to 1828. Henry's brother Samuel was an anti-slavery campaigner and Henry is thought to have shared his opposition to the trade.

TOBACCO

Tobacco was first introduced to England in the sixteenth century by Royal favourite and adventurer, Sir Walter Raleigh. He owned land in Mitcham (including a site near Eagle House) through his marriage to Bess Throckmorton, daughter of a wealthy diplomat.

During the 1580s and '90s Raleigh established Roanoke colony in Virginia. It was from his work here that tobacco, potatoes and maize were introduced to England. The English soon became addicted to the nicotine content in tobacco leaf which they smoked in clay pipes, chewed as heavy wads or ground into a powder known as snuff.

From 1619 onwards African slaves were being transported to work giant tobacco plantations established in the fertile soils of Virginia. By the 1630s the American colony was shipping 1,000,000 pounds of tobacco to England. During the early eighteenth century around 100,000 new slaves were sent to Virginia and tobacco exports rose to 220 million pounds.

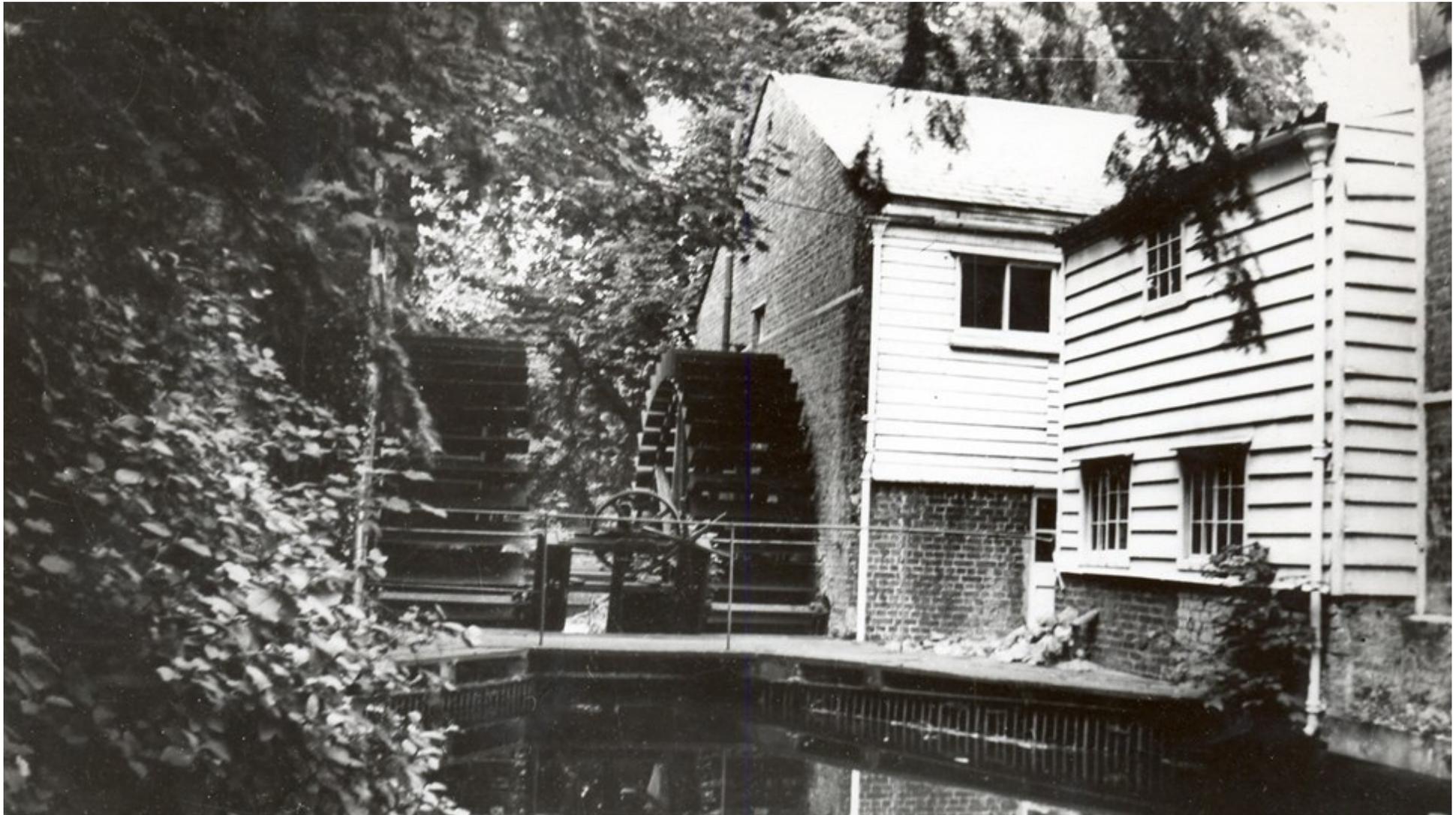
From the eighteenth century onwards, the River Wandle was used to power the snuff industry. Waterwheels drove the machinery that ground tobacco leaves into fine powder - this was thought to clear the sense and stimulate the mind if snorted up the nose to promote sneezing.

There were snuff mills in Mitcham and also at Ravensbury Mill and Morden Hall. The latter site once had two parallel mills. By 1845 these were both leased to James Taddy & Co. of Fenchurch Street. Alexander Hatfeild, grandson of the company founder, worked with his son Gilliat and amassed a large fortune. The Hatfeilds later bought the Morden Hall estate.



(Left) Gilray's cartoon showing snuff-taking as a cure for the common cold.

(Right) Tobacco leaves powdered to form snuff - this could be flavoured with everything from cloves and bergamot to lavender.



The East and West mills at Morden Hall Park - used to produce snuff.

Production here ceased in 1922 following industrial action by non union workers in sympathy with striking cigarette workers at Taddy & Co. London.



Ravensbury Mill, Wandle Road, Morden.

During the 18th and early 19th century, the mill was used to grind snuff for John Rutter, owner of a City based tobacco firm.

UNDERGROUND.

Following World War II London Transport found it increasingly hard to find staff.

Despite recruitment drives across the home nations, by 1955 there were 3500 unfilled posts on the Underground and bus network. It was particularly hard to fill lower grade jobs, many of which were poorly paid, dirty, difficult and involved long shift work.

Overseas recruitment was now vital and the lack of employment opportunities in the West Indies prompted the Barbados Government to invite London Transport to start direct recruitment in 1956. Passage to the UK was covered by the Barbadian authorities but had to be paid back over two years. This left many Caribbean immigrants “tied” to particular occupations. By 1966 over 4000 West Indians had emigrated to work on the London Underground, trams, trolleybuses and in LT canteens.

Some white employees felt threatened by the new arrivals and unions placed quotas on the number of overseas recruits and the work they could do. Having shown their grit and determination the new workers became more accepted - although some left, those who stayed were gradually promoted and given more responsibility.

Advancing technology has changed the nature of London Transport. In 1968 there were 73,000, roughly 9000 of whom were black. By 2018 there were 27,300 employees including 7233 from London’s black community. Today black workers are employed on all branches of the network, from management roles and office staff, to Tube and bus drivers, station staff, track crew, I T, catering, maintenance work and cleaning.



London's transport workers have been serving the community since the 1950s - from train drivers and track maintenance, to station staff, administrators, catering teams and technical support.





London Transport employees, c.1960

During the 1950s and '60s labour shortages led to intensive recruitment from Africa and the Caribbean. New arrivals sought work as conductors and drivers on the Capital's bus and Tube network

VOTEWINNERS - Public Service in Merton

There is a strong tradition of public service amongst members of the black community in Merton. The borough has had many black councillors whose portfolios have covered everything from public health and equalities, to planning, the environment, child welfare and heritage.

Merton's first black Mayor was Councillor Joe Abrams, who represented the Graveney ward for 24 years and spent much of his professional life working to improve racial equality.

This included work on the landmark Stephen Lawrence Enquiry. He was awarded an OBE in 1982 and awarded the Freedom of Merton in 2006, before retiring to his native Guyana.

Councillor Edith Macauley became Merton's first female black mayor in 2002. She spent over 30 years working in the field of legal affairs and trade unionism and has been a councillor for the Lavender Fields ward since 1988. Her service to the community was recognised in 2012, when she was awarded an MBE by Her Majesty the Queen.

The borough's list of black mayors includes: Councillor John Delaney (2007) who has been active in supporting the Merton Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Group. This offers support to those suffering from the inherited blood disorders, which are common amongst people with Africa and Caribbean heritage. Councillor David Chung (2015) famously swam 100 lengths of the Canons Leisure Centre pool, to raise money for the Merton Centre for Independent Living and Friends in St. Helier, despite being a wheelchair user with a prosthetic leg.

Councillor Agatha Agyikyina (2014) was awarded an OBE for public and political service, having spent over 30 years in the voluntary sector, including support for young parents.



Mayors of Merton:

Top row (left to right)

- Councillor Joe Abrams, 1990
- Councillor Edith Macauley, 2002
- Councillor John Dehaney, 2007
- Councillor Agatha Akyigyina,

2nd row:

- Councillor David Chung, 2015
- Councillor Brenda Fraser, 2016
- Councillor Marsie Skeete, 2017

WAR SERVICE - the vital contribution of black people in two World Wars.

Black and Asian troops made a major contribution to the Allied war effort during both World Wars. Large contingents of African and Caribbean troops, transport, munitions and support staff played their part in defending the British Empire both on home soil and across the globe. Indian troops were also part of a prestigious and highly trained military force, called into action in both the First and Second World Wars.

The British Government ran major recruitment drives to encourage the indigenous population to swell the ranks of the Allied forces. The strength of colonial rule and British involvement overseas also inspired a deep sense of loyalty - this drove many Africans, Asians and West Indians to answer the call to “protect the mother country from tyranny and despotism.”

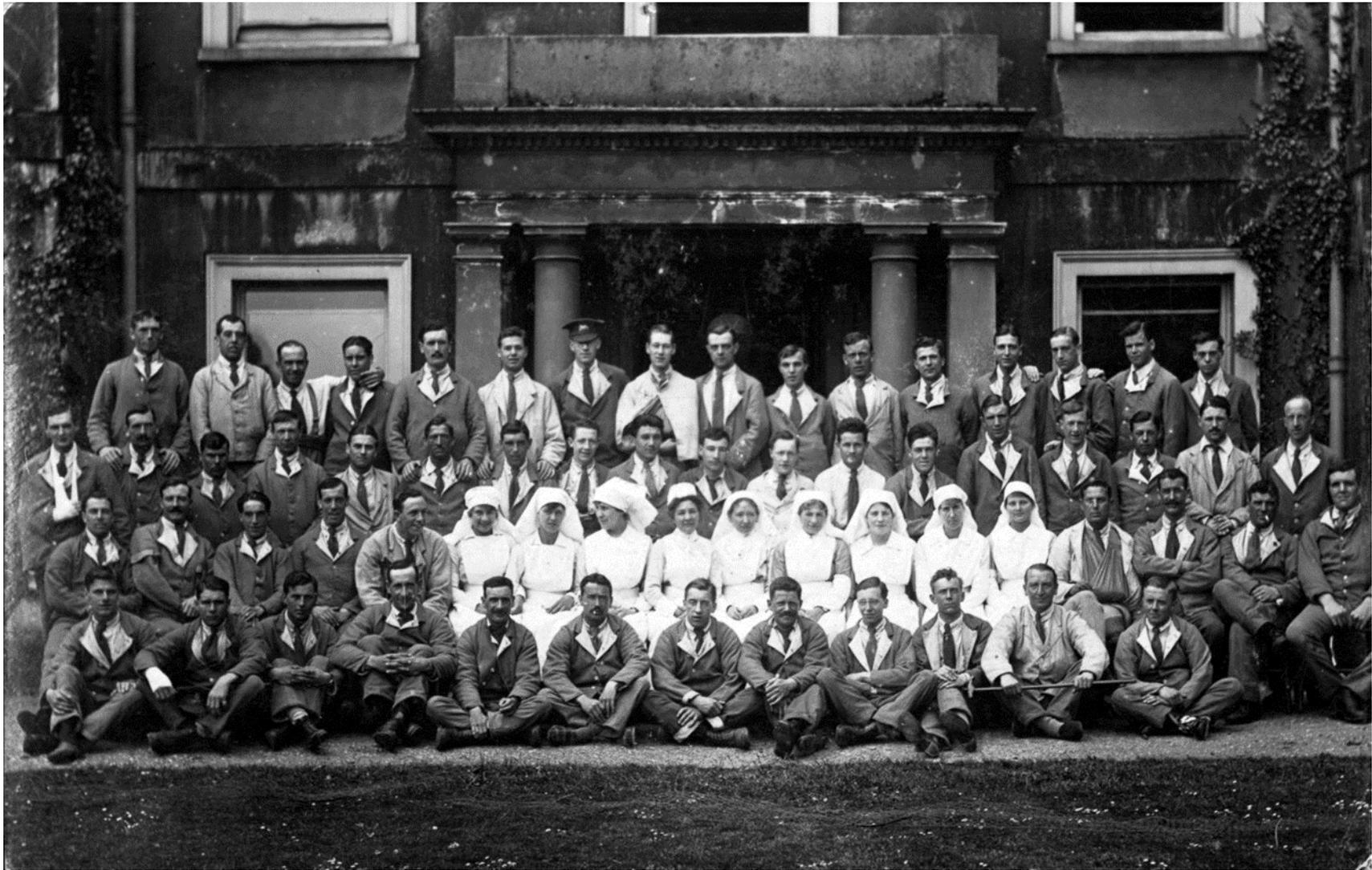
One should also remember that, just as in Britain itself, men from poor communities with few resources, limited educational and employment opportunities, also felt they had little choice but to join up. For some, military service was the only way to obtain regular food, pay and (to some extent) pension provision for themselves and their families.

Thousands of black and Asian troops entered front line conflict - many made the ultimate sacrifice. They either have no known grave, or lie thousands of miles from their families and homeland. Others were seriously wounded or traumatised and found it hard to support themselves and their families in the post-war era, particularly as many were denied the land and pensions promised at the time of enlistment.

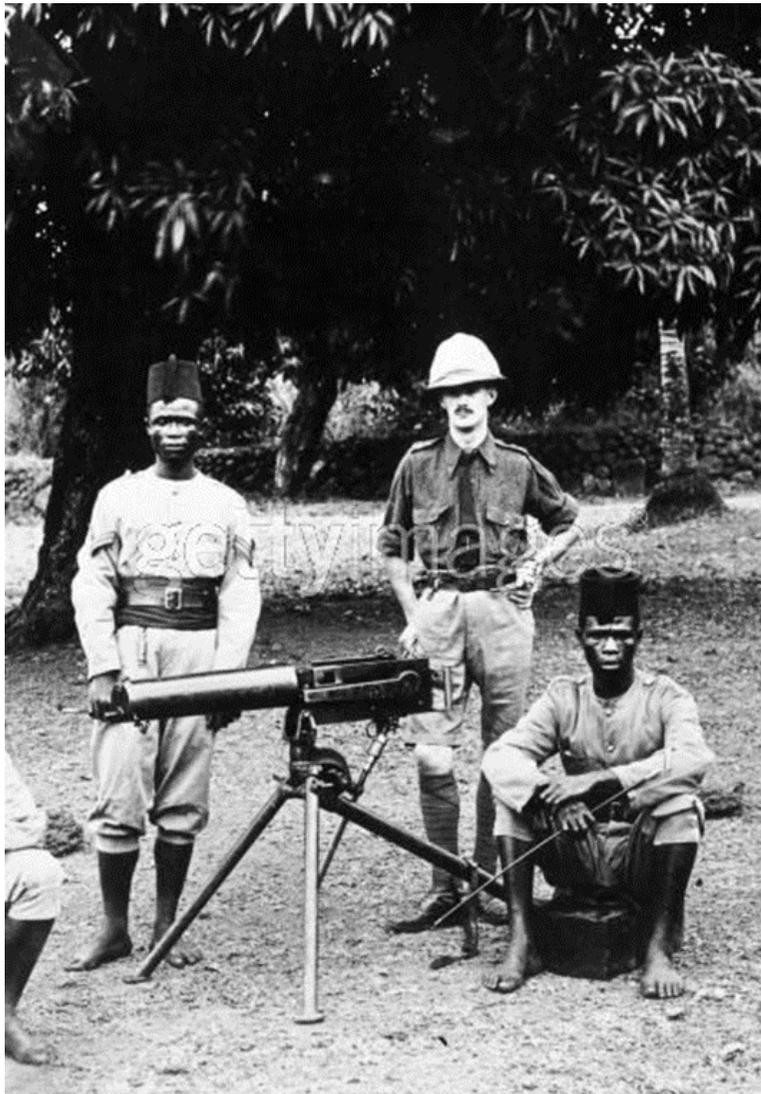


Convalescent troops enjoying an outing on Wimbledon Common, c.1918.

This is currently the only image in the Merton collection to show a black servicemen during the First World War. He and his comrades are pictured in the distinctive light blue uniform and red tie worn by convalescent troops. This was designed to deter them from unauthorised leave but also to safeguard them from being accused of cowardice for being absent from the front line.



Convalescent troops, including soldiers from across the British Empire,
pictured at the military hospital, Morden Hall, c.1916



Serving King and Country far from home:

(top) African troops pictured during the Great War

(base) Merton resident, Jack Dimmer V.C, pictured with his men during service with the West African Regiment, First World War.



Black and Asian servicemen and women made a major contribution to the Allied cause during World War II.



A final resting place far from home...

The grave of a Nigerian soldier in a Commonwealth War Cemetery in Burma



During World War One 60,000 black South Africans and 120,000 other Africans served in uniformed Labour units alone. 15,204 served in the British West Indian Regiment.

More than 600,000 Africans fought for the British during the Second World War.

16,000 West Indians volunteered for service in World War II - they included 6000 RAF and Canadian pilots, bomb aimers, gunners and ground crew; thousands of Merchant Navy Seamen; 1000 members of the Caribbean Regiment; 80 Women's Auxiliary Air Force and 30 Auxiliary Territorial Service personnel. 40,000 West Indians also supported the civilian war effort in the U S A.

XENOPHOBIA



Defined as “dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries,” this is sadly something that has been experienced by many members of the black community at some point in their lives. There have been instances of racism throughout history, often the result of cultural ignorance, suspicion and lack of experience. Many Caribbean immigrants who arrived in the UK during the 1950s encountered signs, such as the one (picture left) when searching for housing or employment.

Today we recognise the tremendous contribution that black people have made to the culture, economy and technological development of Merton and the UK as a whole. The right to equality is enshrined in legislation such as the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Equalities Act 2010. Hate crime has also become a prosecutable offence. However the Windrush Scandal of 2017, which saw hundreds of Commonwealth citizens wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights; the response to the death of George Floyd in the USA and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement show that more needs to be done to ensure equality and respect in all aspects of daily life.

YOU:



Whether you were born in Merton or are a new arrival - everyone who lives, works or studies in Merton is contributing to our borough's heritage on a daily basis. We would like to reflect that in our work, resources and displays. At present there are large gaps in the material we hold, particularly from the 1970s onwards.

We are keen to develop our collection to represent the modern Merton community - if you can help us by sharing your photographs, life stories and memorabilia, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Contact Merton Heritage Service : **Tel. 020 8545 3239 / Email local.studies@merton.gov.uk**

ZULU WARS - A Merton connection.

During Queen Victoria's reign the British Government was keen to consolidate its territories in Southern Africa, some of which were bordered by tribal areas and Boer republics and the powerful Zulu kingdom. In 1878 the British High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere, sent an "insulting and extravagant" ultimatum to the Zulu king, Cetschwayo, demanding that he disband his army which was falsely claimed to be destabilising the region. Frere used the King's refusal as a pretext for a British invasion, to seize the Zulu territory by force.

The Zulus were a proud people, with a large and fearsome army, determined to protect their homeland. The British, although outnumbered, had the advantage of modern military firepower including small cannon, Lee Enfield rifles and the rapid firing Gatling gun. The Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 involved a series of bloody and historic battles including Rorke's Drift, Khambula and the decisive Battle of Ulundi where the Zulus were defeated and Cetshwayo was captured.

Amongst those who fought in the campaign was Henry Lysons, the son of a senior military commander and Crimean veteran, Sir Daniel Lysons. Henry was born in 1858 at Morden Lodge, a property off Morden Hall Road. He also pursued a military career, joining the Cameronian Regiment and serving as aide de camp to Field Marshall Sir Evelyn Wood during the Zulu war.

Lysons was awarded a Victoria Cross for his courage in attempting to stop Zulu warriors who were attacking British troops from caves in Inhlobane Mountain, Natal. He also retrieved the body of a fatally wounded officer, Captain Campbell, during the same assault.



Morden Lodge, near Morden Hall Park.
Birthplace of Henry Lysons, V C (1858).
(Right) Lysons on his Cameronian Regimental uniform.



Zulu warriors at the Battle of Khambula,
March 1879



Inhlobane Mountain, Natal.

It was here that Henry Lysons performed an act
of unstinting bravery, for which he was awarded
the Victoria Cross (March 1879)