

# AHMED IQBAL ULLAH RACE RELATIONS ARCHIVE AND EDUCATION TRUST

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The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive was founded in Manchester in 1999 specifically to combat racist ideas about black people, and is named in honour of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah who was murdered in 1986 in the playground of a Manchester High School. The archive contains material that documents the contributions of black people to British and American history, and the struggle against racism in its many forms.

The archive collection includes books, newspaper cuttings, journal and magazine articles, video and audio-tape, posters and other ephemeral material which is often difficult to find elsewhere. There are, for example, several collections of slave narratives, which include audio-tape of interviews with ex-slaves, from the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s. The collection is organised around the key themes of history, politics, culture and identity, women, education and employment, housing, immigration, social services and criminal justice. A unique cataloguing system allows visitors to identify material relevant to their research needs. The Archive is open to the public daily, and visitors can use its materials free of charge.

The archive collection includes a small local history section that is the focus of current efforts to increase the recording of the histories of African, Asian and Caribbean communities in Manchester. It soon became apparent that there were very large gaps in this area, and volunteers and placement students have been working to gather such material to lodge in the archive. In 2002, for example, a volunteer developed a Black History Trail in preparation for Black History Month, and a placement student from Manchester Metropolitan University has collected evidence of the appearance of the famous Black performers, Ira Aldridge and Paul Robeson, in Manchester theatres, creating new files of this material for the archive.

In 2001, the Archive established the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust as a sister organisation to develop educational outreach work with young people and in schools. The Trust's basic philosophical position is that racism is not natural or inevitable. Teachers need support to create an educational environment in which all children flourish in a culture of inclusion and respect. Work with primary and secondary teachers is essential to the Trust's work, which involves developing new teaching materials as well as lending items from the Archive's collection.

**Untold Histories** is a collection of materials for loan to schools and community groups, which was created to increase the range of material in the Archive that is accessible to young people. It is spread across fifteen boxes with various themes: African Caribbean history; Black Britain in the Twentieth Century; Breathing spaces – Racism and Resistance; Britain since the 1930s; Britain – Trade and Empire, 1750-1900; Pioneers' Biographies; and



The launch of 'Hearts and Homes - Sikh Memories and Views of Manchester'

Refugee Experiences. Most of this collection consists of books written for young people, although some is designed for teachers. **Untold Histories** has proved very popular with Manchester schools, which are allowed to borrow the boxes of materials for at least a half-term, at no charge. (Schools outside Manchester may be able to borrow these materials, subject to negotiation.)

Recognising that the local histories of African, Asian and Caribbean communities have not been systematically recorded, the Trust has also developed an exciting **Community History Project**, which started in September 2001, to assist in collecting those histories. A project worker has been working in four schools in Manchester, with groups of ethnic minority pupils. They are: Sikh pupils at Oakwood High School; Bangladeshi pupils at Burnage High School for Boys and Levenshulme High School for Girls; and Pakistani pupils from Abraham Moss High School. The students are taught video and interviewing skills, interview elders from their own communities and collect visual images of people, landmark buildings and other items of interest. The students are then involved in developing these materials into forms that can be used by other schools and community groups. As a result, the archive has acquired a set of large, lavishly illustrated posters that describe the experiences of eight Sikh families in Manchester. The posters explore aspects of Sikh community life in Manchester, such as the founding of the first Gurdwara, at Monton Street (a purpose built new building was



**Gyani Sundar Singh Sagar outside Strangeways prison**

constructed in the 1960s), and the campaign to exempt those who wear the turban from having to use motorcycle helmets. This involved Gyani Sundar Singh Sagar and culminated in the Motorcycle Crash Helmet (Religious Exemption) Act, 1976.

The **Community History Project** is unique in Manchester (and unusual even on a national level) in that it engages young people from the target communities directly in conducting the research. It is hoped that this approach will generate positive outcomes in terms of understanding and relationships between the generations at the same time as it expands the amount of local historical information collected and stored at the Archive. It was anticipated that young people involved would benefit academically from the opportunity to develop a range of skills while conducting the research, and this has been confirmed by positive feedback throughout the project. The enthusiasm from the young people and from their communities has been outstanding.

The Archive and Education Trust has also developed another innovative project called **A Long Way From Home: Young Refugees in Manchester Write about their Lives**, which began collecting personal testimonies of young refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester in 2000. The intention was to provide local young people with a space to record their experiences and to produce material that teachers in Manchester could use in



**Young refugees contribute their testimonies to 'A Long Way Home'**

teaching about refugees. This is seen as an essential element of the Archive's anti-racist work, in the context of continued racist stereotyping of refugees and asylum seekers. The material collected was put together in a book *A Long Way From Home: Young Refugees in Manchester Write about their Lives*, which was launched in June 2002. It is now the intention to work with several other agencies to set up a new oral history project to document the histories of adult refugees and the formation of their community institutions in Manchester.

From the start, the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive and Education Trust has been concerned to develop contact with other museums, galleries and archives in Manchester, as part of the important task of increasing and improving the representation of ethnic minority groups in the city's cultural institutions. It has provided materials for use in various recent exhibitions, and in June 2002 jointly organised, with the Manchester Museum, a very popular and successful day conference for teachers on Black oral history projects. The evaluations of this day were so positive that another similar oral history day was held in June 2003, which involved a wide variety of organisations across Manchester.

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive and Education Trust aims to be a place where black history can be stored and accessed. This is reflected in the range of educational activities which it supports and in its proactive approach to the collection and dissemination of that history, which recognises that the local history of African, Asian and Caribbean peoples is an important and integral part of the history of Manchester and the region.

The archive will be moving to larger premises later in 2003. Until then, enquiries should be addressed to: Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Relations Archive & Education Trust, Ground Floor, Devonshire House, Precinct Centre, Oxford Rd, M13 9PL. Tel: 0161- 275 2920. URLs [www.racearchive.org.uk](http://www.racearchive.org.uk) or [www.educationtrust.org.uk](http://www.educationtrust.org.uk) E-mail: [rrarchive@man.ac.uk](mailto:rrarchive@man.ac.uk). The archive is open to the public Monday to Friday, 9.30a.m - 4.30p.m. For group visits, please make an appointment first.



**Sikhs and locals meeting at 23 Monton Street**