

DOROTHY KUYA ARCHIVE BLOG: THE FINAL BLOG POST

By JANAYA PICKETT, Project Manager



Our Dorothy Kuya Archive Project reached its end this month. We officially celebrated the handover of the archive at the Museum of Liverpool in collaboration with the International Slavery Museum

Dorothy Kuya: A Legacy of Black Liverpool.

It was wonderful to see so many community members turn out to learn about the project, to hear from our keynote speaker Sharon Grant (ex-councillor and wife of late MP Bernie Grant) as well as a performance from Liverpool's own griot Levi Tafari. We were lucky enough to hear personal stories from the audience from those who knew Dorothy and were excited to see her legacy shared and preserved.

For our final blog, I thought there was no better way to do Dorothy justice than to compile some thoughts of what we have learned about Dorothy Kuya, and her life in activism, during this project.



As a Liverpool-born, Black woman, studying Liverpool Black history is studying my own. And I was never taught this history at school, or even at university.

I first met archivist Vicki Caren when we were both volunteers on WoW's *Great War to Race Riots* project and walking tour (**Returning for Black History Month 2023**) just starting out in our careers. We volunteered together on the L8 Law Centre Archive project too. So, when this project came up, as a Black Liverpool woman, and with Vicki as the project's Head Archivist, it felt like the universe was telling me what to do next.

I wasn't prepared for how Dorothy's archive would forever change my perception on so many things. Or how emotional of a journey it would be. It is truly a capsule of 20th century Black British, and Black Liverpool, history. It documents so much change from the unique perspective of a Black woman.

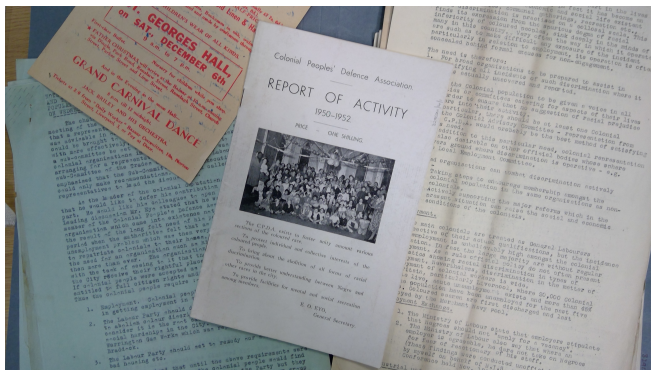


Dorothy's library of books, over seven hundred, covers any aspect of the Black experience that you can think of. There were forty-five crates of papers, meeting minutes, correspondence, magazines, newspaper clippings, photographs, and it goes on. Vicki was set with the huge task of cataloguing it all, with the help of Archive Assistant Dateus Tagoe and our project participants. My job as Project Manager was to interpret the archive for the public.



I want to tell you what I've learned about Dorothy Kuya. I learned she was fearless (at least on the outside). I learned that from aged thirteen she was an anti-racist campaigner, and that this campaign continued in different forms right up until she died. I learned that Pan-Africanism and communism was part of her identity, and it was her home. They were the backbone of all her activity.

I learned about Ludwig Hesse, who was her mentor, and about local organisations like the Colonial Peoples Defence Association, the African Churches Mission, and Stanley House. I learned how Liverpool's Black Community was a cite of Pan-Africanism with a global Black identity. And that Dorothy shared in this view, having strong connections with Black Communities in Manchester and Cardiff.



I learned that she was active in the Movement for Colonial Freedom, eventually becoming a secretary, as well as training to become a Black teacher in the 19 0's. She was active alongside the likes of Claudia Jones, Billie Strachen, Cleston Taylor, Winston Pinder, and more (all of whom I've learned more about because of this archive).

I learned that her mentor from the 1940's, Ludwig Hesse, was one of the founders of the Liverpool Community Relations Council in 1970 when Dorothy returned to Liverpool as the first community relations officer. That she was a driving force behind Liverpool Personnel, the L8 Writers Workshops, theatre groups the Caribbean Centre and PALS Centre, a hostel for Black youth. As well



as her research into racism in children's schoolbooks and education.

In the 1980's she was part of the Broadwater Farm Inquiry panel alongside radical Black MP Bernie Grant, taking the police and media to task over their corruption. She was an important member of the Granby Residents Association in the early 90's and was part of a group working to secure the 2008 Capital of Culture bid. She worked with National Museums Liverpool to establish the Atlantic Slave Trade Gallery and eventually the International Slavery Museum.

There's many details I've missed and I'm not saying that she did any of these things in isolation, but she was always at the forefront.

I learned she didn't suffer fools gladly. That she was highly intelligent and never afraid to show it. That she was always unconventional. Dorothy could be incredibly stubborn and rarely said sorry, but she would apologise in other ways. She was also incredibly generous and altered the lives of people she knew, and people she didn't, for the better. Almost everyone I spoke to had gotten involved in some cause or some line of work because of Dorothy. She changed many a trajectory.



I spoke to people in Liverpool and London. People from Nigeria, Ghana, Trinidad, England. I spoke to a Black Broadway performer and activist Vinnie Burrows who is 98. I spoke to three professors in the United States (all born in Liverpool). I spoke to a priest, a chief, and a few communists, councillors, teachers, academics, activists, and Jeremy Corbyn MP.



I believe Dorothy understood the importance of her work and saved her archive as evidence of her personal contribution to the struggle against anti-racism, but also as a resource toward the true history of the Black experience in this city, in this country, and across the world. I'd like to see Black communities, marginalised communities, inspired by Dorothy as a testament to grassroots activism. And that the archive is used to carry on a tradition of grassroots activism, rather than academic analyses of no practical benefit to working people. This was Dorothy's aim.

**She never toed the line
and she always
recognised and spoke
truth to power.**

I hope our children learn more about Dorothy and other local activists. We're in uncertain times and I feel that the release of Dorothy's archive has come at the right time ... to inspire us all to be as fearless as she was, or at least, to try. Reminding us of the struggles we've come from and give us the energy we need to continue that fight.

More importantly, to know ourselves as Black people, as working-class people, as women, and to be proud of that despite everything.

The Dorothy Kuya Archive is available to view now in the Archives of the Maritime Museum.

