

**Caribbean Connections, Settlers and sojourners in the Wokingham area.**

**A presentation by Guy Grannum at a Wokingham Society Open Meeting on  
Wednesday 16 March 2022**

On a wet and windy March evening Guy Grannum, author of *Tracing your Caribbean Ancestors* and Society Committee member, evoked memories of sunnier climes in a presentation packed with detail drawn from painstaking research into the history of his own ancestry, which had led him to widen out his research into local links with the Caribbean generally over past centuries.

Guy's great grandfather, Reginald Clifton Grannum, who was born in Barbados in 1872 and served as a Civil Servant in the British Colonial Service, was the inspiration for Guy's research, which took him far and wide through the Caribbean, with the brunt of research focussing on Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Anguilla since it was from those islands many Caribbean-born people came to the UK and settled in Berkshire.

Starting with the most visible of Caribbean presence the Black History mural on Central Hall by the Oracle in Reading Guy gave an overview of the migration and settlement. He broke his talk into three parts: leaving Berkshire, living in the Caribbean and settling in Berkshire.

Throughout his presentation, Guy provided us with an abundance of detail drawn from many historical records across a wide range of national archives, institutions and organisations, focussing on Berkshire with particular emphasis on Reading and Wokingham.

Such sources included passenger lists, baptisms, marriages and burials, slave compensation awards and especially censuses. Examples included lists of soldiers from the Royal Berkshire Regiment who died from Yellow Fever while serving in Haiti in 1796; in 1851 one of John Heelas's assistant drapers David Wiles was from Jamaica; and he traced a number of former sugar plantation owners who lived for a few years in Wokingham. One of the owners was Timothy Hare Earle, who had moved into the dower house of the Swallowfield Estate, namely The Elms in Broad Street, where he had died a bachelor in 1836. He also named Thomas Garth who owned Haines Hill, a mansion close to Twyford, whose descendants have connections with Wokingham. Former slave owners were generously compensated by the British Government.

From his research into UK census records Guy had encountered many dead ends since few people remained in Berkshire. Among many fascinating details, contrary to widespread belief, Guy told us that until 1940s, far more Caribbean emigrants went to the Americas than to the UK; it was not until the 1950s that our country became their preferred destination.

The censuses show that people born in the Caribbean were and are a minority population in the Berkshire and lived predominantly in Reading and Slough. They confirm people born in Barbados make up the largest Caribbean-born population in Reading, and it has been said that Reading has the largest Barbadian expatriate community, this relationship was commemorated by being twinned with Speightstown, Barbados in 2003.

Until the 1950s there were no Caribbean communities in the area. Before then the censuses demonstrate that that they were on the whole individuals who were born in the Caribbean and then travelled to Berkshire to live for only a few years before moving on. The censuses record occupations which reveal they were a mix of military officers, landholders, annuitants, and people of independent means at one end with seamstresses, tailors, cordwainers and sailors at the other with farmers, teachers, governesses, surgeons, and clergy in between. Many were children who had been born in the Caribbean while their parents were temporarily based there in the military or church; a minority seemed to be of long-standing Caribbean settler families.

Based on his research into his ancestry, Guy presented us with fascinating and valuable insights not only into our local heritage, but the history of the Caribbean and its people generally. I'm sure those of us who braved the wintery elements felt that it had been well worth venturing out into the cold and gloom to appreciate the wealth of information relating to a subject which in a broader sense is only too topical today. We had also been made aware of the time, resourcefulness and patience needed to elicit the truth from a mass of statistical evidence culled from a wide range of records based here, the islands of the Caribbean and worldwide.