Local and Community History Month 2024

One of the strengths of the HA is our broad interest in all areas of history. So many history themes and narratives focus on the big issues, but for many of us, history starts in the local. That is why we introduced Local History and Community Month for each May – it is an opportunity to promote, highlight and celebrate the local history that is around us at all times. For 2024 the our Student oracy competition *The Great Debate* had the question:

Which historical place or person from your local area deserves greater recognition?
All those students that have taken part have been invited to submit their story, and we will publish them online and in some of our publications.

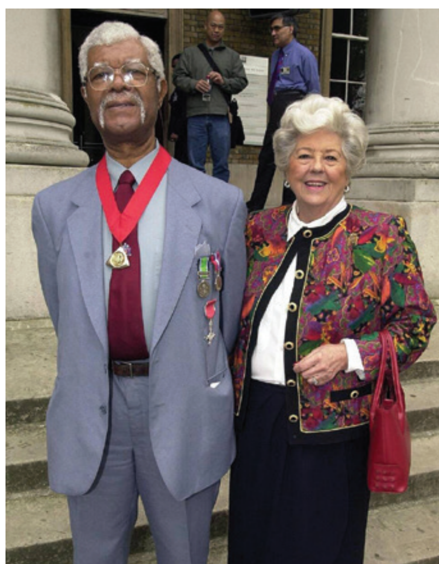
Of those who have sent in their talks, the students have introduced their choice in their own style and they have also told the story in their own way; we have proofed their written versions but only lightly edited them to preserve their own voices and arguments.

Here are three that we have selected. To read more of these wonderful examples of local history heroes from across all of the UK, visit our website from the end of April onwards.

'The truth is finally being told.' Ryan Belaidi

These are the words of the Reverend Michael King on the 75th anniversary of the HMT *Empire Windrush* arriving at the Port of Tilbury, bringing over 1,027 migrants (primarily from the West Indies) to help rebuild London after the Second World War. Perhaps a message of triumph, of optimism, of hope. That we are making progress and finally unlearning the centuries of racist, imperialist, jingoist narratives which have permeated British society. This event is now commemorated, thanks in part to King's father, Samuel Beaver King MBE. Today, I present the case that Sam King deserves greater recognition a historical figure.

To define someone as 'deserving' greater recognition is to argue that they are a significant historical figure. Namely, that they contribute to ideas which are still being developed and upheld today, and helped to open up a difficult conversation which did not end with their passing, but continues to be had. In the case of Sam King, that conversation pertains to the competing visions of British identity: the idea of British exceptionalism, which fuelled British imperialism for centuries, and stayed ingrained within the mindset of many for long after that, contrasted with the struggle for a more inclusive multicultural society, where heritage is celebrated and hardship of others acknowledged, in the name of mutual respect and tolerance.



Former Speaker of the House of Commons, Baroness Boothroyd with West Indies war veteran and former mayor of Southwark, Sam King outside London' Imperial War Museum, launching a fundraising project to commemorate the efforts of African and Caribbean men and women during the two world wars.

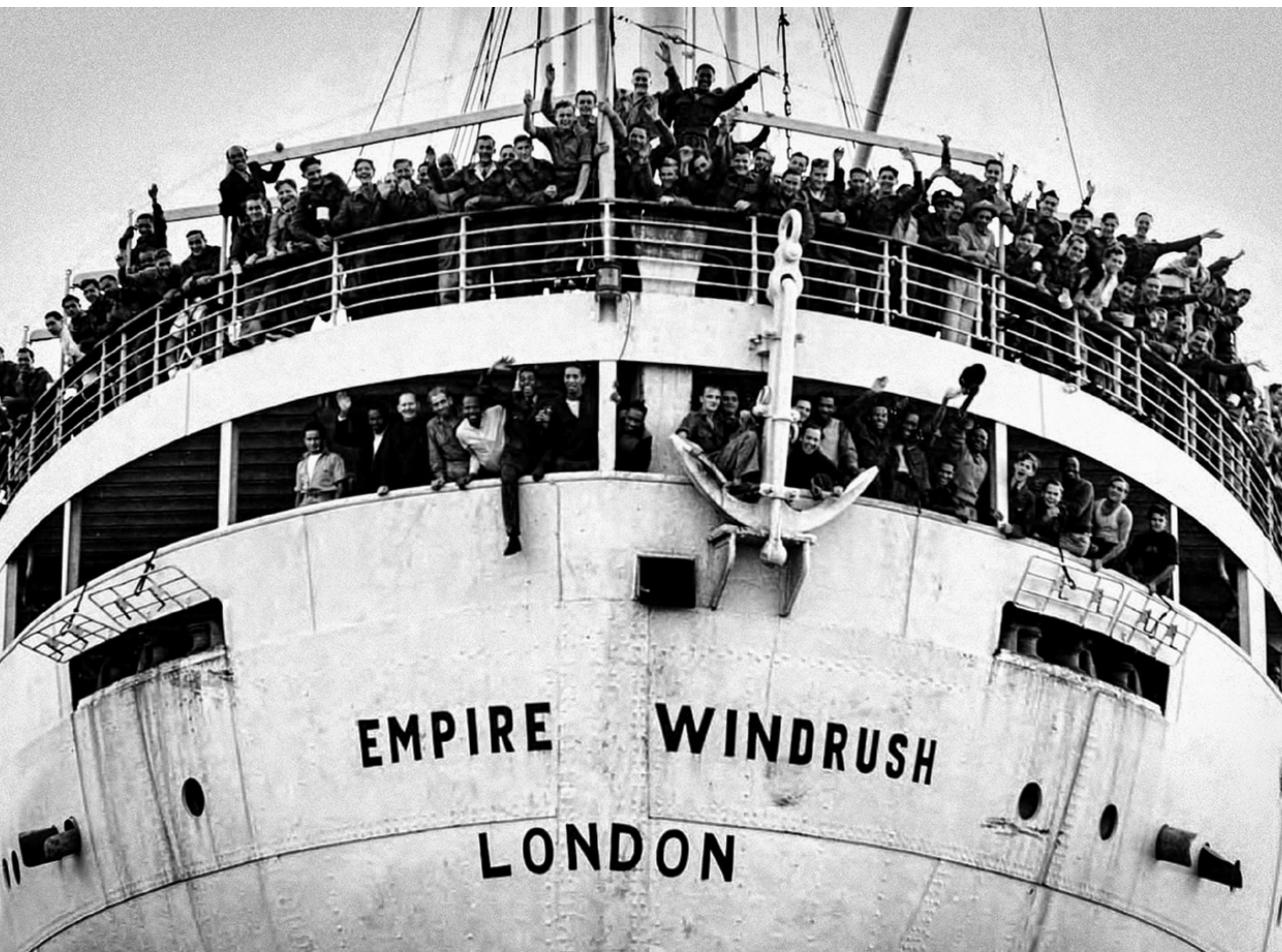
> ***"King demonstrated resilience in the face of discrimination, fighting against the rise of Powell's fascism in the 1960s through his mere existence and living his life."***

Firstly, I will outline the significance of Sam King in the context of his own life. His contribution to the UK arguably began when he, like many young Caribbean people in the 1940s, joined the RAF and served for 'the Mother Country' at RAF Hawkinge, going on to several more postings, ending as an aircraft engineer at RAF Dishforth in 1947. Immediately, this contribution to the war effort should be honoured, working diligently as a cog in the machine of war which fought against European fascism – this would not be King's last encounter with fascistic ideology. He later returned to the UK under the Nationality Act 1948, part of the migration which was called upon by the British government to serve and rebuild the 'Mother Country'. Here, King demonstrated resilience in the face of discrimination, fighting against the rise of Powell's fascism in the 1960s through his mere existence and living his life. His application to the Metropolitan Police was rejected in spite of his decorated military career, but this did not deter him – rather, he started a long and prosperous career at

the Post Office, serving his community through this role, eventually ending up as the Executive Manager for London's South Eastern Postal District. Throughout his life, he served his local community, but also set the precedent for other Caribbean migrants: that while discrimination was a sad reality in twentieth-century Britain, it did not have to dictate one's life or quash one's ambitions.

In fact, King broke even more barriers, becoming the first Black mayor in the UK when he was elected Mayor of Southwark Council in 1983 – this, against the backdrop of racial tension in London, with events like the Battle of Lewisham in 1977, the 1981 Brixton Riots and the rise of the National Front (a fascist organisation), proved a pivotal moment in the history of Black people in Britain. He began to change the narrative of British identity, carving out a place for Black British identity within institutions which had historically oppressed and subjugated people like Sam King. Interestingly, he was commissioned to improve the recruitment of Black police officers, 20 years after having been rejected by the very same police force. His notable work in office includes collaborating with Sam Wanamaker to realise the construction of Shakespeare's Globe, a replica of the original Globe Theatre. In this way, King also championed English culture and heritage, proving his work to be as varied as it was significant.

What is perhaps most significant about King is his contribution to the development of the historiography of Windrush migration: much of what we know and celebrate today comes from his work on this topic. He single-handedly tracked down the 492 Jamaican passengers on the ship, inviting many to tell their stories on documented and televised interviews, and solidifying their legacies by including their names in his autobiography. He was able to shift the narrative from stigma to understanding, from ignoring to listening, from the 'Rivers of Blood' to the 'Second Mayflower'. He first worked with Claudia Jones on the *West Indian Gazette* – often regarded as one of the most significant outlets for Caribbean culture in the twentieth century. He was later treasurer of the organising committee which was behind what would become the Notting Hill Carnival, the largest carnival in Europe and a spectacular showcase of multiculturalism and diversity which still takes place today, celebrating people and their cultures. If King's significance was to be boiled down to one thing, it would be his work on decolonising British identity, making room for narratives like that of the Windrush Generation and acknowledging the struggles they faced, as well as their resilience and courage. In 1988, he organised the 40th Windrush anniversary, ensuring that this migration story was told: he showcased the 'truth' in the face of triumphalism. His commitment to telling this story, which had gone unheard for so long, formalised itself in 1995 with the establishment of the Windrush Foundation. The Foundation sought to educate and culturally decolonise, bringing attention



to the rich history of Black people in Britain even before the *Windrush* – people like Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho. his organisation is now a vocal pressure group for the inclusion of Black and African history in the National Curriculum, successfully lobbying for the inclusion of Equiano and Mary Seacole in the National Curriculum in 2008 – King's legacy impacts the very subject I wish to see him included in.

"Sam King was a voice for his community, at a time when some of the loudest voices in the room wanted to silence people like him forever."

In 2018, King's dream of a Windrush Day, commemorating the migration stories and cultural heritage of the Caribbean migration, as well as the real struggles faced by these people on their arrival to the UK, came to fruition with the inauguration of 22 June as Windrush Day by PM Theresa May. Maybe the truth is 'finally being told' – albeit after a hostile government policy was exposed, leading to hundreds of first-, second- and third-generation Caribbean migrants having their British citizenship revoked, their livelihoods ruined and their families torn apart, as some were deported back to a homeland they knew nothing of.

Perhaps progress is not so linear.

Sam King was a voice for his community, at a time when some of the loudest voices in the room wanted to silence people like him forever. His ideas of promoting multiculturalism are still significant today, and we owe much of our knowledge about the Windrush Generation to Sam King's devoted historiography on the topic. For these reasons, and his hand in shaping a more inclusive British identity, I believe he deserves greater recognition.

My name is Ryan Belaidi, and I have lived in Southwark my entire life, surrounded by the rich cultural diversity and heritage which London has to offer. My parents both migrated here over the course of their lives – my father from Algeria in the 1980s and my mother from Poland in 2004. Migration and multiculturalism in British society have therefore always been a particular interest of mine, particularly considering the cosmopolitan nature of where I live. I hope to go on to study history at university in the future.

1896 Winter Hill Mass Trespass By Molly Grimshaw

Will yo' come o' Sunday mornin'
For a walk o'er Winter Hill?
Ten thousand went last Sunday
But there's room for thousand still!
Oh there moors are rare and bonny
And the heather's sweet and fine
And the roads across the hilltops –
Are the people's – yours and mine!

These are the lyrics to a song written in 1896 by a local Bolton poet called Alan Clarke. One hundred and twenty-seven years ago you could hear this song echoing through a patch of West Pennine moorland just north of Bolton town centre as it was being sung by 10,000 Boltonians, instilling in them a sense of camaraderie, justice and a confidence that what they were doing was right.

Every story needs its protagonists, and ours are two working-class men, Joseph Shufflebotham, a shoemaker, and Solomon Partington, a local journalist. These men shared a common political view: they were both passionately socialist and key figures in the newly formed Bolton branch of the Social Democratic Federation.

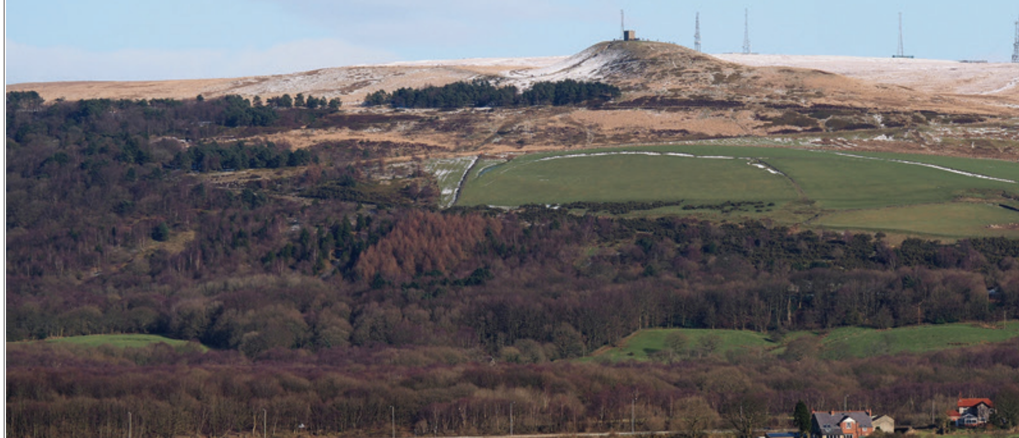
Every story also needs its antagonist, and this is where our wealthy local mill- and land-owning colonel comes in. Colonel Richard Ainsworth owned moorland around his family home of Smithills Hall, which made for an excellent grouse shoot. He therefore increasingly began to restrict access to the common man and eventually closed an ancient moorland path over Winter Hill by erecting a gate. With this, our right of way dispute begins!

Working-class Boltonians, who had walked over the moor without trouble for generations and who believed it was their right to do so, were understandably furious. Therefore, the Social Democratic Federation, with the help of Partington's impressive journalist skills and Shufflebotham's dutiful commitment and enthusiasm for the cause, organised, with just three days' notice, a procession 'to test the right of way'. This procession became known as the Winter Hill Mass Trespass of 1896.

"The protest was one of the largest of any kind in the UK within the eighteenth century. It remains today the largest mass trespass in recorded British history."

On Sunday 6 September, a few hundred Boltonians, many of whom worked in Colonel Ainsworth's mills, met at the bottom of Halliwell Road; they then surged up Smithills Dean and along Coalpit Road until they reached the gate which Ainsworth had erected. By this point, the crowd had swelled to over 10,000 people. With knowledge of the march, the Colonel had positioned his gamekeepers and the local constabulary next to a sign on his gate that read 'trespassers will be prosecuted'. Many working-class men could simply not afford to be arrested, and so, for the first time, doubt rippled among the protesters.

This sparked our protagonists to make a speech, which convinced the crowds that they were honest, law-abiding citizens, claiming their right to roam, and it was this convincing which spurred the crowd on to tear the gate down. The procession burst on to the disputed moorland path; they then carried on over Winter Hill and down

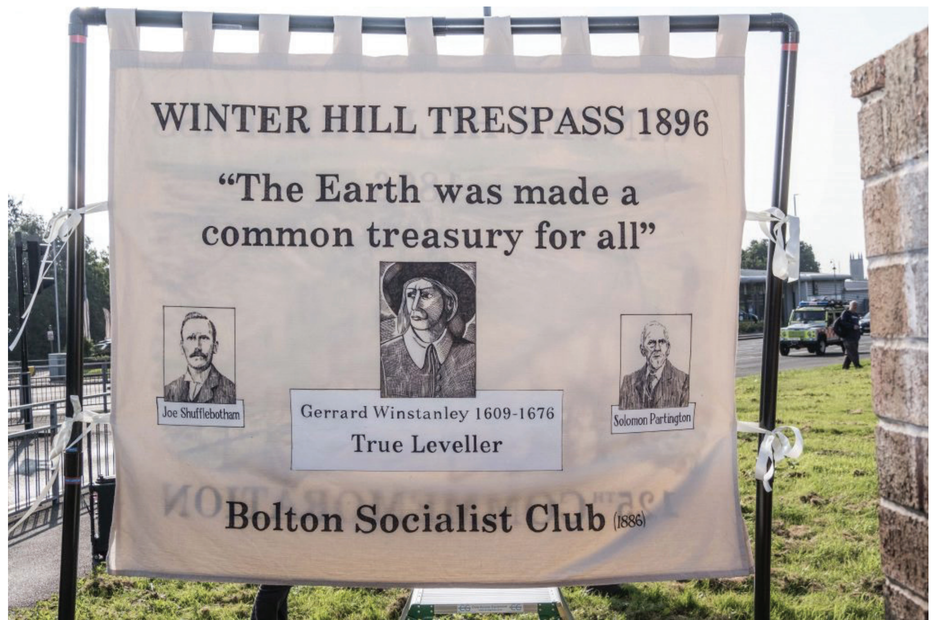


to Belmont, where, in their jubilation, they drunk the local hostelries dry. In the aftermath of the procession, Partington reflected that 'It would have been a misfortune and an incalculable loss to Boltonians of the future if steps had not been taken regardless of time or cost.'

The demonstration caused quite the stir and, through pamphlets, word of mouth and a feature in the local paper, our protagonists were successful in organising a second march. Much like the line of the song, 'But there's room for thousand still!', on the next Sunday, 2,000 more Boltonians attended than the previous week, amounting to a whopping 12,000 protesters, or close to 10% of the town's population. The protest was one of the largest of any kind in the UK within the eighteenth century. It remains today the largest mass trespass in recorded British history, even eclipsing the more famous mass trespass up Kinder Scout in 1932. Therefore, why have its two main organisers, advertisers and enthusiasts failed to receive greater recognition?

As working-class men, Partington and Shufflebotham were of a low socio-economic status. By contrast, Ainsworth was in a position of power, this giving him undue influence in how the events of 1896 were to be remembered. Consequently, in accounts of the trespass, such as the one in the Smithills Hall museum, the heroism of our protagonists fails to be mentioned because they went directly against the Colonel's authority.

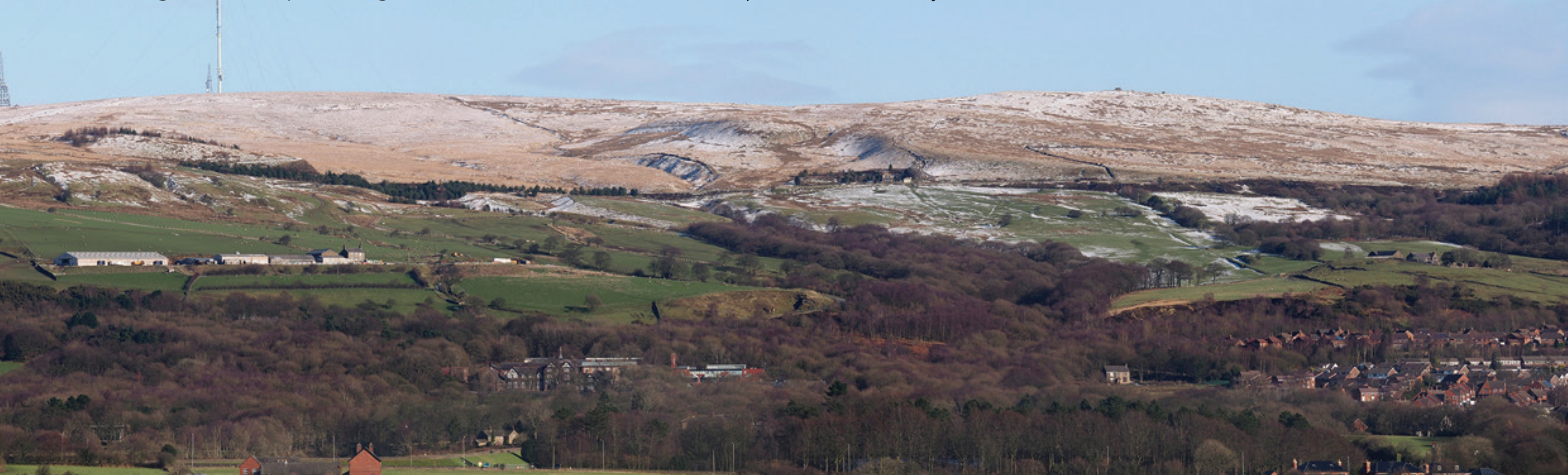
In addition, Ainsworth took the ringleaders of the trespass to court in 1900, four years after the procession took place. Our protagonists were destined to lose the case, as although the people of Bolton had come together to help fund legal defence, the level of representation they could afford was no match for the highly skilled barristers Colonel Ainsworth funded. In his book *Moorlands, Memories and Reflections*, the Bolton-based historian Paul Salveson refers to the aftermath of the case, stating that the ringleaders, despite not going to jail, did suffer heavy fines. I believe the defeat in court may be an integral reason as to why Shufflebotham and Partington, along with the protest as a whole, do not get the recognition they deserve.



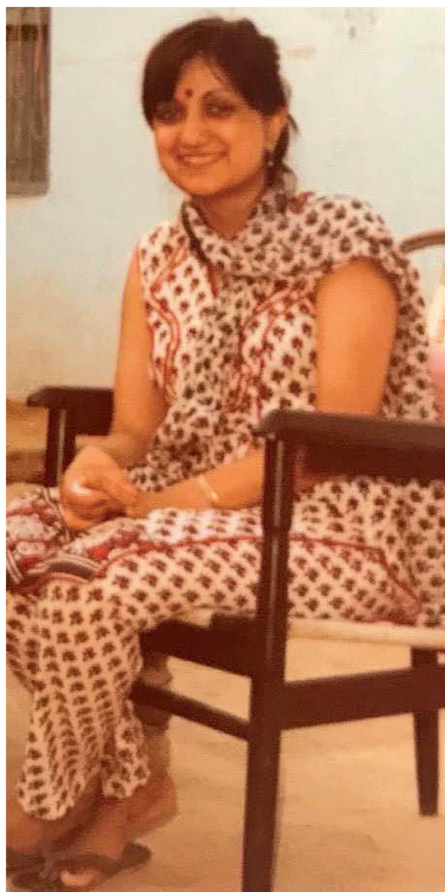
For Boltonians in 1896, the moorland acted as an escape from the polluted mill town and their 90-hour-per-week jobs; for Boltonians in the present day, the moor still acts as this escape. Take the recent pandemic, where the countryside allowed us to get away from the misery of quarantine. This is why our protagonists deserve greater recognition: they understood how important the countryside was to the people of Bolton and were proactive in leading the trespass that attempted to claim back this arrogantly usurped public escape, setting a precedent for public access campaigners of the future.

In the last century, our countryside has been placed under threat, through rights of way being eroded and inappropriate development threatening the landscape. Therefore, it is imperative that the 1896 Winter Hill Mass Trespass and, more importantly, those who spearheaded it are remembered, not only in Bolton but across the UK. If in the future we lose our right to roam, we can look to our protagonists as inspirations and find in their actions the courage, passion and bravery we need to claim back our rights of way and protect the countryside for future generations.

Molly Grimshaw is a student at Bolton School Girls' Division, Bolton



My grandmother
By Sia Vasudeva



Hi, my name is Sia. This year I was a semi-finalist in this year's Great Debate competition; below I have included a section of my speech. My aim was to convey a unique perspective on the question and try to find someone that not only deserved greater recognition but represented a wider movement – something that could not only be in relevance to older history but the journey yet to be taken. For me, this person was my grandmother.

When thinking about history as a whole and the nature of the curriculum, three words instantly come to mind: monotonous, archaic and some may even say tedious. A layer of unfamiliarity coats society, as we embrace a new age, one of innovation, reconstruction and modernisation that we, as a whole, are beginning to acclimatise to. When observing the transience of society and its present civilisation, one question emerges that asks why, if the society around us is constantly changing, does the education system as a whole, but in particular the history curriculum, etain its stale disposition?

My grandmother moved to the UK from her home in Tanzania on 7 July 1971, at just 16 years old. She was a young Indian girl moving to a country tightly shackled by racial prejudice. You can only imagine how she must have been feeling. Displaced, overwhelmed with worry, anxious… funnily enough, despite the stereotype surrounding migrants' opinions of embracing a new country, this is actually the complete opposite of how she felt. She was in awe of the growing urbanisation of England, home to her favourite author Jane Austen; she was overwhelmed with excitement to explore British culture and immerse herself within the world of literature, without the gender restraints ensnared over her education that she had encountered previously in Tanzania. She had always been different from what people expected her to be; in her family, due to cultural beliefs, it was almost expected of her to follow the pathway of her ancestors: get married, have children, raise a family, care for the family... She however rejected this cultural ideology and the 22 suitors her family proposed to her, and decided she wanted to make her own impact within society, so she was the first generation of women within her family to gain an education.

"She was overwhelmed with excitement to explore British culture and immerse herself within the world of literature, without the gender restraints ensnared over her education that she had encountered previously in Tanzania."

Fast-forward 17 years down the line... She was now 33 years old, married, with four kids and inactive qualifications, but she refused to let these go to waste. Having been in the country for over a decade, she endured the brutality of racial prejudice and felt so angered by the preconceived notion of disadvantage that weighed over the Asian community, particularly within the social care system, where generalisations about Asian community and cultural practices were scorned. She was absolutely disgusted by this and craved change, adaptation… for this, she was made a mockery of, something to make dinner table jokes about. They questioned how she would be able to do this and still take care of four children all under the age of ten years, retain a happy marriage and relationships with family friends. She would laugh as if she was in agreement with them, while remembering the promise she had made to herself in the back of her mind; she would nod, gracefully, while internally processing these judgements as fuel, as motivation, to make her not only fulfil her dreams, but prove every single one of them wrong. Not once did she ever complain of her personal difficulties.

And at the age of 33, she achieved her degree, qualifying her as a social worker. With this, she not only gained the self-satisfaction of proving all those who never believed her wrong, but the motivation to utilise this career and change the lives of those around her like she did her own, breaking not only stereotypes surrounding Asian care workers, but the prejudice surrounding young children who came into care. She did this with unwavering commitment, resilience, compassion and most of all sensitivity, warmth and humanity. She cared for children like they were her own, providing them with a love that was unknown to them. The stories she tells me are heart-breaking and emotionally captivating. Her care for these children is unforgettable: over the course of her career, she nurtured and fostered around 50 children, whose lives she completely turned around. She was commemorated for this through an award for being the first Asian carer in the borough of Brent. She made no distinction between the children she fostered and the ones she birthed. They are left with an indelible mark of gratitude that will never fade away.

I think it's time to unveil a new layer to the meaning of history, one where unforgotten heroes get the recognition they truly deserve.

Sia Vasudeva is a student at the Avanti House Secondary School in Stanmore, London.