

Memories on a Monday: Hair Today

Monday 18 May 2020

International Museums Day: Double History Post Today

Welcome to Memories on a Monday: Hair Today ... sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Unless we are sharing a home with someone who is a hairdresser during lockdown, the chances are that we are all crying out for someone to take hold and shape our fast-growing locks at the moment. Some people are taking matters into their own hands and giving it a go themselves, whilst others are considering another look or thinking of alternative hair-dos.

So whilst we wait to hear what happens next for hairdressers and barbers, here are some great moments of the hairdressing heritage in this borough which might serve as a reminder of our own hair “dos” and “don’ts”:



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
© Henry Jacobs

The photograph above was taken by Henry Jacobs and shows the interior and staff of Mehmet's barber shop in White Hart Lane, N17, c.2015. Henry fondly recalls:

'I started going there from the late 70s/ early 80s when Mehmet was working in the shop cutting hair. Over the years, Mehmet has told me snippets about life at his barber shop. He said that he had one elderly customer that had been coming to him for years - so the shop must go back a very long way. My son Barrie had his hair cut there from a young age as did my nephew Andrew. My nephew often met up with Mehmet's son at the Spur's. Mehmet's has been the family barber.

I had no need to tell him what I wanted, I just sat in the chair closed my eyes and had a rest. His prices were always very reasonable and my last hair cut (before the lockdown cost only £9). I believe that Mehmet is retired but still owns the business. One of the staff told me that he often recognised his customers in the street from the back of their head!'

From our collections, here are other fine examples of our local hair heritage:



G. FISCHER,
106, Bruce Grove, Tottenham.
(one minute from the station.)

HIGH CLASS LADIES' AND GENT.'S SALOON.

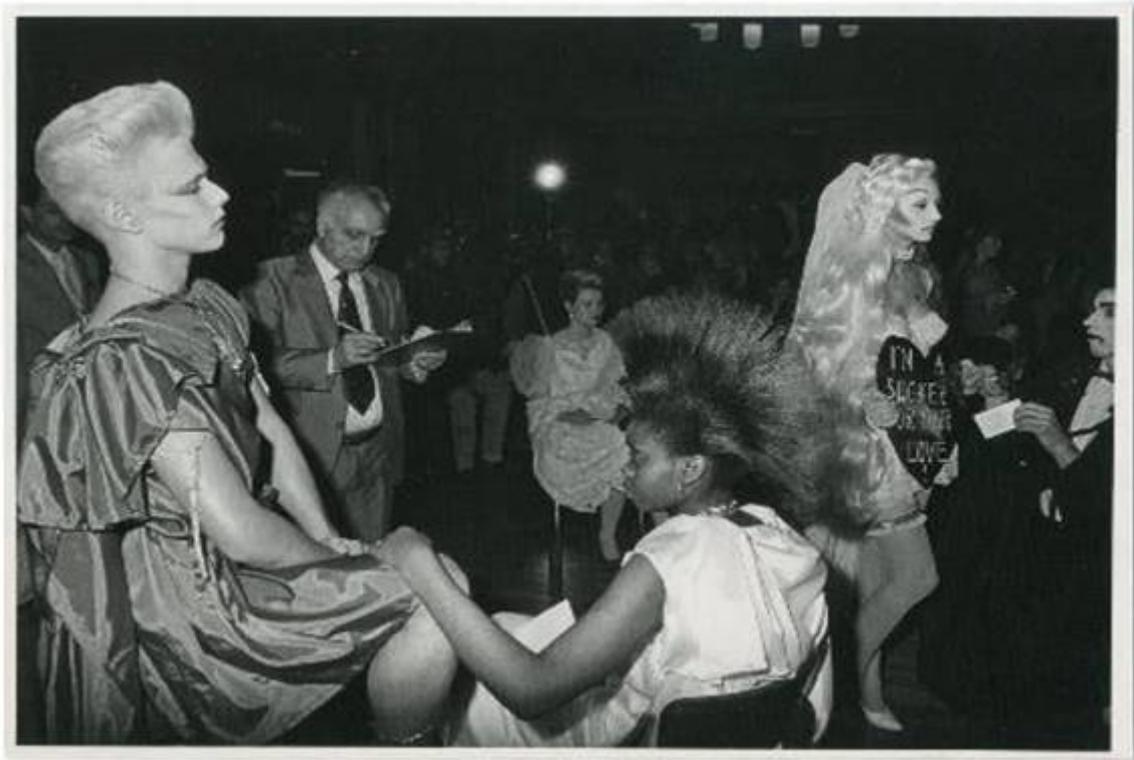
Ladies' Hair Dressed for Parties, from 1/-.
PRIVATE ROOM FOR
Manicure & Chiropody.

Ladies' own Combing made up in any style.
Latest Fashion Empire Curls and Switches, from 2/6.
Shampoo, 1/-. with Electric Dryer.
Marcel Waving, 6d. and 1/-.
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED.
If not, money returned.
PARIS AND WEST END EXPERIENCE.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

We might not be able to have our hair done and go out as we once did, but we can look to the past and imagine having our hair done. Perhaps, both for ladies and gents, at Fischer's of Bruce Grove? This advert above dates from c.1920 when the new fashion of the [Marcel wave](#) for women was all the rage.

Or leaping in time, perhaps we could try out one of these hairstyles, as paraded at the Fantasy valentine hair competition in February 1986?



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Here's other inspiration. Patsy Peltier-Scott (photographed above in 2003) is a member of the Haringey University of the Third Age. Trained in hairdressing, the hot comb that she holds in her hand was essential to her profession and she kindly gave it to Bruce Castle for the collections. During the 1960s Patsy was the

first person to hold the title *Miss Afro-West Indies of Great Britain*, and having a hot comb then was considered important for straightening her hair, as opposed to having natural textured hair. As her friend and fellow U3A member Alison Nunes explains:

“The use of the straightening comb was widespread in the Caribbean islands. Most women - young and old - had someone to do their hair for them for about five old shillings using a straightening iron with handle and teeth. When straightened the hair, black and shiny, would be curled under into what was called a ‘page look’ with the hot tong. Or rolled into a French roll at the back of the head or a bun on top of the head, and then held in with a hair grip or clasp or whatever.”

The photograph of the hairdressing salon below was taken on 23 August 1948. From the signs in the window, at this period of time, making women’s straight hair curly or wavy was one of the main services offered to customers. The salon at 132 St Ann’s Road in Tottenham was for ‘gents and ladies’. Divided in two, one side was operated by Simone, a ladies’ hairdresser. The other half was run by David Strauss for gentlemen. In 1910, the first hairdresser to occupy this shop was Domenico Pasquale.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Locals might remember one of the longest-serving barbers in the area at Scotland Green in Tottenham. Aaron Biber was certainly a well-known character in Tottenham. He was described in 2012 as the oldest barber in London, at the age of 89. His fascinating story [can be read here](#).



Aaron Biber in 2012.

The photograph below shows a selection of Afro hair care products that will be familiar to many people and were manufactured by Dyke and Dryden, a company which was established on West Green Road in Tottenham in 1965. The company became the first black-owned multi-million pound business in Britain. Their products, such as Supreme Super Curl Holding Spray and Supreme Curl Gel Activator, and their own Afro comb design, were hugely popular in the 1970s and 1980s. This year in May 2020, it would be 55 years since Dyke and Dryden started. To see a wonderful history of the company, [follow the link here](#) to see the tribute that was written on its 50th anniversary. The company also organised the Afro Hair and Beauty Show that was often held at Alexandra Palace. You can see the 1983 show by [following the link here](#). It is hoped, all being well, that in October 2020 we will have an exhibition at Bruce Castle to celebrate the history and the nationally-important story of Dyke and Dryden in the borough.



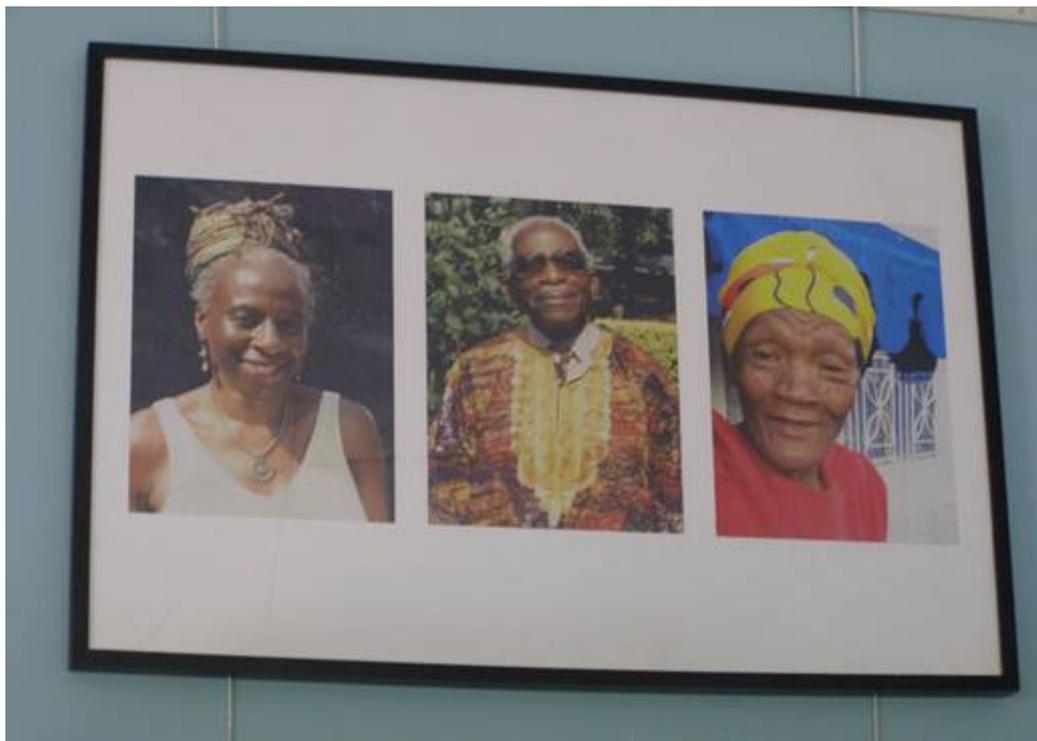
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Notable anniversaries have also been reached recently by two other hairdressing businesses in the borough.

David Barron set up his first shop *One Step Ahead* 50 years ago in 1969 in Middle Lane, Crouch End. It was named in honour of the moon landing that summer, and painted black in tribute to Mick Jagger. David moved to Muswell

Hill 6 years later and opened his salon *Barron* in Muswell Hill Broadway – and it is still there today. You can read all about this hairdressing milestone in the area by [following the link here](#).

Down the road at 7 Stroud Green Road, Finsbury Park, three generations of the same family have been running *Aquarius Hair and Beauty Salon* for more than 40 years. Established by Horace and Cislín Parry, the salon was one of the first to offer hair and beauty services to a growing market back in the 1970s when people with Afro hair had to take care of their own grooming needs for lack of professional outlets. Read how this salon has been at the cutting edge by [following the link here](#).



Images from *Wraparound* exhibition at Bruce Castle

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

We have had two exhibitions at Bruce Castle where the community have shared their stories about caring for their Afro hair. One was called *Wrap Around* and the project co-ordinator, film-maker and co-curator Ann Cross here shares her story:

“Wrapping my hair has always been a part of my life. My Mum wrapped her hair, as did my aunts and cousins. Many friends did the same - and some still do.

I wrap my hair for many reasons. But it wasn't until I started working on the *Head Wrap* project two years ago for schools that I really began to explore the history of head wraps, fabrics and its symbolism. The *Head Wrap* education project evolved out of this interest - how African and Caribbean women and men dress their hair and why the fabrics, patterns, symbols and colours are important to us historically.

Both my parents were born in the Caribbean and they both dressed their hair. My Dad wore *fedoras* and my Mum wore the traditional Sunday Pentecostal church hats. But in the home she would wear a headscarf if she was cooking or cleaning and when she went to sleep to keep her hair in place.

Like my Mum, I wrap my hair in the home for domestic purposes. I also wrap it during the day for work, for celebrations and when my hair is in those in-between stages – when it needs plaiting, styling or cutting. I choose cloths mainly according to patterns and colours. “

Another exhibition we held at Bruce Castle was in 2013 when we worked with the Fitzwilliam Museum as the community partner in *Origins of the Afro Comb*. A summary of the exhibition can be [found here](#). From the community we borrowed Afro combs and photographs and displayed them alongside combs and photographs from our own collections. Every comb and story was quite different. There were also some artistic contributions of artwork and poems, including [combs reimagined by Melonie Stennett](#). Below is the poem written by Bridget Badoe-McQuick:

Hair

By Bridget Badoe McQuick ©

What should I do with my hair?
Cut it short
Shave it clean
Grow it long
Spray some sheen
Add a hairpiece
Or wear a wig
A long weave
Down to my knees
A natural fro
Some China bumps
Twist it up
No, cornrow please
Relaxer or texturise
Single plaits
Finger wave
Maybe gonna locks it up
Don't feel no way
Cause whatever style I choose
I wear my hair with pride.

The exhibition and the important heritage of Dyke and Dryden in Tottenham went on to inspire other artworks in West Green in 2014, with local schoolchildren working with local artist Jennie Pedley. You can check out [the story here](#).

Below we will share other photographs from our collections showing the range of different shops and organisations that have helped us with dealing with our hair. Here, *Beauty Queen's Cosmetics* Afro and European hair and beauty store of 487 Tottenham High Road was photographed in 2002 by Henry Jacobs.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
© Henry Jacobs

Some local people may be missing having their hair done by students studying hair and beauty at CoNEL College of Further Education on Tottenham High Road. This was the former Tottenham Polytechnic / Technical College. Below, we can see in this photograph students making wigs during the 1960s at the Tech.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Making wigs has been particularly important for many of our communities since the 19th century. The photograph below shows J. Drobchinsky, hair frame manufacturer at 679 Seven Sisters Road, Tottenham, c.1920. Like other Jewish immigrants moving to Tottenham at the turn of the 20th century, Mr Drobchinsky started his business around the High Cross area, at 17 Colsterworth Road, providing wigs for married women in the Orthodox Jewish communities.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

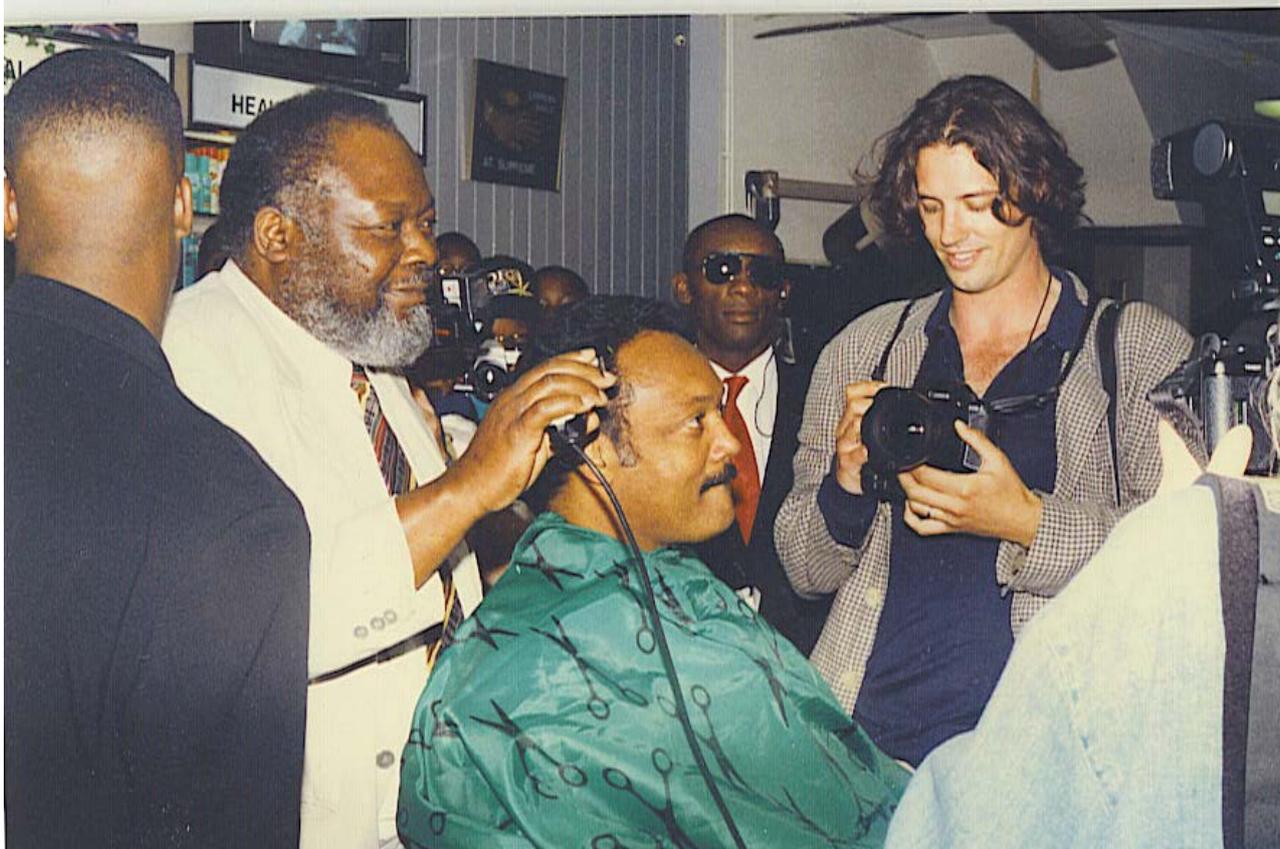
The wig-making business thrives in the area today, and includes - more recently - the wig-maker for stage and screen [Alex Rouse](#), who also has workshops near the High Cross. You may well have seen the wigs made by Alex on blockbuster films like *Lord of the Rings*.

Perhaps Alex might be inspired to make one of the wonderful examples of wigs that can be found in images from our collections at Bruce Castle – such as that worn by Henrietta Townsend of Bruce Castle in the late 18th century, seen here in this engraving below. Henrietta was the Lady of the manor and the daughter of 3rd Lord Coleraine. This is the only known portrait of her.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

This is one other wonderful moment that will go down in hairdressing history – Bernie Grant cutting the hair of civil rights campaigner and friend [Rev. Jesse Jackson](#) in West Green Road on the occasion of his visit to Tottenham in 1994!



Courtesy and © [The Bernie Grant Archive](#)

And this ends our little tour of hair stories from around the borough on this International Museums Day.

Perhaps you might be inspired to share your own memories (or photographs) of hairdressing in the past – a favourite hairdressing haunt or hairdresser? Or how you have been looking after your locks in lockdown? If you do, let us know – we would love to hear or see them.

Until tomorrow

Take care, stay well

Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock
Curator

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