

Special Reflective Post: Remembering Basil Lewis OBE Tuesday 5 May 2020

Today, in our special reflective post, we are commemorating Basil Lewis OBE (1928 - 2020), who very sadly passed away last week.

Basil was born in Clarendon, Jamaica in 1928, and came to London in 1954 aged 26. He was not only Haringey's first Black Council Member, but was also a founding member of the Council's Race Equalities Committee, Anglo-West Indian Conservative Society and the [Hornsey Cooperative Credit Union](#). Basil received an OBE for his work with BAME communities, and his legacy means his endeavours continue to support such groups and organisations, not only in the borough but nationally too.



Basil Lewis OBE, 1979

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

In May 1968, Basil was elected as the Conservative Party's Council Member for the Stroud Green Ward. As the pages from the *Hornsey Journal* news article (17 May 1968) note (below), Mr Lewis was aged 39 at the time of the election, lived within his constituency in Drylands Road and worked a telephone communications engineer. He represented the Stroud Green Ward for ten years and then Crouch End from 1978 until 1982.

After Labour's Election Defeat

TORY NEW BROOM BEGINS SWEEP

Haringey's first Jamaican councillor

£150,000

traffic scheme

The Government's £110 million road improvement scheme for London, announced this week, includes the re-alignment and widening of the Wightman Road - Turnpike Lane - Hornsey Park Road junction, Haringey, at an estimated cost of £150,000.

Although the work has already been approved in principle by Haringey Borough Council's highways committee, the details of the scheme have yet to be settled. It is expected that work will begin in 1971.

The widening of this staggered junction (it is not a direct cross-roads) will produce an improved traffic flow.

A minor scheme to reduce this traffic bottleneck for the next few years will begin later this year.

IT was not unexpected that the Conservatives would gain control of Haringey Borough Council at the elections on Thursday of last week, but what was really shattering, probably as much to them as to Labour, was the stunning size of their success—53 to 7.

Once in the saddle, the Conservatives went quickly into action. Their leader, Cllr. P. P. Rigby, told the "Journal" on Wednesday that they had called for reports from the officers on the running down of the council's building works department, the position of secondary and primary education and other matters which were mentioned in their policy. "Most important," he said, "We want to know how much money is left in the 'kitty'—if any."

There is a fair springling of youth, including some present and former Young Conservatives, in the new line-up. Among the newcomers to the council is Mr. Basil Lewis, a Jamaican who will be the first coloured councillor in Haringey. He was one of the successful Conservatives in the Stroud Green Ward, in which he lives (in Drylands Road, Crouch End).

One of the Conservative old guard, Cllr. Harry Worms, of Osborne Road, Finsbury Park, will be nominated as Mayor of Haringey at the annual meeting of the council on Monday.

More about the elections on inside pages

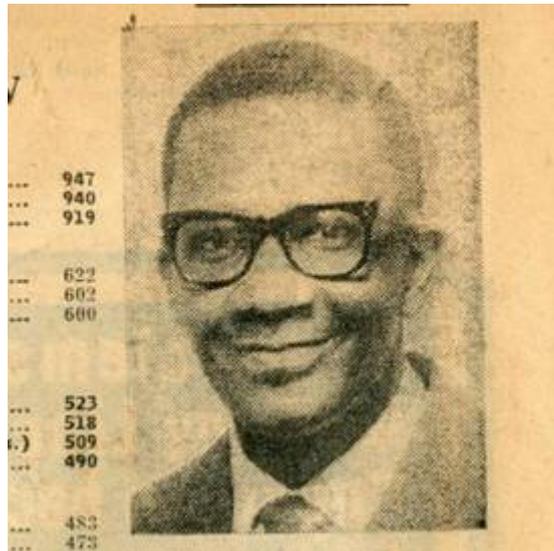
£1000 LEGACY

Miss Rosamund Isabel Skilbeck, of Oakeshott Avenue, Highgate, left £32,929 gross (£32,575 net).

She left £1,000 to Ivy A. Freehill, of Oakeshott Avenue, and the residue to her sister Eirene (or, in the event of her predecease, to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund).

MOUNTVIEWS





Photograph of Basil Lewis, as a winning Conservative candidate for Stroud Green in 1968, along with his comments, below from the local newspaper (*Hornsey Journal*, 17 May 1968)
From the collections Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

THE ELECTED AND THE REJECTED

In the elections in Haringey (made of the old boroughs of Hornsey, Tottenham and Wood Green) there were 33 Conservative gains from Labour and only seven Labour candidates survived the wreck. In the last council there were 40 Labour councillors, ten Labour aldermen and 20 Conservative councillors.

In the new council there are 53 Conservative councillors and only seven Labour councillors—Mrs. S. A. Berkery Smith (group leader), Mrs. Brenda Remington, A. T. Protheroe and J. R. Searle, of Tottenham, and C. Butler, Mrs. L. A. Angell and C. W. Ware, of Wood Green. The last named is a headmaster and lives in Grove Avenue, Muswell Hill.

Labour also have five aldermen whose term of office has still three years to run.

There are five aldermanic vacancies which will be filled by Conservative nominees from outside the council at the annual meeting on Monday. At the inaugural meeting of the council four years ago the Labour majority took

and gaining Central Hornsey, South Hornsey and Turnpike, the Conservatives now hold every seat in the Hornsey division.

Mr. Lewis, the successful Jamaican candidate in Stroud Green, expressing thanks through the "Journal" this week for the support given to him, said, "I am convinced that the electors in Stroud Green have proved a great example which may go down in history. Your decision to elect me as one of your ward representatives I accept as a vote of confidence. I pledge myself to serve you to the best of my ability and I will always be ready to assist you and befriend you. Thanks for all the many letters of good wishes, and I do thank the Hornsey Conservative Association for all that they are doing to foster this good relationship." Mr. Lewis, aged 39, is a telephone communications engineer.

Other new Conservative councillors include Sir Robin Williams, insurance broker (Highgate); Mr. J. M. Cooke, chairman of Hornsey British Legion (Muswell Hill) and

chant Mr. Tom Wilkins, who lives in Priory Road, Hornsey, and is chairman of the Hornsey Conservative Association, shared in a notable Conservative gain. He "invaded" the Tottenham Central ward and was one of three Conservatives returned there.

Mrs. Hazel M. Bavin, of Rosebery Road, Muswell Hill, was one of the three Conservatives who gained Green Lanes, Tottenham. She is the Conservative agent for Edmonton, and her husband, Mr. J. P. Bavin, is the Conservative agent for Hornsey.

Other Hornsey residents who will represent "outside" wards as Conservatives on the new council are Mr. Michael Warburton, a financial adviser, of Highgate High Street (Coleraine, Wood Green); Mr. P. F. Hitchens, a research student, of Allison Road, Haringey (Bruce Grove, Tottenham); Mr. A. C. Perry, a shipping executive, of Chesterfield Gardens, Haringey (Seven Sisters, Tottenham) and Mr. J. M. Scott, an export executive, of View Road, Highgate (also Seven Sisters).

The Conservatives claimed

committee) and his wife, Cllr. Mrs. Naomi McIntosh (chairman of the children's committee); Cllr. C. J. Ettinger (chairman of the establishment committee) and Cllr. Brian Murphy (vice-chairman of the cleansing and transport committee).

The Labour fallen in Wood Green included, surprisingly, Cllr. R. G. Kendall, former mayor of Wood Green and present deputy mayor of Haringey. He lost in the Noel Park ward, previously Labour-held, as did Ald. D. F. W. Billingsley, of Hornsey, a former chairman of the Haringey Education Committee. Also defeated in Wood Green were Cllr. C. D. Moss (chairman of the health and welfare committee) and Ald. J. L. Peirec (chairman of the cleansing and transport committee).

In Tottenham Ald. Mrs. Annie Remington, a former mayor of Haringey and of Tottenham, chose to fight in the marginal West Green ward, but even she well

Before his work in local politics, Basil was a Deacon at the Baptist Church in Ferme Park Road, and it was there in 1962 with 11 other church members, that he helped form a savings scheme. At the time it was hard for new arrivals from the Caribbean to take out loans from the banks, which meant it was difficult for them to buy houses or set up businesses. In some cases, if they were able to take out a loan it was at a higher interest rate or they were asked to pay a larger deposit than most to secure the loan.

Initially, the church members set up a savings scheme, to help each other and the church's congregation, without the constraints they were finding from the

banks. These forms of savings schemes follow the ideas of another Haringey leader, [Priscilla Wakefield](#) (1751-1832) who, from the late 18th century in Tottenham, established the first Penny Savings Bank to encourage and enable the economic emancipation of women.

Although successful in its goals, the Baptist Church's savings scheme had no official governance, which meant no interest was earned and there were no legal protections for its members. The group were encouraged to follow the example seen throughout the Caribbean and establish a credit union. In 1964 Basil and his colleagues founded the [Hornsey Cooperative Credit Union](#) (HCCU) which was one of the very first credit unions established in the UK, giving people the opportunity to buy and furnish their own homes. The need was great and the credit union was popular with locals from the Caribbean communities, having over 100 members by the end of its first year.

In this [commemorative publication celebrating 50 years](#) of credit unions in the UK, two of Basil's co-founders of HCCU, Reynold Grier and Bentley Hines, talk about setting up the credit union and it being so successful they were able to purchase property and set up a community centre in Drylands Road. Once legislation enabled the registration of credit unions in 1967, HCCU was the first credit union to become registered in the UK.



Haringey Conservative councillor Basil Lewis OBE active in establishing Anglo-West Indian Conservative Society.
He sits alongside his wife Louise Lewis and his son Wayne Lewis, 1979

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

2018 was the 50th anniversary of Basil's election as Haringey's first Black Councillor and this landmark occasion was celebrated, along with other renowned leaders, at an event at the Selby Centre in partnership with 4U2 Newsmag, as this flyer shows.

HARINGEY'S BLACK CHANGE MAKERS
 Activism ◉ Democracy ◉ Advocacy

Monday 12th November 2018 | 4pm – 8:30pm
 Selby Centre, Selby Road, Tottenham, London N17 8JL

Join us as we celebrate and learn more about the Black Changemakers from Haringey who challenged the mainstream, shaped equality and fought for justice. The Exhibition reveals a remarkable struggle of achievement and leadership in Haringey - "Change the frame, create the picture". Discussion hosted by Alex Pascal OBE.

Book your free ticket online at www.selbytrust.co.uk/events

4U2 A Selby Trust Event in Partnership with 4U2 Newsmag

The Selby Trust
 Inspiring Culture, One Community

<https://www.haringeyonline.com/forum/topics/haringey-s-black-change-makers> (accessed May 2020)

Fittingly, Basil was awarded an OBE for his work with BAME communities within Haringey and outside the borough. As part of his legacy, he will be remembered for the support he provided, along with his tenacity and his compassion to help others as shown by the various testimonies in the [Ham & High newspaper's obituary](#) last week from friends and former colleagues.

If you have memories, photographs or special recollections you would like to share with us at the museum and archive about Basil Lewis OBE, please do get in touch.

Take care and stay well.
 Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock
 Curator

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