

Shortlist of names for the Gardens

In November 2020 the Council launched the Hackney Naming Hub to find alternative names for Cassland Road Gardens. The names put forward were suggested by local residents and researched by our Heritage Team. The four chosen for this consultation were shortlisted by our community steering group, councillors and the Mayor of Hackney.

We consider the renaming of the Gardens to be an opportunity to directly address the contested history its former name represents and give recognition to the communities most affected by the history and legacies of African enslavement.

For this reason, the names that have been shortlisted celebrate the long presence, history and contributions of Hackney's African and African-Caribbean communities.



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S.J. Celestine Edwards (1857/1858 - 1894)

S.J. Celestine Edwards was an activist for social justice who campaigned locally and nationally on a range of issues. He was known for his strongly anti-racist, anti-slavery and anti-colonial views. Born in Dominica, he studied theology at King's College followed by medicine at the Royal London Hospital. By 1891, he was living in Hackney at 50 Tudor Road, by which time he had become an influential lecturer, speaking locally and throughout the country.

Edwards was the editor of anti-imperial Christian weekly magazine Lux and also the founder and editor of the anti-racist journal Fraternity. It has been suggested that he was the first known editor of African heritage in the UK.

Upon learning of his death, the Shoreditch Observer wrote the following of Edwards: 'no speaker in Victoria Park on Sundays (and elsewhere) was more popular than the above named gentleman, and the news of his early death...will be received with the greatest sorrow by thousands'.

Kathleen 'Kit' Crowley (1918-2018)

Kit was a Cassland Road resident and beloved member of the Homerton community. Born in East London in 1918, she had a difficult childhood facing poverty and the racial prejudices of the early 20th century.

In almost all situations she was the only person of colour, without a community or role models that she could look to for support. Identifying as working class, she recalls that survival was often based on sheer grit and humour as well as the support of her East End and Hackney neighbours.

During the Second World War, she contributed to the war effort by working on the railway as a porter. In 1948 she moved to the Gascoyne Estate, and spent 32 years working as a cleaner at Wentworth Nursery, where she was like a member of the family to the staff and generations of children. She is described as a role model for the children of the Windrush generation growing up on the Gascoyne Estate.

Francis 'Frank' Owusu (1954 - 2018)

Born in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria, Frank came to Hackney in 1967 as a teenage political refugee. He remained a Hackney resident later living on Glyn Road. Frank was to become a teacher of passion and vision, who dedicated his life to enriching the lives and education of children in Hackney. In response to educational underachievement amongst children of African and African-Caribbean heritage within the state education system, he founded the African Community School along with his wife Kome.

The school is a supplementary provision that has provided a vital platform for young people from backgrounds of extreme hardship to thrive. The African Community School provides a safe and supportive environment where curriculum subjects are made relatable. It also offers adult learning classes, parenting classes and summer school as well as mentoring for children.

Frank was an active member of the voluntary and community sector, and made a significant contribution to supplementary school development across London. He touched and inspired the lives of many young people.

Ralph Adolphus Straker (1936 - 2013)

Ralph was an influential campaigner for racial equality. As part of the Windrush Generation, he moved to London from Barbados in 1956 as a recruit for London Transport, quickly becoming a union member. He started to volunteer support to Caribbeans negatively affected by the SUS laws through the North London West Indian Association. He also helped reverse the educationally "sub-normal" classification of many Caribbean children at the time.

Between 1973-1987 he was an officer for the Hackney Community Relations Council, focused on achieving racial equality in the borough. Straker was responsible for twinning the borough with Bridgetown, Barbados in 1982. He continued his work in race relations at Alexandra Palace and Southwark.

He was a founding member and Secretary of the Sam Uriah Morris Society, an exhibition centre on Lower Clapton Road aiming to demonstrate the arts and contributions of African and African Caribbean people, including a Black History Museum. In 2002 he was appointed an OBE for his works in community relations.