



THE RMM UK STORY

In early 2012 Ras Danijah Tafari came to Britain from Ethiopia on a mission to promote an international Rastafari exhibition in Addis Ababa scheduled for 2014.

In 2007 the Smithsonian Institute (USA) had hosted a breakthrough exhibition *Discovering Rastafari!* highlighting the origins and practices of a unique world movement. Largely depicted through artefacts, ephemera and photographs, the exhibition ran successfully for 4 years, creating a template for similar projects in Jamaica and Africa; only this time the story would be told by historians, curators and activists from within the movement. *Rastafari: The Majesty and The Movement* (RTMM) would present the 'authorised edition' - as defined by devotees and adherents from communities across the globe.

After several meetings Ras Danijah Tafari was able to elicit a positive response from individuals in the UK community. Ras Cos Tafari, Recording Artist and co-owner of Majestic Radio Station, along with Sister Stella Headley, entrepreneur-educator, initiated the 'RMM UK'. They were joined by Ras Lyonwyze, Jah Blue (Wolde Adams), Dr Robbie Shilliam, Ras Shango Baku, Ras Ray-I and Sister Addishiwot. In early 2013 the group formed a tight-knit unit, meeting regularly at South London venues, then Queen Mary University and then at Majestic Studios in Harlesden.

Ras Cos co-ordinated the Project, linking with Dr Desta Meghoo Co-ordinator and Curator of the RTMM in Ethiopia. Ras Cos and Ras Ray-I formed the Technical Production Sub-Committee, responsible for filming interviews with Rastafari elders and activists in the UK. Sister Stella took on the role of Project Administrator. Dr Robbie Shilliam was Project Researcher, working closely with Ras Shango Baku Project writer. Jah Blue was the 'Organic Historian'. His book *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Britain* was used as a generic text for the Project. Ras Lyonwyze dealt with promotions. Sister Addis, a later addition to the team, was Amharic Translator and photographer. Ras Levi, an affiliate member, advised on Ethiopian travel and Ethiopian affairs. Danijah Tafari who had since returned to Addis Ababa subsequently had to recline from further involvement in the RMM in Ethiopia due to other personal commitments.

The self-designated roles were facilitated voluntarily by team members. This ensured rapid and consistent progress throughout 2013 and 2014. A 4-person core

group – Ras Cos, Sister Stella, Dr Robbie and Shango Baku – emerged as key players responsible for overall Project development.

A promotional leaflet was produced in April 2013. It called upon the UK community to contribute artefacts, photos, memorabilia and archive materials to the Project. Promo ads were featured on community radio and Facebook. Reasoning was engaged with all major ‘Houses’ and organisations of Rastafari and the RMM UK’s pro-active agenda slowly built up a concerted response from the community. Organs such as the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), the Nyahbinghi National Council (NNC), the Ethio-African Black International Congress (EABIC), Sick Be Nourished (SBN), Mothers of Creation and The Heritage Project, all contributed to the momentum of interest. ‘Outside’ organisations such as the Black Cultural Archives, the Anglo-Ethiopian Society and the Pan African Social Community Forum also assisted in various aspects of the Project.

In June 2013 Project members Sister Stella and Ras Lyonwyze visited Ethiopia on a fact-finding mission, but found little awareness of the Project on the ground. Later visits by Ras Shango Baku to Ghana, Sister Stella and Ras Ray-I to Jamaica, Sister Addis to the USA & Mexico and Ras Cos to Gambia, helped to introduce the RTMM and its UK component to international communities. By March 2014 three newsletters carrying Project information and updates had been produced by the RMM(UK). Fifteen video interviews were completed and a large body of research material had been compiled on both the Majesty (His sojourn in the UK) and the Movement in Britain (1960-2014). The RMM UK’s drive and purpose seemed to re-ignite the UK Rastafari community, bringing together existing organisations and inspiring new ones. Ras Tafari Regal Livity was registered as a Community Interest Company that would represent RMM(UK) as a legal entity for the long-term future. A proposed fund-raising initiative unfortunately never materialized. A small grant from Queen Mary University was used to pay for manufacturing the Exhibition panels designed and prepared for Ethiopia. RMM(UK) survived mainly on out-of-pocket expenses and the personal resources of its members.

On-going links with RMM Ethiopia were tightened in the run-up to May 2014. The twelve specially designed panels were devised to reflect the theme of the Exhibition. These were supported by a range of films, videos, documents and research materials. The panels constituted RMM UK’s main contribution to the Addis Ababa exhibition, which was featured at Ethiopia’s National Museum. In addition, an interactive programme with the Shashemane community from 26th – 28th May 2014 had been drawn up in consultation with opinion leaders and organisational reps on the Land Grant.

Between 5th and 23rd May, the UK team staggered arrival dates in Ethiopia to fit personal commitments and schedules. At the grand opening Exhibition ceremony on Sunday 25th May, seven RMM(UK) personnel were present, representing the largest contingent from any global community in attendance. The UK contribution was highly commended by organizers and audiences alike for its informative and focused presentation. Three days of intense interaction with the Shashemane community followed (26-28th May) under the formal auspices of Rastafari Regal Livity. Presentations and Films were hosted at the EWF HQ with support from the Nyahbinghi Tabernacle Centre and impassioned discussions followed. Donations were made to the Tabernacle administration, Yawenta Primary School, The JRDC School and the Athly-I Rogers Foundation. Some RMM(UK) members contributed to round-table community discussions at the Lily of the Valley Hotel on 29th - 31st May, whilst others departed for Addis Ababa en route to the UK.

In summary, the commitment, vision and dedication of a diverse group working collectively and methodically towards a prescribed goal was crowned with due success. Hopefully the experience and confidence gained in this effort will inspire even greater works for the future - through the guidance of His Imperial Majesty and Empress Menen in Whom is all InI trust.



RAS JOSEPH & NYAHBINGHI YOUTHS AT THE EXHIBITION OPENING MAY 25th 2014



Gratitude is due to Dr Desta Meghoo and the organisers of the Exhibition in Addis Ababa; to Sister Wolete Mehedin for her assistance with the Shashemane component; to Ras Joseph and our hosts at the Nyahbinghi Tabernacle; to Ras Dawit, Ras Paul, Ras Reuben Kush and Ras Kamba at the EWF HQ; to Empress Zauditu and the SBN team; to Ras Mweya, Ras Kabinda, Ras Tagasser, Sister Donisha Prendergast, Jahreal, Dr Jahlani Naiah, Sis Sensi, Sis Anne, Queen Mother Moses and all who helped to make the RMM UK's intervention rewarding and purposeful.

"We are commanded to work diligently for aspirations bear fruit when followed up with deeds"

All Praises due to His Imperial Majesty Qadamawi Haile Selassie I

This is a Ras Tafari The Majesty & The Movement (UK) commemoration Publication marking a most profound Milestone in the Ras Tafari & Pan-African community

'National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, May 25th – June 25th Exhibition 2014