Edinburgh University's African History: Past & Future

Tom Cunningham & Henry Dee
Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh

The Edinburgh University Afro-West Indian Society, c.1915. Front middle is Clara Christian
Scotland Yard monitor the Edinburgh Indian Association fearing revolutionary discussions.
Key Findings: Edinburgh’s African History
James Africanus Horton
Graduated 1859
Born 1835, Gloucester, Sierra Leone
Soldier, Doctor, Political theorist
Agnes Yewande Savage
Graduated 1929
Born 1906, Edinburgh, Scotland
First West African woman to gain a medical degree?
Medical Officer Gold Coast.
Died 1964.
David Pitt
Graduated 1938
First black candidate to stand as MP
Key Caribbean politician
Second ever black member of House of Lords
Edward Oku Ampofo
Graduated 1939
Born 1908, Mampong-Akwapim, Ghana
First Ghanaian to get a government medical bursary.
Renowned doctor and herbalist
Pan-African sculptor and mentor to the Akwapim Six.
Died 1998.

To The Sky God
(cement, 1955)
The past as present... and political
“... if the University of Edinburgh had one characteristic which stood out, it was that it was an Imperial University drawing its students from all parts of the British Empire.”

Alfred Ewing, Principal of Edinburgh University, *The Leader*, 04/11/1920
There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion (negro), nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation... In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning, but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.
I must say a few words on some grave errors in generalization which men of science with restricted observation have arrived at respecting the capacity of progression in the African race [...David] Hume, in his Essay on *Natural Characters*, says that

There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion (negro), nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation...In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning, but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.

A witty writer, the late Dr Knox, of Edinburgh, believes that the races of men, particularly the negro, as they were several centuries ago, still continue to be now; and that despite of Christian influences and other civilizing agencies bearing on their rude and savage character, they will still continue to be. [...To insist on the broad dogma that no changes have taken place in the races of men, or even animals, as far back as historical evidences can be traced, is to insist on what is opposed to nature; and none but the unreflecting can be carried away by such a sweeping doctrine [...]

James Africanus Beale Horton, *West African Countries...a Vindication of the African Race*
Imagine a rather squat figure, with thick lips, crinkly hair, a face as black as the ace of spades, and you have Mr. Taylor from the West Coast of Africa. Africanus was rather a pathetic character; his appearance, his colour and his race were against him [...] He [ultimately] failed to take a degree, which seems a pity, as it might have been of great value in a country where the answer to the charlatanism of the witch doctor is “modern, scientific medicine.”

3

What next?
How to tell our past in our future
Kesaveloo Naidoo
Graduated 1936
Born 1906, Durban, South Africa.
Vice-President of Natal Indian Congress
Died Durban, 1999.
IN MEMORY OF
JAMES AFRICANUS
HORTON
OF SIERRA LEONE
(1835-1883)
FIRST AFRICAN
GRADUATE OF THE
UNIVERSITY