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Meet five black women who have shaped British history

Anne Grier, an HMRC rep who sits on our national black members' committee, tells us about five black women who have shaped British history.

This year, “Celebrating our sisters” is the theme of Black History Month. Black History Month was the brainchild of a Ghanaian man called Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, who came together with other local community activists to successfully organise the first officially celebrated Black History Month event in London in 1987.

And it wasn't long before the momentum quickly spread to the rest of the UK.

Addai-Sebo was moved by a casual conversation he had with a black colleague in 1985. The colleague's 6-year-old son wanted to know why he wasn't “white”. She felt that that she had failed him, but he reassured her she hadn't failed him - the system had.

He felt that more needed to be done challenge racism and that Britons needed to educate themselves and others about the British history of black people.

This first Black History Month event coincided with the 150th anniversary of Caribbean emancipation of slavery and the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Organisation of African Unity, an organisation which sought to bring African nations together to resolve their issues collectively within the continent.

For this year's theme of “Celebrating our sisters” , we take a quick look at five black women who shaped British history.

Diane Abbott

Diane made history when she became the first black woman to be elected to parliament in 1987. She continues as MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and is the longest-serving black MP. She has had her challenges throughout the years, including with racism from her colleagues and the wider public, but she continues to attempt to overcome them. One of my favourite quotes of hers is: “It

is so important for us to come together, share and celebrate each other's work".

Mary Seacole

Mary is one of the most inspirational black women in British history. She was a nurse, born in Jamaica in 1895 to a Scottish lieutenant. She learnt nursing at an early age from her mother. Most famously, she set up a British hotel to help injured soldiers during the Crimean War. Her autobiography, **Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands**, was the first autobiography written by a black woman in Britain.

Sharon White

Sharon was the second permanent secretary at HM Treasury. The first black person and only the second woman to hold that position. She eventually became the first ever female chair of John Lewis and was, in 2022, named the UK's most influential black person.

Margaret Busby

Margaret was born in Ghana in 1944 before later studying in the UK. She became the youngest black woman publisher in Britain. She's part of the judging panel of the Booker Prize and continues to offer a platform for new, emerging black writers.

Baroness Doreen Lawrence

Baroness Lawrence started campaigning in 1993 when her son, Stephen Lawrence, was murdered in a racist attack. Doreen and her husband fought for justice and she received support from PCS throughout. She has dedicated her life to seeking justice and raising awareness of police brutality. She was made a peer in the House of Lords working on issues affecting black communities.