

# The Life of Dr Harold Moody

Written by Stephen Bourne

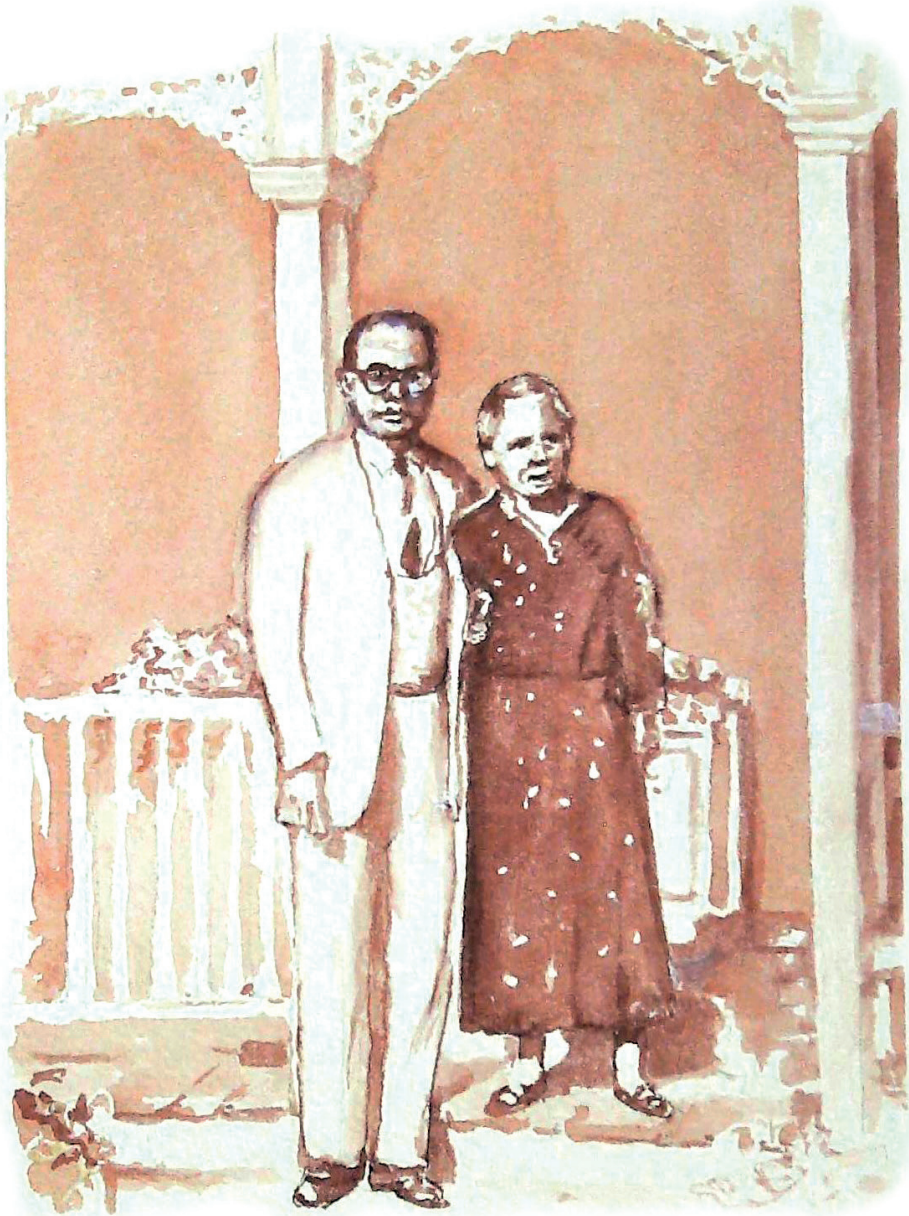


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# Introduction

Harold Moody was born in Jamaica, an island in the Caribbean Sea, at the time when Queen Victoria was ruling the British Empire. Jamaica was part of the British Empire, which meant that it belonged to Britain. As a young man, Harold left Jamaica and travelled across the sea to Britain to train as a doctor. He made the journey to London in 1904, unaware that he would one day become one of the most important leaders of Britain's Black community, and of the British civil rights movement. Because of Harold's work as a campaigner and doctor, he would later be likened to America's Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.



Harold Moody with his mother Christina Moody, in Jamaica



# Harold Moody's early life



Young Harold Moody

Harold Arundel Moody was born in Rum Lane, Kingston, Jamaica on the 8th October 1882. He was the eldest of the six children of Charles and Christina Moody. Harold's father owned a chemist shop in West Parade, Kingston, while Harold's mother gave her children a home full of love and laughter. Even though Harold's mother had never been to school, she wanted her children to receive the best education possible. As such, Harold's brother Ludlow travelled to Britain to study at King's College Hospital in London, while Ronald Moody, another of Harold's brothers, studied to be a dentist. Like his brothers, Harold was encouraged to study hard, and he did well at school. He was also a devout Christian, and his belief in God became an important part of his life and later activities.

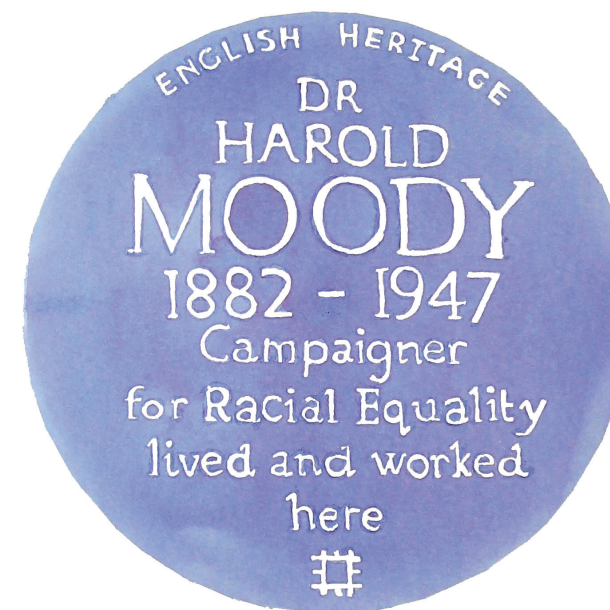
When Harold was growing up, because Jamaica was part of the British Empire, the people of the island were considered British as well as Jamaican. Harold was determined to have a career in medicine in England. With his mother's support, he sailed to England at the age of 21 on the 1st September 1904, to study medicine at King's College Hospital.

At this time, white British people had little exposure to life in other parts of the British Empire, and had very little contact with Black people. The young Harold was completely unprepared for life in London – he was stared at and found it hard to find a place to live. Harold visited the Young Men's Christian Association in Tottenham Court Road, where he was given a list of addresses where he might be able to find accommodation. However, he was turned away at every address he went to, eventually finding a small attic room to live in.

Harold often came face to face with British people who were surprised to meet an educated, well-spoken Black man who appeared to be more British than themselves. Experiencing racial prejudice did not prevent him from making a new life for himself, and in 1912 Harold qualified as a doctor. Although he was the best applicant, Dr Moody was denied a position at King's College Hospital because of racial discrimination. He also applied for an appointment as one of the medical officers of the Camberwell Board of Guardians. A doctor who was a member of this board stated publicly that Dr Moody had the best qualifications of all the applicants, but because he was Black, he would not be given the appointment.

# Moving to Queens Road, Peckham

Harold would not allow racism to hold him back. Having qualified as a doctor, he started his own surgery in Peckham, south-east London in 1913. Nine years later, the family moved to their second home in Peckham: a spacious Victorian house at 164 Queens Road.



The English Heritage blue plaque now displayed at 164 Queens Road, Peckham

At this time, Britain did not have a National Health Service, which meant that many poor families struggled to find the money to pay doctors for medical treatment. Dr Moody often treated the children of poor families for free. Children liked him because he was kind and gentle, not stern as some other doctors might have appeared.

Dr Moody was also deeply religious and he felt strongly that God had called him to serve the people of south-east London. In the first week of the surgery opening, his earnings amounted to just one pound, but gradually this increased because the people who lived in Peckham and the nearby Old Kent Road grew to know and trust him. Dr Moody gained a reputation for being a very good doctor and people appreciated this – they would come from near and far to see him.

As a Christian, Dr Moody also became involved in the administration and running of the Camberwell Green Congregational Church and became a deacon there. He often used the church pulpit to voice his views of racial harmony.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Dr Moody's home on Queens Road became a popular meeting place for famous Black people who visited London. They included the American singer and activist Paul Robeson; the Trinidadian historian and novelist C.L.R. James; Kwame Nkrumah, who later became president of Ghana; Jomo Kenyatta, who later became the founding president of the Republic of Kenya; and the popular cricketer Learie Constantine, also from Trinidad.

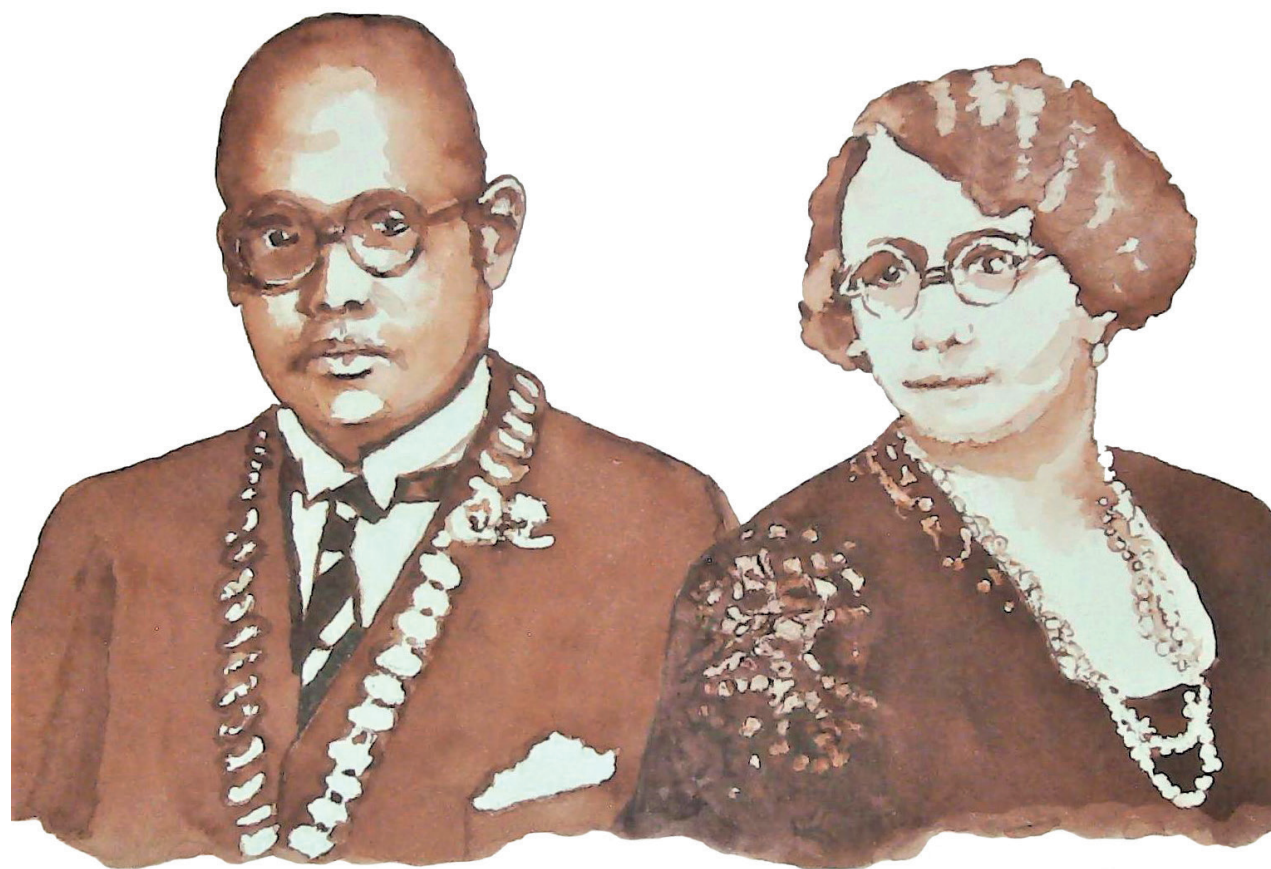




# Family life

In 1913 Harold married Olive Tranter, a warm and affectionate English nurse. They met when she was employed at the Royal Eye Hospital. At this time, marriages between Black and white people were uncommon in Britain. Some couples faced hostility and discrimination, especially if they had children. Fearing for the young couple, their families tried to persuade them not to marry, but Harold and Olive were devoted to each other, and their wedding went ahead at Holy Trinity Church in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

They went on to have six children: Christine, Harold, Charles, Joan, Ronald and Garth, all born in Peckham. As the children grew up, Harold's family and work commitments prevented him from revisiting Jamaica. He only returned on three occasions: in 1912, 1919 and finally in 1946.



Dr Harold Moody and Olive Moody

# The League of Coloured Peoples

The 1920s and 1930s were a difficult time for Black people in Britain. In cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool and London, hotels and restaurants refused to allow Black people to enter. Racism was widespread and deeply rooted in British society, but unlike in America there was no official segregation. This meant that Black people could sit where they liked on a bus, for example, but that many Black people were unable to find work or a place to live in Britain.

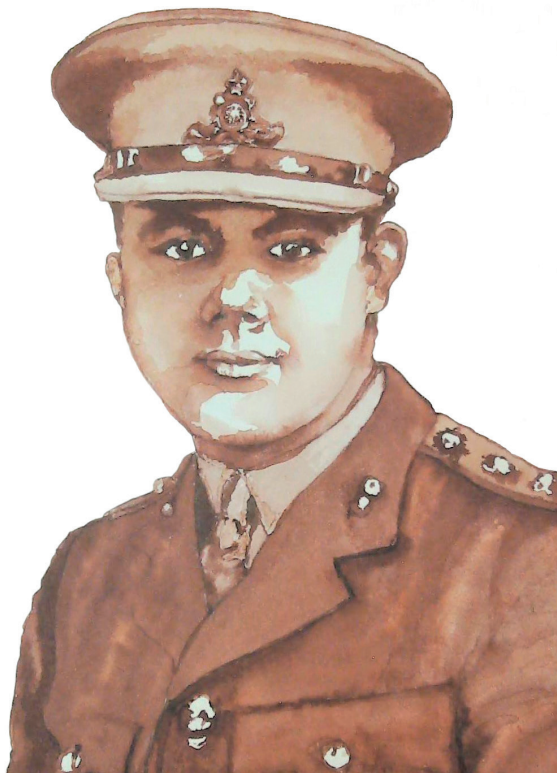
Dr Moody helped many Black people who came to him in distress and before long he realised that it would be more effective if he formed an organisation. In 1931 the League of Coloured Peoples was born, and due to Dr Moody's knowledge of the hardships and racial discrimination Black people faced, he was elected its first president. Based at his home in Peckham, the League became the first influential African Caribbean pressure group in Britain.

Dr Moody saw the League primarily as serving a Christian purpose, not a political one. For two decades the League was the most influential organisation campaigning for the civil rights of African and Caribbean people in Britain, playing an important role in the British civil rights movement. Its members were devoted to serving the interests of African and Caribbean students, as well as campaigning for Black settlers to be given better housing and greater access to employment. The League, and its journal *The Keys* – inspired by the idea of the black and white keys of a piano being in harmony – helped thousands of Black people in Britain take care of some of the problems they faced. It struck many blows against racism in Britain.

Many Black people who had made Britain their home supported Dr Moody and the League. They came from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada, Guyana and Ghana. Also present at the League's first meeting was Stella Thomas, who would later become the first female magistrate in West Africa.

After Dr Moody died in 1947, the League continued their campaign work for several years, but the organisation faded away at the very same time as the post-war increase of African and Caribbean settlers in Britain, following the arrival of *Empire Windrush* in 1948. These people could have benefited from an organisation that would have represented their interests and campaigned on their behalf.

# The Second World War (1939–1945)



Charles 'Joe' Moody

## Charles 'Joe' Moody

During the Second World War, thousands of Black workers and military personnel came to Britain from West Africa and the Caribbean to join the fight against Nazi Germany. This increased the workload of Dr Moody and the League, but it also gave them greater purpose and influence. It also created another dilemma for Dr Moody. He had to challenge the War Office after one of his sons was informed that he could not become an officer in the British Army because he was not white.

In 1939 Dr Moody's 22-year-old son Charles, known to his family and friends as 'Joe', was qualified for basic training as an officer in the British Army. He went to a recruiting office in Whitehall where he was interviewed by an army captain. After the captain talked to the major, Joe was informed that he could not become an officer, despite being born in England.

Dr Moody fought back against this rejection.

He telephoned the Colonial Office and made an appointment with one of the officials to discuss the discrimination in the armed services. As a result, the government began to relax the rules regarding voluntary enlistment and emergency commissions. However, when Dr Moody found out that this ruling would only apply for the duration of the war, he objected, insisting that discrimination in the armed services must end for all time. In 1940, when Joe joined the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, he became generally accepted as the first Black officer in the British Army in the Second World War.

Five of Dr Moody's six children went on to receive important positions in both the army and the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Dr Moody's son Ronald served in the RAF, and his youngest son Garth became a pilot-cadet. Both his daughter Christine and his son Harold qualified as doctors and joined the Royal Army Medical Corps.

## Dr Moody's younger brother Ronald

Dr Moody's younger brother Ronald had been enjoying success as a sculptor in Europe when the Second World War broke out. He had made his home in Paris, France, with his wife Helene, an English painter. In June 1940, two days before the Germans invaded Paris, the couple were forced to leave the city, abandoning his sculptures – which were later retrieved after the war. After their escape from Paris, Ronald and Helene set out on foot and joined many other refugees making their way south. After two hazardous weeks, they reached Marseille on the 2nd July 1940. For the next five weeks they stayed at a small hotel, investigating how they could escape and get back to England. Ronald became ill, but in February 1941, they made an attempt to cross the Pyrenees mountains into Spain, but failed due to Ronald's poor health. Three months later, Helene, who had valid papers, reluctantly returned to England. Ronald, who no longer had valid papers, was forced to hide from the Germans in order to avoid being arrested and put in prison. After three months on the run, he made his second attempt to escape but was captured and imprisoned. Fortunately, he was able to withstand interrogation and was released after a week, when he was finally able to escape successfully. After living for two weeks in a safe house in Barcelona, he was sent to Madrid and then via Gibraltar to Liverpool, where he finally arrived in October 1941.

In 1943 Ronald was interviewed for the BBC Radio show *Calling the West Indies*, where he described what happened when he escaped from Paris with Helene two days before the German invasion. He said that they had walked for miles and miles, so far that Helene's feet had bled, sleeping under hedges to rest. In total, it took Ronald fifteen months to escape to England.

## Helping the community

In 1940 Dr Moody was invited and proudly went to Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty the Queen received a fleet of 35 canteens (lorries that had been fitted with kitchens), purchased and provided by the people of West Africa and the Caribbean, on behalf of Britain. In the *News Letter* (formerly *The Keys*) the League explained to its readers that the canteens would serve hot drinks and food to those who had been bombed out of their homes, or who, during the winter, had to spend long and anxious nights in shelters, away from their homes across London and other cities. During the ceremony at Buckingham Palace, Dr Moody was presented to the Queen, who made enquiries concerning the welfare of Britain's Black citizens.

Dr Moody also focused his efforts on Black communities outside of the capital during the Second World War. At the time, some small communities were living in seaport towns, such as Newcastle. These communities, including a group of 200 people in Newcastle, could feel lonely and isolated from the normal social life of the wider community. Answering an appeal from them, Dr Moody made a journey to Newcastle to meet the seaport community, demonstrating his continued efforts to help others.



## Bomb incident in New Cross

On Saturday 25th November 1944, Dr Moody left his Peckham home to attend the terrible aftermath of a V-2 rocket incident in nearby New Cross Road. The V-2 missile fell just after midday, landing at the rear of a department store in New Cross Road.

People in the street later said that when the V-2 rocket landed, the store, which was full of women and children, bulged slightly outwards and then collapsed inwards in a huge cloud of dust and smoke which mushroomed high into the air. One hundred and sixty-eight people were killed and more than 120 were seriously injured, mainly mothers and their children, who were among the Christmas shopping crowds. Dr Moody attended as part of a team called in from the surrounding area. They struggled night and day amidst the chaos to bring comfort to the survivors.

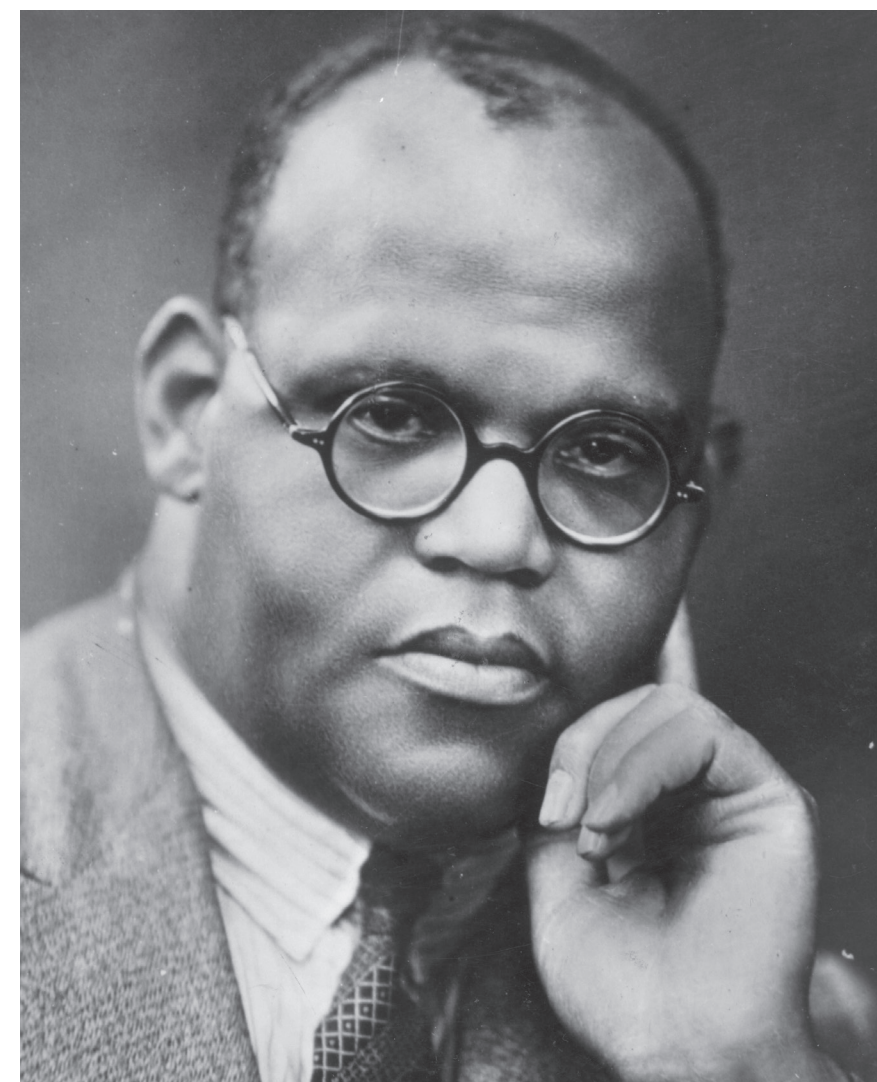
Damaged shops and houses stretched from New Cross Gate Station to Deptford Town Hall. After the explosion, people who witnessed the incident recalled seeing victims running away in fear, while others were seen sitting dazed, silent and motionless on pavements in the middle of the devastation. The air was filled with grit and dust. There was a huge crater where the V-2 had fallen. This was the horrific scene that met Dr Moody and the emergency services when they arrived. At night, floodlights were set up to enable the rescuers to continue through the hours of darkness. They worked long and hard for two days and nights before their difficult task was done. Despite their efforts, eleven people were never found. It was one of Britain's worst bombing disasters of the war.

## The end of the war

As the Second World War drew to a close, Dr Moody reflected on the situation in a radio broadcast to the people of the Caribbean and in the *News Letter* of the League of Coloured Peoples. He said that Victory in Europe (VE) Day on the 8th May 1945 had come and gone, along with the horrors and tensions of war. He described how he had been amongst people whose homes had been destroyed by bombs and whose families had been devastated by the war. But he rejoiced that the people of Europe were free and could look forward to a happy future.

In the winter of 1946–1947 Dr Moody made a tiring five-month tour of the United States and the islands of the Caribbean, with the aim of raising money for a colonial culture centre in London. This tour exhausted him, and he returned to Peckham in ill-health, disappointed that so little money had been raised. On the 24th April 1947, at the age of 64, Dr Moody died of acute influenza. Thousands of people from all walks of life, including many of his patients, paid their respects at his funeral service, which was held at the Camberwell Green Congregational Church.

# Remembering Dr Moody



Dr Harold Moody

The story of Dr Moody is important to remember because he is one of the most influential and highly respected historical figures in Britain. It is sad that he has been forgotten. Other famous Black people have been remembered, such as the nurse Mary Seacole and First World War army officer Walter Tull, but Dr Moody has been overlooked. Dr Moody helped Black people in Britain at a time when they needed a leader who could make a difference. His concern for the needs of Black people and other people of colour in Britain should be celebrated. The time has come for Dr Moody's achievements to be recognised and remembered.

# Timeline

**1882:** Harold Moody is born in Kingston, Jamaica.

**1904:** Aged 21, Harold arrives in England to study medicine at King's College Hospital.

**1912:** Harold qualifies as a doctor.

**1913:** Dr Moody opens his surgery at 111 King's Road (now King's Grove), Peckham, south-east London. In 1922 he moves it to 164 Queens Road, Peckham.

**1912:** Dr Moody and Olive Tranter marry.

**1914:** Birth of daughter Christine.

**1915:** Birth of son Harold.

**1917:** Birth of son Charles.

**1918:** Birth of daughter Joan.

**1920:** Birth of son Ronald.

**1924:** Dr Moody becomes the first Black man to become chair of the board of directors of the Colonial Missionary Society. He is also appointed to the board of the London Missionary Society.

**1925:** Birth of son Garth.

**1931:** The League of Coloured Peoples is founded in Peckham by Dr Moody.

**1932:** Jamaican poet Una Marson arrives in Peckham. The Moody family give her a home. During the Second World War she becomes the first Black woman programme maker and presenter on BBC Radio.

**1933:** The League of Coloured Peoples creates the journal *The Keys*.

**1940:** Dr Moody's son Captain Charles Moody becomes the first Black commissioned officer in the British Army during the Second World War.

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**1944:** Dr Moody attends the V-2 rocket incident in New Cross.

**1946–7:** Dr Moody visits the United States and Caribbean to raise money for a colonial culture centre in London.

**1947:** Dr Moody dies at the age of 64.

**1948:** On the 22nd June, 492 Jamaicans and Trinidadians arrive at Tilbury Docks on the passenger ship *Empire Windrush*.

**1950:** Publication of *Negro Victory: The Life Story of Dr Harold Moody* by David A. Vaughan.

**1951:** Dr Moody's mother, Christina Moody, dies in Jamaica.

**1965:** Dr Moody's wife, Olive Moody, dies.

**1995:** Dr Harold Moody is honoured with an English Heritage blue plaque at his former home at 164 Queens Road, Peckham. The plaque describes him as a "Campaigner for Racial Equality".

**1999:** Consort Park in Peckham is renamed Dr Harold Moody Park.

**2007:** With the help of Stephen Bourne and Dr Moody and Ronald Moody's niece Cynthia Moody, Ronald's 1946 bronze portrait of Dr Moody is purchased by the London Borough of Southwark. It can be seen on display in Peckham Library.

**2020:** Dr Moody is included in Patrick Vernon and Angelina Osborne's book *100 Great Black Britons*.

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# Dr Harold Moody discussion questions: KS2

1. How did the racial discrimination that Harold Moody experienced when he came to Britain affect his career and involvement in the civil rights movement?
2. Look at the text carefully to find examples of racial discrimination at the beginning of the 20th century. How does this compare to the present day?
3. What were Harold Moody's motivations to launch the League of Coloured Peoples, and was the organisation successful in its mission?
4. In what ways did Harold Moody most contribute to the civil rights movement in Britain? Pick three of his achievements and discuss their impact.
5. Which do you think is more important, Harold Moody's contribution to his community or his contribution to the wider civil rights movement?
6. What do you consider Harold Moody's greatest achievement to be, and why?

# Dr Harold Moody discussion questions: KS3

1. Describe Harold Moody's life before he came to Britain.
2. Why do you think Harold Moody decided to leave Jamaica and to settle permanently in Britain? Try to suggest two reasons.
3. Life for Black people in Britain in the early 20th century could be very difficult. List some of the difficulties that Black people, including Dr Harold Moody, encountered. You could think about difficulties with work, housing and other areas in which people experienced discrimination.
4. What do you think were Dr Moody's biggest achievements? Try to explain at least two. You could include the following:
  - his work with the League of Coloured Peoples
  - his work during the Second World War
5. The work of Dr Harold Moody is not widely known in Britain. Why do you think this is?
6. Imagine you are asked to write a short speech explaining why Dr Moody deserves to be remembered. What would your main argument be? Try to plan out your answer, and then write it up.

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# Behind the book

## About the author

Stephen Bourne has been writing Black British history books for thirty years. His most recent publications are *Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the Great War* and *Under Fire: Black Britain in Wartime 1939–45*, both published by The History Press.

## About Pearson P.R.I.M.E

P.R.I.M.E stands for People Representing the Interests of Multiple Ethnicities. Pearson P.R.I.M.E is the voice of Black, Asian and Multiple Ethnic (BAME) colleagues at Pearson globally, committed to achieving equality for all. As an Employee Resource Group (ERG), P.R.I.M.E represent the interests of employees and, importantly, embraces everyone from the diverse range of cultures and backgrounds that are represented within the organisation.

As part of our mission to support the company goal to build our culture, talent, and brand, P.R.I.M.E have been looking at the hidden stories of historical Black individuals and making them known today.

We thank Stephen Bourne for helping to shine a light on Black history.

Kemi and Kwasi – P.R.I.M.E Co-Chairs

Discovering Dr Moody's story in a Google Doodle and then being drawn to Stephen Bourne was like being lucky enough to find a piece of treasure that had once been cared for, but now needed restoring. I'm so grateful that Stephen was willing to work with all of the dedicated people at Pearson to bring life back to Dr Moody's story, so that children in schools can read about his struggle, his resilience and his triumphs for others. Dr Moody, the UK's very own equivalent of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.

Yasmin Pitter, Deputy Director – Higher Education Qualifications, Pearson, and P.R.I.M.E member

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