1927-2006
The life of John La Rose

An easy read summary to help people with learning disabilities find out about John La Rose and his work to fight racism

by Paul Christian

with Sue Ledger, Sarah Garrod, Nicola Grove and Generate Voices
**Who was John La Rose?**

John La Rose was a poet and a writer.

He dreamed of a world that was fair. A world where all people are treated equally.

He worked very hard to make that dream come true.

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John La Rose. International Book Fair 1987
Image: Julian Stapleton
He stood up for the rights of Black people in Britain.

He was a very important leader in Black British history.

John believed that people can take action, no matter how small, to change things they feel are not right.
Read on to find out more……
The life and work of John la Rose

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Early life in Trinidad

John La Rose was born in Trinidad in 1927.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Trinidad is an island in the Caribbean.</strong></th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>John’s family lived in a town called Arima. It was in the mountains.</strong></th>
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</thead>
</table>

| **His father’s name was Ferdinand La Rose. He bought and sold cocoa.** |
| **His mother, Emily La Rose, was a teacher.** |
| **John had four sisters and a brother.** |
John loved Calypso music.

He loved Carnival.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image: Ken Wilson-Max</th>
<th>He loved to dance.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image: Ken Wilson-Max</td>
<td>He loved to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s-1940s</td>
<td>John went to school in Arima.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When he was nine he passed an exam to go to one of the best schools in Trinidad. It was St Mary’s College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1940s-1950s</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When John grew up he was very interested in art, music and books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He made a programme for Radio Trinidad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
He wrote a book about Calypso music with his friend who was a famous musician.

John always believed that people should be treated fairly.

Here he is on a march in Trinidad.

They wanted better rights for workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Life in London 1960s to 2006</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In 1961 John moved to London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John began to study Law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Britain he looked for books about Black history, Black artists and Black music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John could not find any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were Black writers.</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were Black artists.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There were Black film makers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But where was their work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not in the art galleries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
John saw that many British people did not know about Black history.
John worked on a building site to get some extra money. He had an accident. It was not his fault. John was standing on some bad scaffolding. It broke. John fell and hurt his back.

He was paid compensation. This is when the bosses give money to a person who is hurt.

They give money because they know there has been a mistake.

John starts New Beacon Books
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In 1966 John used this money to set up the first Caribbean book publisher in the UK. He called it ‘New Beacon Books’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 1966 John and his wife Sarah also opened a bookshop. It was called the New Beacon bookshop. It was in their flat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This was the first Black bookshop in the UK.

In Trinidad there was a magazine called ‘The Beacon’. It supported the rights of Black people.

*Beacon* is a word that means a light.

John named his publishers ‘New Beacon’.
New Beacon published books:

- By Black writers
- About Black history
- About Black music and carnival
- About Black families and children.

John and Sarah took books about Black history to schools and meetings. They went on their moped.
In 1969 John and Sarah moved house.

The New Beacon bookshop was in their new living room.

It was open for people to visit.

In 1973 they opened New Beacon bookshop near Finsbury Park station in London.

People from schools, libraries and universities came to buy books.
John took books to sell at festivals.

Here he is setting up a New Beacon bookstall in a park.

New Beacon Books sent books all over the world.
The bookshop was a meeting place for Black writers and artists.

People came to the shop if they needed help.

It was important as a centre to fight racism.

John helped to lead a lot of this work.
Some people did not like the bookshop.

Sometimes the windows were broken.

New Beacon bookshop kept going.

New Beacon Books is still here today.

It is a busy meeting place for talks and projects about Black history, writing and art.
John La Rose was an important Black leader. He did lots of things to help fight racism. He did lots of things to share Black history. He did lots of things to share the work of Black artists and writers.

Read on to learn about some of the other work John did. If you want to know a bit more about any of these things you can find it in the ‘more information’ section at the end.

There is also a lot more information on the George Padmore Institute website https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive.

John and his friends start a world-wide Black book fair and festival in London.

John knew writers and booksellers from around the world.

In 1982 he set up the first international Black book fair and festival.

It was in London.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="First Book Fair, 1982" /></td>
<td>The book fair was very big. In 1982 over 6000 people came to buy and sell Black books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Book Fair session for children with G.G. Darah in Bradford." /></td>
<td>There was storytelling for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Legba Dance Company" /> <img src="image4.jpg" alt="Arkoor Arts. Image: Julian Stapleton" /></td>
<td>There were dancers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were rap artists and musicians.

The book fair and festival made a place for Black people to come together, share their work, and support each other.

The last book fair was in 1995.

Many famous Black writers came to the book fair.

Writer Margaret Busby said that many people were inspired by what they saw, heard and read at these Black book fairs.
John and his friends wanted to help Caribbean artists. They made a group called the ‘Caribbean Artists Movement’ or CAM for short. CAM showed great artists and writers from the Caribbean. It helped people to learn about Black artists.
In the 1960s and 1970s families felt Black children were not treated fairly in school.

Families were worried about racism in schools.

Families were worried about racism in the police.

Their children were being stopped and searched by police.

John worked with Black school children and their parents to try to make things better.
John and his friends set up extra lessons for children across the UK.

These were called ‘Saturday’ or ‘supplementary’ schools.

They helped children with their lessons.

They taught children about their history.

Here is a picture of John teaching a lesson.

More and more children came to learn.
The schools also organised trips out for children and families to the seaside.

John’s work to support Black people after the 1981 New Cross Fire.

In 1981 there was a big fire at a house in New Cross in London.
13 young Black people died.

The police did not arrest anyone.

John helped set up a big march to protest about this.

They wanted the police to find out how the fire started.

They wanted the newspapers to talk about Black people in a way that was fair.
There is a separate easy read about the New Cross Fire if you want to find out more information.

The 1981 New Cross Fire
An easy read summary to help people with learning disabilities find out about the New Cross Fire

by Paul Christian

John's work to free an innocent man

Newton Rose was a young Black man from Hackney in London.
The police said he had killed someone. They put him in prison.

John helped to show this was not true.

Newton Rose was set free.
In the 1960s John had an idea to set up an archive - a safe place to store historical records for other people to see.

He felt people should know about the work he and his friends were doing.
He thought this would help people stand up against racism in the future.
John saved photographs and newspaper cuttings.

He made notes and recordings.

1991 the George Padmore Institute opens

John’s plan for an archive came true.

John and many friends set up the George Padmore Institute (GPI).

https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The George Padmore Institute (GPI) is an archive and research centre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is in London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is above the New Beacon bookshop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In this building and on the GPI website you will find photos, stories, books, and leaflets.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They tell you about Black history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They tell you about past work to stop racism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Cross Poster: Chris Abuk
It has more information about everything in this easy read.

Anyone can get in touch and ask to visit.
John La Rose died in 2006
He was 78 years old.

People spoke about what a great leader he was.

Today John’s work to tackle racism lives on.
The George Padmore Institute does Black history talks in schools.

They take items from their archive to schools and community meetings.

New Beacon still publish and sell books.

The bookshop is a place for Black writers to share and talk about their work.
John La Rose
What do you think about the work John did? Can it help us fight racism today?

Helpful Resources

George Padmore Archive Website
https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive

Dream to Change the World: A Tribute to John La Rose
https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute/discover
https://www.newbeaconbooks.com

Dream to Change the World
The Life and Legacy of John La Rose -The book of the Exhibition edited by Sarah Garrod, Nicole-Rachelle Moore and Sarah White

https://www.newbeaconbooks.com
https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute/discover
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Helpful Words</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place to put <a href="#">historical records</a> to keep them safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can be in a building or online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beacon</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A beacon is a light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compensation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money given to someone who has been hurt in an accident that was not their fault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People on a march often shout and carry signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Beacon Books and publisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These were set up by John La Rose in 1966 to print and sell books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bookshop has been a centre for fighting racism and helping Black children and their</td>
</tr>
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</table>
families. It is an important part of Black British history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publishers make information like books, newspapers, magazines, music and art so other people can see or listen to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information may be free or the publisher might sell it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism is the word we use when we talk about the unfair treatment of people with a different background or skin colour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is unfair treatment based on the wrong belief that some people from race or ethnic groups are better or worse than other people.

For a long time, people have treated Black people badly because of the colour of their skin.

Racism can be words and actions like name calling or bullying.

But it can also be harder to spot. It can be the ways that society is run like our schools, laws and support systems.
Racist Attack

Something done to scare or hurt another person or group because of their race, or skin colour, background or faith.

Attacks can be done in lots of ways. It can be threatening people or hurting them.

It can also be writing bad things about people.

Some racist people or groups try to make Black people feel frightened and unwanted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We call these actions racist attacks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Stop and search**

A police officer can stop and search you if they believe you are doing something against the law.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saturday or Supplementary schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra schools open to children from all backgrounds. They were set up to give extra support and help. Black children often learnt about Black history at these schools. Supplementary schools can still be found today in some parts of the UK. They aim to stand up to racism in schools by teaching Black children to be proud of their history and background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tape recordings</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## More information and extra resources about John’s life and work

If you want to know a bit more about John La Rose then you can look on the next pages.

If you want to know a lot more then you can look at the George Padmore Institute website: [https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive](https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive)

or this film about John’s life: Dream to Change the World: A Tribute to John La Rose [https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute/discover](https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute/discover)

## Early life in Trinidad

**1930s-1940s**

| John wrote a book about Calypso music with his friend Raymond Quevedo. |
| Raymond was a famous Calypso musician in Trinidad. His stage name was ‘Atilla the Hun’. |
### 1966-1972

**John helps set up the ‘Caribbean Artists Movement’**

John and his friends Andrew Salkey and Kamau Brathwaite set up the Caribbean Artists Movement. It was called CAM for short.
Andrew Salkey was a Jamaican writer, poet and journalist. He worked for the BBC as a journalist.

Kamau Brathwaite was a poet and a writer. He was born in Barbados. He worked at New York University as a professor of English Literature.

They brought many artists and writers from the Caribbean together.

They made a magazine called Savacou.
They put on events to show the work of Caribbean artists.

CAM showed great artists and writers from the Caribbean.

It helped people to learn about Black artists.

John called the book fair and festival the ‘International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books’.

1969–1980s John’s work in education and schools

- The Black Education Movement
- Supplementary schools for Black children.
- The Black Parents Movement

In Britain in the 1960s and 1970s Africa was sometimes talked about as a bad place.

This was very wrong.
In some British schools some Black children were made to feel that having African roots was something to feel bad about.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This was very wrong.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John thought all Black children should learn to feel proud of their talents, their looks and their history.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child drawing a West Indian Sunny Day
Image: Middlesex County Times and West Middlesex Gazette
In 1969 John helped set up the **Black Education Movement or BEM.**

Black parents were worried about the way their children were treated in UK schools.

John worked with Black school children and their parents to protest and make things better.
In some parts of London the council said that there were too many Black children in the schools.

They wanted Black children to go by bus to schools in other areas.

The parents wanted their children to go to the local school like everyone else.
John worked with parents to stop councils sending Black children to schools outside their local area.

Across the UK John and his friends set up schools called ‘Supplementary schools’. These were usually open to children at weekends or in the evenings.

They gave children extra lessons in Maths and English.

They also taught the children about Black history and about Black artists and writers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teachers were often Black and worked in the schools for free.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 1969 John set up a supplementary school for secondary school children at his own house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 1969 John’s friend, a teacher called Albertina Sylvester set up her school for younger Black children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1975-1993 The Black Parents Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John helped set up the Black Parents Movement (or BPM) to support parents to fight for their rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 1975 in north London a Black schoolboy called Cliff McDaniel was beaten by police and then arrested outside his school.

People from the George Padmore Supplementary Schools knew Cliff and were very upset this had happened to him.

John and his friends helped parents to come together and protest.

The parents of children attending supplementary schools joined with other parents and activists to form the Black Parents Movement.
The Black Parents Movement worked together for over 10 years.

It helped Black people to set up supplementary schools and to come together to help their children.

The parents wanted racism in the UK system to stop.

They wanted the police to treat young Black people fairly and with respect.

The Black Parents Movement worked to...
stop racism in the police.

They protested about the high numbers of Black children excluded from school.

They helped young Black people who had to go to court or who were taken to the police station.
1991 The George Padmore Institute opens

George Padmore was an activist from Trinidad.

John named the archive after him.

Paul Christian - Researcher with The Open University
Sue Ledger - Researcher with The Open University
Sarah Garrod – Archivist at the George Padmore Institute
Nicola Grove – Former Speech and Language Therapist and Researcher with The Open University
Generate Voices Forum – A forum of people with learning disabilities who campaign for positive change.

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