

Spilling The Tea On Our History!

Date and Time:

Friday 23rd February 2023 at 6:30 pm to 8 pm

Location: Stockport Central Library

Description:

A relaxed discussion about LGBTQ+ history. Light refreshments will be available.



Free Ticket
here



Pearl Alcock

Pearl Alcock was born Pearlina Smith in 1935, in the Caribbean island of Jamaica. Little is known about her life before she came to England, but it's thought that she grew up in Jamaica's capital, Kingston, and that she was married to a French-Canadian man.

At the age of 25, she migrated to Leeds as part of the Windrush generation with just five pounds in her pocket. She initially worked as a maid and then found factory work until she saved up £1000 to be able to open her own shop in London.

Sometime in the early 1970s, she launched a bridal shop on Railton Road in Brixton, London. Within a few years, she had opened a sheeben – an unlicensed bar – in the shop's basement.

Pearl's sheeben became the only queer safe space for London's Black gay community in the 1970s. At the time when the community experienced racism within the predominately white gay scene.

Pearls Sheebeen eventually had to close due being targeted by the police following the election of Thatcher in 1979. Her shop also had to close in 1981 due to financial pressures as did the cafe she subsequently opened which closed for similar reasons in 1985.

Spurred on by the positive reaction from her friend, she started making bookmarks and selling them for a pound each using any free materials she could find.

Alcock started to gain recognition from the art world in the late 1980s with the support of her friends, who brought her art materials and purchased some of her early work.

But it wasn't until a year before her death in 2006 that Pearl's work started to gain mainstream recognition, being shown in the Tate Britain as part of their 'Outsider Art' exhibition in 2005.

Pearl Alcock is an important figure in both Black British art and Britain's Black LGBTQ+ community. A fearless pioneer who provided a safe haven to queer Black Britons in the 1970s.

Pearl kept making work until she died aged 72, on 7 May 2006 in St George's Residence Housing Co-op – coincidentally not too far away from where her infamous sheeben was.