

## RAS TAFARI THE MAJESTY & THE MOVEMENT ~ The Chronicles ~ Part One ~ From the UK to Ethiopia ~

In 2012 Ras Danijah Tafari came to the UK from Ethiopia. Danijah is a repatriate from the UK residing in Ethiopia and he visited the UK to tie up some personal business and more significantly, to bring the news to the UK of a visionary project entitled 'Ras Tafari The Majesty & The Movement'. A compact working committee had been formed in Ethiopia since 2010 headed up by Dr Desta Meghoo and Danijah with a distinct vision; to present an Exhibition that could throw light on His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie 1<sup>st</sup> and the movement called by his name 'Rastafari'. According to Danijah and many serious adherents in the movement there was rising concern that the true meaning of who or what is a Rastafarian was becoming mis-interpreted and even more sinister, being mis-represented. The Ras Tafari movement was becoming seen as just a long haired community who smoke marijuana and were mainly musicians with no specific codes of conduct or doctrinal base or cultural anchorage. This was of course untrue to those of us in the inner realms of the movement but that was the wider perception. It was ordained thru' (I would say) Divine Inspiration or Divine Intervention that through this working committee in Ethiopia the message was to be put out to various countries to create a Ras Tafari Exhibition in their locality and present it to the Ethiopian HQ committee for inclusion in a General Exhibition to take place at The National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa between May and June 2014. The rationale was to dispel the myths and stereotypes and present the true significance of His Imperial Majesty's Life-long works and who or what the true Rastafarian is and represents, within a focused context of Pan-Africanism.

Ras Danijah visited all the Rastafari 'mansions' between mid to late 2012 and made utterances to the leaderships and collectives about this visionary idea but none realised the significance at the time. Danijah then reduced his scope to individual Rastafarians and Pan-african minded individuals who were still active. There were around 12 names on the list who were invited to the initial meetings at his home in North London at the time and I was one. Danijah had known of my community works over the preceding years being involved in an Ethiopian Orthodox Church Committee and The Haile Selassie 1<sup>st</sup> Foundation Supplementary School but more recent to that, I had hosted many Radio Interviews with him on live Radio discussing significant matters such as the history of Ethiopia, the current Ethiopian political situation, Bob Marley who Danijah knew personally and Ethiopian music. At the first meeting there was just four present including myself and Danijah, then at the third meeting a brethren brought along Sis Stella. At the next meeting three brethren from the Ras Tafari Council of Britain came along, however two of the original four brethren from the very first meeting were now no longer active amongst us. Sis Stella then brought along Ras Lionwyze and by the following couple of meetings I invited Jah Blue (Gabre Wolde) and Ras Shango Baku onto the project for their particular expertise and experience.

Ras Danijah advised that a legal company would need to be established to administer the formal arrangements and partnerships with other organisations going forward. The name of the Company proposed was to be 'Ras Tafari Royal Livity' but Companies House stated the use of the word Royal was not permissible. I challenged this decision on the basis that a member of the Ethiopian Royal family was patron to the Ethiopian committee but this was rejected. For expediency we then proposed 'Ras Tafari Regal Livity' and this name was successfully registered at Companies House. Ras Danijah decided that his mission and his personal business was accomplished then left to return to Ethiopia in April 2013. Jah Blue (Ras Gabre Wold) then went to Ghana on personal business. The committee by this time consisted of I as Director and Sis Stella as Assistant Director/Administrator as the key drivers for the project. Key roles and posts were assigned to all and an organisational structure was determined. However due to differences of opinion and an untenable working attitude from members of the Ras Tafari Council Of Britain, two were expelled leaving Dr. Robbie Shilliam who chose to remain. I contacted Ras Rai to be invited into the committee to compensate for the departure of the expertise of the expelled members and within a few weeks Sis Addishiwot was co-opted onto the committee also.

The Committee and roles would now be made up as follows, Ras Cos-Director/Co-ordinator, Sis Stella-Assistant Director/Co-ordinator, Dr. Robbie Shilliam-Researcher, Ras Shango Baku-Researcher and writer for the research, Jah Blue-Organic Historian, Ras Lionwyze-Video Documentary gathering, Ras Rai-Video Documentary gathering/Editing, Sis Addishiwot-Amharic Translator and Photographer. Sub Committees were formalised as follows, Research-Dr. Robbie Shilliam/Ras Shango Baku : Video Production-Ras Rai/Ras Lionwyze/Ras Cos. Sis Stella also assisted in the Video Production sub-committee.

The team then set about the Divine objectives in earnest with a series of weekly or fortnightly meetings. A template of a strategic approach was left by Danijah which consisted of mapping out dates and significant events in the UK relating to The Majesty Haile Selassie 1<sup>st</sup> and dates/significant events relating to the growth of the Rastafari Movement' and it was decided to elaborate on this template. Brainstorming sessions ensued noting the names of significant Rastafari organisations and Rastafari individuals who had made an impact in the UK over a timeline covering decades from the 60's, 70's, 80's and so forth to the present and including any Pan-African connections. The same formula was used to map out a timeline of dates of Ethiopian contact with the UK since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a particular focus on His Imperial Majesty highlighting His four and a half year stay at Fairfeild House in the City of Bath. The wealth of detailed research and the Dossier that Dr. Robbie Shilliam had already compiled before coming into the RMM was very comprehensive even containing details of His Majesty's financial situation whilst at Fairfeild House.

It was agreed at this early stage that all the Rastafari 'mansions' in the UK were to be approached again and made aware of this project to seek their sanction at leadership level and secure potential involvement. The first organisation to respond to our 'call' was the National Nyahbinghi Council (NNC) London. Myself and Sis Stella attended a NNC general meeting and outlined the scope of the project. The chairperson Sis Asher moved a motion that the RMM should be made a standing agenda item and this was approved by all present. The leadership of the Twelve Tribes of Israel organisation were formally approached and they responded to decline any involvement. The EABIC were formally approached and they responded to advise that our invitation for their involvement would be forwarded to HQ in Jamaica, no reply was ever forthcoming. Various contacts to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were available and secured positive responses in due course.

The research team made various visits, to the Kew Gardens archives, Black Cultural Archives and met with various organisations to solicit any historical information/facts that may be useful. The Production team set about prioritising and contacting key individuals to embark upon the video documentary gathering that would be compiled to form oral histories/testimonies. I had already begun this work in my capacity of Radio Presenter at Majestic radio by interviewing and recording in Audio format the history of Ras Gabre Wold's involvement and activism in the Ras Tafari Movement since he came to the UK from Jamaica in the early sixties and up to the present time. The following Individuals/Organisations were successfully captured on video: Ras Brenton (Manager of The Ark Project Hackney), Errol Hines (community activist and actor), Joseph Ben-Nathan (The Anglo-Ethiopian Society (AES), Ras Seymour (EWF), Menelyk Shabbaz (Film Director), Sis Atronsa and daughter Sis Askale (Radio Presenter & Artist), Sis Zauditu & Sis Makeda (SBN 'Sick Be Nourished' Birmingham), Sis Bethshani (Mothers of Creation, Birmingham), Ras Maka (Pinnacle Centre Birmingham), Ras Tread (Nyahbinghi Priest Birmingham), Black Symbol (Birmingham Artist), Beenie Brown (Long time Birmingham Community Activist), Sis Esther Stanford-Xosei (Reparations Activist), Young Warrior (Sound System Owner & Son of Jah Shaka), Ras Iman Issachar (Roots Music Promoter), Nyanjah (Musician & Actor), Rev. Kes Springer (1<sup>st</sup> Caribbean Ethiopian Orthodox Church Priest), Ras Clan (EOC Member), Herekuti (Musician and Radio Presenter formally known as Ras Cosmo), Members of Galaxy Radio management, Stephen Bell (Magdala Expert), Tony Massive (Roots music international Promoter) and various others. There were many other notable names identified to be contacted and remain on the committee's charts to be linked when mutual timing permits.

There was consistent Email interaction during the formative and developmental stage of the project with Dr Desta Meghoo and Ras Danijah in Ethiopia to define their expectations with regards to Exhibition format, technical specifications, presentation styles and timescales for delivery stages. Communications became tenuous at one stage around the content of our Exhibition panels but through diplomacy our team stood resolute that we must be in control of the content we were preparing. Committee member Sis Addishiwot had scheduled to make a visit to Ethiopia on personal business and she was asked to liaise with Dr. Desta and Danijah during her stay and various phone calls ensued between Ethiopia and I to smooth the flow of communications and define expectations. Later on, a visit to Ethiopia by Sis Stella and Ras Lionwyze assisted further in securing a greater understanding of the general awareness on the ground of the planned exhibition and also the structure of the committee of our Ethiopia counterparts. General awareness at grass roots level seemed low at that point in time and Dr Desta and Danijah were the only perceived key drivers. However these reports that Sis Stella and Ras lionwyze gave to us upon their return to the UK did not deter our forward motion.

Over the forthcoming weeks, Ras Lionwyze accelerated his personal involvement with Music production and Promotion rarely attending committee meetings but working relations were left harmonious. The video production works and editing were now being managed by Ras Rai and I. Over-arching time-scales and sub-committee timelines were pro-actively managed to ensure that they were being met, with a particular focus on the research aspect. Research compilation, selection of chosen Exhibition specific information, preparation of exhibition panels content, identification of appropriate photo's for the panels, were all pulled together by Dr. Robbie and Ras Shango and brought to the wider committee for assessment, adjustments and final approval. Sis Stella and I visited a Display Company to explore the materials and costings for a professional type foamboard to be used for the Exhibition panels in readiness for the conclusion of the Research teams task.

Gabre Wolde had by now returned to the UK and was sporadically involved in the process. A complete board of Directors from among our committee members were assigned to the paperwork of 'Rastafari Regal Livity' in readiness for opening a formal bank account and for the signing of any formal agreement that would form the 'Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)' between the RMM (UK) and the RMM (ET) for the delivery of the UK component. The MOU was scrutinised and amended where appropriate to protect our contribution and the mutual relationship with our counterparts in Ethiopia. Ras Shango made a routine visit to Ghana in late 2013 on personal business but whilst there publicised the RMM(UK) and the impending Exhibition scheduled for May 2014 in Addis Ababa. By his return to the UK in February 2014 interest had begun to swell with community members asking our committee about fare prices to Ethiopia. Enquiries were made with Ethiopian Airlines to see if they would offer any discounts for group bookings however they could not offer any attractive discounts and so we advised the community that they would have to make their individual enquires personally.

We had all agreed that Shashamane must play a crucial part in our visit to Ethiopia for the Exhibition and so Sis Stella and Ras Shango were appointed to lead the arrangements and co-ordination for that aspect. Communications were exchanged between key individuals in Shashamane enquiring as to specific needs from certain ones that we could comfortably facilitate and also in relation to accommodation requirements for our committee members on their arrival. Based on personal schedules and commitments the RMM members arrived in Ethiopia on staggered dates with Ras Shango reaching first followed by Sis Stella who were pivotal in firming up various arrangements with Dr Desta on the ground. I arrived next followed by Dr. Robbie soon after and by 19<sup>th</sup> May the core team committee members were all in Addis Ababa. Ras Rai had arranged to travel with the 'Sick Be Nourished' members from Birmingham and arrived a day later.

Events on the Ground in Addis Ababa was hotting up. After booking into our various hotels/accommodation we met up with Sis Desta and visited the National Museum of Ethiopia to be introduced to various members of her team and to see for the first time the venue where this ground breaking Exhibition would be staged. The major pre Exhibition event to be staged building up to the Grand Exhibition Opening, was a Symposium where various aspects of Rastafari History, Progress and Livivity would be discussed all guided by the Master of Ceremonies Dr. Jahlani from Jamaica. Many international Rastafari delegates had begun arriving in Ethiopia over the last few days and speakers from Jamaica, USA, UK, Benin, South Africa, the Caribbean and Italy were on the proposed lined up to deliver their reasonings. From our committee Dr. Robbie and Ras Shango had submitted papers for inclusion and would represent the Rastafari UK component on the platform. Ras Ra-i and myself set up the camera and voice recorder to capture the event as it unfolded for the ongoing archiving of the RMM's movements. Donisha Prendergast and Jahril were also filming and photographing in their professional capacities along with our own committee member photographer Sis Addishiwot who had by now arrived in Ethiopia having passed through Mexico.

The final run up to the grand opening was a complete whirlwind of activities with some crucial delays causing Sis Desta much anxiety but certain ones rallied around to strengthen her up and fortify her efforts. At one point it seemed that due to the difficulty in locating particular officials and key holders, Sis Desta was not going to secure the vestures and garments of His Imperial Majesty and Her Imperial Majesty for the Opening, however the official key holder eventually turned up and access to the protected rooms was secured. To my surprise a message was sent by Sis Desta asking for my presence of the opening of the secure room holding all the remaining personal Garments of His and Her Imperial Majesty along with certain chosen vestures, thrones, shields and prized possessions. This was a moment of precious blessing for I to assist Mama Desta, her husband Yerid and the other Ethiopian Officials and helpers to handle His and Her Majesty's personal garments, in preparation to bring them over to the Exhibition Hall at the other side of the building. These items were then carefully transported across to the Exhibition space and carefully and preciously mounted into their glass sided cabinets for display by Sis Desta, Ras Michael and I and with the assistance of various Ethiopian helpers. Egzierebere be Praised.

The final preparations were sped into place on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> May and the Grand Opening of the 'Ras Tafari The Majesty & The Movement' Exhibition became poised for marking its moment in History. The opening ceremony started with a chant from the Shashamane Youths leading into the formal speeches by Sis Desta and various dignitaries including the Ambassador from Jamaica.

A video clip of the opening ceremony has been compiled by Ras Rai and is available for viewing on this website.

END OF PART ONE

RAS TAFARI THE MAJESTY & THE MOVEMENT ~ The Chronicles ~ Part Two ~ The Shashamane Experience ~

With the elation and success of the Exhibition opening many went off to the local restaurants in the afternoon to replenish and exchange views and enjoy further stimulating cultural reasonings. For us as the RMM committee, within our celebrative atmosphere over the meal, the next phase was now coming into view. "All roads lead to Shashamane"

Transportation was arranged and co-ordinated by Sis Stella and Ras Shango. Preliminary enquiries and arrangements for our collective accommodation at the Rift Valley hotel in Shashamane were also previously made and these were now firmed up. On the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> May we were all packed and on the road. We had previously prepared a short programme of events for Shashamane that included three evenings of film screenings and reasonings to be held at the Ethiopian World Federation building and initial arrangements were sketched out through contact with Sis Ijahyna, Ras Joseph, Sis Wolette and Ras Kush based in Shashamane. It was within the scope of the original planning for the RMM Production sub-committee that we would capture video testimonies of ones who had successfully repatriated to Ethiopia with a focus on those who had come from the UK so as to epitomise a substitution of 'The Triangular Slave Trade' ie. From Africa to the Caribbean to the UK with a new 'Triangular Circuit Of Life' ie. from the Caribbean to the UK and the return to Africa. Names such as Ras Mweya, Ras Taggassa, Sis Wolette, Ras Hailu, Ras Kabinda and others were all identified as notable ones to capture a video recording of. As with all arrangements within the realms of Rastafari although plans were sketched out with some sort of framework, programme and timings, room was allowed in our thinking for the spirit of King Rastafari to bring things to fruition according to HIS Divine timing and will.

Our journey to Shashamane was smooth with no major obstacles and on arrival at The Rift Valley Hotel the usual formalities of booking in and securing comfortable rooms took its course. Later that day we made our first visit to The Nyabinghi Tabernacle and the welcome we received was most heart warming in particular from Ras Joseph who blessed our presence firstly with a Prayer and after introductions proceeded to prepare us all a wholesome meal. Various reasonings ensued whilst we awaited the meal and I mentioned to Ras Joseph that I had remembered his face from a couple of Jah Shaka dances in the UK I had went to where he was present around the control Tower. There was a very warm and hospitable atmosphere at The Tabernacle during our visit. We had brought some items for the local school in Shashamane consisting of books, pens and various other items including a Lap-top for use at the Tabernacle and so Sis Stella proceeded to offload these items in the Tabernacle Office.

Following the meal we made our way across to the Ethiopian World Federation(EWF) HQ building and was again warmly greeted by Ras Dawit at the gate and Ras Paul and Ras Kamba on entering the building, a little later Ras Rueben Kush arrived also. Introductions were exchanged and again various reasonings ensued, it turns out that Ras Paul had also been involved in Roots music over many years and was familiar with my released recordings. Arrangements were reasoned upon and finalised for our three afternoon/evenings of film showings as the EWF HQ had the appropriate equipment and the seating area to facilitate our requirements.

The next day was Day 1 of the arranged film screening and the chosen film was 'The First Rasta' transposed from the book by the French author Helena Lee. Day 2 was 'Footsteps Of The Emperor' Produced by Dr Shawn Sobers based in the UK and narrated by Benjamin Zephania and Day 3 'The Jamaican Book Liberator' Produced by Rastafari Regal Livty and narrated by Ras Seymour McLean. Footsteps of The Emperor was particularly inspiring for ones who had memories of visiting Fairfield House and who were involved in its preservation most notably Sis Wolete who had in fact acquired the writing desk that His Majesty had used whilst in Fairfield House and had presented it to Sis Desta for display in the Exhibition. There were many profound reasonings that ensued following the film showings over the three days including testimonies from Ras Kabinda, Ras Rueben Kush, Ras Mweya, Ras Taggassa, Donisha Prendergast, Ras Kamba, Ras Medhin, Sis Wolete, Ras Paul and local Ethiopian youths. Ras Kabinda's testimony of his trials and tribulations during the harsh early years of the 'Dread Act' in Dominica where he was formerly known as Desmond Trotter falsely framed for a killing and his campaign for release, was particularly intense and the atmosphere in the room was palpable. Sis Donisha Prendergast gave an impassioned plea regarding the preservation of the remaining land at 'Pinnacle' St Thomas, Jamaica.

In the days following, at the Lily of The Valley Hotel a satellite of the Ras Tafari The Majesty & The Movement Exhibition had been arranged and a round table Rastafari discussion had been organised to discuss matters of importance related to Rastafari progress to accompany the Exhibition. Myself, Dr. Robbie and Ras Rai had to return to Addis Ababa to prepare for our return to the UK, Ras Shango and Sis Stella stayed on.

## END OF PART TWO

RAS TAFARI THE MAJESTY & THE MOVEMENT ~ The Chronicles ~ Part Three ~ From Ethiopia to Fairfield House !

RMM committee members returned to the UK at different times with the panels returning in the care of Sis Stella. Upon returning to the UK many small miracles continued to unfold. It was deemed that Rastafari Regal Livty the legal entity Community Interest Company established to facilitate committee works would be placed at the front of all activities going forward. A sequence of events were arranged co-ordinated by Ras Robbie starting with a conference at Queen Mary University East London at which a report could be delivered to the community about the mission to Ethiopia. This report was delivered by committee members in turn and a committee panel convened in the second half of the afternoon to take questions from the audience. During the mid-afternoon recess a short film of our visit to Shashamane and a wide selection of photographs in a slide show format was shown.

The next stop was the Guildhall in Bath as special invited guests for an occasion to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of His Majesty being given the 'keys to the city'. The Exhibition panels were placed on display as part of the occasion and following this went on to be displayed at Bath Central Library for two weeks. From Bath Library the next location was appropriately 'Fairfield House, the former home of His Imperial Majesty and the Royal Family, Arch-bishop and priests during the four and a half years temporary exile outside of Ethiopia. Arrangements were facilitated by Steve Nightingale and Dr. Shawn Sobers of the Friends of Fairfield House committee. It was felt that Ras Bandele, the respected elder and long standing 'defender of the preservation of Fairfield' would be the appropriate one to bless and open proceedings for the Grand Exhibition opening and so communications were made to him and he was honoured and glad to fulfil this role. Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 was a special Sabbatical due to the Coronation anniversary celebrations on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November and so the Exhibition opening arranged for Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> acquired a Majestical significance. Crown Prince Ermias Sahle Selassie sent His Imperial Envoy to represent him and he even spoke directly to the gathering via loudspeaker through a telephone. Phone cameras clicked in abundance by the ones gathered to capture this auspicious occasion and the whole event was captured on film by our own video team. In a quiet moment later in the evening I and Sis Stella presented Ras Bandele with a personal copy of the official Exhibition Catalogue of May 2014 from the Addis Ababa National Museum of Ethiopia. Following the success of the occasion, our committee made a request to Steve Nightingale for Fairfield House to be deemed the 'Formal Home' of

Rastafari~The Majesty & The Movement (UK) Exhibition. The request was directed to the board of the Friends of Fairfield House and was accepted. When not on tour the Exhibition now resides at Fairfield House~Bath, for the benefit of the Rastafari community, local community and the many visitors to the former home of our Jah & King. I an I acknowledge the sterling work of those preserving Fairfield over the last 20 years including Ras Bandele, Sis Pauline, Sis Asher, Ras Selah and the many others.

Ras Tafari ~ Egzierbere ~ Let Jah be Praised

*Ras Cos Tafari*