



William Cuffay - the Black Chartist

William Cuffay was born in Kent, in 1788, son of a naval cook and former slave. When William was old enough he found work as a tailor. After going on strike and losing his job Cuffay became convinced that working people needed to be elected to parliament to help them improve their lives.

He became an important figure in the Chartist movement in London and in 1842 he was chosen to become president of the London Chartists. The Times described them as "the black man and his party".

After 1845 Cuffay became seen as the leading figure in the Physical Force Chartists in London and was considered to be one of the most militant members. He believed that violence should be used to get equal rights for working people. At the famous Chartist meeting on Kennington Common in 1848 he was encouraged by some Chartists to lead an armed uprising in London.

In the summer of 1848 a government spy called Powell provided information on a group of London Chartists. Based on the evidence given by Powell, Cuffay was arrested, convicted and sentenced to be transported to Tasmania, Australia for 21 years. In 1856 all political prisoners in Tasmania were pardoned but Cuffay decided not to return to England and instead became a tailor in Tasmania. Sadly William Cuffay died in poverty in Tasmania's workhouse in July 1870.

Task

1. What effect did losing his job have on William Cuffay?
2. What organisation did he join?
3. How did the Times describe this organisation? Why do you think it was described this way?
4. Copy out the paragraph choosing the best answer where appropriate:

After 1845 / 1945 William Cuffay joined the side of the Physical / Moral Force Chartists. They believed that violence should / should not be used to achieve their aim of getting equal rights for middle class / working class people. In 1848 a government spy gave evidence against Cuffay and he was freed / arrested. He was sentenced to 21 / 35 years in Tasmania where he died in poverty.

5. There is very little information written about Black people like William Cuffay and they are often forgotten about. Write a poem, nursery rhyme or a rap about William Cuffay for primary school children so that they can learn about his deeds.