

1958: Beating back Mosley in Notting Hill



A Notting Hill resident recounts his story of fighting racists and fascists in West London.

"Mosley tried to stir up a conflict between the blacks and the whites because his aim was to drive the blacks from North Kensington, to drive them from the shores of England. I wasn't for that because I came here to fight for the mother country... Mosley was stirring up a hate campaign, his supporters, the Teddy boys running around with bicycle chains and 'Keep Britain White, Keep Britain White'. They were going around in groups seeking out a coloured and beating him up, fighting, repressing coloured man or coloured woman, they go round kicking them about and beating them up.

Well, black people were so frightened at that time that they wouldn't leave their houses, they wouldn't come out, they wouldn't walk the streets of Portobello Road. So we decided to form a defence force to fight against that type of behaviour and we did. We organized a force to take home coloured people wherever they were living in the area. We were not leaving our homes and going out attacking anyone, but if you attack our homes you would be met, that was the type of defence force we had. We were warned when they were coming and we had a posse to guard our headquarters.

When they told us that they were coming to attack that night I went around and told all the people that was living in the area to withdraw that night. The women I told them to keep pots, kettles of hot water boiling, get some caustic soda and if anyone tried to break down the door and come in, to just lash out with them. The men, well we were armed. During the day they went out and got milk bottles, got what they could find and got the ingredients of making the Molotov cocktail bombs. Make no mistake, there were iron bars, there were machetes, there were all kinds of arms, weapons, we had guns.

We made preparations at the headquarters for the attack. We had men on the housetop waiting for them, I was standing on the second floor with the lights out as look-out when I saw a massive lot of people out there. I was observing the behaviour of the crowd outside from behind the curtains upstairs and they say, 'Let's burn the niggers, let's lynch the niggers.' That's the time I gave the order for the gates to open and throw them back to where they were coming from. I was an ex-serviceman, I knew guerrilla warfare, I knew all about their game and it was very, very effective.

I says, 'Start bombing them.' When they saw the Molotov cocktails coming and they start to panic and run. It was a very serious bit of fighting that night, we were determined to use any means, any weapon, anything at our disposal for our freedom. We were not prepared to go down like dying dogs. But it did work, we gave Sir Oswald Mosley and his Teddy boys such a whipping they never come back in Notting Hill. I knew one thing, the following morning

we walked the streets free because they knew we were not going to stand for that type of behaviour."

Baker Baron, born in 1925 in Port Antonia, Jamaica, had three brothers and a sister. Their father was a wharf official. Baron joined the Royal Air Force when he was fifteen by telling them that he was a year older. In 1944, after serving in the RAF for four years, he arrived in Britain and settled in London where he got a job working as a labourer on the railways. In 1958 at the time of the riots Baron was living in Notting Hill where he was involved in anti-fascist activities and in the campaign for better housing for the West Indian community. He still lives in West London.

*This piece originally appeared in *Forbidden Britain*, Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, BBC Books, 1994*