

MEMORIES OF 1960 SHEFFIELD SPRINGBOKS VISIT

Sheffield Anti-Apartheid decided to take non-violent action against the visit of the South African cricket team to the city. About 16 of us were involved in planning an event and about 12 in executing the plan. The idea was to paint Anti-Apartheid slogans in huge letters on the walls surrounding the grounds where the match was to be played.

We surreptitiously surveyed the site, planned which of us would paint which letters exactly where, bought the huge blocks of chalk (for some team members to draw the outlines of the letters), and the paint (for others to fill in the outlines). In the weeks preceding the planned 'vandalism' we went out night after night to track the routes and timings of police patrols in the area (this was of course long before the days of CCTV). The patrols were not at the same time each night but we eventually cracked the pattern and trimmed our operation so that it could be fitted in to a suitable space between patrols. We allocated different individuals to different locations and worked out approach routes.

At the last minute my sister announced that she was coming to see me and arriving at Sheffield station shortly before midnight. For reasons I cannot now remember the visit could not be put off. The timings were such that I had to slightly modify the plan as to my approach so as to allow me after collecting my sister to arrive at my allocated position outside the grounds direct from the station. My sister would have to accompany me whether she liked it or not.

Despite that slight hiccup, all went to plan and at the agreed time we were all in our respective positions. We had made no noise, the streets were quiet and no police in sight. As the first 'chalker' began their work, suddenly, all hell broke loose. Police

whistles sounded from all around us, sirens blared, powerful lights were directed onto us. The sense of disorder was only increased by the sound of people dropping their paint pots and equipment and running off in all directions shouting warnings to fellow team members and the sound of the police pounding the streets after us.

I was a 'chalker' and in a moment of inspiration flung my arms around my sister and engaged her in a passionate embrace. Amazingly the police ignored this courting couple in their pursuit of people who were running away (as a 'chalker' I had no give away paint pot). However, all was far from well. Over my sister's shoulder I could see my good friend David had been collared by the police.

David (an anglicised form of his name) was a black Kenyan, a most dignified, cultured, politically sophisticated man who was both sensitive and perhaps a little fastidious. Being black, and the Sheffield police reputation for racism being what it was at that time, there was nobody who I less wanted to see in police hands.

I saw David taken off to one of those police boxes that were dotted about in those days, and it appeared that he was not maltreated inside the box. However the police had evidently called one of their vans and David was bundled out of the police box and into the police van. I didn't want to let the police with David out of my sight. As luck would have it an empty cab was passing and I immediately hailed it and told the driver at all costs to follow the police van however fast it went. The taxi driver was game and we (sister still included) tailed the police van to Sheffield Central Police Station.

From here on my memory is unfortunately less clear. I believe we waited outside the police station for quite a while. Suddenly David was released, after being charged, and was unharmed. Perhaps his unaggressive dignified poise had impressed even the

police. Many others were charged and eventually appeared before the magistrates and were fined. We never discovered how the police had uncovered our plans. I had no phone that could have been tapped, mobile phones had not been invented nor had the PC. It remains a mystery.