

## BIRTH OF THE WINDRUSH GENERATION

In July 1995, the Jamaican born Sam King and Arthur Torrington, a Guyanese, started an organisation aimed at interesting mainly young men and women about their Caribbean heritage. It focused on identity, self-esteem, belongingness and sense of purpose.

Windrush Foundation was formed in 1995 as a community organisation and the following year it became a charity. The co-founders wanted to highlight the significance of MV Empire Windrush's journey and the personal stories of those who travelled on the ship. Before landing at Tilbury Docks, Essex, on 22 June 1948, Sam collated dozens of his fellow passengers' names and UK addresses. Hundreds of RAF servicemen were on the ship and it was apparent that he exerted a degree of leadership among them during the journey. Sam sent his friends Christmas cards every year and kept in touch with them. His book, *Climbing Up the Rough Side of the Mountain* (1998), outlines his second journey from Jamaica, and his intention to settle permanently in the UK. He brought his Windrush friends together in 1988 at Lambeth Town Hall to celebrate 40 years of the arrival of Empire Windrush on 22 June 1948, an event hosted by Lambeth Council.

Sam's generation was one who survived WWII and many of them served King and Country, whether on the frontline or the home-front. They knew how life was, both in the Caribbean and in the UK. More than three thousand Caribbean servicemen remained in Britain after 8 May 1945, and hundreds more arrived on troop-ships after. The Ormonde and Almanzora were only two of many ships. Members of his generation were among the pioneers who laid the foundation for other Caribbean settlers after 22 June 1948.

However, it was MV Empire Windrush that caught the attention of British politicians in April, May and June of 1948 as the troop-ship returned to Britain. Sam was aware of the political atmosphere at the time and told Arthur early in 1995 about the importance to the connection with Caribbean history and heritage in the UK. Sam always made comparisons also with the ship 'Mayflower' (the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her arrival in North America is later this year). Sam was first to coin the words 'Windrush Generation' in describing his colleagues, whether those who remained in the UK just after WWII or who returned on the Ormonde, Almanzora, or Empire Windrush. They were members of his generation who helped to rebuild Britain after WWII.

King and Torrington both put their creditability, honesty, etc on the line as they launched and kept Windrush Foundation going from 1995. They embarked on years of 'Windrush publicity'. Nineteen ninety-eight, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, again brought together dozens of Sam's Windrush friends, servicemen and women. Every leading British newspaper, TV and radio station reported the commemoration in June 1998, even Prince Charles hosted a Reception at St James's Palace for them. Trevor Phillips' four one-hour WINDRUSH documentary series were broadcast by BBC TV.

Windrush Foundation has never denied or will ever deny the presence and history of black Britons in the UK before 22 June 1948, but the organisation continues to focus on the lives and times of Caribbean people, post-WWII, in this country. The 70<sup>th</sup> Windrush anniversary in 2018 was the biggest as more community organisations became interested in the commemorations, adopting the term 'Windrush Generation', ascribing it to those who settled with their parents in Britain during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The British media used words like 'Windrush scandal' to describe a Home Office scandal that was about the Government's 'hostile environment' and its denial of citizenship rights mainly to thousands of Caribbean men and women in the UK. From 2018, the number of organisations and individuals using 'Windrush Generation' to describe themselves increased in large numbers.

By dint of the hard work of King and Torrington, the two decades from 1995 saw targeted Windrush publicity and community activities. Also, they set up 'The Equiano Society' and given the first major Olaudah Equiano presentation in March 1996 and they organised a launch event that honoured 'Gustavus Vassa, The African' at St Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, exactly 200 years after he passed away (Equiano often attended the Church as a young man).

Today, both community organisations are world-leaders, but they couldn't have done so without outstanding volunteers. Their education resources are second to none.

Windrush Foundation Directors (2020): Verona Feurtado, Dr Angelina Osborne, Dione McDonald and Arthur Torrington

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#### FROM THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION TO EMPIRE WINDRUSH

In 2013, Windrush Foundation managed a project titled: MAKING FREEDOM, a unique project that celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the full abolition of nearly a million Africans in the British Caribbean ([www.makingfreedom.co.uk](http://www.makingfreedom.co.uk)). It showed that emancipation was achieved with the agency of Africans who were prepared to be martyrs for the cause of freedom.

Windrush Foundation has retained the exhibition panels and, before the Covid-19 lockdown, prepared a desk-top version which can be displayed in schools and at community venues. It features Caribbean stories and outstanding individuals from 1791 to 1948. The display will be launched during the autumn of 2020. It

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