

BIRTH OF THE WINDRUSH GENERATION

In 1995, Sam King and Arthur Torrington created a community organisation aimed mainly at young men and women of Caribbean heritage. They focused on identity, belonging and sense of purpose and were determined to produce educational material that showed the connection with Caribbean history. The two men established Windrush Foundation and in 1996 it became a registered charity. The co-founders' main objective was to highlight the significance of MV Empire Windrush's journey, the personal stories and heritage of the passengers who travelled on the ship, and of the people in the Caribbean.

Before landing at Tilbury Docks, Essex, on 22 June 1948, Sam, who had served in the Royal Air Force during WWII, collated dozens of his fellow passengers' names and UK addresses. Hundreds of other RAF servicemen/ex-servicemen were also on the ship and it was apparent that he had exerted a degree of leadership among them during the journey. Sam sent his Windrush 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 first brought his Windrush friends together in 1988 at Lambeth Town Hall to celebrate 40th anniversary of the arrival of Empire Windrush on 22 June 1948, an event hosted by Lambeth Council.

Sam survived WWII and hundreds of his friends 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 and others had remained in Britain after 8 May 1945, and hundreds more arrived here on troopships after. The Ormonde and Almanzora were only two of many ships that brought Caribbean settlers to the UK before 1948. Members of Sam's generation were the pioneers who laid the foundation for those who arrive after 22 June 1948.

Empire Windrush was the ship that caught the attention of British politicians in April, May, and June of 1948 as it returned to Britain from the Caribbean. Sam was aware of the political atmosphere at the time and informed Arthur in the early 1990s about the ship's importance to Caribbean history and heritage in the UK. Sam always made comparisons with the ship 'Mayflower' (the 400th anniversary of her arrival in North America is later this year). Sam was first to have coined the term 'Windrush Generation' in describing his colleagues, whether those who remained in the UK just after WWII or who returned the Ormonde, Almanzora, or Empire Windrush. They were all members of Windrush generation who helped to rebuild Britain after May 1945. More than three thousand men and women remained in Britain after the War and made their homes here.

The 1950s saw tens of thousands of Caribbean settlers in the UK. It was a decade of activism as individuals like Claudia Jones, David Pitt, Sam King, Jocelyn Barrow, Amy Garvey (ex-wife of Marcus Garvey), et al, lobbied Parliament for laws against racial (or coloured) discrimination. They were successful to an extent. The Race Relations Act 1965 was the first legislation in the United Kingdom to address the situation. The Act outlawed discrimination on the "grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins" in public places in Great Britain. It also prompted the creation of the Race Relations Board in 1966. Those early pioneers and others formed themselves into a pressure group called the Campaign Against Race Discrimination (CARD) that lobbied for further government action, until the Race Relations Act 1976 was passed. Sam King was a founder member of CARD. There were other Asian lobby groups also. That generation built the platform upon which all other community pressure groups function today in the UK.

King and Torrington both put their creditability and integrity on the line as they launched and kept Windrush Foundation going from 1995. They embarked on years of 'Windrush publicity'. Nineteen ninety-eight, the 50th 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 on 25 June 1998 in acknowledgement the

contribution of the Windrush generation to Britain. Trevor Phillips' four one-hour WINDRUSH documentary series were broadcast by BBC TV during the month.

Windrush Foundation continues to focus on the lives and times of Caribbean people in the UK. Yearly commemorations were held, the larger ones being 1998, 2008, and 2013. The 70th Windrush anniversary in 2018 was the biggest as many more community organisations and local authorities became interested in the commemorations, adopted the term 'Windrush generation', and ascribed it to a younger generation of settlers who moved with their parents to Britain during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The British media syphoned the 'Windrush generation terminology', ending up with term 'Windrush scandal' to describe the 'outrage' caused by the Home Office actions and the Government's 'hostile environment'.

Members of the public were informed by the media in 2018 that the Home Office had wrongly designated thousands of Caribbean men and women as being in the country illegally. Thousands had been wrongly detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation and, in more than 80 cases, wrongly deported from the UK. Most of those affected had been born British subjects and had arrived in the UK before 1973, particularly from British Caribbean colonies, as well as those who were deported, lost their jobs or homes, or were denied benefits or medical care to which they were legally entitled. Some long-term UK residents were refused re-entry to the UK, and larger numbers were threatened with immediate deportation. It was from March 2018 that thousands of victims came to the realisation that they were children and members of the Windrush generation. The connection was mentioned during Parliamentary debates in April 2018 and publicised by the British media.

The video and photo optics (Pathé news-reel video materials, etc) that Windrush Foundation had first been using in its heritage education work since 1995 were used in discussions about the Windrush generation.



www.windrushfoundation.com

Arthur Torrington, 29 March 2021