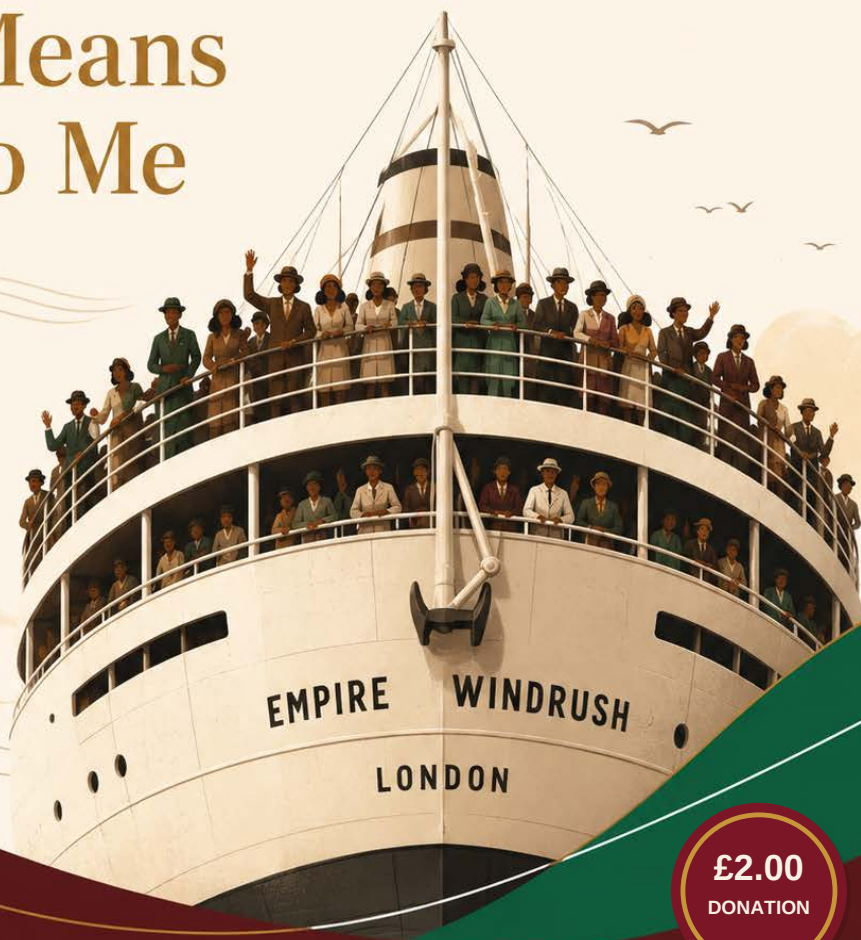


What Windrush Means to Me

A COLLECTION
OF POEMS
AND REFLECTIONS



£2.00
DONATION

Celebrating legacy, resilience and belonging

What Windrush Means to Me

A Collection of Poems and Reflections

This A5 booklet brings together poems, reflections and stories honouring the Windrush Generation - their courage, labour, cultural legacy, struggle for dignity, and enduring contribution to Britain.

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Foreword

by Joseph Jeffers M.A. FRSA

Windrush is more than a moment in history. It is a living story of courage, sacrifice, resilience and belonging.

The people of the Windrush Generation crossed oceans with hope in their hearts and uncertainty before them. They came to help rebuild a country still recovering from war, bringing with them skills, faith, culture, family values, music, food, humour, determination and a deep belief in a better future. Many arrived to a Britain that needed their labour but did not always welcome their presence. Yet, despite hardship, prejudice and injustice, they endured. They worked, they raised families, they built communities, and they helped shape the Britain we know today.

This collection, *What Windrush Means to Me*, gives voice to memory, gratitude and truth. Through poems and personal reflections, we are reminded that Windrush is not only about a ship arriving at Tilbury Docks in 1948. It is about mothers and fathers, nurses and drivers, factory workers and church builders, dreamers and survivors. It is about those who came, those who stayed, and those who continue to carry their legacy forward.

These writings honour the dignity of a generation who gave so much, often without receiving the recognition they deserved. They also challenge us to remember the painful chapters: the racism, the exclusion, the signs that said “No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs,” and the later injustice of the Windrush scandal. To celebrate Windrush honestly, we must hold both the joy and the struggle, both the achievement and the wound.

But above all, this booklet is a tribute to legacy. It reminds us that the Windrush Generation did not simply come to Britain; they changed Britain. Their story lives on in our families, our streets, our schools, our churches, our music, our food, our language and our shared sense of community.

May these words inspire reflection, pride and conversation. May they encourage younger generations to know where they come from and to walk forward with confidence. And may they remind us all that Windrush is not only history - it is inheritance.

We Came, We Stayed, We Built

by Fay Chung

In 1948, the Motherland called
across the ocean to the West Indies for help.
We answered. Without hesitation, we answered.
Sold our land, our homes, our businesses.
Filled in forms we barely understood.
Kissed our families goodbye
and crossed the cold, grey water.
We came. We stayed. We built.
We drove your trains through the fog of morning.
Steered your buses through streets that did not know our names.
We bent our backs in factories,
our hands raw, our spirits unbroken.
Our nurses worked the morning, noon, and night —
stitching together your National Health Service
with thread pulled from our own bones.
We came. We stayed. We built.
Our children sat in your schools,
bright-eyed, eager, full of promise —
and were sent to speech therapists
because the music in their mouths
sounded foreign to your ears.
We came. We stayed. We built.
Look upward, we told our children.
Spread your wings for us —
for those of us who came first,
who were never given the sky,
yet still believed in flight.
We came. We stayed. We built.
For seventy years and more
our families worked harder than hard.
Paid every tax. Obeyed every law.
Built every brick of the life
you said we could have here.
And now — now we are told to leave.
Stripped of our right to healthcare.
Stripped of our homes.
Stripped of our dignity.
We came. We stayed. We built.
And now you are deporting us.
As if we were never here.
As if this country could stand
without the foundation we laid.
We came. We stayed. We built this.
And we will not be erased.

YOU PENCILLED ME IN

by Marie Wray-Williams

You pencilled me in
When you were desperate
To rebuild Great Britain
After World War II
You pencilled me in
When you needed skilled labour
And my eager hands
We're willing and able
You pencilled me in
When I had to seek accommodation
Unfit for human habitation
In your eyes I was too black and uneducated
And dogs given priority over me
You pencilled me in
When suddenly I was paperwork scandal
My right to remain discarded
And I could not prove that I belong
You pencilled me in on a platter
Served with a main course of discrimination,
Segregation, rejection and hostility
Oh yes, I remained here
Surviving the erasures of your pencil marks
With your careful attempts to fade me into margins
Now, my contributions are engraved with indelible graphite ink
A product of HMT Empire Windrush
Pressed deep into Britain's pages
Never to be erased
Marie Wray-Williams

WHAT WINDRUSH MEANS TO ME

by Annette Rose

The Windrush Generation marks the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks, Essex, on June 22nd, 1948, carrying over 1,000 passengers from the Caribbean. The migrants were invited by the governments to help rebuild post-World War II Britain and fill severe labour shortages; we were called over to come to help the mother country to build up the newly formed National Health Service (NHS), public transport, and manufacturing industries.

I have learned that I was a part of that generation because I arrived in 1966 before 1971 of Jamaican parentage. Aldwyn Roberts aka Lord Kitchener a calypsonian who stood out for me, sang “London Is the Place for Me”.

Although the migrants faced racism and the British people refusing to accommodate them in their homes by putting up in their windows NO COLOUREDS, IRISH OR DOGS. Therefore, through their hard work and congregated mainly in Brixton forming the ‘pardner’ wherein they were able to save up and bought their own houses even own churches because the English churches discriminated against them.

They permanently shaped British culture by introducing music like reggae, laying the foundations for Notting Hill Carnival, and enriching the UK’s food and social fabric. Despite everything was against them they persevered by maintaining their dignity and built thriving communities, paving the way for future generations of Black and brown Britons to achieve their own dreams and demand our rightful place in society.

“Windrush” also represents a deeply tragic chapter in British history. Due to changes in immigration law and the “hostile environment” policies, many legal British citizens from the Caribbean were wrongly detained deported and denied fundamental rights like healthcare and employment. It is a symbolical of systemic injustice that demands ongoing rectifications and compensation.

In 2018, Prime Minister Theresa May issued a formal apology to Caribbean leaders regarding the scandal and established Windrush Day on 22nd June to annually celebrate the British Caribbean community.

In That Year...

by Emerald Davis

In that year, I left my homeland.
And travelled to a distant country by air and by sea.
In that year, the sun appeared to have fallen out of the sky.
And white flakes fell like rain covering the ground like an untouched carpet.
In that year, I knew how it felt to be cold.
And it seemed as though I was naked.
And in that year, I knew what it was like to feel truly alone.

What Windrush Means to Me

by Winsome Griffiths MBE

I celebrate Windrush because of my great uncle Amos.

When I was a young child living in Jamaica, I met my great uncle Amos for the very first time.

He was living in London and decided to return to Jamaica after his retirement.

He would speak in what sounded like a strange language to us children, nevertheless, it was his delight to talk about his life abroad.

In June 1948 Uncle Amos embarked on HMS Windrush in Kingston. He was one of many young men who were recruited by the British government to work in London after the Second World War to 'rebuild England'.

The voyage was not a very happy one however, he had his guitar for comfort.

In April they landed in Tilbury where he and many others were taken into an underground lodging in Clapham Common. He mentioned the cold climate and the strange food.

Later, he was sent to work on British Rail.

I was very impressed with his stories and hope that one day I would sail in a great big ship.

I celebrate Windrush because of the stories I heard from my great uncle. The fact that I was born in 1948. (Windrush sailed from Jamaica)

I joined my parents in London
and lived in Clapham
Common.

On leaving school I wanted to work for London Transport but my dad would not allow me to apply for a job.

One of my greatest pleasures in life is Ocean cruising.

I am in favour on any compensation payable to individuals who suffer losses or were unfairly treated by the government or society.

What Windrush Means to Me

by Elsie Sutherland

I came to England at 22 years old from St Vincent and the Grenadines. I left my island home with a small suitcase, the sound of the Caribbean Sea in my ears, and a faith that said, God will make a way. I didn't know everything that was waiting for me, but I knew I was coming to work, to build, and to make a life.

Windrush means memories.

I still remember the waves at home, the hills of St Vincent, the voices of family on the dock telling me to be strong and make them proud. I carried those memories with me on the journey. They kept me warm when England felt cold, when the rooms were small, when the work was hard.

Windrush means the feeling of starting again.

We came to help rebuild this country after the war. We worked in the hospitals, on the buses, in the factories, in people's homes. Long hours, little rest, but we did it with pride. We sent money back home, and we saved to bring our families over. We weren't just working for ourselves. We were working for the next generation.

And yes, Windrush also means facing racism and prejudice.

There were times when signs said, "No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs." Times when doors were closed, when you were spoken to like you were less than. That hurt. It would have been easy to give up and go back. But we didn't. We held our heads high. We knew who we were, where we came from, and what we were worth.

That's why Windrush means resilience to me.

We didn't wait for the world to change. We changed it by being here, by showing up every day, by doing the work with dignity. When doors closed, we opened our own. We built our churches. We turned front rooms into community halls. We looked out for each other like family, even if we weren't blood. That's how we survived. That's how we thrived.

Windrush means belonging.

England became home. My children and grandchildren were born here. They call this place home, and rightly so. But I made sure they knew where their roots are. The food on the table, the music in the house, the stories of St Vincent and the Grenadines at bedtime — all of it kept my island alive in our living room. You can belong to two places at once. That's not confusion. That's richness.

Looking back now, I see what we built. We built families. We built businesses. We built communities. We built a place for ourselves in this country, and in doing so, we became part of Britain's story. Our children are teachers, nurses, lawyers, business owners, mothers, fathers. That's the legacy of Windrush. So, when I think of Windrush, I don't think of it as just a ship.

I think of courage. I think of faith. I think of people from St Vincent and the

Grenadines and across the Caribbean who left everything they knew to come to a place that wasn't always ready for them, and who stayed anyway.

We came with hope.

We stayed with courage.

And we belong.

This is my story.

This is our story.

And I'm proud to say: I am part of the Windrush generation.

Windrush Pioneers

by Heather Davi

PRAISE BE TO THOSE MEN AND WOMEN
WHO ON OPENING THEIR EYES; PEEPED OUT TO
SEE THE DEVESTATION WROTH BY THE HURRICANE
THE NIGHT BEFORE
AND DECIDED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES

PRAISE BE THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO
BEGGED, BORROWED, STOLE THE FARE TO PAY THEIR PASSAGE
TO THE MOTHERLAND
WHO LEFT BEHIND THEIR WIVES, CHILDREN, SWEET- HEARTS
IN THE CARE OF THE ELDERLY AND THE OLD

PRAISE BE TO THOSE SOULS WHO EMBARKED ON PERILOUS SHIPS -
THE S.S.SERRENTO, THE WINDRUSH
TO CROSS THE ATLANTIC
BUT THIS TIME GOING THE WRONG WAY HOME

WHO, ON REACHING ENGLAND WAS EMBROILED IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT
WHERE THEIR LABOUR WAS WANTED BUT, NOT THEM, THEMSELVES

PRAISE BE THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO
DROVE BUSES, TRAINS, WASHED DOWN THE INFIRMED
SWABBED DOWN THE SICK, PICK UP THE SLACK, ABANDONED THEIR OWN

PRAISE BE TO THOSE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO STOOD UP
FOR THEIR RIGHTS IN
NOTTINGHILL GATE, BIRMINGHAM , BRISTOL
AND IN WORKPLACES THROUGHT OUT THE LAND

SO THAT YOU AND I CAN WALK DOWN THE STREETS,
AND HOLD OUR HEADS UP HIGH ,NEVER BEING AFRAID

PRAISE BE TO THOSE MEN AND WOMEN, WHO PUSHED BACK
TO CARVE OUT A LEGACY OF RESILIENCE, AND HOPE, FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S
FUTURES

TO YOU MEN AND WOMEN
I THANK YOU,I SALUTE YOU

Mother Country Calling

by Beverley Dixon

Alston heard the mother country calling for help as he bent down to pick up his grip. He was on his way to Kingston harbour to board the SS Eros for his 5000-mile journey from Jamaica to England. He patted his pocket and felt his passport there. He waved goodbye to his loved one and promised to send for her, and so his journey began. It was December 1958. Three weeks of sea sickness and bad food. When he arrived at Southampton dock, he felt in his pocket, and his passport was there. His lifelong friend Herbert came to meet him, and they travelled on to Waterloo station. It was full of new arrivals in their best clothes, hats, boxes, trunks and suitcases with children in tow, looking a bit scared. The noise from the steam engines sounding like kissing teeth and 'Cha' from disgruntled grandmas left behind in the Caribbean, to bring up what would years later be termed, the Barrel Children.

They got on the number 45 bus to Clapham, which was an experience Alston would never forget. He resisted the urge to shout 'Small Up Yuhself' as he tried to make his way to the front of the bus. When he looked out of the window, he couldn't see how the driver knew where he was going. He was convinced the bus was going to crash as it crept along in the thick fog.

He couldn't feel his fingers or toes as he arrived at Herbert's home; the temperature was 0. His first shudder of homesickness gripped his stomach. For a moment, Alston was stunned by the look of the place. 'A Wah Dis!' he thought. The big brick house in front of him looked more like a factory, especially as he could see smoke billowing from its chimneys. Herbert opened the front door which had panels of stained glass at the top. They climbed the four flights, and Alston was shown to a cramped attic room with a light swinging from the centre of the sloping ceiling. The shadows reminded him of the 'Rolling Calf and Duppy stories' his uncles used to tell him when he was small. He was thankful, but the carpet was very threadbare and dingy. There was a wooden chest of drawers in the corner and a bed with a horsehair blanket over it. The paraffin lamp in the middle of the room was alight, and the blue haze and pungent smell filled the air. Another wave of homesickness washed over him.

The creaky door closed as Herbert left Alston with his thoughts. He took his treasured possession out of his breast pocket and placed it carefully in the top drawer of the chest. He opened a tin of corned beef and filled a white blue-rimmed enamel cup with water from the tap over the sink in the corner. He suddenly got the urge to pee, so he went down onto the next landing, where there was a bathroom and toilet. He'd been told that everyone had to share it because it was the only one in the house. He came to find out that there was another toilet at the bottom of the garden, but stinging nettles around it prevented its use.

He didn't sleep well that night, tossing and turning on the metal springs, and this was not his idea of comfort. Over the next few days, he went to the Labour Exchange on Balham High Road and tried to get himself a job. He was a trained

tailor after all.

His ID was his passport, which he took with him every day, placing it once again in the top drawer of the chest when he got back to his room. The next day, he decided to go for a walk on Clapham Common. He locked the door and was out for a little while, meeting some of his countrymen who'd arrived on the SS Empire Windrush. Unfortunately, they only found accommodation in the Clapham South air-raid shelter. They told him that their eyes were sore as they kept rubbing them in the darkness of the underground. They relayed the living conditions of rusty bunk beds and lines of wash bowls. They said that the food costed one shilling and six pence per meal, which was really expensive. They, too, wondered whether they had made the right decision, leaving their sweet, sweet, sweet Jamaica.

When he came back to his room, he decided to get things ready for the next day's visit to the labour exchange. He quickly opened the top drawer of the chest, but something was wrong. The drawer was empty. His eyes bulged like ripe guineps. He spread his hands right to the back of the drawer and feverishly swept across the space, but nothing was there. He wiped the perspiration from his brow as his heart pounded in his ears. Where could it be? It was his only proof of being a British subject. He swung the door open and tore downstairs to find Herbert. A lady sweeping the passage said he was in the front room.

Blam! The door of the front room hit the frame. Just for a moment, Alston forgot why he'd come down, and he wondered if he'd passed out! It was just like walking into a tropical paradise with sunlight glinting off the mother-of-pearl conch shell sitting on a glass cabinet. The patterned wallpaper and green carpet was splattered with flaming red and orange Poinsettia, which made a tear form in the corner of his eyes as it so reminded him of his island home. There were artificial flowers nestled in what looked like freshly starched doilies on the central coffee table, just like grannies. Photographs of people in their Sunday best held their position on the wall.

Alston sprang back to life with a deep intake of breath, 'Look Man Mi Passport's Missing'. Herbert's face creased up, and his mouth hung down. He shook his head and said there'd been some workmen fixing the sash window in his room, so he wondered if one of them had taken it? 'Some people' Bad Like Yahz.' He said he overheard them saying that they were going to a Blues Party in Battersea that night, so he said he'd get some friends and go on a search. He said to prepare himself for a long night as they'd be searching across South London.

Alston was bemused as this was his first time in England, and he didn't even know what a Blues Party was. He was soon to find out.

Blues parties were the adult's world, a Shubz, one of sharp pressed suits and floral mini dresses, of hot combs sizzling against hair and vaseline smiles glistening in the half-light. The parties had heavy bass notes announcing themselves before the door swung open. Inside, the atmosphere was humid and welcoming: toddlers accompanied their parents, but were promptly put to bed upstairs amongst the coats.

Downstairs, adults were packed into darkened rooms with some huddled by the radiogram, their laughter echoing alongside the latest spins.

The kitchen was 'patois central', the domain of the aunties, who held court as they cooked up curry goat and rice. Greasy fingers gripped steaming plates and bottles of Cherry B, and Babycham were lined up behind them.

In the cellar room, couples propped themselves against psychedelic wallpaper, renting a tile on the stiletto-marked floors. In the corner, speaker boxes blended a rich sound, filling the room with music that made the walls vibrate.

Alston's eyes felt as though they were going around in different directions as he tried to process the vibrancy of the occasion. In the darkened room, he noticed that everyone's attention had been caught by Chubby Checker's Let's Twist Again' blaring out. Patent shoes slid across the linoleum floor, turning this way and that, hips and arms moving in opposite directions as everyone danced the 'Twist' and the 'Mashed Potato'. The gyrating mass exploded in waves, rising and falling to the rhythm of Jamaican Ska.

Lovers rocked as the music played through the night until the Blues Party came to an abrupt end with a scratch on the vinyl. As the music stopped, everyone mopped their faces and filed out into the crisp, misty morning, the echoes of the night's partying lingering in the air.

Herbert and friends had stood for most of the night searching for familiar faces. They looked downcast as the lights went on. Alston's eyes focused, and he was stunned to see a small book lying on the floor in the corner. It was navy blue with gold embossed writing. He nervously picked it up and opened it. 'Rhaatid!' he saw a familiar face staring back at him. Alston Marmaduke Fraser. No one else had a name like that! Someone dancing the Twist must have jerked the passport from their pocket. Serve them right... You brute!

On their way to the 155 bus stop, Alston bought steaming chips, smothered in vinegar, wrapped in newspaper, and they ate whilst musing over ending their evening drinking Red Stripe and mekking up noise playing dominoes.

Alston couldn't stop smiling, as he remembered his mother's wise wordsWhat's meant for me will come my way!..... 'Wah fi yuh, cyan be un-fi yuh'.

What Windrush Means to Me

by Joseph Jeffers

I was picked up in loving hands,
raised by people who crossed the sea,
with Caribbean sun in their stories
and enough love to shelter me.

They came with suitcases full of courage,
Sunday best and sacrifice,
built new lives in Birmingham streets
while paying every kind of price.

There was laughter loud in small front rooms,
the smell of spice carried through the air,
reggae humming from the radio,
and always somebody saying a prayer.

Mixed race, adopted, growing tall,
I learned family is what you do-
not blood alone, but open arms,
and people who keep showing through.

Windrush means roots that travelled oceans,
strength that bends but never breaks.
It means I carry Caribbean love
in every step my journey takes.

And though I wasn't born from their blood,
their spirit lives deep inside of me-
raised by a Windrush generation,
that is my inheritance, my history.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to every contributor whose words, memories and reflections have shaped this booklet.

This collection honours the Windrush Generation and the families, communities and cultural legacies that continue to carry their story forward.



Place At My Table



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

We came with hope.
We stayed with courage.
And we belong.
