

# The Windrush



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# Britain in 1948

Commonwealth citizens were vitally important to the prosperity of the British Empire. Many of them had also fought for Britain during the war, including a large number who lost their lives.

In 1948, the British Nationality Act gave 800 million people in the Commonwealth the right to claim British citizenship.

Britain needed workers since many men had died in World War II.

The NHS was launched in 1948 and needed labour and constantly advertised in Commonwealth countries to attract new workers.

# Britain in 1948

Just after World War II ended in 1945, the first groups of post-war immigrants from the Caribbean began to settle in Britain.

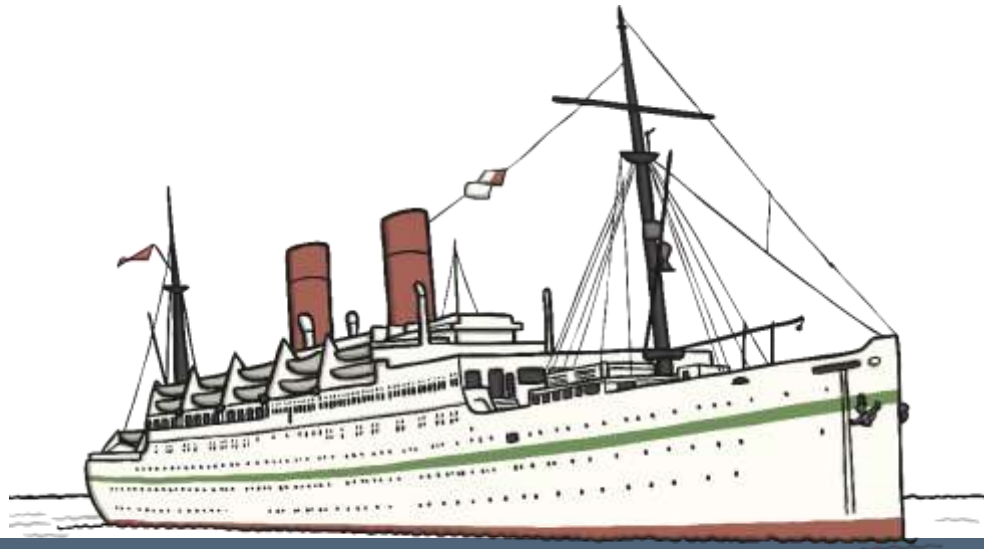
From the 1950s into the 1960s, there was a mass migration of workers from many English-speaking countries in the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, who settled in Britain. These immigrants were invited to fill labour requirements in London's hospitals, railways and other areas of work. They are widely viewed as having been a major contributing factor to the rebuilding of the post-war London economy.

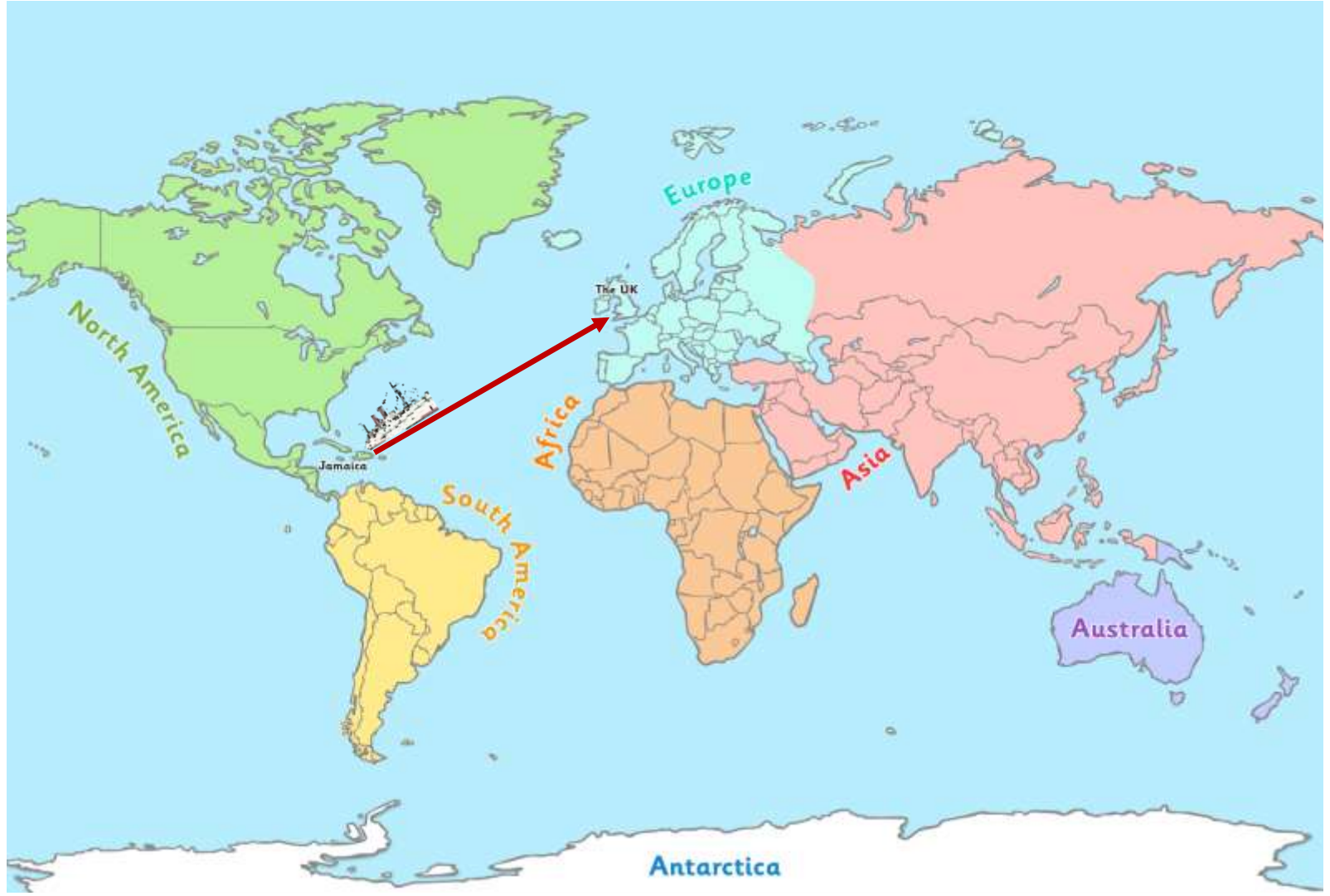


# What was the Windrush?

The passengers had a wide variety of skills to offer. There were cleaners, mechanics, carpenters, former RAF airmen, and lots of other jobs that were needed in Britain.

Many of these passengers settled in the area of Brixton, in London, which led to the development of large Caribbean communities who have contributed to life in Britain ever since.





# Was it only the Windrush ship that brought Caribbean migrants to Britain?

The arrival of the Windrush was the start of a period of migration from the Caribbean to Britain that did not slow down until 1962.

By 1955, 18,000 Jamaicans had moved to Britain.

This outward flow of people to settle in Britain was an important event in the history of both the West Indies and Britain.

Caribbean migrants have become a vital part of British society and, in the process, transformed important aspects of British life.



# What Was it Like to be a Windrush Passenger?

Passengers on the Windrush were told that they would all be welcome in Britain, the 'mother country'. Was this their experience after arriving?

## **Clinton Edwards**

"When I arrived, I had to find work. The first job I got as a welder, instead of doing welding they gave me a wheelbarrow and a shovel. After a couple of weeks my arms were sore. So I packed it in and re-enlisted in the RAF. I knew what to expect in the RAF. I spent the next 8 years with them, 3 years in Egypt and Iraq. After 8 years, I got a job as a laboratory technician.

My life in England has been very good. I enjoy my work, and my work mates treat me nice. I have been back home several times on holiday. I still call Jamaica home, although I lost my parents you know. The home is still there, my relatives live there, and I have to keep up with the repairs, but I prefer to live here. I am married, my family is here, my children, my grandchildren. I am quite happy here."

### **John Richards**

“I knew a lot about Britain from school days but it was a different picture from that one, when you came face to face with the facts. It was two different things. They tell you it is the 'mother country', you're all welcome, you all British. When you come here you realise you're a foreigner and that's all there is to it. The average person knows you as a colonial and that's all. You cut cane or carry bananas and that's it. Anybody wants to diddle you they say I just come off the banana boat and things like that.”

### **Mr. Oswald 'Columbus' Denniston**

“It was common knowledge that there was work in Britain, just after the war. I had no ties. I wasn't married or anything like that. I come from Montego Bay, Jamaica. I knew no one in England, I had travelled before to America and Panama. I had no idea what I was coming to. I can remember some of the people I travelled with, if I see them, but I don't know where they are now. All in all it was a good journey to Britain for me, yeah it was.”



## **Vince Reid**

“My parents brought me on the Windrush - I had no choice in the matter. They didn't have to - they came in search of a better life, better opportunities. It was quite a devastating experience. I was thirteen when I arrived so I wasn't a man, I was a boy. Most of the people on the Windrush were men. I had never been out of Kingston so it was quite an experience. I went to school in Kings Cross. I had never associated with white people and then at school I came across real hostility. I mean to say I had no friends for several years, that wouldn't be far from the truth. I joined the Airforce when I was sixteen. By the time I came out there were more black people in this country. I am 62 years old now. I have been here 50 years . I would prefer to live here. Well, my family is here, my wife, my grandchildren are here. I have been back to Kingston several times. My circumstances were significantly different to everyone else's, but personally I like England, it's a nice place to live. It's not to say it doesn't have its problems, racism and so on.”

# Windrush Square

Windrush Square, Brixton



In 1998, the area in front of the Tate Library in Brixton was renamed 'Windrush Square' to mark the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush.

# Life for Caribbean Immigrants Today

Today, their descendants and new immigrants to the country still suffer the effects of discrimination and racism, which may not always be obvious. For example, they may often find it more difficult to get jobs, or receive the same standards of justice as white British people.



# The Windrush Scandal

Some of the effects of racism are more obvious. Recently, the government was forced to apologise for what has been called the 'Windrush Scandal', in which people who have lived in Britain ever since immigrating decades ago have been wrongly arrested, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation and sometimes even wrongly deported from the UK by the Home Office.



In the 21st century, Britain is a multi-racial society.

The huge contributions made by the various immigrant communities to Britain's economic and social development since the Second World War are beginning to be widely recognised.

Their role in creating a more diverse and tolerant society is indisputable.



