

AN INDIVIDUAL'S JOURNEY

Reading about an historical event, no matter how recent or how important, gives us the facts but often doesn't allow us to really understand what happened. By focusing our attention on the individuals who lived that historical event we can bring a particular moment to life, understand what it really meant and consider it from different points of view.

Read Windrush's Eight Key Pioneers & pick a story that you would like to know more about. Once you have done so, go online & do more research about the individual. Create an information poster, powerpoint presentation or short article and present it to your classmates!

You have 60 mins starting NOW!

1. NORMA BEST

In 1944, Britain appealed to her colonies for assistance and one of the smallest was British Honduras (now Belize) responded. Norma Best (nee Leacock) was among those who volunteered. She was 20 at the time.

With five other Auxiliary Territorial Service recruits, she sailed for Jamaica where they received initial training. Then they were off to New Orleans, and after receiving their uniforms, they travelled to New York before sailing on the Queen Mary to Britain.

After military training at Guilford, Surrey, she wanted to be a driver, as her father was during the First World War. Dressed in uniform, driving around in a Jeep, it would have been an ideal opportunity, but that was not to be. She attempted but could not cope with the cold weather, and so she opted to do administrative work in the office. She served in Preston, and was then posted to Derby. She was in London in May 1945 when the war ended and attended the parties held on the Embankment.

The celebrations lasted for a while. Thousands of people were singing and dancing and there were lots of fireworks. The following year Norma took the opportunity of studying to be a Primary School teacher at Durham University. Just after qualifying in 1947, she was told that she had to return to British Honduras, in spite of the fact that a job had been offered to her at a school in Cambridge.

Norma returned to the UK in the 1950's and was employed as a teacher. In the 1970's she became the Head teacher of a Primary School in the London Borough of Brent.

(WOMEN, WWI & WWII, WINDRUSH, EDUCATION)



2. CONNIE MARK

Born and brought up in Kingston with her sister, mother and father, Connie Mark (nee McDonald) was 16 when World War Two was declared. At the age of 21 she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), and served in Jamaica as a medical secretary to the assistant director of medical services. She said it was a difficult job because she had to be on call 24 hours a day. As a child she had always hated hospitals, and found working in one initially off putting. Her duties included typing up the medical reports of those people who had been injured in the war, documenting the horrific injuries sustained from bombings and combat. She remembered, "Having to type the medical reports really brought home what war was to me – I was 21; I was still in my formative years." After six months, she was promoted to Lance Corporal, and six months after that to Corporal.

ATS women in Jamaica were not compelled to live in barracks; living at home meant that Connie didn't experience the military life in its entirety, but, like others, she had to march every day before doing her duties. The general mood was that Britain would win the war. Connie also remembered the day the war ended as a great relief. "VE Day was marvellous, everybody was happy, 'cause as far as we were concerned, the war was finished. Everybody was happy.

Everybody just jumped up and down; the war was over, and it meant that no more of our people would be killed.

She settled in Britain during the 1950s, and worked as a Medical Secretary. One of the highlights in her community work was the outstanding contribution she made for keeping alive the memories of Mary Seacole. (WOMEN, WWII, COMMUNITY)



3. LUCILDA HARRIS

Lucilda was born in Jamaica, and at the age of 31 was one of the few women passengers who travelled to England on the Empire Windrush in May/June 1948.

She had married a tailor who migrated to England in 1947, and he had saved enough money to send for her. He and his brother met her when she landed at Tilbury Docks, Essex on 22 June 1948. It was a surprise to her when she was told that he would be taking her to live in just one room. Although she was not happy about that, she was very glad to be with him again. Soon afterwards, he bought her a fur coat, which she wore for more than fifty years.

They were among many West Indians who settled in Brixton, near the marketplace. She said, "I tell you that when I came here there were hardly many buildings standing, and far as you can see the Germans' bombs had caused much destruction in London." She and her husband raised a family of five children, three boys and two girls. Lucilda and her husband contributed to the community in Brixton, and played their part in making it a pleasant place in which to live, helping other migrants after they arrived in the 1950's.

(WOMEN, WINDRUSH, COMMUNITY)



4. MONA BAPTISTE - (1926—1993)

Mona Baptiste was born in Trinidad on 21 June 1926. When she embarked on the Empire Windrush she had already made something of a name for herself on Trinidad as a singer and no doubt she set off for England with high hopes of building a career, hopes that were to prove well founded. She set sail as a 21 year old and arrived at Tilbury Docks on 22 June, the day just after age 22.

She declared her occupation as 'clerk' but her musical ambitions were not very well disguised as a Daily Mirror article of 23 June referred to her as a 'singer and saxophonist'. On 9 August, barely six weeks after disembarking at Tilbury, she and fellow Windrush passenger and Trinidadian, Lord Beginner, appeared on the BBC's Light Programme with Stanley Black and his Dance Orchestra. From then on she made regular appearances in concerts up and down the country and continued to perform regularly on the radio on shows such as "Variety Bandbox". In 1951 she secured her first acting role, in a play called 'Tiger Bay.'

Over the course of her career she sang on many records, singing in English, French, German and Spanish, she played the saxophone too and was to appear in films as well (the IMDb site credits her with appearances in a total of 15).

IMDb also lists a whole string of appearances on TV, including: 'Six Five Special' (in 1958); 'Oh Boy' (1959); and even 'The Ken Dodd Show' (1961) when she was billed as 'the international singing star who appears in the Ken Dodd Show at 7.15 on BBC.' In March 1951 she married for the first time in Westminster, London.

Mona and her husband lived together in Germany for many years and had one son, Marcel. The move to Germany did nothing to hinder her career and she appeared in many films from 1953 ('*Spiel mit dem*

Gluck' ['Play with Luck']) through to 1981 ('*So schön wie heute, so muß es bleiben*' ['As beautiful as it is today, it must stay that way']).

Following the death of her first husband she re-married and moved to

Dublin where she died on 25 June 1993. She is buried in Deansgrange Cemetery, Dublin, under the name Mona Baptiste Morrison.



5. SAM KING MBE

Born in Jamaica in 1926, Samuel King worked with his father on the family farm with every intention of eventually taking over after his dad retired.

When war was declared, he was a schoolboy interested in everything that was going on in Britain and Europe.

In 1944, he responded to a Royal Air Force advertisement in The

Gleaner newspaper for volunteers. Having passed a series of tests soon afterwards, he and other volunteers received intensive training in Kingston before travelling to England. Sailing along the American coastline, past Newfoundland and then cutting across to the British Isles, they evaded German submarines and experienced a cold that few of them had ever felt, and would never forget.

After three months of training at Filey, Yorkshire, the men were split up into categories for ground crew training – Sam was posted to the fighter station RAF Hawkinge, near Folkestone, and served as an engineer. He had heard from good sources that if Germany won the war, Hitler would re-introduce slavery in West Indian colonies.

After the war ended, Sam was demobbed and returned to Jamaica. But, he was not happy with life there, and so he took the opportunity of travelling back to England on the Empire Windrush. He rejoined the RAF, and later worked for the Royal Mail.

In 1983/84 he was elected Mayor of the London Borough of Southwark. In 1995, Sam King and Arthur Torrington established Windrush Foundation, the first charitable organisation whose objectives are to keep alive the memories of the young men and women who were among the largest wave of post war settlers in Britain. In 1998, Sam published his autobiography, *Climbing up the Rough Side of the Mountain*.



6. ALLAN WILMOT

Allan was born in Jamaica in 1925. After leaving college in 1941, he volunteered to join the Royal Navy, serving on a patrolling ship, escorting mine sweepers, and picking up survivors in the Caribbean. In 1944 he volunteered for Royal Air Force service, and joined the air sea rescue team.

He was demobbed in November 1946, travelled home to Jamaica and was fortunate to find employment in Customs & Excise. But, he

felt there were more prospects in England and so returned to London in December 1947 to one of the coldest winters on record. Finding a good job and accommodation here was difficult. He often slept in the London Underground trains after the services had closed down at nights. He obtained factory work in Acton and washing dishes at Lion's Corner House in the West End.

Between 1950 and 1953 he entered show business with limited success – the main problem was in obtaining permits to work abroad. It wasn't until Edric Connor, the Trinidadian actor and singer came to Britain in 1954 to record some songs that prospects looked good. Some of the records they made were hits, and the group decided to form "The Southlanders". They toured the UK's variety circuit as well as travelling to Italy, Germany, France and Belgium. Their specialty was rhythm and blues, and they worked alongside the popular artists of the day – Shirley Bassey, David Frost, Joe Loss, Frankie Vaughn, Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele to name but a few.

The advent of the Beatles meant that the Southlanders were reduced to working in Cabaret to survive – eventually the group was disbanded and he got a job in the Post Office as a telephone operator. He was a member of and worked voluntary for the West Indian Ex-Service Association (now West Indian Association of Service Personnel) to highlight the contributions that West Indians made in World War II. Allan was its president for several years.



(WWII, ARTS - SINGER, AUTHOR, COMMUNITY)

7. CY GRANT

Cy was born in British Guiana (now Guyana), and was 22 years of age in 1941 when he volunteered to join the Royal Air Force.

Two years later, he was commissioned, thus becoming one of the few Black Officers in the RAF. During World War 2, he flew on operations in a Lancaster Bomber over Germany and was shot down after a successful bombing raid on the German town of Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhr, his plane crashing in a field in Holland. He managed to bail out

by parachute along with other members of the crew. Two others did not make it.

He was a Nazi prisoner of war for two years and was evacuated with the approach of the Russian army in early 1945. After the war he qualified as a barrister at Law, but felt that racism in the legal profession denied him the opportunity to practice in Britain. So, he went on to become an actor on stage and in film, as well as a singer in concerts and cabaret.

He played parts alongside actors such as Sir Laurence Olivier, Richard Burton, Richard Roundtree (Shaft), and Joan Collins. Cy was the first West Indian to be regularly seen on British Television, singing the daily news on BBC's "Tonight" programme in the 1950's.

He also appeared in the BBC's Blake's 7 and provided the voice of Lieutenant Green in Gerry Anderson's Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons.

He is the author of the book Ring of Steel, pan sound and symbol (Macmillan 1999). He was the Chairman/co-founder of Drum, the London based Black arts centre in the 70's, and Director of Concord Multicultural Festivals in the 80's. His most recent book is "Blackness and the Dreaming Soul", published by Shoving Leopard in 2007.



HAROLD PHILLIPS

Born in 1929, Harold Phillips was a Trinidadian calypsonian and music promoter. He travelled to England on the Empire Windrush in June 1948, but had previously been in Britain, serving in the RAF from 1943.

Phillips spent time in Clapham and Wellington in Shropshire before settling in Liverpool. By day, he worked, among other things, as a builder and decorator by night as a barman and singer. He performed under the name 'Lord Woodbine', taken from a popular

brand of cigarette. 'Lord Woodbine And His Trinidadians', was one of the first to tour England. He also played a tenor pan as part of the first professional steel band in England and later played with the All Caribbean Steel Band in their television appearance on the TV show *Opportunity Knocks* in July 1965.

He is regarded by some as the musical mentor of The Beatles and has been called the 'sixth Beatle'. Phillips was a promoter of The Beatles in their teenage years when they were known as the 'Silver Beetles' and drove the van that took them to Hamburg for what was a crucial part of their development.

Harold married Helen (Ena) Agoro in 1949, in Liverpool. They lived in Toxteth, Liverpool and had one son and seven daughters. He and his wife died in a house fire in 2000, he was 72.

REMEMBER:

- PICK ONE KEY PIONEER**
 - DO FURTHER RESEARCH ABOUT THEM ONLINE**
 - CREATE AN INFORMATION POSTER / POWERPOINT PRESENTATION / SHORT ARTICLE YOU HAVE 60 MINUTES!**
- GOOD LUCK!**