

## THE WINDRUSH GENERATION

### *Pioneering faith*

**I am probably one of the few church leaders who can remember working amongst the ‘Windrush Generation’ of migrants from the West Indies and I want to pay tribute to them. They were brave adventurers, leaving home, family, and friends for an unknown destination and future.**

The arrival of the first 500 in 1948 caused quite a stir, although there had been no preparation for them and most of them had nowhere to stay. Their motivation was mostly economic, as employment prospects in the Caribbean were very low and the lure of well-paid jobs in the UK was strong. Most of them were willing workers, eager to take any kind of job on offer. But living conditions for the first generation were often appalling and I met many young men and women who were desperate for somewhere to live, especially if they were married and had children.

### **Responding to Need**

Britain was still rebuilding houses from bomb damage in the post-war period and there was a great shortage of accommodation, especially in inner-city areas where the migrants settled. As the Minister of a busy London church, much of my time was spent helping people to find employment and housing – in fact my church house became known locally as the ‘**Jamaican Labour Exchange**’ as so many came for help and friendly advice.

My ministry began in 1952,<sup>1</sup> just four years after the arrival of the Windrush and my first contact was with a young couple who wanted me to marry them. I married them in the morning, and I was ordained in the afternoon – I was never quite sure how legal that was – but it was the same date! I rapidly came to know large numbers – mainly young men from Jamaica – from a wide area of West London and I was glad to be of service to them and to help with the multitude of problems they faced, especially with greedy landlords who exploited them and difficult factory foremen who did not take time to understand them.

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<sup>1</sup> Memories from these early days appeared in my book commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade "**Free at Last? The Tottenham riots and the legacy of slavery**" Wilberforce Publications, 2014. More will appear on the dedicated [C and M ministries Heritage website](#) under construction.

## **Integration Problems**

We had large numbers coming to our church and they were always made welcome. One young couple who met in the church became so popular that when they married, the church members provided the reception in the church hall, and we had them to stay in our home for their week's honeymoon. This gave us a wonderful opportunity of learning about life in Jamaica where they had both been involved in churches and community activities.

We didn't know that we were doing anything unusual until the press started taking an interest in what was happening in our church. I published my first book in 1958<sup>2</sup> at the time of the Notting Hill riots, which I had foreseen in the book. I then began broadcasting regularly, doing a weekly programme on the BBC Caribbean Service – a kind of 'Letter from London'. We also did a number of TV programmes from the church where we had a quartet with beautiful voices who became much in demand.

I heard many stories of the early migrants not being welcome, or even being asked not to attend, a local church. But I only personally verified one of these where the vicar of a neighbouring church had advised a young man not to attend his church, but to come to mine where he said he would be more comfortable. Of course, the statistics speak for themselves: only 4% of West Indian migrants attended churches in the Greater London area in the early 1960s, whereas 69% of the population of Jamaica attended one or other of the same denominational churches.<sup>3</sup>

## **Disillusionment**

This massive fall away in church attendance was not a rejection of the religious beliefs of the migrants, or of the traditional church affiliations, but it was a symbol of the disillusionment with, and disassociation from, the society and its culture which had rejected them. It was a massive indictment of British churches that were unable, or unwilling, to offer simple love and hospitality to the newcomers who all came from Christian backgrounds and were desperately in need of friendship and help. Many of them had exercised leadership responsibilities in their churches back home and they

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<sup>2</sup> Clifford Hill, *Black-and-White in Harmony: from a London ministers notebook*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> see, Clifford Hill, *West Indian Migrants and the London Churches*, Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, London, 1963.

could have injected new life and energy into British churches, but the opportunity was missed.

A demonstration that this was not a rejection of their Christian faith may be seen in the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches planted by migrants who felt rejected by British churches. In Jamaica, only 5% of the churchgoing public attended Pentecostal churches – all the others went to Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and other mainline denominations. But the black-led Pentecostal churches formed in Britain in the 1950s grew rapidly as the migrants turned away from the British churches and formed a kind of voluntary apartheid with all-black congregations. The numbers increased rapidly which clearly demonstrated that the migrants had by no means rejected their Christian faith.

### **What of the future?**

Looking back today, I can see that this was something that had to happen as a prelude to full integration. The black churches have succeeded in forming their own organisational structures and leadership. They have demonstrated their ability to meet the needs of their own people, so that they are now in a position to talk with the traditional white-led denominational churches from a position of strength and equality.

The prominence given to black singers and worship leaders, and the many gospel songs in the popular BBC programme “*Songs of Praise*” is a tribute to the natural abilities and achievement of leaders in the black-led churches. It is also a demonstration of the extent of the integration that is now taking place in many traditional churches where the contribution of black Christians is at last being recognised. As the days become more testing for Bible-believing Christians, the vibrant faith and energy of black Christians is likely to become of increasing significance for the future of all the churches in Britain. Full integration is at last taking place thanks to the pioneering work of the Windrush Generation. Most of them have already gone to be with the Lord, but they are no doubt receiving the rewards of good and faithful servants and praising God for those who have followed in their footsteps.