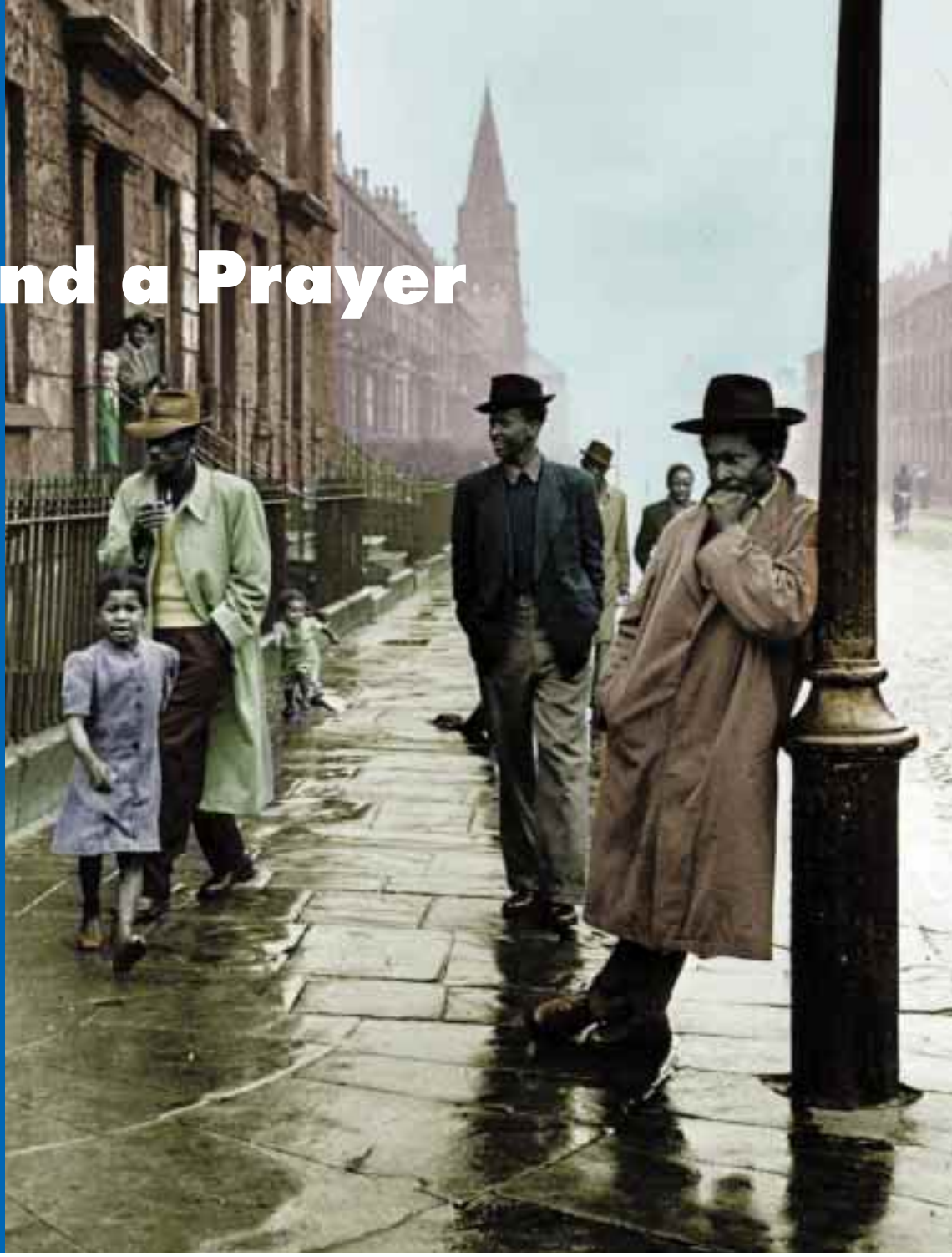
A Ship and a Prayer



The Black Presence in Hammersmith and Fulham

Edited by Stephen Bourne & Sav Kyriacou

A Ship and a Prayer

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foreword

Hammersmith and Fulham is a uniquely diverse borough, with a rich mix of people from many different backgrounds, cultures and nationalities. Hammersmith and Fulham Council believes that this diversity is an asset and that our Black and ethnic minority communities in particular have made a significant and positive contribution to every aspect of life in the borough: the African-Caribbean community of Hammersmith and Fulham is one such group.

A Ship and a Prayer celebrates the presence of the African-Caribbean community in the borough over the past 100 years. The publication also commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks on 21 June 1948. Produced by Stephen Bourne, an award winning archivist and historian on the history of Black people in Britain, and Sav Kyriacou of the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, *A Ship and a Prayer* highlights the contributions, achievements and experiences of the African-Caribbean communities in Hammersmith and Fulham. It acknowledges too, the valuable contribution made to the promotion of racial equality and good community relations by many of our residents and those working in the Black and ethnic minority voluntary sector.

We are delighted to support this initiative because we believe that in working to overcome inequality, discrimination and social exclusion, it is essential to encourage greater understanding and respect between all our communities. We hope that A Ship and a Prayer will not only enlighten and inform its readers, but also act as a spur to greater mutual understanding between all our residents in the years to come.

Councillor Ron Browne MBE
Chair of the Council

Councillor Tim Stanley
Deputy for Community Consultation and Social Exclusion

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1998, events all over the country celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* and the post-war settlement of people from Guyana and the Caribbean. *Windrush* carried the first wave of settlers who were seeking a new life in the land they called the 'Mother Country'. Their arrival at Tilbury Docks on 21 June 1948 changed the face of British history. However, often overlooked in our history books is the fact that, since 1555, there has been a continuous settlement of Black people in Britain. Long before *Windrush* came to these shores, people of African descent from all walks of life were actively involved in British society.

This publication has been produced to celebrate the presence of the Black community in Hammersmith and Fulham over the past 100 years and the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush. It is supported and funded by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Its publication also commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project's (ECOHP) first African-Caribbean publication - *The Motherland Calls* - in 1989.

A Ship and a Prayer draws on interviews published in the following books: *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992); *Aunt Esther's Story* (1991; reprinted 1996); *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992); *"Sorry, no Vacancies" - Life Stories of Senior Citizens from the Caribbean* (1992); and *Sailing on Two Boats - Second Generation Perspectives* (1993).

Among the interviewees featured in *A Ship and a Prayer* are Randolph Beresford, a former Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham who was made an MBE in 1986; Esther Bruce, whose autobiography received the Raymond Williams Prize for Community Publishing in 1992; and Connie Mark, who was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1992 for her services to the community.

contributors biographies

Randolph Beresford (Guyana)

Randolph Beresford was born in Guyana, a British colony in South America, in 1914, and was a skilled carpenter and contractor before he came to London in 1953. Shocked at the state of housing and accommodation, he fought to improve the conditions of working people through his trade union activities and as a councillor. He became an active member of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, sitting on the London Federation of Trades Councils in 1962. He entered local politics after the Notting Hill riots in 1958. On 17 May 1959 Kelso Cochrane, a young carpenter from Antigua, was brutally murdered by a gang of six white teenagers in North Kensington. The killers were never identified, or brought to justice. Black people felt betrayed by the police whose half-hearted investigation of the murder was heavily criticised. Randolph organised a fund for the Kelso Cochrane memorial in Kensal Green cemetery.

A councillor for White City Ward, Randolph became Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham in 1975, inspite of opposition from some members of the community who didn't want a Black Mayor. In answer to his critics, Randolph later reflected, "it was said on record, I was one of the best mayors."

Randolph was also Chair of several school governing boards, highlighting his interest in education, and former Chair of the local Council for Racial Equality. His contribution to the local community was recognised when he received the British Empire Medal in 1979 and was made an MBE in 1986. Since retiring in 1979, Randolph has helped to establish in Ghana two sister clubs to the Mission Dine Club, a luncheon club for Caribbean senior citizens in Willesden.

Randolph contributed to *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992), *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992) and *Windrush - The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998) by Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips. A photograph of Randolph and his wife taken outside Buckingham Palace, after receiving his MBE in 1986, appears in Susan Okokon's *Black Londoners 1880-1990* (1998).

Albertha Blackman-Thomas (Guyana)

Albertha Blackman-Thomas was born in Guyana. After working as a teacher she became a nurse. She then opened her own school and became the founder president of the British Guiana Kindergarten Teachers Association. She came to London in 1961 after her second husband died. She retired in 1975 as a social worker with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Albertha contributed to *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992).

Esther Bruce (Britain)

Seamstress Esther Bruce was born in Fulham in 1912 and received public recognition late in life with her best-selling autobiography *Aunt Esther's Story*, co-authored with her nephew, Stephen Bourne. In this lively, entertaining and informative book, Esther described how her father, Joseph, the son of Guyanese slaves, settled in Fulham at the turn of the century. Until he died in 1941, Joseph worked as a builder's labourer, bus painter and film extra. A proud man, he always made a defiant stand against racism. For example, in the early 1920s, he was responsible for the sacking of a teacher at Fulham's North End Road school who instructed Esther and her (white) classmates "not to talk to coloured people."

For many years Joseph and his daughter were the only Black members of their working-class community and in the book she movingly recalled how they were accepted and protected by their neighbours. In the 1930s Esther met two famous Black Londoners: the Jamaican nationalist leader Marcus Garvey (who also lived in Fulham) and the American singer Elisabeth Welch (for whom Esther made dresses). A friendly, outgoing woman, Esther integrated easily into the new, multi-cultural Fulham of post-war Britain.

As a seamstress, Esther worked in the linen room of Brompton Hospital for fourteen years, leaving in 1956 to make curtains in Fulham. She retired in 1972, but boredom brought her out of retirement to work for another curtain manufacturer, this time in Battersea. Poor eyesight forced her to retire finally at the age of 74.

In 1992 *Aunt Esther's Story* received the Raymond Williams Prize for Community Publishing and in 1996 the book was reprinted with great success. An exhibition of photographs from the book - including several contemporary portraits by Val Wilmer - toured various venues in London throughout the 1990s, including the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton and as part of the Museum of London's "The Peopling of London" exhibition. Esther died on 17 July 1994 at the age of 81, and her ashes were scattered on her parent's grave in Fulham Cemetery. In 1998 photographs of Esther appeared in Jeffrey Green's *Black Edwardians - Black People in Britain 1901-1914* and Susan Okokon's *Black Londoners 1880-1990*.

Clifford Fullerton (Jamaica)

One of the travellers on the historic *Empire Windrush* voyage in 1948 was Clifford Fullerton, a 38-year-old Jamaican tailor. He studied at the Tailor and Cutter Guild and opened his own tailoring business with his wife in North Kensington. 'The Blues Club' was started in their basement before moving to All Saints Road, Notting Hill. It eventually became the Mangrove Restaurant. In 1952 Clifford became the first Black Master Tailor when he was accepted by the City of London Master and Foreman Tailoring Society. During 1961-62 he studied string bass at the London College of Music. Clifford contributed to *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992).

William Henry (Jamaica)

William Henry was born in Trelawny, Jamaica in 1934. He says he came to England in 1960 because he wanted to "better himself". William contributed to *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992).

Thomas Joseph (Guyana)

Thomas Joseph was born in 1919 on the Essequeibo Coast of Guyana. Prior to coming to Britain in 1965, Thomas was heavily involved with Trade Unions in Guyana. On coming to Britain, he immediately found himself drawn into Trade Unionism again. He was involved in many organisations catering for blind and other disabled persons. He started writing poetry immediately after his rehabilitation for blindness in 1979. He was also active in the struggle to keep Guyana

free from Venezuelan invasion in the 1980s. Thomas contributed to *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992) and *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992).

Connie Mark (Jamaica)

Constance MacDonald was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1923. She joined the British Army there in 1943, serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) before becoming Senior Medical Secretary in the Royal Army Medical Corps for ten years, working in the North Caribbean. Connie was awarded the War Medal for her services in the ATS, WRAC and QARANC. In 1954 she left Jamaica with her baby daughter Amru and came to Shepherd's Bush to join her husband, professional cricketer Stanley Goodridge (whom she married in 1952).

Connie worked for many years as a Medical Secretary to some of London's most distinguished specialists, including Sir John Peel, the Queen's Gynaecologist. Connie became Project Officer for the British Council for Aid to Refugees in the 1980s, being responsible for the settlement of the Vietnam 'boat people' in Britain. She has played a leading role in several national and local organisations, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, and has founded several organisations of her own. These have included The Friends of Mary Seacole Memorial Association, in honour of the Jamaican nurse who tended the sick in the Crimean war. Launching the Association in 1985, Connie told *The Voice*: "We want to spread the word about the very hard work Mary Seacole did to help in the Crimean war despite all the racist barriers that she came across. She was a very important woman and she should go down in history as did Florence Nightingale." Connie was awarded the British Empire Medal for her services to the community in 1992.

In recent years Connie has had a high profile in several television programmes documenting the role of Caribbean people in the Second World War and post-war Britain. These have included *Here-Say* (BBC2, 1990), *Lest We Forget* (Channel Four, 1990), *Black Britain* (The Mother Country) (BBC2, 1991), *Birthrights* (Reunion) (BBC2, 1993) and *Arrival*, part one of BBC2's 1998 *Windrush* series. In Shirley Thompson's Arts Council documentary *Memories in Mind* (1992),

Connie read 'Colonisation in Reverse' by the popular Jamaican poet Louise Bennett.

Connie has contributed to several Black history books including *The Motherland Calls - African Caribbean Experiences* (1989; reprinted 1992), *West Indian Women at War - British Racism in World War II* (1991) by Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas,*"Sorry, no Vacancies" - Life Stories of Senior Citizens from the Caribbean* (1992), *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992), *With Hope in Their Eyes* (1998) by Vivienne Francis, and *Windrush - The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998) by Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips. Photographs of Connie appear in Susan Okokon's *Black Londoners 1880-1990* (1998).

Cecilia Wade (Montserrat)

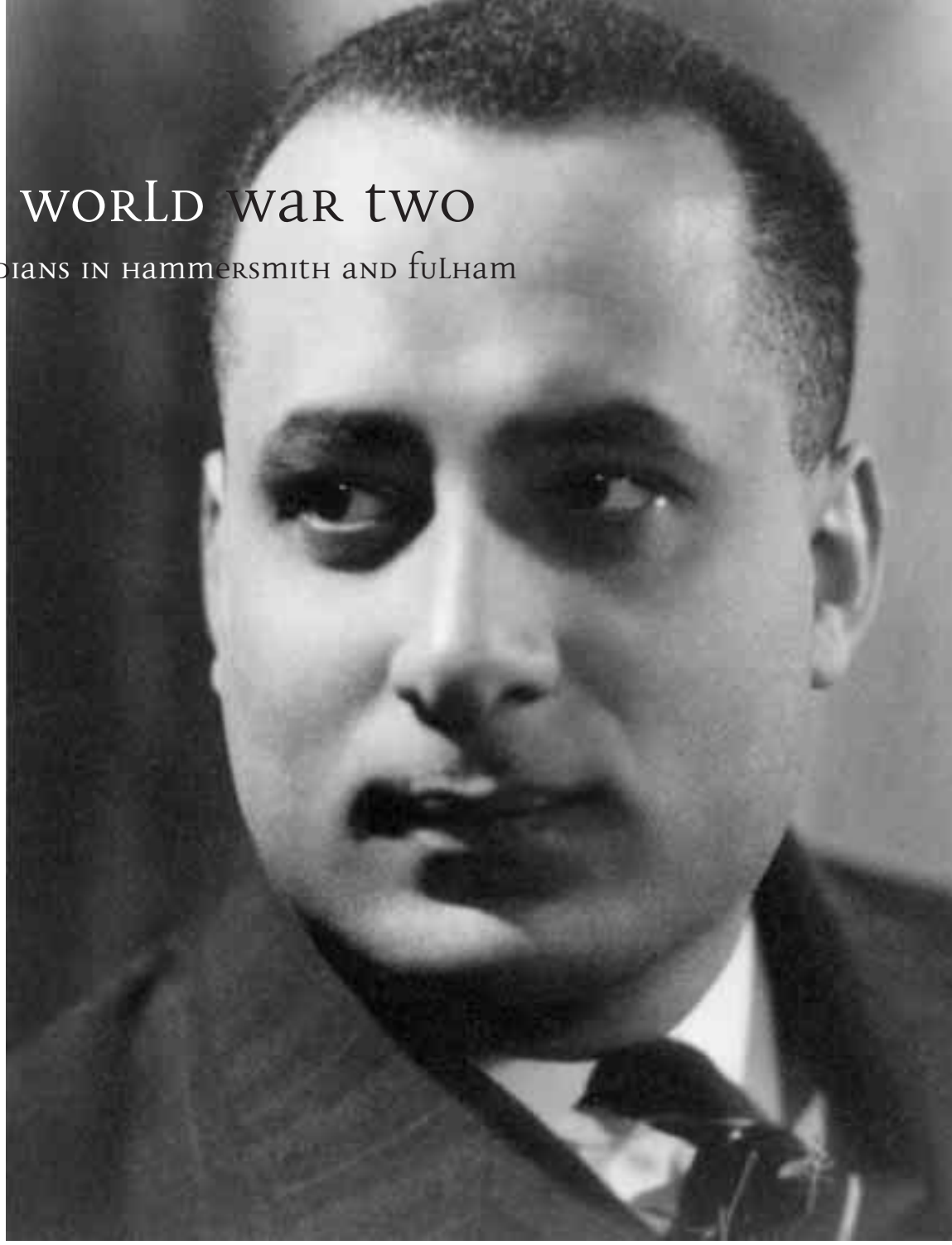
Born in Montserrat, Cecilia Wade came to Britain in 1956 at the age of 34. Cecilia contributed to *"Sorry, no Vacancies" - Life Stories of Senior Citizens from the Caribbean* (1992) and *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992).

Roger Waite (Jamaica)

Born in Jamaica, Roger Waite came to Britain in 1955 at the age of 41. Roger contributed to *"Sorry, no Vacancies" - Life Stories of Senior Citizens from the Caribbean* (1992) and *The Caribbean at War - 'British West Indians' in World War II* (1992).

before world war two

black edwardians in hammersmith and fulham



Reginald Foresythe

In *Black Edwardians - Black People in Britain 1901-1914*, published in 1998, historian Jeffrey Green says: "Edwardian Britain's widespread population of African birth or descent was resident at the centre of the world's largest empire, participating in the affairs of the leading industrial nation. Some knew no other land and others were self-motivated migrants. There were ambitious professionals, youths anxious for an education, parents concerned about the future, adults seeking tranquility and workers seeking more money, as well as the descendants of earlier generations."

Jeffrey Green includes at least two "Black Edwardians" in his book who were born in Hammersmith and Fulham: Reginald Foresythe, the public-school educated son of a West African barrister, and Esther Bruce, the daughter of a Guyanese labourer.

REGINALD FORESYTHE

Pianist, bandleader and composer Reginald Foresythe was born in 1907 in Hetley Road, Shepherd's Bush in North Hammersmith. He was the son of Charles Foresythe, a Yoruba (Nigerian) barrister, and Charlotte Falk, an Englishwoman of German descent. The family lived in the small middle-class West African community that existed in turn-of-the-century Shepherd's Bush. This included doctors and lawyers who sent their children to public schools in England.

Reginald received a public school education, and studied piano and composition. Throughout his life Foresythe used his upper-class British accent to achieve some measure of acceptance in an otherwise racially segregated world. In the 1930s in Britain he won respect in jazz circles for such bold and dazzling compositions as *Serenade for a Wealthy Widow*, *Berceuse For An Unwanted Child*, *Greener the Grass*, *Melancholy Clown* and *Dodging a Divorcee*. In *Just Jazz 3*, published in 1959, Charles Fox says: "Foresythe's music frequently possessed wit as well as sophistication, charm as well as ingenuity, and certainly nobody in this country worked harder to expand the boundaries of jazz."

On a visit to New York in 1937, Foresythe composed the music for some of the songs in that year's *Cotton Club Parade*, a lavish revue with a cast headed by Ethel Waters and Duke Ellington. In America in the 1930s jazz giants, such as Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, admired Foresythe and recorded his compositions. Earl Hines used Foresythe's *Deep Forest* as a signature tune on his first radio series. Says Charles Fox: "If he had only stayed in the United States, instead of returning

to Britain, he might easily have become an influential and important figure in jazz. Over here, of course, his ideas were considered to be "too far out" even by many musicians; he was looked on, in fact, as something of a musical eccentric. The result was that a very talented jazz composer failed to live up to his early promise."

When the Black American singer Elisabeth Welch made London her home in 1933, she began looking for an accompanist. She once recalled: "When I arrived in London I was offered cabaret engagements, but I didn't know anyone who could accompany me. I was given Reggie's name and of course I'd heard about him in America and Paris. He was a sweet, simple, charming person. His appearance was always immaculate and elegant. He loved good food and talked with that wonderful English upper-class accent. When we made fun of his accent, he didn't mind at all. He had a great sense of humour about himself. We all loved him."

On his return to London from New York, Foresythe worked in Mayfair clubs until the outbreak of World War Two. Over-age for active service, he volunteered for the RAF anyway. Drafted into the RAF in 1941, he became an Intelligence Officer, and served in North Africa.

In the 1930s Foresythe had been ahead of his time but, after the war, time seemed to have passed him by. He was soon leading bands in obscure west country hotels, and playing solo piano in drinking clubs in London's Soho and Kensington. His career ended in obscurity, and alcoholism. He died aged 51 in 1958 from heart failure after a fall at his home in Paddington, London.

ESTHER BRUCE

Esther Bruce was born in Dieppe Street, near West Kensington Station, Fulham in 1912. She was the daughter of Joseph Bruce, a builder's labourer from Guyana (then British Guiana), and his Scottish wife, Edith Brooks (who died when Esther was five). Joseph didn't tell his daughter very much about his life, only that he was the son of slaves, John and Mercy Bruce. Esther believed he came here around the turn of the century. She said: "I know he worked on the ships before he came to Britain, but I don't know what port he arrived at. He said he travelled around the world on ships, and I believe he settled in Fulham because it was near a place he took a training course. It couldn't have been easy for him, but he was tough. He could look after himself. He never got

Esther and Joseph Bruce

into fights or anything like that. He kept his distance."

North End Road School. Esther went to school in North End Road, Fulham. She said: "I wasn't treated differently. We were all together. But I remember a teacher called Mrs Carson. She was a funny old dear. One afternoon she said to the class: 'I'm going to teach you how to talk to people.' She taught us how to be polite to each other and then she said: 'Now, children, when you meet coloured people, you do not talk to them. Don't lower yourself. Don't forget, you do *not* talk to coloured people. Remember that.' When I went home Dad said: 'How did you get on at school today? What did you learn?' I ignored him. He said: 'What's wrong with you? Are you deaf?' I said: 'No. I was told at school not to speak to coloured people.' He said: 'Who told you that?' I said: 'Our teacher.' The next day Dad went to the school and raised the roof! Afterwards Mrs Carson was sacked."

Community. Esther remembered with affection the community spirit that existed in Fulham before the war. She said: "In those days we lived in a community. We were one big happy family: Dieppe Street, Hilmer Street, Eli Street and Mund Street. We had our own little land and our own little friends. If we walked along the road singing it was alright with the neighbours. Nobody minded. Neighbours helped each other if they were in trouble. 'Do you want anything?' they

asked. We didn't have Age Concern or Social Services. We didn't have anything like that but we knew we were going to get by because our neighbours came and helped. We helped each other. We didn't go hungry in the old days. We could leave our front doors open all day and if a neighbour walked past we'd call out: 'Come on in, love. Come and have a cup of tea.' I shall never forget New Year's Eve. Every year we went outside, stood on the doorstep and shouted 'Happy New Year!' to everyone. All the neighbours came out of their houses and joined in. All along the road. They were marvellous days."

The Granville. Every Saturday night Joseph gave his young daughter a treat: a trip to The Granville, a music hall in Fulham Broadway. Esther remembered: "Inside it was beautiful. The carvings were really lovely. The dearest seats, which were downstairs and cost one shilling and sixpence, were red velvet, but we always sat upstairs in the gods in the cheap seats. They were stone steps and cost fourpence. Four *old* pennies. We only sat downstairs if there was something big on, and then we felt honoured because we sat on proper seats. We bought a penny's worth of peanuts, or an orange. The big stage curtains were dark red and gold. There was an orchestra in the pit and as soon as they started to tune up we'd get excited and say: 'Here we go.' It was always a variety show and lasted two hours. We saw all the great music hall stars. All the old ones like Nellie Wallace, Florrie Ford, Kate Carney and Hetty King. She impersonated men in top hat and tails. They were really classy people."

Racism. Esther rarely encountered racism in her community, but outside it was a different matter. She said: "I know there was a colour bar in some parts of London but I didn't experience it. In Fulham I could go into a pub at any time. I never had any problems. I always worked and only lost one job for being Black. In 1928 I went to work as a dressmaker for Barkers, a department store in Kensington High Street. I worked there for three years. One day I was told to go to an office in Young Street. I thought I was going to get a rise. Instead the new manager called me into his office and said: 'We don't need you anymore. I'm going to let you go.' I said: 'Why? What's the trouble?' He said: 'I'm sacking you because I don't want coloured people working for me.' So I went home and told my Dad. He was very angry and went to the office the next day. He raised the roof. He even wrote a letter to our MP at the House of Commons, but that's as far as it went.

We didn't hear anymore. I've never forgotten that. When I was sacked I felt insulted. He insulted me because I am Black. Did he know his manners? No. I lived with poor people, but they didn't treat me like that. I said to myself: 'This is England. This is what I've grown up to.' I learnt a hard lesson. In this world you've got to stick up for yourself. It doesn't matter who you are, stick up for your rights. You've got to let people know that you're not frightened of them. You've got to say: 'I'm as good as you.'"

Marcus Garvey. The Jamaican nationalist leader Marcus Garvey settled in Fulham in 1935. He did not return to Jamaica. At the time of his death at the age of 53 in 1940 he was living at 53 Talgarth Road. Esther met him a few times in Fulham in the late 1930s, and remembered their encounters: "One day I was walking along North End Road when I met Marcus Garvey. He was from Jamaica. He was a big built chap and lived in Fulham. He said: 'Why don't you come to my house so we can have a chat?' I said: 'Yes, by all means.' So I went to his house a few times and chatted to him. He was a nice chap. Very, very kind. But he knew what the English people were upto. He wasn't treated with respect like I was because he said: 'The English are no good. No good.' And I said: 'But there are *some* good people in this world.' Then he told me he was going home to Jamaica and I never saw him again.

Marcus Garvey was a middle-class gentleman, and didn't make many friends in Fulham. He would say: 'Good afternoon' and raise his hat to people but I wasn't like that. I would say: 'Hello, love,' or 'Hello, mate,' because that was the way I was brought up. When I went shopping in North End Road market and met the costers they would say: 'Hello, Esther. How are you keeping? What are you having today, love?' But if you were middle-class they wouldn't have a conversation with you. They'd just serve you, and that would be that. Marcus Garvey was middle-class and the costers wouldn't speak to him. It was a class difference. It didn't matter what colour you were. We were working-class. We had our own tongue."

THE WAR YEARS (1939-45)

Connie Mark working at a military hospital, Jamaica

1. Fulham at war

Very little attention has been given to Black people who faced life on the 'front line' during the Second World War. Black citizens were under fire in almost every city in the country, and many volunteered as civilian defence workers, such as Air Raid Wardens, firemen, stretcher bearers, First Aid workers and Mobile Canteen personnel. In Fulham, Esther Bruce lived through the Blitz, and 'did her bit' to help unite people when her community faced devastation.

ESTHER BRUCE

The Blitz. When the London Blitz started in September 1940 my Dad stayed in the house. He took a chance, a lot of people did. But I went to the public shelter in Eli Street with the neighbours. One night we all had to get out of there because the Germans surrounded it with incendiary bombs. They were fire bombs which the Germans dropped so other planes could find Earls Court. This was very close to where we lived. One of the bombs hadn't exploded. It had landed right behind the shelter. The air-raid warden came in and told us we had to get out of there. I had an old girl sitting near me. That was poor old Mrs Clark. She said: "Will you take me to the shelter at the other end of the street, Esther?" I said: "Of course I will, love." But it was quite a long way to the other shelter and the Germans were going hell for leather. Bombs were falling everywhere. Mrs Clark was hanging onto me. So we got out of the shelter in Eli Street and went with the neighbours through the air raid into the one at Hilmer Street. It was packed. As for being scared you just didn't think about it.

Life in the shelter. After my Dad died in 1941, I was left on my own. I'd never lived on my own before and I hated it. So Granny Johnson asked me to come and live with her at 13 Dieppe Street. We'd been neighbours for years and I knew her family very well. She said: "Come over here and live with me, Esther." The war had started and food was rationed. It made sense. So I moved to 13 Dieppe Street and shared a room at the top of the house with Granny. She was an angel.

Granny said: "When you come home from work come straight over to the shelter and I will have your dinner ready." While I was at work she went to the shelter and lit a fire. They had stoves in there. When I came home from work and went to the shelter I found Granny cooking our tea. She said: "What do you want, love, sausages and a baked potato?" I said: "Yes, please" and we

stayed the whole evening in the shelter and all through the night. We had a good time in the shelter. It was warm. We had sing-songs. We had bunks to sleep on. When somebody else came in we said: "Hello, mate. How are you doing?" Everybody was equal and pulled together. If somebody came into the shelter who we didn't know we said: "Hello, love. Where do you come from?" Everybody was welcome. Sometimes during an air raid the bombs came a bit *too* close and it got scary but I don't think the shelter would have stopped a bomb from killing us if one had hit it.

Rationing. Times were hard during the war. Food was rationed. There was no fruit. Things were so bad they started selling whale meat, although I wouldn't eat it. I didn't like the look of it. We made a joke about it, singing to the tune of Vera Lynn's song: "Whale meet again!" Often Granny said: "We could do with this. We could do with that." So I wrote to my Dad's brother, Uncle Sam, in Guyana. I asked him if he could send us food. Two weeks later a bloody great big box arrived. After that I asked Granny: "What grub do we need?" So I wrote more lists and sent them to Uncle Sam. We welcomed those food parcels.

Conscription. In 1941 they introduced conscription for single women and I was told I would have to give up my job as a seamstress, and do war work. They put me to work as a ward cleaner in Brompton Hospital. I cleaned three wards. One was called the Forces Ward. This is where they put boys who had been wounded serving with the Army, Navy and Air Force. I had a smashing time in there. The pranks those boys got up to! There was a chap called Dennis who was in the Air Force. He was the worst. He had a bed in the corner. Once a week I came in to clean the ward. In those days you had to clean the ward the old fashioned way. Down on your hands and knees with the polish and the bumper. One day Dennis had thrown little bits of paper and orange peel all over the floor by his bed. I said: "Look at the mess you've made! Look at it! I've just polished this ward. You know what you can do, don't you? You can get out of bed and pick up all those bits of paper and orange peel. I'm not leaving this ward until you do!" I was carrying on and the boys in the ward didn't say a word. I said: "I'm going to get Matron so watch it!" and then all of a sudden these bits of paper and orange peel disappeared! Dennis had tied them together with a bit of cotton! The boys fell about laughing and Bob, who was also in the Air Force, said: "We've been having a game with you." I saw the funny side of it. What a carry on! I enjoyed working in the Forces Ward.

Cousin Claude. During the war my cousin Claude from Guyana arrived at East India Dock in the East End. I didn't know that he was coming. One night he appeared on our doorstep and said: "I've come to see you. Can I stay for a few days?" I said: "Alright," and gave him a bed. I made him comfortable. Granny's son, Charlie, who lived downstairs, came up to see us. He didn't know Claude and Claude didn't know him. Charlie said: "How you going, mate? You coming over the road for a pint?" That's the difference between people then and people today. Nell Malster, who lived across the road, came over to me and said: "Esther, would you like us to have a party for him?" I said: "O.K." So we had a party for Claude, but nobody knew him. This is the difference in the people. They're so different today, but why? In the old days people respected each other and helped one another. It didn't matter that Claude was Black. He was my cousin and the neighbours treated him with respect. Everybody welcomed him.

2. Guyana and the Caribbean in wartime

During the 1920s and most of the 1930s, Guyana and the Caribbean (then known as British Guiana, and the British West Indies) barely featured on the agenda of policy makers in Whitehall and Westminster. When Guyana and the Caribbean were considered, the concern was usually for the state of plantation agriculture and attendant labour problems - in short, they were viewed as an unchanging part of the British Empire in a rapidly changing world.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a period of crisis everywhere, but especially so in Guyana and the Caribbean. The resulting hardships led to revolt and rebellion - the so-called 'hurricane of protest' - in Guyana, Trinidad, St Kitts, Jamaica, St Vincent and Barbados with a Royal Commission of Inquiry called to examine regional social and economic conditions. By the outbreak of war in September 1939, few still viewed Guyana and the Caribbean as a backwater. Over the following years, the relationship between Guyana, the Caribbean and Britain continued to alter with the war bringing new influences, doubts and confidence.

There was a long history of resistance to colonial injustice in Britain's Caribbean territories. From Bermuda in the Atlantic to British Honduras (Belize) in Central America, the 1930s witnessed a

dramatic rise in organised labour militancy with the increasingly influential and militant trade unions demanding industrial rights, decent pay, improvements in working conditions and social justice. But with nationalist sentiment still muted, when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, the people of Guyana and the Caribbean immediately rallied behind the flag, Empire, and the so-called 'Mother Country'.

RANDOLPH BERESFORD

'God Save the King'. The colonies were more British than the British. As a boy, we celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday, the 24th of May. Every child from all the schools in the town met and paraded to an area where there was a bandstand and sang 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves, Britons never, never shall be slaves!' I mean, I live here [England] for 40 years and I never seen any occasion where the children here march with a little Union Jack at any day of celebration! And this was a traditional thing, every 24th of May. And we would march, dress up in nice short pants, black pants and white shirt and parade with the militia band. We were told we were a part of Britain, we were British. We weren't anything else. We were British.

RAF recruits leaving Jamaica, 1943

Recruitment in Guyana and the Caribbean. At the beginning of the war, Britain was recruiting Air Force ground staff from the entire colonies - including Guyana. I remember turning up at that recruiting centre to come to

England as Air Force ground staff, but for some reason - either my height or whatever reason it was, I was out. So I wasn't selected. But many of my colleagues, friends, relatives, were selected and posted all over the place. Some came to England as Air Force ground staff, some went to Trinidad, some went to the interior in Guyana itself, because don't forget that Guyana is bounded by Brazil and Venezuela - and all those borders they had to cover for spies and so on. They were manned by people from Guyana. We followed the news of [what] Britain was doing with the Germans 'cause we got that information from radio. And we were all in support of Britain. We were all doctrinaire British.

CECILIA WADE

Sitting on the horizon. When war was declared it wasn't really a shock because we were more or less hearing everything everyday that was happening so it wasn't really a shock. I know most people were expecting England to defend our island, Montserrat, being a British island. Every week when there was a different man o'war sitting on the horizon you know there is trouble. Of course people were saying England is our Mother Country therefore they have to protect their British colonies. Sometimes it could be one, sometimes two sitting in the harbour. What most people were scared about was if the Germans got over to the West Indies it would be worse. Say if they bombed Trinidad, which is a British island, or Montserrat or Jamaica. If that part of the world got involved there would be great trouble because they were depending on England to defend them.

News and propaganda. The people in Montserrat didn't like what they heard about Hitler and Mussolini. It was reported on the six o'clock news every evening. It was called the British Worldwide News or something like that. It was coming from England, that's where we used to get our news from. Our island is a very small island, we didn't have any newspapers in those days. One thing I can remember, we used to have news coming through the Cable and Wireless. And if you want to have any special report on what was happening you could go down to the War Memorial and there were different pamphlets there so people could read them. But we didn't have any newspapers circulated at that time.

ROGER WAITE

Air raid sirens. At certain times in Jamaica they would blow an air raid siren and you would have to put out your lights. I don't know why, they must have thought Hitler was coming. You had to put out the light until they started blowing again. I don't know why we had to do that in the country parts. If he came to bomb us he would have missed because the houses are not so clustered. Not even Kingston was bombed.

CONNIE MARK

Recruitment in Jamaica. When war was declared and more personnel were needed for the front, you had English officers who came to Jamaica. I can remember, as young as I was, it was 19 years plus, they would go into all the little corners of Jamaica and they would beg, literally beg you to come and fight for England because you see we were brought up that England was our Mother Country and obviously when your mother has problems you've got to come and help her. So we all felt obliged to come and everybody was very happy to come. Most of the men that came to England came from the country parts. Kingston is the capital of Jamaica and most of them had never even come to Kingston until they were going to the war. I have actually had the opportunity of going on the troop ships. The ships were so crowded there were four to a bunk and I wondered how some of these men who had never travelled on a boat before survived in such cramped conditions. It was like pushing animals together because they really had the ships all cramped to make sure they get as many as they could to fight for England.

The reality of war. The first time the reality of war came to me was when I read in our local paper, *The Gleaner*, that Enid Edwards, from Port Antonio, died in a ship returning to Jamaica. The ship was torpedoed by the Germans. She was my best friend and we went to the same piano teacher. Enid studied at the Royal College of Music in London and passed all her exams with distinction. We were so proud of her and looked forward so much to her return to Jamaica. I cried for weeks.

Wardens and an internment camp. We had wardens who went around the towns and villages in the island and, if by chance you had one speck of light showing from your house, you'd be arrested and fined. Another thing that a lot of people don't know is that we had an internment

camp in Jamaica. When war was declared, all the merchant ships that were in the Caribbean area that had German and Italian men working on board were stopped, and the men taken as prisoners. It must be remembered that England was at war with Germany and Italy and they were our enemies.

Army service. Well, I have found that a lot of people are not really aware of how involved we were in the war, in Jamaica. For instance, I went in the army. I volunteered myself as a Medical Secretary and I was secretary to the Assistant Director of Medical Services. When you are in the army you are on 24 hours duty. You know nothing about off duty, so I used to have my uniform hung up all the while. My mother died so I lived with my aunt and anywhere I was going my aunt had to know where I was because if a troop ship was coming in at 2am in the morning then the Military Police would come to my home, knock on the door and, in five minutes flat, I had to be dressed to go out. If I wasn't there my aunt would have to say she's gone to a night club here and there. The Military Police would come to get me wherever I was and I had to be down at that troop ship. And that's really when the reality of war came home to me because you saw men leaving hale and hearty and you see them coming back on stretchers, you see them coming back in wheelchairs, some blind.

Tuppence a day. It was quite an achievement to even reach the rank of Corporal. When you are a Lance Corporal, army regulations state that once one is promoted to Corporal you are entitled to 2d per day. I applied for my 2d a day and was turned down by the War Office. When I asked why, I was told the Jamaican ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) were not entitled to this. I was in a British regiment attached to The Royal Army Medical Corps but I was still not entitled. That was my first experience of racial discrimination. The Queen still owes me eight years of tuppence a day! That may not sound a lot now, but in those days it added up. So I have had my little prejudices thrown at me.

I get very annoyed that people don't want to accept how the West Indies were involved in the war and how we were brought up to love the King, love the Queen, to love England, and to respect England. Then when you come here after the war, what do you see? You see a sign saying 'No Blacks, no Irish, no dogs, no children'. That hurt, that really used to hurt.

Clifford Fullerton, third from right, with his band on a cruise ship.

The arrival of the troopship *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Docks on 21 June 1948 was a landmark. It is now recognized and celebrated as the official commencement of large-scale post-war migration of Commonwealth citizens from the Caribbean to Britain. After the war, Britain became the land of opportunity. Recruitment drives in the Caribbean encouraged its citizens to leave their homes and help rebuild the 'Mother Country'. The 492 Caribbean migrants who disembarked from the *Windrush* are now acknowledged as the first settlers to begin a major change in the history of Britain's workforce. It was also the beginning of the multi-cultural Britain we know today.

In the decade that followed the arrival of *Windrush*, about 125,000 Caribbean settlers came to these shores. With hopes and dreams, they were drawn to the 'Mother Country', not knowing what lay ahead.

CLIFFORD FULLERTON

Arrival. I came on the *Empire Windrush* from Jamaica because I wanted to gain more knowledge about the making of clothes. When I worked on a Canadian national steamship, I noticed how the Englishmen dressed for dinner. There was always a big difference between them and the Americans. So I thought I would like to go to England to learn the art of drapery. Their suits were well styled and I admired the drapery that was used in those suits.

When I came over in 1948 I had to find somewhere to live. We arrived in June and we didn't have anywhere to go. We were put up in a deep shelter in Clapham. They were old air raid shelters from wartime. Most of the fellows who came with us were fellows who had been here during the war and they had made friends with girls. So when they came they thought they would be able to go back to those places. During the war the girls' boyfriends or husbands were away, but these fellows thought they could go back to the same life, but when they came they had a shock. When we were travelling on the ship it was those fellows who were saying "I know where I'm going to. I have a nice home to go to. I wouldn't go to England if I didn't know where I was going." So we looked at them and we said "Oh, we wish we were like you." So we went to the deep shelter and we were making ourselves quite cosy while these fellows had taken off to go to their respective homes. But when we were having our supper in the deep shelter the same fellows who had those beautiful homes to go to were coming down with sad faces.

The Clapham shelters. The shelters were run by the London Borough of Lambeth and they gave us the food. Those of us who had money paid two shillings and sixpence for a meal. If you hadn't any money you were given it free. There were about 250 of us in the shelters. You had your little grip just beside you and you had a little cot and a blanket. Imagine when you had to go up. There was a lift to take you up from the deep shelter. You go out for two or three hours, anything could have happened to your grip. It could have been stolen, ransacked, anything like that. You had to take a chance. If you came back and found your grip you were quite lucky. I was there for four weeks and every day we had to go up and go around the area to see if we could find any jobs.

Work. We went to a jobcentre, where they would try to find a job for you, and one man asked me "What work do you do?" I said "I'm a tailor." He said "We haven't got any jobs for tailors right now, would you mind working in a mine?" I said "Oh, no sir," but I was anxious to get something to do. I'd do anything rather than steal. I would work anywhere. Fortunately the Salvation Army sent someone to the shelter to find out if there were any tailors there, so four of us got a job at the Salvation Army making uniforms. That was in Judd Street in Kings Cross. We were shown by one of the staff what to do and when we each took up our respective garment and started to work on the machine they watched us carefully. I was given an officer's tunic to make and when I had put on the pocket the man in charge took it from me and walked around the workroom and showed it to them. It was a surprise to me, as if to say "Look what the Black man can do." Anyway we got on with them quite all right. We were very grateful to them for giving us a start.

Tailor and Cutter. After I applied for a job to cut the man said he can't trust the people from the West Indies to cut English clothes, so I said I would go to the Tailor and Cutter Guild. So I got myself enrolled. They were quite suspicious of me. Anyway they took my name and I went back the next week to start. The instructor gave us theory first and then put everyone to their respective table to draft. The week before, when we were enrolled, some Jewish boys were looking at me and saying "What's *he* doing here?" After I finished my draft in about 15 minutes, I stood up with my back against the wall. When the instructor saw me he came towards me with a look as if to say "I knew you would be wasting our time." But when he looked at the draft he was shocked, he couldn't believe his eyes, so he told me to do another one. I finished that and he told me "There is

no more to teach you tonight, you can go home now." So all those that were shrugging their shoulders before, I went up and tapped them on the back, and said "goodnight." I had prior knowledge of most of the points so it was quite easy for me. I remained there for two years. I had a lovely time there and the instructor saw that I was very interested in learning more.

In the 1950s most people used to have their suits hand made by me. They used to be well dressed. It was mostly West Indians but at that time we used to do a lot of the Teddy Boy suits, that's when they used to be well dressed. We had brought a lot of our styles which I incorporated in what I had learnt. When you incorporate West Indian and English styles you get a master suit.

Somewhere to live. My wife joined me one year after I came here. We had one son in Jamaica, he came with her, he was only two when he came. I lived in West Cromwell Road at the time. You weren't able to get a room on your own, sometimes there were six people in a room. You were lucky to get a room for two of you. About a month before my wife came I got a room in Penywern Road but I hadn't given up my one in West Cromwell Road. The man in Penywern Road said if I didn't sleep in this room he would have to take it away from me. But my rent wasn't finished so I had to sleep over there one night and in the other room the next, just to keep it. It was a big struggle, we had a very rough time but we were determined to fight because I was trying to earn as much as I could and pay my rent. I was getting five pounds and you had to pay three pounds fifteen in rent and one pound for school fees. When I told the people at the Salvation Army what I was paying they said that was very exorbitant.

Starting a blues club. Black people had nowhere to go to amuse themselves. If they went to the West End they rejected them, they don't want them. I used to do a big business here with the tailoring and they used to complain to me that they had nowhere to go. They said to me "You have a big place here, why don't you help us?" So I considered it. I'd been used to playing trumpet in different places, especially in my country, Jamaica, but I was afraid of making a disturbance. My business was getting on all right and everybody respected me so I didn't want anything to disturb it. So after a time with them pressing and pressing, I gave in. I started a blues club in 1957, but it wasn't really me who wanted to do it. Two other fellows decided to manage it,

to run it themselves, so I eventually gave in. It was going all right and then all of a sudden the bad elements started to creep in. They only had a drinking licence until 11pm but they kept on selling drinks after eleven and the music and the girls were running up and down, creating a nuisance, you know. I warned them about it. The police knew everything. They had people who told them everything about the club. The Inspector came to me and asked me what is going on down there. He knew already but he asked me as a formality. He wanted to look downstairs, we went downstairs and what he saw was a mess. He said to me "Well, Mr Fullerton, you are doing a good job upstairs so you get rid of these fellows." So we had to close it. It was sad but I had to do something. When the police give you advice, you take it or you are in trouble. I came here to behave myself and learn what I can. I did not come here to break no law. The neighbours didn't like it. They would even phone me in Kensal Rise some nights, I would have to race down in my car and quieten it down, but as soon as I went back it started again. I had some tenants upstairs and I wondered how these people lived with it. The place was rocking. The neighbours were very glad when I stopped it. It was too much.

City of London Master and Foreman Tailoring Society. In June 1952 I received an invitation to attend a reception to be held the following week at the Criterion Hotel in Piccadilly. I accepted the invitation sent by the President of the City of London Master and Foreman Tailoring Society. On the evening of the reception, my wife and I dressed ourselves and attended the reception. When the reception was in full swing, the Master of Ceremonies came over to our table and told me that the President was about to make an announcement in my favour. I was surprised because I was not expecting anything like that. After about five or six minutes the Master of Ceremonies gave three knocks on his table and said "Pray silence ladies and gentlemen, the President will now make a toast." The President got up and told everyone "Please charge your glasses." Everyone did so. He went on "ladies and gentlemen, let us drink to the honour of Mr Clifford Fullerton who has been accepted and made a member of the City of London Master and Foreman Tailoring Society, thereby becoming the first Black man to be made an associate member of the Society." The hall nearly fell down from the claps and cheers.

Going home. I'm very glad that I came to England because I have learnt so much, my trade, the music, the ways of people. I think we'll go back to Jamaica, we love Jamaica very much. I don't think there is anywhere like your own home. There are some things that are good here but if you try and save a bit and you go back you'll have a nice time. Then you are able to impart some of the things you have learnt to your friends. I look forward to it. When I went back in 1982 for a vacation, every tailors shop I went to asked me so many questions.

I was born in Kingston but we would like to buy a home in the country. If we go back now we don't want to live in Kingston again. Kingston is different now from when we left it, it's not so quiet. My wife would go back today, she wasn't really interested in coming, it was just because I was here. She has a lovely home in the country part, she is dying to go back. I could have gone to America, or I could have gone to Canada, but there is something about England that all the West Indians like. If they don't come here they don't feel like they have been anywhere. America is only for the money, they go there to get a few more dollars, but educationally they always look to this place as the Mother Country.

after WINDRUSH

Arrival, 9 June 1956

Some of the passengers on the *Empire Windrush* had already visited Britain when they served in His Majesty's forces during the war. But few of the pioneering settlers who came here in 1948 and throughout the 1950s could have known what sacrifices they would have to make in a country where they expected to find the streets paved with gold. Many of the people who left Guyana and the Caribbean had no experience of life outside the island or country they had left. In cities up and down Britain they would just walk into a shop or a factory and ask for a job. Very quietly they just got on with providing secure, safe homes for their families.

RANDOLPH BERESFORD (came from Guyana in 1953)

Coming to Britain. I came here in 1953, in December. I spent Christmas at sea. In those days we came by boat. I travelled three weeks on the boat. I came alone and nine months after my wife followed me. I decided to leave Guyana because we were British subjects. Guyana had not become an independent country yet. So I told my wife, "I'm off to England." In those days London, or England, needed skilled people, the demand was there, we were doing a service. I arrived on the 27th of December and on the 1st January I had my first job. I was a skilled carpenter. In fact I was intelligent enough to work with a box of tools. The first thing the clerk at the labour exchange said was "Have you got tools?" I said "Yes." He said "Well, there's a job right away in Kensington High Street." I started work.

Landlords. One of the biggest problems that faced us was finding accommodation. In fact that is the reason why I bought this place, because after my wife came we had problems in finding accommodation. All I wanted was somewhere where I could be with my wife and family. I remember living in a Polish man's house. I told him my wife was coming and I had two solicitor's notices at the end of the week. I ask him what's wrong, he said he consulted his solicitor and he said he shouldn't allow me to have my wife living there with me. In those days, although you rent, the landlord comes in. In the first place I lived, the landlord would open the door and that was just a room with a bed and a chair. If I had more than one visitor, in he comes to see where the visitor was sitting and if he or she was sitting on the bed he'd tell you off about it. Just after 10 or 11 o'clock he would come and knock on the door and tell you that it's time your visitors should leave.

Randolph Beresford signing in as Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham, 1975

Racism. I'll tell you a story now. Before I was elected on the council I went to the labour exchange looking for carpentry work. They said come back Tuesday or Wednesday and sign in and we'll see if there is a job vacant for you. The day I went in was the same day as the local elections and I was all dressed up as I was helping the Labour Party. When I went in the clerk at the labour exchange said "There's a job here but they don't want coloured folks because they try you people and you're no good." So I said "Where's the job?" and he said "Hammersmith Council." So I said "I don't believe you, Hammersmith Council is a socialist council. I come to this country, I am a member of my trade union, I represent my trade union on the Hammersmith and Fulham Trades Councils and the London Federation of Trades Councils and I am a member of the Labour Party." So I went to meet my colleagues who were standing for election, some of them were already councillors, so I said to them "Here am I working for you and I'm being told that you are not employing Black folks." They advised me to go to the Housing Manager to complain about it. I complained and they told me that the job was gone but I could have another job in a couple of weeks. A couple of weeks later was the Trades Council Annual General Meeting, I attended the meeting and I spoke about it and it was published in the press 'LOCAL TRADE UNIONIST ACCUSES HAMMERSMITH COUNCIL OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION' and they called me all kinds of names but that stopped it. I doubt whether the council had that policy but the clerk at the labour exchange was carrying out that policy in the name of Hammersmith Council.

CONNIE MARK (came from Jamaica in 1954)

Arrival. When I arrived here, my husband, Stanley, lived in a house with four other men. I came here from Jamaica with our daughter, Amru, three months old, and a suitcase of clothes to change. My husband came here as a professional cricketer. Obviously Stanley would like to see his child. So I came here because I was married and I had this young baby and my husband want to see his child. Because he was on a year's contract, I came to spend one year but not to live, because I didn't bring anything with me. I left all my stuff, everything, in Jamaica because I was going back to my house, back to my family.

First impressions. My first impressions were that it was cold and all the buildings looked alike. I said to myself, how do people know what house to go in? I was worried that after I came out I wouldn't find my street door again. So I took a bit of wood and put it there so when I came back I would know where my door is!

The first time I went out I was so scared and I remember I went in a shop with my baby, and I said to the man, "Could I have a wash rag please?" and he handed me a rag to wash dishes. I said, "I can't put that on my baby's face." He said, "Oh, Madam, what you really want is a face cloth [snooty accent]."

Somewhere to live. Obviously we had to move because Stanley was living in a bachelor's house. It was in Dunraven Road in Shepherd's Bush and we got offered this room in Coningham Road. We didn't take the room because the house had no bath and the landlord said to us "Are you mad? Do you realise you are lucky to get a room, especially with a child. You don't refuse rooms here because it has no bath!" We thought it was a normal thing that you could rent a room with a baby and a bath. Having said that we got another room in Lots Road, Chelsea, and that was a little tiny room and we could only bathe once a week and that was on a Thursday and the bath was in the landlord's kitchen. Otherwise we went to the public baths. Those were the days Black people just did not get council houses. If you go to the town hall, and put your name down, the first thing they would say to you is "What are you wasting your time for, don't you know they don't give Black people flats?" The only people you see with flats is the ex-servicemen and most of them had white wives anyway. In those days it was considered a disgrace to be in a council flat - not like now, council flats are the in thing.

Connie Mark giving a lecture on Mary Seacole, County Hall 1987

Landlords and landladies. If the landlord didn't like you he'd put your things outside on the steps. So I hope people realise - as bad as they think things are now - in a way they are much better off than we were when we came here in the fifties. On one occasion I saw a room advertised on the board and I went and I was told "No. It's gone." I had a friend who was white and she went and she was told that she could have the room. So I went back and I said to the woman, "Isn't it funny how you told me that you didn't have a room and yet my friend just came and you offered her the room."

Oh! You never get used to things like that, how could you? Half the time you say to yourself "My God! What have I come to?" If I were living in my country or my island I wouldn't be living like this. I tell you if people were coming from Jamaica I used to tell them not to give my home address, I was so embarrassed, I didn't want anyone to come and see the way I was living and then I realised, why should I be embarrassed? Everybody else is living the same way that I do. So we had it very hard.

Notting Hill riots. During the Notting Hill riots in 1958 I lived in Shirland Road in North Kensington. My husband was so scared. As soon as he came in from work, he went straight in the bed. Nobody could get him out. But we were very unhappy living in this house. We all lived in one room, we couldn't afford two. I heard about another room in West Kensington. So I went out to use the phone to find out about this other room. I was so shocked the next morning when I passed that same phone box because the Teddy Boys had thrown stones at it and the windows were in splinters. I found out later that I missed them by maybe ten or fifteen minutes. People were afraid to go out into the street. They were very afraid. Youngsters were causing the trouble. Teddy Boys. They wore tight pants and the Brylcreem all over their hair. The old people had their prejudices, the old people *still* have their prejudices, but it was the younger people, the Teddy Boys, that were the violent ones.

There were riots on. Our lives were in danger. They were getting at us. We had to be very careful. It was from those days we really got the impression of how prejudiced the police were. The Teddy Boys would attack the Black boys and then they would go back at them, and the police would keep blaming the Black boys when we know that they weren't the attacker, they were the attacked. Then the Black boys, more or less, went into groups, they made sure that they didn't walk alone. It was dangerous to walk alone. Of course they walked in gangs, wouldn't you? Either you do that or you lock yourself up like a hermit in a house. They were afraid to go to the cinema, afraid to go to the clubs but they said damn it I'm not going to let these people keep me from having fun! They used to go out in crowds so if the Teddy Boys attacked them then they would fight back.

I suppose I'm basically not a coward so I went out but a lot of Black people just did not go out, they were so scared. I have this philosophy that I walk with God and if I get killed, I get killed and that's it, but don't take me as typical.

ROGER WAITE (came from Jamaica in 1955)

The journey. I was 41 when I came to England from Jamaica. I left to better my position. I chose to come here because I had some friends here and we always correspond, and they say to me I must come over.

The journey was a bit rough, on the sea. We spent three weeks on the sea. We did a lot of rocking and rolling and vomiting. At the time you have to call it expensive: I pay £69 on a ship named *Veracruz*. We stopped at Rome, I remember, but we were never allowed to get off. Then we passed Naples, but we landed at a place called Genoa and that's where we took the train. I keep on wondering what happened after I took that train, how did I get to England. I know I was on a train and then I came to Victoria. I remember I took a taxi.

Sharing. My friends tell me how to reach where I want to come. When we came to Hazelwood Crescent my friends were there. Three of us had to share a room and as I was coming up the stairs, the landlady was coming down and put her hand out. "Thirty shillings," she said. The room was very small and all three of us paid thirty shillings each. We had to cook, sleep, eat [in there]. The only thing we didn't do in there is go to the toilet!

When I came here first, it was a Wednesday evening, the sun was shining. I said to myself, "How come they said the sun never shine in England?" It was a warm September day.

Myself and my friends lived in that place for about four months. Not far from there was a Jamaican family. They told me they had a room if I want it. I said. "Sure." I paid £2 a week for that room - it was a big room.

CECILIA WADE (came from Montserrat in 1956)

Our 'Mother Country'. I left the Caribbean when I was 34 years old in 1956. I left my home in Montserrat because there was the England rush going on. People were coming to England, sending back for their families, and I thought of some of the people who sent money to take their family over to England: if they, just ordinary labourers, could do so well in England, then I can go there and do just as well or even better. My second point for leaving Montserrat was my Dad travelled a lot and he used to tell us stories. We didn't believe him and he always finished off by saying, "You're too silly: if you don't travel abroad from this small island you will not get any experience." Also, England was our 'Mother Country' and I thought, well, the 'Mother Country' will look after us.

Travelling. We travelled for twelve days, nine days from the time we left Plymouth, the capital of my island, Montserrat. We saw nothing else but the blue skies above and the green-blue waters

below. No land. But when we were nearing Spain we started to see sea-gulls so we knew land was near. Our first stop was Barcelona. From Barcelona we travelled to Italy, to Naples. It was an Italian boat that was converted for passengers to be transported from the West Indies. From Italy we went to France. From there we were put on a ferry to, I think, Plymouth, England. From there we travelled by train to Victoria. I came on my own because I had one sister and two brothers in England. I came to my brother Tom in Clapton. I wrote him and told him I was coming. Knowing I was a teacher, he knew the hardship of himself and others here not getting the kind of work they want. But when I made up my mind to come I wasn't put off by it.

Looking for work. The first week when I arrived, my brother Tom said I had to sign on on Monday at the labour exchange. The first Monday I took my references from home saying I was a teacher. This woman at the counter said, "Oh, you were a teacher back home were you? Well, you won't get teaching here!" I said, "Well, what have you got to offer?" "Nothing at the moment. Come back next week." The following Monday I went and she looked me up and down again and said, "All I have to offer you is Lyon's Tea Shops, or there is a job going at a hospital in Clapton. Which would you prefer?" I said, "I don't know much about Lyon's Tea Shops because, as I said, I was a teacher and I'm looking for clerical work." "Oh! You won't get clerical work here." She was positive.

For the first three weeks I walked and walked on roads where you had factories. Because my teacher certificate said I was qualified in - amongst other subjects - needlework, I thought I had better try a needlework job. Wherever I saw 'machinist' marked up I would knock on the door. "Have you got any experience?" was always the first question. I would say, "No, I have not worked in England before. I only arrived here two or three weeks ago." "Sorry, no vacancies," came the response.

A job. I went home and brother George gave me the *Hackney Gazette*. I went through it with a fine tooth comb, and I circled one job that I saw that looked near to me. I went in and saw the foreman. The money was £6 19s 6d. I thought this was a good job because experienced machinists were only taking home £5. He told me that was the flat rate but if you work on piece work you could nearly double that. He told me that they have never taken on a coloured person

Esther Bruce, centre, with her cousin Leon and his wife Edna at a family wedding, 1968

before and if I went back on Tuesday he would let me know whether I get the job. I went back on Tuesday and he said, "You know I had to go round the whole building and ask if they had any objection to work with a coloured person and everyone said no, including the governor, so you have got the job. I went in and they put me to a machine which I had never seen before and they showed me the job. I was anxious to learn the job and then go on the piece work. I did well on that job. I was the only Black person working there and they treated me like a normal person. In fact the people there were anxious to learn about the West Indies. There was only one West Indian there - me - and all the others there were Jewish.

ESTHER BRUCE (cousin Leon and his family came here from Guyana in 1959)
A Ship and a Prayer. After the war many people came here from the Caribbean and some white people didn't like it. In 1959 my cousin Leon and his wife Edna came over from Guyana to live in

this country. They wanted their four children to have a good education. Their daughter, Brenda, told me they came on a ship and a prayer. When they arrived, they only had one room to live in. Leon said they took the room because they had nowhere else to go. Leon was here for about three days when he got a job in engineering. He never missed a days work. He was with the same firm when he retired. Eventually he managed to save up and buy a house for his family.

Windsor Castle. When Leon first came here he told me he wanted to see a bit of England so I took him out on trips. One day we went to Windsor Castle. There were several pubs in Windsor and, after we visited the Castle, he said: "Come on, we'll go and have a drink." We went in a pub and several other people were there but, when Leon ordered the drinks, the barmaid said: "No. We're closing." I said: "But you've got all these other people here." When she said "We don't serve you" I lost my temper, so Leon said: "Come on, love. Let's go. They don't want us." I said: "I don't want *them*. I can do without *them*. I'll go into another pub." That pub was right near Windsor Castle. They didn't want to serve us.

A few years later [in the mid-1960s] one of Leon's daughters left school and trained as a nurse. One day she came to me in floods of tears. "What's the matter, love?" I asked. "Oh, Auntie. There's this Matron at the hospital and she keeps giving me all the horrible jobs. I'm not learning anything." I told her not to worry, I would sort it out. The following week I took half a day off work, and went to see this Matron. When I found her, I coated her: "You think you can treat my niece badly because she's from Guyana, but I'm telling you, I'm British - the same as you - and you don't treat my niece like this, so behave yourself, or there'll be trouble!"

Being British. My cousin Leon once said to me: "You're a funny girl. You're British but you tell people you're from Guyana, the same as me." I said: "Why not? I'd rather say I'm from Guyana the way this country is at the moment. I prefer to tell people I come from there than say I am British." Britain isn't what it used to be. The people have changed. I've watched this country go down and down and I don't think it's going to get any better. No way. In the old days the people of Fulham were one big happy family and we helped one another but today people are selfish. We were poor but people cared about each other. They were friendly and that meant a lot. People should be more friendly. Very often I sit here and think of the good old days and how things have changed.

WILLIAM HENRY (came from Jamaica in 1960)

Jamaica. I was born in 1934 in Jamaica. Trelawny Parish. That was in the country. My home was all right but my mother died when I was nine days old so I grew up with my father and grandmum. I had brothers and sisters from a marriage before. I learnt to be a mason, here they call it plasterer or brickie. In Jamaica one man did the plastering and the bricklaying.

Leaving Jamaica. I was twenty-five when I left Jamaica. In 1960 I came here for work because I thought I would make some money in this country. I came to work for ten years and then go back to Jamaica. There is work in Jamaica but you don't make as much money as you make in this country. Some people make plenty, some don't. I came on my own on a ship called *Begona*. The journey was O.K. We finished up landing in Southampton after sixteen days of travelling. It was O.K. Your belly was full all the time. Nice swimming pool; church; music; anything you wanted was on the ship. It was very good on the ship. The fare was eighty pounds.

Arrival. I had a half sister here in Britain but no one came to meet me, no one. I took a taxi from Waterloo to St. Stephen's Avenue, Shepherd's Bush. That was no good, coming into a strange country with no one to meet you, that was bad. But I had travelled to America twice, I had the experience of travelling. Travelling is like education, it makes you have more sense.

First impression. My first impression of Britain was that it was cold, but I was used to the cold from America so it wasn't too bad for me, and I was a young man trying to make a life for my wife and kids. They were still in Jamaica at the time, they came afterwards. Two of my children were born in England and four were born in Jamaica, that makes six altogether.

Employment. As soon as I landed I got a job and I have been working until this day. It was easy to find work. In this country I never had a problem with jobs. I always got a job. My first job in this country was in a rubber factory. That lasted nine months. The job was waiting for me when I came. My sister's daughter's husband got it for me. I worked in a laundry for a year and I worked where they make baths. Then I worked for the Water Board fixing water pipes when they break in the road; putting new supplies in houses and flats, from the main to the pavement. If any big water main bursts in the road then we repair it, dig the road up and sort it out.

Accommodation. I had problems finding accommodation. When my wife came it gave me a little problem but I found a place eventually. You couldn't get a room to rent, rooms were very scarce.

The white people were not renting, so it was only the Black people and most Black people's houses were full already, so they had no room. You had to get the room through friends, that's why it was so hard. I worked and saved to get our own house, me and my wife. Both of us worked and saved to buy it. We got the mortgage from the GLC at that time.

Discrimination. I have faced discrimination but that does not bother me. I don't have that problem, because I have problems with my own people as well. Colour means nothing to me, because Black people don't like Black people, white people don't like white people, Indians don't like Indians, there are problems with every nation, so it doesn't bother me.

Britain. There is nothing I dislike in Britain but there's sun all the time in Jamaica and I want to get right back to my roots. You don't watch the clock in Jamaica, you don't need an alarm clock to wake you up to go to work. When you are abroad you stay for a time, then you want to go back. I came from Jamaica to make a living and I make it by working hard. Nobody gave me anything. I worked for everything I have. I think I've been successful for a man who could not read nor write and have come out better than many people who go to college. I think I have done well for myself, and have a good wife as well. She works and helps. I think I have done well for myself because people with an education are still down under my feet now. It's not the education it's what you plan to set out to do. Education is one of the best things you can have but you have men use it and still end up behind bars.

ALBERTHA BLACKMAN-THOMAS (came from Guyana in 1961)

Journey to England. Well, it was a crisis the day I left Guyana for England. As we left we landed in New York, it was one of the coldest winters ever and we had a long stay, about three or four hours at New York airport, before we got the clearance to come to London. Well, I was lucky because I had bought a coat from a person who'd lived in London. I was with my coat as I got to New York and it was so cold I wore my coat but there were many others who had no coats and they were shivering. But as we left, while in the air we learnt from the pilot there was no accommodation in London at any of the airports for us to land, neither Heathrow, Gatwick nor Luton, and perhaps we will be bound for Manchester. So in the air not knowing where I am going

to be landed, of course I'm not speaking for myself alone, everyone was a bit shaky at the time. As we left for Manchester the pilot again broadcast in the plane "We're not landing at Manchester because that airport too is covered with snow, we might land in Scotland." There was one woman sitting next to me, she started to weep bitterly, I was a bit shaken but I think I had a little more faith than her. I had to comfort her and tell her, "We are all in it, and let us pray that God land us safely at Manchester." I think it was eight to twelve hours we were up there from New York because the time varies but at the end we landed at Manchester Airport at 2pm in the afternoon from leaving New York early that morning.

Snow. Well, when we landed, everybody was happy. I was happy. I was glad but I was more excited with the white snow. I saw snow in our *Royal Reader* books when we read about it and saw it in pictures but you never see it in person. Well, the first time I'm seeing snow, I never expected it to be so white and falling so heavily on the ground. Well, the men and women who were at the airport were very, very nice to us and they sympathised with us in coming to one of the worst winters they were experiencing, the last day of December 1961. At 6pm the coaches came to take us away and we all took our baggages, they were packed in the coaches and we travelled down to London.

Travelling to London. It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene for me because I had never before in my life seen this scenery, and I looked as I travelled all the way in amazement. We had to go to a grill and before that we saw plough shares clearing the way and the snow piling both sides of the road we were going, high and white, and it was indeed a marvellous sight to me. I was cold but not so cold I could not enjoy that scenery. We landed at a grill, I can't remember the name of the grill but they gave us supper. I had to walk in the snow with the summer shoes that I had on. Well, that proved a bit difficult for me, as I go step by step in the snow begging God to guide my footsteps because there was nothing to lean on. You had to go on your own. We reached the grill and we had a lovely supper, then we went back into the coach and we travelled down to London and at midnight, nearly midnight, I was sitting in front with the coach driver and I asked him if we could sing *Auld Lang Syne*. On New Year's Night we are accustomed to singing that. He said we could and I did, but not with gusto, because I was still a bit cold, but with happiness in my heart. I

know that God has blessed me to come into London as well as to welcome the New Year - because at home we all go to church on Old Year's night and when we come out we welcome the New Year and sing Happy New Year to each and everyone around.

London. Well we travelled along and we came into London, and then we passed through Trafalgar Square and the coach driver said to us "Here is where on all New Year's Nights there are grand festivities welcoming the New Year, but tonight it is not like that because as you can observe the snow is heavy." When we got to Victoria my son was waiting, happy to see me, and we cried but he was happy to know I had landed safe and sound in London Town. Just as we gathered together I was chatting to my son about the way in which we would be getting home that night when he saw a friend passing in a car. He hailed him and said "Hey! My mother she has just come from Guyana, would you take us home, I'm in Coningham Road." He says to my son "That I will gladly do, where is your mother?" And he introduced me to him and he took my grips and put them on the back of the car. We entered the car and headed for Coningham Road, Shepherd's Bush. And there is where I landed happy to see my grandchildren in a lovely warm room and I cuddle into bed with my blankets and give my grandchildren a kiss each.

New Year's Day. What really surprised me, thinking how I was coming on New Year's Day, we would have had a family get together as we did in Guyana. Lo and behold my son and his wife are preparing to go to work. I said "Are you working all year and New Year's Day?" They said "Yes, it's not a holiday in London." Well, then I felt a bit faint at heart because I thought New Year's Day would be such a grand reunion day, to eat and drink and celebrate, but it wasn't to be. I had to wait until they returned home for the celebration. I brought some toys and games and that helped me to spend the day with the grandchildren. But I must say at this time I longed to be back home in Guyana. I didn't welcome the New Year in London as I thought I would have. So my spirit just went back to Guyana, thinking of the lovely songs we would have been singing. Thinking of the guitar music that was passing along the road and even the masquerades, thinking about the lovely spread and drinks we would have had and you're calling in your friends and neighbours and having a nice time. It really hit me hard and I wanted to be back home that very day if it was possible. But that didn't stop me from making my grandchildren happy because we

started to play the games I had brought, Lotto and Chinese Checkers, and we started to play until my daughter-in-law came in and then my son and we all had a happy New Year's night and I enjoyed it a lot.

Employment. I told my son "Six months is a very long time to sit down here on my own, I don't think I will like it. I will have to seek employment." He said "Mum, what employment? I will take you to Hythe House, there in Hammersmith, and you are a widow and they will give you some money because you're a British Guyanese. They will pay a little rent for you and you will be happy and we will make the most of it. I will take you around to see London as much as I can." So he did take me but I said when I go there can I ask them if I can get a situation and he said "Yes, you can."

I had a grandfather who was an Anglican Catechist and he always told us that we, the children of the righteous, would never beg bread, and the seed will never perish and I held that in my mind. I didn't want to have dole, I don't want dole. I'm poor because my husband died a year and some months ago and I lost that money but still I didn't want dole. So I said to my son "I am not going to the DHSS to take any dole. I don't want dole." So he said, "Well, Mum, it's your life and you do what you want." So he told me I should try London Transport and I went.

London Transport. When I went there for this job I think I was too grandly dressed. But you see in Guyana you have lots of gold. Guyana is the land of the El Dorado and El Dorado means gold. So I had three pairs of bangles on, a lovely gold chain, lovely gold ear-rings and lovely rings on my fingers. I approached the officer who was in charge of having interviews and we chatted and he opened my passport and he saw 'Teacher' and he looked at me and he just told me "Mrs Blackman, all that I can offer you is a cleaner's job." So I said "A cleaner's job!" He said "That's all the vacancies we have got." When I heard that I remembered some poetry from *The Royal Reader*, I think the fourth standard book, *The Two Crossing Sweepers*, and one of the verses said:

Though poor, they were too proud to beg,
Too upright for to steal,
And gladly did they sweep and clean,
To gain an honest meal.

So I said, "That's for me. I will have it, Sir." He was shocked, he said "You will take it?" I said "I will." Just like that the poem came to me, I took it. When my son came to get me, I took my passport from the man and got my note to go to 55 Broadway and I took it and I went down. My son came down and I wouldn't say a word until we got down the steps. I said "Do you know where you have to take me?" He said "Where?" I said "To 55 Broadway. St. James' Station. And I am to see the Superintendent and he will give me a lovely situation." I made it as a joke. He said "What lovely situation, Mum?" I said "A cleaner." He said "Oh, Mum, you take a cleaner's job?" I said "I take it. I don't want to be on the dole. Get me straight, son. I am strong. In the meanwhile I will apply to the GLC for a job with the children." And he said "If you want it, Mum, what can I do? Let's go." That was my first job, my first experience. I soon found favour with everybody, saying "Good Morning" to everyone.

THOMAS JOSEPH (came from Guyana in 1965)

A new arrival. I worked as a sheet metal worker in Guyana until 1965, when I decided to join my family in the United Kingdom. They came here in 1961 and 1962 respectively, my wife in '61, my daughter in '62. I came and joined them here. When I came to Britain I flew from Georgetown Atkinson airport to Gatwick. My first impression was that it was too damn cold. If it was possible I would have turned back immediately. My wife was here before me and she laid the foundations, she prepared for me before I arrived here. So I had no problem with accommodation. She was here four years ahead of me.

Employment. My main intention when I came over here was to study Industrial Law and Injuries Insurance, thinking I could have got through the back door easily. I had no school certificate leaving school at an early age. Anyway, six weeks after arriving in London, I found my first employment with Handley Page, the aircraft manufacturers in Cricklewood making heating radiators. Then I was given a three years course at London University to read Industrial Relations but at the completion of the first year I enquired from my tutor what kind of certificate I would get. He said none, only a recommendation and, if I want to further my studies, I would have to do it on my own with no certificate to back me or anything. That would have cost me a lot of money. Having come here in such a short space of time I hadn't the backing so I decided to call it quits.

Trade Union activities. I left Handley Page and worked with Lampson and Paragan in Colindale, a packaging firm making paper bags. I was dismissed from there because of my trade union activities. I was trying to organise a branch there of the Transport and General Workers Union. This was brought to the notice of management and I was given my marching orders. After that I found employment with British Rail as a freight guard, stationed in Brent.

I left there and joined the Metal Box Company in Acton. After three months I was elected a shop steward. There I was encouraged by my district officer to pursue my course in Industrial Law and Injuries Insurance through correspondence from Scotland. I did this and completed two courses together in eighteen months. Because of this success within such a short period (it would have taken most students three years to complete the two) I was recommended for a scholarship to Ruskin College. While they were considering my application, that very year - 1974 - I went completely blind, but an operation restored a little sight in one eye. I considered I would have to do quite a lot of research, and the limited sight I had would not have permitted me to do that, so I had to forgo it. I was sent to the rehabilitation centre in Manor House, Torquay, South Devon, where I spent twelve weeks. While I was there I was taught basketry, woodwork, typing, light engineering etc. Well, the typing came very useful to me because I began to write poems and using a tape recorder when the idea comes to me at night in bed, I record it and the next morning I type it on the typewriter.

Discrimination. In work I had a few discriminations against me. The first was when I applied to the labour exchange and registered as a sheet metal worker. About two days before vacancies appeared in the newspaper for metal workers in a certain firm in Holborn. When I went to the labour exchange they gave me a card to go to this job. I went and the security guard at the gate took the card from me and he read it and immediately handed the card back to me saying that the vacancies were filled. So I went back to the labour exchange and the man couldn't understand it and he said "I wonder why?" I said "Don't ask me why, I know why!" Anyway I left him and I found that job at British Rail.

In 1969 I found a job with a firm in Tottenham, they used to make neon signs. I started work there at 8.00 in the morning by lunch time the manager called me and said he could not retain me

because my work was unsatisfactory. I said "You tested me before you took me on and you found me satisfactory, then how come now you have found my work unsatisfactory?" He said things change and I told him I didn't accept his explanation. He said "Have no fear, I'm going to pay you for the entire day." I said "That is not the point, the point is I want you to come clean, why are you giving me the marching orders after being satisfied by my test prior to employing me?" I said goodbye but my intention was to go to the labour exchange and report this but as I was going out he called me back and he say "Mr Joseph, one word." I went back and he said "I'll tell you the truth, it was not my doing," he said. "Those men you see there, they have been with me, some for fifteen, some for twenty years and they told me in no uncertain terms that if you are kept on in employment here they are going to quit. In other words they have pulled me over the barrel for employing a Black man." It was as clear as that. If I had the knowledge I gained after studying Industrial Law I would have him up the chute. But at that time I was ignorant of the laws, so he escaped.

I cannot say that I have faced any other major racial prejudices because I have been the senior shop steward for the Metal Box Company for seven consecutive years and we had all nationalities working there. So if there was any racial prejudices the white people that were there would have objected to me being in such a position because I had my own office on the company's premises.

Along with thousands of others we are still being discriminated against, and I include myself, because of our disabilities. Disabled people presently are being discriminated against. There are positions which talented disabled people can fill but because of their disability they find some incompetent able-bodied ones to fill. Those which cannot do as much, because I can assure you there are disabled people out there in the community that can do as well if not better than those who are holding positions. This is where I believe I am still suffering discrimination, because of my disability.

a second generation perspective

ONAYEMI THEMA ONI: from *Sailing on Two Boats* (1993)

I think a name can tell you a lot about a person. The name Denise is not a legacy on either side of my family, I wasn't named after my grandmothers, aunts or cousins. It doesn't reflect who I am now; I see myself as an African, first and foremost, with Trinidadian, Guyanese and British roots. My name is now Onayemi Thema Oni. Onayemi means 'The profession of art suits me', Thema means 'Queen' and Oni means 'Desirable'. Every time my name is said or written I and other people are affirming all that is good and positive about me.

I have not dropped my surname, Semple. But I don't actively use it. Even though it is a Scottish name, it actually connects me to many members of my family, on many continents. The Semple family is well known in Lichfield Village and Hope Town in Guyana. I am proud of being a member of this family and have admiration for those who have compiled the family tree, which traces our ancestry back to South Africa. I can't explain the feeling of joy and belonging this brings me, the family organise an annual reunion in Guyana every August which Semples and their families attend from all over the world. The next step is to find our South African ancestors' true name and to visit a piece of my history.

I was born in Parsons Green in Fulham. My mother is from Trinidad, my father from Guyana. They met on the boat coming over, it was a real romance. My dad had boarded the boat first, when he saw a beautiful young woman in an eye-catching red outfit. At once he turned to my uncle and said "That's the woman I'm going to marry!" They got to know each other during the journey. When they arrived in Britain they married; 7 kids later they are still hanging on in there!

I talk a lot about my parents' experiences because by understanding why they came here, and what they went through, we, the generation born here, can put our experiences into a clearer perspective. No matter how we feel about our parents, we have to realise that they deserve and are right to demand respect, they were pioneers. Listening to their stories has helped me to motivate myself into living totally in the present. Those pioneers travelled for 504 hours in cramped conditions to make a better life for themselves and their families. They didn't wait for anybody to give it to them, they went out and got it for themselves. I have written a tribute to those early pioneers and their families, called *Get on Radical* which tells their story.

My dad worked the land with his father and his brothers, before coming to England. He had already travelled to the States where he worked on a tobacco plantation in Connecticut. He is a successful, handsome man, the youngest man to build his own house and one of 28 men chosen out of a possible 400 to go to America to work.

My mum was born in Port of Spain to a small family. She was brought up to be a lady, she played the violin, and was an expert craftswoman, she also excelled at letter writing and composition, she trained, and gained secretarial skills.

After they arrived in London they both worked in factories, my dad on the shop floor, my mum in the office. Unfortunately it wasn't too long before she was driven out of the office, through the racism of her co-workers, on to the shop floor with all the other African-Caribbeans.

I went to Sherbrooke Primary School. I'm the second to last in the family so by the time I got there all the teachers knew the family, and had certain expectations of me. Mainly to run fast, and jump very high because my brothers were good at sports and we were all tall, my sister was very quiet and very good, so they expected that too.

It was a school where there was a large number of African-Caribbean kids. There was racism in the school depending on which teacher you had, for example there was an Asian teacher who used to twist African-Caribbean kids ears, just wring them off, that was her speciality. The kids that went to that school are like family, I still see a lot of them now, because we all lived, and some still live, in the streets surrounding the school. I suppose it created a bond for us that has stood the test of time.

In my year none of the Black kids got into Grammar School regardless of what grades they reached in the eleven plus. I had a dream of going to Lady Margaret's in Parsons Green. I was really taken in by the uniform, they wore black blazers with a large red stripe, straw boaters, and pink gingham dresses in the summer. At that time I was a serious bookworm (and still am) and fantasised myself as part of the 'Famous Five', and looked forward to sharing my 'tuck', and going home for 'hols'. Needless to say I had my two feet planted firmly in thin air, and didn't get past the first interview, even though I was more English than the English.

I never faced any racism from the other kids at school because I was always tall for my age.

If anything I was always expected to be hard and stand up for myself so I was constantly fighting with boys and girls to maintain peer credibility.

What I do remember about the white kids at school is the fact that they went home for 'tea' after school, when we went home for 'dinner'. It always puzzled me - how could they survive until the next morning on tea and sandwiches, we always went home to a full cooked meal. There were other differences, for example we weren't allowed to do things like 'penny for the guy' around Guy Fawkes because that was seen as begging and that was not on. Also at home we didn't really take part in Christmas for religious reasons, and I remember going back to school after the Christmas break, and friends would say "What did you get for Christmas?" and I would lie.

I got in to Hurlingham Secondary School. It was a horrible school. It was chosen by mum because my sister had gone there, and it was a single sex school. It wasn't the nearest school, Gilliatt was just round the corner. At the interview the headmistress said "You're lucky I'm taking you," because I really did not care whether I got in to that school or not. I hated that school with a passion.

I was in a high stream class, there was only one other Black girl in it, as you went down the streams there was more. It had nothing to do with intelligence; by the end of my years at school, people in my class were no more intelligent than the people in the lower forms who were allocated to do only CSE's. I was able to do 'O' levels. There was an African girl from the continent, she was dying to do 'O' level maths because her dad wanted her to be a doctor, but she was in a lower stream so she was only allowed to do CSE. I remember seeing her and her dad asking the year tutor to put her into the 'O' level class, and she refused. That was really ironic, there was me being thrown out and her begging to get in. I felt stupid, but looking back there were only two Black girls in the 'O' level class and they managed to get rid of both of us.

The cult of the skinhead was going through a strong revival whilst I was at school. Girls I had previously been friends with now became my enemies. At about the same time some friends and I formed an all girl sound system called Ras Mafia which united the majority of Black girls in the school. Although we were on completely opposite sides there were no physical confrontations because the girls in the sound system were bigger, and stronger than the skinheads. Their only

means of attack were the NF and Nazi slogans they wore on their backs and their bodies, and those that they wrote on school walls and furniture.

I don't remember any teacher ever trying to put a stop to the skinhead cult. I do remember them feeling threatened seeing large groups of African-Caribbean girls hanging out together. One teacher even told me that there was no point in bothering with schoolwork as I was only fit for cleaning toilets. I got an apology for that remark after the Co-ordinator from Colebrooke demanded it. I left school at 16 after being asked not to stay on at 6th form level. I didn't really know what I wanted to do; the Careers Officer was no help at all. I was very good at Art, and excellent at English and enjoyed reading. She suggested a secretarial course, at South Thames College where everybody from Hurlingham went.

My earliest memory of home life is of a very warm environment surrounded by lots of people. I remember my mum teaching me the alphabet from a really colourful mural that she had brought over from Trinidad.

You could say I was lucky being the sixth out of seven children, my brothers and sister had paved the way for me. I was the original 'hot pepper' as they would say in Guyana, I loved to go out and have a good time, and by the time I was 15 I had graduated from youth club dances to 'proper' parties. Proper parties started at 11pm, that's another difference between us and white kids, our parties always started later. They would always talk about 'getting off', like "did you get off with him?" I was always curious "What do you mean get off? Get off what?" [laughs]. I never understood that.

I remember the first party I went to, three o' clock came and I should have been on my way home. I was still dancing when my brothers trooped in saying "Where's Denise?" The guy I was dancing with thought someone had come to beat him up when my brother's watch lit up in his face. As I began going out more and more my dad put his foot down. There was one party I couldn't resist, I asked if I could go, and they said "Yes, but be back by 11pm", but that was when it started. Anyway I was walking home from the party, and the birds were singing and I was thinking "I'm going to be in a lot of trouble". I got home and my brother answered the door. I was so relieved, I thought I'd been saved, my dad was still asleep, then he said "here she is,

daddy." He was so angry, he had a little belt curled up in his pyjama pocket and I just ran for my life. He said Out! Out! OUT! ...and washed his hands of me, as they do in the bible [laughs]. I suppose he was worried that I might get pregnant or something, as fathers do.

My parents expected us to get through school without getting into trouble, and to get a steady job. My dad worked for London Transport, and was keen for my five brothers to join him. At school leaving age he arranged an interview for each one of them.

My first job was working for a big name fashion designer. Her assistant liked what I was wearing, and promptly gave me the job as her secretarial assistant. I worked there for a year but left after she called me her 'Mammy', and her demands left me feeling like a low paid slave.

In 1990, I started an all Black creative writing group called the Rhythm Writers. We met once a week at the bottom of my road, in the Black Cultural Centre. I was looking for a way out from 9-5 office work, and this was a perfect outlet for me. I worked intensively with the group for nearly three years during which time I performed my poetry on Radio 5, and supported Toni Morrison at the Bloomsbury Theatre. The group gave me a safe space to discover my creative self. I was blessed on the 7th September 1992 with a special gift, my daughter Omolara Ife Semple Kinshasa. Her arrival has changed the direction of my life, opening many new doors. I decided at this time that I'd outgrown the group, and really wanted to focus on reproducing cultural traditions using the film-making process.

I'm not a woman who just happens to be Black, I'm definitely an African woman. Although I call myself an African, when I think of home I have difficulties. When I lived in Spain, here was home - not England, but London, and even then only the part of London where I was born and brought up. My spiritual home is not here. It feels fantastic when I go to the West Indies, just being around so many people who look like you is liberating. You don't have to deal with the kinds of racism you get here. You don't have to worry about double meanings, it's more spontaneous. But even when I go there I am a foreigner, they see me as British, there is no way I could say to them I am a Trinidadian. I have a cousin who went to live there at 4, he walks and talks like them, and still isn't considered a Trini. When I speak to Africans from the continent, and call myself an African, they are sometimes confused; there is no quick way to say I am of African descent, with

Trinidadian and Guyanese heritage, and born in Britain, it's a bit of a mouthful and confusing, and the term Black is not appropriate because as they say "there ain't no country named 'Black' on the world map".

When Norman Tebbitt talks about his cricket test we should remember throughout history, the English have shown that whenever they travel, they enforce their culture on their hosts, and refuse to blend in with the host culture. Why is it a crime for people to try to preserve their culture? For some of us it is disappearing fast. We should all be able to co-exist with respect, it is only natural to support the country of your heritage. Even though I'm not a great cricket fan, I always take an interest when the West Indies are playing and want them to win; it used to be a family occasion sitting around the box watching the West Indies beat England again and again. But now we see Black players on the English team, there could come a day when all the players on the English team are Black. It always tickles me when I watch athletics, and the British relay team will comprise 4 Black runners who look exactly like the 4 runners in the team from Zaire.

I talk about Africa and the Caribbean a lot, and eventually I would like to settle in a country with a warm climate. I do believe, however, that because a lot of people born in this country may not want to or have the opportunity to leave we should be making our life here more comfortable, making sure we get what we want. We should continue to build our own institutions, with or without government help, and take serious stock of other communities who build, and use their example for our own good.

Finally, we need to constantly remember all the men, women, and children who have died at the hands of racists, so that their lives were not taken in vain. We must make sure that our children are safe to walk the streets on which their blood has been spilled, and that their ancestors' blood helped to build.

further reading

The following books about the Black (African-Caribbean) presence in Britain were all published in 1998. Most of these titles are available from:

New Beacon Books,
76 Stroud Green Road,
London N4 3EN.
Tel: 0171 272 4889.

West Africans in Britain 1900-1960 - Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism by Hakim Adi (Lawrence and Wishart) (pbk £13.99)

Black in the British Frame - Black People in British Film and Television 1896-1996 by Stephen Bourne (Cassell) (pbk £15.99)

With Hope in Their Eyes by Vivienne Francis (Nia, an imprint of The X Press) (pbk £6.99)

Black Edwardians - Black People in Britain 1901-1914 by Jeffrey Green (Frank Cass) (pbk £18.50)

The Life of Una Marson 1905-65 by Delia Jarrett-Macauley (Manchester University Press) (hbk £19.95)

Climbing Up the Rough Side of the Mountain by Sam King (Minerva Press) (pbk £7.99)

Black Londoners 1880-1990 by Susan Okokon (Sutton Publishing) (pbk £9.99)

Always Elsewhere - Travels of the Black Atlantic edited by Alasdair Pettinger (Cassell) (pbk £16.50)

Windrush - The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain by Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips (Harper Collins) (hbk £16.99)

Here I Stand by Paul Robeson (reprint of autobiography/political testament, first published in 1958; Cassell) (pbk £9.99)

Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African by Ignatius Sancho (first published in 1782; this reprint, with an introduction by Vincent Carretta, was published by Penguin Books in 1998) (pbk £7.99)

Keep on Moving - The Windrush Legacy (The Black Experience in Britain from 1948) by Tony Sewell (Voice Enterprises Ltd) (pbk £8.99)

The First Black Footballer - Arthur Wharton 1865-1930, An Absence of Memory by Phil Vasili (Frank Cass) (pbk £12.50)

An African's Life - The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano 1745-1797 by James Walvin (Cassell) (hbk £25)

Empire Windrush - Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain edited by Onyekachi Wambu (Victor Gollancz) (pbk £10.99)

Imagining Home - Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64 by Wendy Webster (UCL Press) (pbk £12.95)

acknowledgements

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Stephen Bourne, Brenda Clough, Hulton Getty and The Imperial War Museum.

Stephen Bourne (co-editor):
Stephen Bourne is an award-winning archivist and consultant on the history of Black people in Britain. He has written for numerous publications since 1983 including *Caribbean Times*, *The Voice*, *Black Arts in London*, *Artrage* and *Pride*. Stephen is a regular contributor to *Black Film Bulletin*.

In 1991 Stephen co-authored *Aunt Esther's Story* with his aunt, Esther Bruce, and for *Black in the British Frame - Black People in British Film and Television 1896-1996*, Stephen was shortlisted for *The Voice* Community Award for Literature.

Since 1983 Stephen has been responsible for programming a number of ground-breaking Black film and television events for the National Film Theatre including a centenary tribute to Paul Robeson in April, 1998. Also that month, Stephen took part in the Paul Robeson Conference in London.

For the BBC's 1998 *Windrush* season, Stephen researched and scripted *Their Long Voyage Home*, a five-part series broadcast on Radio 2 about Caribbean settlers in Britain. This was presented by Trevor McDonald.

Stephen has received two *Race in the Media* awards from the Commission for Racial Equality, and is a member of the Black History Month Advisory Committee in the London Borough of Southwark.

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the publishers.

ecohp©

The Ethnic Communities Oral History Project (ecohp) was set up in 1987 to provide local people with a voice. It has produced many books, videos and exhibitions over that time. The publications that include African-Caribbean experiences and which are still available are:

The Motherland Calls - African-Caribbean Experiences	£2.50
Aunt Esther's Story	£2.50
Sailing on Two Boats - Second Generation Perspectives	£3.50

All prices include postage and packing. Please make cheques payable to: ECOHP

ECOHP, The Lilla Huset, 191 Talgarth Road, London W6 8BJ

Black people have been living and working in Britain since the 1550s. After the Second World War, mass migration from the Caribbean helped build the multi-cultural Britain we know today. This publication has been produced to celebrate the presence of the Black community in Hammersmith and Fulham over the past 100 years and the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush. It is supported and funded by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Its publication also commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project's (ECOHP) first African-Caribbean publication - *The Motherland Calls* - in 1989. *A Ship and a Prayer* draws on interviews published by ECOHP during the past ten years.

Among the interviewees featured in *A Ship and a Prayer* are Randolph Beresford, a former Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham who was made an MBE; Esther Bruce, whose autobiography received the Raymond Williams Prize for Community Publishing; and Connie Mark, who was awarded the British Empire Medal.

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