

Mapping Windrush Arrivals

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In June 2020, the map-based history website, *Layers of London*, released a new mapping layer locating and documenting the passengers who arrived on the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. The data for the mapping layer originated from a project co-curated by historian Dr John Price, a Senior Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. In this article, John outlines the background to the project and some of the aims and objectives as well as discussing some of the themes that have emerged from the mapping process and the ongoing crowdsourcing aspects of the project.

Late in the evening on 21 June 1948 the *MV Empire Windrush* sailed up the River Thames and docked at the Port of Tilbury just to the east of London. Its previous port of call had been Kingston in Jamaica, but it had also collected passengers from Bermuda, from Trinidad, and from Tampico in Mexico. The following morning, 22 June 1948, the 1027 passengers, men, women and children, began to disembark from the ship.

British media attention at the time predominantly focussed on the ‘500 Jamaican men, all of whom were eager to work in Britain’ while largely overlooking the other 527 passengers. Since then, there has been a tendency to depict the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* as the origin of settled Black communities in Britain and to exemplify it as a seminal moment in Black British history and identity. As a result, the long and varied histories of persons of African origin and descent in Britain can become overshadowed, overlooked and marginalised by this single event. Rather than constructing the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* as a seminal moment in Black British history, it can, instead, be seen and investigated as part of a longer and more complex narrative. As Kennetta Hammond Perry has written, ‘Rather than discard the Windrush moment... ask whether or not there are alternative ways of reading this historical site that might reorientate and or complement debates about how we think about the ways in which post-war Caribbean migration reconfigured the metropolitan political landscape and destabilised racially exclusive notions of Britishness’.¹ It is this approach that has underpinned my recent work on the Windrush passenger list and the mapping project with *Layers of London* that has developed from that.

In 2018, the journalist Amelia Gentleman published a series of articles in *The Guardian* newspaper concerning the deportation, or threatened deportation, of British citizens who had arrived in the UK from the Caribbean during the 1950s and 60s. As part of her investigations, Gentleman discovered that some of the official government documents that would have registered an individual’s entry into the UK had been destroyed. It was reported that the destruction of those documents was making it particularly difficult for some people to prove they had entered the country legally (often as minors) and this was informing the deportation process and decisions. The fuller and wider circumstances that emerged, which have become known as the ‘Windrush Scandal’, were much more complex than originally reported, but it was those original reports of the destroyed documents that drew me to the subject.²

As a historian, I am experienced in cross-referencing a range of different documents in order to get the fullest possible picture. Reading that some registration documents had been destroyed led me to consider what else might have survived that would contain similar information. As a passenger ship arriving into the UK the *Empire Windrush* would have been required to submit a full and detailed list of all passengers. In addition to this, each individual passenger would have been required to complete a Sea Arrival Card, or landing card, which they would have handed in as they disembarked the ship. It was reported that these landing cards were among the documents that had been destroyed, but I quickly identified that the original passenger list was held by The National Archives. A colleague and I transcribed the passenger list in full and throughout 2019 we used the information to stage a series of exhibitions and installations focussed on recreating and reimagining the landing cards.³

My primary interest and approach to the past can broadly be described as People's History. I am interested in the everyday lives of otherwise ordinary individuals and what we can learn about the past by exploring their lives. One of the biggest challenges with undertaking People's History is that historical evidence about the everyday lives of otherwise ordinary individuals can be difficult to find. Some groups of people are very visible in historical records because they spend much of their lives doing things that get recorded; this would include royal families, prime ministers, politicians, those in the armed forces or other services, celebrities, and, more generally, those people who society consider to be the 'great' men and women of their time.

The otherwise ordinary people tend to be sparsely recorded in history and often records are limited to the simple bureaucratic accounting of births, marriages and deaths. Regular people spend most of their lives 'under the radar' of historical recording and it is only when they do something of note that they enter the records. It is at those moments, often very brief in nature, that ordinary people become 'visible' to the historian. Often, however, this is in a negative context; they break the law, they get imprisoned or transported, they enter an asylum, a hospital, or a workhouse, or some calamity befalls them that brings them to the attention of the local press. This can give the impression that everyday lives were unrelentingly difficult, steeped in discomfort, poverty, misery and ill health, and that the people who lived those lives were more likely than others to turn to crime or suffer an untimely end. This is not to say that everyday lives were not difficult and not beset by suffering and tragedy, but finding ways to more accurately research and assess the day to day lives of otherwise ordinary people in the past can provide a broader and more nuanced picture. This is, essentially, why the passenger list from the *Empire Windrush* particularly caught my interest.

The passenger list provides a wealth of information about each individual; their name, their age, their marital status, their occupation, and the address to which they were travelling. The addresses are particularly interesting because they provide some insights into the next stage of the individual's journey, some additional context about their life in the UK, and they can act as a starting point for further research. As part of an installation that we staged at the V&A museum, we added longitude and latitude coordinates for all the address into our passenger database so that we could digitally map them. It was this data that led to the collaboration with *Layers of London*. Its excellent team were able to create the new mapping layer which displays a marker for each Windrush individual at the address they gave when they disembarked the ship and each marker provides the full details of that individual. The mapping layer can be uploaded over a modern base map or, for greater context, over a 1940/50s OS map of London. Also, linked to

the mapping layer, is a document collection which allows anyone to upload their own stories, documents and images relating to any of the 1027 individuals.

Having a database of the passenger information is illuminating and some broad enquires can be answered simply through analysing that data. For example, we can quickly ascertain that there were seventeen families on board, in addition to forty women traveling alone with their children, and even nine children travelling without their parents. There were, as reported, around 500 unmarried men who boarded in Kingston, Jamaica, but the database quickly demonstrates that the range of passengers was much wider and more varied than that. Having the addresses in the database allows for some basic sorting and filtering and this can provide some interesting results. It is possible to see if multiple individuals gave the same address or if multiple addresses in the same street or location occur. However, mapping those addresses very quickly reveals a great deal more than can be seen from the database alone.

Although *Layers of London* is predominantly concerned with London maps and London data it was decided that all the addresses in the Windrush database across the UK should be mapped onto the modern base map. This is a very useful feature because zooming out the UK map allows the user to quickly identify both the spread of addresses and any clustering in particular regions. Generally speaking, post-war immigration to Britain tended to centre on metropolitan areas, predominantly because employment and accommodation were more plentiful in those areas. This generalisation is somewhat supported by the Windrush map; London addresses are, by far, the most frequent, and there are also significant clusters of addresses in Plymouth, Portsmouth, Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. What is, perhaps, more interesting is the wide dispersal of addresses and onward journeys to less expected destinations. For example, Windrush passengers gave addresses in Bodmin, in Lowestoft, in East Dereham, in Hereford, in Cleethorpes, in Llandudno, in Egremont, in Whitby, in Silloth, in Kintore, and as far afield as the Channel Islands. These are not necessarily areas of Britain most often associated with post-war immigration from the Caribbean and, as such, they raise many interesting questions. What took the passengers to those areas? What lives did they lead when they got there? How did those predominantly white rural and semi-rural communities respond to the arrival of migrants from the Caribbean? How long did they stay there? Were these temporary addresses or more permanent destinations?

As with zooming out, zooming in on the map is equally as interesting and raises yet more questions. It is relatively quick and easy to identify small clusters or groupings of addresses and then by clicking on each marker the full details of each individual are provided. Often, as might be expected, these groupings relate to families who were living together at the same address. For example, having identified a small cluster of four individuals in Grove Road in Gillingham in Kent it is quick and easy to discover that this was Leslie Holley, a thirty-one year old engineer who had travelled on the Windrush from Bermuda with his wife, Eva, a household domestic, and their two children Brian, aged seven, and Margaret, aged two. This, in itself, is interesting but the map reveals something more. Just a couple of streets away, in Woodlands Road, Gillingham, was another Windrush passenger, twenty-three year old Doris West. Doris was unmarried, she had also travelled from Bermuda and, interestingly, her occupation, as with Eva Holley, was household domestic. Perhaps this was simply a coincidence, but the proximity of their UK addresses, their shared port of departure, and the similarity of their occupations might suggest there was a connection between them. Maybe Eva had secured work in Gillingham for Doris or, perhaps, vice versa. Eva's maiden name was Lilley so Doris was not her sister, but

perhaps they were more distantly related. Whatever the exact circumstances, it is the mapping of the addresses that identifies something of interest and something worthy of further investigation.

In other cases, groupings of individuals do not explicitly relate to families or relatives and, again, this stimulates interest and raises questions. The Windrush map shows that in one area of Earls Court in South-West London, there were three unmarried male Windrush passengers living at 22 Collingham Gardens, an unmarried female passenger living at 18 Collingham Gardens, an unmarried male passenger living at 15 Collingham Gardens and, just a couple of streets away, an unmarried male and an unmarried female passenger living at 25 Collingham Place. This immediately raises questions about why these one or two streets had attracted those individuals. All seven individuals had boarded at Kingston, Jamaica, although one of them, thirty-nine year old dressmaker Evelyn Wauchape, had been one of two officially recorded stowaways who had been discovered on route. Stories about Wauchape (or sometimes Wauchope) abound and there are several conflicting accounts of her life, but both the passenger list and the electoral register place her at 18 Collingham Gardens in 1948.

Research reveals that in 1948 18 Collingham Gardens was the location of the Colonial Girls Club Hostel, with twenty-seven beds, and 15-16 Collingham Gardens was the Colonial Centre Hostel, with 62 beds. These hostels were among at least ten establishments across Britain that were administered by the Colonial Office to accommodate students coming from British colonies to study in the UK. In a statement read in the House of Commons on 19 February 1947, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, explained, 'These hostels are intended primarily as reception centres where students may go on their first arrival in this country and where they stay until they find more permanent quarters. It is the general policy of the Colonial Office that wherever possible, students from the Colonies should live and work on the same conditions as students in this country rather than be segregated into permanent hostels of their own'.⁴

It is interesting that none of the Windrush passengers who were housed in these hostels were students, yet these were the addresses they provided on the passenger list and the addresses they went to. Research using the electoral register for 1948 also reveals that two other unmarried female Windrush passengers, Mona Baptiste and Edith Demetrius, were registered at 18 Collingham Gardens despite Baptiste giving 3 Pewyvern Road, Earls Court as her onward address and Demetrius providing an onward address in Cambridge. This all suggests that, for many of the Windrush passengers, their arrival and their subsequent onward journey and accommodation could be a rather ad-hoc affair and the fact that several of them were housed in Colonial Office hostels indicates some level of Government intervention. This seems likely, especially given that the Government also intervened to temporarily house around 256 of the passengers, who did not have an address to go to, in the Clapham South underground deep-level shelter. It is also possible that other private hostels might have operated in the Earls Court area to capitalise on those who were not able to secure a place in one of the Colonial Office hostels, hence the clustering in that area.

The occupational data that can be derived from the passenger list also provides interesting insights into the lives of those who arrived on the *Empire Windrush*. Among the 1027 passengers there were 86 mechanics, 54 carpenters, 34 tailors, 23 engineers, 11 dressmakers, 7 chaffeurs, 7 nurses, 5 artists, 4 typists and many other trades including barbers, actors, secretaries, boxers, and civil servants. However, the most prolific single occupation of those on the

Windrush was household domestic or domestic servant and 175 out of the 249 adult women on board declared that as their employment. Mapping the Windrush data allows the occupational information to be considered in a useful geographical context. Sometimes, the insights gained confirm what might already have been suspected. For example, if we take the clustering of addresses in the Plymouth area, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the majority of passengers who travelled there after disembarking from the Windrush were connected, in one way or another, to the shipping and maritime industries. Most were recorded as deckhands or seaman, but there are also shipwrights, firemen, Royal Navy sailors, and officers of the admiralty. It was a similar story for Portsmouth.

However, being able to see occupations mapped may, with a little research, reveal less expected clusters of employment and industry that will shed new light on how and why people moved to particular areas and why particular communities subsequently became established there. So, for example, we can find that three Windrush passengers who were tailors were living in separate addresses on Selbourne Street in Liverpool; Clifford Fullerton living at number six, Nathaniel Thompson at number eleven, and Leslie Broadley at number eighty. Why might they have gravitated to that area and what might that tell us about industry or employment there? Similarly, the map shows a cluster of three carpenters and two cabinet makers being housed in a National Service Hostel at 16 Score Street, West Bromwich, just outside Birmingham. National Service Hostels were established in 1941 by Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service, to house those working away from home during the Second World War. By 1948, the use of these hostels had shifted to providing accommodation for workers engaged in essential post-war reconstruction work. So, what essential reconstruction work might those carpenters and cabinet makers have been engaged in? Why send them all the way to West Bromwich when there would have been plenty of work for them in London? The Windrush map provides the catalyst for these kinds of enquiries and really does provide genuinely new insights into the lives of those who arrived on the ship.

One aspect of People's History is about historians researching, assessing, analysing, and contextualising the everyday lives of otherwise ordinary people in the past. However, another equally important part of People's History is about historians encouraging, empowering, and facilitating everyone to take interest in and research their own histories. People's History is about 'a' history of something, not 'the' history of something and, as such, everyone has a part to play in that. It is a very democratic form of history, both in terms of subject matter and in terms of who undertakes it. Public engagement and knowledge transfer are very much at the heart of People's History and, consequently, they were both at the heart of this mapping project.

The fabulous digitised maps and fascinating datasets available through *Layers of London* are incredibly useful and valuable and provide a wealth of research information and data. However, one of the most exciting features of the Layers of London mapping project is its interactivity. Visitors to the site can set up their own account through which they can upload their own stories, documents, photographs and files and then 'pin' those materials as a record to any location on the map. These can be stand-alone records but, more commonly, the records are uploaded into a collection which, again, any user can set up and any user can add records to. Records can be pinned at any map location, but they are usually pinned at a location most relevant to that record; for example, a historical photograph of a particular building would be pinned at the location of that building. When a user creates a record they can include a range of information about that record and, if they wish, they can upload documents that are then

contained within the record. It is this crowdsourcing element that elevates *Layers of London* from being a valuable but static source of information to being an ever-developing, growing, and evolving source of information that empowers and enables people to both research the past and contribute to a history of that past.

With the Windrush map, there is a dataset layer that can be selected which then places the passenger markers over the modern base map. Users of the map can then navigate to any one of those markers and create their own record on the base map that relates to that particular marker. It is a relatively straightforward 'point and click' process to add a record and there is guidance and advice on the Layers of London website to assist people with creating records and collections. There is already a Windrush record collection set up on the site and we very keen for people to start creating records of their own with any information or documents they might have about any of the passengers. Furthermore, as already outlined in this article, viewing and investigating the mapping of the passenger data stimulates questions and queries which could well be addressed and answered through new historical research. So we are also keen for people to use the mapped data as a research tool and then share the results of their research with everyone by uploading it the map. Ultimately, we want the map to build into an interactive community history resource that can be used by, for example, schools and colleges, by museums, by local history and family history groups, by U3A groups, and by those particularly interested in black British histories.

The arrival of the *Empire Windrush* passengers was a singular moment in history. However, more fully understanding the lives that those people lived, before and after that singular moment, and understanding the wider historical contexts of those lives will allow us to better understand our own lives and the contexts that we live in. The interactive Windrush passenger map won't achieve all that on its own, but we very much hope it will contribute to the range of other excellent work that has already be done, and continues to be done, on this historical topic.

You can access the Windrush passenger map layer via the *Layers of London* website <https://www.layersoflondon.org/>. A recorded webinar on how to access the map layer and how to create records and upload materials can be found on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daSZVqYi8pk>

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Notes

¹Kenetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place For Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

² For more on this see; Amelia Gentleman, *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* (London: Guardian Faber, 2019)

³ For further details of this project see; <https://www.gold.ac.uk/windrush/>

⁴ Hansard, HC, Oral Answers to Questions (19 February 1947), vol. 433, col. 1165.