Many people have heard of the Windrush, and many assume it was the first vessel to bring immigrants from Jamaica to the UK. Hannah Lowe’s *Ormonde* aims to address this error: by bringing together a cycle of poems and unique personal and historical documentary archives, Lowe tells the story of the 1947 journey of the *Ormonde*, which carried pioneering Jamaican immigrants over a year before the *Windrush*. On board was the author’s father, ready to start a new life in a new country. His daughter writes poignantly of his hopes and aspirations, of his fellow passengers, and the issues faced by immigrants arriving in Britain at the time. Lowe’s book reinstates this important and neglected chapter in our cultural memory.
HANNAH LOWE was born in Ilford, Essex, in 1976, to an English mother and a Chinese/Jamaican father. She has a BA in American Literature from the University of Sussex as well as a Masters degree in Refugee Studies, and is currently working towards a PhD in Creative Writing at Newcastle University. Her widely praised pamphlet The Hitcher was published by The Rialto in 2011. Chick, her first full collection, came out from Bloodaxe in 2013, and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize, and the Seamus Heaney Prize for First Collection. She has also published Rx (Time wave peak, 2013), a pamphlet of love poems. Her family memoir Long Time No See will be published by Periscope in Spring 2015. She is a teaching fellow in Creative Writing at Oxford Brookes University.

DR MIKE PHILLIPS, OBE, FRSL, FRSA, has worked as a journalist and broadcaster for the BBC, as a lecturer in media studies at the University of Westminster, as Cross Cultural Curator at Tate Britain, and as Acting Director of Arts in Tilburg, Netherlands. He was awarded the Arts Foundation Fellowship in 1996 for his crime fiction (featuring black journalist Sam Dean), and the OBE in 2007 for services to broadcasting. He is the co-author of Winds of the Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain (1998), which accompanied a BBC television series, and the author of London Crossings: A Biography of Black Britain (2001).

‘What I know’ was originally published in the Morning Star, and ‘In’ in In magazine

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This collection of poems about the Ormonde is prompted by Hannah Lowe’s memories of her father, but equally, as you read them, this act of remembering becomes something more than a memorial. Instead, the poems begin to thrust themselves into our understanding of our history, announcing and reconstructing the epic moments of our migration.

Wind back the hours, the days and months, a year – and out of fog, Ormonde sails like a rumour, or a tale about how what’s too soon forgotten will rise again – light up, awaken engines, swing her bow through half a century, return a hundred drifters, lost-at-sea. (from ‘Ormonde’)

 Appropriately, these poems also bring back to me many of the things I had forgotten about that period. This was a time when everyone I knew from the Caribbean had come to England on one boat or the other – and I remember a crowd of boys and girls, who I had known since I was born, and who I would never see again, lining the narrow street of white marl and sea shells to wave me goodbye, and I remember walking through the wharf, huge and gloomy, with the sickly perfume of sugar, so strong it almost choked me, and I remember the feel of the boat rocking, prelude to sickness and oblivion.

The process is one I also remember from the time when I began writing about the arrival of the Windrush over a year after the Ormonde. Individual reminiscences join a multitude of others, and segue into the river of remembering from which history is assembled. In some respects this is the point of the collection. It begins with a ‘rewind’ back to the Ormonde and goes on to memorialise the individuals who sailed on her – seamen, stowaways, schoolboy, dressmaker, boxer – all of them rehearsing the byways that had

**INTRODUCTION**

**BY MIKE PHILLIPS**

Hannah Lowe’s poems recover the individual identity of the passengers who sailed on the Ormonde, but they do much more.
brought them to this point. Later comes the poem ‘In’, which describes the moments that come after arrival:

In the labour queue, ten men ahead the same as you – you’re in, you’re in, no, no, some other fellow’s in, new worry rising like a wind
In the glass, a thinner picture of your face
In your dreams, a yuka moth, a shell, the sea

This is soon followed by ‘Shipbreaking’ which centres on the breaking up of the Ormonde, and the recovery of its memories:

… Now my mind replays a fizzing cine-film: the young man on a gangway – his trilby tilted, pocket hankie, stride rehearsed – it says I’m here.

So far, so good. In the years since I began writing about the Windrush, this is a journey which has become a symbol of Caribbean migration, and an icon for Britain’s black community. Conceived in three parts, departure, journey and arrival, the story has taken on the quality of an epic myth, which serves as a comprehensive account explaining our origins, our presence, and the nature of our experience in Britain.

Each generation of Caribbean writer has, therefore, been nourished and inspired by it, building and rebuilding the story in line with their own preoccupations and those of their contemporaries – George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, Derek Walcott, Louise Bennett, James Berry – the list could go on. In that sense, the ‘Windrush generation’ is a reference to all those early pioneers who travelled by boat, before the sixties decade of big jets. The story of the Windrush ended and closed the circle, ended and closed the moment in which the boats sailed out of the mist and into the fog of Britain’s coastline.

Hannah Lowe’s poems recover the individual identity of the passengers who sailed on the Ormonde, but they do much more. She’s not bringing us memories, because the actual memories, where they exist, are frozen in time and subject to endless accretions, additions, speculations, hints. As the poet herself says: “All I can do is emphasise that this is a work is work of fiction, with its origins in fact.”

Separated by almost seventy years from the event, her task is less to do with reconstructing memory, and more to do with constructing a species of memorial. Compare Lamming’s The Emigrants from 1954, a novel which highlights language and customary behaviour in a kind of reportage about what was going on around him. Unlike Lamming or Salkey, Lowe writes from the other end of the experience they began to map. She knows the future of her characters. She’s writing it:

and I recall that old trunk in our attic – cracked leather, rusted clasps – my box of tricks you said, you said you’d lost the only key.

This collection, however, reminds us that the “old trunk” contains both a story of remarkable potency, and a link to the experience and identity of migrants and movements in the present day:

and when, at last, the docks on England’s rim rose up, what choice had we but to jump and swim? (from ‘Stowaway’)

History, as always, repeats itself. Migrants of today and tomorrow, from wherever they come, are currently going through an experience very similar to that which Hannah Lowe’s dad understood to be inevitable.

They tore the Ormonde up in ’52 for scrap. I google what I can. If you were here, you’d ask me why I care so much. I’d say it’s what we do these days Dad, clutch at history. (from ‘Shipbreaking’)
The poems in this collection are about the passengers on the ex-troopship *Ormonde*, which sailed from the Caribbean to Liverpool in March 1947. The poems are works of imagination, but their genesis comes from the archive material included here – the passenger list, photographs, newspaper articles, and also from the notebook of my father, Ralph Lowe (usually known as Chick). This is my personal connection to the *Ormonde* – my dad was a passenger on that voyage. As a young man, he travelled in cabin class, listing his destination address – like many of the other men on board – as care of the Colonial Service Club on Wimpole Street in London. Seeing his name on the passenger list was a moment of wonder to me. It cemented the scant details I had about his early life and suddenly furnished my mind’s narrative – I could see him stepping onto the ship, I could see him stepping off. So a few of these poems are about my father, or a man like him at least, making that journey.

I first read of the *Ormonde* in the notebook I found years after my dad’s death. In it, he describes his early years growing up in rural Jamaica – a life of hardship and lack of opportunities. He was a teenager when the Second World War began. The island’s poverty became worse. There were few jobs. He had no family to rely on. The notebook closes with his description of his decision to leave Jamaica:

> Notes written in the 1980s by the author’s father, describing his decision to book passage on *Ormonde*:
> “On board the ship was a small batch of the first immigrants to leave Jamaica for England …”

“My thoughts turned to immigration as a way out of my predicament. I had been hearing from people that it was easy to get to England, so I started to make inquiries as to how I could get there. I soon found out that you could book a passage on ships bringing back servicemen who had fought in the Second World War. So I duly booked my passage on the SS *Ormonde* paying the princely sum of £28.”

Once I knew its name, I looked for more references to the *Ormonde*, but came across surprisingly little information. It took me a while to work out that *Ormonde* was actually the first ship to travel from the Caribbean to Britain in the postwar period – over a year before Empire Windrush. It became fascinating

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**THE OTHER SHIP**

BY HANNAH LOWE

*For the first time I realised that my father was part of the ‘Windrush Generation’ – a group who were to become characterised as stalwart pioneers.*
How it is this voyage has largely been forgotten? What happened to the passengers on the Ormonde? In all my research I’ve not personally come across anyone, aside from my dad, who travelled on the ship. I placed an advert in the Liverpool Echo, looking for any other passengers on that voyage and asking them to get in touch, but heard nothing back.

I decided to write poems about the Ormonde when I finally saw the passenger list at the National Archives in London. My mother had remembered that my dad was befriended by two boxers on the journey, who had offered to share their lodgings with him. How strange and wonderful it was to discover their names – S.A. Allen and F. Thompson – on the list. Further scrutiny revealed the presence of a nine-year-old boy in cabin class, and of six ‘distressed seamen’ who caught a ride home. How strange it was to discover their names – S.A. Allen and F. Thompson – on the list. I’ve not personally come across anyone, aside from my dad, who travelled on the ship.

In writing the poems I’ve called upon not only the scant detail I have about the Ormonde, but also on the broader historical information about this time. There is a lot to draw on, as the tale of postwar Caribbean migration has become more widely known since 1998, when the 50th anniversary of the arrival of Empire Windrush was marked. Images and footage of that ship docking at Tilbury appeared in the newspapers and on television. The phrase ‘Windrush Years’ entered the nation’s vocabulary, and for the first time I realised that my father was part of that ‘Windrush Generation’ – the group who were to become characterised as stalwart pioneers, travelling to Britain, their mother country, full of hope and determination. I’ve also looked to other writers who have taken the Caribbean and migration as their themes. James Berry’s Windrush Songs has been an influence, as have Sam Selvon’s short stories from Ways of Sunlight, and Derek Walcott’s Ways of Sunshine. I’ve been preoccupied with the politics of speaking on behalf of others. I feel my dad would have given me his blessing, but how can I be sure of others? It is an unresolved concern. All I can do is emphasise that this is a work of fiction, with its origins in fact.

I had Louise Bennett’s 1966 poem ‘Colonization in Reverse’ in mind when I wrote in the voices of the dressmaker, the schoolboy, the stowaway, the boxers: trying to express the complexity of their feelings – hope, excitement, desperation – and how they might have imagined their impact on Britain and vice versa. In response to these, the poem ‘In’ takes arrival as its theme. I wanted to repeat and thus estrange that word – ‘in’ – to illustrate how you can be physically in a place, but still excluded from it.

In many of the poems I use iambic couplets. There are various reasons for this: one is my belief in the possibilities of tight formal constraint to invoke creativity. In the words of George Szirtes, “the constraints of form are the chief producers of imagination”, and certainly I needed help to write in other voices. I also wanted to both mimic and subvert the formal English metrical poetry that was taught in Caribbean classrooms under the colonial education system. As an old man, my father could still recite the Wordsworth and Kipling he’d been given at school – poems which had no relation to his life and experience. Why not have some of the Ormonde’s passengers speak in those formal ways of their own lives? Simultaneously, I have been preoccupied with the politics of speaking on behalf of others. I feel my dad would have given me his blessing, but how can I be sure of others? It is an unresolved concern. All I can do is emphasise that this is a work of fiction, with its origins in fact.

My research into the Ormonde has led me in interesting directions. An online obituary of the ship’s wartime surgeon – Dr Twist – led me to discover that a number of fruit bowls had been made from the wood of the ship. A photograph of one was kindly sent to me by the surgeon’s son, who has it in his possession. It is reproduced above. History comes back to us in all kinds of ways.
Ormonde

Rewind, rewind the Windrush! Raise the anchor and sail her back, three weeks across the water, then let the travellers disembark, return them to their silent beds at dawn, before the mayhem of the docks at Kingston Town and Port of Spain – they’ll wake to see their islands’ sun again.

Wind back the hours, the days and months, a year – and out of fog, Ormonde sails like a rumour, or a tale about how what’s too soon forgotten will rise again – light up, awaken engines, swing her bow through half a century, return a hundred drifters, lost-at-sea.

Among the crowd, here’s Gilbert Lowe, a tailor, strolling starboard with his wife and daughter, or staring out to sea alone most nights, here’s Paul the Carpenter, the yellow moonlight and his battered playing cards for company, or curled like woodlice in the clammy canopy of darkness under deck, those stowaways who’ll leap for Liverpool on landing day and sprint a half a mile of stormy water black with mud, to climb the slimy timber below the Albert Dock, where policemen wait to haul them off before the magistrate, and all the passengers step from the ship and through a coverlet of mist, then slip like whispers into tenements and backstreets as Ormonde’s deep horn bellows her retreat – and from this little piece of history she slowly creaks her way back out to sea.

Advertisement from The Sunday Gleaner, 2nd March 1947: “Passengers Who May Want to Travel on H.M.T. Ormonde. The Following Press Release has been made by the Secretariat: Persons awaiting direct sea transport to the United Kingdom who would wish to avail themselves of passages on the HMT “Ormonde”… are asked to register their names with the Office Superintendent at the Secretariat, Kingston before the 5th of March, 1947… the amount normally charged for passages in Troopships is in the vicinity of £48 … the probabilities are that it will be necessary for such persons to remain in the United Kingdom for an indefinite period while awaiting return passages.”
What I Know

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.
– from ‘The Waking’ by Theodore Roethke

At night, you find me at the oil-lamp, dice in hand.
I say to myself, if I throw a pair of fives
I’ll give up this life – the hot slow days
of hurricanes, sweet reek of banana rot,
black fruit on the vine. I want another hand
of chances. I grip the dice and blow
a gust of luck into my fist. I’m dreaming
of England, yes, work, yes, women, riches.
I shake these bone cubes hard, let go.
This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.

The radio fizzes news across the tenement yard –
dazed soldiers sailing home, a weekend cavalcade,
monsoon time coming. I pass dead horses
in the field, dead mules. Men sag like slack suits
in the square. Talk of leaving starts like rain,
slow and spare, a rattle in a can. My tears
aren’t for the ship, new places, strange people,
but the loss of my always faces – I mean,
my people, who I know, my places. My sister says
you carry them with you, don’t fear.
What falls away is always, and is near.

Ormonde rocks steady across the ocean.
You ever look out to sea, and on every side
is sky and water, too much too blue?
Thoughts lap at me like waves against the bow,
not where am I, but why and who?
At night, we use our hours up, ten fellows
flocked to someone’s sticky room. I roll the dice
or deal for chemmy, brag, pontoon.
We go til dawn, a huddle at the lamp turned low.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Some fellow swore there were diamonds
on these streets. Look hard enough in rain
you’ll see them. I squint my eyes but what I see
is sunshine on the dock, my sister’s white gloves
waving me goodbye. There’s no diamonds here,
or if there are, they’re under this skin of snow.
Seems the whole world’s gone white. I roll my dice
in basements below the English pavements.
I guess I’m learning what I need to know.
I learn by going where I have to go.

Footnote in Bloody Foreigners by Robert Winder (Little, Brown, 2004, p.347): “The Windrush was not actually the first ship in this story. In late 1947, a ship called the Ormonde brought 108 migrant workers on the same route without generating a comparable bow-wave of concern.”
Passieras

And the ship like it ready
—from ‘Limbo’ by Edward Kamau Brathwaite

We were losing memories already.
They slipped like fish into the wide red water.
My daddy’s limp, that crazy bougainvillea,
the savage rooster crowing on the fence.

A hot sea wind lulled us past Havana.
In the dark church below deck,
Hosco sang and played his banjo.
We danced calypso, samba, limbo
swigged rum until a fire burnt in every one
and we christened ourselves, Passieras, Passieras,
drifting on the world’s high curve.

We were frontiersmen, we said.
Our god was work. What use was memory?
Ships in the night blinked back our lights
We glided on, eyes fixed to sea.

Distressed British Seamen

Moffatt: I knew black men at Tiger Bay and Toxteth — Somali skippers, seadogs from Cape Verde. Now these Jamaicans quiz me — Sir, will England this, will England that? Some nights they light the deck with music, and my old legs jig, my foot tap taps. Other nights, I tell them let me rest. I am a seaman and distressed.

Page: Of all the portside misses she was darkest — onyx black, like vinyl, like the pupil of an eye. She laid a trail of birdseed and I followed, clambering up into her nest. Seven days bedridden sweetest frangipani. Oh sail me home, I’ve not a penny left. I am a seaman and distressed.

Hooper: You shoulda seen the other fella. Oh, this shiner ain’t a patch on what I done to him. I’ll go a round or two with any boxer from Jamaica. I’m a British bulldog, I’m a — I knocked the policeman out, I slugged the jailor I’m the best o’ British, I’m a brawler, I’m a seaman and distressed.

Wiles: What the wife will say. This pustule bubbles hotter every day, and now my palm and soles a’scratching like there’s ants inside, a rashy hide across my back and chest I’ll see an English doctor ’fore I’m dead. I am a seaman and distressed.

Saeed: I stewed a vat of octopus, four hours on my stove, the brine so lightly spiced with clove and caraway. Saeed, they said, you are the best of chefs before each sailor retched my pulpo back into the sea. That’s it for me, my spoon is laid to rest. I am a seaman and distressed.

Williams: Let the sea gulp down this ship There is nothing to go back to

The term “Distressed British Seamen”, or “DBS”, refers to sailors who are without a ship in a foreign port. They may have lost or missed their vessel for various reasons — enemy action, sickness, drunkenness, imprisonment — or they may have jumped ship. Entry from Ormonde’s British passenger list, 31st March 1947: “Distressed British Seamen. PAGE Mr. R.J.; WILES, Mr. A.W.; WILLIAMS, Mr. E.; MOFFATT, Mr. E.; HOOPER, Mr. T.C.; SAEED, Mr. M.”
white

white as the starched shirt
I buttoned this morning

as the blinding walk
to Kingston docks

as the ship in port
a dazzling arc

white as the great house
on the red rock hill

the point of light I cling to
as we roll away

white as the ocean foam
as gulls who strut the deck

white as our prayers
we pilgrims in our Sunday best

bleached cuffs and collars
as white as dreams

white as cards we turn
below the old white moon

the blank white faces of knaves
and queens staring back at ours

my good white bones
my good white teeth

The Ormonde was built in 1917 by John Brown, Clydebank, for the Orient Steam Navigation Co. Merchant Fleets in Profile Vol. 1 by Duncan Haws (Patrick Stephens, 1978, p142, fig 17), which does not mention its Jamaican episode, states: “1918 June: Completed as a troopship. 1919 Nov 15: Maiden voyage to Australia. 1939: Requisitioned as a troopship. Took part in the evacuations from Norway and France. 1942 Nov: Present at the North African landings, then Sicily and Italy. 1944: Based Bombay for Far East Trooping. 1947: Returned to the Australian route as an emigrant vessel. 1952 Dec: Sold for breaking up at Dalmuir, Scotland.”
Stowaway

A dirty neck. One shirt, each day more grey might easily give men like us away, because we took our passage unencumbered – no clothes, no coin. Eleven was our number, eleven tucked into the Ormonde’s hold, and how compliantly the body buckled when a crewman’s footstep fell – we’d quickly twist into a cask, we sad contortionists.

We couldn’t bear the hopeless day-long yawn of home, and had no gold or pearls to pawn, no cow or goat to sell – but as we’d hands, we’d work, and if a ship set sail for England so we would stow away. And we were fed by kindness – serviettes of scrap, old bread, some fleshy bones. One passenger bestowed a laundered shirt on me for mine had yellowed and when, at last, the docks on England’s rim rose up, what choice had we but to jump and swim?

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Article from The Evening Standard, 1st April 1947: “THE WILLING STOWAWAYS Set free by court. Eleven coloured men who stowed away at Kingston, Jamaica, to come to England to find work were sentenced to one day’s imprisonment at the Liverpool City Magistrates’ Court today. This meant their immediate release. The Chairman Mr. R.H. Smith said he was dealing with them leniently because he was sympathetic towards men who wanted to work and would go to such lengths to get it. Another magistrate, Mr B.G. Burnett said: “It is a thousand pities Mr. Isaacs (Minister of Labour) is not here this morning seeing that we have to import Italians into this country when there are British subjects unemployed in the colonies.”
Schoolboy

i didn’t see her
when i said goodbye
no light she said get going chile
gon buy a cricket bat
in england
shoes and school
but i don’t care
she sold my pig
for the ticket
coughing in the yard
to rope him
nightdress hanging off
franky walked me
to the harbour
shook my hand
now it’s sea sea sea
they give me jokes and mints
call me 27 bitten street
because she sewed it
in my shirts in navy cotton
before, when she could sew
someone i’ve never met
will look after me
in england
her voice whispering
from the corner
say please sit still be good

One from a series of postcards sent by the author to Ormonde passengers whose names or identities she had used as the genesis for poems. All had to give a UK destination, so she sent them to these – with little hope of hearing back after 67 years. Master D Vaz was a nine-year-old boy who travelled in C class, listing his destination address as “27 Bitten Street”, and his occupation as “schoolboy”. The card was returned marked “no such address.”
Dressmaker

At night, I made myself a dress for England.
All through the rainy months, I stitched by hand,
a copper thimble on my thumb. No more
my threadbare skirt or patched-up pinafore

By candlelight, the pattern was a map
laid out across my bed, and as the rain’s slow tap
became a lightning storm, my scissors traced
the pattern line – full sleeves, a gathered waist,
one tier of voile, one poplin, double-skinned
for England’s winter-time, and the cold sea-wind.
It changed my shadowed figure on the wall.
I dreamt myself – on a red bus passing Whitehall,
or walking on the Strand; there was a tea-room
in which I passed my idle afternoons,
and in every scene I wore my dress, bright red
for pillar box and rose, the robins pictured
in my old school-books. And now, at the ship’s cold rail,
I am a jolt of colour as we sail
closer and closer, and finally I see
through a veil of cloud – England, my destiny.

Boxer

brother, one week in
your footwork’s
slipping
let’s do roadwork on deck
skip there too
keep jumping
keep out the lounge
at sundown
those fellows don’t
have the chances we got
time for high-jinks
on the other side
Mr Alexander
paid our fare remember
you best keep punching
I’ve chalked a ring
the moon’s a floodlight
I’ll be running laps
come get me
when you’re ready
we’ll go toe to toe
if you won’t
spar with me
I’ll fight my shadow

Euton Christian, migrant, quoted in
Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain by Mike Phillips & Trevor Phillips
(HarperCollins, 1998, p71): “They expected to come here and to find a job, to find a home.
And in about four or five years, they earn enough money to go back. But a lot of people said that – ninety-nine out of a hundred say that – but they never achieve that goal… because nobody gets rich in four or five years anyway.”
In

In Liverpool, you walk the dock for hours
In your bag, a box of dominoes, a pair of brogues
In the street, a little girl tut-tuts at you
In your belly, worry rising like the wind, but hold it boy, just hold it
In the tenement house, a bed you swap with other men
In shifts, you pass the afternoons
In dreams – the rooster cawing on the fence, your sisters twisting hands, the smell
the smell of uh
In England, you’re in England
In the shop, a rock of last week’s bread you carry home
In snow, your slipping soles and god knows how the world went white like this
In the street, a woman frowning, crossing over
In your pockets, nothing but a letter, flimsy blue
In the labour queue, ten men ahead the same as you – you’re in, you’re
In, no, no, some other fellow’s in, new worry rising like a wind
In the glass, a thinner picture of your face
In your dreams, a yuka moth, a shell, the sea
In the back room of a pub, a cheer, the pint glass clunks just hold it boy, just
In the makeshift ring, a shirtless man who looks like you, but something
In your pocket, something in your pocket
In the air, your bare fists flailing, his bare fists cracking on your ribs, your cheeks, your lip split
In two, a slug of blood, your blood, oh
In that gloomy room, a single bulb above the ring where you are sinking like a puppet
In his arms, in his arms
Twist

We were all gamblers then, switching hands.
From burning sun and yellow dust
to blackened factories
and the cold back rooms
of England

I was all in

From crimson hurricanes that swept dead insects
to our doors, to English rain on pavements
you could squint at
shimmering
the stone

That first autumn,
the strew of leaves on Clapham Common
took me by surprise,
dying on the ground
in coils of gold and red,
the colours of my island.

Memo from Mr Hardman to Mr Glen,
Ministry of Labour and National Service, 27th May 1948, discussing
the arrival of Empire Windrush: “You should be aware of this problem.
There is no bar to the entry of British Subjects to G.B. About 6 months [ago], some 150 workers from Jamiaca came to G.B. apparently on their own initiative and at their own expense. They dispersed and no specific problem emerged publicly. Now another batch is on the way…”
Shipbreaking

These are not the victims of migration…
These folks mean to survive.
– Stuart Hall, in Writing Black Britain 1948–1998

I watch old films of shipyards on the Clyde:
cranes ripping ships apart, their metal hides
peeled back by men in goggles wielding fire.
The shock of innards – girders, joists and wires,
a rusted funnel toppling in slow motion.
Those open flanks rain down the cabin’s foreign
detritus of flags and posters, turquoise charts
distant oceans, photographs of sweethearts –

They tore the Ormonde up in ’52
for scrap. I google what I can. If you
were here, you’d ask me why I care so much.
I’d say it’s what we do these days Dad, clutch
at history. I find old prints – three orphans
on a deckchair squinting at the sun; a crewman
with his arm around a girl, both smiling, windswept;
a stark compartment where you might have slept

and I recall that old trunk in our attic –
cracked leather, rusted claps – my box of tricks
you said, you said you’d lost the only key.
Your home, the ship you sailed, those miles of sea
were locked inside. Now my mind replays
a fizzing cine-film: the young man on a gangway –
his trilby tilted, pocket hankie, stride
rehearsed – it says I’m here. Then sitting dockside
with his trunk among the rippling crowd, he lights
a cigarette, inhales the English night.

Article in Crich Area
Community News,
March 2007, p.15:
“HMS ORMONDE:
a coincidence. In the
obituary for Doctor Twist
in the September issue it
mentioned that he served
on HMS Ormonde during
WW2. This name rang
a bell with Crich resident
Mrs Hilda Turner.
Several years ago, at a
car boot sale, she bought
a wooden fruit bowl made
of teak. The inscription
said that it had been made
from the timbers of HMS
Ormonde. Mrs Turner
had great pleasure in
contacting Dr. Twist’s
son, Tim, to see if he
would like the bowl as
a memento. Tim was
delighted to accept the kind
offer and it now has pride
of place in his home.”
Also published by HERCULES EDITIONS

**FORMERLY**
ISBN 978-0-9572738-0-1

Nominated for the Ted Hughes Award 2012, this bleakly humorous trawl through disappearing London pairs Tamar Yoseloff’s loose sonnets with Vici MacDonald’s gritty photographs.

“The best collaboration between these arts that I have seen since Fay Godwin and Ted Hughes’ Remains of Elmet” – Ian Duhig, poet

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Inspired by artist Christian Boltanski’s archive of heartbeats, Sue Rouse pairs 14 sonnets on family and love with her own poignant photographs to create a unique ‘memento in a book’.

“Heart as organ, metaphor, symbol … meanings accumulate, one poem deepening another”

– Gillian Clarke, National Poet of Wales

CAPTAIN’S TABLE

Thanks to the following for their kind sponsorship:

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Through poems and archive material, Next Generation poet Hannah Lowe recreates the 1947 journey from Jamaica to England of her late father Ralph “Chick” Lowe and his fellow passengers on ex-troopship Ormonde, the forgotten forerunner of 1948’s famed migrant ship Empire Windrush.

“A daughter’s seemingly small quest spools imaginatively into the much larger story of migration to Britain before the SS Windrush. In this feat of reconstruction, Hannah Lowe repositions the long-forgotten journey of the Ormonde into the historic moment. A brave poetic feat and a tender, enlightening visual feast that opens up both the mind and the imagination.”

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