

# WINDRUSH DAY

**Celebrating and commemorating  
the Windrush Generation and  
their contribution to British life.**

**EMPIRE WINDRUSH.**





## **HMT Empire Windrush**

( Picture: The Windrush Foundation.

## **The amazing story of Empire Windrush.**

Originally known as the Merchant vessel *Monte Rosa*, the ship was launched in Hamburg in 1930 and was one of a fleet of German passenger liners initially designed to provide cheap travel between Europe and South America. There was accommodation for 1150 passengers in cabins and a further 1350 in dormitories. When the South American routes failed to flourish, the *Monte Rosa* ran cruises between Norway, the UK and the Mediterranean.

After the Nazi regime came to power in Germany, the ship became a state owned vessel providing cheap holidays and leisure activities. She was later converted to a barracks ship and used as a troopship during the German invasion of Norway in 1940, before becoming an accommodation and recreational vessel linked to the battleship *Tirpitz*.

In 1942 the *Monte Rosa* was used to deport members of Norway's Jewish population. Of the 46 deportees, all but two died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In March 1944 RAF and Royal Canadian Air Force planes set out to sink the ship. Badly damaged the vessel managed to reach Denmark. In June a joint force of British army and Norwegian resistance fighters attached limpet mines to the vessel, which was said to be carrying 3000 enemy troops back to Germany, together with several Norwegian women and children. 200 people were trapped and drowned following the 5am explosion, when the ship's captain closed the bulkhead doors to stop the *Monte Rosa* from sinking. She again managed to reach port and was converted to a hospital ship before suffering further mine damage.

Captured in May 1945, the *Monte Rosa* became a British troopship. She was renamed HMT *Empire Windrush* in January 1947 and used on the route between Southampton and Hong Kong ( via Suez and Colombo. ) It was whilst being operated for the British Government, by the New Zealand Shipping Company, that the vessel made her only trip to the Caribbean to collect troops returning from leave. On the famous return journey, the ship carried at least 500 ( records now suggest 800 ) Caribbean ( mainly Jamaican ) immigrants to the UK.

In 1950 the *Windrush* carried British troops home from Greece, where they had been fighting in the Greek Civil War. The vessel also took part in a 1953 Fleet Review to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1954 the ship was being used to carry wounded U N troops back from the Korean War, when a major explosion killed 4 engine crew and started a major fire. The ship was successfully evacuated but sank on 29 March whilst being towed back to Gibraltar by HMS *Saintes*.