

Jim Grover
WINDRUSH

Portrait of a generation
248pp. Jim Grover. £35.
978 1 5272 2789 7

Last year marked the seventieth anniversary of the arrival of *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury docks in June 1948. Teachers, lawyers, writers, artists and field labourers from the Caribbean came to the UK in response to a recruitment drive and for a better life. They had not all intended to remain “in foreign”, but gradually it dawned on them that they were here to stay. For over a year, the British documentary photographer Jim Grover set out to capture the daily lives and customs of these Caribbean-born British citizens in south London where he lives. His book opens with a photograph of ninety-two-year-old Alford Gardner, who had served in the RAF during the war as a motor mechanic; having paid the standard £28 to cross the Atlantic on the *Windrush*, Gardner settled for good in Leeds.

The project began in June 2017 in Grover’s Anglican church in Clapham, where a parishioner invited him to see the Caribbean clubs where he played “bones”, or dominoes. Subsequently Grover was welcomed into homes, community centres, places of worship and even funerals. His moving and often beautiful photographs show another side to the Caribbean migrant story and celebrate a community and a generation that has contributed immeasurably to the British economy and culture. Known for his tactful presence, Grover photographed London calypso-mento dancers in their “felts” (fedora hats) and domino hotshots banging down tiles. At crowded dance parties in clubhouses south of the Thames, he photographed old-timers moving to jazz-tinged ska, rocksteady and reggae. He scoured the south London streets in search of the famed West Indian “front room” – once a part of every Jamaican home – and found one in Brixton. Front rooms typically contained framed family photographs, a picture of Jesus walking on the water, sofas covered in protective see-through plastic and ornamental glass blowfish. They are nearly all gone now; Grover felt impelled to document a way of life before it was too late.

The book combines the “verbal histories” of first-and second-generation West Indians with “photo-stories” on such themes as faith, friendship, community, love and death. One extraordinary composition shows a woman, Diane Bailey, pouring a libation of rum into the grave of her mother, Floris, at Lambeth cemetery, with the mourners ranged respectfully round. Katy Barron, who curated Grover’s exhibition *Windrush: Portrait of a generation* at Oxo Tower Wharf last summer, described the photograph as “a history painting in its drama and scale”.

IAN THOMSON