

# Cardiff Migration Stories



# Runnymede: Intelligence for a Multi-ethnic Britain

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# Preface



During 2012 Runnymede, together with Professor Claire Alexander from the University of Manchester, has run a series of workshops with young people aged 12 to 14 years from schools and community groups in Cardiff, Leicester and Sheffield. These workshops formed part of an oral histories project involving schoolchildren across the UK. In these workshops we followed the same processes of researching and conducting oral histories we had developed in an earlier work called the *Bengal Diaspora*.

The children who participated in this project interviewed, filmed and recorded their parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, teachers and members of their communities, charting their journeys from the various parts of the world to the cities in which they were now

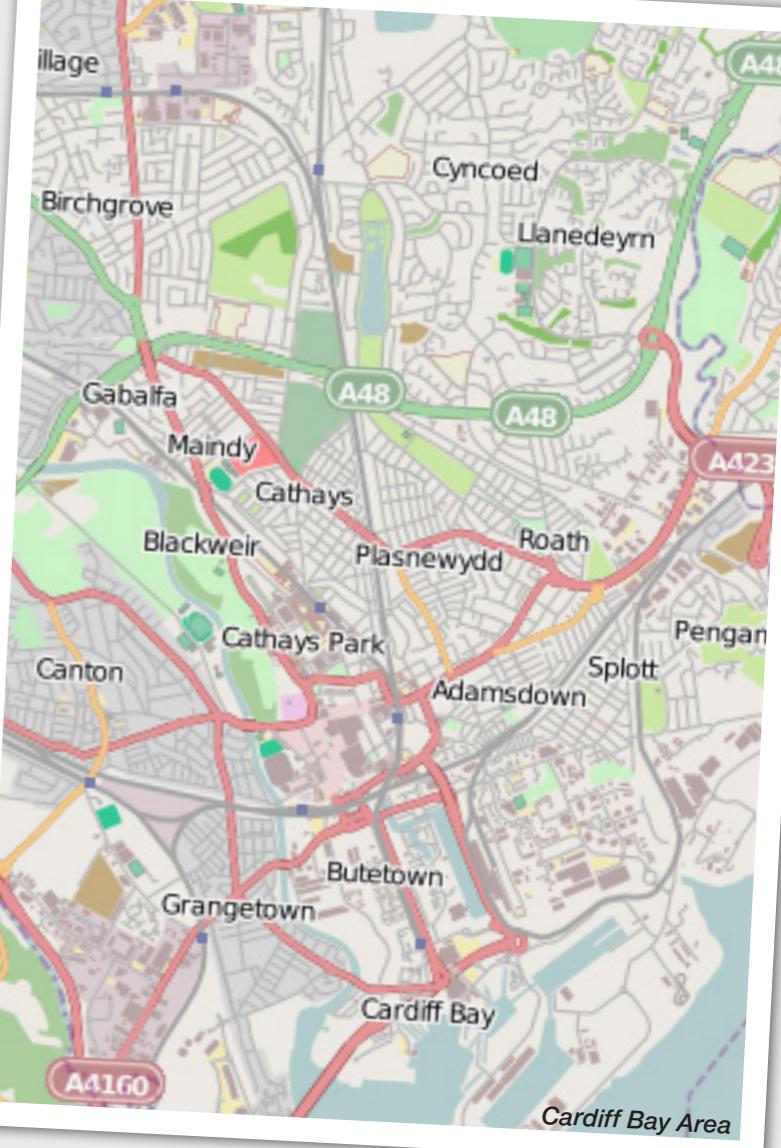
settled. Cardiff is one such city, and in this booklet we are highlighting the historical stories of migration and settlement of the various communities that now live and work there.

We have included quotes from the young people in which they talk about what they have observed in their new roles as young community historians, what they have discovered about their families and what they have learned about their communities.

Some of the communities included in this book are those represented by the young people who have worked with us on the project, or the people they have chosen to interview. Others, though, are communities with long-established historical roles in the unfolding story of Cardiff. There are other groups whose historical journeys to Cardiff have not been included this time. For those whose arrival is a relatively recent phenomenon, reliable data about their migration was unavailable at the time of writing. What we have presented, this time, is a brief description of the many and varied groups whose presence in Cardiff has been recorded locally in museums and archives and, most importantly, by our young emerging community historians.

# Introduction

Cardiff - though not everybody is aware of the fact - is one of the oldest multicultural communities in Britain. From the early 1800s to the time of the Second World War, migrants from more than 50 different countries were brought by the currents of the British Empire to work in the coal industry and international trade. Cardiff was known as 'King Coal' because of the vast amount of coal it transported to the world's furnaces.<sup>1</sup> Most of the migrants were men from the Arabian Peninsula, the Caribbean, Somalia and West Africa, but people had arrived there from all over Europe and beyond. Migrants lived mostly in Tiger Bay, or Butetown, which lay within the boundaries of Bute Street and the Glamorgan Canal, and between Greek Street and Hodges Row, many of them settling in Cardiff for good, marrying women from the South Wales Valleys. Despite the once-squalid reputation of the docklands area, it became a thriving multicultural community rich in culture and understanding.<sup>2</sup> Though many of its original buildings were demolished in the 1960s and 1970s, a generous spirit survives in the people who continue to live there.



***We've learnt loads of stories from our parents and our grandparents that we've never heard before. We've found out where our family comes from - it comes from different areas and different countries around the world.***

- Zainab, Cardiff High School

# Africa

Today, almost 4000 Black people live in Cardiff, 1.3% of the total population. Some communities from the Caribbean, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria have been here for generations. People from other African countries have arrived more recently looking for work. Others may be refugees, where bloody civil wars in their home countries have made it unsafe for them to remain there.

## Cape Verde

People from Cape Verde, an ex-Portuguese colony off the West coast of Africa, are arguably Cardiff's oldest migrant community. In fact, the first ever cargo of coal to leave Cardiff was destined for the small islands of Cape Verde. As early as the 17th century the Cape Verdeans arrived in Tiger Bay as seamen, then later as students or entertainers. This established a connection with Cardiff that is maintained to this day. In fact, Wales's first Black solicitor and lawyer was a Cardiff Cape Verdean named Manuel Delgado.<sup>3</sup>



## Somalia

The Somali community is the second largest migrant community in the UK.<sup>4</sup> Somalis are generally thought to have first arrived in Britain in the late 19th century.<sup>5</sup>

Largely from British Somaliland (now northern Somalia), early Somali migrants, the majority of whom were male, worked either on ships transporting coal and other goods or for the Merchant Navy. (Those taking up work in the Merchant Navy during the First World War, did so at a time when White British seamen were being transferred into the Royal Navy.) Most Somali seamen settled in seaports like Cardiff, Bristol, Hull, Liverpool and London's docklands. Like other Black seamen, they were assumed to be accustomed to a hot climate and hard work, and were therefore taken on to stoke the ship's boilers as 'Donkeymen' or tend to the engines as 'Greasers' below decks.

After the Second World War, 2000 Somalis and their families were settled in Tiger Bay. When the steel industry began to thrive in the city, Somali men took on a lot of the gruelling work at sea that was often unpopular with White Welsh residents, including employment on the tramp steamers. Like other Cardiff residents, in their spare time they liked to drink hot milk and play cards at

Ben Ali's dockside boarding-house. Some also attended a mosque on Sophia Street.<sup>6</sup>

Following the civil war that broke out in Somalia in 1991, when president Siad Barre was overthrown, many refugees travelled from temporary camps in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti to Cardiff because of its already established Somali community. Somalis from European countries such as the Netherlands and Scandinavia were also attracted to the UK for this reason. Today, there are around 8000 Somalis in areas of Cardiff such as Grangetown, Butetown and Riverside.<sup>7</sup>

## Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. After gaining independence from the British in 1960, it has endured a catastrophic civil war between ethnic groups and suffered from continued ethnic violence ever since. The level of corruption and control practised by some militant groups has made parts of Nigeria unsafe. This has prompted some of its residents to come as refugees to various towns and cities in the UK, Cardiff included.

## Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country suffering severe unrest. Deemed to be in a humanitarian crisis,<sup>8</sup> power struggles and rebel fighting are commonplace since the nation gained its independence in 1960. Certain areas such as the east of the country are very dangerous and its citizens often live in fear of attacks by brutal militia groups and the army. As a result, some 1000 Congolese people have arrived in Cardiff, many as refugees, and settled in various parts of the city.<sup>9</sup>

## Zimbabwe

It was after Zimbabwe gained independence from the British in 1980, and later, in the 1990s to early 2000s, that migrants came to Britain in large numbers. In 1999, reforms put in place by President Mugabe's government disrupted the lives of many of its citizens, causing widespread violence.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this unrest, the Zimbabwean population in the UK has more than tripled in recent years, and around 1000 Zimbabweans are living in Cardiff today.<sup>11</sup>



# The Caribbean

People from the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, St Lucia, St Kitts and British Honduras have been coming to Britain since the 1670s, and they are known to have lived in the Tiger Bay (Butetown) area of Cardiff since the 1880s. Like Somalis, they were seafarers and often worked as ships' cooks. Women would work in munitions factories, as clerks on the docks and as rag-pickers.

The end of the Second World War saw mass migration from the Caribbean to the UK. *HMS Empire Windrush* in 1948, carrying 493 people from the Caribbean, was famously the first of many ships to bring to Britain hopeful arrivals responding to encouraging propaganda about a new life in these islands. During the labour shortages of the following years, travel to Britain from around the Empire and Commonwealth remained unrestricted, leading to a sharp rise in migrants during the 1950s, when around 100,000 people left the Caribbean for Britain.<sup>13</sup>

In 1919 there had been race riots in Tiger Bay, sparked by high unemployment and racial tensions. But life was usually more harmonious. In the 1940s, for instance, Caribbean people would socialise at the Caribbean Café at 185a Bute Road and had built up a local team for their much-loved sport, cricket. They used to worship at the Loudon Square Mission Church.<sup>12</sup>

The children and grandchildren of these first migrants eventually became an established part of Cardiff's local community. By the 1970s a whole generation of young Black Britons with African Caribbean heritage had emerged, developing a renewed sense of Black culture in South Wales.

# Europe

Europeans too have migrated to Wales in significant numbers. Before and during the First and Second World Wars, many Jewish people from Russia and Eastern Europe fled persecution and settled in Cardiff. Judaism is the oldest non-Christian faith in Wales, and the first Jewish community in Wales was established in Cardiff in the mid-19th century. Jewish men had travelled to Wales from other port cities like Liverpool to work as peddlers once towns began to increase in size and industrialisation spread. However, following the targeting of Jewish shops across South Wales in 1911 during a period of industrial disputes, the Jewish population declined in many Welsh towns, except for Cardiff. In 1913 the total number of Jewish people living in Wales was estimated at between 4000 and 5000, a number reckoned to have declined to about 2000 at the time of the last national census in 2001.

The Reform Synagogue in Cardiff was established shortly after the end of the Second World War by refugees fleeing persecution in Europe

After the war, Britain advertised a European voluntary working service. This prompted many single men from Ireland, Spain and Italy to come to the UK to work in and around the mining industry.<sup>14</sup>

## Italy

The majority of Italian migration to Wales occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with many settling in Newport and throughout Glamorgan. Significant numbers of the new arrivals from Italy at this time came from Bardi, a village near Parma, though it has been suggested that approximately 240 people of Italian descent living Wales in 1871 were not necessarily from this region.

Those leaving Italy during this period were travelling to Wales to escape poor farming conditions in their country of birth - others arrived as ex-seamen, hoping to join the British Navy, or to work as coal merchants or shipping agents. In 1901 the Italians living in the Cardiff Consular District numbered about 430, and by 1903 there were approximately 1000 Italians living and working in Wales.

Italians settling in Wales in the 19th century famously established many cafes, restaurants and ice cream parlours. Local Welsh residents greatly enjoyed Italian dishes, especially the high-quality ice-cream, and by 1920 most villages contained at least one Italian café. Whilst the number of these cafés has dwindled over the years, many of them are still being run by the descendants of those early Italian pioneers. One such is Café R In Newport Road, Cardiff, which was opened in 2008 by Emma Rabaiotti. Her grandfather, who arrived in Wales in 1880, opened their first Cardiff café, and in 1927 his son established another on St Mary's Street.



Butetown Mural

**'I was born in Italy in Genoa, my father was a professor of Chinese and I went to school in Rome. Then I studied at the University and at the same time the war started and the university was closed. Rome was occupied first by the Germans and afterwards by the Americans. Rome was bombed a large number of times and I helped set up a system whereby the hospitals would give us the names of the ones that were [there] so that the families would know where to find them. When the Americans arrived, they found this quite odd and suspicious and I was taken as a prisoner of war!'**

- Ernesta Rogers, interviewed by Alex Harrison, Cardiff High School



## Ireland

In the mid-19th century, a famine - the potato famine (1845-1852) - devastated Ireland. One million of Ireland's people died of starvation and illness, and a further one million were forced to flee the country. Many of these migrants arrived in cities such as Cardiff and Liverpool.

In Cardiff, it was the Newtown area that sheltered those escaping the potato famine and a thriving Irish community grew up, working on the Bute docks or as steel and factory workers. The community clustered within an area of six streets that included 200 back-to-back houses, St Pauls church and a few shops and pubs. By 1881, one-third of Cardiff's residents were Irish. Although Newtown was demolished in 1966, a memorial garden remains (in the present Atlantic Wharf) commemorating the vibrant community that once lived there.

Recently, the Irish population has been refreshed by a new wave of young immigrants coming to study or further their careers in Cardiff.



**“My ancestors left Ireland probably because of the potato famine. They were traders in Ireland, therefore the trading that they were doing in farming ... was really desperate so they came to Cardiff [and] my grandmother was born on a potato boat coming over from Ireland.”**

- Barbara Imperato, interviewed by Isabel Imperato, Cardiff High School



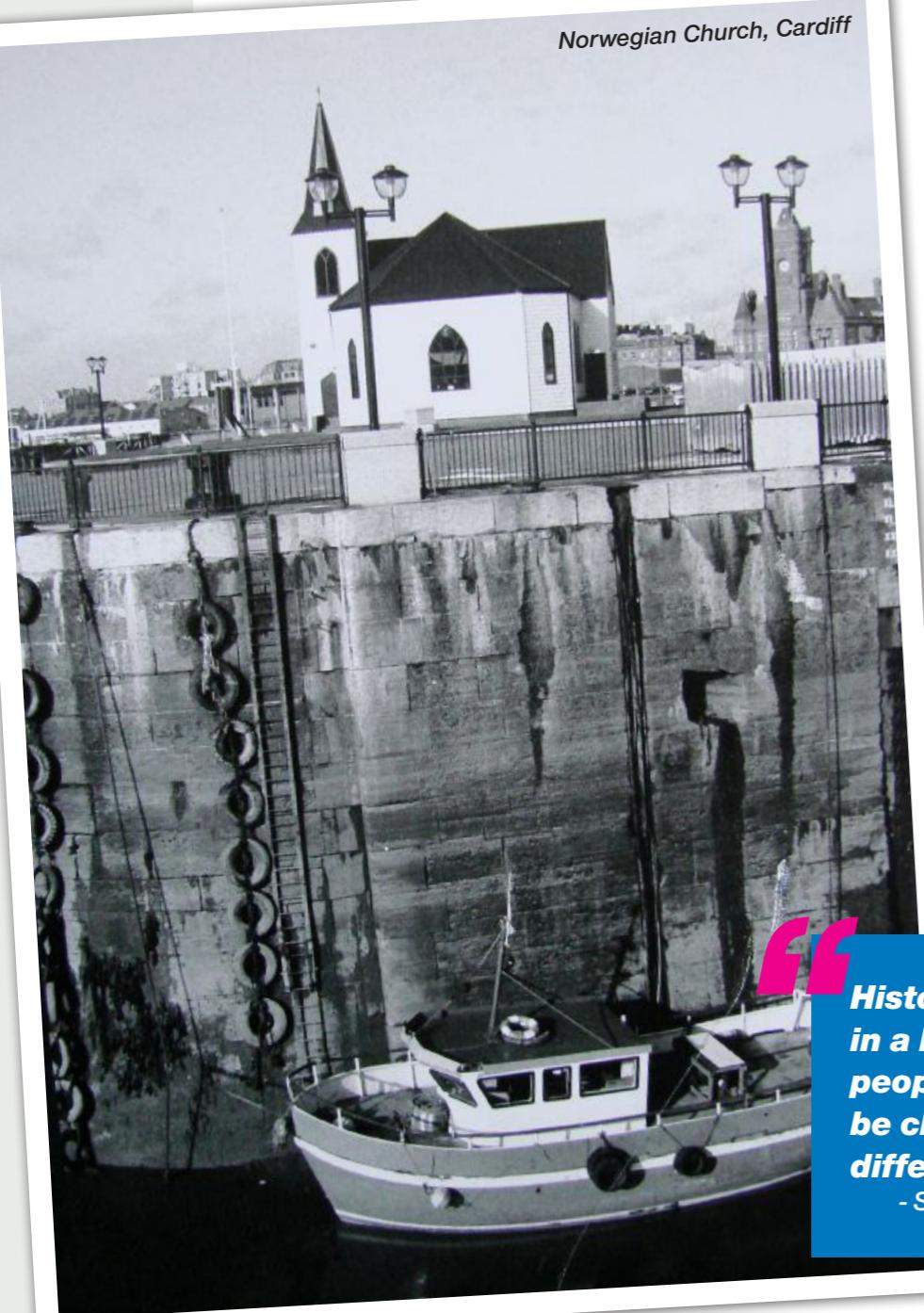
## Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community

The travellers living in Cardiff can be roughly divided into two groups. The first group are English and Irish travellers who have migrated to Britain since the 19th century. They have their own unique cultural practices and dialects. The second group are Roma travellers from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and other parts of Eastern Europe.

Originating in India, the Roma are a very old ethnic group which has spread out across the whole of Europe, and they see travelling as their way of life. The Roma have been in Britain for many hundreds of years (the first

recorded mention of a person of Roma origin in Britain was in 1501) but they still suffer daily discrimination, as do those from the Gypsy and Traveller communities. For example, a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller person may find it hard to access employment, healthcare and the freedom, for those who desire it, to enjoy their nomadic lifestyle.

In Cardiff, in 2012, there were 147 authorised and unauthorised caravan sites housing some of the Gypsy and Traveller community.<sup>15</sup> Nowadays, a significant number of travellers of all backgrounds have moved away from the travelling lifestyle and live in houses.



Norwegian Church, Cardiff

### Scandinavia

Significant numbers of sailors from Scandinavia began to arrive in Cardiff in the 19th century. Cardiff docks was the first place in Britain to have a Norwegian sailors' church. Founded in 1868 by Herman Lunde of Oslo, and built on land donated by the Marquis of Bute, the church was a lively meeting-place for tens of thousands of people each year. The most famous member of its congregation was the celebrated children's author, Roald Dahl, born in Cardiff to Norwegian immigrant parents. As exports of coal from Cardiff declined, the church fell into disrepair, but in 1987 it was moved to a new site in docklands, renovated and in 2011 began a new role as a centre for the arts.<sup>16</sup>

**History isn't just writing in a book. It's about real people, whose lives can be changed in many different ways.**

- Student, Cathays High School

## Middle East / Arab Populations

For over a hundred years, Cardiff has been home to a significant population of people from the Middle East, or those who define themselves as Arab.

As well as the communities outlined below, the city also houses families of Libyan, Egyptian, Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and Algerian descent, as well as students from the Gulf States. The 2001 Census shows that 3600 people from China and the Middle East and Arab states were living in Cardiff in that year.<sup>17</sup>

### Sudan

After Sudan achieved its independence from the UK in 1956, a bloody civil war broke out in the country. This war raged for 30 years until the removal of the Prime Minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi, in 1986. The unrest that followed led to the displacement of more than four million people, and subsequent famines killed another two million.

The UK is considered the oldest and most popular destination for Sudanese migrants. The earliest migrants were students and professional people who came to Britain to work and study. Sudanese people migrating to Cardiff have done so in the main for educational reasons with many choosing to study medicine at the University.

**“Originally I am from Libya, I was born in a town called Zawiya, 40 km west of the capital Tripoli. I had a great childhood [and have] 6 brothers and 3 sisters. I miss the narrow streets, the little town, the cattle market, I miss going to the cinema every Thursday night after school and particularly I think I miss the beach! [But] I [have] had a good education here, have met a lot of people and seen a lot of the world.”**

- Mr Ghelai interviewed by Mohamed Salah Hassan and Ahmed Ahmed, Cathays High School

### Kurdish People

The Kurdish people are the largest ethnic group in the world without their own nation-state. Around 20 million in number, they are living mainly in the countries of Armenia, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, an area known as Kurdistan. They are predominantly Sunni Muslim, and have their own language and culture.

Kurds living in the UK usually come from Turkey and Iraq, where the recent civil wars and political unrest have singled out the Kurds for persecution, putting their language and culture at risk. In Iraq, for instance, Saddam Hussein's actions had made refugees of 1.5 million Kurds. Currently, around 300 Iraqi Kurds live in Cardiff.<sup>18</sup>



The Salaman Family

## Yemen

The longest-established Arab community in the UK are the Yemenis. They have been settling in Cardiff since the 19th century, after the Yemeni city of Aden came under British control in 1839. Aden, a strategic coaling station that remained under British control until 1967, was used as a refuelling stop, so coal industry ships frequently passed through Yemen, and migrant workers began to arrive in Britain as sailors, stokers and engineers on these ships. They eventually began to seek jobs in Britain's industries, and Cardiff became an attractive destination for both working seamen and those wishing to relocate and settle.

During the 1950s, as with many other migrants arriving and settling in Tiger Bay, many of those arriving into Cardiff would settle and marry local people. One such example is from the Salaman family. Ali arrived in Cardiff from Yemen and met Olive, from the Valleys one night in Butetown who found herself lost going home from the cinema. Soon after they met they got married and ran the famous Cairo Café on Bute Street.

Yemenis would socialise in boarding-houses and cafés in Tiger Bay, and would encourage the local community to celebrate Eid by eating chicken curry and rice with them.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, a Yemeni named Shaikh Abdulla Ali al-Hakimi, grandfather of Farouk al Hakimi, the present deputy minister of Culture and Tourism in the Yemen, was imam of the Butetown mosque from the 1930s to the 1950s. He produced the first Arabic newspaper in the UK, *Al Salaam*, in which he spread the word about current affairs in the Yemen to his fellow countrymen in Cardiff.<sup>20</sup> Hakimi has described Cardiff as his 'second home' despite never having visited it, on the basis of all that his grandfather was able to achieve when living in the city.<sup>21</sup>

In 1994 the former Northern and Southern states of Yemen declared war on each other, resulting in a long period of unrest for the country. At that time many more Yemenis fled to Britain to join friends and family here.

# The Indian Subcontinent

For at least 400 years, people from the places now known as India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have been coming to Britain to live and work. Many men serving in the British army or merchant navy sought new lives in the UK throughout the 20th century. After the Second World War, Britain experienced a sharp rise in economic prosperity and encouraged foreign migrants to come and work in its growing industries. There was an influx of migrants from all over the Indian subcontinent, mainly poorer men

who came alone as they could not afford the cost of bringing their families with them until they could be sure of regular work. In the 1960s, these workers were joined by their relatives, who established places of worship, education and community centres. There are now around 12,000 Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people residing in Cardiff,<sup>22</sup> mostly in the Grangetown, Riverside, Plasnewydd and Butetown areas.

## Migrants from Pakistan

In 1947, when India was given independence from the British, the country was divided to create the new country of Pakistan alongside India. This was a far from peaceful process. Mass violence broke out, and up to one million people lost their lives.<sup>23</sup> In addition, around 8 million people were left homeless or forced in one direction or another across the new borders as a result of this partition into two countries. Many people, especially those from areas such as the Northern Punjab, Mirpur and the much disputed and often war-torn Kashmir, decided to leave the Indian Subcontinent altogether. Single men came to Britain in large numbers to answer the call for workers after the Second World War.

Another important factor in population movements was the construction of the Mangla Dam in 1966. Many thousands of people became refugees when their villages were flooded in the process of building it, and they were encouraged to move to Britain by the Pakistani government.

Cardiff's Pakistani population are these days settled mainly in the South Riverside area.

**My father came here in the 1960s for work and he decided to stay here. I do miss Pakistan but I can't go back to live there now because it's totally different to how I picture it. If someone asks us [me, my daughter] we say that we are Welsh Pakistanis.**

- Miss Hazam, interviewed by Halima Muhith, Rehana Akther and Fatima Omer, Cathays High School

## Bangladesh

Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, gained its independence from Pakistan in the 1970s. It had been occupied by the British until 1947 and the partition of India and Pakistan.

People from Bangladesh who live in the UK hail mainly from the Sylhet region, coming to the UK as lascars working on ships, some working as chefs on their way to Britain, going on to set up many of the successful curry houses to be found on most high streets in the UK. Following Independence, many Sylheti men brought their families to the UK to escape poverty.



Cricket in Saidpur



Shree Swaminarayan Temple, Cardiff

## India

Indian migrants mainly come from places that have experienced unrest since Independence and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. People from the Gujarat area of India have been travelling the world for hundreds of years, exporting goods such as cotton and other textiles to the Middle East. From the 17th century on, these trading routes had been used by the Europeans to establish links between India and the UK. When Britain colonised India, this created more links and employment

opportunities. Indeed, boatmen from some north-western Indian regions virtually monopolised the job of engine-room stoker on British ships sailing out of Bombay and Karachi.<sup>24</sup>

As with Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants, their Indian forebears had started coming to Britain hundreds of years ago. They have increased in number since the 1960s, and in Cardiff they have settled mostly in Tiger Bay. Bute Road in the 1940s featured an Indian Café at number 191.<sup>25</sup>

# Vietnam

When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 a brief war with China ensued. Conditions became dreadful in Vietnam, with citizens facing poverty, concentration camps and religious persecution.<sup>26</sup> To escape this misery, 602 Vietnamese 'boat people' arrived in Cardiff in the late 1970s.<sup>27</sup> Many had been at sea for 6 months or more, travelling 6500 miles and risking their lives in the process. Though some moved on to join family and friends in other parts of the UK, a small Vietnamese community remains in Cardiff to this day.



# The Philippines

Wales is currently home to 6000 people born in the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> In 1869, with the opening of the Suez Canal, migration to Europe had become a lot easier for those living in the southern hemisphere. In the aftermath of the Second World War, many skilled workers came from the Philippines to help rebuild blitzed Britain. Migration from the Philippines increased in the 1970s as employers started to look for workers from beyond Europe. They recruited Filipinos mainly to work in the NHS, hotels and catering services and in clothing companies.



# China

For over 100 years there has been a Chinese community in Butetown's Tiger Bay. In the very early years of settlement they encountered some hostility. In 1911, for example, the National Union of Seamen called a strike for workers' rights, suggesting that low-paid Chinese workers threatened the jobs of other local workers. Riots broke out in 32 out of 34 areas of the city during one night, and every Chinese laundry in Cardiff was set ablaze by residents in a wave of anti-Chinese anger.

However, walking along Bute Road in the 1940s, you would pass the Oriental Café and the Chop Suey Café, where Chinese people would socialise, and by the 1950s there was a Chinese laundry on almost every street in Cardiff!<sup>29</sup> However, the invention of the electric washing-machine in the 1960s led to a rapid decline for these laundries.

In their place, came more of the ever-popular Chinese restaurants. The British quickly acquired a taste for Chinese cooking, which contributed to a steady flow of people from China to Britain. Chinese factories, companies, restaurants, takeaways and shops continue to play an integral part in the British economy. Chinese people are also turning to professions such as teaching and medicine. Currently, the Chinese community is the third largest migrant community in Wales, and it makes up 0.95% of the population of Cardiff.

**Flag of China**



# What's special about Cardiff?

Cardiff, as are many other port towns and cities, is made up of a diverse group of individuals - those who over the years have moved to the city from Wales's small towns and mining villages following changes within the Welsh economy, and those who have migrated to South Wales from other parts of the world. It has a history rich in movement and resettlement, and peppered with tensions, but it is a history clearly influenced by the changes that migration has brought. The journeys of those represented in the communities outlined above are an integral part of Welsh and British history. As Fuaad Musa, of Cathays High School, proudly writes:

*Men and women, young and keen bravely left homes where pasts lay  
In search of a brighter tomorrow, they now wound up in Cardiff Bay  
Our Caerdydd, so young and free, was invaded by many a nation.  
Not in a violent way ... they just sought a new location.  
In our town, you'd now encounter new faces like Chinese and Somali  
And there were lots of new occasions too, like Eid and Diwali.  
Butetown, Riverside, Roath and Splott  
Brand new neighbours resided in the lot.  
And to think it all started with a little bit of coal  
As new faces came for the precious black gold.  
Cardiff once the heart of coal now the seat of Welsh diversity.  
So come on all aboard now to Cardiff city!*



Artwork - Rehana, Halima & Fatima

# Photo Acknowledgements

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**Page 12:** The Salaman family © Daoud Salaman and family Ali Salaman came to Cardiff from Aden in the Yemen. Olive Salaman was from the Valleys. They met one night in Butetown when Olive got lost going home from the cinema. They married soon after they met, had a family and owned the famous Cairo Cafe on Bute Street in Cardiff docks.

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**Back cover:** Daoud and Olive Salaman In this photo of mother and son, Olive and Daoud Salaaman, Daoud is holding a *jambiya*, a Yemeni dagger. 'The *jambiya* is an important and traditional part of a Yemeni man's identity,' he says. Copyright © Daoud Salaaman and family.

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# Notes and References

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