

# Kindertransport

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# Defining “Kindertransport”

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- The rescue and adaptation to a new way of life of about 10,000, mainly Jewish children who were sent between 1938 and 1940 by their parents as a last resort to countries such as Britain, Sweden, Holland, France, Switzerland and Belgium to escape Nazi persecution.
- These children are collectively called the Kinder or individually they are known as a “Kindertransportee”.



# The Kindertransports within the context of the Nazi drive to intensify Jewish emigration before (“Polenaktion”) and after Reichskristallnacht

- The Central Office for Jewish Emigration (under Eichmann), the German Police, Gestapo, and Reichsbahn, for instance, all played a role in the Kindertransport.
- The Reich Representation of German Jews, and specifically that of the “Kinderauswanderung” departments set up within the Welfare Care of the Jewish Communities in Germany aided Jews to flee.
- In Austria, the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG) planned for transporting Jewish children following the Nazi occupation of Austria.
- These groups collaborated with the Central British Fund: as of May 1938, the CBF effectively funded the IKG’s proposed emigration programme, with the full knowledge and encouragement of Eichmann.
- Goebbels and the Nazi press criticised Britain’s Palestine politics and expose British concerns for Jews in Germany as hypocritical.
- In allowing Jewish children to be brought to Britain, the British government was responding to internal but also external pressures, and trying to appear philo-semitic. The Kindertransport, seen from this perspective, was an exercise in public relations and international diplomacy. It is generally understood as a rescue action, but this is in part a post hoc view, one shaped by the Holocaust and the wish, with hindsight, to appear prescient: at the time, while it was motivated by concern for Jewish children, it was also an action which accorded with Nazi wishes to accelerate emigration after Kristallnacht.



# Organising the Rescue from a British perspective

- The rescued children came from Germany, Nazi-occupied Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.
- The groundwork for the rescue program was laid by the Central British Fund for German Jewry (CBF).
- Several organizations came together to help make the transport possible, including the CBF, the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, and the Society of Friends (Quakers).
- The emigration of some of the Polish Kinder was arranged by an Anglo-Jewish group - the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund.





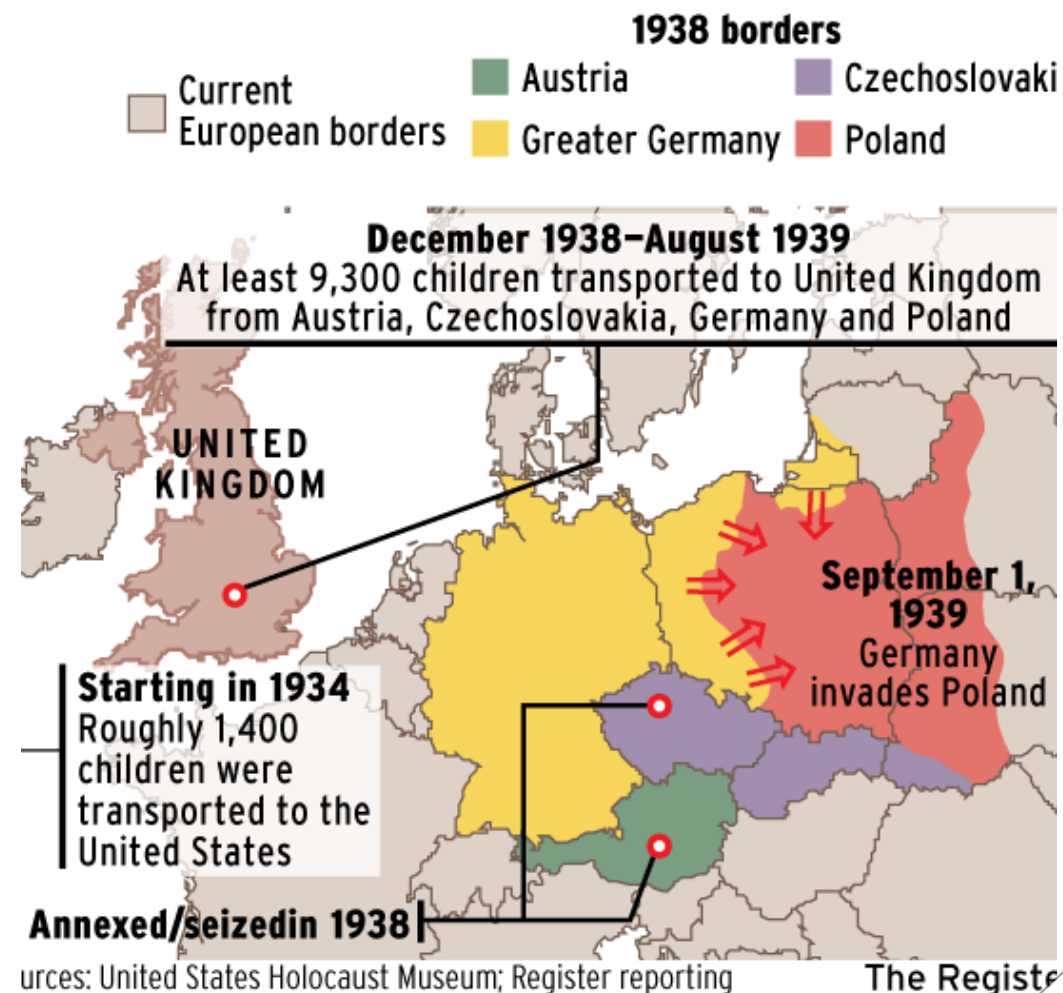
# Organisations

- However, there were other Jewish and Non-Jewish organisations who helped rescue those fleeing Continental Europe. These include;
- **Jewish Organisations**
- Hechalutz
- B'nai B'rith
- Youth Aliyah
- Woman's Appeal Committee
- Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council
- Jewish Refugees Committee
- **Non-Jewish Organisations**
- The Church of England Committee for Non-Aryan Christians
- Catholic Committee for Refugees from Germany
- Catholic Children's subcommittee
- The Riversmead Methodist Committee



# Origins, Destinations

- The children came from Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Vienna, Prague, and Danzig.
- When they arrived in Britain, they lived with foster families, in hostels, in boarding schools, on farms, in convents, or with their extended family.
- These children were aged from infants to teenagers. They travelled mainly by train and by boat but a very small number travelled by plane.
- There were also later transports to America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and some of these transports went via Britain.



## Life before the Kindertransport

- The Kinder came from a variety of social, economic, and political backgrounds:
  - Orthodox families – Orthodox Judaism teaches strict adherence to rabbinical interpretation of Jewish law and its traditional observances.
  - Assimilated families – Families which had adapted to the norms and values of the surrounding (non-Jewish) society.
  - Families who had converted to Christianity
  - Affluent families
  - A Modest home
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- Their parents also had a variety of jobs ranging from lawyers, to maids, businessmen, doctors, and mothers who ran the household. The Kinder also had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends.



# The Turning Point

- The events of Kristallnacht on 9 November 1938 brought a marked increase in anti-Semitic violence and persecution.
- Jewish children were banned from attending German schools.
- Their fathers were arrested and taken away to concentration camps such as Dachau.
- Jewish children were even rejected by their peers who used to regard them as friends.



# “We have to do something for the children!”

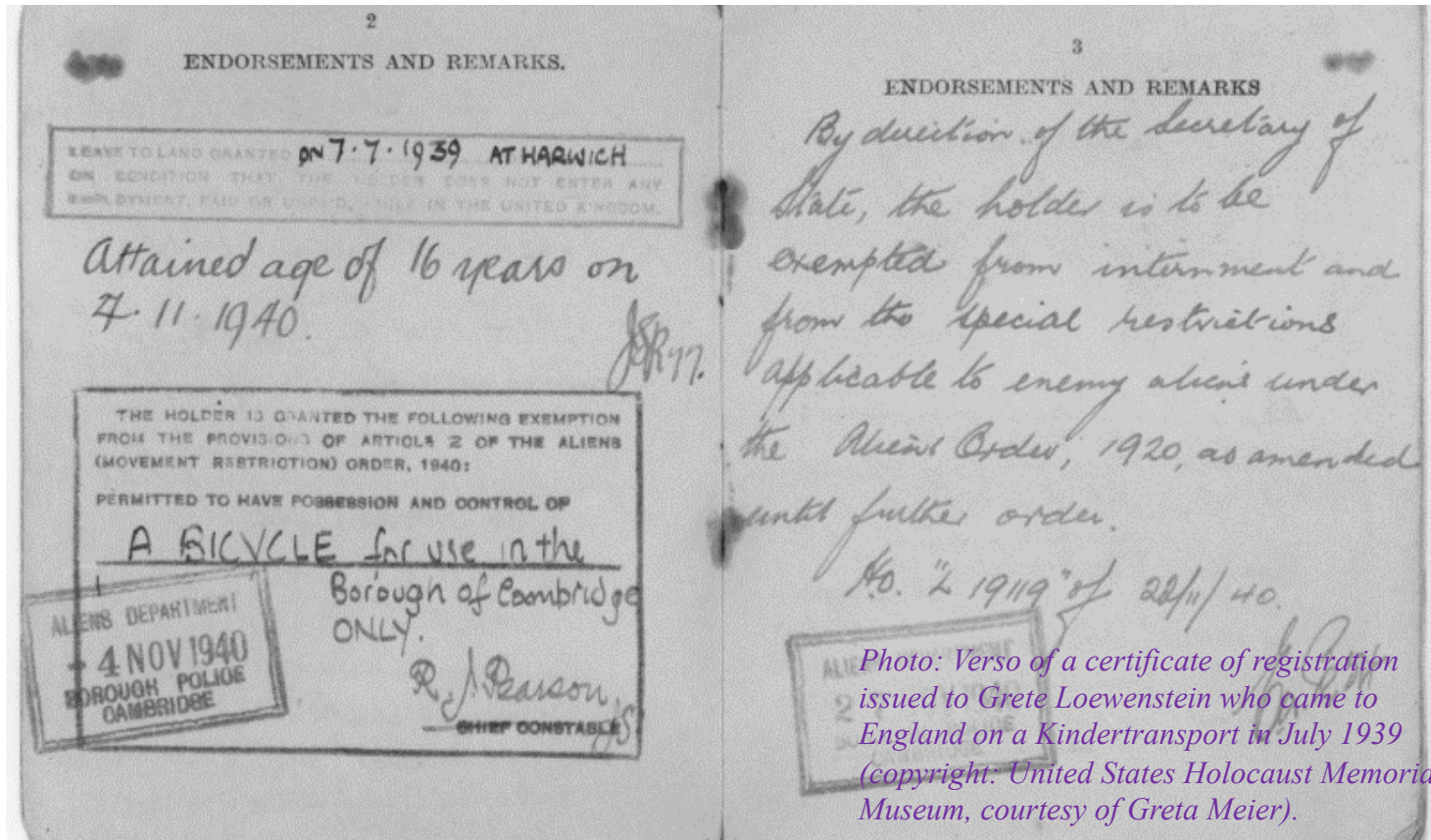


Photo: Verso of a certificate of registration issued to Grete Loewenstein who came to England on a Kindertransport in July 1939 (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Greta Meier).

- Jewish parents queued outside different embassies to get visas for their families to escape from Nazi persecution.
- They would bravely send their children to foreign countries in the hope they would find safety.
- Some countries did not want to accept adults for fear of them taking people's jobs. However, there was more sympathy towards the plight of the Jewish children.



# What the Kinder packed

- The Kinder packed many different objects both practical and sentimental. These included clothes, dolls, photographs, and religious objects. They all had to be packed into a suitcase that a child could carry.
- The Kinder were not allowed to take valuables out of the country such as jewels, but some parents would hide them in their children's clothing.



# Transports

- The first transport from Berlin departed on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1938
- The first transport from Vienna departed on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1938
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Winton transport left from Prague for Britain on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1939 but the first actual Winton transport left Prague for Sweden.
- The last Winton train came on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1939
- The final group to leave Germany departed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939
- There was also a transport that left the Netherlands for Britain on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1940
- There were also transports of Polish children and they arrived in England in February and August of 1939.



# The Journey and Arrival

- The children boarded trains from Germany, Austria, or Czechoslovakia to Holland where they were given a warm welcome and hot chocolate.
- Then they boarded a ferry from the Hook of Holland to Harwich in Britain. After this, they travelled by train from Harwich to Liverpool Street Train Station in London.
- Some Polish Kinder arrived in 1939 aboard the packet steamer *Warszawa* from Gdynia. There was also a transport that came by plane.
- *Photo: Jewish children on their way out of Nazi Germany in December 1938 (copyright: Wiener Library)*





# Arriving in Britain

- The Kinder arrived in Britain tired after their long journeys.
- *Photo: Jewish refugee girls passing through UK customs during the Kindertransport in December 1938 (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Anna Leist)*



# Foster Families

- At Liverpool Street Station, the children were gathered together, and their foster families came to collect them.
- Not all the Kinder found homes immediately. Many went to Dovercourt Refugee Camp where they were housed until further arrangements could be made.
- *Photo (left): Members of the first Kindertransport arrive in Harwich, England (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).*
- On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, all of the transports to Britain stopped – on this day, a train carrying over 200 Kinder was prevented from leaving its platform in Prague. The children did not make it to freedom.



# Other Transports to Other Countries

- America
  - The United States scheme differed to the British Kindertransport scheme because it was not government-backed like the British operation. The Wagner-Rogers Bill proposed an extra quota for refugee children to enter the States, but it never passed through Congress. Therefore, many of the children who found refuge in America were sponsored and cared for by various organizations such as the German-Jewish Children's Aid (GJCA), individuals, or extended family members. There were also two other transports to the United States. These included the transports of British evacuee children in 1940 and the transports of children fleeing unoccupied France in 1941 and 1942.
- The Antipodes
  - The transports to the Antipodes could be considered to be the second Kindertransport as many of the Kinder came via Britain and then travelled to Australia and New Zealand. Groups such as the Dunera Boys and the Deckston Children were resettled in these nations. The Dunera Boys set sail with other German, Austrian, and Italian internees on 10 July 1940 from the port of Liverpool and the ship docked in Freemantle on 27 August 1940. The boys were categorised as type B and C aliens and therefore on their arrival in Australia they were interned; they would later be released. The Deckston children were privately funded by Max and Annie Deckston who brought 20 Polish children from Bialystok in two passages 1935 and 1937.



- 1,000 children found refuge in Belgium but when Belgium was occupied by the Nazis these Kinder had to find safety yet again. Some of these children eventually escaped to America by illegally escaping into Spain and Switzerland while others were hidden in France. Although it is thought that many of the Kindertransport children survived 11 La Hille children/teenagers were murdered in Auschwitz and Majdanek.

## La Hille Children



# Difficulties the Children had to Face

- Most Kinder could not speak English when they arrived, and were not acquainted with British customs.
- Often, they came from different social, political and economic backgrounds to their foster families.
- Some of the children also had to adapt to being brought up in Christian households.
- Foster families were very supportive of the Kinder in the main, but occasionally used them as domestics.
- The Kinder quickly learned English and many threw themselves into their studies. Sometimes, however, they had to face hostility at school.
- *Photo: Elisabeth and Lux Adorno pose with Mr. Hulford, their first foster-parent after arriving in England on a Kindertransport (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Elisabeth Reinhuber-Adorno).*





# The Blitz and Evacuation

- In the course of the war, which began in September 1939, the Kinder became double refugees when they were evacuated to the countryside to escape from the bombings.
- For a second time, the Kinder had to adapt to:
  - being separated from adults
  - leaving home
  - relocating to unfamiliar surroundings
  - wearing labels around their neck
  - being placed in new schools



# Enemy Aliens

- The identity of the Kinder became problematic as war continued. Now, it was their nationality rather than their faith or race which raised concerns.
- They were categorized as type B or C enemy aliens and had to report to the local police station.
- The Nazis had stripped them of their identity as Germans, yet now it was their German background which led to fears there might be spies among them.
- Some Kinder were sent to internment camps.

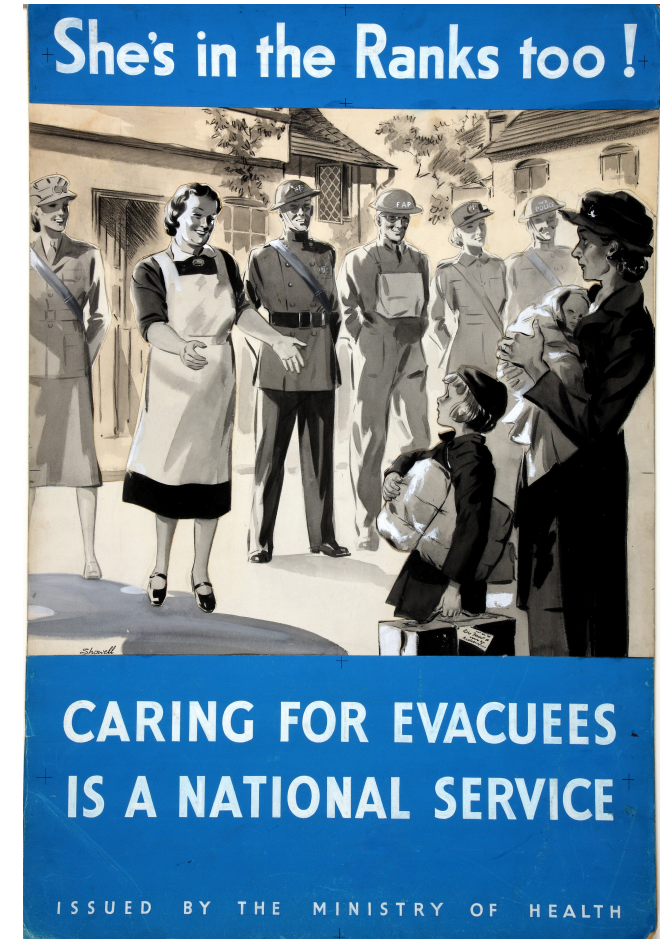
• *Photo: Trudel, Miri and Emmi Farntrug, who came to Britain as children in 1939. Trudel and her father were interned on the Isle of Man as enemy aliens (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).*





# Acceptance

- During the Blitz and evacuation the Kinder shared many similar experiences to British children. This broke down distinctions between them.
- Kinder came to serve in the British armed forces, the nursing professions, in food production and in war-related industries.
- 1000 Kinder, when they turned 18, joined the Pioneer Corps of the British Army. 30 of them lost their lives.
- The identity of the Kinder developed from that of being a Jewish refugee and a foreign presence to being a welcome member of society.
- This identity would develop again after the war as many of the Kinder became British citizens.
- *Photo: Ministry of Health Poster (courtesy of The National Archives)*





# The End of The Second World War

- The Kinder became survivors not only of the Second World War, but also of the Holocaust. But this was not the end of their story...
- After the war there were other transports of children that reached British and Swedish shores.
- These children had survived the concentration camps and the ghettos. They would find new homes in Britain and they too had to adapt to a new way of life.

The Lake District Holocaust Project tells the story of the Windermere Boys, three hundred child Holocaust Survivors, who found new homes in Britain after the war.

*Photo: Four members of the orphans' transport to England known as "The Boys" pose on a city street (copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Erica & Joseph Grossman).*



# The Families of the Kinder

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- After the war, many of the Kinder received naturalisation papers declaring them to be British citizens
- Many wrote letters to the Red Cross and other organisations to try to find out what had happened to their families. For some, these answers would take years to come. Some Kinder were later reunited with their parents.
- Others were contacted by those who had survived and told what had happened to their loved ones. Many of them had not survived.
- *Photo: A memorial “Stumbling Stone” in Heidelberg outside the home in which the Durlacher family used to live: the Durlacher children were brought to Britain on the Kindertransport, but their parents were later murdered in Auschwitz (copyright: Gerd W. Zinke. CC BY-SA 3.0).*





# Further Reading

## Histories

Judith Tydor Baumel, *Unfulfilled Promise: Rescue and Resettlement of Jewish Refugee Children in the United States, 1934-1945* (The Denali Press: Alaska, 1990).

Alan Gill, *Interrupted Journeys: Young Refugees from Hitler's Reich* (Simon & Schuster: Sydney, 2004).

Agnes Grunwald-Spier, *The Other Schindlers: Why some people chose to save Jews in the Holocaust* (The History Press: Port Stroud, 2010).

Barry Turner, *... And the Policeman Smiled: 10,000 Children Escaped from Nazi Europe* (Bloomsbury: London, 1990).

Frances Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransports: The Scottish Experience* (Bloomsbury: London, 2014).