



The Holocaust and Wales

Kindertransport 1

Jewish Life in Central Europe before the Second World War

Created by the Centre for the Movement of People (CMOP) at Aberystwyth University



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Jewish life in Central Europe before the Second World War

This is resource 1 of 4 on the topic of the Kindertransport and can be used alongside the other 3 resources. The resources explore the stories of child refugees who came on the Kindertransport to Wales.

This resource explores the life of a young Austrian Jewish girl, Dorothy Fleming, before she arrived in Cardiff.

It contains:

- Background information about the Kindertransport and where to find out more
- Useful definitions: 'historical source', 'oral history' and 'Anschluss'
- Short biography of Dorothy Fleming
- Links to audio clips of 2 oral history recordings of Dorothy Fleming
- Worksheet 'Dorothy Fleming: Life in Vienna, Austria in 1938'. The worksheet also offers an opportunity for learners to summarise their learning and could be used to assess progress
- Transcripts of the audio clips

The resource assumes a basic understanding of the Holocaust. You may wish to cover the Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) worksheet ['Defining the Holocaust'](#) before exploring these resources. See also the HET's ['General Principles for Teaching the Holocaust'](#).

Background information about the Kindertransport

From the moment Adolf Hitler and the Nazis took power in Germany in January 1933, they started to persecute their political opponents and Jewish citizens. Many tried to escape this persecution by fleeing, but few countries around the world were willing to admit them. The situation escalated following the November pogrom (Kristallnacht) and Germany's annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939. For many, this marked the 'writing on the wall'. From 1933-39, 400,000 refugees fled from the Third Reich.

There were strict rules on entry to the UK. Visas were only granted to those refugees with the prospect of permanent emigration elsewhere or whose presence was considered advantageous to the UK. Some were allowed to enter through help from relatives, friends or charities. By September 1939, around 78,000 refugees from Central Europe were living in the UK, and a further 12,000 had arrived and re-emigrated. Approximately 90% of these refugees were Jewish, and some 2,000 refugees probably came to Wales. With the outbreak of war, immigration from the German Reich effectively ended.

Fleeing across Europe to escape the Nazis, about 10,000 Jewish children arrived in Britain between December 1938 and September 1939 on the Kindertransport (children's transport). This was a visa waiver scheme for children persecuted as Jewish in the German Reich and was a response to public pressure after the November pogrom. Children had to be guaranteed by a £50 deposit from a sponsor (e.g. individuals, the Jewish community, church groups, workers' co-operatives), which covered their maintenance up until the age of eighteen – over £4,000 in today's money.



The British government only admitted unaccompanied minors through this scheme, even though most of them had lived with their parents and other members of their families before their flight. Most travelled from the German Reich by train and then boat (usually leaving from the Netherlands and arriving in Harwich in Essex), but others flew by plane.

The transports were organised by organisations on the Continent and by the Refugee Children's Movement, an umbrella organisation in the UK. Some children were supported by non-Jewish groups like the Society of Friends (Quakers). The British government did not fund or organise the transports. They were organised by hundreds of volunteers. Nicholas Winton, a British banker, is one of the most well-known, but there were many others. Winton helped save 669 children by organising transports from Prague, Czechoslovakia.

Several children ended up in Wales. Some stayed with relatives, others were fostered by Welsh families. Between 1939 and 1941, around 200 Jewish child refugees were housed at Gwrych Castle in Abergele, as well as at Llandough Castle in Glamorgan. During the war, many refugees were evacuated to Wales from other areas, like London, or the Czechoslovak State School in Llanwrtyd Wells, which was located at the Abernant Lake Hotel from 1943-5.

For more information on the Kindertransport, see:

- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40>
- <https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/kindertransportees/>



Books: Andrea Hammel, The Kindertransport: What Really Happened (Polity, 2024); Jennifer Craig-Norton, The Kindertransport: Contesting Memory (Indiana University Press, 2019); Vera K. Fast, Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport (I.B. Taurus, 2011); Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938-1945 (Purdue University Press, 2012)

What is a 'historical source'?

Any leftover (or 'trace') of the past can be considered a source. It might well be a document, but it might also be a building, a piece of art or an ephemeral object – a train ticket, or perhaps a pair of shoes. These are all 'sources' because they all provide us in different ways with information which can add to the sum of our knowledge of the past.

Sources only become historical evidence, however, when they are interpreted by the historian to make sense of the past. The answers they provide will very much depend on the sorts of questions historians are asking and what the historian wants to know. This is why it makes little sense to ask if something is 'good historical evidence', without knowing what evidence it's supposed to provide.

For more information, see:

- <https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/getting-started-reading-primary-sources>
- <https://www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/10764/whats-important-about-sources-and-evidence>



What is Oral History?

Oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker, and is usually recorded through interviews. It may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past, but can include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth.

For more information about what oral history is, see:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_history
- <https://le.ac.uk/history/outreach/besh/oral-history/what-is>

Definition of Anschluss

The Anschluss was the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938. Although forbidden under the Treaty of Versailles, the move was welcomed by many Austrians, who were also German speakers. Other European powers did not punish the Nazis for the annexation, which was the first piece of territorial expansion by the Nazis. Austria quickly began persecuting its Jewish citizens, who numbered around 200,000.

Short (1.51mins) Associated Press newsreel on the Anschluss:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI0Kx9sHoso>

For more information about the Anschluss, see

- <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/anschluss>



Historical source 1: Short biography of Dorothy Fleming

Dorothy Fleming was born in Vienna, Austria in 1928. She came from a middle-class Jewish family and lived a happy life until the Anschluss in 1938. She was ten when her parents sent her and her sister on a Kindertransport to Britain to escape the Nazis in 1939. She spent much of the Second World War with relatives in Cardiff and attended Hywel School. Unlike many Kindertransportees, Dorothy's parents were able to flee to England. She became a British citizen in 1947 and later qualified as a teacher, establishing Sheffield's first Jewish kindergarten, where she was headteacher until her retirement.

Historical source 2: [Audio Clip 1: Dorothy Fleming – Early Childhood](#)

Historical source 3: [Audio Clip 2: Dorothy Fleming – Life after the Anschluss](#)

Dorothy Fleming: Life in Vienna, Austria in 1938



Austrian citizens gather in the Heldenplatz in Vienna to hear Hitler's declaration of the Anschluss, 15 March 1938

Image: Wikimedia Commons

Image author: Heinrich Hoffmann

Original document held by USA National Archive in Washington, D.C.

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After March 1938, things quickly got worse for Jews in Vienna. By November 1938, Jewish children were not allowed to go to school with non-Jewish children and by June 1942, they were not allowed to go to school at all.

Some of the anti-Jewish laws that were forced upon Dorothy and her family in March 1938:

- Jewish people lose their rights as German/Austrian citizens
- Jewish people are not allowed to be members of sports clubs
- Jewish people are not allowed to marry non-Jews
- Jewish people are not allowed to work for the government

Eventually, Jewish people could not go to the cinema, drive a car, buy a magazine, listen to the radio, stay out late or even own a business. They could be thrown out of their homes at any time and had to wear a yellow star on their clothes, so people knew their identity. It was a terrifying and dangerous time.



TASK: Complete the boxes below to describe some of the changes that Dorothy and her family faced. Use the information provided in the text and what you heard in Dorothy's oral history.

Changes in home life:

Changes in school life:

Changes among her classmates:

Changes to leisure activities:



Transcripts

[Audio Clip 1: Dorothy Fleming – Early Childhood](#)

I went to Kindergarten in Vienna and then I started the ordinary primary school, which I remember as being very academic, very strict. When I give talks about my story, which I do, I tell the people how we used to have to sit with our hands flat on the desk in front of us unless we were writing. This is so that the teacher would know where our hands were, and when we answered a question, we had to lift them with just two fingers up like the Boy Scout salute. It was very disciplined and very academic, and we just studied the normal academic subjects.

We went to school early in the morning, and you only had morning school, and in the afternoon, you did all the extramural things. And the things I did were skating, swimming, gymnastics, and my homework, and most importantly, English.

My mother was an extraordinary woman, although it was a fashion to have your children privately taught French, she thought somehow that English might be of more use, which indeed, it was. So, I had private lessons in English, and as I came to this country when I was 10, and passed the 11+ at 11+, it's all credit to my teacher I suppose!

So ... primary school was just an ordinary primary school nearby; you went to your neighbourhood school, and I must have done reasonably well. And then I went on to a school called the Frauen-Erwerb-Verein, which is a little bit like girls' public day school, trust schools in this country, where I started early; I think we should have started at 11 but I was already there when I was 10, and that was also very academic, but it seems that I was doing alright. The idea was that all the girls who went there would eventually enter the professions, and certainly go to university. But of course, I didn't stay there long enough for that to happen.

[...]

I had a very happy childhood, and full of activity, and very proud when my sister was born when I was six, and I have very good memories of visiting

my father's shop, and going to the opera, and swimming, and going on wonderful holidays, and going skiing and skating, and playing the piano. I wasn't that keen on practising the piano although I was beginning to do pieces before we came away and that I enjoyed; scales I didn't enjoy so much! And I enjoyed my English lessons, and a great advantage to me was that I had been away from home two or three times before I came to this country, so, unlike many of the other children who'd never been away before they emigrated, for me it wasn't such a shock.

[Audio Clip 2: Dorothy Fleming – Life after the Anschluss](#)

And I remember the change after the Anschluss, when mealtimes began to be much more sombre, because to begin with they tried not to discuss what was going on in front of the children – as you do – but as time went on it got so bad, that I remember the laughing and the jokes stopping, and the discussions were all about permits and visas, and people who'd been able to get out, and those who hadn't.

[...]

And of course, things changed dramatically at school, because after the Anschluss, suddenly those of us in the class who were Jewish were kept separate from the others – 'You sit over there, you're Jewish, nobody has to talk to you.' And I remember many of the girls joining the BDM, the Bund Deutscher Mädchen, which is like the Hitler Youth for girls, and I remember what they wore, including the three-quarter length white socks, and I have to say to this day I have a dislike for three-quarter length white socks, although I'm not neurotic about it and my children wore them the same as everybody else, but I don't feel comfortable about them.

And I have a very, very strong memory of that time, which I always relate to people because it made a – it had a big influence on me. I remember the teacher telling the children that we have a new regime now, and you'll have noticed that things are different, and I want you to promise me that you will come and tell me if you hear your parents or any of their friends, or your brothers and sisters, saying anything nasty about this new regime that we have; you are to come and report to me. So, what she was doing,

she was encouraging the children to tell on their parents, as we say, and I found at age 10, that that was intolerable, and at age 67, I still find it intolerable!

And when I was training teachers, every year group that I worked with, I invariably told them 'You must do what you think is right, you must work out what you think is right and stick with that, not just what they, out there, are telling you.'



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