



The Holocaust and Wales

Kindertransport 2

The Journey to Britain

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



Created in partnership between CMOP and the Jewish History Association of South Wales (JHASW) and funded by The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR)



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Kindertransport 2

The Journey to Britain

This is resource 2 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 second resource explores the Kindertransport journey of a young Austrian Jewish girl, Dorothy Fleming. She made this journey to Britain in 1939 before eventually settling with her family in Cardiff.

It contains:

- Background information about the Kindertransport and where to find out more
- Useful definition and video: 'Who is a Refugee?'
- Short biography of Dorothy Fleming
- Link to audio clip of oral history recording of Dorothy Fleming
- Photographs showing 1930s child refugees
- Transcripts of the video and 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)

Who is a Refugee?

[Who is a Refugee? UNHCR Video](#) – first 60 seconds

United Nations (UN) definition of refugee:

'A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to seek safety. They cannot return to their country without risking their life or freedoms. It is a legal term that carries with it certain protections that refugees are entitled to.'

[United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)

An [asylum seeker](#) refers to a person who is seeking protection (or 'sanctuary') from another government whose claim has not been processed yet. If their claim is successful, they are given refugee status. Seeking asylum is a human right.



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: Dorothy Fleming – Kindertransport Journey](#)

Historical source 3: Photograph of Dorothy Fleming and her sister in 1938



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Link: <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/photograph-dorothy-fleming-and-sister-in-1938>

Historical source 4: Photograph showing young refugees of the first Kindertransport after their arrival at Harwich, Essex, in the early morning of 2 December 1938



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Transcripts

[Who is a Refugee? UNHCR Video](#) – first 60 seconds

Refugees are ordinary people who live through extraordinary times. In the country they live in conflict or persecution have put them at risk. They have no other choice but to flee and to leave their country to seek safety. This means leaving a lot behind. One of the hardest decisions a person can ever take.

So, what makes a person a refugee? Refugees are no longer in their own country and have crossed at least one border. Ongoing conflict may put them at risk if they return. Or they are at risk of persecution because of their nationality, race, or sexual orientation or because they associate with a religion, a social group, or a political opinion. Some get jailed or harmed physically or mentally.

[Audio Clip: Dorothy Fleming – Kindertransport Journey](#)

We're not absolutely sure how my parents heard about the Kindertransport, because they weren't 'about', but we think that the Jewish community must have used youngsters like Boy Scouts to go to the homes of families where they knew there were children and explain to them that this opportunity existed. And we actually have the application forms – two – one for me, and shortly after that, one for both my sister and myself.

[...]

You'll know that there were committees formed all over the country here – both Jewish ones and non-Jewish – to try and find places for these children to go, because the government had said they would accept 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children.

[...]

And so, my parents were prepared to send us to, to this country, convinced that they would be following.

[...]

So, we were given a place and we left on the 10th of January for England, and really that's a very dramatic story. My parents...we, we were allowed one piece of luggage each, and they took us to the Western Railway Station in the evening – it was always in the evening – and they were very sensible, they said their goodbyes, and were just about to leave. But I know that a lot of people were very upset, and some even snatched their children back; they just couldn't let them go. But we got into a compartment which was fairly full of children, and between us the older ones decided that the little ones would go on a luggage rack, which was made of netting; they would be more comfortable up there. So, we put my little sister up there, and she was promptly sick, which was actually very helpful, because the next half hour I was very busy, and my parents said 'look after your sister, we must go now, and we'll follow you soon. Bye-bye' and off they went, which was very sensible. And indeed, they did follow eventually.

Now the...the journey started off with rumours going down the train that soon, when we got to the border, the Nazis would come and inspect our papers and our luggage, and if they found anything that we shouldn't have had, we might get sent back or there might be trouble. And they weren't rumours, it was true, and amongst our number was a little lad about eleven, whose father had given him the family gold watch – fob watch – and he got very panicky in case the Nazis found that. So, he dropped it into the slit of a ventilator, and they didn't find it, and we crossed the border having been examined and we all breathed a big sigh of relief, because it was very frightening. And, of course, from that moment onwards he was fiddling around trying to get the watch out, and never did. And I remember with all the wisdom of my ten and a half years, saying to him 'look, it's only a watch. Your father would be very happy that you survived.' But he was most distressed. I think the reason he had the watch was partly as, as a family heirloom, but partly his father would have thought maybe he can sell it and maybe live on it. There are pictures also of, of children who came with a violin – again, partly perhaps to sell, partly to make a living.

