The Holocaust and Wales

Kindertransport 3

Arrival in Wales

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

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This is resource 3 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 third resource explores the story of Bea Green, a German Jewish child refugee, who travelled to Britain on the Kindertransport and lived in Wales after her school was evacuated there.

It contains:

- Background information about the Kindertransport and where to find out more
- Brief description of enemy alien status during the Second World War and where to find out more
- Useful definition: the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism
- Short biographies of Bea Green and Dorothy Fleming
- Links to audio clips and video of oral history recordings of Bea Green and Dorothy Fleming
- Photograph of Bea Green's Enemy Aliens and Internees Card
- 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)

Enemy alien status during the Second World War

Following the outbreak of war in September 1939, all Germans and Austrians in Britain were classified as 'enemy aliens', regardless of their attitude towards the Nazi regime. The Home Office set up 120 tribunals to address the issue between September and December 1939, with all 'aliens' classified into three categories (A, B or C), depending on their perceived risk to the war effort. Some were barred from using motor cars or bicycles, or from owning a camera or maps (even those in guide books). Those deemed most 'at risk' were interned in various camps across the country, the largest of which was Hutchinson Internment Camp in the Isle of Man.

Although only a few hundred people were interned at first, as the war progressed the government grew more alarmist. In May 1940, 'protected areas' were set up around coastal areas deemed susceptible to invasion in which no aliens were permitted, and all aliens classed in the middle 'risk' category were interned. By June 1940, this was extended to all German, Austrian, and, by this stage, Italian, men over the age of 16, alongside women deemed in the upper two 'risk' categories. The result was the internment of approximately 28,000 'enemy aliens' (most of whom were Jewish refugees).

For more information on enemy aliens and internment, see:

- https://wp-research.aber.ac.uk/nsrefugeeswales/history/internment/
- https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/collar-lot-britains-policy-internment-second-world-war/
- https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=pistol-enemy-alien.pdf&site=15

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism

'Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.'

Link: https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism

Historical source 1: Short biography of Bea Green

Bea Green (née Siegel) was born in Munich, Germany in 1925. She lived in a block of flats in the city with her father (a lawyer), her mother and older brother. Bea attended the local primary school and had a happy life. In March 1933, her father was brutally beaten in an antisemitic attack. Even after this terrible event and with Hitler now in power, initially Bea's family had mixed feelings about leaving. Her father had built a successful legal practice and they had an agreeable life.

But in 1938 Bea's school was closed and after Kristallnacht things became increasingly more dangerous and desperate. The family knew they had to do everything they could to get out. Eventually, in June 1939, Bea travelled to Britain on a Kindertransport leaving her parents behind. She was taken in by the Williams family in England. After the Second World War started, Bea was evacuated to Wales where she stayed for some time. Eventually, several years later, she was reunited with her parents. She settled in South London with her husband and three children and had a career as a linguist and translator and would speak to groups about her experiences.

Historical source 2: 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. 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.

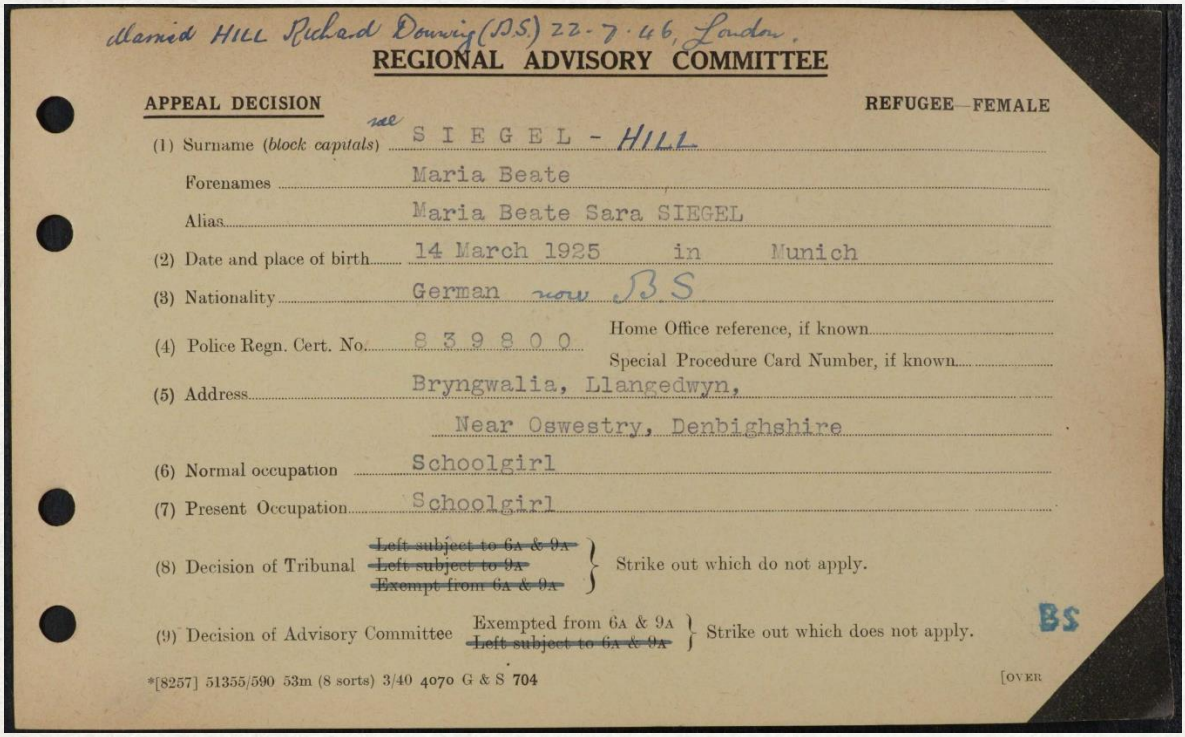
Historical source 3: Video Clip: Bea Green – Arriving in Wales

Historical source 4: Audio Clip: Bea Green – Enemy Alien

Historical source 5: Audio Clip: Dorothy Fleming – Enemy Alien

Historical source 6: Audio Clip: Bea Green – Antisemitism

Historical source 7: Photograph showing Bea Green's Enemy Aliens and Internees card, 1941-7



married HILL Richard Downie (BS) 22.7.46, London.

REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPEAL DECISION — REFUGEE—FEMALE

(1) Surname (*block capitals*) see SIEGEL - HILL

Forenames Maria Beate

Alias Maria Beate Sara SIEGEL

(2) Date and place of birth 14 March 1925 in Munich

(3) Nationality German now BS

(4) Police Regn. Cert. No. S 3 9 8 0 0 — Home Office reference, if known

Special Procedure Card Number, if known

(5) Address Bryngwalia, Llangedwyn, Near Oswestry, Denbighshire

(6) Normal occupation Schoolgirl

(7) Present Occupation Schoolgirl

(8) Decision of Tribunal ~~Left subject to 6A & 9A~~ ~~Left subject to 9A~~ ~~Exempt from 6A & 9A~~ } Strike out which do not apply.

(9) Decision of Advisory Committee Exempted from 6A & 9A ~~Left subject to 6A & 9A~~ } Strike out which does not apply. BS

*[8257] 51355/590 53m (8 sorts) 3/40 4070 G & S 704 [OVER

Image: Enemy Aliens and Internees card for Maria Beate Siegel. Findmypast. Original document: © Crown Copyright. Image reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, London, England

Link: https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1832751

Transcripts

Video Clip: Bea Green – Arriving in Wales

However, when we were evacuated, most of the school did not come with us. In the end, I think, we were only about twelve or thirteen or fourteen children that got onto this train to Wales, because the school had rented or pre-empted the rent – whatever they did, I don't know – of a house in Wales. Presumably the Creighton-Davieses were Welsh, Welsh origin, so that would have been a natural thing for them to do. So, we got onto this train to Welshpool, from there to be taken, I don't remember how, to this farmhouse called Mathrafal – and a friend of mine told me the other day, it still exists. So, we went to Mathrafal near Welshpool.

Now, on that train journey was another period of fear, because, as I said before, I wasn't afraid when the bomb fell, I wasn't afraid when I was cut – it just didn't bother me, I mean, you know, you, you get into the cellar and you're alive and that's all that matters. But when we were sitting in a train, either with no lights on or with the blinds down, going through town, through town after town with sirens going, and you felt trapped in a train, that was real … that was scary, I mean, I was actually really frightened. But then we wound up in Wales! Now, two things: a, it was wonderful to be in Wales, I adore Wales. The Welsh adored me in principle because I wasn't English – those Welsh that I met; you know, there's a problem between Welsh and English sometimes. And I loved it because the war was far away. And while we kept the blackouts, it was sort of a perfunctory thing to do, but, I mean, there were no aeroplanes, nothing.

However, the farmhouse was haunted. Now, I do not believe in ghosts, intellectually I don't, but there were funny bangings going on in this house. Again, I was sort of reading a bedtime story to the little ones, and there was this thump, thump, thump. And one of the little girls cried, and I said, 'No, no, no, no, it's just the headmistress poking the fire.' Well, it was nowhere near the fireplace – they didn't know that. And the headmistress said, 'I can't stay in this house, it's haunted!' So, what the truth of the matter is, I don't know, but it was, it was creepy. So, she found a very modern house, probably thirties-built thing, where three of us had to sleep in one small double bed, we hadn't the width to sleep end-on, so the one

who slept in the middle never had any cover at all, ‘cause the other two sort of stretched it over her.

But, well, we survived that too, and then she found a big house to rent, called Bryn Gwalia Hall near Oswestry, and that was a bit rough in the sense that this was winter, and there were – there was not a stick of furniture in this place, and she managed to organise a cooker, and the local carpenter made us beds out of bits of wood that he made into legs and chicken wire. And we just had blankets, and of course, it was terribly cold, so I put my blankets on the floor instead and slept on the hard floor with the blankets. And in due course, I guess we must have got beds, and anyhow, spring came, and the bluebells came out and the daffodils, and I had become a company leader for the Guides, so I’d joined the Girl Guides, and I’d, I’d passed umpteen badges by then, even before we left.

Audio Clip: Bea Green – Enemy Alien

In March of 1941 I was 16, and between March the 13th and March the 14th, I became an enemy alien. I had to register at the police and somewhere or other I might still have this – no, I don’t think I have – anyhow, I had this photograph in a little grey aliens’ registration book which showed how cold and chilblain-ridden I was at the time. You see, to me, I wasn't a refugee; to me, I’d come here: what they thought was their problem.

When I went to this police station, I suppose it was fortunate that it was in Wales because they made light of it. So, I mean I just knew it hit people and again it was something like – happened like bad weather. You know, you just took it and I had this card and the Welsh police were rather sweet and ... you know I, it didn’t – I don’t think it impinged a lot. What impinged was something much deeper that I was coping with by saying to myself ‘I'll show them who I am.’

Audio Clip: Dorothy Fleming – Enemy Alien

So, we, we were in Cardiff and there I went to Howell's School, which is an excellent school. I don't know how my mother heard that this was the best school, but it clearly was, and they must have scrimped and scraped. I had some sort of a scholarship, but nevertheless they had something to pay. But you know, Jewish people value education very highly and they felt it was a sacrifice worth making.

So, apart from the odd raids, the first I knew really seriously about the war was the day I became 16. And I think at 16 I became an enemy alien. Up to then I'd been a child but when you were 16 you were an enemy alien and I had to go and report to the police and my fellow pupils just laughed me out of it and said, 'Don't worry, we know you're not an alien.'

Audio Clip: Bea Green – Antisemitism

While still in Aberystwyth, I did come across some antisemitism in an extraordinary form. A fellow student in my year also doing German – a chap called Stan Price – had been, as an even younger man, full of enthusiasm for Hitler and all his ideas and ideals and been in Germany and worked for the Arbeitsdienst [Reichsarbeitsdienst, meaning National or Reich Labour Service] but come back from a year or two doing this in order to pursue his studies and then the war broke out and he joined the army. I mean, he was as fit as a fiddle and joined the army. And on one of the manoeuvres that he was on he either shot himself in the foot or trod on a mine or something … anyhow he shot his big toe off or his big toe was lost somewhere.

And so, he was invalided out of the army and partly because of his erstwhile convictions and partly because he resented the British army for having got him to lose his toe, he reverted to this or took up again his original ideas of, you know, the Herrenvolk and superior..., racial superiority and all of that and spouted this publicly. When he realised that it upset me – because apart from that we had been colleagues and friends and in the same group – there were only about six or seven of us in our year doing German – he said 'Well, you know, you're alright.' You know,

the argument you're alright, it's all the other Jews. And I remember there – because of the way he spoke – one couldn't actually argue against him, because there was nothing tangible to argue; it was an attitude which was so entrenched and so profoundly ill thought out, that certainly at that stage there was nothing, I felt there was nothing I could do about Stan Price. So, I remember I walked down to the beach – I don't know if you know Aberystwyth but it's a pebbly beach not a sandy beach – and I sat on the pebbles and wept into the sea. I was just so frustrated and so upset thinking that here I'd come away from this thing only to meet it again.