

## General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company at Treforest Trading Estate

### INFORMATION SHEET AND ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNERS

#### 1. Treforest Trading Estate

Treforest Trading Estate, near Pontypridd, was set up as part of the Special Areas Act of 1934. The act was created to help parts of Britain with high unemployment, and it offered support to businesses to set up in these areas. When the Nazis began seizing Jewish businesses in Germany in the years after 1933, many Jewish refugees fled here to establish their businesses with help from this scheme.

By May 1940, 55 businesses started by Jewish refugees were operating out of Treforest. They provided jobs for around 1,800 local people.

#### 2. Activities

##### ACTIVITY 1

a) Read the information about General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company and the Schoenmann family:



[The wall plaque for the General Paper & Box Manufacturing Company in Treforest Trading Estate, 1941.](#)

*Image courtesy of George Schoenmann.*

George Schoenmann was born in Vienna in 1934. George's father, Paul, a prolific businessman, had owned a cigarette paper factory in Vienna but after the *Anschluss* (the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany on 12 March 1938), the Nazis confiscated all Jewish businesses in Austria. Paul received permission to set up General Paper & Box Manufacturing Company on the Treforest Trading Estate in 1938, and the family came to Wales as refugees in 1939 and moved to Whitchurch, Cardiff.

The company specialised in two areas: luxury cardboard boxes and cigarette paper. The boxes were assembled by hand in the factory.



[Workers at the General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company reinforcing the corners of pre-folded boxes.](#)

*Image courtesy of George Schoenmann.*

During WW2, their business was deemed “vital to the war effort” as cigarettes were classed as “essential to keeping up morale both in the forces and at home”.<sup>1</sup> The company also made tools for the Ministry of Defence.

Rizla bought the company in 1948 and Paul was forced out in 1951. He subsequently started a furniture company in Bridgend.

George attended school in Brecon and after the war worked for many of the Jewish businesses at Treforest, as well as his father's furniture company. He set up his own company selling electrical spare parts in 1979, before retiring aged 70.

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<sup>1</sup> George Schoenmann, *Memoirs... The Long Road to Retirement* (Self-published, March 2011), p. 18.

b) Listen to two oral history clips of George Schoenmann describing [his time at school](#) and [his father's factory at Treforest](#).

### Oral History Transcripts:

#### [George Schoenmann talks about being bullied at school](#)

*I went to the state school and that didn't work out very well 'cos I was—I couldn't speak English. And I was teased mercilessly. You know, they would call me names: 'Jerry' was the favourite one, 'cos of course the war had just started. And they would run around pretending to be aeroplanes, as little children did in those days, with arms outstretched [laughs], making noises and I was always the, the Messerschmitt which got shot at. Anyway, it was, it wasn't very pleasant and the fact that I couldn't speak a word of English of course and no effort was really made to include me in the lessons. So, every day at breaktime, at ten o'clock, I sneaked out through the gate and ran home [laughs]. And this, this went on for three or four months apparently until—well, nobody missed me for a start, but I was caught by, by my father's sister, my aunt, who came to visit my mother unexpectedly and found me sitting on the railway bank and watching the trains! And of course, she told my mother and that was the first intimation that my mother had that something had gone wrong at school.*

#### [George Schoenmann talks about the General Paper and Box Manufacturing Company](#)

*The units in—that were built by the government on the Treforest Estate, they all seemed to be of one design. They were very plain, nothing fancy at all. Just a utilitarian building. I, I think it was about seven or 8,000 square foot and the building was—it had offices at the front and it was divided roughly into half and the slightly bigger half, probably 55 percent was devoted to cigarette paper and the other 45 percent was the box making division. They made boxes—well, I don't know, you could put shoes in them—all that sort of thing. Although, of course, they didn't do so well in the war because on the one hand there was very little new stuff being produced, and the one thing that you didn't need was luxury boxes [laughs]. So, they did struggle a bit and the main revenue stream was from the cigarette paper.*

c) Consider and discuss in pairs or small groups:

- Why did the other children at George's school bully him?
- How would you feel if someone bullied you for your nationality/religion?
- How might the school have made George feel more included?

### ACTIVITY 2

Children who came to the UK were generally only permitted to take one suitcase with them. Especially precious items were often kept in a small box inside the suitcase.

a) Working in pairs or small groups, consider and discuss:

- If you were forced to flee from your home, what belongings would you want to take with you? Could they fit inside a suitcase?
- Why have you chosen these particular belongings?

**b)** Communicate the main discussion points to the whole class.

### **ACTIVITY 3**

**a)** Create your 'precious items' box:

- Cut out the box template on the sheet of paper you have been given.
- Draw or paint the items and/or memories you would take with you on the template. Fold the box so that your items/memories are safely inside.
- Assemble the box: fold it along the dotted lines and glue/tape it together.

**b)** Consider and discuss in small groups or as a class:

- What items have you put in your small 'precious items' box and why?



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