

Kindertransport

Our July speaker was Mike Levy, who has written a book titled 'Get the children out- the unsung heroes of the Kindertransport' (German for children's transport). Mike told us about his book and the research which he undertook in the course of writing it. A former teacher and journalist, he was interested in discovering the unknown men and women who helped to save the lives of so many youngsters, mostly Jewish, who were brought over to Great Britain from Nazi Europe in the months leading up to World War 2.

These children, under the age of 17yrs, were granted temporary refuge in Britain – often with the expectation that they would eventually be reunited with their families afterwards. The operation was largely facilitated by Jewish organisations and the British Government. Between 1938 and 1939, 10,000 children came here, without their parents, mainly from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The first group arrived in Britain on December 2nd 1938 with the last group leaving Germany on September 1st 1939, shortly before the outbreak of WW2.

One notable rescuer was Sir Nicholas Winton, a British financier, who organised transport from Prague for 669 children. Many years ago, some of you might remember, Esther Rantzen traced and invited surviving children to be part of the audience for a 'That's Life' TV special programme where they memorably stood up one by one to surprise Nicholas Winton who had no idea that half the audience surrounding him were his former child survivors. The Winton train (March-August 1939) brought the children overland from Germany to Harwich via the Hook of Holland and finally to London's Liverpool Street Station. A memorial statue titled The Arrival was placed in the station forecourt in 2006 (see photo). Nearer to home, a memorial in

Harwich was unveiled in 2022. An exhibition at Harwich in 2024 was called 'And the policeman smiled', a fond memory for many frightened children arriving in a strange place.

Many children had been housed in the former Warner's holiday camp at Dovercourt. Many years later Mike met a survivor David Hughes at a reunion and he proudly showed Mike a souvenir of those days – a Dovercourt chalet key fob which he had always kept in his pocket. Tickets to Harwich had been paid for by parents and ID cards issued for educational purposes. Other places of safety included Pakefield Holiday Camp, St Felix School Southwold and Barham House at Claydon, Suffolk.

Mike Levy's quest was to find the other less well-known people involved in the rescue effort. Sir Samuel Hoare was Home Secretary at the time and instrumental in allowing the children to come to Britain. Bertha Bracey, the general secretary for the Society of Friends (Quakers) has had a blue plaque tribute to her as one of the founders of Kindertransport. Another commemorative blue plaque can be found at Lowestoft station. Other names to mention in grateful thanks are Helen Bentwich, Brigadier General Sir Wyndham Deedes, Rabbi Dr. Schonfeld and Alan (later Lord) Sainsbury.

Anyone wanting to find out more or to buy a copy of his book can contact Mike Levy via his website www.lemonsoul.com

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