

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

BRITISH DIPLOMATS AND OTHER BRITONS
WHO HELPED JEWS ESCAPE FROM NAZI TYRANNY

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The courage and ingenuity of those who rescued Jews from the clutches of Nazi Germany is a high point in the moral progress of mankind. At a time when fear and hatred threatened the whole continent of Europe, individuals – many of them diplomats accustomed to the dignified luxury of peaceful rooms and calm conversation – made enormous efforts to find avenues of rescue for those whose lives were in daily peril.

From 1933 to 1939 the policy of Nazi Germany towards its Jewish citizens was to encourage their emigration. As Nazi persecution drove tens of thousands of German and Austrian Jews to search for visas to foreign havens, British diplomats were among those who took the initiative to save life.

There were considerable obstacles, as many individuals shared the ignorance and prejudice that was then prevalent. Five weeks before the outbreak of war, an official at the Foreign Office in London declined to help a group of Czech Jews who had fled from the German regime's anti-Jewish policies on the grounds that 'they are not in any sense political refugees, but Jews who panicked unnecessarily & who need not have left.'

The official added that these Jews 'are quite unsuitable as emigrants & would be a very difficult problem if brought here.'¹

But the instinct to help could not be crushed, and British diplomats were to take a lead in helping Jews find safe havens in both Britain and British Mandate Palestine.

Sixty-five years after the end of the war in Europe, the world is still confronted by situations of grave danger. Diplomats and people of good will in many lands – even when not supported by their governments or colleagues - still have the power to offer a helping hand. The desire to help – far older even than the parable of the Good Samaritan - knows no barriers of race or creed. It is as much needed today as it ever was. Even a handful of people can be effective, when they are determined to make a difference to the fate of their fellow human beings.

On 7 April 1933, less than three months after Hitler became Chancellor, Jews were forbidden by law from continuing to work in any branch of the civil service, which included teachers at schools and universities. In reaction to this harsh dismissal, an Academic Assistance Council was set up in Britain, which launched an emergency fund to find university positions and financial help in Britain for the dismissed scholars, and, in the

¹ Note by Patrick Reilly, Foreign Office papers, FO 371/24100.

words of the Council's secretary, Esther (Tess) Simpson, 'to salvage the displaced academics'.²

In its first three years, the Academic Assistance Council gave help in Britain to 1,300 German-Jewish academics, first to overcome the difficulties of being refugees, and then to find permanent professional employment. In addition to the Academic Assistance Council, the Society of Friends – the Quakers - was also active in helping German Jews to find work in Britain.³ During this three-year period, from 1933 to 1936, the British Embassy in Berlin, headed first by Sir Horace Rumbold and then by Sir Eric Phipps, issued entry visas to Britain for an average of 10,000 German Jews each year.

British schools were at the forefront of rescue and rehabilitation. In 1934, Ludwig Rosenberg, from Berlin, was among the German-Jewish schoolteachers invited to teach in Britain: he came with his wife and their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter.⁴ At King's School, Taunton, the headmaster, Dr R.D. Reid, welcomed to his school a German Jewish boy, Kurt Abrahamsohn, from the Baltic port of Stettin. That boy, later Kenneth Ambrose, recalled how Dr Reid, 'saw it as his duty to

² R.M. Cooper (editor), *Refugee Scholars: conversations with Tess Simpson*, page 31.

³ In the United States, an Emergency Committee for Aid to Displaced German Scholars did likewise, helped by the Rockefeller Foundation.

⁴ Ludwig Rosenberg's daughter, in conversation with the author, 24 March 2002.

look after me *in loco parentis*.⁵ Headmasters and teachers throughout Britain did likewise.

For some British travellers in Germany after 1933, showing contempt for Nazi persecution of the Jews was a natural reaction to the abomination of racism. Lord Drogheda, who in 1935 went for his honeymoon to Bavaria, later recalled 'pretending to be Jewish in order to be turned out of a restaurant which displayed prominently a sign *Juden hier Unerwünscht* (Jews not wanted here)'.⁶

Another of those who witnessed the persecution of the Jews in those early years was Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, then a British schoolboy. He later recalled how, at the age of twelve, he had 'first-hand experience of the anti-Semitic frenzy that was gripping the members of the National Socialist party in Germany in those days. I had just moved from a private school in England to attend the boarding school at Salem in the south of Germany belonging to one of my brothers-in-law. The founder of the school, Kurt Hahn, had already been driven out of Germany by Nazi persecution and this was well known throughout the school. It was the custom of the school to appoint a senior boy to look after the new arrivals. I was unaware of it at the time, but it so happened that our "Helper" as he was called, was of Jewish origin. One night he was over-

⁵ Kenneth Ambrose, 'The Suitcase in the Garage: Letters and Photographs of a German Jewish family, 1800-1950', manuscript, 1996.

⁶ Lord Drogheda, *Double Harness: Memoirs by Lord Drogheda*, page 59.

powered in his bed and had all his hair cut off. You can imagine what an effect this had on us junior boys. Nothing could have given us a clearer indication of the meaning of persecution. It so happened that I had played cricket for my school in England and I still had my cricket cap with me. I offered it to our Helper. I was pleased to see that he wore it.’⁷

Persecution and racism, which had already permeated all walks of German life, could be challenged: a schoolboy had made a gesture of understanding.

The work of the British diplomats stationed in Germany was vitally important in securing permission for Jews to leave Germany. In 1937 the British Consul-General in Munich, John Carvell, issued Palestine Certificates that permitted entry into Mandate Palestine. This led to the release of three hundred Jewish men being held in Dachau concentration camp. The men had been accused of ‘race defilement’, because they were married to, or were in a relationship with non-Jewish German women.⁸

In March 1938 German troops entered Vienna, and Austria was annexed to Germany. A further 183,000 Jews came under

⁷ Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, speaking at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 21 October 1994, at the ceremony honouring his mother, Princess Alice of Greece. Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations, file 6080.

⁸ Benno Cohn, ‘Address on the occasion of the planting of a forest near Harel in remembrance and in the name of Major Foley, 10 July 1959.’ Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

Nazi rule. The British Passport Control Officer in Vienna, Captain Kendrick, was besieged by applicants for visas. One of those applicants, eighteen-year-old George Weidenfeld, later recalled going with his mother to an interview with Kendrick. 'Just as he was about to end the interview, my mother broke down and sobbed. Captain Kendrick relented and gave me the flimsiest of all visas - the right to enter England for a period of three months in transit to a final destination.⁹ Weidenfeld remained in Britain, worked for the BBC during the war, first for the Monitoring Service and then as a news commentator, and became a leading British publisher, and member of the House of Lords.

Captain Frank Foley, the British Passport Control Officer in Berlin, was active, from his office in Tiergartenstrasse, in seeking means to expedite the escape of Jews from what had become Greater Germany, including Austria. In his official report to the Foreign Office in London for June 1938, Foley wrote: 'In Berlin as well as in other parts of Germany there were systematic house to house searches for, and arrests of Jews; cafés were raided and even cinema halls were emptied of Jews so that they could be arrested and taken to concentration camps. In Berlin the methods of persecution were particularly severe... it is no exaggeration to say that Jews have been hunted like rats

⁹ George Weidenfeld, *Remembering My Good Friends: An Autobiography*. London: HarperCollins, 1995, page 76.

in their homes, and for fear of arrest many of them sleep at a different address overnight.’¹⁰

Foley helped several thousand German and Austrian Jews to leave for Palestine between 1936 and the outbreak of war. His biographer has estimated the number at ten thousand.¹¹

Jews wanting to leave had often to use convoluted methods to escape. Foley was glad to participate in, and even initiate, such methods. In 1991, in supporting him for a Righteous Among the Nations Award at the Yad Yashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Sabina Comberti wrote about her father, Wolfgang Meyer-Michael, an aspiring potter. He could not raise the £1,000 needed for a ‘Capitalist’ certificate’ - the most common requirement for emigration to Palestine. It was Foley who suggested finding the money through someone who would vouchsafe it: ‘Just get a promise – you don’t have to use it,’ was Foley’s comment. ‘My father then looked up a cousin in Holland, who understood the dilemma. They drew up two documents. In one, the cousin promised to lend my father £1,000 when/if he needed it. In a second my father declared the first one invalid and promised not to make use of it.’

Sabina Comberti added: ‘Mr Foley knew of course that this was a ploy, but issued the visa immediately. Meyer-Michael was deeply touched. They had discussed art and poetry. Mr

¹⁰ Berlin Consular Report (Foley), 16 July 1938. Foreign Office Papers, FO 371/21635.

¹¹ Michael Smith, Foley, *The Spy Who Saved 10,000 Jews*.

Foley seemed very interested and my father promised him the first decent pot, if he ever made it in Palestine.'

Wolfgang Meyer-Michael and his wife reached Palestine at the end of 1935. Sabina Comberti followed in March 1937, in a boat of unaccompanied children and seven hundred adults. In writing to Foley in 1947, she sent him from Palestine the ceramic pot that her father had promised him.¹²

Foley's work, although often clandestine, has been discovered in many corners. The historian Naomi Shepherd writes in her biography of Wilfrid Israel - a Berlin Jew who made his own strenuous efforts to enable Jews to leave Germany: 'If Wilfrid had any British source of protection in Berlin, it was Foley.' When one of Wilfrid Israel's Jewish friends arrived in Berlin from Palestine in early 1938 to help Jews leave Germany, Foley provided him with a British passport, replacing his Palestinian Mandate passport, from which it could be deduced that he was a Jew, with one that enabled him to cross frontiers repeatedly without trouble. When this friend was asked to report to the Gestapo on arrival in Germany, Foley told him to contact the consulate within a few hours, promising that if he did not, Foley would personally take

¹² Sabina Comberti, letter to Mordecai Paldiel, 14 January 1999: Yad Vashem Righteous of the Nations Archive, file 8378.

action. Foley also told him 'of a special compartment in trains leaving Berlin which he could enter if he was in danger'.¹³

Foley was helped in his work by the Counsellor at the British Embassy in Berlin, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, who also expedited the emigration of German Jews. Many years after the war, John Schnellenberg wrote from New Zealand about his father, Rudolf Schnellenberg, who was service manager for a Ford car dealership in Berlin. Ogilvie-Forbes was one of his customers. 'One day in 1938, Forbes came to my father and advised him that it would be well to take his family out of Germany as soon as possible. Further, Forbes undertook to provide papers for any country in the British Empire that my parents chose. So it came about that they chose New Zealand, papers were duly provided, and the three of us arrived safely in Wellington on 28 March 1939. My father's parents; two of his uncles and an aunt, and their spouses; my mother's widowed mother, and one of her sisters — all were lost.'

John Schnellenberg added: 'There is no doubt in my mind that Forbes must have arranged the New Zealand documentation through Foley, and I have in my possession the original of a letter approving our entry to this country, written by the

¹³ Naomi Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel, German Jewry's Secret Ambassador*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, page 131.

responsible Government authority. It is addressed to the Passport Control Officer, British Embassy, Berlin.’¹⁴

The German annexation of Austria had intensified the search for havens. Each family outside the confines of the newly created Greater Germany, who offered a helping hand, did so against the prevailing mood of apathy and even hostility to refugees. Becoming a bystander is a universal instinct. To encourage the hope of rescue was noble.

In the Lincolnshire town of Grantham, Muriel Roberts and her sister Margaret (later Lady Thatcher) had pen pals overseas. Muriel’s was Edith, an Austrian Jewish girl. Muriel recalled after the war how, after the German occupation of Austria, ‘Edith’s father, a banker, wrote to mine asking whether we could take his daughter, since he very clearly foresaw the way events were leading. We had neither the time – having to run the shops – nor the money to accept such a responsibility alone; but my father won the support of the Grantham Rotarians for the idea, and Edith came to stay with each of our families in turn until she went to live with relatives in South America. She was seventeen, tall, beautiful, well dressed, evidently from a well-to-do family, and spoke good English. She told us what it was like to live as a Jew under an anti-Semitic regime. One thing Edith

¹⁴ John Schnellenberg, letter of 14 March 2001: Yad Vashem Righteous of the Nations Archive, file 8378; letter to the author, 18 August 2008.

reported particularly stuck in my mind: the Jews, she said, were being made scrub the streets.’¹⁵

Margaret Thatcher never forgot the young girl whom her family had taken into their home. ‘I am so glad that we were able to do something,’ she reflected seventy years later.¹⁶

Another future British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, who in 1938 was a Member of Parliament, gave shelter to a number of Jewish refugees. As his Principal Private Secretary wrote, ‘He lent them a house on his estate.’¹⁷

On 6 July 1938 an international conference opened at Evian, on the shores of Lake Geneva, to discuss the future reception of refugees. More than 150,000 Jews had already escaped the torments of Germany and recently annexed Austria. Of these the largest group, 55,000, had thus far been admitted to the United States. The British government had permitted 40,000 into Britain and a further 40,000 into Palestine. Switzerland had taken in more than 14,000, who survived the war due to Swiss neutrality. France had taken in 15,000, whose fate would again hang in the balance within a few years, when France was defeated by Germany. Many were then saved a second time by

¹⁵ Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, pages 26-7.

¹⁶ Baroness Thatcher, in conversation with the author, 1 July 2008.

¹⁷ John Wyndham, letter to the author, 17 August 1963.

French men and women who showed great courage as the risks involved in helping had grown to grave proportions.¹⁸

More than 250,000 German and Austrian Jews were desperate for safe havens, but not all the delegates at the Evian Conference were sympathetic to the Jewish plight. 'It will no doubt be appreciated,' the Australian delegate, Colonel T.W. White, told the conference, 'that as we have no racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one.'¹⁹ As the number of Jews seeking to leave grew, restrictions against them also grew. Four South American countries, Argentine, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico, adopted laws severely restricting the number of Jews who could enter; in the case of Mexico to a hundred a year. The Republic of Ireland declined to take in any refugees. Ironically, Australia, the representative of which at Evian had been so reticent, agreed to take in five thousand Jews.

Following the Evian Conference, Captain Foley redoubled his efforts to expedite Jewish emigration to Palestine. A German Jew, Simon Wertheimer later recalled how his father, Eliezer Leopold Wertheimer, had been imprisoned in 1937 'on a flimsy charge to deprive him of his livelihood as a textile merchant'. He was sentenced to one year in prison, to be served in Nuremberg prison. 'As by 1937/38 the Nazis were in the habit

¹⁸ J. Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem, Report of a Survey*, pages 323 (France), 340 (Britain), 397 (Switzerland), and 473 note 1 (United States).

¹⁹ 'Proceedings of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, Evian, July 6th to 15th': Foreign Office papers, FO 919.

of transferring released Jewish prisoners to concentration camps, my mother was strongly advised to obtain visas to Palestine. All her efforts through Jewish aid organizations and the directly concerned British consulate were of no avail and one of the Jewish aid organizations referred her to Captain Foley, the British Passport Officer in Berlin, as the last possible source of help. My mother, accompanied by her sister (my late aunt), travelled to Berlin, were well received by Captain Foley and my mother was granted the life-saving "Zertifikat" to Palestine – "for the sake of the child" as Captain Foley told my mother.²⁰ Simon Wertheimer's parents left Germany in August 1938, for Palestine. His aunt, Carola Neumark, was later deported to Treblinka and murdered.

On 19 August 1938 the *Spectator*, a London weekly magazine, published an article, signed 'An Aryan Englishman,' describing the plight of the Jews of Vienna, and the 'pitiful' scenes at Vienna's main railway station, 'where whole families were splitting up'. The anonymous eyewitness continued: 'And no less pitiful are the queues in the sun-baked streets outside the consulates, queues which form up, as for a theatre premiere, in the early hours of the morning. But the prima donna in the consulate is far more inaccessible than any film star, and I have met Jews who have waited every morning from 5 a.m.,

²⁰ Letter of 17 January 1999 to the Department for the Righteous. Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

sometimes waiting only for information and sometimes for the visa or permit they have been told to collect'.²¹

Reflecting on this 'Aryan Englishman's' criticism of the attitude of many of the foreign consuls in Vienna, Norman Angell put his skills at the service of the refugees. In 1934 he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for the previous year. In September 1938 he and his co-author Dorothy Buxton, a leading Quaker, wrote in their Penguin Special volume *You and The Refugee* that many refugees 'now knock at the doors of the greatest Empire in the world, asking sanctuary'. Angell and Buxton went on to ask: 'Shall those doors be closed against them?'²²

In October 1938 Germany annexed the Sudetenland regions of Czechoslovakia. The prospect of yet wider German conquests and persecution led to an upsurge in the search for emigration from Germany, Austria and beyond. In the first week of November 1938 the Bible College of Wales, in Swansea, applied to the Home Office in London to take in twenty Jewish refugees who had written to the college from Germany, Austria and Italy. There were four doctors among them. In the hope of being able to bring over as many as a hundred more Jewish refugees, the College asked the Swansea Corporation to give it

²¹ *Spectator*, 19 August 1938.

²² Norman Angell and Dorothy Frances Buxton, *You and the Refugee: The Morals and Economics of the Problem*, page 44.

the tenancy of a large house in the city that had earlier been used to house Spanish Republican refugee children. The director of the College, the Reverend Rees Howell, was also planning to go to Palestine to negotiate for the purchase of a college and hospital, and also to buy land, for Jewish refugees there.²³

The *Manchester Guardian* published this report on November 7. That day, a Polish-born Jew, Hersh Grynspan, received a postcard in which his sister reported the plight of the 15,000 Polish-born Jewish deportees - their parents among them - dumped by the Germans at the Polish border. Incensed at the German treatment of these deportees, Grynspan carried out a fatal attack on a junior German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, at the German Embassy in Paris.

The death of vom Rath provided the Nazi Party with the excuse it needed to unleash a long-prepared night of terror against the Jews of Germany and Austria: Kristallnacht, on the night of 9/10 November 1938. That night, a thousand synagogues were destroyed throughout Germany, and tens of thousands of Jewish homes and businesses were ransacked. At least ninety Jews were killed, and 60,000 Jewish men were taken to three concentration camps: Sachsenhausen outside Berlin, Dachau outside Munich, and Buchenwald near Weimar.

Details about that horrendous night were immediately reported to London by the British Embassy in Berlin. 'I am

²³ 'Bible College and Jews', *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1938.

informed that arrests of male Jews up to the age of sixty are being made on a large scale,' Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, telegraphed on November 11. He added that all Jewish schools, newspapers and cultural organizations had been closed down; it was even rumoured that the Germans intended to confiscate all Jewish capital.²⁴

On November 13, Ogilvie-Forbes telegraphed again: the Germans had just announced that, from the New Year, no Jew could continue to work as a retailer, an exporter, or a manager of a business. In addition, all damage done to Jewish property during Kristallnacht would have to be paid for by the Jews themselves, in addition to a massive fine. Ogilvie-Forbes reported that many Jews 'are wandering about in the streets and parks afraid to return to their homes.' He added: 'I can find no words strong enough in condemnation of the disgusting treatment of so many innocent people, and the civilised world is faced with the appalling sight of 500,000 people about to rot away in starvation.'²⁵

In the days following Kristallnacht, Robert Smallbones, British Consul-General in Frankfurt, and his deputy, Consul Arthur Dowden, made extraordinary efforts to process as many British entry visas as possible. They also showed a humane touch so absent from the routine of officialdom during these

²⁴ British Foreign Office papers, FO 371/21637.

²⁵ British Foreign Office papers, FO 371/21637.

chaotic times. One British eyewitness, Ida Cook, recorded: 'Those who came there hungry and in need (no Jew was allowed to buy food for nine days) were fed. And I understand that the Vice-Consul even went through the streets, with food in his car, to feed those in want.' According to one Jewish woman: 'My husband was in the concentration camp, and while I tried to get him out it was too terrible for one even to cry. Then at last I went to the British Consul to see if he could help me. And the first thing they asked me at the consulate was, "Have you had anything to eat today?" I hadn't of course; I was too worried to think of food. And, before they did anything else, they fed me with coffee and sandwiches, as though I had been a guest. And then I cried.'²⁶

In 1995, Ida Cook and her sister Louise Cook - who had made several journeys together to Germany before the war, the last in August 1939, to help Jews leave - received a Certificate of Recognition from Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 'for their many courageous acts of humanity in rescuing Jews from Germany and from Austria during the dark days of the Nazi regime and in helping them to rebuild their lives in Britain.'²⁷

Robert Smallbones later set down his recollections of those tumultuous and challenging days. On Kristallnacht, he wrote, 'I happened to be in London. Inga (my grandmother)

²⁶ Ida Cook (Mary Burchell), *We Followed Our Stars*, page 172.

²⁷ Reproduced in facsimile on the back page of Ida Cook (Mary Burchell), *We Followed Our Stars*.

telephoned me the next morning that hundreds of Jews had besieged the consulate and that she had allowed all who sought refuge to spend the night as best they could in the house. She, Irene (my mother) and the servants had been up all night supplying them with food - and trying to console them. She asked me to do something to help. The Home Office is the department dealing with immigration and I went to see a senior official there who dealt with this question. He had seen in the newspapers what was going on in Germany and I asked him what they proposed doing about it. He replied: "Nothing, What can we do? We cannot let them come in and cause unemployment amongst our own people. Have you got an idea?" I said that I had, and he summoned a few of his colleagues.'

Smallbones then explained to the German officials 'that my idea was based on the fact that under American Law quotas for immigrants had been established for every country, according to the number admitted in 1892, which could not be readily expanded to meet this emergency. We however could give some relief by allowing German refugees, bound eventually under the quota system for the United States of America to spend a waiting period of a year or more in the United Kingdom on condition that they did not seek employment or were liable to become destitute.'

After 'a short discussion', Smallbones noted, 'it was agreed that under British law and regulations this was possible and I was asked whether I could draw up the details of procedure. I telephoned to Otto Schiff of the Jewish Relief organization and asked him to lunch at the Savoy Hotel with some of his collaborators. We drafted an undertaking to be given by the applicant for the British visa not to seek employment in the United Kingdom and a guarantee to be given by a bank or a responsible person in the United Kingdom that he would not become a charge on public funds. We also worked out the details of the procedure with the American consular authorities in Germany to make sure that the applicant would eventually be admitted to the United States of America. I submitted this at once to the Home Office and was authorized the same afternoon to introduce this system in my district. The Foreign Office was to be asked to send corresponding instructions to the Passport Control Officer at Berlin and to all my colleagues in Germany.'

Smallbones returned to Frankfurt that same night, and on the following morning, as he wrote, 'went to see the local head of the Gestapo to arrange that Jews would be released from the concentration camps if they produced the promise of a British visa and if they had only been interned because they were Jews and if no charge was to be preferred against them. He said that they could only be released if, in addition, they had all their

German emigration papers in order, passports, exit visas, certificates from the inland revenue that they had paid income and other taxes etc. I replied that this was an impossible condition as they could not themselves attend to these formalities while locked up and as the Jewish lawyers who could act for them were also interned; few Aryan lawyers would risk importuning the authorities on their behalf. We had a fierce argument and I started shouting in the proper German manner. When I jumped up and said that my proposal to help Germany to be rid of some of their Jews was off, and that I would report by telegram to my Government, the Gestapo bully collapsed and we made an agreement in the sense desired by me. I know of no case in which a promise of a visa given by me did not lead to the immediate release of the interned.'

The amount of work was, in Smallbones' words, 'formidable'. Before leaving London, he has told the Home Office that 'I would be personally responsible for the ultimate decision in each case in my district. My American colleague in Frankfurt was not authorized to grant visas and we had to correspond about every applicant with Stuttgart.... I had a relatively large staff and they were hard put to it dealing with the interminable queue besieging us. I usually worked about eighteen hours a day. The longest stretch I remember was from early in the morning until midnight when I fell asleep for a few minutes on my desk.... I went to bed.... After two hours sleep

my conscience pricked me. The feeling was horrible that there were people in concentration camp whom I could get out and that I was comfortable in bed.... I returned to my desk and stayed there until the next midnight. I had a nervous breakdown after a few months.... The last straw that broke my back was the case of a person who died in a concentration camp because one of my staff had failed to get my signature and to dispatch the promise of a visa which was in order.'

In October 1939, shortly after the outbreak of war, Smallbones - back in Britain - went to the Home Office to find out how many had benefited 'under what they were kind enough to call the "Smallbones Scheme". I was told in confidence and not for publication in the press that some 48,000 persons had entered the United Kingdom under it and that another 50,000 cases were under consideration when war broke out. They did not want the numbers to be made known, partly because some of the refuges had made themselves very unpopular and partly because the Home Office might be attacked for having admitted such numbers as an administrative measure without the specific sanction of Parliament.'²⁸

The impact of Kristallnacht on Christian opinion in Britain was immediate. As Robert Smallbones set his scheme in motion, David Logan, a Labour Member of Parliament, spoke

²⁸ Robert Smallbones, recollections: sent to the author by his granddaughter, Sandra Wellington, 26 August 2008.

emphatically in the House of Commons of his desire to see Britain take an initiative. 'I speak, he said, 'as an orthodox Catholic, feeling to the depth of my heart the cause of the Jew. I hear mention made of the question of money. If we cannot have civilization contented, if we cannot bring sunshine into the lives of people, without being concerned with the question of money, civilization is doomed. Today an opportunity is offered to the British nation to take its proper stand among the nations of the world.'²⁹

In a debate in the House of Commons on 24 November 1938, George Lloyd, the Under-Secretary of State of the Home Office, in answer to a question about the status of the newcomers, told the House that 'it was proposed that refugee children admitted to this country under the care of the Inter-Allied Committee for Children might be permitted to remain in this country for purely educational or training purposes until they had completed their education or training on condition that they were not placed in ordinary employment. A record would be kept of each individual child.'³⁰

In a public broadcast launching the Lord Mayor of London's Fund, for the assistance of Jewish refugees who reached Britain, Lord Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain's

²⁹ House of Commons, 15 October 1938: *Hansard*. Logan, the son of a ship's cook, had been elected to Parliament in 1929; he remained an MP until his death in 1964, aged 92.

³⁰ House of Commons, 24 November 1938: *Hansard*.

predecessor as Prime Minister, spoke with feeling: 'Thousands of men, women, and children,' he said, 'despoiled of their goods, driven from their homes, are seeking asylum and sanctuary on our doorsteps, a hiding place from the wind and a cover from the tempest.' Baldwin added: 'They may not be our fellow subjects, but they are our fellow men. Tonight I plead for the victims who turn to England for help.... Thousands of every degree of education, industry, wealth, position, have been made equal in misery. I shall not attempt to depict to you what it means to be scorned and branded and isolated like a leper. The honour of our country is challenged, our Christian charity is challenged, and it up to us to meet that challenge.'³¹

Kristallnacht was the first sustained anti-Jewish pogrom since the widespread massacre of Jews during the Russian civil war twenty years earlier. The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain later confided in a private letter to one of his sisters: 'No doubt Jews aren't a lovable people; I don't care about them myself; - but that is not sufficient to explain the pogrom.'³²

The first ship with Jewish refugee children - whose journeys became known as the Kindertransport (and they later called themselves the Kinder) - reached the British port of Harwich from Holland on 2 December 1938. On board ship

³¹ Lord Baldwin, broadcast, 8 December 1938, widely reported in the British newspapers on the following day; *The Times*, 9 December 1938.

³² Letter of 30 July 1939, Templewood Papers, University Library, Cambridge.

were 196 children from a Berlin Jewish orphanage that had been set on fire on Kristallnacht, three weeks earlier.

On 14 December 1938, twelve days after the first Kindertransport ship, Neville Chamberlain's Cabinet discussed allowing an unspecified number of German Jewish children up to the age of seventeen to enter Britain, provided the refugee organizations in Britain would guarantee their maintenance. The Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, under whom the scheme would have to operate, told his Cabinet colleagues: 'Here is a chance of taking the young generation of a great people, here is a chance of mitigating to some extent the terrible suffering of their parents and their friends.' The Cabinet agreed to let the scheme go ahead. A fifty pound Sterling bond had to be posted for each child, to ensure their 'ultimate resettlement' elsewhere than Britain.³³

Five thousand children were to receive immediate permits. There would be at least five thousand more in the second wave. Had it not been for the outbreak of war eight months later, and the sealing of Germany's western borders, the British Government intended that even more would have been able to make the journey to safety. A number of the older children joined the British or Australian armed forces as soon as they reached eighteen, and fought in the Allied ranks. Most of the

³³ Cabinet No. 59 of 1938, London, 14 December 1938, Conclusion 6: Cabinet papers, 23/96.

children never saw their parents again. After the war, some 2,500 Kindertransport children went to the United States or Canada; from them that the Kindertransport Association of North America draws its members.³⁴

Almost eight thousand of the youngsters who arrived in Britain between December 1938 and September 1939 were helped by Jewish organizations – principally the Central British Fund, the German-Jewish Aid Committee, the Austrian Self-Aid Committee, and the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO). A further two thousand children were looked after by the German and Austrian Committees of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), the Christian Council for Refugees, and the Catholic Committee for Refugees.

To coordinate the heavy workload of these voluntary bodies, a single volunteer organisation was established, the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (soon known as the Refugee Children’s Movement). The Chairman of the Refugee Children’s Movement was a Protestant peer of the realm, the third Baron Gorell, a member of the Liberal Party, whose older brother had been killed in the First World War.

Under the Kindertransport scheme – as it came to be known – almost ten thousand children, most of them Jewish, were brought to Britain from Germany, Austria and – after

³⁴ The Kindertransport Association of North America (KTA) website: www.kindertransport.org/history.html

Hitler's forces occupied Prague four months after Kristallnacht - from Czechoslovakia. Anne Fox, a twelve-year-old girl from Berlin, left Hamburg with a large group of German Jewish children on December 28. She later wrote: 'Foster homes were found - both Jewish and Gentile - hostels were opened, boarding schools contacted and established summer camp facilities were readied to receive these children. It was a tremendous undertaking, and all of us owe our lives to this venture.'³⁵

Anne Fox's parents did not survive the war. Her father Eugen, who had lost an arm fighting for Germany on the Western Front in the First World War, died in Theresienstadt in 1944. Her mother Marta was deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz a few months later, and was murdered there. The kindness of a non-Jewish couple, Mary and Jim Mansfield, and their family, in the Bedfordshire village of Swineshead, lightened the burden of Anne's wartime life as an evacuee from the London blitz.

Kindness, hospitality and a helping hand were actions that contrasted powerfully with the growing intolerance, racism, segregation and persecution to which Jews were being subjected in Germany. Among those who showed that goodwill and breadth of spirit that characterised the rescuers were two teachers in the West of England, James and Kathleen Crossfield. They took in Pauline Makowski, a ten-year-old Jewish girl from

³⁵ Anne L. Fox, *My Heart in a Suitcase*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, page 43.

Stuttgart, whose parents were Polish-born Jews. 'I was fostered by a Christian family from 16 January 1939 until I left their home in 1947 to train as a nurse,' she writes. 'Their home was always regarded as my home and their children still regard me as their sister. They were exceptional people and their generosity of spirit should be acknowledged.' Pauline's parents did not survive the war: in her words, they were 'part of the lost six million'.³⁶

Richard Attenborough was fifteen years old when his mother travelled to London from their home in Leicester, to bring back with her two Jewish girls, Irene, aged twelve, and Helga, nine. Attenborough later reflected: 'My parents' generosity represents only one of many acts of kindness of the British people in those dark days,' and he added: 'My parents' attitude to life was always that there is such a thing as "society", and that it involves obligations of concern, tolerance and compassion for those less fortunate than we are. But taking Helga and Irene into our family as sisters wasn't theory. It was first-hand experience. These were human beings whom we came to love.'³⁷

³⁶ Pauline Wornor (née Makowski), letters to the author, 19 February and 7 March 2002.

³⁷ Lord Attenborough, Preface to Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000, page xii.

Following Kristallnacht, Captain Foley sent a strongly worded telegram from Berlin to the British Mandate authorities in Jerusalem, asking for extra certificates, including a thousand for young Jews who might thereby be allowed to leave Germany without their parents. As Benno Cohn, a leader of the German-Jewish community, later recalled, Foley 'did everything in his power to enable us to bring over as many Jews as possible. He helped all the categories, and one can say that he rescued thousands of Jews from the jaws of death.'³⁸

Ze'ev Padan, who was later a technician at Israel Radio, recalled with emotion how, at the time of Kristallnacht, his father, Gunther Powitzer, formerly a taxi driver in pre-war Berlin, was already interned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp north of Berlin. Having served his one year and nine months term, he was about to return home to Berlin when a SS man told him, 'You are not free.' Powitzer's brother, who had earlier settled in Palestine, appealed to the British authorities for help. Many years later, Powitzer told his son Ze'ev Padan - who was two years old in 1938 - of what happened next. He was given fresh clothes and taken to a waiting room: 'A small man was sitting there. He introduced himself. It was Captain Foley.' Powitzer, who understood English, asked for an interpreter - to gain time. 'What do you want?' he asked Foley, who replied: 'I can tell you that you will be released tomorrow.' 'What about

³⁸ Benno Cohn, testimony: Eichmann Trial.

my child?' Powitzer asked. 'It is all right,' Foley reassured him, 'I have papers for the child.'

Within a week, Powitzer and his son were on their way by train to Italy, and thence by boat to Palestine. Foley accompanied them to the train station in Berlin to make sure they were allowed to leave Germany without further hindrance.³⁹

After the war, one of those whom Foley had saved - whose name was not recorded - described Foley's method, and his achievements in individual cases. The writer did not identify himself. 'In the conflict between official duty and human duty,' this witness wrote, 'Captain (as he then was) Foley unreservedly decided to fulfil his human duty. As a Passport Control Officer he was not subject to any personal instructions, but was free to interpret existing rules and regulations according to his discretion. In that situation he never chose the easy way out. He never tried to make himself popular with the Ambassador (Sir Nevile Henderson), nor with the Home Office by giving a strict and narrow interpretation to the rules. On the contrary, he was not above sophistic interpretations if he could help Jews to emigrate.'

An example of this was when Foley issued a category A visa, granted to those with £1,000 capital, and intended strictly for themselves alone. This particular visa, the witness noted,

³⁹ Zc'ev Padan, in conversation with the author, 13 January 2002.

was issued 'to a not so very young lady, who was in possession of the required £1,000 for herself, he granted the visa to her "accompanied by her infirm mother" (an interpretation which contradicted both the letter and the spirit of the Palestine Migration Ordinance). And so great was his authority with the Palestine Migration Office that upon arrival in Haifa the Port Immigration Officer (an Englishman) did not question the validity of the document.'

In another instance, this witness recalled, Foley granted an immigration visa into a British Dominion to a young girl of nineteen, although the girl came to him straight from prison, having served two years for Communist activities. She did not deny having been a Communist, even though that would automatically prevent her being given the visa. Having talked to the girl, Foley decided: 'The girl is now nineteen. When she was a Communist she was seventeen. At that age everyone is liable to commit a youthful stupidity without being aware of the consequences.' In yet another instance, in order to secure a Jewish prisoner's immediate release from Sachsenhausen, Foley personally stamped a visa for a British Crown Colony into the man's passport after his office was closed and the staff gone home. After 9 November 1938, 'when crowds of thousands were besieging his office day and night', Foley increased the number of his assistants from two to six, and doubled his

clerical staff, 'something quite extraordinary in peacetime Britain of those days'.⁴⁰

Among those who saw Foley at work was a young Dutch Jew, Wim van Leer. Forty-six years later he recalled Foley's 'genuine compassion for the throngs that day in, day out. besieged his office with their applications, requests and enquiries as to the progress of their case'. Van Leer added: 'The winter of 1938 was a harsh one, and elderly men and women waited from six in the morning, queuing up in the snow and biting wind. Captain Foley saw to it that a uniformed commissionaire trundled a tea-urn on a trolley along the line of frozen misery, and all this despite the clientele, neurotic with frustration and cold, doing little to lighten his task.'⁴¹

No one knew how much time remained for the flow of refugees out of Germany. Foley continued his work without interruption. He was 'an active little man,' noted Margaret Reid, a member of his Berlin staff. 'He appears to work fourteen hours a day and remain good-tempered'.⁴² One of those who saw a great deal of Foley, Benno Cohn, a beneficiary of one of the precious Palestine Certificates, recalled twenty years later, at a ceremony in Jerusalem honouring Foley: 'He did not act in violation of his duties, but in accordance with his own

⁴⁰ 'Major Francis Edward Foley', single page note, no author given, March 1960. Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

⁴¹ Wim van Leer, *Time of My Life*, Jerusalem: Carta, 1984, page 174.

⁴² Margaret Reid, quoted in Douglas Davis, 'The hero inside a quiet little man'. *Jerusalem Post*, 29 January 1999.

judgement, and in such an openhearted way, that many got the longed-for visa, who certainly wouldn't have gotten it, had he strictly followed his regulations. Tourist visas, capitalist certificates or relationship-certificates, the whole complicated alphabet of Palestine immigration was manipulated by him in such a way that precisely during those years of considerable restrictions, there was a considerable quantity of immigration.'

Benno Cohn continued: 'The peak of Foley's activities was reached during the dark weeks of the pogroms of November 1938. Approaching the building of the Consulate in the Tiergartenstrasse, you could see women queuing up to be allowed to enter. The rooms of the Consulate were transformed into a shelter for Jews, looking for protection from persecution. 32,000 men were in prison in concentration camps during those weeks, their wives besieging the consul for a visa that meant liberation for their husbands. It was a question of life or death for several thousands. During those days, Captain Foley's extensive humanity became obvious. Day and night he was at the disposition of those seeking help. Generously, he distributed every kind of visa, thus helping the liberation of many thousands from the camps.'

What was Foley's motivation? Benno Cohn, who often reflected on this, recalled: 'Working together with Foley at that time, we asked ourselves very often, why he acted like this. The

basic fact was – he was a Mensch.⁴³ It was really a rare experience to meet a person like him behind a desk in a German office. Perhaps his human behaviour was deepened by his being a Christian. Foley was a real Christian for whom help to others was the first commandment. He often told us that, as a Christian, he wanted to prove how little the Christians, governing Germany then, had to do with real Christianity. We knew, however, that he didn't act from mere love of Mordechai, but at the same time out of hatred against Haman. He hated the Nazis and, as he told me once in a conversation, considered them as the realm of Satan on earth. He despised their mean actions and he felt responsible to extend help to the victims. He, nevertheless, acted as a good Englishman. From quite nearby, he was able to witness the crimes of the regime, and he knew better than the Ministers in London that it was impossible to be in peace with these people.⁴⁴

Several thousand Jews who had travelled by boat from German ports, were able to enter Shanghai without visas, using the documents issued by the Chinese Vice-Consul in Vienna, Dr Feng Shan Ho. Despite Foreign Office hesitation in London, Foley supported this method of emigration: 'It might be considered humane on our part not to interfere officially to

⁴³ Yiddish for 'a man': a real man, a decent person.

⁴⁴ Benno Cohn, 'Address on the Occasion of the planting of a forest near Harel in remembrance and in the name of Major Foley, 10 July 1959.' Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

prevent the Jews from choosing their own graveyards,' he wrote in defence of this emigration. 'They would rather die as free men in Shanghai than slaves in Dachau.'⁴⁵

In February 1939, a German-Jewish parliamentarian of the pre-Hitler era, Dr August Weber, who from 1930 to 1932 had been a leading opponent of the Nazi Party in the Reichstag, was warned that he should 'disappear'. His wife and two children had emigrated to Britain after Hitler came to power. Dr Weber had already been in and out of a variety of prisons. Desperate to save her father from an inevitable and cruel fate, his daughter Paula telephoned from Britain to Margaret Reid, Foley's assistant in Berlin. 'My father,' she later recalled, 'needed an immigration visa to England, where I was earning enough money to keep my parents, but on an immigration visa, the Gestapo would never have allowed him to leave Germany. So Frank Foley arranged for my father's passport to show a one week's visiting visa to London, at the same time notifying us that once in London, it would become an immigration visa (without an immigration visa my father could not have stayed in England).'⁴⁶

In January 1939, Winston Churchill, then without political office but still a Member of Parliament, was on holiday in the

⁴⁵ Captain Foley to Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, 17 January 1939: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/24079.

⁴⁶ Paula Quirk (nee Weber), 'To Whom It May Concern', 8 June 1995: Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

South of France, where he met an Albanian diplomat, Chatin Sarachi, a member of one of Albania's leading Roman Catholic families. For the previous five years, Sarachi had been First Secretary at the Albanian Embassy in London. Churchill raised with him the possibility of allowing German and Austrian Jews to enter Albania. Six weeks later, Sarachi, having just returned to London from Albania, wrote to Churchill that he had been 'authorized to negotiate in case the question still exists'.⁴⁷ Sarachi's hopeful letter was written on March 13. Within six weeks, Mussolini had invaded and conquered Albania, ending its independence, and ending the possibility of any Albanian Government rescue scheme.

On 14 December 1938, Robert Smallbones, the British Consul-General in Frankfurt who had been so shocked by what he had seen and heard since Kristallnacht, and so active in devising schemes of rescue, wrote to the British Embassy in Berlin: 'As far as is possible to mitigate the plight of the Jews in Germany, I venture to think that the policy indicated at present is not "women and children first," but men first; they are in the concentration camps and in imminent danger of death, and they are the potential bread-winners. If they die the problem of dealing with their families will be all the more formidable. I gather that some of the Quakers wish to put up an organization

⁴⁷ Chatin Sarachi to Winston S. Churchill, 13 March 1939: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/24081. Published in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Companion (document) Volume V, Part 3, The Coming of War, 1936-1939*. London: Heinemann, 1982, page 1389.

in Germany to feed and clothe non-Aryans, and that they contemplate gradual evacuation spread over a number of years. Unless the German government agrees to such a scheme it is difficult to calculate what percentage of these people will survive their enforced stay in Germany.’ Smallbones added that ‘it might be useful’ to bring the facts of current German persecution of the Jews to the notice of those governments outside Germany, ‘which contemplate doing something towards the solution of this problem’.⁴⁸

In the Free City of Danzig, which since 1920 had been under the League of Nations, local Nazi Party parliamentarians had slowly secured a majority, and were demanding union with Germany. The League of Nations’ High Commission in Danzig struggled to maintain the city’s independence. The British Consul General in Danzig, Gerald Shepherd, had regularly reported on the spread of Nazi terror in the city, starting in the hours before Kristallnacht, when ‘several Jews, as well as Aryan women with whom they have had intimate relations, have been taken into protective custody, although there is no legal justification for such action’.⁴⁹ When, a week after Kristallnacht, the senior Nazi representative in Danzig announced the introduction of the

⁴⁸ Enclosure No. 8, Command paper 6120, Germany No. 2 (1939), *Papers Concerning the Treatment of German Nationals in Germany, 1938-1939*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1939, pages 20-24.

⁴⁹ Gerald Shepherd, report of 9 November 1938: Foreign Office papers FO 371/21637.

Nuremberg Laws in to the city, Shepherd reported that the position of the Jews of Danzig 'is now similar to that of those in Germany, synagogues burned, houses and shops wrecked, furniture destroyed, a few personal injuries and arrests without explanation.'⁵⁰

Shepherd's chance to help came with the request by the Jewish Agency for Palestine for the emigration of five hundred Jewish men, women and children to Palestine. Working with Chaim Posner, the Jewish Agency representative in the city, Shepherd was able to report to London on 6 March 1939, the 3.30 a.m. roundup of these emigrants from their homes by the local Free State German police, and their arrival 'with heavy rucksacks, bundles and small hand luggage' at the quayside, from where they were taken in trucks to the main railway station, for the thousand-mile train journey southward across Europe, to the Romanian Black Sea port of Constanza, where they took ship to Palestine.⁵¹

In the coming month, 124 Jewish children left Danzig - in four trains - to Berlin, for the onward journey to the Hook of Holland, where they joined Kindertransport groups on the boat to Harwich.

⁵⁰ Gerald Shepherd, telegram of 17 November 1938: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/21637.

⁵¹ Gerald Shepherd, letter of 6 March 1939: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/24085.

For the Jews of Czechoslovakia, the German annexation of the Sudetenland in the first days of October 1938 – under the Munich Agreement – was a warning of danger, should Germany's next move be the complete conquest of Czechoslovakia. In October 1938 the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia set up an office in Prague, headed by Doreen Warrender. She was joined in December by Martin Blake, a schoolmaster from Westminster School, who persuaded a young stockbroker, Nicholas Winton, the scion of a distinguished German-Jewish family, to go with him to Prague, and then, in the new year, to run the committee's London office.⁵² In all, the committee brought 669 Czech-Jewish children to Britain from Prague between October 1938 and March 1939.

On 7 March 1939, as Hitler's fulminations against Czechoslovakia intensified, a British schoolmaster, Trevor Chadwick, flew from London to Prague. A week later he flew back to Britain with twenty Jewish children. 'They were all cheerfully sick,' he later recalled, except a baby of one who slept peacefully in my lap the whole time.'⁵³ On the following day, German forces entered Prague, and the swastika flag flew above the Hradcany Castle, the centre of government.

⁵² In 2002, Nicholas Winton was knighted for his efforts in 1938-9.

⁵³ Quoted in Barry Turner, *...And the Policeman Smiled: 10,000 Children Escape from Nazi Europe*, page 93.

The German occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939 put tens of thousands more Jews at risk, including those in Prague who were refugees from Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. Among those Britons who took immediate action to try to help was a young Oxford academic, Robert Auty, who had already made several journeys to Germany to try to help Jews leave. He took the first night train after the occupation of Prague across Germany to the occupied Czech capital. A friend has written: 'I myself got to know about Robert Auty's activities some years ago, by chance, through meeting somebody whose parents had been saved by him.' Being 'such a modest man', Auty had asked his friend 'not to tell anybody else'.⁵⁴

Many of the Jewish youngsters reaching Britain from Germany between November 1938 and September 1939 were either adopted by or given shelter with non-Jewish families. These were not people who risked their lives to help, but had they not come forward and offered their hospitality, fewer children would have been able to leave Germany. The actions of those who opened their homes to Jewish youngsters made a strong impression on those they welcomed. One such young girl, Margit Diamond (now living in the United States) wrote of the woman with whom she was lodged in Britain: 'Although she would not qualify as a "Righteous Gentile" from the point of view of "heroism", I nevertheless feel that her sensitivity and

⁵⁴ Professor Richard Griffiths, letter to the author, 20 November 1978. Professor Griffiths had just written the obituary of Robert Auty in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

“heart” definitely make her a “Righteous Gentile”. When I arrived in England from Berlin as an eleven-year-old Kindertransport child in May 1939, it was Miss Elsie M. Lobb, Headmistress of Trinity Hall School for Girls - all Methodist ministers’ daughters - who took me in. This excellent Boarding School was located in Southport, Lancashire, and since I was an “Enemy Alien”, Miss Lobb had to make special arrangements for me to be there lest, in the event of a German invasion by sea, I should aid the enemy!’

In explaining why she considered Elsie Lobb ‘to have been so unusual’, Margit Diamond noted that because the school was for the daughters of Methodist Ministers, ‘we went to church twice every Sunday and also had Sunday School. When I demonstrated reluctance at having to kneel in church, this dear lady called me into her office and said most kindly: “Margit, children can be quite cruel if they think you’re very different from them. Going to church and Sunday School will never make you Methodist - you will always be Jewish”... and she made arrangements for the local Rabbi to come and visit me regularly several times a month! NEVER, at any time, was any attempt made to convert me!’ Margit Diamond added: ‘One of my deepest regrets is that this “Righteous Gentile” died before I was in a position to repay in some small measure (I could NEVER

actually repay what she did for me, of course) what she had done for me.’⁵⁵

Otto Hutter was one of two Jewish refugee boys from Germany taken in by Stortford School in Kent. As appeals to help refugees went out, the Old Boys of the school had decided to raise the money needed for their schooling. In a special appeal letter, J.F. Attenborough, the President of the Old Stortfordian Club, had written: ‘From one country after another in Europe today men and women, who have been guilty of no offence, are being driven out as penniless refugees. To their distress none of us can be indifferent, but few of us can, out of our own resources, offer any effective assistance. What, then, can Stortford do?’⁵⁶

In sending me this letter sixty-one years after the school took him in, Otto Hutter wrote: ‘Rummaging among old papers, I have just come across this remarkable 1939 document. It may serve as a fine example of how compassionate people in England joined together in those dark days “to make a lasting contribution”, in this case by affording two refugee boys a fine education. True, the cry “What, then, can Stortford do?” did not reverberate across the country, but for that it is surely the more worthy of record.’⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Margit A. Diamond, letter to the author, 2 May 2001.

⁵⁶ Printed circular letter, headed ‘Old Stortfordians’ Club’, dated 22 February 1939.

⁵⁷ Professor Otto Hutter, letter to the author, 17 February 2000.

Many of those who took in Jewish children after Kristallnacht hardly had the resources to do so, but wanted to help, and willingly accepted the hardships involved. In Archway, in north London, Bertha Emily Harder, who ran a sweet and tobacconist shop, and lived in a two-room flat, took in three Berlin-born Jewish sisters – Hannelore (Laura), Liselotte (Lisa) and Rosemarie (Romie). Six months after taking them in, Bertha Harder died of tuberculosis. But during the short time she looked after them, she took them on a holiday in the Isle of Wight, at her own expense, and tried – in vain – to get their mother out of Czechoslovakia.

Laura later recalled: 'After the German invasion in March 1939, my father fled to Poland with an attaché case. We stayed behind in a cheap hotel, with our mother. In her desperation, she heard about the Children's Section who tried to save youngsters up to the age of sixteen. The ladies from the committee called. They came from England. They admired my mother and hoped that they could save her too. But first they had the difficult task of finding someone who would take her three daughters. "My girls must not be separated," she pleaded. One day we heard a Miss Harder was prepared to take us. The day came and we arrived in England on 1st June 1939. We waved goodbye to our wonderful mother at the station. She had a white handkerchief in her hands. It receded.... We never saw her again.' Miss Harder met them on their arrival in London at Liverpool Street Station.

After the outbreak of war, Laura worked first as a maid in Epsom, then, in 1944, joined the British Army. Lisa became a Professor at the University of Minnesota, Romie a much-respected teacher.⁵⁸

Almost ten thousand German-Jewish children were admitted to Britain in 1938 and 1939. Towards Palestine, British policy was stricter. The same Cabinet meeting which, on 14 December 1938, agreed to take in many thousands of Jewish children to Britain, rejected an appeal to allow ten thousand into Palestine.

Five months after Kristallnacht, the British government set an upper limit of 100,000 Jews who would be allowed to enter Palestine over the coming five years. Alfred Duff Cooper, who had earlier resigned from the Cabinet in protest at the Munich Agreement, spoke in the House of Commons against the new five-year restriction, telling his fellow parliamentarians: 'It is the strong arm of the British Empire that has opened the door to them when all other doors are shut. Shall we now replace that hope – that we have revived – by despair, and shall we slam the door in the face of the long-wandering Jew?'⁵⁹

From Berlin, Captain Foley continued to try to get as many of these 'wandering Jews' as possible into Palestine. When Dr Dagobert Arian, a German Jew already living in

⁵⁸ BBC People's War, Article ID A6988882: Hannelore (Laura) Gumpel, 15 November 2002. See also her book, *Three Lives in Transit*.

⁵⁹ *Hansard* (Parliamentary Debates), 30 July 1939.

Palestine, applied for permission for his mother to join him, Foley supported this application - as he did so many thousands of others – and on 19 April 1939, Dr Arian was informed by the Commissioner for Migration and Statistics in Jerusalem that Foley had nominated his mother for one of the immigration certificates put at his disposal in Berlin ‘for persons living in circumstances of exceptional hardship’.

As soon as his mother reached Palestine, Dr Arian wrote from Tel-Aviv directly to Foley: ‘Having brought my mother home from the boat, I feel like writing to you these few lines. Destiny has placed you in a position where you daily come in touch with sorrow and despair, and where a man like you always feels the restrictions of power to help those who suffer. However, I know that whenever you find a possibility to assist the oppressed you do all you can to help them and by doing so you find happiness and satisfaction. My thanks, which I hereby express for the help given to my mother, is surely but a small portion of your own heart’s satisfaction. It may also please you to hear that wherever your name is mentioned “From Dan to Beer Sheva” – you are talked of with the greatest respect and devotion and that you and a few other persons act as a counterweight where the evils of the everyday politics suppress and destroy the faith in honesty and humanity.’⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Dr Arian to Captain Foley, undated letter: Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

Foley's work was unceasing. Writing about his mother Ida, her son Peter Weiss recalled a visit she had made from her home town in Germany to Berlin: 'When I asked her the purpose of her visit she told me that she had heard that visas were being arranged at the British Passport Office in Berlin. She did not give me any great detail, but said that she had met an Englishman to whom "we should be ever grateful". She remembered the man as a Mr Foley, but did not mention (or perhaps she never knew) his first name.' Ida Weiss told her son that she had virtually no money, and was quite ill: 'Mr Foley let me stay at his house for a few days and then he came home late one night with the necessary exit visas and papers. I left for Belgium and then onward to England on the early train the next morning. The last time I saw Mr Foley was at the station.' Ida Weiss arrived in Britain in June 1939. To her son's comment: 'This man Foley seems to have saved your life and I suppose, my own?' she replied: 'His name will always be close to my heart.'⁶¹

On 13 May 1939 more than nine hundred German-Jewish refugees left Hamburg on board the German ocean liner *St Louis*. Two weeks later they reached Cuba, where, after prolonged negotiations, the Cuban government agreed to take in

⁶¹ Peter P.W. Weiss, letter to Yad Vashem, 4 January 1999. Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378. Ida Weiss died in Birmingham, England, in 1995.

twenty-four of them. No more were allowed in, not even those who held immigration quota numbers for the United States that would enable them to enter the United States in 1940 and 1941. Seven Latin American countries - Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay - refused to take in any at all. Canada likewise refused. An appeal sent on June 6 from the refugees on board the ship to President Roosevelt received no reply. Four days later the United States formally refused the refugees entry. The *St Louis* returned to Europe, docking at the Belgian port of Antwerp.

On the ship's arrival in Antwerp on June 17, following a promise by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to help bear the cost, four nations made a humanitarian gesture to take in the returnees: France took in 244, Belgium 214 and Holland 181. Britain took in the largest number, 288. The four countries also took in, in similar proportions, the ninety-six refugees on board the *Flandres* and the forty on board the *Orduna*, both of which were likewise turned back from the Americas. Within a year, all those from the three boats who had been taken back to European countries came under German rule, as those countries were overrun. Those in Britain were safe.⁶²

Throughout the summer of 1939 Jewish refugees continued to find sanctuary in Britain. Between March and August, 164 youngsters came from Prague in three

⁶² Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts, *Voyage of the Damned: The Voyage of the St Louis*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974, pages 302-3.

Kindertransports. Alfred Dubs, aged six, came with his parents. As a Labour Member of Parliament from 1979 to 1987, he served as a member of the Parliamentary committee on Race Relations and Immigration. In 1994 he entered the House of Lords, and from 1997 to 1999 was Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. From 2001 to 2003 he was Chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Commission and since 2000 the Chairman of the All-Party Group on European Enlargement.⁶³

Also from Czechoslovakia, having escaped through Poland, came Karel and Anna Seifter. With them was their one-year-old son Pavel. They returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, and for twenty years lived under the Communist regime. Pavel Seifter became the editor of several dissident publications in Prague. Forced by the regime to give up his university lectureship in history, he became a window cleaner. In 1999, sixty years after reaching the safety of Britain, he returned to London as Ambassador of the Czech Republic.⁶⁴

By the end of August 1939 Britain had become a haven for almost ten percent of German Jews. Including those from Austria and Czechoslovakia, there were between 63,000 and 65,000 Jewish refugees in Britain. Of these, 9,354 were children. Britain's colonial territories were less generous. Official Colonial Office figures show that, in the six-month

⁶³ *Who's Who 2008*. London, A.C.Black, 2007, page 656.

⁶⁴ His Excellency Pavel Seifter, in conversation with the author, 19 March 2001.

period up to March 1939, Cyprus took in 744 Jews, Kenya 650 and Trinidad 359. Malta would only agree to take eighteen and Aden five. In the West Indies, St Vincent accepted twenty Jews, British Honduras twelve, Grenada five, and Barbados two. The Bahamas, Bermuda, the Leeward Islands and the Windward Islands would take no Jewish refugees at all.⁶⁵

Despite immigration restrictions across the globe, government hesitations, popular prejudice and official hostility in the lands to which Jews turned, more than half Germany's Jews had left Germany before the outbreak of war. More than 166,000 had been given refuge in the United States. The first writers to assemble Jewish refugee statistics commented: 'This number is larger than the total of Jewish refugees resettled in any other country.'⁶⁶ Britain had taken in the second largest, more than 65,000. British mandate Palestine had taken in 35,000.

On the evening of 31 August 1939, as German radio poured out a stream of venom against the Polish Republic, sixty German Jewish children were travelling with their adult escort in a train crowded with German soldiers from Cologne to Cleve, the only point on the Dutch frontier to which trains were still running. Crossing the frontier, the train proceeded to the Hook of

⁶⁵ Colonial Office papers: Statistical Digest, October 1938 – March 1939.

⁶⁶ Arieh Tartakower and Kurt R. Grossman, *The Jewish Refugee*, page 81.

Holland. Overnight, the children crossed the North Sea to the British port of Harwich. There, at dawn on September 1, those who had just reached safety learned that Germany had invaded Poland.⁶⁷

For the nine months between September 1939 and April 1940, the people of Western Europe watched while Poland, having been rapidly overrun by Germany, was subjected to the full savagery of Nazi rule. Daily reports reached the West of executions: of both Christian and Jewish Poles. On April 9 the German army struck at Denmark and Norway.

John Buxton was among the British soldiers captured during the Norwegian campaign and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp. During the prisoners' first week in the camp, he recalled, 'the apparently very-civilized-seeming German commandant asked their colonel if, when they next lined up on parade, he could let him know how many Jews were numbered among the British POWs. It was, the commandant assured the English colonel, just for administrative purposes. The next morning the Regimental Sergeant Major bellowed out on the parade ground: "All Jews three paces FORWARD!" Every single "Anglo-Saxon" POW stepped forward.'⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Eva Michaelis, 'Youth Aliyah Report, August 25th - September 7th 1939': Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file S 75/746.

⁶⁸ A. N. Wilson, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 April 2001. Buxton had been A.N. Wilson's tutor at New College, Oxford.

A month later, on 10 May 1940 the course of the war took yet another violent turn, when German troops invaded Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and France. In Amsterdam, a non-Jewish woman, Geertruida Wijsmuller-Meijer, who had earlier been in charge of Jewish refugees from Germany, decided, as German troops approached Amsterdam, to make one last rescue bid. Assembling half a dozen coaches, on May 14 she gathered two hundred Jewish refugees, among them eighty children. One of the children, fourteen-year-old Harry Jacobi, later recalled the drive from Amsterdam to the port of IJmuiden, where British troops were still landing in a last-minute attempt to bolster the Dutch defences.

On reaching IJmuiden, Geertruida Wijsmuller persuaded the captain of the Dutch freighter *Bodegraven* to take the Jews on board, and to set sail across the North Sea for England. 'At 7 p.m. we sailed,' Harry Jacobi recalled. 'Far away from the shore we looked back and saw a huge column of black smoke from the oil storage tanks that had been set on fire to prevent the Germans having them. At 9 p.m. news came through, picked up by the ship's radio. The Dutch had capitulated.'

Harry Jacobi and the two hundred other Jewish refugees reached Britain and safety. Neither his parents, who were still in Berlin, nor his grandparents, then in Holland, survived the war. There had been no room for his grandparents on the crowded coaches. Geertruida Wijsmuller-Meijer remained in Holland,

where she continued to smuggle Jews into neutral Spain and Switzerland.⁶⁹

Captain Foley continued to save Jews after the German assault on the West. While briefly at Bordeaux in June 1940 with thousands of retreating soldiers and civilians, he continued to issue visas for Britain.⁷⁰ Also in 1940, in Kaunas, Lithuania, the British Consul, Thomas Preston, issued eight hundred legal Palestine certificates, and four hundred extra certificates without authorisation to do so, to Jewish refugees from Poland, who were then able to make their way from Lithuania to Istanbul and on to Palestine. A further hundred Jews with documents from Preston were able to make their way across the Baltic Sea to neutral Sweden, where they survived the war.⁷¹

The spread of war through Europe closed its frontiers. No British diplomats remained in any of the capital cities conquered by Germany – among them Warsaw, Oslo, Brussels, The Hague, Paris, Belgrade and Athens; but British efforts to help Jews continued. In his book *Wartime Courage*, Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, tells the story of twelve Britons given the Righteous Gentile award by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. One was the Scottish missionary Jane Haining, who had been sent to

⁶⁹Recollections of Rabbi Harry M. Jacobi, *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 September 1978; Harry Jacobi, in conversation with the author, London, 21 February 1985.

⁷⁰Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378.

⁷¹International Wallenberg Foundation.

Auschwitz after having been reported to the SS for crying when she was ordered to sew the yellow star badges on her Jewish orphan charges in Budapest in 1944. She died in Auschwitz a few months later. The second was a British prisoner of war, Sergeant Charles Coward, who devised a scheme to save Jewish prisoners in the Buna-Monowitz slave labour camp from being sent to nearby Auschwitz and murdered there. The other ten were also British prisoners of war, who risked their lives to save a Jewish girl who had managed to escape from a death march of Jewish slave labourers near Danzig.⁷²

As news of the wartime mass murder of the Jews reached London, British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine were set aside to help Jews escape. On 4 March 1942 the British Passport Control Officer in Istanbul, A.H. Whittall, informed Chaim Barlas, the Jewish Agency representative in the city, that the Immigration Department of the Government of Palestine had decided 'to permit the immigration into Palestine of identified Jewish children resident in Hungary aged 11-16 years.' Visas to enter Palestine would be given to these children on their arrival in Istanbul.⁷³ The problem was to find the children and to arrange escape routes out of Europe. In March 1943, seventy-

⁷² Gordon Brown, *Wartime Courage*, Bloomsbury, 2008, chapter 13.

⁷³ Jewish Agency Archive: papers of Chaim Barlas.

two children were able to make their way to safety by this route: in May, twenty-two, and in June, forty-nine.⁷⁴

In November 1942, Lieutenant Colonel Stanley Cole, a former regular army officer employed at the Colonial Office, came up with a scheme that saved several hundred Jews trapped in Europe: the exchange of these Jews for German nationals being held by Britain in both Egypt and Palestine. Cole put the idea to Joseph Linton, the Secretary at the Jewish Agency's London office: it was accepted with alacrity, and gratitude.⁷⁵

On 2 July 1943 the War Cabinet agreed with Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley, that 'any Jew who might escape to Turkey or other neutral countries would be regarded as eligible for onward transport to Palestine.'⁷⁶ As a result, more than four thousand Jewish refugees were able to reach Palestine during the last two years of the war, mostly having arrived in Istanbul by sea from Romania, and then taken by train to Haifa. Their transit through Istanbul, and their collective British passports – with up to four hundred names pasted in to a single passport – was organised by A.H. Whittall. The first such collective passport was issued on 8 April 1944, for 244 Romanian Jewish refugees. Two days later these refugees were in the train crossing Turkey for Palestine.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Central Zionist Archive: L22/168.

⁷⁵ Joseph Linton, in conversation with the author, 1 July 1980.

⁷⁶ War Cabinet 92 of 1943; Premier papers, PREM 4/52/5.

⁷⁷ Central Zionist Archive, S25/1678.

In the final months of the war, in one of the partisan-controlled areas of Yugoslavia, a rescue operation took place as a result of an Englishman's initiative. On 3 September 1944, as the result of a suggestion put forward by Winston Churchill's son Randolph, then serving with the Yugoslav partisans, the evacuation began, by air, of 650 German, Austrian and Czech Jews to Allied-controlled southern Italy.⁷⁸

At a ceremony at Yad Vashem in 1994, speaking on behalf of his mother, Princess Alice of Greece – who was being honoured for saving several Jews in her palace in Athens – her son Prince Philip told those at the ceremony: 'We may dislike individual people, we may disagree with their politics and opinions, but that should never allow us to condemn their whole community simply because of the race or religion of its members. This, it seems to me, is the essential message of this memorial. It is a message that all of us, who were alive at the time of the Holocaust, fully understand, but it is only too apparent that this message needs to get through to present and future generations of all races and religions. The Holocaust may be over, but there are altogether too many examples in the world today of man's capacity for inhumanity.'

Prince Philip added: 'The Holocaust was the most horrific event in all Jewish history and it will remain in the memory of

⁷⁸ List of Jews to be evacuated from Topusko (Yugoslavia) to Bari (Italy), 3 September 1944: Public Record Office, War Office papers, WO 202/293. The first twenty-nine Jews were airlifted out on 18 September 1944.

all future generations. It is, therefore, a very generous gesture that also remembered here are the many thousands of non-Jews, like my mother, who shared in your pain and anguish and did what they could in small ways to alleviate the horror.⁷⁹

During 1999 a campaign was begun in Britain to obtain recognition for Frank Foley, the pre-war British Passport Control Officer in Berlin. Leading the campaign was a British journalist, Michael Smith, whose book about Foley assembled a formidable archive of testimonies from those whom Foley had enabled to leave Germany.⁸⁰ In an article in the British press, Smith urged Yad Vashem to honour Foley, who, he wrote, ‘risked both his life and his career, bending the rules to get the Jews visas, hiding those hunted by the Gestapo in his home and even going into the concentration camps to rescue them’.⁸¹

Yad Vashem hesitated to grant Foley an award; their original remit was that the person to be honoured had to have risked his or her life. It was not clear that Foley life’s was ever at risk, any more than were the lives of other diplomats who issued visas: almost certainly the worst that would have happened is that they would have been expelled from Germany. To resolve the dispute, Yad Vashem consulted Zerah Warhaftig

⁷⁹ Remarks at Yad Vashem on 31 October 1994: Yad Vashem Righteous of the Nations Archive, file 6080.

⁸⁰ Michael Smith, Foley, *The Spy Who Saved 10,000 Jews*, page 278.

⁸¹ Michael Smith, ‘How righteous does a Gentile have to be?’ *Daily Telegraph*, 4 January 1999.

- then in his nineties - who had been on the committee that drew up the original rules in the 1950s. Warhaftig, himself a beneficiary of travel documents issued by the Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, told those who consulted him: 'We did not rule out those who bent the rules - and gave visas on a large scale.'⁸²

In a letter to a sceptic who doubted that Foley, being a diplomat, deserved the honour for 'merely' issuing documents, Mordecai Paldiel, head of the Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, wrote: 'When all the vast information (including documentary material and personal testimonies) of Foley's help to Jews is taken into consideration, we have the portrait of a man who went above and beyond, bending regulations at free will, to try to save as many Jews as possible (also affording temporary shelter in his private residence). The number of persons assisted in leaving Germany, who did not meet the requirements for the granting of visas, and yet were allowed to leave, is also of great importance.'⁸³

Those Foley had saved had no doubt that he merited the award. One of them wrote to the *Jerusalem Post*: 'I have five children and eighteen grandchildren, none of whom would ever have seen the light of day had I not lived. There must be

⁸² Mordecai Paldiel, in conversation with the author, 24 December 2001.

⁸³ Letter of 21 March 1999, Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations Archive, file 8378. Paldiel added: 'There were no dissenting opinions among the some twenty Commission members present, when the favourable decision was adopted on 25 February 1999.'

countless men, women and children today who would never have been born but for Foley. May God bless his memory.⁸⁴

Recognition and remembrance are continuous. At Liverpool Street Station, in London, a statue and a memorial commemorate the arrival of the Kindertransport children. In November 2008, at the instigation of Sir Sigmund Sternberg, of the Three Faiths Forum, a memorial plaque was erected in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London to honour those British diplomats who had worked against the clock to ensure that as many Jews as possible could leave Germany and Austria for Britain and Palestine. At the ceremony, a speaker referred to Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, whose gesture towards a Jewish boy at his school in Germany in 1933 had been an early example of the courage to care.

When the Holocaust is finally beyond living memory, the desire will remain to remember and to honour those who extended a helping hand. It is important to recognise individual bravery. It is also important to provide a reminder that human beings can, in situations where civilized values are being undermined, find the strength of character and purpose to resist the evil impulses of the age, and to rescue the victims of barbarity.

⁸⁴ *Jerusalem Post*, undated press cutting, Yad Vashem archive.

The project for the creation and unveiling of the plaque, in honour of the British diplomats who by their personal endeavours helped rescue the Jewish victims of Nazi racial policy, would not have been possible without the initiative of Sir Sigmund Sternberg, the contributions of Neville Shulman, CBE, Jack V. Lunzer, Peter Dicks, and John Curtis, and the help of Professor Patrick Salmon, Chief Historian and Dr. Alastair Noble, Historian, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Thanks are also due to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Peter Ricketts KCMG, for his support of the project in its early stages, and to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Rt. Hon. David Miliband PC, MP, for his support of the project, and for leading the ceremony on 20 November 2008.