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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

History

Contesting Memory: New Perspectives on the *Kindertransport*

by

Jennifer Craig-Norton

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Jennifer Craig-Norton

The *Kindertransport* – the government facilitated but privately funded movement that brought 10,000 unaccompanied mostly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland to the UK by 1940 – has been celebrated as a humanitarian act of rescue by the British government and people. The existing literature on the movement has been dominated by a reductionist and redemptive narrative emphasising the children’s survival, minimising their less positive experiences and outcomes and erasing the parents from the story.

The administrative details of the programme centred on the Refugee Children’s Movement have been well covered in existing academic studies that have utilised publicly available archival records, but the examination of *Kindertransportees*’ experiences in the UK has depended almost entirely upon the memoirs and testimonies of former child refugees, largely because of restrictions on their after-care records. Archival gaps and the extensive use of *Kinder* memory have resulted in a historiography that has not adequately addressed the complexity and range of the children’s experiences.

This study challenges the dominant memory of the *Kindertransport* using newly discovered archival sources. The case files of more than 100 German-born children who were brought to England from Poland are the basis for an investigation of both the particularities of their lives and the universalities of their experiences to the *Kindertransport* as a whole. The perspectives of the major *Kindertransport* actors – the refugee organisations, the everyday carers, the children and their parents – inform this analysis, contributing new insights on their interactions, motivations, attitudes and actions. Particular attention is paid to issues of religion, agency, gender, identity and writing the parents back into the *Kindertransport* narrative.

In addition to contesting the memory of the *Kindertransport*, the documentation facilitates a critical investigation of *Kinder* memory. Using both recorded testimony from this group of *Kinder* and interviews with many of the still-living *Kinder* and their families, *Kinder* memory and archival documentation are interrogated, resulting in a synthesis that challenges both sources and produces new understandings of the *Kindertransport* and its legacies.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Jennifer Craig-Norton declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Contesting Memory: New Perspectives on the Kindertransport

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| AJR | Association of Jewish Refugees |
| BBCC | B'nai B'rith Care Committee for Refugee Children |
| BRCC | Birmingham Refugee Children's Council |
| BoD | Board of Deputies of British Jews |
| BoG | Jewish Board of Guardians |
| CBF/WJR | Central British Fund/World Jewish Relief |
| CCJR | Central Council for Jewish Refugees (Council) |
| CCR | Central Committee for Refugees |
| COR | Central Office for Refugees |
| CRREC | Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council |
| FJRO | Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations |
| FPJ | Federation of Polish Jews in London |
| IAC | Inter-Aid Committee |
| ITS | International Tracing Service |
| JDC | American Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) |
| JCREW | Joint Committee for Religious Education and Welfare of Jewish Children |
| JRC | Jewish Refugees Committee |
| KA | <i>Kindertransport</i> Association |
| MCCG | Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (later RCM) |
| PJRF | Polish Jewish Refugee Fund (Fund or Polish Fund) |
| PRF | Polish Relief Fund |
| PRC | Polish Research Council |
| RCM | Refugee Children's Movement (Movement) |
| USCSF | University of Southern California Shoah Foundation |
| YV | Yad Vashem |

Manuscript Notes

All quotes are transcribed exactly as written, avoiding the use of ‘sic’.

Translations from other languages are acknowledged in notes.

Where permission has been granted or the material is not of a sensitive nature, real names have been used. These appear in full in both text and corresponding notes.

Pseudonyms preserve the initials of the actual names and appear in the footnotes as initials only.

Photographic Information

Photographs and document images appear without captions throughout the text. These photographs are from a variety of sources, including archival holdings, private photographs lent by families and *Kinder*, photographs from various databases and a few contemporary ones from my own collection. Some of the photographs interact with the text that surrounds them; others are implicitly understood to complement the accompanying text. All captions and credits appear at the end.

Introduction

On the morning of 28 October 1938, German police in the small town of Brambauer came to the Haberberg family home and arrested the head of the household, forty-two year old Alter Bernard. At about the same time in nearby Dortmund, Alter's son Herbert, who had just arrived at school, was told that he must return home immediately. Confused and uncertain, Herbert took the tram back to Brambauer where he found his weeping mother, Fella, and his six-year-old brother Manfred. Interrupted as she was preparing the Shabbat meal, Fella was too distraught by her husband's arrest to carry out the policeman's instructions to pack some suitcases. Herbert, who had turned fourteen the day before, attempted to take charge, helping his mother gather belongings and prepare for a journey to an unknown destination. That afternoon the police returned, loaded the Haberbergs and other Jewish families into open trucks, and drove them in a cold late October drizzle through the streets of Brambauer, lined with townspeople shouting abuse. Detained for hours with their previously arrested husbands and fathers, the frightened and bewildered families were then taken to the nearby train depot where they were each given three slices of bread, placed in sealed third class carriages and sent on a eighteen-hour journey to the Polish border.¹

Similar scenes took place across Germany, as some 17,000 Jewish men, women and children were expelled from their homes and deported to various points along the German-Polish border in less than two days.² All were Jews of Polish heritage, though many, like Herbert and Manfred Haberberg, had been born in Germany and knew no other language or home. The boys' father was born in Warsaw and his wife in Krakow, and with tens of thousands of other Jews from the former Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, they had come to Germany seeking safety and economic opportunity. Many had arrived, like the Haberbergs, during or immediately after the First World War, though some had lived in Germany for decades, and though they had settled and established businesses and families, German naturalisation was denied to

¹ Author's interview with Herbert Haberberg, London, 28 January 2012.

² The few academic accounts of the expulsion estimate the number expelled to be in the range of 12,000-20,000. See: Trude Maurer, 'The Background for Kristallnacht: The Expulsion of Polish Jews', in Walter H Pehle ed., *November 1938: From 'Reichskristallnacht' to Genocide*, trans., William Templar (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1991) pp. 45-72; Sybil Milton, 'The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany October 1938 to July 1939: A Documentation', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 29/1 (1984) pp. 169-199 and Jerzy Tomaszewski "Przystanek Zbaszyn" in Izabela Skórzynska and Wojciech Oleniczak eds., *Do zobacenia za Rok w Jerozolimnie: Deportacje polskich Żydów w 1938 roku z Niemiec do Zbaszyna*, (Zbaszyn: Fundacja Tres, 2012).

them and their German-born children.³

The expulsion of Polish Jews, called the *Polenaktion*, was the first coordinated mass deportation of Jews from the German Reich under the Nazi regime, and served as a template for the systematic deportations that followed in the years 1939-1945. The brutal action was precipitated by Poland's threat to deny citizenship to its expatriates abroad.⁴ Over 50,000 Jews born in ethnic Polish territories who had settled in Germany became citizens of a new state when Poland gained nationhood in 1921. In the succeeding years, thousands of new migrants fleeing antisemitism and pogroms in the Republic of Poland joined them in Weimar Germany.⁵ The Polish state, which after 1936 pursued an overtly anti-Jewish policy, had no desire to absorb its expatriates living in Germany and thwarted German deportations for a time by denying passports and by retaliatory actions against German citizens residing within Polish borders.⁶ The diplomatic balance between Poland and Germany was upended by the *Anschluss Österreichs* in March 1938. Fearing the return of thousands of Polish Jews fleeing repression in Austria, the Polish Parliament passed a 'revocation of citizenship' act on 1 April 1938, annulling the citizenship of those who had lived continuously abroad for more than five years and igniting suspicion in Germany that Poland intended to 'toss' Polish Jews to the countries in which they now resided.⁷

From the German perspective, the consequences of enforcement would be intolerable. Once the deadline passed, all of Germany's Polish Jews would become stateless, making their deportation impossible and nullifying Germany's efforts at 'forced emigration', since other nations would be reluctant to accept immigrants they could not subsequently expel. Before the enforcement deadline, Germany declared foreign Jews 'undeserving of hospitality' and laid the groundwork for coercive action by stipulating that 'implementation of deportation was no longer dependent on the willingness of a foreign country to accept the person deported'.⁸ On 6 October 1938, a new Polish ordinance required the surrender of all foreign-issued Polish passports to the

³ Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) pp. 17, 54-60. Children automatically took the citizenship of their fathers.

⁴ Maurer, 'The Background for Kristallnacht', pp. 52-6. Milton gives a slightly different account of these negotiations, as does Jerzy Tomaszewski.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46. The population of Polish Jews, according to the June 1933 census, was 56,480, or 57.2% of foreign Jews.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷ Tomaszewski 'Przystanek Zbaaszyn', p. 73.

⁸ Maurer, 'The Background for Kristallnacht', p. 54. Germany also tried to force Polish Jews to leave 'voluntarily' by increasing deportable offences and tightening regulations on residential visas.

nearest consulate for ‘checking’, warning that those not receiving a special stamp would be invalidated.⁹ The Germans recognised the move as a general revocation of citizenship intended to prevent the deportation of Polish Jews from Germany.¹⁰ The ordinance was to take effect on 30 October 1938.

The new Polish decree put the two nations on a diplomatic collision course. Last-minute negotiations between Warsaw and Berlin did not convince the Germans that Polish intentions were benign. On 26 October, *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler ordered the Security and Regular Police to set aside all other duties and take into custody all Polish Jews with valid passports ‘in a group transport’ to be deported on or before 29 October 1938.¹¹ Himmler stressed that ‘as large a number as possible of Polish Jews, especially adult males, must successfully be transferred across the frontier to Poland before the deadline mentioned’.¹² Thus on the 28/29 October, nearly 20,000 Jewish residents from all parts of the Reich, including the family of Herbert Haberberg, were unceremoniously taken into custody, herded onto trains, and forced over the German border into Poland.

The expulsion took both its Jewish victims and the Poles by surprise.¹³ Trainloads of Jews, some filled with families, and some only with adult males, made their way to border points and disgorged the passengers into ‘no man’s land’. Unprepared Polish frontier guards allowed the deportees to cross in several places, but at others, they were refused further entry into Poland. The largest of these holding points was in the town of Zbąszyń, where with five to eight thousand other Jews, the Haberberg family were detained and forced to find shelter in former horse stables, while others settled in an unused flourmill and vacated military barracks.¹⁴ At first, life for the refugees was disorganised and chaotic, but with the help of Jewish relief agencies from Warsaw and

⁹ Tomaszewski, ‘Przystanek Zbąszyń’, pp. 73-5 and Maurer, ‘The Background of Kristallnacht’, pp. 54-55.

¹⁰ Maurer, ‘The Background for Kristallnacht’, p. 55. The majority of Polish citizens in Germany held such passports.

¹¹ ‘(Second) Express Letter’, Reichsführer SS, 26 October 1938, in *Documente zur Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden*, pp. 422f quoted in Maurer, ‘The Background to Kristallnacht’, p. 56.

¹² The deportations were halted on 29 October 1938 when the Polish government undertook retaliatory expulsions. The two nations agreed to resume diplomatic negotiations. Polish Jews in Germany who had avoided deportation on were allowed to remain in Germany, but those who were already in Poland were not permitted back except in controlled numbers and for brief periods in order to liquidate their assets. Poland agreed to allow wives and children to join adult males who had been deported alone. The expellees were able to send their furniture and personal effects to Poland but were forced to place their capital and the assets from the disposal of their property into special accounts with the German Foreign Exchange Bank. Ibid. pp. 64-66.

¹³ Maurer, ‘The Background for Kristallnacht’, pp. 52-6.

¹⁴ Milton, ‘The Expulsion of Polish Jews’, pp. 170-1.

the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint), regular food distributions were set up and workshops, educational and recreational activities, stores, a welfare office, a police force and a library were established. International relief organisations joined those from Warsaw to bring help to the refugees, and it was in this context that the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund (PJRF or Fund), a small Anglo-Jewish relief organisation, came into existence.

Established by the United Polish Appeal Committee in London in conjunction with Keren Hatorah Relief Fund to collect donations for thousands of refugees stranded at various points along the



German-Polish border, it quickly became much more than a money-raising organ, sending representatives to Poland and actively helping the Zbąszyń refugees organise themselves.¹⁵

The *Polenaktion* served as the catalyst for a much more familiar act of German anti-Jewish persecution. Sheltering in the horse stalls with the Haberbergs was the family of Sendel and Rivka Grynszpan, whose youngest son, Herschel, was living illegally in Paris.¹⁶ After learning about their traumatic deportation and deplorable living conditions, the seventeen year old purchased a gun, went to the German Embassy in Paris and shot the diplomat Ernst vom Rath, who died two days later.¹⁷ The Germans used the assassination of vom Rath as the putative justification for the Reich-wide

¹⁵ 'Four Days Without Food: Victims of Gestapo Housed in Pigsties-Terrible Scenes in Zbonszyn', *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 November 1938, pp. 25-26. Keren Hatorah was the educational arm of Agudath Israel, an independent orthodox faction of Judaism, which in the 1930s was led in the UK by Dr Solomon Schonfeld. It was also connected to the Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations (FJRO) and the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain (FPJ). The organisation, which was first named the Polish Refugee Fund, changed its name to the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund, possibly to distinguish itself from the similarly named, but non-Jewish Polish Relief Fund. By 1 December 1939, the group was referred to by the new name. 'Lest You Forget: Brief Summary of the activities of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund in London', *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 December 1939, p. 25

¹⁶ Rita Thalman and Emmanuel Feinermann, *Crystal Night: 9-10 November 1938*, trans. by Gilles Cremonesi, (New York: Holocaust Library, 1973), pp. 35-36. The Grynszpans' arrest and deportation in Hannover were similar to the Haberbergs, including riding in open trucks through city streets lined with jeering Germans. They survived the war in the USSR and Sendel and Marcus testified at the Eichmann trial in 1961.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35-6, 40-2.

pogrom of mass arrests and destruction of Jewish religious and commercial property known as *Kristallnacht*, which was launched on 9 November 1938, the evening of vom Rath's death.¹⁸

The *Polenaktion* had attracted little attention internationally, but *Kristallnacht* resulted in worldwide outrage and condemnation.¹⁹ It was this event, rather than the punitive mass expulsion of Polish Jews two weeks earlier that awakened the world to the seriousness of Nazi intentions towards the Jews in their midst. In spite of their professed horror of *Kristallnacht*, however, most nations that had resolutely refused to alter their strict immigration policies for Jewish refugees at the Evian Conference a few months earlier did not now relax their borders.²⁰ One notable exception was Great Britain. In reaction to *Kristallnacht*, British government officials agreed to a plan proposed by Anglo-Jewish leaders to bring unaccompanied Jewish children under the age of seventeen out of the Reich as temporary transmigrants, and to streamline the process by waiving visa and passport requirements. Thus was inaugurated the movement that is now widely known as the *Kindertransport*.²¹

Once the outlines of the programme were in place, relief agencies working with beleaguered Jewish communities in the Reich worked quickly to send children to Britain. The first group arrived on 2 December 1938 – a mere eleven days after the British Parliament approved the scheme. For the next nine months, until the beginning of the Second World War halted the transports, an average of 1100 children per month arrived on British shores.²² The majority of the children came from Germany and Austria in an effort largely directed by the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (MCCG), later renamed the Refugee Children's Movement (RCM or

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁹ Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Persecution: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1933-1939*, (London: Phoenix, 2007), pp. 298-300. Notably, the French government failed to register even the slightest condemnation of the pogrom.

²⁰ For Britain's emigration policies, as well as the Evian Conference and its aftermath, see Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²¹ A number of sources recount these events. For the most recent see Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938-1945*, (West Lafayette IN: Purdue University Press, 2012), Chapter 3.

²² One small group of children who had been stranded in the Netherlands by the start of the war managed to get out in the spring of 1940. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 173-4.

Movement).²³ The British government had given its official imprimatur to no single agency, though, and the *Kindertransport* included efforts by dedicated individuals and agencies working independently in Vienna, Czechoslovakia, the free city of Danzig, and even from the Zbąszyń refugee camp and other locations in Poland.²⁴

After the *Kindertransport* scheme had been approved, the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund altered its remit to include bringing *Polenaktion* refugee children into Great Britain under the terms of the scheme. The first fifty-four Zbąszyń children arrived in England on 14 February 1939. Two subsequent transports landed in August that year: a small group of thirty on 1 August, and the largest, comprised of about seventy children on 29 August 1939.²⁵ Although records for this phase of the Polish *Kindertransport* are scarce, difficulties in securing sponsors as well as bureaucratic problems in Poland may account for the long delay between the first and second transports. Public statements by the Fund indicated a goal of bringing at least 500 children from Poland, but they managed only 154 before the war put an end to their efforts.²⁶

Herbert and Manfred Haberberg were among the victims of the *Polenaktion* who were beneficiaries of the British government's acquiescence to the *Kindertransports*. Included in the final group, the Haberberg boys travelled by train to Gdynia where they boarded the packet steamer the *SS Warszawa* for the five-day journey to London, setting foot on British shores at Cotton's Wharf, Tower Bridge on 30 August 1939, two days before the Nazi invasion of Poland that signalled the start of the Second World War.²⁷ There they joined the ranks of approximately 10,000 other unaccompanied children whose transmigration was thrown into uncertainty and whose status as aliens and

²³ The RCM was self an offshoot of the Central British Fund for German Jewry (CBF) in coordination with the non-Jewish Save the Children/ Inter-Aid Fund. The CBF has undergone several name changes including: Central British Fund for German Jewry, 1933-1936; Council for German Jewry, 1936-1939; Central Council for Jewish Refugees, 1939-1944; Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation, 1944-present, though it is now generally known as World Jewish Relief. For the purposes of simplification and clarity, I will refer to it as CBF or Council throughout the thesis.

²⁴ The British Government initially recognised only the Inter-Aid Committee. A full discussion of various agencies associated with the *Kindertransport* is included in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

²⁵ '70 Children from Zbonszyn: Lived in Barns and Pigsties', *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 September 1939, p. 20; 'Child Refugees Here From No Man's Land Between the Guns', *News Chronicle*, 30 August 1939, p. 9. Although the *Jewish Chronicle* put the number at seventy, *The News Chronicle* reported the arrival of sixty-seven. The latter number is probably correct, based on the testimony of survivors like Herbert Haberberg, who remember several children being left behind.

²⁶ 'No Man's Land Children in London', *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 February 1939, p. 32.

²⁷ Their entry cards were stamped 29 August 1939, the official date of their arrival into British territory, and probably stamped by an immigration official who boarded the ship on the evening of the 29th somewhere in British waters. They did not disembark from their ship, however, until the morning of 30 August. This was the date that the PJRF informed guarantors they should come to Tower Bridge to claim their charges.

refugees became their primary identities.²⁸ Coming from a wide variety of national, socio-economic and religious backgrounds and ranging in age from infants to late teens, the *Kinder*, as they have come to refer to themselves collectively, were united by the persecutions they had experienced prior to arrival and their separation from homes and families. Once in Britain, their lives varied significantly depending on age, gender, nationality, location and other factors, but a great number of them shared many common experiences.²⁹

Although the ‘No Man’s Land’ children, as the *Kinder* who arrived as victims of the *Polenaktion* were dubbed in the British press, represented only a tiny fraction of the entire *Kindertransport*, their story is important and noteworthy for a number of reasons. The only children of Polish citizenship brought out of Polish territory to be included on the *Kindertransport*, they were also among the few to have arrived as *double refugees*.³⁰ The unusual circumstances of their lives, as German-born and German-speaking Polish nationals, presented them with singular challenges and opportunities as child refugees in the UK. Yet the lives of the *Polenaktion Kinder* paralleled those of other *Kinder* in Great Britain, and their experiences – with foster homes and hostels, evacuation and internment, school, employment, loss of and reunion with family and challenges to religion – are representative of the *Kindertransport* experience as a whole. The unique combination of the particularity and universality of the Polish *Kindertransportees*’ lives makes a prosopographical study based upon their experiences possible.³¹

For the historian, one of the most remarkable things about the *Polenaktion*

²⁸ For the development of the *Kindertransport* as a temporary, trans-migratory programme, see Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 49-53. Frances Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees: The Scottish Experience*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) pp. 15-16 also deals with transmigration, though she inflated its significance, making it central to the *Kindertransportees*’ experience. Paula Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children 1938-1945’, unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, 2001 pp. 129-130, argued that the British Government in reality never pressured the children to re-emigrate.

²⁹ Frances Williams refused to use the collective noun ‘kinder’ arguing that it connoted ‘a monolithic kinship group with one identity and experience’ and contending that there was little commonality or uniformity of experience among this highly diverse group of child refugees. Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees* pp. xxv-xxxvi. However, since many of the surviving former unaccompanied child refugees have chosen the term for themselves, they will be collectively referred to as *Kinder* (singular *Kind*) in this study.

³⁰ Some of the Czech *Kinder* were also refugees from Nazi persecution, although they had not been forcibly expelled from their homes as the *Polenaktion Kinder* had.

³¹ The *Polenaktion* children were not the only *Kindertransportees* of Polish nationality. Many Polish Jews avoided expulsion from Germany and some of their children came to Britain on *Kindertransport*s from Germany. There were also Polish Jews in Austria. For the purposes of this study, the children who came from inside Poland as a result of the *Polenaktion* will be referred to using the terms ‘Polish *Kinder*’, ‘*Polenaktion Kinder*’ and ‘Zbąszyń *Kinder*’ even though some of these *Kindertransportees* were expelled to other parts of the Polish border and were never in Zbąszyń.

children is that the detailed records of their lives as child refugees have survived intact. The files of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund are a rich repository of original documentation representing the voices of those who cared for and guided the children as well as the parents and the children themselves. In addition to letters, the files contain photographs, birth certificates, welfare reports, school and employment records, clothing requests, re-emigration documents, entry cards and other ephemera, long believed lost or destroyed. Working with similarly varied, fragmentary and distinctive material in his study of Hungarian ghettos in 1944, Holocaust historian Tim Cole, drawing upon the work of Peter Burke and others, has referred to such documentation as ‘traces’.³² The traces, relics and artefacts of the past that had lain undisturbed in the file folders of the PJRF for over sixty years provide what has long been lacking in the *Kindertransport* archival record: a corpus of contemporaneous writings from the multitude of individual, but largely forgotten actors in the *Kindertransport* saga. These files represent a unique opportunity to do what Tim Cole has referred to as ‘writing the unknowns into [...] historiography’.³³ The Polish Fund materials may in fact be the only comprehensive original traces of *Kindertransportees* still in existence, and are almost certainly the only publicly accessible ones.³⁴

The unavailability of similar archival material has long handicapped the academic study of the *Kindertransport*. The dossiers held by the Refugee Children’s Movement, which disbanded in 1948, devolved to its parent organisation, the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief (CBF or WJR). Although its website boasts that ‘records for every *Kind* that arrived in the UK through the *Kindertransports* are still maintained by World Jewish Relief through its Jewish Refugees Committee’, access to these records are restricted to *Kinder* and their descendants.³⁵ Held at the London Metropolitan Archives, these records do not contain original documentation of the kind

³² Tim Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust: Journeying in and out of the Ghettos*, (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 1-2.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴ For archival material on the *Kindertransport* see Andrea Hammel, ‘The Future of *Kindertransport* Research: Archives, Diaries, Databases, Fiction’, in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds., *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/9: New Perspectives*, The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 13, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 141-156.

³⁵ World Jewish Relief, ‘*Kindertransport*’, <<http://www.wjr.org.uk/about-us/kindertransport/>>[accessed 10 April 2013].

found in the PJRF records.³⁶ *Kinder* and their families who request records receive summaries of correspondence and logs of contact only. The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) archivist maintains that the voluminous original correspondence and most other records in the files were destroyed over twenty years ago.³⁷ In a recent study of the *Kindertransport*, Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz revealed that in the late 1970s she was told that much of the RCM documentation was destroyed in the 1950s.³⁸ If these reports are true, then all that remains of the files of 10,000 child refugees are truncated summaries. Those made available privately to researchers help to establish factual details and chronologies, but preclude the close reading and textual analysis provided by original correspondence, limiting their utility for deep enquiry and interrogation.

The precise fate of the original documentation remains in doubt, but it was unquestionably made available prior to 1990 to a few authors with direct connections to the RCM and its successor organisations to produce a significant body of popular and academic *Kindertransport* history. These authors were granted privileged access to case files, welfare reports, and other archival materials to create a number of ‘managed’ or ‘official’ histories favouring a redemptive and celebratory narrative centred on the Refugee Children’s Movement. This construction, which valorised the refugee agency and the British nation, minimised the children’s hardships in Great Britain and effaced the suffering of their families, became the paradigmatic interpretation of the *Kindertransport*.

A *Kindertransport* narrative of rescue, salvation, altruism and integration – an essentially blemish-free success story – emerged before the end of the war. This interpretation was first articulated in the pamphlet *A Great Adventure: The Story of the Children’s Refugee Movement* written by Gladys Skelton Bendit under the pseudonym

³⁶ Communication with archivists at the London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA) about the extent and general contents of the recently indexed JRC files has confirmed that ten percent of the German files and about four percent of the Austrian files concern child refugees. (*Kinder* were around twenty percent of all Jewish refugees whose files were kept by the JRC). According to the LMA, ‘The records are the original administrative files and as a rule contain no additional personal material such as letters, birth records or personal photographs’. Email correspondence with the LMA, 13 March 2013.

³⁷ Email correspondence 13 March- 30 April 2012 between Kamiel family and AJR shared with author. The claim appears to be substantiated by the material sent to three other *Kinder* who petitioned for their records and shared the results with the author. The reason given for the destruction of the documents was that the archive was simply too large to house.

³⁸ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 9. The reason given to Baumel-Schwartz was that former *Kinder* who had reached powerful positions wished to efface all traces of their refugee pasts.

John Presland in 1944.³⁹ This brief account, intended to counter criticisms of the RCM's after-care, made the *Kindertransport* synonymous with the Refugee Children's Movement. The author, a founder of the RCM, portrayed the scheme as an uplifting story featuring 'the untiring efforts of the Movement's workers, the natural kindness of the public and the humanity and patience of the authorities' working together 'in the interests of the [...] children' who 'were guaranteed proper care, education and preparation for earning a livelihood'.⁴⁰ Though granting that its efforts were 'imperfect in many respects, like all human endeavour', Bendit exempted the Movement from criticism by reminding readers of the difficulty of its task and most importantly, 'but for the work of the Movement [...] these children must have suffered death or a fate far more horrible than death'.⁴¹ In Bendit's re-telling, all the children's religious, educational and vocational needs were met and many achieved 'brilliant success'.⁴² The children's struggles – 'the fear and bewilderment with which they found themselves refugees in a strange land', and their 'many problems of psychological maladjustment' – were framed as difficulties 'with which the workers in the Movement were faced'.⁴³ The emphasis was on their escape from 'miseries', the restoration of their 'zest and pride' and their finding 'not only an abiding place among us, but a spiritual home'.⁴⁴ Bendit's summative remarks, the most oft-quoted phrases in *Kindertransport* literature, spawned the enduring narrative of salvation, redemption and triumph:

It is not a small thing in these years of suffering without parallel, to have given ten thousand children the opportunity to grow up in an atmosphere of decency and normality, to work, play, to laugh and be happy and to assume their rightful heritage as free men and women.⁴⁵

This interpretation has proved remarkably resilient, and one of the primary objectives of this study is to interrogate this representation and to challenge and complicate the *Kindertransport's* meaning and outcomes.

The version of the *Kindertransport* promulgated in *A Great Adventure* was

³⁹ John Presland [Gladys Bendit], *A Great Adventure: The Story of the Children's Refugee Movement*. (London: Bloomsbury House, 1944).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16. She also insisted that the government's 'stringent' regulations 'were not designed for the protection of the British public only', but in the 'interests of the refugees themselves'. p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* These words appear on the frontispiece of Barry Turner, *...And the Policeman Smiled: 10,000 Children Escape Nazi Germany*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1990) attributed to Dorothy Hardisty, the General Secretary of the RCM. They may well have been Hardisty's words, but Turner provided no references, and as their first published incidence was in *A Great Adventure*, which did not credit Hardisty with the quote, authorship must go to Bendit.

amplified by additional works similarly authored by those with connections to the RCM or its successor organisations. Norman Bentwich's *They Found Refuge: An Account of British Jewry's Work for Victims of Nazi Oppression* included a laudatory chapter on the *Kindertransport* favourably comparing Britain's rescue effort to those of other nations. The book featured an essay by Lord Gorell, the Movement's chairman and the *Kinder's* parliamentary-appointed legal guardian, which offered a hagiographical account of the Movement's work.⁴⁶

It had been 'a great adventure': yes, but it had been much more [...] in spite of the suffering they had endured [...] hardly one of the children thus brought over failed to make good. It is [...] a tribute to the organization of the Refugee Children's Movement, and to the loving, understanding care shown to them by many, many people in this country to whose humanity neither race nor religion proved any barrier. It was a magnificent achievement: it remains the finest of memories.⁴⁷

With the distance of a decade, Lord Gorell's interpretation advanced a successful 'happily-ever-after' outcome for children (whose only suffering had occurred before arrival in Britain), placed a mantle of exceptionalism on all the actors, and air-brushed the lost families out of the narrative. The child refugees faded from public memory however, and it was over thirty years before another historical account was published.⁴⁸ An upsurge of interest in Holocaust and related subjects in the 1980s, and the first reunion of former child refugees on the fifty-year anniversary of their arrival marked a turning point in the historiography. Authors such as Elaine Laski Blond, Barry Turner and Amy Zahl Gottlieb produced works that were RCM-centric and sympathetic to the heroicising narrative first framed in 1944.⁴⁹ Turner's *...And the Policeman Smiled: 10,000 Children Escape Nazi Germany* was the first book fully devoted to the history of the *Kindertransport*, and for two decades stood as the standard and most frequently referenced work on the movement.⁵⁰

A popular and not an *academic* history, written with a specific didactic and

⁴⁶ J. Norman Bentwich, *They Found Refuge: An Account of British Jewry's Work for Victims of Nazi Oppression*, (London: Cresset Press, 1956), pp. 65-74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁸ The disappearance of the *Kinder* in public consciousness is discussed in Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Elaine Blond and Barry Turner, *Marks of Distinction: The Memoirs of Elaine Blond* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1988); Amy Zahl Gottlieb, *Men of Vision: Anglo-Jewry's Aid to Victims of the Nazi Regime 1933-1945*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).

⁵⁰ Barry Turner, *...And the Policeman Smiled*. In several chapters on the *Kindertransport*, Gottlieb, the CBF's archivist, managed a scholarly counterpoint to Turner, utilising the same archival material, but without what she termed 'anecdotal sources'. The result is a rather colourless and uncritical rendering of the RCM within the broader context of the refugee work of the CBF.

polemical purpose, Turner's book is deeply problematic as an authoritative source. Turner frankly declared that his remit was to tell the story of the Refugee Children's Movement (rather than the *Kindertransport* as a whole) and that he had been commissioned by its successor agency the CBF to do so.⁵¹ Although quoting at length from Movement records, Turner eschewed citations and references and provided little chronological context, precluding his work from consideration as an objective or critical academic study. Unfortunately, Turner's book remains the only source of information from the children's RCM dossiers, to which the author was given exclusive access. Utilising these invaluable documents to perpetuate a valorising narrative, Turner minimised the experiences of those who *failed* 'to work, to play, to laugh and be happy'. Culling the most sensational examples of mental and emotional trauma from the RCM files, Turner grouped them all in one chapter, which framed the victims' unfortunate lives in terms of the challenges they presented to the RCM.⁵² The chapter's flippant title 'Short Straws' is emblematic of the way in which their tragedies were downplayed in service to the larger story of the Movement's unqualified successes. The subsequent destruction of those archival records has made the task of challenging and re-interpreting the 'official' histories' sources virtually impossible.

The inaccessibility of the remaining records in the Movement dossiers has left sparse archival assets for researchers and inhibited the development of a robust scholarly historiography of the *Kindertransport*. The RCM administrative and financial records made public by the CBF provide perspectives on organisational dimensions of the *Kindertransport* and have been thoroughly explored in the literature. Outside of Great Britain, Jewish community archives from the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* in Vienna are still extant, though corresponding records from Berlin were lost during the war.⁵³ For the past two decades, researchers have also had access to the papers of individual rescuers such as Nicholas Winton and Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld, both of whom brought children into England independently of the Movement. Winton's papers provide important information on the selection and placement process, but little on the aftercare of the Czech children for whom he helped arrange transportation. Schonfeld's vast collection, yet to be fully exploited, holds the greatest promise of new archival findings, and his records have proved fruitful for some of the most recent

⁵¹ Turner, ...*And the Policeman Smiled*, p. vi.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Chapter 12, pp. 216-234.

⁵³ Hammel, 'The Future of Archival Research', pp. 142-144.

Kindertransport scholarship.

A new wave of researchers has produced the latest additions to the literature, shifting the focus slightly away from the Refugee Children's Movement and advancing new approaches to the history. Inaugurating this trend was Vera K. Fast's *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport*, the first historic study devoted entirely to the child evacuation scheme to appear in over two decades.⁵⁴ Scholarly and well researched, its primary value lies in its coverage of lesser-known actors in the *Kindertransport* saga, and its extended focus on the greatest controversy of child refugee movement: the placing of Jewish children in non-Jewish foster homes. At the centre of this debate was Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld, whose papers formed the core of her archival research. Fast's emphasis on Schonfeld's activities on behalf of the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council (CRREC) and her even-handed treatment of this polarizing figure are among the strengths of this book.⁵⁵ Fast achieved a balanced rendering of the Rabbi, recognizing both his success and failures while also acknowledging the limits of his influence and his less admirable methods and personality traits. Fast's study is limited by an unfocused approach to the subject and a tentative and uncritical analysis. Purporting to be a general history, the book is actually several specialist studies, including chapters on the experiences of non-Jewish child refugees, the efforts of non-Jewish relief agencies, and the experiences of orthodox children, but her coverage of topics only tangentially related to the *Kindertransport* compromises its overall coherence.⁵⁶ The major shortcomings are the lack of critical analysis and a failure to offer fresh interpretations. In concluding, Fast posed a critical question: 'Was the painful uprooting of these thousands of children [...] a wise and positive operation, or

⁵⁴ Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: L.B. Tauris, 2011). There are also several studies published in German including Rebekka Göpfert, *Der jüdische kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39*, (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1997).

⁵⁵ Works devoted to Schonfeld have tended towards the hagiographic, while in literature emanating from RCM, Schonfeld has been subjected to vilification, contempt or total neglect. For hagiographies see David Kranzler, *Holocaust Hero: The Untold Story and Vignettes of Soloman Schonfeld, an Extraordinary British Orthodox Rabbi who Rescued 4000 Jews During the Holocaust*, (Jersey City: KTAV, 2004) and Derek Taylor, *Solomon Schonfeld: A Purpose in Life*, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2009). More critical is Chanan Tomlin, *Protest and Prayer: Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld and Orthodox Jewish Responses in Britain to the Nazi persecution of Europe's Jews 1942-1945*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006). For the most vilifying treatment, see Turner, ...*And the Policeman Smiled*, pp. 236-40, 257-8.

⁵⁶ For example, Fast included Schonfeld's post-war rescue of Polish child survivors of the Holocaust as a 'natural progression' to the *Kindertransport* saga. While a worthy topic, it is questionable whether it fits within a study of the *Kindertransport*.

was it not?’⁵⁷ Disappointingly, Fast chose not to answer with her own analysis, but defaulted to Gladys Bendit, quoting verbatim from the final words of *A Great Adventure*. Fast’s professed intent to ‘wring something life-affirming and productive’ out of the story led her to endorse rather than to challenge the existing redemptive portrayal.⁵⁸

Subsequent additions to the literature have indicated a greater openness to move the narrative beyond the paradigmatic account. Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz’s *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938-1945* was the first monograph to challenge the ‘official’ histories’ one-dimensional accounts of rescue and salvation.⁵⁹ Baumel-Schwartz’s work derived from an MA thesis written thirty years earlier, among the first research on child refugees from Nazism.⁶⁰ She came to the then radical conclusions that the British government was motivated by political pragmatics rather than humanitarian compassion and that the spiritual and emotional needs of the children were ignored by an Anglo-Jewish community that was ‘condescending and intolerant’.⁶¹ This counter-narrative thesis, as well as her perspectives as an Israeli scholar, put her at odds with the existing histories, although her first study received limited attention. The published work originating from Baumel-Schwartz’s earlier research is a modulated though still sharply critical study of *Kinder* reception and care and especially of the estrangement of Jewish children from their faith. Although updated to reflect recent scholarship, the study does not include substantial new archival

⁵⁷ Fast, *Children’s Exodus*, p. 197.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xvii, 197-8.

⁵⁹ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*. This work was preceded by a number of discrete studies challenging *Kindertransport* mythologies beginning with Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) specifically the chapter, ‘The *Kindertransport*: A Case of Selective Memory?’ and Caroline Sharples, ‘Reconstructing the Past: Refugee Writings on the *Kindertransport*’, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12:3 (2006), 40-62. More recently, Caroline Sharples ‘The *Kindertransport* in British Historical Memory’, in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds., *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/9: New Perspectives*,. 15-27 and Kay Andrews, ‘The British Government and the *Kindertransport*: Moving Away from the Redemptive Story’, *Prism*, 5, Spring 2013, pp. 54-60. Three journals, *Shofar* (Fall 2004), *The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 13 (2012), and *Prism* (2013) have all devoted entire issues to contemporary *Kindertransport* scholarship.

⁶⁰ Judith Tydor Baumel, ‘The Refugee Children in Great Britain’, unpublished MA thesis, Bar Ilan University, Israel, 1981.

⁶¹ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never look Back*, p. 240. The author concluded her book with a long passage from her 1981 MA thesis cited above. I explored similar themes in my MA thesis, from which Baumel-Schwartz draws several laudatory references in her work, noting my critique of the dominant narrative. See Jennifer Norton, ‘The *Kindertransport*: History and Memory’, unpublished MA Thesis, California State University Sacramento, 2010 < <http://csus-dspace.calstate.edu/handle/10211.9/832> > [accessed 14 September 2014]

findings.⁶² A comprehensive overview of the mechanics and administration of the *Kindertransport*, it is not a ‘history from below’ focusing on the daily lives of the children in wartime Britain. Nevertheless, Baumel-Schwartz has written the first coherent scholarly history of the movement, from its evolution in Anglo-Jewish philanthropy, to the guardianship battle at the end of the war, ably covering most of the major issues the *Kinder* faced. A balanced chronological study putting RCM efforts into perspective and giving credit to a variety of individuals and organisations, it supplants Barry Turner’s book as the definitive history of the *Kindertransport*.

More recently, Frances Williams’ *The Forgotten Kindertransportees: The Scottish Experience* acknowledged the inadequacy of the redemptive narrative to do justice to the broad range of *Kinder* experiences. Locating the treatment of *Kinder* within the context of particular socio-cultural norms, Williams’ examination of specific aspects of the Scottish *Kinder* experience, especially Scotland’s institutional care model, is a valuable contribution to the literature of the *Kindertransport*. The work is rather unevenly written and structured however, and its shifting focus between Scottish and English *Kinder* undermines Williams’ argument for a particularist rather than a universalist approach to the study of the *Kindertransport*. Although her objective was to address the unique and neglected story of the Scottish *Kinder* and to question accounts focussing on commonalities of experience across the UK, she consistently resorted to evidence from non-Scottish *Kinder*, contradicting her own arguments about *Kinder* heterogeneity. She also overstated the importance of trans-migration, conflating the Scottish *Kinder*’s voluntary post-war exodus with the *Kindertransport* programme’s mandated but unenforced re-emigration stipulation.⁶³ The most troubling aspect of the study, though, was Williams’ failure to critically engage with her sources, especially her primary instrument, the 2007 *Kindertransport* Association Survey. Making extensive use of the survey’s statistics, Williams’ unflinching presented them as conclusive for the entire *Kindertransport* but neglected to address the survey’s limitations or qualify the

⁶² Baumel-Schwartz discussed the archival difficulties in her introduction and included a full critical literature review as well.

⁶³ See Hansard, House of Commons v. 345, 6 April 1939, c. 3062-3. Colonel Wedgewood asked, ‘Why should these children be compelled to re-emigrate? [...] We have a falling birth rate, and we have an urgent need for men, and yet we are doing our best to keep out children and able-bodied men from Germany’. Later, Lord Derwent noted, ‘In view of the declining birthrate [...] such stock might be a real acquisition to the country’. Hansard, House of Lords, v. 113, 5 July 1939, c. 1033-4.

data in any way, seriously weakening the credibility of her arguments.⁶⁴

The lack of comprehensive and reliable *Kindertransport* data has plagued the historiography and the effort by the AJR/KA to gather statistics, although rather late in the day, was an admirable and ultimately fruitful undertaking. Questionnaires distributed to about 1500 former *Kinder* worldwide garnered more than 1000 responses, providing information on background, religion, foster care, family, education, work and many other aspects of *Kinder* experience. While the data is undeniably useful, there has been a worrying trend among academics such as Williams, Anthony Grenville and Andrea Hamel to discuss the survey's findings, especially those relating to the parents' fates, as 'definitive'.⁶⁵ According to Williams, who was employed by the AJR/KA to create and disseminate the questionnaires and disaggregate the data, 'The database shows that 46 per cent of *Kindertransportees* were re-united with at least one parent'.⁶⁶ More precisely, the database shows that '46 per cent of the survey's respondents' were reunited with a parent – a crucial distinction that Frances Williams failed to make throughout her study. Unfortunately, her insinuation that the data is accurate for the *Kindertransport* as a whole has begun to creep into the literature, particularly as a (presumed) factual corrective to the prior estimates of a much higher parental death rate.⁶⁷

Using this survey to extrapolate results for the entirety of the *Kinder* remains problematic. The AJR/KA surveyed only those who had made their contact information available to various *Kinder* associations and were willing to give details about their lives, making them a uniquely self-selected group of participants. Among the small number of still-living *Kinder*, their average age was seventy-nine, with two thirds over eighty, a long-lived but not necessarily representative group. It is impossible to know whether the *Kinder* who were not surveyed – fully ninety percent – had similar

⁶⁴ Association of Jewish Refugees, '*Kindertransport Survey*', <<http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey>> [accessed 10 April 2013]

⁶⁵ Anthony Grenville, 'The Home Office and the *Kindertransport* Parents', *AJR Journal*, 14/1, January 2014, p. 1. 'For many years, conventional wisdom had it that 90 per cent of the parents of *Kindertransport* children had died in the Holocaust. Only when the survey [...] produced very different results was the figure of 90 per cent definitively discredited'. See also Hamel, 'The Future of *Kindertransport* Research', pp. 149-150. Hamel noted that the survey 'cannot claim to be totally representative [...] as the sample is necessarily restricted to those known [...] and those who were still alive [...] However, there is an uncanny accuracy for some statistics' and 'One surprising outcome [...] has been the realisation that maybe more children than previously thought were reunited with one or both of their parents' and that 'the *Kindertransport* Survey has been able to rectify some of these long-held assumptions' about the death rate of the parents.

⁶⁶ Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. xv-xvi.

⁶⁷ Further discussion of the problematics of this interpretation appears in chapter 4 of this thesis.

experiences to those who submitted questionnaires. Although it was a large sample, it was not a scientific one, and definitive assertions of its accuracy for the entire *Kindertransport* are ill-advised in scholarly contexts.

Archival and data gaps relating to the experiences of child refugees have contributed to a *Kindertransport* historiography constructed largely on *Kinder* memory literature and testimony. Fast, Baumel-Schwartz and Williams all relied heavily upon *Kinder* interviews and memoirs to create their narratives and inform their analyses.⁶⁸ The proliferation of written and recorded testimony, interviews and films since the late 1980s has made the *Kinder*, in the words of historian Tony Kushner, the most documented ‘of all refugee movements in twentieth-century Britain’ – at least ten per cent of the former child refugees having left some record of their experiences.⁶⁹ This unprecedented outpouring of memory arrived at a time when memory and history were no longer considered rival claimants for accessing, reconstructing and representing the past.⁷⁰ *Kindertransport* recollections form not merely an adjunct to the established history of the movement, but a distinct and complementary body of literature, integral and vital to the historiography.

Since its first expression in Karen Gershon’s *We Came as Children: A Collective Autobiography of Refugees*, published in 1966, *Kindertransport* memory documentation has represented the possibility of a counter-narrative to the triumphal construction of rescue, salvation and redemptive outcomes.⁷¹ Among those who have chosen to share their remembrances, none have purported to be emotionally unaffected by their experiences, and most have reported life-long effects from being uprooted and separated, often permanently, from their families.⁷² Very few testimonies conform to the unclouded outcomes predicated in the ‘official’ histories. Although each individual

⁶⁸ Andrea Hammel has noted that ‘Some researchers have been criticized for their overreliance on memory documents’. Hammel, ‘The Future of *Kindertransport* Research’, p. 142.

⁶⁹ Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees* p. 141. This figure has probably grown since 2006.

⁷⁰ Aleida Assman, ‘History, Memory and the Genre of Testimony’, *Poetics Today*, 27 /2, (2006), pp. 261-273, (p. 262).

⁷¹ Karen Gershon, ed., *We Came as Children: A Collective Autobiography of Refugees*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966).

⁷² Gershon’s anonymous collection was later joined by Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn, eds. *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports*, (Sussex: Book Guild, 1990 4th repr. 2007) and Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers; Stories of the Kindertransport-The British Scheme that Saved 10,000 Children from the Nazi Regime* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000) as the primary collective autobiographies. Smaller ones include Rosa M Sacharin, ed., *Recollections of Child Refugees from 1938 to the Present*, (Glasgow: Scottish Annual Reunion of the *Kinder*, 1999). Although not exclusively devoted to the *Kindertransport*, Dorit Bader Whiteman, *The Uprooted: A Hitler Legacy*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1993) features extensive memory accounts derived from interviews and questionnaires.

recollection is unique, collectively they establish a range of *Kinder* experiences which can be regarded as a corrective to overly-simplistic interpretations of the *Kindertransport*.⁷³

Unsurprisingly, this body of material has not seriously challenged the laudatory elements of the existing narrative, which still have significant salience.⁷⁴ For example, a recent announcement of an exhibition on the RCM's Cambridge committee noted that while not avoiding 'the tragedies and heartaches of children who missed and worried about their parents' or 'foster families who were cold or exploitative' or the 'many children [...] shunted from family to family',

The main message of the exhibition [...] will be to celebrate the remarkable work done by a group of mostly formidable ladies and well-connected academics whose sole motivation was to right the wrongs done to these innocent children.⁷⁵

Individual *Kinder* testimonies are incapable of contesting such celebratory memories of the *Kindertransport*. A comprehensive collation of *Kinder* testimony might challenge existing paradigms, but presently they remain a disconnected assortment of separate remembrances. Nevertheless, these isolated accounts have constituted researchers' main source of information about *Kinder* experiences and for that reason, they must be scrutinised as a separate archival record.

It is important to recognise that the recollections that comprise the *Kinder* memory archive are voluntary constructions of various types that were recorded for specific purposes. Former child refugees who gave interviews or testimony or published memoirs felt that something noteworthy had happened to them, believed that their stories were worthy of preserving for a wider audience and were willing to reflect upon and recall their lives. Among their output are hundreds of video and audiotaped testimonies in various collections worldwide, representing a discrete group of *Kinder* who had both the motivation and the opportunity to work with the necessary external agents. All such testimonies are mediated by what Geoffrey Hartman calls 'frame conditions' –displacement in time, exile from the land and language of birth and the

⁷³ See individual memoirs, far too many to be listed here, and over 400 recorded testimonies in the Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute among other oral history collections.

⁷⁴ See for example, recent articles in the *AJR Journal*, including Anthony Grenville's apologia for the British Government 'The Home Office and the *Kindertransport* Parents' *AJR Journal*, 14/1 January 2014, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Mike Levy, 'We Must Save the Children' *AJR Journal*, 14/6 June 2014, p. 5.

‘spirit in which the testimony interview is conducted’.⁷⁶ Many fewer, though still a considerable number, have published written accounts of their lives, and these must be approached as constructed narratives conforming to specific literary imperatives. As Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson have argued, ‘any life story, whether a written autobiography or an oral testimony, is shaped not only by the reworkings of experience through memory and re-evaluation, but also always at least to some extent by art’.⁷⁷ Besides those who chose to come forward to record their experiences for public posterity, a significant number of others have shared their stories privately with researchers in formal interviews, questionnaires and informal conversations. Indeed, it is around many such interactions that the most recent additions to the literature have been structured.

As researchers have long noted, each of the 10,000 children has a unique story, and although it cannot be said that there was a ‘typical’ *Kinder* experience, certain commonalities do emerge from among their many autobiographical accounts. All researchers using this material, even those who resist homogenising the *Kinder*, have detected broad patterns of experience and drawn conclusions about the *Kindertransport* from such accounts. However, within this plentiful and varied corpus of material, it is impossible to know whether the perceived commonalities are representative of *Kindertransport* experience generally. It is conceivable that those who have chosen to share their life stories represent the extremes of *Kinder* life – those with the most positive recollections and successful outcomes and/or those with the most negative experiences. It is possible that the ninety per cent who have left no public record led lives of greater happiness or more traumas, and it is equally possible that their lives fell into a middle ground between these two extremes. *Kinder* memoirists, like those who responded to the *Kindertransport* Survey, are a non-random sample, and deductions drawn from their accounts must be approached with caution. It is as vital to engage critically with the memory record as it is with any other sources, especially because it accounts for such a significant part of *Kindertransport* historiography.

Unfortunately, critical engagement with memory sources is often lacking in the

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, ‘The Humanities of Testimony: An Introduction’, *Poetics Today*, 27/2, (2006), pp. 249-260, (pp. 250, 254).

⁷⁷ Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, ‘Introduction: Genre and Narrative in Life Stories’, in Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, eds., *Narrative and Genre*, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-22, (p. 1). Quoted in Tony Kushner, ‘Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation’, *Poetics Today*, 27/2, (2006), pp. 275-295.

scholarly discourse of the *Kindertransport*. Fast, Baumel-Schwartz and Williams all utilised numerous publicly available accounts, and the latter two authors also used privately obtained interviews to construct narratives and fill archival gaps. None of these authors interrogated the memory materials they worked with, instead incorporating testimony uncritically and interpreting it sparingly. The disinclination to scrutinise memory may derive from an increasing tendency towards ‘emotional adulation’ of witnesses, especially those who have survived traumatic events.⁷⁸ However, as Christopher Browning has observed, harrowing experiences do not themselves turn ‘ordinary people into heroic saints and martyrs’.⁷⁹ Survivors’ memories, like all memories, are subject to disjunctures and are embroideries of what has been remembered and forgotten, uttered and withheld. For these reasons, memory historians working in similar contexts have suggested that it is the imperative of the professional to be a ‘memory critic’, while conceding the difficulties of this task.⁸⁰

[C]an the historian, when face to face with a living person, act morally as a ‘memory critic? The suffering conveyed by the story of a survivor [...] paralyzes the historian. The historian knows that all life stories are constructions but also that these (re)constructions are the very armature [...] of life in the present.⁸¹

However, the historian *must* face this moral dilemma, and an exemplary model of the way ‘memory critique’ can be sensitively approached is found in Mark Roseman’s work on Marianne Strauss-Ellenbogen, a survivor whose interviews he skilfully juxtaposed with archival documentation and conversations with those who helped her after her family’s deportation from Germany.⁸² Roseman did not shy away from confronting Marianne’s memories, which were sometimes significantly at odds with other evidence, and tried to understand why she remembered in these particular ways. It

⁷⁸ Lawrence Langer, ‘Hearing the Holocaust’, *Poetics Today*, 27/2, (2006), pp. 297-309 (p. 302). I, too, have been guilty of using testimony uncritically in my previous work on the *Kindertransport*. I am indebted to Tony Kushner for his guidance on approaching testimony more critically. See especially his essay on the use of Holocaust survivor testimony: Tony Kushner ‘Saul Friedländer, Holocaust Historiography and the Use of Witness Testimony’, in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts, eds., *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedlander and the Future of Holocaust Studies*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 67-79.

⁷⁹ Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 84-5 quoted in Langer, ‘Hearing the Holocaust’, p. 302.

⁸⁰ Pierre Labourie, ‘Histoire et résistance: des historiens trouble-mémoire’, in *Écrire l’histoire de temps présent: En hommage à François Bédarida*, (Paris: CNRS, 2003) pp. 140-1 quoted in Annette Wieviorka, ‘The Witness in History’, trans., Jared Stark, *Poetics Today*, 27/2, (2006), pp. 385-97, (p. 39).

⁸¹ Wieviorka, ‘The Witness in History’, pp. 395-6.

⁸² Mark Roseman, *A Past in Hiding: Memory and Survival in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Metropolitan, 2000).

is a masterful example of the ways in which memory can be incorporated and interrogated while still honouring the survivor's trauma and loss.

Another reason for *Kindertransport* historians' failure to engage critically with memory is the lack of other sources against which memories could be contraposed. Mark Roseman's success in connecting meaningfully with Marianne's memories is partly attributable to the wealth of contemporaneous documentation he had at his disposal. Other scholars agree on the necessity of such an approach. Aleida Assman has argued that while 'memory is indispensable, as a view from the inside, to evaluating the events of the past [...] history is needed, as a view from the outside, to scrutinize and verify the remembered events'.⁸³ Geoffrey Hartman agreed, noting that 'Oral documents [...] should be carefully compared with other sources when it comes to positivistic data'.⁸⁴ Among the many justifications for counterpoising sources is the widely recognised occurrence of memory distortions prevalent within communities of people who experienced similar events. The most famous example of this phenomenon is that 'every Auschwitz survivor seems to have gone through a selection by Mengele, as if he manned his post 24 hours every day'.⁸⁵ The *Kindertransport* is not immune to such misrepresentations. Wide publicity about common arrival experiences led some of the *Polenaktion Kinder* to report arriving in Harwich or Southampton, and being subjected to a 'cattle call' selection by potential foster parents, despite the fact that that they all arrived at London's Tower Bridge and were met or sent on to pre-selected foster parents or guardians.⁸⁶ One Zbąszyń *Kind* 'remembered' cattle cars full of Jews being sent through Zbąszyń in October 1938 – a deportation method not used until 1941.⁸⁷

The challenge for researchers utilising testimony and memoir is how to evaluate

⁸³ Assman, 'History, Memory and the Genre of Testimony', p. 264.

⁸⁴ Hartman, 'The Humanities of Testimony: An Introduction', p. 254.

⁸⁵ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002 <1996>), p. 141. A similar observation was made by Christopher Browning in *Collected Memories* p. 83 and quoted in Kushner, 'Saul Friedländer, Holocaust Historiography and the Use of Witness Testimony', p. 69.

⁸⁶ See Gerd Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale: A Young Refugee's Home Fronts 1938-1948*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 63. Similar misremembering in Chaja Chovers, *Biography of Klara Kleimann: Deportation to Zbaszyn and rescue in England*, (unpublished, Hebrew, 2004), deposited at The Ghetto Fighters House Archives, Catalog No. 511. Chaja Chovers provided me a copy, which was kindly translated by Mimi Schneiderman. SH's memories of arrival and selection provided to me by her family. Email correspondence with RW, 25 April 2013. There are many mistakes relating to dates of arrival in *Polenaktion Kinder*'s testimonies, as well as in the names of the organisations responsible for their rescue. See Yad Vashem, Edward Itzhak Pachtman Audio Testimony, doc. 4013468, 1999. (Hereafter YV/EP Audio Testimony)

⁸⁷ Doreen Wachman, 'Margot Found German Trip Had Such Meaning', *The Jewish Telegraph*, 11 January 2013, p. 21.

and interpret such memory distortions. Often, misremembering has to do with dates and events that can easily be checked against the historical record, such as the *Kind* who testified that the *Polenaktion* was the result of *Kristallnacht*, rather than the other way around.⁸⁸ Mistakes in externalities like these do not in themselves invalidate memoirs, but it must be understood that they are sometimes subconsciously incorporated by the testifier to enhance the meaning of the lived experience. One *Kind*, for example, recalled leaving Poland on the day war broke out, arriving in London on the day Britain declared war, and the ship he sailed in being sunk on the way back to Poland, none of which was true.⁸⁹ The meta-narrative this man had constructed over the years to make sense of the traumas he had experienced was that his life was ‘like a novel’.⁹⁰ For Fred, the import-laden dates, along with other episodes that may or may not have been accurately recalled, scaffolded a perception that his life was comprised of a series of close escapes and improbable adventures. It is in the recognition of these internalised ‘truths’ that the real value of memory accounts can be discovered and utilised. The subjective feelings about experiences, both at the time of remembering, as well as the recalled state of mind – how events were experienced, not merely what was experienced – are the unique aspects of memory, investing it with importance to the historical record. Yet all too often in *Kindertransport* historiography, because of the lack of other documentation and external data, unchallenged and unmediated memory accounts have *become* the historical record.

The fragments and traces in the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund files provide a unique opportunity for redressing this imbalance between memory and archive in *Kindertransport* scholarship – for contesting *Kindertransport* memory and examining new perspectives. The documentation in these case files includes correspondence and other records from 1938 through the late 1950s, providing new insights on a vast array of issues affecting all aspects of *Kinder* experience. Over 100 dossiers contain both outgoing correspondence from the PJRF and incoming communications from four distinct constituencies: refugee organisations, everyday carers, *Kinder* and their parents. To these traces have been added contemporaneous newspaper articles, publicly recorded and privately collected testimony, interviews and memoirs, Yad Vashem (YV) and International Tracing Service (ITS) data and genealogical and General Register Office

⁸⁸ YV/EP Audio Testimony.

⁸⁹ University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive 39572, Fred Haberberg, 1998. (Hereafter USCSF/VHA).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

records, enabling the construction of a multi-layered and textured analysis of four interconnected groups yielding new insights into many aspects of the *Kindertransport*.

Over 8,000 traces and artefacts from four groups of actors have enabled the interrogation of the *Kindertransport* from their perspectives, each cohort being the subject of a separate chapter. The first, devoted to the organisations, answers questions about smaller agencies' interactions with the Refugee Children's Movement and other major Anglo-Jewish organisations, focusing closely upon the agencies' founding philosophies and their handling of the religious education of Jewish refugee children. The chapter concludes by investigating interactions between refugee agencies and the children, including how their attitudes towards gender and refugee status guided their decisions on education, training and employment. The everyday caregivers profiled in the second chapter are among the least examined actors in *Kindertransport* historiography. Foster parents, teachers, hostel managers and regional refugee workers attended to the quotidian needs of refugee children and wielded great influence on their lives, but most of what is known about them has come via *Kinder* memoirs and testimonies, problematizing analysis of their motivations and actions. Contemporaneous correspondence from custodians, organisations and the children answers important questions about carers' motivations and behaviour and their influence on *Kinder*'s lives. *Kindertransport* historiography has lacked contemporaneous children's writings and chapter three utilises *Kinder* letters to the PJRF to explore their agency, charting their movement from dependent refugee wards to independent autonomous young adults. The chapter also grapples with the *Polenaktion Kinder*'s identity and nationality issues and their interactions with guardian agencies, assessing how the children perceived their treatment, unmediated by the passage of time. The final chapter brings the parents fully into the *Kindertransport* narrative. An analysis of parents' letters from exile in Poland restores their voices and documents their struggles as they faced expulsion, refugee life and the separation from their children. Using data culled from Yad Vashem and the ITS archives, interviews and testimony, this chapter closes the narrative arc on many of the children and their families profiled throughout the study.

An investigation of archival sources and memory records within each chapter addresses two distinct contestations of memory. Woven throughout is an interrogation of the national and international myths surrounding the memory of the *Kindertransport*, specifically the redemptive and celebratory narrative of salvation and rescue. This is not the first study to attempt such an examination, but applying new sources to the task

advances a re-evaluation of the presumptive narrative. Additionally, the material I uncovered in the University of Southampton archives presented an extraordinary and unprecedented opportunity to juxtapose and interweave archival and memory records of the *Kindertransport*. This required sourcing existing recorded testimonies from these *Kinder*, and I was able to locate two written, one audio and fifteen video recordings. Concurrently, I began searching for still-living former *Polenaktion* refugees, an enormous effort of detective work utilising records from Yad Vashem, the PRO, ITS, AJR and KA newsletters, survivor networks, genealogical and subscription-based ‘people searches’, and other sources. To date, I have located and communicated with over a dozen still living *Polenaktion Kinder* and the families of two dozen others who are scattered across the globe. I have been in contact with twelve former *Polenaktion* child refugees either in person, by phone, or through email and regular correspondence, and conducted a variety of interviews, from informal phone conversations of a few minutes to formal, taped interviews lasting several hours. In addition, I have met and corresponded with a number of families, many of whom have shared with me their photographs and private papers, including unpublished memoirs, further enriching the traces with which I have been able to work.

Not a single person who recorded their testimony, nor any that I located were aware of the existence of the Polish Fund files, leaving the memory record untouched by the contents of the archival documentation. This ‘purity’ was vital to the investigation and to the conclusions I was able to draw. When conducting interviews, I endeavoured to elicit memories as unmediated by the archival record as possible. Revealing only the existence of documents, but without sharing them or revealing their contents, I asked interviewees about their parents, their lives before the expulsion, their memories of the expulsion, their experiences after arriving in Great Britain, and their lives after the war, occasionally prompting with specific names or locations only. Only on completion of the interviews did I share specific documents, recording their responses to the revealed records. Family members were asked about their knowledge of their relatives’ experiences as child refugees, and information about their relatives’ lives after the war. As one of my primary motivations in finding *Kinder* and their families was to unite them with these material traces of their past, I assisted them all in obtaining copies of the documentation in their files.

All these efforts resulted in the acquisition of a substantial body of public and private testimony, which, contraposed with the material in the PJRF files, critically

engages with *Kindertransport* memory in a new way. For the first time it has been possible to juxtapose the documentary record of a life with an account of the remembered life – not only the events both experienced and recalled, but in many cases also the documented and remembered thoughts, feelings and actions. Wherever possible throughout the text, these complementary sources have been woven together into a textured analysis of *Kinder* experience. As anticipated, this investigation has revealed that *Kinder* memories both corroborate and contradict the documentary evidence. In some cases the correlation between memory and archive was astonishingly close – results that unambiguously validate testimony as a historical source. Disjunctures between recalled experience and archival documentation required much greater efforts as a ‘memory critic’ and an analysis of testimony that honoured its inner truths. This was particularly challenging in the case of Thea Feliks Eden, whose published testimony was an important source throughout the study. Discrepancies between memory and archive do not automatically invalidate *Kinder* memory as an historical source but raise issues about its uncritical use as stand-alone evidence in the absence of corroborating or paralleling archival documentation. Somewhat surprisingly, the interaction of memory and archive frequently demanded closer reading and counterfactual interpretations of documentary evidence that appeared straightforward. The results of this synthesis proved beyond question that it is in the reciprocal communication between archive and memory that *Kinder* identities are more fully explored, and a multi-layered analysis and complex, critical historiography is constructed.

The *Polenaktion Kinder* represent only a fraction of all the *Kindertransportees*, but the remarkable wealth of information in their case files makes a micro-historical study of their lives important both as an honouring of their experiences and a contribution to *Kindertransport* historiography. The challenge Tim Cole undertook in his study of Hungarian ghetto inmates was to focus ‘on exceptional “nobodies”’ in order ‘to cast light on broader themes’ and it is my challenge to explore both the particularities of this unique group of *Kindertransportees*, and the universalities of their experiences within the larger *Kindertransport* programme.⁹¹ This is not an organisational or administrative history of the *Kindertransport*, but a ‘history from

⁹¹ Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust*, p. 10. My authority for claims about the *Kindertransport* as a whole derives from work undertaken for my MA thesis, ‘The *Kindertransport*: History and Memory’.

below', and at its core, this research is centred on the documentary traces, and the meanings that can be drawn from them by close reading and textual analysis. Sustained focus on personal writings allows actors who have been virtually silent in *Kindertransport* literature – the parents, the carers and the children *as children* – to speak in their authentic voices. These documents, undisclosed and forgotten for over half a century, represent a crucial few years in the lives of 154 refugee children, but the traces of their lives have significance and resonance far beyond those years. This exploration of the *Polenaktion Kinder* and those whose lives intersected with them will help to frame new understandings of the *Kindertransport* as a whole.

1

The Organisations

In late December 1941, passers-by on London's Berners Street might have seen a teenage boy with thick dark hair and large expressive eyes sitting disconsolately on the steps of the Bernhard Baron Settlement, a large Jewish boarding house off Commercial Road in the East End. Herbert Haberberg had just come to London from Leeds with no job, no home, little money and few prospects; life seemed bleak indeed to the seventeen-year-old Jewish refugee. A stranger approached, put his arm around Herbert, and offered to buy him a cup of tea. Feeling very low, and disarmed by the man's fatherly demeanour, Herbert poured his heart out, telling his new confidant about the disappointments, worries and concerns he had accumulated since he and his brother Manfred had parted from their parents in Poland and left on a *Kindertransport* to England more than two years earlier.¹

Herbert explained that he had been separated from his younger brother on arrival in London and shuttled to a remote farm with a dozen other German-speaking refugee boys upon the outbreak of war. Herbert and the others chafed at the heavy manual labour, bitterly disappointed at the absence of English instruction and lack of training provided to them. After spending a cold and miserable winter in rural Hertfordshire, Herbert had been sent to Ely to attend the evacuated Jews' Free Boys' School. At school-leaving age, he and three compatriots were promised industrial training in Leeds, but the plan failed to materialise and they were put to work in a clothing factory. He had come to London alone to find more satisfactory training and employment. Herbert was unhappy with the efforts of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund to respond to his needs, and the frustrations and disenchantments that had built up over many months were discharged in his conversation with the sympathetic stranger. The man who had befriended Herbert was Mr Gee, head of the Boys' Industrial and Welfare Department of the Jewish Board of Guardians (BoG), who thenceforward took a special interest in the young man, helping him to find lodgings and employment and keeping an eye on his welfare. Mr Gee's involvement in Herbert's case came with the full knowledge and blessing of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund, which worked closely with the BoG, the

¹ Information about this episode in this and the following paragraph from author's interview with Herbert Haberberg, London, 28 January 2012.

Jewish Refugee Committee (JRC), the Refugee Children's Movement and other organisations to meet the children's financial, material, social and religious needs.

The number of agencies involved in Herbert's care was not atypical, although this



aspect of the *Kindertransport* is rarely appreciated, and the story of the organisations that administered the scheme is much more complex than has previously been told. In the early months of the programme, a multitude of relief committees operated semi-autonomously both cooperatively and competitively with one another, as they faced the challenges of emigrating and settling the children. After control over most of the children consolidated under the aegis of the RCM in 1940, smaller agencies like the PJRF continued to

maintain and care for their own *Kinder* separately throughout the war and even after. Correspondence reveals that the PJRF and other agencies maintained informal and fluid relationships with the organisations associated with Bloomsbury House, apportioning financial and welfare obligations among themselves according to varying circumstances.²

The picture that emerges from these documents contests the prevailing notion that a monolithic Refugee Children's Movement singularly and efficiently cared for the needs of over 10,000 children scattered across the United Kingdom. This depiction has been fostered by much of the literature created since the publication of *A Great Adventure* in 1944.³ The *Kinder* memory record is largely silent about the London-based refugee organisations – a significant lacuna that has forced historians to rely on RCM administrative records to chart the agencies' activities and resulted in a Movement-centric after-care narrative. The most recent literature, while attentive to the pre-war efforts of various groups bringing children to Britain, says little about the

² Bloomsbury House was the headquarters for the JRC, the RCM and the Coordinating Committee for Refugees, created in May 1938 to help the many (largely non-Jewish) refugee committees liaise with one another. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 35-6, 83-4.

³ Presland [Gladys Bendit] *A Great Adventure*. The development and nurture of this narrative is discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

smaller agencies' ongoing responsibilities towards the children in their care.⁴ Thus, the Schonfeld papers and other overlooked collections are invaluable in redressing the imbalance in the *Kindertransport* organisational narrative.

These documents also provide important information about the most contentious issue facing the entire *Kindertransport* enterprise: the estrangement of Jewish children from their faith. The organisations bore responsibility for the children's placement and pastoral care, and the archival records consulted for this study give rise to a fresh appraisal of their philosophical and functional approaches to critical religious issues. The orthodox community and the Movement had fundamentally divergent attitudes to the placement of Jewish children that were further complicated by wartime mass evacuations, resulting in the majority of children being lodged with non-Jewish foster families.⁵ The documentation reveals the agencies' cooperative efforts to deal with issues of religious estrangement arising from these circumstances, but also the constraints that limited such efforts.

Finally, this documentation is invaluable in depicting the refugee agencies' authority over the children's lives. The refugee committees were the ultimate arbiters of where the children lived and with whom, where and for how long they attended school, what training and jobs they received, and the extent of their religious education. The records of the PJRF offer important insights into the attitudes and philosophies of the agencies who were responsible for the *Kinder*, as well as the challenges they encountered in guiding the material, spiritual and emotional lives of the child refugees in their care. A key finding is the markedly gendered treatment of young refugees. Thus, these archival sources expand and revise current knowledge about *Kindertransport* relief organisations' interface, their responses to issues of religion, and their interactions with the *Kinder*.

⁴ For a thorough account of the pre-war period including the work of Inter-Aid, B'nai B'rith, RCM and CRREC, see Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, Chapters 2 and 5. The author acknowledged the confusion and overlap that existed among a plethora of refugee agencies in the process of bringing children to England (p. 74) but did not consistently follow this theme in descriptions of aftercare, with the exception of her discussion of the religious education of Jewish children pp. 167-172. Paula Hill also addressed the uncoordinated Jewish voluntary services and the existence of multiple rescue efforts as well as the 'pyramid of committees' set up by the RCM, many of which acted independently of the central organisation, exacerbating the Movement's difficulties. See Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children' pp. 72, 246. Frances Williams also mentioned clashes and contradictions in oversight, specifically in the Scottish case. See Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. xiv, 18.

⁵ University of Southampton Library (Hereafter USL) /MS/175 139/2 undated chart showing that in the Movement's twelve regions 1844 children were in Jewish homes and 3457 in non-Jewish homes. The chart was associated with reports made in 1944 by Dorothy Hardisty and Leo Elton after a visit to Devon related to Jewish children in non-Jewish evacuation homes.

I. *Kindertransport* Organisations: From Conception to Cooperation

In the dominant literature as well as in popular imagination, the conflation of the *Kindertransport* with the Refugee Children's Movement has minimised the part played by non-Movement individuals and agencies.⁶ Several agencies working to bring endangered children to Britain predated the Movement including the Children's Inter-Aid Committee (IAC), B'nai B'rith Care Committee for Refugee Children (BBCC), the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council (CRREC), various Quaker organisations and the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund.⁷ The Fund, which had begun as a relief organisation for expelled Polish Jews also began providing maintenance, clothing, medical care, job training, educational, legal, re-emigration aid, and religious needs to over 500 Polish-Jewish adult refugees and 300 children in Great Britain.⁸ The Fund had offices at 33 Soho Square, London in the same building as their associate agencies the Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations (FJRO), and the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain (FPJ). MPs George Lansbury and Oliver Locker-Lampson sponsored the Fund, which boasted a distinguished list of honorary officers through its association with the FJRO.⁹

In its day-to-day functioning, three men representing orthodox Jewry were at the helm of the PJRF. At the head was Elsley Zeitlyn (1878-1959), a King's Counsellor and nationally recognized expert in the practice of shechita. Retired from his law practice by 1938, he spent the ensuing years travelling the globe on behalf of endangered Jews and Jewish refugees.¹⁰ Strongly opinionated and a man of some self-importance, his personality and values shaped his responses to the children in the Fund's care. There were two Assistant General Secretaries, Arnold M Kaizer (1896-1967) and Moise Gorowitz (1896-1951). Kaizer was a noted writer and historian of Yiddish literature,

⁶ The Refugee Children's Movement (originally the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany) came into being in late November 1938. The establishment and operating mechanics of the Movement is well covered in the literature, and need not be repeated here. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* Chapter Three for the most up-to-date and critical account.

⁷ B'nai B'rith (meaning 'Children of the Covenant') is a Jewish service organisation founded in mid-nineteenth century America and spreading to the UK in 1910. *B'nai B'rith UK* < <http://bnaibrithuk.org/> > [accessed 16 May 2014]. The CRREC was largely a one-man effort of Rabbi Schonfeld to rescue religious Jews in Europe and care for orthodox refugees and other observant Jews throughout the UK.

⁸ USL/MS/183 730 'Polish Jewish Refugee Fund Summary of Activities in Great Britain', 1 May 1943. The available PJRF files contain very little organisational material such as financial reports, agenda and minutes, case committee reports etc. This summary is one of the few such documents located.

⁹ Information on all these organisations is extremely hard to come by. No administrative records for the PJRF have turned up, leaving sources such as the *Jewish Chronicle* to fill in a few of the gaps.

¹⁰ Elsley Zeitlyn Obituary, *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 April 1959, 17.

and worked for both the Polish Jewish Relief Fund and the FJRO, which he served for twenty-seven years.¹¹ Gorowitz, a naturalised Polish immigrant, was deeply involved in Zionist politics, serving for a time as Chairman of the Jewish State Party and active in the Anglo-Palestinian Club.¹² In addition to these three, an Executive Committee comprised of prominent Jewish communal activists and rabbis made most of the decisions affecting their young Jewish charges.¹³ In the post-war period, a much-reduced PRJF was managed by Louis Questle (1917-1985), a former Yeshiva student who was employed by the FJRO from 1946 until his death.¹⁴

Of the many British humanitarian groups working on behalf of refugees, several were specifically formed to bring threatened children to Britain.¹⁵ Inter-Aid was the earliest, founded in March 1936 by Gladys Skelton (1885-1975), an author and activist, to aid mainly ‘non-Aryan’ Christian children in Nazi Germany.¹⁶ Skelton’s prior participation with the Save the Children organisation led to the formation of the affiliated Inter-Aid Committee, and jointly these organisations took part in the

¹¹A M Kaizer Obituaries, *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 July 1967, p. 39 and 18 August 1967, p. 35.

¹² Various notices in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 October 1941, p. 8; 30 October 1942, p. 6; 8 March 1946, p. 7; 2 March 1951, p. 2. Throughout the PJRF correspondence, Gorowitz signed his name as spelled. Sometime after the war, he replaced the ‘w’ with a ‘v’. The original spelling will be maintained throughout this study.

¹³ Information derived from correspondence in the files and lists of names on the Fund’s letterhead stationery.

¹⁴ Louis Questle Obituary, *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 November 1985, p. 32. His primary role was as organising secretary of the FJRO.

¹⁵ Although it would be remiss to omit reference to the Society of Friends, (Quakers) which was also deeply engaged in refugee matters, including the emigration of children out of the Reich, as a long-standing institution, it was not formed specifically for the purpose as were the other organisations mentioned. See Rose Holmes, ‘British Quakers and Refugees from Fascism, 1933-1939’ unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2014.

¹⁶ Gladys Skelton was the author of *A Great Adventure*. During the war, she married Francis Bendit, the Secretary of the Central Office for Refugees located in Bloomsbury House. Information on Inter-Aid is found in Jürgen Matthäus and Mark Roseman *Jewish Responses to Persecution: 1933–1938, Volume 1*, Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context Series, (Lanham MD: Alta Mira, 2010), p. 234 note 35. See also Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 37, 41, 49. The Council for German Jewry was formed in 1936 as a cooperative effort of the CBF, the American Joint Distribution Committee, various Zionist and other organisations, to coordinate the emigration of German Jews. See Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p. 68. Inter-Aid was begun with financial help from the Council for German Jewry, the Save the Children Fund and the American Friends Service Committee; it was headed by the pro-Zionist Christian Sir Wyndham Deedes (1883-1956), who was active throughout the 1930s on behalf of Jewish refugees. Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 39-40. Regarding the formation of Inter-Aid, Gottlieb did not mention Skelton and gave the CBF and Save the Children credit for its formation and financial backing. Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, pp. 100-101. In November 1938, Deedes, with Lord Samuel became one of the founding co-chairmen of the Movement. Gottlieb, p. 107. Skelton later wrote a book about Deedes, *Deedes Bey: A Study of Sir Wyndham Deedes, 1883-1923* (Macmillan, 1942).

temporary rescue of Basque children during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁷ Inter-Aid was the first non-denominational organisation dedicated to the rescue of Jewish and non-Jewish children from the Reich. It was given offices in Woburn House along with the German Jewish Aid Committee with which it worked cooperatively prior to *Kristallnacht*, bringing 471 mostly Jewish child refugees to the UK for educational purposes.¹⁸

Before *Kristallnacht*, Anglo-Jewish agencies were stretched to the limit and had no intention of taking on unaccompanied child migration, or paying for such refugees out of their own coffers. Otto Schiff, a founder of the German Jewish Aid Committee and a leader in Anglo-Jewish refugee operations, made this clear to Julius Jung, the Secretary of the BBCC, who was interested in expanding B'nai B'rith's child emigration work.¹⁹ In early October 1938, Schiff advised Jung that any children brought over by B'nai B'rith could not be 'supported financially by the Refugee Committee, because our expenditure is growing so enormous that I am, quite honestly, terrified of what is going to happen in a few months' time if things go on as they are doing now'.²⁰ He advised Jung to get in touch with Inter-Aid instead. In his correspondence with various Jewish community leaders, Julius Jung characterised Inter-Aid as 'the one Committee in England recognised by His Majesty's government' for dealing with Jewish and non-Jewish refugees.²¹

Humanitarian-minded organisations that were anxious to begin helping endangered Jewish children on the Continent, but were unsure about how to proceed,

¹⁷ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 37, 40-1. Gladys Skelton later married Francis Bendit, and under her pseudonym, John Presland, penned the first history of the Refugee Children's Movement, *A Great Adventure* in 1944. Save the Children Fund had been created in the aftermath of the First World War by two British women activists. See Save the Children/History <<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/history>> [accessed 25 September 2013]. See also, J. M. Ritchie, 'German Refugee from Nazism' in Panikos Panayi, ed., *Germans in Britain since 1500*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1996) pp. 147-70, (p 163). While the story and later representation of the 4000 unaccompanied Basque children brought to the UK in 1937 has parallels to the *Kindertransport*, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine them. For information on the effort and how it has been remembered see Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox, *Refugees in and Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*, (London: Frank Cass, 1999). Also *BasqueChildren.org: The Website of the Basque Children of '37 UK* <<http://www.basquechildren.org/>> [accessed 16 May 2014].

¹⁸ Wiener Library, Julius Jung Papers 1410/2647-3202 Gladys Skelton to Julius Jung 10 October 1938, (Hereafter WL/JJ) and Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 37. See also 'The surprising and inspiring history of World Jewish Relief during the Second World War', 10 June 2013, *WJR News Blog*, <<http://www.wjr.org.uk/news/blog/the-surprising-and-inspiring-history-of-world-jewish-relief-during-the-second-world-war>> [accessed 24 September 2013]. The German Jewish Aid Committee was one of the iterations of the Jewish Refugee Committee. See Gottleib, pp. 97, 120.

¹⁹ A. J. Sherman and Pamela Shatzkes, 'Otto M. Schiff (1875-1952), Unsung Rescuer', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 54, August 2009, pp. 243-271.

²⁰ WL/JJ 1410/2647-3202 Otto Schiff to Julius Jung, 11 October 1938.

²¹ *Ibid.* Julius Jung to J Goldberg, 14 October 1938.

looked to Gladys Skelton for advice on the logistics of bringing unaccompanied refugee children to Great Britain. When Julius Jung contacted her about the procurement of homes and sponsors, she advised him that the costs of education, training and maintenance would exceed £1 per week per child, although ‘working class families would take a child at £1 a week certainly’.²² Skelton cautioned, however, that most of the Jewish children seeking to come to England ‘would not fit into a working class family very well’.²³ Basing this assessment on her previous work with unaccompanied refugee children, she noted that Jewish children ‘are in a different category [...] because they are not the children of peasants or working class people as were most of the Basques’.²⁴

To take the child of a Jewish doctor, lawyer or professor and give it a working class education in working class surroundings [...] is an addition to their grief. The fact that at 16 we begin to train for practical life must be accepted, but up to that time, we try to give them a more cultured background than that which was acceptable for the simpler needs of the Basque children.²⁵

This unguarded differentiation between Basque and Jewish refugee children along class lines is not particularly surprising given the sensibilities of the times. What *is* striking about her frank admission is that as refugees, despite their ‘more cultured’ placements, middle-class Jewish children would still have to go out into the workforce at age sixteen rather than go on to university to pursue professions. PJRF correspondence shows that this attitude prevailed among aid workers as well as in society generally.²⁶

The other distinction Skelton observed about Jewish refugee children was even more startling given the date of the letter. She told Jung that ‘because they cannot return’ Jewish children ‘are a more permanent liability’.²⁷ This pragmatic and perceptive appraisal acknowledged that Germany’s persecution of Jews was escalating, and that refugees escaping that tyranny were likely to remain in Britain indefinitely – a reality that the British Government was reluctant to admit. She understood, even before *Kristallnacht* or the development of the *Kindertransport*, that in the case of Jewish refugee children, notions of transmigration or rapid repatriation were improbable. Mrs Skelton’s careful prescriptions for class-appropriate placements were disregarded after

²² Ibid. Gladys Skelton to Julius Jung, 23 October 1938. Maintenance, according to Skelton was 25-30 shillings per week.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See section III of this chapter for a more detailed discussion of this point.

²⁷ WL/JJ 1410/2647-3202 Gladys Skelton to Julius Jung, 23 October 1938.

the commencement of the *Kindertransport* programme, but her advice on emigration procedures was vital to B'nai B'rith, which immediately began finding places for Jewish children.²⁸

After Parliament approved the *Kindertransport*, those who wished to bring unaccompanied children to Great Britain were fettered by a conspicuous lack of centralised guidance and authority. When he wanted to expand his organisation's child rescue activities, Elsley Zeitlyn sought advice not from Gladys Skelton but from Lord Samuel, who led the *Kindertransport* effort in Parliament.²⁹ Samuel passed Zeitlyn's enquiry to the Council for German Jewry (hereafter Council), which indicated that Polish children might be brought over under the same arrangements as German children, but only if Zeitlyn's committee found guarantors and homes for them.³⁰ This proscription was not yet being applied to German and Austrian children being brought over by the Council's new committee the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (later RCM), and many unguaranteed children from those countries were flooding into Harwich, the costs of their immigration being underwritten by the Lord Baldwin Fund.³¹ These funds did not apply to the *Polenaktion Kinder*, and the Council made it clear that they would not financially aid children brought by independent organisations. Zeitlyn was offered the use of their 'clearing hostels' near Harwich, but only if their costs of £1 per child per week 'would be reimbursed by your committee'.³² Additionally, Zeitlyn was warned:

Your Committee will no doubt make a fair distribution between the different countries to which it is proposed to send these children, because it would not be desirable to bring a great number to any single country. It might be possible to place a quarter of them in England if the necessary guarantors were found.³³

The directives in this letter contrasted markedly with the guidelines being followed by the Movement. At the time, other countries were not taking in large numbers of refugee

²⁸ Ibid., Julius Jung to Otto Schiff, 3 November 1938. By this date they had placed about fifty Jewish children.

²⁹ WL/JJ 1410/3202-3633 M Stepany to Elsley Zeitlyn (Hereafter Zeitlyn), 15 December 1938.

³⁰ Ibid. In September 1939, the partnership between the CJG and the Joint was formally dissolved and the London branch resumed operations as the Central Council for Jewish Refugees, one of the main decision-making bodies in refugee matters for the remainder of the war. See Gottlieb, *Men Of Vision*, pp. 68-78, 97.

³¹ The Home Office imposed a £50 guarantee against future re-emigration for each child brought over effective 1 March 1939. Children brought over under the auspices of the Movement were covered by funds from the Lord Baldwin Fund and other sources, but these funds were not made available to smaller organisations like the PJRF. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 63.

³² WL/JJ 1410/3202-3633 M Stepany to Zeitlyn, 15 December 1938.

³³ Ibid.

children as suggested by the response and in Britain, no numerical limits were being imposed upon German and Austrian children.³⁴ While it is only speculation, these constraints, which appear to have applied only to the Polish children, may have been due to their uncertain nationality and origins, or their sponsorship by an independent agency unaffiliated with established Anglo-Jewish organisations.

The requirement that guarantors be found for every child before arrival severely limited the number of children all rescue organisations were able to bring to Great Britain. This included the PJRF and the operation concurrently taking place in Czechoslovakia led by a group of volunteers including the now-famous Nicholas Winton. Upon his arrival in Prague Winton, like Zeitlyn and Jung, was in desperate need of procedural advice, beginning with ‘what guarantees you need’.³⁵ He asked fellow volunteers in London for answers to the most basic questions about forms, block visas, limited guarantees and money.³⁶ Winton was aware that ‘hundreds of children’ were being brought from Germany and he wanted ‘information from some engaged in this work’.³⁷ The logical authority was Gladys Skelton, and Winton sent his contacts to Woburn House to consult her. By this time, Inter-Aid had been co-opted by the Council and was now part of its newly formed agency, the World Movement for the Rescue of Children from Germany – British Inter-Aid.³⁸ Very involved with the new committee, Skelton was so unavailable to the Czech delegation that an exasperated Winton asked his colleague whether he had been able ‘to make any impression on the moribund Mrs. Skelton [...] as far as I can make out from this end she might as well not exist at all’.³⁹ In spite of Winton’s irritation with her, Skelton commanded respect on issues of unaccompanied child migration, and she was instrumental in guiding the Movement in its early months.

³⁴ Although Sweden, France, Belgium and the Netherlands took in small numbers of unaccompanied children, there was no formal agreement among these countries to ‘divide’ the transports, as the letter seems to suggest.

³⁵ Wiener Library, Nicholas Winton, (hereafter WL/NW) *Saving the Children, Czechoslovakia 1939: A scrapbook recording the transportation of 664 children out of Czechoslovakia* [2 vol.]

³⁶ Ibid. ‘If a family wishes to guarantee for a child, what do they have to do? If forms have to be filled, can you get a few specimens? Is it easier to get children in on the block? [...] Can one get a child over if someone guarantees for a year? [...] what is the smallest cash required?’ Undated Winton letter.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The unwieldy title of the Movement was shortened to the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany- Inter-Aid Committee, then the Movement for the Care of Children and finally the Refugee Children’s Movement (RCM) by which it is best known. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 75.

³⁹ WL/NW, Nicholas Winton to Martin Blake, 11 January 1939. For further difficulties Winton encountered with the Movement see Hill ‘Anglo Jewry and the Refugee Children’, pp. 83-6.

Winton and Zeitlyn's experiences reflected the fluidity of the entire *Kindertransport* enterprise in its early days. The absence of a fixed structure was also revealed in the correspondence of the BBCC, whose vice chairman, Israel Kestenbaum, informed Julius Jung on the day the first *Kinder* arrived in England:

[I]t is my intention as soon as our position within the large scheme of Lord Samuel is clarified, to take steps for organising various groups in all parts of London and the provinces, with the view to getting the whole activity in connection with Jewish children under the auspices of our Committee.⁴⁰

The 'scheme of Lord Samuel' was of course the nascent Movement, but its formal identity had made no impression on Kestenbaum. It is telling that Kestenbaum believed at that time that it was eminently possible for *his* organisation to take the leading role in the child refugee movement. Clearly thinking that B'nai B'rith was the logical choice to lead the entire enterprise, Kestenbaum suggested 'a meeting with the other organisations like the Inter Aid Committee and the Samuel Committee so that our standing can be defined'.⁴¹ Yet, it was under the auspices of the Movement and not B'nai B'rith that in Kestenbaum's words, 'the whole activity in connection with Jewish children' became organised. Although he headed an important Anglo-Jewish service organisation, Kestenbaum was unaware that Anglo-Jewish leadership had made a rapid about-turn regarding unaccompanied child migration after *Kristallnacht*. Rather than deferring to established organisations such as Inter-Aid or B'nai B'rith that were already bringing Jewish refugee children to Britain, the Council had instead mooted the establishment of an entirely new agency – the Movement – to deal with the expected influx of young transmigrants.⁴²

Since both the Inter-Aid Committee and B'nai B'rith had experience, knowledgeable personnel, (and a desire to expand their operations), it is worth considering why a separate agency was necessary at all. Gottlieb, Turner, Bentwich and other 'official' accounts assert that existing agencies lacked the resources, infrastructure and fund-raising ability to mount a large-scale child migration scheme.⁴³ Had they chosen to, the Council could have coordinated with those agencies to effect the

⁴⁰ WL/JJ 2647-3202 Israel Kestenbaum to Julius Jung, 2 December 1938.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The establishment and operating mechanics of the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany are well covered in the literature, and need not be repeated here. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* Chapter Three for the most up-to-date and objective account. The recommendation of a new committee under the auspices of the Council was made as early as 16 November 1938. Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the refugee Children', p. 51.

⁴³ Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p.102 and Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 56.

programme, but as Baumel-Schwartz alleged, their insistence on maintaining monopolistic control meant that ‘any such new and powerful organisation would have to begin as an outgrowth of the Council [for German Jewry] and not an expansion of a pre-existing but unrelated body’.⁴⁴ This impulse explained why neither B’nai B’rith nor Inter-Aid was given the go-ahead to lead the programme and why orthodox factions operating outside the mainstream of Anglo-Jewry were excluded from partnership in the new undertaking.⁴⁵ The organisation that emerged from this calculus had a hybrid identity. Built on the model of Inter-Aid, a non-sectarian committee serving the needs of Jewish child refugees, it was nonetheless born from and shepherded by organisations representing powerful segments of liberal Anglo-Jewry.⁴⁶ In the space between non-sectarian and Jewish, the purposes and objectives of rescue tended to blur, leading to contention and bitterness as the consequences of the Movement’s foundational duality became manifest.

The need to embrace a non-sectarian approach was underpinned by an awareness that the scope of the proposed rescue scheme required resources well beyond the capacities of the national Jewish community. Jewish leaders had promised the government in 1933 that in the matter of Jewish refugees, the community would ‘take care of its own’ and so far, it had succeeded in doing so.⁴⁷ The children’s campaign, however, meant seeking support outside these bounds. Thus, the Council nudged B’nai B’rith aside and marginalised polarising figures such as the orthodox leader Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld, but included representatives of leading Christian organisations in the planning, implementation and executive control of the new body.⁴⁸ These representatives provided the new organisation its non-denominational bona fides and

⁴⁴ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ This leadership has often been referred to as ‘The Cousinhood’— a group of politically connected, economically powerful and influential families who were linked by marriage, well assimilated into British society and exercised an enormous amount of control over Jewish voluntary welfare activities. In general, these were either Liberal Jews or moderately Orthodox members of the United Synagogues, as opposed to the ‘ultra-Orthodox’ Agudath congregations led by Solomon Schonfeld. See Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, pp. 75-7, 89-91. Hill also argued that one of the Movement’s agendas, driven by its liberal Jewish founders, was to strengthen Jewish/non-Jewish relations (p. 237). She also agreed that the Movement’s philosophical basis was one of welfare over religion.

⁴⁷ Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, pp. 13-19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Also, see Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, p. 137. Until the late in the war, only three Jewish members, all Liberal, were on the Executive Committee of the RCM. They were Lady Reading, Elaine Blond and Lola Hahn-Warburg. In 1944, increasing attention to religious issues prompted the appointment of Rabbi Morris Swift as a representative of the Chief Rabbi. Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’ pp. 137, 160-2.

enabled it to raise money from across the entire populace, but as Paula Hill noted, the decision to accept help from non-Jews meant accepting their offers of hospitality as well as their money.⁴⁹ The same rationale was applied to securing political agreement for the project. The delegation that met with Home Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare to press for the scheme consisted of members of the Council, a representative of Inter-Aid, and Bertha Bracey and Ben Greene from the Society of Friends, but no one from B'nai B'rith or the orthodox Jewish community.⁵⁰ This deputation was more palatable to a Home Secretary who, already nervous about antisemitism, found it much easier to deliver an ecumenical or non-denominational plan to Parliament than a sectarian Jewish one.⁵¹

So anxious were Anglo-Jewry and the Government on this point that at its inception, Inter-Aid was put forward as the public face of the *Kindertransport*. Inter-Aid's favoured status was endorsed by its having garnered the only official imprimatur granted by the Home Office. On every newly created landing card issued to children brought to England under the scheme was printed the following;

This document of identity is issued with the approval of his Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children. THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.⁵²

The Inter-Aid Committee alone was authorized to issue these cards, which assumed tremendous importance for many of the children – especially those who were bereft of any other birth or national identification.⁵³ However, by the spring of 1939, Inter-Aid had been dissolved into the Movement, and its founder, Gladys Skelton, became a stalwart of the new organisation.⁵⁴

Once the programme had been approved, and landing cards and other details worked out, the Movement and other refugee organisations faced the difficult task of deciding which children would be included and which would be left behind. The selection of children for transport lists from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia is a critical one that has not been fully addressed in the literature. No

⁴⁹ Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children', p. 8.

⁵⁰ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 58.

⁵¹ For Hoare's and Anglo-Jewry's fears of refugee-related antisemitism, see Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, pp. 110, 148-9. Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children', pp. 106-7.

⁵² Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 82, 257. Several of these cards are in the children's files of the PJRF, and as most of the Polish children lacked other documentation, these were their only legal documents of birth and nationality.

⁵³ Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p. 107.

⁵⁴ The absorption of Inter-Aid into the RCM is covered in most of the major studies, including Baumel-Schwartz, Fast, and Gottlieb.

documentary evidence about selection procedures from the Children's Emigration Department of the *Reichsvertretung* survives, and no sustained research from relevant records in the *Israelische Kultsgemeinde*, has yet been published. Oral testimonies and anecdotal evidence suggested that the selection process was rather chaotic in both Vienna and Berlin, as understaffed offices dealt with an overwhelming volume of applications.⁵⁵ The impression given by *Reichsvertretung* workers was that in the absence of a systematic selection process, desperate parents who had stormed their offices could persuade them to place their child's application to the top of the pile.⁵⁶ These relief workers apparently had enormous latitude in choosing 'suitable' children for the transports. At first, this may have meant those who were perceived as the most vulnerable, but as feedback arrived from the British end about the lack of placements for teenage boys and strictly orthodox children, and as the regulations changed to include only sponsored and guaranteed children, the offices began to choose instead those children deemed most 'desirable' and adoptable.⁵⁷ Tara Zahra suggested that Jewish community workers in Austria and Germany deliberately chose children as 'attractive ambassadors' who might 'ease the way for more Jewish children and adults to escape in their footsteps'.⁵⁸

The records of the Movement provide some insights about selection procedures from the British perspective. Retrospectively disassociating itself from recriminations over the fairness of the process, the Movement declared in its First Annual Report that it had played no role in adjudicating individual cases, having 'decided that the only equitable method was to rely entirely on the judgement of the committees in Germany'.⁵⁹ The Movement did affirm that in the first three months of the programme priority was given to orphans and teenage boys who had been interned or were

⁵⁵ The extensive reminiscences of Norbert Wollheim, recorded in 1986 and later are widely quoted on this point. See Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, and Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* for extensive coverage of his testimony.

⁵⁶ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 104-5.

⁵⁷ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67. Claudia Curio also addresses these aspects of selection, suggesting that after the initial wave of *Kinder* had arrived, by March 1939, some aspects of 'pre-selection' were present including social and psychological profiling, scrutiny of school records, and assessments of appearance and social background. Claudia Curio, 'Were Unaccompanied Child Refugees a Privileged Class of Refugees in the Liberal States of Europe?' in Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore eds., *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 169-89 (pp. 175-6).

⁵⁹ Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, *First Annual Report: November 1938-December 1939*, (London: Bloomsbury House, 1940), p. 4.

threatened with arrest, a claim supported by oral testimony.⁶⁰ Even within these parameters there were far more applicants than places, though no administrative records explain the criteria of selection from among the hopeful.⁶¹

The selection process for the *Polenaktion Kinder* mirrored Germany's and Austria's in many respects. The records show that teenage boys were initially favoured, and decided preferences were made for 'orphans' with an absent or deceased parent.⁶² Desperate parents' entreaties to the Polish Fund were met by Elsley Zeitlyn's stock reply.⁶³

I am hoping to bring out 100 children from 'No-Man's Land', and would be very glad to take your children amongst them, but unfortunately I have the greatest difficulty in finding homes for them. Up to the present moment, I have not yet succeeded in more than about 30 homes out of the 100.⁶⁴

This opening was employed to temper parents' hopes and was usually followed by an expression of optimism, but in some cases, Zeitlyn could not even give parents that. He wrote to Rubin Hirschman that his daughters at fifteen and sixteen were 'too old, because the Government wants the children to leave this country again at 18'.⁶⁵ Only nine-year-old Yehudit 'is still young and if I find a home for her I will, please God, bring her out'.⁶⁶ This response laid out the obstacles – children's ages, the need to secure homes and stipulations about re-emigration – with which the relief organisations

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 5-6. These selection criteria were also reported in Gershon although without sources cited. Gershon, *We Came as Children*, pp. 21-22. Judith Baumel-Schwartz quotes oral history interviews conducted in 1967 with two women who worked in the Children's Emigration Department of the *Reichsvertretung* making the same point. Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 104. At the time, the term orphan was defined quite broadly as any child missing one or both parents, whether such absence was due to death, imprisonment or flight. Using this definition, at least ten percent of all the respondents in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* were 'orphans'.

⁶¹ Accounts by Fred Dunston who helped in Vienna and Norbert Wollheim who worked in Berlin, insist that the system was impartial and included no favouritism. Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 73-4, 359-61.

⁶² About a third of the children were 'orphans'. Of those from intact families, the greatest number were boys over the age of thirteen. This confirms a preference for older boys who could be placed in hostels or training farms and perhaps a lack of enthusiasm from foster families for younger boys.

⁶³ Although the Movement insisted it left selection up to the Germans and Austrian, Elaine Blond, a founder of the RCM, recalled in her memoir the mountains of letters from parents begging the agency to save their children, many of which lay unanswered and unopened after the outbreak of war. Blond and Turner, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 68.

⁶⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Zeitlyn to Leib Reich, 14 June 39.

⁶⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Zeitlyn to RH, 14 June 1939.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

had to contend.⁶⁷ In a letter to Leib Reich, Zeitlyn again rejected an older daughter, and added:

With regard to Yoachim, I will do what I can to try and find a home for him [...]. But it is, unfortunately, not a very hopeful picture. There are so many thousands of refugee children already, and people are not willing to burden themselves with more.⁶⁸

Zeitlyn's acknowledgement of the 'refugee fatigue' engendered by the large number of *Kinder* who had already arrived is a key finding. That, along with the £50 guarantee that organisations were required to collect, militated against a more rapid or larger rescue effort.⁶⁹ In spite of those obstacles, Zeitlyn continued to offer the parents a reason for optimism, telling Reich that he was 'not despairing' and hoped to include Joachim 'in the next batch that I bring out' urging him 'to have faith and hope for the best'.⁷⁰

Most of the early correspondence dealt with the Fund's efforts to secure housing, money and sponsors for the children in Poland. Zeitlyn, who visited Zbąszyń at least twice, used a variety of tactics to get Jewish communities to sponsor individual children or to pool their resources to establish dedicated hostels for the refugees.⁷¹ One strategy was an appeal to humanitarian sympathies:

From the few days I spent in 'No-Man's -Land' I am not able [...] to give you any details of their particular abilities and aptitudes, but I know that they all have a great aptitude for decent food, tolerable living conditions, a sense of freedom from the close imprisonment which they suffered for so long [...] and [...] a prayerful hope that their futures may offer them some opportunity of living a free and independent life somewhere in this broad world.⁷²

This letter played upon communal compassion and obligations, but also framed

⁶⁷ According to Paula Hill, re-emigration was a smokescreen, the British Government never having actually pressured the children to leave, before or after the war began. Hill, 'Anglo Jewry and the Refugee Children'. pp. 129, 136. There was Parliamentary debate in early 1939 about making the *Kinder* permanent emigrants. (See notes 28 and 63 in the Introduction). Contrast this with Frances Williams' belief that the children's trans-migrant status was their defining feature and a permanent aspect of their experience.

⁶⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Zeitlyn to Leib Reich, 14 June 1939.

⁶⁹ Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p. 121 stated that 'The Council emphasized that no child had been prevented from leaving Austria or Germany because a deposit had been lacking'. Somewhat contradictorily, she also noted that 'the lack of Jewish sponsors and the never-ending shortage of funds [...] continued to blight the Movement's life-saving operation', p. 119. She was speaking only of the of the Movement's efforts. Lack of deposits and sponsors also limited the Polish Fund's operations.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See 'Polish Refugee Fund', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 November 1938, p. 26 and 'Children from No-Man's Land', *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 February 1939, p. 19 for accounts of Zeitlyn's travels. The majority of the Fund's guarantors were Jewish communities willing to maintain small single sex hostels, so it is not surprising that overall, two thirds of the children it brought out of Poland were over the age of twelve and placed in these group homes.

⁷² USL/MS/183 591 F1 Zeitlyn to Mrs Kestenbaum, 30 January 1939.

Zeitlyn's remit in bringing children out of Zbąszyń. Although it was unusual for Zeitlyn to express himself so emotively, his words presaged the sentiments of *A Great Adventure* and bore some remarkable similarities to Gladys Bendit's 'opportunity to grow up in an atmosphere of decency and normality, [...] and to assume their rightful heritage as free men and women'.⁷³ Each employed the figurative language of decency, freedom and salvation to express the mission of the *Kindertransport*, although for different purposes and with slightly different sensibilities. Zeitlyn was attempting to persuade reluctant sponsors in the pre-war period, and Bendit to justify a movement that had come under attack near the end of the war. In accord with the differing character of the two agencies, Bendit's universalist message eschewed all religious imagery while Zeitlyn's allusion to the children's 'prayerful hope' for a better future was more discursively sectarian.

A vaguely shared sense of purpose with the Movement did not lead to the Fund's immediate cooperation with or eventual incorporation into the RCM. The PJRF and similar independent efforts were eventually drawn into the orbits of Woburn and Bloomsbury Houses, but maintained a degree of autonomy throughout the war.⁷⁴ Initially, the plethora of rival agencies led to a great deal of confusion for the public, the various refugee organisations, and even the agencies themselves.⁷⁵ The confusion was not abetted by the Movement's maintenance of the fiction well into 1939 that Inter-Aid had legal authority over the refugee children in the country. A memorandum about schooling aimed at foster parents and drawn up by the RCM's Helen Bentwich, stipulated that 'the responsible guardian to the government in the case of refugee children, is the British Inter-Aid Committee, and not the individual guardian of the child'.⁷⁶ However, the Movement had begun establishing de facto management of the

⁷³ Presland [Gladys Bendit], *A Great Adventure*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ In Prague, these efforts were led by Nicholas Winton, Trevor Chadwick, Doreen Warinner and Bill Barzetti, while in Vienna, Solomon Schonfeld brought out at least 300 orthodox children under the auspices of the CRREC. See William Chadwick, *The Rescue of the Prague Refugees 1938-39*, (Leicester: Troubadour, 2010). Muriel Emmanuel and Vera Gissing, *Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation: Save One Life, Save the World*, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2001) and Karen Gershon, *We Came as Children* for accounts of the Prague effort. There is no definitive account dedicated to Schonfeld's rescue activities. For the most critical, see Vera Fast, *Children's Exodus*. Woburn House was the headquarters of the Council, its ancillary committees and the Central British Fund. There was a Czech section of the RCM, and the Czech children enjoyed some separate funding from the Government. See USL/MS/183 674 F3 for correspondence between the Movement and Solomon Schonfeld concerning the Czech children. It is also important to note that the Scottish Council took over from the Movement in regards to *Kinder* placed in Scotland. See Francis Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees: The Scottish Experience*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁷⁵ This point is also made by Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 68, 73-5, and 83-5.

⁷⁶ USL/MS/183 617/2 F2 'Refugee Children and Secondary Schools', 27 March 1939.

child refugee movement before the guidance was published. Very early on, the nascent Movement revealed its intention to neutralise competing organisations. Complaining about the ‘many local organisations which had nothing to do with the Central Appeal’, the executive committee declared that the only way ‘to control these sporadic efforts’ was to refuse to cooperate.⁷⁷

As long as these committees could get children to look after it was not possible to force them to send their funds to the Central fund [...] Efforts would have to be made to establish some control over local efforts without damping local enthusiasm.⁷⁸

In frank wording, the Movement patronisingly dismissed local committees as ‘sporadic efforts’ whose enthusiasm they valued but whose independent fund raising they intended to ‘control’. They were quite willing to withhold children from legitimate offers of hospitality in order to ‘force’ the local committees to fall into line and direct their fundraising efforts towards the Movement.

The Movement dominated some smaller refugee organisations with relative ease but found a formidable opponent in Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld (1912-1984), the leader of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. An educational reformer dedicated to the rescue of religious Jewish refugees through the CRREC, Schonfeld became the Movement’s chief antagonist.⁷⁹ At first concerned mainly about provisions for kosher food and Sabbath observances, Schonfeld became increasingly alarmed by the Movement’s actions with regard to the placement of Jewish refugee children. His handwritten notes of a December 1938 meeting of rabbis record their ‘dismay’ over the news of Jewish children being placed in non-Jewish homes.⁸⁰ The gathering registered ‘its strong protest against this action’ and:

⁷⁷ USL/MS/183 53/2 F2 MCCG Minutes of Meeting held 19 December 1938. The Central Appeal was the first fund raising drive for refugees outside the Anglo-Jewish community. See also Paula Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, pp. 157-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p. 113. She characterized the Chief Rabbi and Solomon Schonfeld as both ungrateful and obstructionist from the outset. At the opposite end of the spectrum are hagiographic accounts such as David Kranzler and Gertrude Hirschler, eds, *Solomon Schonfeld: His Place in History*, (New York: Judaica Press, 1982) and those referenced above.

⁸⁰ USL/MS/183 53/2 F1 Solomon Schonfeld’s handwritten notes December 1938. At least one-third of all the children were initially placed in non-Jewish homes, with many more being billeted by non-Jews after the war began. See Blond and Turner, *Marks of Distinction*, pp. 70-1. See also USL/MS/175 139/2 for a 1944 chart showing nearly twice as many children in non-Jewish homes. Frances Williams stated that 57% of *Kinder* were placed in non-Jewish homes in England (as opposed to 25% in Scotland) and only 30% of those fostered in England were in Jewish homes. Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, p. 87. These figures are derived from the KA Survey and are not definitive.

[W]hile gratefully acknowledging the spirit of charity with which such offers from non-Jews are made, [...] requests a definite assurance that such children will be transferred to Jewish homes [and] that no Jewish children will in future be placed in such homes. Failing which, they deem it their sacred duty to call public attention to this virtual apostasy of Jewish children entrusted to the care of Anglo-Jewry.⁸¹

Schonfeld's own efforts to bring both orthodox rabbis and *Kinder* to England indicated his deep forebodings about the future of European Jewry. His fears, combined with his distrust of the liberal Judaism that pervaded the Movement's leadership, led him in February 1939 to remind Anglo-Jewry of their duty to the refugee children and warn against 'the neglect of their religious education'.⁸²

Schonfeld's convictions about the purpose of rescuing Jewish children were distinctive and steadfast. He made it clear that he believed the *Kinder* were the responsibility of Anglo-Jewry, not the nation at large. He expanded on this point a few months later in his 'Memorandum on Jewish Refugee Children in non-Jewish Homes'.

I trust that it will be agreed that the Anglo-Jewish community is in the position of guardians or trustees for these children and has a definite religious duty and responsibility towards them.⁸³

Schonfeld believed the rescue of Jewish children was inextricably linked to their Jewishness. His apprehensions were rooted in the Movement's transformation into a non-denominational entity that, although closely associated with the Council, expediently accepted all offers of 'suitable' hospitality and only very belatedly heeded the children's religious needs.⁸⁴ Elaine Blond, a founding member of the RCM and a scion of the Anglo-Jewish elite later confirmed this disregard:

I and the other liberal members of the RCM central committee skirted the religious issue with a reminder that beggars can't be choosers [...] Help was welcomed from whomever and wherever we could get it including Christian families. We were storing up trouble for ourselves, of course. The fanatics would have their day. Meanwhile, my conscience was easier, knowing that we were not turning children away on spurious grounds of religious incompatibility.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² USL/MS/183 617/2 F1 'Memorandum on Jewish Refugee Children in non-Jewish Homes'. Although undated, the document must have been written before February 1939, when the Movement relocated from Great Russell St. to the Palace Hotel, later known as Bloomsbury House.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ This accusation is most forcefully made by Judith Tydor Baumel (Schwartz) in various publications, and by Paula Hill in 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children'. See Judith Tydor Baumel, 'Twice a Refugee: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain during Evacuation, 1939-1943', *Jewish Social Studies*, 45/ 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 175-184 (p. 180); E. J. Baumel, 'The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain 1938-1945'.

⁸⁵ Blond and Turner, *Marks of Distinction*, pp. 71-2.

Blond could not have made the Movement's position any clearer. Religion was unimportant to the RCM in the early days and religious scruples mere 'spurious grounds' to be 'skirted' in decisions about placement. The children (and, implicitly, their parents) were 'beggars' subject to the non-sectarian leanings of the RCM.

Somewhat surprisingly, Elaine Blond did not blame the Anglo-Jewish community for providing too few foster homes for Jewish refugee children. Once it began receiving sustained criticism for its practices, the Movement consistently resorted to this justification to explain its placement decisions and absolve itself of blame for the results of the policy. Solomon Schonfeld hotly disputed the allegation that the Jewish community had been unresponsive to calls for hospitality, and the accuracy of the claim has never actually been proven, but it appeared regularly in Movement correspondence and publications.⁸⁶ Its persistent repetition has imbued it with veracity and it has been repeatedly, if uncritically, cited in the literature.⁸⁷ Regardless of the truth of the claim, it is undisputable that the Movement's position put them on a direct collision course with 'the fanatics'; a battle Tony Kushner characterised as Schonfeld's 'Jewish particularity [...] relentlessly pursued' against Gladys Skelton's more universal humanitarian aims of giving 'ten thousand children the opportunity to grow up in an atmosphere of decency and normality'.⁸⁸

Schonfeld's major disagreement with the Movement concerned hospitality and housing. He strongly" advocated hostels because they provided permanent residences for hard to place youths, and more importantly, because they offered better opportunities to maintain (or enforce) Jewish religious observances. Schonfeld's promotion of hostels created an arena for disputatious interaction with the Movement. He was present at one of the Movement's first meetings in which it 'was agreed that

⁸⁶ USL/MS/183 366 F4 Central Council of Jewish Refugees Report, October 1943. 'The [...] reason that so many Jewish children were originally in non-Jewish homes was due to a lack of response on the part of the Jewish community in this country to the appeal that was made at the time for hospitality for Refugee Children'. p. 2. Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children' p. 240 was the first to accuse the Movement of trying to shift blame from itself to the Jewish community.

⁸⁷ Presland [Gladys Bendit], *A Great Adventure*, pp. 4-5. The claim was repeated by Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, pp. 118, 132, Turner ...*And the Policeman Smiled*, pp. 107-8, Fast, *Children's Exodus* p. 80 and Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, p. 87. Turner attempted to exonerate the Anglo-Jewish community. 'Jews in Christian Homes: Refugees Committee Criticised', *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 October 1949, p. 5. 'Fishing in troubled waters', *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 July 1939, p. 8. Mrs Norman Bentwich, 'Care of Child Refugees', *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 December 1938, p. 32 discussed the government mandates of dispersal of Jewish children that Schonfeld believed caused many willing Jewish foster families in the cities to be ignored or overlooked. For Schonfeld's counter-argument, see *The Child Estranging Movement: An Expose on the Alienation of Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain from Judaism*, (London: Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, January 1944) p. 4.

⁸⁸ Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, p. 159.

[hostels] would probably be necessary' but that 'as a general principle the children should be adopted by private individuals who would bear the expense'.⁸⁹ Schonfeld was appalled by the insinuation that private individuals' capacity to lift the refugee agencies' financial burden was the Movement's overriding concern. He began a campaign to secure support for housing a number of children he planned to bring over by privately encouraging individual communities to set up their own hostels outside the aegis of the Council or Movement. In Liverpool, Schonfeld's contact, Isaac Harris, revealed that the Refugee Committee had already arranged to bring in 125 children 'under the auspices of the Committee with which Mrs. Bentwich is connected'.⁹⁰ Mrs Bentwich's committee was the Movement, and it had beaten Schonfeld to Liverpool. Unfortunately, the Liverpool Jewish community had 'its hands full' but Harris advised Schonfeld to contact the Cardiff Refugee Committee instead.⁹¹ Harris's concluding advice emphasised the contentiousness of the situation: 'The chief point is that the letter should be sent immediately, in order to reach the Committee before they make contact with Mrs Bentwich's organisation'.⁹²

The contest for funds and housing forced local Jewish communities to choose sides. The Sheffield Jewish Aid Committee consulted with Woburn House before agreeing to set up a hostel for Schonfeld's children and unsurprisingly, they advised 'that it would be better' if Sheffield sent their funds to the Council, which they agreed to do.⁹³ After this defeat, Schonfeld emphasized the advantages of independence from London, advising a potential donor in Hove that his organisation did not 'insist that every Hostel should be under the Central body, and we are encouraging local and individual effort'.⁹⁴ To avoid a repeat of Liverpool and Sheffield, however, he asked that they 'keep this matter as confidential as possible'.⁹⁵ Schonfeld commiserated with one local committee, opining that 'difficulties put in your way by London' were 'unjustified' and that 'monies collected by you are retained for use in Manchester'.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ USL/MS/183 53/2 F2 MCCG Minutes of Meeting held 19 December 1938. In fact, several hostels, including 'Wyberley' in Burgess Hill set up by the Jewish service organization The Grand Order of the Sons of Jacob and the Brighton and Hove Hostel committee complained bitterly to both the Board of Deputies and the Movement about the failure of the RCM to place children in their facilities. See Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children', pp. 79-80.

⁹⁰ USL/MS/183 53/2 F2 Isaac Harris to Pels, 4 January 1939.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ USL/MS/183 617/2 F2 David Brown to Schonfeld, 6 February 1939.

⁹⁴ USL/MS/183 617/2 F2 Schonfeld to S. Miller Esq., 7 February 1939.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ USL/MS/183/ 53/2 F 2 Pels to Jacobs, 29 March 1939.

Surely this need not mean that you are limited in your refugee work to spend on only such cases as meet with the approval of the London offices. As long as you choose to take any particular batch of children, it should not be anyone's business to question your justification.⁹⁷

Before this incitement to insurrection against the Council, Schonfeld had assured Manchester that 'in London smaller organisations and Synagogues are encouraged to form Hostels on their own and to raise and control the necessary funds' and that a number of independent hostels existed 'outside the control of the Central body'.⁹⁸ For months, Schonfeld battled the Movement and established Anglo-Jewry tenaciously, but the effort exhausted him and in April 1939, he informed his supporters that he would no longer bring children from the Continent and that they should direct all their requests to the Movement.⁹⁹

Schonfeld's withdrawal from the active rescue of children was a tacit admission that the Movement controlled the *Kindertransport*, but did not signal his approval of their placement policies. His opposition to the RCM was unflinching, and his disdain for the organisation growing, as demonstrated in an exchange of letters with a prospective foster parent who had read 'that a number of Jewish children' needed homes.¹⁰⁰

I can offer a home (at any rate a temporary one) to a girl between 14 & 18 years. I should like her to be Christian if possible & fond of children [...] and she would need to be able to speak English. We keep a maid but I should want her to be willing to give some assistance with the housework & the little boy, as a sort of house-daughter. We would try to make her happy.¹⁰¹

This letter writer epitomised everything Schonfeld disdained about the policy of entertaining offers of hospitality from non-Jews. Although the woman noted that homes were needed for *Jewish* children, she requested a 'Christian if possible'. She seemed unaware that the children who needed homes were foreigners who did not speak English, and offered only a temporary home when long-term hospitality was needed. However, it was her self-serving (and transparent) request for 'a sort of house-daughter' that raised the most suspicions about her application. No doubt exercising great restraint, Schonfeld confined his brief response to the shortcomings of her proposal:

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ USL/MS/183 617/2 F2 Schonfeld to Jacobs, 18 February 1939.

⁹⁹ USL/MS/183 617/2 F1 Schonfeld to Reverend Jerevitch, 2 April 1939 and Schonfeld to Max Wuhl, 23 April 1939.

¹⁰⁰ USL/MS/183/ 53/2 F1 Unsigned postcard to Schonfeld, 3 January 1939.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Dear Madam, I thank you for your letter offering to take a girl temporarily, and have to inform you that a guarantee to maintain the child until she is 18 years of age must be signed. If you will, however, get in touch with the Movement for the Care of Children [...] I am sure that they will be able to make use of your kind offer.¹⁰²

Schonfeld, whose sarcasm was likely lost on the recipient, summed up his animus with the intimation that the Movement would have no compunction about accepting ‘hospitality’ from someone who expressed patent disregard for the needs of a Jewish refugee child.

Unfazed by Schonfeld’s disdain, and backed by a formidable array of Anglo-Jewish refugee organisations, the Movement began to wield its authority over the entire *Kindertransport* programme. In the spring of 1939, the RCM became the official custodian of the *Kinder* landing cards. These documents had the same legal weight as passports and stewardship over them was a crucial step towards hegemonic control. The Movement wielded its new authority imperiously, ordering Schonfeld to return ‘any permit cards which your boys may have retained and forward them [...] to this office at once. It is a Home Office requirement that we hold these permit cards ourselves’.¹⁰³ The real consolidation came after war was declared and the RCM co-opted independent provincial refugee organisations in twelve regional areas, making itself responsible for all the children evacuated and dispersed to various parts of the country.¹⁰⁴ The large number of children under its care, its more secure financing and its increasingly sophisticated infrastructure allowed the organisation to assume de facto leadership over the *Kindertransport*.¹⁰⁵

Britain’s entry into the war changed the parameters of the *Kindertransport* programme and affected the operations of every agency that had sponsored children. War upset many of the careful arrangements the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund and other organisations had made with guarantors. With the general evacuation of children from London and wartime uncertainty causing a number of guarantors to withdraw their support, the organisations found themselves fully or partially financing the upkeep of many of the children they had brought to Britain. Responsibility for the indefinite maintenance and guidance of large numbers of minor children meant that the Fund and

¹⁰² USL/MS/183/ 53/2 F1 Schonfeld to ‘Madam’, 3 January 1939.

¹⁰³ USL/MS/183 617/2 F1 Major Langdon to Schonfeld, 14 March 1939.

¹⁰⁴ This information, from the Movement’s *First Annual Report* and *A Great Adventure* is summarised succinctly by Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵ The initial funding came from the Lord Baldwin Fund. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* p. 93 and Hill, *Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children*, pp. 60-1.

other independent agencies now had to coordinate their efforts with the Refugee Children's Movement.

The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund and the Movement did not achieve coordination and cooperation seamlessly. Among other things, custodianship and control over permit cards became a source of friction between the two organisations. Since the *Polenaktion Kinder* generally lacked any other form of identification, these cards were critical to their classification as Polish nationals. The Fund preferred to liaise directly with their wards when they needed the permits for police registration on turning sixteen. The Movement communicated their resistance to this level of independence.

Many of our children have been brought over on behalf of various organisations, but we forward the Permit Cards direct to the children. It is not very practical to check up every case to ascertain which Committee aided them to come over, as in any case the Committee would then only have to forward the documents on to the children.¹⁰⁶

This arrangement stripped the Fund and similar organisations of autonomy over their own refugee children. The Movement characterised all refugee children as 'ours' and in communicating directly with them, disconnected them from their parent agencies. The dismissiveness of 'various organisations' as having done little more than 'aided them to come over' indicated the Movement's conception of the *Kindertransport's* organisational hierarchy – as did an additional request for all the Polish children's documents. Elsley Zeitlyn was offended by the haughty tone of the Movement's representative, insisting that 'all applications for the Permits for children who were brought out by the Fund should be made by this office only'.¹⁰⁷ This was not the first tussle over permit cards. A few months earlier, when the Fund asked the Movement to send two permit cards to their offices, they were duly informed that the cards had been sent to the Movement's Regional Secretary 'and will be forwarded to the children in time for their Police registration which will take place this month'.¹⁰⁸ Embedded in this deliberate rebuff of the Fund's request was the insinuation that the Movement was more capable and better informed about registration matters than the PJRF.

It took some time before relations between the Fund and the RCM became more amicable. Elsley Zeitlyn had a strong sense of proprietorship over the Fund's children and in the early months struggled with the Movement's After-Care Department. When

¹⁰⁶ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Olive Dyke to PJRF, 13 February 1940.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Zeitlyn's Secretary to O. Dyke, 12 February 1940.

¹⁰⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F1 PJRF Children's Department to Miss Williams, 5 December 1940, Miss Williams to Children's Department, 7 December 1940.

Zeitlyn was informed that one of the Polish boys was ‘not settling down at all well’, and instructed to ‘make some other arrangements for the boy as soon as possible’, he dictated a testy reply.¹⁰⁹

Mr Zeitlyn would be glad to know what are the functions and aims of the After Care Department of which you appear to be in charge [...] Mr Zeitlyn is unable to appreciate the helpfulness of this After Care Department, as if all that it is able to do is to write to him to ‘kindly investigate this case’ [...] This does not sound too helpful.¹¹⁰

Zeitlyn received a long, patronizing reply from the Movement, indicating that ‘the functions and aims of the After Care Department [...] are too varied to put down in detail on paper’.¹¹¹ He was informed that ‘well over 10,000 refugee children’ had been ‘brought over under the auspices of the Movement, and we have set up committees throughout the length and breadth of the country to keep a personal eye on these children’.¹¹² It was the Movement’s job to ascertain that the children were ‘being well cared for and are not being in any way mis-used’ offering ‘advice and assistance as we can’.¹¹³ Despite this expansive description of their responsibilities, the RCM admitted that when difficulties arose, direct assistance was only given to ‘a Movement child’.¹¹⁴ Otherwise, ‘we endeavour to see that the person who guaranteed to make themselves responsible for the child fulfils that obligation’.¹¹⁵ In the case of the Zbąszyń child, ‘we therefore consulted you, as you may have definite plans in mind for this boy’.¹¹⁶ Despite its authoritative rhetoric, the Movement was obliged to cooperate with other agencies and ultimately to defer to the guarantor organisations.

The Fund’s communications with the Movement highlighted the confusions that abounded over the remit and financial obligations of the various children’s refugee organisations. The perplexity of such arrangements was encapsulated in the case of one family whose members were guaranteed by four separate organisations. Leon and Eidel Alpern and their four children Heinrich, Anita, Sonia and Irene – ranging in age from twenty months to seven years – had arrived together in February 1939.¹¹⁷ When they were still in Zbąszyń, the Polish Fund approached B’nai B’rith to guarantee the three

¹⁰⁹ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Olive Dyke to Zeitlyn, 13 March 1940.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Zeitlyn’s Secretary to Olive Dyke, 20 March 1940.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Olive Dyke to Zeitlyn, 27 March 1940.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ USCSF/VHA 8209 Renee Alpern Moss, 1996.

oldest children while the parents (with their baby) awaited domestic visas to the UK. Those visas came through shortly after the older children had left the refugee camp, and improbably, the entire family found themselves on the same train traveling to embark on the same ship from Gdynia. A year and a half after the family's arrival, the Jewish Refugee Committee wrote to the PJRF:

The whole question concerning the four children seems rather confused, as your Committee, the B'nai B'rith Care Committee and the Movement for the Care of Children all seem to have a share in responsibility. We are now trying to find out who is really responsible [...] We find that you have in the first instance taken an interest on behalf of the children and it seems that your Committee is actually responsible.¹¹⁸

The Fund argued that since the BBCC guaranteed the children that organisation should undertake their maintenance and that the JRC, as the parents' guarantors, should actually be responsible for the entire family. The JRC disagreed, adding that 'in the same way as the Movement [...] are supporting the two children for whom they are responsible, we must ask you to support the two children you brought to this country'.¹¹⁹ The Fund was eventually let off the hook financially but continued to monitor the Alpern children's welfare, demonstrating that the boundaries between financial and other types of after-care were not watertight.

As the war dragged on and money became scarcer, most organisations accepted greater cooperation with one another, especially after 1940 when the British government instituted a grant-in-aid programme to the voluntary refugee agencies.¹²⁰ Exhaustion of private funds had necessitated the scheme, and on 1 April 1941, the Fund officially transferred most of their children's maintenance obligations to the Jewish Refugee Committee, which worked under the Central Committee for Refugees to distribute the Government funds.¹²¹ Qualifying for this subvention involved intricate bureaucratic

¹¹⁸ USL/MS/183 591 F1 JRC to PJRF, 7 October 1940.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., JRC to PJRF, 23 January 1941.

¹²⁰ The possible exception to cooperative efforts was the CRREC. For a thorough account of the financial crisis that led to Government funding for the refugee agencies see Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, pp. 146-60. For the specific conditions of finance for refugee children, see Refugee Children's Movement, *Third Annual Report: 1941-1942*, (London: Bloomsbury House, 1942) and Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 173. The government provided maintenance subsidies of up to eighteen shillings per week for children under the age of eighteen.

¹²¹ USL/MS/183 384 F1 Central Office for Refugees, *The Care of German and Austrian Refugees* (London: Bloomsbury House, 1942) pp. 4-6. At the Government grant programme's initiation, the voluntary organisations formed the Central Committee for Refugees (CCR) to distribute and supervise its disbursements. The Central Council for Jewish Refugees (CCJR) was the distributor of the grant monies to the Jewish 'case-working bodies' of which the Jewish Refugees Committee was but one of over a dozen. The JRC was the agency with whom groups such as the PJRF dealt, and almost every PJRF case file has Assistance Board forms and correspondence with the JRC accountant Mr R Cooper.

transactions and the PJRF files are replete with correspondence regarding these payments.¹²² In addition, the Jewish Board of Guardians oversaw the welfare of the boys who returned to London seeking training and work.¹²³ Finally, a number of the Fund's cases were transferred wholly or partly to the care of the Refugee Children's Movement, especially after 1943.¹²⁴

The early months of the *Kindertransport* were a time of confusion and competition as numerous mostly Jewish refugee organisations worked out the mechanics of emigrating unaccompanied children to Great Britain and caring for them once they arrived. Fundamental differences in ideology further exacerbated the situation as committees jockeyed for position and scrambled to compete for scarce resources. Conflicts arose over hospitality, the raising and utilisation of money, after care arrangements and financial liabilities. Eventually, Government funding created both financial stability and rigid bureaucratic arrangements that facilitated greater cooperative efforts among agencies. At the intersection of these efforts, involving a range of after-care activities, arose the most contentious issue in the *Kindertransport* operation – the placement of Jewish children in non-Jewish homes – spawning an array of crises to which a number of refugee organisations responded, both cooperatively and combatively.

II. The Organisations and Religion

The alienation of Jewish children from their religious and cultural roots is one of the most enduring negative legacies of the *Kindertransport*. The Movement received sharp criticism for its handling of the issue both during the war and after – a complex subject

¹²² See USL/MS/183 575 F1 R Cooper (Hereafter Cooper) to Moise Gorowitz (hereafter Gorowitz), 22 February 1943, 591 F1 Gorowitz to Cooper, 22 May 1941, 213/2 Cooper to Kaizer, 8 December 1941, 591 F2 Cooper to Kaiser, 2 October 1941 for examples. The process was especially complex for the Fund because the programme applied only to German and Austrian refugees, 'or persons of other nationalities who had made Germany or Austria their home'. Additionally, the PJRF had formally requested to maintain administrative control of the monies for its refugees financially turned over to the JRC, entering into a complicated agreement with the Council for this purpose. The Fund wanted to maintain oversight of its refugees citing their Polish nationality problems as the reason. See USL/MS/183 384 Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive of the Central Council for Jewish Refugees, 31 December 1940 and 14 February 1941.

¹²³ See the case of Herbert Haberberg outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

¹²⁴ There is very little administrative information in the PJRF files, and no information at all on the reasons for or the mechanics of these transfers.

deserving of a separate study, and one that is too large to be fully covered here.¹²⁵ The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund initially avoided controversy by placing its children only in Jewish homes and hostels, but with the advent of war and evacuation, many of the Fund's wards ended up in non-Jewish households. Solomon Schonfeld had railed against such placements initially, and after evacuation, penned a tract entitled 'Save Jewish children for Judaism' in which he warned:

Thousands of Jewish children who have been evacuated and now severed from all Jewish association are being estranged from Judaism and Jewish observances [...] In many cases there is [...] a deliberate alienation from Judaism. [...] It is vital that local centres of Jewish life and influence be established and maintained in every town and village where Jewish children have been billeted.¹²⁶

The Movement, however, was quite slow to respond to these concerns. When complaints reached the Jewish Board of Deputies (BoD) a year after Schonfeld's call to action, they commissioned a study that revealed there were 5000 Jewish refugee children brought over by the RCM 'for whom no organised religious education was being provided'.¹²⁷ The Board's president, Selig Brodetsky, expressed resentment the Board was being forced to respond to an issue that was rightly the Movement's concern, and worried that the problem 'would arise in greater and greater profusion in the future'.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the Movement did not mount a serious and sustained response until July 1942 with the presentation of a report to the Council, which resulted in the formation of the Joint Committee for the Religious Education and Welfare of Jewish Refugee Children, (Joint Committee or JCREW).¹²⁹ In November 1944, the Joint Committee was able to report that 'the value of the work of the Committee was beginning to be felt'.¹³⁰ Of course, by that late date, the religious needs of many of the

¹²⁵ See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* pp. 167-72 for a critical review and Fast, *Children's Exodus*, for a less critical one. Both Turner and Gottlieb absolved the Movement of any malfeasance. See also two unpublished studies: Baumel, 'The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain 1938-1945', and Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children 1938-1945'. Frances Williams tackled the subject in *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, although her interpretation of Schonfeld's position is badly flawed.

¹²⁶ USL/MS/183 786/2 'Save Jewish children for Judaism', 21 June 1940. In late 1941, Schonfeld made good on his call to action, sending out letters to hundreds of districts and boroughs asking about Jewish children billeted in remote locations and the status of their religious education. See USL/MS/183 786/2 for examples.

¹²⁷ USL/MS/183 384 F1 Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive of the CCJR, 15 May 1941.

¹²⁸ LMA/BOD C2/3/3 Brodetsky to Brotman, 19 May 1941, cited in Hill, *Anglo Jewry and the Refugee Children*, p. 226.

¹²⁹ USL/MS/183 384 F1 Central Council for Jewish Refugees (Hereafter CCJR): Religious Education of Refugee Children Memorandum by Mrs Norman Laski & Mrs Hahn Warburg (Presented in July 1942) and Minutes of the Executive of the CCJR, 27 July 1942.

¹³⁰ USL/MS/183 366 F3 'Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Committee for the Religious Education and Welfare of Jewish Refugee Children', 13 November 1944.

5000 children identified three and a half years earlier had gone completely unmet. A number of high profile cases of baptism plunged the Movement into deep religious controversy.

One of the most protracted of these cases, and one that became a *cause célèbre* in the Anglo-Jewish community, involved six *Polenaktion Kinder* who had been evacuated along with other Jewish students from London to the Devon village of Talaton and billeted with non-Jews.¹³¹ In early 1940, the American relatives of the youngest evacuee, Josef Kamiel, who had been raised in a strictly orthodox home, contacted the Movement, requesting that he be moved out of his Christian billet.¹³² Elsley Zeitlyn conditionally agreed, pending discussion with the children's guarantors, who solicited information from Mr L Cohen, an Exeter religious leader. Cohen assured them that Josef and the Korman brothers, who were billeted together, received daily Hebrew instruction and Sabbath services weekly.¹³³ Regarding the boys, Cohen reported:

[H]is cottager told me she never asks them to do anything on Saturday, as she knows it is their Sabbath! I'd like to know whether all Jewish people have the same consideration for other Jewish employees.¹³⁴

Cohen took umbrage at the implication that the boys' religious consciences were not being properly looked after, noting indignantly that it was 'a pity the busybodies at the Federation don't verify their facts before listening to news that cannot be founded on fact'.¹³⁵ He assured the boys' guarantors, the Borough Synagogue Committee, that 'their protégées are all being looked after very well and are quite happy'.¹³⁶ Zeitlyn then advised the RCM against Josef's removal.¹³⁷ The boy subsequently stayed with his foster mother, Mrs Gosling, after the other two boys left to join their mother in America in 1940 and all the London based Jewish children had gone home, leaving him and three

¹³¹ All information on these cases comes from Josef Kamiel's file and other non-archival sources. The files of the Korman brothers and the three girls have not been located. Hill, 'Anglo Jewry and the Refugee Children' p. 230 states that sixty-four children were evacuated to Talaton, although this number seems quite large.

¹³² USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Laura Gaster to Zeitlyn, 5 January 1940.

¹³³ Ibid., Zeitlyn in a footnote to letter Olive Dyke to Zeitlyn, 9 January 1940. The responsible party was the Borough Synagogue Care Committee for Refugee Children.

¹³⁴ Ibid., L Cohen to Mr Klein 14 January 1940. 'The Federation' was the FJRO. Zeitlyn was offended at the characterization and he replied directly to Cohen: 'the pity that you rightly have for "busy bodies" is a wasted element as far as I am concerned. I am, however, glad to have elicited a picture which has [...] emboldened [me] to assume that the particular concern of the boy's uncle is fully met by the supervision which you exercise over the children entrusted to your care'. Zeitlyn to L Cohen, 17 January 1940.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Olive Dyke to Zeitlyn, 9 January 1940 and Zeitlyn to Olive Dyke, 17 January 1940.

girls, Isa Schneider and Gwen and Paula Frajdenreich, in Talaton.¹³⁸

Religious controversy involving the Talaton children did not end there. For the next two years, there were multiple discussions among the Fund, the Movement and the Hostels Committee for Evacuated Jewish Children, a sub-committee of the JCREW, about rebilleting the four remaining Talaton refugees in Jewish homes.¹³⁹ The Council itself intervened in 1943, informing the Fund that the Talaton children ‘have been unwilling to leave their present foster parents’ but since they had now reached the ages of thirteen and fourteen, ‘it is thought to be necessary that they be place[d] in Jewish surroundings without further delay’.¹⁴⁰

The Movement had consistently resisted moving children who were happy in non-Jewish foster homes they had lived in for years, and the security of such placements was the most commonly cited reason in Movement correspondence for the failure to move a child out of a non-Jewish home.¹⁴¹ In his summation of the Devon situation, Leo Elton (1874-1947), a member of the Council appointed to the executive of the JCREW, confirmed this tendency.¹⁴²

More than one attempt has been made to transfer the children to a Jewish home, but the attempts have been [...] somewhat maladroit and ill-co-ordinated. The attempts were resisted by the children themselves, and the foster-parents and the local authorities are also antagonistic to removal.¹⁴³

A plethora of overlapping agencies had sprung up to oversee children’s religious welfare, accounting for the ‘maladroit and ill-coordinated’ attempts to remove the

¹³⁸ Gerd Korman, *Nightmare’s Fairy Tale: A Young Refugee’s Home Fronts 1938-1948*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 125.

¹³⁹ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Kaizer to L Cohen, 23 March 1942 and Olga Braham to PJRF, 18 August 1942. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 170 for discussion of the various religious committees.

¹⁴⁰ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25, ‘Copy of a letter from the Central Jewish Committee, Mrs Taylor’, 13 October 1943. The Council also noted that the children were now ‘under the legal guardianship of the Movement for the Care of Refugee Children of Bloomsbury House’ though it seems quite odd that the Council was still referring to the Refugee Children’s Movement by this variant of their original name. The Fund apparently retained some authority over the children’s welfare, as they were included in these negotiations.

¹⁴¹ Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, p. 240 contended that ‘happy’ placements and concerns about disruptions to secular education were the main obstructions the Movement put in the path of re-housing Jewish children. Evidence from the PJRF files in the cases of the Talaton children, Ruth Reicher, Manfred Lindenbaum and others supports these conclusions.

¹⁴² USL/MS/183 674 F3 Leo Elton, ‘Précis of a specimen case (The case of the Talaton Children)’, 27 December 1943

¹⁴³ Ibid.

children.¹⁴⁴ As Baumel-Schwartz noted, their number ‘far surpassed the scope of actual activities that most of these committees engaged in’, and they proved ineffectual in providing consistent religious education to children in remote areas like Talaton.¹⁴⁵ The impotence of these efforts, in combination with resistance from children, foster families and local authorities virtually guaranteed that the Talaton children remained in their Christian homes.

The religious controversy surrounding the Talaton children focused the attention of Anglo-Jewry on the problem of Jewish children in non-Jewish homes. Solomon Schonfeld followed the case closely, seeing it as part of a persistent pattern of deliberate malfeasance on the part of the Movement.¹⁴⁶ Along with the like-minded Harry Goodman of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, he waged an increasingly public campaign against the Movement culminating in the publication in 1944 of a pamphlet entitled *The Child Estranging Movement: An Expose on the Alienation of Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain from Judaism*.¹⁴⁷ Echoing some of the wording and sentiments of his earlier tract ‘Save Jewish Children for Judaism’, Schonfeld briefly considered titling it *The Child Snatching Movement*, a title more in keeping with its vitriolic tone.¹⁴⁸ Schonfeld accused the Movement of being ‘tendencious away from Orthodox Judaism’, as well as having ‘declared it their intentions to make these children forget all their past, to send them as ambassadors into the homes of Christian foster-parents where they could assimilate and create Christian good-will’.¹⁴⁹ Schonfeld alleged that the difficulty Anglo-Jewry had in investigating specific cases was due to the ‘unwarranted secrecy [that] surrounds the files and dossiers even with regard to accredited representatives who are cooperating with the

¹⁴⁴ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 170-1. In 1941, the Liberal and Reform movements created The Joint Emergency Committee for the Religious Education of Evacuated Children and The Joint Emergency Committee for Jewish Education. The same year the RCM set up the Religious Teaching Sub-Committee, and the Chief Rabbi initiated the Chief Rabbi’s National Council for Jewish Education. These were joined in 1942 by the Joint Committee for Religious Education and Welfare of Jewish Refugee Children.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ USL/MS/183 674 F3 Dr van der Zyl to Schonfeld, 28 July 1943.

¹⁴⁷ USL/MS/183 344/10 *The Child Estranging Movement: An Expose on the Alienation of Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain from Judaism*. Although not listed as the author, it was certainly written by Schonfeld. The rough and early drafts in his handwriting are among his papers.

¹⁴⁸ USL/MS/183 674 F3. An early version of the manuscript dated December 1943 and written Schonfeld’s handwriting bears this title. A later handwritten version with Schonfeld’s edits under the published title also exists in the same set of papers.

¹⁴⁹ *The Child Estranging Movement*, p. 1. Schonfeld also took up the Movement’s hostility to hostels and the failure of various religious education committees to bring any effective religious education to children billeted in non-Jewish homes as well as registering his objections to the RCM’s non-Jewish leadership and the appointment of a liberal Reform minister as its welfare officer pp. 2-4.

Movement'.¹⁵⁰ He accused the Movement of insincerity and of engaging in 'technical obstruction and sidetracking tactics' to avoid handing over information on specific cases, but that those which had come to light showed that the RCM's 'general policy of laissez faire' had 'contributed toward the alienation of the children from the faith of their parents'.¹⁵¹

Schonfeld blamed the non-denominational identity of the Movement for the disaffection of Jewish children from their heritage. He warned that 'Anglo-Jewry will be blamed by the parents and by posterity for the wholesale estrangement from Jewry and Judaism'.¹⁵² The pamphlet's primary message was that Jewish refugee children were the responsibility of Anglo-Jewry, rather than a non-sectarian body. *The Child Estranging Movement* was part of a larger campaign to convince Parliament to appoint the Chief Rabbi the legal guardian of *all* the *Kinder*. The guardianship issue had been brewing for several years, due largely to controversies arising from the removal of Jewish children from non-Jewish homes. As the ideological struggle between the non-Jewish chairman of the Movement, Lord Gorell, and Chief Rabbi Hertz became more public, tensions and acrimony mounted. Schonfeld lobbied intensely on Hertz's behalf, but Parliament was comfortable with the non-sectarian status quo and awarded the guardianship to Lord Gorell.¹⁵³

Amidst this larger controversy, the Talaton case came under greater public scrutiny, exerting pressure on the RCM to act. In December 1943, Leo Elton and the Movement's Dorothy Hardisty journeyed to Devon to investigate and report on the situation.¹⁵⁴ Both Hardisty's and Elton's reports were unanimous in their approbation of the Zbąszyń children's care, and the lack of proselytization in the youngsters' foster homes.¹⁵⁵ Mrs Hardisty did not voice outright opposition to the eventual removal of the children to a Jewish hostel, signalling a sensitivity to the concerns of the religious community, but she was fundamentally in agreement with the local billeting officers that the children should not be moved from the homes to which they had become very

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵³ 'Religious Education of Refugee Children: Surveying the Problems', *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 November 1943, p. 13. For a thorough account of the guardianship struggle, see Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, Chapter 9, 'The Guardianship'.

¹⁵⁴ Leo Elton obituary *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 March 1947, p. 17. Although those in control of the RCM archives have never made Hardisty's and Elton's reports public, copies were obtained by the CRREC and are part of Chief Rabbi Hertz's papers, a separate collection at USL.

¹⁵⁵ USL/MS/175 139/1 F1 Dorothy Hardisty and Leo Elton Reports, 8 December 1943.

attached.¹⁵⁶ She was most concerned about young Josef, whom she described as ‘highly strung’ and who, at the age of twelve, had begun bedwetting, so ‘profoundly upset’ was he at the prospect of being uprooted from his foster home.¹⁵⁷ Mrs Hardisty repeatedly noted Josef’s and Isa’s assurances that their parents, who were still alive in Europe, approved of their children’s placements in non-Jewish homes. Although she lacked independent verification of these assertions, she implied that such permission justified leaving the children where they were.¹⁵⁸

The two visitors’ recommendations for the children’s immediate futures differed substantially. Hardisty advocated a gradual reintroduction of Jewish life and allowing the children to develop ‘a natural desire [...] to move into Jewish surroundings – a desire that the foster parents will not oppose’.¹⁵⁹ She was adamant that ‘they cannot be forced away’.¹⁶⁰ Elton was less compromising. He insisted that ‘these children have got to be moved to Jewish homes, and the sooner the better’.¹⁶¹ However, even Elton admitted that he could not ‘envisage, let alone recommend their removal out of hand’.¹⁶² He recognised that the children were ‘embedded in their present associations’ and conceded that prior clumsy attempts ‘to tear them away have manifestly resulted already in psychological damage, particularly in the case of the boy’.¹⁶³ Elton advised an intensive and immediate re-immersion into Jewish life.¹⁶⁴ Elton ended his report by claiming: ‘We shall get them back and we shall keep them’.¹⁶⁵

In the Talaton case as in many others, the long inertia meant that despite intense scrutiny, there was little will to upset the status quo. The children in Devon were never moved to Jewish lodgings. In early 1946, word reached London that the three Jewish girls residing in Talaton had all been baptized. Outraged, Leo Elton demanded that the Board of Deputies go over the heads of the Refugee Children’s Movement and the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Hardisty’s primary sympathies lay with the ‘frank, intelligent’ children who, according to the rector’s wife, had arrived in Devon as ‘poor little miseries’. They were ‘a credit to their foster parents- well grown, well-mannered, friendly, beautifully kept’. She called the foster parents ‘outstanding’ and praised the villagers, concluding, ‘It was a real joy to meet such people’.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ USL/MS/175 139/1 F1 Leo Elton Report, 8 December 1943. Apparently confident that a Jewish guardian would be appointed, he noted that in this case he did not think that ‘the guardianship aspect matters much, though no doubt it will be all to the good to have our rights legally established’.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Council and launch an inquest.¹⁶⁶ He recalled that after his 1943 visit he had requested a ‘searching inquiry’ into ‘how it came about that nothing whatever was done for the religious welfare of these four children for so long’.¹⁶⁷ He hoped that now that ‘the conscience of the whole Community should be so aroused’ it would demand the ‘searching investigation’ that the case had been ‘denied two years ago’.¹⁶⁸ An investigative ‘Special Committee on Baptism’ chaired by Board appointee Elsley Zeitlyn was mounted shortly thereafter, but Leo Elton did not live to hear its conclusions.¹⁶⁹ When the report was submitted to the BoD, its representative, Dr Homa, agreed that the report ‘disclosed a very serious state of affairs’ and argued that ‘the Jewish Community had failed miserably in its responsibilities in this matter’.¹⁷⁰ Of the most significance was his belief that:

[T]he authorities in this country shared a large proportion of the blame. They had treated this matter entirely from a humanitarian point of view, and [the Board] must be thankful to them, of course, for the part they had played. But it was wrong in a matter of this kind to treat refugees on a non-denominational basis.¹⁷¹

Dr Homa’s reference to ‘the authorities’ may have meant the Government, but it is more than likely a reference to the Refugee Children’s Movement whose authority over the refugee children, humanitarian rather than religious focus and treatment of the children on a non-denominational basis fit his description most closely. A letter to the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* concurred, arguing that ‘The movement was, and is, a too willing instrument in the alienation from Judaism’ and the Council ‘became [...] an unwitting partner in the ways of the movement’.¹⁷² Solomon Schonfeld had raised the alarm in 1939, but it was not until years later, after irrevocable alterations to the faith and identity of countless Jewish children that the BoD and Anglo-Jewry acknowledged the truth of Dr Homa’s statement: ‘it was wrong in a matter of this kind to treat refugees on

¹⁶⁶ Leo Elton, ‘Baptism of Refugee Children: Shocking Case in Devonshire Village-Demand for Proper Inquiry’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 April 1946, p. 5. In May, at a subsequent meeting of the BoD, it was added that a third child had been baptised in the Devonshire village. ‘The Deputies’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 May 1946, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Elton, ‘Baptism of Refugee Children’ *Jewish Chronicle*, p. 5. Dorothy Hardisty’s report on the Talaton visit did note Josef ‘corresponds with Mr Kayser of the Polish Refugee Fund who sends him books and literature’ although ‘Mr Elton believed they were ‘not much use’ USL/MS/175 139/1 F1 Dorothy Hardisty Report, 8 December 1943.

¹⁶⁸ Elton, ‘Baptism of Refugee Children’ *Jewish Chronicle*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Deputies Decline Invitation’ *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 September 1946, p. 5

¹⁷⁰ ‘In Legal Hands’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 March 1947, p. 5. The actual report was never made public, as explained in detail below.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Mr B Strauss, ‘Baptism of Refugee Children’ *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 May 1946, p. 16.

a non-denominational basis'.¹⁷³

The ending of the war, the well-publicized baptisms in Devon and the damning report submitted to the BoD focused critical and uncomfortable attention on the Refugee Children's Movement. In 1947, the Board announced the formation of the Refugee Children's Rescue Committee, tasked with ascertaining the status of all refugee children still in the UK and finding Jewish homes for those still residing with non-Jews.¹⁷⁴ The goal was 'to regain for the Jewish Community a considerable number of refugee young persons and children,' and to prevent 'the most obvious of dangers, namely, of their being induced into baptism'.¹⁷⁵ The committee hoped 'to attract them by the offer of a Jewish home in lieu of the comfortable and pleasant non-Jewish homes in which many of them are now placed'.¹⁷⁶ In 1950, the Rescue Committee finally brought its findings to the Board. Attached was a separate report undertaken at the Board's behest to examine the RCM children's case files.¹⁷⁷ The BoD had appointed the Fund's Moise Gorowitz and Dr J Braude to investigate the files along with the CBF's delegate Lola Hahn-Warburg, a former leader of the Movement. The head of the Rescue Committee apologized for the delay, but revealed that 'it had taken three years [...] to get the C.B.F. to allow them a tiny glimpse into their files on these children'.¹⁷⁸ The three-year delay had prompted criticisms of Movement and CBF secrecy from Julius Jung who wrote in a *Jewish Chronicle* editorial in 1949:

The problem should be removed from the present atmosphere of secrecy [...] I challenge the Jewish Refugees Committee to give the full facts. I say categorically that the number of young adults in Christian homes runs into the very many hundreds.¹⁷⁹

This indictment was repeated by the former Director of the JCREW, who appealed for 'an end to the secrecy that surrounds these young people' and the formation of a committee which would inquire 'into every name and every case and which would act

¹⁷³ 'In Legal Hands', *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 March 1947, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Jacques Cohen, 'Refugee Children and Baptism: Deputies Appeal to Jewry', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 April 1947, p. 17.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Wiener Library Central British Fund Archives (hereafter WL/CBF) 27/29/169 'Report on Jewish Refugee Children brought to England', May 1950. Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children', pp. 239-40 stated that Lola Hahn-Warburg of the RCM refused to sign the report because she believed 'that the number likely to be traced would probably be so small as to make the effort futile'.

¹⁷⁸ 'Alleged Baptism of Refugees: Deputies to Investigate', *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 July 1950, p. 8. The RCM had been disbanded in 1948. The CBF became the de facto custodian of its case files.

¹⁷⁹ 'Jews in Christian Home: Refugees Committee Criticised', *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 October 1949, p. 5.

unhampered and unhindered to right the wrongs only too long left neglected'.¹⁸⁰ Multiple accusations of RCM secrecy and obfuscation dating at least back to Schonfeld's 1944 *Child Estranging Movement* indicate that the present zealous control of the children's files had its antecedents in the 1940s.¹⁸¹

The CBF had stonewalled Gorowitz's committee for three years, and when it finally relented, the 'tiny glimpse' they allowed into their files was so restricted as to render the exercise almost pointless. In March 1950, they agreed to release 'the first ten files of the first ten letters of the alphabetical list' of children cared for by the RCM.¹⁸² These stipulations were revealing in themselves, and the Board appointees' findings within their limited scope of investigation were most enlightening. The committee learned that in 1948, the RCM had handed over the files of all its non-Jewish cases, as well as the files of 129 baptised Jewish children to the Christian Council.¹⁸³ They were also told that 300 minor Jewish children remained in care in 1950, of which 50 were in non-Jewish homes.¹⁸⁴ When they analysed the 100 files they had permission to inspect, they found they were only given access to young men's files, and 48 of those were children who had emigrated, or whose cases had been handed over to the Christian Council, leaving them only 52 files to examine.¹⁸⁵ They discovered that the 'present whereabouts' of most of those were impossible to determine because 'in most cases the files do not disclose any information about the last five or six years'.¹⁸⁶ The Board's delegates expressed surprise that 16 out of the 100 cases had gone to the Christian Council, a percentage 'that would appear extraordinarily high', especially since 'most of these 16 young people had distinctly Jewish names'.¹⁸⁷ They mooted an unconvincing explanation that some of these children had been baptised on the continent, but expressed regret 'that all the files referring to baptism were handed over to the Christian Council without copies being retained'.¹⁸⁸ The alacrity with which the Movement had

¹⁸⁰ 'Plea to End Secrecy', Letters, *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 October 1949, p. 16.

¹⁸¹ USL/MS/183 384 F1 Council Circular No. 95, 10 April 1941 (cited in Williams, pp. 20, 31). The obsessive control of children's files was instigated very early in the war with management of the permit cards and the Movement's refusal to transfer the children's files from London to the regional committees.

¹⁸² WL/CBF 27/29/169 'Report on Jewish Refugee Children brought to England', p. 1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Tellingly, as a result of the report, arrangements were made to transfer responsibility and care for all those children from the JRC to the Jewish Board of Guardians.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6. They also expressed concern over the 50 children still in non-Jewish homes, but were informed that those were children who 'had no family left whom they could join'.

divested themselves of the baptism files and their granting access to only 100 files with limited utility raises questions about the Movement's motives. The reluctance to allow access to their records compounded by multiple accusations of secrecy points to a persistent failure on the part of the Movement and its successors to be fully transparent about the outcomes of their after-care, especially regarding religious conversions.

The implications of the Gorowitz report and its dramatic conclusions have never been explored in the literature. Baumel-Schwartz mentioned it only in passing, and Gottlieb cherry-picked selected passages to conclude that 'the Movement was vindicated'.¹⁸⁹ She only quoted the few lines that noted 'considerable care' had been taken to place the children 'in good homes' and that it 'was not the fault of the Movement but of the Jewish community at large that these home often were non-Jewish'.¹⁹⁰ The report *did* endorse this oft-repeated impeachment of the Jewish community, but it also criticised the Movement's efforts 'to bring some Jewish education and understanding to these children' characterising them as 'sporadic and unsystematic' and concluded rather despondently:

It is doubtful whether anything can be done at present [...] The Jewish community will continue to be held morally responsible [...] It is unfortunate that [...] it took several years to bring about this investigation. The chances of improving matters from a Jewish point of view would have been considerably greater some four or five years ago.¹⁹¹

The report suggested that 'serious efforts' should be made to locate and contact all the *Kinder* still in the UK and determine their religious needs, re-establishing contact where necessary.¹⁹² They also suggested that the issue of the missing baptism case files should not be left in abeyance.¹⁹³ Quite contrary to Gottlieb's selective conclusions, the Gorowitz report did not exonerate the Movement, and left many unanswered questions about their handling, and possible cover-up, of baptisms and other issues. Pointedly, the report also noted in closing that, 'the views expressed above are not shared by one of the members of the Committee'.¹⁹⁴ On the report's final page, above the typed name of the CBF representative, Mrs Lola Hahn-Warburg, the signature space is blank.¹⁹⁵ It would appear that the former RCM stalwart did not herself believe that the report

¹⁸⁹ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 219-20 and Gottlieb, *Men of Vision*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁰ WL/CBF 27/29/169 'Report on Jewish Refugee Children brought to England', p. 6.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

vindicated the Movement.

The Board of Deputies received the reports from the Baptism inquiry, the Rescue Committee and Gorowitz, but at the culmination of all these inquests, it was apparent that the Board, too, was averse to transparency. The head of the Rescue Committee, Dr Homa, asserted that the various investigations warranted ‘a full examination of the cases of all children brought to this country before the war by the Refugee Children’s Movement’.¹⁹⁶ This investigation, which would have required full access to all 10,000 case files, may or may not have taken place. Homa’s report and all subsequent undertakings were covered by a veil of secrecy and their contents have never been publicly revealed. Held in the London Metropolitan Archives, the ‘Refugee Children’s Rescue Committee: Joint Emergency Committee, Special Committee on Baptisms and Committee of Enquiry into Baptisms’ is closed to public access until 2051.¹⁹⁷

The religious controversy that produced these long hidden documents was closely linked to the lives of four refugee children from Poland. The failure of multiple agencies to address the children’s religious heritage had profound consequences. Josef Kamiel’s family members were reportedly satisfied with his non-Jewish placement, but expected him to revert to orthodoxy when he was reunited with them after the war – a transition that proved extremely difficult.¹⁹⁸ Although Mrs Hardisty was convinced that in the girls’ homes no proselytizing had taken place, Gwen Frajdenreich testified long afterwards:

In 1949, this family adopted us, saying we had no one left. We then had to become Christian, and at the age of twenty I married a Christian man, but deep down in my heart I am still a Polish Jewess.¹⁹⁹

This poignant testimony brings the religious controversy into focus in a way that no report is capable of doing. Confirming Orthodoxy’s worst fears about placing Jewish children in non-Jewish homes, it underscores the conceptual tensions infusing the entire *Kindertransport* scheme.

The religious issues that generated so many inquiries and resulted in the loss of Jewish identity for *Kinder* like Gwen Frajdenreich had their roots in an ideological

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ LMA/ ACC/3121/C/02/002/004 1941 – 1950 Refugee Children’s Rescue Committee: Joint Emergency Committee, Special Committee on Baptisms and Committee of Enquiry into Baptisms. Conditions of access: closed until 2051 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=074-acc3121_2&cid=1-2-2-4#1-2-2-4> [accessed 27 January 2013]

¹⁹⁸ Interview with the Kamiel family, London, 3 August 2013 and Korman, *Nightmare’s Fairy Tale*, p. 22.

¹⁹⁹ Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p. 257.

conflict underpinning the entire *Kindertransport* enterprise. In 1944, Leo Elton had framed it as an ‘us versus them’ tug-of-war and claimed the Jewish children as ‘ours’. For the Movement and its non-orthodox Anglo-Jewish supporters however, the ‘major concern’ according to CBF historian Gottlieb, ‘was the rescue of the greatest number’ irrespective of religious considerations.²⁰⁰ These conflicting visions about the *Kindertransport’s* *raison d’être* were made manifest in the recollections of its most famous rescuer, Nicholas Winton. As he later recalled, when orthodox rabbis expressed their outrage over his placement of Jewish children with the Barbican Mission, a Christian group with unconcealed conversionary aims:

I took no notice of their objections. It may seem terrible from the Jewish point of view but, on the other hand, the children are alive! I was after saving lives, not souls. I told them, ‘I’ve got my work to do, you’ve got yours. If you prefer a dead Jew to a proselytised one, that’s your business’.²⁰¹

Winton’s own mixed background may have accounted for his ‘saving lives, not souls’ perspective.²⁰² A British born Jew by birth and a Christian by baptism, Winton owed no fealty to Torah faithfulness. He was thus a kind of analogue of the Movement itself: a non-denominational entity springing from Jewish origins. Furthermore, Winton’s convictions and the Movement’s philosophical approach to the *Kindertransport* paralleled one another, putting them in direct conflict with the more orthodox factions of Anglo-Jewry.

Nicholas Winton’s ‘a dead Jew or a proselytised one’ and Leo Elton’s ‘we shall get them back and we shall keep them’ represented two extremes of an ideological divide. Although sincerely grounded, these passionately held positions scarcely considered the young refugees’ feelings or agency and often failed to respond to the complexities embedded in the religious conflict. Despite Elton’s and Schonfeld’s

²⁰⁰ Gottlieb, pp. 102-3. Interestingly, Gorowitz’s 1950 report said essentially the same thing. ‘The Refugee Children’s Movement was founded in 1938 [...] with the aim to save as many children as possible from Central Europe’. p. 1.

²⁰¹ Winton is recorded saying these words in *Nicholas Winton: The Power of Good*, dir. by Matej Mináč, (Gelman Educational Foundation, 2006). This quote is found in Emanuel and Gissing, *Nicholas Winton*, p. 83. Interestingly, Winton’s recollections, recorded more than sixty years after meeting with the rabbis, contrast significantly with the concerns he expressed at the time the children were being moved out of Czechoslovakia. In a report included with his 1939 papers are found these words: ‘25 children [...] have been brought out of Czechoslovakia. These were brought out under conditions which are not even acceptable to a large section of the British public, in so far as an undertaking had to be given, if Jewish, that they should be baptized’. Nicholas Winton, Undated report, in WL/NW *Saving the Children, Czechoslovakia 1939*.

²⁰² Emanuel and Gissing assert that the family, while intentionally leaving their Jewish roots behind, adopted rather than converted to Christianity going not much farther than having their children baptised and confirmed. Emanuel and Gissing, *Nicholas Winton*, p. 9.

pessimism about non-Jewish placements, not all of these involved the loss of Jewish religion and identity, and many older children resisted or actively fought against explicit proselytization.²⁰³ At the other end of the spectrum, there are accounts of children who were miserable in strictly orthodox environments and who rebelled against the faith.²⁰⁴ For the greatest number, the drift away from Judaism or towards Christianity occurred in a vacuum of Jewish instruction, as was the case with the Talaton children. Children who were lovingly cared for and had grown attached to their foster families might be drawn to Christianity by the example of admired carers, or simply adopt it because they wished to belong.²⁰⁵ Many resisted attempts to move them to Jewish surroundings, and forcible removal from secure environments was likely to produce trauma, as even Leo Elton acknowledged.

The Talaton cases are among the most dramatic in the contest between a purely humanitarian and a uniquely Jewish vision of the *Kindertransport*, but they followed a pattern that was oft repeated. Calls of alarm were followed by a flurry of correspondence amongst various agencies aimed at exchanging the current placement for a more suitably Jewish one. In very few instances were the children actually moved. This cycle was reflected in the experiences of eight young Polish girls evacuated to the Kent countryside and billeted in non-Jewish homes. Many months elapsed before efforts were initiated to move them all into a Jewish hostel in Tunbridge Wells and each case received an identical memorandum.

Above is residing in a non-Jewish house [and...] is receiving Hebrew education from Miss Trouton, A Christian English Lady who teaches according to the system of Dr Claude Montefiore (liberal). Note: Essential that above be removed to the Jewish Hostel [...] within the next few days.²⁰⁶

Despite the serious-sounding intent, there is no evidence that any of the girls were ever moved out of their foster homes. Although they had consistently recognised the importance of preserving the children's religious heritage, the PJRF's record of re-

²⁰³ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 150, 166, 212, and Gershon, *We Came as Children* pp. 59, 66. USCSF/VHA 16930 Henry Kreisel, 1996 for a testimony of resisting proselytization.

²⁰⁴ This was the experience of Herbert Haberberg in Ely. Frances Williams also discussed this in her chapter 'Scottish Care for the Jewish Minor: *Kindertransportees*' Adaptation to a New Jewish Life'. Williams, pp. 81-124, specifically pp. 104-5.

²⁰⁵ Examples of non-coercive conversions and of those who completely drifted away from all religion are found in Gershon, *We Came as Children* pp. 64-6, 157-8, 163, 165-67 and Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 120, 210.

²⁰⁶ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Memo Re: Helen Ettinger, 30 June 1942. Since most of the children it had brought over from Poland came from observant and orthodox homes, the PJRF found both the liberal system and its non-Jewish teacher unacceptable for their religious instruction

moving children from secure non-Jewish homes was also mixed.

The Fund was led by religiously observant men who were deeply concerned about their refugee children drifting away from Judaism. Perhaps the most passionate on the subject was the Fund's welfare officer, Rabbi Dr Joseph Litvin (1896-1966), an émigré from Latvia, whose empathy for the refugee children was evident in his strongly worded and often perceptive reports.²⁰⁷ A typical example was a home visit report about a refugee boy living in London with non-Jews:

Klarman rarely meets Jews. He is becoming a stranger to Jews and Jewishness [...] I think this should not continue. I think our organisation did not bring over excellent Jewish children from the Polish and German hell to make them [goyim] here.

Litvin knew that Leo Klarman's parents fervently hoped their children would remain observant. He offered the boy lodgings with more Jewish contact but Leo replied that his landlady 'was so kind to him when he earned only about a pound a week' and treated him 'now in such a good way, that he would definitely refuse to move out'.²⁰⁸

[A]s a result this fine boy whose family has suffered so much from Anti-Semitism may be lost to our people because of no fault of his own. He works on [Shabbos] he eats [treif] he rarely meets a Jew and his ideas are accordingly becoming non-Jewish.²⁰⁹

If the Fund had difficulties changing the dwellings of financially dependent children, it had very little leverage with boys like Leo who were making their own way in life.

Litvin bemoaned the situation but acknowledged Leo's agency, and recognized he had little recourse to alter the young man's apparent apostasy.²¹⁰

Although he was devout and orthodox, Dr Litvin was no religious doctrinaire. When it was discovered that Ruth Reicher was receiving 'no Hebrew education' he actually advised against moving her from a non-Jewish foster home into a Jewish hostel because of the latter's 'strange rule' that all girls over fourteen had to work, and since Ruth was fifteen 'and is going to school and this would create ill feelings'.²¹¹ In this instance, education took priority over religious orthodoxy. Ruth's hosts and the local Movement committee supported her academic goals and although there was still talk of

²⁰⁷ Obituary, *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 December 1966, p. 28.

²⁰⁸ USL/MS/183 409 F2 Dr Litvin report, 12 February 1942. Words in brackets are in Yiddish.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Interestingly, Litvin added this aside to his report: 'I was told last week his house was visited by a representative of the Bloomsbury House although he has never been registered with any other organisation except ours'. Litvin may have felt that if Leo began to identify with the less religiously driven Movement that might undercut the Fund's efforts to bring the boy back to Judaism.

²¹¹ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Handwritten notes on Ruth Reicher, ND 1942(?) and 'Report on Reicher by Dr. Litvin', 27 July 1942.

an orthodox placement two years later, Ruth remained with her non-Jewish family until the end of the war.²¹² After secondary school, Ruth declined the Fund's offer to place her in a Jewish Training Hospital for nursing studies, instead taking up a position secured by the local Movement representative in a non-Jewish hospital. When asked about her religious life, Ruth assured the Fund: 'If I want to go to any Jewish services, I am very near the Hove Synagogue'.²¹³ Ruth's case exemplifies the secular educational concerns that, along with mutually satisfying placements, were the two most commonly cited justifications for leaving Jewish children in non-Jewish environments.

The Fund was most successful in supporting the children who were self-motivated to maintain religious orthodoxy. They regularly sent the children Passover gifts of five shillings each, boxes of matzos, special clothing for bar mitzvah ceremonies and occasionally, small gifts to mark Chanukah. Applications to move into more orthodox hostels or observant homes, to receive Hebrew lessons, to observe *kashrut*, or to avoid working on Saturdays were treated very seriously. The devout Helen Reich thanked the Fund 'for [...] promising me to go to another place where I will be able to go to a Secondary School and have kosher meals'.²¹⁴ Although it is unclear whether she was referring to the schooling or the chance to be observant, she added 'I hope that this, my greatest wish, will soon be gratified. I am looking out for it day by day and hour by hour'.²¹⁵ The Fund helped Helen achieve her greatest wish by supporting her through secondary school and helping her find a job with Saturdays and Jewish holidays off, as well as helping to pay for her lodgings in an orthodox hostel in London where she received kosher food.²¹⁶

It is impossible to know how many of the Fund's children maintained their Jewish identity and religious adherence. At least one girl who spent the entire war in non-Jewish billets did abandon the faith and several identified their religion as Christian or agnostic in their post-war testimonies, indicating a significant drift away from

²¹² See the quote above by Rabbi Dr van der Zyl.

²¹³ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Ruth Reicher to Kaizer, 16 May 1944.

²¹⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Helen Reich PJRF, 6 May 1940.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F2 EG to Kaizer, 18 August 1942 and Helen Reich to Gorowitz, 1 September 1942.

orthodoxy.²¹⁷ Unlike the Movement, the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund was committed to keeping the children in Jewish surroundings, although many factors militated against such objectives. Evacuation created many situations that were difficult to resolve. The humanitarian side argued that upsetting mutually fulfilling placements visited cruelty on secure and happy children; the orthodox forces held that disaffection from their faith had already done them irreparable harm.²¹⁸ Thus, the ‘lives versus souls’ battle was unresolved. In the Anglo-Jewish post-war agonizing over the loss of Jewish children to baptism, it was recognized that both the community and the organisations had failed many of the children religiously, and the issue remains contentious in *Kindertransport* historiography and memory to this day.

Religion, though a major aspect of after-care, was only one part of the agencies’ remit. The organizations also had enormous influence in non-spiritual matters and the guidance they provided in terms of material, education and vocational support reveal much about how these agencies related to and interacted with the refugee children. These interactions, though little explored in the literature, are of major importance in understanding the nature of the *Kindertransport* experience, and the attitudes, perceptions and constraints that guided the organisations in their dealings with the children in their care.

III. The *Kinder* and the Organisations

The London based refugee organisations were generally remote actors in *Kinder*’s daily lives. Nevertheless, they wielded tremendous influence on the children’s overall welfare as the issues surrounding religion demonstrate. The committees in Bloomsbury House, Woburn House and Soho Square bore financial responsibility for *Kinder* aftercare, and their guiding philosophies and attitudes also profoundly affected decisions on education, employment, healthcare and even marriage. The PJRF correspondence suggests that agencies expected their wards to humbly accept their refugee status and be grateful for

²¹⁷ USCSF/VHA 45065 Isabella Schneider Weber, 1998, 26263 Jacques Rich, 1997 and 33965 Sylvia Balbierer Schneider, 1997 for examples of those who drifted away from Judaism. Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 213 noted a conversion rate among former Jewish refugee children ‘unparalleled among British Jewry’, and blamed conversionary missionary societies, the Movement and Anglo-Jewry (in that order).

²¹⁸ Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, p. 240 also came to this conclusion. She noted ‘a reluctance to blame the Movement’s structural arrangements for the loss of so many Jewish children to their faith’.

efforts expended on their behalf, but it also shows that these efforts were often quite significant, especially given the financial constraints of refugee work. The deep sense of responsibility these agencies felt towards the children is obvious from their correspondence, but supervision was often uneven, and ingrained ideas about deference, gender, social class, education and vocation coloured their interactions with the *Kinder*. Financial liability was overwhelmingly the determining factor when it came to decisions about the children. The Fund accounted for every penny, and an astounding amount of correspondence transpired over relatively miniscule amounts of money and small items of new and used clothing.²¹⁹ Internal correspondence between agencies showed that financial concerns regularly drove decisions about such things as lodging, training, educational supplies and pocket money. That the scarcity of funds redounded on the children is discernible from later memory-based accounts, although rarely do the London committees play a starring role in *Kinder* testimonies.

For many *Kinder*, contact with refugee organisations in London was sporadic or non-existent and their imprecise memories of those agencies characterise them in detached terms, deserving of gratitude but distanced from everyday existence. A representative portrayal is found in the memoirs of Thea Feliks Eden, a *Kind* who was evacuated to Ely and moved permanently to London in 1942:

They were pretty good people [...] both in London and the countryside. Even when we were being kind of neglected, it was benign neglect, it was not deliberate [...] they did the best they knew how to do as far as we were concerned.²²⁰

Like many *Kinder*, Thea recalled almost nothing about the committee or individuals who organised her rescue, never naming them and only briefly alluding to their influence. She described coming to London at sixteen:

[W]e didn't totally have to support ourselves if we didn't choose to [...] I remember having a job that paid for my expenses and I had about half a dollar left per week. And I chose to pay the full amount.²²¹

Thea's account gives the impression that she had limited contact with the administrative bodies in London, but the archival records in the PJRF files tell a different story. In over a dozen letters to the personnel in London, Thea, a pretty, dark-haired dimpled girl,

²¹⁹ Carbon copies of outgoing correspondence did not even merit fresh paper; instead, the blank sides of old appeal letters, forms, and even financial reports were recycled, indicating the need to conserve on every possible expense.

²²⁰ Irene Reti and Valerie Chase, eds., *A Transported Life: Memories of the Kindertransport, the Oral History of Thea Feliks Eden* (Santa Cruz: Her Books, 1995), p. 52.

²²¹ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 58.

corresponded about housing, jobs, money, clothing and health. In respect to the issue of financial independence, Thea's recollections accorded almost identically with the documents in her file. Her reported choice to support herself is entirely borne out by the correspondence, and the small amount of money she remembered having left over, though expressed in American dollars, was not an exaggeration.²²² After six months in London, she wrote, 'As we are supposed to pay 30/- at the hostel I feel I should pay more than £1 from now onwards. I can hardly afford to pay 30/- yet as I have to buy my own cloth etc'.²²³ Four months later, she informed the Fund that she had received a five shilling rise, and was prepared to pay the full board to the hostel 'from next Friday'.²²⁴



Thea's desire to be financially independent was unusual. Several Zbąszyń boys, older than Thea and earning much higher wages, under-reported their earnings while maintained by the Fund in order to keep more of their money and delay self-support as long as possible. Thea's determination to pay her full board meant considerable hardship, and she was still forced to rely upon the Fund for her clothing needs.²²⁵ Nevertheless, she freed herself from financial dependence on the Fund at a younger age than most *Kinder*. Her memoir, recorded fifty years later, only vaguely explained her compulsion to do so.

I chose to pay the full amount until I got my first raise a few months later in order not to be beholden to this particular group of people whom I didn't particularly respect because I thought they were kind of exploitative types.²²⁶

The Fund's personnel had arranged Thea's move to London and had not pressured her to support herself. They had shown solicitous care when she had serious health

²²² USL/MS/183 575 F1 Gorowitz to Cooper, 12 October 1942 and Report Re: Thea Feliks, 2 November 1942.

²²³ Ibid., Thea Feliks to Gorowitz, 20 May 1943. See also Thea Feliks to Gorowitz, 2 November 1942, and Thea Feliks to Kaizer 15 February 1943. By 'cloth' Thea meant clothing. She did not, in fact, have to buy that either, for the Fund was ready to provide her with free used clothing or new clothing with ration coupons only.

²²⁴ Ibid., Thea Feliks to Gorowitz, 19 September 1943.

²²⁵ Ibid., Thea Feliks to Gorowitz 23 November 1942, Thea Feliks to Kaizer 17 December 1942, Thea to M Gorowitz 20 May 1943, and Weissbraun Report, January 1945.

²²⁶ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 58.

problems in Ely, making her characterisation of them as ‘exploitative types’ somewhat confounding. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction lies at the intersection of memory and archival documentation. Shortly after she assumed full financial self-support. Mr Gorowitz invited her to the offices to discuss her ‘future career’.²²⁷ The Fund had received notice of an offer of ‘six months’ secretarial training for a Jewish refugee girl of sixteen’.²²⁸ Free tuition and materials were included, but no maintenance, ‘best suit[ing] a girl who is living with parents’ or ‘a guarantor who could meet the cost’.²²⁹ Weeks after her interview, Thea inquired:

As I have not heard from you as regards my going to a Secretarial Training College, I have been wondering how this matter is progressing. I am naturally very anxious to go as you know [...] and I would be much obliged if you would kindly inform me what action has been taken.²³⁰

No reply to Thea’s request was retained. The final piece of correspondence on the matter was a letter from the Fund to the benefactor, declaring that they were ‘unable to avail themselves of this offer’.²³¹

Although not definitive, it is probable that financial concerns were decisive in the Fund’s rejection of the free training. Its terms would have required the Fund to resume paying maintenance for a girl who had recently become self-supporting, and although it was a generous and attractive proposal that would have substantially benefitted Thea, the Fund’s committee made the most economically prudent decision from their vantage point. Since they had given Thea reason to believe she might take up the offer, she is likely to have felt quite let down when it failed to materialise. The memory of this episode, coincident with the hardships attendant upon her assumption of financial independence, may have led to the recollection that she did not wish ‘to be beholden to this particular group of people’. Her enduring memory of the Polish Fund as ‘exploitative types’ blotted out all recall of their help and even the expressions of gratitude that she conveyed to them at the time.

This interrogation of memory and archival correspondence yields a nuanced and critical picture of the interactions between organisations and *Kinder*. Documents both

²²⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Gorowitz to Thea Feliks, 22 September 1943. Thea had announced on 12 September 1943 that she had received a rise and was prepared to pay the full 30 shillings a week room and board from 17 September 1943. Thea Feliks to Gorowitz, 12 September 1943.

²²⁸ Ibid., Miss L H Stewart to Kaizer, 14 September 1943. Interestingly, the offer was not open to ‘German or Austrian nationals’, leading to the Polish Fund.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Thea Feliks to Gorowitz, 26 October 1943.

²³¹ Ibid., Gorowitz to Miss Stewart, 4 November 1943.

corroborating and challenging later testimony invite consideration of the issues inherent in historicizing memory. For the *Kindertransport*, these reflections are particularly important, since memory-based literature remains a key component of the historiography. Thea's oral testimony provides important insights about the refugee child's reception of experience, and her precise recall of many aspects of her life was confirmed by much of the correspondence. The documents also highlight gaps in Thea's recollections of the Fund, and their juxtaposition with her memories facilitates a more measured portrayal of the organisation by adding balance and context to the memoir.

The financial considerations that drove the Fund's decisions in Thea's life were among a multitude of factors that affected their interactions with the *Kinder*. Less quantifiable but equally important were the values and attitudes of the organisations' principals. Elsley Zeitlyn's outgoing correspondence, for example, pointedly revealed the underlying convictions that influenced many of the Fund's decisions. Zeitlyn, whose career as a barrister no doubt informed his character, manner and beliefs, was capable of tact, but he could also be abrasive, abrupt, and overbearing, especially with those he perceived as troublemakers (including, it seemed, most of the refugee boys in his agency's care).²³² These qualities were evident in his correspondence with Salomon Lassman, a solemn seventeen year old whose letters portrayed him as anything but a reprobate. In response to Lassman's concern about finding meaningful employment, Zeitlyn wrote:

[B]oys who came into this country under special conditions [...] are subject to the regulations [...] and jobs can only be taken on the conditions made by the Government. This seems a matter which has not yet been appreciated by you and I am sorry to say that your letter does not contain a solitary word of appreciation for what has been done on your behalf.²³³

Zeitlyn conveyed little sympathy or understanding of the boy's frustration, but made a strong point about the gratitude he expected of the refugee children. Lassman incorporated such sentiments into his next letter, mentioning that he was 'one of the boys brought over by you from Poland [...] for which I am very thankful and obliged to you, and I think that I have fully appreciated your work done for me'.²³⁴ The boy was properly deferential, but this made little difference to Zeitlyn. When Lassman wrote that

²³² France Williams' coverage of contemporary social assumptions about juvenile delinquency is one of the strongest elements of *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*.

²³³ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Zeitlyn to Salomon Lassman, 9 October 1939.

²³⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Salomon Lassman to Zeitlyn, 25 December 1939.

he had left Leeds to find work, Zeitlyn, jumped to the erroneous conclusion that he had left without the proper permission.

It seems certain that you will get in trouble with the police and your lack of discipline is likely to lead to various serious consequences [...] The steps that you have taken,[are] totally unwarranted and can only be censured.²³⁵

Warnings about trouble with the police were a stock response to boys whom Zeitlyn considered troublesome. An adversarial approach, lack of sensitivity, and admonition to show gratitude were the hallmarks of Zeitlyn's relations with refugee boys, making him an unsympathetic figure to those who recalled him with any clarity.²³⁶

In general, refugee boys were expected to enter the workforce and become self-supporting as soon as possible and those whom the Fund deemed insufficiently thrifty, diligent or grateful received stern rebukes and warnings. Zeitlyn was both patronising and paternalistic, communicating that refugee children must resign themselves to reduced expectations.²³⁷ This attitude was manifest in his dealings with Bruno Nussbaum, a young man with a winning smile and artistic aspirations who, when evacuated to Worthing, found advocates in his teachers and local refugee workers. As Bruno was nearly sixteen, decisions about his future rested with the PJRF and Zeitlyn's lukewarm response to further training reflected more than financial hesitation.



[T]he boy Bruno Nussbaum [...] apparently is anxious to be an architect. As far as memory serves me, he shows no special ability to justify this Fund incurring the very great responsibility involved in seconding this boy's desires [...] My own ideal is to have the boys taught a handicraft rather than a profession.²³⁸

Zeitlyn's response revealed several conceits. Although he had limited contact with the

²³⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Zeitlyn's Secretary to Salomon Lassman, 14 May 1940.

²³⁶ Herbert Haberberg, interview 28 January 2012. Correspondence with Gerry Lieder, 4 August 2013 and with the family of Edward Pachtman, 18 July 2013.

²³⁷ Baumei-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 213 characterised this attitude as Anglo-Jewry treating refugee children as 'poor relations'.

²³⁸ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Zeitlyn to Mrs Thornycroft, 9 February 1940. Frances Williams also reported on official and societal preferences for 'handicraft' for working class boys as well as 'homcraft' for the girls. She extrapolated these attitudes to apply to unaccompanied migrant children in institutional care in Scotland. Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. 63-4.

children, he imagined that he was intimately knowledgeable about their aptitudes and skills. Further, his preference for ‘handicraft’ over ‘profession’ defined his beliefs about what the *Kinder* had a right to expect in their country of refuge. He expanded on these themes to the headmaster, asking whether Bruno was ‘a fit subject for the expenditure involved in giving him architectural training’ and noting further.²³⁹

[T]he ordinary difficulties that face professional people are exacerbated when these are foreigners, in addition to which, I personally, am all for the crafts. It is the artisan rather than the artist that I should like to help produce.²⁴⁰

According to his understanding of economic and social realities, spending even a modest sum on a foreign child, even one with innate talents and ambition was wasteful and unproductive.

Although he possessed an abstract humanitarian concern for the children, Zeitlyn was unable to see them as social equals whose professional ambitions might be nurtured and encouraged – an attitude he shared with other Jewish philanthropists and even the general British public. Elaine Blond recounted that the Marchioness of Reading, one of the executives of the Movement, ‘judged every problem within the narrow conventions of her own class. Refugees were seen as deserving sympathy and help, but they were not to be pampered’ and because ‘they were from the lower strata in society’ they ‘could not expect or even appreciate the finer things of life’.²⁴¹ Articles in several British newspapers emphasized that refugee boys would ‘be trained as artisans and the girls for domestic service and nursing’.²⁴² The Worthington refugee committee was apparently unencumbered by similar beliefs, and their consistent support for Bruno won over a reluctant Elsley Zeitlyn who reminded them that:

I prefer the Artisan to the Architect, but in view of my anxiety to meet what you consider advisable in regard to this refugee boy, I gladly accept your suggestion.²⁴³

To his credit, Zeitlyn put aside his own prejudices in the face of his peers’ recommendations and the modest sums required, but he never relinquished his convictions about the refugee children in the Fund’s care.

Refugee girls less frequently incurred Zeitlyn’s displeasure, but ingratitude was

²³⁹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Zeitlyn to Donald Sinclair, 22 February 1940.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Blond and Turner, *Marks of Distinction*, p. 73.

²⁴² *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 3 December 1938, p. 14. Also, see *Picture Post*, 17 December 1938, pp. 56-58.

²⁴³ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Zeitlyn to Thornycroft, 28 February 1940. The Fund agreed to pay Bruno’s fee of approximately £3.

something he simply would not tolerate. When a group of girls whose parents had enjoined them ‘to do no housework’ refused ‘even small odd jobs about the house’ in their hostel, the Middlesbrough Refugee Committee threatened to send them back to London.²⁴⁴ Alarmed by the prospect, Zeitlyn gave the committee carte blanche to ‘exercise the sternest disciplinary measure against the refractory girls’.²⁴⁵ Zeitlyn was ‘grieved’ at the news from Middlesbrough and told the head of the committee that the ringleader:

[S]hould be reminded that she was taken from Zbąszyń and be told it is most ungrateful as well as disgusting indeed for a person who is cared for as she is, not to do the work that you put her to do.²⁴⁶

Adjuring the Middlesbrough committee not to give in to the girls, Zeitlyn, echoing the Marchioness of Reading, added, ‘I am afraid that we are inclined to spoil the children instead of preparing them to see life as it is’.²⁴⁷ For Zeitlyn ‘life as it is’ meant accepting the status of ‘refugee’ and adjusting one’s ambitions accordingly.

Zeitlyn’s responses to various refugee children were a measure of the organisation’s beliefs about the *Kinder*’s indebtedness. As the reaction to the recalcitrant girls indicated, the Fund was not above shaming or instilling guilt in those whose behaviour they believed warranted it. One young man who had ignored repeated requests to contact the Fund received a terse and slightly chilling note:

I wish to remind you that our Committee has brought you over from Poland, and you can imagine your position if you still would have been there.²⁴⁸

This letter was written in late 1941, after reports of German atrocities had already reached British shores, demonstrating the Fund’s willingness to impress upon the *Kinder* that they owed their very lives to the refugee organisation. In general, such stark language was reserved for the boys under the Fund’s care. Whether this reflected the girls’ greater complaisance, or connotes a different attitude towards girls, it fits with a pattern of perceptibly gendered responses to refugee children.

Gender differentiation was observable in many interactions between the Fund and its wards. The refugee agencies were more sympathetic to girls’ dissatisfactions with their hospitality and in the Fund’s files, many more girls than boys were found alternate

²⁴⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F4 Mayer Marks to Zeitlyn, 7 March 1939.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Mayer Marks, 8 March 1939.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Gorowitz to Felix Orchan, 18 October 1941.

housing when they expressed unhappiness in their foster homes. This was the case for Tilly Friedman, who was reported to be ‘quite unhappy at her present billet’ after she was evacuated from London to Oxford not long after arrival.²⁴⁹ The Fund petitioned the Ely billeting authority requesting her transfer to the Jews’ Free Girls’ School where she would be with other refugee children.²⁵⁰ In a similar case, Sylvia Balbierer, who had arrived a month after her adored older sister Ruth, was placed in a foster home in London, while Ruth was in a hostel near Brighton. In a video testimony, Sylvia recalled being ‘the most miserable child in the world’. She remembered that ‘somebody came to see what was wrong. I was ashamed to say I was homesick. I thought they’d throw me out if I showed any lack of appreciation for my good fortune quote unquote’.²⁵¹ Ruth’s embittered recollection of the gratitude she was supposed to feel is an important counterpoint to the Fund’s regular injunctions about deference and appreciation, but her testimony also indicates that the Fund was responsive to her unhappiness. In fact, although she remembered her foster father being responsible for the reunion with Ruth, Elsley Zeitlyn interceded with the hostel authorities, noting that ‘this unfortunate child is terribly unhappy and is pining for her sister’ and hoping that they would ‘make every effort to take this girl’.²⁵² In both cases, the requests were granted and the girls were removed from their unhappy placements.

There were no analogous examples of concern for unhappy young boys in the Polish Fund’s files, although several boys’ distress was made known to the agency. In two cases, a Movement representative advocated for the troubled boy, and in each case, the Fund was reluctant to credit their concerns. In one instance, the Fund was determined to move Manfred Lindenbaum, a nervous and anxious boy, from a non-Jewish foster home into an orthodox hostel, but was persuaded to forestall the move on the recommendation of the Movement’s regional representatives. In a different case, Bloomsbury House informed the Fund that Edward Ohringer was ‘the only refugee child left in Worthing and is very unhappy and lonely there’ and asked the Fund to arrange for his removal ‘as he is your responsibility’.²⁵³ Kaizer was unsympathetic, noting only that Edward had been sent to Worthing with four other refugee boys.²⁵⁴ In a

²⁴⁹ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Children’s Department to Clark, 26 November 1940.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ USCSF/VHA Sylvia Balbierer Schneider.

²⁵² USL/MS/183 591 F1 Secretary to Zeitlyn to H J Osterley, 12 February 1940.

²⁵³ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Virginia Bradell to PJRF, 24 July 1940.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Kaizer to Virginia Bradell, 2 August 1940.

similar situation, the RCM advocated for Frieda Brecher, who according to Dorothy Hardisty was ‘shy and timid’ and whose ‘development has been slow’ because she did not ‘find it easy to adapt herself to new surroundings’.²⁵⁵ Hardisty wanted Frieda removed from her hostel to a Jewish foster home because ‘private family life is just what this child needs’ and ‘individual attention [...] would do her a world of good’.²⁵⁶ The Fund agreed that the move to a domestic environment was advisable and further, they offered to send a staff member ‘to visit Frieda and report to us on her progress’.²⁵⁷ With the limited evidence available, it is not possible to determine whether the RCM was more compassionate than the Fund, but the PJRF record of responding to the sorrows of its young girl refugees is unmistakable and well documented.

With respect to the location of housing, the Fund also showed a marked gender bias. Older boys were more readily allowed to come to London to take advantage of higher paying, and hence self-supporting, jobs. When girls proposed the same, Zeitlyn inveighed against their leaving their hostels, no doubt hoping they would stay safely under supervision in the provinces. Nonetheless, one Middlesbrough girl, Charlotte Ohringer, was encouraged by her older sister to come to London. Alarmed, Zeitlyn contacted Middlesbrough in the hope that Charlotte could be induced to stay in the north adding, ‘I am far from enamoured with the habitation of Ohringer’s sister’ who was living in London’s East End.²⁵⁸ Fears for girls’ morals and safety in London exceeded those for boys, and the Fund’s principals were quite relieved when, after Charlotte moved in with her sister, she became engaged to a respectable ‘English Jewish boy’.²⁵⁹

In relationships and marriage, gender roles were clearly delineated: the young men were generally left to their own devices, while the girls were subject to much greater scrutiny and their unions were more explicitly acknowledged. Charlotte Ohringer’s ‘nice English Jewish boy’ was thoroughly vetted by representatives of the Fund, who were especially diligent since the girl was only twenty at the time of her engagement and required their express permission to marry.²⁶⁰ The Fund made the young couple a gift of £10, while other girls received generous grants of £25.²⁶¹ There

²⁵⁵ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Hardisty to Kaizer, 15 December 1942.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., Kaizer to Hardisty, 29 December 1942.

²⁵⁸ USL/MS/183 213/2 Zeitlyn to Mayer Marks, 16 January 1940.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., Dr Litvin’s report, 12 July 1942.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., Kaiser to Charlotte Ohringer, 14 May 1943.

²⁶¹ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Gorowitz to Mr Goldberg, 19 July 1945 and USL/MS/183 563 F2 Zeitlyn to Annie Knecht, 4 April 1946.

are no records of the Fund sending monetary gifts to any of the young men on marriage, although one did receive a book of the Chief Rabbi's writings as a wedding present.²⁶² In one young man's file was the rather laconic entry that the boy 'has been in and out of the office very frequently and is about to be married. The young woman is in a state of pregnancy. She is non-Jewish'.²⁶³ It is unlikely that the Fund would have taken such a laissez-faire attitude to either an out of wedlock pregnancy or 'marrying out' if the ward in question had been a young woman and not a young man.

Although the Fund did not react with alarm to the modest immorality of the young man with the pregnant girlfriend, other situations raised their moral apprehension. When word reached the Fund that one of their boys had taken up residence with another young man in Cardiff, they became concerned enough to send Dr Litvin to investigate. After Litvin interviewed the boys' landlord, he reported, 'Grunbaum and the man share one room and one bed. He wants to get rid of them (He is a non-Jew)' adding ominously, 'He told me things I shouldn't like to write about'.²⁶⁴ Desperate to separate their ward from his companion and bring him to London where they could keep an eye on him, they enlisted the help of Jewish authorities in Cardiff, who agreed, 'that for his own good, and [...] perhaps for the public good- he should be removed from Cardiff'.²⁶⁵ When several months had passed with no resolution, Kaiser suggested to the local representative, Mr Roskin, that the boy should be sent for an examination with the medical board, eliciting this shocked response:

I do not understand your suggestion regarding the examination of this youth [...] Do you realise that if this were done and the result of such an examination were to justify your fears, that the matter would pass entirely out of your hands? I certainly do not propose suggesting any such step until all else has failed—and perhaps not even then.²⁶⁶

Obviously, Litvin, Kaiser and Roskin suspected or knew that the boy Grunbaum was engaged in a homosexual relationship, which was not only illegal in England at the time, but would bring enormous shame to the Jewish and refugee communities were it to become a public issue. Litvin's observation that the boy's landlord (who was privy to Grunbaum's behaviour) was a non-Jew indicated his concerns about the reputation of the Jewish community. Furthermore, Roskin's advice not to alert the authorities had as

²⁶² USL/MS/183 591 F1 Gorowitz to Julius Buck, 7 February 1944.

²⁶³ Ibid., Report on Georg Amper, 20 February 1945.

²⁶⁴ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Litvin Report, 15 May 1942.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Roskin to Kaiser, 10 July 1942.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Roskin to Kaiser, 18 December 1942.

much to do with protecting the Jewish community as it did with concern for the boy. Nothing in the boy's file indicated a resolution of this delicate situation for either the young man or the refugee organisations. However, by the time Kaiser made the suggestion to notify the medical board, Grunbaum had already turned eighteen, so it is unlikely that the Fund pressed the issue further. Informing the authorities would only have embroiled the refugee agency in scandal, and it was quite possible that they simply severed all ties with the boy.

In addition to the moral health of the children, the Fund was concerned about their physical and emotional wellbeing. Health matters, which were prominent in the correspondence, elicited markedly gender-differentiated responses from the Fund's staff, and in general, they exhibited more care and concern for all aspects of the girls' welfare. The case of the orthodox sisters Pepi and Fanni Firestein who had been evacuated to Aberystwyth and were working as housemaids in non-Jewish homes, represented the Fund at its most solicitous. The girls were deeply unhappy in the isolated Welsh town with no Jewish community, and they hoped to fulfil their parents' desire that they take up tailoring.²⁶⁷ The Fund had to get the permission of the Ministry of Labour to move the sisters, claiming that as 'the legal guardians of these girls' they wanted them 'to learn a trade instead of doing their present domestic jobs, which we consider is not giving them sufficient scope'.²⁶⁸ The Ministry was unenthusiastic about the proposal, opining that the sisters 'should be left undisturbed in their present jobs' because, they were informed, 'they are well cared for, are doing work of value to the community and are receiving valuable training in domestic service'.²⁶⁹ The Ministry also upbraided the Fund for its past inattentions to the girls, claiming that 'about a year ago, when they had nowhere to go, your organisation took no particular steps on their behalf' while 'the Ministry of Labour went to considerable trouble on their behalf and was eventually successful in finding them their present posts'.²⁷⁰ The fact that neither of these girls' files contained a single piece of correspondence from the year 1941 does suggest that the Fund may well have lost track of them after their evacuation. The Ministry's patronizing insinuation that refugee girls should aspire only to domestic service is unsurprising and demonstrates the systemic and institutionalised

²⁶⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F1 PF to Kaizer, 24 April 1942.

²⁶⁸ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Kaizer to the Ministry of Labour (hereafter MOL) Cardiff, 30 March 1942.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., MOL, London to the PJRF, 8 May 1942.

pervasiveness of such attitudes towards refugees.²⁷¹ Even the girls' need for Jewish contact did not sway the Ministry in the Fund's favour.

The point you make about religious instruction is appreciated, but as your organisation have apparently been content to leave the matter in abeyance for at least the last twelve months it does not seem [...] it should be used as an argument in support of the transfer of the girls.²⁷²

The Ministry seemed to regard the Fund's past inattention to the girls' religious, emotional and vocational welfare as a valid reason to compound their misery, but despite the Ministry's obduracy, the girls were brought to London, taking up war work in a clothing factory.

The strains of refugee life were harder for some *Kinder* to bear, and even removal from Aberystwyth to London could not assuage Pepi's distress. At the age of fifteen, she suffered a complete psychological breakdown. The PJRF arranged and paid for hospitalisations, spells in convalescent homes and follow-up aftercare, led by the recommendations of its in-house physician, Dr Merkin, who pointed out that the condition of her nerves was still delicate.

The improvement is only such that she is now able to work as domestic help in a family. [...] the girl had a nervous breakdown from which she is recovering only very slowly [...] every change [...] means a new and difficult adjustment to her new conditions of life.²⁷³

Interestingly, although the Fund had petitioned the government to release Pepi from domestic labour that was not providing 'sufficient scope,' such work was now considered palliative. As with Frieda Brecher cited earlier, family life was the prescription for sensitive young women. While recuperating, it was reported that:

Miss Firestein is now living with [...] a very nice orthodox Jewish family, with whom Pepi gets on very well. Our Medical Officer feels that any mental strain would be detrimental to Pepi's newly recovered delicate nervous system and light domestic duties with a daily walk with two nice young children under the motherly eye of Mrs Jacobson will help her revert to normal routine again.²⁷⁴

Pepi's treatment fell into line with the Fund's general assiduousness in the matter of female mental and emotional health and with ideas about gender roles and feminine spheres prevalent at the time. She was allowed to revert to a child-like role under the 'motherly eye' of a carer in a sheltered Jewish environment rather than being expected

²⁷¹ For a discussion of gendered attitudes towards work prevalent in the UK at the time, see Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. 63-7.

²⁷² USL/MS/183 591 F2 MOL London to PJRF, 8 May 1942.

²⁷³ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Dr Merkin to PJRF, 23 February 1943.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, G Samson, JRC to Kaizer, 12 February 1943.

to work and support herself. Pepi recovered and resumed work but two years later was hospitalised again, and at the end of the war was still receiving financial and material aid from the Fund.²⁷⁵

Pepi Firestein's conscientious care was not an isolated incident. Many dependent children fell ill enough to require advanced medical treatment though girls were given more time and support in their illnesses and recoveries. The treatment Thea Felix received in Ely when she became seriously ill with a tubercular gland is a good example of the Fund's assistance. After surgery, the Fund sent several substantial grants of money for extra food while she recuperated.²⁷⁶ Other girls who had operations for various illnesses such as tonsillitis all received extra grants of money during their convalescences and letters of solicitation from the Fund.²⁷⁷ Devorah Brodsky, a *Zbąszyń Kind* who suffered from chronic, disabling psoriasis, sought the help of Bloomsbury House, whose staff, though sympathetic to her report of illness and feeling 'very run down', referred her back to the Fund.

Unfortunately our Committee is not in a position to help her as she is of Polish nationality and as we understand had been assessed by you previously. This girl has kept herself so far but is now in need of maintenance and we trust that you will help her.²⁷⁸

Late in the war, the Movement was not quite so ready to claim responsibility for all 10,000 *Kinder* as they had been in 1940. Regardless, the Fund responded immediately to Devorah's plight, and, demonstrating great concern for her nerves, arranged a convalescence in Cambridge to remove her from the London bombings that exacerbated her condition.²⁷⁹ Thereafter, the Fund took direct charge of her care, which sometimes required expensive medications for which Dr Merkin advocated forcefully:

As you know, she is going to marry in four weeks' time and her illness spoils her appearance. She must see the specialist [...] and I beg you to grant the fees again [...] he advises me that by a rather expensive treatment [...] Please grant her this treatment too as it would be the best expenditure of the money for her before her marriage.²⁸⁰

As in Pepi Firestein's case, gendered attitudes influenced recommendations about

²⁷⁵ Ibid., Gorowitz to PF, 31 May 1945.

²⁷⁶ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Gorowitz to Sara Samuel, 26 September 1941, Gorowitz to Sara Samuel 10 October 1941, Gorowitz to Sara Samuel, 18 December 1941.

²⁷⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Helen Reich to Mr Gorowitz, 11 September 1944.

²⁷⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Guttman to PJRF, 24 July 1944.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Guttman to Franklin, 31 July 1944.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., Dr Merkin to Case Committee, 5 November 1945. Treatment was granted, and the specialist even gave the Fund a discounted price for the costly medication. Major F W Jacobson to PJRF, 14 November 1945.

treatment. Beliefs about feminine beauty and appearance, especially in relation to Devorah's upcoming wedding, at least partially determined the Fund's accession to an expensive medical regimen for a condition that was uncomfortable and disfiguring, but not life threatening.²⁸¹

There are virtually no examples in the PJRF files of young men receiving equivalent levels of care and solicitation in matters of health. Rarely did the Polish Fund send expressions of concern, extra funds, or other special considerations when boys fell ill. Of more concern to them was the boys' return to work. Even serious surgeries, like Rudi Kleinbrodt's hernia operation, received little sympathy or additional help. When he asked for extra money for special foods and a grant to help him cover his rent while he was convalescing, Kaiser agreed to pay some maintenance for a few weeks, but advised the case committee to factor in his health benefit when deciding on his grant.²⁸² Appended to the young man's letter was the note: 'Cooper will not pay anything'.²⁸³ Cooper, the JRC accountant with whom the PJRF liaised over Government funds, was a stickler for rules, and determining that Kleinbrodt had exceeded his convalescent period, denied him benefits. While girls were given latitude in their recoveries, boys who recuperated for too long were suspected of malingering. This was certainly the case for Edward Ohringer, who visited the offices on Soho Square to tell the Fund he was not well and presented a doctor's certificate saying he was unfit for work owing to 'general debility'.²⁸⁴ Instead of giving him a grant, Gorowitz wrote to the Fund's representative in Leeds asking his opinion on the wisdom of giving the boy extra funds. It is unlikely Edward ever received any money for he wrote again the following month begging for a grant of £4 to pay his rent for the period of his illness.²⁸⁵ In another instance, an RCM welfare report notified the Fund that Lothar Weiss required nasal surgery because his nose was 'very swollen and the boy says he is constantly suffering from headaches and throat trouble'; however, there was no record of any follow-up, nor even any comment

²⁸¹ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Typed report, 16 October 1944 shows that the same beliefs applied to the girls' clothing needs as well. For example, the RCM recommended that Frieda Brecher 'should have new things, as she is now nearly seventeen and had never had something new and she should fit in with the other girls at the hostel'. No such concerns were ever expressed by any refugee organisations on behalf of boys' clothing.

²⁸² USL/MS/183 575 F3 Rudi Kleinbrodt to Kaiser, 10 November 1942; Kaiser to Minsk, 12 November 1942.

²⁸³ Ibid., Rudi Kleinbrodt to Kaiser, 10 November 1942.

²⁸⁴ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Gorowitz to Barrett, 27 April 1945 and Health Insurance Doctor's Certificate of Incapacity for Work signed by Dr Rummelsburg, 13 April 1945.

²⁸⁵ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Edward Ohringer to PJRF, 1 May 1945.

by the Polish committee regarding his health problems.²⁸⁶

The PJRF files effectively document the fact that boys and young men received far less solicitous care in their health crises. This gendered response was perhaps most evident in the case of Josef Sztajn, a young man who had suffered internment, deportation to Canada, return and re-internment within his first two years in England. Later, he lodged very unhappily with relatives, of which the Fund was well aware. The organisation kept an eye on the boy and there were home visits from both the Movement and the PJRF, but he received no special care. The last document in his file was a one-line note: 'Josef Sztajn in St Ebba's Hospital Epsom, undergoing treatment for mental disturbance'.²⁸⁷ Despite his travails, there was no evidence that Sztajn was the beneficiary of the kind of medical, emotional or financial help that was bestowed upon Pepi Firestein.

The context and standards of the time account for such disparities in treatment. It was acceptable, and even expected, for girls to be weak, helpless and needing support, while boys were obliged to be resilient and independent. Illness, whether physical or mental, was a culturally unacceptable sign of weakness, particularly in a time of war. These societal attitudes informed a great deal of the refugee agencies' responses to *Kinder* health issues. Much concern was expended over girls' emotions and convalescences in sheltered, domestic settings, while male *Kinder* received less tolerance and sympathy and were expected to be hardier and more self-reliant in all aspects of their lives.

The refugee committees expected *Kinder* boys to be stoic and resourceful, but they appeared to have little faith in the young men's abilities to manage themselves. This dichotomous attitude was communicated in confusing mixed messages to boys on the verge of independence.²⁸⁸ Bruno Nussbaum, the budding architect, encountered these inconsistencies when he arrived in London after a stint as an architectural assistant in Leeds. Concerning the circumstances of his move, Kaizer wrote to the head of the Leeds Refugee Committee:

²⁸⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F2 E Smith, RCM Welfare Report 27 August 1943. USL/MS/183 563 F1 Gee to Kaizer, 13 July 1943 for Herman Karpf, who missed several days' work due to a hand injury. Nonetheless, Mr Gee was of the opinion that 'This is not a case that we can recommend a grant'.

²⁸⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Untitled memorandum, 12 August 1946

²⁸⁸ For a discussion of paternalism and contemporaneous attitudes towards juvenile delinquency and chronic welfare dependence as guiding factors in the treatment of *Kindertransportees*, see Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. 35-60. Although her focus is on the Scottish care experience, Williams generalises for all of Britain in this and other aspects of her study.

[B]oys who wish to work in London must leave the whole matter to our Welfare Committee. We shall find the job and [...] board and lodging for him [...] Nussbaum has not taken our advise and made all the arrangements on his own to which we strongly object [...] he must be guided by us. We shall gladly give him all possible assistance if he undertakes to follow our advise.²⁸⁹

Kaizer's reaction was representative of the dual messages sent to male *Kinder* when they attempted to fend for themselves. Financial self-support was desirable, but taking initiative, living and working independently was not. The Fund expected even eighteen year olds like Nussbaum to be 'guided by us'.²⁹⁰ Bruno had found his own lodgings but his job paid very little and he applied for additional support. Mr Gee agreed that while 'occasional grants' for 'clothing, books and instruments' for his work might be considered,

[Bruno] must realise that he will eventually have to keep himself on his earnings [and] at his age the sooner he becomes self-supporting and independent of charity the better for all concerned'.²⁹¹

Girls' requests for financial help were not subject to disapproving remarks about 'charity', and girls were never accused of milking the agencies' help, yet Nussbaum was not the only boy who received this admonition. Bruno's persistent requests for expenses earned him more criticism from Mr. Gee who felt he should 'become independent and learn to fend for himself'.²⁹² Nussbaum was working full time and studying in the evenings towards an architectural degree. After paying his rent and other expenses including mandatory savings, he retained less pocket money than he had in Leeds. Gee noted that Bruno was 'smoking to excess and we have had to warn him to cut down', but it was for financial and not health reasons that this reproach was issued.²⁹³ More disparagingly, Gee concluded that 'Nussbaum has been treated fairly generously but his general attitude is beggarly and my committee do not think this state of mind should be encouraged in his case'.²⁹⁴ The refugee agencies' apprehensions about young men led

²⁸⁹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Kaizer to Minsk, 11 January 1943. Note original spelling throughout.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., Gee to Kaizer, 12 January 1943. Not only had Nussbaum acted independently, he had also failed to turn up for an interview the Jewish Board of Guardians had arranged for him and according to Mr Gee, this had 'led to some unpleasantness'

²⁹¹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Gee to Kaizer, 12 January 1943. Note that Mr Gee had befriended Herbert Haberberg, in the episode recounted at the beginning of this chapter.

²⁹² Ibid., 'Extract of letter from the Board of Guardians', 25 May 1943.

²⁹³ Ibid., Gee to Kaizer, 18 February 1943.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. USL/MS/183 563 F1 Gee to Kaizer, 6 July 1942. Mr Gee expressed a similar paternalism towards his protégée Herbert Haberberg, writing to the Fund that Herbert 'will need supervision. He is inclined to be a little bit difficult at home but the foster mother is keeping a watchful eye on his movements and the boy will be required to report here from time to time'.

them to read requests for help as signs of ‘beggarliness’ that required censure and reprimand.

Refugee boys likely found the organisations’ contradictory messages about their competence confusing and struggled to discern when they should allow the committees to make decisions for them, and when requests for help would be deemed ‘beggarly’. Accusations of freeloading and micro-management of his funds may have been too much for Bruno. After several months in London, Gorowitz informed the JRC that Bruno had moved ‘and he has made it clear that he does not want us to take any further interest in his welfare’.²⁹⁵ The organisations’ overbearing supervision, whether intended or not, had achieved the goal of making Bruno Nussbaum self-sufficient. The impulse to look after the boys sprang from a genuine concern for their welfare, but the conflicting signals, domineering paternalism and presumptions of misconduct often impaired interactions between young male refugees and the organizations.

While children who were living semi-independently in London could be kept under an agency’s watchful eye, those further away were sometime less carefully monitored. The Fund’s record of keeping track of its children across the country was uneven, as indeed it appears was the case for *Kinder* more generally. Home visits were standard procedure in the *Kindertransport* after-care scheme, and the RCM instituted a mandate that they be undertaken twice yearly. The memory literature indicates that few refugee children remembered seeing or speaking to a home visitor, and only the RCM dossiers can verify whether regular reporting took place. Some of the *Polenaktion Kinder* received home visits from the RCM whose reports, on official, printed ‘fill-in – the-blanks’ forms, were rarely complete or informative.²⁹⁶ These formulaic reports contrasted strikingly with the colourful, detailed and personal records that the Fund’s welfare officer scribbled on the backs of scratch paper.

Dr Litvin’s reports are some of the most informative and useful documents in the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund’s file. He wrote his initial impressions in long hand, then revised and typed them for presentation to the Case Committee. Fortunately, for posterity, both sets of Litvin’s reports were preserved in the case files. The most emotive language and vivid imagery were struck out of the formal reports, but the handwritten ones offer candid glimpses into his concern for and interactions with the children. For example, after Dr. Litvin’s visit to young Joseph Blau, living with

²⁹⁵ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Gorowitz to Cooper, 21 September 1943.

²⁹⁶ USL/MS/183 575 F3 RCM Welfare Report for Felix Orcan, 21 February 1944.

relatives in London, he found the house ‘demolished by enemy action’.²⁹⁷ Relieved to learn that the family had moved, he was nonetheless ‘terrified by the thought that G-d forbid a Zbonszyn child had perished without anyone knowing of it’.²⁹⁸ Litvin was also very perceptive about the dynamics of foster relationships. When he visited the foster home of Sonja Baranska. Mrs Davis, the guardian, wanted Litvin to wait until the girl came home from school to speak with her. ‘This I could not do as it meant to spend over two hours waiting, Besides, there is little use in talking to a child in the presence of her foster parents’.²⁹⁹ As Litvin was well aware, children were unlikely to feel comfortable giving candid answers unless they were alone. Litvin’s admirable sensitivity seems to have been unusual among home visitors, as *Kinder* testimony amply indicates.³⁰⁰

The Polish Fund tried to keep track of and stay in contact with its *Kinder*, but lapses in supervision and guidance did occur. One of those gaps involved the Firestein sisters, noted earlier in the chapter, and another was revealed by an air Training Corps officer who was trying to help a potential recruit, Georg Amper. The officer was infuriated by the unresponsiveness of the PJRF and by having been sent back and forth between Bloomsbury House and the Fund.

I would remind Mr. Gorowitz that the lad arrived in this country at the age of 13 ½ years having no knowledge of our language and since then the authorities responsible for his coming have not shown the slightest interest in his well-being and he has been left to fend for himself. He tells me that he has received no communication from your office and I have no reason to disbelieve him.³⁰¹

Indeed, in young Amper’s file a gap covering all of 1941 indicated that the Fund had lost touch with the boy. In another instance, the Fund received a letter from the Movement stating that they had ‘been maintaining eight Polish Children for some time, not knowing they were registered with your organisation’ and desiring ‘to know what arrangements you wish to make for their future welfare’.³⁰² The girls in question were dispersed to individual evacuation foster homes when their guarantors’ hostel, unbeknownst to the Fund, was requisitioned by the government. When the RCM letter arrived, the Fund had been out of contact with the children for over a year and a half. In spite of such lacunae, the Polish Fund earned respect for its caregiving from other

²⁹⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Litvin report, 18 February 1942.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Litvin report, 19 February 1942.

³⁰⁰ See for example the testimony of Berth Leverton, in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p. 183. Also, Gershon, *We Came as Children*, p. 65.

³⁰¹ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Webb to PJRF, 10 May 1942.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, Elaine Laski to PJRF, 10 April 1941.

organisations. One who was warmly appreciative was Sarah Samuel, the headmistress of the Jews' Free Girls' School. Several Zbąszyń girls had been evacuated with the school to Ely, and for several months, Miss Samuel had no idea whose responsibility they were.³⁰³ Once she had established contact with the Fund, she was generous in her praise. After Thea Feliks' surgery, Miss Samuel commended Gorowitz and the PJRF, telling him that 'you and your organization are exceptionally good to the children that we have from your Fund in Ely'.³⁰⁴ Later, acknowledging the gifts of money she had received for Thea's care, she thanked the Fund 'for all you do for the children. It is very helpful when an "organisation" has such personal interest in the "charges."'³⁰⁵

The Fund's record of supervision was imperfect, running the gamut from negligent to exemplary. There were genuine, if uneven, efforts to stay connected to the *Kinder* and to respond to them with concern and as much generosity as its resources allowed. That concern, though, was often coloured by prevailing attitudes about refugees and societal prescriptions about gender and class, which, along with financial restraints, greatly influenced their interactions and the Fund's responses to *Kinder* requests and needs.

IV. The Organisations: New Perspectives

The existing *Kindertransport* literature has generally over-simplified the story of the London-based refugee organisations, particular in respect to after-care. Not all *Kinder*-related decisions emanated from Bloomsbury House. The PJRF documentation shows that interactions among various refugee organisations were multifaceted, shifting, variable and often fractious and did not end after the RCM had established itself as the primary maintenance and welfare agency. Smaller committees continued to look after their refugee children physically, financially and spiritually, both singularly and in concert with the Movement. The complexities of these relationships, little explored until now, are abundantly illustrated in the correspondence referenced herein, including their collaboration and conflict over consequential religious issues.

At the root of the religious controversies were fundamental differences in the

³⁰³ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sarah Samuel to Zeitlyn, 20 March 1940.

³⁰⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Sarah Samuel to Gorowitz, 29 August 1941.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., Sarah Samuel to Gorowitz, 17 October 1941.

refugee organisations' outlook and understanding of the *Kindertransport* mission. Nicholas Winton's conception of a singular choice between death or proselytization has been accepted uncritically as one of the foundational realities of the *Kindertransport* and its 'either/or' terms implicitly informed the Refugee Children's Movement's rationale. The documentation suggests, however, that this was a false dichotomy. As the wider Anglo-Jewish community realised too late, it was wrong to approach the *Kindertransport* strictly as a non-denominational, humanitarian rescue mission. This orientation created an unnecessarily binary quandary between saving lives or saving souls. The Movement's confused identity, its choice of executive personnel and its unresponsiveness to perspectives that fell outside the spectrum of Anglo-Jewry from which it had sprung, all increased the ideological divide over religious issues. An insufficiency of Jewish foster homes, enshrined in the *Kindertransport* narrative, has been utilised by the RCM and its successor agencies as a shield against criticisms over its handling of the religious issue.³⁰⁶ However, by the admission of its own personnel, the preservation of religious integrity was not an initial priority. Options such as hostels and the conscientious provision of Jewish teaching in the provinces were not consistently pursued, irrevocably fraying thousands of children's connections to Judaism. When the problems of religious estrangement were finally recognised, it became un-humanitarian to move children from secure and caring Christian homes. The documentary record examined in this chapter adds much to our understanding of this most critical of *Kindertransport* legacies.

The records examined in this chapter provide new and deeper understandings of administrating authorities' values and attitudes and their impacts on the refugee children. The revelation of paternalistic, classist and gendered attitudes permeating these relationships adds the agencies' perspective to the after-care narrative, complementing and augmenting the memory record of care. The correspondence also shows that the agencies were staffed with dedicated and benevolent individuals who took a personal interest in individual lives. Although their responses were pervasively gendered, the organisations' interactions with female *Kinder* provide multiple glimpses of the refugee workers' compassion and concern, and the lengths to which they would go to meet their wards' needs. Conversely, relationships with male refugees demonstrated a sterner and less forgiving approach to supervision. The organisations

³⁰⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this controversy, see Paula Hill, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children', p. 7.

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faced enormous financial and logistical challenges in looking after the interests of their refugee wards, challenges that often redounded with negative consequences for the children. However, there is also evidence that when and where they could, the organisations provided resources and other support for the *Kinder* to pursue education, stay in secure foster homes and find satisfactory employment. The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund, like all *Kindertransport* organisations, had a mixed and complex record of interaction, oversight and after-care. The detailed examination of their traces revises and fine-tunes perceptions of the child refugee programme and the many actors that had a hand in guiding the lives of 10,000 young people.

2

The Carers

Herbert and Manfred Haberberg were accepted on the *Kindertransport* from Poland because homes had been found for them with distant relatives in London's East End.¹ Days before the boys left Warsaw, Herbert's guarantor, Mrs Lewin, withdrew her offer of hospitality.² Manfred was taken in by his foster family, the Finkelsteins, but Herbert, who was without a placement, was set up at the Jew's Temporary Shelter in London with similarly unclaimed boys before being sent off to Mutford's Farm in Buntingford, Hertfordshire. Seven-year-old Manfred settled in well with the Finkelsteins, but within a few months, he was evacuated with other London children to the countryside of Bedfordshire where he was billeted, like most Jewish evacuees, with a Christian family.³ Herbert never experienced foster care, but after leaving the farm in the spring of 1940, he lived in a hostel in Ely, established for evacuated boys attending the Jews' Free Boys' School. In Ely, the hostel manager, the headmaster, the Cambridge regional branch of the Movement and the vicar's wife collectively took responsibility for the boys' physical, educational, emotional and spiritual well-being. The combined experiences of the Haberberg boys – Jewish and Christian foster care, agricultural training, and hostel life – and the carers with whom they interacted, spanned the entire spectrum of hospitality that *Kinder* encountered once they arrived in Great Britain.

Little academic study has been devoted to the custodians of Jewish refugee children, yet, as parental substitutes, they wielded great influence, for good or ill, on the *Kinder's* lives, making a detailed examination of their role critical to the historiography of the *Kindertransport*. In part because so little is known about them, the carers have generally been represented in the literature as a homogeneous group of 'good-natured strangers' who 'decided to save [children's] lives'.⁴ No systematic study has distinguished between sponsoring and evacuation foster parents, or differentiated the roles of others who looked after the children. Similarly, little is known about interactions between carers and agencies such as the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund and

¹ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Haberberg Boys Case Sheet, 28 June 1939.

² Ibid.

³ Author's Interview with Herbert Haberberg, London, 28 January 2012.

⁴ 'The Making of 'The Last Boat: A Filmmaker's Journey to Tell the Story of the Last *Kindertransport* Boat from Poland', *Wiener Library Newsletter* < <http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Whats-On?item=69>> [accessed 2 June 2013].

the Refugee Children's Movement.

Much of what *is* known about everyday carers derives from the memory work of former child refugees, in which carers often feature prominently. In the absence of other records, these accounts have been vital in the construction of a narrative about everyday carers, but, deriving from a unique perspective, this construct cannot tell the entire story. Child refugees encountered their caregivers as disoriented dependents adjusting to upheaval and trauma. Warm and welcoming carers and those who were perceived as neglectful, abusive or exploitative were held most tenaciously in memory. The carers at the midpoint of these extremes made little impression and are rarely recalled in testimony.⁵ Impressions were formed by children with limited maturity and objectivity and when describing carers' actions and attitudes, even the most perceptive former *Kindertransportees* cannot entirely dissociate themselves *later* from the feelings they experienced *then*.⁶ Memories of carers are further mediated by the temporal distance between the events and their recording. None of these considerations discounts the authenticity of the former child refugees' experiences, the feelings engendered by those experiences or the importance of their memories, but it is important to acknowledge the limitations of such testimony in creating a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of everyday caregivers.

Significantly, *Kinder* memory has not been counterbalanced by a corpus of accounts from the carers themselves. Few foster parents, hostel managers, teachers or local refugee workers left reminiscences.⁷ In the post-war decades, few researchers

⁵ This is especially true of children who experienced a multitude of short foster care placements. See USCSF/VHA 12610 Mira Blaustein Grayson, 1996.

⁶ See for example Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery*, (London: David Paul, 2010). Barnett, a trained psychologist, objectively analysed her foster mothers' actions and behaviours, but could not keep the rejection she experienced as a child from colouring her perceptions.

⁷ For the most prominent of foster parents' records, see Lord Richard Attenborough's preface to Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, pp. xi-xiii; also Sir Richard Attenborough's contribution to Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* pp. 22-23. For regional refugee worker Grete Burkill, see Gertrude Dubrovsky, *Six From Leipzig: Kindertransport and the Cambridge Refugee Children's Committee*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004) and Margareta Burkill interview, Imperial War Museum, 1980, < <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80004548> >[accessed 16 September 2014]. For a teacher, see Judith Grunfeld, *Shefford: The Story of a Jewish School Community in Evacuation, 1939-1945* (London: Soncino Press, 1980). Several refugee helpers, hostel workers and foster parents are anonymously represented in Gershon, *We Came As Children*. One foster parent features in Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, and several in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*.

asked custodial figures to discuss or record their experiences during the war years.⁸ Unfortunately, by the time the *Kindertransport* had been ‘rediscovered’ in the late 1980s, most of these carers had already died. Had they recorded their testimonies in later years, however, these reminiscences would have been, like the *Kinder*’s, subject to the refracting forces of time. Also missing in the historiography is contemporary correspondence that reveals details about everyday carers from their own and others’ perspectives. The voluminous correspondence to, from and about everyday caregivers in the PJRF files addresses this gap, and close reading of and critical engagement with these sources yields important new insights about carers’ motivations and challenges as well as their interactions with London based refugee organisations. The existing narrative about carers is also problematized by testimony from the Zbąszyń *Kinder*. The intersection of these evidentiary strands provides the opportunity for a more inclusive and multi-layered examination of carer behaviour.

The investigation commences with a detailed examination of foster parenting, the template upon which the *Kindertransport* was conceived and an experience shared by the greatest number of *Kinder*. The evidence reveals that there were distinctions between those who took in strangers’ children, and those who sponsored the children of relatives and that different patterns of expectation and interaction existed between these two sub-groups. Evacuation billeting, a distinctly different type of foster care, merits a separate examination focusing on the challenges presented by the fostering of Jewish children in non-Jewish homes. The chapter finally explores the roles of various other caregivers such as local refugee workers, hostel managers and teachers whose regular contact with the *Kinder* meant that they were often influential in the children’s lives.

⁸ An exception is Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz *Never Look Back*. The author conducted a number of interviews with former refugee activists in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Few of these were everyday carers, however. Although she stated in the introduction that one of her primary theoretical bases was an exploration of the motivations and actions of those who assisted refugee children, she used the testimonies she gathered thirty years earlier rather sparingly and never completely came to grips with the issue. Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back* pp. 6-8.

I. Voluntary Foster Carers

Kindertransport scholarly literature has offered little critical analysis of the motives and actions of volunteering foster families, instead emphasising carers' selflessness and sacrifices. Representative of this genre is Doris Whiteman's *The Uprooted* in which she concluded:

The foster parents were there when it counted. That must always be remembered. It is true that there were some that were emotionally disturbed. But on the whole the majority provided competent care [...] Good or bad, all the foster parents were instrumental in helping the children survive.

Consistent with the redemptive narrative, this account minimised lapses in care, dismissed the few 'bad apples' and even suggested that the children's mere survival absolved 'bad' carers. Indeed, Whiteman focused on 'the myriad obstacles the foster parents themselves faced' claiming that in the face of carers' own struggles, it was 'extraordinary that the children did as well as they did. They not only survived, but they went on to successful adulthood'.⁹ Whiteman's heroicising narrative depends upon the *Kinder's* triumphant outcomes made possible by the foster parents' altruism and sacrifice. No other motives are suggested, no other outcomes possible. In contrast, the collective story told through individual *Kinder* recollections challenges the claim that 'the majority provided competent care' and suggests that inadequate care cannot be dismissed merely as the failings of a few 'emotionally disturbed' guardians.¹⁰

The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund documentation represents different voices and perspectives in this contested narrative. This correspondence provides convincing evidence that foster parents were compelled by a mixture of impulses, and often harboured unrealistic and idealistic expectations. The following case studies reveal that foster parents' motives ranged from the altruistic to the avaricious, the selfless to the self-interested. The decision to become the foster carer of an unaccompanied refugee child was not necessarily a straightforward aspiration to 'do good'. Relationships between carers and children reflected the complexity of motives and attitudes underlying such decisions. Likewise, the reception of *Kinder* represented a range of care models and integration levels – from being treated 'like family', to being regarded as a

⁹ Whiteman, *The Uprooted*, p. 236.

¹⁰ Gershon, *We Came as Children: Sacharin, Recollections of Child Refugees from 1938 to the Present*, and Levertov and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* contain numerous examples of these types of testimony.

guest, a lodger, an employee or a servant.

The foster care paradigm was based on assumptions that children would be placed into appropriate private homes matching each child's religion and social class, and that families motivated by altruism would financially support strangers' children until re-emigration.¹¹ Archives and *Kinder* memories suggest that these were at best simplistic notions. The Fund's records indicate that few families of independent means sponsored children, and that the Jewish foster homes in which about forty percent of the Zbąszyń children were initially placed were of modest incomes, the £50 guarantee having been raised collectively by their Jewish communities. The Fund worked assiduously to garner these foster homes and established relationships with many of the parents, partially explaining why the correspondence is heavily weighted towards this group of carers. Another explanation for the profusion of correspondence lies in the fact that the majority of these families accepted regular maintenance payments, clothing and school fees, generating regular exchanges between carers and the Fund. Such support was not incompatible with humanitarianism, but the entanglement of financial factors with eleemosynary impulses complicates the task of decoding motivation, especially from the documentary record alone.

Testimony from *Polenaktion Kinder* adds an important dimension to the interpretation of foster motivation. Following patterns seen widely throughout the *Kinder* memory record, reflections on foster care tend to describe the extremes: relationships based entirely on virtuous motives that were unequivocally loving, and those grounded in mercenary self-interest that were almost wholly unsatisfactory. An example of the former exists in the unpublished memoir of Klara Klajman who wrote that her foster family, the Solomons, were wonderful and 'I can only praise them'.¹² She enjoyed the company of their daughter, Hetty, and son Michael (who was stricken with muscular dystrophy) and she recalled them as 'good people with a lot of good will'.¹³

¹¹ Movement for the Care of Children from Germany British Interraid Committee pamphlet, 7 December 1938 reprinted in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 403-6.

¹² Email correspondence with Shula Morchy who interviewed Klara (Chaja Hovers) in Israel 7 June – 8 August 2012. Shula's mother Paula Waldhorn (Pinina Galilli) was best friends with Klara both in England and later when they both went to Palestine in April 1940. Shula was kind enough to interview Chaja who only speaks Hebrew, and to send me Chaja's unpublished memoir.

¹³ Chaja Hovers personal unpublished memoir manuscript, 2004, translated from Hebrew by Mimi Schniederman. The memoir is deposited in the Ghetto Fighter's House Archives, Israel, as 'Biography of Klara Kleimann: Deportation to Zbaszyn and rescue in England' Catalogue No. 511. <http://www.infocenters.co.il/gfh/notebook_ext.asp?item=7707&site=gfh&lang=ENG&menu=1> [access -ed 16 September 2014]. Also, USCSF/VHA 19173 Sonia Rosenfeld, 1997.

I got a nice room, and essentially I was a sort of companion for Hetty. I went to the park with Michael, and I was accepted as a member of their extended family. I had a lot of free time at the Solomons', which I spent reading.¹⁴

Validating Klara's rosy reminiscences, her relationship with the Solomons persisted even after she made *aliyah* in 1940, and one of her daughters later married into the foster family.¹⁵

Interestingly, an example of the opposite foster experience was provided by Klara's best friend, Paula Waldhorn, whose foster home was not nurturing. Paula, who recalled that she and her foster family 'had no common language, physical or mental' harboured no illusions about foster families' motives, which she succinctly summarised many years later.¹⁶

1. 'Save face' among the Jewish community.
2. Get some money from the Fund.
3. Have someone cheap to help with the house chores.¹⁷

This disparaging assessment made no allowance for charitable feelings as a motivating force, reflecting Paula's own experiences. Mrs Swern, her foster mother, was among a group of carers secured by the Fund through its appeals to the Gladstone Park and Neasden Congregation Refugee Children's Aid Committee. As part of a community effort, 'face-saving' may indeed have motivated Mrs Swern. In addition, she requested a modest subvention within two months of Paula's arrival, indicating that finances also factored into the fostering equation.¹⁸ Paula's recollections confirm that she was not exploited as an unpaid maid, but her file comprises little more than correspondence about the maintenance payments, and Mrs Swern's few letters contained no information about her foster child, to whom she never referred by name.¹⁹ Such silences do not alone indict the foster mother, but combined with Paula's recollections they speak volumes.

In *Kinder* memory, the most abundantly corroborated of Paula's listed motives

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Shula Morchy correspondence, 6 August 2012.

¹⁶ Ibid. 7 July- 8 August 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ USL/MS/183 213/1 Zeitlyn to Mrs Swern, 20 April 1939.

¹⁹ Ibid., Mrs Swern to Zeitlyn, 10 January 1940 and 18 January 1940.

was the desire to acquire ‘someone cheap to help with the house chores’.²⁰ As the letter in the previous chapter from the prospective foster mother seeking ‘a sort of house-daughter’ demonstrated, some families were quite transparent in their desire for household help.²¹ For others, the expectation of domestic help from a teenage girl reflected societal attitudes about refugees, status and gender. Some undoubtedly felt that such labour was a fair recompense for rescue, and the natural lot of charity cases who had been rescued by the good graces of British people. The fact that domestic work was practically the only route to a British visa for Jewish young women appears to have been an official endorsement of this attitude.²² Twice as many Jewish refugees arrived in Britain via this route than through the *Kindertransport*. The presence in Britain of a large number of young Jewish maids may have blurred the distinctions between this group of refugees and older *Kinder* girls, and resulted in some foster parents regarding their *Kinder* as workers rather than as family.²³

Although they were conscious of the danger, the PJRF and other agencies were often completely unaware when their girls were victims of this treatment. After-the-fact accounts appeared in Dr Litvin’s reports, based on interviews with young women like Devorah Brodsky, who was sponsored by a Jewish family.

There she was cook, nurse to four children (from ten years to a few months) housemaid and charwoman. She did not get a penny wages [...] had not a minute’s rest and in spite of all this she had to be grateful for the Cannons regarded themselves as her benefactors. After nine months’ hard labour, [...] when Brodsky told the Cannons that she was leaving she was called ‘Dirty un-grateful German.’²⁴

No countervailing correspondence provided the foster mother’s perspective, but by Litvin’s account, the family was unapologetic about requiring their ‘foster daughter’ to work as an unpaid domestic, and expected approbation for their act of charity.

²⁰ USCSF/VHA 32914 Harry Bebring, 1997, 39698 Lorraine Allard, 1998, and 32914 Ellen Kerry Davis, 1996. See also Bertha Leverton’s story in Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, p. 147 and Gershon, *We Came as Children*, pp. 39, 65. See also Rosa Sacharin’s and Monica Saxton’s stories in Sacharin, *Recollections of Child Refugees from 1938 to the Present*, pp. 51-2 and Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 19-20, 112. These are just a few examples.

²¹ See Chapter 1.

²² See the attitude of the Ministry of Labour regarding FF and PF in Chapter 1.

²³ Tony Kushner, ‘Politics and Race, Gender and Class: Refugees, Fascists and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1940’ in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn eds., *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990) pp. 49-58 and Tony Kushner, ‘An Alien Occupation – Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1948’, in Julius Carlebach, Gerhard Hirschfeld, and Aubrey Newman eds., *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) pp. 553-578 are among the only studies of this group of refugees.

²⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Dr Litvin’s Report, 5 July 1942.

Apparently indifferent to Devorah's feelings, the family's anti-German prejudices reflected both prevalent wartime feelings and complex *Ostjuden/Westjuden* tensions.

Devorah, whose bright eyes and dimpled smile remain unchanged seventy years later, contested Dr Litvin's report. Although confirming that she had performed the work he described, she insisted that Mrs Cannon did not use the pejoratives he reported, remembering her saying only that 'she would never help another German'.²⁵ She believes that there were strains in the marriage, and that one of the children was seriously ill, factors that, along with her own experiences as a wife and mother, softened her judgement of the woman. Dr Litvin, a fierce advocate for the children who had a flair for the dramatic, may have embellished his account out of outrage over Devorah's treatment. Conversely, Litvin may have accurately recorded Devorah's words, but her subsequent reassessment of Mrs Canon led to memories of a milder chastisement. However, Devorah's treatment as an uncompensated domestic and the unkindness she received when she left is not in dispute.



When they were made aware, the Fund proved responsive to instances of exploitation. The best-documented example took place in the home of the Bernsteins – an East End kosher butcher, his wife and two young children – who had requested one teenage girl, but reluctantly agreed to take the younger sister when two girls arrived together and refused to be separated. Initially, the family did not receive maintenance for Sara and Yehudit Hirschman, but by the end of 1940, Mr Bernstein's business was in tatters and the family had evacuated to Oxford. The children themselves were the first to apply for relief, perhaps at the urging of the foster parents. Sara wrote in broken English 'Please, Mr Kaiser till now I didn't trabble you. But now the peple wher we are staying are not doing to well. Please would you be so kind to help my sister and myself with some mony'.²⁶ After the Fund responded affirmatively, Mr Bernstein sent in his own modest appeal:

²⁵ Author's Interview with DB, London, 28 April 2013.

²⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F1 SH to Kaiser, 6 November 1940.

I regret to say that business affairs [...] have gone from bad to worse [...] I shall still do my best to maintain the girls as regards food and a home but I find it will now prove beyond my capacity to provide them with pocket money [...] to see to this myself will be to place too great a strain upon my resources.²⁷

Bernstein took pride in his not having ‘made any previous call upon your funds’ and assured the Fund that he would ‘still enjoy giving the girls the best I can possibly afford’.²⁸ Bernstein’s focus on the girls’ well-being confirmed Sara’s later recollections of his kindness and concern for their interests.²⁹ The Fund increased the monthly grant, advising them to send Sara out to work to help with the family finances.³⁰

The new financial arrangements subtly altered the Bernstein’s relationship with the Fund. Mrs Bernstein now commenced pursuing the monthly stipend in correspondence devoid of concern for the girls.

I did not get no allowances for the girls Yehudit and Sara I have kept them over a year and now my husband is not doing any business at all, I shall be glad to have the livingmoney we get for them.³¹

The London agency continued to pay, and never inquired why Sara had not been sent out into the workforce, but a letter from the girls indicating that Bernsteins had not given them pocket money for two months sparked concern.³² A few months later, on turning sixteen and independently applying for a work permit, Sara finally apprised the Fund of the true situation in the Bernstein’s home, telling them that ‘we have always been unhappy with Mrs Bernstein. I was just good enough to do all the housework and look after her children’.³³ Within a few months, Sara and Yehudit were removed from the Bernsteins, who continued to claim the girls’ maintenance money until the moment they left.³⁴ Though probably not initially financially motivated, it seems clear that Mrs Bernstein intended to acquire a mother’s helper (explaining why they had never sent Sara into the workforce) and the family came to depend upon the money attached to their care. Unhappy about being saddled with the younger sister, Mrs Bernstein was also

²⁷ Ibid., Mr Bernstein to PJRF, 10 December 1940.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Family history compiled by the daughter of SH, shared with author 25 April 2013 (hereafter SH family history),

³⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Children’s Department PJRF to Mrs Bernstein, 18 December 1940 and undated memo entitled ‘Application from Mrs Bernstein’. Mr Bernstein assured Mr Kaizer that the money granted would ‘give around satisfaction’ and he repeated his ‘previous assurances [...] to do all I can for the girls’ welfare’.

³¹ Ibid., Mrs Bernstein to PJRF, 26 January 1941 and Mrs Bernstein to PJRF, 20 January 1941.

³² Ibid., SH to Kaiser, 11 March 1941.

³³ Ibid., SH to Kaiser, 26 June 1941.

³⁴ Ibid., Gorowitz to SH and YH, 13 November 1941 and Cooper to Gorowitz, 30 January 1942. The Bernsteins may have also been receiving a billeting allowance from the government during this time.

neglectful and unkind to Yehudit.³⁵ The Hirschman sisters never contacted the Bernstein family again, an indication that families who took in foster children on a *quid pro quo* basis developed neither close, warm nor enduring relationships with them.

It is very difficult to deduce foster parents' motivations from fragmentary evidence, and important to recognise that motivations were not necessarily static and unchanging. As in the case of the Bernsteins, war altered expectations and circumstances, and for many what began as a charitable gesture based upon the expectation of a temporary encumbrance became an indefinite responsibility at a time when livelihoods and financial security were compromised.³⁶ Thus, even those who had intended to support their foster children later requested maintenance payments from the refugee agencies, altering their relationships with both *Kinder* and the London-based organisations. Among those were Paula Waldhorn's foster mother Mrs Swern and others in her congregation, whose community leader characterised as 'people whose hearts are greater than their pockets' who were 'having a very trying time of it, under the present circumstances' and would have to relinquish their foster children if they did not receive some financial help.³⁷ The Fund had no desire to find new accommodation for these children, and authorised payments to the families, thereby increasing its own financial burdens.³⁸

To their credit, the Neasdon congregation families agreed to keep caring for their foster children pending modest payments, but the episode highlighted how wartime stresses tested the good intentions of many foster parents. It also exposed the precariousness of the fostering bond and clouded the issue of motivation. A case exemplifying many of these crosscurrents is that of Louis Kaufman, who in August 1939 took in nine-year-old Johanna Dukat, a shy, delicate girl with dark eyes and a dimpled chin, supporting her without financial help from the Fund.³⁹ By 1941, war had altered the family's situation with two 'semi-dependent' married daughters (whose husbands were in the army) and a young son going to Grammar School 'thus incurring extra expenses' leading Kaufman to lament that his finances did not 'stretch as they did

³⁵ SH family history.

³⁶ Those whose children were evacuated often relinquished all ties with and financial responsibilities for the children they had brought into their homes. See the case of Sever Kleinberg below.

³⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Sydney Rubenstein to Zeitlyn, 15 December 1939.

³⁸ The requested amounts were ten to fifteen shillings per week per child.

³⁹ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Louis Kaufmann to PJRF, 29 August 1941.

before the war'.⁴⁰ The Kaufmans were moderately better off than the majority of foster parents, but had not anticipated bearing the cost of a foster child for such a length of time and Kaufman requested 'some help towards Johanna's upkeep' to 'avoid the necessity of my having to send her elsewhere'.⁴¹

The evidence suggests that the Kaufmanns were conscientious caregivers motivated by a benevolent impulse. Although none of their letters mentioned Johanna's health or general welfare, it was reported that the Kaufmanns looked after her 'as



though she were their own child'.⁴² Their initial request was willingly granted and they later received an unsolicited increase, indicating that material gain was not a motivating factor.⁴³ However, the acceptance of financial help altered the family's relationship with the Fund and revealed the fragility of the fostering relationship. When the maintenance payments were late, Kaufman wrote that he was 'very sorry to have to [...] remind you that further money is now due. I hope you will not put me in the position of having to do this every time. I feel very uncomfortable

about this'.⁴⁴ Financial ties changed the power relationship between the Fund and the foster family, provoking Kaufmann's discomfort and resentment and possibly even changing the family's relationship with the child who was now perceived as a burden. Although it was reported that they treated Joanna 'like family' Kaufman prioritised his own children's needs and demonstrated a disinclination to sacrifice for her sake. His readiness to send her away over a few shillings a week intimates that their bond with Johanna was not especially deep. In 1943, Johanna *was* sent away, at the behest of her older sister.⁴⁵ The Kaufmans relinquished her willingly and there is no indication that they attempted to maintain contact with the child who had lived with them for over four

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., Kaizer to J Barrett, 1 September 1941 and J Barrett to Kaiser, 20 August 1941. Mr Kaufman requested only partial maintenance of 13 shillings per week. Gorowitz to J Barrett, 24 October 41 and Kaizer to J Barrett, 27 October 41.

⁴³ Their initial request was so modest that the Fund voluntarily increased it by half.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Louis Kaufmann to PJRF, 8 December 1941.

⁴⁵ Interview with Grete Dukat Sole, 15 May 2012.

years.

Guarantors' correspondence reveals much about their self-image and motivations and for many foster parents it was a significant source of pride not to have leaned on the refugee agencies for financial help. Kaufman noted that he had 'kept Joanna for over two years and have not asked for anything' and assured the Fund he 'should not have done so now if it had not been absolutely necessary'.⁴⁶ For many foster parents, it was shameful to seek help and most prior claims of self-reliance were truthful. But one foster mother's assertion of self-sufficiency, made on behalf of her soon-to-be married foster daughter Annie Knecht, did not hold up. A memorandum recorded that Mrs Gaffin 'has been given to understand' that the Fund had 'set aside a sum of money sufficient to give them £50 upon marriage. Is this so?'⁴⁷ With added editorial emphases, the secretary noted 'Mrs. Gaffin *says she* has never asked for any help towards the upkeep of this girl'.⁴⁸ The foster mother apparently felt that a claim of prior financial independence bolstered her entitlement to the marriage grant, but the Fund was clearly sceptical about her statement, and with good reason. Mrs Gaffin was one of the Gladstone Park and Neasden Congregation foster mothers for whom financial aid had been arranged in late 1939. In addition, there were several later letters from Mr and Mrs Gaffin regarding maintenance money and clothing for Annie.

The Gaffins' correspondence reveals much about their relationship with the Fund as well as their own self-perceptions. The Polish Fund's late maintenance payments aggravated them (and many other foster parents) but unlike Mr Kaufman's reluctant and embarrassed pleading, the Gaffins were unashamed beneficiaries.

I am still short of three weeks money due to me, and of which I am really in need of as my husband has had no work for weeks and weeks and as you know, the cost of living nowadays is extremely high and I cannot afford to lose that money.⁴⁹

Noting that 'I need the money', Mr Gaffin later complained that 'It is not very pleasant for me to have to remind you every month [...] So please forward the check as soon as possible'.⁵⁰ The Gaffins' bold appeals indicated no shame in taking payments from the refugee agency, an attitude consistent with a belief that they were entitled to the grants

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Miss Zacks to Zeitlyn, 18 March 1946.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Mrs Swern to Zeitlyn, 18 January 1940.

⁵⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Mr Gaffin to Gorowitz, 8 January 1940 and Mr Gaffin to Kaizer, 14 April 1940.

as a just recompense for taking in a refugee child. Somehow, Mrs Gaffin's self-image as a conscientious foster mother was tied up in a sincere conviction that she had 'never had to ask [the Fund] for any additional favours' explaining her persistent (though false) avowals of self-reliance.⁵¹ She asserted that 'Annie has been with us nearly two years and has been very happy with us' and her elevated self-regard was perhaps responsible for her rejection of clothing from the Fund's second hand stocks. When she found 'nothing suitable at all for my foster girl', she demanded a cash contribution towards new clothing.⁵² In denying her request, the Fund assured her that there was ample appropriate apparel, indicating that perhaps Mrs Gaffin was actually hoping for some extra money to spend as she pleased.⁵³ Alternatively, she may genuinely have wanted Annie to have something new, though it seems unlikely that a working class family suffering wartime contractions would have deigned to dress their refugee foster daughter in free second hand clothing.

The Gaffins' case highlights some of the difficulties of using the archive alone to decipher foster carers' motives. Like many, they had suffered when Mr Gaffin's shop 'was bombed' and their 'circumstances [...] greatly reduced' and she also had two young children to support.⁵⁴ They seem to have legitimately needed the maintenance money, which the Fund paid until Annie was self-supporting. After that, Annie turned over half her weekly seamstress's wage to Mrs Gaffin while continuing to receive clothing from the Fund.⁵⁵ This arrangement suggests that the Gaffins took advantage of the financial benefits of fostering, notwithstanding their insistent claims that they had 'never asked for any help towards the upkeep of this girl'.⁵⁶ Their correspondence invites an interpretation of less than exemplary care, but Annie independently reported to the Fund that she was happy, had her own room and had no complaints.⁵⁷ Furthermore, she stayed with the family until she got married.⁵⁸ This evidence alone is counter-interpretive, since few *Kinder* stayed that long with one foster carer. Additionally, although there were young children in the family, it does not appear that

⁵¹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Mrs Gaffin to PJRF, 11 November 1940.

⁵² Ibid., Mrs Gaffin to Case Committee, 14 December 1940. The Fund maintained that there was ample clothing 'which would prove most suitable for a girl of her age'.

⁵³ Ibid., Clothing Department coupon, 30 January 1941.

⁵⁴ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Mrs Gaffin to PJRF, 11 November 1940.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 'Litvin's Report', 4 February 1942, untitled report, 29 March 1942, Gorowitz to Mrs Gaffin, 17 December 1940 and CCR1 form, 9 June 1941.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Miss Zacks to Zeitlyn, 18 March 1946.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Report, 29 March 1942.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Annie Knecht, 4 April 1946.

the foster mother used Annie as a maid or child-minder. Although their own words portray them as acquisitive, the Gaffins were probably conscientious foster parents, emphasising the point that financial motives did not necessarily portend discontent for the foster child.

One of the difficulties in interpreting cases like the Gaffins is the absence of corresponding testimony. Without tracing Annie or any of her descendants, it is impossible to know if she was happy with the Gaffins. However, the existence of such testimony does not guarantee clarification of the historical record. Sometimes, problems in the transmission of the memory piece call into question its reliability, as the video recording of Zbąszyń refugee Ida Najman demonstrates.⁵⁹ The testimony is deeply flawed by an interviewer whose questions betrayed fundamental gaps in historical knowledge and whose style was intrusive. Poor interview technique was compounded by Ida's uncertain mental state. Nevertheless, the testimony has value in corroborating some of the documentation in her dossier.



The documentation portrays a foster mother who made conscientious efforts to provide appropriately for a foster child for whom she had sincere affections. Ida, a devoutly religious girl with expressive eyes and long, thick plaits was taken in by the Orensteins, but evacuated shortly after arrival. When Mrs Orenstein learned that she had been billeted 'at a Christian place', she worried about the lack of kosher food and asked for the fare money to bring Ida home.⁶⁰ Zeitlyn warned her that under no circumstances should she 'remove the child to London' because it was 'wholly opposed by the Government'.⁶¹ Ida believed that the Christian family with whom she was billeted

⁵⁹ USCSF/VHA 15097 Ida Najman Drob, 1996. The interviewer prevented Mrs Drob from speaking at any length about her life in England. Ida told her daughter later that she was prevented from talking about the episodes in her life that were most important to her. As the interview progressed, Mrs Drob repeated herself and changed details of her life story, seeming confused and very upset. Subsequently, it was revealed by family members that Ida suffered from Alzheimer's disease for many years, and was probably already in its initial stages when she gave the interview. Ida's neurologist believed her disease was brought on by the extreme stress and sorrow of her life. Ida passed away in August 2013. Email communications with Mandy Sawday, 28 October 2013.

⁶⁰ USL/MS/183 213/1 Mrs Orenstein to PJRF, 5 October 1939. Elsley Zeitlyn unsympathetically reminded the foster mother that 'we are living in War times and if no Kosher meat can be obtained children can surely be taught to eat other permitted food'. Zeitlyn to Mrs Orenstein, 9 October 1939.

⁶¹ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Mrs Orenstein, 9 October 1939.

‘would like to adopt her’ and she ‘was crying because she thought we had given her over to Christian people’.⁶² Mrs Orenstein visited Ida, ‘calmed her down’ and ‘gave the people to understand that Ida would come back to us’ as soon as possible.⁶³

I took some warm clothing for Ida and told her that she would be getting a new hat, coat and shoes, but she has informed me that the woman she is billeted with has already bought her these things.⁶⁴

Ida was caught between two carers who both wanted to win her affection, but the Jewish foster mother, who sent ‘parcels of kosher food, pocket money and small necessities’ prevailed.⁶⁵ After six months, Ida returned to London, to the apparent satisfaction of all.

The evidence implies that the Orensteins were responsive foster parents who were genuinely fond of Ida. Many foster parents, especially those who received their foster children only days before evacuation commenced, as the Orensteins had, never developed bonds with their wards, and many allowed their associations to lapse once the child was evacuated.⁶⁶ The Orensteins received money from the Fund, even when Ida was evacuated, but Mrs Orenstein claimed it in order to provide kosher food for the girl.⁶⁷ Although she never named them, Ida remembered the family and stressed that they ‘were very kind to me’.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, she petitioned the Fund about eighteen months after her return to London.

I have a brother who is living in Leeds, who though happy would be happier still if I would be with him. I am therefore asking you to transfer me to Leeds in order that I should be with him.⁶⁹

Though only recalling living with the Orensteins for six months before making the request, she noted that she had ‘promised my mother to look after one another and we still do it to this day’.⁷⁰ Her chronological memory was flawed but her recall of placements was accurate and her interview confirmed the congenial, if not deeply attached relationship to her foster family that the correspondence suggested.

However, Ida’s contradictory remarks compromised her testimony and act as a reminder of the vigilance required when utilising such material to construct accounts of the *Kindertransport*. As a stand-alone record of her experiences, Ida’s account of life in

⁶² Ibid., Mrs Orenstein to PJRF, received 27 October 1939.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Mrs Orenstein to PJRF, 23 December 1939.

⁶⁶ There are several such cases in the PJRF files. See USL/MS/183 574 F1 the cases of Siegfried Lindenbaum and Sever Kleinberg for two examples.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ USCSF/VHA Ida Najman Drob.

⁶⁹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Ida Najman to PJRF, 3 July 1941.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

England is muddled and unclear. Corresponding archival documents buttress testimony in this case, but the vast memory documentation structuring *Kindertransport* historiography is not reinforced by accessible archival records, suggesting that such material must be used judiciously.

The paradigmatic narrative implies that altruistic impulses, like those that may have animated Mrs Orenstein, were universal. Paradoxically, it is extremely difficult to quantify and identify such motives within the documentary record. It is a challenge to differentiate altruism from other motives such as a longing for communal esteem or a desire to construct a nuclear family. Some apparently well-meaning couples held romantic notions about the fostering experience and harboured unrealistic expectations about the children who would be sharing their homes. The reality of a strange, foreign, and often traumatised child clashed with the idealised imaginings of eager hosts, especially those who had little experience with children, as was often the case. Bed-wetting was a frequent manifestation of trauma, especially in young children, and the RCM even published guidance about the issue.⁷¹ Some foster parents such as Ruth Gosling in Talaton were able to muster the necessary forbearance to deal with the inconveniences such behaviour caused. Gerd Korman recalled that he, his brother Manfred and Josef Kamiel ‘shared so much, including the big upstairs bed in which we slept and wetted night after night!’⁷² Others like the Rifkins, who fostered Edward Fischbein, a cherubic looking five-year-old were not as long-suffering. Less than a month after his arrival, the Polish Fund received the following letter:

[R]egarding the little refugee Hedwig Fishbaum. We have become very attached to him, unfortunately he has the very distressing habit of wetting the bed. We took him to the doctor who gave him medicine, but he expressed his doubts as to whether it would be of any help.⁷³

The Rifkins (who had not even bothered to learn the child’s actual name), were, like many foster carers, ill-prepared to cope with a distressed little boy.⁷⁴ The family revealed that Edward had ‘to share a bedroom with our grown up son who naturally

⁷¹ Executive Committee for the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, *Instructions for the Guidance of Regional and Local Committees*, (London: Bloomsbury House, May 1940). ‘[...] bed-wetting [...] and similar signs of instability of character are sometimes symptoms of deep-seated nervous disturbance and should not be lightly dismissed or treated by penal methods. [...] These children become problem children who need and deserve kindness and patience to help them overcome their difficulties’.

⁷² Korman, *Nightmare’s Fairy Tale* p. 78. At least four other young Zbąszyń refugees regressed to bed-wetting after they arrived in England.

⁷³ USL/MS/183 575 F2, Mr and Mrs Rifkin to PJRF, received 21 September 1939.

⁷⁴ Whiteman, *The Uprooted* pp. 259-261, 268 and Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* pp. 19-20 have other examples.

complains', indicating that their intolerance arose from a lack of recent exposure to young children.⁷⁵ Although they said they were 'distressful', the couple were 'reluctantly compelled to [say] under the circumstances we find it impossible to keep the child'.⁷⁶ Though professing to be 'very attached' to Edward, the family lacked the patience to guide him through a period of readjustment, and, apparently oblivious to the implications of returning him, hoped that it would not inconvenience the Fund 'in any way'.⁷⁷ At a time when over a million children were being evacuated, the only alternative placement the Fund could only find was in a hostel. Eddie's bed-wetting had caused the family a few weeks of discomfort, but their lack of perseverance consigned him to the impersonal atmosphere of a group home for the remainder of his childhood, a placement that other very young refugees found lonely and emotionally damaging.⁷⁸



Both the documentary record and *Kinder* testimony attest to the fact that a significant number of voluntary foster families were older childless couples, or, like the Rifkins, those with no young children of their own. It is not difficult to deduce that such couples desired to create or enlarge a family, and, like the Rifkins, harboured unrealistic ideas of what that might entail. The archival record demonstrates that naive altruism, especially when compounded by inexperience with children was not an auspicious basis

⁷⁵ USL/MS/183 575 F2, Mr and Mrs Rifkin to PJRF, received 21 September 1939.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Dorothy Hardisty to Mr. Gorowitz, 1 January 1945. Ralph Mollerick, 'My *Kindertransport* Experience', *Prism* 5, (2013), pp. 3-10. Manfred Lindenbaum, phone interview 25 March 2012.

for a successful foster parenting experience. One of the most striking examples of such incompatibility was the case of Lewis and Ann Hoze, an elderly man and his middle-aged unmarried daughter who sponsored Karol Feliks, Thea's thirteen-year-old brother. Anne Hoze's correspondence did not clarify her impulse to sponsor a refugee boy, but whatever illusions she harboured were quickly dispelled and five months after his arrival, the foster mother demanded that the PJRF take the boy off her hands.

We have endeavoured to keep this boy as one of our own, and have done everything in our power to make arrangements for his future welfare, but I regret to state that from the commencement we have had trouble with the boy, and although we have tried to smooth things over he has now be-come so that it is impossible for us to keep him another day.⁷⁹

Miss Hoze disclosed that 'owing to the aggravation' the boy caused, her father 'today entered hospital for observation, and I feel that in our own interest and that of the boy it would be better were you to find him a home elsewhere'.⁸⁰ She informed Zeitlyn that within the week she would be 'closing down the house' and 'going away indefinitely'.⁸¹ Prepared to take the drastic step of literally making the boy homeless in order to get out of her fostering agreement, she informed the Fund that there would 'be no one to have him here and I refuse to have the responsibility of his welfare any longer – matters do not get any better'.⁸²

Reneging on guarantees was a major problem for refugee agencies. Elsie Zeitlyn reminded her that she 'voluntarily sought the opportunity to give the boy hospitality and incurred an obligation' from which she now sought release.⁸³ He insisted that the foster mother 'carry on till such time as proper accommodation has been secured' but his suggestion that the upcoming summer holidays might improve things provoked a vehement reaction from Miss Hoze.⁸⁴

[W]hilst I am as certain as you are to do all I possibly can to assist in the present tragedy of Eastern Jewry you should surely not expect [...] that we keep the boy any longer- and your suggestion HOLIDAYS do certainly not enter our mind during such an anxious time.

A few days later she sent Karol's savings book, and thanked the Fund 'on behalf of my father and myself [...] for relieving us of any further responsibility of this boy' whom

⁷⁹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Anne Hoze to Zeitlyn, 23 July 1939.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Anne Hoze, 27 July 1939.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

she had dropped off at the Soho Square offices the previous day.⁸⁵

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This document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.

THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

Name FELIKS. KAROL.
 Sex MALE. Date of Birth 10-6-25.
 Place KÖLN
 Full Names and Address of Parents
FELIKS. SAMUEL. CHATA.
ZBASZYŃ.
Exact address unknown.



While it seems obvious that the Hozes were unsuitable candidates to foster an adolescent refugee, something induced them to believe otherwise. Miss Hoze's concern for 'the tragedy of Eastern Jewry' indicates a responsiveness to communal imperatives and a desire for approbation. They took no money from the Fund, perhaps contributing to a self-righteous sensibility. The impulse to win such plaudits is frequently mentioned in *Kindertransport* literature, perhaps most famously by Vera Gissing who recalled being shown off every Wednesday at her foster mother's church teas.⁸⁶ Judith Baumel-Schwartz quotes *Kinder* whose foster families 'with all good intentions [...] treated the child as an "exhibit" with one Jewish housewife saying to another, "come see my refugee child" as if it were a status symbol'.⁸⁷ The Hoze and Rifkin cases show that a desire to do good, unless coupled with copious amounts of patience and forbearance, is a poor basis upon which to welcome a refugee child. It is unlikely that Karol Feliks' behaviour was proportionate to the treatment he received from the Hozes. The boy never caused the Fund any trouble and neither complained of his treatment nor asked for help. Language and cultural barriers as well as normal adolescent awkwardness were probably to blame, and it is possible that the reality of a teenage boy in their midst so upended their set routines that rapprochement proved insuperable. The Hozes' lives were temporarily thrown into turmoil by the ill-considered experiment, while Karol Feliks, who was placed in the Jews Temporary Shelter, was forced to become an autonomous adult at the age of fourteen.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Anne Hoze to Kaizer, 14 August 1939.

⁸⁶ Vera Gissing, *Pearls of Childhood: The Poignant True Wartime Story of a Young Girl Growing Up in an Adopted Land*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 56-57.

⁸⁷ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 128.

Bonding between foster family and child was never a given, even when the pairing appeared compatible and the foster family approached its task realistically and conscientiously. One such misalliance occurred between Fannie Obst and her sponsors the Rubens, an older childless couple who took her in as a four-year-old and eventually legally adopted her.⁸⁸ Sara Rubens, responding to the Fund's inquiries about Fannie's well-being, revealed her feelings about the child.

[W]e do not regard ourselves as having her in our 'care'. [...] we regard her as our own and treat her accordingly [...] She attends school regularly, has no trace of a German accent and if she is still with us when she is old enough, will go to High School [...] we have had no assistance towards her maintenance & do not need any. In fact, we owe you a debt of gratitude for allowing her to come to us.⁸⁹

Sara Rubens communicated a clear devotion to the little girl, and a desire to keep Fannie permanently. In noting the loss of accent, she indicated her wish that Fannie shed her foreign self, 'become English' and fully assimilate into the family.⁹⁰ When they adopted her, they gave Fannie an entirely new name, connoting the complete erasure of her former identity.⁹¹ Mrs Rubens' gratitude conveyed her obvious impulse to acquire the child she had never had and this motive was underscored by the family's neither taking nor requesting maintenance. Fannie's young age and Sara Rubens' attachment to the sweet-faced little girl portended a mutually fulfilling foster relationship, and the logical assumption from the documentation is that such bonding took place.



Such assumptions were dispelled by Fannie's later reflections. While she was

⁸⁸ London Gazette 17 August 1948, p. 12 and General Records Office, Birmingham District, Volume 9c, page 1107 <<http://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=sKvFMB4y7tpBi78JlXuWgQ&scan=1>> [accessed 7 December 2012].

⁸⁹ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Sara Rubens to Kaizer, 12 February 1942.

⁹⁰ The urge to anglicise foreign refugee children was widespread and several instances are discussed later in this chapter. Also, see Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. 38-40.

⁹¹ A similar impulse was famously depicted in W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, (New York: Random House, 2001), based upon the true story of Susi Bechhöfer, who was sent in a *Kindertransport* with her twin sister at the age of three. Jeremy Josephs with Susi Bechhöfer, *Rosa's Child: The True Story of One Woman's Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996). For a critique of Sebald's use of Susi Bechhöfer's story see Martin Modlinger, "You can't change names and feel the same": The *Kindertransport* Experience of Susi Bechhöfer in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds., *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/9* pp. 219-232.

unequivocal in affirming that her foster mother was ‘a good person’ to whom ‘she owed a lot’, Fannie also confessed that she had never bonded to Sarah Rubens as a ‘real mother’.⁹² She never lost her longing for her biological mother Etta and her two brothers from whom she was permanently separated. Mrs Rubens was much older than Fannie’s lost mother, and her advanced age was a barrier to their attachment. The Rubens’ were strictly orthodox, but tellingly, Fannie stated that the religious upbringing never ‘took’ with her, and to her adoptive family’s dismay, she married out of the Jewish faith. It was surprising to learn that such a young child had failed to bond with a receptive foster mother and the later rejection of her Jewish upbringing confirmed the weak connection with her adoptive family. In fact, she regarded her mother’s sister, who was in England on a domestic visa, as her true mother figure.⁹³ The foster mother’s correspondence contrasted so markedly with reams of carer exchanges revealing little affection and a great deal of concern about finances that it afforded a temptation to romanticise a rosy outcome for all parties in this fostering relationship. The additional information provided by Fannie’s later recollections proved critical to a counter-intuitive interpretation of the archival record.

The archive and testimony interface in which the voices of the carers are brought into dialogue with the memories of the former child refugees adds immeasurably to the *Kindertransport* narrative. Just as *Kinder* recollections balance contemporaneous communications, written archives bring the carers’ perspectives into clearer view. These collocations between testimony and document highlight the rarity of unambiguously positive fostering relationships. But such relationships have been confirmed, and one of the best-documented examples is that of the middle-aged childless couple, Sid and Kit Davis who took in eight-year-old Sonja Baranska.⁹⁴ The Davises, like Sara Rubens, were impelled by the desire to create a family of their own and although their voices are faint in the documentary record, extensive information about their custodianship is communicated through Dr Litvin’s reports.

Mrs Davis signalled her devotion to Sonja quite early. The child was evacuated

⁹² Author’s phone interview with FO, 30 January 2013. Both Iris Guske and Claudia Curio have written about the attachment problems of very young *Kindertransportees*. See Iris Guske *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Child Refugees Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Publishing, 2009) and Claudia Curio, ““Invisible” Children: the Selection and Integration Strategies of Relief Organizations”, trans., Toby Axelrod. *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23/1 (2004) pp. 41-56.

⁹³ Author’s phone interview with FO, 30 January 2013.

⁹⁴ Note that the PJRF spelled her name Sonja. She preferred ‘Sonia’. I kept the archival usage.

very soon after her arrival and Kit brought her back to London less than a month later, acting on her own initiative to reclaim Sonja when the immediate scare had passed. Later, rather than be separated again, the foster mother ‘went with her to the country until the Blitz was over’.⁹⁵ Mrs Davis’s actions were no different from many Londoners’, but unlike those families, Sonia was not her natural-born daughter and she had known the child for barely a month when she was sent away. Still, Mrs Davis treated the refugee girl as her own. The singularity of her actions cannot be overstated. In similar situations, most foster families relinquished the child and eventually lost touch with him or her.⁹⁶ In addition, the working class family, which received a modest stipend for Sonia throughout the war, made no requests for clothing or extra assistance and sent only one overdue reminder letter to the Fund.⁹⁷

Dr Litvin, who harboured few illusions about foster parents, believed that Sonja had found that rarest of things – ideal foster parents – who cherished and loved her.

Mrs Davies, who is childless is very attached to Sonja, whom she treats as her own daughter and whom she would like to adopt and so to make her a British citizen. If Sonja wins a scholarship, Mrs Davies would like her to go to a Secondary School and she hopes to marry her to a nice English Jewish boy.⁹⁸

Like Mrs Rubens, Kit Davis was intent on anglicising her foster daughter, though not bent on a complete erasure of her former identity. The desire to adopt Sonja and hopes for the child’s eventual marriage reflected this urge and corroborate the Davises’ motive in sponsoring her. Litvin concluded with a description of Sonja’s recent birthday at which she celebrated ‘with a cake with eleven candles. I give all these particulars to show that Sonja Baranska is in good hands and in my opinion she is one of the best well kept Zbonszyn children’.⁹⁹ Although Litvin is a reliable source in the Polish Fund’s records, there is no other corroborating evidence in the documentation. Litvin never

⁹⁵ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Dr Litvin report re Baranska, Sonja, 19 February 1942. Note that although the family’s name was Davis, Dr Litvin refers to them as the Davies throughout the correspondence.

⁹⁶ Ida Najman is an exception, and at least three Polish girls returned to their foster families after many years’ absence. USL/MS/183 574 F2 Gorowitz report, 1 June 1945. More often, the foster family relinquished all ties. USL/MS/183 574 F2 Samuel Marks to PJRF, 23 June 1940, USL/MS/183 575 F1 Dr Litvin report, 19 February 1942 and the case of Sever Kleinberg later in the chapter are examples.

⁹⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Mr Davis to PJRF, 12 February 1940. The Davises never requested an increase in maintenance and were so financially undemanding that in 1942, after the JRC determined that the foster parents had no other source of income for Sonia, granted an unsolicited increase in the allowance ‘as the maintenance charge of £2 seems rather low in view of the present cost of living’. RC Copper to M Gorowitz, 18 December 1942.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Dr Litvin report re Baranska, Sonja, 19 February 1942

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

spoke to or interviewed the child, and knew her only from photographs as ‘a pretty, well-nourished girl’.¹⁰⁰

Dr Litvin’s findings *are* substantiated in Sonja Baranska Rosenfeld’s videotaped testimony. Her recollections, along with the testimony of her husband Bernard, verified that Sonia adored the Davises and enjoyed a happy childhood. The Davises provided greater stability and security than she had enjoyed in Germany, where she and her five siblings had lived with their father, a widower who struggled to provide for them.¹⁰¹ The Davises wanted to adopt her, but the refugee agencies wouldn’t allow it because, she said, her voice trailing off, ‘The war wasn’t over and if my father could still be alive...’¹⁰² Her husband Bernard recalled Sonja declaring that if her father returned from the war, she would not go with him since she considered the Davises her parents.¹⁰³ Her mother had died when Sonja was about four, leaving a maternal gap that Kit Davis ably filled.¹⁰⁴

Sonja Baranska’s case, substantiated by both documentation and testimony, appeared to epitomise the ideal fostering relationship. But even this example was not straightforward, for, as Dr Litvin wrote in his first report, ‘everything is not all right, even with Sonja’.¹⁰⁵

Her twin sister is in Birmingham with Jewish people [...] However her sister’s fosterparents object to Sonja visiting her sister or even writing to her. This causes Sonja much suffering and worries the kind Mrs Davies. I promised her that we would do our best to help Sonja to communicate and visit her twin sister.¹⁰⁶

This unnatural arrangement, in which the identical twin to whom she was ‘very attached’ had been wrenched away and isolated, marred Sonja’s life with the Davises. According to Litvin, Mrs Davis had attempted to retrieve Estera, Sonja’s sister, within hours of the girls’ separation, ‘but when she arrived in our office she was informed that Estera had left for Birmingham a few hours earlier’.¹⁰⁷

Sonja’s testimony verified Litvin’s account precisely, with additional important

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ USCSF/VHA 19173 Sonia Baranska Davis Rosenfeld, 1996. Sonia never remembered having a hot meal in Germany, and that when she arrived the Davises bought her all new clothes.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Phone interview with Bernie Rosenfeld, 25 January 2013.

¹⁰⁴ USCSF/VHA Sonia Baranska Rosenfeld.

¹⁰⁵ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Dr Litvin report re Baranska, Sonja, 19 February 1942.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Dr Litvin report, 19 February 1942.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Dr Litvin report Re The Baranska Sisters, 23 April 1942. Sonja’s twin was referred to as Estera throughout the correspondence. She later took the anglicised ‘Ester’. I have preserved the archival usage.

information about the separation. When they left the establishment without her sister, Sonja, who spoke only German, recalled ‘I was crying and [...] and they kept saying in Yiddish, ‘Why are you crying?’ I just couldn’t talk, I just kept crying and crying’.¹⁰⁸

They eventually located a German refugee girl to speak to Sonja.

I told her I left my twin sister behind, which they didn’t know, see, they did not – it was bad enough finding a home for one let alone two – it was hard. But they didn’t tell my foster parents that I was a twin.¹⁰⁹

Sonja added that the Davises had ‘tried to call the restaurant [but] it was already closed. The next morning they called the refugee people but she already went up to Birmingham England to another foster home. So, we were separated’.¹¹⁰ Punctuating the trauma of their separation, Sonja and Estera had already suffered the shock of parting with their younger brother Rolf, due to come with them on the *Kindertransport* but left behind at the final moment because he had contracted conjunctivitis.¹¹¹



The unhappy situation created by the Fund’s failure to inform either foster family of the existence of a twin highlights the quandaries and challenges refugee agencies encountered in their relationships with foster parents. The London office attempted to rectify the situation, but Estera’s foster family was intractable. Although Mrs Benjamin,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ USCSF/VHA Sonia Baranska Rosenfeld.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Estera's foster mother, reluctantly agreed to the girls corresponding, according to Mrs Davis, the letters from Estera were few.¹¹² Though he had not discovered the situation until the girls had already been kept apart for two and a half years, Litvin lobbied intensively for a meeting of the sisters, but he faced formidable resistance from Birmingham Refugee Children's Council (BRCC), which represented the Benjamin's interests and received little support from his own organisation.¹¹³ Despite their sympathy for Sonia and the Davises, no one from the Fund ever met or communicated directly with the Benjamins. The Fund was loathe to disturb an arrangement in which both girls were in stable, caring Jewish homes. The Benjamins were treated very carefully. They supported Estera independently, lifting a significant burden on the cash-strapped organisation. Lacking any financial influence, the Fund was constrained from pressing demands on the family.

The Fund's task was made more difficult by inter-agency friction and competition. The BRCC, one of the Movement's regional offices, for reasons of its own, erected a firewall around the Benjamins and colluded with them to keep the girls apart. In response to Litvin's pressure for a reunion, the head of the committee wrote:

Mr & Mrs Benjamin are very kind and attached to Estera and [...] I should be very sorry to do anything to jeopardise the happy relationship between Estera and her foster parents as she is so fortunate in her home and care expended on her, but there is no reason that her sister cannot write to her regularly and get replies.¹¹⁴

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Benjamins feared Estera's attachment to her twin sister competed with her affections for her foster family and were thus deliberately trying to sever the bond between the sisters by keeping them apart. The BRCC dashed hopes for a rapprochement over the Jewish holidays, telling the Fund that arrangements could 'only be done through the goodwill of the foster parents of both children and [...] nothing should be done contrary to the wishes of Mr & Mrs Benjamin who are doing their best to make Estera happy to the utmost of their power'.¹¹⁵

The Benjamins' elevated socio-economic status was evident from the BRCC letters suggesting that class prejudices were also factors in the estrangement.

¹¹² USL/MS/183 575 F1 Mrs Davis to Dr Litvin, 9 August 1942. She was 'very glad to know that Ester is being most kindly treated, which is most relieving to Sonia' and thanked Litvin 'or your great efforts for these children'.

¹¹³ Ibid., Dr Litvin report Re The Baranska Sisters, 23 April 1942.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Mrs Silverstone to Dr Litvin, 9 March 1941.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Estera is extremely happy [...] she goes to a good school, she is beautifully clothed, is treated as absolutely as one of Mrs Benjamin's own children. She has just been away on holiday, the Benjamins have just moved to another house [...] and Mrs Benjamin assures me that Estera likes writing to her sister to tell her all that she is doing.¹¹⁶

The Birmingham committee members communicated their admiration of the Benjamins and the life they were providing for Estera. The Davises were working class East Londoners, and it is not difficult to conclude that the families' differing social status added to the Benjamin's reluctance to allow Estera too much contact with her sister. Understandably hesitant to say anything unforgiving about her sister's foster family, Sonja confirmed the impression given by the Birmingham correspondence with her halting description of Estera's family. 'She always had a good -- she went to very comfortable people and she had everything she ever needed there'.¹¹⁷ The Benjamins, who by all accounts lavished Estera with affection, could have been considered ideal parents except for their painful obstinacy in forbidding their foster daughter to maintain a relationship with her identical twin. The committee continued to screen Mrs Benjamin and prevaricate about a meeting, which was finally arranged, but not until nearly five years had elapsed since their separation.¹¹⁸

The reunion was a bittersweet experience for Sonja. When they met, 'it was like looking in a mirror. We were identical and we enjoyed it. We had a nice week together. She stayed with us. I must've been about twelve. Then she went back'.¹¹⁹ The years of separation and Mrs Benjamin's deliberate alienation had irretrievably damaged, if not broken, their sibling attachment. As Sonja noted, 'We didn't see each other too often because her parents -- I never did go to her house [...] She used to come down to me occasionally to stay with us'.¹²⁰ Sonja provided the only explanation of her exclusion from Birmingham. 'My sister's people didn't want anybody to know it wasn't their child and that she was a refugee'.¹²¹ This revelation conveyed a great deal about the Benjamins' motives and their attitudes towards both their foster daughter and her sister.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Miss Lessar to Dr Litvin, 18 September 1942.

¹¹⁷ USCSF/VHA Sonia Baranska Rosenfeld.

¹¹⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Miss Lessar to Dr Litvin, 18 September 1942.

¹¹⁹ USCSF/VHA Sonia Baranska Rosenfeld. The meeting, which is not recorded in the girls' files, was most likely at the behest of the RCM, which had accepted full responsibility for Sonia in August 1943. The Movement was more influential than the Polish Fund with authority over the Birmingham Refugee Council, one of its regional committees. As Sonia noted in her testimony, 'By the end [...] my foster father told the refugee committee it's not fair, she's a twin and they need to be together and they agreed and they just told them that they had to bring her down to see me which they did'.¹¹⁹

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

The shame attached to Estera's foreignness was compounded by the existence of a twin sister who was living in much different circumstances.

Although they remained in contact with one another throughout the remainder of their lives, Sonja and Estera were never able to resurrect the closeness they had once shared.¹²² After the war, their sister, Leni, who had lived in the United States since the late 1930s, found the twins and begged them to come to America. Estera and her husband did not go with Sonja and Bernard when they left in 1957 with their own infant twin daughters to make a new life for themselves in Houston.¹²³ Separately, each sister had fared better than many child refugees, but the care and love they found in their foster families came at a very high cost. The tragedy of their estrangement was initiated by a foster family's self-serving impulses, but the refugee agencies must take responsibility for their contribution to the girls' separation and its consequences.



The Baranska case study bolsters the legitimacy of *Kinder* memory as a source for *Kindertransport* historiography. It is rare for an oral testimony to be so well substantiated by archival records and vice versa. Sonja's story about the twins' separation might alone have been received sceptically, but it was entirely authenticated by Litvin's report, and the concordance between the two accounts is remarkable. The image of the Davises that emerges from their letters and Litvin's reports entirely accords with Sonja's memories of them as kind and caring people. Sonja was not aware of her PJRF dossier nor had she seen Litvin's reports and the precision with which her testimony complements those records validates the use of *Kinder* memory to reconstruct events. Equally importantly, the affirmation of Litvin's reports provides legitimising

¹²² Phone interview with Bernard Rosenfeld, 25 January 2013.

¹²³ Ibid.

evidence for the general reliability of the Welfare Officer's notes and observations.

The Baranska twins each enjoyed a caring foster relationship, though in Estera's case, caring and selfishness united in the same foster parent, creating unnecessary unhappiness for both children. This mixture of motivations and their perhaps unintended consequences for the refugee children involved is a hallmark of many of the fostering relationships examined in this chapter. Even with a wealth of correspondence and the conjunction of related memory-based accounts, it is extraordinarily difficult to discern foster parents' motives or definitively assess their treatment of the *Kinder*. Another case in the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund files epitomises this challenge, incorporating a range of carer motives and behaviours with unusually profuse documentation, and meriting an extended examination that exposes the complexities involved in archival interpretation.

Further Interpretive Challenges: The Case of Ewa Mohr

In many instances, a surfeit of records facilitates interpretation, but the case of Ewa Mohr is anything but straightforward. Claims and counterclaims between foster parents and the representatives of various agencies complicate the narrative and compound the ambiguity of actors' motivations and actions. The multitude of letters from the sponsoring family, Henry and Miriam Najberg, obfuscate rather than clarify their behaviour and objectives, but the completeness of the documentation and the profusion of actors makes this case compelling and instructive. These records expose the complexity of carer motives, illustrate the agencies' difficulties in handling problematic foster parents and children, and expose the interpretive challenges posed by archival documentation that is not mediated by later testimony.

From the Polish Fund's perspective, the Najbergs, of Hayes, West London seemed the ideal foster family for four-year-old Ewa Mohr who arrived in London at the end of August 1939. Their daughter Marlene was close in age, and they took Ewa in as part of a Jewish community appeal, on the condition of receiving clothing and a small allowance. The Najbergs were prolific correspondents, keeping the Fund regularly updated about Ewa's welfare. Soon after her arrival, the family evacuated, but quickly returned to Hayes 'owing to bad treatment received'.¹²⁴ Mrs Najberg reported that Ewa was in good health, 'goes to school here and really likes it she is getting on quite well

¹²⁴ USL/MS/183 476/1 MN to Kaizer, 26 September 1939.

with her English speech'.¹²⁵ Her concern about Ewa's assimilation, purchase of 'warm winter clothing' and eagerness to keep the Fund apprised of her welfare connoted a responsible, caring foster arrangement.¹²⁶ The family also consistently assured the Fund of their fondness for their new ward, writing that 'every care and attention is being shown to Ewa, who is settling down as one of the family and hoping that it will be possible for her to always stay in our care'.¹²⁷ Some months later, she reiterated that she treated Ewa 'as you can understand, the same as my own child' and stressed that Ewa 'and my own child are very attached to each other and know each other as sisters and [...] she knows me as mother'.¹²⁸ Very few foster parents went to such lengths to express their devotion and attachment to the child in their care.

Mrs Najberg's avowals of care, however, were never the primary purpose of her correspondence. The declarations always functioned as a prelude to requests relating to Ewa's financial and material upkeep. Within a month of her arrival, Miriam petitioned for a maintenance rise because she found it 'very hard to manage now, owing to my husband having to close his business through being called for National Police Service' resulting in a 'severely curtailed' income.¹²⁹ This type of request, underpinned by laments about wartime financial contractions, was a familiar one to the Fund, but unlike the similarly situated Davis family, the Najbergs were never satisfied. The Fund substantially increased their allowance but each month they received unapologetic and insistent reminders for payment along with appeals for clothing.¹³⁰ Mrs Najberg initially appeared grateful for the second hand clothing she received, but she also carefully itemised purchases she made for Ewa and put in a standing order for 'shoes and slippers [...] as she is very heavy on footwear'.¹³¹ Within a few months, she approached the Fund with 'great reluctance' to ask 'a little extra towards Ewa's clothing expenses'.¹³² She reiterated her reduced circumstances, and Ewa's being 'very heavy

¹²⁵ Ibid., MN to Gorowitz, 8 January 1940.

¹²⁶ Ibid., MN to Kaizer, 26 September 1939.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., MN to PJRF, 11 April 1940 and 8 October 1940.

¹²⁹ Ibid., MN to Kaizer, 26 September 1939. This letter began by thanking the Fund for a check and informing them: 'I received Ewa on the 29th August, 1939, but you have only sent me £1.10 covering three weeks at 7/- per week, but you will find that up to the end of the month of September, it will total four and a half weeks, so that makes you owing me a week and a half's money at 10/- per week covering from the 22nd of September until the end of the month'.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Mrs Sugarman, 9 October 1939. This was only after consulting with the Jewish community leader who had recommended the Najbergs as foster parents. MN to PJRF, 16 February 1940, 30 November 1939, and 11 April 1940.

¹³¹ Ibid., MN to Gorowitz, 8 January 1940.

¹³² Ibid., MN to PJRF, 11 April 1940.

on clothing' noting 'I should not like her to go short of what she really needs'.¹³³

Nevertheless, she assured them that 'Ewa has had my fullest care and attention and she has improved beyond words'.¹³⁴

When Fund became less ready to accede to Mrs Najberg's wishes, the tenor of her correspondence shifted. When they failed to grant the clothing allowance, reminding her of all the clothing they had already sent, Miriam deemed their offerings 'of no use' complaining that 'most of the articles were too small, and others too old and full of holes and the articles she needed most [...] you did not send at all'.¹³⁵ She reminded the Fund that she treated Ewa 'as my own little girl and wish her to appear as neat and tidy as such, and I feel sure you understand [...] that I cannot dress the child in any old clothing'.¹³⁶ There is certainly room to interpret the foster mother's protestations magnanimously as the concerns of a conscientious carer, but there is the equal possibility that she engaged in a kind of emotional blackmail in an effort to get more from the Fund.¹³⁷ There was no indication that the Fund harboured such suspicions in the first year of Ewa's life with the Najbergs, but as events unfolded, definite cracks appeared in their relationship with the foster family.

Towards the end of 1940, Mr Najberg's summons for military service set in motion the chain of events that challenged the Fund's conceptions of the foster family and redounded on Ewa with disastrous consequences. With her husband away, Mrs Najberg arranged to send Marlene temporarily to the Lucy Gaster children's home in Oxhey Hall, Hertfordshire while she sought employment. She pleaded with the Fund to send Ewa too, lamenting that 'it would be a dreadful thing to Ewa if they had to be separated'.¹³⁸ If that were not possible she added, 'I must ask you to accept Ewa back' claiming 'it would be impossible for me to keep Ewa at the present rate of £2 per month'.¹³⁹ Despite declarations of attachment to Ewa, this threat invites speculation that the child was being used coercively as a stratagem for increased maintenance. The Fund agreed to put Ewa up in the care home for a short stay on the Najberg's assurances that the weekly cost was little more than they were currently paying the family.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ USL/MS/183 476/1 Mrs Najberg to PJRF, 25 May 1940.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ See in addition to those cited above, letters from MN to PJRF, 30 November 1939, 28 December 1939 and 16 February 1940.

¹³⁸ Ibid., MN to PJRF, 8 October 1940.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

From the events that followed, it is difficult to determine if the Najbergs were simply capricious and irresponsible or a pair of calculating schemers. Abandoning her stated intention to seek work in London, Mrs Najberg instead went to Norfolk under an evacuation scheme, taking Marlene with her. Meanwhile, Ewa had been installed in the children's home, at double the maintenance that the Fund paid the Najbergs. The matron, Miss Gaster, informed them that 'Mr Najberg said he kept the child for nothing' and that Ewa had 'not learned clean habits'.¹⁴⁰ When Mrs Tibber, Miriam's mother, visited the home, Miss Gaster repeated the charges, alleging that Ewa 'was of dirty habits and had arrived dirty'.¹⁴¹ Henry, now Private Najberg, passionately rebutted charges of negligence, characterising them as 'gross libel', insisting that he had 'washed Ewa's hair and had cut it (as I am a hairdresser)' and that 'Ewa had all her clothing put on clean'.¹⁴² He reminded the Fund that one of their Executive committee members had interviewed the family 'the same morning that I took her to Miss Gaster' and he had 'remarked on Ewa's appearance and character and also how well she looked'.¹⁴³ Najberg hurled the counter accusation that Ewa had been mistreated by Miss Gaster, had 'a septic finger' and was 'scratched all down her face'.¹⁴⁴ He especially bristled at allegations of Ewa's unspecified 'dirty habits', noting that although they 'had a great deal of trouble with her up-bringing' Miriam had 'persevered with her'.¹⁴⁵

It seems to me Miss Gaster is not able to take care of her, as Ewa certainly did not have this trouble with us. Miss Gaster also complains of Ewa wetting the bed? We had this trouble with her, and [...] she was cured of this habit by the careful instruction [...] of my wife.¹⁴⁶

There were mutual accusations about Ewa's clothing, with both parties claiming the other had clothed Ewa 'in rags'.¹⁴⁷ Najberg accused Miss Gaster of confiscating the sweets he claimed they sent weekly and refusing to allow his friends to visit the child.¹⁴⁸ It is impossible to know whose accusations were justified, but Miss Gaster's multiple

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Miss Gaster to Kaizer, 23 October 1940. The Fund tried desperately to get the fees reduced. Mirkin to Matron Gaster, 14 October 1940, Mirkin to MN, 14 October 1940 and Lucy Gaster to Kaizer, 23 October 1940.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. HN to PJRF, 9 December 1940.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. The 'dirty habits' may have been some kind of self-soothing or self-comforting behaviour that was considered 'unclean'. Institutionalised children and those deprived of affection and care commonly indulge in such behaviours. See Joyanna L. Silberg, *The Child Survivor: Healing Developmental Trauma and Dissociation* (Hove: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., and Matron Gaster to Kaizer, 24 January 1941, MN to Mirkin, 4 February 1941.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., HN to PJRF, 9 December 1940.

letters to the Fund during Ewa's four month stay dealt exclusively with demands for money and clothing, and not a single sentence was expended on her progress or wellbeing.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the Fund learned months later that an outbreak of scabies was recorded while Ewa was in residence, a fact that was not disclosed when Ewa was discharged with a rash that Miss Gaster dismissed as 'nothing to worry about'.¹⁵⁰

The exchange of accusations between the foster parents and the children's home disclosed little reliable information about the child, but revealed a great deal about the carers. The duelling accounts were a canvas upon which were projected wounded feelings and defensive assertions about self-image, character and integrity. Stung by the impugning of their honour, Henry reminded the Fund that a member of their own sub-committee recruited them and 'would not have asked anybody who was incompetent, as Miss Gaster wishes to make out'.¹⁵¹ He reiterated that Ewa had been given every care and attention', that she 'had become as like our own child and in truth we had decided if possible to legally adopt Ewa after the cessation of hostilities'.¹⁵² Najberg was reacting not only to Miss Gaster's charges, but also to intimations that the Polish committee had decided to remove Ewa from their care. He pleaded 'Surely you can realise that Ewa would be getting better care and attention with my wife than that she is getting at Oxhey Hall Farm, claiming that it was 'beyond my comprehension' that the Fund would not 'reconciliate Ewa with my own family'.¹⁵³

My kiddie repeatedly asks for Ewa and vice versa. Plus all this we had gone to a big expense on Ewa's account clothing her [...]. plus teaching her piano. It seems a pity that you should want to keep Ewa separated from those much more congenial surroundings.¹⁵⁴

The Committee reassured him that 'there was no intention to take the child away from you completely' but 'we had no alternative but to adopt the course we have taken'.¹⁵⁵ However, they deferred discussion of permanent custodianship, diplomatically saying that 'the question of adoption is a very delicate one' that 'must be left in abeyance until happier times, when the matter could be approached in a calmer spirit'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Miss Gaster to Kaizer, 23 October 1940, 1 November 1940, 27 November 1940, 6 December 1940, 3 January 1941, 14 January 1941, 24 January 1941.

¹⁵⁰ USL/MS/183 213/2 County Medical Officer Hertfordshire to Kaizer, 16 August 1941 and USL/MS/183 476/1 Typed report, 'Mrs Tibber called here to-day re Ewa Mohr', 18 February 1941.

¹⁵¹ USL/MS/183 476/1 HN to PJRF, 9 December 1940.

¹⁵² Ibid., HN to Kaizer, 18 November 1940.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Case Committee to HN, 21 November 1940.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Inter-office correspondence revealed the source of the Fund's emerging misgivings adding further edification of the Najbergs' character and motives. Shortly before Ewa was sent away, the Najbergs had negotiated a rise in her stipend.¹⁵⁷ However, after Ewa's admission to Oxhey Hall, Mrs Tibber had visited Soho Square advising the Fund 'that if we wish to send Ewa back we will be called upon to pay £1 per week'.¹⁵⁸ The language implied that the Fund felt coerced and even extorted by this family, which had already misled them about the Oxhey Hall fees.¹⁵⁹ When the Fund refused this demand, Henry Najberg confirmed their suspicions.

You pay Miss Gaster £1 a week which doesn't give Ewa any home comforts or family love, as you know Ewa is (or was) treated as our own child. Yet when my wife asks for Ewa back, and a little more towards her keep, it seems you have an objection. We asked you to consider paying the same amount as you do to Miss Gaster, but it seems too much to you. I cannot see your point of view.¹⁶⁰

The Fund's failure to validate the Najbergs by paying them equally to Miss Gaster was a blow to their pride and self-esteem. They had been angling for £1 a week for a long while, and the entire Oxhey Hall episode can be interpreted as an elaborate manoeuvre, using Ewa as a pawn, to get the maintenance stipend they believed they deserved. Najberg's parting shot was an appeal to the Fund's sense of duty and patriotism.

I would esteem it a great favour if you would settle this matter satisfactory to my wife, as [...] this is greatly disturbing to me, as believe me, sir we in the army have sufficient to worry us.¹⁶¹

Mrs Najberg eventually negotiated with billeting officials for a supplement that brought them the £1 per week that they craved, and Ewa was reunited with her in Norfolk.¹⁶² However the child (whom they now called Evelyn), arriving with scabies, was declared highly contagious and was immediately quarantined.

The final chapter of Ewa's life with the Najbergs was punctuated by the involvement of a billeting official whose correspondence added another level of complexity to the case. While Ewa was isolated a second time, Miriam suddenly moved back to London with Marlene. This second abandonment was explained in a letter Miss Meade, the Norfolk billeting officer, sent to the foster mother.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. The amount was not specified but was obviously less than £1 per week. They had been receiving £2 (forty shillings) per month. The original maintenance was twenty-eight shillings per month.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., HN to PJRF, 9 December 1940.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., MN to Mirkin, 4 February 1941 and MN to PJRF, 18 February 1941.

I hear [...] that you have also got scabies – Evelyn must have caught it the second time from you. This is very wrong, as you could have gone with her to Crow Hall* for treatment and been quite cured by this time. I suppose you know that you are liable to a fine for mixing with people when you are suffering from a very contagious disease – I do hope therefore you will go for treatment at once.¹⁶³

This began a new tug-of-war over Ewa in which once again her interests were peripheral to the contest. Mrs Najberg asked the Norfolk authorities to send Ewa to London, but Miss Meade was determined to keep her in Norfolk, even after Miriam sent proof that she was ‘quite recovered’, and pledging ‘I can provide Evelyn with a happy home’.¹⁶⁴ The officer refused to put the girl on a train to London, asserting that she could only release her to ‘an authorised person’ and arguing that Ewa was ‘so happy here’ and so ‘very well looked after’ that she should remain in Norfolk.¹⁶⁵ Mrs Najberg’s repeated appeals were met with obstructions about custodianship and health.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Fund provided certifications of Mrs Najberg’s right to custody, and she finally took the child back to Hayes End.¹⁶⁷

The continuation of Miss Meade’s involvement in the case after Ewa’s removal to London embraced themes of class, prejudice and the exertion of authority. The billeting official was determined to convince the Fund that Miriam Najberg was an unfit mother and to have Ewa removed from her care. She wrote at length to the Fund, expressing her concerns about the Najbergs and making the case for Ewa’s staying in Norfolk.

When the child went to her present billet I found she only possessed the clothes she stood up in and was very nervous – though well fed [...] The child cried the whole day before she left and the householder tells me she seemed very afraid of Mrs Najberg, who still seemed to have bad scabies places on her hands etc.¹⁶⁸

She noted that the District Ministry of Health had given ‘a very bad report of this woman’ and advised her to withhold the child’s whereabouts from the foster mother, a suggestion ‘strongly endorsed’ by the Chestneys, Ewa’s temporary (non-Jewish) foster parents in Norfolk.¹⁶⁹ She lobbied determinedly for the Chestneys who felt ‘very strongly’ that Ewa had ‘been unkindly treated’ and said ‘if you have any authority for

¹⁶³ Ibid., Patricia Meade to MN, 29 May 1940. *Crow Hall was a quarantine facility.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., MN to Meade, 19 June 1941 and 26 June 1941. These letters all originals, must have been copied in or forwarded to the Fund, although why and by whom, is not clear.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Meade to MN, 29 June 1942.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Meade to MN, 4 July 1941.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Meade to PJRF, 10 July 1941 [postmarked 16 July 1941].

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Miss Meade, noted, ‘I did not feel we had the authority to do this’.

removing this child' the Chestneys would 'take her gladly' since Mrs Najberg 'seems totally unfit to have the care of any child'.¹⁷⁰ Finally, she informed the Fund that she had written 'to the police at Hayes End and asked them to forward my letter to the R.S.P.C.C.*' and expressed the 'hope' that 'if the woman still has scabies that would give us the authority to remove the child temporarily at any rate?'¹⁷¹ The conspiratorial 'us' signalled her continuing sense of authority over the case, and confidence in the Fund's accord. Her letter to the constabulary was nearly identical, adding only that she was bothering them because 'the householders were so upset a[t] handing a child over to *such a person*'.¹⁷² She also suggested, somewhat conspiratorially, 'there is some mystery attached to the case – which she is keeping from me – I cannot understand why Mrs Najberg was so extremely anxious to get the child back to herself?'¹⁷³

This astonishing flurry of letters from the billeting official complicates and problematizes the interpretation of this case. Miss Meade questioned the foster mother's motives, but her own were equally enigmatic. It is difficult to know whether she was an intrepid advocate or an officious bigot. On the one hand, although she projected a certain bureaucratic pedantry, her job *was* to ensure Ewa was safely housed and cared for. However, her almost visceral antipathy to Miriam, whom it appears she never actually even met, raises questions about the source of her antagonism. Characterising Mrs Najberg as 'such a person' and 'totally unfit to have the care of any child', crediting all accusations of abuse and bad character against her, championing the non-Jewish foster parents, implying that scabies was shameful and intimating that Mrs Najberg was keeping some dark secret support the possibility that antisemitism played a part in her disapprobation. The PJRF, sensitised to these allusions and desirous of buttressing their reputation with the non-Jewish community, sympathetically defended Mrs Najberg in their reply to the billeting official.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. * Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

¹⁷² Ibid., Meade to Inspector of Police Hayes End, 14 July 1941 (emphasis added). The existence of Miss Meade's original letter to the police in Ewa's file indicates that the local authorities must have decided that the case was not within their prerogative and forwarded the letter to the PJRF.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ This issue is dealt with at greater length later in the chapter.

On the special recommendation of various people, Mrs Najberg was mentioned to us as a likely foster mother [...] and she apparently had quite a nice home of which she was proud. Her home has since been somewhat broken up, since her husband has joined the army, and [...] Mrs Najberg has had to reduce her expenses and has probably had difficulty in keeping up her old standards, as a result of which she has taken advantage of the evacuation scheme.¹⁷⁵

Somewhat defensively, the Fund suggested that fault lay with Norfolk medical officers who released Ewa uncured.¹⁷⁶ They seemed determined to tamp down any insinuations that Mrs Najberg's unclean personal habits had caused the scabies and defended her against the implication that she was cowardly for evacuating along with her child.¹⁷⁷ They assured Miss Meade that they would 'investigate the whole matter thoroughly' and keep her informed after interviewing Mrs Najberg.¹⁷⁸

The Fund took Miss Meade's involvement of the police quite seriously and on the same day they wrote to the billeting officer, they sent a very differently toned letter to Mrs Najberg summoning her for an immediate interview and medical examination.

[I]n view of further correspondence received by us [...] we should like to know definitely what arrangements you have made in order to provide Ewa with a permanent home and not take her about from one place to another. We feel that it is about time that Ewa should receive a regular schooling and we should be obliged if you would come prepared to answer all these questions.¹⁷⁹

Despite their sturdy defence of Miriam to the billeting officer, they adopted quite a different demeanour with the foster mother. This was the severest the Fund had ever been with the Mrs Najberg, indicating that they had reached the end of their patience with her peripatetic lifestyle and inconsistent treatment of Ewa. The two letters written on the same day are also indicative of the different ways in which the Fund communicated within and outside the Jewish community. When she arrived at Soho Square, both Miriam and Ewa were found to be infected with scabies. Mrs Najberg was

¹⁷⁵ USL/MS/183 476/1 Mr Mirkin to Mrs Meade, 23 July 1941.

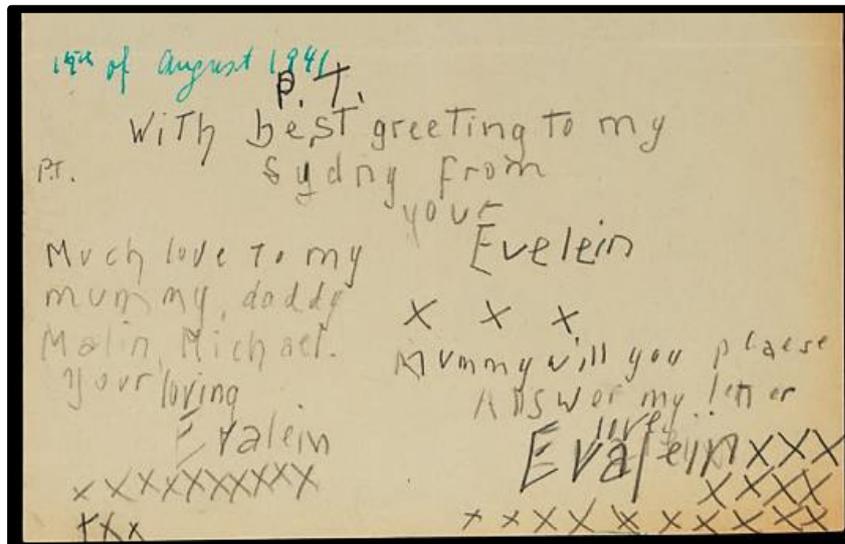
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Both of these implied accusations can be read as rebutting common antisemitic tropes of 'dirty Jews' and 'cowardly Jews' still very much alive today. See Anthony Faiola, 'Anti-Jewish slogans return to the streets in Germany as Mideast protests sweep Europe', *Washington Post*, 30 July 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-spills-into-europe-with-protests-anti-jewish-slogans/2014/07/30/36ca8d41-b5a4-4790-9b53-c94e75da4ba6_story.html>[accessed 9 September 2014] and Justin Huggler and Josie Ensor, 'Anti-Semitism on the march: Europe braces for violence', *The Telegraph*, 26 July 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/10992886/Anti-Semitism-on-the-march-Europe-braces-for-violence.html>>[accessed 9 September 2014]

¹⁷⁸ USL/MS/183 476/1 Mirkin to Mrs Meade, 23 July 1941.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Mirkin to MN, 23 July 1941.

sent off to seek treatment while Ewa was immediately admitted to a London hospital.¹⁸⁰ When she was healed, they sent Ewa to the Jewish Children's Hostel in Harrogate in the care of Ida Najman, but it was a short-lived stay.¹⁸¹ The matron, Margaret Aaron, said that 'although she is a good child [...] she is really too young at present for our organization' and asked the Fund to take her back.¹⁸² Shortly after their arrival in Harrogate, the Fund received a letter from Ida reporting on the girls' progress. Appended at the bottom in a childish hand, Ewa wrote to her foster family, including a note to Mrs Najberg 'Mummy will you please answer my letter love Evalein'.¹⁸³



The Fund's handling of Ewa's case must also come under scrutiny. Despite all the evidence that the Najbergs were not suitable foster parents, the PJRF again attempted to put her back in their home. Miriam, who was now doing war work, demurred.

Evelyn is not a child I can leave with other people. She is [...] a very nervous child, and if perchance there are any air raids or warnings and I shouldn't be with her I feel sure this would affect her nerves severely.¹⁸⁴

She suggested that if Ewa could 'remain at the Convalescent Home until I am again able to resume my home. I would keep in touch with her and visit her occasionally', taking the child back when she recommenced her 'household duties'.¹⁸⁵ The PJRF could not assent to Miriam's suggestions since Ewa was not welcome at Harrogate and needed an immediate placement. There were no further attempts to reunite her with the family.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., Dr Merkin to Chief Medical Officer of Health LCC, 24 July 1941.

¹⁸¹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Ida Najman to PJRF, 4 August 1941.

¹⁸² Ibid., Margaret Aaron to Sydney Gerrard, 8 August 1941.

¹⁸³ Ibid., Ida Najman and Evelyn Mohr to PJRF, 15 August 1941.

¹⁸⁴ USL/MS/183 476/1 MN to Sidney Gerrard, 31 August 1941

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Miriam sent back Ewa's clothing with the simple line 'Trusting Evelyn is keeping well'.¹⁸⁶ With that, the Najbergs slipped out of Ewa Mohr's life forever.

Ewa's next placement revealed the toll that multiple upheavals and abandonments had taken on the child. After another skin disease treatment in London, she was sent to the Jewish Secondary School in Shefford, under the direction of Dr. Judith Grunfeld, a refugee and protégé of Solomon Schonfeld. The first reports were favourable; she was happy and showed 'marked improvement', an assessment verified by the Fund's own visitor.¹⁸⁷

The teachers told me that she was at first completely unable to concentrate herself and seemed to look for the line connecting her old life with her new one. Now she is getting on, improving her manners, which were rather loud, and becoming calmer in her movements.¹⁸⁸

This rather perceptively phrased account hinted at the turmoil produced by multiple uprootings as Ewa searched for continuities in her unsettled life. She was already in her third foster placement in Shefford, having given two families 'too much trouble'.¹⁸⁹ The Welfare report noted that this family, 'the best foster mother we could wish for' loved her, but only a week later, Dr Grunfeld delivered bad news.¹⁹⁰

She really took the child to her heart [...] but little Eva is [...] too small and too undisciplined to be put into an ordinary home. Mrs Stephens declares now that the child makes her life a misery and that although she feels sorry for the kid she cannot put up with her anymore.¹⁹¹

Ewa was 'naughty and irresponsible' and 'definitely a child who ought to be in a hostel'¹⁹². Grunfeld expressed regret 'that she will have to change again the surroundings but there is no stability for her here either'.¹⁹³

The final phase in Ewa Mohr's turbulent foster care journey commenced as tumultuously as all the others. Early in 1942, Ewa, now six, was placed temporarily with a childless older couple, the Goders, in North London, pending location of a suitable hostel for the troubled girl. The couple got off on the wrong foot with the Fund over clothing and finances, and after having Ewa for only three weeks, were notified

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Dr Grunfeld to PJRF, 28 October 1941.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Report of Mrs Ina Gross, 11 December 1941.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Dr Grunfeld to PJRF, 17 December 1941.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Report of Mrs Ina Gross, 11 December 1941, Dr Grunfeld to PJRF, 17 December 1941.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. Dr Grunfeld to PJRF, 17 December 1941.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Dr Grunfeld to PJRF 31 December 1941 and 17 December 1941. Ewa had exhibited aggressive behaviour after her stay in the children's home. MN to Kaizer, 18 February 1941.

that she would be removed from their care.¹⁹⁴ This announcement triggered a passionate and spirited reply from Mr Goder, one of many remarkable letters in this child's records, and one worthy of quoting in full:

Having regard to the circumstance in which the child was brought to us [...] I can see no reason for relinquishing her.

When she was handed over to us [...] you informed us that she was quite homeless and alone in the world. The fact was indeed apparent from her lamentable condition. We were shocked to see her deformed little fingers and the constant nervous shivers and trembling of the hands and body. She was unkempt, her clothes were torn and dirty, without even a pair of gloves in this bitter cold. She came to us a wild uncared for little child speaking the language of the gutter. And from what she has told us it is clear that she has been bundled about from place to place with no one to take a sufficient interest in her physical and moral welfare. She often says pathetically 'nobody ever wanted me'.

Her body still bears marks from abscesses and sores. She is still suffering at present from enuresis nocturna, and we have to attend to her regularly twice a night. She is restless in her sleep.

She is quite an intelligent child, but in the general opinion backward because of neglect. She had no idea of God or religion.

We have been moved and touched by the gratitude and love she is showing us and are very glad to say that since she has been with us her health and general condition have markedly improved, she speaks better, behaves better and her nerves are steadier.

There can be no doubt – and many people including herself can testify – that she is very happy with us. And it would, in our opinion, be outrageous, having regard to both her tragic history and the mutual affection and attachment that has grown between us and the child to wrench her away from her first and only happy environment. To her it would indeed be a tragedy.

I am resolved to continue as guardian of this unfortunate and defenceless little girl. Consequently **I shall not** expect your Representative Monday morning.¹⁹⁵

The Fund may have been wary of this impassioned avowal of concern, having received similar (though less articulate) letters from the Najbergs over the years. Goder's proprietorial manner and imputations of neglect offended them and his aggressive and confrontational tone compelled them to consult a solicitor in anticipation of having to

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Typed Report -January 1942, Kaizer to Mr Goder, 5 February 1942. Like many foster parents before her, Mrs Goder had rejected the Fund's used clothing and had purchased a significant new wardrobe for Ewa, for which she subsequently billed the Fund. Based upon their prior experience, the PJRF made what seemed the prudent decision to remove the child from their care.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., Mr Goder to PJRF 7 February 1942. Note: Mr Goder repeated the word 'markedly' for emphasis.

remove the child by force.¹⁹⁶ However, although they registered their strong objections to his characterisation of her previous care, something in Goder's letter must have swayed them, for they withdrew their threat to remove her, though making it clear they were 'the legal guardians of Ewa Mohr and are always at liberty to remove her'.¹⁹⁷

The reams of correspondence in this case provide an enormous amount of information about *Kinder* foster care, but also throw up innumerable interpretative possibilities. Mr Goder's ardent letter and the fact that Ewa was still living with the couple 'as a daughter' in 1947 seem to portend the best of outcomes for Ewa. But as previous cases demonstrated, without corroborating evidence such an interpretation must be approached with caution.¹⁹⁸ In this case however, Ewa's son Nigel definitively confirmed that Mr Goder was correct: it would indeed have been a tragedy for Ewa to have been wrenched away 'from her first and only' happy home. For the little girl who changed addresses at least twenty-one times in twenty-eight months, staying in nine foster homes, one hostel and three hospitals, the Goders *were* the ideal foster parents. They fully embraced her, legally adopted her, and even sent her to a Swiss finishing school.¹⁹⁹ A painting they had commissioned shortly after her arrival shows her as a pretty but pensive child who was nurtured, loved and provided with the stable, secure home that she so badly needed.

Ewa Mohr's first few years in England included the best and worst of foster care among carers who were driven



¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Shapiro to Kaizer 23 February 1942.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Kaizer to Goder, 25 February 1942. They made some suspect stipulations about religious education, since there was absolutely no mention of religious teaching while the child lived with the Najbergs. Also, citing their responsibilities as 'legal guardians' they claimed they had 'a duty of care to the child's parents [...] to exercise discretion in accordance with [their] wishes'. This was obviously just a ploy, since the Fund was well aware that Ewa no longer had living parents.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., Questle to Miss Ney, 4 August 1947.

¹⁹⁹ Evelyn Mohr Steele passed away in 1992. For the information on her life with the Goders I am indebted to her son Nigel, whom I interviewed on 30 April 2014. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Konrad Soyez, who in the course of his own historical research found both Nigel and me and helped us reconstruct Ewa's childhood experiences.

by a complex mix of motives. The claims and counter-claims from a multitude of actors each commenting upon the others' substandard care both challenge and instruct. Regarding her first custodians, the Norfolk billeting officer posed a critical question: 'Why *was* Mrs Najberg so extremely anxious to get the child back to herself?' The preponderance of evidence makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Najbergs' attachment to the money and clothing that accrued to Ewa drove a great deal of their professed attachment to her. Even given the legitimately mitigating circumstances repeatedly cited by the couple, all the evidence indicates that they used Ewa as leverage to clothe and provide for their own child and supplement their income. The Najbergs' countless professions of affection and attachment to Ewa obfuscated their motivations. It is difficult to dismiss these declamations as mere smokescreens, and it is likely that the family believed the sentiments to be genuine, though in light of their multiple abandonments of Ewa, their declarations appear disingenuous. Much less opaquely, the Najbergs were deeply concerned with their image and reputation as competent and caring foster parents. The couple conformed to the impulses of 'getting money from the Fund' and 'saving face with the Jewish community'. They might even have fulfilled the third of Paula Waldhorn's suggested motives. A few months after Ewa arrived, Mrs Najberg requested another foster child. This time, she specified a girl of about twelve, indicating the possibility that she was interested in acquiring a mother's helper as well.²⁰⁰

The Ewa Mohr case encapsulates the complicated and varied picture of voluntary foster care disclosed by both documents and testimony. Many cases, including Ewa Mohr's, demonstrate that Paula Waldhorn's cynical conclusions about foster parents were uncomfortably accurate. Financial motivations were troublingly common, as were the impulses to acquire unpaid domestic service. The desire for communal approbation and gratitude, though less easily quantified, was also apparent. Both wartime stresses and unrealistic expectations exposed the insubstantiality of many fostering bonds, and abandonment was too frequent an outcome, but attachment issues went both ways, as in the case of Fannie Obst. Although Paula made no allowance for altruism, it was also present in the Goders, the Davises and others who were motivated by affection and unselfishness and provided patient guidance and devotion for the children in their care.

A very different dynamic existed among foster parents who took in the children of

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Mrs Najberg to PJRF, 30 November 1939.

relatives. Like their counterparts who took in strangers' children, these foster parents came from a variety of backgrounds and were animated by a range of motives and expectations, not all of them selfless. The unique characteristics of such relationships, which have never before been examined in the context of the *Kindertransport*, lend themselves to a separate investigation.

II. Fostering the Children of Relatives

There were clear motives for sponsoring a relative's child. Many letters in the PJRF files attest to the concerns of those in Britain about endangered relations on the Continent, and the familial obligations that compelled them to house the offspring of distant relatives in spite of their own reservations or hardships. From the perspective of the refugee organisations, relatives who possessed the means to support a child appeared to be the ideal foster parents. There were assumptions that religion would not pose any problems, and the *Kinder*, not being the children of strangers, would find comfort and security in the homes of extended family members.²⁰¹ The relief agencies likely anticipated that such foster arrangements would require less oversight and intervention and that relatives would be less apt to ask for financial help. Some of these assumptions were accurate, for the correspondence with family carers is less extensive, reflecting far fewer interchanges about financial matters. However, the information about such fostering arrangements derived from home visit reports revealed that many of the other anticipations were misplaced. Although family fostering was sometimes ideal, in other instances reality was at variance with the expectations of the carers, the Fund and the *Kinder*.

The PJRF records actually only record a few examples of harmonious foster relations between relatives. These involved younger children and relatives who were conscientious and unselfish caretakers.²⁰² Several *Polenaktion Kinder*'s relations in the UK were themselves refugees and thus unable to sponsor a child, although some of

²⁰¹ For at least one *Kind*, religion was an issue. Ida Alt was sponsored by distant relatives in whose home 'she suffered much [...] mainly because she is very religious, while her relations were not religious'. USL/MS/183 213/1 Litvin report, 28 June 1942.

²⁰² USL/MS/183 591 F1 Joseph Blau was one such case as was Manfred Haberberg before evacuation. None of these cases generated much correspondence, making extended case studies difficult.

these did take the children in once they were established.²⁰³ In general, those who sponsored relatives' children were already settled in Britain and had the financial wherewithal to bring a child into their homes although material security was no predictor of congeniality in these relationships.

Contesting expectations were responsible for most of the discord in these foster homes, and occasionally, miscommunication of those expectations was the biggest obstacle to amicable relations. These issues appear to have severed the fostering bond between the Grabers and their sixteen-year-old nephew, Leon. When Dr Litvin visited in 1942, the boy no longer lived with them because Mrs Graber had 'no maid and is overburdened with work'.²⁰⁴ Though he earned a good wage, Leon did not contribute anything towards his board and lodging.²⁰⁵ Mrs Graber described Leon as healthy, happy and a frequent visitor, but Litvin believed she felt guilty about Leon's departure and 'tried to justify herself and depict Graber as a very difficult young man' adding 'as all young men in his age, as you know'.²⁰⁶ Litvin summoned Leon for an interview 'as I do not think the whole story is as simple as his aunt told me', but his fears proved unfounded, and Leon confirmed his aunt's report.²⁰⁷ Although it was reasonable for foster parents to ask an employed nineteen-year-old contribute financially, the Grabers did not make that request, and Leon failed to do so voluntarily, causing the breakdown of their relationship. The aunt displaced her own guilt about the failure of the arrangement by describing Leon as 'very difficult'. Leon, in turn, may have considered his aunt and uncle substitute parents and, expecting to be treated as a son rather than a boarder, failed to contribute to the household. In this case, the extended family maintained a level of cordiality despite their incompatibility.

At the other end of the spectrum were foster relations whose excessive demands on their relatives' children resulted in mutual discontent. The fraught relationship of Mr Silverstone and his niece and nephew Sara and Josef Sztajn exemplifies this dynamic. The uncle, a tobacconist in the East End had appealed on their behalf in December 1938, vowing to 'maintain and support them'.²⁰⁸ Soon after their arrival, Mr Silverstone found them burdensome and petitioned the Fund for help.

¹⁹⁶ USL/MS/183 562 F2 Herbert Klarmann and USL/MS/183 591 F2 Jehuda Lauicht.

²⁰⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F2 'Summary of a Report By Dr Litvin', 6 February 1942

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F2 B Silverstone to IAC, 14 December 1938.

What is the boy to do. He cannot walk about without any work & without a penny in his pocket. I cannot give him. I have to feed and clothe both him and his sister. The business today as you know is very bad owing to the war and the expenses are very high, therefore I must ask you to get him a permit to take up some work as soon as possible.²⁰⁹

Plagued like so many others by wartime business concerns and frustrated by delays in Josef's work permit, the émigré uncle was understandably upset. But his concerns were unappreciated by Elsley Zeitlyn, who, according to his dictated reply, 'greatly resents the tone of your letter'.²¹⁰ Silverstone was reminded that it was at his 'urgent and insistent request' that the Fund had consented to bringing the children to Britain, and Zeitlyn 'relied upon your undertaking to look after these children'.²¹¹ Zeitlyn perceived that Graber was 'nursing a grievance against this Fund' and hoped that 'the terms of your letter [are] due to some ignorant hand which wrote it on your behalf'.²¹² Zeitlyn's approach to foster parents he considered ungrateful was similar to the one he adopted with recalcitrant refugee boys and he was apt to address them with condescension and even disrespect. Expecting relatives to be more self-reliant and less demanding than other foster parents, he clearly felt that Silverstone owed him appreciation rather than complaints.

Dr Litvin's reports on the mutually antagonistic inhabitants of the Silverstone household shed considerable light on the complicated interrelationships among the Fund, foster carers and refugee children. Although the children lived with relatives, the Fund still took responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being, and they saw the children several times over the next few months. Both siblings handed most of their wages over for board and lodging, but Litvin noted sardonically that the Grabers were 'dissatisfied with the children (the eternal complaint of relatives), who they say are not grateful enough and also not obedient enough'.²¹³ Many foster parents expected gratitude, but Litvin's parenthetical comment implied that foster relatives' expectations were exponentially greater.²¹⁴ When the siblings gave frank interviews outside the presence of their foster parents, they complained about having to provide their own clothing, the aunt's refusal to give Josef 'a hot meal when he comes home in the evening' and Sara's having 'to do household work whereas her aunt's daughter is doing

²⁰⁹ Ibid., B Silverstone to PJRF, 21 November 1939.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Zeitlyn (Secretary) to B Silverstone, 15 December 1939.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., Dr Litvin Report (typed) re SS and JS, 23 February 1942.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

nothing'.²¹⁵ The interviewer concluded that the 'aunt appears to be unwilling to look after Sara or her brother'.²¹⁶

The Fund made concerted efforts to credit the grievances of all parties and tried to ascertain the truth from the perspective of all members of a household. They requested an interview with the aunt be 'in order to find out the correct reasons of the said complaints'.²¹⁷ Tellingly, the aunt never called in, but the uncle made a request for blankets, claiming that he could not afford 'to buy any and they both need them very badly'.²¹⁸ The PJRF was willing to hear the couple's side of the story, but the request for necessities such as blankets, added to the rest of the evidence, tipped the balance in favour of the children. Within six months, the Fund had helped Josef find alternate lodgings, and Sara joined him later.²¹⁹ The Silverstones, who were not wealthy, certainly had a right to expect some contribution from their niece and nephew, and it is important to give them the benefit of the doubt. However, their own correspondence and Dr Litvin's reports paint a less than stellar portrait of the pair as foster guardians, and their insensitive treatment of the children may well have played a part in Josef's later mental breakdown.²²⁰

The lack of testimony from *Polenaktion Kinder* who were taken in by relatives makes it difficult to confirm interpretations of the documentary evidence. In fact, very few *Kinder* who were sponsored by relatives have recorded their memories, so not much is known about these foster care arrangements. For example, in *I Came Alone*, only six of over 300 testimonies were from those who went to live with relatives. Two said nothing at all about the experience, two expressed mild unhappiness tempered with gratitude and two were unreservedly critical of the treatment they received.²²¹ As reflected in the PJRF files, few *Kinder* seem to have had wholly satisfactory experiences in the homes of relatives.²²² The overall negativity of these interactions, rather than their rarity, may account for the dearth of testimony about familial fostering. The powerful forces of family fealty may have inhibited *Kinder* from speaking unkindly

²¹⁵ Ibid., 'Report of Interview with JS by RS', 15 March 1942.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 'Report of Interview with SS by RS', 15 March 1942.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 'Report of Interview with JS by RS', 22 June 1942.

²¹⁸ Ibid., B Silverstone to Kaizer, 29 June 1942.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 'Report of Interview with JS by RS', 22 June 1942.

²²⁰ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Josef's breakdown.

²²¹ Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* pp. 207, 236-7, 248-9, 250-1, 262-3. Some of these placements were very short. In Gershon, *We Came as Children*, pp. 54-5 are two accounts, both negative.

²²² See Hannele Zürndorfer, *The Ninth of November*, (London: Quartet, 1983) for a positive, if short-lived foster placement with an aunt and uncle in Hampstead.

about the relatives who sponsored them, and rather than record narratives of discontent, they chose to remain silent.

One family fostering case in the Polish Fund files has been complemented by later testimony, which, though not extensive, contributed eloquently to the discourse of the documentary evidence. The situation in the home of Mr and Mrs Solberg, who sponsored their thirteen-year-old nephew Itzach Garburger bore many similarities to the Silverstone/Sztajn saga although the Fund had not anticipated any problems with the family. A handwritten postscript on Itzach's guarantee form noted that the family was 'Respectable and consider should prove good for our purpose'.²²³ There was little contact until a 1942 home visit at which Dr Litvin learned that Itzach worked for his uncle along with another relative who was present at the interview.²²⁴

Mr. Solberg and Mr Finkle bitterly complained. They said that Garburger was a difficult boy, that his German habits were bad, that he was ungrateful etc. Especially Mr Finkle complained. Mr Solberg, while agreeing [...] tried to justify Garburger's behaviour saying that you cannot expect anything better from modern children and specially German children. 'You can never satisfy a relation' he added.²²⁵

Like the Grabers and the Silverstones, Itzach's relations focused on his 'difficult' behaviour and lack of gratitude. Polish immigrants themselves, the Solberg's disparaging remarks about German habits may have reflected the *Ostjuden/Westjuden* resentments seen in other foster relationships.²²⁶ Dr Litvin, whose intuitions about foster families were well honed, incisively assessed the dynamic in the Solberg home.

The boy looks very pale and is dissatisfied as far as I could understand from his replies or rather from his looks. All my attempts to speak with him in private were unsuccessful. He should be asked to call at our office to have with him a frank talk.²²⁷

Itzach visited Soho Square and complained about money and clothing, telling Dr Litvin that he disliked box making and wanted to become an engineer, for which the Fund promised to help.²²⁸ Itzach stayed with the Solbergs just until he was old enough to

²²³ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Save the Children Inter Aid Guarantee Form, 21 December 1938.

²²⁴ Mr F was Mr S's son-in-law.

²²⁵ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Litvin, 'Report on Zbonszyn Children No 7', 16 February 1942.

²²⁶ See the discussion of DB earlier in the chapter.

²²⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Litvin, 'Report on Zbonszyn Children No 7', 16 February 1942. In contrast to Litvin's perceptive and detailed remarks, an RCM welfare report the following year contained only the perfunctory observation that 'the boy seems to get on all right in every respect'. USL/MS/183 575 F2 W Rupin to Kaizer, 17 August 1943.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, Report, 27 March 1942. They offered help in locating evening classes for IG to attend.

enter the military, engaging the help of the PJRF to apply for the Air Training Corps.²²⁹

Joining up allowed Itzach to escape the Solbergs and in 1947, when he became a naturalised citizen, he took a completely new name – a clear rejection of his previous existence.²³⁰ The evidence in Itzach's file pointed decisively to a discordant and unsatisfactory foster relationship for all parties, but without confirmation, this interpretation could only be speculative. When located in 2013 and asked to comment on his experiences, the former Itzach Garburger declined, stating through his wife that he had 'decided not to delve back into that awful period of his life'.²³¹ The last time he had discussed his past he had 'suffered dreadfully' with 'terrible dreams and horrible nightmares' and he had 'no desire to repeat that exceedingly unhappy experience'.²³²

Somewhat counterintuitively, foster care among relatives produced some of the most fraught relationships. Often burdened by heightened expectations arising from a shared family heritage and hampered by prejudices and family tensions, foster parents and their relatives' children experienced greater disappointments than those who came together as strangers. For the foster families, pecuniary motivations were generally absent, replaced by the anticipation of filial obedience and gratitude from those they had 'saved' and the expectations of material contributions to the family. The children, anticipating inclusion into their relatives' families and guidance from caring parental substitutes, were upset when treated as lodgers and employees. These interconnected and idealistic imaginings manifested themselves in the disillusionment and discontent Dr Litvin observed in home after home. The British relatives undoubtedly faced difficulties and sacrifices in sponsoring and housing the children of their less fortunate family members. However, the fact that so many of these children felt ill-used and unhappy is a sign that merely bringing them out of 'No-Man's Land' and putting a roof over their heads was not enough. As Dr Litvin concluded in a home visit report to one of these families, 'By the way, my experience is that relations are not too good as foster parents'.²³³

Fostering by relatives was a unique situation, experienced by relatively few

²²⁹ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Kaizer to Commanding Officer Air Training Corps Hackney, 10 April 1944. The Fund assured his commanding officer that 'in general we can give the best references', perhaps fearing that his family might not help be much help to IG's cause.

²³⁰ *London Gazette*, Issue no 38179 P 418, 16 January 1948 <<http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/38179/pages/418> >[accessed 21 February 2013].

²³¹ Private email communications with author, 25 February 2013.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ USL/MS/183 575 F2 J Litvin, 'Report on Zbonszyn Children No 7', 16 February 1942.

Kinder. In contrast, evacuation foster homes were among the most widely experienced hospitality variants, possessing distinctive characteristics. Evacuation foster carers were strangers, unburdened by familial ties and expectations, but laden with their own set of challenges. As in all fostering, *Kinder* found a range of carers in evacuation homes, but the unique circumstances that brought Jewish refugee children into ordinary British households produced some of the most stable and enduring foster relationships for the *Polenaktion Kinder*.

III. Evacuation Foster Carers

There are clear distinctions between those who sponsored refugee children and those who billeted evacuees. The government maintained compulsory billeting powers, and families deemed to have extra room were compelled to take in evacuees.²³⁴ Only school-aged children were evacuated, so these families did not have to deal with the challenges of older teenagers and they were generally not expected to act as substitute parents since most of the evacuated children had families in England. These expectations were altered somewhat in the case of unaccompanied child refugees but in all cases, the billeting families did not have to support the children financially. They were promised billeting allowances, though these fees were so modest that few families would have been induced to take in children simply for the money.²³⁵ Insofar as they had any independent motivation to provide housing, billeting families were probably moved more by patriotism than altruism. As Baumel-Schwartz argued, evacuation foster parents felt a ‘national burden and collective British responsibility’ to provide hospitality, and ‘social status’ attached to their offers.²³⁶ Billeting families might anticipate community approbation for their actions, but many householders regarded their billeted children as boarders rather than foster children, and few carers expected that long-term or adoptive relationships would ensue. Indeed, billets changed frequently and many of these relationships were fleeting ones.²³⁷

²³⁴ Edward Timms, ‘The Ordeals of *Kinder* and Evacuees in Comparative Perspective’, in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds., *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/9: New Perspectives*, pp. 125-140, (pp. 126-7).

²³⁵ John E. Forbat, *Evacuee Boys: Letters of a Family Separated by War*, (Port Stroud: The History Press, 2012), pp. 15-19.

²³⁶ Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 159.

²³⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Grete Dukat.

The *Kinder* were only a small portion of all evacuees and their experiences differed from those of British born children, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Most obviously, British children had parents and families to whom they could turn when homesick or in need of help, and with whom they could visit, however infrequently. The *Kinder* relied upon the various relief agencies and their evacuation foster families for emotional and material sustenance.²³⁸ Few studies are devoted specifically to the Jewish experience of evacuation, but a non-*Kinder* memoir sheds some light on the subject.²³⁹ The preserved letters of John and Andrew Forbat, the children of Hungarian Jewish refugees who arrived in England in 1936, provide a fascinating and valuable glimpse into rural evacuation.²⁴⁰ Their recounted experiences and the accounts of British Jewish children suggest that few evacuation destinations were prepared for Jewish evacuees. Bernard Rosenfeld, who was evacuated with his brother from London's East End to a remote Cambridgeshire farm, recalled that their elderly hosts' first act was to remove their caps to see if Jews really did have horns.²⁴¹ The Zbąszyń *Kind* Anita Alpern recalled that in rural Devon, people 'didn't know what Jews were. They wouldn't have been a bit surprised if we did have the horns. They didn't understand the concept of being Jewish at all'.²⁴² Similar experiences were reported by other *Kinder*.²⁴³

Jewish refugee children were subjected to both the transparent prejudices described above and a veiled antisemitism that was incorporated into the general disgruntlement of evacuation carers. The Forbat brothers' hostess, Mrs Kelly, was dissatisfied from the outset because 'the money she gets for billeting us is far too little' and she wanted their parents 'to contribute with a reasonable amount to our keeping'.

²³⁸ Edward Timms, 'The Ordeals of *Kinder* and Evacuees in Comparative Perspective', p. 138. This study, concluded that while superficially similar in some respects, the two experiences varied enormously in their degree of trauma. Likening evacuation to an extended hospital stay or being sent away to boarding school, Edward Timms suggests that 'the ordeals of Evacuees were in a minor key compared to those of the *Kinder*'.

²³⁹ Baumel 'Twice a Refugee', pp. 175-184 looks at the experience of *Kinder* in evacuation with special attention to their religious care.

²⁴⁰ John E. Forbat, *Evacuee Boys*.

²⁴¹ Phone interview with Bernard Rosenfeld. Despite this inauspicious beginning, the children and the old childless couple bonded, so much so that years later when they died, the younger brother was the one to raise headstones for the pair in the village churchyard. A similar story is told in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p. 364, although in that case the attribute in question was not horns but tails!

²⁴² USCSF/VHA 16323 Anita Alpern Jaye, 1996.

²⁴³ See Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone* p. 354 and Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, p. 91.

She said she hated to do this & she would not have done it were it a question of a few weeks only, but the war might last for years & prices of food are getting higher [and] other people have [asked] for help from the children's parents.²⁴⁴

These were the common complaints of many foster parents but even with the extra money, the Kellys exhibited dissatisfactions. Mr Kelly objected to the boys referring to him as their landlord, declaring 'he was no landlord to us until we paid anything like £2 a week. As we are now, we are only in his house through his charity and kind-heartedness'.²⁴⁵ To the common fostering conceits of benevolence and gratitude, Mr Kelly added something that young Forbat 'did not understand'—

'When you came here I did not take you in as Jews, but as children in distress. If your conduct had been such as to alter this attitude, it was your own fault'.²⁴⁶

The Forbat brothers were subject to latent antisemitic stereotypes no less pernicious than the ones Bernard Rosenfeld and Anita Alpern encountered. The Forbats' parents were invaluable in helping the brothers navigate these prejudices and petty slights and provided for them both materially and emotionally during the long years of evacuation.

Most *Kinder* were bereft of these resources and relied upon the organisations and individuals responsible for them to fill the role of their missing parents. In this capacity, the PJRF depended upon regional refugee organisations to liaise with billeting families. The Fund developed few relationships with these hosts, accounting for the relative lack of correspondence in the files from evacuation carers. In addition, some local committee members actively discouraged the Fund from corresponding directly with their foster families and mediated all communications with the Fund. As a result, investigation and interpretation of evacuation fostering is challenged by evidentiary gaps.

A few evacuation foster placements were long-term, and these reflected in some respects the relationships that developed in voluntary foster care. The most illustrative of these is the case of Sever Kleinberg whose foster mother's brief but regular letters were sprinkled throughout with glimpses of her regard for her foster son. Mrs Padgham, received the twelve-year-old in 1941, and immediately requested 'a decent blazer' because 'I should like him to look well cared for'.²⁴⁷ She was particularly concerned with shoes 'as he is wearing an old pair of my husband's and continually getting wet

²⁴⁴ Forbat, *Evacuee Boys* p. 15. The family received seventeen shillings a week for the two boys. Mrs Kelly requested that the family supplement this with an additional ten shillings a week.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Mrs Padgham to Kaizer, 2 July 1941.

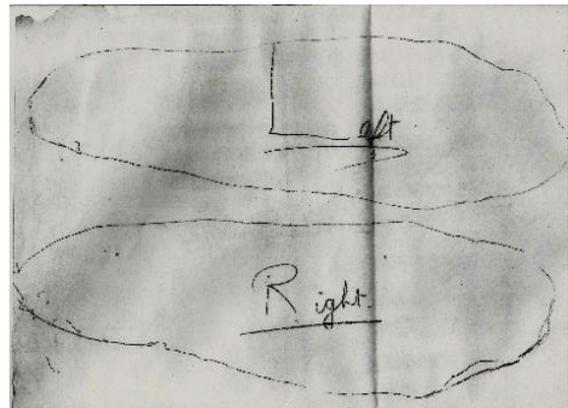
feet, which if something is not done soon will end in him being ill'.²⁴⁸ The boy's original guarantor, citing the wartime decline of his business, declared that he was no longer able to provide for Sever, but the Fund felt he should continue to support the boy, leaving Mrs Padgham caught in the middle.²⁴⁹

I am getting rather tired with being pushed first to one person and then to someone else, just because I am taking a little interest in the boy and intend to get him decently clothed while he is in my care.²⁵⁰

Understandably frustrated, her letters also implied that Sever's shoddy clothing would reflect badly on her. However, her persistence with a plodding and unresponsive organisation is evidence of her unselfish motives and her desire for Sever's appearance to correspond to the level of care she was providing. Later, when ill-fitting shoes were sent from London, Mrs Padgham sent a diagram of Sever's feet to ensure the Fund sent the right size next time.

From a refugee committee's perspective, ideal foster parents made few demands and kept them updated on their *Kinder's* activities and general well-being. In this

respect, Mrs Padgham was a model of conscientious custodianship. The foster mother's few but informative letters reveal the framework of a normal village life emerging for the boy. In response to a standard four-question letter the Fund periodically sent out to foster parents, Mrs Padgham sent a detailed and informative



report. He attended Hebrew classes weekly and he 'has just bought himself some handkerchiefs and a pair of wellingtons'.²⁵¹

I do not think he is receiving any training for employment but he does a small newspaper round every morning and evening if required. The money he earns I have encouraged him to buy savings certificates and also small incidentals.²⁵²

A concerned guardian, Mrs Padgham instilled the values of hard work and financial responsibility and ensured that Sever maintain religious contacts. She also asked 'if there is any way in which he could try and get in touch with his parents. He has not

²⁴⁸ Ibid., Mrs Padgham to PJRF, 1 December 1941.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid., Mrs Padgham to PJRF, 17 February 1942.

²⁵² Ibid.

heard from them for over a year'.²⁵³ This suggests that Sever had confided in his foster mother, and that she had listened with a sympathetic ear.

Sever is in perfect health and growing a big lad. He is progressing favourably at school [...] He is also taking music lessons for which he pays himself and is a scout. He is treated in this house exactly the same as my son who is about the same age. My only difficulty is keeping him properly clothed.²⁵⁴

Without testimonial confirmation, it is not possible to conclude definitively, but Sever seems to have enjoyed a stable and supportive upbringing with a couple who treated him 'like family'. It is unclear how long he remained with them. Sever, who grew to a handsome young man, trained as an engineer and was naturalised in 1947. Although his sister stayed in England, in 1952 he emigrated permanently to Brazil.²⁵⁵

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| FICHA CONSULAR DE QUALIFICAÇÃO | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Esta ficha, expedida em duas vias, será entregue à Polícia Marítima e à Imigração no porto de destino | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nome por extenso | Sever KLEINBERG (Sewer) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Admitido em território nacional em caráter | PERMANENTE (temporário ou permanente) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nos termos do art. 9 | letra | do dec. n. 7967, de 1945 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lugar e data de nascimento | Frankfurt 28 / 1 / 1929 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nacionalidade | britânica | | Estado civil solteiro | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Filiação (nome do Pai e da Mãe) | Oskar e Alice KLEINBERG | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Profissão | Engenheiro | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Residência no país de origem | Niederamstädter Str., 177, Darmstadt, NOME Germany. IDADE SEXO | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FILHOS MENORES DE 18 ANOS | <table border="1"> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| visado sob n. | 269 | | Consulado Geral do Brasil em Londres 26 de Fev ^a de 19 52 pelo CONSUL Geral J. Camargo Wilson | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ASSINATURA DO PORTADOR: |  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| NOTA—Esta ficha deve ser preenchida à máquina pela autoridade consular, sendo as duas vias em original. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Other children's good experiences in evacuation foster care are corroborated by later testimony, confirming that they integrated well into their host families' lives, though not benefiting from the conscientious religious instruction Sever Kleinberg received. Grete Dukat, a young girl with bright eyes and an open face who lived with the Wickham family for about eighteen months was one such child. In response to the Fund's inquiries, her foster mother detailed her 'thoroughly satisfactory' development,

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Mrs Padgham to PJRF 4 July 1942.

²⁵⁵ 'Sever Ou Sewer Kleinberg', *My Heritage* <<http://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-30284/brazil-rio-de-janeiro-immigration-cards-1900-1965?s=253780411&itemId=276344-&action=showRecord>> [accessed 10 September 2014]

adding, ‘She is a likeable girl’.²⁵⁶ Greta’s school fees and incidental expenses were paid for by the American Foster Parents’ scheme, a charity from which a number of Zbąszyń



children received small gifts, pocket money and small educational stipends.²⁵⁷ In addition, the family received the usual modest billeting allowance, which as most evacuation foster parents discovered, did not cover the full costs of the child. Unlike the Forbat brothers’ hosts, Mrs Wickham was prepared to supplement the allowance ‘to meet our standard of living’ and ensure ‘that Greta joins in all our family activities’.²⁵⁸ The foster mother stressed that ‘Greta always appears very happy and contented and is now

one of the family, and enters into our English life well’.²⁵⁹ Like Sever, Greta found a placement in which she was treated ‘like family’ rather than as a boarder, even to the extent of the Wickham’s desire to anglicise and integrate her into ‘English life’. The foster mother made it clear that she was aware of the risks to Greta’s Jewish identity in living with a Christian family.

Her religious education is neglected. We are a Church of England family and since I do not understand Greta’s religion, all I can do is to watch and guide to the best of my ability and encourage her to read her own prayer book.²⁶⁰

There was no guarantee of the effectiveness of such passive religious instruction especially when a young child was encouraged to become part of a non-Jewish family. Despite the Wickhams’ well-intentioned guidance, the lack of formal Jewish religious education and contact had consequences for Greta, who later lived with another Christian family. As an adult, she shed her Jewish identity, marrying outside the faith

²⁵⁶ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Mr and Mrs Wickham to Kaizer, 14 February 1942.

²⁵⁷ The organisation was formally known as ‘Foster Parents Plan for War Children’ co-founded by British journalist John Langdon-Davies and refugee worker Eric Muggerridge in 1937 to help displaced children from the Spanish Civil War. It was chartered in New York to expand its charitable base, and during the Second World War provided aid for displaced children in England, mainly with sponsorships from Americans, including, prominently, Eleanor Roosevelt. This is probably why it is referred to as the ‘American Foster Parents Scheme’ in PJRF records. See *Plan*, ‘History’ <<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/history/>> [accessed 24 April 2014] and *University of Rhode Island Library Special Collections and Archives*, ‘Guide to the Records of Foster Parents Plan International, Volume 2 1937-1982’ http://www.uri.edu/library/special_collections/registers/manuscripts/msg117.2.xml [accessed 24 April 2014].

²⁵⁸ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Wickhams to Kaizer, 14 February 1942.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and separating from the religion of her birth.²⁶¹ In an interview, Greta confirmed that the fondness expressed in the Wickhams' letter was genuine, and she maintained her contacts with them and her other foster family into adulthood, recalling that in both homes she was treated as a daughter and remembering her hosts with affection.²⁶²

The relative paucity of evacuation foster parents' correspondence elevates the evidentiary significance of documents about rather than from carers. As an example, not a single letter from Josef Kamiel's foster mothers, Ruth and Polly Gosling, has been preserved, although they cared for him for ten years. The most complete account of their care was contained in a letter from the boys' Jewish teacher, Mr Cohen.²⁶³

- (1) Josef Kamiel is living with two other Polish boys, Gerhard and Manfred Korman, in a very nice cottage.
- (2) They are well looked after, receive four meals a day and do not eat any meat. They have milk, cheese, fish and puddings made with butter.
- (3) They have all received gifts from the cottager. When Josef had his birthday in December, he had a birthday party and received many presents such as ties, shirts, stockings etc. The boys also had a bicycle given to them.²⁶⁴

The Goslings honoured the children's Jewish dietary proscriptions and their generosity was manifest. Cohen emphasised that Josef, who had arrived as a small, wary and nervous seven year old, 'has improved in every way since coming here. He is bigger, looks healthy, and is very well liked'.²⁶⁵ His 'only unhappiness' was that 'he hasn't heard from his mother' but the visitor was 'quite satisfied Josef is well looked after'.²⁶⁶ Cohen's observations were corroborated in Gerd Korman's memoir and by the accounts Josef gave to his family about his years with the Goslings.²⁶⁷ But despite the Gosling's conscientious efforts to avoid contravening Josef's



²⁶¹ Interview with Greta Dukat Sole, 15 May 2012.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Parts of this letter were excerpted in Chapter 1.

²⁶⁴ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 L Cohen to Mr Klein, 14 January 1940.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Gerd Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale*, p. 125. Kamiel family correspondence.

faith, the long years without exposure to regular Jewish teaching led to his drift away from Orthodox Judaism and the religious crisis in Talaton recounted in the previous chapter.²⁶⁸

Unfortunately, not all evacuation foster parents were as respectful of the children's religion integrity. Sylvia Balbierer, a freckled-faced child with light eyes and



a bright smile, was placed with the elderly Mr and Mrs Riddell whom she described as 'very religious people' who 'began to harass me to change my religion'.²⁶⁹ Sylvia, who was about thirteen, resisted, but the couple told her they were trying to 'save' her. When Sylvia told them 'I don't want to be saved, I want to be Jewish', Mrs Riddell threatened to write to the committee and tell them that Sylvia was uncooperative and was not clean.²⁷⁰ Sylvia remembered Mr Riddell as 'quite nice, but always in his barbershop' while his wife was 'a dreadful woman. She really drove me nuts'.²⁷¹ The local

committee was informed, and while they did not remove her from the home, sent a Jewish teacher to her once a week 'to keep me up to date on Jewishness'.²⁷² She had to live with the Riddells until she left school, when she got a job and moved into a Jewish hostel.

Although many *Kinder* found Jewish hostel life unsatisfactory, for others including Sylvia it was a positive experience. She was 'much happier among refugee children' and especially relieved to get away from the overt conversionary tactics of her foster mother.²⁷³ Sylvia resided in an area overseen by a particularly authoritative Movement regional secretary, who declined to inform the Fund about the situation in the Riddell home, and thus no documentation of the proselytization exists in the PJRF

²⁶⁸ See the discussion of the religious crisis in Talaton in Chapter 1.

²⁶⁹ USCSF/VHA Sylvia Balbierer Schneider.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. Sylvia was later befriended by a wealthy local Jewish woman, with whom she hoped to forge a warm relationship, but found that once the woman had 'done her good deed' by giving Sylvia a room in her large home, the woman had little wish to have anything more to do with her. This was especially hard on Sylvia when she received the shocking news that her adored older sister, who had preceded her on a *Kindertransport* and was training to be a nurse, had died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage at the age of eighteen.

records.²⁷⁴ It is difficult to know how they might have reacted since no other child's file contained accounts of blatant proselytization. However, the Fund's relations with Christian carers suggest that they would have acted circumspectly. Several children's files provide evidence that interactions with non-Jews were judicious and deferential. These approaches were evident in the Fund's response to Ewa Mohr's billeting officer, for example. In another instance, a deferential note to Josef Kamiel was enclosed in a letter to his foster mother indicating that they were 'most happy' to provide him 'with any clothing you may require' stressing their anxiety 'to furnish you with new clothing' and asking him whether he required 'any Pocket Money, books etc. as these we will gladly provide'.²⁷⁵ As the Fund's correspondence with other children attested, that level of courtesy and generosity were not the norm. The timing suggests that Josef's unusual treatment was at least partially for the benefit of his Christian foster mother and reflected both the significant attention his case was receiving and the Fund's desire to manage their image with the wider community.

The correspondence indicates a significant difference in the organisations' communications with non-Jewish and Jewish carers. Reverend Lewin, a Jewish leader involved with Sever Kleinberg's case, took the Fund to task when Mrs Padgham encountered clothing difficulties. He provided the foster mother with money 'as one cannot expect this kind Christian lady to do everything for the boy out of her own pocket'.²⁷⁶ Lewin chastised the Fund's neglect as 'unfair' and reminded them that 'your attitude creates a very bad impression with the Christian foster mother'.²⁷⁷ He even threatened to 'take steps with the quarters that provide you with the money for your work'.²⁷⁸ Lewin's reaction reflected Anglo-Jewish leaders' concerns about their image in British society and especially about Christians' perceptions of them. These concerns did not extend to the Jewish community. No religious leaders interfered on behalf of Jewish foster parents whose requests for clothing and maintenance were similarly

²⁷⁴ Sylvia lived within the jurisdiction of RCM Region 12, and its chairman, Mrs Bethell was insistent upon managing the Fund's children with as little interference as possible. Her office arranged for the Jewish teacher, but did not let the Fund know about what was going on in the home. Mrs Bethell's relationship with the Fund is dealt with later in this chapter.

²⁷⁵ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Kaizer to Josef Kamiel, 5 November 1943 and Josef Kamiel to Kaizer, 14 January 1944. No other child received an unsolicited offer of 'pocket money, books etc'. The Fund later sent Josef Chanukah toys and sweets. Although children were routinely sent five shillings at Passover, there only other example of a Chanukah toy being sent to a refugee child was a doll named 'Polly' sent to Ewa Mohr. USL/MS/183 476/1 PJRF to Ewa Mohr, 24 November 1941

²⁷⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Reverend Lewin to PJRF, 3 December 1941.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Lewin to PJRF, 17 December 1941.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

delayed. Nor were Christian carers ever on the receiving end of the sharp and condescending responses Elsley Zeitlyn sometimes sent to Jewish carers.²⁷⁹ These divergent responses to Jewish and Christian carers fit within a larger framework of British Jewish/non-Jewish relations, a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study. However, these preliminary findings do suggest the need for further investigation of refugee agencies' interactions with a variety of foster carers.

Evacuation foster parents occupy a distinct place among the *Kinder's* everyday carers. Many of these relationships were transitory, and the relative paucity of correspondence from caretakers makes analysis of their role more challenging. The evidence that does exist indicates that many children found concerned, affectionate care in their evacuation foster homes, though short stays did not always afford opportunities for life-long bonding. Immersion in non-Jewish environments compromised many children's Jewish identification, despite some Christian carers' sincere efforts to honour the religious heritage of their wards. The compulsory nature of evacuation hospitality probably minimized conversionary motivation, but outright proselytization still occurred. Similarly, there were fewer instances of labour exploitation in evacuation settings, which is attributable to both the younger age of evacuees, and the additional surveillance of local billeting officers. One important aspect of evacuation foster care was the involvement of local and regional refugee workers in the children's care. In many instances, these volunteers had such a marked role in the *Kinder's* lives that they are justifiably included among everyday carers.

IV. Local Refugee Workers

Community refugee workers who interacted regularly with *Kinder* wielded considerable control and influence over those in their care, though the children rarely boarded in these workers' homes. Often acting as powerful advocates for *Kinder*, these volunteers, the majority of whom were non-Jewish women, were members of local refugee organisations affiliated with RCM regional centres.²⁸⁰ They administered quotidian necessities, advocated with the London agencies for financial and material needs and

²⁷⁹ See the responses to Mrs Orenstein and Mr Silverstone above.

²⁸⁰ See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, p. 158 for a more complete discussion of these events and committees. The one exception appears to be the Worthing Refugee Committee, which had at least three men who were actively involved with the refugee boys there.

helped secure employment and training for the children. Acting as parental substitutes in many respects, these workers were crucially important to many refugee children's everyday lives.

Local committee members were often in the best position to advise the London agencies about the academic progress and capabilities of the children in their area. For example, among the Fund's children championed by the Worthing Refugee Committee, was Bruno Nussbaum, the budding young architect profiled in Chapter 1.²⁸¹ When he was evacuated from Worthing, the secretary, Mrs Thornycroft, noted that her committee was 'very anxious' that he continue his training in order to 'become a useful member of society earning a good wage as an architectural draftsman'.²⁸²

[M]y committee realises the difficulty involved in giving preferential treatment to one boy, [and] it is willing to pay half the fees [...] to attend the local municipal technical school for one year not exceeding £4.²⁸³

This offer was quite remarkable in view of refugee organisations' perpetually strained finances, especially considering that Bruno was no longer even in their jurisdiction. Emphasizing the magnitude of the issue, Mrs Thornycroft added, 'I trust that your committee will see its way to giving this boy the opportunity that may make the whole difference in his life'.²⁸⁴

A few local committee representatives showed exceptional involvement in the lives of refugee children in their areas. The Secretary of the Movement's Region 12 office in Tunbridge Wells, Mrs Bethell, along with Helen Trouton, secretary of the Rotherford Guardian Committee, were indefatigable in attending to the myriad needs of eight Zbąszyń girls who were all billeted with local non-Jewish foster mothers. The girls' records are dominated by clothing concerns, and Mrs Bethell possessed a limited tolerance for the Fund's inefficiencies in providing properly fitting clothes in a timely fashion. She often resorted to purchasing them herself and trusting that the Fund 'will approve my action and refund the amount in the enclosed bill to me'.²⁸⁵ As her unabashed approach indicated, Mrs Bethell was a forceful personality who considered herself in charge of the girls in her region. This conceit was accepted by other organisations including the Polish Research Centre (PRC), which informed the Fund

²⁸¹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Mrs Thornycroft to Zeitlyn, 27 February 1940. See Chapter 1.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, Mrs Thornycroft to PJRF Case Committee, 12 January 1941.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Despite the offer, the PJRF declined to pay for Bruno's further schooling, and he was forced to seek advancement on his own. See Chapter 1 for the refugee organisations' approach to Bruno.

²⁸⁵ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Mrs Bethell to PJRF, 28 August 1942.

that one of their beneficiaries, Greta Dukat, ‘is in the charge of the Refugee Children’s Movement and Mrs Bethell [...] is responsible for her’.²⁸⁶ This information would have been news to the Fund, which had never turned Greta’s case over to the Movement or Mrs Bethell. Similarly, when Kaizer inquired about Anna Orchan, using the name on her official documents, Mrs Bethell curtly replied, ‘this girl’s name is HANNAH. She is living now in the London Region and is no longer under *my care*’.²⁸⁷ Mrs Bethell also discouraged the Fund from communicating directly with the girls’ foster mothers, dryly remarking when she sent one of their welfare inquiries back ‘I think the enclosed form must have been sent in error direct to the foster parent, instead of to the Regional Office’ giving the information requested.²⁸⁸ Her terse answers, which focused on the committee’s work rather than on the girl’s progress, did not compare in tone nor were they as instructive as letters from the foster parents themselves.²⁸⁹

Occasionally, regional refugee workers became even more involved with the refugee children in their areas. Miss Trouton, the other dominant personality in the Tunbridge Wells region, gave the girls religious education and took a child into to her home.²⁹⁰ Miss Trouton’s committee was another that championed a particularly able student, Helene Ettinger. In conveying her committee’s support for the child, Miss Trouton informed the Movement that ‘of all the refugee children who have passed through her hands, Helene is outstandingly the one who most merits and would profit most by further education’.²⁹¹

The Rotherford committee feel so strongly about this case that although Helene is not one of the children originally guaranteed by them, they would be willing to make a substantial grant to help this child if funds were otherwise forthcoming.²⁹²

Far more amenable than they had been with Bruno Nussbaum two years earlier, and further convinced by the Headmistress’s endorsement of Helene as ‘intelligent, industrious, reliable, dignified and with a keen sense of humour’, the Fund was induced to put up the rather astonishing sum of £50 towards her fees, with Miss Trouton’s

²⁸⁶ USL/MS/183 591 F1 GA Hansell to Kaizer, 29 July 1942. The PRC was a non-Jewish Anglo-Polish educational trust.

²⁸⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Mrs Bethell to Kaizer, 30 August 1943. (Emphasis added).

²⁸⁸ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Mrs Bethell to Kaizer, 5 March 1942.

²⁸⁹ For example, Mrs Wickham’s letter about Greta Ducat, who was also in Mrs Bethell’s region. Choosing to answer the Fund’s queries herself, showed that she was either more vested in her foster daughter welfare, or less in thrall to Mrs Bethell’s authority.

²⁹⁰ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Elaine Laski to PJRF, 10 April 1941.

²⁹¹ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Elaine Laski to Kaizer, 14 April 1942. Miss Trouton directed all her correspondence to the RCM, completely bypassing the Fund, as the Tunbridge Well area was wont to do.

²⁹² Ibid.

committee picking up the balance.²⁹³ A similarly generous endowment was arranged by Mrs Bethell for another Zbąszyń girl, Ruth Reicher, securing funding from the Polish Relief Fund, a non-Jewish organisation aiding Polish refugees, and the American Foster Parents Scheme.²⁹⁴ In spite of Mrs Bethell's somewhat domineering demeanour, she and other regional volunteer workers invested time, energy and even substantial funds on behalf of young refugees' educational endeavours giving them, as Mrs Thornycroft had asserted, 'the opportunity that may make the whole difference' in their lives.

56 MS 183/591 F2 8955

THIS PART TO BE FORWARDED TO THE ALIENS DEPARTMENT, HOME OFFICE.

This document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.

THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

Name ETINGER HELENA

Sex FEMALE Date of Birth 2-4-28

Place DORTMUND

Full Names and Address of Parents
ETINGER Lajb & Frieda
ZBONSZYŃ



The regional committee volunteers not only took charge of the children in their areas, but often considered themselves much more knowledgeable about their needs than the parent organisations. One example was the Movement's regional office in Cambridge whose personnel intersected with *Polenaktion Kinder* who had been evacuated to Ely. Among them was Manfred Lindenbaum, a rebellious and troubled seven year old who was moved out the orthodox Jewish hostel and sent to live with a Christian family. When he was about ten, pressure was put on the Fund to return him to a Jewish environment although the headmaster, Dr Bernstein, favoured leaving Manfred where he was. The Cambridge committee was similarly disinclined and noted that when Manfred first stayed in the hostel, 'he was very much the youngest', and he 'was in a very nervous condition and did need special care, which could not be given to him at the Hostel'.²⁹⁵ Since his move to the Christian foster home, he had 'settled very well and is

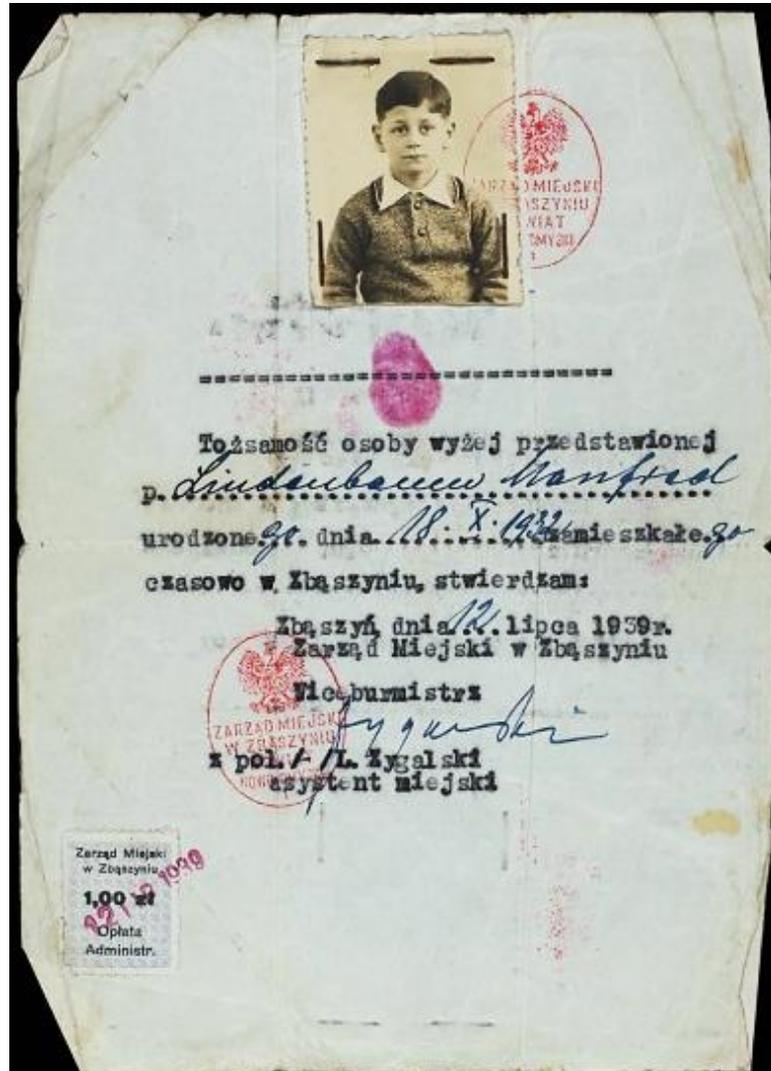
²⁹³ Ibid., F2 copy of Letter from Headmistress of Rotherford School, 31 March 1942 and Helen Trouton to PJRF, 1 May 1942. The total per annum cost was £75.

²⁹⁴ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Bethell to Gorowitz, 8 May 1944.

²⁹⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Report of the RCM Regional Secretary, 23 December 1942. The report, though unsigned, was probably written by Miss Penman, the Secretary of Cambridge Committee.

very happy'.²⁹⁶ The report continued:

He is not quite a normal child. He is very backward and has suffered very much from the separation from his brother and from the other members of his family when he first came over to this country.²⁹⁷



Miss Penman's authoritative tone and detailed knowledge of Manfred's emotional state implied close familiarity with the child and a belief in her prerogative to take control of the case. Her characterisation of the young boy was somewhat accurate, according to his later testimony. Although there was nothing organically limited about Manfred's intelligence, the emotional trauma of separation from his parents had made it impossible to learn, and he could not read.²⁹⁸ He recalled being far happier in his Christian billet

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ David Lerner, 'Manfred's Story', *JFS Alumni Newsletter*, February 2009, p. 21. Corroborated by author's telephone interview with Manfred Lindenbaum, 25 March 2012.

than in the hostel, where he got little attention and much discipline.²⁹⁹ Miss Penman felt that they should proceed cautiously noting that Manfred was ‘very frightened’ and that ‘the Hostel, unfortunately only has bad memories for him’.³⁰⁰ The case and recommendations were very similar to those of Josef Kamiel. Miss Penman suggested that Manfred spend Sabbaths at the hostel, re-establishing his relationship with his older brother there and ‘in this way he will become less nervous’.³⁰¹ Once he had proven to be ‘more at ease in the hostel’, her committee would ‘be very willing to have him transferred there permanently’.³⁰² What is most striking about this case is that the carers who interacted with the boy regularly believed that critical decisions regarding his emotional well-being correctly resided with them and not the Fund.

Other community figures unaffiliated with refugee organisations also made lasting impressions on *Kinder*’s lives. One was the vicar of Ely’s wife, Mrs Rebecca Hinton Knowles. There are no letters from her in the children’s files, but she figures prominently in their memories.³⁰³ When efforts were made to return Manfred to the hostel, Dr Bernstein informed the Fund that the boy ‘has been a special interest of Mrs Knowles’ and that before any decisions about his transfer were made ‘ask Mrs Knowles what she would like done’.³⁰⁴ Manfred, whose Christian family were kind and generous, lived in a house with no toilet, heat, electricity or hot water. Seventy years later, he recalled

Mrs Hinton-Knowles was so kind. I would go around once a week and knock on her door and she would let me have a bath. She gave me stamps. I still have the stamps she gave me. I had no one else to give me anything. I remember her so fondly; she was so helpful. She did what every human being should do. She made a difference.³⁰⁵

Most of the carers who passed through the lives of the refugee children have slipped away unremarked and unacknowledged. Mrs Hinton-Knowles kindnesses to Manfred

²⁹⁹ Author’s interview with Manfred Lindenbaum.

³⁰⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Report of the RCM Regional Secretary, 23 December 1942. She supported ‘the wish of the Polish Committee and others’ but was quite adamant in her recommendations.

³⁰¹ Ibid,

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ See Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 165-6. Herbert Haberberg also remembered her very fondly. Dr Bernstein turned to her when faced with the problem of orthodox Jewish refugees who would eat nothing in their non-Jewish foster homes. David Lerner, ‘Tish Hinton Knowles’, *JFS Alumni Newsletter*, December 2010, p. 4. Mrs Hinton Knowles dealt with the immediate situation, and then found a suitable building for the boys’ hostel, which Lord Rothschild, a patron of the school, paid to furnish. Susan Soyinka, *From East End to Land’s End; The Evacuation of Jews’ Free School, London to Mousehole in Cornwall During World War Two*, (Derby: DB Publishing, 2010), p. 53.

³⁰⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Dr Bernstein to Kaizer, 30 September 1942.

³⁰⁵ David Lerner, ‘Manfred’s Story’, p. 21.

and the other boys were slight things in the larger context of refugee care, but they were important to the children at the time and remained well remembered for decades afterwards.

The vicar's wife, local refugee activists and many others did, in Manfred Lindenbaum's words, 'make a difference'. Their familiarity with the children's foster homes and teachers, their role in securing material needs and their advocacy in matters of education and training make them important figures in the lives of unaccompanied refugees. They interacted with evacuated children, substituting for parents who would otherwise have provided care and guidance. As long as the children remained in the same area, these workers provided a constant and often reassuring presence, regardless of the child's changes in billets. As is evident in the case of Manfred Lindenbaum, they also involved themselves with children who had been or were living in hostels, an experience shared by large numbers of the Zbąszyń refugees, as well as the *Kinder* as a whole. Hostel managers and matrons, too, must be counted in the ranks of everyday carers.

V. Hostel Matrons and Managers

Kinder testimony often includes accounts of hostel life, but there has been little systematic study of the men and women who ran these establishments and interacted daily with the *Kinder* residents. Few records exist from these temporary shelters, many of which closed down before the war was over. *Kinder* have recorded both positive and less happy memories of their experiences in hostels, most of which they remember by name, though the managers have often been forgotten.³⁰⁶ The PJRF maintained connections with hostels in several cities and correspondence with those institutions provides new insights into the proprietors' attitudes and treatment of the refugees in their care.

Hostel managers and matrons were not quite like foster parents, though their influence on the lives of refugee children was significant. Managing an entire house full of refugees meant that they had little time for individual care, and the records seem to indicate that they were somewhat remote figures whose primary function was to enforce

³⁰⁶ See Whiteman, *The Uprooted*, 211-12, 233, Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, 187-8, 200, 203-4, 267 for just a few accounts.

rules and keep order. Still, there is documentary evidence that they knew the children in their care and kept the Fund informed about the *Kinder's* well-being and development. The girls' hostel in Harrogate, home for a time to Ida Najman, Ewa Mohr and Yehudit Hirschman, and run by matrons Margaret Aaron and Ida Wolf, was one such establishment. The communications from these two women conveyed the qualities they valued for harmonious hostel life. Once Ida and Ewa arrived in August 1941, Margaret Aaron told the Fund that the older girl was 'settling down well' and 'looking after Ewa and helping in the house'.³⁰⁷ The matron was responsive to Ida's wishes to get training in children's nursing and made several concrete suggestions for getting her into a day nursery.³⁰⁸ The impression of Margaret Aaron as a caring and involved matron is endorsed by the recollections of several other residents of Harrogate.³⁰⁹

Many of the staff in these establishments were refugees and emigrants themselves, statuses that may have influenced their interactions with the children in their care. Harrogate's other matron, Ida Wolf, also wrote informatively and her most instructive letter concerned Yehudit Hirschman who had been sent to Harrogate when she and her sister Sara left the Bernsteins. Acknowledging the Fund's concern, she reported:

Yehudit is absolutely healthy and cheerful and behaves well being good hearted but not clever. Her knowledge in English reading and writing is not grand. Nevertheless she was 23rd out of 36 in her class at school [...] Being polite and obedient she does not give any reason for complains and I hope she will go on satisfactory.³¹⁰

While the letter makes it obvious that the Matron's own 'English writing' was 'not grand', Mrs Wolf tried to emphasise the positive aspects of Yehudit's progress and character and gave the impression that she was fond of the girl. However, an interview with Yehudit and subsequent communications with her nieces, revealed that Yehudit did not care for Mrs Wolf, whom she considered condescending, and that she had suffered life-long self-doubt as a result of the



³⁰⁷ USL/MS/183 213/2 Margaret Aaron to Sydney Gerrard, 8 August 1941.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. and Ida Wolf to Kaizer, 27 August 1941. After Ida was sent back to London for treatment of skin disease, the matron said that they were 'always prepared to take Ida back at the hostel'.

³⁰⁹ Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, pp. 145, 158, 385 for examples.

³¹⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Ida Wolf to Kaizer, 22 February 1942.

judgements made about her intellect during these crucial years of development.³¹¹ She did not enjoy her time at Harrogate, for she was separated from her sister, and as one of the youngest children there, made few friends.³¹² These factors probably coloured her memories as much as the matron's attitude.³¹³

The matrons' correspondence in the Fund's records was uniformly generous and supportive, but material emanating from boys' hostels conveyed quite a different message.³¹⁴ The extensive documentation from the Leeds JRC hostel shows that the overseer, Mr J M Barrett, who monitored all the Polish boys in Leeds for the PJRF, held strong and mostly negative opinions about refugees. Barrett did not favour extending boys' education; instead, like Elsley Zeitlyn, he endorsed their working in the trades. Edward Pachtman, one of the boys in his care, had arrived from the Ely hostel with recommendations describing him as 'a most keen and able scholar' 'top of the form' and 'brilliant in all subjects'.³¹⁵ He was 'absolutely trustworthy' 'an excellent leader and a splendid influence among the boys'.³¹⁶

He is a very superior type of boy- quite the outstanding boy [...] in character and intelligence. Although he is obviously ideally suited to a profession- law or medicine- in the circumstances he would have to be satisfied with technical training. He is a boy of rare ability and will undoubtedly do well.³¹⁷

Notably, though described as a boy of great promise, the headmaster's report demonstrated an unquestioning acceptance of the reduced opportunities available to refugees like Edward Pachtman. Though 'ideally suited' to a white collared profession, 'circumstances' dictated that his dreams of accountancy would be hard to achieve. The headmaster suggested that in Leeds Pachtman be placed in an accountant's office, studying for his matriculation by correspondence at the Fund's expense, but Mr Barrett demurred, since as an apprentice accountant Pachtman would have to pay a premium and would receive no wages.³¹⁸ Barrett thought Edward should be placed in 'a trade e.g.

³¹¹ Author's telephone interview with YH, 21 March 2012. SH family History, 21 July 2012.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid. Despite her negative memories, reports of her politeness and obedience indicate that the hostel was an improvement over the Bernsteins where she admitted engaging in naughty behaviour in response to her foster mother's neglect and the unkindnesses of the Bernstein children.

³¹⁴ Not all hostels were happy with girls' behaviour, however. See for example the Middleborough hostel committee's complaints cited in Chapter 1.

³¹⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F1 I E Pachtman to Kaizer, 30 September 1941.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F1 'Extract of Letter from Dr Bernstein', 12 December 1940, Kaizer to Barrett, 24 February 1942.

³¹⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F4 J Barrett to Kaizer, 29 March 1942.

tailors cutter’, characterising Pachtman as ‘entirely unwilling to cooperate’ and not understanding that ‘we cannot display such privileges to a single individual’.³¹⁹

Contemptuously characterising further schooling as ‘living on charity for the following



three to four years’ he concluded that Pachtman ‘wants to find an easy way out and doesn’t want to work. As you already know there are many with degrees working in factories’.³²⁰ Barrett’s feelings about Pachtman, so at odds with the testimonials from Ely, disclose little about Pachtman and much about the hostel manager’s beliefs. Boys ‘living on charity’ were undeserving of the ‘privileges’ of further education. Rather than admiring Pachtman’s ambitions, Barrett branded him a freeloader shirking honest factory work. Pachtman did

find an advocate in Reverend Cohen of the Leeds JRC who overruled Barrett, and enabled the boy to apprentice and study for his examination, which he passed a few months later.³²¹

Edward Pachtman and other boys were on the receiving end of common societal assumptions about delinquency, idleness and disobedience among the ranks of the working classes – ideas which were also applied to refugees and aliens.³²² Like Elsley Zeitlyn, Barrett regarded nearly all teenage boys as malefactors, apt to misbehave. He had particular problems with a group of headstrong youths who, chaffing against the orthodox hostel’s strictness, left Leeds without permission and showed up unexpectedly in Soho Square, to the annoyance of the PJRF staff. Barrett sidestepped responsibility for lapses in supervision, blaming absconders such as Herbert Klarmann.

[W]e have had nothing but trouble from this boy since he came to Leeds. He is a liar, a gambler and a thoroughly bad character. My advice is to get him into the army as soon as possible. They might make a man out of him.³²³

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ USL/MS 83 574 F1 Litvin Report, 20 October 1942.

³²² See Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees* for a comprehensive discussion of societal attitudes about juvenile delinquency.

³²³ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Barrett to Kaizer, 19 May 1943.

Barrett also advised against any financial assistance, assuring the Fund that any money they provided would be ill-spent. Despite this depiction, Klarman, who had left Leeds nine days earlier with £3 and still had fifteen shillings in his pocket, secured lodgings and a job for himself, only asking the refugee agency for a loan until he received his first wages.³²⁴ After coming to London, Herbert settled into work and became self-supporting, causing the London refugee agencies absolutely no trouble at all and doing nothing to earn the opprobrium heaped upon him by Barrett.

It is possible that presumptions of misconduct and consistent disapproval had a bearing on the behaviour of children in care. The disparity between Barrett's assessments of Pachtman and Klarman and their actual comportment suggests that his custodianship brought out the worst in his charges. This was almost certainly true of Kurt Treibwasser, another boy who briefly escaped to London to plead his case with the PJRF. Treibwasser 'complained to us about the treatment meted out to him at the hostel, where he said the food is bad and he has no friends' and where 'he felt as though he were in a prison'.³²⁵ Barrett bristled at this allegation challenging Kaizer, 'You yourself have visited "our prison" and I only wish all the Jewish children in the world were fed as good as our children at the hostel are fed'.³²⁶ Kurt wanted a waiter's job because his father had 'become the owner of many restaurants in Leipzig and he would like to do the same'.³²⁷ But Barrett, who declared that there was 'no doubt that he is the worst boy we have', disagreed with Kurt's 'learning to be a waiter at a non-Kosher hostel. Can you imagine the mentality of a person who boasts of eating Traife [non-Kosher] food?', declaring contemptuously that it was 'mainly the fact that he gets 'tips' that holds him to the waiter's job'.³²⁸

Treibwasser has been nothing but trouble to me. On three occasions I have received complaints from Gentile neighbours because he has stood in the window shouting 'Heil Hitler'. On questioning he admitted it and said he was only joking. He evidently joked twice more.³²⁹

Declaring Kurt unfit to remain in the hostel 'as he is a bad influence towards the other boys' he solicited the input of the Leeds JRC, which branded Treibwasser 'obstinate and stupid', decrying his 'tendency to mix with non-Jewish elements' and break kosher

³²⁴ Ibid., Kaizer to Mr Gee, 18 May 1943.

³²⁵ USL/MS/190 390 11/3/28 Kaizer to Barrett, 8 September 1941.

³²⁶ Ibid., Barrett to Kaiser, 9 September 1941.

³²⁷ Ibid., Kaizer to J Barrett, 8 September 1941.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ USL/MS/190 390 11/3/28 Barrett to Kaiser, 9 September 1941.

laws and declared he was no longer welcome in Leeds.³³⁰

The carers' fundamental insensitivity to the needs of restless, confused and parentless refugee boys likely exacerbated their problem behaviour. If Kurt Treibwasser had engaged in the outrageous act described, no attempt was made to try to understand the source of such a stunt. Little regard was given to their prior travails and their constant worry about families in Poland, nor to the difficulties of refugee life in England. On the contrary, as refugees they were held to an even higher standard of conduct and gratitude. The judgements from carers in Leeds could not have failed to register with the boys, and their most obvious reaction was to run away. The Leeds boys were not perfect; they exhibited disobedient and sometimes dishonest behaviour, but they fled to London because they perceived the Fund personnel to be more sympathetic and caring. These boys, and especially Kurt, were crying out for the attention and concern that their Leeds' carers lacked.³³¹

Hostel correspondence reveals obvious gendered differences in both approach to and regard for the *Kinder*. Although some girls did not enjoy their hostel stays, the matrons, at least in writing, remained positive and encouraging about girls' abilities and personal qualities. Conversely, boys were often subjected to preconceived notions of delinquency and wrongdoing, and in some cases lived up (or down) to expectations of bad behaviour. The hostility of hostel carers was a bafflement to boys like Edward Pachtman and Herbert Klarman who had formerly enjoyed the kindness and interest of teachers and other support workers. Especially in evacuation settings, teachers interacted with child refugees regularly and assumed important functions in their development and care, meriting a separate examination of their roles as everyday carers.

VI. Teachers

Kinder memoirs often mention special and influential teachers and a few, like Judith Grunfeld and Anna Essinger, attained some renown in later years. Daily contact, especially in evacuation, positioned teachers to know the children and to respond to their needs. The Ely boys recorded many memories of teachers, including Mr Cousins, Mr Joseph, Mr Bourne, Mr Simmons and Dr Enoch Bernstein, who attended, taught at

³³⁰ Ibid. Minsk to Kaizer, 19 October 1941. The Leeds committee put Kurt on a train and sent him to the Fund in London.

³³¹ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Mr Gee to Kaizer, 7 December 1942.

and eventually led the Jews' Free School and was the head teacher in Ely.³³² He was a trusted advisor to the PJRF in London who took a special interest in particular boys like Edward Pachtman and Herbert Haberberg.³³³ When the Fund was considering moving the boys from Ely, Bernstein wrote:

I should be very glad indeed if you could arrange for Haberberg to continue a little while longer here as he is being given responsible work in the Home and I am very anxious to give him a little experience in a position of responsibility as this will be a most useful preparation for his walk in life.³³⁴

Herbert recalled in an interview that once his schooling ended he wanted to leave Ely, which he found stifling and unfulfilling. He rebelled against the orthodoxy of the hostel and he resented Dr Bernstein's efforts to keep him at the school. 'I was his errand-boy', Herbert noted, adding that he had no desire to be anyone's 'dogs-body'.³³⁵ Herbert's memories cast Bernstein's 'position of responsibility' in an entirely different light. From Herbert's perspective, Bernstein's request was self-serving, although presented to the PJRF as entirely in the boy's best interest. This seemingly small incident is another powerful example of the enhanced interpretations that arise at the intersection of memory and the archival record.

Evacuation teachers were in a position to fulfil several roles, especially for refugee children without parents to guide them. The most potent example of such an educator is Miss Sara Samuel, the headmistress of the evacuated Jew's Free Girls' School in Ely who was a prolific and expressive correspondent. In the confusion of evacuation, it was some months before Miss Samuel discovered the identity of the Fund, several of whose girls were under her care. In her first letter to the organisation, she praised them as 'charming girls, most obedient, ladylike, & appreciative. I am very fond of them. They must have come from refined delightful homes'.³³⁶ Her generous sentiments were supported by actions indicating her sincere regard for their well-being. Prior to contacting the Fund, she had provided for their clothes, milk and spending

³³² Edward Pachtman, *Our Family*, (unpublished private memoir, nd.), pp. 45-6. Lent by the Pachtman Family. Mr Cousins wrote the glowing letter of recommendation for Pachtman excerpted earlier in the chapter. Herbert Haberberg also fondly remembered him and the other three teachers.

³³³ Dr Bernstein's voluminous correspondence is unfortunately of limited utility as his handwriting is practically illegible. Even the Fund's officers had difficulty with his letters and more than one file contains typewritten documents headed 'extract from a letter from Dr Bernstein' containing numerous gaps and ellipses where the words could simply not be deciphered. See for example USL/MS/183 574 F2 'Transcription of Letter from Dr Bernstein' ND.

³³⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F1 'Extract of Letter from Dr Bernstein', 12 December 1940.

³³⁵ Author's interview with Herbert Haberberg, 28 January 2012.

³³⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sara Samuel to Zeitlyn, 20 March 1940.

money out of her own pocket, and expressed concerns about their needs.³³⁷

I have quite a number of other Refugee children but these do not seem so friendless as Helen, Thea and Fanni [...] I should be very grateful if you could send me some money for clothes etc. for these girls. I haven't any funds at all but I try to help in all ways because I want these children to be happy & remain self-respecting girls.³³⁸

This letter is consistent with the tenor of Miss Samuel's correspondence throughout. Her concern for the girls' physical well-being, education and training was unswerving, and she was sensitive to their emotional needs. She saw them through illnesses, and proved a feisty advocate for them when the Fund was unresponsive.

Although burdened with the responsibility of an entire school, Miss Samuel provided critical vocational guidance and care to 'friendless' refugee children. Helen Reich was singled out for special attention, and Miss Samuel had recognized immediately that 'Helen in particular wants friendship. She is a highly intelligent girl & sometimes is very sad and homesick'.³³⁹ As Helen approached sixteen, Miss Samuel



informed the Fund that she was 'a very capable girl and does not wish to do domestic work. She is really very worried and wants to do office work'.³⁴⁰ The Fund's failure to reply propelled Miss Samuel into action. She independently contacted a local secretarial school, ascertaining that the principal was 'willing to accept Helen as a student', and justifying her actions to the Fund by declaring that the 'poor girl' had 'been ever so worried and is simply craving for further education'.³⁴¹ When the Fund prevaricated over costs, Miss Samuel impatiently assured them that 'incidental expenses

will be almost nil. I am seeing to her outfit etc.' and rounding on them for their inattention to Helen's needs.³⁴²

I have been writing to your organisation off and on for the last six months. The girl has worried herself until she has become positively ill and I am afraid I cannot wait any longer. I have signed the necessary forms and Helene has had a successful interview with the Principal.³⁴³

Motivated by a fierce concern and frustration with the London agency, Sara Samuel

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., Sara Samuel to PJRF, 3 November 1940.

³⁴¹ Ibid., Sara Samuel to PJRF, 27 November 1940.

³⁴² Ibid., Sara Samuel to PJRF 10 December 1940.

³⁴³ Ibid.

acted quite boldly in arranging for Helen's training, since technically, such decisions were not hers to make. Stepping into a parental role, her sincere devotion to Helen's well-being was substantiated by her paying many of the costs herself.³⁴⁴

Teachers like Miss Samuel were also occasionally called upon to fulfil roles for their refugee students that fell outside of their educational remit. At the same time as she was nurturing Helen Reich's ambitions, Sara Samuel was also dealing with the difficult case of Thea Feliks who fell desperately ill while on holiday with her foster family, requiring surgery.³⁴⁵ Miss Samuel was confronted with the need to make a guardian's decision about her treatment, as she recounted to the PJRF.

Would I leave her at Bridlington or have her here in Hospital near Ely
[...] I thought it wiser to have her here near me in this environment. [...] She is getting on quite nicely. [...] She is a very nice girl and everything possible is being done for her.³⁴⁶

Miss Samuel oversaw Thea's after-care, taking considerable time out of her schedule to visit her in hospital.³⁴⁷ As the girl recovered, the headmistress regularly updated the Fund, informing them that she had 'brought her home from the hospital where she had a very nasty operation' and that the doctors had discovered 'a TB Gland'.³⁴⁸ Now considered contagious, Thea had to be found 'outdoor employment' though the headmistress fretted that 'she doesn't like farm work or garden work'.³⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Miss Samuel assured the Fund that 'she will not be fit to work for some time yet' and 'I will go on looking after her'.³⁵⁰ Thea could no longer attend school and Miss Samuel continued to worry about her future. She pleaded with the Fund to 'please let me know what is proposed as an occupation for Thea' because she was



³⁴⁴ She wrote in the same letter, 'I do feel however that when girls reach the age of 15-16 there should be some definite plan for the girl's career'.

³⁴⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sara Samuel to PJRF, 11 July 1941. Consistent with her adopted role as the girls' de facto guardian, she had not even secured the Fund's permission for this excursion, although she did ask them to pay the rail fares.

³⁴⁶ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Sara Samuel to PJRF, 29 August 1941.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 'She will be visited on Saturday and Sunday and [...] Wednesday next in hospital'.

³⁴⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sara Samuel to PJRF, 29 September 1941.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

‘getting very worried and distressed’ and ‘most anxious to be suitably occupied’.³⁵¹ Solicitously, she added that Thea was ‘a very nice, capable and willing girl’ and ‘anxious to get to work. I see her every day’.³⁵² She helped Thea find work in Ely the following summer and continued to look after her for about a year until Thea moved to London and Sara Samuel’s relationship with the refugee girl ended.³⁵³

Plentiful and consistent correspondence would seem to present many fewer interpretive challenges than scantier writings. Sara Samuel’s substantial correspondence uniformly portrays a dedicated, emotionally sensitive and genuinely concerned caregiver who devoted considerable efforts to provide support for several motherless refugee girls. Without children of her own, she seems to have treated the girls as de facto adoptees for the period they spent in Ely. By her own admission, they absorbed many of her resources.

These adolescent girls now six in number require pocket money and little articles of clothing [...] I have more than 100 girls to see to but I am afraid the Refugee girls through no fault of their own take a very great part of my time’.³⁵⁴

Her efforts and sensitivity to the plight of her refugees stand in stark contrast to those of less benevolent caretakers like Mr Barrett. However, this interpretation is challenged by the existence of Thea’s Feliks’ memoir, previously quoted in Chapter 1, which depicts a very different perspective of life in Ely.



³⁵¹ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Sara Samuel to PJRF, 2 December 1941 and 24 December 1941.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ See Chapter 1 for Thea’s memories and the PJRF records of this period in her life.

³⁵⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sara Samuel to PJRF, 10 December 1940.

For Thea, who died in 1994, time did not assuage any of the raw pain of her expulsion and *Kindertransport* experiences, and hers is one of the few memoirs that refused to hew to the standard professions of gratitude. The slim volume devoted only a few pages to Ely, in a chapter tellingly entitled ‘You’re on Your Own, Kiddo’.³⁵⁵ In reflecting on her education, she recalled, ‘we were put in a classroom and [...] left to sit on a bench with no help’.³⁵⁶

No one helped us. They put us in a chair and said, “Sit”, and then ignored us. Not because they wanted to ignore us but because the school was an evacuated makeshift school from London and they were trying to do the best they could under very trying circumstances [...]. There was no possibility of giving refugee children some special degree of attention. It was just tough, you know, learn as best you can, if you can [...]. No one taught us anything. Nothing.³⁵⁷

There is little in Thea’s PJRF records about her education, but one report several months before her illness indicated that she was ‘highly intelligent’ that Miss Samuel ‘thinks highly of her’, that she was ‘attending evening classes and learning shorthand/typing. Has no complaints and is quite happy’.³⁵⁸ In addition, before she was barred from the classroom by her TB diagnosis, the Fund expressed to Miss Samuel their desire that Thea continue her studies ‘either in elementary or secondary school according to your choice’.³⁵⁹ These pieces of evidence, slight as they are, stand in stark contradiction to Thea’s own characterisation of her education.

The lack of supervision that runs through Thea’s account of her education appears as a theme throughout her recollections. ‘Nobody was watching that closely. We were too proud to say, ‘Hey my feet hurt. I really need a pair of shoes that fit’.³⁶⁰ Even more significantly, Thea recalled ‘getting sick with TB and so on. All those things started coming out, [...] the TB, that started flaring- these things they didn’t take care of’.³⁶¹ The documentary record could not be clearer in this point. Thea’s illness was taken very seriously by both Miss Samuel and the Fund and it generated a great deal of correspondence especially about extra stipends the Fund sent for several months while

³⁵⁵ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life* pp. 39-65.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46. A few pages later Thea returned to this theme: ‘we did pretty well [...] But no formal schooling. Nothing. It was really, ‘Do it on your own, kiddo’. *A Transported Life* p. 50.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁵⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Typed Report, 1 January 1941.

³⁵⁹ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Gorowitz to Sara Samuel, 18 December 1941.

³⁶⁰ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life* pp. 49-50.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

she convalesced.³⁶² Miss Samuel's letters attest to the amount of time she invested in Thea's care, but of the teacher, Thea had only this to say:

I drove the headmistress crazy because I walked away with the English prize, first prize. She called the school together, and I can still hear her saying, 'This is a disgrace. These refugee children have won the school prize in English!' [...] I remember her being really outraged that these refugee kids, who had missed a year's schooling while they were interned, were walking away with these school prizes.³⁶³

Thea's account of life in Ely contrasts startlingly with the records in her dossier. It is difficult to reconcile the conscientious motherly figure of Sara Samuel's letters with the reproachful headmistress of Thea's memory or square her recollections of illness with the descriptions of her care in the Fund's correspondence.

This study has demonstrated that *Kinder* testimonies can augment and enrich the archival record, and in turn be validated and authenticated by those documents. These complementary sources offer what historian Mark Roseman calls 'a mosaic of vantage points each offering a fragment of the whole'.³⁶⁴ Thea's account is problematized by the documentary evidence, and in turn, her memories compel scrutiny of the archival records. Miss Samuel's correspondence in multiple dossiers suggests that she was dedicated to her refugee students. However, Dr Bernstein expressions of concern for Herbert were unmasked as self-serving by Herbert's later testimony, and Sara Samuel's letters must be held up to the same analysis. There is no way of ascertaining whether the headmistress articulated kind and generous words to the students themselves, nor is it possible to know if they were aware of the money and time she expended on their behalf.³⁶⁵ Therefore, while the documentary evidence points to Miss Samuel as a compassionate caregiver, space must be given to the possibility of alternate interpretations of her attitudes and behaviour.

But the Sara Samuel that emerges from her correspondence cannot be dismissed by Thea's almost wholly negative memories, just as Thea's recollections cannot be discredited by the documentary evidence in her file. People remember (or forget) in

³⁶² Over three months, the Fund sent amounts from ten shillings to £2 for extra food for Thea.

³⁶³ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 50.

³⁶⁴ Mark Roseman, 'Holocaust Perpetrators in Victims' Eyes', in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts, eds., *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedlander and the Future of Holocaust Studies*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2010) pp. 81-100, (p. 81).

³⁶⁵ The only possible corroborating account of the headmistress comes from Manfred Lindenbaum. He was placed at the age of ten in the girls' school. There, under the compassionate instruction of a woman teacher, he was able to conquer his learning blockage and pass his '11 plus' exams at the end of the year. Author's interview with Manfred Lindenbaum, 22 March 2012.

specific ways and for particular reasons that are intricately connected to their self-image and experiences. As Annette Wieviorka has stated ‘Each person has an absolute right to his or her memory, which is nothing other than his or her identity, his or her very being’.³⁶⁶ This observation is even more resonant in the case of traumatic memory such as Thea’s. However, as Wieviorka cautioned, ‘this right can come into conflict with an imperative of the historian’s profession, the imperative of an obstinate quest for the truth’.³⁶⁷

Within the duelling narratives of Thea’s experiences, one told by the letters in her file, one by Thea herself, lies the difficult ‘quest for the truth’. In Chapter 1, Thea’s correspondence revealed a strong drive for financial independence and she admitted placing burdens on herself ‘that didn’t have to be there’, and linking these self-imposed hardships ‘to what had happened to us as children’.³⁶⁸

I was really hard on myself [...] Sheer indifference was there because people didn’t understand, or they didn’t know, and you weren’t going to explain [...] I guess you could say some inner force was driving me [...] I think it mainly had to do with independence. Not being dependent.³⁶⁹

Thea’s entire memoir is consistent with this theme. In her internalised life narrative, the outside world, adults and authority figures were untrustworthy. The only person she could safely rely upon was herself. Everything she had accomplished – education, job, financial independence – she had done on her own. Other actors were relegated to the margins, and a compassionate teacher or a helpful refugee agency did not fit the narrative she had constructed to make sense of her experiences. As Tony Kushner has written, ‘the mythology within oral history [...] is seen not as an inherent weakness of the source but in fact a strength, telling of the identity and identity constructions of individuals both then *and now*’.³⁷⁰ Thea’s identity construction as a strong, independent and autonomous child helped her deal with the searing experiences of expulsion, separation from her mother and migration to a strange country; a construct that also helped her make sense of them fifty years later. Her mantra, ‘You’re on your own, kiddo’, was a statement at once mournful and defiant, summing up not only the resilient child who suffered uncomplainingly when her shoes were too small and who

³⁶⁶ Wieviorka ‘The Witness in History’, p. 394.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 59.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Kushner, ‘Saul Friedländer, Holocaust Historiography and the Use of Witness Testimony’, p.

punishingly made herself self-supporting at barely seventeen, but the neglected and abandoned child who was forced to face the world alone before she was ready. As she confirmed, ‘There was this outer persona who functioned well and efficiently. But there was also this hurt child who you never talked about, kept hidden. I don’t think those things ever heal’.³⁷¹

Thea’s memories of Ely speak volumes about her own constructed identity but say very little about Miss Samuel or the quality of education or care Thea received in Ely. The concordance between archive and memory vis-à-vis her time in London reveals that Thea did not ‘mis-remember’ the facts of her life. Instead, those events were filtered through the identity she had constructed both then and later. That her only recorded memory of the headmistress was being shouted at fit with her image of having self-educated. Miss Samuel was not outraged with her having won the prize, but rather of the English students’ relative lack of effort. Thea’s memory of the moment is instead consistent with the wounded/steely persona that by her own admission she embodied. There is no ‘true and false’ in the case of the dichotomous narratives of Miss Samuel’s letters and Thea’s memories. Both have their own truth, and neither discredits the other.

VII. Everyday Carers- A New Perspective

In their thousands, the people of Britain opened their homes and often their hearts to the ‘strangers within their gates’, and many millions of pounds sterling were donated without any thought of reimbursement...[B]y ‘doing things that [were] morally right’ the country had indeed achieved something ‘worthy of the name of the British nation’.³⁷²

This summation of the *Kindertransport* from a recent volume on the subject pulls all the levers of the paradigmatic redemptive narrative. British exceptionalism and moral superiority are celebrated, and the welcoming hospitality of its people lauded. The everyday carers, those people of Britain who ‘opened their homes and hearts’ are regarded together as an undifferentiated mass of selfless benefactors. A narrative of ‘doing things that were morally right’, leaves no room for the British people to have been anything but unselfish, generous, competent and caring. In fact, Dorit Whiteman

³⁷¹ Reti and Chase *A Transported Life*, p. 59.

³⁷² Fast, *Children’s Exodus*, p. 193.

and others have suggested that any other interpretation verges on the morally wrong.³⁷³ This narration holds the children's survival as the primary value and emphasizes rescue, salvation, and the sacrifices of the carers.³⁷⁴ Those in contravention of the benevolent archetype are marginalised as aberrations and the entire edifice is underpinned by the myth that all the children grew up to lead well-adjusted successful lives. This reassuring and uncomplicated synopsis of the *Kindertransport* and in particular the role of everyday carers has had enduring traction, but it lacks nuance and excludes the less attractive motivations of carers, and the intentional and unintentional cruelties they inflicted on the *Kinder*. Reluctance to look more closely at the *Kindertransport* and to approach its more awkward, disquieting and even disturbing truths is understandable, but failure to do so has begotten a national mythology that is difficult to dislodge.

Few subjects can be more discomfiting than interrogating the motives and actions of people who voluntarily brought refugee children into their homes. There is a natural desire to credit caregivers with altruism and compassion, although a wealth of *Kinder* testimony provides ample evidence to the contrary. However, the memory archive's hundreds of disconnected stories have done little to shake existing paradigms. Singular accounts of insensitive or self-serving carers can easily be dismissed as anomalous and the diffusion of sources impedes the examination of patterns of experience. The *Kinder* memory literature, though an invaluable part of the historiography, does not alone provide sufficient scaffolding for the construction of new perspectives of *Kindertransport* carers.

The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund records provide a way into a more complex, if less comforting narrative of caretaking behaviour, though critiquing individual carers' actions is unsettling and fraught with difficulty. Through these documents, the carers themselves speak, revealing a range of attitudes and behaviours. Their motives and behaviour are further amplified by their interactions with other actors – refugee agencies, welfare officers, and the children. The truth about everyday carers that emerges from this correspondence has long been intuited from *Kinder* memory: some

³⁷³ Dorit Whiteman was quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

³⁷⁴ Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Refugee from Nazi Germany*, (Hannover NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001) 'It would be unfair to blame all the psychological difficulties on the foster parents [...] It should always be remembered that without the change in attitude of the British government, many of the thousands would not have survived' p. 196. Edie Friedman and Reva Klein, *Reluctant Refugee: The Story of Asylum in Britain*, (London: British Library, 2008) 'the *Kindertransport* [...] is an excellent example of how government planning combined with public generosity resulted in a successful humanitarian programme. This is not to say there were no difficulties, but [...] the children who came on the *Kindertransport* were spared the death camps' p. 103.

were nurturing and sustaining, and many were far from competent, though few can be dismissed outright as ‘emotionally disturbed’. Foster parents were motivated by a complex web of factors both admirable and self-serving. Carers were sometimes naively idealistic and fostering relationships often startlingly shallow-rooted. Host families’ willingness to relinquish, abandon or send away children they had promised to care for proved disconcertingly common.

The archival record reveals some entirely new understandings about carers as well. Counter-intuitively, relatives, who were seemingly more invested in their *Kinder* often made the least suitable foster carers, while evacuation hosts, putatively the most detached of carers, often proved the most caring. Teachers, hostel managers and local volunteers could and did have enormous influence on children’s self-image, well-being and future prospects. Many times, it was the least likely agents, such as the vicar’s wife Mrs Knowles, who played pivotal roles in children’s lives. Some of the carers sacrificed, showed sensitivity, and incorporated their refugee children into the family, but many did not ‘do the best they could’. Many did not have much patience, forbearance or understanding. Many took advantage of the children in their care, for money, labour and prestige. Some were exemplary, but the archival correspondence and reports lead to the inescapable conclusion that the majority were not.

Close reading of the documentary record has produced important new perspectives on *Kinder* after-care, but like the *Kinder* memory literature, it alone cannot fully provide a critical evaluation of caretaking. The preceding investigations had shown that when juxtaposed with the archival correspondence, memory literature complicates and enhances interpretations. The apposition of these sources has revealed that care that appeared compassionate in correspondence was not always experienced that way by the children and that evidence that seemed straightforward often was not. Indisputably, the dialogue between archive and memory yields a much more textured picture than either can produce on its own, and brings us closer to Wieviorka’s elusive ‘truth’. All the evidence points to one ‘meta-truth’: there were vast differentiations in what ‘survival’ meant for refugee children and none were untouched by their experiences with everyday carers.

3

The Children

In January 1940, Manfred Haberberg's foster mother, Mrs Finklestein, asked the Fund to give his brother Herbert permission to leave Mutford's Farm for a few days in order to visit London. There was no objection, but it was made clear that Herbert's visit would 'not incur any expenses by this Fund' for 'travelling or maintenance expenses'.¹ The Fund had delayed several weeks in granting permission, but Mr Gorowitz was unapologetic, confident that 'the brothers will be happy to see one another at any time'.² Sadly, the visit between seven-year-old Manfred and fifteen-year-old Herbert was far from a joyous reunion. The trauma of separating from his family and the months in London had combined to efface Manfred's memories of the past – including his knowledge of German. Herbert, who had been sequestered on the farm with only German speaking companions, had learned little English and still spoke in his native tongue. The brothers, after a separation of a little over four months, could no longer communicate with one another.

In his first few years in England, Herbert lacked the autonomy and independence to plan and implement visits to his brother. He was entirely dependent on the PJRF and other adults for permission and funds to carry out such undertakings. Yet, once he learned English, Herbert gained agency and the confidence to advocate for himself. Like many other refugee children, his budding independence sometimes took the form of small rebellions such as going to the pictures on Saturdays instead of attending Sabbath services when he lived in Ely.³ There, lodged in an orthodox Jewish hostel, he had begun to question the strict religiosity of his upbringing. He also learned to petition for help, especially in order to maintain contact with his younger brother. In late 1941, a few months after arriving in Leeds, Herbert penned a letter to the Fund on behalf of himself and three compatriots thanking them for clothing. In a postscript Hebert wrote, 'Could you please grant me permission to come to London over Christmas to see my brother which I have not seen for two years'.⁴ In spite of their parents' fervent hope that the boys would remain together, this would be only the second meeting of the brothers

¹ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Gorowitz to Mrs Finkelstein, 26 January 1940.

² Ibid.

³ Author's interview with Herbert Haberberg London, 8 August 2014. Herbert was not the only Ely boy to report this rebellion. USCSF/VHA 26263 Jacques Reich (Rich), 1997.

⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Herbert Haberberg to PJRF, 30 November 1941.

since their arrival in Great Britain in August 1939.

The confluence of autonomy and dependence in Herbert's relationship with the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund and the cultural and religious challenges he grappled with were typical of the agency and identity issues confronting unaccompanied refugee children. Deprived of parental support, *Kinder* dealt with their own maturation as refugees whose choices in basic matters such as clothing and accommodation as well as in critical areas of education and employment were circumscribed by their dependent status. Their correspondence, which forms the basis of this chapter, reveals a range of responses from self-confident assertiveness to disobedient rebellion as they transitioned from refugees to autonomous young adults. Although they were dependent in many ways, the *Kinder* exhibited a variety of strategies – including the enlistment of allies and advocates among refugee workers – to compensate for the absent parents who would have provided guidance along the way to adulthood.

Herbert's are among hundreds of children's letters in the files of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund that document relationships between the *Kinder* and the agencies responsible for their welfare. Investigation of this aspect of the *Kindertransport* has heretofore relied primarily upon *Kinder* testimony. Former child refugees' imprecise memories tend to characterise the organisations as remote actors, deserving of gratitude, but not relied upon for material or emotional assistance. The PJRF files, on the other hand, reveal the children's considerable interactions with the custodial organisations, making possible the reconstruction of relationships that have largely been forgotten by the *Kinder* and subsequently ignored in the literature. The archival documents also record the *Kinder's* identity struggles, which in the case of the *Polenaktion* refugees were magnified by their complicated backgrounds. Thus, the children's chapter presents new perspectives on the broad issues of agency, dependency, autonomy and identity.



I. Dependence and Agency

Although they were largely dependent upon refugee organizations and carers, the Polish *Kinder* began asserting agency from the outset of the *Kindertransport*. Before they mastered English, and in some cases before they arrived in Britain, they appealed for help from various organisations and individuals, acting as their own agents of rescue. One of these was Devorah Brodsky, who told Elsley Zeitlyn of her despair at living in Zbąszyń for seven months, a place that was ‘certainly the greatest suffering and misfortunate for refugees’.⁵

At the moment my most ardent wish is to leave this refugee camp and somehow manage to get to some country where one can live freely and with the hope of a happy future. But unfortunately I have no emigration options, so I must turn to you as a last resort.⁶

Devorah’s sentiments faintly echoed those of Elsley Zeitlyn and Gladys Bendit, but at sixteen her prospects of living freely and ‘a happy future’ were in jeopardy. Too young for a domestic permit and nearly too old for the *Kindertransport*, her lack of affidavits or other options seriously limited her suitability for inclusion on the transports. In lieu of other qualifications, she emphasised the assets that would enable the Fund ‘to find someone in the big city of London who will be interested enough to take me on’.⁷

I am [...] totally fit, industrious, reliable, honest, and prepared to take over any tasks assigned to me to utmost satisfaction. I have been diligently learning English for some time now, so that I'm sure I wouldn't have difficulties with the language after a short time in the country.⁸

Later, in increasing desperation, she wrote that she ‘would be unspeakably grateful if you could give me positive news [...] since I am all alone here in Zbąszyń without any relatives’.⁹ Devorah’s mother had gone back to Germany to settle the family’s affairs while her father and three siblings had moved into Eastern Poland, leaving her to advocate for herself from Zbąszyń. Her ‘orphan’ status and willingness to work undoubtedly favoured her, but the acceptance of any conditions as the price of rescue may have later contributed to her labouring as an unpaid domestic for a year, and her reluctance to solicit the Fund’s help during that time.¹⁰

⁵ USL/MS/183 575 F1 DB to Zeitlyn, 30 May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. DB to E Zeitlyn, 15 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁰ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Dr Litvin’s Report, 5 July 1942. DB’s records indicate that at various times she also sought the help of Bloomsbury House.

Not all the *Kinder* who arrived from Poland had been deported to Zbąszyń. Those scattered in other parts of Poland had much more difficulty securing help from the



PJRF, which based its operations there. Ida Alt, a dignified young woman, mature beyond her years, was in Warsaw when she sent her plea to the ‘Movement for the Care of Children, London’. Her knowledge of that organisation, but not of the PJRF was a reflection of her having been expelled across the border from Stettin where deportees were allowed to cross freely into Poland. Ida’s letter, which was redirected to the Polish Fund, emphasized her ‘heartbreaking situation’ and begged ‘your esteemed organization to provide help in getting me over to England as soon as possible’.¹¹ She, too, stressed her qualifications,

which included attending the *Oberlyceum*, working as a bookkeeper and speaking ‘good English’.¹²

My situation here is terrible, my father has died suddenly, so that I am now a half-orphan. I hope for your certain and immediate help, since this is about saving a young woman from certain doom.¹³

Like Devorah, Ida’s status as a ‘half-orphan’ was decisive, and also like her, Ida appealed using formal language and extreme politeness to impress potential benefactors with her attractiveness as a candidate and her desperation to come to England. Significantly, these letters revealed widespread knowledge about the various agencies involved in the *Kindertransport* scheme, and *Kinder*’s ability to promote themselves and secure rescue.

The refugee children’s letters from Poland underscored their essential dependence and the desperation that impelled their attempts at agency. This state persisted after they reached Britain, where fears about the fates of their loved ones were amplified. Pinning their hopes on the refugee agency that had plucked them from a dire situation, they barraged the Fund with requests on behalf of siblings and parents. Early

¹¹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Ida Alt to MCC, 6 March 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

letters were often written in German by young men like Kurt Triebwasser who wrote to Elsley Zeitlyn for advice. Kurt's mother and sister had been given a permit to return to Germany for two weeks:

But they do not know where they should go after these two weeks. They don't want to go back to Poland and Poland wouldn't let my mother in any more. I don't know what I should do. Only you can help me [...] It's very urgent!!¹⁴

Kurt was only fourteen, far removed in England, lacking mastery of the language and with no resources whatsoever, yet he had assumed responsibility for finding a solution to his mother's dilemma in Germany. His lament, 'I don't know what I should do' reflects both helplessness and hopelessness, because there was little he could do.

Children seeking succour for their families knew that guarantees were the only hope. They lacked the means to secure guarantors on their own, but some, including Kurt, were resourceful enough to propose possible benefactors. Zeitlyn told Kurt that 'it is difficult beyond words to do what you are asking. There are no guarantors to be found', but the boy was undeterred.¹⁵ Acknowledging Zeitlyn's status and expressing his gratitude 'that I am doing so well', Kurt made his final plea:

I am in great distress. Please rescue my mother and my sister from the misery of the Nazi pogroms. I have some good acquaintances in London. Maybe they can do something for me [...] Describe to the people the desperate situation of my parents. It is very important.¹⁶

Kurt enclosed a completed form for a domestic position for his widowed mother and the contact details of several of his 'good acquaintances in London'.¹⁷ But even had Zeitlyn initiated Kurt's request, there was not enough time before the war began to rescue his relatives.

Many *Kinder* who had availed themselves of the organisations' help from the beginning continued to view them as a source of support and assistance in the ensuing years. Exactly one year after his previous requests, Kurt wrote in imperfect English:

I would like to ask your advice what I have to do as I would like some family to adopt me. My father is dead and I have tried to communicate with my mother via the red cross but they could not identify her so I must believe that she is not alive either. I would be glad to hear your advice.¹⁸

¹⁴ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 11/3/28 Kurt Triebwasser to Zeitlyn, 17 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁵ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Triebwasser, 19 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁶ Ibid., Triebwasser to Zeitlyn, 20 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., Triebwasser to PJRF 10 July 1940

Kurt's plea revealed his longing for a replacement family and demonstrated his continuing reliance on the Fund as the only parental entity left to him. This same boy fell afoul of the Leeds refugee committee after he shouted 'Heil Hitler' out his hostel window. It does not require much imagination to see how Kurt's sufferings might have led to his later anti-social behaviour. Kurt's losses were experienced by thousands of others, many of whom recounted them for posterity. In comparison to such later reflections, the temporality of Kurt's letters heightens their poignancy, and their immediacy powerfully expresses how young refugees felt about and reacted to the circumstances of their lives at the time.

Many of the children's requests revealed inflated conceptions of the refugee agencies' powers. The boldness of some of these appeals from children who had been



removed from peril seemingly against the odds reflected their faith in the Fund and other organisations to effect any feats of rescue. Willie Najman had just turned eleven when he penned a request that brimmed with optimism, but was in truth insuperable. His father, Baruch, had returned to Germany to liquidate his business, but was unable to return to his family in Poland. Even worse, Willie wrote, 'My father was interned in Sachsenhausen. He is not doing well there'.¹⁹ His sister Sala, who had gone back to Germany with her father 'was able to arrange an entry permit for my father to Shanghai under

the condition that someone deposits a security of 400 dollars in America'.²⁰

And now my request. Could you please get in contact with a committee in America that would pay the money there? If you have no time to go to the American Committee, I will go to them [...] I hope you will succeed in getting my father out of Germany.²¹

Willie Najman's youth and naïveté account for his apparent incomprehension of the huge sum of money he confidently requested on his father's behalf. Having assumed the burden of rescuing his father, though powerless to effect a positive outcome, he had sought help from the only source available to him.

Efforts on behalf of older family members were almost certainly doomed but the

¹⁹ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Willie Najman to PJRF, 20 March 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Kinder held out hope for their eligible siblings and appealed for them as well. One of the most persistent of these was Simon Markel, who arrived in February 1939. Within four months of his arrival, the sixteen year old began writing in English to Elsley Zeitlyn and his letters revealed a notable aptitude in his newly acquired language. He was closely attuned to Zeitlyn's expectations, opening with thanks 'for all what you have done for me' before eloquently articulating his concerns.²²

One thought but keeps me in affliction, the thought of my parents and brothers, who have come, by unfortunate circumstances, undeserved into poverty and despair.²³

Acknowledging Zeitlyn's status and authority (and perhaps appealing to his vanity), Simon framed his request with an oblique reference to a Jewish *mitzvoth*.

You would do a great deed if you would take over one or two of my brothers, to relieve them of their struggle for return to an ordinary life [...] Thei have no job there. Thei are unable to speak the Polish language and so thei have no future there at all.²⁴

Simon was reassured that his brothers' names were on lists awaiting guarantors, so, like Kurt, he wrote several subsequent and increasingly desperate letters, proposing solutions to the guarantor problem.²⁵ He apologised 'for the trouble I make you, but I don't [let] anything rest for me but for the sake of my brothers'.²⁶ Despite his repeated pleas, Simon also ran up against the tide of war, and all possibilities of rescue ended a week after the Fund received his last letter on the subject. Both boys laboured diligently but their lack of resources and autonomy neutralised their efforts in spite of their passion and desperation.

Even *Kinder* whose siblings had secured guarantees endured agonised waits and heightened anxiety in the weeks and months before their arrival. Berta Rotblit and Regina Fischbein who had been in England since February 1939 wrote to Zeitlyn in late summer to express their apprehensions about Berta's sister and Regina's two brothers who were still in Otwock with the other Polish children.

²² USL/MS/183 574 F1 Simon Markel to Zeitlyn, 17 July 1939.

²³ *Ibid.* His uncanny eloquence suggests some help in composing this letter, but all his letters written over a span of several years conformed to the same language patterns, spelling and syntactical errors, indicating that the phrasing was indeed his own.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Markel to Zeitlyn, 17 July 1939.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Zeitlyn to Markel, 18 July 1939, Markel to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939, 6 August 1939 and 21 August 1939. Simon was assured that the Leeds hostel, where he lived was planning to take 'to take up and give lodging to a number of boys [...] chosen by the chairman' and asked Zeitlyn to put his brothers names forward because 'it would not make any difference to him to which boys he gives his help. You would easily succeed in that' Markel to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

[W]e've heard that the permits are not yet there for all children. We request you with all politeness to please make sure our siblings are on the transport [...] We and our parents are very upset and impatient.²⁷

The girls helpfully gave Zeitlyn information on each child's placement and even included the return postage for his anticipated reply.²⁸ They were promptly assured that all three children would arrive 'within the next two to three weeks' as indeed they did.²⁹ The girls had little influence on the outcome of the case, but demonstrated the extent of contact between the *Kinder* in England and their families in Poland, and the accuracy of their knowledge about their siblings' arrangements. Prompted by their parents, they had refused to let matters take their own course, and like others, turned to the refugee agency for confirmation and assurances.

Worry and concern about families was magnified after the invasion of Poland and the start of the war, and the Polish *Kinder* continued to petition the Fund for help in contacting parents in occupied countries. Salomon Lassman wrote in April 1940 that although he was 'very happy to say' that he could get in touch with his parents, 'through information by neutral countries I am very much disturbed about the happenings in Poland and especially in Warsaw, where my parents are living'.³⁰ Realistic about the limits of the Fund's powers, he asked only 'whether you can give me any help or can you tell me please any institution or private source with whom I can communicate, and who can help me, to bring my parents out of Poland to a neutral country'.³¹ Painfully aware of his parents' precarious situation, Solomon was optimistic that he had the agency to do something helpful for his family. In contrast, Sara Hirschman, who had wanted to know how best to communicate with her parents in Soviet-occupied Poland, asked only 'whether it would be better if we sent a letter to my parents over a neutral country, or directly from here'.³²

The Polish *Kinder's* correspondence indicates that some young refugees were naturally more self-confident and assertive from the outset, regardless of mastery of English. Isi Freund, a bold young man with thick blond hair, was never hesitant to ask

²⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F4 Berta Rotblit and Regina Fischbein to Zeitlyn, 3 August 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Berta Rotblit and Regina Fischbein, 4 August 1939.

³⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Salomon Lassman to Zeitlyn, 10 April 1940.

³¹ Ibid.

³² USL/MS/183 574 F1 SH to Kaizer, 24 February 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter. Excusing herself for 'taking too much of your time with all our writing' she closed with 'the most heartfelt thanks and also best greetings to Mr Zeitlyn and you'.

the Fund directly for help. Rather audaciously, he asked Elsley Zeitlyn to ‘forward the enclosed letter to my parents. Unfortunately it is impossible for me [to post it myself],



since I don't own a single penny’.³³ Not bothering to couch his request in the usual excessive politeness, Isi's breezy tone belied his concern; but whether grave or glib, the Polish *Kinder* actively sought the Fund's help especially for the sake of their families. It is not possible to know whether these children had first sought guidance from more immediate carers, but the documentary evidence indicates that many had not developed bonds of trust with their hosts and perhaps believed they were not authoritative enough for such weighty concerns. It is likely, though, that language was the most significant barrier to

seeking assistance from everyday carers. The children were aware that the staff in Soho Square could read both German and Yiddish, and until they mastered English, sought the Fund's aid for even minor needs.

Apart from family appeals, the children's requests were self-interested. For example, in the same letter in which he asked for help in corresponding with his parents, Isi Freund requested re-emigration assistance, a common subject of concern for the *Kinder* in the months immediately after their arrival. Since the *Kindertransport* was originally conceived as a transmigratory scheme, the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund favoured those with solid re-emigration prospects and a significant number of their *Kinder* had relatives in the USA and Palestine. Isi was among those children who expected to leave Britain for other destinations and framed his request in his unapologetically forthright way:

I already informed Mr. Gorowitz that I received the request from the Inter Aid Committee to send in passport photos for my journey to Mexico. I asked him to do this little chore for me, since otherwise my trip might be delayed. Unfortunately nothing has been done as yet! I borrowed a shilling and am not able to pay it back. I would be very thankful if you could fulfil the above mentioned requests!!³⁴

Although Isi seemed to regard the Fund's staff as there to do his bidding, he was never

³³ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Zeitlyn, 6 April 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Isi wrote this letter in German, which may account for its confident informality. However, once he became fluent in English, his letters did not change perceptibly in tone or style.

upbraided for his communication style. Instead, the Fund did all they could for the boy, enlisting the Movement's help with documents and visas. Many months later the RCM informed Isi that it was impossible to secure the numerous transit passes, and he would have to stay in England.³⁵

Those with contacts in America stood a better chance of re-emigration, though there were still numerous hurdles to surmount, and few actually managed to leave before the United States entered the war. Two sets of siblings who were unsuccessful tried to utilise an evacuation scheme organised for British children under the age of sixteen in order to reach relatives in the USA. Sara Hirschman, writing in German, asked for help, although her plans were far from formed.

I would be very grateful if you could tell me whether my sister and I, age 10 + 15 years, could get on this transport to America. We have relatives in Brooklyn NY who would take us. I would be very pleased if you could [...] let us know to whom we should apply and whether we could go directly to our relatives.³⁶

Without affidavits from America, Sara's hopes came to nought, but two other siblings very nearly made it to the United States. Helen and Joachim Reich, whose older brother Benjamin was in the UK arranged with a sponsor who paid a considerable sum to secure their passage and visas. The bureaucracy involved worked against the pair and Benjamin informed the Fund that his sister 'who is becoming sixteen December next won't be able to evacuate and I have no intention to send my brother by himself'.³⁷ Two *Polenaktion* girls went to Palestine in 1940 and the Korman brothers joined their mother in the USA in 1941, but these were the only Polish *Kinder* who re-emigrated voluntarily during the war.³⁸ The fact that the adult refugee Benjamin Reich was unable to secure the passage of his younger siblings demonstrates the limited agency of all refugees in matters of emigration regardless of their ages or circumstances.

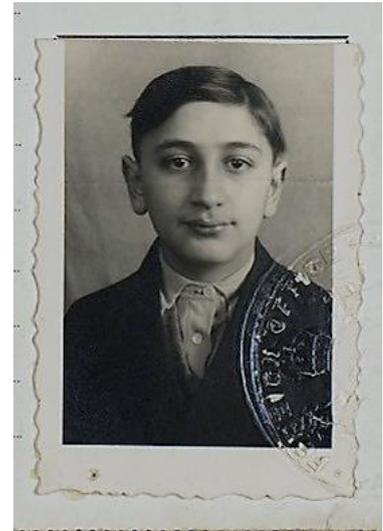
³⁵ USL/MS/183 563 F1 G Exiner to Isi Freund, 14 August 1941.

³⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F1 SH to Kaizer, 21 June 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter.

³⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Benjamin Reich to PJRF, 12 November 1940.

³⁸ These are the known cases from among the 129 *Polenaktion Kinder* whose names and some records have been located. While these four represent only 3% of all the Polish *Kinder*, for the *Kindertransport* as a whole, about 15% re-emigrated before America entered the war. See Presland [Gladys Bendit], *A Great Adventure* p. 14.

The majority of children's requests reflected immediate concerns, including reunions with their siblings from whom they were separated. Their ability to plan for and execute such visits was circumscribed by both the restrictions on aliens' free movement and the expense of travel, necessitating requests for permission and financial aid. Many of the children were quite proactive in making these requests, and the Fund was generally cooperative in granting them, especially in extenuating circumstances such as those presented by Karol Feliks who applied for 'a grant of £2 to cover the cost of visiting my sister Thea which has undergone a severe operation'.³⁹ He justified his appeal by listing his wages and living expenses



leaving him with '4 shillings a week, of which I cannot afford to spend this sum'.⁴⁰ He was allowed to go but the Fund only granted £1 to meet his traveling costs.⁴¹ As in Herbert's case, the Fund readily gave permission, but proved less willing to provide money for sibling reunions.⁴²

Sibling separations highlight the spaces in which *Kinder* agency was limited. Few children were able to fulfil parental wishes that they remain with their brothers and sisters. The extreme example in the Polish Fund files is the separation of the Baranska twins, in which no efforts by the children, Sonia's foster parents or even the Fund were successful in reuniting the girls. Similarly, Herbert Haberberg had no recourse to remain with his younger brother as his mother had hoped. Ida Najman was able to petition the Fund to move her nearer her brother, but that was the best many children could hope for, since most foster families were unwilling or ill-equipped to take on two children. Hostels provided some opportunities for same gendered siblings to remain together and there are several who managed this solution successfully, but the majority of siblings

³⁹ USL/MS/183 213/2 Karol Feliks to PJRF, 27 October 1941.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., PJRF information form, 2 November 1941.

⁴² USL/MS/183 563 F1 Herbert Haberberg to PJRF, 1 April 1942 and 19 October 1942. On two occasions in 1942, Herbert petitioned the Fund to allow his brother to come visit him in London. He assured them on the first occasion that 'I take full responsibility for the time that he is with me' and on the second that 'The only reason that I want to take him to London is that I have not seen him for nearly a year and it would cost me too much money to go out there'. Although Manfred was no longer living with the Finkelsteins, the family hosted Herbert and Manfred on these infrequent visits.

sets that came from Poland were placed separately.⁴³

Siblings who insisted on remaining together faced different challenges that limited their agency and deepened their dependence on the Fund. The most striking example is the Hirschman sisters, Sara and Yehudit, who had been guaranteed by different families, but insisted on staying together when they arrived in London. Yehudit remembered that their mother's parting words in Poland were to 'hold one another's hands and never to let go'.⁴⁴ For the Hirschman girls this meant accepting a place in the only home that would take them both, with a foster mother who regarded the younger girl as a liability.⁴⁵ Sara's correspondence depicts a determined and resourceful young woman, imbued with a strong sense of responsibility for her sister and a willingness to seek assistance. Her first letters requesting help from the Fund were in German, but she soon began to write in halting English, hinting that all was not well in the Bernstein home.⁴⁶ Her growing self-assurance and mastery of English were evident when she informed the Fund that she had 'not received the pocket money for the first and second month. As I can so use it now to buy a few things for my sister and myself [...] would you be so kind and let me have it as I need it urgent'.⁴⁷ Sara had become convinced that she could turn to the Fund in difficulty, and continued to do so as the situation in the Bernstein home worsened.



Kinder who were confident in the Fund's responsiveness relied upon them to fulfil requests both large and small. As recounted in the previous chapter, Sara eventually revealed to the Fund that she had been working as an unpaid domestic for Mrs Bernstein. She had remained silent until she reached the age at which she could

⁴³ Among these were another set of identical twins, Rebecka and Liesa Krenzler, who went to a Nottingham girls' hostel. Sisters FF and PF and Bruno and Josef Nussbaum were kept together in both Worthing and Leeds, and both the Rotblit sisters and Ohringer sisters were together in the Middlesbrough hostel. In another case, the Fund reunited Sylvia Balbierer, and her sister at the Wyberley hostel in Burgess Hill where Ruth Balbierer was living although the reunion was short lived. The hostel was requisitioned and the girls all sent to evacuation foster homes, and the Balbierer sisters were separated once more. See USCSF/ VHA Sylvia Balbierer Schneider and USL/MS/183 591 F1 Zeitlyn to H. J. Osterley, 12 February 1940.

⁴⁴ Author's phone interview with YH, 23 March 2012.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1 for an example.

⁴⁷ Ibid., SH to Kaiser, 11 March 1941.

undertake self-supporting work.

Now that I am 16 ½ years old I have registered for work [...] and I would be very thankful if you could find out if there are any Jewish people in Aylesbury who would have my sister Yehudit she is 11 years old now. *I am shure that you will help us out.* In the hope to here very soon of you.⁴⁸

Though she had formulated a plan to free herself, Sara still felt responsible for securing an appropriate placement for her sister, and expressed confidence that the Fund would help. They did not disappoint her, eventually locating a job and lodging in Leeds, and placing Yehudit in Harrogate, which Kaiser had assured Sara ‘was only a busride’ away.⁴⁹ This separation was not ideal from the sisters’ perspective, and Yehudit disliked the hostel, but it was an improvement upon conditions in the Bernstein home, where both girls felt mistreated. This generally positive change in circumstances was largely attributable to Sara’s efforts and active engagement with the Fund. Sara’s appreciation for their support is attested to by an engraved invitation to her wedding in 1945 made out to the Executive of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund.⁵⁰ After leaving the Bernsteins, Sara displayed one final flash of defiant agency. A job application from Leeds had been sent to the Bernsteins with a request for a reference. Mr Bernstein declared ‘that while he can give the best references about the girl he did not want to complete the form’ because he objected to the information Sara had provided.⁵¹ Sara had declared that for the past two years she had worked in domestic service in the Bernstein home.⁵²

Although many *Kinder* requested help with major issues as Sara had done, a great number of their letters were concerned with quotidian matters of clothing and pocket money. Some came from children living in hostels or in close proximity to one another, facilitating the composition of group entreaties, a strategy particularly favoured by the young men. Several of the boys who had been on Mutford’s Farm with Herbert Haberberg wrote a group letter during a brief sojourn in London after the farm was closed down. Validating Herbert’s claim that they learned virtually no English while on the farm, the letter, though written in the spring of 1940, was in German. They listed their clothing requirements and ‘most politely’ requested ‘that you manage to have us

⁴⁸ Ibid., SH to Kaiser, 26 June 1941 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Ibid., Kaiser to SH, 28 October 1941.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Gorowitz to SH, 19 July 1945. No representative of the Fund was able to attend the wedding but they did send £25 as a wedding gift.

⁵¹ Ibid., Gorowitz to Barrett, 21 December 1941.

⁵² USL/MS/183 574 F1 Montague Burton Job Application, 8 December 1941. Mr Bernstein said he would not complete the form ‘because she was not employed by him’.

get a weekly allowance so that we can have our laundry done, our shoes repaired, and be able to purchase some small necessary items (e.g. stamps)!'⁵³ Indeed, stamps were a recurring request, no doubt needed in order to help the *Kinder* write letters to the Fund and to keep in touch with their friends scattered across the country, if not their families in occupied Europe.

The group letter strategy was employed by a number of boys who chose writers with the most persuasive powers or the best grasp of English to plead their causes. An early letter to Elsley Zeitlyn, representing the interests of five boys in Worthing, was written in German by Leo Klarman, a confident young man and the eldest in the group. The boys were desperate for shoes, clothes, and toiletries, for which Leo provided extensive itemised lists. He also mentioned that in their few weeks in London they had each received only eleven pence in pocket money.⁵⁴

We would be very happy if you could provide us with one shilling every week. That would only be one penny more. Unfortunately we haven't received a penny in 3 months and when the English boys buy some small thing we always just have to look on.⁵⁵

The letter provided a rare glimpse of refugees comparing themselves enviously with their English counterparts, emphasising their diminished and dependent status. Leo's final request was on behalf of Jack Reich, the youngest who 'would very much like his TWO brothers to join us' adding confidently, 'We are sure that the hotel director would also allow them to stay here as evacuated children, since they can sleep with us in our room'.⁵⁶ This was but the first in a volley of missives from Leo, who was a prolific letter writer and self-promoter, as the Fund was later to discover.

The boys in Worthing were very proactive in making their needs and desires known. Leo's younger brother Herbert became the designated writer when the language changed to English, and persuasion seems to have been a family trait. During the summer of 1940, when Worthing became a protected area during the Battle of Britain, evacuated children were forced to relocate once again. Proving himself remarkably well informed about pending alien restrictions, Herbert made his case to the Worthing Refugee Committee on behalf of his four compatriots.

⁵³ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Adolph Bank and others to Zeitlyn, 22 April 1940.

⁵⁴ USL/MS/183 409 F2 Leo Klarman to Zeitlyn, 31 December 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

[I]t has come to my knowledge that all the London children who have been evacuated to Worthing [...] are being re-evacuated to the Home Counties [...] If you could arrange with Mr Zeitlyn that we may come back to London you would make us very happy.⁵⁷

Setting out his points in lawyerly fashion, Herbert, who possessed a disarming smile, argued that they should be brought to London immediately so as to avoid the fate of those evacuated to Devon and Cornwall who were not allowed back to London.



Worried that they would be ‘evacuated to a “barred” or “defended” area’ where ‘the difficulties of attaining employment are greater still’, he asked, ‘would it not be better that we would go now, to save us the trouble and time?’⁵⁸ Declaring that ‘there really depends much on our coming’, he closed the letter with a note that they were all ‘rather bad off with cases and we don’t know how to help with this trouble’.⁵⁹ The Worthing Committee and the Fund were impressed with the letter and within two months, the boys had been sent to

London. The boost to Klarman’s confidence after this victory can be read into letters emanating from London, where the boys continued to find their financial position unsatisfactory.

It has not been possible for us on the various occasions on which we have been at your offices to tell you [...] our requests. Up to now we have been provided with all the things we wanted but since we came to London we have been unable to obtain anything. Would you please [...] make arrangements about the way little expenses shall be paid in future [...] we would appreciate a quick settlement.⁶⁰

The letter listed their requirements and a request for repayment of expenses already incurred. Though still dependent upon the relief agencies’ largesse, their increasing astuteness translated into greater assertiveness as they moved towards autonomy.

The *Kinder*’s growing facility with English and acquired shrewdness in communicating their needs and desires is also seen in matters pertaining to education

⁵⁷ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Herbert Klarman to Mr Taylor, 15 July 1940.

⁵⁸ Ibid. According to the letter, only Bruno Nussbaum, the budding architect, should be allowed to stay in Worthing, otherwise his studying ‘would be wasted’. Bruno ‘would prefer to stay here than to go to the unknown place where he may have to go to a village school’, but if that were not possible, ‘he would like to come to London too and continue his studies there’.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Leo Klarman, Edward Ohringer, & Herbert Klarman to PJRF, 17 July 1940.

and training. A different cohort of boys who remained together for several years also resorted to group action. Edward Pachtman, Hebert Haberberg, Jehuda Laulich and Benno Katz were among the dozen or so boys sent to Mutford's Farm on the outbreak of the war. Elsley Zeitlyn had hoped that the farm would provide Zionist training on the Bachad model, but in fact they were not given proper clothing, equipment, training or pocket money and spent their days, as Pachtman sardonically recalled 'collecting stones from the fields and similar efforts requiring high intelligence'.⁶¹ Herbert Haberberg remembered picking potatoes in the winter of 1939-40, clad in the only clothes he had brought with him from Poland – a fancy new suit of 'plus-fours' provided by his Polish uncle in the misguided apprehension that this outfit would allow him to fit in better with English boys.⁶² Herbert claimed that the boys 'went on strike' and this act of defiant agency forced Zeitlyn to shut down the farm and send them elsewhere.⁶³ Herbert's recollection is supported by Zeitlyn's rueful admission to the Movement that he had kept the boys 'for the past seven months with a view to their being trained in agriculture, but I regret to say it has turned out to be a hopeless task. I am now constrained to close the Farm House'.⁶⁴

The closure of Mutford's Farm was probably not entirely due to the boys' defiant actions. Two of the boys' elder sisters were in England on domestic visas and after visiting their siblings, both Toni Pachtman and Doris Lieder remonstrated with Zeitlyn about conditions there, as Gerry Leider recalled.

When she saw [...] the circumstances under which we boys laboured and our housing, food and guideless existence, she was so appalled that she travelled straight to London (no easy task in war time) confronted the President [...] a man whose name I never forgot, Zeitlin, who in response to her pleading, said, "your brother has to stay on the farm, no one is coming back to big cities, we have no other place for him" etc.⁶⁵

Doris threatened to go to the police 'to report the "Hard Labour" situation' and the 'abject poverty, no education spare food, rough living conditions' Zeitlyn had 'these underage boys living in'.⁶⁶ It is very likely that these complaints had more than a little to do with the curtailment of operations at Mutford's.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Edward Pachtman, *Our Family*, p. 45.

⁶² Interview with Hebert Haberberg, 28 January 2012.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Zeitlyn to Elaine Laski, 1 April 1940.

⁶⁵ Email correspondence with Gerry Leider, 22 July 2013.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Toni Pachtman stormed into Zeitlyn's office after a visit to the Farm and demanding her brother's removal. Phone interview with Yossi Aaron, Toni Pachtman's son, 24 August 2013.

Belief in the efficacy of their own agency provided potent encouragement for boys who had arrived as destitute refugees, and they continued to act together to advance their desire for education and training. When their move from Ely to Leeds was imminent, they designated Jehuda Laulicht, the most serious and eloquent of the group, to compose a collective letter, making the case for their enrolment in the Leeds College of Technology rather than the ORT technical school.



Comparing the fees at the two institutions, they found that it would save the Polish Fund ‘nearly £30 per annum’, and the College provided a diploma course rather than a technical certificate.⁶⁸ Their argument was persuasive to both the Fund and Mr Barrett in Leeds, but they lacked the English Matriculation qualifications necessary for admission. As foreigners, bright and motivated refugees frequently encountered such roadblocks. These, combined with inconsistent messages

about further education from the refugee organisations made academic advancement exceptionally difficult and contributed to a sense among these boys that ‘the deck was stacked’ against them.

Undeterred by such setbacks, some refugee boys pursued the necessary qualifications on their own. Eduard Pachtman borrowed money for a correspondence course and exam, and then wrote to the Fund when the matter was a *fait accompli*, noting that they had ‘kindly encouraged me to go in for my Matriculation, and promised me that your committee would pay the necessary expenses’.⁶⁹ The Fund was not entirely certain that they *had* made any such promises to the boy, and there was considerable delay in meeting his request for retroactive payment. In fact, when Pachtman was caught allegedly under reporting his wages as well as colluding with his landlady ‘to deceive us about his lodgings and the money sent for his maintenance’ he insisted that it was only necessary because the Fund had not provided the money to pay back his debt.⁷⁰ Pachtman, supported by religious leaders in Leeds, trusted that the Fund would honour its promise and pay for his successful matriculation, in which he rightly

⁶⁸ USL/MS 193 591 F2 Edward Pachtman, et all to PJRF, 29 September 1941.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Edward Pachtman to Kaizer, 2 October 1942. He asked for reimbursement for the cost of the course ‘and two and a half guineas for my examination’.

⁷⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Dr Litvin Report, 28 October 1942, Gee to Kaizer, 26 November 1942 and Gee to Kaizer, 7 December 1942.

took pride. The refugee agencies were unpredictable and inconsistent in approving payments for independently pursued educational endeavours, and notoriously dilatory in providing such payments. This impelled boys like Pachtman to take matters in their own hands and borrow money in order to advance, putting them in untenable positions. Their expressions of agency in these situations, while not always positive from the organisations' point of view, nevertheless demonstrated the *Kinder's* continuing attempts to manage their lives and control their destinies while still under the care of the refugee organisations.

The habit of self-advocacy developed early among many of the *Polenaktion Kinder* as they looked to the Fund to provide guidance and material help of all kinds. The Mutford's Farm boys continued to send the Fund exceptionally polite and detailed requests for pocket money and urgently needed clothing.⁷¹ In contrast, the Nussbaum brothers' correspondence with the Fund concerned their joint desires to become certified architects, commencing with their move to Leeds.

Since we left Worthing we need some help and advices from you. My elder brother Bruno who studded 'Architecture' in Worthing had to break up his studies [...] He done some interesting 'Architecture drawings'. It is a pity that he had to leave [...] the profession what I am interested in is 'Architect' too.⁷²

Placed as apprentices in a Leeds architecture firm, Bruno's dissatisfactions had led to his difficult and unsatisfactory move to London (outlined in Chapter 1). While still in Leeds he had appealed for more training, complaining that he was 'not learning as much as I am shure you would wish me to' and lobbying for a course that would qualify him for the Royal Institute of British Architects. According to Bruno, such training was 'essential for anyone who wishes to keep himself and to be of any use to [...] the people of the country in which he lives'.⁷³ Revealing that 'it is one of my greatest dreams to go to college and



⁷¹ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Jehuda Laulich, Edward Pachtman, Hebert Haberberg and Benno Katz to PJRF, 25 September 1941. These included overcoats, boots and 'a pair of man-sized winter pyjamas' for Jehuda Laulich, adding, 'we do not think it is necessary to repeat that the things which we have mentioned are only the things we absolutely could not do without'.

⁷² USL/MS/190 AJ 390 7/10 Josef Nussbaum to PJRF, 17 September 1940.

⁷³ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Bruno Nussbaum to PJRF, 19 August 1941.

to achieve the R.I.B.A' he made his most persuasive case:⁷⁴

After the war, architects will be needed, not only in England, but all over the universe, and I will get many chances to prove myself worthy of the letters behind my name. I would then be able to prove my gratitude to the Polish Committee which have [done] many good things for us [...] I would be very grateful if you would consider of my going to any college of architecture for it is on this my position of the future depends.⁷⁵

This charmingly phrased letter represented the conscious self-promotion and innocent sincerity of a bright, ambitious sixteen year old who was wholly dependent upon the kindness of strangers to realise his dreams. Expressing the required gratitude and siting the request within a framework of civic responsibility, Bruno also revealed a boyish eagerness to prove himself worthy, 'not only in England but all over the universe'. The Fund briefly considered the request, but £250 for a five-year course was deemed far too expensive and Bruno had to settle for night school and correspondence courses towards his further qualifications.⁷⁶

Although the Fund tried to be responsive to the ambitions of its child refugees, the refugee organisations' bureaucracies were cumbersome and inefficient, frustrating the *Kinder* and at the same time honing their assertiveness. One of the best examples concerned Josef Nussbaum's request for architectural drawing supplies and evening classes, made toward the end of 1941.⁷⁷ When he received no reply, he appealed again, helpfully providing a 'set marked number 1' and if 'that it is a bit too much money I have put another set in, marked number 2 which I could probable make do'.⁷⁸ Although he diplomatically gave the organisation a choice, he 'would be so grateful' if they would 'let me have the first set' 'as it is just the sort suitable for my work'.⁷⁹ The total came to just under £6. Six months later, the list was forwarded to the Fund by the Leeds Refugee Committee to whom Josef had appealed for help, but he still got no response. After another lapse of five months, Nussbaum wrote again to the PJRF.

It is about one half years that I am writing every month to you, for payment of some materials, on which I did not receive any final reply. Will you be so kind and reply me so quick as possible, because I need these materials very urgently.⁸⁰

He wrote again in March 1943, still having not received the materials and fees he had

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Kaizer to Bruno Nussbaum, 3 December 1941.

⁷⁷ USL/MS/190 390 7/10 Josef Nussbaum to PJRF 19, November 1941.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Josef Nussbaum to PJRF, 15 December 1941.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Josef Nussbaum to PJRF, 11 October 1942.

requested sixteen months earlier.⁸¹ The request ground its way through three different refugee organisations and was finally approved by the JRC in July 1943, although Josef did not actually receive the materials until September – a full two years from the original request.⁸² This case, although extreme, highlights the young refugees' dependence on guardian agencies even for modest sums necessary to advance their education and training. With no parents, relatives or concerned friends to step in, they were entirely reliant upon the refugee organisations to achieve their goals. These negotiations tested the patience of highly motivated youth and often ended in disappointment despite their concerted efforts to exercise agency.

Not all *Kinder* possessed the necessary forbearance to tolerate the refugee agencies' time-consuming bureaucracies and disorganisation. One of the least longsuffering was Isi Freund, who, while living in the Leeds hostel applied for new trousers, never imagining that it would take four months to get a properly fitting pair.⁸³ After his long wait, Isi wrote in some frustration to the PJRF:

Please allow me to point out to you, that the boys of the Bloomsbury House and the Czech Trust Fund are getting an allowance of a few Pounds yearly for clothing from their respective Committees and I would like to ask you to consider whether this matter couldn't be arranged for us as well.⁸⁴

Freund was confident enough to express his opinions forcefully, though he softened the tone a bit by expressing the hope that Gorowitz would not 'be angry with me for making any suggestions to you!!'.⁸⁵ His suggestion was not acted upon, but his awareness of the differences in the care of *Kindertransportees*, and his willingness to advocate for equal treatment demonstrated a developing self-assurance, a practical understanding of the refugee politics and a demand to be treated fairly, all hallmarks of emerging autonomy.

Those boys who were clumsier in their requests and who allowed their frustrations to surface naturally met with less success than those who learned to curry favour. One of the most blunt was Mendel Solomon, a boy who had been challenging the Fund since the days on Mutford's Farm who wrote in exasperation after waiting six weeks for a new pair of shoes:

⁸¹ Ibid., Josef Nussbaum to PJRF, 17 March 1943.

⁸² Ibid., Gorowitz to Josef Nussbaum 11 July 1943, Josef Nussbaum to PJRF, 6 September 1943.

⁸³ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Gorowitz, 20 October 1941.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Isi Freund to Gorowitz, 29 October 1941.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

I received a note [...] informing me that I will soon receive my shoes. I answered this note and a week afterwards I sent yet another letter. Both of the letters were not answered. I think it disgraceful!! [...] If I don't get the promised shoes and other clothing before Passover I will have to report the matter to Lieutenant Colonel Levey.⁸⁶

Mendel, who did not bother to cushion his sentiments with courtesies or deflect his annoyance, even felt emboldened enough to threaten the Fund. Not surprisingly, he earned a reputation as a troublemaker. Another boy in the Leeds hostel who had earned



a similar reputation was Rudi Kleinbrodt, a mature young man with a strong brow and wavy hair, who also vented his frustrations about finding a suitable job. 'It is now already six weeks ago since I wrote to you my first letter and [...] I have now nearly lost all my patient in waiting for a communication from you in this matter'.⁸⁷ Securing remunerative employment was one of the biggest complaints that *Kinder* boys expressed in their letters to the Fund. Satisfying jobs were few in places

like Leeds, where accommodation costs remained low, but positions in London rarely paid enough to cover food, lodging and clothing. And although they were straining to become autonomous and independent, their financial dependence on the Fund carried with it the sometimes overbearing supervision described in Chapter 1.

Disappointment, resentment, loneliness, fear and anger caused a number of boys like Rudi to act out and express agency negatively. All the children were expected to dedicate their earnings to their upkeep and very little was allotted for their own pocket money. While in Leeds, Rudi was caught under-reporting his wages in order to keep a little more of his earnings for himself. Although the Leeds Committee wanted the PJRF 'to take back this boy and punish him by sending him to a camp or similar place at your discretion,' in the end, they were satisfied with a signed confession:⁸⁸

As you have heard I have done a big offence, I have kept from my weekly wages sometimes few shillings without permission. Unfortunately I cant tell you the sum which I kept back but I think it must be about £5. I feel that I made a big mistake and I beg your pardon

⁸⁶ USL/MS/183 563 F 2 Mendel Solomon to PJRF, 21 March 1941. Colonel Levey headed the British ORT-OSE (see below).

⁸⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Rudi Kleinbrodt to Kaizer, 16 March 1942.

⁸⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Minsk to Zeitlyn, 2 October 1941.

and my guardian for all my offences. I hope you will give me a chance. I put my fate in your hands and I hope for forgiveness.⁸⁹

Two years later in London, Rudi repeated the offence.⁹⁰ This time, he was let off with a promise to pay back the amount he had pocketed. Mr Gee of the BoG expressed his faith that Rudi was ‘the sort of good fellow who will probably repay any assistance granted him’.⁹¹ As the case of Edward Pachtman showed, Rudi was not alone in this subterfuge – years of penury and dependence led many boys to seek autonomy through less positive behaviour.

Dissatisfactions with lodging and training were common subjects of correspondence, especially from the boys in the Leeds hostel who were attending the ORT-OSE school.⁹² Many boys found the ORT and its associated hostels disappointing, and quite a few of them expressed their disenchantment freely to Sydney Gerrard, who for about two years ran the Children’s Department of the PJRF. Letters to Sydney, to whom many of the boys looked as a confidante and friend, differed markedly in tone from those written to authority figures such as Zeitlyn, Kaizer and Gorowitz, and the boys in particular regarded him as someone to whom they could safely pour out their hearts. Little is known about Sydney, who was called up to service in 1941 and left the Fund, but he seems to have taken a genuine interest in the children’s welfare at a time when they most needed guidance and care. Sydney was a favourite of Isi Freund, who wrote light-heartedly about his training at the ORT. In addition to electrical engineering, ‘I am also trained already in another kind of engineering which forms a good professional training i.e. domestical work!’⁹³ Not all the boys adopted Isi’s jocular attitude to the perceived deficiencies of the ORT. Oskar Bergmann complained bitterly.

I came here [...] to learn a trade. The first two weeks I didn’t learn anything because there was no master. The third week we just started with the electrician than they gave me housecleaning [...] Now today a week later they gave me again housecleaning.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid. The letter was addressed to one of the PJRF Executive Committee members.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Gee to Kaiser, 21 September 1943.

⁹¹ Ibid., Gee to Kaiser, 7 September 1943.

⁹² Katarzyna Person, "A Constructive Form of Help": Vocational Training as a Form of Rehabilitation of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, 1939–1948’ *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 8, 2011, pp. 84-95, (pp. 84-6). ORT was a technical training scheme established in late nineteenth century Russia. British ORT began in 1921 although there were no schools in the UK until the Berlin ORT, which had begun in 1937, was allowed to flee to England on 29 August 1939 with 104 students and a few of the masters. Set up in Leeds, it served refugee boys from Germany, Austria and Poland and was run with military precision by Colonel J. H. Levey head of British ORT.

⁹³ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Sidney Gerrard, 3 January 1941.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Oscar Bergmann to Sidney Gerrard, 9 January 1941.

Receiving no reply, he wrote again, concerned that ‘perhaps you didn’t received my letter or you think that I am silly’.⁹⁵ Desperate that his complaints be taken seriously, he listed the problems in Leeds.

The conditions are terrible here. I am learning so good as nothing. Here are a few theifs which are stealing from everyone [...] then the dishes isn’t Kosher. We are getting by milk meals the same dishes as by meat. Beside this Colonel Levey told us that we will learn a here a trade but I am now here seven weeks and the only thing what I learned was housecleaning. I knew this trade already before.⁹⁶

Oskar felt duped, assuring Sydney he had come to Leeds ‘because I heard such a nice speech’ and not because he was afraid of the London air raids.⁹⁷ Despite his complaints, Oskar apologized for making ‘you always such troubles, but it isn’t my fault’. He did not want to appear ungrateful, telling Sydney ‘You mustn’t think that I am never satisfied’ but he was quick to assure Sydney that he was not the only one, since ‘there are every week going a few boys away from here’.⁹⁸ He relied on Sydney to ‘settle everything with the Committee which will be very angry of me’.⁹⁹ Oskar’s frank admission of guilt over the way his actions would be perceived demonstrated a conscience and morality for which the boys were not often given credit.

Although the message of gratitude and indebtedness had been well assimilated by the refugee boys, they expressed agency by leaving the ORT, despite the guilt they may have felt about their disobedience. Oskar was among their number, aided by Mendel Solomon, who confessed his role to Sydney and bitterly outlined the consequences.

Colonel Levey stopped my pocket money and gave me penalty duty and reported me to the police. I refused of course to do the penalty work. Yesterday I had to go to the C.I.D. Besides this Colonel Levey wants to send me on a farm without my agreement.¹⁰⁰

Mendel, a serious and mature looking young man, frankly informed Sydney that ‘I won’t be responsible for things that will have to happen’ and asked him to get in touch with Levey, adding, ‘I expect an answer soon’.¹⁰¹ The Colonel later softened and said he thought that Mendel ‘has some good in him and should make a success of his training if

⁹⁵ Ibid., Oscar Bergmann to Sidney Gerrard, 19 January 1941.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Oscar Bergmann to Sidney Gerrard, 9 January 1941

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Mendel Solomon to Sidney Gerrard, 5 February 1941. C.I.D. stands for Criminal Investigation Department.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

he will be amenable to discipline'.¹⁰² Mendel was allowed to continue his training under strict supervision and the threats of penalties were dropped. The Leeds boys had developed a strong self-esteem and refused to acquiesce to perceived injustices. They were increasingly emboldened to act autonomously even though their agency was expressed through rebellion.



It is interesting to note the way in which *Kinder* later recalled some of these interactions and assertions of independence. In a previous chapter, it was shown that Thea Feliks failed to recall the refugee organisations by name, and mostly disparaged them, minimising their influence on her life. Others had clearer, though often imperfect memories of the organisations and their interrelationships. Edward Pachtman, for example, made no mention of the PJRF in either his written or recorded testimony but did correctly identify the Board of Guardians as overseeing his care.¹⁰³ Admitting in both accounts that his memories were fragmented, his recall of the period between late 1941 and mid 1943 was quite jumbled. Significantly, he had no clear memory of the time he spent in Leeds, nor recollections of the events that transpired in London when he was accused of financial improprieties. After that incident, Pachtman had, according to Mr Gee, gone back to Leeds 'without our consent' and in disobedience to 'our implicit instructions to him'.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, Gee decreed that since Pachtman 'has removed himself from our care' the Board 'must decline any further responsibility for him'.¹⁰⁵ Of these incidents, Edward Pachtman remembered only that 'I managed to get my matriculation and then Toni organised for me to go to Gateshead Yeshivah. This was in spite of some very strenuous objections from the Board of Guardians, who

¹⁰² Ibid., Anderson to Kaizer, 11 February 1941.

¹⁰³ Pachtman, *Our Family*, p. 45-6. In his recorded testimony, however, he repeatedly stated that it was the Board of Deputies and the Chief Rabbi who had been in charge of his case. YV/EP Audio testimony.

¹⁰⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Gee to Toni Pachtman, 15 December 1942.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Gee to Kaizer, 31 December 1942. Gee wrote further to Toni Pachtman, 15 December 1942: 'In view of his other offences in regard to money matters [...] it is feared that the outlook for your brother's future is not promising [...] You had better explain to your brother that unless he changes his mode of living and shows [...] that he can be honest and straightforward, he may not get off so lightly in the future and will probably suffer the consequences of breaking the law'.

threatened to (and in effect did) wipe their hands of me'.¹⁰⁶ Although he clearly remembered the Board's withdrawal of support, his account implied that their displeasure was provoked by his enrolment in the Yeshiva rather than the unpleasant business of his alleged financial misdeeds. Like Thea Feliks, whose memories were filtered through a meta-narrative of self-reliance, Edward Pachtman had not retained this part of his history, organising his memories instead around his consistent and dedicated efforts to attain further education and the crucial support provided by his sister Toni.

Kinder memories of achieving full independence from refugee agencies are often at odds with the archival record. Although Edward Pachtman believed that his removal to Leeds signalled the end of his relationship with organisations, there is evidence that he called upon them again when the need arose. In 1943, he and Jehuda Laulicht, who had gone to Gateshead with Edward, wrote to one of the Fund's executives with an eloquent plea:

[T]hough the [Yeshiva] can, and does supply our spiritual and the most urgent of our material needs, it is unable to keep us financially. Up to last week one of us gave a few private lessons, and we were thus able to, somewhat roughly, keep our heads above water [...] It was our original intention not to impose upon you anymore, but seeing that circumstances had thus become bad, we had no alternative but to write to you.¹⁰⁷

There is no record of the Fund's response, but in other cases, it is clear that the PJRF continued to afford small sums of relief even after the boys had become independent. Bruno Nussbaum, who had severed his ties with the organisations in 1942, was able to get some of his architecture training through a government scheme after he joined the Army, but while on leave in 1945, he requested the Fund help him purchase some drawing tools and architecture books.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, Herbert Haberberg was certain that after he came to London and fell under the guidance of Mr Gee he had nothing further to do with the Polish Fund, which he does not remember with fondness.¹⁰⁹ He was very surprised, upon reading his case file in 2012, to discover that he had in fact visited their offices and received several grants of £1 to £2 when on leave from the Army in 1945.¹¹⁰

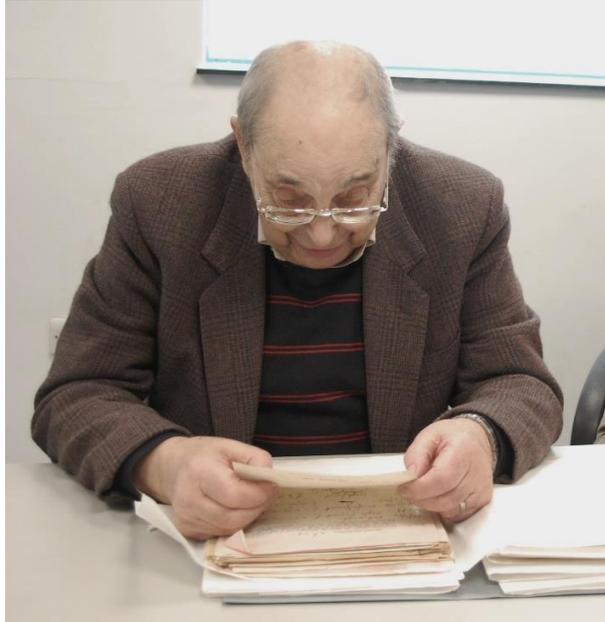
¹⁰⁶ Pachtman, *Our Family*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Jehuda Laulicht and Edward Pachtman to Rabbi Twersky, 29 July 1943.

¹⁰⁸ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Bruno Nussbaum to PJRF, 4 June 1945. His request was granted.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Herbert Haberberg, 28 January 2012.

¹¹⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Typed report, 26 September 1943 through 16 April 1945.



The tension between dependence and autonomy can be seen in the *Polenaktion Kinder*'s willingness to maintain their ties with the Fund even when they were frustrated or disappointed with the organisation. Like any teenagers, they were moving towards independence, but unlike those in intact families, they had only the personnel of refugee agencies to fall back on when they faced difficulties. Many craved someone who showed interest in the everyday events of their lives, and with whom they could share the intimacies of friendship. Sydney Gerrard fulfilled that role for many of the boys, especially Isi Freund, who wrote several letters to him in his inimitable style.

I am still working in the electrical department and am climbing the road to 'fame' and honour [...] How is yourself? What about promotion? Mendel told me that you'll have to leave the Home Guard soon in order to join the army. I sincerely hope that the government will reconsider this important matter and spare the HG the loss of its most courageous warrior!¹¹¹

Affably familiar with the refugee caseworker, Isi's letter shows an understanding of the give and take of friendship and displays a sophisticated and humorous facility with his new language. The boys continued to ask after Sydney long after he had left the Fund, and they seemed to genuinely miss corresponding with him. Some transferred their confidences to others, but the letters to Sydney stand out as a unique example of the connections that were made between *Kinder* and some refugee workers.

¹¹¹ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Sydney Gerrard, 10 June 1941. He also asked after Gorowitz 'and all the other members of the committee' concerned after hearing that the Polish Fund 'was hit and hope very much that nothing serious happened!' He finished by asking Sydney to 'Please answer soon!'

It is safe to assume that most of the children sought a warm connection with some adult confidant during their refugee lives. Many undoubtedly found these figures in their foster parents, teachers, or hostel managers, but the files hold few traces of these relationships. There are only occasional glimpses of such connections, and these are found in letters to various staff of the Fund including Mrs Flaschner, Elsley Zeitlyn's secretary Francis Barnett, and Mr Gorowitz. Mrs Flaschner, who ran the Fund's clothing stores, formed close relationships with some of the girls who came to London for clothing and various other reasons. She was often the one who met underage girls at train stations and chaperoned them in the big city. She established a warm relationship with Ruth Reicher and after one of her visits to London, Ruth wrote, 'I hope you are well I got back very well. If you want any more cooking recipes ask me'.¹¹² This small detail hints at the formation of a motherly bond with the young refugee girl. Francis Barnett's warm and caring demeanour is also remembered fondly by some of the former *Polenaktion* children, an attribute evident in a letter she sent to Helen Reich a few months after her arrival in England in which she apologised 'for not having replied to your letter sooner, but as you must understand I have plenty of work to do'.¹¹³

Anyway, I was very happy to hear from you and to know that you still think of me. I was also very pleased to read your English letter-as I am not very good at German.¹¹⁴

She gave her 'kindest regards to the children, likewise yourself and apologise on my behalf for not writing to them'.¹¹⁵ The children had little regular contact with the London staff, but those who showed empathy made a strong impression on them. A few months later, Helen and two other refugee girls in Ely sent Francis Barnett the following card:

Our teacher gave us yesterday these notes which I am sending to you. She told every girl to send it to their parents. So we thought it would be right if we send it to you.¹¹⁶

These refugee girls were attending an evacuation school with London children whose could easily correspond with their parents, a luxury denied the *Kinder* who were cut off from their own families by war. It is difficult to overstate the poignancy of their having no one else to send their 'parent' letters to than the secretary of a refugee agency.

¹¹² USL/MS/183 591 F3 Ruth Reicher to Mrs Flaschner, nd.

¹¹³ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Francis Barnett to Helen Reich, 25 October 1939.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Helen Reich, Thea Feliks and Fannie Lederberger to Frances Barnett, 23 February 1940.

Mr Gorowitz also made particularly strong connections with some of the girls as they grew older. He was a great lender of books, and someone in whom they could confide when ill or worried. An excerpt from one of Helen Reich's letters exemplifies this relationship. 'I hope you are in as good health and cheer as you were on Tuesday, I was very sorry you could not see me as that was one of my main reason for coming to London'.¹¹⁷ Not long after this letter, Helen went in for surgery, and she wrote to Mr Gorowitz at length about her operation and recovery.¹¹⁸ He was a sympathetic source of strength and support for her in a difficult moment. Similarly, Devorah Brodsky, convalescing from a severe outbreak of skin disease, wrote from Cambridge to let Gorowitz know she had arrived safely and to tell him that 'it is certainly a relieve to be away from the bombs and have a good night's rest. I also take the opportunity thanking very much your kindness. As arranged I hope to see you on Sunday next'.¹¹⁹ She later wrote to let him know how she was getting on after her holiday and enclosing a book she borrowed, noting 'I found it very interesting and it would be advisable if every Zionist would read it'.¹²⁰ When asked about these letters in her ninetieth year, Devorah confessed to but dim memories of the Fund's staff, noting only her fond regard for the doctor who had been so solicitous in treating her skin condition.¹²¹ Faded memories of once significant relationships underscore the importance of documents that attest to the warm bonds that developed, at least temporarily, between some of the *Kinder* and the relief workers in charge of their welfare.

As in other aspects of *Kinder* interaction with refugee organisations, there are marked gender differences in their correspondence with the Fund's personnel. The jocularity, frustration and confrontation that marked many of the boys' communications are entirely absent from the girls' letters. In general, the girls' requests for help and guidance were unguarded, and their letters lacked the calculating persuasion of many of the boy's appeals. This is readily seen in a letter Pepi Firestein wrote in imperfect English to Mr Kaizer:

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Helen Reich to Gorowitz, 3 September 1944.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Helen Reich to Gorowitz, 11 September 1944, 25 September 1944, 18 October 1944.

¹¹⁹ MS 183 575 F1 DB to M Gorowitz, 3 August 1944

¹²⁰ Ibid., DB to Gorowitz 5 September 1944.

¹²¹ Author's interview with DB, 28 April 2013.

I hope I did not interrupt you yesterday as I poned you but I wonderd when we could go. Because we cant live until we got some where to lodge. The lady Mrs James is making me do a lot of work and I only get of every day 2 hours and Fanny the same. And we would love to come back down to London as soones it is possible. Because I am shore my Parents would prefore [us] as tailorresses as well. ¹²²

Although she had been in England for over three years, Pepi had still not mastered the language, and her letter betrayed both timidity and a certain pathos. She seemed to be somewhat afraid of her mistress for she pleaded with Kaizer 'Please dont say anything to Mrs. Thomas that I have poned to you or about this letter thank you very much. If you should pfone [...] please pfone in the morning in case I be out of side'.¹²³ The invocation of her parents' desires is but one of several hints in her correspondence that her anxiety about their separation was a contributing factor in her complete nervous breakdown the following year.¹²⁴ Girls like Pepi reinforced the Fund's natural tendency to consider them more vulnerable and needy, accounting for the kind and solicitous correspondence with them. In turn, the girls related to the Fund's staff more transparently as parental substitutes. Even Sydney Gerrard, whom many of the boys held in high esteem, was regarded more as a beloved older brother than a fatherly figure.

Children's letters to the staff of the Polish Fund are numerous, but letters to others they looked to for guidance and support are rare. One of the very few of these is from Henry Danziger to his former landlords, the Sugarman. Although there is little correspondence from them in the files, this couple must have been warmly hospitable, for Isi Freund made a special request for placement in their home when he transferred from Leeds to London.¹²⁵ Henry believed that the couple were interested in his welfare and indicated that they were among his regular correspondents when he apologised for not writing for such a long time:

We had a concert and I didn't have one free minute during whole seven weeks and I was pretty finished afterwards. So to night I think I choosed the right time to write. The audience at the concert was about 600 people. I was, however a success. All the people to whom I talked after the concert agreed with me saying that I should train my voice very soon.¹²⁶

¹²² USL/MS/183 575 F1 Pepi Firestein to Kaizer, 24 April 1942.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 1.

¹²⁵ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Gorowitz, 15 February 1942.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Henry Danziger to Mr/s Sugarman, 14 July 1941.

As the only child of cantor in the Neustadt synagogue, Henry had desired from childhood to follow his father's profession. In the same letter, he confided these dreams to the Sugarmans.

You know my wish is to be Chasen, but I don't want to be Chasen only, my wish is to have a generally knowledge in music too [...] Now I would like to hear your opinion about my plans. It always seemed to me that you have a certain interest in my plans.¹²⁷

At the time, Henry was enrolled in the Market Gardening course at the ORT, which provided no avenue for his ambitions.¹²⁸ He was then seventeen, and recognised that 'it is no use to go on like this, I know too that I can't depend always in the committee and have to make my own way soon. I want to make it as soon as possible'.¹²⁹ Showing maturity and acknowledging his need to become self-supporting, Henry could not



conceal a boyish delight in describing the receipt of a parcel from the American Foster Parents organisation. 'They send me a 'PARKERS' fountain pen and pencil. I was the first to get something like it and was certainly very proud. I think it is really very nice that so strange people are taking such interest in me'.¹³⁰ Nearly an adult, Henry still plainly missed having someone in whom to confide his ambitions and triumphs and even the small events of his life, like the joy of receiving a fountain pen from America. Such letters speak volumes about the lacunae in these

children's lives – the missing parents, grandparents and extended families with whom to share hopes and ambitions, the struggles of coming of age and the everyday details of living.

Major educational and vocational undertakings were beyond the means of all the refugee children no matter how much they desired to 'make their own way' in life. Once he had determined to pursue his cantorial ambitions, Henry Danziger turned to the Fund for help and guidance.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. He confessed 'I don't like the ORT so much as I liked it before.'

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

As you have heard perhaps already that I am very keen to study music to become a Chasan. It was always the wish of parents that I should learn it, and I think I have the ability too. I know how difficult it is in these times but [...] it would be the best thing for me to [...] study these things wich I need for my future aim.¹³¹

Whether it was the invocation of parental wishes, or a desire to support a religious ambition, the Fund took Henry seriously. A flurry of correspondence indicated that his talent was positively appraised in Leeds and a place was found for him in a London Yeshiva. A month after his arrival in London, however, Henry was working full time as a machinist in Belsize Park. The correspondence stated only that ‘when he came to London and was examined, it was found that he was not suitable’.¹³² It is not clear whether his voice or ‘standard of Jewish knowledge’ was found wanting, but it is most likely that the Fund could not justify supporting an eighteen year old through several years of voice and religious preparation.¹³³ Once the refugee agencies had deemed a course of education was too expensive, it was extremely difficult for *Kinder* to continue pursuing their ambitions. Henry Danziger expressed no resentment towards the PJRF for his failure to train as a chasan, but it meant the indefinite deferral of his ambitions since he was in no position to fund such training himself.



¹³¹ Ibid., Henry Danziger to PJRF, 4 July 1941.

¹³² Ibid., Gorowitz to Cooper, 8 February 1942.

¹³³ Ibid., Issac Cohen to Rabbi Twersky, 7 November 1941.

Other boys who found their ambitions similarly stymied employed risky strategies that depended ultimately upon the good will and largesse of the often fickle refugee organisations. One of these was Julius Buck, who had, like Pachtman, been judged ‘one of those gifted Zbonszyn boys whom it is our duty to help develop their gifts’ and who had also passed his matriculation by studying on his own.¹³⁴ On completion of the exam, he enrolled himself in Birbeck College, London, determined to become a medical doctor.¹³⁵ His foster mother had told him the Fund would pay his fees; however, when they were apprised of the situation, expressed shock ‘that you have entered Birbeck College and are asking us to pay the fee [...] without even consulting us. We therefore cannot be responsible for this payment’.¹³⁶ Buck was more fortunate than Edward Pachtman, whose modest matriculation costs the Fund had balked at paying. Unpredictably, the PJRF reversed course and agreed to fund Buck’s medical training, for which he was ‘very grateful to you indeed. I am working very hard and feel sure, that you will have no cause ever to regret your decision’.¹³⁷ Buck had taken a far greater risk than Pachtman, enrolling in an expensive five-year course without firm guarantees of financial support, but his case demonstrated that the Fund, though inconsistent in its provisions for further education, did help some children of exceptional aptitude and perseverance fulfil their ambitions. Buck’s gratitude was sincere. A little over a year later, he invited Mr Kaizer to his wedding and received sincere congratulations from the Fund.¹³⁸

Expressions of gratitude are ubiquitous in the *Kinder*’s correspondence, but for these children, gratitude was an issue freighted with complexity and its manifestations cannot always be taken at face value. It is possible to find in the children’s letters both heartfelt appreciation and the calculated responses that many *Kinder* quickly learned were expected of them. When Herman Karpf thanked the Fund ‘very much that you have sent me to Whittinghame [a Bachad farm] which was a real beautiful time for me I will always think of’, there was no reason to judge his appreciation as anything but sincere, since he was merely reporting upon his next stage in life.¹³⁹ For other boys,

¹³⁴ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Litvin Report, 22 December 1942.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Julius Buck to Kaizer, 3 October 1942. He was doing a part-time course, and working nearly full-time as an optician.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Kaizer to Julius Buck, 16 October 1942. The fees were a little over £13 per term and the course would take five years. ‘Report’ 17 November 1942.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Julius Buck to Kaizer, 6 December 1942.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Wedding Invitation, 23 January 1944 and Gorowitz to Julius Buck, 7 February 1944.

¹³⁹ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Herman Karpf to PJRF, 23 April 1941.

gratitude was often mixed with a hearty dose of blandishment and flattery as a prelude to an entreaty. For example, Edward Pachtman prefaced his request for his matriculation fees with the flowery introduction: 'I am one of the children who has been saved from the European hell through your and your committes splendid work'.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Isi Freund, who was skilled in the art of effective communication, wrote:

After having been able, through the kindness and understanding of the Polish Fund, to stay in the ORT school nearly fifteen months, I think, that my training here is nearly finished and I would like to return to London, in order to take a job and thus ease the burden of the Committee, though only in a small way.¹⁴¹

It would be unfair to impute Isi's appreciation to simple fawning but he had definitely learned how to maximise the chances his requests would be granted. Perhaps the most remarkable expression of thanks in the PJRF records was written by Salomon Lassman, the boy who had been excoriated by Elsley Zeitlyn for failing to express the proper gratitude for all that had been done for him.¹⁴² Perhaps Zeitlyn had forgotten the letter Lassman had written in German only a few months after his arrival in Britain when he wrote of Leeds 'we have a wonderful set-up' and 'everything we want'.¹⁴³ He expressed appreciation for the 'importance attached to our physical well-being' with weekly cricket and swimming and enthused about the education they were receiving.

Since all of us boys acknowledge the immediate necessity of mastering the English language, and we have excellent teachers, we are making wonderful progress. If you like, I can write you my next letter completely in English.¹⁴⁴

Lassman, one of the most mature and philosophical of the *Polenaktion* boys, seemed to sincerely appreciate the opportunity he had been granted.

I feel ashamed that I made you wait so long to hear from me and perhaps made it look like I had forgotten you and all you have done for me, but quite the contrary, I am so very grateful for all the good you have done, not only for me but for all of us girls and boys, and bringing me to England and giving me the opportunity to get started in a new if not final homeland.¹⁴⁵

Lassman had no ulterior motives, and his letter contained no requests for money, clothes or help of any kind. It was written solely to thank Elsley Zeitlyn for a chance at life.

¹⁴⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Edward Pachtman to Kaizer, 2 October 1942.

¹⁴¹ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Gorowitz, 15 February 1942.

¹⁴² See Chapter 1.

¹⁴³ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Salomon Lassman to Zeitlyn, 15 June 1939, translated from German by

Margy Walter.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Such letters are rare in the children's correspondence, but most of the *Kinder*, even those who had the most contentious relationships with the refugee agencies, did have occasion to express appreciation for the efforts that had been made on their behalf. And whether sincere or feigned, demonstrations of thankfulness were a hallmark of skilful agency in achieving goals and desires.



In any investigation of *Kinder* agency, it would be wrong to imply that *all* children experienced growing empowerment and successfully negotiated the transition from dependence to autonomy. The youngest *Kinder* were unable to express agency in any but the most basic of ways, most of which were interpreted negatively. Thus, young Eddie Fischbein's and Ewa Mohr's bedwetting and the latter's misbehaviour and temper tantrums became the only way to give voice to unhappiness and frustration. Similarly, the separated twins Sonia and Estera Baranska were unable to effect their reunion and remained separated by the manipulations and ineffectuality of their adult caretakers for nearly five years. Some of the older, less resilient children lacked the skills, resolve and *chutzpah* of Isi Freud, Edward Pachtman, Julius Buck, Sara Hirschman, Thea Feliks and dozens of others and remained dependent on the Fund for many years – long after their contemporaries had become independent and self-supporting. While most of the *Kinder* quickly determined where and to whom their petitions should be directed, some, like Rudi Kleinbrodt, remained unsure. After moving to London, he wrote plaintively: 'It is a pity we are only alone by ourselves and don't know where to go and where to apply to'.¹⁴⁶

More girls than boys remained dependent on the refugee organisations at the end of the war, although *Kinder* of both genders sought continued maintenance and guidance. Several had been supported in pursuing advanced educational goals, including Josef Nussbaum, the budding architect, who was still receiving living and educational expenses until late 1948, after he had turned twenty-two.¹⁴⁷ A few months after the Fund had ceased to support him, Josef appealed once again for five guineas

¹⁴⁶ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Rudi Kleinbrodt to Gorowitz, 29 September 1941.

¹⁴⁷ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 7/10 Typed report, 28 September 1948.

‘for enrolment as a Probationer of the R.I.B.A’ and £12 for a suit and overcoat.¹⁴⁸ The Fund did not grant his request, though it did offer to send him used clothing.¹⁴⁹ Others, like Frieda Brecher, who at eighteen was self-supporting, continued to receive subvention a year after the end of the war.¹⁵⁰ But there were also *Kinder* whose needy dependence persisted even in young adulthood. Some were simply too emotionally fragile and needed support at least through their early twenties, as in the case of Pepi Firestein.¹⁵¹ Another was Edward Ohringer, who at nineteen wrote:

I am writing this letter because I thought you might be interested to know how I am getting on. [...] I have been in the Armee for over two month and find the life not to bad. [...] The only think is I am rather in difficulty with the money and I wonder whether you could not help me out sometimes. I should be most grateful to you. I got nobody to turn to so I hope you will not let me down.¹⁵²

This was only one of four letters written within a short period in which Edward explained how he was ‘hard pressed’ for money, having been out of work for weeks and in debt to his landlady, and asking them to ‘Please help me at once’.¹⁵³ This same boy was described as lonely and unhappy in his early evacuation placement, perhaps indicating a long-term melancholy and emotional sensitivity. The *Kinder* who found autonomy difficult were in the minority, but it is important to stress that the path to independence was not the same for all child refugees, and for some of them agency was very hard-won.

The children’s correspondence in these files is invaluable in adding their voices to the *Kindertransport* narrative. Their letters, written to refugee organisations and other caregivers provide unique insights into their feelings, aspirations, needs and desires with an immediacy that is absent in memory sources. The correspondence provides critical information about both the events in the children’s lives, and their emotional and psychological states as they were experiencing them. The *memory* records show that many of the details of their lives, and even more significantly their feelings about those experiences, have been forgotten or lost with the passage of time. The *archival* records provide crucial evidence of both dependence and autonomy, and serve as a corrective to memory accounts that stress only the latter. The *Kinder’s* writings present a wide range

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Nussbaum pleaded: ‘Unfortunately I have no money whatsoever’ and ‘this is of great importance to me, as it is an important step in my life’.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Questle to Josef Nussbaum, 10 January 1949.

¹⁵⁰ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Miss Simmons to Questle, 11 May 1946.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., PF to Gorowitz, 22 May 1945 and Gorowitz to PF 31 May 1945.

¹⁵² USL/MS/183 563 F2 Edward Ohringer to PJRF nd., (after July 1945).

¹⁵³ Ibid., Edward Ohringer to the PJRF, 1 May 1945, 16 March 1945, 24 April 1945.

of responses to their plight and show that while they were very reliant on external organisations for the most basic of needs, they were not powerless, helpless or voiceless. When they knew to whom they should apply for help, most were eager and willing to advocate for themselves, and their threatened families back in Poland. The children's correspondence is especially important in identifying their emerging confidence and assertiveness in seeking reunions with siblings, better living conditions, more suitable jobs, and further educational opportunities. Far from being passive actors whose lives were wholly shaped by the decisions of remote and hegemonic organizations, these children were actively engaged in establishing agency in their own lives, whether it was through direct appeal, or less positively, through misbehaviour and rebellion.

In addition, the letters highlight the complex relationship that developed between the children and the refugee agencies tasked with their physical and material well-being. Many of the letters give an insight into the emotional vulnerabilities of these unaccompanied refugee children and their attempts to form bonds with substitute parental figures in the refugee agencies. These relationships were largely temporary, serving the children's needs at a particularly sensitive period in their adjustment to a new life without the guidance of family structures. Like many other aspects of *Kinder* experience, these connections have been mostly lost to time. They rarely appear in the memory literature of the *Kindertransport*, and their absence invests the *Polenaktion Kinder's* letters with enhanced significance, like snapshots into a little known past.

Dependency, agency and autonomy were not the only issues with which the Polish, and indeed all *Kinder* had to grapple. Child refugees struggled not only with the external challenges of clothing, housing, education, and vocation, but with existential identity issues as they adapted to life in a new country. Language and cultural differences were the immediate problems to be dealt with, but religious and national identity posed life-long conflicts for many of these children. Little has been written about the identity struggles of *Kindertransportees*, although along with the establishment of autonomy, it was the greatest challenge many of them faced. Identity issues are a crucial part of the *Kindertransport*, but like many other aspects of the historiography, they have been pushed to the margins of a cohesive narrative of rescue and integration, making a new examination of them even more important.

II. Identity

In her study of Austrian and Czech *Kindertransportees*, Laura Brade constructively identified four areas of identity crisis for unaccompanied child refugees.¹⁵⁴ She noted that for *Kinder*, there were often distinct differences between national origin, nationality, and national identity.¹⁵⁵ Further, she identified the divisions ‘friend/enemy’ as they applied to the alien children after the war began.¹⁵⁶ All of these factors posed challenges, some temporary, some lifelong, to the unaccompanied child refugees. To Brade’s metrics, it is vital to add religion, for challenges to Jewishness and Judaism were intrinsic to the *Kindertransport* experience of scores of children. Brade’s distinctions match up especially well to the experience of the children who came on the transports from Poland, and are useful in the discussion of their contested identities.

National origin, the land of birth, is an objective status, but its relationship to nationality is often complicated, even today, by variable national citizenship laws. Given the geopolitical realities of 1930s Europe, these complexities affected all *Kinder*, but none more acutely than the PJRF children who arrived from within Poland.¹⁵⁷ All those children were born in Germany, but the land of their birth was not the land of their nationality.¹⁵⁸ Because their fathers or both their parents had been born in Poland, they were considered Polish citizens by the German authorities. Their parents were prevented from becoming naturalised Germans, but many of them had arrived before the Polish state had been reconstituted as a political entity in the aftermath of the First World War. Coming from different parts of partitioned Poland, most of the parents had little sense of Polish national identification themselves.¹⁵⁹ Few of the parents spoke Polish as their primary language, having grown up speaking predominantly German, Russian or

¹⁵⁴ Laura Elizabeth Brade, ‘Temporary Exile: National Differences in the *Kindertransport* Experience and Memory of Children from Austria and Czechoslovakia’, unpublished MA thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ By 1938 all Jews in the Third Reich had been stripped of their citizenship but were considered ‘state subjects’. Questions of nationality and national identity were muddled. See Diemut Majer, *“Non-Germans” Under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939-1945* translated from German by Peter Thomas Hill, Edward Vance Humphrey and Brian Levin, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) pp. 108-117.

¹⁵⁸ The one possible exception is Fannie Obst, whose documents indicate she may have been born in Poland. See USL/MS 575 F3 Undated ‘100 Child Refugees’ registration form.

¹⁵⁹ The issues of Polish nationalism and Polish national identity are enormous ones, complicated by the place of Jews within those conceptions, both during and after the period of partition. See Johana Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

Yiddish depending upon where they had been born, and none of their children spoke Polish.¹⁶⁰ The parents' (and by extension their children's) legal and social status in Germany was that of aliens, and their citizenship documents were officially Polish. After the advent of Nazi rule, they were more specifically categorised as Polish Jews.

National identity, the subject of a vast and relatively recent scholarship, is a subjective metric, and one that is difficult to quantify. This observation is substantiated by the work that has grounded much of this scholarship for the past three decades: Benedict Anderson's seminal study, 'Imagined Communities'.¹⁶¹ For Anderson and other scholars, nations are 'imagined political communities', but nationalism and national identity are cultural constructs that tie members together in bonds of 'deep, horizontal comradeship'.¹⁶² Stuart Hall, a pioneer of cultural studies, defined these constructs as comprised of 'common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us [...] with unchanging and continuous frames of reference'.¹⁶³ For most people, these collective forces are associated with places of national origin, but Hall also addresses diasporic identities with their 'ruptures and discontinuities, which [...] undergo constant transformation' and 'are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power'.¹⁶⁴ Both of Halls' iterations apply to the experiences of unaccompanied child refugees, and especially those of the Polish *Kinder*. At the time of their emigration to Britain, many *Kindertransportees* had or were developing conceptions of national identity tied to the lands of their birth, and the rupture with those lands challenged their feelings of national allegiance.¹⁶⁵ For the *Polenaktion Kinder*, birth in Germany to non-German Jewish parents, growing up under Nazi rule, expulsion to Poland, and subsequent emigration to Britain problematized these

¹⁶⁰ The Government Assistance Board Forms (CCR1) in most of the children's files list the children's languages, and without exception, none mention Polish.

¹⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised 2nd ed. (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, <1983, 1991> 2006).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7. Here, they depart somewhat from Ernest Gellner, a major figure in the field, whose earlier writings concentrated on nationalism within a political context. Gellner's later works took a cultural turn and he explored the idea that national identity was a function of language and access to cultural institutions like schools, where citizens interact and form national bonds. See Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); *Nations and Nationalism*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994).

¹⁶³ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and Diaspora', in R.J. P. Williams ed. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory; A Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) pp. 392-403, (p. 394).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 394-6.

¹⁶⁵ See Andrea Hammel, 'Representations of Family in Autobiographical Texts of Child Refugees', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23/1 (2004) pp. 121-131.

emergent national identities and magnified their challenges once they were in Britain.¹⁶⁶

As *Kinder* forged new lives, national identities were discarded or transformed, a process that posed uncertainties and insecurities for many. Although there are clues to the *Polenaktion* children's national identities in some of the forms and correspondence in their files, subjective feelings about national identity are retrieved primarily through individual questioning and cannot easily be determined from correspondence or other documentation. Testimony, although limited, indicates that in some cases identity issues were ongoing and unresolved, as was the case for Thea Feliks.

[T]o the extent that I am anything, in terms of nationality [...] I would say that I identify as more English than anything else. I was born in Germany but there was this uncertain element. I've always been displaced. I went to Poland but I wasn't accepted as being Polish because I'd been born in Germany. I went to England – well, I was a refugee child of uncertain nationality. Then when I lived in Israel, they considered me 'Oh you know, that English kid'.¹⁶⁷

Thea recorded her recollections when she was in her late sixties and had been living in California for several decades. Despite her often negative memories of growing up in England and the relatively short part of her life spent living there, she still thought of herself, amongst a mixture of possible identities, as English. Those formative childhood years, in the country that had despite its disappointments and challenges given her refuge, had made the greatest impact upon her sense of national identity. Yet, the Government Assistance form in Thea's PJRF file listed her nationality as 'Polish', as did the forms for other *Polenaktion Kinder*, thus underscoring the contested nature of their identities.¹⁶⁸



¹⁶⁶ For younger children identity was confined to family and immediate community, and notions of nationality and national identity were abstract constructs.

¹⁶⁷ Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 78. These feelings were experienced by other *Kinder*. For example, Ruth Barnett, the daughter of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother who had been raised as a Christian in Berlin remembered her identity crisis at age sixteen: 'I would never be fully English because I wasn't born in England. I was very confused [...] So what was I? Who was I? Not English, and certainly not German; there was only Jewish left. I had to be Jewish. The trouble was that I had no idea what it meant to be Jewish'. Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality*, p. 132. Laura Brade also examined post-war identity in the cases of Austrian and Czech *Kinder*. Brade, 'Temporary Exile', pp. 48-51.

¹⁶⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F1 CCR1 form, 10 June 1941

Thea's recollections of Poland, shared by most of the Polish *Kinder*, reflect the reality that although technically Polish citizens, they lacked an internalised Polish national identity. Few had visited Poland before the expulsion, and post-expulsion letters confirmed their perceptions of Poland as a place that promised no future:

I was born in Germany [...] and was only months before attaining my Abitur degree. My brother, 16 years of age, was also born in Germany and attended a commercial school. Our life here is utterly dreary, since we are not familiar with the language, culture, and customs of this country and it is impossible for us to adapt to these conditions.¹⁶⁹

This letter, from Josef Kamiel's eighteen-year-old cousin, not only implicitly confirmed his identification with Germany, but listed three elements that contribute to a shared national character. Depicting Poland's 'language, culture and customs' as alien implied Kamiel's firm rejection of a Polish national identity. Only a few *Kinder* wrote letters from Poland confirming their disaffection with the land of their citizenship, but many more recorded memories of their feelings of alienation. Some, like Henry Danziger, remembered refugee life in Poland as one shock after another. He grew up immersed in German language and culture, did not speak a word of Polish, and recalled complete estrangement from Polish Jewry, saying of the old-world Orthodox Jews he encountered in Częstochowa, 'It was a sort of living that I wasn't really used to'.¹⁷⁰ While he realized the deportation 'saved my life to a great extent', he experienced Poles as viciously antisemitic and frightening. He recalled life in Poland as 'terrifying [...] absolutely horrific [...] in every aspect'.¹⁷¹ Another expellee, Gerry Lieder, who was staying in Radom, recalled the 'brutal antisemitism' he encountered in Poland, remembering being 'punched bloody' and called 'a dirty *żyd*'.¹⁷² Similarly, Mira Blaustein recalled that in Zbąszyń 'if you walked the streets and it was dark, you heard the Polish people screaming against the Jews'.¹⁷³ But memories of Poland were not uniformly negative. Sylvia Balbierer recalled that in Zbąszyń, the Poles 'didn't do

¹⁶⁹ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Josef Kamiel to the United Appeal for Polish Jewry, 12 February 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁷⁰ USCSF/VHA 14226 Henry Danziger, 1996. Although in pre-war Poland Jews made up about a third of the population, Częstochowa is better known as a virtual mecca for Polish (and other) Catholics, drawing millions of pilgrims annually to the Jasna Góra Monastery to worship in front of the 'Black Madonna'. It is possible that heightened antisemitic and Polish-Jewish tensions in the later pre-war period were magnified there, contributing to Henry's extremely negative impressions of the city.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Yad Vashem 'Testimony of Gerald Lieder' (hereafter YV/GL video testimony), 1997, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/testimony-of-gerald-lieder-born-in-stettin-1926-regarding-his-experiences-as-a-child-refugee-in-bydgoszcz-and-radom-and-during-the-kindertransport-to-england/_QH-NORVBH_iA?hl=en> [accessed 20 August 2014]

¹⁷³ USCSF/VHA Mira Blaustein Grayson.

anything to hurt us physically, they just didn't do anything to help us either'.¹⁷⁴ Yet when she and her sister left for Krakow, to live with family members, 'they didn't welcome the German cousins'.¹⁷⁵ In contrast, Julius Buck, who with his father also moved in with relatives in Krakow, found the Polish Jews helpful and accommodating, noting 'they couldn't do enough for us'.¹⁷⁶ Buck 'didn't particularly like' Poland, though.¹⁷⁷ In all cases, post-Holocaust consciousness must be considered as a mediating factor in memory construction with respect to recollections of reception in Poland.

Although they lacked affinity for the land of their nationality, few Polish *Kinder* embraced a German national identity either. Herbert Haberberg reported quite emphatically that he did not identify as German, and additionally, as the son of Eastern European emigrants, he was ostracized as an *Ostjuden* by German Jews in Dortmund.¹⁷⁸ Although Herbert attended school with German Jewish students, they never invited him to their homes and he did not mix with them outside school hours.¹⁷⁹ He and his family attended a synagogue that served the Eastern European Jewish community and socialised within that milieu.¹⁸⁰ Herman Feldman reported a similar situation in Dusseldorf, where he and his father attended a small *schul* attached to the main synagogue and noted 'there were two separate Jewish communities in Dusseldorf – German Jews and the others, most from Poland – and they kept separate'.¹⁸¹ When pressed, Herbert Haberberg acknowledged that he knew his family were Polish Jews, although as a child Polish nationality was an abstract concept to him.¹⁸² But other Polish *Kinder* did not even concede this level of identification. Rebecka Krenzler, who arrived in England when she was thirteen, was adamant that when growing up in Gladbeck, Germany, she felt neither German nor Polish. When asked about her childhood national self-identification, she answered simply, 'Jewish'.¹⁸³

Many of the children who came on the *Kindertransport* from Poland experienced

¹⁷⁴ USCSF/VHA Sylvia Balbierer Schneider.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ USCSF/VHA 37719 Julius Buck, 1997.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Herbert Haberberg, 28 January 2012.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ USCSF/VHA 40479 Herman Feldman/Zvi Nir, 1997.

¹⁸² Interview with Herbert Haberberg, 28 January 2012. He did note, however, that there were a few advantages to Polish citizenship. In 1934, when the Nazi party boycotted Jewish businesses and vandalised his father shop, Alter Haberberg complained to the Polish legation resulting in the German police being obliged to rectify the damage to a foreign national's property.

¹⁸³ Interview with Rebecka Krenzler Scherer, 10 February 2013.

life on the margins in Germany, but there were also Polish *Kinder* who grew up identifying more centrally with German culture and nationality. Henry Danziger, Julius Buck and Edward Pachtman all affirmed childhood German identifications in later interviews. Danziger's mother was a German Jew, and he grew up with a positive appreciation for German music and culture.¹⁸⁴ In later years, according to his family, he continued to speak and read German, visited Germany regularly, and raised his children to think positively about Germany.¹⁸⁵ Buck remembered growing up in a well-assimilated 'secular' Berlin Jewish family, putting him outside the mainstream of the Polish *Kinder*, who grew up in observant and predominantly orthodox Jewish households.¹⁸⁶ Buck also recalled:

I didn't discover that I was a Pole until I was fairly old and it came as a terrible shock to me. I was always a very patriotic German [...] I was shattered. And to be Polish of all things. I didn't know a word of Polish and I didn't want to learn it either [...] and when I went to collect my Polish passport [...] the consular official [...] told me very indignantly that the very least you should do when you go to apply for a country's passport [is to] take the trouble to learn its language.¹⁸⁷

Similarly, Edward Pachtman told his interviewer that he was raised 'basically on German culture rather than Eastern European [...] we were brought up German [...] my parents had left the Polish background [behind]'.¹⁸⁸ Both Buck's and Pachtman's fathers had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War, perhaps contributing to their markedly German identifications.¹⁸⁹

Regardless of the national identities they recalled embracing as children, the *Polenaktion Kinder* were legally Polish citizens, making their inclusion on the *Kindertransports* to Britain somewhat anomalous. Officially, Polish children were not among those whom the British Government included in the *Kindertransport* scheme. In a letter to Simon Markel's mother in Krakow, Elsley Zeitlyn alluded to this fact.

¹⁸⁴ USCSF/VHA, Henry Danziger.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* His German identification obviously came through his mother. She voluntarily joined her son and husband in Poland after the expulsion, and when she wrote to Henry before his departure to England, she asked him if he was with 'other German children'. See Chapter 4 for excerpts from these letters. Private Danziger correspondence shared by the Danziger family, dated July 1939.

¹⁸⁶ USCSF/VHA Julius Buck. He did say that 'my parents would be horrified for me to say it but I certainly considered myself very much secular'.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ YV/EP Audio Testimony.

¹⁸⁹ The Alpern children's father was born in Germany, (though Polish because his father was Polish). 'My father in particular felt very proud of being German [...] but his Jewish identity was always the strongest of his identities'. USCSF/VHA Renee Alpern Moss. The children, all under age seven when they arrived in England were too young to develop a sense of German identity themselves.

Unfortunately, it is getting almost impossible to find homes for more children from Zbąszyń, and these must come first. With all the regret in the world, I cannot think of bringing children out from Poland, unless the Government gives permission, and the permission is dependent upon the homes and conditions laid down by the Government.¹⁹⁰

Although he was mistaken in believing that Mrs Markel's children had not been expelled from Germany, Zeitlyn clearly articulated that the British Government had excluded Polish born children from the scheme. Ironically, Polish citizenship had occasioned their expulsion from Germany, and this event, irrespective of citizenship, qualified the young *Polenaktion* victims for the *Kindertransport* programme. The salient fact as far as the Home Office was concerned was the children's birth in Germany, and not their official citizenship. Thus, Herbert Haberberg, Jehuda Laulicht, Ruth and Sylvia Balbierer and many others who went to live with extended families after expulsion were privileged with an escape route from Poland, while their Polish cousins were not, even though they were all Polish citizens.

It is not clear whether the British government considered the *Polenaktion* children German due to their national origin, or realised that they were actually Polish, but refugee organisations and even the press identified them as the latter. In early 1939, the Hull Jewish Refugee committee asked the PJRF to 'advise us what there is to do, as we do not know if the same procedure as to German children applies to Polish children as well'.¹⁹¹ Elsley Zeitlyn had encountered the same confusion weeks earlier when he had requested guidance from Lord Samuel.¹⁹² The expulsions from Germany had garnered considerable coverage in the British press, and there were news reports in the Jewish and general presses when the first 'No-Man's Land' children arrived.¹⁹³ The *News Chronicle*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express*, *The Star*, and the *Evening News* all reported on their arrival, perhaps because they were the only *Kinder* whose ship sailed up the Thames and docked in London, making them more visible than the thousands arriving in Harwich.¹⁹⁴ Although all the articles noted that they had arrived from Poland or the German-Polish border, none identified the children's nationality. Months later, newsreel

¹⁹⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Zeitlyn to Chana Markel, 14 July 1939.

¹⁹¹ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Alder to Kaizer, 29 January 1939.

¹⁹² See Chapter 1.

¹⁹³ 'No Man's Land children in London', *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 February 1939. p. 32, '30 Children from Zbonszyn' *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 August 1939, p. 21 and '70 Children From Zbonszyn', *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 September 1939. p. 20.

¹⁹⁴ 'Children from No-Man' Land Here', *The Star*, 15 February 1939, p. 8, '4 Smiles from No-Man's Land', *News Chronicle* 16 February 1939, p. 3, 'Refugees from the Polish Frontier', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 1939, 'Waifs of No-Man's Land in London', *The Daily Express*, p. 15, 'Stateless' *The Evening News*, 15 February 1939.

footage of the last transport *did* identify the children as ‘Polish Jews expelled from Germany’.¹⁹⁵

The complicated origins of the children who had arrived from Poland was a source of confusion for many, including carers and many local English authorities who were sceptical of their designation as Polish nationals. As noted in the previous chapter, numerous foster parents called the children in their care ‘Germans’ especially when they were unhappy with them. Similarly, the headmistress Sara Samuel evinced some confusion about the girls in her care in Ely. In her first letter to the Fund, she mentioned friends of Helen Reich as ‘people she knew in ~~Germany~~ Poland’.¹⁹⁶ If there was uncertainty amongst carers about the German-born, German-speaking children in their midst, British police authorities had even less certitude. Their doubts about the children’s nationality were heightened by the PJRF *Kinder*’s general lack of documents other than Home Office Permit (or Landing) Cards (HOPC). These important documents accompanied *Kindertransportees* when they registered as aliens with local police constabularies upon turning sixteen. It was at this crucial juncture that their nationality was fixed by British officialdom. Unfortunately, for the Polish children, the HPOC did not have an entry for nationality. Listing only name, gender, birthdate, birthplace, parents’ names and address, these cards left the designation of nationality to provincial police clerks with little awareness of the complex politics of European citizenship in the Nazi era.

To local British authorities, birthplace trumped all other considerations. Thus, the East Suffolk Police wrote to the Fund about a boy in their jurisdiction, ‘It is noted that Herschmann was born in Dortmund, Germany, therefore, in the absence of the necessary documents it is difficult to see how he can claim Polish nationality’.¹⁹⁷ Even the Hull Jewish Refugees Committee was persuaded by their local police to question the nationality of a child in their jurisdiction.

The Police are not quite clear as to the nationality of the boy, as he was born in Berlin, but taken to ‘No-Men’s Land’. They have asked us to make inquiries at your Committee, and we should be obliged if you would kindly let us know [...] whether this lad is of Polish or German nationality.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Newsreel footage sent to me by the family of Fannie Obst. Provenance unknown.

¹⁹⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Sara Samuel to Zeitlyn, 20 March 1940.

¹⁹⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F2 East Suffolk Police to D Williams, 14 March 1941.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, HJRC to Zeitlyn, 2 November 1939.

The Epsom Police also refused to register a child as Polish without documentation such as a passport. When they designated Pepi Firestein a German national, the Fund consulted with the Movement, which could muster only an exasperated response:

I am afraid we cannot say very much more, as we really have no papers here at all to prove the facts. Perhaps our combined efforts may be of some avail, but I am afraid the Police do not like to register a girl as Polish without definite documents. You know the trouble we have had in the past.¹⁹⁹

This 1943 reference to past troubles indicated that the Polish *Kinder*'s nationality problems had been persistent and systemic. From Pepi's perspective, the process was also arbitrary and frustrating, for she reported her older sister Fanni, 'has not got it that she is German – Polish is on her book'.²⁰⁰ Although similarly bereft of documents, Fanni had registered three years earlier in a London precinct and encountered no difficulties in securing the preferred designation. The Movement also intervened on behalf of Herbert Klarmann, inquiring of the Fund whether they held his HOPC for it 'showed that he came from Gdynia, and I understand that if this document were available the Police could be induced to refrain from registering him as of German nationality'.²⁰¹ It is not widely understood that the local constabularies had such broad discretionary authority to assign nationalities to the *Kindertransportees* nor that they approached this task without official guidelines or oversight. For the majority of the *Kinder*, this issue did not arise, but for the Polish children, the vesting of such authority in provincial officials could and did have devastating consequences.

The Polish Jewish Refugee Fund responded to the registration problems of its wards in several ways. They wrote directly to police authorities, attempting to enlighten them in the intricacies of international politics:

We should like to inform you that though he was born in Dortmund, Germany, he is nevertheless of Polish Nationality. He was born [...] of Polish parents and, as there existed a regulation between the German and Polish Governments whereby a child born of German National living in Poland automatically acquired the nationality of its parents i.e. German and vice versa, Samuel Herschmann on birth became a Polish National.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ USL/MS/183 591 F2, Mrs. Meyers to PJRF, 6 April 1943.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., PF to AM Kaizer, 2 March 1943.

²⁰¹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Janet Rimmer to Kaizer, 15 April 1942.

²⁰² USL/MS/183 575 F2 Kaizer to East Suffolk Police, 19 March 1941.

While it is far from certain that these letters clarified the position of the *Polenaktion* children with regional officials, the Fund also developed a form letter vouching for the children's Polish parentage and thus national status. In most cases this, along with the entry permit, was enough to satisfy the authorities, especially later in the war after the anti-alien panic had died down somewhat. However, a few of the Polish children were caught up in that hysteria and the matter of their nationality became one of grave importance.

Regardless of their feelings about Poland, the *Polenaktion Kinder* were forced by Britain's undifferentiated fear of foreigners to embrace Polish nationality, especially after the advent of the Second World War. Thereafter, all foreigners, including refugees from Fascism, had to appear before Tribunals, which, based on their nationality, classified them as 'friend' or 'enemy' subject to curfew, travel and employment restrictions. Those registered as Poles avoided the most restrictive classifications, since Great Britain and Poland were not enemies. Critically, this meant the avoidance of classifications 'A', 'B' or even 'C', with their escalating scales of restrictions and the threat of interment and deportation to Canada or Australia.

That the imperative to affirm a Polish identity once in Great Britain was a matter of expediency is made clear in both testimony and documentation. Henry Danziger, who admitted to having negative feelings about Poland, described the situation at the beginning of the war.

[W]e were marked as Polish people because we came from Poland, we were not enemy aliens as they call it [...] We weren't touched because we originally didn't come from Germany. Our entry permit came over Poland so they thought we are Polish people.²⁰³

This recollection reveals a great deal about Henry's internalized identity. He did not personally claim Polish citizenship, noting only that he was 'marked' as Polish, this status being conferred on him by British authorities who *thought* he was Polish based upon the information on his entry document. Perhaps unconsciously, Henry articulated one of the fundamental identity conflicts faced by the *Polenaktion Kinder*. Although they had not developed an integrated Polish identity, as Henry noted, there were advantages accruing to a Polish identification, in that they were not 'enemy aliens' and therefore 'weren't touched'.²⁰⁴ Ambivalence about Polish identity also showed up on some of the children's government assistance forms, when they indicated under

²⁰³ USCSF/VHA Henry Danziger.

²⁰⁴ The same advantages accrued to Czech *Kinder*. See Brade, 'Temporary Exile', pp. 37-40.

Contesting Memory

nationality, 'Stateless – Polish Origin'.²⁰⁵

There is evidence in the Polish children's files that the Tribunal process was far more frightening than police registration, especially for boys in danger of internment. Isi Freund, who had been classified as German during his police registration wrote to Sydney Gerrard in a panic before his Tribunal:

Friday next [...] I have to go to the Tribunal and they will ask me there a lot of questions especially about nationality etc. Now would you please be so kind and send me a letter stating that you brought me over here as a Polish subject and you applied for a passport by the Polish consulate and would you please enclose the documents from Bloomsbury House because I think they will be useful here.²⁰⁶

Sydney tried to reassure Isi, telling him that the C.I.D. was given the details, 'these

LB. 113
No. F. 15064.
Date 3rd May, 1940.

Authority issuing certificate—HOME OFFICE.
Indication de l'autorité qui délivre le certificat
Place of issue of certificate—LONDON.
Lieu où l'on délivre le certificat

**CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY.
CERTIFICAT D'IDENTITE.**
Valid until 3rd Nov. 1941.
Valable jusqu'

The present certificate is issued for the sole purpose of providing the holder with identity papers in lieu of a national passport. It is without prejudice to and in no way affects the national status of the holder. If the holder obtains a national passport it ceases to be valid and must be surrendered to the issuing authority.

Le présent certificat est délivré à seule fin de fournir au titulaire une pièce d'identité pouvant tenir lieu de passeport national. Il ne préjuge pas la nationalité du titulaire et est sans effet sur celle-ci. Au cas où le titulaire obtiendrait un passeport national, ce certificat cessera d'être valable et devra être renvoyé à l'autorité qui l'a délivré.

Signature of Holder, Isi Freund
Signature du titulaire, Isi Freund

**DESCRIPTION.
SIGNALEMENT.**

Age 15.
Age 15.
Height 5 ft. 3 in.
Taille 5 ft. 3 in.
Hair Fair.
Cheveux Fair.
Eyes Blue.
Yeux Blue.
Face Oval.
Visage Oval.
Nose Normal.
Nez Normal.
Special peculiarities
Signes particuliers

Remarks
Observations

This Certificate is available during its validity for the holder's return to the United Kingdom without visa. Il est, au pendant de sa validité le présent certificat, disponible pour la rentrée du titulaire dans le Royaume Uni sans formalité de Visa.

This Certificate must be returned with my Pass Book on my return to the United Kingdom.

Signature of the issuing authority,
J. Blumers
J.M. CHIEF INSPECTOR,
IMMIGRATION BRANCH,
HOME OFFICE,
LONDON, S.W.1.

Police Registration Certificate,
Certificat d'enregistrement délivré par la Police.

The undersigned certifies that the photograph and signature hereon are those of the bearer of the present document.
Le soussigné certifie que la photographie et la signature apposées ci-contre sont bien celles du porteur du présent document.

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particulars will be brought up before a Tribunal, and there is nothing to be afraid of'.²⁰⁷ Also enclosed was a Home Office Certificate of Identity, an unusual document that the RCM had acquired for Isi in anticipation of his re-emigration, clearly stating the boy's nationality as Polish.²⁰⁸ However, afterwards he wrote in frustration, 'I have been at the tribunal and have been made category c, friendly alien, but I couldn't get it changed to Polish'.²⁰⁹ Expressing the exasperation many of the children felt when pushed from one agency to another, Isi tried to enlist Sydney in his quest. 'As in London I was told to get any documents from the consul! Otherwise it can't be changed.

²⁰⁵ See USL/MS/183 567/1 CCR1 form Manfred Kasner, 23 June 1941 and USL/MS/183 213/2 CCR1 form Karol Feliks, 7 July 1941.

²⁰⁶ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Isi Freund to Sidney Gerrard, PJRF, 15 December 1940.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Sidney Gerrard to Isi Freund, 17 December 1940.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Isi Freund Certificate of Identity, 2 May 1940.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Isi Freund to Sidney Gerrard, 3 January 1941.

Perhaps you could try it for me!²¹⁰

The fact that the official Home Office identity document was not sufficient evidence to alter the national status assigned by the Leeds police reveals the tenacity of those designations. The case also highlights the layers of contradictory bureaucracy these children had to negotiate, as well as the fact that they were dealing with multiple refugee agencies that did not always coordinate their efforts effectively. By 1943, Bloomsbury House confirmed Isi's nationality as Polish.²¹¹ Not all the *Polenaktion* children were as fortunate as Isi, and for a few, the failure to secure Polish nationality bore lifelong consequences. After the war began, and Simon Markel could no longer lobby for the rescue of his brothers, he was forced by circumstances into a different writing campaign to the Fund. His Polish passport had been retained in Gdynia when he embarked for England and in Leeds 'when I got my registration Certificate I was made a German by Nationality because I was born in Chemnitz'.²¹² But when he went to the police, 'I was told to produce documents to prove my Polish Nationality otherwise they could not do anything at all'.²¹³

But the only official document I have got is my landing permit which confirms a) that I was born in Chemnitz (Germany) b) that I came from Poland c) that my parents are in Poland. Now it be a really great help if you would write a letter to me that I could produce to the police.²¹⁴

The Fund complied, attesting to his Polish nationality and also taking up his case with the Polish Consul General, but the Leeds Police unbendingly refused to amend Simon's classification.²¹⁵ In May 1940 Simon was classified 'enemy alien' and interned on the Isle of Man, where he continued to seek Polish identity.²¹⁶ While Zeitlyn was sympathetic, he could only advise Simon 'to exercise all the patience that you can'.²¹⁷

I know your hatred of the Nazi regime from which you have suffered much, but you were born in Germany and the authorities have thought it right to intern such persons, perhaps for their own good [...] we shall do everything possible to put before the authorities the circumstances of your case. In the meantime, submit with the best will that you can command.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., PJRF Grant Form, 7 January 1945.

²¹² USL/MS/183 574 F1 Simon Markel to Zeitlyn, 14 December 1939.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., Gorowitz to Gitte Markel, 26 March 1940, Simon Markel to Zeitlyn, 17 June 1940.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Simon Markel to Zeitlyn, 17 June 1940.

²¹⁷ Ibid., Zeitlyn to Simon Markel, 28 June 1940.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Despite the efforts of the Fund and the Movement, Simon's case was unresolved and he was deported to Canada in July 1940 with other enemy aliens, where they were assigned the undifferentiated status 'prisoner of war'. The Fund engaged a solicitor to pursue his release and he was eventually cleared to return to England, but was unable to secure shipping before America entered the war, ending his hopes of return.²¹⁹ Simon submitted to his misfortunes as Zeitlyn had adjured. He accepted that 'there cannot much be done with regard to the restoration of my Polish Passport, and that I have got to have patience until circumstances have improved'.²²⁰ He requested only that they send him *O'Roarke's Engineering Handbook* and *A Textbook of Physics for Students of Science and Engineering* so that he could pursue his education.²²¹

The failure to establish Polish nationality in England had grave and life-changing consequences for several of the *Polenaktion* boys. At least three other PJRF boys were classified as German, interned and sent to Canada including Salomon Lassman who also ran up against the intransigence of the Leeds police authorities. Having been classified as a Category B enemy alien of German nationality, he appealed to the Fund for help, noting that 'it does not take much conviction to know that I am a real refugee from Nazi oppression as I have come here in one of your childrens transports and I have never been a German'.²²² Nevertheless, he was, like Markel, interned on the Isle of Man, sent to Canada, reprieved, but unable to return to Britain. Salomon Lassman also longed to continue his education, and found a patron in England to help him. Demonstrating his fluency in English, he informed his benefactor that since he had been interned 'in those fateful May days in 1940' he had 'under the new circumstances and a totally new environment [...] continued my studies as best I could'.²²³

Some ago our status has been transformed from Prisoner of War to Refugees and many privileges and improvements were inaugurated. Refugee students are allowed to continue their studies if a sponsor is willing to guarantee their upkeep and study expenses. We were even permitted to take the [...] Matriculation exams [...] which I passed successfully.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ibid., R Shapiro to Kaizer, 27 October 1941.

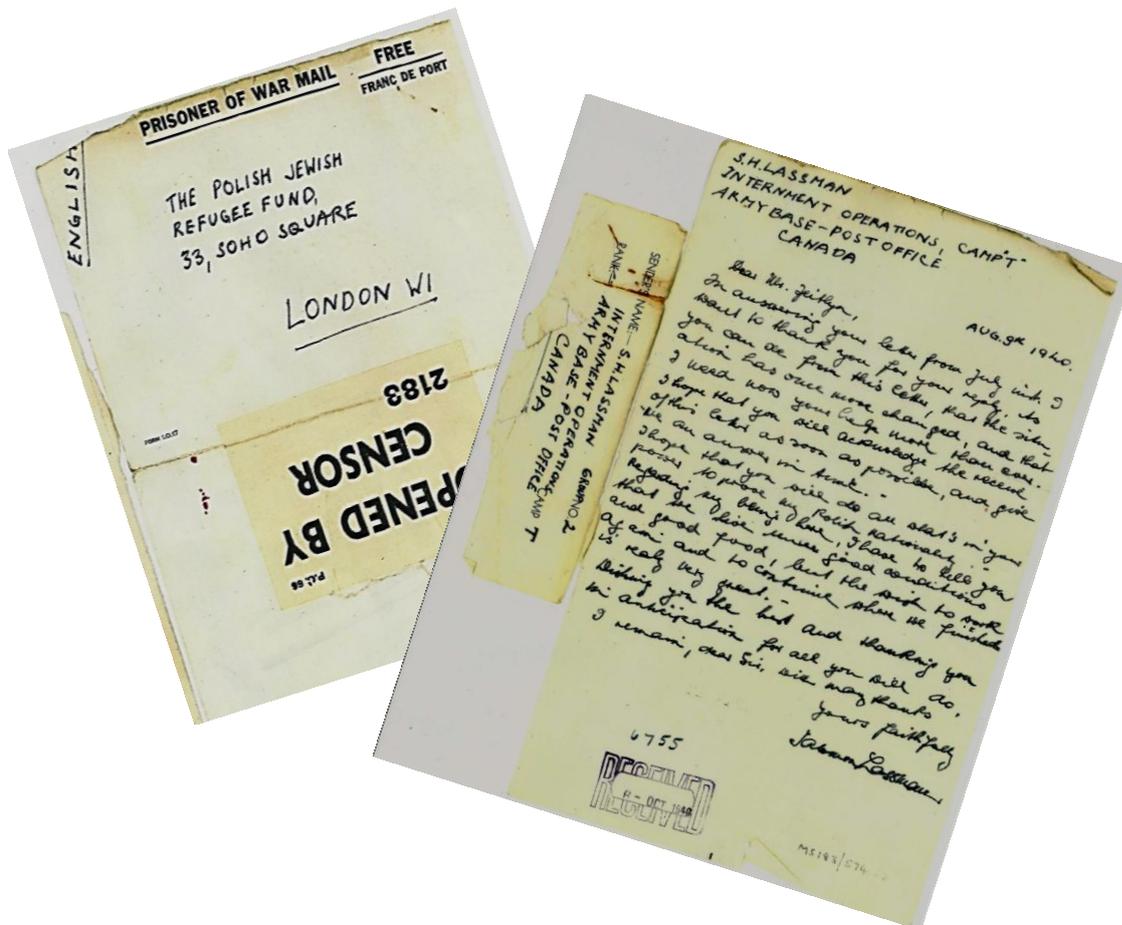
²²⁰ Ibid., Simon Markel to Zeitlyn, 19 September 1940.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² USL/MS/183 574 F2 Salomon Lassman to Zeitlyn, 24 January 1940 and 10 June 1940.

²²³ Ibid., Salomon Lassman to Mr Lemco, 22 October 1941.

²²⁴ Ibid.



The bright announcement of his changed status belied the fact that Salomon Lassman had successively been a refugee in Poland, Britain and then Canada within the space of less than three years. Although his situation appeared resolved, the Home Office informed the Fund that the internees were now Canada's responsibility, complicating the sponsorship issues. Solomon's benefactor, Mr Lemco, was willing to post the considerable sum of \$2500 that the Canadian government required, but since Lemco was an English resident, the authorities decreed that 'there is no chance of transferring the funds to Canada. The best way [...] would be to get a Canadian to sponsor the boy'.²²⁵ Despite this setback, Lassman was able to express his appreciation to his generous would-be patron:

It seems to me almost as the appearance of a meteor how people emerge from absolute darkness and at the light of a second find so many parallels in this our great world.²²⁶

Lassman's poetically expressed and philosophically optimistic sentiments were quite remarkable in the face of the hardships he had endured, and the wrongs that had been

²²⁵ Ibid., B Wallow, to Kaizer, 6 March 1942.

²²⁶ Ibid., Salomon Lassman to Mr Lemco, 22 October 1941.

done to him because of a provincial Police authority's obduracy. He stoically hoped only that 'back in Camp in the old environment' he could 'continue my old ways and if possible find a philanthropic soul to help me out of this distress and dilemma'.²²⁷

Not all internees were able to adapt with such sanguinity and pragmatism. One whose fate was quite different was Josef Sztajn, whose uncle had been very concerned about a discrepancy on his HOPC when he first arrived in England.

I should like to point out [...] that you have put him down as Josef Sztjan. He has his birth certificate with his name on it Josef Stein [...] Now I understand you have spelt it in Polish. I should like his name put right before he goes to the Aliens Registration Office so as not to have any kind of bother later on.²²⁸

Logically reckoning that the birth certificate would carry more weight than other documents, the uncle was anxious to reconcile the variant spellings, but the birth certificate and Germanised version of Josef's name only confirmed to the police that he was German and not Polish. Ironically, had the uncle maintained the Polish spelling, and the boy used only his Home Office card, Sztajn might have been able to avoid the 'bother later on' of internment and deportation to Canada. Josef was repatriated in 1941 and re-interned on the Isle of Man for a time. Although he alone of the deportees was able to return to England, his letters indicated a high level of distress over the nearly two-year ordeal of being treated as an enemy alien and a prisoner of war.²²⁹

The threat of deportation applied not only to boys caught up in the anti-alien panic of 1940. Perhaps the most painful case of identity confusion among the *Polenaktion* children involved Leo Klarman, one of the boys who was evacuated to Worthing at the start of the war, and the 'fine boy whose family has suffered so much from Anti-Semitism' that Dr Litvin feared was losing his ties to Judaism.²³⁰ Although Litvin described Leo as 'honest, industrious and sincere – a charming boy, polite and kind', he was also headstrong, bold and independent. When his younger brother Herbert went to

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F2, Mr Silverstone to PJRF, 15 August 1939.

²²⁹ See USL/MS/183 574 F2 JS to PJRF, 8 August 1941 and 10 September 1941, to Mrs Mantin, 10 August 1941 and 13 August 1941. JS's case spotlights the role of the Polish Consulate in disputed nationality matters. The Home Office and the Fund sought help from the Polish legate, but received little encouragement. The Consul General, expressing scepticism that 'Josef Stein' was a Polish subject, indicated that only on the production of a valid passport would the case for Polish citizenship be considered. Explanations for the Polish authorities' disinclination to support claims of Polish nationality can only be postulated, but it may have had to do with the 1938 citizenship annulment act, which invalidated or confiscated many of these children's or their parents' passports. It may have reflected an underlying reluctance, borne of latent antisemitism, to admit these Jewish refugees as Polish nationals. USL/MS/183 574 F2 Dr Poznanski to PJRF, 12 November 1940.

²³⁰ See Chapter 1.

live with their uncle in London, Leo struck out on his own, eventually losing touch with his relations.²³¹ Leo had sporadic contact with the Fund, notably in pursuit of papers or documents that would prove his Polish nationality, as he had, like many boys, been classified as a German national when he registered with the police in 1940.²³² After the war, Leo went into business for himself, married and had a child, but in the late 1940s, he fell afoul of the law. Found guilty, he served several months in prison, and as an alien, was subject to deportation.

As the *Kinder* often discovered, their primary identity in Britain was ‘alien’ especially in legal matters, and little regard was paid to their *lived* identities as refugees



from Fascism. The courts gave no consideration to Leo’s declarations of Polish nationality, and in 1947, classified as ‘German’, Klarmann was deported to the country that had expelled his family nine years earlier.²³³ Determined to clear his name, he openly (and illegally) returned to England, was re-apprehended and while in prison once again, embarked upon a furious campaign of correspondence with the Fund to try to forestall a second deportation. In addition to his protestations of innocence, Leo was desperate to establish that he was a stateless person,

Polish nationality being no longer advantageous. He wrote in imperfect English to the Fund’s Louis Questle:

Miss Hardisty of the Children’s Movement wrote to the Home Office on my behalf and agreed with the Home Office that I was born in Dusseldorf I must be a German, and they must have got my record mix up and they said I came to this country from Germany as a German but that you know as well as the Police, is not so.²³⁴

Leo begged the Fund to remove the Jewish Refugees Committee (which had taken over from the Movement) from his case, so embittered was he about their treatment. In begging for documents that would establish his proper status, he implored Questle to ‘Please bear in mind that I was only 15 years of age when I came to England as a

²³¹ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Gee to Kaizer 8 June 1943 and Weissbraun Report January 1945.

²³² USL/MS/183 409 F2 Dr Litvin report, 12 February 1942 and Typed Report 22, 25 and 30 June 1942.

²³³ Ibid., Leo Klarman to Questle, 11 October 1949.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Stateless Pole, from Poland that I am stateless that I have a English wife and child'.²³⁵ He also asked the authorities to take into consideration the fate of his family. Regardless of Leo's guilt or innocence, it was anathema to him, and still seems a cruelty more than seventy years later, that he would be deported to the very country that expelled and shattered his family a decade earlier.²³⁶ Leo's case is the starkest example of the severe penalties that could accrue to *Polenaktion Kinder* who failed to secure Polish nationality.

The internment and deportation cases underscore the importance of documents, and especially the Home Office Permit Cards, to the *Kinder's* lives. The HOPC were considered by government and refugee agencies alike to be as immutable as birth certificates or passports and the scant information they held, accurate or not, became the defining data of the children's identities. The *Polenaktion* children had arrived in England with little but the intrinsic elements of identity: name and date of birth. Yet even these were challenged in some cases. When Rosa Piperberg was preparing to register with the police she notified the Fund that she had 'noted an error on my permit card' and asking them to 'kindly alter the date of my birth' and 'return the card to me'.²³⁷ The Fund told Rosa that they had no authority to alter the cards unless she had proof 'that 22.3.26 is the correct date of your birth and not 2.3.26 as mentioned on the card'.²³⁸ Rosa, who sent her Unemployment book hoping that would suffice, was told:

We are sorry [...] to state that this is no proof that you were born on March 22nd. If you have a birth certificate, we shall be glad to have this, but if you have no other formal documents, we suggest that you leave the date [...] as there is only a difference of 20 days which should not worry you.²³⁹

²³⁵ Ibid., Leo Klarman to Questle, 22 November 1949.

²³⁶ Leo Klarman's case was also written up at length in Barry Turner's *...And the Policeman Smiled*, pp. 222-3. It is obvious that Turner had access to RCM files and correspondence not in Klarman's PJRF file, and his account fills in some of the blanks in the Polish Fund records. Turner's tone throughout the account was derogating and defamatory. He wrote that in early 1944 Leo 'set up as a freelance photographer without first obtaining formal documentation from the Home Office. The Movement took against him, not so much because he had neglected the bureaucratic niceties, but more because he was a "weedy, conceited, unattractive young man" who did not respond to exhortations to join the war effort (presumably by swapping his camera for a pick and shovel). When he applied to the court for permission to marry [...] the magistrate [...] refused "as he was not in favour of a British girl marrying an alien". The RCM expressed itself powerless to intercede'. Turner finished the account with Leo's arrest, deportation and re-arrest, noting that Leo 'appealed for help to the RCM' and concluding 'On his record card appears a brief, dismissive comment: "It is pointless for the committee to intervene"'. Although Turner's remit was to laud the RCM, and intended Leo's case to demonstrate one of the Movement's many challenges, he succeeded only in making the RCM appear unsympathetic, mean, petty, vindictive and unhelpful.

²³⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Rosa Piperberg to Kaizer 23 February 1942.

²³⁸ Ibid., Kaizer to Rosa Piperberg, 27 February 1942.

²³⁹ Ibid., Kaizer to Rosa Piperberg, 9 March 1942.

The blitheness with which the agency suggested the girl accept an incorrect birthdate suggests an inability to recognize the importance of such markers to a child whose identity had been variously challenged over a number of years. In addition, the Fund as well as government agencies knew that it was impossible for these children to secure copies of their birth certificates from Germany in the middle of the war, and such suggestions could only have added to their despair and frustration.

Cases such as Rosa Piperberg's also emphasise the inviolability of the Permit Cards' data. Other *Kinder* whose birthdates were recorded incorrectly experienced similar responses. Mendel Solomon's birthdate was wrong not by a matter of days, but by an entire year. Both the boy and the Fund appealed to the Movement to change the date, but the 'General Secretary [...] informs us that the Movement cannot alter the Permit Card on the boy's statement alone'.²⁴⁰ The RCM suggested, rather unhelpfully, the Mendel should take his card to the police and ask them to register him under the correct birth year and then to ask the Home Office to alter the card.²⁴¹ Mendel was not likely to be successful in that endeavour, for when Salomon Lassman, whose nationality was wrongly recorded, took his parents' Polish passports to the Police to prove his identity, he was told 'that it was not in the power of the Police to change registration Certificates'.²⁴² The Movement informed a number of the *Polenaktion Kinder* that they were also forbidden to alter the HOPC that they held for safekeeping. Names were also affected by the Permit Cards' renderings. Simon Markel's card, for example, recorded his surname as 'Markiel', and that was how he was consistently addressed in all correspondence, despite the fact that he signed his letters 'Markel'.²⁴³ Similarly, Jehuda Laulicht noticed that 'on my identity card has been made a slight mistake, instead of Laulicht there has been written Laulight'.²⁴⁴ He hoped the Fund could get his birth certificate 'as I would like to keep my old name'.²⁴⁵ Misstated birthdates and names did not carry consequences such as internment and deportation, but they did impinge upon the core, internalised identities of children whose lives had been upended and whose externally imposed identification was shifting and confused.

²⁴⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Olive Dyke to PJRF, 23 May 1940.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² USL/MS/183 574 F2 Salomon Lassman to Zeitlyn, 24 January 1940.

²⁴³ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Simon Markel Permit Card.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Jehuda Laulicht to PJRF, 15 July 1941.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

3297 3045

This document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.

THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

Name MARKIEL SIMON
 Sex M. Date of Birth 16-3-23
 Place CHEMNITZ
 Full Names and Address of Parents
MARKIEL FEIWEL-CHANA.
CRACOV.
EXACT ADDRESS UNKNOWN

R2.



Identity uncertainties also affected other important aspects of *Kinder's* lives, including jobs, education and training. Several of the boys who were classified as German found it difficult to secure work permits and some jobs and training opportunities barred Germans and Austrians. Simon Markel had 'met with hard difficulties in getting the permission to work, just because of that German Nationality which I never really possessed'.²⁴⁶ There were also non-Jewish Polish organisations like the Polish Relief Fund (PRF) that offered generous stipends for continuing education to Polish *Kinder* who could 'prove' their Polish citizenship. This became a point of some importance for Ruth Reicher, an intelligent, diligent girl who wanted to become a nurse. In 1943, Alice Dunfield of the PRF told Kaizer that her organisation 'agreed to contribute' but only 'if Ruth's Polish nationality could be established to the satisfaction of the Polish Consulate'.²⁴⁷ She noted that 'a lot of people and Committees have been talking' but 'so far nobody has established the Polish nationality'.²⁴⁸ The question of Ruth's nationality had been left in abeyance, and Dunfield contended that since PJRF knew 'a great deal more about this child than anyone else' and 'she is really one of your children that you brought over from Germany and Poland' it might be 'more appropriate' for the PJRF to 'give her her real start in life'.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Alice Dunfield to Kaizer, 30 July 1943.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

While there might be some doubt of her being Polish there is none whatsoever about her being Jewish, and that is why I suggest that your Committee might like to take it over.²⁵⁰

The PJRF was not financially able to give Ruth ‘her real start in life’ and had she not



finally succeeded in securing a Polish passport, it is unlikely she would have been able to finish secondary school and continue as a nurse trainee. This episode illustrates the advantages that establishment of Polish nationality could confer on a child refugee’s future.

Alice Dunfield’s uncertainty about Ruth’s Polish identity in contrast to her confidence regarding Ruth’s Jewishness, underscored the other critical aspect of identity with which many *Kindertransportees* had to contend. Examples throughout this study have shown that challenges to religious faith and observance were

numerous in *Kinder* experience. The core identity of children brought up as religiously observant Jews, as most of the *Polenaktion* children were, was less mutable than issues of nationality. The Fund’s mixed successes in protecting and honouring those affiliations have been explored in previous chapters, showing that many children drifted or were pulled away from Judaism by foster placements that provided little or no support for Jewish teaching and observance. In this chapter, the examination of religion focusses on former child refugees’ reflections on their religious identities both *then* and *now*, and the agency exhibited by Jewish children in preserving their observant faith. Two Zbąszyń *Kinder* recalled evacuation foster placements in which they were exposed to Christian teachings. Mira Blaustein, who had suffered deeply in her Jewish sponsor’s home, found an evacuation family she described as ‘the kindest, the most decent people’ who ‘treated me no different than their own daughter which was wonderful’.²⁵¹

I wanted to be part of that family. I went to church with them every Sunday. They never forced me. I voluntarily went. I knew I was Jewish [...] but I went to church with them [...] They never said you must but they enjoyed the fact that I went with them and participated.²⁵²

This was a situational shift for Mira that did not fundamentally challenge her Jewishness. She reluctantly returned to the sponsoring family and later met and married

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ USCSF/VHA Mira Blaustein.

²⁵² Ibid.

another Jewish refugee, maintaining her faith for the rest of her life.²⁵³ Exposure to Christianity resulted in a very different outcome for Isabella Schneider, one of the Talaton girls. She lived with a vicar for a time, attending church with him and feeling that ‘it was really quite something’.²⁵⁴ From the age of ten, she resided with childless Christian foster parents, remembering it as ‘a lovely time’ and she left them only when she married a non-Jewish man, becoming a very devout member of the Congregational church.²⁵⁵

Non-voluntary exposure to Christianity as a young child did not always result in conversion or even a straying away from Orthodox Judaism. When he was only seven or eight, Manfred Haberberg was placed in an evacuation foster home where the family ‘raised me as Gentile’.²⁵⁶

I remember going to church every Sunday, I remember Sunday school and even to this day my favourite programme [...] is the programme of English church music [...] called ‘Songs of Praise’. I can identify every single hymn [...] I know it by heart so it was a very formative part of my life.²⁵⁷

Even if he enjoyed this aspect of Christianity, Manfred maintained a strong sense of his own Jewishness. He understood that his foster family ‘never thought of me as Jewish and if they did, they certainly didn’t think I should be’.²⁵⁸ Manfred’s Jewish foster siblings the Finkelsteins had been evacuated with him but their parents were unhappy about the children’s church attendance, so they ‘removed their children from this environment’ leaving Manfred alone in a Christian setting.²⁵⁹ He could not recall how, but he managed to get himself to Judith Grunfeld in Shefford, where he was accepted into her Jewish orthodox school, meeting the challenge to his religious faith through his own agency.²⁶⁰

Like Manfred, a significant number of the child refugees took some initiative and demonstrated agency in safeguarding their religious identity. Some were small requests, such as that of Charlotte Piperberg, who informed the Fund when she was fourteen that ‘When I first came to Luton I went to Hebrew classes. [...] I should like to learn

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ USCSF/VHA 45065 Isabella Schneider Webber, 1997.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ USCSF/VHA Fred Haberberg.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Hebrew but I have had no other opportunity yet'.²⁶¹ Kaizer approached the local Jewish leaders, telling them that 'we are naturally anxious for her to take an interest in Jewish matters and move in a Jewish atmosphere' and assuring them that if there were expenses involved, 'we shall be prepared to pay whatever is needed'.²⁶² The Fund was also approached by Paul Goldberg's brother about Paul's upcoming bar mitzvah, for which the Law of Truth Talmudical College, where both boys were studying, was unable to provide appropriate clothing. Philip Goldberg wrote to Kaizer:

I appeal to your Jewish heart. I know your intention is to assist [...] poor persecuted Jewish brothers and sisters, and specially poor little ones. So I beg you instantly to have real pity with my brother and to grant for him all the clothing he is in very great need of.²⁶³

The brother also requested a small weekly grant for 'unfortunately I have not the very smallest amount to buy for me and my little brother only one fruit'.²⁶⁴ A notation at the bottom of the letter noted: 'Interviewed boy. Clothes. Grant of 5 [shillings]'.²⁶⁵

A few children changed lodgings, either with help or independently, in order to ensure the maintenance of their religious standards. At sixteen, the devoutly orthodox identical twins Rebecka and Liesa Krenzler left their Jewish hostel in Nottingham and moved into flat of their own because they felt that the hostel had become too lax in its orthodoxy and they wanted to maintain a higher level of observance.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Wilhelm Najman at age fourteen asked the Fund for help during an impending move 'so that I can be transferred from Leeds to a strictly religious hostel in London'.²⁶⁷ Even older *Kinder* sometimes needed the Fund's intercession in order to obtain the right religious environment. After she left her first foster placement, Devorah Brodsky went to another Jewish family, but, as Dr Litvin reported, 'She is very dissatisfied with her present lodgings; the people are not religious, even no Yom Kippur' whereas 'she herself belongs to a strict religious family and is very orthodox'.²⁶⁸ Litvin suggested that they transfer her to a more observant Jewish home.²⁶⁹

Devorah's case is illustrative of instances when the challenge to an orthodox Jewish identity came from within Judaism. Another example from the Polish Fund files

²⁶¹ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Charlotte Piperberg to Kaizer, 13 February 1942.

²⁶² Ibid. Kaizer to Reverend Ritvo, 23 March 1942.

²⁶³ USL/MS/183 563 F1 Philip Goldberg to Kaizer, 5 May 1940.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Rebecka Krenzler Scherer, 10 February 2013.

²⁶⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Wilhelm Najman to Gorowitz, 14 May 1943.

²⁶⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F1 Litvin Reports, 5 July 1942.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

concerned two boys who had been guaranteed by a small Jewish community in Pontypridd, Wales. The leader of the congregation informed Zeitlyn that ‘they are working in the optical shop of one of our members who now feels that he cannot train the boys efficiently unless they work on the Shabbos and Festivals’.²⁷⁰

The boys however [...] have been brought up in a very orthodox environment [and] feel that [...] they cannot under any circumstances venture to desecrate the Shabbos and Festivals and might I add that this is a conviction which must be respected and encouraged by all, especially members of our own race.²⁷¹

Zeitlyn expressed surprise ‘that the Community could not bring its influence to bear upon the gentleman’ to accommodate the boys’ convictions and ‘show this gentleman the proper viewpoint to take in this matter’ since it was ‘a case which is from the very beginning to the end one of the highest charity’.²⁷²

It is surely the least that one can do for these poor refugees – to show respect to their religious upbringing. Particularly do I emphasize that view in the case of children who are still of tender years. When they are grown up and are independent it will be time enough to let them mould their own religious views.²⁷³

Here, Zeitlyn succinctly captured the entire religious issue pertaining to unaccompanied Jewish refugee children. Realistically recognizing that even some of those who had been raised in religiously observant families might choose different paths as adults, Zeitlyn nevertheless made the entirely reasonable claim that the beliefs of ‘poor refugees’ should be respected and honoured while they were ‘still of tender years’.²⁷⁴

All *Kinder* faced some kind of identity challenges, whether these were to religion or nationality, especially in the post-war era. For many, the issue of nationality was resolved through participation in the British war effort, most significantly through service in the British military. Uniformed military service buttressed their allegiance to the country that had taken them in as transmigrant refugees, and for many, represented the juncture at which they shed their refugee persona. For those who chose to stay in the UK, naturalisation was streamlined in 1947, and the acquisition of a British passport

²⁷⁰ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Reverend E Morris to Zeitlyn, 9 May 1940.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., Zeitlyn to Reverend Morris, 14 May 1940.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Zeitlyn’s observations were certainly true in the case of Herbert Haberberg, who rebelled against his orthodox upbringing. Interview with Herbert Haberberg, London, 8 August 2014. Frances Williams also addressed the issue of voluntary rebellion against orthodoxy and Judaism in general. See Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, pp. 107-9.

cemented their national identity.²⁷⁵ Even for those who eventually left Britain, most frequently for the USA, Israel or Australia, the imprint of their formative years in the United Kingdom had lasting reverberations. Some whose religious identity had been challenged as children came back to Judaism as adults, although for many the break with their Jewish heritage was permanent.

In terms of contested identities, the Polish *Kinder's* situation was unique. By birth and language German, most never actually thought of themselves as such, and the expulsion to Poland added further confusions. Polish identity conferred some vital protections for them in wartime Britain, but its importance faded away in the post-war world. Even for those who did not have to convince authorities of their Polish nationality, German identification became a liability and something to be despised. Zbąszyń *Kindertransportee* Renee Alpern recalled being uncomfortable as a schoolgirl in England answering the question 'Where were you born?'

I never used to like to say I was born in Germany [...] I used to say I was born outside of Germany. I was ashamed of being German. Germans were hated [...] Non-Jewish people couldn't differentiate [...] if you were Jewish and German or non-Jewish and German.²⁷⁶

Renee's family heritage, a complicated mix of Swiss, Polish and German, contributed to her conflicted feelings, and her recollections also echoed the widespread discomfort *Kindertransportees* experienced in wartime Britain due to general ignorance of Continental politics and Britons' failure to distinguish between a German and a refugee from Fascism. Thea Feliks' memoir indicated that antipathy to German birth could extend far beyond the war years.

I can't say I'm German, even though I was born there. 'Where were you born?' I don't like that question. Because it implies that I'm German [...] I don't want to be mistaken for being German [...] That I have an inherent dislike of. That I just can't do. If I'm pushed then I say, I was born in Germany of foreign parents. I have to add that.²⁷⁷

Although Thea adopted an English national identity, the issue of national origin continued to plague her for the rest of her life. Birthplace, commonly a defining shorthand for nationality, was problematic for her.

²⁷⁵ Bentwich, *They Found Refuge*, pp. 72-3.

²⁷⁶ USCSF/VHA Renee Alpern Moss. To further complicate matters for Renee, her mother and two of her siblings who were also *Kinder* were born in Zurich, Switzerland, and could legitimately avoid the German label.

²⁷⁷ Reti and Chase, eds., *A Transported Life*, p. 79. Brade reports similar dissociations in Austrian refugee children. Brade, 'Temporary Exile', pp. 35-7.

I don't answer the question to this day, 'Where do you come from? What are you?' I don't know how to answer the question because it's a puzzle to me. So I laugh it off. I say, 'Well, of European hash'.²⁷⁸

For many like Thea, that fundamental identity query 'What are you?' became a loaded question that defied a quick and easy answer.²⁷⁹ Some *Kinder* clung to the one identity that made sense – their Jewishness. Alexander Dominitz, a Zbąszyń *Kind* who spent several years in a Liverpool yeshiva and became an Orthodox Rabbi in London, told an interviewer that although he felt connected to British Jewry, for someone with 'an identity with a Jewish life there is no country'.²⁸⁰ Yet for many others, this too was inadequate as a definitive identity.

III. The Children: New Perspectives

Questions of dependence, agency and identity loomed large for all 10,000 displaced children of the *Kindertransport*. The loss of family support systems and their refugee status rendered even the most confident and capable *Kinder* dependent upon refugee organisations for some period. Almost all began asserting limited agency as soon as they arrived, especially in respect to communicating with and helping family members still in Europe. As they gained facility with the language and acquired the norms of communication, many of the unaccompanied children actively sought autonomy through a variety of strategies, not all of them positive. In pursuing various strategies to achieve their educational and vocational goals, and get their material needs met, they formed numerous relationships with refugee workers and other adults. Although these alliances were often forgotten by the time *Kinder* recorded their memories, their correspondence proves how significant and important such connections were when the children were vulnerable and in need of guidance and support. The children's own correspondence enters their voices *as children* into the record of the *Kindertransport*, and presents powerful evidence of their agency, ambition, resourcefulness and initiative, as well as their vulnerability, confusion, frustration and yearning for parental guidance.

The transition to independence was easier for some than others, and the normal

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ These confusions were not unique to the Polish *Kinder*. One former child refugee from Germany wrote, 'for years I could not be sure I was German or English, Jew of Gentile. I used to say I got sore from sitting on the fence. In recent years I have solved these problems and at last come to terms with myself'. Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p. 117.

²⁸⁰ USCSF/VHA 36908 Alexander Dominitz, 1997.

problems of adolescence were heightened for many of the *Kinder* by external identity crises. For the majority, a sense of belonging to a nation, a community and a family had been shattered by the experience of migration. For some, this uncoupling with the past also included estrangement from the religion of their birth. These processes applied equally to the cohort from Germany via Poland for whom the issues of birth and nationality were more complex. The *Polenaktion Kinder*, who struggled with the same issues of agency as all *Kinder*, adopted and discarded multiple national identities, although for them, mis-assignments carried potentially life-altering consequences. Along with the rest of the *Kinder* they created new bonds with adopted nations and communities, built new families, attached themselves to new religions, or rediscovered their Jewish heritage in the process of identity reconstruction and establishing agency and autonomy.

4

The Parents

On 24 August 1939, when Herbert and Manfred Haberberg left Warsaw by train on the first leg of their journey to Britain, their parents, Alter and Fella, were not there to see them off. After the family's arrival in Zbąszyń almost exactly ten months earlier, Fella's brother, Bernard Kohane, had tried to rescue them, but was forbidden from taking the family out of the refugee camp. Kohane only managed to spirit Herbert away by passing him off as his own child.¹ For the next eight months, Herbert lived in Katowice with his aunt, uncle and cousins, leaving his parents and brother in Zbąszyń. In early 1939, Alter travelled to Germany to liquidate his business. While he was away, the refugee camp was dismantled and Fella and Manfred left Zbąszyń and moved in with her relatives in Krakow. Herbert joined his mother and Manfred in Krakow but there was no room there for Alter when he returned from Germany and he went to his own relatives in Warsaw. The forced exile from their home in Germany on 28 October 1938 had scattered the family and the Haberbergs never resided together under the same roof again.

The parents, separated by circumstance, did not even have the solace of each other's counsel and company as they made the difficult decision to send their children to England. Herbert and Manfred joined the list of *Kindertransportees* in late July 1939, parting from their mother in Krakow and travelling to Otwock, a spa town outside Warsaw, where dozens of Zbąszyń children were assembled prior to departure. There



¹ Author's interview with Herbert Haberberg, London, 28 January 2012. Except where noted, the remaining information in this and the following paragraphs on the Haberberg family also comes from this interview.

they stayed with other young refugees at a Jewish children's home for several weeks, waiting for permission to transfer to England. On 19 August 1939, Herbert and Manfred were allowed to travel to Warsaw to see their father, attending Sabbath services with him and their uncle in the orthodox Nożyk Synagogue. Five days later they departed by train for Gdynia, where they boarded the packet steamer *Warszawa* for the four day journey to London.

The parents' anticipation of a reunion with their beloved children sustained them in the grim days that followed. The children's departure allowed Alter to re-join his wife in Krakow where they lived for the first eighteen months of the war, corresponding sporadically through Fella's brother Willie who had escaped to the United States in 1940. Like many parents, they were frustrated by the inevitable delays occasioned by such correspondence routes and by the paucity of news from England.

I really don't know what tone I should adopt with you, dear Herbert, in begging you to give me a sign of life, how many countless times have I asked you, how happy other children would be in your shoes if they had such an opportunity.²

Fella's censorious tone was located in the hardships of life under the Nazis and the anguish of separation from both sons, but especially her little 'Manfredchen', about whom she was desperate for news.

You last wrote me that you wanted to visit little Manfred 4 ½ months ago, were you there and how did you find him, how does he look, what is he doing, does he ever speak of his parents? Has he grown much, the sweet little boy?³

During the short time Herbert had spent in Krakow with his mother prior to his departure, Fella Haberberg had adjured him to take responsibility for his much younger brother, but the few letters that reached her revealed the painful reality that her boys were separated and rarely saw one another. The lack of news compounded the heartache of separation, and magnified their hardships in Nazi-occupied Poland where only one consoling hope sustained them.

Ach! Children! How I pray to dear God that we will all see each other again in joy, you are my only reason to go on living, and it is this belief that keeps me going, what could become of me otherwise?⁴

² Undated Haberberg correspondence lent and used with the kind permission of Herbert Haberberg and translated from German by Margy Walter. Though undated, it was probably written 5 May 1940. In the letter, Fella mentions it was 'father's birthday' and the visit to Manfred four and a half months earlier fits with Herbert's January 1940 visit described in Chapter 3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Although Herbert's parents were generally circumspect when discussing themselves, Fella's letter concluded with unsettling news of their own precarious existence:

[W]e are all freezing [...] winter just doesn't want to leave us, even more so than last year. We are [...] in a terrible condition, father has no work, but [all we want is to] simply survive everything and be happy with all of you again.⁵

Feeling guilty about seeing his brother only once in two years, Herbert found it difficult to provide the much desired information to his parents and wrote infrequently, amplifying their anguish and his remorse.⁶ Eventually for Herbert, as for so many others, the letters from Poland ceased altogether.

The desperate plight of parents like the Haberbergs has never fully found a place within *Kindertransport* historiography. The managed histories, beginning with *A Great Adventure*, set the pattern for later accounts by putting the parents at the margins of the narrative, or erasing them almost completely. Relegated to chapters concerned with leave-taking and the post-war aftermath, they are only a ghostly presence in most narratives. The most potent explanation for the parents' silence is the fact that the majority of them did not survive the Holocaust. The lack of reliable statistics to quantify this statement has been noted elsewhere in this study, but even the most optimistic of the post-war estimates concede that the majority of *Kinder* lost one or both of their parents in the Holocaust.⁷ The memory literature and a disaggregation of the available data suggest that of those who survived, more than three fourths managed to leave the Reich by 1940, most coming to the UK before the onset of the war.⁸ Significantly, not one of the surviving fathers in the 2007 AJR *Kindertransport* Survey is reported to have returned from 'the East', though several mothers survived deportation to Nazi-occupied

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Private conversation with Herbert Haberberg, London, 6 November 2013.

⁷ The figure that the AJR *Kindertransport* Survey asserts as definitive is 54%, although the limitations of that instrument cast serious doubts upon this assertion. These statistics are dealt with later in the chapter.

⁸ The collective autobiographies and other memory literature contain numerous accounts of parents who managed to secure domestic visas to the UK. See Mark Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, Leverton and Lowensohn, eds., *I Came Alone*, and Karen Gershon ed., *We Came as Children*. It is not possible to disaggregate completely accurately from the *Kindertransport* Survey due to the absence of data on many entries. Nonetheless, the figures indicate that of the 40% of respondents who reported that their parent or parents survived, at least 77% of surviving mothers and 76% of surviving fathers left Europe or found safe haven in Sweden, Switzerland or Spain by 1941. At least two thirds of those managed to get to the UK and were reunited with their children in 1939 or early 1940.

Poland or the Baltic states.⁹ Those who did not manage pre-war emigration to a safe haven in Europe or abroad suffered a death rate of eighty to ninety percent.

The literature and the data suggest that a significant minority of parents did survive however, which begs the question why their voices are almost wholly absent from *Kindertransport* historiography.¹⁰ Like many other gaps in the historiography, the parents' silence reflects a lack of available documentation. The passing away of the parents' generation before the *Kindertransport* became a subject of popular interest and academic study meant that few left testimonies or memoirs about their experiences.¹¹ Documents that could bring the parents back into the discourse such as their letters to the refugee agencies, have been lost or remain in closed collections, and private communications between children and their families are not part of the public record, remaining elusive and rare.¹² But documentary lacunae are not the only explanation for the erasure of the parents from the mainstream *Kindertransport* narrative. The fate of the parents, perhaps the greatest tragedy of the *Kindertransport*, does not fit comfortably within the romanticised version of the movement. Historians have been reluctant to integrate the parents' stories into the redemptive narrative of *Kinder* who were 'reborn' in Britain, leaving their deep pasts unexplored and unrecorded. A narrative predicated upon the *Kinder's* success and happiness leaves little space for the misfortunes and catastrophes of the parents who remained behind.

Significant archival and historiographical silences have left the children as the sole transmitters of their parents' stories. *Kinder* memory work is the primary means by which the parents have been included in the narrative, but there remain serious

⁹ *Kindertransport* Survey. In the cell 'Father's location of/fate during WWI' 'there is no filter in the spread sheet for Poland or the USSR once the data has been limited to surviving fathers. Nine of the surviving mothers are reported to have survived camps in Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania. There are many gaps in this part of the survey, however, and it is obvious that many respondents were not entirely sure of the details of their parents' survival.

¹⁰ One of the most powerful representations of a surviving parent is found in Diane Samuels' play *Kindertransport*. Based on interviews and reading about the *Kindertransport*, the maternal voice is nevertheless fictionalised and mediated by the narrator.

¹¹ A notable exception is the testimony of two surviving mothers and one foster mother in Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*.

¹² Andrea Hammel, 'The Future of *Kindertransport* Research', pp. 142-44. The *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien*, which has not been fully researched to date, contains parents' communications with rescue agencies in Britain, offering a tantalising glimpse of possibilities for future research. Milena Roth, *Lifesaving Letters: A Child's Flight from the Holocaust*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) is an exception. Roth excerpted letters written to her and her foster mother both before and after Milena's flight to the UK. Ruth David, *Child of Our Time; A Young Girl's Flight from the Holocaust*, (London: I B Taurus, 2003) also excerpts her mother's letters. See also: *Lilli Tauber-A Suitcase full of Memories*, dir. by Ulrike Osterman (Centropa, 2008), <<http://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/lilli-tauber-suitcase-full-memories>> [accessed 18 January 2014]

disadvantages in relying solely on such accounts to convey the parents' stories. Principally, these accounts are not in the parents' own voices, but are portraits of the parents distilled through their children's memories. All the usual caveats about the use of memory documentation to construct historical accounts must be applied in this instance, with the further caution that the entire subject of the parents remains a raw and deeply sensitive one for many *Kinder*, some of whom remained unable to re-read their parents' letters or discuss their fates after the war.¹³ In addition, for many of the *Kinder*, the parents' story is incomplete. Most children were neither privy to their parents' efforts to get them out of danger, nor knowledgeable about the details of their wartime lives. Many remain uncertain about their parents' ultimate fates. What has been filtered through the memories of the former child refugees is inextricable from their own experiences of separation and loss. From the standpoint of both emotion and resources, the parents remain among the most difficult of *Kindertransport* topics to approach.

A few memory accounts preserve an invaluable record of the parents' voices, but, like *Kinder* memories themselves, even these must be approached critically. Some memoirs and testimonies have made public the preserved pre-war and wartime correspondence from parents, and others have shared their parents' letters privately with researchers. Like Fella Haberberg's letters, these convey some of the parents' own thoughts, concerns, fears, hopes, advice and experiences, and add an important dimension to discourse. However, such communications are also constrained in significant ways by the parent-child relationship and the stresses of war and separation, and represent an entirely different kind of communication than that between parents and other adults.

Correspondence of a different kind in the files of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund represents what has been missing in the historiography. These letters account for the parents' efforts to get their children included on *Kindertransports* and their feelings about sending their children away, as well as the lives they led after the *Kinder* departed

¹³ Deborah Oppenheimer sums this up succinctly: '[My mother's] grief was vast and deep. My brother, sister and I understood not to ask questions'. Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, p. 261. Some of my own correspondents among the families of the Polish children have reported similar sentiments: 'I never asked her to recount her life during the years that the memories would have been fresher. That was too painful for me as a youngster [...] stirrings of memory would become so emotional for her'. Private email 22 January 2014. One *Kind* I interviewed intends to be buried with her mother's letters, which she cannot bring herself to read. Deborah Oppenheimer found after her mother's death an enormous trove of letters her mother had received from her parents, a collection that neither Deborah, her siblings, nor her father knew existed. Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers* p. 266.

and the reunions of survivors with their children. These subjects can only truly be explored from the parents' perspective, using their own words and thoughts, which heretofore have been unavailable to researchers. This chapter redresses those gaps and begins to integrate the parents more fully into the *Kindertransport* narrative. In dozens of letters from parents and other family members to various refugee agencies, the voices of the adults are manifest, and although the bulk of this correspondence ended with the onset of war, it sheds new light on parents' agency in seeking refuge for their offspring. In the absence of similar documentation from the files of German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian children, these few extant letters from 1938 and 1939 give a voice to the thousands of parents whose similar letters, photos and documents have now all vanished or remain buried in closed archives.

Although nearly all the parents' letters in the Polish files were written before August 1939, the parents' presence in the documentation can be traced throughout the war years. In addition, a few of the *Polenaktion* parents were able to get to Britain, and their interactions with the Fund and other agencies cast light on their unique experiences. For the majority of the Polish *Kinder*, as for most of their fellow child migrants, the parents' fates were not revealed until the war's end, making it most appropriate to close this study with their words and fates, along with the post-war lives of the children they sent to safety. This chapter gives the parents, the forgotten actors in the *Kindertransport* saga, a voice in the story, explores the concerns, hopes and fears that animated their actions, and closes the narrative arc on the children whose lives have been explored in the preceding chapters.

I. December 1938-August 1939

The parents' pre-war letters illustrate both the universality and the particularity of the *Polenaktion Kinder's* lives. Like all beleaguered Jewish parents in Nazi-controlled lands, these parents experienced a persecutory event so shocking that the idea of sending their offspring away ceased to be unthinkable. The *Anschluss*, *Kristallnacht*, the Sudeten Crisis and the invasion of Czechoslovakia caused parents all across Central Europe to seek ways of getting their children to safety. For the Polish parents, the *Polenaktion* and the miseries and uncertainties of refugee life provided the impetus. As options dwindled for family migration, the one positive thing parents could do was to

try to get their children to Great Britain. In Berlin and Vienna, Zbąszyń and Prague, parents endured frustration, disappointment and despair as they manoeuvred through bureaucracies that were often arbitrary and offered far too few places to meet demand. The pre-war letters of the *Polenaktion* parents explore that part of the narrative.

The majority of the parents' letters dealt with the attempt to get their children included on the transport lists, and detailed the desperation and frustration involved in that task. All parents had to ascertain which command structures and authority figures had the greatest power to respond to their pleas. In Germany and Austria there were Nazi-sanctioned community organisations with which parents dealt, but in Czechoslovakia and Poland the situation was far less structured.¹⁴ Records are fragmentary, but it is certain that parents in Zbąszyń interacted with a number of refugee and aid groups from whom they might have learned about the *Kindertransport*.¹⁵ Throughout Poland, informal networks shared information about agencies that could help get children out, enabling even those who had not been expelled to Zbąszyń to get their children included on the transports.

Parents sought help from any organisation that might get their children to safety, though finding the correct audience for their petitions was made more difficult by the profusion of organisations in Great Britain working in the interests of Polish Jewry.¹⁶ Appeals to other agencies usually found their way to the modest offices of the PJRF on Soho Square and parents expressed relief when they were finally referred to Elsley Zeitlyn, though as Leib Ettinger wrote, it was only with 'great difficulty I have learned your esteemed address'.¹⁷ Another father, Abraham Graber, expressed a similar sentiment.

¹⁴ The *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* and the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien*. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, pp. 85-91 and 103-112. The machinery of the *Reichsvertretung* and *Kultusgemeinde* are both discussed, as well as the much less structured and orderly process in Prague overseen by Trevor Chadwick and Doreen Warriner. Baumel-Schwartz also discussed the Zbąszyń children using the *Jewish Chronicle* as her primary source.

¹⁵ These included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ('the Joint'), CENTOS, a Polish organisation for Jewish orphans, and various British based organisations

¹⁶ In addition to the Association of Jews of Polish Citizenship in Great Britain, the Federation of Polish Jews of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Nahum Sokolow Society (the Union of Polish Zionists in Great Britain), there were other Zionist and Agudas organisations working on behalf of Polish Jews. 'Polish Jewish Organizations in Great Britain Unite', JTA Archive, 10 September 1941 <<http://www.jta.org/1941/09/11/archive/polish-jewish-organizations-in-great-britain-unite#ixzz2rDxj6fGa>> [accessed 22 January 2014]. Letters from Poland were addressed variously to the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain, the German Jewish Aid Committee in London, the United Appeal for Polish Jewry, the 'Children Refugee Committee', The Polish Refugee Committee and individuals including Morris Myer, the president of the United Appeal, Mr Goldberg, the secretary of the Federation and Elsley Zeitlyn himself.

¹⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Leib Ettinger to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

I have learned of your address from a friend and now turn to you for help in my distress. I am an emigrant, deported here with my family [...] It is unnecessary to describe our situation to you, since you are surely well aware of how we fare here, especially now that the Committee no longer exists and we can expect help from nowhere.¹⁸

Graber was among several parents who mentioned ‘the Committee’, an ad hoc organisation providing aid and administrative help to the expelled.¹⁹ Like many other parents, Graber expressed a sense of abandonment and even hopelessness in his dependence on the largesse of various committees.

Parents’ gratitude towards ‘the Committee’ was tempered by suspicions that it was obstructing their efforts to get their children to safety. One of these aggrieved parents was Anna Kamiel, who had been suddenly widowed following the deportation leaving her with three children to care for.²⁰ Anna Kamiel expressed the frustration of that task, telling Elsley Zeitlyn that her ‘great efforts to take care of my children’ had been met ‘without the least bit of success in this affair’.²¹

I hope to be able to find more understanding and obligingness from you, dear Sir. As we were told, you have the possibility of freeing me from my anxiety. I therefore plead that you, honoured Sir, do what you can in your power to help me and make it possible for my children to emigrate to England.²²

She was indignant that her children had been ‘noted down [for transport to England] already since December’ but seven months later were still in Zbąszyń, posing her own

¹⁸ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Abraham Graber to Zeitlyn, 17 June 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁹ Tomaszewski, ‘Przystanek Zbąszczyń’ p. 78. It was comprised of members of the Polish National Jewish Committee from Warsaw, the ‘Joint’, and local activists. Among them was Emanuel Ringleblum, then working for the ‘Joint’, whose recorded impressions of the expulsions and the efforts of the Committee to help the refugees have survived.

²⁰ Mrs Kamiel had lost her husband to illness after the expulsion. The welfare of her family, and of the family of Sender Kamiel, her brother-in-law, which had also been expelled, was of great concern to their American relatives. There is a remarkable letter in Josef Kamiel’s file from America written to an English relative on 2 December 1938, the day that the first boatload of *Kinder* arrived in Harwich. In it, Rose Kosminsky relayed the expulsion of the ‘formerly well to do’ families from Germany ‘without any money or clothes’ and noted, ‘In today’s paper [...] I read that children from 10 to 17 years of age were admitted to England from Germany to be absorbed, in all probability in Jewish homes. Would it be possible for you or yours to try to take some of my cousins into England?’ She revealed their efforts ‘to get the family left in Germany here first and then them’ but admitted that ‘God knows how long it may be before things turn’ enabling their ‘poverty stricken’ relations in Poland, to ‘get here’. USL/MS/190 AJ 390 16/25 Rose Kosminsky to Mr Rubenstein, 2 December 1938. In the letter, Rose also tells of the hospitalisation of Wolf Kamiel.

²¹ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Anna Kamiel to Zeitlyn nd, received 31 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

²² Ibid.

conclusions about the delay.²³ She bitterly recorded that she was ‘forced to realise that there is no personality in charge here who has the capacity to arrange everything in a fair and just manner’ and that it was ‘useless for me to simply wait trustfully until someone should trouble to consider me, or rather my children’.²⁴

I already spoke with the Committee but could achieve nothing [my children] don't have the advantage of belonging to the protected children. It has namely become the custom here that only those who have connections to people on the Committee can achieve something in Zbąszyń.²⁵

Anna Kamiel's suspicions about the advantages accruing to the well connected were a common concern, not only in Poland but also in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Though difficult to substantiate empirically, there is anecdotal evidence that such connections did make a difference for some of the children. One of the Polish boys testified that his cousin was ‘the head of the Jewish community in Zbąszyń, so maybe that had something to do with [his selection]’.²⁶ Julius Buck's mother, who was not deported with her son and husband, was able to get help from the *Hilfsverein* section of the *Reichsvertretung* through contacts in Berlin's Jewish community and orchestrated her son's release from Poland via Germany.²⁷ Anna Kamiel's notion that the odds were stacked against her children and that the system was neither fair nor just is impossible to prove, but given the disparity between applications and placements, and the sheer desperation of the situation, it is probable that many disappointed parents felt the same.²⁸

A lack of connections was not the only handicap confronting children like the Kamiels. Because of their ages, young teens Klara and Miriam received unfavourable responses from the Fund and only seven-year-old Josef fit the agency's adoptability profile. However, as a recent widow, Anna's children were considered ‘orphans’, a factor that should have favoured their chances of rescue. In an earlier letter, Anna Kamiel revealed another factor that refugee organisations would have to consider.

²³ Ibid. The fact that her children were put on lists in December is possibly evidence of the active involvement of her American relations.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ USCSF/VHA Henry Feldman.

²⁷ USCSF/VHA Julius Buck. There is evidence of this connection in a letter in Buck's PJRF file. USL/MS/183 591 F1 Zeiltyn to the *Hilfsverein*, 26 May 1939.

²⁸ For a discussion of the importance of contacts and influence in selection see Hill, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Refugee Children’, pp. 63-5.

Mr. Captain Stephens has [...] been trying to find families willing to take my daughters, aged 16 and 13 years. However, only a few Christian families have offered to do so. But since my children have been raised in the strict Jewish tradition, I cannot manage to accept such an offer, even though it's the only possibility of escaping this misery.²⁹

The future of their children's religious lives was a serious consideration for orthodox parents like Anna. Weighing their survival against the possibility of estrangement from their faith, this mother was unwilling to compromise, a position that few parents were prepared to take. Had she been dealing directly with the RCM, such an unconditional stance might have cost her children a chance to escape Zbąszyń.³⁰ Anna Kamiel found a sympathetic agency in the PJRF, but only young Josef was taken to England. Even though Anna had advocated vociferously for her child's rescue, Gerd Korman remembered that she very nearly pulled Josef off the transport, fearful that in sending her son into unknown she was compromising 'the continuity of her ultra-orthodox family'.³¹ In an ironic twist, Josef grew up in a Christian foster home and was later at the centre of the heated controversy within the refugee and larger Jewish community over the estrangement of Jewish children from their faith.³²

Not all parents were as unequivocal as Anna Kamiel, although it is clear from their letters that they expected their children to be placed with Jewish families. Soon after Frieda Lindenbaum had bid farewell to her sons Siegfried and Manfred, she wrote to a family friend to 'inquire with the London committee as to [...] where they were sent' and 'ask them to not separate them, and for them to be in a Jewish environment'.³³ Simon Klarman appealed directly to co-religionists in British refugee agencies as a 'Jewish father [...] to you as a Jew'.³⁴

²⁹ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Anna Kamiel to German Jewish Aid Committee, 18 May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter. 'Mr Captain Stevens' worked for a French Zionist organisation and had taken a decided interest in the Kamiel family's case. There are several letters from him in Josef Kamiel's file, but no clear indication why or how his organisation had become involved. It is possible that he became acquainted with their case through the American family, the Kosminskys.

³⁰ Such scruples had undoubtedly put orthodox Austrian, German and Czech children at a disadvantage and it was this issue that led to Rabbi Schonfeld's decision to go to Vienna and bring out 300 orthodox children whom he felt the *Kultusgemeinde* had unfairly side-lined as unplaceable. See Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back*, 79-83.

³¹ Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale*, p. 61.

³² See Chapter 1 for the details.

³³ *Lindenbaum Odyssey: Returning After 76 Years*, 'Letters', Frieda Lindenbaum to Isi, 21 July 1939 <<http://odyssey76.com/letters/>> [accessed 20 September 2014]

³⁴ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Simon Klarman to Morris Myer, 15 March 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

Help my children get out of Zbąszyń! Get them to one or more Jewish families and arrange for them to take on my children until I can take them to the USA with me [...] Please ask around [...] If this doesn't work, I beg you urgently to place an announcement in your newspaper for a Jewish family who could take on my children.³⁵

Klarman explicitly requested a Jewish family, but his implicit entreaty was as one Jew to another. Knowing that he was writing to an unambiguously Jewish organisation allowed him to invoke the imperative of *mitzvot* in his plea.

You have already done many a good deed, you would do another one for my three innocent children. Can you imagine [...] what it means for them to get out of here? [...] Thank G-d my children are healthy and well brought-up and affectionate. They will never forget your good deed on their behalf.³⁶

Klarman appealed to the Jewish conscience of his would-be benefactor, obviously hoping that emphasis on faithfulness would favour his children's chances. The same impulse animated Dina Kasner, who recounted her husband being 'put under preventive arrest during the first boycott, and [...] released a totally sick and broken man'.³⁷ Consequently, 'he died in 1935, along with many other innocent fellow believers a victim of the new regime in Germany'.³⁸ Dignified and dispassionate, Dina explained how she coped after that shock:

My husband and I conducted an Orthodox household, we lived in orderly circumstances and nurtured the children with a good upbringing [...] I have continued to bring my children up as well-mannered, diligent young people. They are industrious, honest, and dutiful.³⁹

Explaining that her eldest son attended a Yeshiva and aspired to a rabbinical profession, she sent this letter, suffused with religious references, not to the PJRF but to the 'Children Refugee Committee' for whom its religious message would not have had the same resonance. It eventually made its way to the Fund, where assurances of her children's steadfast faith added salience to her plea for their rescue.

In addition to emphasising their good Jewish upbringing, parents stressed factors that would make their children attractive candidates and advantage them in the selection process. Writing in the language of his prospective patrons, Rubin Hirschman, who had already been told that two of his daughters were too old, continued to press his case.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ USL/MS/183 567/1 F1 Dina Kasner to Children Refugee Committee, 4 December 1938, translated from German by Margy Walter.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

I would like to see if you are able to take out my daughter Sara because she at all is very unfortunate. Please therefore, Dear Mr Zeitlyn, be kind enough also to take care of my Cilly Sara. She is a clever and intelligent girl. Excuse my letter is so bad written but the situation makes us so nervous.⁴⁰

Stressing their intelligence and usefulness in his desperate attempt to get them rescued, Hirschman revealed, both directly and indirectly, his own agitated state of mind. He confused his daughters' names, writing 'Sara' in the first sentence when he surely meant the 'very unfortunate' Cilly who had just missed the age cut-off for the *Kindertransport*. His crossing out of 'Cilly' and replacing it with 'Sara', was a physical demonstration of the nervousness to which he alluded affecting his ability to think and write clearly.

Many letters stressed the existence of affidavits, since families were aware of the trans-migratory nature of the programme and wanted to assure refugee agencies that their children would only be a temporary burden on their resources. In his effort to save Cilly, Rubin Hirschman had written that both she and Sara had affidavits 'and therefore will leave the country of United Kingdom within a short time'.⁴¹ Leib Reich wrote in a similar vein about his son and daughter.

In Germany they were both prefect of their form, they learned English, and so they were well prepared for an emigration to the USA [...] I would like very much to save the spiritual and physical soundness of my children. And so I beg you [...] to make my children come over to England even if only for an intermediate length of time.⁴²

Like other parents, Reich listed his children's academic and linguistic accomplishments and his desire to preserve their 'spiritual soundness', but he also stressed that he had 'an affidavit for my whole family'.⁴³

Having secured the necessary paperwork for emigration to the United States prior to expulsion was a mixed blessing for the *Polenaktion* families. Imbedded in Leib Reich's letter was an apprehension shared by all affidavit holders that 'here, besides my not knowing when we will get free, we will have to wait a longer time for our turn'.⁴⁴ No longer eligible under the German quota (which was inadequate for the demand anyway) they now had to qualify under the Polish quota, which was practically non-

⁴⁰ USL/MS/183 574 F1 RH to Zeitlyn, 16 June 1939. He acknowledged Zeitlyn's 'kind' but 'not very hopeful' letter and his efforts to 'get the poor children out of here' and suggested that Sara was eager 'to learn hairdressing or dressmaker'.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² USL/MS/183 574 F2 Leib Reich to Zeitlyn, 5 June 1939.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

existent. Selig Friedman, a father with a good command of English, had felt ‘very happy’ after securing American affidavits for his two daughters, since ‘we are living here in a horrible situation’.⁴⁵ After the expulsion, it was ‘a very great disappointment’ to learn that it ‘takes a time of two years to emigrate from Poland to America and there is no preferred quota for children in Poland’.⁴⁶ Stating that he was ‘very unhappy about these circumstances’, Friedman asked Zeitlyn ‘to assist me that my two daughters can come to England to spend the time of their waiting in this country’.⁴⁷ Paula Krenzler, a widow who hoped to have her daughters taken to England, explicitly articulated the advantage of reaching Britain for those with American affidavits.

[T]here is an affidavit back in Germany for my two [...] splendid girls (twins), to go to America. And I want to request that my children be taken to an interim camp in England since the English quota is a great deal larger than the Polish one.⁴⁸

Parents whose own hopes of migration had been dashed by their expulsion from Germany scrambled to find alternate routes to safety for their children, which now included unforeseen but eagerly sought stopovers in Great Britain. The uncertainties about quotas and questions about the validity of past arrangements only added to the stresses already heaped upon them by the deportation and refugee life in Poland.



Educational achievements, vocational aptitude and English proficiency as well as the loss of educational opportunity were constant themes in the parents’ letters to the refugee agencies. One parent expounded on these attributes, hoping that they might outweigh other less favourable factors.

⁴⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Selig Friedman to Zeitlyn, 18 May 1939.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ USL MS 575 F3 Paula Krenzler to PJRF nd., probably April or May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter

[M]y oldest boy cannot walk so well but is otherwise healthy and independent and can get around on his own, [...] he knows English, French, Hebrew and much more, I want him to go to England to continue his studies- [...] here he has no chance to learn anything, [...] just such a boy as this must be helped, otherwise he will only sink into hunger and misery here.⁴⁹

Like the other parents, Chaskiel Laulich enumerated his child's fine qualities and abilities, but he ill-advisedly also revealed a physical handicap – an almost certain disqualifier. His son Jehuda was already in England and of his remaining two he wrote:

The third child is a girl 13 years old and healthy, jolly, well-grown and can do almost anything, she is popular wherever she goes and is used to doing all kinds of work. The fourth is a boy 8 years old and I beg you politely to perhaps have him come to a private family there.⁵⁰

Pinned to this letter were three tiny envelopes, inscribed on the outside with the name, birthdate, birthplace and address of Israel, Perel and Josef Laulich. Each envelop contained four passport photos, possibly the last pictures ever taken of the Laulich children.



By the time their father's letter, dated 14 August 1939, reached the Fund it was too late to save them. Chaskiel, Henia and their three children were living with relatives in Krakow when last heard from in 1941. After the war, the Red Cross listed the entire

⁴⁹ USL/MS/183 591 F2 Chaskiel Laulich to PJRF, 14 August 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

family as *verschollen* – lost without a trace.⁵¹ Their son Jehuda, who had attended the Gateshead Yeshiva with Edward Pachtman, emigrated to Palestine, where he fought in Israel's War of Independence. He married and settled there, maintaining his orthodox faith. The loss of his entire family deeply affected him, though he rarely spoke about his past, and he named his first two children after his murdered parents. Jehuda died in 1985, leaving his widow Zipporah, six children and forty-one grandchildren – his legacy as the only surviving member of his family.⁵²



Many parents expressed despair about the degradation of their children's lives in Poland. They felt hopeless about their prospects and overcome with impending dread. Leib Reich lamented, 'We are all here in Zbąszyń in the refugees camp. I don't see how to come free and what will be the future of my children'.⁵³ Paula Krenzler, too, worried about her children's future 'especially since I am a widow and have no possibility of taking care of my children here in Poland'.⁵⁴

[My children were all born in Germany and therefore have no knowledge of the Polish language. The children are all young, very good-looking, talented and industrious girls [...] I would like to urgently request that you issue a permit.⁵⁵

Paula Krenzler's status as a widow looking after six children was perhaps the strongest argument in favour of including her four daughters on the transport lists. In a second letter, she emphasized their usefulness and maturity.

⁵¹ The Wiener Library, International Tracing Service [Hereafter WL/ITS] document nos. 31092501, 31092522, 31092523, 31092530, 31092524.

⁵² Meeting with the extended Laulicht family, Petah Tikvah, Israel, 8 July 2014.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Paula Krenzler to Zeitlyn, 11 May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Senta helped out in a butcher shop for 1 ½ years and is also very skilled in childcare and household tasks [...] Inge has been learning the tailor trade for the past half year. The [...] twins [...] unfortunately had to break off their schooling due to the deportation. All of my daughters are sensible, intelligent, healthy and independent girls.⁵⁶

She sensed that the British would be more welcoming to those who could offer a useful trade and earn their own keep, making her older daughters the more attractive candidates. Ironically, she bemoaned the cessation of the twins' schooling, worried that they lacked the qualifications for emigration when in reality their young age and 'orphan' status were the strongest factors in their favour.

There is an element of disingenuousness in the parents' emphasis on their children's German birth and unfamiliarity with Poland. They implied that their children's lack of Polish was an insurmountable impediment to success in the land of exile, yet were desperate to send them to a different foreign country with yet another language that was not their own. Presumably children like Paula's 'talented and industrious girls' would in time learn the Polish language, just as they had been able to learn English. But the deported parents inherently knew that regardless of language barriers, their children had no future in Poland. Leib Reich noted that 'even if we should be allowed to settle in Poland, it would be a misfortune for my children to remain [...] as we have no means to maintain them', and Abraham Graber reiterated that 'there is no chance at all that the children can make it here, since they do not speak the language'.⁵⁷

Chana Markel's letter in imperfect English starkly expressed this truth:

In Poland they cannot live. Here can only children live who are born here, but not such one who have visited the High-School in Germany and have begun to learn professions. Now the children sat here and must go under if they must stay here.⁵⁸

Dina Kasner concurred that without rescue their children 'must go under', and in her own letter detailed their 'desperate situation' and 'sordid quarters'.⁵⁹

The children are in complete misery, they have no proper nourishment, and there is insufficient opportunity for bodily cleanliness, and for the most part they sleep on straw sacks on the ground, even in private quarters.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., Paula Krenzler to Zeitlyn, 29 May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁵⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Leib Reich to Zeitlyn, 26 June 1939 and USL/MS/183 575 F2 Abraham Graber to Zeitlyn, 21 June 1939, both translated from German By Margy Walter.

⁵⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Chana Markel to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939.

⁵⁹ USL/MS/183 567/1 F1 Dina Kasner to Children Refugee Committee, 4 December 1938, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The immediate physical deprivations of the refugee camp were discouraging and difficult to manage, but Dina Kassner feared even more the long term outcomes of the deportation on her 'healthy and well-grown, orderly and conscientious' children.⁶¹

I don't need to tell you the dreadful impact of these conditions on the children. I am in no position to do anything more for my children. If proper accommodations are not provided, I see my years and years of effort on their behalf all in vain. I don't know what will become of my fatherless children.⁶²

Anxiety about the inability to provide for their children in Poland was a pervasive concern animating their willingness and even desire to send their children away.

Although the letters were focused on getting the children to safety, the parents also made it clear that their own lives and futures had been upended by the expulsion from Germany. They had suffered a sudden and complete break with their former comfortable lives in Germany, arriving in Poland with little money, no job prospects, and their own language barriers. Dina Kasner's revelation that she had 'no relatives or assets in Poland' because she had 'left Poland as a 14-year-old with my parents and siblings, and can no longer speak Polish', underscored both her need for help and her complete alienation from the land of her birth.⁶³ Anna Kamiel expressed similar feelings of estrangement, viewing Poland as a place of 'no opportunity for [the children] at all, since I am a stranger here' and lamenting that, having lost her husband, 'we are lost if we cannot get help'.⁶⁴ Widows such as Dina and Anna uninhibitedly expressed their helplessness, but it may have been more difficult for heads of families like Leib Reich to admit that he did not 'know what to do in Poland and what to live on'.⁶⁵

Destabilising the situation further were the citizenship uncertainties disclosed by several parents. Abraham Graber told the agencies that 'since the children were born in Leipzig, their Polish passports have been taken away from them and they are only to get emigrant passports'.⁶⁶ Dina Kasner revealed that 'there is no prospect of our moving from here towards the interior of Poland. Poland doesn't recognize us as citizens,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Anna Kamiel to Zeitlyn, 18 May 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶⁵ USL/MS/183 574 F2 Leib Reich to Zeitlyn, 26 June 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶⁶ USL/MS/183 575 F2 Abraham Graber to Zeitlyn, 21 June 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

particularly the children who were born in Germany'.⁶⁷ These deportees' letters revealed that estrangement with Poland cut both ways, adding to the urgency of their appeals.

For some parents, antipathy towards their birthplace was magnified by the strength of their affection for their adopted homeland. The most eloquent of these was Simon Klarman, whose impassioned letters vividly articulated his life story.

32 years ago I came with my blessed parents to Germany. I grew up there and got married 17 years ago, earned my living there, and enjoyed many a happy time with my wife and 3 children. I had a store there and employed a staff of three.⁶⁸

Klarman, who was not yet forty, nostalgically recalled his previous life, contrasting it sharply with the shattering reality of his current existence.

Now we have been almost 5 months in the most unhappy situation in my life, and I am practically in despair. Please just imagine, my home is destroyed, my business plundered, and I had to cross the border as a poor man with only the barest of necessities.

Klarman's fond memories of Germany exposed the injury and betrayal he felt from the *Polenaktion*. Although Germany had denied him and his children the right of citizenship, he had internalised a middle class German identity, a *weltanschauung* that was challenged by the expulsion. Compounding Klarman's disorientation was the affront of his reception in Poland,

[A] country that I left as a 5-year-old child, whose language I don't know, whose people don't seem to like us Jews, and who as soon as we had set foot on their land let us know that we are in no way welcome here!⁶⁹

Characterising Poles as a foreign 'other' with whom he shared no commonalities, Klarman articulated more clearly than most what the *Polenaktion* had cost him and his family. Within the corpus of parents' letters, the focus rarely strayed from the children and their need for help. Occasionally, a passage such as this departed from that script representing a parent's own *cri de coeur* for all that he had lost.

The parents, having lost control of their own destinies, understood the stark choices available to them if they or their children had any hope for a future. Like many others, Simon Klarman's well-established plans to leave Germany had been thrown into

⁶⁷ USL/MS/183 567/1 F1 Dina Kasner to Children Refugee Committee, 4 December 1938, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶⁸ USL MS 563 F2 Simon Klarman to Morris Myer, 15 March 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

disarray by the expulsion, and he was forced to redirect his thinking.

I'm consoled by the fact that if G-d wills, one day I can get to the USA. I have the necessary papers. But it will take at least 1-1 1/2 years until I get the visa. I want to be patient until then, and my wife also agrees to sit out our fate until we have found a new home in the USA. But what depresses us more than anything else in our lot is to witness how our children have to live here.⁷⁰

The conditions in Zbąszyń made the decision to send children away slightly easier for parents like Simon Klarman, but it was still heart-wrenching. Very few of the Zbąszyń correspondents confided those feelings explicitly to the refugee agencies, but Simon Klarman was in this, as in other ways, an exception.

I end this letter and beg you once again to help me! Help my children and make me happy. Even if my heart weeps at the thought that I am not to be blessed to have my children around me, to bring them up and speak with them – if hopefully not for too long a time – *I am only doing this because it is a bitter necessity.*⁷¹

Few documents in *Kindertransport* literature as powerfully convey the parents' plight as this passage from Simon Klarman's letter. He gave voice to the agony of sending one's children away, relinquishing their upbringing to strangers, and the possibility of never seeing them again. For him, as for all *Kinder* parents, only 'bitter necessity' made such a choice possible.

Once they had come to terms with their painful decision though, all these parents longed for was news of their children's acceptance on a transport. When he received that affirmation, Simon Klarman expressed his delight.

If only you could realise how much joy your letter has given me. I can hope once again and gain fresh courage to face life! How happy I am that my children will once again be able to lead a normal, well-conducted life!⁷²

The knowledge that his children would be released from the degradations of the refugee camp came as an enormous relief to this parent, but he was still concerned about the long-term effects of the deportation which he believed was 'poison for the souls' of his 'innocent children'.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. (emphasis added).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

How can they ever be happy again in their lives, and feel themselves as free Jewish people, when they have to ask themselves every day, what have our parents and we done wrong that one is allowed to treat us this way?⁷⁴

Joy was mixed with the trepidation that persecution and misery would mar his children's lives forever, causing them to question their heritage and their faith. Klarman hoped that the sacrifice he and his wife were making in relinquishing their children would spare them that crisis of identity.

My dearest wish is that my children can grow into happy and fearless people who are glad that we are Jews and proud of their Jewishness. You have my gratitude for wanting to help them do so. May our dear G-d reward you for your effort! I cannot do any more now than to give thanks.⁷⁵

Simon entrusted his children's lives to British refugee organisations with the express wish that in the absence of his guiding hand they would safeguard his children's Jewish inheritance and supervise their development 'into happy and fearless people'.

Simon Klarman's letters are exceptional, but his hopes for his children were not. Only such aspirations, which were shared by thousands of other parents across Europe, could rationalise separations that made their hearts, like Klarman's 'weep at the thought that I am not to be blessed to have my children around me, to bring them up and speak with them'. Simon Klarman's expectations *went beyond mere survival* and *Kindertransport* narratives that laud rescue to excuse lapses in the children's care utterly disregard the parents' justifications for sending their children away. Excluding the parents from such narratives avoids a painful confrontation with the programme's shortcomings, but unnaturally distorts the discourse about the outcomes of the *Kindertransport*. Acknowledging that the wishes of all parents, not just Simon Klarman, were for much more than just survival is a vital corrective to the celebratory narrative of salvation.

Despite his hopes, the future did not unfold in the way that Klarman so eloquently envisaged. Simon and his wife Rachela did not make it to the USA, and though he yearned to be separated 'hopefully not for too long a time', the Klarmans never had their longed-for reunion with their children. Only Leo and Herbert were taken to England, leaving his daughter Gisela behind. After his sons left Poland, Simon illegally made his way to Rotterdam, hoping to get out of Europe on his existing exit papers, but

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Contesting Memory

he was trapped by the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries in the spring of 1940.⁷⁶ Shortly thereafter, he was arrested and imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and later sent as *haftlinge* 1153 to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp.⁷⁷ On his intake questionnaire, Simon wrote that Rachela was in Tarnow, Poland and his ‘*Kinder sind in Palestina*’.⁷⁸ The date of Simon Klarman’s death in Gross-Rosen – 23 February 1942 – is pencilled in red at the bottom of his questionnaire.⁷⁹ Rachela was sent to Auschwitz and died under unknown circumstances there.⁸⁰ The Klarmans would have rejoiced in knowing that Gisela, after getting into Lithuania, made it to Palestine where she settled permanently, and that Herbert married, had two daughters and lived in London until his death in 1974.⁸¹

Sofort genau ausfüllen und zur Effektenkammer zurückgeben : 38

Block: 4 Bv. *Jude* Name: *Klarman, Simon* Haftlings-Nr. *1153*
Geb.: *10.4.1900*

1. Genaue Anschrift der Ehefrau (auch wenn in Scheidung):
Klarman, Rachela, geb. Bogu, Tarnow, Lydomeka 28

2. Wieviel eheliche Kinder sind vorhanden: *3* Alter: *18, 17, 16*
Wieviel uneheliche " " " : — Alter: —

3. Genaue Anschrift des Ältesten Kindes: (falls unbekannt, des zweit-
Ältesten usw.)
Kinder sind in Palestina

4. Genaue Anschrift der Eltern (Vater, Mutter), falls noch am Leben: —

5. Genaue Anschrift der Geschwister, falls noch am Leben:
Schwester Paula Gansel, Gansel Wittelgans 57

6. Falls Kinder oder Eltern nicht vorhanden, Anschrift der Großeltern
oder deren Abkömmlinge (Onkel, Tante): —

7. Im Falle des Ablebens, Name und Anschrift des Erbberechtigten:
Mein Vater, der Nova jüdische Adressen Paula Gansel Gansel Angelt

Konz.-Lager Gr.-Ro., den *23.2.1942* Unterschrift:
Simon Klarman

Not all the Klarman children grew into ‘happy and fearless people’ who were ‘proud of their Jewishness’ as Simon had hoped. His eldest son, Leo, whose slide away from Judaism, arrest, conviction, deportation, return and second imprisonment were

⁷⁶ USL/MS/183 409 F2 Litvin report, 12 February 1942.

⁷⁷ WL/ITS doc. no. 30522953.

⁷⁸ Ibid. doc. no. 134899

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. doc. no. 30523005.

⁸¹ USL/MS/183 409 F2 Litvin report, 12 February 1942. Leo Klarman had not heard from his sister for over a year. He knew Gisela had fled to Lithuania, and was ‘most definitely not in Palestine nor in Poland’. She apparently made her way to Palestine through Lithuania. Later correspondence from Brixton prison in Leo’s file indicated that Gisela was in Israel. USL/MS/183 409 Ruth Fellner to Leo Wolf Klarman, 12 January 1950. Information on Herbert Klarman from Public Records Office (PRO) Birth Marriages and Death records, accessed through *The Genealogist*, < <http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/> > [accessed 16 August 2014]. Thea Feliks’s oldest brother Henry also made it to Palestine through Lithuania. Reti and Chase, *A Transported Life*, p. 61.

covered in previous chapters, was deported again to Germany in 1950.⁸² It is impossible to know whether the effects of the *Polenaktion* had poisoned Leo's soul as Simon feared, but it is certain that his son's life did not conform to his dreams when he sent his children to England. The last documents in Leo's PJRF file were letters written from Brixton Prison in the days before his second deportation.⁸³ Leo appealed to the Polish Fund to help him secure a pardon or assist him to join his sister in Israel, reminding them that 'both my parents were murdered by the Germans'.⁸⁴ The derailment of Leo's life was attributable to many factors, not least the loss of parental guidance and care. His father Simon knew that sending his children away was a leap of faith that required him to relinquish control of their lives. Difficult as that was, Simon Klarman was among thousands of parents willing to take that leap and give their children the chance to live, grow and prosper.

Among the families most anxious to avail themselves of that opportunity were those whose special circumstances put their children especially at risk. Enumeration of those conditions, it was hoped, might make their children priority cases. The most vulnerable were those whose fathers were dead or missing, and several correspondents including Dina Kasner, Paula Krenzler and Anna Kamiel all underscored their widowhood. So, too, did Lisa Orchan, who wrote to the Fund in English letting them know that she had been a widow for nine years and that in Zbąszyń 'we are very unhappy'.⁸⁵ Some, like Malka Balbierer, although not a widow, were alone with their children in Zbąszyń, her husband Max listed on forms as 'whereabouts unknown'.⁸⁶ Emphasising their knowledge of English, she requested 'some suitable place to stay in England, whether a children's home or with private persons' for her two daughters aged eleven and twelve, complaining that there was 'no future for the children in Poland,

⁸² USL/MS/183 409 F2 Litvin report, 12 February 1942 and Leo Klarman to Questle, 11 October 1949.

⁸³ Ibid., Two letters from Leo Wolf Klarman to Questle, 16 January 1950 and Leo Wolf Klarman to Rabbi Cohen, 17 January 1950. In pencil at the top of one of the letters to Questle are the words 'File Case. Deportation Effective 18-1-50'. In a letter from Ruth Fellner of the JRC to the PJRF, she disclosed that although Leo did not know it, she had discussed his case with the Home Office, offering the opinion that Leo was 'a most troublesome person' and 'under no circumstances would they consider giving him his freedom in the UK for even a short period'. Ruth Fellner to Questle, 21 December 1949.

⁸⁴ Ibid. and Leo Wolf Klarman to Questle, 22 November 1949. There is no resolution in the file as to Leo's ultimate destination. The only clue is an ITS document concerning the fate of Simon and Rachela listing Leo Klarman as living in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1956. WL/ITS doc. no. 103513611.

⁸⁵ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Lisa Orchan to Zeitlyn, 3 July 1939.

⁸⁶ USL/MS/183 591 F1 'List of 100 Children to be brought to England', nd., 1939. Sylvia Balbierer's father had tuberculosis and when she was about four, he was sent away to a sanatorium and she never saw him again. USCSF/VHA Sylvia Balbierer Schneider.

since I am alone [...] and I have no chance to feed [them] or put them in someone else's care'.⁸⁷

Even in intact families, a father's disability constituted an extenuating condition necessitating the children's rescue. One such petitioner was Leib Ettinger who informed the Fund that he was the father 'of six children and am an ill man with sickness in gall bladder, liver, and stomach disorders since several years'.⁸⁸ He had spent time in hospital in Zbąszyń 'so it is no longer possible for me to give my children proper upbringing or nourishment'.⁸⁹ He requested that the Fund take two of his daughters both of whom 'learned the English language [and] have good school reports'.⁹⁰ The father hoped that his condition would strengthen his daughters' chances of rescue since other than English proficiency, little set his children apart from so many others in desperate straits. He did not mention affidavits, particular skills or religious piety; his self-confessed inability to give his children 'proper upbringing or nourishment' was the basis of his plea. Accompanying the letter was a snapshot with 'X' and 'XX' under the two children he hoped to get to safety.⁹¹ The child with long plaits at the far left of the photo was the Ettinger's eleven-year-old daughter Helene.



When the letter was penned, she had already been sent to Otwock to await transport to England. Although her father had not boasted of his children's intelligence, Helene Ettinger was one of the few girls whose academic gifts earned special attention from

⁸⁷ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Malka Balbierer to Zeitlyn, 21 June 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Leib Ettinger to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

refugee workers.⁹² With extra financial support, Helene became a qualified nurse, and in 1947, listing herself as a stateless Pole, she sailed for New York.⁹³ She may have carried a photograph of her family posed in a Zbąszyń courtyard, the last one ever taken of the Ettingers. Her sisters Paula and Betti, along with younger brother Oskar, and parents Leib and Frieda, were murdered in the Holocaust.⁹⁴ A sister, Klara, (not pictured) and her older brother (standing) survived.

An air of melancholy and resignation characterised many of the parents' letters, especially about their own prospects for survival. Bruno and Josef Nussbaum's mother Dwora was one who, in halting English, communicated this sense of discouragement.

I take the liberty to apply to you in great desperation [...] My husband has got a bad wound in the last war and is unable to [do] any work. As we presently have not to expect to get a chance in Poland, it would be luck for us for you to save our children from a future as ours one.⁹⁵

The absence of hope for herself and her disabled husband conveyed an acceptance of a grim fate. She informed the Fund that she had a son in America 'who will send the boys an Affidavit so that they will only stay in Great Britain for a time', but she seemed to hold out no hope that he would be able to get his parents out of Poland too. Sadly, her premonitions of 'a future such as ours one' proved accurate. Both she and her husband Oskar were murdered in the Holocaust.⁹⁶ But it was 'luck for them' that both Bruno and Josef were saved. The brothers Nussbaum, who exhibited tenacious agency in pursuit of their vocations, both became Royal Institute of British Architects, and each found 'many chances to prove [himself] worthy of the letters behind [his] name'.⁹⁷

While some parents were resigned to a hopeless future, others persisted in efforts to get themselves and their families out of Poland. Malka Balbierer, for example, was 'in contact with England about getting a job as housekeeper'.⁹⁸ She hoped as a single woman to secure a domestic visa, an avenue that was much more difficult for couples to pursue. Ironically, success in this endeavour actually put her children at risk, as the

⁹² See Chapter 2 for further information on Helene.

⁹³ 'List or Manifest of Alien Passengers to the United States', *SS Marine Jumper*, 15 July 1947. Located on the website *Family Search* < <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.3.1/TH-1951-33866-3889-12?cc=1923888>> [accessed 16 August 2014].

⁹⁴ 'The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names', Yad Vashem, [Hereafter YV/CD]items, 3797585, 3797588, 3797589, 3797590, 3797591. < <http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en>> [accessed 17 August 2014]

⁹⁵ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Dwora Nussbaum to Zeitlyn, received 16 June 1939.

⁹⁶ YV/CD items 3806820, 3806968. < <http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en>> [accessed 17 August 2014]

⁹⁷ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Bruno Nussbaum to PJRF, 19 August 1941.

⁹⁸ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Malka Balbierer to Zeitlyn, 21 June 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

widow Lisa Orchan outlined in halting English.

Being alone with my two children and not having nobody who takes care of us I tried to get a permit for England as domestic. The Federation of Polish Jews gave me a favourable answer. I do not know where to leave my [...] daughter Anna, 12 years old and my son Leo 9 years old. I should be happy if it were possible to bring these two orphans to England.⁹⁹

It would have been unthinkable for this mother to take her visa and leave two children behind in Zbąszyń with no one to look after them. But as a penniless refugee, she would have found it impossible to bring her children to England had she settled there first. This dilemma put Lisa Orchan in a tragic situation. Unless her two children were taken first on a *Kindertransport*, she would have to turn down the lifeline of a domestic visa. In the summer of 1939, the Fund had found a sponsor for Anna, who joined her older brother Felix, sent to England on an earlier transport. Unwilling to leave her youngest child behind, Lisa stayed in Poland where both she and Leo perished.¹⁰⁰

The parents vacillated between raised hopes and dashed promises and their letters reflected the anxiety of waiting for word from the refugee agencies. For every family that received reassuring news, many more faced disappointment. None betrayed more bitter dismay than Selig Friedman who lamented to Elsley Zeitlyn, ‘you promised to bring over to England both my daughters’.

Meanwhile I was in Germany liquidating my household and when I yesterday came back here, I found only one of my girls, the younger one gone away to England two days back whereas the older has remained here.¹⁰¹

Certain that he had secured both his children’s futures, it is not difficult to detect his panic when he returned to find that thirteen-year-old Helene had been left behind. In addition, more misfortune had come his way.

[M]y wife has fallen seriously ill and for a long time she will not be able to take care of my daughter as she herself needs care moreover and my girl is too young for that. I beg you, downhearted as I am now, to arrange that my elder girl can also go over to England.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ USL/MS/183 591 F3 Lisa Orchan to Zeitlyn, 3 July 1939. Covering all avenues of escape, Lisa had also sent affidavits for the entire family to the American consulate at Warsaw.

¹⁰⁰ YV/CD items 3835470, 3835471 < [http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?](http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en) language=en > [accessed 17 August 2014]

¹⁰¹ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Selig Friedman to E Zeitlyn 20 July 1939.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Selig Freidman viewed his situation as disastrous and responded to it in a tone of despairing bewilderment:

There were several couples of children of one family who have gone over the day before yesterday with this transport, why should only my girl, especially in such a calamity as we are in now remain left here? Please sir, it's now a matter of pity to take also my other girl over, and I hope to receive a soon answer from you giving me hope.¹⁰³



Selig Friedman could not conceive why his daughters had been separated when other families were allowed to send 'couples of children' together. The documents in Tilly's file corroborate his confusion. As late as 11 July 1939, just before Selig returned from Germany, Helene was allotted to the hosts who eventually took in Sara and Yehudit Hirschman.¹⁰⁴ For reasons unknown, her name was scratched off the list, and Sara Hirschman's put in her place. Tilly, his youngest child, was sent to England, where she was taken in by prominent Jewish restaurateurs in Aldgate.

It is impossible to know all the ways in which the crossing out of a child's name on a transport list changed a family's fate. For Selig Friedman, it meant that he never received the longed for reprieve for his eldest daughter. When the war began, the Friedmans were caught in Poland along with their twenty-year-old son Ferdinand.



Helene and her brother's names were recorded on a census of Jews in Krakow in 1941, but the exact fate of Selig and his wife Brucha is not known. The entire family was murdered in the Shoah.¹⁰⁵ After the war, Tilly, now an orphan, was informally adopted by her foster family and treated as a daughter.¹⁰⁶ She grew to become a beautiful young woman who was loved by all. She married into a prosperous Anglo- Jewish family and soon bore two children. By all appearances, Tilly had, despite the trauma of the war years, achieved the happy and

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ USL/MS/183 574 F 1 'Guarantees Promised', 11 July 1939.

¹⁰⁵ YV/CD items nos. 3802920, 3803104, 3802953, 3802887, 9983675, 9983836.

¹⁰⁶ Private correspondence with Tilly Friedman's daughter.

fulfilling life confidently assured in *A Great Adventure*. Ever since the separation from her family, though, Tilly had been a troubled young woman. Her unhappiness only faintly registered in her PJRF file, but she could never reconcile herself to the losses she had suffered.¹⁰⁷



On 20 March 1954, just two years after posing in a smiling family portrait with her handsome husband and two chubby-cheeked infants, Tilly Friedman threw herself in front of a suburban London train.¹⁰⁸ She was just twenty-six years old.

Knowing that few *Kinder's* lives were as troubled as Tilly Freidman's does nothing to mitigate her tragic and horrific death. No one knows how many other *Kinder* fell victim to the same level of despair that Tilly felt. Most found ways of reconciling themselves to their losses and forging lives of purpose and meaning, though many report that they were forever shadowed by sorrow. Some, like Tilly, just could not cope with the accumulated sadnesses of forced separation from and then loss of parents and families. RCM documentation indicated that suicides had been occurring among the *Kindertransportees* throughout the war years. In a 1943 executive committee meeting,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Tilly was so unhappy in her first evacuation foster home that the Fund transferred her to Ely. There, she asked 'to have her billet changed because her foster-parent changed her mind so often about her-one moment bad and the next moment good [...] Miss Samuel [...] stated that Mrs Wilson looked after the children very well and loved her (Tilli)'. USL MS 574 F1 'Report on Refugee Girl Evacuated to Ely', 1 January 1941. Conversation and correspondence with Tilly's daughter also provided evidence of her emotional disturbance in the post-war period.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. and Tilly van Gelder death notice, *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 March 1954, p. 3.

they acknowledged the need to address an upsurge in children's emotional problems.¹⁰⁹

There was a discussion [...] of the mental strain which many of our children were suffering due to either bad news, or lack of news from their parents [...] The Committee fully agreed to the suggestion that there was at the moment the need for the employment of a trained psychiatric social worker.¹¹⁰

Included in the minutes were accounts of several recent *Kinder* suicides.¹¹¹ Barry Turner, who had access to the Movement records, noted nearly fifty *Kinder* in mental hospitals in the late 1940s in addition to the suicide attempts and cases of severe mental and emotional disturbance he profiled in his chapter 'Short Straws'.¹¹² At least two of the Zbąszyń *Kinder* suffered mental breakdowns. Pepi Firestein, who was hospitalized at least twice, lost her parents in Treblinka, and Josef Sztajn was hospitalised in 1946, by which time he had received the news of his parents' and brother David's deaths in Auschwitz.¹¹³ Mental illness affected other young refugees, too. Gerry Lieder testified that his eldest sister, who came to England on a domestic visa, 'never got over the trauma of her family breaking up'.¹¹⁴ Although her four surviving siblings emigrated to America, she spent the rest of her life in residential care in Britain, unable to pass the US health test. As Gerry said, 'These were deep wounds that you didn't see [...] there were scars [...] she had a very miserable life'.¹¹⁵ The idea that young refugees suffered life-long trauma and that in some cases their survival was not enough to prevent them from taking their own lives, does not comport well with the paradigmatic narrative of 'saved' children who, despite difficult odds, succeeded in forging happy successful lives. Mental illness and subjects like sexual abuse are uncomfortable correctives to such narratives and have often been ignored, glossed over or minimised. These issues were much more prevalent than existing accounts based primarily on *Kinder* memory indicate, making their exposure, though uncomfortable, absolutely necessary to a more inclusive and critical historiography.

Certainly in 1938 and 1939 when parents had an opportunity to send their children

¹⁰⁹ WL/CBF 27/28/166 Refugee Children's Movement: Executive Committee Minutes and Papers, Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 20 October 1943.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 'Fritz Kopstein has been found gassed in his room; Hans Schmier had thrown himself from a building. Martin Schmitz had died at Miss Essinger's school as a result of an accident in which he had been playing with a rope hanging from a tree'. This last may or may not have been a suicide.

¹¹² Turner, ... *And the Policeman Smiled* p. 229 and Chapter 12, 'Short Straws' pp. 216-234.

¹¹³ WL/ITS doc nos. 53685628 and 53824704 1 for PF; YV/CD item nos. 5633844, 1232548, 5633844, 994736, 1232505 for JS.

¹¹⁴ YV/GL Testimony.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

to Britain, their intent was not to consign them to years of debilitating mental and emotional strain. Fearing the worst for themselves, all they could do was to try to give their children a chance at life. One mother in Poland felt that charge most keenly, and her letters stand out for their expressions of travail. Of Chana and Fiewel Markel's four sons, only Simon had been taken on a *Kindertransport*, and while he barraged Elsie Zeitlyn with correspondence from Leeds in an attempt to get his brothers to England, his mother was campaigning feverishly for them from Krakow, writing her letters in halting English.

Dear Mr Dr., perhaps it is possible for you at first to find a way for my littlest son Willy [...]. Would it be possible, if I would come with my child to Zbąszyń if you would be there? So that perhaps my littlest son can go with the transport from Zbąszyń? I would be there with my child on the day when the transport is going to England. .¹¹⁶

Krakow was 300 miles from Zbąszyń, but Chana Markel was willing to do anything to increase Willie's chances of inclusion on the next transport as her letter poignantly indicated.

I would thank you all my life, if you would be to make. You may be sure that you would not have any shame with my children in England. I beg you hearty to inform me how I shall make my youngest son so that he will be among the 100 children going to England.¹¹⁷

Like other parents, she assured the PJRF that her boys would be no burden – they had affidavits ‘and my children will only be there to improve their knowledges’.¹¹⁸ In a previous letter, Chana had introduced her boys, nineteen-year-old Richard, seventeen-year-old David and fourteen-year-old Willy, stressing the unsustainability of life in Poland. ‘My sons are not able to understand the polish language and have no possibility, to earn anything. They only speak English, Germanic, and Hebrew. They are very clever and intelligent children’.¹¹⁹ Understanding that Richard was far outside the acceptable age range, and that David's chances were slim, she suggested that the seventeen year old ‘could go to accompany the children’.¹²⁰

It is interesting that some parents chose to write in English, even when their fluency was imperfect. This perhaps reflected a belief that writing in the language of potential benefactors would increase their children's chances of rescue. For the

¹¹⁶ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Chana Markel to Zeitlyn, 24 July 1939.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Chana Markel to Zeitlyn, 11 July 1939.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

historian, the affecting poignancy of these broken English phrases is undeniable.

I believe, there is nobody, who can imagine, what a terrible situation I am in. It is cruel for me, as a mother, to see her children in such a situation. Dearest Mr. Dr., I would thank you all the life if you can do anything to help my children.¹²¹

Few parents' letters expressed a mother's suffering as movingly. Chana Markel, like all parents, believed in the value of her children's lives and struggled to convince distant and anonymous refugee workers of their worth.

It is a pity, really, if they would stay here. Every day, which is passed is a loosened day in their life. My children are loved, wherever they come.¹²²



In her attempt to make others see her children as she did, Chana enclosed two photos. One, taken in their home in Chemnitz, Germany, in 1938 showed Richard, David, Willy and Simon, four handsome and serious young men in collared shirts and jackets only months before the deportation that robbed them of their futures. The second photo, undated, was taken in studio and showed four tiny children, dressed in identical sailor suits and arranged in order of height. On the back, in Chana's handwriting are only the words 'As little boys'. In spite of her pleas and the inclusion of those touching photos, Chana was unable to secure any more places on the lifesaving ships to England. The exact circumstances are unknown, but Richard, David and Willy, along with Chana and Feiwel were all murdered in the Shoah.¹²³ Although Simon's deportation to Canada

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ WL/ITS doc nos. 41022260, 41022460, 41023380, 41023489,

(discussed in Chapter 3), was commuted, he chose not to be uprooted a fourth time and lived there for the rest of his life. He put the books he had asked for in the Canadian deportation camp to good use, qualifying as an engineer and making that his career. He was married for fifty-eight years but had no children of his own. Simon Markel died in 2008, aged eighty-five.¹²⁴



Chana Markel was not alone in attempting to alter the trajectory of her children's lives by sending a family photograph to the refugee agencies. Some, like the portrait of the Markels as toddlers, were meant to tug at the heartstrings of even the most dispassionate refugee worker, but Simon Klarman offered an alternate reason for parting with a valued family memento. After sending their passport identification, he begged the refugee organisation 'not to judge the appearance of my [children] from them'.¹²⁵

My children look better than they appear on the passport photos. [...] I had to have [them] made as cheaply as possible. If you think that these little pictures might hamper the efforts to accommodate my children, I have a photo of them from the time back in Germany [...] which I would be glad to send to you.¹²⁶

Klarman knew the power of photographs, and he was anxious to provide a picture taken

¹²⁴ Simon Markel Obituary, *Montreal Gazette*, 22 April 2008. <<http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/story.html?id=3270aa5d-2992-4d98-919b-3a1e86e3158e&k=83458>> [accessed 13 April 2012].

¹²⁵ USL MS 563 F2 Simon Klarman to Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain, 3 February 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

in less stressful circumstances that would show his children in a relaxed and charming manner. Although there is no evidence that Klarman sent a photograph ‘from the time back in Germany’, parting with such an object would undoubtedly have been difficult, especially for families that were deported with few of their belongings. Still, Klarman and other parents were willing to do so if could influence their child’s fate.



It is possible that such photographs did make a difference since many foster parents in Britain were anxious to see pictures of children before they committed to guarantees. Liesa and Rebecka Krenzler’s prospective guarantors requested ‘to see the girls on arrival for choosing purposes’.¹²⁷ They were told that such selection was not possible, but in the twins’ file is a snapshot, taken in the summer of 1938, showing them in summer frocks, smiling, happy and relaxed with their elder sister Inge in a park near their home in Gladbeck, Germany. The girls look nothing like their slightly awkward, and tentative passport photos images. Pretty Inge sits shyly on a rock behind the twins, who posed impishly in front. Perhaps boosted by this photograph, Inge was put on the list and her medical clearance, birth certificate, passport photos and other documents were on file, but in the end, only the twins were brought to Britain.



¹²⁷ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Mr Levene to PJRF, 7 July 1939.

Parents were the primary correspondents from Poland, but a few petitioners were older children forced to take on adult roles. In the previous chapter were the examples of Devorah Brodt and Ida Alt who each wrote to the Fund on her own behalf, pleading for inclusion in the transports. Both girls were forced to advocate for themselves after their families were shattered following the deportation.¹²⁸ Older children were occasionally tasked with entreating on behalf of their siblings as well as themselves. In some cases, this may have been calculated to impress the refugee committees with the child's erudition and resolve as in the case of Bruno Nussbaum, whose letter was excerpted in Chapter 3. More often, family breakdown after the *Polenaktion* forced a child to take on a parental role as supplicant. One of the most moving of all the letters written from Poland came from sixteen-year-old Sala Najman. She vividly and dramatically recounted her family's arrest and deportation and described the conditions of their lives in Zbąszyń.

For weeks we were kept in thin wooden barracks, without money, without clothing, without food. Then a committee was set up here that provided us with the bare necessities. But now the aid committee is running out of resources, and what should become of us? You cannot imagine our utterly miserable and hopeless situation. Therefore I beg you to help us somehow.¹²⁹

Although she wrote in German, she assured the refugee agency that she had 'a good command of written and spoken English' and that her younger siblings Ida and Willie also possessed 'some prior knowledge of English'.¹³⁰ She emphasized that although her father 'ran a flourishing textile goods store' in Hamburg, 'we have absolutely no prospects of getting abroad' and she appealed to them 'in our great fear and despair'.¹³¹

You probably know the situation here just as well as we do. Since there are no prospects whatsoever of our escaping the pending misery, we beg you from the depths of our hearts to at least get us three children over to England.¹³²

She was realistic about her parents' chances of escape, and revealed the devastating effects of deportation and refugee life on them.

¹²⁸ Ida's father had died suddenly and DB's mother had gone to Germany, her father and siblings to Eastern Poland. See Chapter 3.

¹²⁹ MS 183 213/2 Sala Najman to PJRF, 9 June 1939 translated from German by Margy Walter. She enclosed a transcription of a letter from Chief Rabbi Dr Carlsbach that 'gives you information about our life and qualifications and what sort of people we are'.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

You cannot imagine how terrible it is for us children to have to watch young parents gradually collapse. I plead with you in the name of five despairing people, please help us.¹³³

Sala's 'young parents' Baruch and Mania were in their early forties, and their breakdown, which caused Sala such anguish, impelled her to assume an adult role in the family. She declared that she 'would even work in a household, I would take up any kind of task, just so as not to burden my parents'. Sala, who wrote with a maturity beyond her years, was, after all, only a teenager. Although she unselfishly took responsibility for both her parents and younger siblings, she was able to express her own despair eloquently and with great emotion.

Our future is black as the night in Poland, but we are still young and want to live a bit. [...] I beg you to help us. We are truly facing our doom. You [...] are our last hope in our great misery.

With the understated phrase, 'We are still young and want to live a bit', Sala Najman spoke for millions of children caught up in the events of the Holocaust. Few letters from any phase of the Shoah so movingly express what it meant to be a teenager whose life and hopes were mortally threatened.

Although longing to escape and live, Sala persevered in her parental role, accompanying her father back to Hamburg to help settle the family's business affairs after her mother's health collapsed in Zbąszyń. Calamity struck when Baruch Najman was arrested and sent to Buchenwald. While Sala was in Germany supporting her father, her siblings were taken on the last transport to England. It is possible that her appeal, with its astonishingly evocative prose, played a crucial role in saving the lives of her younger siblings, although her filial devotion cost her a chance to live. In 1942 she was a prisoner in Ravensbrück concentration camp and in August 1943, she became prisoner 37969 in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Neither Sala nor her parents survived the war. Baruch died on 28 December 1940 in Dachau and Mania was sent east in 1941.¹³⁴ Ida and Willie Najman looked after one another in England, spending most of the war years near one another in the Leeds area. Ida learned hairdressing, then became a Kindergarten teacher, eventually marrying and moving to Australia where she had one daughter. She died in 2013 aged 87. Willie remained in England his entire life, where he married Geertruida and fathered six children. In 2008, he travelled back to Zbąszyń for the seventieth anniversary of the expulsion from Germany. There, he was reunited

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ WL/ITS doc nos. 51993993, 65556789.

with the children of a Polish family who had helped accommodate the Najmans. They gave him a tiny snapshot of the entire family, including Baruch and Mania, Sala, Ida and Willie, taken on a snowy day in the winter of 1938-39, the last picture taken of the entire family before it was scattered and destroyed by the war.¹³⁵



Less than a week after the last Zbąszyń children left Poland, the unravelling of families that began ten months earlier with the deportation from Germany was finalised by the events of 1 September 1939. The parents' efforts to get their children to safety in the frantic months leading up to the German invasion of Poland left a unique collection of letters that has preserved their voices and revealed the immediacy of their concerns at a critical moment in the *Kindertransport* saga. These letters share similar themes and concerns: finding out who and where to direct their appeals and telling those agencies about their desperate plight, pressing the case for their own children by presenting them appealingly, and emphasising their children's suitability for Britain and re-emigration. Embedded within those leitmotifs were the parents' individual stories, fears, hopes, and reflections – all the glimmers of humanity that make this collection of letters so personal, intimate and significant.

With the coming of the Second World War, the cruel fates of the parents, siblings and extended families who had been left behind began to unfold. Now, maintaining contact with their children in Britain became an over-riding concern. Although the parents' direct voices fade almost entirely from the documentary record after the start of

¹³⁵ Willie Najman, 'Memories of Zbąszyń: October 1938 to end of August 1939', in Izabela Skórzynska and Wojciech Oleniczak eds., *Do zobacenia za Rok w Jerozolimnie: Deportacje polskich Żydów w 1938 roku z Niemiec do Zbąszynia*, pp. 160-7 (p. 160).

the war, there is evidence of their efforts to stay connected. Of the few who escaped, contemporaneous documentation reveals the difficulties and challenges they confronted both in surviving and in rebuilding their families after the war.

II. Wartime Letters

Publically available wartime communications from the parents are extremely rare. Few letters from this period exist in the files of the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund since parents who still had the ability to communicate with their children wrote directly to them, rather than through the refugee agencies. Communication between belligerent nations was difficult, and only those who had contacts in neutral countries were able to exchange letters with Britain. Herbert Haberberg and his parents corresponded sporadically in this way, and Dr Litvin's reports reveal that many of the children received letters from their families through these routes at least until late 1941.¹³⁶ Those private letters between parents and children only become available to researchers if the recipients choose to share them or to publish them in memoirs and testimonies.

Nevertheless, there are within the Polish Fund's records a few documents that record the parents' thoughts and concerns after their children had been sent away. Additionally, several personal letters shared by *Polenaktion Kinder* document the private discourse between parents and their departed offspring. Both of these communication models demonstrate the parents' desperate desire to determine the well-being of their children and to maintain some semblance of contact with them even in the midst of war and deprivation.

Given the difficulties of wartime communication, it is rather remarkable that any parents' letters reached the offices at Soho Square after 3 September 1939. A few anxious parents managed to contact London, all wanting to know how to get in touch with their children. The earliest of these arrived from Buczacz in Soviet controlled eastern Poland, where Rubin, Chaje and Cilly Hirschman had fled at the start of the war.

¹³⁶ One of the questions Litvin routinely asked children on home visits was whether they heard from their families, and when the last communication took place. See for example USL/MS/183 575 F1 Litvin Report on DB, 5 July 1942; F2 Litvin Report on David Hendel, 12 February 1942; 409 F2 Litvin Report on Leo Klarman, 12 February 1942; 574 F2 Litvin Report JS and SS, 23 February 1942. The Movement Welfare reports sometimes commented on correspondence as well. See 563 F2 MCCG Report Herbert Klarman ND.

Since my 2 children [...] were sent along with the children transport [...] unfortunately I have no news at all, and also no address, so I am forced to write to your esteemed address and hope to receive some news about where are my children who back then were brought from Zbąszyń to Warsaw.¹³⁷

Since Sara and Yehudit left on the final transport, it is easy to understand how, in the first confusing weeks of war, the Hirschman parents had lost touch with their children and that after nearly four months of silence were deeply concerned. These feelings were transmitted in the letter's flawed syntax despite its being written in German, one of Rubin's native tongues. As this letter demonstrated, parents who had fled into Soviet-held territory were able to send mail to England, although the process was protracted.¹³⁸ At about the same time, the PJRF notified the girls' foster mother of a letter forwarded to them by the Movement from a 'Children's Committee in Switzerland' asking the Fund 'to give them a report of the [Hirschman] girls' welfare, as the parents are anxious about them'.¹³⁹ He asked the Bernsteins to report on 'how they are getting on and what they are doing at present' so that the information could be sent to the Swiss organisation.¹⁴⁰ It is obvious from this chain of communications that the Hirschman parents had contacted every agency they could in order to establish contact with their distant children, after which they corresponded with their daughters for a number of years.

As the Hirschman letters demonstrated, parents employed multiple strategies to locate their children. A series of letters concerning the Krenzler twins illustrates this most aptly. In mid-February 1940, the Fund received a postcard via the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain (FPJ) from Margot Krenzler, the twins' eldest sister. She was seeking 'two children who were brought into this country probably by you', and requested information about them.¹⁴¹ Zeitlyn forwarded the card directly to the twins, who enthused 'we can't say how pleased we were to have it'.¹⁴² Shortly afterwards, Zeitlyn received a postcard from The Hague. The correspondent, Mrs Margot Mayer, a family friend of the Krenzlers, had been deputised by the twins' eldest sibling Herman

¹³⁷ USL/MS/183 574 F1 RH to Zeitlyn, 15 December 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter. His switch to German supports the theory that those who wrote in English before the war were trying to increase their children's chances of selection

¹³⁸ USL/MS/183 574 F1 SH to Kaizer, 24 February 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter. When the Fund forwarded Rubin's letter to Sara, she noted that it took nine weeks for his letter to arrive in England.

¹³⁹ USL/MS/183 574 F1 Children's Department to Mrs Bernstein, 19 February 1940.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Jack Goldberg to Zeitlyn, 14 February 1940.

¹⁴² USL/MS/183 575 F3 Ursel and Liesa Krenzler to Mrs Barnett, 3 March 1940. Ursel was Rebecka's first name, but she adopted her middle name Rebecka while living in England.

to ask ‘about the whereabouts of the twins Lisa and Ursel Krenzler’ and to state ‘how they are faring’.¹⁴³ Mrs Mayer noted that since the girls had left Poland some six months earlier, ‘Family Krenzler has heard no more from them’.¹⁴⁴ When the postcard was sent, Mrs Meyer was still able to write to England directly from the Netherlands, whereas Herman Krenzler, who was in Łódź, could not. Although the family, which was scattered around occupied Poland, were already suffering under Nazi occupation, they demonstrated an overriding concern to determine the well-being of the youngest children, availing themselves of resources in several countries in order to do so. Elsley Zeitlyn assured Mrs Mayer that the twins, safely residing in a Nottingham hostel, were ‘particularly well cared for’.¹⁴⁵

The reestablishment of contact resulting from these concerted efforts brought relief to children and parents alike. The Krenzler twins were buoyed by the flurry of news from their loved ones, and Paula Krenzler was subsequently able to write directly to her children. However, in late 1941 the girls wrote that ‘we are two years In England [and] we never really hear from our dear mother except 1 letter through the Red Cross last year about June’.¹⁴⁶ Although the exact fates of Paula and her daughters Senta, Margot and Inge are not definitively known, none of them survived the Holocaust. Herman was sent to Auschwitz and worked in the slave labour sub-camp of Buna-Monowitz.¹⁴⁷ On 10 August 1943, he was admitted to the Buna infirmary diagnosed with *Körperschwäche*- ‘body weakness’. That same day, he was sent ‘*nach* Auschwitz’ where, as prisoner 128117, he died, or was put to death two days later.¹⁴⁸ The only survivors of their family of eight, both Liesa and Rebecka married and remained in England, although Liesa sadly passed away childless in her early forties. Rebecka settled in Manchester, where she still resides, surrounded by a large and loving family. In 2013, I brought Rebecca, then 88, and the last of her family still living, a copy of the snapshot her mother had taken of her, Liesa and Inge, on that happy day in the summer of 1938. Rebecka vividly remembered the photograph she had last seen seventy-five years earlier, recalling every detail of the outing and fondly invoking the name of the sister left behind. The only other pre-war photographs she possessed were a family

¹⁴³ USL/MS/183 575 F3 Margot Mayer to Zeitlyn, 2 March 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Zeitlyn’s to Mrs Margot Mayer, 12 March 1940.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Rebecka and Liesa Krenzler to Kaizer, 27 October 1941.

¹⁴⁷ WL/ITS doc no 1031648.

¹⁴⁸ WL/ ITS doc. no. 530197.

portrait taken when the twins were infants and a picture of her brother Herman at his bar mitzvah. Her children and grandchildren had never seen a photograph of her as a young girl in Germany.¹⁴⁹ The photograph, a talisman of a vanished world, embodied what Rebecca had lost in the separation from her mother and siblings, and the life she and her twin had gained as a result of the *Kindertransport* and her mother's efforts and sacrifice.



Parents like Paula Krenzler are but ghostly presences in the Polish Fund's records after 1940. Only Dr Litvin's welfare reports specifically mentioned them, for he routinely asked the children whether they still received letters from their families. For most *Kinder* whose families were caught in German occupied Poland, letters ceased immediately after the war began, causing the children 'much worry'.¹⁵⁰ Children whose parents made it into Soviet-occupied Poland continued to receive letters or Red Cross postcards until mid-1941 or so. There are no reports of children continuing to hear from their families anywhere in the occupied East after 1942. Throughout the war, *Kinder* asked the Fund to help in locating their silent family members. Julius Buck, whose parents were in France was informed somehow that 'his mother has been deported just now' and wanted 'to know whether we could do something to trace her'.¹⁵¹ Ida Alt also seemed to have been fairly well informed about her mother's whereabouts, and had received Red Cross letters from her until early 1942. She had no news from her sister,

¹⁴⁹ In February 2013, I met with Rebecka and some of her family to deliver copies of the documentation in her file. Later that year, at the 75th *Kindertransport* Anniversary event, I met Rebecka, who carried with her a small pillow upon which her daughter had had silkscreened the photo of the sisters. Rebecka hugged the pillow to herself and said to me 'I carry it with me wherever I go'.

¹⁵⁰ USL/MS/183 563 F2 Litvin report, 6 February 1942. These are Litvin's words.

¹⁵¹ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Report, 17 November 1942.

who was in ‘Russian Poland’, since the German invasion.¹⁵² In 1943 she wrote,

I just had a letter from the Red Cross that [...] my poor mother is not anymore at her old address [...]. They [...] told me to please inquire in your place because you have got lists of those in ghettos. Please [...] let me know [...] whether you know where the Jews from Bełżyce Lublin got transported to.¹⁵³

The Fund regretfully informed Ida that they had no such information. Ida’s inquiry arrived almost a year after the vast majority of the Jews in the region she identified had been killed in Bełżec. Ida’s brother Max made it to England but her mother and married sister Berta were murdered in the Shoah.¹⁵⁴ In 1942, Ida married Yaakov Bulka, who, according to Dr Litvin, was ‘a Pole from Nuremberg Germany, in other words, he is a German Jewish refugee with a Polish passport’.¹⁵⁵ Litvin reported three months after the wedding that Ida was ‘very happy and in need of no help material or otherwise’ and that her ‘only worries were her relations in Poland’.¹⁵⁶ He added, ‘Mrs Bulka is a living witness of some excellent results of our work in connection with bringing over children from Germany-Poland’.¹⁵⁷ Ida and Yaakov, who became an orthodox Rabbi, emigrated to the USA, where they raised three children. Ida and Yaakov died within weeks of one another in 2006, leaving behind over fifty direct descendants.¹⁵⁸



¹⁵² USL/MS/183 213/2 Litvin report, 28 June 1942.

¹⁵³ USL MA 183 575 F1 Ida Alt Bulka to PJRF, 3 June 1943.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Lieder Family Tree as of 28 July 2009’ provided by Leah Wolf, Ida’s relative, 21 July 2013.

¹⁵⁵ USL MA 183 575 F1 Ida Alt Bulka to PJRF, 3 June 1943.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ ‘Lieder Family Tree’ It was through Leah Wolf and Ida’s extended family that I was able to trace Gerry Leider, Edward Pachtman’s family and Jehuda Laulich’s family as well as the family of another *Polenaktion Kind*, Karl Weisbraun.

Correspondence between parents and children after they were separated but before the war broke out represents a unique subset of *Kindertransport* correspondence. Although such correspondence is referenced in the PJRF documentation, those letters remained with the recipients, and are only available for research if *Kinder* and their families publish or privately share those letters. Although often compromised by condition problems, such correspondence provides important insights into the parents' states of mind as they sent their children off into the unknown, and faced uncertain futures themselves. In many respects, they echo the timeless letters written to children everywhere when embarking upon their first independent journeys from home, but the gravity of those separations meant that running through the commonplace advice and light-hearted admonitions were profound and sobering undercurrents. The *Polenaktion* parents' letters occupy a special place in this genre, conveying a subtext of fear and longing borne out of the unique and threatening circumstances of those particular farewells. Already in Poland, they felt more acutely the ominous threat of war, imbuing their parting letters with extra emotional intensity.

Few of these letters have been shared by *Polenaktion Kinder* or their families, but those that it has been possible to translate provide poignant and important insights into the dynamics of separation and the parents' states of mind. Most emblematic of these are the correspondence of Magda and Samuel Danziger to their adored son Henry – an only child, in whom all his parents' hopes and aspirations resided. After he had been sent to Otwock to await his travel permit, his parents sent a number of letters that revealed the anxiety of their first separation. His mother implored her 'Dearest *Brüderle**' to 'Please write us in detail how everything is there, your board and lodging, how you sleep' and continued in a stream-of-consciousness passage:

[H]ave you found people you know there from home [...] how you will be traveling (as G-d wills), and who is in charge of the transport? Yes, yes, I know I want to know a lot [...] Write us if you need money, [...] you have so few socks and [...] how is it with your bed and bedclothes. I so wanted a photo of you in a suit with long pants etc. Get your hair cut, my child.¹⁵⁹

Underlying quotidian concerns about socks, haircuts, bedclothes and travel was her longing to remain a part of his daily life, and the fear that he would not be chosen to go. 'Have older children been left behind and why? Write me the truth, my dearest boy, and

¹⁵⁹ *Although he was an only child, *Brüderle* ('little brother') was Henry's nickname. Private Danziger correspondence undated July or August 1939 translated from German by Margy Walter.

would you get enough to eat if you were left behind? And are you truly happy?’¹⁶⁰ As the time for departure from Warsaw approached, and she was assured that he would be included, Henry’s mother fretted about the lack of news from him. They had received a ‘dear postcard’ but wanted ‘to know a great deal more’.¹⁶¹ She wanted to know about his cohort, asking ‘how many of you children are there’ and wondering about their supervision and whether ‘there other Germans there and how old are they?’¹⁶² Finally, she pleaded, ‘Associate with the others and don’t isolate yourself and [...] write us everything in your heart’.¹⁶³

In Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, parents like the Danzigers felt both relief and dread at their children’s imminent departures. The Danzigers harboured the still imaginable hope of reuniting with their son, but their letters also carried the subtextual fear that they might never see him again.

[W]e will see each other sooner, God willing [...] Maybe we can somehow find a way from here to you. Go courageously and happily to the new country, you desired this and our blessing accompanies you wherever you go. We keep you in our thoughts at all times.¹⁶⁴

Henry’s father wrote very little, but even he was moved to add some sobering lines that spoke to the possibility of a long or even permanent separation. Acknowledging his wife’s role as the primary caregiver he wrote, ‘My beloved son, the blessings of your loving mother should accompany you on your way and protect you from all harm’ but asked his son to ‘also take your father’s blessing with you even if at a distance’.¹⁶⁵ Adjuring his son to ‘remain a good Jew and trust in what is eternal’ he also admonished ‘don’t let yourself be tempted to go astray, remain resolute in all things’.¹⁶⁶ Magda’s instructions to her son were less formal though no less weighty.

You share the fate of thousands of other children and there are many here who would like to be in your shoes but have no way of escape. Be careful in your journey, my beloved *Brüderle*, and make sure nothing happens to you, and don’t go too near the window or the water. I am thinking of the lovely moment when your ship departs.¹⁶⁷

Pulling back from her contemplations about the fate of children less fortunate than

¹⁶⁰ Private Danziger correspondence fragments nd., (August 1939) translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Private Danziger correspondence. 14 August 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter

¹⁶⁴ Private Danziger correspondence nd., translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Henry, her solemn reflections were overlaid by the minutiae of motherly concerns. Her letter fairly sighs with the relief she would feel at that ‘lovely moment’ when he was safely en route to England. In the final letter, Magda wrote, ‘Now you are no longer counting [the days] and the so-called "wonderful journey" begins’.¹⁶⁸ With the usual mixture of banality and gravity she reminded him that it was ‘very cool on the water and cold at night’ so he ought not to ‘dress lightly and be sure you have socks in your backpack on board the ship, and have a pullover and sweat suit ready since you only have the rubber raincoat’.¹⁶⁹ But implicitly referencing their precarious and impoverished status, she also enjoined him to ‘watch out for your things and take good care of them. Consider that they are all you have, your only assets. Your total belongings. Always lock your suitcase’.¹⁷⁰ The final passages seemed to come to terms with the realities of the separation.

[T]hank God your path is easy, you are coming to a definite place, will find a roof over your head, will be taken care of and will be working along with others so you can strive towards your own future goal that you want for yourself [...] remain as veracious as you have always been.¹⁷¹

Grateful that her son was sailing towards the safety and security that he lacked in Poland, she lamented her inability to guide him any further. Instructing that he ‘must learn to look more after your own interests, otherwise you’ll always remain in the background’ she could only hope that without their guidance he would have the strength to withstand the difficulties that undoubtedly lay ahead of him.¹⁷²

Most of the parents’ letters only hinted at the effort it took to send their vulnerable and yet-unformed children away to a foreign land. All they could hope for was that their children’s way in life would not prove too difficult and they might be able to fulfil their own, and their parents’ dreams. Henry Danziger, the son of a *Chasan*, a child who was groomed from the age of four to become a cantor himself, did his best to follow their advice and live up to his parents’ expectations. After he confided his dreams of a cantorial career to the Fund they had promised vocal training, but he was adjudged as lacking the qualifications for such a calling. Henry joined the British Army and was sent to Italy in 1944. It was there that the once aspiring cantor was first exposed to opera,

¹⁶⁸ Private Danziger correspondence 21 August 1939, translated from German by Margy Walter

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

becoming so enthralled by it that he carried back into civilian life the dream of professional operatic singing. Henry Danziger made good on his dream, pursuing formal vocal training and enjoying a long career as a baritone in opera venues across Britain and Europe.¹⁷³ He married, had two sons and also became a cantor, serving congregations in London and North America, where he retired. Henry's parents did not live to see their only child grow up and become a renowned vocalist. Forced into the Czestochowa ghetto along with 40,000 others, they may have survived until late 1942 when the ghetto was cleared, its inhabitants loaded into cattle cars and taken to Treblinka where they were gassed upon arrival. Henry died in 2004. When his family were sorting his effects, they found the letters Henry's parents had written to him from Czestochowa, creased and folded into a wallet that he had kept for sixty-five years.



Parents like the Danzigers had no avenue of communication once the Germans occupied Poland, but those who had contacts in neutral countries could get letters to their children for a time. Henry Danziger's good friend Herbert Haberberg had relatives in America through whom his parents communicated until America entered the war. Significantly, the Haberbergs' letters were all written under the duress of war. Until early 1941, the Haberbergs were with extended family in Krakow, suffering hardships and restrictions, but with some freedom of movement. When a ghetto established across the river in Podgórze, 15,000 Jews including Herbert's parents were driven out of

¹⁷³ All information about Henry Danziger's life from USCSF/VHA Henry Danziger and correspondence with his sons, Michael and Sebastian, 10-21 March 2012.

Krakow and sent to towns around Tarnow.¹⁷⁴ Herbert's parents were deported to Dębica and later confined to a ghetto in Dąbrowa Tarnowska. Like the Danziger's, Fella and Alter's letters were a mixture of the prosaic and the profound. In their extremity, they struggled to maintain a normative parent-child dynamic while expressing their love, imparting their guidance and masking their anxiety and fear. This last imperative must have been supremely difficult, for the surviving letters, written between May 1940 and September 1941, betray an increasing sense of despair. All the letters implored Herbert to write more often and at greater length, especially about Manfred, who was too young to write for himself. Although Fella, the primary correspondent, withheld most of the specifics of their travails, subtle hints emerged between her pleas for news and bits of advice and counsel.

[P]lease write everything in detail about [Manfred], and whether you go to school already. Study industriously, you have to become a capable and hard-working fellow, so that first of all you can help your parents [...] for now you have to be our protector. Father would so like to work, but cannot. The winter has us very much worried, but [no matter] if only dear God can please protect you.¹⁷⁵

This undated letter from 1940 indicated that the Haberbergs still held out some hope of rescue or reprieve themselves, and lay that responsibility upon their teenage son, upending the parent-child relationship. Fella's concern about the coming winter, and her revelation that Alter could not work – whether because of ill health or lack of jobs – connoted an underlying hopelessness and desperation about their situation. She ended the letter acknowledging 'that you miss your parents sometimes', and asking again 'with whom is Manfred staying, is he making progress in his learning, dear Herbert do you see him often, has he grown?'¹⁷⁶

As their situations deteriorated, parents tended to emphasise their wish to be reunited with their children and tried not to burden them too much with the details of their own suffering. The last letter Herbert received was written late in 1941.

¹⁷⁴ All information on the Haberbergs' fate is from family records provided by Herbert Haberberg, 12 December 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Private Haberberg correspondence, undated letter probably late 1940, translated from German by Margy Walter. .

¹⁷⁶ Private undated Haberberg correspondence, translated from German by Margy Walter. She also asked after some of the other Zbąszyń *Kinder*, including Jehuda Laulich, whose parents were also living in Krakow, asking Herbert to 'please tell them that their parents are well and they send their loving greetings to all the children'.

Oh Herbert! [...] my dearest wish and also that of your father's is that we can be with you again as soon as possible, oh if it only doesn't last too long, we really don't have the patience, our yearning for you all, my beloved ones, is simply too huge.¹⁷⁷

Besides her longing for a reunion, Fella, with impending foreboding also felt impelled to give Herbert advice capable of guiding him through the remainder of his life.

[T]he main thing is only that you [...] grow up to be capable people. My dear Herbert, pull yourself together and study industriously and then also write a bit more correctly and carefully, since otherwise your customers will not be able to decipher your handwriting.¹⁷⁸

As always, she inquired about Manfred's life and begged Herbert to 'please fulfil the wish of your parents – - have a photograph taken of you and little Manfred together, or one of each of you alone, please do this'.¹⁷⁹ But she longed for even more 'to just be able to hug you in my arms, maybe the dear lord will let me experience this someday again'.¹⁸⁰ Fella ended her letter with a hint of hardships they faced noting that 'here it is already cold and one has to dress warmly, hopefully the winter does not bode to be too cruel this year, since where could we possibly get any fuel?'.¹⁸¹ She sent the 'hope that our dear God will give us the longed-for peace, so that at last we can be joyful again together! [...] know you are dearly blessed and kissed by your loving mother who thinks of you all the time'.¹⁸² Appended to this letter was a note from Alter Haberberg.

'My dear boys! Already 3 years have passed without you with us and our pain is heavy, but our thoughts are always with you at all times. When we get a letter from you, dear Herbert, it's a real holiday [...] Please, my dear Herbert, fulfil your mother's wishes and write in detail and often [...] I wish all of you a happy new year, and may the heavens give us peace soon and bring us all back together again'.¹⁸³

Despite these parents' fervent wishes and heartfelt prayers, they were never reunited with their two sons. Alter and Fella Haberberg died a few months after this letter was written – either during the destruction of the ghetto in the summer of 1942, or sent to the killing centre Belżec. Herbert joined the Jewish Brigade of the British Army and served in Italy and Germany until 1947. He worked with survivors and refugees in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp and was reunited with one of his Kohane cousins who had

¹⁷⁷ Private Haberberg correspondence, 21 September 1941, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

survived the camps. Most of the rest of his large extended family perished in the Shoah. In 1946, uncle Willy adopted Manfred, who spent the remainder of his life in America. Both brothers pursued successful careers in the metals business. Manfred died in 2004, leaving a wife, two children and three grandchildren. After the army, Herbert made his home in England. He travelled extensively, for both business and pleasure, re-visiting many of the sites of his childhood in Germany and Poland. Herbert still lives in London near his son, daughter and four granddaughters, proud of his Jewish heritage, but maintaining the indomitable and independent spirit that helped him survive his experiences as a child refugee. For many years, Herbert spoke little about his past, and in his ninetieth year, still feels acutely the pain of separation from and loss of his parents, Alter and Fella Haberberg and his large extended family in Poland.



One of the notable features of the letters that reached the *Kinder* during the war was the parents' attempts to downplay the hardships they were experiencing. Long after the war, Herbert received a copy of the last letter his aunt had written to America from the Krakow ghetto in late 1941. In it she stated that the only pleasure for Fella and Alter Haberberg was the 'satisfying news' about their children and that 'their suffering is unbelievable, what they are going through over there is hard to describe'.¹⁸⁴ Alter had no work and 'he got so nervous that no one can approach him'.¹⁸⁵ None of this was communicated to Hebert in his parents' letters. Toni and Edward Pachtman received

¹⁸⁴ Private Haberberg correspondence, 12 November 1941, translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

similarly self-censored letters from their mother, who was living with relatives, in Przemsyl, Poland. Her husband Meir had gone to France not long after Hitler came to power to try to set up a business, and so had avoided the *Polenaktion*, but they were unable to re-join one another thereafter. Pepi Pachtman sent her letters via a friend in Switzerland, and thus was able to communicate even after America entered the war. Since she was in Soviet occupied Poland, she was able to write somewhat freely in the first two years of the war, though she wrote very little about herself. She implored them not to worry about her, assuring them that ‘I am thanking G.d well. In my spare time I am learning English. I am not working too hard. The only thing which worries me day and night is my worry about you all and my longing for you’.¹⁸⁶

Another commonality of the parents’ letters was their unhappiness at receiving so little news from their children, especially their sons. Edward’s sister Toni was the primary correspondent, and was conscientious about sending letters and telegrams to her mother, but it was not until February 1941 that Pepi received her first direct message from her son.

Although I heard about you by way of Toni it was hard for me to understand why you never wrote direct. I do realize that you have no money, and I am very upset that I cannot send you anything [...] Who could have imagined that we would be separated for so long. I did think that [...] we would all soon have been together again with Papa. Who could have imagined that things would turn out the way they did.¹⁸⁷

Pepi downplayed any distress caused by Edward’s negligence, expressing dismay only about her inability to provide for her penniless child. Pointedly, her incomprehension at the length of their separation conveyed the parents’ real expectations that they would be reunited with the children one day. Like Fella Haberberg’s plaintively hoping ‘it doesn’t last too long’ because ‘we really don’t have the patience’ and her husband’s sad recounting that ‘Already 3 years have passed without you with us’, Pepi Pachtman seemed almost shocked ‘that things would turn out the way they did’. Commonly in the memory literature, *Kinder* recall their certainty at parting that they would never see their parents again. These parents’ letters provide a counterweight to those post-war mediated memories – parents and children, even in Poland, harboured sincere beliefs that those partings were not permanent.

Parents’ letters also express a common desire to minimise their own suffering,

¹⁸⁶ Pachtman, *Our Family*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 38.

both to spare their children worry, and to preserve a normative relationship with them. Remarkably, after the German invasion of Russia, when her life in Przemysł must have become much more difficult and precarious, the tone of Pepi Pachtman's letters did not change significantly.¹⁸⁸ She assured her family that 'thanks to dear Papa's parcels I am also healthy and have everything I need to live'.¹⁸⁹ In fact, she told them that 'Every second day he sends me a little parcel with specially selected delicacies. I often receive [...] chocolates. The only reason that these do not taste so good is because I think that you are going short'.¹⁹⁰ Her letters were taken up with concerns about her children's health and whether they had enough to eat, as if she were projecting her own deprivations onto them. She only vaguely hinted at these hardships when she wrote, after receiving some parcels and letters, 'If, in my present circumstances and at the present time one can talk of being happy, then I am so today'.¹⁹¹ Just two months after writing these lines, her husband was arrested and deported to Auschwitz. The parcels ceased and so did her letters. Thereafter, Toni and Edward heard about their mother only through their Swiss contact who received Pepi Pachtman's final note in early 1943. In it, she asked that her children be assured that 'they should not be surprised if [their] mother won't write for a while. She is working and has no chance to write, but she is t.G. healthy'.¹⁹² The exact date and circumstances of Pepi's death are unknown. Meir Pachtman survived only one month in Auschwitz before he, too was murdered. All three Pachtman children survived. The eldest, Herman, a member of the French Resistance, remained in France, but Toni and Edward emigrated to Australia where they each married and raised families. Edward's family made *Aliyah* in 1971, and he died there in 2009. His wife, Val, three daughters and many grand and great grandchildren live in Israel still. Edward Pachtman, like his friend Jehuda Laulicht, maintained his observant, orthodox faith, speaking little about his past as a child refugee.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ A ghetto was established in Przemysł in late 1941 and there were deportations to death and labour camps and major killing actions in the vicinity between June and November 1942, when over half the Jews in the area were murdered. Most of the rest were killed or sent to Auschwitz or labour camps in September 1943. See: Dr. Arie Menczer, ed'. Przemysł Memorial Book, Part V- Shoah and Destruction', *Jewishgen.org*, < <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/przemysl/prz371.html>> [accessed 20 August 2014]

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41. Her husband was at that time still living relatively unmolested in Paris.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 42.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* This letter was written in May 1942.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 44. This letter was written in February 1943.

¹⁹³ The correspondence and photographs in their PJRF files were a revelation to the families, and in July 2014 when I visited Israel, the extended families of Laulicht, Pachtman and Ida Alt all arranged family gatherings to meet me and express their appreciation for the information I had been able to provide them from their relatives' PJRF files.



The Pachtman, Haberberg and Danziger correspondence provides strong evidence that mothers took the primary role in correspondence with their distant children. Fathers appended addendums to their wives' letters, but were rarely the main correspondents. Even Maier Pachtman appears to have relied upon Pepi to maintain a steady correspondence with their children. Toni Pachtman did receive one letter from her father, written to her after a brief stopover in Paris on her way to England.

Immediately you left I went up to my room and broke down. I spent the whole of Thursday afternoon in my room. I could not even go down for supper. I could not stop crying. [...]. I am sure that this was probably the last time I shall see you. As you saw I am getting old and weary.¹⁹⁴

Maier's foreboding, contrasting so markedly with his wife's optimism, proved tragically prescient. It was fairly rare for a father, or indeed any parent, to confess that extent of sorrow to their child. His extreme grief, even before the war began, may explain the absence of letters from him throughout the war, although it is clear from Pepi's letters that he wrote regularly to his wife.

One father who did write to his children regularly observed the more usual tactic of minimising his hardship and asking for news from his children. Rubin Hirschman was the primary correspondent for the family, who were in Buczacz, Soviet occupied Poland, and thus relatively unmolested for the first two years of the war. Like other parents, their main concerns were with their daughters' health and well-being, their anxiety about the slowness and lack of mail, and their desperate wish for photographs of the girls.¹⁹⁵ There was always room for fatherly advice – for example to Sara, 'please don't eat too much meat since it is unhealthy when one is a bit older', and to Yehudit,

¹⁹⁴ Pachtman, *Our Family*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁵ Private family correspondence, lent and used with the kind permission of SH's daughters.

‘practice writing for 1 hour every day after school this way [you] will learn to have a nice handwriting. As a child I had to write 3 hours a day until I could do it’.¹⁹⁶ There was a consistent minimising of their own difficulties and constant injunction from both parents: ‘Do not worry about us the main thing is that you are well and it won't be so much longer than we will all see each other again’.¹⁹⁷ One reason Rubin took the lead in correspondence was his wife's limited fluency in German or English, and he told Sara that although ‘we are glad that you and Yehudit speak the language well’ their mother ‘would be glad if you could write a Jewish letter since she can understand the Jewish script but not your script’.¹⁹⁸ Their mother never failed to send ‘extra kisses’, the number of which escalated from ‘eighty million’ to ‘seventy billion’ as their separation lengthened.¹⁹⁹ The parents’ worry after the children’s evacuation from London and regret that ‘unfortunately we are just too far away to be of any help to our dearest children right now’ overrode any concern they had for their own situation, and Rubin assured them that ‘we are doing pretty well and with God's help will continue so’.²⁰⁰

Although the parents’ letters only suggest what their children may have written, it is clear from some of the correspondence that silences about the realities of life were not the exclusive purview of the parents. The children were undoubtedly inhibited from adding to their parents’ woes by burdening them with truthful accounts that would only make them more anxious. Herbert Haberberg never told his mother the truth that, through no fault of his own, he had only seen Manfred once in two years. Similarly, Sara Hirschman had obviously not divulged the real situation in the Bernstein household, where she was maid and child-minder, for her father expressed their joy ‘that you are well and living with good people who treat you like their own children’.²⁰¹ She may later have hinted something, for he asked her to speak with the foster parents whether it was ‘not possible that you could learn some sort of profession that interests you’ since ‘it's always good to have a vocation’, although he added ‘certainly being able to run a household well and cooking and baking is very good’.²⁰² Primarily though, each seemed to want to reassure the other that all was well. He told his daughter that their

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., RH to his daughters, 15 July 1940 translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., RH and CH to their daughters, 12 February 1941 translated from German by Margy Walter.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., RH, 1 July 1940 and 15 July 1940. He perhaps meant Yiddish.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., RH letters 1 July 1940, 15 July 1940, 12 February 1941, and 5 March 1941, all translated from German by Margy Walter.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., RH, 15 July 1940 and 30 January 1941.

²⁰¹ Ibid., RH, 1 July 1940.

²⁰² Ibid., RH, 15 July 1940

sister Cilly worked ‘and I also earn something so we are getting along’.²⁰³

Do not worry, my dear one, because the time of our joy will come soon. We will see all of you once again and that will be the most joyful days of our life. Just don't give up hope, and don't be anxious about us, since we will manage alright [...] you are undoubtedly being helped by other people [...] So my dear one do not worry, my precious ones write us in detail [...] and cheer up.²⁰⁴

The girls only received one more letter from Buczacz, dated March 1941. Three months later, the Germans invaded and all mail ceased. Although perhaps their parents and sister lived until 1944, Sara and Yehudit never learned the exact circumstances of their deaths. After the war, Yehudit went to live in America, where her two surviving brothers had settled and where she married, raised a family and still lives. Sara made her home in England after her marriage, passing away in 2005 mourned by her husband, two daughters and several grandchildren.

Parents like the Hirschmans and Pepi Pachtman who reached Soviet occupied Poland had a longer window of opportunity for corresponding with their children and lived under somewhat less trying circumstances for the first two years of the war. Their more predictable lives allowed them time to dwell on separation from their children. Otto and Frieda Lindenbaum, whose sons Manfred, seven and Siegfried, ten, had gone on the last transport, were another such family, living in Grodno with their daughter Ruth when the war began. Their preserved letters included several to other adults, in which they more freely expressed their concerns and emotions. They wrote to relatives in Palestine that receiving their first letter from Siegfried, ‘was an explosion of joy. It was the first sign of life after 9 months’.²⁰⁵ Frieda worried a great deal about Siegfried’s education, after coming ‘to a foreign land’ where he ‘endured so much spiritual stress’.²⁰⁶ She was most ‘uncomfortable that Manfred was sent to another town’.²⁰⁷

The two boys are very close and I hope that they meet often. You may imagine that we miss the children very much and I suffer much because of their absence. Let us hope the time will come when we shall again have our children with us. [...]. I am only afraid that little Meni* will be longing for home.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Ibid., RH, 12 February 1941.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ *Lindenbaum Odyssey*, ‘Letters’, Frieda Lindenbaum to Isi, 22 May 1940.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. *Manfred.

Her apprehensions were not misplaced, for Manfred, the boy that the Cambridge RCM secretary characterised as ‘not quite a normal child’ *was* longing for home, and had not done well since the separation from his family. Of their own existence, she only wrote that they lived ‘quite well’, had jobs, earned ‘sufficiently’ and had ‘enough time and tranquillity to pursue our studies of Russian’.²⁰⁹

Letters to Siegfried and Manfred were archetypical, focusing on the children and providing very little news of themselves. Frieda peppered her eldest son for details, conveying the pain of no longer being a part of his daily life.

Are you diligent in your studies? What is the taste of the food and the air in England? Is the teacher satisfied with your work? We all miss you both. Do you go outside of the house often? Do you sleep in your own room?²¹⁰

She apologetically added, ‘you’re surely thinking that your mother has become curious [...] but it’s not a matter of curiosity as much as I’m worried about you. I must know how you are and everything that you’re doing’.²¹¹ Having much in common with Fella Haberberg whose sons were also separated, she was desperate for news of her own little ‘Meni’ asking ‘How long were you together and since when are you apart? [...] How often do you meet? How is he doing? Take care that he isn’t sad’.²¹² Only one more letter arrived from Grodno. Siegfried had written with news of Manfred, which had cheered them greatly. However, the pain of long separation and the impatience to be reunited with her sons was etched in every line.

I long for you so much! Hopefully the war will soon end and we will be able to see one another again [...] You are both my dear good children and when the war is over we will hopefully meet again. Remain healthy [...] I greet you and give you a hearty kiss from your Mother.²¹³

The Lindenbaums were never heard from again. Ruth, who had been promised a place on the *Kindertransport* and travelled all the way to Gdynia with her brothers only to be turned back at the dock, died with her parents in unknown circumstances.²¹⁴ After the war, Manfred and Siegfried, who had joined his brother in Ely and shone as a student, winning a place at a Grammar School, joined relatives in America and made their lives there. Siegfried, who had a distinguished career as a professor of pharmaceutical

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Frieda to Siegfried, 22 May 1940.

²¹¹ Ibid., Frieda to Siegfried, 22 May 1940.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., Frieda to Siegfried, 8 January 1941.

²¹⁴ *Lindenbaum Odyssey: Returning After 76 Years* ‘Augustow and Gdansk’, <<http://odyssey76.com/>> [accessed 20 September 2014]

chemistry, died in 1994. Manfred did not have an easy time in life. He found his entire childhood so devastating that he later said, ‘In my whole life, I had never spoken about my childhood – about my trauma. I never spoke to my brother – I never spoke to my children. I hardly mentioned my past to my wife’.²¹⁵ Eventually, after the birth of his grandchildren, he began to reconcile the past. In 2014, Manfred, aged eighty-one, accompanied by his wife, children and grandchildren, retraced the fateful journey from his birthplace in Germany to Zbąszyń, Warsaw and Gdansk to honour his sister Ruth, who made him get on the boat to England seventy-six years earlier.

My sister never got to have a life. I think of her every day, and her memory inspires me, so she lives through me. I try to make a difference, to do things that eliminate the hate and indifference that led to the murder of my family and the continued persecution of people around the world.²¹⁶

An active campaigner for human rights, Manfred used his odyssey to raise funds for child victims of the genocide in Darfur.²¹⁷ It took Manfred Lindenbaum most of his adulthood to come to terms with the events of his childhood, and long past the time when it had been pronounced that all *Kinder* ‘made good’, he still suffered from the disabling trauma that had marred his early years. But his late-life work eloquently testifies to the fact that *Kinder* outcomes are complex and variable: incapacitating suffering and success are not mutually exclusive, and can both be manifest in the same individual life.



²¹⁵ Ibid., ‘A Return to Poland: Manfred’s Odyssey’.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

The losses suffered by Siegfried and Manfred Lindenbaum, the Hirschman sisters, Edward Pachtman, the Haberberg brothers, Henry Danziger and others detailed in this chapter were shared by the majority of the *Polenaktion Kinder*. Thea and Karol Feliks' mother and younger brother Leo were shot by Einsatzgruppen in eastern Poland in 1941. The Dukat sisters lost their parents and baby brother as well. After Isi Freund's family perished, he made his way to Mexico where he died in 2013. Eddie Fischbein's parents were killed, and Eddie himself fell in Israel in 1948. The Firestein's entire family, the parents of Klara Klajman, Paula Waldhorn's and Mira Balustein's widowed mothers, Ruth Reicher's parents and three sisters – all were lost in the Holocaust. The fates of 116 (seventy-five percent) of the Polish *Kinder*'s families are known. Ninety percent of the parents of those unaccompanied child refugees were killed or died under the Nazi regime from 1933-1945.²¹⁸ Fewer than twenty five percent were reunited with a surviving sibling during or after the war.²¹⁹ These rates of loss are substantially higher than the figures derived from the 2007 *Kindertransport Survey*, which are inaccurately touted as definitive. While the *Polenaktion Kinder*'s losses may have been higher because their families were nearly all in Poland when the war began, that alone cannot explain the discrepancy between the PJFR statistics and the *Kindertransport Survey*. Nearly fifteen percent of the Polish children's parents were in Germany or other Western European countries during the war, and this did not increase their chances of survival.

The objective results derived from the PJRF files must call into question the conclusions drawn by the 2007 survey – a large but far from scientific or objective sample of *Kindertransportees*. Of the thirteen *Polenaktion Kinder* who participated in the survey, five were among those whose parent or parents survived – a parent mortality rate of sixty-two percent. This figure is only marginally higher than the survey overall, and significantly lower than the true mortality rate of ninety percent for all *Polenaktion* parents. These discrepancies suggest that *Kinder* whose parents survived felt more positively about the *Kindertransport* and made themselves available to be surveyed, accounting for their over-representation in the data, thus skewing the results to show lower overall parental death rates.

²¹⁸ Various sources: Yad Vashem, ITS, AJR Survey, family interviews.

²¹⁹ This figure is more difficult to adduce, since the number of pre-war siblings is not always known, and a significant number of older siblings emigrated to Palestine, the US or the UK in the 1930s. The fates of 100 entire families are known, of which 20 had a surviving sibling (other than those who also came on *Kindertransport*s).

The emphasis on the ‘revised’ death rates of *Kindertransportees*’ parents derived from the *Kindertransport Survey* is part of a wider impulse to position the *Kindertransport* as positive and redeeming. Frances Williams confidently credited the survey with correcting ‘the widely held misconception that “nine out of ten” *Kindertransportees* did not see their parents again’ and claimed that the survey’s results ‘dramatically transform the outlook of *Kindertransportees*’ experiences’.²²⁰ The PJRF findings suggest that on the contrary, the long-held claim of a ninety percent parental mortality rate is far closer to the truth. Regardless of statistical accuracy, however, it remains undeniable that a majority of the parents died, most under horrific circumstances. The doomed parents’ letters excerpted in this chapter demonstrate, as no statistics ever will, the heartbreak and trauma of sending children away and enduring long and mostly silent separations with the ever-increasing realisation that they would never see their children again. The evidence also shows unequivocally that those partings, silences and permanent separations resulted in life-long and even life-ending sorrow and trauma for the children. The anxious, frightened, broken and desperate parents’ words in these letters stand as evidence of the true cost of unaccompanied child ‘rescue’, beside which all statistics pale in comparison.

Disputed as the numbers may be however, some parents did survive, both in the *Kindertransport* as a whole and within the small *Polenaktion* cohort. Some managed to join their children by securing domestic visas to the UK, or emigrating elsewhere; some survived exile in the Soviet Union, evaded deportation, or, rarely, survived the camps. The PJRF documents do not record all of these survivals and reunions, but do provide insight into a few, and it is important for the sake of narrative accuracy to conclude by examining them.

III. Refugees and Survivors

Although no one knows definitively how many parents managed to secure domestic or other visas to Britain, *Kinder* testimony and memoirs suggest the number is significant, and represents the majority of parent-child reunions. These visas, as opposed to entry documents to other countries, provided *Kinder* and parents with separations of the

²²⁰ Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees*, p. xvi. She claimed definitively that ‘46 per cent of *Kindertransportees* were reunited with at least one parent [...] of these [...] 64 per cent were reunited with both parents’, pp. xv-. xvi.

shortest duration, because the majority of parents arrived in the UK before the war began. Some *Kinder* were able to re-emigrate after a few months to join parents in America or other destinations, but often they had to wait until the end of the war to be reunited with their families. All partings and separations were hard on the families of course, but the great advantage of those whose parents had escaped occupied Europe was the elimination of much of the fear and anxiety experienced by children whose loved ones were behind enemy lines. The PJRF files record instances of both kinds of parental escape. The Korman brothers, who were in Devon with Josef Kamiel, were able to leave England in 1940 and join their mother who had made it to America. Incredibly, their father, who had been caught in the Netherlands when the war broke out, survived several years at the Westerbork transit camp and re-joined his family after the war.²²¹ Two families of Zbąszyń *Kinder*, the Alperns and the Kasners, who had between them seven children, were able to reunite in 1939 when the parents' domestic visas were approved.

While the presence of parents in Great Britain was definitely a positive outcome for families who were reunited through domestic visas, refugee life was often not easy for them. *Kinder* accounts indicate that most of these families were unable to live together immediately upon the parents' arrival, and the PJRF files corroborate this finding. Often, the parents struggled financially, had restricted living and working options, and were dependent upon refugee agencies, all of which took a psychological toll. Of the two Zbąszyń families that faced these obstacles, the Alperns had by far the more positive experience. This family of six had been unexpectedly reunited on the train to Gdynia and arrived in London together. For a time the parents and children were separated, and even the baby sent to a children's home, but after the three older children were evacuated to Paignton, Devon, the parents and baby followed.²²² The older children spent about a year in evacuation foster homes, but eventually the family was able to move to Torquay, and remained together for the remainder of the war, during which time a fifth child was born.²²³ Aside from some inter-agency squabbling over which organisations were responsible for the family's maintenance, the only concerns the Fund expressed about the children related to religious instruction.²²⁴ They were

²²¹ Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale*, pp. 111-14.

²²² USCSF/VHA Renee Alpern Moss.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ USL/MS/183 591 F1 Kaizer to Mr Podro, 26 February 1942.

assured that the family was orthodox and observant and all children well within the Jewish fold.²²⁵

Although they faced some difficulties and disappointments, the Alpern family adjusted to refugee life fairly seamlessly, but not all such families fared as well. The widow Dina Kasner, who had written so movingly from Zbąszyń, also managed to secure a domestic visa, arriving in August 1939, six months after her three children.²²⁶ The children had all been guaranteed by the Cricklewood Synagogue and lived in a hostel run by the committee.²²⁷ Mrs Kasner was supported by the Jewish Refugees Committee though it is not clear that she worked as a domestic when she reached England.²²⁸ By late 1940, Dina had removed her youngest from the hostel, and brought him to live with her, and the older children later joined them.²²⁹ Life was difficult for the family, even though they were together. One of Dr Litvin's most impassioned reports was written after he visited them in early 1942.

It is difficult for me to describe their poverty and their privation. Elfriede, a girl of 17 looks like an undernourished child of 13. Their flat in a top floor is unfurnished, cold, poor, black, smoky. Starvation, despair, homelessness and suffering were to be seen everywhere [...] the children are orphans, their father was killed by the Nazis in Germany.²³⁰

This Dickensian description was underscored by an accounting of their paltry combined income and Litvin concluded with a plea for immediate financial help for the family whose condition outraged him.

They are an orthodox family and [...] I shudder when I think how these poor people, homeless Jews, our brethren martyrs will celebrate [Passover]. It is heartrending to look at the bloodless faces of the tortured children and their poor mother [...] When I think how the students (who get tens of pounds from us and do not repay them) live [...] and how the poor Kasner's live – my blood is boiling.²³¹

Litvin's report was redacted to remove his most emotional outbursts, but his appeal was convincing. After initially declining to help, the Fund did thereafter provide substantial financial help to the family, and educational support for Manfred through 1947.²³² In 1948, Dina Kasner signed a declaration stating that she acknowledged 'receipt of £100

²²⁵ Ibid., A M Cohen to PJRF, 3 March 1942.

²²⁶ USL/MS/183 567/1 '50 Children to be Evacuated' form for Elfriede Kasner, nd.

²²⁷ Ibid., '50 Children to be Evacuated' forms for Josef, Elfriede and Manfred Kasner, nd.

²²⁸ Ibid., Litvin to Gorowitz, 30 September 1942.

²²⁹ Ibid., '50 Children' form for Manfred Kasner.

²³⁰ Ibid., Litvin report, 22 February 1942.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., Gorowitz to Kaizer, 11 October 1942, various scraps with payments amounts 1942, 1943, 1945 and Questle to Manfred Kasner, 18 December 1947.

from the Federation of Polish Jews in Great Britain. I do my best to repay the money as soon as I am in a position to do so'.²³³ It is unknown whether Mrs Kasner ever found her feet financially, but her first nine years in England were difficult in the extreme. For a woman whose dignified and stoic demeanour was so evident in her first letter to the Fund in 1938, life in Britain proved challenging. No doubt having her children with her moderated her discomfiture to a large extent, but her case illustrates the rocky path many families faced when arriving in Britain as penniless refugees.

If it was difficult for families who reunited before the war broke out, it was even more traumatic for those parents who survived the war. In addition to the harrowing trials of their survival, gaining entrance to the UK in the post-war was an arduous and drawn out process, usually negotiated while living in a DP camp. Once they managed to secure a visa, they faced the daunting prospect of re-connecting with children they had said goodbye to as many as ten years earlier. Only a few of the *Polenaktion Kinder's* parents survived the war in occupied Europe. George Amper's mother lived through the Krakow ghetto, Płaszów, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald, although her husband Max and younger son Henri were murdered.²³⁴ Sally Amper is the only parent from this *Kindertransport* group to have so survived, although a few of the *Kinder's* siblings also managed to endure the camps. Julius Buck's elderly father in Vichy France avoided deportation because of his age, but his much younger wife was arrested and sent to her death in Auschwitz in 1942.²³⁵ Buck and his father reunited in Paris after the war but his father was a broken man and he died soon after.²³⁶ Although several of the children's families escaped the Nazis temporarily by fleeing to locations in Soviet occupied Poland, the majority of these later perished. Devorah Brodsky's father Ozjasz and three siblings managed to escape the Germans, but endured terrible hardships in exile, and Ozjasz died of typhus before the war ended. Her mother Laja who was caught in Germany at the start of the war was deported and killed in the Shoah.²³⁷ Only one Zbąszyń family survived intact in war-torn Europe. The indomitable widow Anna

²³³ Ibid., Declaration, 14 October 1948.

²³⁴ WL/ITS doc nos. 13121253, 13121264, 13121290. George's eldest brother also survived camps including Mauthausen. doc no. 13121234.

²³⁵ USCSF/VHA Julius Buck. His father was given a temporary visa to leave Poland after he fell dangerously ill and re-joined his wife who had not been deported from Germany in 1938. They escaped to Italy, but chose to try their luck in Vichy France instead. Unfortunately, his father was arrested when they arrived and spent a year in prison. While they were in the south of France, they could write to their son through neutral Spain, and he began to receive 'urgent appeals' for help. He approached the Home Office but was told they could do nothing. As foreign Jews, they were in grave danger of deportation.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Interview with DB.

Kamiel managed to escape into Soviet Russia with her teenage daughter Miriam, barely surviving several years in Siberia, buoyed only by the hope of a reunion with her son Josef. Against all odds, her elder daughter made it to Palestine in 1939. After the war, Josef Kamiel received what all *Kinder* hoped for but few realised – the confirmation of the survival of his entire immediate family.

A family's reunification after many years of separation during which there was no contact at all was not an unblemished blessing. Josef had been aware of his mother's survival since it was confirmed in late 1944 and he had received communications from his sister in Palestine, but, as detailed in Chapter 1, he became deeply bonded to his foster mothers, Ruth and Polly Gosling. Anna Kamiel was not able to gain entry to the UK until 1948, and for months before her arrival, the RCM, which now oversaw Josef's care, had been preparing him for his reunification with the mother he had not seen for nearly ten years. In anticipation of the family's reintegration, Anna and Miriam, who had both had to obtain domestic visas in order to re-join Josef, were set up by the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund as domestics in an orthodox Jewish hostel in North London.²³⁸ It was understood that Josef would move into the hostel with his family, find a job and become self-supporting.

Kinder testimony indicates that parents separated from their children over the long years of the war often imagined joyous reunions and seamless resumptions of their parental roles. Most of these accounts relate meetings that were instead fraught with awkwardness, resentment and difficulty as parents were confronted with thoroughly anglicised teenagers or young adults.²³⁹ This pattern was confirmed in the Kamiel's case. When his mother and sister finally arrived, Josef resolutely refused to join them. The RCM and the PJRF had to force an initial meeting several weeks after their arrival.²⁴⁰ After this shaky start, it was agreed that Josef could finish his last year of high school in Devon while making monthly visits to London, but that the end of the academic year meant departing Talaton permanently. Josef's continued resistance prompted the RCM to write to Mrs Gosling, to 'encourage Josef to spend at least a week

²³⁸ USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 Ruth Fellner to Questle, 9 December 1949.

²³⁹ See Ruth Barnett, *A Child of No Nationality*, Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, Annette Saville, *Only a Kindertransportee* and several anonymous accounts in Gershon, *We Came as Children*.

²⁴⁰ Josef Kamiel's family has obtained copies of Josef's RCM records from the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief (WJR), which controls the files. These consist of 19 pages of short summaries dating from July 1944 to November 1950. These will be designated as Josef Kamiel's RCM records (hereafter RCM/JK) 27 July 1948.

with his mother', but matters did not improve.²⁴¹ His mother became aware of Josef's 'intention to join the Army, evidently due to his unwillingness to move to London as planned' and Anna made a desperate journey to Talaton 'in order to appeal to his foster mother to help her regain her son'.²⁴² Although there were no ugly legal battles over Joseph, the situation was unspeakably sad for all of them. The foster carers, who had come to cherish a small nervous boy and nurture him to adulthood, now had to relinquish that child, along with their aspirations for his future academic career. His mother, who had endured appalling hardship to be reunited with her son, confronted the reality that he would do anything to avoid re-joining her. Her son was compelled to leave the secure place he now considered home, abandon his dreams of a university education and reconcile with a virtual stranger – a destitute refugee whose language he did not speak and whose religion was foreign to him.

Parent-child reunification was an ideal that sustained all participants in the *Kindertransport* from its inception to the end of the war. That there were so few of these meetings was the greatest tragedy, but the on-going trauma of many of the reunions is another sad legacy of the programme. Anna Kamiel's difficulties did not cease when Josef finally came to London as an apprentice accountant and joined her at the Freshwater Hostel in the fall of 1949. She had agreed with the refugee agencies to pay Josef's board and lodging out of their combined earnings, her daughter Miriam earning her own way as a domestic.²⁴³ Eight weeks after his arrival, however, Anna Kamiel petitioned the JRC and the PJRF to provide for Josef's full maintenance at the hostel, sparking an intensive inquiry into her expenses. In a transparent effort to make up for lost time and to win her son over, she had purchased gifts and clothing for Josef, allowing him to keep his small wage because she did not 'wish him to go short or feel different from the other young people working at his office'.²⁴⁴ Neither was she 'prepared for the boy to feel in any way dependent upon any committee'.²⁴⁵ She had also paid Josef's fares to visit the Goslings 'to whom she sends gifts, as it was on the understanding that he would be visiting them periodically that he came to London'.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ RCM/JK, 9 December 1948.

²⁴² Ibid., 7 August 1949 and 9 August 1949.

²⁴³ USL/MS/183 190 AJ 390 15/25 Ruth Fellner to Questle, 9 December 1949.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. Part of the problem was that a prominent Jewish refugee activist, Mr Margulies, who had promised to be Josef's financial guarantor, fell ill and reneged on his agreement, thus triggering Anna Kamiel's request for the support to come from the JRC and PJRF.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Additionally, she was supporting Miriam, because she was ‘anxious to get her married and feels that [domestic] work would lessen her chances’.²⁴⁷ The JRC told Mrs Kamiel that they ‘were deeply shocked to learn that you thought it necessary to spend a large sum of money on purchasing a fountain pen [...] for your son’.²⁴⁸ In turn, Anna Kamiel felt ‘great indignation and inner turmoil caused by the manner in which it was seen fit to attack me’.²⁴⁹

After having to bear persecutions of various kinds I have learnt to suffer and to put up with unpleasant events as composedly as possible. But this humiliation and disappointment surpasses my conceptions. The fact that I must suffer it at the hands of coreligionists and people who should show understanding fills me with sadness and discouragement.

Anna’s difficult survival and arduous odyssey to get to Britain had not resulted in the joyous reunion of her imaginings, instead bringing with it ‘disappointment, sadness and discouragement’. Only the thought that she had ‘to fulfil one of the most important duties’ enabled her ‘to overlook all and even to put up with insults of all sorts’.²⁵⁰ That important duty was guiding her children and she defended her actions unrepentantly, asking the JRC to ‘spare me mentioning every detail concerning my expenses’.²⁵¹ Although the refugee agencies agreed to provide temporary financial relief, they insisted on Miriam’s employment and Josef’s financial contributions.²⁵² Refusing to force any sacrifices on the daughter who had suffered so much or the son for whom she had so long been unable to provide, Anna Kamiel failed to comply. She fell into debt and lost her job with the hostel.²⁵³ Josef Kamiel continued to work as an accountant and eventually was able to support his mother, with whose religious orthodoxy he finally made peace.²⁵⁴ He continued to visit the Goslings in Talaton regularly.²⁵⁵ Polly died in the early 1950s, and Ruth, his true foster mother figure, died in 1974, four years before his own mother Anna.²⁵⁶ Josef, a successful accountant, died in 1999, leaving his widow Helen, three children and numerous grandchildren, all of whom are orthodox observers of the Jewish faith.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., Miss Eckstein to Mrs Kamiel, 9 January 1950.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. Anna Kamiel to Miss Eckstein, nd but late January 1950. The translation was done by the JRC. The original letter in German (or Yiddish) is not in the file.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid. Miss Eckstein to Mrs Kamiel, 6 February 1950.

²⁵³ Ibid., Miss Eckstein to Questle, 17 May 1950 and Questle to Mrs Epstein, 2 October 1950.

²⁵⁴ Korman, *Nightmare’s Fairy Tale*, p. 22.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Information provided by Deborah Kamiel Clements, 24 August 2014.

The surviving parents of the *Polenaktion Kinder* were few. Whether their survival rate mirrors that of the entire *Kindertransport* is disputed, but it is undeniable that the surviving parents' experiences were similar to those of all *Kinder*. Some suffered minimally from separation, though their refugee lives were difficult. Others endured long separations in unspeakable circumstances, missing crucial years of their children's lives. In the painful reassemblings of family life, they never wholly regained what had been taken away. These parents' stories are fragmented and incomplete, but their traces contribute greatly to the complex kaleidoscope that comprises the *Kindertransport*.

IV. The Parents: New Perspectives

The parents belong in the *Kindertransport* narrative, and they deserve to be represented in their own voices rather than only through the filter of their children's memories and the mediation of others. The correspondence explored in this chapter helps to restore this discourse to the historiography. If there is one conclusion to be drawn from the parents' experiences it is that there were no unambiguously happy endings in the *Kindertransport*. Even the Alperns, the family that unexpectedly arrived together, had to endure long periods of separation in England while the parents struggled as penniless refugees. Still, it is arguable that all *Kindertransportees'* families would have happily settled for that opportunity, compared to the other options they were offered. Sadly, for the vast majority of the *Kinder* and their parents, the Alpern's experiences were a tiny exception, shared by very, very few. A significant number of families were reunited, some quickly and happily, and others after long years apart, requiring painful readjustments to accommodate their various experiences.

For the majority of parents and their children, though, there were no reunions at all. In researching the families of *Polenaktion Kinder*, it was impossible not to be affected by the hundreds whose fates were simply *verstorben*, deceased, and *verschollen* – missing, lost without a trace, presumed dead. These parents and family members who never had a chance to see, or even write to their children again after they sent them on trains to Britain, died in unspecified ways in unknown places, their thoughts about their *Kinder* forever unrecorded. The huge silences created by these losses magnify the importance of the parents' letters that have survived. These few traces convey important understandings about the parents' expectations of survival and reunion with their

children, and their determination not to burden their children with their own hardships, preserving, however tenuously, the norms of their familial relationships. Their preserved correspondence to the refugee agencies is a vital record of their efforts and determination to get their children to safety, and the private letters shared by families of their desperate hopes of reunion during dark days of separation and their last, tragic words of love and encouragement.

Contesting Memory

Although I was lucky enough not to go into a concentration camp, my life wasn't easy. It's worse now than it was years ago. I don't know why. I can't shake it. When I was young I was able to say 'I have my children'. We worked to build a life, to build a home [...] you build, you build and then when you're older and your children and your grandchildren are adults there's nothing to build. You're not building, you're just coasting and all the things that were there in the back of your mind they are somehow in the front. And I can't shake it, I can't.¹

Mira Blaustein, who was twelve when she arrived in London on a *Kindertransport* from Zbąszyń, Poland, wept uncontrollably as she reflected on her life nearly sixty years later. The wrenching sadness that resurfaced to haunt her old age repudiates the *Kindertransport* narrative predicated upon successful and unclouded lives first suggested by Gladys Skelton and sustained by much of the historiography since. Mira had suppressed important threads of her own history while building her life, the visible accomplishments of which likely confirmed the sunny narrative of *A Great Adventure* and its successors. But distance and age unearthed her past traumas enabling her to proclaim unapologetically that her life had been difficult, rebutting the perception that because the *Kinder* had been spared the [*Shoah*] they had not suffered after their 'rescue'. Implicitly, her reflections challenge the notion that survival – being 'saved' – nullified the difficulties that *Kinder* encountered, which in her case included multiple foster placements: one where she was treated 'like family' but others in which she was abused emotionally and sexually and forced to perform unpaid labour.

Mira's testimony, like all *Kinder* memory, contributes vitally to our understanding of the *Kindertransport* and its consequences, but this study has shown that the memory record alone cannot carry the entire burden of *Kindertransport* scholarship. Memory accounts testify to many of the complexities and difficult realities of the child refugee experience, but as a collection of individual attestations, they have been unable to shift the redemptive *Kindertransport* narrative. By enabling a critical interrogation of the memory record, the contemporaneous documentation in the files of the *Polenaktion Kinder* has cast new light on *Kinder* memory. Juxtapositions of testimony and archive have demonstrated that temporally distanced sources can sometimes align almost perfectly, but also that meta-narratives developed over lifetimes inevitably shaped the

¹ USCSF/VHA Mira Blaustein.

ways in which *Kinder* remembered their experiences. Thus, former child refugees could elide over difficult events, minimise their dependence and emphasise their own agency, and forget relationships that were once vitally important to them. The *Kinder's* own correspondence and that of their carers and benefactors has facilitated a rediscovery of those forgotten elements, recovering important aspects of the *Kinder* experience and producing a multi-layered, nuanced and textured portrayal of *Kinder* lives.

Perhaps the most valuable result of the interplay of documentation and testimony undertaken herein is the understanding that the most insightful interpretations arise at the intersection of archive and memory. Testimony has been shown to have an important function in providing evidence for a restrained and critical analysis of the archival record. Documentation, in turn, has brought the immediate voices of the children back into the narrative, restoring and redressing imbalances in the memory record. Uniquely, memory records the authentic emotions engendered by the recalled life and registers the ways in which being a child refugee shaped and re-shaped existences, revealing that recollections of *then* are inextricably linked to lives lived *now*. The evidence in the archival record has provided opportunities for critically interpreting those memories and suggesting new approaches to the use of memory in *Kindertransport* historiography.

Memory has also been unable to provide the broader perspectives on the child refugee experience suggested by the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund documentation. In previous studies this wider view privileged the perspectives of central authorities, especially the Refugee Children's Movement, but this study has brought the voices of the additional actors to the fore, integrating them fully into the discourse. Thus, for the first time, evidence of refugee agencies' pervasively gendered treatment of child refugees has been documented. Previous studies have noted the differential treatment of male and female child refugees within a narrow focus of training and vocational roles but this study has demonstrated that attitudes about traditional gender domains profoundly affected the treatment of young refugees. This was manifested most clearly in the arena of health care, as female refugee children were consistently offered substantially more material and emotional support, and their mental health issues often addressed by the administrations of motherly figures and lengthy retreats into the domestic sphere. Conversely, male refugees were more brusquely dealt when ill or injured with an emphasis on their speedy return to work. The same discrepancies existed in regard to young refugees' romantic alliances and marriages and the training

and vocational guidance they received and there was even a marked difference in the way that the refugee agencies communicated with the different genders. In general, female *Kinder* received more patient attention and succour, reflective of the conventional attitudes about the sexes prevalent at the time.

This study also provided extensive evidence of the paternalistic and authoritarian attitudes that governed many of the interactions between refugee agencies and the *Kinder*. Genderization meant that adolescent male refugees received firmer and more patronising supervision and sharper and more threatening correspondence than girls did. All *Kinder* were subject to the hierarchical and class attitudes that were predominant at the time, compounded by their foreign and refugee status, although these convictions also devolved more severely upon the males. These firmly held beliefs about aliens, class and social status had far-reaching consequences for refugee children's aspirations for professional careers or further education. All of these gendered and socio-cultural responses to alien refugee children corresponded to norms within both Anglo-Jewry and the wider British society and suggest that further exploration of these attitudes and approaches as well as a broader contextualisation and historicization within the *Kindertransport* and vis-à-vis British society should be undertaken.

Another key finding of this research, ventured in a number of memory accounts but only definitively confirmed by the documentary correspondence in the PJRF files, is the pervasive importance of economics to the treatment of child refugees. In critical after-care decisions, the refugee agencies frequently put financial calculations before the material, spiritual or emotional welfare of the children. Monetary concerns bore upon crucial areas of after-care including education, vocation and placement decisions, including the splitting up of siblings, often with deleterious consequences for the *Kinder*. The prevalence of sibling separation and its effects upon the children involved deserves serious further study, within both the contexts of the *Kindertransport* and history of childhood, taking into account British child outplacement policies and the emerging study of the history of siblings.

Economics also bore heavily upon *Kinder*-carer relationships. The records of the Polish Fund support *Kinder* testimony that has suggested foster parents were sometimes motivated by financial gain when offering to take in refugee children. The costs associated with fostering, especially in addition to wartime strains on finances had significant impacts upon the permanence and adhesion of *Kinder*-carer bonds. The correspondence from foster and other carers also facilitated the exploration and analysis

of a variety of other carer motivations, exposing the complexities of hospitality, revealing that everyday carers were often impelled by self-serving impulses, and that although altruism existed, it was not the only or even primary motivation in most fostering relationships. The wealth of information from and about carers demonstrated that teachers, hostel personnel and refugee workers were also deeply influential in young refugee lives, and supported the first detailed examination of a variety of hospitality models, showing that bonds of attachment were unpredictable and often fragile. The evidence uncovered in this research shows that further study of the differences between voluntary and evacuation fostering, and of fostering by relatives is warranted.

This study has also grappled with the legacy of conflict over religion within the *Kindertransport*, contributing important new evidence and analysis to existing debates. This research contends that overall the Refugee Children's Movement pursued a flawed, inadequate and unsystematic approach to religious education with serious consequences for thousands of young child migrants. The exploration of the organisation's management of the children's Jewish religious heritage showed that other concerns – economic, educational, compassionate and pragmatic – often overrode religious ones when placement decisions were implemented. This study also uncovered significant conflict among the voluntary organisations in the early months of the *Kindertransport* and ideological differences among various refugee agencies with regard to placement of Jewish children in non-Jewish homes, which culminated in a series of high-level investigations within the post-war Anglo-Jewish community, though their findings were ultimately suppressed.

Religion was among several identity issues with which *Kinder* contended, another significant area of investigation undertaken within this work. The specific circumstances of the *Polenaktion Kinder's* lives led to both opportunities and challenges as they pragmatically sought Polish nationality while coming to terms with their mixed Jewish and national heritages. Their later testimony clarified the identity conflicts they encountered as German born refugees from Poland and the juxtaposition of their concerns then with their later recollections demonstrated how the former child refugees' identities have been constructed and re-constructed and their *Kinder* experiences integrated into their life stories as a whole.

As they struggled with identity, so too the *Kinder* fought to establish agency and autonomy within a setting in which they were largely dependent upon refugee

organisations and the attitudes their carers and benefactors brought to bear upon their lives. The *Kinder*'s own correspondence added their authentic children's voices to the narrative of their struggle to mature and become independent in the absence of parental guidance and support. The correspondence demonstrated in ways that the memory archive could not the strategies that *Kinder* adopted in their search for connections, guidance and autonomy. The research revealed that while most adapted to the circumstances of their lives as refugees, some could not cope, and attempts at independence often manifested as rebellion and rule-breaking, especially among the boys. This study is the first to explore issues of *Kinder* agency, and among the first to develop the theme of identity formation among refugee children. Both subjects deserve further examination sited within a wider context of unaccompanied child migration the experiences of British evacuees whose discourses in class, identity have some parallels to *Kinder* lives.

Many of the *Kinder*'s attempts at agency revolved around maintaining connections to their families and the study was enriched with a corpus of letters from parents and family members that enabled these lost voices to be re-integrated into the mainstream of the *Kindertransport* story. The restored voices revealed desperate efforts to get children to safety and stay connected to them, while consumed by longing for their children and buoyed by dreams of reunion. Uncovered in this exploration were the parents' desires for their children to be more than simply 'saved' – an important corrective to the narrative of salvation. Contrasting the parents' letters written to benefactors and those to their children highlighted the self-imposed silences, attempts to maintain normative parental relationships with their offspring and sincerely held beliefs in the restoration of the family unit. The evidence from the Fund's case files supports the *Kinder* memory archive in suggesting that even though longed for, such reunions were fraught with conflict and anguish.

This study's findings are illuminated by the individual stories of about one hundred children, which the author contends represent both the particular experiences of the *Polenaktion Kinder* and universal elements of the *Kinder* experience. The bold assertion that the lives of such a small number of children can reliably represent the experiences of 10,000 was also made by the CBF/WJR, which in 1950 gave the Jewish Board of Deputies' committee investigating religious conversions access to but 100 files, arguing that it was a valid sample from which to draw their conclusions. Similarly, Mark Roseman, who resisted drawing larger insights about life in the Third

Reich from the singular experiences of his subject, found that ‘although the drama of Marianne’s survival was unique, its backdrop was so well illuminated and its cast of players so large that her story sheds light on the whole theatre in which it took place’.² The abundance and variety of material preserved in the PJRF dossiers creates a similarly well-lit canvas informed by a huge array of actors, justifying their use for this prosopographical investigation. The varied traces left by these actors have, in Tim Cole’s words, enabled the writing of ‘the obscure(d) into history’.³ The *Polenaktion* children encountered a comprehensive range of Jewish and non-Jewish hospitality in which they found all levels of care. They faced evacuation, internment, and deportation, challenges both overt and passive to their religious identification, identity crises and the socio-cultural prejudices felt across the spectrum of *Kindertransportees*. Most lost contact with their families during the war, and few were reunited afterwards. All of these factors provide powerful confirmation that the experiences of this small percentage of *Kinder* have salience and relevance beyond the particularities of their lives.

Within this study, the synthesis of recollections recorded now with the records of those lives lived then has produced a deeper understanding of the *Kinder* and critical and challenging new perspectives on the *Kindertransport*. More broadly, this thesis, inclusively incorporating multiple perspectives, multiple voices and multiple temporalities suggests a wider and more challenging model for approaching history and memory, refugee studies and Holocaust scholarship.

² Roseman, *A Past in Hiding*, pp. 11-13.

³ Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust*, p. 9.

Picture Credits

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| 8 | Refugees peel potatoes in Zbąszyń. In the foreground at left is Rebecka Krenzler who later came to the UK as a <i>Kind</i> | Yad Vashem FA159/A28 http://collections1.yadvashem.org/arch_srika/Albums/159-173/159_A28.JPG |
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| 74 | Thea Feliks age 13 | USL/MS/183 575 F1 |
| 77 | Bruno Nussbaum age 14 | USL/MS/183 563 F2 |
| 102 | DB age 16 | USL/MS/183 575 F1 |
| 105 | Joanna Dukat age 8 or 9 | USL/MS/183 591 F1 |
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| 111 | Edward Fischbein age 5 | USL/MS/183 575 F2 |
| 113 | Karol Feliks HOPC 1939 | USL/MS/183 575 F1 |
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| 146 | Emigration of Sever Kleinberg, 1952 | <i>My Heritage</i> www.myheritage.com |
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| 148 | Josef Kamiel age 7 | USL/MS/190 AJ 390 15/25 |
| 149 | Sylvia Balbierer age 9 | USL/MS/183 591 F1 |
| 154 | Helena Ettinger HOPC 1939 | USL/MS/183 591 F2 |
| 155 | Manfred Lindenbaum Health Certificate | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 158 | YH age 9 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 160 | Edward Pachtman age 14 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 164 | Helen Reich age 14 | USL/MS/183 574 F2 |
| 165 | Sara Samuel circa 1933 | www.movinghere.org.uk JML/E 1991.281.1/E 1991.281.1.p1 Copyright Jews' Free School |
| 166 | Group Photo, Jews' Free Girls' School, Ely circa 1940. Thea Feliks appears at the centre of the photo. | Reti and Chase, eds. <i>A Transported Life</i> , p. 39 used with the kind permission of Irene Reti |
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| 176 | Ida Alt age 16 | USL/MS/183213/2 |
| 178 | Willie Najman age 10 | USL/MS/183 575 F3 |
| 181 | Isi Freund age 14 | USL/MS/183 563 F1 |
| 183 | Karol Feliks, age 13 | USL/MS/183 575 F1 |
| 185 | SH age 14 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |

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| 187 | Herbert Klarman age 13 | USL/MS/183 563 F2 |
| 189 | Jehuda Laulicht age 13 | USL/MS/183 591 F2 |
| 190 | Bruno Nussbaum age 14 | USL/MS/183 563 F2 |
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| 196 | Mendel Solomon age 14 | USL/MS/183 563 F2 |
| 197 | Herbert Haberberg in the University of Southampton archives reading his file, December 2012 | Collection of the author |
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| 203 | Henry Danziger with his father, Neustadt, Germany circa 1932 | Lent and used with the kind permission of the Danziger family |
| 206 | Salomon Lassman circa 1946 | UNB Class Composites and Group Photo Database http://www.lib.unb.ca/archives/ |
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| 228 | Ruth Reicher, age 12 | USL/MS/183 591 F3 |
| 235 | Group Photo, Otwock, July 1939. Most of these children were on the last transport. | Lent and used with the kind permission of the family of SH. |
| 247 | Rebecka and Liesa Krenzler, age 12 | USL/MS/183 575 F3 |
| 248 | Israel, Perel and Josef Laulicht | USL/MS/183 591 F2 |
| 249 | Zipporah Laulicht, widow of Jehuda, their children and spouses, with the author July 2014, Israel | Collection of the author |
| 255 | Simon Klarman's Gross-Rosen questionnaire, circa 1941 | Wiener Library International Tracing Service Archive doc. no. 134899 |
| 257 | The Ettinger family, Zbąszyń, 1939 | USL/MS/183 591 F2 |
| 260 | Top right: Tilly Friedman, age 12 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 260 | Bottom left: Tilly Friedman, 1947 | Lent and used with the kind permission of her daughter and son. |
| 261 | Tilly Friedman Van Gelder and family, 1952 | Lent and used with the kind permission of her son and daughter. |
| 264 | The Markel brothers, 1938 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 265 | The Markel brothers circa 1928 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |
| 266 | Top: Leo, Gisela, Herbert Klarman, 1939 | USL/MS/183 409 F2 and 563 F2 |
| 266 | Bottom: The Krenzler sisters, 1938 | USL/MS/183 575 F3 |
| 269 | The Najman family and others, 1939 | Skórzynska and Oleniczak eds., <i>Do zobacenia za Rok w Jerozolimie</i> , p. 160 |
| 273 | Rebecka Krenzler Scherer, 2013 | Collection of the author |
| 274 | Descendants of Ida Alt Bulka with the author, Jerusalem, 2014 | Collection of the author |
| 278 | Henry Danziger in the army circa 1945 and singing opera, 1960s | Lent and used with the kind permission of the Danziger family |

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|-----|---|--------------------------|
| 281 | The author and Herbert Haberberg, <i>Kindertransport</i> Reunion, London 2013 | Collection of the author |
| 283 | Val Pachtman, Edward Pachtman's widow and the extended family, Israel, 2014 | Collection of the author |
| 288 | Siegfried and Manfred Lindenbaum, aged 10 and 7 | USL/MS/183 574 F1 |

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565, 566, 567/1, 568, 570, 574, 575, 591, 592, 617/2, 666, 674, 730, 786/2, 791, 805, 898/2,
997/3.

MS 190 AJ 390- Polish Jewish Refugee Fund

7/10, 11/3/28, 15/15, 15/25

MS 175- Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz Papers

139/1, 139/2

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1347 Reunion of the *Kindertransport*: 50th Anniversary Papers, 1989

1350 60th Anniversary Reunion of the Kindertransportees, 1999

1368 Reunion of *Kindertransport* Documents, 1987-2002

1410 Julius Jung Papers

Winton, Nicholas. *Saving the Children, Czechoslovakia 1939: A Scrapbook Recording the Transportation of 664 children out of Czechoslovakia* [2 vol.]

International Tracing Service Archive (Wiener Library)

University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute Visual History Archive

Polenaktion Kindertransportees:

8209 Renee (Irene) Alpern Moss

10405 Henry Alpern

12610 Mira Blaustein Grayson

14226 Henry Danziger

14724 Ellen Kerry Davis

15097 Ida Najman Drob

16323 Anita Alpern Jaye

16930 Henry Kreisel

19173 Sonja Baranska Davis Rosenfeld

26263 Jacques Reich (Rich)

33965 Sylvia Balbierer Schneider

36908 Alexander Dominitz

37719 Julius Buck

39572 Manfred Haberberger

40479 Herman Feldman (Zvi Nir)

45065 Isabella Schneider Webber

Other Kindertransportees:

32 Eva Abraham-Podietz
9701 Hedy Epstein
10818 Elsbeth Lewin
12278 Alice Kurzman
13642 Helen Ascher
14437 Tosca Kempler
14724 Ellen Kerry Davis
16930 Henry Kreisel
18654 Nora Danzig
23372 Laura Selo
25315 Eve Soumerai
30819 Frank Forester
32914 Harry Bibring
33039 Paul Hart
35952 Herbert Holden
36513 Emma Mogilensky
39698 Lorraine Allard
41844 Stephanie Robertson,
43762 Ursula Rosenfeld
44405 Paul Zell
44422 Lillyan Rosenberg
48310 Helga Relation
48610 Fred Dunston,

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Yetty Herman Sachs- Correspondence and Phone Interview (USA) 21 March 2012

Grete Dukat Sole- Correspondence and Interview- Horsham, 15 May 2012

Lothar Weiss –Phone 21 April 2014

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Liz Berg (Josef Hochberger) 2014
Mark Blatter (Helene Ettinger)2012
Rabbi Yakov Bulka (Ida Bulka) 2013
Deborah Clements (Josef Kamiel) 2012-14
Michael and Sebastian Danziger (Henry Danziger) 2012-14
Paul Doffman (Esther Baranska)2013
Rabbi and Mrs Fine (Karl Weisbraun) 2013-14
Miriam Frankel and Yael Carlin (Edward Pachtman) 2013-2014
Shula Galili (Paula Waldhorn & Klara Klajman) 2012-2013
Daniel Ghazal (Simon Markel) 2012
Alan Haberberg (Manfred Haberberg) 2012
Helen Kamiel (Josef Kamiel) 2012
Isreal Laulicht (Yehuda Laulicht) 2013
Zippora Laulicht, Hedva Laulicht (Yehuda Laulicht)2014
Lorraine Lindenbaum (Siegfried) 2012
RM(SH and YH) 2012-13
Truus Najman (Willie Najman) 2012-13
Val Pachtman (Edward Pachtman) 2013
Irene Reti (Thea & Karol Feliks) 2011-2012
Bernie Rosenfeld (Sonia Barnaska) 2013
Mandy Sawday (Ida Najman) 2013-14
Vivan Schechter, Annette Kaufman, Jeffrey Lieder (Gerald Lieder)2013-14
Rabbi Bulka, Rebecca Ritvin (Ida Alt Bulka) 2013
Nigel Steele (Ewa Mohr) 2014
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Ruth Winterton (Selma and Yetty Herman) 2012-13
Leah Wolf and extended related family (Ida Bulka) 2013-14

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