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### **Editorial:**

Introduction: Breadth and depth in the history of the Kindertransport and beyond

Michael Berkowitz <sup>1,\*</sup>

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\* Correspondence: [m.berkowitz@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.berkowitz@ucl.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Hebrew & Jewish Studies, UCL, UK

## INTRODUCTION

# Breadth and depth in the history of the Kindertransport and beyond

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In early October 2017 I was approached by Lesley Urbach and Dr. Jennifer Craig-Norton, of the Parkes Institute, University of Southampton, about their intention to host a conference, in London, to mark the eightieth anniversary of the Kindertransport and to explore new approaches to its history. No doubt most readers of *Transactions* are familiar with the broad outlines of the Kindertransport. It is the umbrella term for the scheme that permitted more than 10,000 unaccompanied, mostly Jewish, children to enter the United Kingdom in 1938–39. It has been for the most part celebrated, and its commemoration is part of the Holocaust-memory landscape, which includes not one but two separate sculptural installations in London’s Liverpool Street Station. At that time, Dr Craig-Norton was completing a book for Indiana University Press based on new sources that challenged these celebratory narratives.<sup>1</sup> I was enthusiastic to collaborate with this initiative, in no small part because of the possibility for the presentations to materialize as (a major part) of the volume before you. Dr. Andrea Hammel of the University Wales – Aberystwyth, another Kindertransport scholar, and Anita Grosz, a public historian, also took lead roles in organization. The conference was held 22–24 January 2019 at the Institute of Advanced Studies at University College London (UCL). Professor (and then Dean) Mary Fulbrook of UCL delivered the keynote address on “émigrés, child survivors, and the Holocaust”, and special presentations were offered by James Bulgin on the new Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, Ruth Barnett on the impact of the fiftieth anniversary activities of the Kindertransport, and Diane Samuels speaking about her acclaimed play “Kindertransport”.

The gathering was immeasurably enhanced by the keen participation of Robert A. Shaw, a distinguished chemist and scientific educator. (To their great credit, colleagues at Wolverhampton University have recognized and celebrated the significance of Professor Shaw’s life and career.) On

1 Jennifer Craig-Norton, *The Kindertransport: Contesting Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

the heels of the Anschluss in March 1938, along with the rest of Austria's Jewish community, Shaw and his family were subject to unprecedented horrors and humiliation. Then a teenager in Vienna, he was assigned to the Kindertransport by his mother. Once landing as a refugee in Britain, Shaw worked on a farm in Suffolk. Later he scrambled around London as an errand-boy during the Blitz, then volunteered for the British Army. He somehow managed to study while serving in India and the South East Asia Command, entering university on his return. Despite limited exposure to the English language before the Kindertransport, Shaw became a lecturer at Birkbeck College in the 1950s, was elevated to a professorship in the 1960s, and accorded emeritus status in 1990. As a scientist and scholar Shaw initiated and led numerous international research projects and authored more than 350 publications. These primarily concern chemistry, while his scholarship also focuses on education, economic development, and medical history. Professor Shaw's life story has reached a new, fraught chapter, as he is enmeshed in the process of seeking some semblance of restitution from the Austrian government. His family ran a formidable clothing business before the Anschluss and thus far there has been no compensation for its plunder.

Prior to the conference, as proposals for papers were being received, and the meeting was taking shape, I found it striking that there was no mention of those among the Kinder who had become, themselves, scholars of the Holocaust: namely, Gerd Korman, who spent most of his career teaching in the famed school of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University,<sup>2</sup> and the late Geoffrey Hartman (1929–2016), of Yale, a scholar of literature and harbinger of new methodologies in literary studies. (Korman is, however, well represented in the work of Jennifer Craig-Norton.) In addition to being a professor of literature, Hartman also helped to found an institution at Yale that was, for the time, quite unusual: the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, in the early 1980s. In contrast to the project initiated by Steven Spielberg in the wake of *Schindler's List* (1993), which had an explicit set of questions and time limits prescribed by its supervisory foundation, the Fortunoff Archive's "interviewing methodology stresses the leadership role of the witness in structuring and telling his or her own story",<sup>3</sup> which has made it

2 Gerd Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale: A Young Refugee's Home Fronts 1938–1948* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

3 Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, <http://fortunoff.library.yale.edu/about-us/our-story/> (accessed 8 January 2020).

particularly valuable not only for survivors and their families, but also the work of scholars. A portrait of Hartman graces the cover of this volume.

While Hartman's complex career cannot possibly be reduced to his presence on the Kindertransport, he situates it prominently in his biography: "Were there sharp turns in my self-image or career consciousness?" he mused:

I was blessed with a surprising lack of career thinking during my first appointment at Yale (1955–62), perhaps because of an alternate and very strong, if inchoate, sense of vocation. That sense arrived early yet never tangled enough with academic politics or polemics to accrue missionary intensity. Where my wish to teach and study literature came from, I do not know to this day, but once on that path nothing could divert me. However obscure the motivating source, several factors contributed to self-reliance. With over twenty boys, I had been evacuated from Frankfurt in March 1939 on a "Kindertransport." We were resettled in a small English village, a dependency of the Waddesdon Manor and its owners, James and Dorothy de Rothschild, who supported the refugees. My mother had left for America in December 1938, shortly after the pogrom of Kristallnacht, intending I should join her as soon as a visa could be obtained. My grandmother, already ill, did not escape and died in Theresienstadt. My father, long divorced, managed to emigrate to Argentina. Because of the war and the submarine menace, I was unable to join my mother until August 1945. I was then close to sixteen and eager to continue my education.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the basic fact of his refuge in this excerpt, Hartman does not dwell on his time in England. He was aware, however, that it was essential for his survival and no doubt helped to shape his outlook. Korman, in contrast, provides a thick description of his migration, including what he ate and vivid descriptions of his companions.<sup>5</sup> Both of them proved to be resolute in figuring out ways to look after themselves. The means of their rescue, however, was bestowed on them by others.

Considering what may be termed the instrumentality of the Kindertransport I also wish to address an event that is not reflected elsewhere in this volume and has rarely been regarded as notable: a statement of Stanley Baldwin, of some fourteen minutes, which was aired on BBC radio on 8 December 1938.<sup>6</sup> It is "an appeal by the Right Honourable Lord Badwin

4 Geoffrey Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale: Intellectual Journey of a Displaced Child of Europe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 5–6.

5 Korman, *Nightmare's Fairy Tale*, 56–67.

6 Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/jewish-refugees-already-fleeing-germany> (accessed 5 January 2020).

of Bewdley on behalf of Jewish and non-Jewish Christian refugees.” The recording of this programme was preserved by, and is now available through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It was brought to my attention by the historian Kyle Jantzen of Ambrose University College of Calgary, Alberta.<sup>7</sup> While this speech had a decided impact when it was delivered, it has elicited limited scholarly attention. Its main significance is that it gave both official sanction and financial heft to what would become known as the Kindertransport.

The Conservative politician Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947) served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for three terms: in 1923–24, 1924–29, and 1935–37. As the leader of the opposition, nearing the end of his career, Baldwin cautiously supported Neville Chamberlain’s now highly questioned appeasement of Hitler in 1938. But his biographer, Philip Williamson, asserts that “Baldwin was not deluded about the increasing danger and unpleasantness of the Nazi regime.” While officially falling in line behind Chamberlain, Baldwin also pressed for “national, cross-party, co-operation and for industrial mobilization to accelerate rearmament. Already, in March 1935, Baldwin had with other university chancellors appealed for funds to help Jewish scholars fleeing from Germany.”<sup>8</sup>

Baldwin had retired from public service only months before Kristallnacht, that is, the event (problematically) termed the “November Pogrom” from 9 to 10 November 1938.<sup>9</sup> The editors of Baldwin’s papers, Philip Williamson and Edward Baldwin, write that in the wake of Kristallnacht, “representatives of the Church of England Assembly asked Baldwin to lead an appeal in support of their refugee organization. Baldwin agreed on the condition that it should be a ‘national’ appeal, on behalf of all the British religious denominations, including Free Church, Roman Catholic, and Jewish. This was arranged, and with advice from Tom Jones, the

7 Professor Jantzen and I were contributors to a research seminar on North American responses to Kristallnacht at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC; see Maria Mazzenga, ed., *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

8 Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58.

9 See François Guesnet and Ulrich Baumann, “Kristallnacht-Pogrom-Terror: A Terminological Reflection”, in Wulf Gruner and Steven J. Ross, eds., Lisa Ansell, assoc. ed., *New Perspectives on Kristallnacht after 80 Years: The Nazi Pogrom in Global Comparison* (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press for the USC Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life, 2019), 1–15.

Archbishop's Office, and the Foreign Office Baldwin on 8 December made one of his most impressive and important broadcasts." As can be heard,

he appealed for donations to the "Lord Baldwin Fund for Refugees"; all bank branches co-operated, many fund-raising events were organized, and over the next two months *The Times* printed pages of donors' names. The broadcast also drew personal attacks on Baldwin in the German press, and protests from German diplomats in London. By summer 1939 the Fund had received £522,000, with half distributed directly to assist child refugees and the rest allocated to Jewish and Christian refugee organizations. The broadcast was also related to North America and parts of the Empire, to support separate appeals in those areas" [emphasis added].<sup>10</sup>

Anne Hugon, the noted French historian of Africa, found that Baldwin's appeal even elicited some sympathy from traditional local chiefs of Africa's Gold Coast—but the requests for asylum were declined by colonial officials.<sup>11</sup> In Britain, there were more than a million individual donors to this fund, which also was directed towards assisting the 10,000 children of the Kindertransport.<sup>12</sup> Although Stanley Baldwin will not reappear in this volume, numerous previously under-examined aspects of the mechanics of the rescue efforts will be explored. The eightieth anniversary proved to be a fitting time to solicit new, critical assessments of the Kindertransport concerning its origins, rationales, enactment, and outcomes.

This special section of *Transactions* therefore includes a study of the relationship between existing archival collections relevant to the Kindertransport in the light of the historiography by Jennifer Craig-Norton, who also assisted with the editing of selected articles here. As a complement to Craig-Norton's contribution, Paul Weindling, through examining the papers of the Welfare Department of the Israelitisches Kultusgemeinde (IKG) of Vienna, offers a fresh, and at times painful, view of the process of screening children who were selected for – and excluded from – the Kindertransport. The article by Annabel Cohen and Barbara Warnock surveys the experiences of Kindertransportees and their parents based on material available at London's Wiener Holocaust Library; Rose Holmes

10 Philip Williamson and Edward Baldwin, eds., *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman 1908–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 460.

11 Anne Hugon, "Les colonies, un refuge pour les juifs? Le cas de la Gold Coast (1938–1945)", *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 84, no. 4 (2004): 23–41, at [https://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID\\_ARTICLE=VING\\_084\\_0023](https://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_ARTICLE=VING_084_0023) (accessed 6 January 2020).

12 Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 59.

reflects on what she terms “the politics of compassion”, focusing on the provision of care; Jane Brooks illuminates the lives of Kinder girls and the nursing profession in wartime Britain; Marie-Catherine Allard explores the aforementioned memorial sculpture of Frank Meisler in Liverpool Street Station. Akin to Gerd Korman and Geoffrey Hartman’s stress on self-reliance, Stephanie Homer scrutinizes the notion of “resilience” in Kinder memoirs. Ujjwal Krishna proposes a novel framework for excavating the integration of the Kinder in Britain, which may be applied to other child refugees. In a similar vein, Bill Niven and Amy Williams use the memory of the Kindertransport as a lens to explore the relationship of Holocaust memory to global human rights advocacy in the twenty-first century. Eva-Maria Thüne provides an in-depth and fascinating study of the acquisition of English, and retention of German, among the Kindertransportees. A deep foray into a local community is revealed in Richard Hawkins’s excellent portrait of the Dudley Refugee Committee’s work from 1938 to 1945. On a more personal level, Lesley Urbach recalls the Wyberlye Ladies Convalescent Home in Burgess Hill. Continuing with the attention to Jewish relations with Christian missionary societies from previous articles in *Transactions*, Nurit Grossman details the highly controversial, and still contentious, efforts of the Barbican Mission to the Jews from Prague. An unsparing analysis of the poetry of Gerda Mayer is the subject of Angharad Mountford’s intriguing article, and Anita Barmettler revisits the poetry of Karen Gershon, who is fundamental to any reappraisal of the Kindertransport. Looking beyond the Kindertransport itself, Jon Blend and Roz Carroll share their findings about mitigating “transgenerational trauma” through “semi-structured improvised enactments”, having developed their approach from a series of workshops and group events focusing on the legacy of the Shoah and refugee experiences of escaping persecution. Another perspective from beyond the usual gaze directed at the Kindertransport in the UK is Lilly Maier’s thoughtful remarks on the French Kindertransport, “rescued twice”, which highlights differences and similarities to the British experience. Even further removed from the British Isles, Catherine Rymph deftly examines the efforts of American child welfare experts and philanthropists to attempt an American version of the Kindertransport in 1939.

Following the Kindertransport articles, the regular activity of *Transactions* resumes with Anna Matheson’s comprehensive response to the question: “Was there a Jewish presence in medieval Ireland?” The issue

includes book reviews by Colum Kenny, Sacha Stern, Geoffrey Alderman, Colin Shindler, Anne Kershen, Samantha Baskind, Kent Ljungquist, Art Simon, Joachim Schlör, Nathan Abrams, and Laurel Leff. We conclude with a review essay, focusing on groundbreaking work, respectively, by Julie Mell, *The Myth of the Medieval Jewish Moneylender*, volumes 1 and 2, and Francesca Trivellato, *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance tells us about the making of European Commercial Society*, by *Transactions'* book review editor, Lars Fischer. This is something of reprise for these superb historians of pre-modern Jewry. Julie Mell first appeared in *Transactions* volume 44, writing on “the paradox of Jewish participation in the self-representative political processes” of medieval England. And in *Transactions* volume 43, Edgar Samuel praised Francesca Trivellato’s earlier book, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (Yale University Press, 2009), for its “great thoroughness” and for being “a most important and original description of the economic and social history of this major Jewish community.”

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Lesley Urbach, Andrea Hammel, Anita Grosz, and Jennifer Craig-Norton for initiating and carrying forward the Kindertransport conference, to Steven Naron for supplying the photograph of Geoffrey Hartman for the cover of this issue, to Tony Kitzinger for his ongoing design work for *Transactions*, and as usual, to Lars Fischer, book review editor, to Katharine Ridler, copy-editor, and to Jeremy Schonfield, contributing editor, for their tireless and greatly appreciated efforts.

Michael Berkowitz  
London