

REMEMBERING THE GIRLS

This month the AJR plants one of the last of its 80 trees in Windermere, honouring the orphaned Jewish children brought to Windermere after WW2, aka 'The Boys'. It will also honour the fact that Windermere was home to several girls who came via Kindertransport before war was declared and who were subsequently evacuated from Tyneside. Vivien Sieber, author of a new book *Kino and Kinder*, takes up the story.



Summer 1939
 Edith Hanna Elfi Stella Lore Dasha Helga Annie* Ruth Marion
 Margot Lore ? Lisl R. Ilse Eva
 *The two little girls with Annie are cousins visiting

In early 1939 a group of Newcastle friends decided to establish a hostel for girls saved by the Kindertransport. The committee, chaired by a local jeweller, David Summerfield, raised the funds to provide and furnish a house and employ two matrons to run it. Furniture, bedding, duplicate kitchen equipment, fuel, food and clothing were sourced and the committee also covered the cost of education and health and the £50.00 sponsorship fee per child.

The two matrons, recruited via Woburn House, were the celebrated cook Alice Urbach and my grandmother Paula Sieber. Both were refugees from Vienna, where my grandmother had run a cinema. The hostel was at 55 Percy Park, Tynemouth, where the AJR planted a tree in January.

The girls, aged between five and fourteen, arrived at Harwich from



Germany, Austria and one from Czechoslovakia. Most were sent to Newcastle via Liverpool Street by train. They attended school locally and were treated with generosity by teachers, fellow students and the local community. Despite their linguistic and educational differences, the children were rapidly assimilated. They enjoyed summer on the beach, sending home pictures from street photographers.

The girls wrote movingly about leaving their parents and life in the hostel: *We were separated into three groups: 'little ones', 'middle ones' and 'big ones', according to age. We big ones had to look after the younger ones and help with the housekeeping. It was very hard for some of the children who kept crying for their parents and who did not know if they would ever see them again. Of course, we did not speak English and the girl from Czechoslovakia did not speak English or German. The matrons were kindly but also imposed rules and regulations which some children resented.*

In September war broke out and all refugees over 16 were declared enemy aliens. Paula's son, Peter, was interned in the Isle of Man and Canada. Following Dunkirk and the onset of German bombing, the coast was declared a restricted zone and the Newcastle committee was given only three weeks to find and relocate to a new property.

The committee found and rented South

Wood - a house on the outskirts of Windermere that was part of the Wood estate. Although large by domestic standards, the house was small for 25 girls and two matrons. Alice prepared their daily meals in the compact kitchen. As the local school, St Mary's, was only a short walk the girls returned for lunch.

The children were pleased to move to the beautiful Lake District, commenting on the wild flowers and the garden. Teachers at St Mary's were kind and the local community supportive. As there was no domestic help the girls had to do routine tasks – cleaning, fires, kitchen duties – alongside their schoolwork. Kosher meat was sent weekly from Newcastle and committee members visited regularly.

When girls reached the age of 14 they found employment or training locally or had to move further afield. After the war most of the girls discovered they were now orphans, although a few found distant relatives who had survived. The hostel closed in 1946 and the younger girls were moved to other hostels.

Despite experiencing terrible events the 40+ girls went on to have useful and fulfilling lives, many creating their own families. They stayed in touch with one another and the matrons as they spread across the globe.

www.vivien sieber.eu/kino-and-kinder