

Memory of the Kindertransports seen through memorial roses – Amy Williams

There has been an increasing awareness of the Kindertransports over the last twenty years which could be the result of the first reunions held by Kinder in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But this could also be due to the international acclaim of numerous cultural forms which remember the transports. For several novels, plays, exhibitions and memorials have won different prestigious awards and they have been read by or visited by thousands of people from around the globe. Memory of the Kindertransports is therefore not limited to Britain because many other nations are commemorating and representing the transports in different ways. Britain's memory of the Kindertransports is celebratory because it focuses on the rescue and arrival of the Kinder to these shores. This is emphasised by the Frank Meisler memorial outside Liverpool Street Station, London which is entitled "The Arrival". The more negative aspects such as internment, abuse, separation and loss tend to be marginalised by Britain's national narrative of the Kindertransports. Germany's memory of the transports though is more complex, as is demonstrated by another Kindertransport Meisler memorial, "Trains to Death – Trains to Life", at Friedrichstrasse in Berlin. This memorial reminds passersby not just that some children were rescued, but also that many did not manage to escape Nazi Germany, and were killed in the Holocaust. Germany, then, remembers its role as perpetrator, while Britain recalls its role as rescuer. Memorials to the Kindertransports therefore reflect upon the complex history of the transports, and they present different national perspectives. The memorial rose garden at the National Holocaust Centre and Museum is part of this international commemoration of the Kindertransports. Unlike other memorials, though, it is a living memorial as it is not made from bronze or stone.

A memorial garden represents growth and regeneration as well as decay. It can also have a calming effect on visitors as it is a place to sit and reflect. There is also a generational context to a garden because various plants, for example, bloom and then wilt each year, making room for new buds. Memorial gardens are organic memorials which change over time creating new meaning depending upon the season. They are also more personal and more individual compared to other memorials because they present a narrative shaped by survivors than an institutional or state narrative. For example, the rose garden at the National Holocaust Centre and Museum represents a space which is 'not shaped by historians or museum curators [rather the gardens are] somewhere for victims and survivors to have a little dignity'.^[1] Although the memorial garden at the Centre to a degree presents the British national narrative of the transports because there is an emphasis on rescue, the narrative within the garden is more complex. It is a space which reflects upon the more negative stories of the Kindertransports because the Kindertransports are placed within the wider context of the Holocaust. In the edited volume *Behind the Rose*, former Kinder such as Harry Bibring, Otto Deutsch, Ellen Rawson, and Susanne Pearson have discussed how many of their family members who were murdered in the Holocaust do not have graves. In this sense, the garden at the Centre has come to symbolise their resting place, it is a physical marker which remembers them, keeping their memory alive. Hana Eardley describes how

the beautiful and delicately fragranced rose garden at Beth Shalom is, for [her], a great source of solace and consolation, a peaceful haven for the souls of so many wronged and innocent victims of the Holocaust who have no proper resting place.^[2]

The rose garden is a memorial which encourages the viewer to use their senses, especially their sense of smell as Hana describes above. In doing so the roses bring the viewer closer to the narrative of the Kindertransports because they encourage us to explore and discover

individual stories which present a more rounded view of the Kinder's lives as both positive and negative aspects of the transports are present within the narrative on display within the garden.

To date, there have been over 2,000 memorial roses dedicated at the Centre and each one represents an individual's or family's story. Out of the 2,000 roses found in the garden only around twenty roses directly remember the Kindertransports. These roses preserve memory of the transports because they have been dedicated to Kinder by members of their former foster families or by extended family members. Kinder have also dedicated roses to their parents and family members. Likewise, second-generation Kinder have also dedicated roses which remember their parents, their grandparents, and even their great-grandparents. Therefore, there are many different individuals who have dedicated roses to not only remember the Kindertransports but also the Holocaust. The roses not only remember broader family stories which focus on loss, estrangement, separation, and destruction, because the roses dedicated to Kinder are found next to roses dedicated to rescuers and survivors of the death camps as well as those who were murdered in the Holocaust. Moreover, the memorial garden is a space where there is personal engagement from many different perspectives. It is a place where an intergenerational dialogue is created as there is a multiplicity of perspectives presented. This garden is unique because the Centre, an institution, has made room for this memorial yet instead of an institutional narrative a non-institutional memory has taken root. The roses have come to highlight personal, group, and local memories which also demonstrates how there are many different national memories on display from British, to German, to Polish, to Czech, and Austrian.

The roses make us rethink the positive British national narrative of the transports because William Kaczynski's rose, for example, which he dedicated to the Bach and Kaczynski families remembers his cousin Vera Happ who 'tragically [...] had escaped on a Kindertransport [but who later] died of meningitis aged 14, soon after her arrival'.^[4] Likewise, roses dedicated to their family by second-generation Kinder Gerald Stern and Susan Mulroy recall the complexities of the transports. For example, Stern's rose reflects upon how his family's home was destroyed, how his grandfather was taken to Buchenwald concentration camp, and how his father was able to flee to Britain on a Kindertransport. Mulroy's rose, which she and her two brothers have dedicated to her father highlights how her father and his twin sister came to Britain on a Kindertransport but how they were then separated in their host nation. Their father and aunt later discovered that their grandmother had survived the Holocaust. Yet the hope of being reunited was 'never realised' because 'it was impossible for them to travel to Pilsen, and she felt unable to take up the generous offer of a home from [Hans and Hana's] foster mother'.^[5] The Kinder's Czech language also 'lapsed' so they communicated with their grandmother in German'.^[6] The transnational narrative is presented by these two roses because the Kindertransports are placed within the wider context of the Holocaust, a context often overlooked by the British national narrative. The personal stories behind the roses bring into focus the more negative stories of rescue and adaptation yet they also show how the Kindertransports are part of broader family histories. Therefore, the Kindertransports are connected to other stories which end in murder and total loss. For many of the Kinder never saw their parents again. Many second and third generations of Kinder also reflect upon the family that they never knew.

This sense of loss is emphasised further by the roses dedicated from the Kinder themselves to their families. For example, Otto Deutsch's story behind his rose remembers how he never said goodbye to his father and how he later travelled to Mali Trostinec where his family were

murdered and said Kaddish.^[7] Harry Bibring's rose remembers how his mother was left by herself to organise his father's funeral. Harry's father suffered a heart attack in a van when his father was sent to a concentration camp.^[8] Bernard Grünberg's rose also reflects upon loss because his mother had to give consent for Bernard to leave on a Kindertransport without his father's support as he was in Buchenwald concentration camp at the time. Bernard then explains how his father was released just before he left for Britain and how his 'father managed to get on board [the train] and travel with [him] for about 20 miles until [they] reached the Dutch boarder'.^[9]

Memory of the Kindertransports therefore lives on due to the garden and this special space also remembers the stories which have been marginalized by the British national narrative as many of the roses remember the Kinder's parents, siblings and extended families.

[1]James M. Smith, 'Introduction' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. xii.

[2]Hana Eardley née Kohn, 'The Kohn Family' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. 50.

[3]Michael Attenborough, 'Helga and Irene Bejach' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. 10.

[4]William Kaczynski, 'Bach and Kaczynski families' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), pp. 93-94.

[5]Susan Mulroy, 'The Kohns and Humbergers of Pilsen' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. 51.

[6]Mulroy, 'The Kohns and Humbergers of Pilsen', p. 51.

[7]Otto Deutsch, 'Deutsch Family' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), pp. 45-46.

[8]Harry Bibring, 'Lea Ester Bibring and Anna Cormuss' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. 14.

[9]Bernard Grünberg, 'Grünberg Family' in David Brown (ed.), *Behind the Rose: Stories Behind the Roses Dedicated in the Holocaust Centre's Memorial Gardens* (The Holocaust Centre: Newark, 2011), p. 76.