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The emergence of the Kindertransport in Prague: the Barbican Mission to the Jews, a unique endeavour

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On 14 March 1939, a day before the German troops marched into Prague, an aircraft carrying twenty children took off from Prague's Ruzyně Airport bound for Croydon, south of London. This was one but certainly not the first of the several expeditions, by air and by rail, taking children from Prague to London during the lead up to the Second World War. This flight, which made its way over the Czech border less than twenty-four hours before the Nazis took control of Prague, was arranged by the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (the BCRC) and accompanied by Trevor Chadwick, one of the BCRC team members.¹ Yet, preceding this BCRC-sponsored air transport, several earlier planeloads of children, arranged by the Barbican Mission to the Jews (the BMJ) organization, left Prague throughout the period between January and March 1939. The children aboard these flights were attended by the Reverends Isaac Emmanuel Davidson, the director of the BMJ in London, and William Edward Wallner, the BMJ representative in Prague. After the Nazi army took possession of Czechoslovakia, Ruzyně Airport was turned into a military base of the Luftwaffe.

Over the following months, after the Nazi takeover of Prague in March 1939, as flights could no longer be arranged and trains were the only possible means to get children out of Prague, seven train transports departed from Prague's Wilson railway station, Wilsonovo Nádraží, bound for Liverpool Street Station in London. A few hundred youngsters were sent across Europe from Prague to London, within the framework of this unique humanitarian effort, which involved a platform of activists from different niches of life. This scheme later became known as the Czech Kindertransport ("children's transport" in German), a series of efforts to bring mainly Jewish children to safety in Britain before the outbreak of the Second World War. This exceptional endeavour was the work of

¹ See Trevor Chadwick's account in Karen Gershon, ed., *We came as Children: A Collective Autobiography of Refugees* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 22–5.

numerous activists, many of whom, besides the well-known Nicholas Winton, have been overlooked and under-researched. Their coverage in the published literature is negligible. They remained at the margins of the Prague narrative. One of these less documented organizations and yet a significant player in this scheme, the Barbican Mission to the Jews (BMJ), is the focus of this paper. The story of this remarkable and at the same time controversial group has gone almost completely unnoticed in scholarly research. The relevant information has been briefly mentioned in only some of the scholarly literature but can be traced in contemporary documents and archival records. For years, the topic of those British missionaries involved in the Kindertansport did not raise any public interest. This chapter in history had been left untouched for decades.

The last decade has seen the publication of several academic works on the Kindertransport with particular reference to the controversies that emerged over the activities of the BMJ. According to these scholarly literatures, criticism was targeted against the BMJ and even more so against Winton. The latter was held responsible for failing to find Jewish homes for dozens of children. It appears that prominent leaders in Anglo-Jewry strongly disapproved of Jewish children being baptized by the BMJ, claiming that proselytizing was being carried out under the cloak of humanitarianism.²

The BMJ, a small evangelical and interdenominational mission organization, was seeking to promote the propagation of the Christian Gospel among the Jews. It was devoted not only to propagating Christianity among the Jews but also to converting them to Christianity. Its declared intention was “To proclaim the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Jews.”³ The BMJ openly declared that it planned to take Jewish children out of Prague, bring them to Britain, and raise them as Christians: “It is our first and foremost intention to give these children a true Christian home and give them an opportunity to know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour”.⁴ Their missionary work originated in London during the early part of the nineteenth century and rapidly expanded to major cities

2 Paula Hill, “Anglo Jewry and the Refugee Children, 1938–1945” (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2002), 86; Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938–1945*, vol. 10 (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2012), 212; Jennifer Craig-Norton, *The Kindertransport: Contesting Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 78.

3 Barbican Mission to the Jews (BMJ), *Emmanuel’s Witness* (April 1938–March 1939), title pages.

4 *Ibid.* (Jan. 1939), 1845.

on the Continent, especially in Eastern Europe. The Mission was named after the Barbican area of London because of its Jewish community at the time. This organization, it appears, managed to get about a hundred children out of Prague and arranged for their safe arrival in London. It was committed to caring for the children, providing them with education, and giving them a Christian home for as long as needed. Against the backdrop of Hitler's rise to power, the Christian missionary station in Prague had flourished. Many Jews, many of them assimilated, were attracted to Christian religious practices. Jews in prewar Prague considered the option of converting to Christianity in order to get out of Prague. It was during the period between 1933 and 1938 that the flow of refugees into Czechoslovakia rapidly increased, but it was not until the Nazi occupation of the Sudetenland in October 1938 that a major refugee crisis emerged. As the Sudetenland, the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, was ceded to Nazi Germany under the terms of the Munich Agreement, thousands of Sudeten Germans, Jews who were living in the Sudetenland and Jews who had previously arrived from Germany and Austria, Social Democrats, and Communists were forced to leave their homes and most of their belongings in haste and go to Prague.⁵

A little more than a month after this annexation, on 9–10 November 1938, nationwide violent anti-Jewish pogroms took place throughout Nazi Germany. This event later became known as Kristallnacht (“Night of Broken Glass” in German). Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues were smashed and demolished, some thirty thousand Jews were arrested, and close to a hundred were murdered. Then, on 15 March 1939, Nazi Germany invaded the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia where they established the “Protectorate”. A few months later, in September, German forces invaded Poland, precipitating the Second World War.

Nearly a year had passed since the infamous Munich Agreement, during which many dramatic political changes and upheavals had taken place. The agreement had brought the First Czechoslovak Republic to its end. When, six months later, Prague was taken over by German troops, the Second Republic of Czechoslovakia also ceased to exist.⁶ With the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Protectorate of Bohemia and

5 Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 143–5.

6 Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia*, trans. Derek and Marzia Paton (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 246.

Moravia was established and the Nazis took their first measures against Jews and those who opposed their regime and did not comply with their new decrees and regulations.⁷ Many Jews, non-Jews, Nazi opponents, and Social Democrats, some of them deeply rooted in Prague and many who became refugees in Prague, found themselves trapped in a situation that called their future into question.

In fact, by 1933 and the Nazi rise to power, Czechoslovakia had become a major destination for many Jewish but also non-Jewish emigrants from Germany. In search of safe haven, thousands of Jews and non-Jews crossed the long border with Germany into Czechoslovakia. German was widely spoken in Czechoslovakia, making it an attractive destination with no language barrier.⁸ It was within this setting – the Nazi rise to power in Germany, the takeover of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and the resulting refugee crisis in Prague – that the Czech Kindertransport developed.

These dates and events have had far-reaching consequences and implications for what later became known as the children's transports. Kindertransport is the widely accepted term for the large-scale operation responsible for the removal of about ten thousand unaccompanied and mostly Jewish children from Nazi-occupied countries to safety in Britain. All children's transports were brought to an end with the eruption of the war. The Czech Kindertransport was an initiative that emerged within the context of the mounting refugee crisis in Prague and against the urgent need to bring Jewish children to safety in Britain, independently of the transports organized from Berlin and Vienna. The Prague transports appear to have been unique in terms of their circumstances, scope, and key actors. Despite the fact that they have been commonly presented as part of the centrally organized large-scale Kindertransport from Nazi-occupied territory to Britain, evidence proves that the Prague scheme originated from a different wide-scale response to the refugee crisis.

According to the official numbers published in 1944 by the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, the figure of ten thousand children included 9,354 reported to have arrived in Britain from Germany and Austria.⁹ A much smaller number of children was estimated to have arrived

7 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 97.

8 Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner, *The Jews of Czechoslovakia II: Historical Studies and Surveys* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984), 56.

9 John Presland (Gladys Bendit), "A Great Adventure: The Story of the Refugee

in Britain via the humanitarian scheme set up in Prague. The figures presented by the BCRC indicate that 669 children were sent from Prague to Britain under their auspices.¹⁰ This number did not include some additional children whose departure from Prague was arranged by other agencies. All in all, the number of children who were sent out of Prague constituted a relatively small fraction of the total number of children sent to Britain.

Sending children on the Kindertransport to England was believed to be the best solution under the circumstances at the time. All parties involved understood this to be a temporary measure for a short period only. In the autumn of 1938 Prague became a destination for refugees arriving from within and outside Czechoslovakia. The flood of refugees created a major emergency in Prague. Few organizations and committees were operating in the area. Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers were providing aid to the increasing number of refugees, mainly adults. At the time no organization took responsibility for the welfare of endangered children.

According to the 1930 Census in Czechoslovakia, the estimated number of Jews living in Prague at the time was 35,000. By the end of 1938, the Jewish population of Prague had almost doubled as several thousands of Jewish refugees had been arriving first from Germany, then from Austria, and later from the Sudetenland (the German-speaking area of Czechoslovakia). The estimated number of refugees in Prague stood at around 40,000, 15,000 from Germany and Austria and the rest, some 25,000, from the Sudetenland.¹¹

As 1938 was drawing to its end, some relief aid workers already in Prague were desperately trying to deal with the mounting refugee crisis. Several activists had just appeared on the scene. It was in mid-December 1938 that a British Unitarian Church minister, the Reverend Herbert John McLachlan, arrived in Prague at the request of his colleagues to assist with humanitarian work.¹² During his month-long stay in Prague, McLachlan kept a diary in which he documented the humanitarian crisis there. On 15 December

Children's Movement, July 1944, ACC/2793/03/04/04-1, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter, LMA), London.

10 "Statement of Children Brought over up to the 1st September, 1939", October 1939, 0.7cz118, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem; Jewish Emigration and Children Transport to England, 043a, Archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague

11 Pamela Shatzkes, *Holocaust and Rescue: Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo-Jewry 1938-1945* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 66.

12 Chava Revell Kotzin, "The Diary of a Refugee Aid Worker: Reverend H. J. McLachlan in Czechoslovakia, 1938-39", *Journal of Holocaust Education* 8, no. 2 (1999): 49.

1938 he wrote: "One hopes that the efforts made to rescue particularly the Jewish children will soon be mighty successful".¹³ Two weeks later he became a witness to the baptizing of Jewish children. It was around the same time that Nicholas Winton, a young British stockbroker, joined his friend Martin Blake in Prague. Blake, a master from Westminster School in London, was an associate of the BCRC, engaged in relief aid for refugees in Prague. At about the same time, the Reverend Isaac Emmanuel Davidson, the director of the BMJ, travelled to Prague and joined his fellow pastor, the Reverend William Edward Wallner. As the BMJ representative in Prague, Wallner was conducting missionary services and arranging the baptism of Jewish children.¹⁴ In his diary for 30 December 1938, McLachlan referred to the baptizing of Jewish children within the premises of the Czech Unitarian headquarters. Although he made no direct reference to the BMJ, it is obvious that it was the BMJ performing these baptisms, as they were the only organization converting Jewish children to Christianity. McLachlan mentioned "Pastor Wallno" (perhaps a typing error) as the officiant.¹⁵

The BMJ's initiative received little attention in the context of the Prague endeavour. While there has been a growing awareness and interest among historians and the general public in the efforts made by the BCRC team, Nicholas Winton in particular, the BMJ contribution to the Prague effort is not as widely known as it ought to be. The BCRC, originally formed to help Sudeten Social Democrat refugees and their families, was not the only organization occupied with the effort to get the children out of Prague. Evidence emerging from the various sources supports the conjecture that besides Winton, and even before his arrival in Prague, several organizations, committees, and humanitarian activists, some working independently and some as part of organizations or funds, were in Prague. Only later would they become involved in helping Jewish families and Jewish children out of Prague, and some months passed before the children's transports took shape.

Once it became clear that the problem of the children required an immediate solution, a network of humanitarian aid workers evolved. Whether they were individuals or groups of activists, politically, socially, or religiously motivated, they cooperated among themselves, apparently regardless of affiliation. Different Christian denominations, such as the Christadelphians, the Society of Friends (the Quakers), the Methodists,

¹³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴ BMJ, *Emmanuel's Witness* (Dec. 1938): 167–70.

¹⁵ Kotzin, "The Diary of a Refugee Aid Worker", 67.

the Unitarians, and the BMJ, were all operating in Prague. Collaboration among these different faith groups, who were working with secular committees at the same time, eventually created a huge advantage. Despite the diverse agendas of the many groups and individuals involved and regardless of the unfavourable conditions, it was their shared commitment to the children's cause that made their voluntary aid work effective.

A great number of records disclose the efforts of individuals and organizations that apart from or alongside Winton got heavily involved in this operation. Winton and the BCRC team are well documented in the Prague and London archives, both being the primary locations for this topic. Much less information is provided on the members of the BMJ. Records of the BMJ can be found at the head office of Christian Witness to Israel (CWI, the BMJ's successor organization) located in Eynsham, Oxfordshire. This fairly small archive maintains and preserves a unique collection of books, journals, reports, registers, and various other documents concerning BMJ activities throughout their years of operation.

One significant source is the BMJ's monthly journal *Emmanuel's Witness*. This religious publication, dating back to the early 1900s, contains annual reports of the BMJ, essays on Jewish topics, and documentation of the mission's activities. A vast amount of information emerges from these volumes. Davidson and Wallner's missions to Prague were documented in its 1938 and 1939 editions.¹⁶ The CWI still has the majority of the former children's files from the time of their arrival at the BMJ homes in 1939. These files comprise the personal documents of each particular child, including certificates, photographs, reports, letters, and the child's personal history.

Another important source of information on the children brought to Britain by the BMJ is their Register of Children, a large notebook with alphabetical lists of the children's names. This register also provides relevant details such as dates and places connected with the children's history. These details are essential for our understanding of the circumstances that made the children's departure from Prague possible.¹⁷

One other register book, the *Register of Baptisms in the Parish of Christ Church, Chislehurst*, is lodged with Bromley Historic Collections in the archives of the London borough of Bromley. This register contains only a partial list of the baptisms of children who were brought by the BMJ

¹⁶ See e.g. BMJ, *Emmanuel's Witness* (Dec. 1938): 167–70.

¹⁷ BMJ, Register of Children in "Seven Trees", "Mount Zion", "Naomi House", CWI Archive, Eynsham.

from Prague in 1939.¹⁸ As the period covered by this register is 1939–42, it is clear that a substantial number of children were baptized only some months after their arrival in London: that is, not many had been baptized in Prague before leaving for Britain. Converting children to Christianity required a parental consent form. As parents stayed behind, they had to sign a notarized letter, stating that they wished their children to be raised in the Christian faith. In view of the deteriorating situation in Prague, parents were ready to send their children off to the Barbican’s residential homes in Britain. Numerous British humanitarians, among them the missionaries, were responding to parents, anxious first to get their children out of Prague and hoping to follow later. But most parents never managed to get out of Prague. Before 1938, the Jews of Prague, many from the upper and middle classes, were gradually being integrated into secular society. Secularization, acculturation, interfaith marriages, and orientation towards German culture led to widespread assimilation of the Jews. Many children born to mixed couples or to assimilated families were raised as non-Jews. Thus, for many parents, the baptizing of their children was not a major problem, as long as they could get them to a safe haven.

Apart from the previously mentioned sources on the BMJ, the most compelling and informative account is that of Lucy Davidson, Emmanuel Davidson’s wife. This memoir, written during 1938–42, provides first-hand evidence of the BMJ’s initiative in bringing the children from Prague and tending to them in south-east London. Lucy entitled her account “The Houses of Refuge in England”.

Only in 1989, on the fiftieth anniversary of the children’s arrival, was this remarkable narrative published in an edition by the Reverend Dr. John Ross, the former head of CWI. Ross added some comments to the original text and also introduced changes in the title wording: the new title was inspired by a line from Jeremiah 29:11, “For a future and a hope”, and read *For a Future and a Hope: The Story of the Houses of Refuge in Chislehurst*, a story that touches on many of the aspects and issues involved in sending children away from their familiar world and placing them in an unfamiliar reality.¹⁹

As this story unfolds, we realize that it was a collaboration between the BCRC and the BMJ that resulted in the first flights that took children

18 *Register of Baptisms in the Parish of Christ Church, Chislehurst* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1939–1942), P/92C/1/1, London Borough of Bromley Archives.

19 Lucy V. Davidson, *For a Future and a Hope: The Story of the Houses of Refuge in Chislehurst*, ed. John S. Ross (Chislehurst: Christian Witness to Israel, 1989).

from Prague to London. It is likely that in some cases this collaboration also resulted in train transports. Some of the children travelled by train and were taken to the BMJ headquarters in London, later to be settled in Chislehurst.

The very first flights departing from Prague, on 12 January 1939, consisted entirely of Jewish children under the supervision of William Wallner. Two Dutch Douglas aircraft of KLM, the Royal Dutch Airline, were made available. Nicholas Winton was on the scene at the time of the children's departure, in his capacity as an associate of the BCRC. In his report of that day, in a scrapbook entitled "Saving the Children, Czechoslovakia 1939", Winton wrote: The first party of children today left Prague. This was fixed up by the Barbican Mission to the Jews in London and transport was arranged by us. Being the first lot of kids to leave Czechoslovakia it aroused much attention and cinema men and journalists were very much in evidence²⁰. "The event was indeed extensively covered and documented by journalists, reporters, and photographers. Newsreel cameras were filming the children parting from their parents before take-off. Unique silent, black-and-white footage lasting 2½ minutes perfectly captures the moment. The cameraman's report reads "Today on the aerodrome of Ruzyn nearly 30 children of refugees took leave of their parents. Two Dutch Douglas airplanes brought them to Rotterdam and from there to London. This is the charitable work of the Barbican Mission of London, under the direction of Rev. Wallner. He intends to give 60 children altogether a new home in London where they will remain till their 18th year."²¹

A second group left Prague two months later, on 8 March, a week before Prague was taken over by the Nazis. This time the flight was arranged and accompanied by Emmanuel Davidson. A travel document was issued by the "British Committee London, Representative Praha", including the names of twenty children and their accompanying adult, Davidson.²² These flights had been planned long before by the BCRC's Doreen Warriner together with Davidson and Wallner of the BMJ. This was one of

20 Nicholas Winton, Report, January 12, 1939, "Saving the Children, Czechoslovakia 1939", o.7cz118, YVA.

21 "Kindertransport Jewish children leave Prague on January 11, 1939", Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, RG-60.0583, 245, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

22 "Výprava do Anglie letadlem dne 8 března 1939" (Expedition to England by air on the date March 8, 1939), Židovský vystěhovalectví Transporty děti do Anglie – Jewish Emigration and Children Transport to England, o43.a, Archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague.

many collaborations that emerged in Prague during that time. Back in late November 1938, Miss Warriner, by then head of the BCRC in Prague, was in correspondence with Davidson concerning the necessary arrangements for the departure of endangered children from Prague to London.²³

Sending the children from Prague to London was just the beginning of a long journey. Once they arrived in Britain, the young travellers first had to complete entry formalities including a medical inspection. The BMJ managed to obtain official entry permits stamped by the Home Office and took it upon themselves to organize and settle the children into new accommodation.²⁴ These devout Christians also arranged for the children's education, providing them with care and support in their daily life. Following strict Christian beliefs, the BMJ ensured that the children would grow up with their Christian values.

Emmanuel and Lucy Davidson found homes for Jewish children in suburban south-east London, mostly in Chislehurst. That is the place that bore witness to the BMJ story. On Lubbock Road, where several properties housed the Jewish children, a memorial plaque is displayed on a wooden bench. A token of gratitude to the Davidsons for their endeavour in bringing Jewish children from Europe to Britain in 1939, the text inscribed on the plaque reads: "Rev. & Mrs. I. E. Davidson and Friends, gratefully remembered by all the BMJ children (68 of them rescued from Central Europe 1939)". The plaque was placed on the bench in 1989 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the children's arrival.²⁵

The children were initially placed on the premises of the parish rooms at Christ Church, 40 Lubbock Road. Later, when more space was required and as more children arrived, the newcomers were all moved into a larger house next door, Seven Trees, 44 Lubbock Road. Lamas, a First World War hospital and the former home of Sir John Lubbock, became available for the accommodation of the children further down the road, at 103 Lubbock Road. The BMJ renamed this property "Mount Zion". "Naomi Home", at 71 Tressillian Road in Brockley, not far from Chislehurst, was also made available to house the children.²⁶

Driven by missionary zeal, the BMJ's conversionary activities were sparking forceful criticism and resentment within the Jewish community

23 Doreen Warriner letter to the Rev. Davidson, 26 Nov. 1938, HO 294/53, The National Archives, Kew.

24 Davidson, *For a Future*, 6.

25 Joanna Friel and Adam Swaine, *Secret Chislehurst* (StroudAmberley Publishing, 2015); "Houses of Refuge in Chislehurst", *The Cockpit* (Chislehurst Society) 90 (Winter 2008): 90.

26 BMJ, *Emmanuel's Witness* (June 1939): 42.

in Britain and among many of the Jewish leaders. Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld and his colleagues on the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council (CRREC) strongly objected to the BMJ's practice of baptizing Jewish children. Besides Jewish orthodox organizations that firmly opposed the actions of the BMJ, Christians such as the Reverend Dr. James Parkes, in the Church of England, stood up against the BMJ. Parkes, who was also a historian and a social activist, was known to have been involved in the rescue of Jewish refugees from Europe and getting them to Britain. He tried to prevent Czech Jewish children from being baptized by missionaries such as the BMJ.²⁷ Furthermore, residents of Chislehurst raised objections to the Davidsons' conduct. With the common prejudice of the time, they were deeply concerned about the presence of Czech immigrants in their vicinity. And yet, the BMJ were providing homes for Jewish children at the time when demand for foster families was extremely high, many of them already taken by the children who had arrived earlier from Germany and Austria.

As already mentioned, an exchange of letters between Warriner and Davidson concerning the children's travel arrangements sheds light on the need and urgency to get children out of Prague. The letter from Warriner to Davidson of 26 November 1938 cited earlier reads: "Dear Mr. Davidson, Many thanks for your letter. Your plans for the 50 children will give new hope to many families who need it most. I have talked to Mr. W. E. Wallner and all is in order at this end."²⁸ This was when the majority of the humanitarian activists had not yet arrived in Prague. It was eighty years ago that Warriner, a young assistant lecturer at University College London, gave up her academic career, cancelled her trip to the United States on a Rockefeller Fellowship, and travelled to Prague instead, where she became engaged in humanitarian aid.

It is beyond doubt that the children's departure from Prague was made possible thanks to the massive response generated by voluntary aid workers, whether religiously motivated or socially concerned activists. Indeed, beyond a response, these volunteers co-operated among themselves and took the initiative and the responsibility to solve the problem of the endangered children in Prague. The BMJ, a religiously committed group, was beating the odds in the name of its faith.

27 David Cesarani, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Towards a Taxonomy of Rescuers in a 'Bystander' Country – Britain 1933–45", in *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation*, ed. David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 46.

28 Warriner to Davidson, 26 Nov. 1938, HO 294/53, The National Archives.

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, to understand the special circumstances under which the children's transports took shape in Prague, and secondly to underline one group involved in this Prague endeavour, namely the BMJ. My point of departure in this paper was the assumption that the Kindertransports from Prague developed within the context of the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis and the intensifying concern over the plight of endangered children. Today, eighty years after the commencement of this rescue operation, it is clear that this was not just a simple heroic adventure story.

This rescue operation has often been referred to in the literature as a "journey to safety" or "children being sent away to safety in England". This "journey" began with children's separation from parents and home, and further on with their displacement and adjustment difficulties in England. For most of the children this was a never-ending "journey". By the end of the war, they were beginning to find out about the fate of their parents, to realize that they were not coming back, and to cope with changed parents and separation again – this time from what had been their home for several years.

Children arriving in England on the Kindertransport, having just been separated from their families, turned into refugees from one day to the next. They lost their sense of belonging, they experienced a break in the continuity of their life and identity. Children arriving in England on the Kindertransport had to adjust to a totally unfamiliar world while at the same time coping with separation from everything that was familiar.

There has been a considerable amount of academic research and popular coverage of the Kindertransports, more on the thousands of children from Germany and Austria and less on the few hundreds of children from Prague. The Prague effort turned out to have been unique on account of the humanitarian activists involved. It was the substantial number of voluntary activists who were instrumental in getting the children out of Prague. The BMJ, one of the less-documented groups, played a key role in this scheme, which deserves to be acknowledged and further researched.

More than any other person, the well-known Nicholas Winton has been identified with the Czech Kindertransport. Winton received worldwide recognition as the organizer of the children's transports from Prague and has been the subject of many publications and films. Half a century after the actual events, Winton has become an icon. His story as presented in literature and the media has overshadowed the significant role played by British and some American volunteers. The BCRC members, the

Unitarians, the Quakers, the BMJ, and other aid workers were arranging the exit of transports from Prague. On the occasion of Emmanuel Davidson's ninetieth birthday, in 1978, and twelve years after Lucy had died, a special edition of Lucy's memoir (mentioned earlier) was published. This edition included letters written by some of the former children, one of whom recorded: "Finally, on behalf of each and every one of us we wish to say 'Thank you' for the discipline and high moral standards to which we were brought up and which have no doubt borne fruit in all our lives in one way or another."²⁹

The conversion of Jewish children to Christianity in the prewar period was and still is one of the most controversial issues connected with the need to get children out of Nazi-occupied Europe and bring them to safety in Britain. Naturally, the Jewish standpoint on the subject differed completely from the evangelical Christian one. Within the Jewish community, Orthodox rabbis in particular regarded missionary work as exploitation of the Kindertransport children and their parents in the name of Christianity. In contrast, the BMJ saw their primary mission as propagating the Christian Gospel among the Jews: therefore, the humanitarian action of saving the children and helping their parents was undertaken for that reason.

29 Lucy V. Davidson, *Houses of Refuge in England* (Chislehurst: Christian Witness to Israel, 1979), n.p., copy in private collection.