

KINDERTRANSPORT EVACUEES

Rob Forsyth

FRANK STEINER



Willi, Frank, Paula and Richard Steiner in 1938

Frank was born in Vienna in 1922 into a Catholic family with Jewish ancestors. His father was a High Court Judge and his mother was a linguist. He and his brother went to a school in Vienna which was founded by Benedictine Irish monks in 1158, but was always known as *Schottengymnasium* i.e. Scottish Grammar School; clearly in 1158 one Celt was obviously much like another! The school's alumni included the last Emperor of Austria and the founder of the Austrian Socialist Party. When Nazis closed the school in 1938 Frank's elder brother, Willi, left to study law in England.

Frank takes up the story 'I arrived in this country in early December 1938 on the first train to leave Vienna as part of the *Kindertransport*. This was a very generous gesture on the part of the British government. Preceding this, on 9 November, the so called *Kristallnacht* (night of broken glass) had ushered in a wave of persecution of the Jews and, as a result, the British government announced that both Jewish and non-Aryan children under 17 would be allowed into the UK without passports or visas for education and training prior to emigration to countries of permanent settlement. Given the reluctance of most countries to let in any refugees at all, this was not only unique but the speed of operations was impressive; the system was up and running less than four weeks after the outrage that provoked it. I suspect that the fact that the then Home Secretary was a Quaker may have had something to do with it. The outbreak of war scotched every idea of re-emigration. By the outbreak of war in 1939 some 9,400 *Kindertransport* had arrived of which about 4,000 eventually joined HM Forces. This may have been responsible for the post-war Attlee government deciding to let us remain in the country and eventually qualify for naturalisation. Nearly 90% were Jewish by faith and were adopted into Jewish families. The prospects were less clear for the 12% of other faiths. On arrival we were lodged in holiday camps on the East Coast and gradually placed into families, schools and hostels.'

Of his departure from Vienna Frank recalls 'Like so much of the autumn and winter of 1938-39 my otherwise good memory has left blanks. I can remember only highlights. In a nice old fashioned way I knelt for my Father's blessing the night before and it is probably the only time I could see tears in his eyes. When my parents took me to the station by taxi, they were not allowed on the platform and when the train pulled out of the station I leant out of the window to try and see them. I can't remember if I did, but I do remember calling out into the dark "I am coming back". That was foolish at the time but perhaps I sensed that the Nazi nightmare would not last, and that I would eventually regain a respected position in Vienna as a frequent business visitor, holder of a senior Austrian decoration, and as a member for over 50 years of the *Kathpress*, the press agency owned and run by the Austrian bench of bishops.'

Frank's parents were subsequently arrested by the Nazis and were taken to Auschwitz. They did not survive.

The head of the Benedictine School in Belmont Abbey School, near Hereford, had offered two places for refugees. Frank got one of these places and after five terms at the school, took matriculation by which time war had broken out. Being in the phase between schoolboy and student, he was interned in the Isle of Man for 15 months. The Isle of Man was used as an internment camp for about 70,000 refugees who were technically enemy aliens, but who had more reason to hate the Nazis than even the British. Around 10,000 finished up in the British forces. Frank was released after volunteering for army service, but was found to be medically unfit.

He went to London, joined his brother in digs and enrolled for a part-time course as an external student of London University, where he took a BSc (Economics), the final examination of which was interrupted by a bomb. He became a fire watcher in 1941 and was trained as a fire-fighter. In 2010 he still sleeps with his face under his pillow, a habit acquired when, during air raids, even in houses not hit by bombs, one's face and eyes might get scarred from flying glass from blasts anywhere in the neighbourhood. He also got a job in food distribution as part of the war effort and in 1945 volunteered again for Army service. He was not accepted as he failed the physical and was drafted into the Civil Service instead. He ended up in the Board of Trade. Because of his ability to speak several languages fluently he was seconded in 1948 to the British delegation attached to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation. The OEEC was an intergovernmental body charged with administering the US initiative, called the Marshall Plan, for the reconstruction of Europe.

After leaving the OEEC he worked in the oil industry for nine years, but when the company folded, he landed a job in the City with what eventually became the largest stock-broking firm in London and in due course became a partner.

Frank finally arrived in Deddington when he married Rosemary Oldham, who was from an old Warwickshire farming family. Rosemary's aunt Vida Stanley (née Oldham) had lived in Deddington for many years on the corner of Chapman's Lane and the main road. After her husband's death in 1954 Vida sold her house but kept part of the property on which she built a smaller house further down Chapman's Lane. Rosemary inherited this property in 1975. Twenty-five years later, after Rosemary died, Frank converted the garage and an extension into his flat and his daughter and family now live in the main house.

Since 1955 Frank had been a part-time journalist as UK correspondent of an Austrian press agency and for over 20 years a member of the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee of the Catholic Union of Great Britain. For the former work he received the Austrian Insignia of Honour in Gold, roughly equivalent to an OBE and for the latter he was made a Knight of the Papal Order of St Gregory.

In 1987 he retired from the City and in 2007 he retired from all voluntary and other functions outside 'the village' and retained only two activities based locally. He was one of the committee which took over producing the *Deddington News* when Norman and Angela Stone handed this over, and early in 2010 he received the Long Service Medal as a volunteer with the Thames Valley Police.

Editor's note: Frank's recollections are quoted verbatim from his brother Willi's autobiographical account of his family. I also drew on Wendy Burrow's resumé of his life from the exhibition 'Keeping the Home Fires Burning' held in the Parish Church in June 2010.

MARIANNE ELSLEY

(1923-2009)

Marianne was born in 1923 in Rostock, Germany. She was still only 15 when, in January 1939, her parents, Franz and Edith Josephy, placed their only child on the SS *Manhattan* (bound from Hamburg to Southampton) to seek safety in England. She never saw her parents again because they died in Auschwitz.

On arrival in England she was taken in by Quakers who were complete strangers but took her extremely warmly into their family and cared for her as of their own.



She married and, for ten years, assisted her husband Ralph with his appointment as a Housemaster at Bedford Modern School. They had two children. After the family moved to Banbury in 1970, she was secretary at Overthorpe Hall School for 20 years. After moving to Deddington in 1973 she was President of the Women's Institute and editor of the *Deddington News* amongst many interests. Her articles on both gardening and cooking were a regular *DN* feature.

She wrote three books about her escape from the Nazis: *A Chance in Six Million* (1989); a tribute to her parents by way of a collection of some 80 letters from them, *Voices in the Night* (1995); and, about her life, *Over the Years* (2004).

Acknowledgement: Christopher Hall's 'Well Remembered' obituary for Marianne in the February 2010 *Deddington News*.