

Harwich honours Jewish children who fled Nazis

Harriet Sherwood

The last time Dame Stephanie Shirley, 88, stood on the quayside in Harwich, she was a frightened five-year-old called Vera Buchtal.

She had just stepped off a boat that had brought her and hundreds of other Jewish children to the UK from the horrors of Nazi Europe. Shirley was back at the Essex port yesterday to unveil a Kindertransport memorial statue commemorating the rescue of 10,000 unaccompanied children.

Her memories of the two-and-a-half-day journey to Harwich were mundane, she told an assembly of Kindertransport veterans, their descendants and local dignitaries. "The lost doll, rather than the lost home; the little boy who kept being sick; sleeping on sheets of corrugated cardboard; the labels round our necks."

She told the Guardian: "Since then I've reflected how things might have been different if I had not been put on a train. And how things are different because I was put on the train - how it gave me resilience and strength."

The first Kindertransport train left Berlin on 1 December 1938, and the first train from Vienna departed nine days later. The rescue mission ended with the outbreak of war. It has been



'I tried to imagine the storm of emotions these children must have felt'

Ian Wolter
Sculptor

◀ *The unveiling ceremony for the Kindertransport memorial, Safe Haven, in Harwich*

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID LEVENE / THE GUARDIAN



◀ *Dame Stephanie Shirley: 'I wish today's refugees were welcomed with the same kindness'*

▼ *Bob Kirk and his wife, Ann, were both evacuated in the Kindertransport and married after the war*



"It was a heavy responsibility - and a huge privilege - to create this memorial. I tried to imagine the storm of emotions these children must have felt arriving in a foreign country, separated from their parents, not speaking the language," said Wolter.

The Harwich memorial was paid for by donations, including a sum from the German government. Miguel Berger, the German ambassador to the UK, told the ceremony's audience that the memorial was a reminder of the need to be "vigilant

against the rise of antisemitism, prejudice and tyranny".

Bob Kirk, 97, arrived in Harwich from Germany at the age of 13 in May 1939, six months after the Kristallnacht pogrom, when Jews were rounded up and killed and synagogues destroyed.

"I had very mixed feelings: excited and scared," he said. "I wasn't very well prepared. But it saved my life and gave me the possibility of a new life and a new family."

Kirk's parents were deported to Riga and killed. After the war he married another Kindertransportee, Ann, and the couple had two children. Both are active in Holocaust education.

Shirley is now one of the UK's foremost philanthropists. She, her sister and her parents moved from Germany to Austria in the 1930s after her father lost his job.

In the face of the Nazi threat, Shirley's mother took the heartbreaking decision to put her daughters on a Kindertransport train to London. The family was reunited after the war.

"I was very lucky that my family survived," she said. "I wish that today's refugees were welcomed with the same kindness we were shown."

NHS vacancies hit new record high at almost 10% of workforce

Denis Campbell
Health policy editor

The number of posts lying vacant across the NHS in England has reached a "staggering" new record high of 132,139 - almost one tenth of its entire workforce.

The total of unfilled posts had risen dramatically by the end of June from the 105,855 vacancies that existed three months earlier, new quarterly personnel figures show.

NHS leaders said the huge number of empty posts, revealed today by NHS Digital, showed why the health service was in a state of deepening crisis, with patients facing long waits for almost every type of care.

The previous highest number of vacancies for full-time equivalent staff was 111,864, in June 2019.

The latest number of vacant posts represent 9.7% of the NHS's planned staffing levels - a new high. As recently as March 2021, the number of vacancies recorded was 76,082.

"Today's vacancy figures are staggering and further proof that the NHS simply doesn't have enough staff to deliver everything being asked of it", said Saffron Cordery, the interim chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents all health service trusts in England. As a result, she added, "many staff face unsustainable workloads and burnout".

The headline total of 132,139 includes vacancies for 46,828 nurses - the highest number on record. That represents a vacancy rate of 11.8%, the highest since the 12.1% recorded in September 2019. There were also 10,582 vacancies for doctors at the end of June - a 7.3% rate.

The Department of Health and Social Care was approached for comment.

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