



Left: Ian Wolter in his studio with part of the Harwich statue; (above) the Kindertransport document of Vera Buchthal, who later changed her name and became Dame Stephanie Shirley (below)

## A NEW STATUE TO MARK HARWICH'S ROLE IN THE KINDERTRANSPORT STORY

The Essex port will be the site for a new memorial and educational project in recognition of the welcome it extended to thousands of children fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe, reports **Peter Watts**

**T**he two memorials for the Kindertransport at London's Liverpool Street have created an indelible link in the public mind between the station and the arrival in Britain of 10,000 Jewish children fleeing Europe between 1938 and 1940. But these statues do not tell the whole story. The vast majority of Kindertransport children arrived by boat, so first touched these shores not at Liverpool Street but at the Essex port of Harwich. Plans are now underway to commemorate the town's important role in the Kindertransport story, and artist Ian Wolter has been commissioned to create a statue to mark this legacy. Organisers hope this memorial will do as much for the public understanding of the Kindertransport as those at Liverpool Street.

"I am delighted to support the Kindertransport memorial for Harwich," says Dame Stephanie Shirley, who arrived in the UK as a Kindertransportee from Vienna in 1939. "It is important to remember Britain's role in the rescue and care of the mainly Jewish children fleeing Nazi Europe. Harwich played an important role in this largest ever recorded migration of children," she says,

adding, that Wolter's memorial should act as "a stimulus for the next generation to learn about the Kindertransport and to support today's child refugees."

Mike Levy, a writer and Holocaust educator, became involved in the Harwich statue campaign when he realised the town was "a gap in the memorial map". While small numbers of children arrived at Southampton, Dover and Croydon Airport, most came into the UK at Harwich, spending their first few weeks in the town looked after by locals and volunteers before going on to central London. There is a string of Kindertransport statues across Europe in Prague, Berlin, Danzig, Vienna and the Hook of Holland, where the boats left mainland Europe. "The Hook of Holland memorial prompted me to think that all the children who

went from there came to Harwich and lived here for months but there was very little to commemorate that," says Levy.

With support from locals, who were keen to see Harwich's role in the Kindertransport commemorated, a

committee of educators, historians and local volunteers approached Wolter, having seen his Children Of Calais sculpture in Saffron Walden, which addresses the plight of contemporary child refugees. His Kindertransport piece will feature five children, modelled from life, who will reflect some of the conflicting emotions the children would have felt on their arrival. Quotes by the children, either from contemporary interviews or taken from memoirs, will be engraved on the memorial, which will be placed on Harwich quayside.

Wolter talks of the "responsibility and privilege" of the work and notes the contemporary resonance: "One of the amazing things about our diverse country is that you don't have to scratch very far back in any family to find they come from somewhere else."

There will also be an audio bench in a specially created 'garden of reflection' and there are plans to place a plaque on the site of nearby Dovercourt holiday camp, where at least 2,000 Kindertransportees stayed in those crucial first weeks.

Levy, who is about to publish a book about the Kindertransport, *Get The Children Out!*, says the memorial will

be used for ongoing Holocaust education work by partner organisations such as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Schools of Sanctuary. "We will be working on creating a set of lessons and educational

resources based on the role of Harwich and Dovercourt. Locals have been very enthusiastic and there has been tremendous support," he says. Fundraising is ongoing but Levy hopes the statue will finally be unveiled in September.

He says the memorial will also raise awareness of the role of the thousands of British volunteers who gave the children welfare and assistance and broadening public knowledge of the Kindertransport. ■

kindertransport-memorial.org. **Peter Watts** is a writer and journalist. He is the author of *Altered States: The Library of Julio Santo Domingo*.

