



# World war II refugees

Subject guide





Quakers in Britain set up a committee to assist people in Germany as soon as Hitler came to power in 1933. They knew from British Quaker staff at the Berlin International Centre, and from contact with German Friends, that there would likely be persecution of various people in society under Hitler, including Jews, pacifists and socialists. The first committee set up in response to this situation was the Germany Emergency Committee, which eventually became the Friends Committee for Refugees and Aliens (FCRA). This committee provided the main apparatus of the Society for helping refugees. Its most prominent member was committee secretary Bertha Bracey, whose name is synonymous with the Kindertransport.

The Kindertransport involved the rescue of around 10,000 children from Nazi Europe on the eve of war in 1938–1939. Jewish groups and Quakers lobbied government to allow these children entry to Britain, and then many different groups and individuals on the ground in Europe helped to organise the transports of children to Britain. While the operation is referred to in FCRA documents, there are no detailed files on children, or lists of children, helped by the Quakers.

The Kindertransport was, however, only a small part of the effort to help refugees by the FCRA. Thousands of people were helped to escape Nazi Europe and start new lives in Britain and elsewhere around the world. The FCRA also helped interned 'aliens' – German and Austrian nationals who were imprisoned in Britain when the war broke out.

1933

January: Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany  
April: British Quakers set up the Germany Emergency Committee to help those at risk of persecution

1934

Friends set up a school in the Netherlands for expelled German teachers and children fleeing the Nazi regime  
Quaker Edith Pye gives evidence on refugee crisis to League of Nations

1935

Quakers deliver a letter to Hitler's Secretary of State in Berlin complaining about the existence of concentration camps and appealing for their closure

1936

Spanish Civil War creates a new refugee crisis; Friends Service Council assists refugees throughout the war

1938

Following Kristallnacht Quakers help Jewish delegation report to Home Secretary on perilous situation and gain entry to Britain for 1000s of child refugees

1939

Outbreak of war; British relief workers forced to leave Nazi-occupied Europe and hand over administration of relief to 'neutral' workers and the American Friends Service Committee

1943

The Friends Relief Service is set up for emergency relief work and prepares for the war's inevitable aftermath. After the war it assists the UNRRA in caring for the millions who are displaced

1950

Most of the support work for refugees is complete and most staff are let go

# World War II refugee records in the Library collections

## Getting started

Darton, L (1954) *Account of the Work of the Friends Committee for Refugees and Aliens*. London: FCRA. [066 DAR]

*Part report, part history, this detailed overview was written for the FCRA as their work was coming to an end.*

Greenwood, J O (1975) *Quaker Encounters v.1: Friends and Relief*. York: Sessions. [033.1 GRE]

*Puts the work done in WWII in the context of 200 years of Quaker relief work.*

Zornberg, I (2016) *Jews, Quakers and the Holocaust: the Struggle to Save the Lives of Twenty-Thousand Children*. [s.l.]: [s.n.]. [066 ZOR]

*A good introduction to the Kindertransport and the relief work of American Quakers.*

A longer bibliography is available from the Library.

## On the catalogue

For a more complete idea of our holdings of printed material (including contemporary pamphlets and news articles) search our online catalogue, found here:

<http://quaker.adlibhosting.com/search>

The following terms might be useful when searching the catalogue:

- Friends Committee for Refugees and Aliens (FCRA)
- Friends Relief Service (FRS)
- United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)
- Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU)
- Friends Service Council (FSC)
- Resistance Movements
- Bracey, Bertha L. 1893-1989





## Archive collections

For the FCRA we hold minutes and papers, correspondence, and a name index of people helped by Quakers with basic details such as where they came from in Europe, date of birth, and occupation.

The name index and some other records in the collection are closed for data protection reasons, but we will consider requests for access under certain conditions. Please email your request to [library@quaker.org.uk](mailto:library@quaker.org.uk).

Unfortunately, only about 20 case files for “unsponsored” cases have survived. Otherwise, there is no detailed information on specific cases.

There were other Quaker bodies involved in the relief of refugees, and after the war with displaced persons, often working very closely with the FCRA. Their records, which are open for research, may contain information on refugees.

These bodies include:

- Friends Ambulance Unit
- Friends Relief Service
- Friends Service Council (look at the country files from Nazi-occupied countries for the time period, such as FSC/Germany and FSC/Austria)

## Other resources

### **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)**

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

The USHMM is a good resource for clearly presented information about the Holocaust in general.

If you are interested in a particular individual, it may be most useful to start your search by entering a name into the Holocaust victims and survivors database compiled by USHMM.

We, alongside institutions all over Europe, and the world, gave USHMM copies of many of our archive series. You can therefore search a name on the database and get a reference to part of our collection. So, it's useful to try this search first and then contact us for the relevant record.

The USHMM holds the American Friends Service Committee case files for refugees. This was the American equivalent of the Friends Service Council and was in charge of American efforts to help refugees. It took over the work, on the ground, from the FCRA when British workers were forced to leave Nazi Europe on the outbreak of war. This means it holds case files for many refugees, not only for those who went to America (see also the AFSC archives below).



## World Jewish Relief (WJR)

Formerly known as the CBF (Central British Fund for German Jewry), WJR rescued 65,000 people from Europe in the 1930s and 40s, including many of the 10,000 children who came on the Kindertransport, thousands of men who came to the Kitchener camp and 732 child survivors from concentration camps known as 'The Boys'. It has digitised records for over 35,000 people. You can apply for access here:

[www.worldjewishrelief.org/about-us/your-family-history](http://www.worldjewishrelief.org/about-us/your-family-history)

## The Wiener Holocaust Library

[wienerholocaustlibrary.org](http://wienerholocaustlibrary.org)

The Wiener Holocaust Library is home to a world-class archive of records about the holocaust and the Nazi-era.

Online it offers an interactive map of refugee family papers, which includes photographs and audio interviews, as well as a database of testimonies about Kristallnacht and a collection of over 1000 eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust.

Records of the International Tracing Service (over 100 million documents on the fate of those affected by the Holocaust) are now accessible at the Wiener Library – you can search the inventory, schedule an appointment to consult the archive or make a request for research assistance via their website.

## National Archives

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

The National Archives holds the records for the British Foreign Office and Home Office. Useful resources on the National Archives website include research guides to its material on refugees and small collections of digitised items made available as part of their educational resources.

The National Archives Kindertransport records are now available for a fee from:

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/kindertransport-browse>

## American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

[www.afsc.org/project/archives](http://www.afsc.org/project/archives)

The AFSC archive holds records of American Friends' relief work throughout the 20th century. It is in Philadelphia, but it has digitised highlights of its collection which are available on its website. This collection is particularly strong on information about Spanish refugees in the French border region.





**The Library of the  
Society of Friends**

Friends House

173–177 Euston Road

London

NW1 2BJ

020 7663 1135

[library@quaker.org.uk](mailto:library@quaker.org.uk)

Twitter: [@libsocfriends](https://twitter.com/libsocfriends)

Facebook: [/libraryofthesocietyoffriends](https://www.facebook.com/libraryofthesocietyoffriends)

[www.quaker.org.uk/library](http://www.quaker.org.uk/library)